Fighting Child Poverty

The Child Guarantee

**KEY FINDINGS**

Child poverty or social exclusion is high – around 21% of Europe’s children live in income poverty (60% of median income in a given country), 8.5% live in severe material deprivation and 9.3% in workless households. Some 2.5% live in all three conditions. Child poverty is a problem for all Member States though prevalence and intensity is highest in some of the Central Eastern European, Baltic and Mediterranean states.

Child poverty is multidimensional as issues of education, leisure, clothing, food, health and housing (among others) are involved along with income. Research confirms that poverty and deprivation in childhood has both short- and long-term effects causing an intergenerational cycle of disadvantage. Further it shows that well-designed cash transfers and tax benefits, employment of parents, early child education and care and family service are key to fight child poverty.

The EU is a leader in policies to combat child poverty as exemplified in the 2013 Council Recommendation Investing in Children which has a tri-partite strategy focusing on employment and adequate income, access to quality services and children’s participation. Nevertheless, research suggests that action at national level has been partial and slow and that child poverty has not been mainstreamed into the European Semester.

A European Child Guarantee as called for by the European Parliament in its Resolution of 24 November 2015 and confirmed in its Resolution on the ESF+ of 4 April 2019 is specific by virtue of its focus on the poorest children and also the emphasis on services. The Guarantee centres on free access for every child in poverty to quality early childhood care and education, education, health, decent housing and adequate nutrition.

Going forward the following key priorities are suggested: 1) Setting a results-oriented, child poverty target which integrates a focus on the poorest children (measured on a clear basis); 2) Integrating a specific concern with child poverty and the achievement of a target into the multi-annual financial framework; 3) Encouraging and enabling Member States to adopt national strategies around a Child Guarantee; 4) Working out the mode of delivery of the Child Guarantee and deciding whether particular areas of the five components of the Guarantee should be prioritised. It may be strategic to start with service areas where approaches for the poorest and most vulnerable children are better developed, such as early childhood education and care and education. These could be test cases for the Guarantee.
Introduction

This briefing note is in five parts, covering in turn existing evidence on the volume and nature of child poverty, knowledge on the consequences and effects of child poverty, the known effectiveness of the main social policy approaches to child poverty, assessment of the 2013 Recommendation on Investing in Children and the Child Guarantee, and suggested future priorities for the Guarantee.

What is the problem?

Being at risk of poverty or social exclusion is broadly defined by Eurostat composing three measures at household level: income poverty, material deprivation and exclusion through low insufficient engagement with employment:

EU poverty concepts - being at Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion (AROPE):

- **At risk of income poverty** = 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income. The median divides the observation two groups, above and below 50%.
- **Severe material deprivation** = the enforced inability of a household to pay for or afford at least four of nine items considered to be desirable or necessary to lead an adequate life.
- **Low work-intensity** = number of persons living in a household with less than 20% of the total labour potential (during the previous 12 months).

On this definition - known as AROPE – 23,694,000 of the Union’s children (0-17) are classified as AROPE on 2017 statistics. This translates into 24.9% of the Union’s children. Of these, the proportion experiencing each of the three types of poverty used in the EU definition varies considerably. Taking 2016 as an example, some 21% were at risk of income poverty; 8.5% lived in severe material deprivation; 9.3% lived in households with low work intensity (see Figure 1). Income poverty is therefore the largest problem.

Figure 1: Children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, 2016 (% of total child population aged 0-17, EU-28)

Poverty is complex and child poverty especially so. As AROPE is not a child-specific measure using data gathered at the household level and indicators oriented to adults, in 2018 a new child deprivation indicator was adopted, which uses child-focused indicators (at individual and household level), and is now integrated for monitoring purposes. Using evidence on the child-specific deprivation, it can be estimated that between 9% and 14% of children are in this situation. Note that the lower estimate here is based on the severe multiple deprivation measure in the AROPE and the higher is based on figures produced by Guio.
et al (2018) on the number of children aged between 0 and 14 experiencing an enforced lack of 5 or more child-specific deprivation items in 2014.

For a child living in poverty or social exclusion, the following may be an occurrence:

- not having enough to eat or for a healthy diet;
- not being able to afford new clothes or decent shoes;
- not having the equipment that other children take for granted in their country such as books and equipment for school or leisure equipment such as a bicycle or skateboard;
- living in poor or overcrowded housing; sharing rooms and living in a cramped space and in neighbourhoods which have limited chances to play outside;
- not being able to afford proper health care or high-quality child care or to go to a good school or to get help when needed;
- being unable to invite friends home and being socially isolated;
- having little to say in decisions that affect daily life.

**Policy Insight**

Child poverty is multidimensional – issues of education, health, leisure, clothing, food, health and housing (among others) are involved along with income.

There is wide cross-national variation in the prevalence of child poverty/deprivation. Taking child-specific indicators of deprivation as the focus, Table 1 shows that children in RO and BU are at greatest risk, with child deprivation rates of 70%. Other countries with elevated levels of risk are CY, EL, HU, LV and PT.

Table 1: Proportion of materially deprived children (children aged 1-14, child-specific measures, 2014 EU-28)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of poverty</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low (&lt; 10 %)</td>
<td>DK (4 %) FI (4 %) LU (9 %) NL (5 %) SE (4 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low to Middle (11-20 %)</td>
<td>AT (11 %) BE (16 %) CZ (15 %) DE (10 %) EE (17 %) FR (16 %) SI (11 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle to High (&gt; 21 - 30 %)</td>
<td>ES (27 %) HR (23 %), IE (26 %), IT (21 %) LI (30 %) MT (23 %) PO (26 %) SK (25 %) UK (23 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (&gt; 31 - 50 %)</td>
<td>CY (27 %) EL (44 %) HU (50 %) LV (41 %) PT (39 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very High (&gt; 50 %)</td>
<td>BU (69 %) RO (70 %)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: Guio et al (2018), Table Annex 1, p. 54

In contrast, children in the three Nordic countries as well as LU and NL have the lowest risk of child deprivation. The continental European countries – AU, BE, DE and FR - tend to have a moderate to low prevalence of child deprivation but there are still between 10% and 20% of children in this situation in these countries. Child poverty/deprivation is therefore an EU wide problem but also a source of inequality among Member States. The general pattern is for the Central Eastern European, Baltic and Mediterranean countries to have the greatest risk.
In terms of change over time (data not shown), the child AROPE rate fell between 2010 and 2017 (by 2.7 percentage points), mirroring a fall for the general population. A number of countries - notably BU, IE, LV, PL and RO - achieved substantial reductions in their child AROPE rates over the seven-year period. The great recession generally heightened child poverty rates, with children and young people some of the main victims of the crisis. As noted there has been some recovery, with Greece as a significant exception. High child poverty/deprivation rates endanger the Europe 2020 target of lifting 20 million people out of poverty or social exclusion by 2020.

Policy Insight

Child poverty is a problem for all Member States but it is higher in some of the least well-off and newer Member States.

Who are the children involved and what are the consequences?

There are four major, inter-related risk factors with low education having an overarching impact: non-working parents; parents with a relatively low education level; migration background; being from certain minority groups, such as Roma.

It is vital to note the significance of long-term consequences, of inherited poverty and of an inter-generational poverty cycle. Overall, evidence confirms an association between childhood poverty and child well-being in the present as well as their development and future life chances:

- Exposure to poor living conditions in early childhood materially affects brain development at school age (Luby et al 2013). In addition to lagging behind their economically-advantaged peers in academic achievement and educational attainment, low-income children are typically rated by their parents and teachers as having more behavioural problems than more affluent children.
- In terms of future outcomes, the hardship can be lifelong with children who are poor in childhood being substantially more likely to be poor in adulthood. Schurer et al (2019), in relation to the UK, find that adverse childhood experiences are strong predictors of economic outcomes at age 55, over and above the influence of standard early-life predictors including health at birth, parental education, occupation, income, and household overcrowding.

Mechanisms through which childhood adversity is considered to affect these outcomes include material hardship, family stress, parental and cognitive inputs and capacities, and the developmental context to which children are exposed. The timing, duration, and community context of poverty also appear to matter for children's outcomes—with early experiences of poverty, longer durations of poverty, and higher concentrations of poverty in the community leading to worse child outcomes. However, the positive effects of care giving and managing the effects of stressful life events can make a difference, giving a significant space for policy and other interventions (such as supportive family neighbours and friends). This raises especially the matter of early intervention.

Policy Insight

Research confirms that poverty and deprivation in childhood has both short- and long term effects implying the risk of an intergenerational poverty cycle.

Policy approaches: what works?

Social policy has developed three main approaches to combatting child poverty: cash transfers/tax benefits, parental employment and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and other services.
1. The anti-child poverty effect of cash transfers and tax benefits

The evidence suggests that: a) level of social spending matters (Chzhen 2017\(^{15}\)); b) level of family transfers matters (Thévenon et al 2018\(^{16}\)); and c) nations with universal benefits do better in lifting children out of deep or extreme poverty than those with targeted programmes alone in high-income nations (Cai and Smeeding 2018\(^{17}\)). Looking at 15 relatively high-income countries (mostly the EU Member States), Gornick and Nell (2017: 11) suggest that about 45% of child poverty reduction effected by taxes and transfers comes in the form of family-related income supports\(^{18}\).

Somewhat against the evidence above, the last 10 years have not generally been good for Europe’s children (Chzhen et al 2017\(^{19}\); Thévenon et al 2018\(^{20}\)). Austerity hit family benefits particularly hard, especially in the 2008-2012 period when 12 Member States made major cut-backs (mainly Central Eastern European and Mediterranean countries) (European Commission 2017\(^{21}\)). This has since been corrected for the Union as a whole and the latest evidence suggests both that expenditure on family transfers is growing again and indeed that some countries (EE, LI, LU, IT, PL and RO) are expanding their family income support policies and targeting support in particular towards larger families (EPIC 2019\(^{22}\); European Commission 2019\(^{23}\)). However, there is no evidence that concerns about children are driving these reforms. Cash transfers originally and still today are not especially oriented to child poverty - many income transfers frequently share no real clear and systematic association with changes in relative child poverty rates over time\(^{24}\).

2. The anti-child poverty effect of employment of parents

Analysing the OECD as a whole, Thévenon et al (2018) conclude that a substantial reduction in family poverty (of almost half) would be obtained if all parents from poor families were to be in paid employment\(^{25}\). However, an outcome such as this depends on the state and conditions of the labour market and its capacity to offer both employment per se and work with decent conditions. In recent years, in-work poverty has been increasing in the EU – in 2017 some 9.5% of all workers (20 million people) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion with lone parents and families with two or more children especially affected (Peña-Casas et al 2019\(^{26}\)). Looking at patterns over the last decade, there are two problems here. On the supply side, the labour market could not deliver enough jobs or enough jobs with decent wages and conditions (note the decreasing returns from employment – Théveneon et al 2018\(^{27}\)). But on the demand side, strong barriers to employment remain (lack of childcare, disincentives in the benefit and taxation system, skill mismatches or underdevelopment and too few bridges into employment).

3. The anti-child poverty effect of ECEC and family services

ECEC and family services are hugely important for child poverty – some suggest that these expenditures have a larger poverty reducing effect than cash transfers, mainly through the impact on maternal employment (Nygård et al 2019\(^{28}\)). There are several known mechanisms through which ECEC helps to reduce child poverty: reducing inequality of opportunities and therefore improving skills and knowledge for today’s children as well as their chances in later life; influencing children’s subsequent development more than education at any other stage of life; increasing mothers’ opportunities to be in employment (Heckman 2006\(^{29}\)).

However, it should be noted that not all children participate equally in ECEC. The latest evidence indicates that on average childcare use by the families in the lowest income quintile is 18.3% for children aged 3 or less, whereas average use by families in the top quintile is 42.5% (measured in full-time equivalents of 30 hours a week for every child enrolled)\(^{30}\).
Policy Insight

Child poverty is at the crossroads/intersection of a number of policy fields. Poor children are imperfectly targeted in both benefits and services. Supporting parents and their chances of decent employment is a vital element in the anti-child poverty package. ECEC services are vital elements of the child poverty package but they must be supplemented with other measures.

What Is the EU Approach?

The EU is becoming a world leader in policy on combating child poverty (Daly 2019). An integrated and child rights-based approach is the hallmark of the EU approach on child poverty.

The 2013 Council Recommendation on Investing in Children was a major step forward. The Child Guarantee, described below, is a second major development. These are set within the context of the EU legal framework (especially the Charter of Fundamental Rights as well as international conventions (such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)). Principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights states that ‘children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality’ and ‘children have the right to protection from poverty. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities’. The EU’s commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals is also relevant, especially Goal 1 which aims to halve the number of children, women and men in poverty by 2030.

The Council Recommendation 2013: Investing in Children

Adopted as part of the Social Investment Package, the Recommendation sets out a common European Framework for tackling child poverty and social exclusion and promoting child well-being. The Recommendation’s multi-dimensional strategy centres around three pillars (Table 2).

One of the hallmark features is its integrated approach. This can be seen from its first horizontal principle: ‘to tackle child poverty and social exclusion through integrated strategies that go beyond ensuring children’s material security and promote equal opportunities so that all children can realise their full potential.’ Hence, it includes both a universal and a targeted approach. Another of its horizontal principles is to support a balance between universal policies aimed at all children and targeted policies supporting poor and other disadvantaged children. Groups mentioned include Roma children, some migrant or ethnic minority children, children with special needs or disabilities, children in alternative care and street children, children of imprisoned parents, as well as children within households at particular risk of poverty, such as single parent or large families.

In terms of the policy package or content, the three-pillar approach shows that the Recommendation favours a comprehensive package that emphasises adequate resources (through employment as well as cash transfers) and also access to a range of quality and affordable services as well as participation for children. A rights-based approach is another of the horizontal principles. Philosophically, a children’s rights approach means emphasising children’s agency and personhood, their access to power/authority (and hence their right to be heard and to participate in decisions affecting them) as well as their material and immaterial circumstances (see European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2018 for a detailed exposition). This is the underlying philosophy in which children’s participation is one of the three pillars. A child-rights approach is strongly present also in specifying the child’s best interests as one of its horizontal principles.
Table 2: Council Recommendation 2013: Investing in Children - Key elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fields</th>
<th>Actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to adequate resources</td>
<td>Support parents’ employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide for adequate living standards through a combination of benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to affordable quality services</td>
<td>Invest in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improve education system’s impact on equal opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improve the responsiveness of health systems to address the needs of disadvantaged children</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide children with a safe, adequate housing and living environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enhance family support and quality of alternative care settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s right to participate</td>
<td>Support the participation of all children in play, recreation, sport and cultural activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Put in place mechanisms to promote children’s participation in decision-making that affects their lives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own compilation

How has the Council Recommendation 2013 progressed since 2013?

Progress in implementing the Recommendation has been slow (European Commission 2019), although it must be borne in mind that these are still early days. In a country-by-country assessment carried out in 2017 (Frazer and Marlier 2017), the following are to be noted:

- Nine Member States (BE, EE, FR, IE, MT, NL, PT, RO SK) have taken initiatives to strengthen their policies/approaches and programmes;
- Very limited progress has been made in most areas in those Member States with high or very high levels of child poverty or social exclusion (including BG, CY, EL, ES, HR, HU, IT, LT, LV, UK).

There are important exemplary anti-child poverty programmes underway in Member States, most notably BE, FR, IE and NL which have great potential (Frazer and Marlier 2017; EPIC 2019).

Policy Insight

The Recommendation on Investing in Children has provoked some action at Member State level but only a minority of Member States could be said to have a comprehensive strategy and significant numbers of countries with the highest child poverty rates have no strategy.

Questions have also been raised about the extent to which the goals of the Recommendation have been integrated into the European Semester. For example, in 2014 only seven CSRs specifically addressed child poverty; in 2015 it was two; in 2016 one; in 2017 zero; in 2018 five (European Parliament). This indicates lack of consistency or relative indifference.

In terms of support through EU funding streams and instruments, while there was some focus on lifting people out of poverty (in line with the target) in the 2014-2020 programming period, child poverty was not specifically mentioned in the thematic objectives of either the ERD or the ESF. Only FEAD directly addressed child poverty. In 2014-2020, Member States used FEAD to provide food, material assistance and social inclusion activities to children suffering from severe material deprivation (European Parliament). Almost 11 million children received food support in the period 2014-2016 (ibid). While interventions targeting disadvantaged children were funded in most welfare states by the ERDF and ESF (notably...
measures tackling early school leaving, investing in educational facilities and ECEC infrastructure and also alternative community-based care), such initiatives were not tied to a broader programme of child poverty reduction (ibid).

**Policy Insight**

The 2013 Recommendation on Investing in Children has not been mainstreamed into the European Semester and EU funds are not tied to a broader programme of child poverty reduction.

The Child Guarantee

The Guarantee was developed in an April 2015 European Parliament Resolution on reducing inequalities with a special focus on child poverty. It calls for both a better implementation of the Council Recommendation described above and for the establishment of an additional instrument. In the latter regard it calls on the Commission and on the Member States 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, as part of a European integrated plan to combat child poverty’. Further, it recommends ‘that all children have access to good quality services at this crucial stage in their development’. The proposal follows the model of the Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee (2013), a hugely innovative labour market policy to provide all young people under the age of 25 with a good quality offer of employment or continuing education within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

The European Parliament’s Child Guarantee continues the tradition of EU leadership, innovation and an integrated approach. It differs in key respects to the approach of the 2013 Recommendation (Table 3). The Guarantee has a more specific focus targeting the most vulnerable children, those with the most acute and urgent needs – resolution 8 for example stresses that universal solutions should be coupled with targeted measures to support the most vulnerable and marginalised groups of children and adolescents.

Table 3: Comparison of policy approach: Council Recommendation 2013 and Child guarantee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universal or targeted approach</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Targeted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy content</td>
<td>Resources (Employment of parents plus cash/tax transfers), Services (health, ECEC, education, housing, family support) Participation (see Table 2)</td>
<td>Services (healthcare, childcare, education, nutrition, housing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which children</td>
<td>All children suffering AROPE and other disadvantaged children</td>
<td>Focus on children in poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus parents / children</td>
<td>Parents and children</td>
<td>Children prioritised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-rights approach</td>
<td>Mainstreamed</td>
<td>Mainstreamed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own compilation
The social investment focus of the Recommendation, in contrast, means a much broader focus. The Guarantee also gives priority to services, aiming to establish a decent floor of services which children can access. In key respects, the spotlight is placed on intervening in the gap between the existence of a legal right and its realisation in practice. It turns the focus especially on implementation and the provision of services or other resources to realise a guarantee.

**How has the Guarantee progressed since 2015?**

In 2017 the European Parliament called on the Commission to implement a preparatory action on establishing a possible child guarantee scheme. For this purpose the Commission decided that a necessary first step would be to study the potential scope of the concept of a Child Guarantee by exploring the feasibility and analysing the conditions for the implementation of such a scheme. In commissioning the feasibility study, the Commission prioritised four groups of vulnerable children: children in precarious family situations (which includes children in economically fragile families, those in precarious household situations such as lone parent families, and children exposed to precariousness due to other risk factors such as being of Roma background); children residing in institutions; children of recent migrants and refugees; children with a disability and other children with special needs. These groups were singled out because it was thought that they may present the most urgent acute need. However the breadth should be noted and also the potentially loose connection to material poverty in some cases (for example, children residing in institutions). In addition, the groups vary from being very coherent and small in size (e.g., estimations of 455,000 of the number of children living in institutions compared to an inability to estimate the numbers in precarious family situations). A narrower focus is to be adopted in the second phase of the study which will look at the costs and benefits of a Child Guarantee for children at risk of poverty (which in 2016 comprised 21% of the Union’s children).

**Way forward**

With work on the Guarantee still at an early stage, there are three pressing issues:

1. **Integrating the Guarantee into related EU provisions and processes**

A strategic and rights-based approach already exists at EU level, articulated in many commitments, and is beginning to be adopted more widely by Member States. The evidence shows, however, that the fight against child poverty is not integrated widely in the European Semester (including the multi-annual financial framework).

There are different ways in which this can be advanced. Two potentially bring the greatest leverage: a specific target and integration of the Guarantee into the European Semester.

The first is the specification of an **EU wide, results-level child poverty target**. The Child Guarantee could be integrated into this target through a number of strategies. First, the subject of the target (or of a sub-target) could be the poorest children or those in extreme poverty. These could be identified in a number of ways. One would be based on the intensity of the poverty gap (which measures the extent to which incomes fall below the poverty threshold). A cut-off or threshold would need to be taken for this purpose. Another way of identifying those in the most extreme poverty situation is the children who suffer from all three of the AROPE dimensions as outlined earlier – these comprised 2.5% of all children in 2016. The target could have the aim of eliminating this.
Integrating a specific concern with child poverty and the achievement of a target into the multi-annual financial framework is also vital. In this regard there are promising first steps (on the basis of the proposed amendments contained in the draft text of the EP legislative Resolution of 4 April 2019 on the European Social Fund Plus to note).

These include:

- The allocation of an additional €5.9 billion to ESF+ for the purposes of implementing the Child Guarantee;
- the proposal that Member States should allocate at least 5% of their ESF+ resources under shared management to the Child Guarantee;
- the proposal that Member States should allocate at least 3% of their national resources of the ESF+ strand under shared management to combat the most extreme forms of poverty;
- the naming of children as a deprived group and the strategic insertion of the 2013 Recommendation in key places in the Framework.

It is vital that the above amendments are retained in the final version.

**Monitoring** will be vital as well as data development, including the refinement of the child-specific measures of deprivation that were adopted in 2018⁴¹.

2. Integrating the Guarantee at Member State level

To realise the Child Guarantee at Member State level, ways should be found to **encourage and enable Member States to adopt national strategies aiming at a Child Guarantee**. Obviously, a national target would be part of this and the designated ESF+ resources also. But in addition, the principles of the EP legislative Resolution could also be recommended at Member State level (e.g., a specific child poverty budget or budgetary allocation, the naming of children as a deprived group, the specification of goals in regard to children’s access to the five specified guarantees).

3. Deciding on the mechanisms that can deliver the Guarantee and the sequence

As mentioned, the Guarantee is a relatively novel instrument, especially so in its application to children. There is, therefore, much that needs to be examined and worked out in relation to the Guarantee as a policy response to child poverty. It has the merits of spotlighting provision in general but fundamental services and needs in particular. There are key questions that have to be raised about it in relation to the mode of delivery, the focus and the sequence.

There are **various choices** in regard to mode of delivery for example. To take some applied examples, to achieve adequate nutrition among the options are subsidised or free school meals, food-based strategies like food fortification, subsidies or vouchers for particular foods or distribution of food as in the FEAD as well as more immaterial elements like nutritional education (for both children and parents) (European Commission 2018⁴²). A similarly broad range of choices apply to the other four domains also (education, ECEC, health and housing). There is also the matter of how to conceive of a ‘free service’ (as envisaged for ECEC, education and health for example). In relation to healthcare for example, the possibilities include totally free services, some co-payments, free consultation but payment for drugs, free service through health insurance, free access to a number of services (European Commission 2018⁴³). More work is therefore needed on the modalities.
The Guarantee is not just a blanket provision about access, although there are issues about service volume. It especially envisages quality services and suitable environments and conditions for children that do not ghettoise vulnerable and poor children. Hence, the **inclusivity of provisions** is vital along issues of access. There exist a number of relevant initiatives to build on in this regard, especially in the field of ECEC and education. For example, the recent [Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems](https://www.euractiv.com/section/society/article/council-recommendation-on-high-quality-early-childhood-education-care-systems) lays out good investments in early childhood education and care as being inclusive, accessible, affordable and high quality. There are also developments to note in relation to education, and early school leaving in particular. It may be an idea to start with areas where EU-level recommendations and programmes for the integration of the poorest and most vulnerable children already exist – as in ECEC and education. These could be prioritised as test cases and as areas where protection and prevention dovetail closely.
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