

EUROMA REFERENCE DOCUMENT

How to guarantee that the European Child Guarantee efficiently tackles Roma children's poverty and inequality gap?

April 2022

Critical aspects to consider in the context of the Child Guarantee National Action Plans and of the European Cohesion Policy Funds 2021-2027

Launched in 2007, EURoma (European Network on Roma inclusion under ESI Funds) brings together public authorities responsible for Roma policies and those responsible for ESI Funds (EU Funds in the 2021-2027 programming period) from fifteen European Union (EU) Member States as well as the European Commission. It aims to promote (through mutual learning, generation of knowledge and awareness-raising activities) an increased and effective use of these funds for the promotion of social inclusion, equal opportunities and fight against discrimination of the Roma community across the EU.

On 24 March 2021 the European Commission put forward its proposal for a comprehensive [EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2021-2024](#) with a view to promote joint efforts to better protect all children, to help them fulfil their rights and to place them right at the centre of EU policy making. It aimed at bringing together all new and existing EU legislative, policy and funding instruments - including the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)- within one comprehensive framework.

Subsequently, as an integral part of this EU Strategy, the Council adopted a [Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee](#) on 14 June 2021 to focus specifically on 'children in need' (the 22.9% of those children under the age of 18 who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, i.e. 18 million children). The Recommendation makes specific reference to children with a migrant background or minority ethnic origin (particularly Roma) as one the target groups.

The Child Guarantee aims to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing access of children in need to a set of key services, thereby also contributing to upholding the rights of the child by combating child poverty and fostering equal opportunities.

Roma children are explicitly targeted as one of the specific categories of children to be reached.

Both instruments stress the need to put forward measures to fight against poverty, to foster equal opportunities and to promote inclusive and non-discriminatory health and education systems. Member States are called to guarantee effective and free access to early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day and healthcare, as well as effective access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing.

These EU initiatives, together with the [EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation 2020-2030](#), including the [European Commission Communication](#) and the [Council Recommendation](#), contribute to the joint efforts to make EU rights and values more tangible for Roma adults and children across the EU.



Infographic - European Child Guarantee: how the EU protects children, European Commission

I. The added value of the European Child Guarantee for Roma children

The Child Guarantee aims to ensure access to essential services for all children in need in the EU and specifically identifies Roma children as one of the groups facing particular disadvantages and, therefore, requiring special attention when implementing the Recommendation at national level.

This explicit mention of Roma children in a European mainstream instrument becomes a very important step forward since it acknowledges the particular levels of inequality and disadvantage that they face across the EU and the need for a targeted commitment.

As stated in the [European Commission's Staff Working Document Accompanying the document Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee](#), while discrimination and prejudices against minorities in general still have a direct bearing on children

with a minority racial or ethnic background in the EU, the situation of Roma, who are the largest ethnic minority group in Europe¹, calls for special attention. In most Member States with sizeable Roma population, Roma children are at least twice as likely to experience income poverty as their non-Roma peers. Around 60% of them live in severe material deprivation and 85% are at risk of poverty (compared to 19.6% for children in general)². 50% face nutritional risk, has underlying malnutrition and exhibit stunting and inadequate child growth (41% of Roma children live in a household where at least one person in the household went to bed hungry at least once in a month)³. In addition, the housing situation remains difficult especially due to inadequate and segregated housing: 61% of Roma are affected by housing deprivation (general population: 17.9%) and 78% live in overcrowded households (general population: 17.1%).

It also remains a challenge to ensure effective equal access to inclusive, desegregated, mainstream education and training as well as early childhood education and care for Roma children. Although certain progress has been made (the share of early school leavers dropped from 87% to 68%, attendance of early childhood education increased from 47% to 53%, while the percentage of compulsory-schooling-age children attending education jumped from 86% to 90%)⁴ since the adoption of the EU Roma Framework in 2011, there is much room for improvement. As an example, the high share of Roma children (44%) attending schools where 'most or all schoolmates are Roma' and the share of Roma children attending early childhood education and care (42% compared to 92.2% for general population)⁵; the number of Roma children of compulsory schooling age not attending education (10% in 2016)⁶; the extremely high share of early leavers from education and training (ranging between 57% and 92% in nine surveyed Member States)⁷. In addition, since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, these challenges have deepened for many Roma children, notably those from remote and marginalised communities, due to their lack of internet access and IT equipment necessary to participate in distance learning, resulting in an increased risk of Roma dropping out of school or falling behind in their education⁸.

¹ No official census or statistical data on Roma and Roma children exist in most EU Member States, though. Table A8 in Staff Working Document Annex includes Council of Europe estimation of population sizes per country and some references to the methodological difficulties.

² Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee Final Report, quoting Fundamental Rights Agency Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, 2016 and EU-SILC 2014, Eurostat, Table [TESSI012].

³ Fundamental Rights Agency, 2016, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II): Roma – selected findings

⁴ Commission Staff Working Document 'Roma integration indicators scoreboard (2011-2016)' accompanying the Communication 'Midterm review of the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies', SWD(2017) 458 final

⁵ Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the European Commission Communication 'A Union of Equality: EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation and its accompanying proposal for a revised Council recommendation on national Roma strategic frameworks for equality, inclusion and participation', SWD(2020) 530 final, Annex 2: Baseline for EU headline indicators

⁶ Fundamental Rights Agency, 2016, Education: the situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States Roma survey – Data in focus

⁷ European Commission Communication 'Midterm review of the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies', COM (2017) 458 final

⁸ Fundamental Rights Agency, 2020, Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – fundamental rights implications: focus on social rights

Against this background, efforts framed under the Child Guarantee are called to be focused on breaking down the generational vicious cycle of poverty that affects so many Roma families across the EU, understanding that living under (extreme) poverty hinders the enjoyment of many other rights. This is situation that too many Roma children face every day in the twentieth century.

This call to the particular vulnerable situation of Roma needs to be heard and deployed in Child Guarantee National Action Plans with specific measures, actions with a combination of short and medium- term goals aimed at bringing long-term structural changes for eradicating child poverty among Roma and other particularly disadvantaged groups. European Cohesion Policy Funds are also expected to play a crucial role in the implementation of the Child Guarantee.

The EU has built the best-ever institutional setting for undertaking policy reforms and interventions particularly focused on those social groups suffering from greatest levels of poverty, social exclusion, lack of equal opportunities and discrimination of European children. **This is an opportunity not to be missed since it can make a difference in the lives of many Roma children across the EU.**

II. How to ensure that Child Guarantee National Action Plans contribute to tackling Roma children poverty and exclusion?

Indeed, the Child Guarantee is built as a targeted initiative for specific target groups, such as Roma, and for specific areas. For this principle to be operational on the ground, it needs to be translated in terms of targeted assistance to access services and rights so that right to equal opportunities is guaranteed for Roma children.

There is the danger that targeted actions for Roma children, despite being acknowledged as one of the specific groups whose needs have to be particularly taken into account, become diluted in the implementation of national action plans (and regional ones when existing).

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Specific measures, targets and disaggregated indicators need to be put in place.

To avoid such risk and making the most of the Child Guarantee in relation to Roma, we believe **the following criteria should be considered in National Action Plans, as well as in regional ones:**

- **Acknowledgement/references of the specific situation of vulnerability and disadvantage of Roma children and the main challenges faced** based on objective information and data such as those presented in previous section (e.g. access to an inclusive, disaggregated, mainstream education and training; housing conditions; material

deprivation; digital gap; discrimination and prejudices...). It is also essential to pay particular attention to the specific situation of certain Roma children, such as those living in slums and segregated deprived areas and EU mobile Roma children (sometimes both coincide).

- **Inclusion of Roma children as one of the targeted categories of children within the scope of action of National Action Plans (and regional ones).**

- **Establishment of targeted measures accordingly to tackle poverty and guarantee equal access to rights of Roma children.**

- Reflect on what needs to be changed to reverse the situation and guarantee equal rights of Roma children, with a focus on reducing poverty, eradicating slums, assuring equal access to quality and non-segregated early childhood education and compulsory education;
- Combination of income support measures with activation measures: tackling poverty not only from having finances but a multidimensional process (having access to resources);
- Not only centered in the children themselves but also in supporting their families as key factor for overcoming poverty and social exclusion;
- Targeted measures around priority areas need to be defined for Roma children (poverty and social protection, educational segregation and drop-out of compulsory education and deprived segregated housing, among others).

The Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee states that:

1. Targeted categories of children in need have to be reached by corresponding integrated measures
2. Quantitative and qualitative targets to be achieved in terms of children in need
3. Monitor progress of implementation, including its outcomes and the impact on children in need

- **If mainstream measures are developed, inclusion of a set of safeguards to assure they reach out to Roma children**, including the explicit reference to Roma children as target group of the actions, the consideration of their needs and challenges in the assessment, the setting up of positive actions and/or adaptations to address potential barriers preventing them from benefiting from the actions...

- **Combine the setting up of direct interventions to Roma children and their families, with an improvement of already existing processes and programmes, and structural reforms for improving the impact of social protection schemes on child poverty in general and of certain vulnerable children such as Roma.**

- **Setting up a specific set of indicators specifically related to Roma children in key areas to allow for monitoring and evaluation. The objectives established in National Action Plans need to include specific targets for Roma and most relevant indicators need to be disaggregated by ethnic origin to be able to measure progress.**

It is necessary to include indicators that allow assessing the impact of measures on different categories of vulnerable children, such as Roma. A robust system of information and data collection on Roma children need to be put in place (*ad hoc* studies may be necessary to that end). This is a crucial aspect to eventually be able to assess results for Roma, otherwise specific impact of measures on Roma children will be diluted in the overall data not allowing for proper monitoring of one of the main aims of the Child Guarantee itself: the focus on those children in need, Roma being one of these specific categories. As reflected in the Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, there is a call to set:

- Targeted categories of children in need have to be reached by corresponding integrated measures
- Quantitative and qualitative targets to be achieved in terms of children in need
- Monitor progress of implementation, including its outcomes and the impact on children in need.

Dissemination of positive impacts of measures on Roma children will also be essential.

Proposal for a minimum set of indicators, disaggregated by ethnic or racial origin	
(Each country may consider their modification and/or extension based on its national context)	
Poverty and social exclusion	% of reduction of the “At-Risk-Of Poverty and Exclusion” (AROPE) indicator related to Roma childhood
Food and material deprivation	% of reduction of Roma children facing food and material deprivation
Education	% of reduction of early school leaving, school dropout and school segregation among Roma % of increase of Roma children in early childhood education and care % of reduction of the digital gap among Roma
Housing and essential services	% of reduction of children without access to adequate desegregated housing (considering elements such as housing deprivation, overcrowding, housing segregation...) and essential services

- **Good governance for aligning current EU/national instruments focusing on Roma inequality and equal rights to join forces and create synergies to that end.** The principles of the Child Guarantee for Roma need to be embedded in global strategies.

- **Alignment between public authorities.** It is essential to ensure a close cooperation between Child Guarantee National Coordinators and the National Roma Contact Points (as well as other public administrations such as sectorial ministers and regional and local authorities) around the programmes and actions to be developed under the umbrella of the Child Guarantee. There needs to be coherence between the Child Guarantee and the objectives established in National Strategic Frameworks on Roma equality, inclusion and participation 2021-2030 in each Member States, in particular in those objectives related to education (including early childhood education and care), nutrition, healthcare and housing as well as poverty and social exclusion in general. This should be applied to the regional and local level too.
- **Cooperation with other key stakeholders to assure outreach, implementation and monitoring of targeted actions for Roma children.** Cooperation with NGO working directly in the field with Roma children can certainly contribute to make the implementation of actions more effective.
- **Link between policy and structural reforms with the long-term and large-scale dimension that the European Cohesion Policy Funds allow for,** achieving the expected positive impact and social change of the investments.
- **Support to pilot experiences on tackling Roma poverty and social exclusion,** which, if successful, could be benchmarked, scaled up and transferred to other contexts at a later stage. Peer review could play an important role in this regard.

III. How to translate priorities for Roma children into programming documents of European Cohesion Policy Funds 2021-2027?

As established in the Recommendation for the Child Guarantee, EU Funds play a crucial role to assure its implementation. This is particularly relevant for the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), together with the REACT-EU, INVEST-EU and the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

Given the characteristics of the EU Cohesion Funds 2021-2027, the impact in achieving social change and fulfilling the Child Guarantee’s objectives and targets could be great if used at the full potential of the funds:

- by fully aligning the programming with the Child Guarantee objectives;
- by making use of the long-term approach of foreseen interventions that ESF+ allows for in order to achieve social impact;
- by combining critical situations and also using EU Funds to trigger social change and contributing to set up the basis for definite eradication of existing inequalities and poverty of children (particularly in relation to deprived housing in complementarity with ERDF);
- by having a comprehensive vision of the need to integrated interventions considering the whole family unit/household and its environment (in opposition to isolated and sectorial actions).

European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)

As established in the ESF+ Regulation entered into force on 1 July 2021, Member States where the risk of poverty or social exclusion among children of less than 18 years old is above the EU average for the years 2017- 2019 (i.e. above 23.4%) should earmark **at least 5% of their ESF+ resources under shared management to support targeted actions and structural reforms tackling child poverty**. All other EU Member States must programme an appropriate amount to address this challenge. Eleven countries are over the EU average of 23.4%, including five countries reaching up to a 30%: Romania, Bulgaria, Italy, Greece and Spain. This allocation will serve to implement the Child Guarantee.

Operations contributing to this thematic concentration requirement should be programmed under Specific Objectives (f), (h), (i), (j), (k) y (l). This means that measures related to Roma children’s equality and inclusion can be programmed under the Specific Objective (j) *Promoting the socio-economic integration of marginalised communities, such as Roma people*, which based on experience may have multiple advantages and the Specific Objective (i) related to third-country nationals, including migrants, but also under other Specific Objectives.

Advantages of programming measures under Specific Objective (j)

- The programming of targeted measures connected with the objectives of the National/Regional Roma Strategic Framework;
- The designation of a specific budget;
- The establishment of a performance framework with specific outputs, results indicators and milestones to be achieved by 2024 and targets to be achieved by 2029. This contributes to improve the gathering, monitoring and evaluation of data on the contribution of the Funds to Roma equality and inclusion;
- The selection of key intervention fields related to Roma equality and inclusion as defined in Annex I of the Regulation laying down the common provisions (including 126, 134, 136, 139, 145, 154 and 155);
- The promotion in a more efficient manner of integrated and innovative actions to promote Roma equality and inclusion.

Furthermore, **Member States should allocate at least 3 % of their resources of the ESF+ strand under shared management to address the forms of extreme poverty with the greatest social exclusion impact, such as homelessness, child poverty and food deprivation**.

Measures contributing to this thematic concentration requirement should be programmed under Specific Objective (m) *Addressing material deprivation through food and/or basic material assistance to the most deprived persons, including children, and providing accompanying measures supporting their social inclusion* or, in duly justified cases, either under Specific

Objective (l) *Promoting social integration of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including the most deprived persons and children, or both of those specific objectives.*

Examples of measures under each of the areas addressed by the Child Guarantee

Area	Specific Objectives under which measures can be programmed	Examples of measures
Education	(j) (f) (i) (l)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted long-term and integrated measures to ensure an inclusive and quality education for Roma boys and girls that contribute to prevent and reduce the gap between Roma and their non-Roma peers. Interventions should be aimed to: address school failure and early-school leaving in all educational stages; motivate students who left the educational system to return to it; tackle educational segregation/ concentration; promote engagement in post-compulsory studies; promote access and guarantee a universal and free of charge early childhood education and care, with particular attention to children from families with lower incomes. • Integrated and long-term interventions aimed to address the digital gap that exist among Roma population in general and Roma children in particular, contributing to the provision of the digital equipment, resources and competences to adapt to the current world. • Provision of support to families with children/teenagers in relation to the educational services. • Promotion of participation in cultural, free time and leisure activities. <p>Initiatives could be carried out in cooperation with educational authorities and specialised Third Sector organisations.</p>

Healthcare	(j) (i) (k) (l)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted long-term and integrated measures to improve social protection and access to essential public and private goods and services such as health services. • Provision of support to families with children/teenagers in their access to the services related to healthcare and health promotion, including the promotion of physical, psychic and socioemotional health, nutrition and healthy living habits. • Screening for people facing socio-economic vulnerabilities (diagnosis, treatment and medication are not ESF+ support priorities and should rather be financed with national/regional resources).
Nutrition	(j) (i) (l) (m)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions to tackle food deprivation and nutritional risk, together with accompanying measures for social inclusion. • Provision of support to families with children/teenagers in their access to the services related to nutrition and healthy living habits.
Housing	(j) (i) (k) (l)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted long-term and integrated measures to improve social protection and access to essential public and private goods and services such as social, health and housing services, in particular social housing. • Integrated and long-term interventions aimed to address housing segregation/concentration and substandard housing, including the reduction/eradication of shanty towns and other areas of substandard housing and the promotion of physical and economic regeneration of deprived/vulnerable urban and rural areas where the most excluded persons live. Rent support can be considered eligible under ESF+ as part of an integrated set of measures and considered essential (i.e. a necessary conditions) to ensure Roma inclusion.

		<p>It is essential to carry out these interventions in coordination and synergy with the ERDF, which will allow for the elaboration of integrated plans combining interventions to promote access to housing with interventions to support and accompany access to services of social protection, education, health, training and employment.</p>
<p>Crosscutting measures for different areas/ Specific Objectives</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted integrated and long-term interventions to reduce and prevent child poverty and exclusion as well as the intergenerational transmission of poverty among Roma children, through the provision of support to families with children/teenagers in their access to their systems of social protection, educational services, services related to healthcare and health promotion, including nutrition and healthy living habits, and adequate living conditions with special attention to housing and basic supplies as well as the social and community participation. • Interventions to develop inclusion strategies based on integrated activation pathways for families benefiting from minimum income schemes and other social incomes, which include support to access relevant resources, development of social and personal competences (including those related to the digital field and technological accessibility), the improvement of employability and education pathways. • Training and sensitisation of public services staff on the specific needs/problems faced by Roma children and their families. • Targeted long-term measures to promote equal treatment and non-discrimination (with special attention to antigypsyism) in the access to the different goods and resources (education and training, healthcare...). • Measures aimed at preventing and providing assistance to children victims of discrimination

		<p>on the ground of racial and ethnic origin (with specific reference to antigypsism).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interventions related to the promotion of awareness-raising (such as campaigns, sensitising actions...) as well as to the elaboration of studies, research and evaluations in the different fields (e.g. education, poverty and social exclusion) and their dissemination and transfer (e.g. through public events or other means) • Promotion of transnational and interregional cooperation for searching common solutions related to Roma equality, inclusion and non-discrimination between Member States, including programmes to address the particular challenges of EU mobile Roma children...
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European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

It is also envisaged that ERDF contributes to the implementation of the Child Guarantee by supporting long-term and integrated investments (independently or in combination with the ESF+) that contribute to reduce and prevent poverty and exclusion of Roma boys and girls (and their families) and to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty among Roma children, by ensuring:

- **Equal access to inclusive and quality education in order to reduce the existing gap between Roma children and their non-Roma peers**
- **Socioeconomic integration of marginalised communities, including Roma, and children with a migrant background**
- **Equal access to healthcare, in particular primary care services**
- **Transition from institutional to family- and community-based care**
- **Investment in housing for low-income households, people with special needs and above-mentioned vulnerable groups**

This could be done under the Specific Objective 4(iii) *Promoting the socioeconomic inclusion of marginalised communities, low-income households and disadvantaged groups, including people with special needs, through integrated actions, including housing and social services* and the Specific Objective 4 (iv) related specifically to third country nationals, including migrants but also under other Specific Objectives such as 1(v), 4(ii), 4(v), 5(i) and 5(ii).

Examples of measures under each of the areas addressed by the Child Guarantee

Area	Specific Objectives under which measures can be programmed	Examples of measures
Education	1(v), 4(ii), 4(iii), 4(iv), 5(i) and 5(ii)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted long-term and integrated measures to prevent and reduce school failure and early-school leaving among Roma girls and boys, in all educational stages, and promote their engagement in post-compulsory studies. • Targeted long-term and integrated measures to prevent and reduce the educational segregation/concentration of Roma children, in all educational stages. • Targeted long-term and integrated measures to promote access and guarantee a universal and free of charge early-childhood education, with particular attention to children from families with lower incomes. • Integrated and long-term interventions aimed to address the digital gap that exist among Roma population, contributing to the provision of the digital equipment, resources and competences to adapt to the current world.
Healthcare	4(iii), 4(iv), 4(v), 5(i) and 5(ii)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted long-term and integrated measures to improve social protection and access to essential public and private services such as social and health services.
Housing	1(v), 4(iii), 4(iv), 5(i) and 5(ii).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted long-term and integrated measures to promote access to housing and to address housing segregation/concentration. • Targeted long-term and integrated measures to promote physical and economic regeneration of deprived/vulnerable urban and rural areas in order to reduce special concentration of poverty. <p>This should be done through the elaboration of integrated plans combining interventions to promote access to housing with interventions to support and accompany access to services of</p>

		social protection, education, health, training and employment, in coordination with ESF+.
Crosscutting measures for different areas/ Specific Objectives		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted long-term and integrated measures to address the economic and social consequences of COVID-19 among Roma. • Targeted long-term and integrated measures to address the existing digital gap among the Roma population. • Targeted medium and long-term measures to prevent antigypsyism and fight against discrimination. • Measures aimed to promote innovative actions and experimentation in order to foster Roma equality and inclusion, with special attention to those most at risk of poverty.

Caution should be made that investments do not contribute to deepen segregation and that, whenever relevant, they contribute to desegregation.

Measures could be carried out in cooperation with relevant authorities and specialised Third Sector organisations.

IV. European Semester and child poverty and social exclusion

The programming of the funds for the 2021-2027 period should continue to address some of the gaps identified in the context of the European Semester economic and employment coordination process. Supported by the Social Scoreboard, the challenge of child poverty or social exclusion, has been highlighted in a number of Member States receiving related Country-Specific Recommendations.

With this purpose in mind, the country reports of the 2019 European Semester identified (in Annexes D) some priority areas to make the best use of those funds, also taking into account regional disparities. Several priorities closely relate to the services covered by the European Child Guarantee are highlighted, such as:

- (i) access to early childhood education and care and inclusive education;
- (ii) the transition from institutional to family- and community-based services; and
- (iii) access to quality and affordable social and healthcare services.

Furthermore, for the purposes of the Child Guarantee, as indicated in the ‘Staff Working Document Accompanying the Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee’, the following policy lines from the 2014-2020 period will still hold in 2021-2027:

- Comprehensive actions to foster the inclusion of marginalized children with particular attention to those with disabilities, with a migrant background, or from marginalised Roma communities.
- The shift from institutional to community/family-based care, including prevention of institutionalisation
- Providing access to quality and non-segregated, inclusive education for marginalised children, including children of Roma ethnicity and children with disabilities, and children with a migrant background
- Improving access to quality and non-segregated childcare, and to educational, social and healthcare services.

We have the tools to undertake the necessary reforms and invest on Roma children with a long-term and integrated perspective in order to make structural changes and revert the situation of disproportionate inequality and poverty that Roma children and their families face. Let’s use the full potential of the EU Child Guarantee and European Cohesion Funds 2021-2027 to that end.