FEANTSA's statement on Strengthening the European Child Guarantee to address Child Homelessness

As acknowledged in the EU Affordable Housing Plan, "homelessness is rising across Europe, with more than one million people affected, including around 400 000 children and 80000 people sleeping rough." The Plan further recognises that "we must immediately change course" while Ursula von der Leyen stated in her speech at the European Employment and Social Rights Forum in March that "everyone deserves a place to call home". Low-income households are particularly affected by the housing crisis, with single parents and families with children at high risk of poverty among the most impacted groups.

This recognition at EU level is welcome. However, homeless children are already one of the key target groups of the European Child Guarantee (ECG), a flagship EU policy adopted more than five years ago. Despite this commitment, the number of homeless children in Europe continues to rise, showing that the policy has not yet delivered on its promise to address the housing needs of children most in need.

The current effort of the European Commission to reinforce the ECG is an opportunity to remedy this situation and put child homelessness at the center of a strengthened ECG implementation.

The Child Guarantee focuses on access to essential services: education, healthcare, early childhood education and care, nutrition and housing. Housing is fundamental for children's well being. Without stable housing, children cannot access adequately any of these services. Strengthening housing measures therefore supports all the objectives of the ECG.

Scale and impact of child homelessness in Europe

In many EU Member States, up to one-third of people staying in homeless shelters are children. Thousands of children also sleep rough across the EU each night or in emergency or temporary accommodation. Several million children live in inadequate or unfit housing conditions.

In Belgium, children represent 26% of the homeless population (11,697 children compared to 34,163 adults). In France, 29,780 children live in hotels with their families due to shortages in housing and over 1,500 children are living rough. (FEANTSA, 2023)

Child homelessness is closely linked to women's homelessness, as the majority of homeless children live in single-mother households.

Homelessness has severe and long-lasting consequences for children, affecting their physical and mental health, their safety, their cognitive and emotional development, their education. Without stable housing, children face repeated disruptions to schooling, limited access to healthcare, and increased exposure to stress and insecurity all of which have serious impact on their mental and physical health.

The recently adopted EP Report on the Housing Crisis calls for an ambitious and accelerated implementation of the European Child Guarantee across the Euas a key tool to prevent and tackle child homelessness. It also urges Member States to adopt national targets to prevent the eviction of children in cases where there is a clear risk of homelessness. This reinforces the need to strengthen the ECG as a key instrument in addressing child homelessness.

Recommendations

The ECH already specifically calls on Member States "to ensure that homeless children and their families receive adequate accommodation prompt transfer from temporary accommodation to permanent housing and provision of relevant social and advisory services. "(article 10 of the Council Recommendation) However, its implementation is weak and should be strengthened as key core policy.

To effectively address child homelessness, the European Child Guarantee should:

- Require Member States to explicitly address child homelessness in their national action plans, including concrete measures and targets to reduce child homelessness.
- Introduce indicators on child homelessness withing the ECG monitoring framework. Even though housing is recognised as a priority, it is not translated into measurable indicators.
- Include eviction prevention measures and support for families, particularly single headed household who are often women.
- Ensure that EU funding instruments linked to the ECG support housing solutions and homelessness prevention for families.

Strengthening the European Child Guarantee is an important opportunity for the European Commission and for Member states to take action to ensure that no child in Europe grows up without a safe and stable place to live.

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