

European Child Guarantee: Eurochild members' perspectives

Taken from
*Children's Realities in Europe:
Progress & Gaps*
Eurochild 2024 flagship report
on children in need across Europe.



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On 20 November - World Children's Day - Eurochild released its flagship report on children in need titled "Children's Realities in Europe: Progress & Gaps", which compiles information from 57 Eurochild members in 31 countries across Europe. This sub-report presents insights on the implementation of the European Child Guarantee provided by Eurochild members across EU countries, including direct quotes from members regarding its evaluation. After laying out the information coming from the ground on the implementation of the Child Guarantee, Eurochild offers its recommendations to both EU member states and the European Union.

Introduction

The European Child Guarantee is an EU-wide initiative aimed at preventing and combating child poverty and social exclusion by ensuring effective access for children in need across the EU to a set of key services. It recommends that EU Member States allocate an appropriate amount of their *European Social Fund +* resources to combat child poverty. Implementing the European Child Guarantee is crucial for fulfilling **Principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights**, affirming that children have the right to education, care, and protection against poverty, essential for breaking the intergenerational cycle of social exclusion.

This initiative directly supports several rights enshrined in the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**:

- By promoting free early childhood education and care and free education, the Guarantee supports the **right to education** (Article 28) and the **aim of education** (Article 29). Through its support for school-based activities, the initiative also upholds the **right to play and recreation** (Article 31).
- By providing at least one healthy meal per school day, promoting healthy nutrition, and ensuring access to healthcare, the Guarantee reinforces the **right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health** (Article 24).
- By focusing on housing, the Guarantee supports the **right to an adequate standard of living** and the **states' obligation to assist parents and others responsible for the child** to implement this standard (Article 27).
- The Guarantee upholds the **right to benefit from social security** (Article 26).

In line with the UNCRC principle of non-discrimination (Article 2), the Guarantee prioritises vulnerable groups to ensure equal access to rights for all children. These groups include **children with disabilities** (Article 23), **children in alternative care** (Article 20) and **migrant, refugee** (Article 22) or **children belonging to minorities** (Article 30).

The enjoyment of these rights is essential for ensuring access to a broader set of rights, thus breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and social exclusion and having a long-term impact on the lives of children.

Eurochild played a key role in analysing and providing overviews of the National Action Plans (NAPs) prepared by the Member States. These plans, covering the period until 2030, were developed by the Member States after nominating their Child Guarantee Coordinators. We are currently publishing overviews of the biennial reports on the implementation of the Guarantee once they are adopted by the Member States. These reports mark a significant milestone, offering insights into the progress made, contextual factors, target groups and the rollout of services. We look forward to continuing to monitor this initiative to ensure its effective implementation and to contribute to the 2026 Commission's Review Report.

Findings from Eurochild Members

1. Monitoring, data collection and indicators

Across Europe, countries are making strides in monitoring child poverty and social exclusion, though significant gaps in data availability exist.

In **Belgium**, the federal administration is mapping the availability of data to monitor and evaluate child poverty and social exclusion. In **Ireland**, data is primarily sourced from the *Central Statistics Office Survey on Income and Living Conditions*, which helps track trends in child poverty and provides insights into different groups of children who are not always visible in datasets. **Portugal** has existing data indicators in place, with ongoing efforts to develop new disaggregated indicators for children under six in collaboration with the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)*.

Cyprus lacks detailed evaluations on the effectiveness of government actions to implement the Guarantee. In **Greece**, the National Action Plan (NAP) does not include specific indicators for monitoring and evaluation. CSOs are advocating for the creation of platforms to collect data and monitor the effectiveness of the NAP. In **Hungary**, the *Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation* advocates for establishing a standard data reporting process and feedback mechanism to ensure that progress on the measures in the NAP can be adequately monitored. The **Dutch** NAP lacks relevant data collection and indicators for effective monitoring and evaluation.

In **Germany**, data gaps persist in areas such as homeless children, children from families affected by addiction, and those facing multiple vulnerabilities. The Ministry for Family Affairs has tasked the *German Youth Institute* with monitoring the NAP's implementation, developing indicators and conducting studies on children's well-being. **Malta's** NAP includes specific indicators of material and social deprivation and educational attainment, but the monitoring and reporting mechanisms must be strengthened. **Poland's** NAP lacks indicators to assess the quality of alternative care, deinstitutionalisation, and support for vulnerable groups such as migrant children.

Countries are making varied progress in integrating the European Child Guarantee into broader policy frameworks. In **Finland**, the Guarantee is incorporated into the *National Child Strategy*, making it difficult to distinguish specific actions and budget allocations for the Guarantee itself. **Croatia** focuses its NAP on legislative and institutional frameworks, raising concerns about whether these frameworks will translate into meaningful services. **Estonia** is addressing the absence of comprehensive child welfare indicators through cross-sectoral initiatives inspired by best practices from Iceland. Meanwhile, **Spain** has adopted its NAP, but its implementation relies on operational plans still to be developed by the Autonomous Communities.

Several countries demonstrate promising developments while acknowledging areas for improvement. **Slovenia's** NAP outlines plans for a national framework to collect data, define indicators for monitoring, and establish a financial framework for implementation. In **Romania**, where data for the NAP is collected by institutions such as the *National Institute of Statistics and the Ministries of Education and Health*, it is important to have integrated services for vulnerable children in education and healthcare, but better data disaggregation to monitor specific groups is needed. In **Malta**, monitoring mechanisms exist, but they need to be strengthened to ensure effective reporting. National statistics and *EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions* are used to track progress, but there are significant gaps in data collection methods.

2. Inclusion of the most vulnerable children

While the National Action Plans (NAPs) under the European Child Guarantee aim to address the needs of vulnerable children, many fall short of adequately targeting marginalised groups such as refugees and those in single-parent households.

Slovenia's NAP, while prioritising all children in need, fails to address the needs of children who are victims of violence. **Greece's** NAP includes measures for all groups of children except for those in correctional facilities. **Latvia's** NAP includes target groups for children and families that receive special legal status or support, such as large families and low-income families. However, the *Latvian Child Welfare Network* advocates for the inclusion of children in single-parent households, children of ethnic minorities, street children, adolescent parents, and children with seriously ill parents, all of whom should also be considered as target groups.

Romania's NAP focuses on children from low-income families, Roma children, children with disabilities, and children in institutional care. However, Eurochild members recommend the inclusion of migrant children, children from rural areas, and LGBTQ+ children, who face particular challenges in accessing services. **Malta's** NAP prioritises children from low-income families, children with disabilities, and children in single-parent households. Still, migrant and refugee children are not adequately included, and there is a need for more support services and anti-discrimination measures for LGBTQ+ youth to ensure their safety and well-being.

The **Bulgarian** NAP lacks measures to improve the situation of homeless children and refugees. **Germany** is urged to address the needs of refugee children and those in

alternative care. While **Portugal**'s NAP identifies five specific groups of children in need, Eurochild members recommend the inclusion of children from vulnerable families. The **Dutch** NAP does not include measures to prioritise all groups of children in need, such as children with migrant backgrounds, Roma children, children affected by homelessness and children from single-parent families.

3. Civil society involvement

Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a crucial role in developing, implementing, and monitoring the European Child Guarantee, but their involvement varies widely, with many countries lacking meaningful engagement mechanisms.

In **Ireland**, there is strong collaboration between the government and civil society. CSOs are actively consulted, and there is a close working relationship with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth. **Ireland** also hosted a meeting of Child Guarantee National Coordinators in 2023, where CSOs were invited. **Bulgaria** has established a *Permanent Expert Working Group*, including CSOs and academia, to monitor implementation, providing an inclusive approach to the process. In **Romania**, *FONPC* is a member of the *Monitoring Committee for the Child Guarantee*. In **Malta**, relevant CSOs such as *MaltaCAN* and *CROM* have not been consulted to develop the National Action Plan (NAP). In **Germany**, a committee of researchers, civil society, national ministries, and regional/local entities provides a useful forum for coordination and exchange of best practices. In **Hungary**, the *Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation* has not been involved in the development or implementation of the NAP. In **Italy**, *L'Albero della Vita* was involved in the Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce in 2021.

In **Spain**, there is some cooperation between different levels of government and CSOs, including the *Childhood Observatory* and children themselves, but the involvement of CSOs could be improved. In **Slovakia**, the *Coalition for Children* has not been engaged in the implementation, monitoring, or evaluation of the Child Guarantee, as the authorities did not approach them. The Coalition believes more stakeholders, including experts and specialists, should be involved. In **Latvia**, the *Child Welfare Network* was involved in consultations with government representatives and other CSOs, but their proposals were not incorporated into the preparation of the NAP. **Denmark's** *Joint Council for Child Issues* has not been involved in the implementation, monitoring, or evaluation of the Guarantee, and there has been no clear cooperation or coordination between Danish stakeholders regarding the initiative. In **Croatia**, CSOs are also not involved.

The Netherlands has had limited involvement of CSOs in developing the NAP, with Eurochild members aware of only a few meetings with them during the design process. In **Finland**, CSOs were not included in the preparation of the report. The *Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth* was involved in the preparation of the NAP but has not been engaged in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Guarantee. In **Portugal**, Eurochild members have not been engaged in the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the Child Guarantee NAP and are not aware of any formal or consultative mechanism that allows stakeholders to be involved in this process. In **Cyprus**, the Guarantee is considered a

'government project', and CSOs are not consulted. In **Greece**, there has been limited participation of CSOs in the implementation, monitoring or evaluation of the Guarantee.

4. Child participation

Efforts to include children in the European Child Guarantee's development and monitoring processes remain inconsistent, with only a few countries demonstrating structured and effective approaches to child participation.

Some countries have made efforts to involve children in a more structured way. In **Spain**, the *State Council for the Participation of Children and Adolescents* was consulted during the development of the National Action Plan. In **Italy**, a *Youth Advisory Board* is playing a role in planning and monitoring the NAP. In **Romania**, the *FONPC Youth and Children's Council* has translated parts of the Child Guarantee into child-friendly language.

In **Cyprus**, a planned consultation with children was cancelled, eliminating any opportunity for direct engagement. Similarly, in **Poland**, no children were consulted at any stage of the process. In **Latvia**, a single discussion with children took place but did not include representatives from the Child Guarantee target groups. Latvian CSOs had proposed involving children and families during the NAP's development, but these suggestions were not implemented.

In **Estonia**, there is a lack of data on children's participation. In **Greece**, child participation in the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation processes has been minimal. The **Dutch** NGO *Coalition on Children's Rights* calls for stronger measures to ensure the effective participation of children in all stages of the Child Guarantee process, including implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. In **Slovenia**, the NAP outlines plans to establish a national framework that will also define children's participation and include a financial structure to support the monitoring process.

5. Funding and targets

The implementation of the Child Guarantee relies heavily on EU and national funding, but concerns about sufficiency, sustainability, and transparency in resource allocation remain widespread.

Portugal's implementation of the Child Guarantee is primarily funded through a combination of national and EU resources, with a significant portion coming from the *European Social Fund+ (ESF+)* and the *Recovery and Resilience Facility*. In **Italy**, the *ESF+* supports the implementation of the Guarantee with a substantial budget of over €1.1 billion. **Poland** plans to finance a digital central register of vacancies in alternative care, expected to be ready by 2029, using funds from the *ESF+* and domestic sources.

Malta's National Action Plan (NAP) is set to receive significant financial backing, including €145 million from a mix of national and EU funds like the *ESF+*, though there is a call for more long-term, sustainable, and diverse funding from both national budgets and EU sources. **Hungary's** NAP implementation is expected to be funded by the national budget

and EU contributions, including resources from the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the *Human Resources Development Operational Program Plus (EFOP Plus)*.

Greece's implementation of the Child Guarantee also relies on mixed funding from domestic and European sources, but there are calls for increased financial support. **Romania's** NAP success hinges on adequate and sustainable funding, a combination of national budget allocations and EU resources, including the *ESF+*. The **Spanish** NAP will be primarily financed by *ESF+* funding.

Belgium relies on existing budgets and resources, such as those from the *Recovery and Resilience Plan* and *ESF+*. In **Bulgaria**, concerns remain about the sufficiency of the available funding. In **Ireland**, spending on the Child Guarantee is not easily identifiable, as some actions were already underway before the programme's official launch.

In **Bulgaria**, the Child Guarantee is expected to benefit over 200,000 children, with a focus on improving educational outcomes, de-segregating education, and promoting sports activities for disadvantaged children. In **Greece**, the most promising measure of the NAP is the creation of 50,000 new early childhood care. **Romania** aims to decrease child poverty by 500,000 by 2030 through its Child Guarantee National Action Plan. In **Cyprus**, the child poverty reduction target in the NAP was already achieved in 2022, raising concerns that the government may not take further action.

6. Biennial reports on the implementation of the Child Guarantee

Biennial reports provide an opportunity to track progress under the Child Guarantee, but their comprehensiveness and focus on target groups vary significantly across countries.

Finland's biennial report, which was submitted in 2024, does not adequately reflect the current situation or the impacts of social security cuts. **Ireland's** biennial report provides an overview of activities undertaken but acknowledges that some were already in progress before the Child Guarantee. **Portugal's** biennial report captures a broad picture of activities but lacks focus on the target groups identified in the National Action Plan (NAP). **Romania's** biennial report provides a comprehensive overview of progress, including the construction of new nurseries, the Hot Meal programme, and financial aid for high school students, but continuous assessment is necessary to ensure all children in need are supported. **Poland** published its biennial Child Guarantee biennial report in 2024, which captures a broad range of target groups outlined in the NAP. However, the report lacks a critical reflection on the progress of the proposed measures and does not include valuable practices or innovative approaches, particularly in the "planned activities" section, which mentions only a few target groups.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen data collection and monitoring systems

Ensure comprehensive and disaggregated data collection that covers marginalised and hard-to-reach groups. Countries should establish comprehensive monitoring and evaluation frameworks that incorporate the 2023 monitoring framework while also introducing new indicators, such as those related to children's mental health. Develop mechanisms for regularly updating this data to reflect changes over time, improving the accuracy and relevance of monitoring efforts. Utilise this data to design evidence-based interventions while also building long-term resilience for children and families.

2. Address the needs of the most vulnerable groups

Ensure that the measures of the Guarantee reach those most in need, including children with disabilities, children in alternative care, Roma and children with migrant backgrounds, children living in poverty, and those residing in remote areas. Adopt intersectional approaches that recognise the compounded vulnerabilities faced by children from marginalised communities.

3. Strengthen civil society participation

Ensure active and consistent CSO involvement in the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation processes of the Child Guarantee. These include the National Action Plans, the biennial reports and the 2026 Commission's Review Report on the Child Guarantee.

4. Promote child participation

Establish robust frameworks and tools that allow children to actively engage in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies that affect them. This should ensure children are adequately informed of the role of the Child Guarantee and its role in bringing about change in the lives of children.

5. Enhance funding and resource allocation

Strengthen the Child Guarantee by allocating specific and dedicated financial resources for its implementation. Support the European Parliament's pledge to increase funding for the Child Guarantee as part of the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework revision. Tackling inequalities must be a core priority, integrated across all sectors.

6. Leverage the biennial reports and the to strengthen the implementation of the European Child Guarantee

Utilise the biennial reports to regularly update and strengthen the National Action Plans (NAPs). These reports should provide a thorough assessment of progress, highlight challenges, and offer actionable recommendations for improving the impact of the Child

Guarantee. The biennial reports should also be widely disseminated at the national level to foster conversations and debates.

Quotes from Eurochild's members

CONCORDIA Bulgaria Foundation and National Network for Children for Bulgaria:

“Overall we think the implementation of the Child Guarantee started in a turbulent political environment and is yet to be developed. The Child Guarantee is expected to ensure continuity and consistency in children’s policies in Bulgaria.”

Association Children First, Association ‘Magical World’ Knin, ‘Croatia for Children’ Foundation, Croatian Association on Early Childhood Intervention, Ombudsman for Children Croatia, The Society ‘Our Children’ Opatija for Croatia:

“Overall, the Child Guarantee is a very important initiative for Croatia. Available ESF+ funds should be fully used. It is necessary to engage different stakeholders, including the largest possible number of NGOs, which together with the Ministries will do everything in their power to ensure that every child has equal opportunities to develop their full potential in the future.”

Joint Council for Child Issues in Denmark:

“In general, the Child Guarantee does not take up much space in the discussions in Denmark about vulnerable and poor children.”

Estonian Union for Child Welfare for Estonia:

“Although the number of children living in poverty has only slightly increased in Estonia, and access to education and healthcare has improved through the implementation of the Estonian Child Guarantee, access to suitable housing and mental health services remains a challenge.”

Central Union for Child Welfare for Finland:

“Overall we think the goals and implementation of the Child Guarantee are jeopardised by the significant cuts to social security. Finland is currently not working consistently towards ending child poverty.”

Child and Youth Welfare Association - AGJ and National Coalition Germany - Network for the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (NC) for Germany:

“In Germany the implementation of the Child Guarantee lacks the necessary political will, especially at national level, to combat child poverty with a consistent and integrated strategy. So far, implementation depends heavily on the initiative of civil society and some regional or local (state) actors, to move forward.”

Network for Children’s Rights and The Smile of the Child for Greece:

“Overall, our assessment of the Child Guarantee is that efforts are being made to implement it in the best possible way, but are not always successful, due to a lack of staff, poor communication between services, lack of political and economic stability, and insufficient financial resources. In addition, the European Child Guarantee needs to introduce specific indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of its measures.”

The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society for Malta:

“Overall, our assessment of the Child Guarantee is that in Malta there is a strong commitment to addressing child poverty and social exclusion through comprehensive measures and significant financial investments. However, several areas require improvement, particularly data collection, inclusion and funding, to enhance the National Action Plan’s effectiveness and ensure that all vulnerable groups are adequately supported.”

Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation (HCR) for Hungary:

“Overall, the Hungarian Child Guarantee National Action Plan does not apply a child rights approach. Rather than an action plan, the NAP is more focused on reporting, and its implementation and feasibility are questionable.”

Dutch NGO Coalition for Children’s Rights and Utrecht University - Dynamics of Youth for the Netherlands:

“Overall, the Dutch NAP seems to be a list of activities rather than a clear plan. We are worried about how the 2024 Dutch Government coalition agreement will influence the current Plan. The new government seems to give less priority to combating child poverty than the previous government.”

Foundation Happy Kids and Polish Foster Care Coalition for Poland:

“Overall, our assessment of the implementation of the Child Guarantee is that it should be done in dialogue and collaboration with NGOs and community organisations.”

Fundação Nossa Senhora do Bom Sucesso, Instituto de Apoio à Criança and Sérgio Costa Araújo (individual member) for Portugal:

Portugal “Overall, our assessment of the implementation of the Child Guarantee is that it tries to encompass already existing policies and measures regarding vulnerable children and young people. It lacks some innovation.”

Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth for Slovenia:

“Overall, we think the implementation of the Child Guarantee will help children to have equal opportunities for a better life.”

FONCP and Organizatia Umanitara CONCORDIA for Romania:

“Overall, we believe the implementation of the Child Guarantee in Romania shows promising results. Significant progress has been made in providing vulnerable children with access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and adequate housing. The collaborative

efforts between government agencies, NGOs, and local communities have been instrumental in driving this positive change. However, there is still work to be done to ensure that every child benefits from this initiative, and we remain committed to addressing any challenges that arise to fully realise the goals of the Child Guarantee.”

Fedaia and Plataforma de Infancia for Spain:

“Overall, we think the implementation of the Child Guarantee is still in progress, but there is a lack of information.”

Summary

The European Child Guarantee supports the provision of essential services for children in need, aiming to address child poverty and social exclusion across the EU. However, Eurochild’s members have highlighted several challenges in its implementation at the national level. **Many member states face limited financial resources**, often relying on existing budgets, raising concerns about the sufficiency of funding to meet the Guarantee’s objectives. Furthermore, **data collection and monitoring remain inconsistent**, with gaps in both qualitative and quantitative disaggregated indicators needed to effectively assess progress.

Civil society organisations play a crucial role in ensuring community-driven solutions, but their involvement in the development, monitoring, and evaluation processes varies significantly across countries, with **some states failing to adequately engage them**.

The inclusion of the most vulnerable children, such as those from marginalised communities, migrant backgrounds, or living in alternative care, remains an ongoing challenge. **Many national action plans overlook specific groups**, including children with disabilities, or those living in poverty, which risks deepening social exclusion. Additionally, efforts to involve children in decision-making processes are limited.

While some progress has been made in integrating the Child Guarantee into broader policy frameworks, many countries still face obstacles in translating legislative and institutional commitments into tangible services.

The Child Guarantee must be strengthened to ensure it delivers meaningful change in the lives of the most vulnerable children. Eurochild’s recommendations call for strengthened data collection, inclusive reach to vulnerable groups, active civil society participation, promoting child participation, enhanced funding allocation, and leveraging biennial reports to ensure assessment and strengthening of the National Plans.

At Eurochild, we will continue to closely monitor the implementation of this initiative and provide our support to the European Child Guarantee Coordinators and European institutions. Our goal is to ensure that this initiative results in meaningful changes in children’s lives, breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and social exclusion and guaranteeing the full enjoyment of a wide range of children’s rights. We look forward to

contributing to the 2026 Commission's Review Report while emphasising the need to strengthen the Child Guarantee to ensure it effectively benefits children on the ground.

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