



# ENDING EDUCATIONAL AND CHILD POVERTY IN EUROPE



Save the Children

Leaving no child behind

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

## Acknowledgements

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Boy writing on a blackboard at the opening of Save the Children's Italy's 'Spotlight Centre' (Punto Luce) in Torre Maura, Rome, on 23 April 2015. The 'Spotlight Centres' offer cultural, artistic and sport activities for children and adolescents in areas deprived of services and educational opportunities.

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# ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>AROPE</b>	At risk of poverty or social exclusion
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EU SILC</b>	European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
<b>EUROSTAT LFS</b>	European Union Labour Force Survey
<b>FRA</b>	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
<b>GDP</b>	Gross domestic product
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PISA</b>	Programme for International Student Assessment
<b>PP</b>	percentage point
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>UNCRC</b>	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

# FOREWORD

**More than 26 million children in Europe are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.<sup>1</sup> Together these children would make up the seventh most populous country in the European Union (EU). This is simply not acceptable.**

Children face a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than adults, and the effects of poverty can last for life. Children tell us that what poverty means for them is going to school on an empty stomach, being stressed because their parents can't pay the rent, spending winter in cold homes and schools, not having enough money to buy a book, and not daring to have hopes and dreams.

In this year's report, we shed light on one of the most devastating aspects of child poverty in Europe: educational poverty. Children from the most disadvantaged families are more likely to achieve less at school. They have fewer opportunities to take part in cultural, sports and social activities, to develop emotionally, and to realise their potential. As they grow up, they will face greater challenges in becoming active members of society and finding stable, good-quality jobs. It's a vicious circle: material deprivation leads to educational poverty and vice versa. This intergenerational transmission of disadvantage is unfair and costly for both individuals and society as a whole. If European countries fail to act now to reach children who are being left behind, we risk exacerbating social divides in the future.

At Save the Children we believe that the best way to protect and empower children is to invest in them. While there are no one-size-fits-all policies for all European countries, some policies are proven to be effective in tackling child poverty and social exclusion. These include: providing protection for children and support for families; investing in early childhood education and care; ensuring high-quality educational opportunities for all children and securing good-quality jobs for their parents.

We are also calling for greater accountability to children. Children are agents of change and capable of identifying solutions to the problems they face. Children, especially those who are among the most disadvantaged, must be consulted when designing policies to reduce poverty and social exclusion.

In his 2016 State of the Union speech, the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker said *"Our children deserve better... They deserve a Europe that empowers and defends them. They deserve a Europe that protects them."*

If European states invest in adequate funding and effective policies, millions of disadvantaged children could become empowered and active members of society. By investing in children, we will be investing in a more just and equal Europe. We will all win.

**Helle Thorning-Schmidt**

Chief Executive Officer

Save the Children International

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**No European country is free from child poverty. As latest available data show, across Europe more than 26 million children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.<sup>2</sup> As well as being at greater risk than adults, the effects of poverty on children can last a lifetime.**

At the root of child poverty and social exclusion is inequality. The top 10% of households in Europe now earn 31% of total income and own over 50% of total wealth, and the gap between rich and poor is growing in many countries.

Children living in single parent families, large households or households where the adults have little or no work are more likely to grow up in poverty. Indeed, children living in families with very low work intensity are 54% more likely to be at risk of poverty than those living in families with high work intensity. Even those children whose parents are in paid work have no guarantee that they will not be poor. In some European countries, including Luxembourg, Bulgaria, Spain and Sweden, one-fifth or more of children with working parents are at risk of poverty. In Romania the figure is nearly 50%. Children whose parents have low levels of education are also more likely to grow up in poverty and be socially excluded, as are the children of migrants. In all European countries apart from three, the risk of being in poverty is higher among children whose parents are migrants.

The figures above cover economic and material poverty, but child poverty is multidimensional and in order to tackle the root causes of disadvantage, we need to also consider educational poverty. We define educational poverty as a process that limits children's right to education and deprives them of the opportunity to learn and develop the cognitive and non-cognitive skills they will need to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

Children who are educationally poor are also denied the opportunity to develop the skills that enable them to grow emotionally, establish relationships and have a sense of purpose in a society they feel they belong to. Educational poverty tends to be transmitted across generations, but it

is a process that *can* and *should* be changed.

Material and educational poverty affect children's development and wellbeing from their earliest years, which means that investment in early childhood care and education is crucial. However, in 11 countries in Europe coverage of childcare is less than 20%, and in Slovakia, Poland, the Czech Republic and Romania, it is less than 10%. In Romania, Poland and Croatia, more than 50% of children do not have access to preschool. In most countries coverage actually decreased between 2012 and 2014 for both childcare and preschool services.

Children with parents from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are one-third more likely to be low achievers in mathematics and reading compared with children whose parents are in the top socioeconomic background.

Latest available data show that 22% of 15-year-olds in Europe were unable to apply mathematics they learned at school to real-life scenarios and 20% were low achievers in reading.<sup>3</sup> It is a vicious cycle: material poverty leads to educational poverty and both mutually reinforce the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage.

Save the Children believes that ending child poverty, social exclusion and educational poverty must be a priority for all EU member states, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland and the European institutions. This requires several measures, including:

- children's participation
- addressing the multidimensional nature of child poverty with an integrated and child rights-based approach
- investment in early childhood education and care
- budgeting to fulfil children's rights and securing these budgets against cuts.

Children are agents of change and can provide important insights and expertise that adults may not identify or prioritise. Their views – both in terms of their personal experiences of poverty and how to tackle it – must be taken into account throughout decision-making processes and efforts to end multidimensional child poverty, including educational poverty.

Children in eight European countries<sup>4</sup> told Save the Children that education should be more relevant to children's lives and the skills they will need as adults. Children ask to be more involved in the running of the school through students' unions. All children should have access to sport, leisure and cultural activities, and parents should be helped to find decently paid work.

We believe that child poverty and educational poverty have to be addressed with a child rights approach. All European countries have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and therefore have obligations to protect, promote and fulfil children's rights, regardless of each child's family circumstances.

Policy and decision makers should tackle child poverty and social exclusion with a cross-sectoral approach. Adequate funds should be made available to invest in early childhood education and care and ensure that national education systems provide equitable high-quality education.

European countries should increase support to children and families living in poverty through child-sensitive social protection and monitor the impact of social protection interventions, including transfers, on children's wellbeing. European states should also promote parents' employability while guaranteeing adequate working

conditions and the potential to reconcile work and family life. Universal services should be available for all children, with direct interventions towards vulnerable children.

The EU has agreed on a number of initiatives to tackle poverty. These include *Europe 2020: A European Strategy for Smart, Sustainable, and Inclusive Growth*, with its objective of lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty by 2020, and the European Commission's Recommendation, *Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*. As regards the former, tackling child poverty is not an explicit objective of the strategy and latest available data show that the EU is far from achieving its overall anti-poverty target.

Crucially, the *Investing in Children* recommendation places children and support for the most disadvantaged children at the centre of efforts to combat child poverty and social exclusion and highlights the early years as a critical time for children's development. However, EU member states are not required to report on their progress and to date the recommendation is not being fully implemented. We urge the European Commission to monitor the implementation of the Recommendation *Investing in children* and the EU institutions to prioritise the fight against child poverty and social exclusion.



**20%**  
One in five 15-year-old adolescents  
(20%) is **educationally poor** in Europe



**28%**  
More than **one in every four** children (28%) are  
at **risk of poverty** or **social exclusion** in the **EU**



**26 million**  
More than **26 million**  
children are at **risk**  
of **poverty** or **social**  
exclusion in **Europe**

# INTRODUCTION

Even before the 2008 global financial crisis, Europe registered high levels of child poverty and social exclusion. In 2014, Save the Children's report *Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe: A matter of children's rights* explored the alarming rise in these trends between 2008 and 2012.

Two years later, our new research shows that levels of child poverty across Europe are still unacceptably high. As the latest available European data show, more than 26 million children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Europe.<sup>5</sup> Children living in single parent families, large households or households where the adults have little or no work, and those with parents who have a low level of education or whose parents are migrants are more likely to grow up in poverty. Even those children whose parents are in employment are not necessarily shielded from poverty. In 2014, 9.5% of adults aged 18–64 at risk of poverty in the European Union (EU) were employed. Furthermore, children in the poorest sections of European societies are falling further behind in education, health and quality of life as a consequence of growing inequality in the EU.<sup>6</sup>

Child poverty is multidimensional. Common European data (Eurostat) provide information mainly on material child poverty, measured with indicators calculating the family's income, parents' work intensity and the availability of some goods. But in order to gain a full picture of child poverty and its impact on children's lives, it is essential to look at other aspects of poverty, in particular educational poverty. Educational poverty relates to children's lack of opportunities to learn and develop the skills they will need to succeed in a rapidly changing world (cognitive skills) and to establish relationships with others and discover themselves and the world (non-cognitive skills). Educational poverty also relates to the lack of opportunity to participate in sport, culture and other leisure activities.

In this report, we look at how material deprivation and educational poverty affect children's development and wellbeing in Europe and mutually reinforce the inter-

generational transmission of disadvantage. We have analysed available data on the risk of poverty or social exclusion for children in Europe. In addition, we have examined data on educational performance,<sup>7</sup> childcare and preschool services and levels of early school leaving, and we have asked children themselves for their views. The latest available data show that one 15-year-old child in five in Europe did not reach the minimum competencies in mathematics and reading.

The data highlight strong correlations between children's low educational achievements and parents' low socioeconomic background, and migrant background. Educational poverty is also one of the drivers of youth unemployment, since children who leave school early with few qualifications are more at risk of being unemployed or in low-skilled, poorly-paid jobs as adults.<sup>8</sup> Being materially poor therefore increases the risk of being educationally poor and vice versa. In addition, many children, in particular those living in poor households and neighbourhoods, have limited access to cultural, leisure and sports activities, which contribute to their quality of life, social relationships and overall satisfaction with life.

Save the Children believes that child poverty should be addressed in all its dimensions and with a children's rights approach (see page 10). As well as being obligations of all European governments, under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the protection, promotion and fulfilment of children's rights can prevent children from experiencing poverty and social exclusion, or at least mitigate the consequences. One of the rights enshrined in the UNCRC is every child's right to participate in decisions that affect them. In order to design effective policies to tackle child poverty and social exclusion, including educational poverty, it is essential that we listen to children themselves about their own experiences and what they think policy makers should be doing. For this reason, Save the Children consulted with 300 children in Germany, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain and Sweden. Recommendations from these consultations are included in Chapter 5.



## EUROPEAN AND GLOBAL INITIATIVES TO TACKLE CHILD POVERTY

In recent years, the EU has introduced a number of initiatives to tackle poverty. The *Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, adopted by the EU in 2010, aimed at improving economic efficiency, equality and social justice, and set the objective of lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty by 2020. However, tackling child poverty is not an explicit objective of the strategy and latest available data show that the EU is far from achieving the strategy's anti-poverty target.

In 2013, the European Commission adopted the Recommendation *Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*, which crucially places children's rights, the best interests of the child, equal opportunities and support for the most disadvantaged children at the centre of efforts to combat child poverty and social exclusion. The recommendation highlights that the early years are a critical time for children, as the experiences they go through and the opportunities available to them during this time affect the development of cognitive and non-cognitive skills and physical abilities that will influence the rest of their lives. However, EU member states are not required to report on their progress and to date the recommendation is not being fully implemented.

In September 2015, the international community adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>9</sup> and 169 targets to be achieved by 2030. These specifically call for the eradication of extreme poverty and halving poverty in all its dimensions, based on national definitions, for all groups including children. Furthermore, SDG 4 aims to ensure 'inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (see box). In addition, the agenda pledges to leave no one behind, which means that it must necessarily favour those who are currently disadvantaged – poorer households, women and, above all, children.



PHOTO: ALESSANDRO GAROFALO

Children participating in a workshop at Save the Children Italy's 'Spotlight Centre' in Naples Barra, Italy. Children from the most disadvantaged families have fewer opportunities to join cultural activities, go to the theatre or cinema.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS): A TOOL TO FIGHT CHILD POVERTY AND EDUCATIONAL POVERTY IN EUROPE

The Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a number of child-focused targets that reflect key principles of the UNCRC, including:

- SDG 1:** to eradicate extreme poverty and reduce by at least half the proportion of children living in poverty in all its dimensions
- SDG 3:** to ensure that no child dies from causes that can be prevented or treated
- SDG 4:** to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- SDG 5:** to ensure that all women and girls are protected from violence and exploitation
- SDG 10:** cross-cutting goal to reduce inequality within and among countries

Save the Children believes that the Agenda 2030 is an important instrument in building more equal and just societies, and in designing and implementing coherent and effective policies to eradicate child poverty and social exclusion across Europe. The SDGs could contribute to a more thorough realisation of the rights of all children which are enshrined in the UNCRC and also support EU member states in implementing the European Commission's Recommendation *Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*.

The EU and European countries have played a crucial role in promoting the Sustainable Development Agenda and are now expected to deliver on their commitments. Building sustainable, cohesive societies implies investing in the most vulnerable groups and providing them with the means to be active members of a society they feel they belong to. These efforts should start with a focus on children, especially children at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Chapters 1 and 2 of this report analyse Eurostat data on the risk of poverty or social exclusion for children across Europe. The chapters look at some factors that influence the risk of poverty such as effectiveness of social transfers, parents' participation in the labour market and parents' level of education.

Chapter 3 analyses available European-level data on educational poverty, mainly referring to acquisition of skills in school and the offer of educational services from early childhood, along with the drivers of inequality. Data used in this chapter are the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey 2012, Eurostat 2015 data on early school leaving, and Eurostat 2014 data on access to childcare and preschool.

Chapter 4 gives children's insights into their own experiences of education and their views about what policy makers and politicians should be doing to eradicate educational poverty. Their recommendations are also an integral part of Chapter 5, which draws conclusions and includes a number of recommendations for policy makers at EU and national level.

**In our analysis, the term 'Europe' refers to the 28 European Union (EU) members along with Norway, Iceland and Switzerland.**



Children playing football at Save the Children Italy's 'Spotlight Centre' in Naples Barra, Italy. The right to play is enshrined in the UNCRIC but is often disregarded.

## THE RIGHTS APPROACH TO CHILD POVERTY

Save the Children believes that child poverty should be addressed from a children's rights perspective. Guaranteeing the right to education, in particular, can provide disadvantaged children with the tools to break intergenerational cycles of poverty.

Every European government has signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), several articles of which are directly related to fighting child poverty. These include the right to:

- participation (Article 12)
- an adequate standard of living (Article 27)
- social security (Article 26)
- survival and development (Article 6)
- childcare and education (Articles 18.3, 28, 29)
- health (Article 24)
- leisure, play and culture (Article 31)
- protection from violence and neglect (Articles 19, 34, 35, 36)
- non-discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status (Article 2).

As all EU member states have ratified the UNCRC, "the EU is bound to adhere to the principles and provisions enshrined therein, at least in relation to matters that fall within the scope of the EU's competence (as defined by the EU treaties)." <sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the EU's Lisbon Treaty provides that protecting the rights of children is an objective of the EU. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU guarantees the protection of children's rights by EU institutions and EU member states when they implement EU law.

Protecting, promoting and fulfilling the rights of the child requires adequate budget allocations. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has recently adopted General Comment No.19 on *Public budgeting for the realization of children's rights*,<sup>11</sup> which provides recommendations on how to budget in effective, efficient, equitable, transparent and sustainable ways for children's rights to become a reality. European countries and the EU should take into account General Comment No.19 when developing national and EU budgets. By complying with the UNCRC and fulfilling children's rights, the EU and European governments can prevent children experiencing – or at least mitigate the consequences of – poverty.

# 1. CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN EUROPE

***“We sleep four in the same room, my mother, my father, my sister and me, because my house is too small. When I come home in winter I’m cold, and in summer [it’s] too hot.” Girl, Spain***

The EU measures poverty and social exclusion through the ‘at risk of poverty or social exclusion’ (AROPE) composite indicator, which measures relative poverty. It is comprised of three sub-indicators: ‘at-risk-of’ poverty, ‘severe material deprivation’ and ‘very low work intensity’. (See Appendix 2 for more detail.)

According to the most recent data, more than 26 million children in Europe are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (in the 28 EU member states, Iceland and Norway).<sup>12</sup> Within the European Union (EU), almost one-third of children (28%) are at risk of poverty and social exclusion.<sup>13</sup> Together, these children would make up the seventh most populated country in the EU. Among them, 21% are at risk of poverty after social transfers, meaning that they live in households with a disposable income below 60% of the national median, 10% are in households with very low work intensity, and 10% live in severely deprived households.<sup>14</sup>

## 1.1. DYNAMICS OF CHILD POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN EUROPE

The risk of poverty increases when children live in single parent families (+11 percentage points), or in large households (+6 percentage points).<sup>15</sup> Particularly worrisome is the number of children who live in severe poverty, namely in households with a disposable income of less than 40% of the national median, almost one child in ten (8%),<sup>16</sup> and those who live in a persistent risk of poverty (13%),<sup>17</sup> meaning that they have been living below the risk of poverty threshold for the current year and at least two of the preceding three years.

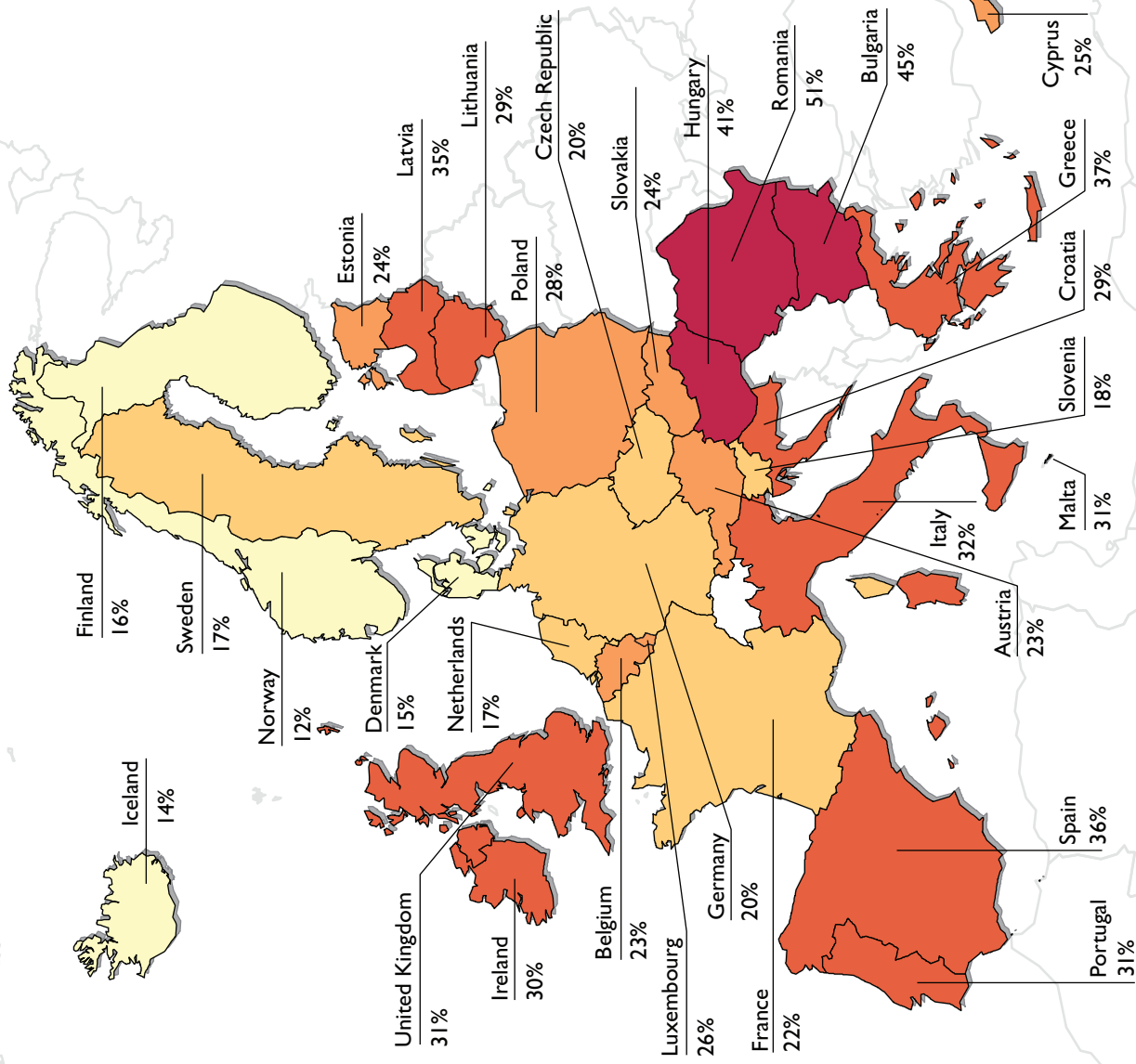
Although there are different trends across European countries,<sup>18</sup> none is free from child poverty. As outlined in Figure 1, the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion reaches 35% or more in Bulgaria, Hungary, Greece, Spain and Latvia and goes up to 51% in Romania. Even in Nordic countries and the Netherlands, which historically have had low socioeconomic inequality and well-developed welfare systems, the percentage ranges between 12% and 17%. Child poverty is also present in European countries with the highest GDP per capita. In Luxembourg, Ireland and Austria, for example, the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion ranges between one-fifth and one-third of the child population.<sup>19</sup>

Since the start of the global financial crisis in 2008, the proportion of children who are poor or socially excluded has been on the rise. Between 2008 and 2014, the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Europe went up by more than 700,000. The percentage of children at risk of poverty and exclusion in the EU increased by up to 2 percentage points (pp) between 2008 and 2012, and has remained almost stable in subsequent years.<sup>20</sup> The economic crisis has hit employment and welfare systems, with the consequent loss of jobs and drastic cuts in benefits and services.<sup>21</sup> “Budget analyses suggest that 70% of the burden of cuts in benefits and services have fallen on women, with a significant impact on childcare and family life.”<sup>22</sup> With respect to the Europe 2020 objective of lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty by 2020, the latest available data show that the EU is far from achieving this target.<sup>23</sup> This is particularly salient for children.

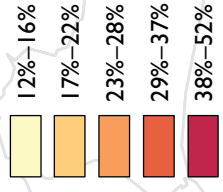
***“By poverty I understand that there are not enough money and conditions to allow you to have at least a decent life.”***

***Child, Romania***

**Figure 1: Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) (%)**



Children at risk of poverty and social exclusion



The At Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion (AROPE) indicator is composed of three sub-indicators:

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

AROPE for children is obtained by extrapolating data for individuals below the age of 18.

Source: EU-SILC (2014)

Only a few countries have seen a reduction in the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion since the beginning of the crisis: Poland, Slovakia, Germany and Norway. Nevertheless, for Slovakia, Germany and Norway the decrease has been minimal (1 pp). Conversely, these countries have acknowledged an increase in the persistence of the risk of poverty among children (Germany + 2.6 pp). In Poland the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion went down substantially (5 pp), but the level remains high – almost one-third. In addition, a decrease in the risk of poverty or social exclusion rate does not necessarily indicate a genuine improvement in the living standards of households with children as it might be due to a reduction in the national median income. This is the case in Slovakia and Germany, for example, where the median income has declined in real terms in the last two years.<sup>24</sup>

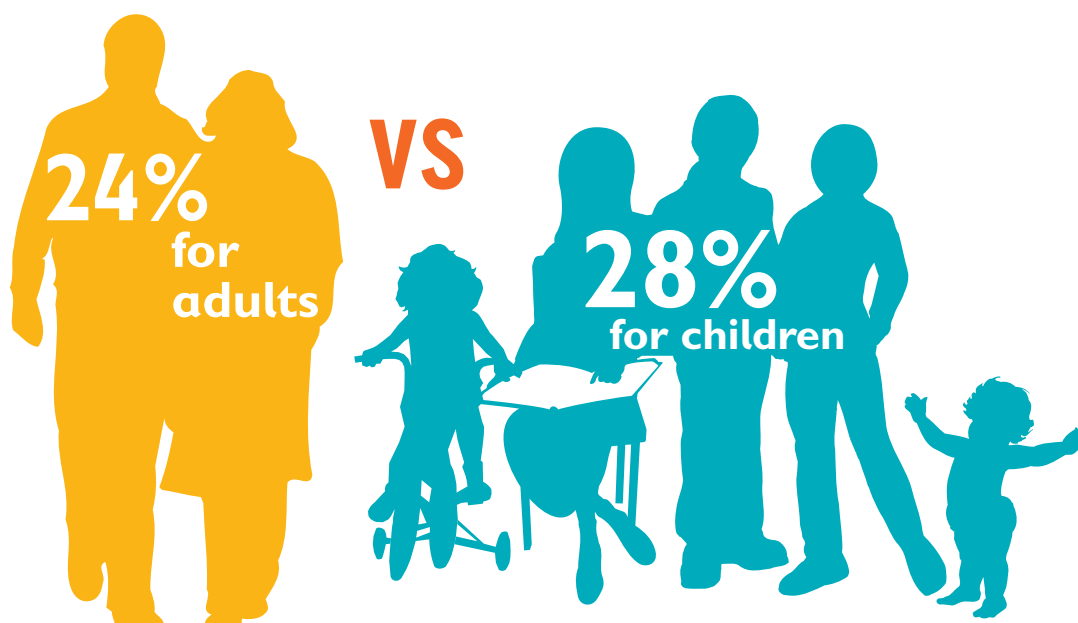
Malta, Estonia, Luxembourg, Ireland and Sweden, which had the largest GDP growth among EU countries since the beginning of the crisis, have also seen an increase in their share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (between 2 and 6 pp).<sup>25</sup> These trends confirm that the crucial issue of poverty and child poverty in high-income countries, including European countries, is its persistence among identifiable groups and an inequitable distribution of wealth.<sup>26</sup>

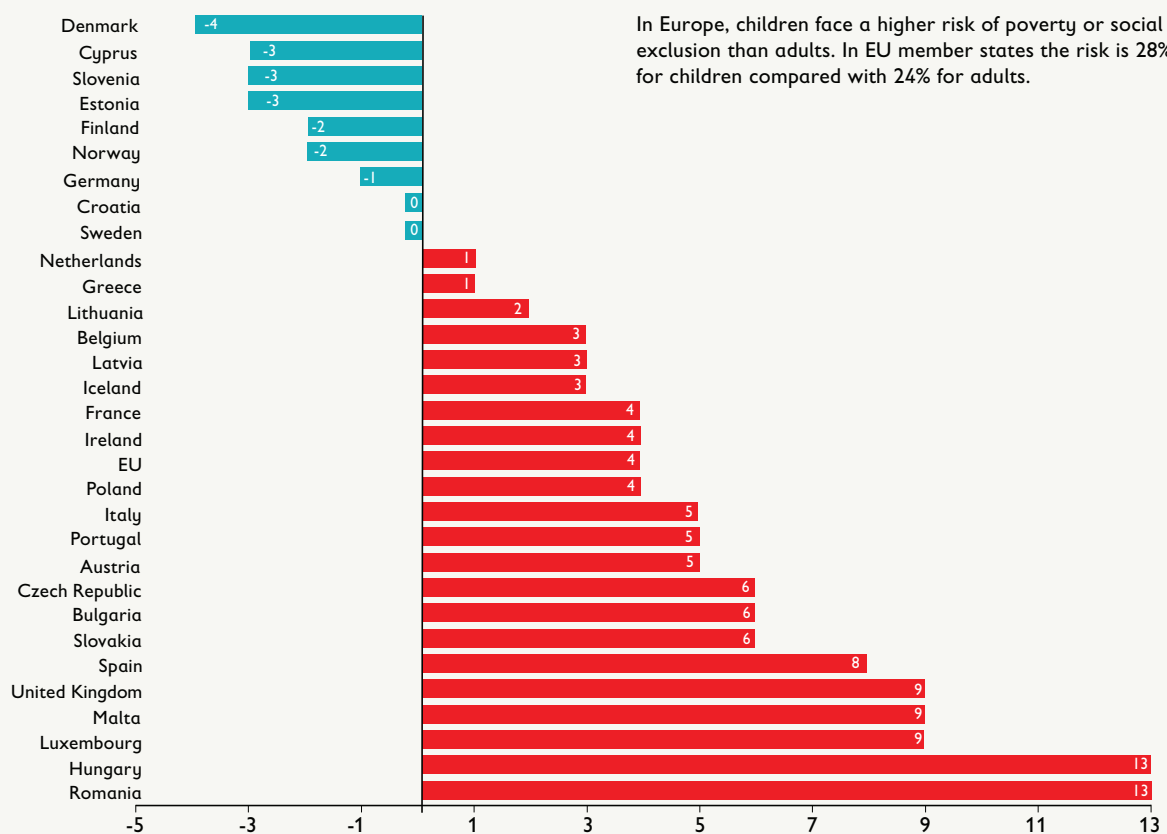
## 1.2. CHILD VS. ADULT POVERTY

The risk of poverty or social exclusion is significantly higher among children than adults. In EU member states the risk is 28% for children compared with 24% for adults.<sup>27</sup> As shown in Figure 2, the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion is 5 pp higher or more in nine countries (more than 10 pp in Hungary and Romania). In only nine countries – Denmark, Cyprus, Slovenia, Estonia, Finland, Norway, Germany, Croatia and Sweden – is the risk lower for children than adults. Whereas an adult may risk falling into poverty or being socially excluded temporarily, without this necessarily having any major consequences, growing up in poverty can have negative effects on children that can last for life.

**“Some people feel left out because they can’t take part in stuff that goes on. It’s important that classmates don’t distinguish so much between rich and poor.”**  
Girl, Norway

## IN EU MEMBER STATES THE RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION IS



**Figure 2: (%) Difference in risk of poverty or social exclusion between children and adults**

Source: EU-SILC (2014)

***“My father is unemployed, because the factory closed. My mother is at home but she is looking for a job, if my parents say ‘no’, I know it’s for a reason. My parents want us to be happy, if they say no it’s because they have no money. I understand.”***

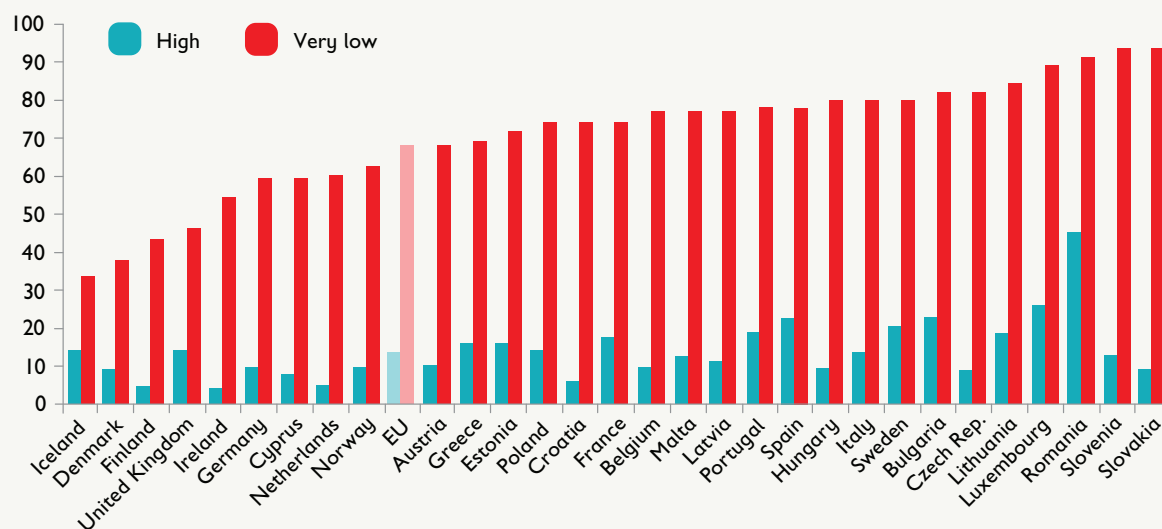
***Girl, Spain***

### 1.3. CHILD POVERTY AND PARENTS’ PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

One of the chief factors that determines whether a child is living in poverty is the employment status of her or his parents. A secure job with an adequate income – not mere participation in the labour market – is essential if parents are to provide adequate living standards for their children. Furthermore, secure and quality employment enhances parents’ autonomy and self-esteem, which in turn benefits children’s social and emotional stability. In particular, a number of studies have shown the key role

that mothers’ employment plays in their children’s early years and long-term wellbeing.<sup>28</sup> Job losses as a result of the financial crisis have been one of the main causes of the increase in child poverty levels in Europe in recent years.

As Figure 3 illustrates, children who live in households with parents working less than 20% of their potential (very low work intensity) are at greater risk of poverty – 67% on average in the EU, compared with 13% for children whose parents work between 55 and 85% of their time (high work intensity).<sup>29</sup> To sum up, children with parents with very low work intensity are 54% more likely to be at risk of poverty. The likelihood ratio is 60% or above in 12 countries in Europe, reaching more than 80% in Slovenia and Slovakia. The financial and economic crisis has exacerbated the gap between children in most European countries: in Latvia, Lithuania and Denmark, the likelihood ratio has increased between 5 and 7 pp, in Romania 13 pp and Luxembourg 15 pp. Even in countries with well-developed welfare systems targeting vulnerable groups, such as the Nordic countries and Netherlands, the likelihood ratio has grown: Iceland +9 pp, Netherlands +10 pp and Norway, which has seen the highest increase among European countries, +25 pp.

**Figure 3: % Children at risk of poverty per work intensity of the household**

Children living in families with very low work intensity are 54% more likely to be at risk of poverty than those living in families with high work intensity. The likelihood ratio is 60% or above in 12 European countries, reaching more than 80% in Slovenia and Slovakia.

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

Source: EU-SILC (2014)

The risk of poverty among children living in households with high work intensity highlights the fact that parents' participation in the labour market is not sufficient to shield children from poverty. As shown in Figure 3, this is the case for Romania, Luxembourg, Bulgaria, Spain and Sweden, where 20% of children or more are at risk of poverty even though they live with parents with high work intensity.

A number of studies have shown that in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, finding employment prevented people from falling into poverty in only 50% of cases.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, households that are in work and poor make up a significant – and, in some countries, growing – proportion of all those in poverty. In 2014, 9.5% of employed adults (aged 18–64) in the EU were at risk of poverty, which means that they had an income below the 60% median income.<sup>31</sup> It is essential, therefore, that parents' job security, adequate salary levels, job progression<sup>32</sup> and the possibility of reconciling work and family life<sup>33</sup> are addressed in order to tackle child poverty.

#### 1.4. EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL TRANSFERS

Findings on the share of the risk of poverty for children in relation to parents' low work intensity illustrate the

**“Poverty means the financial impossibility to buy, get or pay for basic goods and services required for daily living.”** *Child, Romania*

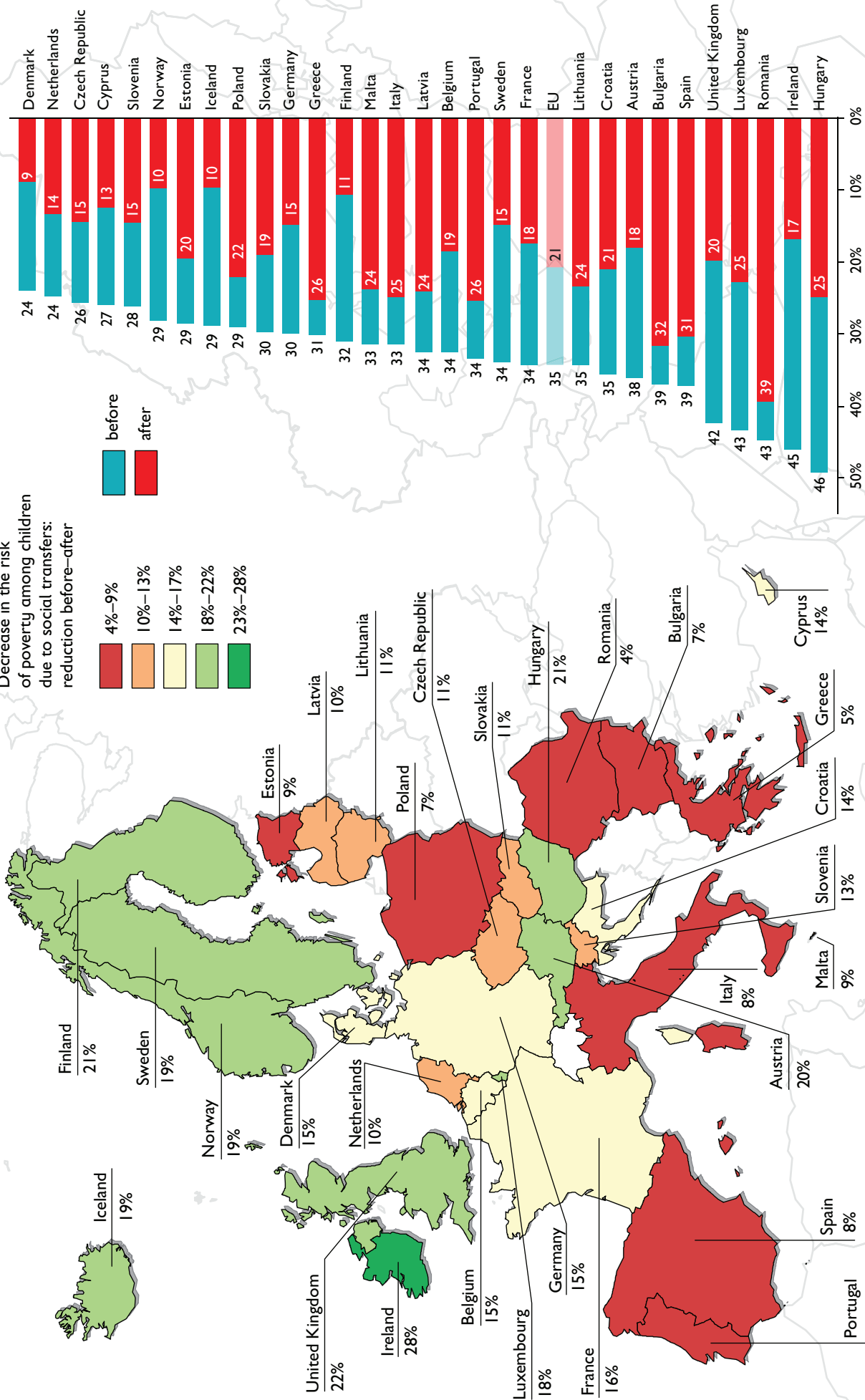
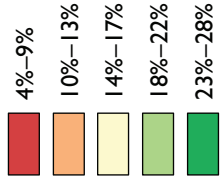
weakness of public spending, both in terms of financial capacities and the design of effective measures and services, in guaranteeing adequate income support to parents 'out of work' or in precarious working conditions. Social transfers have a major role in tackling child poverty. As well as being substantial in financial terms, they should also be designed to target families and children, and above all those with the greatest need.<sup>34</sup>

Social housing, access to employment and parental leave, a minimum wage, unemployment benefits, tax deductions, and access to early childhood education and care are among the measures that governments can employ to reduce child poverty and social exclusion.<sup>35</sup>

According to data from 2014, in Romania, Greece, Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal, Malta and Spain, the share of children at risk of poverty decreases by less than 10 pp as a result of social transfers (well below 14 pp, the EU average). In Austria, Hungary, Finland, the UK and Ireland welfare provisions lead to a reduction in child poverty by 20 pp or more. Although Hungary, the UK and Ireland have effective public policies targeting children, the high incidence of poverty before state intervention (between 40 and 50%) means that they rank high in the share of children at risk of poverty after social transfers. Conversely, in the case of Greece, the share before social transfers is lower (32%, basically the same as in Germany), but the capacity of the Greek's welfare system to further reduce this share is minimal (5 pp compared with 15 pp in Germany).<sup>36</sup>

Figure 4: Decrease in risk of poverty among children after social transfer (%)

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



Social transfers can play an important role in reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion. Their effectiveness depends on the levels of spending directly targeting families and children, and how substantial they are.



## 2. INEQUALITY: THE ROOT CAUSE OF CHILD POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Countries with high levels of inequality or in which distributional patterns of growth do not favour poorer households are less efficient in combating poverty, especially child poverty.<sup>37</sup>

Data show that in Norway, Finland, Denmark, Slovenia, Iceland, Sweden, Austria and the Czech Republic, countries with fewer inequalities, children are less likely to be at risk of poverty and social exclusion.<sup>38</sup> However, in recent decades inequality has been on the rise across the EU. **The top 10% of households now earn 31% of total income and own over 50% of total wealth. The top 5% of the income distribution earn 20% of total income and own 37% of the total wealth.**<sup>39</sup> Growing inequalities have had negative consequences for children in Europe, with those at the bottom end falling further behind in education, health and life satisfaction.<sup>40</sup> Wealth is increasingly concentrated in a small section of society, with fewer working families able to invest in their children's opportunities.<sup>41</sup> Even though the argument that increasing inequality is bad for economic growth has gained global consensus, many European countries continue to adopt regressive tax systems and fiscal policies that favour a concentration of capital among a minority of their population.<sup>42</sup>

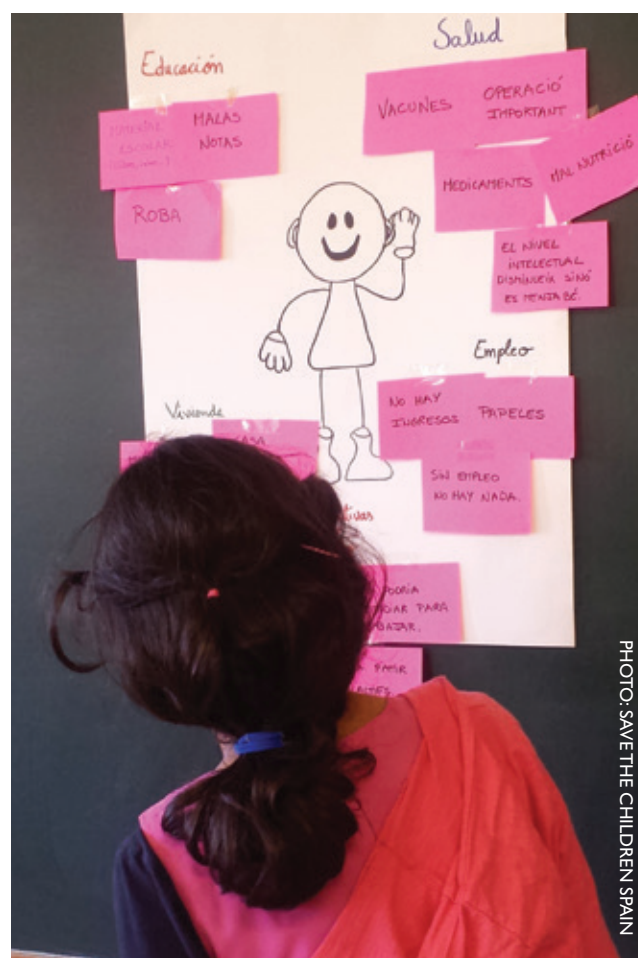
The UNCRC affirms that rights and opportunities for human and social development apply to every child, whatever her or his race, religion or abilities, family background or country of origin.<sup>43</sup> All European countries have ratified the UNCRC but, according to Save the Children's analyses, the extent to which they fulfil children's rights is strongly influenced by the socioeconomic status of the child's parents, and/or their racial or ethnic background, migrant status, or region where they were born.

### 2.1. PARENTS' LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Children's inequalities are strongly influenced by the socioeconomic status of their parents, notably their level of education. Children whose parents have the lowest levels (pre-primary, primary or lower secondary) of education have a substantially higher probability of being at risk of poverty or social exclusion compared with children whose parents have medium to high education levels (upper secondary and post-secondary).

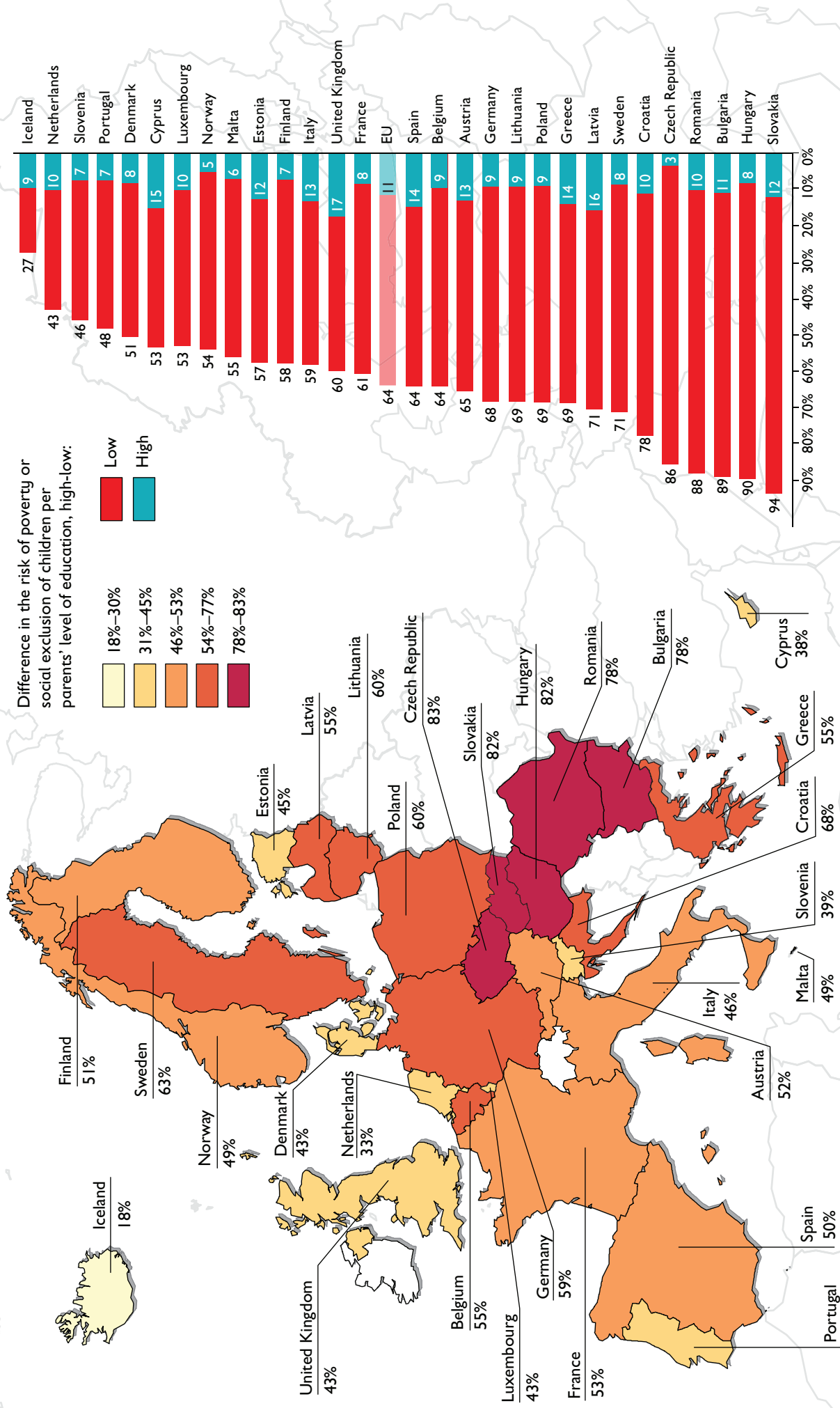
Inequalities in relation to parents' education are widespread across Europe. In all European countries (except Iceland), the average difference between parents with low and medium levels of education is 30 pp, exceeding 40 pp in 25 European countries. In Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic, the gap is more than 80 pp. The average difference among EU members is 32 pp (64% vs. 32%).<sup>44</sup>

As shown in Figure 5, the difference reaches 53 pp at EU level, when the comparison is made instead between children with parents with the lowest and highest (tertiary) levels of education. Between 2012 and 2014, the gap increased by 2 pp and has increased by 9 pp since 2008.<sup>45</sup>



Young girl participating in Save the Children Spain's workshop on education. Save the Children held workshops with children in Germany, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain and Sweden to ask about what educational poverty means for them.

**Figure 5: Difference in the risk of poverty or social exclusion (%) among children per parents' level of education**



Parents' level of education strongly influences children's risk of poverty or social exclusion. Children whose parents have the lowest levels (pre-primary, primary or lower secondary) of education have a substantially higher probability of being at risk of poverty and social exclusion compared with children whose parents have highest (tertiary) levels of education: the difference reaches 53 pp at EU level.

Source: EU-SILC (2014)

It is important to underline that these data do not imply that parents with a low level of education care less about their children. Since parents' education is highly correlated with employment status and earnings, the findings actually indicate that children born into and growing up in socially and economically disadvantaged households face a higher risk of living in poverty and marginalisation. In light of increasing income and wealth inequality in Europe, these differences highlight that children's opportunities are and will be increasingly influenced by parents' level of education, employment and socioeconomic status, unless these trends are reversed.

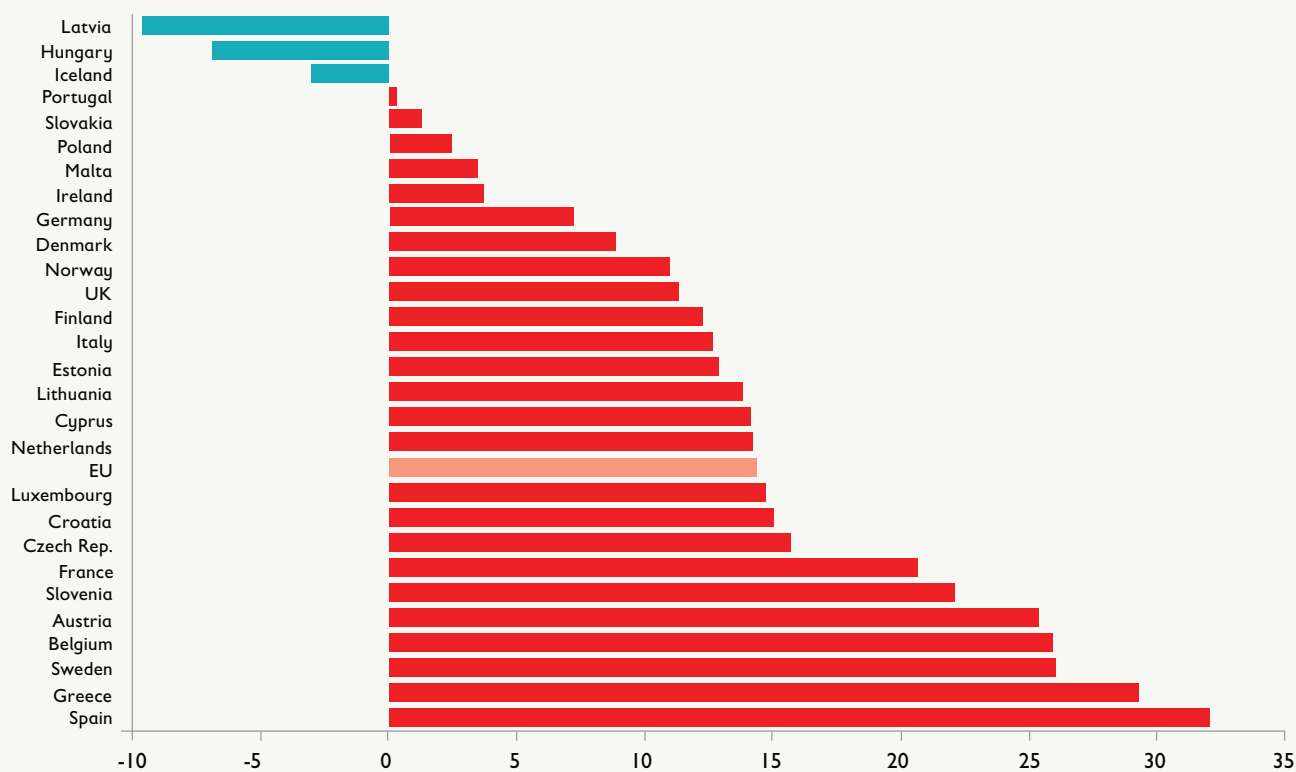
## 2.2. PARENTS' COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

In all European countries except Latvia, Hungary and Iceland, the risk of children being in poverty is strongly

correlated with their parents' country of origin. Higher rates of the risk of poverty are observed among children with parents born in a foreign country, compared with children whose parents were born in the reporting country (33% vs. 18%). In France, Slovenia, Austria, Belgium, Sweden, Greece and Spain, the difference is more than 20 pp. Foreign-born parents are more likely to be unemployed or in unskilled occupations in sectors that have been particularly vulnerable to the economic crisis.<sup>46</sup>

It is important to stress that Eurostat data for people born in a foreign country include data for EU migrants and third-country nationals, without disaggregating the information on these groups or providing specific data for economic migrants and beneficiaries of international protection. It is therefore impossible to assess the specific poverty risks among these groups of people.

**Figure 6: % Difference in risk of poverty between children with parents born in a foreign country and those with parents born in the reporting country**



Source: EU-SILC (2014)

In all European countries apart from three, the risk of being in poverty is higher among children of parents born in another country than among those whose parents were born in the reporting country.

# 3. EDUCATIONAL POVERTY AMONG CHILDREN IN EUROPE

***“Culture is important because it enables you to choose what to do in life and achieve it. It is the basis of everything. Music is important because it opens your mind. I liked it a lot when I went to a concert with my mum. I felt part of something important and magic.” Boy, Italy***

**As mentioned previously, child poverty is multidimensional and cannot be described solely in terms of material and economic deprivation.**

Among other things, poverty has an impact on children’s educational achievements. It impairs their performance at school, hinders development of their talents and limits their aspirations. Child poverty not only affects early childhood, it also jeopardises children’s futures. Quality education, from the early years, is key in promoting the full development of children. Nonetheless, since the beginning of the global financial crisis in 2008, there has been a constant decline in public spending on education in EU member states, with an average drop of 3% between 2010 and 2013.<sup>47</sup>

Save the Children defines educational poverty as a process that limits children’s right to education and deprives them of the opportunities to learn and develop the skills they will need to succeed in a rapidly changing world (cognitive skills). It also means having less chance to grow emotionally, establish relationships with others and discover oneself and the world (non-cognitive skills). Educational poverty tends to be transmitted across generations, but it is a process that can and *should* be changed.

***“Poverty is a barrier – for poor children, poverty is an obstacle for their education and development.”***  
*Child, Romania*

## 3.1. CHILDREN’S POVERTY IN COGNITIVE SKILLS

Cognitive skills are primarily developed and achieved at school and can be measured in part through internationally recognised tests, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which is promoted by the Organisation for Overseas Co-operation and Development (OECD) (for more detail, see Appendix 2.). Non-cognitive skills are often neglected, but are equally important. These skills can be developed through, for example, leisure, cultural activities, civic engagement and family and social relations.

The PISA survey tests reading and mathematical literacy in terms of general competencies to assess how students can apply the knowledge and skills they have learned at school against real-life situations. Based on the 2012 PISA tests (the most recent providing comparable data across Europe), 22% of 15-year-olds in Europe were unable to apply mathematics they learned in school to real-life scenarios (Figure 7) and 20% were low achievers in reading (Figure 8).

Figure 7: % Children low achievers in mathematics

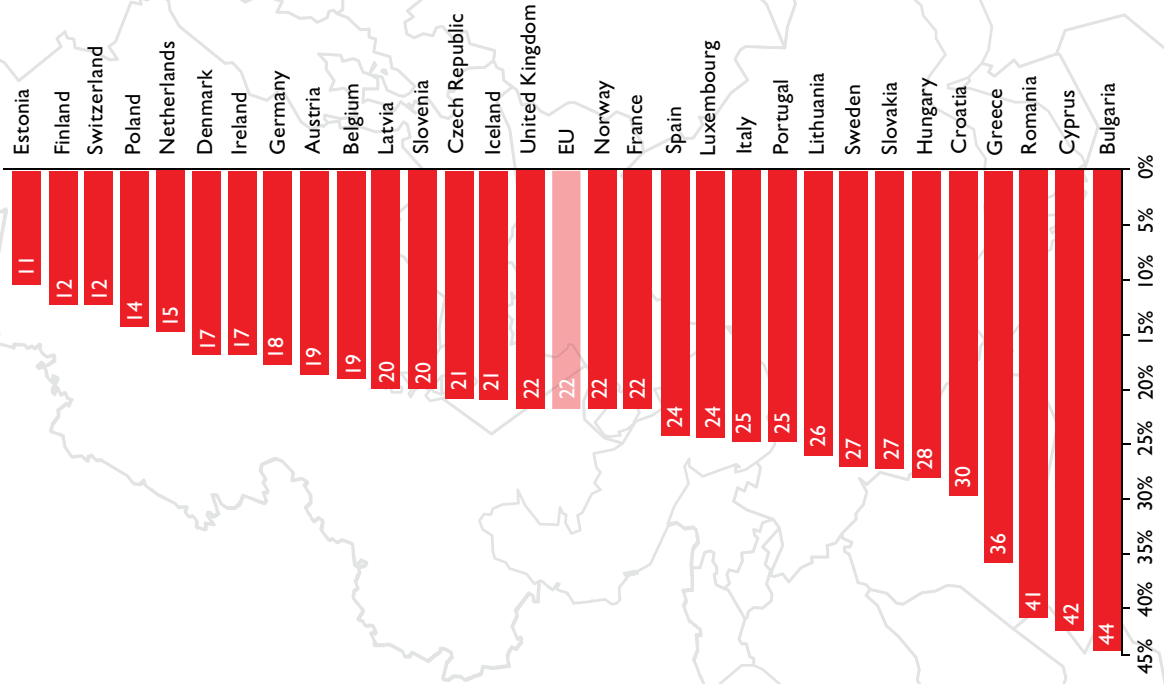
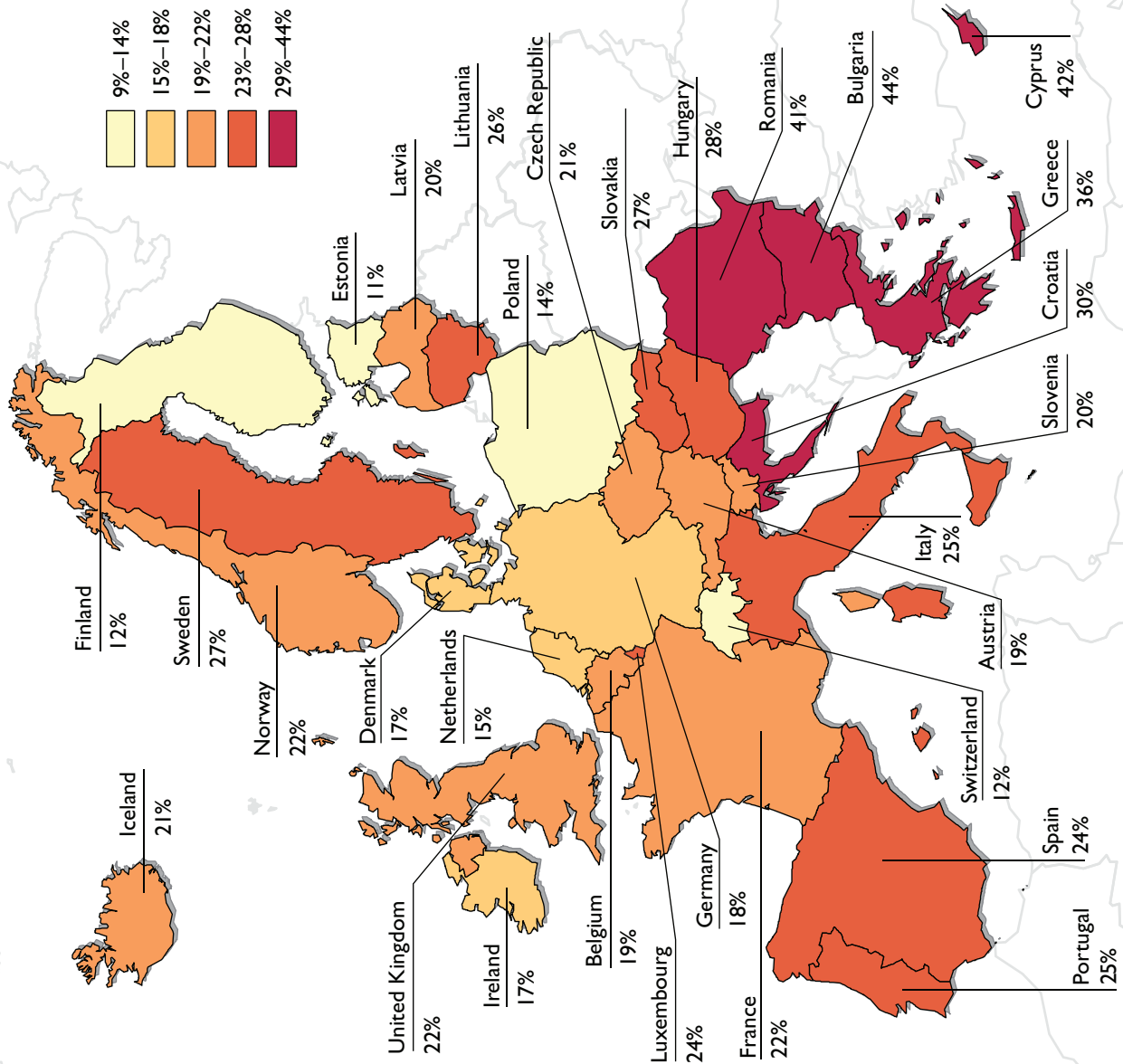
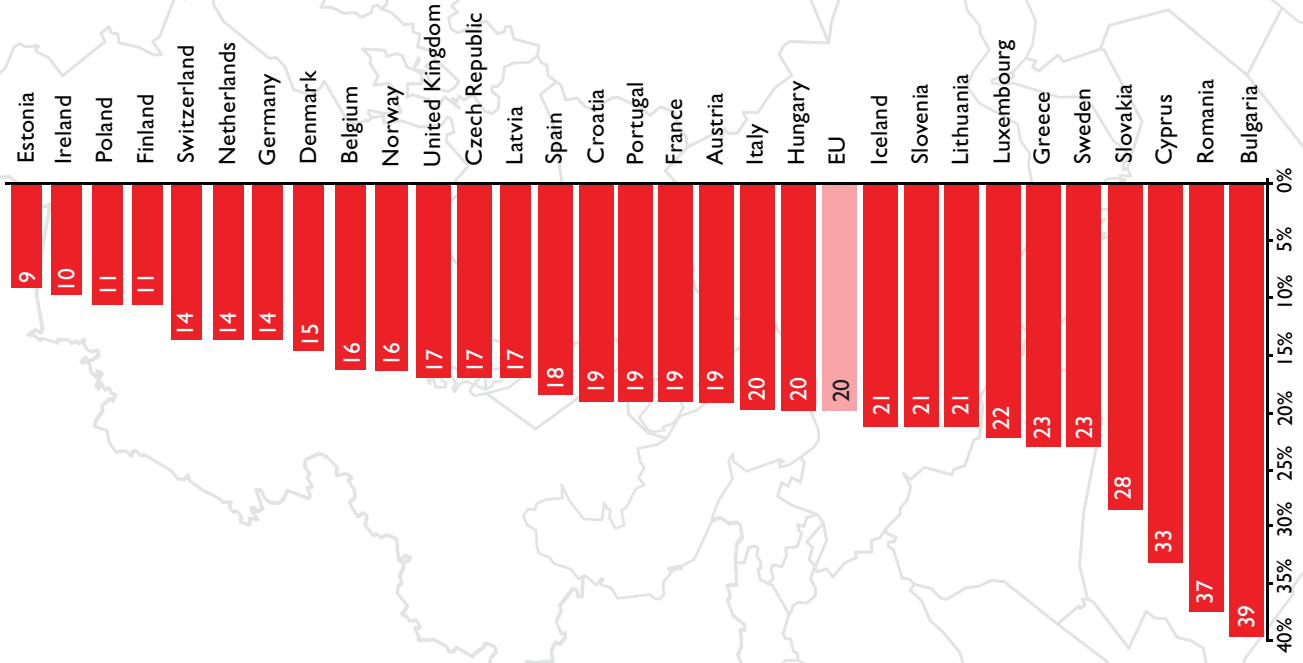
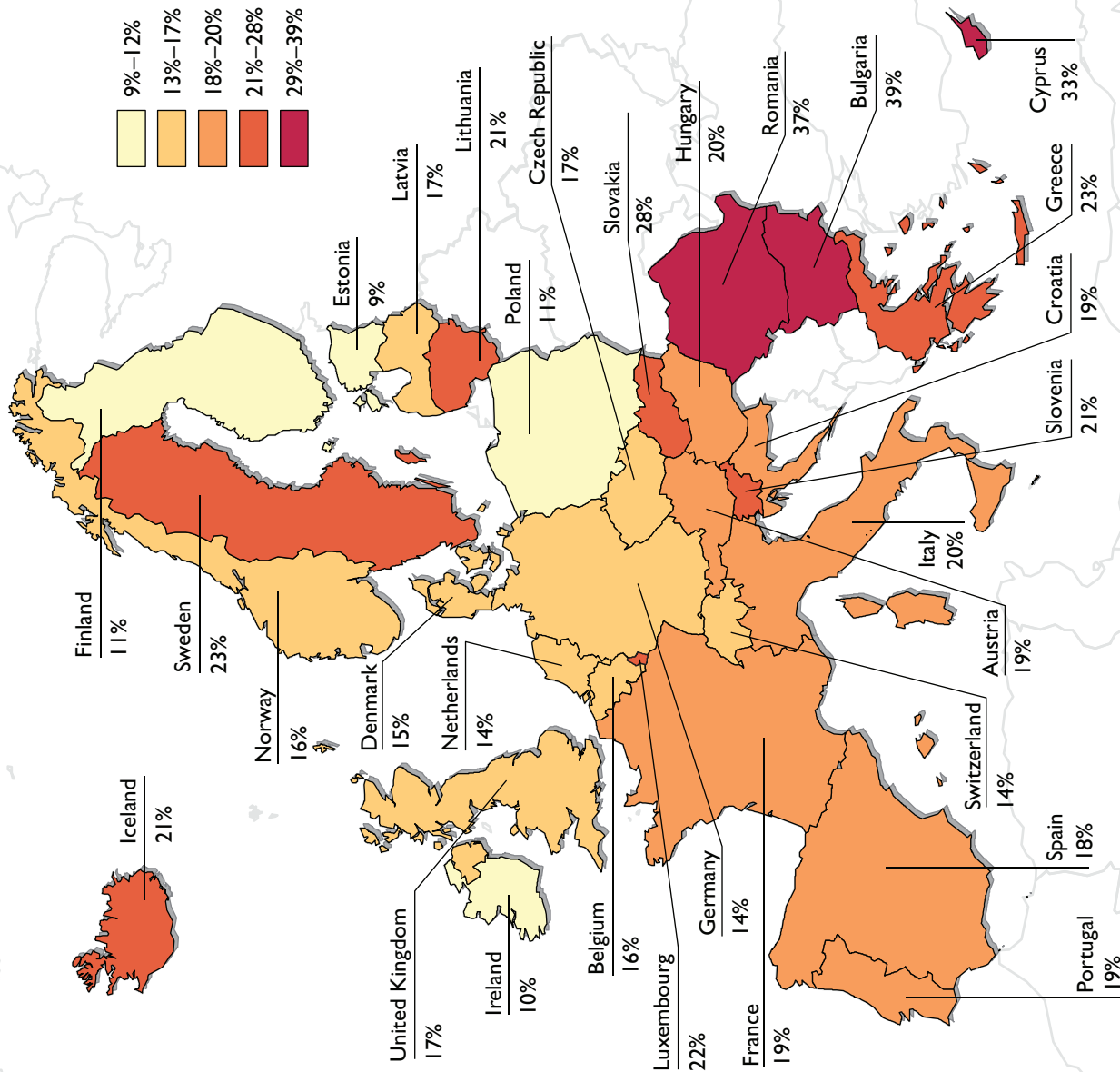


Figure 8: % Children low achievers in reading



Source: OECD (2012)

Differences among European countries are substantial. In Bulgaria, Cyprus, Romania and Greece, more than one-third of 15-year-old students are low achievers in mathematics and reading (Figures 7 and 8). In Bulgaria, the 44% of children are low achievers in mathematics (Figure 7), very close to figures for Malaysia and Mexico.<sup>48</sup> Even in the Netherlands, where the percentage is 15%, almost one of every seven children is a low achiever in mathematics. Similar figures can be observed for poverty in reading competencies (Figure 8).

### 3.2. INEQUALITY AND EDUCATIONAL POVERTY: PARENTS' SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND

As well as parents' employment status and level of education, the OECD's PISA survey takes into account whether children have access to resources at home and to cultural activities that will assist them in their educational development. As Figure 9 shows, 15-year-olds with parents from the most disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are 33% more likely not to reach minimum competencies in mathematics.<sup>49</sup> In Greece, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, the difference between the most disadvantaged and most privileged families exceeds 40 pp. In every country the difference is 20 pp or more, except in Iceland and Ireland (where it is 10 pp). In France and Denmark, despite high education spending and policies aimed at reducing educational inequalities,

the differences are extremely high (37 pp and 35 pp). In Luxembourg, the country with the highest GDP per capita in Europe, the ratio is 45% vs. 6%. As shown in Figure 10, similar findings are observed in relation to reading competencies.

For the many children living in economically and socially disadvantaged households, this means being deprived of basic educational opportunities (including not having a room where they can study, not going to the theatre, cinema or cultural events, not being able to join a sports club, etc). It is a vicious cycle: material deprivation leads to educational poverty and vice versa. Not only is this intergenerational transmission of disadvantage unfair and costly for individuals, it is detrimental for the economy and society as a whole.<sup>50</sup> As a result, countries should adopt policies aimed at combatting the intergenerational transmission of inequalities, by ensuring high-quality universal services for children (in particular in education and health), while also embarking on wage and fiscal policies reducing income inequalities among families.<sup>51</sup>

***“When I become a parent, I want to teach my children to dream, persevere, make it happen and ‘do your best at school’.”***

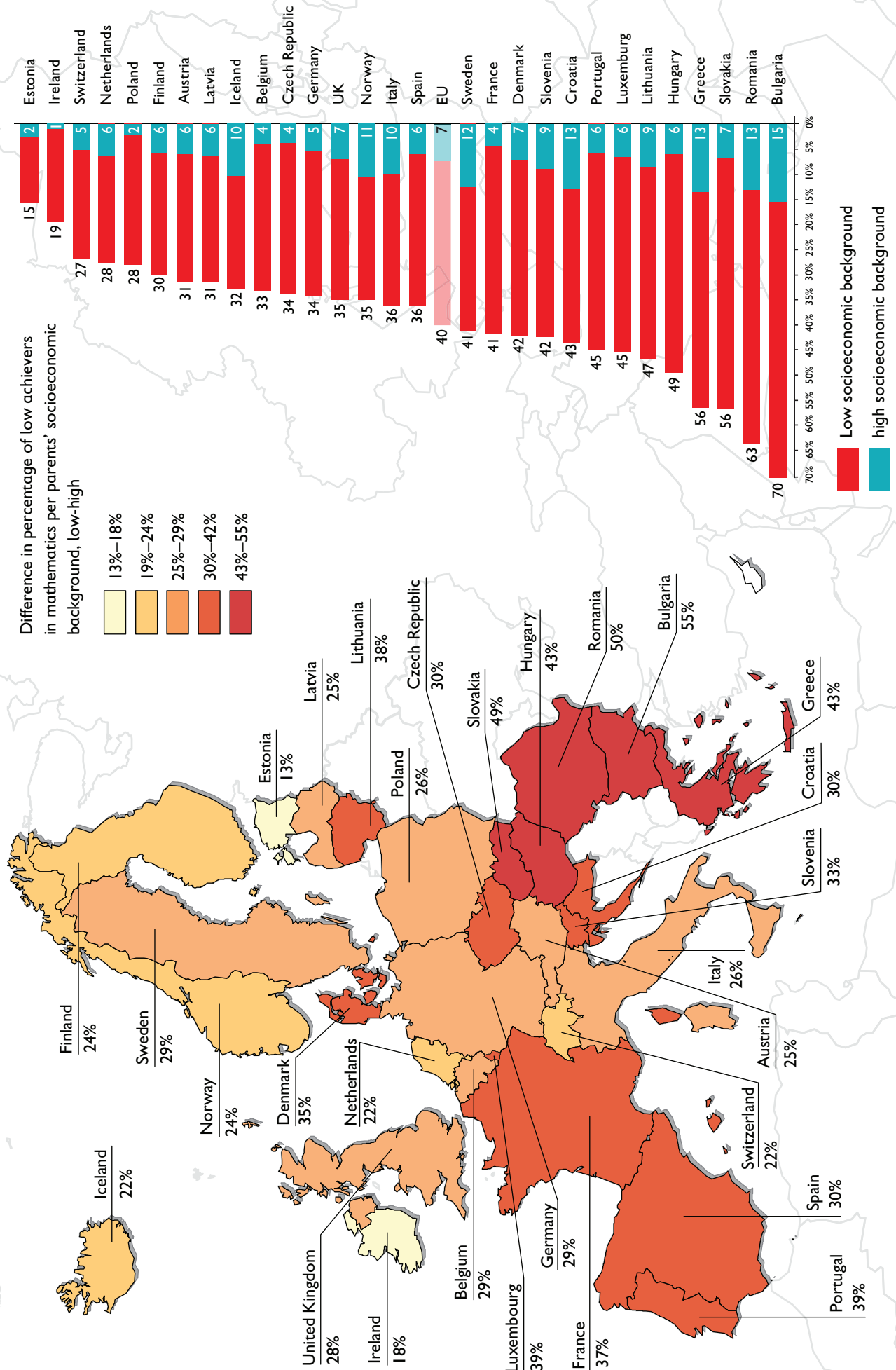
***Boy, Netherlands***



PHOTO: FRANCESCO ALESI

**A Save the Children volunteer helps a girl with homework in the ‘Spotlight Centre’ in Turin, Italy. Children have told us that dedicated spaces for after-school activities are critical in building relations with their peers.**

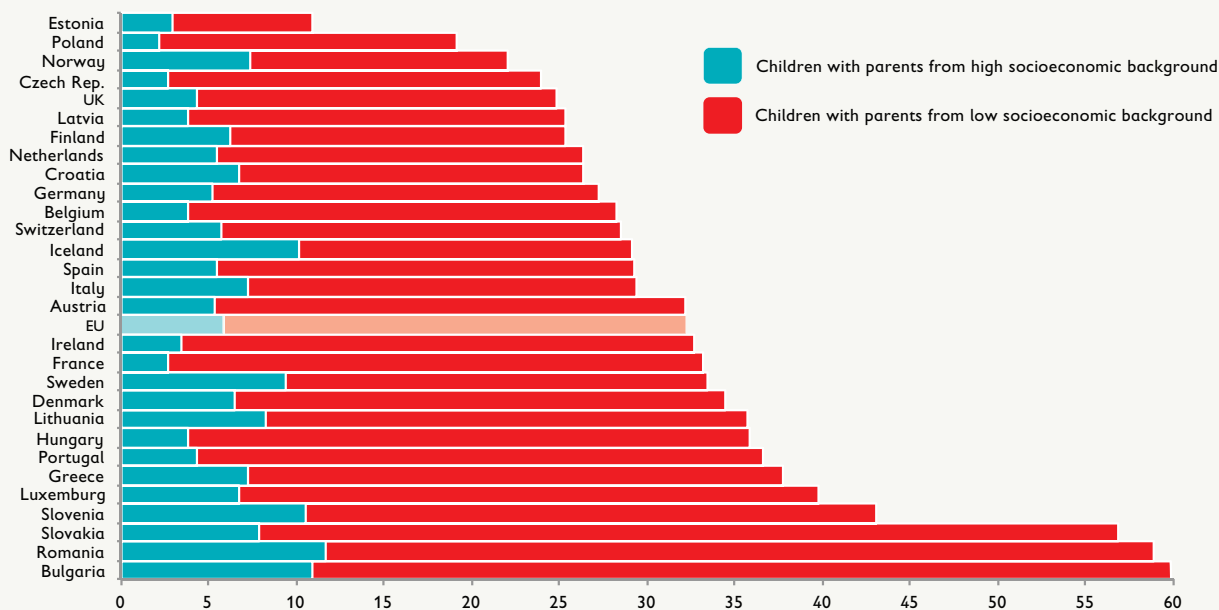
**Figure 9: Difference in the percentage of low achievers in mathematics per parents' socioeconomic background**



Source: OECD (2012)



**Figure 10: Difference in percentage of children low achievers in reading per parents' socioeconomic background**



Source: OECD (2012)

Children with parents from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be low achievers in mathematics (33% more likely) and reading (26% more likely) compared with children with parents from the top socioeconomic background. OECD refers to 'socioeconomic and cultural status'. In this report we use the term 'socioeconomic background'.

***"I know that going to school is important, but to do that I need a lot of money. When I ask my mum for money, she grumbles and explains that now that dad is inside [prison] I can't ask for much... all these notebooks, pens, books. But if I don't have them, teachers get angry, and classmates make fun of me, and I do not want to go back."***

***Child, Italy***

Countries where there is a high percentage difference between children living in the most deprived households and those who are more fortunate are also countries where the incidence of educational poverty, at national level, is more accentuated.<sup>52</sup> As a result, reducing inequalities by lifting up the competencies of the most marginalised children is the most effective strategy to eradicate educational poverty at a national level.

Even without such measures, and despite the discrimination and disadvantage experienced by children in poor households, some students from poorer households do acquire competencies above the minimum standard. Indeed, across Europe 2.8% of top performers in mathematics and 1.3% in reading are from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>53</sup> In Austria, Germany, Iceland and Finland, around 5% of students from disadvantaged households are among the top performers in maths. In Estonia and Belgium, the figure is 7% and in the Netherlands, 7.5%. In Norway, 4% of children from the most disadvantaged households reach the best level in reading.

### 3.3. INEQUALITY AND EDUCATIONAL POVERTY: GENDER

OECD data on student performances also highlight the existence of differences related to gender.<sup>54</sup> In particular, in most European countries, girls have a higher probability of not reaching the minimum competencies in maths (Figure 11). In Luxembourg, the share of low

performing girls is 8 pp more than for boys. For reading competencies, girls gain better results than boys in every country.<sup>55</sup> These data highlight that *social preconceptions based on gender stereotypes influence children and their educational outcomes from an early age*. While boys are seen as naturally fit for scientific subjects, girls are traditionally considered more suited to the humanities.<sup>56</sup>

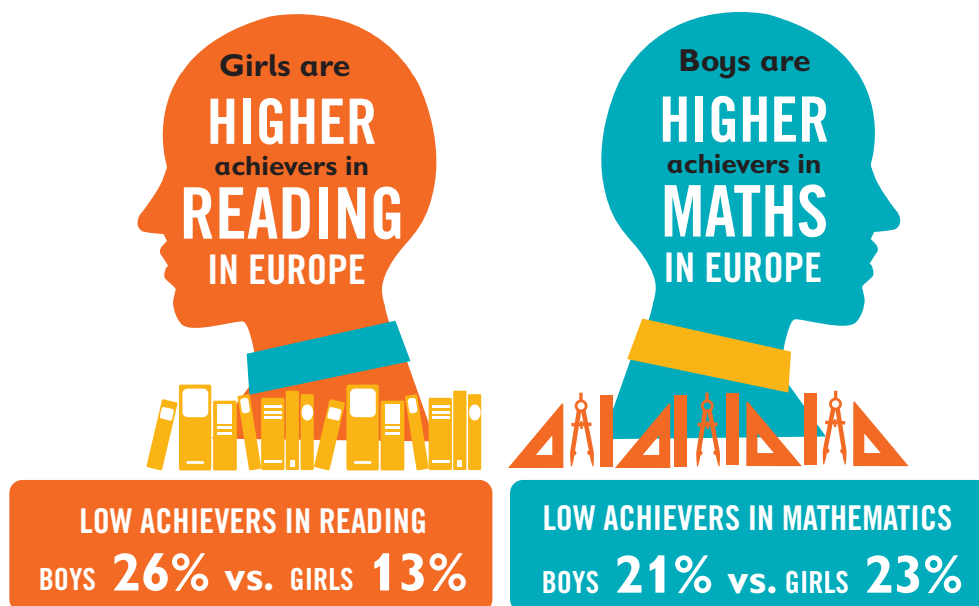
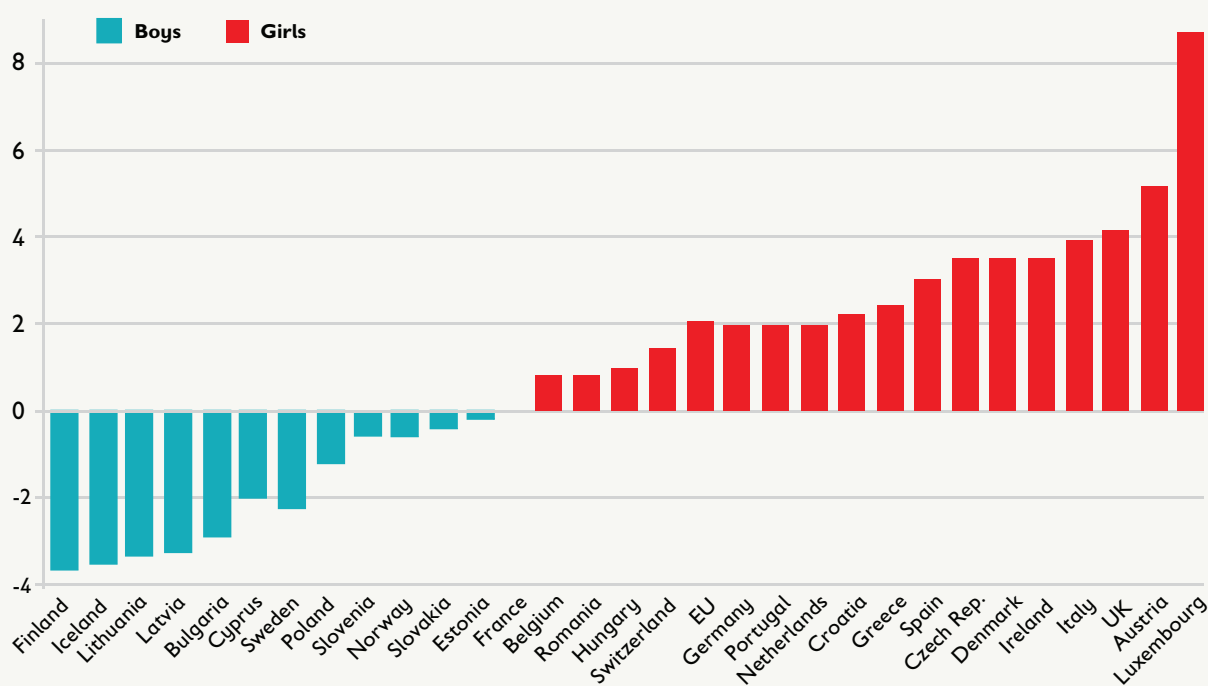


Figure 11: % Difference low achievers mathematics between girls and boys



Source: OECD (2012)

3.4. INEQUALITY AND EDUCATIONAL POVERTY: PARENTS' COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

**“We spoke a lot about stereotypes... Teachers’ behaviour is different towards different students based on their ethnicity, how they dress and which area they live in. The teachers are already prejudiced against students and have a negative attitude.”**

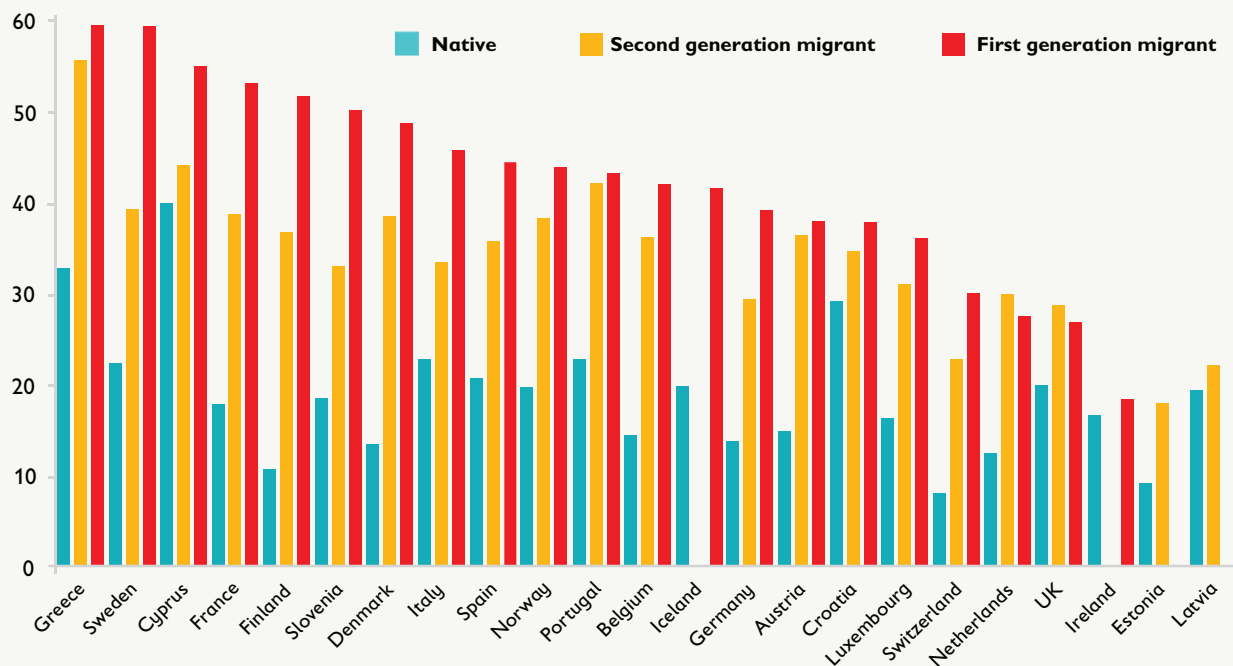
**Girl, Sweden**

The OECD uses the term ‘native’ to refer to children born in the reporting country whose parents were also born in that country. Second generation migrants are children born in the country whose parents were born abroad. First generation migrants are children born abroad whose parents were also born abroad.

Another important predictor of educational inequalities is whether the child’s parents are migrants or born in the reporting country (Figure 12). According to OECD data, 15-year-old first generation migrants across Europe are on average about 25% more likely not to attain the minimum level of competencies in mathematics than native children, with most countries exceeding a difference of 20 pp. The gap broadens to 40 pp in Finland, which is the best performing European country in PISA overall tests.<sup>57</sup> Parents’ migrant status is highly correlated with poverty and social exclusion; schools and the educational community are often unable to overcome this disadvantage.<sup>58</sup>

Figure 12 shows that first and second generation migrant children face more obstacles to learn and develop skills. For example, the language they speak at home might not be the language they are taught at school and they might therefore need additional support. In some cases, preconceptions based on ethnicity, race or migrant background can also influence their educational outcomes, as children told us in our workshops (see Chapter 4).

**Figure 12: % Difference low achievers mathematics between native and migrant children (both first and second generation migrant)**



Source: OECD (2012)

Figure 12 shows that 15-year-old first and second generation migrant children are more likely to be low achievers in mathematics compared with native children

## DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ROMA CHILDREN

At their best, the odds for graduating from secondary school for Roma children living in Europe are 29%. In some countries in central and eastern Europe they are much lower, especially among girls. It is estimated that fewer than half of Roma men and a quarter or less of Roma women can get paid work, and that the poverty levels experienced by nearly three-quarters of Roma families in Europe are similar to those in the poorest areas of the world.<sup>59</sup>

A study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)<sup>60</sup> showed that only 9% of Roma children aged from four up to compulsory primary education age attend preschool in Greece and less than 30% in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In Romania, only 22% of Roma children in this age range attend preschool or kindergarten. In relation to compulsory school attendance, differences vary widely across EU member states: in Greece, 43% of school-age Roma children do not attend school, and in Romania, 22%. In Bulgaria, France, Italy and Portugal the percentage of Roma school-age children not attending school is 11%–14%. In Romania, the main reasons Roma children give for dropping out of school are: geographical distance, lack of public transport, the need to work to support the family or to take care of younger siblings. The FRA report went on to state that promoting Roma children's access to early childhood education and services would have a beneficial effect on their development and subsequent school attendance and attainment.

The European Council's *Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States*, adopted by the EU in December 2013, details effective policy measures to promote Roma access to education. It also covers anti-discrimination policies and stresses the need to implement, where relevant, the collection and disaggregation of data concerning Roma both regionally and locally.<sup>61</sup>

Figure 12 also illustrates the difficulty national welfare systems – education systems in particular – have in enabling the integration of children from migrant backgrounds. This is evident when looking at the educational results of second generation children and is particularly worrying in light of the increasing number of migrants and refugees coming to Europe, many of them children. This phenomenon presents new challenges, including how to integrate children by ensuring equal rights and opportunities to develop their human, social and emotional potential.

### 3.5. EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

Educational poverty can also be measured in terms of young people who leave school early. The *Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* aims to reduce the share of **early leaver from education and training** – previously named **early school leaver** – to below 10% by 2020. The indicator used to measure progress on this target describes the percentage of the population aged 18–24 that has attained, at most, lower secondary education but is not involved in further education or training.<sup>62</sup> The EU as a whole is close to achieving that target, but 11 countries are lagging behind (Figure 13), among them Norway, the UK, Hungary, Estonia, Bulgaria, Portugal and Italy. Spain, Malta, Iceland and Romania, with a 20% share of early school leavers, are very far from reaching the target. According to the European Commission, the long-term effects of the global financial crisis on unemployment are making a further decrease to below 10% by 2020 unlikely. Countries that are not far from reaching the target will need to sustain, and in some cases increase, their efforts.<sup>63</sup>

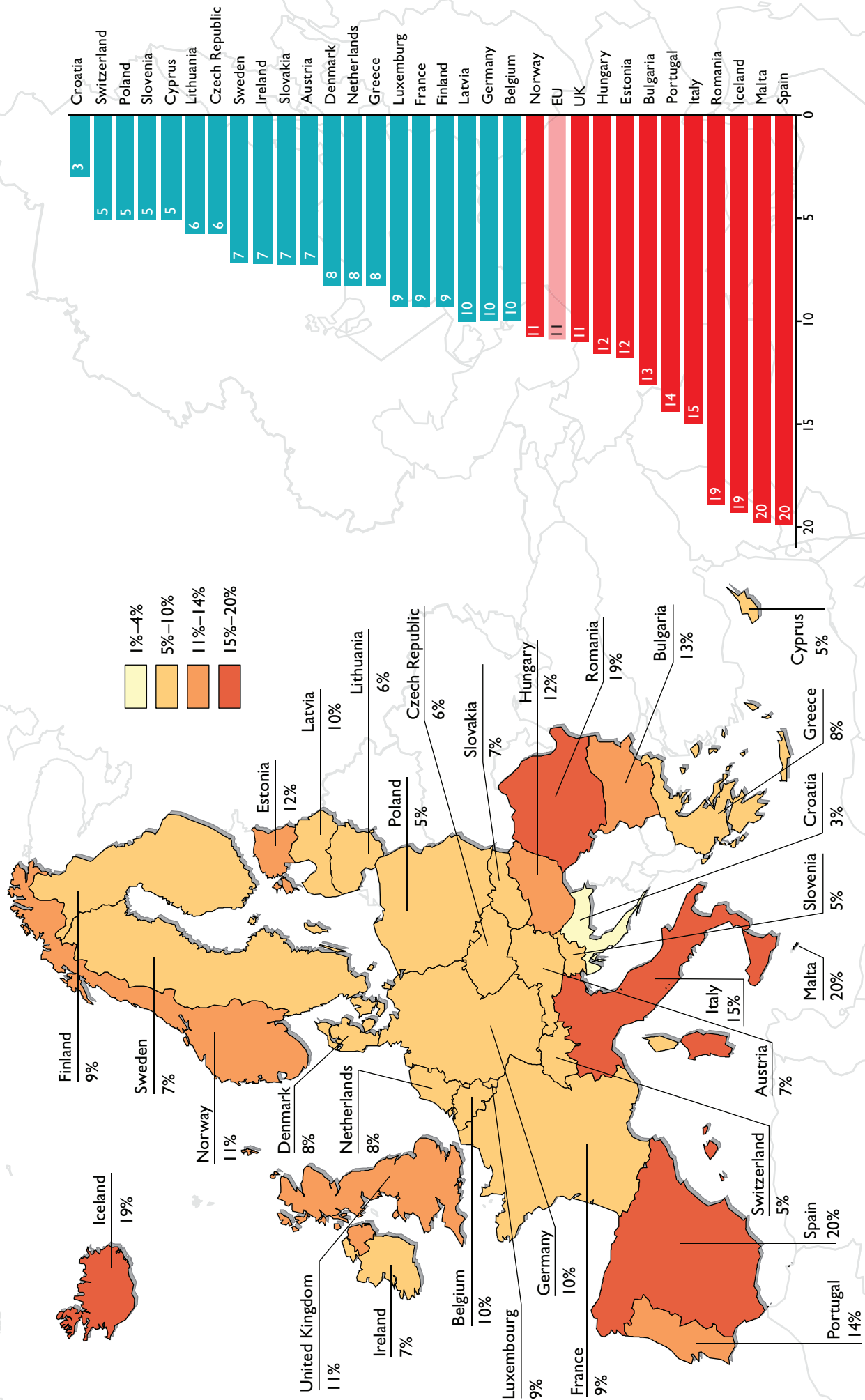
**“I didn’t finish high school and now an education is too expensive. I don’t want to get into debt but I do want to work.”** Girl, Netherlands



PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN ROMANIA

Save the Children Romania's mobile school programme in Iasi County, Romania.

Figure 13: % Early school leavers



Source: Eurostat LSF (2015)

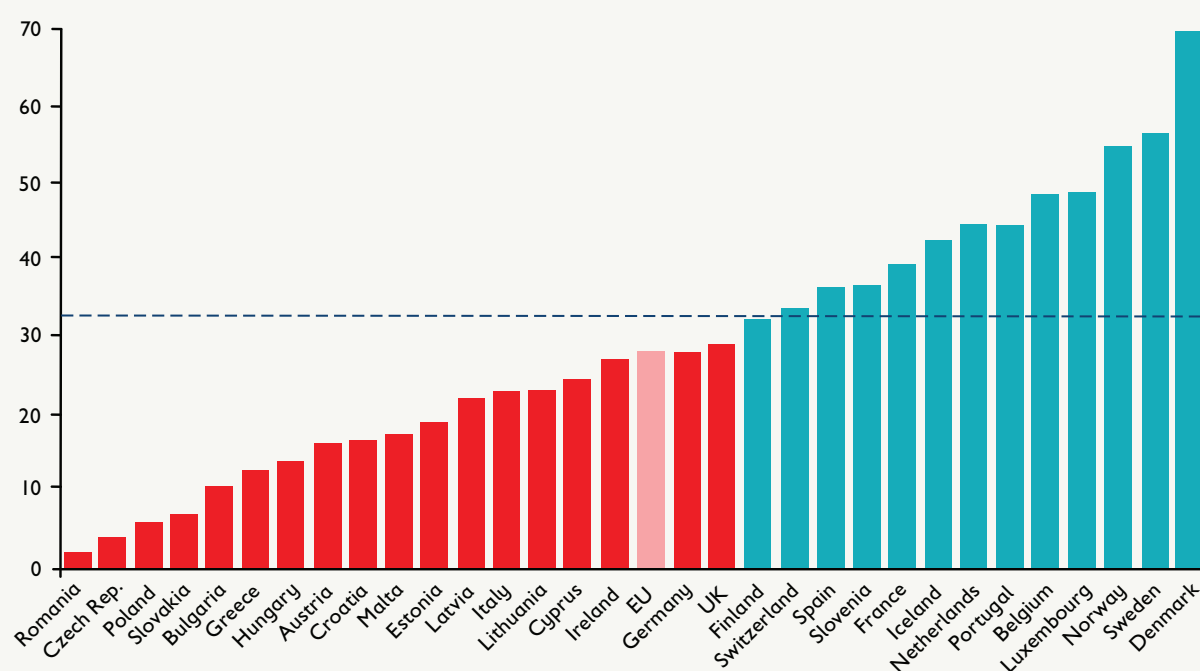
Early school leaving affects more first generation migrant children and young people (23% at EU level), with major differences in Germany, Greece, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Austria, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden. In those countries, the difference in the share of early school leavers between children with parents born in a foreign country and children born in the reporting country range between 11 and 23 pp.<sup>64</sup>

### 3.6. CHILDCARE AND PRESCHOOL

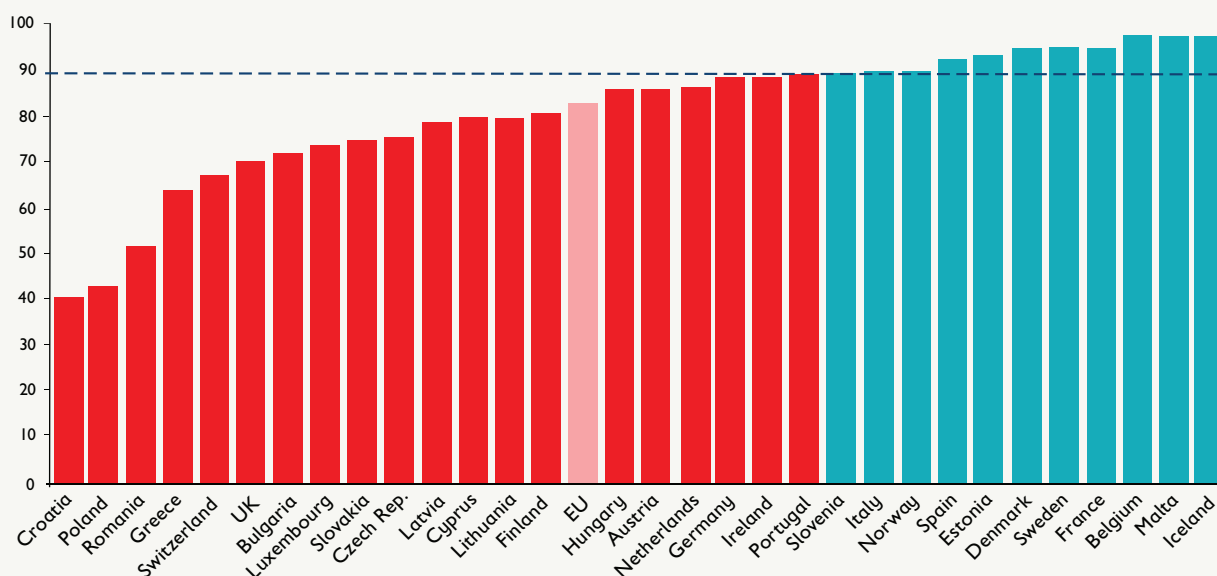
The early years, from birth to compulsory education, are a crucial period for children's development. It is during this time that the capabilities and skills – cognitive, non-cognitive and physical – that will accompany them throughout life start to form.<sup>65</sup> For this reason, formal

childcare and education are essential rights of the child (UNCRC, Articles 18.3, 28 and 29), and need to be taken into consideration when defining and measuring child poverty and social exclusion.<sup>66</sup> The Barcelona targets – agreed by the European Council in 2002 – set out to provide childcare to at least 33% of children under the age of three and preschool education to at least 90% of children between three years and the mandatory school age by 2010. These targets have not yet been met at EU level, with only 28% of children having access to childcare (Figure 14) and 83% to preschool (Figure 15).<sup>67</sup> European countries should increase their efforts to ensure that “all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education (SDG 4.2).”

**Figure 14: % of children participating in childcare**



Source: EU-SILC (2014)

**Figure 15: % of children participating in pre-school**

Source: EU-SILC (2014)

In 11 countries, coverage of childcare is less than 20%, and in Slovakia, Poland, the Czech Republic and Romania, it is less than 10%. In Romania, Poland and Croatia, more than 50% of children do not have access to preschool. It is particularly worrisome that in most countries coverage has actually decreased between 2012 and 2014 for both targets. In addition, on average only 15% of children under three had access to services of 30 hours or more per week. In the Netherlands, one of the countries with the highest coverage of childcare, only 6% of children benefit from services of 30 hours or more. At EU level, only half of children have access to preschool services of 30 hours per week or more. The number of hours in

childcare is one aspect of quality. Other relevant aspects are staff training and the child to carer ratio.<sup>68</sup> However, Eurostat data on this is very limited. In addition, no comparative information is available on the affordability of services. In many European countries, the privatisation of early childhood services has increased costs for families, making children in poorer households less likely to benefit from preschool education and care.<sup>69</sup> A further matter of concern is the over-representation of women in the childcare and preschool workforce, since studies highlight that interaction with male as well as female teachers has a positive impact on children's development.<sup>70</sup>



PHOTO: SIGRIDUR SOLAN

**A girl studying at a school in Reykjavik, Iceland.**

# 4. CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATIONAL POVERTY

## 4.1. FOUR DIMENSIONS OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

In order to consult children about what educational poverty means for them, Save the Children held workshops with 300 children from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds in Germany, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain and Sweden.<sup>71</sup> Using a theoretical framework developed from Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's capabilities theory,<sup>72</sup> the children and young people discussed four dimensions of educational opportunity, which are linked to Save the Children's Quality of Learning Environment framework.<sup>73</sup> These are the opportunities:

- **to know:** cognitive life skills, such as critical thinking (analysing different sources of information, interpreting motivations); problem solving and decision-making skills (collecting information, evaluating consequences, defining alternatives, choosing a solution). *Learning to know* thus refers to both the acquisition of knowledge as well as the application of knowledge
- **to be:** self-management life skills related to self-awareness, self-esteem and self-confidence (building an identity, valuing oneself, setting goals, pursuing dreams, etc); coping skills (skills for managing feelings and stress). This element is linked with seeing oneself as the main actor in defining a positive outcome for the future
- **to live together:** interpersonal and social life skills such as communication, negotiation, refusal, assertiveness, interpersonal, cooperation and empathy skills. Skills under *learning to live together* are essential to define a human being as a social being. This aspect can be reached when a person is not faced with a paucity of resources and when she or he is aware of the importance of social support and collective wellbeing as a prerequisite to individual wellbeing. This aspect also implies feeling concerned about others' welfare and feeling an affiliation or link to a group, a category, a society and a culture
- **to do:** linked to the actions a person takes and closely related to the practical or psychomotor skills required to meet immediate needs and day-to-day functioning.

These four dimensions of educational opportunity are closely associated with rights enshrined in the UNCRC,

which has been ratified by all EU members. These include the rights to:

- survival and development
- education, health, leisure, play and culture
- protection from violence and abuse
- physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development
- mutual respect with others and nature, and tolerance
- non-discrimination
- freedom of expression and opinion
- to dignity and to be heard.

The workshops were held in locations familiar to the children and facilitated by Save the Children staff who knew them. They were structured in such a way as to encourage children to express their recommendations about how to tackle educational poverty, using open-ended questions, games, collages and drawings. After an introduction by the facilitator on participation and democratic values, discussions were held on themes such as '*me and the school*', '*me and myself*', '*me and the others*', '*me and the world*'. Subsequently, the children were encouraged to explore the roles of institutions such as the school and 'educational environments' such as family, friends and community in fulfilling their capabilities *to know, to be, to live together and to do*. Children were also asked to suggest what barriers might undermine their capabilities and what policy makers could do to overcome these barriers.

## 4.2. THE IDEAL SCHOOL

The school plays a fundamental role in either promoting or neglecting the development of children's capabilities *to know, to be, to live together and to do*. Children at the workshops were asked to imagine their ideal school and to analyse differences between that ideal and the reality of their own schools.

### Teachers

Children consider teachers as key actors in the ideal school and would like them to be dedicated, competent, patient, and able to support pupils with special educational needs. Teaching methods should inspire pupils, and encourage their participation and interest. However, children complain about there not being enough teachers and about a high turnover. In some cases, children do not feel "understood, heard and taken into account" by their teachers.



**“We need more teachers. Sometimes we go to school and find out that the first class got cancelled.”**

*(Boy, Netherlands)*

**“I’m not performing well in some topics because I’ve been taught different things by different substitute teachers. They’re recruiting all the time.”**

*(Girl, Sweden)*

**“We need more teachers for students with special needs.”** *(Boy, Romania)*

**“There are times when the teacher explains things to me that I don’t get... So she starts going on and on explaining it again and again and in the end I get it. For me, that’s a good education because I get to understand.”**

*(Boy, Spain)*

**“In the ideal school, the teachers help the children.”** *(Boy, Germany)*

**“In the ideal school, lessons would be a lot of fun and disciplined.”**

*(Girl, Germany)*



Child playing basketball at Save the Children Italy’s ‘Spotlight Centre’ in Torre Maura, Rome, Italy.

## Curriculum and teaching practices

The quality of the learning environment also relies on inclusive and appropriate teaching practices. According to the children who participated in the workshops, their school curricula provide little knowledge about the world they live in. They want to “be better informed” about current global issues, such as finance and economics, media, sustainability and gender discrimination. They would like curricula go beyond standard cognitive skills development so that they can acquire artistic and cultural abilities. They are aware that they live in a world of increasing interconnectivity, and would like to be able to communicate in other languages. They also complain that education is too focused on examinations results rather than on fostering capabilities and knowledge. This causes stress and gets in the way of their learning.

**“Many children worry that they’ll handle money poorly like their parents did. It would be great if we were taught at school about how to manage our money and things like tax returns.”**

*(Boy, Norway)*

**“There [in our dream school] they have optional courses, such as languages, creativity, sports, media and science.”**

*(Girl, Germany)*

**“We need to start [studying] English earlier, in primary school.”**

*(Boy, Netherlands)*

**“Nowadays, school is more about passing exams than about knowledge. As soon as you’ve finished the test, it doesn’t matter anymore. It can be really stressful because you have several things to hand in, maybe in the same week... Sometimes it’s just too much. It’s stressful. Maybe you feel bad and get a headache. Maybe you don’t go to school. Your motivation is gone. You have no hope. After you’ve got an E, you can never get an A so it doesn’t matter anymore. You don’t feel responsible.”** *(Girl, Sweden)*

## Equity and inclusion

Children said that in their ideal school, teachers would foster a positive environment. They would talk about diversity by challenging ethnic, social and gender stereotypes, and teach students to respect each other and their different religious beliefs and traditions, regardless of their socioeconomic status. They said that teachers working in schools in areas with low levels of integration between different ethnicities and social groups tend to reflect prejudices conveyed by the media against ‘newcomers’ and therefore have lower educational expectations of them. This in turn contributes to reinforcing inequalities in educational achievements. Prejudice and concerns about their physical appearance also affect children’s educational outcomes. In particular, the children said that dress codes and body image stereotypes affect their self-esteem and their ability to concentrate in class.

*“There are big differences between rich and poor. There is also racism and the schools are not inclusive for all of us. Differences between people grow if only one group can access good schools and that has a negative impact on others.”*

*(Girl, Sweden)*

*“The media is painting a picture of the area and the people living there. That’s the picture the teacher gets. That’s why they are prejudiced and treat students differently.”*

*(Boy, Sweden)*

*“My parents do not speak Dutch. Teachers do not take me seriously. The Dutch child gets preferential treatment.”* (Boy, Netherlands)

*“When you worry about not having the right clothes at school, you can’t really concentrate on what’s being taught. You think about it constantly. It makes it hard to learn.”*

*(Boy, Norway)*

Another factor fostering inequality is the lack of schemes to support learning activities, both in and after school, particularly at home and among children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Poorer families often cannot afford to buy learning materials.

*“You often can’t afford all the equipment you need. School kits [pencils, erasers, etc] would be great.”*

*(Boy, Norway)*

*“Help with homework is great because often parents don’t know what you’re doing. My mum doesn’t understand a thing about my homework.”*

*(Boy, Norway)*

*“Study tutors should be available for students.”* (Child, Iceland)

## Participation

The children are aware of their role in the learning process and understand that they ‘share responsibility’ with teachers and parents to create a positive learning environment. As a result, they said that they would like to participate more in their school’s decision-making processes. This aspect was especially emphasised by children living in socially and economically deprived areas. They believe that parents should also share responsibility, but observed that schools give parents few opportunities to support their children’s learning activities.



Boy attending an information technology class in a school in Reykjavik, Iceland. The children who participated in Save the Children’s workshops told us that their school curricula provide little knowledge about the world they live in. They want to “be better informed” about current global issues, such as finance and economics, media, sustainability and gender discrimination.

*“I want to have a positive influence on people around me. I want to become a person with the power to lead positive change.”*

*(Girl, Iceland)*

*“If students are more included in the decision-making process, they will feel more responsible.”*

*(Boy, Sweden)*

*“Schools should involve parents more, especially when their children are younger, so that they can support children who are not doing so well. Schools need to work more actively to include parents of different backgrounds and use interpreters if necessary. Parents need to be aware of what’s going on in the school.”*

*(Boy, Sweden)*

### **Accessibility, infrastructure and learning materials**

Children said their ideal school is accessible, clean, functioning, safe and ‘modern’. They pointed out that schools are often far from their homes and that getting to school can be difficult because of a lack of affordable public transport. They would like to be able to walk to school or have free public transport. In addition, they would like their schools to have better infrastructure, including functioning heaters and playgrounds. They would like their school to be clean and to have communal spaces where they can socialise, take part in extra curricula activities such as sport and music, and use information and communication technologies. All these are important aspects of a school environment that enhances children’s educational opportunities.

*“Schools are not accessible for all. If you live on the outskirts, you have to travel to schools in central Stockholm. So you need a travel card. It means that only rich people, only Swedish people, can go to some schools.”*

*(Girl, Sweden)*

*“Schools need to provide the conditions needed for learning in terms of infrastructure.”* (Girl, Romania)

*“Safety at school is important, otherwise the children are afraid to go to school and they could be hurt.”*

*(Boy, Italy)*

*“I’d like to have warmer classrooms in winter, as it’s freezing. At least it is at my school. The heating’s broken. During the mornings it’s cold and when it’s cold it’s harder to work.”* (Boy, Spain)

*“Our schools are really dirty. We don’t have a canteen or room to get together during breaks, so we have to hang out at megastores or McDonalds.”*

*(Boy, Netherlands)*

*“In our dream school nothing’s dirty. [There are] big rooms, everything is big, the whole school building. There are many clubs, such as football, boxing, drumming and so on. There’s a big yard, a basketball court, a football ground.”*

*(Boy, Germany)*

*“I’d make the classrooms more attractive. We could have a digital blackboard and, instead of books, we could bring a tablet.”* (Girl, Spain)

Finally, some children, especially from the most disadvantaged households, suffer severe nutritional deficiencies. Some do not have breakfast before they go to school. This has a negative impact on their motivation and ability to learn, and can have lasting effects on their physical and cognitive development. Children's ideal school would therefore care about their healthy nutrition and provide free meals.

*“I never eat breakfast. The first thing I eat at around 11.15 am is a sandwich, usually of a type of cold meat. At the weekend when I go to my grandma's, I have breakfast because she brings me churros or cakes... When I'm not there, on Saturdays I wait till midday and go to a bar where they serve paella for free.” (Girl, Spain)*

*“If we had school meals, pupils would be more motivated to go to school.” (Boy, Norway)*

### 4.3. THE IDEAL 'EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY'

Children's education is shaped outside as well as inside school walls. Being educationally poor also means being denied the opportunity to know, to be, to live together and to do through sport, contact with nature, culture and beauty, and positive relationships with families and friends. The so-called 'educational community' plays a crucial role in preventing – or conversely reinforcing – educational poverty.

#### **Leisure and culture**

Participation in leisure and cultural activities (eg sport, theatre, concerts, museums, art exhibitions, holidays) outside of school contributes to the development of children's psychomotor, emotional and social skills. It helps children to broaden their horizons, relax and feel integrated in society. It also has a positive impact on their cognitive abilities, motivation and learning. However, a lack of financial means prevents many children from undertaking leisure and cultural activities.

*“The afterschool club is great... You get the opportunity to take part in activities you could never do otherwise.” (Girl, Norway)*

*“It would be nice if there were more opportunities for holidays for everyone – cheaper travel, activities and experiences. When everyone except me has gone on vacation, it's hard to talk about what I did during the holidays. You feel like you should have experiences to share.” (Girl, Norway)*

*“Make afterschool activities less expensive.” (Girl, Netherlands)*

*“I play a lot of soccer, but on my own. I don't enrol in the team because they charge €180 a year.” (Boy, Spain)*

#### **Family and home**

The family plays a pivotal role in children's education and the family and home are an integral part of the 'educational community'. Children say they would like to spend time with their parents to share experiences, thoughts, aspirations and fears, and to get support and care. Their relationship with their parents is, however, often undermined by poor living conditions, unemployment and stress caused by poverty.

*“Family is crucial. It's a safe place where you can find support.” (Boy, Italy)*

*“My parents encourage me to keep up with my studies.” (Boy, Spain)*

*“My mother worries the most that something will happen to us, and also about the mortgage. I help with what I can, by giving them a part of my pocket money and helping her ... and talking to her, encouraging her sometimes when she doesn't look very well. Rich people can give everything they want to their children, for example, they can buy a book. But poor people try to save to spend only on the most important [things].”*

*(Girl, Spain)*

*“The most important definition of poverty is ‘broken home’.”*

*(Girl, Romania)*

*“The real problem is that parents don't have jobs.”* *(Girl, Norway)*

*“Adult education would be a good thing, so that parents could get a job.”*

*(Boy, Norway)*

## Friends

Friendship is one of the most important features of childhood and friends are a unique source of learning. They help children to feel part of a community and develop their socio-emotional abilities. However, many children, especially those in vulnerable socioeconomic conditions, said they were bullied or stigmatised by other children, for example by not being invited to birthday parties and other social events. Unfriendly behaviour can undermine children's self-esteem and negatively affect their educational achievements.

*“The most important thing I think is friendship, and warmth. Love, and many good friends.”* *(Girl, Spain)*

*“Being alone means being poor.”*

*(Girl, Germany)*

*“If we stop bullying those who have less money, it could prevent bullying from spreading. We can tell them that it will all work out.”* *(Girl, Norway)*

*“When you can't go to your friend's birthday party because you can't afford it, they eventually stop inviting you. The friend just disappears.”* *(Boy, Norway)*

## The neighbourhood

Educational poverty is also shaped by the neighbourhoods where children live. Where there are no parks, green areas or sport and cultural facilities, and where children fear for their physical safety, their wellbeing and development is directly affected. Most of the children who participated in the workshops described their neighbourhoods as “dirty and dangerous”. They dream of friendlier and cleaner neighbourhoods with more playgrounds, colour, art and concerts.

*“As a girl I don't feel safe in the neighbourhood. Sometimes I get followed.”* *(Girl, Netherlands)*

*“I want to be safe at home and elsewhere. The whole society needs to shape up.”* *(Boy, Iceland)*

*“I don't want my children to live here. Maybe I don't want to have children.”* *(Boy, Italy)*

*“I dream of a neighbourhood where no one yells on the street, and there are no fights on the street.”*

*(Boy, Germany)*

*“More playgrounds, more colour.”*

*(Girl, Netherlands)*

*“The environment in which we live is important and it's more beautiful if there are museums and concerts on the street. You only feel safe if there's no crime, and if your health is protected, because crime causes isolation and abandonment of hope.”*

*(Girl, Italy)*

# 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**No European country is free from child poverty. Indeed, two years after publishing our 2014 report on child poverty in Europe, figures remain alarmingly high, with more than 26 million children at risk of poverty or social exclusion.<sup>74</sup>**

Poverty has a root cause: inequality. And across Europe, inequality is rising. Children from the most disadvantaged families are being left behind. They are being denied their rights and the opportunities to develop their potential. As they grow up these children will find it harder to get a stable, good-quality job. They are more likely to continue living in poverty and be prevented from playing an active role in society. Not only is this intergenerational transmission of disadvantage unjust, it is detrimental and costly for the economy and society as a whole. If European countries fail to act now to reach those children and young people who are furthest behind, they risk exacerbating social divides further.

Tackling inequality of opportunity in childhood by removing the barriers that prevent children developing skills and capabilities is the most effective and least costly strategy to break cycles of poverty and disadvantage. As highlighted by the European Commission, as well as contributing to fighting long-term socioeconomic inequalities and social exclusion, this approach can enhance economic efficiency. Ensuring that vulnerable and excluded children are supported to realise their potential and make their contribution will, among other things, help to preserve social welfare systems in our ageing societies.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, the multidimensional nature of child poverty – in terms of material deprivation, social exclusion and educational poverty – must be tackled from a children's rights perspective, taking into account every aspect of children's wellbeing. Participation in decisions that affect them is every child's right. As our research has shown, children can make a valuable contribution, both in identifying the problems children face and in helping policy makers and politicians design more effective policies to eradicate poverty. However, when the EU and European states set their policies, draw up their budgets and determine social protection measures, Europe's children are often missing from view.

Policy makers and decision makers should apply a cross-sectoral approach to tackle child poverty and social exclusion, consult with civil society and exchange good practices. European countries should increase support to children and families living in poverty through child-sensitive social protection and should monitor the impact of national social protection interventions, including transfers, on children's wellbeing. European states should also promote parents' employability while guaranteeing adequate working conditions and the potential to reconcile work and family life. Universal services should be available for all children, with direct interventions towards vulnerable children. Countries where the incidence of poverty – material and educational – among children is lower are those where welfare provision is more generous and efficient in targeting disadvantaged children.

Reversing the decline in living standards for our next generation requires actions in member states as well as EU-level policy commitments. The EU should develop a strategy to fight child poverty that promotes family support; education, early childhood education and care services; and access to leisure and culture.

Children's experiences should be the starting point of such a strategy. Improving parents' employability and working conditions and promoting a healthy work-life balance will also be critical. Finally, the EU, its member states and Iceland, Norway and Switzerland should step up with the necessary investment, in terms of budget allocations, to ensure that all Europe's children – including the poorest and most vulnerable – have the best start in life.

## ENDING CHILD POVERTY AND EDUCATIONAL POVERTY IN EUROPE REQUIRES:

- children's participation
- addressing the multidimensional nature of child poverty with an integrated and child rights-based approach
- investment in early childhood education and care
- budgeting to fulfil children's rights and securing these budgets against cuts

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

- Take a children's rights approach to developing strategies, plans and actions to reduce and prevent child poverty. Give children and young people the opportunity to participate in all decisions that affect them, including the development, implementation and evaluation of policies
- **Deliver on the pledges made under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.** At national level, this requires the development of national plans to combat child poverty, social exclusion and the lack of educational opportunities with clear targets. When implementing SDG 4 on education, ensure that national education systems provide equitable educational opportunities and that disadvantaged groups are not left behind
- **Funding should follow policy:** National plans to fight child poverty must be supported by adequate resources, in line with the budgeting standards of the General Comment 19 on *Public budgeting for the realization of children's rights*: effectiveness, efficiency, equity, transparency and sustainability. National governments should support regional and municipal authorities in tackling child poverty and educational poverty, in particular by enhancing child rights budgeting at local level
- Ensure free high-quality education for all children and provide early childhood education and care services
- Strengthen welfare systems to support children and families at risk of poverty, including through income support for unemployed parents or parents in in-work poverty, and by promoting women's employment (through parental leave for male and female parents)

### We urge all EU member states to:

- Implement the European Commission's Recommendation *Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* by developing and implementing national action plans to fight child poverty and social exclusion
- Make full use of European funds (including the European Social Fund (ESF), the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)) to reduce child poverty and social exclusion, as well as educational poverty

### We urge the European Commission to:

- Monitor member states' implementation of the Recommendation *Investing in children*, and include in the Draft Joint Employment Report the **Annual Child Report**, an instrument to monitor main trends,

challenges and policy developments on child poverty across all member states

- Ensure that data on the risk of poverty and social exclusion for children are available annually and capture the multidimensions of child poverty and social exclusion (See Appendix 1 on suggested list of indicators)
- Rebalance economic and social priorities within the European Semester
- **Develop the European Pillar of Social Rights** from a children's rights perspective to ensure that all children are protected from poverty and social exclusion. This means that the Social Pillar should promote investment in education from early childhood, while also tackling unemployment, stimulating secure and good-quality employment, in particular for women, and ensuring that efficient social safety nets are in place for parents who are in in-work poverty or excluded from the labour market. The Pillar should address increasing inequalities in Europe across different policy domains with a view to protecting children and families at risk of poverty and social exclusion

### We urge the European Union and EU member states to:

- **Develop an EU strategy to implement the SDGs, within Europe and externally.** Among other objectives, this strategy should contribute to fighting child poverty in the EU
- Set a target to reduce child poverty in the EU within the Europe 2020 strategy and monitor it throughout the European Semester
- Discount investment in children from the Stability and Growth Pact
- Ensure adequate funds in the EU budget to combat child poverty in its multidimensional forms, including educational poverty and inequality, particularly through setting up a **Child Guarantee** as an instrument to enhance coordination, planning, monitoring and evaluation of the impact of EU spending on children

### We urge the European Parliament to:

- Exercise its budgetary control to ensure EU funds are specifically allocated to promote children's rights and prevent child poverty, social exclusion and educational poverty
- Support an EU strategy on SDG implementation which sets child-focused targets for ending poverty, within Europe and externally

- Recall the issue of child poverty and social exclusion in their annual opinion on the Country Specific Recommendations for the Europe 2020 process in autumn each year
- Ensure the protection of children's rights by systematically integrating a child focus in all parliamentary initiatives
- Organise an annual hearing on child poverty and social exclusion, including educational poverty, to monitor progress on implementation of the Commission's Recommendation *Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*

**We urge the EU Social Protection Committee<sup>76</sup> to**

- Include child poverty as a priority in its **annual work programme** and establish a working group to regularly monitor progress on reducing child poverty and social exclusion and in particular to monitor the implementation of the Commission's Recommendation *Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*



PHOTO: EDUARD OTI/SAVE THE CHILDREN ROMANIA

Girl attending Save the Children Romania's after-school programme in Bucharest, Romania.



# TACKLING EDUCATIONAL POVERTY: WHAT CHILDREN THEMSELVES RECOMMEND<sup>77</sup>

## **At school**

### *Improve teaching by:*

- Trying new and innovative teaching methods
- Taking time to get to know students as individuals
- Learning about and appreciating different cultures
- Reducing class sizes
- Employing teachers from different backgrounds and with different experience

### *Make education more relevant and useful*

- Modernise the curriculum to make it more relevant to children's lives and the skills they need
- Introduce subjects that develop practical skills and enrich knowledge about society and the environment
- Shift the focus of assessment away from exams to developing a broad range of capabilities
- Make learning more enjoyable!

### *Provide extra support for learning*

- The school or municipality should provide school kits, with pencils, pens erasers, etc to every child at the beginning of the school year
- Set up homework schemes
- Provide a monthly allowance or free tuition for homework support, to compensate for the lack of support at home

### *Increase participation and inclusion*

- Involve students in the running of schools through students' unions and societies
- Encourage partnerships with businesses, universities and schools locally and in other countries
- Provide courses for parents to learn about the education system and build respect between schools and families
- Set up discussion groups to resolve conflict among schoolmates, families and school personnel
- Use the school website as a platform to encourage participation and to report anonymously cases of bullying
- Organise more activities to promote knowledge and tolerance of different cultures

### *Improve buildings and meals*

- Make schools infrastructure safe, as well as lighter, brighter and more colourful with bigger windows, art displays and plants and flowers
- Make schools accessible for children with disabilities
- Provide free meals, including vegetarian, halal and anti-allergy meals
- Provide free transport for children in remote rural areas
- Provide study rooms, a cafeteria, sports field and gym
- Offer free internet access and printing

## **In the 'educational community'**

### *Culture and leisure*

- Set up public creative spaces in local neighbourhoods
- Provide free artistic activities, music, dance and sports with qualified educators
- Create more and better parks with slides, fountains and more sports fields
- Improve neighbourhoods by painting walls, etc
- Provide summer and holiday camps for children from low-income families

### *Economic and social support to households*

- Set up national adult education courses to help parents find jobs
- Introduce or increase a minimum wage
- Provide income support for poor families
- Provide essential furniture such as beds and mattresses for poor families
- Ensure that families have access to psychologists, doctors and social workers



All children have the right to rest and leisure, play, and to participate in recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (UNCRC, Article 31).

PHOTO: ALESSANDRO GAROFALO

# APPENDIX 1:

## EUROPE 2020: SUGGESTED INDICATORS TO CAPTURE MULTIDIMENSIONAL CHILD POVERTY

The Europe 2020 strategy should be enriched with a sub-target on child poverty reduction. Progress on this target should be measured with indicators capturing the multidimensional nature of child poverty. Current monitoring instruments do not yet capture the root causes of disadvantage, as for example inequality in access to educational opportunities since early childhood, and thus are unable to fully contribute to the harmonisation of employment, social and educational policies.

Save the Children proposes a set of Europe 2020 sub-indicators on child poverty and social exclusion based on the indispensable *Investing in Children* framework.<sup>78</sup>

These include indicators on:

- aspects of educational poverty, such as leisure, cultural activities, civic engagement, quality of family and social relations, and life satisfaction. The ad-hoc module of EU-SILC on subjective wellbeing, which captures many of these dimensions, should be conducted annually
- quality of services: education and health, income support, and also leisure, culture, sport and community networks.

Efforts should be made to observe gradients in relation to gender, disability/special needs, geographical areas within a country, the type of international protection provided, migrant background, minority ethnic groups (eg Roma), and children in institutions.

Children and young people should be involved in designing and develop these indicators.

# APPENDIX 2:

## LIST OF INDICATORS USED IN THIS REPORT

### At risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE)

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

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

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

Disaggregated by:

- Children living in single parent households refer to either children living with mother or father, or large families with both parents and three children or more. In this case, only sub-indicator 1) people living in households with disposable income below the poverty threshold (60% national median) is used
- Work intensity: (percentage of work done in the past year compared to the potential for members of working age (18–59 years)) in the household among those aged from 0–59 years. Very low work intensity is below 20% of the potential high intensity (between 55% and 85%). In this case, only sub-indicator 1) people living in households with disposable income below the poverty threshold (60% national median) is used

- Children (below 18 years) vs. adults (18 years old and over);
- Parents' education level (level 0 to 2 refers to pre-primary education, primary, and lower secondary; level 3 to 4 refers to upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education)
- Parents' country of birth (parents born in a foreign country vs. reporting country). In this case, only sub-indicator 1) people living in households with disposable income below the poverty threshold (60% national median) is used.

### Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

PISA tests measure the ability of students, aged 15 years, to reproduce the skills in maths and reading acquired at school, and also the ability to extrapolate these skills and to apply them to unfamiliar school and out-of-school environments. PISA tests assess literacy in maths and reading – the ability to use knowledge and skills in key domains and to analyse, reflect and effectively communicate when they identify, interpret and solve problems in a variety of situations. Fifteen-year-old children are considered to be low achievers if they do not exceed level 2 in PISA tests (equivalent to 420.07 points in maths and 407.47 points in reading). These students are not necessarily totally unable to perform mathematical operations or to interpret reading texts, but they are not able to use their limited abilities in problematic situations provided even by the easiest questions.

Disaggregated by:

- Parents' socioeconomic and cultural status. The economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) indicator takes into account parents' employment status and educational attainments, as well as the availability of educational resources at home such as a desk and a quiet place where the adolescent can study, a room of his/her own, and the number of full bathrooms (with shower and/or bath), a computer to study, internet connection, educational software, books, dictionaries, but also washing machine, DVD player, mobile phone, television and car
- Gender (boys vs. girls)
- Parents' country of origin (children born in the European country, children migrant first generation, children migrant second generation).

## Early school leavers

Early school leavers – the share of early school leavers as a percentage of the population aged 18–24 having attained at most lower secondary education and not being involved in further education or training. The numerator of the indicator refers to people aged 18–24 who meet the following two conditions: (a) the highest level of education or training they have attained and (b) they have not received any education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey. The denominator in the total population consists of the same age group, excluding the respondents who have not answered the questions ‘highest level of education or training attained’ and ‘participation to education and training’.

Disaggregated by:

- Citizenship (non-EU citizenship vs. EU citizenship).

## Access to childcare and preschool

The indicator refers to children’s access to childcare and pre-school formal services. Formal services refer to 1) education at pre-school or equivalent, 2) education at compulsory education, 3) childcare at centre-based services outside school hours, 4) childcare at day-care centre organised/controlled by a public or private structure. Two separate indicators are used, one for children aged from 0 to 3 years (childcare), the other for children aged 3 to the age for compulsory education (pre-school).

Disaggregated by:

- Number of hours of service per week, 1 to 29 or above 30.

# NOTES

- 1 EUROSTAT *EU-SILC* (2014) Data for Switzerland are not available.
- 2 EUROSTAT *EU-SILC* (2014) Data for Switzerland are not available.
- 3 Based on the 2012 PISA survey, the most recent providing comparable data across Europe, OECD *PISA* (2012).
- 4 Save the Children consulted 300 children from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds in Germany, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain and Sweden.
- 5 EUROSTAT *EU-SILC* (2014) Data for Switzerland are not available.
- 6 UNICEF (2016) Report Card 13, *Fairness for Children, A league table of inequality in child well-being in rich countries*.
- 7 Since there is a lack of available and comparable data on non-cognitive skills, the data covered refer only to cognitive skills.
- 8 European Commission (2015) *Education and training monitor*.
- 9 United Nations General Assembly (2015). *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015. Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>.
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# ENDING EDUCATIONAL AND CHILD POVERTY IN EUROPE

*“When I become a parent, I want to teach my children to dream, persevere, make it happen and ‘do your best at school’.”* Boy, Netherlands

*“Culture is important because it enables you to choose what to do in life and achieve it. It is the basis of everything. Music is important because it opens your mind. I liked it a lot when I went to a concert with my mum. I felt part of something important and magic.”* Boy, Italy

In Europe, more than 26 million children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Together they would make up the seventh most populous country in the European Union. As well as being at greater risk than adults, the effects of poverty on children can last a lifetime.

Child poverty is not a synonym of material deprivation; it is a multidimensional problem. This report sheds light on educational poverty as one of the most devastating aspects of child poverty. Educational poverty is a process that limits children’s right to education and, therefore, the development of the cognitive and non-cognitive skills they will need to grow emotionally, establish relationships and plan for their future. Children from the most disadvantaged families are more likely to achieve less at school. Material and educational poverty mutually reinforce the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage.

Save the Children believes that promoting children’s rights can mitigate the consequences of poverty and, in the long term, reduce and prevent it. Investment in children makes sense – morally, economically, socially and politically. With adequate funding, effective policies and political commitment, the current generation of children who are growing up in poverty and social exclusion in Europe will be enabled to reach their full potential.