

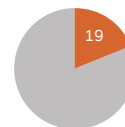
“Country recommendation

Latvia should take action to implement Article 12 of the UNCRC and integrate the recommendations outlined in the General Comment into its national legislation and practical measures. This concerted effort is essential to foster a shared comprehension of child participation and will respect, protect, and fulfil the rights of children in Latvia.

Country
Profile 2023



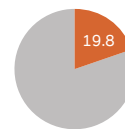
Latvia



Child Population:

356,864

19% of total population



Child Poverty:

70,659

19.8% (2022)

▼ -0.3% compared to 2021

RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

[Association Latvian Child Welfare Network \(LCWN\)](#)

Children's Rights in Latvia

At the national level, the Minister of Welfare is responsible for children's rights in Latvia. However, the [Ministry of Welfare](#) has many parallel competencies. Previously, between 2002 and 2009, there was a Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, and from 2009, this was incorporated into the Ministry of Welfare. Today, the interests and priorities of the person holding the post of Minister for Welfare determine the level of attention given to children's rights.

According to the Association Latvian Child Welfare Network (LCWN), in Latvia, children are seen as part of a family in policy planning, implementation and statistics. This can often impact the child's quality of life as they are seen as an object and not the subject of rights.

Therefore, the family's needs are recognised, but the needs and any

additional support the child needs are not recognised. In policy planning at national and local levels, children are seen as future adults rather than a member of society with their own needs now.

LCWN identified several key areas related to children's rights that they wanted to provide comments on.

Child participation

The [Latvian Law on the Protection of the Children's Rights \(1998\)](#) does not incorporate Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), for children to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, with the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity. Moreover, different laws and regulations set different ages for children's views to be ascertained, from 12 years for views on adoption, 14 years for views on health care and criminal

justice, 11 years for views on educational coercion¹, 13 years for views on civic participation and youth policy. Accordingly, the legal framework has no common or consistent approach for children to provide their views.

Anti-child rights movements

There is a lack of understanding of children's rights across Latvian society, and consequently, a strong resistance to respecting, protecting, and fulfilling children's rights. Instead, there is a focus on children's responsibilities. Currently, teachers and school managers' unions are [campaigning](#) for children with behavioural disorders to be assigned to family education provided by their parents. LCWN is concerned that such a decision will not protect, respect and fulfil children's right to an education ([Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC](#), and [General Comment 1](#) on the aims of education).

Child safety and well-being online

Although educational campaigns and materials are made available occasionally, the actual safety of children on the Internet depends entirely on the knowledge, actions, and capacity of parents. The State does not provide specific protection for children in the digital environment. Mental health and social professionals [have recently become increasingly concerned](#) about children's mental health in Latvia, linking this to the isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic and children's uncontrolled device use. However, children in Latvian schools are largely free from restrictions on the use of devices (phones, tablets, etc.). Some [schools have individual initiatives](#) to restrict the use of devices in schools, but this is not a priority for national policy.

¹ Law On the Imposition of Compulsory Measures of a Correctional Nature on Children, Legal Acts of the Republic of Latvia, Section 3, and Section 12.

Child protection systems

The child protection system in Latvia is fragmented and no one institution is responsible for child protection. The Ministry of Welfare is the policymaker. The State Inspectorate for the Protection of Children's Rights is a direct administrative body under the supervision of the Minister of Welfare, which ensures supervision and control of compliance with laws and regulations in protecting children's rights and the activities of the Orphan Courts.²

The Orphan Courts are an important part of the children's rights protection system that ensures the protection of the rights and legal interests of the child and make decisions concerning children. Experts continue to debate the lack of influence and decision-making capacity of Orphans' Courts staff. Therefore, a growing debate is on

the need for a children's family court that will replace the Orphan Courts.

The reform of the Inspectorate is currently under review to structurally separate the support function from the supervisory function and establishing the Inspectorate as a support institution.

There is no children's Ombudsperson in Latvia. However, there is an Ombudsperson who is responsible for child protection issues. LCWN reports that children rarely turn to the Ombudsperson as they are unaware of the role in protecting their rights. The Ombudsperson is also not represented on the [Children's Cooperation Council](#) of the Ministry of Welfare, a collegial body convened by the Minister of Welfare to promote coordinated action between institutions to protect children's rights.

In Latvia, a child at risk does not have a single responsible person (social worker or case manager) in charge of their case and its progresses. Thus, no one is looking after the child's best interests. Each case is handled in a fragmented way as it moves through the system, depending on the specific area of work of the particular person responsible for the process.

Children impacted by war and conflict

The war in Ukraine has increased nationalism in Latvia, which has created negative social attitudes towards the use of the Russian language and ethnicity. These social resentments have a direct impact on children. This is especially significant given that Russian is the mother language of about 36% of the Latvian population.

As a result of the war in Ukraine, Ukrainian refugee children

currently make up 2% of children in Latvia. LCWN is currently clarifying information on the needs and available support for Ukrainian children in Latvia.

Children's mental health

The main problems in mental health in Latvia are related to the shortage and availability of professionals. In addition, societal stigma towards mental health persists, which affects the speed with which mental health professionals are contacted, if at all.

Children from 14 years old can receive psychological counselling without parental consent. LCWN is calling for this age limit to be removed and for a child to receive psychological counselling at whatever age they require it. If such access is free, this would significantly expand the possibilities for children to receive psychological support

² This is a historical title, and they are not courts. An Orphan's Court is a guardianship and trusteeship institution established by a local government. They are not only for child right protection of orphans but for all children.

anonymously and timely. Mental health support and services for children are expensive, and these costs are either not covered by the State or insufficiently covered. School psychologists are available to children but are often used in schools as a punishment for inappropriate behaviour.

Moreover, according to the [legislation](#), psychological counselling is one of the coercive measures of an educational nature, which consequently does not promote trust in mental health professionals among the general public, including children.

In addition, there are no medical and rehabilitation services available for children with addictions in Latvia. Despite the extremely widespread problem of addiction, there is only [one motivational programme](#) for young people with addictions, and only if they do not want to continue treatment.

Education

Developing an inclusive education system is a key issue in Latvia.

Currently, children with special needs and disabilities are not provided with the necessary support in schools. Often, a teacher must cope alone with a class of 30 children, where some have behavioural problems, and some have learning disabilities. As a result, schools have very high levels of bullying, both by teachers and between children. [Latvia](#) has the highest school bullying rates among both OECD and EU countries.

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

Child poverty in Latvia

Latvia has a total child population of 356,864, of which 19.8% of children live at risk of poverty and social exclusion as of 2022. That amounts to an estimated 70,659 children in need in Latvia. The rate of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion has slightly decreased by 0.3% since 2021.

According to the Association Latvian Child Welfare Network (LCWN), the groups of children most in need in Latvia are children with disabilities, including children with mental disabilities, street children, children from families at social risk, Roma children, refugee children, including Ukrainian children, children in alternative care, under-age parents-to-be/ young parents, children of parents with mental disabilities/severely ill parents, children of single-parent families.

The children listed above require available and sufficient universal services, and specialised services according to the specific needs of each target group. Also, due to diverse needs, the groups of children require individual evaluations and individually tailored services.

To tackle child poverty and social exclusion, the Latvian government should prioritise:

1. The development of social services, including creating a wide range of basic services in municipalities.

2. Increasing the quality of education, including free school meals for all age groups and free extra-curricular education.
3. Developing an inclusive housing policy.

A recent promising practice of an intervention that has helped children in need in Latvia are [OPEN Radošais Centrs](#) for young people aged 13 to 25. The 19 centres are located across Latvia. Most of the children attending these centres spend their days on the streets and are at risk of dropping out of school.

The young people are mostly from families at social risk, families in need or who are homeless, and children neglected in affluent families. Young people can receive a range of support without providing personal data and without involving the orphan court or social services, where there is a lack of trust and security.

The centres allow young people to eat, wash, receive hygiene items, and, if necessary, to receive advice from various medical and

mental health specialists, lawyers, etc., as well as help to continue their education. The centres also have several apartments where young adults and women (mothers) suffering from intimate partner violence are provided with temporary accommodation.

The European Child Guarantee

Latvia's 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 Latvia had yet to be published at the time of writing this report.³ Association Latvian Child Welfare Network (LCWN) is aware that Latvia submitted its NAP to the European

Commission on 1st of June 2023, but the NAP has not yet been published and made available for analysis. LCWN reported that non-governmental organisations were not involved in preparing the NAP.

The LCWN has identified two main obstacles that are challenging for civil society organisations in shaping national policy in Latvia:

1. Meaningful participation of children in policy making is not implemented in practice.
2. Meaningful cooperation between non-governmental organisations and policymakers.

For the NAP, LCWN has been calling for the Latvian government to provide free meals for all children in schools, and fully funded meals in kindergartens for all children, not only for certain categories. In addition, they call on the Latvian government to prioritise early intervention policies to help prevent many of the issues children face today.

European Semester 2023 – Country reports and recommendations

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

The 2023 European Semester Country Report for Latvia outlines the needs of young children. However, it does not include a policy on early childhood development planning, guidance on the need for such planning, or targets for support. The report includes goals to improve access to education for all children. However, it does not have targets to promote inclusive education and the need to increase the availability of special education programmes in mainstream schools, to end the practice of residential schools, and to reduce the very widespread problem of bullying in school systems.

Overall, the European Semester Country report did not accurately reflect the reality on the ground. The Country Report failed to include the needs of families with children (especially single-parent families), families with children with disabilities, young people after leaving alternative care, families with children at social risk, street children, Roma children, refugee children including Ukrainian children, under-age parents-to-be/young parents, children of parents with mental disabilities/severely ill parents among the groups at social risk.

The report does not address the current problems of alternative care, including insufficient numbers of foster families, quality of care provided by foster families, unavailability of care for young people with behavioural and addiction problems, and aftercare support systems for care leavers. In addition, the support system for children and after out-of-family

³ The lists of Child Guarantee National Coordinators and National Action Plans, where published, are available at the bottom of [this page](#).

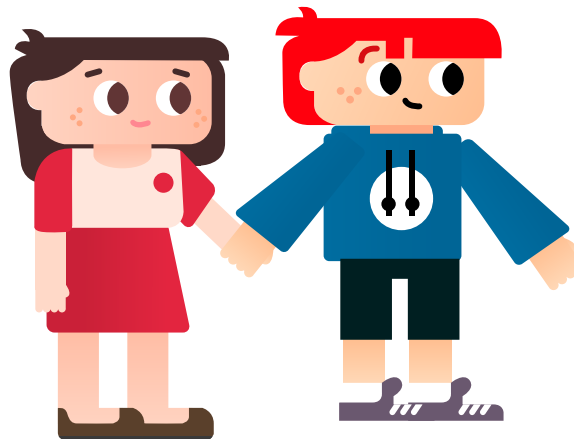
care is formal and inadequate, leaving them unable to continue their education and at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

The report does not mention the situation and the country's plans for children's mental health and well-being. In addition, there needs to be recognition of the much-needed attention to children's rights in the digital world, including protecting children from age-inappropriate content on the Internet.

There are more than 4,000 Ukrainian children enrolled in Latvian schools. It is particularly worrying that the report does not draw attention to the State'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.

Overall, the Association Latvian Child Welfare Network was not involved in the Semester Process 2023, and they are unaware of the involvement of any other civil society organisation.

Overall, there is a lack of focus on investing in children, and the Recommendations issued by this year's European Semester do not reflect the situation of children in Latvia. Therefore, they do not meet the needs of national reforms needed for children.



Eurochild advocates for children's rights and well-being to be at the heart of policymaking. We are a network of organisations working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. We influence policies, build internal capacities, facilitate mutual learning and exchange practice and research. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the foundation of all our work.



Eurochild

Putting children at
the heart of Europe

info@eurochild.org - www.eurochild.org

Avenue des Arts 7/8 1210 Brussels, Belgium

+32 2 511 7083

For more information, contact:

Dr Ally Dunhill

Eurochild Director of Policy,

Advocacy and Communications

Ally.Dunhill@eurochild.org



Eurochild

Putting children at
the heart of Europe



**Funded by
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.