



# Developments in Child and Family Policy in the EU in 2019

European Platform for Investing in  
Children: Third annual thematic report



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and Inclusion

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## **Executive Summary: 2019 Developments in Child and Family Policy across the EU**

The objective of this report is to provide an overview of developments in the area of child and family policy across the European Union, with a focus on developments that took place in the year of 2019. This report has been produced by the European Platform for Investing in Children (EPIC).<sup>i</sup> Established in 2013, EPIC monitors key and innovative developments in child and family policy across the European Union (EU). The project develops resources to support Member States in implementing the 2013 European Commission Recommendation, ‘Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage’.<sup>ii</sup>

The 2013 Recommendation sets out principles on how Member States can support positive well-being and outcomes for children and families. These principles are structured across three main pillars: access to adequate resources, access to affordable quality services, and children’s right to participation. The focus of this report is on developments relating to implementation of the Recommendation across the EU. The report’s focus has further been shaped by the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), proclaimed in 2017.<sup>iii</sup> This Pillar sets out 20 key principles against which Member States can benchmark their social policies. Three of those 20 principles relate directly to children and families, including:

- Principle 1: The right to quality and inclusive education;
- Principle 9: The right of parents and carers to work-life balance;
- Principle 11: The right to affordable quality early childhood education and care.

Drawing on areas identified in the 2013 Recommendation and the EPSR, this report first outlines actions at the EU level (Chapter 2), then provides information on developments on five broad issues, including: provision of early childhood education and care (ECEC) (Chapter 3), family leave and actions to improve work-life balance (Chapter 4), social and income support and benefits for families (Chapter 5), children’s participation (Chapter 6) and developments regarding children at risk of poverty, marginalisation or social exclusion (Chapter 7). Information for this report has been gathered in two primary ways: 1) expert consultations; and 2) EPIC’s monthly news-monitoring bulletins, which cover developments in child and family policy in EU Member States. Detailed information on the methodology and its caveats are provided in Annex 1. The next few paragraphs will provide a brief summary of each chapter.

Chapter 2 outlines progress and recent initiatives undertaken by EU institutions and agencies related to the well-being of children and their families in Europe. Notable examples include the Directive on Work-Life Balance and further developments towards a Child Guarantee.

### **Quality ECEC and Work-Life Balance at the forefront**

The adoption of the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems in May 2019 has put early childhood education and care firmly on the national and EU policy agenda.<sup>iv</sup> Accordingly, several EU Member States are continuing their efforts to increase the availability and quality of formal childcare provision. This includes countries allocating funds towards the expansion of childcare places and increased affordability of childcare provision. Countries have also been working towards ensuring the quality of services by reviewing national ECEC quality standards and updating ECEC

programmes/curricula. Some countries have also moved towards making at least some participation in ECEC mandatory.

In 2019, the Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers entered into force.<sup>v</sup> According to the information collected for this report, seven countries – Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Italy, Malta, Netherlands and Slovenia – have extended the length of available paternity leave. Four Member States – Croatia, Czechia, Slovenia and Slovakia – have increased the amount of benefits or allowance paid to some parents during family leave. Two Member States – Hungary and Romania – have made policy or legislative changes aimed to support grandparents who are providing childcare for their grandchildren. Information collected for this report shows that at least two Member States – Ireland and Slovenia – have implemented leave provisions to better support adoptive families. Finland has increased its leave provisions for single mothers, and Spain and Sweden have increased the flexibility of leave arrangements for same-sex parents.

### **Changes in financial support**

While most EU Member States provide some sort of financial assistance to families, formats and amounts can vary greatly between countries. In 2019, two countries – Belgium and Estonia – made significant changes to their overall benefit systems. There have also been multiple developments regarding changes to child benefits, tax credits, and child allowances paid to families. In 2019, Malta, Cyprus, Germany, Slovakia and Denmark increased support for low income families. Other notable developments include increased benefits for larger families. Italy, Lithuania and Poland introduced benefits for families with three or more children, for example by offering ‘family card programmes’ that enable families to gain access to certain services. Poland and Hungary introduced measures specifically targeting mothers who have many children, which applies to mothers who no longer have any dependent children. Hungary has abolished personal income tax for women who have raised four or more children. Poland has introduced the ‘Mama 4 Plus programme’, which provides financial support to all mothers over the age of 60 who have had four or more children and meet specific income criteria. Some Member States – including Belgium, Malta and Germany – also reported increases in benefits for single parents.

### **Children’s participation and inclusion**

The year of 2019 marked the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Article 12 of the CRC addresses specifically children’s right to participation in matters that affect them. In at least three Member States – including Germany, Ireland and Estonia – children have been consulted at some point during the policy process in 2019. Most of these consultations were regarding the development of national youth strategies. In other Member States, initiatives aimed at increasing children’s participation have been created, such as the formation of a National Council of Children in Portugal, and the establishment of a Children’s Board in Romania.

Reducing child poverty and social exclusion is the cornerstone of the 2013 Recommendations on Investing in Children. This EPIC annual thematic report adopts a broad definition of the term ‘vulnerable’; Chapter 7 provides an overview of the data collected for this report on 1) migrant children, 2) children from ethnic minority or/and Roma background, 3) children with special educational needs (SEN), 4) children living in institutions or foster care arrangements

and 5) children living in non-traditional families. Data collection yielded the most information for group number three (children with SEN).

### **Methodology limitations**

Due to limitations of the methodology (see Annex 1), the amount of information available for all Member States differed across these five areas. However, the breadth and reach of the EPIC project – in terms of both thematic areas and geographical coverage – allows readers to gain a useful overview of some of the important developments that have taken place in 2019 in regard to child and family policy at the EU and Member State levels.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

This third annual thematic report, produced by the European Platform for Investing in Children (EPIC), provides an overview of child and family policy and practice developments that occurred at EU level and at Member State level (EU28) throughout the year of 2019.<sup>vi</sup> The report covers developments in areas that relate to the 2013 European Commission Recommendation ‘Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage’.<sup>vii</sup>

The 2013 Recommendations set out principles and recommendations for Member States regarding supporting positive well-being and outcomes for children and families. Box 1 provides a more detailed breakdown of the three key pillars of the European Commission Recommendations.

### Box 1 Three key pillars of the European Commission’s Recommendation ‘Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage’

1. **Access to adequate resources**
  - Support parents’ participation in the labour market
  - Provide for adequate living standards through a combination of benefits
2. **Access to affordable quality services**
  - Reduce inequality at a young age by investing in early childhood education and care
  - Improve education systems’ impact on equal opportunities
  - Improve the responsiveness of health systems to address the needs of disadvantaged children
  - Provide children with a safe, adequate housing and living environment
  - Enhance family support and the quality of alternative care settings
3. **Children’s right to participate**
  - Support the participation of all children in play, recreation, sport and cultural activities
  - Put in place mechanisms that promote children’s participation in decision-making that affects their lives

*Source:* European Commission. 2013, ‘Commission Recommendation of Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage’.

The report also aligns with three of the 20 principles of the 2017 European Pillar of Social Rights that are directly relevant to children and families.<sup>viii</sup> These are:

- Principle 1: The right to quality and inclusive education
- Principle 9: The right of parents and carers to work-life balance
- Principle 11: The right to affordable quality early childhood education and care.

Progress towards achieving the Pillar’s principles is recorded in the form of a social scoreboard of indicators.<sup>ix,x</sup> Delivering on the Pillar was reiterated in the ‘New Strategic Agenda 2019–2024’, which was agreed by the European Council on 20 June 2019.<sup>xi</sup>

The information gathered for this report stems from two main sources of data. First, data was collected by experts in each Member State in response to a questionnaire, which can be found in Annex 2. Second, data has been gathered via the EPIC monthly news-monitoring bulletins, which collate and disseminate information about developments in child and family policy and practice across the EU every month. A detailed overview of the data and methodology used in this report can be found in Annex 1.



The remainder of this report consists of seven chapters. Chapter 2 provides an overview of relevant EU level developments that took place in the area of child and family policy in 2019. Chapter 3 reviews developments in the area of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) at Member State level. Chapter 4 investigates changes and new initiatives in family leave provisions, for both traditional and non-traditional families across the EU. Chapter 5 focuses on income support and/or benefits provided to children and families, including for vulnerable children and families in particular. Chapter 6 turns its attention to policy and practice developments regarding children's rights to participate in decisions that affect them. Chapter 7 covers developments aimed at several different groups of vulnerable children, including: migrant children, children from ethnic or minority background, children with special educational needs (SEN), children living in institutions or foster care, and children living in non-traditional families. The final chapter summarises main observations and outlines remaining challenges and potential next steps.

## Chapter 2: EU-level Actions and Developments in Child and Family Policy

This chapter outlines progress and recent initiatives undertaken by EU institutions and agencies that relate to the well-being of children and their families in Europe. The following sections of this chapter report on key developments related to the three principles that are relevant for children and families, as outlined in Chapter 1.

### Directive on Work-Life Balance

As part of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers was proposed by the EC in 2017.<sup>xii</sup> The Directive was passed by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union in April 2019 and entered into force on 1 August 2019.<sup>xiii</sup> Member States now have until 2022 to transpose the directive into national laws, regulations and administrative provisions.

The Directive aims to improve the existing EU legal and policy provisions related to flexible work arrangements and access to family leave by encouraging a more equal sharing of parental leave between men and women, and by providing support measures for working parents and carers.<sup>xiv</sup>

The Directive set several minimum standards for EU Member States, as detailed in Table 1 below.<sup>xv</sup>

**Table 1 New minimum standards set by the Directive on Work-Life Balance**

	Current EU law	New Directive
<b>Paternity leave</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No minimum standard for paternity leave across EU Member States</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimum of 10 days of paid paternity leave</li> <li>Payment at sick-leave level</li> </ul>
<b>Parental leave</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimum of 4 months per parent, transferable between parents</li> <li>No rule on allowance or payment of leave</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimum of 4 months per parent, including 2 months which are non-transferable between parents</li> <li>The 2 months of non-transferable leave are to be compensated at a level set by Member States</li> <li>Leave can be flexible (full-time, part-time or in fragmented periods)</li> </ul>
<b>Carers' leave</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No minimum standard for carers' leave (except so-called <i>force majeure</i>, which allows a short time of leave for unexpected family reasons)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimum of 5 days of carers' leave per employee per year</li> </ul>
<b>Flexible working arrangements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents returning from parental leave have the right to request reduced and flexible working hours</li> <li>All workers have the right to request part-time work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Right for all working parents of children up to at least eight years old and for all carers to request flexible working arrangements (reduced or flexible working hours and flexibility on the place of work)</li> </ul>

On the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of implementing the United Nations Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Council of the European Union adopted conclusions on gender-equal economies in the EU. The conclusions recognise progress made (e.g. the adoption of the Directive on Work-Life Balance regulating more equal share of leave provisions between both parents), but

also point towards policy and practice areas where gender inequality continues and requires further improvement (e.g. gaps in affordable and high-quality ECEC).<sup>xvi</sup>

## **Childcare and support to children**

### *Developments towards high-quality inclusive ECEC*

Provision of high-quality ECEC services is one of the building blocks of the Commission's vision to create a European Education Area by 2025.<sup>xvii</sup> The adoption of a Proposal for a Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems in May 2019 has put childcare quality firmly on the EU- and national-level agendas.<sup>xviii</sup> In addition, the ET (Education and Training) 2020 framework Thematic Working Group on ECEC – under the auspices of the Commission's DG-EAC – continues to advance policy and practice on the topics of:

1. Professionalisation of ECEC staff as a key element of creating an attractive, sustainable and competent profession;
2. Social inclusion by promoting broad participation in ECEC.<sup>xix</sup>

### *Developments towards inclusive education*

A European Citizens' Initiative called 'Europe CARES: Inclusive Quality Education for Children with Disabilities' is one initiative undertaken in 2019. The aim of this initiative is to ensure that the rights of children and adults with disabilities to be educated together with their peers is guaranteed across EU Member States. The registration of this initiative also began a process of collecting signatures and statements of support across Member States calling on the European Commission to consider drafting a bill on a common EU framework of inclusive education.<sup>xx</sup>

### *Developments towards the Child Guarantee*

Fighting child poverty and social exclusion remains a high priority and there is room to improving the situation of children (see Figure 1). To ensure that every child in the EU has access to basic services, such as healthcare, education, ECEC, decent housing and adequate nutrition,<sup>xxi</sup> the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen proposed the introduction of a European Child Guarantee in the political guidelines of 2019.<sup>xxii</sup>

The European Commission launched a study on the Child Guarantee proposal in 2018 to assess the feasibility, implementation options and added value of the guarantee. As part of the study, an online consultation and a series of expert workshops in 2019 supported the development of recommendations for the implementation of a Child Guarantee. The study concluded at the closing conference in Brussels on 17 February 2020, with a final report published in June 2020.<sup>xxiii</sup> The four workshops held throughout 2019 each focused on one particular group of vulnerable children:xxiii

- children living in precarious family situations;
- children residing in institutions;
- children with a migrant background (including refugee children);
- children with disabilities.

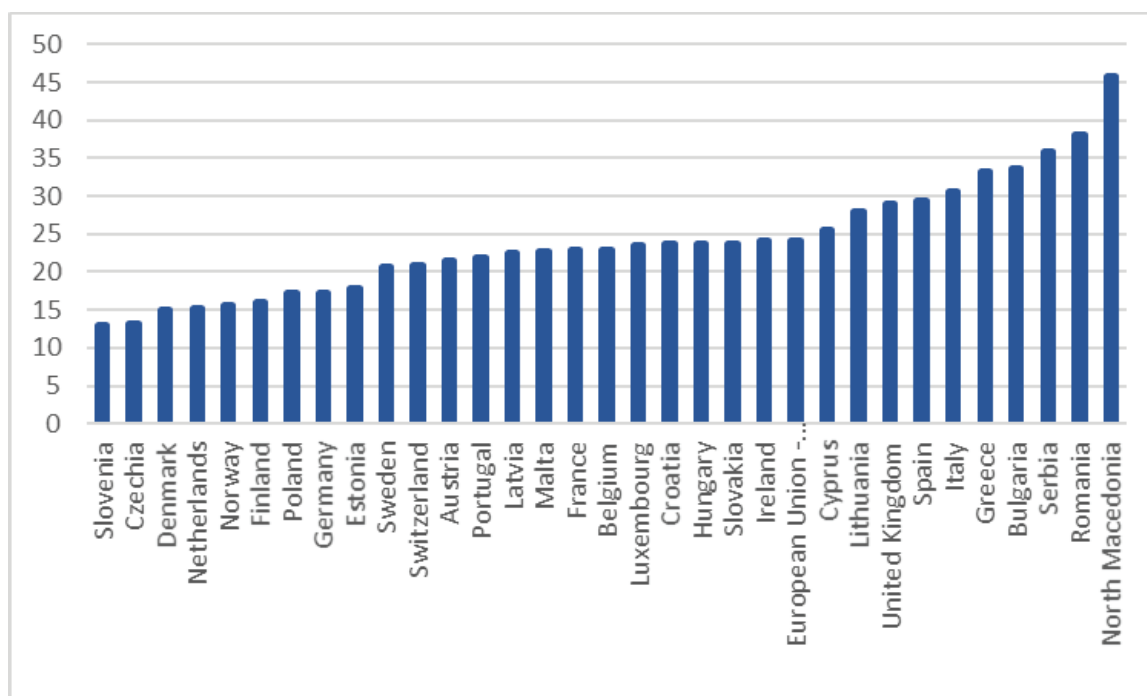


Figure 1 Share of children below 18 years old at risk of poverty or social exclusion, EU28, 2018

Source: Eurostat data [ilc\_peps01]. Unit: Percentage, Less than 18 years, Sex: Total. Data extracted on 12 June 2020

In January 2019, the European Parliament backed a draft regulation on the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) for the period 2021–2027. Under this scheme, Member States will have to allocate at least 5% of ESF+ resources to help foster investment areas such as education, training and lifelong learning, equal access to employment, and social inclusion<sup>xxiv</sup>

### Youth strategy and development of youth policies

The EU Youth Strategy for the period 2019–2027 came into force in January 2019. Focusing on three areas of action – Engage, Connect and Empower – the strategy aims to strengthen young people’s participation in democratic life, connect young people through voluntary engagement, learning mobility and intercultural understanding, and to support youth empowerment.<sup>xxv</sup> In order to enhance cross-sectoral cooperation, knowledge development and exchange on youth issues within the Commission services, the strategy includes an establishment of an EU Youth Coordinator within the European Commission.<sup>xxvi</sup>

A first step towards tackling objectives set by the EU Youth Strategy, based on the EU Youth Goals, was the European Union Youth Conference in March 2019 in Bucharest. Hosted as part of the Romanian Presidency of the EU, the conference had a specific focus on youth employment and the future of work.<sup>xxvii</sup> Finally, a Toolkit on Youth Participation aimed to support young people’s participation in the political life in their community, was developed with the support of the European Youth Foundation and the Council of Europe, and released by an organisation called Youth of European Nationalities. This toolkit is also intended as a training tool to explore the concept of youth participation, its different versions and practical applications.<sup>xxviii</sup>

## Children's rights and children's participation

The year of 2019 marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>xxxix</sup> Article 12 of this convention relates directly to children's right to participation in matters that affect them. Given that 1 out of 5 EU citizens is a child, children should be given the opportunity to participate in decision-making.<sup>xxx</sup> In May 2019, 60 children from 16 EU countries met with representatives from EU institutions, members of civil society organisations and independent experts to discuss ways to ensure that children's voices are heard.<sup>xxxix</sup> Following the conference, the Bucharest Declaration was adopted. This Declaration, which was co-drafted by children, represents political commitment calling policymakers for mechanisms to ensure child participation in decisions that affect their lives, such as a 'clear roadmap' for implementing the UNCRC, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and EU recommendations related to child participation; for provision of training for children and adults about children's right to participate, and for the use of these mechanisms and for a requirement to inform children about policies affecting their right.<sup>xxxii</sup> This development has put children's rights to participate firmly on the EU policy agenda.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

There has also been progress with the development and implementation of the Child Participation Assessment Tool. This tool was developed by the Council of Europe in 2016 to support Member States to meet the goals set out in 2012 by the Recommendation of Participation of Children and Young People under the age of 18.<sup>xxxiv</sup> The application of the tool aims to create opportunities for children's participation, representation and empowerment, and to measure how well children's right to participate is protected in Europe.<sup>xxxv</sup> Upon piloting and testing the tool in Bulgaria, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Latvia and Romania, the tool is now available for implementation across other EU Member States.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Furthermore, ahead of the European Parliament elections in May 2019, child rights organisations from across Europe, together with the European Parliament Intergroup of Children's Rights, launched a Vote for Children campaign to encourage candidates running in the elections to support and defend children's rights.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

### In summary

The principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights guide a number of EU-level initiatives related to child and family policy and well-being. Current priorities for EU and Member State actions aim to ensure that all children and young people are provided with quality and inclusive education, including high-quality inclusive ECEC, and that families can achieve a work-life balance. Developments towards assessing the feasibility of a Child Guarantee also aim to provide all children with strengthened access to critical services. Finally, the EU Youth Strategy, the Bucharest Declaration and developments related to youth and children's participation show the EU's commitment to inclusion of children and young people in decision-making processes at the EU and national level.

## Chapter 3: Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Provision

The well-known benefits of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for children, their parents, and society are the key drivers for EU Member States to continue investing in accessible, affordable and high-quality provision.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Over recent years Member States have made a number of efforts to increase access to and affordability of ECEC services. There has also been an increased policy focus to ensure that high-quality services are being implemented.

Member States have put in place new strategies, action plans and specific policies focusing on the provision of ECEC and other services for children. In Cyprus, a third ‘Demographic and Family Policy Action Plan’ covering the years 2019–2020 was approved<sup>xxxix</sup> and a new ‘unified evaluation plan’ was developed and implemented.<sup>xl</sup> In Malta, two new acts were introduced focusing on education: Arrangement of Education Act 2019<sup>xli</sup> and Teaching and Allied Professions Act 2019.<sup>xlii</sup>

Bulgaria has published a National Strategy for Children 2019–2030.<sup>xliii</sup> A preparatory action towards drafting a Strategy for Children has also concluded in Finland, with the steering group in charge of preparing this strategy publishing a report recommending development of clear objectives, indicators and tools related to the strategy implementation.<sup>xliv</sup> Romania has also implemented a new strategy – the Sustainable Development Strategy 2030.<sup>xlv</sup> In Germany, preparatory activities have begun aiming to introduce a new legal day-care entitlement for children.<sup>xlvi</sup> Lastly, political leaders in France have turned their attention to investing in the early years of children,<sup>xlvii</sup> while the issue of the first thousand days of the child was put firmly on the government's agenda.

### Assessing progress against Barcelona targets

At the Barcelona Summit of the European Council in 2002, Member States set childcare provision targets of at least 33% of children under age 3, and at least 90% of children between age 3 and the mandatory school starting age with access to formal ECEC services by 2010. In spite of efforts and progress made, the extent of children’s participation in formal ECEC services varies considerably among EU Member States.

On average, 35.1% of under-3-year-olds were enrolled in childcare in the EU in 2018, according to Eurostat data. However, there are considerable differences in enrolment among Member States, varying between 63.2% in Denmark, 54.4% in Belgium and 50% in France, to only 11.0% in Poland, 9.0% in Czechia and less than 1.6% in Slovakia. Comparison of the 2010 and 2018 full-time attendance data shows that participation rates increased in most Member States. Yet there are still countries that need to invest more in ECEC provision to reach the Barcelona targets.

In terms of children age 3 and above, 86.9% had access to ECEC services in 2018. However, access to childcare for this age group is still less than the agreed Barcelona target of 90% in 18 EU Member States.

Figure 2 and Figure 3 show the percentage of formal ECEC in all EU Member States for children up to age 3 and for children age 3 up to mandatory school age, respectively.



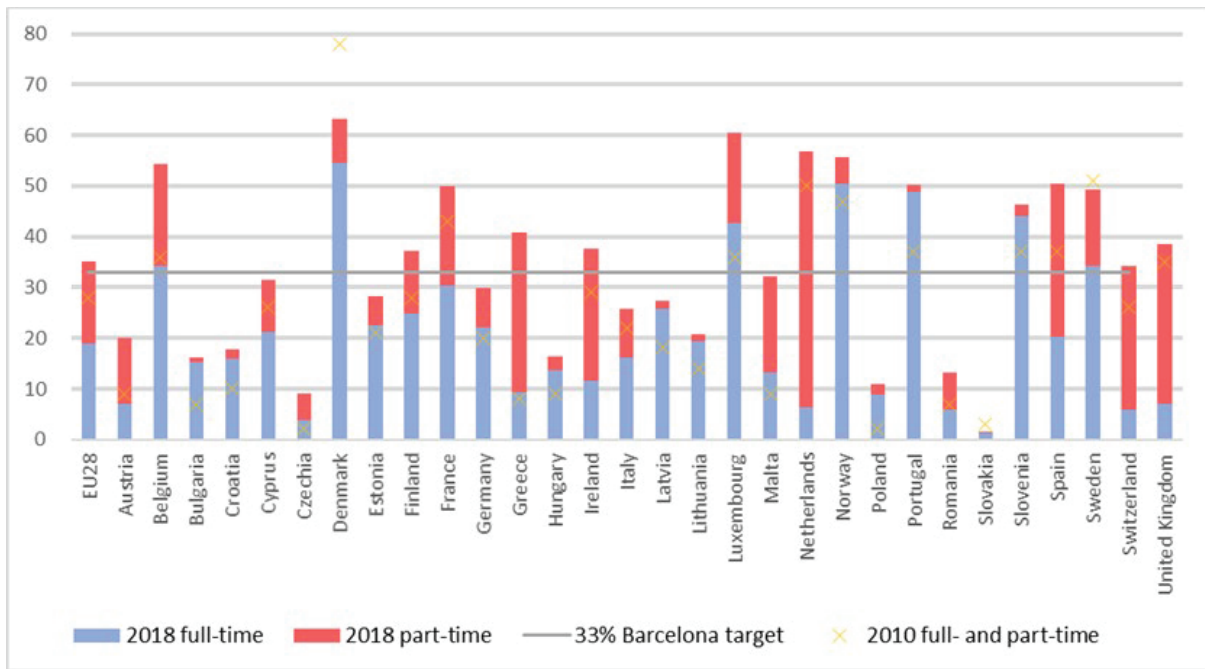


Figure 2 Percentage of children up to age 3 in full-time or part-time formal childcare arrangements, EU28, 2010 and 2018  
 Source: Eurostat, Children in formal childcare or education by age group and duration EU-SILC survey (online data code: [ilc\_caindformal]).

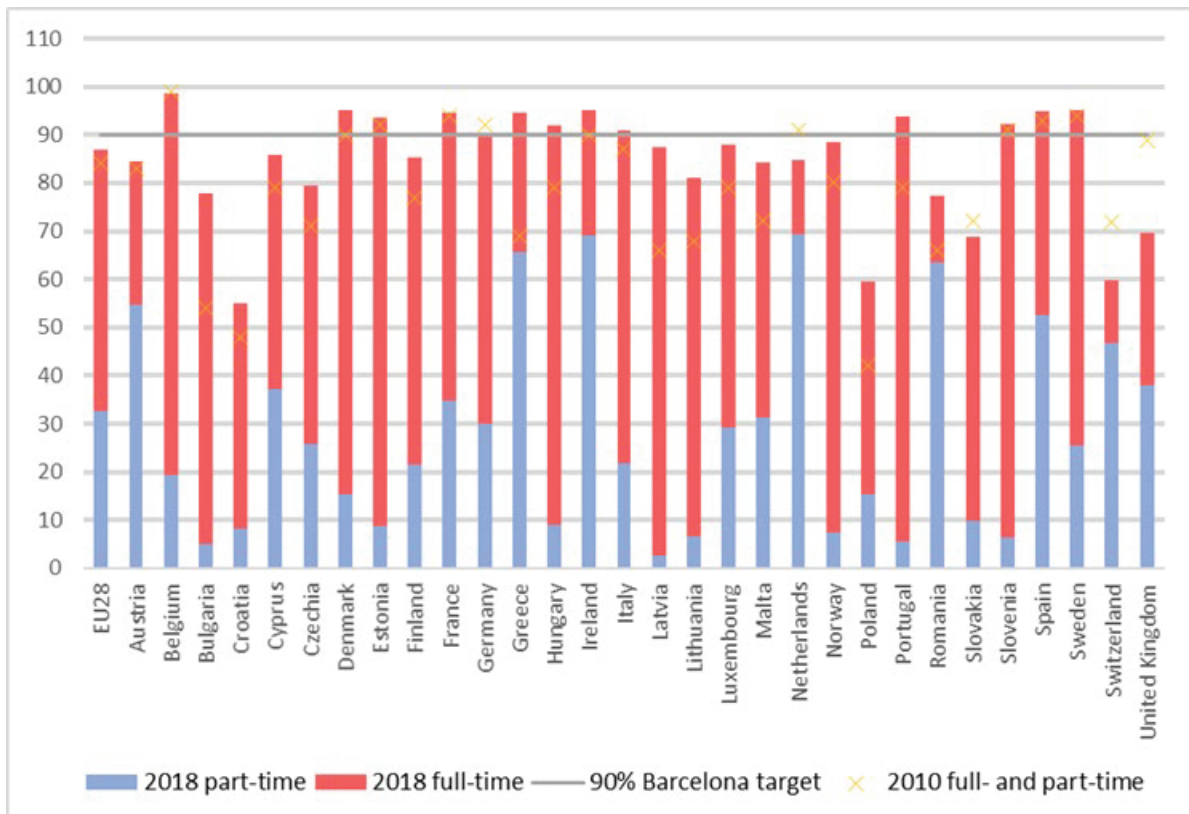


Figure 3 Percentage of children from age 3 to mandatory school age in full-time and part-time formal childcare arrangements, EU28, 2010 and 2018  
 Source: Eurostat, Children in formal childcare or education by age group and duration EU-SILC survey (online data code: [ilc\_caindformal]).

## Expanding availability of and access to ECEC provision

A number of Member States undertook legislative changes to increase availability of and access to childcare provision. This included expanding the number of places to increase capacity, making provision to cater to the particular needs of certain groups of children, and sharing information about ECEC provision.

For instance, in Denmark, the government announced an initiative called ‘The 1,000 days fund’ (1.000-dages puljen) and secured DKK 760 million (approx. €102 million) to finance it. The aim of this initiative is to financially support day-care institutions with a high proportion of children from socio-economically disadvantaged and vulnerable families. It is estimated that the money would facilitate recruiting extra staff in around 500 day-care institutions for children aged 0–2 years old (nurseries), benefiting between 12,000 and 15,000 children, and for continuing education for day-care providers and educators.<sup>xlviii</sup>

Additional funds for the National Childcare Scheme have been secured in Ireland for more childcare and ECEC places. The Ministry for Children and Youth Affairs allocated an additional €8.1 million for childcare capital grants in 2020, with the majority of this funding (€7.2 million) to be spent on early childhood education and care services. The funds, available from October 2019, are used to create new early childhood education and care places, as well as childcare places for children of school age.<sup>xlix</sup> This is the first statutory entitlement to provide financial support for childcare in Ireland and consists of a system of universal and means-tested subsidies to support families in meeting the cost of childcare.<sup>l</sup> In Greece, the allocation of additional financial resources (€270 million for the year 2019–2020 compared, with €234 million in 2018) has created 3,000 places in childcare centres and 9,000 places for preschool children in 2019 (with another 9,000 places to be created in 2020).<sup>li</sup> In Spain, an additional €53 million was allocated for the school year 2019–2020 in order to implement universal access to ECEC services free of charge.<sup>lii</sup>

In Lithuania, additional funds have been allocated for children’s day-care centres. In total, €5.2 million was distributed from the state budget to cover the costs of 345 centres, mainly providing social care and educational services for children from families at social risk and low-income families.<sup>liiii</sup> Slovakia has continuously increased capacity in preschool facilities with the support of national financial resources and European Funds.<sup>liv</sup> The Polish government has created over 27,000 new early ECEC places for children aged 3 and under. In addition, the government co-financed another 74,000 places under the ongoing ‘Toddler+’ (‘Maluch+’) programme funds, which encourage local governments to establish crèches and kids’ clubs.<sup>lv</sup>

The Hungarian government also has a target to increase the number of available places in crèches. This target, part of the Family Protection Action Plan, has set an objective of 70,000 available places in crèches by the end of June 2022. The Plan also sets additional goals, such as increasing the role of non-public crèches, higher subsidies towards alternative forms of crèches – e.g. family crèches and workplace crèches – and better provision of human resources in crèches.<sup>lvi</sup>

Similarly, to respond to the growing need for flexible childcare, the Luxembourgish government authorised the establishment of mini-crèches, a new form of childcare. This new model of childcare provides care for children aged from 0 to 12 years old via smaller home-like environments with flexible opening hours (05.00–23.00) to meet the needs of parents working in shifts or irregular hours.<sup>lvii</sup> In Cyprus, more flexible childcare provision was

facilitated by the establishment of child-friendly creative places operating in the afternoon and during holidays.<sup>lviii</sup>

Finally, Finland had to revise its ECEC legislation to encompass all children. Changes to the Finnish Act on Early Childhood Education and Care entered into force in 2016, and stipulated that children had a right to ECEC for only 20 hours a week, with full-time ECEC provision granted mainly to children of full-time students or working parents. These changes were challenged by the Central Union for Child Welfare, which lodged a complaint to the European Committee on Social Rights against Finland. As a result of the Committee ruling stating that all children have a right to ECEC, Finland had to amend its legislation. The revised Finnish legislation strengthens the non-discrimination of children and families, with all children having an equal right to full-time ECEC from August 2020 regardless of their family socio-economic status or residence.<sup>lix</sup>

Member States have also made provisions to accommodate the special needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable children. For instance, local authorities in the Netherlands are extending early education programmes for children with a language disadvantage. By 1 August 2020, the ECEC provision for this group of preschoolers (2.5- to 4-year-olds) will extend from 10 hours per week to 16 hours per week.<sup>lx</sup> Luxembourg is also putting more emphasis on the language inclusion of children by introducing a plurilingual education programme (in Luxembourgish and French languages) covering children aged 1 to 4 years.<sup>lxi</sup> In Denmark, increased funds to cater to the needs of vulnerable children allowed the numbers of staff in day-care provision to increase.<sup>lxii</sup> In Belgium, policy discussions related to ECEC provision were stimulated by 2019 research study findings showing that there is still a substantial unmet need in childcare, in particular for families with low incomes and/or with a migration background.<sup>lxiii</sup> There has also been a new global individual assistant measure introduced in Belgium in 2019 aiming to better facilitate inclusion of SEN children. This new measure strengthens the inclusive process in transition periods between childcare provision, kindergarten and primary school for young children (under the age of 6 years) with signs of disabilities.<sup>lxiv</sup>

Other measures to facilitate access to ECEC services include information activities, such as an online portal launched in Germany providing parents with information about children's early years and links to local support networks,<sup>lxv</sup> and a School Guide of public pre-primary and primary schools in Greece providing parents with information about the school application process, school life and ways of communicating with schools.<sup>lxvi</sup>

## **Making ECEC more affordable**

Affordability of childcare facilities remains a challenge for many parents across the EU.<sup>lxvii</sup> In order to facilitate more affordable ECEC provision, countries are funding and/or subsidising ECEC places. For instance, in Malta a free childcare provision is available to children of working parents, student parents and terminally ill parents.<sup>lxviii</sup> Governments are also funding childcare provision, such as in Luxembourg – where 20 hours of free childcare during 46 weeks per year is subsidised under the Childcare Service Voucher system (Chèque-service)<sup>lxix</sup> – and also in England, where 3- and 4-year-old children of working parents can access 30 hrs of free provision during school terms. In February 2019, a new law was proposed in Spain aiming to make ECEC services for children aged 0–3 free of charge.

In the Netherlands, almost all working parents using formal childcare services are also eligible for a childcare allowance, which was increased in 2019.<sup>lxx</sup> A new subsidy of childcare fees has

been offered to working parents in Hungary: since 2019, parents who took up employment after taking childcare leave but were unable to obtain a place in a public crèche have been provided with a crèche subsidy of up to 40,000 HUF (approx. €113) per month per child.<sup>lxxi</sup> In Belgium (Flanders region), as part of a new child benefit system, the new maximum level of parents' financial contribution has been set at €3.23 per day. This limit is not related to parental income levels.<sup>lxxii</sup> Similarly, at least two regions in Austria undertook reforms of the parents' financial contribution to formal childcare institutions. Since September 2019, the region of Carinthia pays 66% of the average ECEC cost (excluding the cost of lunch and the cost of arts and crafts materials) for children from the age of 3 until school entry.<sup>lxxiii</sup> In the region of Burgenland, since November ECEC is free of charge (again, excluding the cost of lunch and the cost of the arts and crafts materials) for all children before school entry.<sup>lxxiv</sup> In Portugal, the government provides a fixed subsidy (€264.61 per child in 2018) to support affordability of childcare, in particular among parents of low socio-economic status.

Other measures to make ECEC more affordable include the introduction of the Good KiTa Act in January 2019 across 12 German states (Länder) to ensure high-quality childcare at a low cost to parents;<sup>lxxv</sup> Romania's Sustainable Development Strategy 2030, a guaranteed social package aiming to increase enrolment rates in preschools;<sup>lxxvi</sup> and childcare payment support for parents in France.<sup>lxxvii</sup> In the Czech Republic, payment of a parental benefit became conditional on children under 2 years old using 92 hours per month of publicly funded childcare. This increase of free hours, from 46 hours previously, was introduced to facilitate parents returning to work for at least 50% of full-time hours.<sup>lxxviii</sup> Finally, the Croatian government has undertaken some measures to address the low affordability of ECEC. However, a long-term strategy in this area is still pending (e.g. aspects related to increasing the number of qualified preschool teachers and increasing enrolment rates), and questions remain about the sustainability of current ECEC models once the EU funds are no longer available.<sup>lxxix</sup>

## **Making ECEC mandatory**

There is a general trend among Member States to extend the length of compulsory preschool attendance. Typically, preschool attendance is only compulsory during the final year before primary school. For instance, in 2019 Slovakia introduced compulsory one-year pre-primary education for children who reach the age of 5. The reason behind this step was to improve preparedness for primary education, especially for children living in marginalised Roma communities or experiencing poor living conditions. Due to limited capacities of preschool facilities, this change is planned to be fully implemented in 2021.<sup>lxxx</sup>

However, several countries have begun extending the compulsory preschool attendance towards younger age groups. For instance, Greece implemented compulsory two-year pre-primary school during the school year 2019–2020,<sup>lxxxii</sup> and Cyprus lowered the compulsory school age to 5 for pre-primary school and 6 for primary school.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

## **Improving ECEC quality**

### *ECEC Quality standards*

Evidence from research suggests there is a link between the quality of ECEC and the outcomes for children.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Therefore, ECEC quality standards have become a priority in many Member States, where legislation and policies have been reviewed and/or amended.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> For instance, recommendations from the research reports<sup>lxxxv</sup> on the quality of ECEC across France served

as the basis for the creation of a national quality guide for ECEC.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Similarly, findings from research studies conducted in Cyprus identifying challenges related to ECEC quality and funding were a cornerstone to develop and implement a new ‘unified evaluation plan’. The plans focus on aspects related to student assessments to ensure that children’s needs are identified in a timely manner and that effective aid interventions are put in place.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Other research results, such as findings from a project conducted in Portugal indicating concerns related to the quality of ECEC provision and the number of hours young children spend in settings,<sup>lxxxviii</sup> and a study on regional differences in ECEC provision, affordability and quality conducted in Croatia,<sup>lxxxix</sup> are yet to initiate national policy change.

National ECEC quality standards are also changing following evaluation of current policies. For instance, the quality audits focusing on the attainment, quality and equivalency of preschools across Sweden conducted between 2015 and 2017 initiated a series of ongoing investments in continuing professional developments, revisions of the curriculum and the teaching dimension in preschools.<sup>xc</sup> A work on new laws aiming at improving the quality of ECEC provision and equal participation opportunities for all children is also currently being undertaken in Estonia.<sup>xc1</sup> Furthermore, Ireland launched a draft Action plan in August 2019 setting out proposals for improving access to high-quality and affordable early learning and care and school-age childcare through childminding.<sup>xcii</sup>

Germany developed a new policy and a legal act – ‘The Good Daycare Facilities Act’ (‘Gute-Kita-Gesetz’) – focusing on ECEC quality. It covers a comprehensive range of aspects related to structural characteristics and process quality, i.e. caregiver-child ratio, staff qualifications, centre leadership and governance of ECEC system, diversity and child participation. The law was adopted in 2019 and came into force in January 2020, with the implementation of new measures taking place until 2022.<sup>xciii</sup> Finally, a new parental cooperation package for ECEC professionals was published in Denmark aiming to increase cooperation between professionals and parents.<sup>xciv</sup>

## **ECEC Programmes / Curricula**

Some Member States have sought to ensure high-quality ECEC provision by adopting or updating ECEC programmes. For instance, a new curriculum for early education, including programmes for children under 3 years old, was approved in Romania. It offers more play hours and more focus on children’s personal development. The curriculum also stipulates that ECEC providers cannot charge parents for optional activities offered in nurseries, e.g. theatre or dance classes, as these may not be affordable to all parents.<sup>xcv</sup> A revised curriculum strengthening the education/teaching dimension in preschools also came into force in Sweden in 2019.<sup>xcvi</sup> A new law regulating issues pertaining to quality assurance across education levels (including preschools/kindergartens)<sup>xcvii</sup> and a new educational guide focusing on descriptive evaluation in kindergarten was introduced in Greece.<sup>xcviii</sup> Finally, given the importance of sleep for children’s development, a set of recommendations related to naps for children was released in Portugal.<sup>xcix</sup>

### *Professionalisation of ECEC staff and improvement of working conditions*

To ensure the provision of high-quality services, several Member States undertook steps towards professionalisation of ECEC occupations and the improvement of ECEC staffs’ work conduct. In this respect, France announced the ‘Ambition 600,000 plan’ – a training plan for professionals in the field of early childhood care.<sup>c</sup> A Draft Childminding Action Plan setting



suggestions for bespoke training and qualifications for childminders was put in place in Ireland.<sup>ci</sup> In addition, requirements needed to access early childhood-related professionals were defined in Italy<sup>cii</sup> and in Malta, where the current law stipulates that educational institutions – such as childcare centres – require a licence to operate<sup>ciii</sup> and that kindergarten educators are required to have a license or a warrant (a specific level of education) to practise. Because the warrant implies variance in salaries, it is projected that there would be an increased interest and demand in the upskilling and training of current kindergarten practitioners wanting to improve their remuneration. Germany has also allocated additional resources (€22.5 million to be spent by 2021) as part of a new federal childcare programme – ‘ProKindertagespflege’. This programme will focus on three areas: the qualifications of childcare workers, better working conditions for childcare staff, and building a coordination office for youth welfare officers.<sup>civ</sup> Finally, a project was run in the UK aiming to challenge stereotypes around men’s roles in early education professions in order to provide more diverse role models for young children. The project also included a recruitment drive and support on how to enter the sector, and peer support for men already working in ECEC.<sup>cv</sup>

### *Reducing class size and changing the class set-up*

The quality of ECEC provision also depends on the class size and set-up, with smaller class sizes and smaller child-teacher ratios having positive impact on child development. In order to improve the pedagogical and teaching support for children, the maximum number of preschool children has been reduced from 25 to 22 in Greek kindergarten classes for the school year 2019–2020.<sup>cvi</sup> Similarly, the Finnish government proposed to reduce the size of class groups in ECEC. If the proposed amendment is passed, there would be a maximum of 21 children in a group, with one member of staff for every seven children (instead of the present regulation of one member of staff for every eight children).<sup>cvii</sup> The child-staff ratio for young babies has changed in the Netherlands. As of 2019, one pedagogical staff member can care for a maximum of three (used to be four) babies below the age of 1, with quality of provision monitored on a regular basis.<sup>cviii</sup>

In Luxembourg, the regulation on mini-crèches stipulates a maximum of four babies younger than 12 months old and a maximum of 11 children at any setting. The regulation also requires two qualified members of staff trained in the socio-educational field.<sup>cix</sup> Lastly, trade unions have warned the government in Croatia that the plan to improve ECEC availability by increasing the size of the groups, and by allowing school teachers to work in ECEC without any additional training, would lower the quality of provision.<sup>cx</sup>

Member States have also initiated changes related to investing into the ECEC infrastructure and additional provisions for children. In Ireland, the government published Universal Design Guidelines for ‘Early Learning and Care’, which aims to make ECEC settings accessible for all by providing guidance on refurbishment, renovation and building of ECEC centres. This is also to encourage the participation of children with disabilities in ECECs as well as better accessibility for parents, grandparents and staff.<sup>cxii</sup>

The government in Poland has also revised standards of ECEC accommodation,<sup>cxiii</sup> whereas the new government regulations in Cyprus stipulate that child-friendly creative places should be safe, accessible and operate under surveillance.<sup>cxiiii</sup> Croatia has also invested in ECEC services infrastructure by spending on reconstruction, adaptation and improvement of facilities as well as extending opening times, particularly in less developed areas that did not have or had weak ECEC infrastructure.<sup>cxv</sup>



## **In summary**

Recent developments in Member States indicate that there are continuous efforts across European countries to increase the availability and use of formal childcare provision. Countries put additional funds towards expansion of childcare places and making provision more affordable, providing wider information-sharing about the types of childcare offered and making participation in ECEC mandatory. There are also continuous efforts to improve the quality of the services by reviewing national ECEC quality standards, updating ECEC programmes/curricula, undertaking steps to improve qualifications and working conditions of ECEC staff, and making improvements to the class size and set-ups.

## Chapter 4: Family Leave Provision and Actions to Improve Work-Life Balance

Early infancy is a formative and critical period for child development and, as research demonstrates, adequate access to maternity and paternity leave following the birth of a child can contribute to various positive outcomes for parents and for children. However, recent research has also demonstrated that prolonged periods of maternity leave can have a detrimental impact on mothers' career progression and labour force participation.<sup>cxv</sup> Similarly, while the presence of fathers in early infancy has been found to benefit children in a range of ways, recent research has also suggested that fathers' uptake of available parental leave remains uneven.<sup>cxvi</sup>

### Expansions to family leave in 2019

In 2019 Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands and Slovenia extended the length of paternity leave available. In Slovenia, paternity leave became 10 days<sup>cxvii</sup> while in Estonia, paternity leave was extended to 30 days.<sup>cxviii</sup> Similarly, paternity leave in has been extended from one day to five days for employees in the public sector (in Malta<sup>cxix</sup>) and from five days to seven days (in Italy<sup>cxx</sup>). The Netherlands also extended paternity leave from two days to one week from January 2019 onwards, with a commitment that the amount of leave would extend to five weeks from July 2020 onwards.<sup>cxxi</sup> In Belgium, broader reforms to family leave have included introducing the right for all full-time employed or self-employed fathers or second parents to be eligible to take 10 days of leave (paid at 100% of earnings for employed parents and at a fixed daily rate for self-employed parents) during the first four months of a child's life.<sup>cxxii</sup> In addition, two countries have extended paternity leave for some groups of parents: Austria has extended the right to take a month's unpaid leave (the so-called 'daddy month') after a child's birth from federal sector employees to all employees (during which fathers receive a daily social security payment)<sup>cxxiii</sup> while in France, paternity leave will be extended from 11 days to 30 days if the child is hospitalised.<sup>cxxiv</sup> It is possible that several of these developments are in response to or pre-empting this new European Union directive.

Several countries have introduced reforms to parental leave and maternity leave, including creating new types of leave, extending the eligibility to other groups of parents, and increasing the flexibility of the leave offered. Ireland introduced paid parental leave in November 2019 for the first time, allowing both parents to take two weeks of parental leave during the first year of the child's life compensated at the same rate as maternity and paternity leave.<sup>cxxv</sup> Belgium has introduced reforms that aim to offer more flexibility to families by allowing both full-time and part-time parental leave that can be taken for shorter amounts of time over a longer period. For example, parents can now follow the '1/10 arrangement', where they take a half-day off work every second week in order to look after their children.<sup>cxxvi</sup> In Spain, parental leave for the second parent was extended from four weeks to eight weeks (with plans to extend this to 16 weeks, the same amount as currently granted to biological mothers, by 2021). Finally, in France, paid maternity leave was extended from two weeks to eight weeks for women working as farmers and self-employed women.<sup>cxxvii</sup> On a larger scale, family leave reforms in Spain also led to some changes in how maternity and paternity leave is organised. In 2019, both types of leave were merged to create a new leave entitled 'birth and childcare leave' (*prestación de nacimiento y cuidado de menor*), the first six weeks of which must be taken by the parent giving birth and which can be distributed between parents in weekly periods as they wish during the first year of the child's birth.<sup>cxxviii</sup>

Other forms of leave designed to support families and parents with caring responsibilities were also introduced in Greece, Slovakia, Slovenia and Portugal. Greece introduced three months of paid leave that can be taken by parents with three or more children, with the aim of supporting parents with larger families in child-raising.<sup>cxxxix</sup> A legislative amendment in Slovenia<sup>cxxx</sup> and a new programme in Portugal<sup>cxxxi</sup> has allowed parents to take paid leave to accompany their child on their first day of school, while a new policy in Greece allows employees who care for children with disabilities to reduce their working hours by one hour each day.<sup>cxxxii</sup>

## **Developments in how family leave is funded**

Some countries have introduced changes in the level and length of payments received by parents while taking maternity, paternity, parental or other forms of family leave.

Croatia, Czechia, Slovenia and Slovakia have increased the amount of benefits or allowance paid to some parents during family leave. In Slovenia, benefits received during maternity, paternity and parental leave have been increased, with the cap previously set upon maternity leave benefits lifted and the level of compensation for paternity leave and parental leave raised to 100% of previous earnings.<sup>cxxxiii</sup> In Croatia, the government announced plans to introduce full pay for the full 12 months of maternity leave, citing the aim of ensuring equal access to labour markets for mothers and fathers as a driving force.<sup>cxxxiv</sup> The Croatian parliament is also considering an increase in the maximum parental allowance that can be received by self-employed parents (from 120% to 170% of the minimum wage).<sup>cxxxv</sup> Slovakia increased parental allowance for all parents and introduced graduated levels of benefit, with a higher amount for those who were previously employed and had paid social contributions.<sup>cxxxvi</sup> In both instances, ministries cited a desire to improve work-life balance and share care-giving responsibilities between the genders. Finally, in Estonia, parental allowance is now calculated on the basis of the 12 months before the pregnancy began.<sup>cxxxvii</sup>

In Finland and Lithuania, eligibility to allowances and benefits taken during family leave were extended to particular groups. In Finland, maternity and paternity allowance is now paid during leave if a pregnancy is terminated after 154 days, while fathers are entitled to receive more paid paternity allowance in the case of multiple births.<sup>cxxxviii</sup> In Lithuania, amendments to the law regarding maternity social insurance have taken place following a constitutional court ruling, which will make it easier for women who lose their jobs during pregnancy to receive maternity benefits.<sup>cxxxix</sup>

## **Leave policies affecting non-traditional families**

On a European Union scale and in individual Member States, there is increasing recognition that families that are considered ‘non-traditional’ (which differ in some way from the nuclear family of one mother and one father living together with biologically related children) are increasingly prevalent.<sup>cxl</sup>

Some developments in 2019 indicate changes at a Member State level that consider and explicitly support various types of non-traditional families. In Sweden, an amendment was made to the parental leave system to allow a biological parent to transfer parental leave days to their partner (even if the partner is not the biological or legal parent of the child or married to the parent). This also applies to same-sex adopting parents who have undergone artificial insemination, as the biological parent is able to transfer parental leave days to parents who are

awaiting confirmation of adoption.<sup>cxli</sup> The introduction of ‘birth and childcare leave’ by Spain (replacing maternity and paternity leave) also has the effect of ensuring that leave arrangements are explicitly inclusive of same-sex parents.<sup>cxlii</sup> Legislation passed in Ireland in 2019 also enabled male same-sex couples to receive adoptive leave and benefits for the first time.<sup>cxliii</sup>

Some Member States have introduced further support in terms of leave for adoptive and foster parents. In two Member States, leave has been introduced for foster parents in 2019: in Slovenia, foster parents looking after a child who has not yet started school can take parental leave of up to 30 days,<sup>cxliv</sup> while in Belgium, all foster parents who are taking care of a child for at least six months can take six weeks of leave every two years.<sup>cxlv</sup> Leave arrangements for adoptive parents have also been introduced in Belgium<sup>cxlv</sup> (where all adoptive parents now receive a minimum of six weeks of adoptive leave regardless of the age of the child they are adopting) and in Malta,<sup>cxlvi</sup> where adoptive leave is now paid by the employer for the first 14 weeks and by a state benefit for the remaining four weeks. Finland altered the eligibility criteria governing adoptive parents’ parental allowance, which is now open to all adoptive parents during the first 233 days of adopting a child (regardless of whether they work or study full time).<sup>cxlvii</sup>

At least two countries increased support for single parents. In Belgium, leave allowances (parental, medical or palliative care leave) for single-parent employees increased by 4.5%.<sup>cxlviii</sup> In 2019, Finnish single mothers – both birth mothers and women who are adopting a child on their own – became eligible for an additional 54 working days of parental allowance payments.<sup>cxlix</sup>

Two other Member States have also made policy or legislative changes that are designed to better support grandparents who are taking care of their grandchildren. In Hungary, grandparents who are active in the labour market and take care of their grandchildren are now able to take unpaid leave and receive childcare benefit of up to 70% of their previous earnings (or 70% of double the minimum wage).<sup>cl</sup> In Romania, a proposal is under consideration regarding amending legislation to allow grandparents who are caring for children under the age of two years old to receive parental allowance.<sup>cli</sup>

## **Other policies to support work-life balance**

In addition to policies that directly support parents and families upon the arrival of children into their family, some Member States have launched programmes, collaborations or policies that are designed to encourage companies to support parents and promote a work-life balance. In Austria, this has involved working with companies to launch a handbook of best practice for companies to promote a good work-life balance;<sup>clii</sup> while in Germany, the ministry of family affairs launched an online tool designed to help employers embed their family-friendly policies in companies, including by allowing comparison to other companies’ policies.<sup>cliii</sup> Similarly, in Estonia<sup>cliv</sup> and Latvia,<sup>clv</sup> governments launched schemes designed to reward or recognise companies or employers who are considered ‘family-friendly’ (for example, by allowing remote working, flexible working hours or providing support for childcare). In Italy, the government has announced funding for projects that aim to support parents to balance work and family commitments.<sup>clvi</sup> In Romania, an ongoing legislative proposal includes a package that encourages companies to provide childcare for their employees.<sup>clvii</sup>

In addition, other Member States have made commitments to encourage flexible working and family-friendly policies through action plans (Cyprus<sup>clviii</sup>), pilots that are designed to support

women's reintegration to the labour market (Netherlands<sup>clix</sup>), and broader government policies (Spain<sup>clx</sup> and Portugal<sup>clxi</sup>), meaning that further changes may be expected in coming years.

### **In summary**

2019 has seen a range of developments in how family leave provision and work-life balance is addressed across most of the Member States. Most prominent are the extensions to paternity leave brought about in several Member States, with some indications from country experts that further developments will follow in other Member States over the next few years. Other notable developments include the increase in allowances or benefits paid during family leave in a few Member States, and various developments that extend eligibility to family leave to other types of non-traditional families (including foster and adoptive families, single parent families and families with grandparent carers). Ongoing work by Member State governments to encourage companies to support families in the early years of their children's lives is also evident.

## Chapter 5: Social and Income Support, and Benefits for families

Most Member States provide financial support to families to help with the various costs of child-raising. There are, however, considerable differences between countries in terms of how support is offered, to whom support is offered, and why support is offered.<sup>clxii</sup> This financial support may take the form of direct cash transfers (e.g. child benefit, working family payments) or a fiscal support (e.g. tax rebates, tax credits). In addition, while elements of family financial support may be universal (paid to all children or families with children), other types of support are means-tested (paid only to or for families with income under a certain threshold or who are considered in a vulnerable category).

### Child benefits, and child and family tax credits and child allowance

In 2019, changes were made in two Member States that affected the whole benefits and social security system. In Estonia, the social insurance board announced an electronic system that is designed to allow families to complete all benefits applications online rather than physically.<sup>clxiii</sup> In Belgium, the Sixth-State reform (2011), entitled ‘A more efficient federal State and more autonomous entities’, meant that family allowances were transformed from the federal level to the regional level from January 2020. Therefore, in 2019, separate newly established benefits systems were announced and launched in all regions (Brussels,<sup>clxiv</sup> Flanders,<sup>clxv</sup> German speaking territory<sup>clxvi</sup> and Wallonia<sup>clxvii</sup>). Specific developments in each region are discussed in various sections below. Perhaps smaller in scale, but still a significant development was the approval of a new Basic Family Service Package in Lithuania.<sup>clxviii</sup> This package consists of 14 services for families, including: youth work, childcare and pre-primary education, information sharing, developing cultural and informational competences and reading literacy, informal education of children, development of parenting skills, primary health care, educational assistance and rehabilitation of children with developmental disorders.<sup>clxix</sup>

In many Member States, families and parents may receive child benefit, family allowance or child allowance designed to help families support and raise their children.<sup>clxx</sup> In 2019, a number of Member States increased the amount of child benefit, family allowance or child allowance received by families: including Estonia (for the first and second child in a family),<sup>clxxi</sup> Germany (from July 2019),<sup>clxxii</sup> Lithuania,<sup>clxxiii</sup> Malta,<sup>clxxiv</sup> the Netherlands (universal child benefit)<sup>clxxv</sup> and Portugal (from July 2019 onwards for families with children under 6).<sup>clxxvi</sup> In addition, Poland extended eligibility for child-raising benefits (*świadczenie wychowawcze, 500 Plus programme*) upon the birth of a first-born child to all families (previously only received by families earning under a certain amount each year).<sup>clxxvii</sup> Furthermore, in their new benefits systems, all regions of Belgium included monthly child benefits.<sup>clxxviii</sup>

Some Member States have tax credits or tax exemptions for families with children. In 2019, these increased for all dependent children in Germany and for children under six in Lithuania.

Member States may offer childcare benefits or childcare allowance that may be paid to parents to help cover the cost of their children going to a childcare facility. In 2019, means-tested childcare allowance was increased in the Netherlands for almost all families.<sup>clxxix</sup> In France, how parents received childcare allowance and paid their childcare providers was reformed with the introduction of third-party payment, which pays the childcare provider in advance (payment is then taken from parents to repay this balance). This was introduced with the aim of simplifying procedures and to avoid parents having to pay for childcare upfront, before



receiving the allowance.<sup>clxxx</sup> The launch of the new National Childcare Scheme in Ireland involves the introduction of childcare subsidies for families.<sup>clxxxi</sup> However, in Estonia, childcare allowances were terminated, with funds instead incorporated into the parental benefits system from September 2019 onwards.<sup>clxxxii</sup>

Other Member States saw changes in other benefits that support families with children, often in their schooling. Germany increased the amount of benefit that supports children starting school from August 2019 onwards.<sup>clxxxiii</sup> Similarly, in the new benefits systems launched by Belgian regions, all children in all regions will receive a yearly education supplement.<sup>clxxxiv</sup> In January 2019, a free school lunches programme was launched for vulnerable children in Poland,<sup>clxxxv</sup> while the ‘Good Start’ (*Dobry Start*) programme, which is designed to fund activities or items that children need to start a new school year, was expanded to cover children until the age of 20.<sup>clxxxvi</sup>

Some countries pay one-off funds or grants to parents when a new child joins the family (sometimes known as ‘birth payments’). In Malta, a new one-off payment for children born or adopted into families was introduced.<sup>clxxxvii</sup> All regions of Belgium also included a birth supplement in their newly launched regional benefits systems.<sup>clxxxviii</sup> A new ‘birth fund’ (*fondo natalità*) was launched by the Italian government in collaboration with the Italian Banking Association and is designed to help families with children under the age of 3 to access bank loans.<sup>clxxxix</sup>

## Support for lower-income families

A number of Member States offer benefits or allowances that are means-tested to ensure that they provide extra support to families with income under a certain threshold.<sup>cx</sup>

In 2019, several Member States increased the support available to lower-income families. Malta<sup>cxci</sup> and Cyprus<sup>cxcii</sup> increased child allowances that are designed to support low-income families and Germany increased the amount of supplementary child allowance (*Kinderzuschlag*) that accompanies child benefits for families with low income. Slovakia also increased the amount of support available through a minimum income protection scheme for families with dependent children.<sup>cxci</sup> In addition, Malta altered the times at which child allowance was paid with the aim of ensuring that all families had enough money at important times in the year (for example, by shifting a payment date to just before Christmas).<sup>cxci</sup>

In other Member States, new forms of support were introduced for lower-income families. Denmark announced a new temporary child allowance for children aged 14 or under in the poorest families.<sup>cxcv</sup> This was due to come into force in January 2020 and will apply retrospectively with payments made for September 2019 onwards. The Danish government also announced an intention to review current legislation around social assistance in 2020.<sup>cxevi</sup> Meanwhile, the newly launched regional family benefits systems in Belgium include the introduction of means-tested social supplements for children (in Brussels<sup>cxcvii</sup>) and new supplements specifically for low-income families (in Wallonia<sup>cxcviii</sup>, Flanders<sup>cxvix</sup> and the German-speaking community<sup>cx</sup>).

## Support for large families

A few Member States take particular steps to support large families, including by providing benefits, allowances and tax credits and schemes that facilitate their access to services and support.<sup>cci</sup>

In 2019, Italy<sup>ccii</sup> and Lithuania<sup>cciii</sup> joined the Member States who offer a ‘Family Card’ – providing special benefits, services and discounts from a range of private and public companies – to families with at least three children. In Poland, the Large Family Card programme was extended to cover families who have three children, regardless of the child’s age or whether or not they were still dependent on their parents.<sup>cciv</sup> Lithuania also introduced a new family benefit to all families with three or more children aged up to 18 (or 21, if in full-time study) regardless of their family income.<sup>ccv</sup> Supplements for large families were also introduced in Belgium as part of benefits system reform (in Wallonia<sup>ccvi</sup> and the German-speaking community<sup>ccvii</sup>).

In particular, the governments of Hungary and Poland have developed the support they offer to large families in 2019. Both have introduced measures to support mothers who have a large family, including those who no longer have dependent children: Hungary abolished personal income tax for women who have raised four or more children,<sup>ccviii</sup> while Poland introduced the ‘Mama 4 Plus programme’ to provide financial support to mothers over the age of 60 who have had four or more children and who meet specific income criteria.<sup>ccix</sup>

In addition, several separate policies in Hungary have been launched or extended that involve offering interest-free loans to young couples with the possibility for loan repayments to be delayed or cancelled upon the birth of future children. The Family Housing Support Programme (CSOK), which provides loans to facilitate purchasing property, was extended to apply to used properties, as well as new builds.<sup>ccx</sup> In addition, a new programme was launched that involved granting an interest-free loan to young married couples meeting the eligibility criteria who could then delay or cancel repayment if they had children in the next three years.<sup>ccxi</sup> Furthermore, the government in Hungary extended the policy of covering mortgage loans of families upon the birth of the third child, and launched a scheme to help large families purchase large cars.<sup>ccxii</sup>

## Support for single parents

In many Member States, there are specific supports available for single-parent families, including specific supplements or eligibility to receive higher rates of benefits.

In 2019, some Member States reported increases in the support that may be received by single-parent families. In Belgium, the regional family benefits systems established in Brussels, the German-speaking community and Wallonia included specific supplements for children living in single-parent families.<sup>ccxiii</sup> Furthermore, Malta announced an increase in allowances received by widows or widowers with children under the age of 18.<sup>ccxiv</sup> In Germany, the Strong Families Act (*Starke-Familien-Gesetz*) made all single-parent families eligible for supplementary child allowance.<sup>ccxv</sup> In Luxembourg, the new social inclusion income (REVIS) was calculated in a way that ensured single-parent families receive more benefits.<sup>ccxvi</sup>

In addition, in Sweden increases were made to the substitute maintenance allowance that is paid by social insurance agencies to single-parent families when the other parent does not fulfil a maintenance obligation.<sup>ccxvii</sup>

## **Support for other groups**

A number of Member States announced changes in the financial support available to foster families and adoptive families in 2019. Lithuania, for instance, announced a new temporary foster care allowance that will be paid to parents temporarily fostering a child,<sup>ccxviii</sup> and Latvia introduced benefits for adoptive parents, with different amounts depending on the age of the child.<sup>ccxix</sup> Slovakia announced an increase in the allowance given to foster parents and the introduction of graduated amounts depending on the age of the child.<sup>ccxx</sup> Furthermore, all Belgian regions announced allowances specifically for children who have become orphans.<sup>ccxxi</sup>

## **In summary**

There is a wide variety in the EU of different systems of benefits and social support that are intended to support families in different ways and for different purposes. Yet in 2019, it appears that a number of Member States increased the amount of child benefit that families receive to help them look after a child, while a few others changed arrangements in how they provide families with allowances to help with childcare for young children or schools-related expenses for older children. Support for large families, single-parent families and other vulnerable families was also extended in a small number of Member States.

## Chapter 6: Children’s Participation

The right of children to participate in matters that affect them constitutes the third pillar of the 2013 Recommendations. This principle is further enshrined in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).<sup>ccxxii</sup> The year 2019 marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CRC. As per the definition included in the CRC, a ‘child’ is anyone under the age of 18. But mechanisms aimed at participation may target different age groups, e.g. 15–24-year-olds, or 14–20-year-olds. The objective of this chapter is to provide an overview of policy and practice developments at the EU Member State level in 2019 regarding children’s rights to participate, based on the information collected for this report.

### Member State level policy developments

Examples in 2019 of consultations during the policy process included the development of national youth strategies. In Germany, the Federal Ministry for Youth consulted young people in the development of the federal government’s new youth strategy, titled ‘Shared Responsibility: politics for, with, and by youth’ (*In gemeinsamer Verantwortung: Politik für, mit und von Jugend*). The strategy covers nine areas relevant to young people, which each suggest areas for improvement and possible action points. In May 2019, 450 young people between the ages of 16 and 27 from across Germany participated in three days of discussion and workshops with policymakers. The aim was to develop recommendations that were to be incorporated into the national youth strategy.<sup>ccxxiii</sup> The strategy has been approved by the Federal Cabinet, making it the first cross-departmental youth strategy to be accepted.<sup>ccxxiv</sup> The creation of a new youth development plan has also been ongoing throughout 2019 in Estonia, where the Ministry of Education and Research is preparing a new strategy for 2021–2035. Young people aged 13–30 have been involved and participated in the European consultations regarding topics such as health promotion, safe environment and nature preservation.<sup>ccxxv</sup> Similarly, Ireland introduced its Child and Youth participation strategy for 2019–2023, which recognises the importance of children and young people participating in decisions that affect their lives.<sup>ccxxvi</sup>

### Member State level practice development

Some Member States launched initiatives aimed at facilitating children’s participation in decision-making processes. A common mechanism seemed to be the creation of platforms, such as youth councils. In Portugal, the National Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People (CNPJCR) developed a National Council of Children.<sup>ccxxvii</sup> This platform aims to help facilitate structures for children’s participation and encourage dialogue between children and policymakers.<sup>ccxxviii</sup> Similarly, Romania established a Children’s Board, which brings together children with different backgrounds to actively involve them in the promotion of children’s right to participate in decision-making and policymaking.<sup>ccxxix</sup> In Malta, the focus seemed to have been more on creating networks where groups can work together to facilitate children’s participation. Examples include setting up the Malta Children’s Associations Network (Malta CAN) in June 2019. This association connects 17 non-profit organisations and aims to ‘promote, foster and support children’s rights and child participatory mechanisms in Malta’.<sup>ccxxx</sup> The network is the national partner of Eurochild.<sup>ccxxxi</sup> Another noteworthy nationwide consultation occurred in Spain, where UNICEF launched the Barometer for the Opinion of Children and Youth as part of the Child-friendly Cities Initiatives. This survey consults the views and opinions of 8,500 children between the ages of 11 and 18.<sup>ccxxxii</sup>

Other examples of child participation mechanisms introduced in 2019 related to either health or education. Driven by the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the Irish Ministry for Children and Youth Affairs launched an online toolkit, titled ‘Our Voices Our Schools’.<sup>ccxxxiii</sup> This toolkit includes resources – such as worksheets, exercises, research articles and other resources – for educators to help them encourage children’s participation in school decisions.<sup>ccxxxiv</sup>

The Maltese Children and Young Persons’ council was further consulted in creating a campaign designed by children for children, in collaboration with adults, on the issue of teen obesity. Consultations took the form of a workshop where children were able to lead discussions and collaborate in the creation of a tool to promote healthy eating habits in young people. Children further participated in the 4th National Conference on Wellbeing, which also focused on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Malta in 2019.<sup>ccxxxv</sup> Furthermore, one of the entities of the Malta Foundation for the Well-being of Society (MFWS), the National Institute for Childhood (NIC), conducted a project entitled *Fil-Berah* (‘Open Spaces’). The study focused on children’s use, interactions, and relationships with and through open, public spaces. While children provided data for this project, they were also given the opportunity to conduct research and analysis themselves. The report is due to be published in the foreseeable future.<sup>ccxxxvi</sup>

Children’s consultations around healthy eating were also conducted in the UK. An inquiry carried out in 2019 represented the first effort to consult children on their experiences of food poverty. An estimated 2.5 million children live in households where family income is not enough to provide healthy diets, which means that these children may experience symptoms of food insecurity. The results were published in a report, which included a Right2Food charter for children as well as views from experts and other stakeholders. It is expected that decision-makers will incorporate the report’s findings into any future policy decisions on the issue.<sup>ccxxxvii</sup>

## **In summary**

The data collected for this report reveals promising examples of how children can participate in matters that affect their lives. This includes examples of children’s participation in policy developments, such as the consultations that took place to help shape countries’ national youth strategies. This also includes examples of a range of issues, including education and health. These examples illustrate that it is possible for children to be active participants in the policymaking process.

## Chapter 7: Initiatives Towards Vulnerable Children

Despite increased commitment to improve the situation of particularly vulnerable children across the EU, progress has been slow.<sup>ccxxxviii</sup> In 2018, about 23 million children were at risk of poverty or social exclusion across the EU.<sup>ccxxxix</sup> Some groups of children are more likely to be affected than others. This report uses a broad definition of the term ‘vulnerable’, which makes it possible to show the diversity of initiatives and policies that Member States have undertaken in the year of 2019 to reach children who might be most in need of support. The expert country profile questionnaire through which information for this report was gathered (see Annex 2) asked for information on a wide range of different groups, but this chapter only presents information on the groups for which sufficient information has been gathered.<sup>ccxi</sup> Accordingly, this chapter presents examples of developments regarding migrant children, children with ethnic minority background (including Roma children), children with special educational needs (SEN), and children living in non-traditional families.

### Developments regarding migrant children and children from ethnic minority background

#### *Migrant Children*

Migrant children are one of the target groups of the Child Guarantee. Members of this group are defined as ‘any child below the age of 18 with at least one parent born outside the EU, whatever the country of birth of the child.’<sup>ccxli</sup> As noted in the inception report for the Feasibility Study for the Child Guarantee, the issue of defining who counts as a ‘migrant child’ can pose challenges in terms of children being able to access services.<sup>ccxlii</sup> An example of this includes the Bulgarian National Strategy for Migration, Asylum and Integration 2015–2020, which aims to ensure equal access to education for foreign citizens under the age of 18 who are seeking or have been granted international protection in the Republic of Bulgaria.<sup>ccxliii</sup> In this case, migrant children are only included in educational statistics once they have been granted refugee status.<sup>ccxliv</sup>

Initiatives related to the education of migrant children have also taken place in Greece and Cyprus. Both countries have developed resources for educators on teaching refugee children (Greece)<sup>ccxlv</sup> or children with immigrant background (Cyprus).<sup>ccxlvii</sup> The Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus has further undertaken to provide seminars and training for educators and other professionals in schools to strengthen their ability to work with children who have a migrant background.<sup>ccxlvii</sup>

Two further 2019 developments regarding migrant children concern the reception of new arrivals. In Luxembourg, the agency responsible for the reception of minors has changed. The former Luxembourg Reception and Integration Agency (OLAI) has been replaced by the National Reception Office (ONA – *Office national de l'accueil*), which will be responsible for the reception, processing and accommodation of minors.<sup>ccxlviii</sup> Ireland has entered into an agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) and the EU to provide sanctuary to 2,900 people fleeing persecution over the next 4 years.<sup>ccxlix</sup>

#### *Children with Ethnic Minority/Roma Background*

The information revealed developments towards increasing inclusion of Roma children in five EU member states in 2019, including Bulgaria, Slovakia, Romania, Portugal and Estonia.



Driven by the National Action Plan for 2015–2020 – which aids implementation of National Strategy for Integration of Roma (2012–2020) and also the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and School-children from Ethnic Minorities – Bulgaria undertook several activities to increase the enrolment of Roma children in crèches and kindergartens and to prevent the drop-out of Roma children from schools.<sup>ccli</sup> Similar efforts have been ongoing in Slovakia, which introduced compulsory pre-primary education for children aged 5 for one year. However, these developments might not come into force until 2021 due to limited capacities of preschool facilities.<sup>ccli</sup> Albeit not exclusively focused on children, Portugal approved a resolution that extended the National Strategy for the Integration of Roma Communities (*Estratégia Nacional para a Integração das comunidades ciganas*) until 2022. It is hoped that the Strategy will help improve the communities’ well-being indicators.<sup>cclii</sup>

Further developments regarding children with ethnic minority background include the publication of a new action plan for the prevention of violence against children in Finland. The action plan focuses on children with vulnerable backgrounds, including preventing violence against children from ethnic or minority backgrounds.<sup>ccliii</sup> The aim of the action plan is to improve the support provided to children who are victims of violence by ensuring better coordination and cooperation between various specialists. The plan is to be implemented between 2020 and 2025. The UK’s announcement of funding for mental health support of young people also targets children from black or minority ethnic backgrounds.<sup>ccliv</sup>

## **Children with special educational needs (SEN)**

This report applies a broad definition of the concept of ‘special educational needs’ (SEN) to include physical, mental, cognitive and educational impairments.<sup>cclv</sup> Developments regarding children with SEN took place in at least nine countries, including: Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Poland. This section uses the terms SEN and ‘disability’ interchangeably, applies them very broadly. They can include policies and approaches towards children with mild learning disabilities, to severe physical and mental disabilities, to autism.

### *Legal and Policy Developments*

In Bulgaria, three new laws that directly concern children with disabilities were in the process of preparation and discussion in 2019. This includes the Law for People with Disabilities, the Law for Social Services and the Law for Personal Assistance. The objective of these laws is to incorporate a human-rights-based approach and the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. The main proposed measures include individual assessment of the needs of disabled people/children, provision of personal assistance and changes in the financial support schemes.<sup>cclvi</sup> Belgium passed an initiative aimed at facilitating greater inclusion of children with SEN by focusing on encouraging participation of young children (5 years old or younger) with possible signs of disabilities in childcare provisions, kindergarten or primary school.<sup>cclvii</sup>

On World Autism Awareness Day on 2 April 2019, the French government revealed its action plan to realise its autism strategy for 2018–2022. The plan covers all stages of life from early childhood to adulthood, with a focus on science and research as drivers of new initiatives. Measures favour early diagnosis and support for children under seven years old and new special autism units to favour inclusion in schools and address children’s specific needs.<sup>cclviii</sup>

### *Increasing accessibility and support in schools*

Some Member States have introduced legislation, undertaken policy developments or pledged funding to help increase accessibility and support in schools for children with disabilities. This includes both changes to physical infrastructure, as well as learning support. Through its initiative ‘Accessibility+’ (*Dostępność+*), Poland promised funds to help schools make changes to the building infrastructure to improve access for children with disabilities.<sup>cclix</sup> Romania amended its National Education Law 1/2011, which requires schools to either be equipped with elevators or organise a class on the ground floor to ensure accessibility.<sup>cclx</sup> Estonia allocated 15.6 million euro to improve the infrastructure in schools for children with disabilities, with the support of the European Regional Development Fund.<sup>cclxi</sup>

Belgium piloted two experiments in the personalised support of learning. The results of the initiatives will be used to inform the development of an approach to personalised support to learning in all schools to be implemented in the new school year.<sup>cclxii</sup> Denmark has taken steps towards improving conditions for children with dyslexia, with a focus on facilitating early detection and identifying appropriate support.<sup>cclxiii</sup> This includes sharing learning about what works best in narrowing any achievement gaps between children with dyslexia and children who do not have dyslexia. The Romanian Ministry of National Education and Research developed support for children with special educational needs during exams, specifically the final 8th grade exam (secondary school) and baccalaureate (end of high school) for children with seeing/hearing impairments, autism spectrum disorders (ASD) or learning disorders.<sup>cclxiv</sup> Support is to be tailored to each child’s unique needs. An example includes allowing children with ASD to take exams in separate classrooms and under the supervision of staff who are trained in working with children with special needs, and specifically ASD. Another example includes helping ease students’ anxiety by making sure that they know the assistant teacher who is supervising the exam, and providing additional time (e.g. 1–2 hours) for exams.<sup>cclxv</sup> In addition, the Romanian government will award a daily food allowance to children with special educational needs who are boarded, including for weekends and public holidays.<sup>cclxvi</sup>

### *Funding*

As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, several countries have made adjustments to their leave or benefit schemes in 2019. Some of these changes also affect children with disabilities. Poland created a Solidarity Fund in Support of People with Disabilities (*Solidarnościowy Fundusz Wsparcia Osób Niepełnosprawnych*). This act includes four main pillars: 1) funds for care services; 2) respite services for adults caring for family members with disabilities; 3) funds for live-in institutions where adults with disabilities could reside permanently; and 4) funds for assistants to people with disabilities.<sup>cclxvii</sup> Although the act aims to support all people with disabilities, the act specifically supports children with disabilities and their families by offering relevant respite services and improving access and availability of educational services.<sup>cclxvii</sup> The increase in child benefits in Lithuania from 30 euro in 2018 to 50 euro per child also included a benefit of 70 euro per child with disabilities.<sup>cclxviii</sup> Additional funds were pledged to municipalities to distribute funding to support adapting housing or living environments for children with severe disabilities where needed.<sup>cclxix</sup> Lithuania’s new ‘Basic Family Service Package’ also provides for some new services for children with disabilities and their families, including rehabilitation for children with developmental disorders.<sup>cclxx</sup>

Estonia, Finland and Bulgaria introduced benefits for children with disabilities where the amount is dependent on the severity of the condition. In 2019, Estonia pledged to increase

benefits for children with disabilities and their families starting 2020.<sup>cclxxi</sup> The amount will vary depending on a child's level of impairment. In Finland, as of 2019 disabled or chronically ill children under 16 are granted an allowance dependent on the level of care they need. In Portugal, 2019 saw the third phase of the implementation of Social Allowance for Inclusion, during which the measure was extended to children and young people with disabilities to provide disability allowance for children up to the age of 10.<sup>cclxxii</sup> Children with disabilities receive further support through the newly established Flemish benefit system *Groeipakket*. This package provides for monthly 'care' supplements for families with children with disabilities.

Finland further provides that parents of severely disabled or chronically ill children receive part-time childcare leave until the child has reached the age of 18.<sup>cclxxiii</sup> A similar development took place in Belgium, where the definition of 'disability' was adjusted so that more families with children with disabilities will be able to apply for parental allowance under the 'time credit' system.<sup>cclxxiv</sup> While beneficial for families with disabled children, it is also hoped that this measure can further support work-life balance.<sup>cclxxv</sup>

### *Awareness-raising, training and other initiatives to help foster inclusion*

Focusing on fostering inclusion through sport, the government of Luxembourg worked together with the national Paralympic Committee to launch the 'I'mPOSSIBLE' initiative focused on children age 6 to 12. The initiative was to be shared by teachers in interactive classrooms, once teacher training was completed.<sup>cclxxvi</sup> In Cyprus, the Pedagogical Institute planned to conduct a number of seminars and training sessions for educators and other professionals working in school to support their capacity to work with children with special needs.<sup>cclxxvii</sup>

In 2019, Finland established a working group to support the founding of 'Centres of expertise and support to respond to special needs of children and young people', to be opened in May 2020. The announcement included plans to establish five centres of expertise.<sup>cclxxviii</sup> This development was driven by the realisation that children and young people with special needs often require access to a variety of services, including medical care, social care and education. It is hoped that the establishment of these centres can help strengthen cooperation and coordination amongst agencies in a sustainable way.<sup>cclxxviii</sup> Better coordinated services are also at the heart of Finland's 'Action Plan for the Prevention of Violence against Children', which was published in 2019 and is to be implemented from 2020–2025. The plan pays special attention to providing better coordinated and timely support for children who have been subjected to violence and who are particularly vulnerable, including children with disabilities.<sup>cclxxix</sup>

## **Children living in institutions or foster care**

### *Increasing emotional support*

Recognising how challenging it can be for children placed in foster care to adapt to their new surroundings, the 'Mockingbird Family' model has been implemented in England and Wales. This project aims to support foster families by building a local network for peer support and practical learning. Each network has a mentor, who is an experienced foster carer, and runs projects that include offering short respite breaks for parents, practical advice and emotional support, and social activities to foster families.<sup>cclxxx</sup> Similarly, the Social Insurance Board in Estonia – which is funded by the European Social Fund – increased its free services for foster

families, including mentoring, psychological counselling and group support.<sup>cclxxxix</sup> The Finnish new action plan also includes measures aimed at preventing violence against children in care. It is hoped that this act will encourage better coordination between specialist services commonly needed to effectively support children who have experienced violence.<sup>cclxxxii</sup>

### *Reducing institutionalisation*

The Maltese government has taken steps towards decreasing institutionalisation of children. In July 2019, Malta launched the new Child Protection Act. Beginning early 2020, the act replaces the Children and Young Persons (Care Orders) Act, the Foster Care Act and the Placing of Minors Regulations. The new Child Protection Act includes additional protection orders for children needing care or who are at risk of being placed into care arrangements.<sup>cclxxxiii</sup> In similar fashion, Croatia is continuing implementation of the 2018–2020 Action Plan on Deinstitutionalisation. Throughout 2019, various meetings were organised to discuss the implementation of the new act as well as the importance of effective coordination between foster parents, providers of social services and support centres.<sup>cclxxxiv</sup> In 2019, Lithuania made further progress on implementing its Strategic Guidelines 2014–2020 and accompanying Action Plan, which aim to prevent children entering institutional care and instead transition to community-based services.<sup>cclxxxv</sup> This is to be implemented by 2020. Although it is unclear from our data whether this development can also be categorised as a development around deinstitutionalisation, Portugal passed a new regulation recommending that the government changes the policy for the protection of children and young people at risk to encourage and privilege foster care amongst placement measures.<sup>cclxxxvi</sup> Finally, the proposed Child Protection Act in Malta includes a proposal that foster parents who have had a child in their custody for more than five years will be able to file a court request to adopt the child.<sup>cclxxxvii</sup>

### *Increasing financial support*

At least five EU member states issued provisions that stipulated increased financial support for children in care arrangements or their care takers, or in the case of the UK, children who are leaving care and transitioning into adulthood. The UK increased its support for young people who are transitioning out of foster care by committing roughly GBP 19 million (€22.3 million) in funding to assist with access to housing, independent living support and further education.<sup>cclxxxviii</sup> Lithuania has passed a temporary foster care allowance for persons who have been approved for temporarily fostering children. The temporary foster care allowance equals six basic social benefits (basic social benefit in 2019 was €38).<sup>cclxxxix</sup> The newly established benefits system of Flanders, Belgium, named *Groeipakket*, also provides for monthly ‘care’ supplements for orphans or children in foster care.<sup>ccxc</sup>

### *Developments around contact and information*

In July 2019, Malta passed a law that includes provisions to ensure that contact with biological families can be maintained and to facilitate adoption by foster families.<sup>ccxci</sup> In Romania, a National Information System for Adoption was established with the aim to help simplify processes and the sharing of information about children in child protection and adoption proceedings. This includes keeping all records of a child in a single file for each child, which can be edited and shared between agents involved in the adoption process.<sup>ccxcii</sup>

## Children living in non-traditional families

### *Adoptive families*

Based on the information gathered for this report, developments for adoptive families took place in at least four countries, including Germany, Slovenia, Belgium and the UK. The federal cabinet (*Bundeskabinett*) of the German Federal Government adopted two draft bills aimed at facilitating adoption and providing support to adoptive families. One bill (*Entwurf des Adoptionshilfe-Gesetzes*) proposes measures that expand the support offered to all parties involved in an adoption, encourage open adoption<sup>1</sup>, and strengthens regulations around adoption agencies. The second bill proposes enabling the partners of parents to adopt their partners' children without the need to get married first, as is currently the case (*Gesetzentwurf zur Stiefkindadoption*).<sup>ccxciii</sup>

The UK government has announced additional funding of GBP 45 million (approximately €53 million) to support the Adoption Support Fund, which supports families at all stages of the adoption journey. The UK government has also committed to provide more funding to regional adoption agencies, which focus on finding adoptive families for children from minority ethnic backgrounds.<sup>ccxciv</sup>

### *Rainbow families*

Recognition of same-sex families varies from Member State to Member State. This means that parents' rights can be affected when exercising the right to free movement and/or relocating from one Member State to another.<sup>ccxcv</sup> This has been the case for one rainbow family in Poland. In December 2019, the court refused the registration of two mothers as 'parents of a child', consequently upholding the decision not to recognise same-sex parents as a family.<sup>ccxcvi</sup> In the UK, the High Court of England and Wales ruled that a transgender man who gave birth is not allowed to be registered as the child's father – but must be registered on the child's birth certificate as 'mother', despite being legally male. This ruling had the effect that motherhood is now defined in English law as the state of being pregnant and giving birth, regardless of the person's gender at the time. The ruling includes a statement that highlights the 'pressing need' for the government and parliament of the United Kingdom to address the question of the status of transgender parents who have given birth.<sup>ccxcvii</sup>

## In summary

This section illustrates the diverse needs of vulnerable children. Accordingly, there is a wide range of policy and practice developments for different groups, ranging from increasing funds for additional support, increasing access to learning and education, and better coordinated care and support services. There have also been developments around providing increased mental health support and fostering inclusion through sport and other leisure activities. Implementation of the Child Guarantee might further enable Member States to continue their efforts towards ensuring support for the most vulnerable children.

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<sup>1</sup> Open adoption refers to a form of adoption that allows birth parents to know and have contact with the adoptive parents and the adopted child (for more information, see for example: MacDonald M, McSherry D. Open Adoption: Adoptive Parents' Experiences of Birth Family Contact and Talking to Their Child about Adoption. *Adoption & Fostering*. 2011;35(3):4-16).



## Chapter 8: Summary

The objective of this report was to outline developments in child and family policy across the EU in 2019. It has focused on policies and practices that relate to the three pillars of the 2013 European Commission Recommendation for Investing in Children, as well as the 2017 European Pillar on Social Rights. To that end, after providing a brief overview of developments at the EU level, chapters in this report have reviewed developments in Member States in the following areas:

- Early childhood education and care (ECEC);
- Family leave provisions;
- Social and income support and benefits; and
- Children’s right to participation.

In addition, Chapter 7 provided information on different groups of ‘vulnerable’ children, with a broad definition applied to the term vulnerable. The methods used for gathering information for this report yielded sufficient information to offer an overview on developments regarding four groups of vulnerable children, including children with migrant and/or ethnic minority background (including Roma children), children with special educational needs (SEN), and children living in non-traditional families. This chapter provides a brief summary of the main takeaway points of developments reviewed in this report, as well as some observations on how they relate to the 2013 Recommendations for Investing In Children and/or the 2017 European Pillar on Social Rights. As explained in Annex 1, the available information varies by Member State and by issue area. This means that the picture presented in this report and the summaries below might not be exhaustive and the conclusions are rather tentative. The following paragraphs should be read with this caveat in mind.

In 2019, several Member States put in place new strategies and actions that focused on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The Barcelona targets stipulate that at least 33% of children under age 3 and at least 90% of children between age 3 and the mandatory school starting age should have access to formal ECEC. Based on the most recent Eurostat data available (2018), an average of 35.1% of under-3-year-olds were enrolled in childcare across the EU. However, enrolment rates differed considerably between Member states, with Denmark recording one of the highest rates (63.2%) compared to one of the lowest rates (1.5%) in Slovakia. Accordingly, while there has been progress, there are still countries that need to invest more in ECEC provision to reach the Barcelona targets. In addition, it is important to look beyond enrolment rates. Providing quality ECEC is also an important prerequisite for improving outcomes for children. In that regard, this report has presented some interesting examples of initiatives from Member States, such as paying attention to staff-to-child ratios in care centres, staff quantifications, and updating ECEC curricula to focus more on children’s personal development. These developments could be seen in support of one of the aspects covered by pillar 2 of the 2013 Recommendations, which suggest that investing in ECEC can help reduce inequality at a young age.

The year of 2019 saw the implementation of the Directive on Work-Life Balance, which sets out minimum standards for parental leave provisions. Previously, there was no minimum number of days for paternity leave set at EU level; the directive now stipulates at least 10 days. In 2019, at least seven Member States extended the length of available paternity leave, ranging from up to 30 days in Estonia to five days in Malta. Member States are asked to meet the minimum standards of the Directive on Work-Life Balance by 2023. It will be interesting to



see the progress made in the future regarding the directive, as well as towards Principle 9 of the 2017 European Pillar, which refers to improved work-life balance.

With approximately 23 million children living in poverty across the EU, this report has also examined changes in financial and benefit support for children and families. It appears that in 2019, a few Member States raised the amount of child benefits awarded to families. In several cases, Member States also increased their support for single parent families. These developments could possibly be seen as steps towards supporting children who live in precarious family situations, which constitutes one of the four target groups of the Child Guarantee initiative.

The year 2019 was also a year of children's rights, marked by the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The development of the EU Youth Strategy and the Bucharest Declaration show the EU's commitment to inclusion of children and young people in decision-making processes at the EU and national level. This report has provided some commendable examples of children's consultations that took place in 2019 on the Member State level. But in comparison to the other issue areas covered in this report, the information gathered on national initiatives aimed towards ensuring child participation was more limited.

The 2013 Recommendation aims to 'break the cycle of disadvantage'. The Final Report for the Child Guarantee acknowledges that some groups of children are more disadvantaged than others. Taking a very broad approach to the term 'vulnerable', this report covered 2019 developments regarding migrant children, children with ethnic background (including Roma children), children with special educational needs (SEN), children living in foster care, and children living in non-traditional families. Member States undertook a diverse range of initiatives to provide additional support to vulnerable children. Relatively little information was presented in regard to migrant children and children with ethnic minority background, but the information was more abundant for children with SEN. This included information on legal and policy developments, funding support, increasing accessibility and support in schools – both in terms of changes to the infrastructure, and providing more educational and awareness-raising support. The report has also covered a wide range of initiatives aimed at children living in institutions and foster care. This included increasing emotional support, reducing institutionalisation, increasing financial support, and some legal or policy developments around contact and information. Lastly, the report has provided information on two types of 'non-traditional families', including adoptive families and rainbow families.

Meeting the needs of diverse populations is challenging. But it is important that Member States continue their efforts to ensure progress towards the 2013 Recommendations, and consequently promote equal opportunities for all children in the EU.

## **Annex 1: Methodology**

The information collected for this report stems from two main sources. First, data has been gathered from questionnaires sent to experts in each EU member state (EU-28). A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 2. Experts were chosen based on their relevant expertise in child and family policy in the respective member state, as well as their language skills. The questionnaire was structured in accordance with a common reporting template, requiring experts to provide information on current policy objectives, legislation, programmes, initiatives and other measures that took place in 2019 in relation to the three pillars of the 2013 Recommendation for Investing in Children. It should be noted that national experts were afforded some flexibility in reporting information. Thus, there was some variation in the content, length and breadth of information included in each questionnaire. This variability is also reflected in our report when we outline the policy changes across European countries. Some topics are covered in more depth for some Member States than for others. In some instances, information might also not have been available for some countries at all. The report should be read with this caveat in mind. We would like to thank all experts for their contributions. A list of their names and positions is presented in Table 2.

The second main data source for this report was the monthly EPIC news-monitoring bulletins. Every month, the EPIC team publishes a news item on the EPIC website that covers developments in child and family policy in all Member States and (occasionally) at the EU or international level. To put together this news item, the EPIC team checks a number of relevant ministries' websites for updates on new developments in each Member States (typically those that cover children, families, social policy and education). Using internal language skills and internet translation software, the EPIC team identifies from these websites any relevant news items and announcements from the past month that indicate a change in policy or relevant development that speaks to at least one of the three pillars of the 2013 Recommendation for Investing in Children. For each relevant development, the EPIC team then writes a short news summary that clearly summarises the development, context and key actors, with hyperlinks to the relevant ministry website page that contains more information. The resulting news item is checked by two members of the core EPIC team (paying attention to both English language and the quality of the work) and approved by the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion (DG-EMPL) before being uploaded to the EPIC website. The information used for this report builds on the monthly EPIC news monitoring bulletins produced throughout 2019.

Data from both sources were collated with the use of a data extraction template. The authors then reviewed the data and included the most relevant information in this report. Some information was excluded, because it represented an ongoing debate and discussion, rather than a concrete development such as an initiative, a legislative proposal or a policy or legal change. For the background sections, a small number of additional references was included for added context.

We would like to acknowledge the following experts for their contributions to this report:

**Table 2 List of Expert Contributors**

Country	Name	Affiliation
Austria	Dr Isabella Hranek	Managing Director and Commercial manager, Austrian Institute for Family Studies, University of Vienna
Belgium	Asst Prof. Wim Van Lancker	Assistant Professor in Social Work and Social Policy, KU Leuven
Bulgaria	Ass. Prof. Elitsa Dimitrova	Associate Professor and sector leader, Institute for Population and Human Studies
Croatia	Ass. Prof. Ivana Dobrotić	Associate Professor, Faculty of Law, Department of Social Work, Social Policy, University of Zagreb
Czech Republic	Dr Alena Krížková	Head of department, Gender & Sociology Department, Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences
Cyprus	Dr Konstantina Rentzou	Senior Programme Manager, International Step by Step Association
Denmark	Ass. Prof. Peter Abrahamson	Associate Professor, University of Copenhagen
Estonia	Dr Asta Põldma	Researcher, Estonian Institute for Population Studies, Tallinn University
Finland	Dr Pihla Maria Siim	Junior Research Fellow, University of Tartu
France	Dr Anne Solaz	Senior Researcher, National institute for demographic studies (INED)
Germany	Prof. Bernhard Kalicki	German Youth Institute
Greece	Dr Konstantina Rentzou	Senior Programme Manager, International Step by Step Association
Hungary	Dr Zsuzsanna Makay	Research Fellow, Hungarian Demographic Research Institute
Ireland	Asst Prof. Dorota Szelewa	Lecturer and assistant professor at the School of Social Policy, University of Dublin
Italy	Dr Angela Papparuso	National Research Council Institute for Research on Population and Social Policies
	Dr Marina Zannella	University of Rome, Department of Methods and Models for Economics, Territory and Finance
Latvia	Dr Liga Abolina	Researcher at Department of Public Administration, Demography and Socio-Economic Statistics, University of Latvia
Lithuania	Ass. Prof. Ruta Braziene	Chief Researcher, Lithuanian Social Research Centre, Institute of Labour and Social Research
Luxemburg	Dr Aigul Alieva	Research Fellow, Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research
Malta	Prof. Valerie Sollars	Professor on Early Childhood and Primary Education, University of Malta
Netherlands	Dr Chantal Remery	Utrecht University School of Economics
Poland	Dr Anna Rybińska	Research Scientist, Duke University Sanford School of Public Policy, Center for Child and Family Policy
Portugal	Prof. Maria Filomena Gaspar	Professor at ProChild CoLab Against Poverty and Social Exclusion Association

Country	Name	Affiliation
Romania	Asst Prof. Costina Pasarelu	Assistant Professor at Babeş-Bolyai University (UBB)
Slovakia	Dr Daniel Gerbery	Lecturer in Department of Sociology, Comenius University
Slovenia	Dr Nada Stropnik	Senior researcher, Institute for Economic Research
Spain	Elvira González Gago	Independent expert
Sweden	Dr Maelis Karlsson Lohmander	Senior lecturer at University of Gothenburg
United Kingdom	Dr Michaela Bruckmayer	Analyst, RAND Europe

## Annex 2: Expert Country Profile Questionnaire

### Family life, work-life balance and child and family funding schemes

- Please summarise **any new developments** in policies and laws related to promoting family life and work-life balance and child and family funding schemes, **during 2019**.

*This might include (but is not limited to):*

- *changes or developments to family leave arrangements*
  - *changes or developments in policies around promoting family-friendly workplaces or enabling parents' participation in the labour force*
  - *changes or developments to social assistance available to some or all families (e.g. child benefit, childcare allowances, leave benefits, grants relating to families)*
- a) Please also indicate any **drivers behind these changes and developments**, if possible.
- b) **If there have been no developments or changes**, please also **indicate this**.

### Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

- Please summarise **any new developments** in policies or laws related to early childhood education and care **during 2019**.

*This might include (but is not limited to):*

- *changes in the **formal** childcare provision available to all or some families*
  - *changes to the **informal** childcare provision available to all or some families*
- a) Please also indicate the **drivers** behind these changes and developments, if possible.
- b) **If there have been no developments or changes**, please also **indicate this**.
- Are there any developing or emerging issues relating to **access to or quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC)**? Have there been any national reports, evaluations or strategies around this issue?

*This might include (but is not limited to):*

- *Issues of governance (for example, the regulation, evaluation and monitoring of ECEC settings and standards)*
- *Issues of access (for example, measures to increase participation in ECEC, financing arrangement)*

- *Quality of ECEC (for example, minimum qualification requirements for ECEC staff, provision of educational guidelines and requirements)*

### **Children and families at risk of poverty, social exclusion or marginalisation**

- Please summarise **any new developments** in policies or new laws relating to support or assistance for children and families who are at risk of poverty, social exclusion and marginalisation.

*In your response, please consider children:*

- *From migrant or asylum-seeking backgrounds*
  - *From ethnic minority and Roma backgrounds*
  - *From non-traditional families (including: single parent families, blended families with step-parents and -children, families with same-sex parents, families with children left behind)*
  - *Living in poor housing or at risk of homelessness*
  - *With special educational needs*
  - *Living in institutions or foster care*
  - *Vulnerable in another way*
- a) Please also indicate **the drivers** behind these changes and developments, if possible.
- b) **If there have been no developments or changes during 2019, please also indicate this.**

### **Child participation and rights of the child**

- Please describe **any new developments or changes during 2019** in mechanisms and practices that promote the participation of children.

*This might include (but is not limited to) the participation of children in cultural, social and political life (as well as in their education and other institutions).*

- a) **If there have been no developments or changes during 2019, please also indicate this.**
- b) Please describe **any developments or changes or new practices** that aim to promote any other aspect of child well-being.

### **Summary**

- Of all the developments discussed above, which do you believe are **the most important and why?**
- Is there **anything else** that has affected child and family policy during 2019 that we have not asked about?



- Are there **any overarching concerns or directions** within your country that have contributed to or driven the changes and developments in child and family policy during 2019?

## Annex 3: List of Relevant Research Published in 2019

The EPIC monthly news-monitoring bulletins, which constitute one of the two main data sources for this report, occasionally includes announcements of publications of new reports and research studies. The list below includes such studies and has been presented here as a potential resource for readers:

Reports published in 2019 related to work-life balance issues:

- Eurofound released a report analysing the uptake of parental leave by fathers across the EU. Analysing national statistical data, the study found that despite increased paternity leave entitlements in most Member States, the uptake of paternity and parental leave by fathers has not increased to the same extent, with marked differences in the uptake of leave across EU Member States.<sup>ccxcviii</sup>
- The European Equality Law Network, a European network of legal experts on gender equality and non-discrimination, also released a report on family leave. Focusing on enforcement of the protection against dismissal and unfavourable treatment in the context of family leave, the study highlighted how discrimination still affects many people in practice. One of the recommendations to remedy this situation is to facilitate access to childcare and to challenge gender stereotypes.<sup>ccxcix</sup>
- Finally, UNICEF published a new report examining family-friendly policies across 41 high- and middle-income EU and OECD countries. The study found significant disparities between countries in terms of the availability of paid parental leave provisions and affordability of ECEC. ECEC affordability often acted as a barrier for parents to access services, thus the study recommended that countries should take actions to remove this financial barrier to allow all children access to high-quality and affordable childcare. In the context of work-life balance, the study recommended that all countries provide statutory paid leave to both parents.<sup>ccc</sup>

Reports published in 2019 related to the ECEC provision:

- Eurydice report ‘Key data on early childhood education and care in Europe providing indicators on ECEC in EU Member States’.<sup>ccci</sup>
- UNICEF ‘Family-Friendly Policies Report’ examining ECEC for preschool children across 41 high- and middle-income EU and OECD countries.<sup>cccii</sup>
- OECD ‘Education at a Glance’ report providing data on the structure, finances and performance of education systems across OECD economies and other partner countries, including many EU Member States.<sup>ccciii</sup>
- Eurofound study ‘Challenges and prospects in the EU: Quality of life and public services’ reporting on young people’s inequalities in access to health and social services and highlighting the relevance of continuous professional development for the quality of interactions of staff and the outcomes for children in ECEC settings.<sup>ccciv</sup>

Reports published in 2019 related to family leave and other policies to support working parents and carers:

- The European Equality Law Network produced the report ‘Family leave: enforcement of the protection against dismissal and unfavourable treatment’. This report examines the problems of discriminatory treatment in the context of family leave (including, for example, the dismissal of pregnant workers) and concludes that in practice, such

discrimination affects many people. The report recommends that EU and Member State authorities give greater focus to policies and programmes that involve facilitating access to childcare and challenging gender stereotypes.

- Eurofound produced a report analysing the uptake of parental leave by fathers, drawing upon national statistics about parental leave uptake across EU. The report finds that while paternity leave entitlements have increased in most Member States over the last decade, uptake of paternity and parental leave by fathers has not risen to the same extent. While some countries have made progress in increasing the share of fathers taking parental leave, other countries lag further behind.
- UNICEF produced a report examining family-friendly policies in 41 high- and middle-income EU and OECD countries, including by examining the level of childcare leave available for parents. It found that there were significant disparities between countries in terms of the paid parental leave available and made a number of recommendations, including that all countries provide statutory paid leave to both parents, so that barriers to taking up such leave are removed.

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> For more information about the European Platform for Investing in Children, please see:

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1246&langId=en>

<sup>ii</sup> European Commission, 2013, ‘Commission Recommendation of 20.2.2013. Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage’, C(2013) 778 final. As of 10 June 2019:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=9762&langId=en>

<sup>iii</sup> European Commission, n.d., ‘European Pillar of Social Rights, Building a More Inclusive and Fairer European Union’. As of 6 September 2020: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/priorities/economy-works-people/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/priorities/economy-works-people/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights_en)

<sup>iv</sup> European Commission, 2018, ‘Proposal for a Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems’, COM(2018) 271 final 2018/0127 (NLE). As of 10 June 2019: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:05aa1e50-5dc7-11e8-ab9c-01aa75ed71a1.0003.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:05aa1e50-5dc7-11e8-ab9c-01aa75ed71a1.0003.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)

<sup>v</sup> European Commission, 2017, ‘Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU’, COM/2017/0253 final—2017/0085 (COD). As of 10 June 2019: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:84205176-2b39-11e7-9412-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:84205176-2b39-11e7-9412-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)

<sup>vi</sup> The UK formally left the EU on 31 January 2020. Because this report focuses on 2019 developments, the United Kingdom is still included as a Member State.

<sup>vii</sup> European Commission, 2013, ‘Commission Recommendation of 20.2.2013 Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage’, C(2013) 778 final. As of 10 June 2019:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=9762&langId=en>

<sup>viii</sup> European Commission, Council of the European Union, European Parliament, 2018, ‘European Pillar of Social Rights’, DOI:10.2792/95934. As of 10 June 2019: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/social-summit-european-pillar-social-rights-booklet\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/social-summit-european-pillar-social-rights-booklet_en.pdf)

<sup>ix</sup> Eurostat, n.d., ‘Social Scoreboard of Indicators’, European Pillar of Social Rights. As of 6 September 2020: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/european-pillar-of-social-rights/indicators/social-scoreboard-indicators>

<sup>x</sup> Eurostat, n.d., ‘European Pillar of Social Rights – Overview’. As of 6 September 2020:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/european-pillar-of-social-rights/overview>

<sup>xi</sup> European Council – Council of the European Union, n.d., ‘EU Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024’. As of 6 September 2020: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/eu-strategic-agenda-2019-2024/>

<sup>xii</sup> European Commission, 2017, ‘Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU’, COM/2017/0253 final—2017/0085 (COD). As of 10 June 2019: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:84205176-2b39-11e7-9412-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:84205176-2b39-11e7-9412-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)

<sup>xiii</sup> Eur-Lex (European Union Law), 2019, ‘Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU’. As of 6 September 2020: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32019L1158>

<sup>xiv</sup> European Commission, 2019, ‘A new start to support work-life balance for parents and carers, 2019’, Factsheet. As of 6 September 2020: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=17583&langId=en>; European Commission, 2019, ‘EU Work-life Balance Directive enters into force’. As of 6 September 2020:

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9438&langId=en>

<sup>xv</sup> This table was originally presented in Janta, Barbara; Davies, Lynn M.; Jordan, Victoria; Stewart, Katherine, 2019, ‘Recent Trends in Child and Family Policy in the EU. European Platform for Investing in Children: Annual Thematic Report’, European Commission, Brussels. As of 6 September 2020:

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<sup>xvi</sup> European Council – Council of the European Union, 2019, ‘Gender-Equal Economies in the EU: The Way Forward - draft Council Conclusions’, 14254/19, Note from Presidency to Permanent Representatives Committee/Council. As of 6 September 2020: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14254-2019-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>xvii</sup> European Commission, 2017, ‘Towards a European Education Area by 2025’, Weekly Meeting. As of 6 September 2020: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/towards-european-education-area-2025-2017-nov-14\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/towards-european-education-area-2025-2017-nov-14_en)

<sup>xviii</sup> European Commission, 2018, ‘Proposal for a Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems’, COM/2018/271 final - 2018/0127 (NLE). As of 6 September 2020:

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[https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/proposal-for-council-recommendation-on-early-childhood-education-and-care\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/proposal-for-council-recommendation-on-early-childhood-education-and-care_en); <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52018DC0271>

<sup>xix</sup> European Commission, n.d., ‘ET 2020 Working Groups’. As of 6 September 2020: [https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-working-groups\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-working-groups_en)

<sup>xx</sup> European Commission, 2019, ‘European Citizens’ Initiative: Commission registers “Europe CARES - Inclusive Quality Education for Children with Disabilities” initiative’, Press release. As of 6 September 2020: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_19\\_1417](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_1417)

<sup>xxi</sup> European Commission, n.d., ‘Child guarantee for vulnerable children’. As of 6 September 2020: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en>

<sup>xxii</sup> Von der Leyen, Ursula, n.d., *A Union that strives for more: My agenda for Europe*. As of 23 November 2020: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/political-guidelines-next-commission\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/political-guidelines-next-commission_en.pdf)

<sup>xxiii</sup> European Commission, n.d., ‘Child guarantee for vulnerable children’. As of 6 September 2020: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en>; European Commission, 2020, ‘Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG): Final Report’. As of 6 September 2020: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=22869&langId=en>

<sup>xxiv</sup> European Parliament (EPRS), 2019, ‘European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) 2021-2027’, Briefing, 2019. EU Legislation in Progress 2021-2027 MFF. As of 6 September 2020: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/625154/EPRS\\_BRI\(2018\)625154\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/625154/EPRS_BRI(2018)625154_EN.pdf)

<sup>xxv</sup> European Commission, n.d., ‘A renewed EU Youth Strategy proposed by the European Commission for 2019-2027’. As of 6 September 2020: [https://ec.europa.eu/youth/news/eu-youth-strategy-adopted\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/youth/news/eu-youth-strategy-adopted_en)

<sup>xxvi</sup> European Commission, n.d., ‘EU Youth Coordinator’. As of 6 September 2020: [https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy/euyouthcoordinator\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy/euyouthcoordinator_en)

<sup>xxvii</sup> www.youthconf.ro, n.d., ‘About – #YouthConf’. As of 17 June 2020: <https://www.youthconf.ro/about/>

<sup>xxviii</sup> Youth of European Nationalities (YEN), 2019, ‘Our Toolkit on Youth Participation is there!’. As of 6 September 2020: <http://www.yeni.org/2019/10/22/our-toolkit-on-youth-participation-is-there/>

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<sup>xxx</sup> ‘Exploring What the EU Can Do To Promote and Support the Participation of Children in Decision-Making. Experts’ Supporting Document to the Bucharest EU Children’s Declaration – draft version 5, May 2019’. As of 6 September 2020: <https://www.unicef.org/romania/media/656/file/Experts%E2%80%99%20supporting%20document%20to%20the%20%22Bucharest%20EU%20Children's%20Declaration%22.pdf>

<sup>xxxi</sup> Bucharest EU Children’s Declaration, *Child Participation*. As of 11 June 2020: <https://childparticipation.typeform.com/to/h8dSPt>

<sup>xxxii</sup> European Commission, 2019, ‘Bucharest Declaration highlights the role of children in decision-making processes’. As of 6 September 2020: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1246&newsId=9380&furtherNews=yes;> Romanian Children’s Board, 2019, ‘Bucharest EU Children’s Declaration on Child Participation in Decision-Making at National and EU levels’. As of 6 September 2020: <https://childrendeclaration.typeform.com/to/h8dSPt>

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Romanian Children’s Board, 2019, ‘Bucharest EU Children’s Declaration on Child Participation in Decision-Making at National and EU levels’. As of 6 September 2020: <https://childrendeclaration.typeform.com/to/h8dSPt>

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Committee of Ministers, Council of Europe Portal, 2012, ‘Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18’. As of 11 June 2020: [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805cb0ca](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805cb0ca)

<sup>xxxv</sup> Council of Europe, 2016, ‘Child Participation Assessment Tool’, Children’s Rights Division and Youth Department. As of 6 September 2020: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/child-participation-assessment-tool>

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Council of Europe, 2016, ‘Child Participation Assessment Tool’. As of 6 September 2020: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/child-participation-assessment-tool>

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Vote for Children, n.d., ‘Putting Child rights at the heart of EU action’, Child rights manifesto. As of 6 September 2020: <https://www.childrightsmanifesto.eu/about/>

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Vandenbroek, Michel, Lenaerts, Karolien, Beblavý, Miroslav, 2018 ‘Benefits of Early Childhood Education and Care and the Conditions for Obtaining Them’. European Commission, Brussels. As of 6 September 2020: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/14194adc-fc04-11e7-b8f5-01aa75ed71a1#>

<sup>xxxix</sup> Υπουργείο Εργασίας, Πρόνοιας και Κοινωνικών Ασφαλίσεων, n.d., ‘Σχέδιο Δράσης Δημογραφικής και Οικογενειακής Πολιτικής 2019-2020’. As of 6 September 2020:

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<sup>xl</sup> Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth (Υπουργείο Παιδείας και Πολιτισμού), 2018, 'Unified Evaluation Plan', “Ενιαίο Σύστημα Αξιολόγησης Μαθητή / Μαθήτριας

(ΕΣΑ)”. As of 6 September 2020: <http://enimerosi.moec.gov.cy/archeia/1/ypp8560b>

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