THE CHILD GUARANTEE:  
BREAKING THE CYCLE OF DISADVANTAGE

PHASE III OF THE PREPARATORY ACTION FOR A CHILD GUARANTEE

The partnership between the UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (ECARO) and the European Commission to pilot the European Child Guarantee (ECG) as part of the Phase III of the preparatory action of the ECG across in seven Member States (Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, and Spain) is coming to an end on the 28th of April 2023.

We are pleased to share with you through this Programmatic Update the most important highlights of the progress to date.

Closing Event of Phase III: Leading the Way for Europe’s Children

The end of the Phase III of the Preparatory Action for a European Child Guarantee will be marked with a high-level closing event taking place in Sofia-Bulgaria, on 20 April 2023. The event aims to take stock of progress achieved in testing ECG and pave the way for effective implementation of ECG in European Union and beyond.

It will provide a unique opportunity for member states to celebrate achievements and share lessons learned and insights from the pilots and thus inspiring member states for an EU wide implementation of the ECG.
Based on the experience of Phase III, the event will aim to showcase how integrated, coordinated policies and practices developed as part of the ECG can reach to the most disadvantaged children and ensure their effective and free access to essential services. It will also provide an opportunity to discuss how the Child Guarantee serves as a vehicle for implementing the recommendations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Visit the dedicated webpage to follow the event online and for more information:

Leading the Way for Europe’s Children | UNICEF Europe and Central Asia
Some of the main results of the Phase III of the Preparatory Action for a European Child Guarantee include:

- **18 models of services, interventions, and mechanisms** aiming to enable access to essential services for disadvantaged groups of children, were developed, tested, and integrated within ECG National Action Plans, sectoral strategies as well as regional and local service development plans in 4 countries, through participatory and coordinated processes focused on bridging target groups of children to existing programmes and services.

- Since the start of the project over **30,345 children and young adults were reached** with services and interventions and over **16,037 adult caregivers** were reached with models of services and interventions across all four countries; around **2,914 professionals** and decision-makers have been capacitated to provide quality ECG services and interventions.

- **7 countries were supported to design comprehensive ECG National Action Plans informed by the deep dive policy analyses**, stakeholders’ participation and rapid evidence assessment on inter-sectorial collaboration.

- Sharing experience between pilot and with other Member States as part of the knowledge sharing platform and series of thematic webinars

To learn more about the pilot projects in the 7 countries participating in the Phase III of the Preparatory Action for the ECG, click HERE.
UNICEF Support to the development of European Child Guarantee National Action Plans (ECG NAP)

ECG NAPs have been developed in six pilot Member States under the leadership of ECG National Coordinators or other designated actors. UNICEF, together with the governments of these countries, have worked to ensure that these plans are based on robust evidence and rely on the findings and recommendations of the Deep Dives analyses undertaken in each country, and that they are participatory and have sound monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

In the context of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, most of the countries are adapting their national action plans to include measures to address the basic need for protection and access to services for refugee children from Ukraine.

By the time this Programmatic Update was drafted, the ECG NAPs for Croatia, Greece, Italy and Spain were submitted to the European Commission.

**Bulgaria**

The Deep Dive analysis has been reviewed by line ministries which have provided their feedback and has been used extensively to inform the drafting of the ECG NAP. The NAP is expected to be a comprehensive document based on the vision of the government to consolidate in one place all the sectoral policies covered by the Child Guarantee, as well as other areas such as social protection measures and social services. To inform the work of the WG, technical guidance and capacity-building support was provided such as a ‘Brief M&E Guidance Note’, prepared by UNICEF ECARO, a proposal for key actions to be included in the NAP, a draft M&E Framework consultative meeting with some key NGO networks, and technical webinars covering the five thematic areas of the ECG.

The NAP development process has been delayed due to the decision of the Government to expand its scope and to include specific measures and interventions targeted at refugee families and children from Ukraine. The NAP will be published for public consultation as per national legislation. The draft NAP was developed by an inter-institutional Working Group, chaired by the Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Policy & National Coordinator for the ECG and included more than 60 members – representatives of national institution and agencies, local authorities, civil society organisations, private sector associations, trade unions, academia, UNICEF and UNHCR. In October 2022, final version of the NAP was discussed and approved by the National Council on Social Inclusion, the National Council on Child Protection and the National Child Council at the State Agency for Child Protection and submitted for approval by the Council of Ministers. On 9 November 2022, the NAP was approved by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria. Its implementation will be coordinated through an inter institutional working group at a political level, chaired by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and involving all key line ministries and institutions, which will be complemented by a permanent expert group to provide technical support and monitor its implementation.

**Croatia**

UNICEF Croatia is a member of the Working Group set up for the development of the NAP, together with more than 20 other governmental institutions and key stakeholders and it has supported consultations with children and young people, which were conducted in several related phases.

The Deep Dive analysis as well as report from the consultations with children have informed and served as a basis for development of the NAP.

An advanced draft has been submitted to the European Commission and published on its website. On 22nd of December 2022 consultations with all stakeholders were organized with participation of children and young people. The process of gathering formal opinions from all the line ministries and national authorities will be completed soon and the final document submitted to the Government for formal adoption. With technical support by UNICEF, a monitoring framework is being advanced further.
### Greece

Greece has established a Working Group comprised of representatives from 12 key Ministries to work on the development of the NAP and provide inputs, including new measures, recommendations, and key actions.

Under the leadership of the national coordinator for the ECG, EKKA, inputs were requested from a variety of stakeholders: local, regional government, independent authorities, and civil society. UNICEF supported the task force established to draft the NAP monitoring framework in line with the recommendations of the Deep Dive analysis. Upon the request by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, UNICEF provided technical expertise to support the drafting process, to develop the monitoring and evaluation framework, and to ensure that children's voices are considered.

A preliminary draft was submitted to the European Commission at the end of March 2022. The final NAP was submitted in September 2022.

UNICEF is providing technical support to Molsa since late December 2022 through TSI in order to a) provide a recommendations report on an effective monitoring and evaluation framework for children in poverty and social exclusion, including technical specifications for the creation of an integrated system for the monitoring of children in need and b) a consolidated governance mechanism to be developed for the implementation of the NAP on the Child Guarantee, with a clear set of duties, referral pathways and statutory collaboration protocols for all stakeholders involved.

### Italy

Further to its submission in March 2022, the Italian ECG NAP was formally adopted for dissemination in September 2022. Under the leadership of the National Coordinator, several inter-governmental Technical Working Groups were proposed to prioritise implementation of key ECG National Action Plan (ECG NAP) measures. The National Coordinator has moved forward in the set up of a Governance structure by establishing a National Steering Group inclusive of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Department of Family Policy under the Presidency of the Council, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Education. Further coordination work is planned to take place for the constitution of a similar governance mechanisms at regional and local level to support the implementation and monitoring of the ECG NAP.

To promote the dissemination of the findings of the Deep Dive and the content of the ECG NAP, UNICEF, together with the National ECG Coordinator and relevant Ministries, has organised three thematic webinars on some of the main topics related to the ECG in Italy, namely education, participation and multidimensional poverty. As part of the dissemination strategy, UNICEF is holding public presentations of the main results of the research, and those that informed the EGC NAP, with local governments and relevant stakeholders. Presentations have been conducted for the Social Committee of the Conference of the Italian Regions, the Umbria Region and the Social Policy Committee of the Emilia-Romagna Region. The Youth Advisory Board (YAB) has continued to raise awareness, gather the opinions of their peers and share recommendations with National Coordinator and key institutional stakeholders on ECG priorities.

### Germany

The German NAP is developed jointly by all relevant Ministries and together with the regional and communal level. It is currently being negotiated between the Ministries. The Deep Dive analysis has been informing the discussions around the NAP. The Deep Dive analysis was shared with the Commission in January 2022 and has since led to a dialogue on recommendations and envisaged measures. The Deep Dive analysis has been welcomed and its main results have been considered as basis for the first draft of the NAP.
### Lithuania

The draft ECG NAP has been presented to the National Child Welfare Council under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, chaired by the Minister of Social Security and Labour. This Council is expected to endorse the ECG NAP, once finalized. It is expected that the ECG NAP will be formally approved via a Ministerial decision (by three Ministers – Social Security and Labour, Health and Education, Science and Sports). The Council is also the body in charge of the monitoring of the implementation and serves as a platform for its coordination. In addition, the Parliament will also play an oversight role through its Human Rights and Social Affairs and Labour Committees.

The final draft ECG NAP will be translated in a child-friendly language and consulted with children so that their voices are reflected in the plan. Children will be involved through the newly established Child Council under the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Agency. The participation of children from the ECG target groups is prioritized for this exercise.

### Spain

The drafting of the ECG NAP was led by the ECG Management committee, which includes the National Coordinator (General Directorate for Children Rights), High Commissioner on Child Poverty and UNICEF. The results of the Deep Dive were used extensively in the elaboration of the ECG NAP in Spain, especially in the analysis of the different key services and objectives concerning different groups of children in need, the definition of areas for action, objectives and measures, and the choice of indicators for goals and objectives.

The consultation process for the ECG NAP with the public and relevant stakeholders, has been organized in parallel with its drafting. The process of consultation with children has also been organized in parallel, including the development of a child-friendly version of the NAP and the organization of several consultation meetings with children of various backgrounds and age groups in the framework of National Council for Child Participation.

The State Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Child Guarantee (2022-2030) in Spain was finally approved by the Council of Ministers on June 5, 2022, following a review of the advanced draft by the European Commission and the final contributions of all relevant ministries and the Autonomous Communities. The NAP is structured in three axes: fight against child poverty and reinforcement of social protection for children and adolescents; universalization of social rights through access and enjoyment of quality, accessible and inclusive services; and promotion of territorial equity and protective, inclusive and participatory environments. The NAP includes 25 objectives and more than 80 concrete measures with their respective goals and indicators.

Spanish Government, with the collaboration of UNICEF, is currently developing a tool for data collection, monitoring and evaluation, and to facilitate mutual learning, in order to support the implementation and reporting on the progress of the ECG.

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Innovative and evidence-based models of services for the most disadvantaged children

In 4 countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, and Italy), in close cooperation with the national and local governments, 18 evidenced-based and sustainable models of services and interventions for children from disadvantaged backgrounds are being implemented and tested for replicability. The implementation of all models of services has continued in coordination and agreement with national and sub-national authorities and institutions, through carefully designed plans and agreements, overseen by the coordination mechanisms at national and local level.

Figure shows the key results for the first year of implementation of the Phase III of the European Child Guarantee

- **Reach**
  - 2,914 professionals and decision-makers capacitated to plan, provide, and monitor quality ECG services and interventions for children and young adults.
  - 30,345 children and young adults directly reached with services and interventions across 4 countries.
  - 16,037 adult caregivers were reached with models of services and interventions across all four countries since the start of the project.

Technical guidance and tools developed to support partners at national and subnational level.
In **Bulgaria** the interventions in the framework of Phase III of the ECG aim to improve the living conditions and increase access and use of integrated services for *children with disabilities* and *children in precarious family situations* - including children in poor households and extremely poor households and Roma children - through the testing and scaling up of 4 innovative models in three districts of the country.
**Home visiting program**

**What:** Home visiting service and the provision of individualized guidance, information, and support for caregivers of children 0-3 years old and pregnant women, with a particular focus on families in precarious situations and children with disabilities. Support is tailored to the specific needs of families and children and includes referral to other services (social, educational and health).

**Where:** All four municipalities in Sliven district: Sliven, Nova Zagora, Kotel and Tvarditsa

**Progress**
- 48% of children (0-3 years) covered by the home visiting service in Sliven district
- 3654 families with 4538 children (0-3 years) received individualised support, including 729 families and 1534 children in precarious family situations
- 740 children were referred to specialists,
- 1143 pregnant women (of which 610 in precarious situation) received access to prenatal care
- 23,126 home visits conducted
- Guide for the provision of home visiting services developed
- Methodology for the costing of the home visiting services developed
- Costing analysis conducted and financial scenarios for the provision of universal access to home visiting services for families with small children developed

**Early childhood interventions**

**What:** Early childhood intervention (ECI) services for families with young children with disabilities and developmental difficulties. This model ensures families with young children with developmental difficulties and disabilities, receive timely and quality family-centred support through integrated ECI services in three pilot municipalities where specialists from health, education, and social services work together in a systemic way.

**Where:** 3 municipalities: Chirpan, Sliven and Stara Zagora

**Progress**
- 237 parents and 190 children reached by ECI teams, out of which 85 parents and 72 children received intensive support
- 79 children (0-3) with disabilities referred to ECI services (of which 34 recruited by the ECI teams or self-referred)
- 41 staff of the ECI services completed intensive training programme
- 99 specialists trained to conduct development screening
- 150 people participated in workshops for parents on ECI
- 70% of healthcare professionals (GPs and pediatricians) and 100% of health staff nurseries trained
- Guidelines for general practitioners for monitoring child development in the first 3 years developed
- Methodology for the provision of family-centered early intervention developed

**Inclusive Pre-Primary Education**

**What:** 30 pilot kindergartens provide quality inclusive pre-school education services for children with disabilities and learning difficulties. The capacities of 30 pilot kindergartens in 10 municipalities strengthened to provide quality inclusive pre-school education for children with disabilities and special learning needs, and to engage effectively with parents.

**Where:** 10 pilot municipalities in Burgas, Sliven, and Stara Zagora districts.

**Progress**
- 6,614 children, including 193 children with disabilities and special learning needs, in 30 kindergartens, supported with access to improved inclusive pre-school education
- 2,691 parents engaged
- 489 kindergarten staff trained
- 45 additional specialists hired
- 30 kindergartens have improved inclusive environments
- 65 staff from 3 RCSPIE completed specialized trainings
- Methodological guide for screening test for children (3 – 3.5 years)
- Practical guide with inclusive practices and approaches developed
- National quality ECEC framework tested by 10 pilot kindergartens
**Integrated child protection and family support**

**What:** Children in precarious family situations and their families have access to integrated child and family-centered support services that address their specific vulnerabilities and prevent child-family separation. This intervention aims to improve the quality and strengthen the prevention capacities of existing family support social services by establishing mobile teams for outreach support to children and families in precarious situations with a focus on marginalized Roma communities in 7 pilot municipalities.

**Where:** 7 municipalities in three pilot districts Burgas, Silven, and Stara Zagora

**Progress:**
- **3,386 children and 2,522 parents** in vulnerable situations provided with support, including intense case work with 733 children and 458 parents.
- **901 children** provided access to education and healthcare.
- **793 parents** provided access to social benefits and other services.
- **7 mobile teams with 22 newly hired social workers** and assistants established.
- **97 social workers and assistants** provided with intensive training.
- **11 additional social workers in 10 CPDs** and trained.
- **615 cases** opened in CPDs: 145 multidisciplinary coordination meetings.
- Methodology for the provision of the social service ”Community work” developed.
- University programme for the pre-service training of social workers in the child protection system developed.
BULGARIA
Albena is now a calm and fearless student

Young girl breaks barriers and starts school with professional help under the European Child Guarantee pilot project in Bulgaria.

It’s exactly 7:30 am as the bell in the only school in the small Bulgarian mountain town of Tvarditsa rings. Classes will start in a minute. A little girl with a big pink princess bag runs up the stairs, holding her mother tightly by the hand. Together, they walk up to the classroom and give each other a hug, then another, before they finally part ways.

The girl’s name is Albena, she is seven years old, and is in the first grade. For all children, this is perhaps the most difficult time, but for her it is even harder. She has a developmental disability and communicates only with those people closest to her, using very few words. She is does not trust anyone she doesn’t know and dislikes anything that is new. Since she was little, she has almost always sought the comfort of calm, secluded and quiet places. She cannot bear noise and large groups of people gathered in one place.

“When we started coming to school, Albena was so scared and startled by the sound of the bell that she even covered her ears! I was terribly worried about the first grade. It wasn’t even about the writing, I was terrified she’d refuse to stay in class.”

This is what Maria Radneva, Albena’s mother, who takes her to school every morning and picks her up at lunchtime, tells us.

“Today, one month later, she comes to school visibly relaxed and stays on even until the last class,” adds Maria in a trembling voice, which shows that she too finds it difficult to believe what is happening. “No one ever thought this might happen.”

Read more here
In Croatia, the specific interventions in the framework of Phase III of the ECG pay special attention to the early identification of boys and girls, and their families who live in particularly deprived environments, face specific disadvantages and for which early intervention is crucial to break the cycle of disadvantage and provide them with opportunities for developing at their maximum potential. These models of services aim to improve living conditions and increase access and use of integrated services for children living in precarious situations, including families living in poor households, Roma children and families and children with disabilities in the Medjimurje County in Croatia.
**Child protection and family-support services**

**What:** Integrated child protection and family support services aiming to ensure early identification of girls, boys and their families who live in precarious and deprived environments and promotes accessible, high-quality, timely and appropriate family support and child protection interventions, that include outreach services in communities at the highest risk of poverty and social exclusion. It is implemented through the partnership with the Croatian Institute for Social Work, two regional offices in Medjimurje County (Prelog and Čakovec), Family Centre – Office Medjimurje, Croatian Association of Social Workers and CSO Centre Growing Up Together.

**Where:** Medjimurje County

**Progress:**
- 626 children benefitted from the programme
- 854 parents acquired new parenting knowledge and skills
- Parenting support programme for Roma families have been developed
- 55 educational and social welfare professionals as well as 37 paraprofessionals (Roma cultural mediators) acquired knowledge and skills to conduct parenting support programmes
- 58 experts from social welfare centres trained on multicultural perspective in social work and case management
- 34 family outreach workers trained on effective family interventions
- 138 experts trained on effective and qualitative cross-sectoral and inter-disciplinary cooperation
- 7 cross-sectoral and inter-disciplinary teams established and are functional
- Child-friendly environment within two social welfare centres and a family centre being ensured

**Quality pre-primary education**

**What:** All vulnerable children (including Roma, children with disabilities and children living in precarious family situations) have effective access to quality pre-primary education to prevent social exclusion and early school-drop out. This includes strengthening capacities of pre-primary education professionals and parents, establishment of new facilities, and development of a regulatory framework for local government.

**Where:** Medjimurje Country

**Progress:**
- 100 parents and caregivers supported and gained new knowledge and skills in providing stimulating home learning activities
- Over 300 at-risk children without access to kindergarten using non-formal opportunities to play and learn in 4 Play Hubs
- 210 kindergarten teachers and Roma assistants trained on inclusive principles in their practice
- A tool to plan the cost of kindergarten per child developed, tested, and shared within Medjimurje and MoE
- 1 faculty cabinet for early childhood education equipped with furniture and didactics to help students gain competencies for working with diverse learners
- 180 students completed part of their practical training working with Roma children without access to kindergarten.
- 4 kindergartens (573 children) and 6 primary schools (1607 children) equipped with furniture, ICT, and didactics to benefit the educational outcomes of disadvantaged children
- 100 young children participated in an interactive children’s plays aimed at sensitizing children to respect diversity among people, with a focus on the Roma national minority

**Early childhood interventions**

**What:** Young children (0-7) with or at risk of developmental delays and those with disabilities and their families have improved access to integrated and coordinated early childhood interventions (ECI) services that timely and adequately address their developmental needs. This includes providing coordinated and integrated quality ECI services, strengthened knowledge and skills of health, education and social protection professionals, parenting support and improved data collection.

**Where:** Medjimurje County

**Progress:**
- 970 children and 913 caregivers/parents have been directly reached, of which 332 children and 179 parents received intensive support,
- 3607 services provided to children and parents/caregivers by ECD/ECI outreach team
- 145 education, social welfare, health care and other professionals increased capacities on early childhood detection and intervention and how to support young children and families
- 1 online course on fundamentals of ECI made available on the UNICEF learning platform AGORA.²

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² [https://agora.unicef.org/course/info.php?id=30674](https://agora.unicef.org/course/info.php?id=30674)
Local level Coordination

Establishment of 5 community resource centres, centres for children and families:

Five community resource centres (i.e. Centres for children and families) have been constructed and established in close cooperation with five municipalities (Mala Subotica, Nedelišče, Podturen, Pribisлавec and Orehovia). The process of fully equipping them is at the final stage. They are places of resources and support, where children, adolescents and their families will benefit from practical and daily support, case management, parenting support, early intervention, and mental health and psychosocial support.

Additionally, a Centre for the provision of community services in Medjimurje County, which operates as a public institution within social welfare system offering family- and community-based services, is being established. The Centre will deliver services within the premises of the community resource centres.

Coordination:

The Programme Implementation Committee for Medjimurje County has been established and has met in person three times (in February, May, and November 2021). Furthermore, during 2022 regular bilateral meetings as well as coordination meetings of municipalities where community resource centres will be established have been organized.
Parenting support workshops nurture positive and empowering parenting

“If those workshops were to repeat today, I would run to attend them again. Really. I would like these workshops to be held again, for us moms, for future moms and future generations to be able to rely on our experts,” says Senka Ignac, mother of five. Three months after she completed a cycle of 15 Growing Up Together Count Us In Plus workshops, intended for parents and families living in demanding circumstances, mother Senka met with her group in Međimurje County for a so-called booster workshop. Booster workshops are organized to test and check the program’s efficiency, learn how much participants learned, whether they apply what they learned in their everyday life and family routine, and what has anything changed in their lives…”

A lot of mothers tell us they control their anger much better now, as if they didn’t know or didn’t have the techniques and tools to do it before. They shout less at children, and they solve more by talking. Many of them spend time with children by reading picture books to them and encouraging them to do something together. While before they may have baked cookies by themselves, now they will do it with the help of children. They have noticed how their relationships with their partners have changed because they started to better control both their behaviours, they think differently about some things, so there is certainly an effect, there are changes,” shares Jelena Ptiček Perković, workshop educator.

Through these workshops, she continues, she learned that it is really worthy to give parents some basic tools they can apply in everyday parenting because it shows results.

In addition to the workshop educators, the participants also get support of Roma cultural mediators, Growing Up Together activists (RAZA). Krešo Balog, Growing Up Together activist (RAZA), played a key role in informing and motivating mothers to attend workshops, which, at the beginning, as he admits, was not a simple task.

“They thought it was linked to formal education, so I had to talk to them a lot to make them understand that workshops will be beneficial for them and their children and allow them to learn some useful information. I managed to motivate them and by the end of program, they were all delighted. I was also very interested in these workshops, same as them actually,” Krešo says and concludes how workshop were very useful to him as a father too. He learned a lot of things and he believes how more fathers should got involved.
In Greece the interventions in the framework of Phase III of the ECG pay particular attention to the needs of children without parental care, including non-Greek migrant children, and aim to build solid evidence, practice, and an operational base to inform the national deinstitutionalisation reform. This takes stock of the best practices developed by UNICEF and its partners in the framework of the migrant response in Greece. The other two models of service address skills building for young people and inclusive school education.
## Deinstitutionalisation

**What:** Support national authorities to develop a clear national de-institutionalisation strategy and support the local authorities in the region of Attica to facilitate deinstitutionalisation and identify alternative care options for vulnerable children. Strengthening a gatekeeping system and the capacities of the social workforce are key elements of this approach.

**Where:** National / Attica region

**Progress:**
- **379 children** have been supported: 218 children and young persons living in residential institutions had their individual DI plans developed, and 161 children at risk have been supported through the intervention of the hands-on team in social services
- **101 residential care staff participated in** awareness raising sessions on DI
- **273 social workers** from 51 municipalities in Attika Region trained in early identification and case management

## Foster care

**What:** Support for the development of the national Foster Care System to enable an effective national foster care operational framework through the evaluation, training, and support of potential and registered foster families in all stages of foster care. In addition, foster care programs piloted in the Region of Attica with a view to scale them up nationally.

**Where:** Attica region

**Progress:**
- **109 children** have benefited, 9 children returned to their biological family, 24 children supported during the foster care placement
- **28 professionals** working in childcare institutions capacitated to support foster care
- **97 foster parents/potential foster parents** supported throughout the different stages of fostering
- A protocol has been developed with the support of a sub working group of experts and the ELMEPA University for the professionals working on foster care
- A Joint Ministerial Decision has been issued establishing the operational framework for the professional foster care (available [here](#))

## Supported independent living

**What:** Supported Independent Living (SIL) is integrated as a standard alternative care modality of the national child protection system. This includes an evaluation of the SIL model as it was developed and implemented for unaccompanied children, integration in the national regulatory framework to expand the service and integrate into the national childcare system and piloting in the selected region.

**Where:** Attica region

**Progress:**
- **Report** with the analysis of the 14 FGDs and 5 key informant interviews and recommendations.
- **1 Ministerial Decision** for the pilot EU CG program, issued in May 2022 enabling the implementation of the SIL pilot project (no 41843/11-5-2022, B’2313)
- **1 Joint Ministerial Decision** for the national SIL program (no 23356/13-3-2023, B’ 1519)
- **4 young adults and 2 children** have been placed in the first 2 SIL apartments from institutions
**Integrated skills development**

**What:** Access to skills development and opportunities for social and economic inclusion of young people - to support adolescents and young people in challenging living conditions, to benefit from better employment or entrepreneurship opportunities and become engaged members of civil society.

**Where:** Attica region

**Progress:**
- **100 young people** interviewed to outline their profile
- **429 adolescents and young people** participated in vocational guidance sessions and job orientation sessions
- **377 adolescents and young people** (among them 122 young people with disabilities) supported to develop entrepreneurial skills
- **107 young people** participated in skills development program including 30 young Roma
- **37 young people** participated in job experience acquisition program
- **1 social enterprises** by young people with disabilities is currently operationalised. While 2 were established and had their business plans approved as previously reported.

**Inclusive education**

**What:** Schools become more inclusive, ensuring quality education for all children, including those with disabilities in families or in institutional care and migrant children. This includes a teacher capacity building programme, piloting the intervention in Attica region and a sensitisation campaign on the power and benefits of inclusive education.

**Where:** Attica region

**Progress:**
- **191 children** supported through individualized learning paths
- **519 professionals** trained on the principle of inclusive education, differentiated learning and the integration of social-emotional learning in everyday teaching practices
- **30 schools** supported with intra-school trainings and a mentorship scheme
- **Bottleneck analysis** on the implementation of an inclusive school in Greece finalised and validated.

**Coordination**

The National Child Guarantee Steering Committee (Co-chaired with MoLSA) includes both representatives of the central government as well as of local authorities and has met once. The Committee is complemented by technical groups aiming to inform the implementation of the models of services and results areas.
GREECE: Creating employment opportunities for young people with disabilities

Apollo, Panagiota and Joseph, three young people with different disabilities, are all graduates of Agios Dimitrios’ Special Vocational Education and Training Workshop (SVET). They now work together at Synergy Snacks; a company selling energy nut bars, with the vision to ensure the independence and maximum autonomy of young people with mental disabilities and other developmental disorders.

This is their very first job and, as they share with us, their work has contributed significantly to strengthening their skills - both on a personal and professional level - helping them to feel more independent, confident and optimistic about their professional future.

“It gives me great satisfaction when I get out of my house and go to work. Then I wait to get paid and I feel very good with myself...” says Apollo.

Panagiota adds “Here I learned how to work, how to manage customer orders, answer the phone and talk to clients.”

George, who has been working at the 3S – School Synergy Snacks for 3 years now, continuously supports them by sharing with them his experience and knowledge, while Ms. Rena, who is the office manager, observes their progress and shares her thoughts, “I saw that work makes them happy and I hope there will be more initiatives like this because it is invaluable for these children to be able to work and get paid for it.”

The “Empowering young people to access increased employment and entrepreneurship opportunities” initiative is implemented by the UNICEF Greece Country Office in collaboration with Junior Achievement Greece, as part of the pilot implementation of the EU ‘Child Guarantee’ programme. In addition, the initiative has been implemented also as part of Junior Achievement Europe’s ‘Economic Opportunities for all’ programme in collaboration with the NN Group, which promotes the education and employment of young people from vulnerable groups and remote areas.

Both initiatives aim to strengthen the skills and create opportunities for young people with disabilities to access employment and entrepreneurship.
In Italy, the intervention in the framework of Phase III of the ECG aims to address the needs of children affected by migration and those without parental care, as well as children in precarious family situations, children with disabilities and children with mental health support needs.
### Foster care

**What:** Foster care mainstreamed in the childcare system. This intervention aims to map and document promising practices in the provision of alternative care for out-of-home children, including specialized foster care practices, as well as design and integrate a model of foster care for migrant children who are unaccompanied, separated or accompanied and requiring supplementary support, into the mainstream childcare system.

**Where:** Sicily, Latium, Lombardy and Veneto

**Progress:**
1. **58 migrant children** have been placed in foster care and are supported
2. Costing analysis for the scale-up of the model and to generate sound evidence for its sustainability started
3. One methodological protocol for the foster care of unaccompanied children developed for the Municipality of Rome
4. **Mapping of 12 alternative care promising practices finalized**
5. **9 promising practices of specialized foster care** for children aged 0 to 6 for children with disability and of light foster care identified, documented and analysed

### Integrated skills development

**What:** An integrated skills development package which aims to improve young people’s employability and social inclusion and ensure their effective transition to adulthood. UNICEF’s flagship initiative UPSHIFT aims to empower marginalized adolescents to become social innovators. Innovation & Creativity Camps, as well as in-depth programmes delivered by trained teachers, aim to generate ideas amongst adolescents on how to address community problems.

**Where:** Sicily, Latium, and Lombardy

**Progress:**
- **3,619 students** were involved in 41 “Innovation & Creativity Camps”, generating innovative social impact ideas. Of these, **1,225 students** completed the second phase “Ideas in Action for UPSHIFT”, while **339 students** completed the last incubation phase
- **Over 200 schoolteachers** were trained on UPSHIFT XXI century skills building programme
- **1 MoU signed with the Ministry of Education** on UPSHIFT promotion and replication in lower and upper secondary schools
- **Around 1,000 students, 55 teachers and 160 mentors** demonstrated an increase of their 21st-century skills
- **An evaluation involving 157 students** who completed the incubation phase recorded that UPSHIFT had a positive impact on the acquisition of **entrepreneurial skills** (including self-efficacy, teamwork, creative ideas generation, financial skills) and **life skills** (including empathy, self-esteem, emotional and stress management).
- Costing analysis for the scale-up of the model and to generate sound evidence for its sustainability started

### Social housing and skills building for care leavers

**What:** Integration of social housing and skills building components into the National Care Leavers Programme, led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies. The intervention aims at complementing the already existing individualized support to care leavers with support for school-to-work transition and housing autonomy. The intervention includes a mapping of good practices, support to local social services, capacity building activities and potentially direct support to care leavers.

**Where:** Sicily, Latium, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, and Campania

**Progress:**
1. **110 tutors and social workers** trained
2. **1 mapping of promising practices** of social housing completed and validated
3. **Handbook for the promotion of social housing for care leavers** and for the support in their transition to housing autonomy, tested in 3 municipalities (Asti, Lucca and Atripalda) and finalized.
**Innovative family support service**

**What:** Peer support for vulnerable families, including families with children with disabilities. The intervention included: mapping of services already offered by the Family Support Centres, focusing on initiatives aimed to enhance and consolidate peer-to-peer support between families, and creation of a summary document of up-to-date initiatives in Family Support Centres; Development of a standardized methodology, included a Toolkit/Handbook with Guidelines and Tools to help the Family Support Centres in designing and implementing inclusive and accessible peer-to-peer support activities for families; a pilot testing in 6 selected Centres of a model for family peer support, which included the following activities: staff training; and technical assistance and supervision.

**Where:**
- Mapping of Services: Lombardy, Emilia Romagna, Latium, Piedmont, Marche, and Apulia
- Pilot testing: Lombardy, Emilia Romagna, Latium, Marche, and Apulia

**Progress:**
1) **70 Family Support Centres** consulted in the initial mapping of peer-support initiatives  
2) **Toolkit/Handbook** with Guidelines and Tools for Family Support Centres’ staff developed and validated  
3) **Pilot phase initiated** in the 6 Family Support Centres, including the following activities:  
   - Staff training in 6 Family Support Centres: **29 professionals** of multidisciplinary teams trained (roles: Social workers, Psychologists/Psychotherapists, Educators, Teachers, Project managers, Volunteers).  
   - **Technical assistance to Family Support Centres’ staff** in designing of peer-to-peer support initiatives and activities, with a focus on: participation and consultation of families; inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized families and communities; partnership with the local network of stakeholders (public services and institutions, private services, organizations, schools and educational services, informal groups).

**Contrasting educational poverty**

**What:** Interventions to effectively counter educational poverty. The aim of the intervention is to monitor and document the most promising practices financed by the Department for Family Policies (through the Educare call for proposals), present them in a structured way and analyse their replicability and potential scale-up and inclusion in the ECG NAP.

**Where:** Veneto, Piedmont, Emilia Romagna, Umbria, Latium, Campania

**Progress:**
- **Research protocol and data collection tools** developed and validated  
- **9 promising practices** selected (3 in the North of Italy, 3 in the Center and 3 in the South)  
- **Data collection phase conducted** – a total of 30 focus groups and 18 direct interviews were conducted with the participation of 177 people  
- Analysis and documentation phase completed with all 9 documentation reports developed and validated

The **National Child Guarantee Steering Committee** meets approximately on a monthly basis and includes representatives of both co-leading Ministries (the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Department for Family Policies), UNICEF, the European Commission (as observer) and more recently the CG National Coordinator.
One year after the adoption of the Council recommendation, the Youth Advisory Board meets the Child Guarantee National Coordinator and authorities in Italy.

One year after the adoption of the Council recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee — inviting Member States to adopt national action plans to combat child poverty and social exclusion—adolescents and young people from the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) in Italy met the Child Guarantee National Coordinator and authorities to share their views on the processes underway.

The Youth Advisory Board, created to foster the participation of vulnerable children and adolescents in developing the Child Guarantee National Action Plan for Italy, was established in December 2021 by UNICEF as part of the European Child Guarantee pilot phase in collaboration with the Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Department for Family Policies and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies.

The group is composed of 20 adolescents and young people, from different socio-economic backgrounds, whose task is collecting the voices of children and adolescents living in Italy and participating in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Child Guarantee. Since December 2021, the YAB and its subgroups met in Florence and continued their work to develop a set of recommendations, which were reported to national authorities and then integrated within the National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee.

The YAB was consulted with regard to the development of the ECG NAP in February 2022. Since its establishment, the YAB has raised awareness, gathered the opinions of their young peers and shared recommendations with key institutional stakeholders. It has also engaged in 3 in-person meetings involving key government partners (Municipalities of Florence, Rome and Milan). To sensitize young people on the Child Guarantee priorities, videos and posts on social media have been produced and disseminated via the YAB Instagram page, and three polls have been disseminated via U Report. Moreover, three podcasts are being co-produced by YAB members and key subject experts. YAB members also drafted recommendations for the newly elected Government based on their views and priorities in terms of promoting child and adolescent rights, including quality education.

Read more [here](#)
The Operational Research (or process evaluation) is being carried out in the 4 Countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, and Italy) which are implementing specific models of services to address the needs of the most disadvantaged children. Phase 1 and Phase II data collection have been completed.

The operational research has been completed and a synthesis report has been prepared. The aim of the research is to identify key learning from the pilot that can be used to inform the further development of effective services for children and families through the Child Guarantee in all 27 EU countries. The research entailed two waves of in-depth interviews involving 121 key stakeholders (including practitioners, practice managers and policy makers) near the initiation and completion of the pilot.

The report covers key themes related to the experience of implementing these models of intervention, including: planning, integrated working, service design and innovation, needs assessment, monitoring and evaluation, participation, inclusion, and sustainability. It concludes with three sets of key messages from the research, focusing on what is needed to: support the initiative at the European level, lay the foundations at the national level, and develop interventions at the local level.

The synthesis report will be published in late May and UNICEF will host a webinar at that point to communicate the key messages.
The Journey to Childcare reform:

De-Institutionalisation: Supporting transition from institutional to family- and community-based alternative care

On 15 February 2023, UNICEF ECARO, together with the European Commission (DG EMPL), organised a webinar titled, "De-Institutionalisation: Supporting transition from institutional to family- and community-based alternative care," to present the work done in Phase III of the Preparatory Action for a Child Guarantee around improving outcomes for children who are living in institutions or those at risk of family separation. The aim of the webinar was threefold: to highlight the key elements of the deinstitutionalization process; to share perspectives on prevention and high-quality care for children; and to identify key drivers that stimulate the necessary deinstitutionalisation reforms and good practices and practical tools for their sustainable implementation and monitoring.

This event, which forms a part of a series of technical exchanges for European Child Guarantee National Coordinators, spotlights the work underway at country level under the pilot programmes and aims to provide decision-makers and practitioners working on the European Child Guarantee in all Member States with guidance, support and inspiration. The webinar series targets government partners, National Coordinators from the piloting countries and other EU Member States, implementing partners, as well as European Commission officials and UNICEF Country Offices across Europe and the Western Balkans.

Using examples from the European Child Guarantee Phase III pilot countries, the webinar highlighted programmatic interventions, partnerships and targets being used to accelerate the de-institutionalisation agenda. It also underlined the importance of representation of de-institutionalisation in national plans and budgets, given the ongoing Ukrainian refugee crisis and challenges related to adequate care and durable solutions for refugee children in need for protection.
The panel was moderated by Ms. Joanna Rogers, UNICEF Expert on Deinstitutionalisation, with opening remarks from Mr. Jiří Švarc, Head of Unit, Social Affairs and Inclusion - Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission and an overview of the work to date in the region by Dr. Stela Grigoras, UNICEF Child Protection Specialist. The panel discussion focused on sharing experiences and lessons learned from pilot countries on childcare reform from the following speakers:

- Ms. Natalia Efremova, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Policy and CG National Coordinator, Bulgaria
- Ms. Tatjana Katkić Stanić, ECG National Coordinator, Director, Institute for Social Work, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, Croatia
- Mr. George Nikolaidis, Director, Department of Mental Health and Social Welfare, Center for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, Institute of Child Health, Greece
- Ms. Donata Bianchi, Coordinator of the Research and Monitoring Unit, Istituto degli Innocenti in Florence

The discussion reflected on national action plan development, the key challenges and key successes of the de-institutionalisation process and, how the Child Guarantee can support de-institutionalisation reform. It also focused on identifying the critical next steps to accelerate reforms childcare systems at national and European levels and what different actors, including UNICEF and the European Commission, can do to support governments.

Over the past decade, many countries in the region have made progress on phasing out institutional care for children or are starting to do so, particularly for children under the age of three. Nevertheless, there was a common understanding on the need to continue to prioritize the most vulnerable children – those under the age of three, the Roma, and those with disabilities and to ensure continued investment and momentum so that no child is left behind in institutional care.

Finally, there was consensus that what is needed to complete the transition for all children is a fundamental change in the child-care system, coupled by strong political will, institutional commitment and ownership, a coordinated government approach which ensures reforms as well as budget and willingness to shift attitudes on all levels and across all sectors. This means properly planning and financing this change, including wider investments in childcare and protection systems. Participants also discussed how media campaigns and public opinion can be leveraged to generate a demand for de-institutionalisation.
Communications & Visibility

A series of new human interest stories and videos are featured in this programmatic update, and this content can be viewed on UNICEF ECARO’s European Child Guarantee Phase III webpage. In turn, European Child Guarantee videos and events can be viewed on this consolidated playlist. Social media posts on the European Child Guarantee have been shared widely on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube through UNICEF offices in Europe. To date, 140+ Web pages have been developed, including programmatic updates and other report pages, human interest stories, photo essays, event and landing pages related to the ECG pilot project initiative. All posts published by UNICEF local, regional, and global accounts have been viewed 5,700,000 times around the world. UNICEF partners, media and influencers added at least 47,900,000 impressions to an overall digital outreach. All posts published by UNICEF and partners have reached at least 57,000,000 users online.

European Child Guarantee Event Highlights

The following is a compilation of event highlights on twitter for key European Child Guarantee events, highlighting the voices and perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders from policy-makers to children and young people engaged in the work of the Child Guarantee.

- Making the European Child Guarantee a Reality
- Social Inclusion of Roma Children
- Child and Adolescent Participation in the Child Guarantee
- Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities
- Early childhood education and care in the European Child Guarantee
- #EUChildGuarantee Conference in Prague, Czech Republic
- Conference “Building the Europe’s future: Implementing the European Child Guarantee”

Programmatic Updates on Phase III of the European Child Guarantee

- March 2021
- June 2021
- November 2021
- April 2022
- November 2022

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