



# Working Paper

**Local Civil Regimes for Combating Child Poverty:  
Insights from the Austrian and  
Belgian Corporatist Welfare States**

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# **Local Civil Regimes for Combating Child Poverty: Insights from the Austrian and Belgian Corporatist Welfare States**

Melanie Schinnerl<sup>1</sup> and Dorothea Greiling<sup>2</sup>

## **Disclosure Statement**

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## ***Abstract***

Child poverty is a persistent problem in many European welfare states, irrespective of the welfare state regime. The paper examines approaches on the local level in Belgium and Austria, two countries with a corporatist welfare state tradition and three levels of government. In both countries child poverty rates are high, with 23% (Austria) and 22% (Belgium) (Eurostat, 2019). Child poverty means that the children live in households which are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Children of such households have a much higher risk of being poor later in life. By conducting case studies in four focus cities (Antwerp, Ghent, Linz and Vienna) the paper contributes to the emerging empirical research on the localisation of social policies in a multi-level governance context. Theoretically, the paper addresses the practices of rescaling of social policies towards the local level. The study examines how the European Commissions' 2013 Recommendation "Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantages" is translated into the local social policies. For that purpose, the paper focuses on the local collaborations between the local governments and the partners of the social and solidarity economy on the policy design - and the service provision levels. Our findings show that the discrepancies start already with the vertical policy making competencies, with a stronger role of the Belgian regions. Also, Belgium has a longer tradition of an explicit policy focus of reducing child poverty. In all three pillars of the 2013 Recommendation, the two focus countries face some challenges, despite some progresses, in particular in pillar two (access to affordable quality services). The policy makers of the four cities are guided, in a varying degree, by the social investment paradigm. This was most prominent in the interviews in Linz. Regarding collaborative local policy making, Ghent is the only focus city with an explicit local plan to combat child poverty. In all four cities target group-specific and universal services are provided for poor children and their families. Regarding the delivery of social policies to combat child poverty, there are considerable differences in the governance modes. While both Flemish cities have a tradition of institutionalized local networks to combat early childhood poverty, the service-delivery modes in the two Austrian cities are much fragmented, when it comes to combat child poverty. The network approach offers better chances to provide an integrated service. On a more positive note, the two Austrian cities provided good practices in managing the transition phase from school to work.

**Keywords:** child poverty, rescaling of social policies, social investment, social and solidarity economy

**JEL Codes:** H75, I24, I28, I30, O57

## 1. Motivation and Research Questions

Back in 2010, the EU member states committed themselves to reducing poverty by 20 million people, by 2020, a target the member states will fail to reach. Among the poverty risks, child poverty is a pressing issue in the European Union. Recent statistics show that in 2017, 24.9% of children in the EU-28 – compared to 23.0% of adults (18-64) and 18.2% of the elderly (65 or over) – are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Eurostat, 2019). Austria and Belgium are two states of the European Union, where the Gross National Product (GDP) is well above the average, but they are also states where the poverty rates in cities are consistently higher than in rural areas. In the two focus countries, Austria (AT) and Belgium (BE), the current child poverty rates are 23% (AT) and 22% (BE) (Eurostat, 2019). Child poverty means that the children live in households which are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Statistical data show that children of such households have a much higher risk of being poor later in life, suffer from a poorer health status or have fewer chances of educational success.

Concerning the design and delivery of social infrastructure, *two inter-connected developments* can be observed. The first is that social policies are guided by the idea of the social investment state. In the mid-1990s, the social investment idea gained popularity and was put on the agenda by researchers (Esping-Andersen et al., 2002; Giddens, 1998; Morel et al., 2012; Vandenbroucke et al., 2011) as well as politicians and international organisations (European Commission, 2013a, 2019c; OECD, 2012). In 2013, the European Commission (2013b) issued a recommendation to the member states entitled “Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage”.

The second development is a rescaling of social policies and therefore a localization of welfare state arrangements (Kazepov, 2008, 2010; Andreotti et al., 2012; Martinelli et al., 2017; Vermeiren et al., 2018). The welfare state is no longer a national system; it is viewed, instead, as a multi-governance system (in terms of regulation, governance, and partnership resources, policy-making and policy-implementing competences) with various levels of government involved. The vertical division of labour between all government levels has been changing and local governments are increasingly confronted with having to deal with wicked social problems, among them, the fight against poverty. Andreotti et al. (2012, p. 1934) introduced the concept of the local welfare system, referring to the welfare system in a municipal territory or metropolitan area. On the local level, a variety of institutionalised public, non-profit, or for-profit actors as well as citizens interact in a dynamic way in providing services to combat child poverty. According to

Andreotti et al. (2012) local welfare systems have been emerging as a consequence of bottom-up and top-down transformative pressures in the last two decades. The localisation of welfare state arrangements is advocated with the following main arguments: firstly, they are regarded as more effective because “in complex societies individual needs are met with higher accuracy by welfare policies which are tailored more closely to their specific context” (Andreotti et al., 2012, p. 1926); secondly, they are more participatory because “a localization of policies will facilitate the activation and empowerment of citizens and will facilitate the activation and participation of nongovernmental actors in decision-making” (Andreotti et al., 2012, p. 1926) and thirdly, they mobilise additional resources for welfare needs from local economic actors and social groups in times of tight welfare budgets and public debt ceilings (Andreotti et al., 2012).

Under rescaling aspects, Austria and Belgium are both countries with a three-tier governmental system: the federal level, the regional state (Austria) or province (Belgium) level and the local government level. Both states also share the fact that they are, despite all developments under New Public Management, European member countries with a corporatist welfare state tradition. While there is a broad body of literature evaluating national policies in various fields of social policies, the impacts of the rescaling down to the local government level is much less evaluated. As a review by Andreotti et al. (2012) shows, the research localization of welfare policies and social cohesion is still in its early days. A recent publication by Arvidson et al. (2018) evaluated the rescaling of social policies for three Swedish cities and identified variations in the local welfare state regimes. Sweden is a country with a social-democratic welfare state tradition.

Austrian and Belgian local governments are confronted with the implementation of nationally and regionally designed anti-poverty policies within the limits of their legal and policy-making competencies as well as their financial capacities and their political priorities. On the local level, social services to combat child poverty, as part of the local social service infrastructure, are provided in close collaboration with multiple local actors (Martinelli et al., 2017). Here the idea of co-production or collective service provision comes into play. In the area of local anti-poverty services for combating child poverty, co-production networks between local governments and non-profit service providers or, as Bance et al. name it, Public - Social and Solidarity Economy Partnerships (PSSEPs) (Bance, 2018; CIRIEC and Bance, 2018) are particularly important. In both countries such PSSEPs have a long tradition but public-non-profit relationships change over time. The traditional bureaucratic governance mode was replaced in both countries by

marketization elements in line with New Public Management (Greiling, 2015). Compared to the liberal welfare states, the adoption of New Public Management was much less radical in the field of anti-child-poverty services. The idea of co-production (Taco et al., 2018) and the production of local social services as common action (Lapoutte, 2018; Bance, 2018) in a more collaborative way has entered the debate more recently, as an alternative approach to the market-principle focused New Public Management (Greiling, 2015; Greiling and Schinnerl, 2018).

Back in 2015, the EU commissioned the European Social Policy Network (ESPN) to evaluate the EU member states' approaches of the 2013 recommendations and also to issue a synthesis study of the national policies (Bouget et al., 2015). As these studies focused on the national policies, no attention was paid to the rescaling towards local governments. Since 2019, the country reports for the European Semester include an annex on investment priorities towards economic, social and territorial cohesion. Again, the focus is on national policies. Concerning the academic body of literature on child poverty policies and service provision in the two focus countries, the body of research on local government approaches in Belgium is better than in Austria. Particular attention is paid to the collaborative service provision by local networks for combating child poverty (Raeymaeckers and Kenis, 2016; Vermeiren et al., 2018; Vermeiren, 2018).

The short introduction shows that a cross-country comparison on local government policies to combat child poverty with the focus on two welfare states with a corporatist tradition, namely Austria and Belgium, is an under-researched subject. Concerning welfare state regimes, it is interesting to analyse similarities and discrepancies in the local governance modes in the two three-tier government countries in the societally important area of child poverty. A special focus is laid on PSSEPs and the modes of governance, in order to investigate how the fight against child poverty is implemented on the local government level. Both states share the fact that they have been exposed to the same European social investment policy for "Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage" (European Commission, 2013b). Against this background, the paper focuses on the following research questions:

1. How is the local collaboration of local public, social and solidarity economy partners in Austrian and Belgian municipalities organised in the fight against child poverty as part of the European Social Investment-Strategy on the *policy design level*?

2. How is the collaboration of local public partners with the social and solidarity economy partners in Austrian and Belgian municipalities organised in the fight against child poverty as part of the European Social Investment-Strategy on the *service provision level*?

To address the research questions, the paper provides, in section two, an overview of the theoretical concept of the social investment state and also outlines the basic ideas of the policy recommendation by the European Commission (2013b), back in 2013. Furthermore, an introduction of governance modes for PSSEPs is given, drawing from the literature on network governance. In section three, the methodology is described and some information on the four focus cities is given. Method-wise, the paper is based on a comparative case study approach with interviews and documentary analysis (both academic and non-academic) as a basis. Concerning the empirical findings, at first some statistical data on child poverty in the two focus countries are provided. Then, the implementation of the EU social investment recommendations is evaluated, structured along the three pillars of the 2013 recommendation. Additionally, information is provided on the vertical division of labour between the three government levels in implementing the EU social investment policy for reducing child poverty. In line with the focus on the localisation of welfare systems, the result section ends with the findings regarding the local approaches for combating child poverty in two Austrian and two Belgian cities. Section five discusses the results with respect to similarities and differences. This section also includes the answers to the research questions, policy conclusions and directions for further research.

## **2. The Social Investment State and Governance Modes for PSSEPs**

### ***2.1. Social investment state: the theoretical approach***

In reform debates, a fundamental change in the welfare state and its normative premises are discussed (Dingeldey, 2011). In contrast to the existing guiding principle of the "precautionary" welfare state, the new generation of social policy accentuates the idea of social investment and its contribution to economic development as well as the activation and empowerment of individuals to cope with the life situation and therefore investments in human capital (Bothfeld, 2016). The social investment idea is also linked by some researchers to active welfare policies, which address three levels, namely (1) the individual level (activation and empowerment of the individual through education, training, participation in society and employment), (2) the institutional level that focuses on the institutional actors (profit, voluntary,



public actors) involved, as well as on income transfers and (3) the territorial one, in our case the local level, with its resource potentials and its constraints (Andreotti et al., 2012).

Anthony Giddens (1998) addresses the social investment state as part of the Third Way for social democratic parties between Neo-Liberalism and Keynesianism, which means that the social investment state is supposed to replace spending on social transfers by investment in human capital – e.g. education, to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty and social exclusion. With his Third Way Giddens (1998) asks for more decentralization, higher involvement of the community and the state in its guiding role, which subsidises the private provision of social services. In contrast to Giddens, other authors such as Gosta Esping-Andersen et al. (2002) have distanced themselves much more from neoliberal and New Public Management ideas making the social investment idea much more compatible with the Scandinavian welfare state tradition. Esping-Andersen et al. (2002) focus on the new social risks and therefore their point of departure is the financial stability of the pension scheme, which is to be achieved through early investment in children's human capital and greater participation of women and the unemployed in the labour market. – While Giddens (1998) talks about reduced benefits, private provision and decentralization, Esping-Andersen et al. (2002) try to combine benefits and activating measures to combat poverty and social exclusion, and do not say that this provision has to be private.

In the course of this socio-political paradigm shift, children and their conditions of growing up have come into focus – the necessity of investing in children (Ferrera, 2010). From this point of view, investments in the next generation are particularly promising because, according to Olk (2007), children represent the highest potential of productivity; investing in the human capital of children promises the highest possible benefit in the future. Therefore, children are a main target group of social investment measures. Investments in early childhood education (and care) move to the centre of family policy approaches in the sense of starting early with interventions for a sustainable promotion of "human capital" and "employability". Esping-Andersens' child-centred focus aims at universal high-quality services for all children. With his child-centred investment strategy, the modern welfare state not only counteracts the inheritance of social inequality and exclusion, but also uses preventive strategies to ensure the future viability of its society and thus increase the life chances of its citizens (Ferrera, 2010).

## **2.2. The European Commission concept of the social investment state for breaking the cycle of disadvantage for children**

The 2013 recommendations of the European Commission regard policies and services for breaking the cycle of disadvantage for children as a crucial investment in the future of Europe. In economic terms, children are the target group in the fight against poverty, where the return on euros spent is the highest due to the long horizon of the social investment. The earlier such a policy starts the better. The 2013 recommendations stress the importance of a children's rights-based approach with a focus on promoting equal opportunities so that all children can realise their full potential (European Commission, 2013b). This includes an integrated strategy with a strong preventive approach and, therefore, policies that go well beyond ensuring children's material security. The 2013 recommendations urge the EU-member states to develop strategies based on the following three pillars (European Commission, 2013b).

**Table 1: EC Recommendations: Investing in children - key elements**  
(based on Daly, 2019, p. 7)

Pillars	Actions
One: access to adequate resources	Support parents' employment Provide adequate living standards through a combination of benefits
Two: access to affordable quality services	Improve early childhood education and care (ECEC) Improve education system's impact on equal opportunities Improve the responsiveness of the health system to address the needs of disadvantaged children Provide children with a safe, adequate housing and living environment Enhance family support and quality of alternative care settings
Three: children's right to participate	Support the participation of all children in play, recreation, sport and cultural activities Put in place a mechanism to promote children's participation in decision-making that affects their lives

Concerning the understanding of childhood, the 2013 recommendations focused on toddlers, pre-school children, school children and the first integration of school leavers into the labour market.

Within the social policy for reducing poverty, many European member states have focused on the so-called NEETS (teenagers and young adults under 25 who are not in Education, Employment or Training).

A European Child Guarantee, as called for by the European Parliament in a resolution of 25 November 2015, also directs the spotlight on the poorest children. The Child Guarantee includes free access to quality early childhood care and education, health, education at school age, decent housing and adequate nutrition for every child in poverty (Daly, 2019). A 2019 evaluation for the European Parliament comes to the conclusion that only a minority of the member states have a comprehensive strategy so far, and identifies the importance of financial transfers and tax benefits, the importance of labour market integration of parents and the anti-poverty effect of ECEC and family services as important areas for improvement (Daly, 2019).

In 2015, the European Social Policy Network (ESPN) was asked by the European Union's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion to evaluate the national policies as to how the 2013 Recommendations on "Investing in Children" were implemented (Bouget et al., 2015). The evaluation included country reports for Austria and Belgium (Fink and Muerzl, 2017; Nicaise and Schepers, 2015; Schepers and Nicaise, 2017), as well as a summary report on national policy (Bouget et al., 2015). The evaluation did not focus on the local policies and strategies but evaluated national and, to a lesser extent, regional policies for the three pillars of the 2013 European Recommendations for reducing child poverty. Within the three pillars a subset of policies was evaluated.

- *Pillar one: access to adequate resources.* Here, the evaluation focused on the national policies for supporting parents' labour market integration, in particular of women from households with children in poverty. As a precondition for labour market integration, the evaluation also included the quantity of places of institutionalised childcare facilities and the accessibility of institutionalised childcare for poor families. Furthermore, financial support for poor families (universal child benefit) and additional means-tested benefits and tax exemptions were evaluated.
- *Pillar two: access to affordable quality services.* Here a special focus was put on the quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) as well as on parenting services.
- *Pillar three: children's right to participate* covering the children's right aspect.

The country specific evaluations identify national and regional policies, approaches and challenges. For the collective action of local level activities to combat child poverty, the higher-up governmental levels predetermine a large amount of the policy options on the municipal level. The Austrian and Belgian Country Reports are also relevant under the aspect of the division of labour within the three-tier governance system. The policy priorities of the federal and regional states will be presented in the result section, structured along the three pillars, in order to get a better insight into the national and regional priorities.

A neglected area of the Austrian and Belgian ESPN Country Reports is the focus on the transition from school to work, for teenagers and young adults. Here, the result section is based on the 2019 European Semester reports for Austria and Belgium.

That there is still a lot to do on the part of the EU member states, in order to break the vicious cycle of child poverty, it is shown in a 2019 report by Eurochild, an umbrella origination of non-governmental organisations engaged in this field. Eurochild (2019) published a report on “New opportunities for investing in children”, as an input for the official 2019 European Semester report. Again, the focus was on national approaches. The report urges to improve the efforts to reduce child poverty and demands that it should be made an urgent priority within Europe. Austria was one of the 22 focus countries of the Eurochild report. Major concerns of Eurochild (2019) were the lack of a national strategy to reduce child poverty and the lack of a national action plan for children’s rights (discontinued in 2004). With 339,000 children and adolescents at risk of poverty, the figure for a rich country like Austria is far too high (Eurochild, 2019). Furthermore, it was criticised that refugee children do not have the same access to care and education as Austrian children. Like the European Commission’s country of the European Semester Reports, the Eurochild report evaluates the national level approaches.

### **2.3. Governance modes**

Looking at the various governance modes for organising collaboration in PSSEPs, we see that the oldest is the bureaucratic model, which relied on the logic of appropriateness and compliance with rules and regulations. In many European welfare states, provision of social services was dominated by a few privileged large non-profit organisations (Andreotti et al., 2012; for Austria: Greiling and Stoetzer, 2015). Public actors and big non-profit-actors were frequently tightly intertwined, with the latter often having a double role as political actors and advocates for the poor as well as economic actors,

delivering the social services (Andreotti et al., 2012). The infusion of New Public Management and its focus on the logic of the market and the logic of consequences for the provision of social services, resulted in changes in the relationship between the public sector actors and the non-profits (Greiling and Schinnerl, 2018). Frequently, non-profits lost their privileged position and had to compete for short and medium-term contracts if they wanted to offer public sector-funded social services. The relationship between the public sector and the non-profit sector became much more antagonistic. Private sector management techniques and competition were seen as important drivers to improving the efficiency of social services (Greiling and Schinnerl, 2018). For different fields of social services providers, a plethora of performance accountability schemes were enforced by the national, regional and local governments. For public action this meant a single-centred approach, based on a top-down conception of public action with the national, regional and local governments or governmental (single-purpose) agencies imposing their performance criteria on the non-profits (Bance, 2018). The marketization and economization did not stop at the front doors of PSSEPs under New Public Management.

Moving on to the Public Governance approach with its idea of co-creation, the idea of a partnership for organising collective action was re-discovered. Additional to institutionalised actors, the role of citizens as co-producers is gaining relevance for the local welfare provision. While the involvement of citizens as co-producers of common goods is much better addressed in research (e.g., Brandsen et al., 2018), there is a lack of international comparative papers, which focus on the co-production of institutionalised actors, in particular on PSSEPs, on the local level for combating poverty.

According to Bance (2018), PSSEPs again offer opportunities for the co-construction of collective actions. For the design and implementation of social policies to combat child poverty, this results in a rediscovery of a more collaborative approach with a reliance on trusting relationships and co-creation capabilities (Lapoutte, 2018). Joint problem-solving of complex societal problems, which is based on a dialogical sense-making process and takes into account the specific resources and co-production potentials of the partners, are ideal-type elements of such a collective action, which leads to a deliberate co-creation (Lapoutte, 2018). The Public Governance approach for organising public action relies on the resources of public, non-profit and private (for-profit enterprises and citizens) actors and it is far less hierarchical than the New Public Management approach.

For organising the collaboration between the non-profit organisations as important service providers and the public sector in PSSEPs, the academic literature on network governance offers various models. This paper uses the often referred to governance models by Provan and Kenis (2008) who distinguish between three types of governance models in networks with a public partner involvement, namely a participant-governed network, a lead-governance network and a network administrative organisation. For Provan and Kenis (2008, p. 230), governance is “the use of institutions and structures of authority and collaboration to allocate resources and to coordinate and control joint actions across the network as a whole”.

The *participant-governed network* is the one which is most in line with Lapoutte’s ideas for organising common actions. The decision-making power is equally distributed among the network partners and decisions have to be approved by all network partners. The power distribution for decision-making is more or less symmetrical, although administrative and coordinative tasks can be performed by a subset of the full network (Provan and Kenis, 2008). For the design and delivery of local policies to combat child poverty this would mean that a local anti-child poverty plan is designed by a multiple local actor network. Examples for a such collective design of local anti-poverty plans can be found in the United Kingdom (e.g. the “People Make Glasgow fairer Strategy”). Regarding service provision, in participant-governed networks, this would mean that the service provision is also collectively organised and coordinated by all network partners.

In a *lead-organisation network* a partner exists, which takes charge and governs the collaboration between the network partners (Vermeiren et al., 2018). All major network activities and key decisions are coordinated by a single member, resulting in a highly centralised network and a highly asymmetrical distribution of power (Provan and Kenis, 2008). In the fight against child poverty, the public partner often has the role of the lead organisation. On the local level, this can be either a local government administration or a local government agency. In Belgium local public welfare authorities may serve as an example. In Austria, the local social administration or the local administration for children and youth are examples of such lead organisations.

In the case of a *network administrative organisation* (NAO) an entity exists which has the exclusive task of coordinating and sustaining the network as a network broker. The network is externally governed by the NAO which is a service provider for the network and does not produce a social service (Provan and Kenis, 2008). For the local actions to combat child poverty this means that the network administrative organisation acts as a broker between the different

network partners (Vermeiren, 2018). This approach is only suitable for the service-delivery part of local anti-child poverty networks. For designing local social policies, this model is not appropriate, as the network administrative organisation lacks the decision-making power.

Key predictors for the effectiveness of the three forms of network governance are: trust, the goal consensus among the participants, and network level competencies. All must be high, if the network needs to facilitate a lot of interdependent actions (Provan and Kenis, 2008). A typical example for the latter is, if different professional service providers dealing with the complex needs of families and children have to work together to address the complex reasons for child poverty.

### **3. Methodology and Sample**

In order to get an in-depth insight into local government practices, the paper uses a case-study approach. The paper employs a multi-method research design (interviews and documentary analysis). In line with a qualitative research approach, individual municipal approaches are compared, based on both, deductively and inductively identified criteria. The Austrian findings are based on 53 interviews with politicians, local administration staff, managers of local public enterprises plus representatives from non-profit service organisations and non-governmental organisations. The Belgian findings are based on 19 interviews. All the interviews were transcribed and coded. In addition, the interviewed partners provided us with written material and for each city, complemented by an analysis of publicly available documents.

The local level approaches will be evaluated in four cities, two Austrian and two Belgian ones. The Belgian cities (Antwerp and Ghent) are both located in Flanders, which has a long tradition in initiatives to fight child poverty (Vermeiren et al., 2018). Based on a special analysis of 2014 regional EU-SILC data, Guio and Vandenbrouke (2019) position Flanders in the group of best-performing countries (together with Luxembourg, Slovenia and Switzerland and the four Nordic countries) with respect to child poverty. The two Austrian cities, Linz and Vienna, are the two cities where the Austrian interview partners provided us with good practices for reducing child poverty.

Linz is the regional capital of Upper Austria and the third biggest city in Austria. According to the statistics of the Austrian Staedtebund (2018), 24% of the children in Linz live in poverty or at risk of poverty. Three members of the city government, including the Mayor, are social democrats (SPÖ), two belong to the conservative party, the Peoples Party (ÖVP), two to the far-right Free

Democratic Party (FPÖ), and one member comes from the Green Party (Grüne). The main responsibility for reducing child poverty rests with the social administration, which is led by a social-democratic Vice-Mayor.

Vienna is at the same time a city, a regional state, the capital city of Austria and also the biggest city in Austria. The Viennese City Senate (which is at the same time the regional government) consists of 13 persons, led by a social democrat who is at the same time the regional Prime Minister and the Mayor of Vienna. Altogether seven persons from the Vienna City Senate belong to the SPÖ, four to the FPÖ, one member comes from the Green Party and one from the ÖVP. The heads of the Viennese city administration come from the Green Party (one member) and from the SPÖ (seven members). The responsibilities for social affairs and childcare services are divided between two administrations. Table 2 provides some statistical data for the two Austrian cities. There are no comparable statistics available in Belgium.

**Table 2: Statistical data** (source: Staedtebund, 2018)

	Linz	Vienna
Population (2019)	206.895	1.897.491
Social assistance recipients per 1000 persons	33,6	105,6
Child poverty rate (share of children up to 18)	24%	25%
NEETs	16,1 %	20,4%
Enrolment rates		
0 to 2 years	22%	44%
3 to 5 years	98%	94%
6 to 10 years	54%	22%
11-16 years	1%	1%

Antwerp is the capital of Antwerp province in the Flemish Region. The current majority consists of N-VA (New Flemish Alliance – a conservative political party), sp.a (Socialist Party Differently – it is a social-democratic Flemish political party in Belgium) and Open Vld (Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats – a conservative-liberal Flemish political party). At the time of the interviews in early 2019, the Flemish nationalist party was part of the city government. According to our interview partners, child poverty in Antwerp is higher than in Ghent. The Flemish statistics only account for children under three on the local level: In 2017, 29.6% of the children under the age of 3 grew up in poverty in Antwerp (Vermeiren, 2018, p. 116).



Ghent is the second largest city in Flanders after Antwerp. It is the capital of the province of East Flanders. In Ghent the City Council has 53 members, divided into seven political fractions. The governing coalition is formed by Open Vld (liberal democratic party), Groen (ecological party), sp.a (social democratic party) and CD&V (Christian democratic party). Together, they hold 35 seats in the city council. The opposition parties are N-VA (Flemish nationalist party), PVDA (left-wing labour's party) and Vlaams Belang (right-wing extremist party). The interviewed partners stressed long social democratic and green tradition in the fight against child poverty, which was guided by a rights-based approach. Based on the Belgium EU-SILC statistics, the local administration estimated, in an interview in 2019, that the child poverty rate in Ghent is around 18%.

## **4. Findings**

The presentation of the findings is structured as follows. Firstly, a section providing statistical data, and secondly, a section on the fight against child poverty in a vertical multi-governance context. That part also includes an evaluation of the progress in Austria and Belgium concerning the implementing of the 2013 social investment concept. A third subsection will focus on the policy approaches and good practices in the four focus cities. In line with the above-presented governance modes, the PSSEPs will be evaluated on the policy-making level, in particular whether there are local anti-child poverty plans and who designs and evaluates them. The localization of the services provision of the EU social investment state will be evaluated. Here, a special focus will again be on PSSEPs.

### ***4.1. Child poverty in Austria and Belgium: the statistical perspective***

Looking at the country-wide *development of poverty* we see that both countries are confronted with increases, as the 2019 Eurostat Statistic of the AROPE-rates (people at risk of poverty or social exclusion) shows. In both countries, child poverty is higher than old-age poverty. Both countries will miss the national poverty reduction aims they committed themselves to in 2010. Austria committed itself to a figure of minus 235,000 people by 2020. The 2018 figure is minus 187,000 persons. Belgium made a reduction commitment of minus 380,000 but will fail to reach this goal as the number of persons at risk of poverty showed an increase of 56,000 persons in 2018.

**Table 3: Poverty rates** (source: Eurostat, 2019)

	<i>Austria 2010</i>	Belgium 2010	<i>Austria 2014</i>	Belgium 2014	<i>Austria 2018</i>	Belgium 2018
<b>Income poverty</b>	13.4	13.9	13.5	14.6	13.3	15.6
<b>Poverty and social exclusion</b>	18.9	20.8	19.2	21.2	17.5	19.2
<b>Under 16</b>	23.2	23.2	23.8	22.3	21.7	22.5
<b>16-24</b>	18.3	21.3	21.2	27.3	17.7	24.5
<b>25-54</b>	16.9	18.6	17.5	20.5	16.6	18.5
<b>55-64</b>	23.2	24.5	21.9	21.9	17.9	19.1
<b>65-74</b>	16.8	19.2	13.8	15.4	13.1	16.7
<b>Over 74</b>	18.1	22.5	19.4	18.5	16.2	18.5

Child poverty (under 16 years) in Austria has always been higher than the total average rates, with one exception in 2010. In Belgium, child poverty is also higher than the national average AROPE-rates but sometimes even higher poverty rates can be found for the age group 16 to 24 (teenager and young adult poverty). Child poverty in Austria is higher in the larger cities (Fink and Muerzl, 2017). In both countries, children in single parent households have the highest poverty risk, followed by households with more than two dependent children. Low work intensity, a non-European migration background and low educational qualifications (maximum secondary degree) also increase the risk of child poverty immensely. Low educational qualification of the parents outranks the migration background by far. For 2016, the recent Eurostat statistics showed a children's AROPE rate of 63.7% if parents had a secondary education at most, and a poverty rate of 66.9% for those who were 18+ and unemployed. In comparison, the poverty rate for migrants was 32.2% (Eurostat, 2019).

For Belgium, Guio and Vandenbroucke (2019) analysed for the King Baudouin Foundation the main drivers for childhood poverty for the three Belgian regions, as the level of child poverty in Belgium (according to the EU-SILC 2014 data) was higher than in the neighbouring countries (The Netherlands, Luxembourg, France and Germany). The main factors are displayed in figure 1. For Austria there is no comparative study.

**Figure 1: Percentage of children living in poverty in the Belgian regions according to the main determinants, based on the EU-SILC 2014 cross-sectional data (source: Guio and Vandenbroucke, 2019, p. 30).**

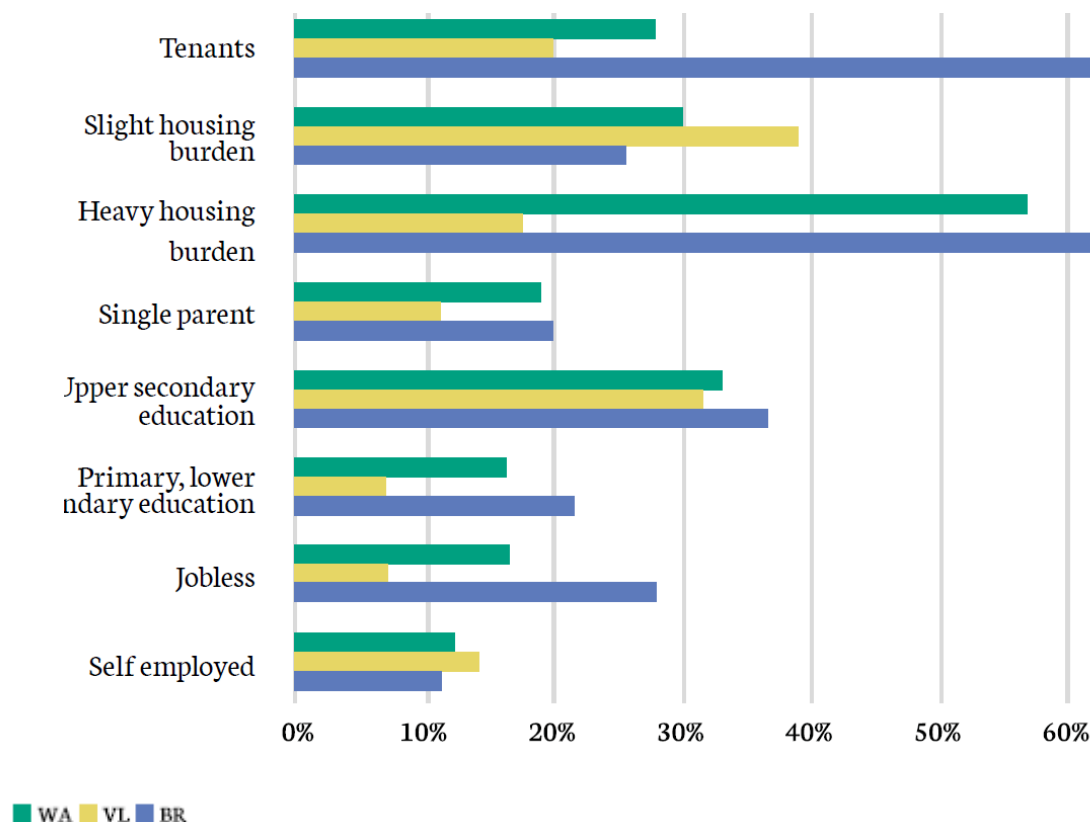
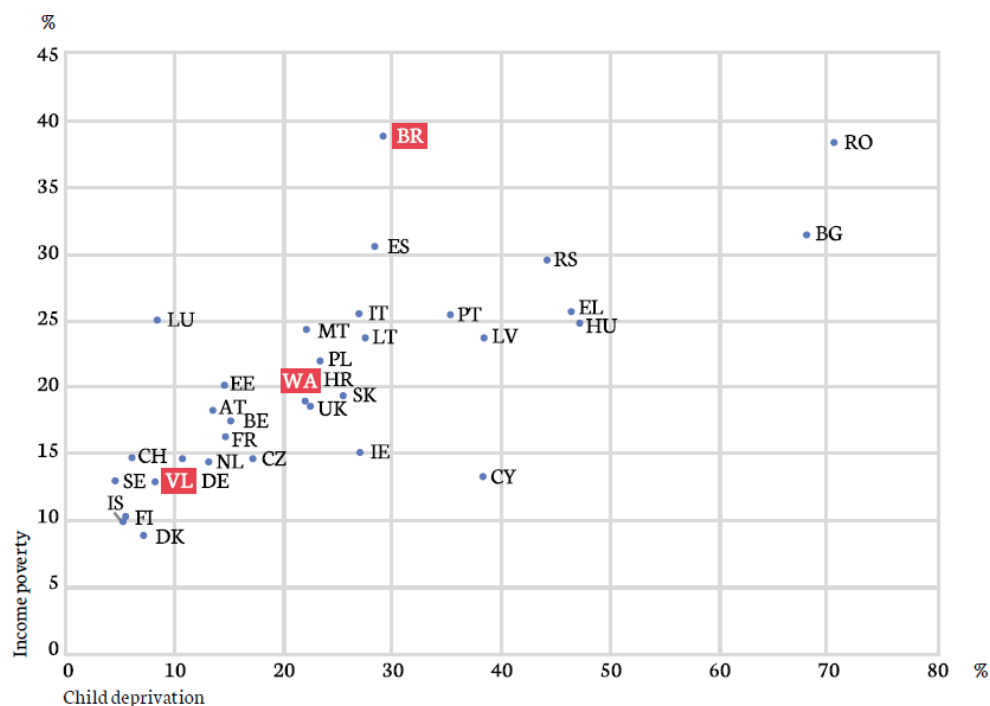


Figure 1 also shows that child poverty is the highest in the capital region of Brussels, followed by the region of Wallonia and the region of Flanders. In Flanders the housing debt burden has a larger impact than in Wallonia (Guio and Vandenbroucke, 2019). In Belgium, poverty rates for children living in low work-intensive or quasi-jobless households are above the EU-average (EC, 2019a). Further very influential determinants are the factors that parents only have secondary education (upper or lower) and that children live in non-EU migrant families (Schepers and Nicaise, 2017; Guio and Vandenbroucke, 2019). According to the 2019 European Commission progress report for Belgium (EC, 2019a), pockets of poverty persist due to the lack of access to the labour market for the young, for older workers and the low-skilled ones. “Youth unemployment is well above the EU average [...] and the existing labour activation measures are less effective for persons with a migrant background” (EC, 2019a, p. 5). As a remedy the EC progress report recommends that Belgium should strengthen its labour market activation policies for reducing the disincentives to work, which are particularly high for women as second income earners (EC, 2019a).

Figure 2 positions the three regions in comparison to European countries. It is obvious that the capital region of Brussels has the highest child poverty rates, Wallonia has a medium position and a child poverty rate a little higher than Austria, and Flanders is among the cluster of countries with a low child poverty rate.

**Figure 2: Percentage of children (aged 1-15 years) who lack at least three items (out of 17) and proportion of children who suffer from income poverty, EU-28 Member States, non-EU countries covered by EU-SILC and Belgian Regions, 2014** (Source: Guio and Vandenbroucke, 2019, p. 20).



#### **4.2. Combating child poverty as a hierarchical multi-level governance approach in Austria and Belgium**

With respect to the multi-level governance systems, Austria and Belgium are both federal states with three levels: the federal, the regional or state level and the local level. Austria has nine regional states; the two focus cities are located in Vienna and Upper Austria. Belgium is divided into three regions. Two of these regions, the Flemish region (or Flanders), and region of Walloon (or Wallonia) are each subdivided into five provinces. The third region is the Brussels capital region. The two focus cities are located in Flanders.

Another common feature of the two countries is that they both have a corporatist welfare state tradition and therefore have a Bismarck tradition of compulsory social insurance for the important risks of life (unemployment, work accidents, pension and health care). Both countries also have a means-tested minimum income benefits system in place to financially support the poor population. In designing and implementing social investment policies, the Belgian regions have had greater autonomy since 2011. In both countries, the national government has the responsibility for reaching the EU 2020 targets.

#### 4.2.1. Austria

As regard *national and regional plans to reduce child poverty*, Austria has neither a national anti-child poverty plan nor have the regional states such plans. With respect to the policy-making competences on the multi-governance level, there is a lack of hierarchical coordination. The fragmentation already starts at the federal level. Here, the competencies to combat child poverty are divided between various federal ministries with the Ministry for Families and Youth in a coordination role. On the regional state and the municipal levels, the fragmentation of policy designing competencies, which potentially concern child poverty and child well-being, continues. The authors of the Country Report on Austria, Fink and Muerzl (2017) conclude that decision-making is rather fragmented and does not follow a common understanding of children's well-being. It is dominated by an "incremental adoption according to logic and particular interests in the different policy areas" (Fink and Muerzl, 2017, p. 4).

With respect to the *legislative and policy design competencies*, it was a re-occurring topic in the Austrian interviews that the cities are the last in the line of decision-making and are, therefore, often reduced to carrying out policy programmes designed elsewhere, that means the higher-up levels of government are more powerful. The municipal policy-making competencies are particularly weak in the field of labour market integration, the design of the social benefit system and the social security system. The recent ideas of the conservative and right-wing federal government (2018-2019) for reforming the means-tested social assistance scheme have created a lot of insecurity for the local governments.

Regarding the three pillars of the 2013 European Commission's ideas for breaking the cycle of disadvantage for children, the evaluations for Austria show for *pillar one* (access to adequate resources) that a challenge exists with respect to the labour market integration of women. Austria is lagging behind with respect to the labour market integration of mothers. In Austria the flexible male-breadwinner model is the dominant one, which means that women,

irrespective of their educational level, have to bear the cost of motherhood at the price of mothers working part time in combination with fathers' full-time employment (Buber-Ennsner, 2015; Fink and Muerzl, 2017). With regard to full-time employment of mothers, Austria has the third highest part-time employment rates of women in the European Union (Fink and Muerzl, 2017). Irrespective of the educational status of mothers, the penalty of motherhood is high in Austria when it comes to full-time labour market integration.

An adequate provision of *institutionalised childcare facilities* is a precondition for the labour market integration of families in poverty. In the Austrian debate, justification of the necessity of more institutionalised childcare is linked primarily to the labour market integration of women and not framed as a policy to reduce child poverty. In Austria, the quantity of institutionalised childcare facilities is smaller than in Belgium. Furthermore, in Belgium childcare starts at a much lower level, especially for the age group 0 to 3 years. There is still a shortage of places in Austria, although the Austrian state has done a lot in the last decade to increase capacities. Cities perform better than rural areas when it comes to institutionalised childcare places for pre-school children. Austria has made some progress, as the enrolment in childcare of the under-3-year olds has doubled in the past decade and since 2008 the federal government has been providing earmarked subsidies for extending institutional pre-school childcare. In addition, a 1.55 billion Euro programme (2014 to 2025) was set up by the federal government in order to reach the goal of 270.000 all-day school places in 2025, in line with the EU-target of 40%. Despite the efforts of the last decade, a persistent deficit in institutional childcare still exists. The Austrian progress is not sufficient for the European Commission (2019b). The 2019 Country Report for the European Semester criticises Austria's efforts in the section on a more social Europe as follows: "The insufficient provision of full-time childcare services and all-day schools, varying strongly between the regional states, is one of the determinants behind the high share of female part-time employment" (EC, 2019b, p. 60). The report continues with the following recommendations: "Priority investment needs have, therefore, been identified to promote women's labour market participation" with the necessity "to enhance access to affordable, accessible and high-quality full-time childcare and all-day schools and support the development and implementation of a quality framework in early childhood education and care" (EC, 2019b, p. 60).

Moving on to the *child benefit system* we see that the universal system is not means-tested. The level of additional means-tested child benefits varies across the nine regional states. The former coalition government (conservative party and right-wing coalition from December 2017 to May 2019) introduced a benefit cap for the means-tested minimum income benefits. As a consequence,

the means-tested part of child support would have been reduced from the second child onward. There was a great out-cry by social and socioeconomic actors that these regulations would increase child poverty tremendously. In 2010, the Austrian Supreme Court ruled that this provision was a violation of the constitution and the three regional states that had introduced the reduction (Burgenland, Upper Austria and Lower Austria) are now reforming their regional regulations for the minimum income benefits.

Concerning *pillar two*, the main responsibility for *ECEC* rests with the nine regional states. The decentralised responsibility for *ECEC* across the nine regional states poses a great challenge, leading to quality variations between the nine regional states (Charlotte Buehler Institute, 2016). The responsibilities are fragmented as different administrations are responsible for school and pre-school children on the level of the regional states. For Austria, an innovative element is the fact that in the last year before school starts, a free of charge kindergarten year is obligatory (16 to 20 hours per week on four days). The obligatory kindergarten year is part of the Austrian Life Long Learning Strategy (Charlotte Buehler Institute, 2016). Since 2012, an agreement between the federal government and the nine regional states has existed, which puts an emphasis on language learning support for 3 to 6-year-old children with insufficient knowledge of German. Pre-school children are tested as to in their German language proficiency. Although the programme is targeted at all kindergarten children, the programme aims, above all, at improving the German language skills of kindergarten children with a non-German speaking background.

As regards initiatives for *early school leavers*, Austria has, like many other European countries, implemented programmes for NEETs in order to foster labour market inclusion. Low educational achievements, a lack of training and low work intensity are factors which significantly increase the risk of being poor. Austria introduced compulsory education and training up to the age of 18 back in 2016, much later than Belgium. Education and training are defined in a broad sense and include internships and vocational trainings organised by the Austrian Federal Employment Agency (AMS), apprenticeships, internships, employability courses and further schooling. The programme is planned to be fully rolled out by 2020 with an earmarked budget of 65 million Euros in the federal budget (Fink and Muerzl, 2017). As Austria is facing a shortage of apprentices (in particular in industry, care and tourism), several industry and employer association-driven initiatives for recruiting and keeping apprentices have been under way since 2019. In his previous position as the Minister of Social Affairs in Upper Austria, the current federal minister for Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection was the political advocate for such an

action. Again, such a policy is not framed as an anti-poverty initiative but in a labour market context.

Concerning *pillar three*, the Eurochild report (2019) criticises that Austria discontinued its efforts for a national action plan for children's rights in 2004. Fink and Muerzl (2017) conclude that, with the positive exception of national and region state-wide youth councils which were established in 2001, Austria has no tradition of any pro-active involvement of children in legal decision-making.

#### 4.2.2. Belgium

Belgium is the country which used its 2010 EU presidency to put the fight against poverty on the European agenda. In line with that, the fight against child poverty is a key dimension of the Belgian Europe 2020 strategy (Schepers and Nicaise, 2017). In recent years, budgetary considerations have slowed down activities which started in 2011.

In Belgium family-related policy-making competencies are shared between the federal, regional and local governments. The latter have gained competencies in anti-poverty policies, which are in line with the growing importance of a localization of welfare policies (Vernemiren et al., 2018). Compared to Austria, the three regions have had more competencies for designing their own social investment policies (such as child benefits and active labour market policies) (Schepers and Nicaise, 2017) since the sixth state reform in 2011, which was put in place, after the formation of the federal government had taken 541 days.

Unlike Austria, Belgium has a tradition of national *action plans to combat poverty* starting in 2013 (Schepers and Nicaise, 2017). The national action plans were developed in close consultation with the three regional states, public welfare agencies and non-profit organisations (e.g., the National Commission on the Rights of the Child, the Belgian Anti-Poverty Network, the Alliance for Families, the Flemish Child & Family, the Walloon Birth and Childhood Office, the Belgium Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion) (Schepers and Nicaise, 2017). One of the strategic goals in the national anti-poverty plan ("Plan fédéral de lutte contre la pauvreté") is the reduction of child poverty. The 2019 renewal of the plan got stuck due to a coalition crisis in 2018 and a withdrawal of the far-right secretary of state in charge of poverty. After a general election in 2019, the new federal government, led by Sophie Wilmès from the Reformist Movement, was constituted at the end of October 2019. On the federal level, the new Minister of Consumer Affairs, Disabled Persons, Economy, Employment, Equal Rights and Fighting Poverty, Nathalie Muylle



comes from the Flemish Christian Democrats and is expected to continue the fight against child poverty as a strategic priority.

The federated entities also have *regional anti-poverty plans* (for the three regions see Schepers and Nicaise, 2017). The Flemish anti-poverty plan emphasises prevention and focuses on child poverty. The most recent plan for the Walloon region focuses on single parent families. The situation for Brussels is complicated because the Flemish community adopted a multi-action plan against child poverty for 2016 to 2020, while the French community commission laid greater emphasis on increasing the number of institutionalised childcare facilities and improving the accessibility for vulnerable families (Schepers and Nicaise, 2017).

Flanders has a long tradition of focusing on integrated services for combating child poverty. Back in 2011, the Flemish government committed itself in the Flemish Action Programme on the Child, creating a specific project fund dedicated to the fight against child poverty with a particular emphasis on children aged 0 to 3 years. With the Flemish Parliament Act on the Organisation of Childcare for Babies and Toddlers, which entered into force on 1 April 2014, the Flemish government continued to strive to gradually provide adequate, quality childcare, which is accessible to everyone (Nicaise and Schepers, 2015). Also, in 2014 the Flemish Minister for Poverty Reduction, Ingrid Lieten, made additional funds available for Flemish local networks for combating child poverty.

Moving on to the evaluation of the three pillars of the 2013 EU Recommendations on child poverty, we find that in Belgium a persistent challenge is the high percentage of poor children living in low work-intensive or quasi-jobless households (Schepers and Nicaise, 2017). With respect to *pillar one*, the 2019 EC progress report criticises that for the *quasi-jobless households* the disincentives to increase their work intensity are still too high (EC, 2019a). The 2019 European Country Report urges to increase active labour market policies, to reform the tax system by abolishing the tax penalty for second income earners (mostly women) and to lower the labour market entry barriers for poorly educated persons. The EC progress report (2019a) marks the situation of migrants as particularly challenging. The Belgium *labour market* is highly segregated. There are high barriers for the poorly educated and for migrants to increasing their work intensity. The language competencies expected of labour market candidates are specially challenging in the capital region of Brussels, which has a persistent child poverty rate of around 39%.

As regards the *quantity and accessibility of institutionalised childcare* for poor children, Belgium has made considerable progress. Concerning the quantity, quality and accessibility to *institutionalised childcare*, the 2015 evaluation by Nicaise and Schepers (2015, p. 8), concluded: “Belgium [...] finds itself just above the average in the European Union, with great variations across the different regions. Despite its relatively good position in the EU-context, there is a need for further improvement, taking into account that access to childcare for disadvantaged families is limited.” The EC Country Report of 2019 (EC, 2019a) also stresses that there are still challenges regarding the enrolment rates and regular attendance gaps of children from low income and immigrant families. “Despite a high participation rate of 98% in 2016, the early childhood education system faces challenges to reach families in poverty and to deal with the multi-cultural context. The population of 3-year-old children reached an all-time high in 2018 with the fastest growth among disadvantaged groups, especially those with an immigrant background. Enrolment and regular attendance gaps remain significant and may affect language skills” (EC, 2019a, p. 38).

Since 2014, institutionalised pre-school childcare can only be provided in Flanders by licensed facilities, and up to 2017, 2,000 new places were created in Flanders (Schepers and Nicaise, 2017). To get a license, private childcare providers had to switch from (semi-)commercial fees to means-tested fees with the result that, in 2016, 74% of the parents paid means-tested fees. Means-tested fees help to make professional childcare more accessible for poor families. In the Brussels capital region, the government put special emphasis on nurseries due the extreme shortage of affordable places for children aged 0 to 3 years. The new places are predominately assigned for parents who work, including children from quasi-jobless households. Belgian-wide, Schepers and Nicaise (2017) conclude that socio-economically disadvantaged and immigrant children are still severely underrepresented in early childcare facilities for children aged 0 to 3 years and to a less extent in pre-school facilities. Despite some progress, particularly in Flanders, made in realizing the 2013 EC Recommendations for breaking the cycle of disadvantage for poor children, Belgium needs to put greater emphasis on avoiding segregation from the very start of a child’s socialisation (Schepers and Nicaise, 2017).

Unlike in Austria, the competencies for *family benefits* have mainly been in the hands of the regional government since the sixth state reform in 2011. For Nicaise and Schepers (2015) the universal child benefit scheme is still inefficient in combating child poverty because it is not focused enough on poor families. Universal child benefits are nearly the same across the regions. Again, the Flemish government performs better with targeting income-poor families,

having created a “so-called ‘universal system’ with selective supplements for people who really need it. [...] Certain categories (such as the long-term unemployed) will be entitled to a social supplement per child [...]. The Walloon government, on the contrary, decided not to modify the system in the near future in order to avoid additional complexity” (Nicaise and Schepers, 2015, p. 9).

In order to improve collaboration in PSSEPs, the federal government also launched a pilot project *Children First* back in 2011. The Programme financed the creation of local platforms that unite different initiatives and organisations in the (preventive) detection and fight against child poverty. 57 local public centres for social welfare (PCSWs) were supported Belgium-wide in establishing local platforms, where the PCSWs, schools, childcare centres and anti-poverty groups come together to develop local context-adjusted specialised solutions for combating child poverty (Schepers and Nicaise, 2017).

Regarding *pillar two*, Belgium and Austria are both countries, where children from academic households have better chances to successfully complete secondary education. For Belgium, Schepers and Nicaise (2017) conclude that social and ethnic inequalities in education remain extremely high. Concerning ECEC, the Flemish government committed itself to investing in the vocational training of employees in the childcare sector, back in 2012 (Nicaise and Schepers, 2015). The French communities are performing more poorly. Despite positive steps, there is no coherent ECEC strategy on the level of all regional governments (Nicaise and Schepers, 2015). The EC Country Report of 2019 (EC, 2019a, p. 38) again mentions Flanders as a positive example as Flanders “has enhanced the staff-to-child ratio and supports increased enrolment and attendance by granting a premium to schools for each child of non-Dutch speaking parents to improve the child’s language skills. It also trains future pre-primary teachers in how to deal with deprivation and diversity”. The progress is less pronounced in the French-speaking communities, according to the 2019 Country Report by the EC (2019a).

Moving on to *parenting services* we realise that support is a multi-level responsibility, involving all three government levels (Nicaise and Schepers, 2015). The service levels were raised in the past decade, especially for low educated and migrant households. Already back in 2007, “the Flemish act of 13 July 2007 created ‘education shops’ (open access information and counselling centres) in all major cities as well as in some provincial areas. The Flemish ‘Houses of the Child’ offer a universal service for young families. In the Walloon region, the mission of the Birth and Childhood Office (ONE) to support parents was reinforced in the contract 2008-2012. [...] There are over

627 consultation points for young children in Brussels and Wallonia. Consultations for children are free and open to any parent with children aged 0 to 6 years” (Nicaise and Schepers, 2015, p. 9).

Concerning *early school leavers*, Belgium has made some progress, but the EC 2019 Semester Country Progress Report diagnoses regional disparities. While Flanders with a rate of 7.2% was below the Belgium 2020 goal of 9.5% of early school leavers. Wallonia with 10.5% and the Brussels capital region with 12.9% of early school leavers in 2017 still have a lot to do (EC, 2019a, p. 38). The early school leavers’ rate is “particularly high for non-EU born young people (16.7%), and for young men in cities (14.4%)” (EC, 2019a, p. 38). In 2017 the percentage of NEETs was 9.3% and therefore below the EU-average (EC, 2019a, p. 71). The efforts towards improving literacy among children with a problematic school career, and the full rollout of a dual vocational and training system in 2019 are seen as positive steps by the European Commission. To increase the effectiveness, Flanders has reformed its temporary work experience scheme for job seekers (with a lack of skills or no recent work experience) while in the Brussels capital region a specialised team of 27 persons for implementing the Youth Job Guarantee (Schepers and Nicaise, 2017) was set up at the employment agency.

In Belgium, *pillar three* has attracted significantly less attention, according to Schepers and Nicaise (2017), although Belgium has a strong commitment to a rights-based approach to combat child poverty. On the service level, there are several activities designed to improve the participation of children from vulnerable families, including a holiday participation programme in Flanders and the provision of supplementary education for 10 to 14-year-old children in the capital region of Brussels. Affordable and decent housing is a challenge in all regions. Access to social housing is over-bureaucratic and the quantity below the needs (Schepers and Nicaise, 2017).

### **4.3. City policies and services**

#### **4.3.1. Linz**

In our interviews, child poverty was put into the context of *inherited poverty*. Family structures (multi-person households, single parents’ households) were seen as poverty increasing factors as well as having a non-German speaking migration background. Better labour market integration was regarded as a very important driver out of poverty. The anti-poverty policy in Linz is characterized by a prevention strategy in the sense that the anti-poverty prevention programmes should start as early as possible. On the political level, combating

poverty belongs to the context of the social investment state with a special focus on children and teenagers.

Despite this strong commitment to the social investment idea on the policy level, Linz has neither a local anti-poverty plan nor a formalised social investment strategy for children. An overall city-coordinated policy approach across the various administrations dealing with the complex issue of child poverty, is lacking. There are no forms of formal institutionalised partnerships with non-profits and other local actors to jointly develop such a strategy. Nor is there any collaborative evaluation of the success of the city-wide local anti-child poverty policies.

Within the local administration, various administrative departments are involved. There is a sectoral segregation. Institutionalised cross-departmental co-operations are occasion-driven (e.g., potential loss of home, child abuse). The administrative sectoral separation extends to the collaboration with the socio-economic actors at the level of service provision.

Looking at the target groups we find that there is a strong focus on children of all age groups. Initiatives cover all age groups (pre-school, school-children and school leavers), but they are sometimes quite small (e.g., home for mother and child, Nachbarinnen, Schule im Park, LearnFit). Table 4 displays the good practice programmes mentioned by our interview partners in Linz.

**Table 4: Services in Linz 8** (authors' own compilations based on the interviews)

Service provider and service characteristics	Focus group and type	Child poverty focus
Non-profit organisation, state of Upper Austria and regional statutory health insurance (OÖGKK) <b><i>Gut begleitet von Anfang an! Fruehe Hilfen (Well accompanied from the beginning! Early help)</i></b> – Austria-wide health promotion and early intervention in pregnancy and early childhood, which takes into account the resources and burdens of families in that specific life situation. A central element of early aid is that multi-professionals services are offered	Pregnant women, young children and their families – early intervention in pregnancy and early childhood	Implicit, universal service
Non-profit organisation with financial support of the federal chancellery and a federal ministry <b><i>Haus fuer Mutter und Kind (Home for mother and child)</i></b> Places for up to 10 mothers with dependent children. The women contribute to the rental cost; multi-team support including volunteers. Maximum stay: 1.5 years	Pregnant women and other women which face severe crises – crisis management and empowerment of women	Implicit, universal service
Austrian-wide operating non-profit organisation (co-financed with federal and EU-subsidies) <b><i>HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters)</i></b> for pre-school children from three to seven: focuses on migrant households to give children a good school start; weekly household visits to empower parents (mostly mothers) to improve children's language skills and the cognitive, social, emotional and motoric potential of children (since 2017)	Children and their parents from 3 years up for a good school start by developing the capabilities of mothers and children Education and counselling	Explicit, as many non-German speaking migrants have a high poverty risk
Non-profit organisation <b><i>Nachbarinnen (Neighbours)</i></b> : four women provide counselling and administrative support in the interaction with pre-school and school	Migrant mothers of pre-school children and school-counselling migrant mothers	Explicit, as non-German speaking migrant children face a high poverty risk
Non-profit organisation Two <b><i>Lerncafés (learning cafes)</i></b> Free of charge afternoon care programme for children between 6 and 15 years from disadvantaged families in two neighbourhoods	Children Care, education and food (provision of a healthy light meal)	Explicit, as it focuses on a high-risk group
Non-profit organisation <b><i>Schule im Park (School in the Park)</i></b> Twice-weekly offer for Roma children in a public park by a social worker	Migrant children Education Prize winning project in 2018 (City of Diversity)	Explicit, as this is a group with a high risk

Municipal association and partner enterprises <b>LearnFit</b> Preparation of disadvantaged youngsters with basic education for a first job with coaching and internships (since 2015)	Young persons between 15 and 23 years Training and education	Explicit, as it focuses on a high-risk group
Municipal association <b>Learn</b> Support for early school leavers (teenagers and young adults) to complete schooling after an interruption and courses to improve employability	Teenagers and young adults Training and education	Explicit, as it focuses on a high-risk group
Municipal association and co-financed by the regional government of Upper Austria <b>Kick and the AMS</b> Individual support and coaching for labour market integration	Youngsters and young adults Counselling	None, universal service
Municipal association (financially supported by the European Social Fund) <b>Produktionsschule Factory (Production school Factory)</b> Individual coaching and work experience in crafts to prepare the target group for an apprenticeship after completion of basic schooling Established after a Danish example in 2001	Youngsters and young adults Training and education	Explicit, as it focuses on a high-risk group
Employment programme of the city of Linz <b>Jobimpuls</b> People are temporarily employed (max. 25 hours) by the municipality (municipal administrations, centres for the elderly, kindergartens and social economy associations (Volkshilfe, SOMA market, VSG, VFQ, Trödlerladen ...).	Jobimpuls is aimed at people who receive minimum income benefits and who (despite appropriate efforts) do not find employment opportunities. Jobimpuls provides occupational integration for people with disabilities in the context of equal opportunities. Jobimpuls employs people in the context of child and youth welfare.	Explicit, as it focuses on minimum income beneficiaries
Regional state of Upper Austria <b>Finanzfuehrerschein – financial drivers licence</b> Financial literacy training	Teenagers Financial literacy	None, universal service

Concerning *institutionalised childcare*, the situation for pre-school children is much better in Linz than in the rest of Upper Austria. After the regional state of Upper Austria limited the free-of charge kindergarten to morning hours, Linz implemented its own tariff-system for the afternoon hours. What parents pay depends on their income. The prices of the lunches for children also vary according to their parents' income. The target group-specific element comes in via socially adjusted tariffs. The rising need of pre-school childcare places is an ongoing challenge for the financially strained municipal budget. It is also not easy to find enough kindergarten teachers.

Regarding ECEC, Linz puts a special focus on improving the language skills of pre-school children in the institutionalised childcare facilities. This is complemented by a variety of early help options, which are open to all parents and start when the children are babies.

Regarding school children, the legal competencies of the city are scanty. Our municipal interview partners stressed the need to increase the places of institutionalised care, improve (free of charge) offers for pupils with learning difficulties and to invest more in school social work as a universal service.

The provision of after-school care is open to all families and, therefore, a step to enable parents, irrespective of their socio-economic status, to improve their labour market integration. Tariffs are socially adjusted.

With respect to the group of young people who have completed 10 years at school, Linz engages itself in offering education and training places as well as counselling and coaching for teenagers and young adults to improve the transition from school to the labour market. Already back in 1997, the city of Linz founded a municipal association (Production school factory) to train and coach disadvantaged young persons in the transition period from school to employment. With the exception of labour market counselling (Kick and the AMS), the city has a clear focus on teenagers and young adults in poverty.

The services listed in table 4 are provided either by municipal providers or non-profit organisations, which also rely on volunteers for the provision of services. The good practice examples show that a special focus is placed on managing transition periods. With respect to financing, most of the funding comes from public subsidies and is, therefore, mostly free of charge for the service recipients. If user-fees have to be paid, they are socially adjusted as the example for afternoon care for pre-school children shows.

The limited policy-making competencies as a city in combination with a tight city budget were a reoccurring challenge mentioned by our interview partners.



In Linz, the number of children is increasing rapidly and childcare facilities are heavily used, so that this field needs to be expanded every year and opening hours have to be adjusted. But also, the aging of society and the changes and challenges in this regard were highlighted in the interviews in Linz. Consequently, the city has to look into the future: especially training in shortage occupations, such as care for the elderly, should be pushed. The change in the labour market with regard to digitalization was also addressed. It is important to motivate and qualify young people for these areas. A challenge is that same time the young generation is aiming at achieving a satisfactory work-life balance.

#### *4.3.2. Vienna*

The status of Vienna as the capital city and as a regional state has consequences for Vienna's decision-making competencies for fighting poverty. They are much more comprehensive than in Linz due to its decision-making competencies as a regional state. In Vienna, the biggest group of minimum income beneficiaries are dependent children. Vienna is a city with a long tradition of social-democratic governments and pursues an anti-poverty policy that addresses all major poverty risk groups. Vienna is proud of its long engagement in combating poverty. Social housing, initiatives for the homeless, active labour market integration for adults and integration projects for migrants are also in the focus of the municipal and the non-profit interviewees. Some of the Vienna-based interview partners put the fight against poverty in the human rights context. Poverty is seen as a violation of a life in dignity. Financial assistance and special services have to go hand in hand with a preventive approach. A good education is seen as a key resource.

Combating child poverty is one of the key focus areas. Concerning child poverty, single parent families, and poverty risks in multi-person households as well as inherited poverty were interview topics. Additionally, the situation of homeless children was addressed. Migrant women with dependent children and a low level of education were regarded as a particularly challenging group. Children, young adults and non-EU citizens have the highest poverty risks in Vienna.

With respect to collaborative policy-making to reduce child poverty, Vienna has neither a local poverty plan nor an explicit child poverty strategy. The administrative responsibilities are divided, but the departments have long established working relationships. Intra-administrative collaboration is very good, according to our interview partners. The Viennese public agencies and municipal enterprises see themselves as strong partners of the city

administration and collaborate in accordance with their specific mandates. Both, the public and the non-profit interview partners, stressed that there are good, long-established working relationships. The city of Vienna is well-connected to other civil society actors and acts an agenda setter in social policy networks. Since the migration crisis in 2015, when Vienna was a hot spot, collaborations with volunteers to complement professional services have regained importance as a service provision option.

As a good practice example for *joint strategic planning* the qualification plan 2030 was mentioned which was co-designed by the Employment Agency, the federal Social Ministry, and the Viennese employee supporting fund (WAFF), the city of Vienna and the social partners. City representatives and partners from the social and solidarity economy meet on advisory boards. Some of the interview partners from the city of Vienna stressed that they are trying to keep updated lists showing which employees sit on these advisory boards. The city of Vienna was also heavily involved in raising the age of compulsory training and education to 18 across Austria.

Table 5 provides an overview of the good practice services for combating child poverty, mentioned in the Viennese interviews. If not free of charge, Vienna has a long tradition of socially-adjusted tariffs for social services.

**Table 5: City of Vienna** (own compilations based on the interviews)

Service provider and service characteristics	Focus group and type	Child poverty focus
City of Vienna <b>Free pre-school childcare</b>	Pres-school children Education and care	Implicit, universal service
Non-profit organisation in combination with the social administration and the financial support of the EU and the federal ministry of the exterior <b>HIPPY</b> (see Linz), currently rolled out to 224 migrant families in various districts and <b>HIPPY Plus</b> Providing support and empowerment of migrant families in the dialogue with schools till the end of primary schooling	Children and mothers Education and care	Explicit, through the focus on migrant families with low qualifications
Non-profit organisation (Austria-wide programme financed with EU FEAD (Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived) <b>Aktion Schulanfang (School starter package)</b> Support of poor families with vouchers for the school start costs	School children Financial assistance	Explicit, as it is targeted to poor families

Non-profit organisation <b>Lernen mit leerem Bauch (learning with an empty stomach)</b> Provision of cold meals for 820 children (year 2017/2018) (since 2011)	School children Food and housekeeping training	Implicit, as access is not limited to poor children
Non-profit organisation <b>Nightingale</b> is an international mentoring programme for children between 8 and 10 with a migration background. Students are the mentors.	School children Education	Explicit, as its focus is on migrant children as a high-risk group
Non-profit organisation in cooperation with the city of Vienna and the Viennese Social Fund <b>Providing shelter and intensive support for homeless teenagers</b>	Teenagers and young adults (14 to 20 years) Homelessness	Explicit, due to the focus on homeless teenagers
Non-profit organisation with the financial support of the EU social fund, the AMS, the city of Vienna and the Viennese Social Fund (also belonging to the city) <b>Jugend College (Youth College)</b> Provision of courses for early school leavers in order to empower them to return to school or start working, capacity 1000 persons	Teenagers and young adults up to 21 years Coaching and training	Explicit, as early school leavers are a high-risk group
Non-profit organisation cooperation project of the city of Vienna and the regional AMS (labour market agency) with financial support from the EU, the city of Vienna and the regional AMS <b>Back to the future</b> Gaining work experience in many areas for recipients of minimum income benefits, mainly in city services and socio-economic enterprises	Minimum income benefit recipients between 18 and 24 Gaining work experience in many areas	Explicit, as it is limited to minimum income beneficiaries
Regional AMS (labour market agency) <b>Job NAVI</b> Support for labour market integration of young mothers and coaching till a training or apprenticeship has been completed	Young mothers Counselling	Explicit, as it focuses on minimum income beneficiaries with children

*Institutionalised childcare* is free for all pre-school children and the current Viennese mayor, Michael Ludwig, announced in 2020 that there will also be free after-school facilities in the near future. Free of charge institutionalised childcare was described as being particularly advantageous for children from deprived families by our interview partners, but additionally it was seen as a precondition for increasing labour market integration, in particular of mothers. Compared to the surrounding rural areas in Lower Austria, the quantity of places for pre-school children is much larger in Vienna.

Concerning early school leavers, Vienna offers a variety of programmes targeted to minimum income beneficiaries. For the city representatives it is important to provide support, managing the transition from school to employment. To empower young minimum income beneficiaries to successfully enter the labour market is an important aspect of the Viennese policy to end the vicious circle of inherent poverty. Labour market integration of this particular age group is an essential strategic objective within the Viennese means-tested minimum income benefits policy. Programmes for poor teenagers and young adults are seen as the backbone of an anti-poverty prevention strategy. Education is regarded as the most sustainable key to ending poverty. The period of being a minimum income beneficiary at this age should be as short as possible.

In Vienna, good labour market conditions, raising the age for obligatory training and education to 18 and a policy of (possible) financial penalties, together with a special focus on teenagers and young adults resulted in a fall in the number of minimum income beneficiaries in that age group at the time of the interview (2018).

Homeless families with dependent children are also in the focus of the Viennese municipal decision-makers. A change of approaches occurred in recent years. While in the past family shelters were provided, today's approach is to get homeless families into housing and set up case management. Vienna also has special shelters for homeless teenagers. For this age group, too, special case management is offered.

Like Linz, Vienna focuses on all age groups of children in poverty. Especially, teenagers and young adults are addressed during their transition to the world of work.

In Vienna, the question of what digitization means for the working world is an uncertainty, according to the city administration. This is classified as the greatest challenge, especially for the group of the low-skilled, as well as for certain professional fields that are particularly affected by digitization. In connection with this, the "matching process" between human skills and economic requirements is addressed. According to the interview partners', better coordination would be needed to facilitate the transition to the world of work. The financial aspect of the continued funding of programmes and measures is also highlighted as challenging.

#### 4.3.3. Antwerp

As section 4.2.2 showed, Flanders has a long tradition in making the fight against child poverty a top priority. Among the Belgian regions, Flanders is the one with the lowest child poverty rates. Compared to Austria, not only the regional policy-making competencies are higher, local decision-making competencies in implementing EU social investment policies are also more comprehensive. The Flemish decree on local social policy considers the local governments as the main coordinating actors in the local welfare landscape. More specifically, local governments oversee the coordination of local needs and supply in the social sector and are responsible for providing and creating services that are accessible and supportive for everyone. The responsibility for detecting gaps and overlaps in welfare service provision rests with the Flemish local governments. Together with the local PCSWs, the local governments are supposed to provide and offer well-functioning and accessible services to their citizens.

As already mentioned, in 2011 the Belgium state started to support the formation of local service networks with the local welfare agency as a lead organisation. In 2014 the then Flemish minister for poverty reduction, Ingrid Lieten, extended the federal support for the formation of local service networks to combat child poverty (Vermeiren et al., 2018). The biggest recipients were the two focus cities: Antwerp got € 550,000, and Ghent received € 274,000. In both focus cities local service provision networks to reduce child poverty exist with the PCSWs as the lead organisations. The local PCSWs are responsible for the implementation of the Right of Social Integration and that the needy get means-tested minimum income benefits (Penne and Parcerisas, 2018).

For the coordination within these PSSEPs, the lead organisation appoints a network coordinator who acts as a broker between the lead organisation and the other participants (Vermeiren et al., 2018). As a second coordination layer, the anti-child poverty networks have steering committees and, as a third layer, they have various specialised working groups, resulting in vertical layers (Figure 3) within the local anti-child poverty networks.

**Figure 3: Vertical layers within the networks for combating child poverty**  
(Source: Vermeiren et al., 2018, p. 41)



With regard to the local context, in Antwerp the problem of child poverty is strongly linked to the unemployment of parents, according to our municipal interview partners. The child poverty rate is particularly high in the quasi-jobless households. Another challenge of Antwerp is that 25% of all (non-EU) migrants to Belgium come to Antwerp. The labour market integration of early school leavers also presents challenge. Our interview partners regarded education as the key to getting children out of poverty.

According to our interview partners from the city of Antwerp, there is no local anti-poverty plan, but the OASeS research group (Centre on Inequalities, Poverty, Social Exclusion and the City) from the University of Antwerp publishes the Yearbook on Poverty and Social Exclusion (every year since 1991), which influences the agenda of policy-makers.

Since the 1990s regular welfare meetings have been held in various districts of Antwerp to improve the coordination among social service providers. As a network analysis of Raeymaeckers and Kenis (2016) of three district networks shows, these include organisations offering services targeted at vulnerable families.

**Table 6: Number of organisations per service domain in the Network and participation rates** (authors' own compilation based on Raeymaeckers and Kenis, 2016, p. 409 and 411).

Service Domain	A	B	C
Employment and education	8	11	9
Housing (e.g. Social Housing)	3	6	2
Children, youth and their families	6	10	16
Health Care	20	28	17
Community centres (leisure activities and volunteering work)	4	2	1
Financial and material services	3	5	8
Services to people with foreign background (leisure and group activities)	0	16	4
Services to people addicted to drugs	0	0	5
Others	7	4	8
Total	49	72	71
<b>Participation rates in the welfare meetings</b>			
Absolute: number of organisations (on average)	21	28	30
In percentage of the organisations in the three network	42%	38%	42%

Participation in these networks is voluntary. In all networks the local PCSW is involved as a central organisation. The aim of the networks is to provide better service for the multiple problems of their clients (Raeymaeckers and Kenis, 2016). Beyond exchanging information, the networks aim at improving the collaboration between the providers and to overcome the danger that social service organisations live on isolated islands (Raeymaeckers and Kenis, 2016, p. 413). In the case of the three networks this worked quite well in networks A and B (Raeymaeckers and Kenis, 2016).

Table 7 provides an overview of the good practices mentioned by our interview partners from Antwerp.

**Table 7: City of Antwerp** (authors' own compilations based on the interviews)

Service provider and service characteristics	Focus group and type	Child poverty focus
CAW – Centre of General Welfare <b>Gezinscoaches03 (Family Coaches 03)</b> This is a unique cooperation model with various local care partners, in which vulnerable families with small children (0-3) receive intensive and long-term support.	Vulnerable families with small children; network of specialist and generalist professionals providing support to families in poverty in different life domains Support for families	Explicit, as it focuses on vulnerable families

<p>Non-profit organisation in cooperation with the city</p> <p><b>Spring Mee!</b></p> <p>Spring Mee offers an intensive coaching for parents of toddlers for one year. Under the direction of Vormingplus, the nursery schools organise parent groups on relevant topics such as independence, toilet training, playful learning, multilingual education, etc.</p>	<p>Toddlers,</p> <p>The nursey schools are selected based on socio-economic indicators.</p> <p>Education for parents</p>	<p>Implicit, as the participation is open for all parents of nursery schools</p>
<p>Cooperation between Werkhaven and Stekelbees National Childcare; with Werkhaven providing LDE employees (Local Service Economy) and Stekelbees acts as a coordinator</p> <p><b>Instapje</b></p> <p>It is a development stimulation programme for vulnerable parents with a toddler and prepares parents and children for starting in kindergarten.</p>	<p>Vulnerable families with small children</p> <p>Education</p>	<p>Explicit, as it focuses on vulnerable families</p>
<p>Federal government (via OMCW)</p> <p><b>Child poverty fund</b> is a financial support (maximum € 300 per child) for children's school bills, etc.</p>	<p>Vulnerable families with children</p> <p>Financial assistance</p>	<p>Explicit, as it focuses on vulnerable families</p>
<p><b>House of the child (Project in Flanders)</b></p> <p>Physical meeting places and contact points for families with small children in the municipality. One stop agency for preventive social family services and health care services for the children.</p>	<p>Families with small children (0-3 years old)</p> <p>Counselling, education and health services</p>	<p>Implicit, universal service</p>
<p>Youth organisation on behalf of the city of Antwerp</p> <p><b>Buddyproject</b></p> <p>Young people are supported by a voluntary mentor. The result of the mentoring can be that they enrol in school again, start a (higher) education, start an education, find work, etc.</p>	<p>Unemployed young adults between 17 and 25 (especially NEETs)</p> <p>Coaching</p>	<p>Implicit, as the mentoring is open to all high school students with school difficulties irrespective of their socio-economic status</p>
<p>Youth organisation on behalf of the city of Antwerp</p> <p><b>Experience project</b> focuses on volunteering as a possible step into work.</p>	<p>NEETs between 18 and 26</p>	<p>Explicit, as it focuses on NEETs</p>

Table 7 shows that, in line with the Belgian tradition for the *pillars one and two*, there is a focus on pre-school children. Our interview partners regarded institutionalised pre-school childcare facilities as particularly valuable for children from deprived families.

Concerning *labour market integration*, the interview partners mentioned a project in which 1.900 unemployed persons in Antwerp participate. Many



participants find a job within a year. This labour market integration project is open to all unemployed persons and not specifically focused on families in poverty. The University of Antwerp is currently evaluating how migrant women wearing a head scarf are treated by the local employment agencies. They are in a particularly disadvantaged position concerning labour market integration. Belgium-wide the activation mechanism has been strengthened for the unemployed and a system of personal contracts defining the obligations of the unemployed has been implemented.

*Family Coaches* have been established in both Belgian cities. Family Coaches offer long term support on several domains for small children and their parents (Vermeiren, 2018). The Family Coaches project is organised as PSSEPs. Under the project, one social worker is appointed for one family, who has the task of serving as a broker between the family and various professional generalist and specialist service providers, ranging from nursing, family and housing counselling to pedagogical services (Vermeiren, 2018). The number of families allocated to the Family Coaches, who also work in their “home” social service organisation, varies between one, two or a few more. Vermeiren characterised the Family Coaches as follows: “Family Coaches is a network among generalist and specialist service providers that focuses on preventive, generalist and accessible counselling for deprived families with small children. The main strength of this project is the connection that is made between generalist and specialist services and the link that these professionals maintain with their own organisations” (Vermeiren, 2018, p. 117). Intervention and supervision meetings of the professionals involved also act as drivers for increasing the effectiveness and for creating a collaborative service provision (Vermeiren, 2018). The local PCSW is the lead organisation. The experience in Antwerp showed that there is an inherent tension between the lead organisations’ requirements and the professional autonomy of the Family Coaches (Vermeiren, 2018).

Another Flanders-wide approach is the *Houses of the Child*. The Houses of the Child operate at the district level. Antwerp has 14 Houses of the Child. They are physical meeting places, which provide a universal service, starting with pregnant women, and health services for new-born children. A variety of services of preventive parental support, leisure time activities for children and meeting opportunities for parents, financial assistance and educational services are also provided for families with small children aged 0 to 3 years (Vermeiren et al., 2018). In Antwerp the Houses of the Child offer universal services to all families with small children. Additionally, they are a low-threshold opportunity for families in poverty to contact a variety of social services providers (Vermeiren et al., 2018; Dierckx et al., 2019). Compared to the Family Coaches, the access point via the Houses of the Child requires more

self-organisation from the vulnerable families. Family Coaches and the services provided in the Houses of the Child are complementary social services. In the Houses of the Child in Antwerp, the local public health and welfare organisation “Child & Family” is a central actor and has been a strong promotor since the beginning (Dierckx et al., 2019). According to Dierckx et al. (2019) the Antwerp Houses of the Child are a typical example of an integrated social service, with many partners. There are three vertical layers: firstly “Child & Family” as the lead organisation, secondly the other professional service providers and as a third layer the social workers.

The lack of sustainable funding is seen as a main barrier to reducing poverty in Antwerp. Our interview partners stressed that it is easy to get a lot of money for short term projects (e.g., for unaccompanied migrants after 2015) but the fight against poverty is a long-term endeavour. According to our interview partners, the number of prevention projects could be raised further.

#### *4.3.4. Ghent*

According to our interview partners in the city of Ghent, poverty is a multi-dimensional challenge, affecting a variety of life domains. Families with children, single-parents and young adults, aged 18 to 24 are the main risk groups. The municipalities estimated that around 9,000 children live in poverty. Housing costs are another driver of poverty in Ghent. Poverty rates in the historical part of the city are particularly high and territorial segregation is also an issue in Ghent. In addition to EU-SILC data, the city of Ghent works with a reference budget, which includes housing costs and the quality of dwellings. Since the 2013 European Social Investment Package, the EU has funded pilot projects for developing a methodology for reference budgets in order to have a benchmark for assessing the adequacy of income support in EU member states (Penne and Parcerisas, 2018). The reference budget is based on the necessary expenditures in several domains and presents a threshold of minimum income benefits for a life in dignity. Back in 2006, the Flemish local PCSWs imitated the calculation of local reference budgets as a tool to be used by social workers and municipal councillors to assess the individual household situation (Penne and Parcerisas, 2018). Today, reference budgets are calculated for 21 different family types in all three regions and the Belgian reference budgets are re-priced every year and fully updated every five years (Penne and Parcerisas, 2018). Although Antwerp was one of the pilot cities after 2013, the reference budget was not mentioned by the municipal interview partners. Ghent has been using a local reference budget since 2016 (Penne and Parcerisas, 2018).

Policy-wise, the municipal interview partners stressed that there is a strong focus on young adults in addition to children. Above all, the aim is to have a profound long-term impact and to ensure that the spiral of poverty is broken inter-generationally. The municipal approach is driven by progressive universalism providing more support for those who need more. As in the other cities, education is seen as a key to getting children and young adults out of poverty. Most of the money for combating poverty comes from federal or regional funds but the city of Ghent also uses local taxes to provide financial assistance in urgent cases.

Ghent has a *local anti-poverty action plan*, and one of the 15 domains focuses on child poverty. The local action plan has been developed in cooperation between municipal actors, social service non-profits and a non-profit formed by persons who have experienced poverty. The SSEPs are involved in a counselling role at a later stage. The local PCSW plays a key role in designing the local poverty plan. Furthermore, the city of Ghent has a strategy, regarding children and adolescents, under the title “Ghent: a child and youth-friendly city” (CYFC). With the action plan, Ghent intends to be the most child and youth-friendly city in Flanders. A further ambition of this strategy is combating child poverty and youth unemployment, and focusing on accessible, affordable and high quality childcare. There are fourteen main goals, most of them having a universal orientation, e.g., “all the choices and decisions made by the municipality are taking into account the views of children and youngsters”, “the youth unemployment is tackled”, “focusing on unqualified outflow”, “more school and childcare”, “focus on health and welfare of children and youngsters”, the city of Ghent “provides a family-friendly working environment for its staff members”, etc. (Stad Gent, 2015, pp. 7-25).

In the city of Ghent, a *voluntary network against poverty* exists with the municipality and non-profits services as the main stakeholders. Once a year, an extended group of stakeholders, including representatives from schools and the local public health organisation, come together. Such networks were established in many Flemish cities by the Flemish government to promote information exchange among the service providers, to improve their collaboration and to make use of their experience in order to enhance the effectiveness of the federal anti-poverty programmes. Furthermore, once a year there is a dialogue between those who live in poverty and local policy makers.

Concerning the provision of social services, Ghent has a municipal director of policy who is responsible for all poverty reduction programmes. Within the city administration he coordinates all intra-organisation collaboration in the areas

of minimum income benefits and social rights. Another central coordination actor is the local PCSW, the lead organisation in local service provision networks for combating (child) poverty in line with the local anti-poverty plan.

In table 8 only those services are included which came up in the interviews with city representatives. Ghent also has Family Coaches and projects for improving the labour market integration of unemployed persons. Additionally, there are programmes for NEETs to gain work experience. The city does not have the same number of Houses of the Child. Compared to Antwerp, Ghent makes more use of district social centres.

**Table 8: City of Ghent** (authors' own compilations based on the interviews)

Service provider and service characteristics	Focus group and type	Child poverty focus
PCSW <b><i>Social workers in schools</i></b> in deprived school districts. Two social workers form the local PCSW for 25 schools to address welfare problems	Vulnerable school children Support for the teachers	Explicit, as it focuses on children in poverty; selection according to a local deprivation index calculated by the local PCSW
<b><i>One Family – One Plan (in Flanders)</i></b> This means that an individual plan is drawn up for each family, based on the family's needs and problems	Vulnerable families	Explicit, as it focuses on vulnerable families
<b><i>District-based social worker specialised in dealing with 18 to 25 year old adults</i></b>	Vulnerable young adults	Explicit, as it focuses on vulnerable young adults
<b><i>Means-tested financial assistance for young adults</i></b> for continuing their education	Young adults	Explicit, as it focuses on vulnerable young adults

According to our interview partners, “One Family - One plan” is again an initiative by the Flemish government aiming at empowering poor families to get out of poverty. The plan should be tailor-made to the special needs of each family and aims to overcome the fragmented service provision. The local welfare (PCWS) authority is expected to mobilise all the professional services needed by each family. As a lead organisation in fighting poverty, the local PCSW uses the professional social service networks and the network coordinators provide the PCSW with the necessary expertise. At the time of the interview (early in 2019) 14,5 persons provided the services for 200 families involving an expenditure volume of 1 million Euros. At the same time the local PCSW was active in getting funding for another 200 families.

To deal with the specific challenges for vulnerable young adults, the local PCSW has a specialised social worker for this age group in every district. The main aim is to get the young adults in training and education. At the time of the interview in 2019, 750 young adults received financial assistance in the form of minimum income benefits enabling them to continue their education.

Like Antwerp, Ghent is committed to a preventive and right-based approach. According to our interview partners, the minimum income benefits for those in poverty are too low. The financial means for all the necessary projects are never sufficient. The fight against child poverty needs strong local power promoters on the political level and is dependent on the political priorities of the ruling local government. So far, this has been a top priority of the local governments in Ghent, but this can change with every election.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusions**

Before evaluating the approaches of the four cities in a comparative way, the statistical data and the general challenges facing the countries are compared. On the nation level, Belgium is not performing better than Austria in combating child poverty despite a constant focus on combating child poverty. In Belgium, there are huge variations between the three regions. The capital region of Brussels has a persistent child poverty rate of nearly 40%. Flanders has always enjoyed much lower child poverty rates. The two countries analysed also have in common that child poverty is higher in the cities than in rural areas.

A comparison of the challenges along the three pillars of the 2013 EC social investment recommendations for combating child poverty shows that the two countries have overlapping but also different challenges in *pillar one (access to adequate resources)*. Belgium faces persistent challenges regarding the labour market integration of low-work intensive households with low secondary education or a migrant background. The exclusion already starts at the type of secondary school children attend. Austria is one of the countries where the penalty of motherhood is particularly high, irrespective of the education level. Both countries have invested a lot in the quantity and accessibility of institutionalised childcare. Belgium has a much longer tradition in institutionalised childcare facilities for children aged 0 to 3 years. Both countries share challenges in the enrolment and attendance rate of children from poor families, despite their efforts with respect to means-tested tariffs. Both countries have universal child benefit systems above the EU average. The attempt of the former federal Austrian government (December 2017 to May 2019) to introduce Austria-wide a digressive means-tested child allowance as part of the Austrian minimum income benefits failed.

With respect to *pillar two (access to affordable quality services)* both countries have made progress regarding the ECEC, with the challenge to reach children from low income or migrant families remaining hard to meet. While in Austria a compulsory free of charge kindergarten year exists for the five to six-year old children (Austria-wide for the morning hours), Belgium does not provide free of charge tariffs. Belgium has put a focus on parenting services and invested in local networks concentrating on parents and children, to a higher degree than Austria. The challenges Belgium faces with respect to early school leavers are higher, in particular in Brussels.

With respect to *pillar three (children's right to participate)* both countries have some homework to do to promote participatory decision-making involving children, irrespective of the children's socio-economic status. The 14 main goals in Ghent include some elements of an approach to improving the decision-making for children.

With respect to research question one (*"How is the local collaboration of local public, social and solidarity economy partners in Austrian and Belgian municipalities organised in the fight against child poverty as part of the European Social Investment-Strategy on the policy design level?"*) we find that discrepancies start already with the vertical policy-making competencies. Since the sixth state reforms in 2011, the Belgian regions have much more policy-making competencies in designing their own regional social investment policies. The level of vertical decentralisation of policy-making competencies to the local level, is higher in Flanders than in Austria, owing to the Flemish Decree on Local Social Policies.

Unlike in Austria, Belgium has national and regional anti-poverty plans. These plans are developed in collaboration with social and solidarity economy partners. The final decision-making power rests with the public partners. Therefore, the decision-making powers are not symmetrical and not in line with a fully participatory governance model. Reducing child poverty has been a long-term strategic goal within the national plans. Flanders has an even longer tradition in explicit policies for combating child poverty.

Regarding the local level we see that Ghent is the only city which has a local anti-poverty plan. The lead organisation for designing such a plan is the local PCSW. The PSSEPs are asked at a later stage to provide an input. The local anti-poverty plan is, like the regional and the national one, an example of joint action with a lead organisation. This has to do with the fact that the final political responsibility cannot be shared. An innovative approach in Ghent is

that people who have experienced poverty are also involved in developing the local anti-poverty plan.

A common notion in all four cities, is the social investment approach and the conviction that a good education is crucial for overcoming the challenges of inherited poverty. Comparing the two Austrian cities, social investment orientation was more prominent in the interviews in Linz. Linz has done a lot in recent years to extend the social services for pre-school and school children. In Linz, good practices started with new-born children/babies. In Vienna, the social investment paradigm was less prominent. The fight against poverty was put, as in Antwerp and Ghent, in the context of a life in dignity.

As regards to the decision-making structures, within which the two Austrian cities implement their implicit social investment policies, various municipal departments are involved. In both cities the PSSEPs regularly talk with each other, but there are no formally institutionalised partnerships like those we find in the two Belgian cities. All four cities lack any form of institutionalised PSSEPs for joint evaluation of the success in combating child poverty. In Belgium, the local PCSWs are responsible for implementing all programmes for combating child poverty for pre-school and school children. For relevant health-related issues the local “Child & Family” organisation is in Flanders the counterpart of the local PCSWs.

In the area of designing local policies for combating child poverty Ghent has the most structured and coordinated approach. In Antwerp, Linz and Vienna the strategic decision-making focus is less formalised due to the lack of a local plan to combat child poverty. Having said this, there is one exception in Vienna: the qualification plan 2030, which was co-designed by municipal, regional and federal public partners as well as the chamber of labour and the chamber of commerce, who are also non-profits but do not specialise in supplying programmes for combating child poverty. To include the so-called social partners in the political decision-making, has a long tradition in Austria.

Regarding research question two (*“How is the collaboration of local public partners with the social and solidary economy partners in Austrian and Belgian municipalities organised in the fight against child poverty as part of the European Social Investment-Strategy on the service provision level?”*), both Belgian cities have established service-provider networks. In Antwerp and in Ghent the network approach was quite dominant as a precondition for addressing the challenge of family poverty holistically. Since 2011, the Belgium state has invested in setting up local networks for combating child poverty. In the two Belgian cities, there are two types of service-provider networks. The

Antwerp findings shows that there are participant-governed networks (Raeymaeckers and Kenis, 2016), established at the district level to bring a variety of non-profit organisations and public partners together with the aim of better inter-organisational collaboration in order to increase the effectiveness for their clients. Participation is voluntary and the PSSEPs offer a huge range of services. The Antwerp examples analysed all have central players in practice, among them the local PCSWs. The second type of service provision networks in Antwerp and Ghent consists of professionals coming from various non-profits and municipal organisations, providing specialised or generalist services for combating child poverty and related parenting services. Only in that case, the local PCSW is the lead organisation. The network partners are accountable to the local PCSW. For better coordination and, therefore, for providing a holistic service, each of these networks has a paid network-coordinator who acts as a broker between the service providers and the local PCSW.

The network approach also results in a life domain focus which sees children and parents together and, as a result, it is more family-centred and not predominately children-centred.

Looking at the two Austrian cities, we find that the provision of services is much more fragmented. Within the city, various administrative departments are responsible, depending on the type of service provided. Another notable difference between the Austrian and the Belgian cities is, that the service provision in Linz and Vienna is pre-dominantly either in the hands of a municipal partner or a non-profit organisation. Therefore, both partners provide complementary services. To identify the level of collaboration in PSSEPs to combat child poverty, one has to move to the meso level and evaluate how the various organisation-specific services add up. The still too fragmented service delivery approach in the two Austrian cities could profit from the more holistically designed good practices in Antwerp and Ghent, which span several life domains.

On a more positive note, the good practices in Linz and Vienna cover all age groups to a higher degree, from new born children to young adults, addressed in the 2013 EC recommendation. Comparing services in Linz and Vienna, the number of good practices for school children was higher in Vienna. The Viennese good practices are more focused on minimum income beneficiaries. Providing specialised shelters for homeless teenagers, was also only a topic in Vienna, while in Linz the services (universal and target group-specific) for children from 0 to 6 years were more prominent.



With respect to early school leavers and young adults, the two Austrian cities presented more good practices, in the majority target group-specific services. Vienna was the only city with a specialised programme for young mothers receiving minimum income benefits.

Comparing the good practices across the four cities, we see that all cities provide a mixture of target-group specific and universal services. In all four cities, the target-group specific focus comes along with socially adjusted tariffs. Here the two Austrian cities perform better as they have a higher amount of free of charge services for institutionalised childcare. Regarding institutionalised childcare, which is a universal service, Vienna has higher enrolment rates for pre-school children, while Linz performs better at the after-school enrolment in the age-group 6 to 10 years (see table 3).

Summing up what this means for service-providing PSSEPs we may say that, predominantly, the Austrian examples are still often taking an isolated island approach. Institutionalization of PSSEPs is much lower. This does not mean that there is no well-established collaboration on the operative service level, but initiatives like “One Family - One plan” are missing. For Austrian families in poverty, this means that more information and coordination tasks rest with them. The two Austrian cities can learn from the two Belgian cities how to institutionalise service providing PSSEPs.

Evaluating the results with respect to common actions, Ghent has the most advanced approach because local PSSEPs exist in both areas (policy-making and service provision). In Antwerp, such PSSEPs exist in the form of service provision networks. In the two Austrian cities, a more fragmented approach prevails, which leads to complementary service provision for addressing various aspects of child poverty.

For the local welfare system, the different approaches (network approach versus traditional fragmented approach) result in differences as to how much money and time is spent on providing a life domain-centred joint service provision and how tight the network ties and the network density are.

To provide such an in-depth analysis of the localisation of the welfare state, the study focused on four cities. With two Flemish cities the study is concentrated on the Belgium region with the lowest child poverty rates. This is a limitation. Further research could increase number of cities included. Country-wise it would be interesting to add German cities as a third central European country, which has a corporatist welfare state tradition. Under the aspect of common goods provided by PSSEPs, it would also be interesting to see whether, in Belgium, the higher degree of collaborative policy-making and service provision

is filled with life in other fields of care work, for example in the care for the elderly.

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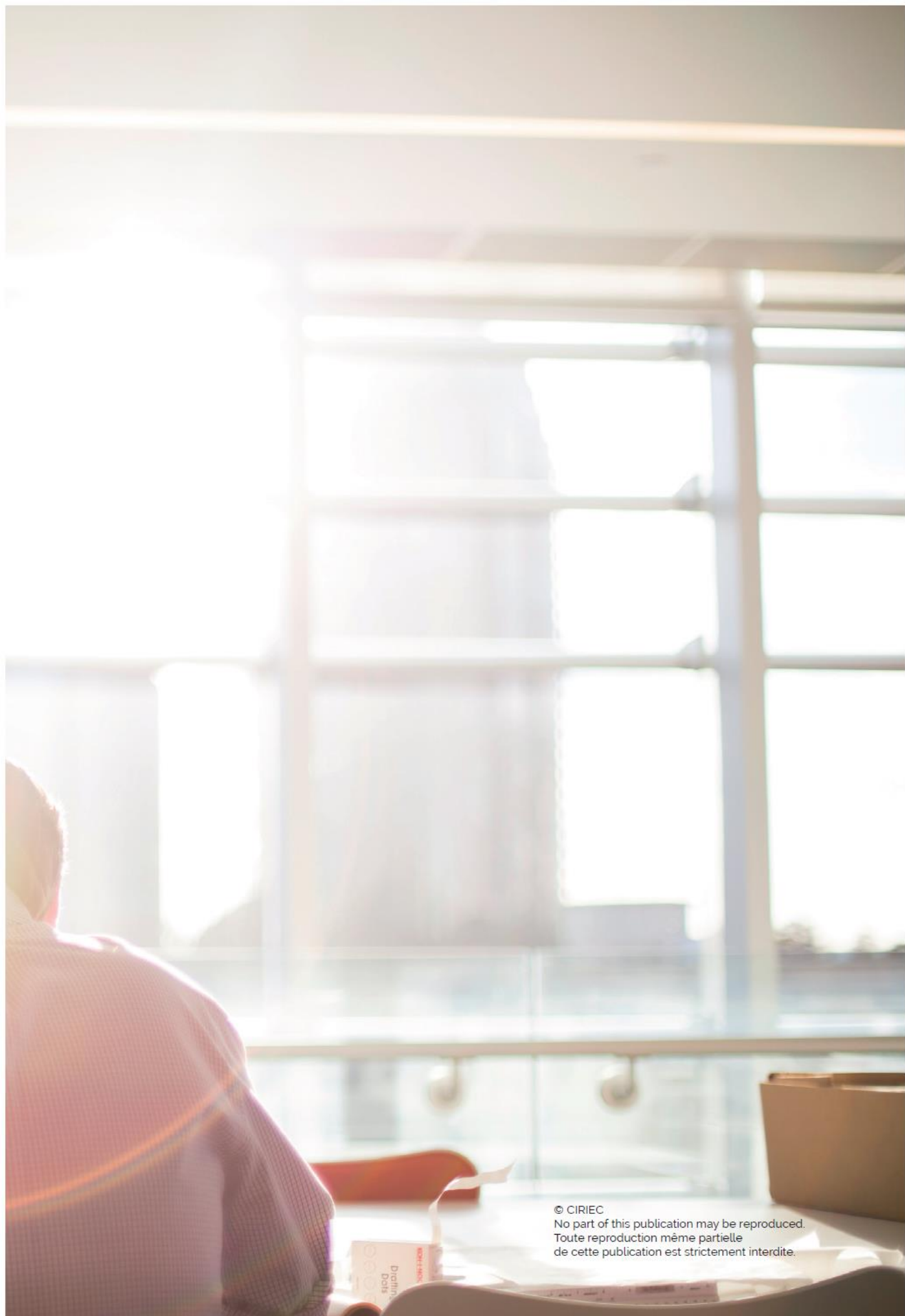
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