

# France

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

Contributors:

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22.5%

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

### Children in Alternative Care - CiAC

	Total number of institutions (2019)	Number of children (2019)
Number of minors benefiting from at least one child protection measure 2018		306,800 <sup>23</sup>
Alternative care		177,000
Institutional care (in total) 2017 <sup>4</sup>	1,963	61,000
Institutions for children with disabilities	325,000 places (figure including adults, precise data for children is not available)	23,010
Institutions for children 0-3	33	790
Number of children in family-based/foster care:	around 50 % = 80,000	
Unaccompanied minors		17,760 <sup>5</sup> (2019)

### Alternative recommendations

#### Supporting children and families in the short term:

- More support for strengthening parenting assistance for young "at-risk" parents in order to prevent the neglect of children. Extend support for vulnerable young adults including care leavers to help them find accommodation, work, and create social ties.

- Support development of additional mechanisms to identify violence and protect children's rights and access to information on their rights. Make sure all children can participate in education, especially in homes where dropping out of school is identified and provide financial assistance to buy school supplies, etc.

#### Supporting children and families in the long term:

- Put in place programmes to allow the most vulnerable children (poor children, children in child protection, children with disabilities, unaccompanied children, etc.) to go on holiday to allow them to experiment, discover, learn about sustainable development, arts, culture, sport, science, digital technologies, and foreign languages. Well-being of children is as important as material support.
- Dedicate a ministry to children and youth: the questions linked to childhood and youth are multidimensional and many actors are concerned.
- Put in place more preventive policies: despite the recent awareness by public authorities, the actions carried out for prevention are still insufficient. Strong political support is necessary to put in place effective prevention policies.

<sup>1</sup> NEXEM is a network representing employers from the not-for-profit social services sector in France.

<sup>2</sup> Chiffres clés en protection de l'enfance au 31 décembre 2018.

<sup>3</sup> In 2017 the placements represented 52% of 344 000 protection measures entrusted to children's social welfare.

<sup>4</sup> 61.000 enfants, adolescents et jeunes majeurs hébergés fin 2017 dans les établissements de l'aide sociale à l'enfance.

<sup>5</sup> Rapport annuel d'activité 2019 du Ministère de la Justice.

## Summary of Ratings

Government's support for families and children during the COVID-19 pandemic:



2020 Country-Specific Recommendations:



## Child Poverty

### Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

Child-related issues, especially within the child protection system, have been excluded from the public debate during the health crisis. Many children have had their rights infringed. The Defender of Rights in France received 127 referrals regarding the rights of the child, in connection with the health crisis.

#### Increase in domestic violence

Organisations report an up to 90% increase in calls to 119, the emergency number for children at risk during the lockdown. On average, the 119 line receives 700 calls per day. The government has launched an awareness campaign on intra family violence and introduced an online reporting form that allows for more discreet reporting.

#### Increase in school drop outs

Many children are at risk of dropping out of school. More human and technical resources will be needed

for teachers and families in order to set up individual support for children disengaged from school during lockdown.

#### Decrease in vaccinations

Heavily impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic, vaccinations overall have decreased significantly in France. According to the National Agency for the Safety of Medicines (ANSM) and the National Health Insurance Fund (CNAM), the number of vaccine prescriptions reimbursed in pharmacies fell considerably during the health crisis. They estimate that 44,000 infants aged 3 to 18 months have not received vaccines against diphtheria, tetanus, polio, whooping cough, haemophilus influenza, meningitis B and hepatitis B. In reaction, the French National Authority for Health (HAS) called for resuming vaccinations, particularly in infants and frail people.

#### Impact on mental health

Taking into account the traumatic effects of the crisis on children, particularly on those suffering from persistent pathologies, children's

mental health should be the subject of particular attention.

#### Decentralisation of policies

The COVID crisis has shown the importance to address the compartmentalisation of policies in France. Despite the appointment of Adrien Taquet, Secretary of State responsible for child protection, there is an explosion and a partitioning of childhood and youth policies between ministries, resulting in inequalities of treatment between children. Children with disabilities, for example, have not received the same treatment as children in child protection establishments.

#### Impact on children's rights organisations

Associations working with children in vulnerable situations have many challenges awaiting them. They will have to make up for the delay in implementing the measures, reassess the danger in homes at risk, recreate a bond of trust with families. The social and medico-social associations have been the source of many initiatives to pursue their mission of supporting the most

vulnerable audiences. In order for them to continue their work, it is necessary to restore the ability to experiment for these associations, for example by letting them initiate projects outside of the regulatory procedures which frame social and medico-social action.

## Positive developments

**Exceptional financial assistance for vulnerable families and their children (one-off assistance): it's proportional to the number of children and ranges between EUR 150 (a couple without children) and EUR 5,550 (four children).**



This initiative is good but considered insufficient by CNAPE. Many associations have alerted the government of the increase in the number of families in financial distress and the unprecedented increase in demand for food support (+ 45% between March and May 2020).

**For the duration of the crisis, an obligation to support young adults leaving the child protection system and unaccompanied minors**

**regardless of their supposed age.**



This measure is welcomed as the risk of poverty is extremely high for young people leaving the child protection system, even more for former unaccompanied minors who lack a reliable social or family network.

Many young people living in precarious situations do not have access to social benefits (for example, the Active Solidarity Income or Revenue de Solidarité Active (RSA) is reserved for those over 25 years old). However, this measure is planned to run only until 11 July 2020, and there is thus an urgent need for long-term solutions.

Family support schemes (respite, strengthening of home support) have been put in place and in particular have resulted in the launch of the single call number that allows for very rapid implementation of responses to the needs of families or young people.

**The implementation of home schooling for all children, to prevent dropping out. An online**

**platform has been created by the Ministry of Education.**



The implementation of the home schooling online platform has allowed children and youth to continue their education. But organisations have highlighted numerous problems arising from it: no accompaniment or control over families, no specific training for teachers to use the platform, the lack of technological equipment for many children, especially in institutions. This situation has aggravated the risk of school drop-out. A study launched in March reveals that 20% of the pupils have been disengaged from their schooling since the start of the lockdown.

## Good practice – Helplines

Several telephone platforms have been created by federations of psychologists to support parents and children during lockdown. Toll-free numbers have been set up, families have been able to share their daily difficulties. Volunteers have provided a listening service to reassure and inform, but also to

identify the risks and refer families to other services if necessary.

## Policies For Investing in Children

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) remains unknown in France. This observation is shared by many institutions and associations. A survey conducted by the Defender of Rights showed that only half the population is able to cite at least one right of the child. There is progress in the implementation of the UNCRC in certain areas: the prohibition of corporal punishment by law, the plan to tackle violence against children, the child protection law adopted in 2016 focused on the best interests of the child. However, the situation remains extremely worrying in the Overseas Territories.

### National strategy to tackle child poverty

With 9 million people below the poverty line, France's 2018 national strategy for preventing and combating poverty<sup>1</sup> was long-awaited. A large part of this strategy is dedicated to children

and young people, with three main commitments:

- Ensure equal opportunities for all children;
- Guarantee the fundamental rights of children;
- Ensure a training path for all young people.

Almost two years later, significant progress has been made. However, many territories cannot properly deploy the strategy due to the lack of financial and human means. For example, the implementation of some measures such as the wider opening of nurseries for disadvantaged families or the development of the One Euro canteen has been very limited.

### Access to financial resources in the family

Social policies need to be better coordinated to provide for all the needs of the child and their family, particularly in view of the economic

crisis and the worsening situation of poor and precarious families.

### Children's access to services of high quality

For young adults leaving care, the CNAPE has developed three recommendations: 1) the extension of the youth guarantee, 2) access to a financial resource for all young people leaving care, 3) the allocation of basic income to all young people.

### CNAPE Recommendation - A universal allowance for young people

- This universal allowance would be allocated in return for the completion of an integration project until its end. It would be flexible according to the specific needs of each young person and taking into account their project. A change of project occurring before the age of 25 would not result in the end of the payment of the allowance so as to allow any young person to take a new direction. For young adults who wish it, this financial resource should be coupled with specific support as needed.

<sup>1</sup> La stratégie nationale de prévention et d'action contre la pauvreté.

## Views on the Semester process

Children and young people are not sufficiently taken into account in the European semester process. The 2020 Country Specific Recommendations do not mention any issues related to childhood,

which is a regression compared to 2019 where the question of dropping out of school and equal opportunities was addressed.

## Children's participation

Children's participation remains insufficient in France, despite

the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Vulnerable or marginalised children are rarely consulted on matters that concern them. The Defender of Rights underlined that children and young people were not sufficiently taken into account in the formulation of public policies at national and local level.

During the crisis, with the possibility for judges to take decisions without upholding the principle of confrontation during legal proceedings, the right of the child to be heard in all decisions concerning them has been violated.

# Children in Alternative Care (CiAC)

## Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

Work on the implementation of the Child Prevention and Protection Strategy was temporarily suspended during the containment period, but resumed in mid-June 2020<sup>2</sup>. There has been a suspension of home visits by child protection services and educators during the lockdown. However, contacts were maintained with children and parents via regular telephone contacts or videoconferences. It emerged that,

in general, these contacts were more frequent than before.

## Children placed

Many children were sent back home during the lockdown. When it was not possible, measures were set in place to limit tensions and prevent the spread of the virus by grouping children in small groups of two or three. Facilities had to reduce or even stop outside collective activities.

## Preventing the unnecessary entry of children in alternative care

In France, a number of mechanisms have been put in place to prevent the placement of children in institutions. For example:

**“Non-institutional Educational Action (AEMO)”** which consists of accompanying, at the request of the juvenile judge, minors who have been the subject of a report due to mistreatment, educational,

emotional, moral or psychological problems which compromise their safety and their development.

**“Home schooling”** which is an administrative measure generally following an AEMO. It results in a contract of objectives signed by the representative of the Department and the family, for a renewable duration of three to six months.

These mechanisms were suspended during the lockdown.

2 Protection de l'enfance : la feuille de route du Gouvernement

## Progress on child protection and care reform

### Children living in institutions/residential care

The crisis has had a major impact on children living in institutions: breakdown of schooling and outside contacts, cessation of medico-social care. Some structures alerted the CNAPE that some children were not tolerating lockdown, leading to violence in the structures and to some children running away. Conversely, some young child “introverts” have been adapting particularly well to the lockdown, and are apprehensive about going back to school.

This is rarely highlighted, but some collective institutions have been able to deal with this very well by establishing the conditions for “family” support with organisations in “small units” that greatly mitigate the “collective” effect of institutions.

### Children living in family-based care

The absence of school and other social relations created a risk of educational and social decline. For some children, the crisis has led to disruptions due to the fact that foster families have been infected by COVID-19.

### Care leavers

For the duration of the crisis, there was an obligation to support young adults leaving the child protection system and unaccompanied minors regardless of their supposed age. The risk of poverty is extremely high for young people leaving the child protection system without social and economic support, even more for former unaccompanied minors who lack a reliable social or family network. This measure is planned to run only until 11 July, there is thus an urgent need for long-term solutions.

## Initiative

In Paris, lawyers and associations notified the public prosecutor that more than 200 unaccompanied minors were exposed to a serious and immediate danger to their mental and physical health. Other reports of this type were made throughout the country.

For more information, please consult the [2020 Eurochild Report](#) or contact [Enrico.Tormen@eurochild.org](mailto:Enrico.Tormen@eurochild.org) and [Zuzana.Konradova@eurochild.org](mailto:Zuzana.Konradova@eurochild.org).

