

ESN Response to the

Child Guarantee Consultation



How a Child Guarantee should care for the most vulnerable children



The European Social Network (ESN) is a European platform with 140 members present in 36 countries. Our members represent public social service authorities at national, regional, and local levels. As such ESN has the mandate to represent the perspective of our membership in EU processes and strategies.

ESN has engaged in the different processes to improve the protection and rights of children in Europe for more than 15 years. This has included the publication of a report of justice and care for asylum-seeking children¹, seminars on child poverty, children's services and support for migrant and unaccompanied children², active participation in the European Expert Group on Deinstitutionalisation, consultations on the Investing in Children Recommendation³ and several meetings⁴ and publications on the role of children's services in promoting children's inclusion⁵.

ESN welcomes the commitment and progress of the European Commission towards the development of a **European Child Guarantee**. ESN is in favour of the European Commission's intent to launch the Child Guarantee in the form of a Council Recommendation that should be accompanied by a roadmap for implementation and a specific monitoring framework.

ESN proposal for a European-wide initiative supporting and bringing together EU initiatives supporting different population groups:

1. Promoting Inclusion for Unaccompanied Young Asylum Seekers and Immigrants – A Duty of Justice and Care (2005) http://www.esn-eu.org/sites/default/files/publications/2005_Promoting_Inclusion_for_Unaccompanied_Minor_AsylumSeeking_Children_and_Immigrants_EN.pdf

2. European Social Network Seminar (2011) – http://www.esn-eu.org/sites/default/files/publications/2011_Developing_Community_Care_Exec_Summary_EN.pdf

European Social Network Seminar (2017) - <http://www.esn-eu.org/news/effective-pathways-integration-migrant-children-and-young-people>

3. Investing in Children – ESN Analysis of the European Recommendation - http://www.esn-eu.org/sites/default/files/publications/Analysis_Children_Recommendation.pdf

4. http://www.esn-eu.org/sites/default/files/publications/2010_Breaking_the_cycle_of_deprivation_EN.pdf

5. <http://www.esn-eu.org/investing-children-services-improving-outcomes>

*Provide support to different vulnerable population groups as suggested by ESN ahead of the adoption of the European Pillar of Social Rights. A **Care Guarantee** would complement other European initiatives like the Recommendation on Investing in Children, the Youth Guarantee, initiatives on long-term care and the European Disability Strategy⁶.*

ESN Publication on European Semester 2020

⁶ http://www.esn-eu.org/sites/default/files/publications/European_Semester2019_interactive_low.pdf





1. Perspective of public social service authorities

In the preparation of this consultation, ESN reached out and consulted with its members from across Europe. The primary success factors for implementation of a Child Guarantee at national level, as highlighted by our members, will be first the need to prioritise **care** for children in situations of vulnerability, for instance through the implementation of **National Child Care Plans**. A second success factor is the consultation and inclusion of regional and local authorities with responsibility for child protection, and children themselves. This is so because most programmes related to care and support for children are the responsibility of children's services in regional and local authorities.

It is necessary to emphasise that children in situations of vulnerability must be prioritised and that they are the main recipients of our services, and European society needs to break with the circle of poverty still very present.

Families, Equality & Social Welfare Department,
Madrid City Council

ESN members welcomed the proposal by the European Commission to have the European Guarantee translated into **National Action Plans**, and identified the following key issues and areas of policy reform to be addressed through these Plans:

- Distribution of competences across the various levels of governance which may lead to differences regarding the availability and quality of children's services within the countries (CZ, ES, IT, NL, RO)
- Challenge in developing community care services for children (EL, EE, CZ, HR and ES)
- initiatives aimed at developing and strengthening community and family-based childcare (DK, EL, EE, CZ, HR, ES and SE)
- Need for closer cooperation between health and social services in providing support for children (EE, EL, ES, FI, IT, LV and RO).

Within the context of these identified issues, ESN members highlighted the following recommendations

- Need to better promote a range of care services in or implementing deinstitutionalisation strategies, including foster care, support foster families, children and their parents (EE, EL, HR, IE and IT)
- Development of long-term strategies based on prevention in particular for the most vulnerable children (EL, ES, FI, LV, SE and SI)
- Need to have national standards on childcare and child support (CZ, EE, EL, ES, FI, HR, LV, and RO) and mapping of every agency working with children and families (EE, EL, FI, HR, LV and IT)
- Implementation of targeted policies for specific groups of children (children in state care and unaccompanied and separated children (UASC)) (DE, EE, IE, HR, LV, MT, RO and the UK)
- Address workforce shortages in children's social services (FI, HR, IE, IT, LV, MT and the UK)

The Child Guarantee should propose a comprehensive and robust approach -in line with the UN Guidelines for Children in Alternative Care- which would include support for families in difficulty to avoid separation and the placement of the child, the provision of different quality alternative care options -tailored to the children' specific needs-, and support for young people aging out of care.

SOS Children's Villages International





2. Key requests from public social service authorities

European funds play a decisive role in promoting social inclusion and effective equal opportunities throughout the EU. Child poverty is the greatest threat to achieving equality for two reasons. First, people under 18 experience a greater risk of poverty or social exclusion. Second, the situation in which millions of boys and girls find themselves in Europe means that if urgent action is not taken, this situation risks becoming chronic, seriously jeopardising their future.

Directorate General for Social Inclusion
Regional Government of Galicia, Spain

Through ESN's annual work on the European Semester cycle and based on the experience of our national members, ESN calls on the European Commission to take an integrated approach in a future **Child Care Guarantee** addressing the needs of **all vulnerable groups of children**:

- children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds,
- children from ethnic minorities,
- children with disabilities,
- children under the formal care of the State and
- unaccompanied and separated children (UASC).

The proposal made by the EU to national authorities should ensure reform of child care policies to ensure coherency in the development, financing and delivery of services and adequate investment in public social services to ensure accessible and quality services for all children, but particularly the most vulnerable.

Specifically, ESN call on the European Commission to ensure that the European Child Guarantee and its implementation at national level:

I. Recognise the essential role of public social services to ensure equal opportunities for all children

Ensure the inclusion in the Council Recommendation on the Child Guarantee the essential role of public social services in the implementation of the Child Guarantee, in line with pillar 2 of the 2013 European Commission's Recommendation Investing in Children. The ability of public social services to respond to the Recommendation and implement it will be central to its success. Recognition should also ensure adequate resourcing and funding (as mentioned in point IV).



II. Implement the 3 pillars of the Investing in Children Recommendation through a multiannual strategy

Ensure that the Child Guarantee is accompanied by a multiannual implementation strategy that is built upon the 3 pillars of the 2013 Investing in Children Recommendation. The strategy should include a focus on investing in public social services to support children experiencing poverty with basic needs such as access to financial resources and housing; protect children from neglect, abuse and violence; and help children access resources and services, including education, health and leisure.

III. Ensure access to public social services for the most vulnerable children and their families

Plans should ensure that access to public social services is universal with a basic services provision for every child and higher intensity as the needs of the child increases with targeted measures for the most disadvantaged. A child's needs can rarely be solved solely by one service, in particular where a child is from a disadvantaged background and faces multiple problems. Therefore, investment should be made on coordination between key services to ensure that professionals have an understanding of what each service offers, how to help a child and their family access the full range of services and have the confidence to work with professionals from other services.

IV. Design National Plans with public social services, vulnerable children and their families

Ensure consultation at national level on the development of Child Guarantee National Plans is inclusive of all stakeholders, in particular children, their families and public social service authorities. Through undertaking consultation with these stakeholders' national ministries will identify areas requiring prioritisation and the best approach to address these areas. Sub-national level authorities such as social welfare, social policy and social services departments in regional and local authorities are responsible for the care and support of children, hence ensuring that they are involved in identifying areas of reform and investment in care and support programmes for children and families is key to ensure success of this European initiative.



V. Invest in public social services to realise the aims and objectives of the Child Guarantee

EU funding instruments which will support implementation should include investment in public social services. National Action Plans should include specific investment in public social services to ensure that the most vulnerable children receive the support and the services they need. Whereby it is welcomed the European Parliament's proposal for EU Member States to earmark 5% of their ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty, we stress that this investment should be targeted to children who are most vulnerable. Considering this we would urge the Council of the EU to endorse this proposal including a focus on supporting and investing in public social services to prevent, respond to and protect the most vulnerable children:

- children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds,
- children from ethnic minorities,
- children with disabilities,
- and in particular children under the formal care of the State and
- unaccompanied and separated children (UASC).

We also welcome the reference to other EU resources under the next Multiannual Financial Framework – such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Asylum and Migration Fund (AMIF), InvestEU and the Erasmus Plus. These funds have specific priorities related to social inclusion and should be used strategically and in line with the priorities included in National Action Plans to support the necessary social investment and reforms. National Plans should provide for the distribution of EU funds to regional and local authorities with responsibility for protecting children in consultation with them based on an assessment of needs identified from evidence collected locally.

VI. Ensure monitoring and evaluation of implementation

National Action plans should have in place specific objectives for identified groups of vulnerable children and indicators to measure progress being made in responding and supporting the needs of children, in particular the most vulnerable. These reports should be published periodically and outline measures used and progress made, including disaggregated data on the different groups of children. ESN suggests that responsible authorities in Member States, depending on their roles and responsibilities, collect data regarding the proportion of households in touch with social services and the reasons (e.g. proportion of abused children or who have suffered violence) and proportion of children in alternative care (with breakdown by disability, health and social circumstances).



@ESNsocial



european-social-network

EUROPEAN SOCIAL NETWORK ASBL
Avenue des Arts 3-4-5
8th Floor
1210 Brussels
Belgium

+32 (0) 2 511 10 93
info@esn-eu.org
www.esn-eu.org