



# The Impact of COVID-19 on children in Europe

A briefing by Save the Children



**Save the Children**

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**Cover photo:** *Save the Children Italy support vulnerable  
families in Brindisi, Italy.  
Photo: Visioni sas / Save the Children*



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Child poverty in Europe was already unacceptably high before the COVID-19 virus outbreak. In 2018, one in four children in the European Union (EU) were already growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The crisis has had devastating consequences for people across the continent and the evidence from this paper shows that children and their families have been further disadvantaged during the pandemic.

The financial pressure on families, the impact of the closure of services on children's lives, the online education inequality and the impact of the crisis on refugee and migrant children are among the key issues confronted by families and children across the continent.

Today, marks the first day of the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Save the Children members and country offices in pre-accession countries<sup>1</sup> call on the German Presidency, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the EU Member States to prioritise child poverty reduction across EU funding and policies in the coming months as part of the response to the pandemic.

The European Commission's proposal to allocate 5% of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) resources to child poverty reduction must be adopted in the negotiations of the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework and the Recovery Plan. The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance III (IPA III) should also allocate funding to support those in most vulnerable situations.

In addition, the upcoming Child Guarantee Council Recommendation should be adopted as soon as possible in order to support EU Member States to tackle child poverty within the EU.

National governments must also act to fulfil their obligation under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and to ensure that children's rights are protected throughout the pandemic and its aftermath.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first details the evidence from the ground, painting the picture of life for children during the pandemic in different European countries with statistics and examples, and giving a set of recommendations on measures that national governments across Europe can take to help protect children from the worst impacts of the crisis relating to the economic impacts on families, loss of services, access to education and targeted measures for children in migration.

The second part focuses on recommendations to the EU institutions on how EU policy and funding can support and complement these national-level actions in these challenging times.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the members of Save the Children Child Poverty Reference Group (CPRG) for their contribution to this report. Notably, Save the Children Italy, Save the Children Spain, Save the Children Sweden, Save the Children Romania, Save the Children Finland, Save the Children Netherlands, Save the Children Germany, Save the Children Norway, Save the Children Iceland and Save the Children Country offices in Kosovo, North Western Balkans and Albania.

# 1 Evidence from the ground: How COVID-19 has affected children and their families in Europe

The COVID-19 pandemic and the policy responses across Europe have had a particular impact on families. Most European countries imposed a period of lockdown in response to the rapid spread of the virus. This had a financial impact on workers across Europe, particularly in the services sector. The closure of services and move to the online provision of education has also increased the existing educational inequality as poorer families who lack adequate digital devices or appropriate study spaces are less able to study remotely. Children in migration have also been disproportionately affected by these factors given their existing vulnerabilities. In particular, migrant families living in reception and accommodation centres have found it difficult or impossible to socially distance in these crowded communal facilities.

## A. Increased financial pressure on families

Families with children have been particularly affected by the economic impact of the necessary measures taken to slow the spread of the virus. Families who were already struggling financially are now placed under greater pressure by the crisis. Many parents have lost employment temporarily or permanently or have had their hours cut.

Sweden	<b>There are around 200 000 children who live in families at risk of poverty and an estimated of 15,000 children who do not have a permanent place to call home.</b> The economic consequences of increased unemployment have exacerbated the situation for these children, as parents with low incomes and unstable working conditions are often the first to be made redundant. This number is expected to rise in coming months where parents are being laid off as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Spain	<b>Spain already before the crisis had the second highest rate of child poverty in the EU (26,8%), with 2.1 million children growing up in poverty.</b> The economic crisis which has resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic has seen livelihoods and family incomes fall as a result of job losses and salary cuts. <b>Save the Children Spain conducted a survey on the social and economic implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and found that 25% of vulnerable families had lost their employment permanently since the start of the crisis<sup>2</sup>.</b> In addition, 60% of the families supported through the programme A Tu Lado (On Your Side) reported that they had seen their job status affected by the crisis.



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In the Netherlands, 90.1% of the anti-poverty organisations expect an increase in demand for assistance in the coming months

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Refugees arriving in Lesbos, Greece, tell their story: "My name is Nadir\* and I am 11 years old. I am travelling with my two sisters and my parents from Afghanistan. © Pedro Armestre/ Save the Children

Finland	<p>There were approximately <b>112,000 children living in poor/low-income households before the COVID-19 pandemic</b>. A number of challenges were highlighted in Save the Children Finland's annual <i>Children's Voice</i> survey<sup>3</sup>, which collected children's experiences during the exceptional circumstances in Finland. Children were asked to assess their family's financial situation and 57% of children from low-income families were worried about their family's livelihood. 47% of these respondents felt that they or their family needed financial help in everyday life. Many migrant and refugee families are facing the most severe effects of the pandemic. In many of these families there is only one person earning an income and in the most common labour markets for migrant workers such as restaurants, there have been many layoffs.</p>
Romania	<p>The risk of poverty or social exclusion among children is expected to rise. <b>Between March and May 2020, more than 1 million employment contracts were suspended (595,672) or terminated (429, 585)</b>. Save the Children Romania analysis on vulnerable families indicated that 66% of the respondents reported that at least one member of the household was affected professionally. 27% stated that they can no longer find occasional employment opportunities and 17% have had their employment contract temporarily suspended. We have learnt from the previous crisis that children have an increased level of vulnerability. For example, between 2010 and 2012, the risk of poverty or social exclusion among Romanian children increased by 4.5 percent (from 48.1% in 2010 to 52.5% in 2012), five times higher than among the Romanian adults (from 40.1% in 2010 to 40.9% in 2012). We should not repeat mistakes from the past but should learn from them and ensure that children are protected.</p>
The Netherlands	<p>The measures taken to address the COVID-19 crisis have had a major impact on the incomes of Dutch people. According to the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP), there is an increase in unemployment and bankruptcy, and single parent families and migrant families are particularly vulnerable . In addition, a Nibud<sup>5</sup> poll showed that <b>only in March 2020 nearly 20% of Dutch adults experienced a decline in income</b>. A research conducted by Armoedefonds shows that 90.1% of the anti-poverty organisations expect <b>an increase in demand for assistance in the coming months, and not all organisations have the financial capacity to assist</b><sup>6</sup>. The Dutch government has implemented financial emergency measures to minimize the economic impact on employers and the self-employed but this approach lacks a specific focus on the consequences for children. For example, there has been no calculation of how many of the nearly 1.9 million households with children have been financially affected by the crisis<sup>7</sup>.</p>



The images show some of the activities carried out by Save the Children and by the partner Coop. SS Pietro e Paolo in Brindisi.  
© Visioni sas Save the Children

## Italy

Due to the crisis, pre-existing poverty has increased, and families have suddenly found themselves in economic difficulty. **It is estimated that an additional 1 million children are at risk of falling into absolute poverty**, adding to the pre-existing 1.2 million children who were living in absolute poverty before the onset of the virus. This would raise the percentage of children living in absolute poverty from the 12% to 20%.

**1.2 million children** living in absolute poverty before COVID-19 in Italy



## Bosnia and Herzegovina

Unemployment is at 37%, 17% of people live below the national poverty line with another 27% at risk falling into poverty. Since the lockdown was imposed, around 30,000 workers lost their job in Bosnia and Herzegovina. **It is foreseen by the end of the year that the rise in number of unemployed will increase to 96,767.**

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**In Kosovo, more than half of people falling into poverty do not benefit from any current social programme**

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Kosovo	<p>Kosovo has one of the highest poverty levels in South Eastern Europe, with a 20.7% child poverty rate. The impacts of COVID-19 on poverty are likely to be substantial, as economic activity in Kosovo has been brought to a standstill and remittances plummeted<sup>8</sup>. A significant number of people are likely to lose their jobs, especially those on fixed-term contracts, seasonal workers, and those working in the informal economy. Kosovo has a large construction sector, which is particularly sensitive because it is an important source of income for the urban poor and vulnerable. <b>Indeed, projections suggest that 57,000–148,000 people could fall into poverty, while the middle class could shrink by as many as 100,000 people.</b> This is equivalent to the poverty rate going up by 4–10 percent. <b>Although social assistance is an important source of income for the (amounting to 15% 2017) and will to some extent protect the poorest from the crisis, more than half of people falling into poverty do not currently benefit from any social programme. It will be necessary to expand the coverage and possibly the generosity of the cash transfer programme to ease the effects of the collapse in incomes.</b></p>
Albania	<p><b>Real GDP growth is expected to decline by 5% in Albania in 2020 from the estimated 2.2% growth in 2019<sup>9</sup>.</b> Unemployment rates (12.3% in 2018) are expected to rise again and poor labour market conditions might be exacerbated, given that a notable share of the workforce lives abroad (around 30% of the population)<sup>10</sup>.</p>

## Recommendations to national governments:

- Invest in data collection on vulnerable groups of children so that it becomes clear which children need extra help. Data should be collected in line with GDPR.
- Provide clear, child friendly information to children and young people about the virus, and about its impact on their lives.
- Provide emergency financial support and material provision to families experiencing increased financial difficulty during the crisis and improve the adequacy and coverage of family benefit systems for children in poverty.
- Ensure that the best interests of the child are considered in any debt proceedings arising from the crisis.
- Direct unspent European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund, Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (as per Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative and Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative +) as well as unspent Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance II<sup>11</sup> to strengthen social and child protection systems to respond to the needs of those already in poverty and those affected by the COVID19 crisis.
- Ensure that the SURE Programme supports access to employment for the whole population with an increased attention to the most vulnerable.
- Direct the REACT-EU to those in vulnerable situations, ensuring that parents are supported to take good care of their children.

## B. The impact of the closure of services on children's lives

The closure of services during the pandemic has had a significant impact on the lives of children. A number of services usually provided through schools have been halted during the period of school closures. Many families have reduced access to healthcare as primary care centres are prioritising the COVID-19 response and have reduced the provision of other services.

“In Romania, 23% of vulnerable families were unable to purchase medicines for their children”

Romania	Due to the virus transmission among patients and medical personnel all public hospitals reduced scheduled admissions by 50-80% and numerous public hospitals were closed, including emergency rooms and maternity wards. <b>There are also limitations in accessing to primary health care since many family doctors do not have access to personal protective equipment and are forced to severely decrease the number of consultations. 23% of vulnerable families were unable to purchase medicines for their children and 15% mention that they did not have access to a physician during the confinement period<sup>12</sup>.</b>
Germany	Support networks and social services have been reduced due to fears of spreading the COVID-19 virus. The gap in services becomes more pronounced for the group of children in most vulnerable situations when schools and kindergartens are closed. For example, <b>child welfare or abuse cases would be reported to the kindergartens and schools but as they are closed more cases are expected to go undetected and unaddressed.</b> The number of reports to social services has also decreased in Sweden as a result of the limited availability of school health services during the school closures.
Albania	It is one of the poorest countries in Europe and over 20% of children live in absolute poverty, 49.6% of families with more than four children are poor, and 22% of children 0-4 years old live in poverty. Children are at risk of multiple deprivations and perhaps, of exploitation, due to the limited access to social protection structures as well as the increased economic pressure on the families. During the lockdown concerns arise for children and women being at high risk of domestic violence. <b>Domestic violence against women and children continues to be widespread in families and communities throughout Albania, with most of the incidents, including those involving violence against children, unreported.</b>
Norway	The capacity of services to support and assist children and young people, especially in healthcare, school health service and youth healthcare, continues to be significantly lower than before the pandemic. This is mainly because health care staff are re-deployed and are not in schools to accommodate children and young people who need support. Save the Children Norway is concerned about the reduced capacity of many social service offices, and that many of the offices are still closed for physical visits. <b>Leisure activities for children and young people also closed during the crisis, and Save the Children Norway is worried that many children will quit and that the costs to participate will rise.</b> Surveys also show that many municipalities will not carry out planned activities for children during the summer break. Several organisers and municipalities attest that they need more money to be able to carry out activities, as well as increased information and guidance.

“ In the Netherlands, Children with mental health problems have not received their psychiatric treatment due to the COVID-19 measures ”

The Netherlands	<p>The confinement period has had a major influence on the social life of children and young people. It can be difficult to remotely maintain or build your social circle of friends and this can lead to more negative feelings. This is even more true for young people who are already feeling lonely, having trouble making social contacts, or young people with mental problems<sup>13</sup>. In addition, psychiatric treatments have not always been continued, which has negative effects on the wellbeing of vulnerable children. <b>Children and young people with mental health problems have reported that their psychiatric treatment has been stopped due to the COVID-19 measures in a questionnaire to the Ombudsman for Children. As they are still in need of their treatment, this lack of support lowers their mental wellbeing.</b></p>
Finland	<p>The Children's Voice survey found that 43% of respondents with a low income assessed their mental well-being as low. Children from low-income families also reported considerably fewer important social networks than other respondents, and they felt that they need more support for their well-being. While non-acute health care is restricted and children feel lonely, stressed and anxious, difficulties with mental well-being are likely to escalate in upcoming months. <b>Save the Children Finland runs a Hotline Nettivihje to receive notices of child sexual abuse material and grooming. According to the Hotline statistics, twice the amount of notices of child sexual abuse and grooming (500) in April 2020 were received in comparison to the usual monthly average.</b></p>





*A child holds sweets and juice distributed by volunteers upon arrival to the island of Lesbos.*

© Pedro Armestre / Save the Children

## Recommendations to national governments:

- Develop strategies on how to provide social services remotely or to reinstate them safely as soon as possible while respecting social distancing.
- Secure sufficient livelihood and social security for families. Extended exceptional circumstances cause strain especially for families with low or sudden stopped income, and with parents in most vulnerable situations.
- Ensure that there are sufficient services for children and families in municipalities and that they are flexibly available and take into account families' different needs.
- Ensure that schools' student welfare services and mental health services targeted to children and youth are sufficient and easy to reach.
- Ensure that civil society organisations are meaningfully consulted in the design of the programmes for the next funding period and on the re-allocation of unused funding from the 2014-2020 EU funding period.
- As per enabling condition 4.3 of the Common Provisions Regulation, ensure that civil society organisations participate in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the national strategies on poverty reduction and social inclusion.
- Deliver capacity building to civil society organisations on accessing EU funding. As service providers to the most vulnerable, CSOs should be supported to access EU funding to continue running their much-needed services.

## C. The impact on children of school closure and online education inequality

The closure of schools has meant that children have had their education interrupted, and not all children have an equal ability to participate in online education. Many poor families do not have proper internet access or digital devices such as laptops or computers. The level of digital literacy varies greatly across families and not all parents are equally able to support their children with remote education. The closure of schools has also had an additional impact on poorer children who had been receiving meals at school and now find themselves without this supply of daily nutrition.



**In Spain, while 11.1% of children are normally provided with schools meals, only 5.7% of children have been reached by the emergency food measures during the crisis**



<b>Spain</b>	As well as in most European countries, the COVID-19 crisis has caused the increase in the educational gap between poor and rich children. This is due to a number of factors including the lack of technological equipment, the lack of support provided to children from their schools as well as the parents' capacity to support children in following the online education. <b>For example, in Spain, approximately 5-9% of schoolchildren have no access to a device and this rises to 20% amongst the lowest-income quintile<sup>14</sup>.</b>
<b>Finland</b>	As in Spain, in <b>Finland 18% of children from low-income families reported that they lacked required equipment, such as computers. Twice as many (15%) of children from poorer families reported a disruption to their studies from online education compared to wealthier children (8%)<sup>15</sup>.</b>
<b>Romania</b>	While the Ministry of Education estimates that 250,000 pupils don't have access to internet and technology and therefore could not benefit of online education, an independent assessment (Romanian Institute of Evaluation and Strategy – IRES) points to a <b>much more severe situation with 900,000 students not having individual access to a proper device for online education.</b>
<b>Albania</b>	<b>Children in Albania are in a particular vulnerable situation</b> since they experienced the 2nd school closure in this academic year, as schools were also closed after the earthquake that hit the county in November 2019. <b>The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has recently declared that around 10,000 children in Albania have missed education.</b>

Save the Children members and country offices in the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Kosovo and North Western Balkans also report a lack of equipment which prevents children from accessing online education. In addition, there is a variance in the degree of involvement and capacity of parents to guide and support their children's remote education. For example, some parents do not speak the language of the country they reside in, are not sufficiently digitally-aware, have difficulty understanding the material, or have a difficult home situation<sup>16</sup>.

In **Iceland**, parents' employment had also an impact on children's education. For example, parents in jobs that do not require education and with less salary had less opportunity to stay at home for work. **64% of workers earning a high salary have the option of working from home during the pandemic, compared to only 12% of low paid workers.** 42% of women have had to stay at home due to reduced school hours compared to 30% of men.



Transporting and distributing educational supplies to children out of school during the coronavirus pandemic in Italy.  
© Francesco Alesi / Save the Children

The school closures have also increased the level of food insecurity for poor families as school meals are no longer provided to children. **For example, in Spain, while 11.1% of children are normally provided with school meals, only 5.7% of children have been reached by the emergency food measures during the crisis.** The same situation is also reported by Save the Children members and country offices in Germany, Finland, Bosnia- Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo, as many children in these countries were depending on a daily nutritious meal supplied from their schools.

### Recommendations to national governments:

- Provide disadvantaged schools and pupils with catch-up programmes and extra resources to support those who have fallen behind while out of school and reduce the learning gap. Educational and recreational opportunities should be offered during the summer to compensate for the lost time in school.
- Support poorer families to participate equally in online education through the provision of digital devices such as laptops and secure WIFI connection.
- Support schools in providing social-emotional support and guidance for students as well as their parents.
- Provide free school meals for all children in poverty, including during the summer period. Unspent FEAD should be directed to families in need of daily meals and for nutrition support.

## D. The impact on migrant and refugee children & their families

Migrant families have been especially impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Migrant workers are disproportionately employed in the services sector which has seen the largest increase in unemployment and temporary layoffs. Families living in crowded accommodation have been impacted as they find it hard or impossible to socially distance from other people to protect themselves from the virus. This is particularly pronounced for migrant and refugee families, especially those who live in reception or accommodation centres.

Save the Children members and country offices in **Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, Germany, Spain and in North Western Balkans**<sup>17</sup> report that overcrowded accommodation in reception centres, poses an increased risk for residents as they are more likely to be infected by the COVID-19. Residents are not always well informed or do not understand the protection measures. **In addition, many families share facilities such as the kitchen and bathroom, and WIFI often only works in the common areas, which means that many people still gather there.**

**In Germany, one reception centre tested the residents and found that 280 out of 560 inhabitants were infected by COVID-19.** At the same time, social workers in Berlin have reported that some adolescent refugees and their families **were afraid to talk about the virus** as they feared that they might be deported if they tested positive.

**Children who arrive during this crisis to seek asylum in the Netherlands are received at an emergency reception centre which does not meet the requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**<sup>18</sup>. The Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP) concludes that asylum seekers who are currently in reception form one particular vulnerable group. Among other things, they run behind in participation options, mental health and quality of life<sup>19</sup>.

**Undocumented children and families in migration are among the most vulnerable groups** as many already have underlying medical conditions exposing them to a heightened risk of getting infected with the virus, and many fear seeking medical attention due to their migration status.

“Residents in reception centres across Europe are more likely to be infected by the COVID-19, as they live in overcrowded facilities, they are not always well informed or do not understand the protection measures”

In Finland and Spain undocumented migrant families are in especially vulnerable situation as medical care for undocumented people is not provided free of charge and undocumented migrants fear being returned to their country of origin if they access healthcare.

Other vulnerable groups include people with temporary residence permits which are dependent on the person's ability to attain or retain a job. **This is more difficult as COVID-19 has had vast consequences on the labour market. In Sweden this includes a group of around 7,400 migrants that have recently turned 18, and whose residence permissions are dependent on completing their studies and securing employment contracts of up to at least two years.**

**The North West Balkans have been particularly affected by the ongoing migrant and refugee influx, as over 17,000 migrants and refugees are accommodated in transit centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia** at any given time (currently close to 9,000 in Serbia and close to 8,000 in B&H). There is a serious threat of a rise in COVID-19 transmission given the conditions and the lack of coordinated services within already overcrowded reception centres. The social protection systems of both countries are already weak and within the centres there is a lack of coordinated services.

**Prolonged stay in reception centres and uncertain prospects for the future and fears of the COVID-19 pandemic have had a deteriorating effect on refugees and migrants' mental health, and on children's development.**



## Recommendations to national governments:

- Provide clear, child friendly information to children and young people about the virus, the measures taken to keep them safe, and the impact of COVID-19 on their lives.
- Ensure that social distancing is possible in reception and accommodation centres in order to prevent mass transmission of the virus and protect migrant and refugee families.
- Identify specific challenges for migrant and refugee families and adapt policies to ensure that these families can access education and healthcare. Ensure that all migrant children can access all social services including healthcare and education regardless of their residence status.
- Ensure that the Youth Guarantee can assist migrant adolescents who are approaching adulthood.
- Use the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the ESF and ERDF to improve reception and accommodation facilities as well as to develop family and community-based services/accommodation for unaccompanied and children with their families



Save the Children Italy support vulnerable families in Brindisi, Italy.  
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## 2 Recommendations towards the EU institutions

The COVID-19 pandemic and the socio-economic consequences across Europe show the importance of prioritising policies and investments that aim to reduce poverty and child poverty across Europe and to foster social inclusion.

### 2.1. Adopt an ambitious EU budget that will support EU Member States and pre-accession countries in strengthening social and child protection systems.

Save the Children welcomes the European Commission's updated MFF proposal and the Recovery Package for the Next Generation, which will play a significant role in supporting EU Member States and pre-accession countries.

Save the Children also welcomes the updated proposal for the European Social Fund+ (ESF+) that requires EU Member States to allocate 5%<sup>20</sup> of their ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty. This earmarking shows the European Commission's commitment to eliminate child poverty across the EU. The European Commission should ensure the strategic spending of this funding and to guarantee that is not spent in ad-hoc activities. This can be realised through the Council Recommendation on the Child Guarantee that will be used to guide EU Member States in spending EU funds in a strategic and sustainable way.

In addition, the proposed REACT EU programme<sup>21</sup> as well as the redirected unspent ESF, ERDF<sup>22</sup> and IPA II have the potential to support EU Member States and pre-accession countries in dealing with the socio-economic impacts of the crisis. Save the Children welcomes these investments and recommends that these financial resources are used to support children and families affected by the crisis and to support the strengthening social services at community level.

The coming months will be decisive as to how the EU champions the rights of children in most vulnerable situations and how the EU's next generation will be supported to fulfil its potential.

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The coming months will be decisive as to how the EU champions the rights of children in most vulnerable situations

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Therefore, Save the Children calls on the EU institutions to:

- Agree to earmark 5% of the ESF+ to tackle child poverty as proposed by the European Commission and European Parliament.
- Increase ESF+ earmarking for social inclusion from 25% to 27%, as per the European Parliament's proposal.
- Agree on the European Parliament's<sup>24</sup> and Council's<sup>25</sup> proposal for a strengthened IPA III regulation that will incorporate the principle of partnership and that will strengthen child protection measures.
- Agree on the Recovery Fund to ensure additional resources for social spending to guarantee that at-risk groups are not left behind in the aftermath of the pandemic.
- Agree on the proposed REACT – EU initiative which is foreseen as a top-up of the current cohesion policy programmes between now and 2022. This initiative can support EU Member States in responding to the socio-economic impacts of the crisis.
- Work with EU Member States to ensure that redirected funds from the ESF, ERDF, FEAD and IPA II are also spent on providing support to families at risk of poverty.

## 2.2. Adopt EU policies that will guide EU Member States investments and policy making

There are three policies in particular that the EU should focus on in the next 12 months to support the COVID-19 recovery linked to a longer-term strategy of protecting children at risk of poverty and exclusion: a Europe 2030 strategy; the new Child Rights Strategy and the new Council Recommendation on the Child Guarantee. We explain each in turn below.

### a) Adopt a Europe 2030 Strategy that will set an ambitious target to tackle poverty and child poverty in the EU and beyond

The Europe 2020 Strategy was adopted in 2010 as a response to the 2008-2009 financial crisis. The EU and the wider world are now facing an even more severe crisis that affects people in multiple levels. The Europe 2020 Strategy comes an end this year and the European Commission has not yet proposed a post-2020 Strategy despite requests from the European Parliament<sup>25</sup> and the Council of the EU<sup>26</sup>.

Relative and extreme poverty including child poverty have already increased and projections show that the situation will only worsen. The European Commission Forecast<sup>27</sup> data confirms this prediction as it foresees that unemployment in the EU will increase, radically pushing more people into poverty, including children.

The EU needs to show its leadership in its response to this crisis and adopt a Europe 2030 Strategy that will be aligned with the UN 2030 Agenda and the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Europe 2030 Strategy should focus on implementing the SDG1 target<sup>28</sup> and aim to end extreme poverty in the EU by 2030 and halve the number of people at risk of poverty. This would mean that out of the (current) 110 million people at risk of poverty and social exclusion, 55 million would be supported to exit poverty, approximately 10 million of whom would be children.

### b) Adopt a comprehensive Child Rights Strategy that will have child poverty reduction in its core and that will apply in both EU Member States and in external action

The proposed Child Rights Strategy is expected to respond to children's most urgent needs. Child poverty is already high, and it will continue to increase due to the devastating consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. Therefore, the Child Rights Strategy should have a specific component on tackling child poverty inside and outside the EU.

The Child Rights Strategy<sup>29</sup> should incorporate different policies (the Europe 2030 Strategy, the European Child Guarantee, the Work Life Balance Directive, the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy) and EU financial resources (ESF+, ERDF, IPA III, NDICI) to tackle child poverty and should monitor their implementation against the target of ending extreme poverty and halving relative poverty in the EU and externally by 2030.

### c) Adopt a Child Guarantee Council Recommendation that will take a comprehensive approach in tackling child poverty

The European Commission has responded to the European Parliament's call for a European Child Guarantee that will help EU Member States to tackle child poverty. The European Commission has incorporated in its updated proposal for the ESF+ an earmarking for child poverty reduction and will launch its proposal for the Child Guarantee in 2021.

**“ We are calling the European Commission to launch as soon as possible its proposal for a European Child Guarantee Council Recommendation and the Council to adopt it by the beginning of 2021 ”**



Save the Children welcomes the EC's prioritisation on tackling child poverty in the form of the Child Guarantee and calls on the EU institutions to:

- **Adopt a Child Guarantee Council Recommendation by beginning of 2021.**  
The 2021-2027 EU budget is expected to be adopted by the end of 2020 and to enter into force in 2021. EU Member States are currently designing their programmes to deliver EU financial resources during the next EU funding period. We are calling the European Commission to launch by the end of 2020 its proposal for a European Child Guarantee Council Recommendation and the Council of the EU to adopt the proposal by the beginning of 2021. The Child Guarantee Council Recommendation will guide EU Member States in strategic money spending that will trigger national reforms.
- **Ensure that the Child Guarantee Council Recommendation takes a comprehensive approach in tackling child poverty**  
Evidence shows that child poverty is multidimensional, and that one size does not fit all. Child poverty can be caused by a range of factors including parental unemployment or low paid employment, lack of social welfare support, or limited or no access to universal and targeted services. The 2013 Recommendation on Investing in Children acknowledged these issues and called on EU Member States to develop child poverty reduction strategies which addressed parents' access to resources, children's access to services and children's right to participate in cultural activities and decision making.  
The Child Guarantee Council Recommendation should also follow this approach and call on EU Member States to develop Child Guarantee implementation plans that will follow the 3 pillars of the 2013 Recommendation on Investing in Children . The Child Guarantee Council Recommendation should have a strong monitoring framework and should feed into the European Semester process and in the **fulfilment of the target to end extreme poverty and relative poverty by 2030.**

## Notes

1 Sweden, Finland, Norway, Romania, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Germany, Iceland, Albania, Kosovo, and the North West Balkans (Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina)

2 Save the Children Spain (2020) The Economic and Social Crisis of the Coronavirus. Spanish language version: PDF

3 The survey was carried out by Save the Children Finland in April 2020 and it gathered 3,129 respondents between ages of 13 and 17. An English-language version can be found here: PDF

4 SCP (2020), Zicht op de samenleving in coronatijd, Den Haag.

5 Nibud, Coronacrisis: Financiële gevolgen voor huishoudens, 3 april 2020, PDF

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