

# CHILD POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN EUROPE

A matter of children's rights



Save the Children

Save the Children is the world's leading independent organisation for children. We work in around 120 countries. We save children's lives. We fight for their rights. We help them fulfil their potential.

## Acknowledgements

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Cover photo: Francesco Alesi  
Italy: An adolescent girl living and spending her afternoon in the street in Idroscalo di Ostia, near Rome, one of the poorest and most marginal areas of the city.

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# FOREWORD

Growing up in poverty can dramatically change children's chances in life. But when we speak about poverty, we tend to think it is something from another time or somewhere else in the world. Sadly, poverty is the everyday reality for millions of children in our European societies. By hitting both employment and welfare systems, the financial and economic crisis that started in 2008 has severely affected children and their families across Europe. Between 2008 and 2012, the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Europe went up by almost 1 million – with an increase of around half a million in only one year between 2011 and 2012.

Across Europe, Save the Children is witnessing the way in which poverty is depriving children of educational opportunities, access to healthcare and healthy diets, adequate housing and living environments, family support, and protection from violence. Children are telling us that they have been evicted from their homes several times because their parents cannot afford to pay the rent or the mortgage, some have even lived in tents or squats without electricity or drinking water. They tell us that they feel socially excluded, they have lost friends because they cannot afford to do the same things as other children of their age. And children tell us that poverty is hard because it robs them of their dreams, hopes and rights.

By publishing this joint European report, Save the Children wants to inspire a change in the perception of child poverty in Europe. We want to generate an increased awareness and recognition of the scale and impact of this reality.

In the light of upcoming institutional changes in the European Union, we want to push children and their rights to the forefront of European political agendas to ensure that they are treated as citizens of today not just tomorrow. The European Union and national governments across Europe need to acknowledge that children who face poverty are deprived of their fundamental rights as enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted 25 years ago.

However, unless backed by adequate resources, political commitments to children will remain nothing but empty promises. Adequate allocation of resources and effective spending are necessary conditions of realising the rights of children and a just and equal society as a whole. Tackling child poverty means making the right political choices – and these choices are available to both wealthier and poorer countries.

For children, the negative effects of growing up in poverty or social exclusion can last for life – making it even more urgent to act now – when the financial and social crisis is putting even more children and their families at risk. We count on policy makers and decision makers not to leave behind the most vulnerable in society, but to act and adopt measures to fight the unacceptable reality of child poverty in Europe.

**Ester Asin Martínez**

Director and EU Representative

Save the Children EU Advocacy Office



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Almost 27 million children in Europe are at risk of poverty or social exclusion<sup>1</sup> and the current economic, financial and social crisis is putting them even more at risk. Although the Europe 2020 strategy<sup>2</sup> for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth aims to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty or social exclusion by 2020, at the moment the European Union (EU) is moving away from achieving this target.

There are children living in poverty in every European country, including the traditionally egalitarian Nordic welfare states. In the 28 EU member states, 28% of under-18s are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.<sup>3</sup> In many countries, the gap between rich and poor is widening.

Household income, both in terms of salary and welfare benefits, is one of the main determinants of whether a child lives in poverty. Nevertheless, poverty is not just about a lack of money. It is multi-dimensional and one of the principal causes of children's rights violations in Europe. It is linked to social exclusion and lack of access to services, including childcare, high-quality education and adequate housing. In the case of children, it includes not being able to participate in social and cultural activities with their peers.

Inequality is not only one of the root causes of poverty, it is also one of the consequences. Children born in economically and socially disadvantaged regions or neighbourhoods, children with disabilities and those from a migrant or minority background are more likely to start their lives at a disadvantage. The effects of poverty and exclusion on children are not short term. On the contrary, they can last a lifetime and be carried on into future generations.

For these reasons, Save the Children believes that child poverty and social exclusion should be tackled from a child rights perspective. This would allow all

aspects of the impact of poverty on children to be addressed, as well as enable children to take an active part in identifying solutions.

Our research looking at the broad causes and effects of child poverty and social exclusion found that redistributive state interventions, along with employment (salaries and conditions), have the greatest influence on child poverty. European countries with high inequality in employment conditions and with social transfer systems that are unable to redistribute wealth to benefit the most disadvantaged children have the highest rates of child poverty or social exclusion.

Equal access to affordable childcare and free, high-quality education is central to securing equal opportunities and breaking poverty cycles. However, less than half of European countries have achieved a target set in 2002 to provide childcare for at least a third of all children under the age of three by 2010.<sup>4</sup> Across the EU, 13% of children leave school after lower secondary level and are not in further education or training programmes. In some countries the figure for early school leavers is as high as 25%.

Inadequate and unaffordable housing is another important aspect of poverty and exclusion. In the EU, around 11% of children live in households that spend more than 40% of disposable income on housing costs. In some countries it is over 30%. There are also many children – 17% across the EU – living in homes with leaking roofs, damp floors or rotten window frames.

Child poverty and social exclusion are a matter of children's rights and should be addressed through a child rights approach. According to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, which every European country has signed and ratified, every child has the right to fully develop their social, emotional, cognitive and physical potential, no matter what their family circumstances are.<sup>5</sup> These rights include the right to an adequate standard of

living, to services like healthcare and education, to be protected, and to participation, leisure, play and culture.

Nevertheless, poverty and exclusion are preventing children in Europe from enjoying these rights, as well as limiting their opportunities to acquire the skills and capabilities that would enable them to work their way out of poverty. What is more, the economic downturn is further eroding these rights.

On 20 February 2013, the European Commission (EC) adopted its Recommendation on child poverty and wellbeing, *Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*<sup>6</sup> as part of its Social Investment Package. The Recommendation is a crucial tool for, and contribution towards, combating child poverty in Europe and crucially places children's rights, the best interests of the child, equal opportunities and support for the most disadvantaged at the centre of efforts to combat child poverty.

Save the Children urges all EU states to implement the Recommendation and the EC to create an annual monitoring and evaluation process to measure its implementation. We are also calling on all European countries, EU institutions and policy makers to develop strategies and plans aimed at reducing child poverty from a children's rights perspective with a cross-sectoral and pan-European approach. Investment in children should be a fiscal principle at European, national, regional and local levels.

We urge the European Commission to develop broad-based indicators to measure child poverty and inequality and, along with EU member states, to commit to specific targets on the reduction of child poverty within the EU's post-2020 strategic policy priorities.



In Spain, 33.8% of children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

# INTRODUCTION

Europe's current economic, financial and social crisis is creating an increase in relative and absolute child poverty and social exclusion across the continent. Almost 27 million children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.<sup>7</sup> Even in countries that have experienced economic growth in recent years, not everyone has a share in the prosperity, especially not children. The gap between rich and poor is increasing, including in the traditionally egalitarian Nordic welfare states.

By hitting both employment and welfare systems, the financial and economic crisis which started in 2008 has severely affected children across Europe. Between 2008 and 2012, the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Europe went up by almost 1 million<sup>8</sup> – with an increase of around half a million in just one year between 2011 and 2012<sup>9</sup> – making it even more urgent to act now and to reduce and prevent child poverty through a rights-based approach.

Growing up in poverty can dramatically affect children's opportunities and deny them their rights. Not only is child poverty ethically unjust, it also represents a social and economic problem. Poverty does not simply mean that children's basic needs – such as for food, clothes and housing – are not being met. It also means not being able to participate in activities such as sport, culture and other leisure activities. Moreover, children growing up in poverty are less likely to acquire the skills and capabilities that will enable them to work their way out of poverty as adults and contribute to the overall wellbeing of society.<sup>10</sup>

*“There's no point having dreams about something that costs money.”*

12-year-old boy, Iceland

According to the Europe 2020 strategy<sup>11</sup> for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, at least 20 million

people in the EU will be lifted out of the risk of poverty or social exclusion by the year 2020. However, the EU is currently moving away from achieving that target, which is based on a composite indicator, the so-called AROPE (at risk of poverty or social exclusion). The AROPE is the Europe 2020 headline indicator for measuring poverty and social exclusion. It is a measure composed of three sub-indicators: 'at-risk-of poverty', 'severe material deprivation' and 'very low work intensity' – see Appendix for more detail. However, the AROPE fails to take into account essential factors affecting the non-monetary or 'non-material' wellbeing of children.

On 20 February 2013, the European Commission (EC) adopted its Recommendation on child poverty and wellbeing, *Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*<sup>12</sup> as part of its Social Investment Package. The Recommendation is a crucial tool for, and contribution towards, combating child poverty in Europe. Save the Children welcomes in particular the Commission's approach, which places children's rights, the best interests of the child, equal opportunities, and support for the most disadvantaged at the centre of efforts to combat child poverty. With its three interconnected pillars – ensuring access to adequate resources, access to affordable quality services, and child participation – the Recommendation serves as an important incentive for concrete and robust action in European states. Save the Children believes that the EC Recommendation should be implemented now and, in implementing it, that states must seek universal solutions that will benefit and involve all children, including the most vulnerable and deprived, to avoid stigmatisation and exclusion.

Because monetary measurements provide only a partial picture of the complex nature of poverty and exclusion and their impact on children's lives, this report gives a broader picture of the causes and effects of child poverty and goes on to explain why a rights-based approach is essential to tackling and preventing it.



In Chapters 1–4, *Save the Children* analyses and comments on available Eurostat data in relation to children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, as well as data on access to early childcare and early school leaving. The countries covered by the Eurostat data are the 28 European Union (EU) member states plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. Our research shows that the effectiveness of redistributive state interventions (both in terms of expenditure levels and social transfers designed specifically to benefit children) represents an important factor in influencing child poverty across the continent, along with employment (conditions and salaries).

Chapter 1 looks at the numbers of children in Europe affected by poverty, where they are and who they are, and at some factors that influence levels of poverty such as parents' levels of employment, the effectiveness of social transfers, household composition or the impact of the current financial crisis.

Chapter 2 examines how inequality puts children at risk of poverty and at factors that place some children at greater risk, including their parents' education level and where their parents were born.

In Chapter 3 we explore the impact that lack of access to childcare and education has on a child's probability of being poor and in Chapter 4 we look at the effects of inadequate and unaffordable housing.

Chapter 5 explains the rights-based approach to addressing child poverty and social exclusion. It outlines the children's rights that every state which has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), including all European states, has a duty to uphold – rights that poverty erodes. We suggest some measures that European governments and institutions can employ to mitigate the effects of poverty and, in the long term, reduce and prevent it.

Finally, we draw a number of conclusions and make recommendations addressed to European governments and institutions, in particular to support the implementation of the EC's long-awaited Recommendation, *Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*.

All strategies, plans and actions aimed at reducing and preventing child poverty should be developed from a child rights perspective and with an understanding of children's needs and situations. Children must be given the opportunity to participate in all decisions affecting them, including the development, implementation and evaluation of policies.

Policy and decision makers should apply a cross-sectoral approach in consultation with civil society and exchange learning on policies and practice across Europe. They should make use of all available resources in an effective way in order to achieve immediate, positive and lasting change for children. Investment in children should be a fiscal principle at European, national, regional and local levels, recognising that resources allocated to children today will deliver benefits to society as a whole – now and in the future.

In our analysis, the term 'Europe' refers to the 28 European Union (EU) members along with Norway, Iceland and Switzerland. The 'EU 28' refers to the 28 EU members (excluding Norway, Iceland and Switzerland). In the case of poverty or social exclusion rates between 2008 and 2012, the term 'EU 27' is used since Croatia was not a member of the EU in 2008.

# I CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION

In 2012, the latest year for which data are available, almost 27 million children in Europe were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (in the 28 EU member states and Iceland, Norway and Switzerland).<sup>13</sup> In the EU's 28 member states, 28% of the total population of under-18-year-olds were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 20.8% of children were living in households with disposable income below 60% national median, 9% were in households with very low work intensity, and 11.8% in materially deprived households.<sup>14</sup>

*“Poor for me is when you don’t have money... you don’t have anything to wear, you don’t have anything to eat.”*

Seven-year-old girl, Romania

Poverty in Europe has no passport. There are children living in poverty in every European country but, as Figure I (overleaf) shows, the percentage of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion varies substantially from country to country – depending on each country’s historical and socio-economic path. In the Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland) and Slovenia, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland and the Czech Republic, 12–19% of children live at risk of poverty or social exclusion. In Greece, Hungary and Latvia the figure is 35–41%, and in Romania and Bulgaria it is more than half (52%).

We tend to assume that children are at greater risk of poverty or social exclusion in countries with a lower GDP. This perception is not necessarily the reality. Members of the G8, including Italy and France, which have a GDP per capita of between €24,000 and €29,000, have from one-fifth to one-third of their children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. In Ireland, which has one of the highest GDPs per capita in Europe (around €33,000), 34% of children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.<sup>15</sup>

A country’s wealth does not automatically benefit the most disadvantaged in society, unless it is properly (re)distributed either through earnings from employment or social transfers (direct and indirect child-family benefits and schemes). Child poverty is strongly associated with inadequate income support from the welfare system, along with parents’ poor working conditions (both in terms of time employed and salary levels).<sup>16</sup>

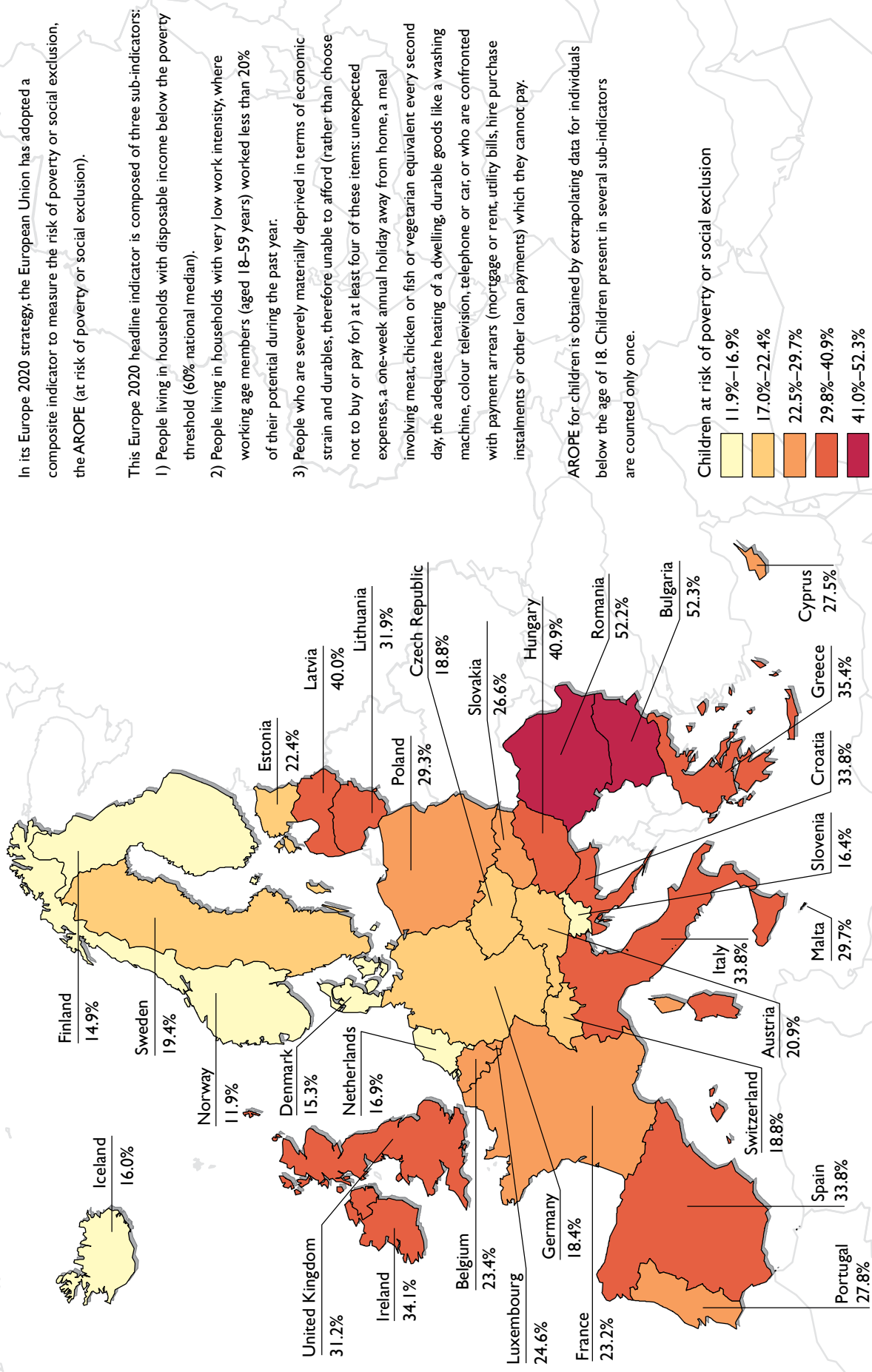
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## PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

Parents’ levels of employment play a major role in determining a household’s level of child poverty. Participation in the labour market and getting an adequate minimum income are essential to guarantee adequate household income. In addition, employment “raises parents’ self-esteem by increasing their autonomy and self-reliance. It can contribute to children’s wellbeing, not only by enhancing the family’s material situation, but also because it helps establish a family routine, strengthens the work ethic and provides stability in children’s lives.”<sup>17</sup>

In Europe, higher risks of poverty are observed among children living in households with very low work intensity (below 20% of parents’ potential), compared to those with high work intensity (55–85%).<sup>18</sup> The aggregate difference in the share of children at risk of poverty between households with high and low work intensity for the 28 EU members (ie, not including

FIGURE 1: CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION (AROPE) (%) 2012



Source: EU-SILC 2013 (Retrieved January 2014) – Data for Ireland refers to 2011

Norway, Iceland and Switzerland) is 56.7 percentage points (Figure 2). This means that children of parents with very low work intensity are 56.7% more likely to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion than those whose parents work intensely.

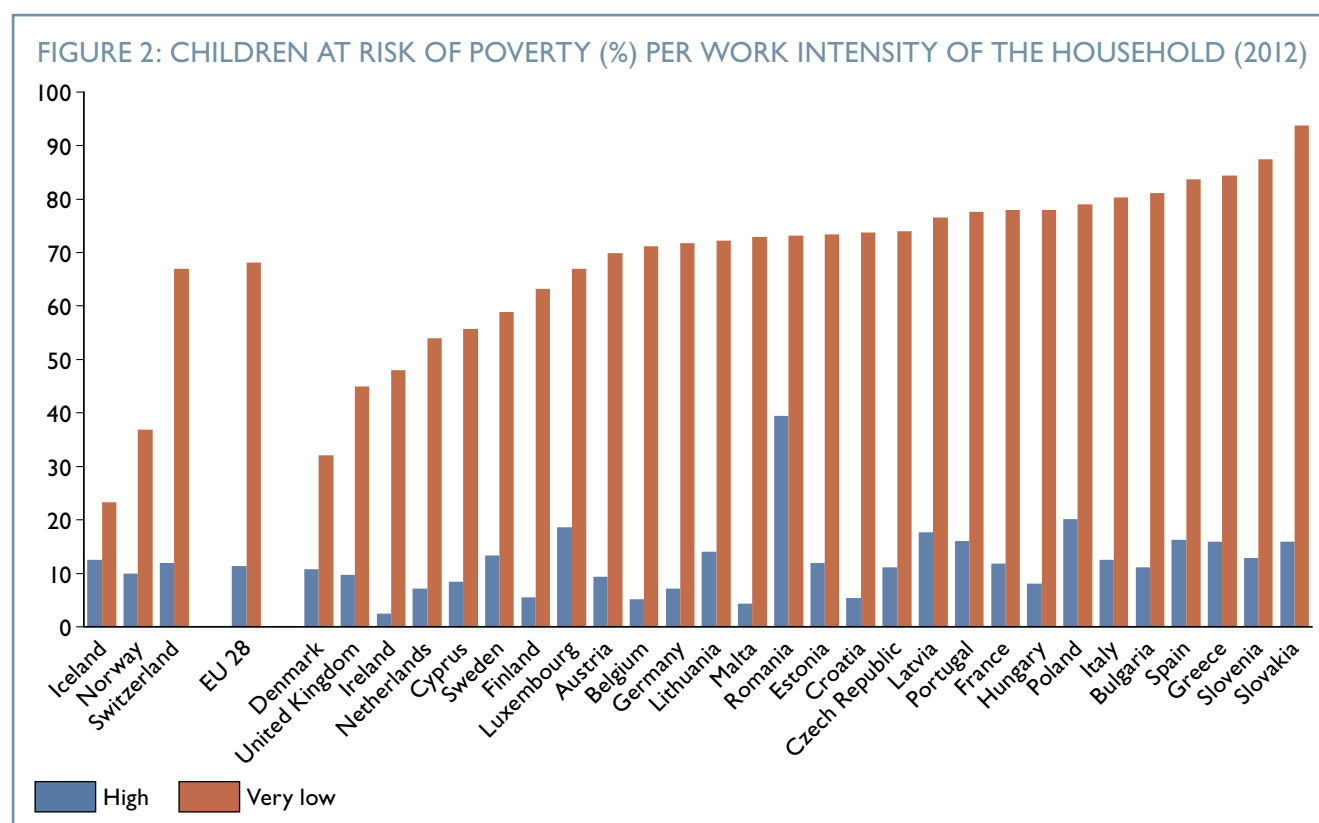
However, mere participation in the workforce is not necessarily enough to escape poverty or social exclusion. The quality of employment is also crucial, both in terms of income and the time available for supporting children.

Children of parents with very low work intensity are 56.7% more likely to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion than those whose parents work intensely.

Some countries (such as Iceland, Denmark, Norway and Romania) have smaller differences for children at risk of poverty between the lowest and high work-intensity households (between 11 and 34 percentage points). In contrast, 21 countries have differences of more than 50 percentage points, including countries traditionally considered egalitarian or middle to high income (such as Italy, Spain, France, Belgium, Germany, Austria and Finland).

However, the persistence of the risk of child poverty among high work-intensity households – such as in Romania, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain, Greece, Latvia, Slovakia, Poland and Luxembourg (Figure 2) – highlights the fact that access to the labour market does not guarantee a basic standard of living for families, and therefore for children. Moreover, the interrelation between employment and state support is shown by the share of children at risk of poverty in households with lower work intensity, which basically reflects scarce income support ‘out of work’, or limited and ineffective social transfers (social transfers represent one-third of the gross income for families with children living below the poverty threshold).<sup>19</sup>

Countries with high inequality in employment conditions and with social transfer systems that are unable to redistribute wealth in order to benefit the most disadvantaged children have the highest child poverty rates in Europe.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, the Nordic countries have historically a lesser share of children at risk of poverty as a result of policies favouring, on the one side, employment, particularly women’s employment (and high-quality women’s employment in terms of salaries and time flexibility) along with generous, and very effective – because they are child



Source: EU-SILC 2013 (Retrieved January 2014) – Data for Ireland refers to 2011

At risk of poverty refers only to % of children living in households with disposable income below 60% national median



centred – social transfers.<sup>21</sup> Lately, these policies have been challenged, resulting in increased child poverty rates.

Countries with high inequality in employment conditions and social transfer systems that are unable to redistribute wealth in order to benefit the most disadvantaged children have the highest child poverty rates in Europe.

## EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL TRANSFERS

Social transfers can have an important impact on the level of child poverty. But how effective they are in reducing the risk of poverty among children depends mainly on the level of spending directly targeted at supporting families and children. The design of social transfer systems is also an important factor. Countries that have fewer children in poverty, namely the Nordic countries, Austria, Slovenia and the Netherlands, are those with consistent spending designed specifically to tackle the root causes of child poverty. These countries employ measures that target families, for example: social housing; access to employment and parental leave; a minimum wage; unemployment benefits; tax deductions; and access to early childhood education and care, with both universal benefits and support to those who are most vulnerable. In Greece, Italy, Portugal, Poland and Spain, lower spending levels are associated with a lack of ‘child-centred’ strategies addressing child poverty.<sup>22</sup> In Ireland, although the effects of social transfers are consistent, the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion before and after state intervention is among the highest in Europe.

Social transfers can have an important impact on the level of child poverty. But how effective they are in reducing the risk of poverty among children depends mainly on the level of spending directly targeted at supporting families and children.

As shown in Figure 3, state policies in countries such as Greece, Italy, Spain, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and Portugal have little impact on reducing the risk of poverty among children (a reduction of 3 to 8 percentage points before and after social transfers), compared to Nordic countries where social transfers enable much higher reductions (around 18 percentage points).<sup>23</sup>

## EFFECT OF THE FINANCIAL CRISIS

By hitting both employment and welfare systems, the financial and economic crisis which started in 2008 has severely affected children across Europe. Between 2008 and 2012, the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Europe went up by almost 1 million,<sup>24</sup> with an increase of around half a million in just one year between 2011 and 2012 (EU 28 and Iceland, Norway and Switzerland). For EU members (excluding Croatia), the percentage of children at risk of poverty or exclusion increased from 26.5% to 28% between 2008 and 2012.<sup>25</sup> By reducing income, the crisis has led to an immediate deterioration in children’s overall wellbeing and development, from nutrition and health, to educational opportunities and leisure. As highlighted in the European Commission’s Annual Growth Survey 2014,<sup>26</sup> Europe might be losing important elements of its future economic, cultural and social potential, since the early years are when a child’s cognitive and socio-emotional skills are forming.

Between 2008 and 2012, the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Europe went up by almost 1 million, with an increase of around half a million in just one year between 2011 and 2012.

As shown in Figure 4, only six countries, namely Poland, Switzerland, Germany, Portugal, Norway and Finland, have seen a decrease in the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion between 2008 and 2012.

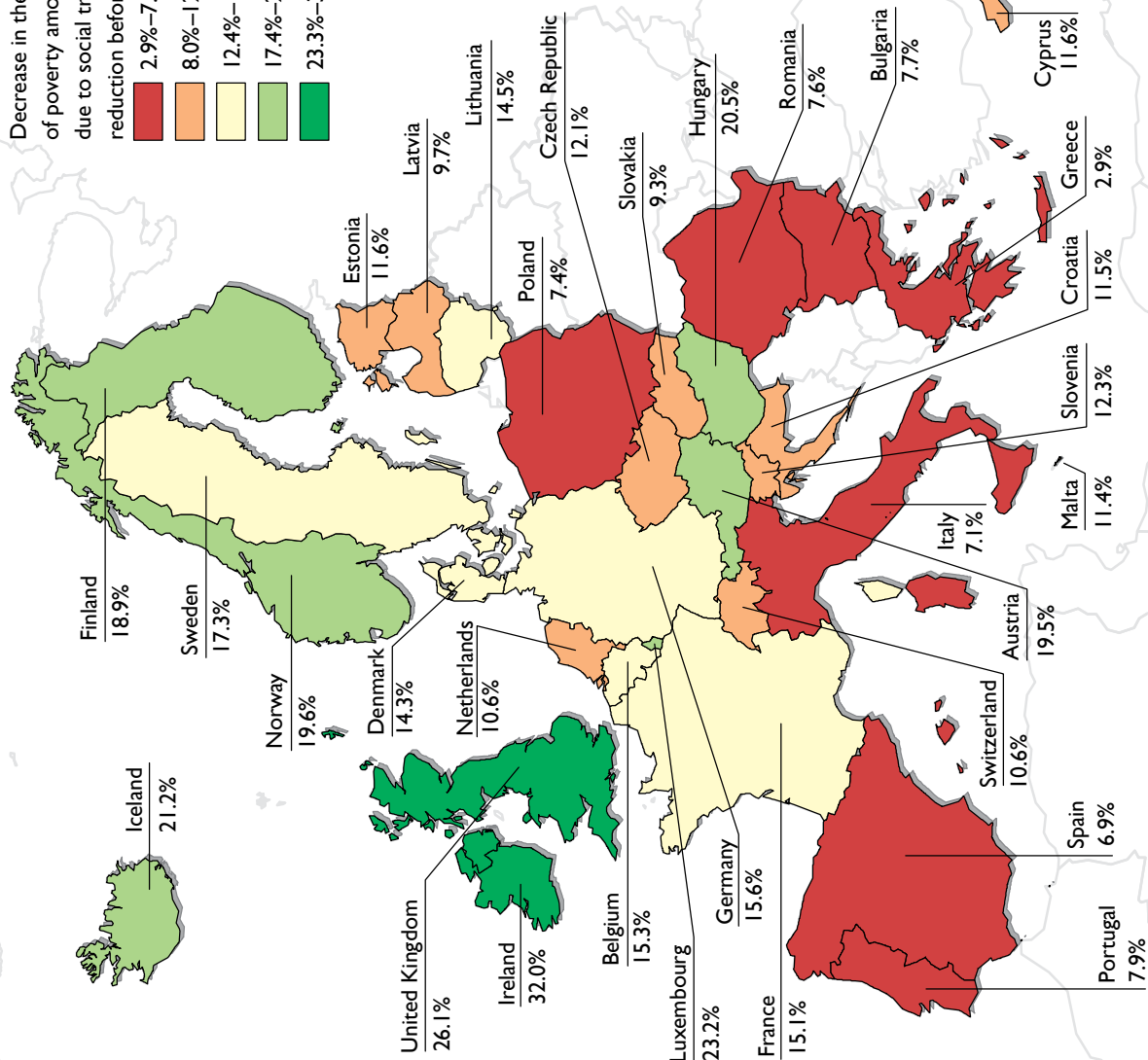
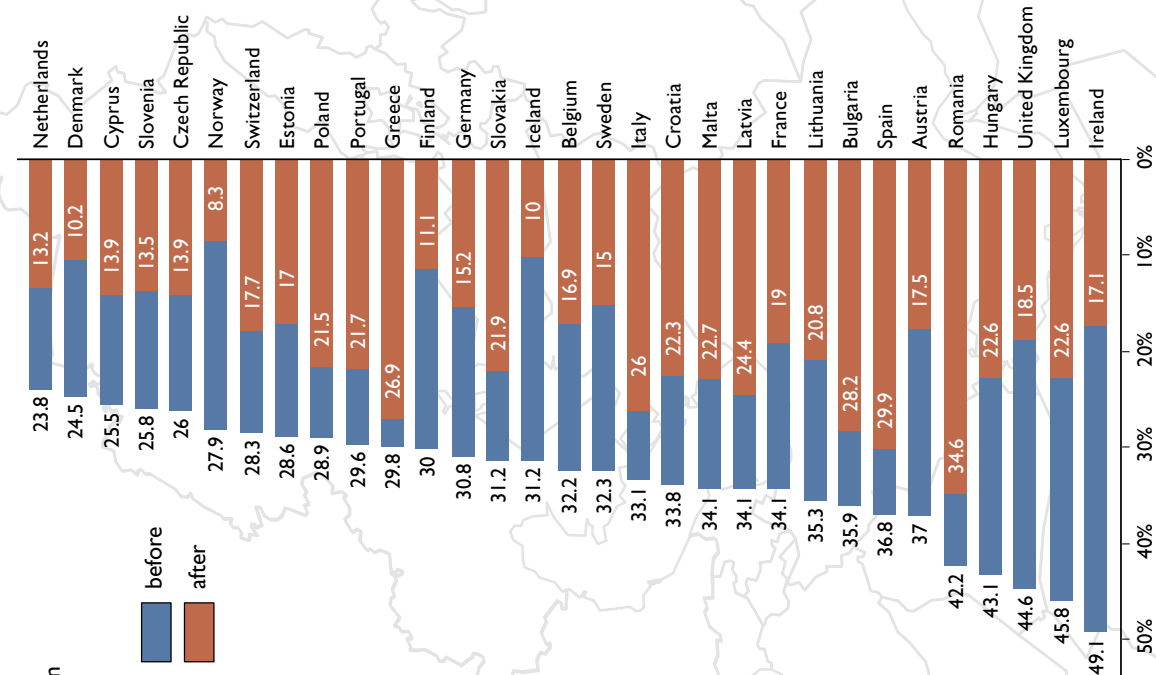
*“Before, I used to go to the cinema with my mum and dad. I could have books and go on school trips, and they could pay the mortgage. Now we can’t do any of that.”*

Eight-year-old boy, Spain

FIGURE 3: DECREASE IN RISK OF POVERTY AMONG CHILDREN AFTER SOCIAL TRANSFERS (%) (2012)

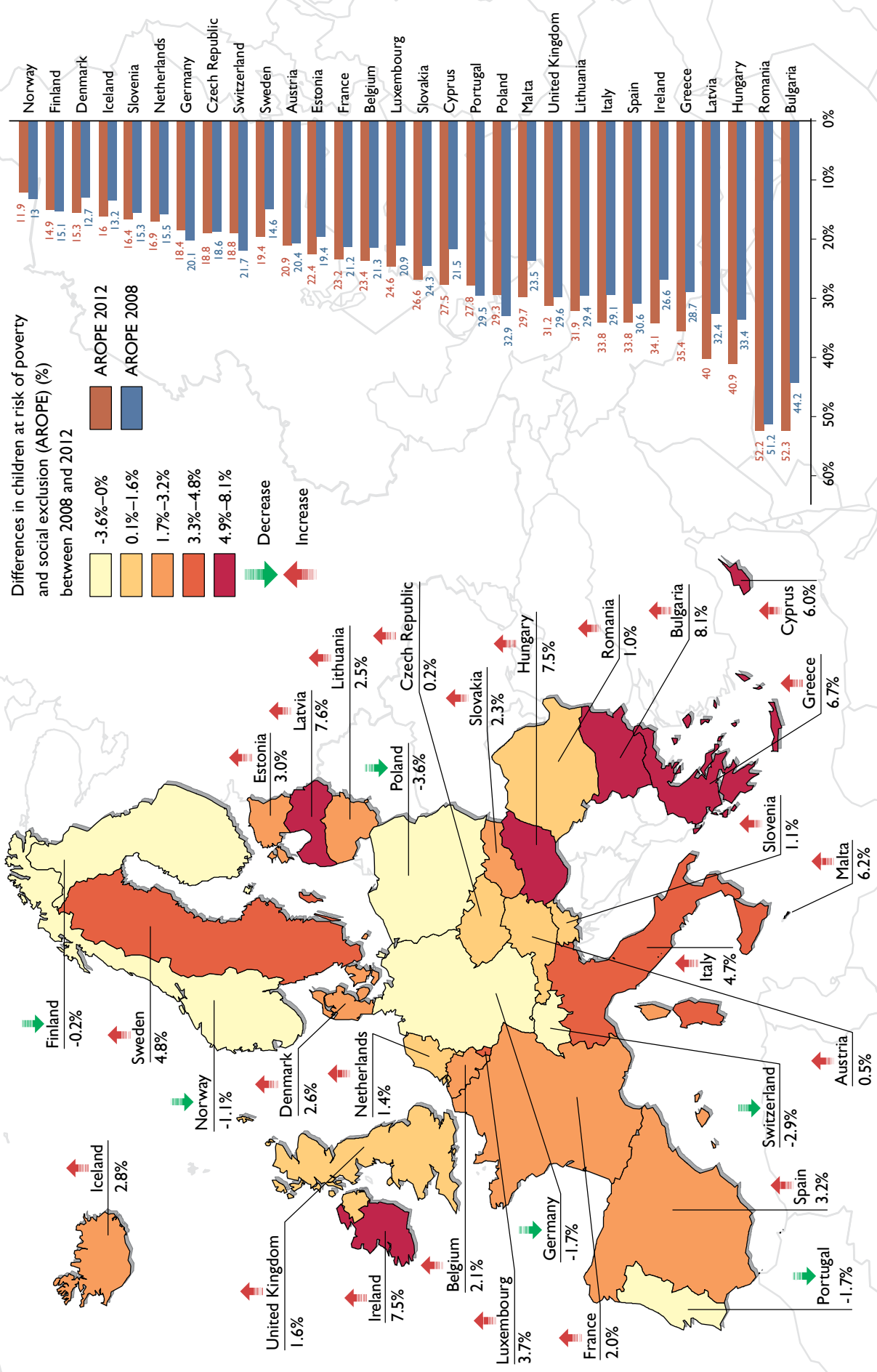
Decrease in the risk of poverty among children due to social transfers: reduction before–after

- 2.9%–7.9%
- 8.0%–12.3%
- 12.4%–17.3%
- 17.4%–23.2%
- 23.3%–32.0%



Source: EU-SILC 2013 (Retrieved January 2014) – Data for Ireland refers to 2011

FIGURE 4: DIFFERENCE IN CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION (AROPE) (%) BETWEEN 2008 AND 2012



Source: EU-SILC 2013 (Retrieved January 2014) – Data for Ireland refers to 2011; Croatia excluded (no data available for 2008)



Even countries such as Austria, Belgium, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Slovenia and Sweden, which experienced positive GDP growth rates in 2010/11, did not register a decrease in child poverty.<sup>27</sup> One of the main reasons is that many European countries, after having embarked on policies to stimulate public spending in 2008, have since started reducing

expenditure and cutting social transfers, including child income support schemes and essential health and childcare.<sup>28</sup> This worsening situation arises from increasing unemployment, especially long-term unemployment, and deteriorating employment conditions, with cuts in wage levels or reductions in hours, and a drop in disposable income coupled with rising prices of basic food, energy and services.



PHOTO: HELE KJERSGAARD/RED BARNET

Denmark: A 2-year-old boy playing in a Copenhagen playground



## 2 INEQUALITY – A ROOT CAUSE OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Inequality is one of the main causes, and consequences, of child poverty and social exclusion. European children born in economically and socially disadvantaged regions or neighbourhoods, with parents who have lower levels of education and employment, or whose parents are migrants, are more likely to live in families with less disposable income or inadequate housing. They are also more likely to have limited access to healthcare and early childhood education and care. These children start their lives at a disadvantage and might grow up in disadvantage. Without support, they are likely to continue the intergenerational transmission of poverty and social exclusion.<sup>29</sup>

In its principle of non-discrimination, the UNCRC states that opportunities for human and social development should be equally given to every child, regardless of her or his family background and origin. In general, countries characterised by high levels of inequality are also likely to have a high share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Poverty is determined by how (to whom and to what extent) wealth is (re)distributed within a country, rather than to the overall level of wealth of the country itself.<sup>30</sup>

*“I’ve never invited any of my classmates to my house... I think of all the questions I couldn’t answer. ‘Where does your father work...?’ What could I say? My dad was receiving social benefits at the time and so was my mum. I was judged by what my parents were doing or, in this case, what they weren’t doing.”*

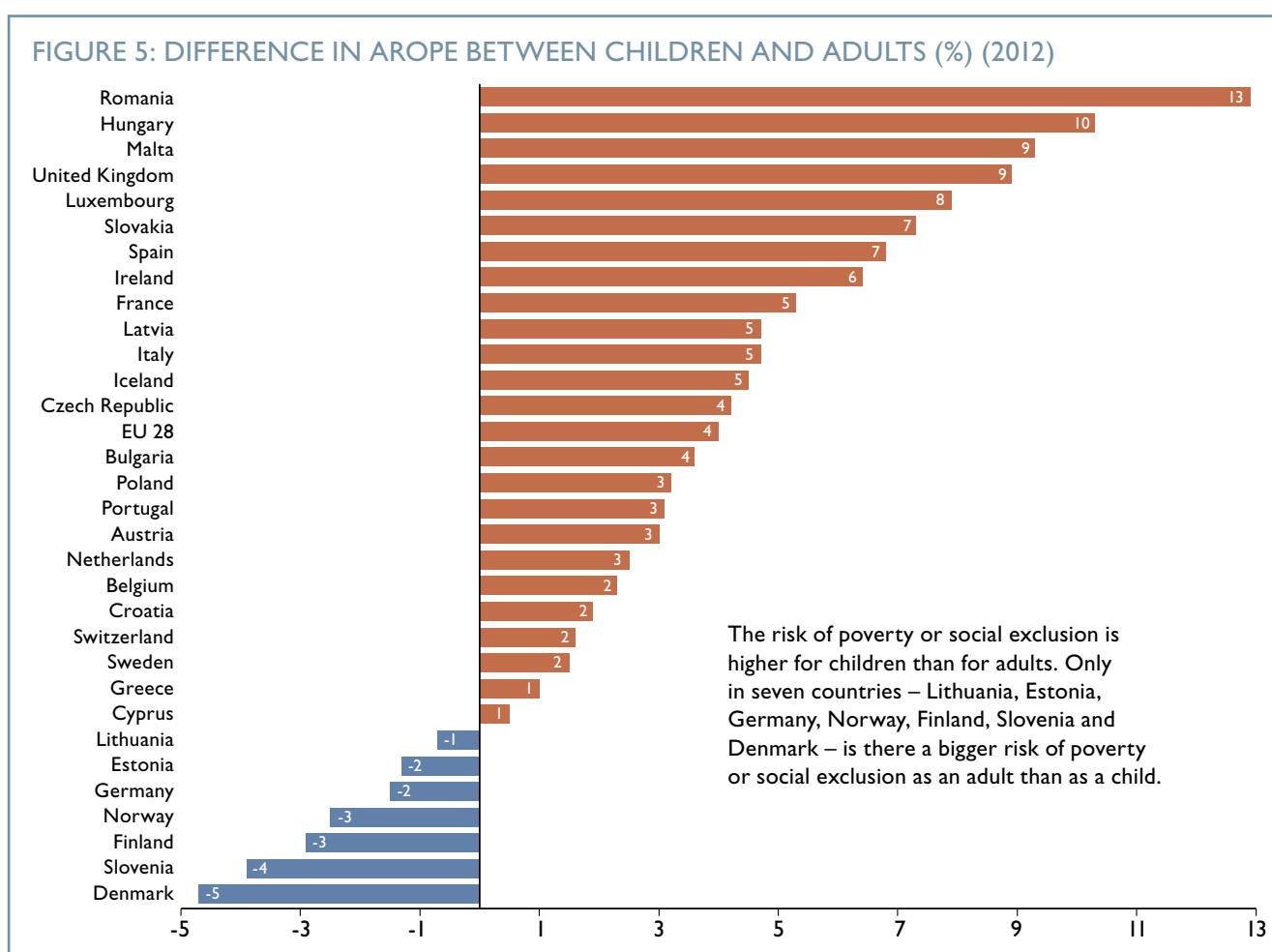
14-year-old boy, Norway

### CHILDREN BEAR THE BRUNT OF POVERTY

The most striking aspect of inequality is the discrimination faced by children simply because they are children. Whereas an adult may risk falling into poverty or social exclusion temporarily without any major consequences in the long term, for children the negative effects can last for life.<sup>31</sup>

As Figure 5 shows, in almost all European countries the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion is higher than for adults. Only in seven countries – Slovenia, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Estonia and Lithuania – is there a bigger risk of poverty or social exclusion as an adult, but differences are small, ranging from 0.7 to around 4.7 percentage points. The greatest differences between children’s and adults’ risk of poverty or social exclusion (more than 5 percentage points) are in Romania, Hungary, Malta, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Spain, Ireland and France. In Romania and Hungary, there is a risk of poverty or social exclusion of more than 10 percentage points for a child.

In general, countries characterised by high levels of inequality are also likely to have a high share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Poverty is determined by how (to whom and to what extent) wealth is (re)distributed within a country, rather than to the overall level of wealth of the country itself.



Source: EU-SILC 2013 (Retrieved January 2014) – Data for Ireland refers to 2011

## PARENTS' EDUCATION

The risk of poverty or social exclusion among children in all European countries is strongly associated with their parents' level of education. These inequalities do not suggest a lack of care by parents with lower levels of education, rather that parents with a higher level of education are usually able to earn more. Lower educational levels can often mean that parents have less disposable income from wages or salaries. Since children's circumstances almost always depend on their parents' and family backgrounds, a lack of education can be a major risk factor for child poverty or social exclusion.

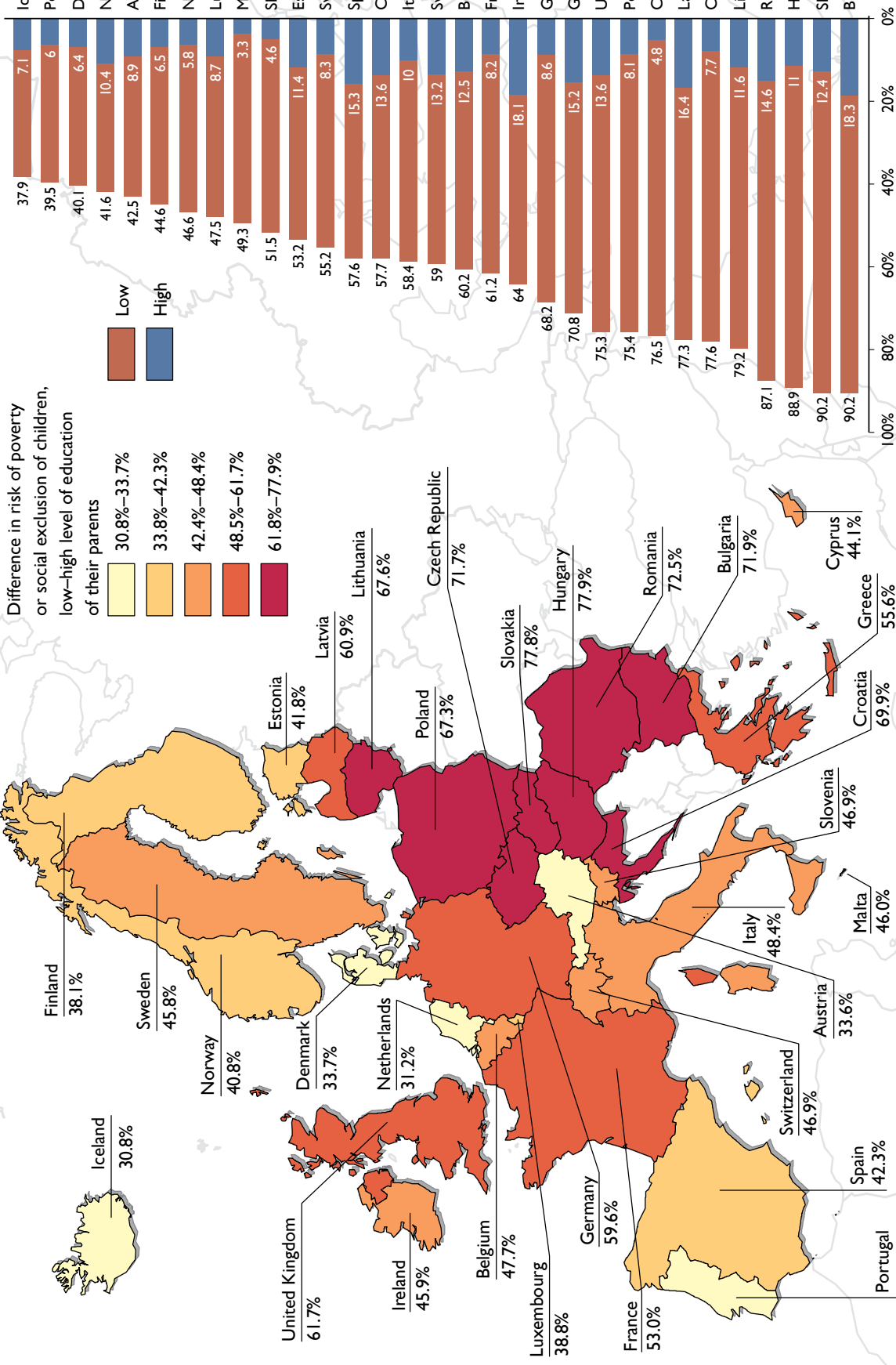
Children of parents with lower educational levels (pre-primary, primary or lower secondary) are more likely to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion than those whose parents have higher educational levels (upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary or tertiary). This trend has increased since 2008.

The percentage of children at risk of poverty in EU countries (excluding Croatia) went up from 55.3% to 61% for children whose parents have a lower level of education, whereas it went up by only 0.5% for children with highly educated parents.

Children of parents with lower educational levels (pre-primary, primary or lower secondary) are more likely to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion than those whose parents have higher educational levels.

As shown in Figure 6 (overleaf), there are smaller differences in the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion between the lowest and highest levels of parents' education in some countries: Iceland, Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Denmark, Finland and Luxembourg. However, those differences still range from 30–40 percentage points. In contrast,

FIGURE 6: DIFFERENCE IN AROPE (%) HIGH/LOW LEVEL OF PARENTS' EDUCATION (2012)



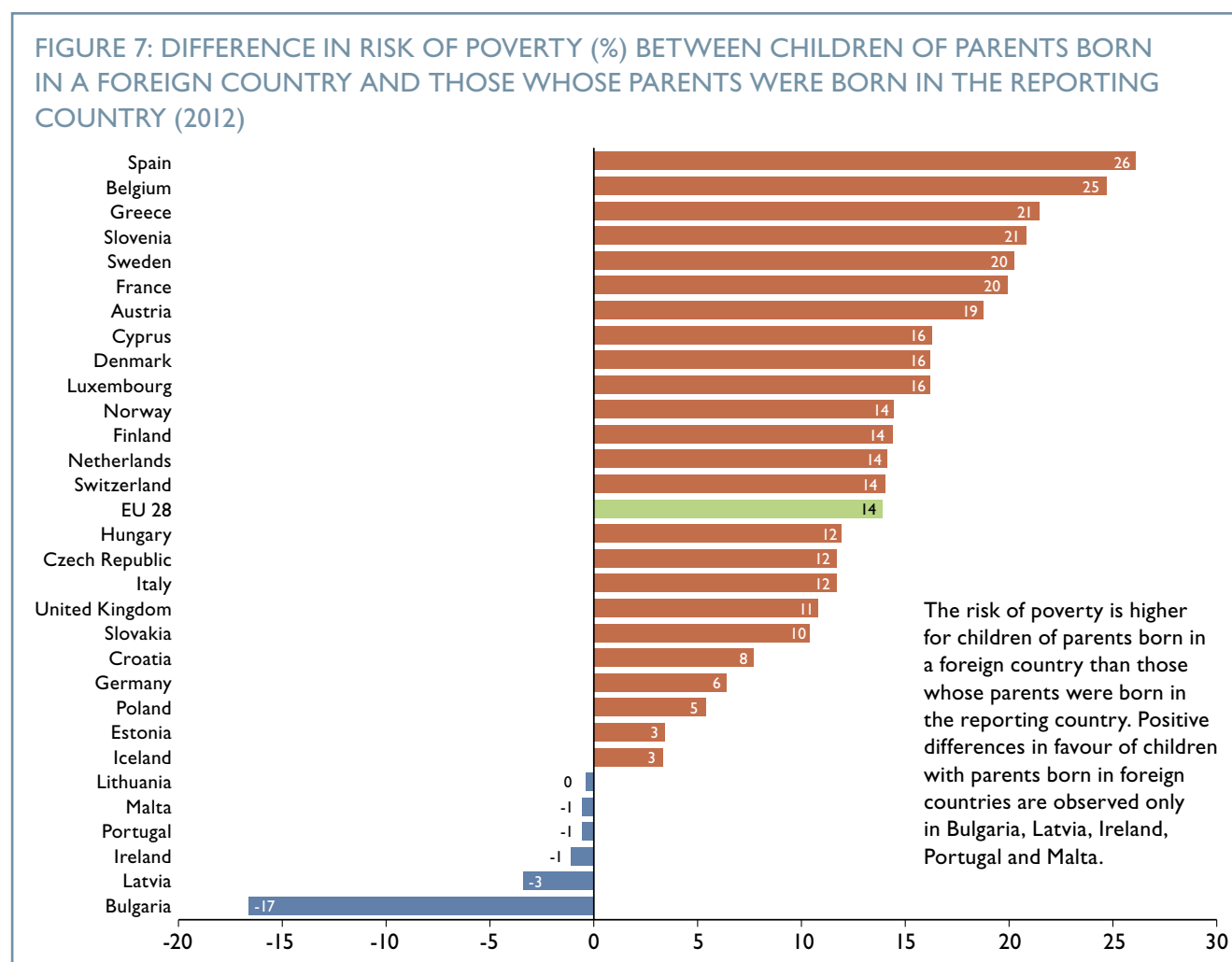
Source: EU-SILC 2013 (Retrieved January 2014)

24 countries have differences of more than 40 percentage points, including countries considered 'egalitarian', such as France, Belgium, Sweden and Norway. Furthermore, nine countries show differences of more than 60 percentage points: including the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, Lithuania, Croatia and Latvia. Figure 6 shows that, in most cases, countries where inequalities are less prominent in terms of parents' educational level are characterised by lower proportions of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. However, even countries with relatively low levels of child poverty (and relatively high GDP per capita), such as the Nordic countries, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Austria, Switzerland and Germany, also discriminate in relation to parents' background.

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## PARENTS' COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Children's likelihood of being at risk of poverty is also determined by their parents' country of birth (Figure 7). In the 28 EU countries, higher rates of risk of poverty are registered among children with parents born in foreign countries than those with parents born in reporting countries (32.2% vs. 18.3%).<sup>32</sup> Positive differences in favour of children



Source: EU-SILC 2013 (Retrieved January 2014) – Data not available for Romania/Data for Bulgaria and Ireland refers to 2011

At risk of poverty refers only to % of children living in households with disposable income below 60% national median



with parents born in foreign countries are observed only in Bulgaria, Latvia, Ireland, Portugal and Malta due to different types of migration. Higher differences are found in Spain, Belgium, Greece, Slovenia, Sweden and France. These are all middle- to high-income countries, indicating that inequalities based on the family's origin or background are relatively high, even in countries historically and culturally characterised by strong concerns with social justice, such as France and Belgium.

Family members born in foreign countries might be more likely to be in lower-paid employment. They might also be more likely to experience difficulty in accessing social welfare and services (such as early childhood education and care).

## COMPOSITION OF HOUSEHOLD

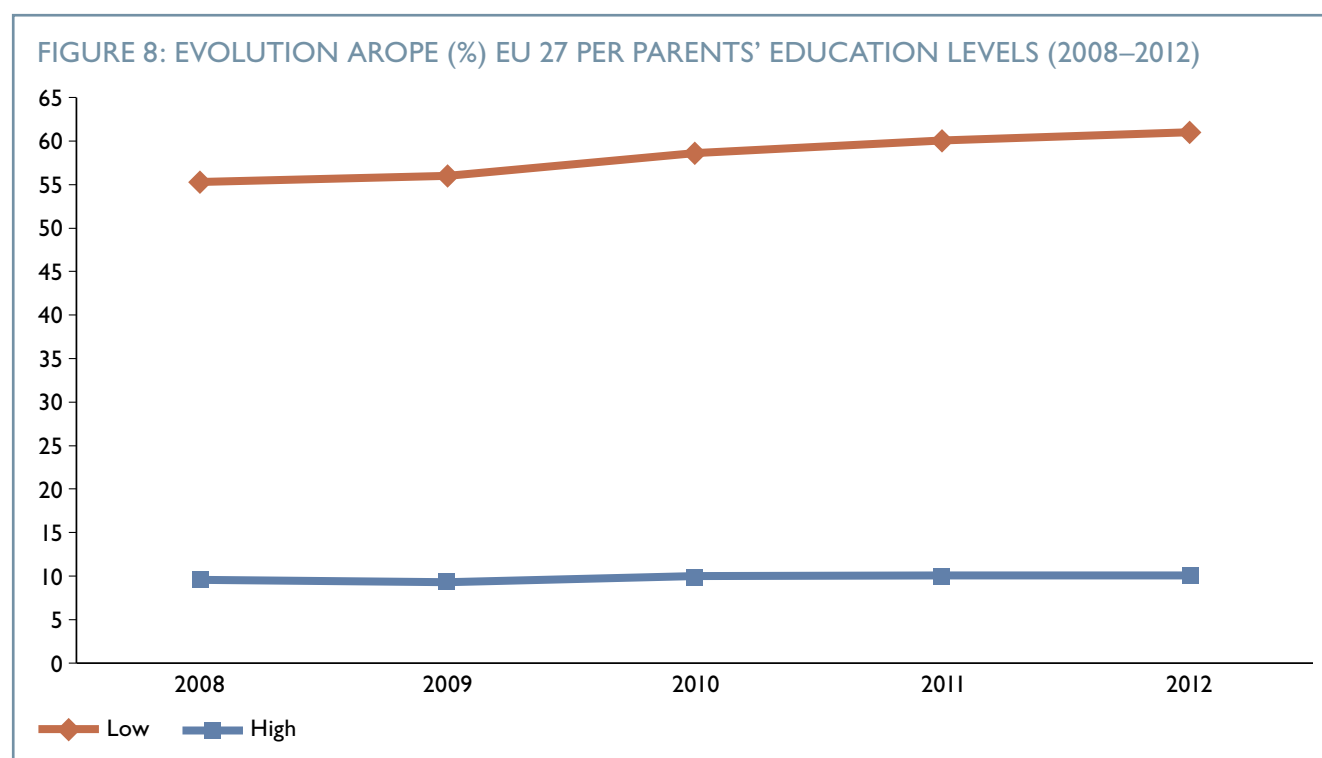
Household composition is a further factor influencing whether or not the children in that household are likely to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Households which correlate with higher numbers of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion are those composed of single parents, mainly women (49.8% vs. 25.2% of average households with dependent children) or large households with two adults and at least three dependent children (30% child poverty shares).<sup>33</sup>

## 2008 DOWNTURN – MAKING THE GAP BIGGER

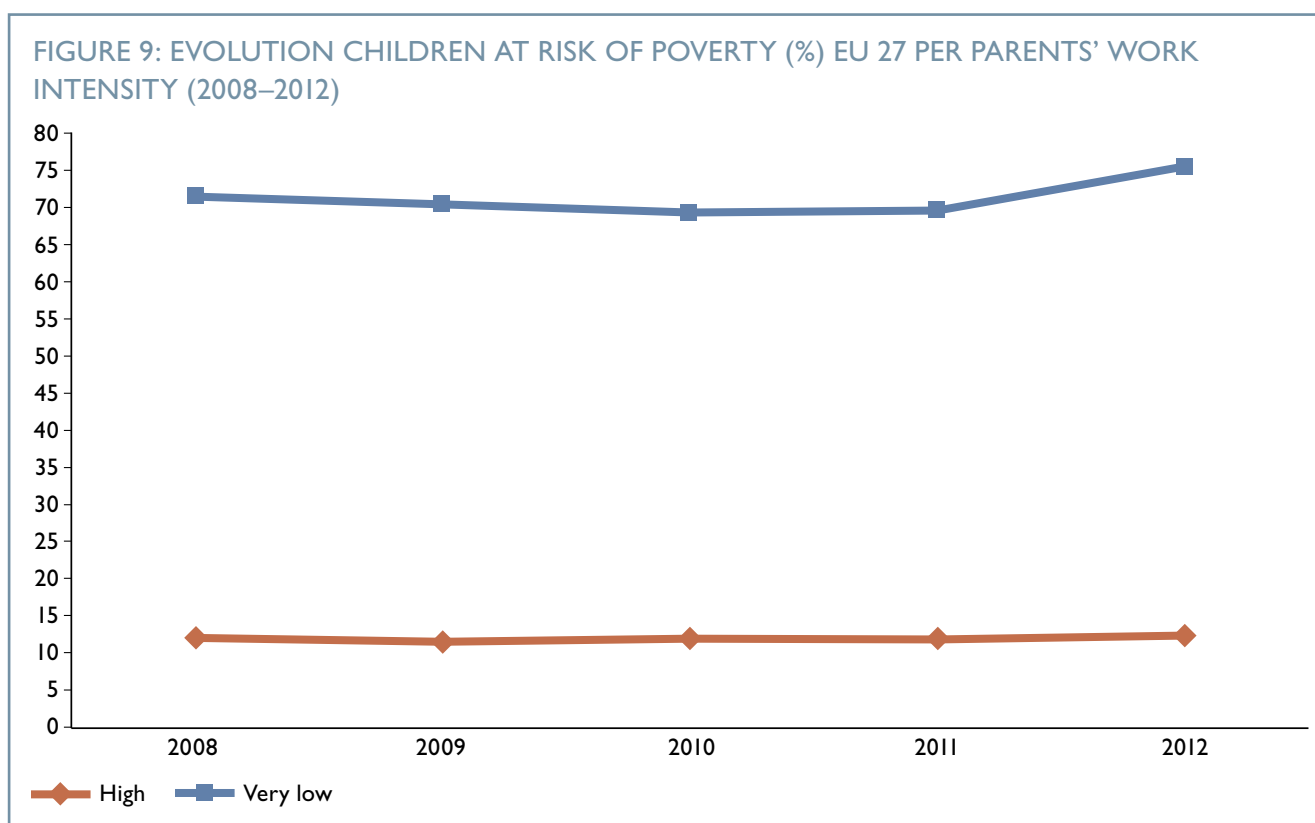
The economic and financial downturn which started in 2008 has aggravated children's situation in relation to child poverty across Europe. It has also exacerbated inequalities and worsened living conditions and opportunities for children whose parents have a lower educational level and limited work. By devaluing salaries, particularly those at the bottom of the job market, the crisis – along with measures that have reduced state support 'out of work' – has reduced the disposable income of most disadvantaged families with children. Figure 8 shows a deterioration among children with parents with lower levels of education (of 5.8 percentage points) in the EU 27 countries, while the shift for children with parents with higher levels of education is only +0.5 percentage points).

*"I've lost all my friends because we don't have enough money. They think I don't want to hang out with them because I can't go out with them. But I do! I just can't afford it."*

17-year-old girl, Sweden



Source: EU-SILC 2013 (Retrieved January 2014)



Source: EU-SILC 2013 (Retrieved January 2014)

At risk of poverty refers only to % of children living in households with disposable income below 60% national median

By devaluing salaries, particularly those at the bottom of the job market, the crisis – along with measures that have reduced state support ‘out of work’ – has reduced the disposable income of most disadvantaged families with children.

As illustrated earlier, inequality is generally associated with an increase in the risk of poverty or social exclusion. In Sweden, for instance, the risk of poverty or social exclusion among children with parents with lower levels of education rose from 42.8% in 2008 to 59% in 2012 (ie, 16 percentage points).<sup>34</sup> Over the same period, where parents had attained tertiary-level education there was a change of less than 4 percentage points. Similar trends are present in Italy, Malta, Greece, Ireland, Cyprus and Latvia. The increased trend of children at risk of poverty or

social exclusion in relation to parents' education is particularly worrying when considering its potential to perpetuate the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage.

Figure 9 highlights inequality trends in relation to work intensity from 2008–12.<sup>35</sup> Again, children with parents working less than 20% of their potential faced an increase in the risk of child poverty from 71.4% in 2008 to 75.5% in 2012, while those with parents working 55–85% of their potential have seen almost no changes.

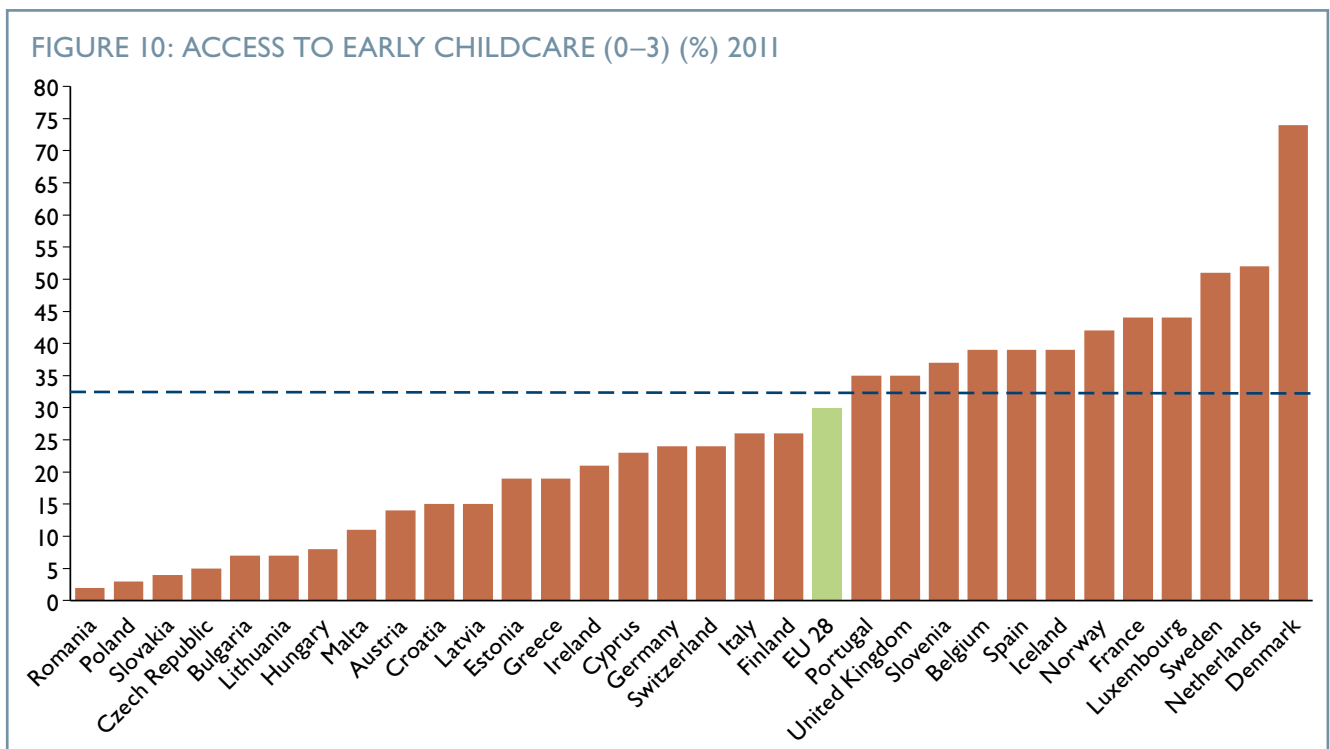
The increased trend of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in relation to parents' education is particularly worrying when considering its potential to perpetuate the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage.

# 3 CHILDCARE AND EDUCATION – A RIGHT AND A ROUTE OUT OF POVERTY

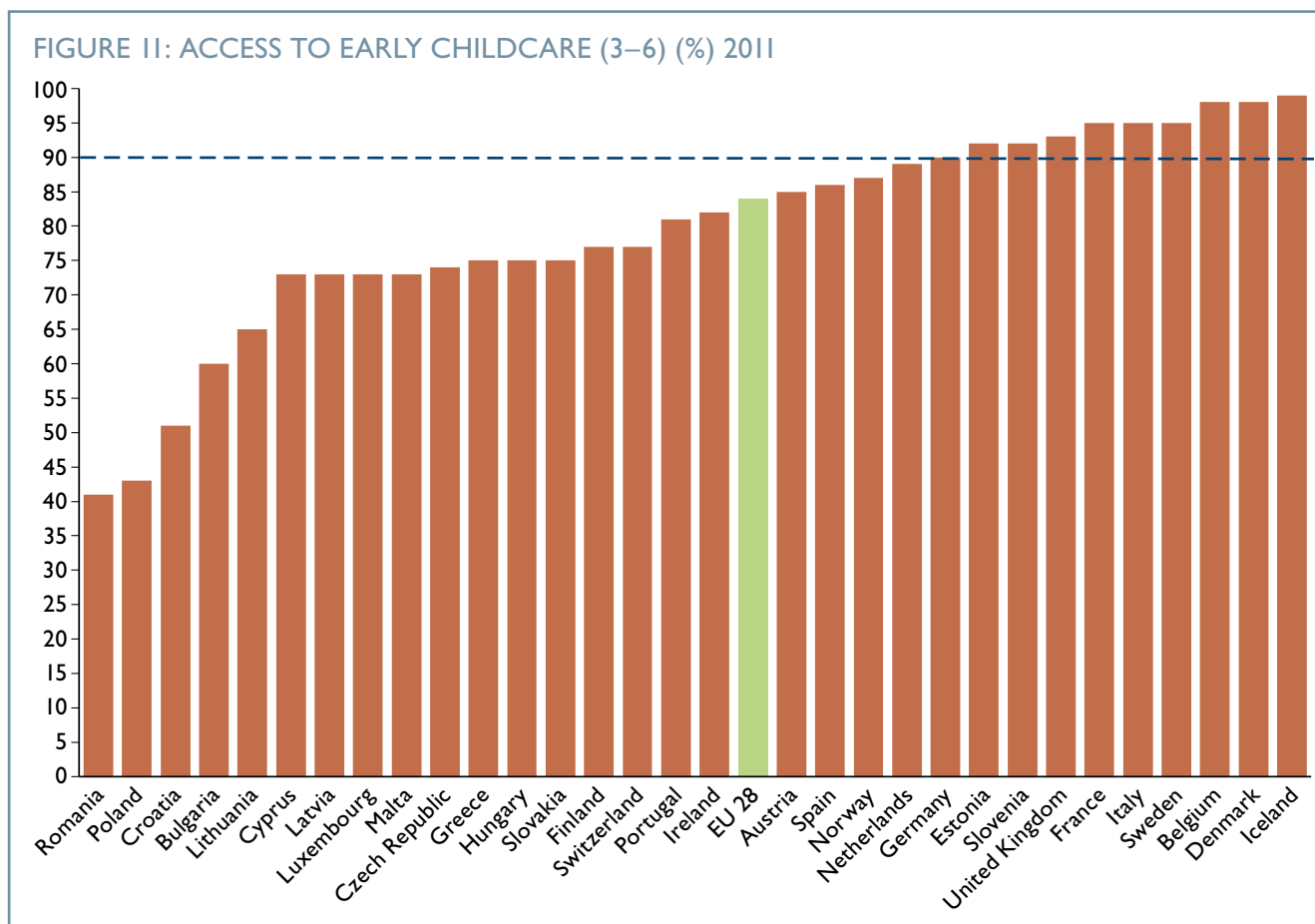
Equal access to affordable and inclusive childcare and free, high-quality education is central to securing equal opportunities and breaking poverty cycles (UNCRC, Articles 28 and 29). The early years, from birth to compulsory education, are crucial for a child’s development. They are the years when capabilities and skills that will last throughout life start to form. Access to formal childcare and education is therefore essential to fulfilling children’s rights<sup>36</sup> and providing opportunities for income security in later life. Access to affordable and inclusive childcare and free, high-quality education also enables parents to participate in the labour market.<sup>37</sup>

However, as Figures 10 and 11 illustrate, the Barcelona targets – agreed by the European Council in 2002 – to provide childcare for at least 33% of children under three years of age and at least 90% of children between three years old and the mandatory school age by 2010 – are far from being achieved in most European countries.

Currently, the European average for provision of 0–3 services is 30%. Only 12 countries have rates above the 33% target for children aged under three years. In these countries, only 5% of children are enrolled in childcare services of 30 hours per week or more,<sup>38</sup> which obviously has an impact on parents’ employment, and therefore, earning possibilities. Eleven countries – Romania, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Austria, Croatia and Latvia – have not achieved 15% of coverage.



Source: EU-SILC 2013 (Retrieved January 2014)



Source: EU-SILC 2013 (Retrieved January 2014)

When it comes to services for children from age three to compulsory education, Iceland, Denmark, Belgium, Sweden, Italy, France, UK, Slovenia, Estonia and Germany all have coverage of 90% or above, although in Belgium, Sweden, France and Germany, less than 70% of services are of 30 hours per week or more.<sup>39</sup> Romania, Poland, Croatia, Bulgaria and Lithuania have the lowest coverage, at less than 65%.

## QUALITY AND AFFORDABILITY

The quality of early childhood education and care is as important as coverage, including the number of hours that it is available. Many countries in Europe have high coverage rates, but offer childcare services of between one and 29 hours per week. As well as affecting quality, this also affects parents' employment possibilities. In general, there is little data available relating to the quality of childcare across Europe, such as the training and qualifications of staff, child-to-carer ratios or integration with the school system. This is particularly concerning given the rise in

childcare coverage between 2008 and 2011, a period for which there is no information available about the quality of childcare being provided.

Similarly, increasing coverage does not necessarily make childcare more affordable. In many European countries, children from poorer households are least likely to benefit from childcare services. These can include those whose parents have little or no work, are from migrant or minority ethnic families (eg, Roma or Traveller children), or those whose parents have only primary or lower secondary education.<sup>40</sup>

*“Schools don’t even provide basic things like supplies to run labs, toilet paper or heating.”*

Armando, Italy

In many European countries, children from poorer households are least likely to benefit from childcare services.





PHOTO: FRANCESCO ALESI / PARALLELOZERO

Children attending Save the Children Italy's informal education activity in Naples

## LONG-TERM IMPACT

The coverage and quality of childcare services has a long-term impact on educational and employment opportunities. Children enrolled in early childhood education and care before compulsory schooling are generally less likely to abandon schooling, and more likely to gain qualifications that will enable them to access better jobs and earn higher salaries as adults.<sup>41</sup> Conversely, having fewer educational opportunities is likely to lead to families and children being less well off, with the potential to perpetuate disadvantage into future generations.

Research by Save the Children Romania revealed that, in order to cover the expenses related to a child's education (excluding the payment of school staff), parents have to spend a sum that is one-and-a-half times higher than the sum allocated to a child by the state.<sup>42</sup> Even though compulsory education is theoretically free, parents have to pay for supplementary tuition, supplies (such as textbooks, pencils, chalk and other teaching materials), transport, renovation and maintenance of school buildings, sports equipment or private security staff. These 'hidden costs' create a clear disadvantage for children whose families cannot afford to pay, and can lead to non-enrolment or school drop-out.

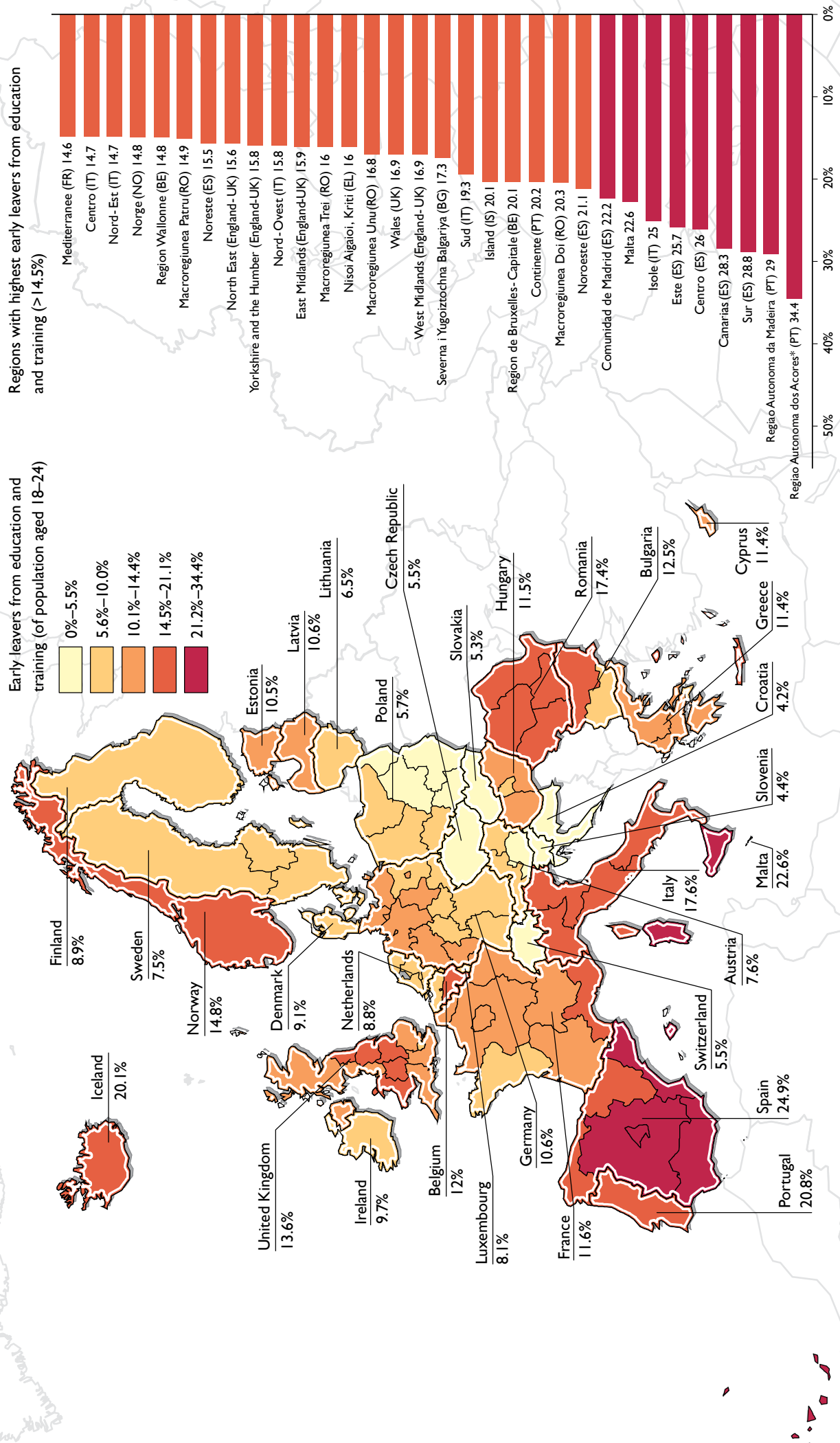
## EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

One of the five targets of the Europe 2020 strategy is to reduce early school leaving to less than 10%. However, despite some improvements in recent years, around 13% of children in the EU leave school after lower secondary level and are not in further education or training programmes. Many countries are far from reaching the target – for example Spain, where 25% leave school early (Figure 12).

The share of early school leavers (Figure 12) outlines the percentage of the population aged 18–24 that has attained, at most, lower secondary education but is not involved in further education or training.<sup>43</sup>

Vulnerable and marginalised children are particularly affected by educational disadvantage. For example, in Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Italy and France 10% or more of Roma children at compulsory school age (7–15) do not attend school. Attendance decreases even further after compulsory school age.<sup>44</sup> In addition, school drop-out rates are much higher for children with a Roma or migrant background and for children with special needs.<sup>45</sup>

FIGURE 12: EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS (%) 2012



\* Not displayed on map  
Source: LFS 2013 (Retrieved January 2014)

# 4 INADEQUATE AND UNAFFORDABLE HOUSING – A POVERTY TRAP

Inadequate housing conditions represent another important aspect of poverty and exclusion. An adequate living environment that is safe, clean and healthy is crucial to children’s development, health, education and social life. Children need a suitable and quiet place to do their homework, play and invite friends home. However, families living in or at risk of poverty are more likely to live in areas characterised by unhealthy and unsafe living conditions.

In the EU (ie, excluding Iceland, Norway and Switzerland), the percentage of children living in a household that spends more than 40% of disposable income on housing costs (preventing parents from affording other activities that contribute to their children’s wellbeing, such as cultural and leisure activities) is around 11%. Greece has the highest percentage (38%), followed by Spain, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Netherlands, Germany and Portugal. The lowest rates are in Slovenia, France, Malta, Cyprus and Finland, where the percentage is between 4% and 2%.<sup>46</sup>

*“My family doesn’t even have access to water. We have to collect rain water which is dirty, and sometimes you find frogs in it. My sister and I can only have a bath at the children’s day care centre, and it makes me feel really ashamed.”*

15-year-old girl, Lithuania

The percentage of children living in households affected by housing deprivation – eg, a dwelling with a leaking roof, damp walls, floors or foundation, or rot in window frames or floor – is 17% among the 28 EU members, with 15 countries equal to or above the average.<sup>47</sup> Slovenia has the highest percentage (31%), closely followed by Latvia, Cyprus and Hungary. In Italy, Portugal and Denmark, nearly a quarter of children are living in households affected by housing deprivation. Lower percentages are found in Malta, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Slovakia, Croatia, Poland, Greece, the Czech Republic and Ireland.<sup>48</sup>

As highlighted in Figures 13 and 14, the share of children in unaffordable housing and households affected by housing deprivation is strongly related to low household income (those living below 60%



PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

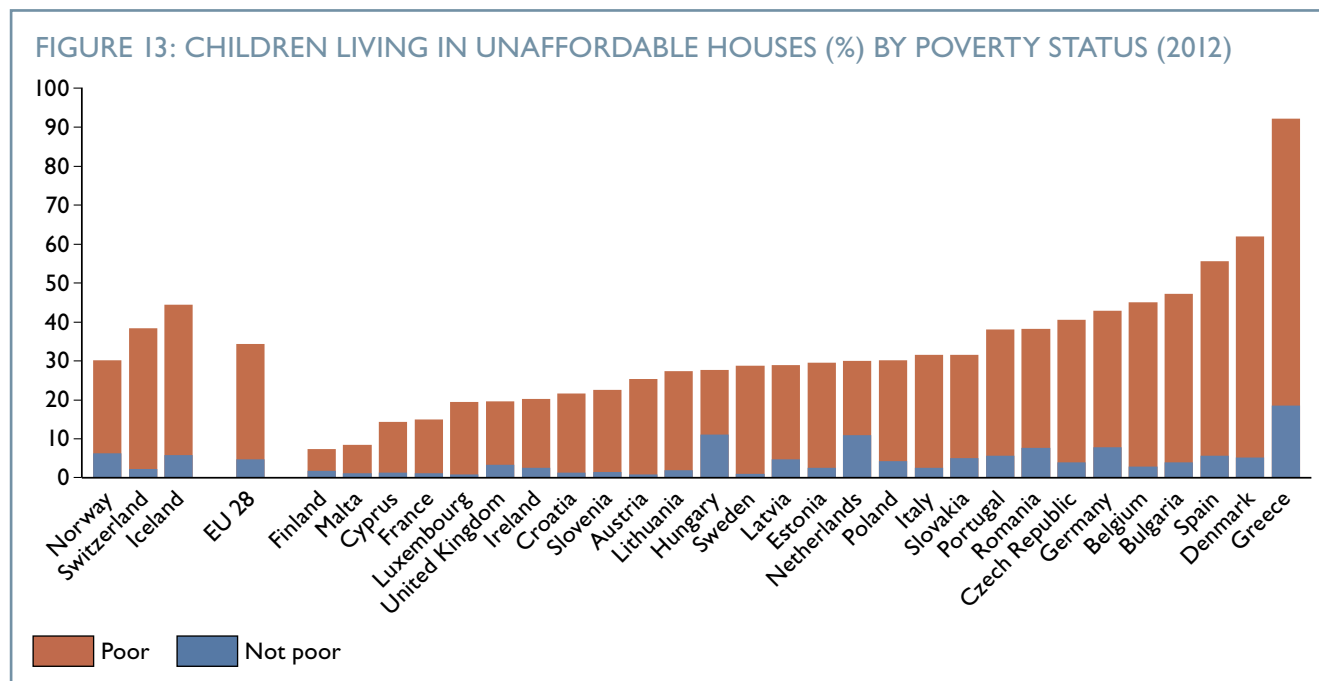
**Romania: A child in Bucharest lives in a house that has no basic facilities. It is not a legal residence so the family of six is also at risk of eviction. Ill health prevents her father from working.**

of national median disposable income). However, inadequate housing can also affect children who would not otherwise be considered poor.

*“I came home from school and all my things were gone. My mum had packed them all. I was so sad.”*

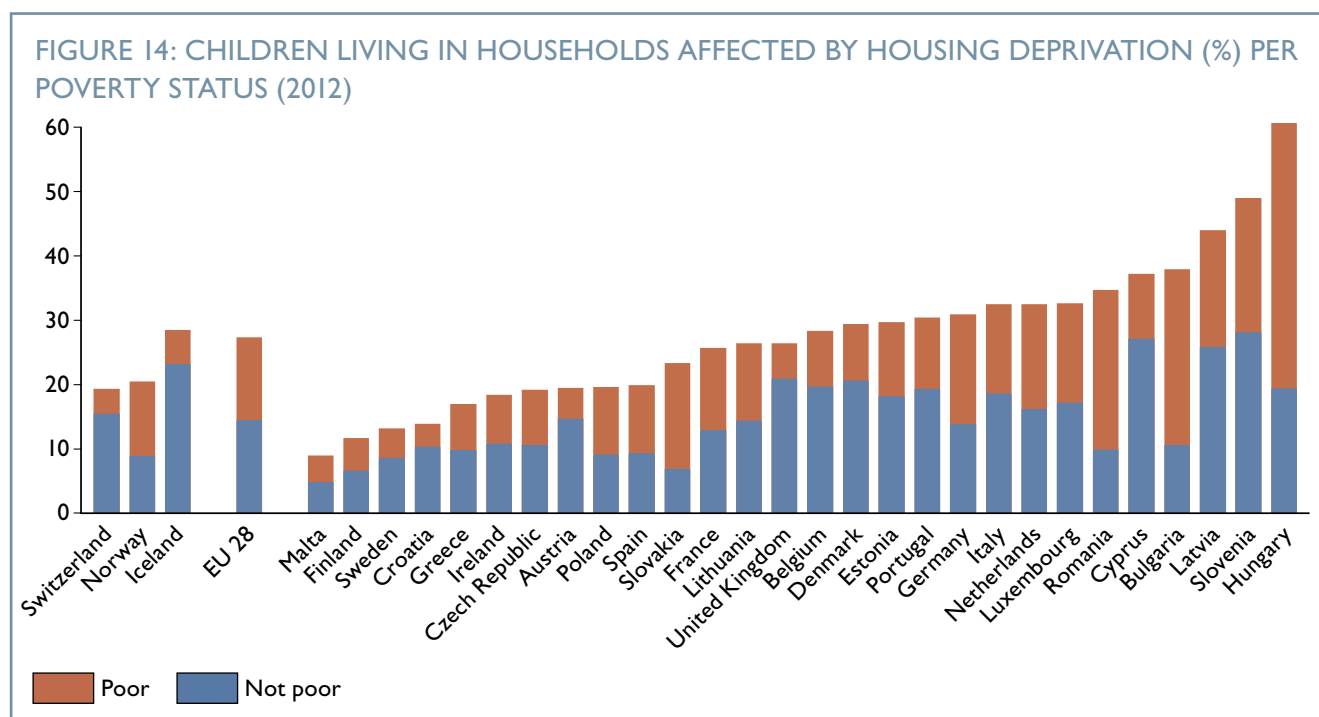
15-year-old girl, Denmark

Research in Denmark shows that, due to increased rents, 0.4% of all families with children are being evicted from their homes every year and can be confronted with homelessness. From 2002 to 2010, the number of people who have been evicted has doubled.<sup>49</sup>



All monetary incomes received from any source by each member of a household are added up. These include income from work, investment and social benefits (all social transfers received in cash including old-age pensions).

Source: EU-SILC 2013 (Retrieved January 2014) – Data for Ireland and Belgium refer to 2011



Source: EU-SILC 2013 (Retrieved January 2014) – Data for Ireland refers to 2011



# 5 CHILDREN'S RIGHTS – THE RIGHT APPROACH TO TACKLING CHILD POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

As we have seen in previous chapters, child poverty is a multidimensional problem. It stems not just from low income, but from exclusion and a denial of children's rights. According to the UNCRC – which every European country has signed and ratified – every child has the right to fully develop their social, emotional, cognitive and physical potential, and to an adequate standard of living, no matter what their family circumstances are.<sup>50</sup> The UNCRC specifically guarantees them the right to education, healthcare, housing and protection, to participate in decisions that affect them, to play and leisure and a balanced diet, and to be cared for in a family environment. Moreover, in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

The EU's Lisbon Treaty has strengthened the EU's commitment and provides that protecting the rights of children is an objective of the EU. Moreover, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU guarantees the protection of children's rights by EU institutions, as well as by EU countries when they implement EU law.

Poverty and exclusion deny children their rights and, in doing so, limit their opportunities to acquire the skills and capabilities that will enable them to work their way out of poverty and contribute to the future wellbeing of society.

Europe's economic downturn has led to a further erosion of children's rights. Even countries that

have experienced economic growth in recent years have seen the gap between rich and poor families widening. Poverty and exclusion deny children their rights and, in doing so, limit their opportunities to acquire the skills and capabilities that will enable them to work their way out of poverty and contribute to the future wellbeing of society.<sup>51</sup>

All European governments have a duty to fulfil children's rights. Save the Children believes that promoting children's rights can mitigate the consequences of poverty and, in the long term, reduce and prevent it. Below are some of the rights that governments and institutions must consider in their attempts to eradicate child poverty across Europe.

*“I thought all children in Norway had equal rights, but it's not so in my world. Some children are simply born into a poor family and have to live with the poverty for the rest of their lives.”*

19-year-old young woman, Norway

## THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION (UNCRC ARTICLE 12)

Children have the right to be heard and to participate in decisions that affect them, and can often provide important insights and expertise about their experiences that adults may not identify or prioritise. They therefore have an important role to play in informing policy and influencing practical measures to tackle child poverty. Children's ombudsmen and similar public and independent bodies that provide impartial and independent complaints mechanisms can help in getting children's voices heard. All European states should also sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the

Child on a communications procedure (OPCP), which will give children the possibility to complain to the UN if their rights have been violated and there is no solution to be found in their home country.<sup>52</sup>

It is also essential that children and their families affected by poverty are better informed about their legal rights and have access to a child-friendly legal system. The EU can play an important role in promoting restorative justice models and child-friendly justice systems by implementing the Council of Europe Guidelines on child-friendly justice systems.

## THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION (UNCRC ARTICLES 28, 29)

Education provides children with the knowledge, skills and qualifications necessary for future employment. In addition, high-quality education improves children's self-esteem and self-confidence and enables them to contribute to a more cohesive and stable community as adults.<sup>53</sup>

Access to high-quality education is central to breaking poverty cycles. However, education outcomes from both primary and secondary school are highly influenced by a child's family background, both the kind of education a child gets and whether or not she or he continues at school long enough to gain qualifications.<sup>54</sup>

In recent years, the education gap between children from a lower and those from a higher socio-economic background has been widening (see Chapter 3). Children from lower socio-economic families or who live in socially or economically disadvantaged areas have less choice of school and are more likely to leave school early. They are also more likely to face discrimination, bullying, and a lack of academic support and parental supervision.

Ensuring that all children have access to high-quality, free education and offering a greater variety of education and training opportunities, both formal and informal as well as after-school programmes, would enable more children from poorer backgrounds to continue their education.

Access to high-quality education is central to breaking poverty cycles. In recent years, however, the education gap between children from a lower and those from a higher socio-economic background has been widening.

## THE RIGHT TO LEISURE, PLAY AND CULTURE (UNCRC ARTICLE 31)

Child poverty is often linked to social exclusion, meaning that children and young people from poor or marginalised families cannot afford to take part in many of the leisure and cultural activities that better-off children enjoy. Children living in remote areas, children with disabilities and migrant children might have even fewer opportunities to participate. At its worst, as revealed in a recent Finnish research study, economic inequality can lead to discrimination by peers, exclusion and bullying.<sup>55</sup>

In February 2013, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted a general comment on UNCRC Article 31 raising concerns about the poor recognition given by states to the rights contained in that Article,<sup>56</sup> which states that all children have the right to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities. The Committee expressed its concern at the "lack of investment in appropriate provisions, weak or non-existent protective legislation and the invisibility of children in national and local-level planning". It was "particularly concerned about the difficulties faced by particular categories of children in relation to enjoyment and conditions of equality of the rights defined in Article 31, especially girls, poor children, children with disabilities, indigenous children and children belonging to minorities, among others".

Participation in leisure activities is crucial to developing self-confidence, and social and civic skills. Governments need to subsidise leisure activities and ensure that they are affordable for all children. There also needs to be more research into the cultural and economic barriers that prevent children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds participating in leisure activities that better-off children enjoy.

Participation in leisure activities is crucial to developing self-confidence, and social and civic skills. Governments need to subsidise leisure activities and ensure that they are affordable for all children.

## THE RIGHT TO PROTECTION (UNCRC ARTICLES 19, 34, 35 AND 36)

All children have the right to protection from abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect. Research suggests that when families are under increasing financial pressure, and when welfare services are cut, children may be at greater risk. According to evidence provided by helplines, women's shelters and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in six European countries, the economic and financial crisis may be leading to increased violence against children and domestic violence in EU member states.<sup>57</sup> In particular, current budget cuts in preventive and protection services for families and children might be exacerbating the situation. In addition, children who are victims of abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect "tend to be more at risk of poverty and social exclusion during their current as well as future lives".<sup>58</sup>

There are currently an estimated 1 million children living in alternative care in the EU.<sup>59</sup> In a number of countries – partly as a consequence of the economic crisis – these numbers are increasing.<sup>60</sup> Even though most EU member states exclude poverty as justification for placing a child in alternative care, poverty and material deprivation often play an implicit role in decisions to remove a child from her or his family. Studies also confirm the overrepresentation of Roma children in institutions across the EU.<sup>61</sup> Young people leaving care institutions for an independent life are particularly at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

It is therefore vital that governments provide support within the family as the first option and that residential care is a last resort. Across Europe, numbers of children referred for and entering alternative care must be closely monitored to ensure that poverty is not leading to an increase in the numbers of children in care. Where there is no alternative, institutions must be regulated, closely supervised and safe, and must meet agreed standards.

## THE RIGHT NOT TO BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST (UNCRC ARTICLE 2)

Article 2 of the UNCRC places a duty on states to ensure the rights of all children within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind. However, as our research shows, children with a migrant background are among those most at risk of poverty (see Chapter 2). Although many of the causes are also those faced by other members of the population, there are some factors that are more specific to migrant households, such as language barriers, that make it more difficult to access well-paid jobs. High levels of unemployment among refugee communities and among some longer-settled migrants and a lack of support systems for asylum seekers cause destitution and lead to migrant children being overrepresented among those living in poverty. Newly arrived migrant children are also more likely to be housed in temporary and inadequate accommodation. Some states discriminate against asylum-seeking children by denying them access to education. For example, in Norway, they do not have the right to childcare and irregular migrants do not have the right to upper-secondary school.

Labour mobility across Europe has also led to some children being separated from their parents (so-called 'EU-orphans' or 'Euro-orphans') when their parents have moved to another European country to find work. NGOs estimate that in EU member states like Romania, Bulgaria and Poland, for example, 500,000 to 1 million children are affected.<sup>62</sup> In Romania, official statistics put the figure at 22,993, although independent research puts it much higher at 350,000.<sup>63</sup> Although the phenomenon affects the whole country, it is often children from the poorest and most disadvantaged communities who are left behind.

Measures to address child poverty and social exclusion must therefore take into account and address the specific issues facing migrant children, including asylum-seeking children (alone or with their families or primary caregivers) and children whose parents have left them in order to find work in another country.

## THE RIGHT TO HEALTHCARE (UNCRC ARTICLE 24)

Inequalities in children's health and access to healthcare remain high across Europe, and are increasing due to the economic crisis. Inequalities often start during childhood, last and widen during life, and can be passed on to the next generation. Children born into poverty are at higher risk of chronic diseases, and poor health can lead to the transmission of poverty across generations, which is strongly correlated to the social determinants of health.<sup>64</sup>

Health inequalities exist both between and within European countries. In Norway, for example, research shows that children from low-income families eat less regular meals and exercise less than their better-off peers, and 34% of young people from low-income families show depressive symptoms. There is also a correlation between financial problems within the family and risk factors related to drug use, crime, bullying and violence.<sup>65</sup>

Children living in poverty have fewer opportunities and resources to benefit from disease prevention and health promotion. Even if universal access to healthcare is guaranteed by law, they may find it difficult to access a general practitioner or dentist because of fewer health services in disadvantaged areas, discriminatory practices, or the cost of medication and other fees. Increasing unemployment and poverty rates are putting parents under great

stress, which can lead to a rise in suicide, depression and psychological abuse.<sup>66</sup> Children suffer from the effects of the crisis on their parents.

Studies have shown that reducing health inequalities by 1% per year could increase a country's annual GDP growth rate by 0.15%, which means that investing in health can help reduce poverty.<sup>67</sup> In turn, reducing poverty is a catalyst for improving health equality. Measures should, in particular, target marginalised and vulnerable children, such as Roma children, migrant children and children with disabilities. More research is needed into the causes of health inequality and unequal access to healthcare.

## THE RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING (UNCRC ARTICLE 27)

Finally, children have the right to a standard of living that meets their physical and mental needs. Poor families are more likely to live in unhealthy, unsafe and crowded living conditions. Loss of earnings, increasing rents and rising fuel prices are placing many families across Europe in this position, leading to stress, ill-health and even family breakdown. It is the duty of all states to support parents and guardians who cannot afford to provide their children with an adequate standard of living – in particular with regards to food, clothing and housing.



**Naples:** These children live in a very poor and difficult suburb of the city, called Soccavo. In the afternoon, they attend educational and recreational activities run by Save the Children Italy.

PHOTO: FRANCESCO ALESSI/PARALLELOZERO



# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Measuring poverty solely in terms of money provides only a partial picture of the disadvantage and exclusion facing a growing number of children in Europe. Children are poor as the result of a variety of circumstances – often a combination of several. Their parents may not have enough disposable income to pay the rent or keep up with mortgage repayments. They may live in inadequate housing, or be unable to access high-quality public services like healthcare, childcare and education. They may not be able to participate in their community or in social and cultural events. They may be physically unsafe or denied the security of living in a stable and supportive family.

Different socio-economic circumstances and histories make comparisons between countries difficult. But what is certain is that there are children living in poverty in all European countries, regardless of each country's overall economic wealth – and the number is growing. The financial and economic crisis of 2008 has increased child poverty and children's vulnerability to poverty in most countries across Europe. Between 2008 and 2012, the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Europe went up by almost 1 million, with an increase of around half a million in just one year between 2011 and 2012.

The poorest and most marginalised children have been hardest hit, which has widened the gap between rich and poor. Tackling child poverty means making the right political choices, and these choices are available to both wealthy and poorer countries. As evidence provided in this report shows, tackling inequalities is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty and exclusion, as is adopting a children's rights approach.

*“Those who don't have any money mostly stay at home. We should start a youth centre in every suburb and every area, and organise activities and cheap travel.”*

13-year-old boy, Sweden

A children's rights approach entails addressing every aspect of children's wellbeing and a change in social policies. In practice, it means providing more resources to expand and improve the quality of affordable childcare and education. It means stimulating employment opportunities and improving working conditions, both in financial terms and in relation to enabling parents to achieve a work-family balance. Social transfers targeting children must be increased in size and effectiveness. Their primary aim should be to reduce inequalities and break the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage. Universal provision should therefore be accompanied by resources specifically for the most disadvantaged children. It is also important to ensure that social, cultural and leisure activities are affordable and accessible for all children, regardless of their economic background.

European institutions have a crucial role to play and can promote the timely collection of data, which should include all dimensions of poverty such as access to education, health and protection systems, and general living conditions. It should also include the possibility for children to participate in decisions that affect them, their ability to access culture and leisure activities, and information concerning risk factors for inequalities, such as being part of a minority group or having a migration background or disability.

A paradigm shift is needed across Europe towards considering investment in children as a cost-effective fiscal policy at European, national, regional and local levels. Child poverty and social exclusion are a matter of children's rights and should be addressed through a child rights approach.



PHOTO: FRANCESCA LEONARDI

Italy: Child playing at La Buona Tavola, a Save the Children's project to tackle food poverty in Naples

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**In order to reduce and prevent child poverty, we urge the EU member states and Iceland, Norway and Switzerland and the European Union to take the following actions:**

- All strategies, plans and actions aimed at reducing and preventing child poverty should be developed from a children's rights perspective and with an understanding of children's needs and situations. Children must be given the opportunity to participate in all decisions affecting them, including the development, implementation and evaluation of policies.
- Policy makers should apply a cross-sectoral approach in consultation with civil society. This approach needs to promote measures in all relevant policy sectors. Moreover, exchange and learning on policies and practice across Europe should be further deepened.
- Investment in children should be a fiscal principle at European, national, regional and local levels, recognising that resources allocated to children today will deliver benefits to society as a whole – now and in the future. This means that many resources allocated to children should be viewed as an investment in society, hence as a part of the long-term structural deficit, rather than as a short-term cost. This implies that these costs are not counted as part of the stability pact. In order to promote this approach, budget transparency is needed, so spending on children should be visible and traceable in all budgets.
- Policy makers should make use of all available resources in an effective way in order to achieve immediate positive and lasting change for children.

### **We urge all EU member states to:**

- implement the European Commission's Recommendation *Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* by developing and implementing national action plans to combat and prevent child poverty and tackle inequalities
- make full use of the European Social Fund towards social inclusion and combating child poverty and inequality.

**We urge all EU member states and Iceland, Norway and Switzerland to:**

- ensure adequate minimum income for families (above the relative poverty threshold)
- ensure free high-quality education for all children and support early childhood education and care, in particular for vulnerable and/or marginalised children
- strengthen universal welfare systems, coupled with direct interventions towards vulnerable and/or marginalised children
- guarantee equal access to justice for all children, including for migrant children, as indicated in the Council of Europe Guidelines on child-friendly justice.

**We urge the European Commission to:**

- develop broad-based indicators to enable a full measurement of the multi-dimensions of child poverty and inequality, including for vulnerable and marginalised children
- create an annual monitoring and evaluation process to measure European governments' action plans on child poverty and inequality and the implementation of the EC Recommendation *Investing in Children – Breaking the cycle of disadvantage*
- prepare joint reports on best practices and progress monitoring
- develop and disseminate information regarding the amount of spending on/for children.

**We urge the European Commission and EU member states to:**

- apply a holistic and multidimensional approach in order to achieve the Europe 2020 objectives, and ensure full use of all relevant EC funding instruments towards combating child poverty and inequality
- make children and the reduction of child poverty an explicit priority in the European Semester and the Europe 2020 governance
- commit to specific targets on the reduction of child poverty and inequality within the EU's post-2020 strategic policy priorities.

**We urge the European Parliament to:**

- ensure the protection of children's rights by systematically integrating a child focus in all parliamentary initiatives and creating a permanent mechanism in the European Parliament with explicit responsibility for protecting and promoting children's rights across all policy sectors
- exercise its budgetary control to ensure EU funds work in the best interests of children
- recall the issue of child poverty in their annual opinion on the Country Specific Recommendations for the Europe 2020 process in autumn each year – reminding the European Commission and European governments to prioritise the reduction of child poverty and inequality
- organise an annual hearing on child poverty to monitor progress on implementation of the Commission's Recommendation.

# APPENDIX: AROPE INDICATOR AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Poverty can be absolute or relative. Absolute poverty relates to the basic needs for survival. In Europe, poverty is usually measured in terms of relative poverty, ie, against a general standard of living in a given country, below which people are considered as unable to conduct a normal life and to participate in ordinary economic, social and cultural activities.<sup>68</sup>

In most European countries, relative poverty is measured in monetary terms, taking as a reference point either the mean or median disposable income of households in a specific country and setting the 'poverty' line as a percentage of that average. The choice of the threshold is often subjective. European Union members and the European Commission generally use the 60% threshold to describe 'risk of poverty'. The OECD, on the other hand, adopts the 50% of median disposable income threshold.<sup>69</sup>

However, relative income poverty lines have significant limitations. First, since they are based on specific countries' standards of living, it is difficult to make comparisons between countries. More importantly, they can change over time as a result of national economic development patterns.

Second, although income might be considered as a proxy of material wellbeing, it fails to capture the complexity of poverty. Other factors – such as environment and housing conditions, education, health status, access to public services, culture and leisure, physical security, family and social relations – define basic needs and standards of adequate living to fulfil individuals' human rights.

In this respect, since the 1990s, other measurements such as the UNDP Human Development Index have emerged, focusing on multi-dimensional aspects of poverty. UNICEF's Global Study on

Child Poverty and Disparities, launched in 2007, explores the relations between child deprivations in eight critical dimensions: education, health, nutrition, water, sanitation, shelter, information and income.<sup>70</sup> In addition, the OECD has proposed a Better Life Index, linking poverty with the broader concept of 'wellbeing' in advanced economies, including alongside the usual measurements of civil engagement, safety and life satisfaction.<sup>71</sup>

In its Europe 2020 strategy, the European Union has adopted a composite indicator to measure the risk of poverty or social exclusion, the AROPE (at risk of poverty or social exclusion). This seeks to integrate other dimensions with monetary measurements of poverty, highlighting 'social exclusion', namely deprivation and work intensity, and disaggregated by gender, age, ethnicity, geography, and socio-economic status of the family. However, the AROPE still fails to take into account essential factors affecting the non-monetary or 'non-material' wellbeing of children. As a result, for this report it has been necessary to integrate AROPE with other existing indicators of children's multidimensional poverty, such as housing conditions and access to early childhood education and care.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, analysis of AROPE trends has been enriched with data on GDP and inequalities in order to make comparisons across countries more relevant.

Finally, the effects of the crisis in child poverty and changes in AROPE from 2008 to 2012 have been compared with outcomes deriving from the indicator measuring the percentage of children in households with disposable income below 60% of the national median value anchored at 2008 (adjusted for inflation for all consecutive years). This has been done in order to consider the potential influence of time (and socio-economic development) changes in median threshold (eg, not excluding children living in households with a low but stable income).



## AROPE: AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The EU's AROPE measurement of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion is composed of three sub-indicators:

- 1) People living in households with disposable income below the poverty threshold (60% national median)
- 2) People living in households with very low work intensity, where working-age members (aged 18–59 years) worked less than 20% of their potential during the past year
- 3) People who are severely materially deprived in terms of economic strain and durables, therefore unable to afford (rather than choose not to buy or pay for) unexpected expenses, a one-week annual holiday away from home, a meal involving meat, chicken or fish every second day, the adequate heating of a dwelling, durable goods like a washing machine, colour television, telephone or car, or who are confronted with payment arrears (mortgage or rent, utility bills, hire purchase instalments or other loan payments) which they cannot pay.

AROPE for children is obtained by extrapolating data for individuals below the age of 18. Children present in several sub-indicators are counted only once.

Disaggregated by:

- Children (below 18 years) vs. adults (18 years old and above).
- Parents' education level (level 0 to 2 refers to pre-primary education, primary, and lower secondary; level 3 to 4 to upper-secondary and post-secondary and non-tertiary; level 5 to 6 to first and second stage of tertiary).
- Work intensity (percentage of work done in the past year compared to the potential for members of working age (18–59 years) in the household among those aged from 0–59 years. Very low work intensity is below 20% of the potential high intensity (between 55% and 85%). In this case, only sub-indicator 1) people living in households with disposable income below the poverty threshold (60% national median) is used.
- Parents' country of birth (parents born in a foreign country vs. reporting country).

## INADEQUATE HOUSING CONDITIONS

Two separate datasets are used in the report:

- 1) Housing costs overburden (households that spend more than 40% of disposable income on housing costs)
- 2) Housing deprivation (a dwelling with a leaking roof, damp walls, floors or foundation, or rot in window frames or floor)

Disaggregated by:

- Poverty status – 'poor households' are those with disposable income below the poverty threshold (60% of national median), while 'not poor' have disposable income above the threshold
- Indicators of housing conditions for children are obtained by extrapolating data for individuals below the age of 18.

## CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

Two separate indicators are used:

- 1) Childcare – access to childcare services of 1 to 29 hours and 30 hours and above per week. Formal services refer to: 1) education at pre-school or equivalent; 2) education at compulsory education; 3) childcare at centre-based services outside school hours; and 4) childcare at daycare centre organised/controlled by a public or private structure). Two separate indicators are used, one for children aged from 0 to 3 years, the other for children aged 3 to the age for compulsory education
- 2) Early school leavers – the share of early school leavers as a percentage of the population aged 18–24 having attained, at most, lower secondary education and not being involved in further education or training. The numerator of the indicator refers to people aged 18–24 who meet the following two conditions: (a) the highest level of education or training they have attained is International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 0, 1, 2 or 3c short; and (b) they have not received any education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey. The denominator in the total population consists of the same age group, excluding the respondents who have not answered the questions 'highest level of education or training attained' and 'participation to education and training'.

# ENDNOTES

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- <sup>2</sup> European Commission *Europe 2020*. [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm) [November 2013]. In 2010 the EU set five targets on employment, innovation, education, fighting poverty and social exclusion and climate/energy to be reached by 2020. Each member state has adopted its own national targets in each of these areas.
- <sup>3</sup> EU-SILC (2013) *European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions*. [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/microdata/eu\\_silc](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/microdata/eu_silc) [January 2014]
- <sup>4</sup> Targets agreed by the European Commission in Barcelona (2002).
- <sup>5</sup> Save the Children Europe Group (2013) *Position Paper: Investment in Children 2014–2020 – Reducing and preventing child poverty in Europe through a rights-based approach*; United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) *Convention on the Rights of the Child webpage*. <http://www.unicef.org/crc/> [January 2014]
- <sup>6</sup> European Commission (2013) *Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*, Recommendation (2013/112/EU). [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/c\\_2013\\_778\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/c_2013_778_en.pdf) [November 2013]. Also see <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1060&langId=en>
- <sup>7</sup> See note 1.
- <sup>8</sup> See note 3.
- <sup>9</sup> All 28 EU members (including Croatia) plus Norway, Switzerland and Iceland.
- <sup>10</sup> Social Protection Committee (2012) *Tackling and preventing child poverty, promoting child well-being*.
- <sup>11</sup> European Commission *Europe 2020*. [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm) [November 2013]. In 2010 the EU set five targets on employment, innovation, education, fighting poverty and social exclusion and climate/energy to be reached by 2020. Each member state has adopted its own national targets in each of these areas.
- <sup>12</sup> European Commission (2013) *Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*, Recommendation (2013/112/EU). [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/c\\_2013\\_778\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/c_2013_778_en.pdf)
- <sup>13</sup> EU-SILC (2013) *European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions*. [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/microdata/eu\\_silc](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/microdata/eu_silc) [January 2014]. The indicator used is the AROPE composed of three sub-indicators. Children who are present in several sub-indicators are counted once.
- <sup>14</sup> Idem.
- <sup>15</sup> GDP per capita in US\$ (\$30,000, \$40,000 and \$45,000 respectively) from World Bank (2013) *World Development Indicators*. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD> [December 2013]
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- <sup>17</sup> Social Protection Committee (2012) *Tackling and preventing child poverty, promoting child well-being*.
- <sup>18</sup> EU-SILC (2013) *European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions*. [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/microdata/eu\\_silc](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/microdata/eu_silc) [January 2014]. Low work intensity refers to the ratio between the number of months that household members of working age (18–59 years) who are not a student (aged 18–24) worked during the income reference year. Low work intensity is below 20% of the potential, high intensity between 55% and 85%. Child poverty in this case refers only to the share of children in households with disposable income below the threshold of 60% national median.
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- <sup>31</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2012) *Child Poverty and Inequality. New Perspectives*, UNICEF, New York
- <sup>32</sup> EU-SILC (2013) *European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions*. [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/microdata/eu\\_silc](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/microdata/eu_silc) [January 2014]
- <sup>33</sup> Eurochild and EAPN (2013) *Towards children's well-being in Europe explainer on child poverty in the EU*. [http://issuu.com/eurochild\\_org/docs/2013\\_child\\_poverty\\_eu?e=5569316/2300156](http://issuu.com/eurochild_org/docs/2013_child_poverty_eu?e=5569316/2300156) [November 2013]
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# CHILD POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN EUROPE

## A matter of children's rights

In Europe, almost 27 million children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Growing up in poverty can negatively affect children for the rest of their lives. It does not simply mean that their basic needs – such as food, clothes and housing – might not be met; it also means lack of equal access to quality services and care, and experiencing exclusion from activities with peers.

Poverty is a multi-dimensional problem and inequality is not only one of the root causes of poverty, it is also one of its consequences. Child poverty and social exclusion are a matter of children's rights and should be addressed through a child rights approach.

With appropriate support, the current generation of children who are growing up in deprivation and exclusion in Europe will be enabled to reach their full potential. Therefore, investment in children makes sense – morally, economically, socially and politically. It is the only sustainable way of overcoming inequalities in the long term and of achieving a just and equal society as a whole.

By publishing this joint European report, Save the Children wants to inspire a change in the perception of child poverty in Europe. We want to generate awareness of the scale and impact of child poverty – one of the principal sources of child rights violations in Europe.

