

# Breaking the cycle of child poverty

Strengthening the European Child Guarantee



**Child poverty in the EU remains persistently high.** Progress towards the 2030 objective of reducing the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 5 million has stalled. Nearly one in four children faces such risks <sup>(1)</sup>. At the same time, the rising cost of living continues to put pressure on family budgets. Child poverty is not only a question of disposable income; it also encompasses whether children's basic needs, such as food or housing, are met, and whether they have access to essential services for their wellbeing and development (education, healthcare, extra-curricular activities).

**1 in 4**

**Children in the EU  
is at risk of poverty**

**The consequences of growing up in poverty are severe and long-lasting – it nearly doubles the likelihood <sup>(2)</sup> of poverty in adulthood.** Children in poverty may face obstacles such as limited access to adequate nutrition <sup>(3)</sup>, healthcare, or adequate housing, as well as heightened exposure to violence and online risks. These disadvantages undermine children's rights, overall wellbeing, educational attainment and participation in society, and curtail future life and employment prospects. Child poverty also has a territorial dimension – regional and territorial disparities persist, unveiling stark differences behind national averages.

**Bold actions and robust investments are needed without delay.** The cost of inaction is high: child disadvantages and their lifelong effects are estimated to cost Europe 3.4% of GDP <sup>(4)</sup> each year. In contrast, investing in children from the earliest age onward yields a high rate of positive returns <sup>(5)</sup> for the children and their future development, and for our economy, social cohesion and democracy. Given tight budgetary constraints, it is therefore essential to assess and, where needed, rebalance how social and public spending is allocated across age groups in order to reduce child poverty and promote intergenerational fairness.

**The EU and Member States are implementing policies to combat child poverty,** also supported by EU funding. A cornerstone policy tool is the **European Child Guarantee** <sup>(6)</sup>. The Guarantee has improved access to services for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Since its adoption, the Guarantee has **delivered important gains**: early childhood education and care (ECEC) participation among children in poverty has risen by 2 percentage points; at least seven Member States have expanded school meal programmes; and 850,000 more children, 80% of them at risk of poverty, have gained access to school-based activities. These gains need to be scaled up by dismantling remaining access barriers in each of these areas.

**Cost of inaction  
is high: 3.4% GDP  
each year**

(1) [In 2025, 19.3 million children were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, representing 24.3% of children. Since 2019, the number of children facing such risk remained broadly stable. The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#) set the target to reduce by at least 15 million the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

(2) [Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages - statistics.](#)

(3) For example, food banks across the EU, once seen as emergency responders, are experiencing unprecedented demand, and becoming regular sources of support for an increasing number of working families. They report a surge in new users, including people who have never previously needed help and young adults.

(4) [The economic costs of childhood socio-economic disadvantage in European OECD countries | OECD.](#)

(5) Staff Working Document accompanying this Communication – SWD (2026) 772.

(6) The objective of the [European Child Guarantee](#) is to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing effective access of children in need to a set of key services: free early childhood education and care; free education (including school-based activities and at least one healthy meal each school day); free healthcare; healthy nutrition; adequate housing.

Yet, it cannot alone lead to exit from poverty. Many gaps in implementation persist, especially in the **outreach** to the most vulnerable and the **integration of (individual) services into broader coherent and consistent support systems** which address the root causes of child poverty and are able to bring these children out of their vulnerable situation. Insufficient funding available for and invested in the Guarantee also limits the positive impact of these measures.

**This Communication looks at the causes specific to child poverty, and the policy responses in place – what worked and what did not in the current policy setting, how can the European Child Guarantee be strengthened and what other policy measures can be taken at EU level to surpass the child poverty trap that persists today.** To achieve this, the Communication builds on three pillars:

**1.**

**The first pillar** focuses on the support given to the **households in which children in need live**. Securing households' access to adequate resources requires, first and foremost, removing barriers which hinder **adult members of the households** to access quality jobs and quality services, as well as ensuring robust social safety nets that prevent deprivation when earnings fall short.

**2.**

**The second pillar looks at the European Child Guarantee. This is the central tool implemented throughout the EU to provide access to services for children in need.** Access to essential services gives **children in need** a fair start in life, reducing the likelihood of poverty in adulthood. The European Child Guarantee has delivered progress in combating and preventing child poverty, but there is room for doing more and better. Its **implementation** must be strengthened. Its scope must take into account emerging challenges, linked for example to mental health pressures facing children and online and offline threats to their security and wellbeing. **Stronger outreach to children in need**, accompanied by mentoring, is needed to ensure that no child falls through the cracks of fragmented systems. In addition, **continuity of support from childhood into early adulthood** is essential to pave the way towards a secure transition into adult life.

**3.**

**The third pillar of this Communication addresses governance, monitoring and funding, crucial to increase the impact of actions tackling child poverty across the EU.** Delivery needs to be stepped up decisively. The EU and the Member States must mobilise all available funding to ensure that the cost-of-living pressures do not drive more families with children into poverty, and that those in need today are urgently helped. These investments must be sustained over the long term; one-off and siloed projects will not bring lasting impacts. This calls for a **stronger governance at all levels** and **robust monitoring** to allow for timely policy reaction at the right place at the right time.

The Staff Working Document accompanying this Communication provides an analysis of the implementation of the European Child Guarantee so far <sup>(?)</sup>.

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<sup>(?)</sup> Staff Working Document accompanying this Communication – SWD (2026) 772.



# **1. PREVENTING AND REDUCING POVERTY AMONG FAMILIES**

**Immediate actions are required to help vulnerable households meet the needs of their children.** Broad affordability challenges, such as housing costs, are addressed in the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy <sup>(8)</sup> and the proposal for a Council Recommendation on fighting housing exclusion <sup>(9)</sup>. This chapter looks at complementary additional measures.

## *Supporting parents' access to employment*

**Quality employment is the most effective pathway out of poverty.** Stable, well-paid jobs significantly reduce risks of poverty and precariousness: if employment rates were to reach the national targets <sup>(10)</sup> set by Member States, around 1.7 million children could be lifted out of poverty <sup>(11)</sup>. Yet, for many low-income parents, particularly mothers, access to jobs is hindered by barriers linked to care responsibilities, limiting their ability to take up employment, work sufficient hours, or progress in their careers. While the EU Work-Life Balance Directive <sup>(12)</sup> has taken important steps to support parents in striking the balance between care and work responsibilities, significant gaps remain.

**One of the barriers to activation and higher employment of parents refers to the lack of or insufficient access to early childhood education and care (ECEC).** Today, 75% of mothers with young children still cite family and care obligations as the primary reason for not being able to participate in the labour market <sup>(13)</sup>. Higher ECEC participation can increase parents' employment by up to 10 percentage points <sup>(14)</sup>. There is evidence that in the longer run, children at risk of poverty or social exclusion who attend ECEC perform better academically, are in better health and have stronger employment prospects. The EU already promotes the expansion of ECEC, and related targets have been set <sup>(15)</sup>.

**A key remaining barrier to higher employment participation of parents is the so-called 'childcare gap'.** For ECEC to be effective, it needs to be accessible, affordable and of sufficient quality. In terms of accessibility, not only do places need to be available, but other factors play a role as well – including the minimum age at which children can be enrolled in ECEC. The childcare gap refers to the period between the end of family-related leave and the point at which children can effectively access ECEC or compulsory schooling. In some Member States, this gap can last several years, leaving families without reliable childcare and limiting parents' ability to take up or remain in

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(8) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European Union's Anti-Poverty Strategy – COM (2026) 538.

(9) Proposal for a Council Recommendation on fighting housing exclusion – COM(2026) 540.

(10) [EU 2030 national targets](#).

(11) [JRC Publications Repository - Reducing AROPE in the EU: combining minimum income, minimum wages, and employment expansion](#).

(12) [Directive \(EU\) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers](#).

(13) [Employment and social developments in Europe 2025 - Publications Office of the EU](#).

(14) [JRC Publications Repository - The impact of alternative childcare policies on mothers' employment for selected EU countries](#).

(15) The target established in the European Education Area aims for at least 96 % of children aged between 3 and the compulsory primary school age to participate in ECEC by 2030. The 2022 Council Recommendation on the revised Barcelona targets for 2030 added that at least 45 % of children below the age of three should attend ECEC by 2030 (with derogations for Member States with particularly low participation rates) and that there should be no participation gap in ECEC between children at risk of poverty or social exclusion and the overall population of children.

employment. Only a limited number of Member States <sup>(16)</sup> ensure seamless coverage. Closing this gap, with a particular focus on the participation of vulnerable children, and addressing territorial disparities, should therefore be a priority.

In this respect, as announced in the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and in line with Article 154 (2) TFEU, the Commission will launch the first stage consultation of European social partners to obtain their views on the **possible direction of EU action to support the activation of persons excluded from the labour market, including through access to childcare.**

**Supporting parents' employment goes however beyond ECEC.** Member States should also implement measures to provide flexible, family-friendly work arrangements (e.g. remote work, predictable hours) and ensure that work pays, by tackling the specific disincentives parents face when entering, remaining or progressing in the labour market, including those related to the design and interaction of tax and benefits systems.

### *Robust safety nets for households with children at risk of poverty*

**Combining employment support with strong safety nets is essential to lift households with children out of poverty and prevent them from deprivation.** Income and in-kind support play a key role to ensure families can meet their basic needs when earnings are insufficient or unstable. Among these, in-cash benefits play a critical role (such as child allowances, child tax credits or income top-ups for households with children). These benefits must be used in the benefit of children and should lead to an improvement in their welfare, and support parents' integration into the labour market. All Member States provide some form of child or family benefits. These transfers reduce child poverty by 10.6 percentage points on average in the EU, also helping to cover essential costs and mitigate the impact of economic shocks. Effective implementation and close monitoring by the Member States, also to avoid fraud and detect potential misuse of child benefits for other objectives than their aims is key, so to ensure the strongest positive impact.

**The poverty-reducing impact of these benefits varies significantly across Member States,** ranging from 4 to 16 percentage points. This reflects differences in how benefits are targeted, their adequacy, and overall design. In 10 Member States, the poorest families with children receive less in absolute terms than wealthier households, often due to regressive benefit structures, or non-take-up, which can reach up to 30% <sup>(17)</sup>. Good practices include a more integrated design of benefits, automatic granting of benefits to reduce administrative barriers, as well as dedicated vouchers for specific goods and services, to avoid misuse and guarantee that benefits directly address children's needs. To enhance their impact, the Commission will actively support Member States in reforming their child benefit systems.

The Commission will adopt a **Commission Recommendation on Guidance for enhancing the efficiency of child-related benefit systems in addressing child poverty**, with a particular focus on their adequacy, coverage, use and take-up. Ways to ensure that benefits are used efficiently to meet the needs of the children they are intended for will also be addressed to maximise impact on their wellbeing.

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<sup>(16)</sup> Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Slovenia, and Sweden according to European Commission: European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Motiejūnaitė-Schulmeister, A., De Coster, I. and Noorani, S., Key data on early childhood education and care in Europe 2025 – Eurydice report, Birch, P.(editor), Publications Office of the European Union, 2025.

<sup>(17)</sup> Staff Working Document accompanying this Communication – SWD (2026) 772.

**Robust safety nets extend beyond income support.** Effective poverty prevention also requires broader family assistance, including debt counselling, peer-to-peer support and financial advisory services. To ensure a stronger impact, Member States should provide key complementary services, such as parenting support, encompassing resources, guidance and assistance aimed at helping parents foster their children’s wellbeing and development.



## **2. STRENGTHENING THE IMPACT OF THE EUROPEAN CHILD GUARANTEE**

**The European Child Guarantee covers the core services that any child needs to be able to grow, regardless of the vulnerability of their household – including housing, food, education, care. However,** with new challenges emerging, the Guarantee alone, and in its current shape, cannot **tackle all drivers of poverty and their implications.** First, the services and measures included under the European Child Guarantee differ considerably in scope and implementation, with some easier to implement than others. For example, ensuring access to healthy and nutritious school meals is a relatively straightforward measure, which often relies on an implementation framework based on procurement of food for schools. On the other hand, ensuring access to early childhood education and care, especially in the youngest age, requires for certain Member States significantly more complex reforms and larger investments.

Second, one-off interventions alone are unlikely to lead to a permanent change in the situation of the children in need, without policy measures connected and well-coordinated, and without ensuring a sustainable implementation in time. A **stronger, more integrated policy framework**, where the evolution of every child in need who benefits from the Guarantee can be tracked, is essential to improve results and impact. Third, since the Guarantee was adopted in 2021, new challenges for children have emerged, such as mental health pressures or higher risk of abuses and exposure to violence online and offline, pointing to the need of a strengthened framework at EU level to address these concerns.

Finally, the connection between the European Child Guarantee and broader policies is needed to ensure that teenagers and young adults, where possible, make a successful transition to the labour market. The goal is to empower them to secure stable employment and build an autonomous, dignified life. Addressing this transition effectively is central to breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty. These challenges demand actions extending beyond the scope of the European Child Guarantee, closely coordinated with it, to ensure child-centred protection and support, in due respect of children's rights.

### *Scaling up access to services*

**The European Child Guarantee has been a catalyst for change, mobilised by Member States to improve access for children in need to key services and goods.**

As regards ECEC, children in poverty still face a 15-percentage-point enrolment gap compared to their peers. Bridging it requires Member States to invest in ECEC capacity and workforce qualifications and reach out to marginalised families.

The Commission will support these efforts through a **Horizon Europe call for innovative solutions in ECEC (18) and present the Guidelines for curriculum and pedagogical development in ECEC.**

While expansions of school meals have improved food security, over 1 million children in the EU still lack daily access to fresh fruit and vegetables. The Commission will promote provision of school meals for children in need, working together with the School Meal Coalition<sup>19</sup>, through mutual learning and technical assistance. It will also leverage the **EU School Fruit, Vegetables and Milk Scheme** and the **ESF+** to extend quality nutrition support, under the new Multiannual Financial Framework.

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(18) [Horizon call “Tackling child poverty and ensuring disadvantaged children's access to Early Childhood Education and Care”](#).

(19) <https://schoolmealscoalition.org/>.

**Besides access to meals, healthy development also entails access to extra-curricular activities.** As many as 22.7% of children in poverty remain excluded from regular extra-curricular activities (compared to just 2.9% of their advantaged peers), often due to costs, transport barriers, or cultural stereotypes.

Addressing this issue requires targeted investments and partnerships, which the Commission aims to support with a dedicated **ESF+ call** for projects using culture and sport as tools for social inclusion. The **update to the Council Recommendation on health enhancing physical activity** can also address the role of physical activity in social inclusion policies.

While individual services covered by the Guarantee continue to expand, **a more integrated response is needed to address barriers that hinder equality of opportunity for children, particularly in education.** According to the latest PISA figures, 28.8% of disadvantaged children <sup>(20)</sup> underachieve in reading, maths and science, compared to just 4.7% of their more advantaged peers – a gap that has widened since the COVID pandemic. Scaling up access to ECEC, school meals and extracurricular activities has a proven positive impact on cognitive development, school engagement and academic achievement. Closing the achievement gap, however, demands a broader response that goes beyond service delivery. Member States should therefore implement comprehensive educational support to children in need, including homework assistance, targeted tutoring and individualised learning programmes, to ensure children in poverty receive help genuinely adapted to each child's needs and circumstances.

**Equally urgent is an integrated response to mental health pressures, disproportionately affecting children in poverty.** Since 2021, the share of children in poverty reporting 'very good health' has fallen by 5 percentage points, with mental health deteriorating fastest among the most vulnerable. Symptoms of depression and loneliness are rising. While an EU-wide inquiry will shed light on the impacts of social media and excessive screen times on these trends, addressing them already demands action on multiple fronts: preventive care, early intervention and cross-sectoral collaboration. Member States should also address shortages of specialised mental health staff and out-of-pocket costs for families in need, and strengthen outreach through closer cooperation between schools, social workers and healthcare providers.

To foster these efforts, the Commission supports UNICEF in piloting a **Toolkit for child and adolescent health and mental wellbeing promotion**, with a specific emphasis on access of most vulnerable children. The Commission will assist Member States and local authorities in implementing the Toolkit through mutual learning and dedicated workshops.

### *Strengthening implementation to ensure well targeted and impactful support until early adulthood*

To ensure the European Child Guarantee translates into lasting change, **its implementation must evolve from fragmented service delivery to a cohesive, child-centred system that wraps tailored support around every child in need, from early childhood through the critical transition to adulthood.** This requires three main shifts: first, individualised support and mentorship to address the unique barriers each child faces; second, new digital solutions to cut through bureaucratic silos and ensure children can easily benefit from support; and third, extended pathways into early adulthood, preventing vulnerable young people from falling through gaps between child and youth support schemes.

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<sup>(20)</sup> [ECG monitoring framework](#).

**Children in need require integrated, individualised support.** Input from children consulted under the EU Children's Participation Platform <sup>(21)</sup> highlighted what makes a difference: having a trusted adult – a parent, a teacher, a social worker, or a community leader – who can provide stability, emotional support, encouragement and practical advice, and detect signs of distress. This is especially crucial when such stability is missing at home. To ensure each child in need can build a path out of poverty, mentorship programmes and counselling interventions should be expanded to guide children in need through challenging moments of their life.

**The Commission will support the expansion of mentorship programmes for vulnerable children** through closer links between schools, social workers and local community actors. This will also be an integral part of the upcoming **Teachers' Agenda**. In addition, the Commission will work jointly with the European Committee of the Regions, by means of a Joint Action Plan, to enable, among others, the local authorities to ensure that each child in need receives such tailored counselling.

**Attention needs to be given to children facing intersecting forms of disadvantage.** For **children with disabilities**, this aligns with the Communication on enhancing the strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities up to 2030. All categories of children in need will be considered, including those in alternative care.

Regarding **Roma children**, for whom poverty, discrimination and segregation too often limit effective access to services, the Commission will prepare, together with stakeholders, a **Guidance focused on integrated measures bringing together outreach, mediation, inclusive education, family support and community-based interventions**.

More than 700,000 children are in alternative care in the EU, with nearly 40% of these children, notably with disabilities, remaining in residential institutions. **For young people leaving alternative care, homeless children and families with children in precarious housing situations**, the proposed **Council recommendation on fighting housing exclusion** will support preventive and integrated responses, including during the transition to adulthood.

**Children in need and their parents struggle too often to navigate the systems designed to help them.** This reflects fragmented delivery systems, with responsibilities spread across different authorities, levels of government and service providers, operating through separate procedures and access points. In practice, families often need to navigate multiple systems to understand their entitlements, identify the competent authority and activate access to the support <sup>(22)</sup>.

**The digital transformation of public services creates new opportunities to address these challenges.** The European Digital Identity framework offers secure, interoperable and privacy-preserving tools **to facilitate more efficient and impactful policy implementation**. These can allow relevant information to be verified and shared, while ensuring that accessible non-digital alternatives remain available where necessary. Digitalisation should be designed around the needs of children and families, with appropriate safeguards for children's rights, personal data protection, non-discrimination, accessibility and the prevention of stigmatisation and digital exclusion. Some Member States have already taken steps to place innovative solutions around this matter.

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<sup>(21)</sup> [Children's Voices on Poverty and Social Inclusion](#).

<sup>(22)</sup> According to some estimates, as many as one third of families and children (and even more in some other instances) do not take up essential support such as childcare, educational assistance, healthcare services and income support they are entitled to. Accompanying SWD (2026) 772.

The Commission will put forward a pilot programme to test and develop a new digital framework for a **European Child Guarantee Card**. The Card will have the objective to facilitate access to services and a coherent support for children in need, while maintaining the EU's rigorous safeguards for children's rights, personal data protection, non-discrimination and accessibility standards. The pilot will build on the European Digital Identity Wallet, as a first step towards a practical tool to improve delivery and coordination between relevant different entitlements, facilitate access and use of support services by children in need, increase visibility and improve transparency and monitoring by the competent authorities. The pilot marks an important step in strengthening Europe's innovation and simplification-friendly digital environment, with the goal of helping relevant authorities, service providers and local support professionals to design and test this type of digital solutions, ensuring that support reaches children in need in a timely, accessible, inclusive and non-stigmatising manner. As part of the pilot, Member States that would test <sup>(23)</sup> the design of these systems will benefit from enhanced support through technical assistance.

**Comprehensive and individualised support, where needed, cannot stop with the end of childhood.** Children growing up in poverty often face elevated risks at the threshold of adulthood: early school leaving, becoming NEETs (not in education, employment or training) and falling through the cracks of fragmented education, employment and social services. Such risks are reinforced by labour market structural developments and growing economic uncertainty, which make bridging the gap between child and youth support systems essential. In recent years, vulnerable youth have also increasingly been targeted by organised crime and terrorism, with almost one third of terrorist suspects in the EU under the age of 20 in 2024 <sup>(24)</sup>.

It is important to ensure that every child in need receives the necessary accompanying measures to transition into empowered adults, capable of earning their living and living a decent life. This requires earlier identification of those at risk, stronger coordination between services, and seamless referral mechanisms across education, employment and social protection services. At the EU level, programmes such as Erasmus+ contribute to supporting vulnerable young people by facilitating access to inclusive learning experiences. The Youth Guarantee provides support to NEETs accessing further education or the labour market.

**Stronger synergies between the European Child Guarantee and the Youth Guarantee will be drawn** to ensure a better continuity of support for children in need, from childhood to early adulthood, until they are settled in independent life. While the European Child Guarantee focuses on ensuring access to key services for children in need up to the age of 18, the Youth Guarantee aims to support young people aged 15–29, including NEETs, with a good quality offer of employment, education, traineeship or apprenticeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education. However, the reach of these instruments remains uneven: coverage gaps persist, in particular for young people facing multiple disadvantages, and administrative fragmentation between national services and across levels of governance continues to limit their effectiveness.

The Commission will develop a **Toolkit to help Member States strengthen the links between the European Child Guarantee and the Youth Guarantee**, with a view to ensuring individualised, continuous support from childhood into early adulthood. It will set out practical ways for Member States to use EU funding, mentoring, outreach and other support measures, and to develop integrated pathways for children and young people in need. These pathways should support their transition into

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<sup>(23)</sup> Member States will test the card on a voluntary basis.

<sup>(24)</sup> [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions ProtectEU: Agenda to prevent and counter terrorism - COM/2026/101 final.](#)

education, training or employment, while reducing the risk of disengagement and falling into a NEET situation.

In addition, to showcase this approach, the Commission will further help Member States to **address disadvantages experienced by young Roma people while entering the labour market within a dedicated ESF+ call for projects.**

### *Protecting vulnerable children from increased threats to safety*

**The safety of children, both online and offline, has come under increasing threat, disproportionately affecting vulnerable children.** While comprehensively addressing such threat goes beyond the scope of the sole European Child Guarantee Council Recommendation, its implementation needs to be closely aligned with the ambitious initiatives which the Commission is putting forward to protect each child in need. It is necessary to address these threats.

**The digital world plays an increasingly central role in children's lives.** It shapes their learning, interactions and future opportunities. However, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more exposed to a digital divide <sup>(25)</sup>: they are less likely to have the skills, resources, or support needed to navigate online environments safely and to benefit from their opportunities. They are also disproportionately exposed to online risks, including cyberbullying, harmful content and manipulative digital practices, radicalisation and child sexual abuse.

The Commission is already responding with a comprehensive toolbox for child safety. At its core are the **Digital Services Act** and its guidelines on the protection of minors that require all platforms accessible to minors to ensure for them a high level of privacy, safety, and security. The implementation and enforcement of the Digital Services Act provide a key opportunity to improve the safety of children on online platforms, including through stronger measures to protect minors, risk assessment and mitigation measures and measures to comply with transparency and other obligations. Furthermore, the Commission has put forward proposals to strengthen the criminal law framework on child sexual abuse and to clarify the responsibilities of online service providers.

This framework is complemented by the **Action Plan against Cyberbullying**, focusing on children and young people, including vulnerable children. While some Member States have begun rolling out programmes under the European Child Guarantee to improve digital literacy and access to digital tools for children in need, these efforts remain uneven and fall short of **delivering the systemic change required**. To provide a strong response, the Commission will put forward ambitious legal proposals.

The forthcoming Digital Fairness Act will contribute to the online protection of children, as it intends to address, from a consumer protection perspective, unfair commercial practices, including dark patterns, unfair influencer marketing, and addictive design features that encourage excessive screen time and spending.

**The upcoming revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive** will also provide enhanced protections for younger viewers, when accessing audiovisual content online, alongside the Better Internet for Kids strategy, which aims to ensure a safer, age-appropriate and empowering digital environment for children across the European Union. Based on the recommendation of the **special panel on child safety online and social media age restrictions in Europe** <sup>(26)</sup>, additional initiatives might follow to ensure that Europe remains ahead when it comes to protecting and

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<sup>(25)</sup> [How's Life for Children in the Digital Age? | OECD](#).

<sup>(26)</sup> [Special panel on child safety online](#).

empowering children online.

**Protecting vulnerable children must also extend to the offline world, where poverty and social exclusion expose them to greater risks.** The European Child Guarantee and its strengthened implementation play a key preventive role by ensuring children in need can access key support services, such as social inclusion measures, educational assistance, and after-school activities, thereby reducing their vulnerability and their potential exposure to crime. In this context, the forthcoming **Action Plan on the Protection of children against crime** will reinforce preventive approaches that address the root causes of children's vulnerability to crime, both as victims and perpetrators, online and offline. Additionally, a dedicated toolkit will be developed to prevent radicalisation, focusing on early detection, strengthening protective factors, resilience through education and social integration <sup>(27)</sup>.

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<sup>(27)</sup> [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions ProtectEU: Agenda to prevent and counter terrorism - COM/2026/101 final.](#)



### **3. REINFORCING FUNDING AND GOVERNANCE**

**Breaking the cycle of child poverty requires bolder strategic choices and coordinated action across all levels.** Joint efforts are needed at European, national, regional and local levels, to design effective policies, invest financial resources efficiently and enhance the engagement of relevant stakeholders, including private actors and children themselves.

### *Adequate funding for impact*

**More robust and sustained funding is needed to have a lasting impact on child poverty and break the cycle of poverty.** Crucial investments have already been mobilised, but some of them only support short-term projects and are not adequately targeted to the most in need. Gaps in financing **remain**. Closing these gaps, by leveraging national and regional/local budgets, EU funding and all other available resources is essential.

**Since the adoption of the Guarantee, EU funding has played a pivotal role in its implementation.** Under the current 2021–2027 Multiannual Financial Framework, at least EUR 9.6 billion from the European Social Fund Plus has been earmarked to tackle child poverty. By the end of 2024, the Recovery and Resilience Facility had enabled Member States to scale up investment in education and childcare, benefiting 2.7 million pupils and students <sup>(28)</sup>. The European Regional Development Fund has helped address critical infrastructure shortages, such as childcare and school facilities, school canteens, and housing, which are essential for delivering the Guarantee’s objectives. Erasmus+ has promoted mobility opportunities for disadvantaged children, while fostering inclusion through sport and culture. In addition, support from the Technical Support Instrument <sup>(29)</sup> has helped design reforms in 13 countries. For instance, a multi-country project enhanced the capacity of authorities in Portugal, Italy and Spain to implement inclusive education policies with a focus on reducing regional disparities. More broadly, EU funding has enabled Member States and local authorities to test innovative approaches, support pilot initiatives, and expand successful measures which benefit children in need. The Commission will also encourage to make full use of investments programmed under the **Recovery and Resilience Facility**.

**Looking ahead, the Commission is committed to ensuring that EU funding continues to support the Guarantee.** In its proposal for the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework, Member States are requested to concentrate on four key social objectives in their National and Regional Partnership Plans <sup>(30)</sup>. One of these is addressing child poverty and implementing the European Child Guarantee, which should be supported by targeted actions and structural reforms, particularly in Member States with high child poverty rates. This gives national and regional authorities a sustained investment opportunity to reinforce their efforts.

To guide this process, the Commission will present a **compendium of good practices to support national, regional and local authorities in scaling up reforms and investments**. In addition, the Commission will leverage the European Semester to identify gaps and, where appropriate, put forward recommendations to better embed the fight against child poverty in the coordination of Member States’ economic and social policies.

**Other types of investments will also be mobilised.** Under the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Commission is stepping up cooperation with **international financial institutions** such as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB). The Commission

<sup>(28)</sup> [MFF Performance Results Reports - Performance Data Tables](#).

<sup>(29)</sup> [Technical Support Instrument](#).

<sup>(30)</sup> [Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Fund for economic, social and territorial cohesion, agriculture and rural, fisheries and maritime, prosperity and security for the period 2028-2034 and amending Regulation \(EU\) 2023/955 and Regulation \(EU, Euratom\) 2024/2509-COM/2025/565](#).

will continue to engage with the EIB Group on supporting investments reflecting the scope of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy as well as the European Child Guarantee. Building on its current portfolio, the CEB can mobilise about EUR 1 billion annually in financing to support the implementation of the Guarantee, within its overall EUR 4 billion social investment envelope. A forthcoming **cooperation framework with the CEB** on tackling poverty and social exclusion will place a strong emphasis on children in vulnerable situations, especially through investments in education and housing solutions.

To further support the European Child Guarantee and Youth Guarantee, the Commission will engage with the **private sector** through the Coalition against poverty, bringing together socially responsible businesses and philanthropic organisations.

### *Strengthened national governance frameworks*

**The European Child Guarantee has already established a solid governance framework, with national action plans and national coordinators in all Member States.** A key added value of these plans lies in translating the Guarantee into concrete actions for children in need. However, given the remaining high incidence of child poverty and the growing threats to children's wellbeing, **Member States should review their plans and step up their ambition** to shield children from poverty, and better protect them from safety risks, in line with this Communication. Building on the **principles for effective anti-poverty policies** presented together with the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy <sup>(31)</sup>, the revised plans should include clear, time-bound targets and dedicated funding, with a stronger focus on all categories of children in need, as well as reinforce outreach and improve the take-up of services.

Besides the implementation of the Guarantee, **the national Child Guarantee coordinators should also play a central role in addressing the broader challenges of child poverty and child safety in an integrated manner.** This requires closer cooperation across ministries and government agencies, as well as enhanced collaboration with the Youth Guarantee coordinators and Anti-Poverty coordinators <sup>(32)</sup>. Some Member States have taken steps in this direction, for instance by establishing the national Child Guarantee coordinator within the Prime Minister's office or creating interministerial structures.

To further support these efforts, the Commission will launch an **ESF+ call for projects strengthening national governance frameworks** and integrated policy responses.

**Regions and municipalities are often directly responsible for the delivery of services on the ground,** while civil society and social economy actors play a crucial role in reaching vulnerable children and filling gaps in benefit provision. Their involvement has already been fostered by some Member States, for instance, by setting up local Child Guarantee units at the municipal level. Member States should step up the involvement of local authorities and grassroots civil society organisations through dedicated local structures, making full use of available EU support <sup>(33)</sup>.

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<sup>(31)</sup> Commission Staff Working Document on Principles for effective anti-poverty policies – Supporting national, regional and local authorities in their fight against child poverty – SWD (2026) 771.

<sup>(32)</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European Union's Anti-Poverty Strategy – COM (2026) 538.

<sup>(33)</sup> EU programmes, initiatives and platforms, such as URBACT, the European Urban Initiative, the Rural Pact, and the upcoming EU Cities Platform, may support regions and municipalities in the implementation of the Guarantee and the fight against child poverty at the local level through technical assistance and mutual learning. Intergovernmental cooperation on urban matters is also in place through the Urban Agenda for the EU and its Thematic Partnerships that could support local actions.

The Commission and the **European Committee of the Regions** will conclude a **Joint Action Plan in 2026** and will collaborate on the launch of an “**EU Social Inclusion Award**” for cities and municipalities. The first edition of the award will focus on empowering children and young people from disadvantaged areas. Moreover, by the end of 2026, the Commission and the **European Economic and Social Committee** will conclude a cooperation agreement, building on existing framework for expert advisory support, and sharing best practices to address poverty, including child poverty.

**Strengthening the participation of children themselves is also important so that their voice is listened to.** Most Member States have involved children in the implementation of the Guarantee and should further reinforce dialogue with children and young adults, in line with the 2026 Council Conclusions on Investing in children. At the EU level, the Commission ran a consultation of 41,700 children under the EU Children’s Participation Platform to inform the preparation of this Communication and will further embed dialogue with children on the Guarantee and the fight against child poverty in the activities of such Platform.

**At EU level, the Commission will also strengthen its partnerships with other EU institutions and stakeholders.** It will actively collaborate with the European Parliament (in particular its Working Group on the European Child Guarantee and the Intergroup on Fighting Poverty, which provides an impactful political forum for addressing child poverty). The Social Protection Committee should ensure that fighting child poverty and exclusion is further reflected across Member States’ policies. The Commission will also further strengthen cooperation with international organisations (such as UNICEF, which has actively contributed to the rollout of the Guarantee in the EU and beyond) and continue to engage the civil society organisations in the delivery of the strengthened Guarantee.

**Robust monitoring systems are essential to track progress, identify gaps and adjust policies accordingly.** At the EU level, the Social Protection Committee has established a common framework <sup>(34)</sup> to track implementation of the European Child Guarantee, with a commitment to continuously address emerging challenges and improve the measurement of results. It should be regularly revised and updated. EU-level monitoring should be complemented by comprehensive tracking at national, regional and local levels. Member States should strengthen their monitoring frameworks when reviewing their national action plans, providing a basis for further joint work within the Social Protection Committee.

### *The Child Guarantee beyond the EU*

**The European Child Guarantee** is being rolled out in the candidate countries and potential candidates, all of which have nominated national contact points and are preparing their national action plans. The Commission supports these efforts through funding provided to UNICEF to assist in the development and implementation of these plans. The EU budget also supports specific projects, such as the rollout of the ‘Better care’ reform in Ukraine, aimed at improving the standards of child protection and alternative care systems. Beyond funding, the Commission will intensify cooperation with national Child Guarantee coordinators to further strengthen mutual learning and foster closer collaboration, also extending this engagement to candidate countries and potential candidates. The Guarantee has also been showcased globally as a promising tool to break the cycle of disadvantage and promote equal opportunities for disadvantaged children.

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<sup>(34)</sup> [ECG monitoring framework](#).



## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

The promise of a fairer, more inclusive Europe where each child grows free from the constraints of poverty must become a reality. **By acting now with determination and solidarity, we can accelerate progress towards the 2030 target of lifting at least 5 million children out of poverty and help eradicate poverty by 2050.**

The Commission stands firmly committed to these objectives and breaking the cycle of disadvantage. This is both a moral imperative and an investment in Europe's future. With nearly one in four children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, bold and collective action is urgently needed to shield vulnerable families, strengthen the European Child Guarantee and ensure every child can thrive in a safe environment.

**All EU institutions, Member States, local authorities, civil society and private partners have a role to play and should join forces,** scale up proven solutions, close implementation gaps and mobilise sustained funding to break the cycle of disadvantage.

## Annex: List of new initiatives included in this Communication on breaking the cycle of child poverty – strengthening the European Child Guarantee

Initiative	Date
<b>1. PREVENTING AND REDUCING POVERTY AMONG FAMILIES</b>	
Launch of the first-stage consultation of European social partners to obtain their views on the possible direction of EU action to support the activation of persons excluded from the labour market and equality between women and men with regard to labour market opportunities, including through childcare.	2026
Commission Recommendation on enhancing efficiency of child-related benefit systems	2027
<b>2. STRENGTHENING THE IMPACT OF THE EUROPEAN CHILD GUARANTEE</b>	
Horizon call for innovative solutions in ECEC	2026
Curriculum and pedagogical guidelines	2026
ESF+ call for projects using culture and sport as tools for social inclusion	2027
Toolkit with UNICEF for child and adolescent health and mental wellbeing promotion	2027
Development of mentorship programmes as part of the Teachers' Agenda	2026
Guidance supporting social inclusion of Roma children	2027
Pilot the European Child Guarantee Card	2027
Toolkit on pathways to adulthood for children in need (linking the European Child Guarantee and the Youth Guarantee)	2027
<b>3. REINFORCING FUNDING AND GOVERNANCE</b>	
Adequate funding for impact	
Support the Coalition Against Poverty in mobilising investments from private and philanthropic actors for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion	Launch in 2026
Compendium of good practices to support national and local authorities' investments in children	2027
Strengthened national governance frameworks	
ESF+ call for strengthening European Child Guarantee national governance frameworks and supporting the access to the labour market for Roma NEETs	2026
Conclusion of a cooperation agreement with the European Economic and Social Committee and a Joint Action Plan with the Committee of Regions on actions supporting fight against child poverty	2026
First edition of the EU Social Inclusion Award on children and young people from disadvantaged areas	Launch in 2027



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

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B-1049 Brussels

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Manuscript completed in May 2026.

This document should not be considered as representative of the European Commission's official position. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2026

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PDF ISBN 978-92-68-39456-4 doi: 10.2767/5750197 KE-01-26-058-EN-N



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of the European Union