



Progress across Europe in the implementation of the 2013 EU Recommendation on 'Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage'

A study of national policies

2017

Hugh Frazer and Eric Marlier
July 2017



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European Social Policy Network (ESPN)

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The European Social Policy Network (ESPN) was established in July 2014 on the initiative of the European Commission to provide high-quality and timely independent information, advice, analysis and expertise on social policy issues in the European Union and neighbouring countries.

The ESPN brings together into a single network the work that used to be carried out by the European Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion, the Network for the Analytical Support on the Socio-Economic Impact of Social Protection Reforms (ASISP) and the MISSOC (Mutual Information Systems on Social Protection) secretariat.

The ESPN is managed by the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER) and APPLICA, together with the European Social Observatory (OSE).

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Preface

In February 2013, the European Commission adopted a Recommendation on *Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage*¹ as a key element of its *Social Investment Package*². This Recommendation, which was subsequently endorsed by the EU Council of Ministers (July 2013), sets out a common European Framework for tackling child poverty and social exclusion and promoting child well-being. It aims to help Member States “strengthen synergies across relevant policy areas” as well as “review their policies and learn from each other’s experiences in improving policy efficiency and effectiveness through innovative approaches, whilst taking into account the different situations and needs at local, regional and national level”. It also encourages the use of financial instruments, especially the Structural Funds, to promote social inclusion and combat poverty. In particular, it sets out guidelines for Member States to “organise and implement policies to address child poverty and social exclusion, promoting children’s well-being, through multi-dimensional strategies”.

In April 2017, after an extensive consultation process, the European Commission launched a *European Pillar of Social Rights*³. The Pillar is a key step forward to achieve European Commission President Juncker’s objective of building a fairer Europe and strengthening its social dimension so as to create a “triple-A” Social Europe. One of the 20 key principles and rights outlined in the Pillar relates to childcare and support to children. It states that “Children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality. Children have the right to protection from poverty. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities.” One of the accompanying documents to the Pillar is a Staff Working Document (SWD) on the implementation of the Recommendation on Investing in children⁴. The SWD is a first step in a stocktaking mid-term Review of the implementation of the Recommendation since 2013. In order to deepen this stocktaking and to identify key ways forward for implementing the Recommendation the Commission asked the European Social Policy Network (ESPN) to prepare country reports and an overall Synthesis Report on the implementation of the Recommendation since its adoption in 2013. The reports are also intended to help the Commission and Member States in setting priorities for implementing the principles in relation to children in the Pillar of Social Rights and to inform the discussion on establishing a *European Child Guarantee*.

In preparing their national reports, ESPN experts were asked to build on the findings of the 2014 reports prepared by the European Network of Independent Experts on Social Exclusion⁵. In their reports, the ESPN experts:

- briefly describe the overall situation with regard to child poverty and social exclusion in their countries;
- assess the policy framework in their countries for tackling child poverty and social exclusion and promoting child well-being and highlight any changes since 2013;

¹ The Commission Recommendation on *Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage* is available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:059:0005:0016:EN:PDF>.

² For more information on the Commission’s *Social Investment Package*, see: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1044&newsId=1807&furtherNews=yes>.

³ The Commission Recommendation establishing the *European Pillar of Social Rights* is available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/commission-recommendation-establishing-european-pillar-social-rights_en.

⁴ European Commission (2017), *Taking stock of the 2013 Recommendation on “Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage”*, Commission Staff Working Document, SWD (2017) 258 final, Brussels: European Commission. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1060>.

⁵ The 2014 national experts’ reports on *Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* together with the related Synthesis Report (Frazer, H. and Marlier, E. (2014), *Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage*, European Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion, Brussels: European Commission) are available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1025&langId=en&newsId=2061&furtherNews=yes>.

- assess the strengths and weaknesses of policies and programmes and any changes in these for each of the three pillars of the Recommendation (i.e. Access to resources, Access to affordable quality services and Children’s right to participate);
- examine the extent to which the implementation of the Recommendation has featured during European Semester discussions since 2013;
- assess the extent to which the 2014-2020 European Social Fund (ESF) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) programming is being used to support the implementation of the Recommendation; and
- make a series of priority recommendations, in the light of their analysis, for the future implementation of the Recommendation in their country.

To assist ESPN experts in making their assessments, key data on the trends in poverty and social exclusion and child-specific material deprivation were compiled centrally by the ESPN Core Team (see Annex 1⁶) and the European Commission provided data on the absorption and spending of EU Funds (Annex 2).

This Synthesis Report brings together the findings of the national reports written by each of the 35 ESPN Country Teams of independent experts⁷ and makes recommendations for the next phase of the implementation of the Recommendation in the light of the *European Pillar of Social Rights*⁸ principles in relation to children. It was prepared by Hugh Frazer and Eric Marlier of the ESPN’s Management Team⁸, with helpful comments and suggestions from the ESPN Country Teams and from colleagues in the ESPN Core Team⁹ as well as from the European Commission¹⁰.

In producing a Synthesis Report, it is only possible to illustrate points made with a limited number of examples. However, where we find that a similar point is made by other experts and we think this would be useful we indicate this in a bracket listing the relevant countries so that readers can examine the individual country reports for more information. In producing their reports, experts cite many different sources in support of their analysis. References to these sources are not included in this Synthesis Report. Readers wishing to follow up the original sources are again invited to consult the individual experts’ reports.

⁶ This annex was prepared for the ESPN national experts by Anne-Catherine Guio (member of the ESPN Core Team).

⁷ The ESPN covers 35 countries: the 28 EU Member States as well as the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey. For a presentation of the ESPN Core Team and its 35 Country Teams, see Annex 6.

⁸ Hugh Frazer is from Maynooth University (Ireland) and Eric Marlier from the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER).

⁹ Particular thanks are due to Sebastiano Sabato, Slavina Spasova and Bart Vanhercke of the European Social Observatory.

¹⁰ For all the comments and suggestions received, the usual disclaimer applies.

Summary

This Synthesis Report examines the extent to which 35 European countries (28 Member States and seven other countries) have strengthened or further developed their policies/approaches and programmes for children since 2013 in ways that are consistent with the EU Recommendation on *Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*. The overall finding of the ESPN analysis is that the modest progress made in the direction outlined in the Recommendation is insufficient to the scale of the problem in many countries. Four countries in particular (EE, FR, IE, MT¹¹) have taken initiatives to strengthen their policies/approaches and programmes in a significant number of areas. Another eight countries (BG, IS, LT, LV, NL, PT, SI, SK) have also made improvements that are in line with the Recommendation in several areas. The countries that already had strong policies and programmes and low levels of child poverty or social exclusion have largely maintained these. However, it is clear that very limited progress has been made in most areas in too many of the countries with high or very high levels of child poverty or social exclusion (CY, EL, ES, HR, HU, IT, MK, RO, RS, TR, UK) and indeed some of these have actually weakened their approach in several areas. This is particularly concerning given the persistently high levels of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU (26.9% in 2015) and the very wide divergence between countries: 10 countries studied have low proportions (14-20%) of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROE¹²) whereas, at the other end of the scale, seven have very high proportions (36-58%).

After setting the overall context on child poverty and social exclusion the report starts by looking at the approach to governance in the 35 countries analysed by ESPN experts. Encouragingly, improvements have been made to strengthen integrated multi-dimensional approaches in some ten countries. On other aspects of governance mainstreaming children’s rights in policy making has been strengthened in six countries; the evidence basis for policy making in nine and the involvement of stakeholders in seven.

In relation to Pillar 1 of the Recommendation (Access to Resources) there have been significant efforts to encourage parents’ participation in the labour market since 2013 in nearly a third of countries in particular in relation to three areas: increased activation measures, measures to reconcile work and family life (e.g. parental leave and flexible working) and improved childcare provision. As regards child and family income support provision has been strengthened in some fourteen countries but has weakened in eight.

In relation to Pillar 2 (Access to affordable quality services) the picture is uneven. Much more progress has been made in strengthening early childhood education and care (ECEC) provision than other areas, with progress in 18 of the 35 countries studied. Nine countries have improved their policies in relation to family support and alternative care, eight in the area of education, and only three in health. In housing and living environment, policies actually weakened in seven countries and were only strengthened in two.

¹¹ Countries’ official abbreviations are as follows: AT (Austria), BE (Belgium), BG (Bulgaria), CH (Switzerland), CY (Cyprus), CZ (Czech Republic), DE (Germany), DK (Denmark), EE (Estonia), EL (Greece), ES (Spain), FI (Finland), FR (France), HR (Croatia), HU (Hungary), IE (Ireland), IS (Iceland), IT (Italy), LI (Liechtenstein), LT (Lithuania), LU (Luxembourg), LV (Latvia), MK (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), MT (Malta), NL (The Netherlands), NO (Norway), PL (Poland), PT (Portugal), RO (Romania), RS (Serbia), SE (Sweden), SI (Slovenia), SK (Slovakia), TR (Turkey), UK (United Kingdom). See also Annex 3.

¹² People (whether adults or children) at risk of poverty or social exclusion are people living in households which are income poor (i.e. households “at risk of poverty” in EU jargon) and/or severely materially deprived (i.e. households suffering from at least four deprivations out of list of nine) and/or (quasi-)jobless (i.e. households where no one works or where the work intensity is very low). For the full definition of these indicators, see: Social Protection Committee (2015), *Portfolio of EU Social Indicators for the monitoring of progress towards the EU objectives for social protection and social inclusion 2015 Update*, Brussels: European Commission (document available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=14239&langId=en>).

In relation to Pillar 3 (Children’s right to participate) seven countries have strengthened their policies related to play, recreation, sport and cultural activities. Some nine countries have strengthened their policies and practices regarding children’s participation in decision making.

As regards the extent to which child poverty and social exclusion have been addressed in the European Semester the approach has been strengthened in only six Member States while it has weakened in three others. A more encouraging picture is evident in relation to the use of EU financial instruments to support the social inclusion of children with efforts being strengthened to varying degrees in 12 out of the 28 EU Member States. However, there has been little change in many countries and even where there has been some strengthening of the use of funds to benefit children it is often not to as great extent as would have been needed. One of the main concerns in the use of EU Funds to support children is that often the approach has been too piecemeal and not organised in a strategic, planned and sustainable manner linked to national policies and programmes.

It is clear from the findings of the report that if the 2013 Recommendation is to have the desired impact on reducing child poverty and social exclusion and improving child well-being, that a significant intensification of effort will be required. Thus a series of overall recommendations are made for strengthening the implementation and linking it to the *European Pillar on Social Rights*. These cover: making the implementation of the Recommendation a high and visible political priority; developing a roadmap for implementation; ensuring rigorous monitoring and reporting; better integrating the Recommendation’s implementation in the European Semester; mainstreaming and monitoring the well-being of children in all relevant EU initiatives; linking with the implementation of relevant international level processes (UN Sustainable Development Goals and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child); enhancing civil dialogue; making more effective use of EU financial instruments; intensifying exchange and learning; and raising public and political awareness.

As regards the next steps that individual countries need to make to implement the Recommendation ESPN experts propose a wide range of actions. Four areas recur frequently: developing more comprehensive, strategic and coordinated approaches including mainstreaming children’s rights in national policy making; better targeting of high risk groups such as Roma and immigrant children; increasing the accessibility and quality of ECEC services; and addressing inequalities and access issues in schools.

1. Overall situation regarding child poverty and social exclusion

This section sketches the context for considering the implementation of the Recommendation on *Investing in children* by briefly outlining the overall situation in relation to poverty and social exclusion of children (including child-specific material deprivation) across the EU and some other countries covered by the ESPN. It also highlights some key trends since the Recommendation was adopted in 2013. Detailed data per country can be found in Annex 1 (Statistical Annex).

In 2015, the latest available data at present, the proportion of children “at risk of poverty or social exclusion” (“AROPE”, see definition above) varies a lot across countries – from around 15% (NO, SE, IS, FI, DK) to more than 40% (RS, BG, MK, RO, TR). The EU weighted average is 26.9% and the Euro-Area weighted average 25.4%. Table 1.1 distinguishes between four main groups of countries according to the share of their AROPE population: low, medium, high and very high AROPE countries. Grouping countries with similar characteristics is helpful as it allows comparisons of countries that are mostly in similar situations. Yet, we want to highlight that what we present in this table is only one possible grouping. We have opted for a grouping based on AROPE in view of its strategic importance in the social inclusion dimension of the Europe 2020 strategy (see below). However, even if this cannot be done in the context of this Synthesis Report, we want to stress that it is important to look at a range of different indicators to properly assess the actual living conditions of children and their families in their multi-dimensional aspects, and thus also to better understand the impact of the economic and financial crisis on their situation. It is clear from the ESPN experts’ reports and other reports¹³ that the crisis had a severe impact on the situation of children as their parents and other family members became worse off with regard to jobs, income etc. However, as the median income fell in many countries this was not always fully caught by the income poverty indicator included in the AROPE indicator – hence the need to complement the analysis of AROPE with other relevant EU social indicators (see Social Protection Committee (2015), *op. cit.*) as well as child-specific material deprivation measures (see below) and more qualitative information to paint the full picture.

Table 1.1: Population at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE), Children aged 0-17, %, 2015

GROUPINGS	COUNTRIES (low → high)
Low 14-20%	NO (13.7), SE (14.0), IS (14.6), FI (14.9), DK (15.7), SI (16.6), NL (16.8), CH (17.3), CZ (18.5), DE (18.5), LI (*)
Medium: 21-27%	FR (21.2), AT (22.3), EE (22.5), LU (23.0), BE (23.3), SK (24.9), EA (25.4) , PL (26.6), EU (26.9)
High 28-34%	HR(28.2), MT (28.2), IE (28.8), CY (28.9), PT (29.6), UK (30.3), LV (31.3), LT (32.7), IT (33.5), ES (34.4)
Very high 36-58%	HU (36.1), EL (37.8), RS (41.8), BG (43.7), MK (46.1), RO (46.8), TR (57.8)

Note: See Annex 3 for countries’ official abbreviations. Survey year for EU-SILC data is 2015 except for CH (2014) and TR (2013). “EU” is the weighted average of all EU countries and “EA” the weighted average of Euro-Area countries.

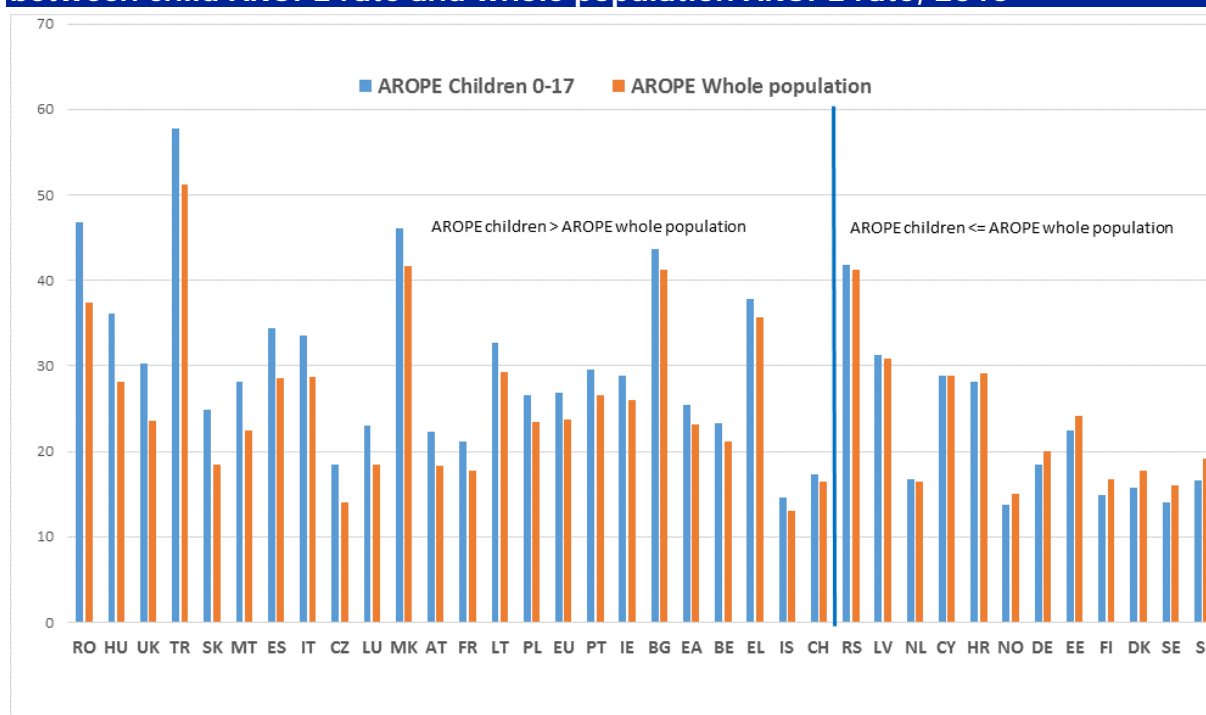
Source: Eurostat web-database, EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), extracted 24 March 2017. (*) In Liechtenstein, EU-SILC is not carried out and there is no alternative data source for calculating AROPE; it is based on the ESPN national experts’ assessment that LI has been put in the low AROPE group.

The social and economic future of countries depends to a great degree on their capacity to fight child poverty and social exclusion and improve child well-being. Yet, as can be seen from Figure 1.1, in most countries children are in fact (much) more at risk of

¹³ See, for instance: Save the Children (2016), *Ending Educational and Child Poverty in Europe*, Brussels: Save the Children.

poverty or social exclusion than the overall population. Only in eight countries are they less at risk than the total population (HR, NO, DE, EE, FI, DK, SE, SI; differences between -2.6 and -0.9 percentage points [pp]). In four countries, the risk is similar for children and the entire population (RS, LV, NL, CY; differences between 0 and 0.5 pp). In the remaining 22 countries for which data are available, differences vary between 0.9 and 2.8 pp (in 6 countries), between 3 and 4.8 pp (9 countries) or between 5.8 and 9.4 pp (7 countries). At EU-28 level (weighted average), the difference is +3.2 pp, with 26.9% children at risk of poverty or social exclusion versus 23.7% for the whole population. For the Euro-Area (weighted average), it is 2.3 pp (25.4% vs 23.1%).

Figure 1.1: Population at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE), Children aged 0-17 and Whole population, %, ranked in decreasing order by difference between child AROPE rate and whole population AROPE rate, 2015



Note: See Annex 3 for countries' official abbreviations. Survey year for data is 2015 except for CH (2014) and TR (2013). For (quasi-)joblessness, the whole population is the population aged 0-59. "EU" is the weighted average of all EU countries and "EA" the weighted average of all Euro-Area countries.

Reading note: Countries are ranked according to the difference between the percentage of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion and the percentage of people in the total population who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Source: Eurostat web-database, EU-SILC (extracted 24 March 2017).

To complement the picture provided by Figure 1.1 it is useful to look at the indicator on child-specific material deprivation developed by Guio *et al.*¹⁴ (see Figure 1.2). According to this indicator, a child is materially deprived if he/she lacks at least three out of 17 items (the lack is “enforced”, i.e. does not reflect a choice). These items include:

- 12 children items: Some new (not second-hand) clothes; Two pairs of properly fitting shoes; Fresh fruits and vegetables daily; Meat, chicken, fish or vegetarian

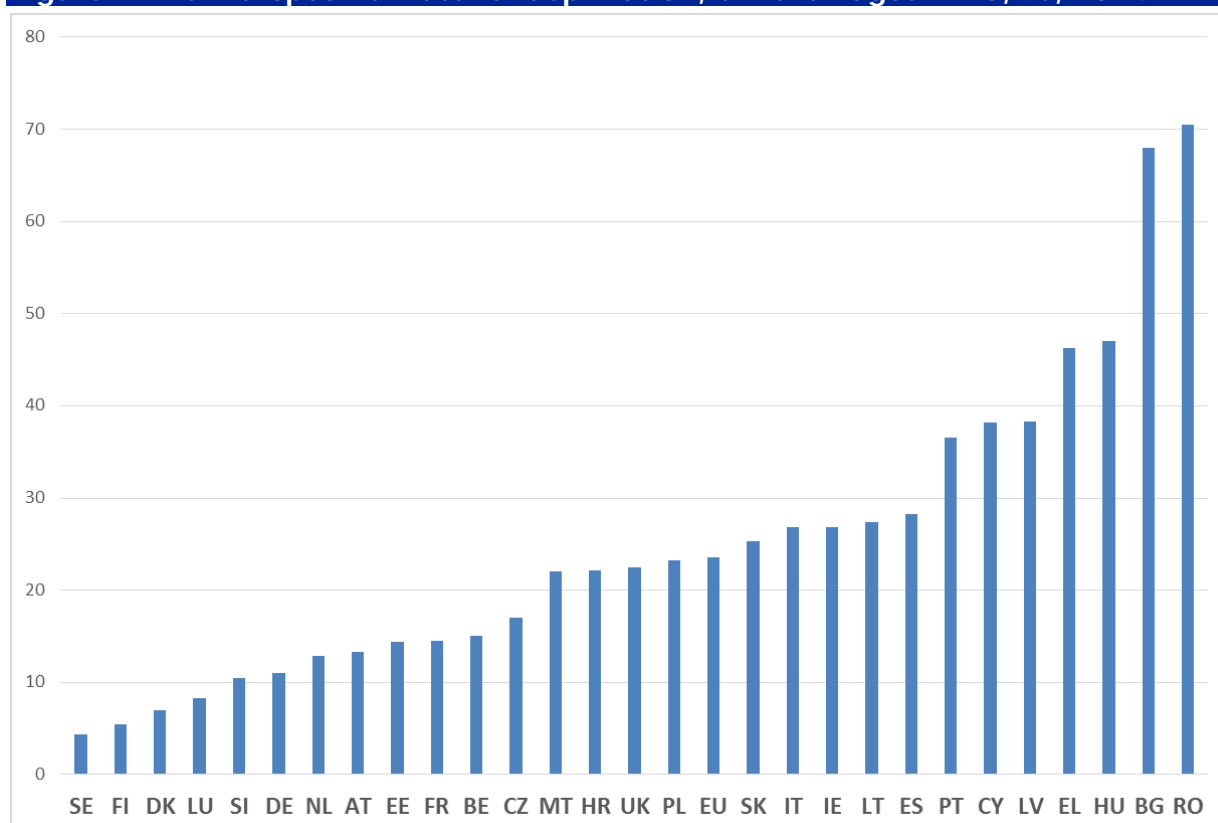
¹⁴ The original list, based on the analysis of the 2009 EU-SILC ad hoc module on material deprivation by Guio *et al.* (2012), consisted of 18 items. These items were collected again in after the economic and financial crisis, in the 2014 EU-SILC module. Further analysis by Guio *et al.* (2017/forthcoming) of the 2014 module confirmed the selection proposed by Guio *et al.* 2012, with the exception of one item which had some reliability problems. See: a) Guio, A.-C., Gordon, D. and Marlier, E. (2012), *Measuring Material Deprivation in the EU: Indicators for the Whole Population and Child-Specific Indicators*, Eurostat Methodologies and Working Papers. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union; and b) Guio, A.-C., Gordon, D., Marlier, E., Najera, H. and Pomati, M. (2017, forthcoming), *Measuring and monitoring child material deprivation in the EU*, Eurostat Statistical Working Papers. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

equivalent daily; Books at home suitable for the children’s age; Outdoor leisure equipment; Indoor games; Regular leisure activities; Celebrations on special occasions; Invitation of friends to play and eat from time to time; Participation in school trips and school events that cost money; Holiday)

- 5 household items: Arrears; Home adequately warm; Access to a car for private use; Replace worn-out furniture; Access to internet.

The most recent data for this indicator are from the 2014 EU-SILC ad-hoc module on material deprivation. If we compare Figures 1.1 and 1.2, we notice that the big differences between countries in the former are even (much) larger in the latter: child-specific material deprivation varies between less than 10% (SE, FI, DK, LU) and around 70% (BG, RO).

Figure 1.2: Child-specific material deprivation, Children aged 1-15, %, 2014



Note: See Annex 3 for countries’ official abbreviations.

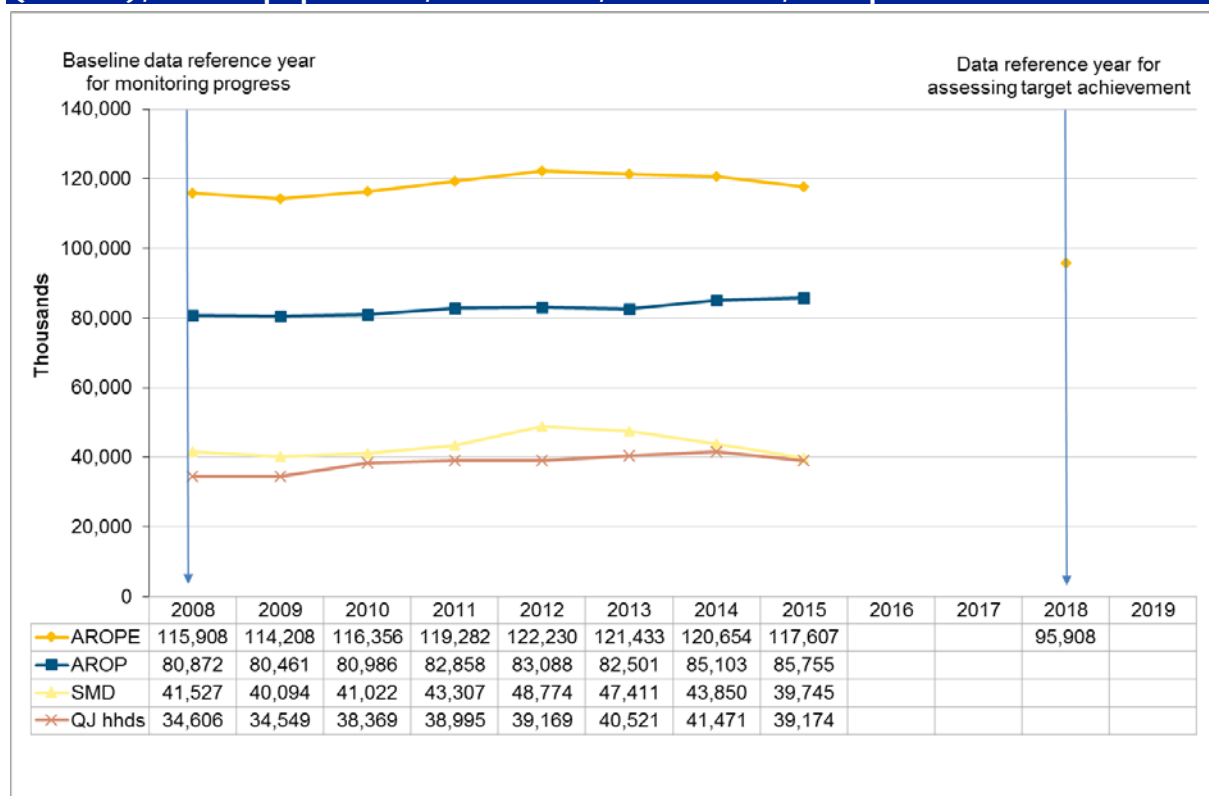
Source: EU-SILC 2014 (users’ database); calculations by Guio *et al.* (2017/forthcoming, *op. cit.*).

When they adopted the Europe 2020 strategy, in June 2010, EU Heads of State and Government endorsed five Headline Targets for the EU as a whole. One of them consists of “promoting social inclusion, in particular through the reduction of poverty, by aiming to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion” (Conclusions of 10 June 2010 European Council). This target is based on the AROPE indicator.

Concretely, the target consists of reducing by 20 million the number of people in the EU who live in “AROE households” (around 116 million people in 2008, which is the reference year used for the target [2008 EU-SILC data were the most recent data available in 2008]), i.e. a decrease by 17.2%.¹⁵

Figure 1.3a shows the trend that will be needed at EU level if the target is to be achieved (the years on the graph are the survey years, i.e. the 2010-2020 trend is from 2008 data to 2018 data). It is clear from this that achieving the target remains an important challenge and that, as rightly put by EU Commissioner Thyssen, “Everybody together — the European Commission and all 28 Member States — need to put their shoulders to the wheel”¹⁶.

Figure 1.3a: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROE), Whole population, thousands, 2008-2015, European Union



Note: AROP is the EU at-risk-of-poverty indicator (the EU indicator of relative income poverty), SMD the EU “severe material deprivation” indicator and QJ the EU (quasi-)jobless household indicator (which covers only the population aged 0-59). For the full definition, see Social Protection Committee (2015), *op. cit.*

¹⁵ For more information on Europe 2020, see: http://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/european-semester/framework/europe-2020-strategy_en.

For a discussion of the Europe 2020 social inclusion target and its three components, see *inter alia*:

- Frazer, H., Guio, A.-C., Marlier, E., Vanhercke, B. and Ward, T. (2014), Putting the Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion at the Heart of the EU Agenda: A Contribution to the Mid-Term Review of the Europe 2020 Strategy, OSE Paper Series, Research Paper 15, Brussels: European Social Observatory, available at: http://www.ose.be/files/publication/OSEPaperSeries/Frazer_Guio_Marlier_Vanhercke_Ward_2014_OseResearchPaper15.pdf.
- Atkinson, A.B., Guio, A.-C. and Marlier, E. (eds.) (2017), *Monitoring social inclusion in Europe*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/8031566/KS-05-14-075-EN-N.pdf/c3a33007-6cf2-4d86-9b9e-d39fd3e5420c>.

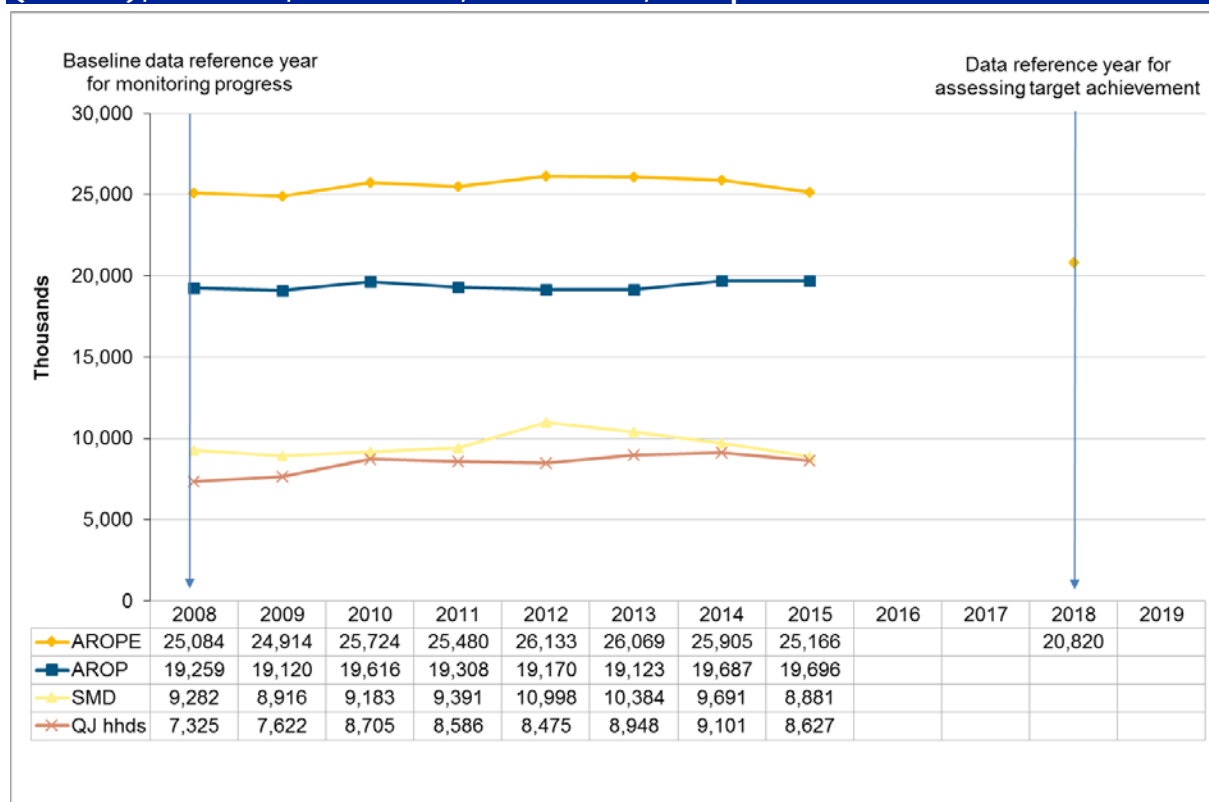
¹⁶ In her Foreword to the aforementioned book on *Monitoring social inclusion in Europe*, EU Commissioner Thyssen stresses that “Our target to lift at least 20 million people from poverty and social exclusion by 2020 remains the most difficult one to achieve. The current levels of poverty and social exclusion that we are witnessing today are not acceptable in 21st century Europe. Everybody together — the European Commission and all 28 Member States — need to put their shoulders to the wheel.”

See also the European Commission’s *Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2017* available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8030&furtherPubs=yes>.

Source: Eurostat web-database, EU-SILC (extracted 24 March 2017).

The Europe 2020 strategy does not include an EU social inclusion target specifically focused on the situation of children even if some EU countries have adopted such targets at the (sub-)national level. Yet, it is worth looking at the agreed EU social inclusion target from a child perspective. This is what Figure 1.3b does by replicating Figure 1.3a and assuming that exactly the same effort would be made for children – i.e., a decrease by 17.2% of the number of AROPE children over the period 2010-2020 (2008-2018 survey years). This means going from 25.1 million down to 20.8 million. Of course, in view of the urgent need to invest more in children and also because children are largely overrepresented in the AROPE group as we saw above, this strictly proportional effort should not be considered sufficient. However, this trend already provides a useful starting basis for reflecting on the implementation of the 2013 EU Recommendation on *Investing in children*.

Figure 1.3b: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE), Children, thousands, 2008-2015, European Union



Note and Source: See Figure 1.3a.

AROPE figures for children in 2015 (25.2 million) are almost identical to those of 2008 (25.1 million). When the Recommendation was launched in 2013 (the latest comparable data available on child poverty and social exclusion were from 2011), the figure was slightly higher (25.5 million). The peak during that period was in 2012, with 26.1 million, the height of the impact of the economic and financial crisis. Looking now at the three AROPE components, we see a slight increase in relative income poverty (2008 and 2011: 19.3 million; 2015: 19.7). (Quasi-)joblessness has increased significantly between 2008 (7.3 million) and 2015 (8.6 million, a figure identical to that observed in 2011). By contrast, the proportion of severely deprived children has slightly decreased: from 9.3 in 2008 (almost identical to the 2011 figure: 9.4) to 8.9 in 2015; in 2012 it had jumped to 11 million.

It is worth emphasising that the sum of the three components of AROPE (relative income poverty, severe deprivation and (quasi-)joblessness) for a given year is higher than the AROPE number that year. This is due to the fact that a number of people at risk combine two or even all three forms of exclusion considered in this aggregate indicator. For

instance, in 2015, the 26.9% of AROPE children consist of 16.8% of children suffering from “only” one form of exclusion (62.5% of all AROPE children), 7.4% two (27.5%) and 2.7% all three (10%). Here again, the situation is worse among children as for the whole population the 23.7% of AROPE people consist of 16.1% of people suffering from “only” one form of exclusion (67.9% of all AROPE children), 5.8% two (24.5%) and 1.8% all three (7.6%).

The main message from the available data (see also Annex 1) is that AROPE levels for children across the EU and beyond continue to be at unacceptably high levels and that progress towards the Europe 2020 target on reducing poverty and social exclusion, and especially the proportion that should be achieved by reducing the number of children AROPE, is quite inadequate.

The more detailed analysis of the situation in the individual country reports prepared by ESPN experts reinforces this overall picture. These reports also highlight the very high levels of poverty and social exclusion among children in lone parent households and the particularly severe risk faced by some groups of children, especially Roma children, refugee and asylum-seeking children, and children with a disability.

2 Assessment of overall approach and governance

This section provides an overview of the ESPN national experts’ assessment of the extent to which countries have made efforts since 2013 to enhance their policy frameworks and approaches to tackling child poverty and social exclusion and promoting child well-being in ways that are in line with the Recommendation on *Investing in children* (see Summary Table in Annex 4¹⁷). In particular, it examines progress made by countries on four issues: the development of an integrated and multi-dimensional approach to promoting the social inclusion of children; the fostering of a children’s rights approach and effective mainstreaming of children’s policy and rights¹⁸; an evidence-based approach; and the involvement of relevant stakeholders, including children.

2.1 Integrated multi-dimensional approach

Encouragingly, compared with the situation in 2013, ESPN experts identify improvements to strengthen integrated multi-dimensional approaches¹⁹ in some ten countries. This was most evident amongst countries in the medium (BE, EE, FR, SK) and high (IE, MT, PT) “ARPE groups” suggested in Table 1.1. However, two low AROPE countries (CH, NL) and just one very high (RO) AROPE country also made improvements. There was, not surprisingly, little change in approach in most of the low AROPE countries which already tend to have quite comprehensive systems²⁰. Also there was little change in some of the medium AROPE countries (AT, LU, PL). However, it is particularly concerning that many of the high (CY, ES, HR, IT, LT, LV) and almost all of the very high (BG, EL, HU, MK, TR) AROPE countries did not move towards a more integrated and multi-dimensional

¹⁷ Throughout this report when the approaches or policies of countries are assessed as having strengthened or having changed little or having weakened, these assessments are the ESPN experts’ assessments which are summarised in Annex 4. In some categories there may be an example of a positive initiative in a country highlighted even if the expert’s assessment for that category is that overall there has been little change or that the situation has weakened.

¹⁸ It is important to highlight that “children mainstreaming involves viewing social inclusion from a child’s perspective and implies integrating a concern with the well-being and social inclusion of children into all areas of policy making”. (Marlier, E., Atkinson, A.B., Cantillon, B. and Nolan, B. (2007), *The EU and social inclusion: Facing the challenges*, Bristol: The Policy Press, p. 11).

¹⁹ The EU Recommendation on *Investing in children* has as its first horizontal principle “Tackle child poverty and social exclusion through integrated strategies that go beyond ensuring children’s material security and promote equal opportunities so that all children can realise their full potential”. The key elements of integrated multi-dimensional strategies are outlined in Frazer and Marlier (2014, *op. cit.*), p. 29.

²⁰ See Frazer and Marlier (2014, *op. cit.*) for a comparative overview of Member States’ approaches to tackling poverty and social exclusion. This ESPN Synthesis Report is available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1025&langId=en&newsId=2061&furtherNews=yes>.

approach; one high AROPE country (UK) and one very high AROPE country (RS) actually moved backwards in this regard.

Positive developments include the following:

- In Belgium, a new inter-federal action plan for fighting child poverty in consultation with the federated entities is being planned. At regional level the Flemish action plan against poverty puts the emphasis on the prevention as well as the fight against child poverty. In the Brussels Capital Region, the Flemish Community Commission has adopted a plan against child poverty 2016-2020 while the French Community Commission (COCOF) approved a draft decree aiming at creating new places for childcare and at making care facilities accessible to children of vulnerable households. In the action plan against poverty of the Walloon Region, an emphasis is placed on single-parent households.
- In France, efforts have been made to develop a more integrated and multi-dimensional strategy to facilitate synergies between relevant policy areas, stakeholders and actors (education, justice, family services, child protection). For instance, a new national body has been put in place to facilitate governance and provide advice in the sectors of family, childhood and ageing and a new *Conseil National de la Protection de l'Enfance (National Council for Child Protection)* has been set up to officially advise the Prime minister and guarantee better coordination of actors and equal treatment of cases irrespective of the territory.
- In Ireland, a *National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 (Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures)* has been developed. It provides the roadmap for action in regard to children's well-being and includes the specification of a child poverty target of lifting over 70,000 children out of “consistent poverty”²¹ by 2020. The approach is broad-reaching. For example, the child poverty target is to be achieved by measures to improve parental employment and to reduce the number of jobless households while increasing investment in evidence-based ECEC services.
- In the Netherlands, anti-poverty policies have increasingly focused on the position of children. In the autumn of 2016, the cabinet allocated an annual amount of €100 million for the fight against child poverty for the period to come with €85 million of this being allocated to municipalities for the provision of in-kind facilities. In delivering this increased cooperation is being encouraged between municipalities and civil society organisations and between municipal departments. Administrative agreements have been made between the government and the representative body for Dutch municipalities.
- In Romania, some positive developments in setting up a coherent strategic framework can be observed since 2013. A series of national strategies with direct and indirect impact on children's welfare have been adopted, creating a broader and more coherent framework for approaching social objectives. However, only few of these strategies were supplemented by operational plans (e.g. the *National Strategy for Combating Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion* and the *National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights*) and even less were accompanied by the creation of institutional structures to support these plans.
- In Slovakia, the *National Action Plan for Children 2014-2017* has led to a more integrated multi-dimensional strategy and to synergies between various policy areas and subjects.
- In Switzerland, there is a growing concern with the situation of children in many policy areas such as family law, migration policy or childcare services. However, the development of coordinated efforts and a long-term strategy is more likely at

²¹ Consistent poverty combines relative income poverty with relative deprivation. People living in households whose income falls below the relative income poverty line and who are also experiencing deprivation are regarded as living in consistent poverty.

the local level, especially within some cities that are more severely confronted with child poverty problems.

2.2 Children’s rights approach and effective mainstreaming of children’s policy and rights

According to ESPN national experts, there is evidence of an increased focus on children’s rights and more effective mainstreaming of children’s policies and rights in seven countries since 2013. There was generally little change in approach in the countries with low AROPE levels as they tend to be already relatively strong in this regard. However, there has been some improvement in Iceland. Since 2013 a stronger focus on children’s rights is most evident amongst the medium (EE, FR, SK) and high (IE, LT, PT) AROPE countries. However, overall there was little change in approach in the majority of medium (AT, BE, LU, PL) and high (CY, ES, HR, IT, LV, MT) AROPE countries and in all but one of the countries in the very high AROPE group (sole exception RS, where there has been a weakening). One high (UK) AROPE country and one very high (RS) AROPE country actually moved backwards in this regard.

Examples of positive developments:

- In Estonia, a children’s rights approach is increasingly adopted in updating and implementing policies. For example, such an approach is central in the new Child Protection Act adopted in 2016 and the Green Paper of Alternative Care (2014).
- In Iceland, the children’s rights approach has been expanded since 2013 and efforts have been made to increase participation of children, in line with the UN charter of children’s rights.
- In Ireland, targeted child policy has been located within a universal, rights-oriented approach. Hence the last few years have seen legislation to expressly recognise children as rights holders under the Constitution; improve child protection measures; reform family law to address the situation of children in diverse households; ensure that, from 16 years of age, the preferred gender of a person will be recognised by the state for all purposes.
- In Lithuania, in 2017, during a special session devoted to protection of children’s rights, the Lithuanian Parliament banned all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment.
- In Portugal, in 2015, within the scope of the strengthening of the role of the National Commission for Child Protection, it was decided that a Multiannual Plan for the Promotion and Protection of Children’s Rights would be produced. The first of these plans is expected to become in place by the end of June 2017.
- In Slovakia, the institutional infrastructure related to monitoring children’s rights has been enriched by the Commissioner for Children and the National Coordination Centre for Action on Violence against Children. These two bodies are expected to contribute to the work of other institutions to ensure effective mainstreaming of children’s policies and rights.

2.3 Evidence-based approach

Some nine countries have taken steps since 2013 to strengthen the evidence-based approach to their policy making in relation to child well-being. This is most evident amongst the countries with low AROPE levels where the approach has been strengthened in four countries (DK, IS, NL, SI) and amongst the medium AROPE countries where three (EE, PL, SK) have strengthened their approach. However, worryingly only one (IE) high AROPE country and one (RO) very high AROPE country have strengthened their approach. The evidence based approach has weakened in one high (UK) and two very high (BG, HU) countries.

Examples of positive developments:

- In Denmark, the trend towards more evidence-based policy-making continues. Concretely, this means that the Ministries and their National Boards finance collect and disseminate information about good practice through meta-reviews, pilot projects and evaluations.
- In Estonia, the development of policies is increasingly evidence-based; analyses, researches and consultations with experts are employed in the process. Also, the impact of planned and implemented policies and measures are increasingly being analysed.
- In Poland, the evidence-based approach has improved. The national statistical office added the topic “Children and family” to its thematic areas. It is regularly updated and fed with various publications.
- In Slovenia, the Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia is monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the strategic documents and policies related to child well-being, as well as analysing various aspects of the position of children. Its unit, the Child Observatory, monitors the situation of children in Slovenia. An on-line database focused on children has been developed to serve that purpose.

2.4 Involvement of relevant stakeholders

The involvement of relevant stakeholders in policy making has seen improvements in seven countries: two low (IS, NL), two medium (EE, SK) and three high (CY, HR, LT) AROPE countries. However, the majority of countries in each of these categories have seen little change since 2013 and involvement has weakened in one country (UK). In the very high AROPE group there has been little change in all the countries except one (HU) where involvement has in fact weakened.

Examples of positive developments:

- In Cyprus, there have been efforts to improve the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in decision-making (e.g. the *National Reform Programme* is concluded after social partners and other stakeholders are consulted). There are several bodies whose competence is to represent children’s views, including the Children’s Parliament, the Commissioner’s Youth Advisory Team and the Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children.
- In Estonia, the policy improvement and implementation process has increasingly involved relevant stakeholders, who are engaged in the process through consultations and working groups.
- In the Netherlands, the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) and five civil society organisations have been involved in the process of policy elaboration; the cooperation is laid down in Administrative Agreements (between the government and the VNG); and the five organisations have described the contours of their contributions. Children are also involved in the policy process. In ten primary schools, the State Secretary will discuss with the children (up to 12 years) how to best spend the additional budget (100 million) for child poverty reduction. Something similar is organised for older children.

3 Pillar 1 – Access to resources

This section summarises the ESPN national experts’ analysis of the degree to which countries have made efforts since 2013 to enhance their policies to increase access to resources - first through supporting parents’ participation in the labour market and secondly through ensuring adequate living standards through an optimal combination of cash and in kind benefits.

3.1 Parents’ participation in the labour market²²

There have been significant efforts to encourage parents’ participation in the labour market since 2013 in a third of countries with policies being strengthened in two low (CZ, SI), three medium (EE, LU, PL), four high (IE, MT, PT, UK) and two very high (HU, MK) AROPE countries. In all other countries there has been little change.

Positive developments in this area include the following:

- increased expenditure on active labour market policies (CZ) and an increase in activation measures for parents, particularly women, and especially single parents (LU, MK, UK);
- reforms in parental leave arrangements to support reconciliation of work and family life (ES, IE, IS, IT, LU, PL, PT, SI, UK) and encouraging more flexible working time arrangements (PT);
- improved right to work part-time for family reasons (SI);
- changes to parental benefit system to support better reconciliation of family and work responsibilities (CZ, EE, IE, PT);
- increase in the number and affordability of childcare places (AT, EL, HU, LU, MT, UK);
- breakfast clubs service in schools and provision of after school and summer school services (MT);
- extended vouchers to purchase babysitting services to mothers who are self-employed or entrepreneurs (IT);
- initiatives to address the gender pay gap such as compiling a regulation setting out an obligation on employers to collect gender-based data on working conditions (EE);
- introduction of a scheme to help people in unemployed households with children return to work by allowing them to retain a greater proportion of their child-related benefits for two years upon taking up employment (IE);
- reduction of previous salary cuts on public administration’s salaries and increase in minimum wage to tackle in-work poverty (PT);
- tax reductions for employers of mothers with 3 or more children (HU);
- employment subsidy programmes, grants and loans for self-employment for parents (MK).

²² See Bouget, D., Frazer, H., Marlier, E., Sabato, S. and Vanhercke, B. (2015), *Social Investment in Europe: a study of national policies*, European Social Policy Network, Brussels: European Commission, which provides a comparative overview of countries’ policies aimed to support parents’ labour market participation. This ESPN Synthesis Report is available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1135&intPageId=3588>.

3.2 Child and family income support

A very mixed picture emerges from the ESPN experts’ assessment in relation to developments in child and family income support. Overall provision has been strengthened in fourteen countries (three low [CZ, NL, SI], five medium [BE, EE, FR, LU, PL], four high [IT, LT, LV, MT] and two very high [MK, RO] AROPE countries) and it has weakened in eight countries (three low [DK, FI, IS], one medium [AT], three high [CY, ES, UK] and one very high [HU] AROPE countries). Norway has strengthened some aspects and weakened others. In the remaining countries, ESPN national experts’ assessment is that there has been little change.

Examples of positive developments:

- improvements in child and family income support, often after a period of stagnation or decline during the economic and financial crisis (BE, EE, FR, IE, LT, LU, LV, MK, NO [just for non-employed mothers], PL, PT, RO, SI);
- increased tax reliefs to households with children (CZ, LT, HU, IT);
- improvements in maintenance/income support to single parents (EE, FR, LU);
- provision of a children’s package to low-income households consisting of the absolute essentials a child needs (e.g. vouchers for clothing) supplemented by things to help the child engage in society (NL);
- social tickets for (ante)preschool attendance to low-income parents to cover food and/or clothing costs for children (RO);
- introduction of a rent subsidy (LU);
- tapering withdrawal of benefits for single parents entering employment (MT);
- introduction of an in-work benefit scheme to care for low-earning couples and single parents (MT);
- introduction/extension of free or discounted meals in crèches, kindergartens and in primary schools to children from low-income households or households with 3 or more children (HU), and funding for healthy meals for impoverished children (BE);
- increased payments in relation to new-born children:
 - increase in the lump-sum payment upon birth (LT, NO);
 - introduction of a once-off grant in case of giving birth to a child with disabilities (PL);
 - bonus in favour of new born or adopted child, doubled for low-income households and a one-off bonus to low-income households with four or more children to contribute to the costs of raising children (IT).

Examples of negative developments:

- decrease in real value of child and family income support either through cuts or freezing of the value of benefits (FI, HU, IS, NO [for lone parents and recipients of disability benefit], UK);
- cuts to benefits from the minimum income scheme for multi-member households and for refugees and people granted subsidiary protection (AT);
- introduction of a lower social assistance for new entrants into the country, a work requirement for remaining eligible to two social assistance benefits in a household and a benefit ceiling (DK);
- low coverage of child and family income support (ES);
- overall decline in spending on family and children policies (CY).

4 Pillar 2 – Access to affordable quality services

This section looks at the extent to which access to affordable quality services has improved since 2013. It examines the areas of early childhood education and care, education, health, housing and living environment, and family support and alternative care. Interestingly, the analysis by ESPN national experts shows that far more progress has been made in ECEC than in any other of the policy areas with progress in over half of the countries. In relation to housing and the living environment the situation has weakened in seven countries whereas it has been strengthened in only three.

4.1 Early childhood education and care²³

The policy area in which the greatest progress has been made since 2013 seems to have been ECEC. This is evident across all four AROPE groups of countries: three of the low AROPE countries (CH, NL, NO [and to a lesser extent CZ]), six of the medium AROPE countries (AT, BE, EE, FR, LU, PL), half of the high AROPE countries (IE, LV, MT, PT, UK) and four of the very high AROPE countries (BG, HU, MK, TR) have strengthened their policies. Amongst those countries where there has been little change many of the low and medium AROPE countries already have quite well-developed policies in this area. According to the ESPN experts, there are no countries where ECEC policies have weakened since 2013.

Examples of positive developments:

- increases in childcare and/or kindergartens and/or preschool places (AT, BE, EE, FR, HU, IE, IT, LU, LV, NL, PL, PT, TR), improvements in quality of ECEC provision (AT, BE, HU, IE, NL, PT) and improved focus on access and support for low-income/disadvantaged households (BE, FI, IE, LU, PT, UK);
- initiatives to reduce costs and/or increase provision of free places in childcare (CH, MT) and pre-school (NO, UK) or provide tax exemption for childcare costs (UK);
- increased places in private child minding in enterprises, associations and private homes (FR, LV, MK);
- development of bridges between childcare centres and preschools to facilitate this transition (FR).

4.2 Education

In education, just eight countries have strengthened their policies and/or approaches since 2013: two low (DK, SI [and to some extent CZ]), two medium (AT, FR), three high (CY, IT, MT) and one very high (BG) AROPE countries. However, approaches have weakened in five countries (FI, PL, PT, HU and RO). In the vast majority of countries, the situation has remained broadly unchanged.

Examples of positive developments:

- reform of public school system to better challenge all students to reach their full potential, reduce the adverse impact of socio-economic background, and increase the well-being of pupils (DK);
- adoption of a new decree on education of pupils with special educational needs which specified the implementation measures aiming to include disadvantaged pupils into mainstream education (CZ);

²³ See ESPN Synthesis Report by Bouget *et al.* (2015), *op. cit.*, for a comparative overview of countries' policies for early childhood development. For more on policies in early childhood, see also the outcomes of the Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion on prevention and early intervention in Frazer, H. (2016), *Prevention and early intervention services to address children at risk of poverty*, Brussels: European Commission. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1024&langId=en&newsId=2328&furtherNews=yes>.

- increased right to free or subsidised school lunch for children from low-income households (SI);
- increased support for Roma children for instance through the employment of Roma assistants at some primary schools (SI);
- reintroduction of the right to means-tested national educational grants for students below 18 years of age (SI);
- a national fund for combating educational poverty of minors through collaboration between households and schools (IT);
- further expansion and development of all-day school places (AT);
- requirement that parents ensure that young people between the age of 15 and 18 participate in further education and training or in measures preparing for further education and training if they have not completed secondary school (AT);
- increase in the number of teachers in “priority education networks” (*Réseaux d’éducation prioritaire*) so that two-year-olds can access preschools (FR) and increased support and advice for parents both on their parenting and education roles (FR);
- appointment of a school mediator and after school programmes (“School-after-school”) in all schools with at least 15% Roma children (RO).

Example of negative development:

- In Poland, compulsory general education will be shorter, and tracking to general or vocational education secondary schools will take place earlier. These changes are likely to have an impact on the inequality of outcomes, on costs and on the situation of teachers.²⁴

4.3 Health

There has been very little change in relation to access to quality health services in most countries since 2013. Only three countries have strengthened access to health services for children in this period: one low (IS), one high (PT) and one very high (BG) AROPE countries. In two countries (CY, RO) services have become weaker.

Examples of positive developments:

- In Bulgaria, a steady downward trend was recorded in mortality of children under 1 year of age from 2013. While child mortality continues to be two times higher than the average EU indicators, positive developments are in place. In 2015, the scope of the basic package for new-borns and pregnant women at risk has been expanded by including additional tests from the National Health Insurance Fund.
- In Iceland, public subsidies of the cost of dental services for children have been significantly increased in the last few years.
- In Portugal, a 2016 Order (201/2016) has relaunched the *National Network of Integrated Continuous Care* whose aims include the prioritisation of paediatric care and the implementation of a network of continued paediatric care.

²⁴ See ESPN Flash Report 2017/38 on “Changes in the education system in Poland” which can be downloaded from the ESPN web-page: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1135&langId=en>.

4.4 Housing and living environment

It is particularly worrying that access to quality housing and living environment has weakened in seven countries since 2013: two low (DK, IS), one medium (BE), one high (UK) and three very high (BG, EL, RO) AROPE countries. Policies and provision have been strengthened in only two countries: one medium (LU) and one high (IE) AROPE countries.

Examples of positive developments:

- In Ireland, concerns about children inform a new action plan for housing and homelessness; this includes the intention of ending the use of unsuitable emergency accommodation for households with children by mid-2017.
- In Luxembourg, the introduction of a rent subsidy in January 2016 is a long-requested step forward in housing inclusion. The rent subsidy is allocated to low-income households, renting on the private market, if their monthly rent exceeds 33% of their net disposable income.

Examples of negative developments:

- In Belgium, while the three regions set goals for increased investment in social housing, the level remains low compared with the needs. The share of the private rental market is shrinking.
- In Bulgaria, the failure to fulfil the commitment to improve and complement the legislation in the field of housing conditions reflects the lack of an overall long-term housing policy.
- In the Czech Republic, the failure to prepare the Law on Social Housing means there are more families with children living in inadequate housing. The main problems some vulnerable groups are faced with (e.g. Roma families, one-parent families) are either the insufficient quality of the housing stock or unaffordable housing costs.
- In Greece, as the socio-economic crisis persists, poor children – and especially children from vulnerable groups such as Roma- are living under ever worsening housing conditions and no public policy is in force to tackle their housing problems. The only action taken in this respect has been the implementation, during the period 2014-2016, of a limited number of programmes, involving, among other things, the provision of rent subsidies to poor households with children, the impact of which has been rather insignificant.
- In Iceland, from 2013 programmes for debt relief and housing mortgage interest cost subsidy, have come swiftly down again and have in the last two years been at an all-time low, while housing prices and rents have galloped ahead of everything else in the society – hence hitting young households with children particularly heavily.
- In Romania, children face higher risks of overcrowding and unacceptable housing conditions compared to their European counterparts, a situation that has not improved over the last three years.
- In the UK, the failure to achieve enough affordable housing means more children living in private rented housing, leading to more frequent house moves; many households with children are also forced by benefit cuts or lack of social housing to move away from their support networks and communities.

4.5 Family support and alternative care

Strengthening policies and programmes in relation to family support and alternative care has occurred in just under a quarter of countries since 2013: two low (CZ, IS), one medium (FR), four high (IT, LT, LV, MT) and two very high (BG, RO) AROPE countries. Most countries have seen little change with only one (NL) becoming weaker.

Examples of positive developments:

- making progress on deinstitutionalisation of children and prevention of family separation (BG, LT, LV, RO);
- strengthening of services to children at risk of abandonment (RO);
- developing a framework for integrated community centres/ service packages in disadvantaged communities (RO);
- expanding quality social services at the place of residence as an alternative to institutional care and to ensure accessibility of services that resemble the family environment for the disabled and children (LV);
- developing a children protection system that integrates welfare, education and primary health services ensuring that all children have equal access to good quality services and improving the quality of child welfare services (LT);
- increasing resources for parenting support such as support for parents to follow their children’s schoolwork, access family mediation in case of family breakdown, access information and advice concerning their parenting role and education (FR);
- a national programme carried out on an experimental basis to support parenting and prevent institutionalisation of minors (IT);
- raising the personal care allowance for funding long-term care both for children and adults (CZ).

5 Pillar 3 – Children’s right to participate

This section assesses the extent to which countries have enhanced children’s right to participate since 2013. ESPN experts were asked to assess first the policies to support the participation of all children in play, recreation, sport and cultural activities (Section 5.1) and then, the mechanisms that promote children’s participation in decision-making in areas that affect their lives (Section 5.2). Overall there has been little change in most countries.

5.1 Participation in play, recreation, sport and cultural activities

Just a fifth (7) of countries studied have strengthened their policies in this area since 2013: three low (FI, IS, NL), one medium (SK) and three high (HR, LT, LV) AROPE countries. In one country (UK) provision is weaker. In the majority of countries there has been little change.

Examples of positive developments:

- In Estonia, the *Youth Field Development Plan 2014-2020* aims to increase opportunities for the creativity development, initiative and collective actions of young people. The government has also approved recreational activity grants to increase availability, diversity and quality of recreational activities. These grants are especially targeted to increase participation among children who have not so far participated.
- In Iceland, proposals for a new family policy covering the period 2017-2021 have been developed to fully realise the goals of protection, care and participation of children in society. They are currently before parliament. One of the many areas they cover is leisure activities of children (participation of children in organised

leisure outside school hours; organisation of leisure and sports activities in off-school periods; increased parental access to children’s school work).

- In Lithuania, since 2016, a new financing method of non-formal education through the principle of the pupil’s education voucher was introduced and pupils can choose various leisure activities provided in schools or outside schools (e.g. sports, music, arts, choreography).
- In the Netherlands, additional funding is being made available to municipalities who are providing a diverse range of assistance with respect to: participation for children of low-income parents in areas such as swimming lessons; contributions to sports clubs, music or dance lessons; reimbursement of parental contributions to school excursions. Municipalities are also working with civil society organisations such as the Youth Sporting Fund and Youth Culture Fund to expand provision.
- In Slovakia, participation in educational activities outside regular school attendance is being supported by educational vouchers which children can use to “buy” various forms of educational/leisure activities offered by schools or school facilities. Also, since 2016, a contribution to “schools in nature” is provided to support participation of children in outdoor educational activities organised by elementary schools.

5.2 Participation in decision making

Since 2013, some nine countries have strengthened their policies and practices in relation to children’s participation in decision-making in areas that affect their lives: four low (FI, IS, NL, SI), two medium (EE, FR) and three high (CY, HR, IE) AROPE countries. In one country (RO), the ESPN expert explains that these mechanisms have weakened due to both a lack of interest to enforce them and a refocussing of the administration on issues perceived as more pressing.

Examples of positive developments:

- In Croatia, there have been some recent improvements in the child’s right to participate and there are examples of good practice at the level of individual cities where children have been included in decision-making regarding play facilities. Opatija, for example, has a children’s council and a children’s mayor.
- In Cyprus, the law establishing the Commissioner for the Protection of Children’s Rights has been modified to upgrade the role of the Commissioner’s Young Advisors Team. Other participation structures are the Children’s parliament and the Pancyprian Coordinating Pupils’ Committee.
- In Estonia, the *Youth field Development Plan 2014-2020* supports participation of young people in community life and decision-making processes. There is also a renewed *Child Protection Act*, which aims to increase inclusion of children in decision making and stipulates the obligation to include children into planning measures targeted to children and to find out the interests of children and use them as the primary consideration when making decisions that affect them.
- In Finland, a new *Early Child Care Act* obliges the educational staff and other authorities working with children to ensure that the child has the opportunity to participate in decisions and influence matters concerning them. Also children aged 12 years or older must be given the opportunity to express their views in any child welfare case concerning them and even younger children must be heard. The *Local Government Act 2015* ensures that young people are able to participate in local decisions.
- In France, since 2016 a new body, the *Haut Conseil de la Famille, de l’Enfance et de l’Age (High Commission for Family, Childhood and Age)*, has the particular objective of promoting children’s participation in decisions that concern their everyday lives. When the Committee for Childhood met in February 2017, eight

children and adolescents aged 9 to 17 were present. In their capacity as established members of this body, they are contributing to the identification of the specific issues which they think should be a priority for this Committee in terms of how children spend their time when they are neither at school nor home.

- In Ireland, “listening to and involving children and young people” is one of the five transformational goals of the overall national policy framework issued in 2014 (*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*). In 2015, as part of this framework, the *National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making* was launched. It aims to give children and young people a voice in decisions that affect them, especially in their everyday lives. It works on the basis of identifying the “spaces and places” where children and young people are entitled to have a voice in decisions that affect them. A Children and Young People’s Participation Hub has been established at the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to be a centre of excellence in regard to knowledge accrual and exchange on children’s participation.
- In Latvia, to improve opportunities for children’s participation, as of April, 2017, started applying the children’s participation assessment system developed and tested by the Council of Europe. This will allow performing regular children’s participation assessment at the national, local, agency and institutional level, involving children and experts of the field.
- In the Netherlands, the State Secretary of Social Affairs and Employment highlighted the importance of involving children in poverty policy and asked the Consulting Kids organisation to enter into dialogue with 10 schools in various municipalities regarding the best use of the additional resources that have been made available for combatting child poverty. In addition, a subsidy will be given to a pilot programme involving the NGOs *Save the Children* and *Defence for Children*.
- In Slovenia, in 2013, the Parliament adopted a Recommendation to the government on a separate act that would institutionalise child advocacy with an autonomous and independent legal entity. The Parliament also recommended that in the meantime the “Advocate – a Child’s Voice” project should be extended. This pilot project has developed a programme for children’s rights advocates. The Slovenian expert explains that there are currently “40 advocates speaking and acting on behalf of children who thus become subjects in the exercising of their rights”.

6 Addressing child poverty and social exclusion and child well-being in the European Semester

The Recommendation on *Investing in children* was developed in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy and it was envisaged that its implementation would feature strongly during European Semester discussions (i.e. in National Reform Programmes, National Social Reports, Country Specific Recommendations and Country Reports). Thus it is disappointing that the ESPN experts’ assessment is that addressing the issues of child poverty and social exclusion and child well-being in the European Semester has only been strengthened in six countries since the adoption of the Recommendation in 2013: two medium (BE, SK) and four high (IE, LT, MT, PT) AROPE countries and has weakened in two (EL, UK).

Examples of positive developments:

- In Belgium, the *National Child Poverty Reduction Plan (2013)* framed the fight against child poverty and social exclusion and the promotion of child well-being within the Europe 2020 strategy. It was shaped around three policy areas that are fundamental: (1) access to adequate resources, (2) access to quality services and (3) opportunities for and active participation of children in society. A fourth strategic objective, setting up horizontal and vertical partnerships between

different policy areas and policy levels, completed the action plan. The new inter-federal action plan (expected in 2017) seems to follow the same structure with a focus on the three pillars of the Recommendation on *Investing in children*. Also, in the most recent National Reform Programme, considerable attention was paid to the initiatives to combat child poverty at lower levels of government.

- In Ireland, child poverty and social exclusion receive a lot of attention in the 2017 National Reform Programme. A number of the developments are in line with the Country Specific Recommendations issued to Ireland. The new *Affordable Childcare Scheme* as a response to the matter of affordability is notable in this context as are the developments around parental leaves and jobless households.
- In Portugal, since 2014, both the National Reform Programmes and the National Social Reports have included several mentions to the subject echoing the rise in child poverty and the increased difficulties of households with children in coping with the effects of the economic and financial crisis. In one case – 2014 National Reform Programme – the Recommendation on *Investing in children* was explicitly mentioned. The National Social Report 2016 stresses that “in accordance with European guidelines, three clear guidelines have been suggested: reinforcing early childhood intervention in fields like health and education; investing on the quality and availability of child support services; ensuring adequate income to families through a well-designed combination of universal and specific benefits”. The issues have also been significantly addressed in Country Reports but not in the documents accompanying Country Specific Recommendations. As for Country Specific Recommendations themselves, they have been addressing family- and child-related policy topics. For instance, the adequate coverage of social assistance, including through the minimum income scheme, was recommended in 2014 and again in 2015.
- In Slovakia, the 2017 National Reform Programme sets “social inclusion of pupils from socially disadvantaged background” as one of the priorities in the area of education. In relation to the labour market, low employment rate of mothers with very young children is identified as a challenge. Attention is also paid to participation of Roma children living in marginalised communities in pre-school education attendance and in successful completion of compulsory school attendance. The *National Framework Strategy for Support of Social Inclusion and Fight against Poverty*, which serves as one of the ex-ante conditionalities²⁵ for the programming period 2014-2020, focuses on child poverty and social exclusion too.

7 Mobilising relevant EU financial instruments²⁶

This section looks at the extent to which the 2014-2020 ESF and ERDF programming is being used to support policies and programmes for children that are in line with the approach outlined in the Recommendation on *Investing in children*. It is encouraging that, according to the ESPN experts’ assessment, the approach to using EU financial instruments to support the social inclusion of children has been strengthened to varying degrees in 12 out of the 28 Member States: two low (CZ, SI), three medium (EE, FR, SK), six high (IE, IT, LT, LV, MT, PT) and one very high (BG) AROPE countries. However, in 14 other countries there has been little change and in two (ES, RO) the use of EU financial instruments has weakened since 2013. Even where there has been some strengthening of the use of funds to benefit children it is often not to as great an extent as might be expected. For instance, in Ireland no monies are spent on the allocative category that most closely relates to children (i.e. early childhood education and early

²⁵ Ex ante conditionalities are one of the key elements of the cohesion policy reform for 2014-20. They were introduced for the European Structural and Investment Funds to ensure that the necessary conditions for the effective and efficient use of these Funds are in place. More information is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/glossary/e/ex-ante-conditionalities.

²⁶ This section covers only the 28 EU countries.

school leaving). The importance of EU financial instruments is also significantly greater in some countries (e.g. BG, CZ, EE, EL, MT, LT, LV) than others.

Overall the three Thematic Objectives (TO) which are most directly (TO9. “Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination” and TO10. “Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and life-long learning”) and indirectly (TO8. “Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility”) relevant to children have fairly consistent levels of mobilisation and expenditure across the three priorities (see Table 7.1). The highest percentage allocated and also already spent is in the area of employment and the lowest in social inclusion. However, it is clear from the ESPN national experts’ reports that the picture on committal/absorption and also actual spending of EU Funds varies widely across Member States and sometimes between Investment Priorities. The information was not available, either at national or EU level, to ESPN experts to enable them to assess what proportion of these funds are actually assisting the social inclusion of children and, more specifically, the implementation of the Recommendation. As the Portuguese experts point out: “Not every investment priority under TO8, TO9 and TO10 addresses children specifically. Additionally, it should be emphasised that the amounts regarding the Investment Priorities (IPs) targeting children cannot be earmarked to children as, in all cases, they do not target children exclusively. In some cases, they are the main target group such as in IP10i and IP10iv but in most cases they are just one of the target-groups (TO9) or they are not clearly identified as a target-group but may be covered by the actions of the IP even if they are deemed to represent only a small proportion of recipients (TO8).” (See Annex 2 for IP figures for the EU as a whole within each TO.²⁷) The German experts make a similar point when they state that “Because no data on the age structure of programme participants are available, it is not possible to assess how many young people are participating in ESF projects. Nor is it possible to assess how effective the funded projects are with regard to the social inclusion of children and adolescents.”

Table 7.1: Distribution of the total amount in the 2014-2020 programme according to the projects selected and the amount already spent per priority

Thematic objectives	% of total EU money in the programme mobilised on projects (level of success in mobilising EU funds) (*)	% of EU money already spent (**)
8. Employment	34.91%	28.49%
9. Social inclusion	28.46%	23.91%
10. Education	30.52%	26.44%

Note: (*) represents the “Sum Total Eligible EU Cost Amount” (i.e. the EU amount committed/absorbed) as a percentage of the “Sum Financial Plan” (i.e. the total amount of EU money in the programme budget for the 2014-2020 period). (**) represents the “Sum Total Expenditure Declared” (i.e. the EU amount that has already been spent and declared to the Commission) as a percentage of the “Sum Total Eligible EU Cost Amount” (i.e. the EU amount committed/absorbed).

Source: see Annex 2.

²⁷ Annex 2 presents the “SFC2014 - Operational programmes financial plan and implementation by investment priority”. SFC2014’s main function is the electronic exchange of information concerning shared Fund management between Member States and the European Commission. Using this system, the Commission supplied ESPN national experts with relevant data on the absorption and spending of ESF Funds for Thematic Objectives 8 (Employment), 9 (Social inclusion), 10 (Education) and 11 (Institutional capacity).

7.1 Issues and problems

Key issues or problems highlighted by ESPN national experts in using EU Funding instruments in the implementation of the Recommendation on *Investing in children* include the following:

- Failure to take all or some of the Recommendation into account in making programming decisions. For instance:
 - In Denmark and Finland, none of the investment priority under TO8, TO9 and TO10 addresses children specifically. Children have not been the main focus of the use of structural funds. In Finland, for example, the horizontal themes chosen do not specifically and directly highlight investments in children, even though, for example, gender equality and non-discrimination programmes (accentuating Roma and immigrants) can certainly have quite direct effects on children as well.
 - In Croatia, projects relating to elements highlighted in the Recommendations on *Investing in children* are not particularly prioritised, other than indirectly, through those programmes targeting female employment and active labour market programmes for disadvantaged groups.
 - In Luxembourg, there is no explicit reference to the Recommendation. The fact that the ESF Operational Programme does not deal, for example, with challenges in education, ECEC and other issues linked to child poverty and social exclusion of children, is a policy choice. It is explicitly stated that these issues are dealt with via regular national funding.
- Failure to use EU funds in favour of children in a strategic and planned way and link them with national or local policies and priorities. For example:
 - In Germany, the efficiency and effectiveness of the ESF funding are still limited because the funded projects are often not embedded in local policies. Instead of a great number of short-term projects with changing targets and target groups, it would be more effective to strengthen the regular planning and funding of service provision.
 - In Greece, in the absence of a specific public investment plan for children with clear-cut priorities, it is hardly possible to expect that the EU structural funds are being used appropriately to support the implementation of the Recommendation. Funding, in most cases, has been directed – and still is – towards supporting different measures and actions, which are implemented in a fragmented way, without ensuring synergy and close interaction between them. It is rare that different actions implemented complement each other or that they form part of an overall policy or strategy.
 - In Hungary, projects are still short-term, maximum 2-3 year-long, which is too limited a time frame to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty. After the project financing ends, they cannot be sustained, so most of their results also vanish in time.
- Displacement of national resources by EU resources and thus lack of mainstreaming of programmes in national policies which raises the issue of long-term sustainability of investment in children (BG, CZ, RO).
- Issues of absorption and expenditure. In several cases, there are low or uneven committal/absorption rates across measures (CY, CZ, ES, FR, HR, LU, MT, PL, PT, RO, SK). However, some experts (CY, PT) point out that on the basis of previous experience commitment and absorption rates are likely to accelerate in the second half of the 2014-2020 programming period. Some countries already have good levels of absorption in most areas (EE, SI). Also, in several countries expenditure is low or uneven across priorities (CZ, EE, ES, FR, HR, IT, LT, SE, SI, SK, UK). For instance, in France it is high on TO9 social exclusion but low on TO10 education.

- Management, procedural and monitoring weaknesses. For instance:
 - In Bulgaria, management bodies tend to prefer direct assignment of operations to mainly state agencies rather than competitive recruitment of the best and most innovative projects. This is not maximising the contribution of the funds to the Europe 2020 strategy, which is their main purpose, and this is contradicting the *Guidance for the Structural Funds programme period 2014-2020*.
 - In Hungary, the project application system is very slow: the regional Children’s chances programmes with invited applications had a deadline in August 2016 with no decision on the 22 applicants yet in May 2017.
 - In Romania, there is a lack of effective monitoring and assessment of EU funded programmes. There were weak application procedures, with delays and, due to the dysfunctionalities of the information system in use, many documents got lost and the evaluation commission did only selectively request clarifications from applicants.

7.2 Ways in which EU funds are benefiting children

The ways in which EU Funds are used to support the social inclusion of children can be both direct and indirect.

7.2.1 Direct support

Examples of where children benefit directly from EU funding:

- Supporting education initiatives: Given the specific Thematic Objective on education it is not surprising that in most countries children are benefiting from expenditures in this area (AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, EE, EL, FI, LV, SV). Examples of how funds are used include the following:
 - Austria is prioritising further improving the conditions in school, for example through increasing the availability of social workers at school;
 - Bulgaria is allocating funds to improve school facilities, prevent student drop-out, introduce ICT into schools, evaluate the quality of education and match it with labour market needs, improve management systems for higher education institutions, and increase the cost allocation per student in teacher training, engineering and natural sciences;
 - Cyprus has supported a programme (*Actions for social and school inclusion*) which targets through assertive actions pupils at risk of low educational performance, exclusion and early school leaving;
 - Finland is providing help to school dropouts;
 - Greece is facilitating access of the disabled and other vulnerable groups of children (Roma etc.) to educational services;
 - Latvia has funded the provision of technologies and adjustments for the inclusive development of children with functional impairment;
 - Sweden is addressing the special challenges for foreign-born children in both schools and school-to-work transitions.
- Enhancing ECEC quality and provision: A number of countries (BE, BG, CZ, EE, EL, FI, PL, SK, UK) use funds to improve ECEC quality and provision, some primarily to increase parental involvement in employment and others more to promote the development and well-being of children. For instance:
 - in Belgium, support to childcare facilities is provided to parents looking for or starting a job;
 - in Finland, funding is used to develop the night time “day-care” of children of shift workers;
 - in Poland, there are a wide range of projects aimed at improvement of care for children less than 3 years spread all over the country (establishing

- nurseries, children clubs, training for carers and others). There are also projects that involve the development of kindergartens or other forms of ECEC. Most of them are implemented by the regional operational programmes, and they always consider equality of men and women in the labour market as well as reconciliation of work and family life;
- in Slovakia, there is a focus on construction of new facilities for children up to 3 years and specific support is provided in marginalised Roma settlements.
 - Developing child protection services and supporting initiatives for families and children at particular risk. Examples of countries making this kind of use of EU funds include the following:
 - Estonia is prioritising improving the quality of alternative care settings;
 - Finland is developing new preventive methods of child protection and supporting projects fortifying the fathers’ role in family life, projects focusing on Roma and immigrant children and projects improving the situation of female prisoners and their families;
 - Latvia is funding work with children with communication difficulties and behavioural disorders, and with cases of domestic violence. Latvia is also investing in deinstitutionalisation and service infrastructure development for the implementation of deinstitutionalisation plans;
 - Slovenia targets children at risk of social exclusion under TO9 (social inclusion), with measures foreseen to promote a greater social inclusion of children belonging to minority ethnic communities and children with disabilities. Slovenia is also supporting pilot projects aimed at supporting the transition from institutional care to community care.

Some experts refer to specific initiatives which use the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) to address child deprivation. For instance:

- Austria has decided to develop and implement a new measure providing school-start-packages (with school supplies) for children living in households receiving minimum income;
- Cyprus has announced the “Baby Dowry” scheme which will provide food, clothing and other essential items to households with babies who fulfil certain eligibility criteria;
- Germany is using FEAD money to fund programmes for recent arrivals from EU Member States and people with housing problems;
- Latvia has launched an additional distribution of food and hygiene kits for infants and children up to 2 years.

7.2.2 Indirect support

Examples of where children benefit indirectly from EU funding:

- Initiatives to improve the position of parents in the labour market (BE, CZ, DE, EE, EL, IE, IT, LV, MT, UK). For instance:
 - In Greece, the programme for the *Reconciliation of family and professional life* aims at filling the gaps in pre-school childcare by increasing the capacity of the childcare centres and services, though its ultimate aim is to increase the opportunities for female employment.
 - In Wales (UK), NEETs are targeted by projects often including young lone parents; in Scotland, a strategic European Structural and Investment Funds intervention for social inclusion and poverty reduction includes increasing income and money management skills for disadvantaged households, helping jobless, lone-parent and low-income households to increase skill levels and find work; in Northern Ireland, the ESF is used to reduce economic inactivity and enhance the skills base including three operations focused on women, several for young people and NEETs, and in particular several “family support” projects.

- Initiatives aimed at supporting marginal Roma communities and other groups at high risk including asylum seekers and refugees (AT, BE, CZ, DE, ES, IT, RO). For instance:
 - in Belgium, there is a focus on improvement of the quality of life for deprived neighbourhoods and populations;
 - in Germany, one of the main target groups for the ESF funds is asylum seekers and refugees; the federal government is funding 128 integration projects in local cooperation networks made up of local employment services, job centres and private and public employers;
 - in Italy, social services are being linked to the implementation of minimum income schemes under a national plan against poverty and social exclusion;
 - in Romania, funds are used for the development of integrated community centres/ service packages, with an important impact on children from disadvantaged communities;
 - in Spain, the scheme “Promote and learn by working”, aimed at the Roma population has been of particular importance in improving Roma children’s education.

8 Overall ESPN findings and recommendations

8.1 Overall ESPN findings

Looking at developments across all 35 countries since 2013 and across all 15 governance and policy areas assessed by ESPN national experts (see Annex 4), it seems that the impact of the Recommendation on *Investing in children* has, overall, been “modestly positive”. However, while a number of countries have strengthened or further developed some of their policies/approaches and programmes for children in ways that are consistent with the Recommendation it should be noted that it is difficult, if at all possible, to assess the extent to which individual improvements can be attributed to the Recommendation itself.

There are 133²⁸ instances where experts have assessed that countries’ policies/approaches and programmes have been strengthened since 2013 and only 39 instances of them being weakened. However, in the vast majority of instances (340) there has been little change. Of course, little change in countries with low or medium AROPE levels and already quite well-developed policies is much less concerning than in those countries with high or very high AROPE levels and often quite weak policy infrastructure. Yet, even in low AROPE countries further improvements in line with the Recommendation are possible and should be sought. In Finland, for instance, the experts highlight that in the national debate child poverty and increasing inequalities have been vividly discussed.

Given the persistent very high levels of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion across the EU it is worrying that more efforts have not been made in more countries in all categories to further strengthen their policies/approaches and programmes. There is a considerable way to go to ensure really effective and energetic implementation of the Recommendation. This is all the truer given that Principle 11 of the new *European Pillar of Social Rights* makes child poverty one of the key areas to be addressed to ensure a more Social Europe.

Table 8.1 shows the huge variation in the extent to which countries have strengthened policies/approaches and programmes further in the direction suggested by the Recommendation. Out of the 15 areas assessed by national experts four countries have made progress in 8 or 9 areas (EE, FR, IE, MT) and eight countries in between 5 and 7 areas (BG, IS, LT, LV, NL, PT, SI, SK). Six countries (DE, EL, ES, LI, RS, SE) saw no improvements in any of the 15 areas but most also saw little change. The countries where policies have weakened in most areas are the UK (8), Romania (5) and Hungary

²⁸ The numbers in this paragraph are derived from the number of countries listed under each of the three columns (i.e. “stronger”, “little change” and “weaker”) in the Summary Table provided in Annex 4.

(4). Of the 12 countries that made progress in the greatest number of areas five are from the high AROPE group, three each from the medium and low AROPE groups and only one from the very high AROPE group. Given that there are 17 countries in the high and very high AROPE groups it is especially concerning that more progress has not been made in more of these countries.

Table 8.1: ESPN experts' assessment of the number of areas in which policies/ approaches and programmes for children have overall been strengthened or been weakened or where there has been little change since 2013

	0 area	1 area	2-4 areas	5-7 areas	8-9 areas
Strengthened	DE EL ES LI RS SE	TR	AT BE CH CY CZ DK FI HU HR IT LU MK NO PL RO UK	BG IS LT LV NL PT SI SK	EE FR IE MT
Weakened	1 area		2 areas	4-5 areas	8 areas
	AT BE NL NO PL PT		BG CY DK EL ES FI IS RS	HU RO	UK
Little change	4-6 areas		7-9 areas	10-12 areas	13-15 areas
	EE IE IS RO UK		BG FR HU LT MT NL PT SI SK	AT BE CH CY CZ DK FI HR IT LU LV MK NO PL RS TR	DE EL ES LI SE

Note: ESPN experts assessed countries' progress in 15 different areas (except for non-Member States who assessed 13 areas). The specific areas where countries' policies/approaches/programmes have been strengthened, have remained broadly unchanged or have weakened since 2013 are spelled out in the Summary Table in Annex 4.

Looking across the 15 areas, progress on strengthening policies/approaches and programmes has been unevenly spread. The areas where the greatest number of countries have made progress are ECEC (18), income support (15, though this was balanced by a weakening of support in 9 countries), mobilising relevant EU financial instruments (12) and developing multi-dimensional strategies with synergies between policies (10). Least progress has been made by countries in the areas of access to housing and living environment (2), health (3), addressing child poverty and social exclusion in the European Semester (6) and education (8)²⁹. The very limited progress in relation to the European Semester is surprising as it is here that one would have expected significant evidence of progress since 2013 if the implementation of the Recommendation had been energetically pursued³⁰. In addition to income support (9 countries) the areas where the policies/approaches and programmes of the most countries have become weaker are housing and the living environment (7) and education (5).

8.2 Overall ESPN recommendations

It is clear from this Synthesis Report that, while a number of countries have strengthened or further developed their policies/ approaches and programmes for children since 2013, only limited progress has been made in many countries - especially

²⁹ The need to make progress on all elements of Pillar 2 of the Recommendation (Access to quality services) is well highlighted in the European Social Network's evaluation of the implementation of the Recommendation in 14 Member States. See: Lara Montero, A. (2016), *Investing in Children's Services, Improving Outcomes*, Brighton: European Social Network. Available at: <http://www.esn-eu.org/publications/index.html>.

³⁰ These findings coincide with those of Eurochild which has been monitoring the extent to which child poverty has featured in the European Semester on an annual basis. Eurochild has regularly highlighted the limited attention that it is being given. See for instance: Eurochild (2016), *Is Europe doing enough to invest in children? 2016 Eurochild Report on the European Semester*, Brussels: Eurochild. Available at: http://www.eurochild.org/fileadmin/public/05_Library/Thematic_priorities/02_Child_Poverty/Eurochild/FINAL_Eurochild_Semester2016_web.pdf.

in some of those with high or very high levels of child poverty or social exclusion. This means that, in the next phase of the implementation of the Recommendation on *Investing in children*, a much more intensive and ambitious approach will be needed if a real impact is to be made. This is even more the case in view of the new importance being given to tackling child poverty in the *European Pillar of Social Rights* and European Commission President Juncker’s goal of achieving a “triple-A” Social Europe. Section 8.3 and Annex 5 of this report include ESPN national experts’ country specific priority recommendations for implementing the Recommendation. Thus, in this section the focus is on some ten key overarching recommendations aimed at bringing greater urgency and effectiveness to the implementation process.

- 1) Promoting and monitoring the implementation of the Recommendation and the Pillar principle on child poverty must be a high and visible **political priority** for the European Council, the EU Council of Ministers, the European Commission, the European Parliament and other EU institutions. To this end the following would help:
 - The European Council should address the issue of the fight against child poverty and social exclusion and the promotion of child well-being at least once a year in its Presidency conclusions.
 - To enable and support this the Social Protection Committee should consider establishing a working group to monitor and advise on the implementation of the Recommendation and to make recommendations to the EU “Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs” Council of Ministers (EPSCO) so that it can regularly feed into the European Council on the issue of child poverty and social exclusion.
 - Within the European Commission, (continued) political leadership on the issue, especially from President Juncker and Commissioner Thyssen acting as champions for the social inclusion and well-being of children, is vital. A high level official should have leading responsibility for the Commission’s implementation of the Recommendation and the *European Pillar of Social Rights’* principle on child poverty.
 - Implementation of the Recommendation and the *European Pillar’s* principle on child poverty should be a key priority in the European Commission’s, and especially Directorate-General (DG) Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion’s, annual work programme.
 - Given the cross-cutting nature of the Recommendation, an inter-services group on Children’s Rights consisting of senior officials should be established to coordinate implementation efforts at EU level and ensure that the issues of child poverty and social exclusion and child well-being are mainstreamed in the implementation of the *European Pillar*. This might involve: DG Justice given its coordination role on the rights of the child among the European Commission’s services and its leading role in the implementation of the EU Agenda for the rights of the child, DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture given its key role in ECEC and education, DG Regional and Urban Policy given its leading role in ERDF funding, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion given its leading role on social inclusion issues and the Recommendation, DG Economic and Financial Affairs given its role on ensuring contribution of economic policies to social inclusion objectives, DG Migration and Home Affairs given its role in migration, DG Health and Food Safety in view of its role in public health and mental health and of course the Secretariat General given its key role in the *European Pillar of Social Rights*.
 - The European Parliament should maintain and enhance its close monitoring of and support for the implementation of the Recommendation. In particular, it should follow through on its 2015 *Written Declaration on Investing in*

*Children*³¹ and put the implementation of the Recommendation at the heart of the work of the inter-services group on Children’s Rights.

- The European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions should give a high priority to the fight against child poverty and social exclusion and the promotion of child well-being of children in their work and monitor and advise the EU Council of Ministers and the European Commission on the implementation of the Recommendation.
 - In the longer term, consideration should be given to Treaty changes to raise the political status of social objectives and to allow for sanctions for countries failing to meet these objectives, including for children, as well as economic, employment and environmental objectives.
- 2) A key first task for the inter-services group on Children’s Rights could be to develop a **roadmap** for the next phase of implementation of the Recommendation and the concrete implementation of the Pillar principle on child poverty:
- a visible communicable plan with specific objectives and key milestones would be very helpful in mobilising support and involving all relevant stakeholders in the implementation process³².
- 3) Rigorous **monitoring and reporting** on the well-being of children and the implementation of the Recommendation will be vital. To this end, the following are of key importance:
- Child poverty and social exclusion and child well-being should be made a key element in the Scoreboard of key employment and social indicators so that each year the performance of countries in this regard can be reported on in the Joint Employment Report and countries “to watch” or in a “critical situation” can be highlighted - it will also be important that the Social Scoreboard is given equal weight with the EU’s Macroeconomic Scoreboard.
 - In monitoring national budgets, the European Commission should encourage transparency and reporting by Member States on the amounts they spend on policies that fight child poverty and social exclusion and promote children’s well-being.
 - One or more EU child-specific indicators (including a child-specific material deprivation indicator on which important progress has already been made) should be adopted so as to enhance monitoring progress towards children’s rights.
 - The indicators used for monitoring the implementation of the Pillar of Social Rights should wherever possible and meaningful contain an age breakdown covering children.
 - The European Commission and Member States should be committed to carry out effective child poverty proofing of all economic, employment and environmental policies to ensure that they are, as far as is possible,

³¹ The *Written Declaration on Investing in Children* (No 0042/2015) was signed by 428 Members of the European Parliament in December 2015. More information is available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=PV&reference=20151214&secondRef=ANN-01&language=EN>.

³² The European Parliament’s *Written Declaration on Investing in Children* (*op. cit.*) calls on the European Commission to draw up a roadmap. The EU Alliance for Investing in Children, in a joint statement on the 2017 European Commission’s Staff Working Document which takes stock of the Recommendation on *Investing in Children* (*op. cit.*), stresses the need for a roadmap and argues that “a visible communicable plan with specific objectives and key milestones” would be an extremely helpful tool. Available at: <http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/joint-statement-on-the-recommendation-on-investing-in-children-working-document/>.

- contributing to the achievement of children’s social rights and are not inadvertently putting them at risk.
- Child poverty and social exclusion and child well-being should (continue to) be a key feature in regular EU monitoring of the social situation (i.e. in the Social Protection Performance Monitor, in the Employment and Social Development in Europe and in Country Reports).
- 4) The implementation of the Recommendation and the *European Pillar of Social Rights’* principle on child poverty should be mainstreamed in the **European Semester** and thus fully integrated into the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy. This could involve:
- Making the issues of fighting child poverty and social exclusion and promoting the well-being of children a central element of the Annual Growth Survey, National Reform Programmes, National Social Reports, Country Specific Recommendations and European Commission Country Reports.
 - Establishing a child poverty or social exclusion target as part of the overall Europe 2020 target on reducing poverty and social exclusion and complementing this with national targets as appropriate.
 - Establishing EU and national anti-poverty strategies as part of the European Semester process with integral elements addressing child poverty and social exclusion and child well-being.
 - Assessing adherence to the Recommendation and the Pillar principle on child poverty in the process of accession to the EU for candidate countries, which are part of the *EU acquis*, and use of EU funds to promote this adherence.
- 5) In addition to the mainstreaming of the Recommendation and the *European Pillar’s* principle on child poverty in the European Semester the European Commission should seek to **mainstream and monitor** the well-being of children in all relevant EU initiatives. To this end, the following could usefully be considered:
- In the context of the *EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies*, Member States could be encouraged to develop coordinated approaches to the integration of Roma children.
 - The European Commission could develop and promote good standards for the integration of migrant children, including unaccompanied minors, and ensure access to education and health services for all migrant children as part of the implementation of *Action Plans on the Integration of Third Country Nationals*.
 - In the implementation of the EU Council of Ministers’ Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed, Member States could be encouraged to give particular attention to lone parents, Roma parents, parents in jobless households, migrant parents and parents of children with a disability.
 - In promoting access to adequate minimum income through an active inclusion approach, the European Commission could highlight the particular importance of adequate income support, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services for households with children³³.
 - The well-being of children, especially those in vulnerable situations, should be a key element in the follow through of the European Commission’s proposals on work-life balance for working parents and carers.

³³ In 2008, the EU Council of Ministers adopted a Recommendation on the active inclusion of people most excluded from the labour market, promoting a comprehensive strategy based on the integration of three key and equally important social policy pillars: adequate income support, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services.

- The drafting of action plans to implement the EU *Urban Agenda* for cities could give a high priority to the well-being of children in cities.
 - The issue of children with a disability should be a key concern in implementing the *European Disability Strategy 2010-2020*.
 - The European Commission support and funding for the *Joint Action for Mental Health and Well-being* should emphasise the importance of a strong focus on children.
 - The implementation of the EU Council of Ministers’ Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways should give particular attention to unemployed parents with low levels of skills.
- 6) Important synergies could be achieved by ensuring close links between the implementation of the Recommendation and other relevant **international level processes**, in particular the United Nations *Sustainable Development Goals*³⁴ and 2030 Agenda and the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*.
- 7) Effective **civil dialogue** involving organisations working on issues of child poverty and child well-being and on the participation of children in such a dialogue should be a key element in the implementation and monitoring of the implementation of the Recommendation³⁵.
- 8) The growing use of **EU financial instruments** to support implementation of the Recommendation should be continued and intensified. To this end, the following could usefully be considered:
- The European Commission should do everything it can to ensure that EU funds to support children are used by Member States as part of a strategic and comprehensive national (and regional and local) approach to the inclusion of children in line with the Recommendation and in a sustainable manner that avoids short-term projects. While there is encouraging evidence of increased use of EU Funds in relation to ECEC it is important to stress that EU Funds should be used to support increased access for children at risk and their families to all services (e.g. health, social services, education, child protection including deinstitutionalisation) and their parents into employment.
 - There should be more rigorous monitoring of how funds are being used to support (both directly and indirectly) the social inclusion of children and to this end data should be collected on this on a regular basis with particular attention being given to children most at risk such as Roma children, migrant children, children with a disability, children in alternative care (especially to their deinstitutionalisation) and homeless children.
 - Increased mapping of poverty and social exclusion, especially in relation to children, could help in effective targeting of EU Funds on some of the most disadvantaged children.

³⁴ The 2017 UNICEF “Innocenti Report Card” 14 (*Building the Future: Children and the Sustainable Development Goals in Rich Countries*) provides valuable insights into what countries need to do to tackle child poverty and promote child well-being in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. Available at: <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/890/>.

³⁵ Several EU level networks have been playing an active role in promoting and monitoring the implementation of the Recommendation. For instance: the EU Alliance for Investing in Children (<http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/>), Eurochild (<http://www.eurochild.org/>), COFACE (<http://www.coface-eu.org/>), the European Anti-Poverty Network (<http://www.eapn.eu/>), the European Social Network (<http://www.esn-eu.org/publications/index.html>), and Save the Children (<https://www.savethechildren.net/eu-office>). Given their wide-ranging expertise on tackling child poverty and social exclusion and promoting the well-being of children their continued involvement in the process will be vital to the effective implementation of the Recommendation.

- In the longer term, consideration should be given to the development of an *EU Child Guarantee* to complement the existing *EU Youth Guarantee* and to ensure a coordinated and strategic approach.³⁶
- 9) There should be an ongoing commitment to documenting good practice and **exchange and learning**:
- a programme of exchange and learning (including peer reviews) on the implementation of the Recommendation should be established; and
 - the online European Platform for Investing in Children (EPIC) should be further developed.
- 10) To build support for sustained implementation of the Recommendation there should be a concerted campaign to **raise public and political awareness** of the nature and extent of child poverty and what needs to be done about it. It could also be helpful to hold regular national seminars involving all relevant stakeholders and the European Commission to monitor and promote the implementation of the Recommendation and the *European Pillar of Social Rights*’ principle on child poverty.

8.3 ESPN country specific priority recommendations

Clearly much more needs to be done if the Recommendation on *Investing in children* is to have the impact that is needed on promoting child well-being and combating child poverty and social exclusion. To assist the future implementation of the Recommendation and to take steps to implement the *European Pillar of Social Rights*’ focus on child poverty the ESPN national experts have, based on their analysis of the implementation of the Recommendation to date, put forward their suggestions as to the key priorities in their countries for making progress. These are summarised in Annex 5. However, it is interesting to look at the areas that they most frequently highlight.

The issues prioritised by experts vary widely reflecting the wide variety of national situations. However, four areas recur frequently: developing more comprehensive, strategic and coordinated approaches including mainstreaming children’s rights in national policy making, better targeting of high risk groups such as Roma and immigrant children, increasing the accessibility and quality of ECEC services, and addressing inequalities and access issues in schools.

The key areas covered by national recommendations can be grouped as follows:

Governance

- Develop a more comprehensive, multi-dimensional and coordinated approach (AT, CY, DE, EL, MK, PL, PT), put the Recommendation more at centre of policy making (EL, IT), improve coordination and integration of services for children (LT) and improve coordination between State and Regional child policies (ES).

³⁶ The European Parliament has called for the establishment of a “European Child Guarantee” (ECG) and has agreed with the European Commission on a preparatory pilot action (PPA) to develop the necessary analytical basis for this scheme. It goes beyond the scope of this Synthesis Report to suggest what the key elements of an ECG should be. However, on the basis of this ESPN study we would suggest that the PPA should give particular attention to four aspects: 1) ensuring that expenditure of EU funds in favour of children is increased, made more transparent and linked to the implementation of the Recommendation on *Investing in Children* and Principle 11 of the *European Pillar of Social Rights* (this principle makes child poverty a key area to be addressed to ensure a more Social Europe); 2) leveraging additional national funding for the inclusion and well-being of children through encouraging better child budgeting (i.e. making the overall government budget more responsive to children’s rights); 3) ensuring that EU funds in favour of children are used to complement and support a strategic and coordinated approach to combating child poverty and social exclusion and improve child well-being in Member States, and not for once-off and unsustainable initiatives; and 4) ensuring that EU funds give priority support to well thought-out policies/approaches and programmes to assist those children at greatest risk (e.g. Roma children, migrant/refugee children, homeless children, children living in or leaving institutions, children with a disability, children in remote rural communities of decaying urban areas).

- Set (ambitious) target for child poverty reduction (IE, NL, UK).
- Mainstream/strengthen a children’s rights approach across all policy areas (EL, IE, LU, RO, SE, SK).
- Better track use of government resources for children and use child rights impact assessments (BG, IE).
- Enhance focus on groups at high risk such as Roma children, immigrant children, children with a disability and lone-parent households (BG, CY, EE, EL, HR, IE, LT, LV, MK, PT, SE, SK).
- Give more attention to child poverty in European Semester (NL).
- Increase collaboration with civil society organisations (NL).
- Raise public awareness (AT).
- Increase use of EU Funds for social inclusion of children (CZ, LU), better link use of Funds with national policies (IT) and enhance administrative capacity to absorb funds and use them in a sustainable and strategic way (RO).

Income

- Enhance measures to increase parents’ employment including:
 - Enhance work-life balance policies and promote flexible work arrangements (HR, LI, LV, NO, SI).
 - Improve the replacement rate of parents’ former wage to calculate the level of paid parental leave (FR).
 - Improve provision, quality and affordability of ECEC services (esp. childcare and pre-school provision) (AT, BE, CH, CY, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FI, HR, LI, MT, NL, PT)³⁷.
 - Make work pay (LV) including through tapering benefits and providing in-work benefits (MT), adjust taxes (NL), ensure access to adequate resources by promoting (quality) employment and adequate salaries (PT) and addressing gender pay gap (EE).
 - Tailor activation programmes for parents (LV), especially single parents and immigrant parents (SE) and NEETs (FI).
 - Taper benefits and provide in-work benefits (MT).
- Improve (or, in some cases restore) income support for families and unemployed

Services

- Increase political priority attached to early childhood education and care as a mechanism to facilitate conciliation of family and professional lives, as well as to reduce inequalities and improve life chances for children from the most vulnerable groups (ES).
- Address educational inequalities and improve access and inclusion for disadvantaged groups of children in schools (BE, CZ, EL, FI, FR, HU, LT, LU, SE, SK, TR), especially immigrant and Roma children (ES), and tackle school dropouts and early school leaving (BG, MT, RO).
- Improve social work and family support services for disadvantaged families and marginal groups such as Roma children (BG, CZ).
- Increase access to primary care and healthcare for every child (RO) and in disadvantaged regions (HU) and for vulnerable groups (LU).

³⁷ In many cases, ESPN experts’ recommendations in relation to ECEC relate to services as well as to income as they are both about facilitating parents’ access to employment and conciliation of family and professional lives as well as reducing inequalities and improving life chances for children.

- Invest in social housing (BE, CZ, HU, SI) and increase supply of affordable housing for young families and housing cash support for first buyers and tenants (IS).
- Improve living conditions in institutions (EL), pursue deinstitutionalisation policies (LV), focus on keeping children in their families (HU) and improve the quality of social services and state child protection system (BG).
- Enhance access to child welfare services for unaccompanied minors (NO).
- Develop competence-based standards and strengthen capacities of different professionals working with children (BG).

Participation

- Enhance children's right to participate in decisions that affect them (EL, IT, MK, MT, PT).

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Notes

“EU” is the weighted average of all EU countries and “EA” the weighted average of all Euro-Area countries.

People “at risk of poverty or social exclusion” (AROPE) are people living in households which are “at risk of poverty” (AROP) and/or “severely materially deprived” (SMD) and/or (quasi-)jobless (QJ). For QJ, the “whole population” is the population aged 0-59. For the full definition of these four indicators, see Social Protection Committee (2015), op. cit.

Source

Eurostat web-database, EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), extracted 24 March 2017.

³⁸ These tables were prepared for the ESPN national experts by Anne-Catherine Guio (member of the ESPN Core Team).

Table A1a: Population at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Breakdown by type and number of problems encountered, Children aged 0-17, %, 2015 (EU countries as well as non-EU countries covered by EU-SILC)

	AROPE with one problem				AROPE with two problems				AROPE with three problems	AROPE total
	AROP	SMD	QJ	TOTAL	AROP & SMD	AROP & QJ	SMD & QJ	TOTAL	AROP & SMD & QJ	TOTAL
EU	11.6	3.1	2.1	16.8	3.0	3.7	0.7	7.4	2.7	26.9
EA	11.7	2.5	1.7	15.9	2.5	4.0	0.4	6.9	2.6	25.4
Austria	12.2	1.2	2.8	16.2	1.5	3.1	0.5	5.1	1.0	22.3
Belgium	6.4	1.6	2.9	10.9	1.5	6.1	0.7	8.3	4.0	23.3
Bulgaria	4.7	16.5	1.3	22.5	8.8	0.5	0.6	9.9	11.4	43.7
Croatia	7.7	4.8	1.9	14.4	3.0	5.2	0.6	8.8	5.0	28.2
Cyprus	6.2	8.9	1.6	16.7	4.3	3.9	1.6	9.8	2.3	28.9
Czech Republic	6.7	2.1	1.5	10.3	1.6	3.1	0.3	5.0	3.3	18.5
Denmark	6.1	0.6	3.0	9.7	1.7	2.2	1.6	5.5	0.3	15.7
Estonia	14.6	1.4	0.9	16.9	1.3	3.0	0.2	4.5	1.0	22.5
Finland	6.5	0.8	3.7	11.0	0.4	2.8	0.4	3.6	0.4	14.9
France	10.7	1.4	0.8	12.9	1.7	4.3	0.3	6.3	1.9	21.2
Germany	8.7	1.5	2.1	12.3	1.2	3.0	0.3	4.5	1.6	18.5
Greece	8.3	8.2	2.3	18.8	10.6	1.4	0.6	12.6	6.2	37.8
Hungary	7.9	10.6	1.5	20.0	6.4	1.8	1.3	9.5	6.6	36.1
Ireland	5.5	2.7	5.8	14.0	0.8	8.5	2.3	11.6	3.1	28.8
Italy	15.9	5.2	1.1	22.2	3.9	3.6	0.5	8.0	3.4	33.5
Latvia	11.0	6.7	1.0	18.7	6.1	2.2	0.3	8.6	3.8	31.3
Lithuania	13.8	3.0	0.6	17.4	7.4	4.4	0.1	11.9	3.3	32.7
Luxembourg	17.6	0.9	0.6	19.1	1.9	1.8	0.0	3.7	0.2	23.0
Malta	12.3	3.3	1.1	16.7	1.8	4.4	0.4	6.6	4.9	28.2
Netherlands	9.3	0.4	1.9	11.6	0.7	3.0	0.5	4.2	1.1	16.8
Poland	15.4	3.0	0.9	19.3	3.1	2.3	0.2	5.6	1.5	26.6
Portugal	13.3	2.8	1.8	17.9	4.8	3.5	0.2	8.5	3.2	29.6
Romania	16.1	7.8	0.5	24.4	15.4	1.3	0.4	17.1	5.2	46.8
Slovakia	10.6	3.8	0.7	15.1	2.4	2.4	0.2	5.0	4.7	24.9
Slovenia	10.0	2.1	0.2	12.3	0.8	1.7	0.0	2.5	1.7	16.6
Spain	17.2	2.2	2.1	21.5	3.0	6.0	0.5	9.5	3.5	34.4
Sweden	8.4	0.1	0.8	9.3	0.3	3.9	0.2	4.4	0.2	14.0
UK	11.1	3.0	5.1	19.2	1.5	4.6	2.5	8.6	2.7	30.3
FYR of Macedonia	7.3	12.8	3.4	23.5	8.0	3.8	1.3	13.1	9.4	46.1
Iceland	8.4	0.7	2.3	11.4	0.4	1.8	0.6	2.8	0.4	14.6
Norway	7.0	0.8	1.2	9.0	0.4	3.1	0.4	3.9	0.8	13.7
Serbia	10.3	7.2	3.2	20.7	4.9	6.3	1.6	12.8	8.4	41.8
Switzerland	12.1	0.4	1.9	14.4	0.6	1.5	0.2	2.3	0.6	17.3
Turkey	5.5	21.1	1.5	28.1	22.8	0.5	1.4	24.7	5.0	57.8

Note: Survey year for data is 2015 except for CH (2014) and TR (2013). Due to rounding, the sum of the components is not always identical to the totals (largest differences between 0.1 and 0.2 percentage point).

Table A1b: Population at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Breakdown by type and number of problems encountered, Whole population, %, 2015 (EU countries as well as non-EU countries covered by EU-SILC)

	AROPE with one problem				AROPE with two problems				AROPE with three problems	AROPE total
	AROP	SMD	QJ	TOTAL	AROP & SMD	AROP & QJ	SMD & QJ	TOTAL	AROP & SMD & QJ	TOTAL
EU	10.2	3.2	2.7	16.1	2.4	2.8	0.6	5.8	1.8	23.7
EA	10.2	2.6	2.7	15.5	2.0	3.2	0.5	5.7	1.8	23.1
Austria	9.7	1.2	2.8	13.7	1.1	2.2	0.4	3.7	0.8	18.3
Belgium	7.0	1.5	4.2	12.7	1.2	4.1	0.5	5.8	2.6	21.1
Bulgaria	5.3	17.3	1.4	24.0	10.3	0.4	0.7	11.4	5.9	41.3
Croatia	8.6	5.6	2.9	17.1	4.1	3.8	0.6	8.5	3.4	29.1
Cyprus	8.0	8.3	3.0	19.3	3.7	2.6	1.4	7.7	2.0	28.9
Czech Republic	5.2	2.5	1.5	9.2	1.1	1.6	0.2	2.9	1.7	14.0
Denmark	7.4	0.9	3.8	12.1	1.1	2.9	0.8	4.8	0.8	17.7
Estonia	16.0	1.5	1.0	18.5	1.8	2.8	0.1	4.7	1.0	24.2
Finland	7.9	0.7	3.2	11.8	0.5	3.5	0.4	4.4	0.6	16.8
France	8.5	1.7	1.9	12.1	1.1	2.7	0.5	4.3	1.2	17.7
Germany	10.4	1.1	1.9	13.4	1.4	3.2	0.3	4.9	1.6	20.0
Greece	7.0	8.4	4.8	20.2	8.0	1.7	1.1	10.8	4.6	35.7
Hungary	5.9	10.2	2.0	18.1	5.1	1.0	1.1	7.2	3.0	28.2
Ireland	7.0	2.7	5.3	15.0	0.9	6.2	1.8	8.9	2.1	26.0
Italy	11.7	5.1	2.9	19.7	3.4	2.6	0.7	6.7	2.2	28.7
Latvia	11.8	7.0	0.9	19.7	6.2	1.7	0.4	8.3	2.8	30.9
Lithuania	11.4	5.4	1.2	18.0	5.6	2.8	0.5	8.9	2.4	29.3
Luxembourg	12.3	0.5	2.5	15.3	1.1	1.7	0.1	2.9	0.2	18.5
Malta	10.0	3.9	1.7	15.6	1.6	2.6	0.4	4.6	2.2	22.4
Netherlands	7.5	0.7	3.3	11.5	0.4	3.0	0.7	4.1	0.7	16.4
Poland	11.6	3.7	1.8	17.1	2.8	1.9	0.3	5.0	1.4	23.4
Portugal	11.4	3.8	3.0	18.2	3.5	2.7	0.4	6.6	1.9	26.6
Romania	11.9	9.6	1.8	23.3	10.0	1.0	0.6	11.6	2.6	37.4
Slovakia	6.6	4.6	1.3	12.5	1.6	1.5	0.3	3.4	2.6	18.4
Slovenia	9.3	2.8	1.9	14.0	1.4	2.1	0.2	3.7	1.5	19.2
Spain	13.1	2.0	4.1	19.2	1.8	5.0	0.5	7.3	2.2	28.6
Sweden	11.4	0.2	1.2	12.8	0.2	2.7	0.1	3.0	0.2	16.0
UK	11.1	2.1	3.4	16.6	1.2	2.8	1.3	5.3	1.5	23.5
FYR of Macedonia	5.1	15.3	3.1	23.5	7.0	2.8	1.6	11.4	6.5	41.6
Iceland	7.9	0.7	2.2	10.8	0.2	1.3	0.4	1.9	0.2	13.0
Norway	8.3	0.6	2.2	11.1	0.3	2.8	0.3	3.4	0.5	15.0
Serbia	9.3	10.4	3.8	23.5	6.1	4.3	1.8	12.2	5.8	41.3
Switzerland	11.9	0.5	2.0	14.4	0.3	1.2	0.1	1.6	0.4	16.4
Turkey	3.9	22.7	3.1	29.7	15.4	0.4	2.3	18.1	3.4	51.2

Note: Survey year for data is 2015 except for CH (2014) and TR (2013). Due to rounding, the sum of the components is not always identical to the totals (largest differences between 0.1 and 0.2 percentage point).

Table A2: Population at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Breakdown by three components (at risk of poverty, severe material deprivation and (quasi-) joblessness), Children aged 0-17 and Whole population, %, 2015 (EU countries as well as non-EU countries covered by EU-SILC)

	Children 0-17				Whole population			
	AROPE	AROP	QJ	SMD	AROPE	AROP	QJ	SMD
EU	26.9	21.1	9.3	9.5	23.7	17.3	10.6	8.0
EA	25.4	20.7	8.7	8.0	23.1	17.2	11.2	6.9
Austria	22.3	17.8	7.5	4.2	18.3	13.9	8.2	3.6
Belgium	23.3	18.0	13.8	7.9	21.1	14.9	14.9	5.8
Bulgaria	43.7	25.4	13.9	37.3	41.3	22.0	11.6	34.2
Croatia	28.2	20.9	12.7	13.4	29.1	20.0	14.4	13.7
Cyprus	28.9	16.7	9.4	17.2	28.9	16.2	10.9	15.4
Czech Republic	18.5	14.7	8.2	7.2	14.0	9.7	6.8	5.6
Denmark	15.7	10.4	7.3	4.3	17.7	12.2	11.6	3.7
Estonia	22.5	20.0	5.2	3.9	24.2	21.6	6.6	4.5
Finland	14.9	10.0	7.2	2.0	16.8	12.4	10.8	2.2
France	21.2	18.7	7.4	5.4	17.7	13.6	8.6	4.5
Germany	18.5	14.6	7.1	4.7	20.0	16.7	9.8	4.4
Greece	37.8	26.6	10.6	25.7	35.7	21.4	16.8	22.2
Hungary	36.1	22.7	11.2	24.9	28.2	14.9	9.4	19.4
Ireland	28.8	17.9	19.8	8.9	26.0	16.3	19.2	7.5
Italy	33.5	26.8	8.6	13.0	28.7	19.9	11.7	11.5
Latvia	31.3	23.2	7.4	17.0	30.9	22.5	7.8	16.4
Lithuania	32.7	28.9	8.5	13.8	29.3	22.2	9.2	13.9
Luxembourg	23.0	21.5	2.6	3.0	18.5	15.3	5.7	2.0
Malta	28.2	23.4	10.8	10.4	22.4	16.3	9.2	8.1
Netherlands	16.8	14.0	6.5	2.6	16.4	11.6	10.2	2.6
Poland	26.6	22.4	5.0	7.9	23.4	17.6	6.9	8.1
Portugal	29.6	24.8	8.7	11.0	26.6	19.5	10.9	9.6
Romania	46.8	38.1	7.5	28.9	37.4	25.4	7.9	22.7
Slovakia	24.9	20.1	8.0	11.2	18.4	12.3	7.1	9.0
Slovenia	16.6	14.2	3.7	4.7	19.2	14.3	7.4	5.8
Spain	34.4	29.6	12.0	9.1	28.6	22.1	15.4	6.4
Sweden	14.0	12.9	5.2	0.8	16.0	14.5	5.8	0.7
UK	30.3	19.8	14.8	9.6	23.5	16.7	11.9	6.1
FYR of Macedonia	46.1	28.6	18	31.6	41.6	21.5	17.4	30.4
Iceland	14.6	10.9	5.1	2.1	13.0	9.6	5.2	1.6
Norway	13.7	11.3	5.6	1.7	15.0	11.9	7.8	1.3
Serbia	41.8	29.9	19.5	22.0	41.3	25.4	21.2	24
Switzerland	17.3	14.8	1.8	4.2	16.4	13.8	4.8	1.3
Turkey	57.8	33.7	8.4	50.3	51.2	23.1	10.4	43.8

Note: Survey year for data is 2015 except for CH (2014) and TR (2013).

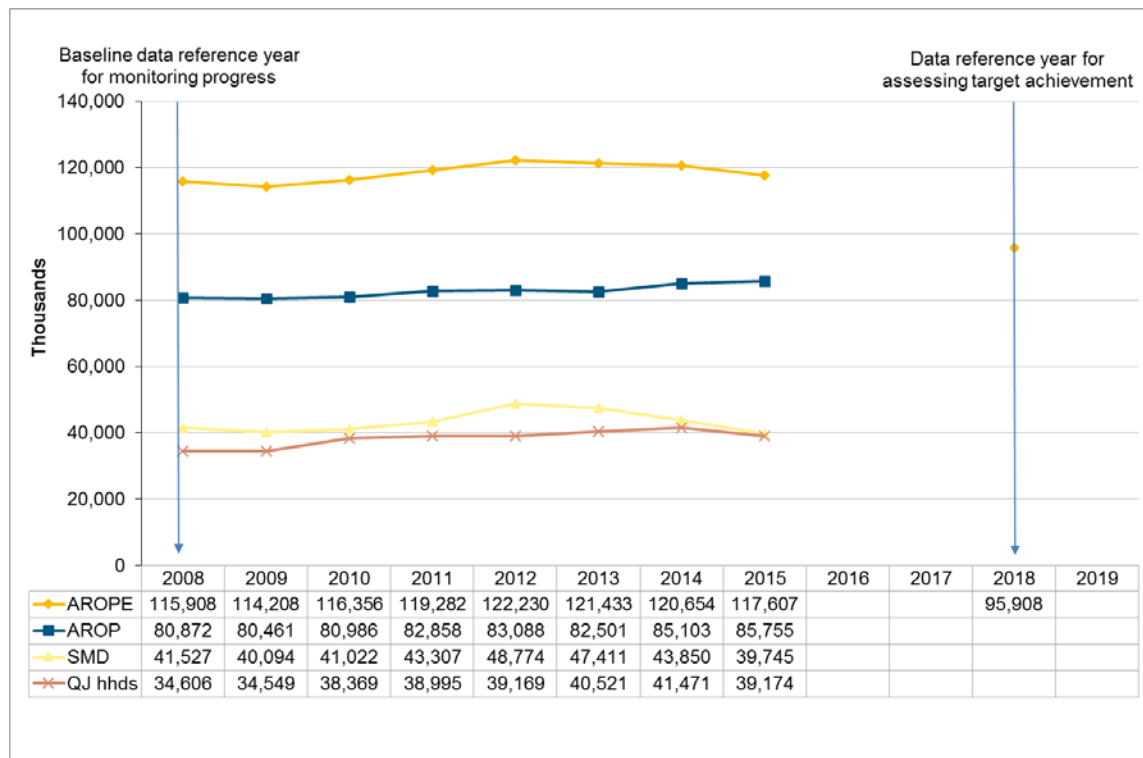
Table A3: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Breakdown by household type, Whole population, %, 2015 (EU countries as well as non-EU countries covered by EU-SILC)

	Single person with dependent children	Two adults with one dependent child	Two adults with two dependent children	Two adults with three or more dependent children	Two or more adults with dependent children	Three or more adults with dependent children	Households with dependent children
EU	48.0	17.6	18.1	31.5	22.6	30.1	25.1
EA	45.5	17.9	17.9	27.9	21.7	30.0	24.0
Austria	43.1	13.3	14.2	27.3	17.0	18.2	19.1
Belgium	48.9	12.9	12.2	24.1	16.4	20.4	20.8
Bulgaria	70.6	30.4	29.9	86.0	37.9	41.0	39.9
Croatia	43.4	20.8	22.4	43.2	25.0	22.8	25.5
Cyprus	48.0	26.0	20.5	30.8	27.3	32.5	28.4
Czech Republic	44.0	8.5	11.4	27.8	12.3	10.4	15.0
Denmark	39.1	7.9	7.5	13.4	9.1	9.4	13.4
Estonia	44.3	23.2	14.7	29.8	18.5	12.6	20.7
Finland	36.4	10.5	5.8	13.4	10.1	20.7	13.0
France	45.1	14.4	11.3	22.9	15.8	23.6	19.4
Germany	43.0	12.8	10.9	17.8	12.6	10.0	16.7
Greece	53.7	30.7	31.8	41.8	37.9	50.9	38.4
Hungary	56.0	24.1	20.1	42.0	28.6	33.7	31.1
Ireland	61.7	22.2	20.1	27.9	23.3	24.1	27.3
Italy	43.9	23.9	26.5	46.8	30.7	38.4	31.7
Latvia	48.5	22.1	21.9	44.4	25.7	26.0	27.8
Lithuania	57.5	23.8	21.7	47.1	23.5	17.6	27.2
Luxembourg	50.5	15.1	16.3	25.2	18.4	22.3	21.2
Malta	56.9	16.2	19.0	41.6	21.3	21.8	23.9
Netherlands	47.4	14.8	9.3	16.8	12.0	6.8	15.4
Poland	43.2	15.6	19.5	38.7	24.0	27.0	24.5
Portugal	46.2	17.8	23.1	39.2	25.3	33.5	27.1
Romania	53.0	23.5	33.1	76.0	40.4	43.9	40.9
Slovakia	39.1	12.5	18.5	37.9	19.8	19.5	20.4
Slovenia	38.1	15.7	11.9	17.3	13.8	13.2	15.5
Spain	50.1	22.3	28.4	46.6	31.7	41.8	32.9
Sweden	34.9	10.1	4.7	14.1	8.9	12.3	12.5
UK	57.5	15.9	18.3	36.4	22.1	25.7	27.4
FYR of Macedonia	71.2	40.9	38.1	65.9	41.8	40.6	42.3
Iceland	43.2	13.6	5.8	9.2	8.1	4.6	12.3
Norway	38.9	5.7	4.9	6.9	6.2	11.9	11.4
Serbia	61.2	34.5	35.0	46.6	39.2	41.4	40.2
Switzerland	32.3	11.8	9.8	26.8	14.4	15.7	15.8
Turkey	78.5	40.7	46.8	69.5	53.3	54.3	53.8

Note: Survey year for data is 2015 except for CH (2014) and TR (2013).

Figure A1: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, European Union

a) Whole population



b) Children

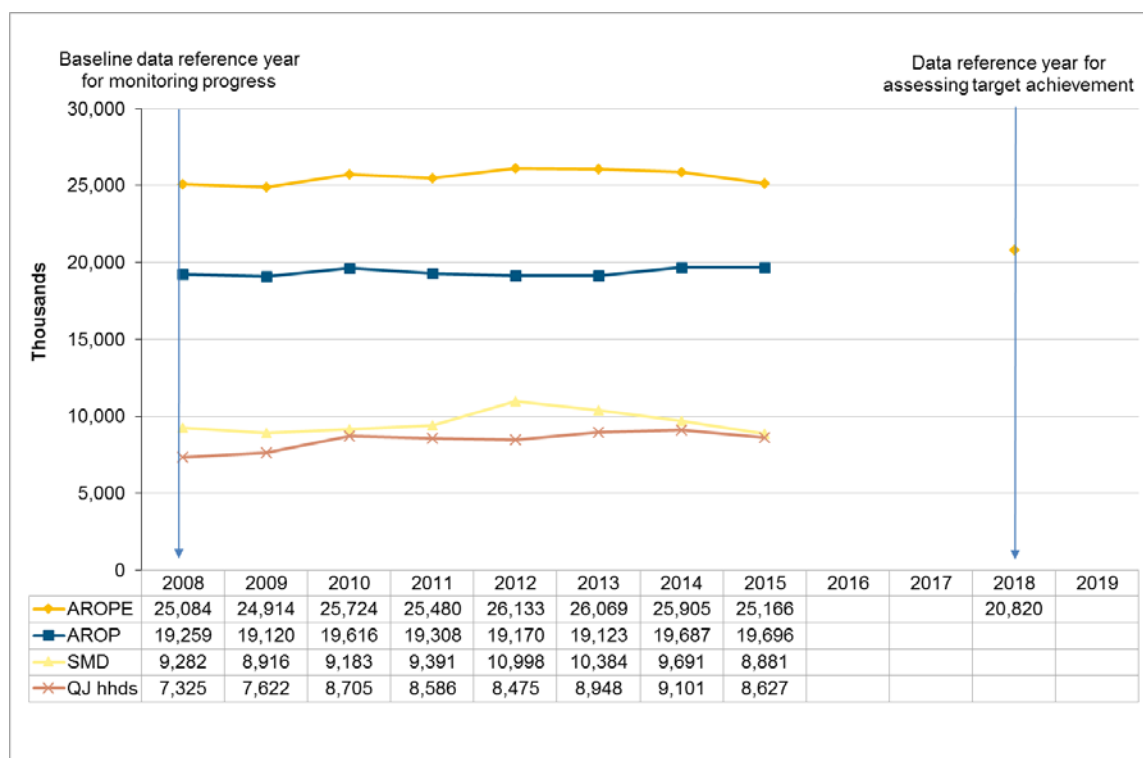
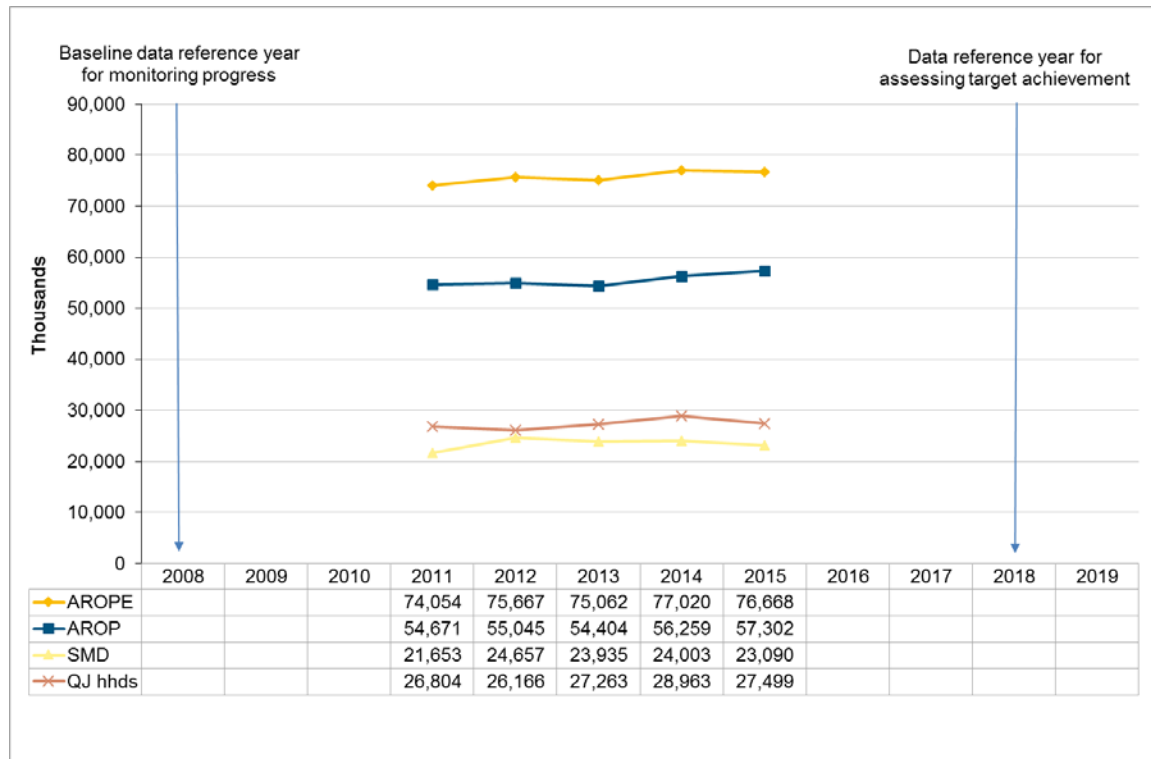


Figure A2: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2011-2015, Euro-Area

a) Whole population



b) Children

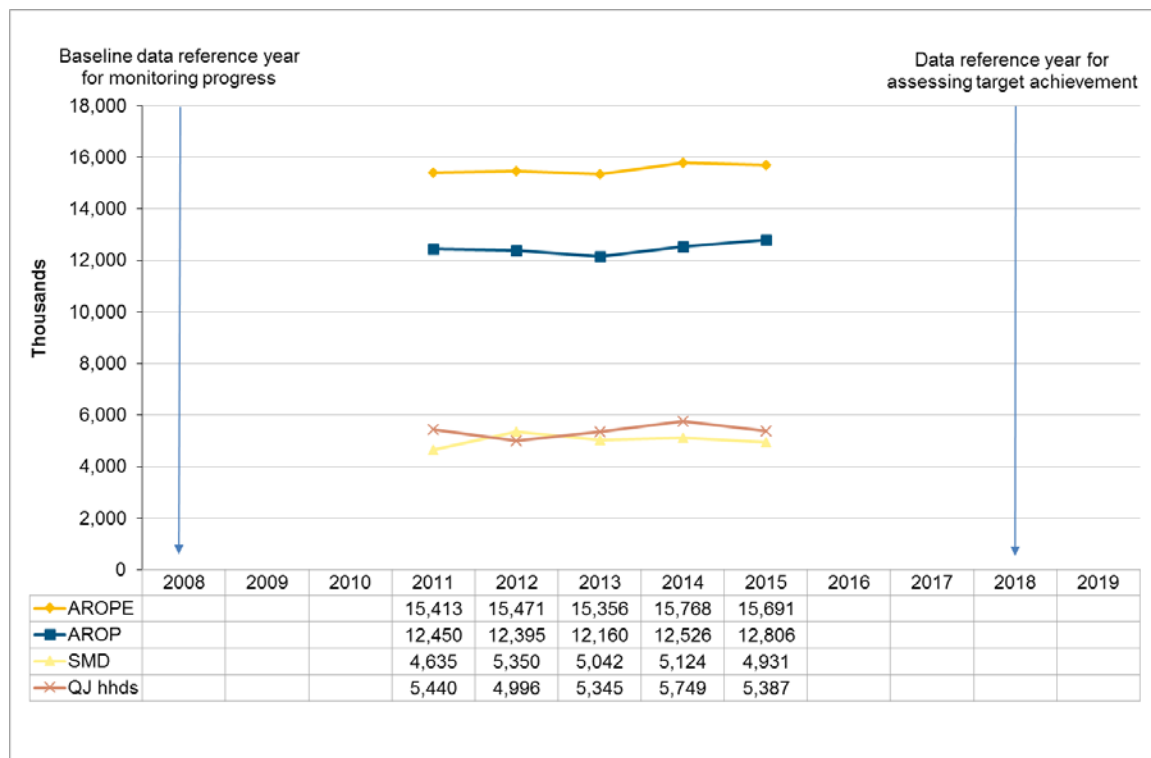
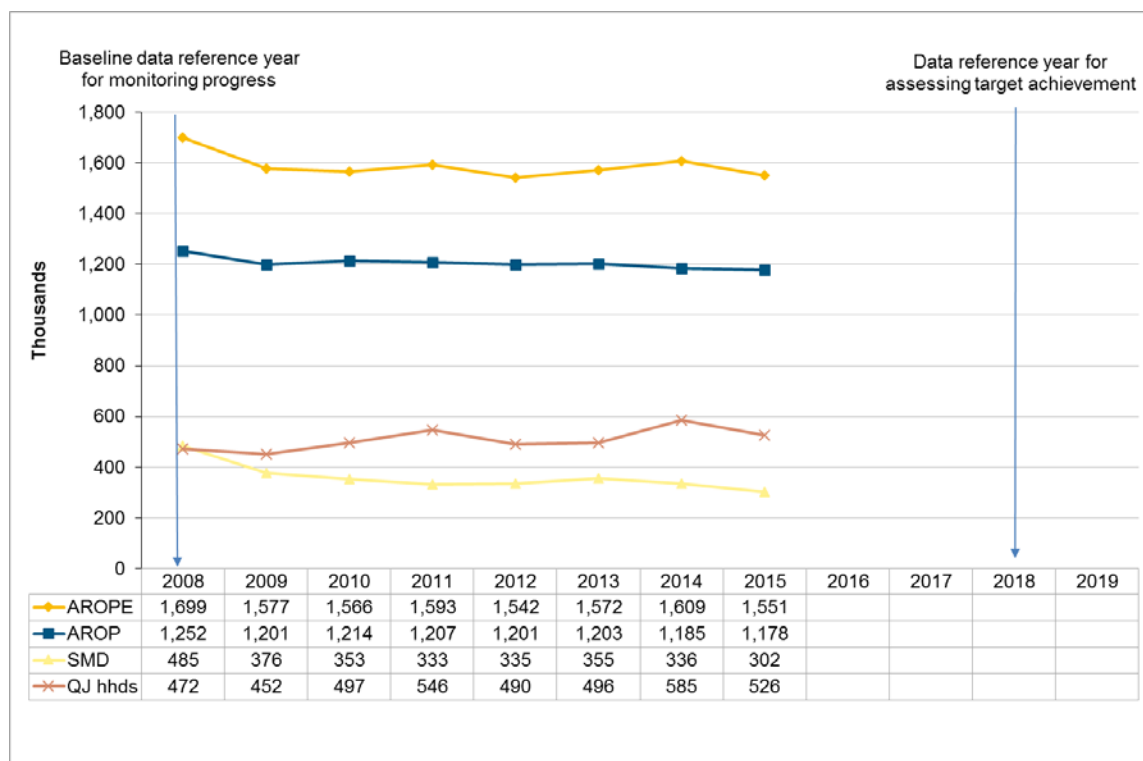


Figure A3: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Austria

a) Whole population



b) Children

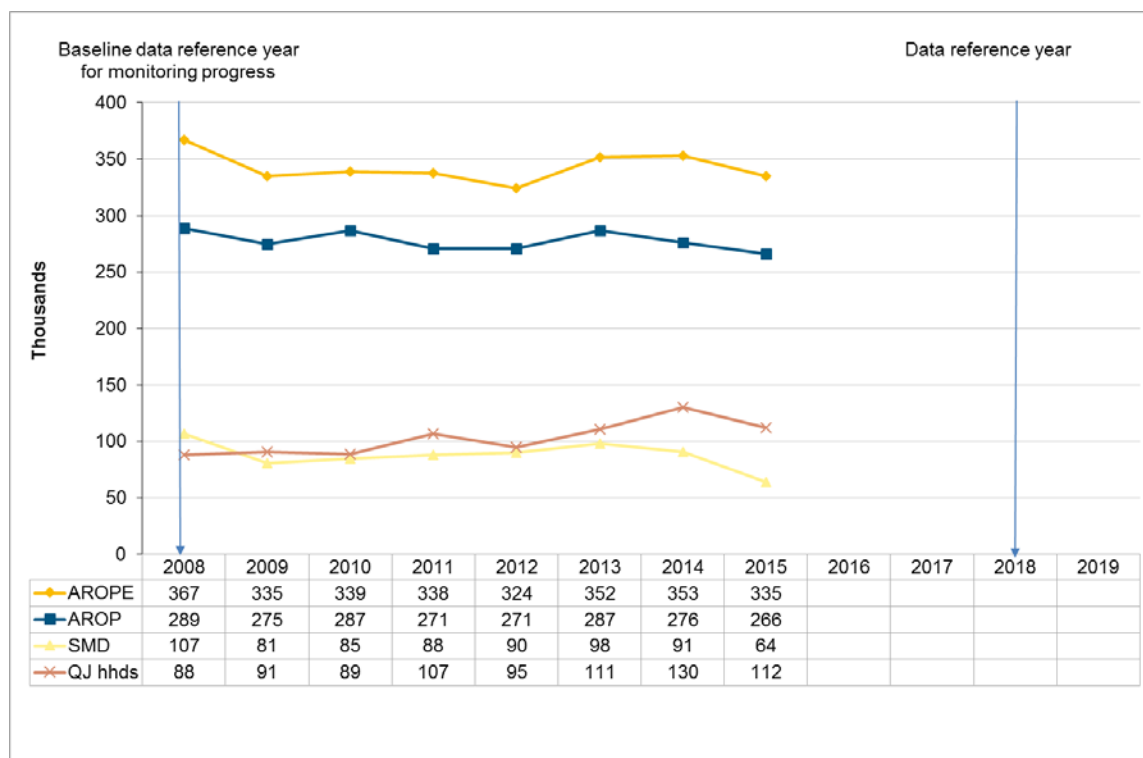
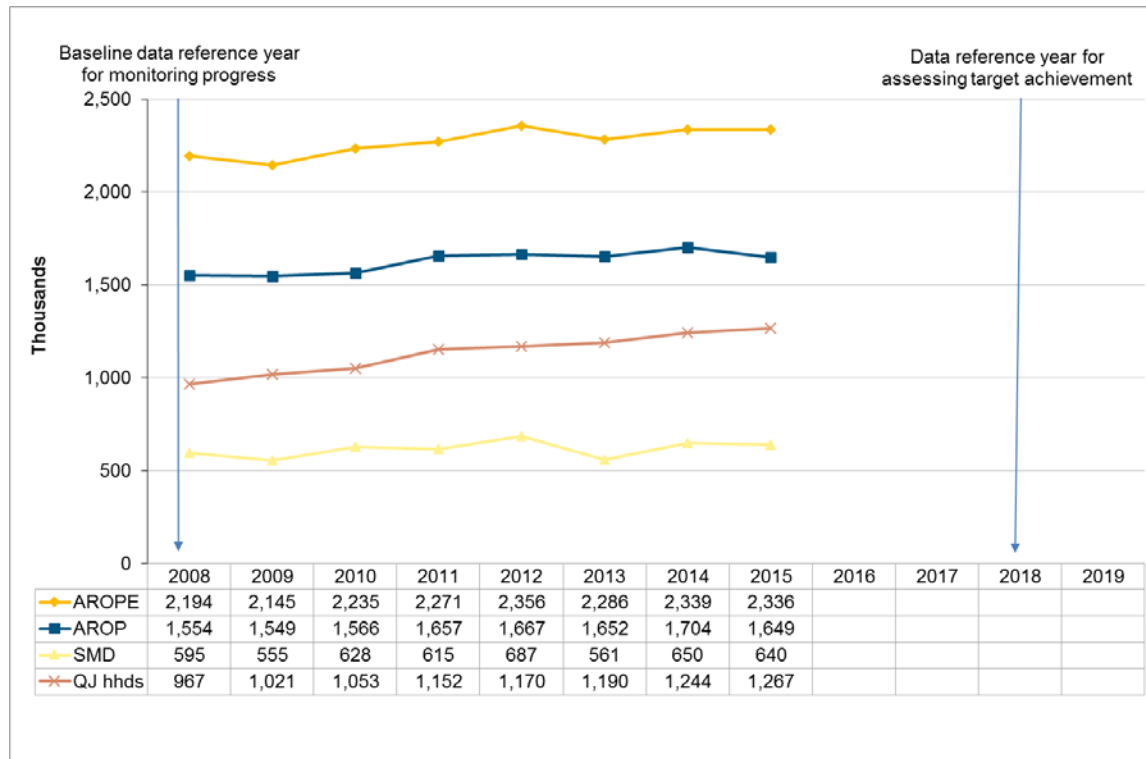


Figure A4: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Belgium

a) Whole population



b) Children

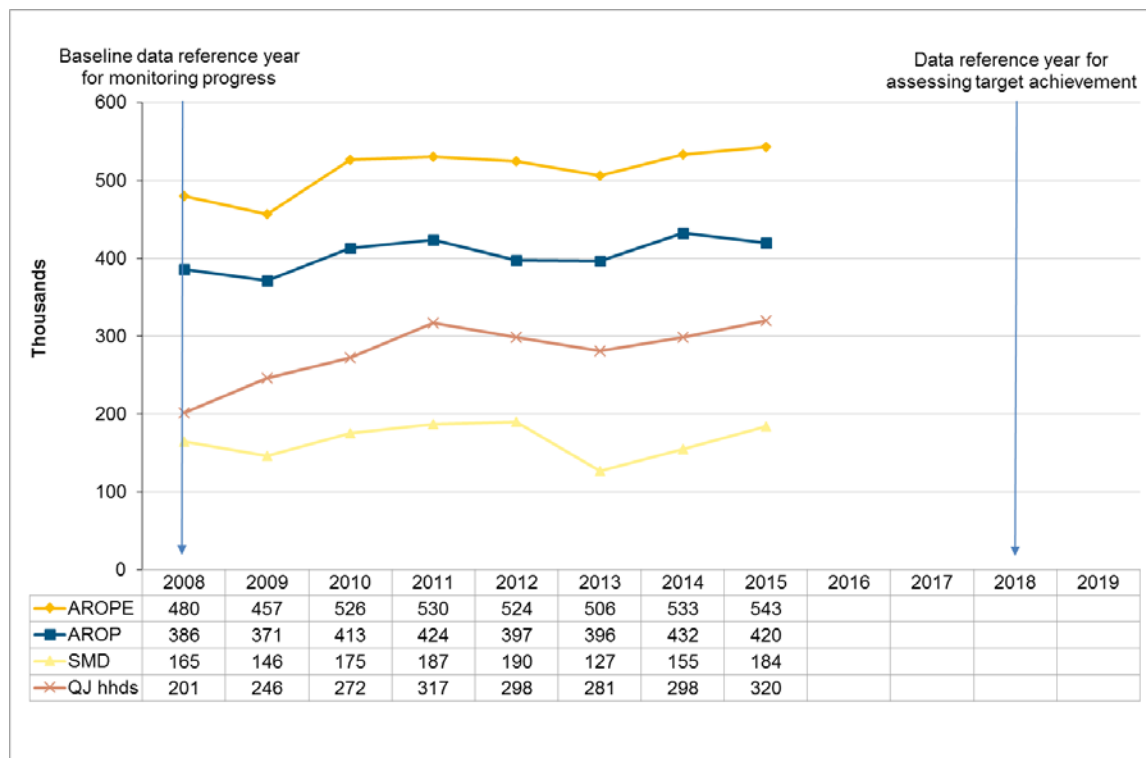
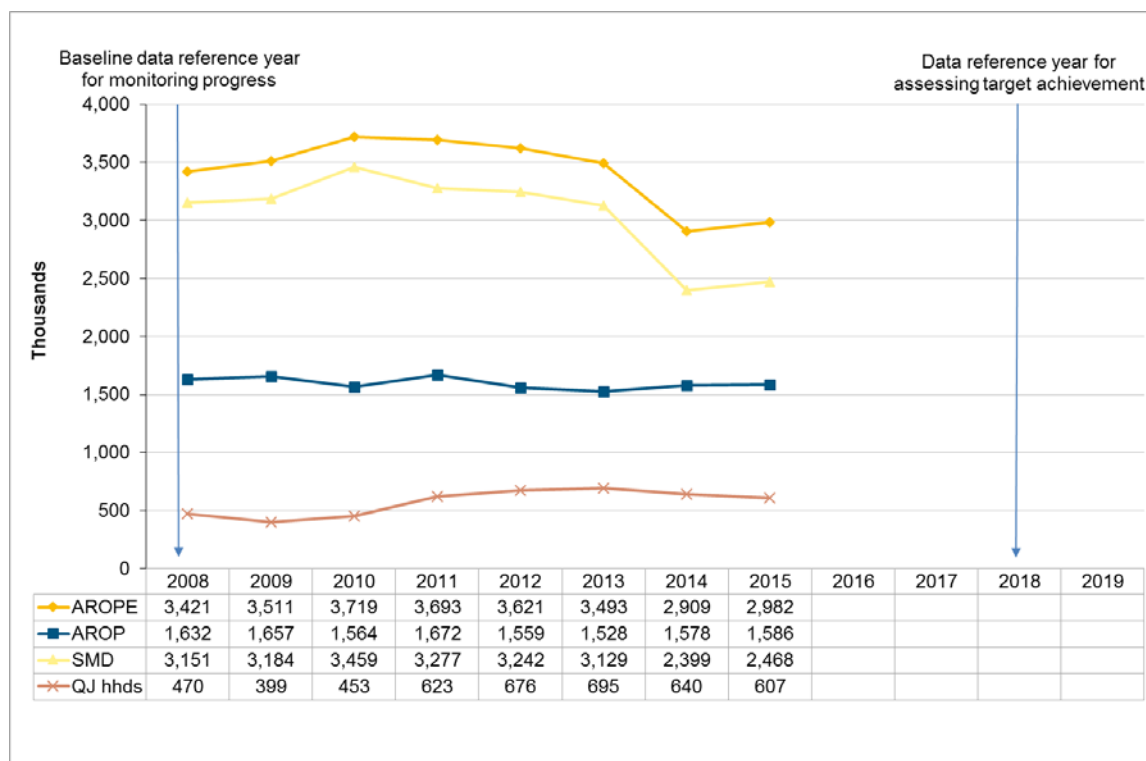
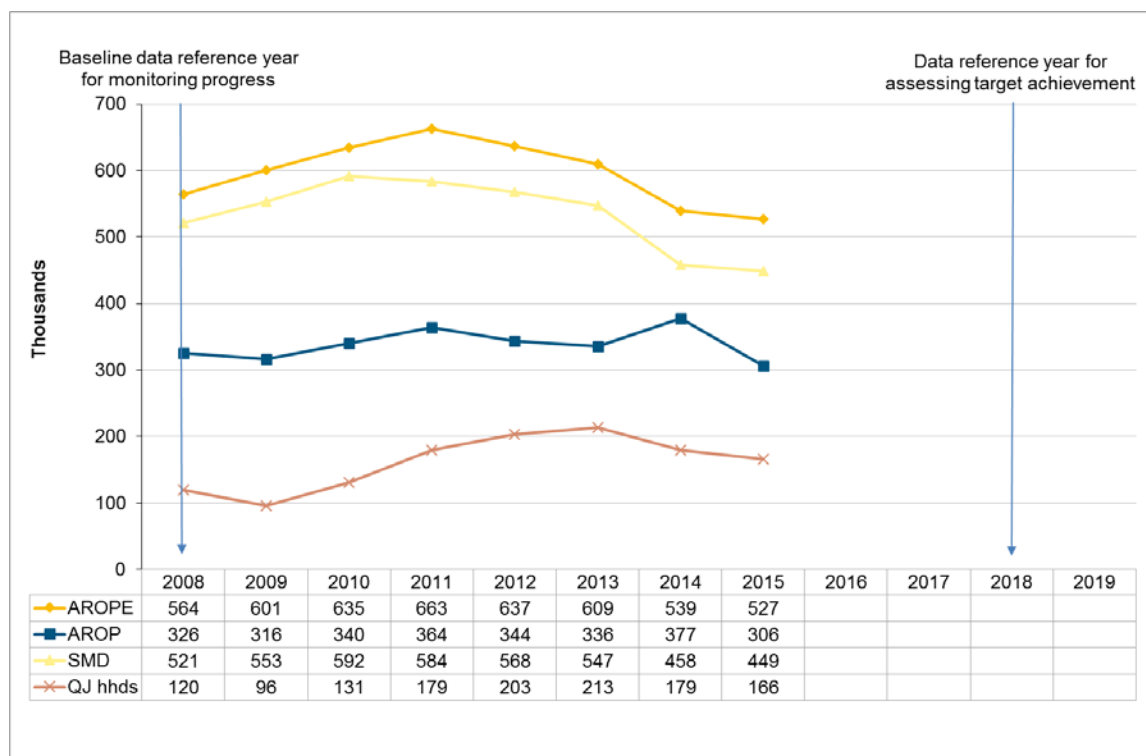


Figure A5: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Bulgaria

a) Whole population



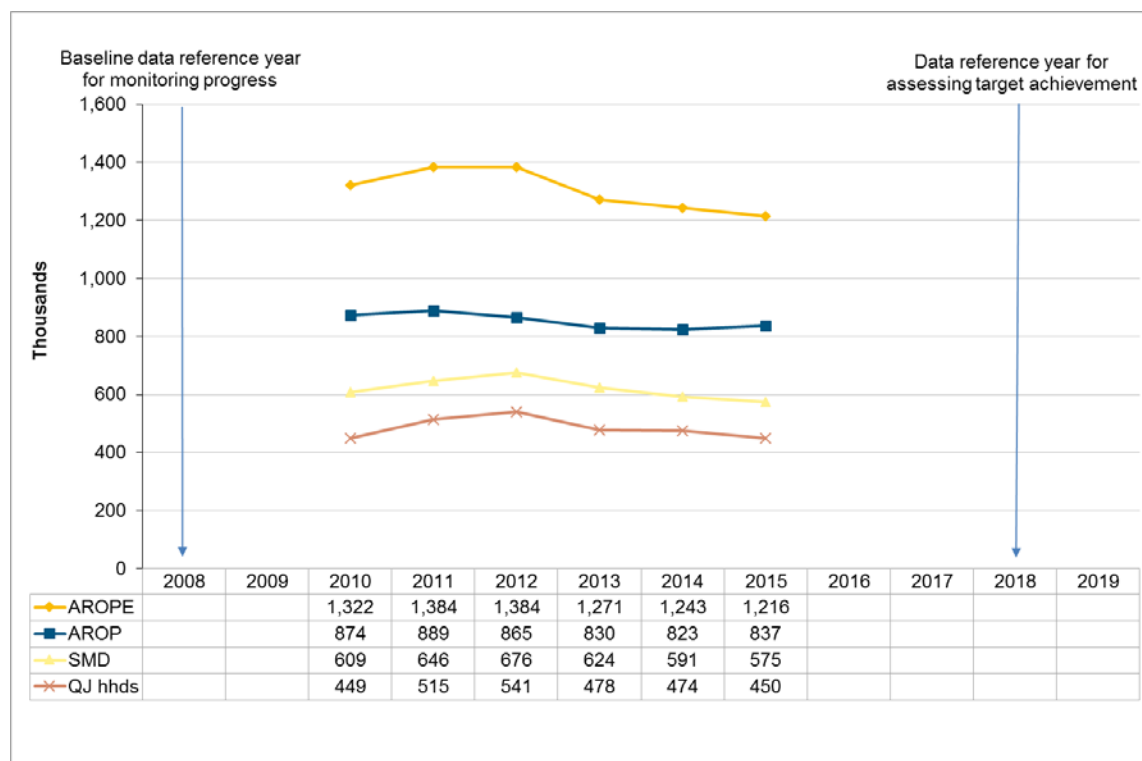
b) Children



Note: Major break in 2014 in the time series for the severe material deprivation indicator and thus the AROPE indicator as well.

Figure A6: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2010-2015, Croatia

a) Whole population



b) Children

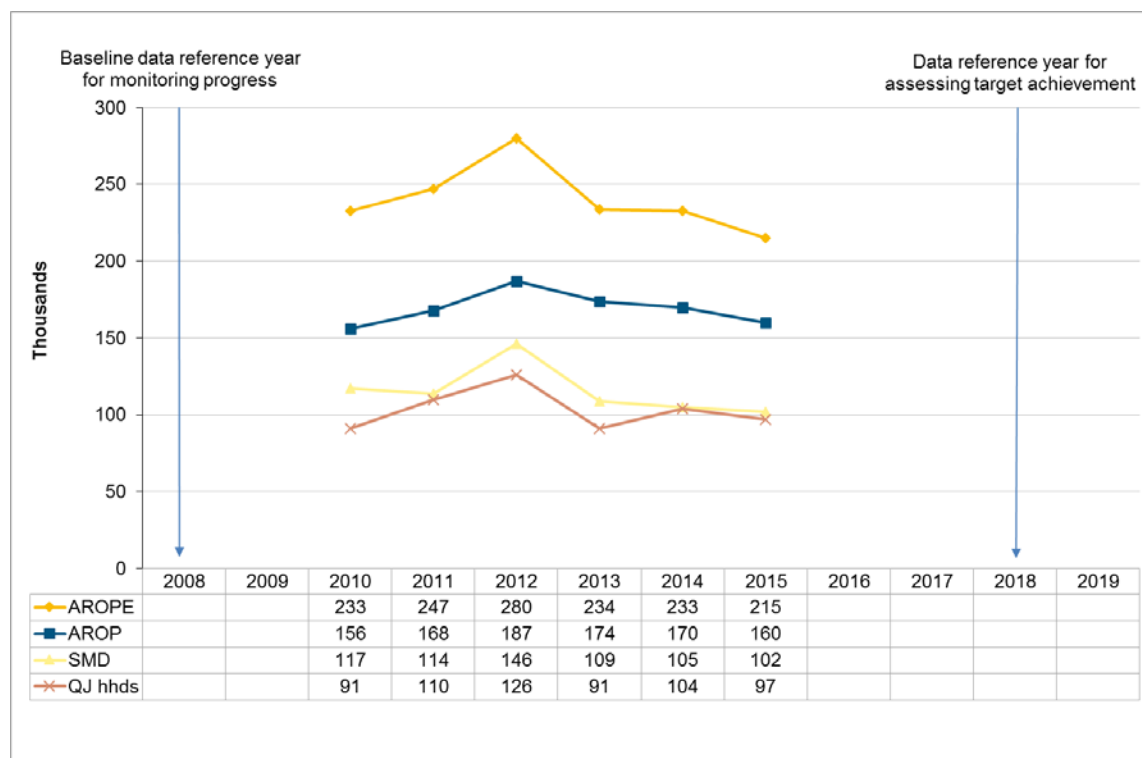
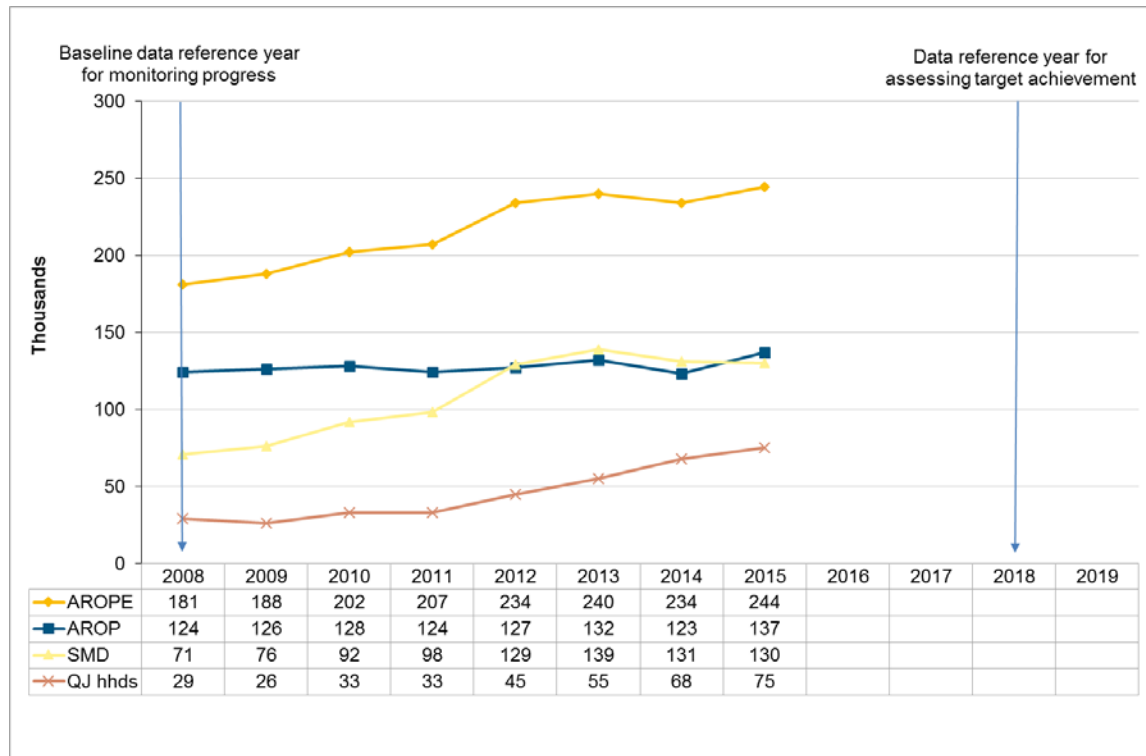


Figure A7: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Cyprus

a) Whole population



b) Children

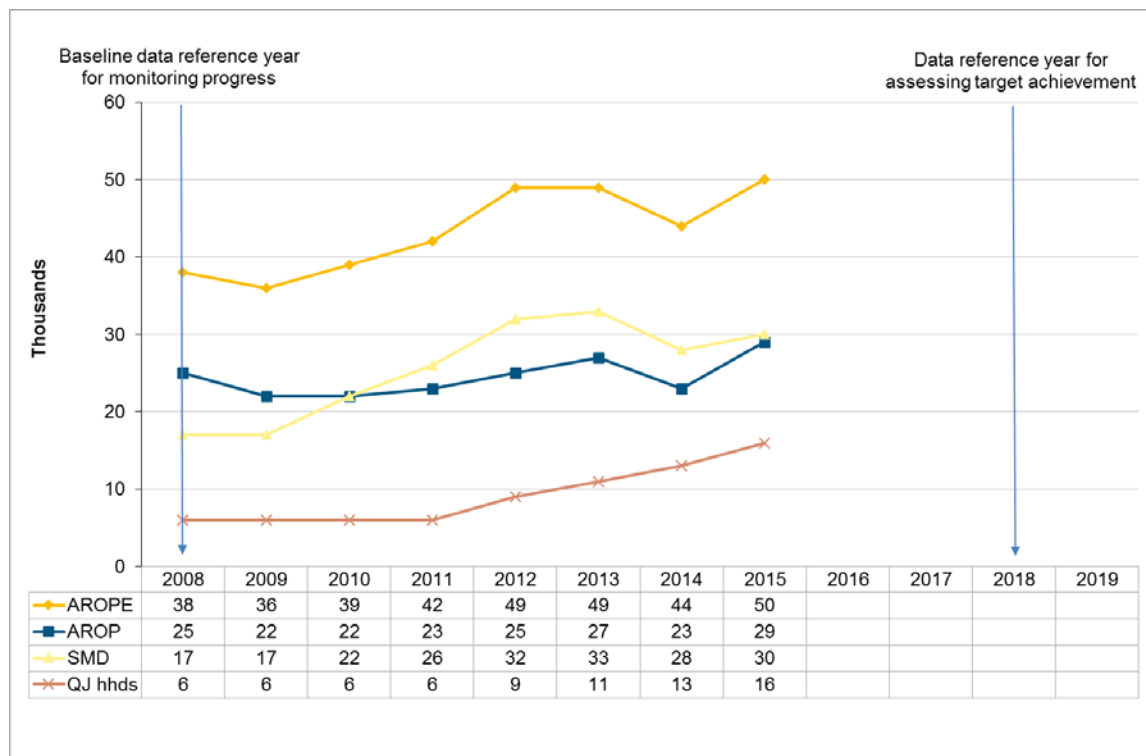
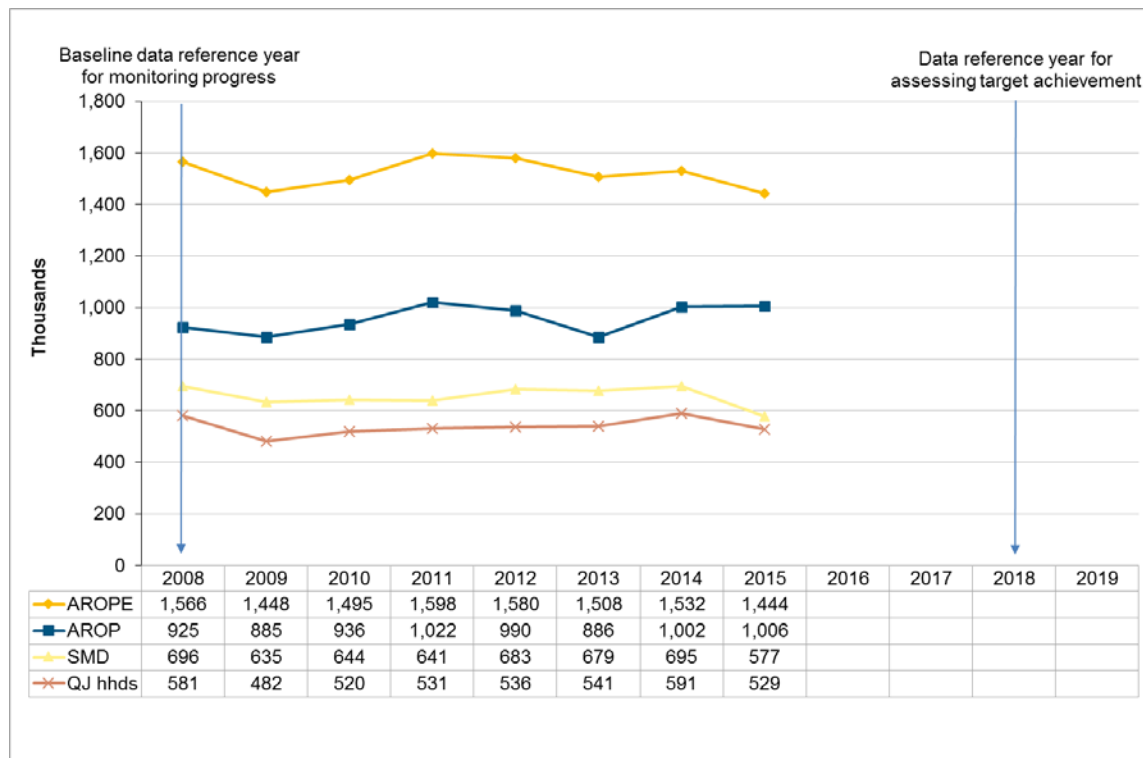


Figure A8: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Czech Republic

a) Whole population



b) Children

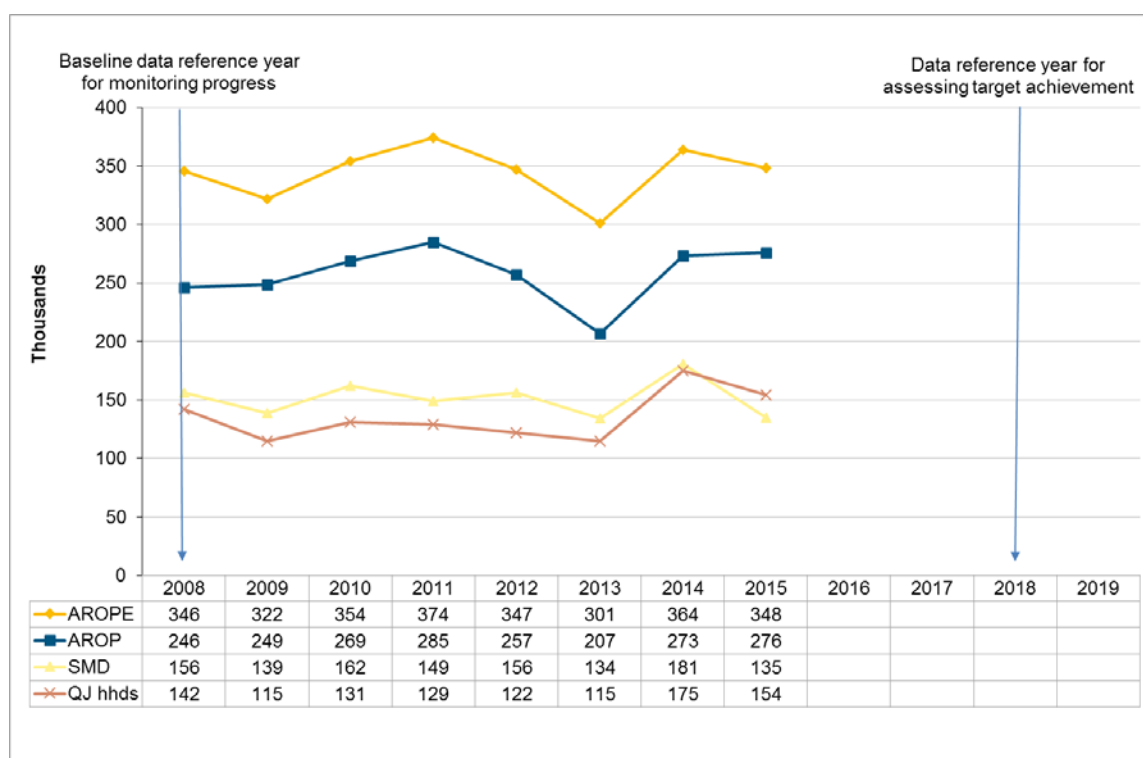
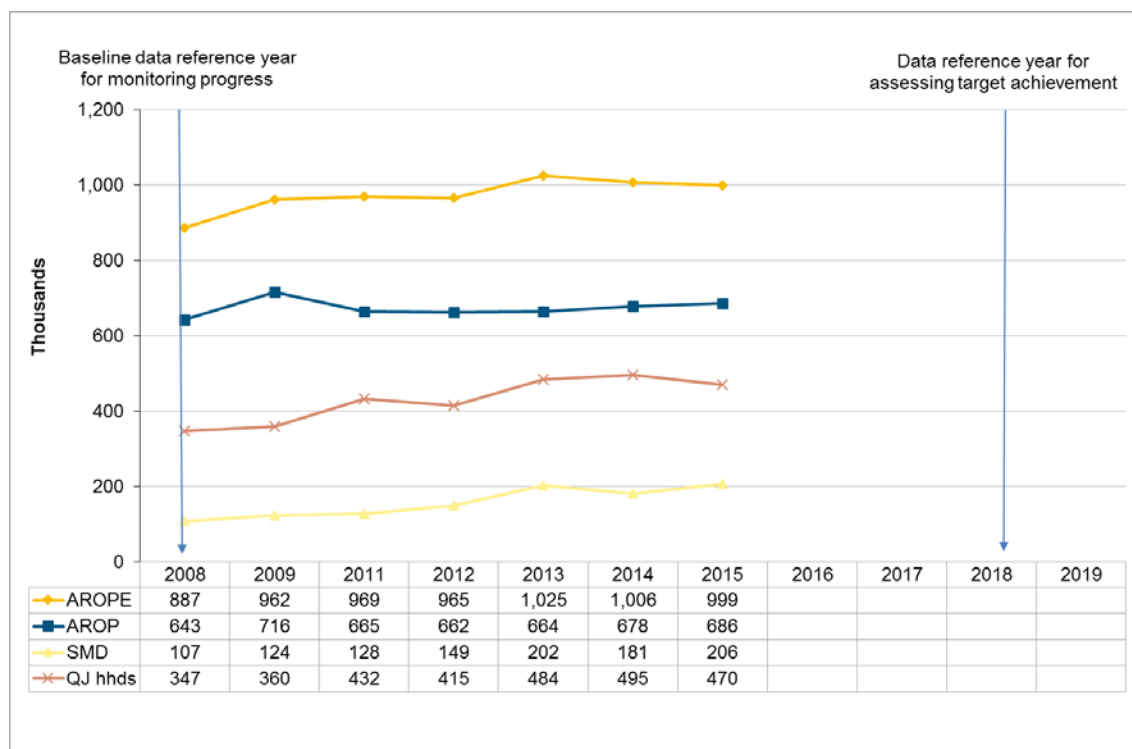
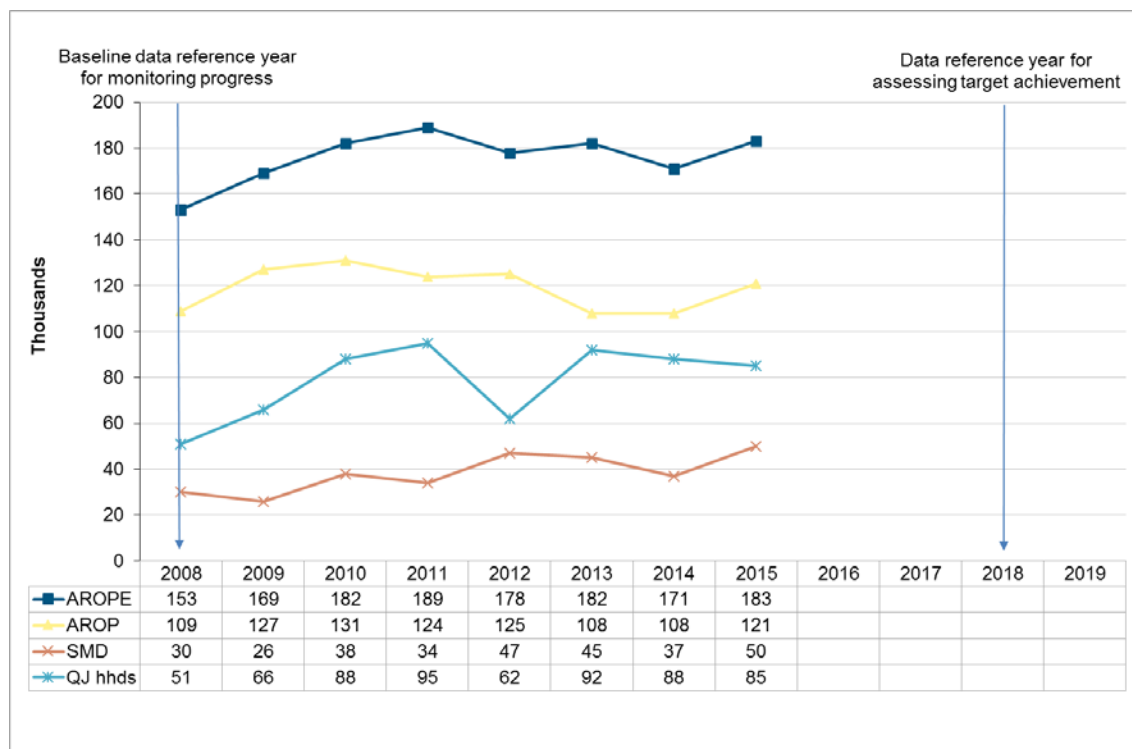


Figure A9: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Denmark

a) Whole population



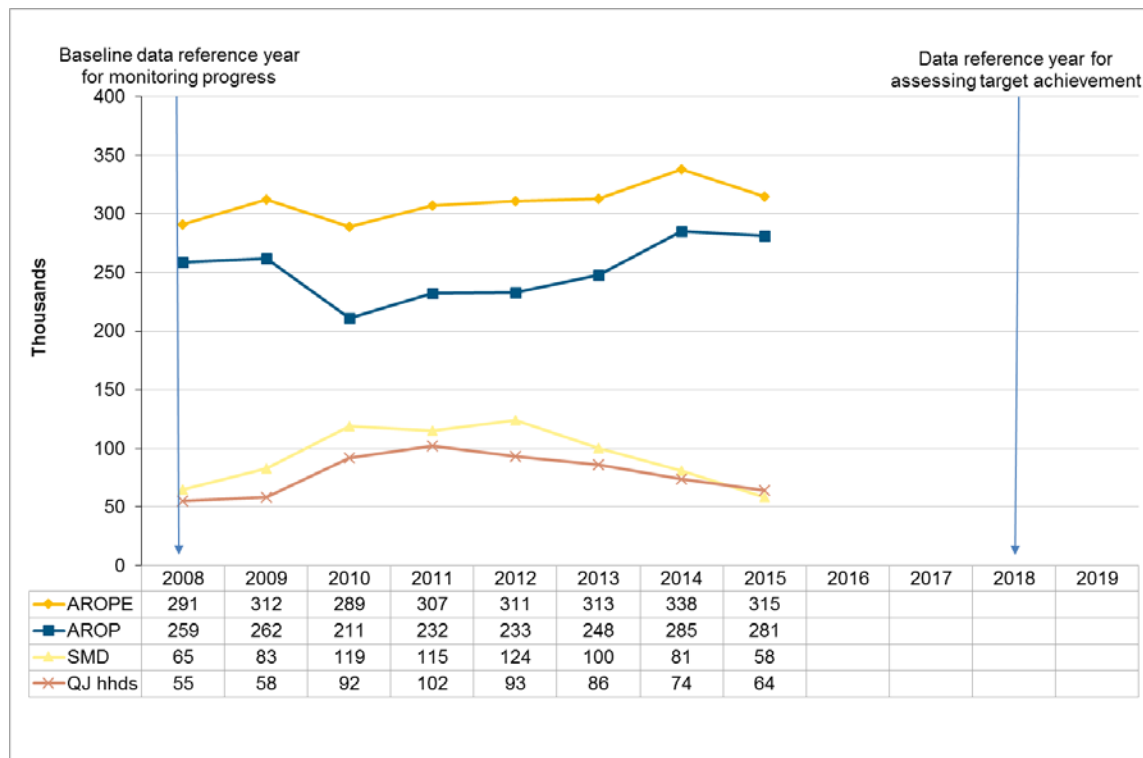
b) Children



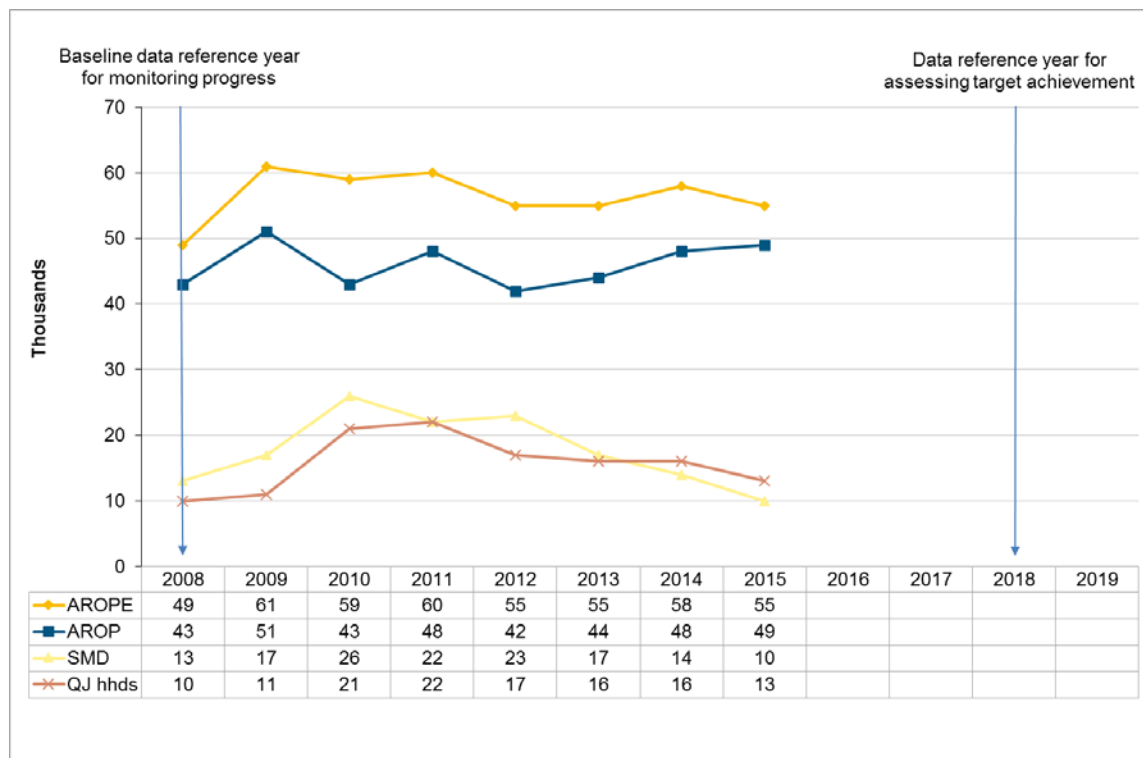
Note: Breaks in series for the period 2008-2014 which mainly affect indicators related to incomes and, to a lesser degree, variables highly correlated with incomes.

Figure A10: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Estonia

a) Whole population



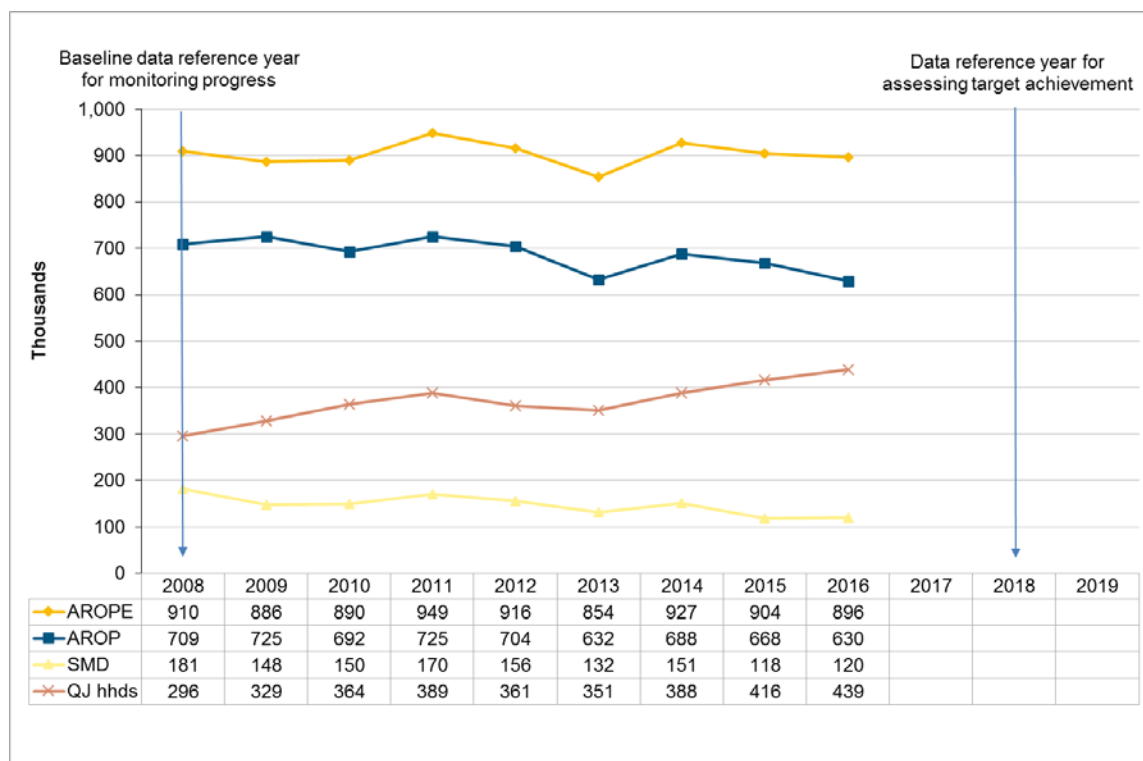
b) Children



Note: Major break in series in 2014 for EU-SILC variables.

Figure A11: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2016, Finland

a) Whole population



b) Children

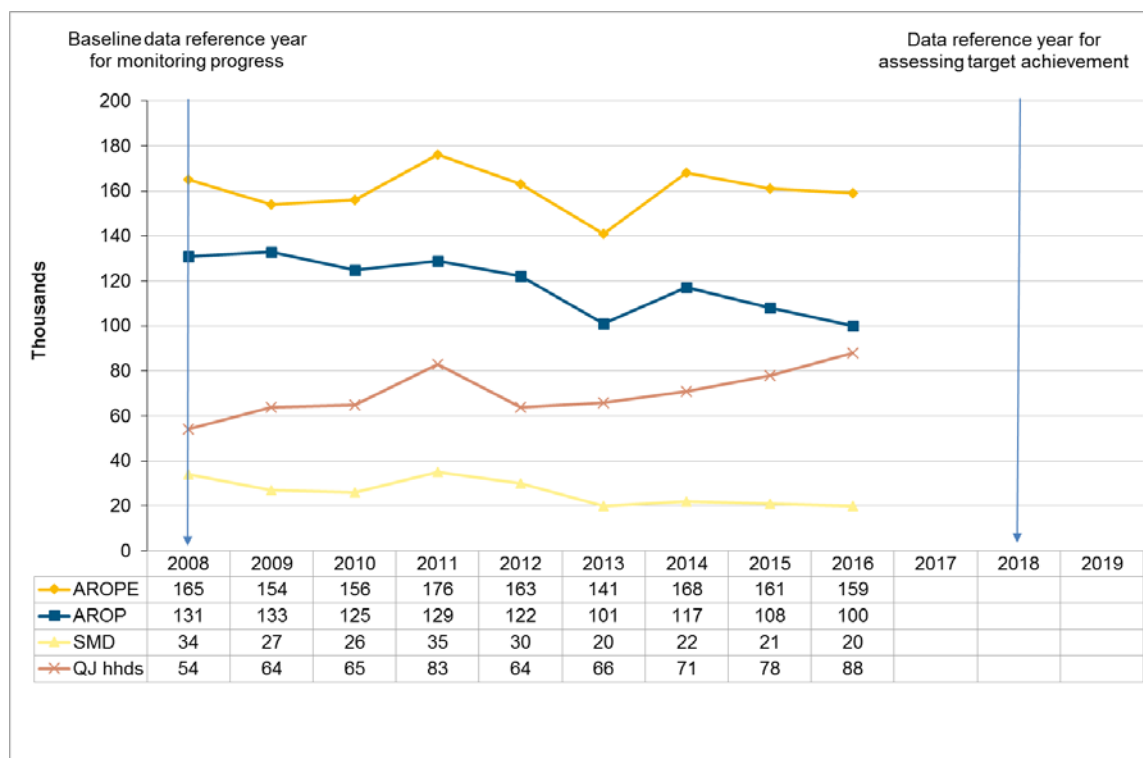
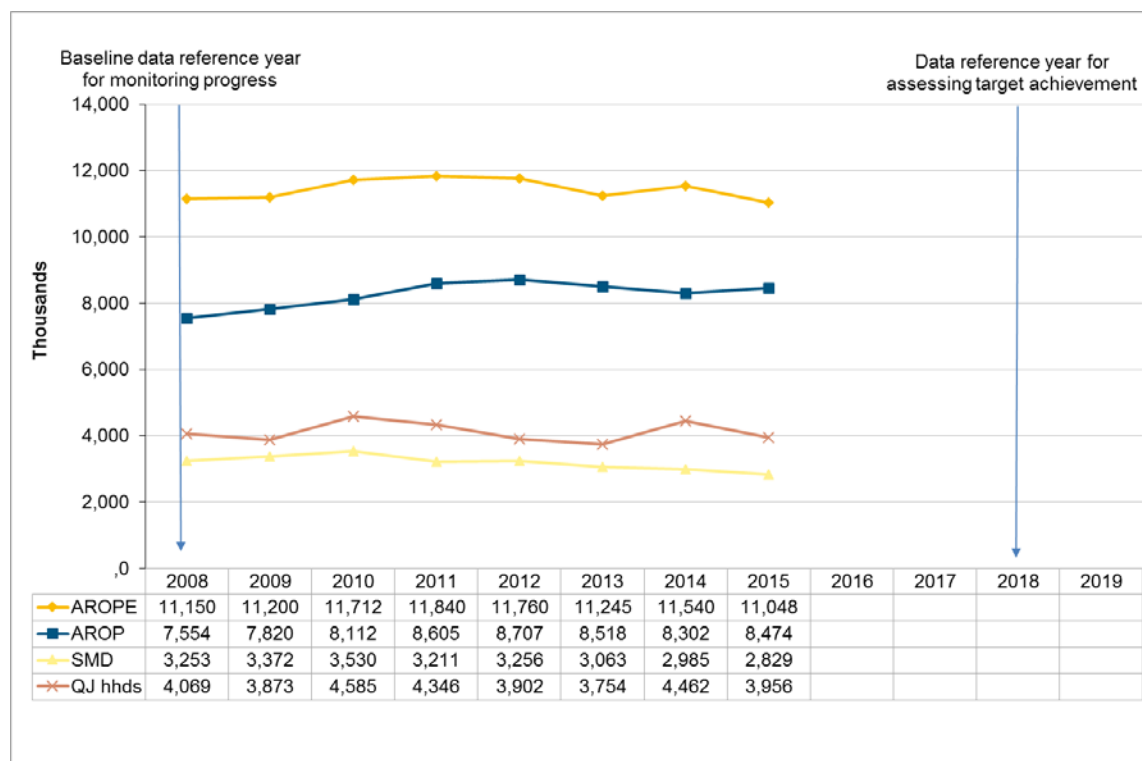


Figure A12: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, France

a) Whole population



b) Children

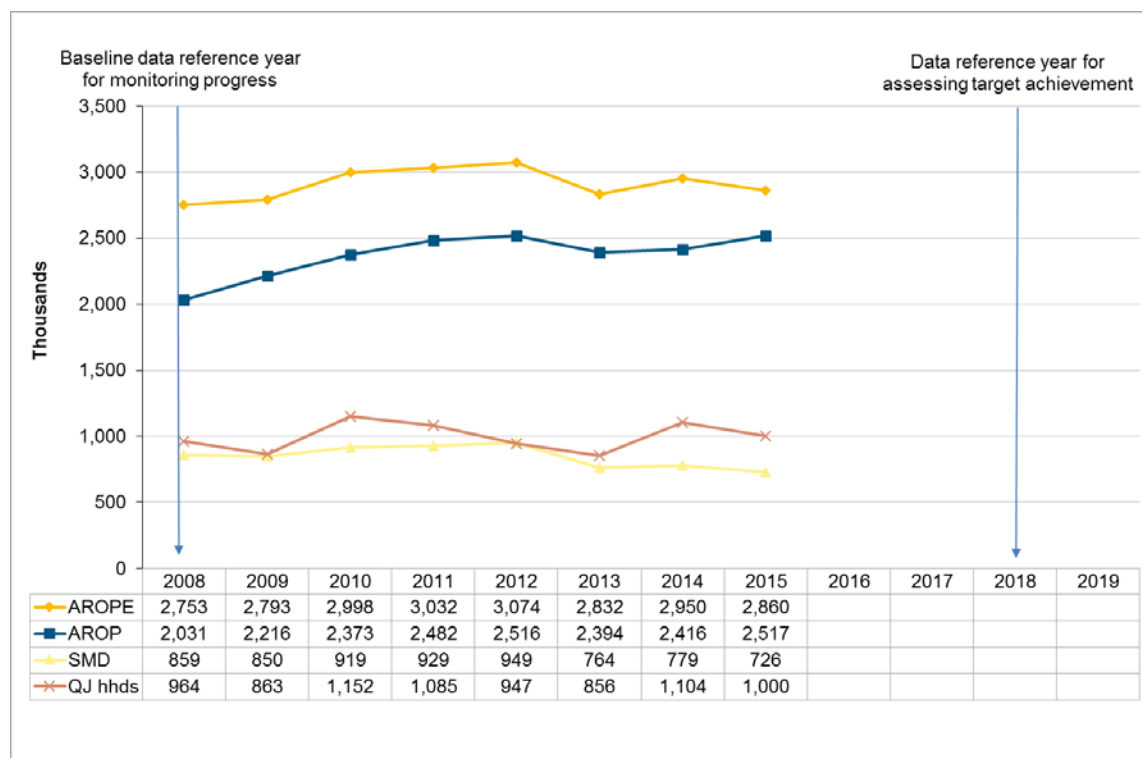
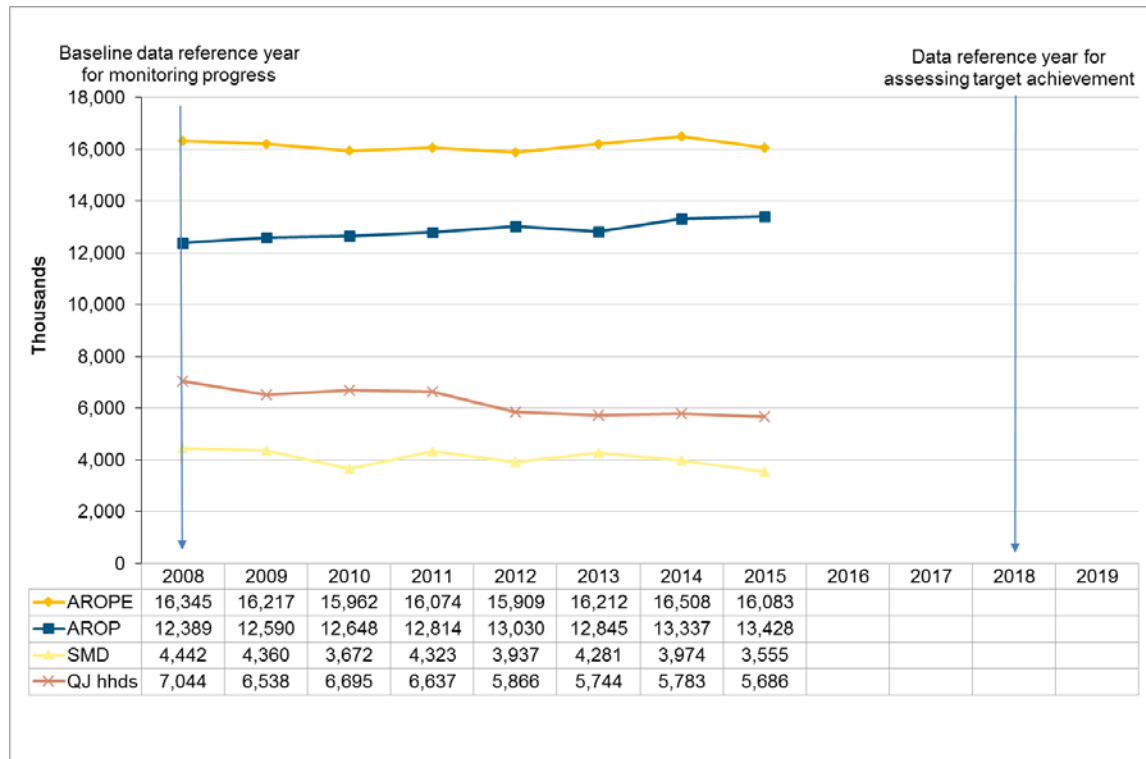


Figure A13: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Germany

a) Whole population



b) Children

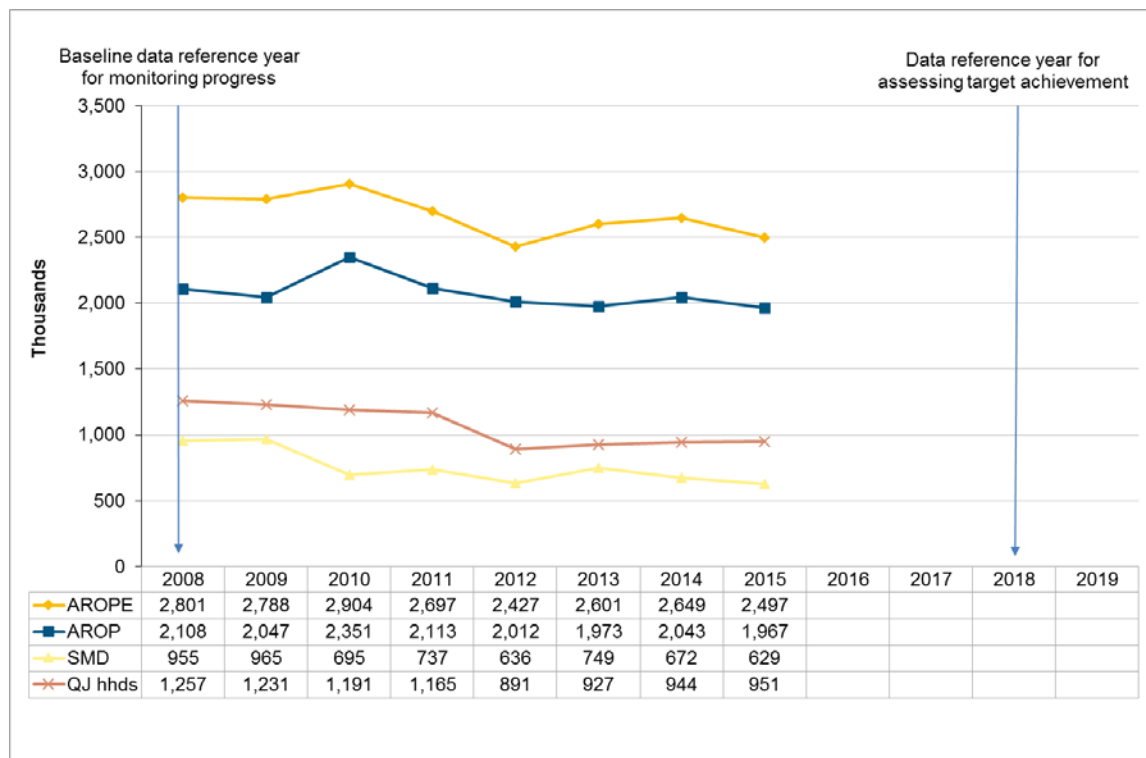
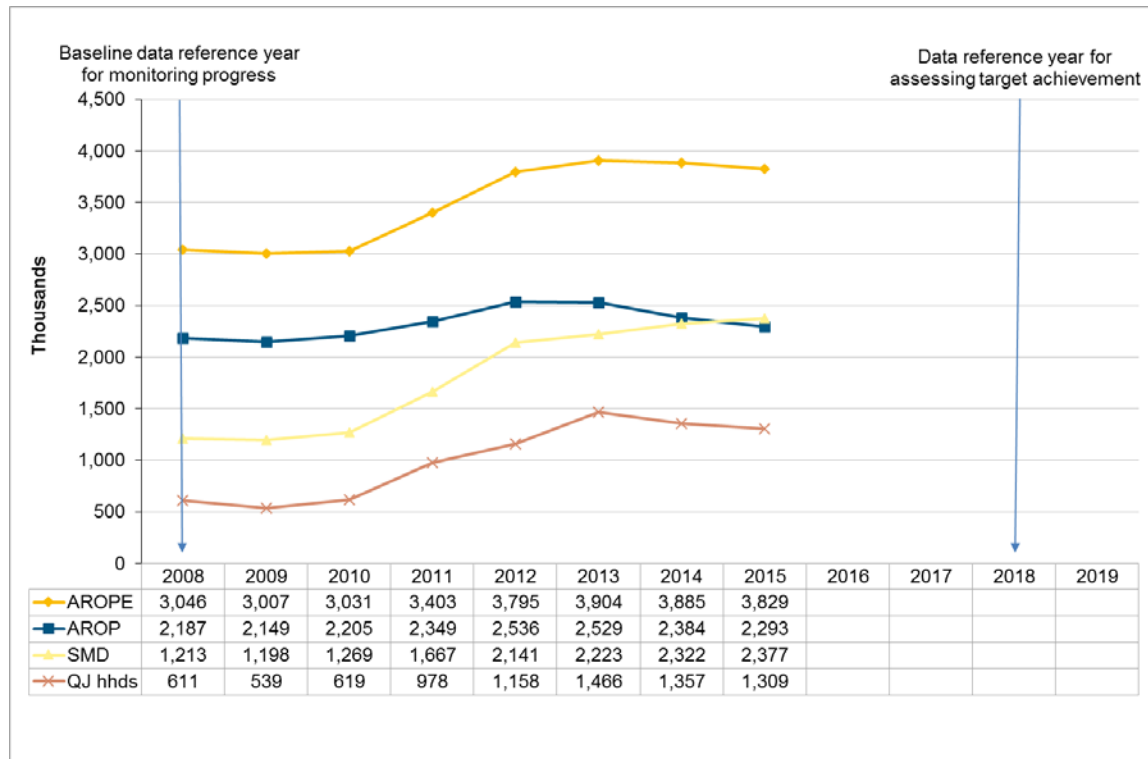


Figure A14: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Greece

a) Whole population



b) Children

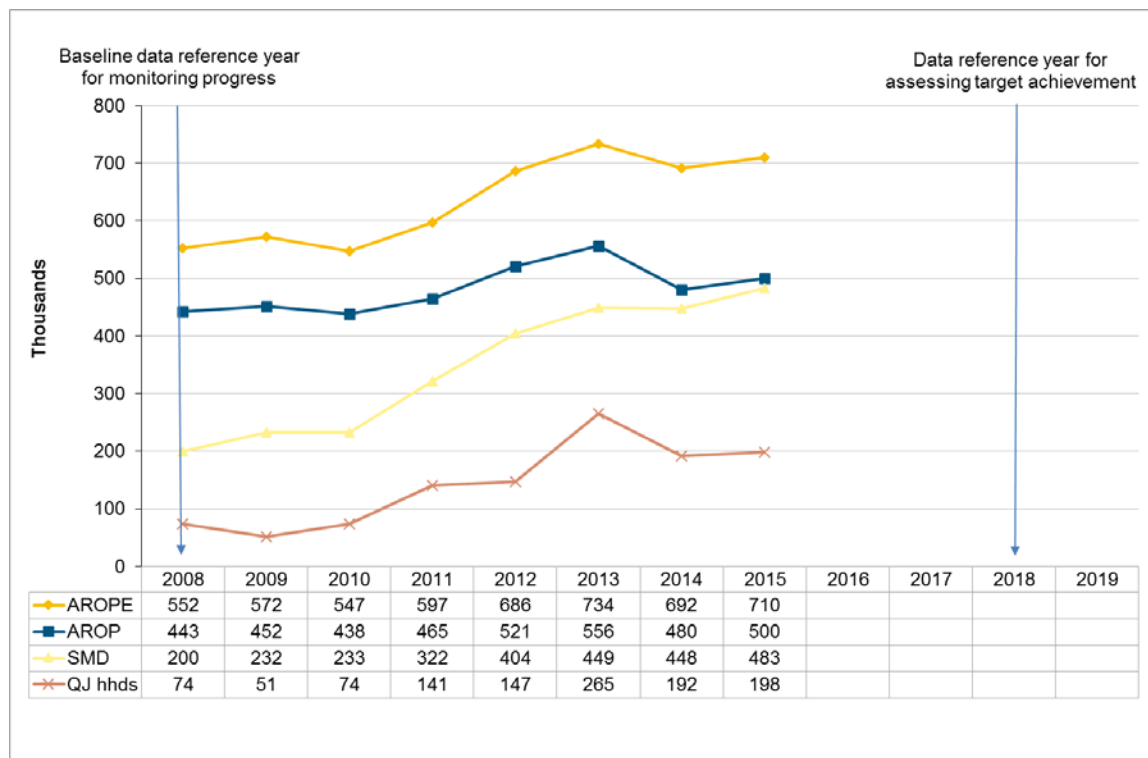
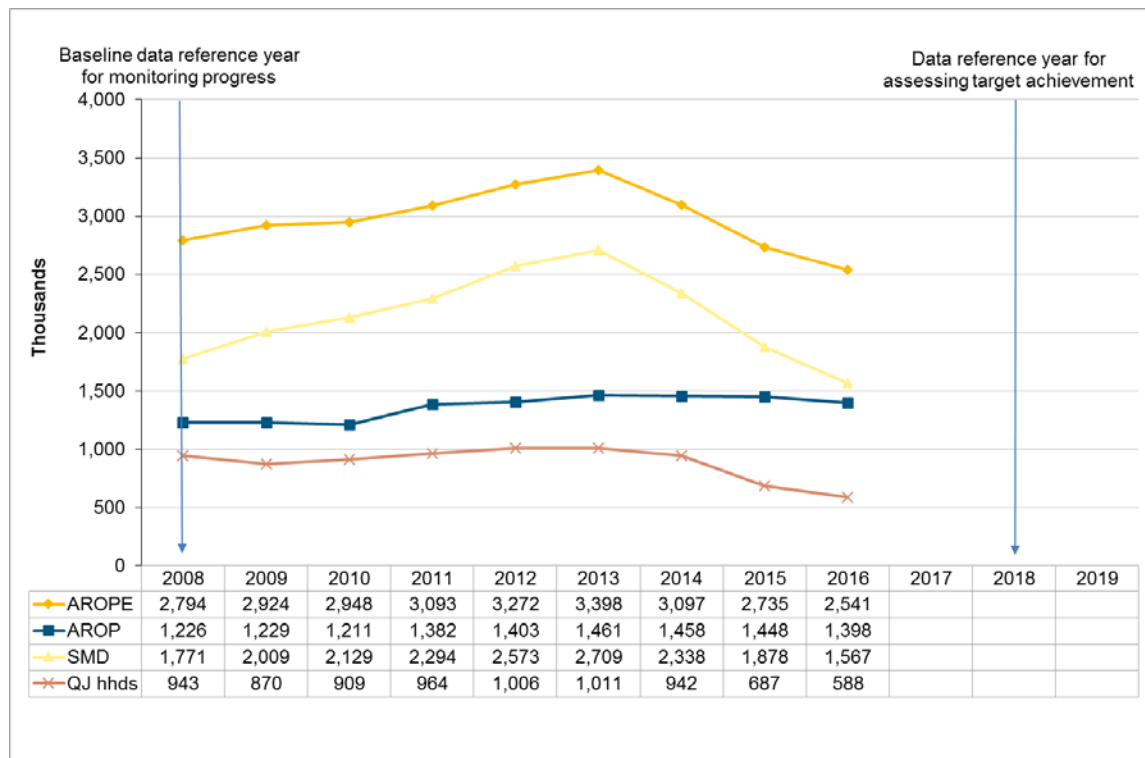


Figure A15: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2016, Hungary

a) Whole population



b) Children

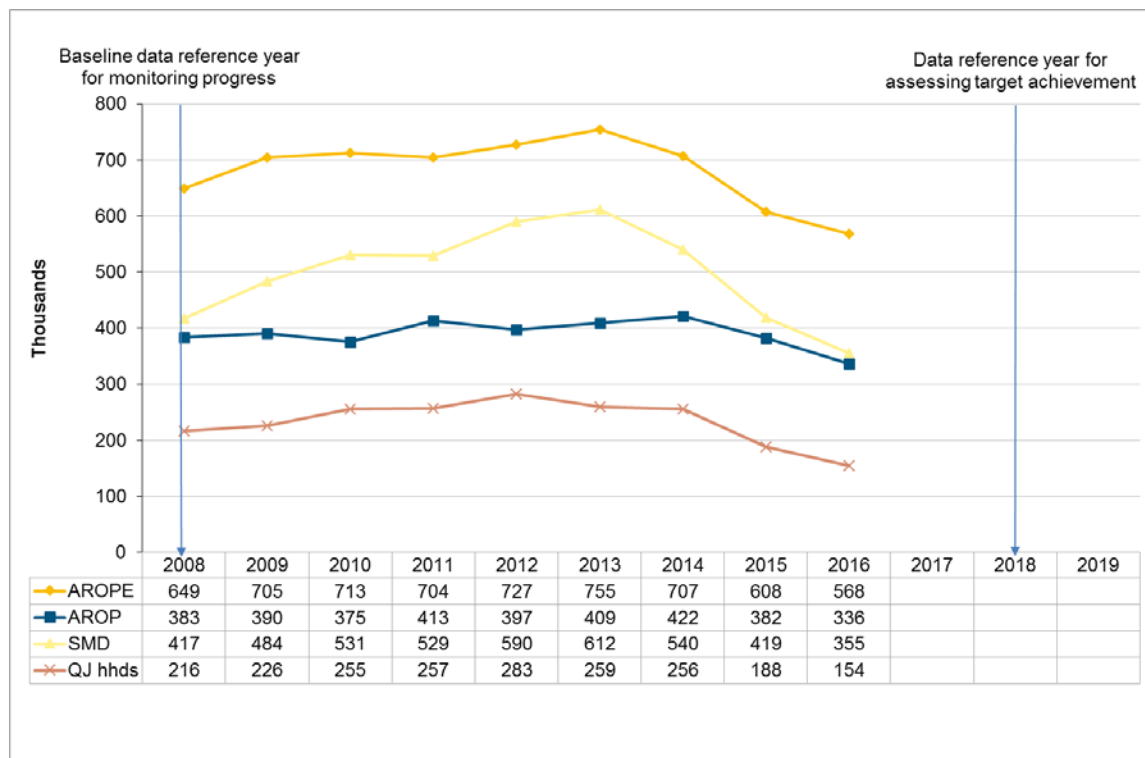
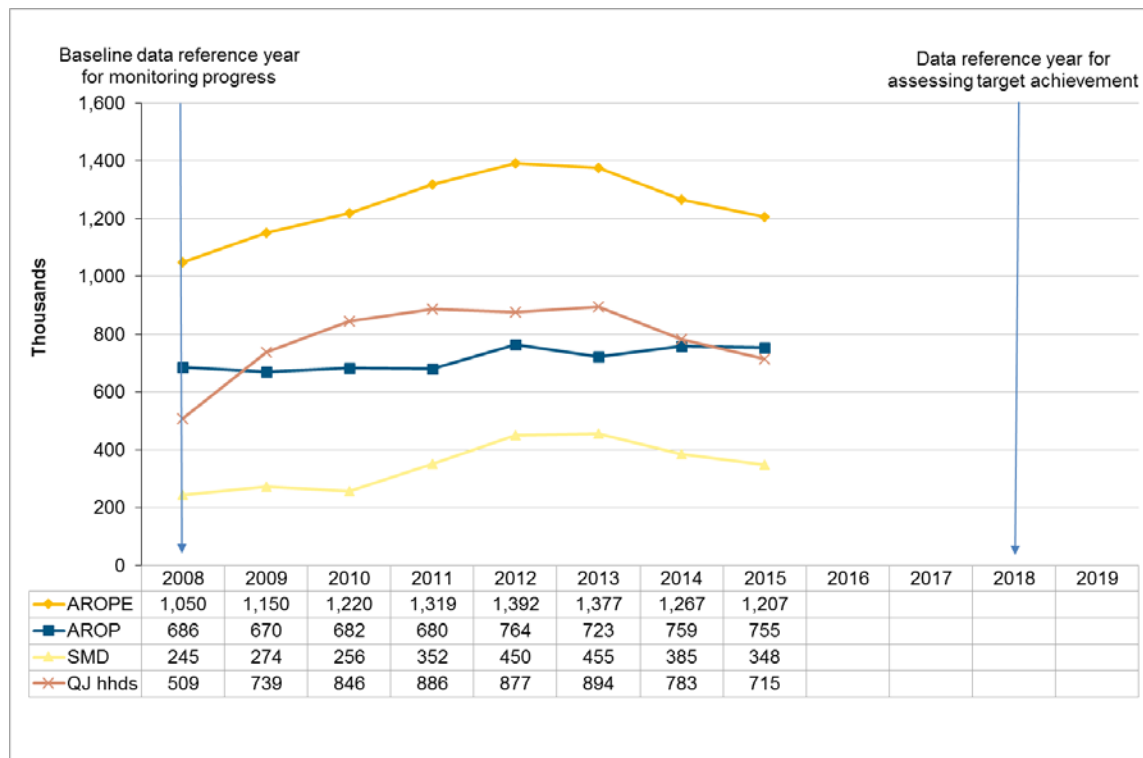


Figure A16: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Ireland

a) Whole population



b) Children

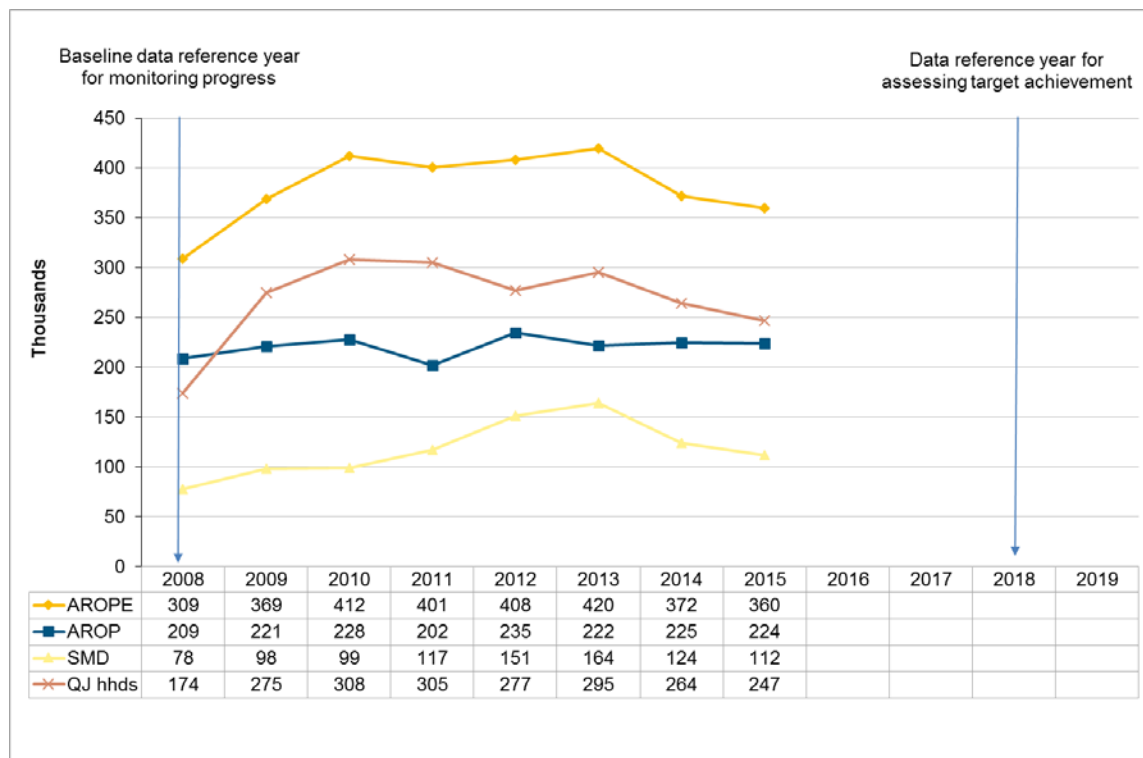
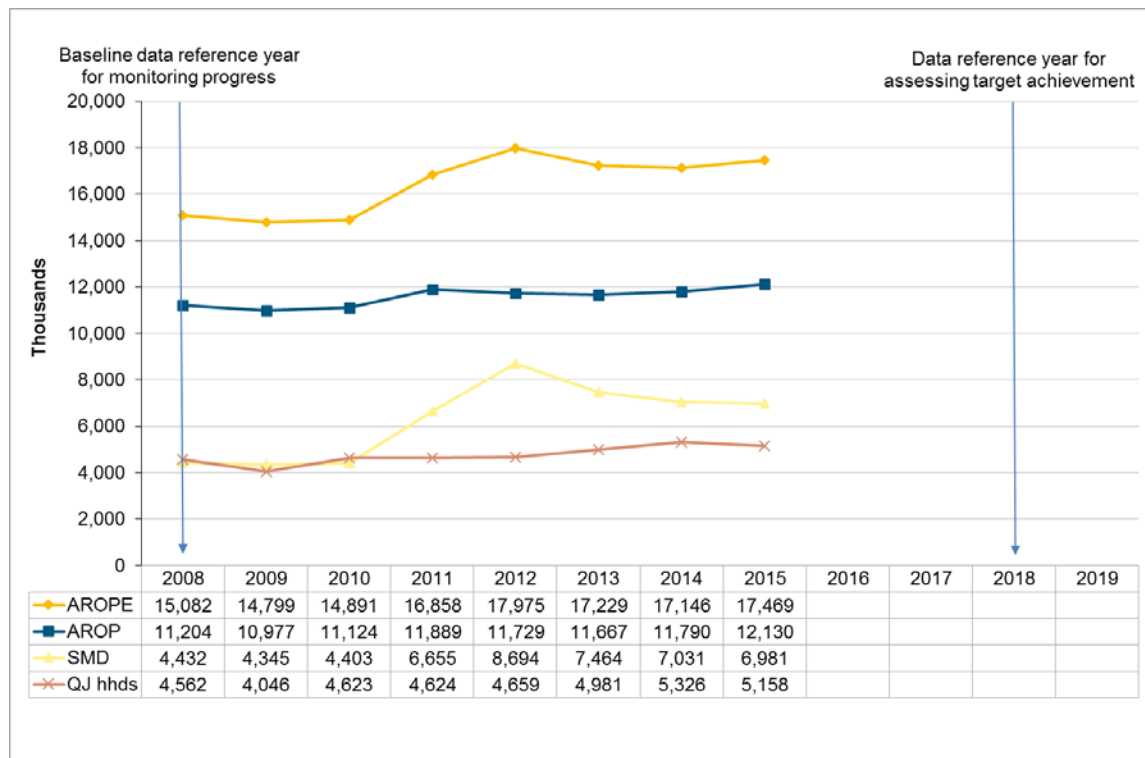


Figure A17: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Italy

a) Whole population



b) Children

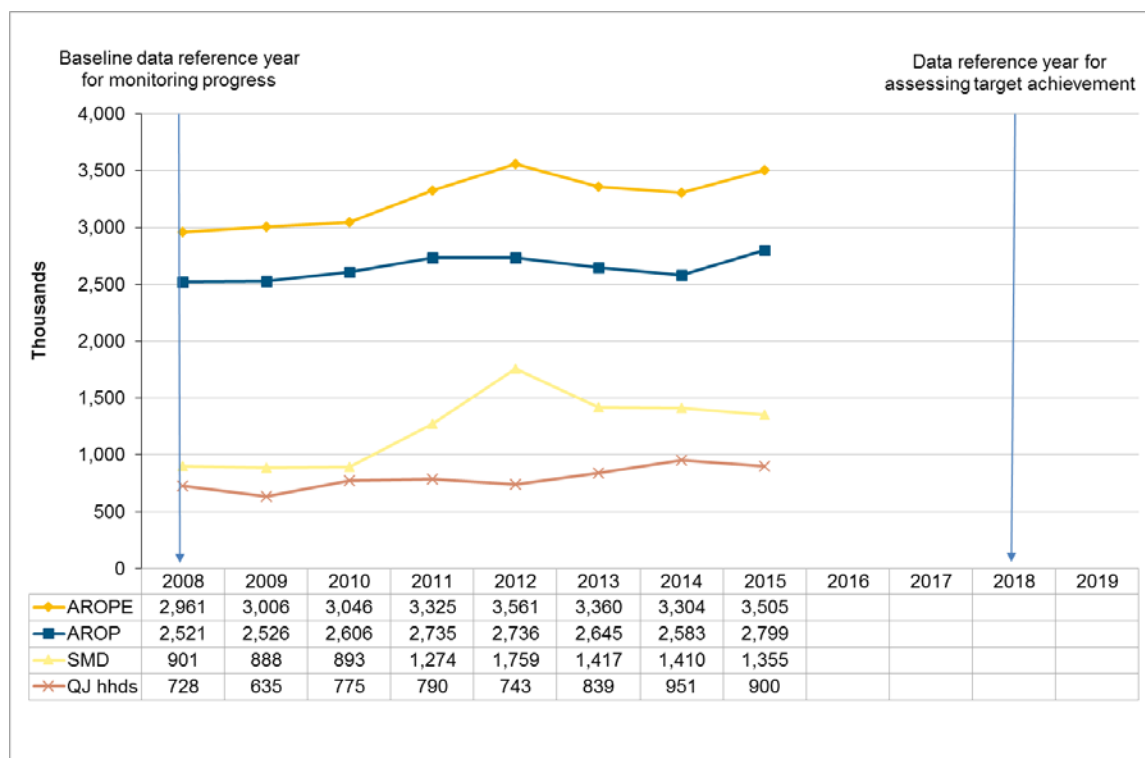
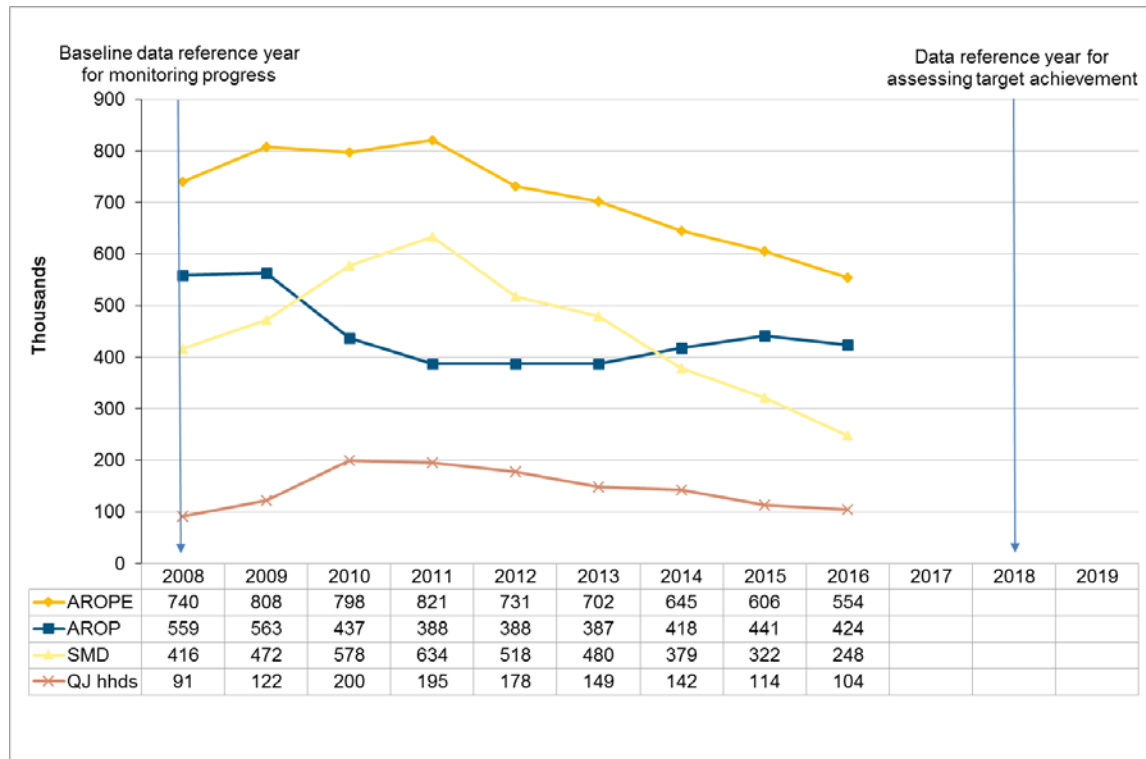


Figure A18: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2016, Latvia

a) Whole population



b) Children

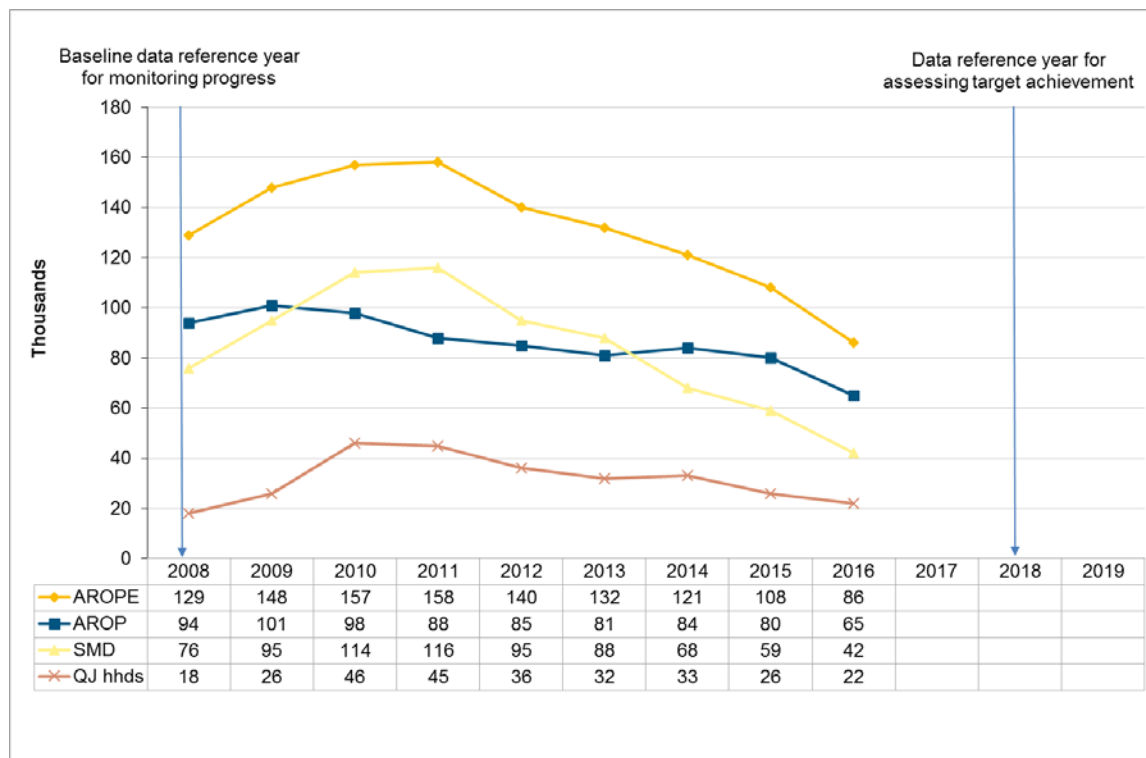
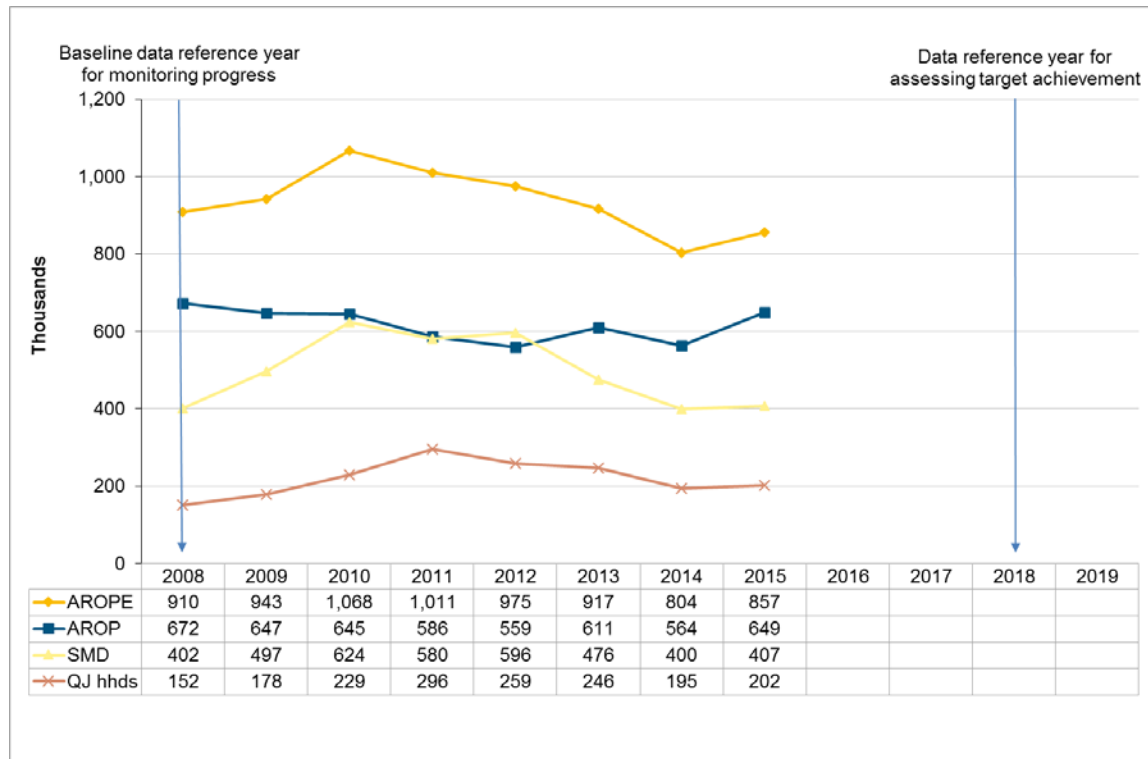


Figure A19: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Lithuania

a) Whole population



b) Children

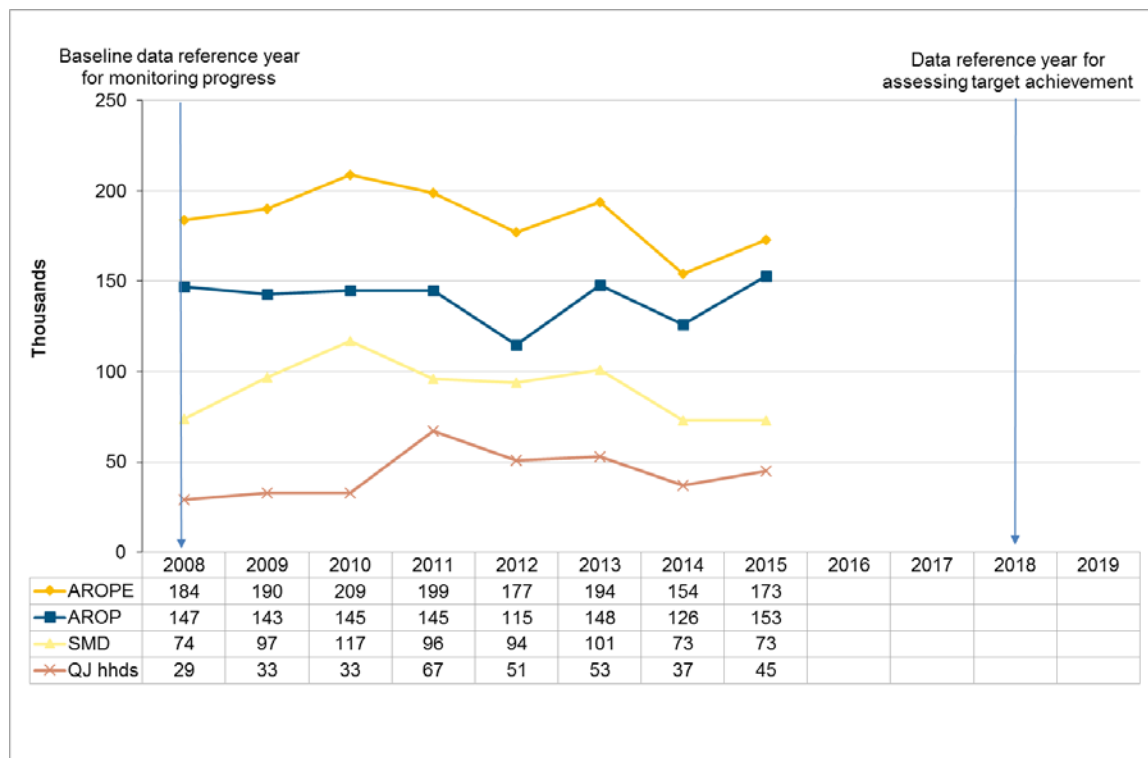
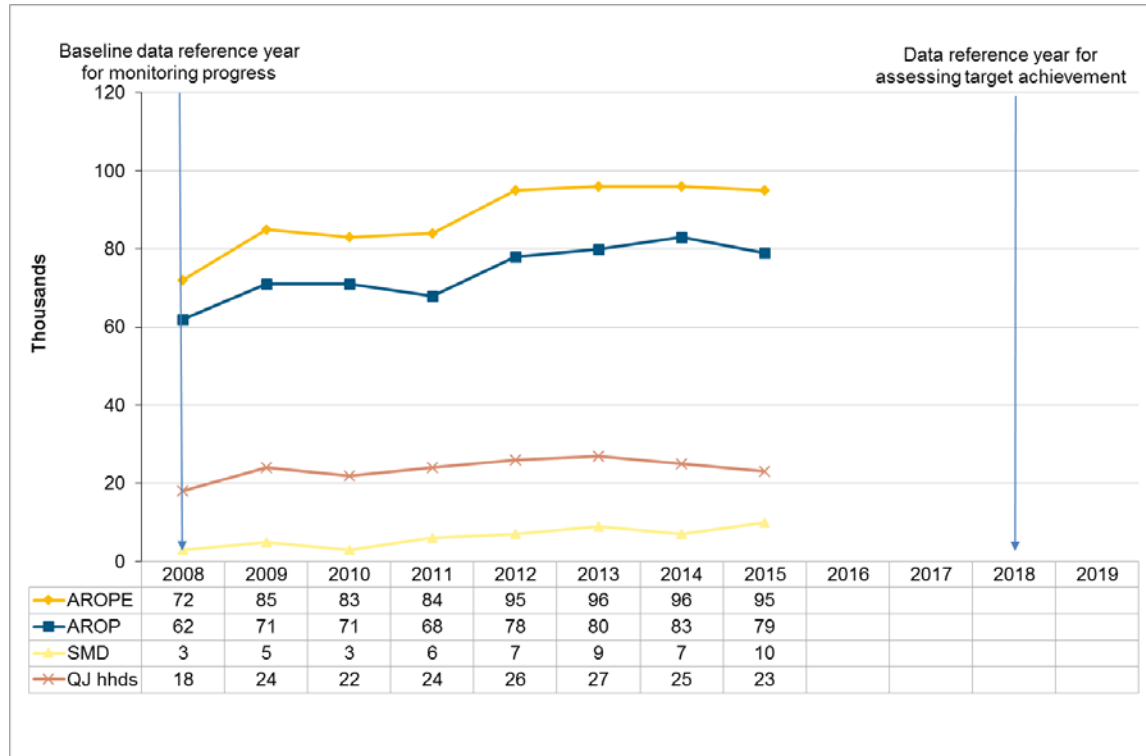


Figure A20: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Luxembourg

a) Whole population



b) Children

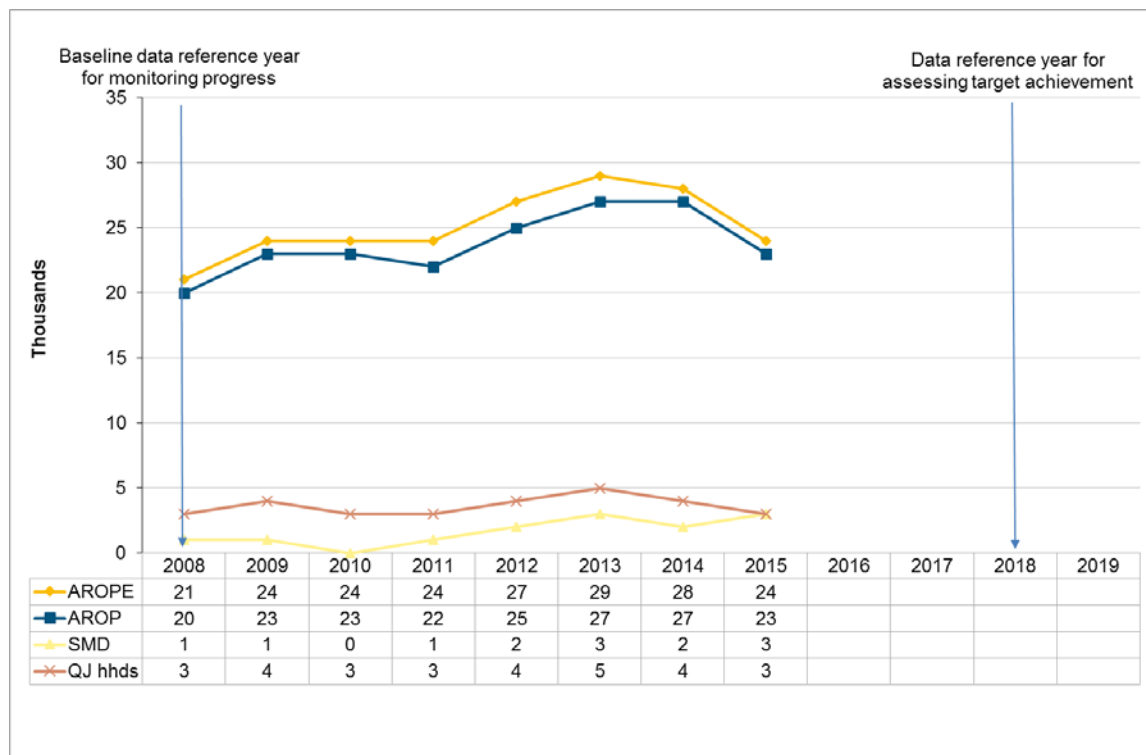
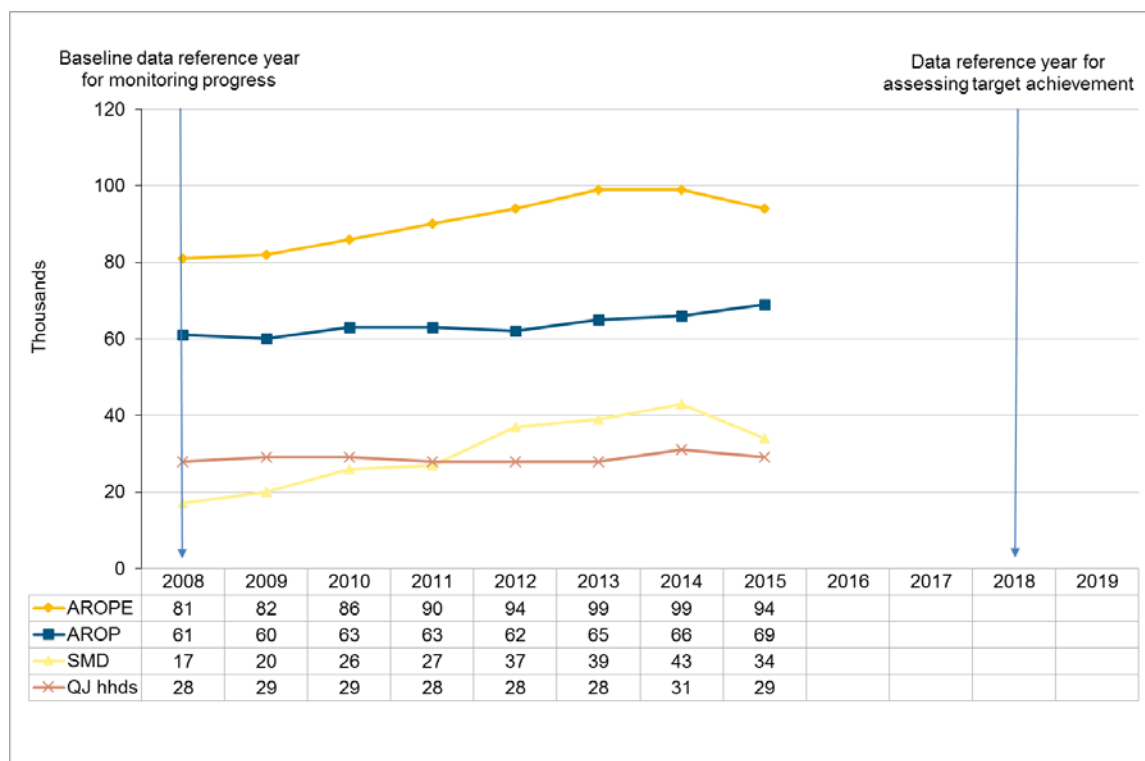


Figure A21: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Malta

a) Whole population



b) Children

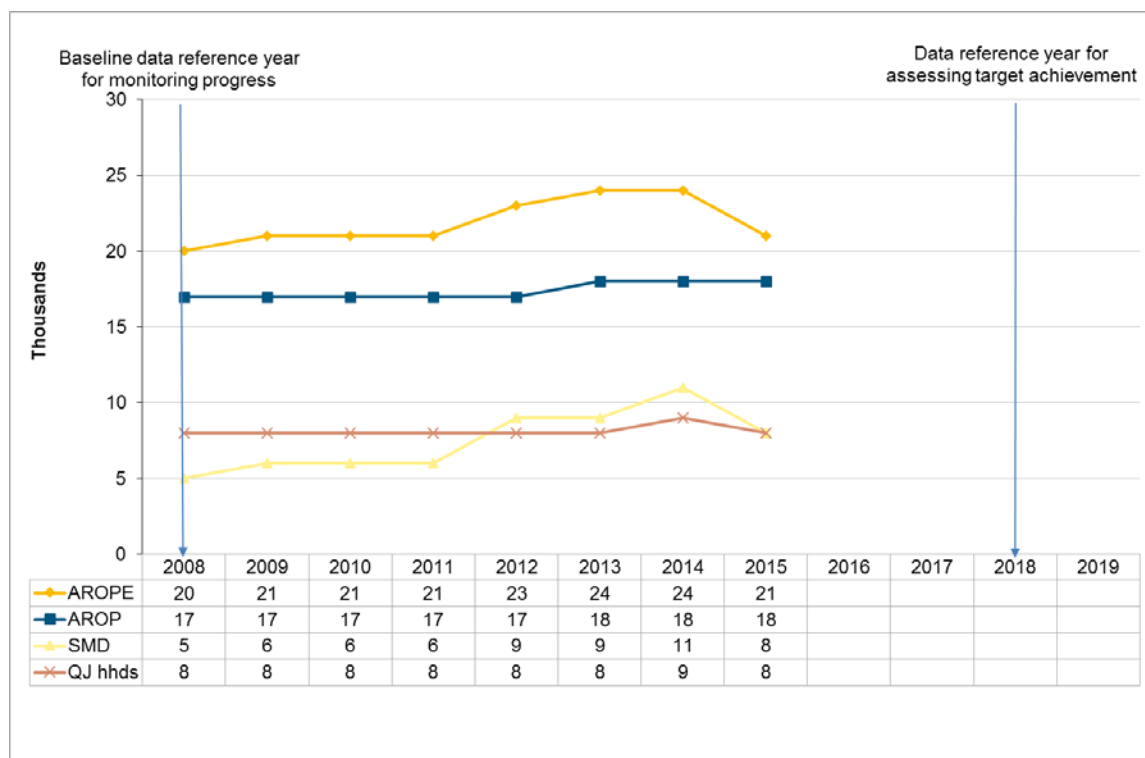
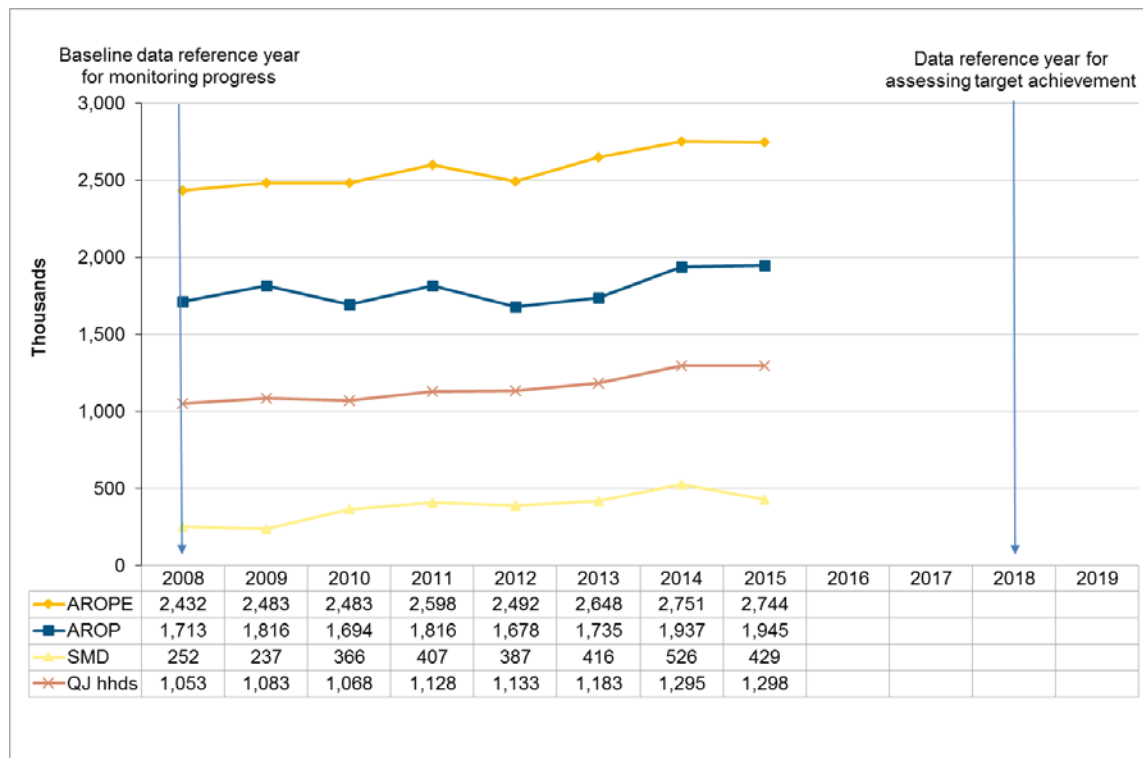


Figure A22: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, The Netherlands

a) Whole population



b) Children

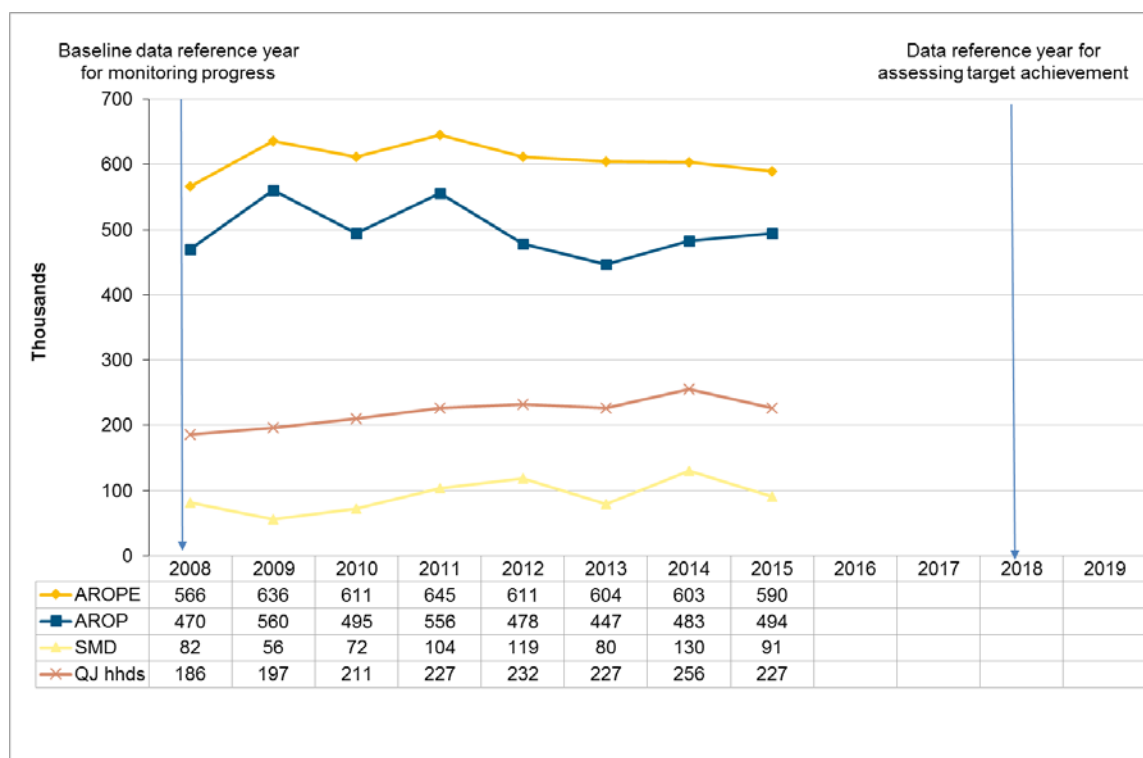
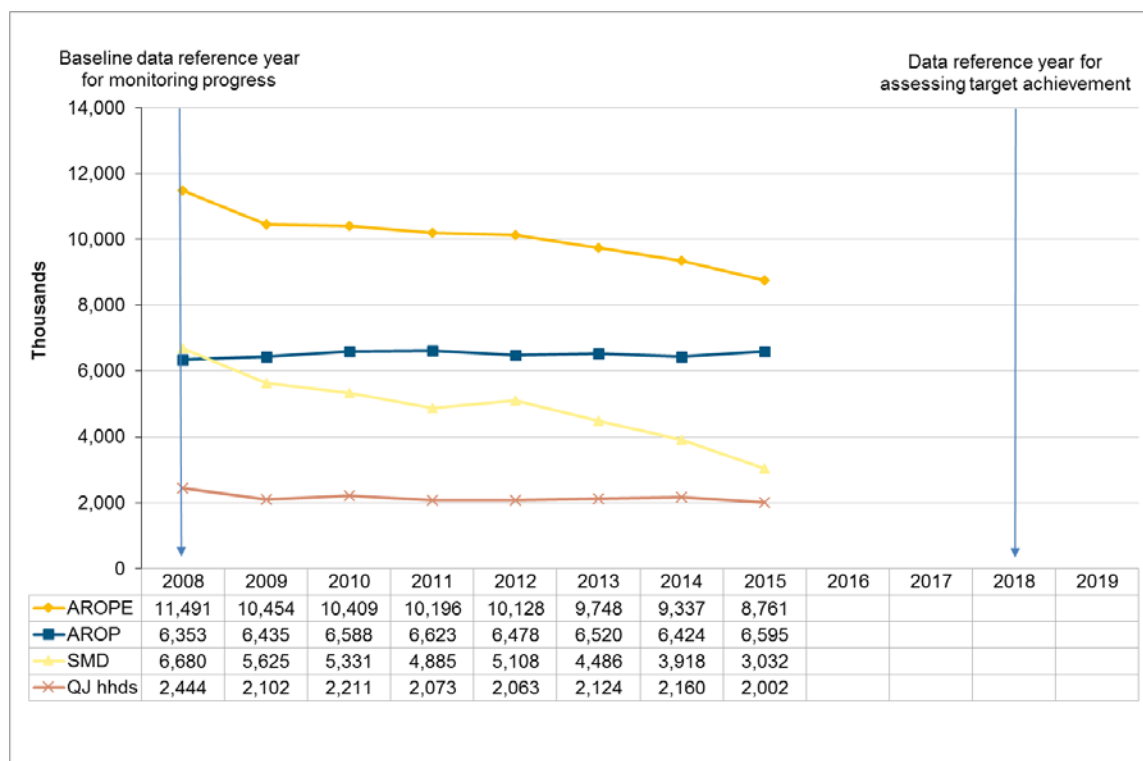


Figure A23: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Poland

a) Whole population



b) Children

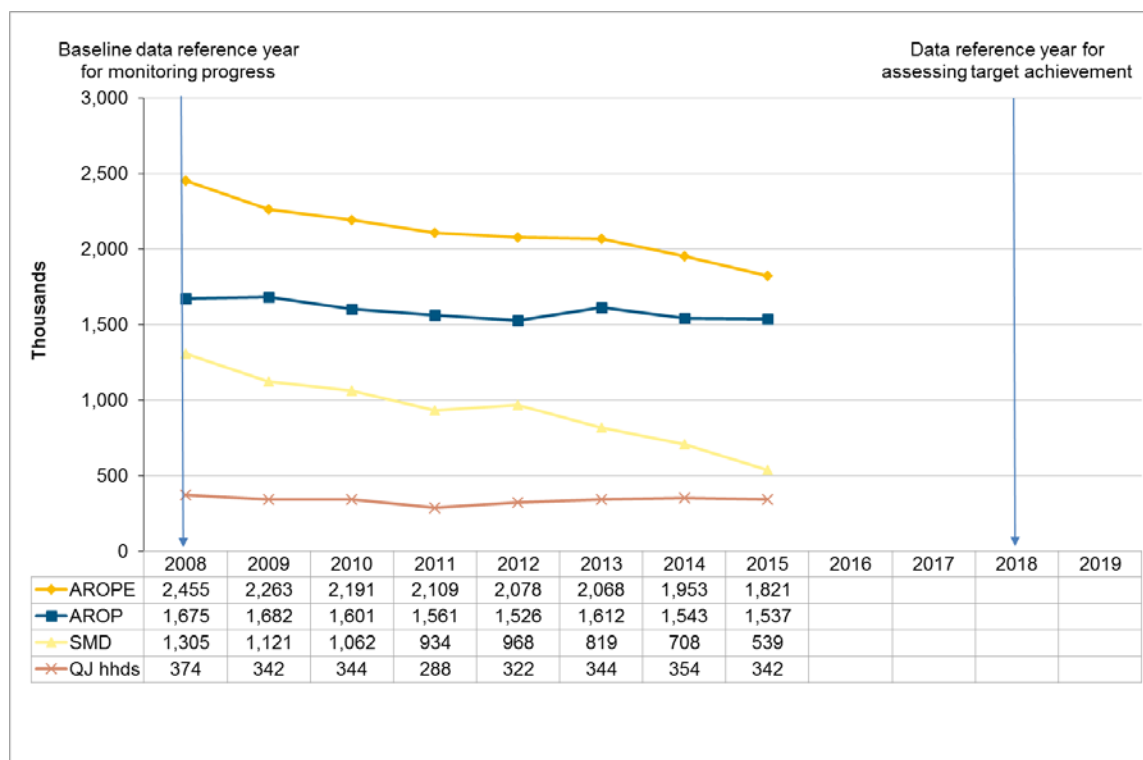
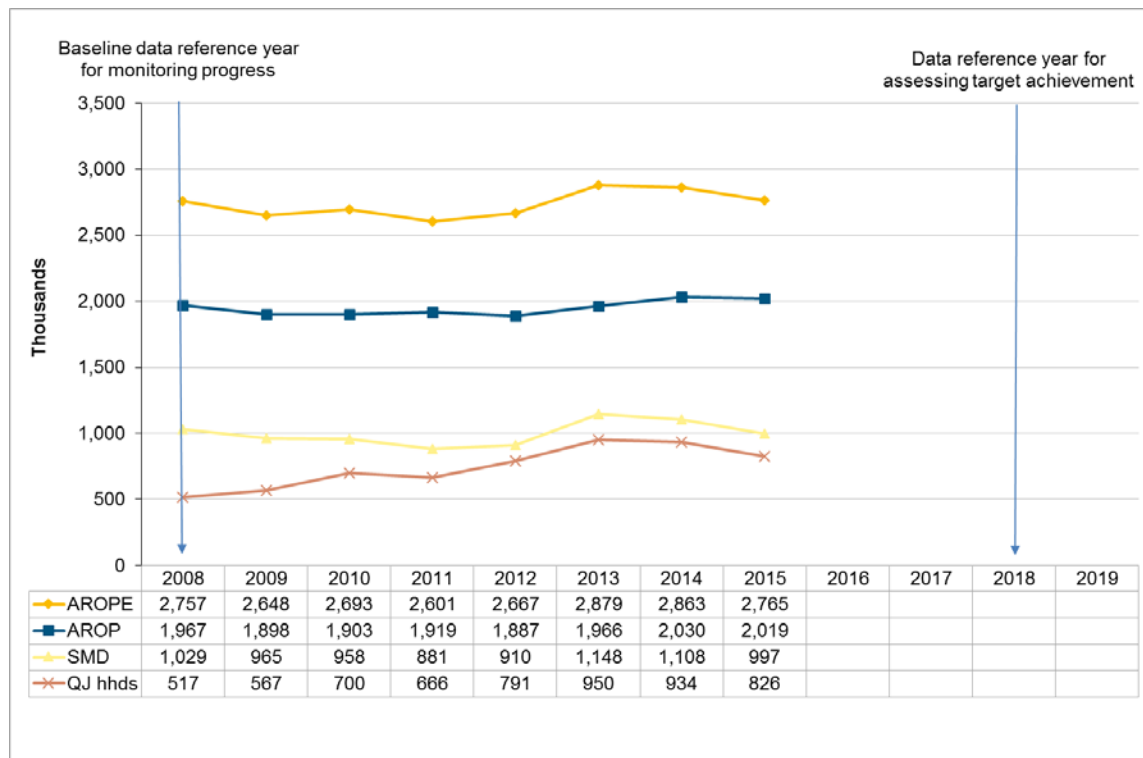


Figure A24: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Portugal

a) Whole population



b) Children

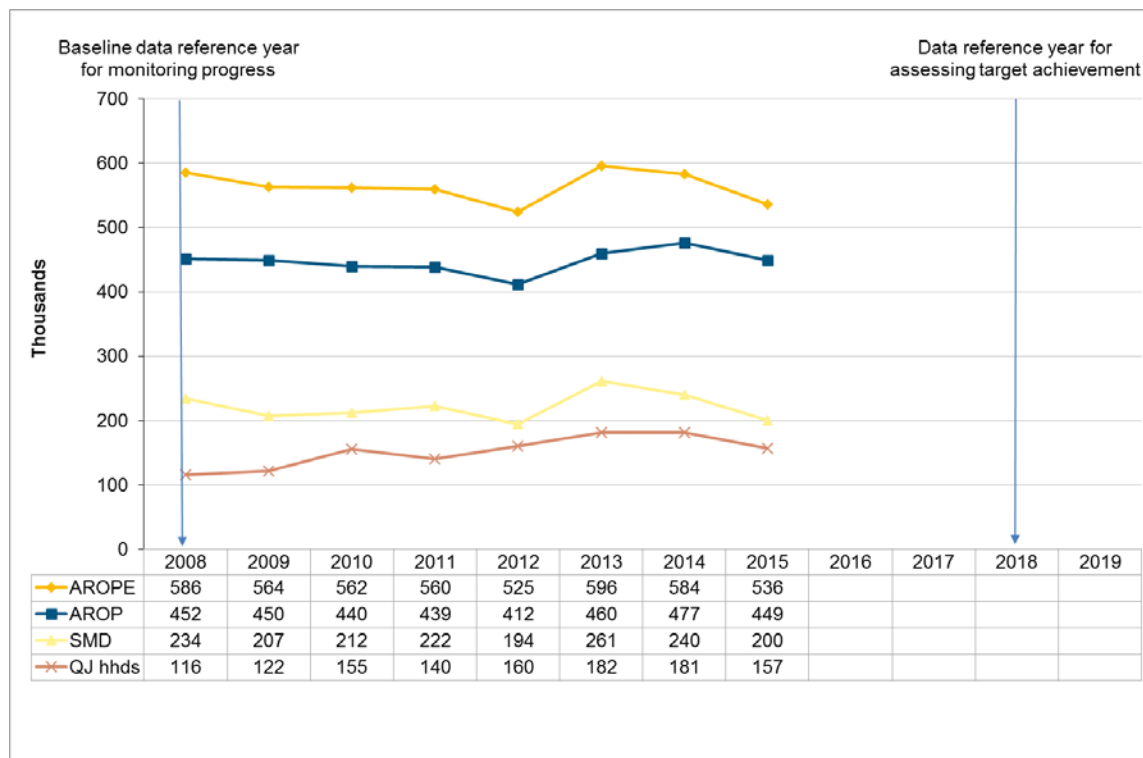
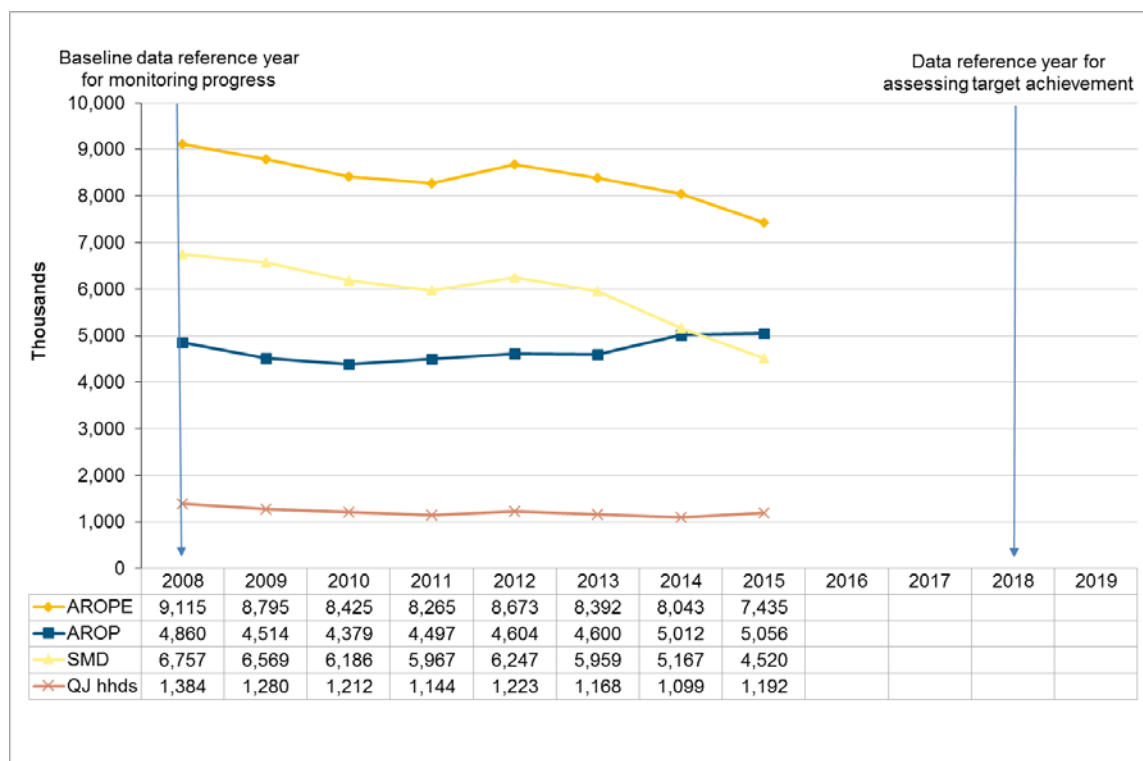


Figure A25: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Romania

a) Whole population



b) Children

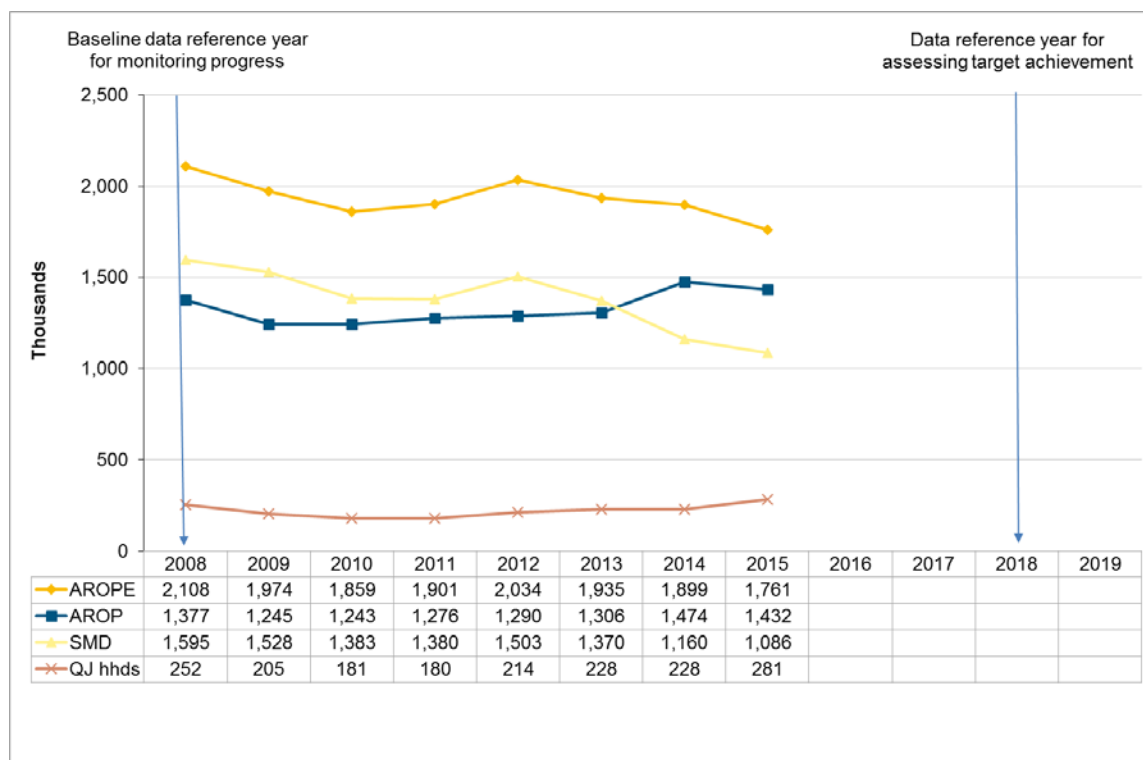
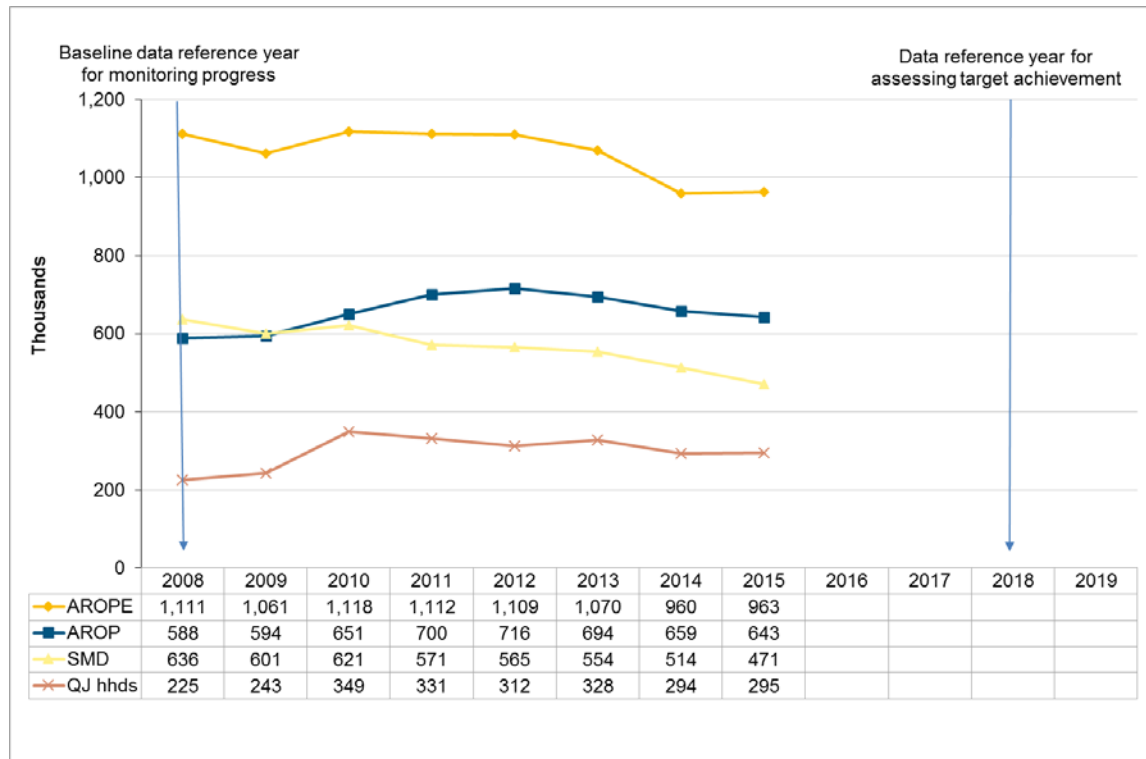


Figure A26: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Slovakia

a) Whole population



b) Children

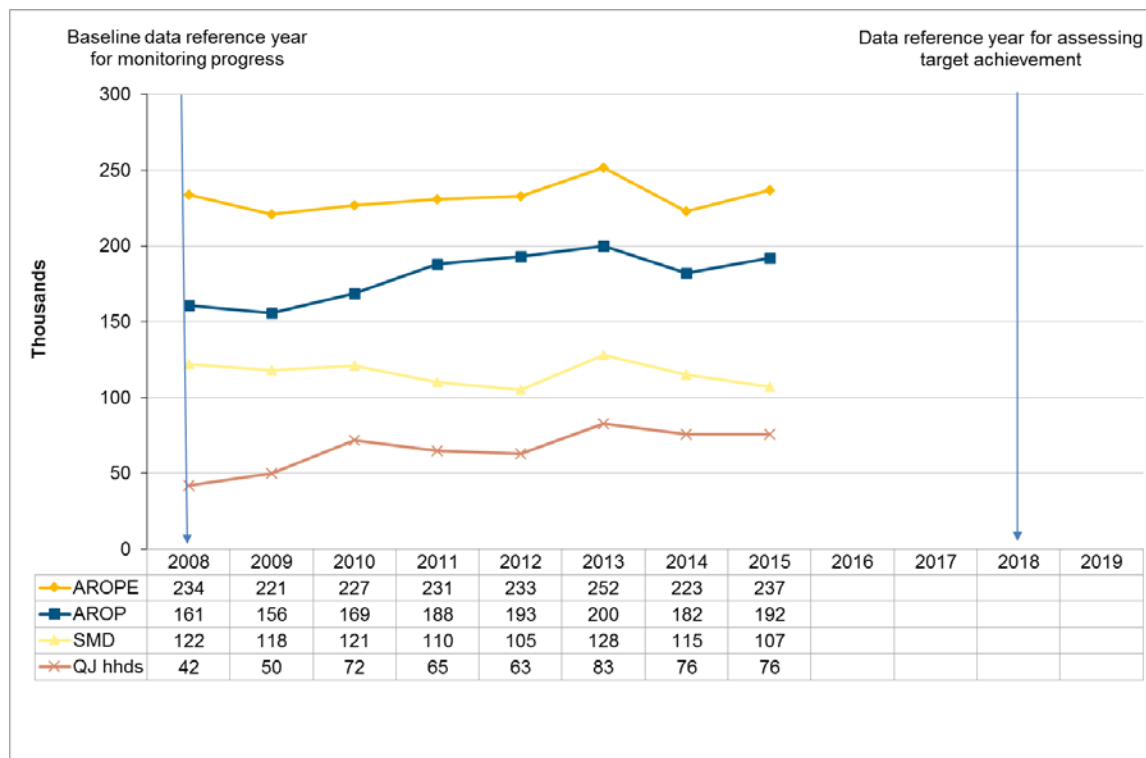
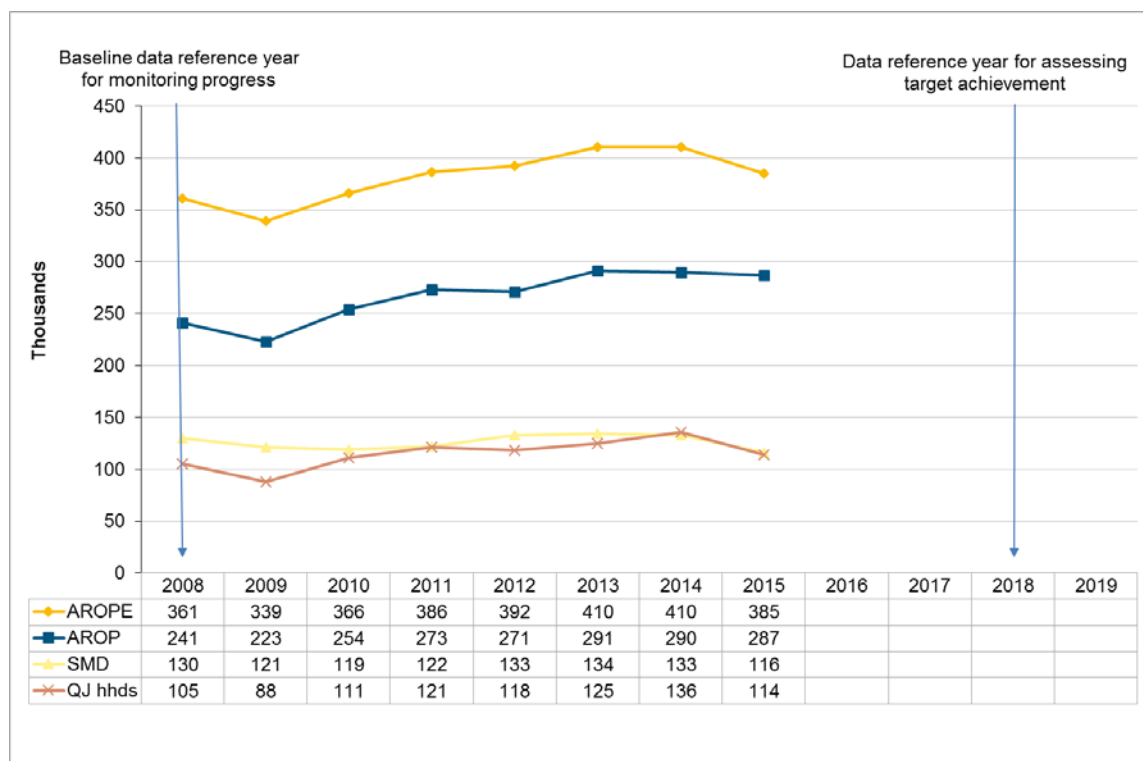


Figure A27: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Slovenia

a) Whole population



b) Children

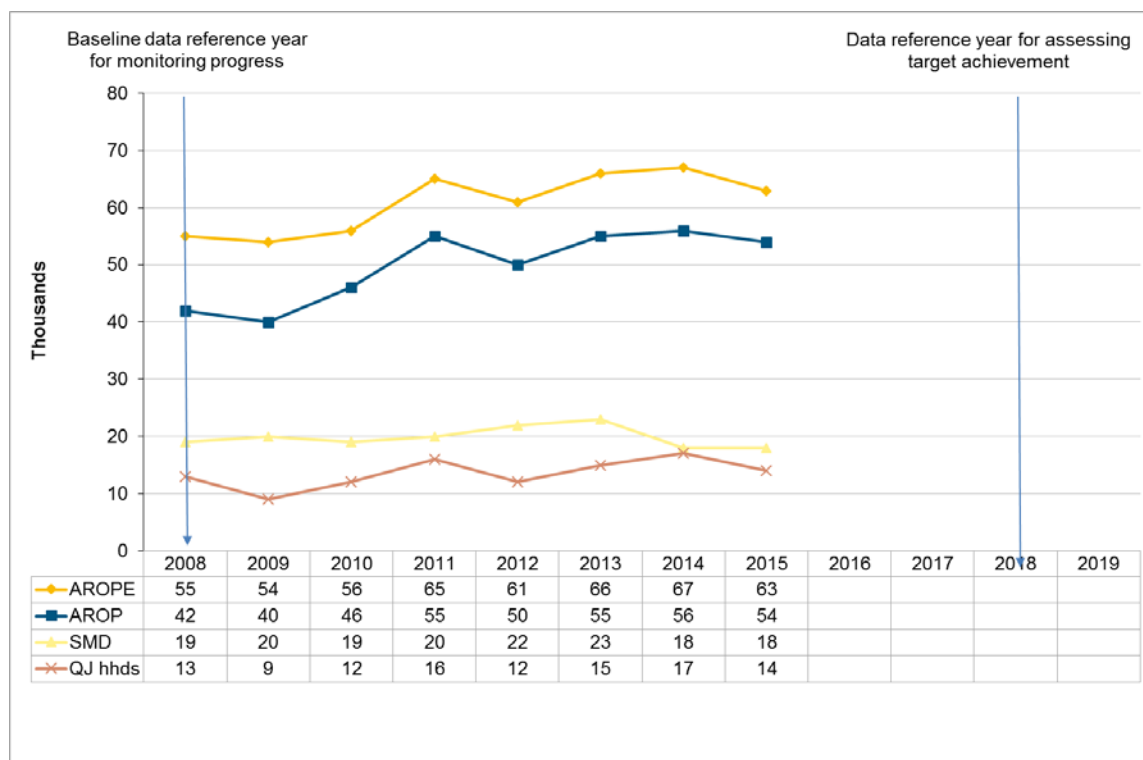
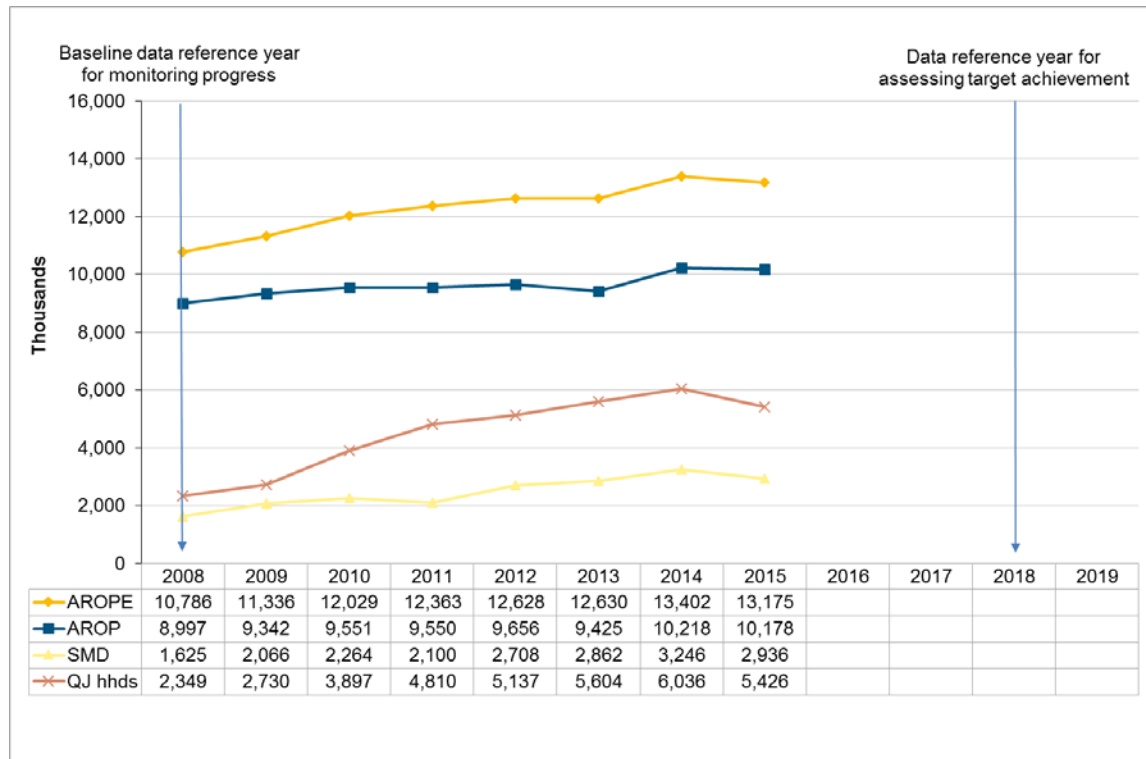


Figure A28: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Spain

a) Whole population



b) Children

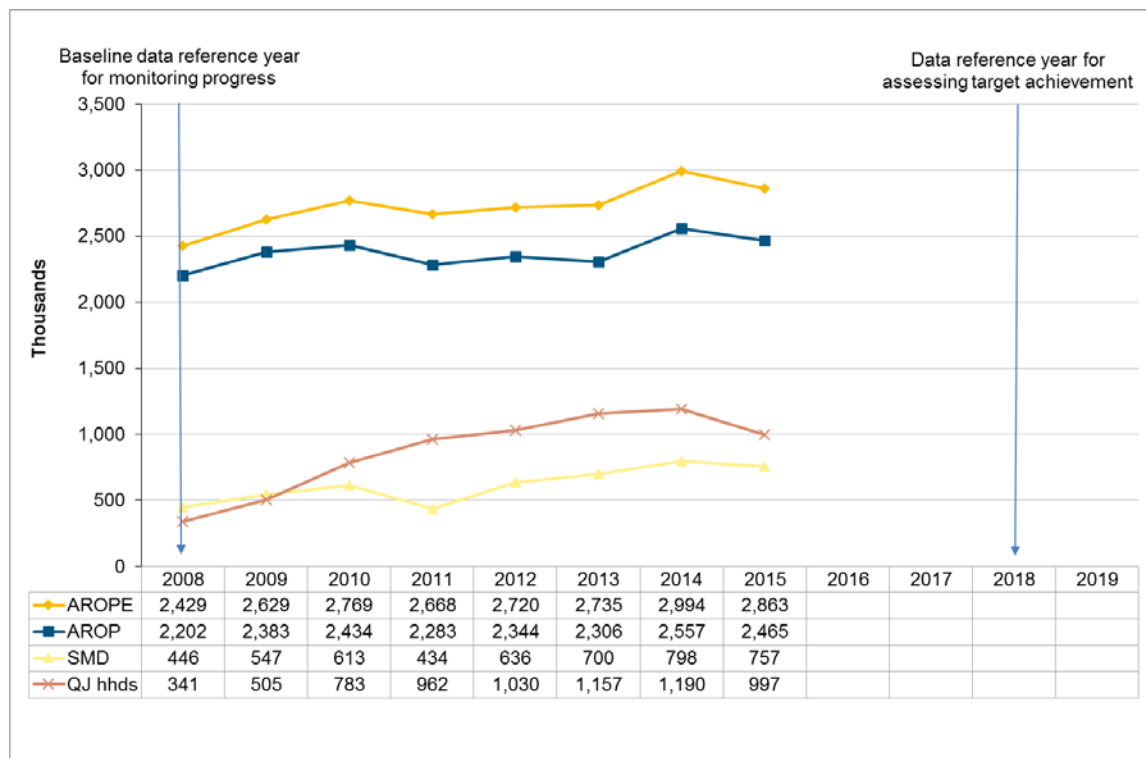
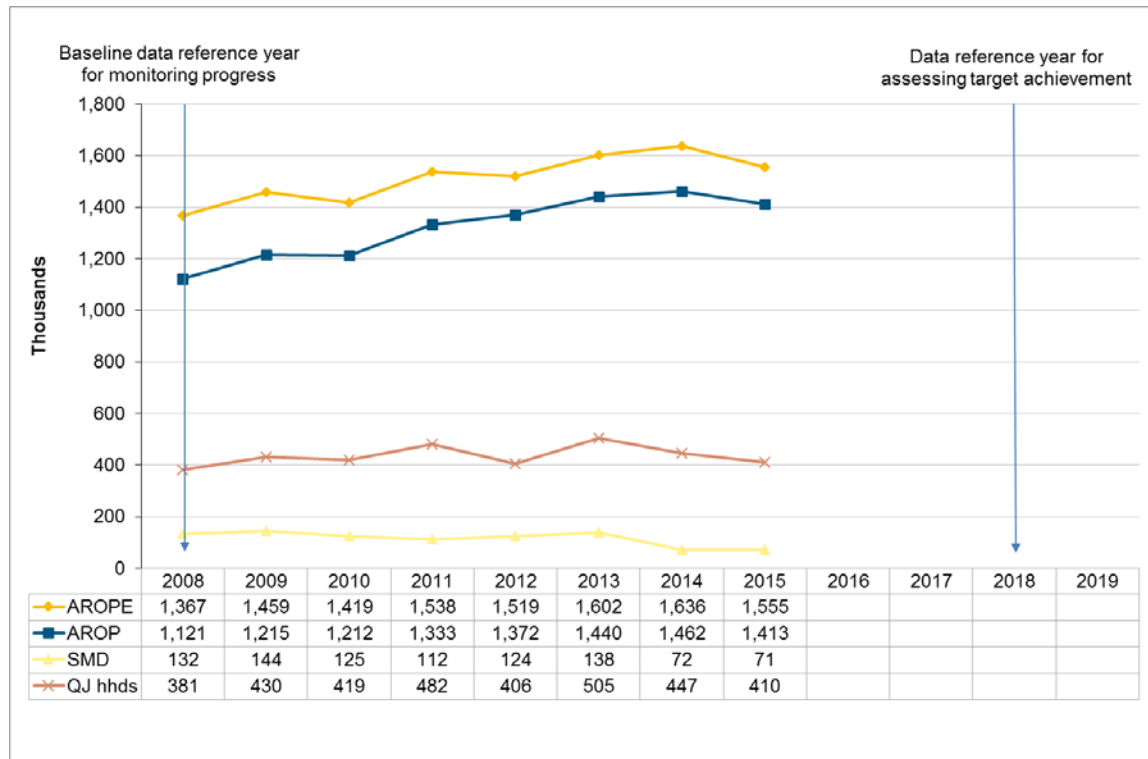


Figure A29: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Sweden

a) Whole population



b) Children

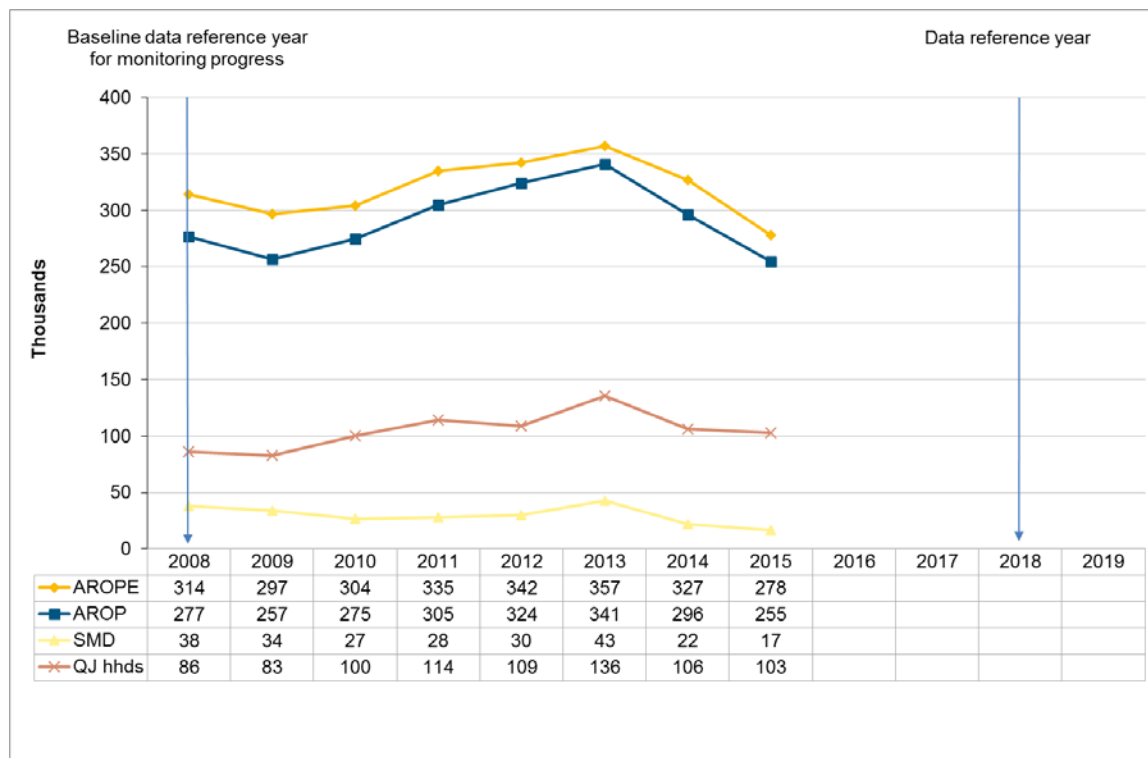
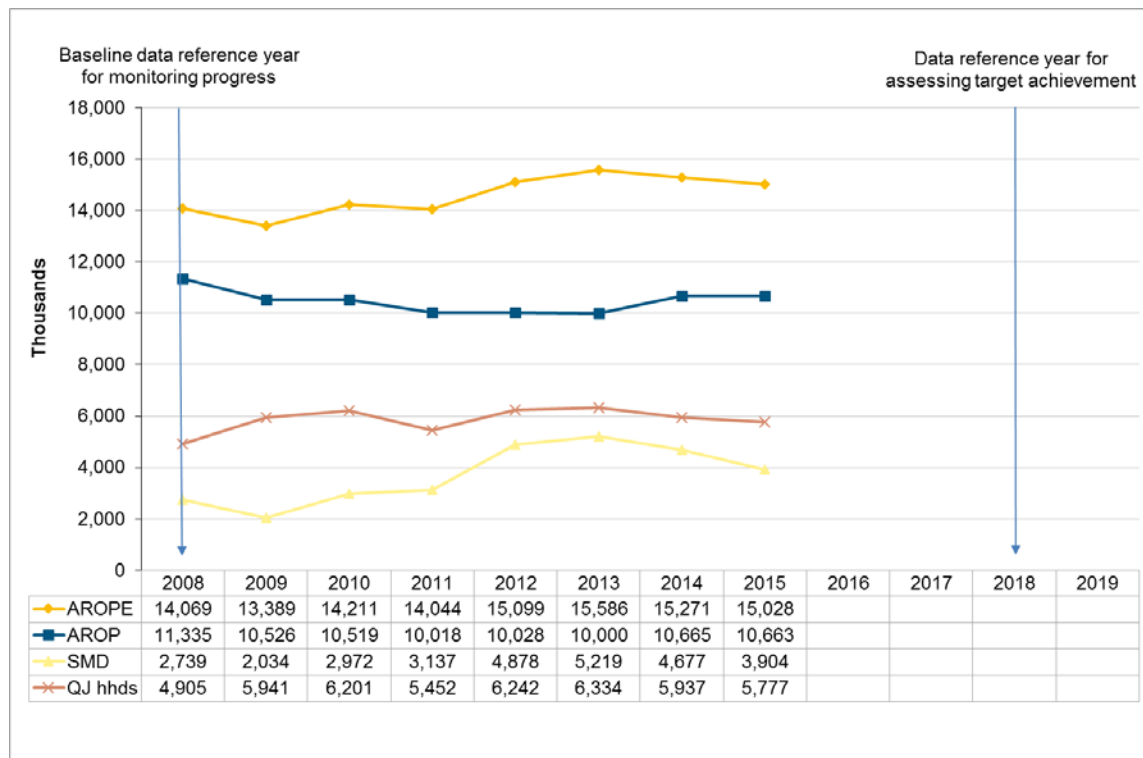
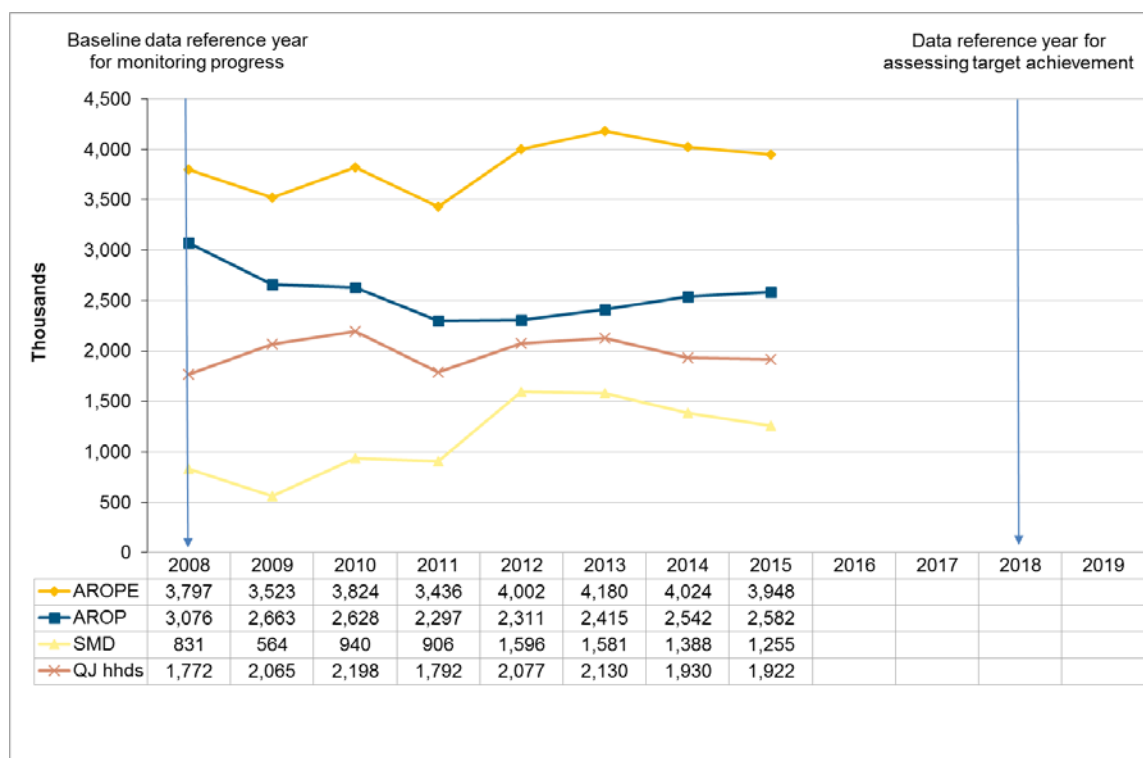


Figure A30: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, United Kingdom

a) Whole population



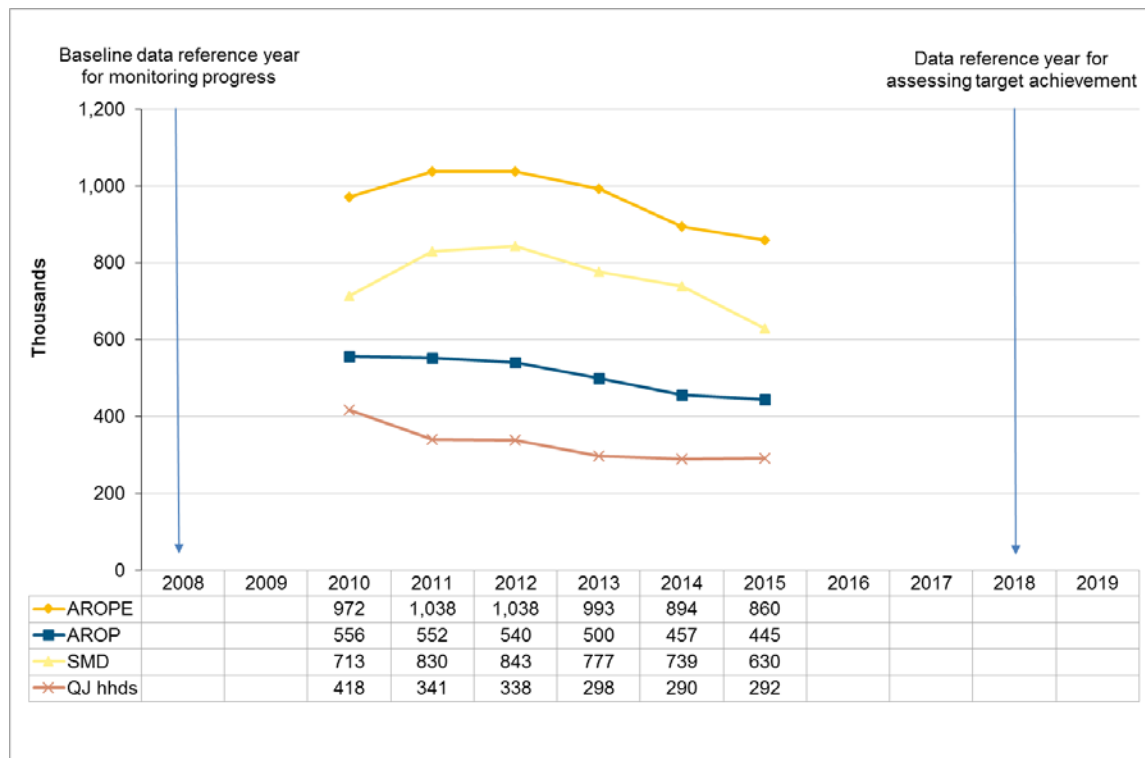
b) Children



Note: Changes in the survey vehicle and institution in 2012 might have affected the results on trends.

Figure A31: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2010-2015, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

a) Whole population



b) Children

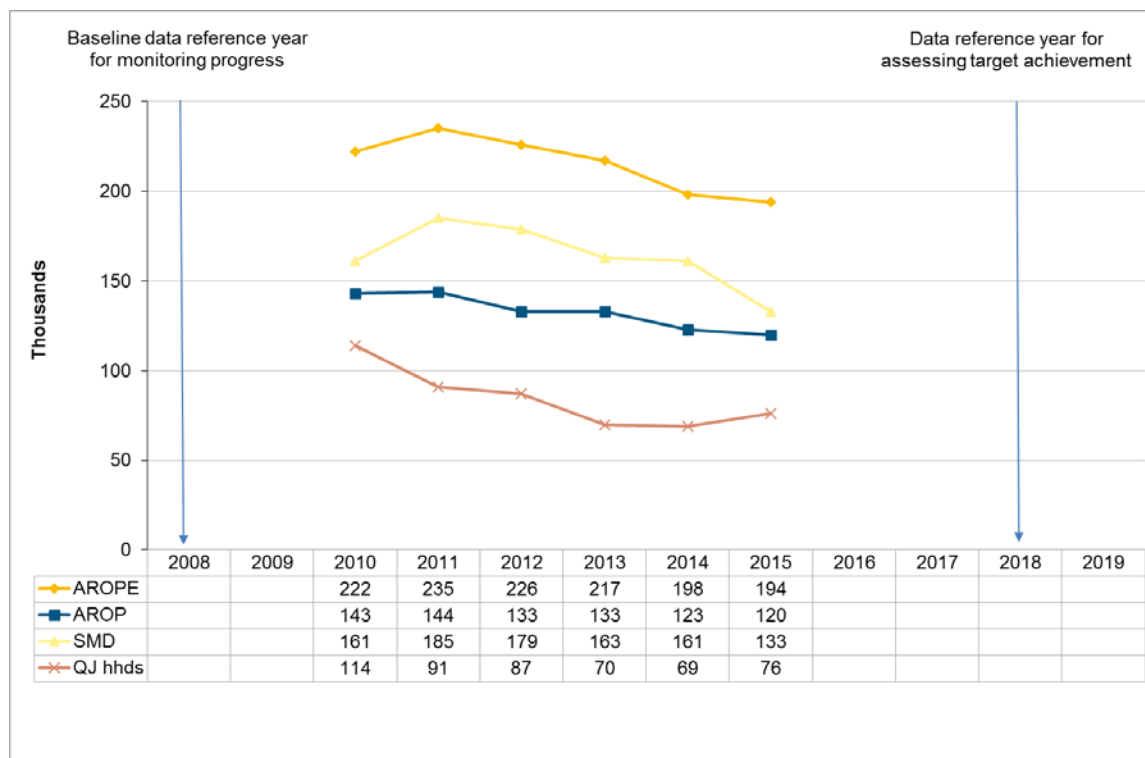
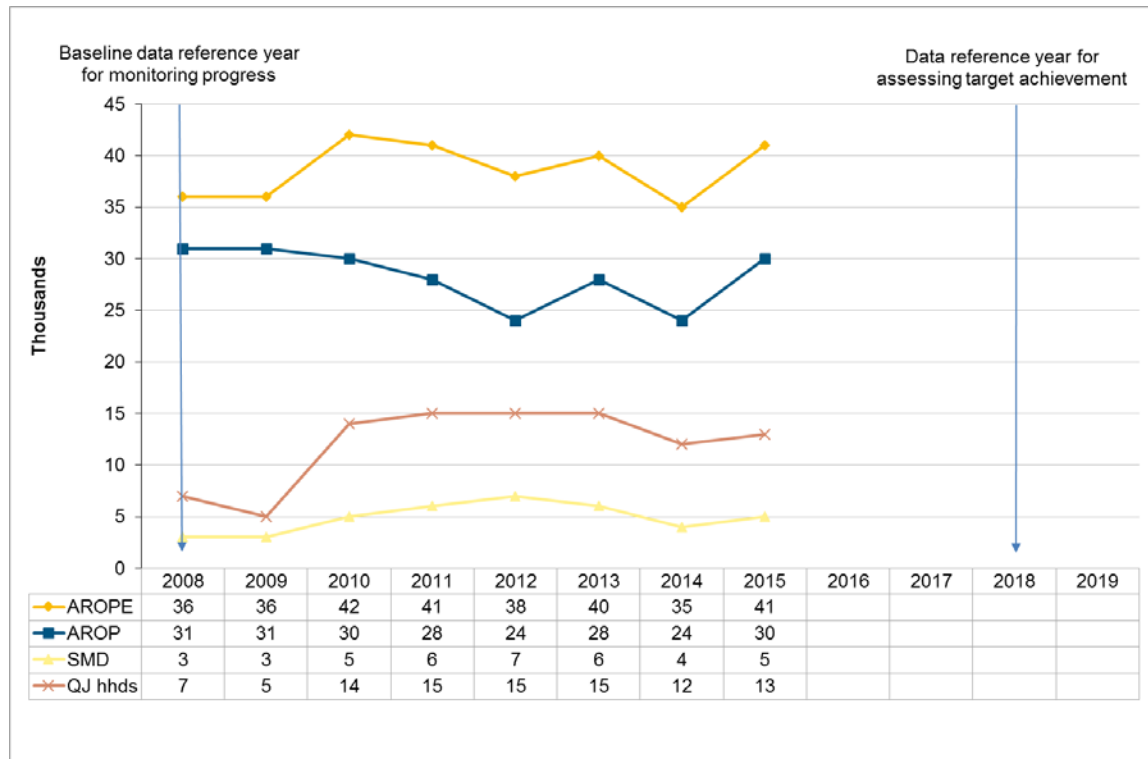


Figure A32: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Iceland

a) Whole population



b) Children

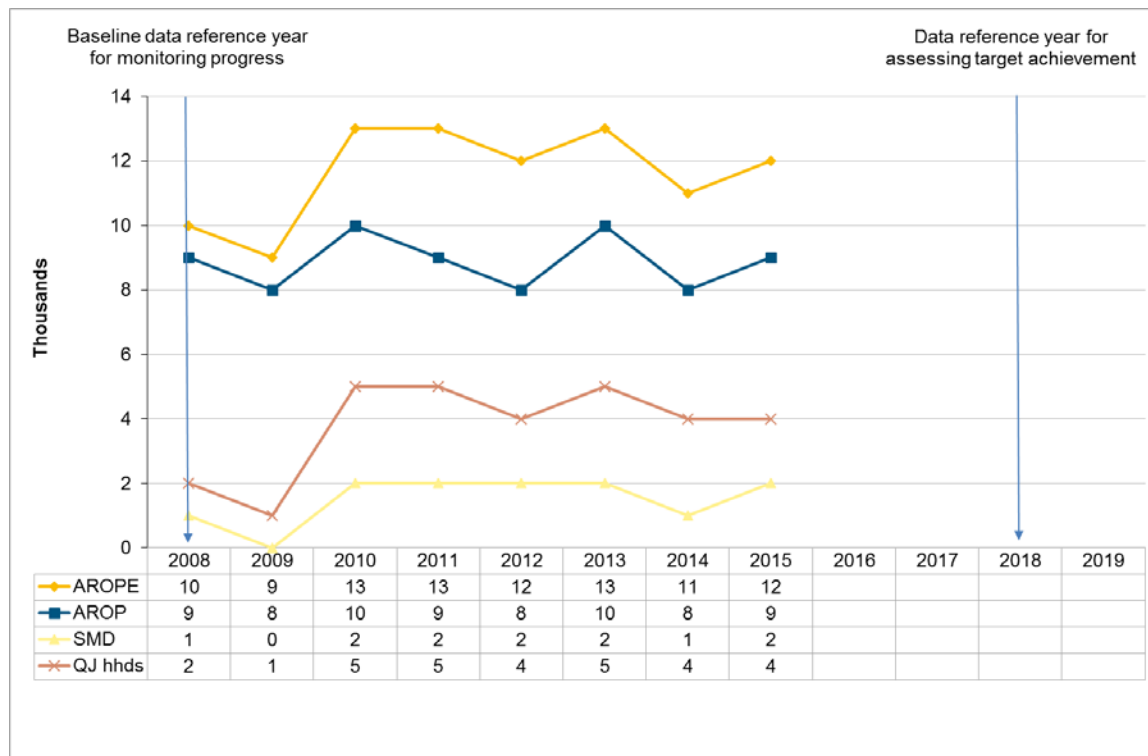
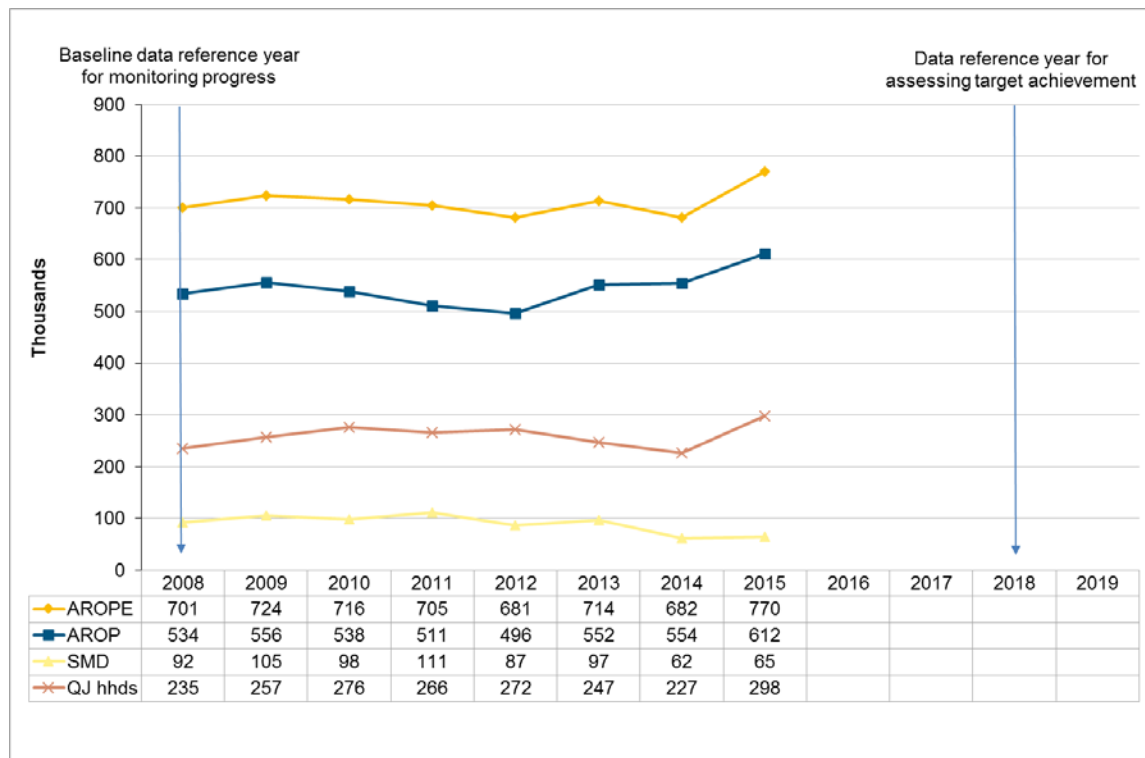


Figure A33: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2015, Norway

a) Whole population



b) Children

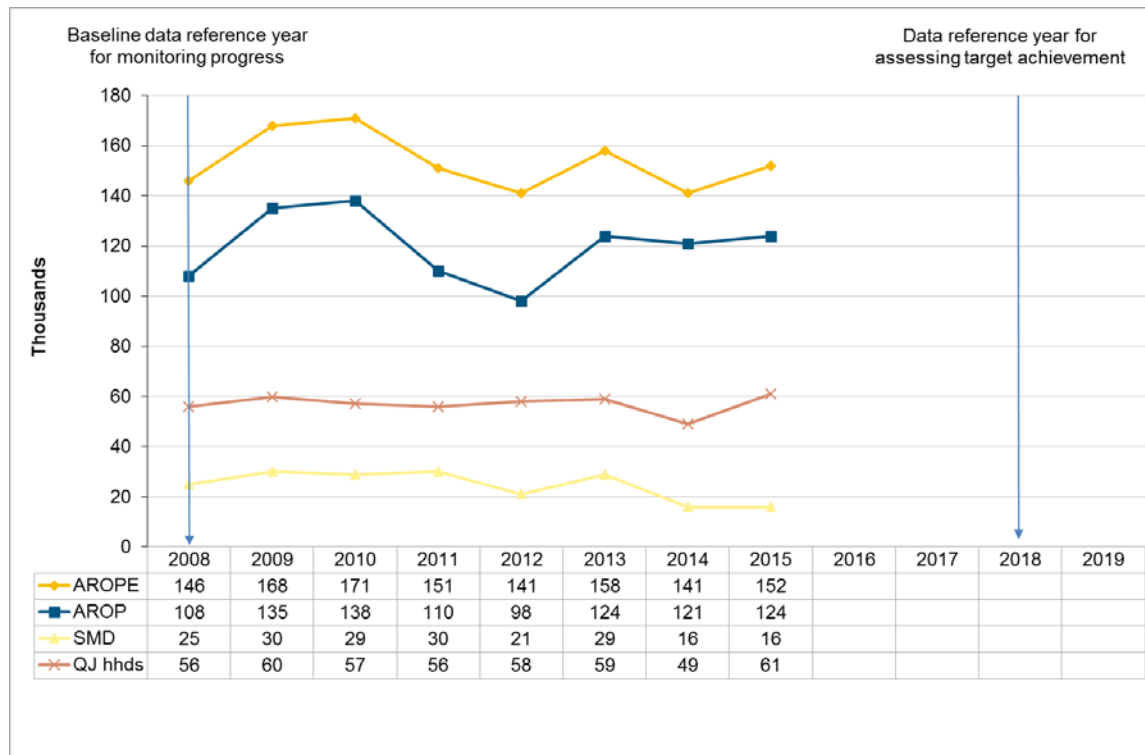
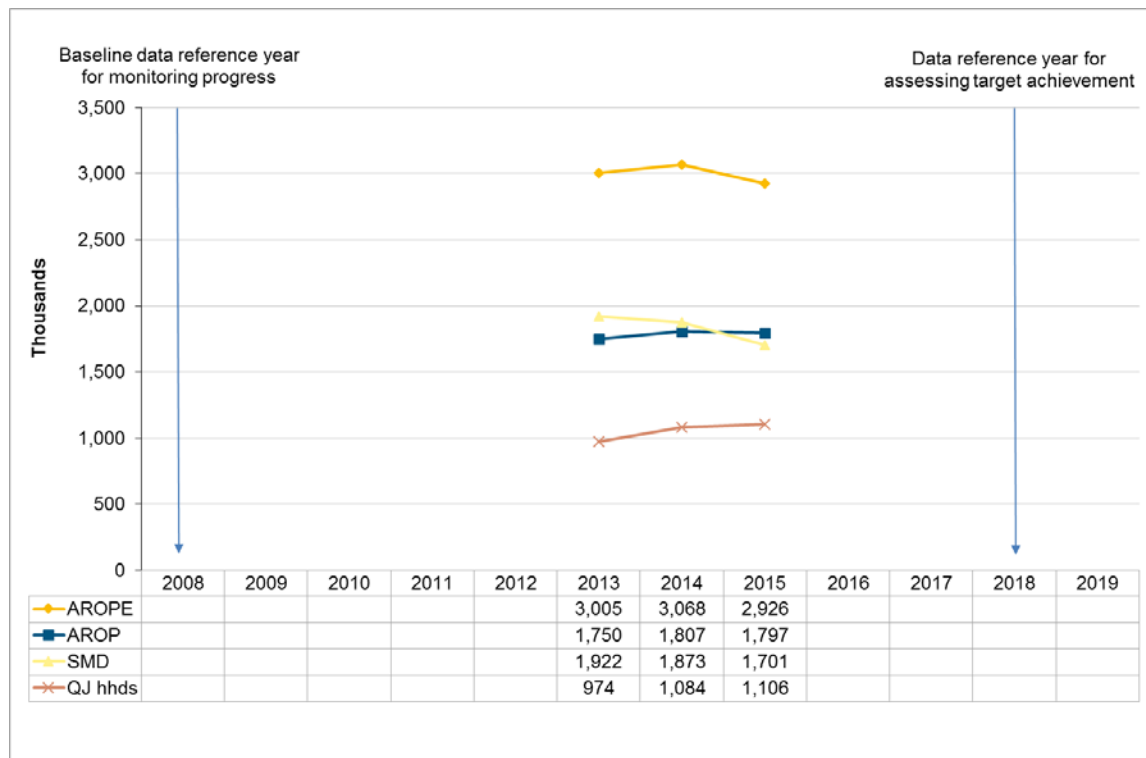


Figure A34: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2013-2015, Serbia

a) Whole population



b) Children

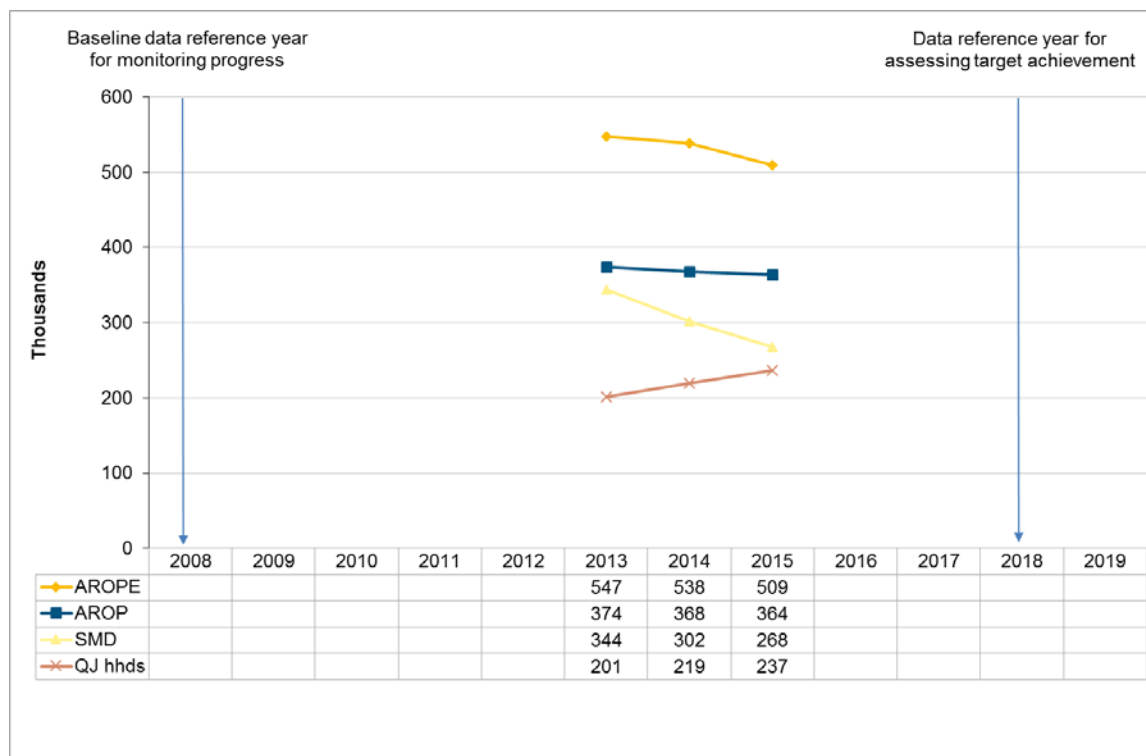
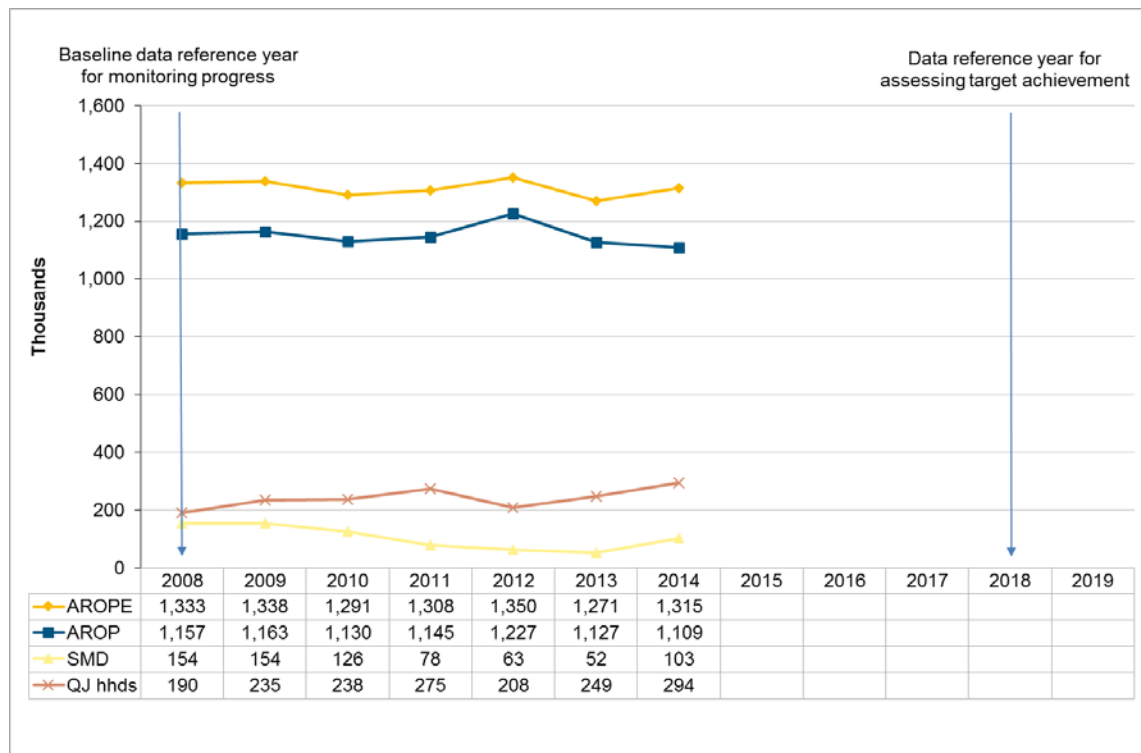
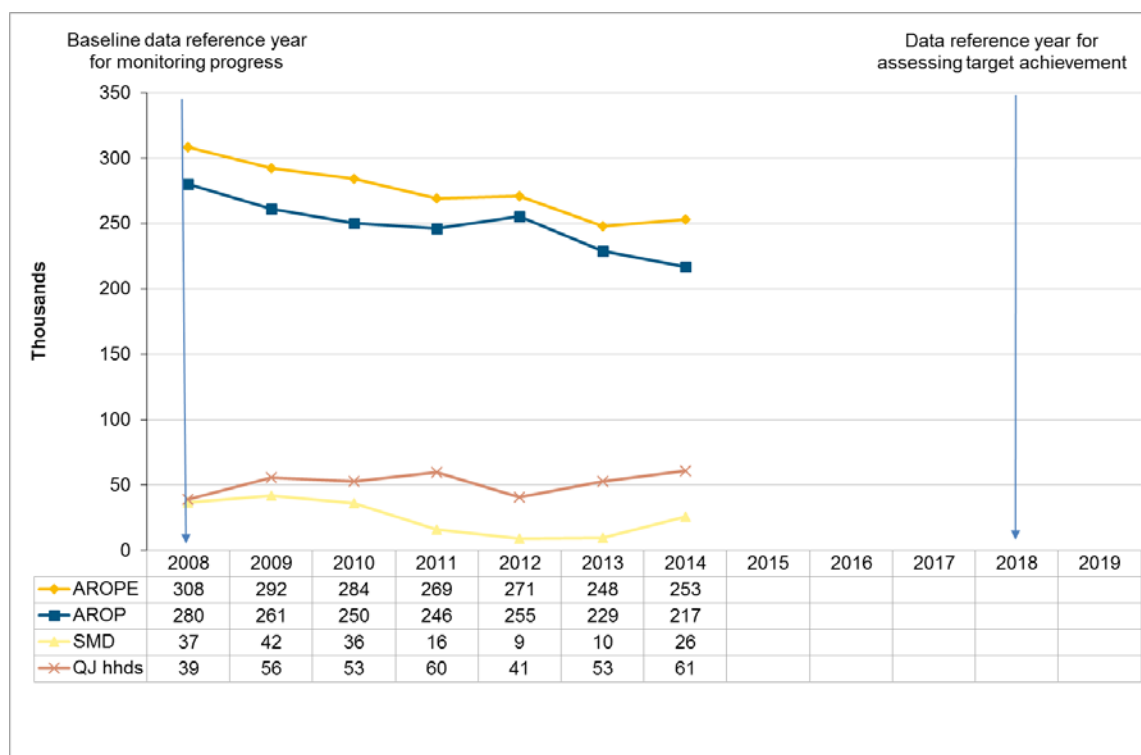


Figure A35: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2014, Switzerland

a) Whole population



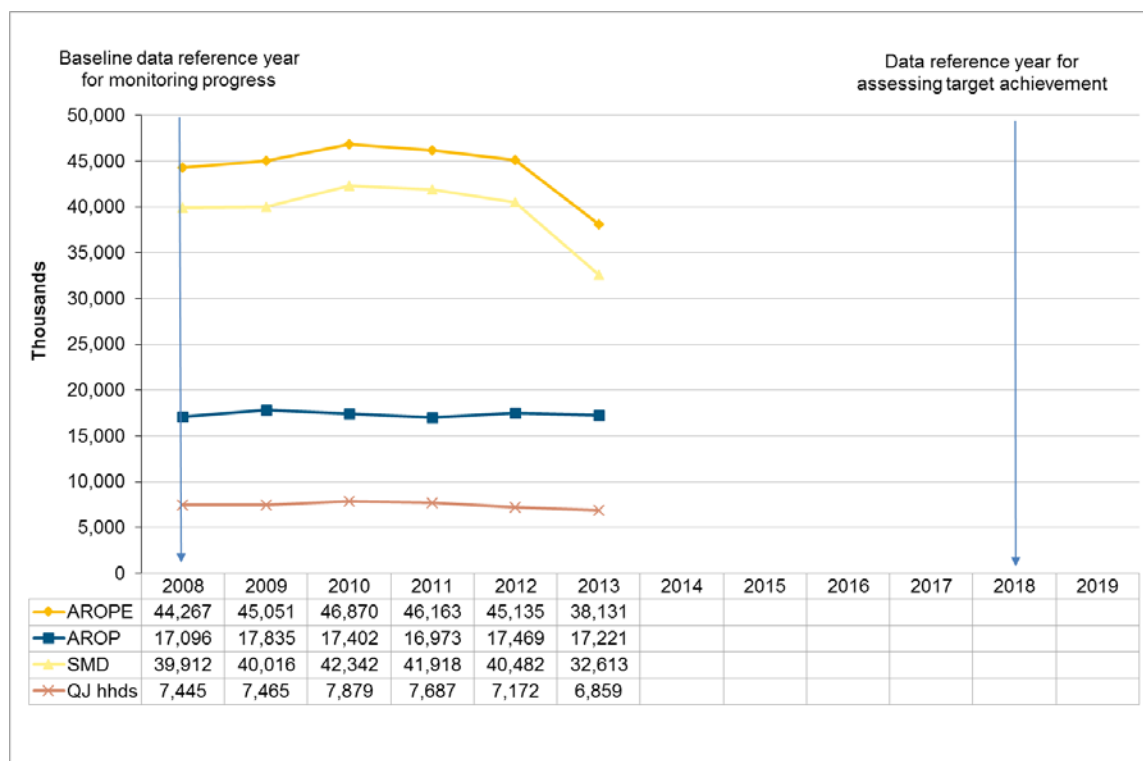
b) Children



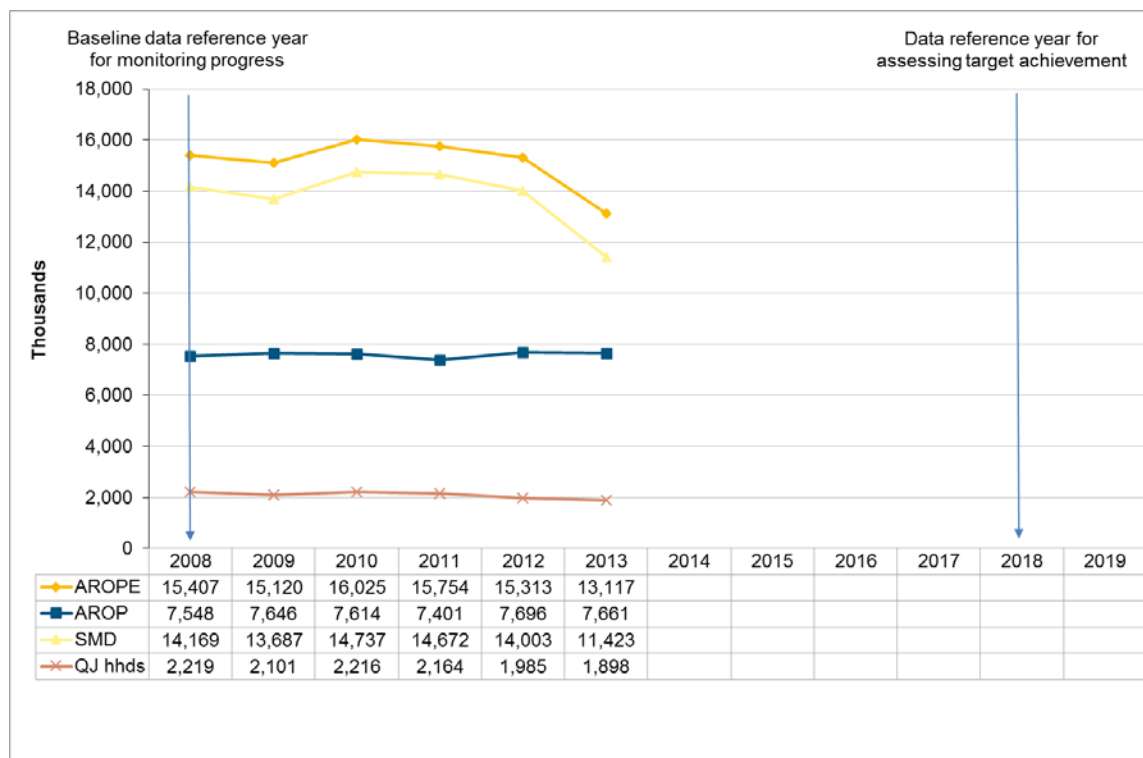
Note: Break in series in 2014.

Figure A36: Trends in number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Whole population and Children aged 0-17, thousands, 2008-2013, Turkey

a) Whole population



b) Children



Note: Break in series in 2013.

ANNEX 2: SFC2014 - Operational Programmes Financial Plan and Implementation by Investment Priority

Thematic Objective		Total amount of EU money in programme budget for 2014-2020	Amount Committed/absorbed	Amount committed/absorbed plus national co-financing	EU amount already spent and declared to the Commission
8 Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility	8i	11,192,509,088.50	3,780,840,605.90	5,498,412,166.86	1,017,211,977.64
	8ii	12,490,425,253.50	5,420,950,372.05	7,001,258,645.82	1,563,994,852.61
	8iii	2,235,587,570.40	685,677,078.26	971,878,385.89	160,637,180.45
	8iv	1,582,471,897.50	384,116,870.48	545,969,138.98	175,059,584.16
	8v	5,041,655,327.10	1,386,707,088.13	2,245,354,280.33	423,066,568.46
	8vi	539,893,844.00	85,455,556.58	145,737,530.25	30,870,896.73
	8vii	974,203,854.00	145,214,107.44	216,892,614.64	16,542,894.48
	Sum	34,056,746,835.00	11,888,961,678.84	16,625,502,762.77	3,387,383,954.53
9 Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination	9i	13,371,439,625.40	5,032,937,318.77	8,386,817,185.00	1,281,706,761.95
	9ii	1,519,263,938.50	106,201,684.30	136,299,090.94	939,494.03
	9iii	413,570,884.00	84,835,720.85	124,793,278.44	9,851,340.92
	9iv	3,863,075,894.00	613,205,009.14	763,454,793.11	79,771,226.75
	9v	1,364,708,508.50	182,294,713.97	233,236,603.85	67,042,659.25
	9vi	634,654,352.00	3,976,314.60	4,796,969.99	1,001,792.40
	Sum	21,166,713,202.40	6,023,450,761.63	9,649,397,921.33	1,440,313,275.30
10 Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and life-long learning	10i	7,984,829,773.32	1,825,885,198.20	2,585,852,432.69	458,890,200.20
	10ii	5,111,014,282.21	995,704,940.26	1,314,378,748.55	340,025,013.02
	10iii	7,217,136,265.60	2,779,379,786.17	4,566,726,989.30	425,143,114.20
	10iv	6,767,070,578.47	2,672,580,161.37	3,670,360,531.68	963,295,879.37
	Sum	27,080,050,899.60	8,273,550,086.00	12,137,318,702.22	2,187,354,206.79

Thematic Objective		Total amount of EU money in programme budget for 2014-2020	Amount Committed/absorbed	Amount committed/absorbed plus national co-financing	EU amount already spent and declared to the Commission
11 Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration	11i	3,466,472,303.50	973,427,459.76	1,255,938,589.69	62,379,347.00
	11ii	189,028,630.50	10,029,637.57	14,940,861.13	3,284,803.73
	Sum	3,655,500,934.00	983,457,097.33	1,270,879,450.82	65,664,150.73
	Technical assistance	3,657,218,610.00	1,261,876,121.46	1,770,399,927.04	266,356,929.66
Grand Total		89,616,230,472.00	28,431,295,745.26	41,453,498,764.18	7,347,072,517.01

Note: SFC2014's main function is the electronic exchange of information concerning shared Fund management between Member States and the European Commission. Using this system, the Commission supplied ESPN national experts with relevant data on the absorption and spending of ESF Funds for Thematic Objectives 8 (Employment), 9 (Social inclusion), 10 (Education) and 11 (Institutional capacity).

Source: European Commission, May 2017.

TO8 - Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility

- 8i - Access to employment for job-seekers and inactive people, including the long-term unemployed and people far from the labour market, also through local employment initiatives and support for labour mobility
- 8ii - Sustainable integration into the labour market of young people, in particular those not in employment, education or training, including young people at risk of social exclusion and young people from marginalised communities, including through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee
- 8iii - Self-employment, entrepreneurship and business creation including innovative micro, small and medium sized enterprises
- 8iv - Equality between men and women in all areas, including in access to employment, career progression, reconciliation of work and private life and promotion of equal pay for equal work
- 8v - Adaptation of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs to change
- 8vi – Active and healthy ageing
- 8vii - Modernisation of labour market institutions, such as public and private employment services, and improving the matching of labour market needs, including through actions that enhance transnational labour mobility as well as through mobility schemes and better cooperation between institutions and relevant stakeholders

TO9 – Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination

- 9i - Active inclusion, including with a view to promoting equal opportunities and active participation, and improving employability
- 9 ii - Socio-economic integration of marginalised communities such as the Roma
- 9iii - Combating all forms of discrimination and promoting equal opportunities
- 9iv - Enhancing access to affordable, sustainable and high quality services, including healthcare and social services of general interest
- 9v - Promoting social entrepreneurship and vocational integration in social enterprises and the social and solidarity economy in order to facilitate access to employment
- 9vi - Community-led local development strategies

TO10 – Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and life-long learning

- 10i - Reducing and preventing early school-leaving and promoting equal access to good quality early-childhood, primary and secondary education including formal, non-formal and informal learning pathways for reintegrating into education and training
- 10ii - Improving the quality and efficiency of, and access to, tertiary and equivalent education with a view to increasing participation and attainment levels, especially for disadvantaged groups
- 10iii - Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning for all age groups in formal, non-formal and informal settings, upgrading the knowledge, skills and competences of the workforce, and promoting flexible learning pathways including through career guidance and validation of acquired competences
- 10iv - Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems, facilitating the transition from education to work, and strengthening vocational education and training systems and their quality, including through mechanisms for skills anticipation, adaptation of curricula and the establishment and development of work-based learning systems, including dual learning systems and apprenticeship schemes

TO11 - Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration

- 11i - Investment in institutional capacity and in the efficiency of public administrations and public services at the national, regional and local levels with a view to reforms, better regulation and good governance
- 11ii - Capacity building for all stakeholders delivering education, lifelong learning, training and employment and social policies, including through sectoral and territorial pacts to mobilise for reform at the national, regional and local levels

ANNEX 3: COUNTRIES’ OFFICIAL ABBREVIATIONS

A. EU countries

EU countries prior to 2004, 2007 and 2013 Enlargements (EU-15)		EU countries that joined in 2004, 2007 or 2013	
BE	Belgium	2004 Enlargement	
DK	Denmark	CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany	EE	Estonia
IE	Ireland	CY	Cyprus
EL	Greece	LV	Latvia
ES	Spain	LT	Lithuania
FR	France	HU	Hungary
IT	Italy	MT	Malta
LU	Luxembourg	PL	Poland
NL	The Netherlands	SI	Slovenia
AT	Austria	SK	Slovakia
PT	Portugal	2007 Enlargement	
FI	Finland	BG	Bulgaria
SE	Sweden	RO	Romania
UK	United Kingdom	2013 Enlargement	
		HR	Croatia

In European Union and Euro-Area averages, countries are weighted by their population sizes.

B. Non-EU countries covered by the ESPN

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (MK), Iceland (IS), Liechtenstein (LI), Norway (NO), Serbia (RS), Switzerland (CH), Turkey (TR).

ANNEX 4: Summary Table – ESPN assessment of progress made since February 2013

Policy area or approach	Low, Medium, High & Very high AROPE	Overall have policies/ approaches been strengthened, stayed much the same or been weakened since the EU Recommendation was adopted in February 2013?		
		Stronger	Little Change	Weaker
Governance - Multi-dimensional strategy with synergies between policies	Low	CH NL	CZ DE DK FI IS LI NO SE SI	
	Medium	BE EE FR SK	AT LU PL	
	High	IE MT PT	CY ES HR IT LT LV	UK
	Very high	RO	BG EL HU MK TR	RS
- Children's rights approach & effective mainstreaming of children's policy and rights	Low	IS	CH CZ DE DK FI LI NL NO SE SI	
	Medium	EE FR SK	AT BE LU PL	
	High	IE LT PT	CY ES HR IT LV MT	UK
	Very high		BG EL HU MK RO TR	RS
- Evidence-based approach	Low	DK IS NL SI	CH CZ DE FI LI NO SE	
	Medium	EE PL SK	AT BE FR LU	
	High	IE	CY ES HR IT LT LV MT PT	UK
	Very high	RO	EL MK RS TR	BG HU
- Involvement of relevant stakeholders (including children)	Low	IS NL	CH CZ DE DK FI LI NO SE SI	
	Medium	EE SK	AT BE FR LU PL	
	High	CY HR LT	ES IE IT LV MT PT	UK
	Very high		BG EL MK RO RS TR	HU
Access to resources (Pillar 1 of 2013 Recommendation) - Parents' participation in the labour market	Low	CZ SI	CH DE DK FI IS LI NL NO SE	
	Medium	EE LU PL	AT BE FR SK	
	High	IE MT PT UK	CY ES HR IT LT LV	
	Very high	HU MK	BG EL RO RS TR	
- Child & family income support	Low	CZ NL NO* SI	CH DE LI SE	DK FI IS NO*
	Medium	BE EE FR LU PL	SK	AT
	High	IT LT LV MT	HR IE PT	CY ES UK
	Very high	MK RO	BG EL RS TR	HU

Policy area or approach	Low, Medium, High & Very high AROPE	Overall have policies/ approaches been strengthened, stayed much the same or been weakened since the EU Recommendation was adopted in February 2013?		
		Stronger	Little Change	Weaker
Access to affordable quality services (Pillar 2 of 2013 Recommendation) - ECEC	Low	CH NL NO	CZ*** DE DK FI IS LI SE SI	
	Medium	AT BE EE FR LU PL	SK	
	High	IE LV MT PT UK	CY ES HR IT LT	
	Very high	BG HU MK TR	EL RO RS	
- Education	Low	DK SI	CH CZ*** DE IS LI NL NO SE	FI
	Medium	AT FR	BE EE LU SK	PL
	High	CY IT MT	ES HR IE LT LV UK	PT
	Very high	BG	EL MK RS TR	HU RO
- Health	Low	IS	CH CZ DE DK FI LI NL NO SE SI	
	Medium		AT BE EE FR LU PL SK	
	High	PT	ES HR IE IT LT LV MT UK	CY
	Very high	BG	EL HU MK RS TR	RO
- Housing & living environment	Low		CH CZ*** DE FI LI NL NO SE SI	DK IS
	Medium	LU	AT EE FR PL SK	BE
	High	IE	CY ES HR IT LT LV MT PT	UK
	Very high		HU MK RS TR	BG EL RO
- Family support & alternative care	Low	CZ IS	CH DE DK FI LI NO SE SI	NL
	Medium	FR	AT BE EE LU PL SK	
	High	IT LT LV MT	CY ES HR IE PT UK	
	Very high	BG RO	EL HU MK RS TR	

Policy area or approach	Low, Medium, High & Very high AROPE	Overall have policies/ approaches been strengthened, stayed much the same or been weakened since the EU Recommendation was adopted in February 2013?		
		Stronger	Little Change	Weaker
Children’s right to participate (Pillar 3 of 2013 Recommendation) - in play, recreation, sport & cultural activities	Low	FI IS NL	CH CZ DE DK LI NO SE SI	
	Medium	SK	AT BE EE FR LU PL	
	High	HR LT LV	CY ES IE IT MT PT	UK
	Very high		BG EL HU MK RO RS TR	
- in decision making	Low	FI IS NL SI	CH CZ DE DK LI NO SE	
	Medium	EE FR	AT BE LU PL SK	
	High	CY HR IE	ES IT LT LV MT PT UK	
	Very high		BG EL HU MK RS TR	RO
Addressing child poverty and social exclusion in the European Semester**	Low		CZ*** DE DK FI NL SE SI	
	Medium	BE SK	AT EE FR LU PL	
	High	IE LT MT PT	CY ES HR IT LV	UK
	Very high		BG HU RO	EL
Mobilising relevant EU financial instruments**	Low	CZ SI	DE DK FI NL SE	
	Medium	EE FR SK	AT BE LU PL	
	High	IE IT LT LV MT PT	CY HR UK	ES
	Very high	BG	EL HU	RO

* stronger for non-employed mothers, weaker for lone parents and recipients of disability benefit.

** as non-EU countries are not part of European Semester and not covered by EU financial instruments they have not been rated in these categories.

*** is used to indicate cases when positive actions are implemented in legislation or in programme materials but are not yet accompanied with significant real impacts (hence the classification has remained “Little Change”).

ANNEX 5: ESPN national experts’ country specific priority recommendations

National experts were asked, in the light of their analysis, to identify their priority recommendations for enhancing the implementation of the Recommendation on *Investing in children* in their countries. These are summarised below. More detail and the rationale behind the recommendations as well as additional recommendations can be read in the individual country reports.

Countries	Priority Recommendations
Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster a political and societal debate explicitly focusing on different aspects of the well-being of children to raise awareness for children’s needs and rights (in terms of a distinct political area).
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to and quality of early childhood education for disadvantaged and immigrant children. • Reinforce efforts to bridge the gaps between schools and address social and ethnic inequalities in education. • Provide better social protection for unemployed school leavers. • Increase investment in social housing facilities.
Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve poor effectiveness of the social protection system in reducing market income inequalities through differentiating the social assistance system from the state child protection system. • Make families from marginalised groups the primary focus of well-coordinated and integrated services covering nutrition, health, early cognitive stimulation and parental literacy. • Develop quality standards and assurance mechanisms and improve coordination, planning and management to enhance the impact of social services and alternative care settings (such as foster care and small group homes) and their better integration with other social protection measures. • Reduce the number of early school leavers by introduction and effective functioning of an early warning system and a clear multi-agency mechanism with clear roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders.
Croatia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote work-care and work-life balance, particularly for women workers. • Increase access to affordable and quality pre-school provision of diverse kinds. • Combine cash and care in ways which augment child well-being. • Focus on improving the quality of life of Roma children and children with disabilities.
Cyprus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a comprehensive National Action Plan for promoting child well-being, and set specific child-related targets to help monitor and assess progress. • Strengthen income support to families with a view to restoring the balance between universal and targeted policies. • Invest in ECEC so as to increase participation (especially in regard to the 0-3 age group) in line with the Barcelona objectives. • Place emphasis on respecting and promoting the enjoyment of rights among vulnerable groups of children (migrant, disabled, Roma).

Countries	Priority Recommendations
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the capacity of public pre-school facilities, mainly for children aged 0-2 years with strong investments into public ECEC. • Strengthen inclusion of disadvantaged children (Roma in the first place) into mainstream education through sustainable financing of appropriate measures. • Ensure fast adoption of the Act on social housing and investment to increase the social housing capacity. • Increase capacities for field social work in excluded Roma localities. • Improve absorption of investment priorities 9 and 10.
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay close attention to the relationship between benefit reductions, permanent housing and social investments as a stable housing situation is a prerequisite for successful social investments.
Estonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop more targeted policies that can address problems specific to children and especially children of vulnerable groups. • Develop services for and measures aimed at households with disabled children and single-parent households. • Further improve access to affordable ECEC. • Take steps to reduce the prevailing gender pay gap which is particularly important for single-parent households.
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce mandatory (part-time) early education for all children aged between 3 and 5. • Fortify the social investment paradigm by adequate investments in early and primary education with special emphasis to children in need and immigrant children with a view to combating intergenerational transmission of disadvantages. • Start experiments with participatory social policy, i.e. tailored activation programmes targeted at the NEETs. • Adopt measures to improve minimum benefits.
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the replacement rate of parents' former wage to calculate the level of paid parental leave, as the best way of improving the share of fathers in parental leave and childcare activities at home. • Define a strategy to reduce the level of inequalities at school and improve the coordination between social workers and teachers, social and family policies and education policy.
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce an integrated, multi-dimensional strategy at national level focused on children at risk because of multiple disadvantages. • Incorporate children's rights into the Basic Law to make it possible to protect children's rights more effectively. • Improve ECEC as well as school-based education services. • Redirect the existing system of monetary marriage and family-related benefits towards the actual situations of need within households with children (including the introduction of a “guaranteed child allowance”).
Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elaborate an adequately funded <i>Strategic Action Plan</i> for tackling child poverty and promoting child well-being. Priorities should be to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ increase access for all children to quality ECEC and health services; ○ improve the educational system and facilitate access to education for vulnerable groups of children; ○ provide targeted integrated support to poor children and their

Countries	Priority Recommendations
	<p>families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take concerted action to improve the living conditions of children living in institutions. • Mainstream children’s policies and rights and ensure a children’s rights approach in all aspects of their development.
Hungary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase provisions (e.g. family allowance) especially in single-parent and poor households. • Increase the potential of the school system to effectively make up for disadvantaged social positions and provide equal opportunities. • Increase the availability of social housing stock and support the construction of subsidised rental housing. • Eliminate the current unlawful but existing practice that children are removed from their families because of financial reasons and secure effective tools for social workers to help such families. • Enhance programmes to increase accessibility/ availability of primary care and improve the quality of healthcare in disadvantaged regions.
Iceland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the child cash benefit and reduce its aggressive targeting at the very lowest income groups, hence making the benefit more generous. • Increase supply of affordable housing for young families - quickly. • Increase housing cash support for first buyers and tenants.
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a tracking system for the allocation and use of resources for children throughout the budget and introduce child rights impact assessments as part of social impact assessments. • Make a child rights approach more explicit in policy areas such as education, housing and protection from poverty. • Develop more robust, focussed and ambitious policies for addressing groups of multiply-disadvantaged children such as those from the Traveller and Roma communities and also child migrants and asylum seekers. • Set a bold and more ambitious child poverty target such as halving poverty among children and young people within 5 years and eliminating it within 10 years.
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make greater efforts to implement the 2013 Recommendation and to involve children in decisions that affect them. • Improve connections between national plans (e.g. for childhood and adolescence, against poverty and social exclusion) and the European Structural and Investment Funds programmes (both at national and regional levels).
Latvia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance parental employment by making work pay, enhancing flexible working arrangements and better targeting active labour market programmes at single parents and (quasi-)jobless couples. • Increase efforts to promote the inclusion of the most vulnerable children (Roma children, children with disabilities, children of refugees and asylum seekers) into the general education system. • Raise guaranteed minimum income level in particular for households with children. • Continue deinstitutionalisation measures and the development of alternative care.

Countries	Priority Recommendations
Liechtenstein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more flexible childcare facilities and ensure they are affordable. • Invest in small day-nurseries with parental participation on a clear legal basis with specific regulations (measures for the professional development, educational qualifications, etc.). • Adapt current school timetable to standard working hours for employees.
Lithuania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase support for single parents and households with three and more children. • Develop coordinated measures for increasing the enrolment in pre-primary education in rural areas. • Establish programmes that integrate healthcare, education services and social work services for children.
Luxembourg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve child poverty mainstreaming and the integration of measures in different relevant policy domains by establishing a task-force on poverty and social exclusion, governed by the inter-ministerial committee for the youth. • Enhance the integration of migrant children and children with special needs in the regular school system. • Increase access to healthcare for vulnerable groups such as migrants, asylum seekers and refugees (language and cultural barriers). • Make more use of ESF to tackle weaknesses in policies for children.
FYR of Macedonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve synergies between relevant policy areas and players to promote an integrated multi-dimensional approach to poverty and social exclusion and undertake regular assessments of the impact of policies related to child well-being. • Increase the funding of child benefits to make access to resources meaningful. • Increase the funding of services targeted at children at risk. • Increase policy emphasis on the rights of children to participate.
Malta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop specialised service packages, including free childcare, to cover households with vulnerable children (like migrant children), ensure that the issue of quality in childcare is given priority and ensure that the after-school services become available in all schools and that all children can access them. • Continue active labour market schemes such as tapering of benefits and in-work benefit schemes. • Continue to actively curb early-school-leaving and maintain the Youth Guarantee scheme. • Implement the National Children’s Policy. • Find ways to extend the decision making by children in areas that affect them directly.
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop quantitative targets for the reduction of child poverty. • Develop an integral vision on the marginal (tax) burden of parents of young children to encourage labour market participation. • Further intensify collaboration with civil society organisations in identifying poverty among children. • Address the low use of childcare among low-income parents and reverse recent cuts in the budget for pre-schools.

Countries	Priority Recommendations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep a close watch on the developments in the access to youth care.
Norway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broaden the current focus of the work against child poverty and its consequences and re-evaluate the balance of services for children versus benefits for families within the overall child poverty package. • Extend the coverage of the Child Welfare Services to 15-18 year old unaccompanied minors. • Look into the possibility of softening, if not abolishing, the rule that a father’s right to paternity leave hinges on the mother’s right to parental leave, i.e. on the mother’s previous employment, while the opposite does not apply.
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a single strategy and coordinating unit to address strong imbalances (focus on ECEC and, from 2016, on cash benefits) and lack of policy harmonisation. • Give more attention to children’s rights and participation.
Portugal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put in place an integrated multi-dimensional strategy by concretising the proposed Multiannual Plan for the Promotion and Protection of Children’s Rights. This should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ focus on undeveloped dimensions such as the involvement of children in decision-making; ◦ give special attention to children at increased risk; ◦ prioritise sustained reinforcement of ECEC and investment in education; ◦ ensure access to adequate resources by promoting (quality) employment, adequate salaries and the reinforcement of universal policies.
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reiterate the interest in child-centred policies, focus on outcomes and objectives rather than on processes to increase monitoring capacity, and refocus the public discourse on children’s rights rather than on parents’ rights to bring up their children. • Ensure that every child has access to a package of preventive health services through school/ preschool and, for children and teenagers out of school, through community services or even employment services. • Mainstream support services and introduce incentive schemes to prevent school dropouts and increase the accessibility of secondary educational cycles (e.g. “school-after-school” programmes, free extracurricular programmes, subsidised school attendance cost for children from remote areas). • Refocus administrative reforms on increasing capacity to provide a sustainable financial framework for pilot programmes and policies and ensuring continuity in implementation – by increasing the capacity to absorb European funds, to coordinate funding and to monitor/meet financial needs especially in the case of cross-sectoral policies or programmes with multiple funding sources.
Serbia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the negative impacts of the planned austerity measures and mainstream the protection of child well-being in all decision making in this area. • Establish a comprehensive national policy involving all stakeholders so as to avoid a one-sided approach and take into account all

Countries	Priority Recommendations
	<p>aspects of child poverty and social exclusion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design a mechanism for the regular monitoring of child poverty and social exclusion based on EU-SILC data. Use this to also monitor progress in implementing programmes and to compare the state of children well-being in Serbia with that in other European countries.
Slovakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide institutional funding for an umbrella organisation to monitor implementation of the <i>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child</i>. • Ensure that the adequate minimum income aspect of an active inclusion approach is addressed. • Address more effectively the risk of intergenerational transmission of disadvantages. • Put addressing barriers in access to social services (such as housing), education, as well as cultural, recreation and leisure activities among marginalised Roma communities high on the agenda of all relevant stakeholders.
Slovenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restore earnings compensation during parental and paternity leave to 100%. • Abolish the cuts in family benefits introduced in June 2012. • Set the cash social assistance as the first benefit from public funds to be claimed. • Ensure better access to social housing for households with children.
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a significant social investment effort by implementing a generous universal social benefit for all children. • Reinforce educational investment in most vulnerable groups (immigrants, Roma). • Increase political priority attached to early childhood education and care (ECEC) as a mechanism to facilitate conciliation of family and professional lives, as well as to reduce inequalities and improve life chances for children from the most vulnerable groups.
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise the integration of the high number of unaccompanied minors among asylum seekers that arrived in 2015 as a key challenge for the pillar of services, including the educational system. • Strengthen the perspective of children’s right to participate in order to fulfil the <i>UN Convention of the Rights of the Child</i> in terms of provision, protection and participation. • Strengthen access to quality education for all children to address a high degree of inequality in performance between schools and family background. • Combat poverty, both through employment strategies and through income security provision, for marginalised children, especially those living in single-parent households and those whose parents, or themselves, have immigrated to Sweden.
Switzerland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the lack of sufficient and affordable supply of childcare in formal settings so as to address the low levels of labour market participation of low-skilled parents with small children and the transmission of intergenerational disadvantage by the school system.
Turkey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise the provision of high quality education for children and develop the policies necessary to ensure children’s enrolment, including if necessary providing incentives to families.

Countries	Priority Recommendations
United Kingdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Withdraw the benefit cap, the two child limit and the “bedroom tax” as these measures directly impoverish children.• End the freeze on working age benefits and raise revenue from progressive increases in direct taxation.• Revert back to the original universal credit proposals so that it reduces rather than increases child poverty.• Reinstate an obligation to meet child poverty targets.

ANNEX 6: PRESENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)

A. ESPN Network Management Team and Network Core Team

The European Social Policy Network (ESPN) is managed jointly by the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER) and the independent research company APPLICA, in close association with the European Social Observatory.

The ESPN Network Management Team is responsible for the overall supervision and coordination of the ESPN. It consists of five members:

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