



Contribution to Public Consultation on Strengthening of the European Child Guarantee



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Consultation on Strengthening of the European Child Guarantee

The European Food Banks Federation (FEBA) welcomes the European Commission's initiative to strengthen the European Child Guarantee (ECG), reaffirming the European Union's commitment to reducing child poverty and social exclusion. As the European Union advances towards its 2030 social targets¹, this initiative provides a crucial opportunity to address both the structural and immediate drivers of child poverty, including food insecurity, one of the most pervasive and often overlooked forms of deprivation affecting children across Europe. This represents a unique opportunity for FEBA and its members to work even closer with stakeholders to tackle child poverty and its root causes in Europe together.

Food banks play a vital role in supporting children in need by providing essential food aid and material assistance, while also contributing to inclusive and resilient communities. Their work directly supports the objectives of the ECG by facilitating access to healthy nutrition and complementing key services such as education, childcare, and social support.

¹ European Commission. (2024, December 18). European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/european-pillar-social-rights-building-fairer-and-more-inclusive-european-union/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en

Child Poverty and Food Insecurity in Europe

Despite sustained policy efforts at EU level, child poverty remains a significant and persistent challenge. According to Eurostat, in 2024, **19.5 million children** in the European Union are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, corresponding to approximately **24.2%** of all children². This situation must also be understood within the broader context, where **93.3 million people in the EU, or 21% of the population**, were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2024³. While this figure marks a slight improvement from the previous year, the reality remains that millions of people struggle daily to cover their basic needs⁴.

Food insecurity represents a critical dimension of this reality. In 2024, approximately **38.2 million people**, equivalent to 8.5% of the EU population, were unable to afford a meal with fish, meat or a vegetarian equivalent every second day⁵. Children are disproportionately affected by such deprivation, as inadequate nutrition has immediate and long-term consequences on their physical health, cognitive development, and educational outcomes.

Although inflationary pressures have eased compared to their peak in 2022-2023⁶, the cumulative impact of rising living costs continues to affect households, particularly those with children. In 2023, prices for food and non-alcoholic beverages rose by 12.5%, placing additional strain on households⁷.

As a result, food banks across Europe continue to experience sustained high levels of demand, particularly from families with children. This increased need has often coincided with constraints in food supply, requiring food banks in many cases to purchase additional food to fill the gap⁸.

To specifically address the nutritional needs of the youngest members of our societies, European Food Banks redistribute specific food products for babies and toddlers, such as jarred fruit and vegetable puree, cereals/ porridge, and biscuits. Non-food items are also a valuable part of the products sourced, in particular, diapers, baby cosmetics, and wipes. Besides providing material support, this report further showcases the involvement of FEBA Members in school meal programmes, weekend or holiday support schemes, as well as counselling services⁹.

Policy context

Being at risk of poverty or social exclusion often coincides with the lack of access to nutritious and healthy food. At the European level, various initiatives and tools support the well-being of children, especially from a food security and nutritional standpoint.

The European Child Guarantee¹⁰, first introduced in 2019 and adopted in 2021, constitutes a key instrument under the European Pillar of Social Rights, particularly Principle 11,

² Eurostat. (2025, May 28). 24% of EU children at poverty risk or social exclusion. Eurostat. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20250528-1>

³ Eurostat. (2025, April 30). People at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2024. Eurostat. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20250430-2>

⁴ Eurostat. (2024, June 12). People at Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion in 2023 - Eurostat. Ec.europa.eu. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240612-1>

⁵ Eurostat. (2025, August 28). Almost 9% in the EU could not afford a proper meal. Eurostat. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20250828-1>

⁶ Key figures on Europe. Eurostat. (2025) <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-key-figures/w/ks-01-25-003>

⁷ Key figures on Europe. Eurostat. (2024) <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-key-figures/w/ks-ei-24-001>

⁸ European Food Banks Federation (FEBA), *Data Collection 2024*.

⁹ Tackling Food Insecurity among Children: EU Policy Context and the Activities of European Food Banks – European Food Banks Federation – FEBA. (2024). Eurofoodbank.org. <https://www.eurofoodbank.org/publications/tackling-food-insecurity-among-children-eu-policy-context-and-the-activities-of-european-food-banks/>

¹⁰ Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 establishing a European Child Guarantee (14 June 2021).

which emphasises access to childcare and support for children¹¹. The Guarantee aims to ensure that children in need have free and effective access to essential services, including childcare, education, and healthcare, as well as effective access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing.

Its implementation relies on coordinated action at national level through National Action Plans (NAPs), supported by EU funding instruments such as the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), which includes earmarked resources to address child poverty. Nevertheless, progress remains uneven across Member States, and the European Union is not yet on track to achieve its broader poverty reduction targets set out in the 2021 Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Strengthening the ECG is therefore essential to ensure more effective and consistent access to services, in particular access to healthy nutrition for children in vulnerable situations.

The ECG places a strong emphasis on ensuring effective access to healthy nutrition for children in need. It highlights the importance of providing access to balanced meals not only within educational settings but also beyond school days, recognising that children's nutritional needs extend throughout the year. The ECG therefore promotes the establishment of adequate nutrition standards in early childhood education and care settings, as well as in schools, ensuring that meals are tailored to children's dietary needs and contribute to reducing the consumption of low-nutritional-value foods.

Evidence consistently shows that children and adolescents from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to have diets lacking in fruits, vegetables, and plant-based foods¹². In response, as of 2024, several Member States have implemented measures supported by EU funding instruments to improve access to nutrition for children¹³. For example, Spain has introduced programmes under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) to combat material deprivation, including the provision of food and basic assistance. Croatia uses ESF+ to support school meal provision, while Greece combines the EU School Fruit, Vegetables and Milk Scheme with funding from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund to provide meals to vulnerable groups. In Italy, ESF+ resources are used to reduce the cost of school meals and strengthen cooperation between public services and third sector organisations, complemented by investments under the Recovery and Resilience Facility to improve school canteen infrastructure.

The Role of Food Banks in Child Poverty Alleviation

Access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food is a fundamental prerequisite for children's well-being and development. Food banks play a crucial role in supporting this objective by redistributing food and essential goods to charities and social organisations that work directly with children and families in need.

In 2024, FEBA Members redistributed approximately **834,000 tonnes of food** and reached around **12.2 million people** across Europe, including a significant number of children¹⁴.

According to available 2024 data provided by 19 FEBA members (Moldova, Spain, Greece, Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Ukraine, Switzerland, Portugal, Ireland, Romania, North Macedonia, Poland,

¹¹ European Pillar of Social Rights (2016) The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles. Online, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1606&langId=en>

¹² Child Guarantee National Action Plans. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/734003/IPOL_BRI\(2022\)734003_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/734003/IPOL_BRI(2022)734003_EN.pdf)

¹³ Tackling Food Insecurity among Children: EU Policy Context and the Activities of European Food Banks – European Food Banks Federation – FEBA. (2024). <https://www.eurofoodbank.org/publications/tackling-food-insecurity-among-children-eu-policy-context-and-the-activities-of-european-food-banks/>

¹⁴ European Food Banks Federation (FEBA), Data Collection 2024.

Belgium), 2.168.148 children and young people under the age of 18 received food and non-food products, this number corresponds to 29,08% of their total final beneficiaries¹⁵.

Through their extensive networks, food banks support a wide range of services that are directly aligned with the objectives of the European Child Guarantee. These include support to organisations providing childcare, education, housing assistance, and social services.

In addition to general food aid, food banks also provide targeted support addressing children's specific needs. This includes the distribution of baby food, infant formula, and other age-appropriate nutritional products, as well as essential non-food items such as diapers and hygiene products. Furthermore, food banks are actively involved in initiatives that directly support children's access to nutrition, such as school meal programmes and weekend or holiday support schemes.

According to data collected in 2024, 63% of FEBA Members redistributed food products to children. Beyond material assistance, food banks also engage in educational and awareness-raising activities, including workshops on nutrition and food waste prevention, thereby contributing to children's long-term well-being and social inclusion¹⁶.

A Rights-Based Approach to Children's Access to Food

The right to food is recognised under Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which establishes the right to an adequate standard of living and the fundamental right to be free from hunger¹⁷. However, this right is not explicitly enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

Strengthening the European Child Guarantee offers a key opportunity to adopt a rights-based approach to children's access to healthy nutrition. Such an approach would reinforce the coherence and effectiveness of policies across Member States, while also helping to reduce the stigma often associated with receiving food aid. Recognising access to adequate nutrition as a fundamental right would ensure that all children can benefit from the conditions necessary for their development and well-being. FEBA therefore strongly advocates for the integration of a rights-based approach to food within the framework of the European Child Guarantee.

Strengthening EU Funding to Support Children

EU funding instruments play a pivotal role in supporting the implementation of the European Child Guarantee. In particular, the ESF+ fund has enabled food banks and their partner organisations to provide essential food aid and material assistance to millions of people, including children.

However, recent developments related to the next Multiannual Financial Framework for the period 2028-2034, as well as revisions to the ESF+ Regulation, indicate a potential shift in priorities towards areas such as security and defence, alongside a risk of reduced emphasis on social inclusion¹⁸. Furthermore, the absence of clear earmarking for social inclusion and material deprivation could weaken targeted support for vulnerable groups, including children.

In this context, maintaining and strengthening dedicated funding for child poverty, including the existing earmarking under ESF+ resources for combating child poverty, is essential to ensure

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Tackling Food Insecurity among Children: EU Policy Context and the Activities of European Food Banks – European Food Banks Federation – FEBA. (2024). [Eurofoodbank.org. https://www.eurofoodbank.org/publications/tackling-food-insecurity-among-children-eu-policy-context-and-the-activities-of-european-food-banks/](https://www.eurofoodbank.org/publications/tackling-food-insecurity-among-children-eu-policy-context-and-the-activities-of-european-food-banks/)

¹⁷ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, art 11(1) and art 11(2).

¹⁸ Regulation (EU) 2025/1913 amending Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 (ESF+).

European Commission, Proposal COM(2025) 164 final (ESF+ revision).

the effective implementation of the European Child Guarantee. To ensure achieving its objectives, the ESF must preserve ESF+ thematic concentration of 25% for social inclusion, 3% for material support to address the most deprived persons, 5% to fight child poverty, as well as to implement the Youth Guarantee, and provide capacity-building for civil society and social partners.

Engagement of Civil Society

The effective implementation of the European Child Guarantee depends on the meaningful involvement of civil society organisations, including food banks, which possess direct expertise and experience in supporting children and families in vulnerable situations. Food banks are uniquely positioned to identify emerging needs, provide immediate assistance, and connect beneficiaries to broader social services.

To fully leverage this potential, the strengthened European Child Guarantee should ensure structured and continuous consultation of civil society actors at both EU and national levels. Improving access to EU funding by simplifying administrative procedures and clarifying co-financing requirements would further enable these organisations to expand their activities and reach more children in need.

Adopting a Cross-Sectoral approach

Child poverty is inherently multi-dimensional and requires a comprehensive response that spans multiple policy areas. Access to healthy nutrition is closely interconnected with education, health, housing, and broader social inclusion.

The strengthening of the European Child Guarantee should therefore adopt a cross-sectoral approach that integrates food security considerations into all relevant policy areas, including health, education, and environmental sustainability, particularly in relation to food waste reduction.

Ensuring Supporting Measures for Children and Families

Reducing child poverty requires not only targeted interventions but also strong and comprehensive social protection systems. The European Child Guarantee should therefore be complemented by measures that support families more broadly, including adequate minimum income schemes, access to affordable services, and policies addressing the ongoing impact of rising living costs.

Given that many of these measures are implemented at local and regional levels, strengthening coordination across different levels of governance is essential. Food banks provide a clear example of effective local cooperation, bringing together public authorities, civil society organisations, and private actors to deliver support to families and children in need.

Monitoring and Data Collection

Robust monitoring mechanisms are essential to ensure the effective implementation of the European Child Guarantee. Currently, the At Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion (AROPE) indicator serves as the main EU measure for tracking poverty¹⁹. However, food insecurity is not sufficiently captured within this framework, limiting the ability to fully assess the extent of deprivation experienced by children.

FEBA is actively working to address this gap through the development of a Unified Data Framework aimed at improving the consistency and accuracy of data collection across its

¹⁹ Eurostat, *Glossary: At-risk-of-poverty rate*.

network. Strengthening monitoring systems under the European Child Guarantee should therefore include a greater focus on food insecurity indicators.

Overview of Policy Recommendations

- **Adopt a rights-based approach to ensure children's access to healthy nutrition**
- **Strengthen EU funding, including earmarking for child poverty and food aid**
- **Support civil society organisations, including food banks**
- **Adopt a cross-sectoral approach integrating food security into relevant policies**
- **Ensure strong supporting measures for children and families**
- **Enhance monitoring systems, including indicators on food insecurity**

Conclusion

The La Hulpe Declaration on the Future of Social Europe²⁰ reaffirmed the central role of the European Pillar of Social Rights, including its strong focus on children's well-being and equal opportunities. In this context, strengthening the European Child Guarantee remains essential to ensure that all children in Europe, particularly those in vulnerable situations, have effective access to adequate nutrition and essential services.

The experience of FEBA Members demonstrates that food banks already make a significant contribution to these objectives by supporting children's development and alleviating pressure on families. However, increasing demand and persistent gaps between supply and needs risk undermining these efforts. At the same time, educational and social activities carried out by food banks play an important role in fostering awareness and promoting long-term positive outcomes for children and their families.

To fully realise the potential of the European Child Guarantee, greater and more sustained support is required. Strengthening funding, enhancing cooperation with civil society, and ensuring a stronger focus on nutrition will be key to enabling food banks and their partners to scale up their impact and better support children across Europe.

²⁰ *EU renews commitment to a strong and resilient social Europe at conference in La Hulpe.* (2024, April 16). Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-renews-commitment-strong-and-resilient-social-europe-conference-la-hulpe-2024-04-16_en