Editorial

Dear readers,

Child poverty is widespread in Europe, even in economically strong countries. Almost 22.5 percent of children in the European Union are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The risk of poverty among children is thus higher than that of the general population. The measures taken throughout Europe to contain the coronavirus pandemic have had – and still have – a particularly negative impact on children and young people. For children, for example, the closure of educational and care facilities meant the loss of social contacts with friends and peers. There were impairments in learning, caused above all by the sluggish transition to online/digital home schooling. Especially those children who were and are affected by poverty or other social disadvantages fell even further behind in learning due to a lack of digital equipment or parental support. Apart from the worsening educational inequality, many offers for children – which so far benefited above all families and children affected by poverty – broke away, such as free lunch at school. These developments, in combination with potential income losses for the parents due to the economic effects of the pandemic mean that child poverty in Europe can be expected to increase.

Against the background of these developments, the Child Guarantee demanded by the European Parliament in 2015, which is planned in the form of a Council recommendation for early 2021, is gaining further importance. Since 2018, within the framework of a broad preparatory action at EU level, possibilities for design and implementation have been discussed which are to counteract poverty and social exclusion among children more effectively throughout Europe. In the first contribution, we present the general idea, first results and conclusions as well as further necessary steps for the implementation of an EU-wide Child Guarantee. Elizabeth Gosme, Director of COFACE Families Europe, takes a stand on the planned Child Guarantee in the second contribution and presents the perspective of civil society organisations in Europe. In an interview, we furthermore asked national experts from France and Italy about their views on child poverty, measures to combat it and the prospects and potentials of an EU-wide Child Guarantee.

The team of the Observatory wishes you an exciting read.
European perspective: new impetus to combat child poverty through an EU-wide Child Guarantee

Katrin Lange, project coordinator and research officer of the Observatory

“We have to care for the most vulnerable: our children. We have to fight poverty. […] We need a Child Guarantee to help ensure that every child in Europe at risk of poverty and social exclusion has access to the most basic of rights like healthcare and education. It will empower them and it pays tremendously if we back them when they are young.” (Ursula von der Leyen)¹

Overview

A European Child Guarantee aims to combat child poverty and social exclusion in Europe by ensuring access to affordable, inclusive, and high-quality services, especially for children who are affected by poverty and socially disadvantaged. The idea goes back to a resolution adopted by the European Parliament in November 2015, which placed a special focus on child poverty when it comes to the goal of reducing inequality in Europe.² In 2017, the Parliament called for a Child Guarantee for the first time.³ The European Commission then adopted a multiannual preparatory action to assess the feasibility of an EU-wide Child Guarantee.⁴ This preparatory action, which is still ongoing, is divided into several phases:

In a first phase, from September 2018 to April 2020, a broad feasibility study was carried out on behalf of the Commission by a consortium⁵ of research institutions, civil society organisations, and independent experts. This study consisted of an initial and an interim report, interviews with children and consultations of experts, thematic workshops, national reports, reports on relevant policy areas and reports on particularly vulnerable target groups as well as a final conference, and a final report.⁶ On the one hand, the studies focused on children in four particularly disadvantaged situations: children living in precarious family situations, children residing in institutions, children of recent migrants and refugees and children with disabilities and other children with special needs. On the other hand, focus was placed on prioritised policy areas – originally early childhood education and care (ECEC), education, health, nutrition and housing, later complemented by cultural and sports participation and integrated services – in which children’s access to affordable, inclusive and high-quality services was to be ensured.

In a second phase, running since March 2020, a study on the economic implementing framework of a possible EU Child Guarantee scheme including its financial foundation will be carried out until early 2021. The aim of this study is to provide a detailed economic and financial analysis of the design, feasibility, governance, and implementation of options for a prospective Child Guarantee in all EU Member states. Based on the results of this feasibility study, it will concretise formulated options for action to reduce child poverty and their effective but also economic implementation.

¹ Opening Statement in the European Parliament Plenary Session by Ursula von der Leyen, at this time Candidate for President of the European Commission of 16 July 2019.
² European Parliament resolution of 24 November 2015 on reducing inequalities with a special focus on child poverty (2014/2231(INI)).
⁵ The study was carried out by a consortium consisting of Applica, an independent research company in Belgium, and the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research, in close cooperation with the two organisations Eurochild and Save the Children Europe, and with the support of nine subject experts as well as 28 national experts and an independent study editor. A list of names can be found in the annex to the final report of the feasibility study: Frazer, Hugh/Guija, Anne-Catherine/Marlier, Eric (2020): Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG). Final Report. On behalf of the European Commission, p. 194–195 (hereinafter Frazer et al. 2020).
⁶ All published studies on the feasibility study for an EU-wide Child Guarantee can be found on the dedicated European Commission website.
The contract was awarded to the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research, which was also involved in the first phase.\(^7\) \(^8\)

In parallel with the second phase, a third phase has been underway since summer 2020, running until summer 2022. Accompanied by UNICEF, a pilot programme is being implemented in several Member States during this phase to test innovative approaches towards reducing child poverty. This phase will also include a series of in-depth analyses of national policies and programmes, including the development of national action plans against child poverty and against social exclusion in a range of Member States.\(^9\)

In August 2020, the Commission launched a consultation\(^10\) on the planned European Child Guarantee to gather feedback from the public. It calls on all organisations, experts and other individual persons to provide feedback on the planned roadmap\(^11\). The roadmap envisages a Council recommendation for early 2021.

First results

The authors of the final report\(^12\) conclude that many of the poor and socially disadvantaged children throughout the European Union have no or merely restricted access to services in one or more of the five policy areas. Identified access barriers include excessive costs and lack of availability. In addition, poor quality of services is considered a problem. There were considerable differences between and within EU Member States. The shortcomings identified are mainly due to a lack of prioritisation and effective strategy, to the fragmentation of responsibilities at national, regional, and local level and to a lack of valid data. This has negative consequences in the short and long term for the children concerned, but also for society in general. Moreover, failure to grant access constitutes a violation of the rights of the child.

Selected results in the priority policy areas

**Early childhood education and care (ECEC):** Only seven EU Member States (Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Finland, and Sweden) provide a place in public facilities for all children from an early age (6 to 18 months). All EU Member States exhibit lower enrolment rates for children from ethnic minorities, refugee children, children with special needs, and children from poor families, compared with the general population.

**Education:** Although in all Member States compulsory schooling is free of charge, families still have expenses related to education (e.g. books, trips and, meals). Note that, in all EU Member States without exception, single-parent households, and households at risk of poverty reported greater difficulty of meeting expenses related to education than the general population of households with children.

**Health care:** 22 Member States have in principle a free health service for all children. However, 13 of the 22 Member States (Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, and Romania) report some gaps in the service for some children. 1.6 percent of all children in EU-28 suffered from unmet medical needs.

**Nutrition:** The proportion of children living in households lacking (for affordability reasons and not by choice) fruit and vegetables daily varied between less than one percent (in Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, and Luxembourg) and 40 percent (Bulgaria). Income poverty increases the risk of an enforced lack of nutrients significantly in almost all Member States, except Nordic countries, Austria, and Luxembourg, where the occurrence of these problems was low for all children.

**Housing:** The proportion of children suffering from severe housing deprivation (i.e. living in a dwelling considered overcrowded and exhibits one or more of the Eurostat-defined housing deprivation measures) is more than 20 percent in Romania and Latvia and more than 15 percent in Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, and Poland. In Portugal, Austria, Greece, and Italy, around seven to eight percent of children are affected by severe housing deprivation.

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\(^7\) Their dedicated website for this tender show that Hugh Frazer, Anne-Catherine Guio, and Eric Marlier, who drafted the study, will also be responsible for the final report.

\(^8\) Contract notice of 9 August 2019 at TED (Tenders Electronic Daily) – the online version of the „Supplement to the Official Journal“ of the EU, dedicated to European public procurement.


\(^10\) Roadmap and Initiative „Basic services for children in need – European Child Guarantee“.

\(^11\) Roadmaps aim to provide information on the work of the Commission and to enable the public to give feedback on the Commission’s concrete projects. A roadmap is to set out the problem and the objectives associated with the initiative as well as potential courses of action. More information on roadmaps can be found on the Commission’s website.

\(^12\) Frazer et al. 2020: 180ff.
The efforts of the European Union to implement an EU-wide Child Guarantee should focus on all children affected by poverty as well as other socially disadvantaged children. In contrast, it is the responsibility of the Member States to identify those children in vulnerable situations who have priority needs on site. This is achieved through the principle formulated in the UN Agenda 2030 to reach the furthest behind first and to leave no one behind.

In order to reduce child poverty and social exclusion across Europe, societal targets with concrete operational objectives are to be formulated. This is already being investigated in the study on the economic implementation framework of the Child Guarantee, focusing on the target group of children at risk of poverty. The authors of the final report suggest that, on the one hand, some very specific and concrete measures for implementation by the Member States should be identified, as these could be implemented and monitored more easily and quickly. At the same time, however, Member States should be encouraged to develop holistic approaches to tackle the multidimensional aspects of child poverty and to achieve the established societal targets.

The Child Guarantee is not the first and by far not the only instrument being developed at EU level aiming at reducing child poverty. Already in 2013, the Commission Recommendation “Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage” was presented. In 2017, the European Pillar of Social Rights was adopted by the Parliament, Council and Commission at the Gothenburg Social Summit. The authors of the final report of the feasibility study on the European Child Guarantee concluded that although the above-mentioned European Union instruments could be helpful, they had not been given sufficient priority in the past and therefore no substantial progress had been made in reducing child poverty and social exclusion. This was similarly true for the use and impact of EU financial support such as the European Social Fund.

However, the feasibility study also showed that while ensuring access for all children to high-quality and integrative services in the priority policy areas could make an important contribution to reducing child poverty, this alone would not be enough. The incorporation of further areas of action – for instance through access to adequate resources and the right of the child to social participation, as mentioned in the Commission’s 2013 recommendation – is considered necessary. Furthermore, these would have to be linked to a holistic approach in order to take into account the multi-dimensionality of child poverty. In the feasibility study, it became clear that those Member States, which were most successful in ensuring that disadvantaged children have, access to affordable, high-quality and inclusive services not only had a comprehensive range of policy measures, but also strategically coordinated and thus integrated approaches based on a holistic approach. It is therefore also necessary to take into account other policy areas that may have effects on the aim of reducing child poverty, such as labour market and tax policies or anti-discrimination and gender equality policies, the report states.

The authors of the final report of the feasibility study call upon the European Union to (continue to) make full use of its legal and financial framework in the fight against child poverty and social exclusion. In particular, the Commission should provi-
The Child Guarantee is expected to be introduced in early 2021, according to Commission announcements. A Council recommendation, which would build on the existing instruments, is considered likely to be adopted, in particular to complement and reinforce the 2013 Commission recommendation.\(^1\) The Council recommendation on a Child Guarantee should focus on children affected by poverty and other socially disadvantaged children, while the 2013 Commission recommendation covers all children. The Child Guarantee could contribute to the implementation of principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, be included in the future action plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and could also be an important element in the forthcoming Strategy on the rights of the child.

A proposal by the European Parliament for the next EU multiannual financial framework 2021–2027 to finance the Child Guarantee has been in place already since 2018. It provides for an additional budget of 5.9 billion euro and the provision of five percent of the resources for the European Social Fund Plus\(^2\) by the EU Member States.\(^3\) The Commission supported this proposal.\(^4\) However, the European Council’s agreement currently provides for only at least two percent of the resources for the specific objective of combating material deprivation in the European Social Fund Plus, without explicitly mentioning child poverty or the Child Guarantee.\(^5\) The European Parliament insists, however, that targeted increases in addition to the figures proposed by the European Council must also be made available for the Child Guarantee in particular.\(^6\) The interinstitutional negotiations for a mandatory provision of funds to reduce child poverty for the European Social Fund Plus are currently still ongoing.

The preparatory action to review the feasibility of an EU-wide Child Guarantee plays a crucial role in this context, as it is the only way to establish a solid foundation on “how a child guarantee should be designed, including the measures and funding required to have a positive impact on the level of child poverty in the EU and to ensure Member State commitment.”\(^7\) It also requires determined action by the European Union, underpinned by a strong political commitment from the Member States. This is all the more urgent because of the not yet fully foreseeable impacts that the EU-wide fight against the coronavirus pandemic has and will have on children. It is the children’s perspective, and in particular that of poverty-stricken and socially disadvantaged children, that is to be taken into account for “a Europe for Children”.\(^8\)

\(^{13}\) See also Frazer et al. 2020: 193 (figure). Also see the assessment of the European Court of Auditors “Combating child poverty – Better targeting of Commission support required” in its Special Report (2020: 25f.) as well as the below listed proposals by the European Parliament on the European Social Funds Plus.

\(^{14}\) Recommendations allow the EU institutions to make their views known and to suggest a line of action without imposing any legal obligation on those to whom it is addressed. They have no binding force and as such form part of the secondary law of the European Union. While the Commission may publish recommendations on its own initiative, the Council is invited to do so by the Commission. The Commission is consulted by the Council when the latter adopts a recommendation.

\(^{15}\) On the role and importance of the European Social Funds Plus, see European Court of Auditors 2020: 20f.


\(^{21}\) European Court of Auditors 2020: 19.

Civil society perspective on an EU-wide Child Guarantee

Civil society organisations and associations, such as COFACE Families Europe, Eurochild, Save the Children, or the EU Alliance for Investing in Children, play an important role in combating child poverty and social exclusion across Europe. By persistently drawing attention to social grievances, voicing criticism of a lack of political will and determination to act, making demands and formulating (policy) recommendations for action, they play a decisive role in shaping the public discourse on child poverty in Europe.

In this context, it is not surprising that they have been committed to the introduction of an EU-wide Child Guarantee right from the start: In particular, the European associations plead for the fastest possible implementation of the Child Guarantee. This is, first, to ensure that the issue of child poverty continues to be included in Member States’ ongoing planning for Structural Fund investment priorities. Second, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic is exacerbating child poverty, which further increases the urgent need for rapid action. Civil society organisations also support the European Parliament’s proposal that Member States should allocate five percent of funds for the European Social Fund Plus within the next EU budget 2021-2027 to the implementation of the Child Guarantee. Moreover, they also highlight the fact that strategic planning and a holistic approach (by linking different policy areas) is crucial for successfully combating child poverty.

**Child Guarantee: Europe must act NOW.**

*Elizabeth Gosme, Direktorin der Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE Families Europe)*

COFACE Families Europe advocates for all types of families, without discrimination, based on values of gender equality, human rights, and social inclusion. We place our holistic family lens on the following different policy areas: social, employment, digital, disability, migration, education, and consumer. By considering such policy fields from a two–generation approach (adult and child), we use an intergenerational lens, which allows us to give a voice to children and their families in policy and legislative discussions.

At the joint seminar of the Association of German Family Organisations (AGF) and COFACE Families Europe on the 29 September in Berlin, we used the COFACE lens to discuss a new EU policy framework, which is currently in preparation: the European Child Guarantee. The aim of this initiative is to boost support for children in vulnerable situations at national level via different instruments (policy exchange, funding, indicators, benchmarking). The Guarantee will be set in two wider frameworks: the **Action plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights**, and the forthcoming **Strategy on the rights of the child**. Some of the following recommendations proposed to shape a future European Child Guarantee emerged from our meeting in Berlin.

The European Commission intends to launch the initiative in 2021, but vulnerable children and their families cannot wait. Measures should urgently be put in place, not least to address the social and economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

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26 See the Documentation of the Expert Meeting.
National and subnational governments need to act now in order to activate support mechanisms through automatic granting of social rights. This should be done via income transfers to families in vulnerable situations, and via reduced fees for services in line with income levels. By the time the Child Guarantee is launched, governments need to be in a position to report to the European Union and their peer countries on their progress towards ending child and family poverty based on their own national realities and actions.

The Child Guarantee, in the form of a Council recommendation, can be a useful framework to support governments (national to local) in addressing the poverty of children and their families with the help of various social policy and funding instruments as well as regular monitoring of progress. However, this needs to be linked to other key EU frameworks (both legislative and non-legislative) in areas that affect the well-being of children and their families. Those include initiatives on minimum income, Roma, and more; as well as other policy areas further afield such as health, education, tax, digital, and consumer.

Targeting children requires a two-generation approach providing support both to children and their immediate family or kinship carers, namely with a family support stream focused on prevention and early intervention reaching out to families before they enter situations of vulnerability. The support can range from light to heavy according to the needs of the child and family members. It should be based on clear quality standards, and should use a holistic approach building universal support with automatic ways to target families and children who need it the most.

The term “guarantee” implies a real focus on operationalization, which should be a priority in the Council recommendation including explicit guidelines such as:

- Reducing bureaucracy for funding of service providers,
- Promoting outreach mechanisms to engage with families,
- Automatizing rights with the help of direct payments (instead of expecting families to do further paperwork to take up their rights),
- Ensuring accessible communications such as multilingual resources and catering for different disabilities and finally
- Considering the role of civil society as key partners to reach out to the most vulnerable.

In its recent report, the European Court of Auditors has indicated the lack of actions in the field of child poverty following the 2013 European Commission recommendation on investing in children, and the need for more data gathering to shape the European Child Guarantee. However, children and their families cannot wait. Action is needed NOW.
National perspectives in interview: Fighting poverty in France and Italy – is the Child Guarantee a new milestone?

Michel Legros is the author of the French report for the feasibility study of the Child Guarantee. Claude Martin is professor at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) and holds the Childhood, Well-being, and Parenting Chair at the EHESP School of Public Health in Rennes, France. Michele Raitano is Associate Professor of Economic Policy at the Sapienza University of Rome in Italy and the author of the Italian report for the feasibility study of the Child Guarantee. All three are members of the European Social Policy Network (ESPN), a network of independent experts that provides the European Commission with independent information, analysis, and expertise on social policies.

What does child poverty mean to you?

Raitano: In my view, child poverty refers to children living in households with a low income. In that sense, I mostly refer to a relative poverty concept (i.e., defining the poverty threshold with respect to the distribution of income instead of establishing a predefined threshold) since “being far from the others” may have crucial consequences especially for children in their life course and may engender long-lasting scarring effects.

Legros and Martin: Child poverty has undergone a recent change of focus in France: Considerable public efforts to combat child poverty were made under the Third French Republic (1870–1940), and even more after 1945. At that time, public policies created universal family benefits as well as health and social services. As a result, combating child poverty gradually hit the political agenda. However, until the 2000s, the political view in France was that children from poor families existed, but not poor children. Now the focus on this type of poverty is shifting again because of the experience of failing social policies in the past and new insights due to new data and research in the area of (child) poverty: Questioning the effectiveness of traditional social policies dealing with rising inequalities and unemployment following the oil crisis.

1. The publication of studies and research based on national statistics and data from the family benefit funds
2. The results of data produced by Eurostat, the OECD, and UNICEF

What are the main challenges in combating child poverty in your country?

Legros and Martin: In France, the poverty threshold of 60 percent of the national median income has been fluctuating for over a decade at around 14 percent, which is a little below the European average. However, this rate reaches 20 percent for the under-18-year-olds, of whom one in five lives under the poverty threshold, amounting to three million children affected by poverty. While poverty concerning children from unstable homes and unaccompanied foreign minors has been identified as an urgent problem, the high number of poor children can also be explained by the vulnerability of two other population groups, i.e., single-parent families, with a poverty rate of 35 percent, and households with low employment, whose poverty rate is 26 percent. These two groups alone explain the differences in poverty rates between children and the general population.

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**Raitano:** In Italy, poverty is assessed in terms of household conditions. Therefore, the main challenges combatting poverty are related to the equivalent household income (i.e. considering the number of individuals living in a household) and to the mechanisms that might, on the one hand, limit household resources or, on the other hand, increase needs to be dealing with limited resources.

Accordingly, following a monetary approach to assess poverty, the main challenge is related to labour market conditions of parents, in terms of employability (especially for females, due to the very low female participation rate in poorer households in Italy) and low wages earned by a large share of workers, especially those working part-time or with atypical arrangements. Extending the view, other challenges are: High housing costs, especially in some Italian areas (lacking effective housing policies), the lack of an effective minimum income support until 2019 (when the means tested so-called “citizenship income” was introduced) and the lack of care services (long-term and childcare).

Limitations in the provision of these services reduce female participation rates and prevent children from poorer households from benefiting from pre-primary schools as a potential tool to improve the cognitive and non-cognitive development in early infancy.

Furthermore, child poverty – and its long-lasting effects on children’s prospects – should also be contrasted through effective educational policies in order to break the link between family background and educational opportunities. However, because of limited investment in the education sector, the educational path usually tends to reproduce inequalities observed at the household level, thus favouring the intergenerational transmission of socio-economic disadvantages.

**What consequences did or does the coronavirus pandemic have on children affected by poverty?**

**Legros and Martin:** In France, the epidemic impacts children in different ways, including the consequences of a strict lockdown that lasted almost two months, the repercussions of the economic and social impacts of the epidemic, and the perception of a disease that children are largely spared from but likely to transmit, in particular to elderly people. The adverse effects of the lockdown include increased reports of domestic violence and a rise in the number of accidents at home concerning children (burns, falls, etc.), along with an imposed sedentary lifestyle, increased exposure to screens, the breakdown of established social ties, increased school dropout rates, and a backlog in access to care and prevention measures. The French Public Health Council drew attention to the increase in these negative impacts for disabled children, unaccompanied foreign minors, and children cared for by child protection services.29 The rise in unemployment among the most disadvantaged families is likely to have significant repercussions on child poverty and develop inequalities that will become visible within the coming months.30

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Raitano: In Italy, the pandemic had two main consequences on children’s well-being. First, the occupational shock led to the reduction in poorer household incomes which had immediate consequences on children’s living standards and, therefore, on their development and opportunities. Even if national policies have been introduced to support incomes of individuals affected by the occupational shock, a relevant reduction in household resources has emerged in Italy, thus also worsening the stress in the family environment. Second, a medium-long term effect refers to the low quality education received by children from poorer households since March 2020 due to the limited access to online learning facilities (because of lack of adequate resources by both the school and the household). Furthermore, poor children were also affected by school closures due to the impossibility to receive full school meals.

What should be learned from the coronavirus pandemic in terms of supporting and empowering children at risk of poverty?

Raitano: Consistent with the previous answer, two strategies should be pursued. On the one hand household incomes should be sustained by acting both on labour market outcomes (e.g. increasing minimum incomes or favouring employment rates of members of poorer households) and on redistributive tools. On the other hand, investment in all levels of education (starting from childcare and pre-primary school) should be highly increased to improve the homogeneity of the quality of education provided to all children, independent of their area of residence since that directly relates to the household’s economic condition due to the difference in housing costs in different areas.

Legros and Martin: Along with social measures featured in the recovery plan for Europe31 that could attenuate household poverty and consequently child poverty, the pandemic could open up other possible areas of intervention. The first concerns schools. While teachers adapted by proving themselves capable of creativity, through the handling of new digital tools, and by developing skills to establish and maintain links with pupils and their parents, the education system as a whole has mostly been unable to develop collaborative work systems, marked by a strong resistance to change.32 The second area concerns a renewal of the public health culture aimed at childhood. The lockdown and the fear of a second wave of the epidemic have shown the importance of applying these new diseases prevention practices from the age of eleven (face masks, sanitiser, social distancing, basic health precautions, etc.).

What do you think needs to be done in your country to combat child poverty and poverty consequences for children more effectively?33

Raitano: Apart from the investment in education, a household’s economic condition during infancy has long-lasting scarring effects on the socio-cognitive development of the child. Therefore, the effectiveness of anti-poverty measures should be strengthened. In 2019 Italy introduced the reddito di cittadinanza, which is a legally binding agreement protecting the rights of every child between 0–18 years regardless of their race, religion, gender, language, or abilities. The convention was ratified by the UN in 1989 and consists of 54 articles that cover children’s rights in all aspects of their life. Furthermore, the convention sets out how governments should work together to make the rights available to all children. 194 countries have ratified the convention until now which makes it the most widely ratified human rights convention.1

1 For further information, see website of UNICEF United Kingdom


The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a legally binding international agreement protecting the rights of every child between 0–18 years regardless of their race, religion, gender, language, or abilities. The convention was ratified by the UN in 1989 and consists of 54 articles that cover children’s rights in all aspects of their life. Furthermore, the convention sets out how governments should work together to make the rights available to all children. 194 countries have ratified the convention until now which makes it the most widely ratified human rights convention.1


2 See website of the European Commission.


The National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (NAPs/inclusion) were a result of the negotiations at the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, geared to advance the fight against poverty until 2010. They were a fundamental part of the open method of coordination. Each Member State of the European Union had submitted an action plan for the duration of a two-year period in response to commonly agreed objectives. In it, the member state analysed the situation in relation to poverty and social exclusion, presented defined strategies, goals and targets and identified the specific actions to achieve the goals.2

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What importance do you attach to an EU-wide Child Guarantee in the fight against child poverty? How should it be framed?

Raitano: Raitano: A Europe-wide Child Guarantee is crucial to put child poverty at the centre of the Italian economic policy debate. It has the advantage of focusing on many monetary and nonmonetary dimensions, which affect child poverty, in terms of both limited resources and a lack of access to adequate services. Its framing should then include an attention to both household income and services. In particular, an idea of an EU based generous minimum income scheme might be considered.

Legros and Martin: The inclusion of child poverty in the two poverty action programmes produced in France since 2012 illustrates a significant, continuous endeavour. Despite these efforts, the child poverty rate has not gone down over the past ten years. In the short run, reducing child poverty requires an increase in minimum income benefits, particularly for single-parent families only receiving revenu de solidarité active. For unemployed families, access to free-of-charge ser-vices like school meals alongside childcare and decent housing would help to reduce this poverty. The efforts made over the last decade have moved in this direction but have been too limited to bring down poverty rates. The solidarity income programme launched in 2017 focuses on social investment in early childhood and schooling and is interesting for its emphasis on the long term.

The Child Guarantee represents a step forward in the battle against child poverty. It extends the progress made by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child dating from 1989 and the European Commission’s recommendation "Investing in Children" of 2013. While the UN Convention has been successfully integrated into French policies, thanks to the work of associations, social protection bodies and the Defender of Human Rights, the EU recommendation lacks considerable legitimacy. If the Child Guarantee is to have a real impact, it should be part of a directive which has to be implemented in national law as well as mobilise structural funds, along with careful monitoring of its implementation which have to go much further than what was done for the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion.