

European Child Guarantee mid-term report

1. Context

Following the recommendation of the European Child Guarantee adopted by the Council of the European Union in June 2021, Belgium submitted its national action plan to the European Commission at the beginning of May 2022. As part of the European objective of lifting 5 million children out of situations where they are at risk of poverty by 2030, Belgium has set itself the target of contributing at least 93,000 children to this objective by 2030. Budgets have been released at various levels to combat child poverty, in order to reach this target of lifting 93,000 children at risk of poverty out of these situations by 2030. At federal level, a budget of around €2.2 million was released between 2021 and 2023 to enable the Public Centres for Social Welfare (PCSWs) to work specifically on this objective. As part of our federal competences, we are looking to follow up this call for projects entitled "Combating child poverty within the framework of the European Child Guarantee". In collaboration with the National Lottery, a call for projects on child poverty resulted in 62 projects in Belgium receiving subsidies amounting to almost €1,200,000. A new call for projects on the same theme will be launched in early 2024 in partnership with the National Lottery, with a budget of €1,800,000.

The PPS Social Integration has undergone some changes regarding the coordination of the Child Guarantee, with Sofie Dumortier now taking on the role of Belgian coordinator of the European Child Guarantee. She will also be in charge of organising the European Child Guarantee (ECG) event as part of the Belgian presidency. Follow-up will be ensured in collaboration with the Anti-Poverty and Urban Cohesion Policy service (Noémie Wouters). The European Childhood Guarantee is therefore coordinated at federal level, under the responsibility of Minister Lalieux. Each federated entity has designated several contact persons known as "SPOCs" (Single Point of Contact), who liaise with the coordinator to ensure that all federated entities' actions are widely known. In the meantime, the SPOCs and the coordinator keep in close contact, in particular to organise seminars, prepare the interim report, contribute to speeches at European level, etc.

Under the Belgian presidency, and more particularly in view of the European Child Guarantee interim report, several thematic seminars were set up at federal level for 2023. A total of four different seminars were organised, each focusing on one of the themes linked to the European Child Guarantee. The federated entities have set up delegations made up of experts from administrations, civil society organisations, universities, etc. This enabled us to draw up a review of child poverty in Belgium, and more specifically of the challenges that will need to be met in the future. This contribution is also crucial in view of the upcoming Belgian presidency, in order to clearly determine the priorities that can be put forward.

The seminars were structured as follows: after a brief presentation of the European Child Guarantee and the Belgian presidency, the various points of contact for the administrations were invited to present their points of action and an overview of the current situation. Several experts then briefly presented their work in relation to the European Child Guarantee, as well as any challenges they may have faced. This was followed by a discussion based on questions for reflection. It's important to note here that the European Commission's observation letter has been used to establish these questions for reflection, in order to fill in any gaps that may have been identified. For each theme, the European

Commission's observations have been presented, in order to give a more accurate picture of the current situation, using the questions for reflection. Conclusions were drawn at the end of each seminar, providing an overview of the current state of implementation of the European Child Guarantee, as well as the challenges facing its roll-out in future.

For each theme, various conclusions were drawn and noted; some came up more frequently and could be generalised:

- The importance of parent participation (at school, district associations, etc.).
- The importance of participation throughout the process.
- The importance of relying on district associations, the proximity approach.
- The importance of structurally integrating contact persons and trusted persons.
- Sustainable development is important, given the impact of climate change.
- The challenge is to reach as many children in precarious situations as possible.
- The importance of making initiatives more accessible.
- We must not forget the intergenerational aspect of poverty.
- It's essential to focus on prevention.
- The challenge of making services more accessible (role of awareness-raising, contact persons, etc.).
- The multi-dimensional aspect is important: all the themes of the European Child Guarantee are interconnected.
- The need for indicators and research to monitor and strengthen knowledge surrounding child poverty.
- Focus not only on financial/economic thresholds, but also on social thresholds.

All the conclusions can be found by thematic seminar in the appendix¹. A final session was held on 18 December with all participants, in order to review the conclusions of the seminars and formulate specific recommendations through work sessions in smaller groups. Political decision makers were also present, to ensure that the conclusions of the seminars were also debated at political level. These sessions demonstrated the importance of ongoing discussion with experts to identify targeted solutions linked to the multi-dimensional challenge that child poverty presents. Although the federal level, in its role as coordinator, is not in a position to evaluate the other levels of authority, this exercise enables us to identify the gaps with the various administrations and experts, and to reflect together on courses of action for the next legislature.

At the closing session on 18 December, after reviewing the various conclusions from the seminars, Anne Van Lancker's report based on ESPAN's analysis of the implementation of the European Child Guarantee in Belgium was presented. In this way, the federal coordinator sought to bring the analyses and feedback from the European level into direct contact with the Belgian stakeholders in the European Child Guarantee, within administrations, cabinets and civil society organisations. Participants then had the opportunity to reflect even more deeply. Firstly, they were asked their opinions on the conclusions and certain gaps they wished to fill. They were then divided into small groups to establish some priorities. This data will then be integrated into a memorandum that the future government in charge of the coordination will be able to bear in mind.

¹ Appendix: pages 26 to 31

This ongoing practical feedback exercise is also taking place as part of the preparations for the Belgian presidency. Discussions are already scheduled with various civil society organisations at European level to gather their ideas on the agenda for the event on 2 and 3 May, as well as any advice they can offer to ensure that the proposed platform is as widely adopted as possible.

Under the Belgian presidency, the European Child Guarantee is one of the four priorities put forward by Minister Lalieux, as part of the EPSCO channel. On 2 and 3 May 2024, Belgium hopes to provide coordinators of the European Child Guarantee, the European Commission, NGOs and others with a platform to discuss the importance of the European Child Guarantee and its successful implementation, as well as to support the coordinators through round tables and ensure an inspiring exchange. The aim is to look back and forwards and, as part of this platform, to review the three-year-old European Child Guarantee recommendation, the interim reports and, most importantly, to anticipate the European elections, the future implementation of the Guarantee and much more.

It is also important to make the link with the European Pillar of Social Rights. Under the Belgian presidency, the European Pillar will be reviewed at La Hulpe, where the "La Hulpe Declaration" will also be drafted. More specifically, the PPS Social Integration will also feed into this Declaration from Minister Lalieux's four priorities, in particular by focusing on social investment within the framework of the Child Guarantee.

To date, there are no plans to amend the existing action plan. However, adjustments could be made following the Belgian elections in June 2024 and a possible change of government.

Some federated entities are also willing to provide more information regarding the context in which the European Child Guarantee will be implemented. This is provided in the appendix².

² Appendix: pages 1 to 2

2. Target groups

As indicated in the European Commission's bilateral observation letter, Belgium has chosen to focus the objectives of the action plan on children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, rather than on more specific groups among them. It's important to note, however, that some actions focus on specific categories of children, such as children with disabilities or with a migrant background.

To ensure that Belgium can achieve its target of lifting 93,000 children out of situations where they are at risk of poverty, and in the context of appropriate monitoring and evaluation, the federal level has begun to draw up an inventory of all available administrative data distributed between the different levels.

For this first exercise, a survey was launched by the coordinator of the Guarantee asking all political levels to share information on the following exercise: a document was distributed in which the different priority target groups of children were divided as indicated in the European Child Guarantee. The various administrations were asked to indicate whether or not they have administrative data on these groups of children in precarious situations and, if so, over what period, of what frequency, from what source and whether there are different "sub-groups" within this group. Further explanation is given in point 4 below.

The coordinator of the European Child Guarantee is currently centralising all the responses to give a clearer picture of the nature and location of the information. The next step will be to create a detailed inventory to facilitate monitoring and assess the progress made.

As indicated in the reference framework, the percentage of children in Belgium at risk of poverty or social exclusion is 19.6%. Although this figure is lower than the European average of 24.7% in 2022, it still encompasses almost one fifth of children under 18.

Thanks to the reference framework, we have an overview of specific groups of children. This allows us to see that within the group of children that are AROPE:

- 47.9% have at least one parent born outside the EU;
- 39.8% live in single-parent families;
- 51.4% have at least one parent with a disability.

3. Roll-out of services

Responsibility for child poverty is divided between the various levels of authority, with the majority falling to the communities and regions. The establishment of forums for exchange between the various levels of authority, provided by the Federal level in its role as coordinator of the Child Guarantee, was essential before we could begin to reflect more deeply on the actions to be implemented to combat child poverty effectively. Seminars were therefore organised on the various themes of the Child Guarantee.

Based on the discussions held at these meetings and the administrative data collected, the next step will be to formulate recommendations for new actions aimed at achieving the goal of reducing the number of children at risk of poverty by 93,000. In addition, particular attention is now paid to gathering administrative data on the number of children reached by the various actions. In this respect, the contact persons in each federated entity have been asked to facilitate the collection of this data.

A summary by specific entity will be provided below for each theme as part of the roll-out of services under the European Child Guarantee. For more information on each entity, please refer to the corresponding appendix³.

Federal

Belgium's national action plan for 2021 mainly contained measures already planned prior to Belgium's commitment to the European Child Guarantee. Some, such as the call for projects "Combating child poverty within the framework of the European Child Guarantee" and the call for projects in collaboration with the National Lottery, were subsequently introduced in response to the recommendation, and target all the different axes of the Child Guarantee.

Brussels

French Community Commission (COCOF)

The national action plan mainly lists existing measures, as it was drawn up in the middle of the legislature. It is therefore only possible to assess existing or planned measures.

Flemish Community Commission (COCON)

Over the past few years, the Flemish Community Commission has been actively working on the measures included in the national action plan for the Child Guarantee as part of the Multi-Year Strategic Plan 2022-2025. The fight against child poverty is the central theme running through all the actions undertaken by the Flemish Community Commission. An overview of the figures and progress of each action is provided in the appendix.

German-speaking Community

The national action plan mainly lists existing measures, as it was drawn up in the middle of the legislature. It is therefore only possible to assess existing or planned measures. Elections will be held in spring 2024 for the German-speaking Community. However, it is not possible at this stage to define

³ Appendix: pages 2 to 25

new measures that could be taken as part of the national action plan to achieve the objective of reducing the situation of children at risk of poverty. This task will fall to the new government.

3.1. Early childhood education and care

As indicated by the Joint EU Monitoring Framework, the EU Social Scoreboard shows the percentage of children benefiting from childcare services.

In Belgium, the percentage of children under 3 at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) benefiting from childcare services for at least 1 hour a week is significantly lower than that of children who do not belong to this group, a percentage of 19.3% versus 59.4%. This vulnerable group is below the European average.

The difficulties faced by the early childhood sector are mainly due to a lack of childcare places and human resources. Staff turnover is high due to an overload of work, and there are calls for better funding of the sector. These difficulties have had an impact on the (slower) development of certain projects.

Flanders

In response to bottlenecks identified in the care of babies and young children in Flanders, and given the importance of such care for children's development, an additional budget of €270 million has recently been allocated to better subsidisation on the one hand, and to improving the quality of existing childcare initiatives and creating 5,000 additional places on the other hand. In addition, there are 18 KOALA operations in Flanders and the bilingual Brussels-Capital Region, which are partnerships between the organisers of childcare services that have more subsidies, Huis van het Kind, group offers for parents and children, and local players such as the social centre, Ligo, anti-poverty associations, education, etc. Subsidies are also granted to local childcare offices, responsible for implementing local childcare policies. Additional subsidies for flexible and urgent care will be granted in 2024.

In 2019, the Decree on childcare and extracurricular activities for schoolchildren was approved. The aim of this decree is to provide an integrated range of out-of-school care and activities (BOA) for all children and families. From 2026, all subsidies will be allocated to local communities, who will be responsible for funding, local policy and local cooperation.

With the adoption of a new Youth Decree, the focus is on sustainable, inclusive and accessible leisure activities for children and young people. Links were established between leisure and children and young people in youth services as part of the "Over Drempeles" call, which ran from June 2022 to July 2023. The link between leisure and children and young people in vulnerable situations was also explored in greater depth with children and young people themselves, through a political participation methodology, "the circle of participation", during the European Year of Youth. This is in preparation for the "General assembly on leisure and poverty" to be held in April 2024.

Twelve pioneers received a subsidy to implement a project proposing a new model of practice with a "continuous line" between childcare, pre-school care and out-of-school care for young children.

In the field of education, the main investment has been focused on controlling costs by providing support and guidance for schools.

The "Local networks of allies" call for projects funded 45 projects aimed at creating or strengthening networks of organisations, stakeholders and citizens active in and around schools in the field of child poverty reduction.

The distribution of school meals is left to the autonomy of the schools, although the Flemish government provides support to schools that require it. We encourage a more comprehensive health policy in schools, which includes nutritional policy.

In addition, in line with the Flemish food strategy, two projects have been implemented, one to encourage healthy, sustainable and affordable eating patterns through various catering structures, and the other to guarantee children and young people access to sufficient, healthy and sustainable food⁴.

Wallonia

New legislation will enter into force on 1 June 2024. This legislation will make it possible to support, on the one hand, so-called type 1 care environments (crèches subsidised by the O.N.E. at level 2, childcare services specialised in early childhood and shelters with a specific approval to care for children aged 0 to 3) via a five-year programme and, on the other hand, the so-called type 2, other early childhood care environments (non-subsidised crèches, childminders, etc.) for the purchase of equipment specific to the activity, small-scale development and safety work or energy renovation.

In parallel with the review of the legislation, a cooperation agreement between the Walloon Region and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation has been adopted to enable the creation of over 3,000 new crèche places.

Brussels

French Community Commission (COCOF)

In the field of early childhood care, COCOF, supported by the Region (with an annual allowance of €4,800,000), encourages the development of crèche places and offers financial assistance for early childhood care infrastructures under the responsibility of the Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance (ONE). This financial assistance is for the purchase of buildings or building work (construction, extension, conversion, renovation, major repairs) offered to municipalities, PCSWs, public utility establishments and non-profit organisations.

A memorandum of understanding was signed on 16 December 2021 between the Brussels-Capital Region, the French Community Commission and the French Community concerning the creation of childcare places for early childhood for the period 2021-2026. These commitments were confirmed in the cooperation agreement of 21 March 2024 between the French Community, the French Community Commission and the Brussels-Capital Region concerning the specific needs of compulsory education and early childhood care in Brussels.

The aim is to increase the number of childcare places for early childhood available in socially accessible, group childcare environments authorised by the Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance (ONE). In

⁴ Further information on these food strategies:

[Healthy, sustainable and affordable through various catering structures;](#)

[Guaranteeing children and young people access to sufficient, healthy and sustainable food.](#)

addition to financial aid, COCOF supports developers in carrying out their projects and ensures the coherence of investments in coordination with all Brussels stakeholders.

In collaboration with the ONE, COCOF launched a call for projects in 2022 to subsidise the creation of crèche places. Project owners could obtain subsidies ranging from 60% to 95%. This call for projects led to 1,659 new places being planned.

In 2024, COCOF, again in collaboration with the ONE, will continue to grant subsidies both for planning new places and for renovating existing infrastructures.

COCOF also continues to ensure support for childcare policies in Brussels. On the one hand, this support takes the form of the work carried out by the Observatoire de l'Enfant and, on the other, of subsidies for associations whose actions are in line with the COCOF's policy on children, such as Formation et Recherche – Accueil du Jeune Enfant (FRAJE).

Flemish Community Commission (COCON)

In the field of childcare and education, COCON provides both content and financial support to numerous partners and organisations.

Opgroeien in Brussel's support offering enhances the pedagogical quality of (pre-school and out-of-school) childcare and family support (*Huizen van het kind*), thanks to tailor-made training and support. The Centre d'Enseignement Bruxellois (CEB) does the same for Dutch-speaking primary and secondary schools in Brussels. Within this framework, the two departments pay particular attention to issues of concern to large cities, such as poverty, multilingualism and diversity.

As a subsidiary authority, COCON also takes child poverty/precarity into account by providing financial support to organisations. For example, students' SES (socio-economic status) indicators play a key role in determining the amount of subsidies granted to schools. In addition, childcare initiatives are only subsidised if they offer places based on income. There are also specific subsidies aimed at tackling child poverty in the areas of care and education, such as the subsidy for school fees. These resources enable schools to contribute to the school-related expenses of vulnerable pupils (e.g. (hot) meals, childcare, sanitary towels and excursions).

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Numerous actions and advances aimed at improving primary and secondary access to early childhood care can be highlighted. Progress is detailed in relation to the structure of the NAP in the appendix "Follow-up to seminar notes 19/10/23 – multi-dimensional strategy". In summary, we can highlight:

- **The creation and subsidisation of new childcare places** (via a call for projects, followed-up and implemented by the ONE and the regional administrations): with a target of 5,200 new subsidised places by 2025 (first stage of 559 new places created in 2023). On 30 June 2023, the ONE's provisional figures showed a total of 45,632 early childhood care places in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, including 35,538 in group care and 10,094 in family care. For group childcare, this represents an increase of 947 places compared with the situation on 31 December 2019.
- **The setting up of the ONE "Accessibility" Taskforce** and the creation of its action plan (2022-2025) to increase the occupancy rate of childcare places and the accessibility of childcare

environments, increase the number of vulnerable children in care and combat social and environmental inequalities.

- The **strengthening teams**, in particular by **raising childcare workers' salaries**.
- The review of the **parental financial contribution (PFC) scale for subsidised childcare environments**: from 1 January 2023, **PFC to be zero for people with BIM status⁵ and automatic reduction of PFC to 70% of the scale for single-parent families**; from 1 January 2025, new pricing scale based on parents' income. Compensatory measures for childcare environments have been/will be put in place.
- Measures to facilitate access to places.
- **Priority to single-parent families** for subsidised childcare places.
- The gradual implementation of **childcare system monitoring**.
- **Support for childcare environments in terms of practices**: the ONE aims to carry out a quantitative and qualitative assessment to gain a broad overview of the state of progress in terms of accessibility to the public concerned in the WBF.
- **Communities of practice at local level**: several cross-functional projects present inspiring practices and reflexivity tools for childcare professionals.
- **Reinforcing the training of childcare professionals and broadening the range of professional development courses on offer**, to ensure high-quality, inclusive childcare that takes account of different forms of diversity, fragility and disability.

To take this accessibility objective even further, there are still major challenges ahead that need to be met. These issues are summarised in section 6 "*Lessons and future developments*" and detailed in the appendix.

German-speaking Community

The measures mentioned in the national action plan for this pillar are underway and aim to provide effective, free access to high-quality early childhood education and care services, educational and school activities and a healthy meal every school day.

Additional measures:

- **Parents' contribution to childcare costs** has been reformed. For parents whose child is cared for by an organisation that applies income-based rates, childcare will be free if their income is less than €40,000. Independent childminders generally do not apply income-related rates. However, they may also qualify for a special subsidy if the parents' income is less than €40,000, or if they are entitled to the increased compulsory health insurance contribution.
- **Childcare as part of integration courses** is free of charge and enshrined in the decree.

⁵ Bénéficiaire de l'Intervention Majorée: status enabling people on low incomes to benefit from higher reimbursement of their healthcare costs, among other advantages. The average socio-economic index for schools ranges from 1 to 20 (in 4 levels: 1-5; 6-10; 11-15; 16-20). Schools with an average socio-economic index between 1 and 5 therefore have a more socio-economically disadvantaged student population, and receive additional funding under the decree of 30 April 2009 organising a differentiated framework.

- **Reduction in secondary school fees (in force since 01/09/2023):** In order to prevent schools' administrative costs from being passed on to parents/legal guardians in the future, and to improve educational opportunities for all students in secondary education, the government has decided to prohibit the transmission of fees. Secondary schools are not allowed to charge parents or legal guardians for the costs related to distributing papers, the school's schedule, and issuing qualifications. To ensure that schools are not penalised financially by this measure, secondary schools will benefit from an indexed annual subsidy of €100 per pupil.
- Since September 2023, **all school staff members have been entitled to a free laptop.** This means that, in addition to management and teaching staff, childminders or childcare workers and administrative staff at educational institutions, for example, will now also have direct access to the ordering platform, where they can order a laptop with maintenance, on-site warranty and servicing.
- With the **creation of a pluralistic and independent centre for inclusive education**, the next step is to structurally merge the existing institutions of the special school system under a single patronage. This will overcome the separation of networks in the special school system and reduce the system's complexity. The creation of the centre should be seen as the next step in the reform of special education in eastern Belgium, whose medium- and long-term aim is to bring resources to ordinary schools in successive stages, to equip them so that they can become as inclusive as possible. The new centre and its special schools should therefore be seen as an interim step.

3.2. Teaching and school activities

Like the EU average and other member states, PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) shows that children of lower socio-economic status are more likely to have lower marks in reading, maths and science than those of higher socio-economic status. In Belgium, the number of children AROPE under 16 who do not have access to paid school trips and events is 6.2%, which is significantly higher than children who do not belong to this group (1%).

There's a clear difference between children under 16 who do not have access to regular leisure activities in Belgium, depending on whether they belong to the AROPE group (22.9%) or not (1.7%). According to Eurostat, there is a 23% difference between young people who leave school early and whose parents have a secondary education qualification and those whose parents have some form of higher education (e.g. a university degree).

Federal

The participation and social activation fund is an annual subsidy that supports children's school and extra-curricular activities in particular. Details of the subsidy are provided in the appendix.

Brussels

Brussels-Capital Region (BCR)

The Brussels Region is the country's leading educational hub. Although the Region has no specific competences in the field of education, the Brussels government mobilises all regional tools in support of community education policies, to guarantee access to high-quality education for all Brussels residents, while respecting each persons' skills. Within this framework, perspective.brussels' School Facilitator Service is responsible for coordinating all initiatives developed by the Region in support of

education. Its missions form the basis of the "Brussels programme for education and childcare" (PBEE) of the GO4Brussels 2030 Strategy⁶.

To support the school retention of young people in difficulty and combat school segregation, on 26 April 2018, following on from the HIVA/KUL study "*Décrochage scolaire en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale - vers une stratégie coordonnée et partagée de lutte contre le décrochage scolaire en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale*" (*School dropout in the Brussels-Capital Region - towards a coordinated and shared strategy to combat school dropout in the Brussels-Capital Region*)⁷, the Brussels government took note of the strategy and adopted the reform of regional policies to combat school dropouts. In this context, the Brussels government has undertaken to strengthen the coordination of the three regional school retention schemes, granting subsidies to associative sector and municipalities. The three schemes account for an annual budget of around €8.5 million, and are subject to a call for projects launched every three years; the next call is scheduled for spring 2024.

- The School Retention Scheme (Dispositif d'Accrochage Scolaire – DAS): through this funding, the Region supports primary and secondary schools of all networks in the 19 municipalities in the fight against school failure, absenteeism, violence and antisocial behaviour. Activities must take place in the school, outside school hours. Resources are allocated as a priority to schools that cater for pupils in difficulty, often from the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. A budget of almost €7 million has been allocated to the DAS 2021-2024.
- The Support scheme for activities assisting children and young people in their education and citizenship (Dispositif de soutien aux activités d'accompagnement à la scolarité et à la citoyenneté des enfants et des jeunes – DASC): this regional programme aims to strengthen equality in education by offering support to children and young people who are unable to benefit from it due to poor material conditions or a lack of adequate family supervision; the aim is therefore to offer appropriate and targeted educational support to young people in precarious situations, who are more at risk of dropping out of school. These projects are run by non-profit organisations outside of school. The projects supported involve parents, the children's schools and local cultural, social, educational and youth support partners. A budget of €1,525,000 has been allocated to the DASC 2022-2024.
- The Municipal School Retention Plan (Plan d'accrochage scolaire communal – PASC): the Region grants subsidies to the 19 municipal prevention services. Municipal prevention services are the main local anchors of the regional policy to prevent school dropouts. They play a leading role as contact persons, working in partnership with other stakeholders. As a result, they take part in developing a supportive environment that aims to guide the child/young person and those around them through education or a life course that allows for autonomy and emancipation. A budget of almost €17 million has been allocated to the PASC 2022-2024 (the PASC has become a three-year plan from 2022).

In order to address the negative effects and impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on education, particularly for children/young people from more vulnerable backgrounds, the Brussels government also released exceptional budgets in its July 2020 recovery and reorientation plan, including, on the one hand, the strengthening of the DAS in secondary schools, with a budget of €300,000 from September 2020 to December 2021 and, on the other hand, the recruitment of an additional full-time equivalent in the 19 municipal dropout prevention services, with an amount of €1,500,000 from September 2020 to June 2022.

In addition, the "social inclusion and integration" project of the GO4Brussels 2030 Strategy's Youth Guarantee aims to provide support and second-chance education. The aim is to increase the number

⁶ GO4Brussels 2030 strategy, extending the 2025 strategy: <http://go4.brussels/>

⁷ https://accrochagescolaire.brussels/sites/default/files/documentation/etude_decrochage_scolaire_-_kul.pdf

of young people earning a qualification at least equivalent to upper secondary education, to prevent and combat school dropouts among young people over 15, and to develop personalised actions, intended for and working with young people in vulnerable situations, to help them develop a sustainable career plan. The coordination involves bringing together all the partners involved in the Brussels Youth Guarantee scheme, in order to strengthen synergies and refine the intervention logic to meet the needs and expectations of the various target groups.

The Trec-One project subsidised since 2014 under this Brussels Youth Guarantee scheme is a cooperative information and support platform for young people in transition from school to working life. The project combines two elements: the development of local platforms, known as "physical" platforms, in priority areas, generally more underprivileged neighbourhoods, and the development of a web-based platform for young people aged 15 to 26, accessible 24 hours a day, developed by Bruxelles-J under the initiative of Infor Jeunes Bruxelles. Under the impetus of the COVID-19 recovery plan, three additional "physical" platforms have been set up, the latest of which is at the Cité des Métiers in Saint-Josse. Today, there are 12 platforms active.

The Youth Guarantee has also enabled the creation of personalised educational workshops (ateliers de pédagogie personnalisée – APP) within five Brussels PCSWs, thanks to the support of the ESF programme Wallonia-Brussels. The aim of these workshops is to help young people experiencing exclusion, who receive assistance from PCSWs, to return to school or start training. These workshops provide an alternative learning environment, with the aim of enabling people to return to training leading to qualifications or the Belgian certificate of upper secondary education (CESS), and ultimately reintegrate into the job market.

Finally, two specific calls for projects have enabled the selection of around 15 pilot projects for and with young people aged 15 to 21 who are known to have dropped out of school, and with young people aged 15 to 21 enrolled in education leading to a qualification and who are in a situation of dropping out or at risk of dropping out as a result of a guidance problem, from 2021 to 2023, for a total amount of over €1 million.

French Community Commission (COCOF)

In the field of education, the French Community Commission, as an education authority, has played its part in the authorities' collective effort to respond to the demographic boom. In 2024, the plan to increase the number of places has been implemented in infrastructures for mainstream education. The two schools that will eventually accommodate 1,200 new students have been completed, and 350 young people have already started classes (opening year by year from the start of the 2021 school year).

For special education, the extension of the Institut Alexandre Herlin is behind schedule in the administrative phase. Work will start in summer 2024 and continue until 2026. The new places will be dedicated to special education for children with type II disabilities, i.e. moderate to severe mental disabilities. Demand for specific classes for children with ASD (autism spectrum disorders) is also very high.

The French Community Commission is also continuing its efforts to maintain, renew and improve teaching conditions. During the period 21-24, several major projects on the CERIA campus will be completed, and the necessary investments in infrastructure and equipment will continue, with a view to sustainability.

The fight against school dropouts also an important priority. In French Community Commission schools, various projects and measures are implemented throughout the year to support students.

Since summer 2020, in response to the health crisis and its negative impact on students, COCOF has been organising workshops that combine schoolwork and various activities (music, sports, etc.) at different teaching sites. The concept is now well established, and is repeated during the spring and summer holidays.

COCOF is continuing its efforts in this area of school retention by providing five full-time equivalents, one for each school, to strengthen the teams responsible for school reintegration projects and for monitoring students in difficulty within the schools.

In order to provide high-quality education that is primarily provided free of charge, the French Community Commission has been distributing a free school pack containing basic supplies to pupils enrolled in mainstream and special secondary education since the start of the 2018-2019 school year.

The social fund designed to reduce costs (particularly in the areas of education that lead to qualifications) is now in place, and has enabled a reduction in costs in the catering sections as a matter of priority. The most vulnerable students can apply – via a file submitted by a social worker – to have school-related costs (equipment, textbooks, activities, travel) covered, so that there are no financial obstacles to their learning.

In terms of food, the canteens are partially supplied with fruit and vegetables grown in the school gardens, with no added pesticides. In addition, a social supermarket was opened in January 2022 on the CERIA campus via an agreement with the non-profit organisation ASEB, to enable students from the COCOF's two higher education schools and three social advancement schools to benefit from low-cost food close to their place of study. The supermarket is part of the supermarket network, and as such is also open to other students in Brussels.

With a view to ensuring equal access to education for all, and going beyond the provision of new and reconditioned IT equipment for the most vulnerable pupils and students, COCOF has drawn up a digital deployment strategy for all its schools. In all, over 750 new or reconditioned laptops have already been acquired since 2020. These investments were continued and diversified in 2022 (laptops, tablets, interactive whiteboards, implementation of digital platforms, etc.). The challenge also lies in training in the use of digital technology, both for pupils, students and their families, and for teachers who need to adapt their teaching practices. Consequently, our schools are planning digital awareness activities. Since 2022, COCOF has hired two digital pedagogy specialists to support the organising authority in this process of rolling out digital technology in schools (budget of €110,000).

Resources for school transport, one of COCOF's competences, have been significantly increased between 2020 and 2024 (+20%) to meet the challenges of this sector.

This increase in resources has enabled:

- The needs of private transport providers to be met, whose costs have soared as a result of the energy crisis
- A system for renting small vehicles to be developed, which provides more options for the routes to be set up and, in some cases, to compensate for the lack of supply from private transport providers
- Alternatives to home pick-up to be created, by encouraging the use of public transport for students who are sufficiently independent: "ranks" have been set up with one or more chaperones, combining STIB transport and walking.

The new social cohesion scheme provided for by the French Community Commission's decree of 30 June 2018 on social cohesion has made it possible to grant approval from 1 January 2024 to 125 Brussels operators developing a project to support and assist children and young people in their schooling and citizenship, accompanied by a subsidy ranging from €30,000 to €70,000 depending on the volume of their actions and the number of children or young people cared for. These 125 projects consist of helping with homework as well as socio-cultural, civic and creative activities aimed primarily at children in precarious situations and those at risk of dropping out of school, for a minimum of 9 hours a week, spread over a minimum of 4 days a week, and delivered to groups of at least 10 children/young people. Autonomy, well-being and self-fulfilment are the central objectives of these actions. Educational trips and a minimum of two weeks' work experience (or camp) are offered with an educational, cultural and/or civic focus. Projects with children and young people are developed in partnership with other associations to promote social interaction, mobility for vulnerable groups, and the appropriation of public space, etc. A dynamic of support for parenthood is anchored in these actions, ensuring that the role of parents in the education and well-being of their children/young people is preserved and enhanced, and that the parent/child bond is strengthened. Links with schools and socio-educational actors are sought in order to include them as partners and to encourage systemic work around the child and young person. A budget of €6,180,000 has been allocated to these 125 operators to develop these approved actions for a total of 131 activity sites spread across the whole of Brussels, and in particular in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods of the Brussels region. These 125 approvals mean that these initiatives are accessible for a minimum of 1,737 hours a week, and provide support for at least 2,630 children and young people in Brussels every day.

Some of these operators are also recognised for specific work in terms of the specific features of their audience or the methodology of their initiative, and therefore receive an additional budget of €10,000 per recognised specificity. An additional budget of €1,060,000 has been granted to 48 of the 125 operators, to support 106 specific actions, ranging from support for people at home, children with learning disabilities and young recent immigrants, to psycho-social support for families, and the integration of institutional pedagogy into the schooling and citizenship support project.

Flemish Community Commission (COCON)

As previously mentioned, there are specific subsidies aimed at tackling child poverty in the areas of care and education, such as the subsidy for school fees. These resources enable schools to contribute to the school-related expenses of vulnerable pupils (e.g. (hot) meals, childcare, sanitary towels and excursions).

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

Some progress has been made in the context of the reforms resulting from the Teaching Excellence Pact, which meets several of the objectives of the European Child Guarantee:

- **Identify and eliminate financial and non-financial barriers preventing children in need from attending early childhood education and care facilities, going to school and participating in extracurricular activities (objective 1.1):** The decree of 14 March 2019 limited the fees that nursery school pupils can be charged, and granted additional resources to schools. This measure has applied to nursery classes since the start of the 2021-2022 school year, and was extended to 1st and 2nd years of primary school at the start of the 2023 school year.
- **Remotivate children who are close to dropping out of school or training, or who have already dropped out, in particular by providing personalised advice and strengthening cooperation with**

families (objective 1.3): A comprehensive plan to combat absenteeism and school dropouts is underway. The guidance paper has been adopted by the government; the drafting of the decree is being finalised; the adoption process is set to be launched in the first half of 2024.

- **Offer learning support to children with learning difficulties, to compensate for their linguistic, cognitive and academic shortcomings (objective 1.4):** Since 2012, the Reception, Integration and Schooling of Newly Arrived Pupils and Assimilated Pupils scheme (Le dispositif d'accueil et de scolarisation des primo-arrivants et assimilés – DASPA) has provided additional resources for schools catering to these pupils. In 2019, the "French as a learning language" (français langue d'apprentissage – FLA) programme was added. The DASPA and FLA schemes are being monitored.
- **Implement measures to promote inclusive education and avoid segregated classes in early childhood education and care facilities (objective 1.6):** The 2017 Decree guarantees the right to reasonable accommodations for students with specific needs in mainstream education. 48 territorial clusters have been created to pool resources and support children with specific needs. There are also 26 inclusive classes and establishments.
- **Set up a cooperative framework to promote inclusive education, provide after-school childcare facilities and opportunities for participation in sporting, recreational and cultural activities (objective 1.13):** Cultural and artistic education pathway (Parcours d'éducation culturelle et artistique – PECA) integrated into the core curriculum for students from 1st year of nursery to the end of secondary school. Creation of regional platforms to strengthen dialogue between schools and cultural and artistic operators.

3.3.A healthy meal every school day

According to Eurostat, the percentage of children AROPE under 16 who do not have access to meat, chicken or fish (or a vegetarian alternative) is 10.5%, compared with 1.1% for those who do not belong to this group. Looking at the percentage of children who do not have access to fruit and vegetables at least once a day, it can be noted that this percentage for children AROPE under 16 is 3.8%, while the percentage for those who are not in this group is 0.8%. The European average for children AROPE is 7.5%.

Wallonia

On 19 November 2020, the government approved a subsidy of €420,450 to the Sustainable Development Canteen Collective (Collectif Développement Cantines Durables), to implement a pilot project aiming to distribute balanced, sustainable and free snacks in schools with a differentiated educational structure. Despite the health situation, this project enabled 320,000 snack portions of soup to be distributed to 5,000 pupils over the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years. The same collective was selected by the Walloon government on 15 September 2022, as part of the call for projects for the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years. The annual budget of €1,000,000 dedicated to each of the two school years under measure 3.4 of the Walloon Poverty Reduction Plan should enable between 1,200,000 and 1,600,000 free snack portions of soup to be served in nurseries and primary schools with a differentiated educational structure.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

A draft decree was passed in the Parliament of the FWB on 2 October 2023 to provide a free, healthy meal service in nurseries and primary school establishments with differentiated structure that have an average socio-economic index between 1 and 5⁸.

3.4. Health care

Looking more closely at the EU monitoring framework, here we examine the percentage of children AROPE under 16 who are in "very good" health. This rate is 71.7% in Belgium, which is above the European average of 62.7%. As in the majority of EU Member States, the percentage of children AROPE under 16 whose needs for medical examination or treatment are not met is higher than that of children who are not AROPE. In Belgium, this figure is 5.4%, which is slightly below the European average of 5.7%. With regard to free/fully subsidised access to regular health check-ups for all children/children in age groups with low incomes, postnatal, early years and school years that include general health check-ups, hearing and eye examinations, but not dental check-ups. The infant mortality rate per 1,000 births is below the European average of 3.2, with an infant mortality rate of 2.9 per 1,000 births in Belgium.

Federal

The NIHDI provides various reductions in health care costs for children, and promotes access to care for the most vulnerable families.

Fedasil also provides a number of measures aimed at applicants for protection in its reception centres.

Details on these measures are provided in the appendix.

Flanders

In Flanders, there is already an extensive and structural supply of high-quality (preventive) family support in this area, regardless of the socio-economic status of the families in which children grow up. During their school years, children and parents can visit school guidance centres (CLB) free of charge, where the focus is on both the educational attainment and mental development of children and young people. In response to the growing psychological discontent among young people, this measure is being systematically reinforced in Flanders. In 2023, a framework agreement was drawn up regarding additional investment and the combination of federal and Flemish actions concerning frontline psychological care for children and young people (including the roll-out of psychological care at *OverKopphuizen*). In addition, there are plans to extend this by installing an *OverKopphuis* in every primary care area by 2024.

The digital world and social media entail many challenges and risks. The Minister for Youth has commissioned the launch of *SAFEHAVEN*, a platform developed in co-creation with young people, which focuses on consent and teaches young people to deal appropriately (as witnesses) with gender identity and respond to transgressive behaviour.

In the context of the first 1,000 days, pregnancy follow-up should include monitoring of health and well-being, with a particular focus on specific vulnerabilities. Born in Belgium Professionals is a digital tool for mapping psychosocial vulnerabilities in pregnant women and their families. This tool is a

⁸ The average socio-economic index for schools ranges from 1 to 20 (with 4 levels: 1-5; 6-10; 11-15; 16-20). Schools with an average socio-economic index between 1 and 5 therefore cater for a more socio-economically disadvantaged student audience, and receive additional resources under the decree of 30 April 2009 organising a differentiated structure.

federal initiative that has been deployed in Flanders since 2022. The *Overhoop* project focuses on providing support to frontline areas to raise awareness of, prevent and treat negative childhood experiences and the potential developmental trauma that can result.

In order to properly approach the impact on children and young people of COVID-19 and the measures taken, on the one hand, the impact of the measures is mapped and on the other hand, the link between coronavirus, well-being and the public space is studied scientifically.

To meet the increased demand for assistance following a crisis, additional resources have been allocated to school guidance centres. Investments have also been made in *CLBch@t*, with an additional budget allocated to the development of a digital platform. From the 2023-2024 school year, an additional structural operating budget of €7,562,000 is designated to focusing on the psychological and social functioning of pupils and school dropouts, and an additional structural operating budget of €1,000,000 is designated to the digitisation of school guidance centres.

For families facing complex problems, pilot projects have been set up in Flanders to work with local family support workers. These family support workers offer more comprehensive guidance and support to these very vulnerable families. Based on scientific research, a Flemish framework for this methodology is currently being developed.

Wallonia

The Integrated Health Associations (Associations de Santé Intégrée – ASI) have been strengthened by the integration of new care providers. For the first component, a budget of €1,600,000 has been planned to enable 53 integrated health associations (ASIs) to hire a social worker, up to a maximum of half-time.

The "young above all" (*jeune avant tout*) project is a cross-disciplinary experimental project tested on the basis of a multi-year agreement since August 2019, which provides multi-sectoral care for young people with complex profiles. This agreement has been extended for a second period of three years, until August 2024. Nine services throughout Wallonia are taking part in this scheme funded by the AVIQ.

In terms of accessibility to services for vulnerable groups, Wallonia has had a health promotion programme, including prevention, since 2022. 74 operators have been approved for five years, and are drawing up their coordinated action plans in line with one or more of the programme's themes.

Theme 1, for example, has the general aim of ensuring a healthy diet and physical exercise. Another example comes from medical centres, which develop activities for their patients to promote healthy, sustainable eating.

Brussels

French Community Commission (COCOF)

Maisons Médicales (medical centres) approved by the French Community Commission offer primary health care and community health activities to Brussels residents. Since 2022, four new medical centres have been approved, bringing the total to 54. The French Community Commission funds 1.5

full-time equivalents to cover reception and community health activities, as well as operating and training costs for the approved manager. In addition, 22 medical centres have been subsidised for ½ FTE health associations (AS) since 2022. In 2023, this subsidy was increased to €755,304.

In the field of mental health, the government is working with the platform for mental health dialogue (Plate-forme de concertation en santé mentale), Bru-Stars, the 107 networks and the Brussels francophone association for mental health (Ligue bruxelloise francophone de santé mentale). It ensures that these systems are coordinated with all outpatient services in Brussels. In consultation with the sector and COCOM, the government is therefore working to strengthen mobile crisis and long-term care teams for children, adolescents and adults, reinforce institutional provision for intensive care (dual diagnosis, judicial observation, detainees, etc.), both for adults and children, organise training and awareness-raising initiatives for general practitioners, reinforce psychological support for relatives, step up outpatient care initiatives, as close as possible to the patient's living environment, strengthen dialogues with all stakeholders concerning the development of the federal "Reform 107", link the 107 projects with community projects, work on social inequalities in health, paying particular attention to specific groups (drug addicts, those living in poverty, those with disabilities, the elderly), guarantee support for the Brussels support centre for sex offenders, and encourage multi-disciplinary and participatory consultation in order to meet all patients' needs.

In 2020, some ten COCOF-approved teams for children and adolescents in mental health services benefited from an extension to their structural framework, amounting to a total of over €700,000. In addition, there is also a series of projects aimed specifically at this target group, working in collaboration with schools and environments offering youth support. These projects are part of outreach, community and cross-sector dynamics, and represent a total of around ten initiatives, worth over €500,000. In 2024, 14 mental health services will be approved for a multi-disciplinary team working in the field of child and adolescent care. At the least, these teams provide paediatric psychiatric, psychological and social services.

Prevention policies, with priority given to screening and vaccination policies, are being coordinated through the creation of a single point in Brussels, aimed at greater integration of screening policies between COCOF and COCOM, and interoperability of the communities' vaccination databases.

Responsibility for people with disabilities is an inclusion policy, encompassing essential measures and projects for the people of Brussels. The French Community Commission is primarily concerned with promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities in society. This inclusion policy meets a cross-cutting objective shared by all Ministers and is reflected in the implementation of the "handistreaming" decree that entered into force on 15 June 2017. The aim is to adopt a new way of looking at people with disabilities, at all levels of authority and across the Brussels region, in order to integrate them more fully into the policies that have been pursued to date.

COCOF is also stepping up its support services this year, with an additional €847,054 allocated to them. This involves providing people with adapted, more flexible and personalised support, offering an alternative to life in an institution.

Action: Adoption of implementing decrees for the Inclusion decree on the reception and accommodation of people with disabilities.

Since the adoption of the national action plan, a number of decrees have been passed on the reform of the reception and accommodation sector, including a reform of approval standards to encourage approved centres to take in more people with high dependency needs (this affects accommodation centres for adults (CHAs), accommodation centres for children (CHEs), day centres for adults (CJAs) and day centres for unschooled children (CJNES)). Two implementing decrees concerning day activity centres and adapted collective housing were adopted on 8 February 2024. They will enter into force on 1 July 2024. However, some measures have already been financed by a discretionary subsidy decree since 1/09/2023.

The majority agreement of the Board of the French Community Commission still provides for the adoption of a decree transforming the day centres for schoolchildren (CJES) into inclusion services for school and out-of-school care (services d'inclusion d'accueil scolaire et extrascolaire – SIASE).

COCOF subsidy for an inclusive crèche

In 2022, the Phare service subsidised the non-profit organisation La Court'Echelle, located in Berchem-Sainte-Agathe, to create and manage an early childhood care centre in the Brussels region, with a particular focus on social integration and the inclusion of children with disabilities.

The childcare workers at the crèche organise activities to help children develop socially and learn physical, bodily and intellectual skills. In the same way, certain activities will enable different children to develop their motor skills and various forms of expression: musicality or oral expression for children with Down's syndrome, for example, while hearing-impaired children will develop other forms of creativity.

In terms of operating procedures, it is important the crèche remains committed to developing a support network of on-site staff (disability professionals, the ONE, etc.). The multi-disciplinary team at this care centre receives training on an ongoing basis from the ONE and other associations.

In February 2024, the crèche had a capacity of 21 places. 17 children were actually attending the centre. Of these 17 children, 3 had Down's syndrome.

Flemish Community Commission (COCON)

As part of its responsibilities, COCON ensures that vulnerable children have access to healthcare through various initiatives.

COCON's sustainable development policy enables organisations committed to the care and support of children and young people to benefit from structural funding. This support is backed up by temporary, targeted projects.

Children's homes (*Huizen van het kind*) and schools in particular play a central role. COCON's new subsidy regulations make it possible to step up medical supervision and vaccination of very young children (0-3 years) in consultation offices, thanks to structural funding of anchors and physical locations. Older children receive medical supervision and vaccinations through school guidance centres (CLB). Innovative offerings supported by COCON focus, for example, on the psychological well-being of pupils in the 1st and 2nd years of secondary school, thanks to collaboration between paediatric psychiatry and education.

Finally, *Logo Brussel* works with COCON on prevention and health promotion among Brussels residents. There is a focus on healthy eating, in addition to topics such as mental health, exercise and oral health. This also contributes to prevention and to the goal of giving all children access to a healthy diet.

German-speaking Community

The measures stated in the national action plan for this pillar are underway and aim to provide effective, free access to quality care.

3.5. Healthy eating

As mentioned above, it is important to refer to Eurostat figures which indicate that there are indeed differences in the percentage of children AROPE under 16 compared to children who are not AROPE, who have access to meat, chicken, fish (or a vegetarian variant) and fresh fruit and vegetables.

Flanders

In addition to school-based initiatives (see above), the availability of healthy food for children and young people is addressed in the Flemish food strategy. For example, sustainable development objective 1 (Healthy and sustainable diets as a shared mission), but especially sustainable development objective 3 (Combating food inequality) address this issue. When the food strategy was launched, a number of leverage actions were announced. *Brood(doos)nodig*, an initiative of the non-profit organisation *Enchanté*, has received an additional subsidy to indirectly improve children and young people's access to sufficient, healthy food.

Wallonia

Food aid has been stepped up, in the form of calls for projects aimed at social supermarkets and social restaurants, among others, amounting to a total of €17,245,564. These calls for projects benefit children in particular.

Wallonia also approves and subsidises social supermarkets and social restaurant projects, and ensures that the various services, institutions and operators, both approved and subsidised, carry out their public service missions on behalf of beneficiaries in compliance with legal provisions. To date, 66 operators from the private and public sectors have been approved and receive an annual flat-rate regulated subsidy.

Finally, some local authorities have also been able to benefit from additional subsidies to boost support for food aid through the implementation of their social cohesion plans.

Brussels

Flemish Community Commission (COCON)

As mentioned above, the emphasis is on healthy eating. This contributes to prevention and to the goal of giving all children access to a healthy diet.

Wallonia-Brussels Federation

The ONE's dietician service helps to develop a balanced diet for children in basic education. The revision of the reference specifications for improving school meals for children aged three to eighteen has been complete.

German-speaking Community

The measures mentioned in the national action plan continue to ensure effective access to sufficient, healthy food, particularly through the distribution of fruit, vegetables and milk at school, organised by the community.

3.6. Adequate housing

As in other EU Member States, the percentage of children AROPE under 18 living in households where housing costs are excessive, is much higher than for children who are not AROPE. In Belgium, this percentage is 18.6%, compared with 1.1% for the not-AROE group. At 18.3%, the percentage of children AROPE living in households unable to heat their homes adequately is higher than for those who are not AROPE (3.2%), but lower than the EU average (24.4%). According to Eurostat figures for 2022, the proportion of children AROPE living in overcrowded households is 39.3%. This proportion is higher than that of children who are not AROPE, which stands at 6.3%.

Federal

The Housing First and Winter Shelter initiatives detailed in the appendix have an impact on children from vulnerable families, through their actions aimed at the general public.

Flanders

An extrapolation of local homelessness surveys from 2023 shows that one third of the estimated 20,000 homeless people in the Flemish Region are minors. In addition to implementing the actions mentioned in the national action plan to prevent and combat homelessness 2020-2024, Flanders is currently developing a "Housing First for Youth" programme aimed at young people at risk of long-term homelessness.

To help families cope with high energy costs, the eligibility conditions for several existing support measures have been amended, changing from status to income, and taking the number of dependent children into account.

In recent years, the social housing sector in Flanders has been reorganised with a view to improving efficiency and service. As part of this reorganisation, a new, unified model for allocating social housing has been approved. To ease the pressure on the housing market as a whole, Flanders wants to increase the supply of social housing and affordable private rental housing. This allocation model makes it possible to speed up allocations and target specific groups such as the elderly, young people, people with disabilities and the homeless. Private developers and housing companies will receive financial incentives, in the form of a subsidy, to build housing projects with social and conventional rental housing. To encourage municipalities to build emergency housing on their territory, an annual call for projects will be launched for local authorities, with the Flemish government covering 50% of the costs.

Wallonia

There is an updated *Permanent Housing Plan (Plan Habitat Permanent)* 2022-2025 for campsite and caravan park residents (rehousing assistance with priority given to families, search for sustainable solutions) in progress in 25 Walloon municipalities.

In addition, from 2023, Wallonia has introduced an allowance of €125 per month for households waiting for public utility housing. This amount is increased by €20 for each dependent child, although this assistance may not exceed €185/month. Nearly 3,000 cases have already been processed, half of them involving families with children.

Wallonia has set up a Walloon Observatory on Homelessness (Observatoire Wallon du Sans-Abrisme – OWSA), which has been fully operational since the start of 2023. A €34,150,000 call for projects entitled "Zero Homelessness Territories Pilot Experiments" will allow various operators to develop housing for these target groups. When these projects are implemented, they will include support for particularly vulnerable groups (women, families, young people, etc.).

The Housing first scheme has also been stepped up and rolled out in rural and semi-rural areas. In 2023, €2,557,895.85 was allocated through this scheme, and an additional €2,000,000 of support via a call for projects supported the acquisition of real estate.

Also as part of the Housing First scheme, to allow for the acquisition of housing, €500,000 has been set aside to finance the hiring of a housing officer within nine social action centres and four housing promotion associations.

Brussels

Common Community Commission (COCOM)

In addition to its role as an observatory on homelessness, the non-profit organisation Bruss'help works with players in the field to harmonise practices for the acquisition and allocation of stable housing. Bruss'help coordinates the implementation, monitoring and assessment of housing and temporary housing schemes, including collective accommodation, social hotel schemes, Housing First schemes and temporary occupancy. In this context, Bruss'help monitors sustainable rehousing and reintegration projects and acts as a link between the public authorities, which support and finance rehousing projects, and partners in the field, who set up and implement the rehousing projects initiated by politicians and the sector.

In addition, COCOM has supported the increase in the number of Housing First operators, which now stands at seven (there were just four until 2022), as well as funding an increase in their capacity in terms of the number of units, which will reach 286 in 2024, with a total budget of €3,831,795.37 for the year. These operators provide housing for homeless people, especially families with children.

At the same time, COCOM has supported the increase in the number of home guidance services, from 10 to 11, and the improvement in their support capacity (average of 920 cases in 2024).

The support provided by these home-based guidance services enables homeless people, whether on their own, in a couple or with one or more children, to benefit from psycho-social monitoring tailored to each family situation. The aim of this activity is to keep these adults and children in their homes and prevent them from becoming homeless, by actively integrating them into society. In addition, as part of the Housing Emergency Plan (PUL) 2020-2024, one of the projects aimed to "Guarantee the right to housing" by creating shelters for specific groups, including a shelter for 14 young LGBTQIA+ people

who are on the streets and/or have broken away from their family environment, and a 19-place shelter for single women or women with children who are victims of domestic or intra-family violence.

Several rehousing projects have been developed in the Brussels region, in partnership with social estate agencies (AIS), local housing associations (SISP) or via private landlords. Some of these projects are aimed at young people, notably the Kot Autonome Provisoire project, which aims to provide accommodation for homeless young people aged between 16 and 25, and to create the conditions necessary for educational and psychosocial support on the road to maximum autonomy.

The people staying in this housing benefit from psychosocial support provided by Housing First operators and home guidance centres, in particular, to encourage their emancipation and autonomy so that they can be reintegrated into the private or public rental market in the long term.

Brussels is a region heavily impacted by a vulnerable population who are illegal residents, particularly migrant women who are alone and/or have children. Financial support is given to self-managed and negotiated collective accommodation projects that enable this specific group of people to be rehoused. An agreement in principle provides a framework for these projects, setting out the guidelines under which they can be supported and facilitated (target group, temporary occupancy agreements, collaboration with the PCSWs, support by a field operator, etc.). More than 1,500 people living with a precarious residence status (men, women and two-parent or single-parent families) have been rehoused since 2021.

Finally, in 2023, the government of the Brussels-Capital Region adopted on first reading a draft decree amending the framework governing AISs, which now provides for the granting of an additional subsidy according to the tenant's profile: the bonus is doubled for homeless people, people suffering from mental health disorders and/or addictions, unaccompanied minors and emancipated minors.

German-speaking Community

The measures stated in the national action plan for this pillar are underway and aim to provide effective access to adequate housing.

Additional measures:

- **The housing decree** (amending the Walloon Code on Sustainable Housing) is currently being processed. The spirit of the decree is to improve the overall socio-integrative situation of individuals and families (individuals must attend language courses, register with the Employment Office, etc.).
- **Social support for social housing** has been established and is one of the most significant changes.

4. Indicators, objectives and monitoring

As this interim report is to be submitted in the last year of the Belgian legislature, no further objectives will be set for implementation of the recommendation.

As mentioned above, budgets have been released at various levels to achieve the goal of lifting 93,000 children out of situations where they are at risk of poverty by 2030.

During the seminars, it was repeatedly suggested that monitoring and assessment using indicators is proving to be a challenge and a gap that we hope to address further.

In addition to the "EU reference framework on childcare and child welfare", the first phase at federal level consists of compiling the administrative data available at the various levels. This call was launched with the idea that it is often suggested at European level that a lot of administrative data is less well known at Member State level. In this context, specific contributions have been requested from representatives of the federated entities within the framework of the European Child Guarantee, as well as from federal civil servants in the various departments.

To date, the coordinator of the Child Guarantee has obtained an overview of the administrative data available for the various categories of target groups (children with disabilities, homeless children, children with mental health problems, etc.) from these different federated entities:

- Flanders
- Wallonia
- French Community (Wallonia-Brussels Federation)
- German-speaking Community

At federal level, the coordinator of the Child Guarantee has already received responses from:

- Fedasil: administrative data on children with disabilities, children from immigrant families, children with mental health problems, etc.
- NIHDI: administrative data on children with disabilities, children from immigrant families, children with mental health problems, etc.
- Crossroads Bank for Social Security: administrative data on children with disabilities, among other things.
- Federal Pensions Service: has administrative data on information such as the civil status of people with dependent children.

This data is a snapshot, meaning that the people in question filled in the data at a precise moment in time. It can, however, help us to obtain a baseline measurement, figures that we can compare with those that will be collected and available in the future. This exercise gives us an overview of the availability of data, the period concerned and the frequency of data collection.

It's true that a number of new action points were proposed during the seminars but have not been included in the action plan. Any amendment to the action plan would have to be decided on by the various competent authorities.

At Brussels level, work is underway to facilitate the collection and sharing of data for each target group, particularly in the context of reporting to the Geneva Committee, which is responsible for ensuring compliance with the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The cabinets concerned with the various issues relating to children's rights have entered into dialogue in order to:

- Create a network of contact points in Brussels administrations and cabinets, and
- Appoint a Children's Rights coordinator in Brussels responsible for setting up and activating the network.

5. **Funding**

Federal

Two calls for projects have been launched within the framework of the Child Guarantee, with a view to combating child poverty: the first (combating poverty within the framework of the Child Guarantee) for a total budget of €2,174,933.76 for two years, and the second (in collaboration with the National Lottery) for a budget of €3,000,000.

Other one-off subsidies have been awarded: the first in connection with the COVID-19 crisis, amounting to a total of €125,000,000, and another, of €3,000,000 over three years, in connection with mental health.

In addition, a recurring subsidy for social participation and activation is granted by the federal government, to cover costs aimed at increasing children's social participation (psychological support, educational support, paramedical support, participation in social programmes, etc.). It amounted to €18,551,129 in 2021. However, this funding is not exclusively dedicated to child poverty.

Regarding European Union funds, part of this concerns the budgets for food aid under the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived. In addition to the nappies already listed in the 2021 National Action Plan, these have enabled the funding of shampoo, toothpaste and toothbrushes specifically for children. Total budgets have risen from €23,000,000 in 2021 to €33,414,000 in 2024. However, this funding is not exclusively dedicated to child poverty.

Finally, larger-scale housing initiatives have been set up, which indirectly affect children. €9,000,000 has been granted to the Housing First project and €4,050,000 to the Winter Shelter programme (for a three-year period). However, this funding is not exclusively dedicated to child poverty.

More information is available in the appendix⁹.

Flanders

Many regular policies targeting children in need are integrated into organisations that also focus on children who are not in a vulnerable situation, or the families to which these children belong. It is therefore not possible to determine exactly how much money is allocated to assistance and services for children in vulnerable situations.

The recent additional investment of €270 million for childcare initiatives has been mentioned above. As part of the roll-out of OverKopuizen, €4.8 million from Vlaamse Relance (€1.6 million over three years) will be invested, and a recurring amount of €4.5 million is planned from 1 January 2024.

In addition, the Flemish government has released a further €8 million to combat child poverty, enabling investment in both preventive assistance for families and local alliance networks.

Several initiatives have been and are being supported by education to strengthen the psychological well-being of children and young people. In addition to a structural reinforcement of around €8.5 million per year, further project-based resources have also been rolled out as part of the recovery plan. The main ones are financial investment in the psycho-medical-social sector, support for the Appwel app (PXL Hogeschool), development of CLBch@t, etc.

⁹ Appendix: pages 3 to 6

Investments in emergency housing through calls for projects have also been mentioned above.

Wallonia

A total of €543.8 million has been allocated to the implementation of the Walloon Poverty Reduction Plan. Concerning the action plan on children's rights, the cost of each measure is covered by each of the functional Ministers.

German-speaking Community

The government of the German-speaking Community supports projects that combat poverty and social exclusion and/or promote the integration of all population groups. Associations and public institutions can benefit from annual funding for special, local, participatory, cross-organisational and innovative projects.

6. Lessons and future developments

A number of different conclusions emerged from the seminars, highlighting possible work areas, challenges and solutions. These conclusions can be read as lessons learned, areas of future work, etc. By reviewing these findings together at the closing event on 18 December, it was easier to identify the challenges ahead. The conclusions are attached in the appendix.

The recommendations arising from the closing event on 18 December are an initial step in identifying clear points of work that the coordinator of the Guarantee can include in a memorandum to future governments and ministers in charge. However, it is important to note that the organisation of several seminars has enabled us to bring together a large working group, which will be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the European Child Guarantee. One of the main lessons learned is the importance of coordination and communication to successfully implement the Child Guarantee in Belgium.

After an initial inventory of administrative data within the various administrations, the federal level wishes to use this as a first step to more easily monitor the roll-out of the European Child Guarantee, in addition to the existing EU reference framework.

At the political level, it may be decided that more quantifiable targets will be set, allowing for more in-depth monitoring during the next legislature, as this is an important lesson that was often highlighted during seminars.

The Belgian presidency in 2024 will provide a crucial platform for European Child Guarantee stakeholders to highlight the importance of the Guarantee, discuss implementation challenges together and share knowledge.

At the level of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, making advances in improving access to early childhood care will require further progress in collaboration with the regional authorities responsible for infrastructure, and greater support for project owners. The progress made in terms of staff status and training must also be continued.

In education, one of the challenges identified (with regard to objective 1.1 of the NAP) is to continue to progressively strengthen access to free education in the other years of the core curriculum, and to develop the reflection process for the post-core curriculum years; as well as to deepen the analysis of the costs of supplies and activities, with a view to analysing the impact on the reduction of educational inequalities (accessibility, etc.).

The evaluation and development of the WBF's next cross-cutting plans (presented in the context section) will also provide an opportunity to redefine certain priorities and actions, in line with the European Child Guarantee.

At the level of the Walloon Region, both the Walloon Poverty Reduction Plan and the Action Plan on the Rights of the Child will be evaluated, and the recommendations made will feed into both plans under the next legislature, 2024-2029. Steps will be taken to ensure that the actions in these plans meet the priorities defined by the Child Guarantee.

More specifically in Flanders, an important lesson learned is the importance of aligning different policies at different levels, but also of effectively organising the participation of vulnerable groups. The participation paths of the vulnerable target groups themselves, in this case children in vulnerable

situations, are undoubtedly essential in this context, but they need sufficient time to run smoothly and in a more coordinated way. Despite these difficulties, the risk of (child) poverty in Flanders has fallen in recent years. This proves that the policies of different governments can make a difference for people in poverty. However, there are indications that demand for emergency assistance has increased. Furthermore, regarding mental well-being, for example, there has been an increase in the number of vulnerable children and young people seeking help. These are further challenges that we have to meet, and additional initiatives have been launched to tackle them. Despite this, the challenges remain considerable.

For the German-speaking Community, as already mentioned, the national action plan contains a further inventory of existing measures, as well as measures currently being planned. The thematic seminars organised around the four pillars of the national action plan provided an opportunity to exchange views and draw conclusions that will be used in the future to implement the national action plan.

7. Conclusions

In order to meet its commitment to reduce the number of children at risk of poverty by 93,000 under the European Child Guarantee, Belgium wishes to emphasise the importance of a multi-dimensional, integral and coordinated approach to effectively combat child poverty.

However, Belgium's institutional complexity poses a particular challenge in this respect. The issues covered by the European Child Guarantee fall under the various competences of several different levels of authority: the federal level, the regional level and the community level.

While each level of authority has, within the scope of its competences, continued most of the actions already underway and launched new ones, Belgium's commitment requires an ambitious undertaking on the part of all political decision-makers in the context of close dialogue with all stakeholders.

In its role as coordinator of the European Child Guarantee, the federal level is initially focused on the importance of establishing a forum for exchange between the different levels of authority on the issue of combating child poverty within the framework of the European Child Guarantee. Preparations for the Belgian presidency of the Council of the European Union, in which this issue is mentioned as one of the Minister's four priorities, have also given additional impetus to the work. Thematic seminars were organised, bringing together political representatives, experts, representatives of civil organisations and academics. These meetings assembled key players, initiated coordinated monitoring of the Plan's implementation and began work to agree on common guidelines for the fight against child poverty.

However, we must remain vigilant to ensure that these efforts continue at the end of the presidency.

In the future, particular attention will be paid to gathering administrative data which, to date, is insufficient and too dispersed between the various levels of authority. The aim will be to bring together all existing information to provide a global view of all actions and their impact on the territory as a whole. In this respect, the contact persons from each federated entity have been asked to facilitate the collection of this data and an exercise to map the information has already been launched. This mapping will enable better monitoring of the target groups and the impact of the various actions implemented.

In addition, Belgium wishes to capitalise on the momentum generated by the seminars organised to date, and maintain a regular forum for exchange between the many experts, political representatives, representatives of civil organisations and academics who have taken part in these meetings, in order to enable close dialogue with a view to formulating common, achievable recommendations and enabling the implementation of further initiatives within each level of authority. It was possible to start this work on recommendations at the closing seminar at the end of 2023, and a number of challenges and possible solutions have already been highlighted, which could form a starting point for the continuation of these working groups, with the aim of formulating more comprehensive and concrete recommendations.