



Belgian National Action Plan for the European Child Guarantee 2022-2030

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1. Context

1.1. *Child Guarantee in Belgium*

The European Pillar of Social Rights and the corresponding Action Plan, launched by the Commission in March 2021, place social issues and poverty at the top of European priorities. The European Union aims to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million, of whom at least 5 million are children.

In order to achieve this objective, the Child Guarantee Recommendation was adopted on 14 June 2021 by the Council of the European Union, Council formation Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO). In this context, Belgium aims to contribute to its achievement in practice. After all, this child guarantee is designed to help children living in a vicious cycle of poverty and social exclusion and aims to break the cycle of poverty and social exclusion from generation to generation by guaranteeing free and effective access to a number of essential services. The implementation of this guarantee covers education and training, as well as healthcare, nutrition and housing.

There is a strong correlation between social exclusion of children and a lack of access to essential services. Children living in poverty or who are disadvantaged in some way are more likely to experience barriers to accessing services necessary for their well-being and the development of their social, cognitive and emotional skills.

This issue will be a very important topic in the debate that will be stimulated under the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, in 2024, and that should lead to ambitious and directly applicable solutions.

Children are our future. Yet many children live in poverty or face social exclusion. This has detrimental effects on their well-being and development with long-term consequences. Nonetheless, everyone has the right to a dignified existence, including children.

In Belgium, 20.4% of children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.¹ Given that this is an unacceptable figure, we must continue more than ever to focus on poverty reduction as far as children and their parents are concerned. Inclusive and truly universal access is of vital importance in ensuring equal opportunities for all children, and especially for those experiencing social exclusion due to poverty or other forms of disadvantage.

Pre-existing social difficulties have become even more acute. The corona crisis weighs particularly heavily upon children and young people in socio-economically vulnerable situations. National Bank research shows that families with the lowest incomes have been hardest hit by the corona crisis. UNICEF calculated that child poverty in high-income countries will remain above pre-corona levels for at least another five years.

This National Child Guarantee Action Plan is framed within a broader package of local, regional, community and federal policy plans. It contributes to the achievement of the Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights, and can be placed within a broader policy framework of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

¹ <https://www.armoedecijfers.be/topic/kinderarmoede>

1.2. *Belgian institutional framework*

Belgium is a federal state, composed of the communities and the regions. Powers are distributed among the different policy levels. The powers of the federal government include everything related to the public interest. In the general interest of all Belgians, the federal state manages, for example, finances, the army, justice, social security and foreign affairs, as well as important areas of public health and internal affairs.

In addition, there are three Regions that have powers in areas related to their region or territory in a broad sense. Thus, the Flemish Region, the Brussels-Capital Region and the Walloon Region are responsible for the economy, employment, agriculture, water policy, housing, public works, energy, transport (with the exception of the SNCB), environment, town and country planning, nature conservation, credit, foreign trade, supervision over the provinces, municipalities and intermunicipal companies.

Finally, the Communities are responsible for culture (theatre, libraries, audiovisual media, etc.), education, the use of languages and people-related matters which include, on the one hand, health policy (curative and preventive medicine) and, on the other hand, assistance to people (youth assistance and protection, social assistance, family assistance, reception of immigrants, etc.). Community competencies are carried out in Brussels by five actors, namely the Flemish Community, the Flemish Community Commission, the French Community Commission, the Common Community Commission and Wallonia-Brussels Federation.

In this national Action Plan, each competent authority develops practical actions according to its competence. Given that most of the powers for the child guarantee are to be found with the Communities and Regions, most of the actions are located at this level. The Federal Government takes on a coordinating role in the formulation and monitoring of this action plan. The territorial basis has been taken into account in the description of the measures.

Levels	Institutions		
Federal	Federal state		
Communities	German-speaking Community	French-speaking Community (Wallonia-Brussels Federation)	Flemish Community
Regions	Walloon Region	Brussels-Capital Region	Flemish Region

The battle against child poverty requires a coordinated approach among the various policy areas. Policy interventions can be found at the intersection of different policy domains such as welfare, youth, education and health. Accordingly, the measures that should lead to cutting through the vicious cycle of poverty can be found in the various policy and action plans of the relevant policy bodies. These can be found in Chapter 9.

Beyond the Belgian political and institutional framework, it is important to note that much attention is given to consultation, not only at the political level with, in particular, inter-ministerial consultative

forums, but also, and in a broader sense, with civil society stakeholders. Specific consultative forums on the battle against poverty – including child poverty – and social exclusion are organised through platforms open to all, and networks that meet several times a year at the initiative of the PPS Social Integration.

1.3. The European context

The battle against child poverty and breaking the vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty has long been a European focus. In 2013, the European Commission launched a recommendation on investing in children so as to break the vicious cycle of disadvantage. To this end, Member States were urged to develop integrated strategies based on three main pillars:

1. Ensuring access to adequate resources by supporting parents' workforce participation, providing an adequate standard of living through a combination of benefits.
2. Ensuring access to affordable, high-quality services where inequality is reduced at an early age by investing in early childhood education and care and increasing the impact of education systems in creating equal opportunities, increasing the responsiveness of health systems to meet the needs of disadvantaged children, providing children with safe, adequate housing and living environments, improving family support and the quality of alternative care structures.
3. Ensuring the right of children to participate by supporting the participation of all children in play, recreation, sports and cultural activities and introducing mechanisms to promote children's participation in decision-making that affects their lives.

The Child Guarantee should be seen as a practical implementation of the second pillar of the 2013 European Commission Recommendation and one of the necessary elements of an integrated strategy alongside the other two pillars in breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

1.4. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the International Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, which was ratified by Belgium in 1991.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child monitors the implementation of the Convention based on periodic reports. Belgium last reported on the measures taken to implement the rights recognised and the progress made for their exercise in 2017.

These included the following recommendations from the Committee on the Rights of the Child to Belgium, as relating to the matters covered by the Child Guarantee:

- Children living in poverty, children with disabilities and children from migrant backgrounds continue to face discrimination, in particular with regard to access to healthcare, education, housing and leisure activities. The Committee is calling for a comprehensive strategy to combat all forms of discrimination.
- The demand for childcare, including for children with disabilities and children from disadvantaged families, still cannot be met. The capacity, flexibility and quality of childcare must be increased and its accessibility for all children ensured, including by expanding subsidised care and improving the training of the staff involved.
- Institutional care remains the first response for children in need of care, particularly for children with disabilities, children from socially or economically disadvantaged families, and for very young children. Family-oriented care for all children, including those from families in poverty, must be supported and facilitated. To this end, adequate staff, technical and financial

resources should be allocated to alternative care centres and to the relevant child protection services.

- Guaranteeing that all children have access to appropriate housing.

The seventh periodic monitoring report should be delivered to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2024.

2. Coordination of the Child Guarantee

The Programmatic Public Service for Social Integration is a federal administration that ensures the coordination of the Belgian Poverty Reduction Policy. Close collaboration with other government services is essential for this, as is a permanent dialogue and collaboration with policy-makers at all levels and with all target groups.

In the regions and communities, a unique contact person has been designated at the level of each of the administrations. These represent the regional and community administrations within the administrative working group responsible for drafting the action plan. A unique contact person was designated for Flanders, the Walloon Region, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, the Brussels-Capital Region, the French Community Commission, the Flemish Community Commission, the Common Community Commission and the German-speaking Community. In this national Action Plan, each competent authority develops practical actions in accordance with its powers. This National Action Plan currently only takes into account policies recently implemented or announced. It should be noted that these existing policies were often created through intensive stakeholder consultation. This action plan enables the Belgian authorities to detect policy gaps and develop new policy initiatives around them in the future.

The National Commission on the Rights of the Child is the informed partner during this process.

Monitoring of the National Child Guarantee Action Plan will take place every two years. The PPS Social Integration will coordinate this monitoring, along with the unique contact persons for the federated entities, and will develop a monitoring process to that end, in consultation with the stakeholders as well. Based on the results of this monitoring, the working group may propose potential adjustments to the respective policy-makers.

The progress of the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee will be notified to the Council of the European Union in a report after no more than 5 years. This will take place according to European guidelines.

3. Identifying children in need and the barriers they face in accessing services

In order to arrive at a thorough action plan, it is necessary to identify the children in need and the barriers they face in accessing and using the services covered by the recommendation. The instructions from the European Commission clarify that information should be provided on the size and characteristics of the target group of children in need.

During the drafting process, it has become apparent that there is currently very little information and data available on those specific groups within the federated entities and that this data is highly fragmented.

The proposal was launched to set up a process, with a view to the next biennial update of the Child Guarantee Plan, to invest in the inventory of available administrative data, its analysis and the development of proposals and initiatives to arrive at harmonised data for Belgium.

Federal

In Belgium, the living wage (LL, a form of social security) is guaranteed financial social assistance granted by the Public Centres for Social Welfare (PCSWs). Thus, social security is granted to an applicant who is not eligible for any other social benefit.

In 2021, we note that one in four social security recipients is a family with dependent children. Of these families, 3 out of 4 are single-parent families and, in almost 9 out of 10 cases, it is a woman who is the head of the single-parent family. Unfortunately, the risk of poverty and the risk of single parenthood are very often linked. Indeed, for the year 2020, the Poverty Barometer tells us that the risk of poverty for a single-parent family is twice as high as for the total Belgian population.

In 2020, there were 6,444 social security recipients in the 0 to 17 age group – nearly 3% of all social security recipients. In the 18-19 age group, there were 21,458, being almost 10% of all social security recipients. In 2020, 384 individuals between the ages of 0 and 17 received an installation premium for homeless people. In the 18-19 age group, 909 individuals received installation subsidies.

Flanders

The Flemish policy is a science-based policy with data management and monitoring. The Flemish government collects data in the areas of proportional participation, active and shared citizenship and social cohesion, among others. These environmental indicators are the flashing lights of society. The Flemish government is aiming to make policy interventions more measurable. On this basis, an evaluation can be made of the extent to which the policy measures are effective, so that adjustments can be made if necessary, down to the local level where possible.

Within the VIONA research programme, a study is underway on the profile of users and non-users of formal childcare and the payback effects for the Flemish policy are being identified.

The aim of the research is to gain a better understanding of the use and thresholds of childcare in Flanders and its link to the job market position of families. Next, Flanders wishes to simulate potential payback effects for the government by investing more in childcare. The final report is due by the end of May 2023.

The Flemish government is committed to empowering children and young people in socially vulnerable situations through an inclusive approach.

Wallonia

The objective that Wallonia intends to enhance is promoting access to children's rights and combating inequality through a coordinated action plan and set of measures that primarily benefit the most vulnerable children, children with disabilities, children living in homes and children who need various forms of (educational) support. This policy mobilises the entire Walloon Government and administrations and is subject to regular monitoring and participatory evaluation.

In the scientific field, and in addition to the general indicator of risk of poverty or social exclusion, Wallonia has developed some specific indicators relating to children (% of pupils in the 6th year of primary school who are overweight, % of pupils “on time” in secondary school, unemployment rate of

young people aged between 15-24, etc. These are taken into account in some schemes and serve as a basis for making actions more operational on the ground.

Brussels

Brussels-Capital Region

The figures regarding child poverty are alarming and are on the rise: 4 in 10 children are born into a family living below the poverty line in Brussels. Thus, the poverty risk rate for children is higher than for the general population.

Early childhood care is the most effective lever for combating this situation. Therefore, the Brussels Regional Policy Statement confirms that priority will be given to supporting and establishing crèches and other care environments at rates proportional to parents' incomes, located in neighbourhoods where coverage is lower than the regional average.

The Government of the Brussels-Capital Region also undertakes to maintain the recurring annual allocation to the French Community Commission (COCOF) and to the Flemish Community Commission (VGC) for project calls (infrastructure) to introduce places in crèches. It also confirms the commitments made on 20 June 2013, as part of the Cigogne III Plan, and undertakes to make available the 106.5 French-speaking GECO posts and 26.5 Dutch-speaking GECO posts needed to implement the last part for the 2019-2022 period that was not implemented during the previous legislative term.

Common Community Commission (COCOM) – United College Services

The COCOM holds powers in the field of assistance to individuals and healthcare for all Brussels residents, as well as for the recipients of the services provided by health and welfare agencies. It also holds powers over the bilingual institutions and services within those sectors.

The Welfare Barometer is part of the Brussels Poverty Report. The Welfare Barometer annually collects and analyses the most recent figures on poverty and social exclusion in the Brussels-Capital Region.

The 2020 Welfare Barometer shows that the risk of poverty for children and adolescents is very high in the Brussels Region. It testifies to the financial difficulties faced by families with children. 41% of children in the Brussels Region live in a household with an income below the poverty risk threshold. The risk of poverty is even higher for single-parent households and households with three or more children.

The non-profit association Bruss'help, which carries out studies and analyses on the issue of homelessness in Brussels, conducted a census of the homeless population in Brussels.

At the last count on 9 November 2020, there were 933 minors among the 5,313 homeless counted, which is an increase from the 2018 count. More than one in five homeless or poorly housed people is a child or adolescent.

As coordinator of the emergency shelter and enablement facilities for the homeless, Bruss'help also monitors the number of available and occupied places in the different structures and refers people on to the appropriate centres (dispatching). Through those assignments, it knows how many homeless families and children are present in shelters and were referred by street workers.

French Community Commission

The number of childcare places available therefore remains, in our region, an essential concern. To meet the demand for childcare, the COCOF, through regional resources, will continue and expand funding for building new childcare places. Specific financial incentives will be proposed to the organising authorities in the districts and/or in the municipalities where the coverage rate is the lowest, more specifically to reduce the disparities identified, with a particular focus on the public sector. The renovation policy for the existing shelters will also be continued.

Flemish Community Commission

The VGC addresses all Dutch-speaking inhabitants of Brussels and Brussels residents seeking affiliation to the Dutch-speaking network. The 2021-2025 Strategic Multi-Year Plan (SMYP) includes additional efforts for vulnerable target groups to make the universal offering accessible to them as well. Children, young people and families in poverty and underage newcomers are explicitly named as priority target groups within these policy plans.

In 2021, the Cartography Study on Dutch-speaking Family Facilities in the Brussels-Capital Region was conducted to gain a view of the number of childcare places and the coverage rates, and to identify the barriers to access to childcare. The study forms the basis for targeted actions.

In 2018-2019, a needs analysis was conducted in the field around the needs of minor newcomers and the barriers they experience to participation in society. This needs analysis provides guidance for further support to professionals and organisations in welcoming underage newcomers.

Annual monitoring of school capacity also takes place.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

The Wallonia-Brussels Federation must give Francophones the opportunity to learn, develop and thrive. The well-being of children, young people and future generations is at the heart of its work. Its actions should aim for the empowerment of all, contribute to the reduction of inequality and encourage the participation of children, young people and families, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable.

The Action Plan on the Rights of the Child considers several categories of children to be vulnerable: children living in poverty, children with disabilities, children in homes, migrant children, children from single-parent families, children whose mothers are in prison. The question of children's mental health also received attention.

The Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance is currently conducting a study on the processes of non-take-up. This study will provide a greater insight into the strategies of self-exclusion, as it is known, and help to better understand why some children and families do not spontaneously use care.

German-speaking Community

The priority groups were determined transversally based on the various measures implemented at the level of the German-speaking Community. Priority was given to children in relation to their family situation, children with disabilities and children from immigration backgrounds.

The Corona crisis has created a new obstacle, which has exacerbated previously existing inequalities. Inadequate opportunities in low-income or unemployed families present additional difficulties.

However, social status also plays an important role, meaning that children with a migrant background are often victims of segregation and discrimination.

4. Targeted categories of children in need

The target group for the National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee is children between the ages of 0 and 18. In general, the federal government and federated entities have chosen not to take specific measures for particularly vulnerable groups of children. In general, measures are taken for all children in poverty, because the needs are great and apply to all. The health crisis has not made the situation any better.

However, we see that some measures by the federated entities are nonetheless targeted at particularly vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities, Roma children or migrant children, etc. This way of working is not generalised, however. A National Strategy for Integration is currently being developed for Roma. This is not specific to children, but it does include them.

5. Outreach and raising awareness

The federal government and federated entities are developing various programmes and activities around initiatives that actively pursue access to and use of essential services by children in need and their families. The proposal was made to initiate a process of mutual learning between the federal government and federated entities on successful practices for increasing service accessibility through outreach activities.

Federal

Prevention of child poverty requires training and raising awareness around poverty in all its aspects and among all actors who come into contact with children and their parents. These are, of course, the government services and the Public Centres for Social Welfare (PCSWs), as well as actors on the ground such as clubs, crèches, schools, etc., which play an essential role in raising awareness of poverty issues. All these actors also have a liaison role in detecting this phenomenon of child poverty as early as possible. It is very important to prevent and detect poverty early. As such, this is one of the four focus themes in the fourth Federal Plan Against Poverty.

Prevention and awareness-raising also include informing children and their parents so that they are better informed about their social rights. This guarantees them better access to these rights. That is what is at stake in the battle against the non-take-up of rights and the automation of these rights. We need to go directly to the most vulnerable people to reach them and not wait for them to find the information. The outreach approach is therefore preferred.

At the federal level, we can count on the PCSWs, the first-line actors. They played an important role during the Covid-19 crisis. In the context of the health crisis, PCSWs received exceptional emergency funds through the PPS Social Integration for the most vulnerable individuals, including children, and funds for operating expenses to accommodate the influx of exceptional requests.

We can also count on the Experts in Poverty and Social Exclusion funded by the PPS Social Integration, who play an important role in improving the accessibility of federal public services, both public services and healthcare, finance, etc. They aim to facilitate access to basic social rights for all citizens.

With the “combating child poverty within the framework of the Child Guarantee” grant, the federal government is aiming to encourage PCSWs that want to launch an innovative project in the fields applicable within the framework of the Child Guarantee. For this purpose, ten PCSWs were selected on the basis of objective criteria such as the number of social security recipients with family expenses. Four PCSWs were selected in Flanders, four in Wallonia and two in Brussels. The current grant year runs from 2021-2022. A possibility of extension is provided for a second grant year.

Flanders

With a view to the early integrated approach to child poverty by organising referral to appropriate additional assistance and/or additional assistance and services, Flanders is enhancing local collaboration between local actors and Huizen van het Kind (‘Houses of the Child’).

The Flemish Agency for People with Disabilities (VAPH) is continuing its efforts to allocate the Personal Assistance Budget (PAB) to minors and to expand its spending options. Online and blended assistance is being enhanced and the possibility of installing a chat function for people with disabilities (PwD) is being explored. Additional resources enhance the provision of directly accessible assistance (DAA).

Brussels

Brussels-Capital Region

The Brussels Region has a map of childcare places with income-based rates. The IBSA's neighbourhood monitoring can be used to determine the geographical location of existing childcare facilities at the neighbourhood level.

The district monitoring also allows us to see whether or not the district is part of the Zone for Urban Revaluation (ZUR). As a reminder, the ZUR covers districts with a combination of three indicators:

- An unemployment rate higher than the regional average;
- A median income lower than the regional average;
- And a population density higher than the regional average.

These are representative indicators of the degree of vulnerability taken into account in the Region's network.

The Brussels Regional Government also pays special attention to single-parent families, as the Brussels Region is characterised by a large number of single-parent families, approximately 65,000 of which 86% are single women with children.

Common Community Commission – United College Services

The COCOM subsidises and recognises a range of emergency shelter and enablement services for the homeless, including families with children and abducted minors. Within this framework, there is specific guidance for children and their parents (activities, school counselling, parenting support, reopening of social rights, maintaining or finding housing, etc.).

General welfare centres, which provide first-line assistance, and Brussels' PCSWs play an important role in the social support of families and children in poverty. The COCOM -approved CAP-CAW Family “Single Parent Families Home” specifically addresses single-parent families and the issues they face.

In 2022, funds were allocated for the creation of multidisciplinary practices in the Brussels Region, as recommended in a 2017 intermutual agency study². That same study, moreover, confirmed that *“community health centres provide primary care that is widely accessible to populations with a socioeconomically weaker profile and who are consequently more exposed to the risk of delayed care”*³.

In the context of the corona crisis, 30 million euros were allocated to the Brussels PCSWs to cope with the social crisis resulting from the health crisis. 700,000 euros were used by the various PCSWs in 2021 to launch innovative projects directly targeting single-parent families and the battle against child and youth poverty.

A few examples of projects:

- Childcare vouchers for single-parent or vulnerable families. With these vouchers, a babysitter recognised by the Family Association or equivalent can come and look after the child for a few hours a month so that the parents can have some free time.
- Collaboration with the non-profit organisation Le Petit Vélo Jaune, which provides support to single-parent families who are isolated or in poor or vulnerable situations. These families are guided from pregnancy to create a network around them that will support the family for years to come. For example, all the tips & tricks around parenting and the parent-child relationship are part of that personalised guidance.
- Two PCSWs have decided to extend support for the Miriam project until the end of the year (this was a pilot project funded by the PPS Social Integration until June 2021). As part of that effort, they intend to monitor more families. The project aims to provide collective counselling for single mothers so that they develop a whole toolbox for dealing with their situation and, most importantly, can form a support network among themselves for all the children in the group.
- Recruiting a youth worker who will work primarily with families in social housing who do not currently rely on the PCSW. This youth worker will be there to create bonds, counter non-take-up and refer for school counselling. New partnerships and projects will also be developed with those children, families and young people in collaboration with the Maison de l'Adolescence.
- Providing a common space in a disadvantaged neighbourhood with a lot of social housing for organising activities that maintain or encourage social contacts, break down isolation and provide a place for mutual aid and health for the residents of the neighbourhood, specifically intended for families and children.
- Support for homework schools through the PCSWs to ensure support for the pupils, who today have to constantly switch between lessons in school and online lessons. Substantial investments were made to support the projects for homework guidance, parenting support, the prevention of non-attendance at school and extracurricular activities, even in this time of crisis.
- Supporting student volunteers who provide tutoring through support to Solidarité Réussite for pupils aged 10 to 15.
- Creation, renovation, provision of study spaces for pupils and students to support the children and young people during this unusual time in order to create social bonds between young people, while at the same time offering them a place to study with all the necessary equipment and a tutor. Some PCSWs have enhanced their club partners' equipment with printers for the homework schools or computer equipment.

² <http://www.ima-aim.be/Communique-de-presse-Les-Maisons>.

³ Idem.

- Another PCSW has invested through a non-profit organisation in the creation of an Internet radio to give young people the opportunity to further discover the world by making reports.
- In general, most PCSWs have started a meticulous analysis of their data about their target group so that they can better identify the families that need additional specific help in these times (parental support, prevention of non-attendance at school, extracurricular activities, etc.) thanks to the awareness-raising work by the social workers, and even about other issues for that target group such as food aid, energy, housing, etc.
- Supporting digital workshops specifically aimed at children aged 8-12 and 12-18, as well as parents who can use a computer independently. Online practices, digital identity, phishing and cyberbullying. (Cyber heroes), discovering online learning platforms (such as the Khan Academy platform, a free pedagogical tool for maths and science – Smartschool, Moodle and the school platforms for facilitating communication between parents and school).

French Community Commission

The COCOF intervenes through several axes:

- Awareness-raising and information: ‘L’Observatoire de l’enfant’ is the research and analysis programme by the ‘Cellule Enfance et Milieux d’accueil de l’enfant’ from the French Community Commission on children's policy, and in particular children's care policy. Aimed at parents, childcare professionals, researchers, policy-makers and government bodies, it provides knowledge, services, information, research findings and recommendations to advance the debate.
- Funding of medical homes and reception structures: The COCOF recognises 50 medical homes in the territory of the Brussels Region. 10 new medical homes have been recognised in the past three years. These services increase access to care for the entire population, but provide significantly better financial and geographical access to healthcare, particularly in neighbourhoods with socio-economic insecurity.

The French Community Commission, supported by the Region, is also encouraging the development of places in crèches and offering financial assistance to childcare structures under the jurisdiction of the Office de la Naissance et de l’Enfance (ONE). This is financial support for the purchase of a building or for work on buildings (construction, enlargement, conversion, renovation, major repairs) offered to municipalities, PCSWs, public utility institutions and non-profit organisations.

The aim is to increase the supply of childcare places in collective childcare environments that are recognised and socially accessible by the Office de la Naissance et de l’Enfance (ONE). In addition to the financial support, the COCOF assists the project developers in the implementation of their projects and we ensure the coherence of the investments in coordination with all the Brussels actors.

Flemish Community Commission

A number of action plans and actions in the Multi-Year Strategic Plan are aimed at increasing access to services. For example, the VGC is enhancing equal educational opportunities through an education policy that focuses on access to Dutch-language education. Families in vulnerable situations can access a nearby and well-tailored offering that provides support in all areas of life from pregnancy onwards. The VGC is promoting the social function of childcare and expanding the capacity of income-based childcare.

Through inter-sectoral collaboration, with due regard to bridges between welfare, education, family and youth, the positions of children and young people in socially vulnerable situations are enhanced. People in poverty receive better support in accessing basic rights, for example through liaison officers and location-based initiatives. Special attention is paid to the situation of children, young people and families in poverty. Welfare and care actors are encouraged to visit Brussels residents with care and support needs in their familiar surroundings more often.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation (FWB)

Le service de lutte contre la pauvreté et la lutte contre les inégalités from the Ministry of the FWB will launch a study to collect indicators on poverty in general and child poverty in particular from the FWB's various intervention sectors. The Administration générale de l'aide à la jeunesse has also planned a study of its audience. L'Office de la naissance et de l'enfance has commissioned a study on the impact of the anti-poverty projects it funds.

Wallonia

Wallonia works closely with the Wallonia-Brussels Federation in the field of education, whether it is accessibility for disabled children or early school leavers. It also participates in awareness-raising, education and prevention in the health sector and ensures that the need for a healthy and balanced diet for children is widely communicated. To this end, Wallonia also relies on a network of partners at the regional, provincial and local levels.

It provides training in children's rights for regional staff and local actors in municipalities and at PCSWs, as well as training for trainers, in order to develop a real culture of children's rights in Wallonia.

Specific provisions have been enhanced to give the most vulnerable children access to sports and cultural activities, low-cost school equipment, mental health services, etc. The child benefit system was revised to take better account of the different situations in which children find themselves (supplementary child benefit).

In Wallonia, the participation of children at all levels is encouraged. Thus, the Child Guarantee will be a topic of communication and information, particularly through the participatory project on the evaluation with children and youth of the Walloon Action Plan for the Rights of the Child 2020-2024. This project will run from 2022 to 2023. During this process, children will be able to make recommendations regarding the questions addressed in the Child Guarantee.

German-speaking Community

The national, regional and local authorities must ensure that every child in need has free and effective access to the following services:

- care, education and training;
- education and school activities, as well as sports and cultural activities;
- at least one balanced meal a day at school

The above services are offered in the German-speaking Community by various local and regional services. Compared to the other communities, the German-speaking community is very small, which allows the region to establish a network of close collaboration between different services. Local authorities, Kaleido (service for the promotion of the healthy development of children and adolescents), PCSWs and, in collaboration with schools, organised social associations and the government, have set up awareness and education programmes.

To name just a few examples: in addition to sports and cultural activities such as "Rolle Bolle" (2nd and 3rd nursery class), "Flott, Fit, Fair" (1st and 2nd years of primary school) "Ballfit" (3 and 4-year-olds), there are also drug awareness programmes such as MEGA and COPS. Secondly, the German-speaking Community has ensured that disadvantaged children can receive free school transport when the public transport service (TEC) does not cover the school route. There are also many other educational initiatives for combating school dropouts. In a structural context, free medical checkups at school and vaccinations against various childhood diseases are also organised.

6. Stakeholder engagement

During the drafting process for the National Child Guarantee Action Plan, the National Commission on the Rights of the Child⁴ (NCRC) is the informed partner. The NCRC is a consultative platform between over 90 child rights actors appointed by collaborative agreement by the relevant Belgian authorities. The NCRC has a dual mandate, namely to develop and coordinate Belgian reporting assignments on children's rights to international bodies and to formulate general policy recommendations. The NCRC was present during the working meetings of the National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee.

As regards participation, the unique contacts at the administrations have pointed out that many of the policy measures and policy plans that feed into this National Action Plan were developed in consultation with the stakeholders and civil society.

Bilateral discussions have already taken place with Caritas Belgium, Eurochild, Children's Rights Coalition and VBJK (Renewal in Basic Services for Young Children non-profit organisation).

A meeting of the Belgian Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion was held on 7 March 2022, dedicated to a civil society consultation around the Child Guarantee. The Belgian Platform is an open structure that seeks to involve as many stakeholders as possible in the European strategy and the battle against poverty and social exclusion. The Belgian Platform's opinion on the Child Guarantee has been added to this Action Plan as an annex. The Belgian Platform will be actively involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the Child Guarantee Plan.

7. Quantitative and qualitative objectives

Belgium wants to do its part in the European ambition to lift five million children out of the risk of poverty by 2030 and has set its contribution to this European goal as at least 93,000 fewer children in poverty by 2030. The following four axes will be used for this purpose, as also determined in the recommendation on the Child Guarantee:

- Ensuring that children in need have free and effective access to high-quality early childhood education and care, education and school activities, and receive a healthy meal every school day (including digitally);
- Ensuring that children in need have free and effective access to quality healthcare;
- Ensuring that children in need have effective access to sufficient and healthy food, including through the EU Programme for the Consumption of Fruit, Vegetables and Milk in Schools;
- Ensuring that children in need have effective access to adequate housing.

⁴ [Welcome to the National Commission on the Rights of the Child! – National Commission on the Rights of the Child \(ncrc-cnde.be\).](https://www.ncrc-cnde.be/)

8. Measures

In this National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee, each competent authority has practical actions in accordance with its powers.

8.1. *Ensuring that children in need have free and effective access to high-quality early childhood education and care, education and school-related activities, and receive a healthy meal every school day.*

a. [Identifying and addressing financial and non-financial barriers to participation in early childhood education and care, education and school-related activities](#)

Federal

Action: Combating child poverty

From 2021 to 2023, the federal government is supporting new projects for combating child poverty under the Child Guarantee. The 10 supported Public Centres for Social Welfare (PCSWs) have proportionally the largest share of social security recipients in category 3 (with family responsibilities), taking into account the size of the PCSW.

A “Tackling Child Poverty Platform” was also established at the end of 2021 to organise intervision sessions so that the PCSWs can exchange information about their practices. These intervisions are open to PCSWs developing a project to combat child poverty under the Child Guarantee.

Action: Child poverty section within the Fund for Participation and Social Activation

One of the three policy priorities of the Participation and Social Activation Allowance is to combat child poverty. As part of this, PCSWs can use the allocated allowance for initiatives for children of PCSW users in the context of psychological, pedagogical and school support and for initiatives to promote their social integration through participation in social programmes.

In the year 2021, the total Participation and Social Activation Allowance was about €18 million (€18,551,129 to be exact).

Action: Corona measures for the target group of PCSWs

Under the Corona measures, the Covid-19 allowance – Article 2 of the RD of 13 May 2020 introducing a “Covid-19” grant for the target group of Public Centres for Social Welfare – provides a specific section for the provision of support as part of the battle against child poverty.

PCSWs can cover the following costs, among others: playgrounds, holiday placements, educational support, school canteen costs, public transport subscriptions, costs of speech therapy, psychomotor skills and the battle against intra-family violence, as well as school fees or tuition. Support specifically targeted at early childhood is also eligible, such as powdered milk, nappies or nursery fees. Particular attention is paid to single-parent families.

The PCSW can also cover school fees, tuition, etc.

Flanders

Action: Childcare as a lever for combating poverty

The most recent “Use of Childcare” survey (2019) shows that there is still significantly less use of childcare by disadvantaged families and families of immigrant origin. Flanders still has a shortage of childcare, a shortage of competencies among professionals in being accessible to vulnerable families and a barrier to the financial viability of organisers, which reduces accessibility for vulnerable groups.

Flanders developed a number of projects using ESF funding that focus on enhancing the sector in order to increase the accessibility of the existing offering. The findings of these projects, which will run over four or five years (depending on ESF funding) can be included in future planning for childcare. Specifically, it concerns the following:

- Increasing the financial viability of childcare facilities that work flexibly by creating additional DOP (= urgent care) spaces.
- Enhancing the competencies of professionals working in a childcare setting with respect to dealing with family diversity.
- Enhancing local collaboration between childcare providers and partners

An external partner will be commissioned to conduct a guidance programme and the qualitative research, and to prepare a research report and policy recommendations.

- In addition, efforts will be made to raise awareness among the general public about childcare as a basic amenity for every family and to guarantee its accessibility.

Action: cost control initiatives

Flanders is committed to a number of cost control initiatives. Two examples of initiatives receiving grants are as follows:

The non-profit organisation Krijt is organising guidance projects, mainly in secondary schools that want to enhance their policy on poverty and schooling costs. It also organises a train-the-trainer offering and disseminates tips and best practices through websites and other channels. The non-profit organisation Krijt will receive a grant of 298,000 euros during the 2021-2022 academic year.

The private Robin Foundation aims to provide all pupils with the necessary school equipment in a timely manner. The aim is to have the school equipment – textbooks, laptops, practical equipment and so on – delivered directly, as a single whole and at an affordable price, so the pupil does not have to miss out on any classroom activities. The foundation covers the costs up-front and then provides an interest-free repayment plan, which may or may not be combined with substantial financial subsidies for families in the greatest need. The Robin Foundation will receive a maximum grant of 100,000 euros during the period 1 September 2021 to 31 August 2022.

Action: Small Children, Big Opportunities

Vulnerable groups must be given equal opportunities. Good nursery education and good childcare that can overcome barriers are essential in this regard. Professionals must be alert and respectful of vulnerable children and their families. The project ‘Small Children, Big Opportunities’ aims to contribute to this by focusing on nursery education as one element and on self-evaluation in childcare and family support as another. Both projects (0-6 years) are complementary and inspire one another.

This project is supported by a partnership between the King Baudouin Foundation, the Education and Training policy area and the Opgroeien ('Growing Up') Agency.

Wallonia

Action: BB-Pack

Thanks to the BB-Pack, various childcare players, such as certain self-employed (co-)day care centres, childcare services, subsidised and/or paid (co-)childcare workers and home childcare services for sick children can benefit from a 20% subsidy for obtaining the equipment and/or performing the activities included in a list drawn up by the Walloon government.

Action: Infrastructure grant for subsidised collective childcare

Subsidised collective childcare such as day care centres, specialist childcare services, and care homes composed of non-profit organisations and PCSWs can receive up to 60% of the infrastructure grant.

Action: Subsidising new childcare places.

A call was issued for projects to subsidise new childcare places for the period 2021-2026. It involves a total of 3,143 places, made up of two separate parts: the first concerns the establishment of 1,757 places in 39 municipalities, the second the establishment of 1,386 places distributed among the 20 Walloon administrative districts.

Brussels

Brussels-Capital Region

The government has also maintained the annual recurrent allocation to the COCOF and the VGC for calls for projects (€6.4 million) / financing of childcare infrastructure.

Action: Regional instruments and current partnerships.

Since 2020, the Schools Service has been responsible for monitoring the supply of and demand for places in day care centres in the BCR, in collaboration with the communities and community commissions, taking into account a segmented study of supply and demand.

Furthermore, with regard to the development of childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years, the Brussels government's priority is:

- the collective public offering, through the funding of infrastructure works and the award of GECO jobs (grants to ACTIRIS amounting to €12,541,000.00 for the year 2021; additional amount in 2022 of €2,000,000.00 to fund GECO jobs planned under Section II of the Ooievaar (Stork) Plan, as well as the corresponding GECO jobs for the VGC)
- the areas with the lowest coverage;
- the most vulnerable groups, single-parent families, the unemployed, or families in livelihood insecurity.

It is in this context that the Schools Service is beginning work on facilitating the creation of places in day care centres (as it does for places in schools).

Action: infrastructure grant for financially accessible collective care facilities

The Majority Agreement 2019-24 states that to meet the demand for childcare, the COCOF will continue and expand funding for the construction of new childcare centres through regional funds. Specific financial incentives will be offered to governing bodies operating in neighbourhoods and/or municipalities with the lowest coverage rates to reduce disparities, with a particular focus on the public sector. The policy of renovating existing shelters will also continue. In collaboration with the ONE, the COCOF will launch a call for projects in 2022 to subsidise the creation of childcare spaces in daycare centres. Project leaders will be able to receive a grant between 60 and 95%.

In December 2021, a Protocol Agreement was signed between the Brussels Region, the COCOF, the FWB and the ONE on the creation of childcare places for the period 2021-2026⁵. A supervisory committee will soon be established to oversee the proper implementation of the protocol and the monitoring of projects. In addition, a draft Appendix to the Protocol Agreement is planned for 2022 with a view to launching the call for projects in Brussels. The Appendix should specify the framework for collaboration between entities, the criteria for eligibility and ranking of projects, both for personnel and infrastructure funding, as well as the procedure for allocation of places.

Article 10 of the Protocol Agreement provides for the subsequent conclusion of a collaboration agreement aimed at providing the competent governments with a more structural framework for collaboration in order to ensure the development of the childcare offering within the framework of the “Brussels Programme for Education and Childcare”.

The COCOF also provides support for childcare policy in Brussels.

This support takes the form, on the one hand, of the work carried out within the framework of the Observatory of the Child and, on the other, of the subsidisation of associations whose actions are in line with the childcare policy implemented by the COCOF, such as the FRAJE.

The goal is to contribute to the development of regional child policy by linking research, policy and applications in the field.

In the field of education, the French Community Commission, as the governing body, wants to play its part in the collective effort by the authorities to respond to the demographic boom. **The priority for 2021 remains increasing the number of places in both ordinary and special education, and improving working and education conditions at the French Community Commission's educational sites.**

Two major infrastructure projects are currently underway:

- The creation of two new schools of active pedagogy on the CERIA campus: a DOA (degré d'observation autonome) with a capacity of 600 places and a secondary school of general education (2nd and 3rd year), also with 600 places. The DOA is scheduled to open in September 2021. The new complex will also include a sports hall, educational greenhouses, a refectory in the centre of the park, vegetable gardens and a kiosk.
- The extension to the Alexandre Herlin Institute is dedicated to special education for children with type II disabilities, i.e. moderate to severe mental disabilities.

In addition, the French Community Commission is continuing its efforts to maintain, renovate and improve educational conditions. Over the course of 2021, several major projects on the CERIA campus

⁵ A similar process is also underway with the VGC and the Flemish Community. It will be implemented over the course of 2022.

were completed and the necessary investments in infrastructure and equipment will continue, with sustainability in mind.

Flemish Community Commission

Action: Increasing the accessibility of childcare.

The Local Childcare Office in Brussels is committed to bringing families in vulnerable situations to childcare and to enhancing the social function of childcare. The local office provides a central registration system where childcare enquiries are registered and handled. Actions within the VGC's Child Poverty Reduction Plan are based on the elimination of barriers for families in poverty to registering and being assigned a place in childcare. This action will run from 2021 to 2025.

Action: Expanding income-based childcare capacity for infants and toddlers

The VGC is purposefully expanding the capacity of income-based childcare for infants and toddlers, basing this on criteria such as coverage rates, as well as outreach to vulnerable families and efforts taking place around reaching vulnerable families in childcare. Urgent care spaces are also being expanded to help families who need childcare quickly in line with the social, educational and economic function of childcare.

Action: Enhancing the pedagogical quality of childcare services through Opgroeien in Brussel ('Growing Up in Brussels')

Through the support offering Opgroeien in Brussel, childcare workers are coached to maximise development opportunities for children in care. Themes covered address the basic competencies that childcare workers need to meet the needs of families. It also works on specific themes such as accessible childcare, poverty policy in childcare, parents and diversity.

Action: Operation of the BXL Education Centre on metropolitan themes (e.g. poverty) + collaboration with the non-profit organisation Krijt

The Brussels Education Centre (OCB) helps school teams to take into account pupils and parents in disadvantaged situations within their school and classroom practices and also employs its own poverty consultant, who is a trained expert in disadvantaged situations and social exclusion.

In order to further guide schools around the financial aspect of poverty at school, the Brussels Education Centre entered into a partnership with the non-profit organisation Krijt during the 2020-2021 academic year. In 2020-2021, 12 educational support staff from the OCB attended a train-the-trainer course at the non-profit organisation Krijt to increase the impact of this operation in Brussels.

Action: FSS grant policy for schools is focusing on lowering financial barriers to participation in educational and play offerings

The VGC provides grants to lower the financial barriers to participation in educational offerings.

The 'school expenses for vulnerable families' grant can be widely used by schools to reduce school expenses for vulnerable pupils, for example by the purchase of textbooks or subject-specific teaching materials, participation fees for excursions / swimming lessons, the purchase of gymnastics and swimming clothing, unpaid school bills, meals and products in connection with menstrual poverty. This grant will be evaluated in 2022 and adjusted if necessary.

Action: Free emergency care in response to Covid-19 crisis

The Dutch-speaking primary schools in Brussels were closed during the week of 20 to 24 December 2021, following the corona situation. A survey of the schools showed that care was not possible for many children in the home network. Emergency shelter had to be organised for them. Schools could apply for a grant from the VGC for this purpose. The VGC also organised its own emergency care in a number of places for children who really cannot be cared for at home, including children of vulnerable parents, parents with precarious employment situations, children in troubled home situations, children with special support needs or children of single parents.

Action: VGC Playgrounds social rate for vulnerable pupils

Families who are entitled to increased assistance are eligible for a reduced rate for their children's participation in VGC Playgrounds.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Action: Enhancing free education and introducing free school fees at nurseries.

The Wallonia-Brussels Federation recently enhanced the legal framework regarding free education. The decree of 14 March 2019 enhancing free access to education, whose explanatory memorandum explicitly refers to the CRC, limited the perimeter of school costs that can be claimed for pupils in nursery education and made additional resources available to schools in return. As of the start of the 2021-2022 academic year, all nursery classes are covered by those measures.

The DPC (Policy Statement of the French Community) provides for the gradual extension of these efforts, depending on the budgetary resources available and according to a gradual timing, to the other levels of education. Work continues to determine a suitable perimeter for primary schools.

The costs of before and after-school care, activities and lunch break – which are not currently covered by the aforementioned decree – should also be taken into account from the point of view of free education, in particular by including the lunch break in school hours and better aligning school hours and after-school care (see 1.2).

Action: Multidimensional strategy to improve childcare accessibility

Children's policy is one of the levers that the Wallonia-Brussels Federation holds for bringing about universal changes in terms of equality, emancipation and well-being. The Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance (ONE) is at the heart of policy measures surrounding children. It is the driving force behind them. It is the main point of contact for users and stakeholders.

ONE's management contract for 2021-2025 provides for a multidimensional strategy with **7 points (actions)** for improving the primary and secondary accessibility of childcare.

1. Creating and subsidising new childcare places

ONE's management contract plans to increase the number of childcare places through the creation of subsidised places, giving priority to disadvantaged areas where coverage is often lowest. A project call intended to subsidise new care sites by 2026 will be launched soon. This is expected to open a total of 5,243 additional places by 2026. The call consists of two separate parts in Wallonia and two separate parts in Brussels.

2. Care reform, a change in practices to improve accessibility and monitor compliance with enrolment criteria in childcare to combat exclusionary mechanisms.

The ONE management contract also includes the introduction of an enhancement grant that all care facilities will have access to by 2025 and that will support care facilities in taking steps toward greater accessibility. This grant is intended to fund management positions and psycho-medical-social guidance positions. Funding for the management function was identified as a key measure, given this role has a major impact on the quality and accessibility of care. After all, the management is the driving force behind the care project and its day-to-day operations; it can provide better guidance to staff and significantly improve accessibility. At each care facility, it is also the management that leads and develops the facility. This funding is one measure that would encourage care facilities to make efforts to improve accessibility, particularly for vulnerable families.

The FWB is also taking actions as part of the childcare reform to ensure compliance with enrolment rules and to gain visibility into the number and types of enrolment applications in order to combat discriminatory situations for the most vulnerable families.

The action consists of introducing new enrolment criteria and offering a better direction tool with regard to the creation of care places. The implementation of the project will be based on a charter that establishes rules so that the challenges in terms of accessibility for all, digital divide and data collection for a needs analysis in future programmes are taken into account.

3. Encouraging optimum utilisation of existing care places for the benefit of vulnerable groups and promoting practices for increased accessibility: establishing an accessibility task force to develop and disseminate accessibility practices through an action plan.

The ONE management contract also provides for the creation of an **“accessibility” task force**, which will mobilise the key players in this area in a cross-cutting manner. That task force will coordinate the implementation of an action plan to increase care uptake rates so as to better utilise existing places, benefiting vulnerable groups. The ONE will be tasked with encouraging initiatives aimed at optimising the utilisation of existing care places for the benefit of vulnerable groups and promoting practices that improve accessibility: flexible care, proactive approaches to target groups that do not use childcare, inclusion of children with disabilities and flexibility in care hours by adapting them according to the changing needs of children and families.

The promotion of these practices takes place in several ways:

- raising awareness of accessibility practices among all actors, especially the ONE staff in charge of care facilities, in collaboration with the subsidised coordination structures that have particular experience in this area;
- adapting the five-year Continuing Professional Development (CPD) plan for of childcare professionals to include those practices in the priority themes;
- monitoring the actual occupancy rate in order to optimise the use of the available places, in compliance with the quality code;
- basic training and CPD;
- development of a local dynamic, networking by primary care providers and local actors;

- development and valorisation of tools, particularly the creation and dissemination of a reference framework for care facilities, both for proactively contacting the target group that does not use care and for one-time or part-time care;
- valorisation of good practices;
- screening of the ONE's procedures, processes and projects to determine barriers and opportunities for improving primary and secondary accessibility;
- actions to make care facilities more open to their surroundings;
- adaptation of care contracts and projects;
- guidance in mastering the objectives of the reforms.

4. Revision of the scale of financial contribution from parents in subsidised childcare with a view to increasing accessibility for the lowest income groups.

The cost of childcare, even when subsidised, is still sometimes too high and contributes to care not being accessible to the most vulnerable families. The action proposed by the FWB has two priorities: to improve the accessibility of subsidised childcare (for low and middle-income families) and to simplify the calculation of the financial contribution (from the parents).

The childcare accessibility strategy includes a review of the rules for determining parental contributions in ONE-subsidised childcare facilities. The aim of the measure is to make childcare more accessible to low and middle-income families. Given the potential for parental contribution reform in subsidised childcare to effectively improve accessibility, and the direct impact such a reform could have on the finances of families and care facilities, the intention is to reform the rules for setting parental contributions to ensure that subsidised care is financially accessible and that there is equality of access for all children, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable children. Due regard will also be paid to the situation of single-parent families.

5. Building up a local network for making care facilities more open to their neighbourhoods and ensure that more vulnerable children actually go to care.

There is a further aim to mobilise all primary care providers in the ONE in building up a local network with the particular aim of increasing the number of care options for vulnerable groups and removing barriers to access. There are a great many services that come into contact with the children and families in various capacities and whose operation complements that of the ONE. Many actions are still needed to better align these services, so as to enhance their effectiveness and complementarity. The ONE adapts the duties of its front-line staff so that they participate in and support the building of a local network among child advocacy services to develop, especially for vulnerable groups, opportunities to attend high-quality care before they enter nursery, and to improve the effective access of vulnerable children to childcare. They guide the care facilities through opening up to their neighbourhoods and ensure the widest possible access to activities that develop culture.

6. Initiating activities that develop culture in infants and toddlers

The FWB's Children's Rights Action Plan 2020-2024 mentions the development of activities that develop culture and are also open to children and families who do not attend care. The objectives are: broadening, systematising, structuring and diversifying the offering around cultural development, while ensuring that the activity is accessible to vulnerable families living near care.

The ONE's management contract provides for the development of a broad range of cultural development services for young children as part of the accessibility strategy. Childcare is a wonderful

lever for accessing many learning opportunities and for opening up to others at a very young age. Culture is an important ally in this regard, as it also supports the aspiration that everyone should have the opportunity to develop and become more free. Therefore, as part of the accessibility strategy, the ONE will expand, structure and diversify the range of cultural development activities by means of a system that is open to all care facilities and children's consultations. On the one hand, the cultural development offering at the care facilities will be enhanced and, on the other, for the sake of accessibility and the battle against inequality, these activities will also be offered to children from the neighbourhood who do not attend the care facilities, such that they will not only come into contact with culture, but with the childcare facilities as well this way.

7. Enhancing the training of childcare professionals and expanding CPD on themes relating to participation, respect, protection and compliance with the rights of the child and inclusion of children with disabilities, people with mental health problems, etc. (ONE).

Finally, the management contract establishes a seventh dimension to this accessibility strategy: the enhancement of basic training and CPD for childcare professionals. In order to improve effective accessibility for vulnerable target groups, all actors must be mobilised to transform practices. This is why the CPD offering in particular will be enhanced for the themes relating to the development of skills in project culture, evaluation and direction. This offering will also be extended to themes relating to participation, respect, the protection and observance of children's rights, the implementation of projects for social accessibility and inclusion for children with disabilities, cultural diversity, the development of new flexible care practices, cultural development, etc.

Action: Creating a register of youth activities offered in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Studies and evaluations of the decrees concerning youth centres and youth organisations have shown that the supply of youth activities in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation is not evenly distributed. Thus, young people under 18 are not all equal and do not have the same opportunities to participate in the activities of sectors that specifically target young people.

With this in mind, it is proposed to identify the range of youth activities (including children between the ages of 3 and 18) in order to map out areas where the distribution of this offering could be improved. The map will serve to specify what youth actions are in place in order to promote access to youth activities.

Action: Improving the accessibility of youth activity offerings – disability

The action aims to improve access to education, leisure, recreation and cultural and artistic life for young people with disabilities (including those aged 12 to 18) by supporting the material development of care facilities.

It endeavours for all care facilities (youth centres, youth movement premises, etc.) to be designed to be more easily accessible to young people (including children) with disabilities.

Action: Supporting accessibility to leisure childcare facilities for all children.

Regarding leisure care and extracurricular activities during the school year or in school holidays, the government of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (FWB) wants to recognise after-school care (known as ATL) as a third living environment (besides family and school) to shore up the battle against social inequality.

Indeed, there are numerous obstacles that prevent leisure care from being accessible to all: economic, cultural, organisational and geographical. These obstacles relate to both the access itself, primary accessibility and the quality of care, which we might call secondary accessibility.

For these two points, accessibility implies adapted communication (documents that are easy to understand, available in different languages, made available to users) and adapted registration procedures (assistance with registration, etc.). Once “over the line”, accessibility must be maintained, in particular by adapting working methods, ethical and deontological attitudes, and means of communication so that linguistic, social and cultural barriers are eliminated.

Financial accessibility is also crucial, and an amendment to certain decrees is also planned for the future to cap the cost of care.

Reforms to schools-out clubs, which are currently underway, will allow concrete progress to be made in the area of accessibility of leisure care.

Action: Adjusting the prices of Adeps courses, school care for sports activities for all

The General Sports Administration will take stock of the existing financial support and adapt the general sports offering proposed by the General Sports Administration through a thinking exercise and a proposal for adjusted pricing for Adeps courses and for pedagogical reception centres. This adjusted pricing addresses a range of target groups: large families, socially and economically disadvantaged families, specialist educational institutions. The General Sports Administration will launch an information and awareness campaign on the positive values of sport as a means of cohesion, inclusion, social integration, integrity, collaboration, personal development and fulfilment, and on its health benefits. This awareness is specifically targeted at children, adolescents and women.

Action: Extending free school meals

The Government of the French Community has decided to continue and enhance its actions for the promotion of free, healthy meals based on local products in nursery education. In order to achieve this objective, a new call for projects was launched, targeting nurseries covered by the differentiated framework decree and those covered by the special education decree that are in identical socio-economic circumstances.

German-speaking Community

Action: Various measures to reduce school and childcare costs.

There are various measures and decrees within the German-speaking Community to reduce the cost of school attendance. With regard to childcare, parental contributions for the childminding service are also differentiated according to income. Since 2021, the government has given socially vulnerable families access to private childcare. In 2021, the government was able to increase the supply of childcare places by about 15%, giving more parents access to childcare. The offer of supervised holidays in collaboration with the municipalities was expanded. There is an offering for children aged 3 to 5.

b. Taking measures to prevent and reduce early school leaving with regard for gender

Brussels

Brussels-Capital Region

Action: Measures to prevent early school leaving

On 26 April 2018, the Brussels-Capital Region adopted a common and shared strategy to combat early school leaving. The Schools Service now administers the three regional programmes for combating early school leaving (multi-year programmes):

- The School Absenteeism Prevention Programme (PSV): support for primary and secondary schools in all networks of the 19 municipalities in the battle against school dropouts, truancy, violence and disobedience = 7 million euros for the PSV 2021-2024;
- The programme for the support of activities aimed at assisting children and young people in their schooling and teaching them citizenship (PBSB): support for non-profit organisations outside the school, for actions that meet a double objective: to increase the collective support offering in schooling and to provide targeted and adapted school support to disadvantaged young people, who are more at risk of dropping out of school = 1,500,000 euros for the PBSB 2022-2024;
- The Municipal Plan against School Absenteeism (GPSV): grants to the 19 municipal prevention services for the implementation of their local plan (coordination tasks, first-line service, collaboration in the supervision of compulsory education, individual follow-up and collective actions) = 17 million euros for the GPSV 2022-2024

The government has also allocated an exceptional budget of 1.8 million euros as part of its recovery and redevelopment plan to address the health crisis (enhancing the PSV and GPSV), and in addition to these measures, specific actions and pilot projects are being supported, particularly for young people between the ages of 15 and 21 who are known to have left school early (670,000 euros for 2021-2023).

Finally, the Brussels Government has also instructed the Schools Service to network the actors together and develop a centre of expertise on early school leavers, which aims to bring together in one place the knowledge and useful information on early school leavers in the BCR.

Flemish Community Commission

Action: KANS Central School Dropout Reporting Centre for Brussels: tailor-made individual and group counselling (including by Abrusco)

KANS grew out of an increasing need in the field for a point of contact regarding pathways for pupils at risk of dropping out of school. From a policy perspective, this need has been met. The VGC and Triptiek (three Brussels CLBs) joined forces to launch KANS. On the one hand, KANS offers information around the existing pathways for young people at risk of dropping out of school. On the other, KANS is responsible for directing these pathways. KANS works with pupils, parents, schools and professional counsellors to find the most appropriate support for pupils to prevent school dropouts.

⁶ For more details on the tasks of the perspective.brussels Schools Service on bringing schools together: <https://schoolinschakeling.brussels/actoren/rol-van-het-brussels-gewest>.

Action: Initiatives relating to study choice and connection to the job market.

In their 2021-2025 multi-year strategic plan, the VGC is committed to decreasing high school dropouts and unqualified dropout rates by developing and supporting appropriate counselling services, both inside and outside the school. There is an extra focus on study choices and the connection with the job market.

Action: 'Taalkot'

The VGC wishes to work towards language goals for young people at risk of dropping out of school. Abrusco is organising the Language Shed especially for young people from the Learning and Working Centres or in training. At the Language Shed, young people can learn a basic knowledge of Dutch in a fun, engaging way. They come at agreed times and days as part of their Learning and Working pathway.

German-speaking Community

Action: Various initiatives to prevent early school leaving

The Germany-speaking Community is taking a range of initiatives to prevent early school leaving. For example, compulsory education has already been reduced to 5 years until the age of 18, regardless of the socio-economic context from which he/she comes. Access to school is also being facilitated; for example, it is free during compulsory education, the child or their family has the right to choose the school and there is the possibility of home education. Children with special educational needs are integrated into mainstream education. More specifically, it involves the following initiatives:

- Schulpflicht (Compulsory education)
- SKEI (for those under 12)
- Time out (for those over 12), Part-time education, differentiated phases for obtaining the GAZ
- Inclusion, special education teachers and integration staff
- Subject and support staff
- Kaleido
- Promotion of mental health in schools

- c. [Re-engaging children who are at risk of dropping out of school or training, or who have already done so through, among other things, personalised counselling and closer collaboration with families](#)

Flanders

Action: Initiatives on combating school dropouts.

As announced in the Flemish Coalition Agreement 2019-2024 and the Education Policy Paper 2019-2024, the Flemish government and the Minister of Education are committed to taking measures during this policy period to reduce early school leaving and to pursue active policies against all forms of truancy.

The current action plan 'Together Against School Dropouts' (2016) contains 52 practical actions. Although it has already been possible to take some steps forward, the challenges remain great. In order

to remain responsive to recent developments in policy, society and the field, a new action plan is being prepared.

Tackling early school leaving efficiently requires the policy domains of education, work and (young people's) welfare to work together. Just as in the current action plan, these policy areas will be involved as key partners in maintaining this collaboration in the future where possible. Furthermore, regional and local translation remains of great importance in order to meet the needs of pupils, parents and schools as far as possible. The evaluation of the functioning and coordinating role of the Networks Together against School Dropouts is therefore a central issue. The roll-out of the action plan is expected by the 2022-2023 school year. Necessary actions will be included where possible.

Action: ESF Transition Pathways

For pupils in the second and third grades of vocational secondary education who are identified by the school as potential dropouts, Flanders provides transition pathways. The pathways are designed for young people who are tired of school and who may find it difficult to embark upon a sustainable career.

The project will run from 1 September 2020 to 30 June 2022 and is funded by European ESF funding. With this project, the Department of Education and Training is aiming to:

- Encourage young people to successfully complete their educational qualification by providing them with prospects for employment or further education.
- Ensure that young people can embark upon a sustainable career after leaving secondary education.

The transition pathways consist of five steps taken by the school, the CLB ('Centre for Pupil Guidance') and the expert organisation:

1. Identification of potential dropouts
2. Prospects interview with the young person about this identification
3. Pathway determination
4. Pathway guidance
5. Aftercare

The project will be offered to 1,000 young people. The project's anticipated output is that 15% of the young people are in education, training or employment at the end of the transition process and that 15% of the young people will obtain their educational qualification (preferably through secondary education, but where necessary through a second-chance learning pathway).

Brussels

French Community Commission

Combating school dropouts is also a key priority. A range of projects and measures are being implemented at French Community Commission schools throughout the year to support the pupils. In response to the health crisis and the negative impact on pupils, the COCOF organised "back-to-school" workshops in the summer of 2020 at the Charles Gheude Institute in the Marolles neighbourhood and at the Ceria campus; this initiative continued in 2021. In addition, for the 2020-2021 school year, the COCOF has recruited 4 full-time equivalents, one per school, to enhance the teams responsible for school reintegration projects and the monitoring of pupils struggling at schools.

Action: 5 Time-in proving grounds

The VGC is subsidising five schools of Dutch-speaking vocational education in Brussels for three school years. In doing so, the VGC is committed to providing guidance and support to vulnerable young people at the school itself. The support project aims to enhance young people's positive behaviour at school, promote a positive school climate and reduce school dropout rates.

Action: Student guidance for second-chance education CVO Brussels (this often involves young people who have dropped out of regular education)

The students at CVO Brussels are getting younger and younger. As a result, CVO Brussels is facing the same problems (including educational ones) as those that caused the young people concerned to drop out of secondary education. In order to prevent these students from dropping out of second-chance education as well and thus from leaving unqualified, intensive guidance is provided for them. This guidance is aimed at the student's general learning process, the monitoring of absences, psychosocial help and advice, etc. There is also monitoring with regard to tuition and progression.

Action: Kasterlinden Support Team

The Support Team Kasterlinden is the largest support network within official education in Brussels, which is governed by the VGC. They provide support to pupils in mainstream education who have specific educational needs and their teachers. Tailor-made, target group-specific guidance achieves inclusive education and increases the chances of a positive school career.

Action: Expansion of Kasterlinden type 3 special primary education

The VGC's ambition is to expand capacity for type 3 primary education at its Kasterlinden school. Kasterlinden special primary education is the only provider of type 3 education in Dutch-speaking education in Brussels, an offering for pupils with a behavioural and emotional disorder. The combination with a difficult home context means that this group of pupils is at high risk of dropping out of school if they do not receive tailored education and support. The VGC wants to expand the current 12 places to 50 by 2025.

Action: Establishment of school substitute day care for children and adolescents with specific care needs

In addition, the VGC's ambition is to establish school substitute day care for pupils with specific and complex care needs, particularly with behavioural and emotional issues that prevent them from attending school full-time. Day care embraces multiple functions, such as individual and group guidance, therapy and time-out. This allows the pupils to receive the care they need and then return to learning. This daily activity will be set up along with the capacity expansion for type 3 BuBaO.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Action: Project to combat school absenteeism and dropouts.

The reforms resulting from the Pacte pour un Enseignement d'excellence (Pact for Excellence in Education) provide for the implementation of several measures to combat this phenomenon, within the framework of a specific project. The intention is to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon and its causes, in particular by developing indicators and better defining school absenteeism or early school leaving. This project, currently underway, will result in a plan to combat school dropouts with a holistic and multidimensional approach built around three axes: prevention-intervention-

compensation. The working framework is that of Opinion No. 3, which sets out the objectives that will cover both early school leaving and efforts to get early school leavers back into school. The coordination principles to be discussed here relate to actors in school and actors outside the school system, such as those in youth work. The aim is to distinguish, within a legal framework, between first-line, second-line and third-line services and to specify the tasks and missions of each of these services, the frequency of their interventions, as well as the conditions and procedures for referral from one service provider or service to another, through a well-defined system.

Action: Development of a positive study orientation.

The Pacte pour un enseignement d'Excellence (Pact for Excellence in Education) advocates a systematic approach to orientation. Orientation reform takes concrete form in pillar 4 "Positive orientation", as well as through the pillars "Tronc commun" (Core curriculum), CLBs, Specialisation, Training and Management. The ongoing projects include:

- The development of an Orientation Portal that will be online by November 2022. The intention of this portal is to provide the FWB with a coordinated, updated source of information that reflects the realities of the job market and brings together an abundance of high-quality, universally accessible data on all qualifications and transitional education, vocational training, higher education and professions. The portal will also provide pupils, parents and educational teams with a reliable and interactive platform so they can get a full overview of what is on offer and have equal access to information on structures, available choices, studies, training and professions. The portal will also offer self-tests for pupils so they can make an informed and positive choice;
- The "Logbook", which aims to provide the pupil throughout their school career with an approach based on the trilogy of "gaining information" – "distancing" and "developing a project", and which they can use throughout their life to stay motivated so they can develop professionally, satisfy their curiosity for new horizons and be encouraged to take action;
- A registry of all the guidance for orientation is currently being worked on. This registry aims to inform the education and orientation actors about the tools, activities and services available in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation in order to develop a positive orientation for school-age young people throughout their school career.

In order to provide appropriate guidance to the pupils, all school actors must master the orientation approach as a lifelong development process. Teachers play a central role in this and these tools will support them in doing so. The CLBs are their partners and will join forces with education teams and local partners.

German-speaking Community

Action: Various initiatives to prevent early school leaving

These initiatives have also been included in 1.C

d. [Providing learning support to children with learning disabilities to compensate for their linguistic-cognitive and educational disadvantages](#)

Flanders

Action: Language screening and language integration pathways.

Now that the age of compulsory education has been lowered to five years, all children must attend the third nursery class. This is also an opportunity to use screening to detect and remedy language delays in all children in a timely manner. The intention is that nursery children can catch up on any language delays during the rest of the school year. Indeed, children who start primary school with a language delay often fall behind in other areas as well.

The KOALA test, as it is known, is due between 10 October and 30 November. Schools can choose the timing themselves and also choose, for example, to test the eldest nursery children in mid-October and the youngest nursery children as late as the end of November. The dates were chosen so that the children have time to catch up after the summer break, while also leaving enough time in the school year for pupils with language delays to brush up.

If the delay at the end of nursery is still too great, the class council may recommend that the transition to primary school be postponed. If parents disregard that advice, then the child will be assigned a language integration programme in the first grade. In principle, this would be a language immersion class or a full-fledged alternative.

For the language integration pathways that follow the language screening, schools for mainstream primary education will receive 12 million euros in the 2021-2022 academic year, in the form of points for concern. The distribution of these funds is based on the number of 4-year-old nursery children whose home language is not Dutch.

Action: Student support – student tutoring / buddy working.

By subsidising the Flanders-wide project Learning Buddy Flanders on the one hand and, on the other, student tutoring activities by (local) higher education institutions, Education is investing in individual guidance and remediation for vulnerable pupils.

- Learning Buddy Flanders will receive 25,200 euros for the period 1/10/2021 to 31/12/21. 2 FTE seconded teachers for the full academic year.
- Annual student tutoring grant call: 230,000 euros (2021-2022 academic year)

Action: Summer schools

Flanders wants to eliminate the learning deficit mainly in the schools and during school hours. Complementarily, however, especially for vulnerable pupils, it makes sense to create additional learning time and reduce the learning loss due to the summer effect. Flanders is therefore structurally embedding the summer schools that were first organised in 2020. The strength of summer schools lies in a varied and goal-oriented offering that is linked to the educational goals and individual educational pathway of participating pupils.

Wallonia

Action: Measures under the Social Cohesion Plan

The Social Cohesion Plan, subsidised by Wallonia with about 26 million per year, pursues two objectives, namely to reduce poverty and inequality by promoting effective access for all to fundamental rights, and to contribute to building a society of solidarity where everyone feels partly responsible for the well-being of all. The plan is being implemented by 204 local governments (176 municipalities and 28 PCSWs) and responds to the needs identified for access to rights. More specifically, this would allow for the expansion of school support through the creation or enhancement of homework schools at the local level.

Brussels

French Community Commission

Action: School support and guidance

In Brussels, 129 school counsellors support the development of children aged 6 to 12 and young people aged 12 to 24.

These are homework help, socio-cultural and creative activities aimed primarily at disadvantaged children and children who fall prey to school absenteeism, for at least 10 hours a week, for groups of at least 10 children. Autonomy and personal development are two central objectives of these actions. Educational outings, two-week internships (or camps) and parenting support workshops are offered. Links with schools are sought so as to include them as partners.

That support is funded by a decree that sets the objectives and requirements for operators prioritising this. In 2021, €2,256,098.12 was allocated to school counsellors.

Flemish Community Commission

Action: Talen-t-boost and summer schools

Along with the Brussels Education Centre (OCB), the VGC organises 'Talen-t-boost', a holiday offering for non-native newcomers and children with another home language who are having a hard time with Dutch. Children aged between six and twelve learn Dutch through play in a language workshop.

Besides the Talen-t-Boost for non-native newcomers, the Flemish Community Commission has also been organising open Summer Schools since 2021. Teachers, pupils and parents worked hard in Corona times to reach all pupils with high-quality distance education. Yet there is concern about learning delays among the most vulnerable pupils. Through the Summer Schools, the VGC is giving pupils the opportunity to close that gap, boost their chances of success and discover some hidden talents.

The VGC Summer Schools are there for those pupils who really need this extra offering: Brussels pupils with learning delays that cannot be remedied during school hours and for which intensive guidance for two weeks can produce results.

Action: De Poolster

De Poolster is a centre for ambulatory rehabilitation. It is aimed at children who are or will be attending Dutch-language education. The centre examines and treats children with a variety of learning and

developmental disabilities. Children and adults with hearing loss can also come to the centre for examination and therapy.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Action: Project for review to revise the Daspa system.

The scheme for reception and education of newcomers and pupils on a similar footing (Dispositif d'Accueil et de Scolarisation des élèves Primo-Arrivants et Assimilés (DASPA)), in place since 2012, aims to gradually integrate newcomers into school life. It provides additional human resources for schools that accommodate this special group, particularly for teaching the language of instruction. Its enhancement in 2019, through the addition of the FLA tutoring system, following the preceding migration crisis, will be analysed, particularly to better take into account the situation of pupils who cannot read or write. The inclusion of children from migrant backgrounds in extracurricular activities must also be the subject of proactive approaches aimed at actual inclusion, well beyond the statement of access for all.

German-speaking Community

Action: Homework help

Homework help is also provided from the German-speaking Community.

- e. [Using inclusive teaching and learning methods, adapting the facilities and teaching materials in early childhood education and care and of educational institutions and meeting the specific needs of children with special educational needs and of children with disabilities in the most appropriate way, providing qualified teachers and other professionals, such as psychologists, speech therapists, physiotherapists, social workers or teaching assistants](#)
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Flanders

This is not a power held in terms of teaching materials/methods, as this concerns the autonomy of the school; also personnel policy (e.g. refresher training) is mainly the responsibility of the school governance. However, the Flemish government is taking / has taken some initiatives to support qualified teachers and other education (and related) professionals. In the current support model, support workers are employed who can engage in professionalisation among their duties. A temporary project on the professionalisation of support staff was also commenced on 1/9/2021 (until the end of 2022).

Brussels

Flemish Community Commission

Action: Inclusive operation of VGC Playgrounds

At the request of parents, the VGC Playgrounds can provide specialist, customized supervision for children with disabilities.

German-speaking Community

Action: see above (Reform of special education) + inclusive schools or inclusive classes. Mentoring of children; inclusion is to be found in the mentoring of children.

Action: Special pedagogical support in special education schools

The purpose of special educational support is to support pupils with disabilities and learning difficulties in their individual abilities to live, learn and act independently and together. This measure supports and encourages these pupils to acquire academic and social skills and helps and teaches them values, attitudes, behaviours and skills.

In the event of an identified special educational need, the pupil will receive qualified and appropriate special educational support provided in a special education school or in a mainstream school in the form of an integration project.

- f. Taking measures to support inclusive education and preventing segregated classes in early childhood education and care and in education more broadly. This may include providing priority or if necessary early access to children in need
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Flanders

There is a decree allowing pupils to progress in their studies on the basis of an individually adapted curriculum within the context of mainstream schools where support is provided equivalent to the special education framework (for mental, physical, visual and hearing impairments and for speech and language development disorders). For other types (basic offering, behaviour and ASD, equal framework for pupils with an IAC is envisaged (decree on learning support). However, class scheduling remains within the school's autonomy.

Brussels

Brussels-Capital Region

No powers for education, but regional instruments and current partnerships:

The Brussels Observatory for Health and Welfare publishes the annual “Social Barometer. Brussels Poverty Report”, which includes a section on education and training.

Combating child poverty and deprivation is a challenge that must be met to ensure access to education for all. The Brussels government supports the initiatives of local communities and clubs, particularly through:

- the provision of homework schools and after-school cultural and sports activities;
- the provision of digital equipment to pupils;
- the “Fruit, vegetables and milk in schools” programme (annual call for projects);
- ...

The resources from the various regional measures (development of the territory, battle against school dropouts, digital transition, social cohesion, etc.) are intended for schools with pupils in difficulty (low socio-economic indicators), often from the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This concentration of resources contributes de facto to poverty reduction.

Action: Encouraging inclusion in childcare.

The VGC is supporting and collaborating with the Elmer Centre for Inclusive Childcare to encourage organisations in nursery and out-of-school childcare to include children with special healthcare needs. Through training for organisations, collaboration in networks and referral of families, we ensure that more children are included in the regular care offering.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Action: Improving the accessibility of youth activity offerings – disability

The action aims to improve access to education, leisure, recreation and cultural and artistic life for children with disabilities by supporting the material adjustment of care facilities. The action is aimed at all children between the ages of 12 and 18 with disabilities and is part of the Children's Rights Plan 2020-2024.

All care structures (youth centres, youth movement classrooms, etc.) must have facilities that facilitate access for children with disabilities

Action: Developing a more inclusive school

One of the areas of action in the Pacte pour un enseignement d'excellence is the development of strong initiatives to better meet the needs of pupils with disabilities and make education more inclusive.

Indeed, a transfer to special education may be considered only when reasonable accommodations made in the mainstream education system prove inadequate. This principle was converted into a decree in 2017, guaranteeing the right to those adjustments for pupils with special needs. In order to support mainstream education in this important development, closer collaboration will be needed between compulsory and special education. To meet that goal, 48 "pôles territoriaux" (territorial centres) will be operational at the start of the 2022-2023 academic year. These centres, consisting of multidisciplinary teams, will help normal education teaching teams to make reasonable adjustments, through appropriate tools and training, and to integrate those aspects into their management plans where necessary. These centres will allow for common management of resources and will hold a coordinating role for those tasks. The system of permanent full integration will remain a possibility for pupils for whom the special education route is realistic. There are currently a further 26 classes and establishments in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation with an inclusive vision at mainstream schools. They are intended for type 2 special education pupils (moderate or severe intellectual disability), with or without autism, or type 3 (behavioural disorders) with autism. About ten new projects are expected to start in the next academic year.

Action: Introduction of measures to effectively increase the accessibility of care, including the inclusion of children with disabilities (ONE)

As mentioned in point 8.1/a, ONE's management contract for 2021-2025 provides for a multidimensional strategy for improving the primary and secondary accessibility of childcare, including the inclusion of children with disabilities.

Action: Encouraging optimum use of existing childcare places for vulnerable groups and ensuring the promotion of accessibility practices (ONE)

That action is also part of the multidimensional strategy outlined in point 8a. This measure also refers to the strategy of the ONE management agreement and to the implementation of childcare reform.

Action: Expanding the provision of continuing education on themes relating to participation, respect, protection and compliance with the rights of the child, and on the inclusion of children with disabilities, people with mental health problems, etc.

That action is also part of the multidimensional strategy outlined in point 8a. The social challenges require an ambitious response and significant progress in the short term. In order to improve effective accessibility for vulnerable target groups, all actors must be mobilised to transform practices. In this sense, CPD will be expanded in terms of themes and methods, such that care facilities are best supported in implementing these objectives.

Action: Organising a systematic dialogue with representatives from parents' associations or experienced experts to give a voice to migrants and people with disabilities

[g. Offering one healthy meal at least every school day](#)

Wallonia

Action: Free healthy snacks

The Walloon Poverty Reduction Plan, as approved by the Walloon government on 25 November 2021, brings together a series of measures proposed by the various Walloon ministers under the coordination of the Prime Minister for gradually eradicating poverty and inequality. It aims to provide every Walloon woman and man with the means to get out of poverty, through access to basic comfort and work. For this purpose, the government is allocating 482 million euros until 2024, on top of the 61 million euros already made available so far. The plan includes the following specific measure relating to children: free healthy snacks in nurseries and primary schools with weak socio-economic indicators. The measure aims to organise the manufacture and distribution of free snacks based on fresh fruit and vegetables (soup, smoothies, etc.) to children. In this way, the aim is to combat an excessively one-sided diet among the poorest children and thus to combat childhood obesity and the medical problems that result from it. Since April 2021, free healthy snacks made with local products have been distributed in 23 Walloon schools. The intention is to distribute 400,000 snacks over a period of 2 years. At the end of that pilot phase, the initiative will be evaluated to see what opportunities exist for scaling it up.

Action: In the context of Progecole ('School Scheme')

Actions to promote the benefits of healthy eating for children, encouraging them to eat more fruit, vegetables and dairy products, and providing free educational tools to support the introduction of accompanying educational measures. By combining the distribution of products with the organisation of educational activities, this Programme offers young people the opportunity to discover local products and reconnect with agriculture as the source of these products. This Program, funded under the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) with additional support from the Walloon Region, aims to provide participating schools with free fruit, vegetables and/or milk and dairy products

at least 20 times per school year and to distribute them to the pupils. Enrolment in this Programme is voluntary.

Action: On a trial basis, free, balanced and sustainable snacks are distributed to children in schools with differentiated pedagogical guidance

Brussels

Flemish Community Commission

Action: ‘School expenses for vulnerable families’ grant

With the ‘School expenses for vulnerable families’ grant, the VGC is contributing, through granting subsidies, towards school expenses for pupils from Dutch-speaking nursery, primary or secondary schools in the Brussels-Capital Region from vulnerable families who have difficulty paying the school bills.

With this grant, the Dutch-speaking schools in Brussels can pay for meals or snacks, among other things, for children from vulnerable families.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Organisation of calls for projects for nurseries to provide free, high-quality meals for all children. There are access criteria for these calls for projects and project promoters must sign a charter with a minimum set of basic principles to be followed and applied, including sustainability criteria.

Action: Review of reference specifications for the improvement of school meals for children aged three to eighteen years (ONE)

ONE is seeking to make free meals in primary school more sustainable.

German-speaking Community

Action: organisation of school meals

“Service and Logistics” (DGSL for short), a service with separate management, has been organising school meals (DG Mensa) since 2013.

One of the things this service does, as subsidised by the German-speaking Community, is to adapt the food offerings to the age of the children. It takes into account the nutritional offerings for children with disabilities or with medical pathologies and, among other things, attaches great importance to the choice of foods, giving preference to local/regional or organically grown products.

h. Providing lesson materials, including digital teaching tools, books, uniforms or any required clothing

Wallonia

Action: Since 2021, nearly 1,200 PCs have been transferred from the Walloon public administration to schools through the General Education Administration of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels.

Brussels

French Community Commission

In order to offer high-quality education free of charge, the French Community Commission has been distributing a free school kit containing basic necessities to primary enrolled in primary and special secondary education since the start of the 2018-2019 academic year. Since the start of the 2020-2021 academic year, an additional step has been taken by reimbursing the cost of photocopies for pupils in compulsory education. In addition, other measures targeting the most financially vulnerable groups have been implemented to make the studies organised under the COCOF accessible to all, such as free sanitary protection for all pupils and students at COCOF schools since the start of the 2021 academic year. A budget of 120,000 euros has also been allocated for the creation of a unique “social service”-type structure for the pupils and students at the COCOF's institutions.

Flemish Community Commission

Action: ‘School expenses for vulnerable families’ grant

With the ‘School expenses for vulnerable families’ grant, the VGC is contributing, through granting subsidies, to the school expenses for pupils from Dutch-speaking nursery, primary or secondary schools in the Brussels-Capital Region from vulnerable families who have difficulty paying the school bills.

With this grant, the Dutch-speaking schools in Brussels can contribute towards the costs of books, school equipment and work clothing for children and young people in financially vulnerable situations.

German-speaking Community

Action: Provide schoolchildren and childcare centres with laptops (IT-Konzept UW)

The sanitation crisis has exposed the need for laptops for needy families. IT-Konzept UW equips all high school pupils with laptops. In 2020, 500 used and 650 new pieces of equipment had already been made available to pupils at high schools.

Efforts are also being made within the German-speaking Community to gradually digitalise school systems by setting up IT infrastructure in schools and providing teachers and students with the necessary technical equipment. One measure is for IT-Konzept UW to implement a high-speed Internet connection for all schools. In childcare in the German-speaking Community, all private childcare facilities were also equipped with a laptop in 2021, so as to participate in digitally organised CPD and thus raise the quality of childcare.

Under the Belgian Recovery Plan, 5.5 million euros will go to the German-speaking Community for digital inclusion in education.

- i. Providing the high-speed connectivity, digital services and adequate equipment required for distance learning to ensure access to online educational content
-

Federal

In 2020 and 2021, during the corona crisis, access to the Internet and computer media for schoolchildren and young people living in Fedasil reception centres was evaluated. Laptops were loaned out or given to young people who need them, and Internet connectivity at reception centres has been improved.

Wallonia

Action: Digital Wallonia + strategy

In order to continue the development of Public Computer Rooms (PCRs), so as to enable collective access to digital technologies such as Internet access, a strategy called Digital Wallonia + is being implemented. Every year, Wallonia launches a call for school projects, open to all schools of compulsory education and schools of social promotion in Wallonia. With the support of advisors from the Walloon government services and an educational expert, Wallonia is working on a guidance method and process that should be inclusive.

This way, Digital Wallonia has made it possible to enhance the role of Public Computer Rooms (PCRs) in the context of digital inclusion in three ways that complement each other: by perpetuating PCR support and guidance, by organising and funding two calls for projects related to the existing PCR, and by funding the computer equipment for new rooms. Currently, 176 active and recognised PCRs, spread over 132 Walloon municipalities, are available to citizens.

Brussels

French Community Commission

With the aim of ensuring equal access to education for all, and in addition to providing new and renovated computer equipment for the most vulnerable pupils and students, the COCOF has developed a strategy for the digital development of all its schools. In total, more than 750 new or refurbished laptops have been purchased since 2020. These investments will continue and be diversified in 2022 (laptops, tablets, interactive whiteboards, introduction of digital platforms, etc.), and will be used to improve the quality of education. The challenge also lies in training in the use of digital technology, both for pupils and students and their families, and for teachers who will have to adapt their teaching practices. Our schools are therefore planning digital awareness activities and the budgets necessary for continuing the work of the technopedagogue hired in 2020 to support the organising authority in this process of deploying digital technology in schools have been made available (+ €58,000).

Action: Distribution of free laptops and Internet subscriptions through schools for vulnerable pupils

During the first corona lockdown and being faced with distance learning, Dutch-speaking schools in Brussels were able to call upon the '1,200 laptops' project. The VGC (in collaboration with the Flemish government), along with the non-profit organisation Digital For Youth, set up this project in which laptops (donated by companies, organisations and institutions) were collected, put in order and distributed to the most vulnerable pupils in secondary education and the third grade of primary education.

Funds were also made available for providing laptops and other multimedia materials through leisure organisations.

The non-profit organisation STARTPROjects installed both hardware and Internet connections for schoolchildren in poverty during the first lockdown in 2020 and in 2021 so that this group could also attend online lessons without any problems. The project was subsidised by the VGC.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Action: Gradually introducing free education, starting with nursery: introducing a grant for school supplies. Introduction of maximum eligible costs for other levels of compulsory education

Brussels-Capital Region

Note to the Joint Government

- Support for the digital transition of schools: investments in hardware and Internet connection aligned with Communities' digital strategies;
- Coordination of regional and community actors involved in providing technical support to schools in the context of their digital equipment;
- Cooperation of the regional entity in CINE, the community body in charge of coordinating measures in the field of digital education, in dealing with questions related to schools' digital equipment;

Regional instruments and current partnerships:

Thanks to the *Fibre to the School* project, which started in 2014, almost all Brussels secondary schools are connected to broadband Internet. The project is continuing and has been expanded as part of the Brussels relaunch and redevelopment plan to deal with the health crisis. The **Regional Digital Development Plan 2020-2023** (total amount around 6.5 million euros), led by the BRIC and IRISnet in collaboration with the Schools Service, targets secondary schools and consists of two main components:

- Axis 1 – Support for **mobile digital equipment** for Special Educational Needs schools (based on the socio-economic indicators), with technical support (helpdesk) by the BRIC (2020-2021);
- Axis 2 – Enhancing the **internal connectivity** of schools: carrying out *site surveys* (on-site examination to clarify needs according to the specific situation of each institution) and installing access points (WiFi terminals) in the 240 Brussels secondary schools (mainstream and specialist education) between 2021 and 2023, starting with institutions with low socio-economic indicators (institutions without fibre will receive a COAX connection, an alternative solution proposed by IRISnet, equivalent in capacity to fibre).

German-speaking Community

See above, Konzept UW.

- j. [Increasing the digital skills of children in need, as well as teachers, and making the necessary investments to address the digital divide in all its forms](#)
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Federal

Action: Committing to actions to prevent digital exclusion for young people

The Recovery and Resilience Facility provides large-scale financial support for reforms and investments by Member States, with the aim of mitigating the economic and social impact of the coronavirus pandemic and making EU economies more sustainable, resilient and prepared for the challenges posed by the green and digital transitions.

Thanks to the European recovery plan, the Federal Government decided to spend 30 million euros on the “e-inclusion for Belgium” project. The PPS Social Integration, along with the Minister for Social Integration and Poverty Reduction, is therefore contributing to this objective and is committed to actions and solutions needed to prevent digital exclusion, so that everyone can participate fully in society. In this context, there is a focus on digital inclusion projects with a focus on young people in the broad sense (aged 16 to 26).

Flanders

Action: Digisprong VV019

Flanders is aiming to capitalise on the corona crisis for a sustainable digital acceleration in education. It is doing so by investing in the ICT infrastructure within the school walls and in ICT devices for shared use at each nursery and in the first through fourth grades in primary school. In addition, we are providing funds for the provision of a private ICT device for pupils in the fifth and sixth grades of primary education and pupils in secondary education.

The necessary framework for schools is also being provided, including greater status for the school ICT coordinator, the development of digital service provision for schools and a knowledge and advice centre serving the field. There will be adapted ICT training courses for teachers, and teacher training courses will also focus more on digital competencies. We are also providing the teachers with ICT equipment.

Digisprong also includes several actions to provide high-quality digital learning equipment and to encourage creativity. The expansion of KlasCement as a unique platform for educational “open” teaching materials and the continued development of the Archive for Education to enrich teaching resources with audiovisual material. In addition, specific attention is given to developing digital learning materials in technical and vocational secondary education. Finally, they are also focusing on cyber security.

On 11 December 2020, the Flemish Government approved the vision paper “Digisprong. From Backwards to Forwards. ICT plan for a high-quality digital education in implementation of the Flemish Resilience recovery plan”.

Input	€375,000,000
Output	IT infrastructure in schools that is up to date, availability of training on digitalisation, better status for ICT coordinators, availability of a Digisprong knowledge and advice centre.
Outcome	Achieving digital acceleration in education
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of population with basic digital skills • Investments in school infrastructure • Integrating ICT into education

Wallonia

As part of the Digital Strategy (2019-2024) Digital Wallonia, Wallonia is establishing the framework for all actions by the Walloon government in terms of digital transformation. The Digital Wallonia strategy is built around 5 themes: digital sector, digital economy, connected and intelligent territory, public services, skills and employment. In this regard, the DW 4 Citizens programme coordinates and organises actions for the digital inclusion of Walloon citizens. It aims to enhance the network of Public Computer Rooms (PCRs) and basic computer training (formerly the PMTIC). The programme also offers actions for helping families get computers and to guide and train people at risk of exclusion from the information society. Those actions are coordinated through unified communications and services to share skills and resources for the benefit of digital mediators.

German-speaking Community

See above, Konzept UW.

k. Providing transport to early childhood education and care institutions and educational institutions

Flanders

This is the responsibility of the Flemish government where pupils who are in special education are concerned. Granting the right lies with Education (AGODI), implementation with Mobility (De Lijn). Education also provides a bus escort.

For young people, De Lijn applies lower rates:

- Children younger than 6 years ride for free
- 6 to 11-year-olds: Buzzy Pazz for 12 months = 56 euros
- 12 to 24-year-olds: Buzzy Pazz for 12 months = 215 euros

These rates are valid as of 30 March 2022.

Wallonia

Action: Free public transport

Developing active mobility around schools and school transport plans, in collaboration with the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, by gradually making public transport free for young people up to the age of 25 and older, and for disadvantaged groups.

Action: Improving children's experience of school transport

Attention is being paid to improving the children's experience during school transport. Several initiatives have been taken around this theme, such as: the creation of a pedestrian certificate in Wallonia, the organisation of the "my safety around my school" competition or conducting research into harassment in school transport.

Brussels

Brussels-Capital Region

Since 1 February, all Brussels residents between the ages of 18 and 24 have been able to take out a STIB annual pass for 12 euros, instead of 499 euros.

French Community Commission

The French Community Commission is responsible for the daily school transport of children attending specialist educational institutions in the Brussels-Capital Region.

At the start of the 2021 academic year, the French Community Commission will ensure the transportation of 3,100 pupils and pay for 2,300 public transport passes. The French Community Commission is also recruiting 205 supervisors and organising more than 220 routes with 24 transport companies.

Flemish Community Commission

The VGC provides transportation for its own VGC educational institutions.

German-speaking Community

The German-speaking Community provides for pupil transport and the transport of children from school to after-school care places. This is free for primary school pupils.

I. Ensuring equal and inclusive access to school-related activities, including school trips and sports, leisure and cultural activities

Flanders

Action: The Support Centre for Inclusion

Belgium ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2009. This treaty makes the inclusion of persons with disabilities a basic right. Personal autonomy and dignity are the guiding principles. In following the Convention, some major steps have already been taken towards inclusion and full social participation, but we are not there yet. Children / young adults with disabilities continue to encounter significant obstacles in virtually all areas of social life. The inclusive operation of the

Support Centre for Inclusion therefore responds to the needs of children with disabilities and their environment and contributes to the achievement of inclusion.

The 'Support Centre for Inclusion' was established in 2012 – with project funding from Equal Opportunities – to support parents of children with disabilities so that they can take the inclusion process into their own hands. The Support Centre guides them through, among other things, tailored pathway counselling, accessible information that is easy to find, exchange of (parental) experiences through meetings, as well as through mediation, and searching for practical solutions to specific inclusion issues.

The Support Centre originally focused on the referral of children to inclusive education. Its successful approach has since been recognised from the policy area of Education itself and is now receiving further funding from that angle. Besides education, many other domains and sectors make up the quality of life for children with disabilities. For example, the Support Centre received an increasing number of questions regarding possibilities for inclusion within domains such as leisure, sport, culture, work and housing. To respond to this, a project grant from Equal Opportunities expanded the scope of the support centre to these sectors.

The current project funding for the Supporter Centre for Inclusion runs from 1 September 2021 through 31 August 2023 and amounts to €65,000 for this period. Potential channels for embedding the continuation of the project's successful inclusive operation are being sought.

Action: Maximum bill

Children identified as having special educational needs and enrolled in mainstream education are entitled to participate in all educational activities organised by the school. Enrolling your child in nursery and primary education is free. A school may not charge a registration fee, and as the equipment and activities strictly necessary to achieve the attainment targets and educational objectives are free. Schools often use more equipment and offer more activities than are strictly necessary for the attainment targets and developmental goals. For those expenses, the school can ask for a contribution from the parents. However, this is capped by the maximum bill.

Wallonia

Action: Promoting the accessibility of tourism activities for vulnerable groups, including children

The Commissariat général au Tourisme (CGT) and the non-profit organisation "Article 27/Wallonia" have signed an agreement, with the support of the Walloon Region, with a view to creating a network of partners from the tourism sector under the "Article 27" scheme to facilitate access to tourism for socially and economically disadvantaged people who have little or no access to Walloon tourism and recreation offerings. In order to achieve this objective of extending the "Article 27" scheme (which was initially aimed at cultural offerings) to include tourist and recreational offerings for day trips, a "Wallonia Tourism for all" team was created at the non-profit organisation "Article 27". This team will work in close collaboration with the tourism sector: tour operators made aware of the issue, Infotourism offices to welcome groups, Wallonie-Belgique Tourisme to promote its reduced-price offer, etc. The partnership provides for the organisation of 28 group excursions by bus per year for less autonomous target groups that do not have any means of transport (2 excursions per local "Article 27" office).

Brussels

French Community Commission

Action: Issuing a call for projects to subsidise a minimum of 2,518 new places at day care centres by 2025

The government will provide the ONE with 894,000 euros in 2022, 1,805,000 euros in 2023, 5,267,000 euros in 2024 and 11,727,000 euros in 2025 for the creation of new childcare places.

Flemish Community Commission

Action: Grants to cover the costs of activities.

With the 'Class in Action' and 'School expenses for vulnerable families' grants (see above), schools can (partially) cover the costs for activities. Primary and secondary schools that work with partners to organise additional high-quality activities to achieve curriculum or developmental goals can receive the VGC's 'Class in Action' grant for this purpose. The activities must fall within certain themes and be organised within the Brussels-Capital Region. Multi-day trips that take place within the country may also be covered.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Action: Strengthening the accessibility of youth/sport/culture offerings

The FWB plans to develop formal membership opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and early school leavers in youth organisations, sports clubs and cultural associations. This involves removing the barriers (financial, mobility, representation) to membership in these associations, **through three areas of action:**

- Developing better communication about existing offerings among these groups in order to remove some of the biases that keep them from becoming members;
- Making membership more affordable: ADEPS' placements already have very low prices and there is also a discount for large families and schools. In addition, some activities are completely free, such as the ADEPS walks. Convinced that sport is a priority for young people, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation supports associations such as SPORT2BE, URBAN YOUTH GAMES and PANATHLON in integrating sport into the school environment, thus making it more accessible;
- Guidance for young people within the structures: In order to better meet current expectations, the ADEPS is offering training that is more tailored to supporting young people in their physical and psychological development.

The Decree of 26 March 2009 establishing the conditions for the recognition and subsidisation of youth organizations stipulates in Article 1: to respect and defend the principles contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as every person responsible for them. This means that all the rights apply to every child without exception, that the state has a duty to protect the child from all forms of discrimination and must take positive measures to promote respect for their rights, and that the child has the right to relax, play and participate in cultural and artistic activities.

The *Decree of 20 July 2000 defining the conditions for the recognition and subsidisation of youth centres, meeting and residence centres, youth information centres and their federations* specifies in Article 3: *Not to ask for membership fees or payment for activities that may hinder the participation of*

the young person. The Youth Centres Decree also refers to the International Convention in its first article.

There have already been some actions, such as the Plan de Relance Jeunesse (Youth Recovery Plan), which has funded more than 165 projects (for nearly 3 million euros) to reconnect young people with youth clubs. On the other hand, during the health crisis, a protocol for combating school absenteeism and social exclusion was introduced to allow activities, especially in the youth sector, to continue.

This action will allow better access to education, leisure, recreation and participation in cultural and artistic life.

Action: Reforming the Accueil Temps Libre (leisure care).

Reform of the Accueil Temps Libre, led by a cross-cutting commission tasked with working towards an overall vision of leisure care in which the best interests of the child and respect for their rights, needs and rhythms are the guiding principles.

Convinced of the need for that reform to be conceived and organised “at the level of the child”, the Minister for Children decided to develop a cross-cutting and integrated approach to government policy for children and young people by launching a broad consultation with actors within the policy areas of children, youth, sports, culture and education. Only by working together, in a participatory and open dynamic, can we give concrete form to that common desire to offer all children effective access to high-quality extracurricular and leisure activities, in continuity and pedagogical coherence with the school and the family.

The commission will continue its work on leisure care reform until the end of 2022. The laws will be passed and implemented from 2023.

Action: Implementing actions to facilitate (free) access to culture.

The action aims to facilitate access to cultural and artistic activities by developing two free one-day events in 2023 and 2024.

The aim is to accommodate up to 100 children from institutions aged 6 to 12 years per day (i.e. 200 in two years). The infrastructure of the Marcel Hicter – La Marlagne Cultural Centre in Namur has been adapted to accommodate groups: meeting room, workshop rooms with technical equipment, theatre with 400 seats and forest area.

Timing:

- 2022: preparation of events
- 2023: event on the theme of “Dance and physical expression: Culture is open to you: join in the dance.”
- 2024: event on the theme of “World music” in 2024: “Culture is open to you: let the music be heard”.

Action: Introduction of the “Accessibility” action plan.

The Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance (ONE) is working on an action plan to make child care more accessible to all families, with a particular focus on target groups that do not use care today.

These actions address both the primary aspect of accessibility (ensuring that every family can make the choice of whether or not their child attends childcare) and the secondary aspect (ensuring that

every family that uses childcare feels that they are welcome, that it is a full right, that they can actively participate in it, etc.).

“To achieve the goal of increasing the effective accessibility of childcare services for vulnerable groups, ONE encourages all stakeholders to work, through numerous converging measures, to structurally and broadly strengthen the primary and secondary accessibility of childcare. This support is based on the compelling experiences developed by childcare providers in Belgium and abroad, on the expertise of ONE staff and on the latest scientific knowledge. Attention will also be paid to the direct link between quality and accessibility in the logic of the Quality Code for the Federation Wallonia-Brussels and the European Quality Code. “Operational Objective 1.3. of ONE's 2021-2025 management contract.

German-speaking Community

The Master Plan 2025, launched in 2016, aims to provide a place for every child living in the German-speaking Community. This includes meeting 100% of care needs by 2025. To this end, the offering will be expanded and staff will be recruited. In addition, there is the “supervised holiday offering” for children aged 3 to 12 in collaboration with several municipalities in the German-speaking Community.

- m. Developing a framework for collaboration between educational institutions, local communities, social, health and child protection services, families and social economy actors to support inclusive education, provide after-school care, opportunities to participate in sports, leisure and cultural activities, and ensure the construction of and investment in educational institutions as centres of inclusion and participation
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Brussels

Flemish Community Commission

Action: Broad Schools

The VGC is supporting 29 local Broad Schools in Brussels that form a network of organisations from different sectors working together to offer children and young people maximum development opportunities. Broad School is essentially a partnership between organisations and actors from a range of sectors (education, culture, youth, sports, welfare, etc.) and connects a child's various learning and living spheres (neighbourhood-parents-school), both during and outside school hours. It is an approach for providing maximum development opportunities for children and young people through sustainable and purposeful collaboration between organisations from different policy areas. Specific attention is paid to children in disadvantaged situations.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Action: Introduction of the cultural and artistic education pathway (PECA).

The introduction of PECA aims to reduce inequality of access to culture and provide children with the opportunity to fully exercise their cultural rights from an early age. PECA is one of the components of the Pact for Excellence in Education. It is aimed at every student in the FWB and runs throughout their time at school. It consists of three components: knowledge (ECA courses), individual and group

sessions, and encounters with artists and works. The continuity of each student's individual pathway means that there are some PECA activities each year, and they are related to the rest of the subject matter that the new curricula will provide, thus giving overall direction to the pathway across the diversity of activities (diverse in expression, in approach, in intensity/duration).

Action: introduction of measures to facilitate geographical access to youth activity offerings

The action is part of the FWB's 2020-2024 Children's Rights Plan. The geographical accessibility of recreation and participation in youth activities is a major problem in rural areas. This problem affects a broad section of the public, but is even more pronounced among socio-economically vulnerable groups. The action consists of the creation of a think tank with the federated entities responsible for these matters on enhancing the transport offering and developing alternative mobility in rural areas.

Brussels-Capital Region

See above: funding for clubs / support for childcare through COCOF (French Community Commission).

German-speaking Community

There is a collaboration between the schools and the out-of-school care organised by the Regionalzentrum für Kleinkindbetreuung ('Regional Centre for Early Years Care', RZKB). The same is true for collaboration with school health services and youth care services.

8.2. Ensuring that children in need have effective and free access to high-quality healthcare

Wallonia

Action: Enhancing the Associations de Santé Intégrée (ASI) through the integration of new healthcare providers

There are district health centres all across the Walloon territory. These are multidisciplinary teams of professional healthcare providers (doctors, physiotherapists, nurses, reception staff, etc.). The community health centres are part of a health promotion and prevention approach. They improve the physical and financial accessibility of primary care and ensure better continuity of care for disadvantaged people. In addition to the federal funding (reimbursement per healthcare provision or lump sum), the Walloon Region funds a number of these centres that have taken the form of an Association de Santé Intégrée – ASIs (currently 93). This funding allows for the functions of care, coordination, community health and observation of primary care. District health centres are finding that they are increasingly being confronted with social problems. Some of them therefore decided to invest in a 0.5 FTE social worker. This has led to an improvement in the situation of the people being supported.

In order to encourage the development of district health centres, particularly in vulnerable neighbourhoods, the measure (included in the Walloon Plan to Combat Poverty) specifically aims to:

- encourage the presence of a 0.5 FTE social worker in the ASI with a high percentage of BIM patients to ensure better psychosocial monitoring of vulnerable target groups;

- initiate a pilot project to equip 4 community health centres with dental furniture. Enhancing the teams will thus enable better access to care, coupled with a universal approach to the patient and quicker identification of high-risk groups.

Action: Support for GPs setting up in areas with a shortage of doctors or with very high inequality indicators

The measure (included in the Walloon Poverty Plan) consists in a revision to the criteria for the allocation of Impulseo measures, in order to focus that support more on areas with a shortage of doctors or where inequality indicators are high.

This way, residents in the most vulnerable areas will have easier access to a GP, for an improvement in their healthcare. In addition, this target group will be made aware of the benefits of the universal medical record, both financially and in terms of monitoring their health.

Brussels

French Community Commission

Action: Development of prevention and public health work by health homes recognised by the COCOF.

The 50 health homes approved by the French Community Commission provide primary healthcare and community health activities for Brussels residents. The French Community Commission is funding 1.5 full-time equivalents for the care and community health activities, as well as for the operational and training costs of the approved manager. The budget for the year 2021 amounts to 4,869,000 euros. Six new health homes had been recognised as of 1 October 2021, and two more were recognised in 2022.

By granting recognition, support and financial assistance to hundreds of associations that are in daily contact with citizens, as well as by raising awareness among the general public, the COCOF's Social Affairs and Health departments have been working every day for years to give all Brussels residents – of all ages, genders, origins and socio-economic backgrounds – access to better social well-being and health.

Flemish Community Commission

Action: Development of the House of the Child Brussels

The House of the Child is a partnership in which various organisations work together to provide an accessible and integrated offering to support (expectant) families with children and young people. The VGC is committed to the expansion of the House of the Child, which provides an integrated, local offering of preventative family support with a particular focus on families in vulnerable situations.

Action: Enhancing the range of help available to children and young people

In the 2021-2025 multi-year plan, the VGC is making additional efforts to encourage innovative initiatives tailored to the reality of Brussels and to create additional offerings where needed. To this end, they are working with relevant partners, such as the schools. Youth care providers in the wider circles of children and young people work together to provide timely intervention and assistance.

Action: Bringing care closer

Another measure in the VGC's 2021-2025 multi-year plan is to lower the barriers to information, advice and guidance within care. Welfare and care actors will be visiting Brussels residents with care and support needs in their familiar surroundings more often. The local service centres are crucial partners in this process because they address the most vulnerable in the neighbourhood and are present in all of the Brussels municipalities.

German-speaking Community

In the German-speaking Community, medical school examinations are conducted by Kaleido. Kaleido is committed to the healthy development of children and young people from 0 to 20 years of age. Among other things, they offer: pregnancy support, free health checks and vaccinations, advice on school development, project work in schools, etc. Kaleido also has funds for supporting needy families when costly medical examinations are necessary.

n. Facilitating the early detection and treatment of diseases and developmental problems, including mental health problems

Federal

Enhancing the provision of appropriate psychiatric care for minors using Fedasil's shelter who exhibit trauma and vulnerabilities as a result of their migration journey. Specifically, participation in a project to develop a day hospital ward for child psychiatry with an intensive transcultural trauma offering, combined with evening and night care in residential units.

In accordance with the protocol agreement of 2 December 2020, the NIHDI convention provides for accessible psychological care for all vulnerable target groups, including children and young people. This offering is being organised within the mental health networks and should be complementary to the offerings from the states. There is a ban on double funding.

The intention is to organise this offering as locally and as close to the citizen and their context as possible. The local collaboration also seeks to better embed psychological care into the thinking of the local community and other primary care professionals. In doing so, we also explicitly want to enhance the resilience of the individual and the local community.

We provide 2 forms of psychological care in this convention: the primary care psychological function and the specialist psychological function. We are providing flexible options for both forms of care. This will allow for both individual and group sessions to take place. There are no location restrictions (so outreach work can be done) and sessions can also take place online. However, we are trying to set up psychological care in those locations that are easily accessible and “findable” for the intended target groups.

Each network will make arrangements with its local partners to determine where care can best be provided. However, the number of sessions is always limited and depends on the need for care. For more acute and complex care needs, other network partners will be called in.

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Flanders

Action: Further development and enhancement of the 'OverKophuizen'

An OverKophuis is a meeting place for young people with accessible and integrated activities for leisure and support in an environment of trust and security. It is a place where leisure, well-being and mental health promotion objectives and care are achieved in combination. OverKop staff provide vigilant care. The emphasis here is on strengthening the mental well-being of young people and getting them to take actions on their own. Particular attention is paid to children and young people in socially vulnerable situations.

In 2021, the Flemish government implemented the structural embedding and expansion of the OverKophuizen as envisaged in the Flemish coalition agreement and in the Well-being, Public Health and Family policy paper 2019-2024. This action is part of the Flemish Resilience Recovery Plan and focuses more specifically on children and young people (aged 12-25) in Flanders and Brussels, with particular attention paid to children and young people in socially vulnerable situations.

A policy and subsidy framework was drawn up for the expansion of OverKophuizen for a duration of 3 years (2021-2024). This is a grant from the Flemish Community to 16 OverKop networks that are developing one or more OverKophuizen in their own area of operation. This grant amounts to €100,000 per year per OverKop network. Where the evaluation is positive, structural embedding is envisaged after the end of the project period. There will then also be an investigation into how the offering can be expanded to cover the entire area within the available budgetary room.

Wallonia

Action: Accessibility of services for disadvantaged groups.

In pillar 2 on mental health, the prevention and health promotion plan includes a measure for improving the accessibility of mental health services for disadvantaged groups.

Action: Improving the overall approach to the health of the most vulnerable population groups, in particular by enabling health workers to better take into account and understand the realities of difficult life circumstances

The measure aims to increase the understanding and empowerment of all Walloons, especially the most vulnerable populations, when it comes to their health. In addition, it aims to monitor the health of the Walloon population in order to adjust the action strategies of the Walloon Plan for Prevention and Health Promotion. The overall goal of this measure is that, in the long run, the disadvantaged, who are better informed and cared for according to their life situation, will more easily engage in prevention and see their health improve. It is also about reducing social inequalities in terms of health. The following is planned:

- To train social and health workers (GPs, healthcare professionals, ASI reception staff, administrative staff, etc.) on the realities of life for the disadvantaged. This will allow for empowering the target population for better health;
- Developing information sheets for professionals and the general public, targeting the most vulnerable groups. Particular attention will be paid to the benefits of opening a universal medical record (better health monitoring, higher reimbursements).

Brussels

Common Community Commission

As part of BRUSTARS, the Brussels Network of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, the COCOM is supporting an early detection programme designed to enhance the prevention of mental health problems in children and adolescents. The programme aims to identify risky situations that may develop into a serious mental health problem in children, adolescents and young adults in the Brussels-Capital Region at an early stage. To this end, there is close collaboration with schools, nurseries and the CLB.

French Community Commission

The government is committed to the dynamism of the Mental Health Consultation Platform, BRUSTARS, the 107 networks and the French-speaking Brussels Mental Health League. It ensures that these mechanisms are connected to all outpatient services in Brussels. Thus, the government, in consultation with the sector and the COCOM, is working to enhance long-term mobile crisis teams for children, young people and adults, to enhance the institutional offering for intensive care (dual diagnosis, judicial observation, internment, etc.), both for adults and for children, to organise training and awareness-raising activities for GPs, to enhance psychological support for family members, to intensify initiatives for outpatient care, as close as possible to the patient's living environment, to enhance the consultation with all actors regarding the development of the federal reform known as "107", linking the 107 projects to community projects, working on social inequalities in health with particular regard to specific groups (drug addicts, poverty, disabled, elderly), guaranteeing support to the Brussels Support Centre responsible for counselling sexual offenders and encouraging multidisciplinary and participatory consultation to meet all the needs of patients.

In 2020, ten teams for children and adolescents in the COCOF-approved mental health service received an extension of the structural framework at a total amount of more than 700,000 euros. In addition, there is a series of projects specifically aimed at that target group, in collaboration with schools and in the services that provide assistance to young people within their living environment (open spaces).

Those projects fit within an *outreach*, community and cross-sector dynamic. In total, it involves about ten initiatives, totalling more than 500,000 euros.

Flemish Community Commission

Action: Enhancing the range of help available to children and young people

In the 2021-2025 multi-year plan, the VGC is making additional efforts to encourage innovative initiatives tailored to the reality of Brussels and to create additional offerings where needed. To this end, they are working with relevant partners, such as the schools. Youth care providers in the wider circles of children and young people work together to provide timely intervention and assistance.

Action: Bringing care closer

Another measure in the VGC's 2021-2025 multi-year plan is to lower the barriers to information, advice and guidance within care. Welfare and care actors will be visiting Brussels residents with care and support needs in their familiar surroundings more often. The local service centres are crucial partners in this process because they address the most vulnerable in the neighbourhood and are present in all of the Brussels municipalities.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Action: Establishing a screening programme for congenital anomalies of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (FWB)

The action aims to maintain the quality of the programme and its coverage, and to improve the programme in accordance with scientific knowledge. The ONE aims to provide high-quality screening of newborns for abnormalities for which effective screening methods and appropriate treatments are available.

Maternity wards and independent midwives educate families and take blood samples from them. Three accredited laboratories conduct the scientific analyses and pass on the information to the maternity units, which organise the screening and monitoring of the children for appropriate care. All actors involved in early childhood are involved so as to best inform families of the importance of screening, as well as to support them in treating their children where a diagnosis has been made after screening. The screening test is reliable, can be applied before the onset of symptoms, can be carried out on a wide scale and is not expensive. The programme's coverage is close to 100%; the quality of the screening allows for near-certain identification of all problematic situations for which effective management is proposed.

Action: Increasing vaccination coverage of the target groups, supporting health promotion teams in schools, harmonising health promotion practices in schools and making preventative medicine more attractive (ONE)

Maintaining and supporting free preventative consultations for children aged 0 to 6 and maintaining and supporting health promotion in free compulsory education.

German-speaking Community

In the German-speaking Community, medical school examinations are conducted by Kaleido.

o. Ensuring access to periodic medical examinations and screening programmes, including for teeth and eyes

Federal

The health insurance fund fully reimburses basic dental care (oral examination, tartar removal, filling or repairing teeth, treating dental nerves, pulling teeth) for children under 18. Therefore, if the dentist adheres to the rates officially agreed upon with health insurance funds, that basic dental care is completely free. Besides that, the health insurance fund only partially reimburses braces and other orthodontic care for children. As part of the 2022-2023 Dentomut Agreement, the second preventative oral examination for young people under 18 is being reassessed. For young people under 18, there are two preventative oral examination services that can be attested once per calendar year, provided they are performed during two different calendar semesters. There are two different fees for these, since the application conditions for the first service are broader than that for the second. The Agreement establishes the same application conditions and fee for both services to improve access to preventative care for children. The annual cost is €5 million. This measure will enter into force no later than 1/07/2022.

Wallonia

Action: Medical examinations being conducted at schools by PMS centres

The PMS centre is available to pupils and their parents from the beginning of nursery through to the end of high school. It also develops activities for the benefit of pupils at the Centres d'Education et de Formation en Alternance (CEFA) (dual learning centres) and their families. It consists of psychologists (counsellors and psycho-pedagogical assistants), social workers (social assistants) and nurses (paramedical assistants) who work as a team. Each PMS centre also has a physician associated with it. The Psycho-Medical-Social Centre is a free public service. Just like a school, the PMS centre is part of a network organised or subsidised by the French Community. There are therefore PMS centres in the French Community that belong to the provincial, municipal and free network.

Brussels

French Community Commission

The coordination of prevention policies, primarily screening and vaccination policies, is being pursued through the establishment of a single Brussels office, aimed at better integration of screening policies between the COCOF and the COCOM and interoperability of community vaccination databases.

Flemish Community Commission

Action: Pupil guidance centre

Each Dutch-speaking school in Brussels has a CLB (Pupil Guidance Centre) attached to it. Among other things, the CLB works on preventative healthcare (5 contact sessions per child during the school career) and also administers free vaccinations at school in line with the Flemish vaccination schedule.

Action: Making healthcare more accessible to vulnerable groups

A great many Brussels residents have trouble exercising their basic social rights. This is why the VGC is supporting initiatives that give vulnerable Brussels residents better access to care and support, including vaccination programmes. Health issues that are characteristic of a large city are given extra attention, with a view to reducing social health inequalities

German-speaking Community

In the German-speaking Community, medical school examinations are conducted by Kaleido.

p. Ensuring timely curative follow-up and rehabilitation, including access to medications, treatments and support

Flanders

Action: Child and Family Consultation Offices (Growing Up) and CLBs (Education and Training)

Wallonia

Action: Improving the universal approach to health for the most vulnerable groups

Specifically, by increasing professional caregivers' understanding of the realities of uncertain life circumstances (see point n above) so that they can take greater account of them.

q. Ensuring access to vaccination programmes

Federal

There is a protocol for vaccination by nurses at Fedasil shelters. Booster vaccines can be administered to vulnerable groups in need of protection. For minors under the age of 12, an information and consent form must be signed by the parents or guardian in the case of a foreign unaccompanied minor (NBMV in Dutch).

Brussels

Flemish Community Commission

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Action: VGC Covid-19 vaccination at the Dutch-speaking schools in Brussels

In order to increase vaccination coverage among Brussels pupils and their parents, the VGC and COCOM drafted a proposed vaccination strategy. The proposal focuses first and foremost on raising awareness and informing pupils and parents during the first few weeks of the school year. Raising awareness will focus on principled and practical arguments for getting vaccinated. But in practice, pupils can also get vaccinated at or with the help of the school.

r. [Providing targeted habilitation and rehabilitation services for children with disabilities](#)

Flanders

Action: Flanders is providing Multifunctional Centres (MFC)

A multifunctional centre (MFC) is aimed at people with disabilities up to 21 years old (extendable up to 25 years old in exceptional cases) who need specific support. A multifunctional centre offers guidance, day care and/or residential care.

Wallonia

Action: Continuing the development of the pilot project “Jeunes avant tout” (Youth first) concerning young people who are at the intersection of different sectors (disability / mental health / youth care)

The project “Jeunes avant tout” (Youth first) is an experimental project being piloted over a period of 3 years and aims to provide specific support to young people in great need with mental health problems, intellectual disabilities accompanied by serious behavioural disorders, and whose families find it extremely difficult to meet their needs. The aim is to provide cross-sectoral responses and to enable the intervention of services from different areas of care more smoothly, in order to put the young person at the centre of the process without labelling them as dependent on one sector or another.

Brussels

French Community Commission

Powers relating to people with disabilities are an integration policy that includes essential measures and projects for Brussels residents. The French Community Commission is primarily concerned with promoting the integration of disabled people into society.

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Therefore, in 2022, the COCOF is devoting significant resources to the allocation of individual material support for integration and employment subsidies. The goal is to prioritise integration and to let people decide where they want to live and work.

This inclusion policy is a cross-cutting objective shared by all Ministers and reflected in the implementation of the “handstreaming” decree that came into force on 15 June 2017. The aim is to

bring about a change in the way disabled people are viewed at all levels of government and throughout the Brussels territory, in order to better integrate them into the policy implemented so far.

The COCOF of Brussels is also enhancing its support services this year, setting aside an additional amount of 847,054 euros. It is aiming to provide people with adapted, more flexible and personalised assistance, thus offering an alternative to living in an institution.

Action: Adoption of 4 decrees implementing the Inclusion Decree on the care and housing of people with disabilities.

The majority agreement by the college of the COCOF provides for the adoption of

- a decree on the reform of the care and housing sector, including a reform of the accreditation standards, in order to encourage accredited centres to accommodate more people in great need (this concerns the CHA, the CHE, the CJA and the day centres for non-school children (CJNES)).
- a decree on the establishment of inclusive housing services (SLI)
- a decree reforming adapted collective housing (LCA)
- a decree on the transformation of the CJES into services for inclusion in school and out-of-school care (SIASE).

The college member confirmed to Parliament that the first three decrees will come into force on 1 January 2023.

German-speaking Community

In the German-speaking Community, the Dienststelle für Selbstbestimmtes Leben ('Independent Living Agency', DSL) and the Zentrum für Förderpädagogik ('Centre for Special Education', ZFP) provide this. Together, they form the UK-Netzwerk Ostbelgien.

s. [Implementing accessible health promotion and disease prevention programmes that target children in need and their families, as well as professionals working with children.](#)

Federal

Health equipment adapted for children and young people living at Fedasil shelters was offered in the context of Covid-19.

The federal government has taken a range of measures as part of the battle against the Covid-19 pandemic. The Task Force 2.0 vulnerable groups and recent studies – including those by the KCE (KCE Reports 334A – 2020) – show that there are a range of needs among various vulnerable groups:

- Unequal access to healthcare. This leads to:
 - o Avoiding or delaying care
 - o Not ending up in the least invasive care (e.g. ending up in the emergency room unnecessarily)
 - o A higher risk among vulnerable groups of being in poorer health
- This inequality seems to be even more acute in the Covid-19 crisis. This includes the economic consequences through loss of income, unequal participation in education, etc.

- The figures show that up to 40% of people in Belgium have limited digital skills. Nonetheless, that is often the quickest way to communicate in this Covid-19 crisis. We need to realise that we are not reaching everyone because of the digital divide.

In order not to exacerbate inequality in this crisis and to ensure that we maximise our efforts to increase accessibility for vulnerable groups (especially at the time of vaccination, psychological well-being, etc.), 50 community health workers were deployed. These are aid workers who bridge the gap between vulnerable groups and primary health and welfare care. This project will also develop in-house training and create employment. In addition, a short-term feasibility study will accompany the project so that we have immediate monitoring of this intervention too.

Objective of the Community Health Workers (CHWs):

- Improving access to health care, especially during this crisis.
- Supporting vulnerable groups in their use of healthcare, so that they do not fall behind during this crisis.
- Identifying inequities and structural accessibility issues within health(care), with additional regard for Covid-19 impacts.

The NIC will be tasked with this. Not only are they well placed substantively and structurally to take on this task, but they also have good experience in deploying field agents. The CHWs will be linked to frontline structures (including frontline zones, community health centres, etc.) and complementary to the projects already underway in the various regions.

Flanders

Action: Relational and sexual education for people with disabilities

People with disabilities are at high risk of becoming victims of physical and/or sexual violence and sexually transgressive behaviour. Despite this, people with disabilities are grossly under-represented in research and policy regarding various types of violence.

The existing provision of relational and sexual education for people with disabilities in the education system is being scrutinised to detect gaps. Based on this analysis, investments are being made in specific learning packages around emotional, relational and sexual experience tailored for people with disabilities that can also be used at facilities. The focus here is on teaching sexual and relationship skills (for example, setting and respecting boundaries, but also knowing what can and cannot be done).

The research has just started; practical actions (e.g. improvement of teaching materials, better support for professionals) will follow based on policy recommendations after completion. €100,000 has been provided for the study.

Wallonia

Action: Handistreaming

In October 2021, the Walloon government approved an ambitious and unprecedented recovery plan with a budget of 7.644 billion euros by 2024. With 319 measures, divided into 22 strategic objectives, it is aiming to launch the recovery in Wallonia.

The Walloon Recovery Plan provides for a handstreaming measure that allows for the integration of a disability dimension into all policy areas in a cross-cutting and preventive manner, avoiding a difference in treatment between people with and without disabilities. Each measure in the recovery plan will be subjected to a handstreaming test. Measures will be identified that take into account that disability dimension, and there will be specific actions, criteria or provisions to achieve that objective. Indeed, handstreaming will also play a part in the reporting and evaluation of the recovery plan.

Brussels

Flemish Community Commission

Action: Brussels residents can make healthy choices thanks to tailored actions for promoting prevention and health

The VGC's 2021-2025 Strategic Multi-Year Plan places high-quality care and assistance at its core. Avoidable problems are addressed to the maximum extent possible with prevention and health promotion. To this end, it is working with Logo Brussels, which is bringing its networking expertise and support.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Action: Expanding the screening and vaccination programs set up by ONE

In terms of newborn screening, the list of diseases to be screened for is regularly updated as knowledge evolves. The inclusion of a new disease in the programme involves several facets: the existence of a treatment remains a prerequisite for the start of a systematic population study, as does the fact that a reliable test must be available that can be used on a large scale.

The ONE's vaccination policy is essential, since most vaccinations occur in childhood.

In order to increase the vaccination coverage of target groups, the ONE is proposing several actions, in particular the promotion of reliable and scientific information in order to combat doubts and misinformation about vaccination, the development of CPD for professional healthcare providers, the support of health promotion services in schools (PSE services, PMS-WBE centres) and the harmonisation of practices, measures for improving medical appeal, as well as the digital tools needed to manage an effective vaccination programme.

Action: Maintaining free preventative consultations for children aged 0-6

Consultations for children are an essential link in preventative and social medicine in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. Those consultations are free and are designed to promote, monitor and maintain the health of children aged 0 to 6, not to treat children who are ill. The goal of this preventative monitoring is to ensure that the child's overall development is going well.

In addition to consultations for children, the ONE offers families a range of mobile consultations in the more rural areas of the provinces of Namur, Liège and Luxembourg.

Each consultation office develops a health and parenting project (projet santé-parentalité – PSP) that is adapted to the needs of the respective target group. The project includes a universal service for all, enhanced monitoring that responds to vulnerabilities identified and joint activities around prevention, health promotion and parenting support.

Action: Maintaining and supporting health promotion in schools.

The free and universal offering from the PSE teams is all the more important because, for more vulnerable citizens, the mandatory health check that they perform is one of the rare occasions when they can get a full medical examination.

In addition to preventative medical activities (such as health checks or vaccination), the PSE teams are also responsible for “supporting and developing health promotion programmes and promoting a health-friendly environment in schools”. As part of that mission, the PSE teams set up health promotion projects that are tailored to the needs of the pupils in their care and must involve various actors in and around the school.

German-speaking Community

The health promotion and disease prevention programmes within the German-speaking Community are implemented by Prisma VoG (centre for counselling, victim protection and sexual health), Kaleido Ostbelgien and the Öffentliches Sozialhilfezentrum (‘Open Social Health Centre’, ÖSHZ).

8.3. Guaranteeing children in need effective access to sufficient and healthy food, including through the EU scheme for school fruit, vegetables and milk

Federal

At the federal level, the FPS Social Integration manages food aid budgets under the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD), which supports the actions of EU countries in providing food aid and/or basic material assistance to the most deprived. In Belgium, these have almost doubled in 2 years. In 2022, the amount of €26 million will improve access to food for families, including children. Some specific measures have also been taken in terms of material support for very small children, such as nappies.

Wallonia

Action: Free healthy snacks

The Poverty Plan provides free healthy snacks at nurseries and primary schools with weak socio-economic indicators (see section 8.1 g).

Action: In the context of Progecole (‘School Scheme’)

Actions that promote the benefits of healthy eating encourage children to eat more fruit, vegetables and dairy products, and provide them with free educational tools. By combining the distribution of products with the organisation of educational activities, this Programme offers young people the opportunity to discover local products and reconnect with agriculture as the source of these products. This Program, funded under the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) with additional support from the Walloon Region, aims to provide participating schools with free fruit, vegetables and/or milk and dairy products at least 20 times per school year and to distribute them to the pupils. Enrolment in this Programme is voluntary.

Action: Distribution of free, balanced and sustainable snacks are distributed to children in schools with differentiated educational support (pilot project)

Brussels

Brussels-Capital Region

The European programme “Fruit, vegetables and dairy products at school” promotes the free distribution of fresh fruit, vegetables and/or dairy products to pupils at Brussels schools.

Common Community Commission – United College Services

In the context of food aid, the COCOM has been subsidising five social grocers since 2016, as well as the Federation of Bicomunity Social Services, under the Concertation Aide Alimentaire (the food aid consultation). This platform brings together organisations that are active in the field of food aid in the Brussels Region: social grocers, social restaurants, food parcel distribution centres, solidarity refrigerators, supply platforms, etc. The goal of the Concertation Aide Alimentaire is to work with the players in the field to develop projects that improve access to rights for people in precarious situations.

In addition, the Brussels PCSWs were enhanced in 2020-2021 in the context of the corona crisis. This enhancement, which will be extended into 2022, was aimed at setting up new projects or enhancing existing projects around food aid, among other things.

Flemish Community Commission

Action: Brussels residents can make healthy choices thanks to tailored actions for promoting prevention and health

The VGC's 2021-2025 Strategic Multi-Year Plan places high-quality care and assistance at its core. Avoidable problems are addressed to the maximum extent possible with prevention and health promotion. To this end, it is working with Logo Brussels, which is bringing its networking expertise and support.

German-speaking Community

Health and quality of life are encouraged early on in schools within the German-speaking Community. DG Mensa emphasises healthy eating, which contributes to physical, mental and social well-being. All schools have the opportunity to participate in EU/WR programmes, and many take advantage of them.

- t. [Supporting access to healthy meals even outside of school days, including through financial or in-kind assistance, particularly under extraordinary circumstances such as school closures](#)
-

Flanders

Action: Social food distribution platforms as a tool for welfare enhancement and poverty reduction (as emergency aid under protest)

Currently, 11 food loss social distribution platforms are active in Flanders, reaching 48% of the Flemish population. Social food distribution platforms offer and/or distribute food products in a centralised

manner. In addition, they support existing actors (voluntary initiatives, socio-cultural and social services, existing retail structures and meeting places, food banks, etc.) that provide these products to socially vulnerable people. This social distribution model has a particular added value in socially activating vulnerable people. The model creates training and employment, encourages a healthy lifestyle, builds the self-confidence and positive self-image of people who live or have ended up in vulnerable (living) conditions and develops a supportive network of welfare actors. Moreover, it provides for affordable and high-quality food.

The Flemish Government is investigating how the operation of the social distribution platforms as an optimum distribution channel can be structurally embedded. This will take into account the relevant business models developed in this respect in the previous legislative term and the evaluation of the projects mentioned. In anticipation of this structural embedding, the focus is on rolling out the social distribution platforms across Flanders and transitioning them into food hubs by mid-2025.

Action: Common Market Organisation for Fruit and Vegetables – operational programmes for producer organisations – market withdrawal action

The sale of fruit and vegetables in Belgium mainly takes place through producer organisations (these are the fruit and vegetable auctions). If there is an oversupply, the producer organisation may decide to 'withdraw' these products from the market. The European Commission has developed a scheme whereby the producer still receives compensation for their products in such an event. The products withdrawn must be made available free of charge, preferably to charitable organisations. This refers to Common Market Organisation for Fruit and Vegetables – Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013.

Wallonia

Action: Development of social grocery stores for the benefit of families in difficulties

A network of social grocery stores is active in the Walloon territory, the existence of social restaurants, soup bars, etc. Social grocers are tasked with offering food and basic products at a greatly reduced price for those who are struggling financially. They provide social guidance for people who are experiencing exclusion. The social restaurants provide cheap or free meals to the less fortunate. They also provide social guidance for people who are experiencing exclusion. Wallonia recognises and subsidises projects by social grocers and social restaurants and ensures that the various services, institutions or operators, both recognised and subsidised, fulfil their public service missions in compliance with legal requirements.

German-speaking Community

Meals are provided in childcare.

u. [Ensuring that the nutritional standards in early childhood education and care and at educational institutions meet specific nutritional needs](#)

Flanders

Action: School fruit, vegetables and milk scheme – Eye for Taste

Starting with the 2017-2018 academic year, the school fruit (Tutti Frutti) and school milk (Milk at School) grant measures were merged and reformed. All Flemish primary schools (nursery and primary) are eligible for a period of 10 weeks of ‘free’ distribution per pupil. All schools in special education (nursery, primary and secondary) are eligible for 2 times 10 weeks of ‘free’ distribution.

In addition, primary schools with a certain minimum percentage of vulnerable pupils (= pupils with an allocated school allowance) are also eligible for 2 times 10 weeks of distribution. This percentage was set at 15% by the Flemish government.

The grant should be viewed as an initiation period where the intention is for the schools to continue the project independently after the 10 or 20 subsidised weeks are over.

A grant is provided for 10 weeks or 20 weeks with 1 distribution per pupil per week for fruit and vegetables and 3 distribution per week for milk, which is fully reimbursed up to a maximum of 3 times 2 euros per pupil for 10 weeks for milk and 3 euros per pupil / 10 weeks for fruit / vegetables (or 12 euros for 20 weeks of milk and 6 euros for 20 weeks of fruit and vegetables).

For this, a European budget of 2.7 million euros per year is provided and there is Flemish co-funding.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Action: Introduction of quality nutrition projects for all.

Within the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, ONE is committed to revising the specifications for improving school meals for children aged 3 to 18 and to sharing in the thinking about ways to make the free meals provided at primary schools more sustainable. The goal here is to reduce the percentage of overweight children and to improve the quality of the food offerings for all children aged 3 to 18 at a ONE-approved institution (childcare) and/or primary and secondary school.

German-speaking Community

Within the German-speaking Community, DG Mensa meets this need.

v. [Limiting the advertising and availability of foods high in fat, salt and sugar in early childhood education and care and at educational institutions](#)

Flanders

The Flemish government (Education & Training policy domain) has guidelines on what can be offered. This guideline determines, for example, what can be offered in vending machines at school, etc. Education regulations also include a ban on advertising in schools.

German-speaking Community

DG Mensa adheres to healthy eating guidelines; unhealthy foods have been removed from the food and drink vending machines and cannot be purchased at school. Healthy eating is also part of the curriculum.

w. Proper education for children and families about healthy eating for children

Flanders

Healthy food is included in Learning Outcomes (Education & Training) – Growing Up Agency (Child and Family) for families with young children

Wallonia

Action: Developing, promoting and disseminating a package of educational tools to raise awareness among the different sectors in agriculture and food

Action: Initiatives relating to the right to food within the framework of the social cohesion plan

The PSC provides for the ability to set up 4 types of initiatives:

- Access to food with awareness-raising activities on healthy eating for children, directly or indirectly through their parents, on topics such as healthy snacks, the importance of a balanced breakfast, the contents of the lunchbox, etc.
- The distribution of food packages to families and thus indirectly to children.
- The distribution of meals to families and thus indirectly to children.
- The harvest from collective vegetable gardens.

Action: The implementation of the prevention and promotion plan includes the following measures relating to nutrition

- Discouraging excessive or inappropriate adherence to highly targeted dietary and physical activity recommendations.
- Ensuring access to innovative education on nutrition and physical activity at all stages of life.
- Providing pleasant communal dining areas, whose ergonomics are adapted to the characteristics of the users.
- Further developing, supporting and reorienting existing physical activity and nutrition offerings to adapt them to the specific characteristics of people suffering from a chronic illness.
- Ensuring the accessibility and nutritional quality of government-provided meals.

German-speaking Community

Action: Kaleido advises on health and nutrition at school

Kaleido provides advice on health and nutrition for schools in the German-speaking Community.

8.4. *Ensuring that children in need have effective access to adequate housing*

Federal

In a cross-cutting manner, at Fedasil's request, a vision was developed that was shared by the reception partners and achieved through co-construction. It aims to improve opportunities for accompanied children in reception by making Fedasil's reception centres more child and family-friendly. It is yet to be applied.

Action: Housing First

In 2021, 19 new Housing First projects were approved at the federal level. For the measure "Housing first – a housing solution for young people in big cities", an amount of 10 million euros has been allocated to the big cities and poverty policy for the 2022-2024 period to implement this measure. This measure aims to get people living on the streets or in temporary housing structures out of them. Further thinking is needed on this measure to determine how it can be implemented.

Action: Winter shelter for the homeless

As part of the battle against poverty, a public contract for an amount of 4,050,000 euros for a period of 3 years (from November 2021 to March 2024) was concluded with the Belgian Red Cross, whose task is to organise the taking in and second-line support of homeless people in the Brussels-Capital Region from 1 November to 31 March. In February 2022, out of a capacity of 190 places, a quarter of the places were reserved for children. Above all, the children receive a roof over their heads, along with their families, as well as school support, healthy meals, appropriate healthcare, a recreation room, etc. The parents receive social support in actively seeking a permanent housing solution.

Action: Housing unit at the PCSW

At the local level, some PCSWs have a housing unit whose role is to support people experiencing difficulties with their housing. Through individual and/or collective support, this unit contributes daily to the implementation of the right to housing. Several PCSWs have particular regard to large families who need housing adapted to the family's needs.

Wallonia

Action: Improving access to housing for vulnerable people

Since 2011, under the Permanent Housing Plan, families with children have been considered a priority group for re-housing support. In addition, some PCSWs are developing actions to promote the independence of young people through housing (supervised housing, etc.). Partnerships exist between public housing agencies and local actors to support young people in their housing. The Walloon Recovery Plan also aims to improve access to home ownership by expanding the mortgage loan mechanisms managed by the Walloon Social Credit Company and the Walloon Housing Fund, with a particular focus on young people, single-parent families and the most disadvantaged groups.

The Walloon housing legislation provides very low-interest loans for families with at least three children for buying, building or renovating a home (works and energy savings), and for renovating and renting a home, mainly in urban areas, for families with at least three children and with incomes in category 1 (precarious situations) and category 2 (low income).

Shelter homes and community centres, which are regulated by Arts. 66 to 117 of the Walloon Code de l'action sociale et de la santé (Walloon Code of Social Action and Health) and by Arts. 69 to 132 of the Code réglementaire wallon sur l'action sociale et la santé (Regulatory section of the Walloon Code of Social Action and Health), also contribute to the provision of assistance in this area and to reintegration into sustainable housing.

Finally, a measure in the future Poverty Reduction Plan relates to “increasing the supply of housing in social housing agencies (AIS), providing financial and administrative support to AIS and providing tax incentives to landlords who manage their properties through AIS”. This plan also aims to “develop measures in the area of social security and the family allowance measure in order to: combat the non-use of entitlements and carry out a prospective study into child poverty”.

- x. Guaranteeing that homeless children and their families are provided with appropriate housing, can move quickly from temporary to permanent housing, and that relevant social services and counselling are provided

Fedasil

A temporary project for transmigrants who are minors has been initiated. This project, Xtra Mena, focuses, through a dynamic approach, on unaccompanied foreign minors who have arrived in Belgium and do not (yet) have a clear reception pathway. This project aims to provide intensive support and guidance to foreign unaccompanied minors in transit through actions at various levels. Young people are informed about the international protection procedure and the reception of foreign unaccompanied minors in Belgium and awareness is raised among professionals working with them, being trained and supported in their practice.

Flanders

Action: Developing an aligned and universal approach to homelessness

Addressing homelessness remains an ongoing challenge that requires a comprehensive and integrated approach. Under the coordination of the Flemish Minister of Welfare, a universal approach to homelessness is being developed and the formulated objectives/actions are being shaped and coordinated.

Further efforts are being made, from both the Welfare and Housing policy domains, to prevent and combat homelessness. The aligned approach and practical actions will be developed into a universal plan for homelessness for 2020-2024⁷. To this end, it continues to build upon the previous plan. This includes a focus on the entire continuum from prevention to intensive counselling. More specifically, the efforts will include:

1. Reducing the number of evictions;
2. Avoiding homelessness in young adults;
3. Address chronic homelessness (including through the use of the Housing First methodology);
4. Implementing an integrated homelessness policy;
5. The monitoring and evaluation of the plan.

⁷ The action plan can be consulted at the following website: <https://www.departementwvg.be/welzijn-en-samenleving/welzijnswerk/dak-en-thuisloosheid>.

Wallonia

Action: Implementation of several measures in the Walloon Region, such as

- The granting of a rent subsidy to low-income households who have been waiting for a certain amount of time for social housing.
- Increasing the supply of housing in social housing agencies (AIS), providing financial and administrative support to AIS, and granting tax incentives to landlords who manage their properties through AIS are provided for in the Poverty Reduction Plan.
- The interest-free loan that can be used for the rent deposit and reducing this deposit to two months' rent.
- The implementation of a coordinated Walloon strategy to combat homelessness.
- Encouraging the development of participatory projects at the shelters.

Action: Establishing partnerships between the Walloon public housing agencies and local actors to set up shelter structures, open shelter institutions, homework schools, guidance structures for parents, etc.

Action: Coordinated strategy for a way out of homelessness

With its recovery plan, Wallonia is committed to developing a strategy for getting out of homelessness with a universal and integrated approach. The strategy rests upon three pillars of intervention: general prevention, prevention aimed at high-risk groups and a curative component. The strategy aims to put people/users at the centre of the process in order to eventually move towards a more preventative approach:

- Establishment of an observatory on homelessness led by the SPW IAS and the IWEPS;
- Enhancing and extending the "Housing First / Housing-Led" programmes to the entire Walloon territory;
- Enhancing the framework of shelters so as to optimise the guidance for beneficiaries and facilitate their transition to sustainable housing.

Brussels

Brussels-Capital Region

Action: Combating housing discrimination against single-parent families.

Under the Emergency Housing Plan, the government has committed to making the battle against discrimination far more effective. To this end, the decision was taken to recruit additional staff, launch an awareness campaign and amend the Brussels Housing Code. Specifically, this involves:

- Including family responsibility (and by extension single-parent families) as a discrimination criterion in the Brussels Housing Code to step up the battle against discrimination in housing based on single-parent families (in particular through field tests for discrimination).
- Organising training for housing actors (especially real estate agents) on the non-discrimination aspects of the Housing Code and specifically addressing the issue of single-parent families.
- Issuing a call for projects targeting the Associations d'insertion par le logement (AIPL) to conduct field tests on discrimination (through specific recognition).
- Establishing a standard tenant information sheet that contains only the information permitted by the Housing Code.

Common Community Commission

The joint general policy statement from the Brussels Capital Government and the United College of the Common Community Commission for the 2019-2024 legislative term makes clear that the government aims to defend a policy of homelessness whose focus is on prevention, enablement and getting off the streets.

In this context, a strategic plan for enhancing homelessness assistance policies was adopted, which includes enhancing the support capacity of Housing First and home-based counselling, as well as enhancing homelessness prevention and increasing the number of housing units to which homeless people have access under a cross-cutting housing and social affairs policy.

Several actions have been taken to this end.

Action: Expanding the number of “Housing First” projects.

The capacity of the four Brussels Housing First operators was increased, as were the budgetary resources allocated to them.

A fifth operator was also established.

These operators are tasked with finding and offering shelter to homeless people, including families with children, and providing them with intensive and supportive counselling.

Action: Increasing the number of housing units

Under Action 27 of the Emergency Housing Plan approved by the Brussels-Capital Government on 19 December 2020, which aims to “increase the supply of shelter for the homeless”, Brussels Housing has launched two actions:

1. a call for expressions of interest intended for the social rent offices (SVKs) to increase the number of homes by 400;
2. A call for projects for the 19 municipalities and PCSWs in the Brussels-Capital Region to support them in the renovation and fitting out of housing that will be made permanently available to the homeless for a period of at least 10 years in the territory of the Brussels-Capital Region.

The accommodation of homeless people in such housing must be accompanied by a guarantee that they will receive specific psychosocial support from specialist actors covered by the COCOM.

As part of that effort, several additional homes have been made available to homeless individuals, including families with children.

Moreover, the Recovery and Redevelopment Plan adopted by the Brussels-Capital Government on 7 July 2020 to address the corona crisis includes a measure to “find sustainable solutions for the re-housing of homeless people and of people temporarily housed in the emergency facilities (in particular hotels) set up during the health crisis”.

In this regard, a number of shelter facilities have been and are being funded, such as shelters for women with children or temporary housing.

German-speaking Community

Within the German-speaking Community, there are numerous services that provide for finding appropriate shelter for homeless children and their families. More specifically, it concerns the following services: Women's Shelter / Prisma, Public Social Support Centre (PCSW), Mosaik, Youth Support, SIA.

- y. Assessing and, if necessary, reviewing national, regional and local housing policies and taking action to ensure that the interests of families with children in need are properly considered, including by addressing energy poverty and preventing the risk of homelessness. Such an assessment and review should include policies for social housing or housing assistance and housing benefits, and further improve accessibility for children with disabilities
-

Federal

Federal energy funds grant additional benefits to low-income individuals or provide additional services, such as debt mediation or settling instalment plans.

Recently, additional measures have been taken to alleviate energy bills, such as the expansion of the categories eligible for the social tariff, the granting of lump sum allowances and the issuing of user vouchers.

Flanders

Action: Energy poverty programme – Long-term renovation strategy

Through a participatory process with a broad group of stakeholders, the Energy Poverty Programme was drafted in 2015. The Energy Poverty Programme had 34 action proposals and was approved by the Flemish Government on 4 March 2016. Deploying social protection against disconnection from the energy supply and structurally working on reduced energy use in homes are the two axes on which the Flemish energy policy works as regards energy poverty. The Energy Poverty Programme was evaluated annually, including through a broad stakeholder survey in 2018. On 10 December 2021, the Flemish Government approved the new “Energy Poverty Plan 2025” with practical measures for structurally combating energy poverty in Flanders. The focus is on measures that improve the energy-efficiency of homes for vulnerable families.

The Energy Poverty Programme is part of the 2050 long-term renovation strategy. This strategy outlines how private and public buildings can be cost-effectively renovated towards the long-term goal. Thus, the strategy also takes into account demographic trends, the pursuit of high-quality, energy-efficient and affordable housing for all, a comparatively tight private and social rental market and increasing spatial planning efficiency.

The Energy Poverty Programme targets families living in energy poverty or at increased risk of energy poverty. The King Baudouin Foundation measures energy poverty in its annual Energy Poverty Barometer using three indicators:

- Measured energy poverty (gEA): spending too much of income on energy costs (11% of Flemish households).
- Hidden energy poverty (vEA): economising on energy use, resulting in abnormally low energy costs compared to similar households (3.3% of Flemish households).
- Families in subjective energy poverty (sEA) indicate that they find it financially difficult to adequately heat their homes (1.9% of Flemish households).

Single-parent families, single people and renters are by far the most at risk of energy poverty. The most vulnerable households tend to live in the homes with the highest EPC values. These homes will be addressed as a priority within the long-term renovation strategy.

The actions within the Energy Poverty Programme and the long-term renovation strategy are being funded through the Flemish Energy Fund, the Flemish Climate Fund and partly through the Flemish budget.

Wallonia

Action: Several measures are being implemented in the Walloon Region, such as

- Evaluation and review of social housing allocation rules.
- Ensuring a sufficient supply of energy at an acceptable price for all households.
- Encouraging social housing agencies to develop a participatory process with children in the beautification and development of common areas.

Action: Battle against energy poverty

In order to combat energy poverty, the Walloon Recovery Plan aims to review the subsidies and the various support measures for the energy renovation of buildings. For example, the subsidy system for low-income households will be reformed to give them more support and so that more people can receive support. Support for citizens in difficulty will be improved, especially for the renovation of energy-hungry homes, through the introduction of specific measures.

Brussels

Brussels-Capital Region

Action: Financial support for housing

The rent subsidy is a monthly financial allowance granted to anyone on the waiting list for social housing and still housed on the private market in Brussels, for a renewable period of five years. The re-housing allowance consists of a moving subsidy and an allowance for rent.

Action: Creation of co-housing projects

Action 12 of the plan for single-parent families provides for the development, in partnership with an association specialising in single-parent families, of training on single-parent issues for professionals working in first and second-line housing services, and for the promotion of co-housing projects for single-parent families.

- Relocation assistance is a one-time financial grant to cover some of the costs the applicant must incur to move to a new home.

- Allowance for rent is a monthly financial allowance for the rental price, granted for a period of up to three years.

Action: Promoting access to owner-occupied housing for single-parent families

Under Action 13 of the Plan for Single-Parent Families, a specific project on this topic will be set up along with the Community Land Trust Brussels (CLTB). Discussions are underway with the CLTB to develop a project for accommodating single-parent families on the site of their next project on Rue Gray. This project would of course include housing, as well as the use of a common area. Its use has not yet been decided, but the possibilities mentioned, such as a co-working space, the establishment of vocational training programmes, etc., address the challenges of combining a family and a professional life.

Action: Increasing the supply of affordable housing

In the event of vacancy, several solutions will be offered to the owner: immediate return to the market, government management takeover, putting the property under AIS management, selling it, etc.

A regional register of vacant properties is being developed. At the same time, work is underway to simplify the Public Administration Act to counteract these vacancies.

As regards increasing the production and purchase of social housing in Brussels, in addition to using the social housing agencies, which represent a system that is now well-known and increasingly successful, the government has decided to allocate a significant budget to our new purchasing strategy, which aims to expand the public rental housing stock. The goal of this new acquisition strategy is to accelerate the expansion of the public housing stock, in full consultation with the private housing production sector. The key, therefore, is to expand the public housing stock for disadvantaged people as quickly as possible.

The strategy is divided into 4 parts:

- The acquisition of existing homes, land and buildings that need to be repurposed
- Turnkey purchases: this leverage of the acquisition strategy has been highly successful, as it has enabled more than 300 additional social housing units to be acquired in less than a year;
- The launch in 2021 of a public contract for design and construction: one project came in for a total of 113 housing units through this process.
- Finally, the development of a public housing partnership: this is a negotiated procedure that allows the SLRB, in the event of interest from developers, to become involved as a purchaser of housing complexes in major construction projects under development. The minimum threshold of 25% social housing in the total number of housing units developed by the developer will also allow the developer to take advantage of the accelerated permit process (known as the "fast lane").

The urgency plan provides an essential tool for speeding up the development and number of housing units, whether social, for social purposes or private, in all of Brussels' municipalities, namely the introduction of an accelerated procedure for issuing building permits (the "fast lane").

This procedure, which will come into effect in May 2021, is aimed at real estate projects that must include at least 25% social housing in order to qualify for this accelerated procedure. The intention is for developers of large mixed-use real estate projects to be able to take advantage of this specific arrangement in the permit instruction procedures. The permit will be obtained within 95 days. Nonetheless, special attention will be paid to the quality of the projects, their integration into the existing urban fabric and – this is important – their architectural quality.

The PUL is aiming to create 15,000 solutions for families on the waiting list for social housing. These 15,000 solutions will require the involvement of all actors and mechanisms for social housing policy. In that spirit, we have imposed upon the AIS a net growth target of 2,500 new housing units by the end of the legislative term. If successful, this will be the largest growth of the AIS in a single legislative term. The decision was therefore taken to exempt the AIS from the budgetary savings requirements that were requested in the preparation of the 2022 budget.

Action: Rent control

As the recent debates over indexation have shown, rent control is not in itself an option that can rely upon the necessary support within government. Nonetheless, we are not standing idly by and watching the developments in the private rental market: on the one hand, by tackling abusive rental pricing through the Joint Rent Commission and, on the other, by creating an agreement that can normalise the relationship between tenant and landlord, while also rewarding those landlords who charge a reasonable rent. We are also continuing our work to increase our knowledge of the private rental market by reviewing the operation of the Rent Observation Centre and Rent Index Price. This way, we will have the necessary tools and data once an agreement on rent control instruments is possible.

Common Community Commission

Action: Enhancing guidance aimed at maintaining housing

As part of the strategic plan for enhancing homelessness assistance policies, several actions have been taken in the area of homelessness prevention.

The capacity of home support services, which provide budgetary, administrative, and psychosocial support in helping people regain their social rights and maintain or seek housing, has been increased, and more resources have been allocated to those services.

In that regard, a call for projects will be launched in 2022 to further increase the capacity of those services and establish two new ones.

In the same vein, shelters have been given an aftercare mandate to continue to support their residents, with whom they have built a relationship of trust, after they have found housing and to prevent them from losing their housing.

Action: Taking into account the greater interests of the child in homelessness policy

The Bruss'help non-profit organisation was tasked with creating an Emergency Assistance and Enablement Committee, whose mission is to improve cooperation between actors, provide advice or propose guidelines to the College to improve the prevention of homelessness, the organisation of emergency assistance and enablement services, and the referral of homeless people or those in need of assistance.

The committee issued an own-initiative opinion on the expansion of the shelter programme on 19 November 2021. This opinion was considered by the Board of Directors of the Bruss'help non-profit

organisation before it was approved. At the end of this opinion, 4 recommendations are formulated, the first of which aims to “activate, through the regional operator New Samusocial, a capacity specifically for families with 100 adaptable places that will allow for a policy of no children on the streets”.

In response to that recommendation, the Minister agreed to the activation by the non-profit organisation New Samusocial of additional places for families with children in the period from 15 December 2021 to 15 April 2022, after which those families would be accommodated at an emergency family shelter.

German-speaking Community

Since 1 January 2020, the German-speaking Community has been responsible for public and private housing and various housing and energy grants and subsidies. The German-speaking community has also developed a bonus system tailored to its residents. The PCSW also plays a role in local housing policy and addressing energy poverty.

z. Providing children in need and their families with priority and timely access to social housing or housing assistance

Flanders

Action: Improving the accessibility of social housing through allocation rules that leave enough room for priority / vulnerable target groups

The social rent regulations (Book 6 of the 2021 Flemish Housing Code Decree) will undergo a number of changes in this legislative term. Flanders is striving for sustainable housing security for the most vulnerable target groups. Due to a tight private and social rental market, as well as waiting times in the care landscape, they are often in a competitive position at present. The planned changes to the social rent regulations aim for an allocation policy where customisation, driven by the relevant housing, welfare and care actors, is central.

For example, a new unified allocation system is being designed that will need to be applied by the accredited housing association and the local administrations that rent socially. Balance and complementarity have been sought in developing this, taking into account specific housing needs, local ties and chronology, as well as special target groups. 20% of the allocations will be compulsory for people in special need or in precarious situations (persons who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless; young people who are living independently or who are going to live with the assistance of an accredited service; people with mental health problems; people living in poor housing and people in special circumstances of a social nature).

Besides this, allocation regulations can be drawn up locally for specific target groups as well. A maximum of one third of the portfolio for the municipalities in the operating area of the housing association can be reserved for prospective tenants belonging to a specific target group. In developing a new allocation framework, particular attention will be paid to assisting these target groups. After all, allocating social housing to the most vulnerable target groups is inherently linked to providing adequate and effective support services. A distinction must be drawn here between support needs that landlords themselves can meet and needs that require more extensive support from a welfare actor.

Wallonia

Action: Priority resettlement of families with children residing in tourist accommodation

Since 2011, under the Permanent Housing Plan, families with children have been considered a priority group in the context of re-housing guidance in a healthy home.

Action: Measures to ensure effective access to adequate housing

The Walloon government has taken the following measure to ensure that families, and therefore the children of those needy families, have effective access to adequate housing: renovation and rental of housing, mainly in urban areas, to families with at least three children and with incomes in Category 1 (precarious situations) and Category 2 (low income).

Action: Housing support measures through the Social Cohesion Plan

As part of the Social Cohesion Plan, a range of actors are developing actions for making young people more independent through housing, for example through assisted living, etc. These actions will also benefit children, through their families.

Brussels

Brussels-Capital Region

Action: Reducing the waiting period for social housing for single-parent families

Again, this issue is addressed in the context of the Plan for Single-Parent Families (Action 14). Specifically, this action includes revising the criteria for the allocation of social housing by proposing new standards regarding the number and size of the rooms for large families.

In practice, this action involves reviewing existing legislation to encourage (and, if necessary, enforce) the transfer of tenants from over-adapted housing to smaller housing in order to free up large homes and thus enable families to obtain adapted housing more quickly. A working group of social housing stakeholders is currently working on a series of recommendations for achieving this goal, which will be presented to the government in the spring of 2022.

German-speaking Community

In the German-speaking Community, there are numerous services that provide children in need and their families with priority and timely access to social housing or housing assistance. More specifically, it concerns the following services: Women's Shelter / Prisma, Public Social Support Centre (PCSW), Mosaik, Youth Support, SIA.

aa. Taking into account the best interests of the child, their general situation and individual needs when children are placed in institutions or in foster care

Flanders

Growing Up Agency in the context of Youth Aid

Wallonia

Action: Enhancing the participation of children in care homes

One of the projects in the Children's Rights Action Plan 2020-2024 is to encourage the development of participatory projects at care centres.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Support for a study: the impact on a child of staying at a care home with their parent(s).

German-speaking Community

When allocating places at the childcare service of the Regionalzentrum für Kleinkindbetreuung (RZKB), priority is given to children who have been referred by the juvenile court and the juvenile care service, the adoption service and the foster care service.

bb. Ensuring children's transition from institutional care to high-quality community or family care and supporting their independent living and social integration

Flanders

Action: Personal Assistance Budget (BAP)

A personal assistance budget (PAB) is a budget given by the Flemish Agency for People with Disabilities (VAPH) for organising and funding assistance for a child at home or at school. Only minors can apply for a PAB.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

1. In collaboration with the Walloon Region, conducting an in-depth reflection on the mobility issue of families who live geographically far from the VBJ and therefore cannot exercise their right to visit in an institution;
2. Sheet on maintaining ties:
 - a. Revising the standards for supervision and funding of specialist early childhood care services (Services d'accueil spécialisés de la petite enfance (SASPE)) so as to ensure high-quality supervision of children, while also enabling them to fulfil their essential mission of maintaining ties with the family of origin – collaboration with the ONE and accredited services;
 - b. Enhancing the consultation between youth care workers, youth care directors, and accredited youth care and specialist early childhood care services (SASPE) on maintaining ties between the child and their family, particularly through the introduction of a tool to support placement decisions;

3. Developing cross-sectoral steering structures for young people with mental health issues, in collaboration with the AVIQ and the mental health sector

German-speaking Community

There are numerous social services within the German-speaking Community that support the social integration of children and provide for the transition from institutional care to high-quality community or family care. Some of these services are ÖSHZ, Pflegefamiliendienst, Jugendhifledienst, Mosaik.

Measures as part of Outreach & Participation.

Flanders

Action: Framework for local family coaches

This action focuses on Outreach (developing effective outreach to children in need and their families). Local family coaches aim to provide intensive, tailored counselling to vulnerable families with children who are struggling with various problems. The proactive and outreaching support helps families move forward in all areas of life, allowing for more basic social rights to be put into practice.

The local authorities' roles is to direct this. The local family coaches are primarily there for the most vulnerable families struggling with various problems, but can also help prevent families from falling into this most precarious situation. In addition, collaboration with partners such as the services of the Growing Up Agency, the social house, education, youth (welfare) work, etc., will be important in the development of this concept.

Action: Participation of children and young people in poverty within the (leisure) policy and offering at the local, supralocal and Flemish level

Flanders is committed to circulating and reflecting the power of the voices of children and young people in poverty in the social debate. Maximum efforts are made to involve children and young people in poverty as fully-fledged actors within the (leisure) policy and offering at the local, supralocal and Flemish level. This includes:

- Engaging in a government-wide youth and children's rights perspective.
- Involving them in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of policies.
- Looking at how to be more poverty-sensitive in their own operations.
- Evaluating and reinforcing decrees relating to drafting impact assessment reports for children and young people (JoKER).

The measure is aimed at Flemish and local policy-makers, experts and actors working with children and young people in vulnerable situations. Children and young people in vulnerable situations are respected as fully-fledged actors.

Action: Reducing the gap between leisure and poverty

The barriers that children and young people in poverty encounter in their leisure experiences are being identified. Included among the efforts being made to address and overcome these barriers are:

- Engaging in solution strategies and poverty sensitivity.

- Working on inclusive youth work and encouraging outreach work, both structural and project-based, from regular policy and actions linked to the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan.
- Making good practices visible and accessible.
- Encouraging youth homes to engage with neighbourhood and community.
- Committing to media literacy and E-inclusion, supporting media organisations that focus on the digital literacy of children and young people in poverty. The inclusion of this group requires special attention, support and a specific approach.

Action: States General children and young people in poverty (including of opportunity)

From the policy area of Youth, in consultation with partners, a States General of 'Children and young people in (opportunity) poverty' is being organised, whereby needs, challenges, opportunities and strengths of Flemish and Brussels young people in poverty concerning leisure time will be addressed.

How the Youth policy domain can respond to this is under consideration. If other policy areas want to link in with this, the themes will be expanded. Experts are brought together to reflect on these themes. Children and young people in poverty are involved and always receive appropriate feedback. Experts will work with the findings arising from the States General and formulate recommendations for policy and practice. Efforts are made to ensure that the recommendations are followed up appropriately.

Action: Empowering social workers in rights recognition and entitlement at individual and societal levels

This action is part of the Strong Social Work Action Plan that was communicated to the Flemish Government in late December 2019. The Strong Social Work Action Plan addresses several societal challenges facing social work. The battle against under-protection is one of them. With this action, Flanders is committed to empowering social workers in rights recognition and entitlement. In the initial phase, a project was launched at PCSW Beveren. Here, the barriers that existing PCSW clients experience to the granting of rights are examined. This is based on the client's perspective. Improvement proposals are sought together, which are first experimented with and then disseminated to other partners within primary care. The project started in late 2020 and will be completed by the May 2022 Social Work Conference. Whether and how the results can be presented there is currently under consideration.

Action: Increasing accessibility of social assistance and services and addressing under-protection through Integrated Broad Reception (GBO) partnerships

From the Social House, under the direction of the local government, a GBO partnership is being implemented that includes at least the Public Centre for Social Welfare (PCSW), the accredited Centre for General Welfare Work (CAW) and the accredited social work services for health insurance funds (DMW). These partnerships are implementing an outreaching and proactive assistance offering, including the recognition and granting of rights. They actively identify vulnerable families and individuals in their local community and provide them with tailored assistance. This implements the intention in the Flemish coalition agreement to detect poverty as early as possible and to work on recognising and granting rights in the battle against under-protection.

Brussels

Flemish Community Commission

Action: encouraging youth participation

The VGC's ambition is to make Brussels residents feel greater ownership of their city. In doing so, they pay special attention to the elderly, people in poverty, people from immigrant backgrounds, and children and young people. In addition to the operation of advisory bodies, such as the VGC Youth Council, the VGC is experimenting with new forms of participation and engagement. They are working together with their strong civil society, while also leaving space for new civic movements, for people and target groups that are not currently being addressed. All forms of policy participation reflect the social and ethno-cultural diversity of Brussels. Within the VGC, there is experimentation with innovative ways to encourage youth participation. In doing so, they are developing sustainable participation policies for the VGC and its organisations.

Action: Conducting outreach on access to fundamental social rights

Within the VGC's 2021-2025 Multi-Year Plan, there is a focus on the gaps in existing metropolitan care offerings. Among the actions being taken to this end are that children and young people in poverty receive better support in accessing basic rights, for example through liaison officers and location-based initiatives. We are encouraging initiatives that conduct outreach, that seek people out in their own living environment. We are working on (leisure) participation for people in poverty and are further developing Paspartoe based on their needs. Special attention is paid to the situation of children, young people and families in poverty. This way, the VGC is promoting initiatives that help young Brussels residents to take up their fundamental social rights.

Wallonia

Action: Raising awareness of children's rights

The Walloon Action Plan on the Rights of the Child (PADE) 2020-2024 includes a series of communication and awareness-raising measures to promote children's access to their rights in application of the 1989 International Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as training measures for regional and local actors and trainers in contact with children and young people.

Action: participation of children

The participation of children and young people is the common thread in the PADE: there is active participation of children, just as in the evaluation of the plan, for 9 projects. This participatory evaluation involves 5 children's / young people's councils that were selected based on a call for nominations. Each of these councils will be tasked with organising a local system for consulting the children living in the municipalities involved about the content of the PADE and its implementation. The themes, areas of action or actions in the PADE will be determined by the children. Thanks to that call for nominations, the participating councils will be selected and each advisory council will receive a participatory budget. The local consultation processes organised by the children's and/or young people's councils should result in recommendations to the Walloon government. The selected service provider will proceed to a participatory evaluation with the children who were involved in the evaluation process.

German-speaking Community

The German-Speaking Youth Council (RDJ) is the link between youth and policy. The Council represents their interests and takes on their challenges: based on its composition of representatives from various youth institutions and interested young people, the Council listens to what young people in the German-speaking Community are experiencing in their lives and passes on this information to policy-makers, be it at the community, Belgian or European level. At the same time, the Council seeks to empower young people to participate through the organisation of events, projects and dialogue. In addition, the Council is also represented on various committees and it tries to ensure that the needs of young people are taken into account there.

9. Facilitative policy framework

Federal

The battle against child poverty is a cross-cutting theme in the 4th Federal Plan for Combating Poverty and Inequality. This plan aims to give everyone in our society the right to live in dignity. That means acting through early detection, strong social protection and social inclusion, within the framework of European developments.

In addition to the cross-cutting approach to child poverty in the Fourth Federal Plan for Combating Poverty and Inequality, the plan also integrates the gender aspect for better solutions to poverty among women. This gender dimension is therefore crucial in a plan against poverty, as the risk of poverty generally remains higher for women, with an average gap of 2%. The risk of poverty is also significantly higher for single-parent families (44.4%) compared to singles (28.6%) and two-parent families (15.4%). In more than 80% of single-parent families, the single parent is a woman, which has a major impact on the children.

For the target group of single parents on social security, for every single father on social security, there are 7 single mothers on social security. In response to this, the federal government developed the MIRIAM project, an empowerment project for single mothers on social security (or its equivalent or support from the PCSW). This project aims, through intensive support, to enhance the empowerment of single female PCSW clients, break their social isolation and reduce poverty, with a particular focus on their socio-professional integration. Intensive collective and individual support is provided from a holistic and gender-sensitive perspective. The project focuses on information, participation, knowledge and use of one's rights, referral to help and support services and training. The development of a critical mind, the path to change and self-confidence are also part of the counselling. The children are the main beneficiaries of the positive effects of this project.

The Maintenance Claims Service (DAVO) was established in 2003 by the FPS Finance (Act of 21 February 2003). One of the objectives is to combat poverty caused by the non-payment of child support or maintenance to the ex-partner. DAVO will intervene to recover monthly maintenance (and maintenance arrears) from the person who is required to pay the maintenance) or, if necessary, pay advances on monthly maintenance.

Since 01/06/2020, the tax administration has been using a new "ALIM IDS" application, which allows for a simplified calculation of maintenance fees. In addition, a number of legislative changes⁸ have

⁸ https://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi/article_body.pl?language=nl&caller=summary&pub_date=20-07-17&numac=2020042219

been implemented that mean the person entitled to maintenance needs to present less evidence. This seeks to provide more oxygen for vulnerable families.

The FPS Finance also provides additional tax measures for families and children, such as a childcare tax credit. Measures such as the elimination of the income threshold as a condition for receiving childcare subsidies are making progress for families.

The National Roma Contact Point is coordinating the drafting of the new National Strategy for Roma Integration (2022 – 2030). In this strategy, Belgium recognises that the Roma are a disadvantaged group who are extremely vulnerable to social exclusion and poverty. With the multi-dimensionality of social exclusion and poverty in mind, Belgium opted for an integrated approach in its strategy. The strategy was developed as a thematic plan with a targeted approach that fits within the more general strategy for combating poverty and social exclusion. In addition to focusing on the crucial policy areas that should enable the socio-economic integration of the Roma (e.g. combating discrimination in employment, education, housing and healthcare), several horizontal objectives (including the participation of Roma in society and their social inclusion, the coordination of all the actions for promoting inclusion, the need to collect reliable data on Roma, etc.) were formulated. This includes attention to Roma women, young people, LGTBQ, etc.

The Federal Disability Action Plan (2021 – 2024) was approved by the Council of Ministers on Friday 16 July 2021. This action plan brought about 145 measures – including 46 “flagship” measures – in close collaboration with all Ministers and Secretaries of State, supported by interest groups representing people with disabilities (such as the National High Council for People with Disabilities and Unia). The action plan includes a measure for evaluating and updating the federal toolbox for combating discrimination against people with disabilities.

Flanders

In Flemish Action Plan for Combating Poverty 2020 – 2024, one of the 5 strategic objectives specifically focuses on the battle against child poverty. 10 targeted actions should lead to increased future opportunities for vulnerable children and young people.

On 8 October 2021, the Flemish Government updated the Horizontal Integration and Equal Opportunities Policy Plan 2020-2024. It is a targeted action plan where the objective is full/proportionate participation in society, namely “Achieving equal opportunities for social groups facing disadvantages or exclusion”. There is a commitment to empowering children and young people in socially vulnerable situations through an inclusive approach.

The Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2020-2024 addresses all children and young people and puts forward five priority themes that link in with the living environment of children and young people. These are (1) Well-being and positive identity development; (2) Healthy and liveable neighbourhoods; (3) Engagement through volunteering; (4) Leisure for all and (5) Media literacy. Particular regard to children and young people in vulnerable situations is a common thread in the actions included. The actions included in this plan provide initial responses to a number of recommendations from the 2019 Final Reflections on themes relevant to Flanders.

The Action Plan for Preventing and Ending Homelessness 2020-2024 has further regard to the impact of homelessness on children and young people and to the position of children and youth in a situation of homelessness.

Wallonia

On 25 November 2021, the Walloon government adopted a new anti-poverty plan with a cross-cutting component and three priority areas for action: access to socio-professional integration for all, access to housing for all, and access to well-being for all.

At a local level, the Social Cohesion Plan 2020-2025, being implemented in 204 Walloon municipalities, has two objectives: to reduce poverty and inequality by promoting effective access for all to fundamental rights, and to contribute to building a society of solidarity where everyone feels partly responsible for the well-being of all.

Regarding the implementation of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Walloon Region has launched an Action Plan on the Rights of the Child 2020-2024. The 54 planned measures are intended to respond to the recommendations from the United Nations Children's Rights Committee.

Last but not least, the Walloon Recovery Plan, approved in October 2021, will use a large part of its resources to enhance social policies in Wallonia and improve the quality of structures ranging from training centres to social housing and childcare.

Brussels

Brussels-Capital Region

In the area of housing, the proper execution of 2 of the plans implemented by the Brussels-Capital Region will leverage action in the area of poverty, and in particular child poverty. These are:

- The “emergency housing plan”, which, given the increase in the number of social housing units in the Brussels Region that this plan supports, will allow more families (and more children) to be housed in decent conditions and escape precarious situations.
- The “Brussels plan for support of single-parent families”, whose measures will help to combat child poverty, which is inherently more prevalent in single-parent families.

Flemish Community Commission

The 2021-2025 Strategic Multi-Year Plan by the College of the Flemish Community Commission brings together all the policy aspects of this level of government. Vulnerable children and young people will receive extra attention. Bridges between welfare, education, family and youth should lower the threshold for childcare, family support, leisure and holiday activities. In order to combat child poverty, integrated initiatives are being developed that are part of the Child Poverty Reduction Plan.

The College of the Flemish Community Commission approved its Child Poverty Reduction Plan for the period 2021-2025 in November 2020. Better integration and coordination of existing initiatives and organisations, increased accessibility of childcare, promotion of nursery participation, and enhancement of knowledge about child poverty and its reduction in a Brussels context are the central objectives of this plan.

The Wallonia-Brussels Federation launched the Plan to Combat Poverty and Reduce Social Inequality 2020-2025. Accessibility of services, prevention of vulnerability during the life cycle and the development of knowledge on the battle against poverty and social inequality are the key objectives.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

The Wallonia-Brussels Federation launched the Plan to Combat Poverty and Reduce Social Inequality 2020-2025. Accessibility of services, prevention of vulnerability during the life cycle and the development of knowledge on the battle against poverty and social inequality are the key objectives.

The Government of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation has made it a priority to make significant progress in the battle against poverty, with a particular focus on childcare. It has made childcare accessibility a priority in its Action Plan on the Rights of the Child 2020-2024 and in its Plan to Combat Poverty and Reduce Social Inequality 2020-2025. In particular, this is being done through the management contract for the “Office national pour l'Enfance” (ONE) for the years 2021-2025, which ensures the continued implementation of the reforms to early childhood care and organises a multidimensional strategy with the ambition of achieving measurable positive effects in terms of increased accessibility of care environments, the number of vulnerable children cared for and the battle against social and environmental inequalities.

In addition, as part of the reforms to early childhood care, the “Organisation de la naissance et de l'enfance” (ONE) will establish an “Accessibility” task force. It will involve all stakeholders in defining and coordinating the implementation of an action plan for the period 2022-2025, which will be evaluated and updated annually, and which aims to combine all the measures resulting from the childcare reforms, is better adapted to current challenges and the management contract, so as to increase the occupancy rate of childcare places and the accessibility of childcare environments.

With regard to education, the Pact for Excellent Education, an ambitious project for the reform of education in the FWB, includes a series of measures for gradually making education free, reducing school dropout, and better integrating vulnerable children. Some of these projects are also included in the Action Plan on the Rights of the Child.

10. EU funding

Member States with a child poverty level above the EU average (23.4% – AROPE 2017 – 2019) are required to allocate 5% of European Social Fund Plus funds to combating child poverty. Belgium falls below this European average and should therefore allocate an appropriate amount of their ESF+ funds to combating child poverty.

Some of the measures related to healthy meals at school are funded by the EU scheme for fruit, vegetables and milk in schools, which has applied since 1 August 2017. The scheme supports the provision of products, educational measures and information campaigns in schools in the three Regions.

As mentioned above, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) supports actions by EU countries to provide food aid and/or basic material assistance to the most deprived. In Belgium, the PPS Social Integration manages the food aid budget of 22 million euros for the year 2022. This budget allows for improved access to food for families, including children. Some specific measures were also taken in terms of material aid for young children, such as nappies.

In December 2020, the leaders of the European Union (EU) Member States, the European Parliament and the European Commission adopted a recovery plan for Europe to help repair the economic and social damage caused by the corona pandemic. 27% of the total budget for reforms and investments

is supporting the digital transition in Belgium. Some of these funds are being allocated to encouraging digital inclusion in education.

11. Data collection, monitoring and evaluation

The Child Guarantee in figures

An analysis of the current social situation for vulnerable children in Belgium

This analysis aims to map out the social situation for vulnerable children in Belgium. The focus here is on access to essential services to which the Child Guarantee Plan aims to contribute. To put the figures and indicators in perspective, we will compare them to the EU.⁹ In the analysis below, we will always take 2019 as the reference year (unless otherwise stated), as this is also the starting year for the EU poverty targets by 2030. We are basing this on indicators that are available and comparable across the EU. In addition, as the Child Guarantee Plan is rolled out, additional and relevant national indicators will need to be developed.

1. Key indicators for monitoring the Child Guarantee

In 2019, child poverty in Belgium was broadly comparable to the level in the EU. In Belgium, 23.0% of children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE), compared to 23.4% in the EU.¹⁰ In addition, we can also note that the risk of poverty or social exclusion is higher for children compared to the total population in Belgium (23.0% vs. 20.0%, respectively).

In order to analyse this AROPE indicator in more detail, we also consider its various sub-indicators. The risk of poverty for children in Belgium is 18.9% in 2019 and is at about the same level as in the EU at 18.5%. When we look at the proportion of children living in a household with very low work intensity, we find that this is significantly higher in Belgium than in the EU (10.5% versus 6.4%). The percentage of children living in households with severe material and social deprivation is at a slightly higher level in Belgium than in the EU (8.7% vs. 7.8%). It is thus mainly on the sub-indicator for children in households with very low work intensity that Belgium scores worse compared to the EU.

In order to get a clearer view of child poverty, a child-specific deprivation indicator was developed at the European level. Based on this indicator – which consists of 17 items considered necessary for every child in the EU – 14.9% of children in Belgium are deprived compared to 23.3% in the EU in 2014. Finally, the relative poverty risk gap for children is 15.4% in Belgium, which is clearly lower than in the EU at 25.4%. So on these last two indicators, Belgium scores better than the EU.¹¹

1.1 Monitoring of the target groups: ‘children in need’

There are a great many vulnerable groups of children in need that require specific policy attention. Indeed, we find that the poverty risk rate for children in a household with very low work intensity is very high in Belgium at 73.8%. Another vulnerable group are children in single-parent families. We know that the proportion of children in single-parent families is significantly higher in Belgium

⁹ The figures for the EU always refer to the EU27 (as of 2020).

¹⁰ Based on the new AROPE indicator. In 2021, the decision was taken to revise the definition of the ‘risk of poverty or social exclusion’ indicator slightly. The ‘severe material and social deprivation’ sub-indicator replaces the ‘severe material deprivation’ sub-indicator. The ‘households with very low work intensity’ sub-indicator was also revised slightly by raising the upper age limit from 59 to 64 (with some additional changes as well). This resulted in changes to two of the three sub-indicators for the AROPE.

¹¹ The relative poverty risk gap is calculated as the distance between the median equivalent total net income for people below the poverty risk threshold and the poverty risk threshold itself, expressed as a percentage of the poverty risk threshold.

compared to the EU (24.8% vs. 16.1%), making it the third-highest in the EU. In addition, we know that the poverty risk rate for single-parent families at 34.6% is also higher than in the EU at 31.3%. The proportion of children living in single-parent households at risk of poverty or social exclusion is 8.5% in Belgium, making it the third-highest in the EU in 2019. Children with disabilities are also a highly vulnerable group. We find that 1.5% of children (under 16) experience severe limitations in their activities due to health problems (for comparison, in the EU this is 0.8%). Another striking finding is that the proportion of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion with at least one parent with a disability is the highest in the EU at 9.8%. Furthermore, children in poor housing conditions are also a vulnerable group. In Belgium, 3.3% of children are in a situation of severe housing deprivation; for children below the poverty risk threshold, this is 9.2%.¹² In addition, children from immigrant backgrounds are also a vulnerable group. The proportion of children with at least one parent born outside the EU is the fourth-highest in the EU at 22.7%. The proportion of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion with at least one parent born outside the EU is the third-highest in the EU at 11.2%. Finally, the poverty risk rate for children whose parents were born abroad is 36.9% (for comparison, in the EU this is 31.6%). Of course, there are other specific vulnerable groups to which the Child Guarantee Plan should also have regard. We would therefore emphasise that the groups cited are not exhaustive.

Below, we provide an overview of access to essential services for children in Belgium as compared to the EU.

1.2 Free and effective access to education and care for young children

An initial essential service is free and effective access to education and care for young children. An initial indicator of this is participation in early childhood education. In Belgium, 98.2% of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion between the age of three and compulsory school age participate in nursery education, which is the highest rate in the EU. In addition, 34.3% of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion under the age of three were in accredited childcare in Belgium in 2019.

Looking at financial access to education and care for young children, 14.3% of households had moderate to severe difficulty in paying for regular childcare in Belgium in 2016. In the EU, this is 12% of households. In addition, the proportion of children from age 3 to the minimum school age who received free regular childcare was 7.1% in Belgium in 2016, compared to 6.3% in the EU.

1.3 Free and effective access to education (including school activities)

Secondly, free and effective access to education is an important lever for improving the situation of vulnerable children. Nonetheless, socio-economic differences continue to create major inequalities in education in Belgium.

To get an idea of the size of the achievement gap as related to socio-economic status within countries, one can compare the average performance of the least advantaged pupils with that of the most advantaged pupils, based on the OECD PISA survey. In Belgium, the difference between the two groups of pupils for reading is 109 points, while this difference averages only 89 points in OECD countries. Socio-economic status explains 17.2% of the variance in reading achievement in Belgium. This is above the OECD average of 12%. Socio-economic status is even more strongly related to performance in maths and natural sciences. On average across OECD countries, pupils' socio-economic status predicts 13.8% of their performance in mathematics, and 12.8% in exact sciences. In Belgium, these

¹² For comparison, in the EU, 6% of children are in a situation of severe housing deprivation; for children below the poverty risk threshold, this is 14%.

percentages are much higher, with 21.3% for mathematics and 20.0% for natural sciences respectively.¹³

The percentage of 15-year-olds performing poorly in reading, mathematics and natural sciences in Belgium in 2018 is 21.3%, 19.7% and 20% respectively (compared to 22.5%, 22.9% and 22.3% in the EU).¹⁴ Belgium therefore scores slightly better than the EU, but both in Belgium and the EU, the proportion of pupils performing poorly has been increasing in recent years.¹⁵

1.4 Free and effective access to at least one healthy meal per school day

On the free and effective access to healthy meals per school day, we do not have any indicators to date. There needs to be an investigation into whether information on this can be collected and national indicators for Belgium can be developed based on this.

1.5 Free and effective access to healthcare

A fourth and necessary basic service for children is free and effective access to healthcare. Based on research, we know that Belgium performs relatively well in terms of access to healthcare for the entire population. Nonetheless, an issue arises with financial access to healthcare for socially and economically vulnerable groups in Belgium. Moreover, Belgium performs lower in this area compared to other countries in the EU.¹⁶ The percentage of children under 16 whose general health status is rated as poor or very poor is 1.1% in Belgium; for the first income quintile (the 20% with the lowest income) it is 1.8%. This suggests a link between the income and health situation for children in Belgium. By comparison, in the EU, the percentage of children whose general health status is assessed as poor or very poor is 0.8% for children in general and 0.9% for children in the first income quintile.

1.6 Effective access to healthy food

Besides healthcare, effective access to healthy food is also important. In 2019, the proportion of households with dependent children who could not afford a meal with meat, chicken or fish (or vegetarian equivalent) was 3.7% in Belgium; for households below the poverty risk threshold, it was 15%. In the EU, this proportion is 5.8% for households with dependent children and 16.8% if the households are below the poverty risk threshold. Effective access to healthy food is thus more difficult for children living in households in poverty.

1.7 Effective access to adequate housing

Finally, effective access to adequate housing is necessary to ensure that children live with dignity. The following indicators provide an initial insight into the housing situation for vulnerable children. In Belgium, the proportion of households with children with excessive housing costs was 6.3% for the total population and 22.1% for households below the poverty risk threshold (for comparison, in the EU it was 8% and 29.5% respectively) in 2019. The percentage of Belgian households with children experiencing severe housing deprivation is 3.3% and, for those below the poverty risk threshold, it is 9.2% (for comparison, in the EU it is 6% and 14% respectively). In addition, the proportion of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion who live in an overcrowded household is 5.7% in Belgium. Furthermore, 9.6% of households with children in Belgium are overcrowded; for households below the

¹³ OECD (2019b). PISA 2018 Results (Volume II). Where All Students Can Succeed. OECD: Paris. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/pisa-2018-results-volume-ii-b5fd1b8f-en.htm>; FPS Social Security, *The evolution of the social situation and social protection in Belgium 2020*, 2021.

¹⁴ 'Performing poorly' means not achieving level 2 'basic skills' on the PISA scale.

¹⁵ For this purpose, we compare the results of the 2018 PISA survey with those from 2012 and 2015.

¹⁶ Cès, S. and Baeten, R. (2020), *Inequalities in access to healthcare in Belgium*. Brussels: European Social Observatory, July 2020, 184 p.

poverty risk threshold, this is 25.2% (for comparison, in the EU this is 24.4% and 40.8% respectively). The gap in the percentage of children living in overcrowded households between households at risk of poverty or social exclusion on the one hand and the general population on the other is 16.2%. Furthermore, the proportion of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion who live in a household that cannot adequately heat its home is 3.6%, putting Belgium in the middle bracket for EU countries. Although the overall housing situation in Belgium is better than in the EU, effective access to adequate housing remains a major concern, particularly for vulnerable children.

Bijlagen

i. Bijlage 1

Objectifs de la Garantie pour l'Enfance Doelstellingen Kindgarantie

Ces objectifs ont été définis au niveau européen dans le cadre du Recommandation du Conseil européen du 15 juin 2021. Le Plan d'action national de la Garantie pour l'Enfance ne peut donc reprendre que les actions du fédéral et des entités fédérées qui se retrouvent dans le cadre décrit ci-dessous.

	Objectifs de la Garantie pour l'Enfance	Doelstellingen van de Kindgarantie
I	Garantir aux enfants dans le besoin un accès effectif et gratuit à des structures d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance de qualité, à une scolarisation ainsi qu'aux activités périscolaires, et à un repas sain chaque jour d'école	Zorgen dat kinderen in nood daadwerkelijke en gratis toegang hebben tot hoogwaardige voor- en vroegschoolse educatie en opvang, onderwijs en schoolgerelateerde activiteiten en elke schooldag een gezonde maaltijd krijgen
1.1	recenser et d'éliminer les obstacles financiers et non financiers empêchant les enfants dans le besoin de fréquenter les structures d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance, d'aller à l'école et de participer à des activités périscolaires	de financiële en niet-financiële belemmeringen voor deelname aan voor- en vroegschoolse educatie en opvang, onderwijs en schoolgerelateerde activiteiten in kaart brengen en aanpakken
1.2	prendre des mesures pour prévenir et réduire le décrochage scolaire, en tenant compte de la perspective de genre,	maatregelen te nemen om met oog voor gender voortijdig schoolverlaten te voorkomen en terug te dringen,
1.3	remotiver les enfants sur le point d'abandonner leur scolarité ou leur formation ou qui l'ont déjà abandonnée, notamment en fournissant des conseils personnalisés et en renforçant la coopération avec les familles	kinderen die het risico lopen hun school of opleiding voortijdig te verlaten of dat al gedaan hebben, opnieuw erbij trekken via onder meer gepersonaliseerde begeleiding en nauwere samenwerking met gezinnen
1.4	offrir un soutien à l'apprentissage aux enfants ayant des difficultés d'apprentissage afin de compenser leurs lacunes linguistiques, cognitives et scolaires	leerondersteuning bieden aan kinderen met leermoeilijkheden om hun taal-,cognitieve en onderwijsachterstand te compenseren
1.5	adapter les installations et le matériel pédagogique des structures d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance ainsi que des établissements d'enseignement et de répondre le plus adéquatement possible aux besoins spécifiques des enfants ayant des besoins éducatifs spéciaux et des enfants handicapés, en utilisant des méthodes d'enseignement et d'apprentissage inclusives de veiller, à cette fin, à ce que des enseignants qualifiés et d'autres	met behulp van inclusieve onderwijs- en leermethoden de voorzieningen en het onderwijsmateriaal van voor- en vroegschoolse educatie en opvang en van onderwijsinstellingen aanpassen en op de meest gepaste wijze voldoen aan de specifieke behoeften van kinderen met speciale onderwijsbehoeften en van kinderen met een handicap en daarbij zorgen voor gekwalificeerde leerkrachten en andere professionals, zoals psychologen,

	professionnels, tels que des psychologues, des orthophonistes, des spécialistes de la réadaptation, des travailleurs sociaux ou des assistants pédagogiques, soient disponibles	logopedisten, maatschappelijk of onderwijsassistenten fysiotherapeuten, werkers of
1.6	mettre en place des mesures destinées à promouvoir l'éducation inclusive et à éviter les classes séparées dans les établissements d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance et dans les établissements d'enseignement ces mesures peuvent aussi consister à accorder une priorité d'accès ou, si nécessaire, un accès précoce aux enfants dans le besoin	maatregelen nemen ter ondersteuning van inclusief onderwijs en ter voorkoming van gescheiden klassen in de voor- en vroegschoolse educatie en opvang en in het onderwijs daarbij kan ook prioritaire of zo nodig vroegtijdige toegang worden verleend aan kinderen in nood
1.7	fournir au moins un repas sain par jour d'école	ten minste elk schooldag één gezonde maaltijd aanbieden
1.8	assurer la fourniture de matériel pédagogique, y compris d'outils pédagogiques numériques, de manuels ou d'uniformes, le cas échéant	zorgen voor lesmateriaal, waaronder digitale onderwijsinstrumenten, boeken, uniformen of eventueel vereiste kleding
1.9	fournir une connectivité à haut débit, des services numériques et des équipements adéquats nécessaires à l'apprentissage à distance pour garantir l'accès aux contenus éducatifs en ligne,	de voor afstandsonderwijs benodigde snelle connectiviteit, digitale diensten en adequate apparatuur aanbieden om de toegang tot educatieve online-inhoud te waarborgen
1.10	améliorer les compétences numériques des enfants dans le besoin et des enseignants et de réaliser les investissements nécessaires pour lutter contre toutes les formes de fracture numérique	de digitale vaardigheden van kinderen in nood en leerkrachten vergroten en de nodige investeringen doen om de digitale kloof in al zijn vormen aan te pakken
1.11	organiser le transport vers les établissements d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance et les établissements d'enseignement	vervoer aan te bieden naar instellingen voor voor- en vroegschoolse educatie en opvang en onderwijsinstellingen
1.12	assurer un accès égal et inclusif aux activités périscolaires, y compris la participation aux voyages scolaires et aux activités sportives, récréatives et culturelles	zorgen voor gelijke en inclusieve toegang tot schoolgerelateerde activiteiten, waaronder schoolreizen en sport-, vrijetijds- en culturele activiteiten
1.13	de mettre en place un cadre de coopération entre les établissements d'enseignement, les collectivités locales, les services sociaux, les services de santé et les services de protection de l'enfance, les familles et les acteurs de l'économie sociale permettant de promouvoir l'éducation inclusive, d'offrir des structures d'accueil post-scolaires et des possibilités de participation à des activités sportives, récréatives et culturelles, de construire des établissements d'enseignement en tant que centres d'inclusion et de participation et d'investir dans ces établissements.	een kader te ontwikkelen voor samenwerking tussen onderwijsinstellingen, lokale gemeenschappen, sociale, gezondheidszorg- en kinderbeschermingsdiensten, gezinnen en actoren van de sociale economie om inclusief onderwijs te ondersteunen, in naschoolse opvang te voorzien, mogelijkheden te bieden om deel te nemen aan sport-, vrijetijds- en culturele activiteiten, en te zorgen voor de bouw van en investeringen in onderwijsinstellingen als centra van inclusie en participatie.
2	Garantir aux enfants dans le besoin un accès effectif et gratuit à des soins de santé de qualité	Zorgen dat kinderen in nood daadwerkelijke en gratis toegang

		hebben tot kwaliteitsvolle gezondheidszorg
2.1	faciliter la détection et le traitement précoces des maladies et des problèmes de développement, y compris ceux relevant de la santé mentale,	de vroege opsporing en behandeling van ziekten en ontwikkelingsproblemen, waaronder geestelijke gezondheidsproblemen, vergemakkelijken
2.2	garantir l'accès à des examens médicaux périodiques, y compris dentaires et ophtalmologiques, ainsi qu'à des programmes de dépistage	zorgen voor toegang tot periodieke medische onderzoeken en screeningprogramma's, ook van tanden en ogen
2.3	d'assurer en temps utile un suivi thérapeutique et de rééducation, y compris un accès aux médicaments, aux traitements et à divers types d'appareils,	te zorgen voor tijdige curatieve follow-up en revalidatie, waaronder toegang tot geneesmiddelen, behandelingen en ondersteuning
2.4	garantir l'accès aux programmes de vaccination	Verzekeren van de toegang tot vaccinatieprogramma's
2.5	fournir aux enfants handicapés des services ciblés de rééducation et d'adaptation	voorzien in gerichte habilitatie- en revalidatiediensten voor kinderen met een handicap
2.6	mettre en œuvre des programmes accessibles de promotion de la santé et de prévention des maladies ciblant les enfants dans le besoin et leurs familles ainsi que les professionnels travaillant avec des enfants.	Uitvoeren van toegankelijke programma's voor gezondheidsbevordering en ziektepreventie die gericht zijn op kinderen in nood en hun gezinnen, alsook op professionals die met kinderen werken.
3.	Garantir aux enfants dans le besoin un accès effectif à une alimentation suffisante et saine y compris par l'intermédiaire du programme de l'Union en faveur de la consommation de fruits, de légumes et de lait à l'école	Kinderen in nood daadwerkelijke toegang tot voldoende en gezonde voeding te garanderen, onder meer via de EU-regeling voor schoolfruit, -groente en -melk
3.1	favoriser l'accès à des repas sains également en dehors des jours d'école, y compris par un soutien en nature ou financier, en particulier dans des circonstances exceptionnelles telles que les fermetures des écoles	de toegang tot gezonde maaltijden ook buiten schooldagen ondersteunen, onder meer door financiële steun of hulp in natura, met name onder buitengewone omstandigheden als schoolsluitingen
3.2	veiller à ce que les normes nutritionnelles appliquées dans les établissements d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance et dans les établissements d'enseignement répondent à des besoins diététiques spécifiques	zorgen dat de voedingsnormen in voor- en vroegschoolse educatie en opvang en in onderwijsinstellingen tegemoetkomen aan specifieke voedingsbehoeften
3.3	limiter la publicité pour les aliments riches en graisses, en sel et en sucre et de restreindre leur disponibilité dans les établissements d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance et les établissements d'enseignement	de reclame beperken voor en de beschikbaarheid van levensmiddelen met een hoog vet-, zouten suikergehalte in voor- en vroegschoolse educatie en opvang en in onderwijsinstellingen
3.4	de fournir aux enfants et aux familles des informations adéquates sur l'alimentation saine des enfants.	kinderen en gezinnen adequaat te informeren over gezonde voeding voor kinderen.

4.	garantir aux enfants dans le besoin un accès effectif à un logement adéquat,	zorgen dat kinderen in nood daadwerkelijke toegang krijgen tot adequate huisvesting
4.1	assurer aux enfants sans domicile et à leurs familles un hébergement adéquat, un transfert rapide d'un hébergement temporaire vers un logement permanent et la fourniture de services sociaux et de conseil pertinents	garanderen dat dakloze kinderen en hun gezinnen geschikte huisvesting krijgen, snel kunnen overgaan van tijdelijke naar permanente huisvesting en relevante sociale diensten en advies wordt verleend
4.2	évaluer et de réviser, si nécessaire, les politiques nationales, régionales et locales en matière de logement et de prendre des mesures pour veiller à ce que les intérêts des familles avec des enfants dans le besoin soient dûment pris en compte, y compris du point de vue de la précarité énergétique et de la prévention du risque d'exclusion liée au logement cette évaluation et cette révision devraient également porter sur les politiques du logement social et d'aide au logement et les allocations de logement, et renforcer encore l'accessibilité pour les enfants handicapés	het nationaal, regionaal en lokaal huisvestingsbeleid beoordelen en indien nodig te herzien en maatregelen te nemen om ervoor te zorgen dat terdege rekening wordt gehouden met de belangen van gezinnen met kinderen in nood, onder meer door energiearmoede aan te pakken en het risico op dakloosheid te voorkomen zo'n beoordeling en herziening moet ook betrekking hebben op beleid voor sociale huisvesting of huisvestingssteun en woontoeslagen en de toegankelijkheid voor kinderen met een handicap verder verbeteren
4.3	prévoir pour les enfants dans le besoin et leurs familles un accès prioritaire et rapide à l'hébergement social ou à l'aide au logement	kinderen in nood en hun gezinnen voorzien van prioritaire en tijdige toegang tot sociale huisvesting of huisvestingssteun
4.4	tenir compte de l'intérêt supérieur de l'enfant, ainsi que de sa situation globale et de ses besoins individuels lorsqu'il est placé en institution ou en famille d'accueil	rekening houden met de belangen van het kind, met zijn algemene situatie en individuele behoeften wanneer het kinderen in een instelling of in een pleeggezin worden geplaatst te
4.5	assurer la transition des enfants pris en charge en institution ou en famille d'accueil vers des structures d'accueil familiales ou de type familial de qualité et de les soutenir dans leur accès à une vie autonome et dans leur intégration sociale.	zorgen voor de overgang van kinderen van institutionele zorg naar hoogwaardige gemeenschaps- of gezinszorg en hun zelfstandig leven en sociale integratie ondersteunen



Opinie

Opinie van het Belgisch Platform tegen armoede en sociale uitsluiting voor het Nationaal Kindgarantieplan.

In het kader van de Europa 2020 strategie werd in 2011 het Belgisch Platform tegen armoede en sociale uitsluiting EU2020 opgericht onder mandaat van de Interministeriële Conferentie “Integratie in de Maatschappij”. Dit naar analogie van het Europees Platform tegen armoede en sociale uitsluiting.

Het Belgisch Platform tegen armoede en sociale uitsluiting EU2020 vormt het centrale overlegorgaan voor de voorbereiding en opvolging van de Europese en Belgische beleid op gebied van de strijd tegen de armoede en sociale uitsluiting in functie van de opmaak en opvolging van het Nationaal Hervormingsprogramma en strategische rapportering in het kader van de versterkte Open Methode van Coördinatie (luik sociale insluiting). Het Belgisch Platform komt minstens 4 keer per jaar samen.

Elke twee jaar organiseert het Belgisch Platform daarenboven een open bijeenkomst om alle stakeholders maximaal de kans te geven om te participeren aan de beleidsprocessen.

De Europese Kindgarantie vormde twee maal het ontwerp van besprekingen op het Belgisch Platform tegen Armoede en Sociale Uitsluiting. Eénmaal in 2020 op een Open Platformdag en éénmaal op 7 maart 2022 tijdens een thematische werkgroep.

Op de vijfde Open Platformdag van 31 januari 2020 werd de Europese Kindgarantie besproken. De grote krachtlijnen van de conclusies en aanbevelingen worden hieronder weergegeven. De volledige opinie van het Belgische Platform is [hier](#) terug te vinden.

Op 7 maart 2022 vond er een bespreking plaats op een thematische bijeenkomst van het Belgische Platform tegen Armoede en Sociale Uitsluiting van het proces dat opgezet werd om uitvoering te geven aan de Raadsaanbeveling Kindgarantie van 14 juni 2021, inzonderheid het engagement om binnen de 9 maanden een Nationaal Kindgarantieplan op te stellen.

Onderstaande conclusies en aanbevelingen baseren zich op beide besprekingen.

Conclusies en aanbeveling mbt de Kindgarantie in België

Algemeen

Het is belangrijk om te noteren dat de aanbeveling van de Europese Commissie van 20 februari 2013 over “Investeren in kinderen, de vicieuze cirkel van achterstand doorbreken” drie pijlers voor geïntegreerde strategieën naar voren schuift : toegang tot adequate middelen via de ouders, toegang tot betaalbare hoogwaardige diensten en het recht van kinderen op participatie.

De Kindgarantie baseert zich op de tweede pijler van de aanbeveling maar kunnen niet los gezien worden van de andere dimensies in de strijd tegen de armoede bij kinderen waarbij een geïntegreerde strategie onontbeerlijk is om de intergenerationele cirkel van armoede te doorbreken.

De Kindgarantie benadrukt het multi-dimensionele benadering die noodzakelijk is om de vicieuze cirkel van de armoede te doorbreken.

De raadsaanbeveling over de Kindgarantie bevat een exhaustieve lijst van categorieën van Kinderen in Nood. Deze lijst mag niet als limitatief gezien worden. Het is belangrijk om steeds te blijven zoeken en naar (nog) niet bereikte of gedetecteerde groepen van kinderen in nood.

Daarnaast dient vermeld te worden dat in België het proportioneel universalisme als beleidsprincipe gestimuleerd wordt waarbij dienstverlening wordt uitgebouwd voor iedereen, die aansluit bij ieders noden door te variëren in schaal en intensiteit.

De doeltreffende en/of gratis toegang tot essentiële diensten

1. Garanderen van adequate voeding.

Naast het beperkte aandeel kinderen dat onvoldoende toegang heeft tot verse groenten, fruit en proteïnen (2-3%), noteren we in België een toename van zwaarlijvigheid (20%), wat eveneens wijst op onevenwichtige voeding.

We bevelen aan om te investeren in gratis en gezonde schoolmaaltijden en maaltijden die door lokale partners (zoals sociale restaurants of sociale kruideniers) worden verstrekt. De steun aan de scholen kan gekoppeld worden aan verhoging van de sociale uitkeringen en meer bindende regelgeving over de kwaliteit en prijszetting van de schoolmaaltijden. Tegelijk laat dit scholen met een kansarm doelpubliek toe om hun werkingsmiddelen aan te wenden voor pedagogische ondersteuning i.p.v. voedselhulp.

2. Gratis gezondheidszorg

In België bestaan heel wat sociale tegemoetkomingen die de gezondheidszorgen goedkoper maken voor lage-inkomensgroepen, alsook een beperkt aantal gratis prestaties voor kinderen. Maar er zitten veel gaten in de toepassing, en de facto stellen we vast dat de toegang tot gezondheidszorgen voor kinderen nog sterk samenhangt met het inkomen en het verblijfsstatuut (nationale ingezetene of EU-burger, 'legale' migrant, asielzoeker of migrant zonder papieren). Ook de kloof tussen arm en rijk in de toegang tot de gezondheidszorg is tijdens de crisisjaren aanzienlijk groter geworden, deels als gevolg van bezuinigingen op de overheidsfinanciering en de stijgende remgelden.

Selectieve steun is tot nu toe dus niet erg effectief geweest in het waarborgen van de toegang van de meest achtergestelde groepen tot (preventieve) gezondheidszorg. Bv. hebben kinderen van asielzoekers theoretisch gratis toegang tot gezondheidszorgen, maar in de praktijk raken gezinnen verstrikt in het administratieve kluwen of in wachtlijsten (bv. voor geestelijke gezondheidszorg).

De steun van de EU zou innovatieve financieringsmaatregelen ten gunste van kinderen in armoede kunnen aanmoedigen - met name in de preventieve en de geestelijke gezondheidszorg - evenals outreachende programma's. Op Belgisch niveau zou men moeten evolueren naar een regelgeving die het recht op gratis gezondheidszorg voor (kansarme) kinderen totaal loskoppelt van het verblijfsstatuut.

3. Gratis onderwijs en gelijke kansen in het onderwijs

De Belgische onderwijssystemen blijven ondanks de recente hervormingen relatief duur en zeer inegalitair. De leerlingen uit de 10% rijkste gezinnen in België hebben op 15-jarige leeftijd in feite ongeveer 4 leerjaren voorsprong op de leerlingen uit de armste 10% van de bevolking. De kloof tussen autochtone en allochtone leerlingen bedraagt ongeveer 1,5 schooljaar.

De kindgarantie zou kunnen bijdragen tot een verlichting van de schoolkosten voor achtergestelde groepen, bijvoorbeeld door middel van hogere schooltoelagen voor leerlingen of versterkte voorrangsfinitiering van scholen met veel leerlingen uit kansengroepen. Maar even belangrijk is dat zij structurele hervormingen aanmoedigt om het onderwijs te desegregeren en sociale discriminatie weg te werken (bijvoorbeeld actieve bevordering van de sociale en etnische mix in scholen, inclusief onderwijs, vermindering van het zittenblijven en uitstel van de studie-oriëntering). Dit vergt bijkomende investeringen in pedagogische en leerlingenbegeleiding. Ook moeten de sociale en interculturele vaardigheden van leerkrachten permanent worden versterkt door middel van basisopleidingen en nascholing. Ten slotte blijven extra inspanningen nodig om het vroegtijdig schoolverlaten te voorkomen en te bestrijden.

4. Degelijke huisvesting

De ongelijke toegang tot huisvesting is schrijnend in België, vanwege het ontbreken van een omvattende regeling voor huisvestingstoelagen en het marginaal kleine aandeel van de sociale huisvesting in de woonmarkt. De kindgarantie zou zich dus kunnen richten op verdere investeringen in sociale huisvesting en met name op sociale verhuurkantoren, terwijl de Belgische overheden daarnaast bijkomend zouden moeten werken aan een behoeftendekkend systeem van huisvestingstoelagen voor de private markt.

Om kinderen beter te beschermen tegen de risico's van dakloosheid en inadequate huisvesting zou de situatie van kinderen als criterium gebruikt moeten worden in de actieve opsporing van ongeschikte woningen, de bouw en toewijzing van sociale woningen en de bescherming tegen uithuiszetting. Bovendien is er in de private huisvestingsmarkt nood aan een krachtig anti-discriminatiebeleid (o.a. met regelmatige praktijktoetsen).

Proces voor de opmaak van het Kindgarantieplan

Er wordt betreurd dat de opmaak van het Kindgarantieplan niet leidde tot een algemene, gedeelde strategische visie en nieuwe beleidsinitiatieven hierop gebaseerd. Het Kindgarantieplan zoals het nu opgesteld is, is een inventarisatie van alle bestaande of geplande maatregelen die onder de noemer van de Kindgarantie kunnen geplaatst worden. Ook werden de stakeholders, inzonderheid de kinderen in nood, niet betrokken bij het opmaak proces.

De institutionele complexiteit van België vormt hier een bijzondere uitdaging omdat de Kindgarantie verschillende beleidsdomeinen in de verschillende overheidsniveaus bestrijkt. Deze fragmentatie dient overstegen te worden door het investeren in de opvolging van het kindgarantieplan, met het oog op de tussentijdse rapportage in 2024. Een ambitieus engagement van alle beleidsverantwoordelijken dient nagestreefd te worden, en dit in nauwe dialoog met alle betrokkenen, met speciale aandacht voor de dialoog met kinderen in nood. Een integrale en gecoördineerde aanpak, waarbij alle pertinente bevoegdheidsniveaus en bevoegdheidsdomeinen betrokken worden, is nodig om de ambitie om de vicieuze cirkel van de armoede te doorbreken te realiseren.

Het nieuwe beleid en de noodzakelijke hervormingen moeten gebaseerd zijn op een grondige en feitelijke analyse van de huidige toegang tot de noodzakelijke dienstverlening voor de kinderen in nood. Die analyses moeten op een kwantitatieve en kwalitatieve manier uitgevoerd worden. Een proces voor de exploratie en harmonisatie van de beschikbare administratieve data over de groepen van kinderen in nood moet ontwikkeld worden, parallel aan het overleg met de voornaamste belanghebbenden, en met de kinderen zelf over de problemen waarmee zij te maken hebben op de verschillende gebieden die door de Kindgarantie worden bestreken (onderwijs en opvang voor jonge kinderen, onderwijs

en buitenschoolse activiteiten, gezondheidszorg, voeding, huisvesting) en de mogelijke oplossingen hiervoor. Nieuwe beleidsinitiatieven dienen inclusief en kwalitatief te zijn om ervoor te zorgen dat kinderen die ze nodig hebben er ten volle gebruik van kunnen maken en om stigmatisering en segregatie te voorkomen.

Lidstaten met een kinderarmoedeniveau boven het EU-gemiddelde (23,4 % - AROPE 2017 - 2019) zijn verplicht 5 % van de European Social Fund Plus-middelen toe te wijzen aan de bestrijding van kinderarmoede. België valt onder dit Europees gemiddelde en dient dus een passend bedrag van hun ESF Plus-middelen toe te wijzen aan de bestrijding van kinderarmoede. Vanuit het Belgisch Platform wordt aanbevolen om de effectieve aanwending van ESF Plus middelen in de strijd tegen de armoede bij kinderen nauwgezet te monitoren en wordt de hoop uitgesproken dat dit minstens 5 % van de totale middelen zal bedragen in de programmaperiode 2021-2027 om zo het Belgisch engagement zichtbaar en tastbaar te maken. Om de sociale innovatie bij de toekenning van de EU-steun te stimuleren zouden doelgroeporganisaties bij het ontwerp van de programma's moeten gestimuleerd worden.

Idealiter zou de kindgarantie ook systeemhervormingen ten gunste van gezinnen in armoedesituaties moeten aanmoedigen. Ze zou stigmatisering van de doelgroepen en substitutie van nationale sociale beleidsmaatregelen door Europese financiering moeten voorkomen.

De deelnemers van het Belgisch Platform aan de thematische sessie over het Kindgarantieplan wensen actief een rol te spelen in de verdere processen voor de opvolging, uitbouw en evaluatie van het Kindgarantieplan en zijn vragende partij dat hiertoe in samenwerking een proces wordt uitgetekend.