

“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.

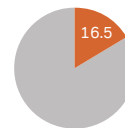
Country Profile 2022



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 area 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.

