



Feasibility Study for a **Child Guarantee**

Report on the online consultation

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee

Report on the online consultation 2019

In 2015, the European Parliament called on the European Commission and the European Union Member States 'to introduce a Child Guarantee so that every child in poverty can have access to free healthcare, free education, free childcare, decent housing and adequate nutrition, as part of a European integrated plan to combat child poverty'. Following the subsequent request by the Parliament to the Commission to implement a Preparatory Action to explore the potential scope of a Child Guarantee for vulnerable children, the Commission commissioned a study to analyse the feasibility of such a scheme.

The *Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG)* is carried out by a consortium consisting of Applica and the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER), in close collaboration with Eurochild and Save the Children, and with the support of nine thematic experts, 28 country experts and an independent study editor.

For more information on the Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee, see:

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

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Introduction

Following the call in 2015 from the European Parliament to introduce a Child Guarantee and the subsequent request to the Commission in 2017 to implement a Preparatory Action to explore its potential scope, the Commission launched a study in 2018 which aims at examining and making proposals as to how a specific programme could best be developed in order to fight poverty and social exclusion amongst the EU's most disadvantaged children (i.e. children living in precarious family situations, children residing in institutions, children of recent migrants and refugees and children with disabilities and other children with special needs) and to ensure their access to the five key policy areas identified by the European Parliament (i.e. free healthcare, free education, free early childhood education and care (ECEC), decent housing and adequate nutrition).

An online targeted consultation was conducted as part of the study. Its main goal was to gather views on the feasibility, efficiency and overall benefits of a Child Guarantee in order to help formulate the final recommendation in this regard. The consultation lasted 6 weeks – from 14 January 2019 to 22 February 2019 – and the link to the questionnaire was sent to more than 1,150 selected people. These consisted of managers in civil society organisations working with children or concerned with child well-being, officials in public authorities at national and sub-national levels, researchers and academics). The link was, in some cases, forwarded by the contact person to associated organisations. In all, 301 valid replies were received.

The questionnaire began with questions to identify the profile of respondents in order to put the replies into context. It then set out a set of multiple-choice questions and, where relevant, the respondents were invited to clarify their replies and to add any further comment they wished to make in a limited number of words. The questionnaire ended with an open question, asking respondents to describe the kind of instrument that they think should be put in place at EU level.

Once the consultation was closed, the validity of the information provided was checked by identifying and coding missing replies, removing duplicates, checking for possible inconsistencies in the answers given to different questions, and trying to detect any 'campaigns' by identifying identical replies to the open questions. Following this, the replies to the multiple choice questions were analysed and the replies to the open questions were divided according to the main themes and issues covered.

This synopsis presents the results of this analysis.

1 Profiles of the respondents

The majority of respondents (59%) replied to the questionnaire on behalf of an organisation, while the remainder (41%) answered as individuals in their own professional capacity (Figure 1).

A third of respondents worked in non-governmental organisations, platforms or networks and a fifth in national public authorities. Some 13% of respondents were researchers or academics, and 8% were from Managing Authorities for EU Structural Funds and 5% from consultancies. Only 2% of respondents were employed in an EU institution or agency and 1% or less in each case worked in schools or nurseries, social partner organisations, churches or religious communities or other non-specified types of institution (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by whether replying on behalf of an organisation or on their own behalf (% total)

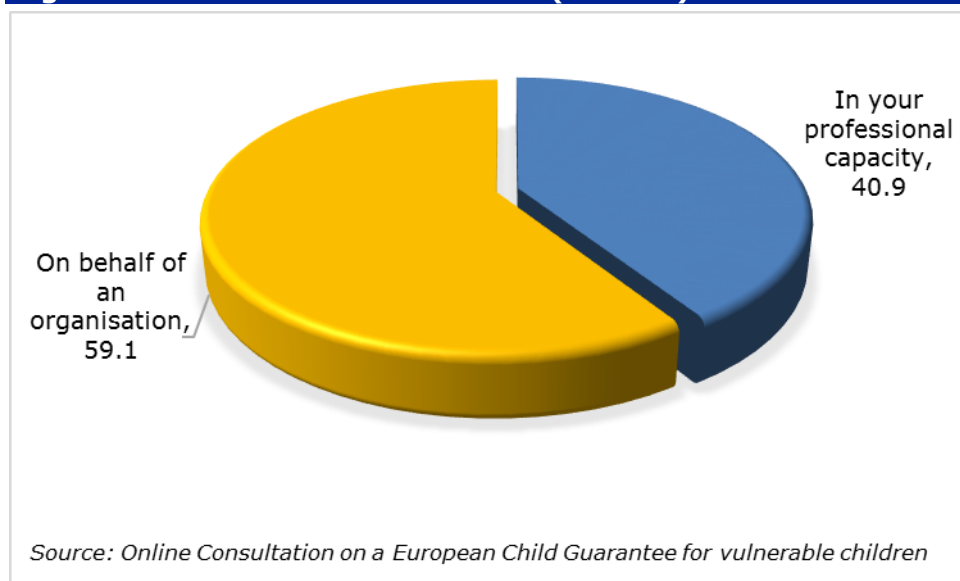
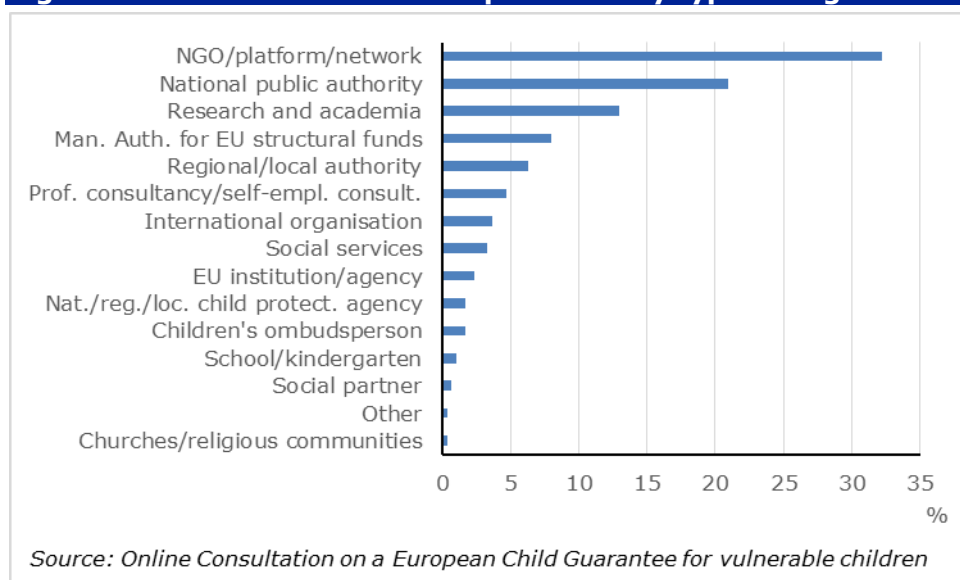


Figure 2. The distribution of respondents by type of organisation (%)



The distribution of respondents across countries was far from balanced. Nearly 26% of respondents came from central Europe (Austria, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Czech Republic – countries which account for 14% of EU population) and 12% from Slovakia alone (i.e. over 10 times its share of EU population), which is explained by the fact that the questionnaire was sent from the national authority to regional offices, which each replies individually.¹ As a result, 42% of replies from regional authorities came from Slovakia. In addition, around 16% of respondents were from Nordic and Baltic countries², three times their share of EU population (just over 5%) (Table 1). There were also a few responses from countries outside the EU: Iceland, Norway, Serbia, Turkey and Kosovo.

¹ Out of the 1,150 invitations to complete the questionnaire, 18 were sent to people in Slovakia (i.e. 1.5%).

² Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

There is only a limited association between the deprivation rate among children³ and the relative number of responses received. A large number of responses in relation to population were received, for example, from Bulgaria, Portugal, Latvia, Lithuania and Croatia, where both rates are relatively high, but also from Slovenia and Finland, where they are relatively low. Equally, relatively few replies were received from Romania, where rates are also high but a relatively large number from , Belgium and Slovenia, where they are low⁴.

Table 1 Distribution of responses in relation to population and deprivation rates among children

	Number of respondents	% total respondents	% total resp. (EU countries)	Share of national population as % of EU population	National child-specific deprivation rate (%)
BE	17	5.6	6.0	2.2	15.0
BG	16	5.3	5.6	1.4	68.0
CZ	7	2.3	2.5	2.1	17.0
DK	5	1.7	1.8	1.1	7.0
DE	4	1.3	1.4	16.2	10.8
EE	1	0.3	0.4	0.3	14.4
IE	3	1.0	1.1	0.9	26.9
EL	8	2.7	2.8	2.1	46.3
ES	16	5.3	5.6	9.1	28.3
FR	11	3.7	3.9	13.1	14.5
HR	6	2.0	2.1	0.8	22.1
IT	11	3.7	3.9	11.8	26.8
CY	6	2.0	2.1	0.2	38.2
LV	12	4.0	4.2	0.4	38.3
LT	10	3.3	3.5	0.5	27.4
LU	4	1.3	1.4	0.1	8.3
HU	8	2.7	2.8	1.9	47.1
MT	7	2.3	2.5	0.1	22.0
NL	9	3.0	3.2	3.4	12.9
AT	8	2.7	2.8	1.7	13.3
PL	19	6.3	6.7	7.4	23.2
PT	13	4.3	4.6	2.0	35.2
RO	7	2.3	2.5	3.8	70.5
SI	13	4.3	4.6	0.4	10.5
SK	37	12.3	13.0	1.1	25.3
FI	12	4.0	4.2	1.1	5.4
SE	7	2.3	2.5	2.0	4.4
UK	8	2.7	2.8	12.9	22.5
Pan-EU/Int.	11	3.7	:	:	:
Other	5	1.7	:	:	:
Total	301	100.0	100.0	100.0	23.3

Note: The child-specific deprivation rate is defined for children aged 1-15 and relates to 2014. The Total is for the EU-28.

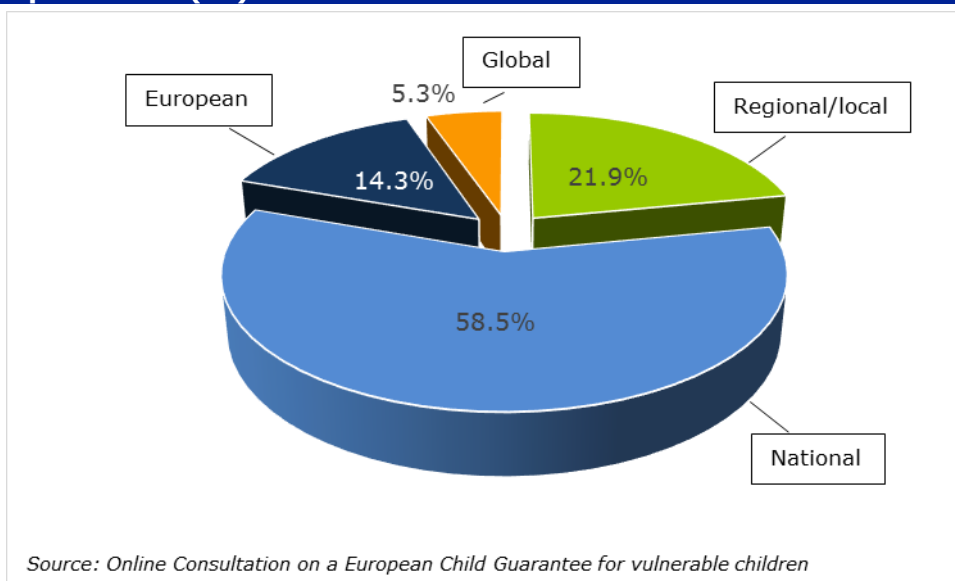
Source: Online Consultation on a European Child Guarantee for vulnerable children and Eurostat, demographic statistics and EU-SILC.

³ The deprivation rate among children is the child-specific indicator of deprivation; it is defined for children aged 1-15 and relates to 2014. It is based on the EU-SILC 2014 ad hoc module on material deprivation.

⁴ In Belgium, the relatively large number of replies are spread across most types of organisation and does not seem to be a consequence, for example, of NGOs or other organisations having offices in Brussels.

Some 59% of respondents reported that they work at national level, and 22% at regional or local level, while 14% work at European level and 5% at global level (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The distribution of respondents by geographical area of organisation represented (%)



To sum up, the replies to the questionnaire came mainly from people replying on behalf of organisations, particularly NGOs and national public authorities, and accordingly the views expressed largely reflect those of the organisations concerned.

In addition, when interpreting the replies, it is important to keep in mind their geographical balance, in the sense that this is not in line with the distribution of population across the EU or of child deprivation. In the analysis which follows, therefore, the replies will be examined not only in aggregate but also in sub-divisions distinguishing the countries or groups of countries concerned (see Box) and the different types of organisation.

Country groupings⁵

Because of the small number of replies from many countries, which means that they may not be representative, countries are divided into groups in the following analysis in terms of the at-risk-of-poverty rate among children and the child-specific deprivation rate which can be expected to affect the way that respondents reply. The groups, based on are as follows:

Very high rate: Bulgaria and Romania

High rate: Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Latvia and Portugal

Medium rate: Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Spain and the UK

Low rate: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany and the Netherlands

Very low rate: Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Luxembourg, Slovenia.

⁵ Country groupings based on a cluster analysis of child-specific deprivation and child at-risk-of-poverty rates carried out in Guio, A.-C., Marlier, E., Vandenbroucke, F. and Verbunt P. (2018) are referred to in the analysis of the questionnaire responses below (in 'Micro- and Macro-drivers of child deprivation in 31 European countries', Paper presented at the Net-SILC3 conference in Athens, 19-20 April 2018). The findings of this study are also included in the Inception Report for the present project.

2 Role of the EU in the fight against poverty and social exclusion

A set of three questions were included in the questionnaire on the role of the EU and countries in combating child poverty and social exclusion.

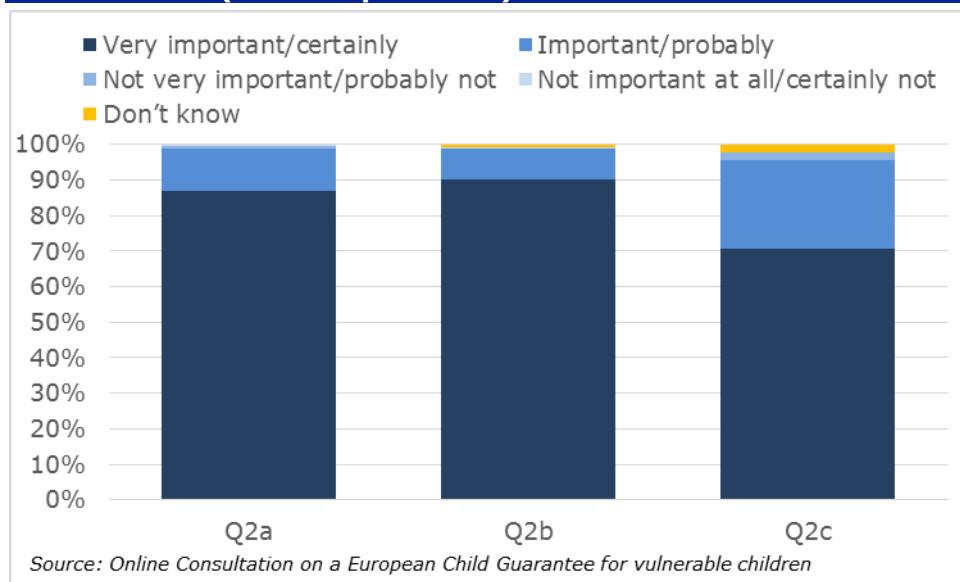
As regards the role of countries, or national governments, 87% of respondents considered that it is very important that their country better combats child poverty and social exclusion specifically, while 12% consider it important, so that only 1% think the issue not to be important (Figure 4).

Nine out of ten respondents consider that the EU should certainly help Member States to fight against child poverty and social exclusion and another 9% that it should probably do so. Researchers and those from NGOs, as well as from EU institutions, are strongly in favour of the EU providing assistance (well over 90% in each case), while a slightly smaller proportion of respondents from national and regional authorities expressed the same view.

The level of child deprivation in the country concerned seems also to have influenced the response, since 4% of respondents from countries where this is low thought either that EU should not provide help or didn't know whether it should or not as compared with no-one in countries where the deprivation rate was high.

When asked whether or not the EU should do **more** to tackle child poverty and social exclusion, respondents show a slightly lower degree of consensus, some 4% of respondents considering either that it should not or not expressing a view. Respondents from national authorities are less in favour of the EU doing more, though the figure for those not expressing support for the view is still only 7%. At the same time, 71% of respondents are strongly of the view that the EU should do more than it currently does to tackle child poverty and social exclusion, the figure being particularly high among those from NGOs.

Figure 4 Importance of combating child poverty and social exclusion and role of the EU in this (% of respondents)



Q.2a How important is it, do you think, that your country better fights specifically against child poverty and social exclusion?

Q.2b Do you think that the EU should help Member States to fight against child poverty and social exclusion among children?

Q.2c If yes, do you think the EU should do more than it currently does to tackle child poverty and social exclusion?

In sum, according to the vast majority of respondents, their country should do better in fighting against child poverty and social exclusion and consider that the EU should help in

this. They also consider that the EU should do more in this regard, this view being particularly strong in countries where the level of child deprivation is high.

3 Children's access to essential services

In this section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to identify the three most important barriers to accessing essential services (healthcare, education, early childhood education and care (ECEC) and decent housing) for three groups of vulnerable children (those living in a precarious family situation, children of migrants and refugees and children with disabilities⁶).

Children's access to four essential services – summarising the replies

For each of the three groups of vulnerable people, respondents were asked to select from a list the three most important barriers in accessing each of four essential services, without ranking them. In practice, not all respondents selected three barriers. In Tables 2, 3 and 4, the figures denote the number of respondents who selected the barrier concerned as a percentage of the total number of respondents replying to the question.

3.1 Children living in precarious family situations

In the case of healthcare for children living in a precarious situation, the three most frequently indicated as barriers to access are lack of awareness or insufficient information (55% of all respondents who indicated at least one barrier), non-availability of services in the area (49%) and problems of affordability (48%) (Table 2). These three barriers were cited by significantly more respondents than the others. The next most frequently cited, that services are not adapted to children's needs, attracted less than a third of replies (32%), though 41% of respondents from countries with a relatively low rate of child deprivation pointed to this as a major barrier.

Table 2. Main barriers that need to be overcome by kind of service: Children in a precarious family situation (%)

	Health	Education	ECEC	Housing
Non-availability of services in the area	49.2	26.4	58.3	50.0
Discrimination	19.3	44.2	24.4	29.0
Not eligible for support	20.5	19.2	24.7	32.6
Lack of awareness/insufficient information	54.9	46.4	48.7	25.0
Problems of physical access	22.0	21.5	21.0	21.4
Problems of cultural access	20.5	44.2	26.6	12.3
Problems of affordability	47.7	35.8	51.7	77.5
Services not adapted to children's needs	32.2	39.2	29.9	23.9
Other barriers	6.1	7.5	7.0	4.7
Don't know	6.4	6.4	5.2	5.1
Number	264	265	271	276

Note: The number of cases indicates the total number of respondents who identified at least one barrier for each service.

The figures in bold indicate the three barriers identified as most important.

Source: Online consultation on a European Child Guarantee for vulnerable children

As regards access to education, the main barrier indicated is again lack of awareness or insufficient information (47%), though this is followed by problems of cultural access and discrimination (both 44%). However, responses from countries where child deprivation is high or very high were somewhat different. In those with high deprivation, the main barriers identified along, with lack of awareness, were the non-adaptation of services to children's needs (52%) and problems of affordability (50%). In the two countries with the

⁶ Children living in institutions, the fourth group of vulnerable children under scrutiny in this Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee, were not included in this question because they are in a very different situation from the other three groups as far as access to these rights is concerned.

highest deprivation levels, Bulgaria and Romania, a much larger proportion than in other countries identified problems of cultural access (64%) and discrimination (55%) as important barriers.

In the case of access to early childhood education and care (ECEC), well over half of respondents see the non-availability of services in their area (58%), followed by problems of affordability (52%) and lack of awareness (49%) as the main barriers. There is some difference between countries in the main barriers identified. In particular, in those where child deprivation is high, two-thirds of respondents or more view the non-availability of services as a major obstacle, whereas in those with a very low level, only 37% do so.

As regards access to decent housing, more than three-quarters of the respondents indicate problems of affordability as a major problem and this was the case in most countries, while half of them consider the non-availability of services – in this case, of housing-related services – as also being important. The third most important barrier identified is the non-entitlement of children (or their families) to support.

A number of respondents also identified other barriers than those specified in the questionnaire as being important, many of which seem to be specific to the country concerned, such as the lack of an integrated approach to the provision of services and the insufficient qualifications or training of social workers so that they are better able to identify children in precarious family situations. Others point to bureaucratic obstacles as well as to the need for parents to receive support, especially those that are most vulnerable (e.g. parents with a mental disability).

On healthcare services specifically, it is pointed out that socially disadvantaged families make comparatively little use of medical services (Germany). Problems of waiting lists and long queues (Ireland, Estonia) are also mentioned, as well as lack of specific services, such as for mental health (Spain, Portugal), and a lack of specialists in the local area (Latvia).

On education, other barriers identified are a lack of political commitment and resources (Poland, Spain), absenteeism and limited support (Spain, Estonia, Ireland) and the polarisation of schools (Spain, Latvia, Germany).

On ECEC, the non-availability of services for parents with irregular working hours (Portugal) was mentioned, as was the fact that this penalises single parents in particular (Slovenia). The limited right to day-care is also reported as a barrier (Finland).

In the case of housing, other important barriers reported are the insufficient availability of social housing (Belgium, Ireland), the poor general quality of housing (Romania) and the absence in legislation of any law against housing being in a 'precarious state' (France).

3.2 Children of migrants and refugees

For the children of migrants and refugees, most respondents (51%) also identify lack of awareness or insufficient information as a major barrier to overcome as regards access to healthcare (Table 3). In this case, however, problems of cultural access (38% of respondents) and discrimination (37%) are the next most frequently reported barriers. These three barriers are also the main ones identified in most countries, though in both countries with very high child deprivation levels (Bulgaria and Romania), in particular, and those with low levels (Belgium, Germany, France, Netherlands and Austria) affordability is one of the three most frequently cited barriers (along with lack of awareness and discrimination).

The same three barriers – lack of awareness, problems of cultural access and discrimination – are also most frequently cited in respect of education. This is also the case in most countries, though in Bulgaria and Romania, with very high child deprivation, the non-availability of services is the third most often reported barrier (by 39% of respondents) instead of lack of awareness.

Lack of awareness (48% of respondents) and problems of cultural access (46%) are also the two of the three most frequently mentioned barriers in respect of access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) – the two most often cited in most cases – while in

some countries, problems of affordability (39% overall) is included as one of the three (especially in countries with low child deprivation), in others (in both those with very low and those with very high deprivation), discrimination (38% overall) and in yet others (Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Spain and Italy), non-availability of services (37% overall).

As regards access to decent housing, problems of affordability (cited by 58% of respondents) is the most frequently identified barrier, as in the case of children in a precarious situation. This is followed by discrimination (46%) and the non-availability of services (39%). These three barriers are the most often cited in most countries, though in Greece, Cyprus, Latvia and Portugal – countries with a high level of child deprivation – lack of awareness is the third most frequently mentioned (by 43% of respondents).

Table 3. Main barriers that need to be overcome by kind of service: Children of migrants or refugees (%)

	Health	Education	ECEC	Housing
Non-availability of services in the area	24.5	26.5	37.2	39.2
Discrimination	37.4	50.5	37.5	45.8
Not eligible for support	27.9	21.8	26.1	30.0
Lack of awareness/insufficient information	50.6	47.6	47.5	30.8
Problems of physical access	14.0	12.4	13.0	14.2
Problems of cultural access	38.1	54.2	46.0	21.9
Problems of affordability	34.0	22.9	39.1	57.7
Services not adapted to children's needs	21.5	36.7	28.0	21.2
Other barriers	5.3	4.4	3.8	3.1
Don't know	13.6	12.0	13.8	11.2
Number	265	275	261	260

Note: The number of cases indicates the total number of respondents who identified at least one barrier for each service.

The figures in bold indicate the three barriers identified as most important.

Source: Online consultation on a European Child Guarantee for vulnerable children

Respondents identifying barriers in respect of migrants, other than those specified in the questionnaire, most often cited language difficulties. In addition, it is noted that children's entitlement to services is in many cases limited by the fact that they are in an irregular situation if they are refugees or recently-arrived migrants. This is particularly the case for children of migrants residing irregularly in the country who have access just to emergency medical treatment in respect of healthcare (noted by a respondent from Slovenia) or restricted access to healthcare during the asylum procedure (Germany). It is also mentioned (Belgium) that reimbursement of the cost of healthcare can be complicated.

As regards access to education, other barriers identified are polarisation of the school system, in the sense that children of migrants tend to be enrolled in the same schools (Slovenia), difficulties in adapting to a new education system (Spain), long waiting times before entry into regular education and inadequate support in primary schools (both in Germany).

3.3 Children with disabilities

For children with disabilities, the most frequently cited barrier in respect of access to healthcare is non-adaptation to children's needs (by 51% of respondents), followed closely by the non-availability of services (50%) and problems of physical access (46%) (Table 4). Affordability is also seen in many countries as a major barrier, especially in Bulgaria and Romania (by 56% of respondents).

Non-adaptation to children's needs is also the most frequently cited barrier in respect of education (54%), in this case, followed closely by problems of physical access (52%), with discrimination (45%) being the third most often cited in some countries and the non-availability of services (43%) in others.

Non-adaptation to children's needs (52%), and problems of physical access (45%) are also two of the three of the most often cited barriers to accessing ECEC for children with disabilities. The most frequently cited barrier, however, is the non-availability of services or facilities in the local area (56%) The barriers identified as being most important are much the same across countries, though in countries with a very low level of child deprivation, the three Nordic countries plus Luxembourg, lack of awareness rather than problems of physical access is the third most frequently reported barrier (by 48% of respondents).

In the case of access to housing, problems of affordability (52%), problems of physical access (49%) and non-availability of the services in the area (42%) are the three barriers cited most, though non-adaptation to children's needs (40%) is a close fourth and the third most cited barrier in many countries, including in particular in Bulgaria and Romania.

Table 4. Main barriers that need to be overcome by kind of service: Children with disabilities (%)

	Health	Education	ECEC	Housing
Non-availability of services in the area	50.2	42.6	56.4	41.9
Discrimination	19.4	45.3	26.9	16.9
Not eligible for support	15.8	15.8	17.8	21.4
Lack of awareness/insufficient information	33.2	30.9	30.7	16.1
Problems of physical access	46.2	52.5	44.7	49.2
Problems of cultural access	11.1	19.6	14.8	7.7
Problems of affordability	41.1	22.3	34.1	52.4
Services not adapted to children's needs	51.4	54.3	51.5	40.3
Other barriers	4.7	4.5	2.3	3.6
Don't know	11.1	8.7	8.3	9.7
N	253	265	264	248

Note: The number of cases indicates the total number of respondents who identified at least one barrier for each service.

The figures in bold indicate the three barriers identified as most important.

Source: Online consultation on a European Child Guarantee for vulnerable children

Other barriers apart from those specified that are identified as being important for children with disabilities include a lack of specialised personnel (Italy) and 'double discrimination', in particular for Roma children (Slovenia) and for those from poor families (France). They also include a lack of political commitment for the adoption of inclusive policies (Hungary and Austria) and the lack of financial support (Luxembourg).

For healthcare, specific obstacles identified are the lack of a comprehensive service adapted to children's needs (Spain and Bulgaria), especially for the transition to adult life, and the difficulty of understanding the system of care available (Finland and Germany).

For education, the other barriers mentioned relate to the scarcity of finance and limited number of specialised centres (Spain), the inadequate implementation of inclusive education (Germany) and the limited access to tertiary education (Slovenia), as well as the lack of support teachers for children with disabilities (Italy).

In the case of ECEC, the need to provide support families and not just children is pointed out (Spain).

As regards access to housing, it is pointed out that the shortage of suitable accommodation could create the additional problem for families of having to move away from the area where they live and are familiar with (Finland).

3.4 Summary

In sum, the main barriers to accessing services identified differ according to the nature of the disadvantage experienced by children. For children living in precarious family situations, they relate to the non-availability of services in the local area, a lack of awareness of what is available and problems of affordability. In addition, they include discrimination and cultural obstacles in respect of access to education and non-eligibility for support in respect of access to decent housing.

For children of migrants or refugees, the main barriers relate to discrimination and cultural obstacle as well as insufficient information about the services available and, for ECEC and housing, the problem of affordability. Their residence status also represents a general problem in many cases as it affect their access to many services.

For children with disabilities, the main barriers identified are problems of physical access, the non-adaptation of services and facilities to children's needs and simply their non-availability in many cases. Discrimination was also cited by many in respect of education and problems of affordability in respect of housing.

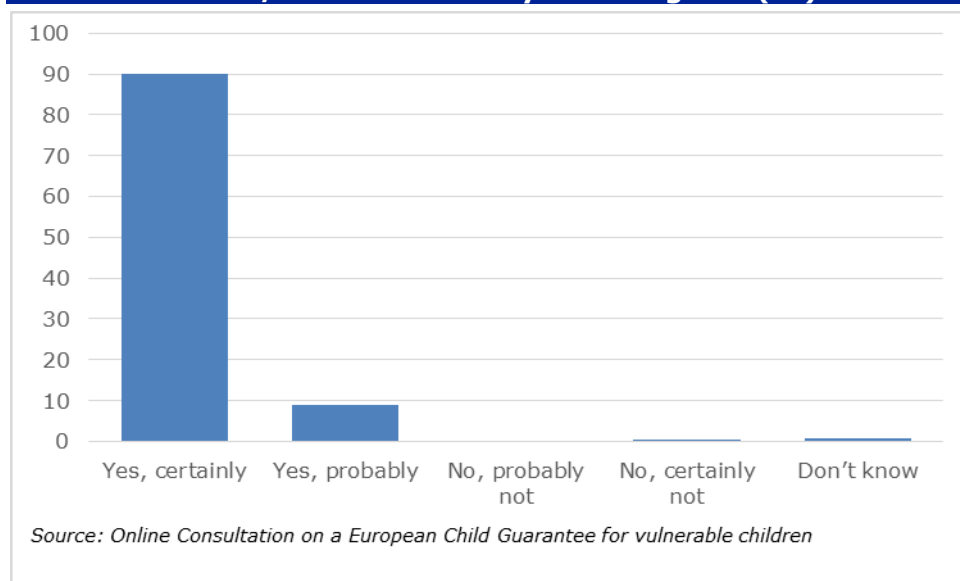
The barriers identified are to a large extent common across countries, but there are some differences, which in some degree seem to be related to the level of deprivation among children.

4 Increasing EU political commitment?

This section of the questionnaire includes three questions on the political commitment of the EU towards disadvantaged children.

An overwhelming majority of respondents (89%) consider that the EU should certainly do more to improve access for vulnerable children to essential services or social rights (specifically, healthcare, education, ECEC, nutrition and housing). Only 2% think that the EU has no role to play in this, while 4% do not know (Figure 5). Most of those against the EU doing more are consultants and researchers while most of those replying that they do not know are from national and regional authorities (including Managing Authorities of EU Cohesion policy programmes).

Figure 5. Do you think the EU should do more to improve access for vulnerable children to some/all of the five key social rights? (%)

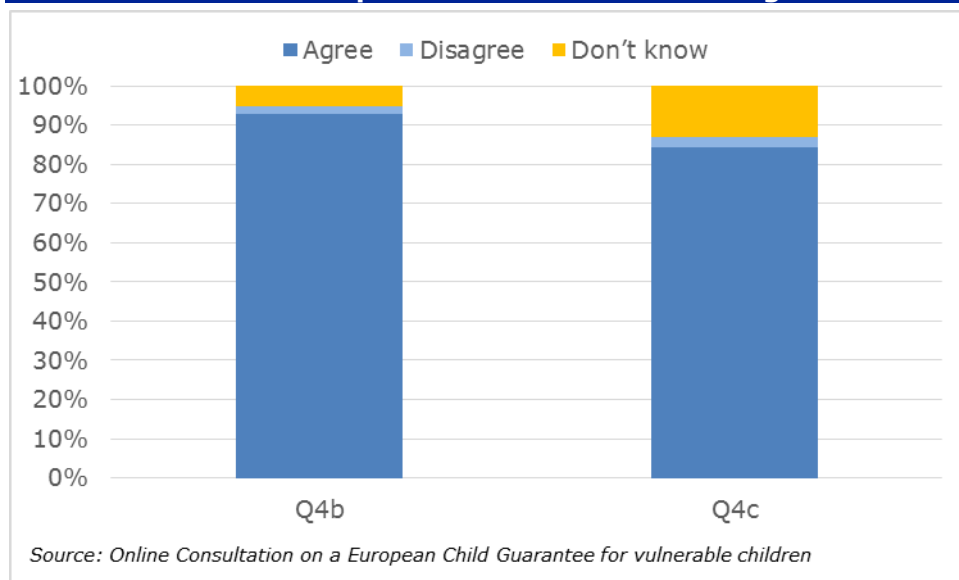


The questionnaire also asked whether or not the implementation of the 2013 EU Recommendation on Investing in children and of the European Pillar of Social Rights must be a high political priority at EU level. Almost all the respondents (93%) agree that it should

be, with only 2% not agreeing and 5% expressing no opinion, a disproportionate number of them again coming from national and regional authorities (Figure 6).

The third question in the section was whether the implementation of the 2017 Communication on the protection of children in migration should be a high political priority at EU level. Although a large majority (84%) agree, the proportion is smaller than for the previous question, with slightly more (3%) disagreeing and significantly more (13%) replying that they do not know. Most of those in both these groups are from regional and national authorities and from Managing Authorities responsible for Cohesion policy programmes.

Figure 6. The importance of implementing the EU Recommendations on Investing in Children, the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Communication on the protection of children in migration



Q4b: The implementation of the 2013 EU Recommendation on Investing in children and of the European Pillar of Social Rights must be a high political priority at EU level

Q4c: The implementation of the 2017 Communication on the protection of children in migration must be a high political priority at EU level

5 Monitoring and reporting on child poverty and on children's access to key social rights

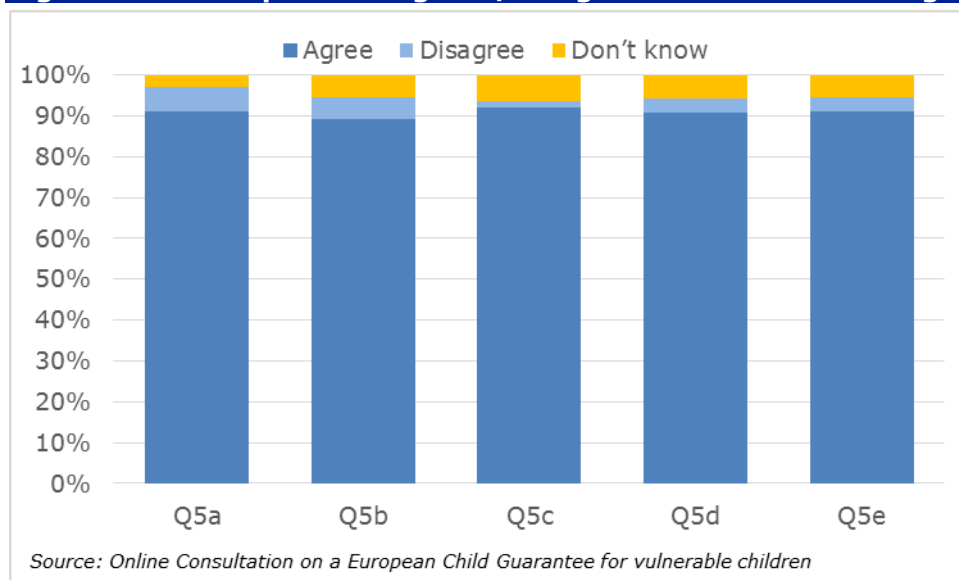
This section of the questionnaire asked respondents whether or not they agree with five statements on the monitoring and reporting of child poverty and on children's access to key social rights, specifically:

- Each Member State should report annually to the EU on the situation of child poverty and children's access to their social rights in the country.
- The Commission should encourage transparency and reporting by Member States on the amounts they spend on policies that fight child poverty and promote children's social rights.
- The indicators used for monitoring the implementation of the Pillar of Social rights should contain at least one indicator specifically on the situation of children.
- The Commission and Member States should be committed to assessing all economic, employment, social and environmental policies for their likely impact on child poverty.
- The EU should improve the quality and availability of data on the living conditions of vulnerable children.

The large majority of respondents (90% or more) agree with all five statements (Figure 7). Support for reporting and monitoring is slightly higher in countries where the level of child deprivation is high or very high, most of those disagreeing being from national and regional authorities.

Most of the 5% disagreeing with the second statement (that the EU should encourage transparent and reporting on the amounts spent by Member States) are from national authorities (i.e. those affected by the proposition). Most of those disagreeing with the third statement (that children should be included in indicators for monitoring the Pillar of Social Rights), on the other hand, are from regional authorities and Managing Authorities of Cohesion Policy programmes, though only 2% of all respondents disagree. By contrast, respondents disagreeing with the fourth statement (that all policies should be assessed in terms of their impact on child poverty) are mainly from Managing Authorities and the same is the case for those disagreeing with the fifth statement (on the need for improvements in the quality of data on the living conditions of vulnerable children), though overall only 4% of respondents disagree with each of the two propositions. However, given the small number of respondents, there is a need for caution in drawing any conclusions from this.

Figure 7. The respondent agrees/disagrees with the following statements (%)



Q5a: Each Member State should report annually to the EU on the situation of child poverty and children's access to their social rights in the country

Q5b: The Commission should encourage transparency and reporting by Member States on the amounts they spend on policies that fight child poverty and promote children's social rights

Q5c: The indicators used for monitoring the implementation of the Pillar for Social rights should contain at least one indicator specifically on the situation of children

Q5d: The Commission and Member States should be committed to assessing all economic, employment, social and environmental policies for their likely impact on child poverty

Q5e: The EU should improve the quality and availability of data on the living conditions of vulnerable children

6 The EU's role and methods in policy coordination

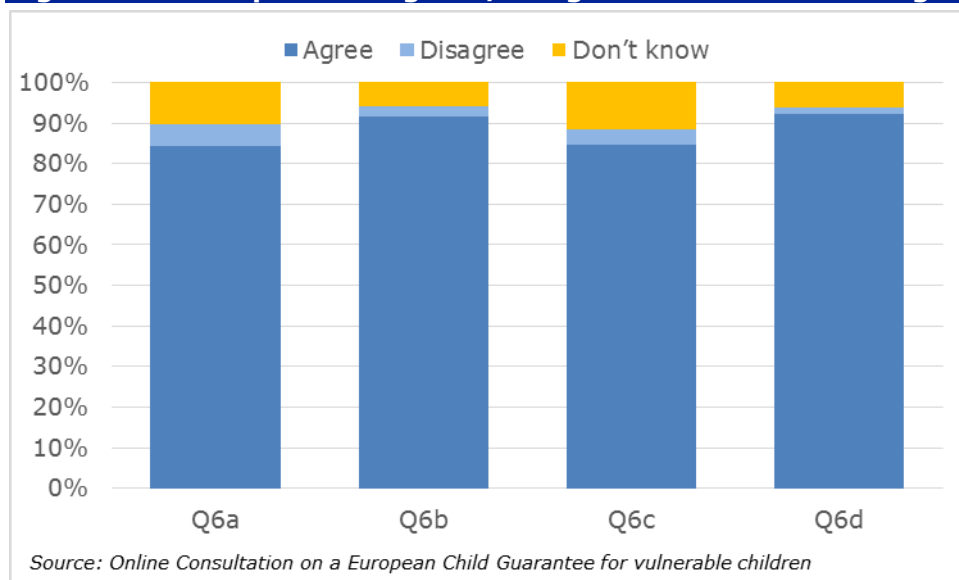
In this section, participants were asked whether or not they agree with four statements about the EU's role in policy coordination and the methods to use, specifically:

- The issue of fighting child poverty and promoting children's social rights should be a more central element of the European Semester than has been the case to date.
- The Commission should do more to promote exchange of best practice between Member States on tackling child poverty and guaranteeing children's social rights.
- A system of regular dialogue between the Commission and all relevant stakeholders should be established specifically to support the effective implementation of the 2013 EU Recommendation on Investing in Children.
- EU targets relating to child poverty and children's social rights should be established as part of any successor to the Europe 2020 Strategy

Again the great majority of respondents agree with all the statements, though slightly more in the case of the second and fourth statements (92-93%) than the first and third (85% for both) (Figure 8). The strongest support comes from countries with high or very high levels of child deprivation, especially for the fourth statement on establishing EU targets on child poverty and children's rights.

Only 1-2% of respondents disagree with the second and fourth statements (that the EU should promote exchange of information on child poverty and establish indicators on this for monitoring the Pillar of Social Rights), while 4-5% disagree with the other two (on combating child poverty being a more central part of the European Semester and establishing dialogue on the EU Recommendation on Investing in Children). Of these, many are from Managing Authorities for Cohesion policy programmes and EU institutions. In addition, for both these propositions, the proportion of don't knows is relatively large (10-12%), implying either that the respondents concerned have insufficient knowledge of the subject matter (the European Semester and the Investing in Children Recommendation) or that they have no opinion one way or the other.

Figure 8 The respondent agrees/disagrees with the following statements



Q6a: The issue of fighting child poverty and promoting children's social rights should be a more central element of the European Semester than has been the case to date

Q6b: The Commission should do more to promote exchange of best practice between Member States on tackling child poverty and guaranteeing children's social rights

Q6c: A system of regular dialogue between the Commission and all relevant stakeholders should be established specifically to support the effective implementation of the 2013 EU Recommendation on Investing in Children

Q6d: EU targets relating to child poverty and children's social rights should be established as part of any successor to the Europe 2020 Strategy

7 Other EU measures

In this section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked whether they agree or not that the EU should also take other forms of action in favour of disadvantaged, specifically:

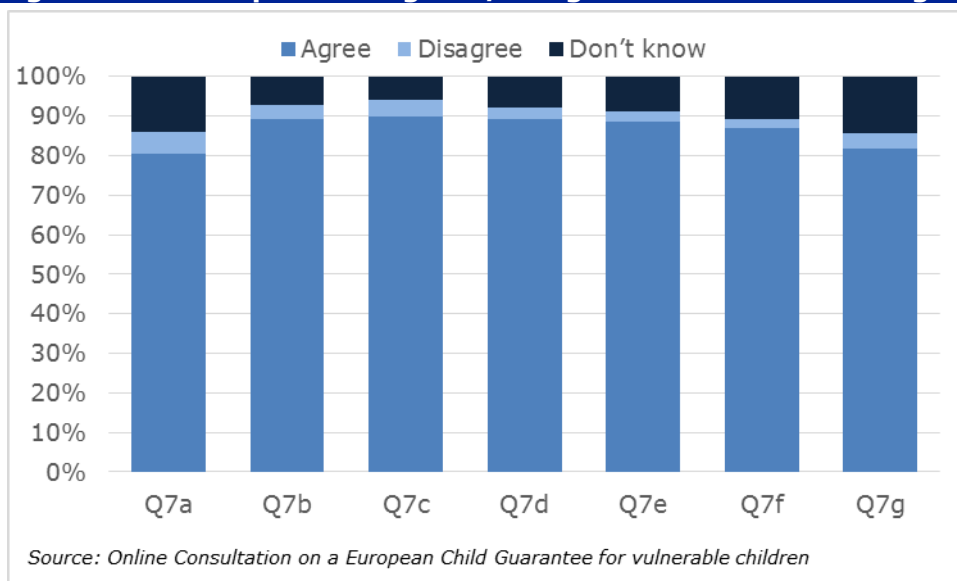
- Member States should be encouraged to develop coordinated approaches to the integration of Roma children into society.
- The Commission should develop and promote good standards for the social integration of migrant children, including unaccompanied minors, and ensure their access to key social rights
- In the implementation of the EU Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed, Member States should be encouraged to give particular attention to parents at risk
- The well-being of children, especially those in vulnerable situations, should be a key element of the follow through of the proposals on work-life balance for working parents and carers
- Children should be a key concern in the implementation of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 and in any future EU strategy relating to disability.
- The 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 Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways should give particular attention to unemployed parents with low skills levels.

Again the large majority of respondents agree with all the propositions, though the extent of support for the first and last (on the approach to the integration of Roma children and the focus on low skilled unemployed parents in the Upskilling Recommendation) is smaller than for the other 5. Even in these cases, however, the proportion agreeing is still around 80%, even if below the figure for the statements. (Figure 9).

Those disagreeing represent less than 5% of respondents for all statements except the first on Roma children, where the figure is 6%, made up to a large extent by people from regional and Cohesion policy managing authorities.

'Don't knows' also account for a relatively large proportion of responses to this statement, as they do for the last proposition on the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation (14% in both cases). Again this could reflect a lack of knowledge about the latter Recommendation or about the nature of an appropriate policy for support of Roma children or simply the lack of opinion on the issues.

Figure 9. The respondent agrees/disagrees with the following statements



Q7a: Member States should be encouraged to develop coordinated approaches to the integration of Roma children into society

Q7b: The Commission should develop and promote good standards for the social integration of migrants children, including unaccompanied minors, and ensure their access to key social rights

Q7c: In the implementation of the EU Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed, Member States should be encouraged to give particular attention to parents at risk

Q7d: The well-being of children, especially those in vulnerable situations, should be a key element of the follow through of the proposals on work-life balance for working parents and carers

Q7e: Children should be a key concern in the implementation of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 and in any future EU strategy relating to disability

Q7f: The Commission support and funding for the Joint Action for Mental Health and Well-being should emphasise the importance of a strong focus on children

Q7g: The implementation of the EU Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways should give particular attention to unemployed parents with low skills levels

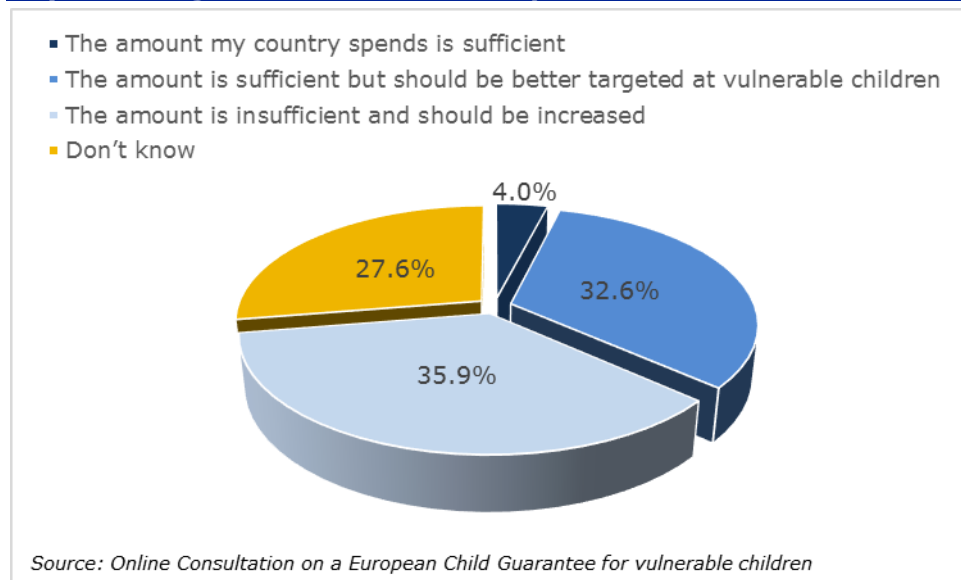
8 EU funding

This section of the questionnaire included four questions on EU funding, specifically on the European Social Fund (ESF), the Fund for European aid to the most deprived (FEAD), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).

The first question is on whether respondents believe their country spends a sufficient amount of the EU funding it receives on relieving child poverty and increasing children's access to key social rights or that it should spend more. Only 4% (mainly from regional and national authorities) consider that the amount spent is sufficient, while a third (33%) think that it is sufficient but should be better targeted at vulnerable children (Figure 10). However, slightly more (36%), disproportionately from NGOs, researchers and, to a lesser extent, Managing Authorities of Cohesion policy programmes, think that the amount is insufficient and should be increased. At the same time, over a quarter of the respondents (28%) are 'don't knows', which is perhaps understandable given the limited information generally available on how much funding goes to the areas concerned.

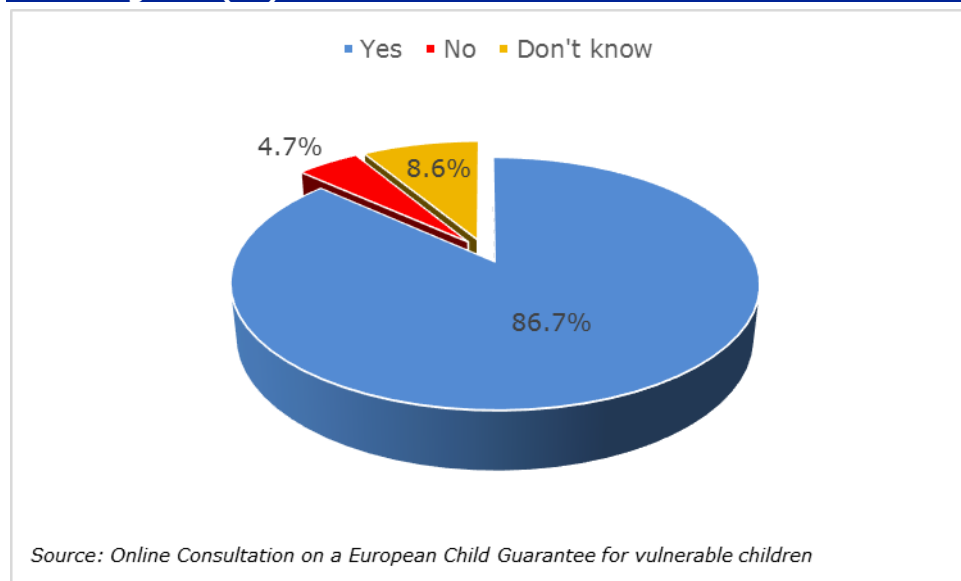
There is some tendency for the share of respondents reporting that their country should spend more of EU funding on relieving child poverty and increasing children’s access to social rights to increase the more acute the problem is in the country concerned (i.e. the higher the rate a child deprivation). The same is true of those indicating that the funding spent in this way should be better targeted. In Bulgaria and Romania, therefore, 48% of respondents indicate that the amount spent, while sufficient, should be better targeted and a further 44% that the amount spent should be increased. None of the respondents in the two countries consider the amount spent on these aims to be sufficient.

Figure 13. Do you think that your country spends a sufficient amount of the EU funding it receives on relieving child poverty and increasing children’s access to key social rights or that it should spend more?



Most respondents (87%) think that the EU should encourage Member States to spend more on combating child poverty and increasing children’s access to social rights. Only 5% disagree, though 9% do not know, these being mainly respondents from regional and national authorities (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Do you think that the EU should encourage Member States to spend more on combating specifically child poverty and increasing children’s access to social rights? (%)

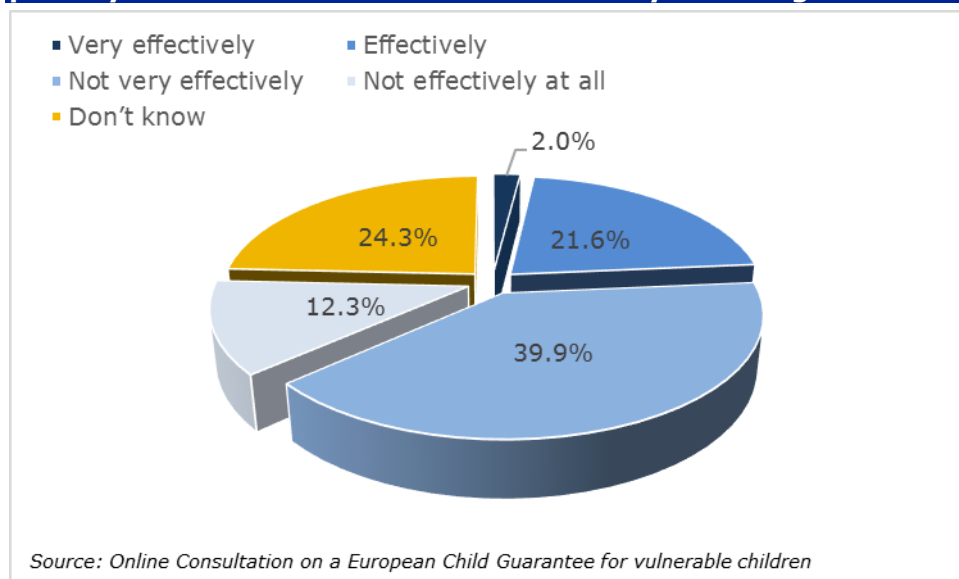


Less than a quarter of respondents (23%) consider that EU Funds have been used effectively in their country to support the development of policies and programmes to combat child poverty or increase children’s access to their social rights, with only 2% believing that they have been used very effectively. Over half (and around two-thirds of NGOs and researchers) think that the funds have not been used effectively, 12% considering that they have not been used effectively at all (these being mainly researchers). By contrast, only 21% of respondents from Managing Authorities think that the funds have not been used effectively.

This leaves almost a quarter (24%, the share being very similar among public authorities and NGOs) who do not know (these being mainly regional and national authorities), reflecting the difficulty of making a judgement on this (Figure 12).

The number of respondents believing that funding is not used effectively is particularly high in countries where child deprivation is high or very high – 70% of the total in the former and 79% in the latter.

Table 12. How effectively do you think EU Funds have been used in your country to support the development of policies and programmes to fight against child poverty or increase children’s access to key social rights?

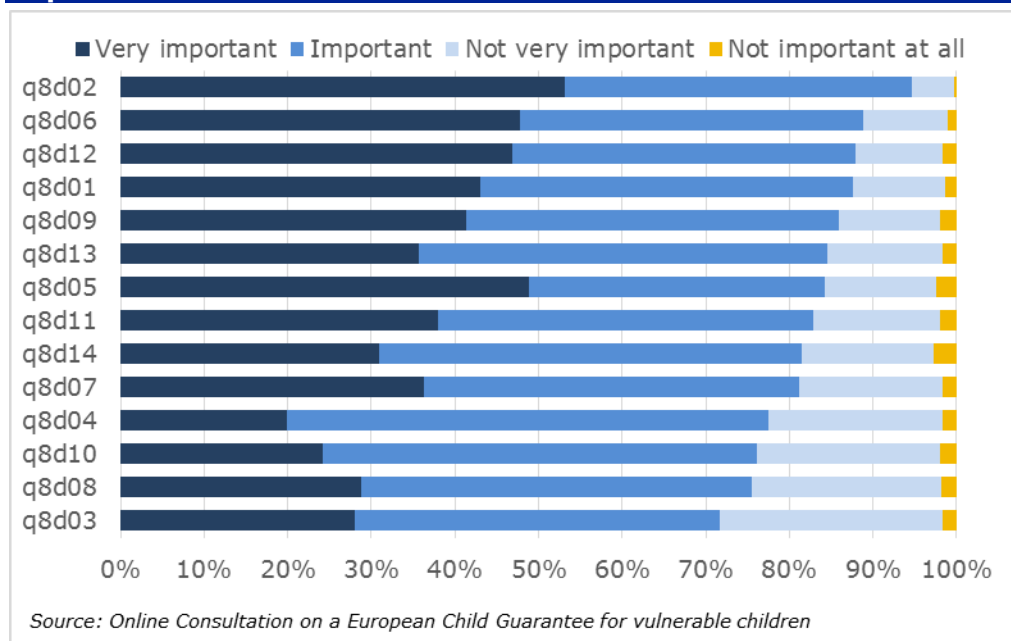


Respondents were also asked to indicate the degree of importance which in their view should be attached to overcoming each of 14 specified barriers to ensuring the more effective use of EU funds so as improve the situation of vulnerable children. In each case, over 70% of respondents consider it important to overcome the barrier concerned. The largest proportion of respondents, almost all of them (95%), think it is important or very important to resolve the fact that there is “no strategic and coordinated approach to combating child poverty and promoting access of children to social rights in the country”. The next second and third largest proportions of respondents (88-89%) consider it important to specifically direct funding, whether from national or EU sources, to tackling child poverty and ensuring children’s social rights, while a similar proportion pointed to the need to overcome the lack of public and political awareness of these issues in the country concerned. In addition, only a slightly smaller proportion identified a lack of national and/or sub-national long-term projects as being important to resolve (Figure 13).

The least important barrier to overcome, in the sense that the largest proportion of respondents identified it as being not important (either not important at all or not very important) is the lack of national and/or sub-national capacity to deal with EU funds (28%). This is closely followed by the lack of good quality projects (25% of respondents), the lack of innovative or pilot projects (24%) and the lack of EU guidance (23%). Nevertheless, it

remains the case, as indicated above, that a large majority of respondents consider these barriers to be important to resolve⁷.

Figure 13. Degree of importance that you think should be attached to overcoming the following barriers to ensure a more effective use of EU funds to improve the situation of vulnerable children



- Q8d02: No strategic and coordinated approach to combating child poverty and promoting access of children to social rights in the country*
- Q8d06: No national or regional funding explicitly dedicated to ("earmarked for") child poverty and children's social rights*
- Q8d12: Lack of targeting of EU funds at vulnerable groups of children*
- Q8d01: Lack of public and political awareness in the country*
- Q8d09: Lack of national and/or sub-national long-term projects*
- Q8d13: Lack of active involvement of stakeholders*
- Q8d05: No EU funding explicitly dedicated to ("earmarked for") child poverty and children's social rights*
- Q8d11: EU funds not sufficiently linked to the implementation of the 2013 EU Recommendation on Investing in Children and the European Pillar of Social Rights*
- Q8d14: Lack of evaluation on the outcome of EU-funded actions*
- Q8d07: Lack of national and/or sub-national budget for co-financing EU-funded measures*
- Q8d04: Lack of EU guidance, including on exchange of best practice*
- Q8d10: Lack of national and/or sub-national pilot or innovative projects*
- Q8d08: Lack of sufficient good quality projects*
- Q8d03: Lack of national and/or sub-national capacity to deal with EU funds*

Some 75 respondents identified other barriers that need to be overcome in addition to those specified. The largest number of respondents (32%) pointed to problems in the EU funding system and, specifically to barriers arising from the project selection system and fund management system more generally. A significant number of these identify the need for effective programme evaluation, some suggest that no EU funding should be received unless common EU values are respected and others indicate the need for an effective

⁷ There are no substantial differences in replies between types of organisation.

system for controlling and sanctioning the usage of funding to be put in place. Other barriers identified in the same broad area include problems of corruption and lack of transparency, the complexity of the funding system (which makes it difficult for small NGOs, in particular, to apply successfully for funds), which is reinforced by a lack of EU guidance, with policy makers at national level often facing language barriers when seeking information on EU funding. The complexity involved in investing in housing under the ERDF was also mentioned.

Almost as many (31%) pointed to problems of political commitment and administrative issues. It is suggested that there is a need for evidence-based and targeted policies, as well as an integrated strategy covering all government policies and for these policies to be implemented effectively. Specific barriers identified include excessive bureaucracy, long waiting lists to access services, a lack of cooperation between the different departments or institutions responsible for policies in the relevant areas and poor organisation of public administration.

A significant proportion (19%) suggests the need for the adoption of a new approach involving both parents and children in the design, delivery and monitoring of services, as well as in the planning of EU funds. Some also propose the greater involvement of social partners and social workers in these tasks.

A slightly smaller proportion (16%) identified discrimination and stigmatisation as important barriers, discrimination against Roma children and children with disabilities being mentioned specifically. It is suggested in particular that EU funds should never support services that segregate these two groups of children from others. The same is suggested in respect of migrants, which it is said, prevents a holistic approach to families and so to the social inclusion of children. It is noted that that separation creates problems for service providers, that services for undocumented migrants are largely excluded from ESF support and that services co-financed by the ESF are only accessible to asylum seekers in some Member States. It is also pointed out that the exclusion of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants with children from labour market integration measures reduces the impact of EU funds on the social inclusion of children in this particular group.

A smaller proportion still (12%) point to the monitoring of policies as being insufficient and that the lack of reliable data, particularly on vulnerable children, is a major issue. There is a need, it is suggested, to organise regular collection of data, disaggregated by region, and to ensure that data are comparable across countries.

In sum, the large majority of respondents consider that their country does not spend a sufficient amount of EU funding on relieving child poverty. For most, the amount that is spent should be increased or better targeted and the EU should encourage Member States to spend more. They also largely believe that EU funding is not used effectively in their countries.

The main barriers to achieving a more effective use of EU funds are seen as the absence of a strategic and coordinated approach to combating child poverty, a lack of funding at all levels being explicitly targeted at reducing child poverty and insufficient public and political awareness of the issue. Some respondents also point to the complexity of the EU funding system, a lack of political will to tackle the issue, discrimination against disadvantaged children in the implementation of policies and a lack of data to reveal the extent and nature of child poverty and the way that it is changing.

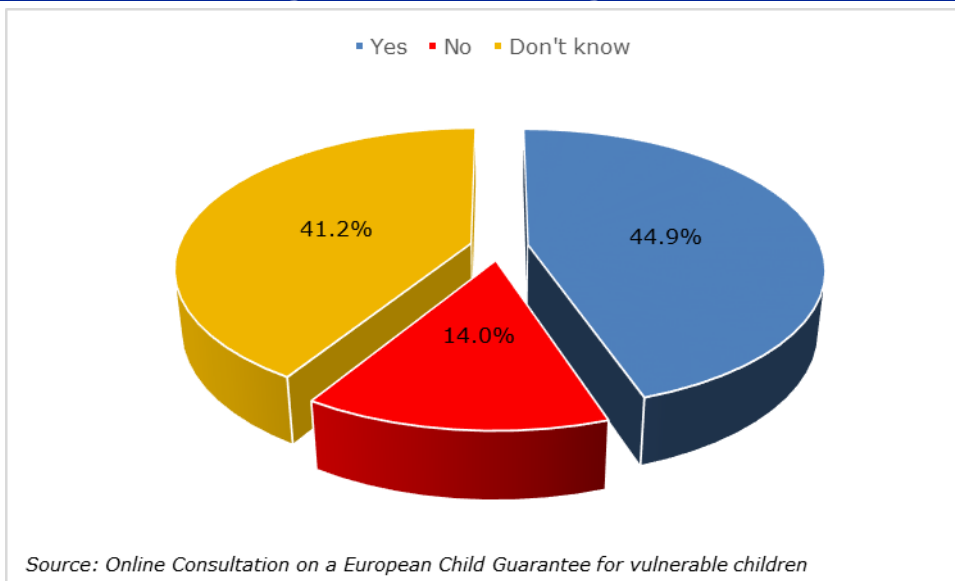
9 The way forward?

In this section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked for their views on the creation of a specific EU instrument for ensuring children's social rights.

In practice, less than half of respondents (45%) consider that a specific EU instrument would be more effective in ensuring children's social rights than those which already exist. At the same time, this is over three times the proportion of those that think it would not be more effective. (14%) (Figure 14). This leaves a large number (41%) who do not know, including half the respondents from national and regional authorities. Many respondents,

therefore, are unwilling to express a view one way or the other, perhaps until they see what a specific instrument would look like.

Figure 14. Do you think that compared to the measures and instruments that already exist at national and EU levels, a specific EU instrument would be more effective in ensuring children’s social rights?



The respondents who consider that a specific instrument would be more effective than existing measures were asked to express their views on what such an instrument should look like. 103 of them did so. A few (5% of those who replied) point to the difficulty of introducing an instrument of this kind at EU level because it is likely to be resisted in some countries. It is also pointed out that there should not be a one-size-fits-all approach but that the instrument should be adapted to the socio-political and economic context in each country, using any funding made available where it is most needed.

Many respondents emphasise that the approach should be holistic and EU-wide but also coherent with national policies and that it should trigger reforms at this level. It should also take explicit account of the complex and multi-faceted nature of child poverty. In this regard, several respondents point to the need to take into consideration the specific circumstances of different groups of disadvantaged children (those abused, those without adequate parental care, those from ethnic minorities, those with disabilities, those who are homeless and so on).

Many, in addition, call for a stronger emphasis on the involvement of children themselves in expressing their views and participating in public policy decisions. Others also stress the need for parents to be involved and the importance of them being supported in their role as educators by the provision of training and ‘family mentors’. The need for political commitment is equally emphasised as being essential to ensure the success of any approach, along with effective collaboration at national level between all the organisations that require to be involved.

Around a third of respondents to the question call for the instrument to be underpinned by a budget, some suggesting a specific funding programme, others a specific investment priority as part of a European Social Fund Plus (an ESF+) or of the European Structural and Investment Funds more generally. Some also express the view that Member States should be committed to supporting EU funds earmarked for combating child poverty by providing national, regional or local counterpart financing.

In addition, several respondents stress the need for any new EU funding to be properly targeted⁸ and for it not to reduce the resources available for the social inclusion of other target groups. It is also emphasised that spending of the funds should be monitored and that inappropriate use should be sanctioned. The need for effective guidance on accessing EU funds, as well as assistance in planning and putting projects in place, is equally underlined.

For some 20% of respondents, it is important to establish adequate means of reporting, monitoring and evaluation. In particular, data should be collected on both the situation of each target group of children and indicators set up on the effectiveness of the measures implemented. Academics, it is suggested, could be consulted to advise on the establishment of such indicators and on suitable methods to evaluate the impact of the measures introduced. It is pointed out that if these indicators were integrated into existing reporting arrangements, they would help to monitor progress in ensuring children's access to social rights and combating child poverty, as well as the outcomes of the measures themselves, which, in turn, would assist in the formulation of effective policies. It is noted, however, that the establishment of such a monitoring system would require a strong political will and commitment at EU level.

Some 10% of respondents call for a more legal approach and for common EU legislation on children's rights in order to oblige Member States to take action. It is proposed, for example, that the 2013 Recommendation on Investing in children should become a regulation or a directive and that a multiannual action plan should be adopted to support its implementation. It is also suggested that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child be ratified and a follow-up established with regular reporting and that an EU Convention against Child Poverty be adopted to complement this. It is proposed, in addition, that the situation as regards child poverty should be part of the European Semester evaluation of Member State socio-economic performance and that the new EU instrument on children's rights should become a 'partner' to the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Other suggestions made are to increase exchange of best practice, in particular, by the European Commission setting-up an online database of examples and by encouraging and helping national experts and professionals in this area to share experience. It is also suggested to reinforce the role of the Ombudsman for Children's rights in all Member States and increase their involvement in the monitoring of child poverty, as well as to establish minimum standards at EU level for the provisions of relevant services.

In sum, almost half of respondents to the questionnaire consider that a specific EU instrument would be more effective in ensuring children's social rights than existing instruments. For most of them, such an instrument should involve an approach that is comprehensive, properly targeted and effectively coordinated at EU level. For many, it should also involve children and parents and be underpinned by a budget, which could come from existing EU funds, but should not reduce resources available for the social inclusion of other groups. Spending should be monitored and effective guidance provided on how to access the funding concerned.

For many too, there is a need to give attention to the reporting, monitoring and evaluation of the new instrument, as well as to data collection and the development of a set of suitable indicators. For some, there is also a need to establish common EU legislation on children's rights to oblige Member States to take action, while for others, it is important to encourage and facilitate the exchange of good practice, to reinforce the role of the Ombudsman for Children's rights and to define minimum standards at EU level for the provision of relevant services.

⁸ Opinions diverged on what should be targeted. For some respondents, it should be families and children at risk of poverty and organisations working closely with families and children; for others, it should be on housing availability, the training of social workers and the education of vulnerable children.

Conclusion

The online consultation was implemented as part of a study on the feasibility of introducing a Child Guarantee for vulnerable children in the EU and was aimed at gathering views on the feasibility, efficiency and overall benefits of such a scheme. Over 1,150 people were invited to fill in the questionnaire between 14 January 2019 and 22 February 2019 and 301 valid replies were received.

The responses to the questionnaire came mainly from people expressing views on behalf of organisations and, in particular, of NGOs and national public authorities. When interpreting the replies, it is important to keep in mind the geographical imbalance, in the sense that those responding were not evenly distributed across the EU.

The large majority of respondents indicated that their country should combat child poverty and social exclusion better and that the EU should help in this by doing more than it has up to now. This was particularly true for countries where the level of child deprivation is relatively high. The greater involvement of the EU was supported in particular by respondents from NGOs.

The main barriers to children's access to key social services in the view of respondents, differ according to the type of disadvantage experienced by the children.

- Independently of the type of service provided, the main barriers identified for children living in precarious family situations are the non-availability of services, lack of awareness of those available and problems of affordability. Discrimination and problems relating to cultural access were also relevant for access to education, while the non-eligibility for support was identified as one of the main barriers to access decent housing.
- For children of migrants or refugees, the major barriers identified stem from discrimination and problems of cultural access, as well as insufficient information and the lack of affordability (specifically for early childhood education and care and housing). Being a migrant and the residence status involve is also seen as a problem since it affects access to many services.
- For children with disabilities, the main barriers are seen as problems of physical access, services not being adapted to children's needs and the non-availability of services. In addition, a number of respondents pointed to problems of discrimination, specifically as regards education and problems of affordability as regards housing.

The large majority of respondents was strongly in favour of more EU political commitment to improving the access of vulnerable children to key social rights, preferably on the basis of the 2013 EU Recommendation on Investing in children and the European Pillar of Social Rights. Most also agreed on the importance of monitoring, assessing and reporting on child poverty and children's access to key social rights⁹.

The large majority of respondents also support the idea that the Commission should do more to promote exchange of best practice between Member States and that EU targets relating to child poverty and children's social rights should be established as part of any successor to the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Equally, respondents expressed support too for:

- the development and the promotion by the Commission of good standards for the social integration of the children of migrants;

⁹ More specifically, the large majority of respondents therefore expressed support for the annual reporting by the Member States on child poverty and children's access to social rights in their country; for establishing an obligation to assess the impact of policies on child poverty; for creating an indicator for the situation of children in the "Social Scoreboard"; for more EU involvement to improve the quality and availability of data on vulnerable children, and for encouraging transparency and reporting by Member States on the amounts spent on policies to combat child poverty and promote children's social rights.

- giving particular attention to parents at risk when implementing the EU Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed;
- the well-being of children, especially those in vulnerable situations, being a key element in proposals on work-life balance for working parents and carers.

In addition, most respondents believe that their country does not spend a sufficient amount of EU funding on relieving child poverty and that the amount should be increased or better targeted. They also consider that EU funding is not used effectively in their countries. The main barriers to ensuring a more effective use of EU funds were identified as the absence of a strategic and coordinated approach to combating child poverty and of national or regional funding explicitly dedicated to child poverty; the lack of targeting of EU funds at vulnerable groups of children; of public and political awareness of the issue and of national and/or sub-national long-term projects. Other barriers identified include the complexity and lack of transparency in the project selection procedures and in the management of funds.

Finally, almost half of all respondents to the questionnaire believe that a specific EU instrument would be more effective in ensuring children's social rights than existing measures. For most of these, this instrument should be comprehensive, properly targeted and coordinated at EU level and should involve the participation of children and parents. It should have a budget, which could come from existing EU funds, but it should not reduce resources available for the social inclusion of other target groups. Respondents also consider that particular attention should be given to the reporting, monitoring and evaluation of the new instrument and that a set of indicators should be developed for the purpose.

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