

# **Eradicating child poverty in Europe**

**Eurochild's vision for the upcoming  
EU Anti-Poverty Strategy**



**Eurochild**  
Putting children at  
the heart of Europe

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## *Eurochild's vision for the upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy*

### Introduction

Despite the commitments made under the *European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan*, the EU is not on track to meet its 2030 target of reducing **by at least 5 million** the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. On the contrary, the number of children affected has risen to **19.5 million**, with 24.2% of children living in poverty and social exclusion in 2024.

**Poverty and social exclusion among children are more prevalent than in the general population, which stood at 21% in 2024.** Poverty is not only a socio-economic condition but a denial of choice and opportunity. It deprives children of access to essential services and participation in society, leading to long-term impacts on their physical, mental, and emotional development. **Ensuring access to services and a life without poverty is not charity** – it is a precondition for the enjoyment of a wide range of children's rights, as recognised under the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

**At the national level, the highest rates are observed in Bulgaria (35.1%), Spain (34.6%), and Romania (33.8%).** Child poverty also affects high-income countries, with 26.2% of children in France and 25.6% in Luxembourg at risk of poverty and social exclusion. In the EU enlargement countries, the situation is equally concerning. In 2020, 39.7% of children in North Macedonia were at risk of poverty and social exclusion. In 2021, 50.1% of children in Albania faced the same risk. In 2022, 40.4% of children in Montenegro faced this risk. According to UNICEF, child poverty in 2023 reached 65.6% in Ukraine. In 2024, 39.5% of children in Türkiye were at risk.

All over Europe, children belonging to vulnerable groups, including those with migrant backgrounds and ethnic minority origin, children living in single-parent families, from large or disadvantaged families, and children with disabilities, are overrepresented among those living in poverty. While poverty is often the result of structural discrimination, people are also frequently discriminated against for being poor.

### Tackling child poverty to uphold human rights and strengthen our societies

Ensuring social inclusion and tackling child poverty by providing services to all children without discrimination, based on any ground, is a pressing issue in Europe. These efforts directly support several rights enshrined in the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**. By supporting vulnerable children and families, states uphold the right to benefit from **social security** (Article 26). Promoting free early childhood education and care, as well as free education, supports **the right to education** (Article 28) and the **aim of education** (Article 29), as well as the **right to play and recreation** (Article 31) through school-based activities. Additionally, providing healthy meals and access to healthcare is

essential to reinforce the right to the **highest attainable standard of health** (Article 24). A focus on housing supports the right to an **adequate standard of living** (Article 27).

By targeting vulnerable groups, such as **children with disabilities** (Article 23), those in **alternative care** (Article 20), and **migrant or refugee children** (Article 22), it is possible to ensure **equal access to rights for all**, in line with the UNCRC **principle of non-discrimination** (Article 2).

**While eradicating poverty is a moral imperative grounded in human rights, it is also a financially sound investment.** Children growing up in poverty or social exclusion begin life at a disadvantage, with long-term consequences for their development and future opportunities. Social exclusion can be passed from one generation to the next, undermining social cohesion and resulting in higher costs for our welfare systems. This, in turn, weakens economic and social resilience. It is estimated that the failure to reduce child poverty and its effects costs European countries an average of 3.4% of GDP each year. As the 2013 Commission Recommendation for investing in children states: *“Preventing the transmission of disadvantage across generations is a crucial investment.”*

## General recommendations

**Eurochild welcomes the development of the first-ever EU Anti-Poverty Strategy.**

With one in four children across Europe affected by poverty, the Strategy must be bold, rights-based, and cross-sectoral. It should set ambitious, measurable targets focused on children, address the root causes of inequality, prioritise access to quality services, and uphold children’s rights. To deliver tangible change in the lives of children across the EU and beyond, the Strategy must:

### 1. Recognise poverty as a societal problem and a political choice

Poverty and social exclusion are not inevitable. It is the direct result of political decisions, chronic underinvestment, and deeply rooted structural inequalities. Poverty reflects how resources, opportunities, and power are distributed in society. **The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy must explicitly acknowledge that poverty is not an individual failure, but a societal one, stemming from long-standing injustices.** When governments fail to invest in inclusive social protection, equitable education, accessible healthcare, and affordable housing, they entrench cycles of deprivation, especially for children. The unequal distribution of wealth, both within and between countries, reinforces these injustices. Structural poverty is created and sustained by unjust systems, and it can be dismantled through a human rights approach.

### 2. Shift from poverty reduction to poverty eradication

As highlighted by the European Anti-Poverty Network, of which Eurochild is a part, the EU must move beyond the narrative of merely reducing poverty and commit to its full **eradication**. Poverty is a violation of human rights and a barrier to social cohesion and sustainable development. A genuine rights-based EU Anti-Poverty Strategy must aim to **eliminate child poverty in all its forms**, not simply to manage or mitigate it.

### 3. Embed children's rights

**A comprehensive strategy must focus on children**, recognising them as rights holders, not passive recipients of welfare. This means making **eradicating child poverty and supporting children's rights** a cross-cutting priority in the strategy's objectives, as well as one of the strategy's objectives. This requires the explicit integration of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its General Comments, particularly General Comment 19 on public budgeting for the realisation of children's rights, into the strategy's design, implementation, and monitoring frameworks.

### 4. Support the strengthening of the *European Child Guarantee*

**The Strategy must strengthen and build upon the European Child Guarantee** (ECG) to ensure every essential services, including free healthcare, education, early childhood education and care, nutritious food, and adequate housing. The strategy should aim to ensure that the implementation of the ECG is inclusive and responsive to children in the most vulnerable situations, and it should be backed by adequate funding. To achieve this, Member States must enhance disaggregated data collection, ensure increased and dedicated funding, improve cross-sector coordination, adopt intersectional approaches targeting the most vulnerable children, and systematically integrate the ECG into key EU policies and processes, including those in enlargement countries.

### 5. Ensure an intersectional approach

**An intersectional and multidisciplinary approach is essential when tackling child poverty, as the complex interplay of diverse vulnerabilities shapes children's challenges.** Child poverty intersects with factors such as disability, such as gender, ethnic origin, and migrant background. For instance, children with a parent born outside the EU are up to twice as likely to grow up in poverty compared to children of EU nationals. Children with disabilities also face unique challenges, with limited access to support services, healthcare, and education, deepening their experience of poverty. Eurochild advocates for a rights-based approach that prioritises the most disadvantaged children, focusing on tackling structural discrimination and breaking the cycles of exclusion to ensure equity in all aspects of childhood development.

### 6. Align with broader EU frameworks

**The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy must be firmly embedded within the broader framework of existing EU policies** that aim to address social inequalities and uphold children's rights. It should fully align with key frameworks, including the European Child Guarantee, the Commission's Recommendation on integrated child protection systems, the upcoming European Affordable Housing Strategy, the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan, the Gender Equality Strategy, the LGBTQ+ Strategy, and the Intergenerational Fairness Strategy. These frameworks are interconnected and must be implemented in a coherent and mutually reinforcing manner to effectively tackle the root causes of child poverty and social exclusion.

## 7. Extend to the EU enlargement countries

**Child poverty is a structural problem across Europe that demands a truly pan-European response. The Strategy must not stop at the EU's borders.** High rates of child poverty in EU enlargement countries underline the urgent need to extend the *Anti-Poverty Strategy* beyond current EU Member States. The EU's influence and investment in these countries must be harnessed to protect and promote children's rights and to support inclusive, rights-based development. The Enlargement Package should specifically and consistently monitor progress in reducing poverty levels in the enlargement countries, as part of Negotiating Chapter 19 on social policy and employment.

## Developing and monitoring the Anti-Poverty Strategy

To eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities across Europe, the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy must be transformative, well-resourced, and grounded in rights. Eurochild outlines five key pillars that are essential for its success:

### 1. Secure adequate funding

**Adequate and sustained funding is essential to turn commitments into action.** The Strategy must be underpinned by the Multiannual Financial Framework, with targeted investment strategically used to support national efforts, with specific allocations to tackle child poverty and address structural barriers. Regarding the 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework, at Eurochild, we call for a standalone, well-funded post-2027 European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) to uphold social rights, requiring 5% ESF+ earmarking for child poverty in all Member States, with higher allocations for high-poverty countries, as well as a dedicated €20 billion ESF+ budget for the European Child Guarantee. The post-2027 Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance should also be used to eradicate child poverty in the enlargement countries. In response to increasing pressure to direct funds toward defence, the Strategy must ensure that investments in children remain a financial priority. As highlighted by the European Anti-Poverty Network, the EU should exclude social investments from deficit calculations, as has been done with defence spending. A tax exemption model for social investment should also be considered.

### 2. Ensure the meaningful participation of people experiencing poverty, including children

An effective strategy must be rooted in the realities of those it seeks to support. **Children experiencing poverty must be meaningfully included in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the Anti-Poverty Strategy.** It is crucial to create safe spaces for children to discuss their realities and value their insights as experts on their own experiences. Eurochild's report, *Poverty Takes Away the Right to Childhood*, which consulted children through a mixed-methods approach adapted to national and local contexts, can serve as a valuable source of inspiration.

### 3. Involve civil society organisations

Civil society organisations that work directly with children and families are indispensable partners in the fight against poverty. **The *Anti-Poverty Strategy* must ensure the regular and meaningful participation of these organisations.** Their experience on the ground is vital to designing ambitious but also practical and effective measures. The EU should fully leverage the expertise of EU networks to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges associated with poverty across Europe and facilitate engagement with their members, including grassroots organisations.

### 4. Require European governments to adopt *National Anti-Poverty Strategies*

**European governments should be required to adopt *National Anti-Poverty Strategies*, with specific indicators on child poverty and social exclusion.** These should include clear objectives, timelines, and indicators, and be backed by dedicated national and EU resources. Planning and funding must go hand in hand to ensure that anti-poverty efforts lead to systemic and sustainable impacts. The development of anti-poverty strategies at local and regional levels should also be encouraged.

### 5. Strengthen monitoring and accountability mechanisms

Monitoring progress and ensuring accountability will be central to the Strategy's success. **Implementing the *National Anti-Poverty Strategies* must be backed by robust, disaggregated data collection**, including age, gender, disability, ethnicity, and migration status. In line with the European Child Guarantee reporting process, which Eurochild regularly monitors, Member States are required to periodically report on the progress made, detailing the actions taken, challenges encountered, and results achieved. These include demonstrating that public budgets are being used to the maximum extent of available resources to prevent and tackle child poverty.

Independent evaluations and opportunities for civil society to provide shadow reports, such as Eurochild Annual reports on children in need across Europe, will be key to maintaining transparency and ensuring that governments are accountable for their commitments.

## Investment in key services

Eurochild advocates for systemic reforms that address structural inequalities, ensuring children and families, particularly those facing disadvantage, receive the necessary support. This approach considers that children's development is also shaped by the environments in which they grow—whether at home, in school, or within their communities. All measures outlined below must be embedded in the *EU Anti-Poverty Strategy*, supported by clear indicators for monitoring progress, as they are instrumental in helping children and families lift themselves out of poverty.

## 1. Strengthening social welfare for children

**A resilient and inclusive social welfare system is central to tackling child poverty.** To achieve this, European states must establish adequate minimum income schemes that shield children and families from falling into extreme poverty and expand social protection measures to cover key services.

**Investment in social services must be explicitly incorporated into the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and monitored through established indicators.** This should include the expansion of child benefits and the strengthening of social protection systems. Member States must commit to raising the level and coverage of child income support, and the EU should track progress with common benchmarks. **Targeted programmes** should provide direct support to families in need, particularly those with children from low-income backgrounds, and invest in long-term strategies to eliminate child poverty. Strengthening universal child and family policies, increasing child allowances, and improving employment opportunities for parents are all key measures to ensure equal opportunities for children to thrive.

In line with General Comment 19 of the CRC, the Anti-Poverty Strategy should explicitly recognise that during times of economic crisis, **governments must prioritise the child's best interests in budgetary decisions and ensure that children's rights are not rolled back.** Special attention must be given to protect the most vulnerable children from the negative impacts of budget cuts.

## 2. Ensuring inclusive, high-quality education and early childhood education and care

Education is one of the most powerful tools to lift children out of poverty. **Eurochild calls for universal access to affordable, high-quality education, starting with early childhood education and care, which lays the foundation for lifelong learning and development.** European governments must ensure that all children, particularly those from underserved communities, can access the services they need. Education systems must be child-centred, child-friendly, and empowering, respecting children's rights to dignity, autonomy, and personal development. These investments must be explicitly integrated into the *EU Anti-Poverty Strategy* and tracked with indicators that reflect educational inclusion and quality for children in poverty.

Education must be not only available but also accessible, acceptable, and adaptable to the diverse needs of children, especially those from marginalised backgrounds. This inequality must be addressed through inclusive education that fosters equity for all **children**. The Strategy should focus on **removing financial, social, and administrative barriers** to school attendance and participation, including access to school meals, supplies, transportation, and extracurricular activities.



### 3. Strengthening child protection systems

**Strong child protection systems must be proactive rather than merely reactive.** Financial support to strengthen them must be embedded within the *EU Anti-Poverty Strategy*, with clear monitoring indicators in place. Adequate income support is a key element in preventing child neglect, alongside comprehensive family policies that include paid parental leave, flexible work arrangements, and initiatives to promote work-life balance.

Ensuring families have access to quality housing, healthcare, and mental health support for parents and caregivers is crucial in creating an environment where children can thrive. Investing in strengthening child protection systems that are based on family-centred care is essential. Investment is needed to address staffing shortages, reduce turnover, and improve worker professional development opportunities. Adequate resources are vital for effective risk identification, response, and continuous access to support services, including for children (at risk of) experiencing violence.

### 4. Addressing housing challenges for children

**Housing insecurity is a growing issue for children in the EU and must be addressed through the *EU Anti-Poverty Strategy* as a structural issue.** According to FEANTSA estimates, approximately 400,000 children in the EU and the UK experienced homelessness in 2023, living in night shelters or temporary accommodation. A significant proportion of children also live in overcrowded housing, with some countries seeing rates that exceed 50%. Additionally, many children are exposed to substandard housing conditions, including homes with inadequate insulation and heating, which makes it difficult for families to maintain a comfortable and healthy living environment.

Eurochild advocates for urgent investment in housing to ensure that all children grow up in secure and stable environments. This includes expanding social housing, addressing waiting lists, and developing national housing strategies that focus on improving the affordability and quality of homes for families. Governments should provide adequate legal protections to prevent forced evictions and ensure families facing eviction can access **alternative housing solutions**. Investment in eviction prevention is essential. The EU must encourage Member States to establish concrete targets to address child homelessness and overcrowding, and these targets must be monitored under the Strategy.

### 5. Improving access to healthcare, including mental health

Access to healthcare is a fundamental right for all children. **Health interventions must be incorporated into the *EU Anti-Poverty Strategy* and evaluated using disaggregated indicators to assess access, quality, and outcomes for vulnerable children.** Eurochild stresses the need for European states to prioritise improving access to healthcare services for children, including essential mental health services. The EU must focus on ensuring affordable and accessible healthcare, especially for vulnerable populations such as children in poverty or those from migrant backgrounds. Mental health care is a growing concern, and



urgent action is needed to strengthen mental health systems, reduce inequalities, improve preventative measures and ensure timely access to care, particularly in underserved and rural areas.

## 6. Bridging the digital divide

**Measures to bridge the digital divide must be fully integrated into the *EU Anti-Poverty Strategy*, with relevant indicators tracking digital inclusion among children.** Children living in rural areas or from low-income families are often deprived of the digital tools and connectivity necessary for education, social interaction, and personal development. Action is needed to bridge the digital divide by ensuring that all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to digital tools and the internet.

## 7. Guaranteeing access to adequate nutrition

**Nutrition plays a vital role in children's development. It must be a core component of the *EU Anti-Poverty Strategy*,** with monitoring indicators covering food security and access to school meals. Eurochild advocates for policies that guarantee all children have access to adequate, nutritious food, ensuring that no child goes hungry. This includes providing hot meals in schools and kindergartens, particularly for children from low-income households. Additionally, provisions should be extended to cover school holidays, thereby addressing food insecurity year-round. Community-based solutions, such as supporting food banks, are also essential in ensuring children have access to the nutrition they need to grow and thrive.

## Summary

**Eurochild calls for a comprehensive, rights-based EU Anti-Poverty Strategy that directly tackles the root causes of child poverty and delivers real, measurable improvements for children.** This means making **eradicating child poverty and supporting children's rights a cross-cutting priority in the strategy's objectives, as well as one of the strategy's objectives.** Strengthening the European Child Guarantee should be one of the strategy's goals, ensuring vulnerable children can access vital services like healthcare, education, and housing.

The meaningful participation of children experiencing poverty and civil society organisations is crucial in helping to create practical and effective measures. Strengthened monitoring and accountability mechanisms, including robust data collection, will ensure progress is tracked.

An intersectional approach is key, acknowledging how factors like migration status, race, disability, and gender deepen child poverty. The strategy should align with broader EU frameworks such as the *European Child Guarantee* and the *EU Anti-Racism Action Plan* and be sufficiently funded to ensure effective implementation.

Investment in key services, including social welfare, education, child protection, healthcare, and housing, is crucial. These measures are necessary to break the cycle of poverty and ensure all children have the opportunity to thrive.

A failure to act not only undermines the rights of millions of children, but it is also a matter of intergenerational fairness. The EU must take a comprehensive approach to create a fairer society where children's rights are upheld and long-term systemic change is achieved.

Eurochild remains at the disposal of the European Institutions to ensure that child poverty is eradicated through rights-based, sustainable, and participatory approaches that reflect the realities of children and families across Europe. We stand ready to contribute our expertise, amplify the voices of children and grassroots organisations, and support the implementation and monitoring of an ambitious *EU Anti-Poverty Strategy* that leaves no child behind.

**For more information, contact:**

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