

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION (EU) 2021/1004

of 14 June 2021

### establishing a European Child Guarantee

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 292, in conjunction with Article 153(2) and Article 153(1)(j) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Whereas:

- (1) Pursuant to Article 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union, the Union combats social exclusion and discrimination and promotes equality between women and men and protection of the rights of the child.
- (2) Pursuant to Article 9 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), in defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union takes into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health.
- (3) Pursuant to Article 151 TFEU, the Union and the Member States have as their objectives the promotion of employment, improved living and working conditions, proper social protection, dialogue between management and labour, the development of human resources with a view to lasting high employment and the combating of social exclusion. Pursuant to Article 153(1), point (j), TFEU, with a view to achieving those objectives, the Union supports and complements the activities of the Member States in the field of combating social exclusion.
- (4) Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (the 'Charter') recognises that children have the right to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being, and that the child's best interests must be a primary consideration in all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions. Article 33 of the Charter stipulates that the family shall enjoy legal, economic and social protection.
- (5) Article 17 of the Revised European Social Charter, done at Strasbourg on 3 May 1996, confirms the commitment to take all appropriate and necessary measures to ensure that children have the care, the assistance, the education and the training they need.
- (6) The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted on 20 November 1989, which has been ratified by all Union Member States, stipulates in Articles 2, 3, 6, 12, 18, 24, 27, 28 and 31 that State Parties to the Convention recognise the best interests of the child to be a primary consideration and recognise the child's right: to participation and development, including the right to protection from all forms of discrimination; to life; to be heard in judicial and administrative proceedings; to enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health; of access to healthcare services; to State assistance to ensure an adequate standard of living, education, leisure, recreational activities, and to participate fully in cultural and artistic life.

- (7) Article 7 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities <sup>(1)</sup>, ratified by the Union and all its Member States, stipulates that State Parties to that Convention shall take all necessary measures to ensure the full enjoyment by children with disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children.
- (8) Together with its Member States, the Union is fully committed to being a frontrunner in implementing the United Nations 2030 Agenda and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, including those on eradicating poverty, ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being, and ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education.
- (9) On 20 February 2013, the Commission adopted Recommendation 2013/112/EU <sup>(2)</sup> entitled 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage'. That Recommendation sets out an integrated approach to reducing child poverty or social exclusion and improving child wellbeing that builds on three pillars: access to resources, access to quality services, and children's right to participate.
- (10) In November 2017, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights, setting out 20 principles to support well-functioning and fair labour markets and welfare systems. Principle 11 provides for children's right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality, protection from poverty and to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- (11) The European Parliament, in its Resolution of 24 November 2015 <sup>(3)</sup>, called on the Commission and the Member States to introduce a child guarantee, with a focus on children in poverty and their access to services. The European Parliament, in its Resolution of 11 March 2021 <sup>(4)</sup>, further called on the Commission to include in the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child concrete measures to invest in children in order to eradicate child poverty, including the establishment of a European Child Guarantee with appropriate resources, and to present its proposal for the European Child Guarantee in the first quarter of 2021, and called on the Member States to invest all possible resources, including Union funds, to fight child poverty and social exclusion and to establish child guarantee national action plans.
- (12) The Joint Declaration entitled 'Overcoming poverty and social exclusion – mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on families – working together to develop prospects for strong children', signed in December 2020 by 24 ministers of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council, called for a European Child Guarantee based on the principles and integrated approach of Recommendation 2013/112/EU and of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The ministers reaffirmed that access to free healthcare, free education, affordable early childhood education and care, decent housing and adequate nutrition are essential for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion.
- (13) The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan <sup>(5)</sup> provides a new impetus to address poverty and social exclusion in the Union, in particular by setting the target with the 2030 horizon to reduce by 15 million the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including at least 5 million children.
- (14) The Union comprehensive Strategy on the Rights of the Child <sup>(6)</sup> helps to strengthen children's participation in society, put the best interests of the child in primary consideration, protect vulnerable children including those at risk of socioeconomic exclusion and marginalisation, protect children's rights online, foster child-friendly justice and prevent and fight violence against children. It also aims to combat discrimination against children, including on the grounds of their sex or sexual orientation or that of their parents.

<sup>(1)</sup> Council Decision 2010/48/EC of 26 November 2009 concerning the conclusion, by the European Community, of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (OJ L 23, 27.1.2010, p. 35).

<sup>(2)</sup> Commission Recommendation 2013/112/EU of 20 February 2013 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage' (OJ L 59, 2.3.2013, p. 5).

<sup>(3)</sup> European Parliament resolution of 24 November 2015 on reducing inequalities with a special focus on child poverty (2014/2237 (INI)).

<sup>(4)</sup> European Parliament resolution of 11 March 2021 on children's rights in view of the EU Strategy on the rights of the child (2021/2523 (RSP)).

<sup>(5)</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 'The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan', COM(2021) 102 final.

<sup>(6)</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 'EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child', COM(2021) 142 final.

- (15) The objective of this Recommendation is to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing the access of children in need to a set of key services, including mainstreaming a gender perspective in order to take into consideration the different situations of girls and boys, by combating child poverty and fostering equal opportunities. Children in need are persons under the age of 18 years who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This refers to children living in households at risk of poverty, or experiencing severe material and social deprivation, or with very low work intensity.
- (16) In order to provide for effective access or effective and free access to key services, Member States should, in accordance with national circumstances and approaches, either organise and provide such services or provide adequate benefits so that parents or guardians of children in need are in a position to cover the costs or charges of those services. Particular attention is required to avoid any possible accompanying costs forming a barrier for children in need in low-income families to full access of the key services.
- (17) Nearly 18 million children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the Union <sup>(7)</sup>, with significant differences between Member States. The range of risk factors that can make some children especially vulnerable and exposed to poverty or social exclusion vary considerably. Therefore, national approaches to implementing this Recommendation should be tailored to specific circumstances and needs on the ground. One of the main determinants of social exclusion of children is the unequal access to key services, essential for their wellbeing and the development of their social, cognitive and emotional skills. Children living in poverty or children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to face barriers in accessing early childhood education and care, inclusive education, healthcare, healthy nutrition and adequate housing. They start their lives at a disadvantage, which can have long-term implications for their development and future prospects.
- (18) The intergenerational transmission of social exclusion jeopardises social cohesion over generations and generates higher costs to our welfare states, hindering economic and social resilience. Improving equal access of children in need to key services is therefore an important means of stepping up efforts to prevent and combat social exclusion. It also contributes to fostering equal opportunities for children in need and combating child poverty.
- (19) Tackling disadvantage from early years is a cost-effective investment, including from a long-term perspective, as it contributes not only to the inclusion of children and their higher socioeconomic outcomes when they are adults, but also to the economy and society through better integration into the labour market and social life and improvement in the school-to-work transition, including through the full implementation of the Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee <sup>(8)</sup>. Investing in equal opportunities for children lays the foundation for a sustainable and inclusive growth, supporting fair and resilient societies and upward social convergence. It also contributes to addressing the impact of adverse demographic developments by reducing skill and labour shortages and ensuring a better territorial coverage, while harnessing the opportunities arising from the green and digital transitions.
- (20) Equal access to quality and inclusive early childhood education and care and education is central to breaking the transmission of social exclusion and securing equal opportunities for children in a disadvantaged situation. However, the limited availability and high costs of early childhood education and care can form a barrier for children from low-income families. Their attendance rates are considerably lower and result later on in worse educational outcomes and higher school drop-out rates, in particular for children with a migrant background or Roma children. Segregation and discrimination in accessing mainstream education by children with disabilities or special educational needs remains a challenge. The choice of the educational establishment needs to reflect the best interests of the child. The growing number of children with a migrant background in education systems calls for the prevention of segregated school settings and the adaptation of teaching methods, in accordance with national law and Member States' obligations under the relevant international instruments in the field.

<sup>(7)</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Children\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_or\\_social\\_exclusion](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Children_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion)

<sup>(8)</sup> Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee (OJ C 372, 4.11.2020, p. 1).

- (21) An important part of learning, including acquiring social skills, takes place by means of sport, leisure or cultural activities. Such activities are proven to be beneficial, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, certain groups of children cannot afford them or their participation is hindered by a lack of proper infrastructure, poor accessibility or language problems.
- (22) Children in need generally have hindered access to certain healthcare services, such as dental care, or to supports, such as braces, corrective lenses or spectacles. Such children also have fewer opportunities and resources to benefit from disease prevention and health promotion programmes. Income poverty and other social determinants significantly affect the overall development and health, including mental health, of children and increase the risk of ill-health in later years. Early intervention and prevention are essential, together with better access to public health prevention and promotion programmes, including vaccination, and parenting support, which can help achieve better outcomes.
- (23) Access to healthy and sustainable nutrition is a challenge for low-income families in particular. Healthy food and nutrition programmes can help address problems such as poor diet, lack of physical activity, obesity or use of alcohol and tobacco, thereby reducing malnutrition and poor nutrition, which is more prevalent among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of school meal schemes for some children, who were suddenly deprived of a reliable source of nutrition during lockdown<sup>(\*)</sup>. Ensuring access of children in need to at least one healthy meal each school day is therefore paramount and could be achieved either by providing such meals or by ensuring that parents or guardians, or children, are in a position to cater for the meals, taking into account specific local circumstances and needs.
- (24) Children from low-income families, with a migrant background or with a minority ethnic origin are at a higher risk of severe housing deprivation, overcrowding and energy poverty, and are more exposed to homelessness. Housing expenditure is a heavy burden for single-earner households, especially those headed by women. The provision of adequate housing and ensuring that children and their families receive adequate temporary accommodation are important mechanisms for tackling social exclusion of children and minimising the risk of homelessness. With the aim of the de-institutionalisation of children, quality community-based or family-based care should be promoted. Placing children in institutional care should be done only when it is in the best interests of the child, taking into account the child's overall situation and considering the child's individual needs. Providing support to children who leave institutional or foster care is crucial to support their independent living and social integration.
- (25) The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic may have far-reaching effects on the economic and social well-being of families and children, and is likely to disproportionately affect children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Low and middle-income groups face a higher risk of income loss, with a potentially significant impact on the disposable income of households due to increasing unemployment and reduced telework possibilities. The crisis is expected to exacerbate existing inequalities and is likely to result in an increase in the number of households being at risk of poverty or social exclusion. It also puts significant pressure on the availability of services. Children experiencing various forms of disadvantage are among the hardest hit by the crisis. Distance learning has been difficult for many children living in households without adequate family support, skills or equipment, including for children living in remote or rural territories with inadequate digital infrastructure.
- (26) Tackling social exclusion of children and reducing the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic requires an integrated, person-centred and multidimensional approach and an enabling policy framework. Strengthening cooperation and coordination between services at various levels warrants effective prevention and supports social inclusion of children. Along with ensuring access to key services, across all regions and territories, including through investment in service infrastructure and the workforce, it is also necessary to improve the effectiveness and relevance of related policies, combine preventive and remedial measures and benefit to the maximum extent from existing Union instruments.

<sup>(\*)</sup> 2020 Social Protection Committee Annual Review of the Social Protection Performance Monitor (SPPM) and developments in social protection policies. Report on key social challenges and key messages, p. 58.

- (27) The European Semester economic and employment coordination process, supported by the Social Scoreboard <sup>(10)</sup>, has highlighted the challenge of child poverty or social exclusion, with a number of Member States receiving country-specific recommendations. The Employment Guidelines underline the importance of ensuring the access of everyone, including children, to certain services, such as early childhood education and care, education and healthcare, with such access serving as a necessary condition for ensuring equal opportunities.
- (28) Union funds are available to support the implementation of the European Child Guarantee and further supportive measures. Within the European Social Fund Plus, all Member States will earmark an appropriate amount to tackle child poverty or social exclusion. For Member States in which the rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion is above the Union average, that amount is to be at least 5 % of their national European Social Fund Plus allocation. In accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, the European Regional Development Fund and InvestEU will also support investment in enabling infrastructure, such as social housing and early childhood education and care facilities, as well as equipment and access to quality and mainstream services. As part of the Recovery Plan for Europe and the 'Next Generation EU' instrument, the Recovery and Resilience Facility offers additional Union funding for reforms, investment and policies for the next generation, children and the youth, such as education and skills, to be included in national recovery and resilience plans <sup>(11)</sup>. The Technical Support Instrument can support Member States in designing and implementing structural reforms in the areas of education, social services, justice and health, including cross-sectoral reforms tackling child poverty and social exclusion.
- (29) Member States can also benefit from the 2017-2023 EU school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme to make healthy products more available to children and improve their understanding of the benefits of healthy and sustainable food.
- (30) This Recommendation should be implemented through national action plans adapted to national, regional and local circumstances. Such national action plans should identify children in need and the barriers they face in accessing and taking-up the services covered by this Recommendation. To this end, Member States are recommended to involve relevant stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations promoting children's rights. Progress in implementing this Recommendation should also be regularly monitored, for example as part of the Social Scoreboard in the context of the European Semester, including through the development of relevant monitoring indicators.
- (31) This Recommendation complements Commission Recommendation 2013/112/EU, constitutes a deliverable of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, and complements the Union comprehensive Strategy on the Rights of the Child.
- (32) This Recommendation fully respects the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. It is without prejudice to principles of national procedural law and the legal traditions of the Member States and does not entail an extension of the Union's powers,

HAS ADOPTED THIS RECOMMENDATION:

#### OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

1. The aim of this Recommendation is to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing access of children in need to a set of key services, thereby also contributing to upholding the rights of the child by combating child poverty and fostering equal opportunities.
2. This Recommendation applies to children in need.

#### DEFINITIONS

3. For the purpose of this Recommendation, the following definitions apply:
  - (a) 'children in need' means persons under the age of 18 years who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion;
  - (b) 'children with a migrant background' means 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;

<sup>(10)</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/european-pillar-of-social-rights/indicators/social-scoreboard-indicators>

<sup>(11)</sup> In line with the Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility (OJ L 57, 18.2.2021, p. 17).

- (c) 'children in precarious family situations' means children exposed to various risk factors that could lead to poverty or to social exclusion. This includes: living in a single-earner household; living with a parent with disabilities; living in a household where there are mental health problems or long-term illness; living in a household where there is substance abuse, or domestic violence; children of a Union citizen who has moved to another Member State while the children themselves remained in their Member State of origin; children having a teenage mother or being a teenage mother; and children having an imprisoned parent;
- (d) 'effective access' means a situation in which services are readily available, affordable, accessible, of good quality, provided in a timely manner and where the potential users are aware of their existence, as well as of entitlements to use them;
- (e) 'effective and free access' means a situation in which services are readily available, accessible, of good quality, provided in a timely manner and where the potential users are aware of their existence, as well as of entitlements to use them, and provided free of charge, either by organising and providing such services or by adequate benefits to cover the costs or the charges of the services, or in such a way that financial circumstances will not pose an obstacle to equal access;
- (f) 'school-based activities' means learning by means of sport, leisure or cultural activities that take place within or outside of regular school hours or are organised by the school community;
- (g) 'healthy meal' or 'healthy nutrition' means a balanced meal consumption, which provides children with nutrients necessary for their physical and mental development and for physical activity that complies with their physiological needs;
- (h) 'adequate housing' means a dwelling that meets the current national technical standards, is in a reasonable state of repair, provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort and is available and accessible at an affordable cost.

IN ACCORDANCE WITH NATIONAL COMPETENCES, CIRCUMSTANCES AND PRACTICES AND FULLY RESPECTING THE PRINCIPLES OF SUBSIDIARITY AND PROPORTIONALITY, HEREBY RECOMMENDS AS FOLLOWS:

#### CORE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4. Member States are recommended to guarantee for children in need:
  - (a) effective and free access to high quality early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day and healthcare;
  - (b) effective access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing.
- 5. Member States are recommended 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.

#### ENABLING POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 6. While putting the best interests of the child as a primary consideration, Member States are recommended to build an integrated and enabling policy framework to address social exclusion of children, focusing on breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty and disadvantage and reducing the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. To that effect, in implementing this Recommendation, Member States are recommended to:
  - (a) ensure consistency of social, education, health, nutrition and housing policies at national, regional and local level and, wherever possible, improve their relevance for supporting children in an integrated manner;
  - (b) continue and where necessary step up investment in education, adequate health and social protection systems in order to address effectively the needs of children and their families, in particular of those exposed to social exclusion;

- (c) ensure adequate policies and resources, including through labour market integration measures, support measures for parents or guardians and income support to families and households, so that financial barriers do not prevent children from accessing quality services;
- (d) address the territorial dimension of social exclusion, taking into account the specific needs of children according to distinctive urban, rural, remote and disadvantaged areas, based on an integrated and multidisciplinary approach;
- (e) strengthen cooperation with, and involvement of, national, regional and local authorities, social economy organisations, non-governmental organisations promoting children's rights, children themselves and other stakeholders, in the design, delivery and monitoring of policies and quality services for children;
- (f) take measures to promote inclusion and to avoid and tackle discrimination and stigmatisation of children in need;
- (g) support strategic investment in quality services for children, including in enabling infrastructure and qualified workforce;
- (h) dedicate adequate resources and make optimal use of national and Union funds, in particular the European Social Fund Plus, the European Regional Development Fund, and where appropriate REACT-EU, Invest-EU, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Technical Support Instrument;
- (i) take into account a gender perspective throughout the enabling framework.

#### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE, INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND SCHOOL-BASED ACTIVITIES, AND A HEALTHY MEAL EACH SCHOOL DAY

7. With a view to guaranteeing effective and free access to high quality early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities and a healthy meal each school day for children in need, Member States are recommended to:
- (a) identify and address financial and non-financial barriers to participation in early childhood education and care, education, and school-based activities;
  - (b) take measures to prevent and reduce early school leaving, taking into account a gender perspective, to re-engage children who are at risk of dropping out or have dropped out of education or training, including by providing personalised guidance and strengthening cooperation with families;
  - (c) provide learning support to children with learning difficulties to compensate for their linguistic, cognitive and educational gaps;
  - (d) adapt facilities and educational materials of early childhood education and care and of educational establishments and provide the most appropriate response to the specific needs of children with special educational needs and of children with disabilities, using inclusive teaching and learning methods; for this purpose ensure that qualified teachers and other professionals are available, such as psychologists, speech therapists, rehabilitators, social workers or teaching assistants;
  - (e) put in place measures to support inclusive education and avoid segregated classes in early childhood education and care establishments and in educational establishments; this may also include giving priority to, or, when needed, early access for, children in need;
  - (f) provide at least one healthy meal each school day;
  - (g) ensure provision of educational materials, including digital educational tools, books, uniforms or any required clothing, where applicable;
  - (h) provide high speed connectivity, digital services and adequate equipment necessary for distance learning to ensure access to educational content online, as well as to improve digital skills of children in need and teachers and make the necessary investment to tackle all forms of digital divide;
  - (i) provide transport to early childhood education and care and education establishments, where applicable;
  - (j) ensure equal and inclusive access to school-based activities, including participation in school trips and sport, leisure and cultural activities;
  - (k) develop a framework for cooperation of educational establishments, local communities, social, health and child protection services, families and social economy actors to support inclusive education, to provide after school care and opportunities to participate in sport, leisure and cultural activities, and to build and invest in educational establishments as centres of inclusion and participation.

#### HEALTHCARE

8. With a view to guaranteeing effective and free access to quality healthcare for children in need, Member States are recommended to:
- (a) facilitate early detection and treatment of diseases and developmental problems, including those related to mental health, ensure access to periodic medical, including dental and ophthalmology, examinations and screening programmes; ensure timely curative and rehabilitative follow-up, including access to medicines, treatments and supports, and access to vaccination programmes;
  - (b) provide targeted rehabilitation and habilitation services for children with disabilities;
  - (c) implement accessible health promotion and disease prevention programmes targeting children in need and their families, as well as professionals working with children.

#### HEALTHY NUTRITION

9. With a view to guaranteeing effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition for children in need, including through the EU school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme, Member States are recommended to:
- (a) support access to healthy meals also outside of school days, including through in-kind or financial support, in particular in exceptional circumstances such as school closures;
  - (b) ensure that nutrition standards in early childhood education and care and education establishments address specific dietary needs;
  - (c) limit advertisement and restrict the availability of foods high in fat, salt and sugar in early childhood education and care and educational establishments;
  - (d) provide adequate information to children and families on healthy nutrition for children.

#### ADEQUATE HOUSING

10. With a view to guaranteeing effective access to adequate housing for children in need, Member States are recommended to:
- (a) ensure that homeless children and their families receive adequate accommodation, prompt transfer from temporary accommodation to permanent housing and provision of relevant social and advisory services;
  - (b) assess and revise, if necessary, national, regional and local housing policies and take action to ensure that the interests of families with children in need are duly taken into account, including addressing energy poverty and preventing the risk of homelessness; such assessment and revision should also include social housing or housing assistance policies and housing benefits and further improve accessibility for children with disabilities;
  - (c) provide for priority and timely access to social housing or housing assistance for children in need and their families;
  - (d) take into account the best interests of the child as well as the child's overall situation and individual needs when placing children into institutional or foster care; ensure the transition of children from institutional or foster care to quality community-based or family-based care and support their independent living and social integration.

#### GOVERNANCE AND REPORTING

11. With a view to sound governance, monitoring and reporting and taking due account of existing national structures and mechanisms, Member States are recommended to:

##### **National Child Guarantee Coordinators**

- (a) nominate a national Child Guarantee Coordinator, equipped with adequate resources and mandate enabling the effective coordination and monitoring of the implementation of this Recommendation;

##### **Identifying children in need**

- (b) with a view to most effective targeting of measures to children in need and taking into account national, regional and local organisations and circumstances, involve relevant stakeholders in identifying children in need and barriers they face in accessing and taking up the services covered by this Recommendation;

### **National action plans**

- (c) submit to the Commission, within nine months from the adoption of this Recommendation, an action plan, covering the period until 2030, to implement this Recommendation, taking into account national, regional and local circumstances as well as existing policy actions and measures to support children in need. The action plan should include, in particular:
  - (i) targeted categories of children in need to be reached by corresponding integrated measures;
  - (ii) quantitative and qualitative targets to be achieved in terms of children in need to be reached by corresponding measures, taking into account regional and local disparities;
  - (iii) measures planned or taken in implementing this Recommendation, including at regional and local level, and the necessary financial resources and timelines;
  - (iv) other measures planned or taken to address child social exclusion and to break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage, based in particular on enabling the policy framework provided for in paragraph 6;
  - (v) a national framework for data collection, monitoring and evaluation of this Recommendation, also with a view to establishing a common monitoring framework, as referred to in paragraph 12, point (d);

### **Outreach**

- (d) develop effective outreach measures towards children in need and their families, in particular at regional and local level and through educational establishments, trained social workers, family-support services, civil society and social economy organisations, with a view to raising awareness and encouraging and facilitating the take-up of the services covered by this Recommendation;

### **Involvement of stakeholders**

- (e) ensure the participation of regional, local and other relevant authorities, children and relevant stakeholders representing civil society, non-governmental organisations, educational establishments and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion and integration, children's rights, inclusive education and non-discrimination, including national equality bodies throughout the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the action plan;

### **Reporting to the Commission**

- (f) report every two years to the Commission on the progress in implementing this Recommendation, in line with the national action plan referred to in point (c).

## **IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

12. The Council welcomes the Commission's aim to:

- (a) monitor progress in implementing this Recommendation, including its outcomes and the impact on children in need, also as part of the Social Scoreboard in the context of the European Semester, and propose, where appropriate, country-specific recommendations to Member States;
- (b) work jointly with Member States, the national Child Guarantee Coordinators and the Social Protection Committee to facilitate mutual learning, share experiences, exchange good practices and follow up on the actions taken in response to this Recommendation as set out in the relevant national action plans;
- (c) report regularly to the Social Protection Committee on the progress in implementing this Recommendation, on the basis of the reports from Member States;
- (d) work jointly with the Social Protection Committee to:
  - (i) establish a common monitoring framework using existing data sources and indicators and, if necessary, develop further agreed common quantitative and qualitative outcome indicators to assess the implementation of this Recommendation;
  - (ii) with a view to informing policy making, enhance the availability, scope and relevance of comparable data at Union level, including on children in need and their access to services, and adequacy and coverage of benefits targeted at children;

- (e) review the progress made in the implementation of this Recommendation and report to the Council by five years after its adoption;
- (f) strengthen awareness-raising and communication efforts and increase dissemination of results and good practice examples at Union level and among Member States and relevant stakeholders.

Done at Luxembourg, 14 June 2021.

*For the Council*  
*The President*  
A. MENDES GODINHO

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