

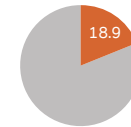
“Country recommendation

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

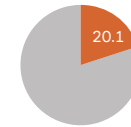
Country Profile 2022



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'.¹

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.

¹ *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

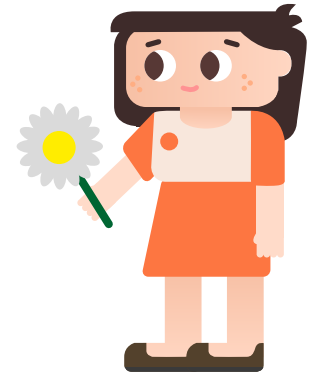
document on children in 5 years, the allocation of funds is not strategically planned and therefore will not improve the situation of children in Latvia.

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.² 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.



² 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.