



Save the Children

GUARANTEERING CHILDREN'S FUTURE

How to end child poverty and social exclusion in
Europe

Save the Children believes that every child deserves a future. In Europe and around the world, we work every day to give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and be protected from harm. When crisis strikes and children are most vulnerable, we are always among the first to respond and the last to leave. We ensure children's unique needs are met and their voices are heard. We deliver lasting results for millions of children, including those hardest to reach.

We do whatever it takes for children – every day and in times of crisis – transforming their lives and the future we share.

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Some names in this report have been changed to protect identities.

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Around 2000 children in Bosnia are forced to beg on the streets every day; many of them are Roma or belong to other minorities. Only a generation away from violent war and still heavily burdened with political tensions and economic hardships, governmental institutions often fail to provide sufficient support for particularly vulnerable children and their families.

Save the Children supports the work of five drop-in centres in the North-West Balkans. Together, these five centres have close to 800 regular beneficiaries, along with as much as 2000 children that occasionally use some of the services. Many Bosnian families lack the financial resources to send their children to school or even ensure basic means of living. In the drop-in centre the children are supported to enroll in school, provided with school materials and warm meals, learn how to read and write, receive support in doing their homework and, most importantly, they can use their leisure time to play with other children.

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Foreword

2021 has been a historic year for the approximately 18 million children growing up in poverty and social exclusion in the European Union.

This year the EU for the first time in its history set a target to reduce child poverty. By 2030 at least 5 million children in the EU should be lifted out of poverty. In parallel, the EU unprecedentedly provided funds and called on all EU Member States to allocate appropriate resources to tackle child poverty, and finally, European Member States unanimously adopted the European Child Guarantee Council Recommendation demonstrating strong alignment and commitment to secure a better future for its children.

Save the Children has been strongly pushing for the EU to acknowledge children's rights not to grow up in poverty. We are therefore pleased to see that combatting child poverty has been recognised as a key priority for the EU and its Member States, in particular at a time when inequality is on the rise following the COVID-19 pandemic.

We now need to harness the newly adopted instruments to achieve sustainable change at national level to address the needs of children in the EU. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, one in four children in Europe were growing up at risk of poverty.

The report *'Guaranteeing Children's Future How to End Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe'* gathers evidence from 14 European countries, 9 EU and 5 non-EU Member States and provides information on child poverty levels and the particular groups of children and families in need in these countries. The report finds that millions of children across Europe do not have access or have limited and often bad quality or non-inclusive access to early childhood education and care and education; do not eat a healthy meal each day leading to increased levels of obesity; have unequal access to healthcare and many are either homeless or deprived decent housing. It also shows that, in

particular, children growing up in single parent households or in large families, children with a migrant background, children with disabilities, children belonging to an ethnic minority and children in rural or disadvantaged areas are among those mostly affected by poverty.

The report also examines children's access to the key service areas identified in the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation as well as the use of EU and national funds to protect children and families in need. It is striking to see that regardless of the EU's commitment to invest in the next generation, many

“ 2021 has indeed been a historic year for children growing up at risk of poverty but the actual work starts now. ”

Member States still fall short of allocating adequate resources to take actions to ensure that children and their families can escape the intergenerational cycle of poverty. EU Member States have the opportunity to invest in comprehensive measures supporting children and families in need to reach a better future.

At this critical moment, Save the Children will continue advocating for the rights of children in need and supporting them in reaching their full potential. At the same time, Save the Children will remain a partner of the EU and national decision makers in realising the much-needed changes. We are therefore sharing our recommendations on how to implement the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation and how to put in place child poverty reduction measures and we hope that these recommendations will inform and inspire decision-makers to deliver on the promise of guaranteeing better childhoods for children in Europe.

Anita Bay Bundegaard
Director



A family from the Nou Moles neighborhood (Valencia, Spain), beneficiary of Save the Children.
Photo: Pablo Blázquez / Save the Children

Introduction

In 2021, the European Union (EU) championed the rights of children growing up at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU by adopting the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation¹ – a comprehensive policy framework that aims at tackling child poverty and breaking the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage through securing the access of children in need to key service areas – and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)² which calls on EU Member States to allocate appropriate financial resources to address child poverty and implement the Child Guarantee. At the same time, the agreed European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) Action Plan aims to lift at least 5 million children out of poverty by 2030³.

The Guaranteeing Children's Future – How to End Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe illustrates the challenges faced by children and families living in poverty and social exclusion in 14 European countries and territories: 9 EU Member States (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Germany, Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Lithuania, Romania) and 5 Non-EU Member States and territories⁴ (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Iceland and Northern Ireland). The report aims to influence the design of the national Child Guarantee Action Plans and child poverty reduction measures in non-EU Member States.

The report provides information on the levels of child poverty and identifies children in need in the 14 examined countries.

It analyses the state of children's access to the key services in each country, the participation of children and civil society in decision-making procedures, and the allocation of EU funds and national budgets for child poverty reduction and social inclusion measures. The report also highlights the work of Save the Children in each of these countries to support children and families in need. Furthermore, it provides recommendations on the Child Guarantee Action Plans that EU Member States will submit by March 2022. The report also covers non-EU Member States as Save the Children considers the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation as an exemplary policy framework which can inspire and serve as a basis for policy making in countries outside the EU.

The findings and recommendations of this report are structured around the service areas of the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation, namely:



Early childhood education and care



Inclusive education and school-based activities



Healthcare



Healthy nutrition



Adequate housing

The report is divided into three main sections:

- 1** The comparative analysis of the results of the 14 country pages;
- 2** Country pages covering the challenges that children in need and their families face in 14 countries in focus, the role of Save the Children and recommendations on the Child Guarantee Action Plans or child poverty reduction measures;
- 3** Recommendations for the EU and Member States on the successful implementation of the Child Guarantee and on child poverty reduction measures for countries outside the EU.

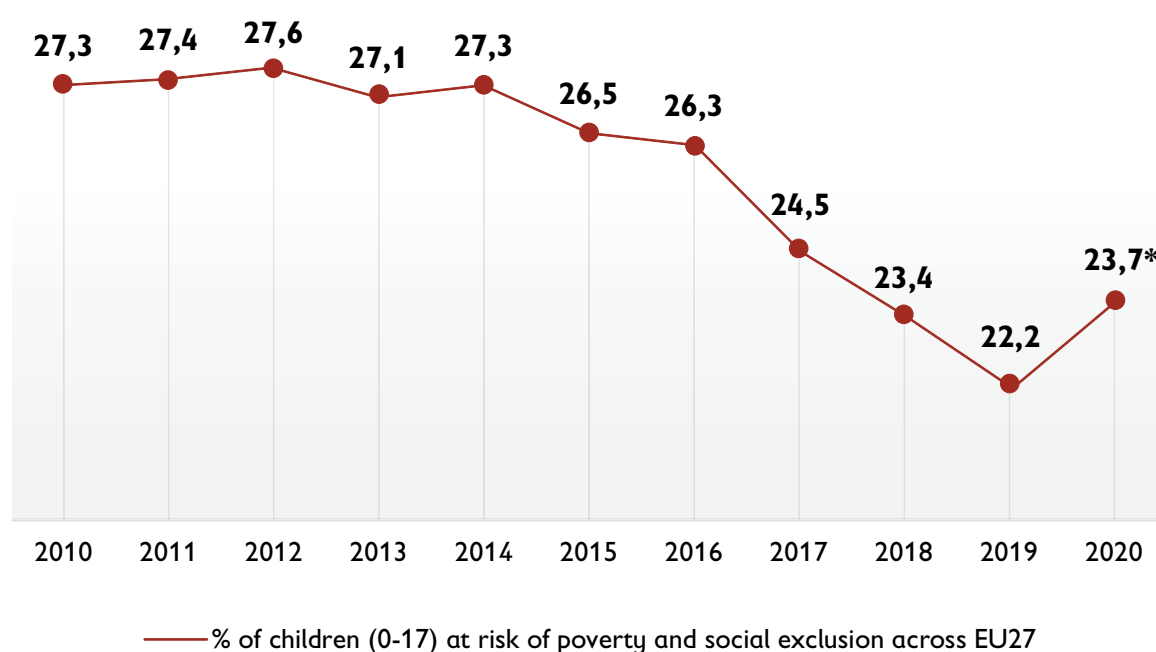


Furugh, 9, on the school bus to a local school in Bihac, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Photo: Save The Children / Elena Heatherwick

Executive Summary

The EU is considered one of the wealthiest and most equal regions in the world. Yet, no European country is free from child poverty. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2019, approximately 1 in 4 children were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion across the 27 EU Member States. The 2020 Eurostat data⁵ for the majority of the countries covered in this report estimate that this proportion will likely increase. According to the latest available data, in Germany, one of the world's richest countries, 1/4 of the children's population are growing up at risk of poverty, in Spain and Romania, one in three children are living below the poverty line. In Italy, 200,000 more children have been driven to extreme poverty in 2020. The situation is even more dire in Western Balkan countries. In Albania, for example, half of children's population grows up in poverty.



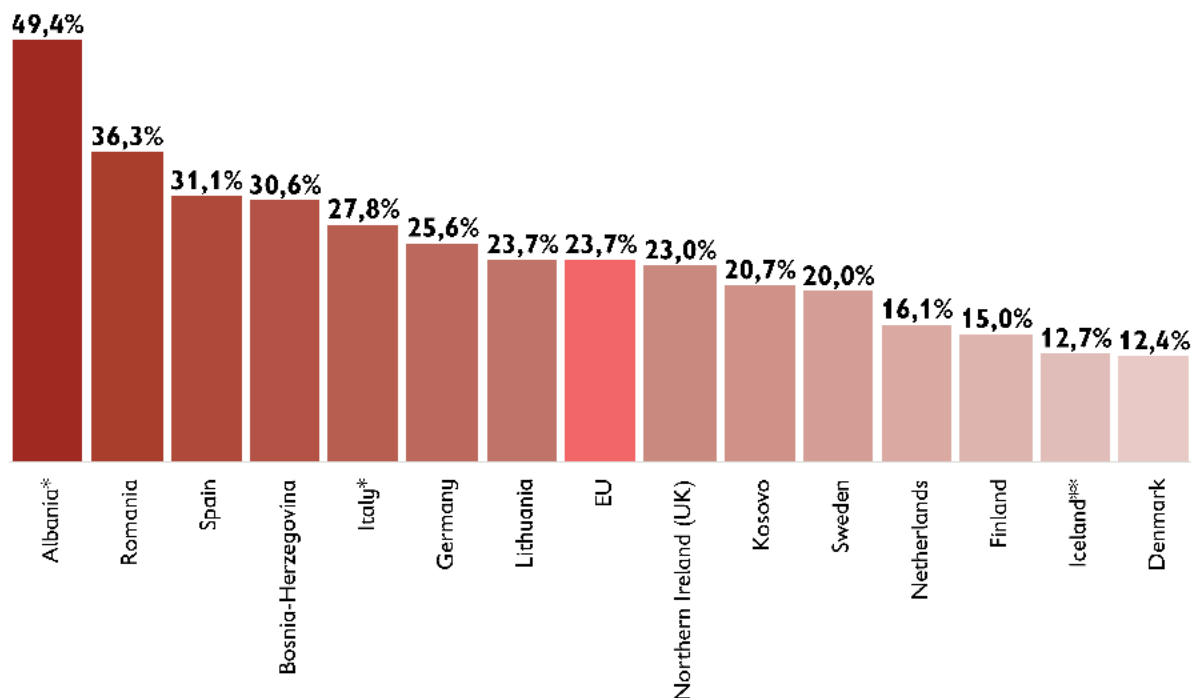
Source: Eurostat

* break in time series, estimated, as 27 October 2021 for 24 out of 27 EU Member States

Chart 1: Child poverty rates across the EU27 in 2010-2020

Whereas the level of child poverty⁶ varies widely across the EU Member States, with the most recent available data showing the lowest level in **Denmark** (12.4%) followed by **Finland** (15%) and the highest level in **Romania** (36.3%) followed by **Spain** (31.1%), children across the EU are facing unacceptable poverty levels.

Poverty affects children's development and wellbeing from their earliest years, which means that lack of access to key services like early childhood education and care, education, health care and adequate housing and the multiple obstacles in accessing the support they need can have negative health and social consequences throughout their lives.



* Data for 2019
 ** Data for 2018

EU: estimate
 Source: Eurostat

Chart 2: Child poverty rates in the report sample across EU Member States, 2020

Children living in migration, growing up in single parent families, large families or low-income working families or belonging to an ethnic minority are more likely to be at risk of poverty and are the children most in need of support. For example, children from single parent families are usually over-represented in the national social security systems. In **Sweden**, 58% of all families headed by a single parent with a foreign background are at risk of poverty, and in **Germany**, 45.2% of children receiving social benefits grow up in a single-parent family. In **more than half of the countries** covered in this report, children from low-income working families also suffer from poverty, showing that parents' access to employment – especially when it's not well paid – cannot be the only solution to addressing child poverty. Children from ethnic minorities are among the most vulnerable children in Europe, particularly in **Albania**, **Bosnia-Herzegovina** and **Kosovo**, where they face discrimination and lack of access to essential services. In **Northern Ireland**, children from black ethnic communities are far more vulnerable to poverty, with two in three growing up in poverty.

The COVID-19 crisis has affected the wellbeing of children across Europe. There is an increase in the demand for support; we also witness growing levels of stress and loneliness among children and young people. In **Finland** and the **Netherlands**, the feeling of depression and loneliness, eating disorders and suicidal behaviour among children have increased, and in **Spain** children's exposure to violence within the household and to unhealthy habits has risen.

The pandemic has also widened the digital divide in education. In **Lithuania** alone, over 40.000 children were left without computers or internet connection during the 2020 school year due to poverty at home.

In many countries, parents struggle to provide their children with a nutritious daily meal. Only two countries in the study, **Finland** and **Sweden**, offer universal free school meals to all children. **All other countries** covered in this report apart from **Denmark**, the **Netherlands**, **Bosnia-Herzegovina**, **Albania** and **Iceland** provide free school meals for children in need, but this does not

include all children in vulnerable situations.

Housing deprivation, inadequate and overcrowded living conditions, the risk of

eviction, and a threat to becoming homeless are everyday realities for many children facing poverty in **Italy, Spain, Romania** and **Northern Ireland**.

Save the Children believes that ending child poverty and social exclusion must be a priority for all EU Member States, European countries and European institutions.

The EU has recently agreed on a number of initiatives to tackle child poverty. These include the European Child Guarantee, the ESF+, which calls on EU Member States to allocate appropriate financial resources to address child poverty and implement the Child Guarantee, and finally, the EPSR Action Plan aiming to lift at least 5 million children out of poverty by 2030.

Member States must harness this unprecedented historic opportunity to eradicate child poverty and invest in the future generation. The next and most crucial step will be the effective implementation of the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation.

Governments now need to swiftly harness new EU anti-poverty instruments and ensure the successful implementation of the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation:

- ➔ take a comprehensive approach to addressing child poverty and social exclusion in the Child Guarantee national action plans and align the Child Guarantee action plans with national poverty reduction strategies;
- ➔ ensure that the Plans reflect the views and needs of children in vulnerable situations and do not stigmatise them and their families;
- ➔ set ambitious national targets for child poverty reduction, develop disaggregated indicators and collect appropriate data to monitor the implementation of the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation;
- ➔ promote and clearly outline the allocation of national and EU financial resources for addressing child poverty in the Child Guarantee national action plans;
- ➔ guarantee the sustainability of reforms, ensuring that the financial resources continue funding services in the long run.

Save the Children calls on national decision makers in non-EU Member States to use the Child Guarantee as a basis for their child poverty reduction measures.

For a full list of recommendations, see p. 210.

1 Analysis of 14 Save the Children country pages on child poverty and social exclusion



A boy riding a bicycle in the Skaramagas camp in Athens, Greece.

Photo: Anna Pantelia / Save the Children



Figure 1: A map of 14 European countries and territories featured in the report

THE SAMPLE

Country pages covering 14 countries and territories: EU Member States (9), non- EU Member States and territories (5).

Information included in the country pages has been gathered by Save the Children Members and Country Offices in 14 European countries and territories through desk research reviewing the situation of children in need and their access to key service areas covered by the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation. Based on programmatic responses in those countries, Save the Children offers recommendations to national decision makers on the measures to include in the Child Guarantee Action Plans as well as in child poverty reduction policies in non-EU Member States.

EU Member States

Northern countries	Denmark Finland Sweden
Western countries	Germany Netherlands
Southern countries	Italy Spain
Eastern countries	Lithuania Romania

Non-EU Member States

Western Balkan countries	Albania Bosnia-Herzegovina Kosovo
EEA countries	Iceland
Neighbouring territories	Northern Ireland

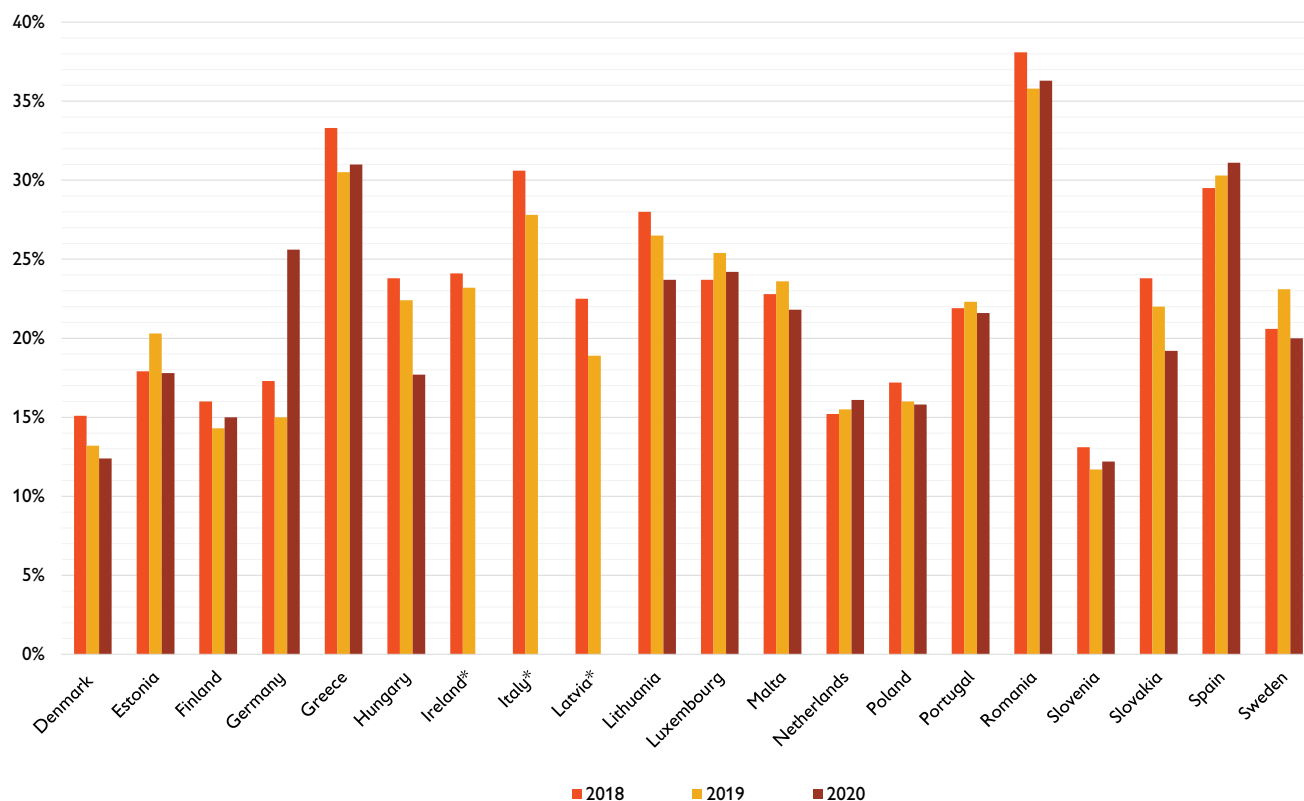
CHILD POVERTY IN EUROPE AND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

Comparison of child poverty across countries

According to most recent available Eurostat data for 2020, 5⁷ out of 8⁸ EU Member States covered in this report continue having unacceptable levels of child poverty, and they also show an increase in the number of children growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion. In the remaining countries featuring in this report, substantial increases in child poverty are foreseen due to the negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis on children in most vulnerable situations. Furthermore, this increase is expected not only for 2020 but also in the years to come as the impact of the crisis will have a delayed effect due to the loss of employment opportunities for many families.

More specifically, surveys and research carried out in 2020-2021 in several countries (Sweden, Germany, Spain, Lithuania, Romania, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina) by different national and international organisations (Bertelsmann

Foundation, Save the Children, World Bank, UNICEF, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner) estimate that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemics will reveal dire consequences. In **Sweden**, data shows a drastic increase in the number of families with children who have difficulties paying their bills. In **Germany**, the Bertelsmann Foundation predicted that family and child poverty as well as educational inequality would significantly increase and the Eurostat's estimated 2020 figures for Germany confirm this prediction. In **Bosnia-Herzegovina**, surveys show that a high proportion of families have faced significant reductions in income and are financially worse off than before the pandemic. In **Spain** and **Romania**, the rates of child poverty, which are already among the highest in the EU, will further increase. It is estimated that in Spain, over 2.7 million children (33.3%) will be at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the years to come. In **Kosovo**, predictions suggest an increase in poverty and as a consequence a smaller middle class, equivalent to an increase of 4-10 percentage points in the poverty rate.



* No data available for 2020
Source: Eurostat

Chart 3: Child poverty rates across EU27 in 2018-2020, %

CATEGORIES OF CHILDREN IN NEED

Main groups of children at risk

In the 14 countries surveyed, the following groups of children were identified as particularly vulnerable:

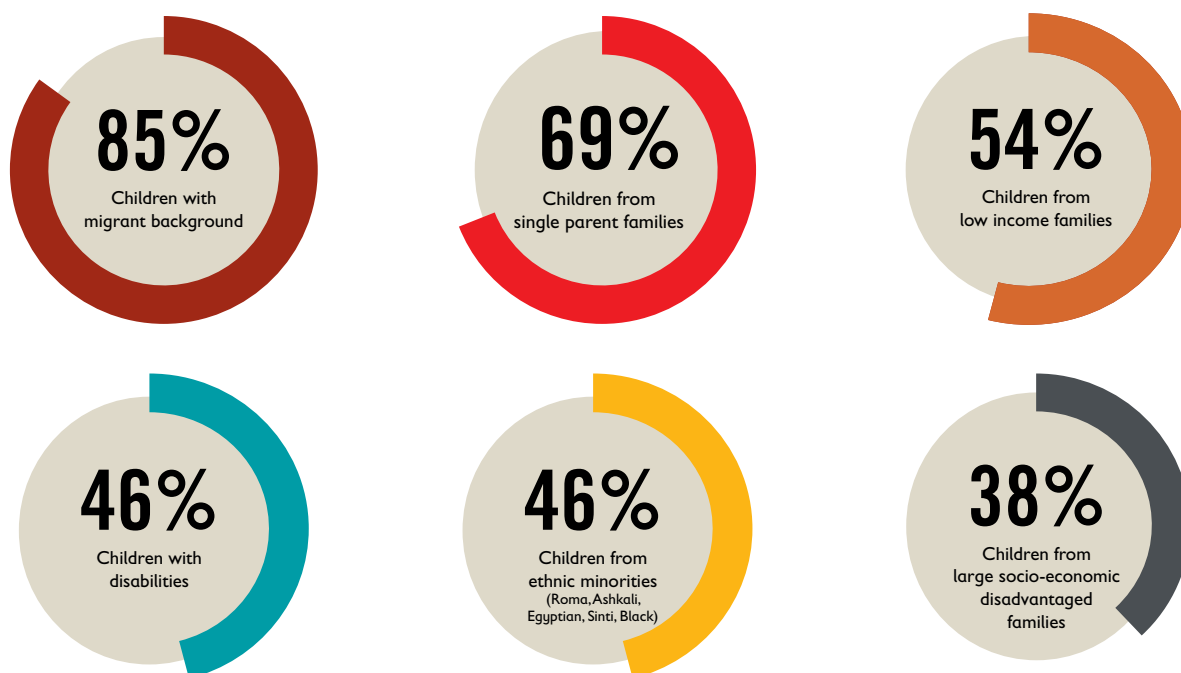


Figure 2: Categories of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion in different countries⁹

Children with migrant background

Children with migrant background, refugees, asylum-seekers, undocumented and unaccompanied children have been cited as most vulnerable by the majority of the countries. These children suffer from particularly difficult situations in many European countries like **Finland, Sweden, Germany, The Netherlands, Italy, and Spain**. Migrant children are significantly more vulnerable to fall into poverty than those with both parents born in the country and they have also been hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic

Children from single parent families

Children from single parent families are also considered amongst the most vulnerable.

They have a higher risk of living with a low economic standard and are usually over-represented in the national social security systems. In **Germany**, 45.2% of children in receipt of social benefits nationwide grow up in a single-parent family. In the **Netherlands**, 23.2% of children from single-parent families grow up in poverty. In **Sweden**, 58% of all families headed by a single parent with a foreign background are at risk of poverty. In **Lithuania**, single parent families are not sufficiently supported by the government and social benefits are very low – not covering the basic needs of the family. Single parent families are more affected when children are young as they need more care and attention, leaving the parent with fewer opportunities to join the labour market.

Children from low-income families

In more than half of the countries children from low-income families belong to the group at risk of poverty and social exclusion. This category also includes children from families receiving social security benefits, and low-income working families (in-work poverty). This is the case for example in **Finland, Sweden, Spain** and the **Netherlands** where about 40% of children at risk of poverty come from working families.

Children from large socio-economic disadvantaged families

In **Finland, Germany, Italy, Spain** and **Northern Ireland**, children from large socio-economic disadvantaged families are another group with high risk of poverty and social exclusion. Large families with children are at high risk of poverty due to a combination of factors which include having one or both parents out of employment (usually mothers of large families are out of the labour market) and/or from a minority ethnic group. In addition, the household needs are increased due to the number of children.

Children with disabilities

Children with disabilities are also among the most vulnerable groups of children in **Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Romania, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina**, and **Kosovo**. Within the EU, in **Lithuania** and **Romania**, children with disabilities are among the most vulnerable and socially excluded as they suffer from limited or no access to services and specialised care and support. The situation is even worse for those children with disabilities growing up in rural areas. In **Albania** and **Kosovo** children with disabilities are also among most in need, often growing up in poor families, since the support parents receive from the state is very low and does not correspond to the increased needs of these children. Children

with disabilities were also those who suffered the most during the COVID-19 pandemic as most services were suspended and their physical and emotional development seriously deteriorated. In addition, attendance in online classes provided by the public education system became impossible for them due to a lack of digital equipment, a lack of assistant teachers, a lack of time and expertise from parents to support their children.

Children from ethnic minorities

In almost half of the countries in the report children from ethnic minorities fall into the most vulnerable group. This group is particularly vulnerable in **Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina** and **Kosovo** where children continue to remain largely unaccounted for and equity for these communities remains a strong concern. Children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) communities face discrimination, lack access to essential services, higher education dropout, lower levels of literacy, and thus belong to one of the poorest categories. In addition, this group of children are over-represented in institutional care. In the EU, the communities at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion are Roma and Sinti families, mentioned by **Italy** and **Romania**. In **Northern Ireland**, children from black ethnic communities are far more vulnerable to poverty, with two in three growing up in poverty.

Other children in vulnerable situations

Finally, in **Romania, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina**, and **Kosovo**, children in vulnerable situations also include children in institutional care, children left behind by parents who are working abroad, underage mothers, children growing up in rural areas and working children (children contributing to family income).

CHILDREN'S EFFECTIVE ACCESS TO KEY SERVICES

Early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, and a healthy meal each school day



Free early childhood education and care (ECEC)¹⁰

It is already well known and has been widely demonstrated that ECEC services are essential to reducing inequalities and providing equal opportunities to every child starting from an early age. Experts consider ECEC to be a crucial area of focus for improving equal access and inclusion¹¹.

There is abundant evidence on ECEC's beneficial influence on children's development (both cognitive and in other developmental domains); on parents (employment, income, and support); and also, indirectly on children (through parenting behaviour); as well as on communities (inclusion and cohesion). The societal added value of ECEC lies in the combination of these effects on children, parents, and communities¹². However, this impact can only be fully realised when ECEC is of above average quality, meaning that it is accessible, has a qualified workforce, has a comprehensive curriculum, is well monitored, and has adequate governance¹³.

It is clear that to yield the potential impact of ECEC, services need to be accessible for children from poor households. This is often not the case, as in most EU Member States, studies reveal that children from low-income households are less often enrolled in childcare than their more affluent peers¹⁴.

Summary of the key findings

Despite the variety of the countries in the report, there are some common traits and key challenges that emerge from the analysis of the country pages and that can be summarised in the following points.

Children from disadvantaged, migrant, low-income and asylum-seeking households are less often enrolled in ECEC than their more affluent peers.

In Finland, although school aged children from asylum-seeking families usually start very quickly going to school, however, ECEC is not provided automatically, and the practices differ a lot depending on the municipality. There is no law that guarantees the right to ECEC to asylum seeking children. The same applies to undocumented migrant children. In Germany, the barriers to access ECEC continue to be higher for children with a migrant background and children from families with socioeconomic disadvantages than for other children. While in principle, refugee children also have a legal right to a place in a day-care centre from the age of 1¹⁵ this regulation is interpreted differently from region to region.¹⁶ Likewise, in Sweden, there is the concern that some of Sweden's most vulnerable children (i.e., children that move around between different forms of temporary housing, asylum-seekers, and undocumented children) are missing out, only attending ECEC occasionally or having their enrolment delayed. The same applies in the Netherlands where children with working parents from the lowest income groups appear to attend less often day-care than their counterparts from higher income groups. Children without a residence permit, particularly those living in asylum centres with their parents, do not always have access to pre-school education.

In Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, the enrolment rates of children from marginalised communities such as RAE communities are extremely low.

The majority of countries experience a shortage of places in public ECEC, which limits access of or for children to early education.

Germany, for example, faces a growing childcare gap due to the limited number of places available. In all German states, the need for childcare for under-3 years old exceeds the supply. Italy is characterised by a persistent lack of availability of ECEC places and low access. Only 13.2% of children have access to free publicly run childcare services (for children from 0 to 2 years old) and supplementary services¹⁷. In some regions, especially in southern areas, supplementary services are almost non-existent. In Lithuania about 36% of children in need are not educated in the pre-school education program due to a lack of spaces or due to the costs of it. In Romania in 2020 there were only 22.506 places in both private and public care settings and an enrolment rate of 3.4% (6% in urban areas and 0.2% in rural areas) and finally in Kosovo only 6.2% of children aged 0 – 5 attended preschool in 2019, also due to the lack of spaces.

The severe lack of places and related costs especially in Romania, Italy and Kosovo which also have high female unemployment rates, leads to a vicious circle of combined lack of supply and lack of demand since the unemployed women will take care of their children at home.

In addition to the shortage of places, the quality of the education provision also raises concerns.

In Finland there is a shortage of teachers and Sweden and Denmark report high ratios of children per teacher/worker. In Albania, there is a low quality of support material, teachers are not qualified and regardless of the newly established 1:15 carer-child ratio, the number of children in classes continues to remain high, particularly in bigger cities. In addition, Save the Children Romania also reports that ECEC settings can often be overcrowded.

The majority of countries offer public ECEC settings and in most of them access is provided through subsidised fees based on family income.

Extra costs are present in several countries and constitute an access barrier for the most vulnerable families. For example, in Romania, Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo costs like school supplies, transport and meals put a heavy burden on families and restrict access. ECEC settings are not always available in small cities or rural areas, however even where available, they are not chosen by parents due to the associated costs. In Lithuania, physical access to ECEC is also an issue since transport costs are often not covered leading parents to leave their children at home.

Finally, in Sweden, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Romania, and Iceland, there is a high variability, in terms of availability, subsidies and accessibility of ECEC services across municipalities, regions or Länder.

EU countries such as Finland, Germany, Italy, and Romania have put (or plan to put) in place several measures to be financed with national and EU funding to improve the quality and access to ECEC.

In 2020, in Romania the government offered a tax deduction to employers granting ECEC vouchers to their employees, but the initiative was suspended before being put into practice. A very recent and debated initiative offers financial incentives to mothers returning to work before children reach 6 months of age. In Lithuania, the updated provisions of the Law on Education (2020) established the duty to all municipalities to create conditions for all pre-school children from the age of 2 to attend ECEC as of 2025. In Western Balkans some reforms are in the pipeline. For example, Albania will improve the quality of the ECEC services by lowering the child-teacher ratio. However, Save the Children Albania clarifies that this change will depend on the human capital and the financial resources that will be provided to the regions. During 2020, the EU provided €4 million to Save the Children in Kosovo as part of a package designed to support vulnerable groups of children affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF COUNTRIES' KEY CHALLENGES IN ACCESS TO ECEC

Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The closure of ECEC settings due to the COVID-19 challenged children in need and their families. • Low-income families had limited or no access to services and material provision (diapers, school meals etc).
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inequality in ECEC (further amplified by the COVID-19 crisis). • Low enrolment rates for vulnerable children (only 1 in 5 children from low-income families in ECEC). • Fees depend on the family income (if the income is low enough then provision is free). • Differences across municipalities in the availability of places (even differences within different parts of the city). • Shortage of teachers. • Very difficult for asylum seeking and undocumented migrant children to access ECEC (and wide variations across municipalities).
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability ensured, however: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the quality of provision is not always of a high standard - the ratio of children per adult worker can be high - not free (but affordable; means-tested fees) • Low participation of the most vulnerable children. Asylum-seekers, undocumented children and children that move around between different forms of temporary housing are missing out, only attending occasionally or having their enrolment delayed. • Government measures to help families and address the needs of vulnerable children have not been satisfactory for those in more precarious situations, such as migrant children and the “ageing-out” migrant group (18+).
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing childcare gap due to the limited number of day-care places available and increasing demand for childcare places. • Wide differences across federal states in terms of coverage, financing, parental contribution levels, professionalisation of the staff, childcare ratios, and scope of childcare. • Access barriers for refugee children, children with a migrant background and children from families with socioeconomic disadvantages. • Lack of nationwide quality standards regarding childcare (despite the implementation of the “Good Day-care Facilities Act”¹⁸, aimed to improve the quality of day-care and relieve parents from the burden of fees).

Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low attendance rates for vulnerable children. • Difficult access for children without a residence permit, and those living in asylum centres. • Not free (but subsidised). • Differences between municipalities in fees and access criteria.
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortage of ECEC places. • Low access. • Wide regional differences in terms of access and availability of ECEC services (southern regions worst-off). • Not free (family contribution required and regional differences). • Vicious circle of insufficient supply (lack of places) and lack of demand (women take care of the children and stay out of the job market).
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower access of children from low socioeconomic status or migrant background¹⁹. • Large regional differences in participation 0-3 years²⁰. • Shortage of ECEC places. • Accessibility and affordability obstacles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admission criteria to public ECEC schools give priority to parents' labour status (permanent formal jobs) instead of household socioeconomic status. - Schedules are inflexible and do not adapt to non-standard work hours of vulnerable families. - Not free and subsidies are insufficient. • Quality shortcomings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - high maximum number of children per staff member²¹. - low staff salaries. - insufficient staff training. - limited evaluation.
Lithuania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortage of places. • Large differences across municipalities and the coverage of settings in each municipality. • Not free. • Transport costs are not always covered.
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortage of ECEC places. • Low enrolment rates (with wide differences between urban vs rural areas). • Limited opening hours. • Overcrowded settings. • Non-certified/supervised private settings that offer care services (especially for younger children). • High extra costs (meals, educational and hygiene supplies, extra-curricular activities) leading to inequalities. • Weak/unsuccessful government initiatives (some not implemented in practice, others controversial).

Albania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of settings (esp. in remote areas). • Lack of inclusive ECEC (children with disabilities excluded from the education system). • Lack of qualified teachers. • Overcrowded settings. • Poor/outdated infrastructure; lack of space inside classrooms; lack of toys, furniture, and playgrounds. • High extra costs (school supplies and transport). • No subsidised-fee schemes available for children in vulnerable situations or adjusted on family income.
Bosnia-Herzegovina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of settings (unavailable in smaller cities and rural areas). • Very low enrolment rates (even lower for Roma children, children from rural areas and children with disabilities). • Low attendance for children under 3. • Public ECEC not free (although subsidised, out of reach for vulnerable groups). • Fragmented implementation, lack of harmonised legislation and budgeting.
Kosovo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of settings (unavailable in rural areas and smaller cities). • Low level of attendance. • Very low enrolment rates for children from marginalised groups (children with disabilities and RAE children). • ECEC services provided through a fragmented sectoral approach. • Lack of information and awareness of parents. • High extra costs (e.g., transport).
Iceland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gap between parental leave and access to early education for children up to the age of 2. • Not free of charge (although the price is modest) and provision differs across municipalities. • Day care in private homes is expensive. • Long-distance travelling for children in rural areas.
Northern Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No provision of free, readily available, accessible, and good quality ECEC from birth. • Lack of a national strategy or legislation in place. • Patchwork of support services (although with some success in enabling access to ECEC for some children). • Further investments needed.

Free education



The 2013 EU Recommendation on Investing in Children highlights 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 that promotes their emotional, social, cognitive and physical development”²². The UNCRC in its article 28, states that children and young people have the right to education regardless of race, gender or disability and requires that primary school education must be free of charge, and that secondary education should be made progressively free of charge²³. The importance of the right to education is also recognised in Principle 1 of the EPSR: “Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market”²⁴. In addition, the importance of access to digital education as a priority is recognised by the European Commission’s digital education action plan (2021-2027), which outlines the EC vision for high-quality, inclusive, and accessible digital education in Europe²⁵.

Summary of the key findings

The following challenges have been identified in the countries covered by the report.

Although in most countries, compulsory public education is free (or highly subsidised), the hidden or extra costs associated with education (school supplies, uniforms, school trips/excursions, transport etc.) continue to act as an access barrier especially for children from low-income families.

All countries in the report, refer extra costs to be a problem as they disproportionately affect low-income families and mean that children miss out on educational opportunities.

In the Netherlands, primary, secondary, and special education have a voluntary financial

parental contribution for activities outside school hours (e.g., school trips, Christmas celebrations). Despite the “voluntary” character of the contribution, in practice the law allows schools to exclude children from extra activities if the voluntary contribution has not been paid by the parents. A new law has recently been passed to avoid the exclusion of children whose parents have not paid the contribution for extra activities. This will hopefully lead to more inclusive schools with students from all backgrounds.

Although the education system is free by law in Romania and Spain, in practice hidden extra costs impose an increasingly heavy burden on families. In Spain, extra fees are requested in many schools (30% of public schools and 90% of government-dependent private schools) and in Romania extra fees range from unofficial payments requested to cover the running costs of schools (stationary, cleaning materials, security etc), to uniforms, textbooks, transport and, most recently, digital equipment needed for on-line education. The situation is similar in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Northern Ireland making attendance to school for vulnerable children even more difficult.

Education should guarantee equal opportunities for all children, but the reality is different.

Although the level of inclusion varies across countries, full inclusive education has not been achieved in any country covered in this report, despite the efforts carried out. In many of the countries examined, most vulnerable children including asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, children from ethnic minorities and children with disabilities are often excluded from or have limited access to education.

In the EU, refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant children, even when they are fully entitled to education like in Sweden, still face disruptions to accessing education and receive limited support for their needs in school. Sweden and Finland report school segregation as an increasing challenge, which has been exacerbated by school choice policies since students with the highest degrees and from well-off families tend to opt out of immigrant-dominated schools. In

Germany, access to schools for refugee children depends on the respective federal state. Children from socially weaker families or children with a non-German language of origin have significantly lower chances of achieving a good school leaving certificate.

When it comes to children with disabilities, although Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Iceland try to become more inclusive, however, children are still enrolled in special schools and some mainstream schools still have separate (special) classes for children with disabilities and learning difficulties. In Germany, 7% of students receive special education and of these, only 39% receive inclusive education. The Netherlands is far behind Germany and the Northern countries since the current two-track system of mainstream and special education does not meet international standards of inclusive education.

In Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo, RAE children and children with disabilities are often excluded from education. Lack of institutional resources, skills, coordination, and response mechanisms to support the development of these children leave them deprived of their basic right to education, socialisation, and other opportunities available to their peers. In Albania, even when children attend mainstream education, most of them drop -out due to discriminatory behaviour and service denial. In Western Balkan countries there are also big gender gaps in education and enrolment rates between boys and girls. Girls' education and enrolment rates are lower than those of boys (especially in rural areas). In Kosovo, 70% of girls attend secondary education compared to 95% for boys. Patriarchal attitudes and cultural expectations that girls should stay at home and help in the house are responsible for these differences. Lack of school settings in rural areas impose a further obstacle for girls.

The COVID-19 crisis has reinforced a pre-existing digital divide, increasing the repercussions for vulnerable children from disadvantaged families who lack the resources and skills to adapt to this new situation.

Children's difficulties in accessing distance learning have been particularly felt in Denmark, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Lithuania, Romania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Albania. Lithuania reports a high number of children (over 40.000) without computer and/or internet connection at home due to poverty and 25.000 children dropping out of distance learning for various reasons (no computers, internet, poverty level in families, difficulties in learning). The Lithuanian government announced the provision of digital equipment as well as access to Wi-Fi connection to children in need. However, delays in provision left many children behind in the education process. The Romanian government launched two initiatives to support children at school. One to purchase materials (IT devices for students, hygiene items and protection equipment); the other, a remedial education programme for children with no access to online education. However, although highly needed they have both failed due to improper planning, administrative hurdles, limited skills of local stakeholders and insufficient resources. In Italy, the distance learning modality imposed by the COVID-19 crisis has widened inequality, not only in the availability of connections or tablets, but also in digital skills. In the Netherlands, the Dutch government earmarked money for digital equipment for children in need to facilitate distance learning during COVID-19. However, this provision was insufficient to meet the high demand and to contribute to fully ensuring children's equal access to the education process. Access to digital resources is very limited in the three Western Balkan countries in the report and during the COVID -19 pandemic, children have struggled with access to online learning. In Albania schools do not have access to internet and primary teachers are not qualified to teach digital competencies. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the government allocated some funds for the provision of IT equipment but overall, this type of support was largely secured through donations and different organisations.

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF COUNTRIES' KEY CHALLENGES IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Some) extra costs related to school assignments and participation in social activities. • Discrimination and lower school results among children living in poverty and their peers. • Children from poorer families were not supported to access online education.
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult access for asylum-seekers, migrant, undocumented children. • Children with disabilities often excluded from mainstream education. • Higher incidence of family background in learning outcomes.
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some hidden costs in some schools (e.g., voluntary trips outside the school curriculum). • Increasing inequality. • Lower quality of education. • Difficult access for asylum-seekers, migrant, undocumented children. • School segregation and increasing achievement gap. • Not full inclusion, some schools have separate classes for children with disabilities and learning difficulties. • Long-distance travelling for children in rural areas (although transport is free).
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide regional differences in education across states (affecting extra costs, IT & broadband coverage, access for refugee children, etc.). • Not inclusive education system achieved. • Limited impact of government measures.
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Voluntary” financial parental contribution leading to school segregation. • Insufficient funding for IT equipment for children from families in need. Digital divide and increasing inequality at school. • Lack of definition of inclusive education, concrete objectives, and planning. Lack of support at school for children with disabilities (cut by municipalities), • Declining educational performance, rising inequality of opportunity, shortage of teachers and excessive work pressure.

Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor provision of full-time education and adequate infrastructure. • Low quality of education. • Wide regional differences (affecting extra costs, digital inequalities) • Insufficient funding for education.
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public education investment below the EU average. • Extra fees are requested in many schools, so access is de facto not free. • Strong impact of social background on educational progress and attainment. • Very high rates of grade repetition, disengagement and early school leaving. • High socioeconomic school segregation in primary schools. • Insufficient funding for disadvantaged schools and for learning support / remedial education for vulnerable pupils.
Lithuania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High drop-out rates in distance learning (due to lack of computers, internet, poverty level in families, difficulties in learning). • Unsuccessful government measures to provide digital equipment and WI-FI to children in need. • Lack of specialised professionals to support children in need – especially with disabilities, learning difficulties.
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very high extra-costs. • Low quality of education. • Insufficient resources/funding. • Not inclusive education – children with disabilities are segregated. • Unsuccessful government measures.
Albania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low enrolment rates at all levels. • Highest rates of dropout in the Western Balkans. • Extra-costs (e.g., transport). • Lack of didactic materials in schools. • Lack of inclusion and segregation of Roma and Egyptian children and children with disabilities. • Lack of access to digital equipment (neither for students nor for schools). • Low and decreasing investments in education.
Kosovo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender gaps in access to education and educational attainment, particularly in rural areas. • Lack of inclusive education for children with disabilities and children from other vulnerable groups. • Big disruption in education due to the COVID-19, especially for the most vulnerable groups of children.

Bosnia-Herzegovina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra-costs to education. • Very low attendance rates for Roma children. • Difficult access to digital education. • No inclusive system. Children with disabilities often excluded from the educational process. • Lack of funding to implement the Strategy for Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Education (in Tuzla Canton) and lack of similar strategies in other parts of the country. • Insufficient government support during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Iceland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary education and equipment are not free. • Some hidden costs in primary education. • High dropout rates in secondary education for children with migrant background. • Insufficient support for children with disabilities. Some children with disabilities are still following special education. • Big disruptions during distance learning.
Northern Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High extra costs. • Not inclusive system. • Traveller or Roma children more likely to be excluded from school. • Insufficient support for children with disabilities. • Limited support and severe disruptions in accessing education for refugee and asylum-seeking children.



A girl in one of the drop-in centres in Brčko, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Photo: Imrana Kapetanović / Save the Children

Effective and free access to school-based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

Article 31 of the UNCRC²⁶ recognises the right of every child to leisure, play, recreational activities, and free and full participation in cultural and artistic life. These activities are interlinked and together form the conditions necessary to protect the unique and evolving nature of childhood. Play, sports and recreation are essential to children's health and wellbeing. They promote the development of creativity, imagination, team building, self-confidence, as well as physical, social, cognitive, and emotional strength and skills. Involvement in cultural and artistic life is important for children's sense of belonging to their family, community, and society and to their own sense of identity. Children's participation in cultural activities also provides opportunities to learn from other cultural and artistic traditions, contributing towards mutual understanding, inclusion, and appreciation of diversity²⁷.

Summary of the key findings

In all countries examined in the report, it is becoming clear that children's access to school-based or leisure, sports and cultural activities is unequal with those children coming from lower income households or disadvantaged backgrounds being largely excluded from these activities due to the related costs.

Although in Denmark there is a culture of children's participation in extracurricular activities (circa 80% of children are enrolled in these activities), this is not always the case for children coming from lower income households as their parents either do not have the financial means to let them participate in these activities or they are not aware of the support in place at municipal level. In Sweden, the schools usually offer these types of activities which they run through external organisations or clubs that either collaborate with the school or rent their buildings. In addition, most municipalities offer affordable cultural activities for children and there are many sports clubs across the country. However, high fees for some of the activities, the cost of the equipment, inaccessible enrolment systems and lack of knowledge of what is on,

are some of the key barriers to access. Another concern is that children whose parents receive social assistance are rarely offered financial support enabling them to participate in leisure activities. In Northern Ireland, the government's Children and Young People's Strategy commits to ensure that all children and young people can enjoy play and leisure, however, there is no funding, nor existing national programmes to ensure that this happens in practice.

In Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Lithuania, Romania, Albania and Kosovo the situation varies depending on the area where the child lives.

In Italy, a very high percentage of children and adolescents do not participate in leisure and cultural/recreational activities. This percentage is even higher in central and southern regions, thus showing substantial differences with respect to the geographic origin of the children and the socio-economic condition of the families. Similarly, in Romania it is very difficult for children living in rural areas to have access to leisure, sports, and cultural activities. Although access of children to public sport clubs, children clubs, public museums and many publicly funded cultural activities is free of charge, most of these settings are functioning in urban areas and the indirect costs associated with accessing them (transport) are not covered for children living outside the cities. The situation is quite similar in Lithuania since children living in rural areas and especially those from low-income families find it hard to access these activities. In the Netherlands, municipalities are responsible for child poverty policies by means of a 'child package' providing access to sports and leisure activities for children living in low-income families. Since there are big differences across municipalities, the support children receive depends on where they live. In addition to the supply, the income threshold that municipalities use to qualify for support also differs. Access and participation of children to extracurricular activities or sport and leisure beyond school varies a lot on the economic status of the family and whether they live in urban or rural settings in Albania and Kosovo. Such opportunities for the majority of children, especially those living in remote rural areas, or non-developed urban cities, are scarce or no existent at all.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

Access to school meals (free or subsidised) has many benefits for children like ensuring adequate child nutrition, reducing food insecurity for children, and reducing parents' economic strain. In addition, it also provides educational benefits (engagement, attendance, behaviour, and attainment) and health benefits as well as children's understanding of healthy eating habits (when meals provided are of good quality). Especially for children from families in need who do not receive food at home in sufficient amounts or of adequate quality, the provision of school meals is essential. Learning might be jeopardised if children do not get a balanced amount of healthy food during the school day. The provision of free meals at school ensures equity in school learning.

Summary of the key findings

There are substantial differences across countries in terms of provision of free meals at school.

Only two countries (Finland and Sweden) have a system of free universal provision of meals at school. All the other countries, declare to provide free meals to children but only to some groups, for some types of schools or in some regions. In Denmark, the Netherlands, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania and Iceland there is no provision of free school meals. Quality is also an issue since only Finland and Sweden report to provide good quality free meals to children. In countries like Romania and Kosovo, the programmes that provide free meals to children in need are questioned due to their low quality and nutritional value.

In some countries there are differences across regions/municipalities.

For example, in Germany, Italy, and Spain the individual cities/municipalities/regions are responsible for regulating school meals and in general, there is no national policy covering all regions/municipalities.

Type of school meal provision	Countries
Free universal provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finland • Sweden
Free provision for some groups of children or in some schools or in some regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Germany • Lithuania • Romania • Italy • Spain • Kosovo • Northern Ireland
No provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denmark • the Netherlands • Albania • Bosnia-Herzegovina • Iceland

Table 3: Types of provision of school meals across the sample countries

COVID-19 imposed restrictions in the access to free meals at schools.

In Finland free meals were delivered during the pandemic, but with municipality-specific differences in quality. In Sweden, many schools continued to offer free school meals for collection, but this was not the case everywhere. In Northern Ireland, the government provided direct payments to families with children eligible for Free School Meals to support families with the cost of meals while children were at home during lockdowns whereas in Germany, most lunches were suspended during the crisis, leaving around three million children and young people without support.

Healthcare



Free quality healthcare

The right to healthcare is a fundamental right, recognised by the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights²⁸, the UNCRC²⁹ and United Nations' Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)³⁰. The latter directly highlights (amongst others) children's rights to adequate healthcare; promotion of healthy development of infants and children; children and adolescents' right to the enjoyment of the highest standard of health; and access to facilities for the treatment of illness³¹. Although it does state that this should be free of charge, it obliges states to ensure that no child is deprived of their right of access to such healthcare services (for example, through the imposition of prohibitive charges)³².

Summary of the key findings

From the analysis of the country pages, two different "blocks" of countries clearly emerge. On the one hand, a first block, which comprises EU Member States, Iceland, and the territory of Northern Ireland. On the other hand, the block which comprises Western Balkan countries.

The analysis of the country pages in the first block reveals the following common challenges.

There is no timely healthcare provision. Long waiting lists affect many children.

Finland reports that services do not always reach children, young people and families on time. There are long waiting lists in Romania, Northern Ireland and Sweden, particularly for children needing specialist support, and in Iceland, for children with disabilities.

There is insufficient protection for refugee, migrant and asylum-seeking children.

In northern and western countries, except for Sweden, refugee and asylum-seeking children do not receive full healthcare assistance. In Germany asylum seeking children have only limited legal access to healthcare, which addresses only acute pain and illnesses – therefore making it challenging to treat, for example, chronic illnesses. In Finland, although

children who are in the asylum process or undocumented children have the right to the same health services as all other children, the interpretation of this obligation is often left to the municipalities. For example, in some areas the municipality or the Regional State Administrative Agency (AVI) has directed asylum seeking children and pregnant women to private health services instead of public health services. At the same time in some more remote areas there have not been sufficient private services available which has resulted in pregnant women and children not receiving all the needed healthcare services.

There is an unequal geographical coverage of healthcare services.

In Sweden, Germany, Spain and Romania, the provision and quality of healthcare vary depending on the area (urban vs rural) or region of residence. For instance, in Spain, there are wide regional differences in terms of coverage, especially as regards the inclusion of specific services under the universal portfolio (e.g., dental care) or the share of out-of-pocket payments in some services. There is also an important urban-rural divide, especially in terms of the availability of services. In Romania primary healthcare (family doctors' network) is extremely unbalanced between urban and rural areas.

Provision of mental health support is a key challenge in all countries.

Mental health services are highly needed but the supply is not satisfactory. In Denmark, Finland and Spain mental health services are needed and demanded by children and adolescents especially due to COVID-19 but the services in place do not correspond to children's needs. In Romania, children can only rely upon the school counsellors, but with major limitations and in Lithuania the access to psychological and psychiatric health support is limited, especially in rural areas. In Northern Ireland, there are also longstanding challenges with children's access to mental health services, including a lack of adequate funding, provision, and availability of support for children around the country. In Sweden, Germany and in the Netherlands access to mental health care for asylum seeking children is very limited.

The COVID-19 crisis has worsened the wellbeing of children in all countries, exacerbating existing problems.

Many countries have registered an increase in the demand for support and an increase in stress and loneliness among children and young people. In the Netherlands, feelings of depression and loneliness, eating disorders and suicidal behaviour among children have increased. Likewise, in Finland, mental health issues and problems within the families have worsened. In Spain, children's exposure to violence within the household and to unhealthy habits has risen. In addition, the pandemic has also increased children's visual problems due to excess close vision and screen overuse, as a result of online education and lack of alternative leisure.

Whereas in the first block of countries and territories the health situation of the majority of children can be considered as generally good and access to healthcare is guaranteed – to a greater or lesser extent depending on the country as explained in the previous paragraphs – in the second block, made up of the Western Balkan countries covered in this report, deleterious health and living conditions, lack of infrastructure, inadequate governance and permanent lack of resources are the norm and most children grow up deprived from the most basic health rights.

Kosovo has one of the highest infant mortality rates in Europe and similarly, the most recent evidence available (2018) in Albania shows an increase in infant and under-5 mortality rates. In all three Western Balkan countries most

vulnerable children like RAE children, children from families engaged in seasonal migration, children contributing to the family income, early married girls (under 15 years), and children with disabilities have often no or limited access to health services and therefore higher prevalence of diseases and unhealthy lifestyle. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo show very low immunisation rates with Bosnia – Herzegovina being one of the few countries in Europe at high risk of a polio outbreak due to low coverage rates. Finally, due to resource limitations of certain public medical units, patients have to seek out-of-country services, which have higher costs and limit some groups of children to meet their life-threatening, emergent health needs.

Governments have taken action to improve provision and access to healthcare services.

This is achieved mainly through: (i) Legal reforms to reduce health inequalities and improve provision; (ii) Use of EU funding. For example, in Spain REACT-EU funding has been directed towards investments in health services and health supplies. In Romania, unspent EU funds, as well as ESF+ and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funding, will support investments in the country's healthcare system. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) has been used to support government efforts in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and the refugee/migrant crisis. Kosovo has also received significant funding from the EU to help with the recovery process from COVID-19 and for vaccines rollout.



Save the Children works in one of the neighborhoods in Valencia, Spain.
Photo: Pablo Martí - Diodo Media / Save the Children

TABLE 4: SUMMARY OF THE COUNTRIES' KEY CHALLENGES IN HEALTHCARE PROVISION

Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor availability of mental health care services for children and young people. • Child protection services poorly organised and under-resourced in relation to demand.
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child protection services under-resourced in relation to demand. • Special challenges with the healthcare of immigrant, refugee, and undocumented migrant children. • Poor availability of mental health care services for children and young people. • Access to some services important for the wellbeing of the family (e.g., couples counselling) not systematic nor equal across the country. • Effects of COVID-19: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduced child/family health and social services. - Reduced help and support provided by school health care services, including school social work and mental health services. - Poor access to psychiatric services for children and adolescents.
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult access to some services/specialist support (e.g., mental health) due to a shortage in provision and long waiting lists. • Healthcare quality and provision vary depending on the area/region of residence. • Difficult access for people living in rural areas.
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited access to healthcare for asylum seeking and refugee children. • No free access to all health services. • Additional costs for some services and treatments (e.g., orthodontics, dental).
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited coverage of health insurance due to its cost. Increase in mental health problems among children due to COVID-19. • Difficult access to services/specialist support due to a shortage in provision and long waiting lists. • Insufficient mental health care for asylum-seeking children.
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor families face difficulties in accessing preventative healthcare due to high costs. • Poor (and better-off families) face difficulties in purchasing medicines. • Poor families spend significantly less money on dental healthcare than better-off families.

Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide regional differences in the provision of health services. • Urban-rural divide in terms of availability of services. • Effects of COVID-19: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased inequality created by the digital gaps in accessing the new forms of health service provision (by phone or remotely). - Lack of children’s mental health support. - Increased visual problems in children (due to excess close vision and screen overuse). - Increased exposure of children to violence within household and to unhealthy habits (smoking).
Lithuania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of mental health professionals and support across the country. • Lack of services in rural areas. • Limited healthcare, specialised care³³ and dental care support for children with disabilities.
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long waiting lists. • Lack of specialists, equipment and facilities in certain areas (paediatric oncology, rare diseases). • Lack of specialised facilities in rural areas. • Unbalanced primary health care (family doctors’ network) between urban and rural areas. • Lack of capacity of the school health network (and difficulties to find qualified staff). • Lack/inadequate mental health support. • COVID-19 has worsened the existing situation specially for children in vulnerable situation.
Albania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate governance, sustainable financing, and provision of quality services. • Unhealthy behavioural practices and deleterious lifestyle patterns. Higher prevalence of diseases among vulnerable children. • High rates of infant and maternal mortality rates (even higher for Roma children). • Insufficient and decreasing budget for health and social protection education.
Kosovo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest infant mortality rates in Europe and lowest immunisation coverage (even worse for minority communities Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children). • Mental health and child protection not prioritised as public health services. • Low sanitation and wash practices in public system settings (i.e., schools, hospitals). • Lack of specialised services in certain public medical units.

<p>Bosnia-Herzegovina</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very low immunisation rates and high under-five mortality rates (even worse for Roma children). • Limited access to health services for poor families, adolescent girls, and ethnic minorities and also in rural areas. • Absence of a defined basic package of health rights. Lack of up-to-date data, documentation, and information about health insurance rights (e.g., for Roma), leading to low uptake. • Fragmented service delivery. • Severe health impacts of the COVID-19 on children.
<p>Iceland</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No free access to all health services (e.g., mental health services, orthodontics excluded). • Difficult access to some services/specialist support (e.g., mental health) due to a shortage in provision and long waiting lists. • Insufficient support for children with disabilities (long waiting lists and insufficient service integration). • Lack of (or insufficient) state support to parents and children affected by specific issues (eg mental health issues) (NGOs replace the state, offering financial and psychological support).
<p>Northern Ireland</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long waiting times, particularly for specialist support. • Limited access to services in some parts of the region. • Lack of awareness about services, leading to inappropriate or rejected referrals. • Inadequacy of services for children with disabilities or with special educational needs. • Lack of adequate funding, provision, and availability of mental health services and support for children. • Lack of funding or support for children facing inter-generational trauma as a result of the conflict in Northern Ireland. • Healthcare access severely curtailed during the first lockdown of the COVID-19.



Educational Archipelago within Fuoriclasse project in action in Milan, Italy.
 Photo: Gianfranco Ferraro / Save the Children

Healthy nutrition



Sufficient and healthy nutrition

According to the UNCRC, good nutrition should be regarded as a fundamental human right and States parties shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right³⁴. Nutrition is a critical part of child health and development. Better nutrition is related to the improved infant, child and maternal health, stronger immune systems, safer pregnancy and childbirth, lower risk of non-communicable diseases (such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease), and longevity³⁵. Healthy eating in childhood and adolescence is important for proper growth and development and to prevent various health conditions³⁶. Healthy children learn better. People with adequate nutrition are more productive and can create opportunities to gradually break the cycles of poverty and hunger. Malnutrition, in every form, presents significant threats to human health. Today the world faces a double burden of malnutrition that includes both undernutrition and overweight, especially in low- and middle-income countries³⁷.

Summary of the key findings

The analysis of the country pages reveals the following.

In most countries, vulnerable families have insufficient financial resources to ensure a healthy diet for themselves and for their children.

In Finland and Sweden an increasing number of families with children are turning to the church and other charitable organisations for assistance with food parcels as the state response is not enough or does not cover all groups of people in need. Most of these families are one-parent households, asylum-seeking and undocumented families and some of these groups are not eligible for the means-tested social assistance scheme provided through social services. In Spain, the family diet is often dependent on the food they receive from food

banks and other organisations and in Northern Ireland, families struggle to secure sufficient and healthy meals due to lack of income and reductions in support from the social security system.

The COVID-19 pandemic has left many children without their school meal due to the lockdowns and has put further pressure on vulnerable families' budgets. For instance, in Italy, poor families faced severe difficulties in purchasing food during the COVID-19 and the government distributed spending vouchers and an emergency income (Reddito di Emergenza) to support vulnerable families.

In all EU countries, inadequate health-related behaviours as well as unhealthy eating habits are present in children.

Children and adolescents have bad eating habits, consume unhealthy snacks, few fresh vegetables and fruits and drink sugar-sweetened drinks. They are all witnessing an increasingly worrying number of obese and overweight³⁸ children. In Spain, the pandemic has increased unhealthy eating habits which, coupled with the decrease in physical activity, will likely worsen data on child obesity, which is already high in Spain³⁹. In Italy, 20.4% of children are overweight and 9.4% are obese. A recent study revealed that 1 out of 2 children does not eat an adequate breakfast, 1 in 4 drinks sugary drinks daily and consumes fruit and vegetables less than once a day. Dutch children suffer from obesity and overweight (11% of children aged 4-18 are overweight and 2.1% obese). Despite the recommendations of the WHO, scientists, doctors and consumer organisations, the VAT on fruit and vegetables has been increased from 6% to 9%.

The availability of canteens or school catering services is limited or non-existent.

In Italy, there is limited availability of canteens and school catering services in schools. In primary school, only 56% of children have access to a school canteen. In Spain, although most primary schools have canteen facilities, only 11.4% of public secondary schools have

a canteen versus 90% of private secondary schools. The lack of canteen facilities makes it difficult for 12–18-year-old children to access school meals and healthy nutrition. Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina also report a lack of canteens in schools

The quality of food provided in school meals (not the free ones) or in school canteens varies across countries.

In Germany there are no common standards on healthy meals. Most schools in the Netherlands do not offer nutritious food products and children often eat snacks and sweets as an easy solution during the school day. In Romania, most parents are not aware of the importance of healthy food. Although legislation limiting access to unhealthy food to be purchased inside or in the proximity of public schools has been in place for many years, the lack of awareness as well as the lack of control measures have led to a culture of unhealthy nutritional habits among school children, which has led in turn to an increasing percentage of overweight and obese children.

On the positive side, cooking classes are school subjects in Finland, Denmark and Iceland.

During school hours, children learn how to cook through various school subjects, and are also taught about the effects of food on health, the environment, economy and culture. In addition, the Finnish government is planning to further develop healthy, communal, and ecological school meals. In an effort to form healthy eating habits, the Ministry of Education in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture in Lithuania distribute fruits, vegetables and dairy products to younger children in schools free of charge. Sample menus and recipes are also distributed to schools from the Ministry of Health to ensure the provision of healthy meals and more and more children are informed about the benefits of healthy eating in schools.

Children in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo suffer from serious malnutrition problems.

In Kosovo, the nutrition status of children remains a public health concern, with 15% of RAE children under five years remain stunted⁴⁰ and 2.5% severely stunted. Bosnia-Herzegovina has a very low breastfeeding rate (19%). This early hindrance continues into childhood, with over 10% of children suffering from stunting (this rate doubles for Roma children). In Albania, nutrient-poor diets and unhealthy dietary practices remain key challenges. Schoolchildren in the country have many risk factors for Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), including poor nutritional status, unhealthy diets, poor eating habits and inadequate physical activity. An additional alarming problem in the country regards the environmental waste which contaminates water and agricultural products. This may be particularly concerning for children residing in Elbasan (steel factory) and/or in the major agricultural sites of the country (such as Fier).

Some European countries (Finland, the Netherlands, Italy, Romania), have used (or will use) European funds (ESF, ERDF, FEAD) to support food aid.

In Romania, under the Inclusion and Social Dignity Operational programme funded by ESF+ and ERDF, 1 million adults and children will benefit from vouchers for the purchase of food items or cooked meals. In Italy €190 million have been allocated to the FEAD Program to increase the distribution of food aid. Finland has received 26.5 million from FEAD, mainly directed to food aid. In the Netherlands, part of the Dutch ESF+ resources will be used as material aid / food aid to support the most deprived groups and children.

TABLE 5: SUMMARY OF COUNTRIES' KEY CHALLENGES IN ACCESS TO NUTRITION

Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unhealthy eating habits of children. • Undocumented children are not eligible for state benefits.
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient state help/assistance for vulnerable groups. • Growing number of vulnerable families with children (mostly one-parent households, asylum-seeking families) turning to the Swedish church and other charitable organisations for assistance with food parcels. • More restrictive eligibility criteria for social support, leaving increasing numbers of families without access to adequate nutrition.
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No nationwide provision of school meals (the provision of school meals depends on the type of school). • No legally mandatory regulations regarding nationwide quality standards for school meals have been established yet.
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most school canteens do not offer nutritious/healthy food products. • 11% of children aged 4-18 are overweight and 2.1% obese. • Continuous increase in the price of fruit and vegetables over the past ten years and recent increase of VAT on fruit and vegetables (from 6% to 9%).
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20.4% of children in Italy are overweight and 9.4% obese. • Low levels of vegetable and fruit consumption. • Families in need cannot afford eating healthy meals. • Lack of school canteens and school catering services.
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of school canteens in public secondary schools. • Diet of vulnerable families often dependent on the food received from food banks or other organisations. • Most children do not eat the recommended portions of fruit or vegetables. • 40.6% of schoolchildren are overweight. • COVID-19 pandemic has worsened unhealthy eating habits. • Limited scope of measures (monetary allowances or direct food distribution) to guarantee access to nutrition among students. • Wide regional differences in coverage of food distribution.

Lithuania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness of parents. • Low consumption of fruits and vegetables. • Children not eating regularly during the day. • Consumption of high-fat, sugar and fast food.
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness of parents about the importance of healthy food. • Lack of enforcement measures (and control) to limit the distribution of unhealthy food inside or nearby public schools. • Extended culture of unhealthy nutritional habits among school children. • Increasing percentage of overweight and obese children. • 14.2% of families cannot afford adequate meals (with chicken, fish, fruit and vegetables).
Albania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malnutrition of children, with co-existence of stunting, overweight and obesity, and iron-deficiency anaemia. • For children residing in some areas of the country, the environmental waste contaminating water and agriculture products is an issue of concern.
Kosovo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deficient nutrition status of children is a public health concern. • RAE children stunted. • No effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition in schools.
Bosnia-Herzegovina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children suffer from stunting (the rates double for Roma children). • Very low breastfeeding rate. • Increasing trend in overweight for children. • Low levels of knowledge about nutrition among children and parents. • Families with children reduced their food consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic. • Child benefits insufficient to cover children's needs and unevenly distributed across the country. • Lack of school canteens.
Iceland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No provision of school meals on holidays. • Many children suffer from obesity. Unhealthy diet and inactivity. • High prices for healthy foods. • More awareness raising and action needed.
Northern Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and families struggle to secure sufficient and healthy meals due to lack of income. • Increasing use of foodbanks. • Reduced support from the social security system.

Adequate housing

Effective access to adequate housing



Decent housing is a necessary condition for families and children to escape poverty and improve their lives and it is also recognised as a fundamental right in the UNCRC⁴¹. However, for many families, this fundamental right does not exist. In a recent report carried out by Eurocities⁴², one in three cities reported that the lack of affordable housing is one of the key obstacles to fighting child poverty. In most European countries, families with children are not protected from eviction, even if there is no alternative solution to shelter them. To prevent homelessness, some families have to accept dwellings that do not meet legal standards or that are inadequate in size. The lack of adequate housing can have a major impact on children's development, physical and mental health, and well-being. Moreover, many families pay an excessive share of their income for housing, leaving few resources for other basic needs like healthcare or food. Gentrification and the concentration of disadvantaged groups in certain areas or neighbourhoods is also an important issue related to housing since these areas are often characterised by a total lack of services (or inadequate service availability) (e.g., free/affordable ECEC services)⁴³.

Summary of the key findings

The analysis of the country pages reveals the following.

Apart from the positive examples of Finland and Lithuania, there is a growing number of homeless people in all countries covered in the report.

For example, Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands share a worrying situation regarding the increase in homelessness with an increasingly large number of homeless children.

All countries report that there is an insufficient supply of social housing.

In Sweden, the situation is particularly difficult in the country's major cities, due to systemic failures to provide access to affordable housing for low-income families. Furthermore, in recent years, several municipalities have become more restrictive in the needs assessments to qualify for the social assistance scheme and non-eligible are left alone without any support. In Germany, despite the social housing assistance available to vulnerable groups, the stock of social housing units is falling, failing to support those in need. Last year, more apartments for people on low incomes were eliminated than new ones were built. In Denmark, although the public home sector is large (1 in 5 homes are public homes) families living in poverty are not supported enough and they live in inadequate living conditions, most of the times in segregated and socially disadvantaged areas. Before summer 2020, there were 331.000 housing shortages (both social and middle rent houses) across the Netherlands, and that shortage will widen, reaching 419.000 by 2025.

Rent subsidies are not sufficient to cover actual housing costs and families cannot afford the high prices of the housing market.

In Germany and Denmark, poor families' incomes are not sufficient to pay the market rent. Similarly, in Lithuania, the housing prices in urban areas do not match with the salaries of Lithuanians, thus many families live in inadequate conditions or sharing the house with relatives. The current system in Northern Ireland includes housing benefits to support families but, over the last decade, the level of support has not kept up with rising housing costs, and families still struggle to afford housing.

An increased risk of eviction is present in Italy, Spain, Romania, and Northern Ireland.

In Italy, for example, every year around 35.000 families are evicted from their homes, affecting circa 50.000 children. There are 1.7 million families at risk of falling into the vortex of

eviction because the rent accounts for over 40-50% of family income. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, evictions were temporarily suspended in the three countries and in Northern Ireland. However, as the eviction ban comes to an end, and financial support is withdrawn, there is a real risk that, without further support, an increasing number of children and families will become homeless.

For refugees, migrants, asylum-seekers and ethnic minorities the situation is even more difficult.

In Finland there is no specific support for undocumented families. In Sweden, new legislation was passed in 2016 forcing all municipalities to provide housing for refugees with settlement status. However, some municipalities have only offered temporary contracts and thousands of families in Sweden are at risk of homelessness as their tenancies are terminated. Families with refugee and migrant backgrounds, especially those with a single mother, are disproportionately affected by the obligation of moving to parts of the country where housing is available

but with limited opportunities to work and access to services. In Northern Ireland like in Finland and Sweden, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and migrant children without permanent leave to remain have no entitlement to the majority of benefits, including housing benefit.

In Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo housing conditions for ethnic minorities are not adequate and many live in informal settlements without access to water and electricity. The earthquake that struck Albania in 2019 left 14.000 people (2% of the population) homeless. The recent armed conflict in Kosovo has caused forced displacements and challenged the prospects of return for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. The country lacks a national strategy to address homelessness and although an institutional framework to provide housing to the most vulnerable is in place, its implementation is challenged, failing to account for the needs of people living in in-work poverty, persons with disabilities, women and children facing domestic violence.



Siblings from one of the at-risk families in Spain, beneficiary of Save the Children.

Photo: Pablo Blázquez / Save the Children

TABLE 6: SUMMARY OF COUNTRIES' KEY CHALLENGES IN ACCESS TO HOUSING

Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High renting price not corresponding to poor families' incomes. • Poor families living in overcrowded settings most of the times in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. • Although 1 in 5 houses in Denmark are public, the support to poor families is limited.
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The successful "Housing First" model, social assistance and housing allowance is only available to "regular"/legal citizens. • Lack of specific government support for asylum seeking families and undocumented migrants (some of them families with children).
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of children living in inadequate housing conditions growing and underestimated. • Serious lack of adequate housing. • Systemic failures to provide access to affordable housing for low-income families in Sweden's major cities. • Municipalities more restrictive in their needs-assessments and support to families. Not eligible families left alone without any support. • Mandatory moves to parts of the country with available housing but limited work opportunities and access to services. • Lack of national legislation that supports priority access to public housing for families with children with disabilities.
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortage of social housing. • Renting prices not corresponding to poor families' incomes.
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe housing shortages (both social and "middle rent" houses) with a deficiency of 331.000 houses in 2020, reaching 419.000 by 2025. • Increasing number of homeless people (in the last decade, the number of homeless people has doubled to circa 40.000). • Homelessness only for economic reasons is not contemplated, thus affected families are not eligible for shelter. • Lack of policy measures to prevent homelessness.
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eviction is a major issue. • Shortage and inadequacy of social housing.
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profound and persistent mismatch between housing needs and housing policies. • Very limited stock of social housing. • Insufficient subsidies and benefits received by families. • Limited scope of the measures introduced to help families in vulnerable situations.

Lithuania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortage of social housing and limited social renting. • Rents are too high in urban areas and do not correspond to the needs of vulnerable families.
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most children live in inadequate and overcrowded households. • Extremely reduced capacity of the authorities to ensure social houses (very limited stock).
Albania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devastating consequences of the 2019 and 2020 earthquakes that left thousands of people homeless and caused significant damages to public and private properties. • Critical living conditions of the Roma population (insufficient space, lack of access to water and electricity). In addition, they rarely benefit from social housing.
Kosovo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recent armed conflict in country has adversely affected housing issues. • No national mechanism in place for systematic data collection and policy making. • The housing conditions of the RAE community remain particularly inadequate. • Increased domestic and gender-based violence in households during COVID-19, increasing vulnerabilities of children and women to homelessness.
Bosnia-Herzegovina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate housing conditions for the Roma population.
Iceland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No data on homeless children. • Inadequate and insufficient social housing assistance. • Renting prices are very high. • Children living in inadequate housing conditions.
Northern Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing number of homeless children and children in temporary accommodation. • Shortage of public housing. • Yearly increases in the cost of private accommodation. • Insufficient housing benefits. • Challenges with the design of the system (long waiting periods to receive the financial support can create problems to families; some children (e.g., unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and migrant children without permanent leave to remain) have no entitlement to housing benefits). • Most vulnerable children (unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, migrant children) have no automatic entitlement to social (incl. housing) benefits.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCEDURES

Child participation in decision making



Summary of the key findings

Article 12 of the UNCRC⁴⁴ recognises that children have a right to be heard. Although the term participation does not appear in the Convention, it is stated that every child has the right to express their views and that the child’s views should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. The term child participation is now very widely used, as a shorthand to describe children’s right to involvement in decisions and actions that affect them and to have those views taken into account⁴⁵.

Finland, Albania, Kosovo, Iceland and Northern Ireland have set up specific structures and/or processes for the participation of children and young people in their countries’ policies. For example, Finland has a well-structured/organised mechanism to ensure the participation of children and young people (and/or their families) in decision making. There are several structures in place like Youth councils, children’s parliament, hearings with families, and the Ombudsman for Children. Moreover, there are guidelines for municipal decision-makers on child impact assessment. However, child participation as part of child impact assessment is not well established in most of the municipalities. In Albania and Kosovo, children are provided with several consultation platforms supported by international bodies (UN) and national CSOs – including Save the Children. These groups of children participate in various local and international fora related to decision-making on child rights. The State Agency for Protection of Child Rights as well as the Ombudsman in Albania have mechanisms and approved guidelines in place to consult children and foster their participation. In Northern Ireland, there are ongoing consultations with different groups

of children as part of the development of government strategies to tackle different issues, such as poverty or mental health challenges.

In the Netherlands, policies aimed at reducing child poverty and social exclusion often fail to meet the needs of children and young people living in poverty, since they are infrequently involved in designing or implementing these policies. In Romania, there is an “institutionalised” mechanism of consultation with children/pupils and parents only in the field of education. There is no similar mechanism when it comes to health, social welfare, or other relevant areas. In Lithuania, a Child Council has just been established, however consultation with children, parents and children’s representatives about poverty reducing decisions is not common so far. In Germany despite the growing efforts to implement youth participation at all regional and structural levels, only around 5% of the 11.000 municipalities in Germany have permanent child and youth committees.

Italy, Spain, and Bosnia-Herzegovina report a complete lack of consultation with children or families and their participation in public policies processes.

Consultation with children usually takes place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finland • Northern Ireland • Albania • Iceland • Kosovo
Consultation with children takes place rarely or on specific topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Netherlands • Germany • Lithuania • Romania
Consultation with children does not take place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spain • Italy • Bosnia-Herzegovina

Table 7: Children’s participation in decision making procedures

Civil society consultation on the allocation of EU funds

Summary of the key findings

According to the ESF+ Regulation, efficient and effective implementation of actions supported by the Fund depends on good governance and partnership with social partners and civil society organisations. It, therefore, calls on the EU Member States to allocate appropriate ESF+ resources to ensure the organisations' meaningful participation in the delivery of employment, education and social inclusion policies supported by the ESF+ and when a country specific recommendation is in place, it calls on the Member States to allocate at least 0,25 % of their ESF+ resources for the capacity building of civil society⁴⁶. Similarly, Article 18 of the RRF Regulation⁴⁷, states that civil society should participate in the preparation and implementation of the NRRPs and that a summary of the consultation process should be reflected in the NRRP.

Ten countries report consultations of governments with CSOs in relation to the allocation of EU funds: Sweden (ESF+), Germany (ESF+), the Netherlands (ESF+), Italy (ERDF/ESF+), Spain (ESF+), Lithuania (ESF, NRRP) Romania (ERDF/ESF+, NRRP), Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Albania (in the programming of IPA funds).

Most of the consultations that have taken place with the civil society refer to consultations on the ESF+ and only Romania and Lithuania report to have had a consultation on their NRRP, although in the case of Romania the transparency of the process has diminished during the last months and little is known about the negotiations and the amendments decided during the dialogue with the European Commission. In Spain, there has been no formal process of stakeholder participation in the definition of the NRRP priority axis, nor in the development of investments and reforms, which have been the responsibility of the appointed Ministries. Only Expressions of Interest have been launched without coordination and lack

of transparency. In Italy, although no public consultations have been organised, Save the Children participated in the public debate through a manifesto with five key actions to be taken under the NGEU and the NRRP.

In the countries where consultations on ESF/+ or IPA take place, it is not clear to what extent CSO's input/contribution is taken into account. The answers vary. For example, in Spain the ESF Managing Authority launched a public consultation on the definition of the political objectives of ESF and Save the Children Spain's views were largely taken into account, leading to revised political objectives which now include an increased focus on child-focused measures. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the civil society is regularly consulted in the programming of IPA funds and Save the Children's views were considered. In Kosovo, civil society is regularly consulted on the EU-related reforms and IPA planning processes and Save the Children in Kosovo contributes as a strong partner in these processes.

In Romania, while, for the ESF+ programming of the 2021-2027 EU funding period, well-structured, transparent, participative, and constructive consultations were organised this was not the case for the allocation of the unspent EU funds for which no consultation was organised, and the priorities were solely decided by the government.

On many occasions, CSOs considerations are disregarded and their requests completely unattended. In Sweden, Save the Children's feedback to ESF+ tried to balance the employment and labour market aspects (which seem to largely override other concerns and perspectives) with the more social aspects of addressing child poverty and social exclusion. However, its input was not considered in the first round of consultations. It remains to be seen whether in the revision of the plan child poverty issues will be truly included and taken into account. In Italy, the general opinion is that the involvement of civil society in the design of EU funding programmes is weak.

CHILD POVERTY REDUCTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE NATIONAL RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLANS (NRRPS)

Summary of the key findings

Although Northern European countries (Denmark, Sweden and Finland) have not included child poverty and exclusion as a priority in their NRRPs, this is not the case for southern and eastern European countries (Italy, Spain and Lithuania). The Italian Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) aims to increase the offer of places in early childcare⁴⁸, finance the extension of full school time to keep them open beyond school hours, renovate school buildings and canteens, promote Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), and digital skills, reduce territorial gaps in the level of basic skills and ensure connectivity for all schools, as well as connections and digital tools for students. Finally the RRP foresees the setup of sports facilities and equipped parks to promote social inclusion, especially in the most marginalised areas. The Lithuanian RRP follows the planned investments of the government which also include the strengthening of the education system to be more inclusive and accessible. In addition, it foresees the expansion and the strengthening of the healthcare and mental care systems.

In Spain, the fight against child poverty and exclusion was mentioned as one of the objectives of Spain's RRP upon its announcement in October 2020. However, there is no specific investment line in the Plan that specifically addresses this

Have child poverty reduction and social inclusion measures been reflected in your country's NRRP?

	No	Limited	Reasonably
Denmark	X		
Finland	X		
Sweden	X		
Germany		X	
Netherlands ⁴⁹	N/A	N/A	N/A
Italy			X
Spain		X	
Lithuania			X
Romania			X

Table 8: NRRP and children

Did you participate in the development of your country's NRRP⁵⁰?

	No	Limited	Reasonably
Denmark	X		
Finland	X		
Sweden	X		
Germany	X		
Netherlands	N/A	N/A	N/A
Italy			X
Spain		X	
Lithuania		X	
Romania			X

Table 9: NRRP and civil society engagement

challenge. The main child-related priorities covered by the draft plan are related to the modernisation of the child protection system and foster care, with a special focus on ageing out children under the protection system. In addition, the Plan also foresees the creation of additional ECEC places with a special focus on children in need and the digitalisation of the education system.

Finally, the Romanian RRP and the German draft of the RRP includes reforms aimed at strengthening social participation and educational support for vulnerable groups without however child poverty reduction being explicitly mentioned. The Romanian RRP includes reforms aimed at improving the social welfare system for both children and adults, improving housing quality for vulnerable categories and groups (including improving the housing for marginalised young families by prioritising families with children), prevention of separation of children from their families, improving the healthcare in rural areas, modernising vulnerable public schools, improving early childhood education and care school, setting up complementary services for disadvantaged groups, prevention and reduction of early school leaving. Within the investment programme "Childcare financing 2020–2021", the federal government of Germany provides grants to Länder and local authorities for investment in day care facilities and day care for children from birth to school entry. Moreover, a €300 benefit for children is mentioned. Under the so-called "DigitalPakt Schule" Germany aims to ensure broad participation in distance learning. Lastly, the RRP foresees a program to support students with pandemic learning delays.

THE USE OF EU AND NATIONAL FUNDS TO HELP CHILDREN IN NEED

Summary of the key findings

National and EU funds can be used by Member States to finance actions/measures to address the main problems/challenges identified in each service area.

EU countries can use various EU funds: ESF+, ERDF, REACT-EU – among others – (alone or in combination) to tackle child poverty on various fronts, including those outlined in the Child Guarantee (i.e., ECEC, education, health, nutrition, housing, as well as leisure, sports and culture).

ESF+

The ESF+ calls on all EU Member States to allocate appropriate resources to tackle child poverty and implement the Child Guarantee. Romania, Lithuania, Italy, and Spain (covered in this report) will have to allocate at least 5% of their ESF+ resources for this cause and countries have already started introducing needed reforms in their draft Programmes.

However, some countries are not taking full advantage or are missing the opportunities offered by this fund.

In the Netherlands, the ESF+ will mainly support people in vulnerable situations to access the labour market. Child poverty reduction will not be among the priorities included under the ESF+ programming, which represents an important missed opportunity to assist the thousands of children growing up in poverty in the Netherlands.

Likewise, Sweden and Finland should broaden their current narrow perspective where employment is seen as (almost) the only path to combat child poverty, to a more holistic perspective where social aspects are also taken into account. National budgets and EU funds, including ESF+ (but also REACT-EU and the RRF) could be allocated to this end.

Germany should include and prioritise children as the main target group in the ESF+ since the 2014-

2020 EU funding period did not target them. In Spain, REACT-EU funding channelled via ESF and ERDF has largely been directed towards investments in health services and health supplies.

ERDF

Other funds like the ERDF will also be used by some Member States. For example, Romania will use the ERDF to support the development of infrastructure – such as improving the school infrastructure and creating new ECEC facilities – to enable all children to have access to affordable and high-quality education from the youngest ages. Save the Children Netherlands calls on the national authorities to use the ERDF for the development of social housing for families in need, ensuring that no family – especially with children – lives homeless or in shelters. ERDF could also be used to ensure that children in need have access to digital equipment.

Western Balkans

In Western Balkan countries, EU funds and national budgets need to be used in a systematic and prolonged manner to provide children with the necessary services such as ECEC; inclusive, quality and accessible education, leisure and sports; psychosocial support and counselling, as well as proper training to help them take decisions when they become older. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, EU funds (largely reprogrammed through IPA II) have been used to support government efforts in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and the refugee/migrant crisis. Some of the investments were directed towards the support of vulnerable groups (humanitarian aid, IT equipment for online education), as well as for the overall response to the migrant crisis (child protection and education in emergency interventions). The country suggests IPA III to finance ongoing and pending reforms, in particular, to support the implementation of strategies and policies focusing on children's rights. In this process, civil society should play an active consultative and implementing role.

A boy from one of the at-risk families in Madrid, Spain, beneficiary of Save the Children.
Photo: Pablo Blázquez / Save the Children



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TOWARDS NATIONAL DECISION MAKERS

The Child Guarantee Council Recommendation represents an important opportunity to ensure a coordinated effort of EU Member States to reduce child poverty and social exclusion. At the same time, the Child Guarantee can be used as a policy example also for other European countries to tackle child poverty and social exclusion. The EU Member States are expected to submit their Child Guarantee Action Plans by March 2022.



A family at risk of poverty and social exclusion from Spain, beneficiary of Save the Children.

Photo: Pablo Blázquez / Save the Children

In this report, Save the Children offices in 9 EU Member States have provided recommendations on the targeted groups of children as well as the policy priorities that should be included in the Child Guarantee Action Plans. However, as the report follows the areas covered by the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation for all countries covered, countries outside the EU have also provided recommendations for the improvement of the areas covered by the Child Guarantee.

Although each country has different challenges to tackle, as shown in the analysis above, there are still many similarities across European countries.

Below is a summary of the recommendations provided by Save the Children on the policies or measures to be developed or strengthened and included in the Child Guarantee Action Plans or to be improved in poverty reduction policies in countries outside the EU. For the specific recommendations for each country, please consult the country pages provided in the next section.

In the area of early childhood education and care (ECEC):



- Ensure equal access and quality of ECEC for all children and especially for children from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds such as migrant families, asylum seekers and minority groups.
- Eliminate or reduce access barriers to ECEC services for vulnerable families. This would also include effective parent counselling and guidance (for instance on options for discounted contributions or reduced fees).
- Invest further in ECEC for younger children (0-2).
- Invest in ECEC infrastructures to increase the number of available places. This is especially needed in Spain, Italy, Romania and in Iceland and in Western Balkans, especially through community-based approaches.
- Develop quality requirements/quality standards in ECEC, including measurement systems and evaluation. Professional training of ECEC professionals/teachers should also be considered.

In the area of education, one healthy meal per day, school-based and leisure, sports and cultural activities:



- Combat inequalities in the educational system and support children in need. 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.
- Decrease school segregation and foster inclusion (national strategies for education and inclusion should be developed).
- Eliminate the extra-costs of education (e.g., ensuring that transport is free, or its costs are reimbursed/subsidised, promoting free access to school books and school supplies, ensuring access to IT devices for children, etc.).
- Ensure access to sport, leisure and cultural activities for children and young people. Invest in sustainable social and cultural infrastructure (not forgetting rural areas) while expanding and securing extracurricular and non-formal education opportunities.
- Improve the availability of summer school camps and ensure the access of children in need.
- Create incentives for private operators that provide free-of-charge participation opportunities for children in need (e.g., private sport or dance clubs).
- Ensure free school meals for children in need in all schools and introduce quality standards to guarantee healthy meals. Invest in school canteens and ensure that children in need have access to one free healthy meal each school day.

In the area of healthcare:



- Provide all children and adolescents with unrestricted access to health care, including health promotion, screening and preventive services, and rehabilitation.
- Ensure support for children with disabilities and children with chronic illnesses to access healthcare and support services.
- Support or strengthen access to free/affordable mental health:
 - Reduce waiting lists.
 - Launch public awareness campaigns and educational programmes (e.g., on the emotional impacts caused by COVID-19 restrictive measures on children).
 - Promote the integration of primary and mental health care services targeted at children.

- Provide special support for children in extreme distress (e.g., asylum seekers, unaccompanied children).
- Train staff at the asylum centres to create safe living environments and identify mental health issues of children.
- Develop holistic health-promoting initiatives to strengthen the health situation of children and adolescents in need, inclusive of children living in remote/rural areas.
- Strengthen public programmes for ophthalmological, dental health care, and nutritional health.

In the area of nutrition:

- Secure equal access to healthy nutrition for families in vulnerable situations. Although access to free meals at school for children is important, unfortunately these meals do not solve the bigger problem of families' inadequate nutrition.
- Create an environment that stimulates children and parents to have a healthy diet (and exercise more), for example through:
 - Developing campaigns to raise awareness about obesity, interventions that prevent obesity in children and the benefits of healthy eating and habits.
 - Banning the advertising of unhealthy products to children.
 - Strengthening the implementation of the legal provisions limiting (or banning) the access to unhealthy food and beverages inside or in the proximity of schools.



In the area of housing:

- Strengthen social support and social housing provision and prioritise families with children in accessing housing.
- Implement measures to tackle homelessness for families with children and strengthen the social protection system by taking a holistic approach (long-term psychosocial support and adequate housing).
- Invest in social houses to increase the stock and solve the housing shortage.
- Prioritise financial and administrative support measures not only for housing costs but also utilities (gas, electricity, water) for vulnerable families with children.
- Enforce the legal provisions limiting or prohibiting evictions of families with children as long as appropriate alternative housing is not ensured.
- Review the protection system to move towards deinstitutionalisation. Priority should be given to kinship care. Residential care should be provided only as a last resort and when it does, it should resemble a family environment within the community.



Further suggestions to address social exclusion and to break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage



As per the Child Guarantee enabling framework, EU Member States should also include in their Child Guarantee Action Plans measures to address social exclusion and break the cycle of disadvantage.

- Tackle the structural causes of inequality and poverty instead of merely compensating for their effects.
- Empower and ensure active child participation in decision making (children need to be involved when developing and monitoring strategies and policies that affect them).

- Provide sufficient employment (job opportunities) and social security for families.
- Increase family policies and:
 - Introduce measures enabling the adaptation and/or reduction of working hours of parents (reform of working time and work-life arrangements).
 - Support the participation of parents in the labour market.
 - Support families in need through efficient benefits and tax deduction policies.
 - Ensure flexibility for child and family services.
 - Work preventively with families to avoid the separation of children from their family environment.
 - Introduce measures to ensure that children do not depend on their parents' social security but are recipients of social security in their own right (e.g., in the Netherlands).
- Provide families with information, guidance, and accompaniment in recognizing their children's rights and in accessing the relevant social, educational and health services that respond to their needs.

In addition, further suggestions mentioned by Western Balkan countries include:

- Ensuring job opportunities, income generating activities and financial literacy to young people to ensure successful transition to adulthood and build a future in their home country, including young people with disabilities.
- Establish integrated (across health, education, and social sectors) data collection mechanisms for children, the lack of which currently impedes any efforts in improving the implementation of policies that guarantee welfare for all children.
- Develop and strengthen the resource allocation and accountability systems between central and local government as well as monitoring systems for tracking progress.
- Ensure that the rights of refugee and migrant children travelling the Balkan route in terms of protection, decent living conditions, health services, and inclusive education are guaranteed and enforced.



Siraj*, 14, attends an Italian lesson with his family and other refugees recently resettled in Italy.
Photo: Jonathan Hyams / Save The Children

2 Country pages: EU Member States

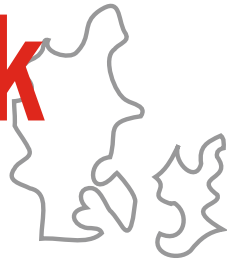




A girl in Ponte di Nona (Rome, Italy), using educational supplies provided by Save the Children during the coronavirus pandemic.

Photo: Francesco Alesi / Save the Children

Denmark



Summary

In general terms, Denmark is a country where most children enjoy their childhood with access to good quality education, healthcare provision and more.

Child poverty in Denmark increased during the last years due to the benefit cap introduced by the government in 2015. Today, approximately 56.000 children grow up in poverty in Denmark. Children living in poverty are discriminated against when it comes to their education. For example, they achieve lower results in elementary school, compared to their peers because a large proportion of vulnerable children leave elementary school without passing their exams.

In Denmark, there is a strong culture around children's participation in leisure activities with 80% of children enrolled in sports or cultural activities. However, these activities are not free of charge. A combination of several factors (financial restrictions, parents' lack of knowledge of the Danish tradition and culture and of the available support as well as hidden norms) exclude many poor children from these activities.

Finally, the Danish system fails to support poor families in accessing adequate housing as renting prices become more and more expensive. Most of the social housing is located in socially disadvantaged residential areas which leads many families leaving their old neighbourhood to move to a new one with fewer opportunities and services. Save the Children Denmark works with and for children across the county. Its programmes focus on bullying prevention in education,

Key facts

60.000

Approximately 60.000 children were living in poverty in Denmark in 2019, corresponding to 5.2 % of children under 18 years of age.

50%

There has been a 50% increase in the number of children and young people contacting mental health services in the past years.

50% vs 80%

Only 50% of girls with ethnic minority background participate in organised leisure and sports activities compared to 80% of girls in general.

supporting children access to leisure activities and parenting support. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Save the Children Denmark changed its programmes to support families at risk offering in-kind and psychosocial support. Only during the first lockdown 2.000 children and 1.000 families were reached. Save the Children Denmark calls on the Danish government to prioritise in the Danish Child Guarantee Action Plan investments related to the strengthening of the education system and the housing sector. It also calls for the introduction of a cash benefit for poor families to ensure that they live in dignity and for the immediate introduction of a new poverty line.

National updates

CHILD POVERTY IN DENMARK



In 2019 approximately 60.000 children were living in poverty in Denmark, corresponding to 5.2 % of children under 18 years of age. The number increased significantly during 2015-2017, when the Danish government introduced a benefit cap that affected many families with children, including families receiving integration benefits. From 2018 to 2019 there was a slight decrease in the number of children living in poverty. Following the Eurostat definition of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 13.2% of the Danish children under the age of 18 years were living under such conditions in 2019. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the percentage of children growing up in poverty seems to have dropped to 12.4% in 2020⁵¹.

There is no official government-approved definition of poverty in Denmark. Statistics Denmark defines economic poverty as having an income less than 50% of the median income for a minimum of one year and, at the same time, not being a student or having savings. This definition is also used to monitor the country's development towards the achievement of SDG no. 1 "No poverty" and report to the UN.

In December 2019, the Danish government adopted an agreement on a temporary child allowance, which in the short term will help to alleviate the problems of child poverty in Denmark. The next step is the introduction of a new cash benefit system that considers families with children. The Benefits Commission set up by the government made recommendations in May 2021 for a new cash benefit system that reduces the economic inequality between children with parents in the cash benefit system and children in Denmark in general, as well as a special leisure allowance that allows all children in cash benefit families to participate in leisure activities. A political agreement to this effect is expected this year. In this context, the government has committed itself to setting a new Danish poverty line.

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN DENMARK



The most vulnerable children are those affected by the government benefit caps introduced in 2015, including children in families receiving integration benefits.

Story from the ground

“ Everything was difficult for us before the pandemic – and now everything has just become worse. I can't be the mother I want to be. I can't answer my daughter's questions or tell her for how long this will continue. As a mother of a child with ADHD you always have to be two steps ahead and plan everything. I can't do that in this situation. Everything is very difficult. Thanks to Save the Children Denmark I feel supported. I am consulted about my child's needs and how I can answer her questions. At the same time, I can also talk to someone about my needs which makes a big difference in my everyday life. Thank you Save the Children Denmark! ”

A mother describing her situation during the first lockdown

CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO SERVICES AS DESCRIBED IN THE CHILD GUARANTEE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

Early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, and a healthy meal each school day

Effective and free access to early childhood education and care (ECEC)



In Denmark, all children are entitled to ECEC. Most children are in ECEC from one year of age until they enrol in school at 6 years of age. Parents pay a fee of approximately €400/month for children aged 0-3 years (nursery), and approximately €200/month for children aged 3-6 years (kindergarten). Parents with a low income and single parents can get a free place subsidy.

The provision of ECEC in Denmark is generally of good quality. However, in 2019 there was a public debate about the child-carer-ratio, which led to new legislation, requiring 1 carer per 3 children in nurseries, and 1 carer per 6 children in kindergartens.

During the COVID-19-pandemic, all ECEC settings were closed for six weeks in the spring of 2020. In addition, localised lockdowns have occurred throughout 2020 and 2021. After the reopening of ECEC settings, there were still many official guidelines about the number of children in a single room, groups not mixing etc., that the settings had to follow. As a result, children in ECEC in Denmark have not had a normal everyday life from March 2020 until June 2021. The lockdowns have also been challenging for many children in families with few resources. For some families the lockdowns resulted in increased mental vulnerability and domestic conflicts – in some cases including domestic violence. In addition, there was a significant lack of positive experiences and social engagement in the families. The

lockdown had also serious consequences on the families' finances since all family members were at home and needed numerous meals during the day. Some families struggled to provide their children with necessities like diapers, medicines, and sufficient nutrition. Furthermore, children missed the routine of everyday life and their daily engagement with resourceful adults such as teachers, trainers etc.

Effective and free access to education



Schools in Denmark are free of charge. Even though there is free access to education many children living in poverty experience inequality and deprivation in connection with their schooling - in relation to solving school assignments and participating in social activities. It may be impossible for them to have their bike repaired for transportation, or they may not have a school bag, eraser, pencils or a computer, sportswear, and a bag for sports. In addition, many schools have politics about birthday parties requiring birthday parties to be thrown for the entire class or either all boys or all girls. As the norm requires bringing a gift to the birthday boy or girl, this excludes children from low-income families from social activities with their class.

Children living in poverty achieve lower results in elementary school, compared to their peers. Only 70% of vulnerable children obtain a final examination from elementary school with a grade average of at least 2⁵². Among their better-off peers, the figure is 93%. The big difference between the two groups is explained by the fact that a large proportion of vulnerable children leave elementary school without passing their exams.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, all schools were closed for six to eight weeks in the spring of 2020 and four weeks in the winter of 2020/2021. In addition, various local lockdowns have occurred throughout 2020 and 2021. During the lockdowns all schools offered online schooling. After the reopening of schools,

there were still numerous guidelines in place that the schools had to follow (e.g., number of children in a classroom, the distance between pupils during class etc.). The lockdowns and online schooling have been challenging for some children in families with few resources for example because of lack of digital equipment such as computers, printers, and Wi-Fi, but also because of their parents' lack of resources to support and structure the online schooling. Furthermore, children have been cut off from their daily contact with carers such as teachers, trainers etc. The situation has had significant consequences on the children's academic performance as well as on their social and mental wellbeing.

Effective and free access to school-based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

Approximately 80% of children in Denmark are enrolled in organised leisure/sports activities, but there is a lack of representation among children with ethnic minority background, children from single-parent households, children of unemployed parents, children from low-income families and children in contact with social services. For example, only 50% of girls with ethnic minority background participate in organised leisure/sports activities compared to 80% in general.

In Denmark there is a strong cultural tradition of participating in leisure, sports, and cultural activities. However, most of these activities are not free of charge. Even though there is a high participation rate in general, organised leisure/sports activities are greatly represented by children from families with a certain level of resources. The barriers for children from families with fewer resources are among other things financial; lack of knowledge about the Danish tradition and culture; hidden norms connected to participation in organised leisure/sports activities; and lack of social and mental resources to prioritise engagement.

In some of Denmark's 98 municipalities low-income families can receive economic support to cover fees, equipment etc.⁵³, to

enable children to participate in leisure/sports activities.

However, it continues to be a problem that some municipalities do not offer such financial support, that many families are unaware of the possibility for support, and that the application process can be too complex for families with few resources to enrol in.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

Access to meals in ECEC and schools vary in Denmark. Some ECEC settings serve breakfast, lunch and/or afternoon snacks as part of the costs that parents pay. In most schools no meals are served, but some schools serve breakfast for children, who have not had breakfast at home. Because of this variation and the lack of a common policy, some school children from families with low income and/or having parents with a lack of resources (mental, social and/or economic) do not have adequate access to sufficient and healthy nutrition.

In recent years, there has been a focus on providing parents with the option to buy healthy meals for their children at school. Some municipalities have subsidy schemes, so children in low-income families also have access to healthy meals at a lower price. However, there is no provision of free school meals for vulnerable children.

Healthcare



Effective and free access to quality healthcare

In Denmark, healthcare, including dental care is free of charge. The official vaccination programme is also free of charge, and most children in Denmark are vaccinated.

During the last 10 years, there has been an increase of 50% in the number of children

and young people contacting mental health services for the first time (from 7.500 individuals in 2008 to 10.700 in 2018). There is a treatment guarantee, which means that children and young people are entitled to receive treatment within 30 days from the time they are referred to the mental health system.

Adequate housing

Effective access to adequate housing



Families living in poverty generally live in very small dwellings compared to the number of family members. The homes are typically located in socially disadvantaged residential areas. The social housing sector is large in Denmark. Every fifth home in Denmark is a public home. But from 2015 to 2018, the social housing sector's relative share of the housing stock decreased.

Combined with the fact that over the last few years there have been fewer and fewer affordable rental homes, many families – especially in the big city areas – have had a hard time finding affordable and adequate housing. The municipalities can, in emergencies, help assign public housing for families who have an urgent housing need, however that differs across municipalities. Relocations

to a social housing far away from the child's neighbourhood can lead to serious disruptions in children's lives when families are forced to relocate away from children's friends and schoolmates.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has provided large grants for initiatives to support and strengthen socially disadvantaged groups during the COVID-19 crisis, including particularly vulnerable children and families. The aid packages that could be applied for by, among others, civil society organisations, were targeted towards tackling loneliness, cultural experiences, and additional temporary space in domestic violence shelters.

CHILD POVERTY REDUCTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE DANISH RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN



Denmark's RRP focuses on investments that will accelerate the green transition, stimulate the growth of a greener economy and support jobs and companies. The RRP does not focus on child poverty.





SAVE THE CHILDREN DENMARK

Save the Children Denmark works with and for children across the county. Its programmes focus on bullying prevention in education, supporting children access leisure activities and parenting support. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Save the Children Denmark changed its programmes to support families at risk offering in kind and psychosocial support. Only during the first lockdown 2.000 children and 1.000 families were reached.

Save the Children Denmark works to protect and develop children's rights. It works to prevent bullying in ECEC, schools, leisure clubs and online. Save the Children Denmark fights all forms of abuse of children and provide positive experiences such as vacation camps and local family clubs for children living in poverty. Save the Children Denmark strives to ensure compliance of children's rights in the Danish society and uses its position to impact decision makers and policies.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Save the Children Denmark is the founder of the programme “StærkeSammen”. It is a teaching course developed for schools, based on the UNCRC and with the objective to educate children about their rights – especially regarding rights not being abused. Currently the programme is being versioned for ECEC settings.

It also offers local clubs for families with children 0-3 years (“Småbørnsklubber”). The initiative is based on knowledge about the importance of a child’s first 1.000 days of living and is carried out in collaboration with local municipalities and caretaker professionals. In the club, parents are supported in ensuring a positive upbringing environment.

Save the Children Denmark is also the founder of the international programme “Free from Bullying” that provides professionals with knowledge and know-how to create a positive and supportive atmosphere in day-care centres and schools. Free from Bullying is currently present in 40% of nurseries and in 60% of kindergartens in Denmark.

EDUCATION, INCLUDING SCHOOL BASED AND EXTRA LEISURE, SPORTS, AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Save the Children Denmark is widely represented in Danish schools through different education programs, educational materials and programs to ensure a positive, supportive, and non-bullying environment in schools, since the social wellbeing of students is an essential part of learning. Save the Children Denmark also hosts yearly school events, where up to 120.000 students/year are engaged.

Save the Children Denmark works actively to ensure that children from families with few resources have a place in organised leisure/ sports activities.

Volunteers help with transportation, planning etc. and application for financial support. Save the Children Denmark supports local leisure clubs in developing an inclusive and supportive environment. It organises around 70 local family clubs, where volunteers facilitate positive experiences and a network for families with few resources. It also hosts more than 50 summer camps for approximately 1.200 children and parents.

CHILD PROTECTION

Most children engage in online communities and activities from a very young age. Save the Children Denmark educates parents and professionals on children’s online behaviour. It provides advice and help for children, parents, and professionals when children experience online bullying, grooming or abuse, and it influences policies on online safety for children.

SAVE THE CHILDREN DENMARK’S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

During the first lockdown Save the Children Denmark was in close contact with the approximately 2.000 children and parents normally enrolled in its activities. Families who struggled in their everyday life before the pandemic were deeply affected by the lockdown. They experienced an increase in mental vulnerability and domestic conflict – in some cases including domestic violence – and there was a decline of positive experiences and social engagement in the families. The lockdown had also serious consequences concerning families’ economy since all family members were at home and needed numerous meals during the day. Save the Children Denmark was aware of families not being able to provide for their children with necessities like food and medicines. Furthermore, children missed the routine of everyday life and their daily engagement with teachers and other children.

Therefore, during the first lockdown Save the Children Denmark quickly established a COVID-19 emergency task force. Volunteers were trained to make 'care-calls' to the families to provide mental support, made 'care-packages' with materials and instructions for positive family engagement and activities, delivered 'play-packages' with toys, offered to pick up groceries and medicines, and in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs and the supermarket ALDI, delivered food packages to 652 families with nutritious food and groceries.

In total, Save the Children Denmark supported circa 2.000 children from 1.000 families during the first lockdown. Many of the activities from the emergency task force were activated again during the second lockdown.

For more long-term support, Save the Children Denmark facilitated online activities to ensure the families' network despite local lockdowns. Save the Children Denmark also initiated a project helping children with their homework by providing educational support for children who were falling behind in schools because of more than a year without proper schooling. The project is still ongoing with a goal to reaching 390 children.

ADVOCACY WORK

Save the Children Denmark has fought for children's rights and is one of the cocreators of a national network, working to fight child poverty. With its advocacy work Save the Children Denmark influences politics and public opinion.

During the pandemic Save the Children Denmark has been engaged in advocacy work, leading a network in the social sector about children's life and wellbeing.

FUNDING OF SAVE THE CHILDREN DENMARK

Save the Children Denmark's national programmes are primarily funded by Danish Foundations. In addition, the programmes are also funded by private donations from Danish citizens, and a few projects on children's online life are funded by public resources. Danish Municipalities contribute to national Save the Children Denmark programmes through co-financing partnership projects. This type of funding is still limited to a few projects, but Save the Children Denmark is working on gaining more experience in this field.

Story from the ground

“ It was so nice of Save the Children Denmark to provide me with this package. We really needed it. You easily feel forgotten and ejected. I was very moved when I received the message that there was a package for us. Moved by the fact that we were not forgotten – that somebody thought of us. ”

A parent thanking a volunteer for delivering a care-package during the lockdown

Recommendations towards national decision makers on measures to be included in the Danish Child Guarantee Action Plan

The targeted categories of children in need to be reached

Families affected by the benefit caps need to be prioritised in order to lift them out of poverty.

Recent years' reforms such as the cash benefit ceiling (benefit cap), start-up aid and integration benefits have thrown thousands of children into poverty. The introduction of a temporary child allowance has been a provisional help for some families but has not reached all families in need. There is a need for a more holistic response to child poverty in Denmark. The Benefits Commission's recommendations will only lift 4-6.000 children out of poverty, which is insufficient. Save the Children Denmark calls on the Danish government to get half the children over the poverty line during the current government period and to abolish child poverty in Denmark in the long run. In addition, although COVID-19 aid packages have been effective in providing necessary, crucial, and urgent assistance to children and families in vulnerable situations, continuous and sustained action is needed to avoid long-term serious consequences for these families due to the COVID-19-pandemic.

Effective and free access to education

The needs of children of different ages must be taken into account. The Danish government should ensure that all children and young people have access to a computer or laptop, so that they can interact with their peers on social media.

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

Children in poverty must be able to have a normal childhood with leisure and cultural activities. All children, regardless of their status

must be able to get a leisure pass (economic support) to support their participation in leisure activities in the same way as low-income families can get financial support for day-care fees.

Effective access to adequate housing

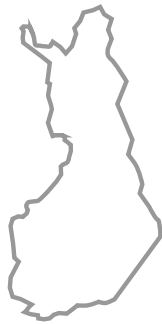
To support families in need to rent decent housing, a new cash benefit system should be introduced. In addition, the rental housing options for families in need in big cities should be increased so that families are not forced to relocate away from their original neighbourhoods.

Further suggestions/measures that should be included in the Danish Child Guarantee Action Plan to address social exclusion and break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage

It is a social responsibility to provide families with adequate cash benefits to ensure that children are not living in poverty. This also applies to children from refugee and immigrant families. Child poverty is best prevented by investing in helping families with children out of poverty.

A new poverty line must be introduced, supported by policies to eradicate poverty. The poverty line should allow that children can be part of the community and can develop academically and socially in line with other children. Save the Children Denmark proposes that the measure of poverty, which Denmark's Statistic Authority uses to monitor the UN's SDGs, should also be used to define a poverty line in Denmark. Once a poverty line has been established, progress to reduce poverty must be continuously measured and monitored.

Finland



Summary

Child poverty in Finland is described as a “silent” phenomenon that can particularly hit vulnerable groups such as, refugee and migrant families with children, single parent households and families with many children.

Even though the Finnish school system is regarded as fairly equal and tends to become more and more inclusive, inequalities are present between families from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The COVID-19 crisis and the distance learning has further exposed the inequalities of the Finnish education system. According to Save the Children Finland, 37% of children from low-income families felt they did not get enough help from their parents while the percentage for children from high-income families was 15%. Additionally, it has been observed that there are inequalities between families with children from different socioeconomic backgrounds with many migrant children facing difficulties with distance learning particularly when the caregivers do not understand the local languages and are not able to provide help to their children or communicate with the school. Save the Children Finland supports children growing up in poverty by providing educational material support for upper secondary students and by promoting children’s participation in play and leisure activities. In addition, it runs several programmes promoting children’s participation in decision making procedures as well as children’s protection from abuse or sexual exploitation. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Save the Children Finland has expanded its programmes and has distributed gift vouchers to provide food aid to families living with financial insecurity due to COVID-19.

Key facts

157.000

In 2020, 157.000 children in Finland (15% of all children’s population) were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion, an increase from 14.3% in 2019.

1 in 5

Inequality in education starts early on. Only around 1 in every 5 children from low-income families are enrolled in early childhood education.

3-10k

There is no housing support for approximately 3.000-10.000 undocumented migrants in Finland, some of them being families with children.

Save the Children Finland calls on the Finnish government to commit to the long-term and sustainable solutions. These commitments should also be reflected in the national Child Guarantee Action Plan. Particular attention should be given to strengthening the mental healthcare system both inside and outside schools as currently many children do not receive the support they need. The Finnish government should also strive to increase the rates of participation in early childhood education and care and to ensure support to access quality and inclusive education for migrant children. Finally, Save the Children Finland calls on the government to prioritise ESF+ resources to address child poverty not limiting the resources only to employment and education priorities. introduction of a new poverty line.

National updates

CHILD POVERTY IN FINLAND



In 2020, 157.000 children in Finland (15% of all children) were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion, an increase from 14.3% in 2019. According to the latest Income Distribution Statistics, the low-income rate for households with children was 11.6%, affecting 121.000 children in 2019.

In Finland, children in poverty are those under the age of 18 years who live in low-income households. The poverty or low-income threshold is 60 % of the median disposable income of households. The household is poor if its net income is less than 60% of the average income level of the population. The overall median income for 2019 was around €25.550, which sets the threshold at €15.330/year or €1.280/month .

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are already evident on children and their families in Finland and a further increase is expected in the years to come as redundancies negatively affect the financial situation of many families and disrupt everyday routines.

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN FINLAND



Children are most vulnerable to poverty when growing up in single parent households and in families suffering from unemployment, debt, illness, and low income.

Refugee and migrant families with children have been significantly affected by the COVID-19. In many of these families, only one person receives an income. The most common jobs for migrant workers, such as restaurant work, have been considerably affected by

the crisis resulting in many redundancies. With reduced income, many of these families fear losing their residence permits or the possibility to bring family members to Finland through family reunification as this depends on the income of the applicant.

Children with disabilities are also among the most vulnerable groups of children in Finland. They live socially excluded or segregated due to limited access to or availability of assistants and also due to the limited work options (after they turn 18 years old) which reduces their chances for independent living.

Poverty is also more common in large families with children.

Unemployment is a poverty risk but there are more and more people who work and still struggle financially due to low salaries.

Figures show that 10-15% of young people are struggling. For example, discrimination of LGBTI children and children belonging to ethnic minorities, mental health problems among girls and discrimination against minorities cause suffering and are costly to society .

CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO SERVICES AS DESCRIBED IN THE CHILD GUARANTEE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

Early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, and a healthy meal each school day



Effective and free access to early childhood education and care (ECEC)

According to the 2019 Early Childhood Report, 77% of children aged 1 to 6 years attended ECEC. However, there are major differences between age groups: 1% of children under 1

year of age attended ECEC while the figure for 5-year-olds was almost 91%. Inequality in education starts early on in Finland with approximately only 1 in 5 children from low-income families attending ECEC. Regional, socio-economic and gender disparities and the correlation between the level of parental education and the performance of children have all become more noticeable in learning and educational achievement. The fees for ECEC depend on family income and ECEC is free below a certain threshold. Availability of places depends on the municipality but there might be differences within the city, depending on the area (e.g., there are some areas of Helsinki with a shortage of places for children in need of ECEC). In addition, there is a shortage of teachers.

When a family arrives in Finland as asylum seekers, school-aged children usually start very quickly going to school. However, ECEC is not provided automatically for asylum seeking children, and the practices differ depending on the municipality. There is no law that guarantees the right to ECEC to asylum seeking children. The same applies to undocumented migrant children. With asylum seeking and undocumented under school aged children, there is often a lack of other compensatory activities that would help children develop their social and other skills.

The government's response and the use of funds



Under the programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin, the government aims to monitor trends in the financial resources of families with children and take action to reduce poverty among them. The government increased the single-parent increment linked to child benefits so that families living on social assistance will also benefit from the increase. Child benefits for the fourth and fifth child have been increased. In addition, the government will promote the learning of basic skills during the early years by reconfiguring pre-primary education and the first two years of primary school into a more coherent system

that allows pupils to move flexibly to the next level after they have gained the required basic skills. As part of this approach, the possibility to provide pre-primary education over a two-year period will be examined. Finally, the government will implement an Action Plan to improve the quality and equality of ECEC and to increase the participation rate. As part of the Action Plan, the government will (i) extend the pilot of free part-time ECEC for 5-year-olds; (ii) test a two-year pre-school (for 5 and 6-year-olds); (iii) create a pathway from maternity and child health clinics to ECEC; and (iv) develop a model of three-tier support. The Finnish government will create a research project around the Action Plan to follow up the impact and outcomes of the measures with a view to implement a part-time free-of-charge ECEC system in the future.

Effective and free access to education



Generally, the Finnish school system is regarded as fairly equal. Studying is free of charge for all children in Finland. In addition, from August 2021, study materials for all children until upper secondary education will be free. This is a considerable achievement since before that students had to pay for the books and other equipment needed in secondary school or in vocational training leading to many children not continuing to upper secondary education.

In addition, although the Finnish system is becoming more and more inclusive, children with disabilities are often excluded from mainstream education. In some schools, there are still special classes for children with neuropsychiatric symptoms, learning difficulties and behavioural problems.

The COVID-19 crisis has further exposed the inequalities of the Finnish education system (e.g., the availability of computers has differed across municipalities, the help children have received from their parents during remote studies has also shown wide variation). According to Save the Children Finland's Children's Voice Survey 2021, 37% of children from low-income families felt they did not get enough help from their



parents while the percentage for children from high-income families was only 15%. Additionally, it has been observed that with many migrant children distance learning has been problematic particularly when the caregivers do not understand local languages and are not able to provide help to their children or communicate with the school.

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

Finnish children do not get the recommended amount of physical activity in their daily life. Wellbeing indicators show growing degrees of polarisation between better-off and poorer families. Children from low-income families have fewer sports or leisure opportunities either due to the costs of the activities or due to the availability of these activities in their neighbourhoods. Currently, not all children have access to leisure activities and usually they are not part of the school day.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

School meals are free for every child, from preschool to secondary school and vocational training. Finland was the first country in the world to serve free school meals, and it is a world leader in nutritional expertise. Providing free school meals became mandatory for municipalities in 1948. This ensures equality in school learning in terms of low-income families and nutrition. Learning must not be jeopardised by not getting a balanced amount of healthy food during the school day. Municipalities are responsible for organising healthy school meals and there is a trend towards a more vegetarian-vegan diet in the menus. Free school meals have also been organised during the COVID-19 pandemic, but there have been municipality-specific differences in quality.

The government's response and the use of funds

The reform to extend compulsory education will become effective in 2021. The school leaving age will be raised to 18 years and all the study materials will be free. The government plans to introduce a range of study and support options for compulsory education, such as voluntary additional primary and lower secondary education, citizens' secondary schools (Kansalaisopisto), workshops, rehabilitation, and preparatory education, which may be included in the range of upper secondary qualifications.

Finland aims to guarantee to every child and young person a genuine opportunity to pursue a leisure activity of their choice as part of the school day. The government objective is to create a Finnish version of the Icelandic model, promoting free-of-charge leisure activities during the school day. The idea is to reinforce and improve the quality of the schools' morning and afternoon activities, clubs and cooperation with municipalities and third-sector providers. The Finnish model for leisure activities will bring children's and young people's leisure activities to the school day as a pilot project from the beginning of 2021. The Ministry of Education and Culture is carrying out a €9.5 million pilot project with the aim to establish the model as a permanent way of operating in municipalities.

With regard to children's access to cultural activities, the government will ensure the accessibility of libraries, availability of mobile libraries, and diversity of collections. The government will also support basic education in arts and increase project grants to children's culture. The Finnish government will establish a sports policy coordination body and will expand the programme "Finland on the Move" to schools ("Schools on the Move"). It will also support the construction of outdoor sports facilities and trails to create more neighbourhood outdoor places, such as parks and green areas, which are important

for everyday physical activity especially for children, older people and groups with special needs. A national strategy aimed at the recreational use of nature will also be developed .

In June 2020, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Finnish government committed to investing €320 million from the state budget in the promotion of children and young people's wellbeing. The amount was divided between the Ministries of Education and Culture, Social Affairs and Health and Economic Affairs and Employment. The supplementary budget supports activities related to several dimensions of children's wellbeing (e.g., increase the access and quality of ECEC, primary and secondary education, mental wellbeing, etc.); increases the support to students who are at risk of dropping out of vocational training; and contributes to ensuring that all children enjoy one free hobby.

In addition, in May 2021 the government agreed to address the problems caused to children and young people by the COVID-19 with additional funding of more than one hundred million: €65 million for education (€40 million for ECEC and primary education, e.g. for the recruitment of additional staff, €20 million for upper secondary education, and €4 million for universities); and €39 million for social and health care services (€16 million to mental health services and €23 million to substance abuse services).

Healthcare



Effective and free access to quality healthcare

Finland has a quite comprehensive school healthcare system, ensuring continuity of health promotion after the services provided by maternity and child health clinics. School healthcare is part of the school welfare services, which include oral health

care services, school social workers and psychologists. These services, provided to all primary school pupils, are free of charge. School health care identifies pupils' support and health examination needs, supports children and refers them to further examinations and treatment if necessary and supports the care of children with chronic illnesses.

According to a study conducted by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, help and support provided by school healthcare services have weakened due to COVID-19, including not only the health but also school social work and mental health services. Other child and family health and social services have been reduced, too, like the maternity and child-care clinic appointments. However, the need for support has not diminished; on the contrary, stress, loneliness, mental health problems and problems with parenthood and relationships with spouses or partners have increased.

Children can experience mental health problems also through their parents' mental illness. Before COVID-19, it was estimated that one in four parents has had mental health problems during their child's lifetime. This group of children who care for their mentally ill family members are still quite invisible in Finland and their needs should be better taken into account in family and child services.

In addition, according to a recent municipal survey, the number of child welfare clients and the number of child welfare notifications have increased during COVID-19. A particular challenge is the limited access of child welfare clients to psychiatric services for children and adolescents and the services provided by the educational system and welfare services, i.e., school healthcare, social work and mental health services .

Services do not always reach children, young persons and families on time. Child protection services are under-resourced in relation to demand. In addition, there are

special challenges with the healthcare of immigrant, refugee, and undocumented migrant children. Finally, access to services that foster the wellbeing of families and offer support when experiencing parenting or relationship problems (e.g., couples or divorce counselling) is not systematic across the country.

The government's response and the use of funds



The government aims to promote low-threshold support services for children, young people and families, such as maternity and child health clinic activities, mental health services, home help services and family counselling, employment services, and high-quality student welfare services. The Act on Client Charges in Health and Social Services will be reformed to remove barriers to treatment and to increase equality in health by introducing more services free of charge and by making client charges more equitable. The government will also focus more on risk factors for social disadvantage and the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage and target effective services at risk groups by revamping adult social work. To foster prevention and strengthen public health, the government will extend the scope of the national vaccination programme (e.g., HVP for boys). Additionally, a gradually tightening minimum staffing level in child protection services, starting from 35 clients per professional in 2022 and reaching 30 clients per professional in 2024 will be introduced. Save the Children Finland is currently campaigning to call on the new municipal decision-makers to invest in child protection and to limit the number of clients per social worker to a maximum of 25.

Healthy nutrition

Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition



In Finland, over 80 % of adolescents eat vegetables, fruits, or berries less than 6 times a week. Depending on the municipality, 20 to 45 % of children do not eat a school meal every day and 4-7 % drink energy drinks daily leading to 1 in 4 boys and 1 in 5 girls being overweight or obese in 2019.

In Finland, there is no specific support for poor families to access food or ready meals. Children who attend after school clubs (1st, 2nd and sometimes 3rd graders) get a snack. Whether a snack is free or not depends on the service provider (private or municipal organised). There are also differences across municipalities on how the after-school activities are organised. During school hours, children participate in kitchen's activities and decisions.

Asylum seeking families get free meals from the reception centre where they stay during their asylum process. If the centre cannot provide the meals (e.g., there is no kitchen or canteen), people receive extra financial benefits so that they can buy and cook their own food. When asylum seekers get their residence permit, they receive the same services and benefits as Finnish people (e.g., income support). However, if they stay in Finland undocumented, they will be no longer eligible for these benefits.

Adequate housing

Effective access to adequate housing



Finland is the only country in Europe where the number of homeless people is declining thanks to the joint efforts and hard work of the state, municipalities, and NGOs to reduce homelessness since the 1980s.

Finland's social benefits system ensures that a person will not end up on the street after becoming unemployed or seriously ill as he/she can apply for social assistance or housing allowance.

In the “Housing First” model, housing is not a “reward” which homeless people receive once their life is back on track. Instead, a house is the foundation on which the rest of the person’s life is put back together. When people have a stable housing situation, it is easier to focus on solving their other problems.

When it comes to undocumented migrant families, the situation is a bit more complicated. There are approx. 3.000-10.000 undocumented migrants in Finland, some of them families with children. For these families there is no specific support. However, there are many non-governmental actors that support undocumented people and provide services for families, including night shelters.

Finally, families subject to child protection are guaranteed a subjective right to housing in accordance with the Child Welfare Act.

The government’s response and the use of funds



The Finnish government aims to work to combat segregation and homelessness and diversify the resident structure of neighbourhoods. The plan is to halve homelessness by 2027 by continuing operating the “Housing First” model. Data collection will be also improved.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCEDURES



In Finland, there are different structures for the participation of children and young people in decision making such as youth councils, children’s parliaments, and student union activities in schools. In some services, especially related to

child protection, increasingly young yet experienced experts have been involved in local and national development and advocacy. In addition, interested groups and other organisations hold hearings with families or run surveys and based on the gathered information, present opinions and statements on ongoing reforms. The Ombudsman for Children regularly organises hearings for children who are affected by planned reforms or who are in a vulnerable and/or in a minority position such as children with a migrant background or special needs, Roma children etc. The government has also issued guidelines for municipal decision-makers on child impact assessment. During the campaign for the municipal elections held in June 2021, there was a children’s municipal election panel discussion broadcast by Children’s News so that children could watch the panel in schools. During COVID-19, the government introduced public media conferences (with sign language interpretation) targeted to children and fostering their participation.

CHILD POVERTY REDUCTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE FINNISH RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN



Child poverty reduction has not been reflected in the materials released so far. Finland’s RRP is centred on four priorities: (i) Green transition; (ii) Digitalisation; (iii) Employment and skills; and (iv) Health and social services.



SAVE THE CHILDREN FINLAND

Save the Children Finland was founded in 1922. Its work is guided by the UNCRC. Save the Children Finland fights for children's rights to immediately and permanently improve children's lives all over the world. This is achieved through efficient professional work, by influencing policy makers, and by providing concrete help.

Save the Children Finland runs the following programmes to support vulnerable groups of children in Finland:

EDUCATION, INCLUDING SCHOOL BASED AND EXTRA LEISURE, SPORTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

To assist children in poverty, Save the Children Finland has implemented the programme “Fuel for Life”. The programme has been operating since 1996 in 60 municipalities in Finland. It supports low-income families by providing educational material for upper secondary students and by promoting children’s participation in play and leisure activities. This programme is focused on children who are at risk of dropping out of school or whose participation in leisure activities is jeopardised due to a lack of resources or other social problems. The programme promotes equality and child participation. It seeks to make lasting changes at an individual level and in society as a whole. It targets children between 6-18 years old and in 2020, 2.285 children were supported. The programme is implemented in almost 60 municipalities where the local branches of Save the Children Finland operate.

CHILD PROTECTION

Child protection work is one of the core working areas of Save the Children Finland. Save the Children Finland provides services for child protection customers in five residential care units (Vantaa, Kauniainen, Turku, Vääksy, Jyväskylä), two family rehabilitation units (Vantaa, Turku) and one team of in-home workers based in Helsinki. Support persons and holiday homes are examples of the preventative work Save the Children Finland implements. In addition, there are 130 foster families and 1250 support families throughout the country.

Save the Children Finland also maintains the “Nettivistijä” hotline an instrument to report child sexual abuse material (CSAM), grooming of children for sexual purposes, and child trafficking related to sexual abuse online. Reports can be made anonymously and in 2020 3.000 reports were made. Nettivistijä

has been in operation since 2002 and is the only member of INHOPE (International Association of Internet Hotlines) in Finland. The main purpose of the INHOPE network is to enhance the removal of CSAM from the internet and to help law enforcement to take further actions. All relevant information regarding Finland is passed to Finnish law enforcement for evaluation and possible actions.

CHILD PARTICIPATION

Save the Children Finland has published the guide “Child Impact Assessment with a Child” as a tool for decision-makers in municipalities and national decision-makers. The guide provides practical guidelines for consulting a wide range of children, including young children and children in particularly vulnerable situations, and for considering the information received by children. To enable participation and influence for a wide range of children (alongside representative structures), Save the Children Finland developed a child-centred service design model. The service allows children to be involved in the development of child-related services. Children also have the right to influence their own affairs as service users. Save the Children Finland has prepared freely available instructions for meeting a child in services and related decisions

Save the Children Finland conducts every year the “Children’s Voices Survey” which maps the views of children on different themes varying from everyday life to broader social dialogue and decision-making. In 2020 and 2021, the survey gathered information about the exceptional circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic from the point of view of everyday life, studies, leisure time, hobbies, and mental well-being. One key element of the survey is to look at the results through the family’s financial situation, thus gaining important information on how family poverty affects children’s wellbeing. The results show that family background plays a key role in how children see their possibilities, how they participate in society and the challenges they face in life.

SAVE THE CHILDREN FINLAND'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Save the Children Finland has expanded its programmes and has distributed gift vouchers to provide food aid to families living with financial insecurity due to COVID-19. In 2020, 8.150 families and 19.932 children received food aid. €706.952 were spent on food aid. Save the Children Finland has also provided children and young people with extra emotional support through the "Netari" online programme. Support is provided through a one-to-one chat or group talk. Netari reaches approximately 17.000 children per year. During spring 2020, the number of chat conversations rose by 260%. Additionally, Save the Children Finland was invited to join the Finland forward project, a multi-agency project led by the Prime Minister's Office by sharing information about the situation of children and families during the COVID-19.

ADVOCACY WORK

Save the Children Finland made a petition to avoid budget cuts in child protection, to increase investments in this area and to limit the number of clients per social worker to a maximum of 25. In September 2021, the petition was submitted to the Minister of Family Affairs and Social Services and to newly elected local decision makers.

Save the Children Finland has also made several other recommendations to municipal decision-makers regarding the well-being of poor and low-income families and children, the child-related impact assessment of decisions and ensuring participation of children in decision-making.

Finally, Save the Children Finland is a key partner in the Europe-wide First Years First Priorities campaign which is coordinated in Finland by the Central Union for Child Welfare. The campaign (running from December 2020

until September 2021) advocates for the prioritisation of early childhood development, with a special focus on children and families at risk of social exclusion and discrimination.

FUNDING OF SAVE THE CHILDREN FINLAND

Save the Children's Fuel for Life programme is fully funded by donations from Finnish individuals, foundations, and companies. Save the Children Finland also receives funding from Finnish organisations such as STEA (Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations) and private foundations.

Story from the ground

“ The support really helps a lot now that both adults in my family have been laid off due the COVID-19 crisis. ”

A teenager whose family received a food aid voucher from Save the Children Finland

“ I am grateful for the support I received for upper secondary school textbooks. There was no way I could have attended high school without Save the Children Learning Materials Support. Thanks to that, I got to study and eventually graduated from upper secondary school. ”

A recipient of Fuel for Life aid

Recommendations towards national decision makers on measures to be included in the Finnish Child Guarantee Action Plan

The targeted categories of children in need to be reached

- Children growing up in single parent households
- Children growing up in large families and in in-work poverty
- Children with disabilities
- Children in migration and undocumented migrant children

Effective and free access to ECEC

- Since ECEC can balance the inequalities and can support the wellbeing of children living in poverty, the Finnish government should ensure that more children attend early childhood education.
- Ensure also that asylum seeking children have the right to ECEC across Finland and regardless of the municipality.

Effective and free access to education

- Ensure that there is a national budget and guidance for the municipalities on how to implement the secondary education reform which guarantees by law free educational materials for every student. Also, children in need of special support should receive necessary educational provision both at school and through distance learning.
- Fight early school dropouts of at-risk groups by improving transitions from school to work with effective implementation of the secondary education reform and employment services for young people.

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

- Advance free of charge leisure activities for

all children and young people by ensuring that the national programme to guarantee one free of charge hobby for every child during the school day will progress at municipal level.

Effective and free access to quality healthcare

- Develop or increase the availability of mental health services and schools' welfare services.
- Increase the number of school doctors and psychologists.
- Ensure access to healthcare for refugee and undocumented migrant children.

Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

- Launch awareness raising campaigns on the importance of healthy nutrition for children and young people.
- Strengthen targeted counselling in the maternity clinics about children's healthy nutrition.
- Change the taxation of unhealthy foods, and accordingly initiate necessary measures.
- Effective access to adequate housing
- Prioritise housing for poor/vulnerable families with children, more affordable family-friendly rental housing needed.
- Strengthen support on housing for undocumented migrant families with children.

The use of EU funds and national budgets to support children and families in need

The Renewable and Competent Finland 2021-2027 programme is under preparation aiming to start in autumn 2021. The programme includes

ERDF, ESF+ and Just Transition Funds. As for ESF+, the programme targets include improved access to employment, support for lifelong learning and active inclusion. In the previous ESF programming cycle 2014-2020, the part “Social inclusion and fight against poverty” included mentions of young people and social inclusion but children and/or child poverty was not included. Save the Children Finland considers this as a major drawback and would like to see this aspect to be better addressed. For example, provision of mental health is an important issue which requires more attention, as well as supporting families in vulnerable situations in their overall wellbeing and life management skills. Also, ensuring resources for civil society organisations, which offer services to families in need, would be important.

In national budgets, it must be ensured that families’ livelihood is adequate. The wellbeing of children and families in vulnerable situations should be prioritised, taking into consideration the need for equal opportunities for people living in different parts of Finland.

Further actions to be prioritised in the Finnish Child Guarantee Action Plan to address social exclusion and break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage

It is important that besides short-term measures taken in response to the COVID-19 crisis, the government commits to long-term decisions agreed in the government programme 2019-2024⁵⁴ and takes the necessary measures to tackle child and family poverty.

These include, for example:

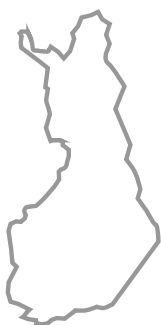
- The provision of sufficient employment and social security for families.

- The development or increase at municipal level of available services such as social services, mental health services (both adults and children), family work, home services/ domiciliary care, student care services, especially for those in most vulnerable situations. In schools, emphasis should be given also on supportive functions for those who need them.
- The flexibility of available child and family services, considering families and children’s different needs. It is important that children and their custodians are informed about services and their rights.
- The development or increase of the availability of preventative support and low-threshold services.
- The development or increase of the availability of legal support, education and protection for unaccompanied and migrant children and their families.

Timeline of actions. What should be prioritised?

- The Finnish government should prioritise children’s access to free and effective mental health care for all children and in particular for those in vulnerable situations. It is crucial that mental health services are available both in healthcare and in school environment.
- The Finnish government should immediately ensure that all children in Finland have access to ECEC. For school children, it should be guaranteed that the necessary support measures are available to every child in need and especially to those with a migrant background.

Sweden



Summary

The issue of child poverty is an ongoing discussion in Sweden. The strong economy combined with a strong universal welfare system provide most children with opportunities to thrive. However, compared to other EU countries, Sweden witnesses growing inequalities among children, and vulnerable groups keep falling behind.

In 2017, there were at least 15.000 homeless children in Sweden, a number which seems to be underestimated as only children whose families have received support through social services, either through temporary emergency accommodation or through so-called 'social contracts' are counted for. There are thousands of families living in illegal sub-rent accommodations -especially in large cities – as the provision of affordable or social housing is severely limited. Save the Children Sweden is actively working to protect children from violence, discrimination, and exclusion. During the COVID-19 pandemic Save the Children Sweden offered food parcels and vouchers. It also opened up community rooms as study-spaces for young people who were expected to study from home but who live in inadequate or overcrowded housing. Save the Children Sweden calls on the Swedish government to prioritise homeless children, children in housing deprivation, children in migration as well as children in single parent families in the Child Guarantee Action Plan by securing equal access to good quality key services. In addition, it calls on the government to take urgent action to combat large and growing educational inequality and to increasingly invest in family policies that will support families holistically.

Key facts

43,7%

Children with at least one foreign-born parent are significantly more vulnerable to fall into poverty than those with both parents born in Sweden. 43,7% of these children were at risk of poverty in 2019.

15.000

In 2017, there were at least 15.000 homeless children in Sweden, a number that seems to be underestimated.

58%

58% of children growing up in single parent households were at risk of poverty in 2019.

Food aid

In recent years, more families with children are turning to the Swedish church and other charitable organisations for assistance with food parcels as the state response is not enough.

National updates

CHILD POVERTY IN SWEDEN



According to 2019 data from Eurostat, the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Sweden was slightly above the EU average at 23% of the total population of children⁵⁵. Sweden is among the EU countries in which income inequality has widened the most since 2007.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 Eurostat data for Sweden indicate that the percentage of child poverty in Sweden was reduced to 20%. However, according to Save the Children Sweden and other NGOs, there are indications that more families with children are experiencing financial hardship due to the pandemic. A recently published study⁵⁶ shows a drastic increase in the number of families with children that report difficulties to pay their bills. Among single parent households, 42% reported difficulties in January 2021 compared to 17% in May 2020. Among two-parent families, 10% reported difficulties in May 2020 and 33% in January 2021. The Swedish Debt Enforcement Agency has expressed concerns that more debts are on the way and there are more families (in particular single parent families), that are struggling to pay their bills.

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN SWEDEN



In Sweden, children with at least one foreign-born parent are significantly more vulnerable to fall into poverty than those with both parents born in Sweden. 43.7% of these children were at risk of poverty in 2019 compared to only 7.3% of children with both parents born in Sweden. This is the greatest difference in the EU⁵⁷. The reasons for this significant difference are a combination of unequal access to employment in general as well as

to low-quality employment since migrants are more likely to be unemployed or in precarious employment⁵⁸. There is also unequal access to housing where an increasing number of people with a foreign background live in expensive rental accommodation. This in turn has an impact on e.g. disposable income.

Children growing up in a single parent family also have a higher risk of living with a low economic standard, especially if they have a foreign-born mother. In 2019, 58% of these households were at risk of poverty⁵⁹.

Children with one foreign-born parent and children growing up in a single parent family are over-represented in the Swedish care system.

In 2019, 31.057 children and young people (aged 0-20), which approximately corresponds to 1.5% of children, were in alternative care in Sweden⁶⁰.

Other vulnerable groups are children in the asylum process and those undocumented. There has been an increase in the number of asylum claims rejected and the impossibility for children to return to their countries of origin. The daily allowance for asylum-seekers has not changed since 1994 and currently corresponds to less than half of the subsistence allowance for a family with two adults and two children.

CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO SERVICES AS DESCRIBED IN THE CHILD GUARANTEE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

Early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, and a healthy meal



Effective and free access to early childhood education and care (ECEC)

In Sweden all children are entitled to a place in an ECEC setting from the age of 1. Municipalities are legally obliged to offer a place within three months from the date an application is made, which means they must ensure there is sufficient supply. Fees are set at the municipal level but tend to be affordable and means-tested. However, the quality of provision is not always of a high standard and the ratio of children per adult worker can be high. Since pre-schools and primary schools remained open during the pandemic and healthy students were allowed to attend school, the effect of COVID-19 on school access was not that significant in Sweden.

There is also a concern that some of Sweden's most vulnerable children (i.e., children that move around between different forms of temporary housing, asylum-seekers, and undocumented children) are missing out, only attending early childhood education occasionally or having their enrolment delayed. This is because homeless shelters are often situated at the periphery of Sweden's larger cities and little, or no consideration is given to the distance a family needs to travel to attend pre-school or school. Furthermore, homeless families are frequently moved between different forms of temporary housing, which can have a negative impact on their ability to access ECEC as this is determined on the basis of the place of residence.

Effective and free access to education



In Sweden, schools are free of charge. There are some hidden costs in some schools, mainly disguised in the form of “voluntary trips”. For example, trips to ski-resorts and the like, organised outside the normal school curriculum, excluding students who cannot afford them. All schools offer access to digital equipment. In some settings students can borrow a laptop or tablet for personal use while attending the school.

Education is a public priority in Sweden. However, in recent years, the access to education has become more unequal, and the country is falling behind its Nordic neighbours.

Over the past decade, average performance in Sweden declined from a level above or around the OECD average to below the average in all three core subjects (reading, mathematics, and science) measured in the PISA⁶¹.

Children of undocumented migrants and asylum-seeking children are entitled to education at all levels (preschool, primary and upper-secondary) with the same conditions and terms as native-born students. Asylum-seeking children should be offered a place in a school within one month of their arrival in Sweden. However, due to their insecure housing conditions and dispersal schemes enforced by the Swedish Migration Agency, they are exposed to longer waiting times and severe disruptions in their learning due to changes in their place of residence.

School segregation is an important challenge in Sweden. It emerges because of the attendance zone principle for the allocation of students between schools. Thus, students from a particular neighbourhood are admitted to their nearest public school. Consequently, the social and ethnic structures, and even status and reputation of the neighbourhood⁶², are replicated in local schools. School choice policies have also contributed to exacerbating school segregation since students with the highest degrees and from affluent families tend to opt out of immigrant-dominated schools⁶³.

In Sweden, children with disabilities are sometimes integrated into mainstream schools, depending on the type of disability. Some schools have separate classes for children with disabilities and learning difficulties. There are also special schools for children not deemed able to cope in mainstream schools. How this is organised will depend on the municipality as they are responsible for education.

A Swedish Government Official Report presented earlier this year states: “Today students are not receiving support to the extent that they need. Support needs are not always picked up, assessments can take a long time and support is delayed for too long. Nor do the interventions provided sufficiently meet students’ needs⁶⁴.”

Although school transport is free of charge, children living in rural areas travel long distances to go to school. Asylum seekers and refugees are often placed in rural areas which has, on the one hand, brought financial resources to the municipalities, but on the other hand, added additional pressure on schools already struggling to find staff.

Primary and secondary schools in Sweden have remained open throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, only with localised and temporary closures caused by an outbreak directly affecting the school population. As a result, the COVID-19 crisis has not impacted children's education as much as in other countries. However, many upper secondary schools moved to online platforms and exclusively online education for long periods. The main policy to keep the schools open is important, especially for children in vulnerable situations. However, there are children that for valid reasons, could not go to school or preschool. For example, there are children who reside with parents or grandparents who are in "risk groups", and hence more vulnerable to the virus. The support for these children has not been satisfactory. Many children did not have access to the needed equipment to follow distance learning and they also did not receive adequate educational support. A closer dialogue with parents and carers (especially for those with a different mother tongue or in need of increased support) is important for students while they cannot attend school.

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

Children in Sweden benefit from programmes run either by civil society, public authorities, or private providers. Most municipalities have a culture school that offers affordable cultural activities for children and there are also many sports clubs across the country. In surveys carried out by Save the Children Sweden, key barriers to inclusion are high fees for some of those activities, cost of equipment, inaccessible enrolment systems and lack of knowledge about the available activities.

Another concern is that children with parents in receipt of social assistance are rarely offered financial support enabling them to participate in leisure activities. Many municipalities are limiting social assistance to simply cover basic needs such as food, clothes, and hygiene articles. Leisure activities for children are seen as the responsibility of the parents.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

In Sweden, primary and secondary schools are required by law to provide free school meals to all pupils, and there is also provision for young people aged 16 to 19 years old in gymnasiums. The quality requirements for school meals are regulated by law and in general the quality is good. The government's response and the use of funds:

In 2021 the Swedish government added around €120 million to the school system budget in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim is to ensure that all children and students receive the education they are entitled to, despite the pandemic.

In Sweden, all children, including asylum-seeking children, are entitled to free healthcare in all areas. Thus, all healthcare, including dental care and specialist care for children with disabilities, is free of charge for children. All children aged 0-5 regularly visit specialist children's clinics where screening and referrals to specialist services are made.

However, access to some specialised services, for example, mental health support, can be significantly delayed due to a shortage in the provision or long waiting lists. The provision and quality of care can also vary depending on the area or the region of residence. Sweden is a large country, scarcely populated and in recent years healthcare centres have moved to more centralised spots, making access for rural populations harder.

Healthcare



Effective and free access to quality healthcare

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Healthy nutrition



Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

Primary and secondary schools in Sweden have remained open during the COVID-19 pandemic with local temporary closures. Gymnasiums, however, have primarily offered online learning. During this period many schools have continued to offer free school meals for collection, but this has not been the case everywhere.

In recent years more families with children are turning to the Swedish church and other charitable organisations for assistance with food parcels as the state response is not enough or does not cover all groups of people in need. Most of these families are single parent families, asylum-seeking families or those who are undocumented. Some of these groups are not eligible for the means-tested social assistance scheme provided through social services. In addition, there are also signs that many municipalities have become more restrictive in

their assessments of eligibility for such support, leaving increasing numbers of families without access to adequate nutrition.

Adequate housing



Effective access to adequate housing

According to the latest national mapping of the prevalence of homelessness, there were at least 15.000 homeless children in Sweden⁶⁵. At the same time, there are no reliable figures as to how many children might be affected by the Swedish housing crisis.

Organisations like Save the Children Sweden have criticised municipalities and public authorities for underestimating the actual number of children living in inadequate housing suffering the consequences of homelessness and housing exclusion. Only children whose families have received support through social services, either through temporary emergency accommodation or through so-called 'social contracts' (housing through social services that is long-term but conditional and with no security in tenancy) are counted. The situation is particularly difficult in Sweden's major cities, due to systemic failures to provide access to affordable housing for low-income families.

Furthermore, in recent years several municipalities have become more restrictive in their needs-assessments and support to homeless families. Families with parents in employment are seen as not eligible for the means-tested social assistance scheme and must find solutions to their housing needs without any support. As a result, the number of families living as lodgers or sublet tenants on a growing illegal letting market has increased and is concentrated on already distressed neighbourhoods.

In many cases, families with children are forced to move to parts of Sweden where housing is available but with very limited opportunities to work and access to services. Families

with refugee and migrant backgrounds, especially those with single mothers, are disproportionately affected by this situation.

The government's response and the use of funds



In 2016, new legislation was passed making it mandatory for all municipalities in Sweden to provide housing for refugees with settlement status. However, some municipalities have only offered temporary contracts and thousands of families in Sweden are at risk of homelessness as their tenancies are terminated. Housing is mentioned as an important factor under the ESF+ programming but no concrete measures (beyond increasing possibilities for employment) are offered to address the very serious lack of adequate housing for many people in Sweden.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCEDURES



Save the Children Sweden, along with other CSOs, has been consulted on the development of the draft ESF+ national programme and operational plan. Unfortunately, much of Save the

Children's input has so far been disregarded as the ESF+ is strongly focused on supporting access to the labour market and education. However, since the ESF+ calls on the EU Member States to allocate appropriate resources to tackle child poverty, the programmes are expected to target also child poverty reduction and social innovation. It remains to be seen how strong the language will be. The Swedish ESF-Council and the Swedish Ministry of Employment have invited Save the Children Sweden to provide input to redraft the programme. The final version is expected to be finalised in November/December 2021 and calls for proposals will be published at the beginning of 2022.

CHILD POVERTY REDUCTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE SWEDISH RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN



At the end of May 2021, the Swedish government submitted its RRP to the European Commission. Sweden requested a total of €3.2 billion in grants under the RRF. Unfortunately, child poverty reduction was not included as a priority in the Plan.





SAVE THE CHILDREN SWEDEN

Sweden is divided into 290 municipalities, and in most of them Save the Children Sweden has local voluntary associations where members work actively to protect children from violence, discrimination, and exclusion. Among other things, they give newly arrived children a good reception and also work to map exclusion in their area, train officials in children's rights, invite them to conversations, try to be seen in the media and network with other actors.

Save the Children Sweden runs numerous programmes where employees support children and families that live in poverty and/or that are newly-arrived.

EDUCATION, INCLUDING SCHOOL BASED, SPORT, LEISURE AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Save the Children Sweden organises free sports and leisure activities aimed at increasing children's participation, health, wellbeing and educational success. These programmes are delivered in collaboration with municipalities, sports associations, clubs and companies in order to improve accessibility and enhance children's rights. Most of these programmes are run in neighbourhoods with high levels of poverty and deprivation.

HEALTHCARE

Save the Children Sweden offers programmes for children and parents on the move or who have recently arrived in Sweden. This includes children who have arrived with their families and unaccompanied children. It offers group activities aimed at improving health and wellbeing among participants. Save the Children Sweden also offers support and information regarding access to healthcare, schools, social services, parenting support and individual support.

SUPPORT TO YOUNG ASYLUM SEEKERS

Save the Children Sweden offers targeted support to young adults who originally arrived in Sweden as unaccompanied children. This is an increasingly vulnerable group as many have temporary permits and their prolonged leave to remain depend on their ability to secure employment. This has become increasingly difficult because of COVID-19. The mental health of many within this target group has deteriorated significantly due to stress, trauma, homelessness, addiction, and the risk of sexual and labour exploitation.

Young adults who arrived as unaccompanied children in Sweden have been a particularly vulnerable group during COVID-19. Save the Children has met more individuals with complex unmet psychosocial needs. There has been an increased need for 1:1 support and signposting to specialist services. It has been important to keep the services for this group open as much as possible. 3,071 individuals aged 18-25 who arrived in Sweden as unaccompanied children have been reached during the year

To support asylum-seeking and refugee families, Save the Children Sweden had to adjust its working methods, for example through restricting the number of people in a group, use of digital platforms or outdoor meetings. This has sometimes had an impact on the content or quality of the programmes delivered. Many participants have also been worried which has made it more difficult to reach people also when activities have been adjusted. Furthermore, digital platforms have not worked that well due to lack of technical equipment and to the fact that many of Save the Children Sweden's service users lack access to computers, smartphones and Wi-Fi. Sometimes, the lack of knowledge and experience of using digital platforms have also been a challenge. 4,195 individuals (adults and children) were reached through Save the Children's activities targeting asylum-seekers and refugees.

CHILD PARTICIPATION

Save the Children Sweden also runs community development activities in neighbourhoods with high levels of poverty and deprivation through the programme "On Equal Terms". The programme is based on the principles of participatory action and aims at involving local residents in activities that strengthen and empower individuals and neighbourhoods. The programme also offers weekly youth group activities centred around principles of children's rights.

Story from the ground



At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, many parents with temporary contracts in the service sector lost their jobs. Although Sweden has a social-security system designed to cover loss of income, the unprecedented pressure on services caused delays in payments and in the interim periods families struggled to pay bills and put food on their table. As a response to this situation, Save the Children Sweden in partnership with the Swedish supermarket chain Willys, offered food vouchers to families in need. The distribution took place through groups and networks that had ongoing contacts with Save the Children and with families that live in poverty. The families that benefited from this scheme already struggled; the pandemic put extra strain on already difficult living circumstances. The majority were single parents and/or had a migrant background. Some were still in the asylum process or were undocumented.

One family that benefited from this scheme was Asma and her teenage son. They live in a disadvantaged neighbourhood in the city of Malmö. Asma was employed in the service sector on a zero-hour contract and did not receive as much work as prior to the pandemic. She also felt worried about what jobs to choose: *“Of course, you worry about the COVID-19 situation and about family or friends falling ill. Do you dare taking any job just to survive?”* Asma explained that the voucher scheme had been helpful for her: *“It has been helpful because I am a single mother. I have a teenager at home who is training, and he eats a lot, so any help is welcome right now.”* Asma wants to say to national decision makers that: *“They need to be more prepared. So many parts of society have been affected by this crisis. Say you lost your job in May, one month later you have not received your unemployment benefit because so many people have applied at the same time. This really affects single parents and our children.”*



SAVE THE CHILDREN SWEDEN'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 crisis has imposed restricted access to leisure activities for many children. It has also had an impact on Save the Children's ability to continue to deliver activities. In some areas all sports facilities and schools have been closed, while in other places Save the Children Sweden has been able to continue to run its activities. It has been unclear on what basis different decisions have been made and to what extent children's health and well-being has been considered.

During the pandemic, Save the Children Sweden created an on-line platform for children between 6 and 12 years old offering a range of videos and ideas for activities that can be done at home or outdoors. Due to the pandemic, many clubs have lost sources of income and have therefore increased their fees putting children that live in poverty at a disadvantage. In areas where Save the Children offers free leisure activities, outdoor activities have been offered for smaller groups of children. In total, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Save the Children Sweden engaged with 1.518 children through leisure activities (the majority aged between 9 and 12).

In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic Save the Children Sweden met more families in need of basic material support. In response, Save the Children offered food parcels and vouchers. It also opened up community rooms as study-spaces for young people who were expected to study from home but who live in inadequate or overcrowded housing. This was also a way of breaking the isolation felt by many young people whose schools were shut down due to the pandemic.

ADVOCACY WORK

In 2020, Save the Children Sweden primarily worked on advocacy campaigns aimed at increasing awareness regarding the rights and living conditions of unaccompanied children and youth. Save the Children has also published a national report on child poverty outlining the risk of poverty over a child's lifetime in Sweden. Other key areas of advocacy are children that

live in homelessness and severe housing deprivation and redistributive policies targeting families with children.

Save the Children Sweden regularly engages in meetings and influencing activities with decision-makers in Sweden on a local, regional and national level. Save the Children Sweden also engages with the media frequently to put forward the organisation's concerns and viewpoints.

FUNDING OF SAVE THE CHILDREN SWEDEN

During 2020 Save the Children Sweden has received funding from various EU funds such as Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), Erasmus +, ESF+ and Leader. The funds have been used to implement and develop new methods and programmes, increase knowledge and carry out research activities.



Recommendations towards national decision makers on measures to be included in the Swedish Child Guarantee Action Plan

The targeted categories of children in need to be reached

- Children living in homelessness or severe housing deprivation.
- Children with a migrant background, including children in the asylum process and those undocumented.
- Children growing up in single parent families.

Effective and free access to ECEC

- Ensure equal access and quality of ECEC for all children and especially for children from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds such as migrant families and minority groups. A study conducted on behalf of The National Agency for Education shows that high-quality preschools are most important for children from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds, migrant families, and minority groups⁶⁶.
- Strengthen the ECEC settings by ensuring that all settings are required by law to have qualified preschool teachers and sufficiently trained childcare workers.

Effective and free access to education

- Develop early action to combat inequalities in the educational system, such as supporting young children in their education and activities inside or outside school. This will, in the long-term, also increase employability
- Develop early action to combat inequalities in the educational system, such as supporting young children in their education and activities inside or outside school. This will, in the long-term, also increase employability. According to national regulations, the Swedish school system shall be compensatory, which means taking into

consideration the needs of all pupils and weigh up differences in their prerequisites by allocating resources. In practice, the compensatory measures are not enough. This has been confirmed in the latest PISA results⁶⁷.

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

- All municipalities should ensure compensatory measures and develop leisure and holiday activities for children and young people of different ages. To make this possible, they should receive support from the government. In a report from 2020 “The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society”, (MUCF)⁶⁸, recommends the Swedish government to launch an inquiry to look over how financial support can be designed to ensure the right of all children and young people to access leisure activities.

Effective and free access to quality healthcare

- The public health authority’s report on health inequalities shows the connections between gender, economy and deterioration of mental health at a young age. Save the Children Sweden calls on the Swedish government to increase the access of children in vulnerable situations to preventive measures, especially regarding primary care where major inequalities exist between children living in wealthier and poorer areas of Sweden.
- Strengthen access to mental health support. The long waiting periods must be shortened and public awareness campaigning on mental health care must be prioritised.

Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

Secure equal access to healthy nutrition for families in vulnerable situations. The daily allowance for asylum-seeking families must be increased.

Effective access to adequate housing

Implement measures to tackle homelessness and strengthen the social protection system by taking a holistic approach, not only focusing on parents' employability and ability to support themselves and their families.

The use of EU funds and national budgets to support children and families in need

The Swedish government should reform the ESF+ national programme and operational plan proposals so that they fully reflect the priority areas of the Child Guarantee (i.e., ECEC, education, health, nutrition, housing, as well as sports and culture) since in their current state, the proposals do not address these areas specifically and there is a lack of specific attention to children.

Save the Children Sweden calls for a shift from the narrow perspective where employment is seen as (almost) the only path to combat child poverty, to a more holistic perspective where social aspects are also considered. National budgets and EU funds, including ESF+, REACT-EU and RRF, must be allocated to tackle child poverty on various fronts, including those outlined in the Child Guarantee priorities and the specific challenges to the Swedish context (as outlined above).

The UNCRC was incorporated into Swedish law on 1 January 2020. Save the Children Sweden would like to see specific references to the Convention in the plans to implement EU funds, including ESF+, REACT EU and RRF, as well as clear and concrete links to the specific rights outlined in the Convention.

Further measures to be included in the Swedish Child Guarantee Action Plan to address social exclusion and to break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage

Save the Children Sweden calls on the Swedish government to:

- Increase targeted family allowances such as housing benefit and child benefit.
- Work towards ensuring that there is no age limit to receive benefit from EU funds (currently the limit is set at 15 years for ESF). As a result, no funds are used to target child poverty and homelessness reducing the ability to use such funds for preventative work.
- Provide platforms for people to meet, be active and talk about challenges and opportunities in their local area and society as a whole.

Timeline of actions. What should be prioritised?

- Support families and children's access to adequate housing.
- Take urgent action to combat large and growing educational inequality.
- Increasingly invest in family policies on a national level.

Germany



Summary

Child poverty is an unresolved structural problem in Germany. Despite many efforts in the past, Germany has not yet succeeded in giving all children equal opportunities and this is also reflected in the most recent Eurostat rate that shows that 25.6% of children in Germany were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2020⁶⁹. Many inequalities are evident across German districts and cities, with percentages of children in need ranging from above 30% in some districts to only 2% in others. The barriers to access ECEC and education are higher for children with a migrant background and children from families with socioeconomic disadvantages. Also, children from families with a low socioeconomic status have fewer chances of growing up healthy or eating healthily. Save the Children Germany focuses on policy influencing at the national, federal, and local level and runs programmes to support children in the most vulnerable situations. Save the Children Germany calls on the German government to develop an ambitious Child Guarantee Action Plan that will include measures related to children in need accessing key service areas with a particular focus on children's free access to quality ECEC, education and healthcare and measures that will address social exclusion such as the design of benefits for poor children and their families, the upgrade of disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the systematic participation of children in decision-making procedures. Finally, Save the Children Germany urges the German government to advance investments under ESF+ and RRF to tackle child poverty and social exclusion with the aim of delivering sustainable reforms.

Key facts

1/4 of children

25.6% of children in Germany were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2020.

Migrant children

Most children in poverty in Germany are children from migrant and single parent families.

45.2%

45.2% of children receiving social benefits nationwide grow up in single-parent families.

42%

7.4% of students in Germany receive special education. Of these, only 42% follow mainstream education.

National updates

CHILD POVERTY IN GERMANY



Child poverty is an unresolved structural problem in Germany. Despite a long period of economic growth, child poverty levels remain significantly high. Already during the pandemic in 2020, the Bertelsmann Foundation estimated that approximately 2.8 million children, or 1 in 5 children, were growing up in poverty in Germany (21.3%)⁷⁰. The Eurostat figures for 2020 – 25,6% – verify this estimation and confirm the urgency of the situation. The situation varies greatly between east and west Germany. Data from 2019 shows that whereas in the eastern states, child poverty rate has somewhat improved (from 22.1% in 2014 to 16.9% in 2019), in western Germany, the rate has stagnated at 13% since 2014. Enormous differences are also evident across German districts and cities, with percentages of children in need ranging from above 30% in some districts to only 2% in others⁷¹.

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN GERMANY



A recent UNICEF study (2021)⁷² shows that despite many efforts, Germany has not yet succeeded in giving all children comparable development opportunities. Most children in poverty in Germany are children from migrant and single parent families. According to the Bertelsmann Foundation Study⁷³, 45.2% of children in receipt of SGB II⁷⁴ benefits nationwide grow up in single-parent families. This high incidence of poverty among children in single-parent families is evident in all German states. In all family households, the poverty rate increases with the number of children despite the availability of several family policy benefits (child benefit, child supplement, etc.). Children and young people with disabilities continue to be excluded from many key areas of life such as education, leisure, culture, and the labour market.

CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO SERVICES AS DESCRIBED IN THE CHILD GUARANTEE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:

Early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, and a healthy meal each school day

Effective and free access to early childhood education and care (ECEC)



Germany faces several challenges with respect to children's access to ECEC. First, there is a growing childcare gap due to the limited number of places available. At the same time, the demand for childcare places grew in past years. On average, the supply gap was around 12% in 2017. By 2025, at least 600.000 additional places will be needed for children up to school entry age. Finally, access to childcare comes with hidden costs. Parents often have to contribute financially which often leads to education inequalities.

There are also major differences between the federal states in terms of demand coverage, financing, parental contribution levels, qualification of skilled workers, shortage of skilled workers, childcare ratios and scope of childcare. For children with a migrant background and children from families with socioeconomic disadvantages, the barriers to access childcare continue to be higher than for other children. For refugee children, access to childcare is not always provided. Their access is often denied with the argument that children have not yet been distributed to the community or are still living in the reception facility and are therefore not yet entitled to early childhood support.

The government's response and use of funds



The federal states regulate the payment of parents' contributions to ECEC differently. Since August 1st, 2019, parents who receive child allowance, according to SGB II or housing benefits are exempted to pay ECEC fees. In Berlin, since August 2018, ECEC is free for all children. ECEC settings are allowed to charge for the meals and supplementary services such as additional sports activities, organic food, or language lessons. With the Good Day-care Facilities Act⁷⁵ the federal government is supporting the states with a total of €5.5 billion until 2022 in measures to further develop the quality of ECEC and relieve parents from the burden of fees. However, this has not led to the existence of nationwide quality standards regarding ECEC.

Effective and free access to education



Most aspects of education fall under the direct authority of the education ministries of the 16 states (Länder) and there are considerable differences in education across states. Primary and secondary schools in Germany are usually free, however, children from socially weaker families or children with a non-German language of origin have significantly lower chances of achieving a good school leaving certificate. This is mainly due to the lack of support received at home as many of these parents cannot help with homework and school due to language barriers and/or long working hours

Regarding teaching materials, only half of the federal states (Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Bremen, Hesse, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Schleswig-Holstein, Saxony and Hamburg) offer free textbooks. In the other states, mandatory parental participation has been introduced. The federal states regulate whether textbooks become the property of the students after use, whether a loan system is established or whether books are rented for a fee.

As for digital literacy, there are considerable regional differences in broadband coverage. Regions with lower population density differ in terms of the available digital infrastructure. In addition, the digital competencies of young people differ according to social status.

Access to school for refugee children depends on the federal state. There are 16 different school laws and thus different ways to deal with this issue. In the case of refugee children that arrive with their parents and are obliged to live in reception facilities for 6 months, 2 years or until repatriation, it depends on the respective federal state law whether school attendance is also compulsory during this period. Many children have only access to a limited school curriculum during that time. For young refugees, the rule in most federal states is that school attendance is compulsory after 3 or 6 months or after a municipal assignment. In the case of unaccompanied children, compulsory school attendance is regulated by state law. Asylum seekers who are in the process of applying for asylum and children without a legal residency status in Germany are not automatically subject to compulsory schooling, but must meet certain requirements beforehand, such as their assignment to a municipality or district. The consequences for these children are serious since the time span between arrival and the start of compulsory schooling can take several weeks or even months due to extended processing times, during which the child is exempted from school.

Regarding special and inclusive education, 7.4% of students receive special education. Of these, only 42% follow mainstream education. Despite much progress, the inclusive development of the German education system still has a long way to go. Although legal frameworks for an inclusive education system have been created in the school laws of the Länder, some of these legal frameworks still contain restrictions on inclusive education, which also stand in the way of the individual right to attend a general and vocational school.

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

Sports and other leisure activities generally take place outside the school setting and are usually arranged by the families. Participation in school excursions, class trips etc, is not free but financial support and subsidies from the government can be obtained. However, the public subsidies for sports clubs and music lessons are still quite low (€15/month) and need to be increased

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

Three million students in all-day schools are entitled to lunch – in some cases free lunch. The number of children and young people who eat lunch at school has almost doubled in the past ten years⁷⁶. Unfortunately, free lunches at ECEC settings and schools, were dropped without replacement during COVID-19.

The government's response and the use of funds



At the beginning of 2011, an education and participation package was introduced to enable the participation of children from low-income families in social and cultural life. The education and participation package has been revised over the years and the last changes came into force in January 2021. The package includes, amongst others, allowances for school and class trips; a flat rate for school supplies; benefits for school transportation (monthly ticket); lunch at school, kindergarten or after-school care centre and participation in culture and leisure activities.

In mid-2019, the Bundestag passed the Strong Families Act to protect families with small and medium incomes more effectively against poverty. To achieve this goal, the child supplement was increased, and the benefits of the education and participation package

were optimised. However, on many occasions, due to bureaucracy, benefits do not arrive or are not claimed because parents are required to go to the office to claim them. In addition, even though the amounts have been increased, they are still too low (e.g., €150 are clearly insufficient to cover all necessary school expenses).

In Berlin, the House of Representatives decided that starting in August 2019, “every Berlin schoolchild in grades 1 to 6 will be entitled to lunch without cost-sharing.” The costs will be covered by the state.

Finally, to support families during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government approved a child bonus⁷⁷ of €300. However, notwithstanding the importance to provide extracash to households with children in times of emergency, limited impact can be achieved with this type of measures without combining them with holistic child poverty reduction measures.

Healthcare



Effective and free access to quality health-care

According to Destatis⁷⁸ the health situation of German children has improved in the last years. Their social background, however, has a strong influence on their health. Children from homes with lower socio-economic status have worse chances of growing up healthily.

Children and young people with a low socio-economic status more often have mental health or behavioural problems. They exercise less regularly, have a less healthy diet and are more likely to be overweight. While unaccompanied child refugees have legal but not actual access to the full benefits of statutory health insurance, refugee children and adolescents who come to Germany with their parents are only entitled to treatment for acute illness and for treatment that is essential

to safeguard their health during the first 15 months. For unaccompanied and accompanied children and adolescents, access to mental health care is severely limited in practice. Preventive health care and psychotherapeutic support therefore hardly takes place. This is mainly due to legal hurdles, language barriers and lack of knowledge of services provided by the German healthcare system.

Self-employed parents with low incomes may fall between the cracks of the Social Health Insurance system and migrants have access only to a restricted set of benefits⁷⁹.

In terms of access to healthcare in rural settings, national data show that some rural areas, particularly in eastern states, have an acute shortage of doctors.

As for children with disabilities, access to doctors' offices and hospitals, as well as to medical education and information, is often difficult or even impossible.

Healthy nutrition



Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

Currently, circa 950 Tafeln⁸⁰ in Germany regularly support more than 1.6 million people affected by poverty. The 2019 survey revealed that the percentage of children and young people who rely on Tafeln support is around 30%. Within one year, the number of children and young people increased by 50.000. The current basic level of financial support from the state for poor households is not sufficient to implement a healthy diet.

Due to the closure of schools and ECEC settings during the pandemic, numerous children did not have access to healthy lunches. Although there was a "Corona children's bonus" in place, the financial support for families was not enough to provide a healthy and balanced diet.

Finally, there is no legally obligatory regulation regarding nationwide quality standards

for school meals⁸¹. The requirements of the German Nutrition Society's (DGE) quality standard for school meals are only partially met (there is still too much meat, too little fish and by no means fresh fruit, vegetables, and salads every day). In all regions, the predominant catering system is the delivery of hot meals.

Adequate housing

Effective access to adequate housing



According to 2017 estimates by the German Youth Institute, about 37.000 children and young people are homeless. They live predominantly in big cities, especially in Berlin. Emergency shelters in cities like Berlin are open to homeless people and provide overnight accommodation and food distribution. In some cases, the facilities also help homeless people by providing medical care or personal hygiene.

The number of social housing units in Germany is falling, failing to support those in need. Last year, more apartments for people on low incomes were eliminated than new ones were built.

The government's response and the use of funds



Social housing assistance supports those households unable to find an appropriate accommodation on the housing market. These include low-income households, low-income families with children, single parents, pregnant women, the elderly, the homeless, and people with disabilities. The latter often incur additional financial and organisational expenses in everyday life. To compensate for these expenses, people with severe disabilities are entitled to the so-called "disadvantage compensations", in the form of tax relief or other benefits/privileges.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCEDURES



Participation of children and parents in policy processes needs to be further improved in Germany. Despite growing efforts to implement youth participation at all regional and structural levels, genuine participation does not always take place. Only around 5% of the 11.000 municipalities in Germany have permanent child and youth committees. These are often structurally safeguarded by statutes and have the right to be consulted or to contribute to decisions.

Regarding the participation of CSOs in stakeholder dialogues concerning the allocation of EU funds, there was a consultation process around the ESF + operational programme which also involved NGOs, although Save the Children Germany did not participate in the process.

During the consultation process, a survey asked participants to identify which objectives under the ESF+ were in most need of funding for the coming funding period. Most of the answers focused on the promotion of social inclusion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including the most disadvantaged, the promotion of women's participation in the labour force, a better work-life balance, including improved access to childcare, a healthy and appropriate working environment, taking into account health risks, the adaptation of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs to change, and healthy and active ageing⁸².

CHILD POVERTY REDUCTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE GERMAN RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN



The German RRP⁸³ includes reforms aimed at strengthening social participation and educational support for pupils in need. With the investment programme “Childcare financing 2020–2021”, the federal government provides grants to Länder and local authorities for investment in day-care facilities and day-care for children from birth to school entry. Moreover, there is a one-time bonus for children of €300.

Under the so-called “DigitalPakt Schule” Germany's objective is “that all students have equal access to distance learning via broadband connections and IT devices, and that they have the necessary digital competencies”. This also includes students with disabilities. All teachers should have access to digital literacy for lesson preparation and to other forms of digital instruction with mobile devices that are part of the school's IT infrastructure. To ensure broad participation in distance learning, the initiative will include an “instant equipment programme” so that schools can lend mobile devices to those students who are unable to use their own mobile devices at home.

Moreover, the German RRP foresees a reform programme called “Support for students with pandemic learning delays” within the framework of the “Catching up action programme for children and adolescents for the years 2021 and 2022”. priority in the Plan.



SAVE THE CHILDREN GERMANY

Save the Children Germany works to ensure that:

- ✓ Children in Germany are protected from violence.
- ✓ Children in need have access to quality education.
- ✓ Refugee children are protected from violence and have equal access to education, health, participation, and appropriate housing.

To achieve systemic and sustainable change, Save the Children Germany's work focuses on policy influencing at the federal and state level as well as with other relevant actors such as refugee reception centres, schools, and nurseries.

Save the Children Germany also enhances the capacity of school and nursery staff to promote children's rights. To pilot and test good practice models, Save the Children Germany also carries out some, albeit limited, work directly with children in schools and ECEC settings.

Save the Children Germany provides the following support to children in key areas:

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

In the area of ECEC, Save the Children Germany has recently implemented two projects “Kinderleicht Kinderstark”⁸⁴ and “Wir schaffen Raum”⁸⁵. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, some trainings of nursery and school staff were largely carried out via remote digital formats instead of face-to-face trainings. Video tutorials further complemented the training efforts. In some projects, direct activities with children had to be stopped and Save the Children focused on strengthening the capacity of nursery and school staff.

EDUCATION, INCLUDING SCHOOL BASED AND EXTRA LEISURE, SPORTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Save the Children Germany is currently implementing two projects that seek to improve the educational outcomes for children from deprived backgrounds. It promotes early reading skills through the “Leseoasen”⁸⁶ project as well as digital (making) skills through the “Makerspace”⁸⁷ project. These projects reach children from deprived socio-economic backgrounds and at the same time generate best practice models that can be replicated by other schools and organisations.

HOUSING AND HEALTHCARE

Save the Children Germany also supports street youth in Berlin to access psychosocial support and health services as well as safe emergency sleeping places and longer-term accommodation through the Karuna Project⁸⁸.

SAVE THE CHILDREN GERMANY'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Save the Children Germany assesses existing policies and practices and advises stakeholders on how to adapt policies and improve their practices. Due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, all advisory and policy influencing work was carried out via digital platforms instead of face-to-face meetings. By adapting in this way, Save the Children Germany managed to continue implementing all ongoing projects.

In direct response to the COVID-19 crisis Save the Children Germany also started additional projects and activities such as the provision of emergency kits, psychosocial support, practical support and the provision of safe emergency accommodation to street youth in Berlin. Furthermore, Save the Children Germany developed and distributed creative toolkit packages for refugee children in reception centres to support their mental health during the crisis.

Through these activities Save the Children Germany has reached about 7.500 children and youth directly since the start of the pandemic. Save the Children Germany has also enhanced the capacity of more than 90 schools, nurseries, and reception centres.

ADVOCACY WORK

Save the Children Germany advocates for:

- Country-wide compulsory minimum standards for the realisation of child rights in refugee reception centres and other accommodation centres for refugees.
- The timely re-unification of asylum-seeking children and youth and their families.
- The right for refugee children to access nursery care and schooling within 30 days of arrival in Germany.
- Child safeguarding standards to be met during all stages of the repatriation process.

FUNDING OF SAVE THE CHILDREN GERMANY

Save the Children's programmes are funded by the AMIF, the Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), as well as corporate donors

such as Ikea, the Ikea Foundation, Postbank and others. Another complementary source of funding is made up of private donations.

Story from the ground



Eighteen-year-old Patrizia was homeless for a year and a half. She was living on the streets in Berlin as COVID-19 spread throughout Germany. The pandemic hit Patrizia badly and made life on the streets even more difficult. Asking passers-by for money also became more difficult.

A friend who was already receiving support from Save the Children's partner KARUNA⁸⁹ told Patrizia about the shelter run by KARUNA in Brandenburg, and Patrizia was able to move in. In this countryside shelter, Patrizia follows a structured daily routine. The informal atmosphere and psychological support provided on site are a great source of stability to her. She hopes that she will soon be able to find a temporary job while continuing her apprenticeship training as a shop assistant. The housing and support provided to young people in Brandenburg is financially supported by Save the Children.

"I would now tell other young people in my situation that they should also accept the help provided by KARUNA and Save the Children. I thought I didn't need any of that. [...] But now I've learnt that talking things over and accepting help can help you to move on more quickly [...]."

"I hope that I can complete my job training. After my apprenticeship, I will probably go into social work. I would love to help people who have gone through just as much as I have."

"Lots of people think that I live on the street for the fun of it. People's prejudices are quite harsh and sometimes they've hurt me. I would really like people to listen to the stories behind homelessness."



Recommendations towards national decision makers on measures to be included in the German Child Guarantee Action Plan⁹⁰

The targeted categories of children in need to be reached

- Homeless children or children experiencing severe housing deprivation.
- Children with disabilities.
- Children with a migrant background and refugee children.
- Children in precarious family situations.
- Children in single parent and large families.

Effective and free access to ECEC

- Develop nationwide quality standards for childcare settings and staff, geared around the best interests of the child.
- Refer to children's rights in the Good Day-care Facilities Act (Gute-KiTa-Gesetz) for agreements between the federal and state governments, and in the elementary-level curricula for the states.
- Eliminate or reduce access barriers to early-education services for families in (or at risk of) poverty and social exclusion. This would include effective parent counselling and guidance on options for discounted contributions or reduced fees.

Effective and free access to education

- Eliminate the disadvantages of children in migration or at risk of poverty. Refugee children in particular must be able to exercise their right to education without restrictions.
- Improve the integration of the needs of children and adolescents when developing full-day schools. This requires more flexible solutions, public services, and the option

of not being obliged to participate fully every day. Full-day schooling should also be possible outside school grounds at public youth-support facilities and space for self-management in general must be provided.

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

- Invest in a sustainable social and cultural infrastructure in social areas while expanding and securing extracurricular and non-formal education opportunities.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

- Ensure free school meals for children in need in all schools and in all states.
- Increase the €150 benefit under the Strong Families Act to support children and their families' needs in a holistic way.

Effective and free access to quality healthcare

- Develop holistic health-promoting initiatives that strengthen the health situation of children and adolescents from families with a low socioeconomic status in cooperation with the states, the municipalities and the civil society.
- Create framework conditions for chronically ill children and children with mental health problems that will enable the organisation of individual treatment and support management depending on the diagnosis, the severity of the clinical picture and the life situation of the young patients.

- Provide all children and adolescents with unrestricted access to health care, including health promotion, preventive services, and rehabilitation.

Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

- Strengthen the quality of school meals by introducing national healthy school meals standards.

Effective access to adequate housing

- Housing support programmes need to consider and cater for the complex psycho-social needs of street youth. Housing programmes for this target group can only be successful if they provide a holistic package of both long-term psycho-social support and adequate housing.

The use of EU funds and national budgets to support children and families in need

During the 2014-2020 EU funding period, the main target groups of the ESF at federal level did not include children. This needs to change in the ESF+ allocation as according to the data presented in this report, child poverty levels are high in Germany. In addition, the ESF+ should also prioritise children as per specific objective 1 of the Fund and as per Article 7 calling all Member States to ensure appropriate allocation of ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty and implement the Child Guarantee.

As for REACT-EU funds, these are distributed to individual federal states and no overview on different focus areas is available. With a budget of €2 billion, the “Action Programme to Catch Up with Corona” is responding to the learning difficulties that have occurred among students due to the absence of classroom instruction, as well as the psychosocial burdens on children,

young people and their families. Thus, funding is available to increase educational opportunities for students in need who have been particularly affected by the consequences of the pandemic.

To support children and families in need, Germany’s RRP, EU funds as well as national budgets need to significantly increase the investments in children and adolescents going beyond ECEC and investments in digital education. The RRF should focus on supporting children and youth and should especially contribute to ensuring quality education for all children in Germany and also tackling youth unemployment through effective training programmes and targeted support.

Further measures to be included in the German Child Guarantee Action Plan to address social exclusion and break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage.

- Design services and benefits to support poor children, adolescents, and families in such a way that they are available on a low-threshold basis and can be easily taken up by the beneficiaries.
- Upgrade disadvantaged neighbourhoods and provide social services, facilities, and educational institutions with particularly good staffing levels so as not to exacerbate the disadvantages faced by children in poverty.
- Systematically anchor sustainable participation processes and structures in the various areas and levels of child and youth policy and promote political education so that children and young people recognise and learn what rights they are entitled to and how they can demand and implement them. Children need to be involved in the development of strategies and policies that affect them.

Netherlands

Summary



The number of children living in poverty in the Netherlands is increasing. The percentage of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion increased from 15.5% in 2019 to 16.1% in 2020 leading to families with young children having no food, water or gas and in some cases even being deported from their homes.

Children in the Netherlands do not have an independent right to social security as prescribed in Article 26 of the UNCRC, since the Netherlands is the only signatory State to the UNCRC which has made a reservation to Article 26. The last few years have also been dominated by the childcare allowance affair ('kinderopvangtoeslagaffaire') which caused severe complications to many families in need in the Netherlands due to the strict legislation and the tough action of the Dutch tax authorities. Unfortunately, the foreseen compensation is still pending. The Dutch early education system varies significantly across municipalities. Housing is also an issue that affects poor families in the Netherlands. The "middle rent" and the social rental homes shortage leads to a situation where many families are living either in dire conditions or homeless as access to shelters can be provided only for people with a specific care need and not for poor families.

Save the Children Netherlands supports children in knowing their rights and children in migration by providing them with psychosocial support. Save the Children Netherlands is very concerned that the Dutch government links child poverty reduction almost entirely to parents' access to employment. However, even before the COVID-19 crisis, it emerged that more than a third of children living in poverty had working parents. This decision

Key facts

+0,6%

The percentage of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion increased from 15.5% in 2019 to 16.1% in 2020.

7.8%

251.000 children (7.8% of all children) lived in households below the minimum income in 2019.

11%

11% of children aged 4-18 are overweight and 2.1% are obese while the VAT on fruit and vegetables has increased from 6% up to 9%.

is also reflected in the ESF+ programming which will mainly concentrate on people's access to employment without investing in the strengthening of services. Save the Children Netherlands calls on the Dutch government to reconsider this decision and recognise the equal importance of good quality services. An ambitious Child Guarantee Action Plan addressing the challenges pertaining to key service areas and measures to effectively tackle child poverty and social exclusion can change this and bring more balance between the priorities.

National updates

CHILD POVERTY IN THE NETHERLANDS



In 2019 according to Statistics Netherlands figures⁹¹, 251.000 children (7.8%) lived in a family with an income below the low-income threshold⁹². However, according to the AROPE indicator of Eurostat the share of the total number of children that were at risk of poverty in 2019 was 15.5%, and this percentage is likely to increase in the coming years. Figures for 2020 already show an increase to 16.1%⁹³.

The government recently set a target for reducing the number of children living in poverty by 50%, from 9.2 % in 2015 to 4.6 % in 2030, following the SDGs. The main focus is to increase incomes through promoting employment for parents, but this is not always realistic. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, it emerged that more than a third of children in poverty had working parents⁹⁴. Besides, this strategy still denies the right of the child to a sufficient standard of living, which has already been restricted by the Dutch reservation to article 26 of the UNCRC⁹⁵. Moreover, research shows that, if the current government policy continues to be implemented, poverty will increase by 25% in the coming years not even counting the effects of the COVID-19 crisis⁹⁶.

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN THE NETHERLANDS



23.2% of children from single-parent families grow up in poverty in the Netherlands. These families get by on social assistance benefits. The risk of poverty is smaller for older children in a single-parent family because as children grow older, single parents have more opportunities to work.

Most children at risk of poverty live in households with a transfer income – mostly a social

assistance benefit – as the main source of income. In 2018, this concerned two-thirds of all children at risk of poverty.

Children with parents of a non-western origin are also at greater risk. Refugees (and their children) from non-western countries who have a residence permit are mostly dependent on social assistance benefits and live below the low-income threshold.

Finally, about one-third of children at risk of poverty come from working families (in-work poverty)⁹⁷.

A significant issue that concerns children in the Netherlands is that they do not have an independent right to social security as prescribed in Article 26 of the UNCRC, since the Netherlands is the only signatory State to the UNCRC which has made a reservation to Article 26. In this reservation, the government argues that children should be given an independent right to social security including social insurance, as children can claim social security through their parents. However, current practice shows that the reservation to article 26 of the UNCRC leads to harrowing cases in which families with young children do not have enough food, water or gas available or are likely to be deported from their homes. Consequently the Dutch Government is criticised by the UN Child Rights Committee urging the government to remove its reservation to Article 26 in the UNCRC. On commission from Save the Children Netherlands, the Verwey-Jonker Institute carried out research on the effect of the the reservation and identified mainly 3 categories of children negatively affected by the Dutch reservation, namely children who have (almost) no contact with their parents, children whose parents are not supported by social services, children whose parents do not pay social benefits for their children⁹⁸.

Finally, in 2020, the Netherlands faced the childcare allowance affair ('kinderopvangtoeslagaffaire') a scandal concerning false allegations of fraud made by the tax authorities while attempting to regulate the distribution of childcare benefits.

In the period 2004- 2019, there were an estimated 26.000 parents and 70.000 children who had made (often minor) mistakes or who had been misled by childcare agencies, when claiming allowances. Tax authorities wrongly accused parents of making fraudulent benefit claims, requiring them to pay back the allowances they had received in their entirety. In many cases, this sum amounted to tens of thousands of euros, driving families into severe financial hardship. As a result, some of the victims had to deal with large-scale disruptions in their lives because they lost their homes or jobs, developed psychological problems, or could no longer afford the necessary medical treatments. A Parliamentary Interrogation Committee on Childcare Allowance was established and presented its report 'Unknown Injustice' in December 2020. Following the parliamentary inquiry into the matter, several Ministers and the Rutte III cabinet resigned. The government announced measures to prevent another allowance "affair" in the future and expanded the compensation scheme. However, the announced compensation is taking longer than expected, and many children and families are still in precarious circumstances. The number of children that have been placed out of their homes as a result of the childcare allowance affair is currently being investigated.

The cabinet wants to make savings on child benefit (kinderbijslag) by not indexing the amount in 2022 and 2023 and less in 2024. According to the cabinet, the measure should raise 100 million euros annually to improve the information and communication systems of various implementing organisations (e.g., SZB and UWV). The envisaged measure has a negative effect on the purchasing power of households below the low-income threshold. Save the Children Netherlands believes that this runs counter to the government's efforts to reduce poverty among children.

CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO SERVICES AS DESCRIBED IN THE CHILD GUARANTEE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

Early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, and a healthy meal each school day



Effective and free access to early childhood education and care (ECEC)

In the Netherlands, every child from the age of 6 weeks up to 4 years old can attend ECEC (day-care/ Kinderdagverblijf) and Dutch municipalities are obliged to provide pre-school education to children aged 2.5-4 within their local area. In 2017, 86% of children aged 2.5-4 attended daycare and pre-school education^{99,100}. Day-care is provided by privately-owned organisations and is only accessible via a financial contribution by the parents. Working parents can receive an income-related allowance for the costs of childcare, which is provided by the (national) tax authorities. Municipalities can provide subsidies to non-working parents of children aged 2.5-4 for supporting them in accessing pre-school education. Subsidy rules may differ between municipalities. In most municipalities parents are required to pay a parental, often income-related, contribution. Children with working parents from the lowest income groups appear to attend day-care less often than their counterparts from higher income groups. Income could be a driving factor for this differentiation, as well as cultural differences with lower income households often being less positive about ECEC than higher income households¹⁰¹.

It is not clear whether children in need have access to ECEC. This is because municipalities decide for themselves which toddlers belong to the groups that need further support¹⁰². The main indicator used is parents' (low) education level. Referral usually takes place via the baby and toddler clinic (consultatiebureau), using criteria that are set by the municipality. Municipalities cannot require parents to enrol their children in an ECEC-group. All parents are free to choose a provision for their children or to refrain from using any of the provisions. Children without a residence permit, particularly those living in asylum centres with their parents,

do not always have access to ECEC¹⁰³. More than 40% of municipalities with a facility run by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), do not offer preschool education for toddlers¹⁰⁴.

From the age of 4, children in the Netherlands can go to primary school. Pre-school education is aimed at children between 2.5 and 4 years old with (risk of) educational disadvantage and is provided at a pre-school facility, such as a pre-school or daycare center. Early Childhood education is for promoting educational opportunities for target group children in class 1 and 2 of primary school¹⁰⁵.

Effective and free access to education



In the Netherlands, primary, secondary and special education require a voluntary financial contribution from parents. The amount of the parental contribution is determined by the school and is used for activities outside the school hours (e.g., school trips or Christmas celebrations) which are not part of the compulsory educational programme. The law clearly states that this contribution should always be voluntary. The law also requires schools to state both the amount and the voluntary nature of the contribution in the school guide. However, parents' contribution is certainly not always experienced as voluntary. For example, the current law allows schools to exclude children from school trips and other extra activities if the voluntary contribution has not been paid by the parents. In addition, the application of a high voluntary parental contribution also leads to segregation, whereby parents with lower income will not choose schools that require high voluntary parental contributions. This leads to segregated schools that gather children growing up in households with higher income and the opposite. Schoolbooks and educational supplies are free for children. However, digital learning resources are not always free of charge. This has led (especially during the COVID-19) to big divides between children from higher income households and those from lower income households, contributing to inequality at school.

When it comes to children with disabilities' access to mainstream education, the current two-track system of mainstream and special education does not meet the international standards of inclusive education. There is no clear definition of inclusive education, let alone concrete objectives and a plan to achieve them. In 2018, the number of children in special education was back to the high levels of 2014. In 2019, it increased further and waiting lists for special education were created.

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

Participation of children in need in leisure and sport activities depends on the municipalities. They often offer support in kind, such as discounts at school, participation in sports and leisure activities, transport, or support in the purchase of essential items such as a bicycle or a winter coat.

Research shows big differences between municipalities that establish partnerships with organisations like the Youth Sports Fund, the Youth Education Fund, the Youth Culture Fund, Stichting Leergeld, Nationaal Fonds Kinderhulp, and those that do not. Children that can make use of the larger, national organisations have more freedom of choice. In addition to the offer, the income threshold that municipalities use to qualify for support also differs across them. NGOs and faith-based organisations provide support on top of the services that municipalities offer, which indicates that children need more support than the municipalities are actually offering.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

Dutch schools do not offer school meals to any child. Children are free to buy food from the school canteen or to take it from home. Since 2020, a milk producer provides free school milk 2 or 3 days a week to 200 Dutch primary schools (there are over 6.500 primary schools).

The government's response and use of funds



A law has recently been passed to limit the negative consequences of unpaid voluntary parental contributions. Thanks to this law, schools can no longer exclude children whose parents have not paid the contribution for extra activities. This will hopefully lead to more inclusive schools with students from all backgrounds.

The Free School Books Act, although particularly important for children's equal access to education, is focused only on the free provision of books and study materials. However, the COVID-19 crisis and the resulting distance learning has put many parents under pressure to pay for a tablet or laptop. During COVID-19, a motion was adopted to include digital devices in the Free School Books Act. Also, the government earmarked national resources to provide digital equipment for children in need. However, this provision did not meet the high demand and therefore did not contribute to ensuring children's equal access to the education process.

The Appropriate Education Act (2014) has not increased the number of children with disabilities in mainstream education. The central government aims to provide more inclusive – as opposed to fully inclusive – education in the next 15 years. At the same time, since the introduction of the Act, municipalities have cut down the extra support at school for children with disabilities which has led to children's further segregation.

Finally, €8.5 billion will be invested in education (from primary to tertiary education) under the National Education Programme to restore the student delays caused by COVID-19. Each school will receive resources in 2021 to help students in a targeted manner. Schools that have many students with fewer opportunities will receive proportionally more money. However, this investment will only solve the education problem in the short term while the system is struggling with deeper problems such as declining educational performance, rising inequality of opportunity, shortage of teachers and excessive work pressure.

Healthcare



Effective and free access to quality health-care

In the Netherlands, everyone (including children) is obliged to be insured for healthcare. As a rule, children up to the age of 18 are co-insured with their parents. No premium has to be paid for children up to the age of 18. There is basic insurance and supplementary packages (with extra costs). The coverage of the parent also applies to the child. Often parents in poverty only have basic health insurance. If they want their child to be insured for additional care, such as glasses, contact lenses or orthodontics, they must take additional health insurance at an extra cost, that most low-income families cannot afford. This creates discrimination and double standards between those that can and those that cannot have access to the extra services. In addition, the mental healthcare rights of many children are not met because of ever-longer waiting lists.

Medication falls under the Health Insurance Act. This means that the health insurance is responsible for the reimbursement, however, some medicines are not reimbursed.

Only in 50% of asylum centres, children use mental healthcare services. At the same time, only 45% of asylum seekers are satisfied with access to physical healthcare¹⁰⁶. Experts believe that many mental health issues are not identified and that asylum-seeking children do not receive the care they need¹⁰⁷. Treatment may not start or may be interrupted multiple times because people are required to move frequently during the asylum procedure.

The COVID-19 measures have led to increased prevalence of feelings of depression and loneliness among children, particularly if they live in unsafe home environments or are otherwise vulnerable¹⁰⁸. The pandemic has also increased and exacerbated existing challenges in the care for young people with mental health problems. It is hard for children with more complex problems to find appropriate care. As a result, they often find themselves in a vicious circle of registration, waiting, diagnosis, rejection, and referral. In addition, services are rarely culture sensitive.

Support for families with multiple and complex problems frequently fails because a whole picture of the family situation is not available. Since not all issues are dealt with, treatment and care will only have a short-term effect.

At the same time, youth care workers are under increased pressure because schools are closed¹⁰⁹. The 113 Suicide Prevention helpline has observed a huge rise in the number of calls, particularly from children. The Ombudsman for Children¹¹⁰ and the Young People Thinktank COVID-19 Crisis¹¹¹ observed a decline in wellbeing among vulnerable children and called for better access to youth care.

The government's response and the use of funds



Mental healthcare provision lies under the responsibility of municipalities and the situation largely differs across them. Most recently and considering that almost half of the young people experience mental health problems compared to approximately 17% of the Dutch population, a new support line called "Alles OK?" has been launched especially for young people.

Healthy nutrition



Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

In the Netherlands 11% of children aged 4-18 are overweight and 2.1% are obese. The rates differ between age groups but have not declined in the past few years. Children – especially those in need - do not receive a healthy meal each school day. At the same time, the school canteens are not regulated to offer nutritious food products and children often eat snacks and sweets as an easy solution during the school day.

The government's response and the use of funds



The Dutch National Prevention Agreement focusing on reducing smoking, obesity and alcohol use came into effect at the end of

2018. However, the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment stated that additional measures are required to meet national targets to reduce overweight. In addition, and despite the recommendations of the WHO, scientists, doctors and consumer organisations, the VAT on fruit and vegetables has increased from 6% up to 9%. In the past ten years, the prices of fruit and vegetables have risen sharply, compared to other products. This goes against the initiatives to promote healthy eating. The government argues that this regulation is in line with the EU regulations and hence VAT cannot be decreased.

Adequate housing



Effective access to adequate housing

In the last decade, the number of homeless people has roughly doubled to about 40.000 people. Tens of thousands of people live in a house in a holiday park. By 2020, there were 331.000 housing shortages across the country and the number will increase to 419.000 by 2025¹¹².

There is a shortage of social rental homes and of homes in the so-called "middle rent"¹¹³. The shortage of social rental housing is much greater than anticipated. Many middle-income families cannot pay rent above the social rent limit (€720.42). The fact that affordability is not taken into account for this group is a blind spot in the housing policy of the Netherlands.

A relatively new group of people in the situations of homelessness is made up of Dutch people with or without children that return to the Netherlands from abroad and become homeless¹¹⁴.

This group does not fall under the Social Support Act 2015¹¹⁵ and will not receive support from the municipalities where they used to live. Families must arrange housing via their own network. However, they do not always have a network, or their network is exhausted. If the family ends up living on the streets or if this scenario seems likely, they may be threatened with the out-of-home placement of their children. For many families, the situation is impossible to solve, and this practice leads to violations of international and European human and children's rights¹¹⁶. Those families who are given access to (emergency) shelter often stay there for longer than ideal, a practice that is harmful to children's development.

The government response and the use of funds



Access to shelter falls under the Social Support Act 2015 (Wmo). Often people are wrongly classified as self-reliant. Since 2015, the law has been curtailed in such a way that only parents with psychiatric disorders or addiction are not considered to be self-reliant. Homelessness for economic reasons alone is not included, so affected families are not eligible for shelter. The government sees these families as self-reliant. However, not all families manage to find accommodation themselves because of the housing shortage and high rents¹¹⁷.

The policy regarding emergency shelter differs per municipality. For instance, some municipalities book and pay for a hotel, while other municipalities do not arrange anything, even if it concerns a family with young children. When a family is deemed self-reliant but cannot find shelter, children are sometimes separated from parents and placed in foster care.

Tackling the housing crisis cannot wait for the formation of a new policy. The cabinet recognises that billions must be invested in housing. At the same time, urgent reforms are needed such as the abolishment of the

cost-sharing standard, so that benefits are not reduced when people share a house with others, and the abolishment of the landlord levy ('verhuurderheffing'). In addition, a new Ministry of housing should be established.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCEDURES



Municipalities are responsible for carrying out poverty policies. Policies aimed at reducing child poverty and social exclusion often fail to tailor the necessary interventions or to meet the needs of children and young people living in poverty, as the latter are infrequently involved in designing or implementing these policies. Recent research into municipal poverty policy¹¹⁸ showed that only one in three municipalities establishes dialogues with children and young people, for example via a permanent group of representatives (children's and/or youth council) or via conversations at school. In addition, it is unknown whether this concerns meaningful and ethical participation¹¹⁹.

Save the Children Netherlands was not consulted on the ESF+ or other EU Funding allocation and therefore its views have not been taken into account.

CHILD POVERTY REDUCTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE DUTCH RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN



The Dutch government has not yet published its National Recovery and Resilience Plan.



SAVE THE CHILDREN NETHERLANDS

Save the Children Netherlands runs two main programmes to support children in the Netherlands. One of them is the TeamUp programme which offers educational and psychosocial support to children in a migration situation. The other one is the Speaking Minds programme which supports the participation of children in decision making procedures. A third programme (All-In) aimed at promoting mutual local cooperation and connections with young people in the poverty domain in order to effectively reach more young people growing up in poverty and/or with debts, is under development. The piloting of this project started in autumn 2021.

EDUCATION, INCLUDING SCHOOL BASED AND EXTRA LEISURE, SPORTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

TeamUp: Save the Children Netherlands, War Child Holland and UNICEF Netherlands joined forces to develop the intervention ‘TeamUp’¹²⁰ as a result of the influx of refugees to the Netherlands in 2015. Children in migration are challenged in accessing quality education services. One of these needs is the provision of psychosocial support in primary and secondary schools.

TeamUp is a movement-based psychosocial support intervention, that contributes to the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of children and to strengthening their resilience. TeamUp sessions support the much-needed safety and structure in the life of children who have been on the move. Sessions of movement-based activities consist of games based on play, movement and body awareness. It supports teachers in better understanding how to engage with and support (migrant) pupils, how to handle new challenges, stimulates development of skills to provide psychosocial relief and acquire knowledge in how to identify and refer children that need more professional mental health support. For the child, this often results in recovery from distressing experiences, development of social and emotional skills, an improved wellbeing and increased social connectedness with peers and adults.

Currently, TeamUp is implemented with children in migration in 32 shelters and 27 schools in the Netherlands with the potential of further expansion. The TeamUp consortium, in collaboration with SOS International, will start to contextualise the methodology and approach for children in migration in Italy, Greece and Sweden.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, TeamUp@Home response was developed. This response offered online TeamUp activities as well as an offline Activity booklet which was distributed to children in the shelters. Save the Children offered play materials and summer activities in 17 locations. When the schools were closed, some activities continued online.

To help teachers, special restart-TeamUp-sessions were created – taking all covid related measures for primary education into account.

CHILD PARTICIPATION

To create an effective poverty policy, it is important to involve the target group in shaping that policy. In the Netherlands, municipalities are responsible for policy on poverty in their area and are obliged to involve their citizens, thus also children and young adults. Save the Children Netherlands has developed a method to bridge the gap between young people living in vulnerable situations and policy makers – both at the national and local level – so that policy interventions are more effective in tackling poverty and social exclusion.

Within the “Speaking Minds”¹²¹ programme, Save the Children Netherlands works with children and civil society to hold the Dutch government and authorities accountable for their commitments to end poverty. Save the Children facilitates the entire process and thereby offers a recognised and important blueprint for effective youth participation in different local domains.

The group of children meets multiple times with the staff of a certain municipality or Ministry involved and at the end of the third month, the adolescents produce visual material (for example a photo exhibition) to present the issue, the solutions they identified and their advice to policy makers. Afterwards, policy makers are obliged to inform the group on how they have taken into account their recommendations. As a result, the youngsters actively participate in the process.

Up to date, about 40 trajectories of Speaking Minds have been implemented in 30 municipalities and more municipalities are interested in starting to adapt this blueprint of meaningful youth participation for policy making processes. An evaluation took place amongst municipalities that ran Speaking Minds projects between 2017 and 2020. Many recommendations from participants have been (partly) adopted by municipalities, showing the relevance and realism of the advice. 65% indicated a continuation of youth participation after Speaking Minds ended.

ADVOCACY WORK

For years, Save the Children Netherlands is advocating for the withdrawal of the Dutch reservation to article 26 of the UNCRC. Recently, Save the Children Netherlands commissioned a research to see which children in the Netherlands are affected by the reservation and what the practical implications are¹²². The report has been launched and handed over with a petition to the Social Affairs and Employment Committee in Parliament. The Minister has committed to discuss this issue with Save the Children Netherlands and to inform the House about the follow up after the summer.

Furthermore, Save the Children Netherlands advocates for:

- Taking the voice of young people into account to tailor (poverty) policies to their needs.
- Build on signals arising from the Speaking Minds trajectories such as the need for structural financial education, breaking the poverty taboo, inclusion in social activities, healthy food.
- Fighting (municipal) inequality: act in the best interests of the child and family.

- Commit to concrete actions to halving the number of children in poverty.
- Ensure that schools and teachers are equipped to respond appropriately to the psychosocial needs of children with a refugee background.
- Breaking discriminatory practices against children with a refugee background. Invest in practices that enhance social cohesion and safety in the classroom.

FUNDING OF SAVE THE CHILDREN NETHERLANDS

TeamUp – shelter locations receive core financial support from AMIF and the Ministry of Justice and Safety. Several private funds also provide donations or subsidies with which core costs, as well as pilots to target more youth, are covered.

At the start of the programme, Speaking Minds received funding from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Wellbeing. Now municipalities pay for trajectories. No EU funding is available for the programme (yet).

Story from the ground



Marissa lives with her brother and her mother in Almelo, a city in the East of the Netherlands and they know what it means to live in poverty and to be in debt. At school, Marissa came in contact with Speaking Minds. Now she knows what opportunities there are within her municipality for young people like her. She is now even an ambassador for Speaking Minds. In that capacity last April 2021 Marissa discussed the effects of child poverty with the State Secretary Blokhuis (Ministry Health Wellbeing and Sports) during the presentation of the NGO report on compliance with children's rights in the Netherlands.

“Speaking Minds gave me a lot of confidence because I was listened to and because I could mean something to others. The trainers really guide you. Now I know better how to handle money and that is very important.”

“Before participating in the Speaking Minds project I did not know very well what the municipality was doing, certainly not in the area of poverty and debt. Now I have learned how they work and what they can offer. Many doors have opened for me because I can use benefits so that I can exercise for free or go to the cinema. You can easily request all of that. I also like that after the project the municipality is telling us what they will do with our advice. And if something is not possible, then they are also honest about it. The municipality is doing more than I thought.”

When asked, “How important is it to be able to give your opinion and to make your voice heard?”, Marissa says: “Very important! What is nice to see is that the municipality is actually going to get started with our advice. I think it's important that they are taking it seriously.”



Recommendations towards national decision makers on measures to be included in the Dutch Child Guarantee Action Plan

The targeted categories of children in need to be reached

- Children from single-parent households.
- Children living in households receiving social assistance benefits.
- Children with parents of a non-western origin
- Children at risk of poverty coming from working families (in-work poverty).
- Children not being covered by their parents' social security.
- Children living in asylum centres.

Effective and free access to ECEC

Ensure that all children who need it have free access to preschool education, including children in asylum seeking centres.

Effective and free access to education

- Include digital devices under the Free School Books Act and ensure pupils have access to WI-FI.
- Use the National Education Programme (NPO) and other funds to employ qualified teachers and ensure that teachers are also placed in special education facilities and schools in deprived areas.
- Undertake efforts to decrease school segregation to ensure a greater social mix
- Ensure that the NPO does not only focus on the short term but takes a comprehensive approach in fighting the long-lasting problem of the education system.

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

- Provide a range of free sports activities for children in need so that they participate equally as their peers.
- Improve the digital accessibility for sports facilities by clearly presenting the information on the website, using simple language and

visual tools.

- Make sure that transport to and from activities is reimbursed for children and families in need.

Effective and free access to quality healthcare

- Make sure that health care is free and available for all children regardless of the care package of the parents.
- Reduce waiting lists by investing more in specialist youth mental healthcare.
- Provide integrated youth care which takes a whole family approach and focus on specialist knowledge within local neighbourhood teams.
- Formulate guidelines for children's healthcare, without any distinction between children with and without a residence permit.
- Support and train staff at the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) to create safe living environments and identify mental health issues.
- Ensure better access to youth care, especially for children in vulnerable situations.
- Pay attention to social and emotional development and skills at school.

Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

- Create an environment that stimulates children and parents to eat a healthy diet and exercise more, through price measures, product improvements, and subsidies on healthy food in schools, sports, and exercise.
- Ban the advertising of unhealthy products to children, and selling them in and close to schools, playing fields and other sports facilities.
- Promote more attention to lifestyle in education for care and welfare professionals

to ensure a central focus on health promotion and protection.

Effective access to adequate housing

- Solve the housing shortage and develop a national policy that will apply to all municipalities.
- Create a separate shelter regulation for families who are homeless for economic reasons or abolish the self-reliance criteria. Ensure the availability of enough child-friendly accommodation.
- Prohibit out-of-home placement of children based on economic homelessness.
- Create more opportunities for families to leave shelters by solving the housing shortage.

The use of EU funds and national budgets to support children and families in need

Save the Children Netherlands is very concerned that the ESF+ is going to have a sole focus on the support of people in vulnerable situations to access the labour market. Although there is a link between poverty reduction and parents' access to employment, this report illustrates that children's access to services is unequal in the Netherlands leaving many children outside the education procedure or without proper access to healthcare or decent housing. The ESF+ calls on all EU Member States to allocate appropriate resources to tackle child poverty and implement the Child Guarantee. However, in February 2021 the Minister of Social Affairs and Employability stated that child poverty reduction will not be among the priorities included under the ESF+ programming. This represents an important missed opportunity for the use of the Fund and for the thousands of children growing up in poverty in the Netherlands and calls on the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employability to reconsider its position.

At the same time, Save the Children Netherlands, calls on the Ministry of Finance to introduce in the RRP, investments especially related to the future of children and young people and

especially on the topic of education which is becoming more and more segregated in the Netherlands. Finally, the ERDF must be used for the development of social housing for families in need, ensuring that no family- especially with children – are homeless or live in shelters and for the provision of digital equipment to children in need.

Finally, although the government has allocated €146 million to reduce poverty and problematic debts, only €11 million have been reserved for accelerating the comprehensive approach to debt and tackling (child) poverty. At the same time, there is a new bill proposing that child benefits will not be indexed in the coming years (2021-2024), which should yield savings of over €100 million on an annual basis. This will have a negative effect on the purchasing power of households below the low-income threshold and Save the Children Netherlands calls for its suspension.

Further measures to be included in the German Child Guarantee Action Plan to address social exclusion and break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage.

- Introduce measures to ensure that children do not depend on their parents' social security but are recipients of social security in their own right.
- Tackle the structural causes of poverty instead of merely compensating for the effects of poverty.
- Guarantee equal access to poverty policies for all children. Support should not depend on the goodwill of a municipal official, but the frameworks must be centrally arranged.
- Prioritise investments in the employability of young people with a migrant background.
- Stimulate active child participation. Ensure sustainable child participation and include the input of children and young people in the design of the Child Guarantee.

Italy



Summary

More than 1 in 4 children in Italy live at risk of poverty or social exclusion. At the same time, more than 1.3 million children live in absolute poverty and with the COVID-19 outbreak, the numbers are expected to further increase.

Inequalities between children's access to services depend on their status and the place of residence, with large disparities between southern and northern regions. For example, when it comes to children's access to ECEC, many families in southern Italy decide to keep their children at home also as the result of the lack of availability of places in publicly run nurseries. At the same time, there is no demand since a considerable number of women are unemployed and take care of their children, thus creating a vicious circle. The eviction rate of families is among the highest in the EU with approximately 140 families being evicted daily. The country is implementing plans to recover from the healthcare crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, consultation with children or families on the challenges they are facing has taken place only partially. Although Save the Children Italy has participated in the debate to address the cohesion policy programming for 2021–2027 and on the Italian RRP, the participation has not always been meaningful and most of civil society's views have not been considered. Save the Children Italy calls on the Italian government to prioritise in the Italian Child Guarantee Action Plan measures to increase the supply of ECEC either by building new infrastructure or by increasing the number of places in existing ones so that all children in need in Italy¹²³ have access to free and good quality ECEC. Children's access to education

Key facts

+925.000

The number of children in absolute poverty in Italy has increased from 375.000 in 2008 to over 1.3 million in 2020.

+200.000

200.000 more children were pushed into absolute poverty in Italy in 2020.

140

140 families are being evicted from their homes daily. 1.7 million more families are at risk of eviction. A threat of becoming homeless is the everyday reality for many children facing poverty in Italy,

13.2%

Only 13.2% of children in Italy have access to public early education and care and supplementary services.

should also be strengthened by addressing in particular children's digital education needs. EU financial resources from the ESF+, ERDF and RRF should be combined with national resources to achieve sustainable results.

National updates

CHILD POVERTY IN ITALY



In 2019, 27.8% of children in Italy were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the socio-economic consequences, in 2020 more than 200.000 children fell into the status of absolute poverty¹²⁴. According to the most recent data, in 2020, 1.337.000 children were growing up in absolute poverty (13.5% of the child population)¹²⁵.

Absolute poverty is increasing at an alarming rate showing an increase of 10 percentage points over 10 years. From the time of the economic and financial crisis of 2008, the number of children in absolute poverty in Italy has increased from 375.000 to over 1.3 million in 2020¹²⁶.

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN ITALY



Large families with at least 5 members and families with a migrant background are those mostly affected by poverty. As a consequence, children and adolescents from these contexts are the most vulnerable and at higher risk of social exclusion¹²⁷.

In addition, children living in single-parent families and specific areas of the country (particularly in southern regions), are at greater risk of poverty. In fact, the incidence of single-parent families rose from 8.9% in 2019 to 11.7% in 2020¹²⁸.

Roma and Sinti families are also at greater risk of social exclusion. In 2018 there were about 25.000 people of Roma and Sinti ethnicity, of which 55% were children living in precarious-emergency contexts in terms of housing which greatly affects their access to fundamental rights.

Furthermore, hate speech against Roma is a phenomenon that is still deeply rooted and endemic in Italy today, made more critical by the narrative style of media and the political discourse¹²⁹.

CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO SERVICES AS DESCRIBED IN THE CHILD GUARANTEE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

Early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, and a healthy meal each school day

Effective and free access to early childhood education and care (ECEC)



Today, only 13.2% of children in Italy have access to publicly run ECEC and supplementary services¹³⁰. In some regions, especially in southern areas services are almost non-existent.

Public ECEC settings require families to contribute to the total costs of management (they bear on average 1/5 of the cost) but with great differences across municipalities. In the North, most municipalities require almost ¼ of the running costs from families, while in southern regions the share drops noticeably (7% in Sicily and Campania, 8% in Calabria).

The participation costs and the lack of available places in publicly run ECEC, lead many families to decide to keep their children at home, often with family members, and register their children to compulsory education starting from the age of 5. However, it should be noted that apart from the lack of places, especially in Southern Italy there is no demand since a significant number of women are unemployed and take care of their children. This situation has created a vicious circle.

The government's response and use of funds.



The Ministry of Education coordinates ECEC at the national level. The main purpose of the integrated system is to facilitate access to ECEC. The strategic goals are: i) 33% coverage of ECEC for 0-3 years old, according to European target (Italy is currently at 25%); ii) 75% of municipalities with educational services, iii) Universal attendance of ECEC for 3-6 years old (Italy is currently at 95%). To facilitate access to the system, Italy aims to reinforce governance and funding, more particularly through the interconnection between: i) National multiannual action plan (to improve the quality, through buildings, fee reduction, staff training), ii) National Fund (resources for Municipalities), iii) Governing body (to support monitoring).

There is a National Fund coordinated by the Ministry of Education for children aged 0-6. The five-year National Multiannual Plan (2021/2025) provides €309 million annually, paid directly to municipalities by the Ministry of Education as a result of the regional programming. After the first three-year action plan (2017-2019) the access to school for children 0-2 years old has increased from 24.7% to 25.5%.

Effective and free access to education



Italian public schools host 8.3 million students: 7.507.484 in state schools and approximately 860.000 in charter schools (MIUR, a.s. 2020/2021). However, the quality, accessibility, and affordability of free education in Italy are questionable.

In Italy, each region implements its own jurisdiction and organises the use of state funds for the free or semi-free supply of text books through bonuses or reimbursements following their own timings, terms and criteria, without ensuring equal access in terms of either adequacy or promptness.

The absence of full-time education and adequate infrastructure for children attending primary and secondary education is also a great concern.

63.9% of primary school pupils attend schools that do not offer full-time education. Even in some areas of northern Italy – which are generally better equipped than southern ones – less than 20% of students attend full-time schools and the situation worsens in regions like Sicily, Campania, Apulia, Lower Lazio, and Molise.

The link between material poverty and educational poverty has increased considerably with the shift from face-to-face to distance learning as new inequalities have emerged, not only in the availability of connections or tablets, but in digital skills, which are crucial today. In the two-year period 2018-2019, 12.3% of children aged 6-17 years did not have a PC or tablet. This share rises to 19% in the south of Italy. ISTAT reports¹³¹ that “45.4% of students aged 6-17 years old (3.100.000) have difficulty in distance learning due to lack of IT tools in the family, often to be shared with other siblings”.

According to a 2020 IPSOS survey for Save the Children Italy, 10% of parents stated that they will not be able to afford the purchase of all schoolbooks in the year to come, 2 out of 10 parents stated that they will not be able to afford the school canteen cost next year and 7 out of 10 parents that used the canteen service declared to be concerned about the possible suspension of the service. Regarding extracurricular activities, 7 out of 10 parents stated that their child will not attend an activity next year¹³².

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

In Italy, 67.6% of children and adolescents between 6 and 17 years had not gone to the theatre in the year prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 emergency, 62.8% had not visited an archaeological site or monument, and 49.9% had not visited exhibitions and museums. Furthermore, 22% of children between 3 and 17 years had not practised any sport or engaged in any physical activity. Also in this case, there are substantial differences with respect to the geographic origin of the children. In northern regions, less than 15% of children do not

engage in sports or physical activity, while this percentage rises to over 20% in the centre and over 30% in southern regions. Similar dynamics are found for all other cultural and recreational activities. The socio-economic condition of families has a significant influence on the enjoyment of sports, cultural and artistic activities. Differences ranging from 8 to 10 percentage points to the disadvantage of the most vulnerable children are also found in relation to the lack of sports practice and activities linked to art and culture¹³³.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

The provision of healthy meals in schools each day to children in need largely differs from municipality to municipality. There is not a national policy covering all children in need and the school canteens remain a service on demand.

The government's response and the use of funds



Even though the school is the place where children and young people spend most of their time, the educational provision can be very small and of poor quality especially in some areas of the country. Several factors account for the loss of prestige that Italian schools once enjoyed. One of the reasons is the decrease of investments accumulated over the last twenty years in public policies to guide and support education. According to authoritative OECD analysis from 1995 to 2010, Italy has invested much less than other countries in this sector. In 1995 spending on education represented 4.85% of GDP, in 2000 4.52%, while in 2013 it dropped to 4%, more than one point less than the OECD average of 5.2%. Public spending on education is also among the lowest in Europe. Eurostat data for 2013 clearly show the Italian deficit in spending at all levels of education: for elementary school it stops at 1.05% of GDP, less than France (1.17%), Spain (1.13%), Poland (1.52%) and all major European countries¹³⁴. According to a Save the Children research published in 2016¹³⁵, each region in Italy is autonomous in using government funds for

the books supply (free or partially free of charge) through vouchers or via refund. This often does not ensure fair access either in terms of adequacy or timing. In fact, the ceiling of expenditure of these vouchers for the high school is set by the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR) and goes from €294 for the first year to €132 for the third year, with maximum amounts for refunds or vouchers widely varying from region to region (i.e., €120 in Lombardy and €800 in Liguria). In most cases the actual demand of families is not met; as a matter of fact, a very few local entities cover 100% of these expenses.

Undoubtedly, the measures adopted for the pandemic, such as the Emergency income, Decree "Cura Italia" and "Decree Rilancio" have contributed to mitigating the most deleterious effects of the current crisis, especially in terms of the risk of falling into poverty. Little, however, has been done to ensure access to school (both physically and as distance learning), especially for the most vulnerable children.

As for EU funding, over €1 billion¹³⁶ will be allocated to the education system through the REACT-EU programme. €446 million will be allocated to complete the fibre cabling of school buildings, €455 million for equipment on digital transformation at school, €45 million for the EDUGREEN project and €57 million, entirely allocated to the south, for green, sustainable and innovative workshops for second-cycle school.

Healthcare

Effective and free access to quality health-care



The National Health Service (SSN) aims to guarantee universal access to the provision of health services as per art.32 of the Constitution. The National Health Service applies this principle through the promotion, maintenance and recovery of physical and mental health of the entire population with a widespread organisation on the national territory whose services are provided by local health authorities, hospitals and private facilities affiliated with the National Health Service. All citizens without any distinc-

tion have access to national healthcare services. Citizens who do not belong to exempted categories are required to pay a contribution that varies for each individual service provided by the Essential Levels of Care (LEA).

All children have a family paediatrician (of free choice) who follows children from 0 to 14 years of age.

According to a recent Report¹³⁷ 500.000 poor people in 2019 were unable to purchase the medicines they needed due to economic reasons. These difficulties, however, do not only concern the poor since according to available data 12.634.000 people, at least once during the year, had limited their spending on medical examinations and periodic preventive check-ups (dentist, mammography, etc) due to economic reasons.

The annual expenditure for treatment per person is €816, the poor can spend only €128. However, non-poor families spend 42% of their health budget on drugs not covered by the National Health Service, while the poor spend 62.5%. Poor families with children experience additional difficulties: in 40.6% of cases, they have limited spending on medical visits and periodic preventive check-ups compared to 37.2% of poor families without children.

Particularly significant is the expenditure of poor families for the dentist and dental services: only €2.19 per month, compared to €31.16 for the rest of the population.

The government's response and the use of funds



In 2020, the Italian government took important measures to strengthen the Italian healthcare system to address the COVID-19 pandemic. It strengthened human resources in the health system by employing thousands of medical and administrative staff across the country. In addition, it directed additional EU and national funds for the purchase and distribution of medicines and monitoring and sharing emergency data on the COVID-19 pandemic.

Healthy nutrition



Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

Italy is among the European countries with the highest values of excess weight in the school-age population, with a percentage of overweight children of 20.4% and obese children of 9.4%, including the severely obese, who represent 2.4%¹³⁸.

“OKkio alla salute”¹³⁹ is a national surveillance system promoted and funded by the Ministry of Health to monitor the evolution of childhood obesity and evaluate the health promotion interventions undertaken. According to the last ISS¹⁴⁰ survey, which involved more than 50.000 children and the same number of families, one child in two does not eat an adequate breakfast in the morning, one in four drinks sugary/carbonated drinks daily and consumes fruit and vegetables less than once a day. Vegetables are consumed less than once a week by 38% of children and nearly half of them eat sweet snacks more than 3 days a week. More effort is also needed on physical activity: one child in five did not do any physical activity the day before the interview, and more than 70% do not walk or cycle to school¹⁴¹.

Before the COVID-19, the percentage of children up to 15 years, who could not access a meal with an adequate protein content on a daily basis was 6%, which raised to 13% in Sicily and over 10% in Campania, regions where childhood obesity and overweight are particularly widespread¹⁴².

Data on food poverty is even more worrying taking into consideration the lack of access to full-time educational services and school canteens. Even before the lockdown, 49.4% of pre-school, primary and secondary school pupils did not have access to the canteen service, with huge disparities in school catering systems, with an ever-increasing distance between north and south and between urban and rural areas, where the highest number of pupils who do not receive school meals is recorded.

Adequate housing



Effective access to adequate housing

Every year the court in Italy issues about 65.000 eviction judgments. In 90 % of cases, the eviction judgments are due to causes beyond the control of the tenant like loss of employment, reduction of income, unforeseen health expenses, etc. Every year circa 35.000 families (140 families per day) are evicted from their houses with the help of law enforcement. Eviction sentences concern about 50.000 children per year and of these at least 20.000 are evicted by public force every year. Eviction may not stop even when faced with pregnant women or children with disabilities. In Italy, there are 650.000 families placed in municipal rankings waiting to access public housing, while there are about one million council houses completely inadequate and about 48.000 council houses that are unused (about 10.000 of these in Milan alone).

Finally, there are 1.7 million families at risk of falling into the vortex of eviction because rent accounts for over 30-40-50% of family income¹⁴³.

The government's response and the use of funds



The “Milleproroghe” decree (D.L. 31/12/2020 n. 183) converted into law n.21 of 26 February 2021 prolonged the extension of evictions until 30 June 2021. The “Decreto Sostegno” (“Decree Supports”), Decree-Law no. 41/2021) converted into Law no. 69 in force since 22 May 2021 provides in article 40 a further extension for evictions that should have expired on 30 June 2021. A double extension is established (30 Sept or 31 Dec. 2021), differentiated according to the date of the release order.

In addition, the Italian RRP foresees structural investment in public social housing and the regeneration of suburbs.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCEDURES



Nationally, Save the Children Italy has participated in the debate to address the Cohesion policy programming for 2021–2027 to engage the country's economic, social and institutional partners (2019, third quarter). It has actively participated in the consultation on the ESF programming 2021-27 on education, training, and inclusion¹⁴⁴. At the regional level, it and has provided written feedback to the local Managing Authorities of Regional Operational Programmes of ERDF/ESF funds in the regions where Save the Children Italy is more active. Save the Children Italy has participated in the public debate on the actions that need to be urgently taken under the NGEU and the NPRR (August 2020)¹⁴⁵, although its recommendations were only partially included in the final text of the plan.

Save the Children Italy observes significant delays in setting programmes as well as a poor alignment between regional and national levels with faint involvement of civil society.

Finally, the Department of Family Policy (Dipartimento per le Politiche della Famiglia) recently published a survey that collected the views of 1,673 girls and boys aged 12-17 on issues covered by the 5th Childhood National Plan¹⁴⁶. Although this is a first and important step towards involving children in decision making, more efforts are needed to ensure the meaningful participation of children at the national, regional and local level.

CHILD POVERTY REDUCTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE ITALIAN RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN



When it comes to ECEC, only one specific mission of the plan¹⁴⁷ aims at increasing the offer of places in early childcare (for children 0-3 years). However, according to Save the Children Italy's estimates, the resources allocated are not sufficient to reach the coverage target of 33% nationwide.

The Italian RRP aims to finance the extension of full school time to expand the educational offer and extend the opening hours to balance the personal and working life of families. The gradual implementation of full time is also pursued through the renovation of canteen spaces (approximately 1.000 buildings by 2026) by local authorities that own the buildings. The plan is consistent with the initiatives of the Ministry of Education to widen the educational offer and put in place extra-curricular projects. The RRP also allocates €1.1 billion to promote STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), digital and innovation skills, programs to promote multilingualism and a coding course for all students throughout their school cycle.

The Italian RRP also represents an opportunity to ensure connectivity for all schools, as well as connections and digital tools for students. To this end, the RRP allocates €2.1 billion for the digital transition of the Italian school system with four initiatives: a) transformation of approximately 100.000 traditional classrooms into connected learning environments b) creation of laboratories for digital professions in the second cycle c) digitisation of school administrations and d)

internal wiring of about 40.000 buildings. Furthermore, the RRP also allocates €3.9 billion for the safety of school buildings and €800 million for the replacement of school buildings and energy upgrade where the renovations are not technically or economically convenient, in particular for those buildings located in areas at high seismic risk. The RRP plans to intervene on around 195 school buildings, benefiting circa 58.000 students. €1.5 billion are allocated to reduce territorial gaps in Italy as regards the level of basic skills (Italian, mathematics and English). €220 million are also allocated to contrast educational poverty in the south and to strengthen socio-educational services in favour of children, by financing third sector initiatives, with specific reference to welfare services in the 0-6-year range and early school leaving alongside with the reinforcement of the educational offer in the age range 5-10 and 11-17 years. These funds will be used on projects run by third sector entities aimed at involving up to 50.000 children living in precarious situations.

Finally, the RRP also envisages the setup of sports facilities and equipped parks to promote social inclusion, especially in the most marginalised areas.





Save the Children



www.savethechildren.it



SAVE THE CHILDREN ITALY

Save the Children Italy operates throughout the national territory to protect children's rights and to give them the opportunity to grow healthy, receive education and be protected.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

The programme "Spazi Mamme" was created for children 0-6 years to combat the factors that foster the increase in child poverty, the inability to access basic goods and services and to prevent educational poverty. 13 spaces are active in Milan, Turin, Genoa, Rome, Naples, Bari, Brindisi, Casal di Principe, San Luca, Palermo, Catania, Sassari. In 2020 Save the Children Italy reached 1.133 children and 2.050 adults.

EDUCATION INCLUDING SCHOOL BASED AND EXTRA LEISURE, SPORTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

The programme "Punti Luce" supports children from 6-16 years. Children and adolescents can follow educational, recreational, and cultural activities for free. Save the Children Italy has activated 26 Punti Luce in 20 Italian cities, reaching almost 4.264 children and adolescents in 2020. In 2014 Save the Children Italy launched the campaign "Illuminiamo il Futuro" to fight educational poverty in Italy and support the Punti Luce.

The programme “Sottosopra” is the Youth Movement of Save the Children Italy which involves children and young adults between 14 and 22 years to carry out actions to raise awareness about active citizenship. The goal is to ensure meaningful participation of children so that they are never just beneficiaries of the interventions but direct agents of change.

The programme “Fuori Classe” is the program promoted by Save the Children Italy to combat early school leaving. It is an integrated intervention addressed to students, teachers, and families. It intervenes with activities to support motivation to study and learning, in order to ensure the full implementation of the right to education. The following actions are carried out: workshops, study support, school camps, training for teachers, paths of inclusion, meetings to strengthen the bond between school, family and the educational community.

HEALTHCARE

The programme “Fiochi in Ospedale” was created to counteract the factors that can affect the development of children, starting from the support of their mothers. The programme offers free reception, listening, support and guidance desks for new and future parents. Save the Children is present in Milan, Rome, Naples, Bari, Turin, Pescara, Sassari, Ancona. In 2020 Save the Children Italy reached 1.280 adults and welcomed 985 children.

CHILD PROTECTION

Save the Children Italy also grants protection and support to unaccompanied migrant children through the Programme “Civico Zero”. Non-residential low-threshold day care centres are dedicated to children who have arrived in Italy alone, including those who have entered the country through organised exploitation circuits (both locally and transnationally) and to children at risk of social exclusion. Within the centre, children, mainly between the ages of 12 and 18, receive support through the provision of basic services, protection and orientation on their rights, abilities, and opportunities, so that they can effectively enjoy their rights and

reshape their personal projects. Basic services of first reception are also provided. Save the Children Italy’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the complex situation under COVID-19, Save the Children Italy has reshaped its activities to remain at the side of children and adolescents and their families, intercepting and responding to old and new needs that have emerged during the pandemic. The ‘Not Alone’ (Non da soli) programme provided an immediate response to the emergency, with targeted activities of educational support, tutorial training for distance learning, delivery of tablets, internet connections and material support (shopping vouchers, early childhood products, distribution of food and school supplies) to families in difficulty. Through this very first intervention, in the period of the initial wave of emergency, Save the Children Italy reached over 75.000 children, families and teachers throughout Italy.

Based on this experience, Save the Children Italy launched in May of 2020, the “Rewrite the future” campaign, which has involved about 160.000 children and adolescents, their families and teachers in 89 deprived neighbourhoods in 36 cities and metropolitan areas.

“Rewrite the future” is an integrated programme of intervention to combat educational poverty and early school leaving, which aims to ensure medium- and long-term support to families and children in greatest difficulty in the peripheries and in the most deprived neighbourhoods of the city, both through material support and educational support in schools and extracurricular activities. It aims to guarantee the right to education for all children and combat educational inequalities. 62.218 children and adolescents in vulnerable situations were supported with direct and indirect interventions through the involvement of families and teachers; 25.947 children and adolescents were reached directly through interventions to school dropout and educational poverty; 4.040 teachers from 623 schools were trained on educational and didactic approaches and more than 15.000 teachers were reached through initiatives in support of distance learning¹⁴⁸.

From June 2020 and throughout the summer, the activation of the “Future Spaces” (Spazi Futuro), provided opportunities for play, meetings and educational sessions to children and teenagers. Through the Future Spaces, artistic and recreational workshops and activities were made available free of charge to ensure that children get better prepared for the reopening of the school.

Summer 2020 was also characterised by the launch of the “Educational Archipelago” (Arcipelago Educativo) to promote the psychophysical wellbeing of children and young people, the consolidation and recovery of basic and transversal skills, the relationship between peers and a more adequate educational climate in the family. Arcipelago Educativo operates through 11 Educational Centres and the activation of personalised tutoring online. With the involvement of teachers and parents, it elaborates “pacts of educational co-responsibility” aimed at promoting an educational alliance between the various actors involved. In addition, Arcipelago Educativo has developed an online platform¹⁴⁹ which currently gathers over 340 didactic/educational resources to stimulate students’ learning in different contexts (at school, at home, in educational centres etc.). The platform has had over 140.000 visits since June 2020.

Finally, the “Volunteers for Education” (Volontari per l’Educazione) initiative brings together volunteer college students who want to support children and teenagers affected by the COVID-19 emergency. It is a concrete, qualified, free, and tailor-made response for children and

adolescents between 9 and 16 years of age who need immediate support in online education. More than 1.800 university students took part in the initiative, thanks to the involvement of 43 universities and 4 related organisations¹⁵⁰.

ADVOCACY WORK

Save the Children Italy launched the national campaign “Rewrite the Future” calling the attention of public opinion and policy makers on the specific needs of the most marginalised children. The campaign manifesto outlines three fundamental points: 1. the need for school materials for distance learning (PCs, tablets, internet connection) to be made available to students in need; 2. The immediate resumption of summer activities under health and safety regulations with a specific focus on bridging the gap of cognitive and social skills loss occurred in the isolation; 3. A timely rearrangement and preparedness of school activities including material and educational support for children in need.

FUNDING OF SAVE THE CHILDREN ITALY

Most of the income is raised from private donors (i.e., individual donors, corporations and foundations) and 12.1% comes from institutional funds. Only a few projects (4%) are funded by the European Commission.



Recommendations towards national decision makers on measures to be included in the Italian Child Guarantee Action Plan

The targeted categories of children in need to be reached

- Children experiencing severe housing deprivation.
- Children with a migrant background.
- Children from Roma and Sinti families.
- Children who live in poor households, and are potentially at higher risk such as children in large or single parent families.

Effective and free access to ECEC

- Plan a progressive expansion of the network of early childhood education services to achieve, by 2025, 60% coverage, with a minimum of 33% through publicly run services in all regions.
- Create a national network of educational services for the 0-2 age group. It is estimated that €5.8 billion should be allocated for this important reform.
- Construct or renovate existing spaces and buildings for ECEC.
- Ensure during the first year of start-up of the reform, public coverage of the operating costs of the existing settings for 0–3-year-olds and gradually of the new places available which are currently carried by families, as a way to ensure free ECEC for all.
- Introduce a service free of charge through a reform process similar to that undertaken with the law of March 18, 1968, no. 444, which led to the universality of kindergartens. For the development of new places, the annual management expenses should be carried by the parents (for an average of 20%) and by the municipalities (for the remainder).

Effective and free access to education

- Increase investments in public education (from the current 3.9% of GDP to 5%, thus reaching the European average).

- Identify the areas where the incidence (and risk following the COVID-19 emergency) of material and educational poverty is highest and develop territorial strategic plans aimed at coordinating and expanding social interventions and educational provision, so to develop areas of high educational density.
- Adopt open educational models, centred on small group work and workshop activities, favouring collaboration with the educational and cultural realities of the territory, in order to guarantee the inclusion of children with educational disadvantages and special needs and to combat more effectively phenomena such as early school leaving.
- Provide all classrooms in schools with digital tools and fast connections, as an essential prerequisite for reducing the digital divide, giving priority to schools located in particularly disadvantaged areas where the incidence of material and educational poverty is highest. Train teachers on the use of digital technologies at school and the development of skills.
- Provide the most disadvantaged families living in poverty or disconnected areas with adequate digital tools. Launch programmes aimed at strengthening digital parenting, making parents aware of the correct and conscious use of new digital tools, for themselves and for their children.
- Define a framework of digital competencies, integrating them into the National Curriculum, as for the National Digital School Plan. The framework should give a clear direction on the size, role, and contour of the digital competencies that each student will have to develop and the related learning objectives and should focus not only on basic digital literacy skills, but also on “media literacy”, that is, learning and personal

development in the virtual world, social relationships, and awareness of the world. Based on this framework, it is necessary to develop and implement a system for evaluating digital skills at school, by means of a certificate proving students' skills.

- Provide free school services or allowances to students under economic difficulties (i.e.: books, educational trips).

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

Extend schools opening time for sports, music, and cultural activities.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

Invest in school canteens and make them a universal public service to ensure that children in need have access to one healthy meal each school day. Promote a fair, healthy and sustainable canteen, as a way for combating food poverty and school dropouts. The canteen is in fact also a prerequisite for guaranteeing the afternoon opening of educational sites, even for extracurricular activities.

Effective and free access to quality healthcare

- To support parents from the birth of their child, it is recommended that each municipality and/or social-health district implement the LEAs (minimum standards for social care) through a locally led governance coordinating different sectors (e.g health services, educational services, social services, third sector), in order to guarantee each pregnant mother early assistance, “an agenda of pregnancy”, including all information on the courses, prenatal diagnostics and screenings. This also serves as a socio-economic assessment to early detect any fragility in the family before the child's birth.
- Promote an effective accompaniment to birth by activating actions to support the entitlement of a paediatrician and the processing of bureaucratic procedures, in particular for families in need. Provide a

specific support track for households with pathologies (parental or of the new-born child) and an educational kit.

- Ensure that mothers (if necessary) have access to post-natal home care in order to promote breastfeeding, psychological support, guidance to services, enrolment in early childcare and possible material and social support¹⁵¹.

Effective access to adequate housing

Develop a planned and strategic housing policy that protects families in need.

The use of EU funds and national budgets to support children and families in need

As Italy is one of the EU Member States whose child poverty rate is higher than the EU average, it must earmark at least 5% of ESF+ to tackle child poverty. This earmark must constitute a lever for the implementation of the Child Guarantee, along with the additional funding under the 2021-2027 Cohesion programming.

With regards to the RRF, Save the Children Italy recommended a national network of educational services for the 0-2-year-olds, in order to ensure, by 2025, the care of 60% of boys and girls, with a minimum of 33% through public service in all regions of Italy.

The NRRP also allocates €960 million, which would barely suffice for the arrangement of new premises (canteens and laboratories) in the primary school only. These allocations must be combined with national resources for the management of school canteens and others (such as those for the strengthening of infrastructures for school sports, equal to €300 million) which could foster full time and the re-opening of spaces after the school hours.

Spain



Summary

In Spain, the rate of child poverty and social exclusion is among the highest in the EU with more than 30%¹⁵² of children living in inadequate conditions.

Save the Children Spain has estimated that child poverty rate will reach 33.3% and place over 2.7 million children at risk of poverty in the next years. Children growing up in single parent families or large families as well as children in families with a migrant background are among the most vulnerable ones. The prevailing system of access to ECEC is socially unfair, leaving children from low-income families behind. In addition, children from parents with low socioeconomic status are heavily affected by the very high rates of school segregation, grade repetition, disengagement and early school leaving. Spain also suffers from a growing housing problem as the ratio of available social housing is among the lowest in the EU. This leads many families with children, and especially those headed by a single parent, to live in inadequate housing conditions, often with the fear of eviction. Disappointingly and despite the growing child poverty rates in the country, the Spanish government has not included a specific investment line in its RRP although the fight against child poverty and exclusion was mentioned as one of the objectives of Spain's RRP upon its announcement in October 2020. While Save the Children Spain shared its proposals with relevant ministries, the opportunity to provide inputs was limited. Save the Children Spain has been working to reduce the impact of poverty on children for the last 25 years. Every year Save the Children Spain supports

Key facts

31.1%

One in every three children (31.1%) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2020 in Spain.

147.000

In 2019, there were 147.000 children in Spain living with irregular status. About half of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion are under the age of 10. Almost 40% of them are younger than 5.

more than 3.500 children and families and help them reach their potential. Save the Children Spain considers the development of the Spanish Child Guarantee Action Plan as a significant opportunity to address child poverty through the strengthening of key services. At the same time, it calls on the government to take a comprehensive approach in addressing social inequalities by investing in the re-design of the Spanish tax system to work in favour of families with children in poverty; to increase the direct financial support for children and families, since at the moment, the support Spanish citizens receive is among the lowest in the EU; and to revise the national Minimum Income Scheme to reach families in poverty and not only in extreme poverty as is currently the case.

National updates

CHILD POVERTY IN SPAIN



According to the latest Eurostat data available, in 2020, the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Spain accounted for 31.1% of the total number of children¹⁵³. This proportion ranks among the highest in the EU.

The share of extreme child poverty is very high (14.1%) and it is almost twice as high as the EU average (6.9%)¹⁵⁴. In this regard, child poverty in Spain has a strong persistent component and behaves differently than the overall poverty rate since households with children are exposed to higher poverty rates¹⁵⁵.

Save the Children Spain has estimated that the child poverty rate will reach 33.3% and place over 2.7 million children at risk of poverty in the next years. Extreme poverty is expected to rise to 15%. Although the rise of poverty levels is a result of the COVID-19 and its socioeconomic consequences, Save the Children Spain has highlighted that such rates may become chronic despite the economy rebounds.

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN SPAIN



The most vulnerable children are those affected by the government benefit caps introduced in 2015, including children in families receiving integration benefits.

Save the Children Spain has identified several categories of families with children facing especially vulnerable situations¹⁵⁶. Whereas this categorisation exercise was carried out before the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, evidence from Save the Children services on the ground confirms that these profiles correspond to groups facing increased levels of vulnerability.

Children living in households headed by a single mother have the highest risk of poverty and social exclusion. 9 out of 10 of these households are headed by a Spanish woman and live in rented houses in large cities. A large majority of these households are headed by women with a low education level. This, together with important obstacles to work-life balance, creates additional barriers to access the labour market with 60.1% women being unemployed and 19.1% working part-time. Poverty rates in these households are three times higher than the average and half of these households are unable to pay unexpected bills, afford holidays, keep their houses warm and eat meat or fish regularly.

Large families with children are the second group at high risk of poverty and the largest one in size, with 688.000 households. These families are headed by an older person (58.4 average age), meaning that these are extended households where three generations live together. In this regard, 1 out of 5 of these households are headed by a retired person and 1 out of 4 are headed by an unemployed person. The share of unemployed without education levels in these households is also larger and roughly 1/5 of them are full-time workers. These extended households are largely headed by Spanish nationals, but the proportion of third-country national heads is significantly higher than the average of all households with children. Most families in this category live in rented houses. Poverty rates in this category are very high (47.2%) and extreme poverty rates amount to 26.6%.

Children living in households with a migrant background are also exposed to significantly higher risks of poverty and social exclusion. The size of households is larger than average and they are overwhelmingly concentrated in cities. In this category, virtually all household heads are employed in full-time jobs. However, their wage levels are lower than average and poverty rates are 14% points above the average of all households with children. The COVID-19 crisis has strongly affected families with immigrant background as they are greatly

represented in the sectors most affected by the pandemic with 149% more chances of losing their jobs than Spanish citizens¹⁵⁷.

In 2019, there were 147.000 children in Spain living with irregular status. About half of them are under the age of 10 and almost 40% is younger than 5. About a third is older than 15 and therefore should be in education or job placement. Children between 0 and 4 years old represent more than 25% of the total migrant population in that age range and 30% of them are undocumented. 3/4 of children in irregular situations come from Latin America, notably from Colombia. The probability of falling into poverty for a medium income Spanish family with children is 14%; in the case of a similar but non-EU household, the probability is as high as 48%. Poor households in irregular situations have no access to support such as the Vital Minimum Income and children have no effective access to healthcare, education, protection, justice, official exams, certifications, or ECEC.

Unaccompanied children ageing out from the child protection system are also at high risk of child poverty and social exclusion. In 2018¹⁵⁸ 21.283 children were placed in residential care and 19.545 children in family care. Most of these children turn 18 before their situation has been regularised, and this excludes them from accessing the few support services existing for independent living, including housing often resulting in homelessness. As they become adults, the requirements to regularize their stay in Spain increase. Although they are not authorised to work, the law requires a minimum monthly income of about €500 or a guarantee that they are provided for. Households with children where parents experience in-work poverty and live in urban areas. These households are mostly headed by Spanish nationals with low-education level. Although most household heads are employed, the share of part-time jobs is significantly higher than the average. In this type of household, 1 out of 4 is at risk of poverty or social exclusion and material deprivation.

CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO SERVICES AS DESCRIBED IN THE CHILD GUARANTEE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

Early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, and a healthy meal each school day

Effective and free access to early childhood education and care (ECEC)



Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the levels of children's participation in ECEC were above the EU average¹⁵⁹. However, access of young children (aged 0-3) to ECEC has been socially and geographically unequal with only 26% of children under three years from lower income families being enrolled versus 63% from the wealthiest ones¹⁶⁰. Differences across regions range from 18.1% in Ceuta to 55.9% in the Basque Country¹⁶¹.

In particular, for children under the age of 3, there are significant availability, accessibility and affordability obstacles. The supply of places is not enough and admission criteria to public ECEC very often give priority to parents' employment status (permanent jobs) instead of household socioeconomic status, discriminating against those children most in need. Schedules are inflexible and do not adapt to non-standard work hours of vulnerable families. Subsidies are insufficient since 3 out of 10 of low-income families pay the full fee¹⁶².

Furthermore, according to the EU quality framework standards, the quality of ECEC for children under the age of 3 in Spain has important shortcomings: the maximum number of children per staff member at age 2 (18) is the highest one in the EU¹⁶³, staff salaries are low, staff training is insufficient, and evaluation is very limited¹⁶⁴.

Because of the pandemic, in 2020-2021 the enrolment rate of children under 3 years has plummeted for the first time in the last decades, declining from 41.1% to 36%. There were 79.333 children less than the previous school year attending and 182 ECEC establishments closed down in the school year 2020-2021.

The government's response and use of funds



During the core pandemic crisis, little attention was paid to ECEC at the national level, especially for children under the age of 3. No specific measures were agreed by the Conference of Regional Education Ministers. Only some regions devoted part of the crisis funds to support ECEC centres.

The new national education act (LOMLOE) passed in December 2020 foresees an 8-year plan to expand access to ECEC for 0–3-year-old children, especially those at risk of poverty. It also establishes a national regulation of curriculum, centres and staff requirements to be passed. In addition, the Spanish RRP also includes the creation of 65.000 new public ECEC places for children in vulnerable situations.

Effective and free access to education



Inequity lies behind the main challenges of the education system in Spain. Social background has a strong impact on educational progress and attainment, perpetuating intergenerational transmission of poverty, social exclusion and inequality. Grade repetition in Spain (8.7% of students in lower secondary) is the highest in the EU¹⁶⁵ and early school leaving (16%) is the second highest after Malta. Children of low socioeconomic status have four times more chances to repeat a grade than their richest peers¹⁶⁶ and six times more probability to drop out¹⁶⁷.

Public education investment (4% of GDP) is below the EU average (4.6% of GDP)¹⁶⁸ while the share of education expenditure paid by

households is the highest in the EU (16% in non-tertiary education)¹⁶⁹. Although basic education is free by law, extra fees are requested in many schools (30% of public schools¹⁷⁰ and 90% of government-dependent private schools¹⁷¹) so access is de facto not free, the choice is limited and leads to school segregation of children based on family income.

According to the most recent data from TIMMS¹⁷² 2019, Spain has one of the highest levels of socioeconomic school segregation in primary schools in the OECD, only below Lithuania and Turkey¹⁷³. School segregation is linked to increased grade repetition, low performance and risk of early school leaving. This lack of investment is also reflected in the provision gap of teaching staff and above all educational material (facilities, heating, laboratories, books, libraries) between advantaged and disadvantaged schools, which is among the highest in the EU¹⁷⁴.

The COVID-19 crisis has particularly hit those students most in need, exacerbating educational inequality in Spain. Even though school closure lasted 45 school days and was among the shortest in the world¹⁷⁵, unprepared distance learning arrangements during the lockdown did not replace face-to-face teaching satisfactorily. Inequalities in digital devices, home resources, family support, digital and self-regulation skills increased the already existing educational gaps.

Unfortunately, few external learning assessments have been carried out in Spain after the lockdown. First data from the Catalonia region shows learning losses in maths and English and wider performance gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged schools¹⁷⁶. In line with research from other European countries, the learning loss is higher for children in need, so most likely inequality gaps and disengagement risks are growing¹⁷⁷. More than a year after the COVID-19 outbreak, almost half of the children beneficiaries of Save the Children

Spain were experiencing significant difficulty to keep up with school¹⁷⁸.

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

Access to extracurricular activities increases with family socioeconomic status. For instance, in Catalonia, 72% of children in low-income households (less than €1.200/month) have access to extracurricular activities versus 89% in high-income ones (more than €3.000/month). Only 41% of children in families in severe material deprivation have access to these activities¹⁷⁹.

The offer of school-based activities depends on the unequal initiative and resources of school boards, school parents' associations and local governments. Before the pandemic half of the disadvantaged schools (ghetto schools) offered no activities at all¹⁸⁰. Because of the COVID-19, 81% of educational establishments in Spain have reduced after-school activities and half of them have fully cancelled them¹⁸¹.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

Free school meal grant schemes only reach 11.5% of school children while child poverty in Spain is 27.4%. There is no national entitlement income threshold so there are significant coverage inequalities between regions: from 2% of school children in Murcia to 22% in the Canary Islands.

The government's response and use of funds



COVID-19 safety measures in schools adopted by the national ministry of Education and regional governments were successful. Hand washing, masks, distance, ventilation, and smaller stable groups allowed reopening schools with very low levels of transmission. Assessment standards and grade repetition were also temporarily modified. As a result, grade repetition dropped and avoided worsening the consequences.

In June 2020, the Ministry of Education launched the "Educa en Digital" programme with €260 million (€184 million from ERDF) to provide devices to students, teacher training in digital skills, digital school resources and artificial intelligence. The Spanish RRP includes another extra €1.412 million for the digitalisation of education and VET.

The PROA+ Programme to support students in need and schools was agreed in July 2020 with a €40 million budget and an additional €20 million were approved in November. The aim is to address the effects of the pandemic and reduce educational poverty by improving pedagogical approaches, teacher training and cooperation with the community in schools. However, the investment is not sufficient to meet the needs of children. More than 3 out of 10 children beneficiaries of Save the Children Spain did not receive any extra learning support despite the fact that they claimed for it¹⁸². The Spanish RRP will allocate €118 million per year for the years 2021, 2022 and 2023 for the PROA+ Programme. However, implementing the successful UK's Pupil Premium Programme would need €1.270 million per year¹⁸³ and the Irish DEIS €4.68M per year¹⁸⁴. A study from university researchers estimates €365 million¹⁸⁵. The national parliament asked to increase its budget up to €300 million, but without success.

For the first time, the new national education act (LOMLOE), passed in December 2020, sets reducing school segregation as a policy objective and contains some measures to tackle it. Nevertheless, education policy is highly decentralised in Spain so stronger cooperation among different government levels is required to implement the law and achieve real progress. Still, school segregation is missing from the national ESF+ 2021-2027 strategy document¹⁸⁶.

Even if the importance of educational leisure activities to address the learning loss and psychosocial impact of the lockdowns has been widely acknowledged, no additional financial resources were provided by the national government.

The budget of the national VECA¹⁸⁷ programme (meals, culture and leisure for children during the summer break) remained the same (€15 million). Given the fear and safety restrictions, far from increasing the offer, many regional and local governments and schools cancelled extracurricular activities, summer camps, and other leisure activities for children. Even some playgrounds were closed.

Under the new education act (LOMLOE), educational authorities must take measures to reduce socioeconomic barriers and discrimination in access to school-based activities (within regular school hours). They must also expand after-school leisure activities in educational establishments and areas where students in need are overrepresented.

Finally, in March 2020, the national government transferred €25 million to the autonomous communities to provide meals during school closures but only to those children entitled to the free school meal subsidy. Whereas the eligibility income threshold for upper secondary and tertiary education scholarships has been recently raised to the poverty line, no changes have been made to the school meal grants' regulation and budget. Despite being on the government agenda, there is still no national legal entitlement and coverage remains insufficient with wide variations across the country.

Healthcare



Effective and free access to quality healthcare

Children in poverty are more likely to suffer chronic conditions such as allergies, asthma or mental health issues.

Spanish regions are responsible for the provision of health services. Therefore, there are differences in terms of coverage, especially regarding the inclusion of specific services under the universal portfolio (e.g., dental care) or

the share of out-of-pocket payments in some services. There is also an important urban-rural divide, especially in terms of the availability of services.

The extraordinary pressure faced by health services as a result of the pandemic has had a higher impact on children. Consultations and new forms of health service provision, for example by phone or remotely, have created additional levels of health inequalities due to digital gaps. In addition, the pandemic has had a very strong effect on one of the least protected areas of health service provision i.e., mental health services.

Two out of ten children under 8 years of age have never had their vision checked. The pandemic has increased visual problems due to excess close vision and screen overuse as a result of online education and lack of alternative leisure.

According to the latest Dental Health Survey, 35.5% of children under 6 years of age have cavities. Children are the only age group for which this type of condition has worsened. The greatest needs are concentrated among children with a low socioeconomic status. Poor public coverage of dental health and large regional inequalities in terms of coverage lies at the heart of such low outcomes.

The government's response and the use of funds: The conclusions on health services and public health of the Spanish Parliament Commission for Social and Economic Reconstruction stressed the need for the health system to consider the factors of families' social and economic vulnerability when planning primary and community care.

In the last year, initial progress to increase coverage of dental health within the public health system has been made. Whilst dental health services are part of the Spanish National Health System, the portfolio of services is small and there are large territorial differences regarding these programs.

With regard to mental health, the pandemic has triggered efforts to renew Spain's national Strategy on Mental Health, which is expected to contain a specific focus on children's mental health. This strategic framework should be an important step towards addressing structural gaps such as underfunding of mental health services and social intervention for children, poor coordination between mental health services and psychosocial teams, the lack of specialisation on children among mental health professionals and persistent social stigma around mental health issues. REACT-EU has largely been directed towards investments in health services and health supplies.

Healthy nutrition



Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

In 2020, 31% of families that benefit from Save the Children Spain only ate meat, fish or their equivalent once or twice a week and approximately 3% claimed to never eat them. In addition, around half of the children only ate fruit or vegetables 1 or 2 times a day and more than 83% did not eat the 5 recommended portions per day. The family diet often depends on the food received from food banks. School meals were mentioned by families as a guarantee of adequate food for children¹⁸⁸.

At the same time, only 11.4% of public secondary schools have a canteen versus 90% of private secondary schools. The lack of canteen facilities makes it difficult for 12–18-year-old children to access school meals and healthy nutrition.

School closures due to COVID-19 have also affected access to school meals. School canteens were temporarily closed during the lockdown and, in some cases, remained closed or reopened with safety limitations afterwards.

Summer educational leisure activities are an essential area to guarantee access to food among children in vulnerable situations.

Despite commitments made to reinforce this support, no additional resources were allocated to ensuring access to summer school activities by children in vulnerable situations. In addition, most regions and municipalities cancelled summer camps and other activities due to the pandemic. In 2019, 4 out of 10 schoolchildren in Spain were overweight (40.6%)¹⁸⁹. The prevalence of obesity and overweight among children is closely linked to the socioeconomic status of families and, therefore, is significantly higher among children living in low-income households (less than €18.000/year). Obesity is almost double among children whose parents have primary education, compared to those whose parents have university studies. The COVID-19 has also increased children's unhealthy eating habits. These, coupled with the decrease in physical activity and increased exposure to screens and hence to advertising of unhealthy food and beverages, will likely worsen data on child obesity.

The government's response and the use of funds



In March 2020, after the closure of schools and canteens, the central government transferred €25 million to regional governments to guarantee access to nutrition among students, either through monetary allowances or direct food distribution. However, only students entitled to regional school meal subsidies provided by school canteens could benefit from this aid.

The state budget introduced fiscal disincentives to the consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks and beverages by increasing VAT from 10% to 21%.

Adequate housing



Effective access to adequate housing

In his report on Spain¹⁹⁰ – prior to the outbreak of the pandemic – the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights highlighted the profound mismatch between housing needs and housing policies. Spain only

has 290.000 housing units that account for 2.5% of households, compared to a 9.3% EU average rate which constitutes an obstacle for vulnerable families when accessing housing.

A large number of households also struggle to keep adequate temperature levels and/or a constant and safe energy supply to carry out basic daily activities such as cooking and food preservation, personal hygiene, study or leisure. The rate is significantly higher among households with children, especially when headed by single parent (21.5%).

Although the subsidies and benefits received by families with children are generally supplemented when the children have disabilities (they are also granted priority access to social housing), however, the root problems (i.e., insufficient social housing stock and insufficient/ too low subsidies to cover rent/mortgage costs) persist and are shared by families with children with and without disabilities.

The government's response and the use of funds



At the beginning of the pandemic, several measures were implemented to ensure housing stability among vulnerable people. These measures have been extended throughout the year until 31 October 2021. An extension of expired rent contracts was introduced to avoid unjustified rent increases. In addition, several initiatives targeted people in vulnerable situations such as rent and mortgage moratoria with a possibility to pay back up to 3 years after the end of the COVID-19 were introduced.

Likewise, evictions for families without alternative housing and in vulnerable situations were suspended before October 2021. However, the definition of 'vulnerable situations' has limited the scope of this measure (1/3 of poor households with children living in a rented dwelling could not benefit from this measure and the percentage reaches three quarters in the case of families with a mortgage).

Throughout the year, adaptations to the State Housing Plan were introduced, such as an additional allocation of €100 million to grant direct rental assistance to people with difficulties paying the rent.

To compensate for Spain's longstanding social housing deficit, €215 million were allocated in the new state budget towards a 20.000-house construction plan aimed at creating affordable social housing under public ownership. However, it remains to be seen whether this investment will benefit and prioritise access to families with children in vulnerable situations. Also, part of the EU Recovery funds included in the 2021 budget (€1.150 million) have been allocated towards the renovation and rehabilitation of poorer neighbourhoods and urban areas.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCEDURES



Participation of children or their parents in any public policies processes has been non-existent at national or regional levels.

Save the Children Spain has not taken part in any established space of civil dialogue on the allocation of EU funding at the national level, nor in the definition of priorities for the RRF since there has been no formal process of stakeholder participation in the definition of Spain's RRP priority axis, nor in the development of investments and reforms within each of those axes. This has been the case at both national and regional levels. The development of each component within the Plan has corresponded to the concerned Ministry. In this regard, expressions of interest have been launched without coordination and a general lack of transparency. Also, this siloed approach has been an obstacle to promote a cross-cutting prioritisation of children across the Plan. While Save the Children Spain has shared its proposals with relevant ministries¹⁹¹, direct opportunities to acquire information on the content of the NRRP have been limited.

Save the Children Spain responded to a public consultation launched by the ESF Managing Authority on the definition of political objectives of the ESF+. Its views were largely taken into account and now the revised political objectives include an increased focus on child-focused measures. Save the Children Spain also responded to a public consultation on the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, launched by the Ministry of Inclusion.

Save the Children Spain was also invited to participate in the elaboration of the National Strategy against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2019-2023. The strategy, which has a significant focus on child poverty, includes several measures that have been approved as a result of COVID-19, including the Minimum Income Scheme, and will be a reference for the implementation of the Child Guarantee in Spain.

CHILD POVERTY REDUCTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE SPANISH RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN



The fight against child poverty and exclusion was mentioned as one of the objectives

of Spain's RRP upon its announcement in October 2020. However, there is no specific investment line in the Plan that specifically addresses this challenge. The main child-related priorities covered by the draft plan are related to the modernisation of the child protection system and foster care, with special focus on children ageing out of the protection system. This includes investments in infrastructure and digitalisation, staff training and capacity building. In addition, the Plan foresees financing of at least one pilot project on de-institutionalisation within the child protection system. To this end, it is necessary to strengthen protection systems and work with families through prevention programmes to prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their families.

Education constitutes another priority axis within the Plan. In this regard, the Plan foresees the creation of additional ECEC places with special focus on children in need (€119 million). It also includes investments in reinforcement, support and guidance (€12 million) as well as in accompaniment and support units for students in need and their families (€27 million). However, the main focus lies on the digitalisation of the education system, including digital skills (€1.000 million).





SAVE THE CHILDREN SPAIN

Save the Children Spain has been working to reduce the impact of poverty on children over the last 25 years. Every year Save the Children Spain supports more than 3.500 children and families to help them reach their potential.

Save the Children programmes aim to achieve educational, emotional support and access to leisure activities for children in poverty and social exclusion and recovery of vulnerable families.

EDUCATION, INCLUDING SCHOOL BASED AND EXTRA LEISURE, SPORTS, AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Prior to COVID-19, Spain already had high school failure rates¹⁹², especially among the most vulnerable children. It also had the highest early drop out school rate in the EU. Save the Children Spain knows that poor educational performance at school is often directly linked to the level of poverty in the child's home, either through lack of parental support or material poverty.

This is why Save the Children Spain provides:

1. **Supplementary classes:** Save the Children dedicates two hours a day to provide educational support to reduce the negative impacts that poverty has caused on children in vulnerable situations. Children will focus their study on the core subjects of language, mathematics and English. Activities that improve children's skills with the use of new technologies are also included.
2. **Recovery and emotional support:** Save the Children provides psychosocial support to help children recover emotionally through play. This is crucial for their resilience and to keep high motivation levels.
3. **Child participation:** Save the Children promotes spaces where children can participate to strengthen children's right to participate and make sure their voices are taken into account.
4. **Education in values:** Through non-formal education activities (workshops and games), Save the Children promotes values in favour of caring for the environment, interculturalism, gender equality, road safety education, cooperation, and respect. This helps poorer children overcome fears of social exclusion due to their backgrounds and help build a better future.
5. **Family leisure spaces:** Many children from poorer families are unable to spend quality time with their parents due to their focus on income earning. Save the Children creates games, activities and workshops for families, which reinforce the positive relationship of parents and children.

Save the Children Spain's educational support programme reaches 3.500 children per year nationally.

CHILD PROTECTION

Children's wellbeing depends on the social and economic stability of their families. Before the crisis, many families already lived in precarious situations and faced poverty. The economic consequences of the crisis have aggravated their situation. 65.7% of the families Save the Children Spain works with have lost their jobs temporarily and 26.4% have lost it permanently¹⁹³.

Save the Children Spain carries out the following interventions for the recovery of families:

1. **Diagnosis and personalised analysis of the economic needs and social situation of families.**
2. **Family support:** Personalised advice to access social benefits and job search to help ensure the well-being of their children.
3. **Positive parenting workshops:** Save the Children Spain works with families and supports parents to equip them to deal with some of the challenges of the crisis and overcome the hurdles they face in building safe, stable and nurturing environments for their children to thrive in.
4. **Digital training of families:** To provide parents with digital skills to support their children in an increasingly digital education environment and help them to find opportunities for employment and remote additional training.
5. **Empowerment of communities:** To promote the integration of vulnerable families in their communities.

In 2020, and as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Save the Children Spain developed the emergency response programme "A tu lado"¹⁹⁴ (By your side) to support more than 2.000 families. 'By your side' aimed at providing a holistic response based on three pillars; the economic emergency; the education emergency; and the mental health status. In addition, Save the Children Spain reinforced

its summer programmes to provide food, school reinforcement and emotional support to children at risk of poverty. Summer camps, urban colonies and online activities have supported over 1.700 children.

ADVOCACY WORK

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, Save the Children Spain urges the government to place children at the heart of its recovery efforts. Save the Children Spain shared proposals with policymakers and other key stakeholders in the areas of social protection, education, health, nutrition, and energy poverty, also including a specific focus on migrant children. Special emphasis was made on the need to reinstate the child allowance –eliminated as a result of the introduction of a national Minimum Income Scheme (MIS). Despite the support of a significant, cross-party share of MPs, few proposals related to an increase of investment in schools as well as support and guidance for students in need were taken into account.

To mark the first anniversary of the pandemic, Save the Children Spain has analysed the socioeconomic status of families and children benefitting from the support of Save the Children Spain programmes. The results of this survey were accompanied by an analysis of policies introduced since last year and a set of proposals¹⁹⁵ to address the emergency situation of children in need in Spain. With the objective to make the so called ‘child poverty pandemic’ visible, Save the Children Spain matched its proposals with the priorities of the RRP and called upon an increased presence of child-focused reforms and investments in the Plan. Finally, during the last year, Save the Children Spain has engaged with the Government and the Parliament, trying to include child-specific measures in the different bills and proposals enacted¹⁹⁶.

FUNDING OF SAVE THE CHILDREN SPAIN

Save the Children Spain obtains its funding from public funds. This amount currently constitutes 15% of the Intervention Fund of the Fight against Poverty Programme. Save the Children Spain also receives funding from the European Social Fund from the Castilla-La Mancha region and the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund. Finally, Save the Children Spain receives funding from private companies sensitised to the issue of child poverty and social exclusion. The Caixa Bank Foundation provides 60% of Save the Children Spain’s funds in the fight against poverty.

Story from the ground

“ We have to pay a rent of €350. My husband has an unemployment benefit of €215 and I have another of €430. We don’t have enough money to overcome this situation. My children come first. I can be without eating, but my children cannot. We can no longer buy them clothes. I am grateful to Save the Children Spain who during the crisis has provided food, cash allowances and educational reinforcement to my children. If it weren’t them, I don’t know where we would be. ”

María del Carmen, 45 years old, a mother of four children. Maria and her husband became unemployed due to COVID-19. Save the Children Spain provided food aid, cash allowances and education reinforcement to her children

Recommendations towards national decision makers on measures to be included in the Spanish Child Guarantee Action Plan

The targeted categories of children in need to be reached

- Children living in single parent families.
- Children living in large families.
- Children living in households with a migrant background.
- Children living with irregular status.
- Unaccompanied children ageing out from the child protection system.
- Households with children whose parents experience in-work poverty and live in urban areas.
- Children living in institutions.
- Children from families assessed as “at risk”¹⁹⁷.

Effective and free access to ECEC

- Invest in ECEC infrastructures to expand the supply of places in disadvantaged areas.
- Expand financial support to low-income parents as part of gradual pricing schemes (sliding fee scale based on income).
- Improve and expand continuing training for ECEC staff incorporating it within the general teacher training system.
- Develop national regulation of quality requirements in ECEC (curricula, staff training, higher staff remunerations, facilities, lower child-staff ratio, equitable admission criteria).
- Develop ECEC Monitoring and Evaluation systems and indicators, including process quality.
- Put in place more flexible opening hours and schedule choice in ECEC establishments, including non-standard hours.
- Modify priority access criteria in ECEC establishments so they are exclusively based on household socioeconomic status instead of parents’ employment situation.
- Establish integration with services relevant for children and families (health sector, family support services, child protection, social worker) as a requirement for new ECEC schools.

- Promote multilingual information and proactive outreach actions targeted to vulnerable families to raise awareness of ECEC benefits, foster enrolment and support application procedures.

Effective and free access to education

- Develop a National Plan for Inclusive Education and Against School Segregation, including reforms in school admission policies and funding for local innovative pilot desegregation projects, co-funded by ESF+.
- Reform regulation and funding of government-dependent private schools to eliminate fees and ensure free access.
- Increase amounts and take-up of scholarships targeted to secondary school and VET students in poverty to prevent early school leaving.
- Increase funding and support schemes for disadvantaged schools (e.g., PROA+ programme) in order to improve performance and reduce stigma and segregation.
- Expand after-school learning support and tutoring for students in need to tackle learning loss and gaps.
- Reinforce counselling, psychologists and social work staff at schools.
- Digitalise and integrate student and school information systems¹⁹⁸ in order to better disaggregate equity indicators, improve administrative data use (big data), prevent failure and dropouts (early warning) and evaluate policies.
- Develop a multi-level National Strategy for Equitable and Inclusive School Success, setting a shared vision, indicators and targets at regional level, in line with the European Education Area 2021-2030 and SDG 4.

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

Set up grants and scholarship schemes (e.g., VECA programme) to guarantee free access to school-based activities for low-income students¹⁹⁹.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

Set a national income threshold so all children under the poverty line are legally entitled to the free school meal grant using funding from ESF+ targeting the most deprived.

Effective and free access to quality healthcare

- Promote the integration of primary and mental health care services targeted at children.
- Strengthen public programmes for ophthalmological and dental health care, and nutritional health.

Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

- Disseminate material aid (food and other basic goods) for low-income families through cash cards.
- Address the increasing numbers of obesity among children through a national strategy promoting healthy eating habits.
- Build more school canteen facilities in public secondary schools and ensure the provision of healthy meals and products.

Effective access to adequate housing

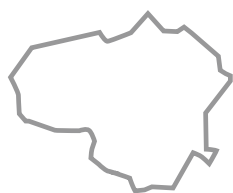
- Increase the stock of social housing for rent.
- Subsidise tax benefits on housing and direct housing targeted at vulnerable families with children.
- Promote subsidies and tax benefits aimed at supporting energy efficiency in old and low-income households.
- Extend and improve functioning of energy consumption subsidies for vulnerable families.

The use of EU funds and national budgets to support children and families in need

- Spain's system of tax benefits constitutes the main mechanism of support for families with children. However, its current design only supports taxpayers and therefore, only benefits middle- and high-income families. The Child Guarantee Action Plan should promote increased levels of progressiveness in tax deductions for families with children, for example through a system of refundable tax credits.
- Promote changes in the Spanish social protection system to increase financial support to children and their families. The Spanish system of child allowances is one of the least generous in the EU, both in terms of coverage and amounts. This situation has been exacerbated by the disappearance of the sole non-contributory benefit, which is now integrated into the MIS.
- Favour the introduction of changes in the national MIS, so that it can reach families in poverty and social exclusion beyond those in extreme poverty, as currently targeted. The MIS should raise its access threshold and include as eligible groups asylum-seeking families with children, irregular migrant families with children and young people (below 23 years of age) formerly under state guardianship.
- Trigger measures enabling the adaptation and/or reduction of working hours of parents²⁰⁰. Some of these measures have been introduced as a result of the exceptional care needs created by the pandemic. These measures should be generalised and materialised into initiatives that support joint responsibility of childcare between parents, through a reform of working time and work-life arrangements.
- Work preventively with families to avoid the separation of children from their family environment, as long as it is in accordance with their well-being and best interest.
- Review the protection system to move towards a complete deinstitutionalisation of the system. To this end, priority should be given to kinship care. Residential care should be provided only as a last resort and should resemble a family environment within the community.

Lithuania

Summary



In 2019, approximately 1 in 4 children in Lithuania were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion with approximately 1/3 of them growing up in absolute poverty.

Although data for 2020 have not been published yet, Save the Children Lithuania is concerned that the number of children in poverty might be further increased in the years to come due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences it has caused especially to families at risk leading many of them to unemployment or to lower paid employment. Although the Lithuanian government has taken important steps during the last years to support children in need, more remains to be done to ensure that children in poverty or social exclusion have equal chances as their peers. Save the Children Lithuania has been working for the last 30 years in the most deprived and remote regions of the country to provide children in need and their families with social skills, psychosocial and in-kind support. Save the Children Lithuania calls on the Lithuanian government to target in its Child Guarantee Action Plan children growing up in single parent families, in rural areas, children with disabilities and children living in inadequate housing conditions – as those are the ones mostly in need. The Lithuanian government should invest

Key facts

1 in 4

Approximately 1 in every 4 children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Lithuania with 1/3 of them growing up in absolute poverty.

12.5%

Children with disabilities are among the most vulnerable and socially excluded in Lithuania with only 12.5% of them attending mainstream education.

40.000

Over 40.000 children did not have access to computers or internet in 2020 which led to 25.000 children dropping out of distance learning last year.

in infrastructure and development of services to ensure that children in need have free and equal access to quality ECEC, education, mental health care – which is one of the most underdeveloped areas in the country – and decent housing. Access to free or affordable services should be combined with family or other kinds of targeted benefits to support children and their families live their lives in dignity.

National updates

CHILD POVERTY IN LITHUANIA



According to Eurostat data, in 2019, 26,5% of children were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Lithuania²⁰¹. At the same time, and according to the Official Statistics Portal of Lithuania²⁰², 8.4% (approximately 41.900 children) faced absolute poverty meaning that the income of the family was lower than needed to meet the child's needs. The minimum income of families consisting of two children under 14 years and two adults was €537/month in 2019.

Although Eurostat's estimated data for 2020 show a decrease in children growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Lithuania, the research of the National Poverty Reduction Network shows that in 2020 37% of the population faced a significant reduction of income, 18% faced difficulties paying for housing and 11% did not have enough money for food²⁰³.

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN LITHUANIA



Children with disabilities are among the most vulnerable and socially excluded in Lithuania. They have limited opportunities to participate in mainstream education, and many are segregated in special schools or (in the worst-case scenario) in institutions – although the use of institutions has significantly dropped during the last years as a result of the deinstitutionalisation reforms which took place in 2015. Alternative care services are being developed to replace big institutions, including those for children with disabilities.

Children with disabilities have also limited access to free specialised services such as physiotherapy, and speech therapy. This group

of children has particularly suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic as most services were closed and their physical and emotional development seriously deteriorated.

Children growing up in single parent households are among the ones experiencing highest levels of poverty. Almost half of the single parents' families (45.4%) experience poverty. Even though benefits are increasing in Lithuania, single parent families are not sufficiently supported by the government as the social benefits and the social service system itself are not as generous as those of other EU Member States. In many cases, the parent is either in low paid employment or unemployed, living on (very low) social benefits.

Lithuania is a very centralised country with most of the social services concentrated in Vilnius or other big cities. Hence, children growing up in rural areas need more social services such as day care centres. Although the number of day care centres is growing every year in Lithuania, there is still a lack of services especially in the municipalities of Palanga city, Panevėžys district, Šilutė district, Šilalė district and Tauragė district²⁰⁴.

CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO SERVICES AS DESCRIBED IN THE CHILD GUARANTEE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

Early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, and a healthy meal each school day



Effective and free access to early childhood education and care (ECEC)

About 36% of children in need²⁰⁵ do not participate in pre-school education for children up to 5 years of age²⁰⁶. In particular, across Lithuania, 14-67% attend pre-school education; in 9 municipalities, there are not enough places

and in 30 municipalities there were no places in settings chosen by parents. Physical access to pre-school education is also an issue in Lithuania since only 37 out of 60 municipalities provide transportation for children who are enrolled in more distant pre-school education settings, something that makes parents deciding not to send their children at school²⁰⁷.

The government's response and the use of funds.

To ensure equal opportunities for every child to enter the education system, the government plans to increase by 20 times the participation of children in need in pre-school education. According to the updated provisions of the Law on Education (2020), from 2025, all municipalities must create the conditions for all pre-school children from the age of 2 to 5 to attend pre-school education. Great attention will also be paid to ensure that all children in compulsory pre-school education receive pre-school education services. Approximately €27.8 million will be directed through the ESF+ resources for this purpose.

Effective and free access to education



The demographic decline remains a major problem for the education system in Lithuania, as it leads to regional differences in the availability of educational services and the quality of education. With the constant and uneven decrease of school-aged children in the regions of Lithuania, the issues of organisation and management of the education system have to be addressed again and again. This means that the government must develop plans for the optimisation of the school network, the development of school settings, the distribution of jobs for teachers, and the improvement of the quality of education under changing conditions²⁰⁸. The results of this process are unsatisfactory: combined classrooms, unqualified teachers, outdated or low-quality textbooks and other educational tools reduce children's motivation to learn, leading to a

deterioration in children's educational outcomes and the pursuit of an innovative country.

On the positive side, the number of children with special educational needs in mainstream education is increasing. In 2018, the total number of students with special needs in mainstream education accounted for 12.5%, which indicates improving access to education and greater inclusion. The number of children with special needs attending mainstream schools is also increasing²⁰⁹. The increasing number of social pedagogues, special pedagogues, psychologists, social workers, and health care specialists in general education schools shows the extent to which special support, psychological assistance and health care is developed. However, there are still gaps to be filled. In 2018, 2.300 child support professionals worked in mainstream education. This means that there were on average only 0.7 specialists per 100 children and 74% worked in Vilnius. About a tenth of the country's schools still do not have any educational support specialists.

In 2020, during the school closures and transition to distance learning, over 40.000 children did not have access to computers or/and internet connection at their homes. Consequently, in January 2021 there were around 25.000 children who dropped out of distance learning. The pandemic and the long school closure have badly affected children both emotionally and physically.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

All children attending pre-school education and also the first grade of primary education have the right to a free lunch. In addition, older children in Lithuania are entitled to a free lunch at school if the average income of the family falls under a certain threshold. They are also entitled to a free lunch in case of illness, accident, loss of a parent, also single parent families, large families or families where at least one member has a disability.

The government's response and the use of funds



At the beginning of the pandemic, the Lithuanian government announced the provision of digital equipment as well as access to WI-FI connection to those children in need. However, due to severe delays in the provision, many children in need were left behind in the education process. Still today, there are many children – especially in rural areas – that do not have access to an internet connection or sufficient digital equipment.

The Lithuanian government ensured that schools delivered free of charge food for children in poverty. In 2021 additional money was allocated for summer camps and emotional support for children in need.

Healthcare



Effective and free access to quality healthcare

Children's access to healthcare in Lithuania is overall good²¹⁰. Parents are responsible for yearly health checks of children and correspondingly free of charge services are available, including dental and ophthalmology examinations and screening programmes. As with the rest of the services, the situation is much better in urban than in rural areas where healthcare services are less developed. Access to healthcare services especially for children with disabilities is limited, especially for services related to dental care. Also, access to psychological, psychiatric, and emotional health is more limited, especially in rural areas.

The government's response and the use of funds



The year 2020 was labelled the year of emotional wellbeing for children in Lithuania. This meant that more attention was given to the development of social and emotional competencies of professionals working with children, the availability of psychological help

in schools was increased, online safety was strengthened. In addition, school programmes were developed aiming at the early identification, diagnosis and assistance of psychological problems and mental disorders as well as programmes that focused on the support of children with behavioural problems entering the labour market and non-formal education²¹¹.

The Health Care Structural Reform Programme project "Creating New Healthy Lifestyle Incentives and Strengthening Prevention" improved the geographical and financial accessibility of mental health, expanded the circle of psychotherapy professionals, increased the number of national health budget funded – paid psychotherapy consultations and created legal preconditions for institutions to provide children and adolescents psychiatric day hospital services. A new service has been introduced – psychosocial rehabilitation of children and adolescents provided by a team of specialists: a child and adolescent psychiatrist, a medical psychologist, a social worker, a mental health nurse and, if necessary, a psychotherapist, an occupational therapist and art therapist.

The Action Plan for Assistance to Children diagnosed with Autism or Other Development Disorders for 2019-2020, which develops complex, integral, health care, social assistance and education for children diagnosed with autism or other developmental disorders, was approved.

Finally, to improve access to help for those at risk of suicide, training for professionals ("gatekeepers") was provided to identify the risks of suicide and to provide the skills needed to provide help. It is planned to train 16.000 professionals by the end of 2021 and to promote health prevention and promotion activities to strengthen the psychological (emotional) resilience of society in order to reduce suicides and addictions.

Healthy nutrition



Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

In Lithuania, it is prohibited to provide nutrition at schools using unhealthy products such as potato, corn or other products cooked in fat and candy²¹².

In exceptional cases²¹³ municipalities are entitled to provide free nutrition for children.

The government's response and the use of funds



To form healthy eating habits and improve children's nutrition at school, a programme for the promotion of the consumption of fruit, vegetables and milk has been implemented in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture. In this programme fruit, vegetables, juices, milk and dairy products are provided free of charge to younger children in educational institutions²¹⁴. To ensure that children receive a balanced diet during the school day, sample menus and recipes for meals that meet the recommended energy and nutrient norms have been published on the website of the Ministry of Health²¹⁵.

In addition, to better understand the implications and benefits of healthy eating and healthy lifestyles for children, the Ministry of Health assisted the Ministry of Education and Science in the development of a "General Framework for Health Education" in schools. This framework aims to ensure the successful development of children's health at school. A large part of this programme is devoted to the development of nutrition and healthy lifestyles.

Adequate housing



Effective access to adequate housing

The prices of housing do not always respond

to the level of salaries of Lithuanians, and in some cases this leads to housing deprivation. Although the credit market is well developed, it is not available to those with low or no income. In addition, the provision of social housing is very limited. Although social housing exists, it is not sufficiently developed. There are long waiting lists and many families with children live in inadequate dwellings (e.g., crowded houses shared with relatives, lack of hot water, toilet or electricity).

However, despite the existing housing problems, it should be mentioned that there are no homeless children in Lithuania.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCEDURES



The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour undertook thorough consultations with civil society on the allocation of the ESF+. The consultation was meaningful and Save the Children Lithuania's proposals were included. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour presented the draft NRRP to NGOs, including Save the Children and it has been announced that the Ministry of Finance will consult further with civil society organisations

CHILD POVERTY REDUCTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE LITHUANIAN RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN



Child poverty reduction is included in the national RRP as part of the wider antipoverty measures that the Lithuanian government has prioritised during the last years. Investments related to the strengthening of the education system to become more accessible and more inclusive as well as investments related to the expansion and better coverage of healthcare and mental healthcare are also included.



SAVE THE CHILDREN LITHUANIA

Save the Children Lithuania supports children and families in vulnerable situations across the country. It mainly runs children's day care centres and supports families with children to access housing.

EDUCATION, INCLUDING SCHOOL BASED AND EXTRA LEISURE, SPORTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Save the Children Lithuania supervises 48 out of more than 400 day-care centres across the country supporting children in vulnerable situations. This accounts for 1.000 children and their families. Children attend these centres after school. They get a meal, prepare their homework for the next day, and engage in creative or educational activities. In addition, parents and children can receive psychosocial and emotional support, if needed. The support provided to children and their families in the day care centres is especially important since

it has been proven that it reduces the risk of child neglect, improves children's physical and emotional health, communication skills, and their learning motivation. In addition, it has been observed that children and families' participation in community life is enhanced. The day care centres started operating in 2007. Since then and due to their positive impact on children's lives, the Lithuanian government has annually allocated funding for their operation with an average budget of €6 million per year in recent years.

HOUSING

Save the Children Lithuania works in this field on a daily basis as the issue of housing concerns many families with children across the country. Save the Children Lithuania offers support to families living in inadequate housing conditions by offering legal as well as practical advice on their situation. Save the Children Lithuania uses private donations and, in collaboration with the local authorities, helps families get adequate housing.

SAVE THE CHILDREN LITHUANIA'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

During 2020 and 2021, Save the Children Lithuania supported over 1.000 children and their family members with material and psychosocial support. Save the Children Lithuania provided computers and supported households in accessing the internet. It also distributed meals to families in need. Finally, it ran leisure activities and summer camps to support children catch up with homework and to support them in having a social life.

ADVOCACY WORK

Save the Children Lithuania advocates to end violence against children, and to end institutional care by promoting family-based and alternative services, increasing the help for children and families in day care centres and for the reduction of child poverty.

FUNDING OF SAVE THE CHILDREN LITHUANIA

Save the Children Lithuania receives funding from the Lithuanian government as well as from private donations. It also receives ESF funding for psychological support for families in need.

Story from the ground

“ A family with 9 children used to live in a two room-apartment. In 2020, schools were closed, and all children had to study from home. The family had only one table in their apartment, so they used it to sit during lessons in shifts. The other children would stay in their beds during the lessons. Children did not have computers either. Save the Children Lithuania managed to get a big house for them so they would have enough space for every child to study in better conditions. Save the Children Lithuania also provided the families with computers and food. ”

Recommendations towards national decision makers on measures to be included in the Lithuanian Child Guarantee Action Plan

The targeted categories of children in need to be reached

- Children with disabilities.
- Children growing up in single parent families.
- Children growing up in rural areas.
- Children in inadequate housing conditions.

Effective and free access to ECEC

Strengthen the infrastructure and provision of pre-school education for all children in Lithuania, especially for those in more segregated or rural areas.

Effective and free access to education

- Ensure that all children have access to digital equipment and that their education is not further disrupted due to the COVID-19.
- Continue the important efforts to ensure mainstream education for all children and strengthen this support especially in rural areas.

Effective and free access to quality healthcare

- Develop more services for children with disabilities (especially free healthcare and social services).
- Support the development of further healthcare services in rural areas and – when this is not possible – ensure that children and their families are guaranteed free

transportation to these services located in urban areas.

- Strengthen the provision of mental health support across Lithuania. Employ psychiatrists and psychologists across Lithuania, especially in rural areas.

Effective access to adequate housing

- Strengthen the infrastructure and the provision of social housing to vulnerable families. Ensure that families with children are prioritised.
- Further support the development of social rents and housing benefits to families in need – especially targeting children growing up in single parent households or large families and children with disabilities.

Further measures to be included in the Lithuanian Child Guarantee Action Plan to address social exclusion and break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage

- Develop further comprehensive services for families with children.
- Create the conditions for appropriate income of families prioritising employment, requalification and education to ensure that parents enter and remain on the labour market.
- Introduce overall measures to ensure the safety of children.

Romania



Summary

For the first time in five years, Romanian children's risk of poverty or social exclusion increased in 2020 as did other indicators relevant for children's wellbeing, for example, the inability to access nutritious meals.

The COVID-19 crisis proved once again that children are more vulnerable than adults with the situation being even more severe for children with disabilities, Roma children and children in precarious situations, including underage mothers from vulnerable, rural communities. Despite the positive steps that the Romanian government has taken during the last years, inequalities across the country are still prevalent. Even before the crisis, Save the Children Romania continuously highlighted the hidden flaws in the education system as it is supposed to be free for all children, but in practice proves to not be the case. The quality of education is also questionable as Romania is among the countries with the strongest link between the socioeconomic status and the academic results of 15-year-old children. Children's access to healthcare varies significantly between rural and urban areas. Specialised services are usually concentrated in urban areas and privately provided, leaving poor families (especially in rural areas) with no choice. Save the Children Romania has been working for the last 31 years in segregated communities across Romania supporting children in need to reach their potential. Save the Children Romania calls on the Romanian government to take full advantage of the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation as well as EU funding through the RRF and the Structural Funds 2021-2027 to support

Key facts

1.582.000

Romania has the highest levels of child poverty in the EU. In 2020, 1.582.000 children in Romania were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

66.3%

Overcrowding remains a severe problem intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to online education. In 2019, 66.3% of Romanian children were living in overcrowded houses, out of whom 79.7% were children at risk of poverty.

the reduction of child poverty in Romania by prioritising investments that will contribute to the strengthening of the education system starting from the early years ensuring that all children and especially those in need have equal access to free and good quality education. The provision and quality of free school meals should be improved and healthcare provision, especially in rural areas, should be strengthened.

National updates

CHILD POVERTY IN ROMANIA



In 2020, 1.582.000 children in Romania (36.3 % of children) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion²¹⁶. As expected, children were more vulnerable to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The risk of poverty or social exclusion among children increased by 0.5 percentage points from 2019 to 2020, while it decreased among adults by 1.2 percentage points (from 30.2% to 29%)²¹⁷. For the first time in five years this rate, together with other indicators relevant for children's wellbeing, increased among children.

Although the risk of monetary poverty (income below 60% of the median income) decreased both among adults (from 22.2% to 21.8%) and children (from 30.8% to 30.1%)²¹⁸, the severe material deprivation rate increased among the general population (from 14.5% to 15.2%)²¹⁹. This increase was higher among children (from 17.7% to 21.4%) and skyrocketed among young children under 6 years old (from 16% to 22%)²²⁰.

Another indicator that raises concerns for the wellbeing of children is the inability to have access to a nutritious meal every second day. Among the households with dependent children, the level of this indicator increased by 2.2 percentage points between 2019 and 2020, but the evolution is much more severe among households with three or more children (from 17.5% to 28.3%) and among single parent families (from 18.9% to 30%)²²¹.

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN ROMANIA



Children growing up in poverty are generally more vulnerable and further excluded when they grow up in rural areas.

Children with disabilities are among the most discriminated against since there is either limited or no capacity of services – including inclusive education or trained professionals. The situation is worse especially for those children growing up in rural areas.

Roma children are facing both discrimination (including segregation in education) and an increased risk of being at risk of poverty due to their parents' limited employment opportunities and segregation from the rest of the community.

Although Romania has made significant steps towards the deinstitutionalisation of children during the last years, it continues to have a significant number of children living in alternative care (34.070 in family-type care and 13.961 in residential care, at the end of 2020). Children in institutional care are growing up in segregated settings, socially excluded from the communities and with limited opportunities for their future²²².

Children left behind by parents who are working abroad are also particularly vulnerable. There were 75.136 children in this situation at the end of December 2020, out of which 13.253 had both parents abroad and 9.409 had one parent living in another country. Most of the children with both parents abroad are left with grandparents or close relatives. However, there are also cases where children are left to themselves or end up in the special protection / alternative care system²²³.

Finally, another important vulnerable group consists of underage mothers from poor, rural communities. In 2019, 7.977 underage girls became mothers and 700 gave birth before turning 15²²⁴. Many of the underage mothers have more than one child before reaching 18 years. The children of underage mothers are also vulnerable compared to other children since they are not immunised on time, do not have periodical health check-ups and fewer have access to free-of-charge medication.

CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO SERVICES AS DESCRIBED IN THE CHILD GUARANTEE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

Early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, and a healthy meal each school day



Effective and free access to early childhood education and care (ECEC)

For children under 3 years of age, the main problem is the very low capacity of dedicated education and care settings (the crèches). In 2020 there were only 22.506 places for 603.616 children under 3 in both private and public care settings with a general enrolment rate of 3.4% of the target population (6% in urban areas and 0.2% in rural areas²²⁵). This leads to families deciding to either care for their children at home with usually mothers leaving their jobs or grandparents taking care of their grandchildren or children being enrolled in settings that provide care services which however are not registered, verified or supervised. The enrolment rate in pre-primary education (from 3 to 6 years) reached 78.5% in 2020 (with a high difference from 83.1% in urban areas to 73% in rural areas). However, most places in public settings have limited opening hours (most of them open only 4 hours/day and those that open 8 hours/day are overcrowded). In public settings, parents are required to cover the costs of meals and to pay contributions for educational and hygiene supplies and extra-curricular activities such as dance, sports or foreign languages classes. These extra costs often lead to inequalities as many parents cannot afford paying for their children's education or extra-curricular activities.

The school closures due to the COVID-19 severely affected ECEC in Romania. The decision about the opening of the settings was left to the local authorities. In February 2021, the Ministry of Education decided to

keep ECEC settings and primary schools open (unless the local area or the setting were put under quarantine).

The government's response and use of funds. Since the school year 2020/2021, at least one year of ECEC education became compulsory and the enrolment rate for 5 years old is expected to rise. In addition, in 2020, the government offered benefits (tax deduction) for employers that were going to grant ECEC vouchers to their employees, but the initiative was suspended before being put into practice.

A very recent and highly debated initiative of the government aims at granting financial incentives (a monthly fixed amount) to mothers returning to work before their children reach 6 months. The initiative is highly debated because, besides stimulating mothers to abandon exclusive breastfeeding before the WHO recommended duration, it raises questions about the care alternatives, given the very limited availability of places in crèches in Romania.

The final version of the RRP²²⁶ includes the creation of 110 crèches (building and operationalising)²²⁷ as well as the setting up, equipping and operationalising of 412 complementary services for groups of children in vulnerable situations. The target is to reach an enrolment rate of 19% of children under 3 by the end of 2025.

Effective and free access to education



The education system in Romania is supposed to be free for all children. However, this is not true. Hidden costs of education have been a constant subject of interest for Save the Children Romania. Save the Children has repeatedly measured (2010, 2018 and 2021) the costs covered by the families in direct connection with their children's participation in public education and reached the conclusion that, although free under the law, public education in Romania implies a wide range of costs: from the unofficial payments requested to the families to cover the running costs of schools and classrooms (stationary, cleaning materials, security etc), to uniforms, textbooks,

after-school programmes, private tutoring in direct connection with school curriculum, transport to and from school and, most recently, as an effect of the school closure, IT equipment needed for the participation to on-line education. From one edition to another, the results showed an increased financial burden on the families, most probably caused by the insufficient resources allocated to education from the national and the local budgets and having as a direct consequence a gap of education quality between the children from vulnerable and well-off families.

At the same time, the quality of education is often low and not inclusive, leading many children either outside the school system or in special education. The percentage of Roma pupils in segregated classes has remained constant over the past years (10%)²²⁸. Children with disabilities face inaccessible schools, inadequate teachers, insufficient support and limited assistance²²⁹. The latest PISA results place Romania among the countries with the strongest link between the socioeconomic status and the academic results of 15-year-old children²³⁰.

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

When analysing the access of Romanian children to leisure, sports and cultural activities, the first shortcoming is the inequity between children living in rural and those living in urban areas. Although the access of children to children's clubs²³¹ public sport clubs²³², public museums and many publicly funded cultural activities is free of charge, the majority of these settings are functioning in urban areas and the indirect costs associated to access them (transport) are not covered for children living outside the cities.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

A pilot project for the provision of school meals in a limited number of schools has been budgeted in recent years. However, without an impact assessment and given the limited

capacity of selected public schools to undergo the public procurement procedures, resulting in delays of provision and even the annulment of budget allocation, is hard to speak about the potential success of this project. On the other hand, several after-school projects – most of them funded under ESF and implemented by NGOs or public institutions- include the provision of after-school meals. Apart from these, children from 3 to 14 years old in public education are entitled to the “Bread and milk” and “Fruits in schools” national programmes. However, delays in procurement procedures, lack of needs-based targeting, low quality of meals and public health concerns are generating doubts about the impact and relevance of these programmes.

The government's response and use of funds



Two significant measures were initiated by the government in the last year to support children at risk to pursue their education.

At the end of August 2020, a decentralised procedure was decided in relation to the use of EU funds for the education system especially with relation to the purchase of tablets for pupils, hygiene items and protection equipment for schools and improvement of water and sanitation conditions. However, the delay in amending the legislation, the procedure based on reimbursement of expenses and the limited capacity of the local stakeholders to follow EU funding specific procedures represented significant obstacles for the success of this initiative. Furthermore, due to the authorities' unclear image on the needs of children and schools, repeated assessments were performed via the schools and the school inspectorates, but the different criteria used led to a high number of children in vulnerable situations being left outside the online education.

Acknowledging the shortcomings of the prolonged online education, in February 2021, the Ministry of Education launched a large remedial education programme for children

who had limited or no access to online education, pupils who did not pass the first school term and pupils who, for any other reasons, were left behind in their educational achievements. According to teachers²³³, several factors hindered the success of this programme, namely, the insufficient number of hours allocated per pupil (20 hours/pupil/month); the financial limits (the allocated budget covered the cost of teachers, but did not cover the cost of meals, school supplies or other running costs); the insufficient space in overcrowded schools and the risk of stigma. A priority of the Education and Employment Operational programme under ESF+ is the prevention of early school leaving and the improvement of the access and participation of vulnerable groups of children in education and training. The programme includes the implementation of an early warning system to prevent school drop-out and early school leaving, but also the discrimination and school segregation still affecting Roma children and children with special education needs. Improving school transport, support for the inclusion of pupils with special education needs in inclusive education, expanding the afterschool and school meal provision are also part of the programme.

The NRRP also prioritises supporting educational establishments with a high risk of dropouts. The objective of the investment is to reduce early school leaving by means of using the Early Warning Mechanism in Education methodology and IT tools to allocate financial resources to schools for the support of students for the transition from lower to upper secondary education.

Finally, ERDF will be allocated for the development of leisure (green) areas in cities, but also for renovating/expanding and modernising the summer camps and the youth centres.

Healthcare

Effective and free access to quality healthcare

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Romanian children faced multiple obstacles



in accessing quality and free healthcare. Although healthcare for children is free of charge, the extreme unbalance between urban and rural areas²³⁴, the waiting lists and the limited funding allocated are “pushing” families towards private healthcare which is not affordable to everyone. Also, the lack of specialists, equipment, and specialised facilities in certain areas, such as paediatric oncology and rare diseases, are forcing parents to go abroad for treatment and investigations, but the prohibitive costs lead to an unacceptable financial selection of who gets a chance to life.

Save the Children Romania’s concerns are also related to the lack of capacity of the school health network. While the official data²³⁵ indicate that the number of school medical offices slightly increased between 2019 and 2020, the overall number of school medical offices remains very low (2012 school medical offices for a total of 18.000 schools and kindergartens in Romania). In addition, the disparities between rural and urban schools are staggering²³⁶ and the number of staff working in this network is insufficient.

Regarding access to mental health support, children in need of this kind of support can only rely upon the school counsellors, but with major limitations. Firstly, parental agreement is needed, secondly not all school counsellors have a psychological background, and thirdly school counsellors are not available in every school and, where available, they have at least 800 pupils. Given these worrying facts, mental health support is mainly covered by NGOs, Save the Children Romania included.

From the very beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, concerns were raised about children’s access to healthcare, especially in the case of children living in rural/remote communities or otherwise in vulnerable situations. Save the Children Romania’s survey results from April 2020²³⁷ showed that 23% of respondents were unable to procure medicines for their children. Part of the respondents mentioned that they had to postpone the vaccinations and 15% could not access their doctors.

The government's response and the use of funds



Since 2020, a significant share of the unspent EU funds was directed to support the healthcare system (equipment, protection materials and human resources). However, the fear of COVID-19 transmission and the assignment of many public hospitals to COVID-19 patients only, have led to disruptions and delays in children's access to healthcare.

Under the draft Health Operational Programme (to be funded by ESF+ and ERDF), funds have been allocated to increase the quality of the primary and community healthcare services such as family doctors and community health centres in rural and small urban areas. Investments in neonatology and paediatrics infrastructure have also been included as well as allocations for centres for children and teenagers with behavioural problems.

The NRRP includes multiple interventions aimed at ensuring the access of vulnerable groups to community-based medical services as well as at improving neonatal care and screening.

Healthy nutrition



Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

In the absence of school-provided meals and since not all parents are aware of the importance of providing their children with a healthy alternative to a snack, parents prefer to give children pocket money to buy food. This leads to many school-aged children buying fast food, highly sugared soft drinks or other unhealthy snacks from the food kiosks located within or in the proximity of schools. Although legislation limiting access to unhealthy food to be purchased inside or in the proximity of public schools has been in place for many years, the lack of awareness, as well as the lack of control measures, have led to

unhealthy nutritional habits among school-aged Romanian children.

According to the most recent results of the HBSC study²³⁸, the percentage of overweight and obese Romanian children is increasing and varies between 22% (girls) and 32% (boys) at 11 years of age, to 15% (girls) and 30% (boys) at 13 years reaching 15% (girls) and 27% (boys) at 15 years of age.

The nutritional status of Romanian children is also raising concerns from the perspective of affordability since 14.2% of the Romanian households cannot afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish every second day (vs. an EU average of 6.7%). For the single-parent households the percentage raises at 18.9% (vs. an EU average of 11.1%), and for families with 3 or more children to 17.5% (vs. an EU average of 6.4%).

The government's response and the use of funds



No special initiatives could be identified at the level of the central government. At the local level, some authorities distributed social vouchers for food purchases to vulnerable families. No unified practice could be identified for the social canteens, where most vulnerable families have access to meals. With the restriction measures put in place by the government due to the COVID-19 pandemic, cooked meals could no longer be served inside the canteens and, while some local authorities allocated the necessary resources for the distribution of packed cooked meals, others shifted to the distribution of basic (uncooked) food without taking into consideration that beneficiaries could not use the distributed food items since many of them do not have access to appropriate equipment.

It is foreseen that under the Inclusion and Social Inclusion and Dignity Operational programme funded by ESF+ and ERDF, 1.2 million adults and children will benefit from vouchers (worth €100/year) to purchase food items or cooked meals.

Adequate housing



Effective access to adequate housing

More than one quarter of Romanian children (26.5%) live in households that lack indoor flushing toilets, while the EU average is only 1.8%²³⁹.

Overcrowding remains a severe problem intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to on-line education. In 2019, 66.3% of Romanian children were living in overcrowded houses. When looking at the children at risk of poverty, the percentage reaches 79.7%.

The capacity of the authorities to ensure social houses is extremely limited since, in 2019, only 1.3% of the houses in Romania were public property. In 2018, the Ministry of Regional Development²⁴⁰ estimated that 128.683 families needed social housing, however this goal is far from being reached.

The government's response and the use of funds



During the state of emergency (mid-March – mid-May 2020), evictions from public or private houses were forbidden. However, this prohibition was not extended, and eviction cases were resumed by both private owners and local authorities (the latest for social houses), despite the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the most vulnerable.

Given the lack of social housing for those in need, it is foreseen that under the Inclusion and Social Dignity Operational programme funded by ESF+ and ERDF, the number of social houses and emergency shelters for homeless persons will be increased. Likewise, the number and the capacity of the centres where accommodation is temporarily provided to migrants, victims of domestic violence or victims of trafficking in persons will also be increased.

The NRRP includes interventions aimed at facilitating the access of vulnerable families to improved housing and families with children are to be given due priority.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCEDURES



The participation of civil society in the decision making of EU funding allocation varied a lot. While, for the programming of the 2021-2027 EU funding period there have been well-structured, transparent, participative and constructive consultations, this has not been the case for the allocation of the unspent EU funds, which has been decided by the government unilaterally.

The drafting of the Romanian RRP has followed a transparent and solid process of consultation with civil society. However, not all priorities proposed by Save the Children Romania or other CSOs have been reflected in the final version.

CHILD POVERTY REDUCTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE ROMANIAN RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN



Although the final version of the Romanian RRP does not include specific references to child poverty reduction and social inclusion, the fight against poverty in general and the promotion of the social inclusion of marginalised groups are given due priority. The plan includes reforms aimed at improving the social welfare system for both children and adults, improving housing quality for vulnerable categories and groups (including improving the housing for marginalised young families by prioritising families with children), prevention of separation of children from their families, improving the healthcare in rural areas, modernising vulnerable public schools, improving early childhood education and care school, setting up complementary services for groups of children in need, prevention and reduction of early school leaving.



SAVE THE CHILDREN ROMANIA

For 31 years, the priorities of action and advocacy for Save the Children Romania have been shaped by the problems faced by Romanian children. Save the Children Romania provides the following support to children, families and communities.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

In 1998, Save the Children Romania initiated its preschool integration programme for children in need, especially Roma children. The “Summer Kindergartens” programme provides children in vulnerable situations with two months of intensive preschool interventions. It has been a successful intervention that attracts children to schools, helps them integrate and reduces the gap

between our beneficiaries and children who had already benefited of a mainstream preschool education. The results of an impact assessment²⁴¹ showed that 93% of our former beneficiaries are in school, only 2.3% have dropped out and 4.7% live abroad with their parents.

In the COVID-19 context, 405 children were enrolled in the Summer Kindergarten groups organised in 2020 and 96% of them were successfully enrolled in mainstream education.

EDUCATION, INCLUDING SCHOOL BASED AND EXTRA LEISURE, SPORTS, AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

In 2001, Save the Children Romania was the first national organisation to start intensive education groups for children out of school. The “School after School” educational support programme is addressed to primary school children. The programme aims to prevent school dropout and to improve school attendance by providing complex social and educational services for children and families in vulnerable situations. Most of the educational centres are organised in public schools situated in vulnerable areas, where the majority of families are socio-economically disadvantaged, and the level of education is low. Schools lend their premises to Save the Children Romania free of charge. In the educational centres, children receive support with their homework, participate in extracurricular activities and benefit from social, psychological and legal support. Depending on their individual needs, children and families may receive support in accessing health services, including registration with the family doctor, specialised medical investigations, housing advice and financial support to purchase prescribed medicines. Meals and school supplies are provided all along the school year and, occasionally, material support is also provided. In 2020, the school dropout prevention activities involved 62.800 children and their families, as well as schools and local authorities. Since 1998, Save the Children Romania has included 105.440 children in its school dropout prevention programmes.

In 2020, Save the Children Romania also stepped up its efforts to support and protect the social beneficiaries from Bucharest and 18 counties. 7.000 children benefited from educational support, emotional support and guidance, as well as non-formal education activities. 5.400 parents received emergency material support and welfare services.

In addition, Save the Children Romania supported 55.800 students through providing IT equipment, hygiene and sanitary materials. 500 teachers received training and counselling in

198 schools. Finally, during the summer of 2020, 127 groups of summer remedial preparation were organised for 4.000 children whose access to education was suspended during the lockdown.

HEALTHCARE

In 2011, Save the Children Romania started its programme aimed at decreasing the infant mortality rate by supporting the maternities in Romania. Since then, Save the Children has provided 830 state-of-the-art medical equipment, worth €6 million, to 100 maternities.

In addition, to strengthen the healthcare system against the COVID-19, 57 medical and patient-care units and 79 family medicine practices from 22 counties were provided with critical medical equipment. Over 6.800 health professionals benefited from 273.609 modern protection equipment. 28.000 children were supported in their fight for survival.

In view of improving the health of mothers, pregnant women and children up to 5 years of age, Save the Children Romania provides socio-medical services in the rural areas, by means of family doctors, social workers and health mediators. 7.500 persons benefited from these services in 2020. Education for health activities was organised addressing proper nutrition and medical supervision of children, pregnancy monitoring and vaccination. Finally, Save the Children Romania has also been implementing a national programme of screening and support for pupils with visual impairments. The programme will become, with the support of the school inspectorates and of the Ministry of Education, the first national screening for eye health identification and assessment for over 600.000 children between 5 and 17 years of age. Since it started, in 2019, more than 14.150 children received eye examinations.

NUTRITION

Education for healthy nutrition is a key component of Save the Children Romania. In 2020, 26.751 students aged between 4 and 17,

from 276 schools in 15 counties benefited from sessions on topics such as nutrition and physical movement, emotional health, sexual education, consumer behaviours.

CHILD PARTICIPATION

Vote for children: In the context of the parliamentary elections on 6 December 2020, Save the Children Romania created a website²⁴² dedicated to the information of voters about the political programmes in terms of observing children's rights and supporting family-related policies. 76% of survey respondents considered that the decision-making institutions did not take into account children's interests in establishing measures. In November, children from Save the Children Romania and Unicef participated in a TV debate with political leaders to discuss their rights and how they are observed in Romania.

ADVOCACY WORK

In 2020, the amendment of the Law no. 272/2004 on child rights was achieved taking into consideration the majority of Save the Children Romania's proposals which were based on the observations made by the Organisation on the protection of children with parents working abroad, protection of refugee and asylum-seeking children and protection of children victims of violence and bullying. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and considering the alarming data faced by the education system in Romania, Save the Children proposed to the government, 30 years after the ratification of the UNCRC by Romania, to immediately apply ten fundamental measures, that would re-establish the right of all children to quality and fair education. The Decalogue for education called, among others, for the opening of schools and face-to-face education, in a safe way, safe communities for safe schools and competent human resources, ensuring students', parents, and teachers' participation in decision-making and increasing the standard cost per student.

FUNDING OF SAVE THE CHILDREN ROMANIA

In 2020, 13% of Save the Children Romania's budget (€945.694 out of €7.210.150) came from EU funds. The remaining funds were from private sources (sponsorships, donations and contributions from private companies and individuals) (85%), state institutions (1%) and bank interests (1%). Part of the educational support programme targeting children at risk of drop out is funded with ESF resources. In 2021, a new ESF funded project, aimed at providing social, emotional, and educational assistance to children whose parents are working abroad will be implemented.

Story from the ground



I was supposed to give birth in Suceava Hospital, but it closed because of the pandemic. Then I called the hospitals in Radauți and Botosani, but I was told that I could not be admitted. I began to panic. I contacted my nurse from Save the Children Romania and told her about my problem. She knew me since she was monitoring me from the beginning of my pregnancy, and she made some phone calls to see where I could give birth". Vlad's mother lives in Suceava County, one of the most severely affected regions of Romania, where the COVID-19 transmission (in March-April 2020) led to the closing of public hospitals and strict quarantine. With Save the Children support, little Vlad was born preterm, but healthy, in the Falticeni maternity ward, after a race against the clock: "When we left, I was nervous and very afraid, but we were all surprised to be allowed to pass every red light and filter lane: let them pass, they are from Save the Children! It was an emotional experience", remembers the young mother. ”

Recommendations towards national decision makers on measures to be included in the Romanian Child Guarantee Action Plan

The targeted categories of children in need to be reached

- Roma children.
- Children with disabilities.
- Children whose parents are working abroad.
- Underage/teenage mothers and their children.
- Children living in improvised settlements or families evicted or about to be evicted.
- Children and families living in extreme/persistent poverty.

While acknowledging the importance of well-targeted interventions, Save the Children Romania recommends that interventions such as the provision of a free healthy school meal per day should cover all Romanian children.

Effective and free access to ECEC

- Develop ECEC infrastructure (especially crèches for children 0-3) to increase available places and prioritise access of children from rural and vulnerable communities.
- Improve and implement the ECEC vouchers legislation and include ECEC costs in the minimum inclusion income scheme.
- Improve the cost-per-pupil financing so that the allocated budget entirely covers the costs and parents' financial participation is no longer needed.
- Develop and implement adequate professional training standards for ECEC staff.

Effective and free access to education

- Develop, finance, and implement a coherent national strategic plan aimed at ensuring the equity in education of children in vulnerable situations. The 2021-2027 programmes and the RRP may respond to some of the needs of these children, but a national strategic plan is needed in a country where educational

poverty and risk are complex phenomena that pre-dated and were worsened by the COVID-19 crisis.

- Take all the necessary measures to ensure that schools stay open and remain safe in pandemic contexts. Evaluate the education losses generated by the closure of schools and develop comprehensive and adequate remedial education interventions accordingly.
- Ensure the implementation of legal provisions that limit the number of pupils per class, avoiding the overcrowding of schools in urban areas.
- Amend the standard cost per pupil and ensure that the public funding of education is adequate and helps the school to respond to the needs of children in vulnerable situations.
- Invest in improving the school infrastructure, taking into consideration accessibility issues and public health standards.
- Ensure well-trained and adequately paid teachers and support staff, based on the needs identified in each educational community.

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

- Amend the cost per pupil and add a separate component on school-based activities.
- Allocate funds (from the national/local budgets) to cover costs related to the participation of pupils in the "Different school" programme dedicated to extracurricular activities.
- Improve the infrastructure of school camps and ensure the access of children in vulnerable situations during the school breaks (including for mixed leisure/remedial education interventions).
- Encourage and fund the local efforts aimed

at creating leisure, sports, and cultural opportunities for children in rural areas.

- Create fiscal facilities for private operators that provide free-of-charge participation opportunities for children in vulnerable situations (e.g., private sport or dance clubs).

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

Include one quality healthy meal per school day in all remedial education programmes.

Effective and free access to quality healthcare

- Develop a comprehensive screening programme for children under 3 years of age and ensure effective access to this programme for all children, including those living in remote/rural areas.
- Strengthen the school-based screening programme, by developing the school health infrastructure and human resources and ensuring harmonisation with the primary healthcare (family doctors) and relevant medical specialities.
- Develop the network of integrated community centres, especially in rural/isolated areas.
- Ensure the equipment, the financial and human resources needed in the area of neonatology and reproductive health.
- Establish or strengthen reference/research centres and care facilities such as paediatric oncology, cardiology, rare diseases in rural or deprived areas.
- Revise the age limits of unsupervised consent for access to healthcare in areas such as reproductive or mental health.

Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

- Strengthen the implementation of the legal provisions limiting the access to unhealthy food and beverages inside or in the proximity of schools.
- Revise the school curriculum to ensure access to health education (including healthy nutrition notions).
- Invest in school canteens to provide healthy

food for children

Effective access to adequate housing

- Solve the housing shortage and develop a national policy that will apply to all municipalities.
- Create a separate shelter regulation for families who are homeless for economic reasons or abolish the self-reliance criteria. Ensure the availability of enough child-friendly accommodation.
- Prohibit out-of-home placement of children based on economic homelessness.
- Create more opportunities for families to leave shelters by solving the housing shortage.

Effective access to adequate housing

- Prioritise public investment in building social houses and increase the public-owned housing capacities.
- Enforce the legal provisions limiting or prohibiting evictions and prohibit evictions of families with children as long as appropriate alternative housing is not ensured.
- Prioritise financial and administrative support measures to ensure access to utilities for households with children (electricity, water and sanitation etc).

The use of EU funds and national budgets to support children and families in need

Romania has already planned to allocate a significant share of its ESF+ and RRF budget for actions targeting children and fighting against child poverty. However, other funds should be also used to support activities to fight child poverty, such as the ERDF that will support the development of infrastructure – such as improving the school infrastructure and creating new ECEC facilities – to enable all children to have access to affordable and high-quality education from the youngest age. According to Save the Children Romania's experience, the lack of (or an improper) infrastructure, which is very frequent in rural areas of Romania, leads to unequal chances for children to benefit and represents a hard obstacle to overcome when developing and providing services for children and families in vulnerable situations.

Further measures to be included in the Romanian Child Guarantee Action Plan to address social exclusion and break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage

- Develop and implement programmes aimed at building the parental skills and provide families with guidance and accompaniment in accessing the relevant social, educational and health services that respond to the needs of their children.
- Ensure the participation of pupils (and secondarily, that of parents and local authorities) in the process of school governance.

Timeline of actions. What should be prioritised?

The dramatic impact of the long-lasting school closures together with the pre-existing shortcomings of the Romanian education system, especially for children in vulnerable situations calls for the prioritisation of actions aimed at ensuring access to quality education and ECEC for all Romanian children, and especially for those who suffered the worst effects of the COVID-19 crisis.



A woman wearing a grey patterned hijab and a young girl with a long, dark braid are embracing each other. The woman is smiling and looking down at the girl. The girl is wearing a blue knitted sweater. They are in a nursery or classroom setting with colorful decorations and a wooden playhouse in the background.

2 Country pages: Non-EU Member States

Rita, 5, and mum Eiman at Rita's nursery in central London.

Photo: Emli Bendixen / Save the Children

Albania



Summary

Albania is one of the poorest countries in Europe. Between 2017-2018, approximately 30% of Albanian children were at risk of poverty.

Girls, Roma and Egyptian children, children with disabilities and children in isolated rural communities face a greater risk of social exclusion. Moreover, even though Albania has ratified all international conventions concerning child labour, children are engaged in the worst forms of child labour, including forced begging and mining. PISA results from 2018 revealed that around 60% of Albanian students were functionally illiterate and the country fell to the 61st position out of 78 countries. The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the Albanian economy and amplified existing inequalities. During the crisis period, important decisions about changes that directly or indirectly impacted children were taken without any consultation with the children. Save the Children has been active in Albania since 1999, working to ensure that every child is supported to meaningfully participate and learn alongside his/her peers. Save the Children in Albania calls on the Albanian government to focus on the development of legal and policy frameworks that promote the rights of children and ensure services at the community level providing quality and access to all children, especially the most marginalised.

Key facts

1/2 of children's population

49.4% of children – almost half of all children – were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Albania in 2019.

1-5%

Only 1% to 5% of Roma and Balkan Egyptian persons aged 7-20 in Albania complete secondary education.

60%

PISA results from 2018 revealed that around 60% of Albanian students were functionally illiterate and the country fell to the 61st position out of 78 countries.

Women and girls at risk

Women and girls face greater risks of domestic and gender-based violence, economic hardship and worsened emotional health and wellbeing.

National updates

CHILD POVERTY IN ALBANIA



Despite the significant developments and reforms that the country has implemented over the past decade towards EU integration²⁴³, Albania remains one of the poorest countries in Europe. According to Eurostat data, in 2019, 49.4% of children in Albania were living at risk of poverty or social exclusion²⁴⁴.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the Albanian economy and amplified existing disparities. Preliminary data from the World Bank reveal that extreme poverty in Albania could double in the short term, and without response measures, poverty could increase from 40% to 44%²⁴⁵. The increase in poverty is mainly the result of people living in urban areas and working in the service industry losing a significant share of their earnings. Many industries, among them textiles, mining, call centres, and construction, have been forced to reduce production to comply with social distancing rules. In addition, demand has dropped as export orders collapsed. Since most of the people working in agriculture are already poor, no income decrease in agriculture is assumed.

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN ALBANIA



In Albania, generating data, evidence, and knowledge on the situation of children continues to be constrained due to a lack of reliable, accountable and systematic monitoring of child rights. The challenges largely relate to gaps in the legal and policy frameworks, low allocation of financial resources on the monitoring of children's

rights, and generally weak capacities on data collection, disaggregation, and analysis. Despite a strong institutional framework for gender equality, women's access to assets, markets, resources and decision-making processes remains limited. In addition, they face negative stereotyping, gender-based discrimination, and exposure to risks of violence, abuse, and exploitation²⁴⁶. Equity for Roma and Balkan Egyptian populations remains a concern. Educational outcomes for Roma and Balkan Egyptians, who represent about 1.2% and 2.5% respectively of public basic education enrolment, remain among the lowest in Albania (UNESCO, 2017). For example, among Roma and Balkan Egyptian persons aged 7-20, roughly 1% and 5% respectively have completed secondary education.

While the majority of compulsory school aged children in Albania attend education, some remain excluded due to complex and overlapping factors such as extreme poverty, migration, disability, parental attitudes and cultural practices, or difficult family circumstances. Out-of-school children in Albania include Roma and Egyptian children from families engaged in seasonal migration (internal and external), returnees, young carers, children contributing to the family income, early married girls and children with disabilities. High unemployment rates, low life perspectives, lack of knowledge of the language of instruction, bullying and discrimination in school, negatively impact the motivation for education of families and young people. Stateless children also face administrative hurdles when enrolling in Grade 1²⁴⁷.

The latest survey and administrative data indicate that 2.5-4% of the child population in Albania has a disability that has been certified by the medical assessment commission. Administrative data suggest that there has been an increase in the number of children with disabilities accessing services, from 3% in 2015 to 8% in 2017. However, almost half of all

social services are provided privately. Around half of the school age children receiving disability allowance are in education, though many are not accessing education adapted to their individual learning needs. Integration into mainstream schools has not necessarily resulted in inclusive education. There is no systematic provision or access to Albanian Sign Language, Braille or assistive devices and technology at affordable cost, significantly preventing the full inclusion of children with disabilities. Most children with disabilities in Albania live with their families. However, many of them are also overrepresented in the public system of residential care²⁴⁸.

Albania has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labour. In 2019, Albania made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labour. The National Council for the Rights and Protection of the Child approved Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 704, which provides guidance to institutions responsible for identifying children working in violation of the law and referring cases to social protection services, and enacted the National Action Plan for the Protection of Children from Economic Exploitation (2019-2021), which includes children working and living in the streets. However, Roma and Balkan Egyptian children still participate in street begging or in the collection of recyclables to contribute to family income. Children are also trafficked domestically and abroad to some EU countries for commercial sexual exploitation and forced labour. In addition, some children informally scavenge chromium around hazardous mines where debris from mine tunnels is found, and they sometimes carry these heavy rocks for miles. Internal child trafficking and forced begging have continued in recent years, particularly during the tourist season. Albania lacks recent, comprehensive data on child labour, including in the agriculture and construction sectors. Building a monitoring mechanism of child labour and economic exploitation of children remains a challenge. Taking stock

of the situation in Albania regarding child labour, the most recent European Committee of Social Rights report published in March 2020, concludes that the situation in Albania is not in conformity with Article 7§1 of the Charter on the ground that the protection of children from child labour exploitation is not guaranteed in practice²⁴⁹.

Human, technical and financial capacity require further enhancement to uphold children's rights and address COVID-19's social and economic consequences. Children's lives have been affected in many ways, including school closures, confinement, reduced household incomes and exacerbated non-monetary deprivations²⁵⁰. Women and girls (especially those from rural areas, living with disabilities, and from Roma and Egyptian communities) face greater risks of domestic and gender-based violence, economic hardship, increased caregiving, worsened emotional health and wellbeing, and decreased access to health services²⁵¹. The COVID-19 related reduction in government revenues could reduce spending on children. Braille or assistive devices and technology at affordable cost, significantly preventing the full inclusion of children with disabilities. Most children with disabilities in Albania live with their families. However, many of them are also overrepresented in the public system of residential care.

CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO SERVICES AS DESCRIBED IN THE CHILD GUARANTEE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

Early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, and a healthy meal each school day

Effective and free access to early childhood education and care (ECEC)



Early childhood education in Albania is optional and offered through kindergartens and preparatory classes for children of age 3–6 years. While most Albanian children attend early childhood education (net enrolment rate reached 75.9% in 2019)²⁵², the rate of enrolment for Roma children in Albania is reported to be 33%²⁵³.

In Albania, there are a series of different relevant laws covering health, education, nutrition and child and social protection, but a national policy framework for early childhood development, care and education is missing. The universalisation of pre-primary classes has been long discussed, but not yet institutionalised²⁵⁴.

3–6-year-old children and their families face several challenges in accessing quality education. Firstly, there is a lack of ECEC settings in remote areas as well as inclusive settings meaning that children with disabilities are automatically left outside the education procedure. In addition, teachers are not qualified and regardless of the newly established 1:15 teacher-student ratio, the number of children in classes continues to remain high, particularly in bigger cities. The poor infrastructure and lack of space inside classrooms, lack of toys, furniture and playgrounds create a non-inviting and non-stimulating environment for children. Finally, the costs of attending preschool education such as school supplies and costs of transport and the lack of free²⁵⁵ or affordable food provision make it even more challenging for parents to enrol their children in ECEC.

During the 2020 - 2021 school year, 71.332 children were enrolled in pre-school education, 8.4 % less compared to the previous school year, mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic²⁵⁶.

The government's response and use of funds



Albania has made improvements in the 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, in an effort to further deconcentrate central functions and improve service delivery.

However, disparities in opportunity and outcomes persist across population groups. The National Strategic Response to IPA III has identified the implementation of the existing and upcoming National Agenda for Children 2022 – 2026 as a key Action Plan under the Thematic Priority 5: Fundamental Rights. The Agenda aims at the elimination of all forms of violence against children, in line with the IPA III priority to take further steps to protect children from violence, neglect and exploitation. In the same TP5 is also mentioned the upcoming National Plan of Action for Integration of Roma and Egyptians 2021-2025, due to be adopted by Q3 2021.

In 2019, national spending on education accounted only for 3.3% of GDP, less than in other Western Balkan countries. In the 2021-2023 period, the education budget will continue to shrink²⁵⁷ and the majority of the funds will be allocated to teacher salaries and operational expenditures. Albania will find it difficult to achieve significant gains in learning outcomes without higher investments in education²⁵⁸. A recent review of the National Agenda for Child Rights (NACR) 2017–2020 found that 39 % of

agreed indicators had been achieved, with 44 % partly achieved, and 87 % of the expenditures forecast had been spent, with the state budget covering 59% of reported expenditures and donors funding 41 %²⁵⁹. These data show very low and unsustainable budget allocation by the government.

Healthcare



Effective and free access to quality healthcare

The health sector in Albania faces a series of issues and challenges related to governance, sustainable financing, and the provision of quality services. Unhealthy behavioural practices and deleterious lifestyle patterns are a cause of concern and a significant challenge.

In line with the overall increase in life expectancy in Albania, there is evidence of an 11% decrease in the infant mortality rate in the past five years. Similarly, the 0-5 mortality rate has declined by 12%, and the maternal mortality rate has decreased by 18% (INSTAT, 2017). However, the most recent data (pertinent to 2018) indicate an increase in both infant mortality rate (8.9 deaths per 1.000 live births vs. 8.0 deaths per 1.000 live births in 2017) and under-5 mortality rate (10.1 deaths per 1.000 live births vs. 9.2 deaths per 1.000 live births in 2017) (INSTAT 2020), which may be due to the neglecting of traditional mother and child health care and budget shifts toward other services.

The current evidence is insufficient to properly understand the needs or health status of children from the following categories: Roma and Egyptian minorities, children from families engaged in seasonal migration (internal and external), returnees, children contributing to the family income, early married girls (under 15 years), and children with disabilities. However, the available evidence indicates a considerably

higher prevalence of diseases and unhealthy lifestyle characteristics among children in vulnerable situations and their families distinguished in terms of low socioeconomic status and particularly Roma and Egyptian minorities²⁶⁰.



The government's response and the use of funds

The recently approved national strategy for Primary Health Care foresees a stronger role and responsibilities of health centres regarding health promotion interventions. This constitutes an excellent opportunity for strengthening school health throughout the country. Control and prevention of NCDs are adequately addressed and highlighted for the first time in the Primary Health Care Strategy endorsed in the past few months by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP).

The government has also committed to increase funding for disease prevention and health promotion programmes. Hence, the total amount of MoHSP expenditures related to health promotion has increased by 3.3% from 2017 to 2019, which indicates the government's commitment to health promotion programmes decentralised at the local level through the recently established Health Operators²⁶¹.

The health system in Albania is a partnership between the public and the private sector, but the state provides most of the services in the field of promotion, prevention, diagnostics, and cure. The private sector covers pharmaceutical and dental services, as well as some speciality diagnostic clinics, concentrated mainly in Tirana. The estimated cost for the implementation of measures to improve access and quality of services of health care for infants and children²⁶² is about €217.9 million or 13.4% of the total cost of Agenda. 95.7% of the costs for the implementation of this target is planned with financial resources from Donors.

Despite these positive elements, in 2021-2023, the budget for health and social protection education will continue to shrink²⁶³. Most of the funds will go to primary and tertiary healthcare necessary to fight the COVID-19 pandemic leaving social protection services seriously underbudgeted.

Findings of the midterm Monitoring report of the Agenda for Children 2017-2020, show that there are limited financial resources for health promotion programmes and activities targeting children aged 6-15 years²⁶⁴. However, at the same time, the budget for Health Care Operators and the related Local Health Care Units at the municipality level has increased.

Healthy nutrition



Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

The available information indicates that many schoolchildren in Albania have many risk factors of NCDs, including poor nutritional status, unhealthy diets, poor eating habits and inadequate physical activity (IPH-FAO 2018 survey; HBSC 2018). Over the past years, NCDs have replaced communicable diseases as chief causes of mortality also including children (GBD 2018). This is influenced by various aspects:

Nutrition-related aspects

Albania is currently described as a country with a triple burden: there is malnutrition of children, with co-existence of stunting (due to under-nutrition), overweight and obesity (over-nutrition), as well as iron-deficiency anaemia (ADHS 2017-18). Among children, nutrient-poor diets and unhealthy dietary practices remain key challenges (IPH-FAO 2018 survey).

Environmental aspects

The environmental waste contaminating water and agriculture products in Albania is an issue of concern, although its impact on children's health is not specifically assessed. This may be particularly concerning for children residing in Elbasan (steel factory) and/or in the major agricultural sites of the country (e.g. Fier).

Substance abuse: About 10% of the schoolchildren had smoked cigarettes during their lifetime, 1 in 5 schoolchildren had tried alcohol during their lifetime and 5% has used cannabis (2% in girls vs. 9% in boys)²⁶⁵.

Adequate housing



Effective access to adequate housing

In Albania, multiple challenges remain due to the lack of available public funds for housing construction and the insufficient capacity of some of the municipalities to implement housing programmes. Moreover, natural disasters created new economic and financial challenges: the earthquake in Albania in November 2019 left 14.000 people (2% of the Albanian population) homeless. Another earthquake struck Albania in January 2020, which brought damage to both public and private properties amounting to €844 million. The cost of their reconstruction is estimated at €1.07 billion. About €800 million are needed to rebuild homes while the remaining amount is to repair the damaged infrastructure, such as schools and health centres.

As for the Roma population, the situation of housing is challenging since these communities live in poor conditions in areas without infrastructure and access to water and electric supplies. Few of them can benefit from low-cost social housing because the majority of Roma are unemployed and/or do not have a regular monthly income.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCEDURES



Children are provided with several platforms of consultation supported by international and national organisations. The State Agency for Protection of Child Rights as well as the Ombudsman have mechanisms and approved guidelines in place to consult children and foster their participation.

However, child participation has faced a set-back due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the crisis period, the lack of opportunities to participate in decision-making processes affected many children. Large-scale decisions about changes that directly or indirectly impacted children were taken in the absence of children's consultation.

Children and adolescents emphasise that parents and key stakeholders need to pay more attention to their concerns^{266, 267}. Existing governmental participation mechanisms reinforce a pattern of inequality, excluding the most vulnerable.

This situation does not only happen at high levels of decision-making, but is also present at lower levels, such as student governments. Student governments serve as an independent forum where student representatives of each class in school establishments share their opinions on education matters including teaching and their learning experience. In recent years, their role is being strengthened to collaborate more closely with school authorities and impact and participate in decision-making. Since the schools were closed, the decisions related to the COVID-19 situation were taken by the schools without taking into consideration the student governments.

The legal framework related to CSOs involvement in policy and decision making has not changed. The Law 146/2014 on Notification and Public Consultation put forward requirements for consultation on draft law and policies. It provides reasonable time for CSOs to engage and contribute to the process and obliges the government to send written feedback on the received proposals and explanations for why some of them are not accepted.

The recent report of “Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development”, shows that 59% of CSOs interviewed reported being consulted regularly by government bodies on different policy and legal issues. The majority of the consultations happens at the local level.

The EU Albania 2020 Report states that the Law on the National Council for Civil Society needs to be amended to reflect changes in ministerial portfolios and provide for appropriate representation in the Council. Moreover, substantial efforts are needed to ensure meaningful and systematic consultations with civil society as part of inclusive policy dialogue for reforms. According to the 2020 Report, these efforts should involve comprehensive feedback and follow up mechanisms. Moreover, the Report observes that the financial sustainability of civil society organisations remains a challenge due to unfavourable fiscal and legal frameworks. The National Plan for EU Integration (NPEI 2021-2023) addresses the above-mentioned EU recommendations by recognising the need to improve the adherence to the EU acquis and structured co-operation among all stakeholders, including local authorities, industry, and civil society.



Save the Children



www.albania.savethechildren.net



SAVE THE CHILDREN ALBANIA

Save the Children in Albania has been active since 1999 and enjoys a reputation for being the lead agency for child rights and an important actor with concrete achievements, while establishing standards for others to follow. Save the Children in Albania is working to ensure that all children, particularly the most vulnerable, have access to quality health, education, and child protection services, as well as addressing child poverty to allow all children opportunities to thrive in life. Together with national and local partners in the country, and the wider community, Save the Children in Albania actively works to ensure that every child, irrespective of gender, language, ability, religion, nationality or other characteristics, is supported to meaningfully participate and learn alongside his/her peers.

Save the Children in Albania provides the following support to children:

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE²⁶⁸

Save the Children in Albania intervention introduces a holistic approach to child development: from food provision, appropriate didactic materials, to teacher training, provision of health sessions for children and parents, civil registration, parenting programmes, educational material support and improved home learning environments. Save the Children in Albania also empowers partner organisation to advocate for the right of children in vulnerable situations to access ECEC, especially towards respective municipalities to ensure the quality of ECEC services for children.

In addition, Save the Children in Albania organises home visits and regular meetings and activities that raise community awareness on the importance of ECEC. It also supports through the “Your story” programme, the home library with books for children, an opportunity for parents and children to acquire knowledge and give parents a chance to get involved in their children’s development in their early years.

EDUCATION, INCLUDING SCHOOL BASED AND EXTRA LEISURE, SPORTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Save the Children in Albania implements the index for inclusion which supports schools to plan and monitor their progress towards achieving inclusive education. It also implements the programme “Second Step” for primary school children to improve socio-emotional skills, learning achievements and decrease discipline problems in class. In addition, it builds the capacity of students and parents on the use of school structures and mechanisms and implements the Save the Children common approaches ‘Ready to Learn’, ‘Numeracy & Literacy Boost’ to

improve literacy and maths skills of children in pre-school and primary education. Finally, it supports and builds the capacity of teachers to use the Diagnostic instrument for development disorders at children aged 5-10 and implements Individual Education Plans for children with special needs.

In addition, Save the Children in Albania implements an empowerment programme for young people. The “Youth Economic Empowerment” programme has increased opportunities for vulnerable youth to break the cycle of poverty in a sustainable way. Save the Children worked to equip the most deprived adolescents and youth with life skills and develop their vocational capacities aiming to build and enhance their access to sustainable livelihood models for a smooth transition to adulthood, from basic education all the way to adulthood. The initiative put at the centre of the action the reviving of opportunities for youth filling the gap of inappropriate life skills and education and increasing opportunities for employment.

HEALTHCARE AND HEALTHY NUTRITION

The School for Health programme – “Shkollat për Shëndetin” is a Swiss-funded project implemented in Albania by Save the Children in Albania to reduce children’s and families’ exposure to the major risk factors for NCDs and effectively cope with health emergencies including COVID-19 through the inducement of positive changes in behavioural patterns and improvement of lifestyle practices, personal hygienic measures and safe environment.

CHILD PROTECTION

Strengthening the child protection mechanisms and alternative care services in Albania has been a major focus in the last decade, through supporting non-formal child protection

mechanisms, multi-sectorial coordination, capacity building of social workforce, supporting family strengthening and case management for children in need of protection and increasing information and knowledge of children and communities on child rights and child protection issues.

CHILD PARTICIPATION

Empowering children to have a voice on issues that affect them and influence decision making. Save the Children has equipped children with the knowledge and capacities to influence decision makers both at country level, as well as international level ensuring engagement with child rights mechanisms at the UN level, such as the UNCRC committee and the Universal Periodic Review.

SAVE THE CHILDREN IN ALBANIA RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Emphasis has been given to support communities, children, and parents in dealing

with the new situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Those in most vulnerable situations have been supported with food and hygienic packages. Children and communities were informed on the situation and how to adapt family/community dynamics in the new context. Parenting tips were provided and online info sessions with children who took an active role in spreading messages among peers were organised. Working guidelines were developed and a set of 4 webinars was delivered to child protection professionals providing information on first psychosocial aid; case management during COVID-19; safety and ethical considerations while working online; the role of the health care system in a pandemic situation and coordination with the child protection system.

In addition, during the last year and as a response to the COVID-19, a child friendly TV spot was produced and launched in national media (TVSh and TV Klan) and Social Media Channels such as Facebook (reaching 9.097 views)²⁶⁹. The main message was to show what children can do to protect themselves from COVID-19. In total, 23.259 children were reached. A Mental Health Campaign was also launched reaching 12.017 views on Facebook



and 1.905 views on Instagram). The celebrity Lira Gjika (paediatrician) took part in two TV shows to make children and their parents aware of the possible strategies to address mental health issues affecting children during the pandemic lockdown²⁷⁰. The TV show reached more than 400.000 views.

ADVOCACY WORK

Save the Children in Albania's evidence-based advocacy efforts primarily focus on keeping children's rights on the agenda of the national and local governments, influencing the development of legal and policy frameworks that promote the rights of children, and ensuring services at the community level providing quality and access to all children, especially the most marginalised. In addition, Child Rights Governance is a strategic pillar in Save the Children in Albania's programming. Through child-led platforms, it seeks to empower children to speak up for their rights, undertake child-led advocacy and have opportunities to be directly engaged with policymakers in decision-making processes impacting their lives.

FUNDING OF SAVE THE CHILDREN IN ALBANIA

Programmes are mainly funded through institutional donors and some other private funding, mainly through the support of Save the Children Italy and Save the Children Switzerland, and a small contribution through Save the Children United States. Main Donors Include AICS – Italian Agency for international cooperation, Swiss Development Cooperation, EUKI – German Government, Bulgari foundation, UEFA foundation, Kahane Foundation, MEDICOR, etc. Currently, Save the Children in Albania has no EU funded grant.

Story from the ground



Ada, aged 11 lives with her family in a rural village where poverty, unemployment, food security and lack of access to public services remain critical issues. Ada's father lost his job before the pandemic and since then, Ada and her family have been living in extreme poverty, supported by the community and relevant CSOs. Ada was on the brink of dropping out of school, during the COVID-19 pandemic school closure and community restricted measures. She felt depressed, hopeless and feared for her family to get sick. She was unable to access the remote learning, as she lacked a mobile phone and the learning materials to follow the online education. Today, due to education support, psycho-social care and provision of learning materials, lpad and internet access provided by Save the Children in Albania she is happy with her progress in school. She is regularly attending school, has gained new knowledge and skills in science and social school subjects. She has enhanced her self-confidence and esteem and actively interacts with her friends at home and at school. She is actively involved in activities and would like to become an advocate of children's rights. On the Child Rights Convention week, she actively participated in the children's school rally in the city centre and promoted children's messages for their rights to education, protection, and well-being. Furthermore, her family (like many other vulnerable families involved in Save the Children in Albania's projects) received psycho-social information and care, food/hygienic packages and a \$100 cash transfer.



Recommendations towards national decision makers to address child poverty and social exclusion in Albania

The targeted categories of children in need to be reached

- Roma and Balkan Egyptian children.
- Out-of-school children.
- Children with disabilities.
- Children contributing to the family income (working children).

Effective and free access to ECEC

Ensure free, quality and inclusive ECEC for all children aged 0-6 years, regardless of their status or place of residence. Particular attention should be given to children in rural or segregated areas and children most in need as presented on this country page.

Effective and free access to education

- Provide opportunities for children to continue their education through online platforms wherever possible, including specific additional support to the poorest households and to girls, who may be at risk of education deficits. Ensure that other forms of communication such as radio or mobile phone technology and paper-based learning packs are available for those children who do not have internet access. This is especially important given the unequal access to learning materials and online availability found on this country page.

Effective and free access to quality healthcare

- Prioritise basic healthcare needs of the most deprived and marginalised children, for example through child grants, mobile basic health care and home health care provision.
- Launch an awareness campaign on the emotional impacts caused by COVID-19 restrictive measures on both adults and children.

- Ensure the development of a mental health support strategy to be rolled out in schools for crisis situations such as the one caused by the Earthquake of 26th of November and the onset of restrictive measures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Increase the primary health care system's capacity to provide integrated, quality, financially sustainable and equitable maternal, newborn and child health and nutrition services, focusing on early detection of development difficulties, and early interventions for children at risk of inadequate care and nutrition.

The use of EU funds and national budgets to support children and families in need

Budgeting for children is an area that is not sufficiently developed yet. In this regard, it is necessary to invest resources to periodically develop child-focused budget analysis, capacity building/instruments to carry out child-centred budgeting at the central and local level and, above all, to increase financial allocations for the benefit of children.

Further measures to address social exclusion and to break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage

Targeted individualised support in the form of benefits and social support to children in or at risk of being placed in institutional care. Children separated from their parents due to poverty is unacceptable and poverty is the main reason in Albania for children being placed in institutional care settings. Families should be supported to be able to take care of their children.

Prioritising the basic needs of households with children to address the consequences caused

by income loss after the COVID-19 pandemic, such as limitation of food, nutrient items, learning materials, access to basic medical care and habitation, through the delivery of social protection schemes, such as emergency income support schemes.

Create economic opportunities and extend social inclusion services to citizens in hard-to-reach areas. Most services are provided in Albania's big cities, thus families and children in rural, mountain or remote areas often lack access to such services. As a result, these regions have higher poverty rates when compared to other locations. Create job opportunities, income generating activities and financial literacy to young people to ensure successful transition to adulthood and build a future in their home country. Young people should have access to employment as a means of integration in society and as a means of financial independence.

Collaborate with representative organisations of persons with disabilities to ensure that their beneficiaries are aware of available support and rights to social protection and that cash transfer programmes and the coverage of social protection systems include disability situation analysis, identification of households with disabilities in need and accessibility measures for service provision. Create employment opportunities for young people with disabilities. Children and young people with disabilities are among the most discriminated against with limited opportunities for education or employment. More investments should be made in this respect, ensuring that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as any other young person to employment.



Bosnia- Herzegovina

Summary

More than half of the country's population is at risk of poverty or social exclusion with children constantly having higher poverty rates than the general population.

The situation is more difficult for children with disabilities, Roma and other minority children, children in poor communities, refugee and migrant children. For example, only 2% of Roma children and other children living in poverty attend ECEC. At the same time, immunisation rates of Roma children are very low (only 4%) due to limited mobility, lack of health insurance, poor access to services, negative attitudes and mutual mistrust between Roma and public institutions. The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Bosnia-Herzegovina has led to an increase in multidimensional poverty and inequality. Although the EU has supported the reform of the social protection system, the deinstitutionalisation process, the inclusion of marginalised groups in education and the refugee/migration response, there are still significant challenges. Over the past 20 years, Save the Children in the North West Balkans has worked hard to help children in local communities across Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, directly reaching 102.161 children in 2020 through the child protection, education, emergency migrant and COVID-19 response interventions. Save the Children in North West Balkans calls on the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina to adopt, finance and implement national strategies for poverty reduction, and to prioritise children's rights in all areas, based on needs assessment and focusing particularly on children and families in vulnerable situations.

Key facts

30.6%

One in every three children (30.6%) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Bosnia-Herzegovina

25%

Only 25% of children aged 3-6 are included in early childhood education and care in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

1 out of 3

Bosnia-Herzegovina is 1 out of 3 countries in Europe at high risk of a polio outbreak due to low vaccination coverage rates.

43,6%

The social impact of COVID-19 in Bosnia-Herzegovina survey showed that 43.6% of the respondents were financially worse than before the crisis.

28,6%

28.6% of families with children had to reduce their food consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic.

National updates

CHILD POVERTY IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA



More than half of the country's population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2010, with no indication that this situation has changed much since then. Children are among the most vulnerable categories, and they consistently have higher poverty rates than the general population²⁷¹. The most recent Household Budget Survey conducted in 2015 by the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia-Herzegovina²⁷² did not disaggregate data on child poverty.

The social impact of COVID-19 in Bosnia-Herzegovina survey²⁷³ showed that 43.6% of the respondents were financially worse off than before the crisis. As for household finances, vulnerable categories reported that they were most affected during the pandemic with 50% of the respondents stating that they were doing worse than before the pandemic and 13% stating that they were significantly worse.

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA



The situation is particularly difficult for children with disabilities, Roma and other minority children, and children in poor communities. Although legally binding since 2003, inclusive education is still not available to all children with disabilities. The percentage of Roma children and other children living in poverty attending pre-school education is extremely low (about 2%), and much lower for primary education than the national average (around 65%). This is mainly due to the lack of systemic solutions to the issue of education-related costs. Additionally, children with disabilities, Roma

children and children living in extreme poverty continue to be over-represented in institutional care. The UNICEF study on multi-dimensional poverty in Bosnia-Herzegovina (2015)²⁷⁴ found that 74% of children aged 5-15 years are deprived in at least one dimension, while 23% are deprived in three or more dimensions. One-third of children aged 0-4 years are deprived in four or more dimensions.

CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO SERVICES AS DESCRIBED IN THE CHILD GUARANTEE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

Early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, and a healthy meal each school day

Effective and free access to early childhood education and care (ECEC)



Only about 25% of children in Bosnia-Herzegovina aged between 3-6 years are included in ECEC education, which is still the lowest percentage in Europe, according to UNICEF data. Less than 2% of Roma children attend preschool education, and a similar percentage applies for children from rural areas and children with disabilities²⁷⁵. Children under 3 years are not in preschool education in any significant number, as most of the times the preferred option is for children to stay at home with parents or grandparents.

Preschool settings are not available in small cities or rural areas. Even where available, they are not chosen by parents due to the associated costs such as transportation, fees, clothing, etc.

State owned settings are not free of charge. Fees are only partially subsidised by the canton/entity and parents must pay a portion of the monthly fee, so largely out of reach for vulnerable groups.

Story from the ground



Sisters Samantha and Zlata have completed the second grade of primary School and they hope that their sister Manuela will join them in school again. The three of them regularly attend the Day Care Centre for Children at Risk in Bijeljina, run by the Citizens' Association for the Promotion of Roma Education "Otaharin", and participate in activities supported by Save the Children and the EU. Samanta and Zlata receive help with homework or exam preparation at the Centre, while Manuela draws, writes and hangs out with children until she starts school again, which she interrupted after a break caused by a car accident in which she was hit as a pedestrian.

"At school, I love maths, and I like to draw. I love drawing my teacher the most. When I grow up, I would love to become a baker", Samantha tells us, and Zlata adds that she likes drawing:

"I love art, I love to draw flowers. I love animals, especially cats, and when I grow up, I would like to become a vet and help them. I know it takes a high school diploma, and it takes a lot of studying", Zlata says. In addition to school, both are happy to participate in sports workshops as a part of projects run by the Association. "I want my children to finish school, to have some craft, to earn their living and to have a better life than I had. I couldn't finish school, so now Zlata helps me with letters, to read and to write. We have a difficult life, we need all the help, but school is a priority", says their mom Mirsada, who also hopes to be able to bring Manuela back to school.

"She was hit by a car, she hadn't gone to school for two months, and she had surgery as well. Now, with the psychologist Rada I am trying to get her ready to start again", Mirsada says, adding that the support of the Centre means a lot to her: "Children are there, learning. People help them with their homework, send them to school, and then I can work, take care of our lives and make sure we have the basic things."

Day Centre Coordinator Snežana Antunović says Samanta, Zlata and Manuela are among the most regular at the centre and have participated in all activities conducted by the Association as a part of the European Union-funded project Bright4All - A Basic Right for Education for All Children in Bosnia-Herzegovina with a budget of €350.000, which is being implemented by Save the Children in partnership with OC Vermont and the Association of Women from Una from Bihać.

"The Bright4All project aims at bringing children back to the education system as well as preventing dropping out of school, so through fieldwork we have mapped out the children who attend school irregularly or not at all. Our Centre has 112 permanent beneficiaries. We included 146 of them through fieldwork, and through the project we worked with 30 children who met these criteria and with whom we worked intensively", says Snežana Antunović.



There is also a compulsory preschool programme in the year prior to starting primary school (only 150 hours) but it is not implemented throughout the country due to a lack of harmonised legislation and budgeting. The rate of compulsory programme attendance is about 50%.

Effective and free access to education



In terms of primary education, while the attendance rate of the total population is about 98%, it is only 65% for Roma children. For secondary education, the attendance rate is 92%, while for Roma children only 23%. Most Roma children drop out of education after finishing primary school to support their families in making a daily living. In addition, Roma families continuously move around in search of work, so education is not prioritised.

Although education is formally free, there are many hidden associated costs, including transportation, textbooks, school supplies, clothing and meals that make attendance to school difficult for vulnerable groups of children.

Although there are nominal attempts to implement inclusive education in Bosnia-Herzegovina, children with disabilities are often excluded from the educational process. This is due to physical barriers that do not allow them to access mainstream schools, lack of teacher training, lack of resources to support inclusion, and a traditional (medical) approach to disability. Thus, education in special schools for children with disabilities is still much present.

Access to digital education has been difficult, especially for children in most vulnerable situations. In a survey carried out by UNICEF in 2021 on the social impacts of COVID-19 in Bosnia-Herzegovina²⁷⁶, 37.4% of respondents found it extremely challenging to make the transition to e-schooling mode. This was mostly due to the lower quality of interaction with teachers online (42%), the poorer organisation compared to learning in classrooms (24%) and the stress caused by the need to share the same device among family members for different tasks (teleworking, school, homework).

Effective and free access to school based and sport, leisure and cultural activities

After school leisure activities are largely provided on a membership fee basis (sport clubs etc). However, there are some extracurricular activities provided within schools free of charge for all interested children.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

Meals are not free, and most schools do not provide cooked meals since there are no canteens in place. Children can use the shops around the schools to buy snacks and sandwiches. Local authorities sporadically subsidise the costs of school snacks for children in vulnerable situations.

The government's response and use of funds: In 2020 Tuzla Canton initiated the revision of the formerly cancelled Strategy for Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Education. It is expected that the new Strategy, which foresees the transformation of the special education system in the canton, will be submitted for adoption in 2021. The special education settings are expected to be transformed into rehabilitation centres providing various services to children with disabilities on site and through outreach teams, with children attending mainstream schools. However, at present, the cantonal government has not allocated funding for the implementation of the Strategy, so it will largely depend on available donor funding.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, governments at different levels put various measures in place to facilitate children's access to online education. Some levels of government (local, cantonal, entity) allocated funds from their budgets for the provision of IT equipment, but overall, this type of support was largely secured through donations and different organisations. Few or no support to children and families has been provided in terms of their mental health and wellbeing which was highly affected during the pandemic. In general, older children tended to cope better

with the challenges of online education and social isolation, whereas experiences are most negative for younger children and their parents. Primary school children had greater problems with following online classes, and this created additional pressure on the parents who needed to provide day to day school support to their children, regardless of their own skills and capacities.

Healthcare



Effective and free access to quality healthcare

UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)²⁷⁷ data from 2011-2012 showed that the rate of full immunisation for tuberculosis (BCG/Bacillus Calmette-Guérin), diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus (DPT), polio, measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) was 68% for all children and only 4% for Roma children. This very low rate among Roma children is caused by a combination of limited mobility, lack of health insurance²⁷⁸, poor access to services, negative attitudes and mutual mistrust between Roma and public institutions, including health care professionals. In recent years, immunisation rates have further declined²⁷⁹. There are frequent measles outbreaks across the country. Bosnia-Herzegovina is one of the three countries in Europe at high risk of a polio outbreak due to low coverage rates. Demand for vaccination has decreased over time, influenced by the lack of knowledge about the importance of vaccination as well as external influences such as the anti-vaccine movement, social norms, unfavourable attitudes and practices by both parents and health providers, and partially due to insufficient training programmes for health professionals.

Basic healthcare in Bosnia-Herzegovina is free but many medications and more complex treatments are not free of charge and the cost is partly borne by the patient. The poor, rural residents, adolescent girls, and ethnic minorities still have lower access to health services. Under-five mortality for Roma children is

estimated at 27 per 1,000 live births. There is no defined basic package of health rights and service delivery is fragmented. There is an overall lack of up-to-date data and lack of documentation and/or information about health insurance rights (e.g., for Roma), leading to low uptake²⁸⁰.

UNICEF's Social Impacts of COVID-19 Survey found that 12.2% of respondents had unmet health needs and were unable to get medical treatment or therapy for conditions other than COVID-19. This was most prominent among persons belonging to vulnerable groups with 14% being unable to get medical treatment or medicine. Among the members of vulnerable groups, medical treatment or therapy was most often not available to the relatively poor (19.9%), persons with disabilities or chronic diseases (19.1%) and members of the Roma community (17.9%). The crisis has also had a significant impact on peoples' mental health with 45.6% of respondents declaring an increase in stress and fear of infection, especially among those living in overcrowded spaces. Young people (including adolescents) overall were most likely to experience an increase in stress with half of the young people up to 30 years of age declaring that their stress and fear levels had increased from 'somewhat' to 'greatly'.

The government's response and the use of funds:



In 2020 and 2021, EU funds (largely reprogrammed through IPA) were used to support government efforts in responding to the pandemic and the refugee/migrant crisis. Most of the investments were directed towards the health sector to fight the COVID-19 infection (medical supplies and equipment, PPE), and some towards supporting vulnerable groups (humanitarian aid, IT equipment for online education), as well as for the overall response to the migration crisis (child protection and education in emergency interventions).

Healthy nutrition



Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

Bosnia-Herzegovina has a very low breastfeeding rate (19%). There is insufficient promotion of and support for breastfeeding. This early hindrance continues into childhood, with over 10% of children suffering from stunting (this rate doubles for Roma children).

In recent years, there has been an increasing trend in overweight for children in Bosnia-Herzegovina (17% according to the 2011-2012 MICS). Research conducted in 2016 in Canton Sarajevo²⁸¹ showed 20% of children to be obese and 12.5% to be malnourished. A 2018 study²⁸² among school-aged children revealed low levels of knowledge about nutrition among children and parents.

UNICEF's Social impacts of COVID-19 Survey (2021) found that 28.6% of families with children had reduced their food consumption during the pandemic. A quarter of the respondents who had reduced food consumption belonged to vulnerable groups. Like with e-schooling support, humanitarian food aid was largely provided through donations to the most vulnerable children and families during the pandemic and not by the government.

When it comes to vulnerable families' access to nutrition, families with children may apply for child benefits but these are not provided throughout the country as some cantons do not have them legally regulated. Even where they are provided, child benefits are not sufficient to cover all children's needs (usually €10-20 per child/month).

Adequate housing



Effective access to adequate housing

Despite recent improvements, housing conditions for the Roma population are not adequate and many live in informal settlements without access to water and electricity. The legalisation of settlements is progressing although unevenly.

Support to children with disabilities in terms of infrastructure adaptation and housing is largely provided through donor funded projects.

The government's response and the use of funds



A Roma strategy has been in place since 2005 and is being implemented through the 2017- 2020 Roma action plan on housing, employment and healthcare and the 2018-2022 action plan on Roma educational needs. The Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees allocates about €1.2 million each year to fund Roma-related activities, matched by funds from entities, cantons and municipalities as well as international organisations, particularly in the area of housing.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCEDURES



Although the government does not organise consultations with parents and children regarding policies, civil society is regularly consulted on the programming of IPA funds. Save the Children in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as part of the larger Child Rights Working Group, has contributed to the consultations on IPA II and IPA III and our views have been taken into account.



SAVE THE CHILDREN NORTH WEST BALKANS

Over the past 20 years, Save the Children has worked hard to help and protect children in local communities across Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro. Save the Children is partnering with government institutions and local NGOs to deliver quality education and child protection to all children in the region in both the development and emergency contexts, and to improve the legislative framework and capacities of institutions to align with the UNCRC.

Save the Children in the North West Balkans is based in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, with field offices in Bihac (Bosnia-Herzegovina) and Belgrade, Serbia. Besides development efforts, since 2014 Save the Children is also involved in humanitarian response, after the severe floods that hit the region in 2014, the migrant and refugee crisis of 2015 and the recent COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, Save the Children reached 102.161 children in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro.

Save the Children in the North West Balkans provides the following support to children:

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Save the Children supports and advocates for the implementation of compulsory ECEC for all children and has extensive experience in establishing ECEC classrooms and centres and strengthening the capacities of professionals.

EDUCATION, INCLUDING SCHOOL BASED AND EXTRA LEISURE, SPORTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Access to quality and relevant education is another key priority of Save the Children to ensure that students in Bosnia-Herzegovina acquire the necessary key competencies to participate in the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century and to become future drivers of economic development.

Save the Children supports inclusive and quality education through the increase of educational attainment, prevention of drop-out and provision of relevant knowledge and skills, particularly for vulnerable and deprived children, also in the most recent context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Save the Children supports children with disabilities by placing them and their needs on the political agenda, resulting in the development and adoption of strategic documents and action plans to improve their status, as well as through the establishment of and support to community-based services.

In addition, Save the Children in the North West Balkans is recognised as a leading agency in child centred Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) within the region. It works with schools and local authorities to empower them to be better prepared and to be able to cope with the consequences of emergencies through capacity strengthening, building the resilience of children and communities against risks of natural and man-made disasters, including pandemic preparedness. Save the Children assists municipalities,

schools and kindergartens to reinforce their preparedness through conducting risk assessments, developing contingency plans, holding workshops with children on DRR topics, simulation drills and awareness raising. Save the Children works to ensure that DRR is incorporated into the education curriculum through regular school lessons or extra-curricular activities.

CHILD PROTECTION

Save the Children in the North West Balkans works with governments and civil society to protect children from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation including harmful work and economic exploitation, online sexual violence, and physical and humiliating punishment. It champions the establishment of drop-in centres for street-involved and children at risk, run by local CSOs, driving their integration into the child protection system. In these drop-in centres, children get food, clean clothes, assistance in obtaining their basic rights, learning support, along with family strengthening and economic empowerment. To protect children from online sexual exploitation and abuse, Save the Children works to empower decision makers, law enforcement, judiciary, educators, CSOs, parents and children to fight against online violence and abuse. Save the Children educates social workers on the application of alternative measures such as mediation to prevent recidivism and be able to swiftly administrate juvenile offence cases, especially when it comes to first time offenders, thus ensuring the protection of child rights throughout the process. To contribute to the strengthening of capacities of child protection professionals, Save the Children also supports the functioning of the Child Protection Hub for Southeast Europe²⁸³.

Finally, Save the Children in the North West Balkans launched the migration crisis response operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018. Save the Children works to ensure appropriate support for the children in most vulnerable situations including unaccompanied and separated children and children at risk of

trafficking and smuggling. Save the Children provides psychosocial support and non-formal education activities in Child Friendly Spaces run by our partner organisation in temporary reception centres where children and families are accommodated and provide emergency assistance and referral through our outreach teams in the field. Save the Children works with front line workers to strengthen their child safeguarding capacities and the organisation supports the inclusion of refugee and migrant children in the regular education system. Its emergency programme is partially supported through IPA funding allocated to Save the Children through UNICEF, and partially through ECHO funds.

SAVE THE CHILDREN IN NORTH WEST BALKANS RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In the year marked by unprecedented health, and consequently humanitarian and educational crisis, Save the Children in the North West Balkans consolidated its existing programming and raised additional funds to ensure that children in most vulnerable situations and their families in NWB countries are safe during the pandemic and have access to basic necessities for survival.

ADVOCACY WORK

Through our joint advocacy with other child rights organisations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, at the very outset of the pandemic, Save the Children spoke out against the total ban on movement for children which was in force for a longer period of time in one part of the country. Bosnia-Herzegovina was one of the very few countries in the world with such a ban in place at the time. Save the Children sent official appeals to relevant authorities and launched a public campaign that was followed by other similar initiatives and petitions by other groups and individuals. The measure was at first relaxed and then completely abandoned after the Constitutional court of Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina ruled it unconstitutional.

FUNDING OF SAVE THE CHILDREN IN NORTH WEST BALKANS

Members and donors: Save the Children Italy, Save the Children US, Save the Children Spain, Save the Children Switzerland, Save the Children Norway, USAID, UNICEF, European Union, Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, Vueling.



Recommendations towards national decision makers to address child poverty and social exclusion in Bosnia – Herzegovina

Save the Children in the North West Balkans calls on the government to adopt, finance, and implement national strategies for poverty reduction, based on needs assessment and focusing particularly on children in vulnerable situations and their families. Poverty and socio-economic deprivation are the main drivers behind many types of inequalities and social exclusion, yet they have not been strategically dealt with by the authorities in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Future strategies need to be grounded in a detailed needs assessment carried out on the ground, focusing specifically on the most marginalised groups, and subsequently properly budgeted for and implemented. A monitoring system for tracking progress also needs to be established. In addition, and as part of the service areas covered in the Child Guarantee, Save the Children calls on the government to prioritise the following categories of children in need and take the following actions to strengthen children's access to the following key services.

The targeted categories of children in need to be reached

- Children with disabilities.
- Roma and other minority children.
- Children in poor communities.
- Refugee and migrant children (accompanied and unaccompanied).

Effective and free access to ECEC

- Reform education systems, starting from the pre-school level, to become fully inclusive and adapted to the needs of all children and the changing external circumstances. Greater investments in early detection of developmental issues and early childhood development and learning programmes are needed, particularly as Bosnia Herzegovina remains the country with the lowest coverage of children with preschool programmes in Europe.

Effective and free access to education

Full support network is needed at the community level for inclusive education to function properly (teaching assistants, removal of physical barriers, community-based services for children). Obsolete education systems based on 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. 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. Cyber bullying and cyber abuse prevention need to be formally addressed and included in education.

Effective and free access to quality healthcare

- Promote further awareness of the importance of vaccination.
- Ensure a uniform basic healthcare package and minimum standards for quality of care and services.
- Increase funding for preventive healthcare, including immunisation, early childhood development /early childhood interventions and nutrition programmes.
- Improve access to early childhood detection and early childhood identification services in all sectors, health, education and social protection.
- Ensure that asylum-seeking children have access to healthcare services, psychosocial support and education, ensuring equal access for children outside reception centres.

Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

- Ensure the provision of optimal nutrition to children in kindergartens and schools.
- Promote further awareness of the importance of breastfeeding and good nutrition.

The use of EU funds and national budgets to support children and families in need

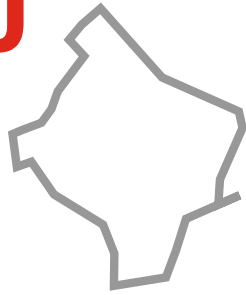
Ongoing and pending reforms focusing on children should be prioritised, budgeted for, and supported through EU funding instruments, especially through the Instrument of Pre-Accession (IPA). To support national governments in the implementation of strategies and policies focusing on children's rights, the EU should insist on such strategies being developed and adopted by relevant governments and should prioritise children's rights in its own funding frameworks and instruments, most notably the IPA.

Interventions that have already been supported through EU funding instruments and that have been successful in initiating reforms and bringing them to a certain stage need sustained attention and funding to be fully completed. Civil society organisations should play an active consultative and implementing role in this process.

Further measures to address social exclusion and to break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage

- Prioritise children's rights in national/entity²⁸⁴ strategies and policies and ensure that the existing legislation focusing on the most marginalised children and families is adequately budgeted and implemented. National/entity strategies need to be adopted by the governments, in consultation with children, youth and civil society, that cover the broad spectrum of all children's rights, in order for them to be reflected in legislation and budgets, and therefore also eligible for support through EU funding instruments. Implementation of existing policies and legislation on children's rights remains questionable since interventions aimed at improving children's lives are severely under-budgeted, and therefore unsustainable in the long term. Investing in children, particularly those in need, should be deemed a priority by all levels of government.
- Strengthen child protection systems to be able to respond to the needs of children and families in vulnerable situations. Child protection services at the local level need to be reformed so as to be relieved of administrative burden and be able to provide timely prevention and support services, in order to assist families at risk and prevent family breakdown. System of cash benefits for children in vulnerable situations and families should be needs-based, universally accessible, adequately budgeted and properly monitored. The ongoing process of deinstitutionalisation, the transformation of large institutions, and the development of community-based services for children without parental care and children with disabilities needs continued funding from the governments and donor community to be fully completed. Support for young people leaving alternative care needs to be legally framed and provided. In this area, protection and support services to child victims of violence must not be forgotten. It is essential to ensure access to independent complaints mechanisms and provide appropriate remedies to victims of abuse, such as redress and adequate compensation, including rehabilitation. Support actions that will lead to the prohibition of corporal punishment of children, with particular attention to children with disabilities living in institutions. This should include awareness raising measures, strengthening the social workforce, and the development of a national monitoring body. Cooperation between governmental child protection service providers and civil society should be promoted and supported.
- Ensure that the rights of refugee and migrant children travelling the Balkans route to protection, decent living conditions, health services, and inclusive education are equally guaranteed and enforced. With the bulk of the migrant/refugee crisis in the North West Balkans focused on Bosnia-Herzegovina, the authorities need to establish better response coordination mechanisms and systems for attracting and allocating funding to ensure the needs of children and families on the move are adequately met. EU funding support to the national authorities in this respect is of crucial importance. Unaccompanied and separated children remain an especially vulnerable group.
- Strengthen programmes and awareness-raising activities to remove all barriers to children expressing their views at all levels and ensure the meaningful participation of all children within the family, community and schools, including within student council bodies, and in decision-making in all matters related to children, with particular attention paid to children in vulnerable situations.

Kosovo



Summary

At the beginning of 2020, the child poverty rate in Kosovo reached 20.7%. Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities endure discrimination on the ethnical basis as they belong to one of the most vulnerable groups. In addition, children with disabilities, children growing up in rural areas and poor households are among the most discriminated against.

The COVID-19 has forced the government to re-allocate resources to fight the pandemic, therefore, directly and indirectly slowing down the progress on the fight against poverty. Children's access to ECEC and education in Kosovo is limited due to a variety of reasons such as the few places available for public ECEC, the lack of parental support, the lack of inclusive education for children with disabilities and the big gender gap in education where only 70% of girls benefit from secondary education after primary school, compared to 95% of boys. Children's access to education worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to online education. Almost half of the children in Kosovo declared to have learnt little to nothing during that period. Save the Children is present in Kosovo since 1997 working directly with children and families in need in a holistic approach. At the same time, it has created and supports child-led groups at the local and national level to advocate and participate in processes regarding the delivery of their rights. Save the Children in Kosovo advocates for the establishment of good practices, capacity building of civil society and

Key facts

6.2%

In 2019, only 6.2% of children aged 0 – 5 attended preschool.

14.6%

14.6% of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children under five years remain stunted and 2.5% severely stunted.

30%

Around 30% of Kosovo's population is unable to obtain health services due to extreme poverty.

70% vs 95%

The lack of parental support, the lack of inclusive education for children with disabilities and the big gender gap in education where only 70% of girls benefit from secondary education after primary school, compared to 95% of boys.

local duty bearers to respond to the needs of children. Save the Children in Kosovo calls on the government to develop child poverty reduction policies that will incorporate inclusive practices and support families with children in need in an integrated way. To this end, appropriate EU and national financial resources shall be directed to support systemic changes and achieve long lasting positive results.

National updates

CHILD POVERTY IN KOSOVO



Kosovo has one of the highest poverty levels in south-eastern Europe, with a 20.7% child poverty rate at the beginning of 2020²⁸⁵.

Although Kosovo was steadily progressing to reduce poverty and increase general welfare²⁸⁶, the COVID-19 crisis has forced the Government to re-allocate resources to fight the pandemic, thereby directly and indirectly halting the progress on the fight against poverty. While there is no data available to show the change in percentage for children's poverty increase, according to a report of the World Bank, projections suggest that 57.000-148.000 people in Kosovo could fall into poverty, while the middle class could shrink by as many as 100.000 people. This is equivalent to an increase of 4-10 percentage points of the poverty rate. Moreover, the World Bank reports that more than half of people falling into poverty do not currently benefit from any social programme. Another striking finding of a report carried out by WorldVision on COVID-19 and children²⁸⁷, revealed that 13.3% of surveyed children in Kosovo declared to contribute to the family income.

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN KOSOVO



Children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities are one of the most vulnerable groups in Kosovo as they face discrimination on ethnical basis and belong to one of the poorest categories.

The burden of accessing healthcare services amid COVID-19 is especially unique for children with disabilities who, due to the suspension of non-emergent and elective, social, rehabilitation and healthcare services, were at high risk of missing out on essential healthcare. Also, these children had enormous difficulties with online education since distance learning is not designed with children with disabilities in mind, thus leaving their educational needs unattended. Save the Children in Kosovo has contributed to the establishment of a user-friendly platform for children with disabilities during COVID-19 and supported their caregivers on its use.

Increased poverty amid COVID-19 has pushed many families and children of vulnerable low socio-economic backgrounds to seek more extreme forms of survival including child labour, early marriage, and sexual exploitation, with staggering consequences.

Children living in rural areas lack access to ECEC and enrolment rates are low especially among girls. These children were especially held back during COVID-19 since their households tend to have a lower income and thus are affected by the digital divide to access online education.

CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO SERVICES AS DESCRIBED IN THE CHILD GUARANTEE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

Early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, and a healthy meal each school day

Effective and free access to early childhood education and care (ECEC)



ECEC services are provided through a fragmented sectoral approach and the level of attendance for children in preschool education in Kosovo is low. In 2019, only 6.2% of children aged 0 – 5 attended preschool.

The reasons for so low levels of attendance are due to:

- Lack of spaces in areas outside the capital and a few larger cities. Rural areas are largely uncovered by services.
- Some parents are not informed or cannot afford to take their children to centres too far away from their homes/jobs, or simply are not aware of the value of ECEC.
- Public pre-school education is free but there are limited places available for children aged 0-5. Private providers exist but there are barriers to entry such as the related costs.
- Education for children aged 5-6 is offered in public schools while for those aged 0-5 is offered in separate facilities outside schools, making it easier for some parents to take their children to ECEC when they turn 5 years old.

Although no attendance numbers exist for children with disabilities, it can be assumed that their attendance rate is very low mainly due to a combination of factors, such as inaccessible facilities, lack of designated educational staff, lack of resources, and lack of public transportation for children in need.

Attendance to ECEC programmes by girls and boys aged 3-6 is reported to be as low as 33.9% and is only 5% for girls and boys from RAE communities, which is very low compared to 93.9% in EU countries²⁸⁸. Additionally, only 18% of children aged 3-6 have sufficient levels of literacy and numeracy. These very low numbers contribute to an onset of the early attainment gap for many marginalised children, in particular for those from minority communities.

Keeping in mind that unemployment is much higher among women than men, particularly in rural areas, and because there is a noticeable lack of ECEC services in rural areas, unemployed mothers or other close family members provide care for pre-school children. The lack of ECEC services in rural areas does not only limit opportunities for mothers

and other care providers to enter the labour market and gain employment, but also limits the children's development potential which is not sufficiently promoted and fulfilled without access to quality and integrated ECEC services. In urban areas where employment of both men and women is higher, there is an increased demand for ECEC services.

The government's response and use of funds



Kosovo has developed a very strong legal framework that promotes a non-discriminatory and inclusive society, and the country is striving to make steady progress towards the SDGs. The Government of Kosovo acknowledges in the National Development Strategy 2016-2021 that the increased inclusion of children in ECEC lays the foundation for better academic success later in life, decreases inequalities between the genders, and raises human capital. Despite legislative frameworks being largely harmonised with international standards and abiding by UNCRC language, information gaps exist in terms of monitoring country performance (i.e., alternative reporting) measured against such standards. Key trends reflect slow progress on addressing children's needs through a holistic approach and weak coordination of mechanisms at local and central level to provide integrated services and enable access to inclusive education.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) with support from Save the Children in Kosovo and UNICEF put in place an early childhood education platform (an online learning platform for children aged 0 - 6 years) and a distance learning platform for children with disabilities, so that children could continue their learning.

During 2020 and 2021, the EU provided funding for child protection and ECEC through UNICEF, and for social services through Save the Children.

Effective and free access to education



The Global COVID-19 Research Survey²⁸⁹ revealed that 43.6% of children in Kosovo learnt little to nothing during the pandemic.

Another survey²⁹⁰ supported by Save the Children in Kosovo that looked into the challenges and the achievements of the distance learning system organised by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, identified the actions needed to improve their experience, namely:

- teachers need better preparation for classes;
- longer duration of classroom time;
- less homework and clearer rules for homework assignments;
- children being able to express their opinions; children having more interesting activities during lessons and the possibility to communicate peer-to-peer and with their teachers.

There are big gender gaps in Kosovo when it comes to educational attainment, particularly in rural areas. Only 70% of girls benefit from secondary education after primary school, compared to 95% of boys. This is due to patriarchal attitudes, cultural expectations that girls/women should stay at home and help around the house, whereas schools are sometimes too far from their homes making it unsafe for girls to travel long distances. Children with disabilities are also discriminated against due to a lack of resources and capacities in schools and Municipal Education Directorates (MED) to deliver inclusive education, and lack of coordination and response mechanisms to support the development of these capacities. The governing institutions at local level and the schools are falling short to create quality inclusive schools for children with disabilities.

The governing institutions at local level and schools are falling short to create quality inclusive schools for children with disabilities. The overall number of children with disabilities

out of school is not measured systematically and their enrolment in education is estimated at around 40%. This leaves a vast majority of children deprived of their basic right to education, socialisation, and other opportunities available to their peers.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

There is no effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition in schools as only the capital Pristina offers a free nutrition programme for children attending primary schools. However, several stakeholders as well as parents, have questioned its nutritional value²⁹¹.

The government's response and use of funds



Inclusive education has been at the core of several strategies developed by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) since 2010. However, there is an overall lack of understanding of children's needs in shaping designated programmes for inclusion and a lack of awareness on the importance of inclusive practices, tools, and resources to ensure that all children benefit from inclusive mainstream education, despite their background. Following the decentralization of education, the competencies between the central and local governance in education have become unclear. MES is responsible for the development of policies, curriculum, inspection, and the provision of optimum condition for work in general, and municipalities are responsible for school performance. There is a lack of resources and capacities at the municipal level to deliver inclusive education and to support the work of Municipal Pedagogical Evaluation Teams as a mechanism to direct children with disabilities into mainstream education. Pedagogical evaluation of children with disabilities is regulated by Administrative Instruction in place since 2012 and revised in 2017. However, the Pedagogical Evaluation Teams (PET) established across

Kosovo so far, often lack the capacities and resources to perform their work. In all the instances, PETs that are not directly supported by Save the Children in Kosovo and do not even have proper space to assess children's needs. Assessments take place in offices, which are often inaccessible and have no child appeal. In addition, they lack assessment tools and other instruments necessary to perform their work.

In 2020, the INCLUDE project (Building capacity for inclusion in education²⁹²) aimed to improve access to quality education of students from groups of children in need in pre-primary, primary and secondary education, was launched. It is expected to be carried out over a period of four years.

Save the Children Italy and Save the Children Switzerland, supported by various donors such as the Ferrari Foundation, Medicor, Kanton Zurich and others, have also provided significant funding towards improving and expanding ECEC services in rural and urban areas in Kosovo. These funds, managed and implemented by Save the Children in Kosovo, have improved access to and quality of education by promoting inclusive and participatory approaches to the education of children from marginalised groups who are deprived of quality learning opportunities and have the poorest learning outcomes with a particular focus on pre-primary and primary education. This was also evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when Save the Children in Kosovo worked with the Ministry of Education to develop a distance learning platform for children with disabilities. Children from poor families were supported with care packages, including tablets and technological tools, in order to access the distance learning platform during the lockdown period so that they could continue their education.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) put in place several online platforms to allow children to continue their learning:

- E-learning platform, an online learning platform, entailing video lessons, which

were also broadcasted daily on the national television "RTK".

- E-scholar learning platform, an online learning platform for pupils of grades 1-9.
- Inclusive Distance learning platform, an online learning platform for children with disabilities.

All platforms, except for the Inclusive Education platform, are available in four languages: Albanian, Serbian, Turkish, and Bosnian.

In March 2020, Save the Children in Kosovo immediately reached out to the Ministry of Education (MoE), the Ministry of Social Welfare (MSW) and the Ministry of Health (MoH) to understand their needs and to support with adapting interventions for children with disabilities. Save the Children in Kosovo supported the Ministry of Education in the development of the distance learning platforms.

Healthcare



Effective and free access to quality health-care

Around 30% of Kosovo's population is unable to obtain health services due to extreme poverty. At the same time, Kosovo has one of the highest infant mortality rates in Europe and the lowest immunisation coverage for the most vulnerable groups, which implicates low probability to survive and high-risk consequences for maternal and child health, thus reflecting the violation of the right to survive and proper development. UNICEF reports that Health outcomes for non-majority communities RAE children are even worse. Immunisation coverage among these children is much lower, and only 30% of children are fully immunised²⁹³. Sexual and reproductive health rights of adolescents are not respected, positioning adolescents in a risk with high consequences of health status and wellbeing. Lack of specialised services in certain medical units imposes patients to seek out-of-country services, which have higher costs and limit some groups of children to meet their life-threatening health needs. Low sanitation and wash practices in the public

system settings (i.e., schools, hospitals) contribute to the prevalence of conditions that lead to diseases and poor health in general.

The government's response and the use of funds



In August 2020, the Assembly of Kosovo adopted a new law to prevent and combat the COVID-19 pandemic, which provides a solid legal basis for public health related restrictions of fundamental rights.

The Ministry of Health in cooperation with the Department of Psychology of the University of Pristina, launched a free phone therapy and counselling line to offer psychological support to all citizens who feel the pressure of the pandemic.

Home visits under the Universal Progressive Home Visiting Programme were carried out virtually during the pandemic. However, the quality of healthcare services provided to new mothers and new-borns virtually remains somewhat questionable.

The EU has mobilised significant funds to help Western Balkan countries in the recovery process²⁹⁴ and adopted a package of €70 million under the IPA II to facilitate the access of Western Balkans partners to COVID-19 vaccines procured by EU Member States²⁹⁵. These actions have been coordinated with Kosovo's institutions and civil society, including Save the Children in Kosovo.

Healthy nutrition



Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey conducted by UNICEF shows that the nutrition status of children remains a public health concern, where 14.6% of RAE children under five years remain stunted and 2.5% severely stunted.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, poorer households will encounter more difficulties advancing in nutrition, with serious longer-term consequences that may take years to recover from²⁹⁶. In addition, children with mothers who gave birth at a young age or who have no education are more likely to be malnourished. There is no effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition in schools as only the capital Pristina offers a nutrition programme for children attending primary schools. No systematic campaign promoting healthy eating and nutritional food has taken place in the last 5 years.

Adequate housing



Effective access to adequate housing

Housing issues in Kosovo have been adversely affected by the recent armed conflict in the country. There is no national mechanism in place for systematic data collection and policymaking. The housing needs of the groups of children most in need, including those from RAE communities remain unattended. The domestic and gender-based violence in households during COVID-19 lockdowns increased the vulnerabilities of children and women. In response to this, the Ministry of Health in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, opened a temporary safe space to shelter survivors of domestic and gender-based violence who had to quarantine and became eligible for shelter in Kosovo government-funded facilities.

The government's response and use of funds



In December 2020, a new law²⁹⁷ entered into force to alleviate the economic consequences created in the country and to provide a legal basis to help entities affected by the COVID-19. The Parliament adopted a Recovery Package that provides short-term financial support, loans, and cash injection for businesses affected by COVID-19. It also provides bonuses for

healthcare workers, police, and other staff deemed essential. The Package also foresees a small raise in pensions and other social assistance schemes.

Kosovo's government continues to undertake ad hoc policy making with prevailing obstacles for inclusive and evidence-based policy making, which does not interlink strategic priorities with the budgeting processes at national and local level. The EU progress report for Kosovo shows that regarding children's rights, Kosovo's legal framework is largely in line with the EU and international standards, but implementation remains limited²⁹⁸.

IPA II funds were re-programmed by the EU Office in Kosovo, in coordination with the government, to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU provided direct financial support to the Government to cover urgent and emergency needs related to the pandemic²⁹⁹. Kosovo has already received €24.05 million as part of the EU's overall assistance to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, to support the modernisation of Kosovo's public administration and to strengthen public finance management. The EU also re-allocated some funding to tackle priority needs in the areas of social services, social protection, access to healthcare and other emerging needs, of which Save the Children in Kosovo is an implementing partner³⁰⁰.

The new Law on Child Protection provides an explicit ban on the corporal punishment in all settings and mandates relevant governing bodies to initiate executive actions for implementing the Law at local level. This is aimed to support the creating of clear mandates for financing of services, staff resourcing and accountability between the duty-bearers at national and local level. Save the Children in Kosovo and civil society continue to advocate for a child-centred policy design of the new Law on ECEC and the Law on Social Services.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCEDURES



Save the Children has created and supports child-led groups in the local and national level that advocate for institutionalising child participation and campaign to influence decision-making on issues that impact the delivery of their rights.

As for the allocation of EU funds, these are usually allocated in consultation with civil society organisations. The EU Office in Kosovo organises formal meetings with CSOs, which are given ample opportunities to raise their concerns and propose solutions/recommendations. The EU also utilises multiple channels to solicit feedback, including formal meetings, informal gatherings, direct feedback mechanisms via e-mail, using the TACSO (Technical Assistance to CSOs in the Western Balkans) instrument, etc. Generally, Save the Children's views are considered, and the EU often asks its opinions and feedback on key issues related to children and their wellbeing. Nevertheless, when it came to EU funds re-programming towards COVID-19, the civil society was partially consulted and on a very limited basis (partly due to the nature of the emergency and partly due to the lack of technical expertise of some CSOs). Nonetheless, consultation took place with some CSOs and International NGOs, including Save the Children in Kosovo.



SAVE THE CHILDREN KOSOVO

Save the Children has worked in Kosovo since 1997. Its program approach is based on direct interventions and the establishment of good practices, capacity building of civil society and local duty bearers to respond to the needs of children. Save the Children also advocates for legislation and policies that will incorporate inclusive practices and have appropriate financial mechanisms to support systemic responses and therefore achieve long lasting positive changes.

The current ongoing projects of Save the Children in Kosovo are:

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

The “Extending Integrated Community Based ECCD in Kosovo”³⁰¹ project builds on and scales up the implementation of best practices established and piloted during the 2015-2019 period,

in improving access and quality of ECEC services for children aged 0-6, including the most marginalised ones, in 8 municipalities. The project focuses mainly on ensuring the sustainability of interventions piloted through the five-year period.

EFFECTIVE AND FREE ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The overall objective of the “Promoting Educational and Social Inclusion 2021-2023”³⁰² project is to empower children with disabilities in Kosovo to reach their full potential through promoting better access to quality inclusive education and job opportunities for children and youth with disabilities living in Ferizaj, Gjakova, Gjilan, Mitrovica south, Peja, Prishtina, and Prizren.

CHILD PROTECTION

Save the Children offered its expertise and support to Kosovo institutions to find an alternative way of delivering distance early childhood education to children 0-6 years from the most vulnerable communities, as well as distance learning for children with disabilities in Kosovo.

Save the Children was supported by the Swedish International Development Agency’s (SIDA) and Global COVID-19 Fund of Save the Children. As a result of these funds and in close coordination with the Municipal Education Directorates (MED), a total of 400 educational kits (containing educational toys and didactic materials) were distributed to children with disabilities, children from RAE communities and other marginalised communities in eight municipalities of Kosovo³⁰³.

A total of 700 families of children with disabilities, from RAE communities and those living in poverty have been identified, through the support of MEDs, and have received hygienic and personal protective items (such as soap, face masks and hand sanitisers, among other things).

Since the pandemic started, Save the Children in Kosovo has supported 274 families to access the internet. Save the Children has provided tablets to 727 children from vulnerable groups and 750 children have received educational

kits to support distance inclusive education during the pandemic. 300 electronic tablets (214 of them with internet subscription for three months) were distributed to children with disabilities, children from RAE and other marginalised communities, to aid them in accessing education platforms and equally participate in the learning process.

The project has also contributed to empowering parents and families to better support their children through psychosocial support, positive parenting, and COVID-19 information by developing and distributing printed awareness materials, producing and broadcasting three TV programmes and radio messages, each of them in three main languages in Kosovo: Albanian, Serbian and Romani.

Throughout this period, Save the Children in Kosovo also focused on:

- Advocating for children’s needs to be met when managing crises. Identifying key child protection messages and develop a common dissemination strategy, in collaboration with partners, institutional duty-bears and other stakeholders delivering child protection services.
- Continuously promoting good hygiene and prevention tips through social and media channels.
- Conducting a national comprehensive situational analysis on the impact of COVID-19 on children with disabilities and children of parents with disabilities in Kosovo.

STRENGTHENING SOCIAL SERVICE PROVISION FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS IN KOSOVO, IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The purpose of the proposed action is to support the availability and access to quality social services³⁰⁴ for girls, boys, women and men living in vulnerable situations, especially

those at socioeconomic risk, victims of violence, domestic violence or trafficking, elders, children and adults living with disability, while also correlating to the country strategic objective for decentralisation of social services and strengthening of the network of quality and standardised social service providers (NGOs). The overall objective of this EU-funded project is to increase the availability of high quality and accessible social services through a third-party financing mechanism for NGOs who are providers of social services in Kosovo for the most vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities.

The proposed project will build upon three main components: 1) Provision of financing for third parties in the form of sub-grants for at least 30 local NGO providers of social services, 2) Provision of capacity-building exercises for providers of social services with the overall aim of enhancing the quality of services, and ensuring longer-term sustainability after the end of the project, and 3) An advocacy and awareness-raising campaign to sensitise people, particularly those in rural and remote areas, of the importance of social services and to inform the general public of the availability of services and how to take advantage of them..

ADVOCACY WORK

Save the Children runs various advocacy initiatives and campaigns to support the delivery of rights for children in Kosovo. Save the Children ensures to campaign and lead change with and for children. Below are some of Save the Children's key campaigns:

- Every Last Child (2016)
The campaign targeted children left behind and the goal was to ensure impact for the most deprived and marginalised children.

- “Know me for My Abilities” National Campaign (2018)

A national campaign was led under the slogans ‘Know me for My Abilities’, and ‘Yes, Children Can!’ aimed at raising awareness and improving the public attitudes towards children with disabilities living in Kosovo, calling for social inclusion and for the rights of children with disabilities to be fully recognized and respected in the country.

- Campaign on Breastfeeding (2018)
Save the Children in Kosovo in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, UNICEF and other local NGOs carried out a one-week campaign aiming to promote the importance of breastfeeding.

- Banning corporal punishment campaign (2019-2021)

The goal was to increase capacity and coordination between partners towards a common strategy and action plan for the campaign on the prohibition of corporal punishment in all environments and change of social norms in prohibiting corporal punishment of children.

- Save our Education Campaign (2021)
A global campaign, implemented also in Kosovo, with the goal of protecting the learning and wellbeing of a generation of children impacted by COVID-19.

FUNDING OF SAVE THE CHILDREN IN KOSOVO

Members and donors: Save the Children Sweden, Save the Children Italy, Save the Children Switzerland, Save the Children US, European Union, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), Embassy of Sweden, Medicor Foundation, Ferrari Foundation, IKEA Foundation.

Recommendations towards national decision makers to address child poverty and social exclusion in Kosovo

The targeted categories of children in need to be reached

- Children with disabilities.
- Children from minority communities.
- Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- Children living in rural areas.

Effective and free access to ECEC

- Strengthen the institutional commitments for increased ECEC and inclusive education services, which particularly affect children from social and ethnic marginalised groups, and rural areas.
- Develop or further expand public, free of charge preschool settings – especially for children aged 0-5 years in rural areas.
- Inform and educate parents and caregivers about the value of ECEC for child development.

Effective and free access to education

- Protect children from COVID-19 in all settings, including schools and ECEC centres.
- Make sure education is made accessible online in a quick and efficient manner for those unable to attend school.
- Develop mechanisms and awareness raising campaigns to support girls' equal access to education (especially to secondary education).
- Ensure a safe, qualitative, and inclusive return of children to schools.
- Develop the infrastructure and/or strengthen the accessibility of children with disabilities to education.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

Support the provision of healthy meal planning in schools and provide free school meals, especially for children in need.

Effective and free access to quality healthcare

- Provide children and their caregivers with resources, mental-health and psychosocial counselling and social/economic support they need during and after COVID-19 to protect them and mitigate the effects of the pandemic.
- Develop awareness raising campaigns and the needed structures to increase the immunisation coverage – especially among the most vulnerable communities and public servants delivering services to children to close the gap in service provision.
- Strengthen the healthcare provision for mothers and infants, especially in rural areas and among the most disadvantaged communities.
- Strengthen the provision of healthcare services and the training of healthcare professionals to respond to the needs of people living in rural areas and in vulnerable communities.

Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

- Develop a nationwide campaign about the effects of malnutrition on children and the positive outcomes of healthy eating. Use child-friendly language and material to target children in schools.

- Reach out to RAE families with children and support them with targeted information to understand the benefits of healthy eating habits and to induce the purchase of nutritious food ingredients.

The use of EU funds and national budgets to support children and families in need

EU funds and national budgets need to be utilised in a systematic and prolonged manner to provide children with the necessary tools such as ECEC services, inclusive education, psychosocial support and counselling, quality and accessible education, leisure and sports, and proper training and preparations for when they become youth and are ready to make life-altering decisions. Programmes need to be developed to tackle these issues in a holistic manner, without gaps in support and services, as well as to challenge the generational effects of traditional harmful practices in child-rearing. EU financial resources must also be allocated to services that support parents and family members since they have also tremendously suffered and are under a lot of stress and strain.

Further measures to address social exclusion and break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage

- Establish an integrated (across health, education, and social sectors) data collection mechanism for children, since the absence of data currently impedes any efforts in improving the implementation of policies that guarantee welfare for all children.
- Develop and strengthen the accountability systems between central and local government, as well as advance the public consultation practices, including the participation of children in decision-making
- Ensure needs-informed public investment that takes into account the ever-changing circumstances of children in Kosovo and empowers young people (including those with disabilities) to increase their skills for participation in the labour market.
- Expand access to unemployment benefits or child benefits to parents and caregivers from poor and disadvantaged communities.
- Consider the introduction of a “Child Tax Credit” for poor families as well as for working families struggling to provide adequate nutrition, housing, and care for their children.



Iceland

Summary

Unlike other countries in Europe, Iceland has no official definition of child poverty. Concerning the impact of COVID-19 on children, Save the Children Iceland foresees an increase in inequality due to the rising levels of unemployment.

In Iceland, there is no policy or action plan on how to eliminate poverty among children. There is also a clear absence of the national policy of participation of children, as NGOs and stakeholders work directly with children and their families to adjust their programmes according to their needs. Save the Children Iceland emphasises that preventing child poverty is a long-term investment that can make a difference in children's lives now and in the future. Therefore, it calls on the government to create policies and timely actions to prevent and eradicate poverty. It urges the government to develop and strengthen effective services to help all children in Iceland and especially children in need such as children growing up in single parent households, children with disabilities, children with parents on disability benefits, children in migration and children living in vulnerable situations. 90% of parents on disability benefits declare that the benefits are insufficient, 80% cannot meet unexpected expenses, 22% cannot pay for food in the school and 19% cannot pay for after school activities. As more and more children and families live in inadequate housing conditions in Iceland, this service area should be prioritised by strengthening social housing provision and prioritising families with children in accessing housing. At the same time, the government should increase the minimum wage and strengthen benefits for parents in order to secure adequate living conditions for their children.

Key facts

12.7%

In 2018, 12.7% of children under 18 years old were living at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Under 2s

There is a lack of ECEC settings for children up to the age of 2 and different standards apply in municipalities.

36%

Only 36% of the 320 immigrants who started secondary school in 2015 graduated four years later.

Under 60%

The relative poverty line is defined as under 60% of the median household disposable income at a time scale and is compared to the OECD's equivalent scale to share household income on all those living in the home.

National updates

CHILD POVERTY IN ICELAND



In 2018, 12.7% of children under 18 years old were living at risk of poverty and social exclusion³⁰⁵.

There is no official definition of child poverty in Iceland. Different definitions of absolute poverty, relative poverty and lack of material goods are used in research and discussions. The relative poverty line is defined as under 60% of the median household disposable income at a time scale and is compared to the OECD's equivalent scale to share household income on all those living in the home.

Save the Children Iceland is worried that inequality will increase, due to a rise in unemployment (in January 2021 the unemployment rate was 8.2% compared to 4.8% in January 2020).

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN ICELAND



Children in low-income families, children with disabilities, children with parents living on disability benefits, children in single parent households and children in unemployed households are among the most vulnerable groups.

Reports of child neglect received by Child Protection Committees have increased by 20% during the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020-February 2021). Likewise, violence increased by 23%, risk behaviour of children by 3% and cases where the health and life of unborn children were in danger by 68%.

CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO SERVICES AS DESCRIBED IN THE CHILD GUARANTEE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

Early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, and a healthy meal each school day



Effective and free access to early childhood

Most of ECEC services in Iceland are run by municipalities and access to ECEC differs across them. Although ECEC is not free the price is modest since the municipalities pay the biggest part. However, the cost differs from municipality to municipality.

In 2019, approximately 97% of children aged 2 to 5 attended ECEC and 55.5% of children attended ECEC since their first year of age. The quality of ECEC is good and is in line with the syllabus based on the national curriculum for kindergartens.

In Iceland there is a lack of ECEC settings for children up to the age of 2 and the different standards applied by municipalities, many parents send their children to private childcare houses until they get access to public ECEC. However, demand exceeds supply and private childcare houses are much more expensive than public ECEC. Since 2021 the parental leave in Iceland is 12 months.

Effective and free access to education



Education from 6-16 years is free for all children in Iceland. From the age of 16, children have to pay for their education. Although costs differ across schools, in most cases the cost is just a registration fee. In addition, children above the age of 16 must pay for their school material and this can be an extra burden for children in need such as children in migration and children from

low income and vulnerable families.

In Iceland, there are a lot of small communities in rural areas and although transport to ECEC settings and school is free, children need to travel long distances to reach the nearest school.

The law on kindergartens and school focuses on inclusive schools regardless the status or disability. Therefore, children with disabilities are invited to attend mainstream education. Although there are special schools for children with disabilities, only 0.03% of students attend these special schools. At the same time although support services should be provided in schools, parents often find that they are insufficient and therefore enrol their children in private support services, which are often expensive and not all families can afford them.

Children in migration are entitled to get their education in their own language. Data shows that drop-out rates in secondary school for children with a migrant background are higher than those for children with an Icelandic background. This indicates that migrant children do not receive the services, support, and education they need, including learning Icelandic. More specifically, almost 36% of the 320 immigrants who started day school at the upper secondary level in the autumn of 2015 graduated four years later. This is the highest graduation rate for this group in this century, but much lower than that of students with an Icelandic background.

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

Schools provide after school activities for children aged 6-9 years old. At the beginning of the school year, children are asked to choose one (or more) activities. However, these activities are not free of charge. Although communities have a certain amount of money (or fee) for each child to participate in sport or cultural activities, it does not cover the whole cost. These extra costs can be a burden for some parents, thus limiting the participation of children in need in these activities. Save

the Children Iceland emphasises that children should get involved in many different sport and leisure activities. These should not be based on competition but on cooperation and with a view to build the child's self-identity.

In addition, although children should not pay for excursions or field trips organised by the school, a fee may be charged for subsistence on student study trips, after consultation with parents.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

All children in Iceland receive lunch and snacks during school hours and after school activities upon payment. Although the amount required is small, it can be nonetheless problematic for children coming from low-income households.

The government's response and the use of funds



Until 2019, school materials, such as school bags, books, notebooks as well as equipment for sports, were covered by parents. From 2019, these costs (apart from the school bags) are covered by the state, which has made a big difference for parents.

Primary and secondary schools remained open during the COVID-19 pandemic while secondary education for children above the age of 16 largely moved online. In addition, as a response to COVID-19, summer loans for university students were offered to students for the school year 2020-2021 and the same will happen for the next academic year.

Healthcare



Effective and free access to quality healthcare

Healthcare (including dental care) is free for children in Iceland.

Children in rural areas face difficulties in accessing healthcare since most of the healthcare centres are located in cities. This is also the case for pregnant women. Although giving birth and paediatric consultation is free of charge, many women in rural areas do not take advantage of these services as they are far from their homes. Parents of new-born children are offered home visits for the first few weeks and then examination in clinics. In the home visits, the nurse examines the child, assesses its development, weight, and head circumference. Parents receive counselling and education regarding the child's care and their own wellbeing. When the child is six weeks old, a medical examination is performed at a health centre and at the age of three months, vaccinations begin. All children get free vaccination from an early age and periodic health care, first at the health care centre and then in the schools through the school doctor and school nurse.

The goal of child and infant protection is to promote the health, wellbeing, and development of young children through regular health check-ups as well as support and health education for their families.

Children with disabilities or chronic illnesses do not receive adequate support. The services in place are often not sufficient and the information about available support is difficult to find. Due to the lack of support, parents often choose to stay at home and take care of their children. They quit their jobs and get burned out due to stress. In the absence of public support, NGOs offer financial and psychosocial support to parents and children with disabilities.

In September 2021 two new reports were published. One on the impact of COVID-19 on children's mental health and one on public health³⁰⁶. From the beginning of the pandemic, the government supported children as much as possible. The majority of children aged 14-15 said that their wellbeing did not worsen in 2020 (56%), 7% even said it had improved. However, in secondary schools the proportion

of those who rated their mental health as good or very good decreased by 16% from 2018 and twice as many felt lonelier than in 2018.

The government's response and the use of funds



In June 2021 the Parliament approved four bills by the Minister of Social Affairs and Children on the integration of services for the benefit of children and their families³⁰⁷.

As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, 600 m. Iskr³⁰⁸ (appr €4 million) will be allocated to mental health care for children and adolescents. Six co-operation projects between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Children, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Culture will be supported. National mental health teams will also be established nationwide and mental health services in colleges and universities will be strengthened to provide free mental health services to all children.

Healthy nutrition



Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

Children receive a school meal on school days, but not on holidays, which creates a problem for vulnerable families and children.

In 2021, 27% of Icelanders – out of which 6.5% are children – suffered from obesity compared to 17% in Europe³⁰⁹. More than a third of obese children concentrate in rural areas. Reasons for children's obesity include unhealthy diet and inactivity, high prices of healthy food, absence of parents from home due to long working hours.

Adequate housing



Effective access to adequate housing

Persons at risk of poverty or with housing problems can apply for social housing or

financial/ material assistance from their municipality. Each municipality sets different rules on the conditions for the allocation of social housing and their operation. However, in all cases, the income of individuals or families must be very modest to have the possibility to access social housing and waiting lists are long. Although there are homeless people in Iceland³¹⁰, unfortunately, there are no statistics about homeless families. This is because when a family with children gets homeless, they usually try to get accommodation with relatives or friends. Children cannot be registered without residence so there are cases that children are placed in the child protection system when their parents are homeless, especially if drug or alcohol use is involved.

Each year approximately 80-100 children go missing. These children are homeless, living in the street or elsewhere for a while. 50% of the lost children each year are “new” and 50% get lost again and again. Most of these children are from difficult home situations, with behavioural problems or drug problems. Some of them disappear from their home or from treatment residential settings. There are two treatment homes for children and adolescents run by the Child Welfare Agency, located in the countryside. The reasons for their placement are behavioural disorders, criminal behaviour, violence, or drug use. A placement agreement is made for six months and then the child’s needs for further treatment are assessed.

The government’s response and use of funds: In 2019, the city introduced a new policy about homeless people based on the “Housing First” model and the definition of ETHOS (European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion). Since 2009 the city of Reykjavík’s Welfare Department has been responsible for data gathering on homeless people and the circumstances of homelessness in Reykjavík. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Social affairs set up a reconstruction team with representatives from the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Transport, the city of Reykjavík, the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities,

the Directorate of Labour, the Ombudsman and the Association of Directors of Social affairs. The team’s goal is to gather and share information about social affairs and employment and to follow the government’s actions. However, no one directly working on children’s issues, except the Children’s Ombudsman, was invited to participate in this Team.

On 30 April 2021, a new policy containing the measures to be taken to address the COVID-19 pandemic and its socioeconomic consequences was adopted. These include a special child benefit increase for those receiving income-related child benefits, travel grants, extended withdrawal of private pension savings, extension of resilience grants and closure grants, shifting the repayment period of support loans and long-term employment benefits. In addition, 200 m. Iskr (around €1.3 million) have been provided to the Ministry of Social Affairs’ action plan to combat the negative effects of COVID-19 on children, senior citizens, people with disabilities people of foreign origin and other socially vulnerable groups. Support measures include actions against domestic violence, improved information for the elderly, the homeless, young people who are neither in the labour market nor in education, and extra measures that will improve the situation of people with developmental disabilities and autism.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCEDURES.



Children’s and civil society participation largely depend on municipalities and other stakeholders working with children. There is not a national policy on participation. All NGOs working directly with children and their families have direct consultations with them to adjust their programmes according to their needs.



SAVE THE CHILDREN ICELAND - BARNAHEILL

Save the Children in Iceland was founded in 1989 with the aim of defending the rights of children in Iceland. It runs the following programmes:

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

The programme “Vinátta”³¹¹ (friendship) is a preventative bullying programme for children up to the age of 9 years. It started in 2014 as a pilot programme and in 2016 became available for all kindergartens. Nowadays, more than 60% of kindergartens use the material and participate in the programme. In 2017, Vinátta started to be implemented in primary schools and now almost 30% of schools use it. The programme’s ideology is reflected in the following four values: care, courage, respect, and tolerance. It provides training for teachers and its success depends on the participation of the whole school community. The programme is of Danish origin and has been translated and published in collaboration with Save the Children Denmark and Mary Fonden in Denmark.

EFFECTIVE AND FREE ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The programme Verndarar barna (Guardians of Children) is a prevention and intervention programme that raises awareness and supports victims of sexual abuse. Save the Children Iceland works with schools and communities and trains teachers and other staff working with children on sexual abuse and ways to support victims. In this context, Save the Children runs a Hotline where people can report sexual abuse of children or any other abuse.

FUNDING OF SAVE THE CHILDREN ICELAND

Save the Children Iceland is run by voluntary donations with the help of Heillavina, a monthly sponsor. In addition, the organisation applies for financial support through ministries and various community funds. Save the Children Iceland runs a Hotline where people can report online sexual abuse of children and other abuse. Until 2014, it was partly funded by the EU under the EU Safer Internet programme and currently it is funded by the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) in Telecom.

Recommendations towards national decision makers to address child poverty and social exclusion in Iceland

In Iceland, there is no policy or action plan on how to eliminate poverty among children. Save the Children Iceland emphasises that to eradicate poverty among children, the rights of all children must be guaranteed according to the UNCRC. All children must have equal opportunities for education, health and participation in sports and leisure. Public bodies and the government must design policies and timely action plans to prevent and eradicate poverty. Preventing child poverty is a long-term investment.

Save the Children Iceland calls on the Icelandic government to develop or strengthen the following services to ensure that all children and especially the following targeted categories of children in need in Iceland have the same opportunities.

The targeted categories of children in need to be reached

- Children living in single parent households.
- Children with disabilities.
- Children in migration.
- Children living in vulnerable family situations.

Effective and free access to ECEC

- Increase ECEC settings, especially for children between 1 and 2 years of age.
- Develop policies and measures to fill the gap between parental leave and children's placement to ECEC so that all children benefit from it..

Effective and free access to education

- Increase support for children with disabilities within the school settings. Ensure that this support is free of charge for those families

with low incomes and affordable for the rest.

- Increase support for children in migration. Support them to continue in secondary education and prevent their drop-out from education.
- Ensure that school materials continue to be provided for free.
- Strengthen the psychosocial support in schools for children of all ages.

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

Ensure that all children in Iceland have the same opportunities to leisure and culture activities, regardless of status or the activities' costs.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

Provide free school meals – especially to those children in vulnerable situations.

Effective and free access to quality healthcare

- Ensure further support for children with disabilities and children with chronic illnesses to access healthcare and support services.
- Strengthen children's access to affordable – and where possible- free mental health provision.

Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

- Develop campaigns to raise awareness about obesity among children and the benefits of healthy eating habits.
- Reduce prices and make healthy food affordable to everyone.

Effective access to adequate housing

- Establish a stable rental market where rental prices are affordable for everyone.
- Lower the interest of loans for buying a house so that is affordable for everyone.
- Strengthen social support and social housing provision and prioritise families with children in accessing housing.

Further measures to address social exclusion and to break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage

Further support for parents of chronically ill children and of children with disabilities. Increase the minimum wage and strengthen benefits for parents to be able to provide for their children.

Timeline of actions. What should be prioritised?

As housing is the biggest challenge in Iceland it should be prioritised.



Northern Ireland

Summary

Over the last decade, cuts and restrictions to the social security system in Northern Ireland have led to an increase in child poverty: 100.000 children are growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Children in single parent families, with two or more siblings, children under 5 years and children from black ethnic minorities are at great risk. Homeless children or children in temporary accommodation, Roma children, asylum seekers and children in migrant families without permanent leave to remain, are not included in official statistics but are likely to be at greater risk of poverty or social exclusion. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, children already faced many struggles in accessing ECEC and education, due to limited provision of free ECEC from birth and costs for education of more than £1.200 per year for items such as transport, registration fees, equipment, food, and trips. Furthermore, children and their families face difficulties when accessing specialised health professionals and mental health support is limited. The number of children growing up homeless or in temporary accommodation has been on the rise during the last years due to the shortage of public housing and increase in rents. Save the Children has been working in Northern Ireland for over 60 years. In the last year, Save the Children supported over 4.000 children directly, and campaigned to secure increased financial

Key facts

23%

In 2020, over 100.000 children in Northern Ireland (23%) were at risk of poverty

3% increase

Although official statistics for 2021 have not published yet, Save the Children expects that child poverty will rise from 23% to at least 26%.

2 in 3

Children from black ethnic communities are far more vulnerable to poverty in Northern Ireland, with two in three (66%) growing up in poverty, almost three times the national figure, and far higher than any other community.

support for children in the social security system. Save the Children is calling on the Northern Irish Executive to commit to ambitious child poverty reduction targets and dedicated investment as part of its ten-year Anti-Poverty Strategy to tackle poverty.

National updates

CHILD POVERTY IN NORTHERN IRELAND



In 2020, over 100.000 children in Northern Ireland (23%) were at risk of poverty³¹².

Poverty in Northern Ireland is defined in financial terms, when a child's household income falls below 60% of the median income, after essential costs for housing are accounted for.

Although Northern Ireland has not yet published its official data for 2021, Save the Children expects that child poverty will rise by at least 3 percentage points in the coming years, from 23% to 26%.

The major driver of child poverty in Northern Ireland has to do with cuts and restrictions to the social security system. In the last decade, families have faced cuts in benefits equivalent to about 10% of their incomes, while restrictions, such as the two-child limit policy which affects families with three or more children, and the policy of no recourse to public funds, which affects migrants with no permanent leave to remain, severely limit financial support. A planned cut in autumn 2021 could plunge a further 11.000 children into poverty.

CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN NORTHERN IRELAND



The following groups of children are most vulnerable to poverty in Northern Ireland:

- Children in particular types of families, like single parent families (one in three, or 36%), families with young children (one

in four, or 27%), and families with three or more children (one in three, or 31%) are more vulnerable than other groups of children.

- Children from black ethnic communities are far more vulnerable to poverty in Northern Ireland, with two in three (66%) growing up in poverty, almost three times the national figure, and far higher than any other community.

However, there are gaps in the data since there are no official statistics on poverty among children who are homeless or in temporary accommodation, traveller or Roma children, asylum seekers and children in migrant families without permanent leave to remain. Save the Children is aware that these groups are far more likely to be at risk of poverty or exclusion as a result of policy or economic conditions, even if they are not included in national data.

CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO SERVICES AS DESCRIBED IN THE CHILD GUARANTEE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

Early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, and a healthy meal each school day

Effective and free access to early childhood education and care (ECEC)



The major challenge facing children is that there is no provision of free, readily available, accessible, and good quality early childhood education and care provision for children from birth. There is no national strategy nor legislation in place to address this, while what does exist is a patch work of support: 12.5 free hours of preschool provision, during term time, in the year before starting school, specialist centre-based support (Sure Start) in areas with high levels of disadvantage, and

targeted funding supports for vulnerable or at risk groups of children (e.g. the “Toybox” programme for Traveller children to access early childhood education and care). These services have had some success in enabling access to early childhood education and care for some children, but the cost and availability of early childhood education and care places remain a significant barrier to access from birth.

The government’s response and the use of funds



Early childhood education and care and schools were closed during March 2020 and September 2020 and between January 2021 and April 2021. Provision was made for children of key workers and children with special educational needs to attend settings, which helped to ensure that some groups of children continued to receive direct support during the pandemic. The government also provided additional funding for childcare settings to help cover financial shortfalls caused by having to close during lockdowns.

Effective and free access to education



Education is free in Northern Ireland, but children and their families can face additional costs of more than £1,200 per year per child for items such as uniforms, transport, registration fees, equipment, food and trips. There are grants for school uniforms, transport, and free school meals for children in receipt of support in the social security system, but the level of support has not kept up with inflation in recent years, meaning that families face shortfalls.

Some children also face additional challenges:

- Traveller or Roma children are both less likely to attend school compared to other children and are also far more likely to be excluded from school (an ‘exclusion’ is when a headteacher asks a child not to attend school) when they do attend school.
- An increasing number of children with disabilities are unable to attend

mainstream education because of a lack of available support in schools, while, even when they do, there is a practice of ‘informal exclusions’ where children are taught part-time.

- Refugee and asylum-seeking children who are moved between accommodations as their applications process can face severe disruptions to accessing their education, with limited and often ad-hoc support for their needs in school.

Effective and free access to one healthy meal each school day

There is a system of free school meals in Northern Ireland, which provides around 100,000 children each year from families who are in receipt of social security support and whose parents earn below £14,000 per year, with a free meal, typically a lunch, during the school day. However, analysis suggests that one in four children in poverty cannot access support because they do not meet the criteria. The scheme also does not provide support outside of term time.

The government’s response and the use of funds:



During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government provided laptops and vouchers for disadvantaged families of school aged children to access online education, and families eligible for free school meals were paid directly to help them with the cost of food.

However, there is limited evidence of how effective the government’s rollout of laptops and vouchers were in supporting children’s access to education, while little support was offered for children’s early learning, with no formal policies or resources provided for children aged 0 to 4. Despite the measures the government implemented, it is likely that the pandemic will lead to a widening of attainment gaps in education between children in need and their peers.

When it comes to children's access to leisure activities, the government's Children and Young People's Strategy commits to ensuring that all children and young people can enjoy play and leisure, but there is no funding, nor existing national programmes to ensure that this happens.

Healthcare



Effective and free access to quality healthcare

The National Health Service provides free health care to all children, but children face significant challenges to accessing health services because of long waiting lists, particularly where they need specialist support, alongside facing issues with the adequacy of available services, especially for children with disabilities or who have special educational needs.

There are also longstanding challenges with children's access to mental health services, including a lack of adequate funding, provision, and availability of support for children around the country. Children face long waiting times, limited access to services in some parts of the country, and a lack of awareness about services, leading to inappropriate or rejected referrals. Children continue to face inter-generational trauma as a result of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Policies and interventions have been agreed by previous governments, but funding or support has never been implemented. As a result, children still do not have adequate support to access specialist mental health services to deal with the trauma caused by the conflict.

The government's response and the use of funds



Healthcare access was severely curtailed, particularly during the first lockdown, during the pandemic, but the government took measures to move services online, including

transferring mental health services online and extending provision to evening and weekend clinics.

The transfer for health, particularly mental health services online did help widen access to services for children. However, waiting lists have grown during the pandemic, with increasing numbers of children facing increasingly long waits for assessment and support, and children face ongoing challenges with accessing primary care services.

Healthy nutrition



Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

One in five children in poverty face challenges with accessing food. In term time, Free School Meals provides a single meal a day to children from disadvantaged backgrounds to 100,000 children, but one in four children in poverty are not eligible for support because they do not meet the criteria. Outside of term time, children and families struggle to secure sufficient and healthy meals because of rising food costs and because of reductions in support in the social security system. Foodbank use has increased in recent years among children.

The government's response and the use of funds:



The government provided direct payments to families with children eligible for Free School Meals to support families with the cost of meals while children were at home during lockdowns. This support was provided both in and out of term time. The direct payment of free school meals was a positive step and helped ensure children and families received additional financial resources to access food during the pandemic.

Adequate housing



Effective access to adequate housing

Around 2.800 children were homeless or in temporary accommodation in the latest government statistics in Northern Ireland. These figures have risen in recent years, with the youngest children most likely to be homeless or in temporary accommodation. Children and their families face challenges to accessing housing because of a shortage of public housing and because of year on-year increases in the cost of private accommodation, which can be beyond the finances of families of vulnerable children. Homeless or in temporary accommodation children and their families also face challenges with accessing adequate housing. There is currently no legal requirement on the length of stay in temporary accommodation. This means that children can face prolonged periods of placements in inappropriate, temporary accommodation, such as a hostel or a hotel, without access to housing.

The government's response and use of funds



The current benefit system includes housing benefits to support families with housing costs. But, over the last decade, the level of support has not kept up with rising housing costs, and families can still struggle to afford housing. The design of the benefit system also creates challenges for children; families have to wait five or more weeks before they receive support when they first apply for benefits, and they face a similar time delay if their circumstances change, as a result, for example, of the end of a parental relationship, a new job, or even moving housing. These waiting periods can leave parents facing significant financial shortfalls, lead to families falling into debt and

arrears with landlords, and has resulted in families not being able to move into homes or even being evicted from homes. The government's 'no recourse to public funds' policy also means that some children – such as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and migrant children without permanent leave to remain - have no entitlement to the majority of benefits, including housing benefit.

A UK wide eviction ban was put in place at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic alongside a temporary uplift to benefit payments, and an additional uplift to housing benefit, to support families with the cost of living and housing during the pandemic.

The eviction ban prevented children and their families from being made homeless during the pandemic, while the additional uplifts to benefits supported families during the pandemic. However, as the ban comes to an end, and financial support is withdrawn, there's a real risk that, without further support, an increasing number of children will be made homeless.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCEDURES



In 2021 the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly was formed to discuss and make recommendations on government policy. The formation of the Youth Assembly is a welcome step forward, and supplements existing participatory bodies, such as the Belfast City Youth Forum and the Children's Commissioner's Children and Young People Panel, and individual consultations with children and young people as part of the development of specific government strategies on poverty and inclusion.



SAVE THE CHILDREN UNITED KINGDOM

Save the Children UK has been working in Northern Ireland for over 60 years. In the last year Save the Children supported over 4,000 children in Northern Ireland through its programmes.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Save the Children's "Building Blocks" programme provides children and their families with educational resources and support to help them with their learning in the early years.

EDUCATION

Save the Children's "Families Connect" programme works with families in schools to help parents build confidence and skills to support their children's learning in the early years. In addition, the "Early Learning Communities" programme works with

partners in local areas to encourage service integration to support children's learning and development.

SAVE THE CHILDREN NORTHERN IRELAND'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Save the Children shifted its programmatic approach to focus on delivering a new programme to respond to children's needs – the Emergency Response Grants. Save the Children worked with community partners to identify children in crisis situations. It provided their families with cash vouchers that they could use to buy household items or goods, as well as educational resources to help support their children's learning at home.

Though the programme Save the Children has supported over 4.000 children through the Emergency Grants programme, with over £670.000 distributed directly to families. The programme helped families to cover the costs of essentials like food or clothing, with basics like beds or cookers, during the pandemic, as well as receiving educational resources for learning at home while educational settings were closed during the pandemic.

ADVOCACY WORK

Our advocacy work in Northern Ireland is focused on child poverty. It aims to secure increased funding in the social security system to tackle the causes of child poverty, while also securing support for children to access essential services like early education, health, and housing. We work in coalitions like the Child Poverty Alliance, in partnership with other organisations like the Child Poverty Action Group, and with children and their families to secure change.



Recommendations towards national decision makers to address child poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland

The targeted categories of children in need to be reached

- Children in single parent families, under 5 years old, and in large families.
- Children who are homeless or in temporary accommodation.
- Children from black ethnic communities.
- Traveller or Roma children.
- Asylum seekers, and children in migrant families without permanent leave to remain.

Effective and free access to ECEC

- The government should publish its Childcare Strategy, detailing how it will expand free provision for children beyond the current one-year entitlement.
- Funding to cover upfront childcare costs in Universal Credit should be made permanent to help families cover the cost of early education and childcare.

Effective and free access to school based, sport, leisure and cultural activities

- The government should implement the measures outlined in the Fair Start report³¹³ to help tackle educational disadvantage in Northern Ireland.
- It should conduct a review of Free School Meal to cover the criteria used, provision outside of term time and coverage.

Effective and free access to quality healthcare

Given the current pressure on the system, and the impact that this is having on children's access to services, there is a need to bring forward plans to increase funding for children's health and mental health services.

Effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition

The government should conduct a review for the provision of free school meals, including reviewing the eligibility criteria to ensure that all children in poverty receive support, and examining the potential of expanding support outside of term time.

Effective access to adequate housing

The government should include housing as a priority outcome in the Programme for Government and carry out a review existing policy for children who are homeless or in temporary accommodation

Further measures to address social exclusion and to break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage

Save the Children UK is calling on the Northern Irish Executive to commit to ambitious child poverty reduction targets as part of the upcoming ten-year Anti-Poverty Strategy. The strategy should also include investment for measures, like a new Northern Irish Child Payment and the removal of the two-child limit, that can help secure a sustained reduction in child poverty in Northern Ireland.

Timeline of actions. What should be prioritised?

The Northern Irish Executive should prioritise publishing the Anti-Poverty Strategy in 2021 with investment and action plans that set out how it will meet the targets in the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

3 Conclusions and recommendations





Children creating art pieces for a small art exhibition in one of the Child Friendly Spaces run by Save the Children.

Photo: Anna Pantelia / Save the Children

Conclusions and Recommendations for the successful implementation of the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation and child poverty reduction policies and measures³¹⁴

This report clearly shows that children growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion are deprived of having the same opportunities as their peers and of reaching their full potential.

Millions of children in Europe grow up without their basic rights being met. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the difficult situation these children were already in and led to even more children growing up in poverty.

The EU Child Guarantee Council Recommendation as well as the proper allocation and use of EU funds can significantly support these children in having a future free of poverty and disadvantage.

To ensure that the EU Child Guarantee Council Recommendation as well as child poverty reduction measures are successful, Save the Children calls on the European Commission to provide full support to the EU Member States and the Western Balkan countries in implementing the Recommendation and relevant child poverty reduction measures and on EU and national decision makers to:

1 Take a comprehensive approach in addressing child poverty and social exclusion.

Child poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon that can be only addressed by taking a comprehensive approach.

For example, as has been clear from this report, children growing up in families belonging to ethnic minorities or migrant families, children growing up in single parent or large families, children with disabilities and children from low income working families are among the most discriminated against. This means that most often these children do not have equal access to key services, not least because they grow up in families where their parents and carers are not supported or they do not have the same opportunities to enter the labour market, to have decent jobs or to access benefits (e.g., housing benefits) allowing them to provide for their children. Women are often left outside the labour market either due to limited and inflexible employment opportunities or due to the limited availability or extra costs of childcare and education, leaving them with no other option than staying at home and taking care of their children. These issues need to be addressed in policies aimed at tackling child poverty.

The need for a comprehensive approach is already acknowledged in the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation which calls on EU Member States to include in their national

Child Guarantee Action Plans measures to address child social exclusion and to break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage, to ensure adequate policies and resources, to support measures for parents or guardians and to provide income support to families and households, so that financial barriers do not prevent children from accessing quality services.

Save the Children strongly supports this suggestion and calls on the EU- and the non-EU Member States to take a comprehensive approach in tackling child poverty through a variety of short-term and long-term social protection measures supporting children and their families in having better livelihoods.

To do so, it is important that the measures included in the Child Guarantee Action Plans and child poverty reduction measures are aligned and feed into the countries' overall strategies for poverty reduction ensuring that they are more responsive to shocks and crises.

When it comes to parents' access to resources, Save the Children calls on national decision makers to include in the Child Guarantee Action Plans investments and policies related to parents' support which will enable them to successfully fulfil their caregiving role.

These investments shall include measures that : address gender inequalities

- enable the adaptation or reduction of working hours of both parents in a caregiving role,
- support parents' access to the labour market in decent jobs to tackle in-work poverty
- support families in need through efficient benefits and tax deductions for families with children in need.

In addition, Save the Children is encouraging national decision makers to identify measures that will enhance the coverage of existing child benefits and progress towards the realisation of universal child benefits (UCBs) and universal access of children to key service areas. Universality can have substantial returns

on investment as it allows all children – no matter their background – to have the same opportunities to access services and benefit from them equally without being discriminated against or stigmatised.

2 Ensure the allocation of adequate national and EU financial resources.

All child poverty reduction measures should be accompanied by adequate financial resources. The enabling framework of the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation calls on the EU Member States to use national and EU funds to implement the Recommendation and to finance the provisions included in the national action plans.

Although this is an important provision and a step in the right direction, the findings in this report show that not all EU Member States plan to use funds for child poverty reduction measures. For example, Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands have failed to include provisions related to the implementation of the Child Guarantee in their ESF+ programmes as they consider child poverty reduction entirely linked to parents' access to the labour market. In addition, few EU Member States (mainly in Eastern and Southern European countries) have included child poverty reduction measures in their NRRPs.

Save the Children calls on EU Member States to allocate adequate financial resources both from EU funding instruments and from national budgets to secure children's equal access to quality and inclusive services. The allocation of resources should be clearly outlined in the Child Guarantee Action Plans as well as in the Member States' plans for the long term investment in sustainable reforms.

The European Commission should also encourage EU Member States and Western Balkan States to allocate and use EU funds for this purpose.

3 Take into account and reflect the needs of children in vulnerable situations

To ensure that investments and measures target those most in need, national decision makers must consult children in need as well as relevant civil society organisations. As demonstrated in this report there are some positive examples of meaningful consultation of children and civil society, but these remain the exception rather than the norm. For example, only a few Save the Children members were consulted on the design of the NRRPs. Furthermore, no country has fully embedded child participation in their national decision-making procedures.

To do so, States should put in place or strengthen

Save the Children calls on EU and non-EU Member States to strengthen the participation of civil society as well as children and parents in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Child Guarantee Action Plans, EU funding allocations and child poverty reduction measures.

structures at national, regional and local level to ensure the meaningful participation of all stakeholders. In terms of process, the Child Guarantee Coordinator should guarantee transparent and inclusive processes linking up with the EU reporting procedures. Both civil society and children should be made aware of the consultation process and receive relevant documents or information well in advance. In the case of children, these documents should be provided in a child friendly version. The consultations should take place (where possible) in person, on a regular basis and in a non-ad-hoc manner. The views of the consultees should be considered, and civil society and children must be informed about the outcomes of the consultations. Both children and civil society should also be part of the bi-annual reporting that EU Member States will be requested to do as part of the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation.

By securing proper consultations, national decision makers will also guarantee that the planned measures and investments will benefit those in most need. Furthermore, national decision makers should identify ways of providing support to those in vulnerable situations without stigmatising them and ensuring the full use of the targeted measures.

Meaningful child participation in decision-making procedures should also take place in countries outside the EU. It is a positive sign to observe that Iceland, Northern Ireland, Albania and Kosovo already have structures in place which promote children's participation in policy-making processes. These positive examples should be strengthened and amplified across Europe.

Finally, Save the Children also calls on the European Commission to ensure that children's voices are heard in EU decision-making processes through the annual Child Rights Forum as well as the anticipated Child Participation Platform.

4 Develop disaggregated indicators and collect appropriate data to monitor the implementation of the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation.

At present, national statistical authorities do not collect and cannot provide available disaggregated data relating specifically to the groups of children in need as identified in the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation. Consequently, those children do not feature in the data and it is therefore not possible to analyse or monitor the impact of poverty or child poverty reduction measures on children in most need.

Save the Children calls on EU and non-EU Member States to develop disaggregated indicators and to collect and publish disaggregated data on the groups of children most in need and on their access to key service areas covered in the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation.

The European Commission should also ensure the proper monitoring of the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation and EU funding allocation and that the EU Member States remain committed and accountable on their pledge to implement the Child Guarantee lifting at least 5 million children out of poverty by 2030.

To do so, the European Commission in partnership with Eurostat should step up efforts to collect disaggregated data and develop a proper monitoring system that will feed into the European Semester cycle. The Commission must ensure that those Member States which do not meet their obligations are provided with country-specific recommendations. The monitoring systems used in EU Member States and the one used by the European Commission should be aligned.

5 **Ensure coordination between local, regional and national authorities and bodies.**

The national Child Guarantee Action Plans will include measures related to early childhood education and care, education, healthcare, nutrition and housing as well as measures to address social exclusion delivered by different authorities and bodies at national, regional and local level. It is crucial that each country appoints one Ministry to be responsible for the coordination of the Child Guarantee and that the Child Guarantee

Coordinator sits in the coordinating ministry. However, all relevant ministries and authorities should be consulted and agree on the measures included in each country's Action Plan. They should also commit and be held accountable for the delivery of the Plan on issues and actions within their competence.

This coordination mechanism should also be in place for countries outside the EU for the successful delivery of child poverty reduction policies.

6 **Use the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation as a model framework for child poverty reduction policies in non-EU Member States.**

The Child Guarantee Council Recommendation has indeed the potential to make a significant difference in the lives of children growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU.

Therefore Save the Children strongly believes that the Child Guarantee should be copied by non-EU Member States and made the basis for their national child poverty reduction policies.

This is even more relevant for the Western Balkans as child poverty reduction is a key principle (11) of the EPSR and the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation is a deliverable under 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.

Annex: Acronyms

ADHD: Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
AMIF: Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
AROP: At risk of poverty
AROPE: At risk of poverty or social exclusion
BMFSFJ: German acronym for the Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth
CESCR: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CEF: Connecting Europe Facility
CG: Child Guarantee
COA: Danish acronym for the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers
CSAM: Child Sexual Abuse Material
CSO: Civil Society Organisation
CWD: Children with Disabilities
DRR: Disaster Risk Reduction
EC: European Commission
ECEC: Early Childhood Education and Care
ECHO: European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EEA: European Economic Area
EPSR: European Pillar of Social Rights
ERDF: European Regional Development Fund
ESF: European Social Fund
ESF+: European Social Fund Plus
ETHOS: European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion
EU: European Union
FEAD: Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived
FSCG: Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee
GDP: Gross Domestic Product
HBSC: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children
HPV: Human Papillomavirus Vaccine
IDP: Internally Displaced Person
INSTAT: Albanian acronym for the National Statistic Service
INHOPE: International Association of Internet Hotlines
IPA: Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IPA II: Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance II (2014-2020)
IPA III: Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance III (2021-2027)
ISEE: Italian acronym for Indicator of the Equivalent Economic Situation
Iskr.: Icelandic Kronas
IT: Information Technology
LEA: Italian acronym for Essential Levels of Care
MED: Municipal Education Directorates
MES: Ministry of Education and Science

MICS: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MIS: Minimum Income Scheme
MIUR: Italian acronym for Ministry of Education, Universities and Research
MoE: Acronym for the Ministry of Education in Kosovo
MoH: Acronym for the Ministry of Health in Kosovo
MoHSP: Albanian acronym for the Ministry of Health and Social Protection
MS: Member States
MSW: Ministry of Social Welfare
MP: Member of Parliament
MUCF: Swedish acronym for the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society
NACR: National Agenda for Child Rights
NCDs: Non-Communicable Diseases
NGEU: Next Generation EU
NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation
NRRP: National Recovery and Resilience Plan
NPEI: National Plan for EU Integration
NPO: Dutch acronym for National Education Programme
NWB: North West Balkans
OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PET Pedagogical Evaluation Teams
PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment
PPE: Personal Protective Equipment
RAE: Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian
REACT-EU: Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe
RRF: Recovery and Resilience Facility
RRP: Recovery and Resilience Plan
SC: Save the Children
SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals
SIDA: Swedish International Development Agency
SpM: Speaking Minds
SSN: Italian acronym for National Health Service
STEA: Finnish acronym for Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations
STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TACSO: Technical Assistance to CSOs in the Western Balkans
TIMMS: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UCB: Universal Child Benefit
UCERF Utrecht Center for European Research into Family Law
UN: United Nations
UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNCRPD: Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
VAT: Value-Added Tax
VET: Vocational Education and Training
WHO: World Health Organisation
Wmo: Dutch acronym for the Social Support Act 2015

Endnotes

- 1 <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9106-2021-INIT/en/pdf>
- 2 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1057/oj>
- 3 https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en
- 4 When referring to non-EU Member States, we refer to countries in Europe, but non-members of the European Union.
- 5 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm040/default/table?lang=en>
- 6 Children at Risk of Child Poverty and Social Exclusion (AROPE)
- 7 Germany, Romania, Spain, Netherlands, Finland
- 8 Germany, Romania, Spain, Netherlands, Finland, Lithuania, Denmark, Sweden
- 9 The percentages refer to the groups of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion as presented in the pages from 14 countries in focus
- 10 ECEC refers to “any regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to compulsory primary school age – regardless of the setting, funding, opening hours or programme content – and includes centre and family day-care; privately and publicly funded provision; pre-school and pre-primary provision European Commission (2014). “Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Report of the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care under the auspices of the European Commission”, Brussels: European Commission.
- 11 Commission staff working document accompanying the document proposal for a council recommendation on high Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems COM (2018) 271 final
- 12 Lazzari, A. and Vandebroek, M. (2012). Literature Review of the Participation of Disadvantaged Children and families in ECEC Services in Europe. In J. Bennett (ed.), Early childhood education and care (ECEC) for children from disadvantaged backgrounds: Findings from a European literature review and two case studies, Study commissioned by the Directorate general for Education and Culture. Brussels: European Commission, in Guio, A.-C., Frazer, H. and Marlier, E. (eds) (2021). “Study on the economic implementing framework of a possible EU Child Guarantee scheme including its financial foundation”, Second phase of the Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG2): Final Report, Brussels: European Commission.
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- 14 Van Lancker, W. and Ghysels, J. (2016). Explaining patterns of inequality in childcare service use across 31 developed economies: A welfare state perspective. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 1(28) in Guio, A.-C., Frazer, H. and Marlier, E. (eds) (2021). “Study on the economic implementing framework of a possible EU Child Guarantee scheme including its financial foundation”, Second phase of the Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG2): Final Report, Brussels: European Commission.
- 15 As long as they can be assumed to have the “habitual residence” status in Germany.
- 16 https://www.diw.de/de/diw_01.c.694645.de/publikationen/wochenberichte/2019_44_1/kita-besuch_von_kindern_aus_nach_deutschland_gefluechteten_familien_verbessert_integration_ihrer_muetter.html

- 17 Supplementary services include educational services addressed to babies and toddlers between 3 and 36 months.
- 18 Gute-KiTa-Gesetz
- 19 Only 26% of children under three years in the lowest income quintile were enrolled versus 63% in the wealthiest one. Calculations from EU-SILC data. Save the Children (2019). Donde todo empieza: educación infantil de 0 a 3 años para igualar oportunidades. https://www.savethechildren.es/sites/default/files/imce/donde_todo_empez_a_0.pdf
- 20 Differences among regions went from 18.1% in Ceuta to 55.9% in the Basque Country. (Ministerio de Educación y FP. Estadísticas de Educación)
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- 22 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32013H0112>
- 23 <https://www.ohchr.org/documents/professionalinterest/crc.pdf>
- 24 https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en
- 25 https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en#:~:text=The%20Digital%20Education%20Action%20Plan,cooperation%20at%20European%20level%20to%3A&text=make%20education%20and%20training%20systems%20fit%20for%20the%20digital%20age
- 26 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- 27 <https://ipaworld.org/childs-right-to-play/article-31/summary-gc17/>
- 28 Article 25(1) <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>
- 29 Article 24 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- 30 Paragraphs 22-24 of General Comment 14 <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4538838d0.pdf>
- 31 <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4538838d0.pdf>
- 32 Adapted from Guio, A.-C., Frazer, H. and Marlier, E. (eds) (2021). “Study on the economic implementing framework of a possible EU Child Guarantee scheme including its financial foundation”, Second phase of the Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG2): Final Report, Brussels: European Commission.
- 33 Early rehabilitation services for children with disabilities; physiotherapy, occupational therapy, game therapy, art therapy, speech therapist, mental health support, rehabilitation.
- 34 Article 27 of the UNCRC <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- 35 <https://www.who.int/health-topics/nutrition>
- 36 <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/nutrition/facts.htm>
- 37 <https://www.who.int/health-topics/nutrition>
- 38 The terms overweight and obesity refer to when a person is too heavy for his/her height. That person may be defined as having abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that may impair health. Body mass index (BMI) is a simple index of weight-for-height that is commonly used to classify overweight and obesity in adults. A BMI greater than or equal to 25 is overweight. A BMI greater than or equal to 30 is obesity. This form of malnutrition results from expending too few calories for the amount consumed,

and increases the risk of non-communicable disease later in life. <http://www.unicef.org/progressforchildren/2006n4/hungerdefinition>

39 40.6% of children in Spain have weight issues (=23,3% are overweight+17,3% are obese Agencia Española de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutrición (AESAN), Estudio ALADINO sobre la alimentación, actividad física, desarrollo infantil y obesidad en España 2019, Octubre 2020

40 Stunting refers to a child who is too short for his or her age. Stunting is the failure to grow both physically and cognitively and is the result of chronic or recurrent malnutrition. It can also be referred to as 'chronic malnutrition'. The effects of stunting often last a lifetime. <http://www.who.int/>

41 Article 27 of the UNCRC <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

42 Eurocities (2020) Fighting child poverty in European cities. Lessons from cities for the EU Child Guarantee. https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Eurocities-report-on-fighting-child-poverty-in-European-cities_Dec-2020.pdf

43 Ibidem

44 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

45 Save the Children, child participation: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/our-thematic-areas/cross-thematic-areas/child-participation>

46 Article 9 of the ESF+ regulation: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1057/oj>

47 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R0241>

48 However, according to Save the Children Italy's estimates, the resources allocated will not be sufficient to reach the coverage target of 33% nationwide.

49 The Netherlands had not submitted the NRRP while these lines were written

50 The views shared in this table only concern the participation of Save the Children members in the NRRP consultations and not the consultations of the entire civil society in each country.

51 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm040/default/table?lang=en>

52 The Danish grade system consists of 7 grades ranging from -3 to 12, where grade 2 is given for the minimal acceptable performance.

53 So called 'leisure pass'

54 https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161935/VN_2019_33.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

55 Data from Statistics Sweden available at https://www.scb.se/contentassets/ed22f1c0a03e4ee199bad44cc32162e0/le0102_2020a01_br_be51br2003.pdf?fbclid=IwAR06jo7fNcVInVZq8zsWO2kfxWwUn0VxKh-9wM0rzYtDC-m1z2Siil5ca0

56 Svensson, M. & Vuleta, D. (2021). Preliminära resultat. Webbenkätundersökning: Privatekonomins utveckling under Covid-19 pandemin. Available at: <https://mb.cision.com/Public/2093/3302109/8f07609977f52dca.pdf>

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- 58 Statistics Sweden 2020, Development for temporary employees 2005-2019 page 1 https://www.scb.se/contentassets/2a10e4f48c214704810ca7dbf06ad237/am0401_2020a01_sm_am110sm2001.pdf
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- 61 OECD (2015). Improving schools in Sweden: An OECD perspective. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/Improving-Schools-in-Sweden.pdf>
- 62 Ambrose 2017
- 63 Bunar 2017
- 64 Slutbetänkande av utredningen om elevers möjligheter att nå kunskapskraven SOU 2021: 11 page 42
- 65 Although there are no children living in the street, there is anecdotal evidence of families with children sleeping in public spaces, for example on night busses, communal laundry rooms, night open restaurants and in the airport. It is more common that they double up with family or friends in small flats or that they live as lodgers (i.e., rent a room in a shared house). Some families are put up temporarily by the municipality in hostels, hotels or on campsites. The problem is that these arrangements tend to be short-term and there is no direct pathway to more secure housing. Some families are placed in self-contained flats but without a secure tenancy. For more details, see Samzelius, T (2020). A vicious circle of silent exclusion: Family homelessness and poverty in Sweden from a single-mother perspective. Malmö University.
- 66 Persson, S (2015) En likvärdig förskola för alla barn – innebörder och indikatorer <https://www.vr.se/>
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- 68 <https://www.mucof.se/publikationer/ungars-ratt-till-en-meningsfull-fritid-tillgang-trygghet-och-hinder>
- 69 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm040/default/table?lang=en>
- 70 291_2020_BST_Facsheet_Kinderarmut_SGB-II_Daten_ID967.pdf (bertelsmann-stiftung.de) – Bertelsmann Foundation, 2020 The poverty rate used by the Bertelsmann foundation is more specific as it is based on a combined poverty measurement taking into account children from families whose income is less than 60 percent of the median income of all households. And it includes adolescents in receipt of basic income support whose families receive Hartz IV.
- 71 Ibidem
- 72 Bericht: Kinder - unsere Zukunft! (unicef.de)
- 73 291_2020_BST_Facsheet_Kinderarmut_SGB-II_Daten_ID967.pdf (bertelsmann-stiftung.de)
- 74 Sozialgesetzbuch II
- 75 Gute-KiTa-Gesetz
- 76 BMEL - Kita und Schule - Neue Studie: Schuessen nach Qualitätsstandards kaum teurer
- 77 Entitlement to the child bonus depends on the eligibility criteria for child benefits: the child bonus 2021 is paid to children for whom

there is or was an entitlement to child benefit for at least one month in 2021. The child bonus is also paid to children for whom in May 2021 (i) are no longer entitled to child benefit (for example: the child completed his or her education in March); (ii) are not yet entitled to child benefit (example: the child is not born until December).

78 Social background has a decisive influence on the life situation of children in Germany - Statistisches Bundesamt (destatis.de)

79 Health-Profile-Germany-Eng.pdf (who.int)

80 They collect qualitatively good food that would otherwise end up in the garbage and distribute it for free or a symbolic amount to socially and economically disadvantaged people.

81 On behalf of the German Federal Ministry of Nutrition, the German Nutrition Society (DGE) has developed quality standards for school meals. (DGE) has developed quality standards for school catering and for catering in daycare centers. The networking centers support schools and daycare centers in implementing these quality standards.

82 Bericht zur Konsultation des Bundes zum Europäischen Sozialfonds plus (esf.de)

83 German Recovery and Resilience Plan – (bundesfinanzministerium.de); germany-recovery-resilience-factsheet_en.pdf (europa.eu)

84 Kinderleicht Kinderstark | Save the Children Deutschland,

85 Reportage Raum Schaffen | Save the Children Deutschland

86 <https://www.savethechildren.de/informieren/einsatzorte/deutschland/bildung/leseasen/>

87 Gemeinsam für mehr Teilhabe

88 Save the Children works with KARUNA Sozialgenossenschaft to help them provide services, such as arranging safe places to sleep

and distributing emergency kits that include hygiene products.

89 Save the Children works with KARUNA Sozialgenossenschaft to help them provide services, such as arranging safe places to sleep and distributing emergency kits that include hygiene products.

90 The recommendations presented are to a large extent in line with the recommendations the National Coalition Germany formulates towards the German government in its report on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the children in Germany; Source: Die Umsetzung der UN-Kinderrechtskonvention in Deutschland – 5. / 6. Ergänzender Bericht an die Vereinten Nationen (umsetzung-der-kinderrechtskonvention.de)

91 Statistics Netherlands (2020), figures for 2019 (<https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2020/49/armoederisico-bevolking-in-2019-een-fractie-lager>)

92 The low-income threshold stands for a fixed amount of purchasing power and is adjusted annually for price developments. In 2019, the limit for a single person was € 1.090/month. For a couple without children was €1.530, and €2.080 for a couple with two children. For a single-parent family with two children, the limit was €1.660. The low-income threshold reflects a fixed amount of purchasing power over time. The limit is derived from the social assistance level for a single person in 1979, when this was the highest in purchasing power. For multi-person households, this limit has been adjusted to the size and composition of the household using equivalence factors. Since the low-income threshold is only indexed for price developments, this criterion is suited for comparisons over time. (<https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2020/49/armoederisico-bevolking-in-2019-een-fractie-lager>)

93 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm040/default/table?lang=en>

94 CBS (2019), Armoede en sociale uitsluiting 2019, Den Haag

- 95 Article 26 of the UNCRC says that children and young people should get financial support from the government when their parents or guardians are unable to provide them with a good enough standard of living by themselves.
- 96 CPB & SCP (2020), Kansrijk armoedebeleid, Den Haag.
- 97 <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2020/49/armoederisico-bevolking-in-2019-een-fractie-lager>)
- 98 Verwey-Jonker Instituut (2021), Kinderen missen recht op sociale zekerheid, Utrecht.
- 99 Pre-school education is provided at a pre-school facility, such as a pre-school or daycare center.
- 100 Buitenhek Management & Consult (2017), Monitor bereik van voorschoolse voorzieningen in 2017. Onderzoek naar effecten bestuurlijke afspraken aanbod voor alle peuters SZW en VNG.
- 101 Child Guarantee Feasibility Study (2018, p.76)
- 102 Inspectorate of Education (2020) De Staat van het Onderwijs 2020
- 103 Under Development Opportunities through Quality and Education Act (the OKE Act), Dutch municipalities are tasked with creating sufficient facilities for children at risk of delayed development in the Dutch language, but they can decide whether toddlers in asylum centres fall within this target group. Education Council (2017) Vluchtelingen en onderwijs: naar een efficiëntere organisatie, betere toegankelijkheid en hogere kwaliteit.
- 104 Sardes, Oberon, KBA Nijmegen (2021) Voorschoolse educatie voor peuters in de asielopvang
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- 107 Vrij Nederland (14-05-2020) Waarom asielzoekers minder psychische zorg krijgen dan andere Nederlanders <https://www.vn.nl/asielzoekers-minder-psychische-zorg/>
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- 112 <https://www.trouw.nl/economie/zo-kwam-nederland-aan-een-tekort-van-331-000-woningen~b04d8d53/>
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- 116 De Kinderombudsman (2020) Ongehoord! De onzichtbaarheid van kinderen bij huisvestingsproblemen; De Kinderombudsman (2020) Handreiking het beste besluit voor het kind bij huisvestingsproblemen <https://www.dekinderombudsman.nl/publicaties>
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- 122 Verwey-Jonker Instituut (2021), Kinderen missen zelfstandig recht op sociale zekerheid, Utrecht
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- 130 Supplementary services for early childhood include: educational services carried out in a home context ("Tagesmutter" or family nurseries), addressed to babies and toddlers between 3 and 36 months, conducted by the educational staff. The aim is to offer a family environment, also through greater flexibility in attendance, which can be differentiated for each child. Children may be accompanied by parents or family members, who participate in educational and social activities.
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- 132 [la-scuola-che-verra_0.pdf](#) (savethechildren.it)
- 133 ISTAT, Aspects of Daily Life (2019)
- 134 Report Save the Children Italy, Scuola di qualità, educazione in comunità: inclusione, protagonismo e lotta alla dispersione
- 135 "Tutti a scuola ... e i libri?", Save the Children Italia <https://s3.savethechildren.it/public/files/uploads/pubblicazioni/tutti-scuola-e-i-libri.pdf>

- 136 €411 million for the south
- 137 7th Report - Donate to Cure: Health Poverty and Medicine Donation, promoted by Banco Farmaceutico onlus Foundation and BF Research
- 138 Okkio alla salute 2019
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- 143 Report Save the Children Italy, Difendere i Diritti - Una comunità di pratica per la protezione legale dei minorenni a rischio di marginalità sociale. difendere-i-diritti_0.pdf (savethechildren.it)
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- 145 See the Manifesto with 5 key actions: 1. A network of educational services for zero-two-year-olds; 2. "Digital license" to all secondary school students; 3. "High educational density" in disadvantaged territories; 4. Beautiful, safe, sustainable schools; 5. Child Guarantee
- 146 <https://famiglia.governo.it/media/2436/rapporto-partecipazione-onia-2021.pdf>]<https://famiglia.governo.it/media/2436/rapporto-partecipazione-onia-2021.pdf>]
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- 148 https://s3.savethechildren.it/public/files/uploads/pubblicazioni/riscriviamo-il-futuro-una-rilevazione-sulla-poverta-educativa-digitale_0.p
- 149 www.arcipelagoeducativo.it
- 150 "Rewrite the Future" (Riscriviamo il Futuro) 6 months update "Children and adolescents at the time of Covid-19" a survey by IPSOS for Save the Children, January 5, 2021.
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physical therapy, home visits by licensed therapists for those immobile, shelter and psychological support for victims of violence, etc. Please refer to the Call for Proposals for a longer list of suggested interventions: <https://kosovo.savethechildren.net/sub-grants>

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