

2025 European Semester Autumn Package

**Our call for advancing children's
rights through the European
Semester with a focus on child
poverty and inclusion**



Eurochild
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the heart of Europe

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The European Commission's European Semester Autumn Package, published in December 2024, initiates a new cycle of the European Semester, providing a comprehensive overview of the socio-economic landscape, **identifying key priorities and risks, and offering policy guidance to assist EU Member States in achieving shared objectives in 2025**. It also identifies 10 Member States (Greece, Cyprus, Estonia, Italy, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany) for which the European Commission will carry out an in-depth analysis.

Eurochild has focused on The Proposal for a Joint Employment Report for 2025 (hereinafter referred to as The Report) that is a central component of this package, with a particular focus on social rights including social protection.

The Report highlights both **progress and persistent challenges in the EU's efforts to achieve its 2030 targets for employment, skills development, and poverty reduction**. Recurring themes include the urgent need to address child poverty and social exclusion, access to early childhood education and care and quality and inclusivity of education, which remain critical challenges despite targeted initiatives such as the **European Child Guarantee**.

1. Child poverty: A persistent challenge

In 2023, **19.9 million children in the EU**—nearly one in four—were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. For the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, the **number of children AROPE declined slightly in the EU**. This reduction in headcount did not translate into a lower rate though, due to the decrease in the total number of children. This highlights the **widening gap between current efforts and the EU's 2030 target of reducing child poverty by at least 5 million children**.

The risks are particularly pronounced for **children from disadvantaged backgrounds**, such as Roma children, whose participation in early childhood education and care remains approximately half the EU average; children in single-parent households and families with dependent children; and children living in (quasi)-jobless households. In addition, in-work poverty affects 10% of households with dependent children. These groups **face compounded poverty risks due to limited access to resources** including healthcare and education, and **adequate social protection**.

Child poverty is not only a social issue but also an economic and societal challenge with long-term consequences. Elevated levels of poverty among children hinder their potential to contribute meaningfully to society and the labor market, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. The Report emphasizes that **targeted investments in children are a fundamental driver of sustainable growth and social equity**.

2. What more can be done for children?

We welcome that the Report underscores that eradicating child poverty and social exclusion is **both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity for breaking cycles of intergenerational poverty** and unlocking the potential of Europe's youngest citizens. The European Commission's key actions include:

1. Accelerating the European Child Guarantee

The European Child Guarantee remains pivotal in combating child poverty. Its full implementation across Member States is urgently needed and should include:

- Free and equitable access to healthcare, education, and quality housing.
- Affordable, high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC), particularly for children at risk of poverty.
- Child Guarantee National action plans and their progress reports that address disparities in access and outcomes for marginalized groups.

2. Addressing Needs of Children in need and Disparities in Child Poverty Risks

Child poverty rates vary widely across and within Member States. Tailored national strategies are essential to bridge these gaps:

- **Target Vulnerable Groups:** Prioritize children with disabilities, non-EU-born children, and those living in overcrowded or substandard housing.

3. Expanding Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Quality ECEC significantly enhances children's social and cognitive development and reduces poverty risks. However, participation rates for children under three years old stood at only 37.5% in 2023, far below the EU's Barcelona 2030 target of 45%. Persistent gaps in affordability and capacity demand immediate attention.

- **Affordability:** Governments must allocate funding to make ECEC accessible to low-income families.
- **Capacity Building:** Address shortages in facilities and staff, particularly in rural and underserved areas.
- **Participation Gaps:** Increase enrollment for Roma children and other marginalized groups.

4. Promoting Equal Opportunities in Education

Equitable access to quality education is crucial for reducing child poverty and enhancing employability.

- Invest in early interventions to prevent school dropouts in disadvantaged communities.
- Address teacher shortages and improve education quality in underserved areas.
- Promote digital skills training to prepare children for future labor market demands.

5. Strengthening Income Support for Families including access to social housing

Despite improvements in social transfers, income support for families remains inadequate in many Member States. Enhanced child allowances, particularly for single-parent families and families with children with disabilities, can significantly reduce poverty risks.

In addition, **the modernization of social protection systems** can contribute to inclusive economic growth, with adequate and sustainable social protection and social services.

Leverage EU Funds: Strengthen **housing programs** and reduce homelessness, which affects approximately 400,000 children in the EU. Access to social housing or housing assistance of good quality for those in need is a **key EU priority**.

3. A Call to Action

The Report makes it clear that **addressing child poverty requires a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach**. Member States must:

- Prioritize children in policy-making and budget allocations, ensuring adequate resources for education, healthcare, and housing.
- Maintain a strong focus on **critical issues** already included, such as **child poverty, early childhood development, education, and deinstitutionalization**. Additionally, broaden the scope to address other vital areas for children, including access to **mental health services, digital literacy including digital safety, the impacts of climate change, and the right to participate and be heard**.
- Strengthen collaboration between institutions and national governments to effectively implement the European Child Guarantee.
- Innovate to overcome barriers, such as leveraging technology to improve access to education and social services.
- Modernize social protection system to target the most vulnerable families with children.

4. Looking Ahead

The Report presents a nuanced picture of progress: **while there have been advances in reducing poverty risks and improving labor market outcomes, persistent inequalities and structural barriers remain**. Achieving the EU's 2030 targets will demand sustained political commitment, strategic investments, and **inclusive policies to ensure no child is left behind**.

We urge the adoption of more specific, actionable measures for each Member State.

Generalized recommendations lack the precision needed to address the complex, localized challenges of child poverty and social exclusion. This contributes to the more effective implementation of the Child Guarantee, among other initiatives.

Moreover, **we call for a stronger emphasis on civil society and child participation and the recognition of children's rights in the European Semester**. The Report's current focus on child poverty often frames children's experiences through the lens of parental advancement or work-life balance. This perspective risks neglecting the intrinsic value of prioritizing

children's individual well-being and development. **Greater focus on the needs of Europe's youngest citizens is crucial for building a prosperous and equitable future.**

We welcome a proposal that the 2025 European Semester cycle will see a gradual move to a **more comprehensive set of Country Specific Recommendations**, due to Recovery and Resilience Facility ending in 2026. Given this understanding, The European Commission should provide **comprehensive recommendations concerning children's rights** for each Member State, thereby enhancing the potential impact of the European Semester to improve the lives of children across the EU.

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