

Ending educational and child poverty in Europe ^[1]

Leaving no child behind

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

No European country is free from child poverty. As latest available data show, across Europe more than 26 million children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. As well as being at greater risk than adults, the effects of poverty on children can last a lifetime.

At the root of child poverty and social exclusion is inequality. The top 10% of households in Europe now earn 31% of total income and own over 50% of total wealth, and the gap between rich and poor is growing in many countries.

Children living in single parent families, large households or households where the adults have little or no work are more likely to grow up in poverty. Indeed, children living in families with very low work intensity are 54% more likely to be at risk of poverty than those living in families with high work intensity. Even those children whose parents are in paid work have no guarantee that they will not be poor. In some European countries, including Luxembourg, Bulgaria, Spain and Sweden, one-fifth or more of children with working parents are at risk of poverty. In Romania the figure is nearly 50%. Children whose parents have low levels of education are also more likely to grow up in poverty and be socially excluded, as are the children of migrants. In all European countries apart from three, the

risk of being in poverty is higher among children whose

parents are migrants.

The figures above cover economic and material poverty, but child poverty is multidimensional and in order to tackle the root causes of disadvantage, we need to also consider educational poverty. We define educational poverty as a process that limits children's right to education and deprives them of the opportunity to learn and develop the cognitive and non-cognitive skills they will need to succeed

in a rapidly changing world.

Children who are educationally poor are also denied the opportunity to develop the skills that enable them to grow emotionally, establish relationships and have a sense of purpose in a society they feel they belong to. Educational poverty tends to be transmitted across generations, but it is a process that can and should be changed.

Material and educational poverty affect children's development and wellbeing from their earliest years, which means that investment in early childhood care and education is crucial. However, in 11 countries in Europe coverage of childcare is less than 20%, and in Slovakia, Poland, the Czech Republic and Romania, it is less than 10%. In Romania, Poland and Croatia, more than 50% of children do not have access to preschool. In most countries coverage actually decreased between 2012 and 2014 for both childcare and preschool services.

Children with parents from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are one-third more likely to be low achievers in mathematics and reading compared with children whose parents are in the top socioeconomic background.

Latest available data show that 22% of 15-year-olds in Europe were unable to apply mathematics they learned at school to real-life scenarios and 20% were low achievers in reading. It is a vicious cycle: material poverty leads to educational poverty and both mutually reinforce the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage.

Save the Children believes that ending child poverty, social exclusion and educational poverty must be a priority for all EU member states, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland and the European institutions. This requires several

measures, including:

- children's participation

- addressing the multidimensional nature of child poverty with an integrated and child rights-based approach
- investment in early childhood education and care
- budgeting to fulfil children's rights and securing these budgets against cuts.

Children are agents of change and can provide important insights and expertise that adults may not identify or prioritise. Their views - both in terms of their personal experiences of poverty and how to tackle it - must be taken into account throughout decision-making processes and efforts to end multidimensional child poverty, including educational poverty.

Children in eight European countries told Save the Children that education should be more relevant to children's lives and the skills they will need as adults. Children ask to be more involved in the running of the school through students' unions. All children should have access to sport, leisure and cultural activities, and parents

should be helped to find decently paid work.

We believe that child poverty and educational poverty have to be addressed with a child rights approach. All European countries have ratified the United Nations

Convention on the Rights of the Child, and therefore have obligations to protect, promote and fulfil children's rights, regardless of each child's family circumstances.

Policy and decision makers should tackle child poverty and social exclusion with a cross-sectoral approach. Adequate funds should be made available to invest in early childhood education and care and ensure that national education

systems provide equitable high-quality education.

European countries should increase support to children and families living in poverty through child-sensitive social protection and monitor the impact of social

protection interventions, including transfers, on children's wellbeing. European states should also promote parents' employability while guaranteeing adequate working conditions and the potential to reconcile work and family life. Universal services should be available for all children, with direct interventions towards vulnerable children.

The EU has agreed on a number of initiatives to tackle poverty. These include

Europe 2020: A European Strategy for Smart, Sustainable, and Inclusive Growth,

with its objective of lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty by 2020,

and the European Commission's Recommendation, Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage. As regards the former, tackling child poverty is not an explicit objective of the strategy and latest available data show that the EU is

far from achieving its overall anti-poverty target.

Crucially, the Investing in Children recommendation places children and support for the most disadvantaged children at the centre of efforts to combat child poverty and social exclusion and highlights the early years as a critical time

for children's development. However, EU member states are not required to report on their progress and to date the recommendation is not being fully implemented.

We urge the European Commission to monitor the implementation of the Recommendation Investing in children and the EU institutions to prioritise the fight against child poverty and social exclusion.

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: poverty ^[4]

disadvantaged children ^[5]

investment ^[6]

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