



EU Network of  
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## Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage

*A Study of National Policies*

Spain

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# Investing in children:

Breaking the cycle of disadvantage

A Study of National Policies

GREGORIO RODRÍGUEZ CABRERO  
UNIVERSIDAD OF ALCALÁ (MADRID)

COUNTRY REPORT – SPAIN



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## Summary<sup>1</sup>

1. Spain has a population of 8,348,433 inhabitants aged between 0 and 17 years (17.83% of the total population) who are characterised by having one of the highest rates of child poverty of the European Union (24.4% in 2008, and 29.7% in 2012). These high rates have become chronic during the last three decades. The rate of child poverty is higher than that of the general population (19.76% in 2008 and 22.3% in 2012), it is more prevalent among girls than boys and, above all, it rises with age (difference of 7.43 points in 2008 between the ranges of 0-5 and 12-17 years, and of 12.37 points in 2012).

During the period of 1978 to 2000, social protection of children and tax credits policies had somewhat of an impact on reducing poverty. It coincided with a low level of deprivation, a high rate of early school leaving and a positive subjective perception of social reality by the vast majority of Spanish children – both above and below the poverty line.

Since 1999 and until the beginning of the current economic and financial crisis, there has been a change of tide in child social policies, hastened by the National Strategic Childhood and Adolescence Plan 2006-2009 (I PENIA 2006-2009). The result of which was more comprehensive policies in an effort to improve social protection by Regional Governments, and a more universal outlook with respect to social benefits and tax credits (above all in 2007-2010), complemented by policies to broaden school coverage for 3-5 year olds, to include immigrant children in the school system and to make progress in work-life balance. The development of central government policies complemented the efforts made by many Regional Governments and led to expenditure on families and children growing from 2.5% of total social protection expenditure in 1999 to 6.6% in 2008, its peak. It also led to an improvement in child poverty rates after transfers between 2008 to 2012 (drop of 5.9 points in 2008 and 9.5 points in 2012), although if we exclude pensions the reduction lessens (1.84 points in 2008 and 2.06 points in 2012, according to most recent information available from the Living Conditions Survey).

Although current deprivation rates are not dramatic, it is true that the gap between poor households with children and other households with children is very wide. Financial difficulties in poor households with children have grown between 2008 and 2011 with respect to defaulting on mortgage payments, utility bill payments and short term debt.

2. In Spain, childhood policies are the full responsibility of the Autonomous Communities. Central Administration has a main role in the vertical coordination of policies through national plans and targeted programmes, as well as promoting the guidance found in the EU Recommendation on “Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage”.

The limited effectiveness of social protection policies for children and the restrictive impact of fiscal consolidation policies since May 2010 have not only cut short the maturity of new programmes, but have highlighted the weakness of these programmes in the current context of economic depression. With the exception of the most representative NGOs, Spanish society has barely found cause for concern in the regression of social protection policies and the steady rise of child poverty indicators. Reports prepared by child poverty experts and NGOs (led by Unicef, with the collaboration of the Spanish Red Cross, Caritas and EAPN) and the Spring 2013 warning on child malnutrition have given political visibility to the problem of rising

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<sup>1</sup> Readers should note that the drafting of this report was completed in September 2013 thus it does not include an analysis of data or policy developments that became available after this date.

child poverty and finally promoted a debate in the lower chamber of the State parliament and in various regional parliaments (such as Andalusia, Catalonia and the Canary Islands).

In this context, the NRP 2013 includes the target to fight child poverty, which is also a strategic target of the II PENIA 2013-2016 on childhood and adolescence.

3. Analysis of policies addressing developed child poverty and exclusion leads to three main conclusions: a) The nature of the Spanish labour market with its low labour intensity continues to be the key explanatory factor of poverty in households with children; b) the social protection and tax systems continue to have little effect in reducing child poverty, although for the 0-5 years age range their effectiveness has improved somewhat; c) the economic and financial crisis has caused public spending cuts in educational and social services which, in turn, have disproportionately affected poor households with children. NGOs have brought this to public attention and, for the first time, have provoked a reaction from the Spanish parliament's lower chamber, which has called for urgent measures to combat child poverty.

4. Recommendations: Cuts in social expenditure affecting children in terms of both benefits and services must be stopped in order to reduce child poverty rates and promote the welfare of children and their families. Only in this way can the targets of the NRP 2013 and the II PENIA 2013-2016 have any hope of making an impact. Public childhood policies must clearly incorporate the philosophy that investment in children is an investment in the welfare of future generations. The PENIA II, approved in April 2013 but prepared before the end of 2012, does not expressly mention the European Commission's Recommendation on "Investing in Children", which should be included in the plan by some means of addendum. That said, it is true that, to a great extent, the PENIA II incorporates the principles of the European Recommendation. Moreover, childhood policies must pursue a comprehensive vision of child welfare and improve coordination between the various regional policies, without undermining their constitutional competence.

Five specific recommendations regarding the most urgent areas for policy improvements can be made:

- a) Improve job quality, stability and salary for poor households with children – current competitive devaluation policies do nothing more than add to the numbers of households suffering in-work poverty;
- b) Based on current healthcare and education coverage, selective protection of Roma, immigrant and disabled children is necessary, guaranteeing meals and academic support – essentially, a universal approach compatible with the needs of vulnerable, at-risk children; or in other words, development of progressive universalism in the area of essential public services;
- c) A new plan to fight child poverty must urgently be launched, in line with the lower parliamentary chamber's early day motion. This would be the first measure to guarantee daily, adequate nutrition to all children currently lacking resources;
- d) Children are entitled to certain rights, and are not merely a burden, and this philosophy must be the basis of the design of general and child-focused public policy;
- e) The Spanish strategy of childhood welfare development for the period 2013-2016 must be developed in effective coordination with regional and local policies, promoting mainstreaming in all social and economic policies, and concentrating the majority of resources in children's early years with respect to social and fiscal benefits and, also, to education, health and social services.



## 1. Introduction<sup>2</sup>

This report analyses the impact of the EU Recommendation of 20 February 2013 on “Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage”; specifically, the strengths and limitations of public policies aimed at fighting child poverty and exclusion and fostering their wellbeing. Particular analysis is given to the impact of social policies targeted at guaranteeing adequate resources, access to quality services and participation of children in the development of their own wellbeing. Analysis is dedicated to the extent that Spain’s 2013 NRP and the EC recommendations approach the issue of child poverty and are adapted to the Europe 2020 Strategy, and how European structural funds are used taking into account child poverty targets.

This report does not only take an analytical stance with respect to child poverty and wellbeing social policy, but also looks at the issue across time, with respect to the 2008-2013 economic and financial crisis, in order to evaluate the progress made in special pro-childhood policies as well as their limitations and deficiencies. In the first instance, two key facts must be outlined:

- a) Firstly, the notable growth in social research in the area of child poverty in Spain, which has translated into greater knowledge of the efficiency and effectiveness of social transfer policies, services and tax benefits under the leadership of a group of well-known researchers in the fields of economics<sup>3</sup> and sociology and psychology<sup>4</sup>.
- b) Since the beginning of the last decade, increasing development of national, regional and local level child policies which, as we will touch on later, have not managed to alter what has historically been a panorama of child poverty and exclusion characterised by very high levels of child poverty (among the highest in the EU), which the current economic and financial crisis has done nothing but worsen, above all in single parent families, in large families and in households of immigrant parents and Roma families.

As a starting point, we refer to the 2007 report prepared by Elizabeth Villagómez for the EC, “Tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children” (also synthesis report of Frazer and Marlier). The conclusions of this report compared with the results set out in the following sections show that changes in the development of childhood policies have had a very limited impact on tackling child poverty between 2007 and 2012.

Effectively, in 2007, the social scenario for 0 to 18 year olds was as follows:  
a) increasing child poverty rates in Spain in spite of a long period of economic and employment growth; b) particularly very high rates of child poverty in households suffering in-work poverty, single parent families, households with large numbers of children, immigrant families and groups at particular risk, such as Roma families; c) universal approach to childhood social policies which are limited in terms of prevention and their response to the problems of target groups; d) negligible redistribution effect of public transfers by the tax and benefit system; e) deficient vertical and horizontal coordination in policies and programmes despite the roll-out of two significant political instruments: The National Strategy Childhood and Adolescence Plan 2006-2009 (I PENIA 2006-2009) and the Childhood Observatory created in 1999; f) absence of adequate arrangements to monitor and evaluate the suitability and impact of childhood policies. The I PENIA 2006-2009 hardly mentions monitoring and

<sup>2</sup> Readers should note that the drafting of this report was completed in September 2013 thus it does not include an analysis of data or policy developments that became available after this date.

<sup>3</sup> Ayala, Cantó, del Río, Gradín, Martínez, Mercader, Sastre.

<sup>4</sup> Casas y Bello, Gaitán, Lázaro, Lorenzo, Malgesini, Mora, Navarro, Renes, Sarasa, Vidal y Mota.

evaluation; g) in 2007, child poverty was not a mainstreaming strategy in public policies – in other words, childhood policies were neither a priority nor did their impact translate into a drop in child poverty rates, despite there being unquestionable progress in regulations to provide legal protection to minors.

Although some important steps forward have been made towards greater social visibility of child issues, and in the development of national and territorial programmes, the specific results in terms of gains to child wellbeing are indeed limited.

## **2. Assessment of overall approach and governance**

### **2.1. Overall assessment**

The NGO Save the Children expressly evaluates the fulfilment of the Childhood Agenda 2012-2015 (Save the Children, 2013) as “Lots of adverts, little progress”. It asserts that the electoral commitments of the 2011 electoral campaign have barely been put into practice, and pinpoints as an example the fact that a plan against child poverty has yet to be passed.

Spain has adhered to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention), which is included in the National Strategy Childhood and Adolescence Plan 2006-2009 (I PENIA) and the Plan 2013-2016, passed in April 2013, in addition to other regional and local plans. As explained by L. Gaitán (2011), prior to the approval of the Convention, some significant changes occurred in the legal status of minors (equality for all children before the law, support for all children born within and outside of marriage, and promotion of family accommodation as an alternative to institutional accommodation), as well as the promotion of education for 0 to 5 year olds, universal healthcare (since 1990) and improved Social Security benefits (1985 and 1990) and protection for the disabled (LISMI, the Social Integration Act for the Disabled, 1982).

The ratification of the Convention by Spain in 1990 created a new wave of childhood-related reforms: The child protection policy (Act 1/1996 on the legal protection of minors and Act 5/2000 on the criminal liability of minors) on work-life balance (Act 39/1999), on equality (Act 3/2007 on effective equality of women and men) and, finally, protection of children of immigrants (Act 4/2000 on the rights and liberties of foreign nationals in Spain and their integration), which together create a significant regulatory framework for the protection of minors.

However, this innovative regulatory framework was not accompanied by an effective social protection framework. As Gaitán observed, coverage of the principal economic social security benefit – allowance per dependent child, in 2000 only covered 16.2% of under 18 year olds, dropping to 12% in 2005. At the beginning of the past decade, child poverty reduction policies were characterised by their low coverage levels (with the exception of tax deductions per child) and, over all, their low level of protection.

The imbalance between the two types of policies – legal protection and social protection, is an indicator of the absence of an integrated, multi-dimensional strategy to prevent and combat child poverty. Further imbalance is created by the weakness of synergies between transfer policies and services that act in parallel. Development of regional and local pro-child policies has favoured certain synergy between Regional Governments, albeit disparately, which together with the merely indicative nature of national childhood plans, results in very low level coordination and weak political integration.

Since the beginning of the 1980s childhood policies have been developed with a focus on the defence of the rights of children, which was result of the approval of the 1978

Constitution, the influence of international bodies, and growing social awareness of children's rights. In fact, the promotion of awareness of children's rights by public institutions has been a very positive step in the development of a civic culture that is sensitive to the needs of children and the vulnerable households they come from. This change in direction began to reap results at the end of the 1990s when the development of pro-child policies and programmes took off as a result of the EU's drive to fight poverty and violence against children. However, as indicated by Malgesini (2012), there is still a long road ahead to achieving effective mainstreaming of children's rights within the scope of public policy.

If in 2007 it was said that "child poverty is not a priority at national level in Spain given the balance of child policies in favour of a universal and weak preventative approach" (Villagómez, 2007), in 2013 this imbalance continues to endure, which can be seen from the fact that the "contrast between the very favourable (and less costly) rhetorical position of children's rights and the weakness of assistance available" (Gaitán, 2011). If we add to this shortcoming the limited and unequal coordination between governments in the fight against child poverty, it can be seen that the effectiveness of childhood policies has been held back by the convergence of universal-approach policies that are limited in their scope and intensity, and the insufficiency of targeted policies aimed at the groups at most risk (children living in impoverished households, immigrant or Roma families).

A qualitative change in the last 15 years has been the improvement of the framework of cooperation and joint actions of the Public Administrations and pro-childhood NGOs. The creation of childhood NGO platforms and the Child Observatory (which was also set up in various Autonomous Regions) are two clear examples of this development. Under the leadership of Unicef, a group of pro-childhood NGOs have developed major programmes and action plans. The more generalist organisations (Caritas Española, the Spanish Red Cross and the EAPN) have given increasing visibility to the issue of children in Spain via their social intervention programmes and delivering social reports on child poverty. The participation of pro-childhood NGOs in the design of the new II PENIA 2013-2016 has been crucial to strengthen the visibility of poverty, particularly child poverty, and to promote policies and programmes in the different territories of the State.

In terms of the follow-up and evaluation of the plans and programmes for the legal and social protection of children, there are no known ex ante evaluations published. In general, ex ante evaluations tend to be non-existent. Ex post evaluations are relatively prevalent. An exception to the above is the evaluation prepared of the I PENIA, a summary of which is included in the II PENIA 2013-2016, although the full report on which said summary is based has not been widely available. With a few exceptions, ex post evaluations that may exist for Regional Governments' childhood plans have not been publicly circulated.

It is true that increasingly we see ex post evaluations of the impact of social protection and anti-poverty policies carried out by various NGOs, led by Unicef (2012), nearly entirely based on evaluations performed by social researchers that have already been mentioned in this report (Ayala, Cantó, del Río, Gaitán, Mercader). As a result, it would be recommendable to introduce the systematic practice of ex ante and ex post evaluations of childhood policies as a way to improve effectiveness and efficiency.

Lastly, although the strategy of social investment in children is currently considered to be an appropriate response to the crisis and a way of anticipating the future by achieving an integrated childhood with quality welfare, said philosophy forms part of the vision of childhood experts and NGOs yet does not form part of public policies. In fact, the PENIA II has not explicitly included the European Commission Recommendation "Investing in children", which is baffling since the Spanish plan was

passed two months after the European Recommendation was published. In any event, in general terms the PENIA II adheres to the philosophy of the Recommendation.

Moreover, the profound impact of the Spanish economic and financial crisis and fiscal consolidation policies applied has had the effect of restricting resources available for investment in child welfare. The social logic of investing in children is currently secondary to the pressure of the social emergency consisting of providing an immediate response to imperious problems (guaranteeing food and accommodation to all children).

## **2.2. Key priorities**

- a) The development of childhood policies in Spain in the last three decades has allowed us to make a comprehensive evaluation on which to make recommendations for their future growth. Effectively, Spain has developed an innovative legal framework of protection for children in parallel to low level policies for households with poor children. In this sense there has been no integrated, multi-dimensional strategy of child policies, nor has there been an effective mainstreaming of child poverty (Eurochild, 2013). However, since 2000 there has been significant progress in the development of public child policies via the national strategic plans I (2006-2009) and II (2013-2016) and the various plans of Autonomous Regions. Another improvement has been seen in governance, with growing cooperation between NGOs and different levels of government. All this has given greater social and political visibility to child programmes, with the effect of progressing towards a comprehensive vision of the problems experienced among children in general and, above all, of the needs of poor children. A notable step forward would be the NRP 2013 introducing as a priority the target to fight child poverty, despite there being no specific child poverty target, at the same time as the impact of the SIP and the Recommendation on Investing in children being seen in the preparation of the NRP 2013 (Eurochild, 2013).
- b) To sum up, and taking into consideration the above, childhood policies must develop more efficient, coordinated strategies and create greater synergies between institutional and social stakeholders. The recently approved II PENIA 2013-2016 and the forthcoming NAPinclusion 2013-2016 are two institutional steps forward that may contribute to achieving these goals. Secondly, in order to progress towards the more robust governance, greater balance is needed between universalist social protection policies of greater scope and effectiveness, and targeted policies in favour of the most vulnerable groups. Lastly, public policies must favour greater mainstreaming, integrating ex ante and ex post evaluations as tools to gauge the effectiveness of programmes and promote the philosophy and practice that investing in childhood is an investment in future potential.

### **3. Access to adequate resources**

Spain has one of the highest and longest enduring rates of child poverty of all the EU countries. The combination of a peculiar socio-demographic structure, high unemployment and a labour market with high levels of short term contracts, and a Welfare State offering low protection levels against child poverty, are three factors that help to explain the phenomenon of child poverty in Spain, and which we will examine in what follows.

Analysis of the period preceding the current structural crisis confirms this. The studies carried out by Cantó, del Río and Gradín (2006 and 2007), and Cantó and Mercader-Prats (1998 y 2002) on the incidence and development of child poverty in the 1970s and 1990s and, specifically, in the period of 1985-1995, show how household size (number of children and dependent adults), a precarious labour market with limited participation of women in the labour market (subject to imbalanced economic cycles) and a low coverage benefits system are all facts that contribute to explaining the persistent phenomenon of prominent child poverty. This is a standard response to the question "Why are child poverty rates so persistently high in Spain?" (Gradín and Cantó, 2009). The economic boom years of 1997-2007 barely touched the above explanatory factors, in spite of increased family benefits between 2001 and 2008 (growing from 4.6% to 6.6% of total social expenditure) and the development of tax and benefit policies at regional level (Ayala, Martínez and Sastre, 2006). The economic and financial crisis affecting Spain since 2008 has extended and hardened the reach of child poverty due to the greating instability of the labour market and the reduction of expenditure affecting children and families in general.

Evidence available (Ayala and Cantó, 2009; Cantó, Adiego, Ayala, Levy and Paniagua, 2012) shows that until the beginning of the last decade, transfers system and tax policies contributed very little in real terms to reducing child poverty. Increasing social expenditure on families between 2001 and 2008 brought some advances, in conjunction with the average EU expenditure on children whose positive effects on child poverty have been cut short by the impact of the crisis on the labour market and public social expenditure. In 2008, the year of the onset of the financial crisis, child poverty indicators comprising a group of 35 OECD countries (according to family composition, socio-economic condition and work intensity) placed Spain at number 31 in terms of child poverty income, one of the lowest positions (Bradshaw, Chzhen, Main, Martorano, Menchini, Neubourg, 2012).

The reports prepared by NGOs at national and regional level coincide in the prior diagnosis of the high incidence and persistence of child poverty, the incidence of severe poverty in homes with children, and the high level of poverty in households with children compared to those with none. A recent report by Unicef Spain on the situation of children in 2012-2103 stated that the scale of child poverty has grown, above all severe poverty, and that the capacity of social policies at present to reduce this is very limited. Improvements in social protection prior to the crisis have not made up for the current economic cycle of structural depression with the resulting high rates of unemployment, drops in wages (competitive devaluation) and tax hikes. The Unicef system of social welfare indicators (SIBI) also highlights the deteriorating state of child welfare.

The FOESSA-Caritas 2013 report on "Social development" supports this diagnosis by stressing the general structure of inequality affecting child poverty (drop in income per capita, increasingly negative Gini index, the doubling of the amount of people assisted by Caritas and the concentration of poverty in households with young breadwinners and households with children).



The recently published regional reports likewise confirm the general diagnosis on the incidence of child poverty and the high rates of poverty in homes with children compared to other types. This is the case of child poverty in Catalonia (Catalonian Red Cross, 2011, Mari-Klose and Mari-Klose, 2012), which has spread to touch middle class households.

The exhaustive work on "Child Poverty in the Basque Country" (SIIS, 2013) is a major contribution to social knowledge of poverty, despite being limited to poverty among children under 14 years (registering at 11.8% of households with children). Between 2004 and 2012, living conditions in households with children have deteriorated at a rate far superior to other housing categories. The report highlights the fact that 53% of all poor homes with children are immigrant households, whilst children under the age of 14 only represent 11% of the child population. Another relevant indicator is that 53.2% of children under the age of 5 suffering relative deprivation attend early childhood education, compared to 75% of children not suffering deprivation. Lastly, the report draws particular attention to the design of policies to fight child poverty having less protagonism in the context of social policies as a whole.

Below we shall analyse the policies to support labour insertion and adequate income guarantee, and how these have developed during the crisis.

### **3.1. Policies to support parents' participation in the labour market, especially those at a distance from the labour market and in households at particular risk**

Although child poverty cannot be explained solely by access to the labour market, but by a series of economic and institutional factors, there is no doubt that there is a close correlation between child poverty and employment, above all in households where no adult member is engaged in employment or where their work income is very low, leading to in-work poverty.

The economic and financial crisis of the last five years has particularly affected households with children, as can be seen in the **Appendix of Figures** on child poverty in Spain 2008-2012 based on the LCS. The poverty rate is higher than the national average in homes with children where the breadwinner is unemployed, in households with all employable members out of work and in those with no kind of income at all (whether work income or social benefits).

Labour inclusion policies of recent years have not reaped the desired results, due to the profound deterioration of the labour market and the fact that jobs created are typically temporary and subject to worsening conditions. In fact, the work intensity rate in homes with children worsened in the period of 2008-2012, in spite of the unsuccessful attempts from employment policies to halt this.

The reasons for this negative behaviour of the different indicators mentioned are explained by the convergence of three factors during the last five years: cutbacks in unemployment benefits and increasingly strict eligibility conditions, the dynamic of a dual labour market with sharp drops in employment levels and, lastly, the February 2012 labour reforms whose effects are already beginning to be visible, in anticipation of the impact evaluations planned by the current government.

Unemployment support benefits (PREPARA programme and Active Insertion Income (AII), as well as minimum incomes of Regional Governments) have contributed to a limited extent to achieving the active inclusion of poor households with children, due to their limited coverage and the level of protection, as well as the meagre success with respect to labour inclusion. This is the case of the PREPARA programme, extended every 6 months since August 2011, whose contribution to job access has been testimonial. In order to ensure that work pays, a labour market such as that in

Spain is not viable, where employment demand is low and support benefit policies are only available to a minority.

Against such a background, promoting employment in poor single parent households is an extraordinary challenge, particularly for those with little qualifications. The promotion of an inclusive employment model allowing equal footing between employment and parenting roles has more likelihood of success in non-poor households with adults working in qualified jobs, than poor households with unqualified adults. Moreover, as shall be seen in section 4, cutbacks in education spending (grants and meal subsidies) are causing an economic overload for poor households forced to resort to family help and NGOs (Caritas Española and the Red Cross) to solve income problems and for in-kind income. Although the availability of places for early years education has improved in the last five years, particularly for 0-2 year olds, the cost of this has progressively been passed on to households, which has impacted negatively upon households with children at risk of exclusion.

### 3.2. Policies to provide adequate living standards through an optimal combination of cash and in kind benefits

The system of social benefits and tax credits per child or dependent is structured at two levels in Spain – nationally (the definitive one) and regionally (complementary):

- At **national level** there is a series of child support programmes, such as a) social security child benefit for under 18 year olds, income means tested and scaled according to level of disability and family size; b) lump-sum child benefits for adoption or multiple birth; c) the universal birth benefit, created in 2007 and abolished in 2010 as part of austerity measures; d) there is also a means-tested lump-sum child benefit for large families, single parents and disabled mothers; e) child tax credit since 2007 (between 1999 and 2007 child tax allowance) and; f) maternity credit for working mothers with children under the age of 3 years.
- At **regional level**: The majority of Regional Governments have developed child related income tax credit and social benefits of different types (universal, means-tested benefits and universal lump-sum benefit at birth). Social benefits outweigh tax credits.

Considering social benefits and tax credits as a whole, the principal expense is on child tax credit, covering more than 95% of under 18 year olds and with an annual average spend of 700 euros. Social security benefits only cover 20% of under 18 year olds, with an annual average spend of 200 euros. Fiscal consolidation policies of the last three years have had a negative impact on the intensity of social benefits. By way of example is the modest social security benefit per child which, despite extending its coverage by 30.8% between 2008 (857,866) and 2012 (1,122,283) – taking coverage from 10.6% in 2008 to 13.8% in 2012, and even overall spending (having grown 20.7%), average spending per recipient has dropped 7.7% for the period. The loss of protection levels is a contributing factor to the failure in lowering child poverty rates. The deduction for maternity of workers with children under the age of 3 years dropped between 2008 and 2012 in terms of both number of beneficiaries (-13.7%) and total spending (-9.4%).

In general, the current crisis has curtailed spending on families and children, from 6.6% of social protection spending in 2008, to 6% in 2012. The gap between national expenditure and the EU average grew from 1.2 points in 2008 to 2 points in 2010, and it likely to grow further in the coming years.

How do assistance programmes for under 18s contribute to the fight against poverty? Ayala and Cantó (2009), Cantó (2011) and Cantó, Adiego, Ayala, Levy and Paniagua (2012) all observed that until the beginning of the last decade, the transfers system and tax policies for families and children made very little impact on the reduction of

child poverty. Growing expenditure between 2001 and 2008 improved the convergence with average European spending on families, and somewhat improved protection levels although this has been slowed by the economic crisis and fiscal consolidation policies

The above mentioned authors (Cantó et al, 2012) used the Euromod method to simulate the eligibility and impact of the central and regional governments' economic benefits. The result was that the central government's programmes have had the greatest impact on reducing child poverty whilst regional programmes are complementary and strengthen the central government's programmes, although disparately so. In terms of the redistribution perspective, the impact of tax credits is dual since, on the one hand, benefits tend to be concentrated on new-borns and under 3 year olds yet, on the other hand, spending is redistributed in favour of higher income quintiles, where children are mostly concentrated. As was observed by Cantó in an impact analysis of the spending on children in 2008 (2011): "the group of children most benefitting from the benefits and tax credits system in 2008 are those under the age of 1 year... reductions in income tax do not particularly favour low income households, although they have had a relevant impact on child poverty across all age groups. National level benefits granted per child are most redistributive between the first income quintile and the remaining quintiles and, together with certain regional policies, significantly reduce the risk of poverty among children under the age of 3 years."

This positive diagnosis of the impact of social childhood policies has changed during the last three years. Child poverty indicators that we have analysed show that transfer policies and tax credits prior to the crisis have lost a large part of their already limited capacity to reduce child poverty.

Although child income poverty rates in Spain are among the highest in the EU, this is not the case for deprivation rates, at least until 2009. As observed by Neubourg, Bradshaw, Chzhen, Main, Martorano and Manchini (2012) in their comparative analysis on deprivation, Spain shares low deprivation with countries such as Germany, France and the UK which, in general, are found in households with low work intensity, single parent families, immigrant and large families and those with a low level of education. The problem of child poverty in Spain is monetary or income poverty (18.4), followed by monetary poverty in addition to deprivation (5.2) and deprivation without monetary poverty (2.9). The growing social impact of the economic crisis in Spain after 2009, above all in 2012-2013, suggests a deterioration of this index, although more detailed information would be necessary to confirm this.

Some aspects of deprivation have risen in poor households with children during the period of 2008-2011, such as not being able to take a week of holiday (56.8% in 2008 and 64.1% in 2011) and not being able to front unforeseen spending (48.8% in 2008 and 59.7% in 2011). Households failing to make more than two mortgage payments have also increased (11.8 in 2008 and 14.8% in 2011), and for the payment of water, energy, telephone bills etc (3.5% in 2008 and 8.5% in 2011), while delays in paying back short term loans has doubled (10.6% in 2008 and 22.4% in 2011).

Policies to guarantee appropriate living standards for the most vulnerable groups have not been successful at all. Very high unemployment rates and social spending cuts have led to numerous members of the middle classes resorting to help from NGOs, whilst demand from the most vulnerable groups has increased dramatically. The case of the Roma population is particularly exemplary.

The report "The impact of the crisis and austerity measures on the situation of the Roma community in Spain" (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2013,a), based on the information prepared by Roma Secretariat Foundation centres in 14 Autonomous Communities, leaves no room for doubt: "The need is general, the situation has



worsened in all areas and is causing stagnation in some cases and a decline in many others, into the progress made by the Roma community in the last three decades". The unemployment rate of the Roma population in 2011 reached 36.4% of the active population due to the drop in salaried employment and mobile trading (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2012). The aforementioned report estimates an unemployment rate around 42% in 2013.

The Acceder Programme, financed by the ESF, Ministry of Employment, Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality and Roma Secretariat Foundation is one the most significant programmes to fight against labour market exclusion (10 million euros in 2013). Other notable programmes are: a) Roma Development National Plan, cofounded by the Central, Regional and Local Administrations; b) programmes managed by NGOs (Caritas Española, FAGA-Valencia; Federación de Asociaciones Gitanas de Castilla y León; Unión Romani; FAGIC-Cataluña; Federación de Castilla-La Mancha, etc...) which are financed by the 0.7% of personal income tax (1.8 million euros in 2012); c) finally, regional and local call funds targeted for Roma population.

Regional basic income in some autonomous regions is the sole source of income for a great many Roma families, in addition to family solidarity and local targeted programmes. It is Roma women who are suffering the most pressure as a result of the crisis due to assuming the majority of family responsibilities.

The aforementioned report (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2013,a) indicates that children are very considerably suffering in this scenario of poverty: deficient nutrition, inadequate footwear and clothing for their daily lives, hygiene problems, absenteeism and early school leaving and, in some cases, even situation of begging. This situation particularly affects Roma children originating from Eastern Europe.

Programmes aimed at fighting academic failure, helping pupils with the greatest difficulties such as programmes to tackle early school leaving, compensation programmes or basic professional qualifications have either been reduced or eradicated: no support teachers are available, nor are extracurricular or out of hours services. In turn, these cutbacks are a cause of greater school absenteeism or abandonment. For children, their parent's loss of purchasing power affects their nutrition, causing cases of unbalanced diets, nutritional deficits, and even malnutrition and health problems.

In spite of the advances achieved on Roma children integration in general education system, besides educational support targeted programmes, with the support of Roma Development National Plan and 0.7% income tax programme, the distance between Roma educative results and those of the general population is very large. In 2012 63.7% of Roma people between 18 and 24 years do not study or have abandoned school, unlike the 25% for general population of same age. Moreover, between young Roma – 15-19 years old –, 64% do not achieve Compulsory Secondary Education degree (ESO). On the contrary, the percentage for general population of the same age is of 13% (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2013, b).

This regression in the progress made in social inclusion of Roma children could cause the implementation of the NIRIS 2012-2020 to be postponed, due to the combination of job crises and the impact of fiscal consolidation policies on social protection benefits.

### **3.3. Key challenges and urgent areas for policy improvements**

We have certainly seen that the factors explaining child poverty are the high poverty rates among Spanish society, the situation of the labour market and the nature and effectiveness of redistribution policies. This last factor is crucial. The limited impact of child poverty reduction and adequate income guarantee policies give rise to challenges

for change in two ways: a) an increase in the amount of social security benefits according to the needs of each home (size, type, extent of employment); b) a strengthening of income guarantee for immigrant and Roma families with children.

Both policies tackle what is currently an irreversible weakness: fiscal consolidation policies which have halted the relative improvements made in the past decade in the scope and intensity of social benefits and tax credits, exacerbated by cutbacks in education, healthcare and social services spending. In order to halt the growing lack of investment in childhood policies, a political commitment at national level to fight child poverty is needed, in conjunction with improved coordination between national and regional policies. In this way, the II PENIA 2013-2016 is a commitment that requires adequate, decided financial support at State level.

In the short term, two measures must urgently be launched and which already have the support of parliament and child NGOs: a) the roll-out of a plan to fight child poverty that integrates all the measures currently in place; b) the recovery of budget provisions for meal and book subsidies and other social assistance for children in the most vulnerable households.

## **4. Access to affordable quality services**

### **4.1. Progress of public social services for children**

The recent Unicef report, "Childhood in Spain 2012-2013" states children are at the forefront of the poverty issue not just in terms of an increasing poverty rate as the economic and financial crisis has intensified, but also the loss of quality public services in the realms of education, healthcare and social services. However, although we have extensive evidence of the crisis' impact on the participation of parents in the labour market and on access to adequate resources, this is not the case with the crisis' impact on the quality of public welfare services for children, of which there is limited knowledge.

In the Unicef study of five years ago (IRC, 2007), child health and safety welfare indicators in Spain were above the OECD average. However, education indicators (success and participation) were below average, and this is a panorama that has seen little change.

A general indicator of the relative deterioration in public services is the reduction in budgetary provisions made by the Central Administration that directly affect children, not to mention budget cuts made by Autonomous Communities. Precisely, social services budgets dropped 15.7% in 2012 with respect to 2011; family and child assistance dropped 42.5%; budget provisions for early years and primary education dropped 36.5% and 28.9% respectively. Moreover, transfers by the Central Administration to Regional Governments dropped 43% for social services and 9% in the plan to reduce early school leaving. The transfer by the State to Regional Governments of 100 million euros to the fund to create school places has disappeared, as have funds for the programme to improve academic success. Accordingly, 2012 has followed a strategy of budget cuts that affect the supply and quality of child education and child social services. The NRP 2013 does not analyse the social impact of these cuts on the most vulnerable groups.

These severe cutbacks, resulting from fiscal consolidation policies are already affecting the quality of education offered and prevention and support services for children at risk of exclusion, as well as the general welfare of children in Spain.

Social spending cutback policies could be partially offset by improved coordination between the central government and regional government, as well as improving the efficiency of administrations, but in any case the successive reductions in social

spending are affecting children's access to various services, above all vulnerable children. A brief review of social policies for children upholds the general diagnosis made above.

### **a) Early childhood education and care**

Access to early childhood education continues to be an obstacle to achieving equal opportunities for children. In 2005, 12.9% of children under 3 years of age were enrolled in school, whilst this was the case for 95% of children aged 3 to 5 years. Likewise, for 17 year olds education coverage reached 81.4%. Seven years later, in 2012, coverage for the group of 0 to 2 years rises to 30.7%, but this is a far reach from the target of the NAPinclusion 2008-2010 (45% of 2 year olds). Education coverage at 3 years dropped one percentage point between 2008 (96.1%) and 2012 (95.1%).

The limited access to childhood assistance services for under 3 year olds was still a fact in 2010.

**b)** In the development of the **education system**, the crisis has had a notable social impact on the reduction of meal and book subsidies in practically all regions of the country, and this is almost certain to be the case for the 2013-2014 academic year. This impact has been particularly noticeable in poor households with children, an observation also made by reports of various NGOs (Caritas Española, Red Cross and Unicef).

The high rates of early school leaving have eased somewhat in recent years, dropping from 30% to 24.9%, yet they continue to be very high in comparative terms with the rest of EU countries. Additionally, the rate of children enrolled in the school year corresponding to their age is still deficient – 40% of 15 year olds repeated an academic year, as is the rate of academic failure – 26% of pupils did not graduate from compulsory secondary education. These indicators continue to hinder the development of education quality.

As have observed experts in education inequality (Calero & Choi, 2012), these rates show that the Spanish education system is insensitive to social and cultural inequalities. They observe that inter-generational mobility in terms of educational qualifications that would have improved during the second half of the 20th century have slowed since 2000, with the current crisis turning the tide backwards. The trend of the last two decades towards greater social inequality with no offsetting by the public sector in the form of effective and wide ranging redistribution can also be seen in the education system. The policy of extensive cutbacks in social spending at all levels of the education system only strengthens the movement towards greater social inequality.

The most vulnerable groups do not only experience early school leaving more acutely, but also the loss of resources in order to reach any kind of equal opportunities. Individual support budgets for disabled school pupils have reduced, although disparately according to Autonomous Region. The trend of segregating pupils from immigrant families is a reality, although selectively so (10% of pupils in Spain, although in some schools this rises to nearly 90%, according to the II PENIA 2013-2016); the loss of meal and book subsidies for Roma children is discouraging their inclusion in school.

### **c) Health**

The strategic targets of the II PENIA 2013-2016 include the development of healthcare rights for children and adolescents, from the promotion of health to rehabilitation, with priority for the “most vulnerable”.

Tackling obesity, collaboration between healthcare, social and education systems in the promotion of health in school reducing tobacco, alcohol and cannabis consumption as well as the development of child psychology services (Mental Health Strategy 2009-2013) are some of the child health related targets.

These targets are aimed at improving the general welfare of children. However, the II PENIA 2013-2016 goes into no detail as to the specific actions to be pursued for vulnerable groups. Indeed, some recent policies question particular targets of the plan. On the one hand, the April 2012 healthcare reform is criticised for limiting foreign nationals' access to the healthcare system in specific ways that may indirectly affect children, even though they are attended by the system regardless of their parents' situation. Exemption from the medicine co-payment is also in place for the disabled, recipients of social inclusion income, beneficiaries of social assistance pensions and the unemployed not receiving unemployment benefits.

On the other hand, cutbacks in meal subsidies for children without resources have created nutrition problems in the 2012-2013 academic year. NGOs CEAPA and CONCAPA issued a warning in September 2012 of the risk of reductions in meal subsidies for children damaging quality of life for poor children. This warning has turned out to be well founded. By reducing meal subsidies by between 30% and 50% in various Autonomous Regions, cases of malnutrition have arisen in poor households which have led to the need for urgent intervention by authorities from Autonomous Communities and City Councils, as will be examined in greater detail on section 7.

#### **d) Housing and living environment**

The risk of homelessness has grown in Spain as a result of the economic crisis, primarily affecting homes in which all members are unemployed (Feantsa country report). Between the year 2000 and the first quarter of 2013, evictions affected 391,032 people.

The action taken by those affected, via the creation of the "Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca" (PAH - Platform for Mortgage Victims) has been a crucial factor in giving greater visibility to social exclusion due to housing problems. This platform launched a citizens' legislative initiative in 2012 that led to new legislation on evictions to be approved by Parliament on 9 May 2013. In March and November 2012, the Spanish Government adopted urgent measures to protect mortgage payers lacking resources. The Judgement of the EU Court of Justice of 14 March 2013, which empowered judges to suspend eviction processes in the event of "abusive clauses", has helped to prevent the eviction of those who cannot make mortgage payments on their main residence. On 13 January 2013, a "Social Housing Fund" was created for rented property for the vulnerable, disabled or victims of domestic violence. This is an agreement between various ministries, the Third Sector Platform, Unions, banks and savings banks, the FEMP and the General Council of Judicial Powers, in order to provide affordable rentals for at least two years in bank-owned properties. The Fund has begun with a total of 5,891 dwellings.

The impact of the November 2012 Royal Decree to relieve the mortgage burden of vulnerable people has been very limited: less than 2% of those requesting suspension of an eviction process have benefitted from the regulation due to excessive demands in order to benefit from the measure (Carmena, 2013).

The Citizens' Legislative Initiative that was passed on 8 May (Measures to strengthen protection for mortgage payers, debt restructuring and social renting) is restrictive in terms of payment in kind of the dwelling and the necessary requirements to suspend an eviction process. Due to these particular elements, it has been appealed by the PAH and certain political parties.

As part of the response to the problem of loss of housing, a State Rental Housing Plan for urban rehabilitation, regeneration and renovation 2013-2016 has been prepared, which sets the housing needs of the most vulnerable groups as a priority target, the so-called "protected rental" and "rotated social renting" (of between one and three years of affordable rent during exclusion or poverty). We do not have access to an ex ante impact evaluation.

#### **e) Family support alternative care**

In January 2013, the Territorial Council of Social Services and Dependency approved the "Social services reference catalogue" which includes a number of instruments aimed at "family support and intervention" such as assistance for minors at risk of social and family exclusion, socio-educational support for minors with learning difficulties, family placement for the vulnerable, residential fostering, adoption and early intervention for under 6 year olds.

This services catalogue is tailored by Regional Governments according to their various childhood programmes, meaning that there is broad regional diversity in terms of how social rights materialise, and how budgetary support realises these rights.

### **4.2. Urgent areas for policy improvements.**

The foregoing analysis reveals some key challenges and urgent areas for action.

These key challenges include: a) progress in developing the subjective right to child social services, which is provided by some Autonomous Regions but not all, meaning that the right to assistance becomes a subjective right for all children without undermining special attention for excluded and at-risk children; b) tackling early school leaving continues to be a priority in order to develop welfare and positive future prospects for children; c) progress must also be made in horizontal coordination between social, education and healthcare services.

The II PENIA 2013-2016 is an ambitious tri-annual programme for the development of childhood services. Yet it lacks specific measures and budgetary commitments in order to be really effective. Central government must ensure a more robust governance to achieve effective vertical and horizontal coordination, and children's NGOs support this cause. The Child Observatory can contribute to reaching this goal by ensuring the continued improvement in information and analysis of the social situation of children and contributing to a multi-dimensional view of child poverty, since the lack of this has a negative effect on the effectiveness of policies (Malgesini, 2012).

**Urgent action includes:** a) guaranteeing the social inclusion of at-risk school children via the combination of academic support and adequate nutrition, avoiding stigmatising which has been seen in some Autonomous Regions in the summer of 2013 with the special assistance provided to ethnic minorities and foreign children from homes without resources; b) returning to meal subsidies, book subsidies and compensation programmes for the most vulnerable children.



## 5. Child participation in society and child policies

Solving child poverty and exclusion does not boil down to income guarantee and access to welfare services, but includes an aspect concerning community and relationships. Particularly, the participation of children provided for in Article 12 of the Convention must be mentioned. As observed by L. Gilsanz (see Lázaro and Mora, 2012) within the complex mix of causes of child poverty, the “voice” of the child, his/her opinion, as well as the guarantee of a safe environment, are relevant factors to explain the exclusion of minors as a whole. Although in this report we will not touch upon child abuse or the impact of a hostile family environment, the element of participation must be considered, the relevance of which has been highlighted by Unicef reports and by the Spain Child Observatory itself.

Since 2008, numerous research has been carried out in relation to the participation of children in accordance with the UN Convention. The report of C. Ballesteros Vicente (2012) for the Spanish Children’s Rights Coalition refers to the consultation carried out in 2008 with a sample of 271 minors aged between 10 and 17 years from seven different Autonomous Communities that participated in programmes run by the Coalition. More than 90% of the children consulted stated that in order to fight child poverty, integrated economic, social and educational help is needed, and that current resources are not sufficient to eradicate child poverty. They put responsibility for this at the feet of governments, NGOs and society as a whole.

Associative child participation in 2008 (Vidal and Mota, 2008) reached 44% of children aged between 6 and 11 years and 31% of children aged between 12 and 14 years who, for the most part, participated in sports organisations (64.5% of 6-14 year olds).

A number of years later, according to Unicef (2012)<sup>5</sup>, Spanish children on the whole have a positive outlook, mostly feeling happy and optimistic, which Casa and Bello dub “the bias of vital optimism”. These are children that primarily believe that everyone must eat, have a home or family and there must be peace in the world.

From the point of view of participation, Spanish children have a favourable but nuanced opinion, showing that child participation is a medium-long term target. They agree that they can participate in decisions taken at home (36.3%) and also agree that local councils should seek their opinion in matters that affect them (31%) and that their teachers listen to their opinions (49.5%).

Child participation was a principal objective of the I PENIA 2006-2009. In fact, a sample of 1,413 children and 3,852 educators was contacted to evaluate and comment on the plan. Likewise, progress in child participation has been made in towns, under the so-called “child participation councils” in place in 12% of all Spanish towns. The programme “Ciudades amigas de la infancia”, promoted by Unicef Spain is also worthy of note.

The (II PENIA 2013-2016, which will be further analysed in what follows, tackles “child participation and an adequate environment” in its strategic target no. 8, which entails the promotion of child participation, favouring appropriate social and environmental surroundings and allowing adequate development of their skills in a safe environment, to promote responsible consumption and sustainable development in both urban and rural areas.

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<sup>5</sup> Report based on a survey on a sample of nearly 6,000 students aged 12-13 years, performed by Casas & Bello in the study: “Calidad de vida y bienestar subjetivo infantil en España”: <http://www.unicef.es/actualidad-documentacion/publicaciones/calidad-de-vida-y-bienestar-infantil-subjetivo-en-espana>.

## 6. Addressing child poverty and social exclusion in the European Semester

The policy framework of child poverty and the wellbeing programmes in Spain comprises a collection of actions developed during the first European semester, which we will highlight below.

a) The **NRP 2013** includes the fight against poverty as a target (no. 5) and adopts the CSR 7.2 on "Promotion and defence of childhood and adolescence" through which specific measures against child poverty are taken within the II PENIA (2013-2016) which was just approved in April 2013. This target is strengthened further by target no. 4 on reduction of early school leaving, to 15% by 2020 (from a current rate of 24.9%).

The Council Recommendation on Spain 2013 NRP recognises that Spain has <sup>(6)</sup> made certain progress in the fight against child poverty and in improving the efficiency of family support services, and recommends reducing the rate of early school leaving in addition to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of support measures for quality homes support services as a whole.

The **II PENIA 2013-2016**, approved in April 2013, was preceded by the I PENIA (2006-2009) which was extended in 2010. Between 2010 and 2012, no strategic plan on childhood was passed at all. The new plan is the result of cooperation between the different Public Administrations, the Coalition of Child Organisations and the Child Observatory <sup>(7)</sup>.

The new plan sets estimated expenditure for the whole period at 5.159 billion euros, of which the Central Administration will fund 14%, and the rest by Regional Governments, the greatest expense of which will be the social protection and inclusion target (34.3%), followed by participation and a positive childhood environment (32%). Spending is not broken down into sub-targets and programmes, meaning that, for example, the specific investment in fighting child poverty cannot be known, despite it being relevant given the importance given to this specific target.

The plan considers the targets as a whole to be an "investment in childhood" and in doing so, adopts the philosophy of the EC Recommendation.

The plan explicitly acknowledges that child poverty is currently one of the main challenges in Spanish social policy, and that in the **forthcoming NAPinclusion 2013-2016** it will be a priority. By referring to the last plan, the NSCAP 2013-2016 has declined to quantify the specific targets for reducing child poverty during its period of validity.

Moreover, the II PENIA 2013-2016 has considered only two child poverty and exclusion indicators: The poverty risk rate of children aged 0-17 years, and households with children wherein no household member is engaged in remunerated work. Other relevant exclusion indicators are not mentioned, such as the rate of poverty of specific at-risk groups (Roma, immigrants, disabled people), the severe poverty rate or the in-work poverty rate.

The II PENIA 2013-2016 also includes targets on quality education (no. 6), healthcare (no. 7) and the already mentioned child participation and appropriate environment (no. 8), accompanied by certain measurement indicators, but no specific annual or

<sup>6</sup> Recommendation for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on Spain's 2013 national reform programme and delivering a Council opinion on Spain's stability programme for 2012-2016 {SWD(2013) 359 final}.

<sup>7</sup> The PENIA 2013-2016 is based on United Nations Committee on the rights of the Child, 2010.

triennial targets. In the case of education, the plan highlights the special attention that must be dedicated to Roma, immigrants and the disabled. With respect to the reduction of early school leavers, the strategy refers to the targets of the NRIS 2012-2020 in the specific case of Roma children, and the Spanish Disability Strategy 2012-2020 for disabled children.

The II PENIA 2013-2016 develops the coordination and harmonisation of national and territorial policies via the "Territorial Council of Social Services and for Dependency" and the "Inter-regional Committee of Childhood Directors-General". The Child Observatory forms part of the European network of child observatories (ChildONEurope) and operates with the purpose of exchanging information among the various central and territorial Public Administrations. Finally, the PENIA II 2013-2016 settles institutional links with the Autonomous Communities Plans of Inclusion, in all programmes related to fight against child poverty and exclusion.

### **b) Regional Childhood Plans**

Since the first I PENIA in 1999, the various Autonomous Regions have developed regional childhood plans based on a similar conceptual perspective – comprehensive assistance approach, the importance of prevention, consideration of vulnerable groups and coordination with other services and benefits. In general, these plans were rooted in the social services system and were developed with limited budget. The most active period in the development of childhood plans took place between 2002 and 2007. The evaluation of the success of this has been limited, if not inexistent or unpublished. In general, all regional plans have contributed to giving institutional and social visibility to childhood problems, yet their institutional position continues to be relatively subordinate amidst the rest of regional social policies.

The development of new regional plans has been limited since the beginning of the economic and financial crisis. The only plans to have been adapted to the new circumstances have been in Aragon (Plan 2010-2014), Castile-La Mancha (Plan 2013-2016), Catalonia (Plan 2010-2013) and La Rioja (Plan 2011-2014). In these updated plans, vulnerable children are clearly identified (immigrants, the disabled, and those at high risk), but the problem of child poverty tends not to clearly appear, and the target of eradicating severe child poverty much less so. The new childhood plans have strengthened the universal perspective of the policies, with more specific risk targets.

The launch of II PENIA in 2013 as a State strategy should lead to the updating of pre-2007 childhood plans and, in general, to improving the coordination of strategies, resources and policies among all plans, whether national or regional. It is not a question of progressing towards any kind of uniform approach against the current autonomous regional system, but it is a path towards more effective coordination, accompanied by sufficient funding. The problem of childhood plans is not so much their design, as the guarantee of sufficient funding that, at present, is dependent on fiscal consolidation policies.

### **c) State cooperation with NGOs**

The coalition of childhood organisations in the last few years has created a dynamic of cooperation with Public Administrations that translates into their active involvement in various child plans and programmes, as well as in the participation in the Child Observatory for the exchange of information and management of child programmes via public subsidies.

It must be pointed out that, of the 0.7% of income tax for NGO subsidies in the programme, 211 million euros are earmarked for social exclusion and a large part of said investment will be used for social emergency programmes, above all child



poverty, teenagers at risk of exclusion, and to guarantee adequate child nutrition <sup>(8)</sup>. This programme contributes to funding, for example, the Spanish Red Cross clothing and food bank programme.

## **7. Mobilising relevant EU financial instruments**

The current economic and financial crisis and its impact on the labour market have led to rising incidents of social emergency. Mortgage payment defaulting has been the most conspicuous impact in 2012. In 2013, difficulties in poor households have particularly manifested in the growing difficulty in guaranteeing adequate nutrition for children living in poverty in the most vulnerable households.

Various Regional Governments, Provinces and City Councils are developing programmes to guarantee at least one daily meal in schools throughout the summer of 2013. The initiative began in Andalusia in June 2013. It then spread to the Canary Islands (Network of School Centres for Nutritional Security for 8,000 school children with a budget of 1.2 million euros), Valencia (Children's Nutritional Programme), Catalonia, among others.

Part of the resources to guarantee adequate daily nutrition for poor children comes from Regional Governments themselves, as well individual city councils. Yet EU Structural Funds are also a source of funding.

The key target is to guarantee adequate food for vulnerable children, at the same time as offering them support at school and extracurricular activities during the two months of summer break. Offering a double service of meals and education strengthens the comprehensive support to the vulnerable child and thus preventing his/her stigmatising.

Spain manages the European Fund for Aid to the Most Deprived via FEGA (Fondo Español de Garantía Agraria). In 2013, this plan destined 85.6 million euros for the purchase of 80 million kilos of hampers containing 14 food products for distribution among 2 million people, principally homes with children suffering severe poverty. The distribution of this food is managed by 900 NGOs under the leadership of the Spanish Red Cross and FESBAL (the Spanish Federation of Food Banks).

The transformation planned, from CAP European Fund to Cohesion Fund, has caused some uncertainty among poverty NGOs (EAPN-Spain 2013), which estimate a 30% reduction in the current fund.

Investment in children in the EU Budget 2014-2020 must first be seen in ESF commitments at EU level. In the specific case of Spain, there are a number of potential measures that could maximise investment of structural funds, above all the ESF. First of all, the Multiregional Operational Programme to Fight Against Discrimination must focus on the needs of poor households with children wherein main earners are unemployed or in a situation of exclusion. Secondly is the coordination of the actions of European funds (ESF and European Fund for Aid to the Most Deprived) with the Spanish programme of 0.7% of Income Tax in search of synergies in their targets, means and outcomes. Thirdly, all funds must give priority to very specific groups such as Roma children, poor children with disabilities, children in homes suffering in-work poverty and children living in marginalised rural areas. Lastly, the management of national and European funds requires greater vertical coordination between the various levels of government (central, regional and local) and maximising the experience of NGOs in the management of European funds and national programmes.

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<sup>8</sup> RD/ 536/2013, 2<sup>nd</sup> July and Resolution of 16<sup>th</sup> July 2013 (BOE 18.7. 2013).

## 8. Conclusions

1. Levels of child poverty in Spain are among the highest in the EU. **The 2008-2013 economic and financial crisis has done nothing but exacerbate chronically high levels of child poverty** that not even the economic boom period of 1997-2007, nor transfer policies and services, could abate. After transfers in Spain, child poverty in 2012 dropped by only 40% compared to the 70% average of the EU-15 and 86.4% of the EU-27, based on very similar severe poverty rates. In poor households with children only 5% of income comes from transfers compared to 24.4% in 2010 for the EU as a whole.

2. **Pro-child policies** began to take off at the beginning of the last decade. The I PENIA 2006-2009 was a leap forward that materialised in growing expenditure on social benefits and tax credits by central and regional governments. Likewise there was improvement in the provision of child and social services. However, as we have made clear in this report, these policies have been limited and disparate and, above all, have failed to stop the impact of the crisis on the labour market for households with children. Fiscal consolidation policies have done nothing but exacerbate the social impact of the crisis.

3. The **II PENIA 2013-2016**, greater visibility of poverty achieved by NGOs and recent parliamentary reaction to combat child poverty allow for some hope of there being a turnaround of child policy. This would necessarily entail a commitment by all levels of government to tackle child poverty, which is precisely a qualitative part of poverty in general. This commitment calls for strong institutional and financial support in order to produce a credible, effective II PENIA.

4. In general it can be said that **Spain has advanced since 2000, above all towards a more integrated, multi-dimensional vision of child policies, combining the universal focus with the targeted focus**. However, political commitments and institutional developments that will make this possible are still pending. This conditions in which this change will take place are indicated above: removing imbalances between legal protection and social protection targets, improving governance in the development of the new strategy, greater reinforcing of the role of childhood NGOs (where unquestionable progress has been made), increasing social expenditure in the fight against child poverty (need for an emergency plan) and driving forward the idea and its practice in all social and economic policy for investment in children to guarantee balanced social development in the future.

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## Appendix of figures on child poverty in Spain 2008-2012 (analysis based on LCS)

Figure 1

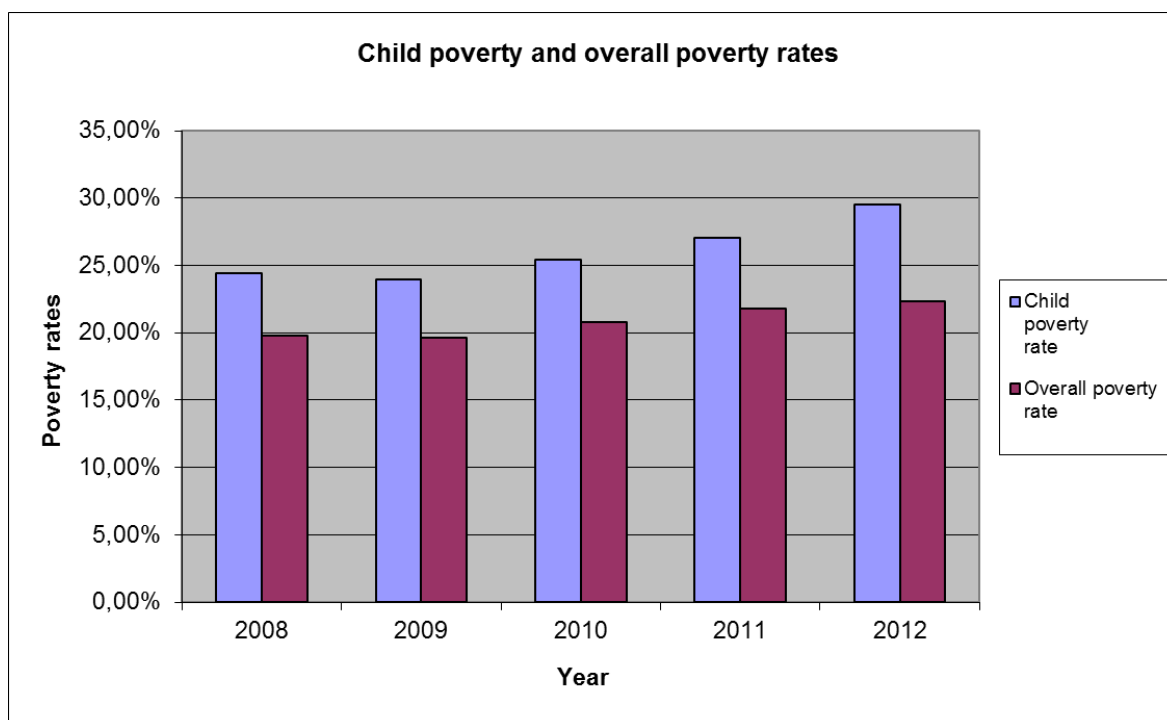


Figure 2

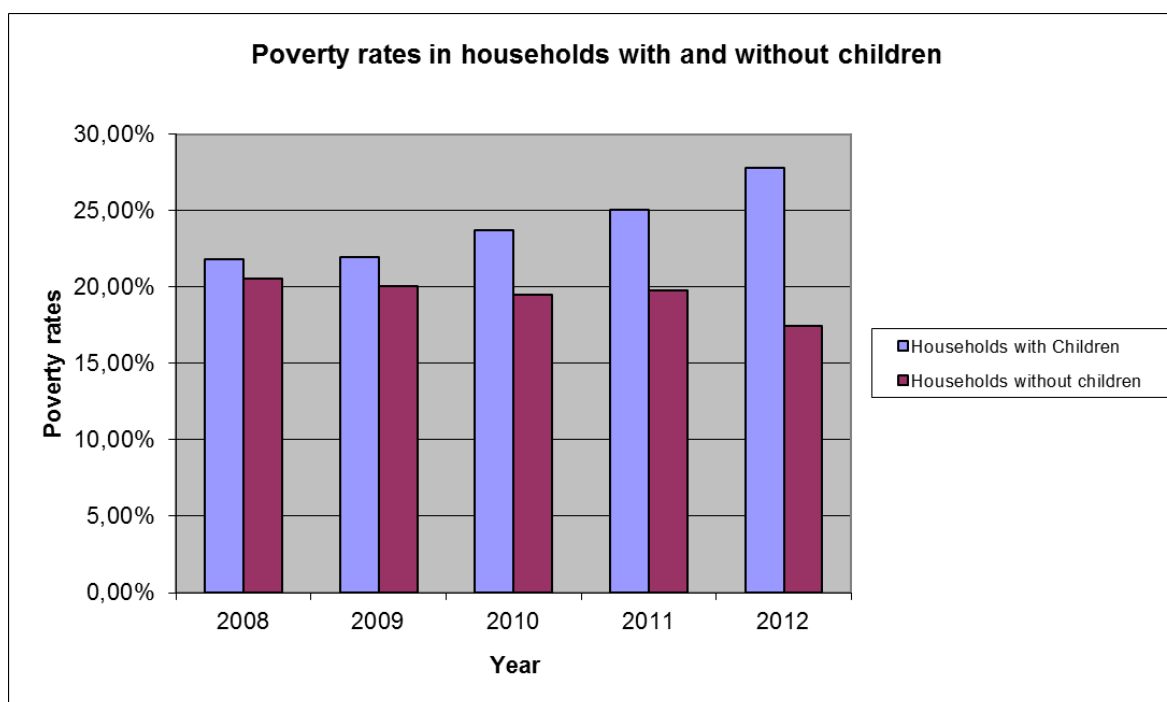


Figure 3

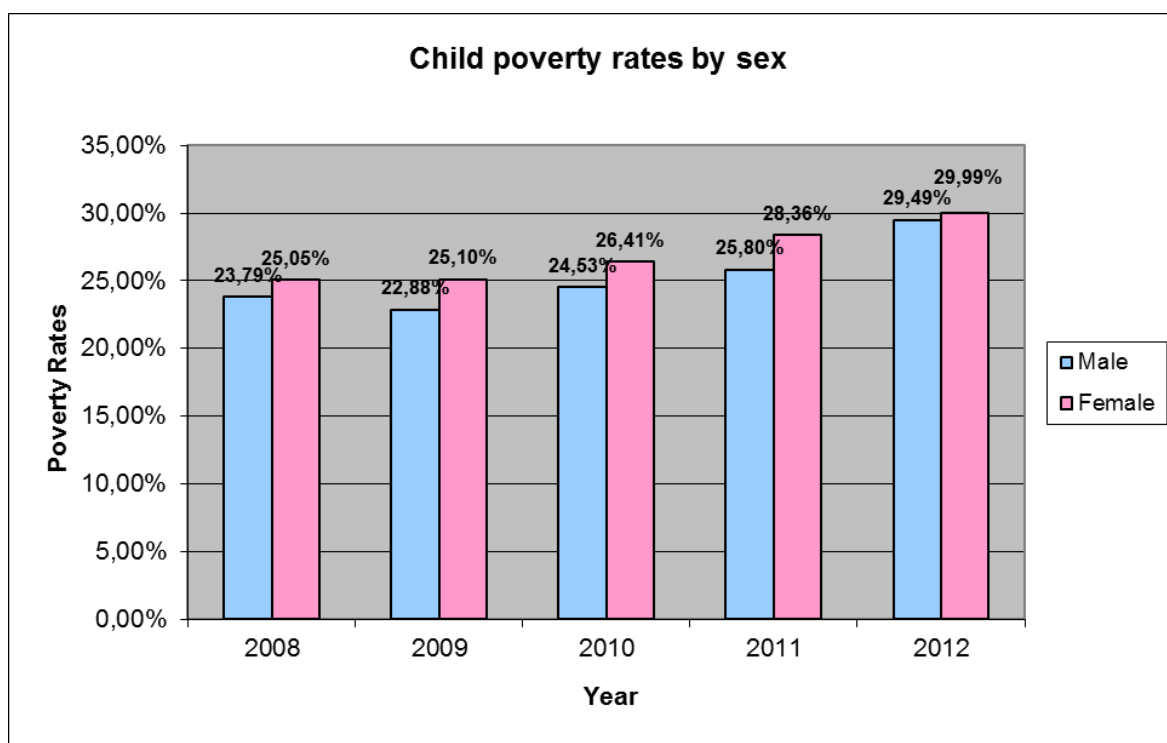


Figure 4

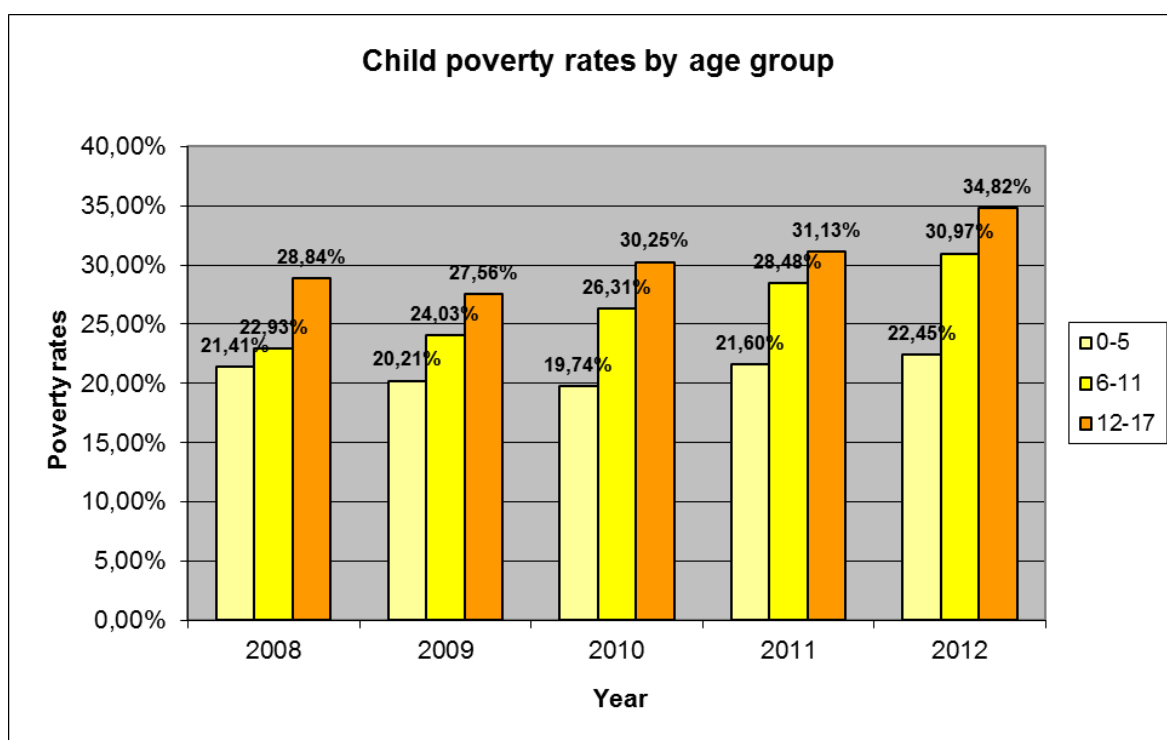


Figure 5

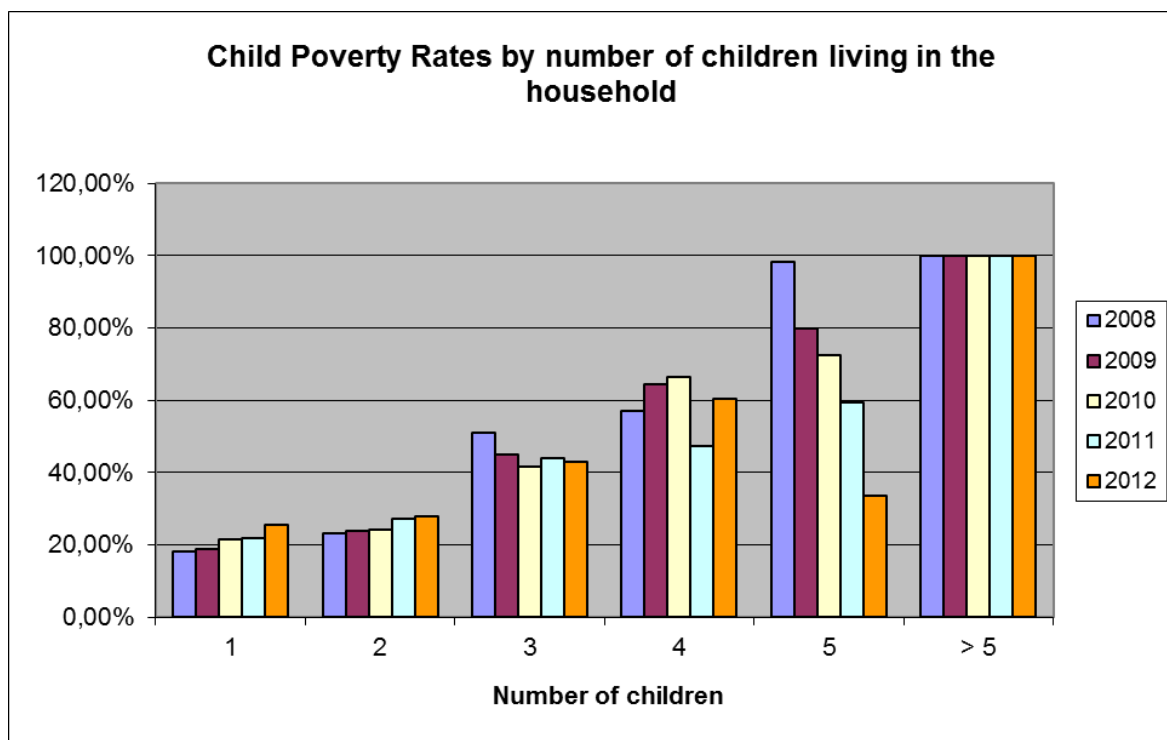


Figure 6

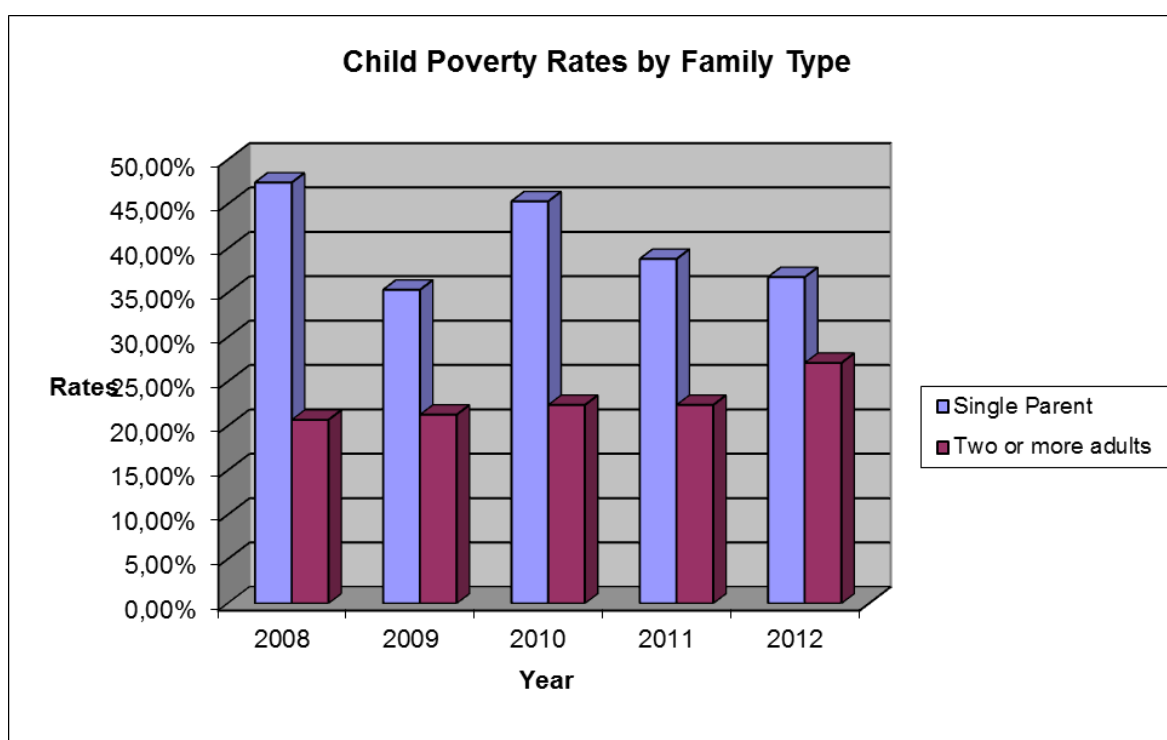




Figure 7

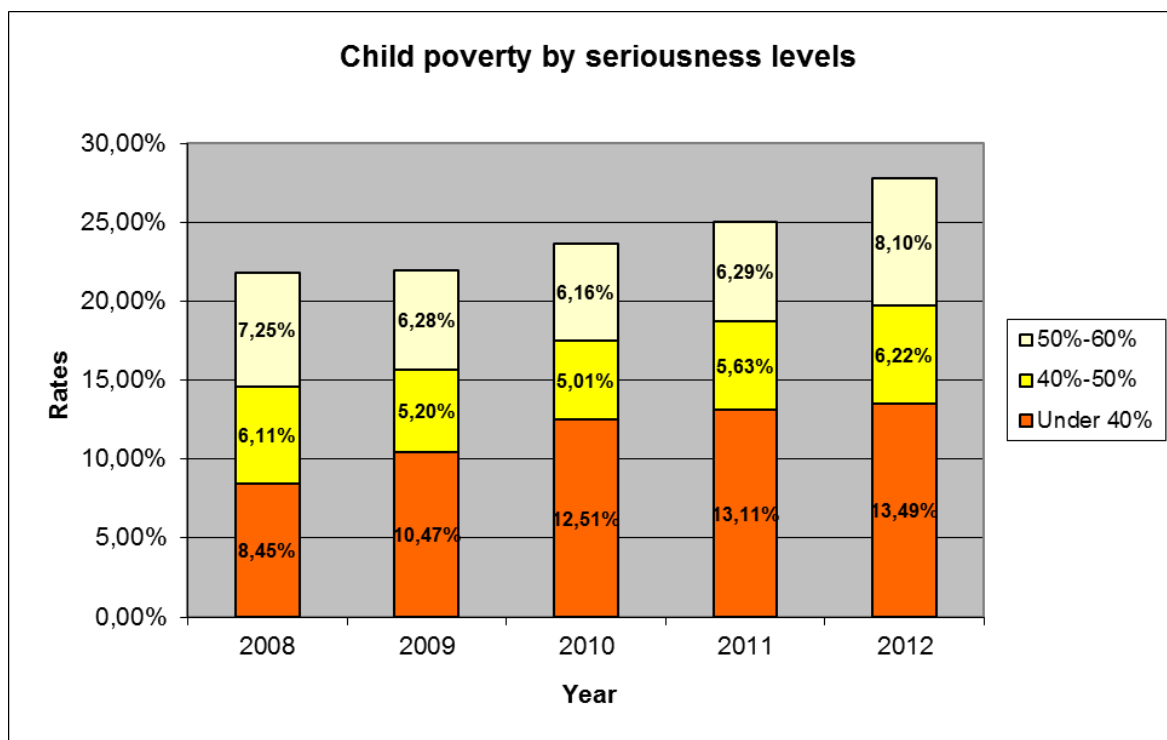


Figure 8

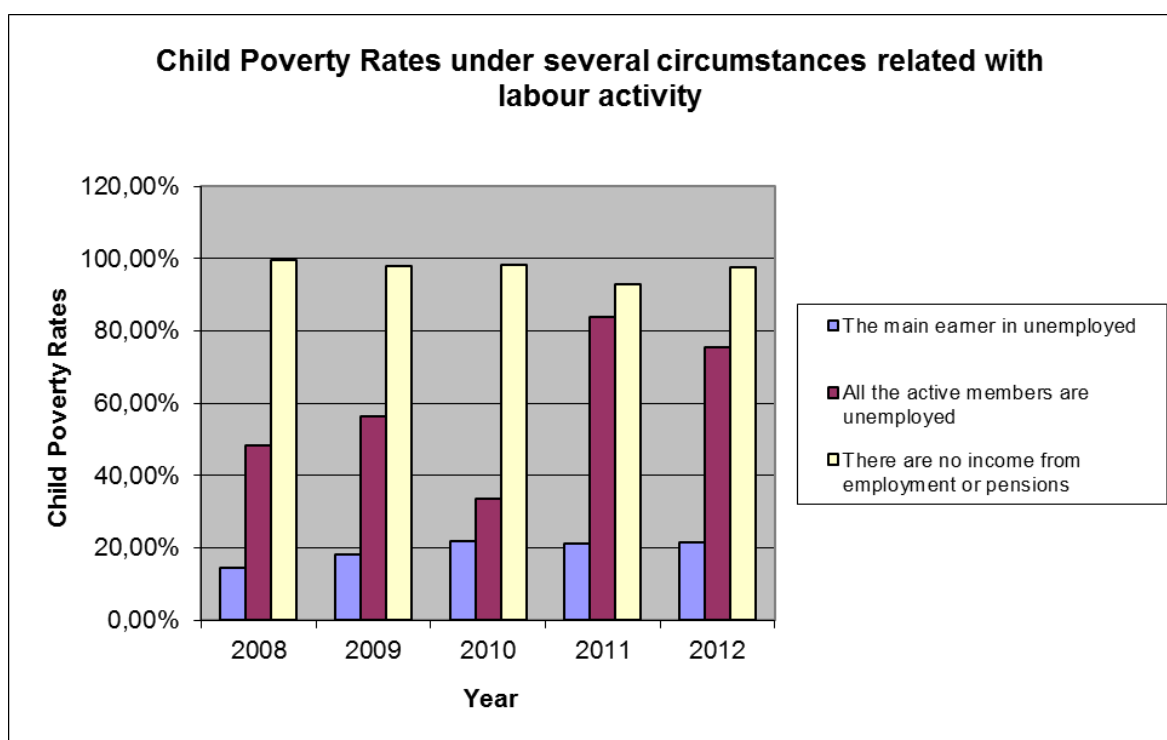


Figure 9

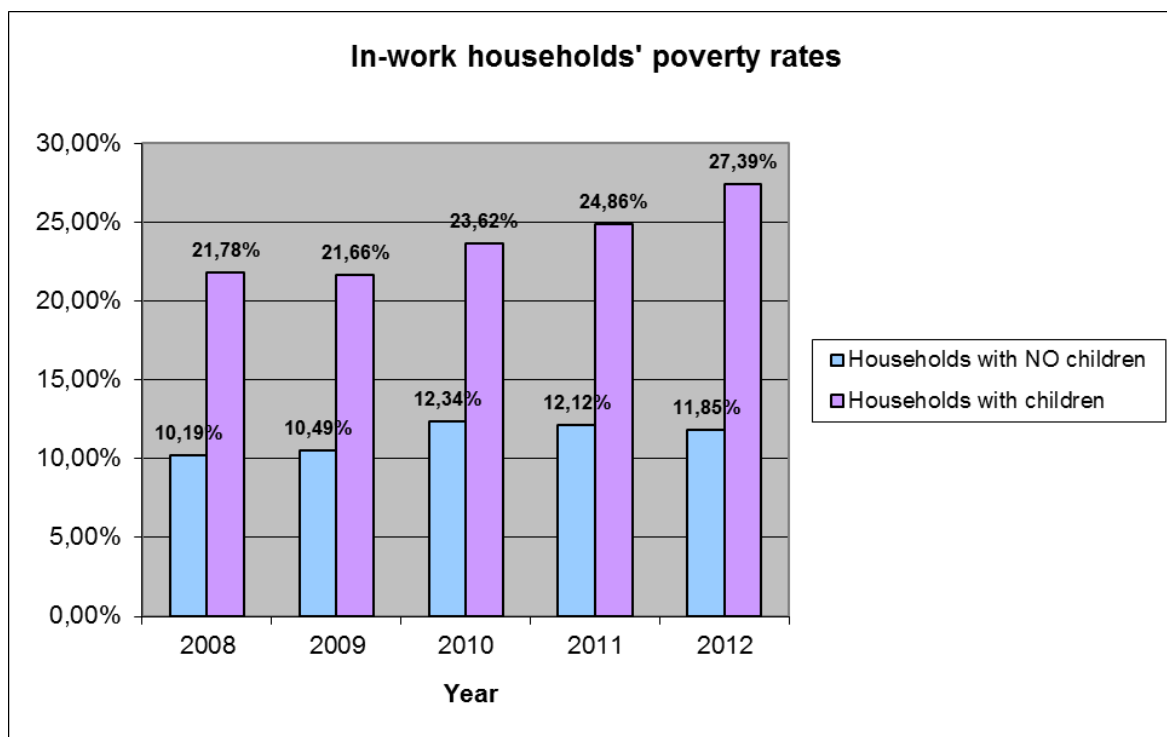


Figure 10

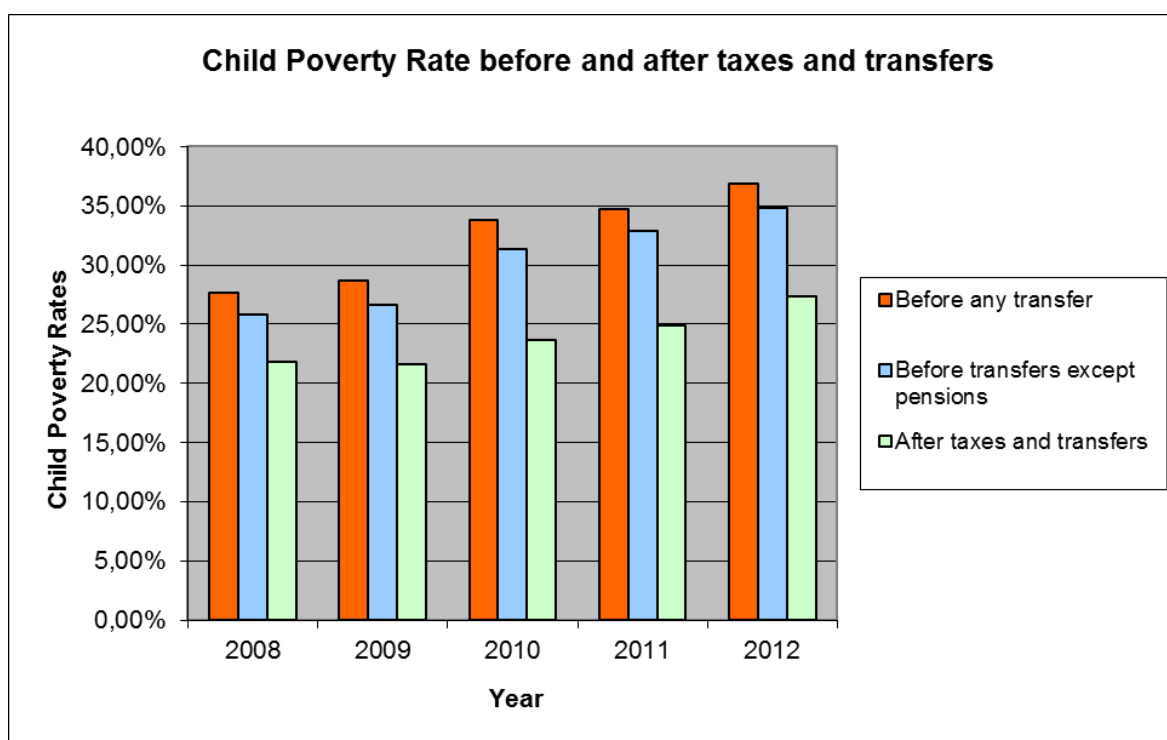


Figure 11

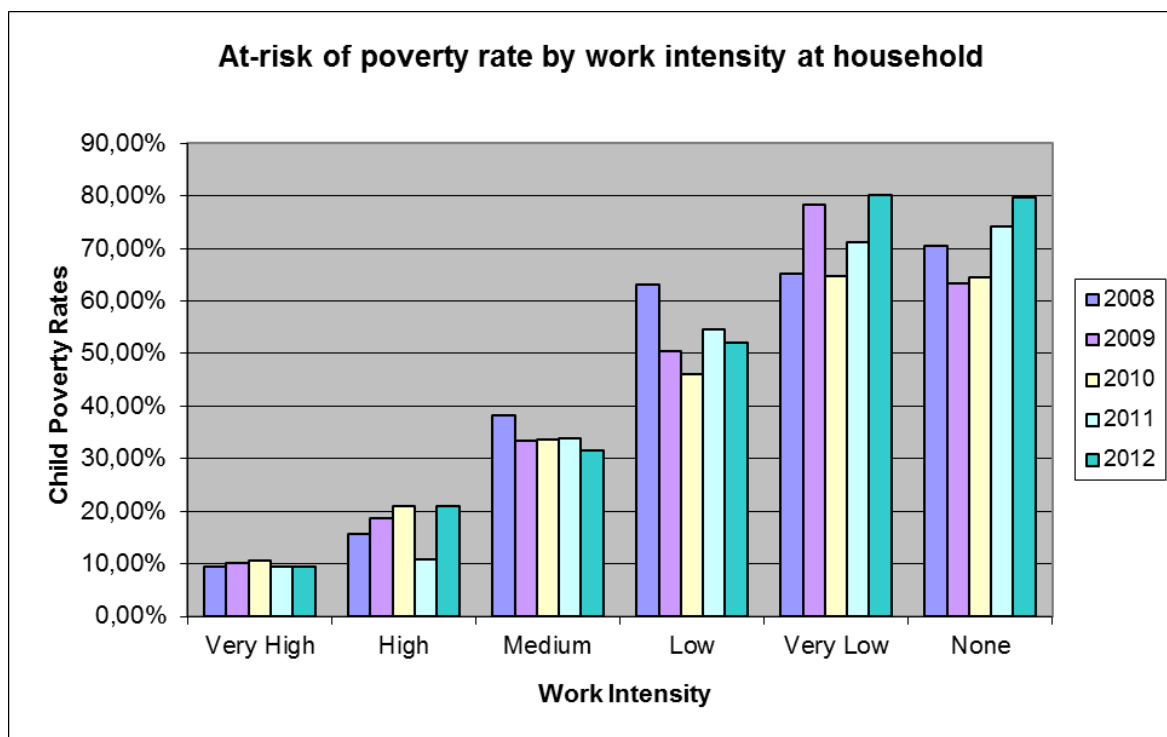


Figure 12

