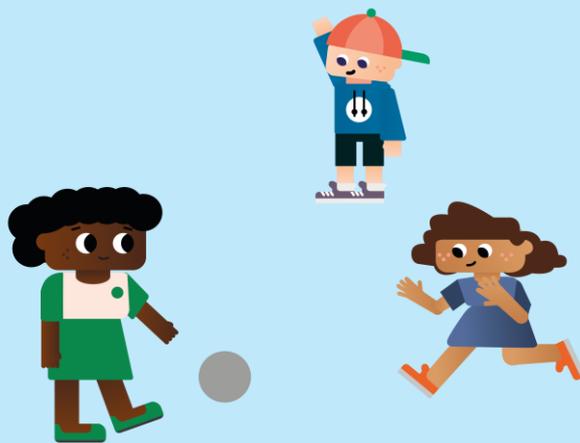


Delivering on the European Child Guarantee: Implementation, Practice and Priorities

Taken from
*Unequal Childhoods: Rights on paper
should be rights in practice*
Eurochild 2025 flagship report
on children in need across Europe.



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Delivering on the European Child Guarantee: Implementation, practice and priorities

On 20 November 2025 - World Children's Day - Eurochild released its flagship report on children in need titled "Unequal Childhoods: Rights on paper should be rights in practice". The report is based on information provided by 84 Eurochild members and contributors in 36 countries across Europe. This sub-report builds on the findings of the Flagship Report to examine the European Child Guarantee as the EU's main framework for addressing child poverty and social exclusion. It analyses implementation experiences four years after the Guarantee's adoption, highlights selected good and promising practices identified by Eurochild members, and reflects on the conditions needed to strengthen the Guarantee's impact in the years ahead.

Introduction

Launched in 2021, the European Child Guarantee (ECG) aims to ensure that children in need can access key services, including education, healthcare, nutrition, housing, and early childhood care, while targeting children living in poverty, those with disabilities, those from migrant or minority backgrounds, those experiencing homelessness, and those in alternative care.

Four years on, progress remains uneven. While some countries have improved coordination and access to services, persistent challenges remain around data availability, child participation and sustainable investment. Despite long-standing commitments, around 19 million children in the EU continue to experience poverty, discrimination and unequal access to these key services, particularly those facing multiple disadvantages.

The ECG was created to close the gap between political commitments and the lived realities of children experiencing poverty. Since its launch, it has contributed to expanding access to key services in several countries and has supported civil society organisations through funding instruments such as the European Social Fund Plus. National Action Plans, ESF+ investment, biennial reporting and coordinated implementation already indicate how political commitments can be translated into practice, but further strengthening is needed.

This sub-report reviews the implementation of the European Child Guarantee (ECG), drawing on input from Eurochild members who shared both challenges and good and promising practices from their national contexts. It identifies common themes, recommendations and remaining gaps, and highlights good practices from across the EU and other European countries. It also outlines the role the European Semester process can play in strengthening the ECG. The report aims to support policymakers, practitioners and stakeholders in improving implementation, building on what works, and ensuring the ECG delivers lasting, meaningful changes for children in vulnerable situations across Europe.

1. Key Similarities Across Countries

Below is a synthesis of common themes and recurring recommendations from Eurochild members across countries in the flagship report, highlighting convergence and shared priorities for strengthening the ECG.

1.1 Stronger Coordination and Governance

Highlighted in: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Romania.

Many countries stressed that implementation remains fragmented. There is a consistent call for:

- Whole-of-government approaches
- Integrated service delivery
- Stronger leadership and accountability mechanisms

Common recommendations:

- Clear institutional responsibility
- Cross-ministerial, cross-sector and multi-level governance, with stronger vertical and horizontal coordination
- Stronger inter-institutional cooperation
- Defined mandates and competences for National Coordinators

1.2 Sustainable and Adequate Funding

Highlighted in: Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Luxembourg, Malta.

Several countries stated that the Child Guarantee could become symbolic or short-term. The need for predictable, structural funding is a major cross-cutting theme.

Common recommendations:

- Stable, long-term funding (not project-based) linked to national reforms on eradicating child poverty
- Better mobilisation of ESF+ and other EU funds, such as ERDF (European Regional Development Fund), especially for infrastructure
- Earmarked resources
- Structural anti-poverty investment (e.g., basic child allowance and other subsidies such as energy/housing subsidy)

1.3 Monitoring, Data and Accountability

Highlighted in: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Slovenia.

Countries repeatedly highlight weak monitoring systems and insufficient accountability mechanisms.

Common recommendations:

- Clear monitoring and evaluation frameworks
- Disaggregated data collection
- Budget tracking and child-rights budgeting
- Transparent reporting, including financial reporting to the Commission

1.4 Meaningful Participation of Civil Society and Children

Highlighted in: Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Romania.

Limited or tokenistic stakeholder participation and consultation are among the most consistent concerns across Member States.

Common recommendations:

- Formal involvement of NGOs in implementation and monitoring
- Structured consultation mechanisms
- Create mechanisms for meaningful child participation

1.5 Targeting the Most Vulnerable Children

Highlighted in: Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain.

There is concern that universal measures alone are insufficient without targeted support.

Common recommendations:

- Clear definition and focus of target groups at the national level
- Focus on children facing multiple disadvantages
- Specific measures for children with a migrant and ethnic minority background, including Roma children and refugee children, children with disabilities, and children in care. Ensure support reaches children with a migration background, regardless of their migration status.
- Targeted anti-poverty strategies.

1.6 Integrated and Preventive Approaches

Highlighted in: Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Italy, Romania, Slovenia.

Several countries stress that implementation must move beyond alignment of existing programmes and instead transform systems.

Common recommendations:

- Integrated family services
- Prevention-focused strategies and investments
- Expansion of quality, inclusive and accessible early childhood services
- Linking education, housing, and social support.

1.7 Housing and Material Deprivation

Highlighted in: Bulgaria, Ireland, Netherlands.

Housing challenges are both consequences and structural drivers of child poverty.

Common recommendations:

- Address housing precarity, including overcrowding, evictions
- Recognise access to basic services as an obligation upon governments (enshrine in legislation)
- Improve living conditions for children in extreme poverty

1.8 Political Will and Strategic Priority

Highlighted in: Finland, Latvia, Malta.

Some countries explicitly describe implementation as weak or symbolic without political commitment.

Common recommendations:

- Elevate the fight against child poverty as a top political priority
- Move from rhetoric to binding commitments and funding
- Anchor the ECG in long-term national strategies

2. Overall Converging Recommendations

Across countries, five core priorities emerge:

1. Move from coordination on paper to systemic, cross-sector implementation.
2. Ensure sustainable, structural funding rather than short-term project logic.
3. Strengthen monitoring, data collection and accountability mechanisms.
4. Guarantee meaningful participation of civil society, children, and families.
5. Target the most vulnerable children through integrated, preventive approaches.

3. How can the European Semester and Recommendations Strengthen the ECG?

The European Semester is a central EU coordination mechanism that guides Member States' economic, social, employment, and fiscal policies. For social policies such as reducing child poverty, it is particularly important because it links policy priorities to EU funding and national reforms. Linking child-related priorities to the European Semester would ensure accountability and progress tracking through measurable targets and annual reporting.

Make Child Poverty Reduction a Core Monitored Objective within the European Semester and Linked to Funding.

Across countries, the core gaps are not a lack of policy ideas, but:

- Weak accountability
- Uneven political prioritisation
- Fragmented implementation
- Insufficient structural investment.

Embedding the ECG more firmly in the European Semester, with measurable targets and funding conditionality, would address all of these simultaneously.

What this would look like in practice

1. **Systematic country-specific recommendations (CSRs)** every Member State should receive a CSR on child poverty or social exclusion and related priorities – ECEC, inclusive education, accessible healthcare, adequate housing and healthy nutrition.
2. **Mandatory reporting on outcomes**, not only measures (e.g. service access, reduction in material deprivation, housing stability).
3. **Stronger link between ESF+ funding and progress**, including:

- Reinforced earmarking for children in the next MFF;
 - Requirement to demonstrate alignment of national budgets with ECG priorities.
4. **Child-rights budgeting and expenditure tracking** integrated into Semester monitoring.

Why is this transformative?

- It elevates child poverty to a macroeconomic and structural reform priority, not just a social add-on.
- It creates political visibility at the highest level of EU governance.
- It links financial leverage to measurable progress.
- It incentivises cross-ministerial coordination at the national level.
- It shifts the ECG from a soft coordination framework to a driver of structural reform.

4. Common Findings from Eurochild Members

The European Child Guarantee focuses on five key services for children in need to grow, learn and thrive, forming the basis for preventing poverty and social exclusion from the earliest years. The following pages outline progress, remaining gaps and promising practices from across Europe in delivering these services.

4.1 Early Childhood Education and Care

Eurochild’s Flagship Report 2025 identifies early childhood education and care (ECEC) as a cornerstone of children’s rights, social inclusion, and long-term equality. Investment in high-quality, affordable, and inclusive ECEC, particularly for children aged 0 to 3, is one of the most effective ways to prevent poverty and break intergenerational disadvantage. However, access remains uneven. Children from low-income families, migrant and minority backgrounds, those with disabilities, and those living in remote areas face persistent barriers such as high costs, limited availability, staff shortages, language obstacles and weak inclusive support. In many countries, legal entitlement does not translate into real access.

The report emphasises the need for integrated early childhood development approaches that link education to health services, parenting support, and social and community interventions, in line with the ECG. While countries that invest strategically in ECEC show positive outcomes, in many contexts, provision remains underfunded, fragmented or insufficiently targeted at the most vulnerable. Scaling up accessible and inclusive ECEC, supported by dedicated funding, workforce investment and strong cross-sector coordination, remains essential to prevent early inequalities from undermining children’s rights and life chances.

Good and promising practices

Albania

In Albania, the National Programme for Early Childhood Development 2022–2026 is a multi-sector programme that integrates early education, health, nutrition, parenting support and social protection services for children aged 0 to 6. It includes expanding access to preschools in underserved areas, implementing routine health screenings, and providing professional training for educators and health workers. The programme specifically targets the most vulnerable children, including those from Roma, Egyptian, rural and low-income families.

Austria

In Austria, public investment in ECEC has been significantly reinforced through the Recovery and Resilience Plan, with resources directed towards expanding childcare capacity and increasing full-day provision.

Belgium

The National Health Strategy 2030 outlines important goals, including improving the reach, access, and quality of maternal and infant healthcare, with a focus on overcoming regional disparities, boosting the healthy habits of mothers-to-be, and enhancing the professional qualifications of health specialists.

Croatia

The development of the National Early Childhood Intervention Plan for 2025-2030 is underway. This supports an early intervention system based on cross-sector cooperation, with an emphasis on regional equity.

Cyprus

Over the past two years, several positive steps have been taken to support early childhood development. The age of free pre-school education has been lowered, with the aim of making it available to children from age 4 by 2028.

Denmark

In Denmark, municipal home-visiting programmes by health nurses ('sundhedsplejersker') provide early screening, parenting support, and referrals during a child's first years. There is also early intervention in daycare settings, where staff identify and support children with developmental needs, often in cooperation with social or health services. These programmes are seen as effective when resources and staffing levels are adequate.

Estonia

Two positive initiatives that support early childhood development (ECD) are: The 'Incredible Years' Parenting Programme provides training for parents and other caregivers of children aged 2–8. Participants learn to set rules and boundaries, encourage and praise their child, help children manage strong emotions, support children's social and communication skills through play and resolve conflicts and cope with stress. Perepesa, community-based centres

for parenting and family support, offer services from pregnancy until children reach school age. Parents have access to training, counselling, peer discussions, and psychological support, while children are cared for in a safe, supportive playroom environment. Perepesa also serves as a community meeting place, helping reduce social isolation among parents.

Finland

Family centres are a positive and effective intervention that supports young children and their families. Family centres bring together various services that promote the well-being, health, growth, and development of children, young people, and families (including early intervention, care, and rehabilitation). The 2023 social and health care reform, which transferred the responsibility for social and health services from municipalities to the counties, has had a positive impact on the operation of family centres, and their activities are becoming established across all counties. The participation rate in early childhood education and care (ECEC) has increased since 2015. In 2023, 42% of children under three participated in ECEC. Among children aged 3–5, the rate is 90%.

France

There are several positive initiatives in France focused on early childhood development (ECD). These include the ‘1000 premiers jours’ (‘the first 1000 days’) policy, which promotes understanding and awareness of the importance of early childhood and provides a range of support measures for parents. The aim is to support young children’s growth, particularly neurocognitive development, and parents’ health in all its dimensions - physical, mental and social. In child protection, the Pégase programme offers standardised monitoring and early psychological care to prevent the long-term effects of child mistreatment in very young children taken into care.

Germany

The Childcare Quality Act provides €4 billion over two years to improve access and quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC). Early intervention services are expanding, linking welfare, healthcare, and counselling to support families around the time of birth. Reform of the Child and Youth Welfare Law has also strengthened integration and child-rights approaches. Investment has led to a 130% increase in ECEC places for under-threes in the past 15 years.

Greece

Three positive and effective interventions that support early childhood development (ECD):

1. The shift from centre-based medical models to a structured, family-centred early childhood intervention (ECI) framework. This reform builds on good practices, raises awareness, trains professionals, and prepares legislation for integrated ECI services. For example, ALMA collaborates with the Municipality of Palaio Faliro on a pilot programme to detect autism early.
2. The Daycare Homes of The Smile of the Child provide care for children whose families face significant challenges. The services include safe and structured

environments for children; assistance with schoolwork and educational support; recreational activities and play; nutritious meals; and parental empowerment and support.

3. The Neighbourhood Babysitters programme, under the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family Affairs.

Hungary

Programmes led by the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service deliver positive and effective interventions for young children and their families, particularly in disadvantaged communities. One notable example is their early childhood development (ECD) and parenting support work in segregated or severely deprived settlements. This aims to strengthen parental capacity, improve school readiness, and address developmental delays at an early stage. Another example is their integrated community-based child and family services, where health, social, and educational support are provided in one place.

Ireland

In Ireland, the introduction of the Equal Start programme is intended to provide additional, targeted support to children in disadvantaged areas. This constitutes a mixed model that combines universal subsidies with targeted interventions for children at risk of poverty.

Italy

‘Born to Read’ (Nati per Leggere) promotes family reading for children aged 0–6 in over 2,000 Italian municipalities. It involves paediatricians, librarians, educators, and volunteers. Nidi Gratis (‘Free Nurseries’) in the Tuscany Region ensures free access to nurseries for families that qualify for the scheme, funded by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and local budgets. Between 2022 and 2025, the participation of children aged 0–3 in nurseries increased to 58%, reducing inequalities. The programme has been replicated in other regions.

Kosovo

In Kosovo, a promising practice under early childhood education and care is the community-based early childhood centres run by CONCORDIA in Prizren and Gjakova. These centres provide inclusive preschool education for some of the most disadvantaged children and combine early learning with nutritious daily meals, psychological counselling, and school-readiness support.

Latvia

In Latvia, several parental support programmes exist, although coverage is uneven. At Riga Maternity Hospital, the When a Baby is Born programme supports parents of newborns. Some municipalities offer the Child’s Guardian Angel programme for parents with low parenting skills (children aged 0–2), while the Emotional Education of the Child (BEA) programme is available to parents of children aged 0–7 in certain regions.

Romania

In Romania, the Minimum Service Package pilot programme offers home visits and integrated health, education, and social protection services through a community team (social worker, community nurse, school counsellor/school mediator). The initiative supports the prevention of family separation, provides care, nutrition, vaccination, and access to early education, and has reduced the risk of social exclusion for hundreds of families in disadvantaged areas. The Community Services for Children Programme develops early intervention and parental support networks at the local level. These include home visits for parents with children aged 0-3, health screening, and psychological and educational support for parents (including teenage parents).

Scotland

Scotland supports early childhood development through regular child health reviews from birth to age five and Best Start Grants and Best Start Food payments, which provide financial support from pregnancy until a child turns three, including for some families with 'No Recourse to Public Funds', who cannot access mainstream benefits (NRPF). ECD data is disaggregated by deprivation, sex, ethnicity, care status, and language, supporting more targeted and inclusive policy responses.

Serbia

A positive development is the UNICEF-led parenting support programme, which provides home visits by nurses to families in need and offers medical and parenting advice. The programme has expanded to 34 municipalities. In addition, the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children increased one-time child and parental allowances for newborns, with higher support depending on the number of children.

Slovenia

Some positive and effective initiatives in Slovenia include a Home Visiting Programme after a child's birth. There are universal, free health checks (by paediatricians) for newborns, infants, and young children (at 2-6 months, 12 months, 3 years, 5-6 years). Kindergartens and schools have lectures for parents on different parenting topics.

Spain

In Spain, a national roadmap to improve early childhood care has been adopted, grounded in the principles of universality, public responsibility, equity and quality, and based on free access at the point of use. The roadmap is set to be implemented by 2030, in line with the European Child Guarantee, and includes €42 million in ESF+ funding distributed to regional governments. It focuses on improving the quality of early care services, continuous professional training for staff, and promoting effective family participation. While significant barriers persist, including a limited number of places, high fees, shortages of specialised personnel, and weak coordination across administrations, the roadmap represents an important step towards more equitable and accessible early childhood education and care if these structural challenges are addressed.

Türkiye

Türkiye has introduced structured early childhood monitoring through family physicians, in line with the Ministry of Health's Infant, Child and Adolescent Monitoring Protocols. Developmental assessments, physical examinations and caregiver counselling are carried out systematically.

Wales

The Flying Start programme provides support for families with children under four in disadvantaged areas in Wales, through childcare, health visiting support and speech/language provision. In addition, Wales will soon introduce a Baby Bundle scheme, targeted at families in Flying Start areas of disadvantage.

4.2 Education

The report highlights education as a fundamental children's right and a decisive factor in either reducing or reproducing inequality. Although access to compulsory education is formally guaranteed across Europe, children affected by poverty, discrimination and social exclusion do not experience education on equal terms. Educational inequalities are closely linked to socioeconomic disadvantage. Children from low-income families, those whose parents have lower educational attainment, children with disabilities, Roma children, children in alternative care and those with a migrant background are more likely to face learning gaps, segregation, inadequate support, hidden costs of schooling, e.g. participation in school trips/sports, and early school leaving. These disparities often emerge early and deepen over time when preventive and inclusive measures are lacking.

The report highlights persistent shortcomings in inclusive education, where non-segregated schooling remains a policy ambition rather than a consistent reality due to insufficient investment, staff shortages and weak coordination between education, social and child protection systems. It also underlines that education systems alone cannot meet the needs of children in vulnerable situations without complementary measures such as school meals, transport, psychosocial support and strong links with families and community services.

Progress is possible when policies are adequately funded, inclusive, and well-coordinated, but without sustained investment and alignment with the ECG's integrated, rights-based approach, education systems risk reproducing broader inequalities rather than reducing them.

Good and promising practices

Albania

There is increasing recognition of the importance of inclusive education, with efforts to integrate children with disabilities and marginalised groups into mainstream schools. This fosters a more supportive and diverse learning environment. The gradual introduction of digital access in schools has opened new opportunities for learning and skills development among children, especially in urban areas.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the government allocated 5.72 million BAM for the 2024 to 2025 academic year to provide free textbooks to approximately 43,870 elementary school pupils. Beneficiaries include children in grades one to four, children from large families, children with disabilities, and winners of national competitions.

Bulgaria

According to Bulgaria's biennial progress report, vulnerable children have been supported through the Child Guarantee's Human Resources Development and Education programmes. Projects such as Strong Start and Success for You supported children with special educational needs, those at risk, and those with chronic illnesses. Success for You reached about 96,000 pupils, including 11,746 with special needs or chronic illnesses and 64,271 from vulnerable groups, while Strong Start supported over 37,000 children.

Estonia

In Estonia, positive developments include the implementation of evidence-based mental health and anti-bullying programmes. Estonia is also investing in teacher in-service training and in strengthening educational leadership and multicultural competencies.

Italy

There has been a slow but steady growth of services for children aged 0–2, the development of integrated tools to measure educational poverty, and initiatives that foster children's positive relationships at school and support their social and emotional well-being.

Romania

A new Education Law (2023) is promising better individualised support for inclusion. The Hot Meal in Schools programme has been expanded, and there are local initiatives to prevent school drop-out. Some schools have benefited from modern equipment and digital platforms.

Slovenia

Education in Slovenia is free and compulsory from ages six to 15. There is universal access to pre-school/kindergarten (from 11 months) and very high enrolment in primary education (98%). Early childhood education prepares most children well for primary school.

Ukraine

Despite war-related disruptions, some schools have introduced innovative programmes and creative teaching methods, alongside extracurricular activities that strengthen engagement and resilience. Teachers are described as highly committed, contributing to supportive learning environments even under crisis conditions.

4.3 Healthcare, including mental health

The report emphasises healthcare as a fundamental children’s right and a core element of social inclusion. Although most European countries formally provide universal healthcare coverage for children, effective access is often undermined by poverty, discrimination, territorial disparities and service shortages. Children face barriers such as long waiting times, out-of-pocket costs for medication or specialist care, limited child-friendly services and insufficient outreach to marginalised families. These challenges are particularly acute for children with disabilities, children in alternative care, Roma children, undocumented migrant children and those living in rural or remote areas.

Mental health is identified as one of the most urgent and under-resourced areas. Rising levels of anxiety, depression and psychosocial distress among children and adolescents, linked to socioeconomic hardship, family stress, educational pressures and the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, contrast sharply with insufficient, unevenly distributed and often inaccessible mental health services. The report stresses that mental health must be treated as an integral part of healthcare, supported by preventive services, school-based support, community care and early intervention.

Health inequalities begin early in life, as limited access to preventive healthcare, early screening and maternal and child health services increases the risk of long-term health problems and developmental delays. The report concludes that effective implementation of the European Child Guarantee requires sustained public investment, integrated service delivery and a strong focus on prevention and early support. Without this, health inequalities will continue to undermine children’s well-being, development and enjoyment of rights from an early age.

Good and promising practices

Belgium

In Flanders, children benefit from structured preventive healthcare, including free consultations at 10 key points in a child’s development to monitor growth, health and development. Children can also receive vaccinations. School-age children and their parents can access free multidisciplinary support through the Centre for Student Guidance, while children can contact Awel, a dedicated helpline. Young people aged 25 or under can visit ‘OverKop’ houses, which offer free, walk-in access to a safe space and professional therapeutic support. Confidential Centres on Child Abuse play a central role in early detection and cross-sector coordination, and crisis centres can host full families to reduce unnecessary separation. In addition, the large-scale ‘JOP’ survey includes questions on mental health, contributing to monitoring and awareness in this area.

Denmark

Denmark collects both quantitative and qualitative data on children’s mental health. In 2025, ON was launched, this is a comprehensive initiative aimed at strengthening digital literacy and promoting the well-being of children and young people. Schools across the

country are given free access to educational materials and peer-to-peer programmes, alongside resources for youth clubs and families.

Germany

A 2024 survey of 2,167 children aged 5–11 found positive results: 87% reported laughing and having fun often. The government has committed to developing a National Strategy for Mental Health in Young People, focusing on prevention, awareness-raising, early intervention, parental counselling, and professional training.

Luxembourg

In Luxembourg, early childhood development is supported by a specific health policy for infants that combines free healthcare, allowances and positive incentives for regular medical check-ups and preventive examinations up to a child's 4th birthday.

Moldova

In Moldova, a key promising practice in mental health is the adoption of the National Mental Health Programme 2023–2027, aimed at improving mental health services, raising awareness, and promoting education in this field. This programme outlines key development priorities. These include accessible, equitable mental health services for all ages, regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion, or social category, ensuring no one is left behind. It emphasises the creation of long-term crisis intervention and psycho-social rehabilitation services, including specialised institutions, and the development of a referral system across primary, outpatient, and hospital care for continuous support for children, adolescents, and young people. The programme also aims to increase national research, the number of mental health specialists, and the development of evidence-based guidelines by 2027. This is complemented by a network of Community Mental Health Centres, recovery centres, and the Child Helpline 116 111, reflecting a structured effort to strengthen child and adolescent mental health support in line with the European Child Guarantee's holistic approach to healthcare.

Netherlands

In the Netherlands, children can access mental health support through services such as In je bol (for young people aged 16–27) and PRAATPOWER (TalkPower), as well as anonymous chat services like Helpwanted.nl and Kindertelefoon. Cases of domestic violence and child abuse can be reported to Veilig Thuis (Safe Home). A national mental health monitor, published every four years by the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, includes data on children and adolescents.

Portugal

In Portugal, the National Health Service guarantees healthcare access to all children, including migrant children, regardless of their parents' legal status. Instituto de Apoio à Criança operates a child helpline that responds to mental health concerns, and Portugal participates in the WHO Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study.

Sweden

The Public Health Agency conducts regular national surveys such as 'Skolbarns hälsövanor', covering children aged 11, 13, and 15.

Switzerland

The Swiss government and affiliated research institutions have improved efforts to collect data on children's mental health, with quantitative and qualitative data available through national health surveys, academic research, and child-focused organisations.

Türkiye

Türkiye has introduced structured early childhood monitoring through family physicians, in line with the Ministry of Health's Infant, Child and Adolescent Monitoring Protocols. Developmental assessments, physical examinations and caregiver counselling are carried out systematically. Multidisciplinary Child and Youth Mental Health Centres have been established to improve the reach and quality of specialised mental health services.

4.4 Healthy nutrition and a healthy meal each school day

The report stresses that access to healthy nutrition is essential for children's development. Despite this, the report highlights that food insecurity remains widespread and is increasing across Europe, particularly amid rising living costs, inflation, and widening socioeconomic inequalities.

A central message of the report is that children living in poverty are disproportionately affected by inadequate nutrition, with direct consequences for their physical health, mental well-being, learning outcomes and social participation. Food insecurity is often hidden and intersects with other forms of deprivation, including poor housing, limited access to healthcare and educational disadvantage. These realities reinforce the Child Guarantee's framing of nutrition not as a charitable intervention, but as an essential service linked to children's dignity, development and equal opportunities.

The Flagship Report underlines that school meals play a crucial protective role for children in vulnerable situations. For many children, a school meal may be the only hot, nutritionally balanced meal they receive during the day. However, access to school meals remains uneven across Europe. Barriers include means-tested eligibility criteria, stigma associated with targeted schemes, insufficient nutritional quality, and lack of provision during school holidays. These barriers mirror the broader Child Guarantee challenge of moving from formal schemes to effective, stigma-free access in practice.

The report also stresses that healthy nutrition must be understood as part of a broader, rights-based and preventive approach, linked to health, education and social protection systems. Fragmented or emergency-based food support cannot substitute for sustainable, universal or inclusive policies.

Good and promising practices

Cyprus

Healthy nutrition is supported through several public schemes. The Tuition Subsidy and Feeding Scheme for 0–4 year-olds reduces childcare fees by up to 80% and subsidises meals, making early childhood education more affordable while supporting access to nutritious food. In addition, school meal subsidies and the “Feeding Students in Need” breakfast programme provide food support to vulnerable children.

Denmark

Denmark has introduced promising measures under the Child Guarantee, with free or subsidised school and daycare meals reducing nutritional inequality.

France

In France, under the Pacte des Solidarités 2023–2027, one measure focuses on free school meals, alongside efforts to reduce household food costs. The Pacte includes a 50% increase in funding over the previous anti-poverty strategy and aims to lift 300,000 children out of poverty by 2030. In implementing the Child Guarantee, there has been progress in distributing school breakfasts in disadvantaged areas, particularly in overseas departments.

Ireland

In Ireland, the School Meals Programme, funded by the Department of Social Protection, provides regular, nutritious food to children to enable them to take full advantage of education. Since 2019, the government has expanded the provision of hot school meals with annual budget increases, and under the Child Guarantee, free hot meals are set to reach 550,000 children in 3,200 schools by 2025. In early childhood settings, the Equal Start programme includes an Enhanced Nutrition Programme in priority settings, representing increased investment in healthy eating in the early years.

Malta

The ECG in Malta supports children and families through free and expanded services, including initiatives such as school breakfast clubs.

Netherlands

The implementation of the Child Guarantee has led to some positive developments, such as the extension of the School Meals Programme.

Slovenia

Slovenia has taken important steps to improve services for children in need. 49.8% of primary school pupils receive free morning snacks, while 21.6 % receive warm free school lunches.

4.5 Housing

Housing emerges in the report as a decisive yet often overlooked dimension of children's rights. Safe, adequate and affordable housing is a prerequisite for children's health, development, education and protection from poverty, yet housing insecurity and homelessness among families with children are increasing across Europe due to rising living costs, shortages of affordable housing and insufficient social protection. Children are disproportionately affected by overcrowding, substandard conditions, frequent moves, and homelessness, with lasting consequences for their physical and mental health, educational participation and emotional security. Housing instability often intersects with income poverty, poor health, limited access to services and discrimination, reinforcing cycles of exclusion.

The report highlights that children's specific needs remain largely invisible in national housing strategies, which tend to focus on labour market participation or crisis management. Responses rely heavily on emergency and temporary accommodation, while preventive, family-centred and child-sensitive approaches remain underdeveloped and weakly coordinated with social and child protection services. Roma families, migrant and refugee families and single-parent households face persistent structural barriers to stable and affordable housing. Although promising practices show that child-centred housing policies are possible, current efforts remain fragmented and insufficient. Ensuring effective access to adequate housing, therefore, requires sustained public investment, strong regulation, anti-discrimination measures and coordinated action across policy areas, without which housing insecurity will continue to undermine children's rights and efforts to break cycles of poverty and exclusion.

Good and promising practices

Germany

In Germany, housing support, subsidised housing, housing benefits, and advisory and support services are provided to help low-income families. Recent policy commitments include expanding social housing, especially for families with children, and increasing housing support for low-income families.

Hungary

In Hungary, the government introduced an Expanded Family Housing Support Loan in 2024. This nationwide scheme provides loans for families planning to have additional children. Eligibility is open to families until the mother reaches 41 years of age, and for a transitional period of two years, women above this age may also apply if they can certify a pregnancy of at least 12 weeks.

Italy

In Italy, the state has several measures to ensure the right to housing for vulnerable families. Social housing, although underfunded, offers rent-controlled accommodation. The

'Rent Bonus' (Bonus Affitto) and tax relief for subsidised leases support low-income families in covering housing costs.

Malta

In Malta, a promising practice in housing is the Housing Benefit Scheme, which subsidises private rental costs for low- and middle-income families, helping households with children maintain stable, affordable accommodation amid rising rents. The Housing Authority is expanding social housing stock and collaborating with private landlords to broaden housing access. Protections for tenants include safeguards against unjust eviction and fair lease terms.

Poland

European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) funds support housing for vulnerable groups through models such as Housing First and assisted living services.

Serbia

Some positive steps have been taken in Serbia. In cities like Čačak, for example, apartments have been built and allocated at a minimal rental cost to ensure stable housing.

Conclusion

The European Child Guarantee represents a significant political and policy milestone in the European Union's efforts to prevent and combat child poverty and social exclusion. Its establishment responded to a long-standing implementation gap between children's rights as recognised in EU and international frameworks and the lived realities of millions of children across Europe. By explicitly focusing on *effective access* to essential services and by embedding governance, monitoring and funding requirements, the Child Guarantee marked a qualitative shift in the EU's approach to child poverty.

Evidence from Eurochild's Flagship Report 2025 confirms that this shift was both necessary and timely. Across all five service areas covered by the Child Guarantee, early childhood education and care, education, healthcare, including mental health, healthy nutrition and school meals, and housing, children continue to face structural and intersecting barriers linked to poverty, discrimination and territorial inequality. The persistence of these barriers underscores the relevance of the Child Guarantee's integrated, prevention-oriented and rights-based design.

Four years into implementation, the European Child Guarantee is demonstrating a tangible impact. It has contributed to increased political visibility of child poverty, stronger cross-ministerial coordination in some Member States, and concrete progress in specific policy areas, often supported by EU funding instruments such as ESF+. National Action Plans, targeted ESF+ investments, biennial monitoring and reporting, and coordinated

implementation mechanisms are contributing to measurable on-the-ground progress. At the same time, implementation remains uneven. National Action Plans and biennial reports vary significantly in ambition and quality, data gaps continue to obscure the situation of the most marginalised children, and many measures remain fragmented or dependent on short-term, project-based funding. Meaningful participation of children and civil society, while formally encouraged, is not yet consistently embedded in practice.

Taken together, these findings point to a clear conclusion: the European Child Guarantee is a necessary but not self-executing instrument. Its transformative potential depends on sustained political commitment, adequate and dedicated funding, stronger governance and accountability, robust monitoring frameworks, and meaningful participation of children and civil society. Above all, it requires a continued and explicit focus on children facing the most severe and intersecting forms of disadvantage.

The forthcoming mid-term review and 'strengthening' of the European Child Guarantee, as highlighted in the commitments of European Commission Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu, therefore represent a critical opportunity. It offers an opportunity to consolidate early progress, address implementation weaknesses and reinforce the prevention-first logic that underpins the Guarantee. As Eurochild's analysis demonstrates, strengthening the Child Guarantee is not only a social policy imperative but a matter of children's rights, social cohesion and the EU's long-term resilience. Ensuring that rights on paper become rights in practice must remain the guiding objective of the next phase of implementation.

ANNEX A: Eurochild members' quotes on strengthening the European Child Guarantee

Austria

“Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by the introduction of a basic child allowance.”

Bulgaria

“Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by improving housing conditions for children living in extreme poverty and expanding the scope of early childhood development services and community-based social services — ensuring that social support reaches children and families not only in the form of social assistance, but through effective integrated services, and that it covers disadvantaged regions.”

Croatia

“The Guarantee must not remain a project-based initiative but serve as the foundation for a long term transformation of systems working with children. As part of the mid-term evaluation, we recommend strengthening cross-sector coordination, involving NGOs, children and parents in the design, monitoring and evaluation of measures, and establishing mechanisms for tracking investments in children through budgetary and programmatic indicators.”

Cyprus

“Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by children’s participation in the assessment process and in any amendments to the National Action Plan.”

Czechia

“Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee cannot be achieved by any government by simply signing it but not taking any action or reporting any progress in its implementation to the European Commission.”

Denmark

“Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by establishing an independent child rights institution and incorporating the UNCRC into Danish law. Unlike Norway and Sweden, Denmark lacks a national ombudsman for children and does not apply child rights impact assessments systematically. This weakens accountability. Strengthening cross-sector coordination and involving civil society in monitoring are also essential to ensure the Child Guarantee benefits all children.”

Estonia

“Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by more structured cross-sector cooperation, and better involvement of children and young people in processes and decisions.”

Finland

“Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by making the fight against child poverty and the prevention of social exclusion a high political priority, against which all other policy measures are assessed. The European Commission might want to consider requiring states to provide information on how decisions affect groups of children in vulnerable situations. The reporting guidelines should also direct states to present a comprehensive overview rather than fragmented reporting. Additionally, the guidelines should require consultation with civil society.”

Germany

“Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by a cross-ministerial strategy with clear objectives, binding targets, and sustainable funding. Current programmes are vulnerable to budget cuts, putting essential services at risk. There is a need for a coherent, prevention-focused agenda that firmly anchors the National Action Plan in policy - with measurable outcomes, binding mechanisms for child and youth participation, and consideration of particularly vulnerable groups like children in poverty, children with disabilities, refugee children, and queer youth.”

Greece

“Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by conducting regular consultations with civil society organisations working on children’s rights and protection, as well as with children themselves, focusing on deinstitutionalisation of children with disabilities and community-based care.”

Ireland

“Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee has been a positive tool for increased investment in early years and school meals. Ireland now needs to build on this investment, take steps to address homelessness and strengthen its child protection and alternative care services.”

Italy

“Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by more effective coordination between different institutions and levels of government, to ensure more effective and integrated educational policies and services. Collaboration networks between local, regional and national authorities must be created to share resources, good practices and to respond to children’s needs. The capacities of those working with children must be strengthened, through regular training to improve the quality and effectiveness of

interventions. Finally, families and communities must be more involved, to promote a more inclusive and participatory approach.”

Latvia

“Overall, in Latvia, the Child Guarantee has so far been little more than a paper exercise. A genuine national plan is urgently needed — one that clearly defines the target groups of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, sets out concrete activities, and establishes effective monitoring mechanisms to ensure implementation.”

Luxembourg

“Overall the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by a better mobilisation of European funds. In Luxembourg, anti-poverty policies and measures have to be improved in order to strengthen its implementation.”

Malta

“For the Child Guarantee to be truly effective, stronger political will, adequate investment, and courageous leadership are needed. As highlighted by H.E. Marie Louise Coleiro Preca, children’s rights must move beyond rhetoric into concrete policies, sustainable funding, and inclusive action. Alongside EU child rights frameworks, its success depends on prioritising peace, empathy, and equity so every child in Europe can grow up safely and with dignity.

Netherlands

“The implementation of the Child Guarantee in the Netherlands will only be effective if we recognise access to basic services, such as housing, drinking water, internet, education and social security, as enforceable rights for all children, including undocumented and asylum-seeking children.”

Portugal

“Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee in Portugal could make a real difference, as numerous concrete public policy measures have been adopted across various ministries, including in the autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira, to achieve the goal of eradicating child poverty and social exclusion by 2030.”

Romania

“Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by developing an integrated and coordinated interinstitutional approach, with the sustainable allocation of financial and human resources and with the active involvement of civil society and children. It is also important to increase the visibility and understanding of the Child Guarantee, through national information campaigns addressed to parents, children, professionals and local decision makers.”

Slovenia

“Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by improving data collection, expanding integrated early childhood services, and ensuring access to quality support for the most vulnerable children.”

Spain

“Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by designing and implementing more precise and targeted strategies focused specifically on the most vulnerable children living in poverty, and by tailoring projects to these groups to maximise their impact.”

Sweden

“Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by introducing child rights budgeting – the government should conduct an analysis of how the national budget impacts children, similar to the gender equality budgeting process that is already in place.”

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