

Advancing the EU Child Guarantee in the Western Balkans: A Strategic Pillar of the Regional Growth Plan

The regional initiative for establishing the EU Child Guarantee in the Western Balkans
as a part of the Growth Plan in the Western Balkans

The Future of the Welfare State in the Western Balkans, a regional network which gathers think tank organizations and social policy researchers, is urging the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the governments of the Western Balkans to endorse and support the development of the EU Child Guarantee within the framework of the new Growth Plan for the Western Balkans.

The initiative to establish **the EU Child Guarantee in the Western Balkans** underscores the importance of ensuring opportunities for every child in the region to thrive, thus enhancing the social and human capital of the Western Balkans. At the same time, the EU Child Guarantee for the Western Balkans would represent a comprehensive policy framework for reforms across the sectors of social protection, education, healthcare, and housing at all levels.

Through the European Child Guarantee, the European Union has acknowledged the critical importance of investing in children and securing their well-being by ensuring effective access to essential services for children in need. By extending this guarantee to the Western Balkans, the initiative aligns with the EU's broader goals of promoting social cohesion and economic stability within its neighboring regions.

Supporting the development of each child in the Western Balkans is critical for several reasons:

Ensuring equal access to essential services: The initiative aims to provide every child in the Western Balkans with equal access to essential services. These services include free early childhood education and care, free education (including school-based activities and at least one healthy meal each school day), free healthcare, healthy nutrition, and adequate housing.

Alleviating child poverty and social exclusion: Families with children are disproportionately affected by poverty in the Western Balkans. By implementing the EU Child Guarantee in the region, countries can improve the socioeconomic conditions of these families and reduce the risk of poverty and/or social exclusion. Furthermore, this initiative could offer crucial support to children who are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion in Western Balkans, such as Roma children, those without parental care, children with disabilities, or victims of violence.

Supporting parental employment and enhancing development opportunities: By providing adequate support and services for children, the initiative enables parents to work, contributing to the economic development of their families and the wider society. This dual focus on child development and parental employment is key to promoting inclusive growth and a more prosperous region.

The Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, endorsed by the European Parliament and the Council in November 2023, is a newly established financial instrument aimed at strengthening the Growth Plan for the region. As part of the Growth Plan, each Western Balkan partner will be encouraged to formulate a Reform Agenda. By integrating the EU Child Guarantee as a policy framework for national reforms within the Growth Plan and Reform Agendas, Western Balkans partners can promote sustainable development and social inclusion across the region, aligning with the Growth Plan's ambition "to double the size of the Western Balkan economies within the next 10 years".

We, members of the regional network the Future of the Welfare State in the Western Balkans invite the European Commission, the European Parliament, Western Balkans governments, civil society, and development partners to join forces in this effort, highlighting the transformative potential of investing in children for the benefit of society as a whole.

The European Commission and Western Balkans governments should agree to allocate a specific portion of the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans and the EU IPA funds for the development, implementation, and monitoring of their national Child Guarantee Action Plans.

In order to kickstart the initiative and provide it with tangible direction, it is essential to develop a joint initial platform, with the baseline indicators and potential actions and measures.

By supporting children and this initiative, stakeholders can contribute to a more prosperous future for the Western Balkans, fostering a region where every child and every country can thrive and achieve their full potential.

The initiative is endorsed by the following members of the network:

- [Center for Social Policy, CSP](#) (Belgrade)
- [GAP Institute](#) (Pristina)
- [Finance Think](#) (Skopje)
- [Centre for Development Evaluation and Social Science Research, CREDI](#) (Sarajevo)
- [Economic and Social Analytics, ESA](#) (Tirana)
- [Juventas](#) (Podgorica)
- [Paul Stubbs, Senior Research Fellow, The Institute of Economics](#) (Zagreb)
- [Maja Gerovska Mitev, Professor of Social Policy, Institute of Social Work and Social Policy, Faculty of Philosophy, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University](#) (Skopje)
- [Aleksandar Baucal, Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade and expert in developmental and educational psychology](#) (Belgrade)
- [Marjan Petreski, Professor of Economics & Statistics, UACS Business School](#) (Skopje)