

Eurochild's contribution to the Renewed Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights

**Prioritising the eradication of child
poverty**



Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

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The next EU Action Plan must make the eradication of child poverty a core objective and fully integrate children's rights across all social policy areas.

Introduction

Eurochild welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of a renewed Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights. As the largest network dedicated to upholding the rights of children across Europe, Eurochild recognises the progress made under the 2021 Action Plan. However, the growing number of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, reaching 19.5 million or 24.2% of the child population in 2024, demands an ambitious and rights-based approach to Europe's social agenda. **While eradicating child 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 opportunities. Social exclusion is intergenerational, undermining social cohesion and increasing the burden on welfare systems. It is estimated that failing to reduce child poverty costs European countries an average of GDP annually.

As the 2013 Commission Recommendation for investing in children states: *"Preventing the transmission of disadvantage across generations is a crucial investment."*

Achievements of the 2021 Action Plan

In 2021, Eurochild welcomed the Action Plan's focus on children's social rights.

- The Action Plan's poverty reduction target recognised children as a distinct group, aiming to lift at least 5 million children out of poverty by 2030.
- A revised Social Scoreboard included child-specific indicators, such as a headline measure on child poverty and indicators on childcare, school participation and early school dropouts.
- Under the European Care Strategy, childcare coverage for children under 3 rose from 33% to 45%; coverage for ages 3 to starting school increased from 90% to 96%.
- The European Child Guarantee (ECG) was adopted through a Council Recommendation, National Action Plans were submitted, and the findings from the biennial reports on the implementation of the European Child Guarantee have officially been incorporated into the European Semester framework.

- €8.9 billion from the ESF+ was allocated to combat child poverty. Eleven Member States with child poverty rates above the EU average were required to allocate at least 5% of the European Social Fund + (ESF+) to supporting children.
- Monitoring of child poverty was strengthened: EU reporting now disaggregates poverty data by age and household characteristics.
- The strengthening of the European Child Guarantee, as included in the European Commission's Political Guidelines, represents a key opportunity to tackle the current challenges children across Europe face.

These achievements demonstrate that placing children at the heart of EU social policy delivers concrete outcomes, but they must now be scaled and sustained.

Remaining challenges and gaps

Despite progress in its monitoring frameworks and targets, Europe remains far off track in achieving its child poverty goals.

Weakening social protection

- The capacity of social transfers to reduce child poverty has declined.
- Welfare systems lift a smaller proportion of children out of poverty than before.
- The Social Protection Committee notes a “weakening in the effectiveness of social protection systems.”

In-work poverty is higher for families with children

In-work poverty has risen in many Member States, including Bulgaria, Croatia, and Slovakia. Romania, Luxembourg, and Bulgaria recorded the highest levels (15.3%, 14.8%, and 11.4%, respectively), while Spain, Estonia, and Portugal also had rates at or above 10%. It mainly affects households with dependent children (10.0%).

Education and Early Childhood Development

- Despite some progress, access to high-quality, inclusive early childhood education and care remains unequal.
- Educational performance is declining; resilience and equity in education systems need strengthening.
- Many children still lack digital tools and literacy needed for learning in a digital world.

Child Protection Systems

- Implementation of child protection legislation is hindered by inadequate funding.
- Child protection systems are fragmented, with poor cross-sector cooperation and staffing challenges.
- Vulnerable children, especially from marginalised communities and unaccompanied minors, or victims of violence, face significant rights violations and service access barriers.

Housing Insecurity

- Access to housing is a key challenge, with around 400,000 children affected by homelessness across the EU and UK.
- 1 in 4 children live in overcrowded homes; many endure poor housing conditions.
- 9.2% of EU families cannot afford adequate indoor heating.

Mental Health Support

- Services are underfunded and understaffed, especially in schools.
- Long waiting times and access barriers disproportionately affect marginalised groups.
- Preventive care is weak; coordination between sectors is lacking.

Data Gaps

- Disaggregation by age is standard, but Member States often fail to report on vulnerable groups.
- Data is limited or delayed for children with disabilities, children with a migrant background and those of ethnic minority origin, including Roma, and those in alternative care.

Recommendations for the next Action Plan

To ensure the new Action Plan realises its full potential, Eurochild recommends:

- Adopting a vision that shifts the focus from poverty reduction to poverty eradication, recognising child poverty as a violation of children's rights that perpetuates the cycle of poverty and transfers disadvantage across generations. Explicitly integrating the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and General Comment 19 on public budgeting for the realisation of children's rights into all relevant measures.
- Adopting an intersectional approach when tackling child poverty, reflecting diverse vulnerabilities. Mandating a specific earmark of EU funding such as the 5% ESF+

earmark for child-poverty measures for all Member States and including a dedicated ECG budget line in the [2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework](#).

- Aligning with EU frameworks, including [the European Child Guarantee](#), the [Commission’s Recommendation on integrated child protection systems](#), the upcoming [European Affordable Housing Strategy](#), [the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy](#), the [EU Anti-Racism Action Plan](#), the Gender Equality Strategy, the LGBTIQ+ Strategy, the [Intergenerational Fairness Strategy](#), and the [Enlargement Package](#).
- Ensuring national budgets increase investments in services and the workforce dedicated to children.
- Require annual publication of disaggregated child-poverty data, including by disability, migration status, ethnicity and geographic location.
- Mandating the participation of children and families with lived experience, and [civil society organisations](#), in the design, implementation and evaluation of the Pillar.
- Making the ECG a fully funded, cross-sectoral, and data-driven framework by extending it to enlargement countries, promoting the sharing of evidence-based practices.
- Implementing the upcoming [EU Anti-Poverty Strategy](#) as a core pillar, with national anti-poverty strategies aligned with EU goals.

Strengthening responses to child poverty

The renewed Action Plan should incorporate the following priorities, anchored in a comprehensive EU Anti-Poverty Strategy:

- **Expand social welfare for children** through minimum income schemes, universal child benefits, and rights-based approaches, particularly during times of crisis.
- **Ensure inclusive, high-quality education and ECEC**, removing barriers to participation, increasing investment in inclusive, accessible schooling, and tracking educational inclusion for children in poverty.
- **Reform child protection systems** to guarantee access to adequate income, housing, healthcare, and mental health support for parents and caregivers, and ensure children live in a family and community-based environment.
- **Address housing challenges for children**, including child homelessness and overcrowding, with targeted investment in affordable housing, eviction prevention, and legal protections.
- **Improve access to healthcare, including mental health**, ensuring accessibility, affordability, and inclusive services for vulnerable children and families.

- **Bridge the digital divide** by providing all children with digital literacy, tools and internet connectivity necessary for education and personal development.
- **Guarantee adequate nutrition** through school meals, community-based support, and year-round food security measures.

Conclusion

Eurochild is ready to support the European Commission and Member States in creating a future where no child experiences poverty or social exclusion.

The 2021 Action Plan laid a strong foundation, but greater ambition and political commitment are now essential. By strengthening the European Child Guarantee, integrating children's rights across all policies, and committing to sustained investment and oversight, the EU can move beyond reducing child poverty toward its eradication. Every child has the right to a life free from poverty and social exclusion. The EU and its Member States must act now - with urgency, ambition, and accountability - to ensure no child is left behind.

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