

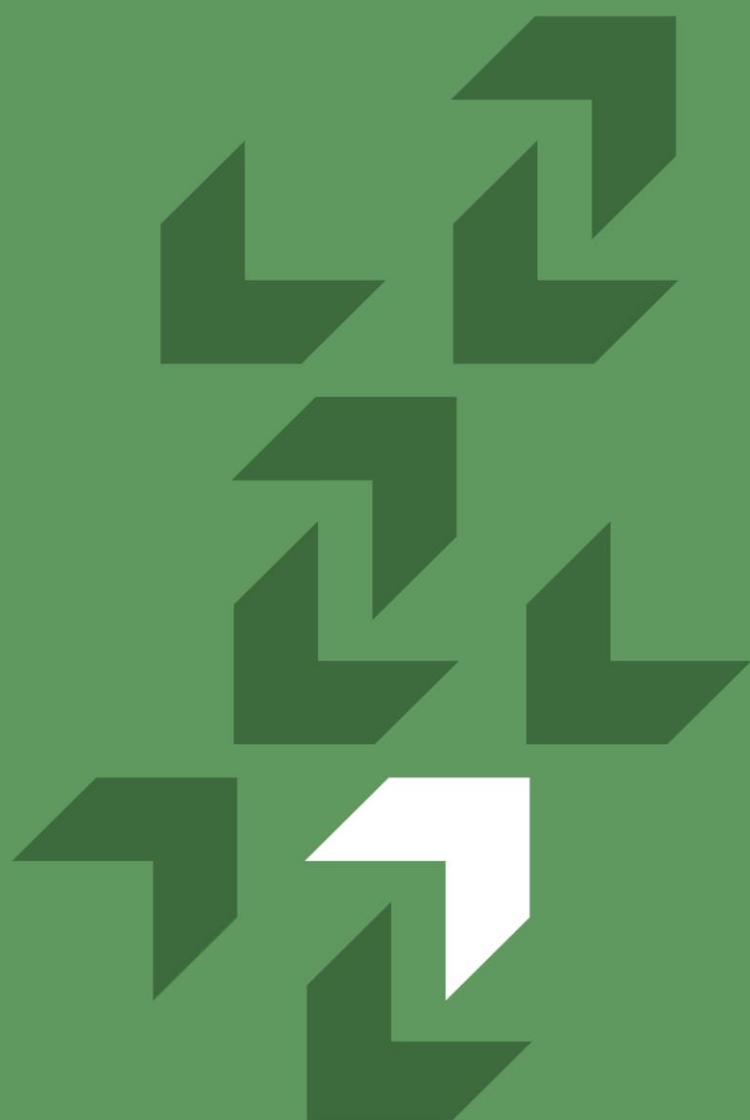


Què funciona
contra la pobresa?
Àmbit Pobresa infantil

Presentation

What works to combat child poverty?

A project to improve decision-making in policies on children and social exclusion



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Institut Català d'Avaluació
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What works to combat child poverty?

A project to improve decision-making in policies on children and social exclusion

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Projecte de recopilació, anàlisi i transferència d'evidència per a millorar
les polítiques públiques destinades a mitigar la pobresa infantil

Un projecte de:



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“A child may be born in poverty, but poverty is never born in a child”

Dr Wess Strafford

Despite the broad consensus of all political and social agents on the importance of ensuring equal opportunities for all children and teenagers,¹ child poverty continues to be one of the most serious blights on our society.

Progress has been made in terms of communicating the importance of focusing on children and teenagers in tackling poverty and thus the concept of “child poverty” has been established. But it has not been an easy path – and it is still not easy – primarily due to the presence of a certain “denialism” of this reality that has assumed various forms.²

The first is directly related to how we observe the phenomenon of poverty. There is sometimes a prevailing sentiment in the case of rich or developed countries that does not correspond to reality. Consequently, the existence of children in poverty in our nation is often challenged because more extreme displays of child poverty occurring in other parts of the world – malnutrition, lack of access to basic supplies such as water and electricity, basic health and education services – are often unusual here. But poverty has to be viewed in the “here and now”, so it is necessary to relate it to the economic and social context in which it occurs in order to define and measure it. Poverty in Catalonia, as in developed countries, has more to do with the idea of social exclusion and lack of opportunities than with extreme material deprivation. This does not mean that there are no cases of extreme poverty in rich countries. Consequently, being a child or teenager living in poverty in Catalonia in general:

“(…) does not necessarily mean going hungry, but it does mean a much greater likelihood of being malnourished; it does not mean not having access to education, but it does mean having difficulties in meeting the resulting costs, with more likelihood of leaving school and having much more difficulty in accessing secondary or higher education. Being poor does not mean not having a roof over one’s head, but it does mean living in overcrowded housing with no adequate spaces for study or privacy, where one suffers from cold or dampness that can deteriorate one’s health. (...) it does not mean the inability of visiting a doctor, but it does mean having problems paying for specific treatments and accessing benefits not covered by the public health system”.³

¹ According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), a child is anyone under the age of 18.

² A good analysis can be found in Marí-Klose, P. (2019). *La infancia que queremos. Una agenda para erradicar la pobreza infantil*. Catarata. Madrid.

³ Arias, M., Bello A., Von Bredow, M. and González-Bueno, G. (2010). UNICEF Spain.

Poverty can also have a negative effect on family relationships and condition the personal and professional expectations of children and teenagers suffering from it. Child poverty also obviously leads to a greater lack of protection, lower self-esteem and poorer social relations. One likewise needs to bear in mind that it is not only an individual but also a collective experience, as there is a social tendency for people in this situation to be concentrated in specific environments, and this simultaneously further affects the individual.

Secondly, the concept of child poverty has also been discussed on the premise that children do not live alone and their poverty is a consequence of that of their families. Although it is true that poor children live in poor families and that this situation also stems from broader factors and causes (such as the state of the labour market, family support policies, and so on), this does not mean that specific policies and approaches are not needed to tackle child poverty that focus on children and teenagers, their rights and special needs at various stages of their development. Furthermore, reducing child poverty is vital for reducing poverty in society as a whole.

Children and teenagers must therefore be a priority when analysing and tackling poverty. The arguments are diverse, but we can basically focus on the following:

- Children, those most affected by poverty: poverty in developed countries has for years not had the face of a child. Among other things, this means that children and teenagers are the age group with the worst data in terms of poverty or social exclusion.
- A critical moment in life: the fact of children living in poverty affects many areas of their lives (physical and mental health, cognitive development, educational outcomes, social inclusion and participation, and so on), which is why we refer to poverty as a multifaceted phenomenon. Children are highly vulnerable to everything that happens around them because of their stage of development and degree of dependence on other people, and the experience of poverty has very different effects from those of the adult population.
- Effects beyond childhood: experiencing poverty as a child often has consequences that persist throughout a person's life. Poverty can even be passed down from generation to generation, so breaking this intergenerational cycle of poverty requires us to focus on children in poverty as a priority.

Defining and measuring child poverty is a complex task, as is the general concept of poverty. It has historically been related to a lack of monetary resources to purchase goods and thereby achieve a level of well-being. This criterion defines a threshold below which a person is considered to be in poverty. This is precisely what is measured by the at-risk-of-poverty rate, indicating the percentage of people living in households with an income below 60% of the median household income.⁴

This view has nonetheless been superseded in recent years and it has been acknowledged that **child poverty is multifaceted**: even though we are referring to material deprivation, access to basic services and factors linked to exclusion and discrimination are also identified as crucial. This also underlines the need for a human rights-based approach to defining, measuring and addressing poverty.

By way of illustration, UNICEF defined child poverty as a deprivation of the material, spiritual and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society.⁵

Analysing child poverty has therefore also shifted from a strictly financial perspective to one that is more closely related to social exclusion. So even though poverty refers to the resources available to a person in order to participate in consumption and ensure adequate living conditions, situations of exclusion are linked to those elements that determine a

⁴ The child poverty rate is specifically defined as the percentage of children in households with an equivalised disposable income of less than 60% of the median income corresponding to household type. This threshold in Catalonia stands at €23,723.60 for a family of two adults and two children according to the latest data from the Living Conditions Survey (ECV 2021).

⁵ UNICEF (2004). *The State of the World's Children 2005. Childhood Under Threat*. New York. Along the same lines, the 61st General Assembly of the United Nations, held in 2007, defined child poverty as follows: “children living in poverty are deprived of nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, access to basic health-care services, shelter, education, participation and protection, and that while a severe lack of goods and services hurts every human being, it is most threatening and harmful to children, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, to reach their full potential and to participate as full members of society”. More recently, the Childhood Observatory of Catalonia defined child poverty as “a multifactorial situation that goes beyond circumstantial or contextual financial hardship that places children at a disadvantage in terms of enjoying a minimum quality of life. A situation in which children are deprived of the resources and support needed to survive, develop and prosper, thereby preventing them from enjoying their rights, reaching their full potential or participating in society as individuals and full citizens on equal terms, and living what is considered to be an adequate life in the society in question”.

person's inclusion in society and do not depend solely on the lack of these resources.⁶

In this regard, the European At Risk of Poverty and Social Exclusion (AROPE) indicator acts to analyse poverty beyond strictly monetary aspects. The AROPE rate is an indicator that complements the measurement of poverty based on monetary terms with aspects of exclusion. It thus combines income factors (relative poverty) with severe material deprivation and low work intensity.⁷

Any action to address child and teenage poverty must therefore take into account the specificity and multifaceted nature of the phenomenon.

1. Why tackle child poverty here and now?

Child poverty: violating the Convention on the Rights of the Child

The poverty and inequality experienced by many children and teenagers in Catalonia directly affects their minds and bodies. It does so on many areas of their lives – present and future – and it is often passed down from generation to generation. This means that it needs to be addressed as a matter of priority.

There is an ethical argument to consider: it is unacceptable that there are still such high numbers of children at risk of poverty and exclusion in rich, developed countries with ample resources. But not only this. Tackling child poverty does not depend on the goodwill of administrations and institutions, for it is also a legal obligation stemming from the adoption and ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).⁸ The CRC is the most ratified international treaty in history and it includes the economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights of children and teenagers, which it recognises as subjects and citizens with full rights.

From the moment the Spanish State ratified the CRC, it has become a binding norm of our legal system and all administrations must ensure its fulfilment,

⁶ Ikuspegiak Childhood Observatory, Basque Country (2013). *Pobreza infantil en Euskadi*. San Sebastián: SIIS Documentation and Studies Centre.

⁷ The AROPE rate is the percentage of a given population in at least one of these situations: at risk of poverty or severe material deprivation or, in the case of children, living in a low work-intensity household.

⁸ Approved by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989 and ratified by Spain on 30 November 1990, entering into force on 5 January 1991 (BOE no. 313, 31 December 1990).

obliging them to adopt all the necessary measures to implement its rights (art. 4 of the CRC).

Poverty affects a wide range of children's rights, conditioning them and often becoming an obstacle to their fulfilment, which is why we speak of poverty as a violation of the rights of children and teenagers. Reducing child poverty is a priority in order to ensure children and teenagers an adequate standard of living for their physical, mental, spiritual and social development (art. 27 of the CRC). But this is not the only CRC right that is threatened by living in poverty. Thus, without being exhaustive, we can include in this list the right to non-discrimination (art. 2), the right to life, survival and development (art. 6), the right to participation (art. 6), access to information (art. 17), the right to the highest standard of health (art. 24), the right to education (art. 28), the right to rest, recreation, play and to take part in cultural and artistic life (art. 31), and so on. In short, the fight to combat child poverty is vital in order to ensure all children a proper start in life and to ensure their development.

Furthermore, the CRC not only obliges priority action to combat child poverty, but also provides the general framework from which to address this. This framework is none other than that of rights. The perspective of rights must not only be part of the "what" (the fight to combat poverty), but also of the "how": not everything is valid in the name of fighting child poverty, but all the rights inherent to children, individually and collectively considered, must be taken into account at all times.

Tackling child poverty: moving towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

As well as a legal obligation, tackling child poverty is essential for moving towards a more equitable, sustainable society and human development. Reducing poverty in society as a whole commences with children.

Given that poverty places children and teenagers at a disadvantage in their current situation and simultaneously very often becomes a trap that imprisons them for life, not investing in and failing to adequately address child poverty and inequality, apart from being a violation of rights, seriously affects society as a whole and entails a cost that we cannot afford. Poverty and inequality imply a heavy toll on economic growth and limit the opportunities for that growth to translate into poverty reduction. Moreover, they also become an obvious factor of political disaffection and social instability. There is therefore no more socially and economically profitable decision than investing in children and teenagers.

For all these reasons, the fight to combat child poverty plays a key role in fulfilling the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the current global development framework that calls all countries to act.⁹

SDG 1¹⁰ of the 2030 Agenda specifically refers to eradicating poverty worldwide in all its forms and its aims include the need to eradicate child poverty and obtain tangible results, thereby highlighting existing international consensus in this regard.

⁹ Approved by the United Nations in 2015, these 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets stem from the efforts and commitment of the international community to define a socially, economically and environmentally equitable and sustainable global agenda to help make human rights a reality for all. The 2030 Agenda implies a paradigm shift because its universality demands the commitment of all states, so that all countries, regardless of their level of development, must assimilate and implement it at all administrative and territorial levels.

For an analysis of the challenges related to the 2030 Agenda for children in Catalonia:

- UNICEF Comitè Catalunya (2018). *No val a badar. L'Agenda 2030 en clau d'infància a Catalunya*
<https://www.unicef.es/cat/noticia/agenda-2030-catalunya>
- UNICEF Comitè Catalunya (2020). *L'Agenda 2030 en clau d'infància a Catalunya. 10 anys per a l'acció*
<https://www.unicef.es/cat/publicacion/la-agenda-2030-en-clave-de-infancia-en-cataluna-10-anos-para-la-accion>

¹⁰ The 2030 Agenda also includes SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities).

2. What is the current state of child poverty in Catalonia?¹¹

Although the financial crisis of 2008 and the political decisions that cut social spending had a major effect on children, child poverty in Catalonia is structural in nature and extremely prevalent even in times of economic prosperity. Child poverty places Catalonia in the lower rungs of the EU,¹² with much worse data than most of the 27 EU countries. What then is the situation in Catalonia?¹³

Children are hardest hit by poverty

According to the Living Conditions Survey 2020, which is the latest available, although it does not yet reflect monetary poverty stemming from the COVID-19 crisis, **33.4% of children and teenagers in Catalonia (462,000) are at risk of poverty**. This has been an increase of 8.4 percentage points since 2016, a figure that places us 6 percentage points above all of Spain and far behind the EU as a whole (Figure 1).

¹¹ Bearing in mind the aim of this document, this section does not intend to be an exhaustive analysis of the state of child poverty in Catalonia, but rather to indicate certain data. The following documents can be consulted (although they are not exhaustive) for an analysis of poverty in Catalonia:

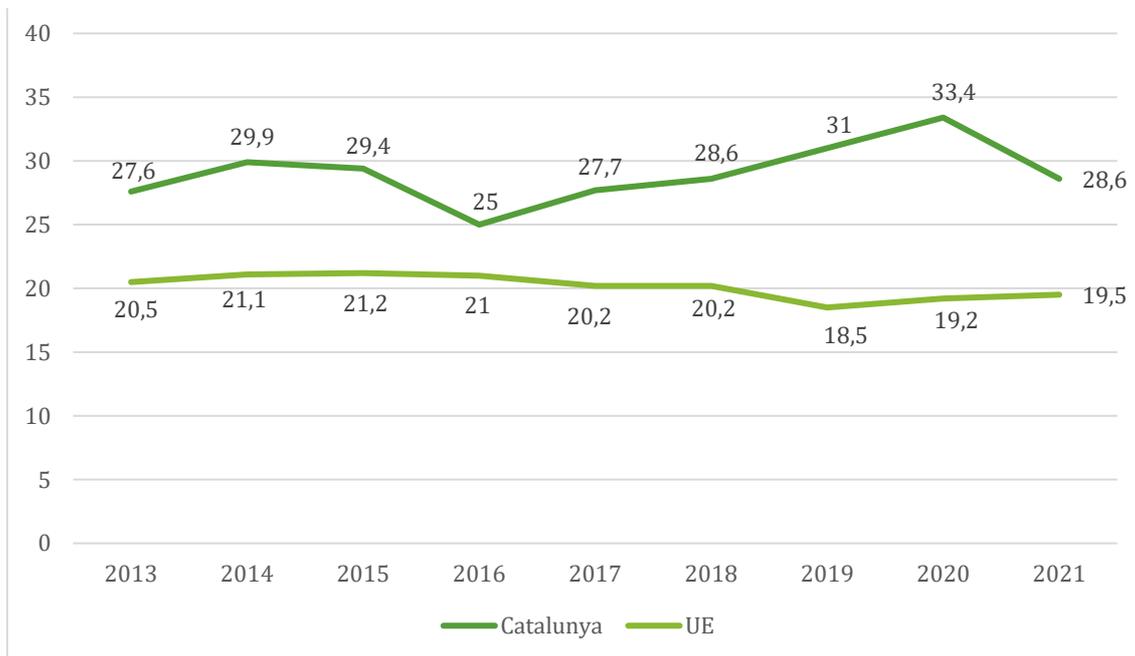
- Síndic de Greuges (2012). *Informe sobre la pobresa infantil a Catalunya*. Barcelona
- FOESSA (2022). *Informe sobre exclusión y desarrollo social en Cataluña*. Madrid
- Ayllón, S. and Ramos, X. (2022). *Informe sobre el bienestar i el progrés social a Catalunya*. Monograph 28. Government of Catalonia. Department of Economy and Finance. Barcelona

¹² If we look at the data according to country published by Eurostat, the Catalan AROPE rate is only surpassed in the EU by Romania (36.3%). The countries that have the worst data after Romania are Bulgaria (33.3%), Spain (31.1%) and Greece. The AROPE rate for the child population stands at 23.9% when looking at Eurozone countries as a whole, a far cry from the 35.9% in Catalonia.

¹³ See the following documents:

- UNICEF Comitè Catalunya (2018). *No val a badar. L'Agenda 2030 en clau d'infància a Catalunya*. Barcelona.
- Mayordomo, E. "Agendar l'equitat". *L'Agenda 2030 en clau d'infància a Catalunya. 10 anys per a l'acció* (2020). UNICEF Comitè Catalunya. Barcelona.
- UNICEF Comitè Catalunya (2021). *L'Agenda 2030 en clau d'infància a Catalunya. Actualització de l'estat dels indicadors*.

Figure 1: Evolution of the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children. Catalonia and EU.

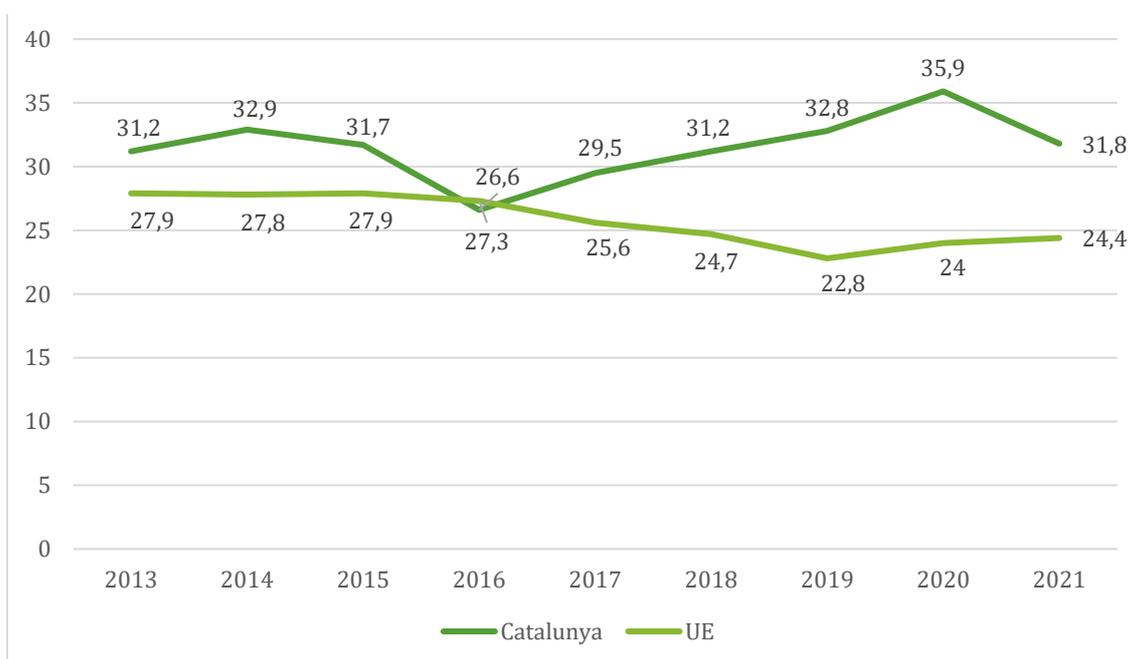


Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from IDESCAT and EUROSTAT

When comparing this figure with that of other age groups, it can be seen that child poverty is almost 12 percentage points higher than that of the Catalan population as a whole (21.7%), and more than 15 percentage points higher in the case of those aged over 65 (18.1%).

The percentage reaches almost 36% of children and teenagers when looking at the AROPE rate, which is 9.3 percentage points higher than in 2016 (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Evolution of the At Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion (AROPE) rate for children (<18 years). Catalonia and EU, 2013-2020.



Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from IDESCAT and EUROSTAT

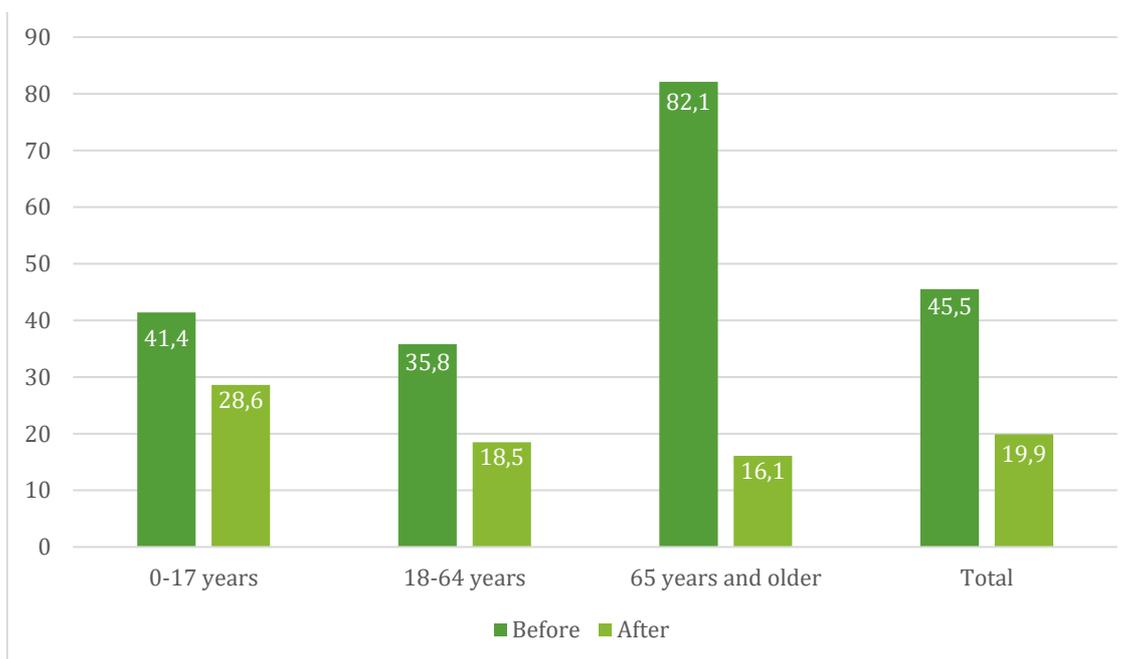
A total of 28.9% of households with dependent children are at risk of poverty, which is more than double that of households without children (14.2%), while 43.2% are at risk of poverty in the case of single-parent (or lone-parent) households.

And what of public policies?

Apart from the fact that investment in social protection in Catalonia is 0.8% of GDP,¹⁴ one should bear in mind that social transfers manage to reduce poverty among children and teenagers very slightly (just over 6 points), while this figure reaches 21 points and 66 points for over-65s (graph 3) for the population as a whole. This demonstrates a specific weakness of the welfare state and the fact that today's social transfer policies have a limited impact on reducing poverty among the age group of children and teenagers.

¹⁴ The investment in social protection benefits for families and children is 0.8% of GDP according to the data published in IDESCAT from the year 2014.
<https://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=aec&n=872>

Figure 3: The at-risk-of-poverty rate before and after social transfers according to age group. Catalonia, 2020



Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from IDESCAT

This underlines the urgent need to tackle child and teenage poverty from all areas in a comprehensive manner so as to respond to a problem that, as already mentioned, represents not only a violation of the rights of children and teenagers, but also a detrimental burden to society as a whole.

3. What are the public policies to alleviate child poverty?

As discussed in the previous sections, child poverty is multifaceted and is not defined solely on the basis of a lack of specific material conditions, but instead it is manifested in a variety of factors. Consequently, the policies and programmes used to address it are also many and diverse, given that they seek to combat it by intervening in many areas through a variety of mechanisms.

One aspect that allows interventions to be established according to their logic is the distinction between pre-distribution and redistribution. This is normally used to classify policies designed to reduce poverty and social inequalities, so it is therefore also useful for classifying policies to combat child poverty.

- **Pre-distributive policies** are interventions designed to act on the causes of inequalities. These types of interventions stress that the factors generating poverty and inequality need to be addressed ex ante if they are to be reduced. The goal is to avoid specific inequalities through preventive actions in order to reduce the need for subsequent redistributive corrections.
- **Redistributive policies**, on the other hand, are interventions designed to correct market-generated inequalities. These policies act on the effects of the market ex post, in other words, by correcting the imbalances it generates. The state and administrations intervene through tax collection and transferring resources in order to reduce income inequalities.

Pre-distribution and redistribution policies are complementary in practice. Nonetheless, the distinction is useful for defining the focus of various interventions to combat child poverty (prevention vs. correction), as well as for understanding how they contribute to combating child poverty, what implications they have, and in which cases and contexts they are most effective. This distinction also enables us to consider how child measures (not directly targeting children in vulnerable situations) act to combat child poverty.

Building on this broad outline, two EU recommendations flesh out the extensive repertoire of policies that are needed to tackle child poverty in a comprehensive manner: the Commission Recommendation of 20 February 2013, “Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage”, and the more recent Council Recommendation of June 2021 that establishes a European Child Guarantee.

The 2013 Recommendation divides interventions into three main strands that provide a general typology of measures to combat child poverty and social exclusion: **access to adequate resources, access to affordable and quality services, and children’s participation.**

As far as **access to adequate resources** is concerned, it focuses in turn on two aspects:

- **Support for adult employment** in families with children. Stable, quality and adequately paid employment is a vital element in ensuring that household income and its stability is the first barrier protecting the entire household against poverty. Employment policies, wage policies and, more specifically, policies promoting active inclusion, job training and support for reintegration into employment after maternity and parental leave are some of these. But other

directly related measures are vital in the case of families with children, such as policies to reconcile work and family life, flexible working hours, work permits, or active policies of non-discrimination on the grounds of gender. Measures aimed at children, especially the youngest children, such as early childhood education and care, also play a key role both in terms of access to employment and access to services.

- **Benefits**, acting as a support for family income, are an instrument used by public administrations to prevent and combat child poverty. Together with financial benefits, others can be provided in kind related to specific rights and needs, such as food, child and teenage care, education, health, housing, transport, or access to sports or sociocultural activities. Certain elements have been shown to be critical for the effectiveness of benefits when it comes to designing them in this area: amount, coverage, duration, levels of conditionality or potential barriers to accessing them.

The main areas of intervention to combat poverty and social exclusion in terms of **accessing services** can be summarised as follows:

- **Access to high-quality, inclusive early childhood education and care services.** This includes ensuring their affordability, free for the poorest households, tailored to the needs of families (especially women) and children, and their ability to identify specialised early care needs.
- **Improving the impact of education systems on equal opportunities,** which should promote school success for all children and teenagers. It is necessary to increase the capacity of education systems in order to break the generational cycle of poverty. This requires avoiding early school leaving (much more prevalent among boys than girls) and ensuring that all children and teenagers can benefit from digital tools and have access to educational materials, through scholarships and grants if required.
- Ensuring that all children can exercise their universal right to **healthcare**, especially through disease prevention and health promotion, as well as accessing high-quality health services. Special attention needs to be paid in this area to aspects such as disability and mental health, particularly linked to poverty, or to the prevention of risk behaviours related to addictions or unwanted teenage pregnancies.
- **Access to adequate housing** is a key element in the fight to combat poverty, not only because of the large amount of family income that goes towards renting or buying housing, but also because of the need

for children and teenagers to live in a safe, stable environment for their development, as housing is an essential aspect for this. This would also include access to related services, such as energy services.

- Strengthening and improving **social services** aimed at families with children, specifically services for the protection of children and teenagers. Not only does this require preventing and acting early in situations of social risk, avoiding as far as possible these becoming situations of neglect (for example, helping families to develop their parenting skills), but also avoiding solutions that involve the residential institutionalisation of children and teenagers, in favour of family or community solutions when neglect occurs.
- Access to **suitable, sustainable food** is a challenge for many families, especially those on low incomes. There are two key aspects to these measures: access to healthy, nutritious food and the prevention of poor eating habits and their consequences, such as childhood obesity, which has a much higher incidence among children and teenagers from the most vulnerable households.

Children's participation in cultural, sports or leisure activities, as well as in private and public decisions that affect them, individually and as a group, is the third focus of these sets of measures. Children and teenagers are full citizens and should therefore be able to be active subjects of policies and measures aimed at combatting poverty and exclusion. Their voices should also be heard, alongside those of their families, when it comes to implementing and evaluating these policies and measures. Making this participation effective implies, among other things:

- The removal of all barriers related to cost, access and cultural differences to ensure that all children and adolescents can participate in play, recreational, sports and cultural activities outside school.
- Train professionals and develop tools to involve children in the management of services (education, healthcare, and so on) and consult them on policy planning through age-appropriate mechanisms.
- The creation of participation or support structures to involve all children and teenagers in existing structures. Active policies are needed to encourage and support the participation of children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds in order for these to be as representative and inclusive as possible.

There are two aspects in this entire list of measures and opportunities for intervention that, although obvious, are vital for any programme or policy

in order for its implementation to have a real impact on reducing child poverty:

- The measures and their design must incorporate a children's rights perspective and therefore have a specific focus on children, so that their rights and needs are prioritised and taken into account in their implementation according to their age and level of development, sex and gender, and family, economic and social context.
- The measures should particularly focus on children and households in poverty, making a special effort to reach the most disadvantaged households and situations, as well as taking into account the characteristics of each household and its members.

4. What is the “what works” perspective and what is its added value in combating child poverty?

One of the most significant developments that has recently been gaining momentum in neighbouring countries is the belief that scientific evidence should play a much greater role in designing and implementing public policies. The aim of what is known as evidence-based policy is to make the most rigorous scientific knowledge available to public bodies as a key element in designing “public solutions to specific social problems”. This position argues that all policy and practice should be justified on the basis of the best available evidence and their possible effects.

In other words, evidence-based policy should not tell public decision-makers what to do, but instead should provide the reasons why some actions and not others can lead to improvements in specific social problems that justify the existence of any public policy. Nonetheless, it does indeed become a very valuable mechanism for comparing other forms of knowledge commonly used in designing public policies (such as those of professionals working on the front line or those of people suffering from the problem). Therefore, and this is a key aspect to bear in mind, evidence-based policy does not replace other forms of knowledge, but rather ties them together and enhances the dialogue between different forms of knowledge.

What then are the main aspects characterising the proposal stemming from the design of evidence-based public policies? First, the main important element is to understand the advantages and limitations of scientific evidence. Second, keeping abreast of the latest scientific developments (and debates) in any given thematic field of knowledge. Third, to test why a given social problem improves or worsens in accordance with specific solutions designed to address it. In other words, to understand the mechanisms and

principles that explain the improvement or worsening of a given social problem, as well as the activities and experiences of the social agents involved. For example, why are job search programmes not useful for the over 55s, or why is emotional and psychological support crucial for this profile of unemployed people? Fourth, critically approach the knowledge that is taken for granted in order to solve a given social problem. For example, “we all know that it is necessary to do X and Y in order to improve the lives of the long-term unemployed”. Statements such as these, although they may be true and even legitimate, are what reaffirm doubts and encourage us to look for evidence to ascertain to what extent our intuitions are heading in the right direction. Fifth, prioritise the evaluation of public policies as a way of generating scientific knowledge about a given public policy. Evaluation can often be uncomfortable because it questions what is initially thought to work, and it can even be costly. But the cost of not evaluating a public policy will always be higher in the long run than the cost of doing so. Sixth, an interest in the local context. Scientific evidence will provide us with programmes and interventions that can improve a specific social problem in specific places, often distanced from our immediate context. One of the steps that needs to be taken is therefore to adapt this learning about “what works” in a local environment, as this will have its own requirements and specificities.

Paying attention to the constraints of one’s immediate environment is a necessary step in order to avoid the temptation to mimic interventions that work in contexts that are completely different from our own. Finally, understanding that not all evidence is valid when it comes to answering questions related to “what works” to improve a given social problem. In other words, to acquire several basic notions of scientific methodology in order to assess the quality of the scientific evidence that can be used to design a given public intervention.

So how is it that evidence-informed policy is not yet common practice despite these promising features? The answer lies in such practical aspects as: how do we identify the most robust knowledge on a given subject? Where do we find the time to seek it out and review it? How do we translate it into our context? How do we justify it against other forms of knowledge (institutional inertias, political interests, cultural values, media pressures, and so on) that are usually better placed and have a greater ability to influence the design of public policies?

The publication that opens this collection aims to advance towards addressing these challenges in a field as important as child poverty in Catalonia. In other words, “What works to combat child poverty?” aims to analyse the effectiveness of interventions geared towards alleviating child poverty, with the ultimate goal of providing empirical evidence for decision-

making processes and designing public policies in this area. In other words, the questions that this project aims to answer are:

- What are the most important services, resources and policies to combat child poverty and social exclusion?
- What aspects and outcome measures do these policies employ and how do they relate to child poverty?
- Are these initiatives effective and are they equally effective for all?
- What are the main areas/challenges to be taken into account in implementing policies that can reduce child poverty in our context?
- Are there examples of good practices that can be used as models for improving the design of these policies in our nation?

As has been well stated, the aim of these publications is not to directly evaluate the effects of various public programmes or policies. They instead intend to gather and analyse what other rigorous studies have stated about the effectiveness of such policies. In this sense, “What works to combat child poverty?” will rely on systematic reviews of this literature.¹⁵ And when this is not possible, primary references to programme evaluations conducted using experimental or quasi-experimental methods will be included.

“What works to combat child poverty?” also has two other characteristics. On the one hand, the project aims to demonstrate causal relationships between a given intervention or policy and the improvement of the social problem to which it responds. In other words, it intends to ascertain whether interventions such as direct income transfers, measures to reconcile work and family life, among others, causally improve, for example, aspects such as the level of family wealth, subjective well-being of children, their cognitive development or, finally, their educational performance. This claim implies that the quality of the existing evidence will be assessed to favour that which has been developed on the basis of rigorous methodology to establish causal relationships – experimental designs with a comparison group and, in some cases, quasi-experimental designs. On the other hand, this project pays special attention to disseminating and transferring the evidence generated, and it does so by means of a flexible and amiable publication format, designed for a non-technical audience. The aim is nothing more than to encourage the use of evidence reviews in today’s public policies to combat child poverty so that public decision-makers can use these as a point of reference to articulate and delimit such policies. We have

¹⁵ For more information, see Sanz, J. “Guia pràctica 16. Les aportacions de les revisions sistemàtiques de la literatura al disseny de polítiques públiques”. Ivàlua, 2020. <http://bit.ly/3LsjGHO>

therefore opted for a short evidence review, very clearly ordering its content, including practical and illustrative case studies and, finally, using simple language and avoiding unnecessary technical complexities.

“What works to combat child poverty?” thus offers a selection of current issues that are strategic in defining the roadmap to combat child poverty in the coming years. The choice of topics has been made by the project’s steering group (the first element of governance), taking into account existing information on the evolution of child poverty in Catalonia and the measures proposed by public administrations to tackle it. This choice of topics has been validated by a group of experts (second governance element) with an in-depth knowledge of child poverty in Catalonia. The members of this group of experts are drawn equally from academia, public administration and the third social sector.

Once the relevant topics have been selected, an academic expert is commissioned to prepare the evidence review. This publication will undergo two-level validation, by both the project’s steering group and the group of experts. The aim of this two-level validation is to ensure the feasibility and potential use of the evidence summaries in designing public policies.

5. First evidence summary: on the importance of targeted interventions in children aged 0-3.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure

Benjamin Franklin (atribuïda, 1736)

Some 300 years ago, Benjamin Franklin, one of the first professional firefighters in the United States of America, suggested that the prevention of a fire far outweighs its extinction. This premise has become the main argument in this first summary of “What works to combat child poverty?”: every action that can be taken to combat child poverty in the early stages of life (zero to three years) will be an important step towards preventing child poverty and social exclusion later in life.

The negative impact of child poverty in the early stages of life is associated with poor physical and cognitive development, poor educational outcomes and poorer social-emotional development. These harmful effects are furthermore more pronounced depending on the years of severe poverty in which a significant proportion of children in Catalonia may be forced to live. This first summary is therefore based on the assumption that interventions in the 0-3 period to alleviate child poverty are vital in order to change the life

trajectories of these children and prevent their existence in prolonged poverty.

In turn, one major aspect to advance towards this direction is to find out which policies are the most appropriate for this 0-3 period. According to the proposed evidence-based policy approach, the aim of this first summary will be to ascertain the degree of effectiveness of the various existing measures to combat child poverty for the 0-3 period, with the final goal of offering a set of recommendations on how these policies could be prioritised here and now. In other words, elements to inform policies in our nation aimed at combating child poverty in the early stages of life, although doing so from the knowledge provided by the degree of effectiveness of the most significant international experiences in this field. This first summary will likewise also emphasise the main characteristics of the policies that work to combat child poverty in order to provide useful mechanisms for working towards their implementation in Catalonia.

 **Què funciona**
contra la pobresa?
Àmbit Pobresa infantil

Projecte de recopilació, anàlisi i transferència d'evidència per a millorar
les polítiques públiques destinades a mitigar la pobresa infantil

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 **Què
funciona?**