

The European Child Guarantee June 2021

What is the European Child Guarantee?

The Child Guarantee is a recommendation put forward by the European Commission that aims to prevent and combat child poverty and social exclusion in the European Union (EU) by supporting the 27 Member States to make efforts to guarantee access to quality key services for children in need.ⁱ

When does the Child Guarantee take effect?

On 24 March 2021, the European Commission presented its proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee. This was formally adopted on 14 June 2021.

Who does the Child Guarantee apply to?

The Child Guarantee applies to children in need across the 27 EU Member States. They are defined as children under 18 who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. It requires Member States to pay particular attention to the specific needs of children who are homeless; who have a disability; those with a migrant background; with a minority racial or ethnic background (particularly Roma); those being in alternative (especially institutional) care; and children in precarious family situations.ⁱⁱ

What services does the Guarantee apply to?

The Guarantee requires the 27 EU Member States to work towards the implementation of six commitments - providing free access to **early childhood education and care (ECEC); education (including school-based activities); a healthy meal each school day; and healthcare**. It also calls on them to ensure effective access to **healthy nutrition and adequate housing**.

How will the Child Guarantee be implemented?

To access EU funding, Member States need to develop a policy framework at national level to address the social exclusion of children, focusing on breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty and disadvantage and reducing the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.ⁱⁱⁱ Each State will have to submit its national plan to the Commission within six months of the adoption of the recommendation. The plan will cover the period up to 2030 and will require States to set quantitative and qualitative targets for the implementation of the Guarantee,^{iv} and to appoint a national Child Guarantee Coordinator with adequate resources for the implementation of the Guarantee.^v

How will actions under the Child Guarantee be funded?

Member States can apply for EU funds to support the implementation of the European Child Guarantee through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). Member States that have a rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion higher than the EU average (in 2017-2019), which currently includes Ireland, will have to earmark five per cent of their ESF+ allocation to combat child poverty or social exclusion. Other Member States will be required to earmark an 'appropriate amount' which is not defined in the Guarantee.^{vi} Member States will have to provide match funding.

How can Member States realise each of the six commitments in the Child Guarantee?

The European Commission has provided guidance to Member States on how to achieve access to the different services it lists.

To guarantee effective and free access to ECEC, education and school-based activities and a healthy meal each school day for children in need, States should:

- Identify and address financial and non-financial barriers to participation in ECEC, education, and school-based activities;
- Take measures to prevent and reduce early school leaving;
- Provide learning support to children with learning difficulties;
- Adapt ECEC and educational facilities, materials and establishments to cater for the needs of children with a disability;
- Ensure that qualified teachers and other educational professionals are available, such as psychologists, speech therapists, rehabilitators or teaching assistants for children with a disability;
- Put in place measures to support inclusive education;
- Ensure at least one healthy meal each school day;
- Ensure provision of educational materials, including books or uniforms, where applicable;
- Provide high speed connectivity, digital services and adequate equipment necessary for distance learning to ensure access to educational content online;
- Ensure transport to ECEC and education establishments, where applicable;
- Ensure equal and inclusive access to school-based activities, including participation in school trips;
- Develop a framework for cooperation between educational establishments, local communities and social services to provide afterschool care and opportunities to participate in sport, leisure and cultural activities. This should include building and investing in educational establishments as centres of inclusion and participation.^{vii}

To guarantee effective and free access to healthcare, States should:

- Facilitate early detection and treatment of health problems, including mental health and ensure access to periodic medical examinations and screening programmes including dental and ophthalmology;
- Ensure timely curative and rehabilitative follow-up, including access to medicines, treatments and supports, and access to vaccination programmes;
- Provide targeted rehabilitation and habilitation services for children with disabilities; and
- Implement accessible health promotion and disease prevention programmes targeting children in need and their families, as well as professionals working with children.^{viii}

To guarantee effective access to healthy nutrition, States should:

- Support access to healthy meals also outside of school days, including through in-kind or financial support;
- Ensure that nutrition standards in ECEC and education establishments address specific dietary needs;
- Limit advertisements and restrict the availability of foods high in fat, salt and sugar in ECEC and education establishments; and
- Provide adequate information to children and families on healthy nutrition for children.^{ix}

To guarantee effective access to adequate housing, States should:

- Ensure that children experiencing homelessness - and their families - receive adequate accommodation in emergency shelters, prompt transfer from such shelters to permanent housing and are provided with relevant social and advisory services;
- Assess and revise, if necessary, national, regional and local housing policies, social housing policies and housing benefits in order to address energy poverty and take actions to ensure the interests of families with children in need are duly taken into account;
- Provide timely and priority access to social housing for children in need and their families; and
- Prevent children from being placed into institutional care; ensuring transition of children from institutional care to quality community-based or family-based care supports their social integration and ability to live independently.^x

ⁱ European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, Brussels, 24.3.2021 COM(2021) 137 final, 1.

ⁱⁱ European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, Brussels, 24.3.2021 COM(2021) 137 final, 2.

ⁱⁱⁱ European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, Brussels, 24.3.2021 COM(2021) 137 final, 25.

^{iv} European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, Brussels, 24.3.2021 COM(2021) 137 final, 27-28.

^v European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, Brussels, 24.3.2021 COM(2021) 137 final, 28.

^{vi} European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, Brussels, 24.3.2021 COM(2021) 137 final, 6.

^{vii} European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, Brussels, 24.3.2021 COM(2021) 137 final, 26.

^{viii} European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, Brussels, 24.3.2021 COM(2021) 137 final, 26- 27.

^{ix} European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, Brussels, 24.3.2021 COM(2021) 137 final, 27.

^x European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, Brussels, 24.3.2021 COM(2021) 137 final, 27.