

EU contribution to the fight against child poverty

The number of children at risk of poverty – almost one in four – remains high in the European Union. As 2019 marks the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the opportunity arises to take stock of what the European Union is doing to fight child poverty. Even though legal competence for child policy remains primarily with the Member States, the fight against child poverty is a major priority of the European Union (EU). The Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Pillar of Social Rights reflect the EU's increasing willingness to tackle child poverty, while the use of European funds is key to success. The European Parliament has always been at the forefront of this fight, most recently with the promotion of a Child Guarantee Scheme.

Background

As 2019 marks the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ([UNCRC](#), 20 November 1989), this year's International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, on [17 October](#), focused on the theme: 'Acting together to empower children, their families and communities to end poverty'. The anniversary has offered a great opportunity to take stock of what the EU is doing to fight child poverty.

Over recent decades, there has been marked progress in reducing poverty worldwide. Nevertheless, despite this progress, the number of people living in poverty remains very high, even in the EU, and in particular amongst children. In 2017, 112.8 million people in the EU-28 lived in households at risk of poverty or social exclusion (i.e. 22.4 % of the EU-28 population ([Eurostat](#))). With an at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate of 24.9 % for the EU-28, children were at greater risk in 2017 than the population as a whole. Almost one in four children in the EU as a whole is therefore at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and children are the group most at risk in more than half of the Member States.

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Precarious living conditions during childhood have a detrimental effect, not only on attainment in school but also on health and on the ability to integrate socially during adolescence, and can continue into later life. Moreover, the [consequences](#) of poverty experienced in childhood may be passed on from one generation to the next. As child poverty remains a reality in the EU, especially for certain groups (children in single-parent, large, or migrant families), child poverty has become a major policy concern for the EU.

EU legal basis

The EU is guided by the principles set out in the UNCRC, ratified by all EU Member States. The objective to promote the protection of the rights of the child is established in [Article 3\(3\)](#) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). Moreover, the EU and its Member States are bound to comply with the [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), Article 24 of which is entirely dedicated to the rights of the child.

EU policy responses

Fighting child poverty in the EU is primarily the responsibility of the Member States. Nevertheless, at European level, there is broad consensus that action is needed to lift children out of poverty and to promote children's wellbeing.

One of the targets of the [Europe 2020 strategy](#) is to reduce the number of people living in poverty by 20 million (compared with 2008). In 2013, the European Commission adopted, and the Council endorsed, a [Recommendation 'Investing in children – breaking the cycle of disadvantage'](#). Part of the [social investment package](#), the recommendation considers child poverty broadly, and sets three priorities: access to adequate resources, access to affordable quality services and children's right to participation.

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The proclamation of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) in November 2017 demonstrates an increasing willingness to tackle child poverty in the EU. [Article 11](#) explicitly reflects that the fight against child poverty is a priority of today's social Europe, while referring to children's right to be protected from poverty.

The EU's commitment to the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) is also noteworthy, particularly with its [Goal 1](#), which aims to halve the number of children, women and men in poverty by 2030.

EU funds

Numerous financial instruments provide a framework for Member States to implement measures to address child poverty with the support of the EU. Indeed, the 2013 recommendation calls for the opportunities provided by the [European social and investment funds](#) during the 2014-2020 programming period to be used when possible to help children.

- The [Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived](#) (FEAD) directly addresses child poverty, and highlights child poverty as being among the most extreme forms of poverty with the highest impact in terms of social exclusion. Its [objectives](#) are to alleviate the worst forms of poverty, by providing [food and/or basic material assistance](#), as well as social inclusion activities for the most deprived. Children represent nearly one third (29.6 %) of the total number of people who have received food support. According to a [study](#) requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, almost 11 million children have received food support (food packages or meals). Nearly 300 000 have received material assistance (school materials).
- During the 2014-2020 programming period, the [European Social Fund](#) (ESF) includes for the first time the idea of breaking the 'cycle of disadvantage across generations', and added children as a target group. It allocated a share of its funding to prevent and reduce early school-leaving and promote equal access to early-childhood, primary and secondary education. These measures indirectly target children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, as most pupils at risk of early school-leaving come from disadvantaged backgrounds. According to the above-mentioned study, a quarter of the ESF allocation (25.6 %, totalling €86.4 billion) was earmarked for social inclusion measures, and €8 billion was dedicated to measures tackling [early school-leaving](#). The Commission's proposal for the upcoming 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework, including the [European Social Fund +](#), highlights the need to strengthen the fight against poverty and social exclusion.
- Under the [European Regional Development Fund](#) (ERDF), €119 billion was dedicated to measures to promote social inclusion and combat poverty, and €5.9 billion to invest in education facilities.

European Parliament

Along this line, Parliament has adopted resolutions addressing child poverty, including on [Promoting inclusion](#) and combating poverty, and on the [European Platform against poverty and social exclusion](#). On 24 November 2015, Parliament adopted a resolution on [reducing inequalities with a special focus on child poverty](#). It recommended that Member States make a real commitment to developing policies to fight child poverty. These should focus on correcting child poverty factors, increase the effectiveness, quantity, amounts and scope of the social support specifically directed at children, and promote labour laws that guarantee social rights, including a statutory adequate minimum wage. It also called for the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion to be made more visible and explicit at all stages of the European Semester. In 2017, Parliament went a step further, requesting that the Commission implement a preparatory action on establishing a [possible child guarantee scheme](#). This guarantee should ensure that every child in poverty receives free access to quality early-childhood education and care, education, healthcare, and access to decent housing and adequate nutrition. On 4 April 2019, the [European Parliament](#) adopted a first-reading legislative resolution on the European Commission's proposal for ESF+, proposing that Member States should allocate at least 5 % of their ESF+ resources to targeted actions aimed at implementing a European Child Guarantee. It also recommended that Member States should allocate at least 27 % of their ESF+ resources to specific objectives in the field of social inclusion, and at least 3 % of their resources to the specific objective of the social inclusion of the most deprived and/or material deprivation. On 2 October 2019, the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs [decided](#) to enter into interinstitutional negotiations on the basis of that first-reading position.

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