



EUROPEAN COMMISSION STRENGTHENS THE EUROPEAN CHILD GUARANTEE *BUT DOES IT DELIVER FOR ROMA CHILDREN IN EUROPE¹?*

On 6 May 2026, the European Commission published a communication entitled [Breaking the Cycle of Child Poverty. Strengthening the European Child Guarantee](#), as part of a comprehensive Social Package which also includes the EU's first-ever **Anti-Poverty Strategy**, a proposal for a Council Recommendation on fighting **housing exclusion**, and a communication on strengthening the rights of **persons with disabilities**. For **ERGO Network**, the European Child Guarantee (2021) has always been a **key framework**, since **Roma children are, explicitly, one of its six target groups** of children identified as most in need of support, as 77% of Roma children experience poverty. As such we have closely engaged with the run-up to the communication, based on [our analysis of the original European Child Guarantee](#), and we have **reviewed the proposed strengthening communication** in light of this. The results of this exercise are reprised below in this response paper.

¹ The umbrella term "Roma" encompasses diverse groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as Traveller populations (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti, etc.), in accordance with terminology used by the [European Commission](#).

ERGO Network warmly welcomes that **the Roma are explicitly mentioned** in the communication, even if it is only **two references in the entire document**: “Regarding **Roma children**, for whom poverty, **discrimination and segregation** too often limit effective access to services, the Commission will prepare, together with stakeholders, a **Guidance focused on integrated measures** bringing together outreach, mediation, inclusive education, family support and community-based interventions.” (page 10, our bold), and “[...] the Commission will further help Member States to address **disadvantages experienced by young Roma people** while entering the labour market within a **dedicated ESF+ call** for projects.” (page 12, our bold).

While two references is not a lot, the positive aspect is that the **each of the two opens up an entire separate initiative**, one directed at Roma children, and one at Roma youth. The Guidance for Roma children is incredibly timely, because while **Roma children are explicitly one of the six target groups** of the original European Child Guarantee, Member States have **largely overlooked** them in the implementation thus far. Only **11 EU countries include Roma children** in their European Child Guarantee National Action Plans (NAPs), and **only 8 of those 11** actually proposed targeted, actionable measures. It was high time that the European Commission provided **more targeted support to Member States** on how to better prioritise Roma children.

From our perspective, the Guidance to Member States should **connect implementation of the Child Guarantee with commitments under the EU Roma Strategic Framework** for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020-2030 and the Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation. The **EU Roma Strategic Framework already contains child-relevant sub-targets**, including **cutting the poverty gap** between Roma children and other children by at least half, and **cutting the gap in participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC)** by at least half by 2030. The Guidance should help Member **States combine Child Guarantee National Action Plans with National Roma Strategic Frameworks**, reducing administrative burden while improving coherence, targeting, reporting, and results for Roma children and families. It should also **foster closer cooperation** between the National Roma Contact Points, National Child Guarantee Coordinators, and National Equality Bodies.

Intersectional discrimination, particularly racism and antigypsyism, has been a blind spot of the original European Child Guarantee from the outset, as we also pointed out at the time. The **fight against discrimination on any grounds was not made an objective** of the Child Guarantee, nor were specific actions attached to it, which was a missed opportunity, given that **antigypsyism actively produces and perpetuates Roma child poverty**. The recent communication on strengthening the European Child Guarantee **does not correct this weakness**.

The forthcoming Guidance on Roma children **must therefore place the fight against discrimination, including racism and antigypsyism, at its core**, since antigypsyism is a direct driver of Roma child poverty, exclusion, and unequal access to services. This should include concrete measures to **prevent and address the stigmatisation of Roma families living in poverty**, including harmful narratives that portray Roma parents as neglectful or unwilling to support their children. Poverty, poor housing, overcrowding, informal settlements, lack of documentation, and limited access to services must not be interpreted as parental neglect. The Guidance should clearly call on Member States to **prevent the disproportionate and unjust separation of Roma children** from their families, and to prioritise family support, adequate income, decent housing, access to services, and community-based prevention over removal from the family environment.

It is not enough to say that the Union of Equality, the EU Roma Strategic Framework, the Anti-Racism Action Plan, or other equality strategies will cover discrimination elsewhere. If the European Child Guarantee is to deliver for Roma children, **anti-discrimination must be mainstreamed within the Child Guarantee itself**. In the original Child Guarantee Council Recommendation, point (7) already states that “measures to promote inclusion and to **avoid and tackle discrimination and stigmatisation**” must be part of the integrated and enabling policy framework that Member States are invited to build. Point (11) further calls for the **involvement of bodies dealing with non-discrimination**, such as National Equality Bodies, in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Action Plans. The new Guidance should build on these provisions and make them operational, by requiring **anti-bias and anti-antigypsyism** training for professionals and **accessible complaints and redress mechanisms**.

The Guidance Note should provide Member States with concrete direction on how to **ensure effective access to all Child Guarantee services for Roma children** – early childhood education and care, education, healthcare, healthy nutrition, adequate housing, and essential public services. Too often, these remain inaccessible to Roma families because of formal and practical **barriers such as cost, distance, lack of documents or legal address, language barriers, digital exclusion, poor transport, and discrimination**. The Guidance should also strive to contribute to ongoing efforts in **desegregation in housing and education** and promote integrated Active Inclusion approaches, recognising that **children’s wellbeing depends on income security**, adequate housing, education, and healthcare, and family support.

The Guidance Note is also a critical opportunity to **acknowledge, formalise, and resource the role of Roma mediators**, as essential actors for outreach, trust-building, and access to services, while ensuring they are properly trained, paid, recognised, and embedded in mainstream public service delivery. Finally, Roma children, parents, young people, Roma civil society and community-rooted actors must be **meaningfully involved in design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation**, and measures must be backed by **clear budgets, indicators, disaggregated data**, community-based monitoring, and sufficient funding that reaches grassroots Roma organisations.

The proposed **link between the Child Guarantee and the Youth Guarantee is welcome**, as it can help ensure continuity of support across the life cycle, in line with the broader approach of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, and could be particularly beneficial for Roma children and young people. However, **the Youth Guarantee is not, in itself, an anti-poverty instrument**. It focuses on providing young people with an offer of employment, education or training, yet only employment should provide an income – and even then, low wages and precarious conditions often lead to in-work poverty – while education and training do not provide income security. The **announced focus on Roma NEETs is very welcome**, especially given that the Youth Guarantee has so far not sufficiently reached them. However, this must be done through a **rights-based approach focused on inclusion, dignity and opportunity** for this talented and brilliant generation, not by treating Roma youth as a cheap labour reserve to fill labour market shortages.

Broadly speaking, ERGO Network **welcomes the communication as an important step towards consolidating the EU’s fight against child poverty** and strengthening the implementation of the European Child Guarantee. We appreciate the **three-pillar structure of the communication**: preventing and reducing poverty among families, strengthening the impact of the European Child Guarantee, and reinforcing funding and governance. The **links made with the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and the proposed Council Recommendation on fighting housing exclusion** are also important, as they recognise that child poverty cannot be tackled in isolation from broader poverty, housing, social protection, and service-access policies.

The **first pillar, focused on preventing and reducing poverty among families**, is very positive insofar as looks beyond children as isolated individuals and recognises the importance of the household and family environment in which they grow up. However, the **approach remains too strongly centred on parental activation** and access to employment. While quality employment can be an important route out of poverty, **not all parents are able to work**, and it is important to guarantee adequate income, accessible services, and dignified living conditions for families where parents or carers are unemployed, unable to work, in poor health, caring for others, or otherwise excluded from the labour market.

Similarly, **early childhood education and care should not be framed mainly as a tool to free parents, especially mothers, to enter the labour market**. Access to quality, inclusive, affordable and non-segregated ECEC is first and foremost a right of the child and a key foundation for wellbeing, learning, socialisation and equal opportunities. While the text rightly notes that **supporting parents’ employment goes beyond ECEC**, it only speaks about workplace adaptations, while overlooking all other barriers to the labour market, such as **poverty itself, inadequate housing, lack of transport, poor nutrition and hygiene conditions, over-indebtedness, low formal qualifications, discrimination by employers, distance from available jobs, lack of documents or bank accounts, and weak access to public services**. Parents are unable to meaningfully take up paid employment for many and complex reasons that are not all related to the fact that they are parents.

We **welcome the attention paid to child and family benefits**, including the recognition that cash benefits play a critical role and that their poverty-reducing impact depends on adequacy, coverage, design and take-up. However, the communication says **too little about what “adequacy” should mean in practice**, and doesn’t spell out that child benefits and income support should be benchmarked against the poverty line and cost of living, and they should be automatically indexed to inflation so that they preserve purchasing power. The emphasis on **automatic granting is very positive**, as administrative burden, complex eligibility rules and non-take-up are major barriers for Roma families. By contrast, **the use of vouchers is highly problematic**, as it reflects a patronising assumption that poor families cannot be trusted to use money responsibly, as well as it pushes families towards purchasing goods and services on the market instead of strengthening universal, public provision.

The second pillar, focused on strengthening the European Child Guarantee itself, is **positive in its more holistic understanding of children’s needs and its attention to the transition from childhood to youth**. We welcome the focus on scaling up access to services, including ECEC, school meals, extracurricular activities, educational support, mental health, mentoring, and stronger links between the Child Guarantee and the Youth Guarantee. Schemes like **school meals and school-based activities** are particularly important for Roma children, who are too often excluded from participation because of cost, transport barriers, stigma, or lack of outreach. These measures **must be implemented in a way that avoids stigmatisation**, reaches children in segregated and remote communities, and ensures that Roma children can participate in the full life of the school.

The communication’s approach to **digitalisation could potentially help simplify access to entitlements** and improve coordination between services, and it is encouraging that the communication refers to safeguards on data protection, accessibility, non-discrimination and non-stigmatisation. However, for Roma children and families, **digital solutions must not become a new barrier**. Many families face limited connectivity, lack of devices, low digital literacy, mistrust of institutions, lack of documentation, or no stable address. Any digital tool must therefore be accompanied by analogue alternatives, human support, outreach, and safeguards against profiling.

The communication also devotes **substantial attention to online safety, including cyberbullying** and other digital risks, which are important concerns. However, there is **limited space dedicated to the daily offline violence**, bullying, harassment and humiliation that many Roma children face in schools and public spaces, as they are routinely **insulted, stereotyped, segregated, physically attacked, over-policed, or treated as less worthy** in real life. Offline protection and safety should not be an afterthought, and it should be explicitly linked to the **heightened risks faced by racialised children, such as the Roma**.

Regarding the third pillar, on funding and governance, we **welcome the call for stronger cooperation between stakeholders, including children** themselves, the **increased role of the European Semester**, and the **rolling out of the European Child Guarantee to candidate countries**. However, the text remains relatively general on how exactly Member States should step up their efforts and how weak implementation will be addressed. It **could also have been stronger on the structured involvement of civil society**, including Roma civil society, not only as service providers or consultees, but as partners in design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation.

Funding remains one of the weakest parts of the communication. It rightly recognises that more robust and sustained funding is needed, but it **does not explicitly support 5% earmarking in the next EU budget**, and the proposed reliance on future ESF+ calls, pilot projects, private actors and philanthropic contributions is not enough. These can support innovation and complement public action, but they **cannot replace predictable, ring-fenced, long-term public funding**.

Overall, ERGO Network **largely welcomes the communication as a very positive next step** in the implementation of the Child Guarantee, hopes to see the concerns above reflected in the ensuing Roma-related initiatives, and **stands ready to support all implementation efforts**.

*
* *

*For more information on ERGO Network's work on Roma child poverty and preventing family separation, please contact Senior Policy Adviser **Amana Ferro** – a.ferro@ergonetwork.org*

* While artificial intelligence-based tools may have been used to support the preparation of this publication, the content, analysis, and final outputs were developed, reviewed, and approved exclusively by human authors.