



**Save the Children**

# **GUARANTEERING CHILDREN'S FUTURE**

**How COVID-19, cost-of-living and climate crises affect children in poverty and what governments in Europe need to do**

Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. In Europe and around the world, we do whatever it takes – every day and in times of crisis – so children can fulfil their rights to a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. Our experts go to the hardest-to-reach places where it’s toughest to be a child. We ensure children’s unique needs are met and their voices are heard. Together with children, families and communities, as well as supporters the world over, we achieve lasting results for millions of children.

With over 100 years of expertise, we are the world’s first and leading independent children’s organization – transforming lives and the future we share.

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# FOREWORD

*“Well, sometimes I notice that mum doesn’t buy certain things. I hear her saying she got a letter about unpaid bills, and that we need to use less water. So I try to shower less, and I don’t really dare drink water when I’m at home”.*

These are the words of a child growing up in Finland, one of the wealthiest and most socially fair countries in the world. No child should have to go to school on an empty stomach, worry about their parent’s job or live in a cold home. Yet, the impact of Europe’s many crises deprives children across the continent of the essentials they need for their development and well-being.

Save the Children has been ceaselessly advocating to ensure that the issue of child poverty tops the European agenda. We provide hands-on support to children and families in need while pushing for new, robust measures to protect their rights. That’s why we were pleased to see European countries and EU institutions take concrete steps to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and to protect society’s most vulnerable children.

In particular, we commend the European Parliament for requesting the creation of the Child Guarantee – an unprecedented instrument to ensure vulnerable children have access to essential services – and for setting up a Working Group that monitors the Guarantee’s progress. We value the European Commission’s work to design and monitor the Child Guarantee together with civil societies and children. We acknowledge Member States’ unanimous adoption in 2021 of the Child Guarantee Recommendation.

These results are impressive. But the work is far from done.

Building on the input received from Save the Children national members and offices

working directly with children and families in 14 European countries, this report reveals how much children feel the devastating impact of recent interlinked crises on their lives. The COVID-19 pandemic still affects their well-being, their education, their social interactions, and their mental health. The conflict in Ukraine and the consequent cost-of-living crisis are plunging financially stable families into poverty and sinking millions of vulnerable children into deeper poverty. As a result, eating or heating is no longer a choice for many families in Europe; they are unable to afford either. At the same time, the climate crisis is not only a threat to the future of children in Europe, but a current, tangible emergency that is jeopardising their rights and impeding their access to services.

The evidence is clear. If we want our children to be protected, enjoy equal opportunities, and grow into healthy and fulfilled adults, governments need to act now.

European countries must show they can rapidly turn child poverty commitments and plans into action. The Child Guarantee is a once-in-a-generation opportunity and governments must fully harness its potential, using national action plans to correctly implement it. They must make extra efforts to fill the gaps highlighted in this report, such as defining clear targets and indicators and making sure there is adequate funding.

As the world faces a convergence of social crises, the most vulnerable children are bearing the brunt of the impact. It’s time to make their protection and well-being the top priority in every policy and initiative. Only in this way can we aim to build a fairer and greener Europe, for and with children.

**Ylva Sperling**  
Save the Children Europe Director





Photo: Pablo Blázquez / Save the Children

## SUMMARY

No country, no matter how rich, is free of child poverty. Europe is one of the world's wealthiest regions, yet it is facing increasing numbers of children and families experiencing poverty and social exclusion. Eurostat's latest data shows that almost one in four children in the EU is at risk of poverty or social exclusion. And yet, these figures do not fully reflect the detrimental and prolonged toll that the COVID-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis on children's rights and child poverty rates.

On the other hand, the EU is witnessing a unique political momentum for the protection of children's rights. In 2021, the Council of the European Union adopted the Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee; the first EU-level policy instrument which aims to comprehensively address childhood disadvantage and exclusion. This text requests Member States to provide vulnerable children with free access to high-quality early childhood education and care, free education and school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day, healthcare, adequate housing, and healthy nutrition. The Recommendation also requires Member States to draft National Action Plans to outline how the framework will concretely be implemented in their respective countries until 2030.

This report builds on the input and insights received by Save the Children members and offices working in 14 European countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden) via a questionnaire designed by Save the Children Europe during the period October-December 2022.

✓ Its first chapter analyses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and cost-of-living and climate crises on children in Europe, showing the concrete detrimental consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, and the climate crisis on children all over the continent. Cases of poor mental health are reaching unprecedented levels, extreme weather events are more frequent, food is scarce and unhealthy, houses are cold, leisure activities are unaffordable for more and more families, and schools are often inaccessible or too crowded.

✓ The second one analyses the implementation of the Child Guarantee and child poverty reduction policies in the 14 countries, highlighting that the work to ensure proper implementation of the Child Guarantee is far from done. All Member States must make sure their Child Guarantee National Action Plans are properly implemented, monitored, and evaluated. Their commitment to reducing child poverty should be demonstrated by setting clear metrics, investing in upgrading data collection, defining more specific targets, and making sufficient, sustainable funding allocations. No National Action Plan will be truly successful if it does not actively target and include the most vulnerable children who are at the heart of the Child Guarantee.

✓ The document also includes brief countries pages highlighting the main data for each of the 14 analysed countries, and an a map showcasing a selection of Save the Children's programmes to tackle child poverty and social exclusion in Europe.

Child poverty is a barrier to the achievement of a more social Europe, a burden on our society which is condemning millions of children to a life of neglect and missed opportunities. Hence, the report shows that, at a time when children's rights are hindered by multiple and compounding crises, the implementation of the Child Guarantee National Action Plans and robust child social protection policies is more urgent than ever.

# INTRODUCTION

This report is about child poverty in Europe. It presents the latest figures, information, and trends on how children and families are affected by:

- 1 the COVID-crisis.
- 2 the cost-of-living crisis.
- 3 climate change.

The report looks at the child poverty reduction policies in Europe and at how the European Child Guarantee is being implemented across the European Union. The National Action Plans that are emerging from the European Child Guarantee are assessed following the components which structure the framework: free early childhood education and care; free education; free quality healthcare; sufficient and healthy nutrition and adequate housing. Insights are also given on the situation at national level in these respective areas, how National Action Plans use national and EU funds, how they involve CSOs and children in their development and roll-out, and how they will be monitored and evaluated.



Save the Children's members and offices in 14 countries gave input, data, and insights: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, and Sweden. They answered a questionnaire sent out by Save the Children Europe from October-December 2022<sup>1</sup>.

<b>EU member states (10)</b>	Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Poland, Romania, Lithuania
<b>Non-EU (4)</b>	<p><b>Western Balkan countries</b> Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina</p> <p><b>EEA countries</b> Iceland</p>

## Why is it important to monitor child poverty in Europe?

No country is free of child poverty. Europe is one of the wealthiest regions of the world, yet it has alarming and increasing numbers of children and families living with poverty and social exclusion.

The most recent data from Eurostat reveal that in 2021, 24,4% of children - or one in four - were at risk of poverty and social exclusion<sup>2</sup>, 0,4 percentage points higher than in 2020. The share of children living in quasi-jobless households<sup>3</sup> was 8,3%, up from 7,6% in 2020<sup>4</sup>. Whereas figures vary across countries, child poverty remains a pan-European crisis that must be urgently and properly tackled.

To address this crisis, on 14 June 2021 the Council of the European Union adopted the Recommendation establishing the European

Child Guarantee. It has also been established that Member States with child poverty levels above the EU average should allocate at least 5% of their ESF+ resources to tackle the problem, while all other Member States are required to allocate an appropriate amount of their ESF+ resources. The Recommendation expects EU Member States to set up and implement National Action Plans to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing effective access of children in need to a set of key services: effective and free access to high quality early childhood education and care, education, and school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day, healthcare, adequate housing, and healthy nutrition. This is a historical milestone: it's the first time that children's effective access to basic services is considered a guaranteed right by the EU. The Child Guarantee ensures that vulnerable children have equal access to quality public key basic in practice, not just in theory.

Although Member States were expected to submit their National Action Plans by the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2022, not all of them have. As of March 2023, 19 plans have been submitted (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden), while 8 are still missing (Austria, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia)<sup>5</sup>.

The evolving situation in Europe requires a speedy implementation of child protection policies. A cost-of-living crisis and rising inflation is out of control in some countries; children arriving to the EU from Ukraine are in need of food, education and health care; the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic remain critical. There is not time for inaction, any further prolonged delay of the submission of the National Action Plans is of deep concern, negatively impacting the children and the entire society.














At the same time, it is worth noting that while the European Child Guarantee and the Child

Guarantee National Action Plans address the worst consequences of child poverty, accompanying measures that support families are also needed to lift children out of poverty. Decent wages, strong social safety nets and progressive redistribution are the long-term answers to break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage for vulnerable children and to lift children out of poverty.



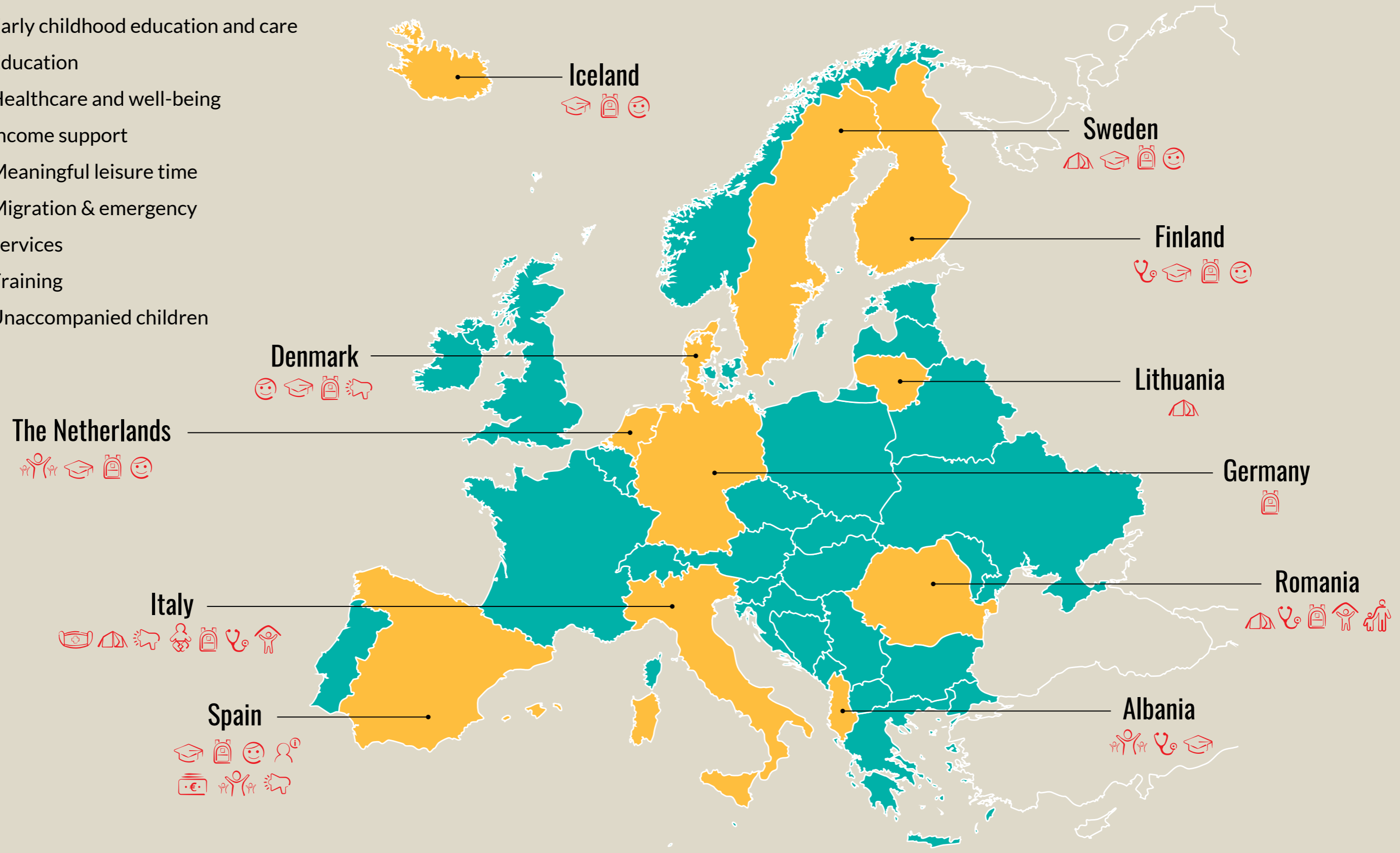
Photo: Elena del Real Moreno / Save the Children

## AREAS OF FOCUS

-  Advocacy
-  Child participation
-  Child protection
-  COVID-19
-  Early childhood education and care
-  Education
-  Healthcare and well-being
-  Income support
-  Meaningful leisure time
-  Migration & emergency
-  Services
-  Training
-  Unaccompanied children

# SAVE THE CHILDREN'S SELECTED WORK ADDRESSING CHILD POVERTY IN EUROPE

For more detailed information on the programmes [click here](#).





**STATE OF  
CHILD POVERTY  
IN EUROPE**

# CHILD POVERTY IN EUROPE

Child poverty today is a pan-European crisis that affects millions of children and families. Poverty deprives children of their possibility to thrive and reach their full potential in adulthood. Even a temporary experience of deprivation can have devastating consequences for a child, lasting a lifetime, if not generations. Poverty affects every aspect of a child's life, negatively impacting their material living conditions, their education, their relations with their families, their personal and professional developments. In other words, poverty deprives children of their fundamental rights and opportunity to thrive.

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities and vulnerabilities, putting huge pressure on available social services. Children could not go to school, meet their family members, play with their friends, nor have access to much-needed services. They were locked in their homes with limited social interaction and with their education disrupted. Their parents struggled to make ends meet after being laid off or obliged to work part-time.



SPAIN

*"I have a part-time job, but I need the help of friends to get clothes for my daughters. Although difficult, I manage to cover the basic needs of my daughters with the support provided by Save the Children Spain."*

The cost-of-living crisis – caused by a complex mix of factors including the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine – is exacerbating this critical situation. Families and children in vulnerable situations are among those most exposed to the daunting impact of rising inflation. Skyrocketing costs risk plunging financially stable families into poverty and sinking millions of vulnerable children into deeper poverty. Child poverty levels are thus likely to escalate as the full economic impact of these social and economic crises becomes apparent, making it even more urgent to act.

## Comparison of child poverty rates across countries and over the last two years (2020-2021)

AROPE<sup>6</sup> is the main indicator used to measure progress towards the EU 2030 target on poverty and social exclusion in Europe<sup>7</sup>, which aims at reducing the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 15 million by 2030. Out of them, at least 5 million should be children. AROPE looks at people who are either at risk of poverty<sup>8</sup>, or severely materially and socially deprived<sup>9</sup> or living in a household with a very low work intensity<sup>10,11</sup>.

Table 1: Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion rates – available in Eurostat<sup>12</sup>.

Country reference	2019	2020	2021
European Union (EU-27)	22,8%	24,0%	24,4%
Denmark	13,8%	13,4%	14,0%
Germany	15,4%	22,3%	23,5%
Spain	31,0%	31,8%	33,4%
Italy	27,1%	28,9%	29,7%
Lithuania	25,8%	23,1%	21,6%
Netherlands	15,4%	15,8%	14,9%
Poland	16,2%	16,1%	16,5%
Romania	39,1%	40,7%	41,5%
Finland	13,8%	14,5%	13,2%
Sweden	23,0%	20,2%	19,7%
Iceland	14%	12,7%	13,1%
Albania <sup>13</sup>	23,0%	21,8%	22,0%
Kosovo	N/A	20,7% <sup>14</sup>	23% <sup>15</sup>

### LEGEND

≥12,7 to 14,63

≥14,63 to 20,03

≥20,03 to 23,1

≥23,1 to 25,9

≥ 25,9 to 32,87

≥32,87 to 51

N/A: Data not available

Note: Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina are not included in Eurostat database.

According to Eurostat AROPE rates<sup>16</sup>, the risk of poverty or social exclusion for children in the EU increased from 24,0 % to 24,4 % between 2020 and 2021. In 2021 it was the lowest in **Finland** and **Denmark** (13,2% and 14% respectively) and the highest in **Spain** and **Romania** (33,4% and 41,5% respectively). In between are **The Netherlands** (14,9%) followed by **Sweden** (19,7%), **Germany** (23,5%), **Lithuania** (21,6%) and **Italy** (29,7%). According to INSTAT, 22% of **Albanian** children were at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021, an increase of 0,2 percentage points compared with 2020 data. Notably, the Albanian government is working in cooperation with CSOs to establish new indicators to collect data on children experiencing poverty and social exclusion<sup>17</sup>.

This increasing trend is even more notable when compared to the AROPE rates before COVID-19 started (2019 rates). Rates continued to rise in 2021, except in **Sweden**, **Finland**, and **Lithuania** where they were higher in 2019.

**In 2021, countries with previously high AROPE rates have seen an increase in child poverty, but countries with lower AROPE rates have seen a decrease.**

Some general trends emerged over 2020 and 2021<sup>18</sup>. The risk of poverty or social exclusion for children was higher in 2021 compared to 2020 for **Romania**, **Spain**, **Italy**, and **Germany**, with the highest difference recorded in **Spain** (+ 1,6 percentage points). As an example of the impact of this trend, a total of 3,26 million children in **Germany** live at risk of poverty or social exclusion according to Save the Children **Germany**<sup>19</sup>, while in **Italy** 2,85 million children grow up at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

On the contrary, for the rest of the countries, with the exception of **Denmark**, a decrease in AROPE rates was recorded, with **Lithuania** showing the greatest reduction in 2021 (-1,5 percentage points).



Table 2: Material deprivation rate (less than 18 years old – data available until 2020), Eurostat

Country	2018	2019	2020	2019 - 2020
Denmark	8,5%	6,7%	7,5%	↑
Germany	8%	6,2%	15,2%	↑
Spain	15,4%	15,1%	18,6%	↑
Italy	16,3%	13,8%	13,0%	↓
Lithuania	21,2%	16,8%	17,8%	↑
Netherlands	5,8%	5,8%	6,0%	↑
Poland	9%	8,1%	6,2%	↓
Romania	35,2%	29,8%	36,1%	↑
Finland	8,8%	7,1%	8,2%	↑
Sweden	6,8%	7,7%	7,1%	↓
Iceland	4,6%	N/A	N/A	

**LEGEND**

- Among 4% and 10%
- Among 10% and 20%
- Among 20% and 30%
- Among 30% and 40%
- Above 40%
- N/A: Data not available

Similar trends can be observed when considering the material deprivation rate<sup>20</sup>, indicator defined as the percentage of population with an enforced lack of at least three out of nine material deprivation items in the ‘economic strain and durables’ dimension. The indicator shows a significant increase in **Denmark, Germany, Spain, Lithuania, Romania** and **Finland**, slight increase in **The Netherlands**, slight decrease in **Italy**, and decreasing rates in **Sweden, Albania**.

## Countries with other data sources

Save the Children **Iceland** provides data for 2021 which shows that 13,1% of children in Iceland are at risk of poverty (more than 10.000 children)<sup>21</sup>. This is an increase of 0,4% compared to 2018.

In 2022, INSTAT Albania published for the first time the main results of the Income and Living Conditions Survey (EU-SILC) that measures living conditions, relative poverty and material deprivation in Albanian households. This survey is in line with the Eurostat methodology<sup>22</sup>.



### ALBANIA

*E., 8, was placed in a residential care institution when he was only 11 months old. His parents were unemployed, and his father was an alcoholic who was violent to his mother. They divorced, and E.'s mother struggled to provide food and education for her children. Save the Children helped to find E. a safe and loving home at his uncle's house – his 'kinship care family'. Save the Children ensured that his uncle and family were supported by social workers, informed, and trained on how to fulfil all E.'s learning and development needs and how to deal with challenging behaviours. Today, after six months of living with his kinship care family, E. is a happy, calm, and healthy boy who attends school and loves his 'kin mother' very much: "I love my mom taking care of me and I like taking care of her".*

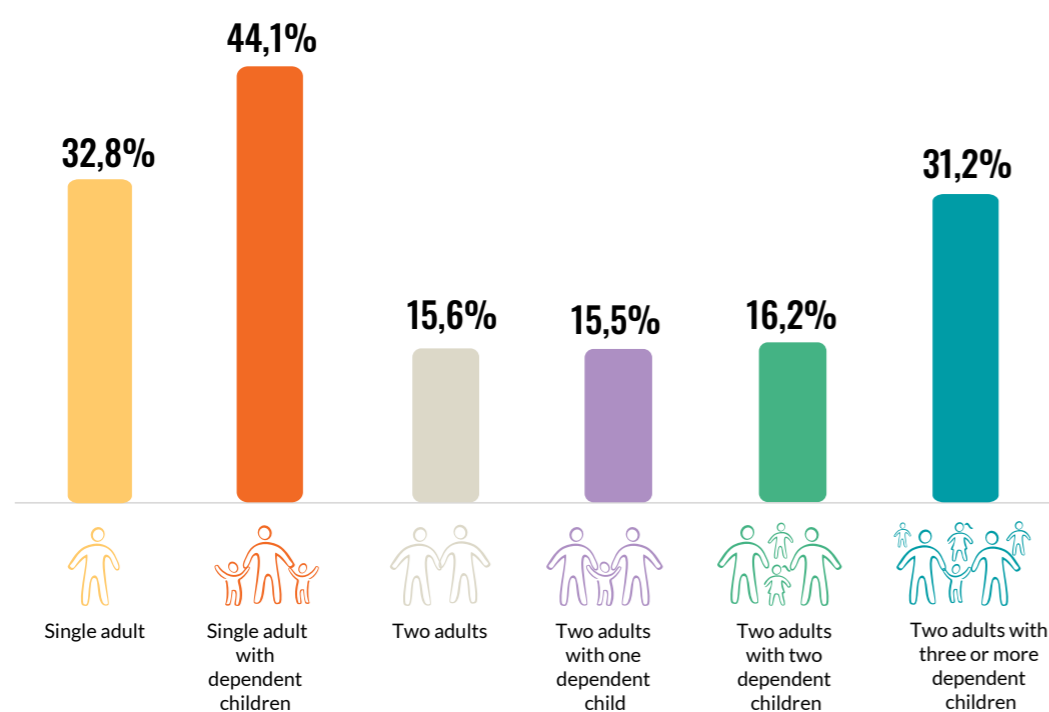
Obtaining data on child poverty is especially difficult in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Kosovo**. Some of the available data refer to **Kosovo** as the poorest country in the Western Balkans, with up to 45% of general poverty rate, 12% of extreme poverty and 18% of child poverty<sup>23</sup>. However, the figures are likely to have increased with the COVID-19 pandemic. UNICEF's report<sup>24</sup> has suggested that the recent rise in food and energy prices (inflation currently at 18%) in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** is increasing poverty and food deprivation and worsening inequalities. In 2019, 337,003 people, approximately 10% of the population, received social welfare, 77.732 (23,1%) of which were minors.

**Spain** has data on child poverty rates by age group. In 2021, 32% of children under 6, 33,3% of children 6-11, and 34,7% of adolescents 12-17 experienced poverty or social exclusion. **Sweden, Finland, Iceland, and Kosovo** also have data on child poverty by age group, but it can be difficult to compare the data between countries. In **Sweden**, statistics show that the risk of poverty is greater for younger children. In **Finland**, the risk of poverty is also greater for younger children – especially in their first three years of life. In **Iceland**, children under 5 are more likely to lack material quality than older children and adolescents. And in **Kosovo**, children 0-14 are at a higher risk of poverty compared to older teenagers.



Photo: Lolo Vasco / Save the Children

Figure 1: Share of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion, analysed by household composition (2020-2021), Eurostat



## Categories of children in need across Europe: Main groups of children at risk

### Children from single parent families

According to Eurostat, the risk of poverty or social exclusion was highest for dependent children living with a single adult in the EU-27; 44,1% are at risk<sup>25</sup>. This is 21,6 percentage points higher than the average for all types of households with dependent children (22,5 %).

This finding has been supported by most Save the Children members and country offices. In **Iceland** 22,6% of children living with one parent live in a low-income household compared to 16,1% in households with 2 adults and children. In addition, 24,1% of Icelandic households had difficulties in covering the daily expenses in 2021, but this was the case for 51% households with single parents compared with 16,1% households with two or more adults with children. In **Sweden**, children living with single

mothers have a higher ratio of living at risk of poverty (49% in 2021)<sup>26</sup> and this is even higher when referring to children living with single foreign-born mothers (62% in 2020)<sup>27</sup>. In **Italy** and in **Finland** children from single parent households are also at greater risk of poverty, with a share of 11,5%<sup>28</sup> and 25,9%<sup>29</sup> respectively. **Lithuania's** single parent households had 50% lower income than the country median (risk of poverty) in 2020. In **Spain**, the poverty rate for single parent households was 45,5%. The income of **Finland's** single parent households is 60% of the country median.

### Children from low-income families

This includes children from low-income working families and from families receiving social benefits. Poverty of families is not always linked to unemployment – for example, in **Finland**, almost half of all low-income families with children include one working parent.<sup>30</sup>

### Parents with lower education levels

Eurostat<sup>31</sup> figures for 2021 show that 62,5% of children in the EU that live with their parents are at risk of poverty or social exclusion if the highest level of education attained by the parents was lower secondary (ISCED<sup>32</sup> levels 0-2). However, only 9,8% of those children living with parents with at least tertiary education or higher grades (ISCED levels 5-8) were at risk of poverty in the EU. When analysing the gap between lower and higher education levels in the Eurostat report the range varies from 20,7 percentage points in **Finland** to 80,1 points in **Romania**<sup>33</sup>.

### Children from large and disadvantaged families

In **Sweden**, for example, 32% of children living in households with two siblings or more, are at risk of poverty<sup>34</sup>. In **Italy**, 22,6% of households with five members or more are in absolute poverty, compared with 11,6% of four-person households<sup>35</sup>.

### Children in migration, refugees, asylum-seekers, undocumented and unaccompanied children

In **Italy**, for instance, the number of migrant citizens living in absolute poverty, according to the national statistics, reaches 32,4%, compared to 7,2% of Italians<sup>36</sup>.

### Children with disabilities

The situation is even worse for those children with disabilities growing up in rural areas.

### Children from ethnic minorities

They are one of the most vulnerable groups of children in their country. Children from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian (RAE) communities are over-represented in institutional care and often are subjected to discrimination and belong

## Spotlight on Save the Children in Poland

Since 27 February 2022, Save the Children (SCI) has been helping children and families in Ukraine who are affected by conflict. As a new organisation in Poland, with no prior presence, it set up its operation in Poland and was successfully registered as a Polish foundation in April 2022. Save the Children Poland has already helped 37,910 affected people, of which 31,918 are children.

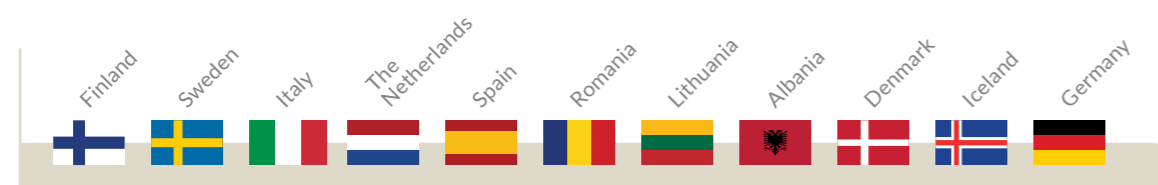
They set up programs in border towns and expanded to Wroclaw through their cash assistance program. They are also working with partners to provide support for children in two centres along the border with Ukraine. They also set up libraries and Digital Learning Centres in Poland and are supporting four schools for Ukrainian children and 11 Polish schools that welcome Ukrainian students. They also provide learning materials to schools in Warsaw, Krakow, and Wroclaw. They support over 50 Digital Learning Centres across Poland that are safe places for children to learn, play and get mental health support.

They have an established presence in border locations, expanding their reach to Wroclaw through our Multipurpose cash assistance programme which is directly implemented by field teams in Krakow and Wroclaw. SCI in Poland is working with partners to deliver Psychosocial Support (PSS) to children in safe spaces at two reception centres on the border with Ukraine and we have set up libraries and Digital Learning Centres (DLC) across Poland.



## CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION

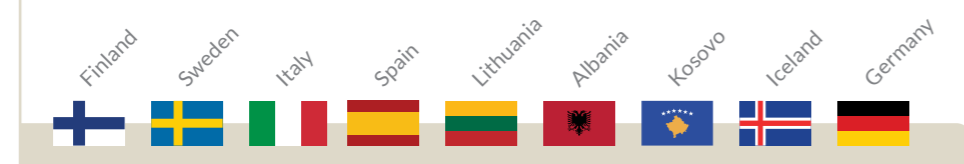
As reported by Save the Children members and country offices that contributed to the report.



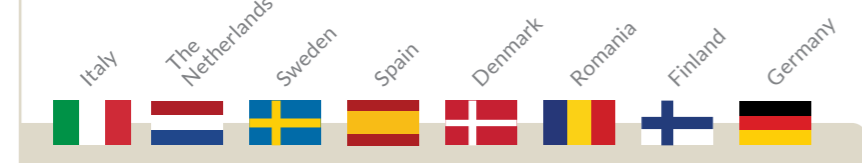
### SINGLE PARENT HOUSEHOLDS



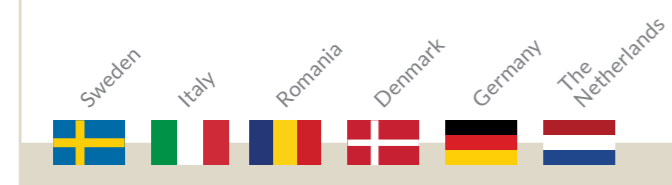
### LOW INCOME / POOR HOUSEHOLDS



### LARGE FAMILIES



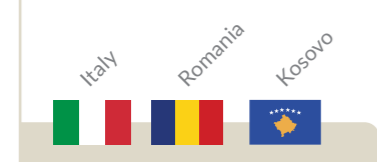
### CHILDREN IN MIGRATION



### CHILDREN LIVING IN SPECIFIC AREAS



### CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES



### ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

to one of the poorest categories. In Romania, most recent data<sup>37</sup> show that 79% of the Roma children were at risk of poverty in 2021, compared to 30% of the general population of children. Across Europe, 29% of Roma children live in households where someone went to bed hungry at least once in the previous month.

### Children living in specific areas of the country

In Sweden, areas with socio-economic challenges report over 50% of children live in households at risk of poverty<sup>38</sup>. In the Italian south, 10,0% of households live in absolute poverty compared with 6,7% and 5,6%<sup>39</sup> in the north and centre of the country. In Romania, the AROPE rate in 2021 was 16,1% in cities, 30,7% in suburbs, and 50,1% in rural Romania<sup>40</sup>.

### Other vulnerable groups

Identified by Save the Children members and offices, these groups include:

- Children no longer eligible for minor protection systems or unaccompanied migrant minor status.
- Children whose parents are working abroad.
- Underage mothers and their children.
- Children living in institutional and foster care.
- Children in families with scarce social resources due to challenging conditions for example illness, mental vulnerability, substance abuse, isolation.
- Children living in rented accommodation.



Posed by a model. Photo: John Owens / Save the Children

# THE COVID-19 CRISIS

COVID-19 hit children hard, not only in terms of health and social impacts but also from the lockdown measures taken to control the emergency.

The loss of jobs and income and the subsequent poverty were heavy blows for many families and were particularly harmful for children from poorer families and for those in less socially protected countries. In 2020 the global socioeconomic crisis caused by the pandemic pushed 142 million more children into monetary poverty in developing countries<sup>41</sup>. Beyond monetary poverty, data from more than 70 countries indicate that around 47% of children were severely deprived of at least one critical need such as access to education, health care, housing, nutrition, sanitation, or water<sup>42</sup>.

Disruptions to schooling and remote learning policies increased inequalities. Children with more education needs and/or socioeconomic difficulties struggled with the lack of necessary technology at home, skills gaps of their teachers and/or absence of parental support. Healthcare systems and welfare states became overburdened. Stillbirth increased since COVID-19 as women are less likely to access quality antenatal and delivery care. More vulnerable children are becoming malnourished in absence of targeted action to prevent it. Vaccines programmes suffered, posing a threat to preventable child deaths. Finally, the psychological stress and uncertainty of a global pandemic put children more at risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse<sup>43</sup>.



KOSOVO

*"My parents were worried about COVID-19. They talked a lot about the number of cases and transmitted a lot of stress to us, they did not spare us from this stress."*

*(child - 15 years old)*

Young Voices Report

## The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on children and families

The negative effects of the pandemic on children in European countries have several common themes.

### Mental health suffered

A survey carried out in Hamburg, Germany, in 2021<sup>44</sup>, showed that every third child suffers from psychological problems with anxiety, depressive symptoms, and psychosomatic complaints on the rise. Despite a small improvement in the results from the beginning of 2022, children and adolescents are still reporting more mental health issues than before the pandemic. The most affected are socially disadvantaged families. From research in **The Netherlands** in January 2022, only 58% of young people aged 16 to 24 said they considered themselves to be in good mental health. However, as the world began to re-open in March 2022, that number improved to 71%. Another **Dutch** study found that young girls were

more affected by mental health problems than young boys. 43% of girls aged 13-16 reported having emotional problems. Similar mental health reports are coming out of countries such as **Lithuania, Finland, and Albania**. In **Spain**, mental health conditions among children aged between 4 and 14 years of age tripled between 2017 and 2021<sup>45</sup>.

### Money became tighter

The pandemic pushed many families in Europe into financial difficulty. In **Romania**, the percentage of people who could not afford a meal that included meat, chicken, fish (or a vegetarian equivalent) every second day has increased from 14,2% in 2019 to 19,2% in 2021. For families with three or more children, this figure increased from 17,5% in 2019 to 23,6% in 2021<sup>46</sup>. During 2020, a survey carried out in **Italy** on minors between 8 and 17 years of age showed that for almost half of the families (46,7%), economic resources had been considerably reduced and one in three households (32,7%) had to postpone paying their bills<sup>47</sup>. **Bosnia and Herzegovina** reports that pressure since COVID-19 on household incomes has increased and, combined with a fragmented and inefficient social protection system, has heavily weighed on low-income families, causing debt and insufficient food intake. This situation will not alleviate underage forced marriage, which is still used in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** as an alternative for some families to earn money<sup>48</sup>.

### An increase in violence against children

Children faced more violence as a result of a pandemic that caused unemployment, economic vulnerability, stress and fear. Research in **Sweden** found children's exposure to domestic violence increased<sup>49</sup> but their access to protection measures was reduced<sup>50</sup>. Child neglect was an additional consequence revealed in a report in **Iceland**<sup>51</sup>. **Lithuania** has also highlighted violence against children and almost

90% of the total number of identified potential victims of human trafficking in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** from January 2021 to June 2022 were children. In **Iceland**, reports registered to the child welfare system about violence and neglect against children increased since the start of the pandemic. 2022 registered a 12% increase of reports about domestic violence from 2021. Reports about violence from parent to children doubled<sup>52</sup>.

### School performances and healthy lifestyles suffered

School performances suffered as indicated by research in **Lithuania**<sup>53</sup> and **Italy**. In **Italy**, share of students reaching upper secondary education without adequate competencies rose from 7,5% in 2019 to 9,8% in 2021<sup>54</sup>. Research in **Germany** showed that more children stopped doing sport and then ate unhealthily and spent more time online. While the increase in unhealthy behaviours decreased again a bit in the most recent survey in 2022<sup>55</sup>, every fifth child still eats more sweets than before the pandemic.

## What has been done to reduce the impact of COVID-19?

Most countries are tackling the combined effect of the COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis by trying to reduce poverty through initiatives such as: **additional child benefits** (Finland, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Lithuania); **energy allowances or subsidies** (The Netherlands, Finland, Italy, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Lithuania, Romania); **regulating the energy prices** (The Netherlands, Germany, Albania); **tax rebates** (Germany, The Netherlands, Finland); **public transport discounts** (Germany, Spain); **food vouchers** (Romania); **housing benefits or cap on rent increases** (The Netherlands, Sweden, Spain).

The measures to support families in **Denmark** reached 400 million Danish krone (€53 million approximately) in 2020. Some of these funds were allocated to CSOs, who played an important role in supporting children and families during the pandemic.

The economic packages in **The Netherlands** were initially focused on preventing unemployment. In 2021 and 2022, €146 million was provided to reduce poverty and debt in the country, including subsidies to provide resources in kind to children of low-income working parents.

In **Italy**, over €1 billion were allocated to support the education system to cope with the effects of COVID-19 including the provision of internet fibre cabling and digital equipment. Similarly, the **German** authorities launched a €2 billion programme<sup>56,57</sup> to reduce the negative effects of the pandemic on children's education. Despite this investment, **Germany** is in the bottom third of Europe in terms of per capita expenditure on extra support in education<sup>58</sup>.

In **Spain**, the government increased the Minimum Income Scheme by 15% to compensate for the higher cost of living, deployed additional benefits for families in extreme poverty, and gave direct incentives (e.g., €200 to every working adult under a €14,000/year income threshold). New child benefits were introduced in December 2021 (e.g., €100 per child per month between 0-3 years old).

**Albania** developed an economic package that doubled the unemployment benefits and social assistance during the pandemic. In April 2020, 176,000 families received 4,000 euros to counteract the impact of the pandemic. The government also supported one-off financial assistance of ALL 16,000 to help 4524 families and individuals not registered in the national aid scheme.

**Bosnia and Herzegovina** adopted a new Act on material support for families with children at the beginning of 2022. For the first time, the federal government takes over the financing of the child

allowance, set at €103,70, which will be equal for all the states of the country.

## Targeted Mental Health measures

Several countries have reinforced public health and mental health policies and resources. **Finland** allocated more financial resources to youth mental health care and strengthened cooperation between educational professionals and mental healthcare specialists. The 'psychological bonus' put in place in **Italy** is a buffer measure to support the costs of psychotherapy sessions<sup>59</sup>. Of the 266,000 applications received by the Italian National Social Security Institute from the under-35s as of 20 October 2022, 32,1% (more than 78,000 applications) concerned children and adolescents aged 0-18<sup>60</sup>. The €25 million for the measure will not be enough to cover all the requests received.

In **The Netherlands** the state-secretary has announced a plan to improve mental health in five domains: online, at school, at work, in the neighbourhood and in society at large<sup>61</sup>.

In **Iceland**, one government report recommended creating a specific working group to provide social and health mitigation measures. Moreover, there are specific initiatives, such as the programme run by Save the Children Iceland, in which social skills, empathy and positive communication are trained to prevent bullying and social exclusion. This programme runs in 65% of kindergartens and 30% of pre-schools of the country<sup>62</sup>.

**Spain** has launched a new national Strategy on Mental Health 2022-2026<sup>63</sup> with a budget of €100 million. The initiative includes mental health and suicide prevention objectives in children. A 24/7 free helpline has been launched. The strategy promotes an integrated approach for health and social services, family support and prevention. A medical specialisation on child psychiatry has been recognised as a formal qualification in 2021-2022.

In **Albania**, the state budget for the health sector in 2021 was increased by 23%, including a 40% additional budget for medical staff at the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. Psycho-social support was provided to families through a dedicated help-line.

## Support for education and/or family services

In **Sweden**, the government considered that closing primary schools because of the pandemic would negatively affect children and society. Therefore, most primary schools have been kept open. Furthermore, the government has been working to improve communication directly with children and young people. The **German** authorities have launched a programme<sup>64,65</sup> to reduce the negative effects on children in education, providing resources to compensate for learning backlogs in schools, provide leisure-oriented social learning and psychosocial support. Funds can be applied for trips, culture and sports, and get to have extra training in helping children deal with emotional and social issues to re-enter the school system. Social work at schools has been strengthened in several federal states. This is especially helpful for children at risk of poverty or exclusion, especially when schools are closed.

In **Iceland**, school activities were maintained during lockdown, so primary schools and kindergartens never closed completely. However, for secondary school remote learning was often applied.

In **Lithuania**, services for families were assured by local governments and mainly provided by NGOs. For children in need, different activities were boosted at care day centres. A specific initiative provided parents a helpline for advice on their concerns. Concrete measures were developed to protect and provide assistance to

children affected by any form of violence.

**Albania** developed education courses for primary and secondary students disseminated through national TV channels. In addition, remote learning was made widely available via online platforms.

## Areas for improvement

Following a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the pandemic on children, **Finland** is working to foster cooperation across different service levels, such as education, healthcare and mental health<sup>66</sup>. Moreover, the country is preparing a social security reform to be able to adjust social security according to the needs and rights of children in different life situations and transitions. However, it has also been acknowledged that resources in health care services are not sufficient to effectively support vulnerable groups of children.

In **Iceland**, the government has agreed to produce a report on the social costs of poverty, as a foundation for eradicating poverty.

In **Germany**, there is a growing need to standardise effective actions and provide professionals in the education system with the skills necessary to address the pandemic's impact on children in different situations.

Despite the measures implemented by European countries to combat the impact of COVID-19, the work is far from over. These testimonies and findings demonstrate that the severe impact that the pandemic is still having on children and families all over the continent cannot be overlooked. Governments must continue to assess the issue, work with children and civil societies, and deliver effective solutions.

# THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

This chapter summarises the content of the Save the Children Europe policy paper<sup>67</sup> covering the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on children published in December 2022 in anticipation of this report. Please refer to the policy paper for more in-depth information on the topics mentioned below.

## Inflation exacerbates child poverty



FINLAND

*“Well, sometimes I notice that mum doesn’t buy certain things. And I hear her saying she got a letter about unpaid bills, and that we need to use less water. So, I try to shower less, and I don’t really dare drink water when I’m at home<sup>68</sup>.”*

The combined impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine have created a perfect storm for the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation. Eating or heating is no longer a choice for many families in Europe. They are unable to afford either. Children’s mental health, already pressured by the COVID-19 pandemic, is under growing strain with those in low-income households three times more likely to suffer mental health problems than their more affluent peers. Access to education and leisure activities, crucial for children’s personal development, is restricted by rising costs.

Because the poverty that comes from reduced family incomes, job losses, and rising inequality<sup>69</sup> hits marginalised and vulnerable groups most

severely, it is the poorest children who suffer most from inflation. Save the Children has already emphasised that children living in migration, growing up in single-parent families, large families, or low-income families, belonging to an ethnic minority or having a disability, are more likely to be at risk of poverty.<sup>70</sup> This crisis, unfortunately, is no different.

In recent years, millions of families had been struggling to keep their children warm or fed. But with an escalating cost-of-living crisis, families with nothing left to cut back on are no longer in the position to choose between heating or eating. They are unable to afford either.

Many households throughout Europe will not be able to adequately heat their homes. They risk disconnection from water, energy, and digital services. Cold homes can cause or worsen respiratory conditions, cardiovascular diseases, poor mental health, dementia, hypothermia, and problems with childhood development<sup>71</sup>.



SPAIN

*“Electricity and gas prices have risen excessively, as has the price of housing. We feel like we’re drowning.”*

At the same time, many families will struggle to put food on the table and risk skipping meals. Lack of sufficient nutrition during critical periods in early life can cause irreversible changes to a child’s development and increase the risk of chronic disease in later life. Household food insecurity during infancy and early childhood is also linked to increased risk of obesity, poor dental health, stunted growth, and other issues<sup>72</sup>.

Finland 

Save the Children Finland highlights that in the Nordic countries, where extreme weather conditions make heating houses an absolute priority, the increase in energy prices means that many households might not be able to adequately heat their home this winter. With food prices too high compared to social security benefits and salaries, many children are expected to suffer from the lack of healthy food and regular warm meals<sup>73</sup>.

Spain 


In Spain, even before the onset of the crisis 17% of children lived in families that could not afford to pay their utility bills, mortgage, or rent on time<sup>74</sup>. The price evolution of goods and services needed for parenting has been higher than the general increase in prices (14,5% vs 11,3% between July 2018 and March 2022). Today, almost 900.000 families do not earn enough to cover the cost of parenting<sup>75</sup>.

Sweden 

Sweden reports that many non-profit organisations see an increase in the number of families seeking assistance and have warned about the impact on children<sup>76</sup>.

Poland 

The Polish economy has been facing several serious economic challenges such as a stark increment in prices, raise of the level of public debt, runaway inflation, large expenditure to support people fleeing from Ukraine<sup>77</sup>.

Germany 

The umbrella foodbank organisation in Germany, Tafel Deutschland, registered a 50% increase since the beginning of the year, with some foodbanks unable to accept new applications<sup>78</sup>.

The Netherlands 

The umbrella organisation for foodbanks<sup>79</sup>, VBNL, has reported a 10% increase of people applying for help – this rise is expected to continue.

Romania 

A recent survey<sup>80</sup> on the impact of the economic crisis on Romanian families revealed that 40% of households have seen their income decrease compared with the previous year (2021) and expenses have grown by 98%. Most households have been forced to spend more on utilities, food, healthcare, and education (e.g. transportation to school, school supplies and books). Households believe that they need to make significant cutbacks. Half will save money from utilities and food, posing a risk to the children’s well-being.

## Children's mental health problems are getting worse



*"I feel anxious about everything, and most of all about not being able to be the person I want to be<sup>81</sup>."*

Even before the pandemic, cases of poor mental health in children and young people were at unprecedented levels, with services struggling to keep up. This leaves a rising number of vulnerable children and young people unable to access support in many EU countries.

Poverty is a major contributor to mental ill health<sup>82</sup>. Children in low-income households are three times more likely to suffer mental health problems than their more affluent peers<sup>83</sup>. With more children and young people pushed into poverty because of the cost-of-living crisis, an increasing number of them are set to see their mental health worsen.

Save the Children's 2021 child poverty report shows the serious impact that the COVID-19 crisis had on children's mental health.<sup>84</sup> Physical school closures and the widespread lockdown weighed on the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents. The demand for essential mental health support services for children, adolescents, and families far exceeds the supply.



*"They [my parents] pay for everything in my life, for my food and home. It feels like I'm a big burden to them<sup>85</sup>."*

The Children's voice 2022<sup>86</sup> report focuses on **Finland**, but its findings likely reflect the situation across many countries. Children's answers to the survey reveal high levels of stress, anxiety, and fear for the future. Having struggled with the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, inflation and the cost-of-living crisis are increasing the challenges for children, especially for those in low-income families. Many families have had to cut down on costs including children's leisure activities. In some rural areas, high transport costs are limiting children's access to different activities. Giving up hobbies and social activities will damage children's mental health and well-being, making them feel even more lonely and isolated.

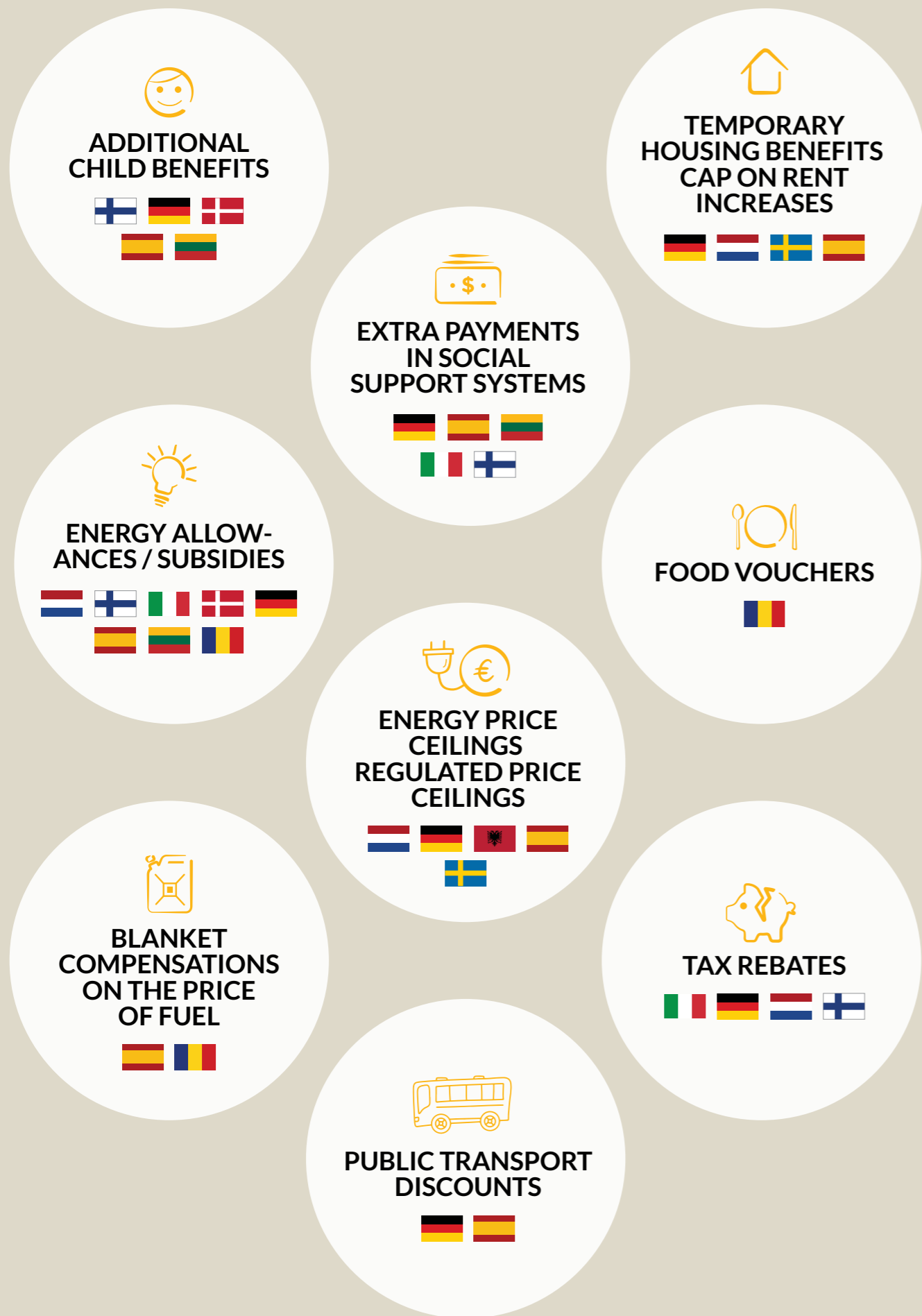


*"I sometimes feel like disappearing or giving up because it seems like it would help others manage better<sup>87</sup>."*

Today's increased financial pressure caused by the cost-of-living crisis is exacerbating an already critical situation. Economic strain and job insecurity among parents is expected to worsen children's well-being. Moreover, decreased purchasing power makes access to mental health services even more difficult, given that public coverage remains limited and psychological support is largely supplied within the private sector. Children's situation will continue to deteriorate if urgent action is not taken; governments need to relieve the financial pressures of vulnerable households and ensure high-quality, affordable, and accessible access to mental health services, resources, and support.



Photo: Lolo Vasco / Save the Children



## Governments' response to the cost-of-living crisis

Governments across Europe are responding to the cost-of-living crisis. Responses are necessary and welcome, but many are targeted at short-term alleviation. The big challenge is how to offer meaningful and sustainable support and relief to poor and vulnerable households. The graph on the left provides a snapshot of relevant government interventions, showing that energy bonuses, subsidies, lower energy consumption taxes and other measures have been put in place in several countries (**Germany, Italy, Spain, The Netherlands, Denmark, Romania, Finland, Lithuania**). Other key measures concern temporary protections or ceilings on household energy costs (**Sweden, Germany, The Netherlands**), targeted measures to tackle rising transport costs (**Spain, Germany**), and new or increased social benefits payments (**Finland, Spain, Lithuania**)<sup>88</sup>.

The measures introduced by European countries are welcome. However, they risk being mainly focused on the immediate future and leave families without structural support to tackle the long-term consequences of this crisis. Short-term measures and one-off payments are temporary relief but not the solution. Governments need to do more to protect children and their families from the devastating impacts of this crisis. It is necessary to invest in sustained forms of social protection that support children and vulnerable families in the long-term.

This period of intense global crisis should serve as a wake-up-call to kickstart ambitious political commitment and activity. Otherwise, we risk robbing an entire generation of children of their chance to reach their full potential and the possibility to create a fairer, safer, and kinder world<sup>89</sup>.



Photo: La Pinza.Creaciones Fotograficas / Save the Children





# Recommendations

## Governments should invest in children - despite economic and inflationary pressures.

- 1. Increase social benefits and services to all families with children in need – including refugees** – and deliver them at the right time. In most countries they are “too little, too late”. Governments should raise benefit levels in line with the cost-of-living (for all benefits including child allowances, income support, allowances for asylum seekers and refugees, housing benefits).
- 2. Ringfence investments in children** ensuring that social systems and interventions are protected from national spending cuts and expanded when inadequate, with a specific focus on investments on early childhood development. Children’s needs must be put first.
- 3. Apply short- and long-term reforms** to child allowance systems, social security benefit, price caps, tax breaks, and social tariffs.
- 4. Increase quality and access to social services** to support the children and families hit by the cost-of-living crisis, with specific support for the most affected and vulnerable.
- 5. Financially assist families** having difficulties with utilities, rent or mortgage payments.
- 6. Make rapid structural and comprehensive national reforms using a dedicated new injection of funds.** Allocate additional ad-hoc funds to tackle the multi-level consequences

of the conflict in Ukraine. These funds could be borrowed as was done for the post-pandemic recovery or could be set up through national contributions.

- 7. Expand measures that help children get involved in leisure, culture, and sports.** Use European funds to finance the participation of low socio-economic status students in school trips or extra school activities.
- 8. Target compensation and support interventions at the most vulnerable children** and families rather than opting for blanket measures. For example, prioritise the most vulnerable families when introducing energy allowances and subsidies.
- 9. Give access to affordable and quality housing for all families with children** by, for instance, capping rent increases, increasing and facilitating access to housing benefits, banning evictions of families with children in vulnerable situations (in the short-term) and increasing the stock of social housing (in the medium-and long-term). A secure and healthy home for every child should be a priority, also for children in migration.
- 10. Introduce a system of cash benefits or food vouchers** to promote the consumption of healthy, fresh, and nutritious food among vulnerable consumers. For meeting basic needs, especially food, cash benefits should be preferred, in particular – multipurpose cash. The choice between cash transfers or vouchers should be based on people’s preferences, evidence, and appropriateness to meet needs in that context<sup>90</sup>. This should be a well-designed part of a sound public system that also includes adequate minimum wages, minimum income schemes, and accessible essential services. In addition, activities for vulnerable children and families that help prevent and better respond to social issues and crisis situations should also

be provided. These activities include health promotion, disease prevention, counselling, and training, including healthy lifestyles and nutrition education. At the same time, ensure, in primary and high school, at least one healthy meal per school day for children in vulnerable situations, as stressed by the Child Guarantee Recommendation.

- 11. Beyond financial measures, it is fundamental to enable adequate and timely practical help and support for families in their daily lives.** Information about services –particularly preventive, low-threshold services and mental

health services– should be communicated to children and young people, for example using digital channels.

- 12. Pay attention to the voices of children themselves.** The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees children strong rights to influence and be consulted on matters that affect them. Children must be given the opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences and offer their opinion on child-oriented solutions. Their rights are fully realised only when their opinions and perspectives are heard – and heeded.



Photo: Diodo Media / Save the Children

# THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Save the Children's Generation Hope Report shows that climate change is not only a threat to the future; for the world's 2.4 billion children, it is a global emergency today<sup>91</sup>. Save the Children's work also shows that the millions of children born in 2020 will face on average 2-7 times more extreme weather events than their grandparent's generation: more heatwaves, flooding, droughts, crop failures and wildfires. Each endangers children's rights to a safe home, healthy environment, healthcare, food, and learning<sup>92</sup>. While climate change affects everyone, those who have contributed the least to the crisis (among them children, people living in poverty, and future generations) are the most affected.



**"They are not aware that if the planet has no future, neither do we."**

(child - 14 years old)

Young Voices Report

Climate change threatens children's very survival: they face a deadly combination of exposure to multiple shocks and slow onset events with high vulnerability resulting from a lack of essential services. Children deserve an opportunity to reach their full potential, but climate change put them at risk.

Due to their unique physical and developmental characteristics, children are more vulnerable to climate and environmental shocks than adults<sup>93</sup>:

- They are physically more vulnerable, and less able to withstand and survive shocks such as floods, droughts, severe weather, and heatwaves. Toxic substances, such as lead and other forms of pollution, affect children more than adults, even at lower doses of exposure.

- They are physiologically more vulnerable.
- They have their whole life ahead of them – any deprivation as a result of climate and environmental degradation at a young age can affect their opportunities for the rest of their lives.
- Climate change heightens existing social and economic inequalities, intensifies poverty and reverses progress towards improvement in children's well-being<sup>94</sup>.

In addition<sup>95</sup>:

- Extreme temperatures leave many families living in poverty with less food, less clean water, lower incomes, and worsening health.
- Extreme events can destroy homes, schools, childcare centres, and infrastructure critical to children's well-being.

Moreover, these threats do not happen in isolation – they overlap. By compounding one another and layered with other social, political and health risks (such as COVID-19, the cost-of-living crisis, and the conflict in Ukraine) they make parts of the world very precarious places for children to grow up.

## Impact of climate change on families and children in Europe

Extreme weather events (heatwaves, floods, droughts, and rainfalls) are hitting Europe hard, creating health problems for children. Children are expected to suffer seven times more heatwaves during their lifetime and at least two times more droughts, as compared to adults born in 1960<sup>96</sup>.

In **Finland**, global warming is contributing to a noticeable spread of ticks and tick-borne diseases such as Lyme disease (borreliosis) that affect children. Darker winters, also linked to climate change, may increase cases of seasonal affective disorder<sup>97</sup> which is likely to have an increased effect on children who already suffer from continuous spread of viruses at early education centres and schools.

**Germany** has seen an increase in vector-borne diseases, allergic and respiratory diseases, and exposure to extreme weather events and UV radiation that particularly affect children<sup>98</sup>.

In the last twenty years, the probability of extreme events in **Italy** has increased by 9%. From 2010 to 2021, 1.181 extreme weather phenomena were recorded, with a negative impact on 637 municipalities<sup>99</sup>. Towns and cities are 5-10°C hotter than the countryside. These events particularly affect populations at risk of poverty and social exclusion, including children<sup>100</sup>.

Children in **Kosovo** grow up in a highly polluted environment, harming their long-term health and violating their right to a healthy environment, **Albania** gets hit by floods, droughts, fires, and landslides<sup>101</sup>. More extreme weather harms the economy and people. It also hurts farming and livestock and damages important systems like irrigation, shelter, and storage.

## Deaths and damage from severe floods

In **Germany**, in 2021, 180 people died due to flooding, and many more lost their homes<sup>102</sup>. For low-income families whose houses are affected by flooding the situation is very critical as they do not have the money to repair/rebuild their houses.

In **Iceland**, climate change is taking a toll on some communities and municipalities as melting permafrost causes flooding and destroys homes. Rainfall is more intense, leading to severe water

floods that inundate homes as pipes and drains become overwhelmed. This presents a significant challenge for vulnerable families and those at risk of poverty, who often lack the financial resources to cope. Moreover, some water damage is not covered by insurance.

**Finland** is expecting more winter and summer floods, bringing large-scale health risks such as water contamination and making roads impassable, limiting access to schools and other essential services. Increased air moisture from floods and rain damages buildings<sup>103</sup>. Flooding and heavy rainfall have damaged schools, public buildings and private houses in **Finland**, **Lithuania** and **Iceland** ruining air quality and putting essential services such as schools out of action.

## And more...

**The climate crisis also puts at risk school attendance.** It's not only floods that prevent children from reaching schools. In **Spain** some children struggle to attend school due to high temperatures and in **Italy**, high temperatures and natural disaster lead to missed school days<sup>104</sup>.

In **Germany**, many low-income families who live in big cities can only afford homes that are more exposed to bad air quality – for example, along busy roads<sup>105</sup>.

In **Italy**, poor air quality causes 50.000 deaths a year and almost 2 million children (21,3% of the total) live in polluted cities<sup>106</sup>. Information and data from different countries shows that climate-related damage to the agricultural sector makes healthy food more expensive<sup>107</sup>. Climate change is also making it harder for families to heat and cool their homes. This is a problem for low-income families who can't afford to buy air heat pumps or pay for more sustainable energy sources<sup>108</sup>.

## What children think about climate change

In the survey “Young voices” by Save the Children **Sweden**, 54% of children responded that they worried about the environment and climate change but only 12% think that politicians and decision-makers in **Sweden** are doing enough<sup>109</sup>.

Save the Children **Romania** contributed to the consultation process launched by the Romanian government on climate change, which consulted with 272 children and young people. 47% of the children said that they already receive

information about climate change in schools, but they don't feel like they're learning anything they did not already know. They said that their teachers don't know enough about climate change and don't teach it in an interesting way. They expressed concerns about the efficiency of the “Green week” because there isn't enough money or resources to make it happen. They believe schools aren't good examples of being environmentally friendly because there aren't any green areas, recycling isn't done properly, and there isn't any renewable energy being used.

Save the Children Romania recently analysed<sup>110</sup> the perception of Romanian children on climate change. The positive findings of the study include the interest of the children to become

active in protecting the environment, their willingness to make changes in their lifestyles in order to reduce impact on the environment and their interest to learn more about this subject, especially about air pollution, pollution with plastic and deforestation. The worrisome results of the study include children's opinions about the lack of interest towards environment issues that they perceive from the decision makers, their feeling that **Romania** is less accountable than other countries in environment-related problematics and their feeling that peers and adults (parents/teachers) alike are ridiculing their environment concerns<sup>111</sup>.

In the framework of the Generation Hope child hearings, Save the Children **Italy** has consulted more than 300 children and youth, between 10 and 25 years old, about the consequences of climate change and inequalities. The majority of children and youth interviewed believe that those most affected are children living in poverty. 90% of the respondents consider that countries should work together to solve these challenges<sup>112</sup>.

For the first time, COP27 hosted a Children and Youth Pavilion. Save the Children **Italy** has facilitated the participation of two young activists from its Youth Movement and organised the event “*Empowering children and youth for their meaningful participation in climate policies and actions*”. It was hosted in the Italian Pavilion with the support of the Italian Ministry for Environment and Energy Security<sup>113</sup>. Moreover, during the Conference, the Italian government announced the launch of the new Italian Climate Fund to support developing countries in their efforts to mitigate and adapt against the effects of climate change, with a contribution of €840 million per year until 2026.

## Policy measures / Government action

Governments have a duty to all children, young people, and future generations to urgently address this crisis and protect their rights.

Different countries are starting to address these issues by approving climate change laws and adaptation strategies.

**Finland's** upcoming next stage climate plan will be updated with a focus on the socio-economic impacts of climate change – for example on elderly people, but - according to Save the Children Finland's assessment – it is likely that children and families will be left out.

Experts believe that the **Spanish** government's 2021 Climate Change Law is not ambitious enough. Compromises towards a green transition have been acquired in the context of the Recovery Plans, but there is still funding for the fossil fuel industry<sup>114</sup>. In 2022, the Ministry of Education proposed a plan to adapt schools to the rising temperatures during summer as a result of the climate crisis<sup>115</sup>.

In 2021, **Iceland** prepared a white paper and a draft policy on adaptation to climate change<sup>116</sup>. The country is making efforts to stop using fossils fuels in transport, emphasises ecological packaging and waste sorting and has introduced sustainability education in schools.

In **Lithuania**, climate change plans are underway. The country offers financial support for renewable energy sources, and runs information campaigns about the negative effects of extreme heat waves and how to prevent heat strokes.

At the beginning of 2022, the **Romanian** Presidency presented a draft national strategy for education about climate change and a public consultation process was initiated. A “Green week” – a week entirely dedicated to climate change – is now in the school calendar.

**Albania's** laws include rules on waste management and a plan to reduce emissions in energy, agriculture, waste, and land use.

**Germany's** announced “Klimageld” mechanism is supposed to compensate people, especially those with low income or living in poverty, for rising costs of living due to CO<sub>2</sub>-prices but it has not happened so far.



Photo: Pablo Blázquez / Save the Children



# Recommendations

## 1. Ensure that climate and environmental policies are child-sensitive

Governments need to ensure that climate and environmental policies are child-sensitive and to evaluate the impacts of climate change on children comprehensively. Climate policies and social policies must go hand in hand. All governments should spend more on building social services that support children's welfare and safety nets, so they can reach their full potential<sup>117</sup>. In addition, government climate change plans should align with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## 2. The only long-term solution to climate change is reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

To avoid the worst impacts of the climate crisis, comprehensive and urgent action is required. Countries must cut their emissions by at least 45% (compared to 2010 levels) by 2030 to keep warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Countries must also rapidly phase out the use and subsidy of fossil fuels and other environmentally destructive practices, moving towards renewable and green energy as quickly as possible, and providing incentives to ensure the families most affected by inequality and discrimination are supported to access new economic opportunities driven by the green economy<sup>118</sup>.

Climate finance should be significantly increased to ease the transition to a sustainable and just development and manage the inevitable impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable ones.



KOSOVO

**"Nobody has taught us about climate change."**

(child - 14 years old)

**"Due to the lack of environmental education in schools, we are not aware that this problem exists."**

(child - 14 years old)

Young Voices Report

## 3. Many actions can greatly reduce children's climate risk.

To protect children from the worst impacts of the already changing climate, **key social services** must be improved and adapted. Thus, it is necessary to:

### • Invest in sustainability education

- » Invest in infrastructure that is resilient to disasters to reduce long-term disruption to children's learning process, as well as solutions that increase access, such as digital learning, as well as equity.
- » Ensure quality learning, providing a safe and friendly environment, as well as qualified and motivated teachers.
- » Include the latest knowledge on climate change into national curricula and provide children with green skills<sup>119</sup>.
- » Empower children, young people, and teachers to participate in climate mitigation, adaptation and climate-resilience activities in schools, encouraging children and young people to become part of the solution to climate change.

- » Include young people in all national, regional, and international climate negotiations and decisions. Children and young people must be included in all climate-related decision making at all levels (national, regional, and international, including United Nations Climate Change Conferences<sup>120</sup>).



KOSOVO

**"The participation of children at the municipal level is quite low, it is a children's right that's been taken away from us."**

(child - 15 years old)

**"Politicians think about our needs only when they want to win an election."**

(child - 14 years old)

Young Voices Report

### • Support children's meaningful engagement<sup>121</sup>

- » Empower children to take action on climate issues.
- » Include young people in all national, regional, and international climate negotiations and decisions. Children and young people must be included in all climate-related decision-making processes and negotiations at all levels (national, regional and international, including United Nations Climate Change Conferences) – also as part of national official delegations during key international moments.

- » Implement laws and set up child-friendly mechanisms and platforms that guarantee the rights of children to participate in processes about climate and environment matters.

### • Invest in improved access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services

- » Since the resilience of a community is strongly related to the resilience of its WASH services, those services must be efficiently managed, protected and monitored

### • Scale up social protection systems to mitigate the increasing impacts of climate shocks

- » Work towards universal coverage of child and family benefits as well as ensure that social protection systems provide connections to other vital services in health, education, and nutrition.
- » Social protection systems must be child-sensitive, gender-responsive, disability-inclusive, linked to child protection systems, and include children experiencing inequalities and discrimination.
- » Understand the impacts of climate change faced by children and their caregivers. Make sure that social protection responses are fast and that they can give extra support during emergencies caused by climate change. Also, make sure that children have access to quality education, protection, and free health care as part of Universal Health Coverage.



**THE IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE EUROPEAN  
CHILD GUARANTEE  
AND CHILD POVERTY  
REDUCTION POLICIES  
IN EUROPE**

# THE EUROPEAN CHILD GUARANTEE AND THE NATIONAL ACTION PLANS

In 2021, EU Member States unanimously adopted the Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee. By calling on EU Member States to guarantee access to basic rights and services for children in need, the Child Guarantee is a crucial, timely instrument to improve the lives of children experiencing poverty and social exclusion. In particular, the framework aims to ensure that vulnerable children can access free early childhood education and care, free education, free healthcare, healthy nutrition, and adequate housing.

The Recommendation emphasises why a rights-based, integrated, person-centred, and multidimensional approach is needed to address child poverty. It advocates the need for an enabling policy framework, and how multiple EU funds can be deployed. Save the Children has welcomed the Child Guarantee as an innovative framework to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and create unprecedented and fundamental opportunities for Member States national authorities to work together to tackle Child Poverty.

The Recommendation requires Member States to nominate a national Child Guarantee Coordinator and submit ambitious and comprehensive Child Guarantee National Action Plans (hereafter referred to as “National Action Plans”). National Action Plans must outline what EU countries plan to do until 2030 to tackle child poverty and explain how their measures will be monitored and evaluated. Despite a deadline of 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2022 for submission of national plans, to date 19 plans have currently been

submitted (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden), while eight are still missing (Austria, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia)<sup>122</sup>. With comprehensive measures to protect vulnerable children more urgent than ever, Save the Children and the EU Alliance for Investing in Children have been advocating for all Member States to submit ambitious plans without further delay. Moreover, Member States should meaningfully involve children and civil society organisations (CSOs) in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluations of the plans<sup>123</sup>.

To date only 19 out of 27 Child Guarantee National Action Plans have currently been submitted

Although the Council Recommendation directly concerns EU countries only, it is an exemplary framework for non-EU countries. In particular, it should be seen as an inherent part of EU candidate countries’ paths towards EU accession given that they need to align with the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan, which include the implementation of the Child Guarantee. Thus, this report also assesses the poverty situation and provides recommendations for Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Iceland on the basis of the Child Guarantee structure.

## General assessment of the Child Guarantee National Action Plans

Save the Children members completed a questionnaire to provide a general assessment of their Child Guarantee National Action Plans and (in particular for non-EU countries) their national child poverty reduction policies<sup>124</sup>. There are positive measures to be found across all countries assessed. However, there are also shortfalls that vary in size and scope from country to country.

Countries such as **Finland, Spain and Italy** have particularly comprehensive plans that are either part of their national child strategies or closely synergized with them. This means the plans are tied to a wider context of children’s rights and can have a greater impact on children’s well-being.

**Finland’s** National Child Strategy is particularly inclusive, with actions aimed at including children in discussions and plans about their rights. Such innovative actions are more likely to produce ideas and testimonies that will help reduce child poverty. The Child Guarantee Action Plan includes free comprehensive and upper secondary education, free school meals, free healthcare, and the subjective right to early childhood education. Most vulnerable and minority groups of children are well defined in the plan. The challenging issue in Finland’s plan is its monitoring and evaluation. Although the Plan mentions that a national cooperation network will be set up for monitoring and evaluation, operating in line with the National Child Strategy, it is only in later stages that qualitative and quantitative metrics and indicators will be specified.

The **Spanish** Action Plan aims to be a holistic blueprint for actions against child poverty until 2030. It has significant commendable elements including proposals to combat energy poverty, address school segregation, implement the

national plan for inclusive education, improve data collection and to deploy a national deinstitutionalization strategy. Some concerns exist about Spain’s Plan. For example, it does not always put the necessary emphasis, in line with the Recommendation, on free access to/affordability of key services, including the right to at least one free meal per school day. The Plan also fails to introduce a preventative approach to the Child Guarantee: it is almost exclusively focused on income support measures for families already in vulnerable situations. The issues of quality standards of the services provided under the Child Guarantee and the needs of migrant children could also be improved.

The process of developing **Italy’s** Action Plan was commendably inclusive. A working group involved not only national governmental officials from the Ministries of Labour and Social Affairs, Education, Health and the Department for Family, it also involved municipalities, regions, NGOs and the Youth Advisory Board. This resulted in a more coherent plan in terms of objectives vs. gaps, and in terms of policies and reforms needed. The plan includes a series of actions in the areas of ECEC, education and health<sup>125</sup> that, if implemented on schedule, will improve the situation of a good number of vulnerable children. Missing in the Plan is a clear identification of the funds that will be used to achieve some of the goals. In some areas (e.g., health) clear targets are also missing. Such missing vital elements, combined with unsatisfactory data collection, will make it difficult to monitor implementation and to stimulate effective change. Without these improvements, the Plan risks to remain a “book of good intentions”.

In **Lithuania**, the strategies put forward in the Child Guarantee Action Plan are based on best practices that were shown to work in tackling child poverty. Also, information about possible areas of improvement is based on official statistics and reviews. The novel elements of the Plan focus on integrating children living in rural areas and children with disabilities and on the development of a strategy to integrate different

governmental sectors (social services, education, healthcare). A shortfall of the Plan is that there is no information about the participation of children in its development.

In **Sweden**, national legislation provides the basis for children to have effective access to the key social services referred to in the European Child Guarantee. Many of these services are also provided free of charge. Sweden's primary national target is to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 15.000 by 2030. Out of these, at least 5.000 should be children. This ambition is far too low and insufficient for fulfilling the goals of the national public health policy for good and equal health. The Swedish plan identifies five groups of children in need who risk not having access to social services: children in families who are financially disadvantaged, children living in inadequate housing or insecure housing or who are homeless, children who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, children with disabilities, and children who are placed in care; but further measures are needed to give them better access to social services. Children in migration get inadequate attention in the Plan, particularly considering that daily allowance for

asylum seekers, unchanged since 1994, is highly insufficient.

The priorities of the **Polish** Action Plan include tackling homelessness, supporting children's mental health, supporting children with a migrant background, Roma children and children of refugees from Ukraine, and supporting children in alternative care. However, data on migrants is from 2021 and does not account for the refugee children from Ukraine that arrived after February 2022, even if currently more than 1,5 million refugees from Ukraine registered for temporary protection in Poland. The actions planned will be funded mainly from ESF+ and ERDF. Monitoring will be carried out by the Ministry of Family and Social Policy will, evaluate results in 2025 and in 2030.

In **The Netherlands**, the Action Plan specifies a single broad target of child poverty reduction by 50% within four years. It identifies several categories of children in need but does not provide any information about the size of these categories. The Plan only runs until 2025, whereas the Child Guarantee recommends that National Action Plans on the Child Guarantee should run until 2030. The framework also

recommends considering a gender perspective throughout the enabling framework, gender remains unmentioned in the Dutch Action Plan. Finally, the Dutch government has also recently published a National Action Plan on poverty and debt, but the document does not mention the Child Guarantee.

While an ambitious and coherent Action Plan is expected from **Germany**, it has not been published at the time of editing this report. Reasons for the delay are the change of government and minister in the Ministry of Family Affairs in early 2022. Further delays are due to a complex coordination process between different federal ministries and levels of the federal states. Save the Children will assess these delays based on the outcome of the process.

**Romania** has not officially presented its National Action Plan, but Save the Children Romania had the opportunity to review its draft in January 2023. The draft closely reflects the objectives and priority actions included in the National Strategy for the protection and promotion of the rights of the child (developed in 2021, based on well-structured consultations with children and other relevant stakeholders, including civil society organisations, soon to be approved under government decision). The two draft instruments also share the same monitoring body: an inter-institutional coordinating council where both relevant public institutions and civil society organisations are represented, but not children themselves. Given the differences between the National Strategy and the Action Plan (specific scope, period of implementation, target groups) a special round of consultation of relevant stakeholders was organised in December 2022<sup>126</sup>.

The **Danish** Action Plan lacks concrete initiatives, actions, and goals to reduce child poverty.

Outside the EU, in **Iceland**, there is no policy to eradicate child poverty or poverty in general. Despite the considerable number of Icelandic organisations helping people in poverty, including vulnerable children, a comprehensive public policy in the country does not exist yet.

## The Child Guarantee Council Recommendation as a model framework for child poverty reduction policies in Western Balkans

Child poverty reduction is a key principle (11) of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation is a deliverable of the Pillar's Action Plan which the **Western Balkan countries** are encouraged to follow as part of their EU integration process. In this context, the Directorate General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) should encourage candidate and potential candidate countries to implement the measures included in the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation to advance their social inclusion policies and pave the way for their integration in the EU.

Save the Children will be also calling the 2024-2029 European Commission to propose measures to integrate the implementation of the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation as a requirement of candidate countries towards their access to the EU, in an effort to address inequalities and invest in the EU's future citizens.



## Child Guarantee service areas: Free early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Every child in the European Union has the right to affordable and high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC), as outlined in the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>127</sup>. The first years of life are a fundamental component of the care needed for children to thrive and develop to their full and unique potential. At the same time, children exposed to prolonged adversity in their first years are less equipped to cope with adversity later in life. Despite progress in many countries, universal access to ECEC is hindered by a lack of availability, affordability, and accessibility of quality services. An EU child- and family-centred early childhood and education approach is thus both essential and urgently needed<sup>128</sup>.

It is especially important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. A valuable investment in education and training for young children, improving access to ECEC will also help reduce overall poverty levels by enabling parents and guardians to seek work and increase their income and independence<sup>129</sup>.

The European Child Guarantee aims to promote ECEC as a tool to address child poverty and social exclusion. The Child Guarantee National Action Plans offer a unique opportunity to expand and improve national, regional, and local level ECEC provision, funding, and coordination. Save the Children's assessment of ECEC policies within the Child Guarantee National Action Plans in different countries shows a mixed picture of meaningful achievements and proposals and unresolved challenges.

### Increase participation in ECEC

Many countries are actively working to increase participation in ECEC. For example, in **Finland**, where the 82% participation of 3-5 years old children is lower than the OECD mean of 88%<sup>130</sup>, ECEC is recommended to be free of charge. On the contrary, pre-school for six years old is free; the country is registering a 99% participation rate<sup>131</sup>. **Italy** planned to reach 50% coverage for full time childcare (children below 3 years old), and 95% for full time preschool education (children aged 3-5), targets that match those in the Care Strategy<sup>132</sup> recently adopted by the European Commission. A total of €4,6 billion has been allocated through the RFF, and the national budget law has allocated funds to establish an essential level of service at 33% by each Municipality to guarantee equal access to ECEC services. Now it is necessary to monitor the implementation of the law.

In **Sweden**, preschool is free for up to 525 hours a year for children aged 3-5. Below the age of three, the cost depends on the family income. 96% of children attend preschool. A new law which will come into effect mid-2023 will ensure that children over three have a reserved place at the preschool, even if the guardians have not applied for it, and municipalities must regularly inform guardians about the preschool purpose and availability. An additional "open preschool," can be attended on a drop-in basis without enrolment.

In **The Netherlands**, to address the below EU average participation in ECEC from the age of three the government has made extra investments to improve the quality of services, raise the qualification level of ECEC staff to tertiary level, and evaluate equal educational opportunities.

### Resolve the shortage of ECEC places

Some countries have a shortage of ECEC places. The **Lithuanian** government provides free childcare, early education and free meals at childcare centres; yet there is still a lack of availability of ECEC centres, especially for children with special needs and/or disabilities. The National Action Plan tries to tackle the problem from multiple dimensions, but there is still no clear and comprehensive plan for financing and implementing access to early childhood education and care for every child. In **Romania**, the draft National Plan envisages the creation of 181 new early education establishments (creches for children from 0-3) as well as a revision of the enrolling criteria prioritising children from vulnerable families (single parent households or socioeconomically vulnerable families).

In **Iceland**, although most children from the age of two participate in ECEC, there remains a gap between parental leave of one year and the possibility to start ECEC. In **Albania**, ECEC is optional overall, extremely limited for children under three years old and practically non-existent in rural and remote areas. The child teacher ratio in cities is very high (up to 1:20) and the infrastructure and learning environment need to be improved and enriched with didactic materials. There are no subsidised or income-adjusted fee schemes.

### Target vulnerable groups

Another gap consistently identified is actions targeted specifically at vulnerable groups. While in **Germany**, the expansion of day-care places has increased over the last years and is available for all children due to subsidised fees, the high demand for places often means vulnerable children are excluded – such as refugee children and children living with unemployed caretakers. Germany does not have a National Action Plan yet. To date, national policies do not actively

support vulnerable families' knowledge of the legal support system nor adopt poverty-sensitive communication. **Sweden's** Plan needs to remedy the problem that children moving between temporary housing, asylum-seekers, and undocumented cannot attend ECEC because applications require a formal address. In **The Netherlands**, it is not clear whether children in need have access to ECEC. This is because policies to tackle child poverty do not identify groups of children in need nor do they specify targets.

### Tackle staff scarcity

Lack of qualified staff in ECEC is a challenge in most countries. While in **Denmark** ECEC is available to all children (including children living in poverty, as their families get subsidised fees) and the quality is generally good, the Plan needs to tackle a high child-caretaker ratio and under-skilled staff. Despite new laws in this area, the situation has not changed. Thus, municipalities – who have economic responsibility for day care and kindergartens – need to be given adequate resources. In **Italy**, a recently established national standard for staff working in childcare will require additional investment in education and training<sup>133</sup>. **Finland, Albania, The Netherlands**<sup>134</sup>, **Germany**, and **Iceland** also cite staff investment as an urgent priority for their Action Plans and national policies. ECEC in **Sweden** requires increased access to special education, psychologists, and adaptations for children with special needs, for example neuropsychiatric conditions in preschool.





## Recommendations

- 1. Countries must aim for ECEC to be affordable for all families and free of charge for the most vulnerable children.**
- 2. Any clear comprehensive plan for financing and implementing access to early childhood education should ensure that the supply of places meets the demand.**
- 3. Break down the non-financial barriers** that prevent vulnerable children from participating in ECEC, such as in some countries the requirement to have a permanent address. Adapt communication about ECEC to suit the needs of vulnerable groups.
- 4. Countries should significantly invest in education,** including tertiary education, that gives ECEC qualifications and should also invest in recruiting and retaining qualified staff.
- 5. Ensure that municipalities,** who often have economic responsibility early education centres, **are given adequate resources** from the national level to deliver the necessary services.



# Summary of countries' main achievements/positive elements & unresolved issues/pending challenges in ECEC

## Sweden

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

✓ Programme “Förskola för fler barn” (“Preschool for more children”): to increase the proportion of children in early childhood education which also includes giving priority to early access for some children in need. When a child turns 3, the municipality automatically reserves a place and informs guardians.

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Difficulties for certain groups of children (asylum-seekers, undocumented children, children in temporary housing) to attend ECEC due to, for example, the lack of a formal address.

## Italy

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

✓ Action Plan states the objectives of 50% coverage for full time childcare, and 95% for full time preschool education.

✓ National standard for staff working in childcare established by law.

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Low participation rate in ECEC, especially in Southern Italy.

## Netherlands

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

✓ Investments to improve quality and participation (objective: to increase the number of participation hours, raise the qualification level of ECEC staff to tertiary level, and evaluate equal educational opportunities).

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Staff shortage.

## Denmark

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ High ratio child-caretaker.

✗ Lack of staff with adequate education.

## Germany

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ High demand of ECEC services and lack of skilled staff.

## Finland

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Low participation rate in ECEC compared to European average levels.

✗ More resources need to be invested in personnel.

## Lithuania

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Lack of a concise plan to provide access to ECEC to every child.

## Kosovo

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

✓ Draft Law on Early Childhood Education approved by the government.

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Low enrolment rates by children 0-6 years old.

✗ Low enrolment rates of children from marginalized communities.

✗ Lack of public ECEC services in rural and remote areas.

✗ ECEC services provided through a fragmented sectoral approach.

✗ Lack of information and awareness among parents.

## Romania

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Limited availability of ECEC places (with high disparities between rural and urban areas).

✗ Insufficient targeting of children from vulnerable families.

## Albania

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Difficult access to ECEC for Roma children and children with disabilities.

✗ ECEC very limited/non-existent in rural/remote areas.

✗ High child teacher ratio.

✗ Lack of qualified ECEC staff.

## Iceland

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Low salaries and lack of educated staff.

✗ Important gap between the parental leave (1 year) and access to ECEC.

## Child Guarantee service areas: Free education

(including effective and free access to school-based, sport, leisure and cultural activities and effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day)

The need to increase the capacity of education systems to break the cycle of disadvantage, ensuring that all children can benefit from inclusive high-quality education was clearly stated in the EU Recommendation on Investing in Children already in 2013<sup>135</sup>. The right to education was fully recognised in the first principle of the EPSR<sup>136</sup>. Likewise, the right of children to leisure and recreational activities was contemplated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)<sup>137</sup>.



### GERMANY

*“Without the support of Save the Children, the children in the severely disadvantaged district would have [...] no such attractive retreat and no incentive to discover reading books as an experiential space for emotional adventures and the expansion of one’s own general knowledge.”*

(LeseOasen Project)<sup>138</sup>

The Child Guarantee aims to ensure that every child in need has effective and free access to high quality education and leisure activities. The National Action Plans should not only address service provision and physical infrastructure but should also tackle the hidden costs of these services to families on low incomes and the root causes of low take-up.

### Examples of positive developments are seen in several countries

Two important policies have been introduced in the **Finnish** action plan: the implementation of the free of charge and compulsory<sup>139</sup> upper secondary education for all children until 18 years and the application of the Finnish model of hobbies<sup>140</sup> in all regions of the country. The Finnish action plan should ensure that the resources allocated to these initiatives are adequate.

In **Lithuania**, the government’s official acknowledgement of the problems in the education system – low quality (especially in rural areas), non-inclusive (for children with special needs, children from different cultural backgrounds), lack of staff, lack of extracurricular/leisure activities – has triggered additional policies to address these issues and improve the overall situation.

In **Sweden**, the National Action Plan presents the ambitious goal to increase the proportion of children in socio-economically vulnerable families who take part in sports and cultural activities; raise the percentage of children who graduate from high school with passing grades; expand support for children with disabilities and establish an inquiry on the obstacles to access leisure centres<sup>141</sup>. The plan however needs to clarify what measures is to be implemented to fulfil this ambition. To combat an increasing problem of school segregation, the government has made proposals to alleviate challenges for vulnerable children and to strengthen the compensatory role of the school.



New legislation in **The Netherlands** obliges schools to allow all children to take part in all school activities regardless of whether the parents have paid the contribution that funds such activities. Access to digital education for children is stimulated by the state sponsored cooperative SIVON, which helps schools to obtain the equipment and infrastructure for effective digital education in the classroom and for remote learning. The National Programme for Education<sup>142</sup> also provides schools with additional resources to purchase digital tools.

In **Albania** the government has made reforms in access to education and in raising learning outcomes including a new competency-based curriculum framework, teacher standards and

a school evaluation indicator framework. Most recently, Albania has restructured key agencies responsible for school support and external evaluation.

### **National plans and policies need to be more ambitious in tackling several problematic areas**

Shortage of teachers and/or a too-high student/teacher ratio are ongoing problems in **Germany, Denmark, and The Netherlands**. Resources for inclusive education initiatives for minority or vulnerable groups are in short supply in countries such as **Sweden, Albania, and Iceland**. In **Romania** the draft National Plan includes



Posed by a model. Photo: John Owens / Save the Children

### **ITALY**

*M. is 10 years old and attends the last year of primary school where he is looked after by a support teacher because of his learning difficulties. Unfortunately, the separation of his parents and the estrangement from his father have contributed to fuel some of Manuel's fragilities.*

*The child needs to be looked after, which is why he has embarked on a course of constant psychotherapy that is resulting to be very beneficial for him. The mother, alone, takes care of her son in every way, she tries to be very present, attentive, but, working a few hours a week, she is unable to support some fundamental expenses, such as psychotherapy or the school canteen for her son. She just cannot guarantee both.*

*Punto Luce<sup>146</sup> decided to support the boy and his family through a care dowry to cover the school canteen fees and psychotherapy.*

*Thanks to the support obtained, M.'s mother, was able to breathe: "This support was an important help for me. No matter*

*how hard I try to be a good mother, I am not always able to give M. everything he needs, and this fills me with pain and worry. But Punto Luce is a very valuable reference point: the operators care about all the children who attend the centre and try to compensate for shortcomings and difficulties, giving support when needed. They are always there, especially from a human and emotional point of view".*

*In the monitoring that the operators do on a regular basis and in the discussion with the mother and the social worker, other needs soon emerged that had previously been put on the back burner due to other pressing necessities. For M., it would have been very helpful to take part in sport activities that would put him in contact with his peers and encourage him to have confidence in himself and others. "When I work, my thought is to put money aside to be able to pay the registration fee for a football course for M.," his mother tells us. Punto Luce operators decided to provide M. with sports endowment. M. thus started playing football.*

**(Punto Luce Project)**

several promising actions aimed at ensuring access at and quality of free education for vulnerable children: revising the public funding mechanism and the cost per pupil standards; expanding the Education Early Warning Mechanism to 3000 public schools; increasing the number of relevant staff especially in vulnerable schools; and increasing the number of schools where the "Second Chance" programme is available.

Although the **Italian** Action Plan sets a clear target to increase full time education in primary schools<sup>143</sup> through activities such as

inclusive educational practices<sup>144</sup> there is a clear need to increase funding in education<sup>145</sup> to at least 5% of GDP and to target resources to areas where the most vulnerable children live. A national programme for "Educational Intensive Areas" should be introduced, aimed at orienting financial resources towards schools and territories where the incidence of poverty is higher. The programme would ensure that all students from those areas can access high quality, low-cost educational materials and a comprehensive range of extracurricular activities.

In **The Netherlands**, there has been a decline in basic skills and the differences in performance levels between schools are increasing. Although several measures were introduced to reduce teacher shortages, including raising salaries, the impact of these measures remains to be seen and there is no mention of the shortage in the Dutch Action Plan. Overall, the Plan has significant room for improvement: it is currently a rather arbitrary summary of policies without proposed targets and without specification of groups of children in need.

The **Danish** educational system is failing to compensate for children's socioeconomic background: children in vulnerable positions do not perform at the level of other children. A lack of resources and too many children per teacher means that children in vulnerable positions do not get the extra attention they need. Although primary education is free of charge, the hidden costs related to field trips, social and leisure activities often prevent children living in poverty from participating. In addition, lack of access to computers, Wi-Fi etc. is increasing inequality.

The **Swedish** Action Plan lacks concrete measures for how to increase the proportion of children who graduate from high school with full grades, particularly children of parents with low education, children in socio-economic vulnerability and children who have moved to Sweden. It also has no solution for access to education for children who are not obliged to attend school, but who are entitled to an education (e.g. asylum seekers and undocumented children). And it does not adequately guarantee meaningful after-school leisure activities for all children.

In **Germany**, educational success highly depends on the economic background of the family. Performance in basic competencies has declined, leaving disadvantaged children even more behind. There is a legal right to full time education but the lack of teachers and educated staff puts the quality of education at risk. The inclusion of children with disabilities and migrant children must also be addressed in the upcoming National Action Plan as it is currently inadequate due to lack of specialised staff, infrastructure, and targeted initiatives.

**Albania's** education system has poor infrastructure, a lack of classroom space and materials, and substandard furniture and playgrounds. Government expenditure in 2021 was 3,1% of GDP. As compared to the OECD average (13,4%), Albania has a high proportion (29,7%) of students who are not demonstrating basic proficiency (Level 2) in all of the three core PISA domains. Over half of the Albanian 15-year-olds lack basic reading skills (52.2%), compared to 22.6% on average in the OECD. In mathematics, 42.4% lack basic skills, compared to 24.0% on average in the OECD. This suggests that a large number of students in Albania have not yet acquired the essential competencies needed to participate fully in a knowledge-based society upon completion of compulsory education<sup>147</sup>. There is a significant number of out-of-school children – mainly from vulnerable groups. Inclusive education and equity of access remain a challenge for children with disabilities, on the basis of gender, ethnic group and geographical distribution. The division of responsibilities between local and central government is unclear, and the allocation of funds to local bodies is insufficient - resulting in a dysfunctional ecosystem.



## Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

Every day, millions of children go to school on an empty stomach. Ensuring that children have a plate of food every day is a basic necessity that must be guaranteed. Governments and local authorities should work with schools to provide healthy meals during the school day. Access to school meals ensures adequate nutrition, decreases food insecurity, and reduces parents' economic strain. School meals are vital for children from low-income families who do not receive enough quality food at home.

**The European Child Guarantee recommends that Member States provide at least one healthy meal each school day.** Although there is variation in the provision of school meals across countries, the majority of member states offer reduced fees for certain families. However, as Save the Children's national assessments show, the shift to free meals enshrined in the European Child Guarantee represents a substantial change in approach for many countries.

Two countries, **Finland** and **Sweden**, provide free meals for all schoolgoers up until secondary school. Finland also provides free meals to secondary school students. This is mostly the case in Sweden, but there are some municipalities and private schools where meals to secondary school students are not free.

With a very low prevalence of school canteens, in **Romania** the nutritional support programmes fail to respond to the needs of the children living in poverty.

Romania continues to implement the national programme under which fruit, vegetables, dairy, and bakery products are being distributed in public schools, and also a pilot programme (started in 2016 and now covering 450 schools) to provide a healthy meal every school day. The draft National Plan envisages the expansion of the latter mentioned programme to 900 schools and 390,000 pupils by 2030 as well as training teachers on healthy nutrition and drafting a National Strategy for Health and Nutrition Education.

In several countries the provision of free or reduced cost meals depends on school or regional authorities. In **Denmark**, some municipalities have subsidy schemes, providing one meal a day at a reduced cost. In **Germany**, **Berlin** introduced a free lunch for all children and some states have started to follow. This now needs to be coordinated in the Action Plan. The situation also varies in **Italy**, where meals are offered to primary school students in some regions, although not for free. The Italian Action Plan targets universal access<sup>148</sup> to one school meal in primary schools – with no charge for vulnerable children – as well as the introduction of canteen services for lower secondary schools. However, the allocated budget is not enough to deliver those services or to eradicate territorial inequalities. At present, there is no clear indication of how running costs will be covered.

In **Iceland**, there are canteens in all kindergartens and in compulsory schools. Although they are not free, the price is modest. In secondary school the price and quality vary a lot.

Further away from the goal of effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day are **Spain** and **The Netherlands**.

In **Albania**, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection is starting a feasibility study to assess how to introduce this service in schools.

In **Spain**, only 11% of children are granted free school meals<sup>149</sup> - well below the 28,9% child poverty rate - and with large differences across regions<sup>150</sup>. Regrettably, and despite its status as a key service within the Child Guarantee Recommendation, access to free school meals has not been properly addressed within the Spanish Action Plan. Save the Children Spain calls for a €425 million investment towards the regions that, coupled with their current co-financing levels, ensure that all children below the poverty level threshold (AROP) enjoy a free school meal.

**The Netherlands** does not provide school meals to pupils<sup>151</sup> but takes part in the EU school fruit, vegetables, and milk scheme, which provides free fruit and vegetables to 3,000 primary schools over 20 weeks a year. Some schools have their own programs in place to provide lunch and in some cities the Red Cross provides breakfast to primary school children. Starting February 1<sup>st</sup> 2023, the most at-risk schools both in primary and secondary education received a €100 million investment in school meals. However, the minister acknowledges that, however significant, this budget is most likely to not be enough to fully guarantee proper nutrition for all school children<sup>152</sup>.



## Recommendations

- 1. In all National Action Plans, it should be made clear how proposed activities will be funded.** Moreover, all activities should be properly budgeted to ensure funding is adequate.
- 2. Ensure the right to education without restrictions to children in need,** such as children with a migrant background, refugees, at risk of poverty or with disabilities.
- 3. Reduce or eliminate any hidden costs of school trips and extracurricular activities,** particularly for vulnerable children.
- 4. Minimise the financial burden of education** by providing free or subsidised transportation, free access to schoolbooks and supplies, and access to IT devices for children.
- 5. Provide free school meals for disadvantaged children in all schools,** with a focus on quality and healthy meals.
- 6. Eliminate regional and local differences in delivery of free education, leisure and extra-curricular activities and free school meals** by ensuring that municipalities are aligned and receive adequate resources for their circumstances

# Summary of countries' main achievements/positive elements & unresolved issues/pending challenges in EDUCATION

(including school-based, sport, leisure and cultural activities and access to one healthy meal each school day)

## Sweden

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

The action plan contains objectives related to:

- ✓ The increase in the proportion of children in socio-economically vulnerable families who take part in sports and cultural activities.
- ✓ The increase in the percentage of children who graduate from high school with passing grades.
- ✓ The increase in the support to be received by children with disabilities.

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ School segregation.
- ✗ Lack of equivalent education.
- ✗ Lack of access to education for asylum seekers and undocumented children.
- ✗ Unequal access to meaningful leisure activities for some children.
- ✗ Non-legislated provision of free meals in secondary and upper secondary schools.

## Lithuania

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

- ✓ Government's official acknowledgement of the education system problems (i.e. low quality, non-inclusive, lack of staff, lack of extracurricular/leisure activities) and policies to address them.

## Denmark

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Lack of resources.
- ✗ Too many children per teacher.
- ✗ High hidden costs of education.

## Italy

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

The Action Plan states targets to:

- ✓ Increase full time education in primary schools.
- ✓ Reach out the most vulnerable children through inclusive educational practices.
- ✓ Reduce dropout rates.
- ✓ Reduce the share of not in employment, education or training (NEETs).
- ✓ Guarantee universal access to one school meal in primary schools and offering canteen services for lower secondary schools.

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Lack of funding for education.
- ✗ Establishment of "Educational Intensive Areas" endowed with adequate resources. Defining funds needed to expand the services and how running costs will be covered.

## Spain

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Access to free school meals.

## Netherlands

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

- ✓ Legal obligation to allow all children to take part in the activities organized by the school regardless of the school contribution payments.
- ✓ National Programme for Education, which provides schools with additional resources to purchase digital tools.

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Shortage of teachers.
- ✗ Decline in basic skills and increasing differences in performance levels between schools.
- ✗ Increased stress among young students.

## Finland

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

Two important policies have been introduced in the Action Plan:

- ✓ Upper secondary education for all children until 18 years.
- ✓ Finnish model of hobbies in all regions enables every child to have one free leisure activity in connection with school days.

## Romania

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Hidden costs of public education persist and, in many cases, generate financial burdens that vulnerable families cannot cope with.
- ✗ School lunches have been piloted since 2016, but the pandemic together with capacity challenges faced by schools hindered the access of vulnerable children to this programme.

## Germany

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Lack of teachers and skilled staff.
- ✗ Lack of free school lunches and a consistent policy in every federal state.

## Iceland

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ High cost of participation in leisure and sport activities.
- ✗ Lack of support for children with disabilities - especially those with mental and behaviour problems.

## Albania

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

- ✓ Improvements in the access to education and in raising learning outcomes through the implementation of several reforms (development of a competency-based curriculum framework, teacher standards and a school evaluation indicator framework).

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Poor infrastructure, lack of space in classrooms, lack of educational material, furniture, and playgrounds.
- ✗ High drop-out rates.
- ✗ High numbers of out-of-school children (Roma and Egyptian, children from families engaged in seasonal migration, returnees, young carers, children contributing to the family income, early married girls, children with disabilities).
- ✗ Lack of resources for inclusive education.
- ✗ Lack of data.
- ✗ Access to free school meals.

## Child Guarantee service areas: Free quality healthcare

Access to quality healthcare is a fundamental human right and is essential for the physical and emotional well-being of children and their families. Despite the huge progress that has been made in Europe over the last few decades in improving child health status, there are still wide variations in outcomes between and within countries. Providing free healthcare to children in Europe would help to ensure that all children, regardless of their family's financial situation, have access to the medical care they need to stay healthy and thrive. Investing in the health of children can also lead to a more productive workforce and a stronger economy in the future, as healthy children are more likely to succeed in school and go on to have successful careers. This requires the establishment of a system to protect health, including access to essential medicine. The realisation of the right to health implies that each country is required to put in place health services that are available in any circumstance, accessible to everyone, of good quality and satisfactory<sup>153</sup>.

The Child Guarantee aims to ensure "effective and free access to quality healthcare for children in need". The Recommendation underlines the need for: early detection and treatment of diseases and developmental problems; targeted services for children with disabilities; and health promotion and disease prevention programmes targeting children in need and their families; and professionals working with children. Nearly all Member States ensure, in principle, free access to healthcare for all children, but access is not always effective, especially for disadvantaged children<sup>154</sup>.



*"In my school, we do not have a psychologist. I know a lot of students that have problems but have nowhere to address them."*

*(child - 14 years-old)*

*"We do not have a psychologist in our school, and we really need one to help us."*

*(child - 14 years old)*

### Young Voices Report

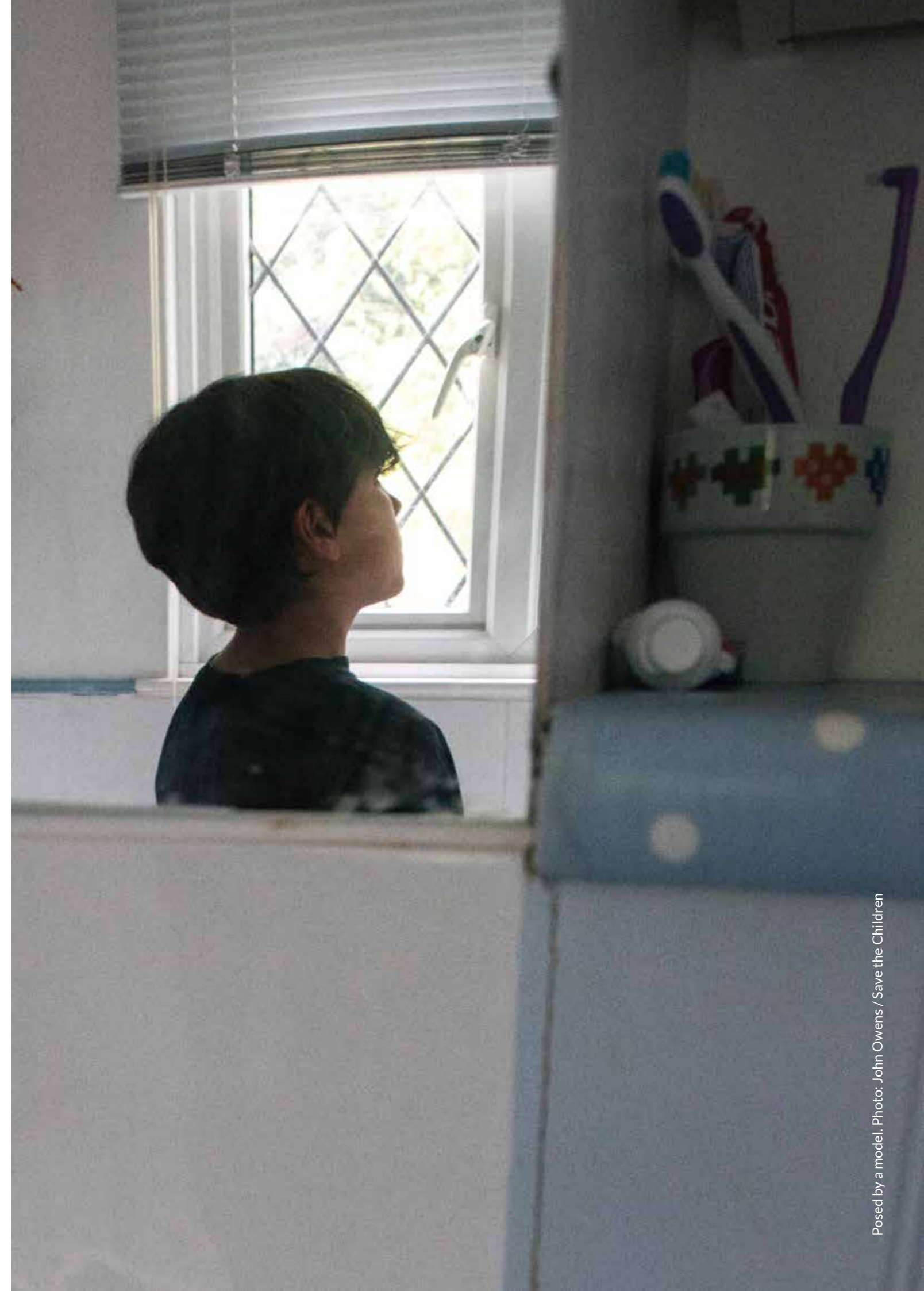
COVID-19 and the resulting lockdowns and restrictions on social life have also drawn attention to the silent epidemic of mental ill-health among European children. Mental illnesses, including anxiety and stress disorders, are increasingly affecting younger children. Free healthcare also means providing free therapy and counselling to children that need it<sup>155</sup>.

Some common themes emerge from Save the Children about free healthcare in national policies and National Action Plans.

### **The new challenge of mental health**

Mental health is addressed to a greater or lesser extent in Action Plans in **Spain, Italy, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and The Netherlands**.

**Spain** proposes to train GPs and teachers to be able to detect mental health problems early. This will accelerate care and lower pressure on specialised psychiatric and psychological services. Mental health programmes in schools are recommended as are specific, regional-level protocols for suicide prevention. **Italy's**





Action Plan foresees the reinforcement of Youth Counselling Centres and the expansion and reinforcement of psychological and social well-being support services for children, pre-adolescents, and adolescents. Developmental Psychology and Child/Adolescent Neuropsychiatry services should be increased and a permanent technical round table on mental health for the 0-18 age group should be set up. **Romania's** draft National Plan also addresses this issue and includes an action to create 70 mental health centres for children.

Although the **Finnish** Action Plan mentions mental healthcare and psychiatric care for young people, not enough activities are specified. Mental health disorders are a significant health problem, but mental health services lag behind other social and healthcare services. Similarly in **Denmark, Sweden, Iceland,** and **The Netherlands** the psychiatric sectors are underfinanced, leaving long waiting lists and many children without psychiatric support. The Danish Action Plan should include stronger and more targeted measures in this area. The Swedish Action Plan addresses the issues but warns that to be efficient, the healthcare system would need significant reform and further resources.

### **Children in vulnerable situations need bigger efforts**

Another area for improvement in most country policies and National Action Plans is the efficient provision of health services to children in vulnerable situations. Migrant families can access primary care in **Spain** but access to specialised services is dependent on the legal residence. There is no explicit commitment in

**Spain's** Action Plan to remedy this. On the plus side, Spain will expand its children's dental care programme to all regions and will finance the cost of glasses and contact lenses for children in poverty.

**Italy's** Action Plan gives considerable attention to access to health care for migrant children and for children with disabilities. Specific actions are planned for migrant children (including Ukrainian refugees), including registration with the national health service for all foreign minors, right to information, facilitated access to psychological care for adolescents, and for children with disabilities.

In **Finland**, healthcare services do not meet the needs of children and young people, especially those children and families who need multiple different services (for example children with disabilities). The reform of healthcare, social welfare, and rescue services will be implemented from the beginning of 2023 and will hopefully change the situation for the better.

In **The Netherlands**, parents in poverty often only have basic health insurance. Additional care such as glasses or orthodontics comes at an extra cost that most low-income families cannot afford. A positive development is a new programme to help parents in vulnerable situations. "Solid Start" (Kansrijke Start<sup>156</sup>), focuses on care and support for families in vulnerable situations in the period prior to, during and after pregnancy.

The **Swedish Action Plan** for the implementation of the Child Guarantee highlights many of the most important problems such as the health inequalities between different groups of children. Recommendations include urgent

actions to lift barriers to healthcare such as the ability to access health care without a national identification number, the possibility to have access to an interpreter when calling a healthcare centre. Furthermore, actual implementation of decisions should be followed up (e.g. national guidelines state that all children placed in institutional care should get access to a health examination, however this has not yet been implemented in practice).

**Romania's** draft National Plan acknowledges the shortcomings of the children's access to health, including the fact that 11-13% of the children under 3 have not been registered with family doctors, although this registration is compulsory and free of charge.

### **Steady reform in Albania**

Finally, on a broader level, the main health indicators for **Albanian** children have been gradually improving in the past decades. Infant mortality and under-5 mortality have both significantly decreased. In addition, nutritional indicators have improved, as evidenced by a significant decrease in the prevalence of wasting and stunting. The new Plan of Action on Health Promotion 2022-2030 aims to improve health and reduce health inequities of the Albanian through social, political, and technical actions. As it is highly recommended to establish an effective system for monitoring and evaluating health programmes, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, in partnership with relevant stakeholders and strategic partners, has conducted several monitoring reports for all the programs implemented.



## Recommendations

- 1. Tackle the mental health crisis** head on. Plug deficiencies in National Action Plans such as lack of resources for mental health interventions and lack of effective initiatives. Make the reduction of waiting times for mental health services a specific focus of all Plans.
- 2. Expand and reinforce youth support services.**
- 3. Train GPs and teachers** to be able to detect mental health problems early. This will accelerate care and lower pressure on specialised psychiatric and psychological services.
- 4. Establish mental health programmes in schools.**
- 5. Provide all children and adolescents with unrestricted access to health care,** including health promotion, screening and preventive services, and rehabilitation.
- 6. Ensure National Action Plans make specific mention of measures for vulnerable children.** For example, remove financial, administrative and language barriers to healthcare for vulnerable families and ensure support for children with disabilities and children with chronic illnesses to access healthcare and support services.

# Summary of countries' main achievements and positive elements & unresolved issues/pending challenges in HEALTHCARE

## Finland

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

✓ Forthcoming reform of healthcare, social welfare, and rescue services.

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Access to mental health services of children and young people.

✗ Unmet needs of children and families who need multiple services (e.g. children with disabilities).

✗ Lack of financial and personnel resources in healthcare and social services.

## Italy

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

✓ Great attention is given in the National Action Plan to the issue of mental health of children, psychosocial development, and guarantee of access to health care to migrant children and attention to children with disabilities.

✓ Health services for children's first 1.000 days of life.

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Improve prevention measures for vulnerable families.

## Netherlands

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

✓ The "Solid Start" programme (Kansrijke Start) to help parents in vulnerable situations in the period prior to, during and after pregnancy.

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Discrimination and double standards of the health insurance system.

✗ Mental health problems of children and long waiting lists.

✗ Shortage of certain categories of health workers.

## Spain

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

✓ The focus of the Action Plan lies on mental and visual health and includes a commitment to gradually eliminate monetary barriers to medicine access among children in vulnerable situations.

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Access to specialized services for migrant families.

## Romania

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

✓ The community health network is a promising good practice in reaching vulnerable children.

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Huge disparities in availability of health services between rural and urban areas (including school health network).

✗ Scarce availability of public/free of charge rehabilitation services for children with disabilities.

## Sweden

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

✓ The Action Plan highlights the most important problems such as the health inequalities between different groups of children and the low access to child psychiatric services.

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Access to mental health services for all children and adolescents is difficult due to long waiting times.

✗ Underutilization of healthcare by some groups of children (children with migrant background, placed in foster care and/or children who have a parent with lower socioeconomic status).

✗ Reform and additional resources needed.

✗ The possibility to access health care without a personal identification number.

✗ The possibility to access an interpreter when calling health care.

## Denmark

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Access to mental health. The psychiatric sector is underfinanced, leaving long waiting lists and many children without support.

## Iceland

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

✓ Antenatal care and free dental care for children.

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Mental health (lack of support and long waiting lists).

## Albania

### *Main achievements & positive elements*

✓ The new Plan of Action on Health Promotion 2022-2030 to renew health promotion through social, political, and technical actions.

### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

✗ Continuous evaluation of health interventions.

## Child Guarantee service areas: Sufficient and healthy nutrition

Child malnutrition, whether due to poor nutrition or lack of food, is a serious problem for children's health and growth. Studies on nutrition<sup>157</sup> show that most children and adolescents (especially those from families with lower socio-economic status) eat too few fruits, vegetables, and plant-based foods. A healthy and balanced diet is essential to children's mental and physical development, so active policies are needed to ensure children in need enjoy the same quality nutrition as their peers from better-off backgrounds. Governments and local authorities can act within school settings by providing healthy meals (see also: [“Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day”](#) under Free Education area) and outside schools, making sure that vulnerable children have access to healthy nutrition at home.



SPAIN

*“I don't like fruit, and I usually don't eat any. There is no fruit in my home – we don't buy it.”*

*(Child – 13 years old)*

The Child Guarantee aims to ensure effective access to healthy nutrition. The Recommendation underlines the need to support access to healthy meals also outside of school days, limit advertisement and availability of 'junk' foods and disseminate information on healthy nutrition to children and families<sup>158</sup>.

According to the answers gathered through the questionnaire, National Action Plans acknowledge the cost-of-living crisis in parallel with (for some countries) rising obesity rates. Plans contain some encouraging actions, but overall, more is needed to make inroads into the issue.

### Making nutritious food more affordable

Several countries have measures to make nutritious food more financially accessible.

**Italy's** Plan contains income support measures which are essential to increase the capacity of families to purchase adequate and healthy food. **The Netherlands** recommends regulation of school canteens to offer nutritious food products and the immediate abolishment of VAT on fruit and vegetables (which is foreseen by 2024). **Romanian's** draft plan envisages the distribution of food parcels or vouchers to material deprived families, with a target of 1.350.000 children to be reached by 2030. **Finland** includes food aid measures in its Plan.

Other countries should not miss the opportunity. **Germany**, which has not yet delivered its National Action Plan, needs to increase welfare support so that families with children can buy healthier food. In **Spain**, cash transfers aimed at financing the purchase of healthy food among vulnerable families could have been envisaged<sup>159</sup>.

In the recommendations from **Iceland's** Directorate of Health, lower taxes have been proposed as a measure to increase the consumption of healthy food.

### Increase access to leisure activities

A positive element in the **Spanish Action Plan** are the measures to give access to leisure and school activities. The measures have specific objectives and associated indicators and could be effective as a lever for improved nutrition-related outcomes such as reducing obesity.

The **Dutch** government's coalition agreement has set out plans for improvements in healthcare, with the aim of keeping it affordable, available, and accessible to all. A greater focus on prevention and healthy lifestyles from a young age will help achieve this goal. The aspiration is to achieve a healthy generation by 2040.

### Filling the gaps

The focus of the **Italian Action Plan** is on ensuring one balanced and free meal per day in primary schools. but no objectives are set to ensure adequate nutrition out of school. It would also be advisable to define a national programme to connect schools and communities on healthy lifestyles for children and adolescents (e.g., nutrition education, sport etc.).

In **Albania** several key nutritional indicators among children have gradually improved including the significant decrease in the prevalence of wasting and stunting. Furthermore, a national monitoring system for child nutrition and growth has been successfully established which allows for effective interventions in a timely manner. Albania has established a wave of policies: the new national health strategy (2021-2030); the development of a national action plan on PHC— for the first time; a new action plan on health promotion (2022-2030), and a new action plan on the control and prevention of NCDs (2021-2030)<sup>160</sup>. The effectiveness and efficiency of the interventions should be closely monitored.



Photo: Ferran Nadeu / Save the Children



# Recommendations

1. Ensure that **basic welfare and income support are sufficient** for families to buy healthy food – taking into account the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on food prices.
2. Explore ways to **make nutritious food more affordable**, including reducing taxes on fruit and vegetables.
3. National Action Plans and health policies should aim to **increase nutritionists specialised in children** within the public health system to help reduce obesity rates.
4. **Invest in preventative approaches** that cover awareness campaigns in schools as well as a focus on healthy nutrition during pregnancy, breastfeeding, and early childhood.
5. **Ban the advertising of unhealthy products to children.**

## Summary of countries' main achievements /positive elements & unresolved issues /pending challenges in NUTRITION

### Italy

*Main achievements & positive elements*

- ✓ The Action Plan contains income support measures which are essential to increase the capacity of families to purchase adequate and healthy food (although these measures with the corresponding objectives are present in the Plan within the area of Fighting Poverty and Ensuring Adequate Housing).

### Germany

*Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Insufficient welfare benefits for healthy nutrition.

### Netherlands

*Main achievements & positive elements*

- ✓ Declaration of the aspiration to achieve a healthy generation by 2040.

*Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Abolishment of VAT on fruit and vegetables (foreseen by 2024).
- ✗ Children's exposure to unhealthy products (despite the Food Advertising Code).

### Romania

*Main achievements & positive elements*

- ✓ Food aid is included in the draft National Plan.

### Spain

*Main achievements & positive elements*

- ✓ Measures towards access to leisure and school activities in the Action Plan represent an adequate approach to address nutrition and healthy habits in an integrated manner.

*Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Fiscal measures to tax unhealthy products.

### Finland

*Main achievements & positive elements*

- ✓ The Action Plan includes food aid measures.

### Iceland

*Main achievements & positive elements*

- ✓ National guidelines and supervision of school canteens.
- ✓ Recommendations on nutrition and healthy lifestyle habits elaborated by Directorate of health.

*Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ High price of healthy food.
- ✗ Increased obesity among children.

### Albania

*Main achievements & positive elements*

- ✓ National health strategy and Action Plans (2021-2030).

*Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Prevalence of overweight and obesity.
- ✗ Lack of continuous monitoring and evaluation systems to evaluate the interventions.

## Child Guarantee service areas: Adequate housing

Housing is a human right recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). Tackling poor housing for children means providing adequate housing to their parent(s)<sup>161</sup>. Decent housing is a necessary condition for families and children to escape poverty and improve their lives. The lack of adequate housing can affect a child's physical and mental health and lead to accidents, low educational outcomes, and a lack of general well-being<sup>162</sup>. Since the economic crisis in 2008, investments in affordable housing have steadily decreased. The housing market displays evident failures, distortions, and deep fragmentation due to gentrification, financialization and increased tourism<sup>163</sup>.

In 2021, the EU institutions, EU governments and civil society launched the European platform to combat homelessness<sup>164</sup>, and as part of the Commission's renovation wave strategy, an Affordable Housing Initiative will ensure that social housing can also benefit from the renovation wave. A recent report on Employment and Social Developments in Europe<sup>165</sup> highlights the increase of house prices and related costs and increasing housing insecurity of young people as areas of concern. Many families are paying an excessive share of their income for housing, leaving few resources for other basic needs like healthcare, heat, or food. Approximately 80 million people in the EU are overburdened by housing costs<sup>166</sup>.

With demand for social housing outstripping supply, most governments recognise the urgency of the situation. But according to the answers

gathered in questionnaires from Save the Children in different countries, the solutions proposed by governments, either in national policies or in their National Action Plans, vary in ambition and effectiveness.

### Strong reforms on the agenda

**Spain** and **Italy** each have strong reforms on the agenda. The size of the Spanish public housing stock for social rent is very limited (1,6% of households compared to 9,3% EU average). The **Spanish Action Plan** runs in parallel with the ongoing legislation to reform the housing market. The Plan includes key provisions to guarantee access to adequate housing by children in vulnerable situations, including an increase of the public housing stock and increased cash transfers to support housing expenses. A ban on evictions of families with children is foreseen for those in vulnerable situations without a housing alternative. Importantly, fighting energy poverty has been integrated in the plan for housing. To be effective, the Action Plan must be accompanied by a parallel administrative reform and by the passing of Spain's new Housing Act.

In **Italy**, every year 50,000 children fall victim to eviction<sup>167</sup>. On its own, the Italian Action Plan will not overcome current housing problems. However, it includes ambitious new measures to help families cope with rising housing costs and to expand the supply of social housing. The supply of affordable social housing will be increased through renovating public buildings (more than €5 billion have been allocated from the Recovery and Resilience Fund - RRF). A moratorium on evictions for families with children, along with ensuring participation of children in urban regeneration and social housing programmes should also have been included in the Plan.

### Strong governance and clear priorities needed the Swedish Action Plan

The **Swedish** housing situation is worrying and has led to socio-economic residential segregation, overcrowded homes, strained household economy, unsafe housing solutions, discrimination between "insiders" and "outsiders"<sup>168</sup> and homelessness. The government is drawing up a national homelessness strategy for the period 2022–2026, that includes preventive work, measures against emergency homelessness and the path to own housing. The Swedish Enforcement Agency has the mandate to prevent children from being affected by evictions. Despite this progress, the Swedish Action Plan does not contain any quantitative goal to decrease homelessness among families with children. That goal should be zero homelessness. In addition, to meet the existing needs, strong governance and clear priorities at municipal level are required so that municipalities' work delivers a children's rights perspective.

### The need for a child-focused approach

The **Dutch Action Plan** centres on the strategy to accelerate the construction of 100.000 new homes per year<sup>169</sup> and to prevent homelessness among the adult population. Regrettably, the Plan does not mention children. No mention is made of children living in deprived housing situations, energy poverty among children or shutting-off of utilities of families with children. To ensure decent housing, the government

should also take other actions such as freeze the rent for social housing, and a ban on evictions for families with children.

Although more than 1 in 4 **Romanian** children is deprived of access to basic facilities (such as indoor flushing toilet or shower) as well as the highest percentage of children living in overcrowded houses (60,7%)<sup>170</sup>, the only housing related action included in the draft National Plan is aimed at improving the housing conditions in informal settlements.

### A decrease in social housing stock

**Denmark** has a large public housing sector where every fifth home in Denmark is a public home. But from 2015 to 2018, the public housing sector's relative share of the housing stock decreased. Fewer cheap rental homes means that many families – especially in the big city areas – have a hard time finding affordable and adequate housing.

Also in **Iceland** public housing is becoming scarcer. The housing market is very owner based, but not everyone can afford to buy a house. Public support for housing is scarce. Only those with very scarce financial resources or housing problems can apply for social housing or financial assistance from their municipality and housing benefits from the state to pay the rent. In 1930, the construction of social housing began, but it stopped in 2002– i.e. when it was privatised. It should be a political priority to reintroduce the system of social housing for low-income families to guarantee that families with children have access to a secure and healthy home.



## Recommendations

- 1. Invest in more social housing** and ensure it is good quality social housing in safe, accessible neighbourhoods.
- 2. Increase financial support to pay rent and other household expenses.**
- 3. Support vulnerable families with energy costs** during the cost-of-living crisis.
- 4. Increased coordination efforts** with social services and other key actors that are closer to families with children in vulnerable situations outside the radar of the social housing market.
- 5. Consider measures such as tax deductions on the rent** for vulnerable groups and low-income families with children.
- 6. Enforce the legal provisions limiting or prohibiting evictions** of families with children as long as appropriate alternative housing is not ensured.
- 7. Ensure that the best interests of the child** are taken into account in decisions about relocations or extensive housing developments that involve moving children.

## Summary of countries' main achievements & unresolved issues/ pending challenges in HOUSING

### Netherlands

#### *Main achievements & positive elements*

- ✓ The Dutch Action Plan focuses on the strategy to accelerate the construction of 100.000 new homes per year and to prevent homelessness.

#### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Shortage of social rental homes and of homes in the so-called "middle rent".
- ✗ Ban on evictions for families with children.

### Romania

#### *Main achievements & positive elements*

- ✓ The approval of the National Strategy for Housing.

#### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Unresolved issues/pending challenges – high percentage of children living in housing deprivation or in overcrowded houses.

### Spain

#### *Main achievements & positive elements*

- ✓ Provisions included in the Action Plan (increase of the public housing stock, increased cash transfers to support housing expenses, ban on evictions of families with children in vulnerable situations without a housing alternative).

#### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Deficit on social housing.
- ✗ Young people with a past record under the protection system (a priority group with a high risk of falling back into poverty and social exclusion during the transition period between childhood and adult life) not receiving sufficient attention.

### Sweden

#### *Main achievements & positive elements*

- ✓ National homelessness strategy (2022–2026).

#### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Overcrowded and unsecure temporary accommodation.
- ✗ The plan does not include quantitative goals for decreasing homelessness among families with children.

### Denmark

#### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Availability of affordable and adequate housing.

### Italy

#### *Main achievements & positive elements*

- ✓ The Action Plan foresees the renovation of public buildings to increase the stock of social housing and to increase the financial support to vulnerable families to pay the rent and other housing expenses.

#### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Moratorium on evictions for families with children.

### Iceland

#### *Unresolved issues & pending challenges*

- ✗ Limited public support for housing.
- ✗ Construction of social housing.

# THE USE OF EU AND NATIONAL FUNDS

to reach the goals proposed by the Child Guarantee, European Union funds are made available to complement existing national level actions and funding. At least 5% of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) will be dedicated to tackle child poverty for those countries with above average rates of children living at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including Italy, Lithuania, Romania, Spain, and Sweden<sup>171</sup>. Other European funding programmes such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), REACT-EU, Invest-EU and the Recovery and Resilience Facility have made funds available. Those funds support infrastructure investments, such as social housing and early childhood education and care facilities, as well as equipment, access to quality services and other investments for structural reforms<sup>172</sup>.

## EU and national funds: leveraging funds to tackle child poverty and exclusion

In **Italy**, the **ESF+** will be the main contributor to achieve the objectives of the Italian Child Guarantee Action Plan. The **ESF+** accounts for around €14 million over the implementation period. **ESF+** focuses on reducing poverty and vulnerability, improving access to the labour market for young people and women, empowering the most deprived territories, and strengthening welfare services. The **ESF+** also supports activities aiming at improving professionalisation of teachers and staff in welfare services, and diffusion of STEM, particularly among girls. 30% of **ESF+** will be devoted to social inclusion; 3% to support the

most deprived; 5% will be destined to fight against child poverty; and 0,25% to increase the capacities of NGOs and civil society organisations.

The **ERDF** will be used for infrastructure and technology and the **Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund** (2021 – 2027) will also be used to cover some actions of the national plan. In addition to the EU funds, two national programmes will contribute to child poverty reduction and objectives listed in the Child Guarantee: the National Plan on School and Skills and the National Plan on Inclusion and Poverty. Regional programmes will provide additional funds.

In **Germany**, 5,9% of the overall ESIF budget is allocated to combat child poverty via the **ESF+** federal and regional programmes. The **ESF+** federal programme will allocate more than 4% of its budget (€104 million) to fight child poverty<sup>173</sup>. The focus is on activities that improve the individual situation of families, including single parents and their children at risk of social exclusion and poverty. Funding will be used to support parents to take up and/or extend employment, and to develop and expand cooperation structures for better family support. Education for parents will be promoted<sup>174</sup>. The programming does not focus on implementing activities directly with children, nor do the activities aim to mitigate the negative consequences experienced by children living in poverty. The **ERDF** can also be used to improve access to inclusive and high-quality services in remote and in-person education as well as lifelong learning.

The **Spanish** National Action Plan intends to assign the required 5% of the **ESF+** plus a dedicated percentage linked to the objective of material deprivation (in total 6,2%). In addition, the Government created a programme under the **ESF+** to address food assistance and basic material deprivation. The funds are transferred to the regions so that there are enough resources in the regional operational plans. Priorities and investments under the new programme are still under development; but they are expected to cover school meals, school materials or health services outside the public portfolio. Around 30% of the new programme will be targeted at children.

In **The Netherlands**, part of the **ESF+** budget that is dedicated to the priority 'People with a vulnerable labour market position' is earmarked for projects addressed to the labour inclusion of young people in practical education and secondary special education. The country has also received funds from **REACT-EU** for finance projects in the regions.

For the **Finnish** Action Plan, the funding comes from the National Child Strategy allocation, which is €6 million, and the **ESF+**. The Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations grants €100–120 million annually to projects that aim to improve the welfare of children, young people, and families. These grants are not intended to serve as funding for statutory public services or business. **ESF+** funding is divided into different projects aimed at supporting employment and equal inclusion (€23 million), developing innovative child protection (€30 million) and providing support for purchasing food (€30 million). All these priority projects have targets and implementation concerning children living in low-income families.

**Lithuania** has allocated €2,3 million to support four areas of the Child Guarantee: **ECEC**; education, healthcare, and nutrition.

In **Romania**, all measures indicated under the draft of the National Plan have a corresponding estimated budget (adding up to an estimated total of 18,6 billion Euro till 2030). Also, in order to make the best use of available EU funds and make sure that more than 5% **ESF+** resources are directed toward reducing child poverty, correlations with relevant Operational programmes actions and budget lines were identified for each specific measure (when appropriate). At the same time, state budget resources are indicated as the source for the period beyond the MFF as well as for complementing EU funds when needed and relevant.

In the case of **Albania**, all the Child Guarantee priorities are addressed through different budget programmes, some of them transferred to local governments. According to the Annual Budget Law 2022, around 12% of the total public expenditures are allocated to the Ministry of Education and Sports while 21% goes to the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. During the process of budget compilation, the Ministry for Children and Youth was created, with a dedication of around 0,06% of the total public expenditures.

The Social Assistance Scheme is a unique social assistance programme in **Kosovo** which aims to reduce poverty<sup>175</sup>. The government does not allocate sufficient funds to finance social services dedicated to children and consequently public investment targeting children experiencing poverty is weak. This limits the effective integration of services addressed to the needs of children with disabilities and other children in vulnerable situations. There is a need for informed planning on the cost of a dedicated community-based social and health service for children.

Within the specific areas of the Child Guarantee:

## **Free early childhood education and care**

**Finland** within the “Equal inclusion – Development of services for children, young people, and families and advancement of welfare towards equality” plan dedicates €23 million (among other goals mentioned below) to improving the competence of professionals working with children, young people, and their parents, especially in early childhood education.

In **The Netherlands**, municipalities and schools receive money from the central government to combat educational disadvantage, funding, among others, early childhood education. In 2021, the budget allocated to this aim was €520 million<sup>176</sup>.

In **Spain**, the **Recovery and Resilience Plan** foresees the creation of additional ECEC places with special focus on disadvantaged children (€119 million).

## **Free education**

Some countries dedicate or will dedicate European funds to improve students’ employability. In **The Netherlands**, the ESF+ will support people in vulnerable situations to access the labour market (€15 million budget). In the same vein, EU funds in **Sweden** have mainly focused on adults’ employment and employability. The ESF+ funds will concretely contribute to projects within the educational system to improve education in socioeconomically deprived areas. Activities that contribute to access to meaningful leisure time for children and young people are also mentioned in the ESF+ priorities for **Sweden**, although the Child Guarantee per se is not mentioned in the budgets.

In **Italy**, €14 million from the ESF + will be dedicated to improving the access to the labour market for young people and women, to foster a social economy to empower most deprived territories, and to strengthen welfare services for children and other groups targeted by the Child Guarantee. The ESF+ also support activities to improve professionalisation of teachers and staff in welfare services, and diffusion of STEM, particularly among girls.

In **Finland**, within the “Equal inclusion” plan (€23 million), the country will support vulnerable families by preventing multi-generational exclusion and disparities in learning, especially by supporting and motivating families, including children. Part of the “Equal inclusion” plan is addressed to promote active and equal participation in culture, leisure activities and sports among children, young people, and their parents<sup>177</sup>.

The **Spanish RRP** includes investments on reinforcement, support, and guidance (€12 million) as well as in accompaniment and support units for disadvantaged students and their families (€27 million) as well as the digitalisation of the education system, including digital skills.

In **The Netherlands**, €4 million goes to the illiteracy action programme “*Tel mee met Taal*”. The country also dedicated a total of €12 million in 2022 and 2023 under the *Alle kinderen doen mee* grant programme<sup>178</sup> to enable children to join sports clubs and take music lessons, and even to celebrate their birthday. For 2024-2027, a total of €10 million is budgeted annually.

In **Romania**, €30 million Euro of the ESF+ allocation is dedicated to reducing the drop-out among vulnerable children in marginalised urban communities by providing educational support, transport to school and extracurricular activities to children at risk of drop-out.





## Free quality healthcare

The **Spanish** National Strategy on Mental Health for the period 2022-2026, which contains a specific axis on mental health among children, has been endowed with €100 million, to be disbursed over the full period. Spain's RRP allocated resources to a dental healthcare plan that targets children between six and 14 years old (among other target groups) with an allocation of €88 million (€44 million in 2022 and the same for 2023). The RRP has also dedicated €3,35 million to reinforce health promotion through green areas, bike lanes and other urban infrastructures. In addition, the Spanish VAT rate applicable to tampons and other feminine hygiene products has been reduced to 4% (from the previous 10%).

In **Finland**, the plan "Safety nets for the future of young people" endowed with €30 million has the following objectives: (i) to reduce the number of children between 13 and 17 in foster care with effective and high-quality everyday support measures; (ii) to support the whole family, especially parenthood, during taking into care, foster care, its reversal, and other transitions to reinforce the family's interrelations; (iii) to reform aftercare into multi-branch support for adulthood to provide every young person with the capacity for independent life; and (iv) to improve the foster care related services by offering tailored and goal-oriented support services<sup>179</sup>.

## Sufficient and healthy nutrition

The **Finnish** Food Authority dedicates €30 million to the programme "Provisions for life". This programme primarily targets unemployed people with limited means and their families.

The related economic aid is based on their demographic or socio-economic factors (for example, single-parent families and immigrants)<sup>180</sup>. **The Netherlands** has allocated €15,8 million from ESF+ for food and material aid and accompanying measures for people who have insufficient resources to keep the household running. Within the budget, €2,5 million is specifically earmarked for the needs of children (covering access to healthy meals and provision of material assistance in line with the basic needs, such as personal care products).

A budget of €485 million (ESF+ and state budget) is allocated in **Romania's** draft plan for food aid (parcels and vouchers) targeting children from materially deprived families.

## Adequate housing

**Spain** has adapted its National Housing Plan<sup>181</sup> with an additional allocation of €100 million to directly provide rental assistance to people with difficulties to pay their rent. Also, to compensate for Spain's long standing social housing deficit, €215 million were allocated in the new state budget<sup>182</sup> towards a 20.000-house construction plan aimed at creating affordable social housing under public ownership and concentrated in areas where housing market prices are highest. In this sense, Spain's RRP has devoted a significant amount to housing needs. The share of investments on housing rehabilitation with a likely impact on children is €588,2 million. An additional €172 million is earmarked for construction of public housing for rent. The Spanish National Housing Plan 2022-2025 aims to mobilise a significant number of resources (€1.331,8 million transferred to regions). Part of these resources are aimed to increase the stock of social housing and to eradicate substandard housing.

In 2023, the **Dutch** government will make € 100 million available for the Housing Construction Impulse over 10 years (in 2022 the government already spent a total of € 250 million). In addition, 15.000 flex<sup>183</sup> and transformation homes will be built in 2023. An additional €380 million is available to accelerate temporary housing. The National Insulation Programme, dedicated to improving the insulate homes, has been reinforced with €300 million (2023 and 2024). From January 2023, the housing

allowance will increase by €16,94 per month, that means an annually budget allocation of €325 million. The increase in housing benefit should provide extra support for low-income households in difficult times. Also, in **The Netherlands**, almost €11 billion is available for investment in affordable housing and rent reduction for incomes below the social minimum. In **Sweden**, the temporary additions in housing allowance for low-income families is prolonged.



## Recommendations

- 1. Closely link ESF+ funds** and Child Guarantee National Action Plans.
- The European Commission and Council should welcome the European Parliament's pledge<sup>184</sup> to set up an urgent increase in funding for the European Child Guarantee with a **dedicated budget of at least €20 billion for the period 2021-2027** and ensure that this dedicated budget is part of the revised MFF and reinforced ESF+.
- CSOs and local authorities should be able to access dedicated parts of the ESF+ funds or other Cohesion policy funding** in support of their wider action against child poverty and social exclusion. As stipulated by FAST-CARE<sup>185</sup> under the specific conditions of addressing the consequences of the conflict in Ukraine (amendment of the Common Provisions Regulation entered into force in October 2022), a portion of the funds should be attributed to CSOs and local authorities operating in local communities. The EU should closely monitor that such use of funds does not disproportionately

benefit one of the two types of beneficiaries. Moreover, the dedicated allocation of portions of Cohesion policy funds to CSOs should also become a wider model in the revision of the MFF to ensure that CSOs have equal access and conditions in all EU Member States.

- 4. Use experiences and lessons learnt** from the Child Guarantee process to feed into the next ESF+ funding period.
- 5. Provide a better and more transparent overview of national funds** dedicated to eradicating child poverty.
- 6. Support the National Action Plans with specific budget** and link it with running services at regional and municipality level.
- 7. Review the decentralisation management systems** in countries and make any necessary changes that will reduce differences and inequalities in poverty policies between municipalities.
- 8. Promote administrative reforms at regional and local levels** aimed at maximising synergies between the Minimum Income Schemes and regional income support schemes.

# MONITORING AND EVALUATION

## Indicators

### **Some national indicators are appropriate**

The indicators included in **Lithuania's** National Action Plan to measure child poverty are appropriate since official statistics are used and more than one method of evaluation is foreseen thus increasing the validity and reliability of the results. In **Sweden** too, the indicators proposed in the Action Plan are relevant, and likely to be followed over time. However, indicators are missing in some important areas (e.g., healthcare).

In **Romania**, most of the indicators included in the draft Action Plan are appropriate, but some of them could have been more child-focused (e.g. for access to health, instead of the number of facilities created or modernised, an indicator related to the number of children addressed by those facilities would have been more relevant).

### **Some national indicators are preliminary...**

In **Finland**, the action plan will use existing qualitative and quantitative metrics and indicators that will be specified in later stages. A national cooperation network (made up of different stakeholders and operating in conjunction with the National Child Strategy) will be set up to promote, monitor and evaluate the Child Guarantee action plan, and will help define indicators.

In **Spain**, the set of indicators included in the Child Guarantee Action Plan is expected to be finalised in the first quarter of 2023.

Indicators will be disaggregated by sex and, when necessary, by age group. If possible, data will also be disaggregated at territorial level, by target group and vulnerability profile. Although the preliminary set of indicators proposed is considered to be relevant, not all objectives within each axis and key service are associated to specific indicators. Also, some of the indicators proposed do not have an identified statistical source (for example, those related to extracurricular activities or early child intervention) or do not have a sufficient frequency. Child poverty and social exclusion (axis 1) contains many proposed indicators, while indicators for each key service are few. Surprisingly, there is no indicator associated to Axis 3, which is devoted to child protection and protective environments. In view of Save the Children Spain, these should be added in coherence with those enshrined in the Law of Comprehensive Child Protection against Violence.

### **...and others need further clarification**

In **Italy**, clear indicators are included in the monitoring framework. The list is complete, in accordance with available data at national and EU level. The monitoring and evaluation system should be strong enough to overcome fragmented and inconsistent data across all areas. It is therefore essential to invest in collecting more regular data to fill these gaps. This can only happen through collaboration between the national statistical institute, the statistical offices of the main ministries and municipalities, and other institutions that collect data on children.

### **No indicators will make for tricky measurement**

The **Danish** and **Dutch** Child Guarantee Action Plans do not contain indicators to measure child poverty. The **Danish** action plan lacks concrete initiatives, actions, and goals to reduce child poverty. The chapter on data collection, monitoring and evaluation of the **Dutch** action plan mentions the fact that the different definitions of poverty used by governmental bodies inhibits the setting of indicators and the monitoring of the actions.

### **In all cases there is room for improvement**

**Romania's** Action Plan is expected to reflect the standard EU indicators (i.e., AROPE, material deprivation, early school leaving). In the area of education, a special tool and set of indicators has been developed: MATE ("Mecanismului de Avertizare Timpurie în Educație") – Romania's mechanism for early warning in education, triggered by the country's persistently high level of early school leaving. MATE identifies schools that might need additional resources or support<sup>186</sup>. However, the indicator is based on school vulnerability, not on individual vulnerability of students. Some data collection might be hindered by the restrictions associated to the pandemic (e.g., data on the health status of school aged children was collected directly in schools by school medical staff). In addition, the standard disaggregation used in the official statistics does not allow for an analysis of children's situation.

## Targets

### **The national targets to fight child poverty and social exclusion differ widely across countries.**

**Finland** is working hard to tackle child poverty and the targets set are appropriate. Besides the Child Guarantee and the Child Strategy, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has an action plan to reduce poverty by concentrating on child poverty and exclusion. The reform of the healthcare and social services to be implemented next year aims to support the overall well-being of children and families.

In **Lithuania** the targets also seem appropriate and reasonable. The areas of improvement are necessary to reduce social inclusion and poverty.

In **Spain**, the definition of targets is appropriate. However, there is no indication on the common/general criteria behind the targets, including an analysis of possible scenarios and an assessment of potential risks and mitigation strategies. In some areas there are no targets specified, for example, with regard to school meals and the ban on evictions. In the area of ECEC, the definition of the target as "the percentage of enrolment children in families in the 20% poorest income level" goes against the philosophy of the Child Guarantee, which sets out the objective to ensure access to all children at risk of poverty, social exclusion or under any other form of vulnerability.

In **Italy**, in areas such as ECEC, school meals and full-time services, there are clear targets to be reached in a specific timeframe. However, in other areas where there is absence of data, targets are not well specified, and are more related to outputs than to actual outcomes.



Posed by a model. Photo: John Owens / Save the Children

In **Denmark**, although the former government promised to introduce a poverty line and fight child poverty, however it did not succeed in any of the endeavours.

In the **Dutch Action Plan**, only one general target has been formulated, i.e., *to halve the number of children growing up in poverty by 2025*. While this is a virtuous target, it is not possible to monitor and evaluate. Thus, meaningful sub-targets and a system of monitoring and evaluation are necessary.

In the **Swedish Action Plan**, the targets are described in a general way and need to be more specific (e.g., “The proportion of children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families (aged 1-5) attending early childhood enrolled in early education is *to increase*”). It is necessary to specify what expressions like “to increase”, “a higher proportion” or “more children” exactly mean, for the targets to be considered satisfactory.

In **Romania**, the draft National Plan includes ten expected results, among which lifting 500.000 children out of poverty or social exclusion risk; vulnerable families with children are re-prioritised for social housing and are eligible for housing benefits, including support for renting when social housing is not available; children in poverty benefit from a food aid program adequate to their nutritional needs; the enrolment rate in early education reaches 22% for children under three years of age and 95% for children between four and six years of age; the national policies documents concerning children’s rights are available in child-friendly formats designed for children and children; at least one national programme aiming at strengthening the capacity of the existing child participation mechanisms is implemented.



## Recommendations

A proper monitoring and evaluation system is necessary to ensure that the Child Guarantee will be properly implemented, and that Member States will fully capitalise on the potentiality of this unprecedented instrument. For this reason, Member States should:

- 1. Establish a sound system for monitoring and evaluation.**
- 2. Invest in upgrading data collection.**
- 3. Define specific targets** (e.g., clearly define/ specify what expressions like “a higher proportion” and “more children” exactly mean in quantitative terms) in order to make it easier to follow up on the indicators. When necessary, establish sub-targets.
- 4. Ensure that indicators** in the National Action Plans **are coherent** with those agreed at EU level.
- 5. Ensure the coherence with targets** defined in other relevant national strategies and policy initiatives touching upon the objective and measures included in the Action Plan.
- 6. Set targets at territorial/local level.** This would stimulate the government and the local administration to invest higher resources and direct them towards the areas most deprived, to tackle child poverty more effectively.

# PARTICIPATION OF CSOs AND CHILDREN IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FRAMEWORK

## CSOs and children's involvement in the development of the National Action Plans

CSOs and children were involved in the development of National Action Plans to a greater or lesser extent. Some countries actively brought CSOs and children on board, integrating them in the process in a structured, formalised way. Others sought input through less structured channels. A somewhat varied approach applied to the inclusion of feedback from CSOs and children in the National Action Plans.

Save the Children questionnaires gave feedback about the level of involvement of CSOs and children.

### CSOs and children actively on board

In **Finland**, CSOs and children participated in the development of the National Action Plan. A stakeholder meeting was held with eight CSOs – including Save the Children Finland – for the first time for the preparation of the action plan. Save the Children and civil societies' views were included in the final plan. Children participated in the preparation of the National Child Strategy through workshops, remote events, and electronic surveys. The promotion of opportunities for children and young

people's participation is core to the National Child Strategy, which aims to expand the idea of "matters belonging to children". Children's participation processes for the National Child Strategy were utilised in the planning of Child Guarantee Action Plan.

Similarly in **Spain** and in **Italy**, the drafting of the National Action Plan formally involved CSOs and children. Save the Children **Spain** and other stakeholders took part in a stakeholder dialogue organised around the three axes of the draft Plan. A large part of Save the Children Spain's input was included in the Action Plan<sup>187</sup>. Children were consulted in a meeting of the National Council of Children Participation. Children will also participate in governance of the plan's implementation through national and regional structures.

CSOs in **Italy**, including Save the Children Italy, were actively involved in a dedicated Working Group of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Children participated in a specially established "Youth Advisory Board", an inclusive group formed by UNICEF, funded by the European Commission and supported by two government ministries. The Youth Advisory Board organised discussions with around 900 children and adolescents across the country and presented the results to the Child Guarantee experts' group who included them in the final Action Plan.

**Germany** combined formal and informal ways of involvement of CSOs in the Action Plan – which has yet to be delivered. Save the Children participated in two conferences organised by the Ministry for Family Affairs and met with the Ministry to discuss the Child Guarantee. The Ministry also announced its intention to receive written input on the Child Guarantee, but CSOs are still waiting for the draft of the plan and the opportunity to provide their comments. The Child Guarantee national coordinator visited one of Save the Children's projects to promote the Plan and gather feedback. The Ministry has also organised focus groups and talks with children, but more established participation structures are currently under development. The scope and impact of child participation in the drafting process remains rather untransparent. Collaboration with children and CSOs in the future is not yet defined.

In **Romania**, the drafting of the National Strategy for the protection and promotion of the rights of the child (upon which the National Plan strongly relies) was a participative process, where both children themselves and civil society organisations played a crucial role. Furthermore, the first draft of the plan was submitted to another round of consultations in December 2022. Most of the proposals and observations submitted by Save the Children Romania across all stages of consultation are reflected in the second draft of the plan.

In **Iceland**, Save the Children has participated in various consultation activities led by the Ministries to prepare the law on integrated services for children. The organisation's views have been taken into account.

### Not fully at the table

In **Denmark**, **The Netherlands** and **Sweden**, CSOs were involved in less structured and less impactful ways and children were not meaningfully consulted.

Save the Children provided written input to the development of the **Danish National Action Plan** highlighting its deficiencies in terms of goals and indicators and offered its expertise to solve them. However, the recommendations were not included.

In **The Netherlands**, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment organised an online consultation on the Child Guarantee with all stakeholders<sup>188</sup>. Many crucial topics were flagged up at the consultation but were omitted in the final version of the National Action Plan. No follow-up collaboration has happened to date.

In **Sweden**, Save the Children was contacted by the Ministry of Social Affairs at an early development stage Action Plan. CSOs were invited to a meeting within the "Children's Rights Delegation"<sup>189</sup> network and were given the possibility to comment on a draft of the Swedish Action Plan, which was sent out at short notice, hampering detailed feedback. Save the Children Sweden's views on the sustainable housing situation appeared in the Action Plan but views on other vital topics were barely considered. Children were not directly involved and could only submit their views through CSOs. The roll out of future collaboration is unclear.

In **Western Balkan countries** like **Kosovo**, the civic space and abilities of girls and boys to advocate, actively engage, influence, and contribute to further the development of civil society is particularly narrowed and limited.

## Involvement of children, families, and CSOs in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the child guarantee action plans

respondents to the questionnaire from **Germany, Finland, Sweden, Spain, and Italy** said that their National Action Plans and preparatory works include indications on how to involve children, families and CSOs in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their Plans.

Some countries have put in place different structures (ad hoc committees, networks, commissions, working groups) to ensure the involvement of children, families, and civil society organisations in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Action Plans.

In **Germany**, the Ministry of Family Affairs announced the creation of an ad hoc committee to supervise the implementation, monitoring and evaluation as well as further development of the German Child Guarantee Action Plan. A research institute (The German Youth Institute) will assist the committee, which will be formed by stakeholders from the federal level (ministries etc.), states, municipalities, civil society, and children.

**Finland** will create a network of CSOs, families and children and different specialists to monitor and evaluate the implementation of its National Action Plan.

The **Swedish** Action Plan includes the government's intention to involve children, families, and Civil Society Organisations. A clearer plan for the involvement of how and when CSOs as well as children is also needed.

The implementation of the Child Guarantee in **Spain** will be steered by a Commission composed by the Child Guarantee national coordinator, coordinators nominated at regional and local

levels, officials from relevant Ministries, the office of the High Commissioner against Child Poverty and the Federation of Municipalities and Provinces. Consultation (with children and CSOs) is expected to support the work of the Child Guarantee Commission.

In **Italy**, the Working Group "Social Policies and Interventions in Favour of Minors in Implementation of the Child Guarantee" will implement and monitor the Plan. The "Osservatorio nazionale infanzia" and the Network of protection and social inclusion will collaborate on monitoring activities.



Photo: Pablo Blázquez / Save the Children



## Recommendations

**Clear plans as well as meaningful and stable participation channels for CSOs are needed.**

- 1. Define clear plans/guidelines for the involvement of Civil Society Organisations**, specifying practical issues, that is, how and when the involvement will take place.
- In countries where the regional dimension is important, **establish participation channels** not only at the **state level** but also at **regional and local levels**.
- In these cases, national authorities should support a **harmonised development of governance structures** and ensure that CSOs can contribute to the work of regional and local Child Guarantee coordinators.

**Children's direct involvement is necessary to ensure a child rights perspective throughout the process.**

Although the reports of Civil Society Organisations are used to gather the views of children, to achieve meaningful participation the direct involvement of children is key. Thus:

- 4. Prioritise child participation in all phases**, not only in the definition and implementation of policies and frameworks but also in their monitoring and evaluation.
- 5. Define clear plans/guidelines for the involvement of children** (specify practical issues, that is, how and when the involvement will take place)
- 6. Keep good practice in the radar** (e.g., Save the Children Netherland's Speaking Minds programme to ensure meaningful child participation in the Child Guarantee National Action Plan).

## CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

The interlocked crises described in this report are bringing unbearable challenges to the lives of millions of families, especially the most vulnerable ones. As a result, millions of children in Europe are experiencing poverty and social exclusion. While this phenomenon varies from country to country, the result is always the same: an unacceptable deprivation of children's fundamental rights.

Child poverty is not only a threat to the *future* of Europe. It is a pan-European emergency *at this very moment*. This report showcases the concrete detrimental consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, and the climate crisis on children all over the continent. Cases of poor mental health are reaching unprecedented levels, extreme weather events are more frequent, the air is more polluted, food is scarce and unhealthy, houses are cold and inadequate, leisure activities are unaffordable for more and more families, and schools are often inaccessible or too crowded.

On the other hand, we are now witnessing a historic political momentum for protecting children's rights in Europe. National child rights strategies, international frameworks such as the European Child Guarantee and the EU target on child poverty, and the funding to deliver them would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. This momentum must be maintained. EU Member States, EU institutions, and European countries must now capitalise on these historic instruments making sure they go beyond lip service into tangible policies and programmes.

The Child Guarantee, in particular, is an unparalleled and unprecedented instrument. For the first time EU Member States have been given a comprehensive and robust framework to reinforce their national policies. The framework creates new synergies within and among countries - as in the case of school meals discussed in this report - and can be a role model for child poverty reduction policies outside the EU, particularly for candidate and potential candidate countries.

Yet, the work to ensure proper implementation of the Child Guarantee is far from done. All Member States must - if they have not done so already - urgently submit comprehensive and robust National Action Plans. They must make sure their plans are properly implemented, monitored, and evaluated. Their commitment to reducing child poverty should be demonstrated by setting clear metrics, investing in upgrading data collection, defining more specific targets, and making sufficient, sustainable funding allocations. No National Action Plan will be truly successful if it does not actively target and include the most vulnerable children who are at the heart of the Child Guarantee.

Child poverty is a barrier to achieving a more social Europe, a burden on our society, and a condemnation for millions of children to a life of neglect and missed opportunities. This report shows the challenges and makes recommendations to address them. It is now time for EU and national policymakers to work with children and stakeholders and ensure that no child in Europe is left behind.





## **APPENDIX:**

- **BRIEF COUNTRY PAGES**
- **CHILD POVERTY MATRIX**



# DENMARK

Red Barnet (Save the Children Denmark)



CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

**158.000**

(EUROSTAT)

AROEPE 2020	AROEPE 2021
<b>13,4%</b>	<b>14,0%</b>

## KEY FACTS/FIGURES

- In 2021, 158.000 children in Denmark (14% of all children) were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion.
- Denmark lacks an official definition of poverty and a poverty line.
- Despite Denmark's strong tradition for children's participation in leisure activities, many children living in poverty are excluded due to unaffordable fees.

## THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The main post-pandemic challenge is the restoration of the social and learning disadvantages caused by the restrictions and limitations in children's lives in response to COVID-19.

The Danish government earmarked 400 million Danish krone (€53 million) for social support measures in 2020. Some of these funds were allocated to civil society organisations, which played an important role in supporting children and families during the pandemic.

## CHILDREN AT RISK in Denmark:

- Children with migrant background
- Children from single parent families
- Children from low-income families
- Children living in specific areas within the country
- Children in families with few social and personal resources

## THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

Denmark is facing the largest increase in consumer prices over the past 40 years and food prices are already among the highest in the EU. Many families with children are struggling to pay their bills and buy necessities.

In response to the crisis, the Danish government introduced a temporary child benefit and a one-off subsidy for energy bills. Unfortunately,

several people entitled to the subsidy did not receive it and should wait until 2023 to apply again.

## THE DANISH CHILD GUARANTEE ACTION PLAN AND KEY SERVICE AREAS

The Danish Ministry stated that Denmark already complies with the Child Guarantee, therefore separate political initiatives with the specific goal of implementing the child guarantee in the country are not envisaged. Save the Children finds that the Danish Action Plan lacks concrete initiatives, actions, and goals to reduce child poverty. Although Civil Society Organizations were invited to comment on the Action Plan initiatives, their recommendations were not fully considered.

## CHILD GUARANTEE SERVICE AREAS

### ECEC

ECEC is available to all children, although the ratio of child-caretaker is high and there is a lack of professionalism in the area. Municipalities – as responsible for day-care and kindergartens – need to be endowed with adequate financial resources.

### EDUCATION

(including school-based activities and one healthy meal per school day)

The Danish educational system is not compensating for children's socioeconomic backgrounds. There is a lack of resources and a high ratio children-teacher. Although primary education is free of charge, the hidden costs related to field trips, and social and leisure

activities often exclude children living in poverty from participating in these activities.

There are no national guidelines or laws regarding healthy meals at school. Children's access to one healthy meal a day depends on the municipality; some of them have subsidy schemes, providing one meal a day at a reduced cost.

### HEALTH

Access to medical support in Denmark is free of charge, but not the related medicines. Mental health among children has worsened. The psychiatric sector is underfinanced, leaving long waiting lists and many children without support.

### HOUSING

Denmark has a large public housing sector where every fifth home is a public home. But from 2015 to 2018, the public housing sector's relative share of the housing stock decreased. Many families – especially in big cities – have difficulties finding affordable and adequate housing.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

SAVE THE CHILDREN DENMARK CALLS ON THE DANISH GOVERNMENT TO:

1. Agree on a national government-approved definition of poverty and a poverty line, taking into consideration not only economic factors, but also social factors such as illness, mental vulnerability, and isolation.
2. Raise the social benefits to guarantee children's participation in school-based activities, leisure, and social activities.
3. Support families that are not able to cover their expenses.





# FINLAND

Pelastakaa Lapset – Rädda Barnen  
(Save the Children Finland)



CHILDREN AT RISK  
OF POVERTY AND  
SOCIAL EXCLUSION

# 138.000

(EUROSTAT)

AROPE 2020	AROPE 2021
14,5%	13,2%

## KEY FACTS/FIGURES

- In 2021, 138.000 children in Finland (13,2% of all children) were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion.
- Due to the cost-of-living crisis, children are expected to suffer from the lack of healthy food and regular warm meals. Moreover, the mental health of children has further deteriorated, and children suffer from high levels of stress, anxiety, and fear for the future.

## THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The COVID-19 crisis has worsened the situation of many vulnerable families, especially migrant and single parent families. Instability in the labour market during and after the pandemic has challenged families. Children's access to key services has been postponed or reduced due to the pandemic. The supply of some healthcare services (e.g., mental care) is deficient. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that children's best interests must be more precisely considered for possible future crises. The impact of the pandemic on children must be evaluated and cooperation through all service levels (education, healthcare, mental healthcare) must be strengthened to ensure appropriate aftercare levels.

## CHILDREN AT RISK in Finland:

- Children from single parent families
- Children with migrant background
- Children from low-income families
- Children from large disadvantaged families

The Finnish government has introduced some changes in social security benefits<sup>190</sup> and has allocated more financial resources to young people's mental health care through different projects and by strengthening the cooperation with educational professionals and mental healthcare specialists at schools. In addition, a reform of the social security system to establish a clearer approach to balance working and social security in changing life situations is underway<sup>191</sup>.

## THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

Prices of food items, fuel and electricity have significantly increased. In December 2022 food items have increased by 16,03% and energy by a hefty 28%<sup>192</sup>. Prices of food items, fuel and electricity have also significantly increased. Having struggled with the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, inflation and the cost-of-living crisis are increasing the challenges for children, especially for those in low-income families. Save the Children Finland highlights that in the Nordic countries, where extreme weather conditions make heating houses an absolute priority, the increase in energy prices means that many households struggle to adequately heat their home this winter. With food prices too high compared to social security benefits and salaries, many children are expected to suffer from the lack of healthy food and regular warm meals. In addition, the mental health of children has further deteriorated, and children suffer from high levels of stress, anxiety, and fear for the future<sup>193</sup>.

The Finnish government has increased the child and social security benefits already in August 2022 and has also introduced energy compensation measures to help families in need at the beginning of 2023<sup>194</sup>.

## THE CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS

Global warming is contributing to a noticeable spread of ticks and tick-borne diseases that affect children. Darker winters, increased precipitation, and cloudiness may increase cases of seasonal affective disorder<sup>195</sup> which is likely to affect children who already suffer from the continuous spread of viruses at early education centres and schools. The likelihood of serious floods is higher, which are linked to large-scale health risks, particularly through contamination of the water supply as well as

reduced access to basic services since roads become inaccessible. Flooding and increased rainfall also increase the moisture of the air which is already causing significant problems for buildings. Many school buildings, early childhood centres and hospitals have been identified as hazardous for human health (due to bad air quality) and the services have been transferred elsewhere, causing inconvenience to the users, especially families with children. Floods have also prevented children from reaching schools due to inaccessible roads in some rural areas.

The Finnish government developed its first National Adaptation Strategy in 2005, followed by the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan<sup>196</sup>, valid until 2022. A new plan is under development<sup>197</sup>, and although it is expected to focus on the socio-economic impacts of at least elderly people, children and families will likely be left out.

## THE FINNISH CHILD GUARANTEE ACTION PLAN AND KEY SERVICE AREAS

The Finnish Child Guarantee Action Plan is part of Finland's National Child Strategy, published in February 2021. The welfare of children is supported in many ways in the Finnish Child Guarantee Action Plan, including free comprehensive and upper secondary education, free school meals, free healthcare, and the subjective right to early childhood education. Most vulnerable and minority groups of children are well defined in the plan.

CSOs and children have participated in the definition and development of the Child Guarantee Action Plan. A stakeholder hearing meeting was held with eight CSOs – including Save the Children Finland – for the preparation of the action plan. Save the Children and civil societies' views were included in the final plan. CSOs will be part of the National Cooperation Network that will be created for monitoring and evaluation of the Action Plan.

## CHILD GUARANTEE SERVICE AREAS

### ECEC

ECEC is available for all families and is free of charge for low-income families. A challenge mentioned in the National Action Plan is the lower participation rate than the OECD mean. ECEC should be free of charge for all children to higher participation, and more resources should be invested in personnel.

### EDUCATION

(including school-based activities and one healthy meal per school day)

Two important policies have been introduced in the Finnish action plan, namely, the implementation of upper secondary education for all children until 18 years and the application of the Finnish model of hobbies<sup>198</sup> in all regions of the country. The Finnish action plan should ensure that the resources allocated to these initiatives are adequate. As for the provision of healthy meals per school day, free meals are provided in the preschool, comprehensive education, vocational institutes, and higher upper secondary schools for all children, in full compliance with the Child Guarantee Recommendation.

### HEALTH

Currently, children in vulnerable situations may not receive the support and help they need since services for children are not consistently and easily available. Mental health disorders are a significant health issue in Finland, but mental health services are not delivered at the level of other social and healthcare services. Although the Finnish Action Plan mentions mental healthcare and psychiatric care for young people, however not enough interventions are targeted. In addition, the resources in healthcare (financial and personnel) are not sufficient and

this is not mentioned in the Action Plan. The reform of healthcare, social welfare, and rescue services will be implemented from the beginning of 2023 and hopefully will change the situation in a better direction.

### NUTRITION

The Finnish Action Plan includes food aid measures.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

SAVE THE CHILDREN FINLAND CALLS ON THE FINNISH GOVERNMENT TO:

1. Increase the supply of social and healthcare services. Children's growth and development must be supported with an adequate level of healthcare services, provided at the right time and with regularity. Services must be based on the needs of the child and his/her family. At the moment, mental health services are most needed and not adequately accessible, thus an adequate level of mental health care services must be urgently provided to children and young people.
2. Effectively communicate the availability of services and facilitate access to services. Service communications and access to services should be developed in such a way that the information reaches children and young people (e.g., via digital channels).
3. Make sure that the difficulties caused by societal changes, economic conditions and/or emergency conditions, such as inflation, pandemics and other crises are tackled promptly by supporting families and by ensuring sufficient financial resources and social security benefits. The government should also consider the different family situations and forms (divorced or single-parent households, immigrant households etc.) and allocate sufficient financial resources and services for families and children in different situations. Social security benefits should also be more flexible in crisis situations.

4. Support parents' access to employment and develop social security benefits in a child-oriented manner. During the reform of the social security system, the government should set up pilot projects to test the new benefits system and its impact on children's well-being.

5. Systematically evaluate the impact of climate change on children. Government should be prepared to face environmental changes and crises to ensure children's well-being. Actions

should be taken to tackle climate change and find ways to create a sustainable future for children.

6. The Finnish Child Guarantee National Action Plan should include more defined and targeted interventions along with more precise indicators and monitoring processes. The Finnish government should ensure that CSOs and children participate in the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the measures included in the plan.

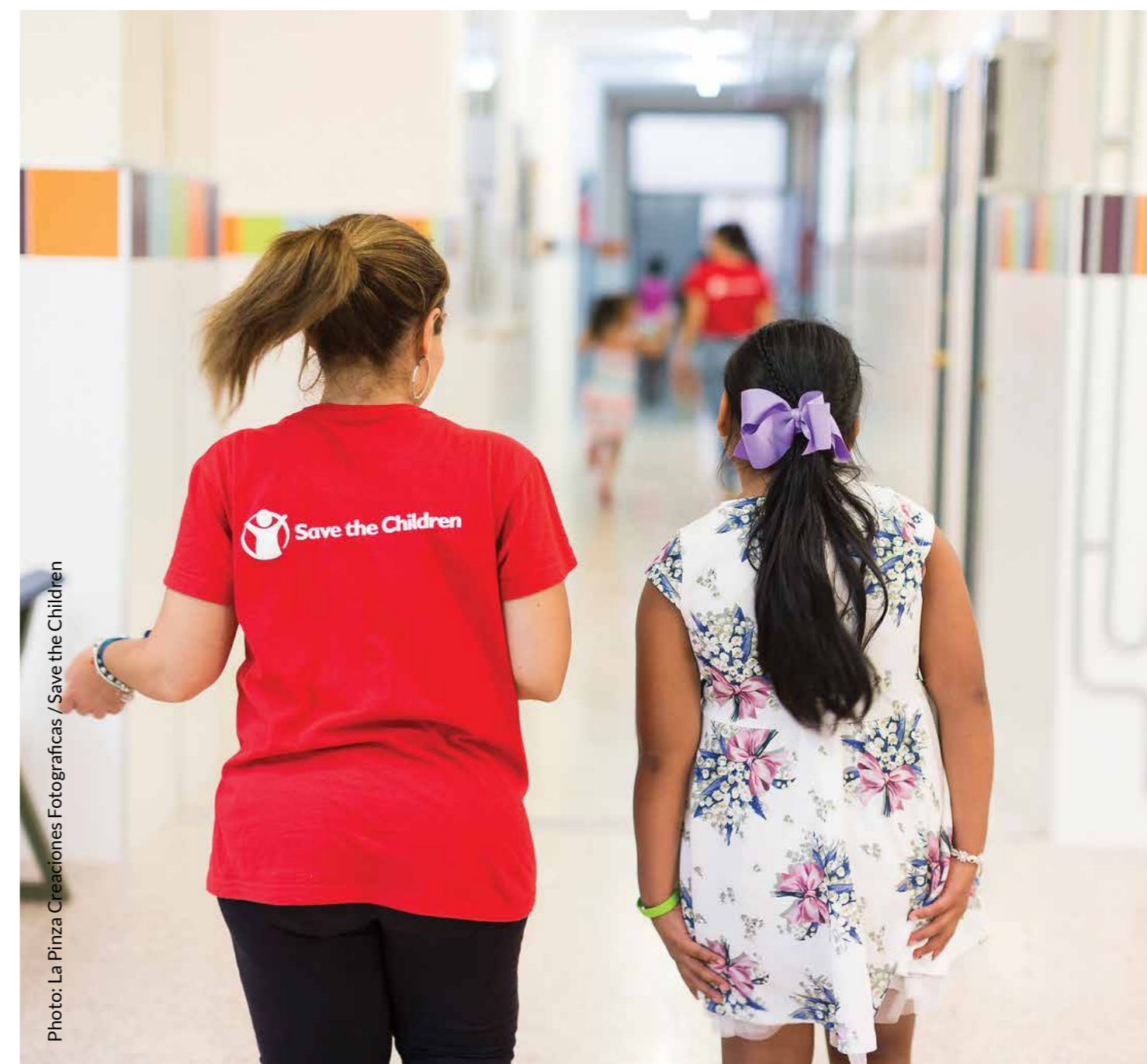


Photo: La Pinza Creaciones Fotograficas / Save the Children



# GERMANY

Save the Children Deutschland  
(Save the Children Germany)



CHILDREN AT RISK  
OF POVERTY AND  
SOCIAL EXCLUSION

**3.357.000**

(EUROSTAT)

AROPE 2020	AROPE 2021
22,3%	23,5%

## KEY FACTS/FIGURES

- According to Eurostat, in 2021, more than 3 million children in Germany (23,5% of all children) were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE-Indicator).<sup>199</sup>
- According to the national statistical institute, every fifth child in Germany grows up in income poverty (20,8% in 2021).<sup>200</sup>
- The pandemic’s long-term effects are still affecting children’s physical and psychological well-being. 1 in 3 children suffers from psychological problems. Anxiety, depressive symptoms, and psychosomatic complaints among children have increased over the last few years.
- Low-income families relying on government benefits cannot afford healthy food for their children.

## THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The consequences of the lockdowns imposed by the pandemic have significantly hit children, since their schools, care facilities, youth centres and other institutions were closed for long periods. This affected the time normally spent with friends and relatives other than the core

### CHILDREN AT RISK in Germany:

- Children with migrant background
- Children from single parent families
- Children from low-income families
- Children from large disadvantaged families

family, lowered chances to do sports or other activities, and increased feelings of loneliness and anxiety about the future. Besides, children were increasingly exposed to conflict and violent situations at home<sup>201</sup>.

The German authorities launched a programme to reduce the negative effects on children in education, providing resources to compensate for learning backlogs in schools as well as leisure-oriented social learning and psychosocial support. Social work at schools has been strengthened in several federal states as well as cooperation with extracurricular learning venues, therefore improving the school capacity to reach children at risk of poverty or exclusion.

## THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

Germany has seen an increase in energy prices of a staggering 38,4% in November 2022, even more (around 40%) in the months before. Recent data show that low-income families relying on government benefits cannot afford healthy food<sup>202</sup> for their children – this situation got worse with rising nutrition costs of around 20% in late 2022. The umbrella foodbank organisation, Tafel Deutschland, registered a 50% increase in people in need since the beginning of the year<sup>203</sup>.

The support measures launched by the German government include, amongst others, a one-off energy bonus for people in employment, a temporary reduction of VAT for gas (from 19 to 7%), tax discounts on petrol and subsidised public transport.

## THE CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS

The country has witnessed an increase in vector-borne diseases, allergic and respiratory diseases, and exposure to extreme weather events and UV radiation. Children are particularly affected as they are subject to physiological peculiarities that make it difficult for them to react to environmental influences, such as heat, and because their well-being often depends on caregivers<sup>204</sup>. Due to the climate-related negative effects on the agricultural sector, healthy eating and nutrition have become more expensive<sup>205</sup>. Besides, the country has been affected by severe floods, causing deaths and widespread damage. In 2021, 180 people lost their lives due to flooding, and many more lost their homes<sup>206</sup>.

At the moment, there are no effective measures to redistribute the costs of climate change and climate policy. In 2021, the elected government mentioned a social compensation mechanism

for private households to compensate for the rising energy prices called “Klimageld”<sup>207</sup>. In the summer of 2022, the Minister for Social Affairs Hubertus Heil suggested it should have a redistributive character and support low-income households on a regular basis<sup>208</sup>. However, to date there is no draft law or even a timeline.

## THE GERMAN CHILD GUARANTEE ACTION PLAN AND KEY SERVICE AREAS

The German national action plan hasn’t been available before the final edit of this report. Reasons for the delay are the change of government and minister in the Ministry of Family Affairs at the beginning of 2022 and thus a delay in starting the process. Further delays are due to a complex coordination process between different federal ministries and levels of the federal state, as the government states. Save the Children will assess these delays based on the outcome of the process. Save the Children expects that it leads to an ambitious and coherent action plan. The following remarks are on issues that Save the Children Germany wants to highlight and should be addressed in the action plan.

## CHILD GUARANTEE SERVICE AREAS



In Germany the expansion of day-care places has increased over the last few years and is available for all children due to subsidized fees. Nevertheless, the high demand for ECEC and lack of educated staff exclude vulnerable children such as children in migration and children living with unemployed caretakers. There is little knowledge of the legal support system, families are entitled to, and a lack of poverty-sensitive communication.

## EDUCATION

(including school-based activities and one healthy meal per school day)

In Germany, educational success highly depends on the economic background of the family. Performance in basic competencies has declined, leaving disadvantaged children even more behind. The legal claim to full-time education should improve access to school-based activities but the lack of teachers and educated staff puts the quality of education at risk. The inclusion of children with disabilities and migrant children is unsatisfying due to the lack of specialised staff and comprehensive infrastructure and concepts.

The federal responsibilities of school matters lead to a variety in cost and quality of school meals. Berlin introduced lunch free of charge for all children, other states started initiatives to follow. This needs to be coordinated in the action plan.

## NUTRITION

The National Action Plan needs to address the situation that especially children living on basic welfare support can't afford healthy nutrition because the benefits are too low. It needs to include an increase in cash benefits so that enough, healthy food is affordable. Therefore, there must be clear benchmarks for the legal definition of the minimum subsistence levels of children and their families.



Photo: Angel Navarrete / Save the Children

## RECOMMENDATIONS

SAVE THE CHILDREN GERMANY CALLS ON THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT TO:

### WELFARE BENEFITS AND LABOUR MARKET POLICIES

1. Speed up the legislative process and implementation of the reform of the child allowance system (Kindergrundsicherung).
2. Ensure that the social protection scheme for jobseekers (Social Code Book II/ "Bürgergeld") addresses the needs of children, especially when it comes to the level of cash benefits and its calculation.
3. Establish nationwide affordable social tariffs for public transport (discounts on the new "Deutschlandticket", similar to expired "9-€-Ticket").
4. Carry out the necessary actions to improve labour market policies to prevent poverty (in terms of better access to employment that secures the livelihood of families).

### EDUCATION AND CARE

1. Ensure preferential allocation of daycare places to children in poverty situations.
2. Early childhood support in the field of language, and motor skills, increasing resilience for better chances of the development of children living in poverty.
3. Ensure the qualification of pedagogical staff in psychosocial support for the good accompaniment of stressed children and children in crises/ children living in poverty.

4. Promote an individual learning culture in which children build on their resources instead of discovering deficits.
5. Poverty sensitization in all educational institutions so that professionals can identify poverty, understand its causes, and offer support without humiliation.
6. Capacity building in all institutions regarding psychosocial support, social legislation, support systems and special needs of children growing up in poverty.

### NATIONAL FUNDS

1. Provide a better and more transparent overview of national funds that are used in the fields of combatting child poverty, such as providing consistent statistics and graphs.
2. Make clearer which household budget is available for combatting child poverty, and where it is available.
3. Use funds to support children burdened by the consequences of child poverty more directly.
4. Back the NAP with specific numbers.

### EU FUNDS

1. Connect and interlink NAP and ESF+ funds more closely for the upcoming ESF+ period.
2. Use experiences and gained information on the Child Guarantee process to feed into the next ESF+ funding period.



# ITALY

Save the Children Italia  
(Save the Children Italy)



CHILDREN AT RISK  
OF POVERTY AND  
SOCIAL EXCLUSION

## 2.851.000

(EUROSTAT)

AROEPE 2020	AROEPE 2021
28,9%	29,7%

## CHILDREN AT RISK in Italy:

- Children with migrant background
- Children from low-income families
- Children from single parent households
- Children from large families
- Children living in specific areas within the country

were considerably reduced and one in three households had to postpone the payment of bills. In 2022, the number of students reflecting a low performance in school national tests has increased, as well as the share of students reaching upper secondary education without the needed competencies (from 7,5% to 9,7% between 2019 and 2022<sup>209</sup>). The Italian Government allocated over €1 billion to support the education system to cope with the effects of COVID-19.

## THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

Due to inflation, in 2022 for families with lower spending capacities, prices of basic needs such as electricity and food have risen more than for affluent families (+12,1%, compared to +7,2%<sup>210</sup>). Government measures to palliate the effects of the crisis include, amongst others, an energy bonus for low-income households, and a reduction of VAT for gas.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

Between 1981 and 2020, the probability of extreme events in Italy increased by 9%<sup>211</sup>. From 2010 to 2021, 1.181 extreme weather phenomena were recorded with a negative impact on 637 municipalities. These events

particularly affect populations at risk of poverty and social exclusion, including children. Climate change also impacts the educational well-being of children in Italy as natural disasters and epidemics cause educational loss. Poor air quality causes 50.000 deaths a year in Italy and in 2020 almost 2 million children (21,3% of the total) lived in polluted cities<sup>212</sup>. No consistent actions have been taken to tackle the effect of climate change on children in Italy.

## THE ITALIAN CHILD GUARANTEE ACTION PLAN AND KEY SERVICE AREAS

The Italian Child Guarantee Action Plan has been drafted by the Working Group "Social Policies and Interventions in Favour of Minors in Implementation of the Child Guarantee" established at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The Plan was drafted with the participation of different Ministries, municipalities, regions, stakeholders, NGOs, CSOs, and the consultation of children through the Youth Advisory Board. The Plan includes clear indicators in the monitoring framework aimed to exploit the full potential of the existing datasets, even if these are generally insufficient. The Plan establishes synergies with the current National Childhood Plan.

## CHILD GUARANTEE SERVICE AREAS



The ECEC objectives included in the Italian Plan are aligned with the Care Strategy recently adopted by the European Commission, in particular reaching 50% coverage for full-time childcare (below 3 years old), and 95% for full-time preschool education (aged 3-5), along with closing the gap in participation between the most vulnerable children and the rest of the

population and improving the quality of services. The Plan also aims to offer free childcare for low-income families<sup>213</sup> and to build up new infrastructure. A total of €4,6 billion have been allocated through the RFF. Given the existing regional disparities, municipalities in southern regions will require targeted funding towards the most vulnerable areas and higher funding to cope with running costs and ensure accessibility and quality of services.

## EDUCATION

(including school-based activities and one healthy meal per school day)

Although in the Italian Action Plan there is a clear target to increase full-time education in primary schools<sup>214</sup>, and objectives are set to reach out to the most vulnerable children through inclusive educational practices<sup>215</sup>, as well as reduce dropout<sup>216</sup> and the share of NEETs<sup>217</sup> through adequate training programs, there is a need to increase funding in education<sup>218</sup> and target resources to areas where the most vulnerable children live.

## HEALTH

The Italian Action Plan contains actions to strengthen health services and programmes for children's first 1.000 days of life; it also foresees the reinforcement of the Youth Counselling Centres and the expansion and reinforcement of psychological and social well-being support services for children, pre-adolescents, and adolescents along with the establishment of a permanent technical round table on mental health for the 0-18 age group. In this sense, Psychology and Child/Adolescent Neuropsychiatry services will be increased.

## NUTRITION

The Italian Action Plan aims at ensuring one balanced and free meal per day in primary schools. A sub-target includes the reduction of contributions by families for meal costs, and

## KEY FACTS/FIGURES

- In 2021, 2.850.000 children in Italy (29,7% of all children) were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion and 1.382.000 (14,2%) lived in absolute poverty.
- 48% of Italian children never read a book and 27,2% never did a sport activity.

## THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, the economic resources of almost half of the families in Italy

free access for vulnerable children. The Plan also foresees the provision of canteen services in lower secondary schools, now available only for one in two children. To this end, the government has allocated €400 million for canteens' infrastructures, particularly targeting the southern regions. Nevertheless, these resources are insufficient to eradicate territorial inequalities in Italy. Although the Plan does not include specific actions to improve the nutritional status of children, it contains several income support measures, which are essential to increase the capacity of families to purchase healthy food.

## HOUSING

The Action Plan includes measures to increase family incomes to cope with rising housing costs and to expand the supply of social housing. The proposal is to reshape the rental contribution for families that benefit from the "Citizens Revenue Scheme" to increase the financial support to pay rent and other housing expenses. The supply of affordable social housing will be mainly done by renovating public buildings. The Plan also foresees guidelines to promote social well-being and inclusion of pre-adolescents and adolescents and the provision of meeting/community spaces for minors.



Photo: Ferran Nadeu / Save the Children

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### SAVE THE CHILDREN ITALY CALLS ON THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT TO:

1. Increase education spending to at least 5% of the GDP (from the current 4,3%).
2. Support municipalities to ensure that new places in childcare services are publicly funded, and services are free for most vulnerable children.
3. Introduce an official national programme for the "Educational Intensive Areas" aimed at orienting financial resources towards schools and territories with a high incidence of poverty and where services are limited or non-existent.
4. Guarantee full-time education in primary schools and expand full-time in secondary schools, offering extra curricula activities (i.e., sport, music, culture, leisure).
5. Guarantee a free meal per day in primary schools.
6. Promote inclusive pedagogy and continuous training for teachers.
7. Make school infrastructures more inclusive, green, and digitally friendly, including civic, climate and environmental education.
8. Promote soft and green skills to address and adapt to climate change, and to respond to the demands of a transforming labour market (green jobs).
9. Invest in tertiary education institutions to ensure an adequate number of trained staff for new childcare services.

10. Define a national programme to connect schools and communities on healthy lifestyles for children and adolescents (e.g., nutrition education, sports etc.)

11. Guarantee a health system of proximity, integrated and multi-level, free and accessible to all children and ensure Assignment without any delay of a paediatrician in all territories.

12. Make a moratorium on evictions for families with children and ensure the participation of children in urban regeneration and social housing programs.

### REGARDING THE ITALIAN CHILD GUARANTEE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN:

1. Collect more regular data to fill the current gaps and have monitoring and evaluation tools to assess the progress of the Child Guarantee Action Plan. To this end, it is necessary to promote collaboration between the national statistical institute, the statistical offices of the main ministries and municipalities, and other institutions that collect granular data on children.
2. Create an Index of "Educational Poverty" that allows to regularly detect the incidence of the phenomenon of multidimensional poverty including the educational, socio-emotional, and physical development of the child, and therefore access to services in the areas indicated by the Child Guarantee.
3. Guarantee the implementation of the activities included in the Action Plan.



# LITHUANIA

Gelbėkit vaikus (Save the Children Lithuania)

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

**107.000**

(EUROSTAT)

AROPE 2020	AROPE 2021
23,1%	21,6%

## KEY FACTS/FIGURES

- In 2021, 105.245 children in Lithuania (21,6% of all children) were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion.
- The situation of children at risk of poverty and social inclusion has slightly improved since 2020 as shown by a decrease of almost 2 percentage points in the AROPE indicator.
- Only 17% of high school graduates from low-income families go on to higher education (compared to 68% from high-income families).
- The Lithuanian education system is not inclusive. Additionally, access to education is very challenging for children living in rural areas.

## THE COVID-19 CRISIS

In Lithuania, the COVID-19 pandemic had damaging consequences for children’s education, socialisation, and above all, mental health. Domestic child abuse increased during the pandemic and vulnerable families struggled to support their children and to compensate for the lack of education and learning caused by school disruption and remote learning.

## CHILDREN AT RISK in Lithuania:

- Children from single parent families
- Children with disabilities
- Children from large disadvantaged families
- Children living in institutional and foster care
- Children with migrant background

Specific measures were developed to protect and aid children affected by any form of violence. Also, a helpline was established to support parents.

## THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

Inflation reached 24,1% in 2022. Food prices increased by 31,2% and new mortgages for households by 24%<sup>219</sup>. To compensate the most vulnerable families for the rise in prices, the government increased the social benefits and

introduced energy compensation measures for vulnerable families. In addition, it also expanded its free school lunch programme to cover more children in need.

## THE CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS

Floods and heavy storms are causing damage to residential buildings around the country and are also partly responsible for the shortage in food supplies and price increases. The high temperatures are having negative effects on children’s health and will increase the demand for cooling systems, posing a problem to low-income families who cannot afford them. The government offers financial support to use renewable energy sources and has launched information campaigns about the negative effects of extreme heat waves and the

prevention of heat strokes. Plans to respond to the negative effects of climate change are foreseen since the country is a part of the EU convention to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

## THE LITHUANIAN CHILD GUARANTEE ACTION PLAN AND KEY SERVICE AREAS

The measures put forward in the Lithuanian Child Guarantee Action Plan are based on best practices that have worked well in tackling child poverty. The Plan focuses on the integration of children living in rural areas, and children with disabilities. It aims to develop a strategy to integrate different governmental sectors: social services, education, and healthcare. However, there is no information about child and adult participation in the drafting of the plan.



Photo: Lolo Vasco / Save the Children

# CHILD GUARANTEE SERVICE AREAS

## ECEC

Although the government provides free childcare, early education and free meals at childcare centres, there is still a lack of availability of ECEC centres for all children, especially for children with special needs and/or disabilities. Regrettably, a concise plan, containing actions and financial resources to provide access to ECEC for every child is still missing.

## EDUCATION

(including school-based activities and one healthy meal per school day)

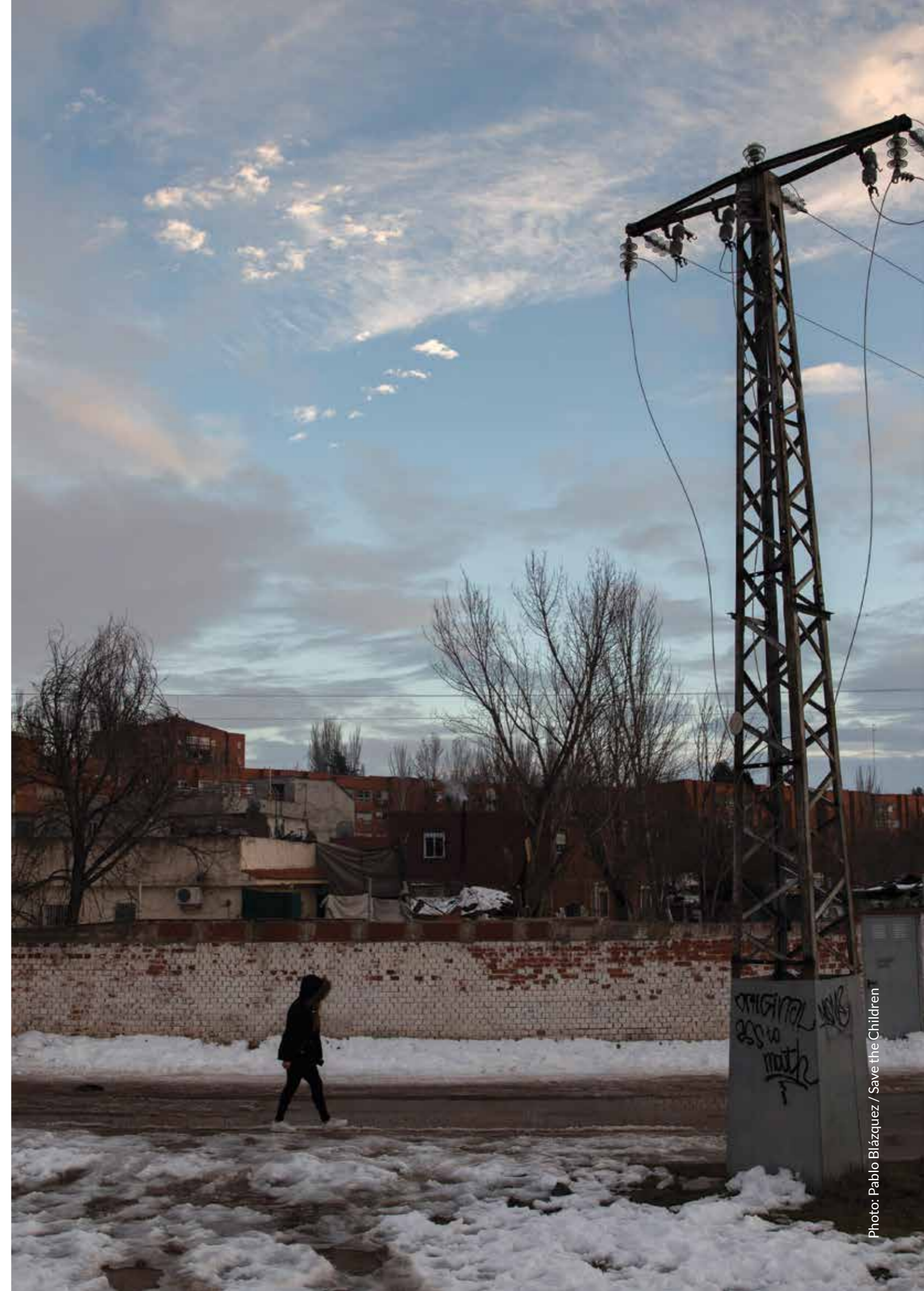
The government's official acknowledgement of the problems in the education system – low quality (especially in rural areas), non-inclusive (for children with special needs, children from different cultural backgrounds), lack of staff, lack of extracurricular/leisure activities – has triggered additional policies to address these issues and improve the situation in the country. For example, to ensure equal opportunities for all social groups to pursue higher education, the government has prepared a priority project for the development of the social dimension of higher education for 2023-2026. In addition, regional special education centres are going to be established, the purpose of which is to promote inclusive education in the assigned region by helping its school communities to apply the principle of inclusion in education in practice, and to spread inclusive education innovations in regional schools. Furthermore, in order to encourage students to choose a profession in the field of education, in 2022 salaries of specialists were raised. Moreover, at the end of 2021, significant amendments to the Law on Education were adopted. It is envisaged that students

experiencing learning difficulties will receive more individualised support in time and will be able to properly prepare for learning at a higher grade level. In total, in 2023, the education and science budget will grow by more than €425 million.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### SAVE THE CHILDREN LITHUANIA CALLS ON THE LITHUANIAN GOVERNMENT TO:

1. Create equal opportunities for every child to have access to ECEC.
2. Pay attention not only to the needs of children but also to those of parents (e.g., keep up social support for poor families, and increase public transportation in rural areas (to ensure children's access to different services)).
3. Increase the inclusion of children with special needs.
4. Ensure professional growth for educators.
5. Renew the school curriculum and ensure diversity and flexibility.
6. Further expand the "whole day" school activities, and extracurricular/leisure activities.
7. Ensure that good quality education is accessible for all children and create national quality supervision and evaluation standards, etc.
8. The Lithuanian Child Guarantee National Action Plan should provide clearer information on (and ensure) children's and stakeholders' participation in the Plan.







# THE NETHERLANDS

Save the Children Nederland  
(Save the Children Netherlands)



CHILDREN AT RISK  
OF POVERTY AND  
SOCIAL EXCLUSION

**493.000**

(EUROSTAT)

AROPE 2020	AROPE 2021
15,8%	14,9%

## THE DUTCH CHILD GUARANTEE ACTION PLAN AND KEY SERVICE AREAS

The Dutch Action Plan only specifies a single broad target of child poverty reduction by 50% within four years. The Plan identifies several categories of children in need but does not provide any information about the size of these categories. Although the European Council recommends that National Action Plans on the Child Guarantee should cover the period until 2030, the Dutch Action Plan runs only until 2025. Stakeholders from different backgrounds participated in a consultation on the Child Guarantee organised by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, however, their views were not fully considered.

### ECEC

Recent investments aim to improve quality and participation in ECEC. Worker shortage in childcare should be dealt with urgently.

### EDUCATION

(including school-based activities and one healthy meal per school day)

The shortage of teachers is increasingly challenging and although several measures were introduced (including raising salaries), their impact remains to be seen. The Dutch Action Plan mentions the need to increase investments in sport, leisure, and cultural activities but the quantities are not specified. In addition, the Action Plan misses important issues since no mention is made of early school leavers, the increasing feelings of stress among young students, the decline in basic skills and the increasing differences in performance levels between schools.

The Netherlands does not provide school meals but participates in the EU school fruit, vegetable, and milk scheme, providing free

fruit and vegetables to 3.000 primary schools over 20 weeks per year. In 2022 a motion asking to invest €100 million in school meals was passed. Starting February 1<sup>st</sup> this budget will be available for the most at-risk schools both in primary and secondary education. The minister acknowledges that, however significant, this budget is most likely not enough to fully guarantee proper nutrition for all school children.<sup>223</sup>

### HEALTH

The Netherlands has a strong primary care system but faces a shortage of certain health workers. Mental health problems are present among children: 1 in 7 children needs some form of psychological care. However, the mental healthcare rights of many children are not met because of long waiting lists. An important programme that has been launched to help parents in vulnerable situations is the "Solid Start" (Kansrijke Start), which focuses on care and support for families in vulnerable situations in the period prior to, during and after pregnancy.

### NUTRITION

Concerns about the proper nutrition of children have increased in the country due to the current inflation and rising food prices. Social workers report that many households are reverting to cheap, highly processed, sugary foods for their caloric intake, while at the same time, they are cutting the costs of sports.

### HOUSING

The Netherlands is in the midst of a housing crisis, with a shortage of social rental homes and homes in the so-called "middle rent"<sup>224</sup>. The Dutch Action Plan focuses on accelerating the construction of 100.000 new homes per year<sup>225</sup> and preventing homelessness among the adult population. However, the Plan does not mention children nor children living in deprived housing situations, energy poverty among children or shutting off of utilities of families with children.

## CHILDREN AT RISK in The Netherlands:

- Children with migrant background
- Children from single parent families
- Children with disabilities
- Children living in specific areas within the country

## KEY FACTS/FIGURES

- In 2021, 221.000 children<sup>220</sup> in The Netherlands (14,9% of all children) were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion.
- 1 in 7 children in The Netherlands needs some form of psychological care.
- Due to the cost-of-living crisis, a household of four people now needs to spend an additional €1500 annually.

## THE COVID-19 CRISIS

There is evidence of the effect of the pandemic in different areas, such as health consequences, education disruption, family vulnerabilities and inequalities. This is mainly linked to the strain on the healthcare systems and the restrictions and lockdowns during the different COVID-19 peaks. However, after the stabilisation of the COVID-19 threat, the main concern is the mental health of children and young people. To address this, the Dutch state secretary has announced a comprehensive plan to improve mental health in five domains: online, at school, at work, in the neighbourhood and society at large.<sup>221</sup>

## THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

The cost of groceries in the country has increased by an average of 18,5%<sup>222</sup> meaning that a household of four people needs to spend an additional €1500 annually. The umbrella organisation for food banks, VBNL, has reported a 10% increase in people applying for help. The Dutch government announced temporary economic aid to tackle the effects of inflation (€17 billion) and to compensate for the rise in energy prices (€23,5 billion). Moreover, several categories of energy taxes have been reduced and low-income households receive an extra one-off energy allowance (€1.300 circa) together with tailored help to save energy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS



### SAVE THE CHILDREN NETHERLANDS CALLS ON THE DUTCH GOVERNMENT TO:

1. Increase investments to mitigate the immediate effects of the cost-of-living crisis.
2. Make sure children in migration have access to mental health and key services.
3. Put the focus of policies at the national and local level on preventing child poverty among the groups at risk.
4. Make use of evidence-based best practices and the expertise and knowledge of related agents.
5. Ensures access to social benefits for children at risk of poverty who grow up outside a family setting.
6. Promulgate new regulations for school canteens to guarantee healthy food products for children.
7. Abolish VAT on fruit and vegetables (foreseen by 2024).
8. Freeze the rent for social housing.

### REGARDING THE DUTCH CHILD GUARANTEE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN:

1. Identify and include in the Plan children in need, targets, and gender perspective.
2. Extend the Plan until 2030, in line with the European Council recommendation.
3. Clarify how the proposed measures are integrated into policies and ministries and shared responsibilities.
4. Tackle worker shortage in childcare following the recommendations provided by the related Taskforce.
5. In-depth analysis of the causes underlying the challenge of teachers shortage in the country, and tailored measures that respond to their needs more than increasing their salaries (i.e., permanent contracts, flexibility).
6. Include meaningful indicators and a sound system to monitor and evaluate the Plan.
7. Ensure that children and municipalities participate in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Action Plan.
8. Organise a follow-up consultation and a roadmap on the Child Guarantee.





# ROMANIA

Salvați Copiii (Save the Children Romania)

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

**1.508.000**

(EUROSTAT)

AROPE 2020	AROPE 2021
<b>40,7%</b>	<b>41,5%</b>

## KEY FACTS/FIGURES

- In 2021, more than 1,5 million children in Romania (41,5% of all children) were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion.
- The risk of poverty or social exclusion is much higher in rural areas than in cities. In 2021, the AROPE rate was 16,1% in cities, 30,7% in towns in suburbs, and 50,1% in rural areas.
- 1 in 10 families could not afford to keep their houses adequately warm in 2021 and almost 1 in 5 could not afford a nutritious meal<sup>226</sup>.

## THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The effects of the pandemics and the cost-of-living crisis have significantly impacted single parent families and large families: in 2019 9,6% of single parent families were at risk of poverty. That rate doubled to 18,2% in 2020 and further increased to 23% in 2021. Similarly, when referring to the inability to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day<sup>227</sup>, the rates in the general population increased from 14,2% in 2019, to 14,7% in 2020 and 19,2% in 2021, but the increase is more dramatic among families with three or more children, escalating from 17,5% in 2019 to 23,6% in 2021.

### CHILDREN AT RISK in Romania:

- Children with migrant background and children fleeing from Ukraine
- Children from single parent families
- Children from low-income families
- Children with disabilities
- Children from ethnic minorities, in particular Roma children
- Children living in specific areas within the country
- Children whose parents are working abroad
- Children with underage mothers

## THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

A 2022 survey<sup>228</sup> on the impact of the economic crisis on Romanian families revealed that 40% of households have seen their income decrease compared with 2021 and expenses have grown by 98%. Most households have been forced to spend more on utilities, food, healthcare and education (transportation to school, school supplies and books). Households believe that they need to make significant cutbacks. Half will save money from utilities and food, posing a risk to children's well-being.

In addition to food and energy price pressures, several analysts say that the financial support provided by the state to Ukrainian displaced persons, combined with the post-COVID return to face-to-face work and higher education, will generate a huge pressure on the renting market, especially in major cities. The Romanian government distributed electronic vouchers (funded under FEAD) to the most vulnerable persons and families for essential food items. It also put in place a complex scheme of compensations for the 2021/2022 winter season. However, the scheme did not favor vulnerable families as compensations were based consumption rather than income.

## THE CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS

Desertification, deforestation, lost biodiversity, air and water pollution, the depletion of gas and oil reserves and the energy crisis are already part of Romanian children's lives.

Save the Children Romania contributed to the consultation process launched by the Romanian government on climate change, in which 272 children and young people participated. 47% of the children mentioned that they receive information about climate change in schools in subjects such as biology, geography, and science but this information only duplicates/confirms

what they had already learnt at home or in social contexts. Children also expressed their concern related to their teacher's level of knowledge, skills, and willingness to teach in an interactive and interdisciplinary manner about climate change. They also underlined that the school infrastructure does not represent an example of environment-friendly settlement since green areas are missing, selective waste management is not in place and investment in sources of green energy for schools is absent.

At the beginning of 2022, the Romanian Presidency presented a draft national strategy for education about climate change and a public consultation process was initiated. Furthermore, a "Green week" – a week entirely dedicated to climate change – has been introduced in the school calendar.

## THE ROMANIAN CHILD GUARANTEE ACTION PLAN AND KEY SERVICE AREAS

In Romania, the draft National Plan closely reflects the objectives and priority actions in the National Strategy for the protection and promotion of the rights of the child. This strategy was developed in 2021 based on well-structured consultations with children and other relevant stakeholders, including civil society organisations. Given the differences between the National Strategy and the Action Plan (specific scope, period of implementation, target groups) a special round of consultation of relevant stakeholders was organised in December 2022<sup>229</sup>.

The draft Action Plan (as communicated on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023), will have seven general objectives: improving child participation; reducing poverty and social exclusion among children; improving the health status of children; increasing participation in quality and inclusive education; developing mechanisms of protection against violence; ensuring safe access to digital services; and strengthening the capacity of evidence-based policy development.

## THERE ARE 10 AMBITIOUS TARGETS IN THE ACTION PLAN

1. Decrease the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 500.000 compared to the 2021 reference value.
2. The impact of social welfare on reducing the poverty rate among children is 30% compared to 45% in 2020.
3. Vulnerable families with children to be re-prioritized for social housing and to be eligible for housing benefits, including support for renting when social housing is not available.
4. Children in poverty will benefit from a food aid programme that meets their nutritional needs.
5. 3 out of 4 children separated from their parents to be placed in family-type services.
6. The mortality rate for deaths due to avoidable causes to be reduced by 20% compared to the 2021 level, for children of all age groups.
7. Vaccine coverage for the vaccines included in the national scheme will reach the WHO-recommended targets.
8. The enrolment rate in early education reaches 22% for children under three years of age and 95% for children between four and six years of age.
9. The national policies and documents relevant to the rights of the child are available in child-friendly formats and designed with children and for children.
10. At least one national programme aiming at strengthening the capacity of the existing child participation mechanisms is implemented.



Photo: Diodo Media / Save the Children

## CHILD GUARANTEE SERVICE AREAS

The Romanian draft Action Plan includes specific objectives, activities, indicators, targets, and budgets for each of the seven general objectives and is based on a comprehensive identification of the categories of vulnerable children and the difficulties they are facing.

The main target groups for the Romanian draft Action Plan are children growing up in poverty or social exclusion, children in rural areas, children with disabilities, Roma children, children in migration (including children displaced from Ukraine), underage mothers and children in institutional care.

### ECEC

In the school year 2020/2021, the number of children under three enrolled in ECEC dropped by 5.100 (from 22506 to 17400) and 97,5% of them were from urban areas<sup>230</sup>. The enrolment rate in pre-school education decreased from 88,6% to 84,5%. These worrying downward trends started in 2016.

In response to the numerous shortcomings of the ECEC in Romania (low coverage and insufficient places for children under three, deep disparities between urban and rural areas, associated costs, dropping in participation rates for all age groups etc), the draft Action Plan envisages the creation of 181 new early education establishments (creches for children from 0-3) as well as a revision of the enrolling criteria prioritising children from vulnerable families (single parent households or socioeconomical vulnerable families).

### EDUCATION

**(including school-based activities and one healthy meal per school day)**

National tests organised in 2022 with the aim of detecting early problems in literacy show poor

educational outcomes in schools in Romania<sup>231</sup>. The results show that only 11% of students aged between 6 and 14 years are fluent readers while 42% of the students are marked as 'non-functional', which is close to illiteracy.

The discrepancies between students in rural and urban schools are also significant. Thus, when looking at the results of the National Evaluation exam (taken by pupils between lower and upper secondary), we notice that, although the gap between the urban and the rural schools is slightly smaller than in previous years, children studying in rural schools continue to score worse than their peers. More than one third scored under 5 in mathematics (36,16% vs 13,95% of the pupils in urban schools), close to one quarter scored under 5 in Romanian (23,89% vs. 7,9% of the pupils in urban schools), and close to 30% reached an average score under 5 (29,5% vs. 10,05% of the pupils in urban schools).

In this context, it is important to notice that the draft Action Plan includes several promising actions aimed at ensuring access and quality of free education for vulnerable children. These include revising the public funding mechanism and the cost per pupil standards, expanding the Education Early Warning Mechanism to 3000 public schools, increasing the number of relevant staff, especially in vulnerable schools (school counsellors, support teachers and school mediators), increasing the number of schools where the "Second Chance" programme is available.

With a very low coverage of school canteens, the nutritional support programmes failed to respond to the needs of the children living in poverty. Romania continues to implement the national programme under which fruit, vegetables, dairy and bakery products are being distributed in public schools, as well as a pilot programme (started in 2016 and now covering 450 schools) that provides a healthy meal every school day. The draft Action Plan envisages the expansion of the latter mentioned programme to 900 schools and 390.000 pupils by 2030, a teacher training programme on healthy nutrition and a National Strategy for Health and Nutrition Education.

## HEALTH

As a combined effect of multiple vulnerabilities related to access to health, education, social services and protection, Romania continues to face severe challenges related to early motherhood. Thousands of girls and teenagers give birth and are confronted with significant risks to their health, education, and livelihoods. In 2021, 745 births were registered from mothers under the age of 15 and 16.997 from teenagers between 15 and 19. Thus almost half (45%) of the EU mothers under 15 are from Romania. Save the Children Romania's assessment of the underage mother's situation<sup>232</sup> shows that 4 in 10 underage mothers and pregnant women have no access to specialised health, 8 in 10 had left education and 2 in 10 have more than one child. It is also important to mention that pregnant girls under the age of 16 need and don't always get parental consent for accessing health services, which leads to extra challenges for theirs and their children's health.

Finally, recent amendments to the law on the rights of the child further restricted the access of Romanian children to health education, pushing children to search for reproductive health information from uncertain sources and thus generating an unacceptable risk to their health.

Romania's draft National Plan acknowledges the shortcomings of the children's access to health, including the fact that 11-13% of the children under three have not been registered with family doctors, although this registration is compulsory and free of charge.

## NUTRITION

In Romania, the percentage of people who could not afford a meal that included meat, chicken, fish (or a vegetarian equivalent) every second day has increased from 14,2% in 2019 to 19,2% in 2021. For families with three or more children, this figure increased from 17,5% in 2019 to 23,6% in 2021<sup>233</sup> while, for single parent families the percentage skyrocketed from 18,9 in 2019 to 31,4 in 2021.

Given the raise in food prices, it is to be expected that vulnerable children and families will face an even worse situation. The results of the Save the Children Romania survey<sup>234</sup> on the impact of the economic crisis show that in the autumn of 2022, almost half (44%) of the vulnerable families with children were unable to meet the expenses for food.

Food aid is included in the draft Action Plan with a target of 1.350.000 children from deprived families who will benefit from food parcels or vouchers by 2030.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### SAVE THE CHILDREN ROMANIA CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

1. Prioritise children and vulnerable families in policy development and budgeting processes and support the local authorities in tackling child poverty, in particular by enhancing child rights budgeting at the local level.
2. Approve, implement, and monitor a coherent national strategic plan aimed at ensuring the equity in education of children in vulnerable situations.
3. Strengthening the welfare system to support children and families at risk of poverty.
4. Target compensation/support interventions towards the most vulnerable children and families rather than opting for blanket measures.





# SPAIN

Save the Children España (Save the Children Spain)

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

**2.750.000**

(EUROSTAT)

AROE 2020	AROE 2021
<b>31,8%</b>	<b>33,4%</b>

peak of consumer price increases in June 2022, a one-off payment of 200 Euro was granted to every working adult under a 14k Euro/year income threshold. The benefit was limited to legal residents and excluded recipients of the Minimum Income Scheme. In December 2022, a second lump-sum payment of 200 Euro was introduced for working adults under 27k Euro/year. Finally, the VAT for basic food products was reduced.

MIS benefits were increased by 15% to protect the purchasing power of those in most vulnerable situations. The same rise was granted to minimum pensions, which are an important source of income among extended families in vulnerable situations.

## CHILD GUARANTEE SERVICE AREAS

### EDUCATION

(including school-based activities and one healthy meal per school day)

The Spanish Action Plan does not consider the provision of free school meals for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion as an objective. School meals are only addressed in the context of their role in promoting healthy nutrition and lifestyles.

### HEALTH

The focus of the Spanish Action Plan lies on mental, visual, and dental health. The Plan includes a commitment to gradually eliminate monetary barriers to medicine access among children in vulnerable situations.

### NUTRITION

Nutrition has been integrated under the health objectives of the Action Plan. However, the objectives in this area lack concreteness. There is an absence of measures linked to health and education spaces, which are key to bringing the objectives of healthy nutrition to life.

### HOUSING

The Spanish Action Plan runs in parallel with the ongoing legislation on the housing market which is a key reform in the RRP and is expected to be a space to address the root causes of housing exclusion. It includes provisions to guarantee access to adequate housing for children in vulnerable situations, including an increase of the public housing stock and increased cash transfers to support housing expenses. Importantly, the Action Plan includes a ban on evictions of families with children in vulnerable situations without a housing alternative. The Plan has also integrated the objective of fighting

## CHILDREN AT RISK in Spain:

- Children at risk in Spain:
- Children with migrant background
- Children from single parent families
- Children from large disadvantaged families
- Unaccompanied migrant children

## THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The pandemic and its consequences put an increased number of children and their families at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The impact on mental health was particularly strong.

A new national Strategy on Mental Health 2022-2026 was launched with a dedicated budget of €100 million. The Strategy includes mental health and suicide prevention in children. Importantly, the medical specialisation in child psychiatry as a formal qualification has been recognised during 2021-2022.<sup>235</sup>

## THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

Even before the onset of the crisis, 17% of Spanish children lived in families that could not afford to pay their utility bills, mortgage, or rent on time<sup>236</sup>. The price evolution of goods and services needed for parenting has been higher than the general increase in prices (14,5% vs 11,3% between July 2018 and March 2022). Consequently, today 900.000 families do not earn enough to cover the cost of parenting (estimated at €672 per month per child) and energy poverty has become more critical. To cope with the crisis, the government increased discounts on energy bills and introduced substantial discounts on public transport (covering up to 50% of the costs). Also, at the

## CLIMATE CHANGE

More than two million children face both the risk of poverty and the effects of the climate crisis. Spanish children are expected to suffer seven times more heatwaves during their lifetime and at least two times more droughts, as compared to adults born in 1960<sup>237</sup>. Moreover, a significant number of children have difficulties attending school due to high temperatures.

## THE SPANISH CHILD GUARANTEE ACTION PLAN AND KEY SERVICE AREAS

The Spanish National Action Plan<sup>238</sup> was launched on 6 July 2022 and contains a holistic and solid approach to different dimensions of child poverty, including – but not limited to – those contained in the Recommendation. The Plan benefitted from the consultation with Save the Children Spain and other stakeholders, while children participated through the National Council of Children Participation. The document includes 12 target groups beyond the transversal category of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Regions and autonomous cities are expected to draft Action Plans as well.

## KEY FACTS/FIGURES

- In 2021, 2.750.000 children in Spain (33,4% of all children) were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Amongst migrant children the rate was 64,7%
- Nowadays, almost 900.000 families would have to devote more than their total earnings to afford the cost of parenting.
- 14,8% of Spanish children live in severely deprived homes.
- Housing overburden affects 39,5% of families with children at risk of poverty.

energy poverty, focused on improved access to utilities and minimise cuts in supply. The effective implementation of most initiatives will depend on the approval of the mentioned new Housing Act, which has been in a standstill for several months.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### SAVE THE CHILDREN SPAIN CALLS THE GOVERNMENT TO:

- 1.** Focus on prevention and implement a universal benefit of at least 100 Euro per month for children between the age of 0 and 17. This benefit should be articulated through reimbursable tax credits that reach all children in the form of a direct benefit or a deduction in the declaration, irrespective of the income level of parents and their obligation to pay taxes.
- 2.** Guarantee the purchasing power of Minimum Income Scheme benefits and child benefits for low-income families by pegging benefits to price increases.
- 3.** Develop a more comprehensive approach to promote health and well-being among children (i.e., establish synergies with nutrition, extracurricular activities, and healthy lifestyles).
- 4.** Involve GPs, schools, and education services in the promotion/prevention of mental health and nutrition. For that, specialised training should be provided, and the provision of protocols encouraged at different levels (as enshrined in the 2021 Law for the Prevention of Violence against Children).
- 5.** Guarantee free access to medicines as a core element of healthcare.
- 6.** Reduce pressure on specialised psychiatric and psychological services.
- 7.** Extend the 'Children's Dental Care Programme' across all regions, including coverage of children under six years of age.
- 8.** Include free screening for children as part of the future National Plan for Visual Health and

Prevention of Blindness (still under discussion).

- 9.** Regulate cash transfers aimed at (i) financing the cost of glasses and contact lenses for children in poverty, and (ii) purchasing healthy food among vulnerable families.
  - 10.** Guarantee that all children below the poverty threshold are entitled to full coverage of school meals.
  - 11.** Regulate the sale of non-healthy beverages and snacks within school premises, revise school menus and increase coordination between school and health authorities.
  - 12.** Include fiscal measures aimed at increased indirect taxing of unhealthy products.
  - 13.** Reduce administrative burden to facilitate the access of vulnerable families to the proposed measures.
  - 14.** Increase the coordination efforts with social services and key actors that are closer to families with children in vulnerable situations.
  - 15.** Integrate housing benefits with income support measures for families with children in vulnerable situations, linking both types of benefits when necessary.
  - 16.** Ensure that support measures reach people in vulnerable situations (i.e., extend tax deductions on the rent for young people and guarantee access to housing to teenagers under the protection system).
  - 17.** Reform of the system of subsidies to utility bills, extending access to all families under the poverty threshold.
- ### REGARDING THE SPANISH CHILD GUARANTEE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN:
- 1.** Include children suffering any form of violence among the target groups.
  - 2.** Clarify the goals of the Action Plan in the different key areas (especially in the nutrition area).





# SWEDEN

Rädda Barnen (Save the Children Sweden)



CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

**437.000**

(EUROSTAT)

AROPE 2020	AROPE 2021
20,2%	19,7%

## CHILDREN AT RISK in Sweden:

- Children with migrant background
- Children from single parent families
- Children from low-income families
- Children from large disadvantaged families
- Children living in specific areas within the country

## KEY FACTS/FIGURES

- In 2021, 437 000 children in Sweden (19,7% of all children) were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion<sup>239</sup>. Furthermore 7,3% of the children grew up in material deprivation<sup>240</sup>.
- About a quarter of the students who leave primary school do not achieve adequate knowledge requirements and receive incomplete final grades.
- 18.000 young people neither work nor study.

## THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The pandemic had detrimental effects on Swedish children's wellbeing that can still be felt today.

Mental illness in children increased in the country not only due to the anxiety generated by the virus symptomatology but also to the financial insecurity and challenging learning conditions faced, above all, by vulnerable families. Moreover, children's exposure to domestic violence also increased during the pandemic due to parents' unemployment, economic vulnerability, stress, and anxiety. Swedish authorities enhanced the communication addressed to children and young people, engaging them in participatory processes leading to government decisions that took their needs into account.

## THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

Food prices have substantially increased. Many non-profit organisations reported an increment in the number of families seeking food assistance, especially families on social support and families who recently migrated to Sweden. Energy prices have also increased as a consequence of the inflation trend, causing

housing expenses to rise. To mitigate the effects of the cost-of-living crisis the government has introduced temporary support measures to complement housing benefits and to protect households from the high increase in electricity prices.

## CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS

Save the Children Sweden's survey "Young voices" revealed that more than half of the children (54%) are very or quite worried about the environment and climate change, but few (12%) believe that politicians/decision-makers in Sweden are doing enough for the environment<sup>241</sup>.

## THE SWEDISH CHILD GUARANTEE ACTION PLAN AND KEY SERVICE AREAS

The Swedish legislation provides the basis for children to have effective access to the key social services referred to in the European Child Guarantee. Many of them are free of charge. However, there are groups of children with limited access to these services. Although the National Action Plan identifies five groups of children in need, some (e.g., migrant children) are given little attention. Sweden's primary national target is to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 15,000 by 2030. Out of these, at least 5,000 should be children. This ambition is far too low and insufficient for fulfilling the goals of the national public health policy for good and equal health. Stakeholders were involved to a limited extent in the development of the Action Plan. Children were not directly involved, but the government has announced that it is reviewing in what way children's involvement will take place.

## CHILD GUARANTEE SERVICE AREAS



The Government has adopted the programme "Förskola för fler barn" (Preschool for more children) with the aim to increase the proportion of children in early childhood education and prioritize access to children in need.



(including school-based activities and one healthy meal per school day)

The Swedish Action Plan includes measures to increase: (i) the proportion of children in socio-economically vulnerable families who take part in sports and cultural activities; (ii) the support received by children with disabilities; and (iii) the participation in leisure centres. However, the Action Plan does not touch upon several key issues like (i) how to increase the proportion of children who graduate from high school with full grades; (ii) access to education for children who are not subject to the obligation to attend compulsory school, but are entitled to education (e.g., asylum seekers and undocumented children); (iii) initiatives that ensure that all children have meaningful leisure activities after school.



The Action Plan highlights many of the most important problems of the Swedish health system such as the health inequalities between different groups of children, the low access to child psychiatric services and the need for a significant reform and further resources.



## HOUSING

The housing situation is on the political agenda and some initiatives will be taken to make housing more accessible for families with children. A national homelessness strategy for the period 2022–2026 is foreseen and welcome. The strategy will include preventive work,

measures against emergency homelessness and the path to own housing to counteract social and structural homelessness. However, the Swedish Action Plan does not contain any quantitative goal to decrease homelessness among families with children; the only goals under this thematic area remain the ones included in the homelessness strategy.



Photo: Pablo Blázquez / Save the Children

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### SAVE THE CHILDREN SWEDEN CALLS ON THE SWEDISH GOVERNMENT TO:

1. Focus on how children in vulnerable situations have been affected by the pandemic when deciding the compensatory measures to be implemented. Analyse child rights and perform related impact assessments, based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in all measures related to COVID-19.
2. Ensure that all children with mental illness receive the right support and care (continue with the support, assessment and rehabilitation initiative at regional/local level started before the pandemic).
3. Increase the income support to meet the rising costs of living for people in need of social aid. Likewise, increase the daily allowance for asylum seekers and persons covered by TPD at the same level as the national standard.
4. Ensure that the economic family policy lives up more efficiently to its overall goals of poverty reduction and reduce differences between households.
5. Prioritise vulnerable people and families in the high-cost protection for increased electricity consumption.
6. Take concrete actions to ensure access to adequate and affordable housing for all families with children. Map children in homelessness situations and identify what needs to be done. The goal should be to ensure that no child in Sweden is homeless.

### THE SWEDISH CHILD GUARANTEE ACTION PLAN SHOULD:

1. Prioritize measures for increased equality between the schools and ensure the school's compensatory mission.
2. Strengthen equal access to quality preschool and ensure competence among staff.
3. Facilitate access to special education, psychologists, and adaptations for children with special needs.
4. Analyse the situation of children with disabilities within the preschool.
5. Legislate one healthy free meal per school day in secondary education.
6. Facilitate access to healthcare services (i.e., avoiding the need for a personal identification number, making available an interpreter when calling the healthcare centre).
7. Analyse the reasons underlying the long waiting times for child psychiatry.
8. Ensure that municipalities' work lives up to a children's rights perspective.
9. Include individual assessment of the child's best interests before any decision about relocations or extensive housing developments.
10. Involve municipal boards, social services, public utility companies and other players in the housing market.
11. Consider the experiences and opinions of homeless families with children in the development of new support measures.
12. Have a stronger focus on children in migration as a group of children in need. They are mentioned very shortly as a vulnerable group of children but barely mentioned in the rest of the plan.



# ALBANIA

Save the Children in Albania



## CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION (INSTAT)

2020	2021
21,8%	22.0%

## KEY FACTS/FIGURES

- In December 2022, INSTAT Albania publishes for the first time the results of the Income and Living Conditions Survey (EUSILC) 2021, estimating that 22% of children are at risk of poverty and social inclusion.

## THE COVID-19 CRISIS

COVID-19 had negative effects on the Albanian economy, healthcare, and education systems. In response to the crisis, the government implemented several economic and health measures. Although the post-pandemic recovery has been notable, the conflict in Ukraine and the cost-of-living crisis raised new challenges that threaten economic and poverty prospects in 2023.

## THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

The prolonged conflict in Ukraine is triggering further and deeper disruptions to global trade, energy, and food prices, making the situation even worse, especially for low-income households in Albania. The increase in prices is

## CHILDREN AT RISK in Albania:

- Children from single parent families
- Children from low-income families
- Children with disabilities
- Children from large disadvantaged families

overwhelming, leading to a spiral of discontent and deprivation. The government presented the “Social Resilience Package” in March 2022, which contains several measures such as the increase of the minimum wage, the indexation of pensions, tax-free fuel for farmers, etc. The Albanian Government introduced two rounds of financial support during 2022; one in the months between April and (9.000 ALL) to mitigate the effects created by the conflict in Ukraine and the second at the end of the year to reduce the impact of inflation (8.000 ALL), which supported 64.000 households and 71.000 individuals with disabilities. Additional support was provided to single mothers and children with disabilities (20.000 ALL).

## CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS

Albania is very vulnerable to climate change<sup>242</sup>. Changes to Albania’s climate, specifically the frequency of extreme weather events and temperature variations, are expected to impact the country’s key sectors, economy, and population. The country is also prone to numerous natural hazards, including hydro-meteorological hazards (floods, droughts, forest fires, and landslides) and geophysical hazards (earthquakes). Natural hazards may also adversely impact crop and livestock production and cause significant damage to critical infrastructure.

The Albanian legal framework for the protection of the environment is based on the law ‘For Environment Protection<sup>243</sup>, which includes the law on integrated waste management<sup>244</sup> and a national plan. As a signatory country of the Paris Convention (2021), the country aims to reduce emissions with the implementation of mitigation actions in the main emitting sectors of the economy: energy<sup>245</sup>, agriculture, waste and land-use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF)<sup>246</sup>.

## NATIONAL POLICIES TO TACKLE CHILD POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The two Social Resilience Packages introduced by the Albanian government doubled the

budget to support families with three or more children (about 15.000 families), doubled the funding to support single mothers with up to two children (5.700 women) and tripled payments for 1,200 victims of domestic violence and orphans. A monthly economic bonus was foreseen for 35.000 children who benefitted from financial aid and attended schools. The Baby Bonus, introduced in 2019 for every newborn, supported more than 100.000 families. An additional monetary bonus concerns the universal payment for every Albanian family and includes several important measures, such as increasing the minimum wage and indexing pensions.



ECEC is optional and offered through kindergartens and preparatory classes for children aged 3–6 years old. Vulnerable children, children with disabilities and those living in rural areas have low access. ECEC for children 0-3 years old is very limited and in rural/remote areas is inexistent. There are limited mechanisms in place to align multi-sector policymaking and implementation to promote the holistic development of children younger than 6 years old. Programmes that target parents and caregivers are sporadic and mostly implemented by NGOs. ECEC staff is not qualified, the child-teacher ratio in cities is very high (up to 1:20) and the infrastructure and learning environment is poor and outdated. There are no subsidised-fee schemes available for children in vulnerable situations or adjusted by family income.

## EDUCATION

(including school-based activities and one healthy meal per school day)

Albania's education system is characterised by poor infrastructure, lack of space in classrooms, lack of educational material, furniture and playgrounds which create a non-inviting and non-stimulating environment for children. In fact, PISA results from 2018 revealed that around 60% of Albanian students were functionally illiterate<sup>247</sup>. Drop-out is still present and there is a significant number of out-of-school children from families engaged in seasonal migration, returnees, young carers, children contributing to the family income, early married girls, and children with disabilities.<sup>248</sup> The government expenditure on education in 2020 was 3,1% of GDP. Inclusive education for children with disabilities continues to suffer from a lack of institutional resources, skills, coordination, and response mechanisms. Equity of access remains a key challenge, particularly because of gender, ethnic group, and geographical distribution. There is also a lack of clarity about roles, responsibilities, authority and competencies between local and central government, insufficient funds assigned, and weak financial management capacity. The Stabilization-Association Agreement signed in 2009 ensures cooperation between the Republic of Albania and EU member countries to improve the quality of education and training. Albania has made improvements in access to education and in raising learning outcomes through the implementation of several reforms that include the development of a competency-based curriculum framework, teacher standards and a school evaluation indicator framework. Most recently, Albania has restructured key agencies responsible for school support and external evaluation. There are free meals at school. The draft national strategy on education, 2021-

2026 has introduced measures to provide free school transport (including for preschool) more than two kilometres from home, for free school meals and textbooks for poorer children but no budget has been allocated yet. Save the Children is about to start an analysis in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection to check the feasibility of introducing free meals in schools.

## HEALTH

The main health indicators revealed improvements in health for Albanian children. For example, infant mortality and under-5 mortality have significantly decreased. The new Plan of Action on Health Promotion 2022-2030 aims to renew health promotion through social, political, and technical actions, addressing the health challenges, to improve health and reduce health inequities of the Albanian population.

## NUTRITION

Nutritional indicators have improved among Albanian children, as evidenced by a significant decrease in the prevalence of wasting and stunting. Furthermore, a national monitoring system for child nutrition and growth has been successfully established which allows the assessment of the current nutritional status and therefore the design of effective and timely interventions. However, the prevalence of overweight and obesity remains a challenge. Progresses in this area include the new national health strategy, Albania 2021-2030; the development (for the first time) of a national action plan on health promotion (2022-2030) and a new action plan on the control and prevention of NCDs (2021-2030). Despite these policy advancements, the country lacks a robust and scientific evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the interventions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

SAVE THE CHILDREN ALBANIA CALLS ON THE ALBANIAN GOVERNMENT TO:

1. Prioritise the basic needs of households with children to address income losses after the COVID-19 pandemic, through the delivery of social protection schemes, such as emergency income support schemes.
2. Prioritise basic healthcare needs of the most deprived and marginalised children, through child grants, mobile healthcare, and home healthcare provision.
3. Provide opportunities for children to continue their education through online platforms wherever possible, including specific additional support to the poorest households and to young girls.
4. Ensure alternative communication means for children without internet access.
5. Ensure the development of a mental health support strategy to be rolled out in schools for crises such as earthquakes and pandemics.
6. Transform climate change into a societal issue involving schools, the community, the private sector, and the media.
7. Consider longer-term effects of climate change linked with economic and social inequalities, especially for the most excluded groups (i.e., risk of school drop-out, gender-based violence).
8. Ensure the involvement of young people in the process of decision-making and engage them as stakeholders during the drafting processes of different laws and politics.
9. Educate all stakeholders on the links between climate change and children and young people's health and wellbeing, including future health professionals, and advocate for it to be incorporated into their training curricula.
10. Strengthen the capacities of municipalities to plan, deliver and monitor services for children.
11. Focus policy, plans, and budget to recover learning losses.
12. Promote evidence-based models that enable attitudinal, environmental, communication/information and institutional education.
13. Consider children, teachers, and the community as designers of their own future.
14. Build stronger and more resilient education systems.
15. Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the national action plan on health promotion (2022-2030) with an effective and timely system.



# BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA (BIH)

Save the Children in North West Balkans



## CHILDREN AT RISK in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH):

- Children at risk in Bosnia and Herzegovina:
- Children with disabilities
- Children from ethnic minorities (in particular Roma children)
- Children living in poverty
- Children living in remote areas
- Children with a migration background

## KEY FACTS/FIGURES

- The largest share of people experiencing poverty in BiH (65%) is in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) entity. The poorest are children aged 0-14, of whom 34% or every third child is poor. Absolute poverty of children aged 0-5 increased from 32% to 38% compared to 2013. The absolute poverty rate of households with two children increased from 25% to 35%.<sup>249</sup>
- As part of the social protection reform, the authorities in FBiH made a significant step forward in improving the position of families with children in a state of social need by passing a new Law on material support to families with children.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina faces the problem of underage marriages, which are often linked to human trafficking. Almost 90% of the total number of victims of human trafficking are children.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina remains the country with the lowest percentage of coverage with early childhood care and education programs (about 17%).
- There is limited availability and poor use of data on children.

## NATIONAL POLICIES TO TACKLE CHILD POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Although Bosnia and Herzegovina made some progress in the field of children's rights with the adoption of new laws and promulgation of amendments to existing ones, the protection of children's rights remain inadequate.

The country has not established a mechanism for analysing the allocation of funds for children. Moreover, there is limited availability and poor use of data on children. Inadequate capacities of centres for social work to identify, report and solve cases of violence against children were also noted as obstacles, as well as limited availability and access to specialised support for children's victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, such as psychosocial support and rehabilitation, inadequate information among children and guardians about where and how to seek support in child protection and limited understanding of positive parenting among parents.

## THE COVID-19 AND THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISES

The social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are still evident and enhanced by the recent rise in food and energy prices in Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>250</sup>. These combined and cumulative effects are causing increased poverty and food deprivation and worsening inequalities.

Access to education was difficult during the pandemic, especially for the most vulnerable

children. Reasons which made the transition to online classes challenging mainly lie in problems related to organizing this type of teaching (39,5%) and weaker interaction between teachers and students in the online environment (27,8%). The absence of technological devices or their use by multiple household members for remote work, following lessons and doing homework proved particularly stressful.

The drastic impact of the current post-pandemic crisis is greater on those already disadvantaged or more vulnerable. This includes people living below the poverty line, families with children, single parents, Roma, people with disabilities, internally displaced people, minority returnees and the LGBTIQ+ community. The pressure on household incomes, in the context of a fragmented and inefficient social protection system, has worsened and the most tangible effects are on low-income families, causing debt and reduction of food. Of particular concern are the effects of the crisis on basic social services such as health – including mental health – and access to quality education. Together, reduced income and limited basic services lead to an increase in multidimensional poverty and inequality<sup>251</sup>. In this context, underage forced marriage is still an alternative for some families to get an economic income. According to official data, almost 90% of the total number of identified potential victims of human trafficking in the country from January 2021 to June 2022 were children.

As part of the social protection reform, the authorities in the Federation of Bosnia Herzegovina entity adopted a new Act on material support for families with children at the beginning of 2022. For the first time, the federal government takes over the financing of the child allowance (€103.7) which will be equal for all the cantons in the FBiH entity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS



### SAVE THE CHILDREN COUNTRY OFFICE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

- 1.** Adopt, budget for, and implement national strategies for poverty reduction, based on needs assessment and focusing on particularly vulnerable children and families. A monitoring system for tracking progress needs to be established.
- 2.** Invest more efforts and continue to reform the social and child protection systems by focusing on the transformation of institutional care and the development of family-based forms of care.
- 3.** Provide available channels for reporting, monitoring, and solving inappropriate treatment of children, including trafficking for economic exploitation and child marriage.
- 4.** Adopt a legal ban on physical and humiliating punishment and home and introduce related parent education programs and awareness raising.
- 5.** Greater investments in the early detection of developmental issues and early childhood development and learning programs are needed, particularly as BiH remains the country with the lowest coverage of children with preschool programs in Europe (about 17%).
- 6.** A support network is needed at the community level for inclusive education to function properly (capacity building of teachers and teaching assistants, removal of physical barriers, and community-based services for children).
- 7.** Obsolete education systems based on the basic reproduction of knowledge require comprehensive reform based on student learning outcomes and contemporary teaching methodologies to better prepare children for the market economies of the future.
- 8.** Full digitisation of schools and access to online learning platforms for all children have also presented themselves as immediate priorities in the context of the pandemic.
- 9.** Cyberbullying and cyber abuse topics need to be formally addressed and included in education.





# KOSOVO

Save the Children in Kosovo



CHILDREN  
EXPERIENCING  
POVERTY 2021  
**23,0%**

## CHILDREN AT RISK in Kosovo:

- Children from low-income families
- Children with disabilities
- Children from ethnic minorities
- Children from large disadvantaged families

## KEY FACTS/FIGURES

- In 2020, 23% of children in Kosovo were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion<sup>252</sup>.
- Children of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, children with disabilities, and young girls are extensively seriously deprived and live under dramatically poor and difficult conditions.
- Around 9% of children in Kosovo are involved in child labour and 5,6% work under hazardous conditions.

## THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Kosovo is the poorest country in the Western Balkans, struggling with high levels of poverty and massive unemployment. The situation is further aggravated since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has negatively affected the health and economic outcomes for those most impacted by inequality and discrimination. Children’s learning is suffering and the learning gap for children belonging to Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian (RAE) communities has further widened.

## THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

The conflict in Ukraine has led to an increase in inflation in Kosovo. The average inflation rate in 2022, reached 11,0% but it is expected to decline by 6,2% in 2023. Simulations on price increase projections carried out in Kosovo reveal that under a “moderate” scenario, in 2023 the price of bread would be 9,3 percentage points higher compared to the base scenario in 2022, the price of edible oil 58,2 percentage points higher, and that of oil derivatives, 23,2 percentage points higher<sup>253</sup>.

## CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS

Children in Kosovo grow up in an environment characterised by extremely high air pollution, polluted rivers, unsustainable land use, and unstable and unpredictable weather patterns. These factors represent long-term health implications, specifically for those already living in hazardous exposure to polluted air and lead poisoning. These risks also impact access to clean water, safe land, and outdoor activities, directly linking to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) on Climate Action (SDG13) and Good Health and well-being (SDG 3) for children.

that is aligned with international human rights standards. The Government of Kosovo approved a National Strategy on the Rights of the Child for 2019 – 2023, which seeks to coordinate government and civil society interventions to improve children’s welfare and development. However, there is a lack of inter-sectoral coordination of financial and human resources, successful evidence-based practices, and monitoring and evaluation. As a result, Kosovo’s children, particularly those living in vulnerable situations and remote areas, face huge inequalities in their rights to health, education, and protection.

## HEALTH

The Social Assistance Scheme is the only social assistance program in Kosovo that aims to reduce poverty<sup>254</sup>. The state does not specify a budget for services dedicated to children. This limits the effective integration of services addressed to the needs of children with disabilities and other children in vulnerable situations.

## NATIONAL POLICIES TO TACKLE CHILD POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Kosovo’s institutions uphold a robust legal, institutional, and strategic framework on the rights and protection of minority communities



Photo: Lolo Vasco / Save the Children

## RECOMMENDATIONS



### SAVE THE CHILDREN COUNTRY OFFICE IN KOSOVO CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

- 1.** Plan and allocate adequate resources across sectors to improve the availability of inclusive services for children with disabilities.
- 2.** Strengthen the institutional commitments for increased ECEC and inclusive education services.
- 3.** Develop or further expand public, free-of-charge preschool settings – especially for children aged 0-5 years in rural areas and children from Roma communities.
- 4.** Inform and educate parents and caregivers about the value of ECEC for child development.
- 5.** Make sure education is made accessible online in a quick and efficient manner for those unable to attend school.
- 6.** Develop mechanisms and awareness-raising campaigns to support girls' equal access to education (especially to secondary education).
- 7.** Develop the infrastructure and/or strengthen the accessibility of children with disabilities to education.
- 8.** Support the provision of healthy meal planning in schools and provide free school meals, especially for children in need.
- 9.** Provide children and their caregivers with resources, mental health and psychosocial counselling and social/economic support they

need after COVID-19 to protect them and mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

- 10.** Implement awareness-raising campaigns and the needed structures to increase immunisation coverage – especially among the most vulnerable communities and public servants delivering services to children.
- 11.** Strengthen the healthcare provision for mothers and infants, especially in rural areas and among the most disadvantaged communities and the training of healthcare professionals to respond to the needs of people living in rural areas and vulnerable communities.
- 12.** Develop a nationwide campaign about the effects of malnutrition on children and the positive outcomes of healthy eating.
- 13.** Expand access to unemployment or child benefits to parents and caregivers from poor and disadvantaged communities.
- 14.** Evaluate the introduction of a “Child Tax Credit” for poor families and working families struggling to provide adequate nutrition, housing, and care for their children.
- 15.** Establish an integrated data collection mechanism for children (across health, education, and social sectors), since the absence of data currently impedes any efforts in improving the implementation of policies that guarantee welfare for all children.
- 16.** Develop and strengthen the accountability systems between central and local governments, and implement public consultation practices, including the participation of children in decision-making.





# ICELAND

Barnaheill (Save the Children Iceland)

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION (2021)

10.000

2020	2021
12,7%	13,1%

## KEY FACTS/FIGURES

- In 2021, more than 10.000 children in Iceland (13,1% of all children) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.
- In 2021, 24,1% of Icelandic households had difficulties covering their daily expenses.
- In 2022, 1072 children asked for asylum or international protection in Iceland. 50% of them came from Ukraine. 80 children were unaccompanied.
- 20,5% of children living in rented accommodations are at risk of poverty, and 8,2% suffer material deprivation.

## THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The COVID-19 restrictions restricted social opportunities for children and adolescents, causing widespread disruption, and an increase in depression symptoms, especially for adolescent girls. Measures to maintain school activities during the peaks of the pandemic were taken, so primary schools and kindergartens never closed completely. However, for secondary school, remote learning was often deployed. The pandemic also increased violence among children and teenagers, including neglect.

## CHILDREN AT RISK in Iceland:

- Children from single parent families
- Children from low-income families
- Children from large disadvantaged families
- Children living in rented accommodation
- Children with parents with disabilities

## THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

In Iceland, inflation has more than doubled going from 4,3% to 9,9%. Inflation has increased loans and interest rates have increased on mortgages. The rental market is insecure, so most people want to own their own homes. Yet, due to the high costs and the national rules for payment assessments, this is not a possibility for numerous households. Rent has increased.

Some people have little money after they pay the rent. In 2021, 24,1% of Icelandic households had difficulty making ends meet. 51% of those were single parent households and 16,1% were households of two or more adults with children.

## THE CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS

The melting of permafrost, coupled with intense floods and heavier rains, has wreaked havoc on public infrastructure and homes in Iceland, leaving vulnerable families struggling to repair the damage without insurance or adequate funds. In response, the country has taken decisive action to address the impacts of climate change. In 2021, Iceland released a white paper and draft policy on climate change adaptation, which focuses on reducing the use of fossil fuels in transportation and promoting sustainable practices such as ecological packaging, waste sorting, and sustainability education in schools. With houses heated by geothermal water and electricity generated by hydropower stations, Iceland is well-positioned to weather the rising costs of oil and ensure that housing costs remain stable.

## NATIONAL POLICIES TO TACKLE CHILD POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

In Iceland there is no public policy to eradicate child poverty (or poverty in general). Nevertheless, in 2021 a new law on child welfare was adopted to guarantee that children and parents in need have access to appropriate integrated services.



Most children from the age of two participate in ECEC. Low salaries and lack of educated ECEC staff are needs pending to be addressed.

## EDUCATION

(including school-based activities and one healthy meal per school day)

A high percentage of children participate in leisure and sports activities. However, the barriers to participating make access difficult especially for children from low-income families and children with disabilities. In most kindergartens and compulsory schools the meals are not free but offered for a modest price. Children from first and fourth grade can attend paying after-school activities.

## HEALTH

Health care is free of charge. Antenatal and newborn care is well developed and since 2017 dental care is free for children. However, when it comes to mental health, there is a lack of support and long waiting lists. Mental health care is not free except in limited cases.

## NUTRITION

The high price of healthy food, especially fish, vegetable, and fruits limit its consumption by low-income families. Obesity is increasing among children due to the consumption of cheaper but unhealthy food.

## HOUSING

Public support for housing is scarce. Only those with very little financial resources or housing problems can apply for social housing or financial assistance to pay the rent at their local municipal. A housing system for low-income families was run from 1931 until 2002 when it was closed and privatised. It has not been replaced.



## RECOMMENDATIONS



### SAVE THE CHILDREN ICELAND CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO:

1. Make a national policy and action plan to eradicate poverty in Iceland<sup>255</sup>.
2. Design dedicated plans to prevent pandemics and other potential crises that can affect Iceland's society in the future, and in particular children at risk of poverty.
3. Research on the impact of child poverty and how the current crisis (such as COVID-19) impacts child poverty.
4. Extend to all ages education on how to help prevent climate change.

### REGARDING ICELAND'S NATIONAL POLICIES TO TACKLE CHILD POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND RELATED SERVICES:

1. Focus the social transfers more on families with children than on adults.
2. Base the provision of child benefits on subsistence standards.

3. Promote students' mental health. Ensure free mental health care for children and eliminate waiting lists for service.
4. Provide free education until 18 years of age.
5. Implement dedicated measures to tackle the high drop-out rates of secondary schools.
6. Make the ECEC institutions more attractive for professionals.
7. Reduce the cost of participating in sports and leisure activities (i.e., travel and equipment). Integrate sports and leisure for children from 5-9 years old, to decrease the chance of dropout.
8. Reduce price and implement quality and control criteria in the meals offered in secondary school.
9. Provide free meals in kindergarten and compulsory school.
10. Lower taxes to promote healthy food eating.
11. Reduce waiting lists in the healthcare provision of children.
12. Reintroduce the system of social housing for low-income families to guarantee that families with children have access to a secure and healthy home.



# CHILD POVERTY MATRIX

The matrix presents relevant data collected by Save the Children while working on this report. This information should feed into the national monitoring and evaluation systems of the Child Guarantee National Action Plans and child poverty reduction policies.

For more detailed information, please contact [Save the Children](#).

## CHILD POVERTY

### EU INDICATORS

	Eurostat: Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion			Eurostat: Material Deprivation Rate			National targets
	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021	
DK	13,8%	13,4%	14,0%	8,5%	6,7%	7,5%	Lift 30.000 persons out of poverty by 2030
FI	13,8%	14,5%	13,2%	8,8%	7,1%	8,2%	Lift 30 000 children out of poverty by 2030
DE	15,4%	22,3%	23,5%	8%	6,2%	15,2%	Lift 1,2 million persons out of poverty by 2030
IT	27,1%	28,9%	29,7%	16,3%	13,8%	13,0%	Lift 3,2 million persons out of poverty by 2030
LT	25,8%	23,1%	21,6%	21,2%	16,8%	17,8%	Lift 223.000 persons out of poverty by 2030
NL	15,4%	15,8%	14,9%	5,8%	5,8%	6,0%	Single broad target of child poverty reduction by 50% by 2030
PL	16,2%	16,1%	16,5%	9%	8,1%	6,2%	Lift 1,5 million persons out of poverty by 2030
RO	39,1%	40,7%	41,5%	35,2%	29,8%	36,1%	Lift 2,5 million persons out of poverty by 2030
ES	31,0%	31,8%	33,4%	15,4%	15,1%	18,6%	Reduce Child AROPE 2019 rates by 30,3% or 8.6 percentage points by 2030
SE	23,0%	20,2%	19,7%	6,8%	7,7%	7,1%	Reduce Child AROPE by 2030 by 5,000.

### RELEVANT INDICATORS USED AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

	Indicator	2019	2020	2021	2022
AL	Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (INSTAT - national child poverty index)	23,0%	21,8%	22,0%	
DK	Children under the age of 18 years living in poverty		4,9%		
	Children at risk of poverty and social exclusion		13,5%		
FI	Children living in low-income households (less than 60% of median income)	12,4%	11,1%	11,9%	
	Single parent families in low-income households	26,7%	23,7%	25,9%	
DE	Families with children receiving social assistance (the basic minimum allowance for living costs)	10,5%	10,5%	9,4%	
	Children living at risk of poverty (less than 60% of median income)	20,5%	20,4%	20,8%	
IS	Children in Social Code book II - basic social service for unemployed people and their families.	13,3%	13,1%	12,4%	13,0%
	Children at risk of poverty			13,1%	
IT	Material deprivation among children			4,2%	
	Children at risk of poverty living outside the capital region			15,8%	
NL	Children in absolute poverty (ISTAT)	11,4%	13,5%	14,2%	
	Children in relative poverty (ISTAT)	22%	20,4%	22%	
KO	Children in energy poverty (OIPE)			10%	
	Children in poverty		20,7%	23%	
NL	Children involved in work				9%
	Children involved in work under hazardous conditions				5,6%
RO	Children with migrant background at risk of poverty: non-western	24,5%	22,1%	22,2%	
	Children with migrant background at risk of poverty: western	7,1%	6,7%	6,7%	
ES	Children at risk of poverty	7,4%	6,9%	6,6%	
	Children experiencing material and social deprivation	36,8%	40,3%	36,4%	
SE	Children experiencing severe material and social deprivation	25,8%	29,7%	28,2%	
	Public spending (% of GDP) on families and children	1,3%	1,6%		
SE	Reduction of child poverty due to social transfers (pensions excluded): AROP before transfers minus AROP after transfers (pp)	5.2 pp	6.4 pp	9.4 pp	
	At risk of poverty rate for children 0-19 years (less than 60% of median income)	18,3%	18,1%	17,9%	
SE	At risk of poverty rate for children born in Sweden with foreign born parents	40%	39,8%	38,9%	

# EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

## EU INDICATORS

	ECEC (Participation in early childhood education by sex (children aged 3 and over))		
	2018	2019	2020
DK	99,5%	97,7%	97,6%
FI	86,4%	88,8%	90,9%
DE	94,2%	94,0%	93,7%
IS	97,1%	96,8%	96,4%
IT	93,6%	93,6%	94,6%
LT	88,9%	89,6%	90,9%
NL	89,4%	90,5%	91,7%
PL	88,2%	90,3%	90,8%
RO	81,9%	78,6%	78,2%
ES	97,5%	97,3%	97,2%
SE	95,1%	95,6%	95,9%

## RELEVANT INDICATORS USED AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

	Indicator	2019	2020	2021	2022
AL	Number of children enrolled in education			577.869	
	Number of children enrolled in kindergartens			72.384	
DK	Children entitled to subsidy enrolled in day-care		36%		
	Children entitled to subsidy enrolled in day-care (partly subsidy)		73%		
	Children entitled to subsidy enrolled in day-care (full subsidy)		27%		
FI	Number of 0-2 years children enrolled in early education			35%	
	Number of 3-5 years children enrolled in early education			87%	
	Number of pre-school/6 years old children enrolled in early education			99%	

	Indicator	2019	2020	2021	2022
DE	Childcare rates (0-3 years)				35,5%
	Childcare rates (3-6 years)				91,7%
	Costs in euros of early childhood education (Average for 0-3/ year)				1.710€
IS	Children from 0 to 6 years old enrolled in preschool		87%		
	One year old children enrolled in kindergarten			55%	
	Two-year-old children enrolled in kindergarten			94%	
	Three-year-old children enrolled in kindergarten			97%	
IT	Places available in ECEC by 100 children aged 0-2 (public provision - ISTAT)	14,7%	13,7%		
	Places available in ECEC by 100 children aged 0-2 (public and private provision - ISTAT)	26,9	27,2		
	Municipalities offering ECEC services (ISTAT)	60,1%	59,3%		
KO	Children aged 0-6 who attend pre-school			20%	
	Number of children in kindergartens and pre-schools	31.068	33.604	31.179	
LT	Children attended pre-school (ages 0-2)			52,5%	
	Children attended pre-school (ages 3-6)			95,8%	
	Children attended pre-school (ages 1-6 and older)			82,8%	
NL	Pre-school costs assumed by the state (average)	73,4%	72,8%	71,7%	
	Number of children in pre-school childcare (0-4)			491.160	
SE	Number of children per full time position	5,2	5,1	5,1	
	Children enrolled 1-5 years in preschool born in Sweden with Swedish born parents	85,5%	85,4%	85,6%	
	Children enrolled 1-5 years in preschool foreign born with foreign born parents			73%	

## EDUCATION (INCLUDING SCHOOL-BASED ACTIVITIES)

### RELEVANT INDICATORS USED AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

	Indicator	2018	2019	2020	2021
AL	Number of out-of-school children of primary school				12,899
	Number of out-of-school children of lower secondary school				3,164
	PISA results: students functionally illiterate	60%			
DK	Students enrolled in ordinary education				95,5%
	Children in vulnerable positions that pass their primary education exams				70%
FI	Drops-out in upper secondary school / vocational training (ages 16-19)		10,4%	14,1%	
	Children who have at least one hobby once a week		95,9%		95,8%
DE	School-leavers without graduation with lowest possible degree (Hauptschule)			6%	6,2%
IS	Dropout rates after four years of school		23%		
	Households where children do not participate in any leisure activities or sport	16,9%			
IT	Early School Leavers (ISTAT)		13,3%	14,2%	12,7%
	NEET (ISTAT)		22,1%	23,7%	23,1%
	Students who do not reach the minimum competency level in reading (lower secondary education - INVALSI)		35,2%		38,5%
LT	Young people (15-24 years old) neither in employment nor in education and training				10,9%
	Proportion of schoolchildren participating in the informal education				26,4%
NL	Primary school children below the reading level 1F				12%
	Primary school children with sport or dance club membership		63%		75%
	Number of early dropouts (13-23)		2%	2%	2%
ES	Children benefitting of school meal allowance		11,2%		
SE	Percentage eligible for a vocational program at upper secondary school		84,3%	85,6	86,2%

## HEALTHCARE

### RELEVANT INDICATORS USED AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

	Indicator	2017	2019	2020	2021
FI	Children (14-15 yo) drinking alcohol heavily at least once a month		9,6%		8,9%
	Children (14-15 yo) using tobacco products daily		9,0%		7,6%
	Number of children waiting longer than 90 days for psychiatric care/service		166	160	581
IS	Children in compulsory school (6-16 yo) who receive targeted help			31%	
IT	Children who do not play sport (sedentary) (ISTAT)		22,4%	22,2%	24,7%
	Air quality - PM2.5 (ISTAT)		81,9%	77,4%	
LT	Number of paediatricians per 10 000 population				3,1
	Population smoking habits of tobacco products for people aged 15-24: smoke every day		12,9%		
	Frequency of alcohol consumption in the past 12 months for people aged 15-24: every week		8,7%		
NL	Children in youth care		12,8%	12,6%	13,4%
	Binge drinking in the past 12 months (16 yo)		42,1%		49,6%
	Used alcohol in the past month (12-16 yo)		26,2%		27,8%
ES	Percentage of households with children with unmet dental care needs	2,7%			

## NUTRITION

### RELEVANT INDICATORS USED AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

	Indicator	2017	2019	2020	2021
FI	Overweight (bmi more than 25) children: 2-16 yo		22,1%	23,6%	23,8%
	Children suffering from obesity				5,6%
IS	Children suffering from obesity: rural areas				9,4%
	Children suffering from lack of material quality				4,6%
IT	Students in primary education who use school canteens (Minister of education)			56,1%	53,5%
	Overweight and obese children: 3-17 yo (ISTAT)		25,6%	26,3%	27%
LT	Obese children: 15-19 yo		5,2%		
NL	Overweight children: 4-12 yo		12%	13,2%	15,5%
	Overweight children: 12-16 yo		14,7%	19,3%	15,9%
	Obese children: 4-12 yo				3,6%
	Obese children: 12-16 yo				2,9%
	Children having breakfast daily: 4-12 yo				84,6%
	Children having breakfast daily: 12-16 yo				67,6%
	Daily consumption of fruit: 4-12 yo				41,8%
	Daily consumption of fruit: 12-16 yo				31,2%
ES	Overweight children between 6 and 9 years old		40,6%		

## HOUSING

### EU INDICATORS

	Eurostat: Households with dependent children with financial burden due to housing costs			Eurostat: Households with dependent children that are unable to keep their homes at an adequate temperature		
	2018	2019	2020	2019	2020	2021
EU	46,6%	48,8%	46,9%	6,4%	7,3%	6,6%
DK	31,9%	33,6%	32,9%	3,0%	3,2%	2,6%
FI	58,7%	57,4%	61,6%	1,6%	1,7%	1,1%
DE	62,5%	61,8%	56,1%	2,2%	7,7%	3,5%
IS	60,9%					
IT	48,8%	57,3%	57,6%	10%	7,5%	7,9%
PL	38,3%	40,7%	41,3%	3,0%	2,2%	2,3%
LT	58,9%	62,6%	63,3%	21,9%	19,9%	20,4%
NL	42,7%	44,1%	41,3%	2,7%	2,5%	1,6%
RO	65,7%	65,6%	65,7%	9,3%	11,4%	9,7%
ES	45,1%	47,5%	51,5%	7,7%	10,2%	13,7%
SE	32,6%	32,9%	32,6%	2,2%	3,2%	1,8%

## RELEVANT INDICATORS USED AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

	Indicator	2019	2020	2021	2022
FI	Households with children living in small settings and/or tight conditions	29%	29%	28%	
	Households receiving general housing allowance	15%	15,5%	14,5%	
IS	Children experiencing material deprivation (rented accommodation)			8,2%	
	Children experiencing material deprivation (own housing)			3,6%	
	Children living with one parent: low-income household or material deprivation			22,6%	
IT	Children living in overcrowded house (Eu-Silc)	41,6%	39,2%	42,9%	
	Children living in houses with some structural problem (Eu-Silc)	12,8%	18,1%	15,7%	
	Families with kids who cannot afford to keep the house warm (EU-Silc)	9,9%	7,6%	7,9%	
NL	Number of evicted households		3000 p/year		
	Households with some form of energy poverty	21%	25%		
	Households having difficulties making ends meet				37%
ES	Share of housing costs in disposable household income among households with dependent children	32.0%	29.7%		
	Households with dependent children that are unable to keep their homes at an adequate temperature	7,7%	10,6%	13,1%	
	Children living in severely deprived homes	3,1%	6,2%		
SE	Number of children affected by evictions	467	449	572	
	Overcrowding rate among children 0-17 years (EU-SILC)	22,8%	22,8%	21,5%	



# Endnotes

1. Although Poland and Bosnia and Herzegovina did not answer the questionnaire, Save the Children's country experts provided some insights and information which have been included in the analysis.

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8. Eurostat, [Glossary: At-risk-of-poverty rate](#), 2021.

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10. Eurostat, [Glossary: Persons living in households with low work intensity](#), 2021

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- 125.** For example, ECEC for children under six years of age, the school canteen, the provision of full-time schooling, actions against early school leaving. Also, specific interventions in healthcare (e.g., preventive interventions for a wide range of children and focus on the criticality in the access of some specific target groups).
- 126.** All references to Romania's National Plan of Action are based on the drafts received by Save the Children Romania, on January 31st, from the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of the Child and Adoption.
- 127.** European Commission, [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), 2021.
- 128.** EU Alliance for Investing in Children, [EU Alliance for Investing in Children Position paper on the European Care Strategy and upcoming Council Recommendations](#), 2022.
- 129.** PES, [The European Child Guarantee: For a fair start in life](#), 2022.
- 130.** Tieto & Trendit, [Varhaiskasvatukseen osallistuminen yleistyy nopeasti Suomessa ja kansainvälisesti](#), 2021.



- 131.** Kansallinen Koulutuksen Arviointikeskus, [Yhteenveto viisivuotiaiden maksuttoman varhaiskasvatuskokeilun arvioinnista vuosina 2018–2021](#), 2021.
- 132.** European Commission, [A European Care Strategy for caregivers and care receivers](#), 2022.
- 133.** Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, [Decreto Legislativo 13.04.2017 n.65](#), 2017.
- 134.** By following the [recommendations](#) from the Kinderopvang Totaal.
- 135.** European Commission, [Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage](#), 2013.
- 136.** European Commission, [The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles](#), 2017.
- 137.** UN, [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), 1989.
- 138.** Save the Children Deutschland, [LeseOasen - Leseförderung im Ganztage](#).
- 139.** Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, [Extension of compulsory education](#).
- 140.** It aims at increasing the wellbeing of children by enabling every child to have one free leisure activity in connection with the school day. More info can be found [here](#).
- 141.** In Sweden, leisure centres are available after school for children between 6-12 years. The leisure centres must stimulate the students' development and learning and offer the students a meaningful free time. The majority of children attend leisure centres between the age of 6-9 (4 out of 5 were enrolled in after-school care in the academic year 2021/22). The corresponding proportion for children between 10 and 12 is 1 of 5. However, children whose parents do not work or study do not have the right to a place in after-school care. the fee is also an obstacle for families. Furthermore, children who live in areas with socio-economic challenges are enrolled to a lesser extent in after-school care than those who live in resource-rich areas.
- 142.** Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, [Nationaal Programma Onderwijs](#).
- 143.** A clear target establishing full time services for primary schools, to reach universal access - starting from the territories with higher educational poverty up to a coverage of 100%.
- 144.** There is a specific objective to increase teaching support and mediation for students with disabilities and with migrant and ethnic minority backgrounds, along with vulnerable family backgrounds, and promotion of guidelines for the right to education of adopted children.
- 145.** 4,3% of GDP in 2022 but decreasing to 3,5% in 2025. Financial resources have been allocated through the RFF, for instance, 3,9 billion € for the safety of school buildings reducing energy consumption, 800 € million euros for the replacement of school buildings and energy upgrade, and 200 million € to reduce educational poverty in Southern regions.
- 146.** Save the Children Italia, [I punti luce](#).
- 147.** OECD, [The Albanian education system](#).
- 148.** Extension of the school meal service to reach universal access - starting from the territories with higher educational poverty up to a coverage of 100%.
- 149.** Partially or completely subsidised.
- 150.** Regional differences range from 2% (Murcia or Melilla) to 18% (Region of Valencia) or 25% in the Canary Islands.
- 151.** It is worth noting that while filling out this survey, a motion from Volt appealing to allocate 100 million € for free healthy meals at school for the most at-risk was approved. Also, a budget of 15,8 million€ was announced from ESF+ for food aid, material aid and accompanying measures for people with insufficient resources to keep the household running.
- 152.** Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, [Uitvoering motie schoolmaaltijden](#), 2022.
- 153.** Humanium, [Understanding Children's Right to Health](#).
- 154.** European Commission, [Staff working document](#), March 2021.
- 155.** PES, [The European Child Guarantee: For a fair start in life](#), 2022.
- 156.** Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, [Kansrijke Start](#).
- 157.** E.g., Robert Koch Institute, [The Eating study as a KiGGS Module in KiGGS Wave 2](#), 2017; UNICEF, [A review of school-aged children and adolescent nutrition in Europe and Central Asia Region](#), 2020.
- 158.** European Parliament, [Child Guarantee National Action Plans – Targets, EU funding and governance](#), 2022.
- 159.** The estimated cost of this measure for families with children in extreme poverty is €1,9K million per year.
- 160.** Ministria e shendetesise dhe mbrojtjes sociale, [Per miratimin e programit te parandalimit te kontrollit te semundjeve jo te transmetueshme](#), 2022.
- 161.** PES, [The European Child Guarantee: For a fair start in life](#), 2022.
- 162.** European Commission, [Staff working document](#), March 2021.
- 163.** PES, [The European Child Guarantee: For a fair start in life](#), 2022.
- 164.** European Commission, [European Platform on Combatting Homelessness](#), 2021.
- 165.** European Commission, [Employment and social developments in Europe](#), July 2022.
- 166.** European Parliament, [Report on access to decent housing for all \(2019/2187\(INI\)\)](#), 2020.
- 167.** Data provided by [Unione Inquilini](#), based on information received from the Ministry of the Interior.
- 168.** The Equality Ombudsman has reported discriminatory rental practices such as the requirement of Swedish citizenship.
- 169.** In the first half of March 2022 the Minister for Housing and Spatial Planning presented the National Housing and Homebuilding Agenda, describing how the government plans to achieve that target and align housing supply and demand. The programme Een thuis voor iedereen ('A home for everyone') will be designed to remove the obstacles to the goal of a pleasant and affordable home for every person by 2030.
- 170.** Eurostat – Data Browser, [Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status - total population - EU-SILC survey](#), 2023.
- 171.** PICUM, [EU Council adopts Child Guarantee that benefits undocumented children](#), 2021.
- 172.** Social Justice Ireland, [EU Child Guarantee – will it work?](#), 2021.
- 173.** [ESF+ federal program](#), p.11
- 174.** [ESF+ federal program](#), p.47.
- 175.** World Bank, [Kosovo Social Assistance Scheme Duty](#), March 2019.
- 176.** Statistics Netherlands calculates each year the “education score” as the risk of a baby or a student being in a situation of educational disadvantage. To calculate this score, Statistics Netherlands considers the following indicators that represent the child's environment: the education level of both parents; the mother's country of origin; the length of stay of the mother in The Netherlands; the average education level of all mothers at the school; and whether the parents are in debt restructuring. Based on these anonymous school scores of children between the ages of 2 and 4 and primary school students, the disadvantage score for a municipality is calculated, and the budget is determined. Schools and municipalities receive a higher amount for children with a higher risk of an educational disadvantage than for children with a lower risk. More info can be found [here](#).
- 177.** Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö, [Uudistuva ja osaava Suomi 2021 – 2027 EU:n alue- ja rakennepolitiikan ohjelma Ohjelma-asiakirja](#), 2022.
- 178.** It is disbursed to parties affiliated to Sam& (Jarige Job, het Jeugdfonds Sport en Cultuur, Nationaal Fonds Kinderhulp and Vereniging Leergeld).
- 179.** Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö, [Uudistuva ja osaava Suomi 2021 – 2027 EU:n alue- ja rakennepolitiikan ohjelma Ohjelma-asiakirja](#), 2022.
- 180.** Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö, [Uudistuva ja osaava Suomi 2021 – 2027 EU:n alue- ja rakennepolitiikan ohjelma Ohjelma-asiakirja](#), 2022.
- 181.** Ministerio de Transportes, Movilidad y Agenda Urbana, [Plan Estatal de Acceso a la Vivienda 2022 – 2025](#).
- 182.** Ministerio de Hacienda y Función: [Presupuestos Generales del Estado del año en curso](#).
- 183.** Flex homes are fully-fledged homes that are made in the factory.
- 184.** European Parliament, [Resolution on upscaling the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework: a resilient EU budget fit for new challenges](#), 2022.
- 185.** European Parliament – European Council, [Regulation \(EU\) 2022/2039 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 amending Regulations \(EU\) No 1303/2013 and \(EU\) 2021/1060 as regards additional flexibility to address the consequences of the military aggression of the Russian Federation FAST \(Flexible Assistance for Territories\) – CARE](#), 2022.

**186.** European Commission, [Proposal for a Council Implementing Decision on the approval of the assessment of the recovery and resilience plan of Romania](#), 2021. The World Bank, in cooperation with the European Commission, developed a tool based on a vulnerability index (the index is itself based on criteria such as schools with a high number of substitute teachers, a high drop-out rate, a low participation rate, and poor results in national pupil assessments). Using these criteria, schools are classified into three categories, depending on the priority of the intervention: high, medium and low. Depending on the classification, schools are eligible for grants from the PNRAS programme for reducing the school drop-out rate, financed from the NRRP. Schools must become responsible for student outcomes and need to produce regular updates on the progress they have made by transferring that information into the MATE data collection system.

**187.** Before the formal consultation process took place, Save the Children Spain sent a document with proposals on the initiatives and investments that should be covered in each key service and on the policies and initiatives to be included as part of the enabling framework. This document was based on Save the Children Spain's previous contributions in the framework of the new MFF, ESF+ and the RRP. Many of these proposals were incorporated in the draft and final Action Plan. However, Save the Children Spain's proposals to the draft Action Plan were largely overlooked and did not translate into any substantial improvement in the final version of the Plan.

**188.** The following organisations were invited to the conference: PO-Raad, VO-Raad, PRO, GO, LAKS, Ouders en Onderwijs, AVS, Save the Children, Kinderrechtcollectief, Unicef, Nederlands Jeugdinstituut, Divosa, VNG, Kinderombudsman, Alliantie Kinderarmoede, Sterk uit Armoede, Stichting Leergeld, SOFT Tulip, NCJ. The aim of the conference was to become acquainted with the theme, as well as to obtain input, particularly on the practical implementation and application of the Child Guarantee. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference was held online and moderated by a professional facilitator.

**189.** The meeting was held on February 18, 2022

**190.** Many minimum social security benefits were raised from 1st of August 2022. And some increases made for year 2023. [Government budget proposal for 2023 secures purchasing power, compensates price hike in electricity and strengthens conditions for sustainable growth \(valtioneuvosto.fi\)](#)

**191.** The reform will consider the diversity of people's life situations and transitions. It will also include the perspective of children and a specific working group has been established for this purpose. This reform has a possibility to comprehensively adjust the social security to the needs and rights of children.

**192.** [Inflation 9,1 per cent in December 2022 - Statistics Finland \(tilastokeskus.fi\)](#), December 2022 OECD Prices - Inflation (CPI) - OECD Data

**193.** Save the Children Finland, [LAPSEN ÄÄNI 2022](#), 2022, and [summary in English](#).

**194.** Government is planning to support families with [extra allowance](#) (maximum for 700e per month) for high energy bills during winter months.

**195.** Finnish Institute for health and welfare, [Climate change](#).

**196.** Maa- ja metsätalousministeriö, [Kansallinen ilmastonmuutokseen sopeutumissuunnitelma](#), 2022

**197.** Maa- ja metsätalousministeriö, [Kansallinen ilmastonmuutokseen sopeutumissuunnitelma 2030 \(KISS2030\)](#), 2021

**198.** The [Finnish model of hobbies](#) aims at increasing the wellbeing of children by enabling every child to have one free leisure activity in connection with the school day.

**199.** Eurostat, [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion](#), 2022.

**200.** Statistischen Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, [Armutsgefährdungsquoten](#).

**201.** Die Bundesregierung, [Wie die Pandemie Kinder und Jugendliche belastet](#).

**202.** MDPI, [Affordability of Different Isocaloric Healthy Diets in Germany—An Assessment of Food Prices for Seven Distinct Food Patterns](#), 2021.

**203.** Tagesschau, [Großer Andrang bei den Tafeln](#), November 2022.

**204.** Stiftung Kinder Gesundheit, [Kindergesundheitsbericht der Stiftung Kindergesundheit](#), 2022.

**205.** Welternährung, [Neue Rechnung: Was Klimaanpassung in der Landwirtschaft kostet](#).

**206.** Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, [Jahrhunderthochwasser 2021 in Deutschland](#), 2021.

**207.** Die Bundesregierung, [Mehr Fortschritt wagen](#), 2021.

**208.** Vorwärts, [Vorschlag: So soll das soziale Klimageld von Hubertus Heil aussehen](#), 2022.

**209.** INVALSI, [National Evaluation of Learning](#), 2022:

**210.** Istat, [Prezzi al consumo. Dati definitivi](#), 2023

**211.** Centro Euromediterraneo sui cambiamenti climatici, [Analisi del Rischio. I cambiamenti climatici in Italia](#), 2020.

**212.** Save the Children Italia, [Crisi climatica e ambientale: l'infanzia a rischio nel presente e nel futuro](#), 2022.

**213.** Households with ISEE – Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator less than 26.000€.

**214.** A clear target establishing full time services for primary schools, to reach universal access, starting from the territories with higher educational poverty up to a coverage of 100%.

**215.** Specific objective to increase teaching support and mediation for students with disabilities and with migrant and ethnic minority backgrounds, along with vulnerable family backgrounds, promotion of guidelines for the right to education of adopted children.

**216.** In 2021, the share of early school leavers was 12,7% still far from target established by the EU of 9% by 2030.

**217.** In Italy 23,1% of people between 15-29 are NEETs.

**218.** 4,3% of GDP in 2022 but decreasing to 3,5% in 2025. Financial resources have been allocated through the RFF: 3,9 billion € for the safety of school buildings reducing energy consumption, 800 € million euros for the replacement of school buildings and energy upgrade, and 200 million € to reduce educational poverty in Southern regions.

**219.** Data for 2022 in comparison with 2021. For food prices data refer to the month of September 2022 compared to September 2021.

**220.** Central Bureau of Statistics, [221 duizend kinderen met armoederisico, laagste aantal in 25 jaar](#), 2021.

**221.** Rijksoverheid, [Aanpak Mentale gezondheid van ons allemaal](#), 2022

**222.** NOS, [Supermarktprijzen bijna een vijfde hoger: 'Gezin jaarlijks 1500 euro extra kwijt](#), August 2022.

**223.** De voorzitter van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, [Uitvoering motie schoolmaaltijden](#), 2022.

**224.** Many middle-income families cannot pay rent above the social rent limit (€720.42).

**225.** In the first half of March 2022 the Minister for Housing and Spatial Planning presented the National Housing and Homebuilding Agenda, describing how the government plans to achieve that target and align housing supply and demand. The programme Een thuis voor iedereen ('A home for everyone') will be designed to remove the obstacles to the goal of a pleasant and affordable home for every person by 2030.

**226.** A meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day.

**227.** Eurostat, [Inability to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish \(or vegetarian equivalent\) every second day - EU-SILC survey](#), 2023.

**228.** Save the Children Romania research based on a questionnaire filled out by a total number of 3570 persons, of whom 1942 children, from 790 households. The questionnaires were taken between 21 and 31 October 2022 in 11 counties and Bucharest.

**229.** All references to Romania's National Plan of Action are based on the drafts received by Save the Children Romania, on January 31st, from the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of the Child and Adoption.

**230.** Romanian Ministry of Education, Raport privind stare invatamantului preuniversitar din Romania 2020-2021

**231.** European Commission, Education and Training Monitor 2022 Romania

**232.** Salvați Copiii Romania, [Analiză privind situația mamei și gravidei sub 18 ani din zonele rurale defavorizate](#). 2022.

**233.** Eurostat, [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion](#), 2022.

**234.** Save the Children Romania – 2022 Research based on a questionnaire filled out by a total number of 3570 persons, of whom 1942 children, from 790 households. The questionnaires were taken between 21 and 31 October 2022 in 11 counties and Bucharest.

**235.** Save the Children, [Save the Children lleva el coronavirus a la infancia de los líderes políticos para que se pongan en la piel de los niños y las niñas que están sufriendo las consecuencias de la crisis](#), 2020.

**236.** Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Encuesta de Condiciones de Vida 2021, 2022.

**237.** Save the Children, Born into the Climate Crisis, 2022.

**238.** Ministerio de derechos sociales y agenda 2030, Infancia con Derechos, 2022.

**239.** Eurostat, Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion - Statistics Explained (europa.eu), 2023.

**240.** Eurostat – Data Browser, Material Deprivation rate by age group – EU-SILC survey, 2022. Material deprivation according to Eurostat means that households that cannot afford at least three out of nine items desirable or necessary.

**241.** Save the Children, Young Voices Sweden 2022, 2022.

**242.** Albania ranked 75 out of 181 countries in the 2020 ND-GAIN Index.

**243.** Law dated June 06 2011 and updated in June 2022.

**244.** Law dated 2011 and updated in 2022.

**245.** Some of the mitigation measures in the energy sector concern the improvement of efficient transport systems, energy labelling of new vehicles, improving buildings' energy performance, the reduction of transmission and distribution losses, reduction of industries emissions based on energy efficiency, promotion of alternative sources of renewable energy.

**246.** UNPD, UNDP helps Albania meet obligations deriving from Paris Climate Change Accord, 2021.

**247.** The country fell to the 61st position out of 78 countries.

**248.** UNESCO figures up to 2019 show a declining enrolment. Secondary school enrolment is lower in Albania than the EU and OECD averages, with fewer boys than girls enrolled: Dropout increases in parallel with educational level, with more boys leaving the higher grades than girls. Boys completed an average of 1,5 years less education than girls. High rates of school absenteeism in some municipalities for children with disabilities

**249.** The most recent official figures for the entire country are from 2015 and may be found here

**250.** UNICEF's report "Assessment of consequences of Covid-19 on Bosnia and Herzegovina Society: third household survey", June 2022

**251.** ILO, Policy brief: Social Protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina: challenges and key policy issues, 2022.

**252.** UNICEF, Children in Kosovo, 2022.

**253.** Central Bank of the Republic of Kosovo, Financial Stability Report, 2021.

**254.** World Bank Group, Kosovo Social Assistance Scheme Study, 2019.

**255.** In October 2022 the Government agreed to make a report on the social costs of poverty in Iceland. This report will provide a better insight about the status of the child poverty in the country and will be the basis to take well informed decisions and actions by the Government.



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