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the heart of Europe

# **How insufficient investment impacts children's rights and their lived experiences: Advocacy strategies for change**

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# Introduction & Overview

1. The importance of investing in children for the realisation of their rights and how does insufficient investment in infrastructure affect the rights and living conditions of children and their families
2. Examples of investing in children from Child Guarantee plans and reports
3. How to use these insights for advocacy.



# Insufficient Investment Children's Rights

- **Economic Disparities:** When countries or communities fail to prioritise children's services in their budgets, the poorest children suffer the most. They experience greater barriers to accessing health, education, and protective services. This widens the inequality gap, perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion.
- **Social Exclusion:** Marginalised children (such as children with disabilities and Roma children) are disproportionately affected by insufficient investment. They may face exclusion from services or social protection programs, infringing on their rights to equality and non-discrimination.



# Insufficient Investment in Education

**Education:** Insufficient funding for education leads to a lack of resources, overcrowded classrooms, poorly trained teachers, and inadequate learning materials. This impacts children's right to quality education, limiting their ability to develop skills and break the cycle of poverty.



# Investing in Education

- **Poland** - revising needs assessment and support for inclusive education
- **Belgium, Estonia & Romania** –preventing school dropout
- **Estonia** - compulsory school education up to the age of 18
- **Denmark** - mandatory tests for reading difficulties, a Notice Book for students with special needs
- **Slovakia** - a definition of segregation in education and guidelines for desegregation
- **Ireland**- establishing the Supporting Traveller and Roma Programme.



# Investing in Early Childhood Education & Care

- **Cyprus** - subsidising care and expanding the network of early childhood development services
- **Romania** - constructing and equipping 110 nurseries and 358 kindergartens
- **Slovakia** - construction, reconstruction and renovation of childcare facilities for children up to 3 years
- **Ireland** - the National Childcare Scheme and the National Action Plan for Childminding 2021-2028. The Equal Start funding model supports disadvantaged families.



# Insufficient Investment in Healthcare

**Healthcare:** Without proper investment in health services, children are denied access to essential healthcare, such as vaccinations, proper nutrition, and early disease prevention. This leads to higher child mortality rates and worsens long-term physical and mental development.



# Investing in Healthcare

- **Romania**- modernising 3,000 primary healthcare facilities with a focus on rural areas. **Integrated Community Centres** under the National Recovery and Resilience Program provide comprehensive healthcare services
- **Poland** - reforming the mental healthcare system to a community-based model with three levels of tailored support
- **Bulgaria**- Legislative changes improved medical care and expanded preventive examinations for children. Support for children with disabilities increased.
- **Denmark** - providing preventive dental and medical care for all children.





# Insufficient Investment in Nutrition & Housing

**Nutrition and Safe Housing:** Low investment in child welfare programs can result in food insecurity, poor housing, and unsafe environments, which violate a child's right to survival and healthy development.



# Investing in Healthy Nutrition & Healthy Meal Each School Day

- **Bulgaria**- free meals for children in full-day nurseries and kindergartens. A National Strategy promotes the supply of healthy food like fruits, vegetables, and dairy products in schools.
- **Estonia**- lunch is free for all students in state-maintained schools and many municipal schools
- **Ireland** - the School Meals Programme funds regular, free, nutritious meals for children
- **Slovakia** - food subsidies have been expanded to include a wide range of students, including secondary school students.
- **Cyprus**- the "Feeding Students in Need Project" provides daily free breakfast to eligible students in vulnerable situations, as well as healthy meals outside school days.



# Investing in Housing

- **Belgium** - the **Housing First** program for youth at risk of homelessness and the Wallonian Observatory of Homelessness. A new unified model for social housing allocation. In 2023, **the Government of the Brussels-Capital** a draft decree amending the framework governing subsidies for most vulnerable - unaccompanied minors
- **Romania**- the National Housing Strategy to improve housing conditions in informal settlements.
- **Slovakia** - targeting housing in marginalised Roma communities, promoting rental housing, and improving living conditions and hygiene
- **Ireland** - adoption of the **Youth Homelessness Strategy** to address housing needs for young people at risk of homelessness.



# Insufficient Investment in Child Protection

- **Violence and Exploitation:** Without investment in social services, child protection systems weaken. Children are more vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, child labour, and trafficking due to a lack of proper monitoring, reporting, and response mechanisms
- **Legal Protection:** In many countries, children lack access to justice due to underfunded legal systems, leaving them without proper representation or the means to have their rights defended in courts.
- **Prevention over Response:** Sometimes the child protection system prioritizes responsiveness over prevention. Funding is often directed towards institutional care, rather than addressing the root causes of child separation and institutionalisation.



# Investment in preventing family separation & supporting deinstitutionalisation

- **Bulgaria** - 20 centers for children with disabilities under construction; and plans to close the four remaining institutional care settings
- **Romania** - reduction of children in the special protection system from 57,279 to 38,337; 73% placed with relatives or foster parents; decrease in residential services from 17,453 in 2014 to 8,327 (in 2023)
- **Slovakia** - establishing a support network for children, parents, and foster families; completing the national project 'Support for the Deinstitutionalisation of Foster Care III'; enhancing foster care conditions.
- **Estonia** - funding for family-based alternative care support services will be €1.5 million from 2025 onwards.



# Investing in Child Protection & Equality

**Ireland - Programmes in Income Support:** Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance, Back to Work Family Dividend, Child Benefit, Domiciliary Care Allowance, Fuel Allowance, Increase for a Qualified Child (to primary social welfare payments), International Protection Child Payment, Maternity & Paternity Benefit, Parent's Benefit, Adoptive Benefit and Health and Safety Benefit, One-Parent Family Payment and Jobseeker's Transitional Payment, Working Family Payment.



# Advocacy Strategies for Change

1. **Lobbying** for Increased Public Investment
2. Public Awareness **Campaigns**
3. International and EU **Pressure and Partnerships**
4. **Child Participation**



# Lobbying for Increased Public Investment

Advocates can engage with government officials and policymakers to push for higher budget allocations for child-centered programs, such as healthcare, education, and child protection services. Using data and research, they can demonstrate how investing in children leads to long-term economic and social benefits for society.





# Public Awareness Campaigns

- **Media and Social Media:** Raising public awareness through campaigns that highlight the impact of underfunding on children's lives can mobilise citizens and organisations to demand change. Storytelling, visuals, and testimonies from affected children can make these campaigns more powerful and relatable.
- **Community Engagement:** Working directly with communities, advocates can educate people about children's rights and empower them to hold their local governments accountable. Mobilising grassroots is key to driving political and social change.



# International Pressure & Partnerships

- Collaboration with organisations at the EU and international level: Partnering or engaging with international bodies (WHO, UNICEF) can provide advocates with additional resources, research, and visibility.
- Utilising Human Rights Treaties: leverage international human rights treaties e.g. UNCRC, to hold governments accountable. Bringing violations of children's rights to global forums can expose neglect and spur corrective action (Ombudsperson Committee).



# Child Participation

Engaging children and youth in advocacy efforts amplifies their voices and ensures their lived experiences are centred in discussions about funding and policy decisions. Giving children platforms to speak about their own rights adds legitimacy and urgency to advocacy efforts.



# Evidence-Based Advocacy

- **Research and Data:** Gathering disaggregated data on how insufficient investment is affecting children's lives is critical. Advocates can use this evidence to create reports and policy recommendations that provide clear solutions for addressing funding gaps, such as child friendly budgeting.
- **Monitoring and Accountability Tools:** Advocates can push for the creation of public dashboards or regular budget reviews that show how much is being spent on children's services and improving their quality, providing transparency and a means to track progress.



# Thank you

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