

Slovakia

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

Contributor:

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22%

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) in 2018

Alternative Recommendations

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

- Avoid chaotic/contradictory announcements and introduction of the measures during the pandemic.
- Include children in the most vulnerable situations, especially those in segregated areas, in the social packages and eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy for the distribution of social allowances from the state.

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

- Provide quality education for all children in any kind of circumstances by preparing

special measures for children in vulnerable situations (living in poverty, in institutional care, migrant children...).

- Ensure meaningful child participation in decision-making processes by shifting the understanding of a child as a passive recipient to that of an active co-creator.

Children in Alternative Care (CiAC):

- To further support families and children in vulnerable situations by targeted financial allowances as well as further development and deployment of family counselling centres to socially disadvantaged areas.



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 protection of children's right to participate:



Child Poverty

Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

Government support

The government's support to families and children during the crisis was inadequate.

The Slovak government did not address the needs of families and children adequately during the pandemic. In particular, no special allowance to support families in vulnerable situations was introduced. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family extended the provision of parental allowance to parents who lost their entitlement to it in March 2020 and did not have a job to return to, and had no other income. It was paid until the end of the emergency in April 2020.¹

An amendment to the Act on Social Insurance, which regulates, inter alia, the conditions for entitlement to nursing care during child sickness

in connection with the spread of coronavirus was adopted in March 2020. It secured a nursing care allowance previously provided during child-sickness for children 0-18 years² during the lockdown.

Negative developments

- In many cases children in segregated villages did not attend any kind of education from March to June 2020.

Good practice

- New and effective ways of working (webinars, online meetings...)
- Big wave of solidarity among people.
- New fundraising tools emerged including new ways of crowdfunding.
- New partnerships that led to new initiatives were established.

Key challenges experienced by families and children

- Insecurity about the future and not knowing how long the situation was going to last. Uncertainty of the re-unification of families whose members/parents stayed locked in different countries.
- Attempts to harmonise home-office and home schooling. Lack of computers and personnel capacities.
- Not being able to generate sufficient income for the families.

Key challenges for civil society organisations

- To continue implementation of the project activities e.g. based on cooperation with schools or by organising conferences.
- Insecurity for the future, inability to plan anything: need for organisations to re-structure their

¹ Slovakian Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family.

² OČR a PN v súvislosti s koronavírusom... čo platí od marca 2020?

activities and their approach and working methods.

- Major impact on cash flow due to interruption of services. Income has scaled down since donors

were facing similar financial difficulties. The donors were generous with prolonging the

projects' duration and submitting the final reports.

Policies for Investing in Children

National strategy to tackle child poverty

The national strategy to tackle poverty and social exclusion³ was adopted in 2015 and updated in 2017. Coalition of Children Slovakia (CCS) considers that it fails to address the needs of the poorest families and children in segregated areas. Another weak point is that there is no action plan to implement the planned measures.

CCS has observed a tendency by the Slovak government to regress in the implementation of policies for the benefit of children. A good example is the Ombudsperson for Children, which is a missed opportunity and a waste of funding. Slovakia has had a new government since March 2020

that includes the parties promoting “traditional family values” (with a conservative catholic background). Children's rights are overlooked and the reproductive rights of woman are now under pressure, due to the new conservative leadership of the Ministry of Social Affairs, and Ministry of Health Care. Their actions (a new law is in parliament) consist of appointing conservative heads of ministerial departments in charge of these policies, introducing measures that will restrict the access of women to abortion and reorienting grant schemes for pro-life and family policies designated originally for gender balance. New measures are also expected in children's rights issues.

The involvement of the EU in promoting children's rights was adequate:

The Coalition for Children Slovakia suggests not providing funds to the areas which were not able to use the allocated funds and evaluating the impact of supported projects. The rule of law and human rights should be the guiding principles in all calls.

Children's right to participate

The main challenge is not understanding the meaning of participation and absence of an official leader or a supervisor for ensuring child participation. A child is understood as a passive recipient instead of an active co-creator that should be involved in all decision-

making processes that affect them. A member of the CCS, the Open Society Foundation Slovakia, published a position paper mapping the situation on child participation in Slovakia⁴. They also published a *National Strategy for support of the participation of children and young people in Slovakia*.⁵ Recommendations focus on two main areas - school and municipality environments:

in school environment:

- Incorporate the child participation into the education & training of future teaching and professional staff
- Elaborate the programme of teacher's professional development that will include the issue of participation of children and young people

³ Národná rámcová stratégia podpory sociálneho začlenenia a boja proti chudobe.

⁴ Pozitívny dokument Participácia detí a mladých ľudí na Slovensku.

⁵ Návrh stratégie podpory a rozvoja participácie detí a mladých ľudí v Slovenskej republike.

- Develop the methodology for ensuring school participation

in the municipality:

- Introduce the participation of children and young people in municipality

- Appoint the coordinator for the participation of children and young people at local-government level

- Develop the methodology to ensure the participation of children and young people

Efforts of the government to ensure child participation:

For progress to be made, a new ombudsperson for children should be appointed, with a mandate to protect and ensure the enforcement of children's rights. The functioning

of the Committee for Children and Young People should be made more efficient and transparent, following the suspension of all activities after the previous coordinator left.

Children in Alternative Care (CIAC)

Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

During lockdown all residential facilities canceled visits. Contact between a child and their biological family was ensured via social media and phone. Adoption processes were also stopped.

- NGOs have been trying to monitor children and families in vulnerable situations with the assistance of some municipalities, and some such as the Banská Bystrica⁵ municipality were very helpful. Given the absence of ambulant or community services, it is estimated that the number of
- children entering child protection will raise by 30% approximately. Families at risk were hit hard by the crisis with no or very limited support including the absence of support provided via family centres. Even in situations where a woman with children needed to leave their home it was difficult to find a place since all help and crisis centres were closed.
- There were no special measures during the crisis to address the needs of young people ageing out of care. They could stay in residential care during the pandemic. Mental health problems and depression from uncertainty increased among young people,

and yet no adequate support was provided.

Child protection

The Slovak Republic introduced new types of services for families in vulnerable situations by creating the Centre for Children and Family in 2019 which the CCS sees as a positive change in child protection. This centre provides new community services from experts such as psychologists and social workers. The centres were created in existing facilities. The quality of the services provided may vary but in general it is a step forward.

There is also a new Concept ensuring the implementation

of measures in social protection facilities and social guardianship for the years 2019 – 2023. The Transformation and Deinstitutionalisation Plan aims at continuing the process of deinstitutionalisation of replacement care, in order to reduce the number of children placed in alternative care.

The Coalition for Children of Slovakia believes the deinstitutionalisation of children in alternative care has brought several positive changes to the care system. However, it is still work in progress and there are several gaps. Remaining challenges are the further transformation of residential facilities, the development of family-based foster care and the adoption of

5 A City in Central Slovakia.

clear standards for all providers of alternative care for children. Family support via various programmes as well as counselling centres needs to be further developed and deployed across the country. Several separations of children from their families could have been prevented if there had been adequate financial and non-financial assistance, given the findings of the Ministry of Labour that one of the main reasons why children enter the child protection system is their poor socio-economic situation⁶.

Children in migration

In Slovakia there were 85 unaccompanied migrant children in 2019 who were placed in a specialised children's home in Medzilaborce⁷. Out of 69 unaccompanied minors who entered Slovakia in 2019, 38 were provided accommodation and support in the same home.

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



⁶ [Sociálne veci a rodina](#).

⁷ [Štatistický prehľad legálnej a nelegálnej migrácie v Slovenskej republike](#).