



## Combating Child Poverty in Europe – PES 11-Point Action Plan

*Declaration of PES Employment and Social Affairs Ministers*

*Adopted on 01 December 2025*

Child poverty is a stain on the European social contract and erodes the EU's social cohesion. Nearly one in four children in the EU grow up at risk of poverty or social exclusion. No child should be denied the right to a decent life, to health, to housing, to education and to a hopeful future.

As PES Ministers for Social Affairs and Employment, we must stand up for children's rights. With the introduction of the European Child Guarantee, our political family has taken a significant step towards ensuring access to essential services for every child in the EU. With this Declaration, we once again affirm our strong political commitment to end child poverty across Europe. We stand for a Europe that invests in its children. Every euro spent on our youngest generations is an investment in Europe's future – not a cost.

In a world where populism often overshadows genuine solutions, and economic difficulties alongside the cost-of-living crisis persist and increase, we are committed to advancing an EU social agenda that truly delivers. We want children to be at the core of EU policy and single out **the following 11 demands to combat child poverty**:

1. We welcome the Commission's upcoming **EU Anti-Poverty Strategy**. This Strategy must set ambitious targets and funding to eradicating poverty and social exclusion in all EU Member States, with children at its heart. We call for a 'poverty check' mechanism to verify that all EU policies have a positive impact on those in poverty and those at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU. In many Member States, minimum income is the last safety net protecting people against suffering and deprivation. We need EU legislation to make sure that no one in need is left without financial support and has a minimum income, as well as promoting social dialogue and collective bargaining with a view to wage-setting to ensure no one is left in poverty without support. Adequate funding at all levels of government is needed to achieve the Porto target of reducing the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million, including 5 million children. We further support a strategy for combating child poverty specifically. It is vital that the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy acknowledges the diverse circumstances of people across the EU through national and regional anti-poverty strategies.
2. The upcoming proposal to strengthen the **European Child Guarantee** provides a crucial tool to enhance free access to quality early childhood education and care, healthcare, nutrition, housing and participation in society. We continue to call for the

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full implementation of the Child Guarantee and allocating at least €20 billion to this instrument. Financial support to families with children contributes significantly in breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and should be reflected in the upcoming EU Intergenerational Fairness Strategy.

3. Prevailing failure and financialisation of the housing market fuels poverty, including of children. We therefore strongly welcome the upcoming first-ever **European Affordable Housing Plan** and ask that it caters to the needs of families, single parents, young people and migrants. **Housing is a human right and must be decent, affordable, available and of better quality.** We want to boost investments in social and public housing by reforming state aid rules. It is an outrage that there are around 1.2 million homeless people in Europe, including around 400,000 minors. We ask for an EU Strategy on Combating Homelessness, building on the European Platform on Combating Homelessness, and an increased roll-out of the Housing First approach. 'Renovictions', energy poverty and inadequate living conditions need to be practices of the past. Furthermore, we call for reducing the housing cost overburden rate from 40% to 25% of a household's disposable income. With housing conditions to be considered in its surrounding, we also fight transport poverty by exploring free offers of public transport for groups including young people.
4. **Universal access to quality healthcare** is a fundamental right and must be guaranteed across ages. The health of children and mothers needs specific attention, including prenatal and neonatal testing and monitoring. There is an unacceptable link between poverty and both infant mortality and stillbirths. We therefore call for an EU strategy addressing these pervasive natal healthcare inequalities. We support that children have free access to outpatient care from general practitioners, services or infant nurses and vaccination programmes in most EU Member States, and call for this practice to be strengthened and implemented in all EU Member States. Given that the availability of free access to prescribed medicines still depends considerably on the income of a child's household and country, we push for the adoption and implementation of the Pharmaceutical Package and Critical Medicines Act to help make medicines more accessible, available and affordable across Europe. We also reaffirm our call for a strong European Mental Health Strategy that specifically considers young people and children. The 'maternity packages' for newborns provided by some EU Member States can equally help to alleviate the financial burden of parents.
5. We recall the significance of **early childhood education and care (ECEC)** in reducing overall poverty levels by allowing women who were previously excluded from the labour market due to caring activities to seek work. We call for the effective implementation of the Barcelona targets and call upon the EU to invest more in the ECEC sector and in its workers to ensure the accessibility, quality, and affordability of services for children aged 0 to 3.
6. The right to education, training and lifelong learning constitutes the very first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights for a reason. We continue to fight for **free, non-discriminatory and equitable access to quality education at all levels.** Schools must be well-funded and provide affordable textbooks and healthy lunches. We equally

advocate for the increased provision of digital literacy programmes and for good connectivity, equipment, and infrastructure everywhere across Europe.

7. We emphasise the needs of **children with disabilities and children from minority groups** in our efforts to combat poverty, and these considerations should be reflected in the upcoming Anti-Poverty Strategy and the reinforced Child Guarantee. To better support persons with disabilities, minorities, and their families, policies and practices must be disability and diversity-mainstreamed.
8. **Women, particularly single mothers**, are disproportionately affected by poverty, which significantly increases the risk of poverty among their children. We call for a dedicated strategy to support the needs of single mothers and underaged mothers, especially regarding basic necessities, childcare and education, healthcare and access to employment. We are committed to closing the gender pay, care and pension gaps. Care work, largely carried out by women, is essential to our societies, yet too often undervalued and underpaid. We therefore seek to strengthen the recognition of care work and to build on the European Care Strategy towards a comprehensive Care Deal for Europe. We also remain committed to eliminating the 'pink tax', which unfairly discriminates against women in their daily cost of living.
9. Young people entering the labour market deserve **quality jobs**. Tackling youth unemployment is essential to break cycles of poverty and exclusion. With young people being more likely than older people to be at risk of precarious situations in the labour market, we promote decent working conditions and will reinforce the European Youth Guarantee with binding quality standards and an increased budget. We want all internships, traineeships, and apprenticeships to be carried out under good working conditions. Therefore, we support a strong Traineeships Directive, which will guarantee that trainees falling under the scope of this Directive are always paid and not discriminated against, while combating abusive practices.
10. We reaffirm the importance of taking effective action to advance the **social, educational and economic empowerment of Roma citizens**. Despite the development of numerous strategies and policy documents over the years, progress in improving the quality of life and the meaningful participation of Roma communities in social and political life remains limited. To achieve real socio-economic inclusion, policies must move beyond a passive approach and be grounded in two key pillars: (1) promoting participation by ensuring that Roma have equal opportunities to engage fully in political, social, economic and cultural life; (2) fostering effective partnership and cooperation between national and local authorities, EU institutions, civil society organisations and Roma communities.
11. There is no social progress without a strong social budget. In the ongoing **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)** negotiations, we call for a **well-funded and separate European Social Fund (ESF)**, solely dedicated to: education from the earliest age, employment, the right to training and skills, social innovation and social inclusion, and fighting against poverty and social exclusion, including aid for the most deprived, in order to ringfence the resources for social and territorial cohesion in the EU, whilst

preserving earmarking and ambitious social conditionalities as they are currently stipulated.

The fight against child poverty is a defining test for Europe's social model. Our political family will continue to lead this effort – no child should grow up poor, no young person should be left without opportunity.

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