



Summary Report

ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform

Community of Practice on Social Inclusion

Webinar on national and international commitments to address Child Poverty and the use of the European Social Fund (ESF)

10 March 2021

The webinar focussed on building links between national and international commitments to address Child Poverty made by Governments and the use of the ESF, drawing on experiences of the use of the ESF for concrete actions relating to implementing these commitments.

The webinar, organised by the ICF Transnationality Team on behalf of the European Commission, was attended by 60 participants who represented managing authorities (MA), intermediate bodies (IB) as well as national and EU-level stakeholders.

The webinar was opened by Maria-Anna Paraskeva from the European Commission who provided a comprehensive overview of the policy context related to **tackling Child Poverty and social exclusion** at the EU level. The European Commission has worked extensively on this topic: already in 1995, several initiatives on children and families in the context of gender equality and the reconciliation between work and family life and later, with the Open Method of Coordination for social inclusion, Child Poverty became a priority. While the ESF does not have a specific concrete focus on Child Poverty, the topic has been addressed through other priorities in the areas of childcare, early childhood education and care, as well as education throughout all stages of life.

Building on various initiatives undertaken by the European Commission, such as the Communication towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child¹ (2006) and the Recommendation on Investing in Children² (2013), the European Parliament called for a Child Guarantee³ to ensure that children at risk of poverty and social exclusion have access to certain services, allowing them to grow in an environment providing equal opportunities in life. The relevant Council Recommendation on the **Child Guarantee**, which is expected to be adopted by the European Commission in March 2021, will focus on the following areas: early childhood education and care, free education, school education and school-based activities, healthy nutrition, the provision of adequate housing and healthcare.

In the context of the ESF+, Member States have a specific obligation to allocate an appropriate amount of resources to support the Child Guarantee. For Member States with an at-risk-of poverty rate for children higher than the EU average, this amount needs to be at least 5% of the ESF+ allocation. Moreover, in the programming period 2021-2027, the Regulation of the ESF+, as well as the Regulation of the European Regional Development Fund and of other cohesion funds, include an enabling condition related to

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/eu-policy/towards-eu-strategy-rights-child_en

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32013H0112>

³ [Fighting Child Poverty - The Child Guarantee \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/eu-policy/towards-eu-strategy-rights-child_en)

Child Poverty which requires Member States to have a strategy on Child Poverty and an action plan to tackle related challenges.

The introduction on the EU context was followed by two presentations, namely on the Poverty Reduction Strategy in Spain, with a strong focus on addressing Child Poverty, and the National Plan against Child Poverty which is being prepared by the High Commissioner against Child Poverty and on the Sure Start Children's Houses and Early Years Programmes' in Hungary, which provides children living in extreme poverty with support in their earliest year and was first supported and developed by external funding (e.g. the ESF and Norwegian Fund) and is now part of the mainstream system of social services.

Strategies presented during the webinar

- Albert Arcarons Feixas and Alejandro Arias Lera from the High Commissioner Against Child Poverty in the Office of the Spanish Prime Minister presented the role of the ESF (+) in national poverty plans. They highlighted that addressing Child Poverty is particularly important for Spain, because of its high rate of children at risk of poverty. Child Poverty is covered in each of the goals of the **National Strategy for the Prevention and Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion (2019-2023)**, which also includes children at risk of poverty as a specific target group. The Strategy aligns with international and EU-level commitments, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention of the Rights of the Child (including an analysis in the General Budget on how the different programmes affect or promote the different rights established by the Convention), the EU 2020 Strategy, the European Pillar of Social Rights (and the recent Action Plan), the Recommendation on Investing in Children, the European Child Guarantee and the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2021-2024.

The High Commissioner Against Child Poverty is also working on the **National Action Plan for the Implementation of the Child Guarantee**. In this context, a research team is analysing transversal areas, related to more structural constraints and solutions for the proper implementation of the Council Recommendation for a Child Guarantee in Spain. They also look into four specific areas, which are the main challenges for vulnerable children in Spain (i.e. early child education and care, education and leisure, nutrition and health and housing).

The European Social Fund is one of the main tools for the implementation of the National Strategy and the Action Plan. Two of the three investment areas have a direct impact on more vulnerable children, namely **education, training and lifelong learning**, with the priorities of reducing early school-leaving and improving the educational level of citizens. An important role plays digital education, especially for vulnerable students, and **social inclusion and fight against poverty** with actions aiming at active inclusion, social integration of vulnerable people and equal and adequate access to quality services and social protection.

- Ivan Sörös, Head of Department in the Hungarian Ministry of Interior, presented the new **Hungarian National Inclusion Strategy (2021-2030)**, which aims at reducing the rate of material and social deprivation (especially amongst the Roma population), preventing the reproduction of poverty and ensuring equal access to socio-economic opportunities. The target groups are families with children living in poverty or extreme poverty, as well as the Roma population in general.

Ivan mentioned three social inclusion measures that were developed supported through EU funds and were then transformed into regular services within the system funded by the national budget, namely the Roma Boarding School, the Sure Start Children House and the Tanoda 'Study Hall'. Among these, the **Sure Start Children House** is a preventive child welfare service promoting integration, aiming at supporting the development and the compensation of children under three with socio-cultural disadvantages. The pilot, funded by the ESF, started in 2004. In 2012 it gained national financing and was mainstreamed into general service provision and referenced

in the law on Child Protection in 2013. Now approximately 2,500 children and parents use the services regularly (in 107 houses).

Lessons learnt from the financial transition from EU funds to national mainstreaming of these social inclusion measures highlight the importance of aligning the services with other strategic goals. For instance, by funding the development of social inclusion measures (i.e. the Sure Start Children House, Tanoda 'Study Hall' and Roma Boarding School), the ESF contributed to the objectives of the Hungarian National Inclusion Strategy. A continuous process of monitoring and redesigning is also crucial to ensure that these services reflect the needs, both at local and strategic level.

Moreover, Ivan highlighted as a challenge that once a service has been established, it takes time for the users' and for other services (even within the Ministry) to use it to its full potential.