



# **Peer Review on “Comprehensive Follow-up of Low-income Families”**

Oslo(Norway), 28-29 November 2019

**Thematic Discussion Paper**

## **Comprehensive Follow-up of Low-Income Families**

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion



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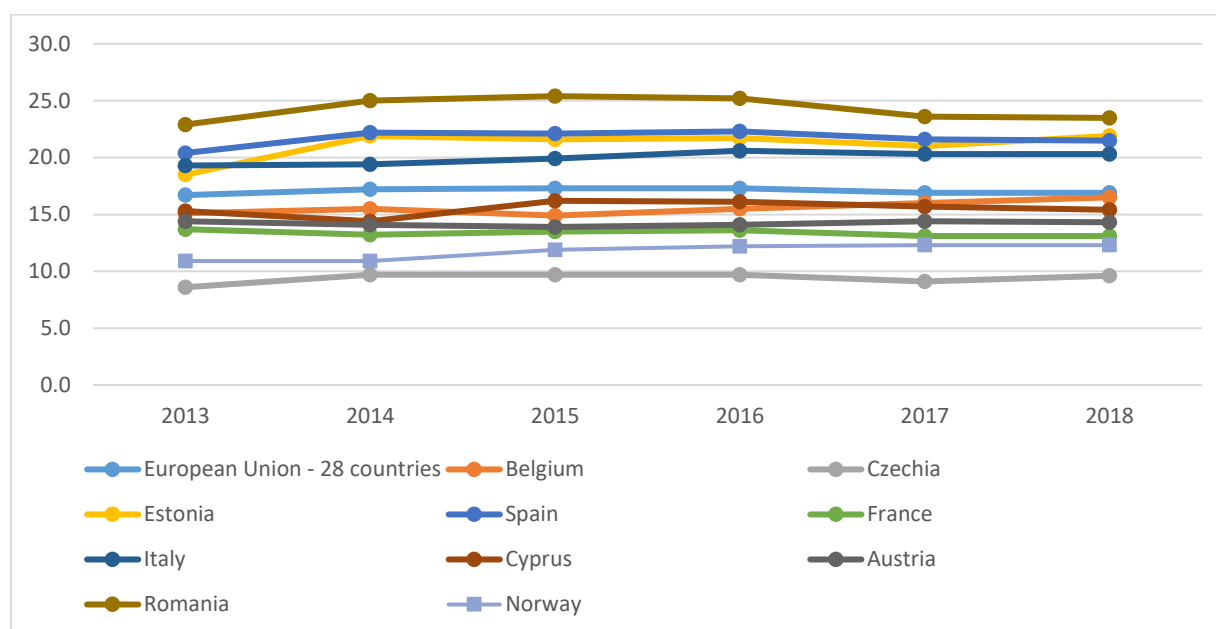
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## 1 Introduction

One of the main objectives set out by the Europe 2020 Strategy is to bring at least 20 million people out of poverty by 2020<sup>1</sup>. However, despite the recent generally positive developments in Europe, such as further reductions in unemployment (SPC annual report, 2018), the target has not been met yet. Also, some poverty-related negative trends, can be identified: (i) deterioration with regard to the depth of poverty risk in many Member States, and with regard to in-work poverty risk in several countries; (ii) rises in the at-risk-of-poverty rates for people in (quasi) jobless households, pointing to a continued deterioration in the adequacy of social benefits in several countries (SPC annual report, 2018).

Household poverty remains one of the major challenges for a number of European countries. In 2018, 16.9 % of households in the EU-28 were at risk of poverty. The share of households at risk of poverty differs by country, with the highest shares in Romania (23.5 %), Estonia (21.9 %) and Spain (21.5 %) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. At-risk-of-poverty (AROP) rate of households - EU-SILC and ECHP surveys



Notes: AROP rate (cut-off point: 60% of median equivalised income after social transfers). The values for the EU-28; France; Italy and Norway for 2018 refer to the last year of available data (2017).

Source: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/income-and-living-conditions/data/database\[iilc\\_li03\]](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/income-and-living-conditions/data/database[iilc_li03]), authors' elaboration.

Low income families with children are particularly affected by poverty. According to the latest data in Eurostat, 24.9 % of the children under the age of 18 were still at risk of poverty and social exclusion (AROPE) in 2017<sup>2</sup>. In 2016, compared to the year

<sup>1</sup> European Commission, 2010. Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Available at:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf> [01.08.2019]

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat, 2019. The sum of children (0-17) who are: at-risk-of-poverty or severely materially deprived or living in (quasi-)jobless households (i.e. households with very low work intensity (below 20%) as a share of the total population in the same age group. [TESPM040] Accessed at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm040/default/table?lang=en> [01.08.2019]

before 13 Member States registered significant reductions in the AROP rate for children. Three Member States (Bulgaria, France and Romania) recorded significant increases. Rates of around 30 % or more are still observed in eight Member States, and among these rates of over 45 % in Bulgaria and Romania are of particular concern (SPC annual report, 2018).

In-work poverty has been increasingly identified as a risk factor for household poverty. In 2017, the in-work poverty risk was higher for workers living in single-person households (13.5 %) and for lone parent workers (21.9 %). The in-work poverty risk for lone-parent workers has also increased between 2012 and 2017 (ESPN, 2019). Significant increases in the average share of housing costs in disposable household income have been recorded in six Member States between 2008 and 2016. Of particular note is the sharp increase in Greece, where the rate has risen by around 18 percentage points over this period (SPC annual report, 2018).

Opportunities in life are strongly linked to social origin (ESDE, 2018). A recent OECD study suggests that family poverty is likely to be one of the causes of the intergenerational transmission of poverty (OECD, 2018a). The results of the 2015 PISA survey on students' competences provide fresh evidence that a person's parental background is a major predictor of their skills which are relevant for the labour market. The study also shows that those who inherit social disadvantage from their parents have a higher risk of lacking also other competences. They also achieve lower social and labour market outcomes (ESDE, 2018). In OECD countries it takes on average four to five generations for the offspring of low-income families to reach average income, suggesting that household poverty tends to persist across generations

Several initiatives were launched at European level in the last decade in order to support low-income families and poor children. The 'Recommendation on Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage'<sup>3</sup> in 2013 emphasises access to decent jobs for parents, affordable childhood education and care services, adequate income support for children and families as well as child participation. In 2016, the European Council adopted conclusions to establish an integrated approach to combatting poverty and social exclusion<sup>4</sup>. In 2017, the Heads of State proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights which refers to many aspects of fighting poverty and securing social inclusion. Several principles of the Pillar are key to supporting low income families with children, in particular principle 11<sup>5</sup>. Given the non-legal nature of the Pillar, its principles and rights are not directly enforceable. An action plan on the implementation of the Pillar is currently being prepared by the Commission. .

**This paper aims to highlight why we do need to ensure comprehensive follow-up to low-income families. First we analyse the factors of risks for household poverty (such as the intergenerational transmission of poverty, the unemployment/social exclusion that low-income households face) and then we give an overview of the approaches implemented in European countries to support and assist low-income households. Finally, conclusions are drawn.**

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<sup>3</sup> European Commission, 2013. Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage. Accessed at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32013H0112> [01.08.2019]

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, 2016. Council Conclusions on 'Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion: an Integrated Approach'. Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=751&newsId=2564&furtherNews=yes#navItem-relatedDocuments> [01.08.2019]

<sup>5</sup> Principle 11 states the right of children to be protected from poverty and underlines that 'children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities', and Principle 14 sets out the 'right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life'.

## 2 Risk factors for household poverty in Europe

The main risk factors for a family to be at risk of poverty include the size of the household, (long-term) unemployment and inactivity of household members, lack of access to services (such as education, healthcare and housing), barriers to labour market participation, adverse effects of welfare benefits on labour market participation, poor coverage and non-take up of social benefits (see for the latter Eurofound, 2015), and lack of access to social services (addressing barriers to social and labour market integration).

Almost 50 % of all single parents were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2016 and 47 % of single parents with dependent children in 2017. This was double the average and higher than for any other household type analysed (OECD, 2018a). In 2017, 32 % of households at risk of poverty were comprised of two adults with three or more dependent children (OECD, 2018a).

Having a job is not always enough to avoid poverty. In 2016, 7.8 % of the working EU population were at risk of poverty even though they were working fulltime. In-work poverty in Europe, as it is conventionally measured, is to a considerable extent concentrated among low work intensity households (Marchal et al., 2017). Workers living in low-intensity households have very high in-work poverty rates (37.3 %). If children are present in these households the in-work poverty rate is even higher (46.1 %) (ESPN, 2018). On average, the poverty rate for families with children would be halved in OECD countries from 11 to 5.4 %, if all parents had a job (Figure A 2) (OECD, 2018b). 63.7 % of children of parents with at most pre-primary and lower secondary education were at risk of poverty (OECD, 2018a).

Limited access to services such as education, healthcare and housing also represents a risk factor increasing the probability of being poor. A clear policy consensus emerged around the need to invest in education, upskilling and access to universal services, and to reform the delivery of these services. The provision of services, especially education and early childhood education and care is relevant in order to reduce inequality of outcomes in adulthood and the transmission of disadvantages to the next generation (European Commission, 2019a).

A low level of skills in general (OECD, 2018b), obsolete skills, and a lack of labour market or occupation related language skills are among key factors preventing access to the labour market as well as becoming and remaining unemployed (Duell et al. 2016). Discrimination may render labour market access difficult for particular groups (e.g. ethnic minorities). Labour force participation of women depends on a variety of factors, including gender stereotypes and cultural factors, tax disincentives, lacking childcare facilities or lacking facilities for elderly care. Indebtedness can affect the working status of family members, as can disability or long-term sickness and mental health problems, family violence and criminality (OECD, 2015) or homelessness (Richardson 2009).

## 3 Policies to improve support and follow-up of low-income families

In general, countries can adopt different types of policies to prevent family poverty (OECD, 2018b):

- i. Financial aid to protect children and families;
- ii. Raising parental employment and/or raising income gains from employment;
- iii. Policies to facilitate access to services to promote social inclusion and well-being of the children.

*(i) Financial aid to protect families and children*



Countries have been increasingly concerned with designing financial aid in a way that does not create disincentives to work by introducing activation requirements (e.g. active job search). Financial aid and in-kind benefits directed to children only and without requirements are designed to mitigate negative impact of low work intensity of the household on children.

Commonly-applied policy instruments with a direct effect on household income include: child benefits, child tax credits, family allowances, parental leave benefits, housing allowances, minimum income schemes, in-work benefits and tax credits<sup>6</sup> (Leventi et al. 2019; OECD 2014, Immervoll, 2007; OECD, 2011). In 2018 in the EU-28, 43.7 % of the households were at risk of poverty before social transfers and 16.9 % after receiving the transfers, with an overall reduction in share of households at risk of poverty of 61%. The Czech Republic, France and Austria were among the European countries who were able to reduce household poverty more than the EU-28 average through re-distributional policies (Figure A 4 in Appendix).

Overall spending levels for family policies across European countries are diverse, but there is some convergence in the share of spending by type with the proportion of in-kind benefits remaining constant and with an increase in the use of fiscal support and a decrease in the proportion of cash benefits over the last decade. The total package of tax/benefit support for families increased in the early 2000s in many countries, but has become less generous since the onset of the economic crisis. The fall in public support for families has been greater for sole-parent families (OECD, 2014).

Social assistance and/or means-tested minimum income schemes may be an effective way of increasing the income of existing recipients. However, non-take-up of the benefits due to stigma, mis-administration or other reasons may reduce their effectiveness (Eurofound, 2015). Thus, the effect of poverty when increasing the social assistance level does not only depend on the poverty threshold and on the conditions of entitlement, but also on the administration of the schemes (Figari et al., 2013; Van Mechelen and Marchal, 2013). The adequacy of minimum income benefits varies significantly between Member States and can be measured by comparing the income of beneficiaries with the national poverty threshold (as an indication of the poverty alleviation effect of schemes) and with the income of beneficiaries to the income of a low-wage earner (to provide an indication of the activation dimension and potential disincentive effects of the schemes). Both indicators suggesting the adequacy of the schemes for single-person households, were the highest in the Netherlands, Ireland, Denmark and Luxembourg and the lowest in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and Lithuania (JER, 2018).

The generosity of social assistance benefits and of the related earnings varies largely across the European Member States (Marchal et al. 2017). Many countries have introduced measures to increase work incentives, and in particular the net pay-off, to foster the transition from dependence on a social assistance or unemployment benefit to a low-paid job. About half of the OECD countries use one or more permanent in-work benefits, which can be granted in the form of a benefit, a tax reduction (such as a tax credit) or a social insurance contribution reduction (for an overview, see e.g. OECD, 2011).

A job itself is not enough to protect against (child) poverty; child support is also a crucial element to combat in-work poverty<sup>7</sup>. Targeted financial services can be found for example in **Romania**, where the family support allowance (*alocație pentru susținerea familiei*) is a form of support for families on low incomes who raise and look

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<sup>6</sup> The US and the UK favour large income tax credits to increase net income of households.

Czech Republic and Slovakia are the only other EU Member States with substantial tax credits.

<sup>7</sup> According to Eurostat the in-work at-risk-of-poverty rate of single persons with dependent children in the EU-27 is 20.2 %, while it is 10 % for households with two or more adults with children (indicator *ilc\_iw02*).

after children aged up to 18. This allowance is paid to top up family income in order to guarantee better conditions in which to raise, look after and bring up children, and to encourage the attendance of education by children (European Commission, 2019). An evaluation of the effectiveness of this approach is currently not available.

*(ii) Policies aimed to raise parental employment and/or income gains from employment*

One main policy area covers measures to increase labour market participation of women. These measures include a wide range of approaches, from breaking gender stereotypes, giving psycho-social guidance to eliminate feelings of guilt of working mothers, empowering women, and facilitating access to childcare and elderly care arrangements as well as reviewing tax systems. The Commission decided to take a broader approach in addressing women's underrepresentation in the labour market. through the Work-life balance Directive<sup>8</sup>, which addresses the work-life balance challenges faced by working parents and carers. This initiative takes into account the developments in society over the past decade in order to enable parents and people with caring responsibilities to better balance their work and family lives and to encourage a better sharing of caring responsibilities between women and men.

Another policy area is labour market integration through active labour market programmes (ALMPs) of the Public Employment Services (PES). While for many years the focus of employment policies has been set on integration in the regular labour market, employment programmes for those who are very detached from the labour market contain social inclusion aspects (e.g. through targeted direct job creation programmes; sheltered employment) with the objective to reduce the risk of intergenerational poverty transmission in the long-term ('inheriting' benefit dependency).

The introduction or tightening of activation requirements of social assistance and minimum income schemes have pushed many countries to better link social benefit claims and activation through the PES and/or municipalities. Institutional arrangements vary from one country to the other: While some countries have focused on cooperation between institutions for monitoring job-search activities of welfare benefit recipients, others have made efforts to integrate also services delivered to benefit recipients. It is becoming increasingly evident that introducing activation requirements as such may not be sufficient as household members may face multiple employment barriers. Therefore, activation policies have been concerned with improving activation mechanisms, including intensive counselling, referring to direct job creation measures and/or providing access to other services for those unemployed who face complex employment barriers (Duell 2016).

Munday B., (2007) suggests that the integration of social services is an increasingly important policy issue for Member State governments as separate services are frequently not in the best interests of service users and their families and they can be more costly. 'Integration' refers to a range of approaches or methods to achieve greater coordination and effectiveness between different services, improving outcomes for service users. With a view on low-income families, ideally these services include access to childcare, education and training (of children and parents, also to avoid intergenerational transmission of poverty), access to debt counselling, psychological support, family coaching, mentoring (to combat discrimination), services provided to employers (to motivate them to engage target groups). However, in practice, service integration has proven to be difficult for a number of reasons. One limitation of this approach is, in fact, that it does not cover all low-income families, as in some countries minimum income schemes are not generous or coverage is very low due to

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/13/better-work-life-balance-for-parents-and-carers-in-the-eu-council-adopts-new-rules/>

non-take-up of benefits (Duell et al. 2016, Immervoll and Knotz, 2018). In order to decrease bureaucratic burden and ease access to benefits, one-stop shop arrangements for benefit claims have been established (e.g. in France<sup>9</sup>, case study France in Eurofound, 2015), or benefits merged (e.g. Universal Credit, UK).

*iii. Policies to improve access to services*

Many of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights aiming to ensure equal opportunities for all refer to key policy areas, such as the right to education, to adequate minimum income or the provision of quality services in health, long-term care or childcare (European Commission, 2019a). In particular, policymakers, at national level as well as EU-level, should strive to make better use of investment in education and social services and promote pre-redistribution measures (European Commission, 2019a).

A number of measures in the area of child, family and educational policies are directed towards the access of children and young people to services. One example for a single measure is the financial support for children of poor families for their participation in education activities (e.g. through the *Bildungs- und Teilhabepaket* - education and participation package - in Germany). The vast majority of programmes available for vulnerable families, both universal and targeted, place emphasis on prevention and early intervention and most integrated service initiatives evolve around early childhood education and care services (OECD, 2015).

The delivery of integrated services to families, in particular to vulnerable families has been in place in a number of countries for many years. Increasing evidence shows that integrated forms of service delivery are often the most effective when addressing this issue of weak demand coupled with high, complex needs (Australian Government, 2012; OECD 2015). However, these approaches often do not focus on the complementarity with employment services. As reported by Vanden Bosch (2014), the European Commission has also pointed to the 'lack of coherence between education and employment policies, given the specific needs of the migrant population', as one of the vulnerable groups prone to be affected by poverty.

There are great differences between countries regarding central and sub-central government involvement in family services. In a number of European countries (e.g. the Nordic countries), state involvement in delivering social and health services is high, and the provision of services is devolved to regional or local authorities. In local settings, co-location of different service providers and agencies is common and tends to encourage strong cooperation and communication between, for instance, municipal health, education and family departments (OECD, 2015). In other countries, provision of integrated services is uneven and depends on the political willingness, as well as financial and institutional capacities at regional and local levels.

## **4 Approaches to ensure social assistance and support for low-income families**

In this section, some country examples for the different types of support, as well as their interaction (if any) are given.

*(i) Financial aid to protect children and families*

Modernisation and increases in adequacy of some benefits continue in several Member States. In **Lithuania**, the state-supported income as well as family-related benefits

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<sup>9</sup> The national measure *Rendez-vous des droits* is focusing on the creation of one-stop-shops in order to facilitate the access to information on social benefits.

were increased in 2018. In **Bulgaria**, the minimum income was increased by 15 % in 2018.

In **France**, the minimum income (*Revenu de solidarité active*, RSA) has undergone a 1.6 % increase in September 2017 followed by a 1% increase in April 2018. These increases are the last of a series that enabled a rise of the minimum income relative to inflation and are complemented by a renewed focus on activation of beneficiaries ('Garantie d'activité'), as part of the recently announced anti-poverty plan.

In **Romania**, the planned consolidation of existing social benefits was postponed to April 2019, while in **Croatia** the implementation of the new Social Welfare Act will not come into effect until December 2019. **Latvia's** planned Minimum Income Improvement Plan (submitted in May 2018 and to take effect in 2020) has not yet been adopted by the Government. A draft law in **Luxembourg** seeks to reorganize the *Revenu minimum garantie* (RMG, Guaranteed Minimum Income mechanism, with the aim to reduce the high inactivity traps generated by the current scheme and address the problems of housing cost overburden and insufficient income for one-parent households (JER, 2019).

In addition to minimum wage setting, a number of inequality-reducing policies related to the tax-benefit system were adopted to alleviate in-work poverty. In **Lithuania**, a reform of the flat tax income regime was adopted in June of 2018, introducing a progressive, two-band structure which should help reduce income inequality. In **Latvia**, the introduction of progressive personal income tax is accompanied by non-taxable allowances of the personal income tax and for dependants. A proposed reform by the **Czech Republic** to revamp the personal income tax system should add a further degree of progressivity, in particular by adding a new tax rate of 23 % for higher incomes (JER, 2019).

Some Member States have taken measures specifically targeting child poverty. In **Spain**, the 2018 national budget allocates EUR 100 million to fight severe poverty with a particular attention to families with children. **Lithuania's** Law on Benefits for Children introduces a universal child benefit system. Furthermore, a child benefit to families raising and/or fostering three and more children shall be paid, disregarding the family income. A supplement to the state benefit for families with two or more children has been introduced in **Latvia**. **Greece** has adopted a reform of the child benefits system, replacing the former two benefits (the 'unified child benefit' and 'large family benefit') with a single means-tested child benefit in order to improve the targeting of the scheme (JER, 2019).

The 2010 to 2011 **Austrian** reform of social assistance benefit (introduction of the minimum income benefit) is an example of reducing non-take up. The successful measures that were introduced then are: an increase of the benefit level to the level of the minimum pension top-up, a limitation of the maintenance obligation to the nuclear family, more transparent and accelerated administrative processes, more legal certainty, increased anonymity as applications can now be made at the district headquarters instead of municipality offices only, a stronger focus on the reintegration of beneficiaries in the labour market and their inclusion in the public health insurance (Fuchs et al., 2019). Fuchs et al. (2019) show that the reform led to a significant decrease of non-take-up from 53 % to 30 % in terms of the number of households and from 51 % to 30 % in terms of expenditure; pecuniary determinants (higher degree of need), lower applications costs (unemployment, low education, renting one's home) and lower psychological barriers (e.g. in larger municipalities stigma for taking-up benefits is lower ; lone-parenthood) are predictors of taking up the benefit.

The weakness of the **Italian** welfare system consists in too many fragmented measures to support individual and household incomes, with large differences in coverage across population groups and territorial levels (Samek et al., 2019). In the **Lombardy** region several new social protection measures have been introduced in the last five years, in the spirit of an integrated approach. The most relevant measure

introduced by the past regional administration was the *Reddito di autonomia* (income for autonomy; Resolution No 5060 of 18 April 2016) as part of a new social policy to promote people's autonomy and guarantee opportunities for social inclusion in addition to income support. It was an example of an integrated policy focused on families, offering to those in difficulty further opportunities to access healthcare, social protection, housing, active job-search services and, from 2019, childcare (Samek et al., 2019).

In the **UK** benefits have been merged to the Universal Credit. A recent study shows that those in the lowest-income 10% of the population lose out most from Universal Credits. Results are mixed for other income groups. While some of these patterns are a natural consequence of integrating many benefits, specific choices that the government has made account for many of the large losses. This includes harsher treatment of the following groups: those with financial assets; the low-earning self-employed; couples where one member is above state pension age and the other below; and some claimants of disability benefits. For some of them, losses may be temporary in nature (Brewer et al.).

Linking child benefits targeted to most vulnerable families to requirements like school attendance, have proven to be difficult to implement effectively in practice. In **Bulgaria**, on-the-spot visits in schools were pursued as one approach, because reporting by schools was not considered to be reliable. (Dimitrov, Duell 2015).

*(ii) Policies aimed to raise parental employment and/or income gains from employment*

Recently, in several countries, policies have been aimed to improve horizontal coordination for the delivery of social and employment services. The aim of these approaches is twofold: reducing poverty and benefit dependency by increasing labour market participation. The approach consists in considering the individual in their socio-economic and socio-demographic context, such as the family background. While counselling services - as part of active labour market services - mostly differ depending on the individual, social services could focus more on families.

*New processes and work organisation*

In **France** a new form of cooperation between the social services at the level of the *département* and the local PES (note that the PES is nationally managed) has been implemented since 2016. This cooperation offers coordinated support, guidance and follow-up to activate social benefit recipients and jobseekers with complex social problems. The rationale behind the initiative was to change the way of working of all actors involved, boost the effect of activation policies and set up permanent partnerships between the PES and local government social services. A common diagnostic document is used by the welfare agencies of the *départements* and the PES. Experiences from the ground, such as the *département* of Essonne, show that the main employment barriers were mobility (public transport versus the need to have a car or a motorbike), childcare, psychological issues and a lack of qualifications. In the *département* of Alpes-Maritimes, the barriers identified included debt, childcare, psychological issues, addiction, lone parenthood, being a single mothers with migration background, and a lack of knowledge of French. It is important to note that programme participation is voluntary, and the target group needs to be well informed and encouraged to participate. To get a shared understanding of the diagnostic and complementarity of services, staff was trained together and exchanged (European Commission 2018).

In **Germany**, the European Social Fund (ESF), under Thematic Objective 9 for social inclusion, has been used to finance and implement innovative approaches to integrate people, who are highly detached from the labour market, into the society and work. One approach that has been piloted since the end of 2017 are coaches. These coaches

work generally with people who have been unemployed for more than two years and are the head of the household (IAB Forum, 2016). In the Land Northrhine-Westfalia (Germany), an ESF-funded project *Schritt für Schritt – Brücken bauen* (Step by Step – Building bridges) was set up. In this project, which targets long-term unemployed, coaches cooperated with the job centres in all locations and a wide range of other actors were involved<sup>10</sup>. According to an evaluation of this project, mentors and peers have to be selected very carefully in order to have the right skills to fulfil their roles.<sup>11</sup> However, support provided by professional coaches to recipients in households receiving the *Arbeitslosengeld II* (means-tested unemployment benefit II according to the Social Book II<sup>12</sup>) proved to be quite effective in improving the situation of some of these households.

In **Estonia**, the measures funded via the ESF support participation in the labour market and reduce caring responsibilities. In particular, since 2012, Estonia implements the ESF funded project 'Integrated services through case management network for people with multiple needs' that aims to improve resilience, acquire coping strategies and support labour market participation (entering into the labour market, retaining the job or participation in ALMP) of people with multiple needs (fe.g. debts, care burden, disability, long-term unemployment, lack of vocational or social skills, low motivation, health problems, alcoholism, drug addiction, etc.) and their families. Clients with coping difficulties have the possibility to receive free of charge counselling services including psychological counselling, family counselling, debt counselling and legal counselling. Also, social support services, clinical psychologist services, psychiatric aid and socio-pedagogical support services are provided. Many of the beneficiaries of the minimum income benefit have been clients of this ESF funded project (Mere, K., 2017).

#### *Improved cooperation at the community level*

In **Italy**, municipalities are in charge of the implementation of social services. In addition to the persistent difference between the Centre-north and the South, smaller municipalities appear to be particularly disadvantaged (Samek et al., 2019). Large variations exist between policy approaches in the different regions. In Piedmont, the regional government is working on a general reform of welfare policies for the period 2018 – 2019 to introduce innovation and a new approach based on community development. The key point is to bring together - in the same territorial planning area (the social cohesion districts) - all the policies and the stakeholders contributing to welfare and social cohesion: health services, social , housing and active labour market policies. In the area of child protection and care, the region is working on the support and strengthening of the centres for families (services set up by the Piedmont region to support families in their educational, social and care roles in all stages of life, supporting in particular parents facing unexpected critical events) (Samek et al., 2019).

In **Germany**, since 1999, the federal government has been supporting the stabilization and upgrading of economically and socially disadvantaged and structurally weak urban and suburban areas with its urban development programme 'Soziale Stadt' (Social City)<sup>13</sup>. Urban planning, investments, infrastructure and quality of living ensure more intergenerational equity and family friendliness in the neighborhood, and

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<sup>10</sup>[https://www.mags.nrw/sites/default/files/asset/document/esf\\_schritt\\_fuer\\_schritt\\_bruecken\\_bauen\\_endbericht\\_2018.pdf](https://www.mags.nrw/sites/default/files/asset/document/esf_schritt_fuer_schritt_bruecken_bauen_endbericht_2018.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.iaw.edu/tl\\_files/dokumente/IAW\\_Schritt\\_fuer\\_Schritt-Bruecken\\_bauen\\_Anhang\\_Endbericht\\_Februar%202018.pdf](http://www.iaw.edu/tl_files/dokumente/IAW_Schritt_fuer_Schritt-Bruecken_bauen_Anhang_Endbericht_Februar%202018.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> In the public debate they are often referred as „Hartz IV“. Means-tested minimum income for people of working age and able to work who have not acquired rights for unemployment benefit

<sup>13</sup>

[https://www.staedtebaufoerderung.info/StBauF/DE/Programm/SozialeStadt/soziale\\_stadt\\_node.html](https://www.staedtebaufoerderung.info/StBauF/DE/Programm/SozialeStadt/soziale_stadt_node.html)

improve the opportunities for those living there to participate and integrate. The aim is, above all, to strengthen social cohesion. Other ESF-funded projects, such as the 'Building Bridges' project mentioned in the previous section<sup>14</sup>, better link also the provision of employment services in these approaches (e.g. in North Rhine-Westphalia).

In **Romania**, in 2016, a policy initiative was put in place aiming at developing a large network of integrated services in rural Romania (social, education, health, employment and housing services), in support of the most vulnerable citizens. This policy initiative targeted especially the poor rural communities, as well as the marginalised areas in urban localities (poor neighbourhoods, ghettos). The strategy proposed the introduction of a Minimum Inclusion Income which focuses on active measures of inclusion, and not on monetary support exclusively, and on the strong development of social services at the local level. One of the flagship programmes of this strategy is called Social Protection – Opportunities and Responsibilities (SPOR), which proposed for the first time in Romania a coherent process for the development of integrated interventions at the level of communities. SPOR is a programme that takes a holistic, systemic, household-, family- and person-based approach to supporting people at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The main mission of the SPOR social workers and the SPOR team (school mediator or counsellor, community nurse or health mediator, other social-related professionals, if needed) hired by the local authorities is to identify the most vulnerable individuals and families in each community, to understand their needs, to provide them with personalized guidance and support, and to help them in accessing a minimum intervention package of services. The assessment of the vulnerability includes as key dimensions: education, health, income, employment, family dynamics and housing. This example shows components of the horizontal and vertical integration of delivery of social services. The example also points to the importance of needs identification and diagnostic (European Commission 2018, Part II country case studies).

#### *Improving systems for sharing information*

Sharing information is often pointed out as hindering the effective delivery of social services. A good practice regarding a common management platform (*Sistema único de información de la Renta de Garantía de Ingresos*, RGI, guaranteed income benefit) can be found in the **Basque Country (Spain)**. This online platform collated all the information about RGI recipients and their household members. The information can be used and edited by all agents involved in RGI management and facilitates the participation of other organisations, such as primary and secondary social services, external entities that provide services, and NGOs. This enables a multidimensional response to poverty through the involvement of several agents. This platform was set up in 2011, alongside the reform. The rationale behind it was to integrate the RGI management software systems that existed before the reform. Previous systems were managed by provincial authorities, which gathered the information provided by municipalities. In the provinces, however, municipalities gathered the information in very different formats (European Commission, 2018).

#### *(iii) Improving access to services*

##### *Access to healthcare*

Specific measures to improve the access to healthcare include the reduction of out-of-pocket payments, specifically co-payments, in some Member States. In 2017, **Cyprus** adopted a major reform to provide universal access to healthcare by 2020. In **Estonia**, the additional reimbursement of costs of prescription pharmaceuticals was

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<sup>14</sup> [http://www.iaw.edu/tl\\_files/dokumente/IAW\\_Schritt\\_fuer\\_Schritt-Bruecken\\_bauen\\_Anhang\\_Endbericht\\_Februar%202018.pdf](http://www.iaw.edu/tl_files/dokumente/IAW_Schritt_fuer_Schritt-Bruecken_bauen_Anhang_Endbericht_Februar%202018.pdf)

widened in 2018. In **Lithuania**, a number of measures were undertaken in 2017 such as the reduction of VAT on expensive medicines and caps put on the difference between the prices at which medicines are offered in pharmacies and their reference prices (JER, 2019).

#### *Access to housing*

**Denmark** has adopted an action plan to fight homelessness, based on enhancing preventive measures and improving the guidance on how to exit homelessness. Greece has introduced a new means-tested housing benefit intended for low-income families living in rented dwellings and those paying a mortgage. **Spain** has adopted a national plan which includes aiding the low-income families to pay the rent, financial aid for young people buying houses in low populated areas and aid to renovate housing for particularly vulnerable groups. The **Swedish** government has allocated additional funds to support non-profit organisations to combat homelessness among young adults (JER, 2019).

#### *Access to social services*

Member States are stepping up their outreach efforts, making services more accessible to young people and ensuring a better identification of those in need. In **Finland**, the one-stop guidance centres for youth (Ohjaamo, originally operating under ESF funding) were made permanent and will receive extensive financial support. Youth Employment Agencies are being created across **Germany**. **Cyprus** has launched an outreach project supported by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and the Cyprus Youth Board, aiming to reach inactive young people not in education, employment, or training (NEETs) and to provide them with activation support through counselling and tailored training. In **Croatia**, a NEET mapping system is in place since November 2017, which aims to identify non-registered NEETs and their characteristics to better target measures to this group (JER, 2019).

#### *Vertical and horizontal cooperation*

New measures were also introduced to better support young people facing multiple disadvantages, including through better cooperation between employment, social and education services. In **Austria**, youth coaching helps keep young people in the education and training system as long as possible, or alternatively reintegrates them into the system. In Ireland since 2018, the Youth Employment Support Scheme offers work placements to young jobseekers who are long-term unemployed or face significant barriers to employment. Participants learn basic work and social skills in a supportive environment while receiving a weekly payment equivalent to the net minimum wage (JER, 2019).

#### *Integrated approaches in family centres*

Families with multiple risks can access specialised, tailored support via universal services, such as the school or the health care system; these can refer and guide families with more complex needs to more tailored support and specialist services and are delivered by family centres (OECD 2015). In most cases, these family centres bring together a fully co-located range of services, central in promoting the well-being of both the children and their parents. In **Sweden**, municipal family centres, which are free-of-charge, are offering a variety of services. They are open to all families and offer cross-sectional services, including educational support for children under six as well as health and social services for families provided by multidisciplinary teams consisting of paediatricians, nurses, psychologists, social workers and other professionals from pregnancy until a child's entry to primary school (Kekkonen et al., 2012; OECD 2015). In addition to the **Nordic countries**, similar 'one-stop-shops' for families have also been introduced, at least at local and regional levels, for instance in



**Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Slovenia** (European Commission, 2012; OECD 2015). There is, however, little evidence that these family centres are also systematically integrated with employment services.

#### *Targeting resources to the most vulnerable*

A few countries have adopted programmes targeted at vulnerable families. For example, in the **UK**, under the 'Troubled Families Programme' - a government initiative - councils are encouraged to prioritise 'troubled families' by tying a part of the funding into a payment-by-results scheme (i.e. further funding is provided to councils, if a family reaches certain defined outcomes following measures including improved school attendance, a reduction in anti-social behaviour and juvenile crime).

## **5 Existing evidence on the effectiveness of measures**

### *(i) Effectiveness of benefit schemes*

The European Social Policy Network (ESPN) report analyses the effectiveness of minimum income schemes by looking at their impact on poverty reduction finding that minimum income provision only has a strong impact on reducing the number of people at risk of poverty in a few countries (Ireland, the Netherlands and UK) (Frazer and Marlier, 2015). However, there is evidence of negative impacts for particular vulnerable groups in the UK (see also above).<sup>15</sup> The Public Accounts Committee argued that the Department in charge of the programme relies too much on the discretion of the coaches to identify and manage the needs of people requiring extra support.

Some of the reasons for the limited impact on poverty reduction are: (i) the benefits levels are lower than the AROP threshold (a fact in most countries), but also below the absolute poverty line of 40 % of median income in several countries; (ii) benefits levels fail to sufficiently take into account housing costs (e.g. Czech Republic); (iii) high levels of non-take-up (e.g. Germany); (iv) low proportion of Gross Domestic Product spent on minimum income benefits (e.g. Bulgaria).

Bontout O. (2015) identified some clusters of Member States with regards to their performances on poverty reduction and employment friendliness. Their analysis is based on: mothers' employment rates; the employment gap between parents; the employment gap between mothers and women without children; the number of children at-risk-of-poverty; the share of children living in households of very low work intensity; relative severe material deprivation of children (compared to adults); relative income of families with children (compared to the total population); and income inequality among families with children. They find that the best outcomes in terms of both low poverty risk and high relative and absolute employment are found in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Slovenia.

A joint report prepared by the Social Protection Committee (SPC) and the European Commission Services in 2015<sup>16</sup>, analyses the social protection systems in the EU with regards to the effectiveness and efficiency of resource allocation. With regards to child poverty for example, the report finds a strong negative correlation with spending on family and child benefits. However, this analysis does not capture the multiple purposes of this type of spending that also wants to enhance parents' capacity to

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<sup>15</sup> The introduction of Universal Credit is causing unacceptable hardship and difficulties for many of the claimants it was designed to help (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (CPA), 17<sup>th</sup> October 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Social Protection Systems in the EU: Financing Arrangements and Effectiveness and Efficiency of Resource Allocation, Report joint prepared by the Social Protection Committee and the European Commission Services, 2015.

generate adequate income, which goes beyond the focus on poverty reduction through direct transfers.

Using microsimulation methods, Leventi et al. (2019) provide evidence of the relative cost-effectiveness of different types of policy instruments in reducing poverty or limiting poverty increases, by comparing within and between seven diverse EU countries and by measuring the implications of increasing/reducing the instrument's size within its national context. They find that the assessment of the most cost-effective instrument may depend on the measure of poverty used and the direction and scale of the change. Overall, the results indicate that the options that reduce poverty most cost-effectively in most countries are increasing child benefits and social assistance, while reducing budget increases poverty substantially. The extent of the effect of child benefits depends on the design of the benefit, whether or not benefit entitlements depend on the age and number of children, and how they impact on the particular households with children below the poverty line (Bradshaw, 2006). If the benefit is universal it may appear to be less cost-effective in terms of poverty reduction than a benefit targeting low income families, but it will have the advantages of high take-up and political support.

*(ii) Effectiveness of approaches for integrated delivery of social services*

The integration of social services aims to combine in the most efficient way, in particular: (i) financial aid, (ii) access to employment and raising income, (iii) integrating different services for children. This does not exclude that general policy coordination in social policy and its delivery is efficient to grasp the complexity of social problems and poverty. With regard to enhancing employment of parents, this relates mainly to integrating services typically provided by welfare agencies and PES. Integration with (iv) policies to mitigate the negative effects of living in low-income families on children and youth is less developed (European Commission, 2018).

Political commitment may be highest in institutionalized cooperation structures. A recent study conducted for the European Commission (2018) shows, that countries have developed different institutional models to integrate welfare and employment services (expanding in some cases also to health services):

- One-stop-shops, therefore the merging of services (e.g. UK, Norway, Germany, Finland (in the case of Finland latter only for certain groups));
- Interinstitutional cooperation (e.g. Switzerland, Belgium, France (in the case of France only for certain groups)).

Cooperation between the different services within an institution is crucial. Here, processes often tend to be less formalised and the lack of shared objectives and accountability may limit the effective cooperation (European Commission, 2018).

A recent study commissioned by the European Commission (2018) on reforms for integrated delivery of social services, as well as the OECD (2015), presents a detailed list of success factors, some of which include:

- Case management and the developments of joint routines around case-processing procedure is of particular interest (European Commission, 2018; OECD, 2015). Case management models can vary. Observed models include (European Commission, 2018): (i) joint or common case management / continuously providing joint services; (ii) regular coordination; (iii) case by case coordination. The combination between case management and specialists' work has been fruitful. Successful approaches strike the right balance between autonomy of the job counsellor or social worker and the rules defining their action.

- Avoiding stigmatisation when targeting a limited number of families with complex needs, and thereby defining them as vulnerable, is key. Stigma can result in reduced take-up of (costly) services designed for those most in need (OECD, 2015).
- Home-based services (e.g. mobile family support teams) offer a solution to providing services to families reluctant to receive them, or unable to access co-located services (e.g. in rural areas (lack of public transport, mobility issues). Integrated home services also enable providers to assess and treat the full range of problems adults and children face (OECD, 2015).
- Reinforced and targeted cooperation with employer services, pro-active strategies to reach out to employers, building up networks with companies having corporate social responsibility schemes, social enterprises and follow-up activities with employers is crucial (European Commission, 2018; Duell, 2016).
- Institutional capacities and resources need to be available: evidence shows that for vulnerable groups and jobless people who are hard-to-place in the labour markets, the caseload of counsellors needs to be low (European Commission, 2018).
- Introduction of financial incentives: e.g. end-of-year auditing and realignment of budgets based on workloads and cost savings; increased investment in preventive services; pooling budgets; creation of a surplus account funded by system-wide cost savings to meet shortfalls in budgets due to higher demand in a given service (European Commission, 2018).

*(iii) Improving access to services and their effectiveness*

In general, evaluating the impact of integrated social services for families and children proves to be difficult. Most long-term evidence on integrated service delivery comes from programmes developed in the early years providing support to disadvantaged families and children. Evaluations mainly in the UK, US, Australia and New Zealand show some promising, yet mixed results (OECD, 2015). Many of the approaches focus on early childhood intervention. In some cases, integrated service delivery policies for families with multiple needs may result in improved outcomes in the beginning, but may have less of a positive impact in the long-term.

One difficulty in evaluations is to disentangle the impact of the specific programme as new risk factors may emerge as time goes by. When applying qualitative methods, evaluations often are based on the individual perception of interviewed social workers. One consequence of low visibility of long-term effectiveness of programmes and services delivered may limit the propensity to invest in and test pilot preventive policies. Furthermore, local service providers might be reluctant to invest and engage in new methods of service delivery to save money for a centrally run service, although this issue can be addressed via alignment of monitoring and funding of these initiatives. In addition to underinvestment, families with multiple needs may also risk 'falling through the cracks' if the links between sectors are not strong or enforced (OECD 2015).

Services decentralisation can affect the identification process of vulnerable families. In many OECD countries, the central or sub-central governments also contract the provision of social and health services for families out to private providers. As argued by OECD (2015), when different family services are provided by private non-profit or for-profit agencies, effective coordination of services generally requires a greater effort and commitment at higher governance levels compared to the cases in which local authorities have the responsibility of providing most health and social services. Lack of support or commitment at the higher governance level impedes the up-scaling of effective initiatives developed on the ground.

Non-take up of services limits the effectiveness of these approaches. Vulnerable families with the highest service needs are often those least likely to access mainstream services (OECD, 2015). This calls for outreach activities towards families in need, a cooperation between institutions that could detect these families (including health services, schools, and police services) and for easy procedures to access the services. To give one example, in Germany, as of 1 January 2011, children, adolescents and young adults from low-income families have a legal right to up to seven earmarked educational and participatory services (Bildungs und Teilhabepaket). It was estimated that about 19 % of children and youth were eligible for it. This programme has been implemented at municipal level. An evaluation report from 2016 shows that take-up depended significantly on bureaucratic procedures put in place by the municipality. The study stresses that outreach activities, information policies and cooperation with key stakeholders were key factors for an effective implementation of the programme (Bartelheimer et al., 2016).

## 6 Conclusions

The share of people at risk of poverty is still high (e.g. Romania) and so child poverty (e.g. in Romania and Bulgaria). While in some EU countries, there is a relatively stable share of poor households it has increased in others.

Some risk factors increase the probability of families to be at risk of poverty, such as the size and the composition of the household (with single parents and large families being at higher risk of poverty); unemployment or low employment intensity of household members (low skills, gender gap in labour force participation); scarce access to services such as education, healthcare and housing; and among others, social issues such as disabilities and family violence/criminality. The risk-of-poverty of families is likely to be transmitted to the next generation, as research indicates. Children's wellbeing, equality of opportunities and prospect of their personnel development are therefore key to break the poverty cycle.

Some countries still have inadequate social protection for low-income households. The absence or low generosity of minimum income schemes and child benefits in some countries restrict possibilities to reduce poverty and prevent children to have better opportunities of social and educational participation in society. However, benefits alone are not guaranteeing poverty reduction in the long-term and may not break the cycle of intergenerational transmission of poverty. In many cases, reasons leading to poverty are manifold and complex to tackle. This calls for actions that put both the individual and their family in their socio-demographic and socio-economic context.

European countries have adopted policies aimed to provide financial aid to protect children and families, to raise parental employment and earnings, and to improve access to services such as education, housing and healthcare. The effectiveness of these policies differs across countries and schemes, characteristics and administration. Family poverty, in particular the prospects of wellbeing and the future of children, have also recently triggered the development of employment programmes with an aim of social inclusion (in addition to or substituting the objective of integration in the regular labour market). There is clear evidence that integrated social services can improve efficiency and prevent low take-up rates of measures.

However, service integration is not a silver bullet: it does not solve all inefficiencies in service provision, and it requires considerable administrative capacity to design and implement appropriately. While progress has been made in a number of countries to better link some social and employment services for long-term unemployed and inactive minimum income beneficiaries, integration of employment services with family services is one area where improvements need to be prioritised. There is room to continue support to social innovation in order to pilot better forms of cooperation and incentive mechanisms.

Points for debate:

- How to reduce and prevent child and youth poverty? Who are the responsible actors? Is there a need for more concertation between national, regional and local actors?
- How to show long-term effectiveness of preventive approaches? How to overcome disincentives to invest in prevention, in particular if (financial) responsibilities are split across actors (both vertically and horizontally)?
- How to determine the adequacy of minimum income levels? Which reference should be used? Reference budgets? How are housing costs accounted for?
- How to ensure access to services? Which services?
- Cooperation within social services and across services: is formalization of cooperation needed? How to set incentives for cooperation (e.g. rules for prioritising poor families in the allocation of child care provision in order to promote employment rates of women? Can performance indicators for taking up children of poor and low-work intensity households into childcare be adapted accordingly?
- How to ensure that diagnostics are all-encompassing and take a holistic approach? How to ensure that diagnostics are shared among the various actors combatting poverty?
- How to ensure that new approaches of individualized support (coaches, peers, mentors) are effective?
- How to ensure that children of low-income families have adequate access to education in order to break through the intergenerational transmission of poverty?

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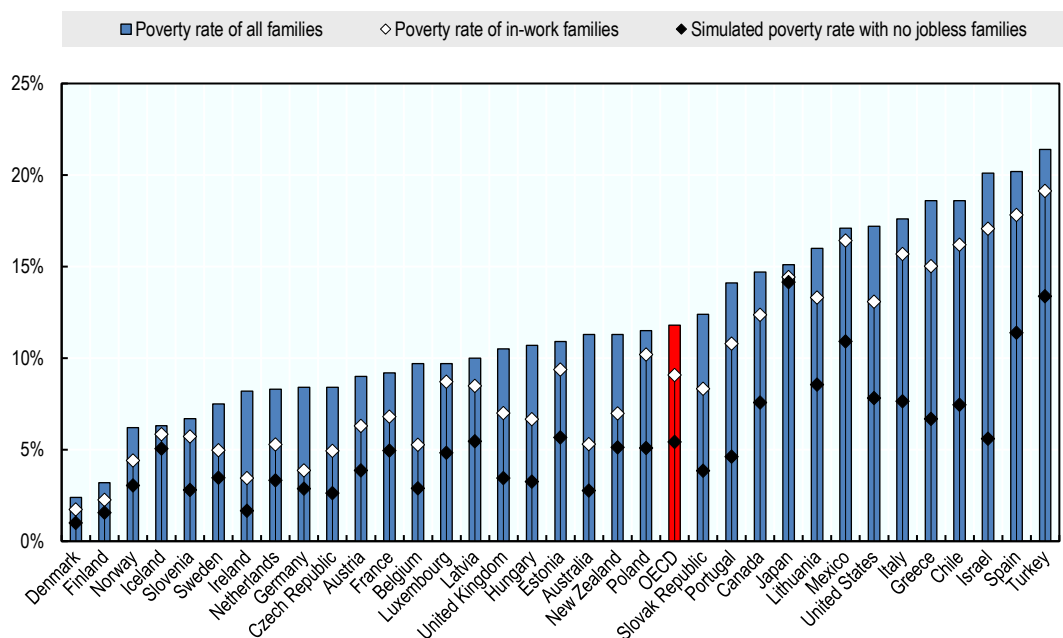
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## 8 Appendix

**Figure 2. How much would family poverty be reduced by raising parental employment? Share (%) of poor children and in families with children by employment status of parents**



*Notes:* The scenario with no jobless families assumes no jobless single parents and all two-parent families having two earners. The current poverty rates applying to families with working parents are then applied to all families with children to estimate the rate that would result if all parents were in employment. On average, the poverty rate for families with children would be halved (from 11 to 5.4%) if all parents had a job.

*Source:* [OECD Income Distribution Database](#)



