

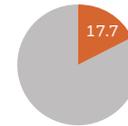
“Country recommendation

Slovenia should take action to reduce poverty and ensure healthcare for all children, including access to paediatricians and mental care professionals.

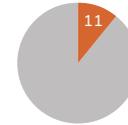
Country Profile 2022



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%).¹

Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights and SAFY welcome the very relevant efforts to 'in combination with ESF+², (...) contribute to reaching the 2030 EU headline target on poverty reduction'.³ 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'.⁴

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**

¹ *European Semester Report for Slovenia*, Table A12.1: Social Scoreboard for Slovenia, p.46.

² (*Editor's Note*) ESF+: European Social Fund Plus.

³ *European Semester Report for Slovenia*, p.47.

⁴ *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'.⁵

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](#).⁶

According to Slovenian NGO network for Children's Rights and Slovenian Association of

⁵ *Country Specific Recommendations for Slovenia*, 2022, p. 10.

⁶ 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.⁷ 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.



⁷ 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.