

Children's Rights Alliance

End Child Poverty Political Panel

Strengthened EU priority increases pressure for more ambitious national action to end child poverty

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Child poverty is a major challenge for the EU

- **Nearly 1 in 4 children** (under 18), 23.8 per cent, in EU at risk of poverty or social exclusion
 - 23.6 per cent in Ireland
- **Some children at high risk**
 - children in single parent families and large families
 - children experiencing homelessness & severe housing deprivation
 - children with a disability
 - children with a migrant background
 - children with a minority racial or ethnic background (particularly Roma)
 - children in alternative (especially institutional) care
 - children in precarious family situations
 - children growing up in disadvantaged and isolated communities
- **Recent crises** are further endangering children
 - Covid-19: greater recognition of impact of poverty/inequality and social determinants of health on children
 - Ukraine conflict and cost of living crisis (esp. migration risks & energy poverty)
 - Environmental/sustainable development crisis: increased migration & need for just transition
- Child poverty increasingly seen as key factor in the **intergenerational perpetuation of poverty**

Strengthened EU approach to child poverty

- **European Child Guarantee (2021)**
 - Objective is to:
 - Prevent & combat social exclusion by guaranteeing the access of children in need to a set of key services
 - Contribute to implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights & achieve target of reducing children in poverty or social exclusion by at least 5 million
 - Break intergenerational cycles of poverty & build back after Covid
 - **European Pillar of Social Rights (2017)**
 - EPSR Principle 11. Childcare and support to children
 - Children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality.
 - Children have the right to protection from poverty. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities
 - EPSR –some other aspects relevant to child poverty – e.g.
 - Principles 5-10 on fair employment: “ensuring that jobs pay adequate wage is essential to guarantee adequate working and living conditions for workers and families”
 - Proposal for Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages
 - Principles 13 on adequate unemployment benefits & 14 on adequate income
 - Proposed Council Recommendation on Minimum Income Principle 19 on housing and assistance for homeless
 - Principle 19 on housing and assistance for homeless and Establishment of European Platform on Combating Homelessness
 - EPSR Action Plan (2021)
- **EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child)(2021)**
 - Theme 2: Socio-economic inclusion, health and education: An EU that fights child poverty, promotes inclusive and child-friendly societies, health and education systems.
- **EU Poverty Target**
 - Out of 15 million people to lift out of poverty or social exclusion by 2030, at least 5 million should be children (EPSR Action Plan EPSR)
- **EU Structural Funds**
 - “Member States should make full use of the unprecedented EU funds available for the 2021-2027 period to support reforms and investments in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights”
 - 25% ESF+ on poverty & social exclusion + other funds (e.g., ERDF, Recovery & Resilience Fund)
 - Between 2021 and 2027, Member States with a rate of child at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion higher than the EU average (in 2017-2019) will have to earmark 5% of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) for combatting child poverty
- **The EU’s commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals**
 - especially Goal 1, which aims to halve the number of children, women and men in poverty by 2030

European Child Guarantee – key elements

- **Guarantee** for children in need:
 - effective and free access to early childhood education and care, education & school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day & healthcare
 - effective access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing
- Focus on **specific disadvantages**
- Build integrated & **enabling policy framework**
- Appoint **national coordinators**
- Develop CG **National Action Plans** 2022-2030
- Involve **stakeholders**
- Use **EU funding** to support implementation
- Regular **monitoring** and reporting

Importance of strengthened EU approach -1

- **High level political priority increases pressure for national action**
- **Reinforces 3 pillar approach**
 - CG builds on 2013 *Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*
 - access to income (work + income support); access to services; participation
- **Emphasises Long-term, Comprehensive & Strategic Approach**
 - National CG Action Plan & Build a supportive enabling policy framework
- **Puts increased emphasis on children's rights**
 - CG underpinned by child rights approach and also linked to EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child
- **Requires clearer identification of children most at risk**
 - CG emphasises need to identify & target children in most vulnerable situations
 - Roma and Traveller children, children from a migrant background, children and families experiencing severe housing exclusion and homelessness, children with a disability, and children in precarious family situations
 - Need for disaggregated data on these children & their access to services

Importance of strengthened EU approach -2

- **Reinforces need for enhanced policy coordination**
 - Build on existing efforts - National CG Coordinator to ensure effective involvement and coordination across different policy areas
- **Enhances monitoring & reporting & therefore accountability of MS**
 - Biannual reporting on progress + link to European Semester
 - SPC developing a common monitoring framework
- **Increases use of EU Funds for children at risk**
 - Strong focus on using EU Funds to support delivery of CG and lever additional national funds
 - 5% ESF+ applies to Ireland
- **Enhances policy role of civil society & those most at risk (esp. children)**
 - Build on Ireland's good track record
 - Strong emphasis in CG on involving broad range of stakeholders and children in development, implementation & monitoring

10 priorities to end child poverty in Ireland

- Increase access to **income from work**
 - strengthen policies to enable lone parents to have increased access to labour force participation and hours of work
 - establish scientific basis for setting & regularly updating adequate levels of living wage
- Accelerate efforts to increase access for children in vulnerable situations to quality affordable **childcare and afterschool provision**
 - work towards establishing state provided system of free child care and afterschool provision
- Increase **social transfers** for families at risk
 - Significantly increase Qualified Child Increases, Working Family Payment, One-Parent Family Payment etc. (see ESRI, June 2022)
 - address cost barriers to participation in education – back-to-school costs
- Introduce **right to housing** for families with children
 - dramatically increase supply of social housing stock with better targeting of children & families in vulnerable situations
- Develop more effective **local coordination and delivery** of services (state and NGO) for children and their families
 - proposed Local Area Child Poverty Plans a welcome development

10 priorities for more ambitious action

- Increase access to **green spaces, recreational, sport and cultural activities** in disadvantaged communities
- Invest in a **progressive universalist** approach to overcome barriers and ensure free and inclusive access for children in vulnerable situations to mainline education, health, sport, recreational and cultural services
- Ensure all children at risk of poverty or social exclusion have access to **free school meals** provision & extend provision to holidays
- Develop the **structured involvement of children**, their families and civil society organisations in the implementation, monitoring and ongoing development of Ireland's Child Guarantee Action Plan
- Increase focus on **children most at risk**
 - Traveller & Roma children, children with disabilities, children in emergency homeless accommodation, children in direct provision, children in precarious family situations, children from Ukraine & others seeking asylum
 - early intervention through better identification & outreach
 - set & monitor specific targets for increasing access to services
 - further enhance national data on children in need, especially at-risk groups

Conclusion

- The persistence of high levels of child poverty is a scandal
 - it is a denial of children's rights
 - it damages children's development & well-being & their future prospects
 - it leads to adult poverty & the intergenerational perpetuation of poverty
 - it has high costs for society & the economy
 - it threatens the prospects of a sustainable future
- We know the policies to end child poverty and social exclusion
- We are a rich country, we have the resources
- We must act now & invest in ambitious action to end child poverty!