



# Roadmap for boosting the rights and resilience of European families

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**rEUsilience**

# Contents

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Challenges and priorities for families of today.....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 The role of policy in supporting families during key transitions.....	5
2.2 Policy priorities for family resilience.....	6
<b>3. Conditions for EU implementation .....</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1 Competence: EU soft and hard law .....	8
3.2 EU funding for investing in families and infrastructure .....	12
3.3 Adequate monitoring frameworks .....	15
3.4 Evidence base for policy reforms.....	16
<b>4. Recommendation: Roll out peer exchanges on family support through the European Child Guarantee .....</b>	<b>18</b>
4.1 Spotlight on country approaches to holistic family support in the European Child Guarantee ..	18
4.2 Scenarios for a European peer exchange programme focusing on family support services .....	24
<b>5. Recommendation: Social investments for family resilience and strengthening support services for families under the European Social Fund + .....</b>	<b>29</b>
5.1 Family centres funded through the ESF+ .....	29
5.2 Key steps to use the ESF+ for family support .....	34
<b>6. Recommendation: Improve monitoring with families-in-households typology and new adult care variables in EU-SILC.....</b>	<b>42</b>
6.1 Families-in-households typology .....	42
6.2 Adult Care & Work survey module .....	44
6.3 Filling gaps in adult care data through EU-SILC .....	45
<b>7. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>48</b>
Annex I: List of EU initiatives covering family support .....	50
Annex II: EU Social Inclusion Peer Review Process .....	52
Annex III: Understanding how the ESF+ works .....	54

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## Executive Summary

Europe is facing a range of challenges, from an ageing population to increasing financial insecurity, growing inequalities and evolving work practices. While policymakers know that adapting to these changes is key to a resilient European economy, this is usually only discussed in relation to individuals. What is left out of these conversations is **families**.

“The vast majority of people live within some form of a family, so their resources and capacities are fundamentally shaped by the close relationships formed within this setting,” says Rense Nieuwenhuis, associate professor of Sociology at Stockholm University.

rEUsilience is working to position families as a driving force for building a more resilient Europe. “Our goal is to design policies that ensure all European families have the resources, skills and support they need to flourish in a rapidly evolving world,” notes Mary Daly, professor of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Oxford.

The rEUsilience consortium has taken stock of ample evidence (both on needs assessment and policy effectiveness), and has actively and intensively engaged with stakeholder panels through its Policy Lab, to test a (limited) set of policies and potential reforms in light of recent EU and national developments.

The La Hulpe Declaration of April 2024<sup>1</sup> recently called for a strengthening of the European Pillar of Social Rights under the 2024-2029 political mandate of the European Commission. Even if policies for families remain largely under national jurisdiction, the EU influences them through legislation, funding, technical assistance, strategic guidelines and transnational exchanges. With the European Pillar of Social Rights as a compass, this Roadmap formulates recommendations for EU-level actions in line with EU and national social policy competences.

The Roadmap starts by providing key findings of the research carried out from 2022-2025 by the rEUsilience consortium in 6 countries (Belgium-Flanders, Croatia, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom), putting forward 15 policy principles for family resilience which are relevant for all European countries. These have been devised cognisant of the wide variation across the rEUsilience and other European countries, and consist of three main overarching policy aims as a guide for countries and international institutions to achieve better resilience on the part of families:

1. Better income support for families with children, with a particular concern for low-resourced families;
2. Closing the childcare gap, arising following the birth of a child when well-paid parental leave has been exhausted, but access to state-supported full-time ECEC is not yet available;
3. Putting in place a comprehensive set of family support services.

The Roadmap then highlights key conditions for the policy priorities to be implemented at an EU-level. These conditions include: key competences for the EU, funding programmes, monitoring mechanisms, and a sound evidence base. The Roadmap formulates practical recommendations in line with these conditions, namely for European peer exchanges to fill gaps in policies which make families vulnerable, for social investments in families and family support through the European Social Fund+, and finally for improving EU monitoring and data on families through EU-SILC. Rather than call for new EU initiatives, this Roadmap builds on existing instruments aiming to consolidate them further. It is intended for use at EU level, by the EU institutions and EU-level stakeholders, in cooperation with national and local stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> Belgian presidency of the EU (2024), La Hulpe Declaration. Available [online](#)



## 1. Introduction

At a time when the European Union is reviewing its Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, this offers an opportunity to set new priorities and intensify efforts to support resilience of families.<sup>2</sup> Namely through actions which aim to strengthen families (all types without discrimination) in Europe by providing comprehensive, accessible, and equitable support systems that enhance the quality of life, promote gender equality, and foster child development and family wellbeing.

At the Porto European Social Summit in 2021, the EU, social partners and civil society adopted headline targets to be achieved by 2030. This included a target to reduce poverty by 15 million people – including 5 million children. Yet since 2019, poverty has only decreased by 1.6 million and child poverty has increased.<sup>3</sup> In 2024, over one-fifth (21.9%) of the EU population living in households with dependent children was at risk of poverty or social exclusion.<sup>4</sup> With five years left to achieve the headline target to reduce poverty, it is important that the Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights strengthens ambitions and urges governments to pay particular attention to advancing faster on the poverty reduction target. **A focus on preventing poverty by boosting family resilience in the face of risks** (of labour market exclusion, financial stress) could be a strategic focus in this next 2025-2030 phase of the Action Plan, as part of a new European Anti-Poverty Strategy.

Family resilience centres on families' capacities to engage in family life, which involves caregiving, especially for children, and manage the transitions involved in moving from one stage of family life to another and engaging in paid work without incurring major risk or trade-off.<sup>5</sup>

The avoidance of poverty and social exclusion is one important risk in this context but family well-being in general, and especially the capacity to engage in family life, are also central. The rEUsilience research project has worked with the notion of low resources (rather than poverty). This is for several reasons. It allows to countenance, first, a broad set of resources as being necessary for family life and, second, that families face difficulties that may originate in factors other than low income (although they may be associated with income and lead to income shortages). We refer here especially to family composition and the extent to which families have heavy caring-related responsibilities. The former places the spotlight on parents raising children alone and those with more than two children while the latter highlights families coping with illness, disability or developmental difficulties (hence also including care for adults).<sup>6</sup>

This European Roadmap provides some key findings of the research carried out from 2022-2025 by the rEUsilience consortium in 6 countries, putting forward 15 policy priorities for family resilience which are relevant for all European countries (chapter 2). It then highlights key conditions for the policy principles to be implemented at an EU-level (chapter 3). These conditions include: key competences, funding, monitoring and a sound evidence base. The Roadmap then formulates practical recommendations for European peer exchanges to fill gaps in policies which make families vulnerable (chapter 4), for social investments in families and family support through the European Social Fund+ (chapter 5), and finally for improving EU monitoring and data collection on families through EU-SILC (chapter 6).

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<sup>2</sup> This Roadmap is focused on EU-related instruments, but intends to be inclusive of the United Kingdom and other non-EU countries in some parts especially in relation to transnational peer exchanges and data collection mechanisms.

<sup>3</sup> European Commission (2024), Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2024. PP: 34. Available [online](#).

<sup>4</sup> Eurostat (2025), Living conditions in Europe - poverty and social exclusion - Statistics Explained Available [online](#)

<sup>5</sup> Daly, M., Gosme, E., Shorey, H., and Uzunalioglu, M., (2025) Policy Priorities for Family Resilience, rEUsilience working paper series: 17. PP 2. Available [online](#).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid



## 2. Challenges and priorities for families of today

### 2.1 The role of policy in supporting families during key transitions

The research also considered how social policy supports transitions for all parents between care and employment and how policy treats three particular types of family situation that the research identifies as needing extra support: parenting alone, caring for children with a disability or illness, and families with a migrant background.

Consequently, five areas of policy were analysed: parenting-related leaves, early childhood education and care (ECEC), provisions for lone-parent families, provisions for families with children with a disability, and provisions for families with a migration background adjusting or integrating into the new country. The research highlights a number of key findings relating to the extent to which national and EU policy systems support families to be resilient:<sup>7</sup>

- Some policy fields seem to be better equipped, or further along the road, than others in helping families to be resilient. The policies oriented to transitions, such as parental leaves and ECEC, generally seem to be better developed than those for family situations with heightened risk;
- Conditions that exclude people from benefits and services reduce policies' effectiveness. For example, significant numbers of people are excluded from various parenting-related leaves because of employment-related conditions and ECEC does not feature enough mechanisms to include low-resourced families in general. So, the degree of inclusiveness or exclusiveness in policies and provision is crucial;
- Where the EU has set legal benchmarks most countries meet them, and so the significance of the EU as a policy agent is confirmed. But where the EU only makes 'soft recommendations', they do not seem to embed thoroughly into the national systems;
- The recognition that some families need more is not fully reflected in the policy systems. One big issue is that of equivalence in support for lone-parent families compared to those with two parents. The lack of information on and system knowledge about certain types of families, especially with children with disabilities and migrant families, is a general weakness found across countries.

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<sup>7</sup> Daly, M., and Uzunalioglu, M. (2025), Analysing A Selection of Family Policies from the Perspective of Resilience, rEUsilience working paper series: 13. PP: 3-4 Available [online](#).



## 2.2 Policy priorities for family resilience

rEUsilience develops a family-centred approach. What does that mean? As a report from the European Observatory of Family Policy states: “The family perspective emphasises the importance of considering the complexity of family needs and the implementation of intersectoral solutions in policymaking.”<sup>8</sup> This directs the focus to the different aspects of family life, especially the resources, tasks and transitions that families are faced with and have to manage. The perspective places the spotlight on both child-rearing and care for other family members and considers how policy shapes the resources and opportunities that families have available in light of their structure, composition and socio-economic and other aspects of their position or situation. The relationship between resource level, income-earning and caregiving is central.<sup>9</sup>

Following extensive comparative research of country-level and EU analyses, coupled with expert consultations, the rEUsilience consortium are mindful of the feasibility and scale of needed reforms to support family resilience. Rather than suggesting specific reforms, the consortium decided that setting out **general principles** would be a more appropriate approach, not least because of the diversity of provision and philosophies in the different countries of the consortium (Belgium, Croatia, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the UK) as well as other European countries.<sup>10</sup> In what follows, operational issues are not considered but it should be noted that such operational issues – especially in the sense of barriers to claiming benefits and services – are relevant to almost every principle and were consistently raised by the families consulted during rEUsilience focus groups as a barrier for them. This includes information scarcity, difficulty in accessing benefits and services, and unhelpful staff.

The priority for the EU and its Member States should be to put in place a good system of support for families which should operate to the highest standards regarding making full information available, creating a system of support that is easy to access and is person-centred. To achieve this, we have proposed 15 principles reproduced below, which have been devised cognisant of the wide variation across the rEUsilience and other European countries. They are divided into three main overarching policy aims as a guide for countries and international institutions to achieve better resilience on the part of families are the following:

1. Better income support for families with children with a particular concern for low-resourced families;
2. Closing the childcare gap, arising following the birth of a child, when well-paid parental leave has been exhausted, but access to state-supported full-time ECEC is not yet available.
3. Putting in place a comprehensive set of family support services.

The specific principles for each of these areas relate to coverage (endorsing a universal approach), adequacy (in terms of amount and sufficiency), inclusion (recognition of additional need) and the absence of gaps. The underlying thinking is that such policy principles set out guidelines or norms that countries should seek to achieve, starting from where they are and in accordance with their national social welfare traditions.

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<sup>8</sup> EOFP (2023), Towards Greater Integration of Family Policy across Europe. PP: 21. Available [online](#).

<sup>9</sup> Daly, M., Gosme, E., Shorey, H., and Uzunalioglu, M., (2025) Policy Priorities for Family Resilience, rEUsilience working paper series: 17. PP: 2. Available [online](#).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



**Table 1. 15 policy principles for family resilience**

Policy aim	Principle
<b>Principles for Better Income Support for Families with Children</b>  4 principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child-related Income Support Should Be Available on a Universal Basis to All Families with Children</li> <li>• Child-related Income Support Should Grant an Adequate Level of Support</li> <li>• Child-related Income Support Should Operate on a Principle of Recognising the Additional Needs of Some Families</li> <li>• Recognition of the Additional Costs of Transitions in Families Should Be Built into the Child-related Income Support</li> </ul>
<b>Principles for Closing the Childcare Gap</b>  8 principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paid Statutory Leave Should Be Universal for All Parents</li> <li>• Well-paid Leave Should Be Accepted as a Principle for all Parenting-related Leaves</li> <li>• Equality among Families Should be Accepted as a Principle especially by Recognising the Additional Needs of Some Families</li> <li>• Gender Equality Should Remain a Core Principle of Parenting-related Leaves</li> <li>• The Right and Entitlement to ECEC Should Be Universal for all Children</li> <li>• There Should Be No Gap between the End of Well-paid, Parenting-related Leaves and the Onset of the Child's Right to ECEC</li> <li>• Some Families have Additional Needs regarding ECEC and Should Be Supported</li> <li>• ECEC Should be Governed by a Principle of Flexibility</li> </ul>
<b>Principles for Putting in Place Comprehensive Family Support Services</b>  3 principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Support Services Should Be Universally Available and Range from General to Highly specialised Support</li> <li>• There Should Be a National-level Framework for Family Support Services Premised on Local level Provision</li> <li>• Family Support Services Should Be Guided by a Holistic Approach</li> </ul>

These principles should serve to drive national-level discussions and reviews of policies to support families, given that family policies and services remain largely under national jurisdiction. However, as highlighted in the next section, the EU can also influence such reforms through legislation, funding, technical assistance, strategic guidelines and transnational exchanges.



### 3. Conditions for EU implementation

**This European Roadmap does not propose a whole new instrument for family support and resilience, but rather builds on existing EU instruments.** This chapter of the Roadmap considers these instruments and what conditions need to be in place for the rEUsilience policy principles to be implemented at EU level. These conditions include competence, funding, monitoring, and evidence – these different elements were extensively discussed in the rEUsilience Policy Lab.<sup>11</sup>

#### 3.1 Competence: EU soft and hard law

The EU does not have competence in all the areas of the rEUsilience policy priorities. Some EU initiatives *indirectly* cover family policy through data collection and monitoring, peer exchanges between governments and benchmarking of policies. This is the case for EU social inclusion peer reviews, European Child Guarantee and European Care Strategy implementation. Some EU initiatives *directly* cover family policy and support: this is the case with the transposition of the EU Work-Life Balance directive and EU funding programmes like the European Social Fund Plus.

**The common thread for all EU initiatives for families is the European Pillar of Social Rights,** proclaimed in 2017, which outlines 20 principles aimed at delivering new and more effective rights for citizens. These principles cover key political priorities for investments and actions which positively impact gender equality, work-life balance, childcare, and long-term care - all of which are particularly relevant for family resilience. An Action Plan was adopted in 2021 (with a review planned in 2025) consisting of different policy and legal initiatives to implement the 20 principles. Examples include the EU Work-Life Balance directive, the European Child Guarantee, the ESF+ and more.

It is in this context that the Spanish presidency of the EU hosted a conference in 2023 for the EU Social Protection Committee on the topic of social protection of families, examining the challenges of families of today through an inclusive and gender-responsive lens, and highlighting measures taken across different countries. The premise for this was the fact that families are considered essential units of society and play a fundamental role in the economy. In fact, the Spanish Presidency of the EU emphasised the importance of family as a unit with the following words:

“They constitute a key economic and social support for the vast majority of citizens and a basic mechanism of solidarity, redistributing resources between individuals, households and generations, and providing protection in difficult situations.”<sup>12</sup>

At a time when there are major discussions about social services at EU level (their effectiveness and improving coordination of services around children and their families); and as the European Pillar of Social Rights Action plan is being reviewed under the new 2024-2029 European Commission, it would make sense to use this opportunity to **create a stream of European action focused on family support**. As a reminder, family support can be understood as “a set of (service and other) activities oriented to improving family functioning and grounding child-rearing and

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<sup>11</sup> With meetings organised in Brussels and online between March 2024 and June 2025 to discuss emerging findings, the feasibility of policy proposals and their implementation. The Lab consisted of two stakeholder panels representing families and representing EU policy experts.

<sup>12</sup> Spanish Presidency of the EU (2023), Conference “Towards comprehensive social protection for families in Europe”, 27 September 2023





other familial activities in a system of supportive relationships and resources (both formal and informal)".<sup>13</sup> This stream of European action could either be a stand-alone flagship initiative under the new Pillar Action Plan, or be integrated into soft law frameworks like the EU Gender Equality Strategy, the European Care Strategy and the European Child Guarantee.

**The EU Gender Equality Strategy** is a strategic framework with objectives and actions which aim to achieve a gender-equal Europe by addressing gender disparities in various spheres. It advocates for equal sharing of care responsibilities, improved family leave policies, and measures to combat gender-based violence and discrimination. It states that "Improving the work-life balance of workers is one of the ways of addressing the gender gaps in the labour market. Both parents need to feel responsible and entitled when it comes to family care."<sup>14</sup> There have been European Commission campaigns on gender stereotypes focusing on different spheres of life including in sharing care responsibilities and in career choices.<sup>15</sup> The European Commission also monitors the availability of childcare, social care and household services, in particular for single parents, through annual reports on gender equality which also examine the extent to which the European Pillar of Social Rights principles 2 (gender equality) and 3 (equal opportunities) are mainstreamed in the European Semester.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the strategy is also implemented through funding of transnational projects under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) funding programme, including a recent call for funding of projects promoting family-friendly practices in companies.<sup>17</sup>

The EU has issued several recommendations on improving care provision in Europe, namely with the launch of the **European Care Strategy** in 2022. This strategy aims to boost the workforce and working conditions in care services as a matter of priority, and also refers to a wide range of measures to be adopted to support "informal" carers (measures such as access to training, mental health supports, short breaks and financial support).<sup>18</sup> This visibility of informal carers is important especially for family carers who are either caring full time or balancing work and care of a child or adult with disabilities in their family environment. The strategy consists of a Communication framing the overall strategy, and two Council Recommendations: one on ECEC, and one on long-term care. Care services are essential to support families, but the EU has no legal competence in the area of care. The Council Recommendations therefore contain policy guidance on how to invest and improve care services at national level. The monitoring framework differs for both. In the case of the ECEC recommendation,<sup>19</sup> this is monitored mainly through the European Semester and the EU social scoreboard with 2030 objectives to be met to increase participation of children in ECEC. For the Long-term care recommendation,<sup>20</sup> appointed national long-term care coordinators meet regularly and have to submit reports to the European Commission (with a first deadline for reporting on national measures in June 2024), and a monitoring framework was adopted by the European Commission and Social Protection

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<sup>13</sup> UNICEF (2015), Family and Parenting Support Policy and Provision in a Global Context. PP: 12. Available [online](#)

<sup>14</sup> European Commission, Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 . Available [online](#).

<sup>15</sup> European Commission (2023) Campaign on ending stereotypes . Available [online](#).

<sup>16</sup> European Commission (2024), Annual report on gender equality. PP: 20. Available [online](#).

<sup>17</sup> Call for proposals to promote gender equality (CERV-2024-GE). Available [online](#).

<sup>18</sup> European Commission (2022), European Care Strategy for care givers and care receivers. Available [online](#).

<sup>19</sup> Council Recommendation 2022/C 484/01 on early childhood education and care: the Barcelona targets for 2030. Available [online](#).

<sup>20</sup> Council of the EU (2022), Council Recommendation 2022/C 476/01 on access to affordable high-quality long-term care. Available [online](#).



Committee in May 2025.<sup>21</sup> A European alliance of civil society organisations and trade unions are monitoring closely the developments of this strategy.<sup>22</sup>

Introduced in 2021 in the framework of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, the **European Child Guarantee** aims to combat child poverty and social exclusion by ensuring that every child in the EU has access to essential services.<sup>23</sup> This initiative focuses on guaranteeing effective access of children in need to a set of key services: access to quality ECEC, education, healthcare, healthy nutrition, and adequate housing. It targets children in vulnerable situations, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, children with disabilities, and those living in precarious family situations. Many countries are approaching the Child Guarantee from a holistic perspective, considering the family environment of children in vulnerable situations, and developing two/multi-generation family-centred approaches to support them. All Member states have to submit national action plans and biennial reports on progress to the European Commission, and a Child Guarantee monitoring framework was developed by the Indicators Sub-Group of the Social Protection Committee in January 2024 to track, through concrete statistical indicators, how it is being implemented nationally.<sup>24</sup> This framework also includes breakdowns of the AROPE (At Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion) indicator by parental background, namely the share of children AROPE with at least one parent born outside the EU, with at least one parent with a disability, and living in a single-parent household. National Child Guarantee coordinators meet regularly through meetings facilitated by the European Commission, and also regularly connect with key European civil society networks members of the EU Alliance for Investing in Children.<sup>25</sup> Members of the Alliance regularly publish different assessments about the implementation of the European Child Guarantee actions or host events.<sup>26</sup>

While these strategies are not directly implemented by the EU, Member states have varying levels of obligations under them, covering different dimensions of family care (education, health, nutrition). These strategies offer useful policy guidance, can foster better coordination of national measures and budgets, build capacity of Member states to invest in quality family support services, and promote transnational exchanges on effective approaches through EU peer reviews and European civil society networks. These Strategies can also provide opportunities for rethinking family support systems and examining local intervention models. Under the EU Gender Equality Strategy, this can look like a campaign on sharing family care, or launching a call for European projects to create policy tools for guidance service development and funding relating to supports in the workplace, tackling domestic violence, supporting family mediation or mental health. Under the European Care Strategy, two major care sectors are the focus (ECEC and LTC) and Member States will have to develop measures to consolidate them. But this strategy also covers supports to informal carers, such as respite care and in-home support – an area with much potential for developing family support. Regarding the European Child Guarantee, it will be interesting to explore the biennial reports submitted by Member states in 2024 and analyse what types of support services are being prioritised to address the situation of vulnerable children and their families.

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<sup>21</sup> Social Protection Committee and European Commission, Monitoring and benchmarking frameworks. Available [online](#)

<sup>22</sup> Joint Statement (2023) by 17 organisations on the UN international day of care and support. Available [online](#).

<sup>23</sup> Council of the EU (2021), Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee . Available [online](#).

<sup>24</sup> Social Protection Committee and European Commission (2023), Joint monitoring framework for the European Child Guarantee. Available [online](#).

<sup>25</sup> EU Alliance for investing in children. Available [online](#).

<sup>26</sup> COFACE (2024) EU policy webinar on the child guarantee. Available [online](#).



In addition to EU soft law strategies like the ones above, there are also examples of hard law which is contributing to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. **The EU Work-Life Balance Directive 2019/1158** adopted in 2019<sup>27</sup> is a cornerstone in supporting workers with care responsibilities. It introduces paternity leave of at least 10 working days, paid at the same rate as sick leave. It also mandates parental leave of at least four months per parent, of which two months are non-transferable and compensated adequately. Additionally, it addresses carers' leave, ensuring that workers can take five days per year to care for seriously ill or dependent relatives. It also ensures workers have the right to request flexible work arrangements. It has different objectives, including ensuring that families do not lose their income due to care responsibilities, and supporting more equal sharing of care between women and men. While these work-life balance rights are not accessible to all workers (e.g. self-employed workers are not in the scope of this legislation), and while some national legislations go beyond these minimum European standards, this legislation seeks to create a more level playing field and equal rights for workers across the 27 countries of the EU. This directive is also having impact on neighbouring countries of the EU, especially in pre-accession counties.

The European Commission proposed the Work-life Balance Directive following the withdrawal of an earlier proposal for the revision of the 1992 maternity leave directive, which would have extended the period of maternity leave. As such it takes a broader approach to modernising the existing EU legal framework in the area of family-related leave and flexible working arrangements, to take account of developments in society over the past decade.<sup>28</sup> Such EU directives are applicable in EU countries only. Monitoring of the Work-Life Balance directive transposition is carried out at different levels, including in the context of the European Semester through the annual Joint Employment Reports.<sup>29</sup> Reforms have been adopted in all countries in order to transpose the minimum standards of this directive. For instance, in Poland, a new amendment to the Labour Code and other acts from April 2023 includes provisions concerning carers' leave (up to 5 days a year), parental leave that must be shared between parents, paternity leave, and time off from work on grounds of force majeure. The transposition of this directive is nearly complete, with some last delays in Spain and Belgium.<sup>30</sup> While the UK was still a member of the EU during the negotiations on the Work-Life Balance directive from 2017-2019, it has since then left the EU and the non-regression clause applies only to labour standards "in place" and not legislation still to be transposed. While the scope of the legal requirements of the directive does not cover care or support services specifically, the recitals of the directive make the link between leaves, flexible arrangements and care services. Moreover, this is an example of employment legislation impacting policies for families, addressing specifically family-employment transitions and ensuring adequate payment of family leaves. It is important to note however that there are many other laws (e.g. in the consumer and digital fields) which also aim to support families directly and indirectly.

Chapter 4 below makes recommendations on how to leverage one of the soft law policy frameworks, the European Child Guarantee, to organise peer exchanges between policy-makers and practitioners on the topic of family support.

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<sup>27</sup> Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU. Available [online](#).

<sup>28</sup> European Parliament (2023), Factsheet: Maternity and paternity leave in the EU. Available [online](#).

<sup>29</sup> European Commission and Council of the EU (2025), Joint Employment Report. PP: 69. Available [online](#).

<sup>30</sup> Eurlex, National Transposition measures concerning the EU Work-Life Balance Directive. Available [online](#).



## 3.2 EU funding for investing in families and infrastructure

Without funding, there is no policy. While EU funds cannot be used as core budgets for implementation of national policies for families, they can still be of added value to complement national, regional and local initiatives. This can include research, innovation and support to policy and services for families, as well as training for professionals working with families and investments in key infrastructure projects linked to housing, schools, transport and care.

**The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)** is a crucial instrument for funding actions to support families through projects which promote employment, social inclusion, health and education. The 2021 ESF+ regulation states that “The ESF+ should also be used to enhance timely and equal access to affordable, sustainable and high-quality services that promote the access to housing and person-centred care such as healthcare and long-term care, in particular family and community-based care services.”<sup>31</sup> Through the ESF+, the EU supports member states in developing services that assist parents in balancing work and family responsibilities, such as childcare facilities and parental training programmes.<sup>32</sup> It funds projects aiming to expand availability and quality of ECEC, hence intending to help parents, particularly mothers, to enter or re-enter the workforce. It can also help boost affordability of ECEC for low- and middle-income families, reducing financial strain and enabling better work-life balance. Moreover, this fund provides opportunities for enhancing educational opportunities for children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes programmes aimed at reducing early school leaving and improving educational outcomes, or supporting inclusive education for children with disabilities.<sup>33</sup> Parental skills development is a focus in some countries, with programmes targeting parents to improve their parenting skills in order to support their children’s educational and social development. An example is the recent call in Ireland under the Young Parent Support Programme which aims to fund services that are evidence based and support the wellbeing of young parents and their children, including helping young parents’ parental capacity and therefore increase their confidence.<sup>34</sup> Finally, some evidence suggests that long-term care services, including for persons with disabilities, are gaining importance for ESF+ allocations after the COVID-19 pandemic which highlighted the need to improve health and long-term care systems. For example, countries such as Bulgaria and Croatia assign strategic importance to long-term care in their ESF+ programmes. Lithuania invests in the training of care workers. Italy, Poland, Romania and Greece are the countries with the highest level of investment in long-term care under the ESF+.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013. Available [online](#).

<sup>32</sup> European Commission (2019), Work-life balance for all: best practice examples from EU Member States. Available [online](#)

<sup>33</sup> European Commission (2023), News article: A helping hand for families of children with disabilities. Available [online](#)

<sup>34</sup> Tusla (2025) Expressions of Interest - Provision of Young Parent Support Programme. Available [online](#).

<sup>35</sup> European Commission (2023), News article: Strong public support for ESF+ investments and healthcare and long-term care. Available [online](#).



**Table 2. Examples of family support interventions eligible under the ESF+ 2021-2027**

EU fund	Measures	Family support type
2021-2027 European Social Fund Plus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct funding of services for families and children</li> <li>• Training of workers in support and care services</li> <li>• Education opportunities (formal and non-formal)</li> <li>• Indirect funding of European networks to build capacity of social services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family counselling, coaches and centres</li> <li>• Casework and access to specialised social services</li> <li>• Respite services (short or long-term support with care for children during a time of family crisis)</li> <li>• In-home support (individualised support provided within the family home)</li> <li>• Peer support networks</li> <li>• Coaching to enter the labour market</li> <li>• Specialised support to families in vulnerable situations</li> <li>• Community-based care</li> </ul>

**The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** is a major financial instrument of the European Union aimed at strengthening economic and social cohesion by correcting imbalances between regions in the EU, with around 200 billion euros allocated under the current 2021-2027 EU budget. This fund does not allocate funds specifically for family-focused policies, but it indirectly benefits families via community services and infrastructure improvements. Of its five priorities, priority 4 of the ERDF is to promote a more social and inclusive Europe, including access to education, healthcare, and social infrastructure, and social inclusion of marginalised and disadvantaged groups. It supports various projects that can have a significant impact on family support services namely by providing financial support for infrastructure development. This includes facilities that benefit families such as childcare centres, schools, and community centres which help to create a supportive environment for family life. The 2021 ERDF regulation states that “The ERDF should support and promote transition from institutional to family-based or community-based care through supporting facilities that would seek to prevent segregation from the community, would facilitate the integration of people in society and would seek to ensure independent living conditions.”<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the ERDF is used to support the transition from institutional to community, family-based care for children with disabilities through investments in supported living, accessible housing, housing adaptations, non-segregated social housing within the community; accessibility of services and the built environment (public transport, public buildings, etc.); technical aids and assistive technologies. The integration of people with a migrant background is within the scope of support provided through the ERDF.<sup>37</sup> One specific example is “Neighbourhood mothers”, known as “Stadtteilmütter in Neukölln” in Germany,

<sup>36</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund. Available [online](#).

<sup>37</sup> European Commission (2022), News article: EU funding in action to help integrate people with a migrant background. Available [online](#)



which is a grassroots outreach project aimed at facilitating access to information and services that help families from immigrant backgrounds with young children of up to 12 years old. It was launched in 2004 in Berlin's Neukölln area with 12 Turkish mothers receiving training to support newly-arrived mothers. It has now become a network of over 70 neighbourhood mothers from all different nationalities and helps to integrate families and create a cohesive community.<sup>38</sup> Further examples can be found in the ERDF project database, covering a wide range of services such as primary health services in Estonia, comprehensive family services in Lithuania, family houses in Croatia (following the earthquake), boosting the care system for child protection in Czechia, community-based services for children with intellectual disabilities in Latvia, family services in Poland, services to combat family poverty in Portugal, and social housing for vulnerable families in Bulgaria.<sup>39</sup>

**Table 3. Examples of family support interventions eligible under the ERDF 2021-2027**

EU funding	Measures	Family support type
2021-2027 European Regional Development Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct funding of service infrastructure</li> <li>• Investments in supported living, accessible housing, housing adaptations, non-segregated social housing within the community; accessibility of services and the built environment (public transport, public buildings, etc.); technical aids and assistive technologies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer support networks</li> <li>• Specialised support to families in vulnerable situations</li> <li>• Community-based care</li> <li>• Long-term care</li> <li>• Early childhood education and care</li> <li>• Child friendly neighbourhoods and urban/rural environments</li> </ul>

There are other funds which provide family support services such as the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) or the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).<sup>40</sup> However this section highlights the two main funds which directly target family support services in a more holistic way, aiming to create community-based support services for families and aiming to prevent family-child separation. Their implementation on the ground and real impacts on families is documented to a certain extent as indicated above, but the full extent of the impact of these funds is hard to pinpoint. Systematic and transparent reporting on the use of EU funds to support families would be useful moving forward to prepare the next 7-year EU budget (2028-2034).<sup>41</sup> Section 5 below dives into the potential of the ESF+ especially to rollout family centres, based on existing successful examples in Estonia, Germany and Italy (the rEUsilience countries also use the ESF+, but not for strategic expansion of family centres and support as is the case for these three countries highlighted in the Roadmap).

<sup>38</sup> European Commission (2018), News article: Neighbourhood Mothers Neukölln: integrating immigrant mothers via local women. Available [online](#)

<sup>39</sup> European Commission database of ERDF projects. Examples of EU projects on Social Inclusion. Available [online](#).

<sup>40</sup> EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and Recovery and Resilience Facility. Available [online](#).

<sup>41</sup> European Commission (2025), Website about the future EU budget. Available [online](#).





### 3.3 Adequate monitoring frameworks

Without monitoring and evaluation, there can be no evidence base for policy making. The EU employs several monitoring frameworks to inform policy making and to assess progress in the social and family policy fields. These frameworks are used to track Member State performance, inform policy coordination, and guide funding allocation.

The **Gender Equality Strategy Monitoring Portal** is a gateway to data aligned with the three main dimensions of the Gender Equality Strategy of the European Commission. It includes indicators on childcare, parental leave, and inactivity due to care responsibilities.<sup>42</sup>

The **European Semester** is the EU's annual cycle of economic, social, and fiscal policy coordination. It includes country-specific recommendations on child poverty, social protection, childcare availability, and parental leave. It monitors progress in these different fields through qualitative and quantitative reporting, namely through the EU Social Scoreboard<sup>43</sup> which is tied to the European Pillar of Social Rights. It contains family-relevant indicators such as the number of children living in households at risk of poverty and social exclusion<sup>44</sup>, as well as the participation rate in formal childcare for children under age 3 and from 3 to school age.<sup>45</sup> (both based on data from the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions – EU-SILC). Progress on the European ECEC targets adopted in 2022 under the European Care Strategy are monitored through this process, as well through a monitoring and benchmarking framework on childcare and support to children adopted in 2021 and revised in 2024 and 2025.<sup>46</sup>

In fact, several **monitoring and benchmarking frameworks used in analytical assessments** have been developed jointly by the Social Protection Committee and the European Commission, and, for some, also with the Employment Committee. In the autumn of 2020, an indicator framework and a related guidance manual were developed to support the collection of **comparative data on the take up of care related leaves**: paternity, parental and carers', as well as flexible working arrangements. The framework aims to support the proper monitoring and assessment of the EU work-life balance for parents and carers, in particular with regard to gender equality.<sup>47</sup>

The Indicators' Sub-Group of the Social Protection Committee jointly prepared with the European Commission a first version of a monitoring framework to assess the implementation of the Recommendation establishing a **European Child Guarantee**. This first version consisted of a set of EU indicators, complemented by indicators relying on other sources, and covers key aspects of the Recommendation: the monitoring of the size of the target group (children in need) and of this group's effective and free access to early childhood education and care, education (and school-based activities), at least one healthy meal per school day and healthcare, and effective access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing. The first version of the monitoring framework was updated and further improved in 2024-2025 to produce a second version.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> European Commission, Gender Equality Strategy Monitoring Portal. Available [online](#)

<sup>43</sup> Eurostat (2024), News article: Social Scoreboard: track social progress across Europe. Available [online](#)

<sup>44</sup> Eurostat (2025), Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion - Statistics Explained. Available [online](#)

<sup>45</sup> Eurostat (2024), Living conditions in Europe - childcare arrangements - Statistics Explained. Available [online](#)

<sup>46</sup> COFACE (2025), News article: European Semester calls for renewed efforts on ECEC participation. Available [online](#)  
Social Protection Committee and European Commission (2025), Benchmarking framework on childcare and support to children. Available [online](#)

<sup>47</sup> Social Protection Committee and European Commission, Monitoring and benchmarking frameworks. Available [online](#)

<sup>48</sup> Social Protection Committee and European Commission (2023), Joint monitoring framework for the European Child Guarantee. Available [online](#).



The Commission and the Indicators Sub-Group of the Social Protection Committee worked over 2023 and 2024 to develop the monitoring framework for the Council Recommendation on **long-term care**. The monitoring framework translates the different dimensions of the Recommendation into measurable and actionable indicators and policy levers, and will be updated on a regular basis. A first version was adopted by the Social Protection Committee in May 2025. It contains a theoretical framework and three types of indicators (performance indicators, policy levers and context information) and constitutes the baseline against which progress can be evaluated.<sup>49</sup>

The rEUsilience research has identified gaps in how families are represented in EU data infrastructure which are at the core of these different monitoring frameworks. Therefore some recommendations below in section 6 are developed to consolidate some of the variables used in EU-SILC data collection to shed more light on the lived experiences of different types of families and more specifically on the reality of adult care in Europe.

### 3.4 Evidence base for policy reforms

Developing an evidence base for policy reforms is a final condition for EU level implementation of this Roadmap, which the EU does through research programmes like Horizon Europe and micro-simulation tools like EUROMOD (a micro-simulation tool of European Tax-Benefit systems). Through its Policy Lab, the rEUsilience consortium has taken stock of ample evidence (both on needs assessment and policy effectiveness), actively and intensively engaged with stakeholder panels, and has tested a (limited set of) policies and potential reforms. As well as the evidence summarised in section 2, the rEUsilience consortium also analysed the link between income support policies and family resilience, in close collaboration with the Policy Lab stakeholder panels and using EUROMOD. The role of income support policies – in particular for low-resourced families – should be considered centrally in reform programmes to support families.

To contribute to an evidence based to support the design and implementation of such income support policies, a selection of income support policies were evaluated from the perspective of how well they support the income position of various families as they undergo transitions, how potential reforms might play out, and how well families with children are supported in covering the costs of raising children by the combination of child benefits and public support for childcare.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Social Protection Committee and European Commission (2025), Monitoring Framework on the Council Recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care. Available [online](#)

<sup>50</sup> These evaluations were carried out using EUROMOD, a micro-simulation tool of European Tax-Benefit systems. Van Havere, T., Nieuwenhuis, R., Thaning, M., Van Lancker, W., & Bartova, A. (2024). Eligibility and benefit adequacy for families in the tax-benefit system: Micro-simulations using EUROMOD. rEUsilience working paper series: 11. Available [online](#)

Van Havere, T., Thaning, M., Van Lancker, W., & Nieuwenhuis, R. (2025). Road Testing Child Benefit and Social Assistance Reforms: Critically analysing the trilemma between poverty reduction, public expenditure and work incentives. rEUsilience working paper series: 16. Available [online](#)





**The first set of analyses** were diagnostic in nature (Van Havere et al., 2024). These analyses focused on the income protection provided through the tax-benefit systems of Belgium, Croatia, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, and specifically examined their impacts on the poverty risk of different types of households – thereby describing the variation in how redistribution sustained income stability of households as they underwent transitions.

The results showed that even when working full-time, single-earner households are close to the poverty thresholds, as are households with dependent children – this accumulates in single-parent households usually being close to the at-risk-of-poverty thresholds. We further studied a number of transitions families can make, in particular in relation to movements in and out of employment. Short-term unemployment is compensated reasonably well, at least when one partner of a dual-earner couple becomes unemployed and if they are eligible for unemployment benefits. Long-term unemployment of both partners results in an income below the poverty level. However, even short-term unemployment of both partners results in a disposable household income below the poverty threshold in Poland and the United Kingdom, or just above it in Croatia. Furthermore, it is important to point out that neither part-time employment, nor living with grandparents, are guaranteed ways in all countries to avoid poverty for (previously) unemployed single parents.

From a resilience perspective, automatic stabilisers can serve an essential function in providing decent outcomes despite the divergent family and household experiences of adverse social and economic conditions. However, even though the transitions (e.g. to unemployment) evaluated here were based on relatively optimistic scenarios, there are strong indications that the automatic stabilisers of tax-benefit systems will not be able to protect the incomes of all households and families equally in times of crisis. This is particularly the case for households with fewer earners (e.g. single adults and single parents). The implication is that even if automatic stabilisers achieve the desired goal of macro-economic recovery, the benefits are not shared equally.

**The second set of analyses** (Van Havere et al., 2025) examined to what extent the income protection through child benefits and social assistance could be improved by increasing benefit levels. A series of policy reforms were evaluated not only based on their (a.) policy effectiveness (i.e. income poverty reduction), but also with respect to (b.) how expensive these reforms were and how these reforms (c.) affected work (dis)incentives. In short, the results showed that poverty reduction is possible through increasing child benefits and social assistance, although at a cost: the reforms were typically associated with an increase between 1% and 3-4% of social expenditure. It was further found that most reforms were associated with reduced work incentives, but the changes in the participation tax rates tended to be small. Moreover, there was only a very weak association between the overall effectiveness of the reform in terms of poverty reduction, and the increase in work dis(incentives). In other words, effective poverty reduction and maintaining financial work incentives need not be mutually exclusive. Moreover, it should be acknowledged that financial work incentives are only one of many factors which determine why people are employed or not.



## 4. Recommendation: Roll out peer exchanges on family support through the European Child Guarantee

While policies for families are included in different soft law EU strategies, through boosting sectors like long-term care and early childhood education and care, work-life balance and support to informal carers, one soft law policy framework stands out as holding most potential for driving change for families and services for families and children at local level: the **European Child Guarantee**. The Child Guarantee National Action Plans and biennial implementation reports submitted to the European Commission indicate a growing consensus on the need to invest in family support services and for effective coordination of local services around families as a mechanism to prevent and address poverty.

### 4.1 Spotlight on country approaches to holistic family support in the European Child Guarantee

Of all the existing frameworks which are potentially useful for addressing the challenges for families highlighted by rEUsilience research, the European Child Guarantee (CG) seems to provide the most favourable environment for driving policy and service changes to boost resilience of low-resourced families. National Child Guarantee coordinators have been appointed in each country and meet regularly through meetings facilitated by the European Commission, and also regularly connect with key European civil society networks members of the EU Alliance for Investing in Children.<sup>51</sup> Cooperation between different administrations is requested in the CG Recommendation, which asks Member States to “develop a framework for cooperation of educational establishments, local communities, social, health and child protection services, **families** and social economy actors [...]”.. The 27 EU countries involved in this process are implementing the Child Guarantee according to their own national and sub-national contexts and capacities, with a mix of existing or new measures put forward, as well as reform of existing laws to facilitate its implementation.

Many countries indicate that they are approaching the Child Guarantee from a holistic perspective, considering the family environment and developing two-generation family-centred approaches. It especially appears that countries are using existing child and family policies as levers for CG implementation. Some of these countries are piloting and implementing holistic support to families who have children in vulnerable situations or targeting entire families in vulnerable situations, in other words through two-generation interventions which aim for health and well-being of children **and** their parents or carers.

This can be read from the national reports submitted to the European Commission in a first phase (the National Action Plans) and from the Biennial implementation reports (which report on progress in implementing the CG).<sup>52</sup> While many countries refer to family support in these reports, some specifically detail the models used for local outreach to families and show significant ambition. This is particularly the case for the following countries: Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy and Sweden. **These countries prioritise family support centres in their reporting to the European Commission.**

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<sup>51</sup> EU Alliance for investing in children. Available [online](#).

<sup>52</sup> The European Commission website includes a section with all national action plans and progress reports on the European Child Guarantee. Available [online](#)



In the following section, we outline the scope of family support services that are mentioned in the National Action Plans of these seven countries, two of which are from the rEUsilience countries. For each country case, there is a description of the kind of family support service offered, its scope, target groups, funding structure and where available its impact as well. The variety of family support models is worth studying and overall leadership of the EU would be helpful to evaluate the effectiveness of these models.

The National Action Plan of **Belgium** reports on measures to deliver family support with a reference to the House of the Child having a central role in Flanders.<sup>53</sup> The House of the Child is a partnership in which various organisations work together to provide an accessible and integrated offer to support (expectant) families with children and young people, and has been analysed by the European Observatory on Family Policy.<sup>54</sup> The services they offer are based on three core pillars: 1) Preventive health care ('Preventieve gezondheidszorg'), 2) Parenting support ('Opvoedingsondersteuning'), and 3) Activities promoting social interaction and cohesion. These encompass the essential services provided by the Flemish governmental agency, Opgroeien, which include preventive healthcare through outpatient clinics such as infant counselling offices ('consultatiebureaus'), prenatal support centres ('prenatale steunpunten'), "parenting shops" ('opvoedingswinkels'), drop-in 'INLOOP' teams, maternity care expertise centres, and various projects aimed at supporting parents. The National Action Plan for Belgium states that the Flemish government is committed to the expansion of the House of the Child (initiated in 2013), which provides an integrated, local offer of preventative family support with a particular focus on families in vulnerable situations. According to the 2023 report of the European Observatory on Family Policy, while these services do not exclude the broader community, they are primarily seen as a valuable resource for families in need of support to navigate the complex system of care services. The combination of co-location of certain services and assistance in accessing and understanding others makes the House of the Child a crucial support instrument for families facing challenges during the perinatal phase. They function as local, multipurpose facilities and provide comprehensive support in the area of preventive family services. The initiative to establish a House of the Child may be undertaken by any relevant local authority or stakeholders involved in preventive family support. The House of the Child of the city of Leuven is considered a good practice by Opgroeien, especially for its efforts to strengthen its model through family coaches.<sup>55</sup> As well as a wide range of services, family coaching is offered by a three-year programme of the Flemish regional administration. They are mostly women who make home visits to families in vulnerable situations. The coaching can last from three months to several years.

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<sup>53</sup> SPP Intégration Sociale (2022), Belgian National Action Plan for the European Child Guarantee 2022-2030. PP 10. Available [online](#).

<sup>54</sup> EOFP (2023), Towards Greater Integration of Family Policy across Europe. PP: 72. Available [online](#).

<sup>55</sup> Opgroeien (2022), News article: Leuven - Family coaches. Available [online](#)



As regards **Croatia**, the government reported in its National Action Plan that it has developed and implemented different interventions to support families.<sup>56</sup> In addition to the national network of family centres that have been providing parenting support and family support services within the social sector<sup>57</sup>, as part of Phase III of the European Child Guarantee preparatory actions to assess how the European Child Guarantee would work in practice, Croatia received funding from the EU and coordination support from UNICEF to implement Child and Family Resource Centers.<sup>58</sup> The project pilot was implemented in the Međimurje County which has a large population of Roma children. As part of the project, infrastructure was established, including the creation of Child and Family Centre/Resource Centres, serving as places for providing integrated services and activities involving experts from various sectors (social welfare, health, education, local communities, NGOs) in the community. Centres include a range of targeted programmes such as “Growing Up Together – Count Us In Plus” which brings together parents and children who face risk of poverty and social exclusion, and “Growing Up Together Plus” which aims to support parents of children with disabilities. Some of the pilots focused on integrated child protection and family support services, ensuring that children in precarious family situations and their families have access to services that address their specific vulnerabilities and prevent child-family separation. This model of service is directed towards the early identification of children and their families who live in precarious and deprived environments and promotes accessible, high-quality, timely and appropriate family support and child protection interventions and based on the target groups highlighted under the European Child Guarantee. Building on this pilot process, the Republic of Croatia wishes to further establish a national framework, ensure financial sustainability (through a mix of EU and national funds), ensure the human resources needed, further integration with the local community, engage more in monitoring and evaluation and increase the digital family centre offer.

The Biennial implementation report of **Estonia** places considerable emphasis on family support, and more specifically on the provision and development of parenting education and parenting support services.<sup>59</sup> Strategic partners of the Ministry of Social Affairs (2022–2024) carry out activities aimed at raising children, valuing families with children and programmes supporting parenting and family relations. These activities are aimed to increase the number of parenting education providers and pilot a group work model for more balanced parenting, in order to support traumatised parents and prevent the harmful effects of parental childhood trauma from being passed on to future generations. The European Union Structural Funds (2021–2027) further help to finance the development and support of parenting skills and the prevention of risk behaviour in children. The focus is on supporting families who are expecting or recently have had a child, as well as raising parents’ awareness of their role in supporting children’s development in the early years of life. Another important activity is the development of prevention activities to support parenting education for parents of children of ages 0–13 years and increasing access to such prevention activities throughout Estonia. Among other things, there is also a gender dimension with a greater focus placed on raising the awareness of fathers and increasing their participation in parenting education programmes. The European Union

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<sup>56</sup> Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy (2023), Croatian National action plan to implement the EU Council’s Recommendations on establishing a European Child Guarantee. PP 8-9, 36. Available [online](#)

<sup>57</sup> Daly, M., Bray, R., Bruckauf, Z., Byrne, J., Margaria, A., Pečnik, N. and Samms-Vaughan, M. (2015) Family and Parenting Support: Policy and Provision in a Global Context . Florence : Innocenti UNICEF Office of Research. <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789210573177>; <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789210573177s004-c004/read>

<sup>58</sup> UNICEF (2023), News article : Successful implementation of activities in Međimurje as a proof that EU Child Guarantee works. Available [online](#)

<sup>59</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs (2024), Estonian Child Guarantee Report. PP: 33 Available [online](#)



Structural Funds for the period of 2023–2027 has also helped to finance the creation and development of family services in local governments. The aim of the Estonian government is to establish and develop prevention and family work centres, thereby increasing the number of and access to services provided by local authorities to families. The target group is families with children aged 0–7 years. Development of the activities is guided by a concept created by the child welfare foundation Sihtasutus Lapse Heaolu Arengukeskus (LaHe). LaHe has developed and piloted in 2022 a prevention and family work centre concept called “Perepesa” (Family Nest).<sup>60</sup> The aim of Perepesa is to provide a systemic solution to support local authorities in improving the quality of and access to services for children and families, and increasing the effectiveness of prevention work with families. By 2027, 18 Perepesa centres will be established in Estonia.

In its National Action Plan, **Finland** highlighted its Programme to Address Child and Family Services (LAPE) which supports children, young people, and families by developing services with a low barrier of entry at family centres.<sup>61</sup> More specifically, the programme develops the following areas: 1) family centres and early everyday support for children, young people, and families; 2) mental health and substance abuse services with a low barrier of entry for children and young people; 3) multisectoral child protection. Support for children, young people, and families will be accomplished by, for example, 1) developing low-barrier services in family centres – parenting and family guidance, divorce services, home help, and social care for families; 2) improving support for growth, learning, and attendance for early childhood education and schooling; 3) adding mental health and substance abuse services in conjunction with schools and other educational institutions; 4) reinforcing cooperation between the social welfare and healthcare sector and the education sector; 5) investing in the education and individual support needs of children receiving child protection. The LAPE programme is being implemented as part of the Future Health and Social Services Centres programme. The model has also been analysed by the European Observatory on Family Policy.<sup>62</sup> The 2023 Observatory report indicates that in Finland, the perinatal sphere is marked by a closely integrated health and social sector. This has been further strengthened by recent reforms that have implemented “well-being service counties”, designed to achieve greater consistency in services across different regions. A key aspect of Finland’s approach since the early 2000s has been the widespread availability of family centre services, often accompanied by meeting places. These services have a strong presence throughout the country, providing families with comprehensive support. The Finnish Biennial implementation report on the Child Guarantee indicates that in line with the Government Programme, the transformation programme for child and family services was continued in 2019-2023 as part of the Future Social and Health Centre programme.<sup>63</sup> The following areas were developed: family centres and early support for children, young people and families in everyday life, low-threshold mental health and substance abuse services for children and young people, and multidisciplinary child protection. The objectives of the Agenda for Change in Child and Family Services were to provide early support for children, young people and families and to strengthen their well-being, to halt the trend towards inequality, and to ensure high quality, timeliness and accessibility of social services.

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<sup>60</sup> Estonian Child Welfare Foundation: Description of the Family Nest model. Available [online](#)

<sup>61</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2022), National Action Plan of Finland European Child Guarantee. PP: 12. Available [online](#).

<sup>62</sup> EOFP (2023), Towards Greater Integration of Family Policy across Europe. PP: 71. Available [online](#).

<sup>63</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2024), European Child Guarantee: Finland’s follow up report. PP: 13. Available [online](#).



According to the National Action Plan of **Germany**, the federal government is committed to supporting the preventive effect of family education and is funding the ESF Plus parental support programme “ElternChanceN – mit Elternbegleitung Familien stärken”, for example, which focuses on low-threshold family support through the development and establishment of 64 parental support networks nationwide.<sup>64</sup> With 48 million euros in federal and EU funding, these networks aim to strengthen the social participation and educational opportunities of children based on partnership-based cooperation with parents, also involving the educational institutions and social facilities in the region. To this end, the networks implement individually tailored services for families in special circumstances in their local areas. In this way, building blocks of successful parental cooperation and educational support in early childhood are created and established in social institutions. There are different models cited, but one specific example to be highlighted is the initiative of the region of North Rhine-Westphalia which is developing family centres at primary schools. The aim is to strengthen parents as competent partners in their children’s education and enable primary school children to participate in education in a way that provides them with equal opportunities based on the joint responsibility of parents and school. Services are made available on as low threshold a basis as possible in order to facilitate access. Family primary school centres form socio-spatial hubs and a point of contact for families. Similarly in the region of Schleswig Holstein, there are dynamics to foster closer networking of existing and newly emerging services in the social space, especially in the area of child and youth welfare as well as in the area of education, social affairs and healthcare. Around 140 family centres in the region are tasked to create meeting and participation opportunities close to communities, guide families through social challenges, provide advice, support and family education.

The National Action Plan of **Italy** refers to a Prime Ministerial Decree of 30 December 2020 which provides for the possibility of constructing and building multifunctional family centres with the resources allocated.<sup>65</sup> More specifically, the plan refers to the project “Support for the development of Family Centres and the coordination of interventions in the field of protection and social inclusion services for multi-problem families and/or particularly disadvantaged persons” which was partly implemented through the ESF 2014-2020 under the objective of “Reducing poverty, social exclusion and promoting social innovation”. The ESF “Inclusion” priority supported the definition of common intervention models to fight poverty and promoted, through system actions and pilot projects, innovative models of social intervention and integration of communities and people at risk of exclusion, such as Family Centres. They used these family centres to enhance the role of the family and the parental competences of care and nursing, especially through peer support schemes, in which families support, inform and guide each other in dedicated spaces and times. The Biennial implementation report of Italy submitted to the European Commission highlights some intervention projects focused on the development, experimentation and systematisation of a family support model for vulnerable families, with a focus on families of children with disabilities.<sup>66</sup> This model developed, through the Family Centres, a methodology of peer support between family units, implemented in terms of reciprocity, in a logic of support and sharing of resources and opportunities. This provided the Family Centres with a replicable model of primary prevention. More specifically, these centres

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<sup>64</sup> Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior citizens, Women and Youth (2023), National Action Plan: New Opportunities for Children in Germany. PP: 33. Available [online](#).

<sup>65</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (2022), National Action Plan for the implementation of the European Child Guarantee (Italy). PP 2. Available [online](#).

<sup>66</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (2024), Report on the implementation of the European Child Guarantee (Italy). PP 34. Available [online](#).





emphasised the role of the family and of parental care and nurturing skills, promoting peer-to-peer support, in which it is the families themselves who support, inform and guide each other, within dedicated spaces and times. In the project, more experienced 'resource' families are foreseen, who flank more fragile families in the daily activities that are fundamental for the well-being and growth of their children.

While the original National Action Plan for **Sweden** does not mention family centres, the biennial progress report of 2024 does.<sup>67</sup> It indicates that the National Board of Health and Welfare was tasked with providing support to municipalities and regions in their work to establish and organise family centres in 2024. They clarify that 'Family centre' is the term used for the co-location of at least Maternal Health, Child Health Services, open preschools and social services. "The focus of the family centre is on supportive and preventive activities. A family centre targets prospective parents, parents, children and other important adults around the child. Co-location of these services in the form of family centres promotes cooperation between multiple actors that are important for children and families. When multiple actors relevant to families are placed under the same roof, parents and other important adults around children become aware of and learn about these actors and their roles and tasks in an easily accessible way." The priority of the National Board of Health and Welfare is to prioritise in particular support to areas where social exclusion is higher, and to provide knowledge support to family centres on preventing and improving the detection of violence, and on supporting gender-equal parenting. A report on the this specific stream of action will be available by 14 March 2026 at the latest.

While the **United Kingdom** (rEUsilience country) is not involved in the Child Guarantee process, the concept of family hubs has also taken off in England as evidenced from the National Centre for Family Hubs launched in 2020 by the Department for Education.<sup>68</sup> This centre has been established to champion family hubs by sharing best practice on evidence-based service models to family hub providers across England. The areas of support offered include an implementation toolkit, resource library, training, and expert consultation. They support local family hubs in various ways, and highlight different case studies such as Father-inclusive practices in Norfolk, Rural delivery of perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationship services in Cornwall, Working with separated parents in Northumberland, and more.<sup>69</sup> Hence it would also be interesting to involve the UK (England) in European peer exchanges on family support.

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<sup>67</sup> Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (2024), Progress Report on Sweden's National Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Child Guarantee. PP: 25. Available [online](#)

<sup>68</sup> National Centre for Family Hubs. Available [online](#)

<sup>69</sup> National Centre for Family Hubs. Case studies library. Available [online](#)



## 4.2 Scenarios for a European peer exchange programme focusing on family support services

The evidence suggests a trend towards the development of local preventative support models targeting both children and adults within families, with interesting if diverse models piloted, evaluated, and still emerging through the implementation of the Child Guarantee, often supported by the ESF+. Family centres or family hubs were also identified as key implementation levers for the European Child Guarantee during discussions under the Belgian presidency of the EU early 2024.<sup>70</sup>

With only five years left to implement the objectives of the Child Guarantee, the time is right to deepen exchanges between the countries with integrated approaches to support children and their families through a **structured peer exchange programme** which examines the effectiveness, costs and coordination of local support services targeting families. The peer review(s) could focus, inter alia, on demonstrating whether more integrated systems of family support services are indeed most (cost-)effective.

This dynamic could kick off through a EU Social Protection Committee thematic review, which would serve to strengthen links between the European Child Guarantee and the work of the Social Protection Committee. The last thematic review on childhood-related policies dates back to 2018.<sup>71</sup> Peer exchanges on integrated family support could alternatively take place through a formal **EU social inclusion peer review** (see more about the peer review process in the Annex II of this Roadmap) organised between a select number of national Child Guarantee coordinators in order to build capacity of national administrations to further understand the family centre/hub model, assess the impact of this model, with a view to inform EU policy decisions and to set up a European checklist of key ingredients needed to roll out this family support model across local authorities. This mechanism could further support administrations to mobilise capacity and resources around reaching the Child Guarantee goals.

The models of Belgium, Estonia, Germany and Sweden are of particular interest as a starting point because they have been functioning successfully for several years with proven impact, and they are backed by stable government funding. In all four cases, the family centre model is also well rooted in the Child Guarantee process. A peer review on family support could be facilitated by the European Observatory on Family Policy<sup>72</sup> in 2026, if the European Commission is willing to support the peer review with a budget and staff resources, in cooperation with the EU Social Protection Committee, and if the countries are willing to host and/or participate.

Here below are four proposals of family support models to study in a European peer exchange context. This could be a peer review organised by one of the four countries below, in line with the usual EU peer review methods (see Annex II). Or the European Commission could organise an exchange on the topic of family support or family centres during a future Social Protection Committee meeting or during one of the Child Guarantee coordinators meetings.

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<sup>70</sup> COFACE (2024), News article: European Child Guarantee centre stage in the Belgian presidency of the EU. Available [online](#)

<sup>71</sup> European Commission webpage about the EU Social Protection Committee. Available [online](#)

<sup>72</sup> The European Observatory on Family Policy (EOFP) is a joint research programme of COFACE Families Europe and the Centre for Family Studies of ODISEE University of Applied Sciences launched in 2022. The Observatory aims to serve as a platform for the observation, analysis, and dissemination of evidence on family policy and other social concerns directly relevant to family well-being across the European Union.





**Proposal 1. House of the Child: Integrated offer to support families with children and young people. Leuven, Belgium**

<b>General description</b>	The House of the Child is a partnership in which various organisations work together to provide an accessible and integrated offer to support (expectant) families with children and young people. The services they offer are based on three core pillars: 1) Preventive health care ('Preventieve gezondheidszorg'), 2) Parenting support ('Opvoedingsondersteuning'), and 3) Activities promoting social interaction and cohesion. These encompass the essential services provided by the Flemish governmental agency, Opgroeien, which include preventive healthcare through outpatient clinics such as infant counselling offices ('consultatiebureaus'), prenatal support centres ('prenatale steunpunten'), "parenting shops" ('opvoedingswinkels'), drop-in 'INLOOP' teams, maternity care expertise centres, and various projects aimed at supporting parents. <sup>73</sup>
<b>Child Guarantee commitment to expansion of the model</b>	The National Action Plan for Belgium states that the Flemish government is committed to the expansion of the House of the Child in the Brussels region, which provides an integrated, local offer of preventative family support with a particular focus on families in vulnerable situations. <sup>74</sup>
<b>Regional/national governance framework</b>	Opgroeien monitors, builds capacity and financially supports House of Child local initiatives across Flanders. Despite huge regional variation (some are "online" rather than "onsite", and the budgets vary across local authorities), there are some good practices worth exploring.
<b>Good practice and relevance for family resilience</b>	The House of the Child of the city of Leuven is considered a good practice by Opgroeien, especially for its efforts to strengthen its model through family coaches. <sup>75</sup> More generally, it uses a prevention-based model, universal in approach yet with some targeted services inserted in its model for targeting families in more vulnerable situations. It also organises services around key life transitions, with a perinatal approach targeting expectant families, as well as advice for childcare, starting school, care needs, family mediation during separation, adolescence and more. More information: <a href="#">Homepage   House of the Child</a>
<b>Peer review history</b>	Belgium has a strong track record of peer reviews on policies targeting children and families (with two peer reviews organised in 2018, 2015 and 2012, but there has never yet been a peer review on the House of the Child as a model nor on family support.
<b>Stakeholders</b>	As well as a strong regional governmental agency acting as coordinator of Houses of the Child, Belgium is one of the rEUsilience countries represented by KULeuven, which would imply potential synergies with the university during a peer review. There are also strong NGOs such as Gezinsbond (Ligue of Families), Ouders voor inclusive, and programmes like Magenta (supporting family carers) which could provide a critical view on the implementation of the model.
<b>Transferability potential to other countries</b>	There is a central website about the House of the Child <a href="#">Homepage   Houses of the Child</a> , as well as material available in research and policy reports. This family centre model provides a wide range of services, and is inclusive of all types of families (with specific services tailored e.g. to families with disabilities), which could inspire countries which have a less inclusive approach or find it challenging to connect with harder-to-reach families.

<sup>73</sup> EOFP (2023), Towards Greater Integration of Family Policy across Europe. PP: 72. Available [online](#)

<sup>74</sup> SPP Intégration Sociale (2022), Belgian National Action Plan for the European Child Guarantee 2022-2030. PP 10. Available [online](#).

<sup>75</sup> Opgroeien (2022), News article: Leuven - Family coaches. Available [online](#)



## Proposal 2. Family Nest: Community prevention and family work centres. Tallinn, Estonia

<b>General description</b>	The aim of the Estonian government is to establish and develop prevention and family work centres, thereby increasing the number of and access to services provided by local authorities to families. The target group is families with children aged 0–7 years. Development of the activities is guided by a concept created by the Child Welfare Development Centre (Sihtasutus Lapse Heaolu Arengukeskus - LaHe). LaHe has developed and piloted in 2022 a prevention and family work centre concept called “Perepesa” (Family Nest). <sup>76</sup> The aim of Perepesa is to provide a systemic solution to support local authorities in improving the quality of and access to services for children and families, and increasing the effectiveness of prevention work with families. Family Nests are designed to provide parents with advice and support in raising their children and growing into a family before problems arise or get worse. All families with children and pre-school children are welcome. The Family Nests offer a playroom, guided activities for children and parents, parenting training and discussion groups, psychological counselling. In addition, they are also a meeting place for families and a community centre. They currently operate in Põltsamaa, Türi, Viljandi, Tartu, Elva and Tallinn. The <a href="#">Perepesa network</a> is expanding.
<b>Child Guarantee commitment to expansion of the model</b>	The Child Guarantee Biennial implementation report of Estonia places considerable emphasis on family support, and more specifically on the provision and development of parenting education and parenting support services. <sup>77</sup> The report states that by 2027, 18 Perepesa centres will be established in Estonia so that they are currently rolling out this model across the country.
<b>Regional/national governance framework</b>	In Estonia, in addition to the national political level, there is only the municipal level, which is primarily responsible for services for families. In 2019, the Child Welfare Development Centre, in cooperation with local governments, launched Family Nests to support parents and provide them with timely, relevant and professional support in raising children.
<b>Good practice and relevance for family resilience</b>	The focus of family nests is 1. conscious parenting (parental education) 2. supporting a conscious and caring couple relationship 3. prioritising and supporting mental health 4. the developmental needs of the child at different stages of his life. The aim is to work together to make the necessary information available to families in one place and to create access to health, social and psychological assistance close to home, with an emphasis on prevention and early detection of potential risks. Half of the population of Estonia live in the capital, Tallinn. The Family Nest in Tallinn offers services such as psychological support, areas of play for children, speech therapy and childhood development, trainings and discussion groups, parenting academy for expectant families and more. Two new family nests will open in Tallinn in 2025, as part of an <a href="#">annual budget</a> focusing on children and families as announced by the Tallinn city government end 2024. For further information: <a href="#">Kesklinna Perepesa</a>
<b>Peer review history</b>	Estonia has not yet hosted a peer review on policies targeting children and families.
<b>Stakeholders</b>	To embed the Child Guarantee in the national system, a "Prevention Council" has been formed at ministerial level, in which all ministries essential for implementation are represented. The Prevention Council has several working groups, including one on social welfare. Local authorities and NGOs are also represented. The Prevention Council is responsible for the National Action Plan and the monitoring of both the Child Guarantee and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
<b>Transferability potential to other countries</b>	The European Union Structural Funds for the period of 2023–2027 has also helped to finance the creation and development of family services in local governments, so that the Family Nest model and the use of ESF+ funds could also be explored in order to inspire use of EU funds for family support development in other countries. <a href="#">European Social Fund 2021-2027   Ministry of Social Affairs</a>

<sup>76</sup> Estonian Child Welfare Foundation: Description of the Family Nest model. Available [online](#)

<sup>77</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs (2024), Estonian Child Guarantee Report. PP: 33 Available [online](#)



### Proposal 3: Family primary school centres. Cologne, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany

<b>General description</b>	The German National Action Plan refers to the importance of preventive support to families and building on existing community hubs such as childcare or schools in order to reach out to families who need support. One approach is to open schools to the local social (community) space so as to establish even stronger links between schools and the world in which children live, and to make the resources of multi-professional local support more available to disadvantaged children and young people. This is the case for the region of North Rhine-Westphalia. The municipal family-school programme Initiative Familiengrundschohzentren NRW has been successfully implemented in the region since 2014. The aim is to create “Family primary school centres” as a contact point for families. The centres aim to strengthen parents as competent partners in their children’s education and enable primary school children to participate in education in a way that provides them with equal opportunities based on the joint responsibility of parents and school. Services are made available on as low-threshold a basis as possible in order to facilitate access. <a href="#">Welcome to the Initiative Familiengrundschohzentren NRW • Familiengrundschohzentren NRW</a>
<b>Child Guarantee commitment to expansion of the model</b>	According to the National Action Plan of Germany, the federal government is committed to supporting the preventive effect of family education. <sup>78</sup> With 48 million euros in federal and EU funding, the government aims to strengthen the social participation and educational opportunities of children based on partnership-based cooperation with parents, also involving the educational institutions and social facilities in the region. The federal government is supporting the ESF Plus parental support programme “ElternChanceN – mit Elternbegleitung Familien stärken” (strengthening families with parental support), for example, which focuses on low-threshold family support through the development and establishment of 64 parental support networks nationwide.
<b>Regional/national governance framework</b>	Under the Initiative Familiengrundschohzentren NRW, participating municipalities exchange knowledge and experience, supporting each other in establishing family primary school centres.
<b>Good practice and relevance for family resilience</b>	Based on the concept of family centres at childcare facilities, which has been promoted throughout the state of North Rhine-Westphalia for over fifteen years (around a third of childcare facilities are also family centres), the “family primary school centres” have continued the municipal prevention chain in the primary school sector, since the need for advice and support in educational issues remains during the transition from childcare to primary school. In the <a href="#">City of Cologne</a> , 9 such centres were launched in 2022. Low-threshold offers have been developed to meet the needs of families, such as parent-café where parents can get to know each other, exchange ideas and also challenges; literacy and German courses, yoga courses, a bicycle workshop, a skateboard workshop, a fathers' meeting, women's breakfast and healthy breakfast are also offered; and three paediatric nurses provide information about nutrition and the health of families. In the premises of the schools known to them, parents can receive confidential advice. In addition, the centres also refer people to other institutions and counselling centres. <a href="#">Nine Family Primary School Centres in Cologne - City of Cologne</a>
<b>Peer review history</b>	Germany has previously hosted peer reviews on policies targeting children and families, namely a recent one on work-life balance policies in 2020 (See Annex II of this Roadmap)
<b>Stakeholders</b>	The German government has set up a space for cooperation with academics and civil society through the German NAP Committee, which has met three times so far and has various working groups. The Vice-President of COFACE is member of this NAP Committee.
<b>Transferability potential</b>	This model is about using key community-based spaces (like schools) to do more effective outreach and provide more preventative supports to families. It is less about integrating services and more about networking and building on existing infrastructure and dynamics, namely using education settings as a starting point for developing family support.

<sup>78</sup> Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior citizens, Women and Youth (2023), National Action Plan: New Opportunities for Children in Germany. PP: 33. Available [online](#).



**Proposal 4: Family Centres in Sweden. Co-location of at least Maternal Health, Child Health Services, open preschools and social services.**

<b>General description</b>	Family Centres in Sweden are holistic family hubs offering preventive, supportive and health-promoting activities that are designed to adjust to the families' situations. These centres have been historically instituted as focal points connecting educational, medical and social services to meet various familial needs since the 1960s across Sweden. These centres are the places where municipalities and regions carry out preventative services either embedded in the existing services or as a new line of service. The Family Centres are also the point of information for families. Four core services are provided at Family Centres: the maternity clinic, the centre for children's health, social advice and support and open kindergarten. The aim is for the professionals in each of these areas to collaborate, hence providing an interdisciplinary service and supporting families in various aspects.
<b>Child Guarantee commitment to expansion of the model</b>	The recent Swedish biennial progress report on implementation of the European Child Guarantee, published in April 2024, mentions that the National Board of Health and Welfare was tasked to provide support for establishing and coordinating Family Centres in municipalities, especially in areas with a high prevalence of social exclusion. <sup>79</sup> The particular areas of support are defined as violence detection and gender-equal parenting.
<b>Regional/national governance framework</b>	Sweden has a nationwide framework that oversees family support services. The policies are designed centrally, and the delivery of services is administrated locally. The Family Law and Parental Support Authority (MFoF) is the central government agency that designs policies regarding family support services, including parental support, family counselling, family law matters and social services. The MFoF also guides the services delivered by municipalities, regions and civil society.
<b>Good practice and relevance for family resilience</b>	The Family Centres have a long history of providing universal family support services. They adopt a holistic and interdisciplinary approach, providing multiple services in one place in the form of a 'one-stop-shop' design. The model is a central government-level commitment to enhancing these services with local-level and delivery, and hence contextually specific. While there no specific good practice examples mentioned in the Swedish biennial report on the Child Guarantee, further detail will be provided in a report to be published by 14 March 2026 at the latest.
<b>Peer review history</b>	Sweden has previously hosted peer reviews, such as on youth at risk in the labour market (2016) and reform of care services (2013). However, as far as is known a peer review of family support or centres has not yet been conducted.
<b>Stakeholders</b>	Municipalities, regions, health care providers, social workers, preschool teachers and NGOs are among the key stakeholders.
<b>Transferability potential to other countries</b>	Details about the Swedish model are available online through the respective websites of MFoF and the National Association for Family Centres. How family centres are organised, which services are offered, and how they operate are among the information publicly shared. The Swedish model has been adopted by other Nordic countries, such as Norway and Finland, proving the practice's transferability. Detailed information about the Family Centres can be found at <a href="https://familjecentraler.se/">https://familjecentraler.se/</a>

<sup>79</sup> Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (2024), Progress Report on Sweden's National Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Child Guarantee. PP: 25. Available [online](#)



## 5. Recommendation: Social investments for family resilience and strengthening support services for families under the European Social Fund +

While different EU funds provide direct and indirect support to families, one fund stands out in providing direct support to families through projects which promote employment, social inclusion, health and education: the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)**. It is explicitly mentioned in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Title XI), and is a key stream of the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (the 7-year EU budget).<sup>80</sup>

The 2021 ESF+ regulation states that “The ESF+ should also be used to enhance timely and equal access to affordable, sustainable and high-quality services that promote the access to housing and person-centred care such as healthcare and long-term care, in particular family and community-based care services.”<sup>81</sup> It also states that “Member States should programme an appropriate amount of their resources of the ESF+ strand under shared management for the implementation of the Child Guarantee for activities addressing child poverty in line with the specific objectives of the ESF+ that allow for programming resources towards actions directly supporting children’s equal access to childcare, education, healthcare, decent housing and adequate nutrition.”

This chapter highlights how the ESF+ can be used to roll out family centres, building on a wide variety of sources such as the National Action Plans for implementation of the European Child Guarantee, but also through different toolkits<sup>82</sup> which aim to encourage take-up of these funds to tackle child poverty, invest in social services and more. There is also an EU helpdesk on how to use the ESF+ in combination with other EU funds.<sup>83</sup> The second part of this chapter provides an operational checklist of how to engage with the ESF+ for family support.

### 5.1 Family centres funded through the ESF+

The evidence collected in rEUsilience research shows periods of **family transitions** are very important as a time when families need support.<sup>84</sup> **Family centres or hubs** are essential spaces for preventive support to families during challenging life transitions, and these are being rolled out in several countries linked to the European Child Guarantee (CG). Indeed, many countries are approaching the CG from a holistic perspective, considering the family environment and developing two/multi-generation family-centred approaches. This is the case for Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, and Italy.

Some of these countries are piloting and implementing holistic support to families who have children in vulnerable situations or targeting entire families in vulnerable situations, in other words through two/multi-generation interventions which aim for health and well-being of children **and** their parents or carers. **Some of these countries are using the ESF+ for rolling out these family centres.** This is evident from the national reports submitted to the European

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<sup>80</sup> EU 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework. Available [online](#).

<sup>81</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013. Available [online](#)

<sup>82</sup> ESF Transnational cooperation platform (2021), Mini toolkit : Use of the ESF for actions to combat poverty and social exclusion of children. Available [online](#)

<sup>83</sup> HELPDESK: EU Funds for Social Services. Available [online](#)

<sup>84</sup> Daly, M., Gosme, E., Shorey, H., and Uzunalioglu, M., (2025) Policy Priorities for Family Resilience, rEUsilience working paper series: 17. PP 2. Available [online](#).



Commission in a first phase (the National Action Plans) and from the Biennial implementation reports (which are being submitted at the moment to report on progress).<sup>85</sup>

The examples in this section focus specifically on **family centres** as a model of service funded or boosted by the ESF+, especially relevant to support families during key life transitions. These are especially linked to the European Child Guarantee implementation, and are examples extracted from the National Action Plans on the Child Guarantee for Estonia, Germany and Italy,<sup>86</sup> as well as from ESF+ online resources in all three countries. These examples are interesting because the three countries in question have shown coordinated approaches linking the ESF+ action to an EU policy process (the European Child Guarantee). These three examples also highlight a government commitment (through a dedicated ESF+ stream of action for families and children) to develop and consolidate these centres to support families through challenging times in order to prevent poverty and promote family well-being.

They all focus on family centres in different ways. In Estonia, the focus is on developing the family centres per se, building capacity to provide a wide range of local support services for families. In Italy, family centres were a clear focus in the last programming period, and the current focus is on experimenting peer support tied to existing family centres, with a focus on families with disabilities. In Germany, the focus is on family centres working in partnership with a wide network of local providers of family support to better address the needs of families. These examples are developed below, and will hopefully inspire other countries to consider similar approaches in the three years of the current ESF+ programme, and to prepare a clear stream of family support for the ESF+ under the new 2028-2034 budget of the EU

#### **Estonia: Family work centres from the perinatal phase to late childhood**

One overarching social policy goal of the ESF+ in Estonia is to make the country a good place to start a family and raise children, and that Estonian children would be happy growing up in a caring, inclusive, safe and developing environment. The activities ensure equal opportunities for target group members of different genders, ages, regions and nationalities to participate in and benefit from the activities. The programme is implemented by the Department of Children and Families of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Social Insurance Board, the National Institute for Health Development and the Centre for Health and Welfare Information Systems are involved as partners.<sup>87</sup> More specifically the activities supported from 01.01.2023–31.12.2027 are the following:<sup>88</sup>

- Developing parenting skills and supporting parenting and preventing children's risky behaviour
- Supporting children with multiple needs and their families
- Developing a cross-sectoral child protection organisational model
- Improving and diversifying the quality of substitute and follow-up care and family-based care.
- Creating IT solutions to support children and families and effective child protection work
- Development and implementation of the Family Friendly Employer label programme
- **Creating and developing family services in local authorities**

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<sup>85</sup> The European Commission website includes a section with all national action plans and progress reports on the European Child Guarantee. Available [online](#)

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> European Social Fund 2021-2027 | Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs. Available [online](#).

<sup>88</sup> Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs (2024), ESF+ priorities for support to children and families. PP: 10-11. Available [online](#)





Regarding the last activity on the creation and development of family services in local authorities, the specific operational objective is to create and develop **prevention and family work centres** and to increase the number and accessibility of family services in local and regional authorities to help families cope better. Family services are defined as programmes supporting parenting and couple relationships, health promotion, support groups, or other services that support families to be resilient. The local authority must be guided in the development of activities by the model of activities developed by the Child Welfare and Development Centre Foundation (hereinafter LaHe). LaHe has developed and piloted in 2022 an operational model for a prevention and family work centre, referred to as "Family Nest" (or "Perepesa" in Estonian). This model aims to provide a systemic solution to support local authorities in improving the quality and accessibility of services for children and families and in increasing the effectiveness of preventive work with families.<sup>89</sup>

The ESF+ grants can be awarded to a local authority to cover the costs of the staffing of the Family Centre. The period for carrying out the project activities is 24 months. Applicants must meet certain conditions. These centres are being rolled out linked to the implementation of the European Child Guarantee in Estonia.

Family Nests are designed to provide parents with advice and support in raising their children and growing into a family before problems arise or get worse, hence using a prevention model to address challenges and risks faced by families. The Family Nests typically offer a playroom, father-inclusive spaces, guided activities for children and parents, parenting training and discussion groups, psychological counselling. In addition, they are also a meeting place for families and a community centre. They currently operate in the cities of Põltsamaa, Türi, Viljandi, Tartu, Elva and Tallinn, and the network is expanding.<sup>90</sup>

#### **Italy: Family centres based on peer support, focusing on families with disabilities**

Family centres had a dedicated programme under the Italian 2014-2020 ESF referred to as "Support for the development of Family Centres and the coordination of interventions in the field of protection and social inclusion services for multi-problem families and/or particularly disadvantaged persons".<sup>91</sup>

The aim was to reduce poverty, social exclusion and promote social innovation. The ESF "Inclusion" priority supports the definition of common intervention models to fight poverty and promotes, through system actions and pilot projects, innovative models of social intervention and integration of communities and people at risk of exclusion, such as Family Centres. They used these family centres to enhance the role of the family and the parental competences of care and nursing, especially through peer support schemes, in which families support, inform and guide each other in dedicated spaces and times.

The aim of this programme was to **create Centres** where they are not yet present, **develop Centres** where they already exist but need to be strengthened and **consolidate the Centres**, where they have been operational for some time and have developed relationships with other local services.

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<sup>89</sup> The operational model of Perepesa is available on a dedicated [website](#)

<sup>90</sup> The Perepesa centres have a dedicated [website](#) describing the different centres across the country.

<sup>91</sup> Italian Department for Family Policies: Family centres. European Social Fund 2014-2020. Available [online](#)



Specifically, the project aimed to achieve the following general objectives:<sup>92</sup>

- promote widespread knowledge and continuous institutional learning with respect to the state of implementation of family policies and services on the national territory, with an in-depth study also at the international level;
- promote the dissemination and harmonious and standardised consolidation of Family Centres throughout the country to support multi-problem families;
- disseminate national models of social inclusion and integration to reduce territorial heterogeneity and support regional and local administrations in responding to the different needs of multi-problem families and foster families of victims of witnessed violence and orphans of domestic crimes;
- develop specialised skills within Family Centres;
- experiment with integrated interventions for the family also in order to implement the role of Family Centres;
- to promote the coordination of interventions on the national territory at the telematic level;
- encourage the coordination of actors and the creation of a "community" open at all levels;
- to promote and encourage the exchange of experiences relating to family services.

Under the 2021-2027 ESF+ in Italy, there is a specific programme on Social inclusion and poverty reduction which has conducted pilots in the framework of the Child Guarantee.<sup>93</sup> Namely a pilot of peer support model for vulnerable families is being developed in Family Centres, with a focus on families with children with disabilities. This is confirmed in the recently submitted Biennial implementation report of Italy on the Child Guarantee.<sup>94</sup>

The model developed, through the Family Centres, a methodology of peer support between family units, implemented in terms of reciprocity, in a logic of support and sharing of resources and opportunities. This provided the Family Centres with a replicable model of primary prevention.

More specifically, these centres emphasised the role of the family and of parental care and nurturing skills, promoting peer-to-peer support, in which it is the families themselves who support, inform and guide each other, within dedicated spaces and times. In the project, more experienced 'resource' families are foreseen, who flank more fragile families in the daily activities that are fundamental for the well-being and growth of their children. The selected Family Centres were offered support through training and accompaniment interventions, involving families residing in the North, Centre and South of the country.

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<sup>92</sup> Italian Department for Family Policies: Family centres. Project and Objectives. European Social Fund 2014-2020. Available [online](#)

<sup>93</sup> Italian Department for cohesion policy (2021), National Plan Social inclusion and poverty reduction 2021- 2027. PP: 73. Available [online](#).

<sup>94</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (2024), Report on the implementation of the European Child Guarantee (Italy). PP 34. Available [online](#).





## Germany: Family centres at the heart of municipal networks for parental support

The Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) is the central coordinating body for the ESF+ in Germany, but in the ESF+ 2021-2027 funding period, five federal ministries are implementing a total of 28 ESF Plus funding programmes contributing to a more social Europe.<sup>95</sup> Under the ESF+ Germany thematic priority of Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs is responsible for running programmes for “support for disadvantaged families, families in special situations as well as families with children affected by poverty and at risk of poverty”. One of these programmes is called ElternChanceN - strengthening families with parental support.<sup>96</sup> It is the successor programme to the ESF programme "Elternchance II" of the ESF funding period 2014-2020, showing a long and successful history of funding of family support under the ESF+.

The "ElternChanceN" programme running from 2022-2028 is intended to provide targeted support for families in disadvantaged situations in their resources for the development and education of their children through the development of **municipal networks of parental support**. The aim of the programme is the development and establishment of 64 parental support networks nationwide, and is aimed at local providers of family support and independent providers of child and youth welfare.

These local providers of family support include **family centres**, family education centres, parenting schools, ECEC centres, multi-generational houses, migration counselling, etc. which should network within and with the community for an effective and sustainable anchoring of parental and educational support. The local youth welfare agency accompanies and supports the implementation of the municipal network – this is mandatory in order to implement parental support in municipal networking structures. Many family centres have secured ESF+ funded through this programme to consolidate their work with families through local networks.<sup>97</sup>

The offers and measures of these 64 Parent Support Networks are primarily aimed at parents in special life situations. In addition to early childhood support in the family, they focus on strengthening the educational partnership of parents with children of primary school age. In the course of an intensification of early childhood education in families, children from disadvantaged families in particular can benefit from the offers in the networks from infrastructural educational advice and support. With family and parental support, the programme pursues the approach of specifically including the needs of families at an early stage and steadily within the framework of municipal prevention approaches.

**The aim is to strengthen the integration of parental support into cooperative forms of work in the social area and in the municipal context.** In order to support parents in special situations, the programme is intended to implement tailor-made educational offers that are geared to the needs of families - from low-threshold to formalised forms of support - in order to strengthen parents' resources for the support of their children. The Parental support services are considered a decisive factor in supporting families in (early) childhood development. The focus is on reaching parents with low (gained) incomes and those who are at risk of poverty, families with a migration or refugee background or educationally disadvantaged families.

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<sup>95</sup> HELPDASK EU Funds for Social Services – Germany. Available [online](#)

28 ESF+ funding programmes in Germany. Available [online](#)

<sup>96</sup> German Federal Ministry for Families, Senior citizens, Women and Youth (2024), Funding guidelines for the ESF Plus programme 'ElternChanceN – strengthening families with parental support'. Available [online](#).

<sup>97</sup> A description of the selected networks can be found [online](#)



## 5.2 Key steps to use the ESF+ for family support

This section provides a step-by-step checklist on how to use this information and to engage with the ESF+ at national and regional level. ESF+ funding is typically awarded on a project-by-project basis to public authorities which work closely with third sector organisations like civil society. Or public agencies can be tasked to manage a stream of funds and issue calls. To be eligible for funding, applicants must ensure that their project aligns with the priorities and objectives of the ESF+, meets the specific criteria of the relevant funding strand, and demonstrates a unique value proposition that sets it apart from others.

### Step 1. Understand the key ingredients of a ESF+ project application

ESF+ funding is typically awarded on a project-by-project basis. The eligibility criteria for ESF+ funding are determined on the basis of EU law, at the national and regional level in each country. Each call for applications will have different formats (there is no harmonised format across the EU for this), but here below are elements to consider for an ESF+ application. This **template** below contains examples which are relevant for family centres, based on different examples from the ESF+ programmes of Estonia, Germany and Italy highlighted above.

<b>Project name</b>	Family centres for a resilient city
<b>Target group</b>	Parents and their children (including with disabilities), as well as professionals in ECEC and education settings, healthcare and employment settings
<b>Evidence</b>	Highlight the challenges for families and professionals in the region. It is preferable to refer to local/regional data, but it is also good to refer to rEUsilience data and other European/international research on families.
<b>Local starting point</b>	A municipality with strong values of family diversity, equality and inclusion, with a high proportion of migrants overall, many large families in the district intended for the implementation of the project, high proportion of single parent households, high social stress factors. Network of partners (schools, NGOs and municipal departments) working around the ECEC facilities as central spaces for connecting with families, with great interest in the implementation of family centres. Experience of implementing family support services targeting especially the perinatal phase but also in early and later childhood phases (adolescence).
<b>Overarching goal</b>	Provide parents and carers with advice and support in raising their children and growing into a family before problems arise or get worse. The aim is to create and develop prevention and family work centres and to increase the number and accessibility of family services in local and regional authorities to help families cope better.
<b>Content of the action</b>	Establishment of a family centre in a neighbourhood with high needs, with the aim to centralise existing parenting support services around the local ECEC service; strengthen the educational competences of parents



	and carers through non-formal learning spaces on parenting, including spaces dedicated also specifically to fathers; create spaces for children to play and learn; support transitions from birth to childcare, and from childcare to primary education.
<b>Link to ESF+ priorities</b>	This can be different priorities, but especially priorities linked to promoting social inclusion, tackling poverty and social exclusion, supporting child development, promoting work-life balance and equality between women and men.
<b>Link to EU agenda</b>	This is linked to the implementation of the European Child Guarantee, which aims to develop services for children in vulnerable situations, including in precarious family situations, through the development of key services (ECEC, nutrition, health).
<b>Services to be offered</b>	Services for families before and after the birth of a child that support the well-being of the child and the family, such as activities and measures to support parenting and couple relationships, health promotion, peer support groups, family therapy, learning spaces on different parenting-related topics, Papa clubs, advice for transition support from daycare to primary school, employment coaching, workshops targeting parents with disabilities. <sup>98</sup>
<b>Professionals to be hired</b>	Manager, mental health workers, social workers, nurses, peer parents, child participation worker, community-outreach worker.
<b>Results of the action</b>	Improving the development and accessibility of family services to ensure earlier identification of family needs and timely support, which improves children's well-being. New prevention and family work centre in the region to ensure the well-being of children and families through systematic prevention and early identification. More resilient families with greater reconciliation of work and family life, social inclusion, child development, and economic empowerment.
<b>Indicators</b>	It is useful to have a system of monitoring (e.g. track the no. of families and children reached, the no. of participants in different services) and evaluation (collecting information on the impact of the services on families such as improved health, reduced risks of poverty). This is important since ESF+ beneficiaries must provide regular reports to Managing Authorities to ensure that the project is on track and that funds are being used appropriately. It is useful to develop a clear narrative about "soft outcomes" versus "hard outcomes" of the project, as well a long-term outcomes (beyond the duration of the project).
<b>Innovative element and added value</b>	This would be the first family centre in the region, and would allow for better networking of key family support services to meet the needs of families.
<b>Budget and financial sustainability</b>	This will depend on the call for applications. In general it is important to put a representative and realistic budget for both coordination (management and finance) and service delivery (different professional

<sup>98</sup> There are many other services possible, and these are examples. It will all depend on the budget available.



	profiles), while also trying to stay within the average cost of such projects in order to stay competitive. Consider closely the co-financing requirements and different ways to generate co-financing for the project. If the application can at least state that the objective is to explore possibilities to sustain the family centres in different ways beyond the project and identify opportunities to scale successful interventions (e.g. through partnerships with key local stakeholders), this is always a positive element to add to any application.
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## Step 2. Data collection on the needs of families

An important starting point is to conduct a study, mapping or survey of the needs of families in a given local authority, region, country. This could include collecting information on:

- Different family profiles, challenges they are faced with linked to their family type, care needs, life challenges they face. This is important to help define clearly the target group of a given family centre or activities within the family centre.
- The key life transitions which affect them the most and create risks of poverty and poor health e.g. expecting a child, birth of a child, shifting between childcare and school, employment-related changes, the presence of disability or long-term illness.
- The types of supports they need and what form this support could take. In order to create a relevant set of services which match demand, consulting families (and children) is an important first step to create effective family centres.
- The types of professional supports already available to families or community-based spaces where families meet and connect, which can serve as a basis to refine the types of skills and professional profiles needed in a given family centre.
- The networks of support in the region, the healthcare, employment and education settings, as well as the NGOs in the area and the role they play (e.g. peer support).

This data can help build a project which can be useful both for direct support to families, as well as to develop training opportunities for managers and professionals in and around family centres. Consider organising focus groups or an expert meeting to collect testimonies from families (adults and children) as well as professionals, or use a multi-lingual survey which can be circulated to key stakeholders. Try to ensure the methodology is inclusive of all types of families without discrimination, for instance considering the realities of one-parent families, families with disabilities, families in migration or same-sex families.

## Step 3. Check priorities of the ESF+ operational programmes

Some countries have national operational programmes for the ESF+, while others have operational programmes for each region of a given country. It is important to read carefully the national and regional ESF+ programmes to understand if there is potential for funding family support programmes in a given region. While some countries or regions explicitly make family support (including family centres) a strategic priority, other countries will refer to families as a target group or will focus on other target groups without mentioning the family environment (e.g. children or adults at risk of poverty). Here below are some examples of ESF+ operational programmes, their strategic priorities and how they link to family centres and boosting resilience of families.



For instance, the **Swedish** ESF+ programme has the priority of “Reducing the risk of economic vulnerability<sup>99</sup>: “The programme will promote economic self-sufficiency, focusing on children and adults at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Measures will include training, education, validation, help with homework and meaningful leisure and extracurricular activities for children and young people, helping to promote social inclusion.” Family centres provide different types of services, including out-of-school activities for children and young people.

**Polish** regional ESF+ programmes, such as that of the Lower Silesian region, focus on concepts of active inclusion support, aiming to support the mental health of children and students, as well as a focus on gender equality and undertaking different actions support women in the labour market.<sup>100</sup> The latter priority usually has a family dimension with a focus on developing early childhood education and care services allowing women and men to reconcile work and family life.

The **Spanish** regional ESF+ programmes do sometimes make explicit references to families, as is the case for the region of Andalusia: “Education and care services will be extended to students and their families living in socially vulnerable areas to strengthen the educational and socio-emotional development of children. School equipment and family counselling sessions will be offered to young Roma as part of dedicated socio-educational programmes.”<sup>101</sup> While the Catalunya programme has as overarching objective: “The ESF+ regional programme for Catalonia will invest in the socioeconomic well-being of individuals and families, by promoting employment, improving education and training and reducing poverty and social exclusion, with special care for children at risk.” Both these regional programmes seem to have a strategic focus on family support.

The **Croatian** national programme also makes explicit reference to families, showing a broader whole-family approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion (but focused more on secondary prevention models): “Dedicated activities under the programme will provide basic material assistance, such as food and hot meals to at-risk individuals and families, including homeless and other vulnerable people.”<sup>102</sup>

While the **Flanders** programme in Belgium does not refer to families or children, it has a strategic priority focused on work-life balance linked to workplace measures<sup>103</sup>: “The ESF+ investments in Flanders will also support ‘Workable work’, including through actions that aim to improve the inclusion and well-being of employees at the workplace. Measures as part of this priority will target at-risk employees who are experiencing high levels of stress or low motivation and will include training opportunities that ensure a better work-life balance.” This can be interpreted as actions for all, and not only workers with care responsibilities, but definitely provides and opening for employers to develop family-supportive services and measures. The operational programme also focuses on life-long learning as a key mechanism to support transitions: “Under this priority the programme will address inequalities in the education and training system, preventing early school leaving and facilitating the transition between learning and working for at-risk young people. Furthermore, dedicated actions aim to increase participation in lifelong

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<sup>99</sup> European Social Fund+ National programme 2021-2027 (Sweden). Available [online](#).

<sup>100</sup> European Funds for Dolny Śląsk 2021-2027 (Poland). Available [online](#).

<sup>101</sup> ESF+ Andalusia (Spain). Available [online](#)

<sup>102</sup> Programme Efficient Human Resources 2021- 2027 (Croatia). Available [online](#)

<sup>103</sup> Programme ESF+ Flanders 2021-2027 (Belgium). Available [online](#)



learning for employees as well as for those that are not in employment, focusing on green and digital skills.” Parenting support (provided in family centres) around the perinatal phase is a form of non-formal family education providing parents (in or out of employment or in training) with specific knowledge and skills linked to child development, which can help families be resilient during this key life transition.

For countries or regions which prioritise broader priorities such as labour market inclusion or skills development, this will be a difficult context for building projects targeting families and children, especially if they need to demonstrate links with employability outcomes. The ESF+ holds potential for family support projects especially when there are explicit references to families, children, parenting, or work-life balance.

#### **Step 4. Linking local ESF+ projects to European networks and priorities**

Since the ESF+ is a European fund, it is important to give a strong European dimension to local projects and programmes. This can be done by showing how the programme links to good practices discussed by European networks; or by making clear links between the ESF+ action and European political objectives and frameworks like the European Pillar of Social Rights or the European Child Guarantee.

It can be helpful to emphasise that the project is linked in some way to a European network (eg that the action is supported by the network, or that similar practices are being discussed in the network). Linking the project to such European networks shows the potential for exchange and learning about similar practices in other countries, and also as a space to disseminate the results of the project (which is beneficial for the visibility and impact of the ESF+).

There are many such European networks like COFACE Families Europe, the European Association of Service Providers for persons with Disabilities, Eurochild, Save The Children Europe and European Social Network. These networks all cover support to families and children from different angles, and they are all actively working on family support and the European Child Guarantee. The table below summarises these networks and their approaches. In general it is helpful in this context of family support for family and child rights organisations to build partnerships to work together in response to ESF+ calls.

**Table 4. European networks active in the field of family support at EU level**

European network	Approach
COFACE Families Europe	Family organisations, representing families and providing family support services for all types of families
EASPD	Disability service providers providing early childhood intervention for children with disabilities and their families
Eurochild	Child rights organisations focusing on child participation and preventing family-child separation
Save The Children EU	Child rights organisations focusing on child and family poverty
European Social Network	Social services in local and regional authorities covering different types of services



**The ESF+ regulation refers explicitly to some key EU policy frameworks** such as the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Child Guarantee, both aiming to create a more inclusive and social Europe. Other relevant EU policy and legal frameworks are not necessarily referred to in the regulation, but are also important indicators of the different thematic priorities of the EU social policy agenda which are important for the 27 EU Member States.

This includes the EU Gender equality strategy which focuses on family-work transitions and gender-responsive family supports; the EU Technical Support Instrument which works with governments to support reforms in different family-relevant areas; the European Care Strategy contains a Council recommendation on early childhood education and care, with targets to be met by Member States by 2030 to increase participation of children in ECEC; the EU Work-life balance directive is a piece of legislation focusing on family leaves (paternity, parental and carers leave) which are important moments during which parental education on childhood development and peer group meetings through family centres can be beneficial for both children and their families.

The table below gives an overview of these different frameworks. It is important to show how a local or regional family centre project is linked to European actions under these frameworks.

**Table 5. EU initiatives relevant for family support**

EU initiative	Measures	Family support type	Link with family centres
<b>2017 Technical Support Instrument</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research</li> <li>• Policy guidance</li> <li>• Monitoring and evaluation frameworks</li> <li>• General support to public administration for reform</li> <li>• Transnational exchanges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long-term care</li> <li>• Respite care</li> <li>• Early childhood education and care</li> <li>• Material needs</li> <li>• Access to education</li> <li>• Early childhood intervention and supports for families with disabilities</li> </ul>	If some governments are working with the TSI on early childhood reforms, family centres may be part of the programme.
<b>2019 EU Work-life balance directive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequately paid paternity leave from work in perinatal phase</li> <li>• Parental leave</li> <li>• Carers leave</li> <li>• Flexible work arrangements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structural policy arrangements</li> <li>• Material needs</li> <li>• Workplace support</li> </ul>	Parental education on childhood development and peer group meetings through family centres can be beneficial for both children and their families. More here about the directive
<b>2020-2024 EU Gender equality strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campaigns</li> <li>• Transnational exchanges</li> <li>• Funding European projects</li> <li>• Legislation</li> <li>• Policy guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports targeting men and care</li> <li>• Family-work transitions</li> <li>• Gender-responsive family support services</li> <li>• Mental health supports</li> </ul>	Intervening during key family-work transitions and gender-responsive family supports can be done through family centres. For instance focusing on creating father-inclusive spaces or





		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Domestic violence supports</li> <li>• Family mediation</li> </ul>	supporting mental health of mothers post-birth.
<b>2021 European Child Guarantee</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National reporting</li> <li>• Data collection and monitoring</li> <li>• Transnational exchanges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early childhood education and care</li> <li>• Health support (nutrition advice)</li> <li>• Material needs (free school meals)</li> <li>• Family centres/parental supports</li> </ul>	Family support and centres are a core part of the national implementation of the Child Guarantee according to some National Action Plans (e.g. Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy)
<b>2021 European Pillar of Social Rights action plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collection of EU initiatives in the social and employment fields</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support services of different types</li> <li>• Adequate income and working conditions</li> <li>• Flexible working arrangements and paid leaves</li> <li>• Prevent intergenerational transmission of poverty</li> </ul>	This is the overarching action plan bringing together many social rights initiatives such as the ones in this table, and cover early childhood, disability rights, work-life balance of families.
<b>2022 European Care Strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy guidance</li> <li>• National reporting</li> <li>• Transnational exchanges</li> <li>• Data collection and monitoring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early childhood education and care</li> <li>• Long-term care</li> <li>• Supports to family carers</li> <li>• Respite care and support</li> </ul>	This strategy includes a recommendation focusing specifically on ECEC, and a recommendation on LTC which focuses on family carers (including of children/adults with disabilities).

#### Step 5. Connect with key stakeholders active in the ESF+ design and implementation

The ESF+ is a fund with multiple stakeholders with clearly defined roles, and it is useful to connect with all of them in different ways. The ESF+ managing authority can provide information about any upcoming calls for projects. The ESF+ monitoring committee should consult different stakeholders including civil society. Local and regional authorities often apply for the ESF+ and sometimes also manage the funds, hence can be key partners. The country desks in the European Commission closely monitor the use of the ESF+ across different regions. European networks closely monitor the funds, and organise capacity buildings on how to access the funds. Members of European Parliament negotiate European agreements on the ESF+ and therefore are well placed to advise their voters about opportunities in their region.





**Table 6. Key stakeholders active in the ESF+**

Stakeholder	Role
ESF+ Managing authority	Managing the funds, issuing the calls for proposals. This is usually one of the government departments, but there may also be “implementation bodies”. Start with the <a href="#">National contact points for the ESF+</a>
ESF+ Monitoring Committee	Article 38 of the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) No. 2021/1060 provides that each Member State establishes a ‘monitoring committee’ to monitor the implementation of their national programme, within 3 months of the date of the Commission’s notification of approval of the programme. Civil society and other representatives should be represented on these monitoring committees.
Local or regional authority	They may be running calls for applications, or be applicants themselves for the funds (depending on how the ESF+ is managed in the country), with whom partnerships are possible to access the funds. It is therefore strategic to connect public authorities to understand how the ESF+ is managed in a given region.
European Commission country desk for the ESF+	European civil servants are responsible for monitoring the use of ESF+ in your country. Check the <a href="#">organisation chart</a> of DG EMPL to contact the head of unit for your country to ask them about opportunities and key contacts.
European networks working on family support	They can advise you about organisations in the network which are already beneficiaries of the ESF+ and any good practices relating to family centres.
Members of European Parliament	They are elected by EU citizens to represent the needs and relay messages from their communities, and can advise you. <a href="#">Contact the MEP for your region.</a>



## 6.Recommendation: Improve monitoring with families-in-households typology and new adult care variables in EU-SILC

Resilience to an important degree takes place through family relations. Family can be a resource, but can also come with obligations. Not all families are facing the same (types of) risks, have the same resources to share, and numerous aspects of well-being (and other relevant outcomes) are shaped at the level of the household or the family. Moreover, social policy rights – for instance as stipulated in eligibility conditions – are often contingent on family/household composition. It should also be acknowledged that some risks, resources and/or outcomes are defined at for instance the individual level, whereas others affect a household as a whole. Moreover, inequalities within households and families persist and it should be possible to account for those. Hence, a measurement approach of resilience that is relevant to social policy distinguishes between individuals, households and families.<sup>104</sup>

### 6.1 Families-in-households typology

Although most EU social surveys have ready-made indicators (/variables) of household and/or family type, rEUsilience research indicates it is possible to improve on those classifications.<sup>105</sup> The improvement predominantly relates to a more explicit distinction between “household” and “family”. This allows for a better understanding how different family types live across various household types.

**As a first step towards disentangling families and households, the rEUsilience consortium has constructed a collection of family- and household- types using a selection of European social surveys.** The purpose of this exercise was to create a baseline for analysing family resilience and the distribution of risks, resources and socio-economic outcomes using a pre-defined set of family types. Due to the complexity of households and the fluidity of the concept of family, it was decided to reformulate the pre-defined household types. The idea is to create a set of household types that incorporate the family structure in mutually exclusive categories and which can be replicated across different datasets.

The point of departure is the basic distinction between non-family and family households. Within the non-family households, we distinguished single-member households and households with at least two people without any family connection. Among the family households we identified four categories. First, couple households with two members who identified each other as partners. Second, two-generational households which comprise at least one adult with at least one child regardless of the child’s age. Third, multigenerational households with at least one grandparent, adult child and a grandchild. And finally, a complex household with at least one family unit of any kind that shares a dwelling with at least one person who is not related to this family unit. We combined the categories of non-family and family households into a single indicator of household type with six categories: (1) no relation (2) single-person household, (3) couples, (4) two-generational household, (5) multigenerational household, and (6) complex household.

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<sup>104</sup> Bartova, A., Thaning, M., Van Lancker, W., Backman, L., Nieuwenhuis, R. (2023), Family profiles: Risks, Resources and Inequalities. rEUsilience working paper series: 1. PP. 15 Available [online](#).

<sup>105</sup> The following data sets were analysed: European Social Survey (ESS, wave 2010), the Household Budget Survey (HBS, wave 2010), the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC, wave 2016), the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS, wave 2016), and the Household Finance and Consumption Survey (HFCS, wave 2017)



**Table 7. Families-in-Households Typology**

	Family in household type	Definition
Non-family	No relation	Co-residing individuals without any family relations
	Single-person household	One member living on their own
Family	Couple household	Two members who identify each other as partners.
	Two-generational household	Single parents with dependent children
		Single parents with adult children
		Couples with dependent children
		Couples with adult children
		Couples who co-reside with at least one of their parents
	Multi-generational household	Single parents with dependent children living with the children's grandparents
		Single parents with adult children and grandparents
		Couples with dependent children and grandparents
		Couples with adult children and grandparents
	Complex household	Household with more than one family unit eg single parent co-reside with their sibling and their parents

While this is an important and feasible first step to unpack family diversity and realities within households, this typology is still limited since it does not capture family relations beyond the household such as the reality of blended or transnational families.



**It should be acknowledged that family life is not restricted to the household, and that many family relations extend between households.** This is captured in European datasets to a very limited extent at best. Financial transfers to and from other households (intra-household transfers) are covered in EU-SILC, but the nature of these transfers is generally unknown. It cannot be ascertained whether these are transfers to support studying children, to help buy a home, inheritances, child support or alimonies – all of which represent different inequalities, social and family dynamics, and are subject to different policies or legislation. Moreover, such indicators generally do not capture sharing of resources among (multi-generational) families living in the same household. Care relations across households are also scarcely documented. Finally, as it not uncommon nowadays – at least in a number of European countries – that children of separated parents alternate living with both parents, the fact that children are classified as living in only one household likely leads to an under-estimate of the number of single parents (in particular single fathers), and it remains unknown how this affects the living conditions of children (of separated parents) living with both parents.<sup>106</sup>

## 6.2 Adult Care & Work survey module

rEUsilience research shows that there is a clear need for high-quality, comparative data that would systematically monitor the amount of care family members provide to their relatives and whether or how these care responsibilities affect their working lives. Hence a blueprint for an EU-SILC ad hoc module concerning ‘Adult Care & Work’ was developed which would allow for better monitoring and understanding of the extent and intensity of care for adult relatives or other close persons in European households.<sup>107</sup>

Childcare responsibilities and their effect on employment that disproportionately affect women compared to men have been central to the European Commission’s agenda. The issue has been widely researched and meticulously monitored through surveys coordinated by the European Statistical Office (Eurostat). One example is the comprehensive set of childcare variables included in the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) that monitor both the different types of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services parents use across countries but also the extent of informal childcare help that is being utilised by parents (variables ‘rl010’-‘rl060’). A comprehensive benchmarking framework has been set up to monitor Member States’ progress towards and implementation of the right of children to ECEC of good quality, as enshrined in principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.<sup>108</sup> Childcare has also been recognised as one of the vulnerabilities of the EU Member States threatening Europe’s resilience during its important transitions and their ability to withstand future shocks not dissimilar to those experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although childcare responsibilities gained wide recognition, adult care and its effect on employment outcomes of family members who provide it remained largely on the periphery of interest. Although the right to affordable long-term care (LTC) services of good quality has been enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights principle 18, the focus is almost exclusively on services for older persons with ill health. Within the Indicators Subgroup of the Social Protection

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<sup>106</sup> Bartova, A., Thaning, M., Van Lancker, W., Backman, L., Nieuwenhuis, R. (2023), Family profiles: Risks, Resources and Inequalities. rEUsilience working paper series: 1. PP. 43. Available [online](#).

<sup>107</sup> Bartova, A. and Van Lancker, W. (2025), Adult Care & Work: Blueprint of an EU-SILC ad hoc module. rEUsilience working paper series: 15. Available [online](#)

<sup>108</sup> Social Protection Committee and European Commission (2025), Benchmarking Framework on Childcare and Support to Children. Available [online](#)



Committee, a monitoring framework in the field of long-term care has been developed, again with a focus on collecting comparative data on the availability, adequacy, and quality of LTC services.<sup>109</sup> **What is absent however, is comparative and high-quality data on adult care provision to family members both within and outside carers' households and the impact of this type of care on the carers' employment outcomes.**

In the context of ageing populations and shrinking families, the care for relatives represents a growing risk to labour market activity for many individuals in productive age, as well as for gender equality and the well-being of caregivers. The risk can be further amplified if more adult family members need assistance or when care for an adult relative collides with childcare responsibilities, which would be an accumulation of the care burden (cumulative care). As such, adult care provision might have important ramifications for the European Care Strategy, the EU Gender Equality Strategy, and the headline European employment target that at least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment by 2030. **Yet, there is no tool that would systematically monitor the amount of care family members provide to their relatives and whether or how these care responsibilities affect their working lives.**

### 6.3 Filling gaps in adult care data through EU-SILC

There is a clear need for high-quality, comparative data on the extent and intensity of care for adult relatives or other close persons in European households. For that reason, we propose an EU-SILC ad-hoc module on 'Adult Care & Work' that allows to monitor and understand the extent and intensity of care for adult relatives or other close persons. The proposed ad hoc module fits well with existing variables on employment and work intensity, as well as with variables on childcare, poverty risks and material deprivation to set the adult care in a wider context of issues such as gender employment and pay gaps, or risks of poverty and social exclusion. The questions have been pilot tested in a wider questionnaire that was fielded in January/February 2025 in Belgium in The Social Study<sup>110</sup>, an online representative panel. The questions proposed tap specifically into adult care and its implications for employment.

The ad hoc module intends to monitor the extent of adult and cumulative care and its impact on employment outcomes. It contains specific questions about adult care provided to household members and family members who live outside the respondents' household. These questions on care responsibilities would complement the rich battery of childcare questions, questions on employment and poverty outcomes that have been fielded by the EU-SILC survey since 2004. **This combination would help map the true extent of care responsibilities in the European population and their effect on employment.** The 'Adult Care & Work' module consists of 10 questions (see below). The first half of the questions asks about the existence and intensity of care responsibilities for adult family members or close persons. The second half of the questions then inquire about the effect these care responsibilities have or have had on respondents' working lives.

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<sup>109</sup>Social Protection Committee and European Commission (2025), Monitoring Framework on the Council Recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care. Available [online](#)

<sup>110</sup> <https://thesocialstudy.be/>



**Table 8. “Adult Care & Work” Ad Hoc Module for EU-SILC Questionnaire**

Q1		Is there anyone living with you who needs support due to <u>disability, age or illness</u> whom you look after or give special help to (accompanying to medical appointments, regular shopping, ...)? Please, don't include anyone who you care for as part of your job.
	1	Yes
	2	No
Q2		Is there anyone <u>not</u> living with you who needs support due to <u>disability, age or illness</u> whom you look after or give special help to (accompanying to medical appointments, regular shopping, ...)? <i>Please, don't include anyone who you care for as part of your job.</i>
	1	Yes
	2	No
Q3		How many people who are elderly, sick and/or disabled <u>living both in and outside your household</u> do you care for or provide regular help to? <i>Please, don't include anyone who you care for as part of your job.</i>
	#	People living in my household
	#	People not living in my household
Q4		Are any of these people your children who are less than 15 years old?
	1	Yes, all of them
	2	Yes, some of them
	2	No
Q5		How many hours <u>in total</u> each week do you typically spend on providing care or regular help to all persons you mentioned in the previous questions who are elderly, sick or disabled? <i>For those not living in your household, please, include the time it usually takes you to reach them and return. Please, don't include anyone who you care for as part of your job.</i>
	1	0-4 hours
	2	5-9 hours
	3	10-19 hours
	4	20-34 hours (about 1-1.5 days a week)
	5	35-49 hours (about 1.5-2 days a week)
	6	50-99 hours (about 2-4 full days a week)
	7	100 or more hours per week/ I provide continuous care (at least 4 full days a week)
Q6		Now, think of the period since you first started providing care or regular help to someone who needed support due to <u>disability, age or illness</u> until now. Have these care responsibilities affected your employment status in any way at any point during that period? <i>[multiple choice]</i>
	1	Yes, I changed something about my work to earn more money
	2	Yes, I reduced my working hours
	3	Yes, I took on less demanding tasks in job(s)
	1	Yes, I changed working times without changing the volume of my work
	2	Yes, I changed job or employer to facilitate reconciliation
	3	Yes, I quit my job



	4	Yes, other effect
	5	No, I experienced some of these changes but they were not due to my care responsibilities
	6	No, I did not experience any of these changes
Q7		Did you ever have to turn down a job offer due to conflicts with your care responsibilities for someone who needed help due to disability, age or illness?
	1	Never
	2	Yes, once or twice
	3	Yes, more times
	4	Not applicable
Q8		Thinking about the care or help you provide to <u>all</u> persons you mentioned in the previous questions (elderly, sick or disabled persons), how important are these care responsibilities in your decision to <i>work less than full-time hours</i> ? [Question only for respondents who work less than full-time hours]
Q9		Thinking about the care or help you provide to <u>all</u> persons you mentioned in the previous questions (elderly, sick or disabled persons), how important are these care responsibilities in your decision to <i>be self-employed</i> ? [Question only for respondents who are self-employed]
Q10		Thinking about the care or help you provide to <u>all</u> persons you mentioned in the previous questions (elderly, sick or disabled persons), how important are these care responsibilities for your <i>not actively looking for a job</i> ? [Question only for respondents who are unemployed and are not actively looking for a job]
	1	Not at all important
	2	Slightly important
	3	Important
	4	Fairly important
	5	Very important





## 7. Conclusion

Progress has been made in strengthening the EU social agenda for families over the last five years. However, challenges remain.<sup>111</sup> Variations in the implementation of EU directives among member states can lead to disparities in family support. Cultural differences, economic conditions, and political priorities influence how member states adopt and enforce EU policies, and EU funds are prioritised differently across countries and regions.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical need for robust family support systems. The crisis has strained families, emphasising the importance of flexible work arrangements, mental health support, and emergency childcare services. The EU's recovery plan in response to the pandemic, NextGenerationEU, includes measures to address these challenges and strengthen family support mechanisms with “Policies for the next generation” as a key pillar of the recovery plan encouraging investments in early childhood education and care, in digital education and more.<sup>112</sup>

At this crucial stage of review of the Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (with a European public consultation launched in June 2025), the European Commission should use this opportunity to integrate more intersectional policy design and implementation in the Action Plan by creating streams of action which look at intersections between the 20 principles. For example, while the principles on gender equality, work-life balance, ECEC and LTC are all very relevant for families, it would be useful to have a flagship initiative aimed at looking at the intersections of these principles. This flagship initiative could create a stream of action on family support, through a specially dedicated Peer Review Programme under the European Child Guarantee, supported by ESF+ funding and a stronger monitoring and evaluation framework through refined EU-SILC variables. The 15 principles in this rEUsilience roadmap could be used as inspiration to further refine parts of the Pillar principles, and the family support models highlighted (namely family centres) could serve as an important starting point for evaluating effectiveness of programmes.

Different types of models of family centres have been highlighted, as well as different community-based services within those centres (e.g. family-focused educational programmes, mental health support and family therapy, early childhood development, capacity-building for workers in and around family centres). As examples of good practice, strong country examples have been put forward showing a real commitment by governments to use the ESF+ for family centres using different approaches such as funding of a specific family centre model (in Estonia), strengthening of family centres through local networks (in Germany), and testing of new peer support models around family centres (in Italy).

The content of this Roadmap is also aligned with a recent resolution of the European Parliament<sup>113</sup> on the *European Semester for economic policy coordination: employment and social priorities for 2025* where it reiterated its call on the Commission to “carefully monitor implementation of the Child Guarantee in all Member States as part of the European Semester and country-specific recommendations; reiterates its call for an increase in the funding of the

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<sup>111</sup> COFACE (2024), State of the European Union for families. Available [online](#)

<sup>112</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Available [online](#)

<sup>113</sup> European Parliament (2025), Resolution of 12 March 2025 on the European Semester for economic policy coordination: employment and social priorities for 2025 (2024/2084(INI)). Available [online](#)



European Child Guarantee with a dedicated budget of at least EUR 20 billion and for all Member States to allocate at least 5 % of their allocated ESF+ funds to fighting child poverty and promoting children's well-being" and also highlighted the that "the country-specific recommendations should reflect Member States' budgetary compliance with the minimum required allocation for tackling child poverty set out in the ESF+ Regulation" calling on the European Commission to provide an ambitious budget for the Child Guarantee in the next Multi-annual financial framework 2028-2025 in order to respond to the growing challenge of child poverty and social exclusion.

Moreover, the resolution calls for "the implementation of policies that promote work-life balance and the right to disconnect, with the aim of improving the quality of life for all families and workers, for ensuring the implementation of the Work-Life Balance Directive and of the European Care Strategy" as well as a proposal for the creation of "a European card for all types of large families and a European action plan for single parents, offering educational and social advantages".

The European Union has the potential to play an even more important role in boosting family resilience across its member states using different tools at its disposal like data collection, legislation, financial assistance to services and infrastructure, technical assistance, policy recommendations and transnational exchanges. This can help families to be resilient in dealing with the « new world of work » (or more generally, inequalities in employment, income, and working conditions), but also in the face of different crises (e.g. health, the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis), or key societal transitions (digital, demographic, green).

Discussions on the future EU budget for 2028-2034 have started in the European Parliament, the European Pillar of Social Rights action plan is being reviewed, and new frameworks are planned in 2026 such as a European Anti-poverty strategy and a European affordable housing plan. Now is the time to ensure that rEUsilience findings support and help shape these different processes as appropriate.



## Annex I: List of EU initiatives covering family support

EU initiative	Measures	Family support type
1992 Maternity leave directive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequately paid leave from work in perinatal phase</li> <li>• Health and safety at work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perinatal support</li> <li>• Structural policy arrangements</li> <li>• Material needs</li> <li>• Workplace support</li> </ul>
2017 Technical Support Instrument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research</li> <li>• Policy guidance</li> <li>• Monitoring and evaluation frameworks</li> <li>• General support to public administration for reform</li> <li>• Transnational exchanges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long-term care</li> <li>• Respite care</li> <li>• Early childhood education and care</li> <li>• Material needs</li> <li>• Access to education</li> <li>• Early childhood intervention and supports for families with disabilities</li> </ul>
2019 EU Work-life balance directive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequately paid paternity leave from work in perinatal phase</li> <li>• Parental leave</li> <li>• Carers leave</li> <li>• Flexible work arrangements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structural policy arrangements</li> <li>• Material needs</li> <li>• Workplace support</li> </ul>
2020-2024 EU Gender equality strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campaigns</li> <li>• Transnational exchanges</li> <li>• Funding European projects</li> <li>• Legislation</li> <li>• Policy guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports targeting men and care</li> <li>• Family-work transitions</li> <li>• Gender-responsive family support services</li> <li>• Mental health supports</li> <li>• Domestic violence supports</li> <li>• Family mediation</li> </ul>
2021-2027 European Social Fund Plus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct funding of services for families</li> <li>• Training of workers in support and care services</li> <li>• Education opportunities (formal and non-formal)</li> <li>• Indirect funding of European networks to build capacity of social services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family counselling, coaches and centres</li> <li>• Casework and access to specialised social services</li> <li>• Respite services (short or long-term support with care for children during a time of family crisis)</li> <li>• In-home support (individualised support provided within the family home)</li> <li>• Peer support networks</li> <li>• Coaching to enter the labour market</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialised support to families in vulnerable situations</li> <li>• Community-based care</li> </ul>
2021-2027 European Regional Development Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct funding of infrastructure</li> <li>• Investments in supported living, accessible housing, housing adaptations, non-segregated social housing within the community; accessibility of services and the built environment (public transport, public buildings, etc.); technical aids and assistive technologies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer support networks</li> <li>• Specialised support to families in vulnerable situations</li> <li>• Community-based care</li> <li>• Long-term care</li> <li>• Early childhood education and care</li> <li>• Child friendly neighbourhoods and urban/rural environments</li> </ul>
2021 European Child Guarantee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National reporting</li> <li>• Data collection and monitoring</li> <li>• Transnational exchanges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early childhood education and care</li> <li>• Health support (nutrition advice)</li> <li>• Material needs (free school meals)</li> <li>• Family centres/parental supports</li> </ul>
2021 European Pillar of Social Rights action plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collection of EU initiatives in the social and employment fields</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support services of different types</li> <li>• Adequate income and working conditions</li> <li>• Flexible working arrangements and paid leaves</li> <li>• Prevent intergenerational transmission of poverty</li> </ul>
2022 European Care Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy guidance</li> <li>• National reporting</li> <li>• Transnational exchanges</li> <li>• Data collection and monitoring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early childhood education and care</li> <li>• Long-term care</li> <li>• Supports to family carers</li> <li>• Respite care and support</li> </ul>
2022 Directive on adequate minimum wages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rules to improve adequacy of minimum wages, providing for the satisfaction of the needs of the worker and their family in light of national economic and social conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequate minimum wage</li> </ul>



## Annex II: EU Social Inclusion Peer Review Process

The EU Social Inclusion Peer Review Process is an initiative within the European Union aimed at fostering mutual learning and the exchange of good practices among EU Member States in the area of social policies.<sup>114</sup> It is particularly focused on social inclusion, poverty reduction, and the development of effective social protection systems. The peer reviews originated under the social Open Method of Coordination, an intergovernmental soft law process formally launched in 2000 by the Lisbon European Council aiming to facilitate policy improvements towards common EU goals through research, benchmarking and transnational exchanges.<sup>115</sup> It now still operates under the framework of the European Pillar of Social Rights and supports the implementation of policies related to social objectives in the European Semester. **Peer reviews on policies for children and families** were frequently held from 2009 to 2020 showing political consensus to work on this topic and the willingness of countries to come together to compare their policies<sup>116</sup>:

Year	Topic	Host country
2020	Work-life balance: promoting gender equality in informal long-term care provision	Germany
2018	Comprehensive follow-up of low-income families	Norway
2018	Furthering quality and flexibility of Early Childhood Education and Care	Denmark
2018	The financial impact of maternity and paternity leave	Czechia
2018	Homelessness from a child's perspective	Belgium
2017	Single mothers facing poverty: Providing adequate financial, material and social support for sustainable social integration	EU
2016	Prevention and early intervention services to address children at risk of poverty	Ireland
2015	Provision of quality early childcare services	Czechia
2015	Conditional cash transfers and their impact on children	Hungary
2015	Children First – pilot local consultation platforms on child poverty	Belgium
2012	Area-based policies in urban areas: how to promote good living conditions for children and youth	Norway
2012	Combating child poverty through measures promoting the socio-cultural participation of clients of the Public Centres for Social Welfare	Belgium
2011	Building a coordinated strategy for parenting support	France
2010	Promoting social inclusion of children in a disadvantaged rural environment - the micro-region of Szécsény	Hungary
2010	Federal Foundation Mother and Child for pregnant women in emergency situations	Germany
2009	The City Strategy for tackling unemployment and child poverty	United Kingdom

<sup>114</sup> EU Social Inclusion Peer Review Process

<sup>115</sup> The Open Method Of Coordination

<sup>116</sup> All information these peer reviews can be found here



The end goal of a peer review is to strengthen national social policies, not through European harmonised standards but through technical exchanges to deepen policy knowledge and encourage policy transfer between countries where relevant. The European Commission allocates budgets to support several peer reviews per year. In terms of the methodology, once the topic and best practice has been selected by the European Commission (which receives several proposals yearly via the EU Social Protection Committee), the peer countries are also selected and the peer review process usually lasts 3-4 months from start to finish.

**Step 1:** A peer review manager is selected to coordinate the process from start to finish, and formal invitations are sent to all ministries concerned. Each ministry delegate is accompanied by a national expert of their choice, and there are sometimes European stakeholders involved, as was the case of COFACE for the 2015 peer review on provision of quality childcare.

**Step 2:** The host country prepares a discussion paper about the given practice, and an independent thematic expert prepares a report to complement this discussion paper and provide an objective analysis of the practice or policy of the host country.

**Step 3:** Both host discussion paper and the thematic report are sent to all peer countries with key questions to answer, to which the peer countries respond by preparing their own country discussion paper. The country papers typically comment on the host the country practice and compare it to their own policy and service model. These discussion papers are sent to all peer review participants ahead of the peer review meeting itself.

**Step 4:** All participants travel to the host country for a peer review meeting which lasts 1,5 to 2 days. The first part of the meeting usually focuses on the host country practice (sometimes with a site visit to show the policy in practice), and the following sessions of the meeting allow for the peer countries to comment on the practice and compare it with their own approach.

**Step 5:** A final synthesis report is developed, summarising the peer review process and results, and formulating recommendations (sometimes for transferability of the practice to other countries or sometimes for European policy action).



## Annex III: Understanding how the ESF+ works

The ESF+ is the main financial instrument with which Europe invests in people, enhancing social cohesion by promoting job creation and skills development and to support a fair and socially inclusive society. The ESF+ contributes to the overarching policy objective of achieving a more social and inclusive Europe. It provides an important contribution to the EU's employment, social, education and skills policies, including structural reforms in these areas. For the 2021-2027 programming period, the ESF+ is used to invest in three main areas:

- **Employment:** to boost the adaptability of workers by helping them acquire new skills and that of companies by promoting new ways of working;
- **Education and training:** Improving access to employment, supporting young students in their transition to the world of work, or training less qualified job seekers to improve their job prospects;
- **Social Inclusion:** helping people from disadvantaged groups to find work (such as people with disabilities, families in vulnerable situations and more).

This fund is part of the EU's cohesion policy framework, intended to promote balanced development across all European regions. Running from 2021 to 2027, the ESF+ has a budget of €142.7 billion, allocated across Member States and supplemented by national or regional budgets.<sup>117</sup> While the European Commission does not decide exactly how the funds are used locally, it does provide guidance within the framework of ESF+ regulations.

The European Commission is guided by the 2030 EU targets on jobs, skills and poverty reduction set by the [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#), the [country-specific recommendations](#) of the European Semester, and by the thematic concentration of the funds as set out in the ESF+ regulation:

- Member States must allocate at least 25% of to fostering social inclusion;
- Member States must allocate at least 3% to fight material deprivation;
- At least 12.5% of their ESF+ resources to support youth employment and the “Not in Education, Employment or Training” or NEET (only those concerned by the recommendations)
- At least 5% of their ESF+ resources to address child poverty (only countries concerned by the recommendations).
- At least 0,25% of their ESF+ resources should be affected to strengthening the capacity of social partners and civil society and to enforcing the social dialogue (only countries concerned by the recommendations).<sup>118</sup>

Generally, the following groups can be identified as the main beneficiaries of the ESF+ :

- Public bodies
- Private sector entities, particularly small businesses;
- Universities;
- Associations, NGOs, and voluntary organisations.

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<sup>117</sup> European Commission: What is the ESF+? Available [online](#)

<sup>118</sup> HELPDESK – EU Funds for Social Services. Available [online](#)





The bulk of the ESF+ budget is designed and implemented in partnership between the European Commission, national and regional authorities and social partners and stakeholders with an approach of "shared management". This means that the **responsibility** for ESF+ management lies with both the European Commission and Member States.<sup>119</sup>

At the beginning of each seven-year programming period (we are currently in the 2021-2027 programming period), the Commission and Member States agree on key priorities for ESF+ investment in a **Partnership Agreement**, priorities which are then set out in **national or regional operational programmes**. For example, a Member State and the Commission may agree that there needs to be further focus on support to families or making the education system more inclusive.

Once the programmes are agreed, **Member States** are responsible for implementing the planned actions – including selecting concrete projects for funding and paying project beneficiaries. Member States allocate funding to a wide range of organisations – public bodies, private companies and civil society. **The Commission** monitors implementation, reimburses expenditure and is ultimately accountable for the budget.

Importantly, shared management works under the **partnership principle**, where partners and stakeholders should be associated at all stages from programming to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This principle is key for ensuring that spending is as effective and efficient as possible.

A key principle of ESF+ shared management, **co-financing** allows that both the EU and a Member State's budget contribute to the total budget of an ESF+ programme. Effectively, this means that if an organisation (public, private, non-profit) has a budget to invest in family support, the ESF+ can complement it through co-financing a project or programme. Depending on the area of investment and the development level of the region in which the activities are taking place, the EU co-financing rate can vary between 50% and 95%.

At national level, the operational programmes are managed by national or regional authorities, depending on the country. These authorities are referred to as ESF+ **Managing Authorities**.<sup>120</sup> They manage the calls for Proposals. Public or private organisations can apply to specific calls issued by national or regional authorities, based on funding priorities in the operational programmes. These calls are usually published on national or regional managing authority websites. These Managing Authorities are responsible for overseeing the implementation of ESF+ funding in their areas. They monitor project applications, approve funding, and ensure compliance with EU regulations. Many of these ESF+ Managing Authorities join **Communities of Practice** to exchange good practice on the use of the fund. There is a Community of Practice on social inclusion.

At European level, the European Commission has various **Country Desks** with EU civil servants who engage regularly with the Managing Authorities. The European Commission also consults the **ESF+ Committee** that focuses on issues relevant to the implementation of the ESF+ programmes. The Committee is chaired by the Commission and made of 3 representatives per Member States (one government representative, including the ESF+ Head of Mission, one representative of workers' organisations, and one representative of employers' organisations), and one representative from each of the organisations representing workers' organisations and employers' organisations at Union level.

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<sup>119</sup> European Commission: Shared management - European Social Fund Plus. Available [online](#)

<sup>120</sup> European Commission – ESF+ Managing authorities. Available [online](#)





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