

Latvia

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

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18.9%

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



Alternative Recommendations

Supporting children and families in the context of COVID-19:

- The government should reinforce family counselling services as well as timely financial /material support for families avoiding unnecessary bureaucratic procedures that delay needed support.
- The effect of the measures adopted in response to the COVID-19 crisis must be evaluated from the point of view of children's rights.
- The government should pay more attention to families with fewer economic resources; the increase in domestic violence; the increase in the psychological problems of parents and their exhaustion.
- In dealing with the COVID-19 crisis, the government should involve professionals from a broader range of sectors, not just epidemiologists and healthcare professionals.
- More educational and informative material should be provided - not only to families, but also to professionals working in different sectors, such as social and educational fields.
- Support measures for professionals should also be provided, as they may burn out over a longer period of time.
- The government should develop simple and practical methodologies to deal with crisis situations and enhance coordination among different sectors and within sectors.
- The government should ensure free psychological consultations for children, young people and parents.
- The government should strengthen the health care system and emergency health care services.
- The government should provide all children with a computer and internet access as well as ensure a learning support from teachers during online education.
- The government should help employees to keep their job during and after the crisis. Provide re-skilling trainings and financial support for people who lost their jobs. This should include self-employed, employees and other vulnerable groups with no or poor social protection.
- Free COVID-19 tests should be provided to all vulnerable members of the society.

Summary of Ratings

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

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Positive EU impact on more child-centred legislation at national level:

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Government's efforts to provide sufficient resources and services for families and children:

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Child Poverty

Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

Negative developments

Lack of a common strategy

At a national level, there was a lack of a common strategy in the field of the social protection of children and families. The Ministry of Welfare published a number of guidelines on the subject. Unfortunately, they were too voluminous, abstract and difficult to understand. There was a lack of common information for professionals working in the social field. Furthermore, there was lack of a unified support scheme for municipalities on what kind of services should be provided to support families with children. Each municipality dealt with this in its own way; some provided lunch for families with children, some food packages, food vouchers, etc.

Education system

The system was unprepared to guarantee distance learning:

teachers were unprepared and uncoordinated. On the other hand, parents were overloaded. Moreover, there was a lack of equipment for distance learning in many families with children. Particularly problematic situations affected children who were in boarding schools, crisis centres and out-of-home care before the COVID-19 outbreak.

NGOs had to deal with serious difficulties

NGO employees were extremely vulnerable, for example many of them were exposed to the virus or lost their jobs; many services were temporarily interrupted. In many instances, it was difficult to provide assistance to clients, especially in cases concerning domestic violence or other sensitive issues. Many projects were fairly reduced or cancelled; there was a huge decline in donations due to companies and individuals concerned about their financial situation.

Social area

There was an increase in violent episodes within families, involving children. This was linked to the emotional pressure experienced by parents and aggravated by the poor living conditions and social, financial or health problems. Many family members returned from abroad, which created additional strain on the daily family routine. Concerning social work, a number of cases were reported in which professionals avoided face-to-face contact with clients.

Healthcare

Health services for children were not available even in the most serious situations as a consequence the illness get worse and the number of patients has increased.

Negative impact

The COVID-19 outbreak has caused a variety of difficulties in the areas of well-being, health and education, which will have significant negative consequences for children and their families in the future. In recent months, conflicts and violence in

families with children increased. The same can be said about economic problems, given that in many one or both parents lost their job or experienced a significant decrease in their income. At present, the country has not yet compiled and analysed data on the impact of the crisis on the well-being of the population. On the other hand, it is expected that children with acute or chronic illnesses who did not receive the help they needed during the crisis may have witnessed a significant deterioration in their health status. There were also significant challenges in the field of education, especially in ensuring a quality learning process. This is clearly shown by the deterioration in students' performances and poor results in their final exams.

Good practice

Education

The government provided distance learning tools (such as computers and the TV channel [Tavaklase](#)), free lunches for children from low-income, poor and large families,

and methodological support for teachers. Furthermore, webinars for professionals (education professionals, educators, interest educators, etc.) were organised by the Agency for International Youth Programmes to teach how to help children and young people learn remotely and build a healthy daily life in times of crisis.

Health

In the majority of cases, the government provided free COVID tests for those who had symptoms of the disease or were involved in the medical sector or police.

Well-being

Amendments were made to the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance, which provides for additional support during a crisis, such as the Crisis Benefit (not more than EUR 40 per person for no more than three months). There is also a supplement of EUR 50 for each child if the family receives 1) crisis benefit (max age of 18 years) or 2) downtime benefit (24 years). The state maintained the payment of parental benefit during the lockdown when a child reaches the age of one or one and a half year (up to EUR

700). Guidelines were developed for working with children and families and for dealing with incidents of violence.

Webinars

NGOs organised many webinars on children's and family welfare. For example, the Union of Local Governments of Latvia organised a conference on the impact of the crisis on domestic violence, which was attended by specialists in various fields, including social workers, orphans' courts, and NGOs.

Positive initiatives

These 'Stay home' and 'Let's help to stay at home' initiatives provided self-isolated people with basic necessities, such as food and medicine. Various regional initiatives provided supplies and psychological support to families and children. For example, the Dobeles Youth Initiative and Health Centre organised virtual remote activities for young people.

Helplines

Free psychological helplines were provided by NGOs such as Dardedze, Marta and Skalbes to help parents and children.

Concrete examples of challenges in supporting families and children


Domestic instabilities




A mother raising a nine-year-old daughter and a 16-year-old son alone was helped by members of a civil society organisation.

Her son has moderate intellectual disability so, before the pandemic, he was attending a special boarding school during the week and returned to his home only during the weekend. During lockdown he had to stay at home, so for the first time both children had to live together in the same place for a long period of time. There were a lot of conflicts and misunderstandings. The sister refused to communicate with her family, she stopped studying and became depressed. She became aggressive towards her brother and started talking about suicide. The mother, struggling to maintain a balance between the two children, experienced a severe emotional crisis and became physically abusive towards her daughter, who she thought was abusing her brother, provoking and annoying her. She finally decided to ask for help from a member of the Latvian Child Welfare Network.


Online safety

 In a house with four pre-school and younger school-age children living in an extended family, parents allowed unrestricted use of screen devices to provide activities for the children. As a result, the children found pornographic material and engaged in inappropriate sexual activities with each other. The mother sought help. Another school-age girl (third grade) met a person on the internet, who soon asked for a naked photo of the girl, which she sent. This person started to blackmail the girl asking for erotic videos and threatening to send the previous photo to her friends. Her grandmother sought help.

Education

 Numerous parents called NGO helplines asking for help for their children who dropped out of school and witnessed a sharp decrease in their success rate.

Healthcare

 An adolescent was assigned to a foster family which required a COVID-19 test for the kid, in order not to endanger the health of the other kids. The state did not pay for the test, so the family had to do it at its own expense paying around 80 euros.

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