Resolution on ‘Children first – strengthening the Child Guarantee, two years on from its adoption’

2023/2811(RSP) - 21/11/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 386 votes to 87, with 141 abstentions, a resolution entitled ‘Children first - strengthening the Child Guarantee, two years on from its adoption’.

Child poverty is a European problem that affects all Member States and should be tackled as such in all Member States with ambitious European and national instruments. NextGenerationEU, in particular the policies for the next generation pillar of the national recovery and resilience plans adopted by the Member States under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), offers a unique opportunity for significant investments and reforms aimed at improving early childhood education and care, its quality and inclusiveness. The Member States’ implementation of these measures should be closely monitored and designed and delivered in synergy with existing national and European programmes in the field, in particular the ECG, the ESF+ and the other European structural and investment funds.

There has been a **delay in the implementation** of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) plans, which, in turn, has delayed reforms in the Child Guarantee national action plans (NAPs) financed through the ESF+. ESF+ resources alone are in no way sufficient for addressing the challenge of child poverty in the EU and, therefore, a **significant increase in funding** for the European Child Guarantee (ECG) is of utmost importance.

20 months after the original due date of March 2022, only 25 Member States have adopted their national action plans on the ECG. In general, the plans lack attention and focus on particularly vulnerable families, such as single-parent families, low-income families and large families facing additional difficulties.

Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the European Child Guarantee and the national action plans

Parliament called on the remaining Member States (Austria and Latvia) to urgently adopt their Child Guarantee NAPs. Member States are urged to set even more ambitious objectives to tackle child poverty, with targeted measures to ensure access to key services for all children from their earliest years, especially for the children in greatest need, such as those displaced by wars, including from Ukraine, those experiencing homelessness or living in severe housing deprivation, those with disabilities or mental health problems, or from a migrant or ethnic minority background, in particular from Roma communities.

The resolution highlighted the need for comprehensive and disaggregated data on child poverty and access to key services from the Member States. Member States are invited to exchange best practices about techniques to collect data and monitor policies, and to create child poverty observatories to gather quality data.

The Commission is called on to create a transparent and publicly accessible EU-wide monitoring tool.

In addition, the resolution called for:

- the allocation of additional resources to support for children with **disabilities**, developmental delays and /or special needs;

- increased efforts to ensure that all children in need receive at least **one free, healthy, hot meal a day**;

- the urgent development of an integrated EU-level strategy, including public solutions for social, non-segregated and affordable **housing**;

Financing of the European Child Guarantee

Parliament reiterated its call for an **urgent increase in funding for the ECG**, with a dedicated budget of EUR 20 billion for 2021-2027 that must be made part of the revised multiannual financial framework and reinforced ESF+. It deeply regretted the fact that the Commission's proposal on the mid-term revision of the multiannual financial framework does not reflect Parliament's long-standing demand for an urgent increase in funding for the ECG.

The Commission is called on to:

- assess the quality of spending on children, and in particular to evaluate the effective and consistent use of the EUR 8.9 billion dedicated to the ECG under the ESF +;

- lift administrative burdens to ensure direct, adequate and easily accessible funding at regional and local level in order to boost investment in social infrastructure and increase the capacity of regional and local services to pilot new models and innovative solutions for reducing child poverty;

- ensure the calls for proposals and funding opportunities reach all stakeholders, including CSOs tackling child poverty.

Governance of the European Child Guarantee

Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to draw up a solid governance framework at EU and national level, with clear political responsibility and leadership, ensuring a successful and integrated interplay between the Child Guarantee, national frameworks and strategies. It also called for the revision of existing relevant strategies to prevent and mitigate child poverty.

National coordinators need adequate leverage and financial and human resources and require a strong mandate to effectively and efficiently coordinate the implementation of the NAPs. Moreover, the possibility of establishing a **European authority for children** was reiterated in the resolution. An impact assessment should be carried out to explore how this body would function.