



Fund for  
**European Aid**  
to the Most Deprived

# Thematic Dossier 4

Addressing child poverty  
and well-being through FEAD

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Social Europe

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# 1. Introduction

Children growing up in socially or economically excluded families experience barriers to acquiring the material, cultural and emotional resources needed to thrive as adults, and as a result are particularly vulnerable to continued poverty and social exclusion in adult life.<sup>1</sup> This has a significant impact on children's mental, physical, emotional and spiritual development.<sup>2</sup> They are more likely to be unemployed or earn low wages, be single parents or be involved in criminal activities.<sup>3</sup> Child poverty is thus a multidimensional that requires an interdisciplinary policy approach.

The importance of investing in children and reducing poverty and social exclusion of children is recognised at all levels of governance. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child sets up common standards for the universal protection of children, including states' responsibility to ensure a maximum survival and development of the child.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognise the importance of poverty reduction by including an ambition to reduce the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions by at least half by 2030.

Child poverty is primarily a responsibility of the EU Member States. However, the EU has prioritised support to children in recent years. In 2013, the European Commission adopted the Recommendation 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage'<sup>5</sup> that informs the Member States how family support and benefits, quality childcare and early childhood education can aid tackling child poverty and social exclusion. Moreover, Principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>6</sup> emphasises children's rights to affordable early childhood education, good quality care, protection from poverty and equal opportunities.<sup>7</sup>

There are various shared management funding mechanisms employed to fulfil the Europe 2020 strategy pledge to bring at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion by 2020.<sup>8</sup> With a total budget of €3.8 billion, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) is used by the Member States to offer non-financial assistance to the most vulnerable individuals in Europe. According to a European Commission report,<sup>9</sup> almost 16 million people received FEAD support in 2016, including 4.4 million children under 15 years of age. This thematic dossier presents a number of approaches that Member States have taken to tackling child poverty through FEAD food and material assistance. It explores national FEAD programmes that specifically support the social inclusion of children through material and food assistance complemented by the accompanying measures (OPI), e.g. by providing school supplies and hygiene products for the most deprived families. FEAD can also be used to support social inclusion measures (OPII) eg dedicated outreach work to families that may help securing access to education, children's extracurricular activities and more. The dossier aims to inform and provide inspiration to FEAD Network members and key stakeholders for the implementation of future initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Bynner, J. (2000), Risks and outcomes of social exclusion: insights from longitudinal data.

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF definition of child poverty.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/child-poverty-and-its-consequences>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> European Commission (2013), Recommendation 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage', 2013/112/EU.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission (2017), The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> DG EMPL Policies and activities: Poverty and social exclusion.

<sup>9</sup> DG EMPL (2018), FEAD successfully complements national initiatives to combat poverty, press release, 14 November 2018.

The dossier highlights the importance of tackling child poverty and social exclusion in Europe. Chapter 2 presents a brief overview of the current situation across Europe in relation to children living in (or at risk of) poverty and social exclusion. Chapter 3 explores the different approaches to addressing child poverty focusing on how FEAD partner organisations use FEAD tools to support vulnerable children. The final chapter summarises the key findings of the analysis and highlights FEAD's contribution to ensure the social protection and inclusion of children.

## 2. Child poverty and social exclusion in Europe

### 2.1 Key facts on child poverty in the EU

According to Eurostat data from 2016, more than 1 in 4 children aged 17 or under in the EU28 (26.4%) – or around 25 million – were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE). That means that they are living in households with low income, low participation in the labour market, material deprivation or several or all of these conditions. Of those children, around 10 million experienced severe material deprivation, meaning they are living in households that cannot afford to pay for at least four out of a list of nine goods or services (including rent, mortgage or utility bills), and a further 2.6 million qualified for all three AROPE conditions. The proportion of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU increased significantly in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis and has fallen only slightly since then (in 2012 it was 28.1%).

Child poverty thus remains a more significant issue compared with poverty among the adult (24.2%) and elderly (18.2%) populations in the EU. This is replicated at the level of the Member states, where poverty rates were higher than the average for the total population in all EU28 countries except Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia and Slovenia.

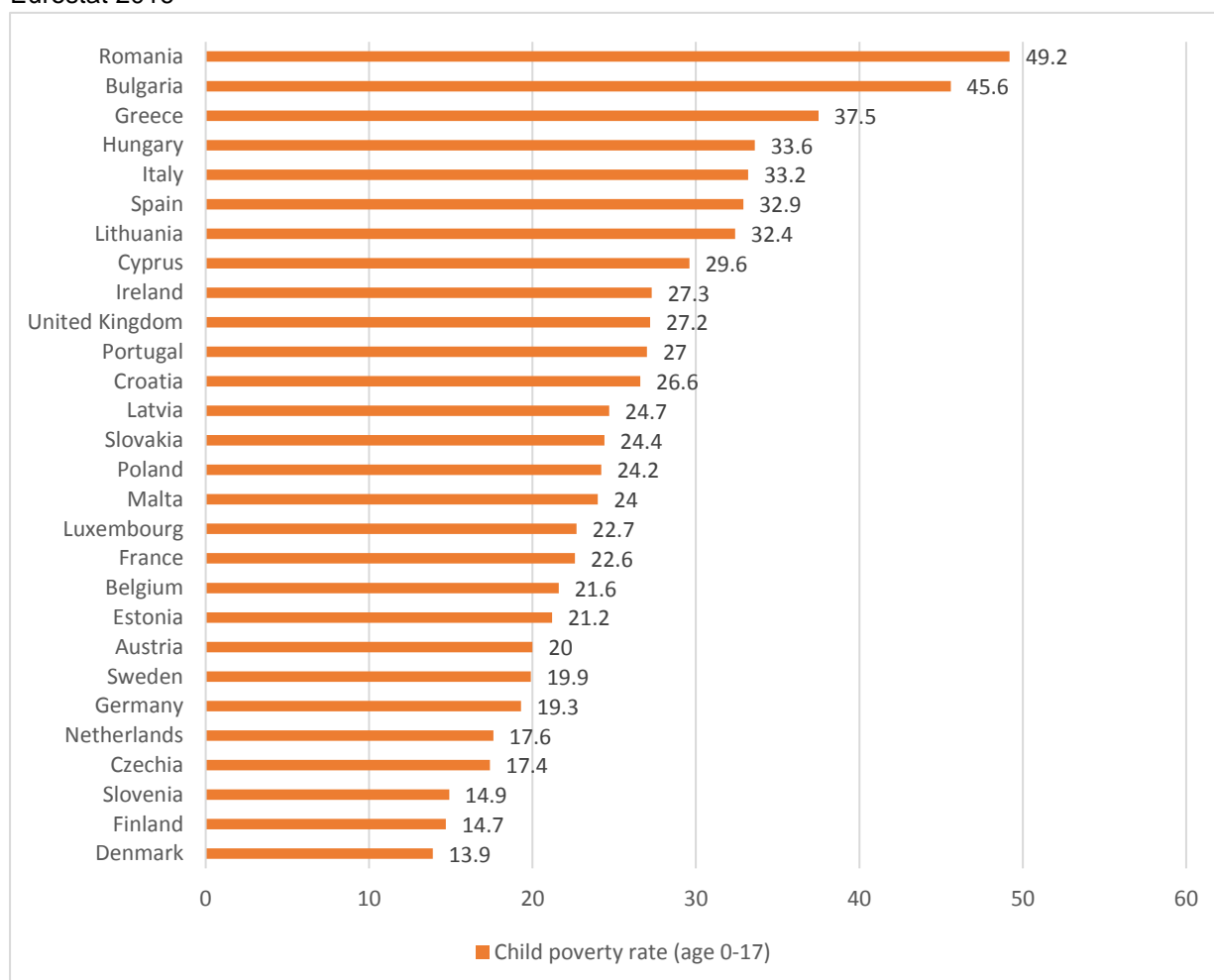
Even though child poverty rates have reduced in the majority of Member States in recent years, a significant number of EU countries still face a growing child poverty issue. According to Eurostat, between 2010 and 2015, child poverty rates fell in 16 European countries, especially in Latvia (-10 percentage points), Bulgaria (-6) and Poland (-4). Yet, child poverty has grown in 11 Member States over the same period, with Greece experiencing the largest increase (4%).<sup>10</sup>

As a result, the disparities in child poverty rates across Member States also continue to be significant. As illustrated in Figure 1, some Member States such as the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland and Slovenia have very small proportions of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion (around 14 to 15%). They are also among the best performing countries with regard to child poverty when compared to other developed economies, ranking in the lowest 10 across OECD countries.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, seven Member States including Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Romania have 30% or more children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, with Romania approaching 50%.

<sup>10</sup> Eurostat (2018), Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

<sup>11</sup> OECD (2018), 'Income distribution', OECD Social and Welfare Statistics (database), <https://doi.org/10.1787/data-00654-en> (accessed on 12 November 2018).

Figure 1. Proportion of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion in EU 28 Member States, Eurostat 2016



Source: Eurostat, 2016

## 2.2 EU policy initiatives addressing child poverty

At European level, the issue of child poverty has been recognised and provided with a course of action through a number of policy initiatives. In 2010, the European Commission put in place the **Europe 2020 strategy**,<sup>12</sup> which is the 'EU's agenda for growth and jobs for the current decade' and set five targets on employment, innovation, education, fighting poverty and social exclusion, and climate and energy, to be reached by 2020. This sets an ambition to bring 20 million people in the EU out of poverty and social exclusion by 2020.<sup>13</sup> As part of its Social Investment Package, in 2013, the European Commission adopted the **Recommendation 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage'**.<sup>14</sup> The Recommendation emphasises the importance of preventative measures to reduce the risk of childhood poverty and social exclusion, and provides guidance for Member States on how to tackle the issue through measures such as family support and benefits, quality childcare and early childhood education. The Recommendation calls for Member States to:

- help parents get access to work and the labour market;

<sup>12</sup> European Commission (2010), Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> European Commission (2013), Recommendation 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage', 2013/112/EU, Official Journal of the European Union.



- render early childhood education and care services more accessible and affordable (including for children whom are under the age of 3);
- provide child and family benefits on the basis of income groups;
- eradicate segregation in schools and enhance access to housing, social services and health;
- enhance the participation of children in extra-curricular activities and in services that affect children (such as social services, education and alternative care).<sup>15</sup>

The European Commission monitors and supports the implementation of the Recommendation by mobilising funds such as FEAD and ESF, sharing best practices through the European Platform for Investing in Children (EPIC)<sup>16</sup>, utilising the PROGRESS programme to evaluate the efficacy of conditional cash transfers, and monitoring the policies implemented by Member States through the European Semester.

Further steps have been taken to prioritise and address child poverty and social exclusion at the EU level. To contribute to the ongoing implementation of the European Commission's Recommendation on Investing in Children in 2015, the European Parliament voted for a Resolution<sup>17</sup> to counteract child poverty which proposed a 'Child Guarantee' funding programme to improve children's access to 'free healthcare, free education, free early childhood education and care, decent housing and adequate nutrition'. Currently, a consortium of organisations including Applica, the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER), Eurochild and Save the Children has been contracted by the European Commission to conduct a feasibility study to understand how the Child Guarantee can benefit children.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, at least 25% of the new European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) has been committed to advancing social inclusion for disadvantaged groups, including children. The proposed ESF+ regulation includes a specific objective to promote social integration of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including the most deprived and children, as well as other objectives that are instrumental to reducing child poverty, such as: improving women's labour market participation and access to childcare facilities; promoting equal access to and completion of, quality and inclusive education and training, in particular for disadvantaged groups; addressing material deprivation through food and/or basic material assistance to the most deprived, including accompanying measures.

## 3. Exploring the different approaches to address child poverty

### 3.1. Child poverty – a definition

Child poverty can manifest itself in different ways and does not solely include a child's lack of basic material needs such as food, clothes and housing.<sup>19</sup> As mentioned above, AROPE refers to the situation of either people who are at risk of poverty, severely materially deprived, or living in a household with low work intensity.

<sup>15</sup> DG EMPL Policies and activities: Investing in Children.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

<sup>17</sup> European Parliament (2015), Resolution of 24 November 2015 on reducing inequalities with a special focus on child poverty, 2014/2237(INI), Strasbourg.

<sup>18</sup> Eurochild (2016), Working Paper on a Child Guarantee.

<sup>19</sup> Save the Children (2014), Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe: A matter of children's rights. Save the Children, Brussels.

Firstly, **'at risk of poverty'** indicates that children are living in a household with an equivalent disposable income below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold (set at 60% of the national median income<sup>20</sup>); it is thus a measure of relative poverty which is also significantly influenced by the structure of the family. In the case of a single-parent household, the risk of poverty was almost 50% in comparison to the two-adult household which had an 18% risk of poverty (Eurostat, 2018).

Furthermore, **severe material deprivation** signifies that children are 'living in a household that cannot pay for at least four out of a list of nine items: rent, mortgage or utility bills; keeping their home adequately warm; unexpected expenses; eating meat or proteins regularly; going on holiday; a television set; a washing machine; a car; or a telephone'. Similarly to the first AROPE condition, this condition is more diffused in more vulnerable households, such as households with one adult. Data from 2015 shows that 17% of children who lived in a one-adult household were severely materially deprived across the Member States, compared with an average of 8.5%.

Finally, children are also AROPE if they are living in households with **very low household work intensity**, whereby 'the members of working age worked less than 20% of their total potential during the previous 12 months'.<sup>21</sup> EUAFR estimates that in 2016, 9.3% of children lived in households with minimal work intensity.<sup>22</sup>

The most severe form of child poverty occurs when all three of the AROPE sub-indicators apply. Based on the 2016 Eurostat data on income and living conditions (EU-SILC), 2.5% of children experienced all three forms of disadvantage and were thus the most severely materially deprived group. Across Europe, most of the severely deprived children live in Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece where every fourth child lives in poverty and materially deprived household (EUAFR, 2018).

A series of **factors** can influence the risk of children becoming AROPE. According to Eurostat,<sup>23</sup> these include:

- the type of household, for instance, whether it's a single parent household;
- monetary poverty;
- the level of education of the parents;
- migrant background and ethnicity of the parents (for instance, Roma)<sup>24</sup>;
- living conditions, for instance, if households are severely materially deprived.

The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) states that children living in poverty 'experience deprivation of the material, spiritual and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society'. However, traditional definitions of child poverty mostly focus on the dimension of income.<sup>25</sup> Capturing the multidimensionality of the issue requires going beyond pure

<sup>20</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (EUAFR) (2018), Combating child poverty: an issue of fundamental rights. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

<sup>21</sup> Eurostat (2018), Glossary: Persons living in households with low work intensity.

<sup>22</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (EUAFR) (2018), Combating child poverty: an issue of fundamental rights. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

<sup>23</sup> Eurostat (2018), Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

<sup>24</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (EUAFR) (2018), Combating child poverty: an issue of fundamental rights. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

<sup>25</sup> Perry, B. (2002), 'The mismatch between income measures and direct outcome measures of poverty', *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, 19, 101–127.

measures of absolute and relative income to encompass more direct measures of children's well-being and social participation and financial factors not directly related to income.<sup>26</sup>

Some researchers have highlighted the benefits of utilising both income and deprivation indicators complementarily.<sup>27</sup> These deprivation indicators can consist of, for instance, 'having a hobby or leisure activity' and 'celebrations on special occasions such as birthdays, Christmas or other religious festivals'.<sup>28</sup> One such indicator within the European context is the Child Deprivation Index developed by the UNICEF Research Centre - Innocenti. Based on the 2009 EU-SILC, the data presents a source of measures of deprivation specific to children. This data shows even more stark variations in child poverty across Member States, with children living in Romania being 56 times more likely to be at a risk of poverty and social exclusion compared to children growing up in Sweden.<sup>29</sup>

The other aspect to be considered is the wider financial factors beyond income that could contribute to or alleviate the poverty and deprivation of a child's family. This may include debt, savings and home ownership but also access to in-kind social assistance in the form of access to health, childcare, housing and education services from national and local governments.<sup>30</sup> The latter dimension can only be explored by looking at the policy approaches that different Member States have taken to reduce child poverty.

### 3.2. Approaches to tackling child poverty

It is widely recognised that addressing child poverty is a key mechanism for breaking the cycle of disadvantage and exclusion in society. Yet, policymakers face a number of challenges when attempting to eradicate child poverty due to the complex mix of contributing factors and needs that must be addressed to intervene effectively.

Firstly, while employment support programmes for parents can help reduce household and child poverty, they do not necessarily fit the circumstances of all deprived families. For instance, single parents or severely disabled parents may not be able to work; furthermore, barriers to employment may be severe for parents living in areas with high unemployment (for instance, rural areas)<sup>31</sup> and limited or costly transport options. Moreover, low earnings, precarious work and low work intensity mean that parental employment may not be a sufficient condition for a household to escape poverty and social exclusion. As a result, Member States cannot rely entirely on 'work first' approaches to reduce child poverty, as many families with children will fall through the net of conventional in-work or back-to-work public support programmes. Thirdly, as discussed above, other factors beyond employment income – for example, access to public services – can affect a family's social and financial disadvantage and exclusion, such that a narrow policy approach excluding complementary measures is a missed opportunity to improve the children's living conditions.

It has been argued that in order to tackle child poverty, policymakers must instead look widely at the multiple causes of poverty and exclusion, and develop policies across the spectrum of government

<sup>26</sup> Save the Children (2007), *Severe Child Poverty in the UK*. Save the Children, London.

<sup>27</sup> Ringen, S. (1998), Direct and indirect measures of poverty, *Journal of Social Policy*, 17, 351–365.

Muffels, R. (1993), 'Deprivation standards and style of living indices' in J Bergham and B Cantillon (eds) *The European Face of Social Security*, Avebury, Aldershot.

Nolan, B. (1999), 'Targeting poverty: lessons from Ireland on setting a national poverty target', *New Economy*, 6 (1), 44–49. Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin.

<sup>28</sup> Save the Children (2007), *Severe Child Poverty in the UK*, p.6. Save the Children, London.

<sup>29</sup> UNICEF (2012), *New league tables of child poverty in the world's rich countries*. Innocenti Research Centre.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2014), *State of the Nation 2014, Social Mobility and Child Poverty in Great Britain*.



responsibilities – joining up health and wellbeing, education, work, taxation and criminal justice more effectively.<sup>32</sup> Member States recognise this by using a combination of policies to address the issue. Given the significantly different child poverty rates and prevailing issues across Member States, this requires developing policy mixes that are tailored to the national circumstances. Recent research has considered the policy options used across the EU for reducing child poverty and identified patterns that help us understand what drives success and failure on this issue.

For example, a recent study on ‘Successful policy mixes to tackle child poverty: an EU-wide comparison’ suggests that a combination of three factors allow for Member States to effectively tackle child poverty; these are: **‘strong work attachment of parents, low risk of poverty associated with being in employment and effective income support’**.<sup>33</sup> All three are needed because parental employment can still leave the household in a situation of in-work poverty if earnings and working hours are low, or other adults in the household remain inactive, as well as in the absence of a strong social transfer system.<sup>34</sup>

The research suggests that Member States can be classified in four clusters (as illustrated in Figure 2) based on their performance in reducing child poverty within their borders. The top cluster comprises of the Nordic countries, as well as Austria, France, the Netherlands and Slovenia. In these countries ‘the work attachment of adults in families with children is strong and economic activity provides an effective protection against the risk of poverty’.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, these countries also have high maternal employment, which is facilitated by the accessibility to childcare facilities. In addition, the labour market is strengthened by the social policies adopted by the governments, and ‘the poverty reduction effect of cash transfers in these countries is also better compared to other Member States’.<sup>36</sup> Public cash transfers (excluding pensions) are a form of income support to reduce child poverty; according to the study, without these, 40% of children in the EU would be AROPE. The study concludes that these effects lead either to a top performance (for instance, in Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden,) on the outcome side (low absolute and relative risk of poverty compared to an estimated narrow gap) or to a solid compensation for the relative weakness in labour market attachment (Finland and Slovenia).<sup>37</sup> By contrast, the study finds that countries that face joblessness as a main challenge do not perform well in reducing child poverty, whereas countries that face high in-work poverty as a main challenge perform the worst at reducing child poverty.

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<sup>32</sup> Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) (2011), Tackling Child Poverty and Improving Life Chances: Consulting on a New Approach - SSAC response.

<sup>33</sup> Gábos, A. (2013), Successful policy mixes to tackle child poverty: an EU-wide comparison. *GINI Discussion Paper 76*.

<sup>34</sup> See footnote 22.

<sup>35</sup> See footnote 22.

<sup>36</sup> See footnote 24.

<sup>37</sup> See footnote 24.

**Figure 2. Country approach clusters to tackling child poverty**

Cluster countries	General analysis	Policy analysis	
		Countries	Implementation
Cluster A: Austria, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Slovenia and Sweden	Their performance in tackling child poverty outcomes, joblessness and in-work poverty is higher than the EU average.	Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden	Provide effective cash transfers and 'enable parents to be present in the labour market and to successfully combine duties related to work and family life' (p.23). Furthermore, most mothers are integrated in the labour market (either full-time or part-time).
		Austria	Government effectively intervenes in the case of child poverty thanks to cash transfers. Higher than average maternal employment (especially part-time).
		Finland and Slovenia	Government interventions especially through cash transfers (similarly to above), but far weaker in terms of maternal employment and childcare enrolment.
Cluster B: Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary and the UK	Their performance in tackling child poverty outcomes, joblessness and in-work poverty is better than the EU average, but not as good as cluster A.	Belgium, France, Germany and the UK	Effective governmental policies especially through cash transfers, above average joblessness in households with children.
		Estonia and Germany	Average performance with regard to childcare arrangements for children under the age of 3.
		Czech Republic and Hungary	The worst performing in this cluster in terms of childcare arrangements for children under the age of 3.
		Estonia and Hungary	Focus on cash transfer
		Czech Republic	Relatively weak governmental intervention
		Belgium, France and the UK	Perform well in terms of childcare arrangements for children under the age of 3.

Cluster C: Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Spain	These countries perform worse than average in tackling child poverty outcomes, joblessness and in-work poverty than the EU average.	Lithuania	Government intervention focuses on cash transfers and spends a higher than average amount of the GDP on benefits for families.
		Bulgaria, Latvia and Slovakia	Weak governmental involvement
		Italy and Spain	They spend the least on family protection, but perform better at maternal employment and childcare availability.
Cluster D: Greece, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland and Portugal	'This cluster shows strong dissimilarities compared to Cluster C by having poverty outcomes below average, but by far not as bad as countries from Cluster C. Also, their performance in the joblessness dimension is (and even better compared to countries in Cluster B). While the main constituent factor of this cluster is the poor performance of its members in terms of in-work poverty, they do not differ too much from cluster C in these terms' (p.25).	Luxembourg	Governmental intervention focuses on cash transfers, highest spending on family-related benefits, successful at reducing poverty. Part-time employment and childcare accessibility are average. Full-time female employment is below 60%.
		Greece and Poland	Weak governmental involvement with regards to cash transfers, maternal participation and childcare availability. Poland spends the least on family-related costs in Europe. Greece is the European country with the lowest poverty reduction impact.
		Malta and Portugal	Spend less on family protection. Portugal has high amount of full-time maternal employment.

Source: Clusters sourced from Gábos (2013), *Successful policy mixes to tackle child poverty: an EU-wide comparison*. GINI Discussion Paper 76.

Another study covering the EU sets out a series of approaches which would allow Member States to successfully tackle child poverty.<sup>38</sup> Firstly, the study argues that, in order for children not to live in poverty, parents must be supported into employment or must be provided **'adequate income support if work is not available or income is too low'**.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, **supporting parents is a fundamental prerequisite for protecting children's rights**. A series of income support schemes can help achieve this, which include unemployment and/or insurance allowance, unemployment assistance, and social assistance.<sup>40</sup> Although most Member States have social assistance schemes, Greece and Italy do not. In fact, these countries put in place pilot projects during the economic crisis that are weak compared to other countries; Italy, for instance, has limited its pilot social assistance project to 'households with children with recent employment spells'. For 'adequate income support', it is essential to provide parents with adequate resources to prevent them and their children from living in poverty. According to the study, adequate resources 'must be provided through a combination of universal policies and services and targeted measures' whereby 'universal policies guarantee a minimum level of income and services for all, while targeted measures reach out to the most disadvantaged'.<sup>41</sup>

By contrast, other research suggests that social benefits directly targeting children do not always have a stronger effect than more broadly targeted benefits. A recent study of child deprivation and social benefits finds that some benefits that directly tackle child poverty (such as child and family benefits) do not always have the intended effects of reducing it. Vice versa, some benefits that do not necessarily focus on children (such as housing benefits, unemployment benefits etc.) can reduce child deprivation.<sup>42</sup> The study concludes that 'it is recommendable to design interventions considering the whole set of benefits, instead of developing single policy instruments' and that it is important to investigate and further research 'the diverging processes that families follow when distributing resources within the household' in order to implement successful and efficient policies.<sup>43</sup>

The link between adult poverty and child poverty and the need for Member States to address the two holistically is evident when dealing with the extreme case of **child homelessness**. Child homelessness is understood as 'a process where most of the children concerned are moving frequently between the streets, situations of homelessness, forms of insecure housing (living with family and friends) or inadequate housing (in squats or makeshift dwellings)'.<sup>44</sup> Although general policies to prevent child homelessness exist, such as social security protection policies, housing policies, education policies and health policies, the number of homeless children seems to be rising. According to the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), the causes of child homelessness consist of a combination of structural, institutional, relational and personal factors and are connected to the poverty and homelessness experienced by adults. FEANTSA outlines a series of recommendations of what should be done at the national and EU levels in order to eradicate child homelessness. The Federation recommends that:

- further research on homelessness must be developed, especially with regard to the causes of the phenomenon;

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<sup>38</sup> Sandbæk, M. (2017), European Policies to Promote Children's Rights and Combat Child Poverty. *International Journal of Environmental and Public Health*. 14, 837.

<sup>39</sup> See footnote 27, p.1.

<sup>40</sup> Maquet, I. Maestri, V. Thévenot, C. (2016), The coverage rate of income support measures in the EU: measurement and challenges. European Commission Working Paper 2/2016. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

<sup>41</sup> Sandbæk, M. (2017), European Policies to Promote Children's Rights and Combat Child Poverty. *International Journal of Environmental and Public Health*. 14, 837, p.9.

<sup>42</sup> Bárcena-Martín, E. Blázquez, M. Budría, S. Moro, I. Egido, A. (2016), 'Child deprivation and social benefits. Europe in cross-national perspective', *The Papers 16/03*, Department of Economic Theory and Economic History of the University of Granada.

<sup>43</sup> See footnote 31, p.16.

<sup>44</sup> FEANTSA (2007), Child Homelessness in Europe – an overview of emerging trends.

- national evidence-based prevention strategies need to be developed;
- the needs of children must be included in all housing needs assessments;
- national administration must improve the monitoring of homelessness;
- homelessness must be mainstreamed in all national policies.

**Social work and social investment strategies** – including family and parenting support programmes – have also been identified by the literature as extremely relevant in order to support parents and help them find a path out of poverty. Providing this support recognises the importance of treating children and parents as active recipients of professional counselling and their rights to self-determination.

### 3.3. FEAD's contribution to tackling child poverty

FEAD contributes to tackling child poverty in two main ways: through direct material and/or food support to children, and through accompanying measures targeted at families with children. When it comes to food aid, 30% of the total number of recipients of FEAD food support are children.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, many national programmes funded by FEAD primarily target children. In fact, **children 'benefit from the largest proportion of EU funding for material assistance, including through the provision of babywear, school bags and stationery'** and 'more than 300 000 children in the EU have received FEAD-funded materials distributed over the last years'.<sup>46</sup>

A number of Member States have decided to dedicate their FEAD programming to providing **food aid for children**. In Cyprus and in other Member States, for instance, programmes which focus on food security for schoolchildren have been put in place. The Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture prevents malnutrition and early school leaving by providing schoolchildren with **free breakfasts**. The programme provides 2 000 eligible schoolchildren attending pre-primary, primary and secondary schools, from disadvantaged families and at risk of malnutrition, with free breakfasts on weekdays. A similar programme has been put in place in the Czech Republic, where the cost of **school lunches** is covered for children whose parents cannot afford it.

Additionally, some Member States have implemented programmes which focus on the **distribution of school supplies** for children. Austria, for one, has implemented the **'School starter parcels' programme**, aimed at schoolchildren who experience material deprivation. It provides them with parcels containing basic educational materials (e.g. school bag, stationery supplies, painting materials, etc.).

In Cyprus and France, programmes have been implemented which specifically focus on **newborn babies**. In France, the NGO Secours Populaire Français (SPF) has put in place the **'libre-service de la solidarité' (self-service of solidarity) programme**. The programme takes place in Paris and the distribution of food aid and material goods takes place five days per week. Similarly, in Cyprus, the **'baby dowry'** programme supports disadvantaged parents with a newborn baby. The Cypriot Social Welfare Services of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance identify potential end recipients and provide them with essential items for newborn babies. These items can include a baby bed and mattress, a baby bathtub, a baby changing unit, a high chair, pushchair, linen, blankets, towels, or a special package with baby bottles, shampoos, creams and nappies for 24 months.

FEAD further contributes to tackling child poverty through the implementation of **'accompanying measures'** alongside the material and food support that are specifically targeted at families with

<sup>45</sup> According to the FEAD regulation, accompanying measures shall not be compulsory in cases where the assistance is solely provided to most deprived children in childcare or comparable facilities

<sup>46</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (EUAFR) (2018), Combating child poverty: an issue of fundamental rights, p.47. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.



children. These measures consist of social inclusion initiatives and can include a wide range of activities, for instance, ‘information about social services, workshops or counselling, [...] implemented at the local level by volunteers and social workers’.<sup>47</sup> Accompanying measures go further than providing basic emergency assistance and instead focus on making a long-term impact on the end recipients’ lives. Some FEAD programmes implement accompanying measures targeted exclusively at children who are at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Malta, for instance, implements a programme which, among other forms of social support, **provides literacy support** for children. The families are provided with books for home use and advice on how to read with children. Furthermore, Lithuania has set up a project which allows children to attend **day camps** and participate in recreational and educational activities (group visits to museums, theatres, cinemas etc.). Although children are the end recipients, their parents, grandparents, psychologists, social pedagogues and care workers can also attend the activities organised. Similarly, the Socio-therapeutic Community Centre in Poland organises **Easter workshops** with the aim of engaging children in activities that allow them to feel that they are participating ‘normally’ in society. During the workshops, the children take part in traditional Easter activities such as preparing traditional Easter dishes, playing Easter-themed games, painting eggs and receiving gifts.

## 4. Future considerations in relation to addressing children’s well-being in the EU

This dossier has considered the importance of tackling child poverty and social exclusion in Europe, the various forms it takes and how Member States are addressing the issue, including the use of FEAD support. It has highlighted the following key points:

- Child poverty remains a significant issue at the EU level with 1 in 4 children classified as at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Progress must be made to reverse the significant rise in child poverty in the aftermath of the 2008 recession.
- The scale and extent of child poverty across Member States continues to be vastly different, as is Member States’ degree of success in reducing it in recent years.
- Child poverty is a multidimensional issue requiring mixed policy approaches that tackle the multiple factors putting children at risk of poverty and social exclusion.
- The importance of addressing this issue is recognised at the EU level and is backed by a number of policy initiatives within the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the European Commission’s Recommendation on investing in children, and efforts by the European Parliament and partner organisations dealing with child protection to develop a Child Guarantee.
- At the national level, addressing child poverty requires strong labour policies focused on increasing household income through the parents’ participation in work, but also measures to supplement household income and facilitate access to public services and social participation.
- Many FEAD partner organisations use FEAD tools to support vulnerable children.

Principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights sets out children’s rights to affordable early childhood education, good quality care and protection from poverty, as well as the right of children from disadvantaged backgrounds to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities.

The direct material and/or food assistance and accompanying measures targeted at children delivered by FEAD make the programme a key delivery mechanism supporting this commitment. Food and material aid contributes to furthering children’s rights by protecting them against the risks of severe

<sup>47</sup> Red Cross EU Office (2018), Strengthening the social impact of food and material assistance through accompanying measures.

poverty and material deprivation. Equally, the accompanying measures delivered through FEAD alleviate some of the barriers and additional challenges faced by deprived children in achieving full and high-quality participation in education and social life more generally.

The European Commission's ambition for ESF+ to contribute to a more social Europe and make the European Pillar of Social Rights a reality on the ground is also a way to contribute to upward economic and social convergence across Europe. The ESF+ will invest in three main areas: (1) education, training and lifelong learning; (2) effectiveness of labour markets and equal access to quality employment; and (3) social inclusion, health and combating poverty. There is also a strong drive for EU institutions to draw more on the legal standards enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European Social Charter when designing and implementing EU policies to fight child poverty. It will thus be important for ESF+ to capitalise on the lessons learned through FEAD in the protection of children and minors against poverty and social exclusion. This issue will be considered in more depth at the next meeting of the FEAD Network in 2019 to enable further reflection on FEAD partners' experiences of supporting children and the dissemination of good practice.



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