

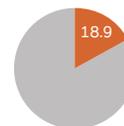
“Country recommendation

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.

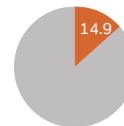
Country
Profile 2022



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.¹

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 1999² 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 rate³. 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.

³ 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.