

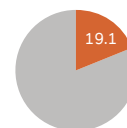
“Country recommendation

Cyprus should take action to include children in all decision-making processes for all issues that affect them and make sure they collect disaggregated data on children.

Country Profile 2023



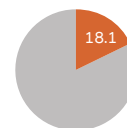
Cyprus



Child Population:

173,028

19.1% of total population



Child Poverty:

31,318

18.1% (2022)

▼ -1.1% compared to 2021

RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children (PCCPWC)

Children's Rights in Cyprus

In Cyprus, no political appointee is responsible for children's rights. However, key policies on children's rights in Cyprus are developed by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Justice. The country also recently developed a new legislation on [Children Against the Law \(N. 55\(I\)/2021\)](#) which provides the framework and the necessary mechanisms to ensure fair treatment of children in the justice system, taking into account their age and vulnerability.

The Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children (PCCPWC) states that there are various legislations on violence against children, corporal punishment, sexual abuse, and exploitation. The government of Cyprus is committed to implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as much as possible.

PCCPWC stresses that the Children's Law in Cyprus has been under review for several years. The legal framework existed since 1952 (with amendments and annexes added since). PCCPWC has been advocating for the government of Cyprus to enact a new law since 1990, but this has not yet passed.

Cyprus has an independent office of the [Commissioner for the Protection of Children's Rights](#).

The 4 pillars of the Office of the Commissioner are:

- Monitoring of legislation, policies and practices that affect children;
- Sensitisation on children's rights;
- Empowering children and promoting their participation;
- Representing children in processes that affect them.

However, this role can only provide recommendations to the government.

PCCPWC identified several critical areas related to children's rights, namely in the area of children being experts in their own lives; anti-child rights movements; child safety online, (digital) well-being and mental health; child protection systems; and children impacted by war and conflict.

Child participation

In Cyprus, children are not considered partners, and are not invited to participate in any decision-making processes. Also, family culture does not involve children in decision-making. Child participation is a relatively "new" concept.

PCCPWC recommends the government in Cyprus, especially the Ministry of Education, to involve a significant number of children more regularly in decision-making instead of working with only a small group of organised students, as is often the case.

Anti-child rights movements

PCCPWC has not seen any evidence of anti-child rights movements in Cyprus. However, family/parent organisations often ask to be consulted, overcoming the right of children to raise their voice on issues affecting them.

PCCPWC recommends the government of Cyprus to include children in consultations on matters that directly affect them and not only ask family/parent's organisations.

Child safety and well-being online

PCCPWC reports that significant efforts have been made for several years in Cyprus to inform children of all ages about their online safety and ways to report abuse, bullying, and other issues. There is a special police unit, a dedicated phone line, and a series of trainings through the [Pedagogical Institute](#) that is expected to reach many children through peer-to-peer learning.

Mental health had not been a priority for the government in Cyprus until the Covid-19 pandemic. However, even in that period of crisis, the government's response to mental health has been superficial.

PCCPWC recommends that the Ministry of Health prioritise directly consulting with children about their mental health. In addition, all activities focusing on child safety online, (digital) well-being and mental health should be better coordinated and involve all civil society organisations working with children to disseminate the good practices widely.

Child protection systems

According to PCCPWC, there is not an adequate and comprehensive system of child protection in Cyprus for vulnerable groups, the majority of which are migrants. PCCPWC recommends the development of a comprehensive child protection system that includes

all individuals under the age of 18, regardless of race, religion, or parent's status.

Children impacted by war and conflict

PCCPWC reports a strong response by the government of Cyprus to accommodate the needs of Ukrainian children. However, there was no real effort to do the same for other children with a migrant background, especially those arriving unaccompanied and without papers. Many children with a migrant background live in adverse conditions and are deprived of schooling, and their development needs are unmet. PCCPWC recommends that the migration policy in Cyprus is non-discriminative and recognises the rights of all children.

Poverty and Social Exclusion – Experiences of children, families, and communities

Child poverty in Cyprus

Cyprus has a total child population of 173,028, of which 18.1% live at risk of poverty and social exclusion as of 2022. That amounts to approximately 31,318 children in need in Cyprus. The rate of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion has decreased since 2021.

The Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children (PCCPWC) states that the number of children at risk of poverty and exclusion in Cyprus has decreased over the last two years due to social transfers available for all age groups.

According to PCCPWC, the groups of children most in need and often forgotten in policy responses in the country are children with a migrant background and children

with special needs. Children with a migrant background are often placed in mainstream schooling before obtaining adequate language skills or some of them are not even enrolled in any educational programme. The government of Cyprus must ensure that all children have access to an inclusive education. Children with a migrant background should be regularly assessed for academic purposes, their living conditions, mental health, family relationships, and any other needs.

“Children with a migrant background in Cyprus are often the ones who are likely to suffer without anyone noticing.”

Different groups of children with special needs should be better supported, especially in their education and rehabilitation. For example, children who require an accompanying adult to be able to attend mainstream school should be provided with such support, and that adult must only cater for one child and not a group (two or three is now the case).

According to PCCPWC, school rehabilitation programs are poorly monitored, evaluated, and modified. They do not always meet children's needs. For some children with disabilities, school should not only be a place for learning but also to receive a wide range of specific therapies and psychological support. Personalising the support children need will allow them to reach their full potential.

To help tackle child poverty and social exclusion, the government of Cyprus should prioritise:

1. Continuous assessment and revisiting of education, health (including prevention) and social protection policies for children with a migrant background.
2. Better coordination across the Ministries involved (Education, Health, Social Welfare).
3. Personalised schemes for children with disabilities and/or requiring learning support.
4. Social transfers not only in hard cash to the parents/family but also in direct free key services to children (e.g., transport, extracurricular activities).

The European Child Guarantee

Cyprus' National Action Plan

2023 marked the third year of the European Child Guarantee's implementation and two years since Member States were requested to submit their National Action Plans (NAPs) to

outline how they would address child poverty at national level.

The National Action Plan of Cyprus was published on 5 December 2022.¹ According to the Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children (PCCPWC), the NAP includes a comprehensive list of children most in need in Cyprus.

The NAP targets:

- Children under (statutory) care – especially those under the protection of the Director of Social Services;
- Children with a migrant background, including unaccompanied minors (under the protection of the Director of Social Services);
- Children in vulnerable family situations (relying on Social Services and receiving social benefits from the Welfare Department);
- Children with disabilities;

- Children belonging to a minority racial or ethnic group (especially Roma);
- Children with housing problems (families that are identified by the relevant departments such as the Social Services or the Welfare Department);
- Children with mental health issues.

Although the NAP includes various actions, it fails to consider child poverty in its entirety – the NAP consists of bits and pieces that can contribute to combatting child poverty. According to PCCPWC, a more holistic and comprehensive approach to combatting child poverty should be employed. It is currently unclear which synergies will exist between different Ministries and authorities and how combatting child poverty will be mainstreamed in all actions that would be key to lifting children out of poverty and social exclusion in Cyprus.

¹ The lists of Child Guarantee National Coordinators and National Action Plans, where published, are available at the bottom of [this page](#).

It must be clarified if the NAP includes robust indicators and a monitoring framework. Statistics and data will be collected, and a monitoring mechanism will be established. The NAP states that there will be a committee, but it is not clear if and when civil society and children (and which children) will be involved.

“PCCPWC will welcome and support activities focusing on the Child Guarantee NAP for Cyprus that will enhance child participation and structures to ensure that children are involved in the implementation and assessment processes.”

European Semester 2023 – Country reports and recommendations

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

According to the Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children (PCCPWC), overall, children were overlooked in the 2023 European Semester Country Report for Cyprus, as it did not accurately reflect the reality on the ground. The Country Report failed to include the vulnerable groups of children that national policymakers should target.

These include:

- Children living in poverty and social exclusion, as there is no real mention of children or any measures for them. The one-off allowance towards the energy cost increase has not made a real difference and has no real added value.
- The early childhood development scheme on

tuition subsidy is currently only available for children aged four years and eight months. This scheme has been criticised for favouring private schooling and not enhancing public schools. The focus on early childhood education and care is not about quality or accessibility but to put mothers back into the labour market. The scheme is expected to be tested in the 2023-2024 school year. After then PCCPWC plans to assess and evaluate it.

- Children in alternative care and deinstitutionalisation are invisible in the report. Deinstitutionalisation has previously been a goal for the government of Cyprus, but due to the increasing numbers of unaccompanied minors, children with a migrant background are currently placed in institutions with no opportunity for a placement in family-based alternative care. This is not the case for Cypriot children, as numbers for them are very low and efforts are made to place these children in alternative care.

- An emphasis on education performance rather than an education experience. PCCPWC acknowledge that the [PISA results](#) (2018) for Cyprus are not good, and they believe there is a need for a radical change in the education system, which was promised by the government but has yet to be carried out. PCCPWC states that the [changes made to the curricula](#) for 2023-2024, such as the examinations system reform, are not enough. There needs to be a radical rethinking of what the people of Cyprus expect from the system, a radical change in teaching and examining methods and continuous teacher training to implement the changes. PCCPWC agree that there are huge disparities based on children's socioeconomic status, and in their opinion, this has never been given adequate attention.

Therefore, they have been calling for linking education with social conditions.

Other pressing issues that the government of Cyprus should prioritise are children's right to be heard, the need of children with a migrant background - including child refugees, the need of children impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the inequalities that have been exacerbated, and children's mental health and well-being.

Overall, PCCPWC was not involved in the Semester Process 2023 and is continually looking for opportunities to work with the government of Cyprus on issues affecting children.

Regarding the importance of investing in children, PCCPWC welcomed the focus on housing in the Country Report. This is the first time that housing has been included, and funds have been allocated.

Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

One recommendation on housing, included in the Country Report, does correspond sufficiently to reform needs in Cyprus. However, the European Commission should have highlighted the need to support the holistic needs of children in poverty.

