

Analysis of the Child Guarantee National Action Plans

Trends in Member States and support
for refugees



Analysis of the Child Guarantee National Action Plans

Trends in Member States and support for refugees

Abstract

This study analyses the measures supporting refugees from Ukraine and elsewhere set out in the Child Guarantee national actions plans. It also supports the monitoring and evaluation of the Guarantee by looking at trends and disparities among Member States in the areas of child poverty, early childhood education and care, housing, food and energy poverty.

This document was provided by the Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies at the request of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL).

This document was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs.

AUTHORS

Daniel MOLINUEVO (Research Manager, Eurofound)
Michele CONSOLINI (Researcher, Eurofound)

ADMINISTRATOR RESPONSIBLE

Aoife KENNEDY

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Irene VERNACOTOLA

LINGUISTIC VERSIONS

Original: EN

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Policy departments provide in-house and external expertise to support European Parliament committees and other parliamentary bodies in shaping legislation and exercising democratic scrutiny over EU internal policies.

To contact the Policy Department or to subscribe for email alert updates, please write to:

Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies

European Parliament

L-2929 - Luxembourg

Email: Poldep-Economy-Science@ep.europa.eu

Manuscript completed: October 2022

Date of publication: November 2022

© European Union, 2022

This document is available on the internet at:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/supporting-analyses>

DISCLAIMER AND COPYRIGHT

The opinions expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the European Parliament.

Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy.

For citation purposes, the publication should be referenced as: Molinuevo, D. and Consolini, M., 2022, *Analysis of the Child Guarantee National Action Plans. Trends in Member States and support for refugees*, publication for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, European Parliament, Luxembourg.

© Cover image used under licence from Adobe Stock

CONTENTS

LIST OF BOXES	6
LIST OF FIGURES	6
LIST OF TABLES	7
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	8
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	9
1. INTRODUCTION	11
2. ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN AND OTHER REFUGEES: A REVIEW OF THE CHILD GUARANTEE NATIONAL ACTION PLANS	14
2.1. Identifying children in need and accessibility barriers	17
2.1.1. Barriers to access services	18
2.2. Measures planned or taken in implementing the CG Recommendation	20
2.2.1. Access to ECEC, education and school-based activities	20
Funding measures	20
Service-related measures	20
Workforce related measures	22
2.2.2. Access to healthcare	22
2.2.3. Access to healthy nutrition and to at least one healthy meal each school day	23
2.2.4. Access to adequate housing	24
2.3. Targets and indicators	24
2.4. Discussion	25
2.4.1. Identification of children and the barriers they face when accessing services	25
Ukrainian children “in need”: different groups, different needs	25
Unmet needs and access barriers: a healthy nutrition and a meal each school day	27
2.4.2. Integration and coordination of measures	28
2.4.3. Targets and indicators	29
3. UPWARD CONVERGENCE: TAKING STOCK OF CHILD POVERTY AND ACCESS TO SERVICES	31
3.1. Planned analysis and data on CG	32
3.2. Upward convergence: a monitoring tool for improving cohesion	32
3.3. At risk of poverty: the impact of economic cycles	34
3.3.1. Percentage of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion	36
3.3.2. Percentage of children living in households with very low income	38
3.3.3. Percentage of children with severe material or social deprivation	39
3.4. Early childhood education and care: increasing disparities among the youngest children	42

3.4.1. Share of children in ECEC below the age of three	43
3.4.2. Share of children in ECEC between three and compulsory school age	45
3.5. Inadequate housing: a hint of the effect of COVID-19	46
3.5.1. Share of households AROP and with dependent children that have arrears on utility bills	47
3.5.2. Share of households AROP and with dependent children that are unable to keep home adequately warm	49
3.5.3. Share of children AROP and living in an overcrowded household	51
3.6. Food poverty: economic downturns at play	53
3.6.1. Share of children AROP and unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day	53
3.7. Conclusions: the fragile stability of upward convergence	56
4. CONCLUDING REMARKS: EUROFOUND'S CONTRIBUTION GOING FORWARD	58
REFERENCES	61
ANNEX 1: LIST OF INDICATORS	65

LIST OF BOXES

Box 1: A brief description of the Child Guarantee	13
Box 2: Definitions and key concepts relevant for this chapter	16
Box 3: Data about the number of Ukrainian children included in the NAPs.	18
Box 4: Ukrainian children with disabilities included in the NAPs.	26
Box 5: Methodological overview of upward convergence	34
Box 6: AROP and AROPE definitions	35

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Overall Member States' disparities reduced (upward sigma convergence) in children AROPE rate, 2008-2020, EU27	37
Figure 2: Children AROPE rate, 2008-2020, EU27	37
Figure 3: Overall Member States' disparities increased (upward sigma divergence) in children AROP rate, 2010-2021, EU27	39
Figure 4: Overall Member States' disparities reduced (upward sigma convergence) in children with severe deprivations, 2009-2020, EU27	40
Figure 5: Share of children with severe deprivations, 2009-2020, EU27	41
Figure 6: Percentage of children (below 3 years old) AROP in ECEC, 2008-2021, EU27	42
Figure 7: Percentage of children (between 3 years old and schooling age) AROP in ECEC, 2008-2021, EU27	43
Figure 8: Overall Member States' disparities increased (upward sigma divergence) in children in ECEC, 2008-2021, EU27	44
Figure 9: Overall Member States' disparities reduced (upward sigma convergence) in children in ECEC, 2008-2021, EU27	46
Figure 10: Overall Member States' disparities reduced (upward sigma convergence) in households AROP with dependent children having arrears on utility bills, 2008-2021, EU27	48
Figure 11: Households AROP with dependent children having arrears on utility bills, 2008-2021, EU27	49
Figure 12: Overall Member States' disparities reduced (upward sigma convergence) in households AROP with dependent children unable to keep home warm, 2008-2021, EU27	50
Figure 13: Share of households AROP with dependent children unable to keep home warm, 2008-2021, EU27	51
Figure 14: Overall Member States' disparities reduced (upward sigma convergence) in children AROP living in overcrowded households, 2008-2021, EU27	53
Figure 15: Share of children AROP unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day	54
Figure 16: Overall Member States' disparities reduced (upward sigma convergence) in children AROP unable to afford a meal every second day, 2008-2021, EU27	55

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Overview of performance and dynamics of disparities (sigma convergence), EU27	57
Table 2: List of indicators used for convergence analysis and Eurostat links	65

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AROPE	At risk of poverty or social exclusion
AROP	At risk of poverty
CG	Child Guarantee
CSR	Country Specific Recommendation
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EP	European Parliament
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
EU	European Union
EU-SILC	European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
FRA	Fundamental Rights Agency
GDP	Gross domestic product
MEP	Member of European Parliament
MS	Member State
NAP	(Child Guarantee) National Action Plan
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NRRP	National recovery and resilience plan
REACT-EU	Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe
SMSD	Severe Material or Social Deprivation
SPC (ISG)	Social Protection Committee (Indicators' Sub-Group)
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Five years ago, a resolution from the European Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States “to introduce a child guarantee so that every child in poverty could access healthcare, education, childcare, decent housing, and adequate nutrition”. The European Child Guarantee has since become one of the **main social policy initiatives at the EU level**. The Council Recommendation establishing it was approved by all Member States in June 2021. Since then, Member States have appointed national coordinators tasked with the rollout and evaluation of the Guarantee. National actions plans describing measures and targets up to 2030 are being developed. Several EU funds are available to support the implementation of these plans.

Aim

The aim of this study is to support the design and implementation of the national action plans. It also provides an analysis that can be of use in the monitoring and evaluation of the Guarantee in the next few years. More specifically, it provides information about:

- The measures that have been included in the Child Guarantee national action plans that target **Ukrainian children as well as other refugees**, asylum seekers, and children of migrant origin.
- **Trends and disparities of the Member States** on indicators relevant for the Child Guarantee, in particular related to children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, early childhood education and care, housing, food, and energy poverty.
- **Disparities among Member States** both based on the current state of play, and with respect to the long term, where Member States’ performance can be tracked and investigated thoroughly.

These aspects have been selected because they are crucial for the successful rollout of the Child Guarantee. The **Ukrainian children that have left their country need access** now to all the services that are part of the Guarantee. Member States also require a **coordinated approach** and sufficient resources to meet this demand. Dynamics of disparities can be part of the monitoring and evaluation of the Guarantee to ensure a homogenous development in the EU. As the Child Guarantee involves several groups of children with different needs in each service, **monitoring trends can be quite complex**, involving several indicators. The analysis of disparities among Member States, i.e., convergence analysis, provides a more elaborated overview of trends. It makes it possible to see the wood from the trees and is thus a useful complement to the EU-wide monitoring framework that is being developed by the Social Protection Committee Indicators Subgroup.

Key Findings

The **timing of the national action plans** has limited the extent to which Member States could react to the war in Ukraine in their national action plans. As the deadline for submission was only a few weeks after Russia started the war, several Member States with a high influx of refugees from Ukraine requested more time for the submission of their action plans in order to put in place measures. Many of the action plans that were submitted during the first half of 2022 only made a general reference in their plans to measures targeting children with a migrant background. Some Member States referred to refugees, unaccompanied minors, and asylum seekers. However, in most cases, the plans reflected the situation prior to the war in Ukraine. Other action plans include references to Ukrainian children, but do not envisage any measures specifically targeting this group of children.

The national action plans have identified several **unmet needs and accessibility barriers** for all these groups of children in the areas of housing, education, ECEC and healthcare. **Healthy nutrition** was not identified as an area in which there were unmet needs or barriers to access. The data about the actual number of Ukrainian children in each Member State is limited, which also affects the quantitative targets that can be set. There are several data collection initiatives (e.g. e-surveys) seeking to provide further information. Many of the measures targeting Ukrainian children sought to overcome language barriers and adapted existing rules to meet the increase in the demand for services.

The results of the analyses of trends and dynamics of Member States' performance in a set of key indicators (poverty, use of ECEC, inadequate housing, energy and food poverty) revealed optimistic trends across Europe, although with some differences among Member States. When considering the overall period, we saw a **reduction of disparities for most of the indicators, with the exception of children at risk of poverty and children below the age of three and at risk of poverty using early childhood education or care (ECEC)**. Moreover, we saw that Member States **improved their performance** in all indicators over time, although this was not straightforward. The economic downturn induced by the financial crisis took a heavy toll on many Member States' social protection measures, so that many countries saw their share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion and children suffering from food poverty increase. This increase was not recorded in all countries, with those more in difficulty deteriorating more than those in a better position. Nonetheless, in the aftermath of the crisis, we saw a quick improvement for many Member States and, particularly, a faster improvement for those Member States in difficulty. A similar dynamic happened for indicators concerning housing, with increased differences among Member States and then a faster decrease in disparities. It is worth bearing in mind that material well-being is particularly vulnerable to economic cycles.

The same dynamic is not found for children in ECEC, for which the improvement in performance was not affected by the financial crisis. The analysis finally dipped into the effect of the **COVID-19 pandemic** on the indicators and found that the most recent data do **not show a European-wide effect for the indicators related to economic factors such as low income, food poverty or arrears**. For economic indicators, the effect was focused on some countries struggling in some indicators more than others, especially in 2020. The **pandemic prevented children attending ECEC in many countries**, due to the obvious restrictions put in place. The reduction of performance was met with a reduction of disparities for children below the age of three, whereas the reduction in performance also saw an increase in disparities for children between three and compulsory school age. These trends might signal a new increase in disparities in future years.

Moreover, the quantitative chapter offers a first overview of using the dynamics of disparities as a useful and effective monitoring tool. Analysing trends and disparities provides both a clear picture of the current state of play and an overview of past responses from Member States to different shocks.

1. INTRODUCTION

“The European Parliament [...] considers the right to free and universal education, health and social security systems as basic conditions for combating poverty, in particular among children; bearing in mind this objective, calls on the Commission and the Member States, in view of the weakening of public services, to introduce a child guarantee so that every child in poverty can have access to free healthcare, free education, free childcare, decent housing and adequate nutrition [...]”

European Parliament Resolution of 24 November 2015 on reducing inequalities with a special focus on child poverty

Seven years after this European Parliament resolution, the Child Guarantee (CG) has become one of the flagship social policy initiatives at EU level. It was one of the main social policies mentioned by Ursula von der Leyen in her political guidelines when she took office¹. The Council Recommendation establishing the CG was unanimously approved by all 27 Member States in June 2021. Several EU funds are available to implement it, with a share of European Social Fund Plus specifically earmarked to tackle child poverty. By mid-October 2022, all Member States had appointed a Child Guarantee National Coordinator, and the majority have submitted their National Action Plans (NAPs).

There are several challenges ahead for the successful rollout of the Guarantee. This study aims to support the implementation and monitoring of the CG by analysing two of these challenges. First, it focuses on the measures promoting the integration of Ukrainian children. This group of children is in dire need of support from the Child Guarantee. There is a political commitment to use the Child Guarantee to alleviate the situation of these children and to integrate them into the EU. However, few of the NAPs available on the European Commission’s website by mid-October 2022 featured measures targeting this group of children specifically. The information provided here is intended to help with the planning of further measures and with the assessment of those already in place.

Secondly, this study analyses trends and disparities in areas that are part of the CG. The CG deals with many groups of children and their access to different services. These groups of children experience different access barriers to these services. This allows for different combinations that make the monitoring and evaluation of progress complex. It can be thus difficult to see the wood from the trees and get an overview of whether Member States are making progress. This could make it difficult to monitor progress at the national level by March 2024. Several Member States have requested assistance from the Technical Support Instrument to develop a full-fledged monitoring and evaluation framework. Progress at EU level will be measured by a monitoring framework developed by the Social Protection Committee Indicators Subgroup. To provide a snapshot of the direction in which countries have moved so far, an analysis of trends and disparities is provided here. The Child Guarantee provides tools to promote effective and/or free access to several key areas for children in need. Hence, the desired outcome would show Member States reducing the percentage of children in difficulty, with Member States also performing similarly to each other. The challenge of combining these two aspects is defined as upward convergence and it was introduced by the European Pillar of Social Rights².

¹ European Commission, 2020, Political guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024 ; Opening statement in the European Parliament plenary session 16 July 2019 ; Speech in the European Parliament plenary session 27 November 2019, Publications Office. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/62e534f4-62c1-11ea-b735-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

² EPRS (European Parliamentary Research Service), 2021, European Pillar of Social Rights. Gothenburg, Porto and beyond, available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690591/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)690591_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690591/EPRS_BRI(2021)690591_EN.pdf).

Eurofound defines upward convergence as “an improvement in the performance of Member States in terms of employment, working and living conditions, moving closer to a policy target, alongside a decrease in the disparities among them”.

One of the key features of convergence analysis is the ability to capture dynamics of disparities over time, especially during a crisis. For instance, upward convergence was investigated on socio-economic indicators to assess the impact of the financial crisis and its long-term effects³. What resulted from the analysis was an increased heterogeneity among Member States during the crisis, hence an increase in disparities among Member States. This can have detrimental effects on the cohesion of the EU, whose core resides in strengthening better living and working conditions among all Member States.

Thus, upward convergence not only provides an overview of the current state of play, but it is an effective tool to monitor the developments of countries toward policy targets highly relevant for the cohesion of the European Union. It is able to flag Member States that are likely to feel economic shocks more. When data allows, it can also dig deeper into differences not only among Member States, but also within them.

Eurofound’s 2021-2024 work programme states that its research can support discussions around initiatives such as the Child Guarantee. The information in this report is part of Eurofound work programmes for 2022 and 2023 and will therefore also be published as part of two research projects. In addition to the two projects featured in this report, some of the findings of Eurofound’s Living, Working and COVID-19 e-survey relevant for the Child Guarantee have already been published (Eurofound 2021). The collaboration between Eurofound and the European Parliament to carry out this study will hopefully contribute to support further activities at the EU and national level in the framework of the Child Guarantee.

³ Eurofound (2020), *Upward convergence in the EU: Definition, measurement and trends*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Box 1: A brief description of the Child Guarantee

The Recommendation of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee, as all other Council Recommendations, is an initiative that enables the EU to support Member States in areas that are their competence. The CG Recommendation supports the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights by promoting access to high quality early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day and healthcare, healthy nutrition and adequate housing.

Access to these areas is promoted for *children in need*, defined in the Recommendation as persons under the age of 18 years who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Within this broad group, Member States are requested to identify specific groups of children and the barriers to access services. In addition to the categories of children in need to be reached by the national action plans⁴, the plans setting out the implementation of the CG should include:

- a) Targets to be achieved in terms of children in need to be reached by corresponding measures;
- b) Measures planned or taken and the necessary financial resources and timelines;
- c) Other wider measures planned or taken to address child social exclusion and to break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage; and
- d) A national framework for data collection, monitoring, and evaluation

National coordinators have been tasked with the coordination and monitoring of the national action plans. The implementation is supported by several EU funds, in particular the European Social Fund Plus, the European Regional Development Fund, and where appropriate REACT-EU, and Invest-EU funding, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Technical Support Instrument.

In 2017, the European Parliament called on the Commission to explore whether a Guarantee for children was possible. As part of this preparatory action, three phases have supported the design and implementation of the European Child Guarantee. The feasibility study carried out in the first preparatory phase looked at the accessibility of services for several groups of children in need. The second phase consisted of a study on the economic implementing framework and the financial viability of the CG. The third phase includes country studies designed to provide the information and evidence base that governments need for the development of their national action plans.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on European Commission source referenced.

⁴ The National Action Plans as well as more information about the European Child Guarantee can be found at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en>.

2. ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN AND OTHER REFUGEES: A REVIEW OF THE CHILD GUARANTEE NATIONAL ACTION PLANS

KEY FINDINGS

As the war started close to the deadline for submitting the national action plans, many of these do not include measures supporting Ukrainian refugees. Some Member States asked for an extension of the deadline to provide an appropriate response to the new situation.

Because of this timing, only a few of the national action plans available by mid-October 2022 make specific reference to Ukrainian refugees. Many national action plans refer to children of a migrant background in general, with no specific reference to Ukrainian children. Similarly, the national action plans that mention refugees, asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors tend to reflect the situation before the war. In some of the plans that do mention Ukrainian children, there are no measures specifically targeting them.

Barriers to access have been identified in these plans for the groups of children mentioned above in housing, healthcare, ECEC, and education. In the area of housing, these groups in some Member States face overcrowding and potentially discriminatory aspects of rental policies. They participate in ECEC less than the rest of children. The same applies to education, where there are also issues regarding academic achievement and social, administrative, and language barriers. These groups also have more dental health problems, and their health has deteriorated because of having to flee the war. There are also delays in receiving care due to administrative issues. Healthy nutrition was not among the areas in which unmet needs or barriers to effective access were identified.

“While the countries of the European Union are gathering today around the European Guarantee for Children, a generation of children on our continent is deprived of access to their most basic and fundamental rights: protection, dignity, a roof over their heads, health care, education, food. The European Union firmly condemns the unprovoked and unjustified military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine”

Declaration of the European Ministers in charge of Children, on the situation in Ukraine (4 March 2022).

The largest conflict in the European Continent since the Second World War has led to millions of Ukrainians (almost all women and children) leaving their country and seeking refuge across Europe. The EU is committed to making the Child Guarantee instrumental in ensuring their safety and wellbeing. At a meeting at the European Parliament in May 2022, the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs stated that the EU will support Ukrainian women by helping with ECEC, as outlined in the Child Guarantee⁵. One year after the CG was adopted, the EU Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights highlighted the need to have enough funding for Ukrainian children and for the countries welcoming Ukrainian refugees⁶.

⁵ Johansson, Y., 2022, Commissioner Johansson’s speech to the Plenary on the impact of the war against Ukraine on women, European Parliament, 5 May, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/johansson/announcements/commissioner-johanssons-speech-plenary-impact-war-against-ukraine-women_en.

⁶ Schmit, N., 2022, Child Rights Strategy and the Child Guarantee: one year on, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RiMc1U09Tk>.

The European Parliament has also requested additional funding, so that the CG can meet the needs of Ukrainian and other children at risk of poverty and social exclusion⁷. Several MEPs also want to make the CG instrumental in ensuring that Ukrainian children are not victims of illegal adoption schemes by increasing legal protection instead of over-relying on NGOs or individuals⁸.

Despite the deadline of the 15 of March 2022 to submit the CG NAPs, seven months later, just over half of Member States had submitted theirs, with several making only fleeting reference to Ukraine. This could be due to the brief time to react to the situation caused by a war that started less than three weeks before the deadline for submission of the plans. Before the summer, those Member States receiving a large influx of refugees from Ukraine requested additional time to incorporate relevant measures into their national action plans⁹. Despite all the obstacles, there is a need to quickly set out and put in place adequate and timely measures to support Ukrainian children in order to alleviate the hardship they are suffering, and in order to make ensure that services in the EU are resilient and effective in resolving crises. In addition to the dire situation in which some of these children find themselves, if services cannot meet the increase in demand, this could potentially lead to a decline in public support for helping Ukrainians. In April 2022, less than one-fifth of EU citizens felt that the EU and national governments were providing too much housing and assistance to refugees from Ukraine¹⁰. The experience from previous large-scale refugee crises shows that, over time, tensions may arise in host countries due to competition for accommodation and services¹¹. At an EU presidency conference organised in July 2022, some CG national coordinators expressed concerns about support waning in their countries.

To help with the implementation of measures, this chapter provides an overview of how the needs of Ukrainian children have been reflected in the Child Guarantee national action plans¹². This analysis can also help with the reporting on progress that Member States need to do by March 2024.

The chapter follows the outline of the national action plans, looking first at the extent to which Ukrainians were identified as children in need of support from the Child Guarantee. It then looks at the measures that have been planned or already underway to implement the CG (including outreach measures and those that are part of the enabling policy framework). Lastly, we summarise the targets and goals that have been set and the indicators chosen to monitor progress and evaluate what has been achieved by 2030.

The focus of this chapter is on measures that target Ukrainian refugees specifically. Ukrainian children can also benefit from services targeting other refugees, asylum seekers and all children of migrant origin. Thus, reference is made to those measures as well. It goes without saying that all these groups of children can avail as well of universal measures for all children in need. These more general measures are however not described here because doing so could entail describing each NAP in its entirety.

⁷ European Parliament, 2022, European Parliament resolution of 5 July 2022 towards a common European action on care (2021/2253(INI)), available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0278_EN.pdf.

⁸ Euractiv, 2022, *Vulnerable Ukrainian children at risk of illegal adoption*, 26 April, available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/vulnerable-ukrainian-children-at-risk-of-illegal-adoption/>.

⁹ Eurocities, 2022, *Interview with EU Commissioner Nicolas Schmit*, web page, available at: <https://eurocities.eu/latest/interview-with-eu-commissioner-nicolas-schmit-on-migration-refugees-and-helping-cities/>.

¹⁰ Eurofound, 2022, *Eurofound survey reveals widespread support for Ukraine*, blog post 8 June, available at: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/blog/eurofound-survey-reveals-widespread-support-for-ukraine>.

¹¹ World Vision International, 2022, *Warm welcomes, Lurking tensions*.

¹² The national action plans analysed here are those that were available in the European Commission's website by 25 October 2022. The NAPs from BE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LU, MT, NL, PL, and SE are thus analysed here. The wording and concepts used are the same as in each NAP.

For example, Belgium has favoured in its NAP universal over targeted measures for specific groups of children. Therefore, even if some Member States are not mentioned in this chapter, this does not necessarily mean that Ukrainian children will not benefit from any CG support at all. It rather means that they are not the subject of measures targeting them specifically in those countries.

The chapter concludes with some reflections on the information gathered as well as pointers on how the rollout and reporting of the NAPs could better meet the needs of Ukrainian children.

Box 2: Definitions and key concepts relevant for this chapter

The CG Recommendation applies to **children in need**. These are defined in the Recommendation as “persons under the age of 18 years who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion”. **Children with a migrant background** are defined in the CG as “third country national children, irrespective of their migration status, and children with the nationality of a Member State who have a third country migrant background through at least one of their foreign-born parents”¹³. These children are also referred to in some NAPs as immigrant families, non-EU foreigners and children with a foreign background. These concepts are thus used in this chapter as well.

In the first preparatory phase of the CG, refugee children were included explicitly in the migrant category. **Refugees** are defined in the EU Migration and Home Affairs glossary as “either a third-country national who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country, or a stateless person who, being outside of the country of former habitual residence for the same reasons as mentioned above, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it, and to whom Art. 12 (Exclusion) of Directive 2011/95/EU (Recast Qualification Directive) does not apply.” **Asylum seeker** is defined in the same glossary as a “third-country national or stateless person who has made an application for protection under the Geneva Refugee Convention and Protocol in respect of which a final decision has not yet been taken.”

The **Temporary Protection Directive** gives a resident permit and access to different services, including healthcare, education, and housing inter alia. The Directive and the Council implementing Decision in the context of granting temporary protection to people fleeing the war in Ukraine apply to all those residing in Ukraine before the start of the war. The Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainians will continue to be in place at least until March 2024.

Unaccompanied minors are defined in the Temporary Protection Directive as “third-country nationals or stateless persons below the age of eighteen, who arrive on the territory of the Member States unaccompanied by an adult responsible for them whether by law or custom, and for as long as they are not effectively taken into the care of such a person, or minors who are left unaccompanied after they have entered the territory of the Member States”¹⁴.

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on the references quoted in the box and the EU Migration and Home Affairs glossary

¹³ Council of the European Union, 2021, Recommendation 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee, Official Journal of the European Union L 223/14, 22 June.

¹⁴ Council of the European Union (2001), Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof, Official Journal of the European Union, L 212/12, 7th of August.

2.1. Identifying children in need and accessibility barriers

As part of their national action plans, Member States are asked to provide information about the categories of children that will be targeted by measures. Many Member States identified in their NAPs **children with a migrant background** as a group of children in need of support.

The identification of this group and their needs may not always reflect the specific situation of Ukrainian children. This identification is done in many NAPs based on analyses of the situation before the start of the war in late February 2022. Nevertheless, Ukrainian children are part of the children with a migrant background category as defined in the CG. Furthermore, some of the barriers faced by all children with a migrant background when accessing services are akin to those Ukrainian children face now.

Children that are **refugees, asylum seekers or unaccompanied minors** are also mentioned in several NAPs. In Sweden, these children are part of the CG category “Children in a precarious family situation”. The Swedish plan states that these children “need to be taken into account in any analysis of children in need and in the measures taken”. When designing the Dutch NAP, refugee families were also identified as a group of children at risk that would benefit from support measures. Unaccompanied minors participated in the focus groups that were organised as part of the preparation of the Greek NAP.

Ukrainian children are identified explicitly as a group of children in need of support together with measures specifically targeting this group in the NAPs of DK, EL, ES, HR, IT, LU, and PL. These specific measures are described in section 2.2 later on in this chapter. Some Member States also refer to the crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, without including any measures in their NAPs targeting this group of children specifically. For example, the Finnish NAP mentions the new context caused by the Ukrainian crisis as a further reason to have services that are resilient and can respond to crises. The Estonian NAP states that “Depending on the number of refugees in Estonia and how many of them will remain in the community, Estonia will need to take greater account of the migration background of children when designing measures”. The forewords to the Irish NAP by the Minister and the Secretary General of the Department responsible for the CG also acknowledge the challenge posed by the war in Ukraine and commit to supporting these children.

Box 3: Data on the number of Ukrainian children included in the NAPs.

The CG Recommendation requests that the national plans set out “quantitative and qualitative targets to be achieved in terms of children in need to be reached by corresponding measures”. When it comes to providing data about the number of children targeted by measures, several countries provide numbers of third country nationals and unaccompanied minors. Below is the data available in the NAPs about Ukrainian children:

Croatia mentions in its NAP that by 18 May 2022, there were 18004 displaced persons from Ukraine, 6267 of whom were children.

As of 19 April 2022, 1900 children covered by alternative care in Ukraine had arrived in **Poland** since the beginning of Russia’s aggression of Ukraine. Data from the Ministry of Family and Social Policy shows that from the beginning of the war to 20 April 2022, 970 000 Ukrainian children had received some type of support. Currently¹⁵ there are approximately 200 Ukrainian children in alternative care. Pursuant to the Act on Granting Protection to Foreigners in the Territory of the Republic of Poland – as of 23 May 2022 – the Head of the Office has extended various forms of assistance to include 352 third-country nationals fleeing Ukraine, including children.

In **Spain**, the number of requests (44279) for temporary protection is included as well. No specific timeline is mentioned (the Spanish NAP was published in early July 2022).

Between March and June 2022, the National Emergency Response Mechanism in **Greece** received referrals for 430 unaccompanied children from Ukraine.

Source: Excerpts from the CG National Action Plans

2.1.1. Barriers to access services

In addition to identifying categories of children, the Recommendation asks for information about the barriers they face when accessing and taking up the services that are part of the CG. The groups mentioned above were identified as children in need in some countries that noted that these children are **more likely to be at risk of poverty and social exclusion**. For example, the situation of immigrant families is considered in the Finnish NAP as “especially concerning,” emphasizing the link in these households between poverty and their low employment rate. In France, whether parents have a residence permit or not is identified as one of the determinants of being in AROPE. In Belgium, it is noted that children with at least one parent born outside the EU are at a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion. Similarly, the Swedish NAP states that half of the children with both a foreign background and a single parent lived in relative financial poverty in 2019. Luxembourg also includes children with parents that are non-nationals as a group that is more at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

As stated previously, the CG Recommendation not only asks for the plans to identify children in need, but also the barriers they face in accessing and taking up the services it covers. Consequently, the Annex of the Swedish NAP provides data about the participation of migrant children in leisure and cultural visits, their situation in school and their health status. Luxembourg’s NAP lists language barriers and lack of information about the services available. Tackling these barriers is part of its overarching objectives for 2030.

¹⁵ The Polish NAP was published on the European Commission’s website at the end of August 2022.

Housing deprivation is mentioned in Malta and Sweden, with non-EU foreigners being more likely to live in overcrowded homes than country nationals and those born in the EU. However, this group is not listed as a CG target group in the Maltese NAP. Rental policies and rental criteria that may be discriminatory (such as requiring Swedish citizenship, a permanent residence permit, or a Swedish personal identity number) are mentioned in the Swedish NAP.

In Croatia, children with a migrant background are mentioned among the categories of children who experience barriers to access decent housing. This category includes children of irregular migrants, children of applicants for international protection, unaccompanied children, and foreigners that were granted temporary accommodation. **Early childhood education and care** is mentioned in Sweden, with children with a foreign background, (especially those born abroad), being over-represented among those not using these services. The Belgian national action plan states that in Flanders migrant families make less use of formal ECEC arrangements than the rest of the population. A similar point regarding the low uptake of ECEC among non-Danish children is made in the NAP from that country. Children living in accommodation structures for asylum seekers in Greece are affected disproportionately by transportation costs and face additional administrative barriers due to the lack of documents.

Education is mentioned in Sweden in relation to the educational attainment of parents, with country nationals having higher attainment than those born outside Europe. In France, it is mentioned that the education policies in the country aim to correct some persisting gaps, with unaccompanied minors being one of the groups experiencing administrative, language and social barriers. The mother tongue and the migration background of students in Luxembourg are noted to still have a large impact on their educational achievement. The high attendance and school enrolment of children with refugee or migrant background in Greece are attributed to the effective coordination of policies by the Ministry of the Education. There is nevertheless around one-quarter of this group that even though they are enrolled do not attend the Greek education system. In Croatia, migrant children (including the same categories as mentioned in housing above) are also identified as experiencing barriers to accessing education.

Croatia also identifies these children as experiencing barriers to accessing **healthcare services**. Children of migrant origin in Spain are noted to have more dental health-related problems. In France, the health of unaccompanied minors is mentioned as a concern, given the trauma suffered due to migrating and possible pre-existing health conditions. Greece identified in its NAP children with a migrant background and refugee children as facing many barriers to access healthcare. These include barriers related to language, cultural differences, difficulties in obtaining documents, lack of interpreters and intercultural mediators in public health centres, and delays in accessing specialised services due to reception and identification procedures.

Other dimensions beyond the policy areas that are not the core of the CG (i.e. not mentioned in article 4 of the CG Recommendation) have also been considered. For example, in Denmark the origin of children is also mentioned in relation to the share of NEETs (not in education, employment, or training) and whether children are subject to violence (children in households where there is domestic violence are listed in the definition of children in precarious family situations in the CG Recommendation). Migrant children (including the same categories as mentioned in housing above) are also identified in Croatia as experiencing barriers in accessing social services.

2.2. Measures planned or taken in implementing the CG Recommendation

As in the previous sections in this chapter, not all the measures listed here have as their sole target Ukrainian children, but also other children of migrant background, asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors. As previously mentioned, many universal measures set out in the NAPs can be availed of by all children, including Ukrainians. Those measures are not reflected here because the aim is to identify measures targeting specifically Ukrainian children and related groups of children in need (i.e. the groups mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph).

The initiatives in each of the CG policy intervention areas listed in article 4 of the Recommendation¹⁶ are described. Many countries listed some of these measures as part of the “enabling policy framework” section in their NAP. The “enabling policy framework” in article 6 of the CG Recommendation encompasses wider measures that tackle child poverty and that are relevant for the CG, but that go beyond the policy intervention areas listed in article 4. For consistency and ease of reading, those measures are also described here together with all the measures listed in article 4 of the CG.

2.2.1. Access to ECEC, education and school-based activities

Funding measures

Dealing with language barriers is the focus of many NAPs. The Polish Office for Foreigners oversees the organisation of social activities for those applying for international protection (including Ukrainian refugees). This office also provides **financial support to attend language lessons** and the necessary educational and support materials. Whenever possible, the costs of school-based activities like sports are also covered. To meet the demand, Ukrainian students may be taught in locations outside of (but subordinated to) usual places of education like schools. Local authorities may arrange **free transport** to such locations and can also provide education grants and allowances. Benefits in cash are also available in Poland to subsidise care in a nursery, children’s club, or at a day carer’s.

The Italian Minister of Education has allocated 1 million euros of additional funding for school reception and psychological support in schools. In the Netherlands, schools can receive additional funding if they have students who are asylum seekers. Schools have used this funding to have smaller class sizes and to organize activities such as summer schools or Dutch language lessons. In Croatia, financial support is available to fund extracurricular, leisure and socialisation activities for Ukrainian children.

Service-related measures

Additional research will also be conducted in the Netherlands in order to better meet the needs of these children. **Language lessons** are offered in Luxembourg for young children. A program for multilingual education has been provided since 2017 in all crèches that receive a service voucher (CSA). This and other types of language support prepare children for education in several languages, so that they can better integrate in Luxembourg. Children aged from 1 to 4 can receive free support for up to 20 hours a week, for a total of 46 weeks a year. The 2022/2023 school year will also see a pilot project of literacy in French in four schools. This project is for groups of students selected considering their circumstances at home and in each school. There is also a special programme for unaccompanied children in Greece that includes language lessons. Ensuring that schools in which Ukrainian children are enrolled have the capacity to teach Croatian is also mentioned in Croatia’s NAP.

¹⁶ These are early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day, healthcare, healthy nutrition and adequate housing.

Out-of-school (extracurricular) activities for Ukrainians in the summer of 2022 are also mentioned in the Luxembourgish NAP so that they can continue practising English and French in various activities.

In France, for those children whose first language is not French, there are specialised centres looking after their schooling, the pedagogical resources available and the training of teachers. These centres (CASNAV) allow children who have recently arrived in the country and who do not have French as their mother tongue to attend public education. Children who do not have the necessary level of language skills are integrated in a pedagogical unit (UPE2A) where they are taught the language.

Unaccompanied minors are often referred to these pedagogical units. For parents, the project “Opening the school to parents for the success of children” (OEPRE) seeks to teach French, the values of French society and how French schools' work. Training courses last between 60 and 120 hours each school year and are free of charge¹⁷.

Luxembourg is also providing services promoting the integration in schools and society. The School Mediation Service created in 2018 has among its tasks the integration of children from outside Luxembourg in public and private schools. A “welcome home” (maison d'accueil) is a new measure announced in the Luxembourgish NAP for students newly arrived in the country. This is a new project developed by the schooling services for migrant children, an exchange platform between students and staff that promotes integration. Another project called “Languages and Cultures” involves the drafting of several country information sheets about their language, culture and school system. This information will be available online, so that staff can be aware of any differences that may play a role in their integration into schools.

By the first month of the war, there were about 7100 Ukrainian students in Spain, with 23% of them attending ECEC, half attending primary schools and 27% secondary education. The Spanish contingency plan for integrated education for displaced Ukrainian students envisages the creation of **educational materials in Ukrainian**, temporarily hosting Ukrainian teachers, speeding up the recognition of Ukrainian degrees and the accreditation of professional competences of teachers.

More staff has been deployed to carry out the homologation of degrees and there is closer collaboration with the Ukrainian embassy to facilitate this¹⁸. In Denmark, teaching materials from the Ukrainian Ministry of Education can be used.

Changes and/ or exemptions from previous rules have been put in place to meet the increase in demand in Poland and Denmark. Exemptions from previous rules set out in the Danish Daycare and Primary School Act are now possible, so that local authorities can meet the surge in demand to access education. The aim of all these measures is also to introduce some flexibility that allows children to maintain a link with their language and culture whilst integrating into Danish society and the education system. The requirement to teach in Danish is waived, so that Ukrainian children in day care centres and primary schools can attend classes (in person or online) in English or Ukrainian. Language tests are waived for Ukrainian children living in deprived areas in Denmark.

¹⁷ Ministère de l'intérieur, 2021, *Ouvrir l'école aux parents pour la réussite des enfants* » (OEPRE) est un dispositif complémentaire au CIR, au croisement des formations civique et linguistique, 25 May, webpage, available at: <https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Integration-et-Access-a-la-nationalite/Le-parcours-personnalise-d-integration-republicaine/Au-dela-du-contrat-d-integration-republicaine-CIR/Ouvrir-l-ecole-aux-parents-pour-la-reussite-des-enfants-OEPRE-est-un-dispositif-complementaire-au-CIR-au-croisement-des-formations-civique-et-linguistique>.

¹⁸ Ministerio de Educación, 2022a, *El ministerio y las CCAA validan el Plan de Contingencia para la escolarización de los estudiantes ucranianos desplazados*, 30th March, webpage, available at: <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/prensa/actualidad/2022/03/20220330-sectorial.html>

Local authorities will be able to assess what measures to put in place. These exemptions are part of a wider agreement between the main Danish political parties. The agreement also includes subsidies for Ukrainian parents. Resources from other levels of education (e.g. vocational schools) can also be used to teach Ukrainians in secondary education. Procedures to provide access to Ukrainians to vocational training and upper secondary education have also been put in place. Changes in service regulations make it possible to increase the total number of children that avail of an ECEC service in Poland. For example, the maximum cap of 30 children in a children's club can now be exceeded to meet demand. Local authorities may also establish more ECEC centres to meet the needs of Ukrainian children.

New nurseries and children's clubs will still need to be registered, but some health-related requirements can be waived.

The Luxembourgish NAP mentions the fact that the existing offer of international schools allows Ukrainian children to attend classes in English if they have sufficient language skills. The opening of a new international school is also mentioned in the NAP as further support for Ukrainian children. The Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada) organises the entry tests for admission to higher education, with tests taking place in an international school in Luxembourg. Luxembourg is also offering a centralised service for Ukrainian families. The department for schooling services for migrant children in the Ministry of education (SECAM) has set up a one-stop shop for Ukrainian families. After an interview and an **assessment of needs**, different options for the education of children are offered to their parents. Once the administrative criteria set by immigration and the health department are met, Ukrainian children can attend school. The skills and knowledge of unaccompanied minors over 15 in Greece are assessed in order to support their transition to adulthood. Supporting this transition is also the subject of a project in which good practices are exchanged.

Workforce related measures

Exemptions for staff have also been put in place. In Poland, additional overtime hours for school teachers can be granted beyond what was previously stipulated in schools where additional places have been created for Ukrainian students. **Jobs as teacher assistants** are now open to non-Polish citizens if they have sufficient language skills to support students who are not fluent in Polish. A similar programme for teacher assistants has been put in place in Spain.

Spain's NAP mentions its collaboration programme with Ukrainian-speaking school support staff. This programme makes it possible to employ staff who will be deployed to different Spanish regions, where they work under the supervision of a teacher for 12 hours a week. The first call concluded in mid-May 2022. It granted 700 euros a month to each staff member to help with costs such as accommodation for a period of half a year, with a maximum of 200 staff being covered in the first call¹⁹. **Training** will be provided in Croatia so that teachers and professional associates can strengthen their capacity regarding inclusion and the adaptation of methodologies to support Ukrainian children. This training also aims to acquire skills to deal with stress, trauma, and sadness.

2.2.2. Access to healthcare

Spain will provide **free access** to healthcare to Ukrainian children that request temporary protection in the same conditions as other children. In France, particular attention will be paid to the health of unaccompanied minors, guaranteeing a full medical examination upon arrival in the country, as well as access to healthcare. The costs are also covered by the public sector. In Poland, there are now

¹⁹ Ministerio de Educación, 2022b, Auxiliares de conversación extranjeros en España, webpage, available at: <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/servicios-al-ciudadano/catalogo/general/99/998188/ficha/998188-2022-ucrania.html>.

translations into Ukrainian of the eligibility rules to obtain health insurance. Additional funding allows healthcare and pharmaceutical costs to be covered. **Benefit eligibility** has also been extended so that social assistance and medical care can be provided to those that have temporary protection according to their level of income.

In Italy, €348 million have been earmarked for 2022 to support the use of healthcare by Ukrainians. This includes giving regions funding so that up to a maximum of 100,000 temporary protection applicants and holders can access the National Health Service. As part of a decree with urgent measures approved on the 21 March 2022, there is also a **temporary exemption** until early March 2023 regarding the rules for recognising the qualifications of Ukrainian healthcare workers in Italy. In addition to the measures specifically targeting Ukrainians, there is also an action in its NAP regarding the compulsory registration of all foreign minors with the National Health Service to ensure their access to services. In Luxembourg, a social paediatrics service provides medical and psychological services to those at risk of social exclusion, (among which asylum seekers are mentioned in the NAP). A project (« Parlons santé ») provided support for those that have applied or that are already under international protection, including minors. These are exchanges that are organised for free that inform and provide skills that promote health and well-being.

Greece is planning the creation of **new healthcare services**. New mobile units will provide primary healthcare for unaccompanied minors. Day centres will also be created to support refugee children that have mental health problems. **Training** for health professionals in Croatia will be provided to educate on the effects of trauma and stress in the early development of Ukrainian children.

2.2.3. Access to healthy nutrition and to at least one healthy meal each school day

The Finnish EU Regional and Structural Policy Programme for 2021–2027 includes a priority axis against material deprivation. ESF+ is used to purchase food and basic commodities. Within this priority, the programme “Provisions for life” will target specific disadvantaged households, among which immigrants are mentioned. This programme has a budget of €30m from the Finnish Food Authority. Croatia plans to conduct a campaign and develop educational materials on the importance of breastfeeding, which will include materials in Ukrainian. Children from Ukraine are also mentioned when it comes to the provision of meals in primary schools. Refugee children and unaccompanied minors that are in reception and identification centres in Greece will receive meals free of charge from October 2022.

The Polish Office for Foreigners provides allowances to buy food to those applying for international protection, either as a one-off payment or as part of the “Meal at School and at Home” programme. Food packages and meals are also provided under the Food Aid Operational Programme²⁰. Those that provide accommodation and food to Ukrainians free of charge can receive a cash benefit²¹. A **public campaign and educational materials** on the benefits of breastfeeding will be translated into Ukrainian in Croatia.

²⁰ Eurofound, 2022a, Food assistance for Ukrainian refugees, Factsheet for measure PL-2022-9/2300, available at: https://static.eurofound.europa.eu/covid19db/cases/PL-2022-9_2300.html?utm_medium=datawrapper&utm_campaign=covid-19&utm_source=latestUkraineCases.

²¹ Eurofound, 2022b, Benefits for people who help to house and feed refugees, Factsheet for measure PL-2022-9/2243, available at: https://static.eurofound.europa.eu/covid19db/cases/PL-2022-9_2243.html?utm_medium=datawrapper&utm_campaign=covid-19&utm_source=latestUkraineCases.

2.2.4. Access to adequate housing

The CG recommends several measures related to foster care to provide adequate housing. In Denmark, since the end of April 2022, new rules expanded who can become a foster family for Ukrainian children, so that local authorities can approve placements in foster families that share cultural and/or linguistic ties with these children. In Poland, a court can allow a Ukrainian citizen to be a foster family or run a family orphanage for Ukrainian children, even in cases when the training requirements are not yet met. New standards for the operation of accommodation facilities for unaccompanied minors are planned in Greece. This will entail the development of quality standards and a mechanism to supervise and evaluate facilities.

Exemptions are also possible in Poland when employing Ukrainian citizens in day support facilities or institutional care. If Ukrainian children are placed in alternative care, it is also possible not to apply standards previously set regarding housing conditions and the number of children.

In Luxembourg, a **new service**, a hosting facility, has been opened providing accommodation, food and necessity goods for those applying for temporary protection in Luxembourg or another EU Member State. In Greece, there is now a National Emergency Mechanism to meet the housing needs of unaccompanied minors, who are also provided with psychosocial services. Unaccompanied minors are also referred to temporary accommodation before they are placed in shelter houses or semi-autonomous flats.

New types of jobs have been created in Poland. Public authorities in Poland have appointed two types of staff responsible for finding accommodation for Ukrainian children. Unaccompanied minors from Ukraine are referred to a city in southwestern Poland (Stalowa Wola). “Children’s Evacuation” staff look after the placement of children that were in orphanages in Ukraine when they arrive in Stalowa Wola. “Place for Children” staff find accommodation for groups of children (keeping groups together as a measure to mitigate distress). All of this is done in cooperation with the Ukrainian authorities, who also receive a record of which children are in Polish orphanages. Poland also provides **cash benefits** to cover housing fees. These are made available to refugees as well as to those that provide accommodation and board to refugees on the basis of an agreement with the municipal office.

2.3. Targets and indicators

As in previous sections, in several NAPs the targets and indicators refer to all children with a migrant background. Others refer to asylum seekers, refugees, or unaccompanied children. In France for example, the Enabee survey took place in spring of 2022 and gathered information about the wellbeing of children aged 3 to 11. This survey will shed light on the health status of unaccompanied minors. In Greece, one of the targets in education to be achieved by 2030 is that all refugee and migrant children enrol in formal education. The country’s NAP states that non-formal education actions will support the achievement of this target. One of the indicators included in the monitoring framework is the number of refugee and migrant children who have benefited from a balanced diet plan. In the area of healthcare, the framework includes:

- a) the number of day centres for the support of minor refugees with mental health problems in operation; and
- b) the number of employees in unaccompanied minors’ structures receiving training on promoting the mental health of unaccompanied minors.

Ukrainian children are seldom featured explicitly in the quantitative targets or the monitoring and evaluation framework sections in the CG national action plans. As shown in Box 3, there are limitations in the data available for this group.

The approach taken in Poland to mitigate the lack of data is to track the number of Ukrainian children supported since the beginning of the war, without breaking it down by policy intervention areas (see Box 3).

The CG brings an opportunity to mitigate the data shortages by putting in place data development initiatives. The monitoring and evaluation framework can thus be not only a compilation of indicators, but also a development plan. In Italy for example, there is a survey of unaccompanied children from Ukraine as part of the Minors Information System (SIM), which is the census that monitors unaccompanied children. The SIM shows that by June 2022, there were 5392 unaccompanied children from Ukraine in Italy, which constituted over one third of the total number of unaccompanied minors in the country²². One of the actions in the country's NAP is to strengthen the census of unaccompanied minors from Ukraine, "in order to ensure constant monitoring of attendance and ensure protection and access to all services". In Finland, indicators that are relevant for the CG will be selected from the national data on the welfare of children and young people with an immigrant background that are available in the School Health Promotion study carried out by THL. Most groups of children identified as target groups have a section in the Finnish NAP listing initiatives to develop monitoring. Children and young people with an immigrant background is the only group that does not feature these types of initiatives in the NAP.

Targets to be achieved by 2030 can be not only quantitative, but qualitative as well. In Luxembourg, the projects listed in the section on education for children newly arrived at the country are listed in the targets to be achieved.

2.4. Discussion

The previous sections in this chapter describe the contents of the National Action Plans. This section summarises the main points and discusses their implications going forward in the rollout of the Child Guarantee.

2.4.1. Identification of children and the barriers they face when accessing services

Ukrainian children "in need": different groups, different needs

In addition to timing issues, it could be the case that some NAPs don't refer specifically to Ukrainian children because they follow the categories listed in the CG Recommendation, thus subsuming them in the category "children with a migrant background or minority ethnic origin". Many national action plans identify as children in need of support in their country the six groups listed in the CG Recommendation. The CG Recommendation asks Member States "to identify children in need and within this group take into account, **wherever appropriate** in designing their national integrated measures, specific disadvantages experienced, in particular, by: (a) homeless children or children experiencing severe housing deprivation; (b) children with disabilities; (c) children with mental health issues; (d) children with a migrant background or minority ethnic origin, particularly Roma; (e) children in alternative, especially institutional, care; (f) children in precarious family situations" (Council of the European Union 2021).

²² Ministero del Lavoro, 2022, Report mensile minori stranieri non accompagnati (msna) in italia dati al 30 giugno 2022, available at: <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/focus-on/minori-stranieri/Documents/Rapporto-approfondimento-semestrale-MSNA-30-giugno-2022.pdf>

It is worth noting the “wherever appropriate” caveat in the Recommendation. In the CG Recommendation, each Member State is asked to identify “children in need and barriers they face in accessing and taking up the services covered by this Recommendation”. This adaptation of the categories to the situation in each Member State reflects the lessons learnt in the preparatory phases of the CG. For example, the Croatian country report for the first preparatory phase noted that the definition of children with a migrant background is not well adapted to the situation in the country. This is because third country nationals from other Balkan countries constitute a large share of the Croatian population²³. Several country reports conducted in the third preparatory phase also show the need for flexibility. Having a set of fixed categories across all Member States and CG areas of interventions does not make it possible to identify all relevant implementation gaps.

For example, a group of children that might be in dire need of support to access ECEC, may not require additional support when it comes to accessing healthcare.

This variability makes it possible to reflect better the needs of children from Ukraine. Even though they are part of the category “children of migrant background”, their specific circumstances as refugees and the large and rapid influx into the EU arguably makes it worthwhile to distinguish them for monitoring and evaluation purposes, in order to assess the adequacy and impact of measures. As seen in section 2.1., only a few Member States make specific reference to Ukrainian children in their NAPs. Many mention children of migrant background and asylum seekers.

Furthermore, adapting the categories and definitions of groups of children in need also makes it possible to acknowledge children facing multiple disadvantages. Several organisations have also pointed out that those children who experienced disadvantages in Ukraine before the war, now face cumulative barriers in other countries²⁴. There is a case therefore for identifying different groups of Ukrainian children in the NAPs. Some NAPs follow this approach (e.g. Poland when it comes to Ukrainian children in care or with a disability).

Box 4: Ukrainian children with disabilities included in the NAPs

A 24-hour helpline established together with the Polish Association for People with Intellectual Disability assists staff on the border and on refugee reception points so that information on existing disabilities and associated needs can be gathered. Foreigners with a certified disability that are legally resident in the country (which is the case of Ukrainian refugees) are also entitled to receive funding, material support and assistance. Information on needs and supports is available on a new website. There are now translations into Ukrainian of the eligibility rules to obtain disability benefits.

Source: Polish national action plan

There are of course several groups of Ukrainian children that could be considered. Two groups that are presumably prevalent in most Member States are Ukrainian children in single parent households and children with mental health problems. Almost all Ukrainians displaced are women and children, with many of these children now living only with their mothers. **Single parent households** are only mentioned in Sweden in the case of children with migrant background. Yet the information from the NAPs and the different preparatory phases of the CG shows that children in lone parent households

²³ Zrinščak, S., 2019. *Feasibility study for a Child Guarantee* - Country report Croatia.

²⁴ ISSA, 2022, Statement on Early Childhood Development and the Ukraine Crisis, available at: <https://www.issa.nl/sites/default/files/u327/Joint-Statement-on-Early-Childhood-Development-and-the-Ukraine-Crisis-ENG.pdf>.

face several barriers to services. Single mothers and those with low income and/or level of education breastfeed their children less frequently and for shorter periods of time. Nearly one quarter of single parents (mostly single mothers) experienced housing cost overburden in Lithuania in 2019, compared with 14.4 per cent among the general population²⁵. In Spain, single parent households are more likely than other households to be financially overburdened²⁶. Participation in the labour market is constrained by the lack of affordable ECEC services, which worsens the socioeconomic situation of their whole household.

The distress caused by the war and moving to another country has led many Ukrainian children to suffer from **poor mental health**. Ukrainian children with special needs like ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) may also have a need for medication, psychosocial support and other specialised services and may have found leaving their country particularly challenging²⁷. The needs of this specific group of Ukrainian children may need further particular attention in the rollout and evaluation of the NAPs.

Children with mental health issues are one of the categories listed in the CG Recommendation. They are not defined in the Recommendation nor in its Staff Working Document. In the country studies that were part of the third preparatory phase of the CG, references to mental health range from learning and neuropsychiatric disorders to depression, anxiety and subjective wellbeing. Across all these groups, stigma associated with treatments was reported as a major access barrier. In Bulgaria for example, more than 60% of teenagers participating in a survey stated that the main reason they did not seek professional help to deal with mental health problems were anxiety and shame, whereas only 17% reported that they did not do so because they did not know where to find professional help²⁸.

Rather than compartmentalised categories of children, what would be important when reporting on progress is to mainstream Ukrainian children in other categories of children in need of support. This could be done either by reflecting on the situation of specific groups of Ukrainian children or by having a subsection on Ukrainian children within the other groups of children in need identified in each country.

Unmet needs and access barriers: a healthy nutrition and a meal each school day

In 2021, 6.6% of the households with dependent children in EU 27 were unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day. In the case of households with dependent children and with lower incomes, this went up to 16.1%. The war in Ukraine has led to several measures to tackle food poverty. Some countries have limited the prices of certain basic food items²⁹. The NAPs identify a series of access barriers that need to be tackled so that Ukrainian children, unaccompanied minors, refugees, asylum seekers and other children with a migrant background can avail of the services that are part of the CG. Even though a few Member States provide for measures

²⁵ UNICEF, 2021a, *A deep dive into the European Child Guarantee in Lithuania Literature review*, UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, Geneva, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/18881/file/Lithuanian%20Deep%20Dive%20Literature%20Review.pdf>.

²⁶ UNICEF, 2021b, *Basis for a European Child Guarantee Action Plan in Spain*, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/18841/file/Spanish%20Deep%20Dive%20Policy%20Brief%20EN.pdf>.

²⁷ ISSA, 2022, Joint Statement on Early Childhood Development and the Ukraine Crisis, available at: <https://www.issa.nl/sites/default/files/u327/Joint-Statement-on-Early-Childhood-Development-and-the-Ukraine-Crisis-ENG.pdf>.

²⁸ UNICEF, 2022, *Un/Equal Childhood: Deep Dive in Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Bulgaria*, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/22121/file/Deep%20Dive%20Bulgaria%20-%20Main%20Report%20EN.pdf>.

²⁹ Eurofound, 2022c, Limitation of the prices of basic food items, fact sheet Factsheet for measure HR-2022-37/2827, available at: https://static.eurofound.europa.eu/covid19db/cases/HR-2022-37_2827.html?utm_medium=datawrapper&utm_campaign=covid-19&utm_source=latestUkraineCases.

regarding nutrition and school meals, none identify barriers to gaining effective access to **healthy nutrition** for the groups of children mentioned in the previous paragraph. The country reports that were drafted as part of the first preparatory phase of the CG identified inadequate nutrition in migrant camps and reception centres, lack of dietary choice and restrictions on access to school meals as barriers faced by the children of asylum seekers. Their low income also impacts their ability to afford food³⁰.

The Child Guarantee Recommendation supports free and effective access to at least one healthy meal each school day and effective access to healthy nutrition. Among the funds available, it lists the EU school fruit, vegetables, and milk scheme. This scheme has been subject to several changes in order to facilitate a redistribution of aid to meet the needs of Ukrainian children in EU schools. Member States have also been invited to review their requests for this scheme³¹.

2.4.2. Integration and coordination of measures

Cooperation between different administrations is requested in the CG Recommendation, which asks Member States to “develop a framework for cooperation of educational establishments, local communities, social, health and child protection services, families and social economy actors [...]”.

To put in place and/or coordinate measures in a short period of time, some Member States have established working groups or new roles. Croatia and Italy have established interdepartmental working groups to manage the reception, needs assessment and care of Ukrainians. There is also cooperation between the network of associations of Ukrainians in Italy, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the International Organization for Migration to better understand the needs on the ground. This Ministry has also met with the National Council of the Third Sector to better coordinate the support provided by its members.

In Luxembourg, collaboration has been strengthened between the national office in charge of children (Office national de l'enfance - ONE) and the office hosting international protection applicants (Office national de l'accueil - ONA) in order to provide accommodation to unaccompanied minors and others fleeing the war in Ukraine.

Administrative aspects are dealt with by the ONA and hosting and follow up is done by ONE, informing ONA on a weekly basis about the accommodation available. The ONE remains open during weekends in case the ONA notifies any needs.

Effective coordination is essential for the CG, given that it encompasses several policy areas in which there has not always been a history of cooperation. Depending on the welfare arrangements in each Member State, competences for the CG services may be at different levels of public administration and their delivery can be mainly public or private. The experience of the Youth Guarantee (which is composed of fewer policy areas) shows how crucial it is to put in place effective cooperation mechanisms.

These mechanisms are all the more necessary to meet the needs of Ukrainian children, who require many types of support and a coordinated response. This is reflected in the Greek NAP, which stressed the need for a comprehensive approach to mitigate the energy crisis and the implications of the

³⁰ Bircan, T., Van Lancker, A., Nicaise, I., 2019, *Target Group Discussion Paper on Children with a Migrant Background (including Refugee Children)*, Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG), Brussels: European Commission.

³¹ European Commission, 2022, €2.9 million to support needs of displaced Ukrainian children in EU schools, news article, 11 July, available at: https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/news/eu29-million-support-needs-displaced-ukrainian-children-eu-schools-2022-07-11_en.

migration flow caused by the war. In Spain, coordination at the ministerial level has been crucial in order to give access to healthcare quickly and to hire teacher assistants.

In this respect, it is useful to look at the evidence stemming from the preparatory phases of the CG about coordination. For example, defining clear responsibilities across different departments was identified as a necessary precondition for effective coordination in Croatia, where it was also recommended to establish an operational body to ensure communication between all parties involved³². The third preparatory phase country report also noted that social welfare systems and the judiciary and the police are generally well coordinated in Croatia, while the same cannot be said about the integration of education and the health system.

In the final preparatory phase evidence was provided of “what works” (and what does not) in the cooperation and coordination between the CG policies. The factors enabling or hindering the coordination of policies across Europe were analysed in a Rapid Evidence Assessment³³. In this type of analysis, studies are selected following a systematic methodology and quality filters to have a limited number of robust studies. The result is an overview of what are the most important factors in different contexts. This makes it possible to prioritise certain types of measures, as well as to anticipate some of the obstacles that may exist in the cooperation and governance of the CG.

The category most mentioned in the studies were organisational or inter-organisational issues. These includes for example, the possibility of organising joint training for all those involved in cooperation. This type of training allows everyone to have the same level of skills and to use similar concepts and terminology. Studies also emphasise the need to have common platforms (WhatsApp groups), or workspaces to coordinate and cooperate between the different public policies.

Management of economic resources and human resources was also identified as an important factor in policy coordination. More studies were identified looking at the management of these resources focusing on the economic and human resources that are available themselves. More specifically, what is important is whether there is a specific budget line for cooperation and coordination, so that cooperation is not something symbolic and inadequately resourced. Failing that, there should be a willingness to share available resources among all parties that are cooperating.

2.4.3. Targets and indicators

The gaps in data mentioned in the previous sections show the need to improve the data available for certain groups of children. Given the changes required, implementing the national action plans needs to go hand in hand with developing national data collection, monitoring, and evaluation systems. Otherwise, there is the risk of only acting on what is measured. This development of data collection systems is requested in the CG Recommendation. Several Member States are availing of the Technical Support Instrument to develop such systems as part of the CG NAP.

The CG Recommendation asks Member States to involve stakeholders in identifying children in need and the barriers they face. The linkages between national information systems and existing gaps could benefit from the involvement of different stakeholders who can point to the evidence available about access barriers, unmet needs, and children in need. In the case of the Croatian and Dutch NAP for example, the barriers faced by refugee children were one of the topics that came up during

³² UNICEF, 2021c, *A deep dive into the European Child Guarantee in Croatia. Literature Review*, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/croatia/media/9951/file/Literature%20Review%20-%20EU%20Child%20Guarantee%20in%20Croatia%20-%20ENG.pdf>.

³³ Molinuevo, D.; Nur, H. and Pozneanșcaia, C., 2021, *Findings on Policy Integration and Coordination to Inform the European Child Guarantee*, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/reports/findings-policy-integration-and-coordination-inform-european-child-guarantee>.

consultations with children. The stakeholder workshops that were organised as part of the country studies in the third preparatory phase of the CG were also useful in that respect. They could perhaps be considered as a way to support the review of implementation planned for March 2024.

These country reports from the final preparatory phase also show ways to mitigate gaps in data. As part of the Bulgarian country report, an online survey was conducted. Its questionnaire was filled in by experts from the regional and local structures of the Agency for Social Assistance, the ministries of education and health and representatives of municipal administrations. This made it possible to identify groups of children in need and the main access barriers they face. In the Spanish country study, it was recommended to consolidate, maintain, and extend existing nutrition and anthropometric studies to allow the disaggregation of data by gender, age group, socioeconomic status, migrant background, or disability status³⁴.

The EU-SILC survey provides information about children with a migrant background, which is determined based on the place of birth of at least one of the parents being outside the EU. Eurostat also gathers administrative data about asylum, residence permits and enforcement of immigration legislation in the case of non-EU nationals aged under 18, including statistics on unaccompanied minors.

In addition to that, several EU institutions are gathering quantitative data specifically about the situation of Ukrainians. The 2022 FRA (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights) Survey on persons displaced from Ukraine includes a questionnaire for children living in the EU. The questionnaire includes questions about access to employment, education, housing, healthcare, language learning as well as other matters affecting social and economic integration. The Surveys of Arriving Migrants from Ukraine (SAM - UKR) carried out in 2022 by the EUAA (European Union Agency for Asylum) in partnership with OECD gather information from adults, including information about their children.

These data can be a useful addition to the monitoring and evaluation frameworks in the NAPs as well. Furthermore, the information gathered in the Living, working and COVID-19 survey carried out by Eurofound about the attitude of the general population can also be useful to assess whether there are changes in the level of support.

While they are based on strong probability sampling strategies, EU-SILC and similar surveys cannot provide data to respond to crises in the same timely manner as e-surveys. Furthermore, general household surveys are limited in the amount of information they can gather about specific groups of the population. As described above, different e-surveys are currently being carried out by EU agencies to gather information from Ukrainians living in the EU. Even if the data collected does not provide a representative sample, the information gathered provides insights about the needs of certain groups of children.

³⁴ UNICEF, 2021d, *Initiatives to reduce poverty and social exclusion among children and recommendations for the implementation of the European Child Guarantee in Spain*, available at: https://www.unicef.org/eca/sites/unicef.org/eca/files/2021-11/Spanish%20Deep%20Dive%20Main%20report%20EN_0.pdf

3. UPWARD CONVERGENCE: TAKING STOCK OF CHILD POVERTY AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

KEY FINDINGS

The chapter examines trends and dynamics among the Member States.

The key findings stemming from the analysis can be summarised as follows:

- For the overall period, Member States improved their performance and reduced disparities, showing a successful convergence pattern over the years. The only two indicators for which disparities were not reduced, but instead increased, were the share of children at risk of poverty and children below the age of three AROP in ECEC.
- Out of nine indicators, six deteriorated following the economic crash of 2008 (poverty indicators; inadequate housing, apart from overcrowded households; energy and food poverty), to then improve in its aftermath. Although they improved in the overall period, the analysis showed that material well-being is particularly vulnerable to economic cycles.
- Even though analyses showed the overall reduction of disparities, not all Member States were successful. Solid foundations are needed to ensure that no Member State is left behind in dealing with intergenerational poverty.
- Out of nine indicators, five indicators showed the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, flagged by increasing disparities and decreased performance for children AROP and children AROP between the age of three and schooling age in ECEC; increasing disparities but increasing performance for households AROP with dependent children unable to keep home warm; and decreased performance and reduced disparities for children AROP below the age of three in ECEC and children in overcrowded households. The negative impact on ECEC was perceived by most of the Member States.

3.1. Planned analysis and data on CG

This chapter investigates trends and disparities among four strands of indicators that are highly relevant for the study, namely:

- children living at risk of poverty or social exclusion;
- share of children at risk of poverty in early childhood education or care (ECEC);
- households with dependent children living in inadequate housing conditions; and
- share of children at risk of poverty that suffer from food poverty.

These four strands feature in the European Child Guarantee. The strand concerning the risk of poverty or social exclusion includes several indicators for both material and monetary deprivation. The indicators of this strand stem from the “social protection and inclusion” Social Scoreboard, which measures the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Access to early childhood education and care is captured by an indicator reporting the share of children AROP in ECEC. Moreover, this indicator is similar to the one included in the Social Scoreboard. As a set of indicators to monitor access to adequate housing at EU level in the framework of the Child Guarantee has not yet been adopted, we selected indicators that refer to households that have arrears on bills, that are not able to keep the house adequately warm, and that experience overcrowding. Finally, food poverty and effective access to healthy nutrition were captured by an indicator reporting the inability to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day. The analysis is thus based on nine indicators. For a full description and relevant links to Eurostat, please check Annex 1.

To investigate the impact of the financial crisis, its aftermath, and the first outlook of the COVID-19 pandemic, upward convergence was investigated from 2008 onwards. The indicators were broken down to capture the condition of children or households with dependent children living on low incomes or at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

3.2. Upward convergence: a monitoring tool for improving cohesion

The concept of convergence is at the core of the European Union project. Although it has always been flagged as one of the key outcomes of the European project, its importance was reinforced in the aftermath of the financial crisis and its asymmetric impact on Member States. Promoting upward convergence means reducing disparities and increasing cohesion among Member States while all countries improve their performances. This started to become clear when convergence entered the debate in the Four Presidents’ Report in 2012 and was mentioned explicitly in the Five Presidents’ Report in 2015³⁵. The main point highlighted by the Presidents was the need for efficient welfare systems able to contain social disparities. A reinforcing factor was the definition the World Bank gave of the European Union, labelled as a “convergence machine”³⁶ due to its ability to boost newer Member States toward higher-income markets.

In this regard, Eurofound has adopted upward convergence analysis as a monitoring tool of trends and disparities. The key point of upward convergence is to investigate the dynamics of disparities of Member States while they are moving toward a policy target that can be measured with selected indicators.

³⁵ Juncker, J. C., Tusk, D., Dijsselbloem, J., Draghi, M. and Schulz, M., 2015, *Completing Europe’s Economic and Monetary Union*, European Commission, Brussels.

³⁶ Ridao-Cano, C. and Bodewig, C., 2018, *Growing united: Upgrading Europe’s convergence machine*, World Bank Group, Washington, DC.

As the name “upward convergence” suggests, we would assume that all Member States are moving toward a policy target, as for instance reduction of poverty or reduction of unemployment. During this process, countries starting from lower levels of a certain indicator -also called least performing countries- would rise to perform more closely to countries with better scores -also called best performing countries. Moreover, the improvement of countries starting from lower performance would be quicker than the one of countries with higher scores. In lay terms, we would then speak of a catching-up process.

Convergence is a simple-to-grasp theory and uses intuitive measurement tools (please check Box 5 for a more detailed explanation). It provides important insights into how the European Member States perform over time and which countries and regions have outstanding or inefficient performance. As a monitoring tool, it has been used to explore the resilience of the Union during the financial crisis. As the goal of the European Union is to increase cohesion and fair conditions across the Member States, convergence analysis shows in which moments the Union was most challenged. Research reports have addressed, for instance, which socio-economic indicators did not diverge -hence showing the resilience of the EU- and which indicators showed drastic changes, to then catch up in the aftermath of the crisis³⁷.

The flexible and dynamic nature of convergence analysis allows the tool to be used not only on economic indicators but also on social, institutional, and environmental dimensions, as shown by recent publications³⁸. For instance, the performance of Member States regarding the Pillar of Social Rights, and upward social and economic convergence can be investigated in regard to its policy targets³⁹. Convergence could contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of progress in the CG Recommendation planned in 2024 and 2026.

The next sections will present the four strands of indicators used for convergence analysis, namely poverty, early childhood education and care, inadequate housing and food poverty. Each strand will present the indicators and a brief description of their relevance. Results are then presented, and an interpretation is provided.

³⁷ Eurofound, 2021, *Monitoring convergence in the European Union: Looking backwards to move forward* – Upward convergence through crises, Challenges and prospects in the EU series, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

³⁸ Eurofound and EIGE (European Institute for Gender Equality), 2021, *Upward convergence in gender equality: How close is the Union of equality?* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

³⁹ Eurofound (2021), *Monitoring convergence in the European Union: Looking backwards to move forward* – Upward convergence through crises, Challenges and prospects in the EU series, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Box 5: Methodological overview of upward convergence

Convergence entails two main concepts: improvement and reduction of disparities. Improvement is measured through changes in the unweighted average of Member States' performance. An upward trend signifies that the performance is going in the expected policy direction, whereas downward trend shows the opposite. Convergence entails the reduction of disparities among Member States. Its opposite would be divergence, i.e. an increase in disparities among Member States. There are four possible patterns within these two dimensions. **Upward convergence** happens when we see improved performance and reduced disparities. **Downward convergence** when we see decreased performance and reduced disparities. **Upward divergence** when we see improved performance and increased disparities. Finally, **downward divergence** when we see decreased performance and increased disparities.

Usually, three statistical measures are used to capture different aspects of the convergence process.

Beta convergence measures the catching-up process of countries starting from lower performance. Their improvement, or growth is expected to be faster than those who started in a better position, so least performers improve faster than best performers. When this happens, we would talk of convergence, whereas the opposite would illustrate divergence.

Sigma convergence measures the reduction of disparities across countries, more specifically their distance from the EU average. The desired policy effect would be that least performing countries have similar performance to the best performing ones. Sigma convergence is composed of two parameters, EU average and EU standard deviation or coefficient of variation⁴⁰. The EU average highlights whether the indicator is performing in the preferred direction -for instance, in increasing GDP⁴¹. In that case, we would talk of an upward trend. On the other hand, if the EU average performs in the opposite direction -for instance, decreasing GDP- we would talk of a downward trend. Similarly, if standard deviation decreases over time, we will talk of convergence, whereas if it increases over time, we will talk of divergence.

Finally, **delta convergence** is a measure that describes countries' distance from the frontrunners. It is simply measured as the sum of distances of each country from the best performers. A reduction in distance implies convergence, whereas an increase implies divergence.

Source: Authors' calculations

3.3. At risk of poverty: the impact of economic cycles

As defined by Eurostat, poverty indicators cover many facets. As explained in Box 6, this section tackles both those children at risk of poverty and those at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

⁴⁰ Standard deviation is a measure of variation. It measures how much countries are far apart from the average. Clearly, being closer to the mean implies a performance more in line with other countries, so an overall low standard deviation is preferable. For example, a least performing country that is scoring much lower than the EU average on GDP shows a certain distance from the rest of Member States. If, over time, the least performing country improves its GDP to get closer to the EU average, standard deviation reduces to desired levels. The coefficient of variation is a "normalised" version of the standard deviation. It simply shows the ratio between the standard deviation and the mean, hence making the difference from the EU average standardised.

⁴¹ As the goal is to reduce the percentage of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, the preferred direction that would show upward trends for most of the indicators presented in this study is a decreasing line for the EU average. On the contrary, an increasing line would show a downward trend, so a deterioration of the indicator.

Box 6: AROP and AROPE definitions

Eurostat provides two different measurements of risk of poverty, **AROP** and **AROPE**.

The former represents those individuals At-Risk-Of-Poverty. AROP refers to those people who are below the poverty threshold, here set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers. This indicator, as recalled by Eurostat, does not measure poverty per se, but low income when compared to other people in the country.

The latter defines individuals At-Risk-Of-Poverty or social Exclusion. AROPE is more nuanced than AROP as it concerns three aspects:

- **people with a low income:** it is simply AROP, i.e. people with an income below the 60% median equivalised disposable income after social transfers.
- **severely materially or socially deprived people:** it refers to people who cannot afford certain goods, services, or social activities. These range from unexpected expenses, arrears, the ability to afford a meal with meat or non-meat alternative every second day, the possibility of getting together with family, or going on holiday for a week.
- **living in a household with very low work intensity:** it refers to those households where the worked hours are equal to or less than 20% of the total work-time potential during the year.

In 2021, the AROPE indicator was modified to reflect the new EU 2030 targets. Regarding severe material deprivation rate, the indicator measures the percentage of the population lacking seven out of 13 deprivation items (previously, it was four out of nine items). Regarding households with very low work intensity, the indicator measures households where adults (18-64) work equal to or less than 20% of their work-time potential (previously, it was 18-59).

As seen, AROPE captures a more nuanced outlook of people with difficulties. AROPE can be used to create detailed breakdowns for other indicators, from GDP to employment to housing conditions. Unfortunately, not all indicators can be broken down within AROPE, hence for some housing indicators, we resorted to simple AROP, i.e. people and households with low income.

Source: Authors' calculations

To investigate AROPE, we broke down the indicator within its items. The analysis considers AROPE as measured by Eurostat, people with low income, and materially or socially deprived people. Our analysis focuses on children below the age of 18. As one of the main goals of the EU and the Member States is to reduce the percentage of people living at risk of poverty or social exclusion, the upward trend is visualised as a decrease in the EU average. The analyses have been run from 2008 (or the earliest year available for indicators) up until the latest data available in Eurostat, generally 2020 or 2021. As in previous publications by Eurofound about convergence, 2008 is often taken as starting year as it coincides with the start of the financial crisis. In most indicators presented today, we see divergence patterns during the financial crisis, usually lasting up until 2013 or 2014, and then belated convergence patterns up until the COVID-19 pandemic. Not all indicators were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which shows that a good shock-absorbing system was swiftly put in place by most Member States. Conversely, some indicators, although showing an overall poverty reduction, highlighted a divergence in some countries, that moved away from the EU average. In the analyses, only the Member States that currently are in EU 27 were considered for the overarching period.

3.3.1. Percentage of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion

a. Indicator

As mentioned previously, AROPE includes people with very low income, those severely materially or socially deprived, and those living in a household with a low work intensity. In this analysis, this indicator measures the percentage of children in such conditions.

b. Analysis

For the overall 12-year period, the percentage of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion **decreased from 25.4% in 2008 to 21.7% in 2020**, the last year available in the Eurostat database⁴² (Figure 1). The decrease was not so straightforward, because poverty increased until 2013, reaching its peak at 28.4% in the last year of the financial crisis. After that, there was a swift decrease, with no sign of an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

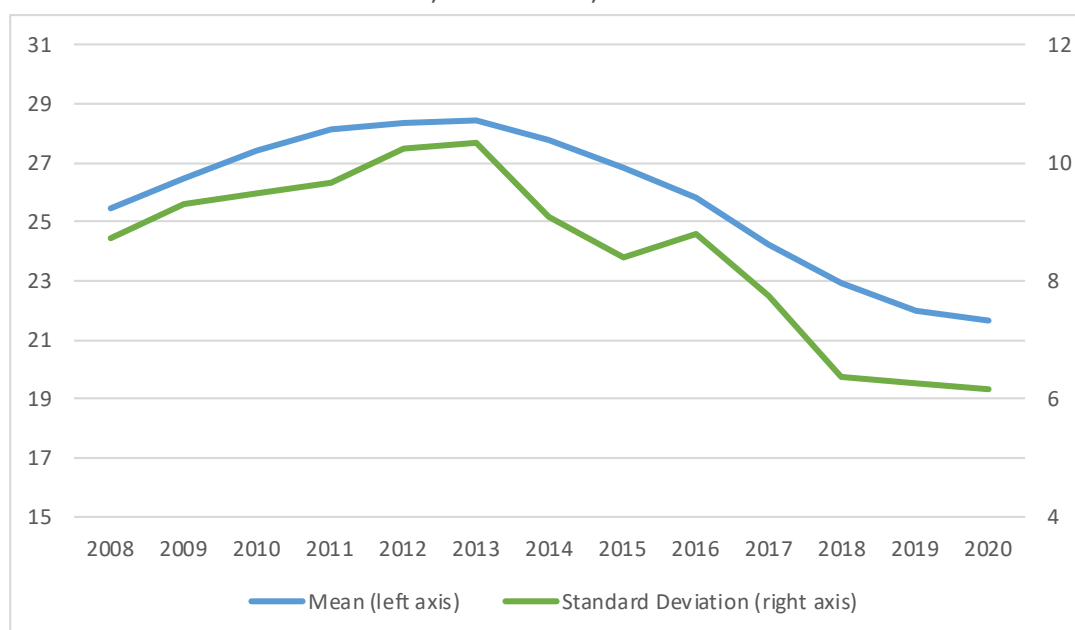
Not all countries climbed the ladder so quickly. Some of them, like **Denmark and Finland, recorded smaller changes in the percentage**, signalling a more resilient system. Unfortunately, some other countries were less prepared to face the crisis. Romania and Bulgaria were most affected by the crisis in terms of absolute numbers. **Hungary, Latvia, and Greece recorded the biggest drop in performance during the crisis**. Until 2013, Hungary went up by more than 10%, whereas Latvia spiked in 2011, recording a 12% increase in only three years. These trends can be noticed in Figure 2, where trends for Romania, Hungary, Latvia and Finland are shown. Romania clearly shows the highest share of AROPE, while Latvia and Hungary recorded a spike during the crisis. Conversely, the rather stable performance of Finland shows a more resilient system. After the financial crisis, countries experienced a fairly homogeneous decrease until 2016, when Romania, Bulgaria, and Cyprus had a small reversal. The trend looks promising until 2019, when we see a steep increase of almost 8% from 2019 to 2020 in Germany, possibly an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic that is not registered in other countries.

Overall **differences among countries are significantly reduced**. They increased during the crisis, especially in those countries mentioned beforehand, but after that, with the economic recovery that followed the crisis, differences were reduced. We noticed a small increase of disparities in 2016, mostly driven by the deterioration of Romania, Bulgaria, and Cyprus.

Finally, we see **least performing countries improve faster than best performing ones** overall. At first, during the crisis, least performing countries were doing worse than best performing countries. This process was then flipped when Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary quickly improved their performance faster than Finland and Denmark, who stayed stable over time.

⁴² The indicator used for the analysis is ILC_PEPS01. The Social Scoreboard uses a different indicator, ILC_PEPS01N, that is updated for 2021. ILC_PEPS01N does not cover data prior to 2015, hence does not capture the effects of the financial crisis.

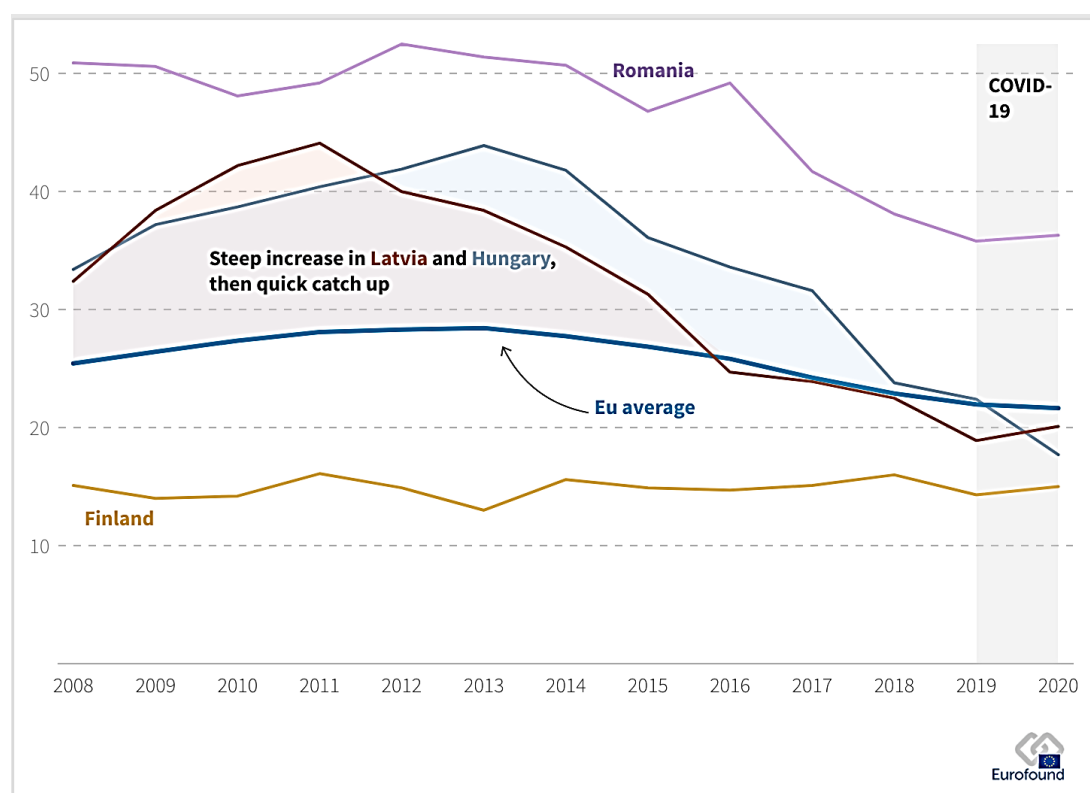
Figure 1: Overall Member States' disparities reduced (upward sigma convergence) in children AROPE rate, 2008-2020, EU27



Source: Eurostat, authors' calculations

Note: Sigma convergence measures the reduction of disparities across countries. The EU average highlights whether the indicator is performing in the preferred direction-reducing the share of AROPE-, signalling an upward trend. The opposite would be a downward trend. Similarly, if standard deviation decreases over time, we will see a reduction of disparities. We will then talk of convergence. If disparities increase over time, we will talk of divergence.

Figure 2: Children AROPE rate, 2008-2020, EU27



Source: Eurostat, authors' calculations

Note: The vertical axis represents the percentage relative to the indicator

3.3.2. Percentage of children living in households with very low income

a. Indicator

To unbundle AROPE, we analysed each of its aspects. Some of the spikes we see in the previous graphs may be due to some AROPE dimensions and not all of them. We start from children living in households with low income, defined as income below the 60% median equivalised disposable income after social transfers. Very low income is a synonym for at risk of poverty (AROP), and the two terms will be used interchangeably.

b. Analysis

For the overall 11-year period, the percentage of children living in households with very low income **decreased from 19.9% in 2010 to 17.7% in 2021** (Figure 3). As seen previously, we notice an increase up until 2014, when the percentage of children living in households with very low income peaked at 21%. After that, countries saw the percentage falling, but not evenly.

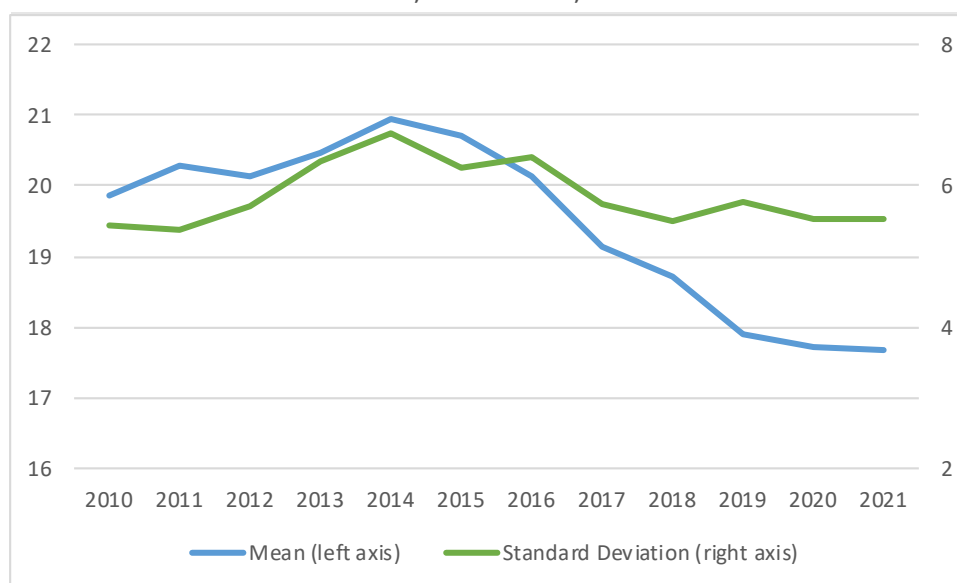
As seen before, Finland and Denmark consistently saw their percentage of children at risk of poverty at around 10% for the whole 11-year period, whereas other countries saw increases and decreases. In particular, **the financial crisis hit Romania heavily**, and the country hit 39.3% of children at risk of poverty in 2014, four times more than Finland and Denmark. Later joiners of the EU saw some shocks during the crisis, but the percentage then decreased swiftly. A good example is the case of Hungary, which dropped from 25% in 2015 to less than 10% in 2020, becoming the year's leader.

A similar trend was seen in Poland, which improved its performance steadily from 2016 onwards. Two countries, Bulgaria and Lithuania, witnessed more spikes, especially Bulgaria in 2014 and 2016. This can be seen in the spikes in standard deviation (Figure 3, green line) for the two years. The Bulgarian drop in performance in 2016 also explains the drop in performance seen previously for the EU average (blue line) in Figure 1. What is perhaps surprising is the high percentage of children at risk of poverty in Spain and Italy. The two countries had higher percentages of between 25% and 30% throughout the period, regardless the effect of the financial crisis. The increase noticed in 2019 is due to a sharp increase in Luxembourg, a country that saw its percentage grow by almost 5% in two years. Finally, we notice an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic in Spain, Italy, Greece, and Hungary among others. Their performance deteriorated by some percentage points, around 2-3% for these countries. It is worthwhile noting that, even though the EU27 trend is a reduction in the percentage of children at risk of poverty, we see country differences slightly increasing.

We indeed see best performing countries and least performing countries **diverging until 2014**, then slowly **coming together until 2019**, and then parting ways again from 2019 onwards. This shows that, while countries with better performances are quite stable over time, some of those with **lower performances are more likely to fluctuate in times of crisis**, as can be seen, both for the financial crisis and for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, we notice a faster improvement of some of the least performing countries over best performing ones, especially in the aftermath of the crisis, although the **overall period does not show a real improvement in those countries**, possibly due to the many shocks suffered by Romania, Bulgaria, Italy, and Spain.

Figure 3: Overall Member States' disparities increased (upward sigma divergence) in children AROP rate, 2010-2021, EU27



Source: Eurostat, authors' calculations

Note: Sigma convergence measures the reduction of disparities across countries. The EU average highlights whether the indicator is performing in the preferred direction -reducing the share of AROP-, signalling an upward trend. The opposite would be a downward trend. Similarly, if standard deviation decreases over time, we will see a reduction of disparities. We will then talk of convergence. If disparities increase over time, we will talk of divergence.

3.3.3. Percentage of children with severe material or social deprivation

a. Indicator

This section considers the second aspect of AROPE, which is severe material or social deprivation (SMSD). As explained in Box 2, the indicator sums up items from different questions related to material and social conditions. Scoring lower than a certain number of items would imply deprivation for that respondent.

b. Analysis

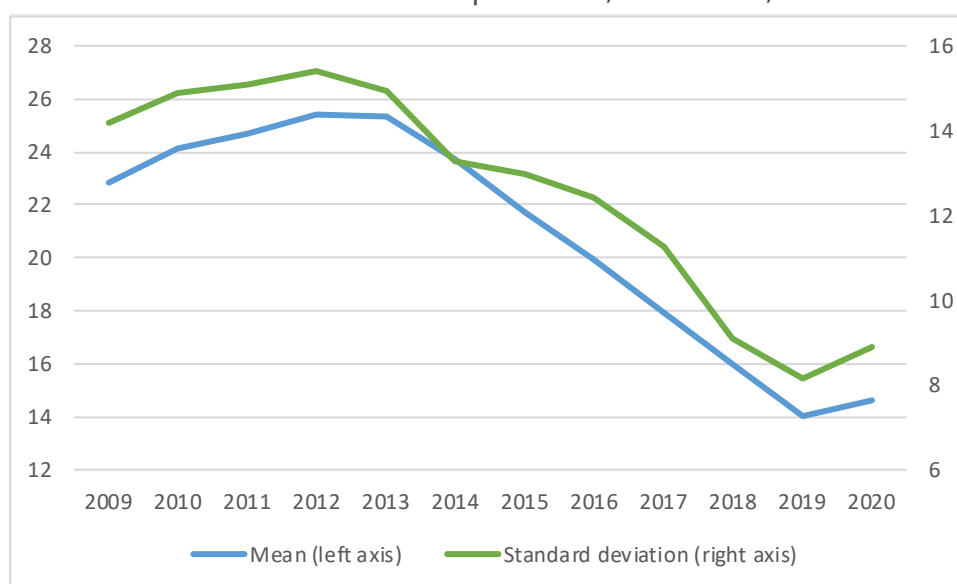
For the overall 11-year period, the percentage of children living with severe deprivations **decreased from 22.8% in 2009 to 14.6% in 2021** (Figure 4). As for the previous two indicators, we see a slight increase during the financial crisis, with the highest value recorded in 2012, 25.3%. After that, the percentage of children with SMSD dropped steadily until 2020, when a small rise in the EU27 as a whole was shown, a possible effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. This result can be perhaps explained by the items asked that involved social gathering and the ability to travel, aspects of life that COVID-19 severely restricted in 2020.

While we see a consistent trend in almost all the countries, Greece's share skyrocketed until 2015. **Greece almost doubled its percentage of children with SMSD in only six years.** Starting from a performance of 24.4% in 2009, the percentage of children with severe deprivation grew steadily to 45.0% in 2015. Since then, the percentage dropped to 32.4% in 2019 but then spiked again in 2020, topping 36.8%. Greece was not the only country affected by the pandemic. Least performing countries before the pandemic like Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary decreased their performance even more in 2020 too. Probably the most striking result was that of **Germany**, which saw an **increase of 9%** in its share of children with severe deprivation **from 2019 to 2020**.

Besides a small increase in differences during the crisis, **countries with higher shares of children with severe deprivation notably improved their condition**. In particular, Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary saw outstanding improvements in a short space of time (Figure 5). From the highest percentages recorded in 2012, 62.6% in Bulgaria, 55.1% in Romania, and 50.6% in Hungary, these countries managed to halve their percentage of children with severe deprivation, reaching their lowest ever performance in 2019 (29.8% in Bulgaria, 29% in Romania and 25% in Hungary).

Finally, **least performing countries improved faster than best performing ones overall**, especially in the aftermath of the financial crisis. As seen before, the steep decrease of countries like Bulgaria and Romania made them improve faster than more stable countries like Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, which saw marginal improvements (from 1 to 6%) in their condition.

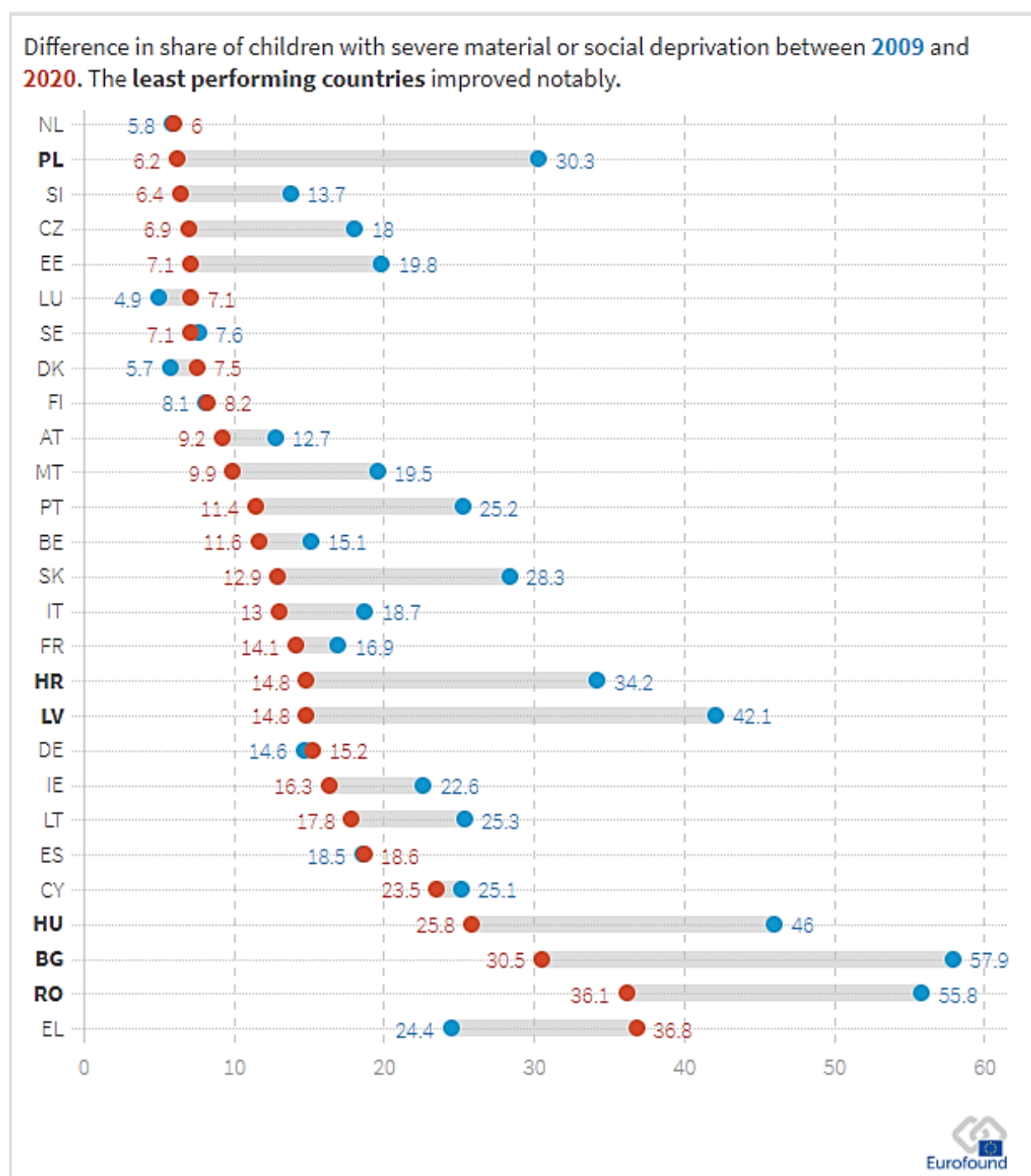
Figure 4: Overall Member States' disparities reduced (upward sigma convergence) in children with severe deprivations, 2009-2020, EU27



Source: Eurostat, authors' calculations

Note: Sigma convergence measures the reduction of disparities across countries. The EU average highlights whether the indicator is performing in the preferred direction-reducing the share of SMSD-, signalling an upward trend. The opposite would be a downward trend. Similarly, if standard deviation decreases over time, we will see a reduction of disparities. We will then talk of convergence. If disparities increase over time, we will talk of divergence.

Figure 5: Share of children with severe deprivations, 2009-2020, EU27



Source: Eurostat, authors' calculations

Note: The horizontal axis represents the percentage relative to the indicator

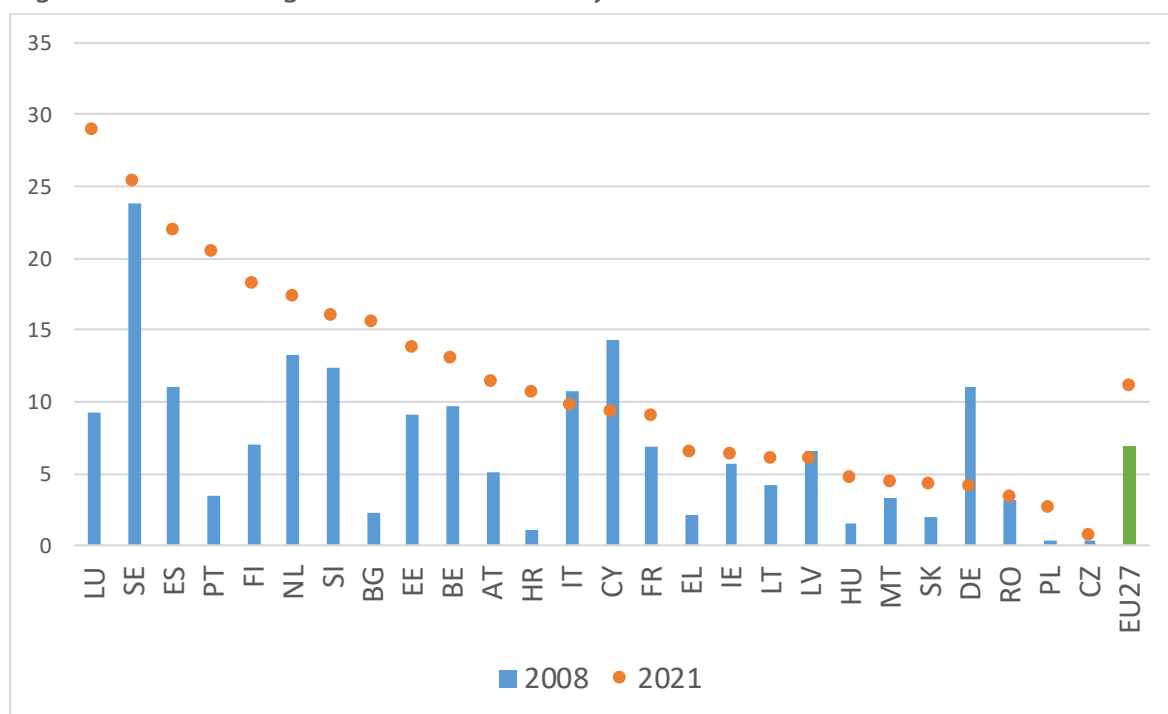
3.4. Early childhood education and care: increasing disparities among the youngest children

To investigate early childhood education and care (ECEC), we focused on one indicator provided by Eurostat. This indicator focuses on children at risk of poverty that are in formal childcare or education. Duration is measured by hours, and it is broken down in three timeframes: zero hours (no formal childcare or education), between one and 29 hours and more than 30 hours. As in the case of the ECEC indicator included in the Social Scoreboard, we merged the last two categories. Similarly, age of the children has been broken down to capture more nuanced results. In this study, we present results for children below the age of three first, and then between the age of three and compulsory school age.

As mentioned previously, 2008 was taken as the starting year for the analysis in order to cover the years of the financial crisis and its aftermath. The selected indicator recently published data for 2021, so it was chosen to investigate the possible impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the indicator shows an improvement in performance, thus a higher share of children was found to use ECEC in 2021 compared to 2008. Whereas we see a reduction of disparities for children between three and compulsory school age, disparities among Member States grew when considering children below three years old. Moreover, although we do not see a clear effect of the financial crisis, the performance dropped in 2020. This is likely to be driven by the closure of ECEC services during the pandemic, impacting families at risk of poverty⁴³.

Figure 6 and Figure 7 present the current state of the indicator for 2021 compared to the starting year, 2008, for all the Member States.

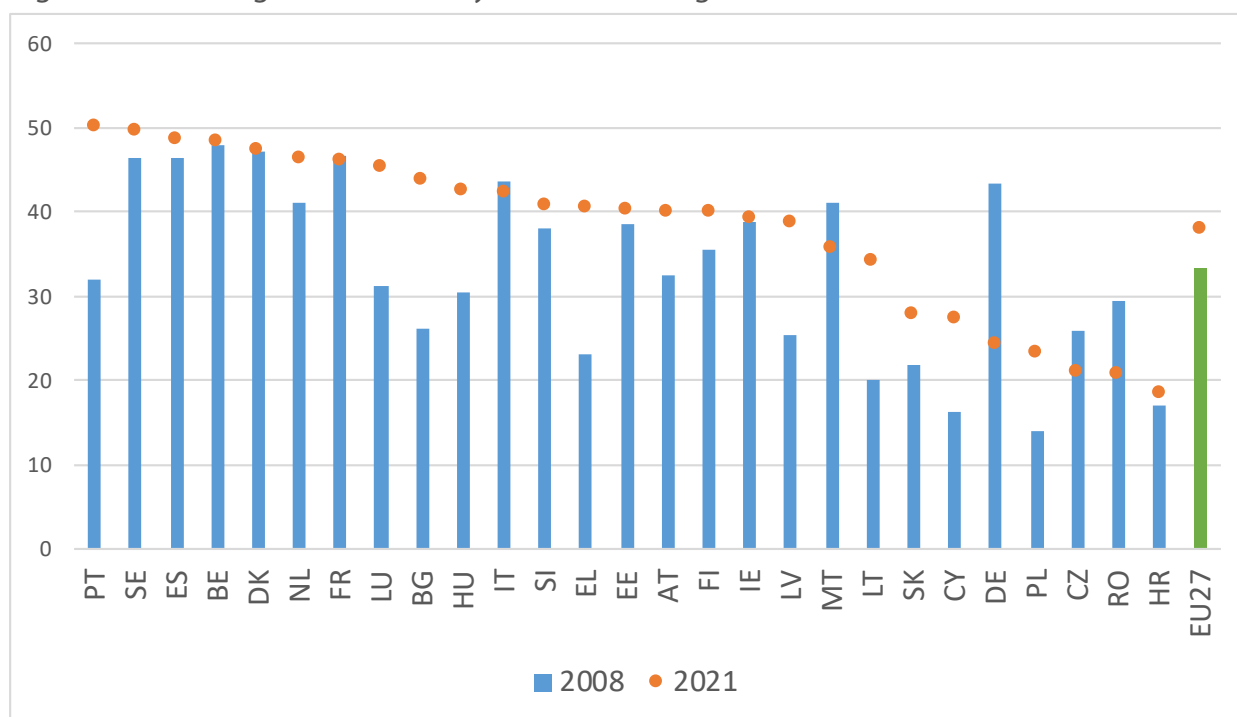
Figure 6: Percentage of children (below 3 years) AROP in ECEC, 2008-2021, EU27



Source: Eurostat, authors' calculations

⁴³ European Commission, 2021, *Early childhood education and care and the Covid-19 pandemic - Understanding and managing the impact of the crisis on the sector*, Publication Office of the European Union, available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c14645b2-24f8-11ec-bd8e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-233017740>.

Figure 7: Percentage of children (3 years to school age) AROP in ECEC, 2008-2021, EU27



Source: Eurostat, authors' calculations

3.4.1. Share of children in ECEC below the age of three

a. Indicator

The indicator refers to share of children AROP on formal childcare and other types of care by duration, in this case more than one hour in a usual week. The age of the child is taken into account and in this section we present results for children below the age of three. Formal childcare is defined in the EU-SILC survey by four variables: education at pre-school or equivalent, education at compulsory education, childcare at centre-based services outside school hours and childcare at day-care centre organised/controlled by a by public or private structure. Due to the presence of many missing values for Denmark, the country had to be excluded from the analysis.

b. Analysis

For the overall 13-year period, the percentage of children below three years old AROP in ECEC **increased from 6.91% in 2008 to 11.16% in 2021** (Figure 8). The increase came to a halt in 2010 due to the financial crisis and then steadily increased until 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced many children to stay home from school. The European performance in 2021 improved by 1% compared to 2020, to almost catch up with pre-pandemic values.

While Sweden had higher performance for the overall period, ranging around 25%, some Member States swiftly their performance consistently. **Luxembourg and the Netherlands saw their performance improving**, especially in the aftermath of the financial crisis. **Estonia** had an improvement of performance, but at a greater scale. In just a year, from 2013 to 2014, the country increased its performance by almost 10%. Among the least performing countries, Slovakia recorded five consecutive years in which no children below three years old at risk of poverty used ECEC, from 2013 to 2018. This was also the case in other countries such as Poland (2015), Croatia (2014), Bulgaria

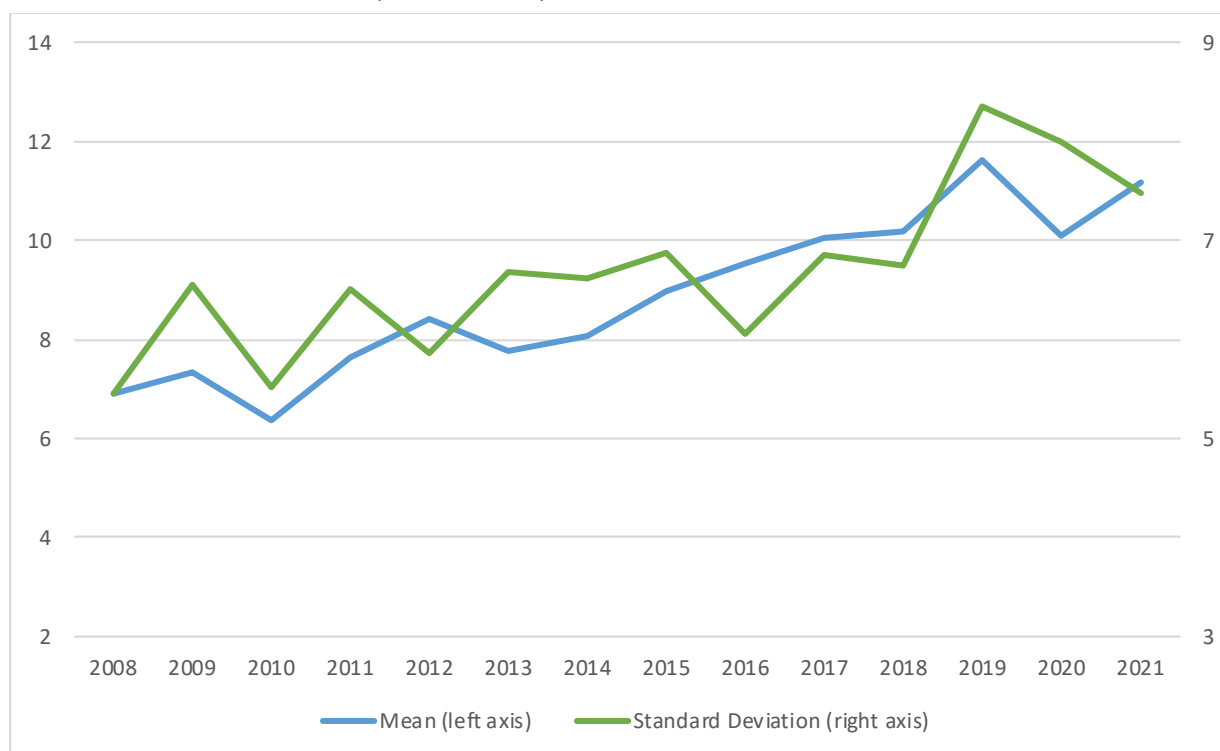
(2010) and Malta (2010), but only during one year. Most of the least performing countries slightly improved their scores, but not enough to catch up with other Member States.

This can be noticed in an **increase in disparities**, as shown by the green line in Figure 8. Surprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic widely reduced disparities, as can be seen in the drop in 2020 and 2021. Most countries (Portugal, Spain, Luxembourg, Estonia, Ireland, Belgium, Austria and Greece) had a considerable drop in performance, around 6-9%, regardless of their previous performance. This effect is probably due to the lockdown put in place and the halt in early childhood education and care. Conversely, 2021 saw a better performance by most of the countries mentioned, alongside some of the least performing ones (Bulgaria, Slovakia and Hungary).

Overall, **differences among countries increased**. Despite fluctuations, they increased for the whole period, to only see a decrease in disparities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The decrease was mostly driven by the drop in performance in most countries due to restrictions. Nonetheless, future data will show whether the effect of the pandemic will be long-term or whether performance will revert to pre-pandemic levels.

Finally, we see **least performing countries improve faster than best performing ones** overall. The overall trend, despite the pandemic setback, shows a catching-up process. As seen before, the improvement in performance of countries like Bulgaria and Hungary made them improve faster than more stable countries like Sweden, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, which saw less marked improvements.

Figure 8: Overall Member States' disparities increased (upward sigma divergence) in children in ECEC, 2008-2021, EU27



Source: Eurostat, authors' calculations

3.4.2. Share of children in ECEC between three and compulsory school age

a. Indicator

The indicator refers to share of children AROP in formal childcare and other types of care by duration, in this case more than one hour in a usual week. Age of the child is taken into account and in this section, we present results for children between the age of three and compulsory school age. School age is different for each country and is calculated based on the different starting ages provided by Member States.

b. Analysis

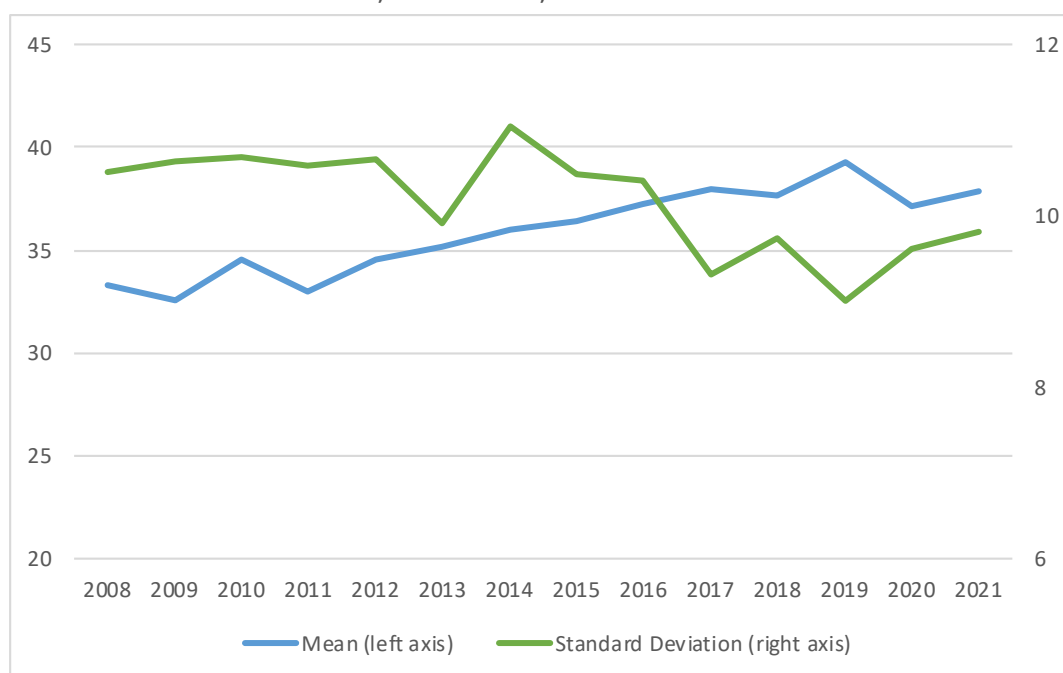
For the overall 13-year period, the percentage of children between three years old and compulsory school age AROP in ECEC **increased from 33.32% in 2008 to 37.82% in 2021** (Figure 9). The increase slowed down in 2010 and then steadily increased until 2020, when the **effect of the COVID-19 pandemic is visible**. The European performance in 2021 improved only by 0.66% compared to 2020, so still 1.5% away from pre-pandemic levels.

Overall, we see **least performing countries improving their performance**. **Poland and Croatia** started from low performances and improved in the aftermath of the financial crisis. Poland grew by 15.56%, whereas Croatia by 11.23%. Similarly, **Bulgaria** improved notably during the years of the financial crisis, to then stabilise its performance at around 40%. Remarkable is the improvement made by **Portugal**, that **improved by 18.06%** in the overall period, to then become the best performing country in 2021. Portugal started from values lower than the European average and steadily climbed the ranks. Among the **best performing countries, Belgium, Spain and Denmark had steady performances** in the overall period, performing between 45-50% even during economic downturns. The countries witnessed a small setback in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the magnitude was small (-3.13% in Belgium and -1.58% in Spain). Some countries felt the **effect of the pandemic more strongly**. For instance, **Slovakia** saw a constant improvement in performance, slowed only in 2021, when the performance dropped by 12.10%. Similarly, **Germany** had stable performance at around 40% and then dropped to 20.01% in 2020. As we will see later on, Germany was deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, Malta had many peaks and troughs. It peaked in 2014, reaching 50% of children AROP in ECEC, to then steadily drop until 2019 when it reached 29.91%.

Overall, **differences among countries decreased**. Despite fluctuations, they decreased for the whole period, with an increase in disparities only visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. The increase was mostly driven by countries whose performance worsened significantly, like Germany and Greece, possibly due to pandemic restrictions. As for children below the age of three, future data will show whether the effect of the pandemic will be long-term or will revert to pre-pandemic levels.

Finally, we see **least performing countries improve faster than best performing ones** overall. The overall trend shows a catching-up process, especially driven by the improvement in performance in countries like Poland, Croatia, and Bulgaria. They improved faster than best performing countries like Belgium, Denmark, and Spain, which saw less marked improvements (+0.52% in Belgium, +0.10% in Denmark, and +2.15% in Spain).

Figure 9: Overall Member States' disparities reduced (upward sigma convergence) in children in ECEC, 2008-2021, EU27



Source: Eurostat, authors' calculations

3.5. Inadequate housing: a hint of the effect of COVID-19

To investigate effective access to adequate housing, we focused on three indicators that explore conditions for households with dependent children and at risk of poverty. The three selected indicators are:

- the share of households at risk of poverty (hence below 60% median equivalised disposable income) and with dependent children that have arrears on utility bills,
- the share of households at risk of poverty, and with dependent children that cannot keep home adequately warm and
- share of children at risk of poverty that live in an overcrowded household.

Analysing data about households with dependent children was the closest option in these areas to investigate children's housing conditions. Moreover, Eurostat data allowed for a selection of those households at risk of poverty, hence zooming in on the most vulnerable households.

As mentioned in the previous section, 2008 was taken as the starting year for the analysis in order to cover the years of the financial crisis and its aftermath. The selected indicators had data available until 2021, hence were chosen to dig into the possible diverging effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. All indicators show an improvement over the 13 years, with countries reducing disparities and reducing inadequate housing conditions for households at risk of poverty and with dependent children. As seen previously, after an initial increase in disparities due to the financial crisis, all countries notably improved their performance. This trend can be seen up until the start of the pandemic when some countries suffered a setback that made them diverge from EU trends.

3.5.1. Share of households AROP and with dependent children that have arrears on utility bills

a. Indicator

This indicator measures the share of households that had arrears on utility bills (heating, electricity, gas, water, etc.) in the past year. Data for this indicator are collected as part of the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) to monitor the development of poverty and social inclusion in the EU. The data collection is based on a survey, which means that indicator values are self-reported. As explained before, the households considered are only those with dependent children and that are at risk of poverty.

b. Analysis

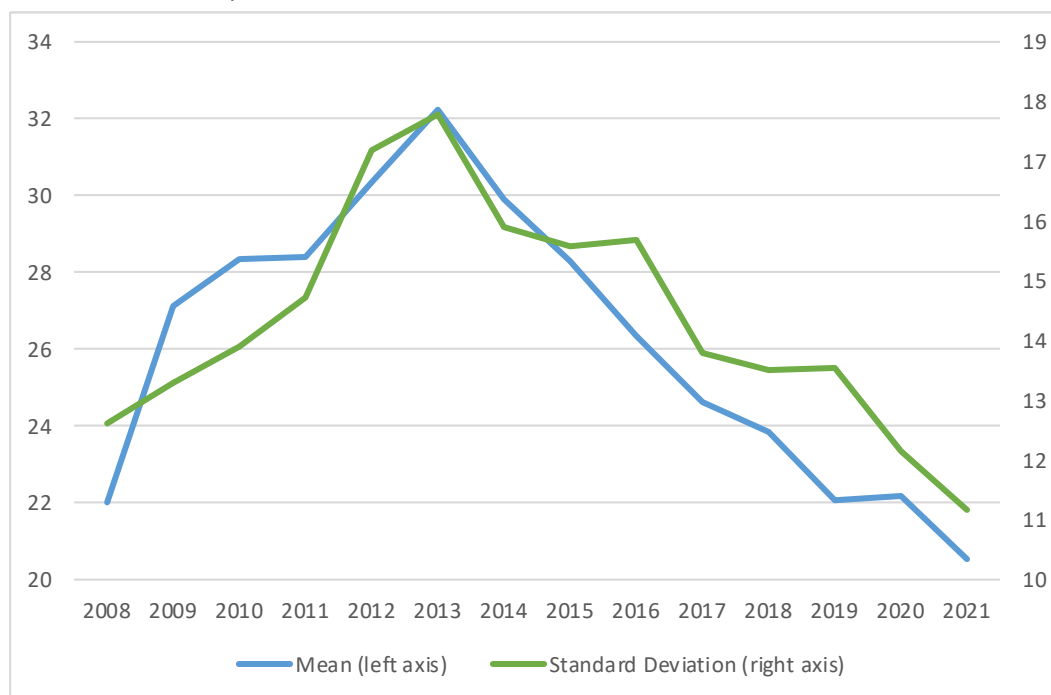
For the overall 13-year period, the percentage of households AROP with dependent children that have arrears on utility bills **decreased from 22.0% in 2008 to 20.5% in 2021** (Figure 10). Although the change does not seem much, it is worth considering that at the peak of the financial crisis this share was 32.2%.

Disparities were ramping up in all European Member States, with worrying surges of **struggling households in Hungary, Greece, Croatia, and Cyprus**. These four countries witnessed a concerning increase in their share: 26% for Hungary, 24% for Greece, 19.5% for Croatia, and 42% for Cyprus. Since then, (with the exception of Greece), Hungary, Croatia, and Cyprus quickly recovered from the shocks of the crisis. However, the ground was still fertile for another setback, which is what happened in Hungary in 2020. Its share doubled from 2019 (19.4%) to 2020 (38.4%). Figure 11 shows how economic downturns have strongly impacted least performing countries like Hungary compared to countries with more resilient systems such as Denmark. For both the financial crisis and the COVID-19 crisis, Hungary presented a considerable drop in performance, whereas Denmark had smaller fluctuations in those years. Moreover, the graph shows the spike Cyprus witnessed during the financial crisis, and its efforts to improve its performance. Conversely, Greece and Bulgaria failed to reduce their share after the crisis, lingering around 60% of households at risk of poverty with dependent children having trouble paying their bills. Romania followed a similar pattern to these two countries, but managed to keep its share low after the crisis and during the pandemic, going from 46.3% in 2013 to 17.2% in 2021. Unfortunately, even **best performing countries saw a slight worsening of their performance over time**, although the EU average stayed quite low. Finally, we can see an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic focused on some countries such as Cyprus, Croatia, Lithuania, and France, but the increase is contained at less than 10%, while other countries saw their share noticeably reduced. Overall, differences spiked during the financial crisis but then recovered to reach a more homogeneous pattern. Surprisingly, the spike recorded in 2016 and the flat line in 2018 is attributable to a sharp increase in Finland and Denmark, two countries that quickly saw their share almost doubling.

We see an increase in disparities during the financial crisis, but then a reduction in its aftermath. 2016 saw a sharp increase, mostly driven by Lithuania and Finland as seen before. The difference increased slightly in 2021, but the magnitude of change is too small to discern a clear diverging pattern due to the pandemic.

Finally, **least performing countries sharply improved their performance to catch up** with best performing countries. At the same time, some of the best performing countries such as Finland and Denmark worsened their performance. This facilitates the catching-up, although it is not desirable.

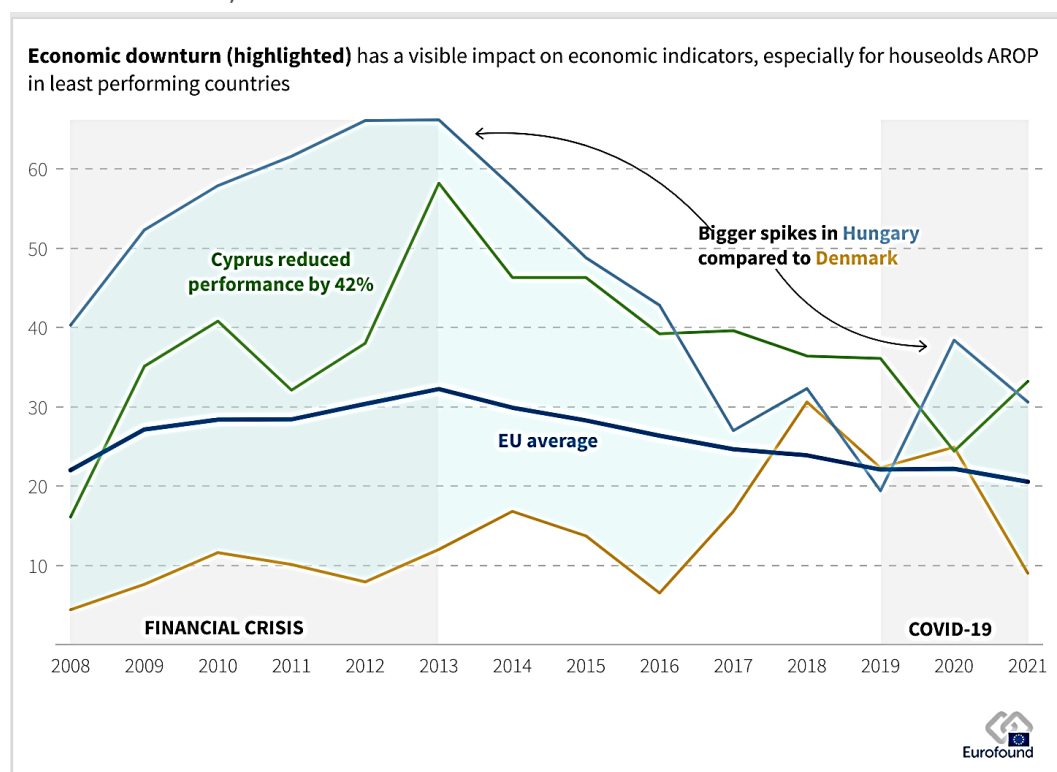
Figure 10: Overall Member States' disparities reduced (upward sigma convergence) in households AROP with dependent children having arrears on utility bills, 2008-2021, EU27



Source: Eurostat, authors' calculations

Note: Sigma convergence measures the reduction of disparities across countries. The EU average highlights whether the indicator is performing in the preferred direction -reducing the share of population with arrears-, signalling an upward trend. The opposite would be a downward trend. Similarly, if standard deviation decreases over time, we will see a reduction of disparities. We will then talk of convergence. If disparities increase over time, we will talk of divergence.

Figure 11: Households AROP with dependent children having arrears on utility bills, 2008-2021, EU27



Source: Eurostat, authors' calculations

Note: the vertical axis represents the percentage relative to the indicator

3.5.2. Share of households AROP and with dependent children that are unable to keep home adequately warm

a. Indicator

The indicator measures the share of the population who are unable to afford to keep their home adequately warm. Data for this indicator are collected as part of the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) to monitor the development of poverty and social inclusion in the EU. The data collection is based on a survey, which means that indicator values are self-reported. Households are selected in this analysis to only include those with dependent children and at risk of poverty.

b. Analysis

For the overall 13-year period the percentage of households AROP with dependent children that were unable to keep their home warm **decreased from 20.9% in 2008 to 16.1% in 2021** (Figure 12). As seen previously, the indicator is affected by the financial crisis, with a slight increase until 2012 and then a drop until 2021.

Most countries seem to consistently reduce the share of low-income households in difficulty in this area during the crisis, even the country with the highest share, Bulgaria (well over 70% until 2013).

The breaking point during the crisis that increases the average is driven by Mediterranean countries like Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Malta. Mediterranean countries saw a steep increase until 2012-2013, to then drop slowly in the aftermath of the crisis (Figure 13). Two countries, Cyprus and Greece, did not manage to decrease their values consistently and their share of households unable to warm

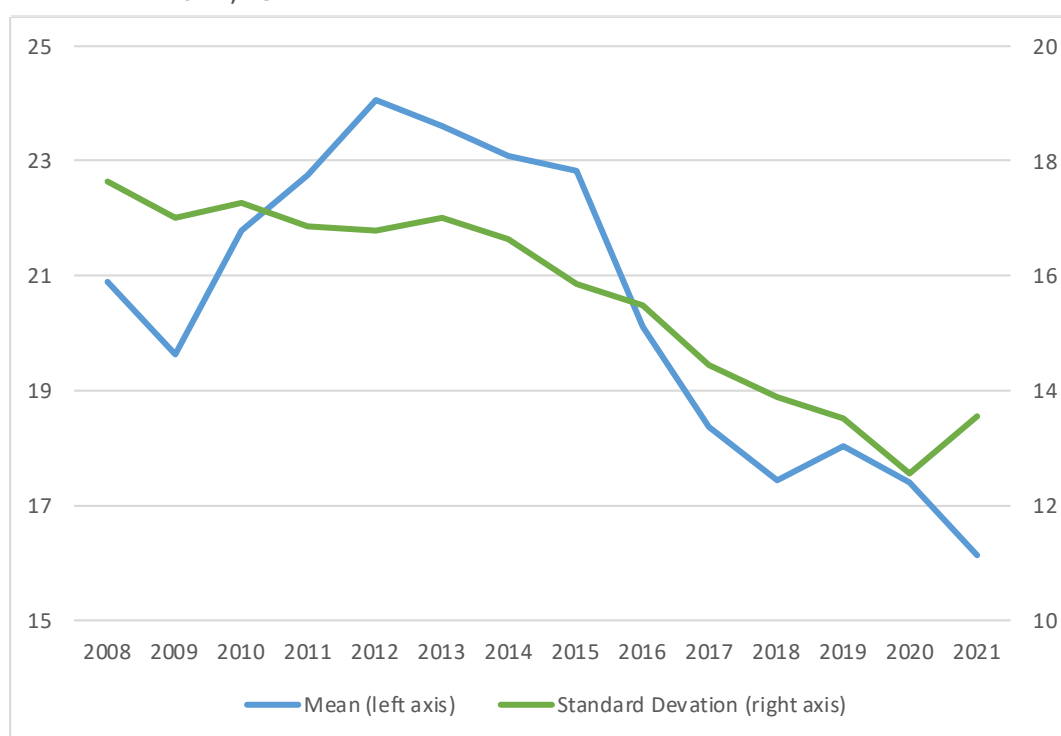
their house shot up to 58.7% in Cyprus and 37.3% in Greece in 2021. Bucking the trend, Bulgaria managed to halve its percentage, starting from a staggering 80.7% in 2008 to drop to 41.8% in 2021.

Countries with good performance, such as Luxembourg, Finland, Sweden, and Estonia **stayed very stable during the crisis and afterward**. The decreasing trend after the financial crisis only slowed down in 2019, when Cyprus, Slovakia, and Malta recorded a rise in their share, but the situation quickly went back to previous values. This is possibly due to a colder winter in those countries. An effect of the COVID-19 pandemic is reflected in the spike in differences in 2021, mostly driven by Cyprus and Spain, with an increase in the share of households unable to warm their home by 10.3% and 6.2% respectively.

We see similar results due to the parting of Mediterranean countries during the crisis. After growing disparities between best performing countries and least performing countries, **differences thinned noticeably from 2012 to 2021**, with a small spike in 2019 driven by Cyprus, Malta, and Slovakia.

Finally, **countries with higher shares quickly caught up with the rest**, especially **Bulgaria** and, after the crisis, the **Mediterranean countries**. Best performing countries seemed to be pretty stable over time, so the catching-up process was indeed driven by least performers improving faster.

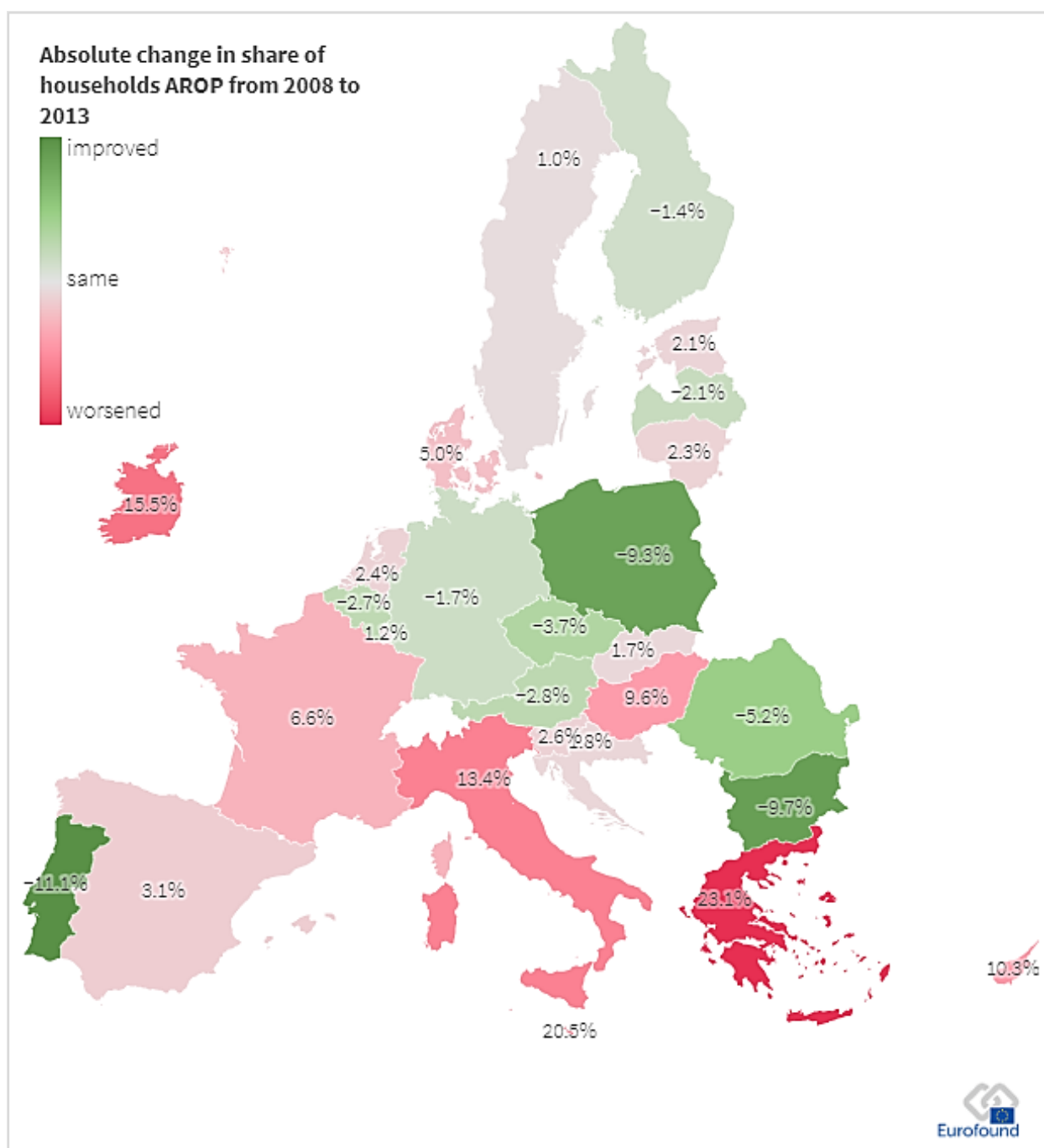
Figure 12: Overall Member States' disparities reduced (upward sigma convergence) in households AROP with dependent children unable to keep home warm, 2008-2021, EU27



Source: Eurostat, authors' calculations

Note: Sigma convergence measures the reduction of disparities across countries. The EU average highlights whether the indicator is performing in the preferred direction-reducing the share of population unable warm the house properly-signalling an upward trend. The opposite would be a downward trend. Similarly, if standard deviation decreases over time, we will see a reduction of disparities. We will then talk of convergence. If disparities increase over time, we will talk of divergence.

Figure 13: Share of households AROP with dependent children unable to keep home warm, 2008-2021, EU27



Source: Eurostat, authors' calculations

3.5.3. Share of children AROP and living in an overcrowded household

a. Indicator

The overcrowding rate is defined as the percentage of the population living in an overcrowded household. A person is considered as living in an overcrowded household if the household does not have at its disposal a minimum number of rooms equal to one room for the household, one room per couple in the household, one room for every single person aged 18 or more, one room per pair of single people of the same gender between 12 and 17 years of age, one room for every single person between

12 and 17 years of age and not included in the previous category and one room per pair of children under 12 years of age. For this indicator, we expect an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, as people had to restrict their movements due to the several lockdowns put in place. Especially for families at risk of poverty, this could mean increased overcrowding.

b. Analysis

For the overall 13-year period the percentage of children AROP living in an overcrowded household **decreased from 46.0% in 2008 to 41.4% in 2021** (Figure 14). As opposed to previous indicators, we do not see a clear effect of the financial crisis. In contrast, we see a sharp decrease from 2010 to 2011, mostly driven by three countries, Estonia, Lithuania, and Slovenia.

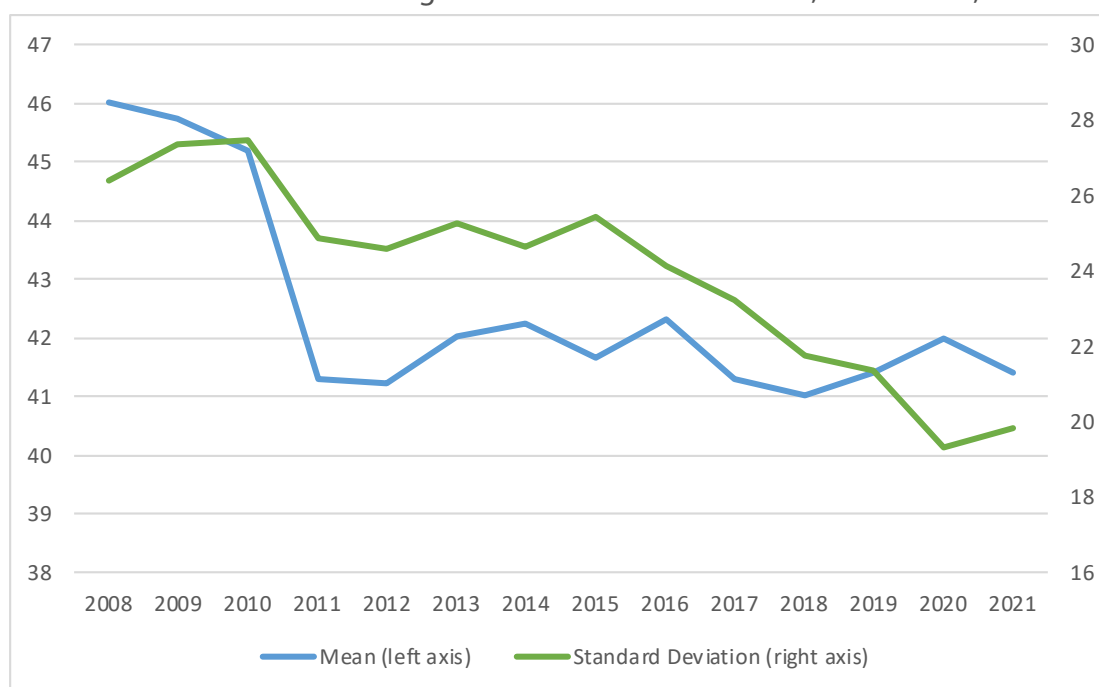
The three countries (EE, LT, SI) saw their share of children living in overcrowded households fall by 20%, with the highest drop recorded for Estonia (-27.1%). Despite the swift improvement, only Estonia maintained the downward trend over time, while Lithuania and Slovenia had some setbacks in the years that followed. Some countries had a high share for the overall period, such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Latvia. **Bulgaria and Romania recorded values above 75% for the 13 years in question**, peaking at 80.9% in Bulgaria and 81.4% in Romania in 2008. Latvia followed a better trajectory, with some sporadic drops below 75%, especially from 2018 onwards. In contrast, **Hungary managed to quickly improve its performance**. Starting out as the country with the highest share of children at risk of poverty in overcrowded households in 2012 (89%), the share quickly decreased to reach an outstanding 40.0% in 2021. In less than 10 years, Hungary managed to half its share.

For this indicator, convergence is not only driven by the improvement of countries with higher shares, but also by the **worsening of best performing countries**. Countries like the **Netherlands** saw a **constant increase from 2010**, when the share was at its lowest ever (0.8%), to then climb to 22.4% in 2020. A similar trend can be observed in **Finland**, where the share **more than doubled from 11.6% to 28.3% in 2020** during the pandemic, then dropped again to 22.6%. Belgium and Germany followed a similar pattern, with countries increasing by a bit more than 10% over the years. Finally, Figure 6 shows a clear downward converging effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. The average climbed by 0.5% compared to the previous year, while differences narrowed. Spikes were recorded for densely populated countries such as Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Germany, and Malta. Conversely, 2021 saw the start of upward divergence, with an increase in performance but also an increase in disparities.

The decreasing trend in disparities was interrupted by a spike in 2021, mostly driven by the five countries mentioned earlier (DK, EE, IE, DE, and MT). The **diverging effect of the COVID-19 pandemic** starts in 2021 and 2022 data will be needed to see if disparities will increase or fall off again in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Finally, **least performing countries improved faster than best performers**. This result can be read in two possible ways. Firstly, countries that were worse off improved swiftly, as is the case for Hungary. Secondly, in the past 10 years, best performing countries saw an erosion due to increasing urbanisation and an increased population.

Figure 14: Overall Member States' disparities reduced (upward sigma convergence) in children AROP living in overcrowded households, 2008-2021, EU27



Source: Eurostat, authors' calculations

Note: Sigma convergence measures the reduction of disparities across countries. The EU average highlights whether the indicator is performing in the preferred direction -reducing the share of overcrowded households-, signalling an upward trend. The opposite would be a downward trend. Similarly, if standard deviation decreases over time, we will see a reduction of disparities. We will then talk of convergence. If disparities increase over time, we will talk of divergence.

3.6. Food poverty: economic downturns at play

To investigate food poverty, the indicator presenting the inability to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day was used. The indicator was then broken down to capture children and at risk of poverty status. Data is available from 2008 to 2021, hence capturing both the years of the financial crisis and the central years of COVID-19.

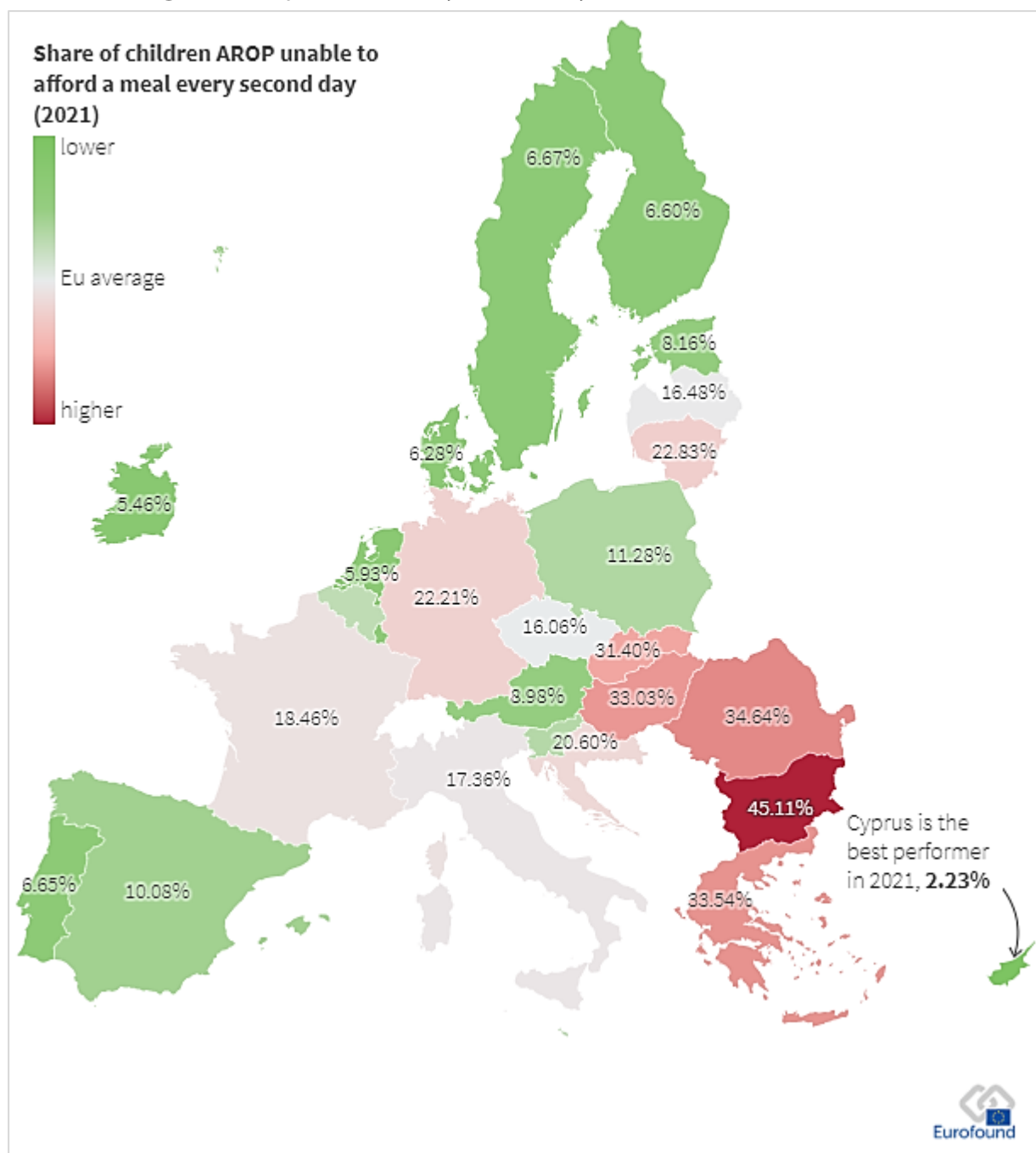
The overall trend shows an increased performance and a reduction of disparities, although a clear effect of both financial crisis and COVID-19 pandemic can be noticed.

3.6.1. Share of children AROP and unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day

a. Indicator

This indicator measures the share of children AROP that are unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day. Data for this indicator are collected as part of the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) to monitor the development of poverty and social inclusion in the EU. The data collection is based on a survey, which means that indicator values are self-reported. Figure 15 represents the state of the indicator in 2021.

Figure 15: Share of children AROP unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day (2021)



Source: Eurostat, authors' calculations

b. Analysis

For the overall 13-year period, the share of children AROP unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day **decreased from 25.82% in 2008 to 16.04% in 2021** (Figure 16). Arguably, the indicator is tied to economic cycles, hence we see an increase in the share until 2013, when the highest values was recorded (27.90%) to then drop down steadily until 2020, when the indicator recorded an increase for the first time in seven years.

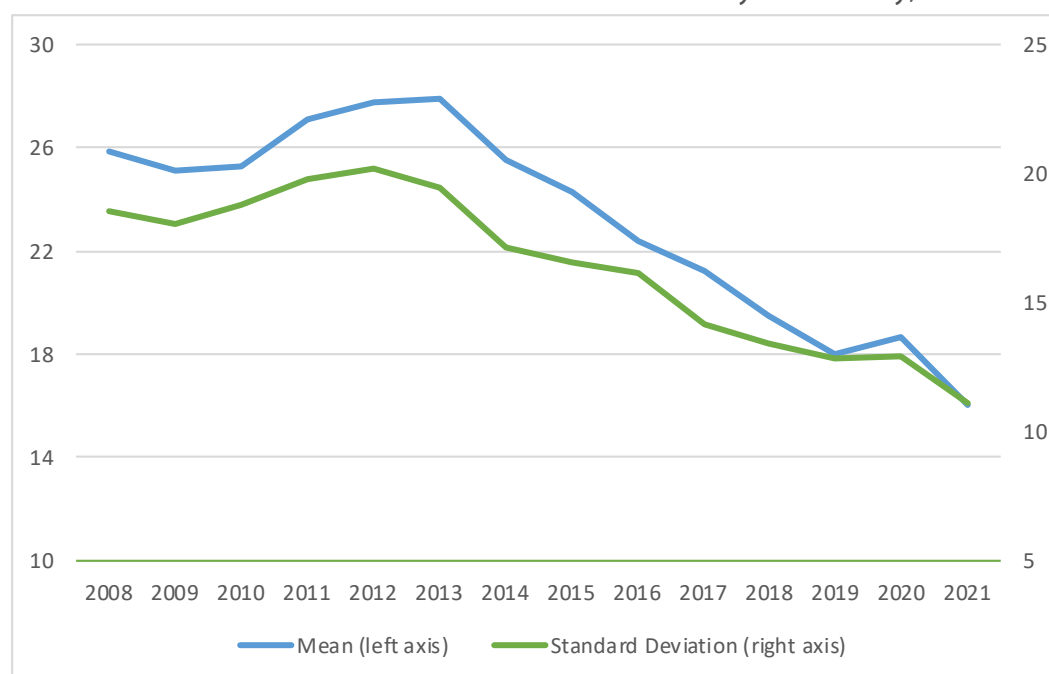
Many countries recorded a **drop in performance during the years of the crisis, especially Hungary, Greece, Latvia and Italy.**

Hungary saw an increase in share of children AROP unable to afford a meal of almost 20%, Greece's share increased by 25%, while on a minor but still relevant scale Italy increased by 16% in two years and Latvia by 14%. While Hungary, Latvia and Italy managed to improve their performance in the following years, Greece stayed rather prone to new setbacks, as in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, **Bulgaria** recorded the highest share of children AROP unable to afford meals, with the peak in 2013 at 85.70%. Since then, the country **witnessed a steady improvement**, with a remarkable performance of 45.11% recorded in 2021, thus improving its share by 40% in only 8 years. **Several countries maintained a good performance in the overall period, such as Sweden, Luxembourg and Ireland.** Cyprus, already among the best performing countries, notably improved its performance from 2017 onwards, to then become the best performing country for three straight years in 2019, 2020 and 2021 with just a share of 2%. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic is found for many countries. The most evident increase is recorded in Greece (+7%), Germany (+7%), and Malta (+9%).

Similar to previous cases of indicators impacted by the economic downturns, we see a slight increase in disparities during the financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. After both economic downturns, we see a reduction in disparities due to the quick improvement recorded by Bulgaria, Hungary and Latvia.

Finally, **countries with higher shares quickly caught up with the rest**, especially **Bulgaria** and, after the crisis, Hungary and Latvia. Best performing countries seemed to be pretty stable over time, so the catching-up process was indeed driven by least performers improving faster.

Figure 16: Overall Member States' disparities reduced (upward sigma convergence) in children AROP unable to afford a meal every second day, 2008-2021, EU27



Source: Eurostat, authors' calculations

3.7. Conclusions: the fragile stability of upward convergence

As seen from the previous analyses, upward convergence was achieved in the period 2008-2021 by seven indicators, namely children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, children with severe material deprivation, children between three and school age AROP in ECEC, households with dependent children with arrears, household with dependent children unable to keep the home adequately warm, share of children living in overcrowded households and share of children AROP unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day.

We saw upward divergence in the share of children living in households with very low income, although the difference between 2010 and 2021 is minimal, and in the share of children AROP below three years of age in ECEC. Nonetheless, all indicators except children in overcrowded households and children in ECEC were heavily impacted by the financial crisis, with some Member States such as Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary taking a heavier blow than others. For the years of the crisis, downward divergence was recorded, meaning a decrease in performance and an increase in disparities. The analysis reveals that social and economic indicators are highly affected by economic cycles, especially by recession. The trend confirms previous findings by Eurofound, with economic downturns negatively affecting most of the indicators of the Social Scoreboard.

The COVID-19 pandemic had deep economic implications and, having seen previous trends, similar setbacks were expected. So far, the effect of COVID-19 has been found only in some countries. Nonetheless, the effect was enough to show a diverging trend -increase in disparities- among Member States concerning children at risk of poverty living in overcrowded households and AROP households with dependent children unable to keep the house adequately warm. Moreover, a downward divergence trend was found starting from 2019 for children with severe material deprivation. This could have a long-term effect on children's ability to exit poverty and have fairer opportunities. Further analysis could show whether the diverging trend was limited to 2020-2021 or will continue in the upcoming years. The drop in performance and increase in disparities could be due to lockdown measures that limited the ability to have social gatherings and kept people inside their houses, hence resulting in more social deprivation and overcrowded households for those at risk of poverty⁴⁴. Similarly, the impact for children in ECEC has been mostly perceived during the first year of the pandemic, but long-term effects cannot be excluded. With the easing of restrictions and the awareness of how to live with the virus, data in 2022 will indicate whether COVID-19 will spark new diverging trends or will be limited to a fluctuation of a few years only.

Regardless of the magnitude of the effect, the impact of the pandemic hit Member States unevenly. Southern Member States suffered more from inadequate housing conditions, with a larger share of households AROP with dependent children unable to keep the house adequately warm. Eastern Member States suffered more with respect to children at risk of poverty, showing similar fluctuations seen in previous economic downturns, although less acute. Interestingly, Germany was heavily impacted by the pandemic on three indicators, severe deprivation, children in ECEC and overcrowded households. They possibly refer to harsh lockdowns that kept people indoor and limited social contacts, especially among the population at risk of poverty.

The ability to recover quickly from a crisis is different for each Member State, and this could drive a diverging pattern overtime. Both the measures to limit the effect of the pandemic and future measures

⁴⁴ Ayala, L., Bárcena-Martín, E., Cantó, O., and Navarro, C., 2022, *COVID-19 lockdown and housing deprivation across European countries*. Social science & medicine, 298, 114839, available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953622001459?via%3Dihub>.

to meet the policy targets in reduction of poverty and access to services will challenge the convergence trend in the upcoming years. Access to funds addressing possible diverging trends is paramount to achieve the goals the European Child Guarantee envisions.

Table 1: Overview of performance and dynamics of disparities (sigma convergence), EU27

Indicators	Financial crisis	Recovery	COVID-19 pandemic	Overall period
Percentage of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion	Downward divergence	Upward convergence	Upward convergence	Upward convergence
Percentage of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion (monetary deprivation)	Downward divergence	Upward convergence	Upward convergence	Upward divergence
Percentage of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion (material deprivation)	Downward divergence	Upward convergence	Downward divergence	Upward convergence
Participation of children AROP in ECEC for more than 1 hour (below the age of 3)	Upward divergence	Upward divergence	Downward convergence	Upward divergence
Participation of children AROP in ECEC for more than 1 hour (between the age of 3 and compulsory schooling age)	Upward convergence	Upward convergence	Downward divergence	Upward convergence
Share of households in AROP and with dependent children that have arrears on utility bills	Downward divergence	Upward convergence	Upward convergence	Upward convergence
Share of households in AROP and with dependent children that are unable to keep home adequately warm	Downward convergence	Upward convergence	Upward divergence	Upward convergence
Share of children who are AROPE and live in an overcrowded household	Upward convergence	Downward convergence	Downward convergence	Upward convergence
Share of children AROP and unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day	Downward divergence	Upward convergence	Upward convergence	Upward convergence

Source: Authors' calculations based on the results of the convergence analysis

Note: The table refers to two trends, increased performance, and reduction of disparities. The former refers to the European Union average. If the performance goes towards a policy target, we have an upward trend. The opposite would show a downward trend. The latter refers to the standard deviation. If the standard deviation grows for the period in question, we have divergence. If the standard deviation decreases, we have convergence.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS: EUROFOUND'S CONTRIBUTION GOING FORWARD

This concluding section provides some pointers regarding how monitoring the CG could be supported further in some of the areas mentioned in the previous chapters and refers to several activities carried out by Eurofound that can contribute.

The chapters above provide information aiming to facilitate the design, implementation, and evaluation of the CG national action plans. The two areas touched upon, refugees and the monitoring of trends, show some of the challenges associated with the monitoring and evaluation of the Child Guarantee. Both chapters show the extent to which crises pose challenges when it comes to assessing their impact and reacting promptly. In addition to this study, other research carried out by Eurofound shows how the impact of COVID-19 on health, income and education can be assessed by complementing statistical analyses of inequality with a systematic review of literature⁴⁵. Another Eurofound research project documents the ways in which the public sector has reacted to the pandemic (e.g. new service channels, more reliance on volunteer support, changes in the coverage of targets groups)⁴⁶.

As stated in the previous chapters, the fact that the Guarantee involves different types of services and service users makes its **monitoring and evaluation complex**. This is even more so the case with crises such as COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine, which have a sudden impact on the accessibility of services. In the case of the Youth Guarantee, detailed guidance was made available to all Member States and such guidance could be helpful now as well. Further research carried out in 2023 by Eurofound will explore further how trends in the Child Guarantee can be monitored.

The CG Recommendation also “welcomes the joint work to facilitate **mutual learning, share experiences, and exchange good practices**”. One aspect that could be considered is the exchange of good practices in data collection between decentralised Member States with devolved competencies. This mutual learning could also involve organisations at the EU/international level gathering data. The experience that Eurofound has had in organising these types of exchanges in the field of statistics on migration shows that exchanges between those producing data and stakeholders using these data help to better understand the needs and priorities and the latter, whilst at the same time clarifying what is feasible.⁴⁷ Similar exchanges could be useful to discuss the extent to which specific groups (and their access to services) can be measured in EU wide surveys. As documented in the first chapter, the data about Ukrainian children living in the EU is very limited at the moment.

Qualitative targets are also included in the several national action plans. To this end, a repository that makes it possible to track developments in the CG intervention areas would facilitate monitoring and promote mutual learning. An example of how this could look like is the Eurofound PolicyWatch, a policy tracker. Among other policy developments, this tracker has already been used to document and track

⁴⁵ Eurofound (forthcoming), *The impact of COVID-19 on multidimensional inequalities*, available at <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2023/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-multidimensional-inequalities>.

⁴⁶ Eurofound (forthcoming), *Social services in Europe: Adapting to a new reality*, available at <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2023/social-services-in-europe-adapting-to-a-new-reality>.

⁴⁷ See for example, a workshop about migration data organised by Eurofound at https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef1131en.pdf.

supports to Ukrainian families in the EU⁴⁸. Many of the supports identified are relevant for the Child Guarantee, as it is the case of food assistance, rental support, free healthcare, and access to education⁴⁹.

Staff is key in providing high-quality services and ensuring effective access. The CG preparatory actions, as well as other research, provide evidence on how working conditions such as training opportunities and adequate remuneration have an impact on the quality of services staff provides. The importance of **workforce-related data** is acknowledged in the Council Recommendation on the revision of the Barcelona targets on ECEC. This Recommendation asks Member States to develop or improve data collection on the working conditions of staff. Similarly, it is important that the work provided for in the CG Recommendation to enhance the availability, scope, and relevance of comparable data at the Union level also includes data about working conditions. Relevant data will be available from the 2021 European Working Conditions Survey in December 2022. The survey includes 70000 workers in 36 European countries and covers sectors relevant for the CG such as education and healthcare⁵⁰.

In the 2022 State of the Union Address, President von der Leyen spoke of “**a war on our energy [and] a war on our economy**” and described several measures addressing the increase in gas prices and to help households make ends meet. Each Member State is dealing with the energy crisis and the green transition with different measures⁵¹. EU-wide plans are being put forward to ensure that no country is left behind in the common struggle to access energy. Energy poverty is under the spotlight both regarding short-term and medium-term measures. The publication of the REPowerEU plan⁵² in May 2022 and the recent discussion on an energy price cap show a clear trend to make the EU energy market more resilient, while mitigating the social impacts of high prices and increasing awareness among the population of a more responsible energy use.

The indicators available at the EU level to monitor energy poverty stem from EU SILC. The analysis in the third chapter using EU SILC data clearly highlights how economic downturns heavily affect energy poverty, captured as arrears on utility bills. The effects are mostly observed in those Member States that have weak welfare systems and are heavily dependent on energy imports. Many countries that are struggling have inefficient distribution systems and poorly implemented grid lines, thus many people rely on gas and oil deliveries which in times of crisis are more expensive. On the opposite side, countries better positioned to fight energy shocks, and perhaps with more national resources such as natural gas, renewable energy, or nuclear power plants, witness less fluctuation. This is particularly important for low-income households with dependent children⁵³. They are more easily affected by spikes in prices and protecting them with ad-hoc policies would prevent long-term effects of poverty and would eventually allow children to exit intergenerational poverty.

⁴⁸ More information regarding the EU PolicyWatch can be found at <https://static.eurofound.europa.eu/covid19db/index.html>.

⁴⁹ Eurofound, 2022d, Policies to support refugees from Ukraine, available at https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/article/2022/policies-to-support-refugees-from-ukraine?pk_campaign=policywatch&pk_source=content.

⁵⁰ For a full methodology and questionnaire of the EWCTS 2021 please check <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/2021/european-working-conditions-telephone-survey-2021>.

⁵¹ European Commission, 2021a, *Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard: Clean Power*, Thematic Analysis available at https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/recovery-and-resilience-scoreboard/assets/thematic_analysis/1_Clean.pdf.

⁵² More information regarding the REPowerEU plan can be found at https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/repowereu-affordable-secure-and-sustainable-energy-europe_en.

⁵³ Eurofound and EEA (European Environmental Agency) (forthcoming), Exploring the socio-economic impact of a climate-neutral economy, Challenges and prospects in the EU series, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

As highlighted before, energy poverty is particularly salient since the start of the war in Ukraine. However, other factors are also at play. Both material and food poverty seem to be correlated with economic downturns, especially during the financial crisis.

The data collected from EU-SILC on a yearly basis (about energy poverty and other issues) can be complemented with information from **e-surveys**, so that developments arising from crises can be measured quickly. The Living and working in COVID-19 survey shows that in spring 2022, 16% of Europeans surveyed reported being in arrears on utility bills. Nearly three quarters of the households already reporting this also expressed concerns about their ability to pay their utility bills in the next three months⁵⁴. The survey also provides information about other areas of the Child Guarantees such as informal care duties in different households, which featured in the CG Recommendation Staff Working Document. The latest wave of this survey also provides information about **views on the war** in Ukraine and about the adequacy of the support provided to Ukrainians in Europe. Russian disinformation strategies have been identified at the EU level targeting public support. Therefore, data on changes in public opinion can help assess the extent to which these strategies put in jeopardy the sustainability of support to Ukrainians.

⁵⁴ Eurofound, 2022e, Energy poverty looms as cost of living increases: Data behind the difficulties, blog post available at: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/blog/energy-poverty-looms-as-cost-of-living-increases-data-behind-the-difficulties>.

REFERENCES

- Ayala, L., Bárcena-Martín, E., Cantó, O., and Navarro, C., 2022, *COVID-19 lockdown and housing deprivation across European countries*. *Social science & medicine*, 298, 114839, available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953622001459?via%3Dihub>.
- Bircan, T., Van Lancker, A., Nicaise, I. 2019. *Target Group Discussion Paper on Children with a Migrant Background (including Refugee Children)*, Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG), Brussels: European Commission.
- Council of the European Union, 2001, *Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof*, Official Journal of the European Union, L 212/12, 7 August.
- Council of the European Union, 2021, *Recommendation 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee*, Official Journal of the European Union L 223/14, 22 June.
- Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee (OJ L 223 22.06.2021, p. 14 <https://beta.op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1936f4dd-d2f3-11eb-ac72-01aa75ed71a1>.
- EPRS, 2021, *European Pillar of Social Rights. Gothenburg, Porto and beyond*, available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690591/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)690591_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690591/EPRS_BRI(2021)690591_EN.pdf).
- Euractiv, 2022, *Vulnerable Ukrainian children at risk of illegal adoption*, 26 April, available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/vulnerable-ukrainian-children-at-risk-of-illegal-adoption/>.
- Eurocities, 2022, *Interview with EU Commissioner Nicolas Schmit*, web page, available at: <https://eurocities.eu/latest/interview-with-eu-commissioner-nicolas-schmit-on-migration-refugees-and-helping-cities/>.
- Eurofound, 2020, *Upward convergence in the EU: Concepts, measurements and indicators*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
- Eurofound, 2021, *Monitoring convergence in the European Union: Looking backwards to move forward – Upward convergence through crises, Challenges and prospects in the EU series*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
- Eurofound, 2021a, *Education, healthcare and housing: How access changed for children and families in 2020*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
- Eurofound, 2022, *Eurofound survey reveals widespread support for Ukraine*, blog post 8 June, available at: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/blog/eurofound-survey-reveals-widespread-support-for-ukraine>.
- Eurofound, 2022a, *Food assistance for Ukrainian refugees*, Factsheet for measure PL-2022-9/2300, available at: https://static.eurofound.europa.eu/covid19db/cases/PL-2022-9_2300.html?utm_medium=datawrapper&utm_campaign=covid-19&utm_source=latestUkraineCases.

- Eurofound, 2022b, Benefits for people who help to house and feed refugees, Factsheet for measure PL-2022-9/2243, available at: https://static.eurofound.europa.eu/covid19db/cases/PL-2022-9_2243.html?utm_medium=datawrapper&utm_campaign=covid-19&utm_source=latestUkraineCases.
- Eurofound, 2022c, Limitation of the prices of basic food items, fact sheet Factsheet for measure HR-2022-37/2827, available at: https://static.eurofound.europa.eu/covid19db/cases/HR-2022-37_2827.html?utm_medium=datawrapper&utm_campaign=covid-19&utm_source=latestUkraineCases.
- Eurofound, 2022d, Policies to support refugees from Ukraine, blog post 5 July, available at: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/article/2022/policies-to-support-refugees-from-ukraine?pk_campaign=policywatch&pk_source=content.
- Eurofound, 2022e, Energy poverty looms as cost of living increases: Data behind the difficulties, blog post available at <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/blog/energy-poverty-looms-as-cost-of-living-increases-data-behind-the-difficulties>.
- Eurofound (forthcoming), *Social services in Europe: Adapting to a new reality, Challenges and prospects in the EU series*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg
- Eurofound (forthcoming), *The impact of COVID-19 on multidimensional inequalities, Challenges and prospects in the EU series*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
- Eurofound and EEA (European Environmental Agency) (forthcoming), *Exploring the socio-economic impact of a climate-neutral economy, Challenges and prospects in the EU series*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
- Eurofound and EIGE (European Institute for Gender Equality) (2021), *Upward convergence in gender equality: How close is the Union of equality?*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
- European Commission 2019, *Feasibility study for a Child Guarantee. Target Group Discussion Paper on Children with a Migrant Background* (including Refugee children).
- European Commission, 2020, Political guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024 ; Opening statement in the European Parliament plenary session 16 July 2019 ; Speech in the European Parliament plenary session 27 November 2019, Publications Office, available at <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2775/101756>.
- European Commission, 2021, *Early childhood education and care and the Covid-19 pandemic - Understanding and managing the impact of the crisis on the sector*, Publication Office of the European Union, available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c14645b2-24f8-11ec-bd8e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-233017740>.
- European Commission, 2021a, *Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard: Clean Power*, Thematic Analysis available at https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/recovery-and-resilience-scoreboard/assets/thematic_analysis/1_Clean.pdf.
- European Commission, 2022, €2.9 million to support needs of displaced Ukrainian children in EU schools, news article, 11 July, available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/62e534f4-62c1-11ea-b735-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

- European Parliament, 2022, *European Parliament resolution of 5 July 2022 towards a common European action on care* (2021/2253(INI)), available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0278_EN.pdf.
- ISSA, 2022, Joint Statement on Early Childhood Development and the Ukraine Crisis, available at: <https://www.issa.nl/sites/default/files/u327/Joint-Statement-on-Early-Childhood-Development-and-the-Ukraine-Crisis-ENG.pdf>.
- Johansson, Y., 2022, *Commissioner Johansson's speech to the Plenary on the impact of the war against Ukraine on women*, European Parliament, 5th of May, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/johansson/announcements/commissioner-johanssons-speech-plenary-impact-war-against-ukraine-women_en.
- Juncker, J. C., Tusk, D., Dijsselbloem, J., Draghi, M. and Schulz, M., 2015, *Completing Europe's Economic and Monetary Union*, European Commission, Brussels.
- Ministère de l'intérieur, 2021, *Ouvrir l'école aux parents pour la réussite des enfants » (OEPRE) est un dispositif complémentaire au CIR, au croisement des formations civique et linguistique*, 25th May, webpage, available at: <https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Integration-et-Acces-a-la-nationalite/Le-parcours-personnalise-d-integration-republicaine/Au-dela-du-contrat-d-integration-republicaine-CIR/Ouvrir-l-ecole-aux-parents-pour-la-reussite-des-enfants-OEPRE-est-un-dispositif-complementaire-au-CIR-au-croisement-des-formations-civique-et-linguistique>.
- Ministerio de Educación, 2022a, *El ministerio y las CCAA validan el Plan de Contingencia para la escolarización de los estudiantes ucranianos desplazados*, 30th March, webpage, available at: <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/prensa/actualidad/2022/03/20220330-sectorial.html>.
- Ministerio de Educación (2022b), *Auxiliares de conversación extranjeros en España*, webpage, available at: <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/servicios-al-ciudadano/catalogo/general/99/998188/ficha/998188-2022-ucrania.html>.
- Ministero del Lavoro, 2022, *Report mensile minori stranieri non accompagnati (msna) in italia dati al 30 giugno 2022*, available at: <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/focus-on/minori-stranieri/Documents/Rapporto-approfondimento-semestrale-MSNA-30-giugno-2022.pdf>.
- Molinuevo, D.; Nur, H. and Pozneanscaia, C., 2021, *Findings on Policy Integration and Coordination to Inform the European Child Guarantee*, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/reports/findings-policy-integration-and-coordination-inform-european-child-guarantee>
- Ridao-Cano, C. and Bodewig, C., 2018, *Growing united: Upgrading Europe's convergence machine*, World Bank Group, Washington, DC.
- Schmit, N., 2022, *Child Rights Strategy and the Child Guarantee: one year on*, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RiMc1U09Tk>.
- UNICEF, 2021a, *A deep dive into the European Child Guarantee in Lithuania Literature review*, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/18881/file/Lithuanian%20Deep%20Dive%20Literature%20Review.pdf>

- UNICEF, 2021b, *Basis for a European Child Guarantee Action Plan in Spain*, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/18841/file/Spanish%20Deep%20dive%20Policy%20Brief%20EN.pdf>.
- UNICEF, 2021c, *A deep-dive into the European Child Guarantee in Croatia. Literature Review*, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/croatia/media/9951/file/Literature%20Review%20-%20EU%20Child%20Guarantee%20in%20Croatia%20-%20ENG.pdf>.
- UNICEF, 2021d, *Initiatives to reduce poverty and social exclusion among children and recommendations for the implementation of the European Child Guarantee in Spain*, available at: https://www.unicef.org/eca/sites/unicef.org.eca/files/2021-11/Spanish%20Deep%20Dive%20Main%20report%20EN_0.pdf.
- UNICEF, 2022, *Un/Equal Childhood: Deep Dive in Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Bulgaria*, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/22121/file/Deep%20Dive%20Bulgaria%20-%20Main%20Report%20EN.pdf.pdf>.
- World Vision International, 2022, *Warm welcomes, Lurking tensions*.
- Zrinščak, S., 2019, *Feasibility study for a Child Guarantee - Country report Croatia*.

ANNEX 1: LIST OF INDICATORS

Table 2: List of indicators used for convergence analysis and Eurostat links

Indicator	Description	First available year	Last available year	Eurostat link
ILC_PEPS01	Percentage of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion	2003	2020	Statistics Eurostat (europa.eu)
TESSI120	Percentage of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion (monetary deprivation)	2010	2021	Statistics Eurostat (europa.eu)
TESSI082	Percentage of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion (material deprivation)	2009	2020	Statistics Eurostat (europa.eu)
ILC_CAINDFORMAL	Participation of children AROP in ECEC for more than 1 hour (below the age of 3)	2007	2021	Statistics Eurostat (europa.eu)
ILC_CAINDFORMAL	Participation of children AROP in ECEC for more than 1 hour (between the age of 3 and compulsory schooling age)	2007	2021	Statistics Eurostat (europa.eu)
ILC_MDES07	Share of households in AROP and with dependent children that have arrears on utility bills	2003	2021	Statistics Eurostat (europa.eu)
ILC_MDES01	Share of households in AROP and with dependent children that are unable to keep home adequately warm	2003	2021	Statistics Eurostat (europa.eu)
ILC_LVHO05A	Share of children who are AROPE and live in an overcrowded household	2003	2021	Statistics Eurostat (europa.eu)
ILC_MDES03	Share of children AROP and unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day	2007	2021	Statistics Eurostat (europa.eu)

Source: Authors' selection of indicators.

This study analyses the measures supporting refugees from Ukraine and elsewhere set out in the Child Guarantee National actions plans. It also supports the monitoring and evaluation of the Guarantee by looking at trends and dynamics among Member States in the areas of child poverty, early childhood education and care, housing, food and energy poverty.

This document was provided by the Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies at the request of the Committee Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL).

PE 734.004
IP/A/EMPL/2022-11

Print ISBN 978-92-846-9872-1 | doi: 10.2861/183208 | QA-09-22-605-EN-C
PDF ISBN 978-92-846-9871-4 | doi: 10.2861/665540 | QA-09-22-605-EN-N