

**Eurochild**

Putting children at  
the heart of Europe

# (In)visible children

Eurochild 2022 report on  
children in need across Europe

Eurochild advocates for children's rights and well-being to be at the heart of policy making. We are a network of organisations working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. We influence policies, build internal capacities, facilitate mutual learning and exchange practice and research. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the foundation of all our work.



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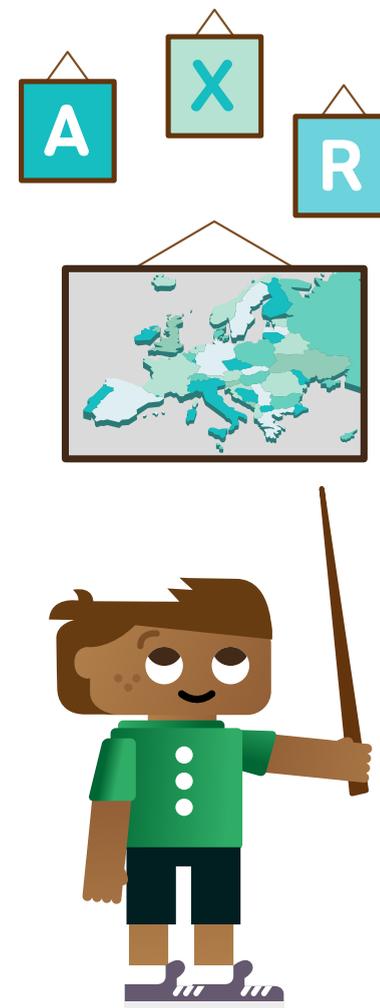
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## Purpose of the report

- 1 Assess the extent to which the European Semester Reports and Recommendations (2022) are aligned to the lived experiences of children from a Civil Society perspective.
- 2 Assess the scale of Eurochild members' engagement in developing the European Child Guarantee National Action Plans.
- 3 Build knowledge of the experiences of children, families and communities living in poverty and social exclusion.
- 4 Provide a Eurochild members perspective on investing in children through EU funding.



## Acknowledgements

This report is based on assessments provided by **35 Eurochild members in 22 countries**. These are:

Office of Birth and Childhood and Child Rights Coalition Flanders for **Belgium**; National Network for Children, Know-how Centre for Alternative Care for Children and Hope and Homes for Children from **Bulgaria**; Society 'Our Children' Opatija, Children First and SOS Children's Villages represented by Coordination of Associations for Children for **Croatia**, Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children for **Cyprus**; Alliance for the Rights of the Child **Czechia**; **Estonian** Union for Child Welfare; Central Union for Child Welfare for **Finland**; Convention Nationale des Associations de Protection de l'Enfant for **France**; Child and Youth Welfare (AGJ), German Children's Fund (DKHW) and National Coalition Germany for **Germany**; The Smile of the Child from **Greece**; Children's Rights Alliance from **Ireland**; Laboratorio di sostenibilità socio-educativa of Milano Bicocca University - "Riccardo Massa" Department, Fondazione S.O.S – il Telefono Azzurro and Fondazione L'Albero della Vita for **Italy**; **Latvian** Child Welfare Network; Malta Foundation for Wellbeing Society and Early Childhood Development Association of Malta (ECDAM) for **Malta**; the Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights from the **Netherlands**; Children in **Northern Ireland**; the **Polish** Foster Care Coalition; Instituto de Apoio à Criança, Fundação Nossa Senhora do Bom Sucesso and Sérgio Costa Araújo for **Portugal**; Hope and Homes for Children from **Romania**; Coalition for Children **Slovakia**; Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights and **Slovenian** Association of Friends of Youth (SAFY) for Slovenia; Plataforma de Infancia for **Spain**.

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# Background

Eradicating all forms of child poverty and social exclusion is integral to protect and promote children's rights. EU-wide data and evidence regularly collected by Eurochild illustrate the extent and nature of children's lived experiences of poverty across the EU. The 2022 Eurochild Report provides **timely and relevant information collected from our members working at national level, to make children in Europe visible**. It provides an

**19.8 million children** (24.4% of all children) in the European Union are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. (2021)  
**The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, adopted in 2021, aims to reduce the number of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 5 million by 2030.**

overview of the needs of children and how they are addressed in the European Semester exercise, good practice and working solutions, and country-specific recommendations for each participating country.

## Child Poverty

Since 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities even further, and the increasing cost of living and energy crises will likely push more children into poverty in 2022. Moreover, **the experience of poverty in childhood negatively impacts health, education, and employment outcomes** later in life. This is a devastating cost, not only to the individual but also to society as a whole. With this report, Eurochild aims to collect good practices from our members on the ground and share this evidence with policy-makers to guide an agenda that successfully fights child poverty.

According to the [latest Eurostat data](#), child poverty has increased from 24% to 24.4% from 2020

to 2021. Spain is now second highest in EU for child poverty at 33.4%, overtaking Bulgaria. Compared to 2020, increases have been noted in 17 countries and decreases in 9. Romania remains the highest at 41.5%, while Bulgaria has registered the most significant drop from 36.2% to 33%. Some of the country profiles in this report will shed some light on these trends.

## Semester Reports and Recommendations

Eurochild has an important role in tracking developments at national and European level and supporting civil society's responses to the most pressing needs of children across Europe. The annual European Semester cycle is a crucial opportunity to reach policy-makers at EU and national levels to ensure investing in children is prioritised within the broader macroeconomic and social policy agenda. The European Semester drives EU policy coordination and national policy reforms. Engaging with the Semester process is therefore

essential to **ensure child poverty and social exclusion are prioritised** at the national level.

In general, the 2022 European Semester Country Reports and Country Specific Recommendations broadly address the needs of each country, mentioning children indirectly through general policy. Many country reports do refer to education, especially in the early years. Moreover, children are often mentioned in the context of poverty and vulnerable households; however, other vulnerable children are seldom referenced, such as children with a migrant background and children in alternative care. While all European Country Reports should address the needs of children, it was disappointing to find out that only **nine 2022 Country Specific Recommendations** (Austria, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia) include the word child, which was mentioned in relation to childcare, child benefits and education, in particular.

**“National governments must identify the children and families who need help, and provide the support they need. Thanks to Eurochild members, we have identified national priorities and recommendations to tackle child poverty, prevent and combat social exclusion, uphold the rights of all children and foster equal opportunities”**  
– H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca,  
*Eurochild President*

## European Child Guarantee and National Action Plans

On 14 June 2021, the European Council adopted the European Child Guarantee Recommendation to combat and prevent poverty and social exclusion by guaranteeing children access to key services, e.g., **early childhood education and care, education, healthcare or healthy nutrition, and adequate housing**. The European Commission has called on EU Member States to develop National Action Plans.

With this initiative, the EU demonstrates the **political will to prioritise children** and highlights the need to tackle child poverty transversally through different policies.

The European Commission strongly encourages Member States to **develop and implement Child Guarantee National Action Plans (NAP) covering the period until 2030**. The NAPs should be tailored to the unique realities of each country — addressing

the specific needs of children and in close cooperation with civil society and the children themselves. **An integrated approach is needed, focusing on the causes of poverty and social exclusion, and that breaks the intergenerational cycle of poverty.**

Developing and implementing a Child Guarantee National Action Plan can differ depending on the national context. At the time of drafting this report, 12 EU Member States still needed to submit their NAPs, and the content of those already published varies much from one country to another. Most of the Eurochild members contributing to this report have participated in consultations organised by Child Guarantee National Coordinators. However, in some cases members described the consultation like a box-ticking exercise. Tight deadlines, low transparency and, in many cases, low representation of the organisations invited to provide input, and lack of feedback from the authorities contributed to consultation being

less meaningful. When it comes to involving children, only a few members confirmed meaningful child participation.

The 2022 Eurochild Report offers insights into how this EU initiative was received at national level by civil society organisations in 21 European Union countries.

## EU Funding

EU funding enables **extensive investment at national level in the fight against child poverty**. The main funding sources that can be used for investment in children and programmes that support children's rights are the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE), the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe). This report identifies what

sources of funding are most used for investing in children across Europe.

In this context, one of the most used is the ESF+, a financing instrument to support employment, education, skills, and social inclusion initiatives. ESF+ is the EU's main instrument for 'investing in people', with a budget of almost €99.3 billion for 2021-2027. Since ESF+ spending is expected to respond to the recommendations and country analyses provided under the European Semester process, this report aims at providing good practice and information on accessibility to funding at national level. In this programming period, Member States whose rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion was higher than the Union average for the period between 2017 and 2019 should allocate at least 5 % of their ESF+ resources to targeted actions and structural reforms to tackle child poverty.<sup>1</sup>

## Eurochild Country Reports at a glance

### European Semester

Many European Semester Country Reports and Country Specific Recommendations featured in this report briefly mention children, referencing measures that will indirectly or to some extent affect them (eg. child poverty, education, early childhood education and care). In most cases, education is referred to in the context of its labour market value and concrete measures referring to children are limited to the National Recovery and Resilience Plans. Only two country reports (Ireland and Poland) seem to offer more of a comprehensive picture. Overall, children's rights and their needs are not sufficiently embedded in either document.

### Child Guarantee National Action Plans

12 countries included in this report have published their NAP. From these, our members reported that 8 involved children in the drafting and 16 involved civil society. However, some members in at least 4 countries (Latvia, Italia, Malta, and the Netherlands) expressed concerns over the lack of transparency of the stakeholder engagement process. Only one country (Estonia) has referred to their involvement as a good practice of co-design of the NAP at the time of drafting.

### EU Funding

In 16 countries featured in this report, members are aware of EU funding, but the majority has expressed that civil society is not being involved in the programming. Moreover, members in at least 6 countries have identified barriers to accessing EU funding regarding information accessibility and technical capacity.

<sup>1</sup> These countries are Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Romania.



## Eurochild member Recommendations for the 2023 European Semester

<b>Belgium</b>	‘Belgium should take action to systematically consult a representative group of children to allow meaningful participation of children in policy decisions that impact their lives’
<b>Bulgaria</b>	‘Bulgaria should take action to reform the child protection system and develop a comprehensive and systemic approach aimed at the well-being of the child, rather than fragmented sectoral policies with separate measures for risk groups’
<b>Croatia</b>	‘Croatia should secure an adequate range of locally based services to prevent child poverty and exclusion, while including civil society organisations and children’s opinions into EU funds implementation and national policy’
<b>Cyprus</b>	‘Cyprus should take action to advance civil society participation in policy-making, ensuring that children are included in all steps of this process’
<b>Czechia</b>	‘The Czech government should promptly adopt and implement the Child Guarantee National Action Plan, provide every pupil aged 3-15 years old with a free warm lunch as a part of their education process, and pursue a child participation model that specifically targets vulnerable and disadvantaged children and allows them to express their opinion about all aspects of public life affecting them’
<b>Estonia</b>	‘Estonia should directly channel the investments in children, because by investing in the green- or digital-transitions we forget/overlook children’
<b>Finland</b>	‘Finland should take immediate action to address the alarming issue of children and young people’s mental health and invest in prevention. It is essential to develop services and guarantee access to mental health support for all’
<b>France</b>	‘France should take into account the consequences of the global pandemic on youth and children. Some children were endangered and isolated during quarantine, including those exposed to a rise in domestic violence, mental health issues, and social inequalities’
<b>Germany</b>	‘Germany should recognise that education is key to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and should therefore take action to improve educational equality by creating a learning environment inside and outside of school that promotes educational success and supports children, regardless of the resources their families have at their disposal’
<b>Greece</b>	‘Greece should pursue a fiscal policy aimed at mitigating inequalities with a focus on nutrition of children in particular vis-à-vis the global COVID-19 crisis and increase of costs for living. Greece should aim at reducing inequalities through direct taxation such as personal income tax and not through indirect taxation (VAT). The exclusion of Value Added Tax from all essential goods in child nutrition is further recommended’

<b>Ireland</b>	'Ireland should take action to establish a dedicated and fully resourced Child Poverty Office which would oversee the implementation of a cross-government child poverty strategy with national goals and objectives'
<b>Italy</b>	'Italy should take action to enhance the current situation of children, especially regarding educational and digital poverty and children's right to be heard. This demand is highlighted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019)'
<b>Latvia</b>	'Latvia should take action to prevent and fight poverty and social exclusion by guaranteeing access for children in need to key services'
<b>Malta</b>	'Malta should take action to prioritise children rights starting from the early years'
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	'We have been waiting nearly 25 years for an Executive Strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion, and patterns of deprivation, despite a legal duty under the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The people of Northern Ireland cannot afford to wait any longer'
<b>Netherlands</b>	'The Netherlands should take action to integrate child's rights and specifically child's social rights in policy framework reported on in the country reports'
<b>Portugal</b>	'Portugal should take action to reduce the inequalities that child poverty exacerbates, by improving the timely access to high quality health services for all, with special attention to children'
<b>Poland</b>	'Poland should take action to efficient facilitation of deinstitutionalisation process of care, including foster care for children and ensure family based care options are available for every child, not leaving behind children with disabilities'
<b>Romania</b>	'Romania should set up a coherent plan that will contribute to reduce child poverty and to avoid family separation through public prevention and gatekeeping policies, ring-fenced funding sources for implementing measures, and a relevant set of indicators'
<b>Slovenia</b>	'Slovenia should take action to reduce poverty and ensure healthcare for all children, including access to paediatricians and mental care professionals'
<b>Slovakia</b>	'Slovakia should take robust and targeted action to ensure that rights of all children are respected regardless of their background, colour of skin, religion, country of origin and family status'
<b>Spain</b>	'Families with children are the ones who are suffering the most from the consequences of the pandemic. In this context, Spain must implement specific policies to fight the growth in poverty and inequality which will fall especially on the most vulnerable groups'

# Policy recommendations

Eurochild members urge governments and decision-makers to **support the most vulnerable children and prevent widening inequalities**.

In particular, they report that especially the most vulnerable children, such as Roma children and children with a migrant background, are struggling to access essential services in many European countries.

In light of the rising energy costs and the cost of living crisis, Eurochild calls on decision-makers to **put children at the heart of the political agenda**, and:

## ✓ Promote access to early childhood education and care

Even in countries where the participation of young children in child care is generally high, it falls sharply among children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, especially Roma children and children with a migrant background. This is due to various reasons, but often the shortage of affordable (or free) public places ranks high among the concerns Eurochild members have shared. Moreover, more attention needs to be paid to the care workforce, to ensure high quality childcare across Europe.

Early childhood education and care plays an essential role in children's social and cognitive development and is often linked to greater achievements later in life. Therefore, we urge all governments to **prioritise this investment** by expanding the public-funded offer of this service and making the care profession more attractive.

## ✓ Protect and support vulnerable children

The recent rise of energy costs and the consequent cost of living crisis are plunging many children and families further into poverty. Additionally, Eurochild members report higher early school leaving rates among vulnerable children, such as Roma children and children with a migrant background.

We urge national governments to prioritise investments to **offer free and equal access to healthcare and mental wellbeing services**, expand or

launch free meal programmes for children in school, and improve their social housing initiatives and social protection measures.

## ✓ Protect children's rights online and offline

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, but especially after, the digital environment has become an integral part of our daily lives. The internet can be a great space for children to learn, have fun, and interact with their peers; however, it is undeniable that this environment still **lacks the safeguards existing offline.**

The new Better Internet for Kids (BIK+) strategy adopted in May 2022 is undoubtedly a step in the right direction; however, it is worrying that children's rights in the digital environment are not an area of focus for most national governments. This is evident in the Child Guarantee National Action Plans and the European Semester Country Specific Recommendations.

Together with our members, we urge decision-makers at national and European levels to take a **leadership role in protecting children's rights online.**

## ✓ Implement the Child Guarantee at national level

The Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee asked Member States to submit their National Action Plan (NAP) by 15 March 2022. However, at the time of drafting this report, many Member States have yet to submit their own.

With child poverty increasing due to the cost of living crisis and the aftermath of Covid-19, it is imperative that **Member States submit their NAPs as soon as possible** and that these plans take into account the expertise, knowledge, and lived experiences that civil society organisations and children bring to the table.

## ✓ Recognise children as agents of change in their own right

With the launch of the European Child Guarantee and the consequent implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the National Action Plans, Member States are being presented with the unique opportunity to meaningfully involve children in decisions affecting their lives.

However, few Member States have consulted with children before drafting their NAP, and it is **often unclear whether children's feedback has been incorporated into the plans or whether this consultation was meaningful.**

While this is disappointing, there is room for improvement. Eurochild and its members call on national government to involve children consistently in the implementation and evaluation of the National Action Plans.

## ✓ Resolve barriers to EU funding

While most Eurochild members are aware of EU funding mechanisms and how EU funds are being used in their respective countries, they also note that **often European resources are inaccessible for small and medium-sized organisations** due to different reasons. Additionally, the complexity of the European funding ecosystem makes it challenging for civil society organisations to monitor.

For instance, the low sustainability in terms of time often makes them less appropriate for poverty interventions. Moreover, applying for EU-funded projects has significant administrative and accountability burdens, especially for smaller NGOs. Language barriers also make it more difficult for local NGOs to find partners for transnational projects and many members also highlighted a lack of stakeholder engagement in EU-funded programming, monitoring, and evaluation at national level.

## ✓ Maintain and strengthen investments in child protection

In recent years, much progress has been made across Europe to further the deinstitutionalisation process and ensure that all children in care also live in a family- and community-based environment. However, the Covid-19 pandemic unveiled gaps in access to health care, including mental care, for children living in institutions which have not been fully addressed yet.

The recent refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine reveals the weaknesses and the lack of harmonisation in child protection systems across the EU. The **need for child protection system reforms** and support of young care leavers is stressed by many Eurochild members throughout this report. Additionally, we urge national governments and the EU to place equal attention on the **prevention of family separation** and the protection and **support of unaccompanied minors**.

## ✓ Put children's rights at the core of the European Semester Cycle

With the introduction of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Semester gained a socio-economic focus. We applaud the efforts to include the Social Scoreboard, which includes special indicators for child poverty, as a central element of the Semester Cycle. However, children are seldom mentioned throughout the Country Reports and Country Specific Recommendations, when they **should be recognised as rights holders**.

Eurochild calls for the **meaningful inclusion of children's rights in the Country Specific Recommendations** to ensure Member States converge together towards better child protection standards and implement reforms to guarantee the wellbeing of children across Europe.



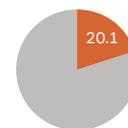
## “ Country recommendation

Belgium should take action to systematically consult a representative group of children to allow meaningful participation of children in policy decisions that impact their lives.

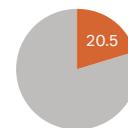
## Country Profile 2022



# Belgium



**Child Population:**  
**2.32 million**  
(20.1% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**20.5% (2021) ▼\***

\* lower compared to pre-covid rates in 2019

### RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

Office of Birth and Childhood (l'Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance - ONE)

Child Rights Coalition Flanders (Kinderrechtencoalitie Vlaanderen)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the country report: identification of children in need

This year's *European Semester Country Report for Belgium* covers some areas affecting children in the country, especially in terms of **education**. The country report states that quality of education is not in line with the high investments included in the national budgets. The Office of Birth and Childhood (ONE) and the Child Rights Coalition Flanders argue this problem is related to the complexity of the education system, which consists of a mixture of private, public, and subsidised schools. Moreover, the competences of education fall on the regions or 'communities' – (Region of Flanders and the 'French speaking community of Belgium', composed by the Region Brussels-Capital and Wallonia), the provinces,

and the municipalities, adding **fragmentation to the management of education** and leading to very different results of investments.

The significant **gap in educational outcomes** depending on students' socio-economic and migrant background is also raised, along with other challenges related to teacher shortages, digital skills gaps, and children with special needs.

The differences in terms of child poverty between Belgium's three regions (the capital Brussels, Wallonia, and Flanders) is also highlighted. For instance, while the national average was at 15.6% in 2020, in Brussels 41% of children were living in poverty in 2019. Eurochild members welcome the recognition of the urgent need to strengthen 'active social inclusion', referring to planned investments in childcare and social housing.

Regarding **childcare**, the report points out that the participation

of young children (0-3 years old) in child care is high in the general population (54.6%), but it falls sharply among children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (34.3%). Even though the shortage of places in childcare facilities affects the whole country, this is especially critical in **the region of Flanders, where they are facing a childcare crisis**, with a critical lack of staff. More effort needs to be put on making the care profession more attractive with relevant training, better salaries, and overall working conditions. With such a high child-to-worker ratio, this crisis has the risk of becoming a child protection issue.

There is **no direct mention of children besides these two topics**. However, matters concerning employment, housing affordability, climate resilience, sustainability, and road congestion – which are discussed in the report – impact children's lives as well. For instance, the report briefly mentions actions, under the National Recovery and

Resilience Plan (NRRP), to support deinstitutionalisation of persons with disabilities in Wallonia. This year's report for Belgium **fails to address children with a migrant background, the situation of children in alternative care in Flanders, and mental health**. Urgent reforms are particularly needed for the latter, especially to address the long waiting lists and affordability of mental healthcare.

Overall, **the country report does not address children's needs from a rights perspective**. Children's rights are not made explicit in the report or the recommendations in general and when so, it is only regarding education and enhancing its market relevance. Similarly, the emphasis on the green transition does not include a focus on the child rights perspective, nor on housing affordability.

## Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

In the [Country Specific Recommendations for Belgium](#), Eurochild members welcome the social recommendation to improve ‘performance and inclusiveness of the education and training system, including by strengthening the quality and labour market relevance of the vocational education and training and of teachers’ career paths and training’.<sup>1</sup> However, this recommendation is broad and does not relate to children’s rights exclusively, but rather to the socio-economic utility of education.

## Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

### Child poverty in Belgium

Belgium [has a total child population of 2.32 million, 20.5% of which live at risk of poverty and](#)

[social exclusion in 2021](#). Behind this number, we can identify **specific groups of children**, namely children in low-income households (particularly single parent households), children with a migration background, children with disabilities, and children in alternative care. The most pressing services are accessible and affordable housing, education, and childcare.

A good example of interventions that can contribute to the mitigation of child poverty rates is Krijt vzw’s activity, which helps schools to identify and tackle financial barriers for students growing up in poverty by setting up trajectories and training for schools and teachers.

The Office of Birth and Childhood asks the **French-speaking community of Belgium** to prioritise investment on:

- Early childhood education and care (ECEC), by investing in quality care, increasing the

number of places offered and making the profession more attractive.

- Increasing the provision and accessibility of preventive healthcare services.

The Child Rights Coalition Flanders calls the **Flemish government** to invest on:

- Providing accessible, affordable, and quality ECEC, by lowering the child-to-worker ratio, improving the working conditions of professionals, and making childcare facilities more inclusive for children with disabilities and/or with special needs.
- Increasing the pace of construction of social housing, while making the housing subsidies more accessible, and tackling discrimination in the private housing market.
- Ensuring that education acts as a social equaliser, by introducing the maximum invoice in secondary education, moving away from

early tracking and working towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in the ‘regular’ education system.

## European Child Guarantee

### Belgium National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022. These Action Plans should indicate the children most in need, the planned and existing policy actions, and measures to support them, and a monitoring and evaluation framework. The plans should also be drafted in consultation with children, civil society, and national authorities.

[The National Action Plan of Belgium](#) was published in August

<sup>1</sup> 2022 Country Specific Recommendations for Belgium, p. 12.

2022. Eurochild member, the Office of Birth and Childhood, was slightly involved in the drafting of the NAP. According to their experience, **real and meaningful participation was not possible** due, among other things, to tight deadlines.

Unfortunately, children were not involved at all in the drafting of the NAP.

However, the Belgian government conducted several bilateral meetings with civil society organisations such as Eurochild or the Child Rights Coalition Flanders, although only upon civil society taking the initiative. The Child Rights Coalition Flanders also published a [position paper](#) outlining the gaps in current policies and putting forward recommendations to address these gaps. This paper was presented to the national coordinator, and to different federal authorities and entities that provided input on the NAP.

A **meeting to consult various civil society organisations** was eventually organised within the framework of the Platform on Combating Poverty. The National Commission on the Rights of the Child (NCRK/CNDE), a coordination platform gathering 90 governmental and non-governmental actors in the children's rights realm in Belgium, was also consulted in the process. For instance, ONE participated through an informal coordination network, the Centre interdisciplinaire des droits de l'enfant (CIDE), which is in turn a member of CNDE.

However, it did not render meaningful and timely participation as the content of the NAP was already decided upon. This participation was also very much **focused on organisations working on child poverty, rather than children rights**. In addition, the specific complexity and administrative fragmentation of Belgium did not help. Finally, the recommendations made by civil society organisations during this

meeting were added as an annex to the NAP.

ONE and the Child Rights Coalition Flanders believe that the creation of an ad hoc platform for civil society organisations, with child-rights and poverty-oriented NGOs working together, for the drafting of the NAP would have improved the resulting plan. Should they receive a stronger mandate related to the Child Guarantee, the NCRK/CNDE could provide a platform for civil society to participate.

Overall, **a structural and overarching approach to child poverty and social exclusion is missing**. As opposed to a fundamental rights approach, several of the listed measures consist of temporary projects or are optional for the institutions involved (i.e. schools, local governments).

ONE and the Child Rights Coalition Flanders welcomed the appointment of a national coordinator and were pleased to

see that the **recommendations made by civil society were included in the annex**, which may prove helpful for accountability reasons. The NAP rightfully identifies the children most in need in the country but fails to propose new measures to address their needs. In fact, **the Belgian NAP is limited to an overview of existing measures**, without an assessment of the current actions in place. This is insufficient, as data and research show that child poverty and social exclusion are still an issue in Belgium, as acknowledged in the NAP itself.

Some existing measures that did not fit within the scope/aim of that particular section of the NAP were also included. For instance, the 'maximum invoice' in Flemish education targets all children and does not enable children with disabilities to participate. Moreover, some measures that constitute a good practice were omitted, such as the community health centres in Flanders, enhancing healthcare accessibility (wijkgezondheidscentra). Finally,

numerous measures were vaguely described and in several cases a description was missing.

ONE and Child Rights Coalition Flanders expressed some concerns regarding the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the NAP, especially due to the **high level of Belgian territorial and political decentralisation**. A coordinated response to child poverty and social exclusion is therefore challenging. However, they are hopeful in light of the compromise to include civil society in the monitoring and evaluation. The first evaluation will take place in 2024, which is sooner than the evaluation in five years put forward by the European Commission.

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

There are a variety of European funds available in Belgium for actions that invest in children.

ONE and the Child Rights Coalition Flanders are fairly aware of EU funding that can be used at national, regional and local levels to invest in children, but there are some barriers to introducing EU-funded projects. For instance, the process to apply for project-based funding is not only very complex, but also very burdening especially for small NGOs. This is foremost related to the high accountability standards required at every step of the application procedure and the lack of sustainability for these funds after the project lifespan. Moreover, language barriers often make it more difficult to find partners in other European countries, for example for organisations working in Wallonia due to a low level of English speakers in this region.

On 28 January 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement that compels Member States with a level of child poverty above the EU average (23.4% – AROPE 2017 – 2019) to

allocate 5% of ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty.

The rest of Member States, such as Belgium, should allocate an ‘appropriate’ amount of their ESF+ resources to combat child poverty. In this framework, ONE and the Child Rights Coalition Flanders call on Belgium to prioritise investment in child poverty, more specially in the areas mentioned before, namely childcare, healthcare, social housing, and education.

Children should be the ones setting the priorities on funding that primarily affects them. Therefore, ONE and the Child Rights Coalition Flanders stressed the importance of listening to children and evaluate their needs and desires to set such funding priorities.



## “ Country recommendation

Bulgaria should take action to reform the child protection system and develop a comprehensive and systemic approach aimed at the well-being of the child, rather than fragmented sectoral policies with separate measures for risk groups.

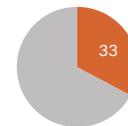
Country Profile 2022



# Bulgaria



**Child Population:**  
**1.19 million**  
(17.2% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**33% (2021)** ▼\*

\* lower compared to pre-covid rates in 2019

### RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

[National Network for Children, Bulgaria \(NNC\)](#)

[Hope and Homes for Children – Bulgaria \(HHC – Bulgaria\)](#) on behalf of [Hope and Homes for Children](#)

[Know-how Centre for Alternative Care for Children, New Bulgarian University \(Know-how Centre\)](#)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report: identification of the children in need

According to Eurochild members, the *European Semester Country Report for Bulgaria* does not reflect the needs of children in Bulgaria. The country report should outline the main vulnerable groups of children that national policymakers should prioritise. However, there is very little about the situation of children, apart from some minimum content concerning access to education (including early childhood education and care). Moreover, the interventions included in the report are partial, and not part of a cross-sectoral comprehensive policy.

The country report contains **very little focus on children or the key services they need**. Children in

Bulgaria need a strategy on early child education and care (ECEC), a thematic policy on early child development and care, a focus on quality of care and increased capacity of professionals working with children, and an early diagnostics or early child intervention model to work with children under the age of 7, and especially children aged 0 to 3.

Deinstitutionalisation is not mentioned in the country report, despite the ongoing reform and several deinstitutionalisation projects funded by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). It is very concerning that despite the aim to close the remaining old type of institutions for children 0-3 years old, by the end of 2022<sup>1</sup>, this process is still not finished, and there is no evidence that this will be achieved by the end of the year. There is also **no focus on developing new integrated services for children in the community**.

The country report includes issues regarding Roma children's access to education and school leaving rates. However, there are **no references to effective mechanisms and programmes for the inclusion of children at risk of dropping out of school**, or to effective support needed by families.

The country report states that Bulgaria's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) will contribute to improving access to education through relevant measures in education and training that 'include the mandatory inclusion of 4-year-olds in preschool education'.<sup>2</sup> However, this measure cannot be implemented effectively without a strategy for tackling the lack of overall services and the lack of sufficient services in the capital, in big cities, and in smaller settlements and rural municipalities.

Worryingly, some **crucial information is missing**. For example, there appears to be no understanding at government and institutional level of the importance of children's right to be heard.

Despite all the problems described by experts and NGOs in previous reports regarding the inclusion and protection of migrant children (including significant numbers of Ukrainian refugee children), there is **no mention of migrant children at all in the report**.

Children in Bulgaria, especially those in disadvantaged and/or in vulnerable situations, were disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 measures. National Network for Children, Bulgaria (NNC), Hope and Homes for Children – Bulgaria (HHC – Bulgaria) and the Know-how Centre for Alternative Care for Children, New Bulgarian University

<sup>1</sup> *Transitional and Final provisions of the Social Services Act*, par. 36.

<sup>2</sup> *European Semester Country Report for Bulgaria*, p. 7

(Know-how Centre), state that this situation requires **specific research focused on the effects of Covid on children**, including how inequalities were exacerbated, and how these can be overcome.

**Children's mental health is not mentioned** as well. However, children's mental health is expected to be addressed in the Bulgarian Child Guarantee National Action Plan (NAP). If this is the case, it will be the first time the Bulgarian government recognises the issue of children's mental health through the strong advocacy messaging of Bulgarian civil society organisations.

Regarding children's rights in the digital environment, there is **no focus on child safety and protection in cyberspace**. There is no mention at all regarding the need to cooperate with civil society organisations, and no recognition of their contribution to policies, despite the fact that there are good examples to draw from.

NNC, HHC – Bulgaria and the Know-how Centre felt the most promising reference on investing in children in the country report was 'the participation rate of children under 3 in formal childcare (15% in 2020) has increased compared to previous years, but it is still well below the EU average (32.3%)'.<sup>3</sup> Overall, the **references to poverty, social exclusion, participation in the labour market, and the many ongoing challenges related to health and education are not encouraging**.

#### **Needs analysis: alignment at country-level**

None of the *Country Specific Recommendations for Bulgaria* concern children's situation directly. However, some specific measures that would improve their situation are included in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), so we welcome the Commission's recommendation to Bulgaria to focus on implementing this plan.

It is expected that in 2022–2023, one of the key deliverables under the NRRP will be the adoption of a Social Support Code, to address the fragmentation of legislation on social benefits and services. However, there is no information as to whether the former government or the new caretaker government has established an Inter-ministerial Working Group to develop the Social Support Code.

The *Ordinance on the Quality of the Social Services* to define quality standards for the provision of social services is a good example of a deliverable that was adopted in alignment with the NRRP. Its purpose is to create conditions for **increasing the quality of social services and their effectiveness**. To achieve this priority, the main emphasis is placed on professional training and continuous professional development for employees who provide social services. The regulation defines the standards for the quality of social and

integrated health and social services, and the criteria for their implementation. The standards are tailored to the type of social service and the specific needs of the people who use it. They include requirements for the organisation and management of services, for the number and qualifications of employees, and criteria for the effectiveness of the results achieved in support of people. The suppliers undertake to provide a sufficient number of employees with the necessary professional training, as well as to provide conditions for increasing their qualifications. The Ordinance also regulates the methods for monitoring the quality of social services by municipalities and other providers, and the Agency for the Quality of Social Services.

Unfortunately, other plans and strategies expected to be accepted in connection with the NRRP were developed with no engagement with stakeholders, in unrealistically short timeframes,

<sup>3</sup> *European Semester Country Report for Bulgaria*, p. 46

and therefore did not benefit from the expertise of civil society organisations. There is a need to strengthen the capacity of State institutions and further develop their understanding of the specific issues concerning children, child rights, and child policies.

## Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

### Child poverty in Bulgaria

Bulgaria has a total [child population of 1.19 million](#), [33% of which lived at risk of poverty and social exclusion](#) in 2021.

According to National Network for Children, Hope and Homes for Children – Bulgaria and the Know-how Centre for Alternative Care for Children, the children most in need in Bulgaria are:

1. ‘children left behind’ (by parents working abroad), especially those living in ‘ghettos’ and remote settlements, and children of the so-called ‘working poor’;

2. children with severe disabilities placed in residential care, including in childcare institutions, and children with disabilities without parental care.

To meet the needs of the children most in need, the policy priorities should be to:

1. Invest in **reforming the child protection system**.
2. **Improve the mechanisms and protocols for gathering data** on vulnerable children and provide access to data for stakeholders.
3. **Assess the impact, efficiency, and effectiveness of the interventions** provided in social services for support in the community, including those that are part of the NAP implementation, to gather reliable data on what works and what does not work.

The Bulgarian branch of Hope and Homes for Children provides a good example of

interventions that mitigate child poverty, as acknowledged by UNICEF and the World Health Organisation. The model for Active Family Support (AFS) and District Deinstitutionalisation Coordination Mechanism (DDICM) has been created by HHC – Bulgaria. The project [Strategic deinstitutionalisation and reform of the childcare for children between the ages of 0 and 3](#) began in 2012 and it is funded by the OAK Foundation, Velux Foundation, and Medicor Foundation. The project supported families of children while institutions were closing in Sofia, Plovdiv, Pernik, Pazardjik, Gabrovo, Montana, Targovishte, and Ruse.

**The Active Family Support model is a key component of the holistic approach** to closing institutions housing children aged 0-3 and for providing assistance to families. This intervention focuses on identifying and supporting children at risk of separation from their parents and of being institutionalised. It was developed by HHC, based on their

20 years of practical experience, in different countries, managing the transition from an institutional to a family-based childcare system. The model provides flexible good practices that can be adapted to different contexts and that involves suitable interventions and services for vulnerable children and families. It is also used to **promote the reintegration of children with their biological or extended families**. Among the successes of this project includes preventing 2,307 children from being abandoned/ placed in institutions, tracing and reintegrating 211 children with their family, and closing 25 institutions for children aged 0-3.

## European Child Guarantee

### Bulgaria National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) outlining how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022. However, some countries had not published their NAP when Eurochild members provided input. This is the case for Bulgaria.

In January 2022, Eurochild published a [country report for Bulgaria](#) that included recommendations for the Bulgarian government to consider when drafting their Child Guarantee National Action Plans. The Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce also provided overall recommendations for all Member States to consider.

These action plans should outline the children most in need, the planned and existing policy actions and measures to

support them, and a monitoring and evaluation framework. The plans should also be drafted in consultation with children, civil society, and national authorities. Although the NAP had not been published when preparing this report, National Network for Children, Hope and Homes for Children – Bulgaria and the Know-how Centre for Alternative Care for Children, New Bulgarian University believe **civil society organisations' inputs and expertise has not been used to its full potential in the drafting process.**

The Know-how Centre has been indirectly involved in drafting the NAP through organisations they collaborate with. However, they have not been invited to participate, although they are a research organisation offering research data proactively to all governmental bodies in the field of child protection and care.

Hope and Homes for Children – Bulgaria was not invited to participate in the inter-institutional working group

set up to develop the NAP, although the organisation is recognised as a worldwide expert on deinstitutionalisation and childcare. However, they developed and presented their proposals regarding deinstitutionalisation of childcare reform and the inclusion of the necessary measures in the plan through their partners from NNC and the [Childhood 2025 Coalition](#). As far as they know, the suggestions they provided have not been reflected in the NAP.

NNC was involved in drafting the plan through the inter-institutional working group, which was active from November 2021 to October 2022. Due to the political crisis in Bulgaria, the change of the Child Guarantee National Coordinator, the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, and the subsequent refugee crisis, the group was practically inactive. It did not meet until the summer of 2022. Although NNC had a partnership with the Ministry of Social Policy and Labour, which has the leading role in the work of the NAP, they believe their expertise was not used to its full

potential. There were very few civil society organisations involved in the working group and they were not representative of all the Child Guarantee key services for children in need. The working group met only 4 times, and the primary communication was by email. The work on the NAP took place mainly in the summer months, when many civil society organisations and experts were on their summer break. Additionally, the deadlines for proposals were extremely short, further complicating the process.

To support the development of the NAP, **NNC organised a series of 6 awareness-raising thematic webinars** aimed at government experts and NGO representatives. A short report with the main conclusions and recommendations was published, based on the outcome of these webinars. Many of these recommendations are included in the final version of the unpublished NAP. The final version of the NAP also includes recommendations from the [Unequal Childhood report](#),

commissioned by UNICEF and drafted by For Our Children Foundation, the Bulgarian National Academy of Sciences, and NNC. NNC believes that **the final version of the NAP they have seen is satisfactory**. However, they have many questions about the methodology for choosing the indicators, the monitoring framework, data collection, and the ambition of its goals.

A lack of continuity of government in Bulgaria raises **concerns for the implementation of the NAP**. The current national government has proposed a mechanism to work with one 'strategic' NAP and several consecutive action plans covering two-year-long periods. NNC, HHC – Bulgaria and the Know-how Centre are concerned that these consecutive action plans would not be developed through consultations with stakeholders but behind closed doors at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The formality of this Ministry during previous cooperation activities with NGOs has left those involved sceptical about future cooperation.

**Children were partially involved in drafting the NAP** at national and local levels. Generally, the children involved were aged between 14 and 19 years old. Some were children with specific backgrounds, such as Roma children and children from alternative care settings, but other children in need were not represented. It is unknown if the children received feedback after their involvement or if the information they provided was included in the NAP.

The [Children-Researchers programme](#), a joint project of UNICEF-Bulgaria and NNC on the European Child Guarantee, focused on child participation and **understanding how to meaningfully involve children in the Child Guarantee**. In 2021, three teams of young people from different parts of Bulgaria were formed and worked on different topics of the Guarantee in their communities. They presented the results through different articles and events. The children underwent training on children's participation and had

an introduction to the goals of the European Child Guarantee. As part of this activity, **young people carried out research** among their peers and in their communities on important issues within the scope of the Child Guarantee, including access to quality healthcare, education, childcare, adequate housing, and adequate nutrition. In addition, three national consultations were held through the [U-Report application in 2021](#), a global UNICEF platform, which collects opinions of children and young people through surveys. More than **200 children and young people aged between 14 and 29 took part** all over the country. The main topics of the consultations focused on access for children in need to healthcare, education, and healthy nutrition. The NAP was also discussed within the [Children's Council of the State Agency for Child Protection](#). NNC implemented the *Children-Researchers* programme with the support of UNICEF.

From reading the latest unpublished version of the Bulgarian NAP, NNC, HHC –

Bulgaria and the Know-how Centre are pleased to see that the plan includes **a specific goal to reduce the number of children living in residential care**. Furthermore, measures to improve access to social services and support and to provide material and financial support for vulnerable families are also welcome, as NNC, HHC – Bulgaria and the Know-how Centre consider these measures are directly related to preventing family separation.

However, NNC, HHC – Bulgaria and the Know-how Centre **do not believe that the alternative care and deinstitutionalisation reforms are reflected explicitly** and in full in the NAP. The government assured the organisations working towards such reform that the NAP should be considered a continuation of the country's deinstitutionalisation efforts and replacement of an updated action plan for deinstitutionalisation until 2025. However, this has not reassured many in the non-governmental sector working in the field of deinstitutionalisation, who

have repeatedly expressed their concerns about the future continuation of the deinstitutionalisation reform. A considerable challenge remains, and there are concerns about how the deinstitutionalisation process will be managed and monitored if a new *Updated Action Plan for the implementation of the National Strategy Vision for the deinstitutionalisation of children in Bulgaria* (which will be in operation until 2025), is not developed. According to the members of the Childhood 2025 Coalition, integrating activities and the measures for implementing deinstitutionalisation into the NAP poses risks for the successful implementation of the reform. Given the political crisis that has been affecting the country over the last two years, **policies in the area of deinstitutionalisation reform remain unclear and unstable**. NNC, HHC – Bulgaria and the Know-how Centre will continue to advocate for ensuring quality implementation of the deinstitutionalisation reform, which does not end with the closure of institutions for children.

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

There are **a variety of European funds available in Bulgaria for actions that invest in children**. NNC, HHC – Bulgaria and the Know-how Centre are aware of EU funding that can be used at national, regional, and local levels to invest in children.

NNC, HHC – Bulgaria and the Know-how Centre stated that the implementation of the **NAP will be financed mainly with funds from the national budget and the European Structural and Investment Funds** (Education Program 2021-2027, Human Resources Development Program 2021-2027, Regional Development Program “ 2021-2027, Program for Food and Basic Material Assistance 2021-2027).

The Bulgarian national budget finances all types of activities related to free healthcare, pre-school and school education,

early childhood care, provision of social services to children and their families, various types of social and family assistance, tax benefits, pensions, and others. On the other hand, European funds, specifically for the purposes of implementing the Child Guarantee in Bulgaria, will finance specifically the education programme, the human resources development programme, the regional development programme, and the programme for food and basic material assistance.

One of the main principles of ESF+ regulation is social dialogue and civil society engagement. NNC, HHC – Bulgaria and the Know-how Centre provide a good practice example of civil society involvement in the monitoring, implementation, and evaluation of EU funds in the national permanent expert group for deinstitutionalisation (PERG), which was established in accordance with the action plan for the implementation of the deinstitutionalisation strategy in Bulgaria. NGOs

participated actively in its activities, including the publication of annual monitoring papers on the progress in the deinstitutionalisation process. However, PERG's work has stopped more than two years ago now, and with the deinstitutionalisation projects being included in the NAP, it is not clear whether or how this group will continue to work.

NNC, HHC – Bulgaria and the Know-how Centre are aware of a number of evaluations and assessments concerning the use of EU funds in Bulgaria, but not of any activities being planned to engage civil society organisations or academic institutions.

There are many NGOs in Bulgaria with good ideas, expertise, and experience on the ground. However, the lack of technical capacity and support to prepare project proposals for EU funding, means that most of them do not apply and funding opportunities are lost.

## Projects funded by the EU in Bulgaria

The Know-how Centre has been involved in two EU funded projects. [Promoting Foster Care for Unaccompanied Children in Europe \(PROFUCE\)](#) partnering with five other EU-based organisations in a project for promoting foster care for unaccompanied minors, and [Fulfil the Impossible Dreams \(FID\)](#), a project for improving the professional capacity of specialists working with care-leavers in Bulgaria.

NNC will lead on a new project, which has just been approved for funding. The *National Unified Registry on Violence against Children (NURVAC)* will be implemented in partnership with the State Agency for Child Protection.

## Priorities for EU funding in Bulgaria

On 28 January 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement that compels Member States with a level of child poverty above the EU average (23.4% - AROPE 2017 – 2019) to allocate 5% of ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty.<sup>4</sup> Bulgaria is one of the countries bound by this agreement. The other Member States are asked to allocate an 'appropriate' amount of their ESF+ resources to combat child poverty.

NNC, HHC – Bulgaria and the Know-how Centre call on the Bulgarian government to prioritise investments in:

- developing **targeted interventions towards preventing the separation of children from their families**, including an assessment of their effectiveness and applicability to the Bulgarian context;

- developing and delivering **social services for care-leavers**;
- targeted investment in **human resources**, especially in the medical field, in social services, and in early child development and care.



<sup>4</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013.

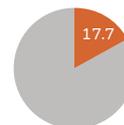
## “ Country recommendation

Croatia should secure an adequate range of locally based services to prevent child poverty and exclusion, while including civil society organisations and children's opinions into EU funds implementation and national policy.

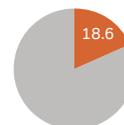
## Country Profile 2022



# Croatia



**Child Population:**  
**691,849**  
(17.1% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**18.6% (2021) ▼\***

\* [lower compared to pre-covid rates in 2019](#)

### RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

Coordination of Associations for Children (CAC) representing

Association Children First (Children First)

[Society "Our Children" Opatija \(SOC Opatija\)](#)

[SOS Children's Villages \(SOS CV\)](#)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report: identification of the children in need

This year's *European Semester Country Report for Croatia* broadly addresses some of the needs at national level, namely early childhood education and care, education, and child poverty. However, it does not address children in alternative care, children's right to be heard, children with a migrant background, access to mental health support, and children's digital rights. Especially worrisome is the invisibility of children's mental health and well-being, since there is overwhelming evidence that the incidence of mental difficulties is increasing, especially in the population under 18.

Overall, the report failed to include a focus on the situation of

children, together with targeted investments. For instance, the two unique reforms addressing children's needs in the country were tied to the [National Recovery and Resilience Plan \(NRRP\)](#).

Coordination of Associations for Children (CAC) highlights the need to put in place **deinstitutionalisation measures, absent in the country report**. As a trend of increased institutionalisation of children becomes noticeable in Croatia, the transition towards stronger community and family-based care should become a priority in public policy. However, there are asymmetries in data and data collection systems.

According to the Ombudsman for Children, the number of children in residential facilities without parental care and community centres mounted to 619, although this number varies depending on the source.<sup>1</sup>

According to [Eurochild DataCare project](#), 3,620 children were placed in alternative care in 2021, of which 921 were in residential care.

Even though there is a link to poverty reduction efforts through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, there is no mention of **children impacted by the pandemic** and the inequalities this may have exacerbated.

CAC felt **early childhood education and care** was rightfully included, with a measure targeting its model of financing. Moreover, some relevant measures are planned for **education** beyond early years, including addressing the low participation of **Roma children in formal education**. CAC acknowledges the deliverables under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan for 2022, but demands more attention be paid to this subject.

They also saw as promising the inclusion of a second reform to

reduce poverty and the increase in the **integration of vulnerable groups by developing family and community-based services**.

### Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

Overall, the *Country Specific Recommendations for Croatia* broadly correspond to the reform needs in Croatia. The Country Specific Recommendations are framed around developing family and community-based services, improving the quality of education, and tackling territorial fragmentation. **However, they do not integrate a rights-based approach**. In fact, children's rights are broadly connected to some of the recommendations, but are not clearly embedded. Broadly, the recommendations for Croatia mostly refer to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. While the implementation of the NRRP can indirectly improve the situation of children, the CSRs do not target the situation of children specifically.

1 Ombudsman for Children Croatia, [Work report 2021](#), 2021.

CAC highlights the **need to prioritise children through Country Specific Recommendation number 2**, which refers to the implementation of the NRRP and 2021-2027 cohesion policy programming.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, improving the quality of education and increasing its market relevance should be prioritised to ensure equal opportunities for all children. While these recommendations are welcomed, European Social Fund Plus funding should further prioritise resolving the challenges connected to the situation of children in Croatia, especially the vulnerable groups of children mentioned above. In this context, the national Council of Children could ensure child poverty and children's rights are addressed in Croatia, through collaborative activities.

## Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

### Child poverty in Croatia

Croatia has a total child population of 691,849, 18.6% of which live at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021. According to Coordination of Associations for Children, the children most in need in Croatia are children in need of psychosocial support (for example, those suffering from any form of violence and with a migrant background), children with disabilities, and children in non-family-based care.

These children need to have access to a broad range of social services in their local communities, including financial support, early intervention services, health services, education tailored to their needs, adequate housing, and psycho-social support for children

who are at risk of separation and their parents.

A good example of interventions that can contribute to the mitigation of child poverty rates and respond to these needs is the project *Loving home for every child*. This project was implemented in Sisacko-Moslavacka, one of the poorest counties in Croatia, and it consisted of the provision of counselling and parental training to parents, foster parents, and guardians to increase their parental and pedagogical skills.

CAC calls on the Croatian government to:

- broaden and further develop a range of integrated social services for children and families at regional level;
- develop non-institutional forms of care and work on the expansion of foster care;
- develop a child-oriented justice system;

- ensure support for parents, both in terms of material aid and counselling.

## European Child Guarantee

### Croatia National Action Plan

The *Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee* asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022. These Action Plans should outline the children most in need, the planned and existing policy actions, and measures to support them and a monitoring and evaluation framework. The plans should also be drafted in consultation with children, civil society, and national authorities.

The *National Action Plan of Croatia* was published in August 2022. Only one Croatian organisation, Children First,

<sup>2</sup> 2022 Country Specific Recommendations for Croatia, p. 9.

also a member of Coordination of Associations for Children, was involved in the drafting of the NAP through a working group representing the whole civil society sector. Overall, the process of stakeholder engagement was not sufficiently visible to the public or to interested stakeholders. According to Eurochild members, it allowed them to gain insight into the NAP content and development process but with a very low possibility to impact the plans. Indeed, the **process was not transparent** and the information provided by such organisations involved has not transcended.

If involved, SOS Children's Villages (SOS CV) would have shared their direct experience in working with children from alternative care, and children and families at risk of separation. SOC Opatija would have **recommended ensuring active child participation on a national level**.

According to the NAP, children were involved in the drafting of the NAP through an online survey for

young people (16-25 years old), group discussions (12-25 years old), and a forum organised by the Ombudsperson for Children. However, our members have no further information about their involvement.

The NAP rightfully recognises the need for a more comprehensive, targeted, and integrated strategic approach to target groups of children. CAC highlighted that while the **six general objectives described in the NAP are relevant to the needs of children in Croatia**, more is needed.

Regarding **early childhood education and care (ECEC)**, it is very important that the NAP addresses the territorial fragmentation and weak fiscal capacities of certain environments and regional instances. **Access to healthcare and quality nutrition** for children at risk of poverty features as a priority in the NAP, along with an accent on a strategic framework for the protection of children's **mental health**. However, there should be more concrete measures for

the prevention of all forms of violence against children, which have increased lately due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other phenomena.

Finally, the NAP duly addresses the needs of **children leaving care**, through objectives related to housing (ensure allowance for up to 1 year leaving care) and social services (expand the network of foster care services and social support services for children leaving care). However, it has some gaps concerning financial support to grassroots NGOs, **failing to include actions on child participation, children from minorities, and children with disabilities**.

The members expressed some **concerns regarding the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the NAP, especially related to measuring outputs and efficacy of public policies in Croatia**. The NAP does not provide specific indicators or benchmarks for the measures outlined. Without a solid monitoring system, which

is a long-standing problem in public policy in the country, effective delivery will be difficult to ensure. CAC proposes enhancing stakeholder engagement, including children through the National Council of Children, in the monitoring of the plan to ensure the effective implementation of the actions planned. According to the NAP, children will be consulted bi-annually on its progress.

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

There are a variety of European funds available in Croatia for actions that invest in children. At national level, information on this can be found on [www.esf.hr](http://www.esf.hr). Coordination of Associations for Children is aware of EU funding that can be used at national, regional, and local levels to invest in children.

One of the main principles of ESF+ regulation is social dialogue and civil society engagement. However, there has been **almost**

**no stakeholder involvement in the drafting process of the Partnership Agreement (PA)**, which sets out the main guidelines to implement EU funds at national level. There were a few selected CSO representatives included in the working group for the planning of the ESF+, according to official sources, but the names of these representatives are not public. The draft of the PA was published for comment in July 2022, only for 15 days and in a period of low activity (summer), with the justification that the draft was extremely late. Therefore, **civil society's opinion was virtually left out of the programming of such funds.**

### Projects funded by the EU in Croatia

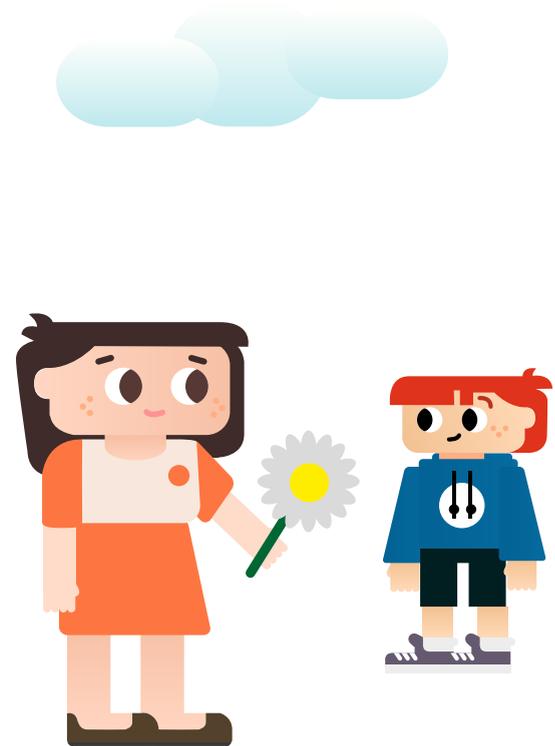
On 28 January 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement that compels Croatia to allocate an 'appropriate'

amount of their ESF+ resources to combat child poverty. Although the Partnership Agreement has not yet been approved, it is foreseen that 5% of ESF+ will be allocated to tackling child poverty.<sup>3</sup>

Our members have a long tradition of being involved in EU-funded projects, especially at local and community levels, and of actively sharing examples of good practice. SOC Opatija has been involved in an EU-funded project that consisted of strengthening the local community for better children's participation. The project 'Let's start the wheel of our community' was carried out with the city of Opatija.

CAC calls on **the Croatian government to use ESF+ to prioritise investment in the priority areas** outlined in the previous section, namely deinstitutionalisation, integrated

social services, child-oriented justice systems, education, and child participation.



<sup>3</sup> Kennedy A., *Child Guarantee National Action Plans – Targets, EU funding and governance*, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, 2022.

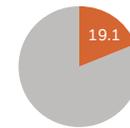
## “Country recommendation

Cyprus should take action to advance civil society participation in policy-making, ensuring that children are included in all steps of this process.

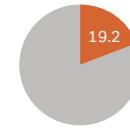
## Country Profile 2022



# Cyprus



**Child Population:**  
**171,476**  
(19.1% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**19.2% (2021) ▼\***

\* [lower compared to pre-covid rates in 2019](#)

### RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

[Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children \(PCCPWC\)](#)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report: identification of the children in need

In this year's *European Semester Country Report for Cyprus*, children are only visible indirectly; when there is attention on measures related to maternal employment, 'market needs' and education. In fact, the Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children (PCCPWC), observes that **children are portrayed only as 'future workers'** and not as individuals bearing rights that must be recognised and upheld.

The country report does not represent the needs of children and the reality on the ground. It also does not include issues of child poverty and social exclusion. There are mentions of early childhood education and

care (ECEC) for under 3-year-olds but primarily in relation to women's employability. 'Children's development' is not referred to anywhere. ECEC is viewed mainly through the lens of employability, even though a strategy is expected to be implemented in 2024 according to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP).

As with many children across Europe, children in Cyprus have been unhappy with the education they receive. Despite this, issues in the Cypriot educational system in terms of achievement are only aligned with market needs. In fact, the country report focuses extensively on **education**, but it **mainly references on 'training and market needs', teachers' assessment schemes and student attainment**, rather than focusing on quality education.

There is **no mention of children in alternative care (CiAC) and deinstitutionalisation**. According

to the PCCPWC, this has never been discussed or considered an issue in Cyprus, despite their ongoing efforts to explain the devastating impact that living in institutions has on children's lives.

There is also **no mention of children's right to be heard, mental health and well-being, or children's rights in the digital environment**.

Children with a migrant background and efforts to integrate them into the educational system (supported by the ESF+) are mentioned but without elaboration. There is also no mention of the needs of people fleeing Ukraine and the need to adjust to changing situations, primarily from a fiscal perspective. The PCCPWC have concerns regarding the existing efforts for effective integration, and the lack of involvement of Local Authorities. Our member believes that the country report should have pointed out the need

for Government services to link to Local Authorities, and strongly recommend that integration programmes should be run by communities, decentralised and adjusted to the needs of the specific people within the community. Adjustments should not only be fiscal but based on changing needs, especially to meet the needs of children and their full integration into the education system and the community.

Although the pandemic and its consequences are included, there is no adequate reference to children or how the pandemic has exacerbated inequalities.

The PCCPWC welcomed the recognition that there is very little involvement of civil society, with the comment in the chapter on public administration/local government stating that 'despite the *Better Regulation Project*, open public consultation of legislation is rare at an early stage'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *European Semester Country Report for Cyprus*, Annex 11, p.43.

Although the report lacks content that directly focuses on investing in children, the PCCPWC welcomed the statement – ‘both the ESF+ and Cyprus’ RRP<sup>2</sup> will support measures to strengthen early childhood education and care in Cyprus by focusing on equal access and affordable services. Tackling these challenges will help Cyprus to reach the 2030 EU headline target on employment.’<sup>3</sup>

### Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

The Recommendations included in the country report need to address the needs on the ground sufficiently. For example, in the [Country Specific Recommendations for Cyprus](#), the European Commission made four recommendations focusing on growth, environment, energy etc. However, there was no direct mention of children or education.

Nevertheless, reforms within the National Reform Programme (NRP) and the NRRP, if successful, will benefit children and adults. For example, in education and health care, several suggested reforms would benefit children.

## Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

### Child poverty in Cyprus

[Cyprus has a total child population of 171,476, 19.2% of which live at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021. Children are not adequately considered in general decision-making in the country.](#) During the COVID-19 pandemic and in its aftermath, income, energy crisis, and housing have become the main issues, completely disregarding the effect they have on children’s mental health and well-being.

According to the Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children, the children most in need in Cyprus are:

- All children with a migration background – not only Ukrainian children fleeing the war. For example, a large number of Syrian children have arrived on the island in the past few years. Many of them are still not integrated in their communities, cannot speak the language and most of their adult relatives are not working full time.
- Among children with a migrant background, unaccompanied minors especially, are increasing in numbers and they are not receiving the appropriate supports they need.

These children need adequate programmes for learning the local language and, where possible, such programmes should be offered to their families as well. Integrating the children who are

most in need through sustainable community programmes that will encourage all family members to do the same is crucial to resolve many of the barriers these children are currently facing.

Additionally, there is an urgent need for policies in Cyprus in the following areas:

- An adequate Minimum Income Scheme that would allow decent living conditions.
- Housing schemes for those who cannot afford rent (these have increased drastically over the past three years).
- Integration programmes for newcomers in schools and in communities with widespread awareness raising within the communities.

The PCCPWC believes that children should be seen as citizens, with needs to be met outside the family and not only through it. Additionally, the organisation has concerns

<sup>2</sup> (Editor’s Note) RRP = Recovery and Resilience Plan.

<sup>3</sup> [European Semester Country Report for Cyprus](#), Annex 12, p.46.

regarding the current method of offering financial support to families with children. The government should explore alternative ways to ensure children can access the key services they need. Such as making the services free for all children in need. Often parents use funds that are expected to directly support children, on other items or household bills. This often means that some children cannot access childcare or extracurricular activities.

## European Child Guarantee

### Cyprus National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a [National Action Plan \(NAP\)](#) outlining how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022. However, **some countries had yet to publish their NAP when Eurochild members provided their input. This is the case for Cyprus.**

The Pancyprrian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children were not asked to partake in any preparatory processes for the NAP. The organisation has been informed that the NAP would be drafted after responses from the different Ministries have been received. At that stage, they expect that a consultation about the draft NAP would be opened. A draft was shared with the PCCPWC in March 2022, and a consultation with children was planned for April 2022. However, the consultation was postponed at the last minute, and no further date was offered. **The PCCPWC has shared comments with the Ministry and requested a face-to-face meeting to discuss them but has not received a response to this request.** In the draft seen in March, the PCCPWC could see potential to improve the lives of children growing up in poverty with the indicated activities. However, there was nothing concrete regarding impactful policy measures.

The PCCPWC felt that **the drafted NAP presented a 'rosy' picture**

**of children's lives in Cyprus** and portrayed no real need for further investment in children, which is far from accurate. Most of the proposed actions ended in 2027. This is concerning as the European Child Guarantee should cover the period until 2030.

Most of the mentioned actions and policy measures did not include a specific budget and relied on national resources for implementation. The **lack of transparency** regarding funding is worrying, and **raises questions over the Child Guarantee's implementation in Cyprus** and accountability for the government's (in)action. PCCPWC worries that this lack of transparency could allow the government to cite 'insufficient funds' as a reason to cancel actions and policy measures in the NAP.

Most actions and policy measures in the March draft related to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health. The PCCPWC stress that fighting child poverty and social exclusion needs to be addressed collectively by

all authorities, including local authorities and civil society. They feel that the real needs of children, and the goal of lifting them out of poverty and social exclusion, were not understood nor considered in preparing this draft.

Overall, the PCCPWC was disappointed that **the March draft NAP included many actions and policy measures already implemented.** This suggests that the Government lacks vision and is not planning for a sustainable improvement of children's well-being and eliminating poverty in Cyprus.

In fact, the current actions and policy measures are not effectively combating child poverty and social exclusion. This is why we need bolder commitments and forward thinking in the Child Guarantee National Action Plan.

**A consultation with children was held in October 2022.** Shortly after, it is believed that the NAP was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. However, the timing of this approval **puts into question**

**whether the information from the consultation with children has actually been included in the NAP.** Therefore, it needs to be determined how the implementation and monitoring of the NAP will be carried out and how children and civil society organisations will be involved. **The PCCPWC is aware that a committee has been created to monitor and evaluate the NAP.** However, to their knowledge, no civil society organisations are in membership at this time.

The PCCPWC has advocated for children to be involved in the drafting of the NAP. The organisation could have helped the ministries collect children's views and suggestions before the beginning of the drafting process. This was a missed opportunity for the government. Commenting on an already finalised draft, without taking on board comments from stakeholders to influence or amend it in any way, does not equate to meaningful involvement.

If the PCCPWC had the opportunity to provide input, they would have proposed measures that would bring forward:

- deinstitutionalisation and alternatives to institutions that could be considered;
- how to meaningfully and sustainably achieve child participation in public life;
- what 'quality education and ECEC' should be all about;
- how linking market needs to education could benefit the lived experiences of children;
- how to meaningfully include children with migrant backgrounds, not only within the school environment but in the community, supporting their families in this process;
- the importance of prevention, as opposed to therapy, including children's mental health, reproductive and sexual education, nutrition, substance abuse etc.;
- the need for child protection in all environments, including online;

- the need to address violence and bullying more substantially.

The PCCPWC's main recommendation would be to bring all actions and measures in line with the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#) and view all children residing in Cyprus equally without discrimination based on one's disability, migrant background etc.

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

There is a variety of European funds available in Cyprus for programmes investing in children. **The Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children is aware of EU funding that can be used at national, regional, and local levels to invest in children.**

One of the main principles of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) regulation is social dialogue and civil society engagement. However, the PCCPWC states that this has been very limited in Cyprus and has been, unfortunately, subsiding over the last three years, with the pandemic often being used as a pretext.

The restructuring of social services in Cyprus (pending since 2013, with no progress on the matter until recently), is expected to be funded by 85% through ESF+. This is reported in the country report: 'To foster equal opportunities and social inclusion, the ESF+ will support measures to restructure social welfare services in Cyprus and to establish a new network of social inclusion services for people with disabilities. These measures will also be key to reaching the 2030 EU headline target on poverty reduction.'<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> [European Semester Country Report for Cyprus](#), p.47

However, the PCCPWC is unaware of what will be funded by ESF+ and how this will be decided. This issue is directly linked to the fact that the existing legislation on children (using a Law from 1959 with numerous amendments and by-laws on different issues such as corporal punishment, family violence, child-friendly justice etc.) is still pending. It is unknown as to what the new law will include, or when it will be brought to Parliament for voting. The PCCPWC was involved (both as the PCCPWC and as Children's Parliament) in the drafting of the proposal for the restructuring of the social services (2019), but there has been no feedback or face-to-face discussions since submitting comments, and no information or updates on its progress.

**The PCCPWC was heavily involved in drafting the Health Strategy for Children in 2017,** and both the PCCPWC and

the Children's Parliament are participating in the monitoring and evaluation committee. The PCCPWC also influenced the original proposed actions and policies, and many of their suggestions were accepted. The PCCPWC continue to be consulted and asked for suggested updates on this strategy. Due to the lack of funding transparency in Cyprus, it is impossible to state if the programmes within the strategy are funded or co-funded by ESF+. However, this is a good example of the importance of child participation and real involvement in policymaking and monitoring and evaluation by civil society, led by the Ministry of Health.

### **Priorities for EU funding in Cyprus**

On 28 January 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement that compels Member

States with a level of child poverty above the EU average (23.4% - AROPE 2017–2019) to allocate 5% of ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty.<sup>5</sup> Cyprus is one of the countries bound by this agreement.

The PCCPWC therefore calls on the Government of Cyprus to prioritise investment in:

- Restructuring of social services, including a new network of social inclusion services not limited to children/people with disabilities (as proposed in the NRRP and the NAP).
- Enhancing education and community measures aimed at students (primary and secondary levels) with a migrant background for better integration and inclusion.
- Supporting the Action Plan on Early Childhood Education and Care (to be drafted in 2023) through ESF+ and NRRP, as stated in the country report.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>5</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013

<sup>6</sup> European Semester Country Report for Cyprus, p.48.

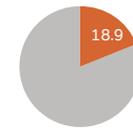
## “Country recommendation

The Czech government should promptly adopt and implement the Child Guarantee National Action Plan, provide every pupil aged 3-15 years old with a free warm lunch as a part of their education process, and pursue a child participation model that specifically targets vulnerable and disadvantaged children and allows them to express their opinion about all aspects of public life affecting them.

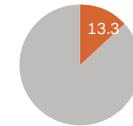
## Country Profile 2022



# Czechia



**Child Population:**  
**2.01 million**  
(18.9% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**13.3% (2021) ▲\***

\* [higher compared to pre-covid rates in 2019](#)

## RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

[Alliance for the Rights of the Child Czechia \(ADP\)](#)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report: identification of the children in need

The Alliance for the Rights of the Child Czechia argues that the [European Semester Country Report for Czechia](#) does not pay particular attention to the needs of children and subsequent investments in children. The report does, however, mention the need for investments in the green and the digital transition, both of utmost importance for children and young people.

The country report further outlines that **early childhood education and care (ECEC) remain low in Czechia** and urges appropriate measures to address the gaps of availability. Furthermore, while child poverty was relatively low at 12.9 % in 2020, the **risk of poverty and social exclusion**

**appears to be high for certain groups** like, children in low-income households in socially disadvantaged locations and Roma children. This is also due to limited expenditure in increasing the accessibility of social housing. Alliance for the Rights of the Child Czechia also suggests that the legislative framework on social housing should ensure further development, including investments.

The current **deinstitutionalisation strategy** is considered an important tool to connect health and social services, and promote the development of community-based services.

### Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

The Council Recommendations mention Czechia's initiatives to **'create new childcare facilities for children below 3 years'** to support working women. In addition, participation in early

childhood education and care is critical for children's healthy development and wellbeing.

The [Country Specific Recommendations for Czechia](#) also prompt more initiatives to ensure inclusive education through support to disadvantaged schools and tutoring. Alliance for the Rights of the Child Czechia explains that segregation in schools and early drop-out from education still affect most Roma pupils; therefore, it requires a more sustainable approach and funding.

Between 130,000 and 190,000 households, including **100,000 children, are experiencing a housing crisis**. These families are primarily located in the largest cities of Czechia, specifically in northern Bohemia and northern Moravia, the most affected regions due to a higher share of the population living in a difficult situation in these regions.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, vulnerable children

from disadvantaged communities, including Roma, are taken from their biological families and placed in alternative care due to evictions or inadequate housing. In such cases, **family separation could be prevented by providing accommodation for families at risk**. Alliance for the Rights of the Child Czechia welcomes that the Country Specific Recommendations also tackle the problem of social housing, which should be addressed through **'the adoption of a specific legislative framework and improved coordination between different public bodies'**.



<sup>1</sup> [Bydleni-jako-problem-2021.pdf \(socialnibydeni.org\)](#)

## Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

### Child poverty in Czechia

Czechia has a total child population of 2.01 million, 13.3% of which lived at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021.

The percentage of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion increased from 12.9% to 13.3% because of the Covid-19 crisis. The most affected are Roma children and other socially disadvantaged groups of children. Additionally, income poverty has increased for families with three or more children by more than a quarter. A slight increase has also been recorded among single mothers, a group who have long had difficulty making ends meet.<sup>2</sup>

### Example of good practice

In 2005, the *School Education Act* established student parliaments

in schools. **Participatory structures based on delegations of students exist in some municipalities and the majority of regions.** They are represented under a national umbrella organisation, the Children and Youth Parliament of the Czech Republic. However, these operate voluntarily, without a budget and they are not regulated by law.

Alliance for the Rights of the Child Czechia coordinates the work of the Children and Youth Parliament in Czechia. The second national meeting of the Parliament of Children and Youth of the Czech Republic (PDM) was held at the Old Town Hall in Prague in October 2022 under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Science, and the Ministry of the Environment.

The programme included discussions with guests, such as members of the European

Parliament and the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, and an expert from UNICEF Czechia.

In its second year of operation, the PDM aims to establish cooperation with organisations that are involved in public affairs and thus create better conditions for the lives of young people in Czechia. The resolution also includes **strong support for the institution of the Ombudsperson for Children**, which must be a separate and independent body from the existing Office of the Ombudsman in order to effectively provide legal protection for all children without distinction.

The meeting confirmed that despite the difficulties associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, the interest in the participation of students and children living in institutions has not faded out.

## European Child Guarantee

### Czechia National Action Plan

The Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at the national level.

Czechia only shared its draft of the National Action Plan with stakeholders including, child rights organisations, in late October.

According to the Alliance for the Rights of the Child Czechia, the **plan identifies all vulnerable groups of children whose needs should be addressed.**

These groups of children include single-parent families, families of 3 and more children, children in need of housing, children in socially disadvantaged communities, low-income

<sup>2</sup> Poverty Watch Czech Republic | Poverty Watch 2021 and 2022 - EAPN

families, children in alternative care, Roma children, children with a migrant background and children whose mother tongue is not Czech, children and young people fleeing Ukraine, children of parents with low educational attainment, children of parents with disabilities, children with disabilities, children in families affected by addiction and violence, and children with risk behaviour.

It also proposes an **ambitious series of measures in early childhood education and care (ECEC), education, housing, healthcare, and nutrition.**

Particular attention is given to Ukrainian children, which make up 36% of the 400,000 refugees arriving in Czechia and registered under the [Temporary Protection Directive](#).

Alliance for the Rights of the Child Czechia calls for the Czech government to move from words to action and put all intended measures into practice.

On October 2022, there were two rounds of consultations on the National Action Plan with civil society organisations, during which the Alliance for the Rights of the Child Czechia provided input.

## EU Funding

### Priorities for EU funding in Czechia

The Alliance for the Rights of the Child Czechia calls the government of Czechia to prioritise investment in:

- providing free meals for all children at schools;
- providing cost -free pre-school facilities, after-school facilities and extracurricular activities; given that these costs are a barrier for the most vulnerable children.



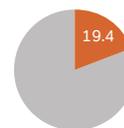
## “ Country recommendation

Estonia should directly channel the investments in children, because by investing in the green- or digital-transitions we forget/overlook children.

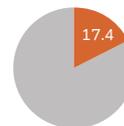
## Country Profile 2022



# Estonia



**Child Population:**  
**258,227**  
(19.4% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**17.4% (2021) ▼\***

\* lower compared to pre-covid rates in 2019

## RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

Estonian Union for Child Welfare (EUCW)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report: identification of the children in need

The [\*European Semester Country Report for Estonia\*](#) addresses the needs of children mainly in the context of families, health, and education. The report welcomes the **National Recovery and Resilience Plan's actions (NRRP)** focused on enhancing the accessibility and resilience of the healthcare and social protection system by **improving care for children with high-care needs**. The Estonian Union for Child Welfare welcomes the remark in the country report on the lack of common national standards and the shortage of workers, which make it difficult to ensure quality of care.

The Estonian Union for Child Welfare (EUCV) further remarks the inclusion of the **child poverty rate** monitoring in the context of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Social Scoreboard. The country report states the rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Estonia (17.4%) remains below the EU average (24.2%).

Other **areas such as early childhood education, education, and children's mental health are not adequately addressed by the report**. Early school leaving, mentioned in the context of high unemployment rate of people with disabilities (one of the highest in the EU at 40.4%), remains higher among young people with disabilities (16.2%).

One of the key deliverables in the field of children's rights in the digital environment is the 'digital transition'. However, according

to the Estonian Union for Child Welfare, this measure shows a lack of focus on children, as it targets broadly all generations to ensure a better access to public services.

When it comes to migrants' children, the report highlights the needs of **Ukrainian refugee children**. In December 2022, the number of Ukrainian children in Estonia was 27 780.<sup>1</sup> Estonia has promptly reacted to the needs of arriving refugees from Ukraine. The EUCV explains that a [new school for 560 Ukrainian children](#) was opened in Tallinn in September and many Ukrainian refugees have been reunited with their families living in Estonia. All over Estonia, temporary accommodations have been set up, and in some cases non-traditional solutions such as ships have also been put forward.<sup>2</sup>

### Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

The [\*Country Specific Recommendations for Estonia\*](#) correspond well to the reforms needed in the country. In the current cost of living crisis and soaring energy prices, households are facing greater care responsibilities and unemployment due to companies' closures and therefore are in need of greater support. Even if children are not mentioned in this context, this situation risks of pushing more children into poverty.

In this regard, the third recommendation stands out asking to 'strengthen social protection, including by extending the coverage of unemployment benefits, in particular to those with short work spells and in non-standard forms of work. Improve the affordability and quality of long-term care, in particular by

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1 [Ukrainian refugee statistics | Estonian | Republic of Estonia Social Insurance Board](#)

2 [Estonian Public Broadcasting, \*The first refugees moved to the Tallink ship \(in Estonian\)\*, 2022](#)

ensuring its sustainable funding and integrating health and social services'.<sup>3</sup>

## Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

### Child poverty in Estonia

Estonia has a total [child population of approximately 258,227, 17.4% of which lived at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021](#). Children affected by poverty and social exclusion come mostly from Russian-speaking families living in Eastern Estonia, single-parent families, and from families with children with special needs.

The Estonian Union for Child Welfare emphasises that **Estonia's Child Guarantee National Action Plan summarises well all groups of vulnerable children, the gaps, and the intended actions**. Another plan

also addressing poverty in Estonia is [the Welfare Development Plan 2023-2030](#), foreseen to be adopted in December 2022. The document brings together the policy areas related to 'Wellbeing' – i.e., reduction of social inequality and poverty, gender equality and greater social inclusion, promotion of equal treatment of people belonging to minority groups, employment, long and high-quality working life, population policy, and increasing the wellbeing of children and families.

The EUCV is a member of the steering committee, whose purpose is to ensure the implementation of the current Welfare Development Plan 2016-2023 and the preparation and implementation of the Welfare Development Plan 2023-2030.

## European Child Guarantee

### Estonia's National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation for a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022.

National Action Plans should outline the children most in need, the planned and existing policy actions and measures to support them, and a monitoring and evaluation framework. The plans should also be drafted in consultation with children, civil society, and national authorities.

The **Estonian Child Welfare Union has been extensively involved and consulted on the draft of [Child Guarantee National Action Plan](#)**, published on 20 April 2022. The EUCV has conducted consultations both at national

and local levels and have also involved children. Their feedback was directly incorporated in the NAP. Their involvement can be considered as a **good example of co-designing** this important policy for children. The only point of improvement was the time pressure, since there was only one month to run and process the consultations.

The EUCV further explains that the NAP provides a comprehensive overview of the situation of children, including statistical data and relevant gaps. All consulted stakeholders, children and local municipalities' and NGOs' representatives, have made recommendations that were translated into actions in the NAP. Therefore, the **resulting Estonian NAP is a relevant policy document that can make substantial improvements in children's lives**. The part that should be further developed is the monitoring and evaluation framework, including a set of

<sup>3</sup> [Country specific Recommendations for Estonia](#), p.10.

indicators that would adequately measure the progress on reduction of child poverty and other areas.

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

The Estonian Child Welfare Union has been involved in **national working groups** (for example on Sustainable Development, new national Welfare Development Plan 2023-2030, National Recovery and Resilience Plan), where they have been providing input in regards to legislative and non-legislative changes and proposing new laws related to children, family, and other topics.

### Example of EU-funded projects:

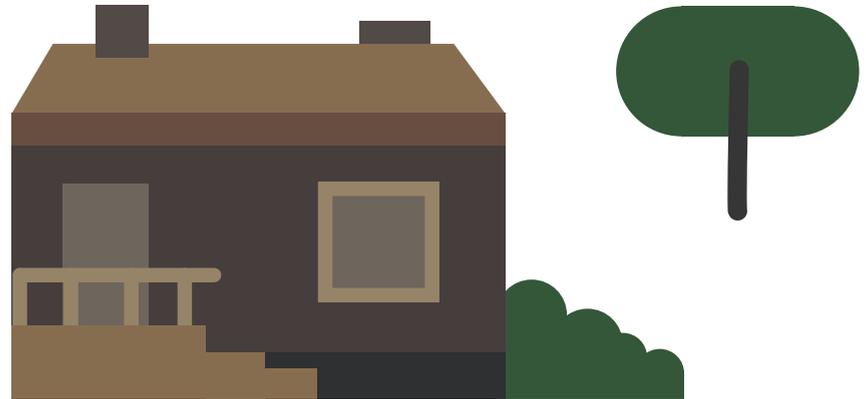
In regards to the digital rights of children, The Estonian Union for Child Welfare has implemented:

- the *Smartly on the Internet*, an initiative through which they operate the **national Safer Internet Centre**;
- the *GaminGEE* project whose aim is to provide educators and families with effective resources and to raise awareness of values applied to sex and affections, such as gender equality, etc.;
- the Erasmus+ projects *Home / tool4gender* on gender equality education.

### Priorities for EU funding in Estonia

The Estonian Union for Child Welfare calls the government of Estonia to prioritise investment in:

- **mitigating the urban-rural disparities** by investing in services and their accessibility for children regardless their place of inhabitancy;
- Investing in **extra-curricular time activities, education, mental health, and health care for children.**



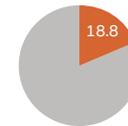
## “ Country recommendation

Finland should take immediate action to address the alarming issue of children and young people's mental health and invest in prevention. It is essential to develop services and guarantee access to mental health support for all.

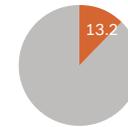
Country Profile 2022



# Finland



**Child Population:**  
**1.04 million**  
(18.8% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**13.2% (2021)** ▼\*

\* [lower compared to pre-covid rates in 2019](#)

**RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):**

[Central Union for Child Welfare](#)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report: identification of the children in need

The *European Semester Country Report for Finland* did not clearly outline the main vulnerable groups of children that should be targeted by national policy-makers.

The areas covered were not representative of the reality on the ground, since there is **no overall analysis of the national situation of the children** and there is no clear focus on the most vulnerable children in Finland.

Children are briefly mentioned when it comes to poverty, youth unemployment and those ‘Not in Employment, Education or Training’ (NEET). However, the **report failed to include a child rights perspective in the sections covering social and health care reform, social policy reform, as well as work-based migration.**

For example, despite social and healthcare reform being mentioned several times, the focus is entirely on health services. Social services, like home services and substitute care, are not covered in the report. Unfortunately, this is what the public discussion concerning the reform has also looked like: the focus has often been on health services, mainly adults’ health services.

**Children and families with a migrant background are not mentioned at all.** While the report mentions the need for work-based immigration, Central Union for Child Welfare wants to highlight that when discussing work-based immigration, the children of the persons to be recruited and their rights must also be taken into account.

Children are mentioned several times in matters concerning early education and learning. However, Central Union for Child Welfare has **concerns about the resources and availability of student welfare services.**

For example, according to the Student Welfare Act, students must be given the opportunity to talk with a school psychologist or a school social worker within a week of contact and, in urgent cases, on the same or the next day. Additionally, the school nurse must be available daily. **Given that these services are not always implemented as required by law,** a stronger focus should be placed on strengthening such services in all municipalities.

**The report does not include any reference to children’s right to be heard and to children’s rights in the digital environment.** Moreover, it doesn’t really cover mental health and wellbeing, which is particularly worrying, as this issue needs to be urgently tackled holistically at all levels of government. This matter concerns especially young people: access to services needs to be guaranteed to those in need and at the same time, young people must be offered support to take care of their mental wellbeing and build their resilience.

### Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

**The recommendations included in the Country Report do not address sufficiently the needs on the ground and neglect the child-rights perspective.**

Recommendation 1 focuses on policy proposals for social security reform, with the aim of increasing the efficiency of the system of social benefits, improving incentives to work, and also supporting long-term sustainability of public finances.

While this recommendation is welcome, the impact of these reforms on children and their rights must be assessed during their preparation. More specifically, the reduction of poverty in families with children must be an evaluation criteria in the reform process. It is **essential that the social security reform contributes to preventing child poverty and the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage.**

As the [Country Specific Recommendations for Finland](#) were **not written with children's rights in mind**, nor were they based on an adequate analysis of the situation of children in the country, Central Union for Child Welfare believe **they should not be used to identify funding priorities for children and their families or caregivers**.

## Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

### Child poverty in Finland

Finland has a total [child population of 1.04 million, 13.2% of which live at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021](#).

Single parents, the unemployed, families with health issues, and large families have traditionally been the most vulnerable groups in Finland, when it comes to poverty and material deprivation. The inflation and energy crises have not hit with full strength yet. Still, it is estimated that **already**

### **16,000 new families have fallen below the poverty line since the beginning of the war in Ukraine.**

We can predict that more families will face severe difficulties in the coming months and years, with rising energy and food prices and with increased interest rates on mortgages. All families are dependent on transport and energy to some extent, but it will be those with lower incomes who will struggle most.

Despite good employment rates and the lack of severe problems to families caused by the Covid-19 after the initial shock, the current crisis is likely to **exacerbate the risk of falling into poverty for new population groups, including some families with two earners**. Central Union for Child Welfare calls on the government of Finland to react immediately to the current crisis.

In fact, while some initiatives to help households with electricity bills have already been put forward, **additional temporary and targeted measures will likely be necessary as well**. The

Finnish government has now put forward an initiative to pay out an extra child allowance as a one-off payment in December 2022. As child allowance is universal and not taxed in Finland, this measure reaches all children under 17 years of age and an additional payment to support single parents has been included as well.

## European Child Guarantee

### Finland National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at the national level.

In January 2022, [Eurochild published recommendations](#) for all Members States to consider when drafting their NAPs.

[Finland's National Action Plan](#) was published on 21 April 2022. **The government will implement the European Child Guarantee**

**as part of the existing National Child Strategy**, the over-arching cross-sectoral framework document for coordinating child and family policies and Finland's implementation of the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#). Its action plan includes 30 measures and a focus on addressing discrimination and inequality and protecting the rights of children in a vulnerable situation.

Central Union for Child Welfare is particularly happy about this choice, given that the **overall coordination of child and family policies in Finland has been a challenge** for years because matters concerning children and families have been allocated to different ministries.

The organisation sees the National Child Strategy as a good framework for child and family policies and for monitoring and evaluating the targets of the Child Guarantee.

**Children and young people have been involved in the preparation of the National Child Strategy**

**and its action plan**, through workshops, online events, and surveys. Various groups of children participated in different ways (including children with disabilities, LGBTI children, etc.).

When children and young people participated, they were informed about how and which processes their opinions would affect. In some cases, results were later compiled and shared with children and young people (e.g. in the form of videos). However, **it is unclear how children and young people will be involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the NAP.**

Central Union for Child Welfare was **actively involved throughout the drafting of the NAP**, along with several other civil society organisations and relevant stakeholders. NGOs will be also included in the planned national cooperation network for monitoring and evaluating the NAP.

Central Union for Child Welfare does not see any major gaps in the National Child Strategy as such. However, they acknowledged that **its success will depend on future governments' commitment to implement the strategy** as an overarching and comprehensive framework for advancing the realisation of children's rights.

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

There are a variety of EU funds available in Finland for actions that invest in children. At national level, information about funds can be found on [www.eurahoitusneuvonta.fi](http://www.eurahoitusneuvonta.fi).

The European Social Fund Plus funding can be used for social innovation, for example for supporting the well-being of

children who receive child welfare services. **For the first time a specific ESF+ programme will focus on child protection issues.** This programme aims to decrease the demand for alternative care.

One of the main principles of ESF+ regulation is social dialogue and civil society engagement. However, Central Union for Child Welfare was not able to provide a good practice example of civil society involvement in the monitoring/implementation/evaluation of EU funds in Finland.

### Projects funded by the EU in Finland

Our member, Central Union for Child Welfare has not been involved in EU funded projects. They applied for funding in 2020 but ultimately they weren't successful. In 2022, they applied for ESF+ funding as a part of a coalition and are waiting for the result.

## Priorities for EU funding in Finland

On 28 January 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement that compels Member States with a level of child poverty above the EU average (23.4% - AROPE 2017 – 2019) to allocate 5% of ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty.<sup>1</sup> The other Member States, including Finland, should allocate an 'appropriate' amount of their ESF+ resources to combat child poverty.

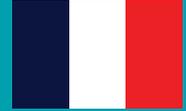
Central Union for Child Welfare calls on the government of Finland to prioritise investment in hobbies and leisure activities, which are out of reach for many children due to an increase in prices. **EU funding has potential for creating and supporting new ways for children to participate in leisure activities outside the home.**

<sup>1</sup> [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus \(ESF+\) and repealing Regulation \(EU\) No 1296/2013](#)

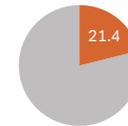
## “ Country recommendation

France should take into account the consequences of the global pandemic on youth and children. Some children were endangered and isolated during quarantine, including those exposed to a rise in domestic violence, mental health issues, and social inequalities.

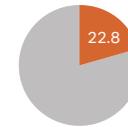
## Country Profile 2022



# France



**Child Population:**  
**14.47 million**  
(21.4% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**22.8% (2021) ▼\***

\* [lower compared to pre-covid rates in 2019](#)

## RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

[Convention Nationale des Associations de Protection de l'Enfant](#)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the country report: identification of the children in need

This year's *European Semester Country Report for France* does not focus on the situation of children or investment in children. According to Eurochild member, the Convention Nationale des Associations de Protection de l'Enfant (CNAPE), the **report focuses only on education in general**, and how it meets (or does not meet) labour market expectations.

The areas covered were not representative of the reality on the ground. For example, it failed to include early child development, children in alternative care and deinstitutionalisation, children's right to be heard, children with a migration background,

including child refugees, children impacted by the pandemic and the inequalities exacerbated, children's mental health and wellbeing, children's rights in the digital environment, and the involvement of civil society.

### Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

The recommendations included in the country report do not sufficiently address the needs on the ground. For example, in the *Country Specific Recommendations for France*, the European Commission made several social recommendations. However, there are **no clear recommendations for investing in children's health or protection**.

However, the report states that 'labour shortages' are rising in France. This is of great concern for social workers, as the numbers of professionals are declining every year, which has a direct impact

on France's child protection system. It has now become a real crisis and has led to multiple demonstrations and gatherings.

### Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

#### Child poverty in France

France has a total child population of approximately 14.47 million, 22.8% of which lived at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021. This amounts to approximately 3.3 million children.

Most children who benefit from child welfare in France are in great need. During France's recent presidential elections, **CNAPE advocated for greater attention for the recruitment of child welfare professionals and mental health services**, such as social workers and child psychiatrists.<sup>1</sup> Additionally,

CNAPE finds that children in French overseas departments<sup>2</sup> and unaccompanied minors are of particular concern, as they are often not included in policies.

#### Child protection in French overseas departments

(Mayotte, Guyane, La Réunion, La Martinique, and Guadeloupe) is rarely mentioned and prioritised in public policies. At national level, the representatives of these territories do not have adequate opportunity to express the experiences, difficulties, and specific needs of their children and young people. Despite almost all national policies being applicable to overseas regions, some provisions and directives remain impossible to apply for economic, social, or even cultural reasons.

The French overseas departments are marked by great precariousness and high unemployment rates and the

<sup>1</sup> CNAPE, *En 2022, je vote pour*, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Departments are the administrative divisions of France, with 101 in total including 5 overseas.

lack of infrastructure makes it impossible for many to access public services and healthcare. Additionally, the pandemic has significantly impacted children and aggravated the difficulties of families, particularly the most vulnerable. Many families live in unsanitary and overcrowded housing and have difficulty accessing adequate nutrition and the inadequacy of the care system does not guarantee effective monitoring of children's health and adequate responses.

This lack of care, and the violence experienced by children, is impacting on children's mental health as well. These difficulties are reinforced by dropping out of school, the lack of prospects for the future, the consumption of narcotics, and the inadequacy of health services, including mental health support.

Significant resources must be invested on building schools and healthcare facilities, creating child protection systems, such as maternal and child protection, and preventing violence and addiction.

CNAPE calls on the French government to invest in these three priority areas to eradicate poverty and social exclusion of children and young people in France's overseas departments:

1. Substantial and sustainable investment to build **facilities and services for children and young people**.
2. Ensuring that **children and young people receive a better education and stay in school**. Illiteracy and failure to develop basic skills in the overseas departments is very prominent and many children and adolescents drop out of school, partially due to a lack of qualified teachers. This translates into challenges to becoming a part of the labour market and it affects young people's motivation and hopes, leading to social and professional exclusion. Some CNAPE members also note the high level of disillusionment among young people.
3. **Expand the number of health and social services structures**. There are not enough services

for children and adolescents, whether in terms of specialised establishments and services, healthcare, maternal and child protection, and childhood social assistance. Investment in prevention actions to combat high rates of domestic violence must be prioritised.

A good example of interventions that can help mitigate child poverty is the **Children's Network**, set up by the Groupe SOS Jeunesse in partnership with the Health Regional Agency.

The Children's Network is an experimental project that aims to provide parenting support and socio-medical assistance to young people in isolated Guyanese communities. This network is helping families in Maripasoula and Camopi with their administrative procedures, access to rights and provision of psychosocial support to both parents and school-aged children.

The Children's Network is part of the *Bien-être des Populations de l'Intérieur de Guyane* programme

(BEPI). It is based on a community approach, where citizens lead on identifying and implementing interventions based on their needs, such as suicide prevention and promoting wellbeing.

## European Child Guarantee

### France National Action Plan

The [\*Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee\*](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022.

These Action Plans should outline the children most in need, the planned and existing policy actions and measures to support them, and a monitoring and evaluation framework. The plans should also be drafted in consultation with children, civil society, and national authorities.

[The National Action Plan for France](#) was published in April 2022 and the National Coordinator

is Jean Benoît Dujol, director of the Direction Générale de la cohésion sociale (DGCS). CNAPE was not involved in drafting the NAP, and they are also **not aware if children were involved in its drafting**.

According to CNAPE, the **NAP is ambitious and some of its measures are welcomed**, such as the creation of the early childhood public service, and the out of school observatory. However, many uncertainties remain, including the financing of these measures and the conditions for the coordination of these policies.

CNAPE have also expressed some concerns regarding the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the NAP. CNAPE also commented that they were unaware of any plans to involve children in the monitoring and evaluation. The NAP only reports that a protocol will be implemented with the Haut

Conseil de la Famille, de l'Enfance et de l'Âge (High Council for Family, Childhood and Age), but there is no further information about this.

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

While there are a variety of European funds available in France for actions that invest in children, CNAPE are not aware of EU funding that can be used at national, regional, and local levels to invest in children.

### Priorities for EU funding in France

On 28 January 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement that compels Member States with a level of child poverty above the EU average (23.4% - AROPE 2017 – 2019) to allocate

5% of European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) resources to tackle child poverty.<sup>3</sup> The rest of Member States, such as France, should allocate an 'appropriate' amount of their ESF+ resources to combat child poverty.

CNAPE calls on the government of France to prioritise investing in children through:

- **Health and prevention** – despite notable efforts, France is still failing to meet the needs on the ground. CNAPE thinks a real holistic services offer from the very beginning of early childhood is essential to maintain children's good health: parenting support, health, and prevention in school at early stages of life, and campaigns in schools against violence (domestic or school-based bullying, for example).

- **Social workers shortage** – France should raise wages for all social workers, improve their working conditions, promote social work through awareness-raising campaigns, and increase the attractiveness of the profession.



<sup>3</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013.

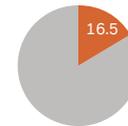
## “Country recommendation

Germany should recognise that education is key to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and should therefore take action to improve educational equality by creating a learning environment inside and outside of school that promotes educational success and supports children, regardless of the resources their families have at their disposal.

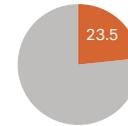
Country  
Profile 2022



# Germany



**Child Population:**  
**13.74 million**  
(16.5% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**23.5% (2021) ▲\***

\* higher compared to pre-covid rates in 2019

### RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

Child and Youth Welfare Organisation (AGJ)

German Children's Fund (DKHW)

National Coalition Germany – Network for the Implementation of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (NC)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the country report: identification of the children in need

The *European Semester Country Report for Germany* has **no particular focus on investing in children**. However, children's issues are mentioned, superficially, in the context of other issues. For example, the report states that 'the proportion of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion is relatively high in Germany, notably among children [...]. In 2020, energy poverty was higher than the EU average'.<sup>1</sup>

Eurochild members, the Child and Youth Welfare Organisation (AGJ), the German Children's Fund (DKHW) and the National Coalition Germany – Network for the Implementation of the UN

Convention of the Rights of the Child (NC) were pleased to see that the country report reaffirms the rising levels of poverty in Germany, 'from 21.4% to 22.5%, above the EU average of 21.9%' in 2020. The country report also states that 'there is scope for reinforced social policy action in order for Germany to contribute to lifting people out of poverty and in this way reaching the 2030 EU headline target on poverty reduction'.

Early childhood development is mentioned in the report from the perspective of **improving access to, and quality of, early childhood education and care (ECEC)** – especially for children under-3-year-old – and providing all-day schooling to help improve both the educational outcomes of pupils and the full-time participation of women in the labour market. However, there is a **clear priority on childcare**

**facilities as being primarily important to facilitate women's labour market participation** and less to promote childhood development, participation, and democracy building.

The focus on education is on investing in skills to achieve the 2030 EU headline target on adult learning and to counter the labour and skills shortages, which in turn is likely to boost productivity. There is a **specific skills shortage in child and youth services** (e.g. youthwork, childcare, family support and assistance). The need for skilled workers in child and youth welfare service until 2025 is outlined in the position paper by AGJ<sup>3</sup>, while the lack of specialists in childcare facilities is outlined in Bertelsmann Stiftung's report *2023 fehlen in Deutschland rund 384.000 Kita-Plätze*. These skills shortages are not included in the list of affected sectors in the country report.

There is **no focus on child refugees**. However, children with a migrant background are mentioned as to being 'highly underrepresented in early childhood education and care'<sup>4</sup>, high rates of school dropouts, and under-achieving pupils.

Children impacted by the pandemic and the exacerbated inequalities are referred to as 'concerning inequalities in educational attainments', and **pandemic restrictions on school attendance disproportionately affected disadvantaged families and children**, which risks exacerbating socio-economic inequalities.

The green transition and Germany's ambitious climate goals feature heavily in the country report. The report also mentioned that the social dimension of the green transition might become a significant

<sup>1</sup> *European Semester Country Report for Germany* p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *European Semester Country Report for Germany*, Annex 12, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> Child and Youth Welfare Organisation, *Dem wachsenden Fachkräftebedarf richtig begegnen! Entwicklung einer Gesamtstrategie zur Personalentwicklung mit verantwortungsvollem Weitblick*, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> *European Semester Country Report for Germany*, Annex 12, p. 42.

challenge. Yet, it **needs to be taken into account that the negative impact of climate change affects children and young adults** to a considerable extent, as environmental degradation will continue to affect their lives for decades to come, endangering their health, and development opportunities. Unfortunately, children's environmental rights are not mentioned. This has been a concern for AGJ, as outlined in their position paper [\*How dare you? The responsibility of child and youth welfare for the implementation of children's environmental rights\*](#), published in December 2021.

The country report also failed to include children in alternative care and deinstitutionalisation, children's right to be heard, children's mental health and wellbeing, and involvement of civil society. Additionally, while digitalisation, including the investment and policy action needed for the envisaged digital transition, is prominent in the country report, children's rights

in the digital environment are not mentioned.

AGJ, DKHW and NC state that the country report needs to prioritise investment in children. The report does, however, mention the need for investment in both the green and the digital transition, both of utmost importance for young people in Germany.

The fact that the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) is incorporated into the European Semester and that one of the headline targets under the EPSR regards poverty reduction, including among children, is promising.

### **Needs analysis: alignment at country-level**

The [\*Country Specific Recommendations\*](#) are aimed at investments in both the green and the digital transition, and in high-capacity digital communications networks. Moreover, it states that energy security should be secured and reliance on fossil fuels reduced. While all this is important

for the lives of all people, young people included, **none of the recommendations are specifically aimed at children, young adults or families**. Given that the country report finds that Germany, among others, needs to take measures to reduce inequalities (SDG 10) and address poverty (SDG 1), these aspects should have been included in the Recommendations.

In September 2022, AGJ published a [\*position paper on the European Semester\*](#), focusing on aspects of the European Semester that are important for children, youth, and families. The paper comments on these aspects and recommends improving the process to pay more attention to young people's concerns.

### **Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities**

#### **Child poverty in Germany**

Germany has a total [\*child population of 13.74 million\*](#); [\*23.5%\*](#)

[\*of which lived at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021\*](#).

According to Child and Youth Welfare Organisation, the German Children's Fund and the National Coalition Germany – Network for the Implementation of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, the children most at risk of poverty in Germany are children with a migrant background, particularly refugee children; children from single-parent households; and children from families with more than two children. Homeless children, children with disabilities and children in alternative care are also at risk of social exclusion and should be a priority in the NAP.

The NAP should also prioritise ensuring equal access to services for children in rural areas. These recommendations are aligned with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recent [\*Concluding Observations for Germany\*](#), published in September 2022. They call on the Federal Government to 'strengthen measures to ensure equal access of children in disadvantaged

groups, including asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children, children with disabilities and children from socio-economically disadvantaged families, to comprehensive schools, higher education and vocational training’.

To fight child poverty, **financial and infrastructural measures need to be combined.**

The Child Basic Income (Kindergrundsicherung) is an essential tool for all children’s financial security. However, it needs to fit the real needs of children and young people. This requires a **reassessment of the subsistence minimum for children with the participation of children and young people.**

DKHW is part of the [Bündnis Kindergrundsicherung](#), an alliance of NGOs which has advocated for a Child Basic Income for many years and has put forward concrete proposals for its effective implementation. The Kindergrundsicherung must also consider the impact of inflation

and rising energy costs, and ensure an appropriate balance.

At the same time, we need a **strong social infrastructure consisting of high quality and easily accessible institutions**, which support children and families living in poverty (e.g. family centres and youth work institutions). Unfortunately, instead of being strengthened, this infrastructure is increasingly at risk due to rising costs. A strong social infrastructure also includes well-trained professionals, so the government must increase its efforts to fill the current personnel gaps in childcare, schools, youth and social work, and other relevant fields.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has also **emphasised the need for a comprehensive policy against child poverty** and recommended Germany to ‘develop a national strategy, with the participation of children, to address the root causes of

child poverty and ensure that all children have an adequate standard of living. The strategy should encompass: (i) a reform of social benefits based on an adequate subsistence level and a stronger method of calculation that takes into account other factors contributing to eligibility; and (ii) include a particular focus on children from disadvantaged families, including migrant children, children without a regular residence status and children of single parents’.<sup>5</sup>

A good example of interventions that can contribute to the mitigation of child poverty rates are networks for the prevention of child poverty (Präventionsketten or Präventionsnetzwerke). Many federal states have been **promoting prevention networks on the local level.** They aim to connect services and professionals from relevant organisations and projects to ensure ongoing support for families throughout a

child’s life. This can lead to different measures in different municipalities based on identified needs, for example, creating opportunities for exchange for professionals, or offering new services for children and/or parents. There are significant differences regarding which ages the networks focus on and how the networks are financed. Often, there is initial funding from the Länder level with a contribution from the communal level, with the goal to establish permanent funding from the communes. In some cases, (initial) funding from (private) foundations plays an important role. For example, the state of Nordrhein-Westfalen uses ESF+ funds for the [Kinderstark](#) project, which focuses on early, preventive support to improve the wellbeing and life perspectives of children and young adults and promote equal opportunities.

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<sup>5</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding observations on the combined fifth to sixth periodic reports of Germany*, 23 Sept 2022.

## European Child Guarantee

### Germany National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) outlining how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022. However, some countries had not published their NAP when Eurochild members provided input for this report. This is the case of Germany.

However, Child and Youth Welfare Organisation, the German Children's Fund and the National Coalition Germany – Network for the Implementation of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child have been involved in drafting the NAP called *Neue Chancen für Kinder in Deutschland*. In general, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth has involved relevant actors in the drafting process. **Civil society organisations were asked to**

**share their views on the Child Guarantee implementation** during two conferences in May and September 2022, bringing together the other Federal Ministries, the Länder level, municipalities and civil society. In July, the Ministry also met with smaller stakeholder groups, one them including DKHW and five other civil society organisations. Following these meetings, different political levels and civil society organisations were asked to provide input on their projects and measures relevant to the NAP. The organisations are also expecting to be asked to comment on the draft of the NAP. However, to what degree their input will be included in the final NAP is unclear. At this time, **the NAP is expected to go through the Federal Cabinet in February 2023.**

Initiated by the Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce and other civil society organisations, DKHW published a paper on key issues regarding the [implementation from a children's rights perspective](#) in February 2022.

Since then, there has been regular exchanges with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.

**DKHW supported the Ministry by including children's perspectives in the kick-off conference in May** and was asked to give a statement from a civil society perspective at the conference in September.

After adopting the NAP, a committee will be formed consisting of the most important stakeholder groups, including civil society. This committee will be tasked with recommending concrete measures to implement the NAP; however, more information about the composition of said committee still needs to be revealed. From the perspective of civil society, **regular monitoring of progress in implementing the NAP must also be ensured.**

**Children were involved in the drafting process of the NAP.** At the first conference in May, in a session facilitated by DKHW, ten children and young people between 13 and 19 years old

from different regions in Germany were invited to speak about their expectations and wishes for the Child Guarantee. Several of them had experiences with poverty/ precarious family situations, including two refugees from Syria. **While the children's inputs made a significant impression on policymakers, their statements were not documented,** and children have not been informed if and how their inputs influenced the development of the NAP. No children attended the conference in September.

Over the summer, the Child Guarantee Coordinator visited 30 projects and institutions in nine Bundesländer focusing on children in need, such as, children in alternative care or refugee children. Unfortunately, while she talked to many children, there is **no evidence of meaningful child participation.**

According to the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, there have been focus groups with children

and young people to influence the development of the NAP. In September 2022, the Child Guarantee Coordinator also stated that she had met with a group of young people living in institutional care.

There are plans to invite children and young people to participate in the implementation of the NAP. A service and monitoring point, *ServiKiD*, has been established at the German Youth Institute (DJI) to advise and monitor the implementation of the NAP, conduct research, and ensure the participation of children and young people. Furthermore, in cooperation with independent advisors from the project *Jugendpolitikberatung*, they are **developing a concept for meaningful child participation**. This concept includes developing appropriate participation formats for implementing the NAP and it is expected to be published as part of the NAP.

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

A variety of European funds are available in Germany for actions that invest in children. The Child and Youth Welfare Organisation, the German Children's Fund and the National Coalition Germany – Network for the Implementation of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child are aware of EU funding that can be used at national, regional, and local levels to invest in children.

### Priorities for EU funding in Germany

On 28 January 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement that compels Member States with a level of child poverty above the EU average (23.4% - AROPE 2017 – 2019) to allocate 5% of ESF+ resources to tackle

child poverty.<sup>6</sup> The rest of the Member States, such as Germany, should allocate an 'appropriate' amount of their ESF+ resources to combat child poverty.

AGJ, DKHW, and NC call the Government of Germany to prioritise EU investment in:

- reducing poverty and social exclusion, including mitigating the social-economic impact of the green transition;
- fostering social inclusion and equality in formal and informal education;
- promoting child and youth participation by enabling dialogue between young people and decision-makers, allowing them to shape policies and initiatives that affect them.

**'Developing the National Action Plan is only the first step in implementing the European Child Guarantee. It is vital that civil society, as well as children and young people, will also be involved in deciding on which concrete measures should follow to make the Child Guarantee a reality in Germany'**



<sup>6</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013.

## “ Country recommendation

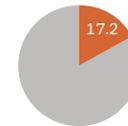
Greece should pursue a fiscal policy aimed at mitigating inequalities with a focus on nutrition of children in particular vis-à-vis the global COVID-19 crisis and increase of costs for living.

Greece should aim at reducing inequalities through direct taxation such as personal income tax and not through indirect taxation (VAT). The exclusion of Value Added Tax from all essential goods in child nutrition is further recommended.

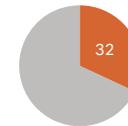
Country Profile 2022



# Greece



**Child Population:**  
**1.83 million**  
(17.2% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**32% (2021) ▲\***

\* [higher compared to pre-covid rates in 2019](#)

RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

[The Smile of the Child](#)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report: identification of the children in need

Greece's European Semester Country Report covers partially child poverty and social exclusion, early childhood development, education, children with a migrant background, children's mental health and wellbeing, and children's right to be heard. Greece ranks last in the EU on participation in early childhood education and care (age 3+) with major challenges linked to affordability and quality. To increase participation in early childhood education and care, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) will subsidise the creation of new childcare facilities in municipalities and in large companies.

The most **disappointing finding** is that **child poverty is not**

mentioned in the **country report**. Even though it reached the historical minimum of 30.8% in Greece in 2020, it has kept increasing to 32% in 2021, making it one of the highest in the EU.

The most promising comment in the country report is: 'Greece recorded the largest drop in the share of early leavers from education and training in the last decade from 13.5% in 2010 to 3.2% in 2021, and now has one of the lowest rates in the EU'.<sup>1</sup>

The Country Specific Recommendations for Greece respond well to the general needs in Greece but unfortunately fail to include reforms regarding the specific **needs of children in Greece**. The CSRs however recommend to 'sustain the purchasing power of the most vulnerable households so as to cushion the impact of the energy price hike and help limit inflationary pressures from

second round effects via targeted and temporary measures'. Many children face problems regarding the **smooth and safe living conditions at home** in Greece (power cuts because of unpaid bills, unsafe heating methods, cold and damp houses, etc.), therefore The Smile of the Child welcomes this recommendation. It aligns with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which encourages taking appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child in case of need, and provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing, and housing.

## Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

### Child poverty in Greece

Greece has a total child population of 1.83 million, 32% of which lived at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021. Research has consistently raised the issue of child poverty and made it more visible within the public sphere. While Greece has already pursued some social policy measures to address child poverty, the recent financial crisis (2009 – 2018) and the new crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have made another negative impact on the Greek economy. **Unemployment has affected a significant number of citizens** and their families; therefore, there is a necessity to provide adequate nutrition to all children.

In light of the current situation, Greece should receive more

<sup>1</sup> European Commission, Greece European Semester Country Report, p. 47.

financial aid from the EU to prevent children from starving. Moreover, national decision-makers in charge of fiscal policy should reduce inequalities through direct taxation like personal income tax, and not through indirect taxation such as the Value Added Tax (VAT). In the scope of public finances, direct taxes are usually perceived as an effective tool for the mitigation of income inequalities, while indirect taxes have proven a burden for lower-income classes. An illustrative example of how regressing direct taxation can improve income equality is the VAT exemption on all essential goods in child nutrition, which raises the disposable income of low-income families. The efforts aimed at mitigating child poverty should be coordinated, and many different institutions dealing with policy should be mobilised, primarily the institutions **implementing fiscal policy**. The Smile of the Child explains that

**welfare provisions** are currently ineffective and problematic; therefore, a new Ministry that would solely focus **on child well-being, child poverty, social welfare, public finances, and welfare** economics should be set up. The Smile of the Child can provide many inspirational practices for its operation.

#### **Groups of Children and Services:**

Regarding nutrition, emphasis must be put on children in high school. **The Smile of the Child recommends the expansion of the provision of school meals from the elementary level to junior high and high schools.** In order to implement this policy, significant funds must be ensured to cover the financial cost of the nutrition of all children in Greece without any exclusions.<sup>2</sup>

Another priority group should be single-parent families with mother or father. Overall,

decision-makers should focus mostly on reform of public finances to mitigate child poverty in Greece.

A good practice in mitigating child poverty is the [National Observatory for Child Well-being in Greece](#) research project, which monitored child poverty multi-dimensionally in the central, metropolitan region of Attica. The project aimed at proposing policies to improve the quality of life of children and their families, by including **5,403 children belonging to three distinct school categories:** the 6<sup>th</sup> grade of elementary school (10–11 years old), the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of junior high (13–14 years old), and the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of high school (16–17 years old). **The introduction of this initial indicator of child welfare helped, among other things, to analyse the situation.** The inordinate growth of child poverty, caused by the economic crisis in Greece, created urgent demands

for social scientific research. The proposed research methodology attempts to interpret, measure, and monitor child wellbeing.

## **European Child Guarantee**

### **Greece National Action Plan**

The [Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at the national level.

The Smile of the Child welcomes the [National Action Plan of the European Child Guarantee](#). The introduction of a system of guaranteed minimum income is a long awaited policy that will help cover needs of vulnerable families. However, there are several gaps. For example, given that child poverty is a multidimensional situation, it is disappointing to see

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<sup>2</sup> [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), Art. 18 and 24; [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#), Art. 24.; [Greece Constitution](#), Art. 21, par. 1.

that the plan does not refer to any **multidimensional index of child poverty/well-being**.

On the other hand, the National Action Plan includes **very important measures for children in need in priority areas** such as (a) early childhood education and care, (b) education, school and extracurricular activities, (c) health care, (d) healthy diet, and (e) adequate housing.

It is noteworthy that, for the first time, special emphasis is given to **early intervention for infants**, including a prevention programme for children and parents. There are plans such as the *Hive* and *The Nannies of the neighbourhood*, as well as the creation of new places in early childhood care. In regards to the babysitting programme *The Nannies of the neighbourhood*, it is important to highlight that a multidisciplinary framework, training for professionals and

supervision are needed for the successful implementation of this measure.

For schooled children<sup>3</sup>, **creative employment centres** have been established. This provision partially covers the needs of families at risk, such as single-parent families or families with serious health problems, and therefore The Smile of the Child proposes the **extension of its own day care homes**, operating since 2004, as an action to prevent and strengthen families.

In regards to housing, targeted prevention actions are foreseen in the NAP through counselling and employment reintegration, among other things. **However, it does not explicitly mention the staffing of the related services to enable professionals to cope with the workload.**

The same is true for **strengthening families in**

order to avoid the separation of children from their families. The recruitment of professionals supporting biological families is not clearly reflected in the NAP.

Moreover, the NAP includes a measure **providing housing for women victims of violence and their minor children**.

In the field of **healthcare provision**, important measures concerning preventive controls, vaccinations, mobile medical units, creation of mental health centres, etc., will be implemented but there is an utmost need to resolve the situation of **uninsured children in all regions** of Greece.

In addition, given that one of the basic principles of the NAP is to combat discrimination, The Smile of the Child proposes issuing legitimising documents and the **acquisition of Greek citizenship for children with foreign parents born in Greece**, provided they

have studied for more than 6-8 years in Greek schools.

Finally, in relation to children with disabilities, there is **no equal access to healthcare services and in particular to specialised doctors for children with disabilities or developmental disorders**, for example children with autism. This issue is present especially in rural areas, but also in cities including Athens.<sup>4</sup>

The Smile of the Child was invited by the National Coordinator for the implementation of the European Child Guarantee to **participate in the preparation of the National Action Plan**. Other organisations such as the Child Health Institute, Municipal Social Welfare Departments, SOS Children's Villages, and Roots Research Centre, participated as well through a questionnaire. The Smile of the Child also organised an online direct exchange with the National Coordinator where

3 Law 4941 / 2022, Art. 104.

4 Hellenic Medical Students' International Committee - HeIMSIC, [Access to Health Care | People with Disabilities](#), 2021.

additional recommendations and proposed actions were discussed and subsequently submitted. Upon the release of the NAP, The Smile of the Child was informed and received thanks for their contribution.

**‘Clearly, our participation is an example of good practice; however we believe that a more substantial dialogue and communication with the National Coordinator in terms of planning and targeting would have been more effective’.**

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

Investment in children has been and remains a priority for national funding through various schemes and initiatives. The [Partnership Agreement 2021-2027](#) (total budget 26.2 billion for 7 years) with 7 Sectoral Programmes (ex. Human Resources and Social Cohesion), 13 Regional Programmes, and Territorial Cooperation Programmes was adopted in July 2022 and many intended actions affect children directly or indirectly. Indicatively, **30% of the total funds will be dedicated to the priority of a more social Greece**. Similarly, 8% of European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) funds will be allocated to tackling child poverty.<sup>5</sup>

Civil society has been involved in the programming of EU Funds. The Managing Authority of

European Territorial Cooperation Programmes in Greece invites civil society organisations to open consultations through meetings and questionnaires for their participation in the elaboration of the new Programmatic Period Guide. Additionally, the Secretary General for Social Solidarity and Fight Against Poverty of the Hellenic Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs invited civil society organisations to a public consultation for the elaboration of the Programme *Roma Inclusion and Empowerment* and the National Strategy and Action Plan for the Social Inclusion of Roma 2021-2030. The Smile of the Child participated in all three consultations.

### Projects funded by the EU in Greece

The Smile of the Child has been implementing EU funded projects in Greece for more than ten years. Currently, the organisation is

working on 16 active projects in either a coordinator or partner capacity.

Among these projects, the following are worth mentioning in this report:

- ***Integrated Territorial Synergies for Children Health and Protection II*** (2017 – 2023), European Territorial Cooperation Programme ‘Interreg V-A Greece –Bulgaria’ 2014-2020: This project aims at protecting and improving the quality of life of children in the cross-border area. More than 6,500 children in Greece and Bulgaria received medical examinations through this project that includes the offer of training seminars for professionals, among other things. In order to contribute to the treatment of the Covid-19 pandemic, the project was extended to implement a series of actions including voluntary

<sup>5</sup> Kennedy A., *Child Guarantee National Action Plans – Targets, EU funding and governance*, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, 2022.

blood donations, provision of psychological and social support to children and families affected by the Covid-19 crisis, purchase of medical equipment with the purpose of strengthening National Health Systems at the cross-border level, training for school psychologists and educators, informative campaign, etc.

- **Homes for children in danger IV** (2022 – 2023): Funded under the Sectoral Development Program of the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum (National Development Program - NDP), this project aims at providing an **adequate framework for the protection and care of unaccompanied minors** and their preparation to reach autonomy. The project also finances the running costs of two existing homes for children at risk in Northern Greece with a special focus on unaccompanied refugee children and victims of abuse and neglect, irrespective of their nationality.

### Priorities for EU funding in Greece

The Smile of the Child recommends investment to prioritise:

- child poverty and social inclusion, with a special focus on children with disabilities and children in precarious family situations;
- support to education and extracurricular activities;
- healthcare for children.



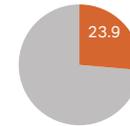
## “ Country recommendation

Ireland should take action to establish a dedicated and fully resourced Child Poverty Office which would oversee the implementation of a cross-government child poverty strategy with national goals and objectives.

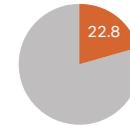
Country Profile 2022



# Ireland



**Child Population:**  
**1.19 million**  
(23.9% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**22.8% (2021) ▼\***

\* [lower compared to pre-covid rates in 2019](#)

**RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):**  
[Children's Rights Alliance](#)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report: identification of the children in need

This year's *European Semester Country Report for Ireland* outlines the following priorities that should be the target of national policymakers in relation to children: early childhood development, education, children impacted by the pandemic, and the exacerbated inequalities they face. However, there is a dearth of focus on children in the country report prior to Annex 12 and 13.

In Annex 12, the report highlights the high cost of early childhood education and care (ECEC), albeit in the context of labour market participation and gender equality, and supporting those with disabilities and lone parents

into employment. However, Annex 13 makes a more holistic point regarding the key reform actions underway to improve the level of quality and affordability of early years' services. This includes publication of the *Childminding Action Plan*, a report on the sector's funding model, *Partnership for the Public Good: A New Funding Model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare*, and the package of measures announced in Ireland's national annual Budgets in 2022 and 2023 to improve pay, quality, and reduce costs to parents.

In the case of the 2023 Budget, released in September, the Irish government reached the goal of investing **€ 1 billion in early childhood education and care** five years ahead of schedule. This is the single biggest investment in childcare. Over the past 12 months, the government's Department of Children, Equality,

Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) has undertaken significant work to reach this milestone.

In Annex 12, the report notes the **fall in child poverty over the last decade** and refers to data related to 2020. Since then, the 2021 data has been published. This latest data shows a reduction in the rates of child poverty between 2020 and 2021.<sup>1</sup> However, the Irish Central Statistics Office highlights that without COVID-19 income support, poverty rates in Ireland would have been much higher. For instance, while the at-risk-of-poverty rate for the entire population was 13.2% in 2021, without the COVID-19 income support this would have risen to 19.9%.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the COVID-19 income support had the greatest impact on those in younger age cohorts. The poverty risk for the 0-17 age group was reduced from

24.2% to 13.6%, a reduction of almost 11 percentage points. The data collection for the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2021 was carried out prior to the onset of sustained increases in the cost of living. According to the Central Statistics Office, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 8.7% in the 12 months between August 2021 and 2022.<sup>3</sup>

### Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

**The recommendations included in the country report do not sufficiently address the needs of children.** The *Country Specific Recommendations for Ireland* include no reference to children or actions that would have a direct impact on the fulfilment of children's rights. Instead, they focus on economic issues, particularly as they relate to the invasion in Ukraine, the need to

1 For further analysis on the issue of child poverty in Ireland see Children's Rights Alliance Child Poverty Monitor (CRA 2022).

2 Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2021* (CSO 2022).

3 Central Statistics Office, *Consumer Price Index August 2022* (CSO September 2022).

reduce Ireland's reliance on fossil fuels, and boosting the circular economy.

This omission is all the starker as Ireland is facing a **huge challenge in providing housing and accommodation for children at risk of poverty**, as noted in Annex 12 of the country report. Low-income families with children have been particularly impacted by a contracted housing market with the numbers living in emergency accommodation increasing month-on-month. Furthermore, the options to exit such accommodation are also increasingly limited, with few properties available to rent within the set limits of government support, such as the Rent Supplement, and the Housing Assistance Payment.<sup>4</sup>

In the latest edition of the Children's Rights Alliance Report

Card – an annual publication grading 16 programmes for the government's commitments focused on children and young people – **family homelessness was graded with an E**.<sup>5</sup> With the Irish government failing to meet social housing targets, there is an **urgent need to prioritise reform that is both sustainable and focused on long term change**, but unfortunately this year's Country Specific Recommendations have missed the opportunity to push for that.

European Social Fund Plus funding should prioritise the implementation of Ireland's commitments under the European Child Guarantee. To achieve this goal, the Irish government should **establish a fully resourced Child Poverty Office** to oversee a cross-government child poverty strategy.

## Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

### Child poverty in Ireland

Ireland has a total child population of 1.19 million, 22.8% of which live at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021. This is a decrease from 2020, where the rate of children at risk was 23.5%.

The annual poverty statistics captured by the Survey on Income and Living Conditions provides important data across three sub-categories – at risk of poverty, households experiencing deprivation, and consistent poverty.

Children are the second highest demographic group in Ireland at risk of poverty, with a poverty rate of 13.6% – higher than the rate among the general population

(11.6%).<sup>6</sup> Single parent households with children have a higher rate, 22.8%, versus those in two-adult households 9.1%.

A shortcoming of the SILC is that it collects data at a household level and therefore does not contain data on groups such as the Traveller community or those living in Direct Provision.<sup>7</sup> Research from the EU Fundamental Rights Agency found that in **2018, 38% of Traveller and Roma families experienced difficulties in making ends meet**. These are among the most marginalised groups in Irish society and need specific and targeted actions to address their needs.

<sup>4</sup> Simon Communities of Ireland, Locked Out of the Market.

<sup>5</sup> Children's Rights Alliance, Report Card 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Direct Provision is the name for Ireland's system of provision of accommodation, food, money, and medical services for people applying for international protection and asylum.

To effectively reduce child poverty and social exclusion in Ireland, the Government should:

- **Ensure access to an adequate income.** This includes setting weekly social welfare payments at a rate that enables families with children to meet a minimum essential standard of living. A payment at a rate equivalent to the universal child benefit payment must be introduced to support families living in Direct Provision.
- **Introduce a new funding stream for early years, which targets disadvantaged children and their families** to break the cycle of poverty and ensure all children have the best start in life.
- **Prioritise the building of social housing** and meet the target of building an average of 10,000 homes each year as outlined in the government's strategy document Housing for All.

## European Child Guarantee

### Ireland National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level. These Action Plans should outline the children most in need, the planned and existing policy actions, the measures to support them, and a monitoring, and evaluation framework. The Plans should also have been drafted in consultation with children, civil society, and national authorities. The [National Action Plan of Ireland was published in June 2022.](#)

In January 2022, Eurochild and Children's Rights Alliance published a [country report for Ireland](#) that included

recommendations for the Irish government to consider when drafting its action plan. Together, we recommended that:

- The National Coordinator of the European Child Guarantee should be a central component of a fully resourced Child Poverty Office established jointly between the DCEDIY and the Department of Social Protection.
- The DCEDIY should draw on the resources of its Participation Unit and the guidance of its [National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making](#) to ensure that a **meaningful consultation involving children and young people takes place** during the implementation and monitoring of the NAP.

## Overview of the NAP

The Irish National Action Plan on the European Child Guarantee was developed by the Irish National Coordinator for the EU Child Guarantee, responsibility for which lies with a recently established EU and International Unit in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.<sup>8</sup>

It restates the current services, programmes, and support in place across relevant government departments within the scope of the Guarantee. In addition, the **plan proposes to leverage the relationship between Local Community Development Committees** and Children and Young People's Services Committees to develop Local Area Child Poverty Plans.<sup>9</sup> The Children's Rights Alliance welcomes this proposal. A pilot programme of four sites will

<sup>8</sup> Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O'Gorman, Dáil Debates, Written Answers, Child Poverty, 22 September 2021, [8736/8738/8739/22].

<sup>9</sup> EU Child Guarantee Ireland's National Action Plan, p.27.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

seek to ‘maximise learning and assess the feasibility of local area child poverty action plans being embedded in local co-ordinating structures’ planning frameworks’.<sup>10</sup>

A notable development in the Budget for 2023 was the announcement of the provision of free schoolbooks for children in primary school in September 2023, as part of the government’s commitment to provide educational materials.

### **Involvement in drafting**

The Children’s Rights Alliance prepared a [detailed contribution](#), which was submitted as part of the national consultation process to feed into the development of the NAP, held from December 2021 to mid-January 2022.<sup>11</sup> The call for submissions was the only

means by which stakeholders could influence the development of the plan.

Prior to the public consultation process, the government established the ‘Better Outcomes Brighter Futures National Advisory Council for Children and Young People’ and developed a comprehensive [paper on addressing child poverty](#). The government also engaged specifically with the Council, given their knowledge and expertise, on how the Guarantee could be implemented.<sup>12</sup>

The DCEDIY has a dedicated Participation Unit, which has **published a participation framework for engaging children and young people in decision-making**. There are best practice examples of participation with previous departmental strategies,

such as Ireland’s [LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020](#) that incorporated the ‘Lundy model of participation’.<sup>13</sup> However, it is not clear if children were involved in the drafting of Ireland’s NAP.

### **Does the NAP identify children in need?**

The NAP provides data and statistics relating to children most in need in Ireland. This includes identifying the proportion of children living in lone parent families, those engaged in caring duties and those who are members of the Traveller community. In addition, the NAP presents the key barriers to accessing services that families and children face.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

The NAP states that a new monitoring and evaluation

framework will be developed to meet the needs of the implementation of both the EU Child Guarantee and the new policy framework being developed for children and young people. Support from both the European Commission’s Directorate General for Structural Reform Support and the OECD will be leveraged to support with this task.

## **EU Funding**

### **Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds**

There are a variety of European funds available in Ireland for actions that invest in children. At national level, information about funds can be found through the initiative [Access Europe](#) and on the website of [Leargas](#) – the national agency for Erasmus+.

<sup>11</sup> Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman, Dáil Debates, Written Answers, Child Poverty, 22 September 2021, [8736/8738/8739/22].

<sup>12</sup> Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman, Dáil Debates, ‘Ombudsman for Children’s Initiative on Eliminating Child Poverty and Child Homelessness: Statements’, 23 September 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth *National Framework for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making* (DCEDIY 2020). Accessed 25 May 2021.

## Projects funded by the EU in Ireland

The Children's Rights Alliance has launched a new project called [Building Children's Futures](#). This project will examine the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on activities and services for children and young people through consultations with groups that were disproportionately impacted. It is funded by the EU's Citizens, Equality, Rights, and Values (CERV) programme.

The project will explore **how Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) can mainstream a children's rights approach**, including during times of emergency, into decision-making throughout Europe.

## Priorities for EU funding in Ireland

On 28 January 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement that compels Member States with a level of child poverty above the EU average (23.4% - AROPE between the years 2017–2019) to allocate 5% of ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty.<sup>14</sup> Ireland is one of the countries bound by this agreement, despite current level of child poverty being just below the EU average. For this programming period 2021-2027, 12% of ESF+ funds is expected to be allocated to tackling child poverty.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, **the Irish Government should prioritise investment to achieve the successful implementation of the European Child Guarantee.**



<sup>14</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013.

<sup>15</sup> Kennedy A., *Child Guarantee National Action Plans – Targets, EU funding and governance*, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, 2022.

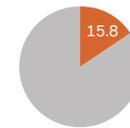
## “ Country recommendation

Italy should take action to enhance the current situation of children, especially regarding educational and digital poverty and children's right to be heard. This demand is highlighted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019).

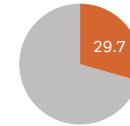
## Country Profile 2022



# Italy



**Child Population:**  
**9.35 million**  
(15.8% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**29.7% (2021) ▲\***

\* higher compared to pre-covid rates in 2019

### RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

Laboratorio di sostenibilità socio-educativa of Milano Bicocca University, 'Riccardo Massa' Department of Human Sciences for Education, University of Milano-Bicocca

Fondazione S.O.S – il Telefono Azzurro Onlus

Fondazione L'Albero della Vita

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report: identification of the children in need

This year's *European Semester Country Report for Italy* clearly refers to the situation of children living in poverty and social exclusion, acknowledging Italy has one of the highest rates in the EU. In this light, the country report summarises the introduction of a universal child allowance, designed to improve this situation.

However, the **areas covered in the country report were not representative enough of the reality on the ground**. Children are not have a particular focus and are mentioned superficially within the context of different topics. Fondazione L'Albero della Vita (FADV), Fondazione S.O.S - il Telefono Azzurro Onlus and Laboratorio di sostenibilità socio-educativa of Milano Bicocca University **call for a more comprehensive approach**

**to meet the needs of children**, along with a dedicated set of measures that accounts for them as active rights holders and direct beneficiaries.

Eurochild members felt **education was very well represented**, along with early childhood education and care (ECEC). In fact, the country report mainly focuses on the fight against early school drop-out, the gender gap, and improving educational infrastructures. Education is one of the key deliverables expected under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) in 2022/2023. The plan calls for comprehensive reforms and substantial investments to **strengthen education and improve primary and secondary educational outcomes**.

According to the country report, Italy has **one of the lowest rates of children under 3-years-old in formal childcare**. And while the report does include **early childhood development and education**, this area is not framed from a child protection or

care service lens. In addition to the shortage of places, the **key challenge is to reduce regional disparities** for early childhood education and care through to higher education. Furthermore, **a child-centred focus is needed** since welfare policy for very young children is often focused on families instead of the child.

Eurochild members were pleased to see the inclusion of **children impacted by the pandemic in the report**. Italian primary and secondary education systems, already affected by structural problems, have been worsened by the pandemic. As a consequence, the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) has increased, further exacerbating social inequalities.

However, a crucial missing point of the country report is the impact of the pandemic on **children's mental health**, an aspect of children's lives that must be prioritised at national level. In 2021, Telefono Azzurro's Helpline handled 3,573 cases, 32.5% of these calls were coming from

children and adolescents reaching out for mental health-related reasons.

According to Eurochild members, the country report failed to mention several groups of vulnerable children. Refugee children are missing from the report, as well as a lack of special focus on **migrant children**, responding to their specific needs.

**Deinstitutionalisation and child protection systems for children separated from their families** are key for child wellbeing and, therefore, should have been included in the report. Moreover, there is no reference to a child's right to be heard, recognised in the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child*. **Children should actively participate in decision-making processes**, and more so when the decisions affect them. Italy does not have an all-encompassing legislative measure establishing the right of the child to be heard and mechanisms to ensure such participation in

the family environment and in any administrative, judicial or mediation procedure in which the child is involved.

Finally, despite a focus on the digital transition and on digitalisation processes, the report lacks attention to **children's rights in the digital environment**. Actions aligning with the latest European strategies on the subject, including awareness raising for the European Commission's *Better Internet for Kids Strategy* is much needed. Telefono Azzurro – in its *Manifesto for Childhood and Adolescence* – argues that children's identity and dignity should be guaranteed both online and offline, that they should be protected in any environment, and that adequate and effective age verification systems should be offered.

## Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

The *Country Specific Recommendations for Italy* correspond to the major reform needs of the country. However, **children are invisible in these recommendations**. While these structural reforms will benefit children, Eurochild members stress the importance of European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) funding in education because of its spillover effects and connection with other points. Point 21 of the Recommendations<sup>1</sup> states that planned reforms and investments in education, skills development, and research sectors have the potential to enhance human capital. **Because educational poverty is an unresolved issue in the country, Eurochild members call for the prioritisation of funding in this key area.**

## Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

### Child poverty in Italy

Italy has a total child population of 9.35 million, 29.7% of which lived at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021. Behind this number, one can identify specific groups of children, namely minors in a situation of severe housing hardship, minors with a migrant background or non-accompanied ones, children with mental health problems, children in alternative care, minors belonging to national minorities, and victims of sexual abuse.

The services these children need are most notably education, social and health care, and child friendly justice. To end child poverty, the Italian government must start investing in these areas to ensure no child is left behind. More concretely, three priority actions

need to be taken in order to tackle child poverty in Italy:

1. Expand childcare subsidies.
2. Create a Universal Child Allowance.
3. Increase migrants' access to safety net programmes, such as social assistance.

Two **good examples of interventions that can contribute to the mitigation of child poverty rates** are the *Cittadinanza Digitale: più consapevoli, più sicuri, più liberi project* and the *Varcare la Soglia – Crossing the Threshold project*.

The *Cittadinanza Digitale: più consapevoli, più sicuri, più liberi* project was implemented by Telefono Azzurro with the support of Google.org. It aimed to support the acquisition of digital skills, tools, and a deeper understanding of the dynamics that children experience in a virtual dimension. It consisted of training with digital tools (webinars, events, publications, summer schools,

<sup>1</sup> European Commission, *Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the 2022 National Reform programme of Italy and delivering a Council opinion on the 2022 Stability Programme for Italy*,

learning kits for schools, etc.) for teachers at all levels of education. It also aimed to raise students' awareness of these issues, with a view of pursuing the wellbeing of every child and adolescent, and their right to grow up in a safe digital environment.

The second example is the project [Varcare la Soglia – Crossing the Threshold](#) by FADV, which consisted on personalised interventions with the active participation of the family unit, bringing a focus on three levels: the adult in his or her individuality, the child, and the relationship between adult and children. Through the support of practitioners, families identify their primary needs by setting clear, shared, and achievable goals. It started as an experimental programme in Milan and Palermo, but it has now been transformed into a national programme.

## European Child Guarantee

### Italy National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022. These Action Plans should outline the children most in need, the planned and existing policy actions, and measures to support them and a monitoring and evaluation framework. The plans should also be drafted in consultation with children, civil society, and national authorities.

The [National Action Plan of Italy](#) was published on 12 April 2022. According to Fondazione L'Albero della Vita, only large NGOs or international organisations were

consulted. As medium/small sized NGOs, Eurochild members struggled to influence, or even find information about, the drafting process of the NAP. The Italian government should have ensured more transparency on the process of stakeholder engagement.

**23 children, aged between 14 and 21 years-old, were involved in the drafting of the NAP** through a pilot project carried out by UNICEF. An effort was made to ensure that the **children involved represented different target groups** as outlined in the Child Guarantee Recommendation, also in terms of gender and geographical representation. This included providing insights on social exclusion, nutrition, health, education, housing, early childhood education, care, and participation. According to FADV, Telefono Azzurro, and Laboratorio di sostenibilità socio-educativa, there

is a need for a child monitoring and implementation system at regional and local level through direct permanent mechanisms (consultation groups) and indirect mechanisms (periodic surveys).

The NAP rightfully identifies the children in need in the country. In fact, members highlighted the inclusion of **children fleeing Ukraine** and **children in homelessness** or in a situation of severe housing hardship. Moreover, they would like to echo the proposal of the Youth Advisory Board<sup>2</sup>, involved during the consultations in the drafting phase, to give proper attention towards **mental health** problems.<sup>3</sup> In terms of scope, members welcomed the inclusion of **children's rights in the digital environment** and child sexual abuse, both online and offline.

Overall, the plan is coherent with Italian policies in terms of

<sup>2</sup> The Youth Advisory Board is a participatory body – composed of 23 boys and girls aged 14-21 from all over Italy – that is supported by UNICEF and participated in the drafting of the NAP. It will remain active for the duration of the Child Guarantee (2021-2030) and will be integrated in the permanent mechanism for child and adolescent participation as planned in the National Guidelines for Child and Adolescent Participation.

<sup>3</sup> Government of Italy, [National Action Plan for the implementation of the Child Guarantee](#) (NAP), 2022, 18.

childhood and covers all the five priorities identified by the Council Recommendation, namely actions in ECEC, education, health, nutrition, and housing.

However, it has some **gaps concerning the information collection and systematic reporting**, failing to provide an enabling policy framework to create a 'whole government approach'. Moreover, there has been a **lack of dissemination** among the wider public. Eurochild members expressed some concerns regarding the implementation and monitoring of the NAP, especially related to the complexity of funding involved (both national and EU funds). The monitoring phase of the Child Guarantee should be transparent and include civil society, i.e. local steering committees.

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

There are a variety of European funds available in Italy for

actions that invest in children. Members are sufficiently aware of EU funding that can be used at national, regional, and local levels to invest in children. Accessibility to such funds depends on the policy area. For instance, accessing youth funds is more difficult. Fondazione L'Albero della Vita has a unit that monitors funding opportunities at local, national, and European level. According to their experience, ESF+ and the European Regional Development Fund Plus (ERDF+) are more difficult to access for NGOs, while the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) is a recurrent source of funding for them. The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) are less commonly used by small/medium NGOs.

### Projects funded by the EU in Italy

Telefono Azzurro was involved in a project called CARE - Leaving with Care, Living with Care. The project addresses the potential for child

victims of violence to experience a second trauma during the process of investigation, removal, and out-of-home placement. CARE aims to raise awareness regarding the trauma that children may experience during these processes and what first responders (social workers, law enforcement, officials, doctors, and caregivers) can do to reduce the stress levels associated with these processes.

In recent years, FADV has been receiving EU funds (Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, AMIF, Erasmus) to boost foster care for unaccompanied migrant children through the project FORUM (in partnership with Eurochild). This project also promotes efficient and sustainable services as an alternative to the reception centres.

### Priorities for EU funding in Italy

Italy is one of the countries bound by the agreement reached in January 2021 that compels Member States with a

level of child poverty above the EU average to allocate 5% of ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty. This commitment has been reflected in the Partnership Agreement for 2021-21, with an expected 5% allocation of ESF+ funds to tackling child poverty.<sup>4</sup>

According to FADV, Telefono Azzurro, and Laboratorio di sostenibilità socio-educativa, to ensure these funds reach the most vulnerable children, the Italian government should prioritise investments on:

- building an integrated system to implement and monitor children's rights (child participation, safeguarding policies);
- education and care, with a particular reference to the digital transition and the correct use of the internet;
- mental health, which has been put at stake due to, among others, the impact of Covid-19, and the war in Ukraine.

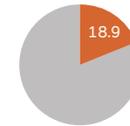
## “Country recommendation

Latvia should take action to prevent and fight poverty and social exclusion by guaranteeing access for children in need to key services.

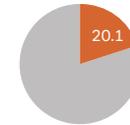
## Country Profile 2022



# Latvia



**Child Population:**  
**358,534**  
(18.9% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**20.1% (2021) ▲\***

\* higher compared to pre-covid rates in 2019

## RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

*Association Latvian Child Welfare Network (LCWN)*

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report: identification of the children in need

The *European Semester Country Report for Latvia* includes goals to improve access to education for all children, including a focus on early childhood education and care (ECEC). However, according to Eurochild's member, the Association Latvian Child Welfare Network (LCWN), what is also needed is a **policy on early childhood development planning**, and guidance on the need for such planning or the targets for support. There is also a narrow focus on education, as the country report does not include targets to promote inclusive education and the availability of special education programs in mainstream schools, to end the practice of residential schools, and to reduce the widespread problem of bullying in schools.

The areas covered in the country report do **not represent the reality for children on the ground** and the required investments needed in Latvia. Children are mentioned in the context of family support services, not as individuals in their own right, within society, with defined needs. The report does not include families with children (especially single-parent families), families with children with disabilities, young people after leaving alternative care, families with children at social risk, and children in homelessness among the groups at social risk.

The country report does not address the issue of promoting access to support professionals for children in alternative care. Despite the fact that the deinstitutionalisation process in Latvia has led to a reduction in the number of institutionalised children, the **quality and stability of the care solution provided needs to be assessed and improved** across the national alternative care system. Improving

the quality and accessibility to social work for families at risk should be one of the priority tasks of the Latvian government to reduce the number of children in alternative care.

There is **no mention of national plans to promote children's participation**, educate those involved in children's participation, or improve the legal framework for promoting children's participation. In addition, the issue of children with a migration background is not being raised in Latvia. Such lack of focus on the needs of children is a concern for LCWN.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on children's mental health as well as on their education. In both of these areas, targeted government-led solutions are needed now and in the future, including the need for the government to plan **support measures for children who have fallen behind in the education process during distance learning** as a result of the pandemic. The report does not mention the situation of or the country's plans

for children's mental health and wellbeing. In Latvia, pandemic restrictions aggravated problems with early diagnosis and access to specialist and support services for children's mental health, as well as children's addictions to processes and substances.

The report does not give the necessary attention to children's rights in the digital environment, including protecting children from age-inappropriate content on the internet.

The involvement of civil society is also absent in Latvia's country report. In Latvia, there is a **lack of public awareness of international children's rights**, the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, and opportunities to participate in societal processes. Awareness and public support for children's participation need to be raised.

Finally, there are no references to children from Ukraine, who have special protection status in Latvia. It is particularly worrying that the report does not mention

the government's planned solutions to provide support measures for Ukrainian children in the education process, given that in Latvia, these children can only receive education in Latvian. There needs to be a stronger focus on the country's problems and planned solutions for improving the child protection system to **ensure inter-sectoral and child-centred cooperation**. Therefore, a dedicated institution overseeing and monitoring the situation of children in the country is needed.

### Needs analysis: Alignment at country-level

While the *Country Specific Recommendations for Latvia* are welcomed, they need to sufficiently reflect the needs of children in Latvia. Such recommendations will not meet the national reform requirements.

LCWN stresses that European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)

funding should prioritise Recommendation 2, 'Proceed with the implementation of its recovery and resilience plan, in line with the milestones and targets included in the Council Implementing Decision of 13 July 2021. Submit the 2021-2027 cohesion policy programming documents with a view to finalising their negotiations with the Commission and subsequently starting their implementation'.<sup>1</sup>

### Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

#### Child poverty in Latvia

Latvia has a total child population of 358,534, 20.1% of which live at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021. According to LCWN, the children most in need in Latvia are children from poor and low-income families, children in single-parent families, children in homelessness, children after and in alternative

care, children with special needs, children with addiction and behavioural problems, Roma children, and children of parents with mental disabilities.

Given that these groups have a very wide range of service needs, the Association Latvian Child Welfare Network outlines both the specific services, principles, and approaches on which these services should be based:

- prevention-oriented activities and services;
- community-based services based on individual needs;
- inter-institutional and inter-sectoral integrated approach;
- sufficient public funding for service development and provision;
- training of professionals involved in service delivery;
- access to rehabilitation services;
- availability of support persons for children and families in different life situations.

Therefore, LCWN calls on the government of Latvia to prioritise three policies:

- prevention as a policy approach;
- child-centred and inclusive education;
- ensuring access to health services.

The *Emergency Response project* assisting refugees from Ukraine with a focus on families with children is a good example of interventions that can contribute to the **mitigation of child poverty and respond to the needs of children**. Launched by SOS Children's Villages Latvia in April 2022, the project has a sustainable budget from SOS Children's Villages International and is initially planned until March 2023, with a possibility of extension.

The project's aims to target 750 beneficiaries. As of 31 September 2022, 380 children were participating in the programme.

<sup>1</sup> *European Semester Recommendations for Latvia*, 2022, p.11.

Children and their parents are receiving mental health and material support.

## European Child Guarantee

### Latvia National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) outlining how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022. However, some countries had not published their NAP when Eurochild members provided input. This is the case of Latvia.

The Association Latvian Child Welfare Network has not been involved in the drafting of the NAP, and at the time of providing information for this report, they are not aware of any stakeholder involvement. There is **concern that children have not been**

**involved in drafting of the NAP** and that the government has no clear vision of how to implement it. However, LCWN would welcome the opportunity to support the National Coordinator, both in the strategic planning and implementation of the NAP, and in supporting meaningful child participation activities to gather children's views.

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

A variety of European funds are available in Latvia for actions that invest in children. However, the Association Latvian Child Welfare Network has not previously been aware of these funding opportunities to invest in children or been involved in EU-funded projects in Latvia.

As Latvia has not adopted a medium-term planning

document on children in 5 years, the allocation of funds is not strategically planned and therefore will not improve the situation of children in Latvia.

### Priorities for EU funding in Latvia

On 28 January 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement that compels Member States with a level of child poverty above the EU average (23.4% - AROPE 2017 – 2019) to allocate 5% of ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty.<sup>2</sup> The rest of Member States, such as Latvia, should allocate an 'appropriate' amount of their ESF+ resources to combat child poverty.

LCWN believes that EU funds would have the most significant impact on children in Latvia in three key areas:

- Appropriate resources for **inclusive education** to ensure enough qualified teachers and support staff, a suitable and safe environment, infrastructure, methodology, and teaching materials.
- Effective access to **adequate housing** for families with children at risk of poverty, and children and young people leaving alternative care.
- Access to **mental health services** for children, especially in rural areas.



<sup>2</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013.

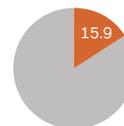
## “ Country recommendation

Malta should take action to prioritise children rights starting from the early years.

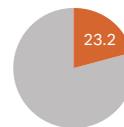
## Country Profile 2022



# Malta



**Child Population:**  
**82.130**  
(15.9% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**23.2% (2021)** ▼\*

\* [lower compared to pre-covid rates in 2019](#)

### RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

[The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society \(MFWS\)](#)

[Early Childhood Development Association of Malta \(ECDAM\)](#)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report: identification of the children in need

The [European Semester Country Report for Malta](#) mentions ‘children’ a total of 11 times. However, these mentions are brief and do not really infer a prioritisation of children. Additionally, the report does not clearly identify the main vulnerable groups of children in Malta for national policymakers’ attention.

The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society (MFWS) and the Early Childhood Development Association of Malta (ECDAM) identified one positive comment, namely that ‘Malta would benefit from ensuring adequate and effective social protection for disadvantaged groups and

fostering social inclusion of children’.<sup>1</sup> However, there are no comments in regards to recommendations focusing on investing in children.

Although, child poverty and social exclusion are referenced directly, this statement alone lacks depth and clarity. **There is no common understanding as to who the children from disadvantaged groups are and what kind of vulnerable situations they are experiencing.**

Vulnerable children include, but are not limited to those in their early years, unaccompanied children asylum seekers, migrant children, children with disabilities, children in poverty, children in out-of-home care, and intersex children. All of them require access to key services and have specific needs that must be met, otherwise the risk of negatively impacting their wellbeing, learning and, development becomes severe.

A stronger and sharper focus on the objectives of the European Child Guarantee is merited, namely to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and foster equal opportunities for children in need.

The Covid-19 pandemic is given a lot of importance in the report. However, the impact of the pandemic on children is only referred to in regard to childcare attendance.

Investment is mentioned throughout in relation to the economy, but never as an investment in children. The report does not include any reference to children’s mental health and wellbeing, or to children’s rights.

### Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

The recommendations included in the country report do not address sufficiently the needs on the

ground. In the [Country Specific Recommendations for Malta](#), the European Commission does not fully respond to the country’s needs due to the fact that children are not even mentioned, implying that the **rights of children are not seen as a priority.**

## Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

### Child poverty in Malta

Malta has a total [child population of 82,130, 23.2% of which lived at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021.](#)

According to the National Statistics Office of Malta, the total number of dependent children in private households increased by 4%, from 92,475 in 2015 to 96,394 in 2019.<sup>2</sup> The average number of dependent children per household remained stable from 2015 onwards.<sup>3</sup>

1 [European Country Report for Malta](#), p. 16.

2 National Statistics Office Malta, [press release](#), 14 May 2021.

3 National Statistics Office Malta, [National Statistical Officer Report](#), table 5, p. 7.

All children have the right to high quality education and care from birth. However, the strengthening and development of this key service doesn't seem like a priority in Malta.

The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society and the Early Childhood Development Association of Malta are calling for **high quality early childhood education and care to be a policy priority**. This should include counselling and support for expectant parents and all adults who are entrusted with the education and care of children in their first 7 years of life.

### **Child participation and democratic engagement in Malta**

The MFWS contributed to lifting children out of poverty and social exclusion through the introduction of the [Child Participation Assessment Tool \(CPAT\)](#) in Malta. This tool, developed with the Council of Europe, offers a method

to enable the implementation of children's right to participate.<sup>4</sup>

The CPAT process found that Malta needs to create more awareness and **move from a top-down approach to one that includes children from the get-go**. The CPAT revealed two opposing yet complimentary elements in Malta. On one hand, there is a lack of infrastructure to promote child participation and on the other hand the passion, willingness, and goodwill of the people working directly or indirectly with children are worth of mention.

Through working with CPAT, the MFWS found that despite a number of initiatives at local level focused on children – in collaboration with schools, NGOs and the Church –, the vast majority did not involve children's participation in the organisation and planning of these activities.

Despite these challenges, children in Malta and Gozo remained optimistic, noting that the work of the MFSW, using the CPAT, is an opportunity for both adults and children to learn from each other, given the right support, tools, and training.

Despite the positive results achieved in terms of legislation, **child participation is still often overlooked and fragmented at national level**, and there is still room for improvement in terms of children's democratic engagement.

In 2020, the MFWS supported children's contribution to a European Commission's Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST) study coordinated by the Eurochild Secretariat, to transmit voices of children coming from diverse and/or vulnerable backgrounds.

The DG JUST study focusing on [child participation in political and](#)

[democratic life](#) sampled a total of 28 children of 12 different nationalities residing in Malta and Gozo, girls and boys. The study was carried out throughout the month of September 2020, during which three separate physical semi-structured focus groups were conducted with diverse cohorts of children, including migrant children living in an open centre, children in a juvenile corrective facility, and children living in an out-of-home care setting.

The DG JUST study highlighted the need to identify the diversity of children within minorities and vulnerable groups. The study also revealed the importance of creating a sense of purpose, identity, and wellbeing in the lives of these children, building on the remains of these children's dreams and aspirations.

Other initiatives such as the MaltaCAN network were established to promote, foster, and support children's rights and

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<sup>4</sup> To learn more, visit the website for the [Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool](#).

child participatory mechanisms in Malta. This network aligns its work to the [UN Convention for the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#).

The MaltaCAN network seeks to raise awareness, and influence policy by creating working groups tasked to react and/or promote topics and issues related to children's rights and child participation, all the while making sure that the fundamental pillar of the network remains the respect of children's voices. Adopting a child-based approach, the network prioritises child participation, and its implementation at a local level, through an integrative and collaborative approach. Projects by the Malta Trust Foundation, the sister organisation of MFWS, also founded and chaired by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca include *Your device Your Right*, *Blossom*, *Adopt a Family* and *Y-assist*. Such initiatives demonstrate the impact of organisations working with children in Malta.

## Children's Rights Observatory Malta

The Children's Rights Observatory Malta (CROM) is a joint initiative between the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society and the University of Malta. It was launched in June 2021 and it focuses on bringing together organisations and professionals working with and for children.

It emerged from the needs identified through various processes with children, including those featured above. Even though Malta signed the UNCRC over 30 years ago, this was never transposed into Maltese national legislation.

## European Child Guarantee

### Malta National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child

Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022. The [National Action Plan for Malta](#) was published in May 2022.

In January 2022, [Eurochild published recommendations](#) for all Members States to consider when drafting their National Action Plans (NAPs). These plans should outline the children most in need, the planned and existing policy actions, and measures to support them and a monitoring and evaluation framework. The plans should also be drafted in consultation with children, civil society, and national authorities.

The [Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society leads the Malta Children's Association Network](#) (MaltaCAN), an umbrella organisation consisting of 16 organisations working with and for children. None of the members of MaltaCAN was involved in the drafting of the NAP.

To counteract the fact that no organisation from MaltaCAN was consulted, the MFWS is

planning to publish a report in December 2022 that will include the feedback of the MaltaCAN network as a response, as a challenge, and in support of the NAP.

The NAP states that a focus group was organised with children. However, the MFWS, the Early Childhood Development Association of Malta and the other 14 organisations within MaltaCAN were not informed, invited, or consulted at any point of the process.



## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

There are a variety of European funds available in Malta for actions that invest in children. The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society and the Early Childhood Development Association of Malta are aware of EU funding that can be used at national, regional, and local levels to invest in children.

However, they identified **three key challenges with EU funds:**

- Co-financing. It is usually impossible for NGOs to contribute 20%.
- Complex procedures, especially the application phase.
- Bureaucratic process, which disheartens NGOs from applying.

At the time of publication, MFWS has just launched a new project

funded by the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) focusing on one of main themes that emerged from the CPAT process namely 'The Voice of the Child'. This is underpinned by [Article 12 of the UNCRC](#), whereby 'the right of every child to freely express her or his views, in all matters affecting her or him, and the subsequent right for those views to be given due weight, according to the child's age and maturity'.

This project will develop and implement a country-wide initiative, which will see to the founding of Local Children's Councils, Regional Children's Councils, and a National Children's Council. The project will focus on children residing in both Malta and Gozo, aged 6-18 years old, as the project has been designed to engage children coming from different geographical areas, various socio-economic backgrounds,

and minority groups, including children with disabilities. Such participation ensures gender and age diversity. In addition, the project will target those working with and for children, this involves those in the education system, public services, and local entities such as Local Councils.

### Priorities for EU funding in Malta

On 28 January 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement that compels Member States with a level of child poverty above the EU average (23.4% - AROPE 2017-2019) to allocate 5% of European Social Fund Plus resources to tackle child poverty.<sup>5</sup> The other Member States, such as Malta, should allocate an 'appropriate' amount of their ESF+ resources to combat child poverty.

MFWS and ECDAM call on the government of Malta to prioritise:

- **Investment in high quality early childhood education and care (0-7 years).** High-quality early years programmes have very positive effects on various aspects of children's development, in the immediate and longer-term. The Education Act should be revised to include those aged 0 to 5 and acknowledge child carers and kindergarten educators as professionals. An early childhood education and care strategic action plan is needed to address, among other things, the professionalisation of the ECEC workforce and a rethinking of the formalised approach to education for children aged 7 and under.

This workforce should be upskilled, with a view to pay parity with teachers in primary education. ECEC in Malta needs a dedicated network or advisory group (including

<sup>5</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013.

all relevant stakeholders and sectors) to create a systemic approach rather than a programmatic one.

- **Investment in the realisation of children's rights in practice**, with a specific focus on affordable housing, environment, inclusion in cultural events, vulnerable school children, unaccompanied asylum seekers, and healthcare. In particular, there is a concrete need for services to eliminate waiting lists in healthcare once and for all, including for the Child Assessment Development Unit (CDAU) – where children are referred to various health related services including autism, global developmental difficulties, learning difficulties, ADHD, cerebral palsy, head injuries, Down syndrome and other syndromes.



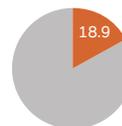
## “Country recommendation

The Netherlands should take action to integrate child's rights and specifically child's social rights in policy framework reported on in the country reports.

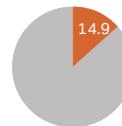
Country Profile 2022



# Netherlands



**Child Population:**  
**3.31 million**  
(18.9% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**14.9% (2021)** ▼\*

\* lower compared to pre-covid rates in 2019

**RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):**

Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the country report: identification of the children in need

This year's [European Semester Country Report for the Netherlands](#) briefly mentions the special vulnerability of children with a migrant background, children in early years, and children with mental health problems. However, the children most in need are not identified alongside specific measures.

Overall, **the country report fails to include a child rights-based approach** where the scope aligns to the situation of children. In the Netherlands, children's needs are often indirectly affected by general social and economic policy, without being specifically addressed nor mainstreamed with ad hoc measures. The country report identifies children with a migrant background, especially regarding education and the risk of poverty, but it fails to mention

access to healthcare, mental wellbeing, nutrition, or housing. Moreover, **the narrow focus excludes refugee children or unaccompanied minors.**

The impact of COVID-19 on children is only acknowledged regarding education, but not mental health or child wellbeing. Children's rights in the digital environment, children in alternative care, or children's right to be heard were not considered in the bi-annual Commission's assessment, leaving out many realities that drive child poverty in the Netherlands.

Eurochild member, the [Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights](#), sees the **inclusion of both education and early childhood education and care (ECEC)** as promising. In particular, the country report outlined **investments in children's participation and quality of early development** services to facilitate convergence with both the EU average and the EU level target for 2030. The focus on education is also welcomed, along with a clear

description of policies in place and investments to be made.

However, despite the country report identifying at-risk groups of children, it fails to give specific recommendations to address their needs, especially regarding child poverty and social exclusion. More specifically, the country report highlights the problem of the long waiting lists for mental healthcare services, but does not elaborate further on the need to invest in children's mental health and wellbeing beyond this.

### Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

The situation of children in the Netherlands is not addressed by the [Country Specific Recommendations](#) issued by the European Commission. These mostly encourage to further implement the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) and submit the 2021-2027 cohesion policy programming documents. When mentioned, **children's needs are only addressed in the context of family**, which ignores

children living outside of family settings. While the focus on the NRRP is welcomed and following what's agreed in the [Partnership Agreement](#) for this programming period, the Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights stresses that European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) funding should prioritise:

- **Investments in the active inclusion of vulnerable groups**, including people with a migrant background, and the provision of up- and re-skilling opportunities for workers at the margins of the labour market. This set of measures will receive the biggest portion of ESF+ funds allocated at this moment.
- **Food and material aid for households.** A budget of €15.8 million was announced from ESF+ for this purpose.
- **Guaranteed food supplies** for people who are temporarily dependent on it. €16 million have been allocated to this action.

These plans are not mentioned in the country specific recommendations. According

to official sources, they will contribute to the [3% of ESF+ that will be dedicated to child poverty in this programming period](#).

## Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

### Child poverty in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has a total [child population of 3.31 million, 14.9% of which lived at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021](#).

Behind this number, the Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights has identified specific groups of children, namely **children with a migrant background or ethnic origins, from single parent families, and children with disabilities**.

The most pressing services these children need are accessible and high quality early childhood

education and care (ECEC) and inclusive education. ECEC provision has several benefits for children living in poverty. Firstly, accessible childcare helps parents combine paid work with their parenting responsibilities. Secondly, ECEC and other policies addressing educational disadvantage enhance children's development. Furthermore, tackling disadvantage at an early stage ensures children have sufficient opportunities. Finally, ECEC can help with identification and referral in the event of problems, as it helps families in poverty obtain appropriate help at an early stage.

In the Netherlands, it is unclear whether children in need have access to ECEC. This is because municipalities decide the access criteria and the groups needing special support. In general, the main indicator used is the parents'

education level. More data and comprehensive monitoring at national level is needed to ensure all children in need get access to basic services, including early childcare.

The focus on family settings when addressing children's needs creates gap in protection particularly for three groups of children: children who have (almost) no contact with their parents, children whose parents are in a situation where facilities are missing, and children of parents who do not invest social benefits in their children.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, **good practices are difficult to identify due to the decentralised nature of the State**. Nevertheless, the Dutch Coalition on Children's Rights welcomes the recent developments around accessible and affordable childcare. As of January 2025, the government

will pay 95% of childcare costs for working parents, regardless of their income, except for parents in the lowest income group who receive back 96% of childcare costs. This will make **childcare more affordable and accessible** to all children.

The Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights calls for the Netherlands to abolish the reservation to Article 26 of the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#), which would allow children outside of family settings also to receive childcare benefits and standard protection. This has also been reiterated by the UN Committee of the UNCRC since 1999<sup>2</sup> and would ensure that **no one is left behind in the fight against child poverty**.

1 De Wildt R., Jonker M., Van Loon-Dijkers L. and Lunnemann K., *Kinderen missen zelfstandig recht op sociale zekerheid*, Verwey Jonker Instituut, 2021.

2 United Nations, *Concluding Observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of the Kingdom of the Netherlands*, p. 2, 2022.

## European Child Guarantee

### Netherlands National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022.

These Action Plans should outline the children most in need, the planned and existing policy actions, and measures to support them and a monitoring and evaluation framework. The plans should also be drafted in consultation with children, civil society, and national authorities.

The [NAP of the Netherlands](#) was published on 27 April 2022. The Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights was somewhat involved in drafting the NAP. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment arranged a wide ranging online conference

on the Child Guarantee with stakeholders covering all policy areas. Participating organisations spotlighted other at-risk groups of children, such as children with parents with disabilities or poor literacy skills as potential groups to be targeted by the NAP. However, they were not included in the final version of the NAP. Further feedback on best practices was also not included in drafting the NAP. According to their experience, this **participation process was insufficient** and could be perceived as a general lack of accountability in the NAP.

It is unclear whether children were involved in the drafting of the NAP. Nevertheless, the inclusion of integrated participation trajectories is promising, though Eurochild members remain cautious about how this will be implemented. A good practice in this sense in the Netherlands is Save the Children's [Speaking minds](#) programme, which works both at national and municipal levels.

The NAP provides a thorough overview of key policies in place at the time of drafting. However, it fails to comply with the fifth recommendation in the [Council Recommendations](#), by not identifying the children most in need in the country. The Dutch NGO Children's Rights Coalition highlighted that the **NAP does not identify target groups**, specific indicators, or objectives. In addition, gaps were found in the enabling framework, especially regarding the **lack of a gender-conscious approach**.

The monitoring and evaluation framework of the NAP has some weaknesses, since no specific roadmap or system is outlined, nor is a timeline for implementation. In fact, the Dutch NAP covers until 2025 – the end of the current government's term –, instead of 2030, as outlined in the Child Guarantee Recommendation. Furthermore, some **concerns remain regarding how the Child Guarantee will be integrated into existing and new policies**. For instance, there is no mention

of the European Child Guarantee in the new [action plan for poverty and debt](#), the main action plan for the fight against poverty at national level. Therefore, there is a need for more awareness of the instrument since this new policy can create confusion about how the government prioritises children. In addition, the National Action Plan should clearly identify what level of administration is in charge of each part of the NAP, to ensure accountability.

The Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights strongly **calls for the Netherlands to mainstream children's rights into all policies**, to avoid overlaps and under-implementation of the Child Guarantee, while integrating EU funds, especially ESF+, into a clear roadmap of actions.

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

The Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights is aware of EU funding that can be used at national, regional, and local levels to invest in children. However, this funding is not always easy to access, especially for smaller NGOs such as grassroots organisations. This is because the application procedure is very technical, and therefore organisations need ad hoc expertise to apply in the first place, but usually do not have funds to hire such staff. This creates a cycle difficult to break. In addition, the sustainability of funds needed for medium-term interventions, often the case when working in child poverty, is not always ensured with project-based EU funds.

One of the main principles of ESF+ regulation is social dialogue

and civil society engagement. However, our members are not aware of arrangements to allow for this participation in the monitoring, implementation, and evaluation of EU funds at national level.

### Projects funded by the EU in the Netherlands

Members of the Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights are frequently involved in EU funded projects. For example, Save the Children Netherlands has been granted funding under the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) for the *Team Up @ AZC* project, which provides children aged from 6 to 18 years old, with a suite of structured sports, games, and movement activities. These activities also include support for children dealing with their complicated feelings such as anger, stress, and peer interaction. In addition, [Defence for Children](#) led the project *Capisce*, which works to improve the protection of victims of human

trafficking in criminal procedures in the Netherlands and Europe. The project is funded by the EU Rights, Equality, and Citizenship Programme and involves 8 organisations throughout Europe. **Priorities for EU funding in the Netherlands**

On 28 January 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement that compels Member States to earmark ESF+ funding for child poverty depending on their child poverty rate<sup>3</sup>. As a result, the Netherlands is expected to allocate an 'appropriate' amount of its ESF+ resources to combat child poverty. The Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights calls on the Netherlands to prioritise investment in the following areas:

- **Renovate social housing** to increase their energy efficiency, more importantly in the context of the energy crisis, which has become a major driver of

poverty, especially for low-income families.

- **Ensure sustainable and substantial funding** is made available to municipalities to invest in **mental healthcare for children and adolescents**. In the Netherlands, youth care lies with the structurally underfunded municipalities, making the waiting list grow and leaving many children without access to mental healthcare.
- **Ensure free access to at least one healthy meal per school day**. The Netherlands takes part in the EU school fruit, vegetables, and milk scheme, providing free fruit and vegetables to 3,000 primary schools over 20 weeks a year. However, increasing anecdotal evidence about children going to school without having a full meal due to inflation and rising food prices indicates this is not enough.

<sup>3</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013.

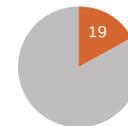
## “Country recommendation

We have been waiting nearly 25 years for an Executive Strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion, and patterns of deprivation, despite a legal duty under the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The people of Northern Ireland cannot afford to wait any longer.

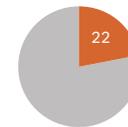
Country  
Profile 2022



# Northern Ireland



**child population  
below 15 years old:**  
**365,200**  
(19% of total population)



**Poverty rate  
(children under 16):**  
**22%**

Source: [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(2019/20\)](#)

**RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):**  
[Children in Northern Ireland \(CiNI\)](#)

## Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

### Child poverty in Northern Ireland

Children in Northern Ireland are more likely to be living in poverty than any other group in society, and the gap is widening.<sup>1</sup> The most recent figures from 2019/20 estimate that **22%, or approximately 100,000 children, are facing severe hardship.**<sup>2</sup> Comparing each of the United Kingdom's four nations and the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland has continuously suffered the highest rate of child poverty between 2010 and 2020.

[Analysis and modelling of official statistics by Save the Children UK and the Child Poverty Action Group](#) show that **child poverty**

**is set to increase** in the absence of any further government intervention. An increase in families affected by the 'two-child limit' is one of the key drivers behind the projected increase. Most families with more than two children on means-tested social security payments are protected by the 2017 cut-off point for the two-child limit, meaning they remain entitled to Child Tax Credit or Universal Credit for all their dependents. However, as the number of families with three or more children grows, an increasing number will be pulled into poverty. This disproportionately affects families with new-borns. Researchers estimate that every year, the 'two-child limit' pushes an estimated 1,500 children into poverty. Removing this limit would also mean 11,000 fewer children in poverty by 2024/25, probably

ensuring Northern Ireland stays below pre-pandemic levels.<sup>3</sup>

A **widening income gap** between the lowest and highest earners could also drive up child poverty in Northern Ireland. If forecasts by the Office for Budgetary Responsibility on real earnings prove accurate and social security rates stay constant in real terms, the gap between low-income households and the median increases, therefore pulling more children into poverty.

Given the significant rise in inflation (approximately 10% in October 2022) and cost of living pressures, those in low-paid employment struggle to balance budgets. The Household Expenditure Tracker, developed by the Consumer Council Northern Ireland, in partnership with the Centre for Economics and

Business Research, has shown that those on the lowest incomes had just £29 per week left after paying bills and other living costs.<sup>4</sup> Between January-March 2022, the lowest earning households saw their income grow by only £0.27; yet spending on essentials rose by 3.5%, discretionary income fell by 18.5%, and the average gross household income in Northern Ireland remained 11% lower than the rest of the UK.

Energy, food, and transport are the key drivers of the current cost of living crisis. Research from the University of York suggests that approximately 72% of people in Northern Ireland will experience **fuel poverty** in 2023, namely 551,000 households spending over 10% of their net income on fuel. Supermarkets have reported that customers are spending less, with food shop sales falling by

1 Department for Communities, *Examination of the Rates and Distribution of Poverty in Northern Ireland*, June 2022.

2 Department for Communities, *Households Below Average Income: Northern Ireland 2019/20*, August 2021.

3 Save the Children UK/Child Poverty Action Group, *Brighter Futures: The Future Path of Child Poverty in Northern Ireland*, November 2021.

4 Consumer Council NI, *Household Expenditure Tracker*, September 2022.

1.6% in May 2022 (2.4% below pre-pandemic levels). Research consistently highlights citizens skipping meals, restricting diets and changing behaviours. According to data from the Trussell Trust, the number of **children who used, or whose family used, a food bank in the UK rose** from 18,979 in 2019/20 to 31,308 in 2020/21.<sup>5</sup> This represents only a portion of the total number of families who avail of emergency food support, as many more independent food banks and community-based providers also operate.

Research from the Food Standards Agency shows that 28% of families with children under 16 years old experience food insecurity compared to 13% not living with children.<sup>6</sup> In addition, 31% of young people aged between 25 and 34 years old experience **food poverty** compared to 8% of

people aged 75 and over. Three-quarters of people in Northern Ireland (74%) have **modified their food behaviours** due to financial concerns, a rate that is significantly higher than the UK average of 65%. This includes eating less, skipping meals, and using food banks. Parents consistently report eating less to provide meals for their children. [An analysis of food security data by Dr Megan Blake, University of Sheffield](#), shows that **families with 3 or more children are 3 times more vulnerable** to food insecurity when compared to adults with no children.

### Children with disabilities

Families that include a **person with disabilities** also face greater financial pressures. According to research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, employment rates for people with disabilities are much lower in Northern Ireland

compared to the rest of the UK. In addition, persons with disabilities are at greater risk of poverty due to their increased reliance on social security to meet their living costs.<sup>7</sup> The Department for Communities' Anti-Poverty Strategy Expert Advisory Panel reported in 2021 that more than **1 in 3 children living in poverty lives in a household where someone with disabilities**. Further research by the Family Fund in 2022 showed that it costs 3 times more to raise a disabled child than a non-disabled child and that, due to the scale of the cost of living crisis, 9 in 10 families report struggling with or falling behind on their household bills.

This pressure is weighing down families at a time when services for disabled children have still not been restored to pre-pandemic levels, and proposed reforms to remove barriers to education have still to be implemented.

Family Fund's poll in early 2022 showed that **62% of parents and carers feel that current Special Educational Needs (SEN) services in Northern Ireland are 'poor'**.

The difficulties they highlight include access to transport, lack of specialist places, communication barriers, bureaucratic processes, lack of information and support, and lack of funding.

Previous research by the Children with Disabilities Strategic Alliance (CDSA) shows that access to short breaks and respite services is not determined based on the child's needs but it is rather a 'postcode lottery' and often depends on the ability of parents and carers to advocate on behalf of a child.<sup>8</sup> Despite legal duties under the Children Order 1995, there is still no unified, robust system for collecting data on children with disabilities

<sup>5</sup> The Trussell Trust, *End of Year Stats*, April 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Food Standards Agency, *Food and You 2*, August 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Joint Submission to the NI Affairs Committee and Work and Pensions Committee joint inquiry into Welfare Policy in Northern Ireland*, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Children with Disabilities Strategic Alliance, *MANIFESTO ASKS, 2016-2020*.

in Northern Ireland. **Research consistently highlights that parents need more information and support.** The CDSA has repeatedly recommended that all children with disabilities be recognised as ‘children in need’ immediately following diagnosis to facilitate family support. They should be offered services, with signposting appropriate to the diagnosis, through an agreed services pathway. Such services should include information, peer support, advice and advocacy services. All of these recommendations have yet to be fully implemented.

### Children’s Social Care

Northern Ireland has had the **highest number of children living in care** since the introduction of the Children Order 1995. The Covid-19 pandemic and the government response have highlighted the importance of Children’s Social Care Services

and the fragility of the system, which is currently undergoing an independent review. Statistics from 2020/2021 show that the **number of young people on the Child Protection Register and the number of young people in care has increased.**<sup>9</sup> From 2017 to 2021, the main source of ‘children in need’ referrals shifted considerably: police referrals went up 10% (from 29% to 39% of total referrals), and social services referrals dropped 11% (from 20% to 9% of total). Southern and Western parts of Northern Ireland also have a higher rate of children on the Child Protection Register. These areas include more rural communities and historically have experienced more significant disadvantages regarding access to public services and infrastructure investment. The lead reviewer in this process has declared that there is an endemic and systemic crisis in Children’s Social Care in Northern Ireland – one that affects all services, linked

to the way they are structured, and influenced by local factors such as the legacy of the conflict, continuous political vacuums, and severe poverty. The independent review is likely to recommend a restructuring of services and a strong emphasis on improving family support, which is essential to improve outcomes for children.

### Children from Ethnic Minority Backgrounds

There is also evidence that **children and young people from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to experience poverty and social exclusion** in Northern Ireland. The proportion of the population from a minority ethnic background is smaller than the rest of the UK, but it has nearly doubled in the last decade from 1.8% in 2011 to 3.4% in 2021 based on Census data. According to an analysis by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the gap in poverty rate between

those from an ethnic minority background and their white counterparts is growing up to 14%.<sup>10</sup> Another key aspect of this growing issue is the **plight of families with no recourse to public funds**, such as those seeking asylum and awaiting a decision on their application for settled status. Many refugee children and their families are now forced to stay for very long periods, some at least 8 months, in contingency accommodation (hotels, B&Bs etc.) managed by private contractors and the number of asylum seekers living in contingency accommodation has risen dramatically, from 14 people in June 2021 to 1067 in April 2022.<sup>11</sup> However, major concerns have been reported by families and their advocates around access to food, the separation of families, and access to healthcare, clothing, and education and their living conditions have been subject to numerous reports and inquiries. At the request of

9 Department of Health, *Children’s Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2020/21*, November 2021.

10 Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Poverty in Northern Ireland 2022*, March 2022.

11 The Detail, *Major rise in hotel use for asylum-seekers: “It feels like we are in a prison”*, June 2022.

the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities at the Council of Europe, the Children's Law Centre in Northern Ireland and the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme submitted a joint report in April 2022 detailing a number of serious concerns around children's rights. The Executive Office in Northern Ireland has established a Strategic Planning Group to develop an action plan to address these issues and will coordinate directly with the UK Home Office.

## Policy Responses

In response to the levels of child poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland, government departments should prioritise the development and delivery of:

- **An Anti-Poverty Strategy** that includes a Commission and a new legislative framework with binding targets.
- **A Disability Strategy** that provides for comprehensive data collection and robust packages of support for families.

- **The introduction of a Child Payment** based on the Scottish model.
- **A permanent scheme for School Holiday Food Grants** to address food insecurity.

The social inclusion strategies have been subject to extensive stakeholder engagement and co-design processes. They now need to be published for public consultation, after which the final strategies will be agreed before being adopted by the next Executive. Each strategy must include clear outcomes and an action plan for delivering these outputs. Legally binding targets to reduce poverty rates will provide a key policy framework for agreeing on future budgets and allocating resources.

In June 2022, the Minister of Education in Northern Ireland announced a funding allocation of £12.6 million to provide low-income families with £13.50 per week for each entitled child to help with food costs during the school holidays. However, given the substantial rise in the

cost of living and other financial pressures, this scheme must be extended until the Executive agrees on a long-term plan.

## Example of an intervention/project demonstrating good practice where children, families, and communities have been supported, and poverty has been overcome or mitigated against

The *Gets Active Project* operates across 4 different areas in Northern Ireland through local Youth Organisations and is aimed at tackling 'Holiday Hunger'. This is a term used to denote food insecurity among children and young people throughout the school holidays. During term-time, over 100,000 children in Northern Ireland would be eligible for 'Free School Meals'. The **holidays create additional financial pressure on their parents**: youth workers and service providers consistently report children being hungry or not bringing enough food when attending programmes

outside of the school term. Therefore, the primary aim is to alleviate this pressure by providing meals and activities for young people. Another key aspect of the project is to provide opportunities for young people to develop skills and influence policy.

In 2021, over 6000 children attended *Gets Active Programmes* in Carrickfergus, Downpatrick, Portadown, and Limavady and over 7000 meals were served. Evaluations of the project show improved health (including mental health) and wellbeing, improved educational attainment, increased confidence and skills, improved employment prospects (including gaining qualifications), and higher levels of social interaction and participation. Families and communities also reported wider positive impacts, including the **potential to reduce anti-social behaviour during the summer months**.

In September 2022, Children in Northern Ireland established the Gets Active Youth Advisory Group, which **brings together**

**a small group of young people (aged between 14 and 19) from each area to work on policy initiatives.** This work is similar to the campaigns and research conducted by the UK-wide Food Foundation, who developed the [#Right2Food Charter](#) in conjunction with young people experiencing food insecurity. This Youth Advisory Group will discuss and lobby for longer-term policy solutions tailored to Northern Ireland. CiNI are providing key platforms for them to be heard and to engage with politicians and policymakers.

Funding for the *Gets Active Project* and the Youth Advisory Group is derived mainly from charitable grants and only covers short time periods. While some statutory bodies have supported this work and recognise the significance of the outcomes, there are currently no plans to provide long-term government funding, which is a major concern for the projects sustainability.



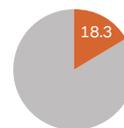
## “ Country recommendation

Poland should take action to efficient facilitation of deinstitutionalisation process of care, including foster care for children and ensure family based care options are available for every child, not leaving behind children with disabilities.

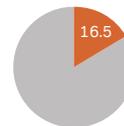
Country Profile 2022



# Poland



**Child Population:**  
**6.92 million**  
(18.3% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**16.5% (2021) ▲\***

\* [higher compared to pre-covid rates in 2019](#)

**RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):**

[Polish Foster Care Coalition](#)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report: identification of the children in need

From a child rights perspective, the [\*European Semester Country Report for Poland\*](#) outlines the challenges concerning early childhood education and care (ECEC), education, and the needs of children arriving from Ukraine. It addresses **child poverty and social exclusion of children** arguing that, while the child benefit scheme was extended to all children, its amount has not been revised for over 5 years to account for inflation.

Poland has one of the **lowest childcare enrolment rates in the EU**, with 10.2% of children under the age of 3 in formal childcare.

The country report further outlines **the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic** as particularly visible in

the education sector. Insufficient ICT equipment and connectivity for schools and households with children and a low level of digital skills among teachers and pupils affect equal access to education and its quality. Prolonged periods of distance learning are likely to have caused **significant educational losses and weakened the wellbeing of students and teachers**. The share of early leavers from education and training is low but is particularly high among persons with disabilities.

There are other gaps that the pandemic revealed such as **access to healthcare and mental health for vulnerable children**. Polish Foster Care Coalition welcomes the call from the European Commission to deinstitutionalise mental health services and move away from the prevailing medical model of provision of mental healthcare and support. However, children's right to high quality family-based care in an alternative care context should have also been emphasised.

To cope with the inflow of **people fleeing Ukraine**, Poland has implemented measures under the EU's Temporary Protection Directive. To this end, the European Commission proposes to establish new school and kindergarten branches to accommodate all children fleeing the country. However, the country report does not refer to the needs of other non-Ukrainian refugees.

### Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

The Polish Foster Care Coalition pointed out that only one out of the six Country Specific Recommendations for Poland directly refers to children. The Coalition welcomes especially the third recommendation, which refers to improving access to childcare and long-term care and removing remaining obstacles to more permanent types of employment. Fostering quality education and improving digital skills is important for children from socially disadvantaged background. Therefore, better targeting of social benefits and

ensuring access of those in need must be prioritised to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

The second recommendation on 'swiftly finalising the negotiations with the Commission of the 2021-2027 cohesion policy programming documents with a view to starting their implementation' indirectly includes children via policy programming documents. Namely, the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), which should also co-finance the implementation of the Child Guarantee National Action Plan in Poland.

## Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families communities

### Child poverty in Poland

Poland has a total child population of 6.92 million, 16.5% of which lived at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021. Child poverty and social exclusion have decreased from 26.8% in 2015 to 16.5% in 2021.

This is mostly due to the **childcare benefit (500+)** programme. Introduced in 2016 and available for all children under 18, this programme has contributed to the reduction of poverty of families with children.

In Poland, the **most vulnerable groups are families with disabled children and families with a disabled parent(s)**. To tackle the poverty of this segment of population, the Polish Foster Care Coalition proposes to adjust the legislation that prohibits people in employment from benefiting from child/adult disability allowances.

## European Child Guarantee

### Poland National Action Plan

The Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022.

These Action Plans should outline the children most in need, the planned and existing policy actions and measures to support them and a monitoring and evaluation framework. The plans should also be drafted in consultation with children, civil society, and national authorities.

The NAP of Poland was published on 29 August 2022.

The Polish Foster Care Coalition explained that **civil society organisations were not meaningfully involved in drafting the NAP** because of the short timeframe given to civil society to provide input. In fact, the official

public consultation of the NAP proposal was open for only three working days.

The Polish Foster Care Coalition's main focus areas are children in alternative care, including children with special needs, and children with a migrant or refugee background. Therefore, the organisation welcomes the reference to children in alternative care in the NAP.

However, the NAP only includes one measure in this area, namely the development of a central system for vacancies in alternative care. The ambition is to **increase the number of children in family-based care by 3%**, from 77% in 2020 to 80% in 2030.

There are also other challenges such as **lack of generational renewal of foster parents**, which can result in a shortage. One of the reasons is that professional foster parents are severely underpaid. Their employment is based on civil contracts, receiving well below the average salary in Poland, which is 6,687 PLN gross.

According to the Polish Foster Care Coalition, care professionals earn the same salary as cashiers at supermarkets, although they need to fulfil the demanding criteria of becoming a caregiver.

Even though a recent legislative amendment increases a professional foster parent salary to 4,100 PLN gross; the cost of other expenses for foster children has not been revised since 2011, and currently it's still set at 1,000 PLN per child and 1,200 PLN per child with disabilities.

Furthermore, the above mentioned amendment allows **local authorities to open new institutions for children** under approval of the Ombudsman for the Rights of a Child and the Head of Province (Wojewoda), new pre-adoptive centres for 20 new-borns (institution for new-borns), and regional care therapeutic institutions for 45 children with disabilities.

**These provisions are in conflict with the objective to ensure a family environment for every**

**child** and, given this context, the organisation finds the measures in the NAP insufficient, even considering the desired slight increase in the percentage of children covered by family forms in alternative care.

Finally, **national child protection systems must be strengthened to provide good quality services and tackle long-standing deficiencies** in response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis and Ukrainian workers should receive trainings on the functioning of the Polish child protection system and on cultural differences, as emphasised by many professionals.

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

The Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy launched the [consultation on 2021-27 ESF+ programmes](#), which closed on 2 December 2022.

### EU funded project

WiseEuropa, the Przyjaciółka Foundation, and the Polish Foster Care Coalition were implementing a partnership project [Creation and implementation of a research tool to accomplish the process of deinstitutionalisation of alternative care of children in municipalities](#) in 2020. The project's goal was to **assess the process of deinstitutionalisation of alternative care** in Poland through the creation and use of a research tool. Thanks to its use, the municipalities are now able to receive reliable data on the state of play of alternative care and available care services in a given municipality. The tool can also calculate

the costs of implementing changes in the alternative care system and provide detailed recommendations for the deinstitutionalisation process.

Despite showing a good potential to promote deinstitutionalisation, **it remained a pilot project with limited implementation**. Additional technical challenges as well as lack of ownership by the public administration prevented it from its proliferation at national level.

### Priorities for EU funding in Poland

The Polish Foster Care Coalition calls the government of Poland to prioritise investments in:

- **training** for prospective and existing foster parents;
- raising the **salaries** of foster carers;
- transforming the existing residential care settings for children to **family- and community-based services**;
- developing a **child budgeting methodology**, which does not exist in Poland.



## “ Country recommendation

‘Portugal should take action to reduce the inequalities that child poverty exacerbates, by improving the timely access to high quality health services for all, with special attention to children.

Country  
Profile 2022



# Portugal

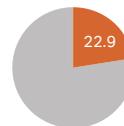


16.5

**Child Population:**

**1.70 million**

(16.5% of total population)



22.9

**Child Poverty Rate:**

**22.9% (2021) ▲\***

\* [higher compared to pre-covid rates in 2019](#)

### RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

[Fundação Nossa Senhora o Bom Sucesso](#)

[Instituto de Apoio à Criança](#)

[Sérgio Costa Araújo](#)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the country report: identification of the children in need

This year's *European Semester Country Report for Portugal* has **failed to outline clearly the main vulnerable groups of children** that should be targeted by national policymakers. This is despite the fact that inequality indicators show that Portugal is one of the countries where the income gap is widening.

This is particularly worrying at a time when 22.4% of the Portuguese population is at risk of poverty or social exclusion. According to the most recent data, Portugal became the 8<sup>th</sup> country in the EU with the highest proportion of the population experiencing poverty. Portugal is also now the Member State with

the greatest increase in income inequality on a year-on-year basis.<sup>1</sup>

Eurochild members in Portugal identified that while **only the issue of education was raised** in the report; Portugal is struggling with issues including quality of provision and equity of access, (low) participation in early childhood education, an ageing population of teachers, and teacher shortages. As a result of the pandemic, the country report identifies that disparities may have increased, with **children from more vulnerable socio-economic groups being disproportionately affected by school lockdowns.**

Promisingly, our members identified that Portugal intends to expand its pre-school network to provide free access to all 3 year olds (the current system is from age 4) but unfortunately, these proposals are solely discussed from the perspective of

supporting parental employment. **Children aged 0-3 therefore continue to be left outside of the formal education system** and without formal early childhood education and care (ECEC) guidelines or standards on quality. Members also identified that proposals are (overly) dependent on funding from Portugal's National Recovery and Resilience Plan.

### The regional dimension of child poverty in Portugal

Annex 15 of Portugal's country report acknowledges that there is a lot to be done concerning **regional disparities in Portugal. Eurochild members support and stress that regional location is one of the main determinants of higher child poverty rates in Portugal**, citing information from the new report [Poverty Watch: Portugal 2022](#) by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Portugal.

The report demonstrates the 'strong regional asymmetries' of poverty in Portugal. The autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira have the highest risk of poverty rates, with 24.2% and 21.9% respectively, followed by the Algarve in the South (21.6%), and the North region (21.1%). The territory with the lowest risk of poverty remains the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA) with 12.8%. However, as the capital region, this lower rate still amounts to a significant number of people living below the poverty line.<sup>2</sup>

### Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

The recommendations included in the country report do address sufficiently the needs on the ground, but strictly from an economic point of view. There is **no country specific recommendation, directly or indirectly, related to children.**

1 Observatório Nacional de Luta contra a Pobreza, *Pobreza e Exclusão Social em Portugal – Relatório 2022*, p.2, 2022.

2 EAPN Portugal, *Poverty Watch: Portugal 2022*, 2022.

This may be due to competing demands related to the ageing of Portugal's population and subsequent pressure on the allocation of public resources.

The result is that **children are left behind and forgotten**, even though 22.9% of children, approximately 388,000, are at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2021. The lack of focus on child poverty is not, unfortunately, due to a reduction in children's vulnerability in Portugal. In the *Country Specific Recommendations for Portugal*, the European Commission did not include any social recommendations. For example, the recommendations are not at all framed within a vision in which investment in children's early years makes a significant difference to their development and wellbeing. This is despite evidence showing that investing in children – through intervention programmes in early childhood

– also has positive economic returns to society, which will be greater the earlier the intervention begins.<sup>3</sup>

## Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

### Child poverty in Portugal

Portugal has a total child population of 1.70 million, 22.9% (approximately 388,000) of which lived at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021. Although the increase in rates of poverty have been higher for adult and senior population groups, there were still **10,000 more children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2021 than the previous year**. Eurochild members identified Roma children, children up to 3 years old, children with disabilities, children in alternative care, children in vulnerable families, as the children most

in need and who continue to be forgotten by policymaking in the country.

An **additional cash benefit for families** called the 'child guarantee' has also been introduced in Portugal since last August to provide a top up to Portugal's existing family benefit cash assistance. Dedicated resources are also required to adequately address the regional dimension of child poverty, as outlined earlier.

The services all of these children need are access to high quality health, early childhood education and care, social services, more effective social protection, and parenting support. Members stressed that children in alternative care and the deinstitutionalisation of **children in alternative care requires serious attention**.

With these groups of children in mind, Eurochild's Portuguese members calls for the Portuguese government to implement policies on:

- **Healthcare** – take action to reduce inequalities in access to healthcare, by improving the timely access to high quality health services for all, with special attention to children. One way to achieve this is to subsidise private and third sector healthcare providers that complement the national health system to satisfy unmet healthcare needs, with community-based integrated health services. Portugal has one of the highest out-of-pocket health expenditure in the EU (30% of health expenses are paid directly by families), and the waiting times for a specialised medical appointment (only available in hospitals) are too long, especially for children.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see Fundação Nossa Senhora o Bom Sucesso, *Intervir na Infância: Quais os resultados nos domínios da saúde, escolaridade, social e económico?*, 2018.

- **Early learning** – to reframe how early childhood education and care is perceived. Early childhood education and care is not only a way to allow parents to go to work but it needs to take into account early child development and to be intentionally educational. There needs to be investment in professionals who are responsive to the specific needs of children and their families. In Portugal, ECEC professionals are only considered for career progression if they work with children above 3 years old, this should be extended to professionals working with children under 3.
- **Family support** – social transfers are failing to break the cycle of poverty for children and families in Portugal. Accessing key services, such as community-based early intervention and prevention support, is crucial. More priority

should be placed on supporting parents and preventing family separation, so that all children grow up in nurturing family environments.

## European Child Guarantee

### Portugal National Action Plan

The *Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee* asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022. However, some countries have still not published their NAP. This is the case for Portugal.

Eurochild members in Portugal, Instituto de Apoio à Criança and Sérgio Costa Araújo, have engaged with the Portuguese authorities to **inform the drafting of the NAP**. However, they cannot say whether their

positions are reflected in the current draft.

IAC was invited to be part of the technical commission that would be involved throughout the preparation, implementation, and monitoring of the Child Guarantee, but so far they are waiting for this involvement to commence.

Sérgio Costa Araújo, together with other national experts as part of Eurochild's *DataCare project*, have met with Portugal's National Coordinator, the Central Services of Instituto de Segurança Social and the National Commission of Protection of Children and Young People. They have engaged with the drafting process particularly on deinstitutionalisation and how the DataCare indicators can be included in national statistics to monitor the situation of children in alternative care in Portugal.

Fundação Nossa Senhora o Bom Sucesso (FNSBS) expressed

their interest to be involved in the drafting process to the Portuguese National Coordinator, and they have proposed a meeting and visit to the Foundation, but this has not yet been scheduled. The possibility of participating in the **NAP public consultation** process was promised, but information on this is still not publicly available.

Representatives from the Portuguese government informed Eurochild members that **two groups of children were involved in the drafting of the NAP**. However, members are concerned that the children involved did not represent a diverse group of children, including those with lived experiences of poverty.

IAC have prepared a brochure with testimonies of vulnerable children from Lisbon on their feelings about poverty and social exclusion. This was presented in October 2022 to the National Coordinator.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Instituto do Apoio à Criança and EAPN Portugal, *A Tua Voz Importa: o que sentem as crianças e jovens sobre a pobreza e exclusão social*, 2022.

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

There are a variety of European funds available in Portugal for actions that invest in children. At national level, information about funds can be found on [this website](#). Eurochild members in Portugal are aware of EU funding that can be used at national, regional, and local levels to invest in children. However, this **funding is not easily accessible for civil society organisations in general**, as it requires expertise and time to identify information about EU financial programmes at a national level.

While Eurochild members are not aware of any EU funding for civil society organisations working with children fleeing Ukraine, there is an annual 'Childhood Prize (the Prêmio Infância), awarded by the BPI Fundação "la Caixa". Created in 2019, the

award supports projects to break the cycle of poverty, facilitate development and empowerment in childhood and adolescence, and strengthen support for families.<sup>5</sup>

One of the main principles of European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) regulation is social dialogue and civil society engagement. However, our members could not provide a good practice example of civil society involvement in the monitoring, implementation, and evaluation of EU funds.

### Projects funded by the EU in Portugal

In Portugal, Instituto de Apoio à Criança has been involved in several EU-funded projects:

- **The RADAR (*Running Away: Drivers, Awareness, and Responses*) project** is coordinated by Missing Children Europe and was launched in March 2020.

The project aims to achieve genuine progress in the awareness, understanding, and responses for children running away, and to provide them with better protection and care across the EU. IAC is one of six European partners. The project is supported by a Board of Professional Experts from different fields of work, and a Young People's Board with 8 young people who have experience of running away.

- **The *Conscious Parent Academy: Replacement Parent Urgently Needed* project** aims to support children who cannot live with their parents and are cared for by adults other than their biological family. These children are sent to foster families, and the goal is for them to feel integrated in the family environment and the provision of adequate care to their needs and wellbeing, providing them with an affective relationship and the necessary education for their

full development. The task and responsibility of caregivers is a large and complex issue, requiring legal, social, emotional, and educational support.

- IAC have also been involved in **child friendly justice projects**. These projects aimed to address the weaknesses of the justice system in ensuring children's access and effective participation in legal proceedings. Through participatory workshops, small group discussions, and individual legal counselling, children felt better informed about the decisions affecting their live.

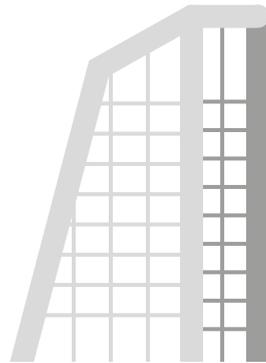
### Priorities for EU funding in Portugal

On 28 January 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement that compels Member States with a level of child poverty above the EU average (23.4% -

<sup>5</sup> A total of €2.3 million have been awarded since the award's inception. For more information, see [here](#).

ARPE 2017 – 2019) to allocate 5% of ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty.<sup>6</sup> Other Member States, including Portugal, should allocate an ‘appropriate’ amount of their ESF+ resources to combat child poverty.

Considering that 10,000 more children are living in poverty than last year, Eurochild and our members in Portugal urge the Portuguese authorities to **prioritise investment in maternal and child health, including mental health; deinstitutionalisation and effective social protection; and early learning.**



<sup>6</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013.

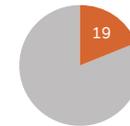
## “Country recommendation

Romania should set up a coherent plan that will contribute to reduce child poverty and to avoid family separation through public prevention and gatekeeping policies, ring-fenced funding sources for implementing measures, and a relevant set of indicators.

Country  
Profile 2022



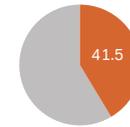
# Romania



**Child Population:**

**3.65 million**

(19% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**

**41.5% (2021) ▲\***

\* [higher compared to pre-covid rates in 2019](#)

### RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

[Hope and Homes for Children Romania \(HHC – Romania\)](#)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the country report: identification of the children in need

Although the *European Semester Country Report for Romania* mentions that **child poverty increased** from 40% in 2019 to 41.5% in 2021 and remains the highest in the EU, the report does not provide significant guidance on how to tackle child poverty.

Additionally, the country report outlines that more than 50% of Roma children aged between 6 and 15 years old attend schools where the majority of students are from the Roma community. Hope and Homes for Children (HHC – Romania) welcomes the acknowledgement that ‘segregation and socio-economic status also further affects students’ expectations of their future achievements’. Investments

in social infrastructure, including day centres for children at risk, is considered therefore as a positive development to **address the needs of most vulnerable children**, including Roma children.

Concerning early childhood education and care (ECEC), the proportion of children under 3 years old in formal childcare dropped to 6.8% in 2020 (from 14.1% in 2019), revealing another **gap in the provision of care for young children**.

While children in vulnerable situations and their **needs are not sufficiently addressed** in this year’s country report, Hope and Homes for Children – Romania welcomes that the country report acknowledges the measures proposed by the government: ‘implementing the minimum inclusion income, minimum wage and pension reforms, investments in child protection and the deinstitutionalisation of people with disabilities, as

outlined in Romania’s RRP<sup>1</sup> could help the country achieve the 2030 EU headline target on poverty reduction’.

### Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

While the *Country Specific Recommendations for Romania* are relevant, they do not correspond to the reform needs and do **not address social issues in general**. Namely, child poverty and social protection, which are the most pressing social issues in Romania. When it comes to **children experiencing alternative care**, many of them still live in old-type institutions and opportunities and support for young care leavers are lacking. Additionally, there is no support for vulnerable families in communities (at risk of separation), and **social housing for vulnerable families and access to education for children from deprived families** are urgent challenges too.

In regard to the reform of the child protection system, the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) will bring some positive results for vulnerable children and adults. However, **more should be done to enact significant progress in the reform process**. For example, the NRRP can finance concrete measures, such as supporting young care leavers, social housing in general, and measures focusing on prevention as an enabling condition for the reform process.

The second recommendation asks for the swift finalisation of the negotiations regarding the 2021-2027 operational programme on cohesion. However, for Romania there will be no direct EU funding for closing down old-type institutions, but only ‘enabling actions’ such as support for families to avoid admissions in the care system, support for young care leavers, support

1 (Editor’s Note) RRP = Recovery and Resilience Plan.

services for vulnerable families, and the development of the foster care network.

The third recommendation on **reducing reliance on fossil fuels** and increasing the use of sustainable energy sources to create the grounds for a cleaner environment is in line with Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which mentions a **clean environment as a condition for improved health of children**. HHC – Romania emphasises the fight against climate change and believes that ensuring a clean environment is crucial for future generations. However, this focus cannot overshadow urgent measures for social inclusion of the most vulnerable, especially as they brace themselves to face the energy crisis.



## Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

### Child poverty in Romania

Romania has a total child population of 3.65 million, 41.5% (approximately 1.5 million) of which live at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021. Behind this number, we can identify specific groups of children, namely children in old-type institutions and young care leavers.

Vulnerable categories of children include:

- **Children in deprived families and communities** who cannot cover their basic needs. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the surge in prices for energy and gas and the consequent cost of living crisis, there are many families that now find it very difficult or impossible to cover their basic needs. The risk of school drop-out is also increasing, as this is the area where parents find it

easier to cut costs, especially in rural areas where children are generally involved in agricultural work or other types of work that generate income.

- **Children in old-type institutions.** There are still 3,300 children growing up in 131 old-type institutions, accommodating on average between 50 and 70 children each. They are vulnerable because of their placement in institutions that infringes their rights to develop to their full potential.
- **Young care leavers.** They lack opportunities to transition in a meaningful way into independent living. Accommodation (especially state-provided accommodation, with affordable rent) is not available, nor are the employment opportunities, as there are still prejudices and stereotypes against these youngsters in some communities.

While there is a legal provision that **all old-type institutions in Romania need to be closed**

**or have a closure programme by the end of October 2022** (and this has been observed nationwide), there is the important **issue of how the process will be carried out**. There are at least two policies that are needed as soon as possible to provide support to vulnerable children:

- **A public policy on preventing family breakdown.** A national policy can regulate the cooperation and the way interventions are implemented, as well as the funding sources and the way the funds are distributed, and cooperation between local and country child protection authorities.
- **A public policy on housing.** Romania does not currently have a public policy on housing, including social housing. The local authorities receive requests for social housing and analyse them, but the eligibility criteria are different from one authority to another. Eurochild members would welcome a public policy 'with targeted measures regarding access to housing, assessments of

needs and prioritisation of beneficiaries, as well as clear funding lines and a relevant set of indicators to track the progress of the policy implementation’.

### Good practices

Hope and Homes for Children Romania implements a long-standing national prevention programme, in cooperation with the local and county authorities in Romania. During the implementation of this programme, they have **supported over 35,000 children to remain with their families, in more than 25 counties of Romania.**

This initiative is part of the wider programme of supporting the reform of the child protection system at national level and it is important because:

- it supports families to remain together and overcome vulnerability;
- it prevents children from being admitted into state care (and old-type institutions in particular), supporting the wider

objective of closing down old-type institutions.

All families supported through the programme are assessed using a tool developed by HHC – Romania. The intervention plan to support them is drawn up based on the specific needs discovered during the assessment, to avoid redundancies in allocating resources or targeting other areas, where families do not need support. This initiative helps provide sustainable interventions, thanks to the involvement of local and county authorities in the assessment, implementation and monitoring of the interventions. The programme also provides up to date status of families’ situations, while empowering families themselves to take the lead in overcoming their own vulnerability.

## European Child Guarantee

### Romania National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022. These Action Plans should indicate the children most in need, the planned and existing policy actions, and measures to support them, and a monitoring and evaluation framework. The plans should also be drafted in consultation with children, civil society, and national authorities.

The Romanian NAP has been published for consultation at the time of writing this report, namely in early November 2022.

Hope and Homes for Children – Romania would like to see included **specific measures regarding young care leavers and children with disabilities** and

the way the deinstitutionalisation process for these children will be implemented.

HHC – Romania notes that they could have supported the development of the NAP by offering recommendations on:

- Setting the NAP priorities and providing input from the field, bringing the perspective of the lived experience of vulnerable children to contribute to the real picture of the current needs.
- Establishing a monitoring system for the implementation of the NAP. Since the Child Guarantee will be implemented by the a public authority, the National Authority for the Protection of Children’s Rights and Adoptions, accountability mechanisms are crucial for the success of the NAP’s implementation.

**No child has been involved in the drafting of the NAP so far.**

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) can be used in Romania to further the reform of the childcare system and to reduce poverty in general. The child protection system reform can be supported by a specific operational programme called *Inclusion and Social Dignity*.

### Projects funded by the EU in Romania

All programmes funded by EU funds are implemented and monitored by two ministries in Romania: the Ministry of Investment and European Projects, and the Ministry of Public Works, Development and Administration.

Hope and Homes for Children – Romania is currently involved

in implementing a EU-funded project aiming **to support the participation of children to education, prevent school abandonment and support young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs)** to further their education and get access to the labour market.

HHC – Romania carries out the identification of children, families, and NEETs as well as the assessment of their needs. Experts then provide counselling regarding prevention of school abandonment, as well as regarding enrolment in education for children and NEETs. They also provide support for parents through parenting courses.

Some of the achievements of the projects are:

- None of the children included in the project have dropped out of school so far.
- The schools involved in the

project are more aware of the needs of the children and they are offering several after-school activities and workshops addressed at vulnerable children, so that they can also enjoy school.

- Parents involved in the project are now better informed of the needs of their children, the challenges regarding education and the education support their children may need.
- NEETs are currently pursuing education and counselling sessions, which will increase their chances of being integrated in the labour market.

### Priorities for EU funding in Romania

On 28 January 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement that compels Member States with a level of child poverty above the EU average (23.4% - AROPE 2017 – 2019) to allocate

5% of ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty.<sup>2</sup> Romania is one of the countries bound by this agreement. With this in mind, HHC – Romania calls on the government to allocate ESF+ resources to combat child poverty in order to:

- **Prevent family separation** through a set of measures following an ‘envelope’ type of intervention (for example covering the cost of rent and living costs for families at risk; clothing items for children and food), with a greater freedom to allocate money towards various resources (being responsive to the specific needs of various parts of Romania), and a unitary and in-depth analysis of the needs of the families.
- **Ensure social housing for families at risk**, which would eliminate, among other things, the risk of family separation, while providing them with decent living conditions.

<sup>2</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013.

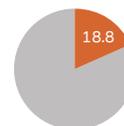
## “Country recommendation

Slovakia should take robust and targeted action to ensure that rights of all children are respected regardless of their background, colour of skin, religion, country of origin and family status.

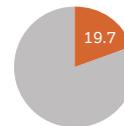
## Country Profile 2022



# Slovakia



**Child Population:**  
**1.02 million**  
(18.8% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**19.7% (2021) ▼\***

\* lower compared to pre-covid rates in 2019

## RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

Coalition for Children Slovakia

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the country report: identification of the children in need

According to the assessment of Coalition for Children Slovakia, the [European Semester Country Report for Slovakia](#) adequately covers child poverty and social exclusion, early childhood education, and education.

The number of children under 3 years old in formal childcare in Slovakia was 4.8% in 2020, among the lowest in the EU (EU average is 32.3% in 2020). Factors that prevent children attending pre-school education are an **acute shortage of places in public kindergartens** and high fees in private-run kindergartens. Coalition for Children Slovakia identifies the newly adopted *National strategy of development*

*of early intervention and early care 2022-2030*<sup>1</sup> as an important step forward to comprehensively address early childhood education and care in Slovakia.

The country report further outlines that Slovakia is also facing a **high rate of school drop-outs and training among Roma children**. There are also regional disparities in educational outcomes, with lower educational achievements in rural areas. To address persistent challenges such as accessibility, quality, and segregation, the Coalition welcomes the recommendation **to strengthen the quality and inclusiveness of education and training at all levels**, as disadvantaged children, including those with special needs, still face many obstacles to access their rights to education.

However, the Coalition of Children Slovakia draws attention to **the insufficient financing of early**

**intervention services** for children with disabilities, limited availability of services including crisis intervention services, and lack of support for children from socially disadvantaged communities.

According to the Coalition for Children Slovakia, there is a lack of cross-sectoral cooperation between ministries. Moreover, the financing of many projects is not sustainable, and therefore it's difficult to make the desired impact.

Additionally, the country report fails to mention children in alternative care, children's rights to be heard, the impact of the pandemic on children, children's mental health and wellbeing, children's rights in the digital environment, and the involvement of civil society organisations.

In 2022, Slovakia was shocked by serious cases of violence against and between children and by their

brutality. However, these cases are not mentioned in the report, which **does not address the system of effective protection of children from violence**, torture, and sexual abuse in all environments. Given the clear need for prevention programmes, initiatives aimed at eliminating violence against and between children, ensuring a system of help and support or the availability of services for children should be prioritised.

In the light of the high number of Ukrainians arriving in Slovakia, the country report only examines the situation of **Ukrainian refugees and children** in the context of integration of Ukrainian children in pre-school and school education but it fails to address the needs of other children with a migration background, including child refugees.

Similarly, the country report points out that disadvantaged

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, *National Strategy Development of Coordinated Timely Services Intervention and Early Care 2022-2030 (in Slovakian)*, 2022.

groups face many challenges and constraints to access the social housing. The Coalition for Children Slovakia adds that public authorities are really struggling to develop **social housing schemes**, and that rental housing for vulnerable family is highly limited and not easily accessible. The long expected national strategy for preventing and ending homelessness has not been approved yet, despite this being a growing problem.

### Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

This year's *Country Specific Recommendations for Slovakia* correspond to reform needs of the country. **Slovakia should address the most serious shortcomings**, such as the low quality and inclusiveness of education, fragmented research and innovation policy coordination, insufficient public-private cooperation, and weak research

and innovation performance with the comprehensive measures. While the recommendation on improving education most directly relates to children, the other recommendations, such as improvements to research and innovation and strengthening public-private cooperation can also have a positive effect on long-standing challenges in childcare, healthcare and housing.

### Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

#### Child poverty in Slovakia

Slovakia has a total child population of 1.02 million, 19.7% of which live at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021.

**Roma children and children from socially disadvantaged background** are the most affected by poverty in Slovakia. In light of

this context, **anti-discrimination policies** should address social stigma and discrimination and be more visible and implemented at national, regional, and local levels of administration.

The Coalition for Children Slovakia also calls on the government to provide quality and accessible services in areas such as nutrition, education, and health to make sure **all children, and especially the most vulnerable, are able to reach their full potential** and end the cycle of poverty.

Families and households should be supported by a **minimum income** scheme to ensure financial barriers do not prevent children from attending schools or being separated from their families due to housing deprivation. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is crucial for healthy development of children as well as a form of prevention of early leaving

from education. **Family centres should be expanded** and focus on enhancing parents' skills and on offering other support to keep families and children together. In this context, it is important to highlight that the **number of children separated from their families is not decreasing**, and neither is the number of children in Child and Family Centres, despite the change in legislation that emphasises preventative and community work. Low involvement of local governments in the social protection of children also persists.

Poverty and an unstimulating environment are risk factors for several negative phenomena, including **violence against children**. This topic is addressed by the National Strategy for the Protection of Children from Violence, which was **co-designed by children** themselves for the first time.<sup>2</sup> Children shared that one lecture a year does not

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, *The children themselves help with the preparation of the National Strategy for the Protection of Children from Violence (in Slovakian)*, 2022.

provide adequate information and that overall there is a lack of learning opportunities on children's rights as well as adequate information on bullying, sexual, and parental education.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the General Prosecutor's Office of the Slovak Republic warned that there was an increase in sexual abuse of children by almost 140%, especially in the digital environment. The government of the Slovak Republic approved the Action Plan for 2022 and 2023 for the National Concept for the Protection of Children in the Digital Space.<sup>3</sup>

From a legislative perspective, the Slovakian government has some strategies in place to combat social issues, namely a **national framework strategy for the promotion of social**

**inclusion** and the fight against poverty,<sup>4</sup> a **deinstitutionalisation strategy** to tackle the needs of children in alternative care system,<sup>5</sup> and the recently **adopted national strategy for the development of coordinated early intervention services** and early care for children under 7 years old.<sup>6</sup>

The Coalition for Children Slovakia welcomes these strategies and calls for an **integrated approach to deliver best outcomes**.

### Example of good practice

Launched in 2016 by a member of the Coalition for Children Slovakia, the Open Society Foundation, the Aflatoun Programme is making a real difference for the lives of children from the Roma community. The

project is based in the Eastern region of the country, and supports up to **1,000 children and parents/caregivers** each year in improving their social and financial skills, parenting skills, and cooperation with teachers and other professionals in social services. Families were also involved in the decision making and evaluation of this intervention. The programme has been funded by Erasmus+, as well as country embassies and other donors in Slovakia.

Another example of good practice is the Slovak preventive program for children between 4 and 7 years old, accredited by the Ministry of the Slovak Republic, aimed at eliminating violence between children and fostering acceptance of otherness, called [Kozmo and his adventures](#).

## European Child Guarantee

### Slovakia National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) outlining how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022. However, some countries had not published their NAP when Eurochild members provided input for this report. This is the case of Slovakia.

The National Coordination Centre for Resolving the Issues of Violence against Children is responsible for the drafting and implementation of the NAP and the Coalition for Children Slovakia was informed that the NAP should be submitted to the government by end of the year.

<sup>3</sup> *National Concept for the Protection of Children in the Digital Space (in Slovakian)*, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> *National Framework Strategy for the Promotion of Social Inclusion and the Fight against Poverty (in Slovakian)*, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, *National Strategy of Deinstitutionalisation System of Social Services and Substitute Care (in Slovakian)*, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, *National Strategy Development of Coordinated Timely Services Intervention and Early Care 2022-2030 (in Slovakian)*, 2022.

There is an ambition to **involve NGOs, regional structures, and children in the implementation of the NAP**, provided there is capacity for this. The Coalition for Children Slovakia has not been involved or consulted so far, although they are aware that there has been **cross-sectoral consultation for the NAP**. So far, no information about engaging children in the process has been shared.

According to the Coalition for Children Slovakia, appointing the Centre as a Coordinator will be the cause of several **structural and logistical problems**. Since the Centre's main area of work is violence against children, they lack the competencies needed to lead on such a comprehensive policy and they require extra consultations and guidance required from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and Family. This is most likely the cause of the delays, according to Eurochild members.

The Coalition regrets not to have been consulted, as they could have brought their expertise and experience working on inclusion, education of children – especially Roma children, violence against children prevention, digital environment, and deinstitutionalisation to ensure these areas are adequately covered in the NAP.

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

The Coalition has been following EU funding, calls and processes at national level.

Open Society Foundation Slovakia, a member of Coalition for Children Slovakia, has implemented a project on **child participation** funded by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) as part of Slovakia's Operational Programme *Effective Public Administration*.

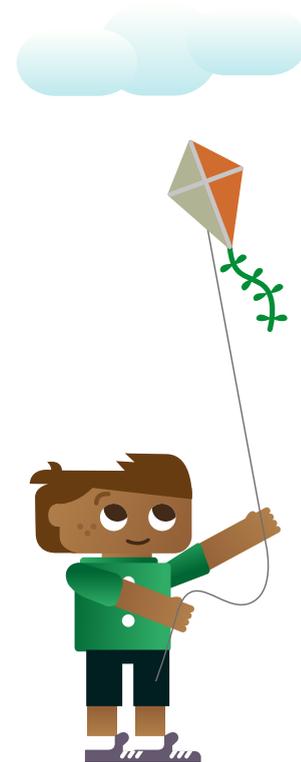
The main purpose of this project, entitled *Creating mechanisms for the participation of children and youth in school decision-making processes and the creation of public youth policies*, is to improve public policies by strengthening the participation of children and young people. The project also promoted participation and **increase the interest of young people in getting involved in school administration** and later in the life of civil society.

### Priorities for EU funding in Slovakia

Coalition for Children Slovakia calls on the government of Slovakia to prioritise investment in:

- **inclusive and accessible education** and early childhood education;
- address the needs of **children living in poverty and social exclusion**;

- **scale up of free services** such as crisis intervention and anonymous psychological care;
- **green economy** to support rural areas and local communities and families.



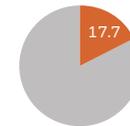
## “Country recommendation

Slovenia should take action to reduce poverty and ensure healthcare for all children, including access to paediatricians and mental care professionals.

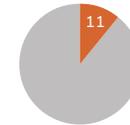
## Country Profile 2022



# Slovenia



**Child Population:**  
**374,210**  
(17.7% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**11% (2021) ▼\***

\* lower compared to pre-covid rates in 2019

### RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights  
Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth (SAFY)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report: identification of the children in need

The *European Semester Country Report for Slovenia* draws attention to the aim of the government to improve public consultations and an action plan to improve the planning, preparation, and adoption of legislation. It also mentions the shortage of paediatricians and **the need to improve access to healthcare** by modernising the sector, in particular, to make better use of skills, and to ensure the attractiveness of care professions, including providing better pay. Eurochild members, Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights and the Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth (SAFY), support these

actions and will continue to monitor whether and when they will be implemented.

However, the **areas covered in the report were not representative of the reality on the ground** in Slovenia. For example, in the 62 pages of the report, children are only mentioned twice, namely when the document states the rate of children at risk of poverty (12.1%) and the rate of children under 3 years old in formal childcare (44.3%).<sup>1</sup>

Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights and SAFY welcome the very relevant efforts to 'in combination with ESF+<sup>2</sup>, (...) contribute to reaching the 2030 EU headline target on poverty reduction'.<sup>3</sup> However, there is **insufficient focus** on this and the report lacks details on the specific measures to be taken in **reducing child poverty and social exclusion**.

Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights and SAFY felt that the most promising comment focused on investing in children was concerning the new **measures to support migrant and Roma pupils in pre-primary and compulsory education**, and the point that 'close monitoring is needed to ensure that the intended results are achieved'.<sup>4</sup>

Eurochild members especially welcome such measures because Roma children and their access to childcare and primary schools have been a long overlooked issue in Slovenia, despite **the severity of the issue and lack of credible data**.

The reality is that **many Roma children fail to complete primary education**, partly due to Slovenian legislature, which just compels students to remain enrolled in primary school for nine years but does not require them

to successfully complete this education cycle.

Additionally, data on Roma children's school attendance is scarce. NGO estimates and schools provide the only existing data on the number of enrolled Roma children at the beginning of the school year; however, there is no data available on how many actually attend or finish primary school.

### Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

The *Country Specific Recommendations* correspond to Slovenia's reform needs, in particular when it comes to:

1. Ensuring that the growth of nationally financed current expenditure is in line with an overall neutral policy stance, especially in regard to taking into **account continued**

<sup>1</sup> *European Semester Report for Slovenia*, Table A12.1: Social Scoreboard for Slovenia, p.46.

<sup>2</sup> (*Editor's Note*) ESF+: European Social Fund Plus.

<sup>3</sup> *European Semester Report for Slovenia*, p.47.

<sup>4</sup> *European Semester Report for Slovenia*, p.46.

**temporary and targeted support to the households and firms** most vulnerable to energy price hikes;

## 2. Ensuring the long-term fiscal sustainability of the **healthcare and long-term care systems**.

However, **none of the recommendations refer explicitly to children's rights**.

There is an overall public opinion in Slovenia that we should focus on 'children's duties' and not rights, indicating that Slovenian society believes that children have too many rights and not enough responsibilities.

A common understanding is that most children in Slovenia are from affluent families. And while that is indeed the case for 89% of children in Slovenia, the [remaining 11% was living in poverty in 2021](#), according to Eurostat.

In addition, some other pressing issues make the living conditions of vulnerable children in Slovenia very challenging. For example:

- some Roma children do not have access to clean water and most do not finish primary school;
- court procedures involving children are too long and too stressful;
- there is a shortage of paediatricians and mental healthcare professionals focusing on children (the need for both has risen since the pandemic, but the problem was pre-existing).

None of those problems are addressed by the Slovenian Country Report or the Country Specific Recommendations.

For the 2022 Semester Cycle, Member States were asked to 'concentrate' ESF+ resources to

address the challenges identified in the European Semester.

Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights and SAFY fully endorse the first recommendation: 'In 2023, ensure that the growth of nationally financed current expenditure is in line with an overall neutral policy stance, taking into account continued temporary and targeted support to households and firms most vulnerable to energy price hikes and to people fleeing Ukraine. Stand ready to adjust current spending to the evolving situation. Expand public investment for the green and digital transition and for energy security, including by making use of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), RePowerEU and other EU funds. For the period beyond 2023, pursue a fiscal policy aimed at

achieving prudent medium-term fiscal positions. Ensure the long-term fiscal sustainability of the healthcare and long-term care systems. Introduce compensating measures to finalise the shift from labour taxes, including by rebalancing towards more green and growth-friendly taxes'.<sup>5</sup>

## Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

### Child poverty in Slovenia

According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Slovenia has a total [child population of 376.390, 10.6% of which lived at risk of poverty in 2021](#).<sup>6</sup>

According to Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights and Slovenian Association of

<sup>5</sup> *Country Specific Recommendations for Slovenia*, 2022, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, in the year 2021 there were 243.000 persons living in poverty, of which 40.000 were children. The total number of children under the age of 18 in the year 2021 was 376.390. Which means that 10.63 % of all children in Slovenia are living in poverty.

Friends of Youth, the **children most in need in Slovenia** are: Roma children, unaccompanied minors, children with disabilities and special needs, refugee children, children with a migrant background, children living in single parent households, children living in low-income families – and especially families with both parents receiving minimum wage, which is so low in Slovenia that parents cannot afford everything they need.

These groups are especially vulnerable and at risk with the winter approaching and given the current energy and socio-economic crisis.

Children coming from different vulnerable backgrounds have different key needs:

- Roma children are primarily in need of access to clean water, decent housing, and equal access to primary school education;
- Unaccompanied minors primarily need the

government to focus on **deinstitutionalisation efforts** to prevent them from being placed in detention facilities (e.g., prisons) and on a **more systematic approach to efficiently and quickly deciding on their asylum applications;**

- Parents with children with disabilities and special needs need higher social transfers, a more comprehensive health care insurance to cover all the expenses, and therapies.

Additionally, all vulnerable children need more accessible healthcare with an adequate number of paediatricians and more mental healthcare practitioners, and higher minimum wage (which is currently being discussed by the government).

Therefore, the Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights and SAFY call on the Slovenian government to focus on the following policy priorities that would contribute to ending child poverty and social exclusion:

1. **Policy for Roma children** to ensure their access to clean water, decent housing, and effective access to primary school.
2. **Higher minimum wages** and higher social transfers.
3. **Policy changes in Slovenia's healthcare:** more paediatricians, more mental healthcare professionals.

## European Child Guarantee

### Slovenia National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022. However, at the time of writing this report, Slovenia had not submitted it.

The Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal

Opportunities is responsible for the preparation and further implementation of the Slovenian NAP and a **governmental working group** was established in October 2021, with members coming from **civil society organisations**, including the Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights. The members of the working group met in person once and continued consultations via e-mail.

Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights and Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth were involved to an online national **consultation process with 45 children** in March 2022. The children were selected with the support of elementary school mentors, they were mostly between 13 and 14 years old, and they were coming from different regions of Slovenia.

The following topics were discussed as a group and in separate workshops: school and education, health, poverty and social exclusion, housing. Slovenian NGO network for

Children's Rights and SAFY remarked the very high level of discussion and mutual listening while the children shared their experiences and observations.

At the time of drafting this report, no feedback has been received from the organisers of the child participation event. Additionally, the Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights and SAFY have not yet received feedback on the suggestions and feedback they provided together with children on the Slovenian NAP. At this time, the Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights and SAFY are not aware of any plans for children to be involved in the monitoring and evaluating of the NAP.

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

There are a variety of European funds available in Slovenia for actions that invest in children. Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights and Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth are aware of EU funding that can be used at national, regional, and local levels to invest in children. Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights and SAFY also acknowledge that EU funding is very diverse and it covers all the main areas where change can be made in Slovenia.

### Projects funded by the EU in Slovenia

Eurochild members, Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights and SAFY are involved in an EU funded project from the [Digital Europe Programme \(Safe.si\)](#) and

[ERASMUS+ programme \(active citizenship, child participation\)](#).

### Priorities for EU funding in Slovenia

On 28 January 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement that compels member States with a level of child poverty above the EU average (23.4% - AROPE 2017 – 2019) to allocate 5% of ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty.<sup>7</sup> The other Member States, such as Slovenia, should allocate an 'appropriate' amount of their ESF+ resources to combat child poverty.

Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights and SAFY feels there should be:

- **more tenders to support NGOs daily work**, so to support the sustainability and efficacy of existing programmes;

- **more tenders to support vast and complex sociological research** (e.g. research on corporal punishment of children; domestic violence);
- **more tenders to enable NGOs to obtain long-term leases for information centres** in locations closer to the people most in need.



<sup>7</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013.

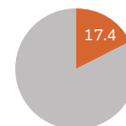
## “ Country recommendation

Families with children are the ones who are suffering the most from the consequences of the pandemic. In this context, Spain must implement specific policies to fight the growth in poverty and inequality which will fall especially on the most vulnerable groups.

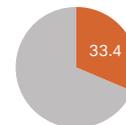
## Country Profile 2022



# Spain



**Child Population:**  
**8.24 million**  
(17.4% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**33.4% (2021) ▲\***

\* [higher compared to pre-covid rates in 2019](#)

## RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

[Plataforma de Infancia](#)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report: identification of the children in need

This year's *European Semester Country Report for Spain* does not clearly outline the main vulnerable groups of children that should be targeted by national policy-makers, and the **areas covered are not representative of the reality on the ground.**

Although the text mentions the levels of child poverty and identifies children as a vulnerable group, it does not provide a more serious analysis and does not propose solutions. There is a lack of data, such as poverty levels for single-parent families, and no comparative analysis of how child poverty has been increasing in the last ten years.

Worryingly, there is no acknowledgement of the acute poverty and social exclusion experienced by children living in segregated settlements in Spain.

The country report **fails to include a comprehensive and holistic reference to the importance of early childhood development**, despite the government's commitment to early childhood care, which is not even mentioned.

There is also no mention of children's mental health and wellbeing, of children's right to be heard or children's rights in the digital environment, despite the worrying increase in suicides among adolescents and the **lack of specialised mental health support** for children and adolescents.

There is no adequate mention of the impact of the pandemic on children and the exacerbation of inequalities.

While the text acknowledges that investments in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) also have to support deinstitutionalisation and support for primary care, there is **no recognition of the devastating impact that living in institutions has on children's lives**, and the specific needs of children in alternative care are not addressed.

In addition to addressing school drop-out as a priority issue, there should be a specific focus on children who drop out of compulsory education. There are some children, including many Roma children, who do not complete compulsory education in Spain: 64% of Roma students between 16 and 24 years old do not finish compulsory studies compared to 13% of overall students.

The social exclusion experienced by Roma children is not

addressed, despite the severity of this problem. In fact, 89% of all Roma children live in poverty;<sup>1</sup> therefore, Plataforma de Infancia believes that the country report should **prioritise certain investments for this particular group of children**, among others.

Our member identified one welcome reference to investing in children in the country report: 'The share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion is high, with significant regional disparities, and it worsened during the pandemic. Close to one in three children was at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Spain in 2020 (well above the 24% EU average). The pandemic is likely to have increased the risk of poverty. In this regard, the entry into force of a national minimum income scheme (part of the RRP's first set of milestones) has boosted support to poor families. The RRP also includes a reform to reorganise and simplify

<sup>1</sup> Fundación Secretariado Gitano, *Comparative study on the situation of the Roma population in Spain in relation to employment and poverty*, 2019.

non-contributory benefits in 2022. Tax benefits will also be reviewed in order to improve support to low- and middle-income families. A new law seeks to encourage the availability of affordable and social housing, which remains a significant challenge, especially for young people and low-income households’.

### Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

At a global level, the recommendations included in the Country Report correspond to macroeconomic reforms that Spain needs. However, there is **no mention of the rights of children.**

In previous years, the [Country Specific Recommendations for Spain](#) have always included a recommendation to reduce child poverty so it is striking that, despite the increase in child poverty in Spain, this year there is no such recommendation.

Spain has developed a **social safety net through the Minimum Vital Income (MVI) scheme**, and

integrated the Child Benefit (CB) for dependent children. While this represents a substantial improvement in the amount of support for families with children living in severe poverty, the number of eligible households has been reduced. A child allowance under the MVI scheme has been also developed and this measure is extendable to families whose income does not exceed 300% of the MVI threshold (€100 in the case of children from 0 to 3 years of age, €70 in the case of children from 0 to 3 years of age, and €50 for children between 6 and 18 years of age).

Plataforma de Infancia stresses that the first recommendation addressed to Spain, in addition to maintaining a prudent fiscal policy and **targeted support for the most vulnerable households**, should also include parenting support and the need to prioritise child poverty in use of European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) funding. In particular, Eurochild members welcome the recommendation for continued temporary and targeted support to the most vulnerable

households in light of the current energy price rises. They also recommend **expanding public investment to benefit the most vulnerable families**, through tax reform and priority investment in child poverty reduction. This recommendation could ensure that the ESF+ is used to address child poverty and social exclusion, considering the traditionally high level of child poverty in Spain compared to the European average.

### Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

#### Child poverty in Spain

Spain has a total [child population of 8.24 million](#), [33.4% of which lived at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021](#).

As the Child Guarantee National Action Plan (NAP) properly illustrates, the most vulnerable children in Spain are the following: children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, children living in

single-parent households, children with a migrant background, Roma children, children with disabilities, children in a situation of severe housing hardship, refugees and asylum seekers, and children in residential care or under guardianship. In this context, it is **hard to identify a group less forgotten than the others**, because they are all in need of substantial support and protection measures.

These children specifically need overall improvement of the social security system coverage, **free access to all health and education services**, the promotion of foster care, and an increased availability of public housing with priority access for families with children and adolescents.

The MVI has been the main step towards ending inequalities in Spain, and it is expected to **help alleviate child poverty** by supporting the most vulnerable households. In [October 2022](#), two years after its implementation, this measure had reached

509.574 households and around 1.4 million people with financial aid. However, there are **some shortcomings**. For example, families and communities eligible for the MVI have not been involved in the decision-making and/or evaluation of this financial support mechanism. Additionally, some delays and difficulties in processing the MVI requests and receiving the payments have also been reported.

Since this measure is specifically aimed at families living in severe poverty, other families in need that however do not meet the eligibility criteria are effectively left out from the measure.

Finally, the introduction of this measure has also meant the **disappearance of the benefit for a dependent child** and uncertainty as to whether some of Spain's Autonomous Regions will continue to provide their minimum income support to households in need

Although the approval of the MVI and the additional allowance are

positive measures for families living in poverty, **Spain still does not have a universal child allowance**. Overall, there is confusion about the objectives of the fight against poverty and the support given to children in families with fewer resources but who are not necessarily at risk of poverty. **This results in a significant underinvestment in childhood in Spain.**

To end child poverty and social exclusion, Plataforma de Infancia calls on the Spanish government to:

1. Establish a **universal child-benefit** provided through refundable deductions in personal income tax. The aim of this measure is to increase financial support to cover the costs of raising children, to reduce inequality in access to tax benefits by households with lower incomes, and prevent and reduce child poverty and its intensity.
2. Guarantee **access to school services for all boys and girls living in poverty**, by

providing free meals at the school canteen; by improving new and existing educational infrastructure, in line with the European strategic framework for education and training 2021-2030; and by tackling school segregation based on economic and ethnic background as a form of discrimination, which undermines equal rights to education.

3. Improve **access to the Minimum Vital Income** and guarantee that it reaches the most vulnerable children.
4. **Eradicate segregated settlements**, where many Roma and migrant children live.

## European Child Guarantee

### Spain National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation for a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022.

In January 2022, Eurochild published a [Country Report for Spain](#) that included recommendations for the Spanish government to consider when drafting their action plan. The reports also included overall recommendations for all Member States to consider.

National Action Plans should outline the children most in need, the planned and existing policy actions and measures to support them, and a monitoring and evaluation framework. The plans should also be drafted in consultation with children, civil society, and national authorities.

[The National Action Plan of Spain](#), published on 11 July 2022, focuses on:

- Increasing the **number of public places in early education** and prioritising free access for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, particularly in rural areas.
- Increasing **public spending on education** to 5% of GDP by 2030.

- Reinforcing **social protection systems** and prioritising the most vulnerable children.
- Expanding **health service coverage** (especially in mental health and ophthalmology).
- Promoting **foster care and deinstitutionalisation**.
- Improving access to housing, **reducing energy poverty**, and eliminating substandard housing.
- Increasing **public housing** and prioritising access to families with young children and adolescents.
- Implementing **mechanisms for child and youth participation** in public policies and services.

Focus groups were set up with NGOs prior to the drafting of the NAP, but there was **no opportunity for formal input** before or after the drafting of the plan. In particular, Plataforma de Infancia believes they were not provided with the same opportunities to be deeply involved in the process as other civil society organisations in the country. In general, civil society was not involved to the extent they would have expected.

**Children were involved in the drafting of the NAP** through the 'State Council for the Participation of Children and Adolescents', which meets at least twice a year. This Council is made up of 34 boys and girls between the ages of 8 and 17, representatives of local or regional councils, and includes children from groups with a vulnerable background and those who are part of state level participatory processes. 12 children were involved by completing a pre-evaluation form of the NAP. However, Plataforma de Infancia had no access to these documents and has not received further details about this process.

Overall, the Eurochild member agrees with the three strategic priorities included in the NAP:

- the **fight against poverty** and the strengthening of social protection (axis 1);
- the **universalisation of social rights** through access to, and enjoyment of, services (axis 2);
- the **promotion of country-**

**wide equity**, and of protective, egalitarian, inclusive, and participatory environments (axis 3).

However, it should be recognised that **some objectives are not ambitious enough**. For instance, the goal to reduce substandard housing settlements should instead propose to eradicate them. Besides, unlike axis 1 and 2, axis 3 presents only a very general section of 'Vision to 2030' and **fails to include a concrete indicator or goal to achieve by 2030**.

Plataforma de Infancia expressed some **concerns regarding the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation** of the NAP, especially related to the fact that, from a governance point of view, civil society has only a consultative role through the [Childhood Observatory](#). This contradicts the aspiration of multi-level governance that should include the social sector as an equal partner in all the development phases of the NAP. The Eurochild member also

commented that children are intended to be involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the NAPs but that plans for this have not been clearly communicated yet.

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

There are a variety of European funds available in Spain for actions that invest in children. At national level, information about funds can be found [on this website](#). Plataforma de Infancia is aware of EU funding that can be used at national, regional, and local levels to invest in children. However they highlighted that **information related to EU funding is not very accessible to civil society**.

One of the main principles of ESF+ regulation is social dialogue and civil society engagement. However, our member stated that social dialogue is limited and fragmented.

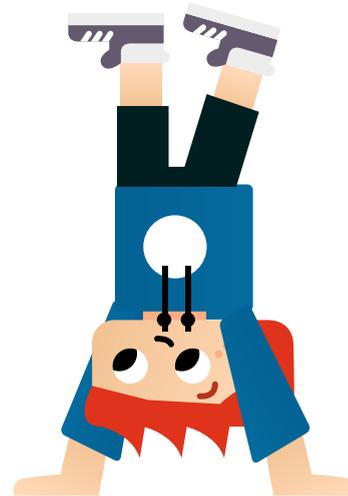
## Projects funded by the EU in Spain

Since 2019 Plataforma de Infancia has been involved in an EU-funded project through the National Cybersecurity Institute (INCIBE). This project provides funds for the **development of a participation programme**, within the framework of the Safe Internet Centre of Spain (SIC Spain) project. Under this programme, Plataforma de Infancia works with a network of young journalists, [the cyber-correspondents](#). The girls and boys who participate in this network acquire skills and competencies in digital tools and in child participation processes, in order to know and defend children's rights. **Addressing children's rights in the digital sphere contributes to safe and responsible use of the Internet.**

## Priorities for EU funding in Spain

On 28 January 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement that compels Member States with a level of child poverty above the EU average (23.4% - AROPE 2017 – 2019) to allocate 5% of ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty.<sup>2</sup> Spain is one of the countries bound by this agreement.

Plataforma de Infancia calls on the government of Spain to **prioritise investment in the areas related to the above mentioned 3 axes** included in the NAP and to **support the completion of compulsory education** for the most disadvantage groups, focusing especially on Roma girls, by working with children, families, and schools.



<sup>2</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013

# Statistics explained

Data on population and child poverty provided in this publication was retrieved from Eurostat, although in some cases data is complemented with national sources. The only exception is Northern Ireland, where data collected by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency<sup>1</sup> was used since it is not a geopolitical entity for which Eurostat provides data.

The arrow (  /  ) displayed on the cover for each country report reflects an increase or decrease in the 2021 child poverty rate for that country over pre-pandemic data in 2019. This comparison could not be provided for Northern Ireland due to lack of data after 2020.

Population numbers are rounded to the nearest person (the previous decimal down).

The most recent data on children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) was taken from 2021 data. Eurostat data is derived from EU-SILC (European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions), compiled annually. AROPE is the main headline indicator to monitor the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan poverty target. It reflects the share of the population fulfilling at least one of the following three conditions:

- at risk of poverty, meaning below the poverty threshold,
- in a situation of severe material deprivation,
- living in a household with a very low work intensity.

[More information on child poverty rates in Europe](#)

[More information on AROPE methodology](#)

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth mentioning official population statistics in Northern Ireland use 0-14 age range based on Census Data while official Poverty Statistics define children as individuals aged under 16. A person will also be identified as a child if they are 16 to 19 years old and they are not married nor in a civil partnership nor living with a partner; are living with parents; and are in full-time non-advanced education or in unwaged government training. This rate is for Relative Poverty, before housing costs.

# Other recent Eurochild Publications

## Child Guarantee

- [Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce Country Reports](#)
- [Child Guarantee National Action Plans at a glance](#)

## Early Years

- [First Years First Priority Campaign – Country Profiles](#)

## Children in Alternative Care

- [DataCare project – Country Overviews](#)
- [Policy & Legal review for children in alternative care & unaccompanied and separated children arriving from Ukraine](#)
- [Discussion Paper on guardianship, care arrangements and custodial responsibilities for unaccompanied and separated children fleeing Ukraine and arriving in the European Union](#)
- [Children in alternative care: Comparable statistics to monitor progress on deinstitutionalisation across the European Union](#)
- [Better data for better child protection systems in Europe](#)

## Child Participation

- [Eurochild Child Participation Strategy](#)

## Children's rights in the Digital Environment:

- [Eurochild calls to make the internet a safe place for Children](#)

## Other

- [Strategic framework 2022-2025](#)





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