



**2023**



**Save the Children**

**Family poverty in**

**the Nordic countries**

This report was prepared by Save the Children Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, June 2023.

Cover photo: Save The Children Norway / Lisbeth Michelsen

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# FOREWORD

## Poverty – a matter of children’s rights!

**Growing up in poverty can dramatically influence children’s chances in life.** 719 500 children grow up in low-income families in the Nordic countries today, according to national statistic in the 5 countries. Poverty is depriving children of educational opportunities, access to healthcare and healthy diets, adequate housing and living environments, leisure activities, family support, and protection from violence.

Children are telling us that they feel excluded and lonely, and that they have lost friends because they cannot afford to do the same things as other children of their age. Children from poor families try to hide the fact that their family has limited resources. They say that it is embarrassing, and that it makes them sad and lonely. Children also tell us that poverty robs them of their dreams, hopes and rights.

**Poverty is not about just lacking money.** It is multi-dimensional and one of the principal causes of human rights violations against children. It can deny children of their rights as stated in UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC): The right to education, participation, leisure, play and culture, protection, health care and an adequate standard of living. The effects of poverty and exclusion of children are not only short-term. On the contrary, they can last a lifetime and reinforce itself into future generations.

**The traditional egalitarian Nordic welfare states, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, have all adopted the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs).** Through goal no. 1, they have committed to at least reduce by half the proportion of children living in poverty by 2030. But in the Nordic countries, we are going in the opposite direction. The number of children growing up in a family with a persistently low income has increased. Although many political measures have been put in place and strategies developed, there is a long way in order to reverse the negative development.



**Fighting poverty among families means making a political commitment, the right political choices and allocating adequate resources.** Investment in children, economically, socially and politically, is the only sustainable way of overcoming social and economic inequalities in the long term. Save the Children in the Nordic countries believes that poverty should be tackled from a child rights perspective. This would allow all aspects of the impact of poverty on children to be addressed, as well as enable children to take an active part in identifying solutions.

The Sustainable Development Goals were adopted in 2015. Since then, 6 years have passed with very little progress and political commitment to combine the perspectives of sustainability and fighting poverty. It is now time for the Nordic governments to act. The Nordic Council must encourage, monitor and coordinate plans, strategies and commitments in the region, so that all children are protected, enjoy equal opportunities, and grow into healthy and fulfilled adults.



**Save the Children is the world's leading independent organisation for children. We work in around 120 countries, in Europe and around the world. We do whatever it takes – every day – so children can fulfill their rights to a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn, protection from harm, adequate standard of living, to participate, to leisure, play and cultural activities, and to fully develop their social, emotional, cognitive and physical potential, no matter what their family situation are.**

**The rights spelled out in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child are violated in all countries in the world, including countries with a strong welfare state such as the Nordics. Save the Children works non-stop to fight the unacceptable reality of family poverty and to ensure that all children have their rights fulfilled.**

# BACKGROUND

## UN Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (often referred to as Agenda 2030) was adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. It consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a total of 169 targets, which are an urgent call for action by all countries. In this paper, we will emphasise SDG number 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere, and target 1.2: By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions. [1]

All the Nordic countries have adopted the 2030 Agenda. Accordingly, they should make sure that policies and strategies follow up on the ambition. The 2030 Agenda demands an important dimension of time effectiveness. All efforts should be made to ensure that at least half the population of children living in poverty is reduced by 2030.

As part of its follow-up and review mechanisms, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages member states to "conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven". [2] All the Nordic countries have conducted a voluntarily review; Finland: 2020, Norway: 2021, Sweden: 2021, Denmark: 2021, and Iceland: 2023.





*"The ambitious goals of the SDGs cannot be achieved by not respecting the rights of children."*





## UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Child poverty is a matter of children's rights and should be addressed through a child rights approach. The ambitious goals of the SDGs cannot be achieved by not respecting the rights of children. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which almost all the countries in the world have signed and ratified, every child has the right to fully develop their social, emotional, cognitive and physical potential, regardless of their background and family circumstances. These rights include the right to an adequate standard of living, to services like healthcare and education, to be protected, and to participation, leisure, play and culture.

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### **Social and economic help**

Governments should provide money or other support to help children from poor families.

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### **Food, clothing, a safe home**

Children have the right to food, clothing and a safe place to live so they can develop in the best possible way. The government should help families and children who cannot afford this.

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### **Rest, play, culture, arts**

Every child has the right to rest, relax, play and to take part in cultural and creative activities.

According to the Article 27 of the CRC, the States Parties should “recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.” [3] Primarily, it is the caregiver's responsibility to secure the child's right to an adequate standard of living. However, the state parties are obligated to, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, to assist the caregiver to implement this right.

Furthermore, Article 2 of the CRC requires that states shall respect all the rights in the convention, regardless or social origin, amongst other. [4]

## **Recommendations from the Committee on the Rights of the Child:**

The Committee on the Rights of the Child is monitoring the implementation of the Child Rights Convention. The committee has given the following comments on Standard of living in Article 27, in their concluding observations, to the Nordic countries:

### **Recommendations to Denmark on article 27 (2017): [5]**

- a) Reintroduce the 2013 poverty line, refrain from further restricting social benefits and allocate sufficient social benefits to prevent children from living in poverty, with a particular emphasis on children from a foreign background;
- b) Develop specific poverty reduction measures for children living in Greenland by tackling the high unemployment rates among family breadwinners;
- c) Conduct specific poverty-reduction measures for children living on the Faroe Islands, with a particular focus on single-parent families;
- d) Hold targeted consultations with families, children and children's rights civil society organizations on the issue of child poverty, with a view to strengthening the strategies and measures for combating child poverty.

### **Recommendations to Finland on article 27 (2023): [6]**

- a) Avoid cuts in social security benefits that impact on children at risk of poverty and exclusion
- b) Further strengthen its policies to ensure that all children have an adequate standard of living, including by improving the financial situation and increasing social benefits for children with disabilities, asylum-seeking children, and children with an irregular residence status;
- c) Develop measures to prevent homelessness and expeditiously provide adequate and long-term social housing and other support measures for families in need;
- d) Collect and publish statistics on the number of children in street situations and children living in temporary accommodation and take measures to adequately address their needs.

### **Recommendation to Iceland on article 27 (2022): [7]**

- a) Further strengthen its policies to ensure that all children have an adequate standard of living, including by increasing social benefits for single-parent households, providing support for childcare prior to the start of preschool and providing adequate and long term social housing for families in need;
- b) Ensure that measures include a particular focus on children from disadvantaged families, especially children of single parents, children of parents with disabilities and migrant children;
- c) Assess the impact of measures to combat poverty, including any negative effects on the enjoyment of other rights, with a view to ensuring that such measures are comprehensive and comply with a child rights-based approach.

**Recommendations to Norway on article 27 (2018): [8]**

- a) While noting the introduction of the strategy “Children Living in Poverty (2015–2017)”, the Committee, in the light of ongoing child poverty, draws the State party’s attention to target 1.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals on implementing nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, and recommends that the State party increase the resources allocated to combating child poverty, including by increasing child benefit rates and by adjusting them in accordance with wage inflation.

**Recommendation to Sweden on article 27 (2023): [9]**

- a) Further strengthen its policies to ensure that all children have an adequate standard of living, including by increasing social benefits for single-parent households, asylum-seeking children, children with an irregular residence status and children of foreign parents; by developing measures to prevent homelessness; and by expeditiously providing adequate and long-term social housing and other support measures for families in need;
- b) Ensure that all municipalities have child-friendly temporary or emergency accommodation available for children in need, no child stays in such accommodation for longer than 14 days and that such children are promptly transferred to long-term accommodation;
- c) Prevent the eviction of children from their homes;
- d) Collect and publish statistics on the number of children in street situations and children living in temporary accommodation and take measures to adequately address their needs.

Overall, the recommendations from the Committee on the Rights of the Child to the Nordic states, are quite similar. The Committee encourages the countries to ensure better living conditions for children growing up in low-income families by strengthening welfare services, developing poverty reduction measures and ensuring economic support to families. The recommendation from the Committee emphasized the importance that the Nordic countries collaborate and coordinate their effort to combat poverty, in a much larger extent than today.



## Poverty and consequences for children

Children's rights are at risk especially for children living in poverty. Child poverty impacts every aspect of a child's life: their health and well-being, living conditions, education, social relationships, and personal and professional development. Scientific research has proved wide impact of poverty on children's lives: problems, disadvantages and inequalities.

Children living in low-income families suffer from hunger and material deprivation (lack of clothes, medicine, phones etc.). Low-income families might not be able to afford to heat their homes adequately or pay the cost-of-living bills (electricity, water, gas, phone, Internet, etc.). Children in poverty often have less opportunity to succeed in school or to uphold adequate health. Child poverty also causes exclusion from social, leisure, cultural and sport activities. Children in low-income households are more likely to suffer mental health problems than others. [10]

Extreme poverty is rare in the Nordic countries, this may have led to underestimating the consequences of growing up in low-income families. In turn, this can lead governments to fail to tackle the relative approach to poverty.



Photo: Save The Children Norway / Lisbeth Michelsen

### **CHILDREN AT RISK OF POVERTY in the Nordic countries:**

- children from single parent families
- children from large, disadvantaged families (illness/disabilities in family, long-period use of basic social allowances, over general disadvantages)
- children with migrant background
- children with disabilities
- children living in rented accommodation
- children living in socially disadvantaged areas
- children living in low-income families (parents who are unemployed, studying or working part-time)
- children living in families with children under the age of 3 years



## **Nordic co-operation on poverty among children**

The Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council are the main forums for official Nordic co-operation. While the Nordic Council of Minister consists of members from the country's governments, the Nordic Council is an body for inter-parliamentary co-operation, and consists of 87 elected members from the national parliaments in the Nordic Countries. [11]

The Nordic Council recently adopted a recommendation that states that the Nordic Council of Ministers should investigate the conditions of children in low-income families in the Nordic countries. They should share their experience regarding effective policies on tackling and reducing child poverty with each other, and put emphasis on the consequences that the recent Covid-19 pandemic had on children. [12]

This report aims to supply the Nordic Council of Ministers with information and analysis on current conditions, struggles and effects of children growing up in low-income families in the Nordic countries, and to point towards efficient measures in order to move forward.

***“Every child who is freezing throughout the winter because their parents can't afford to buy a new jacket is one too many. With high prices and interest rate hikes that we're seeing on top of the pandemic, I'm very concerned that we'll have many more children living in poor families in the Nordic countries. It's extremely important that the Nordic Region stands together to reduce the number of children who are growing up in relative poverty,”***

**Eva Lindh,  
spokesperson for the Nordic Council Welfare Committee. [13]**



# Comparing the Nordic countries

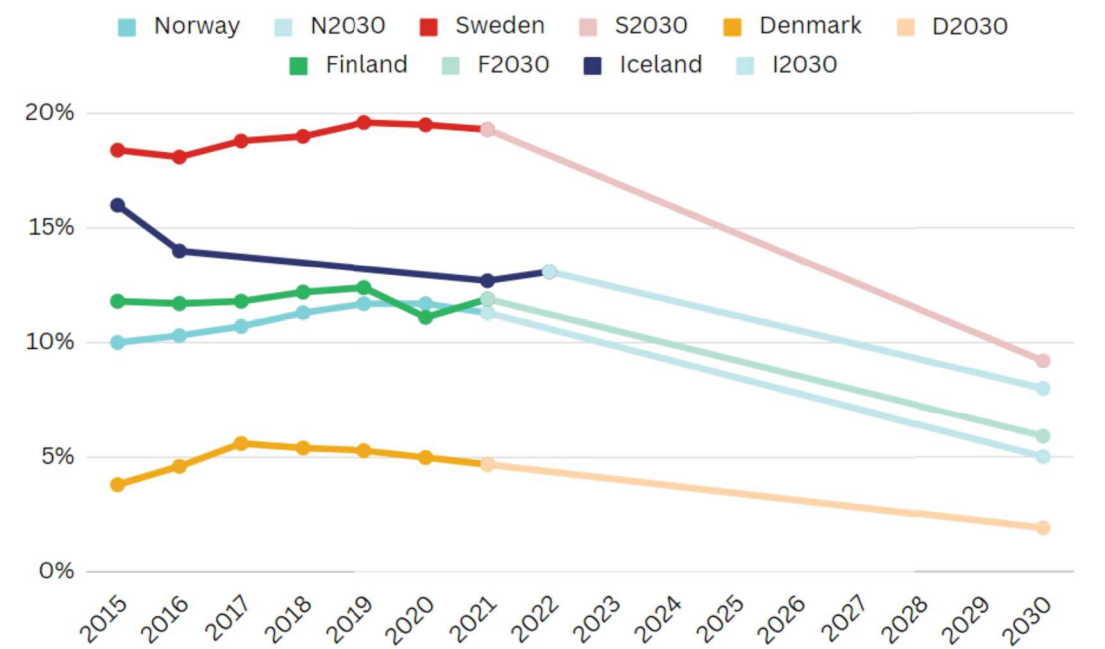
## Family poverty in the Nordic countries

The Nordic countries are considered one of the wealthiest and most equal regions in the world. Yet, the last years there has been a drastic increase in the income gaps among families with children and the relative poverty has increased in all the Nordic countries, except Iceland. A conclusion is that realising the objective of SDG 1, is further away today than when the goals were adopted in 2015.

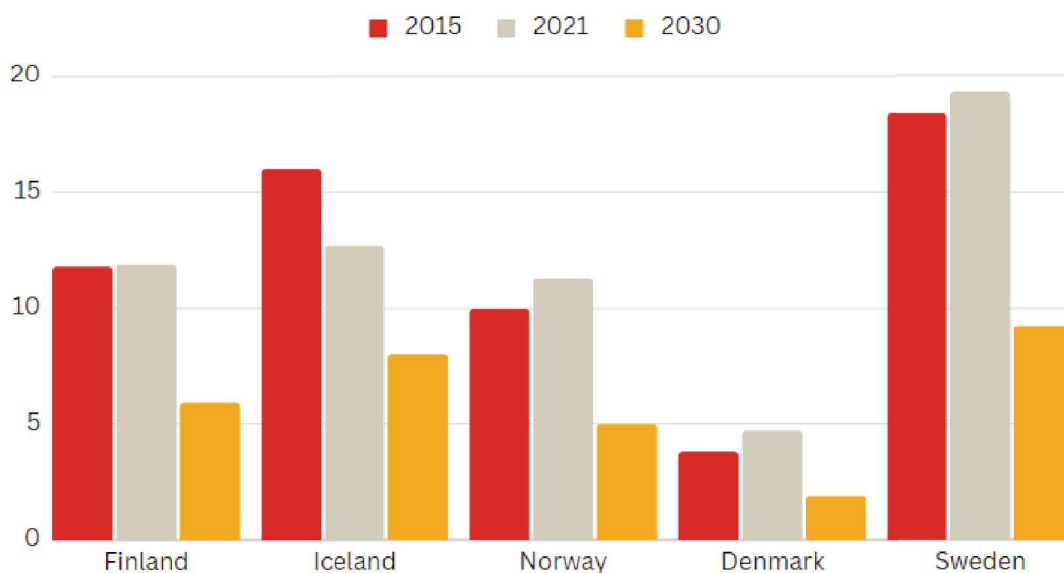
Living in relative poverty in a rich country means having relatively low income levels in relation to the majority population in society. For children, this means for instance that you do not have the same possibilities to participate in similar activities as classmates, friends and other peers. A consequence is therefore often social exclusion.

The most common measure of relative poverty is the share of people with an equivalised disposable income below 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income. This is also by EU called "at risk of poverty". We have here compared the "at risk of poverty rate" in the Nordic countries.

More than 11% of children are living in relative poverty in Norway. It is around 12% in Finland. Iceland is the only country where the percentage of children at risk of poverty has dropped since 2015, from 16% to 12,7% in 2021. Unfortunately, recent data published by Statistics Iceland shows that it is increasing again in Iceland, with 13,1% in 2022. The situation is even harsher in Sweden, with 19% of the children living in relative poverty. In Denmark, 5% of the children are at risk of poverty. But as Denmark use a different measure than the other Nordic countries (50% of the median income, compared to 60% of the median income in the other countries), this makes it challenging to comparing the countries. It is, however, important to notice that also in Denmark the numbers are rising. Table 1.2 demonstrate that it is necessary for all governments to take urgent action in order to reach the SDG 1 by 2030.



**Table 1.1: Children at risk of poverty, and need for reduction if reaching SDG1 by 2030.** The table demonstrate the level of family poverty in the Nordic countries. Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland uses 60% of median income when measuring family poverty. Denmark uses 50% of median income. See Appendix 1 for more information.



**2015: 11,8%    2021: 11,9 %    →    2030: 5,9%**

## **FINLAND**

Finland has had a relatively stable percentage of children growing up in low income families, with a drop in the beginning of the pandemic. The numbers increased again in 2021. The proportion of children at risk of poverty must be reduced with 6 percentage points for Finland to reach SDG1 by 2030.

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**2015: 16%    2021: 12,7%    →    2030: 8%**

## **ICELAND**

Iceland has few measuring points, but is by far the country in the Nordic region that has had the most positive development. The percentage dropped from 16% in 2015 to 12,7% in 2021 (though increased again to 13,1% in 2023.) That said, Iceland has a very small population compared to the other Nordic countries. It is important that the government upholds an annual statistics on children growing up in low-income families. The proportion of children at risk of poverty must be reduced with almost 5 percentage points for Iceland to reach SDG1 by 2030.

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**2015: 10%    2021: 11,3%    →    2030: 5%**

## **NORWAY**

The amount of children living in reletiv poverty has increased throughout the SDG period, with a peek in 2019 and 2020, with 11,7% of the child population growing up in low-income families. The numbers started to drop in 2021 when the child benefit was raised. The proportion of children at risk of poverty must be reduced with 6,3 percentage points for Norway to reach SDG1 by 2030.

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**2015: 3,8%    2021: 4,7%    →    2030: 1,9%**

## **DENMARK**

Denmark deviates from the other Nordic countries by having fewer than 5 % of its child population growing up in low-income families. But Denmark use 50% of the median income as measure, and not 60% as the other countries. Families above the poverty line in Denmark, may experience harsher condition than in the other Nordic countries. Denmark has had the same development as Sweden, Finland and Norway, with a higher degree of family poverty in 2021 than in 2015. The proportion of children at risk of poverty must be reduced almost 3 percentage points for Denmark in order to reach SDG1 by 2030.

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**2015: 18,4%    2021: 19,3%    →    2030: 9,2%**






## **SWEDEN**

Sweden has the highest percentage (close to 20%) of children living at risk of poverty in the Nordic region.. The amount has also increased in the SDG period. The proportion of children at risk of poverty must be reduced with 10,1 percentage points for Sweden to reach SDG1 by 2030.



## National policies to reduce family poverty:

Save the Children has for a long time been pushing for policies and strategies that contribute to combating poverty among children. Family poverty can be solved. Policy and decision makers must apply a cross-sectoral approach in consultation with civil society, and learning exchange on policies and practice across country borders. All available resources should be used to achieve immediate, positive and lasting changes for children. Below is an overview of policies that Save the Children believes national authorities must implement in order to combat family poverty. The list is not exhaustive, but examples of measures that we believe are important to be in place to reach the SDG1 goal by 2030.

						
1	National strategy on (child) poverty	X	✓	X	✓	X
2	Universal child benefit (direct cash transfer to all families with children)	✓	✓	○	✓	✓
3	After school program that is free or strongly subsidised	✓	○	✓	✓	✓
4	Annual statistics on family poverty	X	✓	X	✓	✓
5	Indicators on fighting poverty / reducing poverty	X	✓	X	X	✓
6	A set target for reduction of children growing up in low-income families	✓	✓	X	X	○
7	Free education that contributes to social mobility and reduces inequality, with no extra "hidden" costs	○	○	○	○	○
8	The government provides policies so all children can participate in leisure activities	○	✓	○	○	○
9	Child rights perspective in housing conditions for low-income families	○	○	X	X	○
10	National level of social security benefits/allowances is sufficient (above the poverty line)	X	X	X	X	X



**YES**

The country meet this requirement



**NOT QUITE**

The country does not meet the requirements completely.



**NO**

The country does not meet this requirement

## Explaining the score in the table:

**1. National strategy:** Family poverty is complex and multi-faced, and to reduce the number of children living in poverty, governments must make a holistic and long-term plan. Denmark, Iceland and Sweden don't have a policy or action plan on how to eliminate (child) poverty. The Norwegian strategy is due in 2023, and we encourage the government to evaluate the current strategy and create a new as soon as possible. All strategies should be based on the SDG 1 towards 2030. [14] Finland has a strategy for reducing all poverty by 2030 and that strategy has some specific indicators and implementation plans for child poverty. [15]

**2. Universal child benefit:** Child benefit is one of the most effective policies for reducing poverty among families. In Iceland, the child benefit is only given to low-income families. The child benefit is universal and given to all families with children under 18 years in the rest of the Nordic countries. But the amount is not sufficient, and it also comes with restrictions. In Norway, children under the age of six years old receive a higher amount than children between 6 and 18 years old. In Denmark, it is even more differentiated by age. In addition, the amount you receive depends not only on the age of your child, but also how long you have lived in the country and your household's income. [16] In Finland, the child benefit ends when the child is 17 years old.

**3. Free or subsidized after-school program:** All the Nordic countries have after-school programs that are of low costs. In Denmark, the cost for after school programs can be decreased or free, based on social or economical reasons, to support low income families and families in vulnerable positions ability to attend. [17] In Norway, it is free for first and second grade students, and the government aims to make it free up till fourth grade. In Finland, after-school program is guaranteed only for first grade students, but municipalities can choose to arrange that for second and third grade students as well.

**4. Annual statistics on poverty:** To monitor the progress on reducing poverty, the governments must provide annual statistics on family poverty: percentages of children living below the poverty line at a national and local level, as well as statistics on poverty in general. As of today, the Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish government provide annual statistics, while Denmark and Iceland lack yearly statistics.

**5. Indicators on combating poverty:** Finland, Sweden and Denmark have defined some overall indicators in their Child Guarantee Action plan, but they should be more specific to be useful. The Norwegian government should include indicators in their next strategy on reducing poverty, as should Iceland and Finland.



## THE EU TARGET ON CHILD POVERTY:

**"Aims to lift at least 5 million children out of poverty by 2030".**

*The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) sets out 20 key principles and rights that are important for fair and well-functioning labour markets and social protection systems. The Pillar is accompanied with an Action Plan, that set the EU 2030 target on poverty and social exclusion in Europe with the aim at reducing the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 15 million by 2030. Out of the 15 million, at least 5 million should be children. [18]*

**6. Target for reduction on children in poverty:** Both Finland and Denmark have in their Action plan set a goal to reduce children in poverty and social exclusion (Arope) by 30 000 in 2030. Sweden's goal is even less ambiguous, as it is to reduce the child Arope by 5000 by 2030. Iceland and Norway have not set any targets on family poverty reduction.

**7. Free education:** Elementary school is free of charge for all children in the Nordic countries, but all countries have minor "hidden" costs for parents in many schools. These costs are mainly disguised in the form of "voluntary or agreed-upon contributions, and organized by either the school or the parents. They are mainly collected to fund activities outside the regular school curriculum, excluding pupils that cannot afford it. In all countries, children living in poverty, achieve lower academic results in elementary schools, compared to their peers. For example in Denmark, only 70% of children in vulnerable positions obtained a final exam from elementary school, compared to general level at 93%. [19] In Sweden and Finland, all the primary schools serve one free meal a day, this is not the case in the other Nordic countries. The lock-down during the COVID-19 pandemic was especially challenging for children in low-income families because of lack of digital equipment and difficulties with family support during online schooling. [20]

**8. Reduced costs in leisure activities:** There is a strong cultural tradition of participating in leisure activities in the Nordic countries. All the Nordic countries offers some kind of financial support for leisure activities to families, but it is not adequate in order to ensure equal opportunities for all children to participate. The activities are often costly, and over-represented by children from high- or middle-income families. A study from Denmark shows, that children from low-income families, or families with no prior experience with leisure activities, are under-represented [21].



In addition to financial costs, children from low-income families meet barriers such as lack of equipment, knowledge and language skills, lack of transportation, lack of social and mental resources to prioritize engagement, as well as lack of inclusive activities for children with disabilities. [22] In addition, applying for support, is often complex and difficult. In Finland, there is a model that offers children the opportunity to pursue a hobby for free. More than 250 municipalities are enabling children to engage in hobby activities after school, with state-based funding, primarily from first to sixth grade. This model needs to be assessed, expanded and developed further, so that all children can explore a hobby.

**9. Housing policies:** In all the Nordic countries, families living in poverty, generally live in very small housing compared to the number of family members. Their homes are typically located in socially disadvantaged residential areas. The living-crisis recent years has increased the rental prices, making it even more difficult. All the countries provide social housing for the most vulnerable families, but there is a lack of an overall housing policy which also includes a child perspective. There are very long waiting lists to access social housing, and your income must be very modest in order to receive housing support. There were at least 15 000 homeless children in Sweden in 2017, so the Swedish government target families with children in the National strategy for combating homelessness. [23] In Finland, the new government is planning a slight reduction in the housing benefits, which would worsen the housing situation for poor families. The housing situation in Iceland is based on home-ownership. Families with low incomes cannot get a mortgage, so they have to rent in a very expensive rental market.

**10. Sufficient level of social benefits for families with children:** In all the Nordic countries, there are families dependent on social benefits that are living below the poverty line. The benefits are not ensuring that their income is adequate to secure living conditions for their children, and is therefore not in line with children's rights. Families must be provided with adequate cash benefits to ensure that children are not living in poverty. This also applies to children of refugee and immigrant families.

#### REPORTS FROM SAVE THE CHILDREN:

- **Save the Children Finland (2022): Children's voice 2022. Experiences of children and young people of life in low-income families: Welfare gaps and challenges.**
- **Save the Children Norway (2020): Alt koster penger. Erfaringer og råd fra barn om fattigdom og utenforskap i Norge.**
- **Save the Children Norway (2021): Barnetrygd for alle - unntatt de som trenger den aller mest?**
- **Save the Children Sweden (2018) En plats att kalla hemma - Barnfamiljer i bostadskrisens skugga**
- **Save the Children Sweden (2020): Millenniebarnen - En studie om ekonomisk utsatthet bland barn under hela uppväxten**



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS:

In order to reduce and prevent children living in poverty, we urge the governments of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden to take the following actions:

- All strategies, plans and actions aimed at reducing and preventing child poverty should be developed from a child rights perspective and with an understanding of children's needs and situations. Children must be given the opportunity to participate in all decisions affecting them, including the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies.
- Investment in children should be a fiscal principle at national, regional and local levels, recognising that resources allocated to children today will deliver benefits to society as a whole – now and in the future. This means that many resources allocated to children should be viewed as an investment in society, hence as a part of the long-term structural deficit, rather than as a short-term expenditure. This implies that these costs are not counted as part of the stability pact. In order to promote this approach, budget transparency is needed, so that spending on children will be visible and traceable in all budgets.
- Implementing the European Child Guarantee. Denmark, Finland and Sweden, which are member countries of the EU, have all submitted their National Action plans for implementing the Child Guarantee. These plans must be implemented with adequate resources: Governments should ensure that civil society organisations (CSOs) and children participate in the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of these action plans. Also, the non-EU member countries (Norway and Iceland) should consider implementing a Child Guarantee.

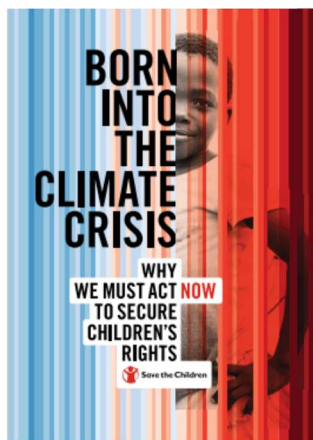
### THE EUROPEAN CHILD GUARANTEE

On June 2021, the Council of the EU adopted the Recommendation establishing the **European Child Guarantee**. This is the first EU-level policy instrument to address childhood disadvantage and exclusion. EU member states are required to provide at-risk children with free access to high-quality early education and care, free education and school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day, healthcare, and adequate housing. [24]



- The Nordic countries have all promised to contribute to the achievement of UN SDG by decreasing or eradicating poverty before 2030. The Nordic governments should develop broad-based indicators to measure poverty and commit to specific targets on the reduction on poverty in line with the SDG 1. The development should be monitored on a yearly basis.
- Policy makers should apply a cross-sectoral approach in consultation with civil society, which should promote measures in all relevant policy sectors that have implications for family poverty. Moreover, exchange and learning on policies and practice across the Nordic countries, and Europe, should be further deepened.
- Increase social benefits and services to all families with children in a child-oriented manner/based on child rights. Social security benefits should be more flexible and at a sufficient level. Governments ought to consider the different family situations and forms (divorced or single parents, immigrant households, families with disabilities, etc.) when allocating social security benefits. Families must be provided with adequate cash benefits to ensure that children are not living in poverty. This also applies to children of refugee and immigrant families.
- Increase quality of and access to social and health services. Services must be based on the needs of the child and their families, and also include mental health services. Health care should be free of charge for all children.
- Free early childhood education and care: Countries must aim for early childhood education and care to be affordable for all families. It should be free of charge for the most vulnerable children.
- Free education and free school meals. In addition to no school-fees, the governments should minimise the financial burden of education by providing free or subsidised transportation, free school meals and free access to school supplies. Hidden costs in the education system should be stronger regulated.
- Sufficient and healthy nutrition: Ensure that basic welfare and income support are sufficient for families to buy healthy food – taking into account the impact of the cost of living crisis on food prices.

- Give access to affordable and quality housing for all families with children. Public housing policy should prioritise poor/vulnerable families with children, have a strong child-right based focus, and the property should be family-friendly.
- Support all children in participating in leisure, culture, and sports activities. Barriers for participating must be identified and met with adequate policies. The government should have in place schemes for reduced fees, the possibility of borrowing necessary equipment, and ensuring that activities are accessible to all, regardless of functional ability.
- Systematically evaluate the impact of climate change on children. Governments should be prepared to face environmental changes and crises in order to ensure children's well-being. The climate and environmental policies should be child-sensitive, and we recommend that all countries use *the Just Transition Mechanism* identified by the European Commission. [24]



**The climate crisis and poverty:** The Save the Children report "*Born into the climate crisis. Why we must act now to secure children's rights*", states that children from low- and middle-income countries have inherited a problem not of their own making, and will be burdened with the most dangerous impacts of the climate crisis.

"When ranked by income, the top 50% of states are responsible for 86% of cumulative global CO2 emissions, while the lower half are responsible for just 14% . Despite this, it is the children of low - and middle-income countries that bear the brunt of losses and damage to health and human capital, land, cultural heritage, indigenous and local knowledge, and biodiversity as a result of climate change." [25]



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NORDIC COUNCIL:

Save the Children believes that ending family poverty must be a priority for all the Nordic countries, and that the Nordic Council must support and pursue initiatives and common policies in order to tackle poverty.

We urge the Nordic Council to :

- call upon all states to have a comprehensive action plan addressing family poverty, with national targets for poverty reduction by 2030;
- ensuring that strategies, plans and actions reflects the view of children with a child-rights perspective, and do not stigmatize children and their families;
- ensure that the progress to reduce poverty in the Nordic countries is continuously measured and monitored;
- create a platform for sharing of tools and best-practices in order for the Nordic governments to work together towards creating a region where all children are protected, enjoy equal opportunities, and grow into healthy and fulfilled adults.



### Child poverty in Europe:

The Save the Children report "Guaranteeing children's future. How COVID-19, cost of living and climate crisis affect children in poverty and what government in Europe need to do" analyses the state of child poverty in Europe and the implementation of the Child Guarantee.

The report shows that no European country, no matter how rich, is free of child poverty. In EU, 19,6 million children are at risk of poverty (1 in 4), and it is expected that these numbers will increase. Poverty is not only a threat to the future of Europe, but also a current pan-European emergency. [26]



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- [26] Save the Children (2023): [Guaranteeing children's future. How COVID-19, cost of living and climate crisis affect children in poverty and what government in Europe need to do](#)

## Appendix 1: Children in Nordic countries living in low-income families - national statistics

	National measure often used:		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
NORWAY	Children living in low-income household – less than 60% of median income	Nor %	10%	10,3%	10,7%	11,3%	11,7%	11,7%	11,3%
		Nor sum	98 175	101 325	105 538	110 818	114 963	115 203	110 700
SWEDEN <sup>30</sup>	Children age 0-17 living in low-income household – less than 60% of median income	Swe %	18,4%	18,1%	18,8%	19%	19,6%	19,5%	19,3%
		Swe sum	371119	373859	397318	407187	425271	425339	422199
FINLAND	Children living in low-income household – less than 60% of median income	Fin %	11,8%	11,7%	11,8%	12,2%	12,4%	11,1%	11,9%
		Fin sum	125 000	123 450	123 850	127 200	128 100	114 300	121 800
ICELAND	Children living in low-income household – less than 60% of median income	Ice %	16%	14%	NA	NA	NA	NA	12,7%
		Ice sum	13 000	11 500	NA	NA	NA	NA	11 000
DENMARK	Children living in low-income household – less than 50% of median income	Den %	3,8%	4,6%	5,6%	5,4%	5,3%	5%	4,7%
		Den sum	43 463	52 397	64 478	61 185	60 102	56 497	53 801

Sources:

- Denmark: Danmarks Statistik / [Statistics Denmark](#)
- Finland: Tilastokeskus / [Statistics Finland](#),
- Iceland: Hagstofa Islands / [Statistics Iceland](#)
- Norway: Statistisk sentralbyrå / [Statistics Norway](#)
- Sweden: Statistiska Centralbyrån / [Statistics Sweden](#)

# Save the Children's webpages on poverty:

Save the Children Denmark

[Red Barnet støtter danske børn, der lever i fattigdom](#)

Save the Children Finland

<https://www.pelastakalapset.fi/ajankohtaista/kampanjat/lapsen-aani/>

Save the Children Iceland

[Fátækt | Barnaheill](#)

Save the Children Norway

<https://www.reddbarna.no/vart-arbeid/barn-i-norge/barn-i-fattige-familier/>

Save the Children Sweden

[Barnfattigdom i Sverige - Rädda Barnen \(raddabarnen.se\)](#)

