

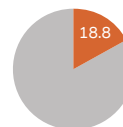
“ Country recommendation

The Netherlands should take action to decrease child poverty and look into achieving more structural solutions and taking measures targeted at specific groups of vulnerable children.

Country
Profile 2023



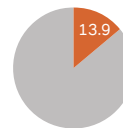
Netherlands



Child Population:

3,300,844

18.8% of total population



Child Poverty:

458,817

13.9% (2022)

▼ -1.0% compared to 2021

RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights

Utrecht University, Strategic Theme 'Dynamics of Youth'

Children's Rights in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands there is currently a caretaker State Secretary at the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport responsible for children's rights.

Key policies on children's rights in the Netherlands include the *Youth Reform Agenda*¹, *Programme plan 2023-2026 Future scenario for child and family protection*² and the *Approach to tackle money worries, poverty, and debt*.³

In relation to the implementation of children's rights, Dutch members pointed out that the Netherlands dropped from its 4th place in the 2022 Kids Rights Index to the 20th place in the [2023 Kids Rights Index](#). There was in particular a decrease in the area of health and the largest decline in the area defined as

'enabling environments for child rights'. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child highlighted in their concerns in the Concluding Observations of 2022 that 'not all municipalities have an anti-discrimination service in accordance with the Municipal Anti-Discrimination Services Act' and that discrimination disproportionately affect children in disadvantaged situations.

Child participation

While there are many different activities regarding child and youth participation at local, regional, and national level there is no integrated approach in the Netherlands. Each Ministry deals with children in its own way. To improve the situation it is recommended that the Netherlands implements the [Council of Europe's Child Participation Assessment Tool](#).

Children in migration and refugees

The crisis in the Dutch asylum reception is hitting children the hardest, with harrowing living conditions in emergency shelters and problems with access to care and children who sometimes do not go to school for months. The Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights recommends that the government develops a national asylum reception programme, in which children's rights, such as the right to care and education, are embedded based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Access to mental health care for children with a refugee background is not always within range and it is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Justice and Security and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and

Sport work more intensively together and accessible information about the way mental health care is organised in the Netherlands needs to be made available. Moreover, children do not always have access to education, because they do not possess a residence permit.

Climate change and environmental impacts

The Netherlands air pollution is negatively impacting on children's health: one in five children suffer from asthma due to air pollution.⁴ Besides pollution, climate change increasingly impacts Dutch children, as the floods of July 2021 in the South of the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany demonstrated.

Children growing up in the province of Groningen suffer [the consequences of earthquakes](#),

1 *Hervormingsagenda Jeugd 2023-2028, Annex to Kamerbrief voortgang Jeugd*, Rijksoverheid, Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, Ministry of Justice and Security, 2023.

2 Voor Jeugd en Gezin, *Programmaplan 2023-2026 Toekomstscenario kind- en gezinsbescherming, 2023*. Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, Letter of the government, *Toekomstscenario kind- en gezinsbescherming*, 2021.

3 *Kamerbrief Aanpak geldzorgen armoede en schulden*, Rijksoverheid, Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2022.

4 Longfonds, *Position paper Gezonde lucht voor gezonde longen*, 2022.

including increased anxiety and stress, due to gas extractions.

Children's mental health

The proportion of young people (12-15 years old) with mental health complaints, which was exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis, has decreased only slightly since the end of the last lockdown in early 2022. In June 2022, the Secretary of State launched an [Action Plan](#) to tackle mental health problems in five different domains: society in general, neighbourhoods, school, work and online. The action plan however has no clear objectives, terms and conditions and budget. Youth mental health care is struggling with the same issues since the 1980s, budget cuts, long waiting lists and low quality of care.

The [Dutch Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children \(HBSC\) study](#) revealed that the percentage of girls experiencing

emotional problems has almost doubled between 2017 and 2021 and the situation did not improve in 2022. Adolescents growing up in families with a low socioeconomic status or that grow up with one parent report relatively high levels of mental health problems.

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

Child poverty in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has a total child population of 3.30 million, of which 13.9% live at risk of poverty and social exclusion as of 2022. That is nearly 460,000 children in need. The rate of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion has decreased since recent years.

The groups of children most in need in the country are those

with a migrant background, children from single families, children with a disability, children from an ethnic minority, and children living in specific areas of the country.

From 2024 onwards, temporary benefits will end, meaning that households with one or more children living around the social minimum income level will be short of finances each month to pay for their basic needs – according to analysis by the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis in March and August 2023. The government's Commission for those living around the social minimum has recommended to implement a new system to prevent the rise in poverty, which includes an increase in child benefits.

An investment of 6 billion Euro is needed annually to counter poverty, but currently the government has pledged

to invest only 2 billion Euro. Discussions within Parliament are still ongoing, as of publication.

In the Netherlands, services are mainly focused on children in a family setting. Access to social benefits is needed to particularly support children that grow up in residential care or in precarious family situations including children with a parent without a residence permit; children growing up in homeless families; children whose parents had cuts to their social benefits; parents who do not use children's benefits for their children and parents with limited cognitive capabilities or who are illiterate. Currently these children have no access to social benefits.⁵ To address this gap, it is recommended that Netherland's reservation to Article 26 of the UNCRC is withdrawn.

Accessible and high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) has several benefits for

⁵ De Wildt, R., Jonker, M., Van Loon-Dijkers, L., Lünemann, K., *'Kinderen missen zelfstandig recht op sociale zekerheid, Het Nederlands voorbehoud op artikel 26 IVRK'*, Verwey Jonker Instituut, 2021.

children growing up in poverty. In the Netherlands, municipalities decide which toddlers should need support to access ECEC. The main indicator used is parents' (low) education level. However, municipalities cannot require parents to enrol their children in an ECEC-group. It is recommended that parents receive more information on ECEC.

A positive reform regarding accessible and affordable childcare that the government should pay 95% of the costs of childcare for working parents due to come into effect from 1 January 2025, has been postponed until 2027, due to high shortages in childcare staff.

The government has set a maximum hourly tariff for childcare for which parents receive a childcare benefit. In case there is a shortage of childcare staff,

which is currently the case in the Netherlands, staff salaries rise above the maximum tariff, meaning that poorer families are not able to pay for childcare anymore.

To help tackle child poverty and social exclusion, the Dutch government should prioritise to address the following 3 policy areas:

- address mental health problems among children and adolescents;
- guarantee access to early childhood education and care, particularly for children in need;
- ensure children not growing up in a family setting or in precarious family situations have access to social benefits.

A recent good example of a project that has helped children in need is the Team-Up project.

This project contributes to the psychosocial well-being of refugee children and children with a migration background through play and exercise. The programme has been specifically developed for children aged 6 to 18 years. Through play, children at Team-Up learn to deal with emotions such as fear, anger and sadness. The skills they acquire are linked to social-emotional themes. New children can immediately participate in the programme's activities because it is not necessary to speak each other's language; rather communication comes by playing and moving together, instead of talking.

Another example is the *JIM method*, your personal informal mentor, that allows a young person to select their own mentor to support with conflicts at home and to avoid placements into care. Research into the method has

seen small but positive effects for young people.⁶

The European Child Guarantee

The Netherlands' National Action Plan

The National Action Plan of the Netherlands was published in March 2022.⁷ According to the Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights, the NAP should be a coherent strategy, but seems to be more of a list of activities.

The NAP fails to identify some of the children most in need in the country, namely children with migrant backgrounds. In 2022, 3 out of 10 children with parents with a migrant background were at risk of poverty, which was over 4 times higher than for children with native born parents (6.9%). Almost 40% of households

6 See Koper et al. (2022). *Resilience, well-being and informal and formal support in multi-problem families during the Covid-19 pandemic*; Sekreve et al. (2020) *Uiting van centrale concepten, onderliggend aan de JIM-aanpak, in het handelen van professionals binnen de specialistische hulp, Het JIM-project fase 3 over trajecten bij Youké waarin met de JIM-aanpak wordt gewerkt*; and Van Dam et al. (2019) *Natuurlijk mentorschap in de jeugdhulp, Duurzame oplossing voor een complex probleem*.

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

with a breadwinner of Afghan, Iraqi, Iranian, Somalian, Syrian or Eritrean origin was at risk of poverty in 2020.⁸

Children from single parent families were also among those identified as a group of children that should be included in the NAP (15% of single families with children below the age of 18 were at risk of poverty in 2020). Children with disabilities (25.9% were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2022) should also have been included in the NAP.

Nevertheless, the NAP does include key services, such as access to education, health care, housing, nutrition and early childhood education and care that are key to lift children out of poverty and social exclusion in the Netherlands. However, there is a need for more elaboration of how these services will address child poverty.

The NAP does not include robust indicators and a monitoring framework, and currently the only goal is to half child poverty by 2025. It is recommended that the Dutch government looks at the Portuguese NAP for a reference. It would be important that the implementation plan includes targeted indicators to be able to effectively monitor and tackle children and their families' 'financial uncertainties', poverty, and debts.

Civil society is not actively involved in implementing the measures or activities included in the NAP nor are aware of government plans to so involve them in the future.

The Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights believes further actions should be included in the NAP including effective and meaningful children and young people's participation in the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the plan.

European Semester 2023 – Country reports and recommendations

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

This year's European Semester Country Report for the Netherlands outlines vulnerable groups of children that should be targeted by national policymakers, namely children with parents with a migrant background, and children with disabilities. However, clear recommendations are lacking.

This year's European Semester Country report for the Netherlands failed to include children in alternative care; children's right to be heard; children with a migrant background, including refugees; children impacted by the pandemic; children's mental health and well-being; children's rights in the digital environment.

The Dutch Coalition on Children's Rights recommends that the Dutch government invests more in monitoring and evaluating the well-being of Dutch children. In the Netherlands, youth wellbeing in the broader context is not systematically assessed and the measurements that exist are scattered. Utrecht University's *Better Well-Being Index* is currently being explored as a structured way to measure the development, prosperity, and well-being of children and adolescents.

Extending this Index, which captures eleven dimensions of well-being, to children and adolescents would provide a more complete 'picture' of their well-being, material living conditions, and quality of life in the Netherlands. It would also provide a framework to measure and track youth well-being and prosperity at local and national level, which is sorely lacking currently.

⁸ *Armoede en Sociale Uitsluiting 2021*, Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CSB), 2021.

Overall, the Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights was not involved in the Semester Process 2023.

Regarding the importance of investing in children, the Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights welcomed the extra investment in quality education. However, monitoring of effective policy and investment in education (and child well-being in general) remains a great challenge.

During the last three years, the [Gelijke Kansen Alliantie](#) (Equal Opportunity Alliance) launched the *School and its neighbourhood project* in which schools, municipalities and civil society have cooperated to increase equal opportunities for children within their communities, villages, cities and regions. Giving every child an equal chance is a task for everyone, not just education. The project aims to strengthen the connection between the home situation, the institutions, and the school, thus facilitating the cooperation between municipalities, education, social

organisations, and the national government.

Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

The recommendations included in the Country Report do not correspond sufficiently to reform needs on the ground in the Netherlands. The social benefits system requires reform, as households with children living on the social minimum will be structurally short of finances as of 2024. It is therefore recommended that the government moves away from temporary measures towards more permanent ones.

The Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights pointed out that the Country Specific Recommendation only refers to improving access to high-quality and affordable childcare to tackle labour and skills shortages. No further references to children's rights are included.



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.



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