Cyprus

Country Profile on the European Semester and COVID-19 crisis from a children's rights perspective

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23%

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) in 2019

Alternative recommendations

Supporting children and families in the short term:

- Make sure all children continue their education

- Make sure parents do not lose their jobs and income

- The EU must provide emergency funds to Member States

Supporting children and families in the long term:

- Identify housing problems and subsidise families in poverty to live in better conditions

- Social services should be reinforced, including mental health support services for children in vulnerable situations

- The EU must provide earmarked funding to fight child poverty in Member States

Child Poverty

Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

Negative developments

Confined to the home in poor housing conditions

Housing is an important social determinant of health. COVID-19, and the actions taken to mitigate its spread, highlighted the central role of the home in people's lives. With the country in lockdown, people must stay in their homes with very limited exceptions, exacerbating inequalities in housing and the repercussions for health.

Reported increase in domestic violence (not specifically against children but mostly against women)

The pandemic and the lockdown triggered an unprecedented increase in domestic violence for reasons including increased stress, cramped and difficult living conditions, and breakdowns in community support systems.

Reported increase in poverty

The economic effects of the pandemic are likely to push many families into poverty.

Impact on civil society organisations

- Difficulty in communicating with members that were not "internet ready"

- Decrease in funding after losing funding from banks and the private sector

- Working from home meant less contact with people on "the ground"

Positive developments

As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, civil society organisations have shifted to remote-working models, leading them to increase their digital capabilities. These new ways of working have also led organisations to expand different Help Lines and to use the media to inform the public. TV and online programmes have been developed especially for pre-school children.

Measures implemented by the government

- Online continuation of education for elementary and high school children, including free provision of tablets to those in need.
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- 60% salary subsidy for all people having to stay home to care for children when schools were closed (the other 40% was to be paid by employers – from March to October 2020)
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- "Rescue packs" for small size companies provided they do not fire any staff at least till the end of 2020 (further measures to be decided in the next months in order to secure jobs).
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Policies for Investing in Children

National strategy to tackle child poverty

Cyprus does not have a proper national strategy to tackle child poverty. The impact of the economic crisis limited the capacity of the state to properly invest in social policies. The COVID-19 crisis is likely to make the situation even worse. The government reacted fast in implementing measures to mitigate the socio-economic effect of the pandemic, but it is far from sufficient for it to improve the situation of children in poverty.

Access to financial resources in the family

Preventing the closure of stores and loss of jobs remains the main challenge to mitigate the economic implications of the crisis. The government was quick in reacting to the pandemic and setting measures to support salaries, online education, and access to health care. Children's access to services will not be substantially affected but access to free services might be limited

or impeded following the crisis. Cyprus is still far from going back to universal services or benefits, excluding education that remains free and universal. The new National Health Care System (in place since June 2019) is universal but co-payments and the percentage of salaries paid by people in order to be "in" the system are high and a burden on the low-waged and low-pensioners.

Views on the Semester process

Fighting unemployment is a critical issue, however, NGOs regret that the Country-Specific Recommendations (CSR) did not mention social issues or children.

Children's participation

The government set up mechanisms to listen to children and has made significant progress since 2018. Children were on the agenda and civil society organisations were hopeful there would be a strategy in place to fight child poverty and

social exclusion. However, the COVID-19 crisis disrupted these efforts.

Face-to-face communication has been impossible and even though – children use technology for recreation, they are not used to "impersonal" ways of communicating. There is a need to involve children under 12 and marginalised children in consultations or formal child-led bodies in a substantial way.

Despite the existing Communication Mechanism between ministries, the presidency and children, the recognition of the Children's Parliament as an "equal partner" in the Parallel Parliaments, the existence of Formal School Councils (by law) and the willingness of the political system to listen to children there is room for improvement. The Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children (PCCPWC) is calling for a change in the law allowing individuals under the age of 18 to form their own NGOs (child-led

organisations) and structures that include children under 12.

For more information, please consult the 2020 Eurochild Report or contact Enrico.Tormen@eurochild. org and Zuzana.Konradova@ eurochild.org