

Slovenia

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

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11.7%

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

Alternative recommendations

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

- Maintaining the health of the population (including mental health), especially of children and families.
- Financial and other support for underprivileged families and families with children with special needs.
- Finding different and new ways of schooling children during an outbreak – giving more support to teachers and parents on how to school children at home.

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

- Efficient tackling of unemployment and poverty.

- Strengthening the health care system (including providing specialists for child health care: paediatricians, child psychiatrists, clinical psychologists).

- Integrating a Child Guarantee mechanism into the national policy planning.

- Higher welfare benefits for children (child allowance – otroški dodatek), reducing inequality in employment and income.

- Free kindergartens for all children, and free school textbooks for all children in primary school.

- Independent healthcare insurance for all children, and increase in the number of child healthcare specialists.

- More affordable loans for families.

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-19¹ crisis

Digital gap

The coronavirus lockdown highlighted and reinforced the education gap. Some rural areas in Slovenia do not have access to stable connections. Many students did not have the equipment at home to log in to class, or their parents might be essential workers, unable to watch them during the day to ensure they sign in for school or help them study.

Food poverty

The school closure put children living in low-income families at risk (to be hungry), they relied on free school meals.

Increase in intra-family violence

The distress of children in violent families has increased. Children subjected to domestic abuse

were forced to stay at home in an environment of heightened stress that caused the violence to increase. The national helpline TOM telephone (helpline for children and young people, which is one of the SAFY's programmes), recorded more calls concerning family relations, psychological issues, depression, destructive behaviours, and loneliness.

Unemployment

Many people lost their jobs, the unemployment rate in Slovenia rose by 20% from 75,026 at the beginning of the epidemic in mid-March to 90,415 at the end of May (resource Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia).

Impact on the work of civil society organisations

Civil society organisations are impacted by the uncertainty concerning COVID-19, making the continuation of their work and activities with children more

difficult due to all the precautionary measures (e.g. children's holidays during the summer, free childcare during the vacations, issues with ensuring children's participation). They are facing a significant increase in humanitarian needs and are operating under short delays. In parallel, government support for the NGO sector started to decrease and there are signs that it will continue to decrease even more (funding cuts).

Positive developments

- Subsidising of part-time work (to maintain jobs in face of the consequences of the epidemic and the temporary inability to provide work) – active employment policy measures.
- Vouchers for strengthening Slovenian tourism (all residents – adult citizens - with permanent residence in Slovenia received a voucher for the amount of €200

¹ Obvestilo za javnost marec 2020.
Obvestilo za javnost april 2020.
Obvestilo za javnost maj 2020.
Neuradni dnevni podatki brezposelnost

and also children and young people for the amount of €50). They can be used to pay bed and breakfast in accommodation establishments in Slovenia.



- Deferral of credit payments for 12 months for a wide range of beneficiaries (persons, citizens of Slovenia) – it only delays the

payment of credit and interest still had to be paid, also the costs of the deferral fees were left to the beneficiaries, so in effect it only prolonged the loan repayment time and made it more costly (because the banks charged a deferral fee).



- The possibility of introducing combined school learning – in-person and remote learning.



During the pandemic, civil society organisations have been successful in:

- Providing technical equipment for remote learning (mostly computers for school pupils).

- Providing food (charitable food packages in cooperation with food online shop [Preprosto.je](https://preprosto.je)).

- Engaging more volunteers in providing childcare for children whose parents had to go to work and also helping the elderly do the grocery shopping and keeping them company.

Policies for Investing in Children

In Slovenia, children's rights received very little attention from the government during COVID-19, as there is a widespread view that children are well off in the country, and the issue is not seen as a priority. Before the crisis, children's rights had a period of progress, when many changes happened, although we are still waiting for the Programme for Children and the state report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The delay is also due to governments shifts. Now, especially since the shift in government from the left to the right-wing political parties at the

start of the COVID crisis, civil society is concerned about the place of children's rights on the political agenda.

National strategy to tackle child poverty

Slovenia does not have a specific national strategy for tackling child poverty. Chapter 3 (decent life for all) of the Development Strategy of Slovenia 2030², is devoted to protecting families and children and creating a supportive decision-

making environment for a child. *Slovenia has committed itself (according to the Agenda 2030) to reduce poverty by half.*

In Slovenia, 41,000 children lived in poverty (which is 10.5 % of all children) in 2019. A strategy to tackle child poverty at the national level is essential to bring this figure down. Moreover, Slovenia should put some efforts to get acquainted with Child Guarantee and take it into account as much as possible, especially in policy making.

The main obstacles for the development of a national strategy to tackle child poverty are:

- There is not enough attention to children's rights.
- Children are often an overlooked social group (especially when talking about children's participation).
- Child poverty cannot be separated from family poverty. In the strategy, poverty should be covered comprehensively.

² [Strategija razvoja Slovenije 2030](#)

Access to financial resources in the family

In Slovenia, social transfers are effective in reducing poverty. Many families rely on welfare benefits to sustain their families. It is important to address unemployment and in-work poverty.

Children in Slovenia have access to kindergartens, healthcare, and education. Kindergartens are free only for the second and next child and children's access to healthcare is dependent on their parents' economic status. There is a lack of specialists for children's health care: paediatricians, child psychiatrists, clinical psychologists.

The majority of Roma children still do not attend school, do not have access to adequate housing or even water.

Views on the Semester process

The 2020 Country-Specific Recommendation does not mention

the NGO sector and only mentions children with regard to education and remote learning (see Art. 29).

Children's participation

Children's participation is not part of any strategic or legislative document in Slovenia, so it is quite hard to include children at the policy level.

The Children's Parliaments programme enables children to participate in school, on a local level, and on the national level. When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, face to face communication was suspended. The Children's Parliaments' activities moved online, using [OPIN.ME](#), a platform for e-participation.

To ensure children's right to participate, SAFY and ZIPCOM are calling for:

- Adoption of a national programme for children (2020-2025) – it is in the preparatory phase.
- Preparation and adoption of a national strategy on child participation.

- More general awareness of children's rights and consequently also on the right to participate.

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