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European Expert Meeting on the Child Guarantee

27 September 2022 in Berlin

Report

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Summary of key findings

The fight against child poverty: an important task for all European countries	Progress is urgently needed in all EU member states to combat child poverty and to increase the social inclusion of children in need. This is true regardless of a country's average level of prosperity.
The EU Child Guarantee as an opportunity to fight child poverty	In the expert meeting, the EU Child Guarantee was seen as a way of improving the social inclusion and life situation of disadvantaged children. The goal of actually fighting poverty should not be neglected in the process.
Potential for interagency / holistic perspectives on child poverty	One observable effect is that greater inter-ministerial cooperation and interdepartmental approaches are encouraged in governments to respond to the complex problems of children and families in poverty.
Budgets for integrated policies	To very different degrees, states provide interdepartmental budgets for the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee. From the perspective of civil society actors, however, it is exactly those integrated budgets that help facilitate more tailored solutions to complex problem situations among families at risk of poverty.
Participation of children, young people and families as well as organisations	The EU Child Guarantee can provide an impetus for the participation of children and young people in political processes. In some countries, new forms of child and young people participation are being tested. Close cooperation with civil society organizations is also seen as a prerequisite for the success of the process.
National Action Plans as booster to the fight against child poverty	The National Action Plans (NAPs) implementing the EU Child Guarantee appear very different in terms of the impetus they give to the fight against child poverty. Some NAPs are content to present programmes and measures that already exist, while others are ambitious and include innovations and new elements of child poverty reduction.
Monitoring as a real instrument for success control	There was agreement that monitoring the implementation process is of high importance. To this end, the National Action Plans should contain measurable and time-bound targets for the situation of children and families. Monitoring should focus less on a description of implemented measures and more on the effects of measures to reduce inequality and promote social inclusion among children and families in need.
Competencies for national and regional coordinators	The role of the national coordinators for the success of the EU Child Guarantee was considered very important. They have the task of providing innovative solutions across ministerial boundaries and federal competencies in association with civil society. This requires appropriate competencies and resources. Coordinators for regional levels were also recommended.

Introduction

On 27 September 2022, COFACE Families Europe and the Association of German Family Organisations (AGF) jointly organised a European expert meeting on the implementation of the European Child Guarantee. The 45 participants from civil society and ministries from 17 European countries exchanged information on the implementation of the Child Guarantee in different countries.

Background

In summer 2021, the EU Member States adopted the "European Child Guarantee", its target group being "children in need". This includes children living in or at risk of poverty in precarious family situations. However, the Child Guarantee also describes children experiencing other forms of disadvantage as "children in need". Other disadvantages that can make social inclusion and participation difficult include homelessness, disability, a migrant background, ethnic discrimination and institutionalisation. The target group-oriented Child Guarantee is embedded in the European Strategy on the Rights of the Child, which was published on 24 March 2021 and encompasses all children throughout Europe. For its implementation, the European Child Guarantee contains commitments by the EU Member States by 2030, to guarantee children in need access to services and goods that are central to their wellbeing and growth to adulthood. These are in particular:

- effective and free access to high-quality early childhood education and care and educational and school-based activities, as well as at least

one healthy meal each school day;

- effective and free access to healthcare;
- effective access to healthy nutrition and
- effective access to adequate housing.

The implementation is thus mainly done at national level. For this purpose, the governments of the member states shall

- develop a National Action Plan (NAP) with country-specific measures for implementation until 2030,
- appoint a national coordinator for the implementation of the Child Guarantee,
- ensure the participation of all relevant stakeholders and children/young people throughout the implementation process, and
- submit a progress report every two years (monitoring).

In the European expert meeting on 27 September 2022 in Berlin, the discussion centred on the status of the national action plans, the national priorities and the different approaches to developing national measures.

This report is an overview of the inputs and discussions. A representative of the European Commission presented a transnational overview. Detailed insights into the implementation process in member countries were provided by Germany, the Czech Republic, Spain and Sweden, and these were supplemented in the discussion by participants from the other countries represented.

Welcome

- **Annemie Drieskens, President of COFACE Families Europe**
- **Sven Iversen, Managing Director of the Association of German Family Organisations (AGF)**
- **Ekin Deligöz, Parliamentary State Secretary at the BMFSFJ**

Annemie Drieskens, COFACE and Sven Iversen, AGF

Annemie Drieskens and Sven Iversen welcomed the participants to the expert meeting, which was jointly conceived and organised by COFACE and AGF. Both thanked the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) for their support in co-organising the meeting, in particular Ekin Deligöz, Parliamentary State Secretary and Coordinator of the German Child Guarantee, as well as Dr Martina Kottmann and Benjamin Glück from the respective unit of the BMFSFJ.

Annemie Drieskens and Sven Iversen emphasised that COFACE and AGF support the European Child Guarantee and that they expect substantial progress on the inclusion of disadvantaged children by the national action plans of the Member States. Depending on the national situation, these action plans would have to go beyond the individual demands set out in the Child Guarantee. In their view, however, it would not be sufficient for Member States to limit themselves to citing their previous family and child policy agendas.

Both referred to the activities of their organisations in the run-up to and after the adoption of the EU Child Guarantee. These included the hybrid conference "Child Guarantee – A tool to tackle family poverty?", which was also jointly organised on 20 September 2020, with around 80 participants from 20 countries. In this meeting, requirements from the perspective of civil society organisations were formulated at the beginning of the process of drafting the EU Child Guarantee.

Two years later and after the adoption of the EU Child Guarantee by the European Council, they now saw the aims of this expert discussion as a) comparing how the national action plans on the Child Guarantee were designed in practice, b) asking what synergies arise between the EU Child

Guarantee and existing family and child policy strategies in the Member States, c) exploring what possibilities exist for influencing for civil society actors, and d) considering the next steps to achieve the goals of the Child Guarantee.



Ekin Deligöz, Parliamentary State Secretary at the BMFSFJ

Ms Ekin Deligöz, Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) and German coordinator for the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee (Kinderchancen-Koordinatorin), welcomed the participants on behalf of the BMFSFJ.

She explained how strongly the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee was influenced by current crises. The increase in inflation, especially due to rising energy prices, the continuing burdens of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine had massively changed the reality of families as well as that of family policy. Child poverty is unfortunately still an issue, even in a rich country like Germany, where currently about 20% of all children are at risk of poverty or live in poverty. Most of the refugees from Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine are women with children. Special family policy efforts are needed to integrate this group, some of whom are traumatised.

The National Action Plan "New Opportunities for Children in Germany" (NAP) puts into place the German framework for the implementation of the European Child Guarantee. As the various strands of the Guarantee are interwoven, this requires a great deal of cooperation between different ministries and between federal, state and local levels of government. The processes for networking the political actors are in full swing in Germany. In addition, civil society organisations are fully participating in the development of the NAP. As the national coordinator of the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee, Ms Deligöz attaches particular importance to the participation of children and young people, which took place through group interviews and her "children's chances tour" in

summer 2022 that took in visits to about 30 projects.

To support the importance of the Child Guarantee goals, she referred to her own biographical experience of being the child of a single mother from Turkey who migrated to Germany. She knows very well the importance of state structures and services, but also of people who support children and encourage them to believe in their abilities so that they may advance in society.

Ms Deligöz finally emphasised the importance of the international exchange on national experiences in the implementation process of the EU Child Guarantee and wished the event every success.

Overview of the status of National Action Plans (NAPs) from an EU perspective

Dr. Stefan Iszkowski, Social Rights and Inclusion Unit (EMPL.D) at the European Commission



Dr Stefan Iszkowski gave an overview of the status of the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee in the Member States. First, he pointed out the importance of the commitment of the Portuguese Council Presidency as well as of civil society actors such as COFACE to work towards relatively quick adoption of the Child Guarantee at the European level.

He emphasised that the Child Guarantee is a voluntary commitment by the Member States. The success of the EU Child Guarantee is therefore primarily dependent on the "goodwill" of the national governments. It is now up to them to anchor the necessary measures in their National Action Plans (NAPs) in order to achieve the goals of the Child Guarantee.

What is the status of the development of the NAPs in the member countries?

The Child Guarantee specified that the NAPs should be submitted in March 2022. Since then, most but not all Member States had developed and published NAPs. The action plans submitted to the Commission could be viewed on the website of the EU Child Guarantee

(<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en>).

According to Dr Iszkowski, the EU Commission sees

itself in a very limited role of merely evaluating or rejecting the submitted NAPs. However, it would provide bilateral feedback to the Member States on whether the NAP submitted met the expected standards and offer assistance in drafting it. In this respect, the Commission supports the Member States in the implementation of the CG. For example, the seventh meeting of the Child Guarantee Coordinators will take place on 19 October as an online conference. An annual face-to-face meeting in Brussels is planned. Further, supplements to the NAPs could be added after the two-year reporting period.

The 15 NAPs submitted highlight different dimensions:

- Target groups: In 10 NAPs, specific target groups were specified that went beyond the groups of "children in need" as generally defined in the Child Guarantee. Five NAPs did not specify any target groups. Among the target groups listed were children in particularly precarious economic circumstances (3 NAPs); children in single-parent households (3 NAPs); children in households with a violence problem (3 NAPs); children with one parent in prison (2 NAPs); children in households with mentally ill or addicted parents (1 NAP); children in large families (1 NAP); children whose parents are minors (1 NAP) and children in unstable family circumstances (1 NAP). Nine NAPs name children with disabilities as a specific target group, eight NAPs name children in institutional care, seven NAPs name homeless children or children at risk of becoming homeless, six NAPs name children with mental health problems, six NAPs name children with a migration background / refugees, four NAPs name children from Roma families, two NAPs name children in rural areas and two NAPs name children in conflict with the law. On the one hand, this reflects the differentiated nature of the NAP; on the other, it shows the various approaches to taking into account interactions between different dimensions of disadvantage.
- Regarding the monitoring of the implementation of the Child Guarantee, six states plan to use

existing data sources. Six states plan to use new surveys and data sources to assess the success of their NAPs.

- There are two categories of stakeholders: those who take part in preparing the NAPs and those who take part in the implementation of the measures planned in the NAPs. The participation of children and young people would be of particular importance in this context.
- Regarding the use of EU funds for the implementation of measures, some NAPs planned to use EFS + funds for the implementation of concrete measures, while others announced that they would apply for EFS + funds, without giving precise information on the purpose for which they would be used

Stefan Iszkowski sees the recently adopted EU Care Strategy as a supplement to the Child Guarantee. In addition to improvements in the long-term care of elderly family members, a second part of the strategy provides for the modification of the Barcelona targets for early childhood care. Whereas the Barcelona targets for childcare hitherto were that 33% of children under three and 90% of children of primary school age should be in childcare and early education, the EU Care Strategy plans to increase these percentages to 50% and 96%, respectively.

Summing up, Stefan Iszkowski said that a comparison of the NAPs unfortunately showed that only a few of the plans formulated verifiable, quantifiable target indicators with fixed time scales. When assessing the success of the NAPs in the respective Member States, the level of protection from child poverty and of access to "essential services" already achieved before the EU initiative must of course be taken into account. Stefan Iszkowski reported that some NAPs did not list measures in certain areas, arguing that the measures recommended in the Child Guarantee had already been implemented. Other countries had formulated ambitious goals in all fields, some of which went far beyond the Council's recommendations.

Country examples

Germany

Dr. Martina Kottmann, Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth



Dr Martina Kottmann leads the unit responsible for the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee at the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). She reported that, in addition to the Family Ministry, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Federal Ministry of Nutrition and Agriculture, the Federal Ministry of Health and the Federal Ministry of Housing, Urban Development and Construction are involved in the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee at the federal level. However, the BMFSFJ has the lead role in preparing the National Action Plan.

Owing to the delay caused by the Bundestag elections and the subsequent formation of a government, Germany has not yet presented a NAP for the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee. This is currently being worked on under the title "New Opportunities for Children in Germany". The plan is supposed to identify where action is needed and bundle together relevant existing and planned measures by the federal government, the federal states, local authorities and civil society actors. A working structure is currently being created for the involvement of the federal government, the Länder, local authorities and members of civil society in the implementation process. In addition, a means of involving children and young people would be developed.

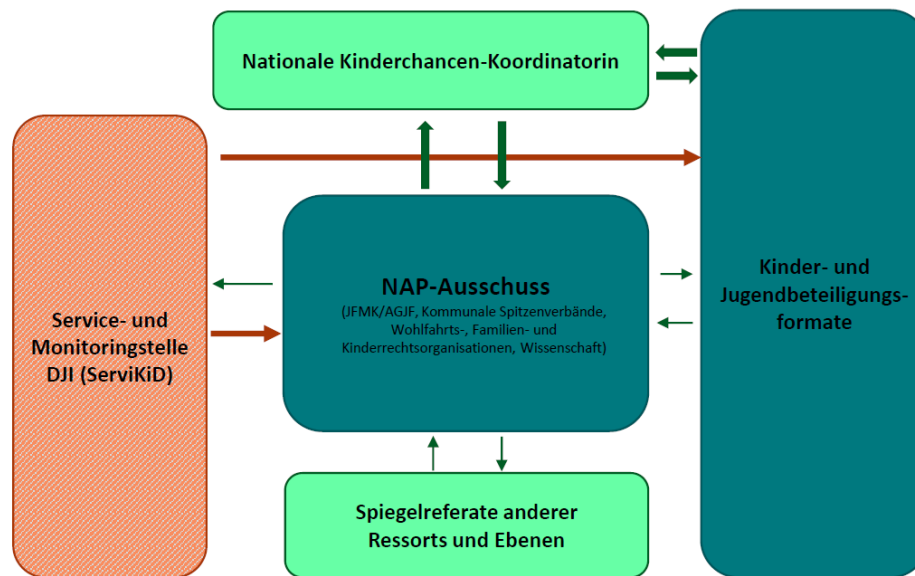
Regarding the process so far, she explained that a digital kick-off event for the NAP had been held in May 2022. At the same time, Parliamentary State Secretary Ms Ekin Deligöz had been appointed National Coordinator for the implementation of the Child Guarantee ("Kinderchancen-Koordinatorin"). In June/July 2022, the BMFSFJ had held consultations with stakeholders and, in August, a scientific service and monitoring centre had been established at the German Youth Institute (DJI) to accompany the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee. Just a few weeks before the European expert meeting, there had been an event to mark the start of the process for involving civil society.

As a next step, a first participation phase for federal ministries, federal states, municipalities and civil society is planned. By January 2023, the NAP will be finalised and agreed upon. After the adoption of the NAP by the Federal Government in March 2023, the implementation phase will begin.

Ms Deligöz and the BMFSFJ attach particular importance to the participation of children and young people. In May 2022, there was a children's panel at the first digital kick-off event. Between May and June 2022, three group discussions took place with primary school children, young people and parents who are suffering poverty and social exclusion. The discussions covered their experiences, wishes, expectations and support needs linked to the EU Child Guarantee. In autumn 2022, further qualitative surveys of children and young people would take place in order to complete the development of a participation concept for children/young people in cooperation with the project "Youth Policy Consultation (JugendPolitikBeratung)" by the end of the year.

The following diagram (in German) shows the planned working structure for the implementation of the Child Guarantee in Germany:

Arbeitsstruktur für die Umsetzungsphase des NAP



Czech Republic

Kamila Vlčková, Kateřina Linková and Ondřej Krysl, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Czech Republic



The three representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic reported that the Head of the Department for Family Policy and Protection of Children's Rights in their Ministry had been appointed as National Coordinator for the EU Child Guarantee. In addition, a working group had been formed from members of

the Ministries of Health, Education and Regional Development. Many municipalities and NGOs such as People in Need, Welfare, Red Cross, UNICEF, Sít pro rodinu (network of maternity centres) and Women for Women (charity especially for single mothers) had been involved in the drafting of the NAP.

The Czech Republic's NAP is closely linked to existing national frameworks for poverty reduction and child participation. These include.

- The Social Inclusion Strategy 2021–2030
- The National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights 2021–2029
- The Czech education policy strategy for the period up to 2030+
- The Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation Strategy 2021–2030
- The Strategic Framework for Health 2030.

The working group had prepared the first draft of the NAP and discussed it with civil society NGOs and representatives of the Czech municipalities as a first step in participation. Children and young people were involved in various ways, including through the children's parliament, individual children's projects and the evaluation of existing surveys on the needs of children.

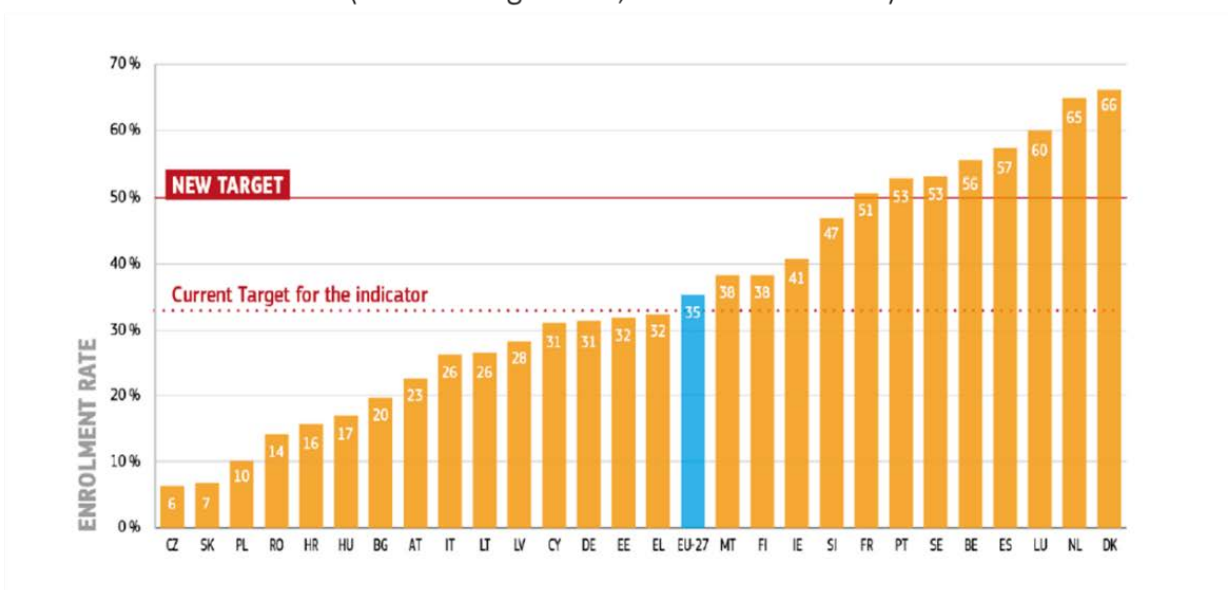
The revised version of the NAP had been submitted after a second round of consultation with NGOs and municipalities and had been sent to the European Commission for comments following an inter-ministerial vote. Feedback from the EU and UNICEF led to the addition of a chapter on refugee children from Ukraine and the concretisation of the target groups based on available data and initiatives. After a final round of consultation with working groups,

municipalities and NGOs, the NAP was finalised and submitted. It prioritises the following topics.

- Expand the provision of institutional childcare services.
- Reduce the number of children leaving school early and segregation in education (Roma, disabled children).
- Increase the availability of health services (especially child psychiatric, addiction and palliative care).
- Increase the number of children attending school meals.
- Increase the availability of housing for families with children in need.

They highlighted that the expansion of institutional childcare services for children under three years of age was particularly urgent. This is reflected in the lowest take-up rate in the EU. Only 6% of the under-threes in the Czech Republic use these services, a rate far below the current Barcelona target of 33%. This is explained by the fact that, in the post-communist transformation phase, most of the nationwide crèche structure was linked to companies, which were dismantled during the transformation phase without new facilities being created. The re-familiarisation of childcare, with mothers taking over this task, was politically

Graph: ECEC enrolment rate for children below 3 years old
(current target 33%, EU SILD data 2019)



supported at that time in view of high unemployment.

Currently, new care services are being tested and their implementation supported by the government.

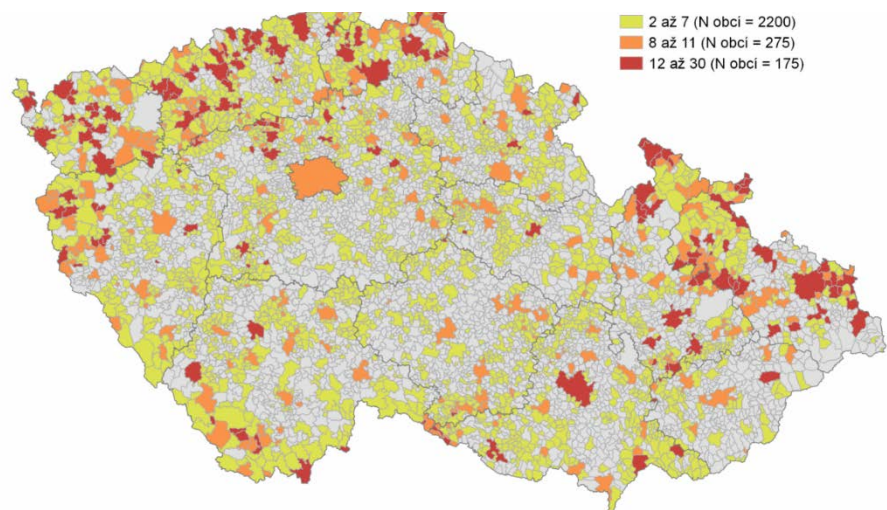
Reducing the numbers of children leaving school early and segregation in the education system is a priority goal in the Czech Republic. This is because 5% of all children do not complete compulsory schooling and/or do not have a diploma at the end of compulsory schooling (nine school years, max. until 17 years). However, there are very large regional differences. In some regions, the rate of early school leaving was significantly higher than the national average, for example in Ústecký kraj at 18.5%, in Karlovarský kraj at 15% or in Moravskoslezský kraj at 13.6%.

Roma children, children with disabilities and children from socially excluded areas were at the highest risk of dropping out of school. In absolute terms, this would affect almost 250,000 Roma children, almost half of whom lived in socially excluded areas in 2020. In these areas, 62.9% of the population failed altogether to finish primary school and 18% completed only part of their schooling.

Most of the socially excluded areas are located in border regions of the Czech Republic, as shown in the graph based on the index of social exclusion in municipalities in 2021.

The speakers concluded that the Child Guarantee

Social exclusion index in the municipalities in 2021



presented challenges and opportunities for the Czech Republic. Overcoming the dearth of institutional childcare services and reducing the risk of dropping out of school among some target groups were particularly conspicuous challenges. Other tasks, such as providing families with affordable housing, caring for refugees from Ukraine and relieving families of the burden of high inflation and especially rising energy prices, are shared by the Czech Republic and other EU countries.

Measures taken by the government within the framework of the Child Guarantee range from financial support for families and children in need (taken from the National Recovery Plan) to measures to support municipalities and targeted social work with families in schools.

The speakers also referred to the High Level Conference held during the Czech Presidency to promote the adoption of the Child Guarantee at the level of the European Council.

Spain

Lucía Losoviz, Director General for Children's Rights at the Ministry of Social Rights and 2030 SDG, Spain



Lucía Losoviz presented the background against which the Spanish NAP for the EU Child Guarantee had been developed. There are 2.6 million children at risk of poverty in Spain, representing 33% of all children; and 27.4% of children under 18 in Spain live in moderate poverty. This means that the rate of child poverty clearly exceeds the poverty rate of 20.7 % for the total population and the European average of 19.5 %.

The process of developing the Spanish National Action Plan began in October 2021 with a study that diagnosed problems in children's living situations. Based on this, a first proposal for a NAP was prepared and discussed in a process involving civil society stakeholders and children and young people in January and February 2022. On 15 March 2022, the first draft NAP was submitted to the European Commission with a request for feedback. The final version of the "Infancia con derechos" (Childhood with rights) plan was approved by the national Council of Ministers on 5 July 2022. From then on, negotiations with the European Commission were started to obtain ESF funding for regional and national measures.

The Spanish NAP extends the general target groups of the Child Guarantee to the specific target groups of unaccompanied minors, children with parents living illegally, children in conflict with the law, victims of trafficking or sexual exploitation or whose families come to Spain as asylum seekers or refugees (especially from Ukraine).

The coordination of the implementation of the Child

Guarantee is shared between the General Directorate for the Rights of Children and Adolescents (DGDIA) of the Ministry of Social Right and 2030 Agenda and the High Commission against Child Poverty (HCPD) in Spain. At the political level, an inter-ministerial working group and a group with representatives of regional and local authorities has been set up. Civil society NGOs as well as children were involved in the elaboration of the NAP and the implementation of the national measures).

The Spanish Action Plan aims to lend strength to the fight against poverty and different dimensions of exclusion of disadvantaged children. Therefore it projects, among other things, increased coverage of existing assistance and a general rise in investment in families and children. Additionally, access to quality services shall be improved. Echoing the general objectives of the Child Guarantee, Spain plans to guarantee universal access to education and care for both one- to three-year-olds and pre-school children. It intends to reduce educational inequality and school segregation, facilitate extracurricular activities for all children and narrow the digital gap. In the area of healthcare, the Spanish NAP aims to expand the provision of health services for children from the target groups, focusing in particular on mental health problems and promoting healthy nutrition. Spain is working on facilitating access to housing and reducing the number of families affected by energy poverty, as well as structurally upgrading substandard housing in the stock. Furthermore, the process of deinstitutionalisation for residential childcare (foster children) will be continued and coordinated with the Child Guarantee.

Overall, the NAP aims to create a protective, inclusive and participatory environment for children. The NAP follows a comprehensive and child-centred approach with the participation of children, which promotes growing up in freedom. This also includes improving the parity of living conditions between the Spanish regions.

In addition to a separate budget for the EU Child

Guarantee, the Spanish government plans to use ESF+ funds. These will be concentrated on three areas:

- The child protection system
- Early childhood care
- Healthy lifestyle.

The NAP was approved by the National Council of

Ministers on 5 July 2022. The next steps are the implementation of cooperative structures between the central government, regional government and the municipalities as well as the implementation of the monitoring and evaluation system. In addition, the European Commission has already requested the submission of the first report on the implementation of the Child Guarantee for 2024.

Sweden

Annika Remaeus und Marit Birk, Division for Social Service and Disability Policy, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Sweden



Annika Remaeus and Marit Birk from the Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs talked about the state of implementation of the EU Child Guarantee in Sweden. First, an analysis had been carried out last year of the current situation in Sweden with reference to the target groups of the Child Guarantee. In summary, the results showed that, although Swedish legislation provides for effective access for children to key services, some groups of children do not have or are at risk of not having such access. As vulnerable groups the study identified: children living in economically disadvantaged circumstances; children living in inadequate or unsafe housing; children who are socio-economically disadvantaged; children with physical, mental or intellectual disabilities; and children placed in care outside their own home by

social services. These target groups were included in the NAP. Reasons for poor access to social services could be, for example, a lack of knowledge about the services in some groups or mistrust of the authorities. Another specific problem is waiting times in the health system, for example in access to treatment for children with mental illness.

Regarding children in precarious family situations in the Swedish context, special emphasis should be placed particularly on children living with a parent with a disability, mental illness, chronic illness or substance abuse problems. Children who live in families in which violence occurs are also disadvantaged. Specific problems may also occur for youngsters in the transition from child to adult in the healthcare or social service system, or from secondary school to finding a job.

The Swedish National Action Plan contains ten goals. Of these, three were highlighted as examples

- The proportion of children from socio-economically disadvantaged families attending a day care centre should increase.
- The proportion of socio-economically disadvantaged families accessing maternal and child health services should increase.
- The number of children affected by evictions should decrease

In implementing the Child Guarantee, Sweden aims to make use of already existing relevant strategic social strategies, on-going government commitments and legal policy work. Current national strategies include public health policy, the long-term strategy to tackle segregation and the new strategy for combating homelessness. A positive effect arises from the integrative, cross-departmental perspective of the Child Guarantee, which will also require a new integrative view of both the existing work and forthcoming interventions. Overall, the focus would shift more towards:

- early detection and prevention
- increased cooperation at all levels
- intervention in socio-economically disadvantaged areas
- the creation of more socially sustainable housing

In Sweden, the EU Child Guarantee is coordinated by the Ministry of Social Affairs. An inter-ministerial working group is responsible for developing and coordinating the measures. The coordination and the working group are supported by the Department for Data Analysis. Various civil society organisations

that advocate for children's rights have been involved in the process of drafting the NAP and will also be regularly involved in the implementation phase. The implementation process will be documented on a website to ensure transparency and it will include greater direct involvement of children.

Monitoring of the progress of the EU Child Guarantee plays a major role in the Swedish plans. The main responsibility for monitoring lies with the Analysis Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs. This department uses established data from official statistics. This includes, for example, data from the Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, which regularly conducts a housing market survey, and statistics on evictions from the Swedish Enforcement Agency. The Analysis Department also conducts its own surveys on the situation of children and young people. Data from other scientific sources are used for monitoring, for example survey data on child poverty from Save the Children or the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society.

In view of the many challenges, the speakers saw the following as priorities in the implementation of the Child Guarantee for Sweden:

- tackling the growing income disparities in Sweden despite comparatively low poverty rates
- tackling increasing segregation in residential areas
- increasing equal opportunities in pre-school and school
- improving the provision of adequate housing for families in precarious living conditions.

Contributions from other countries and discussion

In the discussion, representatives from other countries described the processes of drafting their NAPs and the main points in their plans' content, in addition to elaborating on some individual points. In some countries where elections had recently been held and new governments formed, such as Germany, no NAPs were yet available. In the other countries, despite some differences, the discussion revealed many similarities in the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee.

Similar approaches despite different starting points

Although the Child Guarantee has defined target groups, the NAPs focus on or expand the target groups to respond to the country-specific situations of children. For example, participants from different countries highlighted refugee children and children from migrant families, children from minorities (e.g. Roma families), children with mental illness and children with a parent with mental illness.

For the drafting of the NAP and the planning for its implementation, the participants each reported the establishment of a central office for the coordination of the Child Guarantee in a relevant ministry. In addition, there were inter-ministerial committees/committees to coordinate the various interested parties. These are mainly various ministries, regional and local governments and authorities as well as representatives of civil society and children and young people.

In addition, some participants stressed that regional Child Guarantee coordinators will be appointed in their countries and regional action plans will be developed in order to take into account the different living conditions of children in different parts of the country. In some cases, these coordinators have the task of administering the targeted allocation of national budget funds and EU funds in the regions.

All countries present agreed that the content of NAPs and associated initiatives should be closely linked to existing national strategies to combat child poverty and improve the participation of disadvantaged children. The COVID-19 pandemic had revealed gaps in existing child-related services

and poverty reduction strategies that should be closed in the implementation of the Child Guarantee.

Financial resources for the NAPs

The representatives of civil society organisations at the expert meeting raised the issue of financial resources for the planned measures of the NAPs. Ministry officials were asked whether the governments would provide additional budgets for the implementation of the Child Guarantee or whether they would essentially re-label funds that had already been designated. Ministry representatives unanimously pointed out that government funds are mainly tied up in permanent programmes and schemes and that the scope for additional funding for the Child Guarantee is limited. However, most NAPs at least provide for additional budgets for the coordinating functions and bodies. Furthermore, additional funds are set aside in the budgets, which are necessary as a co-financing share when applying for ESF+ funds.

The European Commission has emphasised the importance it attaches to the obligation for adequate co-financing when Member States apply for ESF+ funds. A wide range of planned investments in the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be found in the NAPs.

However, some countries, for example Spain and Malta, have gone beyond this minimum practice by allocating additional budgets in real terms to achieve the objectives of the Child Guarantee. In Estonia, the development of a new national child and family strategy was started at the same time as the Child Guarantee came into force, meaning that the NAP and the new strategy were so closely interlinked that the budgets were also integrated. The budget had particularly increased measures for large families and for children with disabilities.

In general, member states pointed out that there would be improvements in poverty reduction even without an increase in budgets. For example, the integration of fragmented financial support payments and service provision, as well as an amelioration of interface problems, the elimination

of duplicated structures and a decrease in bureaucracy, could significantly increase the effectiveness of policies to reduce child poverty. Indeed, the quality and targeting of services could be improved without providing additional funding. This would also include raising awareness of services and reducing access barriers. In this context, COFACE in particular referred to the demand for automatic granting of more family benefits without complicated application processes. Many of the data currently requested when applying for financial benefits are available to state administrations and can be automatically brought together using modern IT infrastructures

EU framework

Participants formulated requirements for the European Commission, aimed at a better monitoring of the national implementation. The EU should develop more technical guidelines to support national ministries in the implementation process. These guidelines could help improve the quality of national indicators, monitoring procedures and evaluation methods. Moreover, this would facilitate international comparability.

Peer reviews, monitoring tools and other practical measures should be promoted more strongly by the European Commission as a means of quality assurance of the implementation process of the Child Guarantee. It was also suggested that the biennial reports to the European Commission on the implementation of the NAPs should include both substantive information on the national measures taken and financial updates, in particular on the use of EU funds for the Child Guarantee.

Impulses to combat child poverty

Participants considered what impulses the Child Guarantee generates for combating child and family poverty, asking whether the Child Guarantee will actually add value to national child and family policies or whether measures already planned will be bundled in under the Child Guarantee heading and seen simply as an administrative task.

The Member States pointed out that national strategies to combat poverty among families and children had of course existed before the adoption of the EU Child Guarantee and also that ministries

and federal institutions had previously cooperated in attempts to prevent child poverty. Nevertheless, the Child Guarantee represents another important impulse to respond with holistic strategies to the complex problems of children and families resulting from poverty and the lack of proper participation by those involved. It was emphasised that the problems of those affected by poverty could not be tackled with measures geared to ministerial responsibilities but required comprehensive integrated solutions. The Child Guarantee provided a helpful impulse towards more inter-ministerial cooperation and interdepartmental approaches to problem-oriented family policy. The importance of the coordinators should not be underestimated. In many countries, they have been installed in high-ranking political positions, which enables them to effectively promote inter-ministerial approaches and to act as ambassadors for the Child Guarantee in other ministries and at all federal levels.

The mandatory monitoring of the Child Guarantee offers a starting point for making political effects visible, which is often lacking in national initiatives. The international exchange associated with the Child Guarantee may also help spread information about good practice models of poverty reduction and ways of getting to hard-to-reach target groups, as well as ideas for reconsidering one's own national structures.

Participants advocated for much more operationalisable and verifiable goals for poverty reduction and for improving the opportunities for children in need to be involved to be integrated into the NAPs. Ideally, the indicators would also allow for international comparison.

Websites that provided up-to-date information on the implementation of the Child Guarantee could contribute to awareness of the NAPs and also inform the target groups in child-friendly language about the rights and the promises of the Child Guarantee or the NAPs.

It was also expected that the Child Guarantee could give a boost to the participation of children and young people in political processes, as new forms of engagement would be developed and tested. Working in partnership with the target groups was deemed to be just as important as close cooperation with civil society organisations.

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