

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM POVERTY

A RIGHT, AN OBLIGATION  
AND AN INVESTMENT.



Save the Children

**Save the Children works in more than 120 countries.  
We save children's lives. We fight for their rights.  
We help them fulfil their potencial.**

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This report was written by Virginia Rodríguez with  
Almudena Escorial, both from Save the Children Spain.  
Typeset by Óscar Naranjo.



Save the Children – España  
Plaza Puerto Rubio, 28  
28044 Madrid (SPAIN)

T: (+34) 91 513 05 00

@SavetChildren  
[www.savethechildren.es](http://www.savethechildren.es)

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the economic crisis has exposed many families to diminished income, which has shot up all poverty and social exclusion indicators to alarming levels. Particularly serious is the fact that over 30% of the population under 18 is at risk of poverty or social exclusion<sup>1</sup>, which makes children the most vulnerable age group to poverty at present.

In this report, Save the Children analyses how this situation of poverty or social exclusion quantified by statistics affects children's daily lives. It highlights how the situation of poverty is a major, and at times insurmountable, obstacle to enjoy and exercise the basic rights recognised in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In short, it provides an observation of the situation of child poverty in Spain from a Children's Rights perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> Eurostat. Statistics in focus 4/2013. Children were the age group at the highest risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2011, 27 February 2013.



**8,362,305**  
children living in Spain.\*

According to Eurostat —**29.9%**—,

**2,500,329** children living  
under the poverty threshold;

and —**33.8%**—,

**2,826,549** children are  
at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

—**57.6%**—

Percentage of minors under 18  
whose parents did not attain  
secondary education,  
and are at risk of poverty or social  
exclusion.

—**49.2%**—

Percentage of minors under 18  
in families in which at least one of  
the parents is foreign, living under  
the poverty threshold.

(\*) Instituto Nacional de Estadística, data at January, the 1st 2012.

## CHILD POVERTY IN SPAIN

Several social organisations and public institutions in Spain, through studies and reports, have identified the characteristics of poverty in Spain:

- Impoverishment of the “normalised” population due to the loss or precariousness of employment
- Inefficiency of policy to fight against poverty
- Overloaded social services
- Dependence on informal networks and extended family revenue
- Growing inequality in Spanish society and intergenerational transmission of poverty
- Greater vulnerability of children to poverty and social exclusion

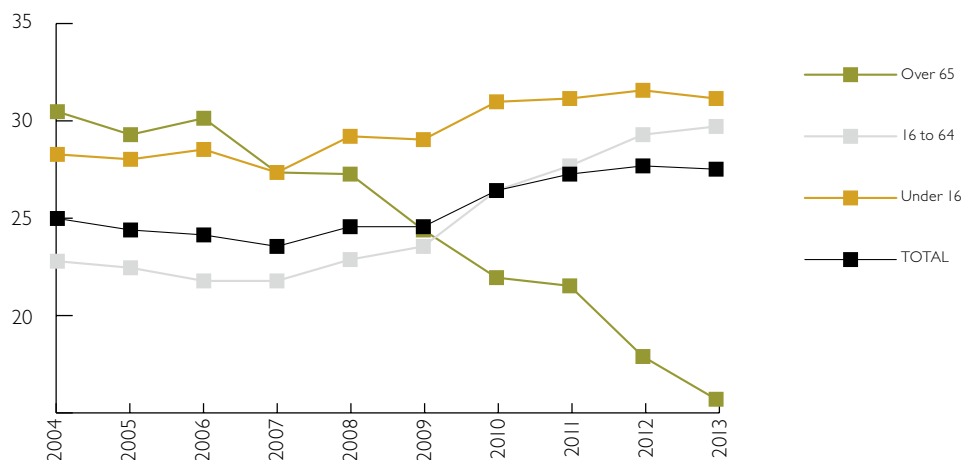
### **Some figures on child poverty in Spain<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> Eurostat, Survey on Incomes and Standard of Living. Last updated 8/11/2013. Extracted 13/11/2013.

Graphic I — Rate of risk of poverty or social exclusion in Spain by age group (\*)



(\*) INE data are presented above these age groups. [ Source: INE 2013, Living Conditions Survey ]

## CHILD POVERTY FROM A CHILDREN'S RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

Children are rights holders, and the State is responsible for guaranteeing that all children can exercise them fully without discrimination. Through the stories of Lucas, Eva, Javier, María, Ana, Andrea, Hugo, Lara, Carlos, Cristina, Miguel and Manolo (children participating in our programmes and whose families have been interviewed to prepare this report) we can see that when a family unit suffers financial hardship several rights can be jeopardised:

- Their right to a decent standard of living for their proper physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development (Art. 27)
- Their right to the best possible health and services to treat diseases and stay healthy (Art. 24)

- Their right to education (Arts. 28 and 29)
- Their right to be protected from all forms of violence, neglect, abuse or exploitation (Arts. 19, 32 and 34)
- Their right to rest and leisure, play, recreational activities and take part freely in cultural and artistic activities (Art. 31)

By demanding that the State fulfils its obligation to adopt all measures necessary to implement these rights for all children they are being asked to adopt measures to **provide them with the most efficient protection against poverty and exclusion.**

From the start of this legislature, repeated appeals have been issued<sup>3</sup> for the urgent adoption of measures to address the situation of poverty experienced by more and more children, both by Save the Children and the other children's organisations in Spain. The Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality also recognised that for the Government, fighting to eradicate child poverty is a priority, referring to a plan on child poverty<sup>4</sup>. This plan does not correspond to the one demanded by the Committee on the Rights of the Child or by Save the Children,

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3 UNICEF, Una apuesta por la infancia. Propuestas de UNICEF para los programas electorales del 20-N, Madrid, 2012. [http://www.unicef.es/sites/www.unicef.es/files/UNA\\_APUESTA\\_POR\\_LA\\_INFANCIA-UNICEF.pdf](http://www.unicef.es/sites/www.unicef.es/files/UNA_APUESTA_POR_LA_INFANCIA-UNICEF.pdf)

Save the Children, Muchos anuncios, pocos avances. Informe de evaluación del cumplimiento de la Agenda de Infancia 2012-2015 un año después de las elecciones generales, Madrid, November 2012. [http://www.savethechildren.es/docs/Ficheros/560/Muchos\\_anuncios\\_pocos\\_avances.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.es/docs/Ficheros/560/Muchos_anuncios_pocos_avances.pdf)

Save the Children and UNICEF, El presente de los niños es el futuro de todos: Propuestas de Save the Children y UNICEF España para el Debate sobre el estado de la nación, 2013. [http://www.savethechildren.es/docs/Ficheros/586/Documento\\_Propuestas\\_vOK.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.es/docs/Ficheros/586/Documento_Propuestas_vOK.pdf)

4 See Press Release from Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality of 16 April 2013. <http://www.msssi.gob.es/gabinete/notasPrensa.do?id=2805>

but rather to a set of measures aiming to achieve this objective with three different national strategic plans:

- 2nd National Strategic Plan for Children and Adolescents (PENIA) 2013-2016<sup>5</sup> approved on 5 April 2013 by the Council of Ministers;
- National Strategic Plan for Social Inclusion currently under development which will have a strategic objective focusing on eradicating child poverty. Among the strategic guidelines to prepare the plan they have announced that fostering welfare of children at risk or in social exclusion will be a priority cross-functional objective<sup>6</sup>.
- Family Support Plan, preparation of which has just started and is expected to be approved in 2014. This plan aims to make progress in such essential areas for children's rights as work-life balance and positive parenting, aspects on which Save the Children presented a series of recommendations before the Congress subcommittee that spent the first months of 2013 studying measures to support work-life balance<sup>7</sup>.

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5 Children's Observatory. 2nd National Strategic Plan for Children and Adolescents 2013-2016. [http://www.observatoriodelainfancia.msssi.gob.es/documentos/PENIA\\_2013-2016.pdf](http://www.observatoriodelainfancia.msssi.gob.es/documentos/PENIA_2013-2016.pdf)

6 Given this announcement, a group of NGOs coordinated by UNICEF and comprised of Save the Children, the Platform of Children's Organisations, EAPN Spain, Spanish Red Cross, Cáritas Española, Fundación Secretariado Gitano [Gypsy Secretariat Foundation], Proyecto Solidario [Solidarity Project], Aldeas Infantiles [Children's Homes] and CERMI submitted to the authorities in charge of drafting this plan, a Table of Proposed Actions and Measures Against Child Poverty and Social Exclusion [http://www.unicef.es/sites/www.unicef.es/files/infancia-espana/CUADRO\\_DE\\_PROPUUESTAS\\_CONTRA\\_LA\\_POVERTY\\_INFANTIL\\_final.pdf](http://www.unicef.es/sites/www.unicef.es/files/infancia-espana/CUADRO_DE_PROPUUESTAS_CONTRA_LA_POVERTY_INFANTIL_final.pdf)

7 Save the Children, La conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar en España: Una oportunidad para promover and proteger los derechos de la infancia, Madrid, April 2013. [http://www.savethechildren.es/docs/Ficheros/597/La\\_conciliacion\\_de\\_la\\_vida\\_laboral\\_and\\_familiarESP\\_vOK.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.es/docs/Ficheros/597/La_conciliacion_de_la_vida_laboral_and_familiarESP_vOK.pdf)



Although any expression of commitment by the public powers to fight against child poverty is positive, the initiatives approved to date are insufficient. They do not respond to the urgency of the current situation, nor do they address measures based on an analysis of the current situation and the specific causes of the special impact of the situation of poverty on children in Spain. There are no specific policies to address child poverty in Spain.

**To propose efficient policies addressing child poverty, it is essential:**

- **To understand the reality of child poverty, how it becomes manifest and affects exercising each one of the rights of children.**
- **To define a common framework guaranteeing the contents of the rights of children to protect them from poverty and social exclusion with no discrimination whatsoever.**
- **To devote all material, human and educational resources necessary to efficiently address implementation of the best measures.**

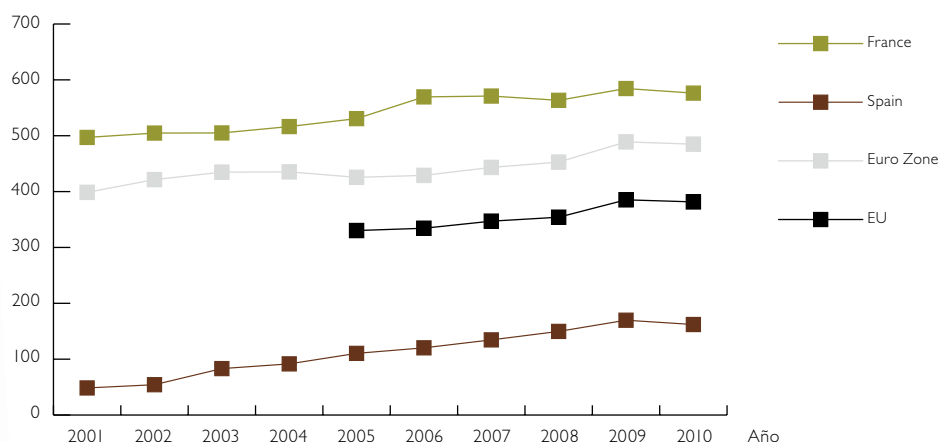
## Investment in Children's Policies

Rather than in the declarations, expressions of political will and legislative reforms, it is in the public budgets where a government's political commitment is more clearly shown to address the situation of children in the country, and in particular, those in a situation of poverty.

Area/ Country	Rate of children under the relative poverty threshold (%)						Difference 2010 – 2011 – 2012		
	before social benefits included pensions			after social benefits					
	2010	2011	2012	2010	2011	2012			
EU	37.1	37	35.2	20.5	20.5	21.4	16.6	16.5	13.8
Euro Zone	36.4	36.1	33.8	19.8	19.7	20.6	16.6	16.4	13.2
Spain	38.8	39	38.6	29.2	29.5	29.9	9.6	9.5	8.7
France	37.8	37.2	35.3	17.9	18.8	19	19.9	18.4	16.3

[ Source: Eurostat. *Statistics on Income and Living Conditions*. Last update 30.10.2013 ]

Graphic 2 — Euros per capita devoted to child and family protection policies



[ Source: Eurostat. *European System of Integrated Social Protection Statistics*. Last Update 11.02.2013 ]

This lack of public investment devoted to social protection policy in general and to the protection of children and families, in particular, has a devastating direct effect: its limited ability to reduce child poverty.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has demanded a focus on the rights of children in public budgets by recommending that Spain:



*a) Applies a focus based on the rights of children when they prepare their State and Regional Government Budgets, implementing a monitoring system for the allocation and use of resources devoted to children in the whole budget, in order to highlight the investment in children. The Committee recommended the preparation of budgets for children specifying the amount and proportion of expenditure devoted to them at a national, regional and local level, to be able to assess the impact and effects of said expenditure on children.*

*b) Ensures priority budget items devoted to children against changes in resource levels in the general budget priorities and, more specifically, that it protects budget items related to affirmative social measures in favour of children in need, even in times of crisis<sup>8</sup>.*

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<sup>8</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Final Observations: Spain, 3 November 2010, CRC/C/ESP/CO/3-4, paragraph 16.



## CONCLUSIONS

At present, 2,826,549 Spanish children are growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion. An alarming proportion, voiced by the cases of the 12 children included in this report. Their experience confirms that growing up in a situation of poverty is an obstacle toward being able to fully enjoy their recognised rights.

Helping them to exercise their rights is the basis of Save the Children's intervention in situations of poverty and social exclusion and the objective of all measures demanded from the various public administrations.

### **Protection of children from poverty is a right, an obligation and an investment.**

Protection of children from poverty and social exclusion is an obligation contracted by the States upon signing the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The States Parties to the Convention have made the commitment to adopt all the necessary measures to implement the rights recognised for all children.

### **A poverty situation generates obstacles in children's daily lives that hinder and at times prevent them from exercising their recognised rights.**

If, as described in this report, the financial situation of their families prevents children from fully exercising their rights, there is discrimination which the Governments are obliged to address in order to meet one of the essential mandates of the Convention.

To make it possible for them to exercise their right, with no discrimination whatsoever; to a good standard of living, to the best possible health, to education, to being protected from all forms of violence or neglect, and to rest, leisure and play, is the way to guarantee child protection from poverty and exclusion.

In Spain, there is no policy to address child poverty specifically. The high rates of child poverty in Spanish society over the last two decades have grown and become more visible as a result of the economic crisis. This is why recently its priority nature has been proclaimed in the political agenda in light of the alarming official figures and reports from institutions and social organisations. However, so far only very occasional and fragmented programmes have been set up at a state, regional and local level to respond to some of the most serious manifestations of child poverty.

There is no diagnosis on its causes, a comprehensive method to guide public interventions or resources specifically devoted to fight against child poverty. The approach is very limited and does not consider investing in policies to eradicate it, an essential element to guarantee equal opportunities and enjoyment of rights by all children in Spain.

Investing in children is not only a legal obligation, it is also a financial decision aimed at investing in people, in making it possible for all children to have the means that enable them to develop their maximum potential thanks to the commitment of society with their present and their future. This investment allows breaking the cycle of the intergenerational transmission of poverty and has an economic return which is a society with more prosperity and cohesion.

However, at present, political actions at any level are completely subject to achieving the objectives to control the public deficit set by the European Union financial authorities. The austerity policies

are not only diminishing the financial capacity of families. They are also weakening essential areas for the protection of children from poverty: social services, education, healthcare and even the capability of social action organisations.

This financial requirement makes it very difficult to comply with the common political objectives of the European Union for the social and educational areas set in the Europe 2020 strategy.

**This policy inconsistency has an impact on the daily life of children.** They are affected by the measures adopted by the powers and all the public administrations in Spain, having ever fewer resources to remedy the social emergency generated by the economic crisis and job destruction.

The whole of society can also play a key role in the fight against child poverty by demanding from the authorities and the public powers efficient actions against child poverty, transparency in the decision-making processes and accountability to fulfil their obligation to protect children from poverty.

**At a time of economic crisis such as the present, we must not forget that human rights are the red lines that no policy must cross. Guaranteeing the protection of children from poverty is a legal and moral obligation that admits no conditioning whatsoever, even less so with regard to short-term economic considerations.**

**The protection of children against violence, social exclusion, poverty and discrimination should be recognised as a fundamental right in the Spanish Legal Code.**





## REASONS FOR CONCERN

### **Right to a good standard of living**

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- Elimination and reduction of Social Security benefits devoted to family protection
- The inability of the social services model to respond to the current social emergency and the worrying terms of their reform
- The impact on children of experiencing an eviction

### **Right to the best possible health**

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- Inappropriateness of housing and food for children exposes them to a higher risk of becoming ill
- Malnutrition and its effect on the health of children
- The consequences of cuts in public expenditure on healthcare received by children
- Exclusion of irregular immigrants from healthcare

### **Right to education**

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- The hidden price of education for families
- Insufficient school meal subsidies
- Cuts in public investment in education and its impact on the right to education for children

## **Right to be protected from violence**

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- Lack of resources and overload of social services are affecting interventions in situations of risk for financial reasons
- Reduction of human and material resources for prevention and early detection programmes

## **Right to rest, leisure, play...**

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- Limited importance given to recognising and exercising this right
- Rise in public price to enjoy public sports centres and worsening of conditions in the facilities
- This is the area in which children feel the greatest discrimination when they cannot participate in peer activities for financial reasons



