

# A new Strategy to prevent and combat poverty and social exclusion in Spain

ESPN Flash Report 2019/50

VICENTE MARBÁN AND ANA ARRIBA – EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK

JULY 2019

*In March 2019, the Spanish government adopted a new "National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion". This Strategy includes measures aimed at improving the income guarantee system and combating child poverty. It has been assessed positively by non-governmental organisations. It does not have a specific budget and its implementation will depend on the effective fund allocation and the degree of cooperation between the different levels of public administration.*



## Description

In March 2019, the Spanish government adopted the National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion 2019-2023 (MSCBS, 2019). The Strategy follows the line of the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion developed since 2001 (the last National Plan was approved for the period 2013-2016).

The Strategy is based on a diagnosis of poverty and social exclusion in Spain: in 2017, 21.6% of the population were at risk of poverty according to the EU agreed definition (EU-28 average: 16.9%); among children, the rate was 28.3% (EU-28: 20.2%) (Eurostat). Poverty risk strongly affects children living in single-parent households, children in households with three or more children as well as children in households with at least one foreign-born parent. Moreover, social transfers in Spain have a limited corrective effect. They reduce poverty risk by 23.9% and child poverty risk by only 17.7% (8.5 and 20.4 percentage points lower respectively than the EU-28 average) (Eurostat).

The Strategy contains 90 lines of action structured around four strategic goals:

1. The fight against poverty: one of the main objectives of the Strategy is to improve the income guarantee system. Particularly noteworthy is the implementation of a national minimum income scheme (Ingreso Mínimo Vital [IMV]) to guarantee a minimum level of income for people in need, although the Strategy is very vague about the features of this

scheme. The IMV will be compatible with the existing regional Minimum Income Schemes. It will be progressively developed, giving priority to the reduction of child poverty, by establishing measures such as an increase in the allowance per dependent child for vulnerable families. The Strategy will also result in an extension of the coverage of unemployment benefits (e.g. to categories of people who are furthest away from the labour market such as the long term unemployed or unemployed people aged over 52).

2. Social investment: objectives highlighted are the improvement of equitable and inclusive education, and giving priority to vulnerable groups in training and employment.
3. Social protection against life course risks: the Strategy will seek to improve healthcare, support for minors and families, personal social services and long-term care and access to housing. It will include measures such as increased funding for the Long Term Care system, extension of parental leave or the promotion of rental support for the most vulnerable.
4. Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public policies: the main objective is to improve the coordination between services, policies and benefits, between territorial administrations and with the EU, with a view to tackling

### LEGAL NOTICE

*This document has been prepared for the European Commission. However, it reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.*

poverty and social exclusion more effectively.

The preparation of the Strategy has involved national, regional and local administrations, the High Commissioner for Combating Child Poverty, civil society associations and the social partners. Its implementation will be based on annual operational plans, to be drawn up by the central, regional and local public administrations; in them, the measures, lines of action, implementation period, responsible body and associated budget will have to be specified. A final evaluation of the Strategy is foreseen following its conclusion, i.e. in 2024.

The Strategy has been evaluated positively by NGOs (EAPN, 2019; Plataforma de Infancia, 2019) and by trade unions such as Comisiones Obreras (2019), although they warn of its limitations given that it has no specifically allocated or targeted financing. Experts (such as L. Sanzo, 2019) welcome the proposed IMV, although they point out some limitations, such as the absence of specific commitments on the level of protection to be achieved, its exclusive targeting at groups located outside the productive system and its scarce linkages with guaranteed access to housing.

## Outlook and commentary

There is a broad political consensus in Spain on the need to deal comprehensively with the issue of poverty and social exclusion. The new National Strategy is important because it establishes the general framework for action against

poverty and social exclusion in Spain. It is a step forward compared to the previous National Action Plans on Social Inclusion, as it includes clearer objectives and lines of action to carry out more effective policies on income guarantee and the fight against child poverty. The participation of the recently appointed High Commissioner for Combating Child Poverty in the preparation of the Strategy has helped to give greater prominence to the issue and to mainstream child poverty in public policies.

However, the Strategy suffers from two main weaknesses. On the one hand, it does not have a specific budget, so it will need an adequate budgetary allocation and to accelerate the pace of implementation of the planned measures. On the other hand, the success of its implementation will depend on the degree of cooperation and institutional loyalty that exists between the central, regional and local public administrations. The Strategy is national in scope, yet it affects services (healthcare, education, housing) and benefits (such as the regional Minimum Income Schemes) that are regional competencies. Implementation of the Strategy will require the elaboration of annual operational plans in which the different levels of public administration (central, regional and local) will participate together with NGOs. Such plans will require proper coordination between the services, policies and benefits organised by the different levels of administration, and such coordination has generally been very weak in the past.

## Further reading

Comisiones Obreras [Workers' Commissions] (CC.OO) (2019), Press release:

<http://bit.ly/311VhTg>

Eurostat (2017), EU-SILC 2017:

<http://bit.ly/2WDkeFi>

EAPN (2019), Press release,

<http://bit.ly/2MDhMef>

Ministerio de Sanidad, Consumo y Bienestar Social [Ministry of Health, Consumption and Social Welfare] (MSCBS) (2019), "National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion 2019-2023":

<http://bit.ly/2KIQXZ9>

Plataforma de Infancia [Platform on Childhood] (2019), Press release: <http://bit.ly/2HRLDv0>

Sanzo, L. (2019), "La estrategia española de garantía de ingresos" [The Spanish Strategy on income guarantee]:

<http://bit.ly/2Xk4AM9>

## Author

[Vicente Marbán](#) and [Ana Arriba](#) (University of Alcalá, Madrid)

*The Flash Reports are produced by the European Social Policy Network (ESPN) established in 2014 to provide the European Commission with independent information, analysis and expertise on social policies in 35 European countries. The topics covered are identified by ESPN experts in the light of significant developments in their countries, or in some cases suggested by the Commission or the Flash Reports' editorial team (Eric Marlier and Slavina Spasova). The ESPN is managed by LISER (Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research), APPLICA and the OSE (European Social Observatory). More information on the ESPN: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1135&langId=en>.*

Quoting this report: Vicente Marbán and Ana Arriba (2019). A new Strategy to prevent and combat poverty and social exclusion in Spain, ESPN Flash Report 2019/50, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Brussels: European Commission.