

Netherlands

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

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on Children's Rights

15.5%

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) in 2019¹

Children in Alternative Care - CiAC

	Total number of institutions/ SGHs	Number of children
Institutional care (in total) in 2019	n/a	2,550 closed residential care ¹ 17,920 residential care ²
Institutions for children with disabilities	n/a	n/a
Institutions for children 0-3	n/a	n/a
Small group homes (SGHs) in 2019	n/a	5,550 ³
Number of children in family- based/foster care in 2019	n/a	23,272 ⁴
Number of adoptions		145 ⁵

1 JH 1223 Gesloten plaatsing (JeugdzorgPlus en gesloten GGZ).

2 JH 1224 Ander verblijf bij JH aanbieder.

3 JH 1222 Gezinsgericht

4 Factsheet PLEEGZORG 2019.

5 Statistisch overzicht Interlandelijke adoptie over de jaren 2015 tot en met 2019.

Alternative recommendations

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

- Provide clear, child-friendly information to children and young people, about the virus, about the measures and about the impact on their lives.
- Ensure that children and young people can participate in discussions in all areas which impact them including poverty measures, education, and mental well-being.
- Provide emergency financial support and material provision for families experiencing increased financial difficulty during the crisis.

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

- Develop and invest in specific protection measures for children and young people against the economic consequences of this crisis such as: extra budget for social protection systems, such

as social assistance, shelter for homeless families, the capacity of food banks with increasing demand, etc.

- Involve children and young people in developing the measures and provide information that is understandable to them.
- Invest in data collection on groups of children in vulnerable situations so that it is quickly clear which children need extra help.
- Research and evaluate the way in which youth care and youth mental health care dealt with the corona crisis and measures. Make sure that children and young people play a role in this.
- Ensure that children and young people are involved in youth care and youth mental health care and can participate in the changes concerning the coronavirus.
- Ensure that waiting lists in youth care and youth mental health care are resolved as quickly as possible and use extra capacity for this.

1 According to the Netherlands Youth Institute: In 2018, 8.1 percent of all minor children (0-18 years) live in low income families and 3.3 percent of all minor children live in long lasting low income families (4 years or longer). This is 11.4 percent in total. More info available here.

Summary of Ratings

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



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



2020 Country-Specific Recommendations:



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



Government's protection of children's right to participate:



Child Poverty

Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

Many families are dealing with reduced incomes, whether from job losses or pay cuts, and are under significant financial pressure. Mitigation measures put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19, such as the closure of services, significantly affected children, particularly children in vulnerable situations. Children dealing with domestic abuse were forced to stay at home in a heightened stress environment, causing violence to increase. Data has shown a surge in calls to helplines since the outbreak⁶. Due to school closures and the switch to online education, children living in highly vulnerable situations fell off the radar, putting their safety and education at risk.

With the imposition of the COVID-19 measures, there were also concerns that tensions created by staying at home together for a long time, stress about possible job losses or contamination could potentially increase cases of child abuse⁷. However, Safe at Home and the police have not seen a major increase since the start of the COVID-19 crisis in the number of reports of domestic violence and child abuse⁸. According to Safe at Home, this is explained by the fact that conscious of the potential effect of lockdown, people were more vigilant and reported situations more easily. The Sexual Violence Centre is deeply concerned about an expected increase in victims of sexual abuse in the domestic circle.

Multiple parties have published reports regarding the impact of the crisis on children in vulnerable situations, for example:

- UNICEF the Netherlands⁹
- Save the Children Netherlands¹⁰

⁶ De Kindertelefoon, Wat Kinderen bezighoudt in Coronatijd Hand-out periode 16 maart t/m 12 april 2020, 24 april 2020.

⁷ Coronacrisis En Kinderen En Jongeren In Nederland

⁸ Landelijk beeld: Corona quarantaine leidt voorsnog niet tot meer adviesvragen en meldingen bij Veilig Thuis.

⁹ Coronacrisis En Kinderen En Jongeren In Nederland

¹⁰ Mbo-jongeren voelen zich tijdens coronacrisis vergeten

About loneliness

"The 1.5 metre measure drives me crazy. I haven't really touched anyone in three months (except for my parents and brother). I now officially fall into the lonely boys category."

17 years (M)

About the lack of clarity

"The thing that worries me the most is that there is simply no clarity. We never received any real information from our school. And if anything was said then it was actually something we already knew."

21 years (F)

About the financial situation

"My mother was stuck abroad, so I had to cover all costs myself."

- 19 years (F)

Government's responses

The Dutch government has implemented financial emergency measures to minimise the economic impact on employers and the self-employed but this approach lacks a specific focus on the consequences for children. For example, there has been no calculation of how many of the nearly 1.9 million households with children have been financially affected by the crisis.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, poverty will increase if no extra efforts are being made and the situation for children in vulnerable situations will regress.

Economic regulations have been put in place for companies to request income for their employees in order for families to provide for their children (among others)¹¹. Money was made available to distribute laptops and secure wifi connection, but many children in vulnerable situations were not reached¹². Implementation of emergency relief funds, but young people were left out¹³.

Good practice

Augeo Foundation, Stichting Kinderpostzegels and Stichting Het Vergeten Kind have joined forces and set up a special crisis fund to help children in vulnerable situations during this difficult period. This extra effort has been made by a lot of NGOs (like distributing laptops by Stichting Leergeld etc.) Several organisations such as Child Ombudsman and Save the Children have talked to children and also shed light of the importance of their position within the crisis¹⁴.

¹¹ Algemene informatie over NOW3 (vanaf oktober 2020).

¹² Zorgen om toename van huiselijk geweld door coronastress. 'Kijk niet weg, ga in gesprek'.

¹³ Scholen verliezen contact met duizenden kwetsbare leerlingen.

¹⁴ Kinderombudsvrouw Margrite Kalverboer maakt zich zorgen om kwetsbare kinderen in coronacrisis. Mbo-jongeren voelen zich tijdens coronacrisis vergeten.

Policies for Investing in Children

National strategy to tackle child poverty

To combat child poverty, in 2019 the Dutch government has formulated "four child poverty ambitions"¹⁵.

Where the central government is primarily responsible for ensuring sufficient income, municipalities are responsible for implementing poverty policy and facilitating participation of citizens in society.

With regard to ambition 1

"Participation" of the above mentioned four child poverty ambitions: municipalities are insufficiently committed to an integrated child-oriented poverty policy that improves the lives of children in all areas and, for example, also tackles the stress in families as a result of poverty¹⁶. Due to the lack

of uniform national policy standards, there are large differences between municipalities. For example, not all municipalities make use of children's participation in shaping policies¹⁷. Children from vulnerable groups in particular are not sufficiently involved¹⁸. In addition, it appears that private child aid organisations often have to provide additional help to the municipal offer.

Regarding ambition 2 "reduce the number of children living in poverty": last April the government formulated a target for halving the number of children growing up in poverty: from 9.2% in 2015 to 4.6% in 2030¹⁹. The government's commitment to this goal: to promote work and more hours of work for parents, appears insufficient as research shows that increasing the earning capacity for working parents is not always feasible²⁰. Even

before the corona crisis, it turned out that more than 40% of children in poverty have working parents. This percentage is expected to increase with the current pandemic and expected economic recession. In addition, this strategy does take into account the right of the child to an adequate standard of living. It can be concluded that the Dutch government does not fulfil its responsibility in providing an adequate standard of living (Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - UNCRC), which is already limited by the government of the Dutch reservation to Article 26 of the UNCRC.

Recent research by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) shows that if the current government policy is continued, poverty will increase by 25% in the coming years, irrespective of the effects of

the COVID-19 crisis²¹. Research by Armoedefonds shows that 90.1% of the anti-poverty organisations expect an increase in demand for assistance in the coming months, and not all organisations have the financial capacity to assist. It is clear, therefore, that the current poverty policy is going to fall far short of reaching the rising number of children in poverty - especially children in long-term poverty.

Many initiatives have been set up by organisations or individuals to help people in poverty such as online donations, a crisis fund for children in vulnerable situations, and an appeal from the National Poverty Coalition. This fund was available until the 26 June 2020. At the time of writing, almost 35.000 requests had been made.

15 Kamerstukken I, 2018-2019, 35.000.XV, nr. D.

16 Alle kinderen kansrijk. Het verbeteren van de ontwikkelingskansen van kinderen in armoede.

17 Kansen voor kinderen: een postcodetombola?

18 The Right of Children to Participate in Public Decision-Making Processes.

19 Brief aan de Eerste Kamer: Nadere uitwerking ambities kinderarmoede.

20 Sam& (2020). 'Altijd op een richeltje lopen'. Verslag onderzoek werkende ouders onder de armoedegrens. Rotterdam.

21 CPB en SCP. (2020). Kansrijk armoedebeleid. Den Haag..

Views on the Semester process

The EU has not been able to push the government to think beyond the conviction that "work is the best way out of poverty".

It should not always be emphasised that the Netherlands is doing so well compared to other European countries. The Netherlands is a champion in reducing poverty among the elderly through social schemes - better than France, Luxembourg and Germany, according to a recent study by the Dutch planning agencies. But when it comes to alleviating poverty among children, the Netherlands is doing worse than all those countries. It is striking that a country like UK scores much better.²²

Access to financial resources in the family

The Dutch benefits system is intended to guarantee sufficient income. The benefits system plays a crucial role in the security of the life of many households and families, but it is opaque, complex, and inaccessible. Families run the risk of reimbursement in the event of a (minimal) rise in income and / or do not dare to use the schemes²³. Furthermore, social assistance and subsistence level are too low, the Dutch reservation on Article 26 UNCRC preclude children from claiming social security themselves. Therefore, a renewal of the entire benefits system should be made a priority of the cabinet.

Children's participation

Albeit the increasing attention on this topic, Children's right to participate is not structurally embedded in the Netherlands and its government way of working. According to the Ombudsman for Children, children's participation is insufficient, especially for children from vulnerable groups²⁴. There are several barriers, including insufficient financial resources at national and local level.

To ensure children's rights to participate, Member States should follow specific guidelines to structurally embed children's participation at a local and national level. Member States should also promote the implementation of the Child Participation Assessment tool developed by the Council of Europe.

²² The Dutch planning agencies base this conclusion on international comparative research into poverty policy in 49 countries (carried out since 1967), conducted by the Department of Empirical Analysis of Social and Tax Regulations at Leiden University.

²³ IBO (2020), Toeslagen deelonderzoek 2. Eenvoud of maatwerk: Alternatieven voor het bestaande toeslagenstelsel.

²⁴ The Right of Children to Participate in Public Decision-Making Processes.

Children in Alternative Care (CiAC)

Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

Contact with parents and family members

Children and young people who are placed in a care institution have the right to maintain contact with their parents and other family members. During the lockdown, visiting hours were prohibited or limited. The effects of limited contact with family on children in vulnerable situations are immense. This also applies to youth mental health care and care for children with an intellectual disability, JeugdzorgPlus, and judicial youth institutions, according to the Netherlands Youth Institute.²⁵ A large number of children do not develop well in an environment that does not replicate family-based living conditions.



*The Parool (a national newspaper) published a blog on 27 June 2020 about a young girl, 17 years old, diagnosed with autism. Her behavioural problems were so severe that she was placed in a care institution: "One day she called, "Daddy, you have to get me or I'll cut my wrists." He raced to the institution. Four care workers sat in a room to talk about Jade. Nobody was with the girl. Until he went to her room himself. It looked like she was frozen. Her father recognised the image. It was only after a few seconds that he saw the belt around her neck. Care workers later reported hearing that furniture was being moved. They were not alarmed. Jade is not included in the National Institute for Health and the Environment (Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu – RIVM) figures for coronavirus victims. But Jade is also a victim of corona."*²⁶

Child protection service

Following the coronavirus outbreak, measures have been put in place to avoid the closure of child protection services. However, at the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, face-to-face contacts were often converted into video meetings. Without interacting directly with family members, social workers risk missing signals and have difficulties reaching some young people. There is also the 'Kindertelefoon', the Dutch Child Helpline, but for some children, online assistance can be a barrier because children feel less familiar with this or because they are not able to speak freely at home²⁷. In addition, there is an increase in the need for drastic interventions, for example, if parents refuse any form of contact. Home visits still take place for exceptional cases, but the distance that has to be kept makes it feel more detached. The Council of Child Protection indicates that their research is

²⁵ Tips voor professionals in de residentiële jeugdhulp

²⁶ Jade wordt niet meegeteld in RIVM-cijfers. Ze werd 17

²⁷ De Kindertelefoon, Wat Kinderen bezighoudt in Coronatijd Hand

mainly done via (video) calling unless that is not possible²⁸. Recent report²⁹ covers the living situation and quality of life of parents within the youth care system. According to the report impact of COVID-19 can lead to a greater demand for youth care as the problems within multi-use households worsen and the number of multi-use households may also increase. Some problems can arise in the short term, other problems in the longer term. There is recommendation to municipalities that multi-use families need special attention to minimize the impact of the crisis on family life.

Special care and support for children with disabilities

Special care and support for children with disabilities have been discontinued.³⁰ In addition, access to care is more difficult and treatments are being delayed. There are also concerns that waiting lists in youth care and youth mental healthcare

are increasing.³¹ The treatment and guidance of children within youth care, youth mental health care, and children with a disability was due to start again on 1 June 2020.

Foster families and children

The Dutch Foster Families Association (NVP) has raised the alarm about the rising tensions in many foster families that are suffering from the COVID-19 crisis. Tensions are mounting, among other things, because children cannot see their family members due to home quarantine and supportive care has been temporarily suspended. Those tensions could ultimately damage the relationship between the child and the foster parents.

Foster care is further under pressure due to the increase in the number of urgent out-of-home placements and the growing need for acute foster care. A survey among foster care organisations shows that they

are now approaching existing foster parents to ask whether they would be prepared to take in extra children temporarily. "The NVP is concerned that the fewer foster homes there are, the greater the chances of a less good match and premature termination of the placement".³²

Care leavers

In view of the research carried out by JSO (expertise centre for youth, society and development), young people leaving care are insufficiently prepared for an independent life³³. The number of homeless youth has also increased enormously to 12,700 in the 18 to 30 age group³⁴. Research has shown that this also concerns young people who can no longer count on child protection schemes after reaching 18. The extension of (the right to) foster care/family home up to 21-years-old is a positive development as it offers the option of guiding young people

in vulnerable situations towards independence.

Family-based care

There has been a great shortage of foster care families for years. In 2018, out of 542 foster parents surveyed, 52% quitted because of undesirable circumstances such as problems with the care system³⁵. A Foster Care Action Plan has been started by the national government, which focuses, among other things, on continuity and promoting the expertise of foster parents. This is still ongoing. In 2019 there were 145 international adoptions. The total number of national adoptions is unknown.

Children in migration

Unaccompanied minors

In 2019, 1,045 unaccompanied minors came to the Netherlands.

²⁸ RvdK werkt door tijdens periode met coronavirus

²⁹ Leefsituatie van ouders met kinderen in de jeugdzorg

³⁰ Gehandicapte kinderen in de knel door corona. 'Wij worden behoorlijk vergeten'

³¹ Cliënten en ggz op zoek naar nieuw evenwicht

³² Pleegouders slaan alarm over thuissituatie

³³ Leren van herhaald beroep in de JeugdzorgPlus

³⁴ Raad Volksgezondheid en Samenleving

³⁵ Waarom stoppen pleegouders? Onderzoek naar omstandigheden, begeleiding en hoe pleegouders behouden kunnen worden

In 2019 there was a total of 3,072 guardianships and 255 supervision orders (ondertoezichtstelling).³⁶

During COVID-19, newcomers had no access to the regular Central Organ for Asylum-seekers (COA) reception. However, an emergency shelter was set up at the military base in Zoutkamp (municipality of Hogeland), where asylum seekers could receive shelter and basic facilities. In line with the Reception Directive, the Zoutkamp had to provide sufficient sanitary facilities, a properly functioning Wifi, opportunities for physical exercise and access for volunteers and care workers (including the Dutch Council for Refugees 'VluchtelingenWerk'). Defence for Children³⁷ was concerned about whether the facilities at the Zoutkamp were suitable for unaccompanied minors because of the minimum facilities, the large dormitories and the measures restricting their freedom.

With regard to the reception of unaccompanied minors, a distinction is made between reception by the COA and reception by Nidos.

Nidos is responsible for the care and supervision of unaccompanied minors until the age of 14 with or without a residence permit. COA is responsible for unaccompanied minors aged 15 and older without a residence permit and provides care for this group at the Process Reception Location (POL). The POL is located on the site of a regular asylum seekers centre (AZC). Another important difference between COA and Nidos is the scale: At COA, small scale means 16-20 youngsters per unit. At Nidos, small scale is 4- 10 children per home. Reception model 2019: 23% with COA and 61% with Nidos.

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

³⁶ CBS

³⁷ Vraag aan Staatssecretaris: Prioriteit voor kinderen bij overplaatsing uit Zoutkamp en goed afstandsonderwijs op azc's