

Country Report Spain

Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce

Recommendations for the Child
Guarantee National Action Plan
in Spain



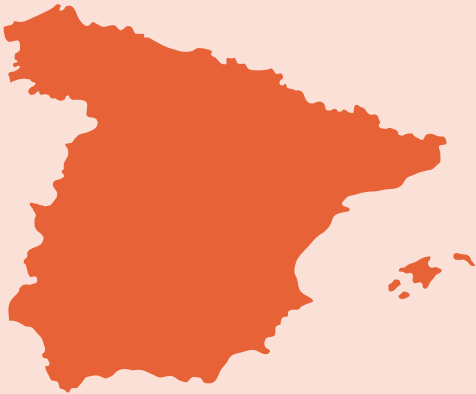
Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

Taskforce Lead

Plataforma de Infancia

Taskforce Team Members

Plataforma de Infancia is a network of 76 entities that work to achieve full compliance with the rights of children and adolescents by enforcing the Convention on the Rights of the Child.



There are 8,325,756 children in Spain. Children make up 17.6% of the total population. 31.8% of children in Spain are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Governance

National actors and their functions

Mrs. Lucía Losoviz was appointed the Child Guarantee National Coordinator in January 2022. She is the General Director for Children's and Adolescents' Rights, in the Ministry of Social Rights, and Agenda 2030.

Best practices of reaching out to stakeholders and relevant parties

Plataforma de Infancia have a close and collaborative relationship with the Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030. In addition to working with this Ministry, Plataforma de Infancia is in constant communication and collaboration with different ministries, including the Ministry of Education, on issues affecting children's rights. It is also in close collaboration with the Directorate General for Family Diversity, whose director is Mrs. Patricia Bezunarte,

and the High Commissioner for Child Poverty, which is part of the Presidency of the Government.

We are currently not aware of any established structure to collaborate across the ministries, but we believe all relevant ministries should be involved. There is a need for tools to support such collaboration and for dialogue with the general directorates of the Ministry of Education, the European Social Fund Administration Unit (UAFSE) and with the Autonomous Communities, who are responsible for managing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+).

We believe the role of the National Coordinator is to ensure that the Autonomous Communities are aligned with the National Action Plan. To do so, the National Coordinator and Autonomous Communities should work in collaboration on the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of impactful operational programmes.

Plataforma de Infancia are keen to support and engage in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Child Guarantee National Action Plan in Spain. From our experience in the First Years First Priorities campaign, where we created a national alliance with more than 15

national children's organisations, we identified national priorities regarding early childhood development. We know how important it will be for the National Action Plan to be developed with stakeholders from the start.

Main Recommendations by Taskforce Spain

- There should be an established structure that ensures collaboration across all the ministries whose work has an impact on children; Government ministries must stop working in 'silos' and collaborate to develop an enabling policy framework;
- The National Action Plan should be developed, implemented, monitored and evaluated with stakeholders, including children;
- It is essential, given the exceptional situation in Spain, that control mechanisms and accountability processes are created to ensure equity for children in need across the different Autonomous Communities;
- There are four particularly vulnerable groups of children in Spain whose needs must be included in the National Action Plan: Children at risk of poverty or currently living in poverty - particularly marginalised children such as Roma children, children with disabilities, and migrant children - especially unaccompanied children; children living in institutions; and children under 6 years of age.

Children in Need and Outreach Measures

Towards a consensus on who children in need are and why

There are four particularly vulnerable groups of children whose needs must be included in the National Action Plan for Spain.

Children and adolescents living at risk of poverty or currently living in poverty

In Spain, the rate of child poverty and social exclusion is among the highest in the EU with more than 30% of children living at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Children growing up in single parent families or large families as well as children in families with a migrant background are among the most vulnerable. Although there is currently financial and fiscal aid available to help families living in vulnerable situations, it is not enough to tackle the situation of child poverty in Spain.

Children and adolescents at risk of social exclusion

These include Roma children, children with disabilities

or migrant children, and above all those in the most vulnerable situations such as migrant and especially unaccompanied children. It is therefore essential to put in place policy actions designed to protect children in this situation of special vulnerability. Roma children are under the persistent and structural confluence of different factors of vulnerability, including poverty (89%).

Children living in institutions

According to the recent publication from the DataCare project, there are currently more than 20,000 children living in institutions in Spain, and more than 1,100 of these children are under 6 years old. Children do not belong in institutions. The best place for a child to live and grow up is in a family-based care setting. A great effort must be made to ensure that the children currently living in institutions in Spain can be placed in foster care (family-care), as this will greatly improve their development and better meet the needs of each child.

Children under 6 years of age

Studies also show that most of the public health problems we suffer in adulthood, such as obesity or certain cardiovascular and mental health problems, are related to early childhood experiences, especially during the first 1,000 days of life. It is therefore essential that the rights of children aged 0-6 years and especially children aged 0-3 years, should be placed at the centre of our public policies. Although the school enrolment rate in the 0-3 age group in Spain is 45.8%, children with fewer economic resources are left out (26.3% enrolment) and it is mainly the middle and upper classes who have access to this education (62.5% enrolment).



Previous or ongoing outreach activities by the government as well as other relevant actors

To date there has only been a diagnosis carried out by UNICEF Spain on behalf of the European Commission which is working with the UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (ECARO), to pilot projects

across seven Member States, with Spain being one of them. These pilot projects are expected to complete in July 2022. The most recent programmatic update is the European Child Guarantee - Phase III of the Preparation Action: Testing the EU Child Guarantee in the EU Member States, which aims to focus on: how the different levels of governance work together - national, regional and local; identifying barriers to key services for the children most in need; social protection systems; and data collection.

Plataforma de Infancia have participated together with other civil society organisations and universities in this project as part of the advisory council.

Stepping up efforts - reaching more children in need

In September 2021, the State Council for Child and Adolescent Participation, was created. This has led to more than 330 municipal Children's Councils. These Children's Councils are made up of 34 children between the ages of 8 and 17 years. Children are invited to express their concerns and make proposals. They will meet at least twice a year, once every six months. The aim of this Council is for children to freely express their ideas and propose measures, defend the social recognition of their rights, formulate proposals on issues that affect them at state level and become the spokespersons and interlocutors of children and adolescents before public institutions.

Key Services and Policy Reform for Children in Need

Current national policies and strategies

Different legislative processes and actions are being developed with the aim of reducing and eradicating poverty and inequalities among children in Spain. Among these processes we would like to highlight:

- The newly developed Children's Participation Council;
- The National Strategy for the Rights of the Child and Adolescents (this strategy is currently being developed);
- The Law on Family Diversity due to be approved; work will be completed on the Strategy for Comprehensive Care for Unaccompanied Migrant Children in the coming months.

In addition, a supplement to the Minimum Vital Income (MVI) is being implemented, which is a measure focused on improving the situation of vulnerable households that has greatly improved the amounts of previous aid, although the thresholds have been reduced. A child supplement to the MVI has recently been approved, which means an increase of 100 euros for children from 0-3 years, 70 euros for 3 to 6 years and 50 euros for 6 to 8 years. The thresholds for this supplement have been substantially increased.

Plataforma de Infancia and other children's organisations welcome this measure, but now it is time to see if it reaches all the families in need, as we are aware of problems in its implementation. For example, there are additional "minimum incomes measures" in some Autonomous Communities, although with the MVI some have been suppressed. There are specific aids in some Autonomous Communities for the 0-3 age group that we believe need to be improved. The government has announced a new law on Family Diversity, which is expected to become law in 2022, that will include a parenting allowance and aid for single parent families, but this law has not yet been drafted.

Gaps and omissions in current national policies

The levels of child poverty in Spain are alarming, indeed Spain has the third highest level of child

poverty in Europe. Although there is help for families, it is not enough. Last year, the minimum vital income was approved, a measure that will help many families with children and adolescents but, due to the requirements, will leave many others in need without assistance.



Special attention should be paid to early childhood, since according to published studies, the first 1,000 days of a child's life can mark his or her future life. Financial support for families, ensuring universal and free early care and education services (0-3) and the implementation of effective work-life balance measures with a child-centred perspective, should also be considered.

It is essential to offer more services free of charge or financed by the administration for families, such as, for example, free access to food at school, support for the work-life balance of these families, specific support for single parents that show higher poverty rates.

Building an Enabling Policy Framework to create a ‘whole of government approach’

Current national policies and strategies on children and young people

Different Directorates are developing relevant strategies and policies that could support the implementation of the Child Guarantee. However, there are concerns that they are working in ‘silos’. For example, a Strategy for Children’s Rights has been proposed, which is being developed by the Directorate General for Children’s Rights and will run until 2030. However, there is no specific mention of this issue in the Strategy to Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion (2019-2023). This is a missed opportunity to develop an enabling policy framework, because the Strategy for Children’s Rights will depend solely on

the Directorate General for Children’s Rights, while it should be part of the more general policy agenda of other Ministries. Many of the powers of the Spanish Government are delegated to the Autonomous Communities, therefore it is important that the success of the Child Guarantee does not depend just on the National Coordinator or Autonomous Communities, but it should be a common objective of all Ministries in the Spanish government.

In addition, for this Strategy, the High Commissioner against Child Poverty, the Directorate General for Children’s Rights and the Directorate General for Family Diversity are deeply involved. We know that The Administrative Unit for the European Social Fund is going to be involved in some way but there is a concern about the role that the Autonomous Communities will play in this Strategy. We have been informed that the Autonomous Communities will participate through the Childhood Observatory and they will participate with other administrations and with civil society organisations. However, we believe it is important for Autonomous Communities to take ownership of this Strategy and be part of its development rather than being informed that they should implement it.

Suggested steps to improve the national response to child poverty

In Spain, many powers of the central government are delegated to the different Autonomous Communities, which means that there is a great difference in services, quality and accessibility to services. We believe that the Child Guarantee will be a driving force, and an opportunity for the different Autonomous Communities to collaborate, and to work towards a common goal, and that all children, regardless of where they live, can access quality services, and have their rights realised. Therefore, it is essential, given the exceptional situation in Spain, to create control mechanisms and accountability processes to monitor what is being done in the different Autonomous Communities.



Accountability - Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

Existing checks and balances

One of the biggest problems encountered when analysing the situation of children in Spain is the lack of disaggregated data, which makes it very difficult to implement and analyse indicators and results. There is also a lack of information on the use and accountability of the ESF+ and how this is being implemented in the Autonomous Communities.

Suggested steps towards a more robust monitoring and evaluation framework

Poverty disaggregated data already exists, but it is essential that this clearly identifies the number of people, including children, experiencing severe poverty. Again, this data should be disaggregated by age, and by age and sex. Such data should also include information on schooling, children receiving free school meals, children in need who receive school grants to meet school costs, and data about children within the protection system.



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There is a lack of specialised resources such as disaggregated data collection mechanisms to be able to effectively monitor the implementation of the Child Guarantee. The establishment of more robust mechanisms could have a much bigger impact on the work that organisations like us can do in Spain.
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