



**Eurochild**

Putting children at  
the heart of Europe

# Children's Realities in Europe: Progress & Gaps

Eurochild 2024 report on  
children in need across Europe

Eurochild advocates for children's rights and well-being to be at the heart of policy-making. We are a network of organisations working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of all children. We represent over 220 organisations and individuals from across 42 European countries, reaching approximately 5000 organisations and individuals working with and for children. Our mission is to promote the rights and well-being of children in policy and practice through advocacy, membership exchange, and research. We aim to bring about tangible positive changes in the lives of children, particularly those affected by poverty and disadvantage. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the foundation of all our work.



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## Purpose of the report

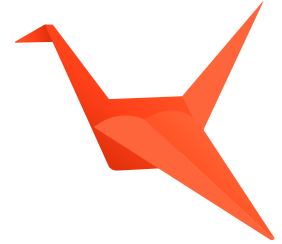
- 1 Evaluate children's rights and Child Rights Impact Assessments:**  
Review the current status of children's rights across countries, focusing on the presence and effectiveness of Child Rights Impact Assessments and other relevant policies. Identify gaps or challenges and provide actionable recommendations to address these issues, ensuring that child participation is meaningful and effective.
- 2 Enhance understanding of poverty and social exclusion:**  
Deepen knowledge of the lived experiences of children, families, and communities affected by poverty and social exclusion. Highlight progress, successful interventions and promising practices that can help alleviate child poverty and support vulnerable groups.
- 3 Examine alignment of Child Guarantee National Action Plans:**  
Assess the extent to which countries' Child Guarantee National Action Plans respond to children's specific needs. Analyse the level of engagement of Eurochild members in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes while considering the findings from biennial reports.
- 4 Analyse European Semester 2024 reports from a child rights perspective:**  
Review how well the European Semester 2024 Country Reports and Recommendations align with the real-world experiences of children. This includes whether these reports reflect the concerns and needs of children on the ground.
- 5 Review priorities in Enlargement Countries:**  
Provide a comprehensive overview of the most pressing children's rights issues in Enlargement Countries. Evaluate their progress in reforming legislation and policies, particularly within the framework of the EU accession process.

## Acknowledgements

This report is based on assessments provided by 57 Eurochild members in 31 countries. These are:

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# Background

Eurochild works to continually put children's rights and child poverty high on political agendas all over Europe. However, recent political changes following European and national elections could potentially undo the progress made in these areas. In light of this, the 'Children's Realities in Europe: Progress & Gaps' report examines how well children's rights are being respected, protected, and fulfilled across Europe, and assesses the effectiveness of policies and programmes designed to prevent child poverty and social exclusion.

The report highlights that the level of commitment to children's rights and to addressing child poverty and social exclusion varies significantly across countries. Each government has different political positions and priorities. While some countries have taken steps to promote children's rights, others need to intensify their efforts. This diversity is reflected in the lived realities of children across Europe.

In 2024, Europe witnessed an unprecedented number of national elections, in the context of the continued cost of living crisis and ongoing conflicts on EU borders. This shift represents not only a change in political landscapes but also a significant opportunity for a renewed commitment to upholding children's rights. The EU elections and the formation of the new European Commission (2024-2029) provide a platform for tangible and impactful changes that can benefit children. The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee, adopted in 2021, remain key guiding frameworks, alongside the anticipated Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Intergenerational Fairness Strategy, and the Affordable Housing Plan.

Several countries have made significant strides in their commitment to children's rights, but many still need to intensify their efforts to address the pressing challenges faced by

children today. Gaps in addressing issues like climate change, mental health and digital safety persist, requiring urgent attention from the new EU and national political leadership.

**“There is no time to wait – millions of children across Europe continue to live in poverty and social exclusion. Their rights are ignored, their voices silenced, and their lived experiences fall short of the values on which the EU is founded. With Europe grappling with a cost of living crisis, and conflicts on its borders, this new political environment presents both a challenge and an opportunity. European leaders must act now to bring about real change for children—ensuring their present is secure, as should their future.”**  
**– H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, Eurochild President**

# Introduction

## Children's rights

Eurochild's work is grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

All countries in this report are signatories, with the exception of Kosovo, which recognises the Convention but cannot officially sign due to its political status. Many European countries have incorporated the UNCRC into their national legal systems, but the extent of the incorporation and enforcement of its provisions and principles varies. According to our members:

- **Full incorporation and implementation:** A number of countries have not only incorporated the UNCRC but also effectively implemented and enforced its provisions.
- **Partial implementation:** Several countries have incorporated the UNCRC to some extent, but the implementation and enforcement of certain provisions is lacking or inconsistent.

- **Limited implementation:** There are countries where the UNCRC is either not fully implemented or where enforcement mechanisms are insufficient to uphold its principles.

This variation highlights the differing levels of commitment to children's rights across Europe.

We are witnessing troubling setbacks, especially for children in vulnerable situations. Although policies may be in place, they are frequently not translated into concrete actions or backed by sufficient funding. In many countries, both public authorities and civil society organisations implement good practices, but these are often project-based and, unfortunately, tend to offer only short-term solutions. These initiatives are often not sustainable and usually disappear once their funding, mainly from the EU, comes to an end.

There are also concerns with children's rights in the justice system in several countries, including the need for better

coordination between the justice system and child protection systems, the need to improve child-friendly justice and to reform juvenile justice systems.

The country profiles in this report highlight the existence of national strategies for children's rights, the use of Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs), and provide an overview of the current situation of children's rights in the country. Most country reports identify the intersectionality of childhood and state that refugee and migrant children are disadvantaged across several areas, for example protection, education, health, and housing. Eurochild members make recommendations to countries to further protect all children and promote their rights.

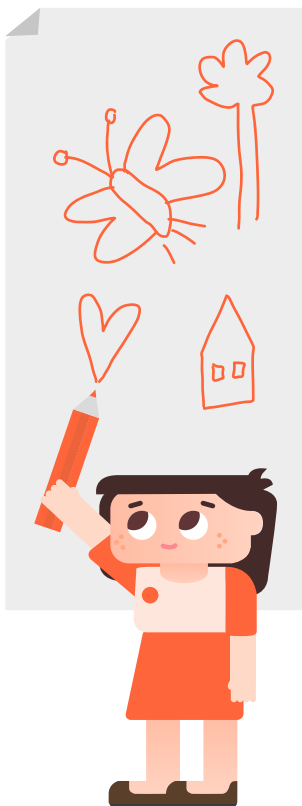
## Poverty and social exclusion – Experiences of children, families, and communities

No child should have to live in poverty or experience social exclusion. Children growing up

in poverty and social exclusion are less likely to do well in school, enjoy good health, and realise their full potential later in life. With this report, Eurochild aims to collect good practices from our members on the ground and share this evidence with policymakers to guide an agenda that successfully fights child poverty.

According to the latest [Eurostat data for 2023](#), 24.8% of children in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Compared to 2022, child poverty remains too high. Specifically, it increased in 16 countries, decreased in 9 countries and remained unchanged in 2 countries. Romania has the most children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, at 39%, followed by Spain with 34.5%, and Bulgaria with 33.9%.

The highest increases in child poverty since 2022 have been in Hungary and Spain, recording increases of 6.3% and 2.3% respectively. The most significant decreases were observed in Romania (-2.5%), Cyprus (-1.4%) and Italy (-1.4%).



As for Enlargement Countries ([candidates and potential candidates](#)), Eurostat data for Albania is only available up to 2021, for Serbia up to 2022 and for Türkiye 2023. While recent data for Enlargement Countries shows a decline in poverty, the percentage of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion remains significantly higher in these countries compared to EU Member States. Albania has the highest rate, with 50.1% of children at risk, while Serbia has a lower rate of 27.1%. No Eurostat data is available for Ukraine, Moldova, or Kosovo at this time.

As England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are not geopolitical entities for which Eurostat provides data, the data included in this report is drawn from national data available in each country. In 2023, in the United Kingdom, England was shown to have the highest percentage of children at risk of

poverty or social exclusion, at 30%, followed by Wales with 29%.

## The European Child Guarantee

2024 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<sup>1</sup> (NAPs) to show how they will address child poverty at the national level. As each Child Guarantee National Action Plan was published, Eurochild released [overviews of these plans](#), highlighting the key services and actions governments are planning to focus on.

EU Member States are currently submitting biennial reports on its implementation. These are due every two years and mark a significant step forward in assessing the progress of the European Child Guarantee. At the time of drafting this report, 16 EU Member States submitted

their first biennial report on the implementation of the Child Guarantee. Eurochild is also releasing [overviews of these reports](#), highlighting lessons learnt and relevant trends.

The involvement of civil society organisations in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the NAPs varies from one country to another. Some of our members mentioned that various civil society organisations are in regular contact with the relevant authorities regarding this phase. However, in many other countries, this is not the case.

## European Semester 2024 – Country reports and recommendations

The European Semester cycle is a crucial opportunity to engage with policymakers at EU and national levels, ensuring that investment in children is prioritised within the broader macroeconomic and social policy agenda. However, the [2024](#)

<sup>1</sup> National Action Plans and biennial reports are available at the bottom of [this page](#).



### European Semester Spring Package Country Reports and Country Specific Recommendations

do not adequately address the needs of children in each country.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of the Country Specific Recommendations do not mention children either in the introduction or the recommendations. A few countries mention children under the topics of poverty, education, early childhood education and care, or deinstitutionalisation. No country mentions children when addressing health.

While some countries have implemented promising measures, child poverty, early childhood development, education, mental health and deinstitutionalisation remain critical. Furthermore, issues such as children's digital safety, climate change, and their right to be heard are largely neglected in the 2024 Spring Package of the European Semester.

The lack of comprehensive recommendations for many countries limits the potential impact of the European Semester. Ensuring a more consistent focus on children's rights, including health, education, digital literacy and social inclusion, is essential for breaking cycles of poverty and fostering long-term social cohesion.

### **Enlargement Countries**

The process of joining the EU, also called accession, has three main steps: candidacy, accession negotiations and treaty ratification. The Enlargement Package aims to provide a detailed assessment of the state of play in Enlargement Countries, including progress on upholding human rights and children's rights. Eurochild and its members contributed to the [2024 consultation on the Enlargement Package](#) to provide a children's rights perspective and insights into the situation of

children in need. This contribution can inform annual enlargement reports presented by the European Commission, with overviews of the most pressing issues and progress by each country towards EU accession.

According to Eurochild members in Albania, Moldova, Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine, the EU should further support countries to ensure children's rights are respected and protected. Investing and prioritising child protection seems to be one of the main needs for Enlargement Countries, together with the need for increased support to families, both financially and through the provision of services, to alleviate child poverty. Members in Serbia recommend that the EU extend the Child Guarantee to Enlargement Countries.

### **Child Protection Systems**

It is not only Enlargement Countries that face challenges

related to their child protection systems. Countries such as Croatia and Poland have seen an increase in the number of children entering the child protection system, leading to a corresponding rise in new entries into alternative care. While the reasons for this trend may vary, the underlying issue is the lack of adequate and accessible preventative services. Moreover, alternative care still relies on institutional care which fails to provide an individualised approach that every child is entitled to. There is a shortage of foster carers and of qualified staff in the child protection system in all countries.

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<sup>2</sup> As outlined in the Eurochild analysis [2024 European Semester Spring Package](#), September 2024.

# Eurochild Country Reports at a glance

## United Nations

### Convention on the Rights of the Child

35 years after the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), all countries analysed in the report are signatories of the UNCRC, except for Kosovo, and many have reflected the Convention in national legislation. However, most countries still do not have a national strategy for children's rights and do not routinely use Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) to assess the effects of policies on children.

## Mental Health

Across all countries, children and young people are experiencing mental health issues, and most countries do not have enough mental health support services, including in schools, to meet their needs. Early intervention support must be a priority and needs to be improved for children and young people with mental health difficulties.

## Early Childhood Development, Education and Care

While many countries have a policy focusing on children's early years, there is a need for more investment to increase access to quality early childhood education and care, with professionals who can respond to children's specific needs. An integrated, holistic, cross-sector approach to children's early years is needed in many countries.

## Child Protection

There is a need for more investment to prevent family separation and to increase support for foster carers and community-based care. Countries need to pay more attention to refugee and asylum-seeking children who are not supported by national child protection systems and children with disabilities who are over-represented in institutions.

## Education

In many countries, there are insufficient professionals to meet the needs of different groups of children in the education systems, such as children with special educational needs and disabilities, migrant children, children with mental health issues and children facing poverty and exclusion.

See more on  
the next page



### **Environment and Climate Change**

While children and young people are increasingly concerned about the impacts of climate change on their lives, most countries are not doing enough to consider the specific impacts of climate change on children.

### **Child Poverty**

The children most in need are children with disabilities, children in alternative care, Roma children or children from other minorities, refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant children (including unaccompanied minors), children living in single-parent families, and children with parents who are not in employment.

### **Child Participation**

Most countries have some mechanisms for children and young people to engage in public policy and in decisions that affect them. However, in most cases, it is difficult to know how much their views are taken into account and acted on.

### **Child Guarantee**

In many countries, civil society organisations working on children's rights have not been involved in the planning, implementation or monitoring of the Child Guarantee National Action Plans. They believe governments should involve civil society more in the Child Guarantee process.

### **The Digital Sphere**

Children's safety in the digital environment is a growing concern, across all countries. Most countries have taken some action to safeguard children online, but much more needs to be done, across Europe.



# “Recommendations from Eurochild members

<b>Albania</b>	“Albania needs to fully develop and strengthen the child protection system that is able to respect, protect and guarantee the rights of every child, despite his/her origin, colour, social or geographical position. Girls are especially in need of protection because traditional values and toxic masculinity expose them to societal oppression, intimate partner violence, sexual violence and exploitation..”
<b>Belgium</b>	“Belgium should recognise the decentralised authorities for child-rights related policies and initiatives and seek better coordination between the subnational authorities to ensure more effective policies”
<b>Bulgaria</b>	“Bulgaria should adopt the National Strategy for the Child (2024-2030) and legislative amendments to provide the State Child Protection Agency with sufficient powers, resources and a clear mandate to coordinate all activities for the implementation of the UNCRC. Bulgaria should also develop inclusive policies that specifically address the needs of children from marginalised communities and ensure their equal access to quality education and digital tools. It is critically important to end the practice of segregated schools and to address early school drop-out with adequate legal and inclusive measures.”
<b>Croatia</b>	“To prevent child poverty and social exclusion, Croatia should take action to ensure an adequate range of social services including early childhood development in local communities. Preserving family stability and preventing neglect and abandonment of children must be a primary concern.”
<b>Cyprus</b>	“Cyprus should take action to improve child participation and have disaggregated data for children.”
<b>Denmark</b>	“The Joint Council for Child Issues in Denmark recommends that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child be incorporated directly into Danish legislation. Denmark has ratified the Convention, but it should be incorporated directly into legislation that deals with vulnerable children and their families.”
<b>England</b>	“The government must take urgent action to address the concerns raised by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, following its examination of the UK in 2023, by taking forwarding the six steps set out in our <a href="#">Children’s Rights Charter</a> . This includes developing a children’s rights strategy, incorporating the UNCRC into domestic law and making Child Rights Impact Assessments a statutory requirement.”

<b>Estonia</b>	“Estonia needs to invest in children and families so they get help as early as possible and without delay, with improvement of the quality and diversity of services provided in all regions. Children are people here and now, and merely passing laws to guarantee their rights is not enough – supportive action is also needed.”
<b>Finland</b>	“Finland should efficiently and consistently respect human rights, including children’s best interests, in its legislative work.”
<b>Germany</b>	“Germany should agree an amendment to the constitution that meets the requirements of the UNCRC. Children’s rights must be enshrined in a separate paragraph of the constitution and contribute to real improvement in the legal position of children in Germany.”
<b>Greece</b>	“Greece should take action to promote child participation and include children’s opinions in matters that concern them.”
<b>Hungary</b>	“The government should take action to establish a social policy that ensures equal opportunities for every child.”
<b>Ireland</b>	“Ireland should lower the voting age to 16 to strengthen young people’s involvement and participation in decision-making that impacts them.”
<b>Italy</b>	“Italy should take action to increase support services for children and parents, and increase extracurricular activities with a special focus on families and children in socio-economically vulnerable conditions.”
<b>Kosovo</b>	“Kosovo has a big gap between approved legislation and its implementation and should make financial investments to build capacities to reduce this implementation gap and develop a wide range of services to strengthen the child protection system.”
<b>Latvia</b>	“Latvia should develop a common strategy to ensure children’s safety in all settings - family, school, community.”
<b>Malta</b>	“Malta should address the gaps in the system concerning children with disabilities, stateless and migrant children, and children from the LGBTIQ community.”

<b>Moldova</b>	“Moldova should take measures to develop community-based support services for families with children in vulnerable situations, to prevent the separation of children from their biological or extended family.”
<b>The Netherlands</b>	“The Netherlands should develop a long-term and holistic vision on children and youth, and introduce mandatory Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) in all relevant policy areas, and Child Participation Assessments (CPAs).”
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	“Northern Ireland should fully implement and utilise our unique legal framework that mandates cooperation between children’s services to maximise limited resources, drive forward transformation and fulfil children’s rights.”
<b>Poland</b>	“Poland should take action to enhance mental health services for children, particularly for those in alternative care and those with migrant backgrounds, ensuring timely access to both psychological and psychiatric support, and urgently address the growing mental health crisis among these vulnerable groups.”
<b>Portugal</b>	“Portugal should ensure the effective participation of all children in the design, monitoring and evaluation of public policies that concern them, including matters relating to climate change. Portugal must also fight for the effective implementation of the legislation it has in several areas, such as children’s rights, children’s participation, health and education.”
<b>Romania</b>	“Romania should take stronger action to ensure equal opportunities for all children, full access to education, rapidly reduce school drop-out rates and provide services for children and families at risk.”
<b>Scotland</b>	“The Scottish Government should take action to ensure the UNCRC Implementation Scheme is properly resourced and integrated across all levels and areas of government to ensure that the <i>UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024</i> delivers the revolution in children’s rights that children and young people have called for and that the First Minister has committed to.”

<b>Serbia</b>	“The adoption of a comprehensive Law on the Rights of the Child would be a crucial step for Serbia to ensure that children’s rights are effectively protected and promoted. It would provide the necessary legal foundation to address existing gaps and challenges, ultimately fostering a more supportive environment for all children in the country.”
<b>Slovakia</b>	“Slovakia should take action to create such conditions so that education, healthcare, mental health and early intervention services are available for all children without any differences.”
<b>Slovenia</b>	“Slovenia should take action to shorten court proceedings involving children, especially in cases involving violence.”
<b>Spain</b>	“Spain should implement effective policies to reduce child poverty and socio-economic inequalities, especially extreme child poverty, and ensure that all children have access to basic needs such as food and adequate housing.”
<b>Türkiye</b>	“Türkiye should take action to ensure an evidence-based and accountable child protection system.”
<b>Ukraine</b>	“Ukraine should develop a comprehensive national strategy on all children’s rights, that includes all vulnerable groups and coordinates all policies, strategies, funding, legislation and initiatives linked to the implementation of the UNCRC. This strategy should be adequately funded, and should be binding..”
<b>Wales</b>	“Wales should introduce legislation to fully and directly incorporate the UNCRC into Welsh law, and make Child Rights Impact Assessments a mandatory requirement.”

# Policy recommendations



## 1 Uphold the rights of all children

Governments must prioritise and implement comprehensive national child rights strategies and consistently apply Child Rights Impact Assessments. To fully realise the rights of all children, especially those most at risk, governments must honour their commitments under international treaties through coordinated efforts across all levels of governance. This approach, combined with meaningful opportunities for child participation, is essential to ensure children's rights are not only respected and protected but fully realised in practice.



## 2 Combat poverty and social exclusion

To effectively address the needs of the most vulnerable populations and their children, a comprehensive reform of the social protection system is necessary. An adequate social security 'safety net' is crucial to prevent and address child poverty with a particular focus on the most vulnerable—including migrant and Roma children, children with disabilities, children from single-parent families and children in low-income families. Additionally, countries must address energy poverty among households with children. There are concerns in some countries that threatened cuts to social security and to initiatives such as free school meals will be damaging for children and will increase child poverty.

Support should be specifically targeted at children facing particular vulnerabilities, including those living on the streets or in inadequate housing, ensuring they have access to safe and suitable living conditions. Financial barriers, such as the high costs of childcare, transportation and school supplies, prevent children from exercising their right to education. Countries need to confront these challenges through comprehensive and inclusive strategies to ensure that no child is left behind. This includes guaranteeing access to fundamental rights such as adequate housing, healthcare, education and other essential services.



### 3 Strengthen child protection systems

Investing in early prevention is crucial to prevent the long-term effects of social exclusion and violations of children's rights during their formative years. Child protection systems should prioritise preventive measures, particularly for children with disabilities and those in vulnerable situations. To achieve this, it is essential to have an adequate number of specialised staff working with children, especially for early detection of vulnerabilities. Increased investment in social support services, including parenting programmes and family support, is needed to strengthen families, prevent family separation, and reduce the placement of children in alternative care. This approach is necessary to reduce the rising number of children entering the child protection system.

Additionally, improving case management is vital, and must be strengthened especially in times of crisis. The transition from institutional to family-based care should be prioritised.

Investments should focus on recruiting, training, and retaining foster carers and qualified staff within the child protection system to enhance the quality of care for vulnerable children. Furthermore, children and young people transitioning out of alternative care need special attention to ensure they are supported and involved in their transition to independent living.



### 4 Guarantee children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

Countries should enact robust legal protections to protect children from the impacts of climate change, ensuring that climate policies and actions uphold their rights. They should develop and implement national legislation that aligns with international standards, such as the UNCRC General Comment No. 26, and establish independent bodies to monitor and enforce these rights, including the right to remedies in cases of violations. Governments must ensure access to clean water and sanitation, prioritising equitable access for children in deprived and rural areas. Targeted interventions are necessary to address environmental inequalities and improve access to green spaces for disadvantaged children. Governments should include children's voices in climate policy decisions, ensuring their meaningful participation in relevant discussions. Additionally, expanding environmental education in schools is essential to empower children and raise awareness about sustainability issues.

### 5 Support children's mental health

Access to mental health support must be universally available for all children, including through the provision of professionals such as psychologists, therapists and psychiatrists, in both urban and rural areas. There is an urgent need to enhance early intervention support for those facing mental health difficulties, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant children, and the LGBTIQ+ community. National decision-makers must invest in mental health services, and address the various factors impacting children's mental health, including material and social deprivation, climate change, and the challenges posed by online platforms.

## 6 Support children's rights in the digital sphere

While digital tools can play a critical role in advancing children's rights, they also expose children to significant risks, such as cyberbullying and online sexual exploitation. Avoiding banning the use of technology and tackling the digital literacy divide are important to ensure that all children, regardless of socio-economic status, gender or age, can benefit from the safe opportunities that digital spaces offer. Caregivers and children must be equipped with the knowledge and tools to navigate and respond to digital threats. Furthermore, it is vital to enforce child safety by design in digital platforms and hold companies accountable for violations of children's rights. EU and national level legislation is needed to address these concerns comprehensively.

## 8 Leverage the European Semester Process

To ensure that investments in social services, healthcare, and education systems effectively benefit children, it is essential to integrate children's rights perspectives into the European Semester process. A focus on critical issues such as child poverty, early childhood development, education, deinstitutionalisation, children's access to mental health services, digital safety, the impacts of climate change, and the right to be heard, in the 2024 Spring Package of the European Semester is crucial for comprehensive monitoring of children's rights. The European Commission should provide comprehensive recommendations concerning children's rights for each Member State, thereby enhancing the potential impact of the European Semester to improve the lives of children across the EU.

## 7 Strengthen the European Child Guarantee

Member States must intensify their efforts to identify the children most in need within their countries. Strengthening the European Child Guarantee requires ongoing research and robust data collection, particularly to address gaps related to homeless children and those in single-parent families. Governments should continue to implement and expand reforms and programmes in critical areas, such as early childhood education and care, education, healthcare, housing, and nutrition. Countries should establish comprehensive monitoring and evaluation frameworks that incorporate the monitoring framework introduced by the European Commission in December 2023, while also introducing new indicators, such as those related to children's mental health. These frameworks must be publicly accessible and transparent, to effectively track progress and impact. Additionally, governments must enhance the involvement of stakeholders, particularly civil society organisations and children, in the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of Child Guarantee programmes. Establishing formal mechanisms for meaningful participation will improve the effectiveness and accountability of these programmes. Addressing child poverty necessitates a holistic, cross-sector approach. Labour market policies should be improved to ensure access to quality jobs and fair wages. Adequate family benefits must be provided, and essential services outlined in the Child Guarantee must be readily accessible. Tackling inequalities must be a core priority, integrated across all sectors.



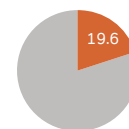
## “Country Recommendation

Albania needs to fully develop and strengthen the child protection system that is able to respect, protect and guarantee the rights of every child, despite his/her origin, colour, social or geographical position. Girls are especially in need of protection because traditional values and toxic masculinity expose them to societal oppression, intimate partner violence, sexual violence and exploitation.

## Country Profile 2024



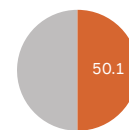
# Albania



### Child Population:

**542,174 (2023)**

19.6% of total population



### Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:

**290,000 (2021)**

50.1% (2021)

▼ -0.9% compared to 2020

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Child Rights Centre Albania/ECPAT Albania

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)

## Children's Rights in Albania

Albania adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1992. The country has since approved several laws in relation to children's rights, including the Law on the Rights and Protection of Children (2017) and the Juvenile Code (2018).

There is no obligation for Albania's government or parliament to carry out Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) so these are not implemented at any level. The Child Rights Centre Albania has been advocating for CRIAs to be mandatory, to ensure the UNCRC is reflected in legislation, policy and delivery across government, including the national budget.

Albania has had a continuous national strategy on children's rights since 2001. However, insufficient political will and funding has hindered implementation. The latest five-

year [National Agenda on the Rights of the Child](#) was approved in 2021. It is based on four policy goals: good governance; the elimination of all forms of violence; child-friendly systems and services; the promotion of children's rights in the digital world. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) has lead responsibility for its implementation, while the National Council on the Rights of the Child monitors and oversees its implementation by government ministries and public institutions.

However, civil society organisations (CSOs) have expressed serious concerns regarding the Council's ability to fulfil its role. The National Agency for Child Rights and Protection (which acts as Secretariat for the Council) is required to present an annual report on the Agenda's implementation, but so far only one report has been published.

While the MoHSP has lead responsibility for children's rights,

61 municipalities are responsible for children's issues in their territory.

In 2022 a new Ministry without portfolio for Children and Youth was also established to promote a rights-based approach within government.

However, a lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities between the MoHSP and the Ministry of Children and Youth has complicated the implementation of the current legal and policy framework.

In recent years there has been a deterioration of awareness and understanding of the UNCRC among policymakers and government officials, at national and local level.

A Parliamentary Group on the Rights of the Child monitors and promotes children's rights, supports new initiatives and holds public institutions to account. It meets 3-4 times a year to discuss issues of concern.

While it has not ensured a better national budget for children, it has been important in increasing accountability for UNCRC implementation, based on the last Concluding Observations by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Albania was last reviewed by the Committee in 2023 and the MoHSP has drafted a national action plan in response to the Concluding Observations. This is due to be discussed and approved in autumn 2024 and will be attached to the National Agenda on the Rights of the Child and its implementation monitored annually.

There are few CSOs working on children's rights in Albania. Very few sources of funding are directly available for local CSOs as funding goes primarily to large international organisations. Despite positive rhetoric, the Albanian Government provides very limited support to CSOs and the Prime Minister and members of his cabinet have been very

critical of CSOs. Open Data found that in 2020 almost 400 CSOs had to de-register due to the lack of an enabling environment for them to operate.

The opening of EU membership negotiations has given more voice to CSOs to participate in decision-making, but lack of support hinders meaningful engagement for most organisations.

### Early childhood development

Recently Albania has changed its approach towards early childhood development (ECD). Coming out of communism, ECD was considered mostly from a health perspective, with the focus on improving child and maternal health without attention to education and social assistance.

Between 2004-2006 Albania carried out a major reform of social care services. Cash handouts were given to families on limited incomes. In the mid-2010s, to counteract

a decreasing birth rate, the government introduced support payments for every newborn. However, the number of births continues to decrease considerably.

In September 2023, the new Minister of Education made ECD a priority of her mandate. The Ministry is expected to publish plans on structural and policy changes that will enable it to carry out proposed reforms on ECD.

### Children's mental health

Albania's mental health system is in serious crisis, and policymakers accept that a major reform is needed. However, no plans have been published. The current system is not able to respond to the mental health needs of children and young people. After Covid 19 many adolescents said their mental health situation has deteriorated. No municipality in Albania provides specialised services for young people, including mental health care.

For a long time, Albania's mental health system was based on psychiatry rather than community-based services. A wider focus on social work and psychology has been gradually introduced, with psychologists included in services such as social care, education and justice. However, the mental health care system is still dominated by psychiatric care, while psychologists are part of social care services. This means that children have to pay to access psychological support. A few municipalities provide free psychological services, but these are very limited in number and scope.

Children can access free psychological support only in schools, but there is a shortage of psychologists and of their further specialisation. The education system has now agreed to provide one psychologist per high school and one psychologist for up to 800 children in primary education. However, there is no professional supervision of the psychologists in the education system, which is a major weakness. In addition, school management often prevents psychologists from reporting or referring cases to child protection services so violence is often unreported.



## Child safety and well-being online

Children face many issues online, including sexual abuse, grooming and bullying, but legislation is inadequate. In 2024, the Child Rights Centre Albania submitted amendments to the Criminal Code, asking parliamentarians to make grooming and sexting criminal offences and to increase penalties for child sexual abuse material. CSOs are also advocating for Albania to align its legislation with the EU Digital Services Act as part of the EU accession process.

Since 2015, the National Platform for Internet Safety (iSIGURT.al) provides support to any child or young person who is a victim of online harm, violence or exploitation, and has protected almost 2000 children and adolescents. The Platform works closely with the National Police, Interpol, industry and other partners to remove online material that harms children.

However, there is no clarity on institutional responsibility for removing or blocking material that is harmful to children. The Law on the Rights of the Child assigned this duty to the National Agency for Child Protection. Meanwhile the Law on Electronic and Postal Communications assigns this responsibility to the National Authority for Electronic Communications. In 2016, the Law on Cyber Security assigned similar duties, including child online safety, to the National Authority for Cyber Safety. The existence of three different institutions assigned to deal with online safety has produced a weak and inefficient system. CSOs recommend that harmful content should be reported to iSIGURT.al for them to issue removal orders.

## Child protection systems

Overall the child protection system remains extremely weak and not fully functional, despite existing legal obligations. Insufficient budgets, a lack of professional standards and

low staff capacity hinders the implementation of child protection legislation. The law requires the establishment of a Child Protection Unit in each municipality, with a child protection officer for every 3,000 children. However, the system is under-funded and has not achieved its full potential.

In 2024 the government approved its new [National Strategy on Social Protection \(2024-2030\)](#) which is the most strategic and comprehensive policy document in the area of social care and support. The Strategy is based on two major goals: mitigating poverty and extending social care services, and advancing deinstitutionalisation.

As of 2017, the new Law on the Rights and Protection of Children established a new system of child protection, organised at municipal level. Municipalities are required to fund social care services and have established daycare centres where multi-disciplinary services support children and families in need.

Albania lacks legislation on foster care. As a result, children living in extreme poverty are often placed in residential care.

At present, almost 80% of all children in public residential care have at least one parent. The government has approved a new action plan for the closure of all public residential care and the placement of children in alternative family-based care.

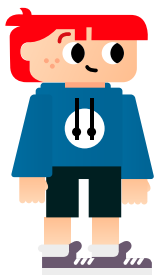
## Education

In 2021 the government approved a new education policy, aimed at making schools safe for every child. However, the Ministry of Education so far has not provided any guidance in this regard and few schools fulfil the criteria for being considered a safe space.

In comparison with other European countries, Albania spends less on education, and funding has decreased year-on-year, with a slight increase only in 2018.

Official data shows that around 75% of families receiving cash handouts are not able to fulfil their children's basic needs, including education. At least 77% of these children aged 16–18 do not attend school. At least 65% of children that miss out on education come from families with limited or no income.

Despite reform and improvement efforts, the education system in Albania continues to face several challenges including inadequate human resources and funding and poor infrastructure. All these factors hinder the realisation of children's right to education in compliance with national and international standards.



## Climate change and the environment

Environmental rights for children are a new concept in Albania and only a handful of CSOs are working in this area. Awareness among children and adults of environmental issues is very low. Although there is a [Law on Environmental Protection](#) in Albania, there are no mandatory requirements for the public education sector to carry out assessments on whether or not schools meet environmental standards or if they respect children's right to a healthy environment.

## Child participation

There are several laws that guarantee the right of children to participate in decision-making on matters of concern to them. The Law on the Rights of the Child provides the main legal framework for child participation. The Law on Pre-university Education includes the right of every child to participate

in decision-making in school matters from the age of six up to the end of compulsory education. The Juvenile Justice Code guarantees procedural rights for children in criminal legal processes. The Youth Law guarantees the right of adolescents over 15 to participate in decision-making processes in City Councils.

However, child participation, especially in public institutions, is often tokenistic or manipulated. There are no standards to safeguard children and meet minimum standards of child participation. Children have been subject to oppression by school staff for demanding to exercise their rights.

Albania has never participated in implementing the [Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool](#).

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

### Child poverty in Albania

According to our members, in 2022 the National Institute of Statistics found that the rate of child poverty and social exclusion in Albania decreased from 28.5% to 27.4%. However, [girls are more at risk of poverty and exclusion than boys, 28.6% compared to 26.3%](#).

To address child poverty and social exclusion the government should increase public investment in the following areas:

- Education, especially early childhood education, and access to technology;
- Access to better social and healthcare services.

In the new National Strategy on Social Protection, the government has included the

Child Guarantee as one of the main policies for addressing child poverty, however discussions on this are in the very early stages.

Children who are the most in need in Albania:

- Roma and Egyptian children
- children living in rural areas
- children with disability
- children living with a single parent

These children need financial and social support, education support, psychological care and leisure and play opportunities.

Eurochild members identified three priorities for Albania:

- Establish a national programme of child support, initially for children up to 10 years old.
- Improve access to quality education, including the provision of one hot meal for every child in kindergarten and school, and after school care.
- Improve social and medical care.

## European Social Fund + (ESF+)

Albania has expressed its interest to be part of the ESF+ but is in the initial steps of the process.

## Enlargement Countries

The process of joining the EU, also called accession, has three main steps: candidacy, accession negotiations and treaty ratification. The Enlargement Package aims to provide a detailed assessment of the state of play in enlargement countries, including the progress concerning upholding human rights and children's rights. For the 2024 Enlargement Package of the European Commission, Eurochild consulted with members to share their insights into the situation of children in the EU enlargement countries.

This contribution can inform the annual Enlargement Package presented by the European Commission, with overviews of the most pressing issues and progress by Albania towards EU accession.

According to Eurochild members, most children's rights issues have been included in the 2023 Enlargement Package.

Eurochild members in Albania recommend that the EU should:

- Put children at the top of its technical and financial support for Albania. Currently, EU funding for child protection is extremely low. The EU Delegation in Albania should increase its budget for Albania, with a special focus on the rights of children and child protection.
- Increase access to funding for local CSOs, with mentoring and support programmes.



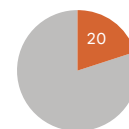
## “Country Recommendation

Belgium should recognise the decentralised authorities for child rights related policies and initiatives and seek better coordination between the subnational authorities to ensure more effective policies.

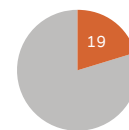
## Country Profile 2024



# Belgium



**Child Population:**  
**2,346,532 (2023)**  
20% of total population



**Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:**  
**460,000 (2023)**  
19% (2023)  
▼ -0.6% compared to 2022

### RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

[Children's Rights Knowledge Centre \(KeKi\)](#)

[Child Rights Coalition Flanders](#) (Kinderrechtencoalitie Vlaanderen)

ONE

Francesca Stuer, individual member

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)

## Children's Rights in Belgium

Belgium ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which has been automatically incorporated into Belgian Law. Article 22bis of the Constitution guarantees children's rights, and there are various initiatives to ensure implementation. However, overall, the content of the UNCRC, its reporting procedure and the Concluding Observations are not well-known by all policymakers in Belgium.

According to a report by the [Federal Institute for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights](#), while Belgian human rights defenders, including children's rights organisations, generally operate in a favourable environment, many face increasing aggression and intimidation, with some noting a worsening situation over the past two years.

Following the June 2024 elections, the new government

of the French-speaking part of Belgium and the new government of Wallonia announced major changes. Ministers now have clearer responsibilities and serve in different regional governments (Wallonia and Wallonia-Brussels Federation) aiming to reduce policy fragmentation, especially for children and young people. While a strong focus on education and empowerment is foreseen, the integrated approach of shared ministerial roles across regions and Wallonia-Brussels Federation underscores a commitment to cohesive governance.

### Early childhood development

There is an [interfederal plan for integrated care](#), including an agreement between the National Institute for Sickness and Disability Insurance, the Department of Care and the Agency for Growing Up, with an accompanying programme called 'Care and Support for pregnant women, their children and their families during the first 1000 days'.

The Flemish Government recognises the importance of children's early years to some extent, with some additional investments in childcare after public pressure, including improvements to working conditions in childcare facilities with lower child-carer ratios. There is also a plan for future investments in childcare, supported by the Flemish Government. However, there is no binding commitment to implement this.

[ONE](#) is the reference organisation in the French Community for all matters related to childhood. They have an important budget (€ 587 854 212), of which 42,5% (€ 265 677 059) is dedicated to finance, and control the quality of early childhood education and care settings.

### Children's mental health

The federal Government has [introduced investments and reforms to increase the accessibility of mental healthcare](#)

[for children and young people](#).

Those under 23 can now visit some specialists free of charge or at a reduced rate. The Flemish Government has invested in expanding walk-in centres ("Overkop-huizen") for young people aged 12-25 that provide a safe space to meet friends, have fun and talk to adults about any issues they may be facing. The cooperation between Education and Welfare is also being reformed. Assistance is being brought closer to children and young people, including in schools.

The taboo associated with talking about mental health [remains high](#).

Despite these efforts, needs remain high. [In 2020, suicide was the most common cause of death for people between 15 and 19 years old in Belgium](#).

Flanders is implementing its [Third Suicide Prevention Plan](#).

One out of 10 young people in Flanders feel like they have no

one to turn to. When they do turn for help, they are held back by long waiting lists. [Zorgnet-Icuro](#) estimates that in Belgium, more than two-thirds of young people with mental disorders have to wait longer than a year for professional treatment. A survey by the Flemish Association for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry calculated in March 2021 that there are 23,749 children and adolescents on a waiting list for psychological help.

Recommendations from Eurochild members in Belgium:

- Ensure more coordination across sectors, including more partnerships with schools, and better data collection.
- Ensure specific attention to the mental health needs of vulnerable and low-income groups and youngsters of LGBTQI+ communities.
- Support young family carers.
- Launch more initiatives for children and young people on mental health issues.
- Ensure a rights-based approach

in mental health, as a necessary complement to the welfare approach.

### Child safety and well-being online

The [average age](#) for children in Flanders and Brussels in 2024 to have their first smartphone is 8.1 years old. While smartphones and other digital tools open up new possibilities for children, it is crucial that children are equipped with the right tools to navigate the digital world responsibly. However, the current Belgian education system is struggling to keep pace with the growing digital needs of young children.

Despite some progress, the development of comprehensive media literacy programmes—especially at the primary school level—remains insufficient.

There have been some initiatives to tackle this issue:

- In 2022, the Government of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation

adopted a [media education plan](#).

- In the preparation for the new [Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan \(2025-2029\)](#) there is a focus on children and young people and the digital environment.
- Since September 2024, smartphones have been banned from schools in the Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles. While effective to address the students' focus during school hours, such a measure must make sure children can still explore the relational, social and informational benefits that digital technologies offer to children, which are key to the exercise of their rights and well-being.

While Belgium has implemented several aspects of the [European strategy for a better internet for kids \(BIK+\)](#), a coordinated approach at policy level is lacking. In January 2024 the Belgian federal parliament adopted a [Resolution](#) to protect children online.

The European Directive 2018/1808 on audio-visual media services [was transposed into Belgian law in 2021](#) and includes measures to combat hate speech and discrimination, as well as measures to protect minors.

### Child protection systems

More early identification and intervention is needed to prevent family separation, with more staff and financial resources to support families.

Kinderrechtencoalitie Vlaanderen identified several gaps in the child protection system in Flanders:

- There is limited access to support services due to consistent under-investment and understaffing.
- There is insufficient focus on preventive measures. It is necessary to invest in prevention, detection and identification of traumatic experiences, and in providing timely support for children. This approach is necessary

to minimise the long-term consequences for both mental and physical health.<sup>2</sup> Achieving this requires broader social awareness and the implementation of active preventive measures, such as information campaigns and educational activities.

Existing measures in Flanders include the development of professional family care homes, a new form of small-scale care where caregivers can provide professional support 24/7, while maintaining contact with the parent. However, further investment is needed to expand this model.

Certain groups of children are not being sufficiently reached by existing support measures, such as unaccompanied minors and children of asylum seekers. The new French-speaking government

plans to pay increased attention to issues faced by asylum seekers. Additionally, the Flemish and federal governments are making efforts to adjust their services and approaches based on the challenges they face.

## Education

The Flemish education system remains one of the most unequal among OECD regions. The socioeconomic status of students largely determines their chances of success in school.

Children from socio-economically disadvantaged families and with a migration background face obstacles that hinder their access to quality education, including costs and discrimination by other students and teachers, leading to under-achievement, over-representation in technical and

vocational training and in special education, school drop-out and exclusion.

While there has been some improvement in the educational opportunities for young people in juvenile justice institutions, more support is needed from the Flemish Government to secure educational pathways for them.

In Flanders, there is a trend towards segregated education rather than more inclusive education for children with disabilities, contrary to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Flemish Government speaks of a 'continuum of educational care', where students with care needs receive an 'appropriate place' in specific, segregated settings. This is assumed to be the most appropriate way to fulfil their right to education.

The number of students in special education is rising, with a significant increase in special pre-school education. Data for the 2022-2023 school year



<sup>2</sup> People with at least 4 or more negative childhood experiences are 3.9 times more likely to have serious lung diseases, 2.4 times more likely to have a stroke, 1.9 times more likely to have cancer, 12.2 times more likely to attempt suicide, 4.6 times more likely to have depression, 7.2 times more likely to have alcoholism and 11.1 times more likely to have injecting drug use. Sources: Felitti (1998), Brown (2009) en Shanta (2009).

indicates that nearly 1 in 20 pupils in Flanders is referred to special education. The [participation rate in special education for compulsory school-age students is 4.4%](#).

Overall, education is under pressure due to a shortage of teachers.

[French-speaking schools](#) have both special education for different types of disability and inclusive schools that welcome disabled children into mainstream education.

### Climate change and the environment

Article 23 of the Belgian Constitution explicitly states that there is a right to a healthy environment. The [Belgian Federal Institute for the protection and promotion of Human Rights](#) is proposing that the Council of Europe adopt a legally binding instrument to explicitly recognise the right to a healthy environment, in the form of an additional

protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights.

The level of exposure to pollution in Belgium is extremely worrying. Belgium was ranked 40th out of 43 countries in terms of risk for exposure to lead and pesticides and also [scores below the European average in terms of air quality](#).

Access to green spaces in Belgium is limited and unevenly distributed. [Existing green space is under pressure](#) due to climate change, urbanisation and privatisation. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more vulnerable as they often live in neighbourhoods that are more exposed to pollution.

Belgium has a [National Plan for Endocrine Disruptors](#), combining research, legislative aspects and harmonised awareness-raising across the country. Children are one of the Plan's target groups.

In the preparation for the new [Flemish Youth and Children's](#)

[Rights Policy Plan \(2025-2029\)](#) there is a focus on the environment, and challenges and opportunities in this area are identified.

### Child participation

From 2024, young people aged 16 and over are obliged to vote in the European elections.

At the Flemish level, there is the 'Flemish Youth Council'. It is the official advisory body of the Flemish Government on all matters concerning children and young people in Flanders. This means that all Flemish Ministers have to ask the Flemish Youth Council for advice whenever they make a decision that will impact children and young people. The Council may also give advice of its own accord, as deemed necessary.

In theory, children and young people can give their input through the JoKER process, but in practice their involvement in this is very limited. Hard-to-reach groups are rarely engaged in these formal

participation initiatives, and participation quality often fails to meet child-friendly standards.

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

### Child poverty in Belgium

[In Belgium](#), 4.6% of children experienced severe material and social deprivation in 2023 (4.3% in 2022). In 2023, 19% of children were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (19.6% in 2022), and 13.2% of children lived in households with incomes below the poverty threshold (14.1% in 2022).

Eurochild members in Belgium identified four policy priorities that would contribute to ending child poverty and social exclusion:

- Eliminating waiting lists for social housing by rapidly expanding the building of social housing (instead of imposing increasingly restrictive

- conditions on candidates).
- Reforming the educational system, including by tackling school costs and the reproduction of social inequality.
- Strengthening the affordability and accessibility of quality healthcare, including mental health care.
- Increasing access to early childhood education and care.

In addition, a reform and expansion of the Flemish ‘Groeipakket’ (child benefits) is needed to lift children out of poverty or to prevent them from growing up in poverty.

The children most in need are:

- children with a migration background, including unaccompanied minors
- children in alternative care
- children with disabilities
- children living in single-parent families

## The European Child Guarantee

The Belgian Child Guarantee National Action Plan ([NL](#), [FR](#)) is an overview of measures that were already taken or planned at the time of the adoption of the European Child Guarantee. The budgets for these measures were already decided on, and there is no specific additional funding to support the implementation of the Child Guarantee.

The federal administration is currently mapping the availability of data to monitor and evaluate child poverty and social exclusion. These were included in an attachment to the biennial report ([NL](#), [FR](#)).



## European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report

The [Country Report](#) for Belgium highlights that the rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) in 2022, was 19.6%.

Participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) among children aged between 3 and the start of compulsory school age is one of the highest in the EU (97.6% in 2021). The participation of children under 3 in formal childcare (52.7%) is similarly high. However, there are challenges to equal access for ECEC. Flanders and the Brussels-Capital Region have significant shortages of childcare places and a lack of staff.

Inequalities are reflected in the large and increasing difference between the AROPE rates of children under 6 of highly educated parents (7.2%) and

those of parents with a low level of education (84.4%). The implementation of the European Child Guarantee is ongoing. Funding from the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the ESF+ are supporting active inclusion and inclusive education.

Both the Country Report and the introduction to the [Country Specific Recommendations](#) highlight that, despite high education spending, results show that 25% of 15-year-olds underperformed in maths, 25.3% in reading, and 22.4% in science. The gap in under-achievement in math between advantaged and disadvantaged students has widened. The under-achievement rate of disadvantaged students increased by 9.2%. The introduction also highlights that increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession, in particular by ensuring job stability and providing continuous training, would help reduce a growing shortage of qualified teachers.

## “Country Recommendation

Bulgaria should adopt the National Strategy for the Child (2024-2030) and legislative amendments to provide the State Child Protection Agency with sufficient powers, resources and a clear mandate to coordinate all activities for the implementation of the UNCRC. Bulgaria should also develop inclusive policies that specifically address the needs of children from marginalised communities and ensure their equal access to quality education and digital tools. It is critically important to end the practice of segregated schools and to address early school drop-out with adequate legal and inclusive measures.

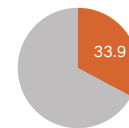
## Country Profile 2024



# Bulgaria



**Child Population:**  
**1,099,696 (2023)**  
17.1% of total population



**Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:**  
**377,000 (2023)**  
33.9% (2023)  
No change compared to 2022

### RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

CONCORDIA Bulgaria Foundation  
National Network for Children

<sup>1</sup> Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc\_peps01n).

## Children's Rights in Bulgaria

Bulgaria ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1991. Domestic legislation is aligned with the UNCRC.

There is no requirement for a [Child Rights Impact Assessment](#) (CRIA) process when making legislative and policy decisions in Bulgaria. Impact assessments are done when developing draft legislation but these do not include a focus on children's rights. Eurochild members continue to advocate for the adoption of CRIA processes with robust indicators.

Bulgaria has still not adopted its National Strategy for the Child (2024-2030). There is an [approved draft](#) not yet endorsed by Parliament. Progress is frozen due to ongoing political crises and snap elections in June and October 2024. Civil

society organisations (CSOs), including the National Network for Children, engaged in the development of the Strategy. However, the process was marred by disinformation campaigns aimed at demonising the National Strategy and undermining civil society, EU values and children's rights in general.

Overall, Eurochild members do not believe there is significant awareness and understanding of the UNCRC among policymakers. They continue to advocate for the independence of the State Agency for Child Protection, and for the government to provide it with [sufficient powers, adequate resources and a clear mandate for coordinating all activities related to the implementation of the UNCRC](#). They are also advocating for the establishment of an [Ombudsperson for Children](#) in Bulgaria.

Members of Parliament in the temporary 50th National

Assembly<sup>2</sup> recently approved the establishment of a standing parliamentary Committee on Demographic Policy, Children and the Family, which is a positive development. However, there are concerns that the Committee's agenda is shaped by far-right propaganda.

Overall there is shrinking space for CSOs working on children's rights in Bulgaria. Misinformation on children's rights has paralysed political parties' cooperation with civil society, and the sector is constantly subjected to smear campaigns. CSOs also struggle with funding, especially for advocacy and campaigns. However, briefly in 2023, when there was a functioning government, there was consultation with children's organisations and progress on several belated reforms including the system of social assistance, social services, protection from domestic violence, juvenile justice, and adoption.

## Early childhood development

The government has [the Annual Plan for the Promotion of Early Childhood Development for 2024](#), which aims to implement an integrated approach and to develop cross-sector services for parents and children.

There are still insufficient services for early childhood education and care (ECEC), and no uniform standards for tracking and measuring their quality. The introduction of a National Quality Framework for ECEC Services has not been implemented. Many services fail to cover the most critical age for early intervention, namely 0-3, and there are significant local and ethnic disparities in the provision of, and access to, ECEC services.

ECEC policies continue to be marked by inconsistency, inefficiency, and poor dissemination, and by a lack of cross-departmental family-

<sup>2</sup> This was constituted in June 2024 on a temporary basis until the general election on 27 October 2024



centered support. This is further exacerbated by the short-term policy horizon of successive governments over the past three years.

Despite a national law guaranteeing free pre-primary education, a chronic shortage of ECEC places is particularly evident in big cities and rural areas. In 2024, nearly 10,000 children were left without access to nurseries and kindergartens in the capital.

There are also vast regional disparities in the provision of ECEC services. 17.9% of children aged 0-3 were enrolled in ECEC services in 2022, well below the EU target of 45%.

Bulgaria's failure to ensure effective access to ECEC for all children was taken before the European Committee for Social Rights in Eurochild v. Bulgaria case No. 221/2023 which is currently pending.

## Children's mental health

There is a lack of free and accessible support for children's mental health in Bulgaria. Investments are scarce and there is stigma surrounding mental health and seeking help. Urgent reform of children's mental healthcare is needed, with comprehensive provision of clinical, counselling and psychotherapeutic support. In the last three years, no real steps have been taken to implement the commitments from the Mental Health Strategy (2020-2030) concerning children's and adolescents' mental health.

The lack of adequate care for children with mental health problems is particularly visible in schools, where there is a great need to address bullying.

## Child safety and well-being online

Bulgaria's first national conference on "Children in the Digital World"<sup>3</sup>, highlighted the following issues:

- Insufficient access to digital devices and the Internet, especially in poorer regions and among marginalised communities.
- Risks of online exploitation and abuse, including cyberbullying and sexual exploitation.
- Unequal access to educational resources and technology for children with special educational needs.
- Insufficient digital literacy among children and their parents, hindering their right to safely access and navigate the digital environment.

The Child Protection Act does not contain any specific provisions on

the protection of children's rights online and on cyberbullying.

The Bulgarian Safer Internet Center has a support hotline, processes reports of online child abuse and provides counselling and training for children, parents and teachers. It also raises public awareness and provides materials for online safety.

Children and young people have suggested ways in which they can be protected in the digital environment, including awareness and prevention campaigns and introducing the topic of human rights and online safety in the school curriculum.

## Child protection systems

About 2,000 children enter the child protection system annually. Funding is urgently needed to improve the system – with resources, training, supervision and quality control. Child

<sup>3</sup> Organized by UNICEF Bulgaria, the Ministry of the Interior, the State Agency for Child Protection, the National Network for Children, the Parents Association and the Center for Safe Internet

protection departments are severely understaffed, with high staff turnover. Child protection systems across sectors such as justice, policing, health, education and social protection need to be improved, with more cooperation at the local level.

Measures needed to strengthen child protection systems:

- Improve the capacity for referrals to social services.
- Attract and retain qualified specialists.
- Ensure comprehensive, targeted and integrated social services.
- Increase the capacity of child protection departments to work with parents (both prevention and intervention).
- Build models of family support with a “one family - one plan – one expert leading the case” approach.
- Strengthen the professionalisation of social workers.

## Education

Bulgaria has one the highest educational inequalities in the world. Data shows the [urgent need for reforms in quality, and equality of access to education in Bulgaria](#). The education system is failing to include children with diverse needs. The [Government has guaranteed equal opportunities and equal access to education for every child by law](#), but implementation is far behind and inequalities persist.

- [According to UNICEF](#), 45% of Roma children do not attend pre-school groups, and 15% do not go to school.
- [According to UNICEF](#), only half of children with disabilities are included in mainstream education, and approximately 14,000 children with disabilities are outside the education system.
- Over 40% of children attending school are illiterate and have minimal skills in reading, arithmetic and science.
- [1 in 6 children are not enrolled](#)

[in school, 1 in 5 do not attend compulsory kindergarten.](#)

In 2024, there is still no overall policy for children with special educational needs. However, the government has initiated consultations on reforming quality standards in education and teachers' qualifications, as well as amendments in the Regulation for Inclusive Education. The government should [adopt these and other necessary reforms identified as a priority by the Ministry of Education.](#)

## Climate change and the environment

Air pollution poses a significant risk for children in Bulgaria. The child [climate risk index](#) is high, and Bulgaria had the EU's highest [levels of estimated premature deaths attributable to exposure to fine particulate matter](#) in 2021.

There is a problem regarding children's access to mainstream

sport and physical activity, with a lack of facilities in many kindergartens and schools and sport facilities in poor condition, where they exist.

There is a need to promote children's awareness of their right to a clean environment, with the active participation of schools, and in accordance with [General Comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change](#) and the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

## Child participation

Society, institutions and professionals working with children do not consistently recognise the need for children to express opinions on issues affecting them. Children do not have access to child-friendly information about laws and policies.

The [National Children's Council to the Chairman of the State](#)

[Agency for Child Protection](#) is the only children's advisory body in Bulgaria through which children and young people can influence public policies.

Bulgaria should adopt a National Strategy for Child Participation to guarantee safe, inclusive, empowering and sustainable child participation at both the municipal and state levels.

### Additional children's rights issues

- Increasing violence and abuse of children both in homes and institutions, including cyberbullying in schools.
- Mistreatment of migrant and asylum-seeking children by the Bulgarian authorities (including unaccompanied minors) with violence and push-backs at borders, lack of humane treatment in reception centres, and of adequate care for children's needs. Government agencies are failing to trace

unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who leave reception centres.

- Bulgaria lacks a National Children's Hospital and funds for the treatment of children with severe or rare diseases.
- Bulgaria lacks measures for the prevention of family separation, and for monitoring the quality of specialised support for children in alternative care.
- The harmful practice of child marriage - while births to mothers who are under 18 are decreasing, Bulgaria continues to be among the EU countries with a relatively high number of births among adolescent mothers.

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

### Child poverty in Bulgaria

The child poverty rate in Bulgaria remains among the highest in Europe. [According to UNICEF's Innocenti Report Card 18](#) the average child poverty rate for 2019-2021 was 26.1%.

Eurochild members identified areas where Bulgaria should increase public investment in children:

- Support parents' access to the labour market and provide a combination of cash and in-kind benefits.
- Invest in social housing.
- Invest in the quality of the child protection system.

According to Eurochild partners, the children most in need in Bulgaria are:

- children from minority groups, including Roma, Turkish, refugee and migrant children and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
- children in households facing poverty despite being in work
- children with special educational needs and with disabilities
- children in households where one or more parents are working abroad<sup>4</sup>
- children victims of violence
- children in conflict with the law

Members identified several policy priorities for Bulgaria:

- Adopt the National Strategy for the Child.
- Reform the juvenile justice system.
- Provide integrated social services (under the Child

<sup>4</sup> According to NNC's Report Card 2024 every fourth child in Bulgaria lives without one or both parents, because he/she/they is/are work/ing abroad.

Guarantee) to support families at risk.

- Adopt a National Strategy for Housing, to increase the availability and quality of housing, including social housing.
- End segregation and inequality in education.

### European Social Fund +

The ESF+ supports various programmes including the implementation of government policy on deinstitutionalisation for children deprived of parental care and children with disabilities, and the “Future for Children” which is part of the [implementation of the National Plan for the European Child Guarantee](#). “Future for Children” supports early childhood development services, education, health and social services, to counteract child poverty.

Members noted that ESF+ funding is almost exclusively allocated to government bodies, with limited access for CSOs. Civil society ought to have access to EU cohesion funds and the restrictive [de minimis](#) thresholds should also be revised.

CONCORDIA Bulgaria and the National Network for Children are not participating in the Monitoring Committee of the ESF+.<sup>5</sup>

### Example of good practice to mitigate child poverty

The CONCORDIA Bulgaria Foundation supports social integration of disadvantaged children through sports, establishing the [CONCORDIA Football Club](#) in 2015. This offers free football to children and young people, on the condition that they attend school. Sports specialists, social workers,

psychologists and teachers work together to support the children and their families.

The MOGA programme (Model for Early Education, Care and Active Participation) is an innovative approach to Roma community development that supports Roma parents during the critical period of early childhood.

### The European Child Guarantee

The indicators to monitor and evaluate [Bulgaria's NAP](#) are relevant, but improved data collection is needed. The measures included in the NAP cover the most relevant groups of children. Funds for the Child Guarantee come mainly from the government budget and the European Structural and Investment Funds, along with other sources.

Measures included in the NAP to de-segregate education, improve children's mental health, and promote sports activities for disadvantaged children are particularly welcome.

[The biennial report](#) includes measures to ensure access to quality ECEC, inclusive education and school activities, healthcare, healthy nutrition and appropriate housing – as outlined in the NAP. However, there is no information on improving the situation of homeless children and those with poor housing conditions, or on additional measures needed for refugee and migrant children.

There is a Permanent Expert Working Group to monitor the NAP's implementation, with representation from various institutions, including CSOs and academia. It is chaired by Bulgaria's National Coordinator for the European Child Guarantee.

<sup>5</sup> In order to examine the performance of programmes, Member States should set up monitoring committees, whose composition should include representatives of relevant partners, including civil society organisations. Member States may set up a single monitoring committee to cover more than one programme.

**“Overall we think the implementation of the Child Guarantee started in a turbulent political environment and is yet to be developed. The Child Guarantee is expected to ensure continuity and consistency in children’s policies in Bulgaria.”**

## **European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations**

### **Overview of the Country Report**

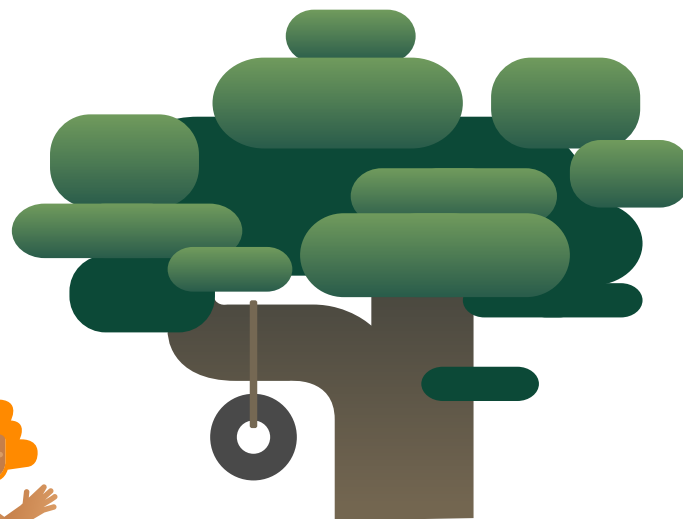
Bulgaria faces significant poverty and inequality, especially for groups including children, older people, people with disabilities and Roma communities.

The Country Report acknowledges Bulgaria has taken action to address high rates of child poverty and social exclusion in its Child Guarantee NAP, with measures to provide better education and healthcare

for children, especially Roma and migrant children and children with disabilities.

In 2023, the participation in formal childcare of children under three was 17.4%, against the EU average of 35.7%. The rate of early leavers from education decreased from 12.2% in 2021 to 9.3% in 2023 but remains disproportionately high in rural areas and in Roma communities. Roma children are identified as those most at risk of poverty, with education as a contributing factor.

The Child Guarantee is expected to benefit over 200,000 children and the ESF+ will support more than 760,000 children and students to improve educational outcomes and the inclusiveness of the education system.



## “Country Recommendation

To prevent child poverty and social exclusion, Croatia should take action to ensure an adequate range of social services including early childhood development in local communities. Preserving family stability and preventing neglect and abandonment of children must be a primary concern.

### RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Ombudsman for Children, Croatia

“Croatia for Children” Foundation

The Society “Our Children” Opatija

Association “Magical World”, Knin

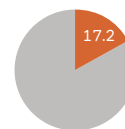
Croatian Association on Early Childhood Intervention

Association Children First

## Country Profile 2024



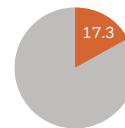
# Croatia



### Child Population:

**664,057 (2023)**

17.2% of total population



### Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:

**113,000 (2023)**

17.3% (2023)

▼-0.8% compared to 2022

<sup>1</sup> Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc\_peps01n).

## Children's Rights in Croatia

Croatia has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and aspects of the Convention have been reflected in national legislation, although often only at a declarative level.

In Croatia, there is no Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) process to consider the impacts of laws, policies and budgetary decisions on children's rights. Eurochild members in Croatia consider it extremely important that Croatia introduces a CRIA process, with clear indicators.

There is a [National Plan for Children's Rights for 2022- 2026](#), but the measures and objectives are not adequately defined. There is a need for appropriate indicators for continuous monitoring and evaluation of children's rights fulfilment.

There is not enough awareness and understanding of the UNCRC among decision-makers, with no single government entity with overall responsibility for children's issues. Responsibility is dispersed across multiple ministries, and ministerial responsibilities frequently change after elections.

There is a Council for Children, an advisory body operating under the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family, and Social Policy (MROSPM), with a mandate to monitor the realisation of children's rights, but it is not as active as it should be.

The Office of the Ombudsman for Children in Croatia is an independent body that covers all areas of children's rights. Along with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) it submits alternative reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Office of the Ombudsman regularly refers to

the Concluding Observations by the UN Committee, and emphasises the need for their implementation. However, the government does not respond publicly to the Committee's recommendations, which are still only available on the MROSPM website in an [unofficial translation](#).

Although there are examples of good practice involving local and regional government and NGOs in the implementation of the UNCRC there is a need for better cross-sector cooperation by all stakeholders.

### Early childhood development

There is insufficient understanding of the importance of early childhood development (ECD), and no comprehensive and integrated approach to ECD. This hinders access to appropriate and timely support and services, especially for children with

developmental difficulties and their parents.

Children's participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) is among the lowest in Europe. There are significant geographical disparities in access to early childhood programmes, with fewer facilities in rural areas and cost and transport barriers.

The needs of children and parents exceed current capacity almost everywhere in Croatia. Kindergartens, particularly in smaller towns and the islands, highlight the shortage of professional ECEC staff. However, in some local authorities there is visible investment, with the opening of new kindergartens and the expansion of existing ones.

There is also a lack of parenting support programmes, which is particularly important for parents of children under three.

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<sup>2</sup> The 'Cities and Municipalities – Friends of Children' initiative; 'Counties – Friends of Children'; Children's Councils; and Children's Forums operated by the Alliance of Societies 'Our Children'.

To reduce regional inequalities in the availability and quality of pre-school education, we consider it a priority to find a support model for cities and municipalities that fail to provide equal access to pre-school education. Due to complaints indicating non-transparent and discriminatory enrolment criteria for kindergartens, we believe it is necessary to standardise these criteria at the national level.

There is no obligation to provide support for children with special educational needs in kindergartens. Children's rights are often denied due to the inability of kindergartens to provide the appropriate professional support and spatial/material conditions for early learning and for individual educational plans.

### Children's mental health

Early intervention mental health services for children remain inadequate. In principle, children have access to mental health

professionals, but there is a long-standing shortage of specialists and long waiting lists. In the public health system, the first appointment with a psychologist can take more than 80 days in Zagreb County. In child and adolescent psychiatry there is a shortage of specialists and inpatient treatment capacity for children. The number of emergency hospitalisations in 2022 increased by 56% compared to 2019.

There are significant regional disparities in the availability of services, with notable shortages in rural areas. In areas where hiring specialists is difficult, it would be beneficial to deploy mobile multidisciplinary teams.

There is a Strategic Framework for Mental Health, which includes measures related to children, but there are concerns about the funding needed for its implementation. An Action Plan for the Protection of Children's and Adolescents' Mental Health is currently being developed. More

specialists are needed, in both the health and education system, to implement these.

Within the school system, specialists often cannot devote enough time to children, due to other tasks. Psychological first aid must be provided in schools, delivered by trained staff. A positive example of this is the [PomoziDa programme](#), which enables the training of teachers and school staff in early intervention for children with mental health issues.

The draft of the new [Public Health Network](#) foresees the hiring of 125 psychologists in health centres. It seems the government has decided that every primary and secondary school must have a psychologist, however this information still needs to be verified.

### Child safety and well-being online

Risks to children's rights from the use of technology and digital

media are increasingly common - including violence, harmful content, misuse of personal data, and violation of privacy. Experts and children themselves point to the excessive use of digital media as an increasing challenge.

A National Programme for Children in the Digital Environment for 2024-2026 is currently being developed.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) in Croatia also implement programmes to educate and raise awareness of safety in the digital world. Members of the National Youth Council of Croatia and the Children's City Council of Opatija participated in the [VOICE research project](#). The goal of the research was to introduce the views of children and parents into policy discussions on safety standards in the digital environment. It showed that children want more information about internet safety, want privacy and protection, and also want to participate in developing solutions to Internet safety issues.



Despite measures to protect children in the digital environment there are still several gaps:

- The lack of a specific law to protect children's rights in the digital sphere, and of a single government body to oversee this area.
- The lack of a unified database on violations of children's rights in the digital sphere.
- Insufficient education for parents and teachers on protecting children in the digital environment, and the lack of support when rights violations occur.
- The absence of mandatory digital literacy education in schools.

There is also a need to address the digital divide and ensure equal access to the Internet for children in all parts of the country.

### Child protection systems

There are laws and protocols on child protection but difficulties in implementation, monitoring and

evaluation. Early intervention is still lacking, with many cases of violence against children going unreported.

There is a need to improve integrated child protection systems, in line with the [European Commission Recommendations on the Development and Strengthening of Integrated Systems for Child Protection in the Best Interests of the Child](#).

Measures to prevent the separation of children from their parents are regulated by the Family Act and the Social Welfare Act, which provide for a range of services designed to address problems and support an appropriate family environment and avoid separation.

There is insufficient placement capacity for children in alternative care, including foster care.

Most service providers are over capacity, raising concerns about the quality of services provided to children. There is also a lack

of professional staff in the social care system.

### Education

Croatia promotes the inclusion of children with developmental difficulties in the educational system. The state provides support for pupils with special educational needs in the form of teaching assistants. However, there is insufficient funding so not all those who need it have access to support.

Parents complain about insufficient monitoring of pupils with special educational needs by professional services and the lack of timely support in schools. The quality of support and education often depends on the efforts and motivation of individuals, while systematic support is lacking.

### Climate change and the environment

Croatia faces the threat of extreme heat and rising sea levels, with coastal areas already

becoming less habitable in the summer. The most vulnerable children are those at risk of poverty and social exclusion, and children with health problems.

There are no specific policies on children's rights to a healthy environment. However, there is a [Climate Change Adaptation Strategy of the Republic of Croatia](#) and Croatia is committed to a green transition.

The Ombudsman for Children monitors the realisation of children's rights to a healthy environment. Air pollution and prolonged exposure of children to harmful emissions are a major concern but there is no appropriate response from the authorities.

School curricula should include content related to climate change. Croatia has adopted the [Sustainable Development Strategy](#) as a legislative framework that should facilitate the implementation of sustainable

development principles in Croatia's education system.

Children involved in the work of the DGV Opatija<sup>3</sup> actively participated in writing [General Comment 26 on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change](#).

The Network of Young Advisors to the Ombudsman for Children participated in the [ENYA Let's Talk Young, Let's Talk About Climate Justice project](#) of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) with the support of the European Commission.

### Child participation

Despite some progress, meaningful participation of children in decision-making processes is still inadequate. Improvements are needed to make children's voices heard and taken into consideration in legislation and policy-making.

Child participation is implemented mainly by CSOs and through the Network of Youth Advisers to the Ombudsman for Children. SOS Children's Villages promotes the participation of children in alternative care.

The [Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool](#) is not being implemented comprehensively, nor is it used as a baseline assessment.

### Emerging children's rights issues

- There is a need to establish a high-quality early intervention system for children with developmental difficulties. An estimated 10.5% of children have developmental difficulties, but only every eighth child in need receives appropriate early intervention services.
- Proposed changes to the national pre-school curriculum could undermine children's right to play by shifting the focus towards school-based

outcomes, thereby limiting opportunities for open-ended, play-based learning.

- There is a need for improvement in the judicial system, with processes that consider children's best interests. Children face inappropriate treatment during judicial proceedings, insufficient support and protection and prolonged proceedings that contribute to distress. Processes must be in place to guarantee that each child gets support according to their age and needs.

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

### Child poverty in Croatia

The rate of children at risk of poverty in Croatia decreased by 0.8% in 2023, standing at 17.3%.

Eurochild members highlighted areas where the government should increase public investment:

- Social services and financial benefits to families with children;
- Education, as a key pathway out of poverty;
- Social housing. A social housing strategy is needed;
- Long-term funding for early childhood intervention services;
- An integrated system of early childhood services and support;
- Economic and social empowerment of families in rural areas, including public transport and educational, cultural, and recreational activities for children.

According to Eurochild members, the children most in need are Roma children, children with developmental difficulties and disabilities and children in rural areas.

<sup>3</sup> A children's city council.

## European Social Fund + (ESF+)

NGOs face constraints in accessing ESF+ funding due to administrative burdens, imposed by Croatian implementing bodies, which exceed organisations' capacities.

A representative from the Ombudsman for Children is part of the Monitoring Committee for the Human Resources Development Programme 2021-2027.

### Example of good practice to mitigate child poverty

By the government's decision, from the beginning of 2023, the costs of meals (one meal) for all elementary school children are co-financed.

The three-year "POTICAJ" Programme (managed by the Association of Societies for Children of Croatia) provides psycho-social support to socially vulnerable children and their parents. Funded by the Ministry of Labour, Pension System,

Family and Social Policy, it aims to improve quality of life for children at risk of social exclusion in different regions, including children from Roma communities. It provided play and art therapy workshops, speech therapy support, learning assistance and excursions.

## The European Child Guarantee

Croatia's Child Guarantee National Action Plan (NAP) was adopted in 2023. However, most of its measures focus on legislative and institutional frameworks, rather than improving service provision for children and families.

The Office of the Ombudsman for Children participated in the working group that prepared the NAP, and in the Committee for Coordination, Monitoring, and Evaluation of the NAP.

Eurochild members in Croatia believe it is important for CSOs to be actively involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the

NAP's implementation, along with other stakeholders. Currently, CSOs are not involved.

**“Overall, the Child Guarantee is a very important initiative for Croatia. Available ESF+ funds should be fully used. It is necessary to engage different stakeholders, including the largest possible number of NGOs, which together with the Ministries will do everything in their power to ensure that every child has equal opportunities to develop their full potential in the future.”**



## European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report

The Croatia [Country Report](#) reveals that the impact of social transfers on poverty reduction remains low at 20.9%, and below the EU average of 33.2%. This disproportionately affects low-income and single-parent families.

Participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) is low, with significant regional differences. Current policies regarding payments for ECEC, regardless of parents' income, prevent children at risk of poverty from benefiting from ECEC. The report highlights a 2020 UNICEF study which found that 69% of children in Croatia live in areas where fees for ECEC are not linked to household income, and 47% of children in areas where even social assistance recipients must pay full fees. Since October 2023, the government co-finances ECEC facilities' operating costs. Investments from the Recovery

and Resilience Plan and from cohesion funds could increase the participation of children in formal childcare, but there is an ongoing shortage of ECEC teachers.

Eurochild members in Croatia support the state co-financing of ECEC as a means to help reduce inequalities and improve participation.

The report points to challenges in the deinstitutionalisation process. An increased demand for institutional care for children indicates shortcomings in the provision of family and community-based care.

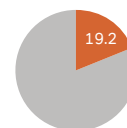
## “Country Recommendation

Cyprus should take action to improve child participation and have disaggregated data for children

## Country Profile 2024



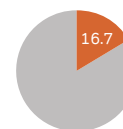
# Cyprus



### Child Population:

**176,838 (2023)**

19.2% of total population



### Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:

**29,000 (2023)**

16.7% (2023)

▼ -1.4% compared to 2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

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

<sup>1</sup> Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc\_peps01n).

## Children's Rights in Cyprus

Upon its ratification, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is considered part of domestic legislation in Cyprus, with greater force over all other domestic legislation, and directly applicable before national courts. However, this is not enough for the proper implementation of children's rights and for mainstreaming children's rights in domestic legislation. Judges are not fully trained on the UNCRC, and the best interest of the child is not always taken into account.

The government should urgently develop a timebound plan for the adoption of all the necessary legislative measures to mainstream children's rights into national legislation. Moreover, important legislation such as the law on the Welfare, Care and Protection of Children - which would modernise legislation in keeping with international and

European standards - is still pending.

The Pancyprrian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children (PCCPWC) is not aware of a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) process in Cyprus, but would encourage Cyprus to adopt such a process.

There is no comprehensive national strategy for children's rights despite advocacy on this by PCCPWC over many years.

There is not enough understanding of children's rights among policymakers, including ministers and parliamentarians. Policymakers in the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Health have some knowledge, but the UNCRC is not a priority. The Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child are not made public.

The PCCPWC does not believe that children's rights are specifically threatened, but is concerned that human rights

in general are under threat – as demonstrated by the rise of far-right ideas that promote racism, discrimination and nationalism.

### Early childhood development

Cyprus recognises the importance of children's early years but has lacked a focus on children under three. Participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) remains low, and has been unaffordable for many households on low incomes.

However, there has been notable progress in this area. In Cyprus, pre-school education is now mandatory starting at four years and six months of age. Each year, this age will be lowered by two months until it reaches four years. The government is also subsidising pre-school and childcare for children from the age of three. Additionally, 30 new all-day schools have been introduced, and their opening hours have been extended.

### Children's mental health

Mental health is a neglected issue in Cyprus, for adults and children alike. Despite promises and plans, no concrete action has been taken.

There is insufficient early intervention mental health support for children. Children can be referred to specialist mental health services, but due to long waiting times the intervention usually comes too late. Mental health services are part of the national healthcare system but are inadequate and dated.

Schools do not offer mental health support to children, only counselling from people who are not psychologists and instead are trained to provide pupils with professional orientation advice for their future studies.

No lessons have been learned, nor data collected, on children's mental health since the Covid pandemic. The government must establish dedicated centres and

services to support children's mental health needs.

### Child safety and well-being online

There is no specific government initiative that aims to enhance children and young people's media literacy and awareness of online safety.

The main awareness-raising programme on the risks posted by new media is the [\*CyberSafety – A better internet for Children\*](#) run by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute. It aims to create a safe Internet



culture by empowering creative, innovative and critical citizens in the digital world. The project consists of four pillars:

- A platform where actors (teachers, parents and students aged 5-18) can find teaching resources and tools, share experiences, expertise and good practice.
- Helpline 1480 where anyone can get advice and support from trained staff, in real time, on issues related to their use of online technologies.
- Hotline 1480 where anyone can report illegal content and actions related to child sexual abuse material, racism and xenophobia.
- The [\*CyberSafety Youth Panel\*](#) shares views and exchanges knowledge and experiences on the creative and safe use of the Internet and digital technologies.

The Cyprus Children's Parliament participates in the CYberSafety Youth Panel.

### Education

In theory the education system is accessible to all children equally. Nevertheless, there are concerns regarding access for migrant children, especially unaccompanied minors, and children whose parents have no legal status and therefore are not registered.

While accessibility also includes children with special educational needs and disabilities, there are concerns over assessment and placement procedures and the quality of services provided. There are instances where children require more specialist bespoke support and this cannot be provided in mainstream schools. Such children need equitable services to ensure their needs are met.

### Child participation

Participation has never been, and still is not, a priority for children under the age of 16 in Cyprus. While those aged 16 and over

are technically included in the Youth Strategy, their voices are often overshadowed by 'adult' perspectives. As expected, the issues they raise differ, and as non-voters (under 17 years old) their voices are not as strong as adults'.

We are not aware of the use of the [\*Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool\*](#), or of an assessment of the state of play regarding child participation in Cyprus.

### Additional children's rights issues

Children in migration are a constant concern and there has been no real progress in supporting these children. PCCPWC have ongoing concerns that children are not effectively integrated into Cypriot communities and cannot access all services.

Children's right to play is not on the government's agenda, despite Eurochild members' efforts to

draw attention to this issue. In Cyprus, a child's right to play is not recognised from the age of 6 as they are expected to spend their time learning and do not have free leisure time to play.

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

### Child poverty in Cyprus

The child poverty rate was 19.2% in 2021, it dropped to 18.1% in 2022 and reduced again in 2023 to 16.7%.

PCCPWC highlighted three areas where Cyprus should increase public investment in children:

- Educational services should be provided outside school hours and education should cater for each child's specific needs (academically and developmentally).

- Adequate housing that enables an adequate standard of living.
- Benefits should not only be given in cash to families but also free and accessible services must be available for all children.

The children most in need in Cyprus are migrant children, especially unaccompanied minors with limited – if any – access to the education system and who are living in 'institutions' (mostly hotels) without any real efforts to include them in society. These children need access to education, better housing, integration programmes, language lessons and other support and services.

PCCPWC named three policy priorities for Cyprus to end child poverty and social exclusion:

- Consider public spending for children as an investment in the future.

- Develop an effective social welfare programme that provides real support to those in need.
- Develop a more progressive tax system and income redistribution policies that can help mitigate income inequalities and reduce poverty.

### European Social Fund + (ESF+)

The Child Guarantee National Action Plan illustrates the effort made by the Republic of Cyprus for a supportive policy framework for the protection of children, by aiming to ensure that every child at risk of poverty or social exclusion has access to the full range of essential services. As such, it contributes to making child and family policies more consistent with children's rights and their full implementation in Cyprus. Most actions are implemented with funding from national resources and EU co-financing through the Recovery

and Resilience Plan, the ESF+ and Cohesion Funds.

PCCPWC is not involved in the Monitoring Committee of ESF+.<sup>2</sup>

## The European Child Guarantee

Cyprus approved its [Child Guarantee National Action Plan \(NAP\)](#) on 18/10/2022. A planned consultation with children was cancelled and never took place. In addition, the child poverty reduction target in the NAP (to reduce child poverty from 35,000 in 2019 to 32,000 by 2030) was already achieved in 2022, with concerns that the government will not take further action as the target is already met.

Cyprus has published its [biennial report](#) on the implementation of the Child Guarantee. The report accurately captures the range of activities outlined in the National Action Plan. However, it is unclear

<sup>2</sup> In order to examine the performance of programmes, Member States should set up monitoring committees, whose composition should include representatives of relevant partners, including civil society organisations. Member States may set up a single monitoring committee to cover more than one programme.



how effective the actions have been, as there has not been a proper impact and assessment report.

Overall, there has been little engagement of civil society organisations (CSOs) and children themselves in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Child Guarantee NAP. While there is collaboration and coordination within the Technical Committee responsible for the NAP (comprising only Ministry representatives), CSOs and community organisations are not included or consulted. The NAP is considered a ‘government project’ only.

PCCPWC believes impact assessments of the implementation of the Child Guarantee should be conducted on a regular basis.

**“It is crucial for Cyprus to establish and sustain robust child participation initiatives to ensure that the Child Guarantee has a meaningful impact.”**



## European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report

In 2022, the participation rate in formal childcare for children under three was only 24.4%, compared to the EU average of 35.9%. In 2020-2021 the participation rate in early childhood education and care (ECEC) for children over 3 dropped by 5.3% to 85.8%. Participation in pre-school for children aged 4 and above is higher at 87.7%, as compulsory education currently starts at 4 years and 6 months. The ESF+ and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) support investment and increased participation in ECEC.

The education system lacks sustained teacher training and competence-based teaching methods. Reforms under the RRF aim to improve education quality. Despite progress, socio-economic divides persist. It is important to continue implementing the

planned priorities, focusing on strengthening the implementation of individual learning and implementing the European Child Guarantee.

Children are not mentioned in the Country Specific Recommendations but the European Child Guarantee and the need to improve the education system appear in the introduction. Recommendations include improving education and enhancing climate adaptation measures.

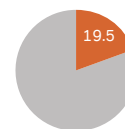
## “Country Recommendation

The Joint Council for Child Issues in Denmark recommends that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child be incorporated directly into Danish legislation. Denmark has ratified the Convention, but it should be incorporated directly into legislation that deals with vulnerable children and their families.

## Country Profile 2024



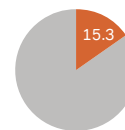
# Denmark



### Child Population:

**1,155,838 (2023)**

19.5% of total population



### Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:

**171,000 (2023)**

15.3% (2023)

▲ +1.5% compared to 2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Joint Council for Child Issues in Denmark

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)

## Children's Rights in Denmark

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was ratified by Denmark in 1991. It is not incorporated directly into Danish legislation, but because Denmark has committed to complying with the Convention the courts include it in cases concerning children. However, the Convention does not have the same legal status as if it had been incorporated into law.

There is no Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) process in Denmark to guide the development of legislation. The Danish National Council for Children - an advisory council set up by the government with representation from civil society and specialists - recommends that child rights assessments are carried out based on a CRIA template prepared by the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC). The Joint Council for Child Issues agrees that the use

of the CRIA template would be useful.

The Joint Council for Child Issues in Denmark is not aware of an explicit national strategy on children's rights, but is calling for such a strategy in its policy and advocacy work.

The Joint Council for Child Issues in Denmark believes there is widespread knowledge of the UNCRC among Danish policymakers. The Convention is referred to in public and political debates. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing is responsible for following up on the Convention and reports on it every five years, in collaboration with other Ministries. The government comments publicly on the Concluding Observations made by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The Joint Council for Child Issues in Denmark believes there is a supportive environment for children's rights overall, and among those working in this area. There was a very strong

focus on children's rights when Denmark adopted a new national Children's Act in 2023. This is the law that determines supportive measures for vulnerable children and young people in Denmark, including those who are placed in alternative care.

### Early childhood development

In Denmark there is a widespread recognition of the importance of children's early years, including among politicians. As a result, in 2020 Denmark passed a national law on minimum standards in nurseries and daycare centres. These norms came into force on 1 January 2024.

### Children's mental health

Children with mental health problems are helped both through the social support available at the municipal level (based on the Children's Act) and through child psychiatric services, which are part of the health service. This provides several opportunities for adequate and early intervention for these children, as well as

specialised support when needed. Unfortunately, there are long waiting times for treatment, especially in child psychiatry. There are also problems in ensuring coherence in the efforts made by the social and health sectors. Civil society organisations are not often involved.

The Joint Council for Child Issues in Denmark strongly recommends that the capacity of child psychiatric services is expanded, so that waiting lists can be reduced.



## Child safety and well-being online

In Denmark, the digital environment for children is currently under-regulated, allowing significant control by the big tech companies. However, there is a national political discussion on how to limit social media's influence on children's lives, and a number of politicians want to strengthen legislation in this area. It is important that the best interests of children remain at the heart of this regulatory push, and that this is also done through legislation from the European Union.

## Child protection systems

With the new Children's Act, Denmark's child protection system has been revised in a way which is expected to fundamentally change the practice of social work in the system. The previous system had specific requirements for case management - mandatory procedures, specific requirements for child interviews, deadlines etc.

This provided a clear procedural basis to work on, but it also led to a comprehensive and very slow case processing and often late action. Much of that has been removed in the Children's Act, so that case processing can go faster and support for families can come earlier. But legal certainty and procedural certainty are now much more dependent on the individual municipality and case worker. The Joint Council for Child Issues in Denmark has expressed concerns that the system can undermine the rights of children and families, because legal requirements are fewer, and professional discretion has a larger role. Additionally, there are concerns that municipalities may not be sufficiently supported when it comes to implementing the law.

## Education

The Danish school system is primarily public, run by municipalities under state regulations, with a degree of co-determination. Obligatory

school boards play a significant role in decision-making related to the school's operation, with co-determination also coming from parent and student councils. All schools are required to have school boards where parents form the majority. Additionally, all schools must establish student councils for children in fourth grade and above. The public school system includes both 'normal' schools and schools for children with special needs. There are also private, or independent, schools, which 17% of young children and 20% of older children attend.

According to The Joint Council for Child Issues, the education system broadly meets children's different needs. Legislation governing both public schools and independent schools is designed so that it is possible to accommodate all children in one way or another, and so that exclusion or discrimination are avoided.

However, there is never sufficient funding especially for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

## Child participation

Children under 18 are involved in discussions concerning their schooling and teaching, through formal student councils in all schools. The children thus have some influence on everyday life at school. This right to unite in student councils is unfortunately not always available for children attending internal schools when placed in alternative care. There are no statutory rules about school boards (with a majority of parents) or about student councils in schools at Alternative Care Institutions. The institutions often have arranged these nevertheless.

Children who receive help through the social system have specific rights to be heard and involved in their case, as outlined in the National Children's Act.

The Joint Council for Child Issues is not aware that the [Council of Europe's Child Participation Assessment Tool](#) has been implemented in any national procedures to ensure the involvement of children in public decision-making.

### Emerging children's rights issues

We are very aware of the impact of the new national Children's Act. On the one hand, vulnerable children have been given more rights compared to their parents. Especially children who are placed, or may be placed, in alternative care. The children's rights vis-à-vis the municipality have not been increased. On the other hand, the law means that there will be a fairly large increase in the number of forced adoptions. This is a new development in

[Denmark](#) that raises questions about children's rights, both in connection with the adoption process itself and in connection with continued contact with their biological family.

In 2021, 31 forced adoptions were decided. 39 cases were tried, but 8 were refused in the courts. Until this day no children have been granted the right to contact with their parents, siblings or other family after a forced adoption, even though this is in principle possible under Danish law.

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

### Child poverty in Denmark

Denmark has a different measure of poverty and social exclusion that is significantly lower than the EU's standard AROPE<sup>2</sup> measure. The Danish standard is primarily based on a limit of 50% of the median income, and according to this, 3.7% of the population in 2022 lived in relative poverty. The figure for children was 4.2%. The conditions in Denmark are illustrated in Statistics Denmark's overview: Income inequality - [Statistics Denmark](#).

Poverty rates are largely determined by changes in child allowances and transfer incomes.

The very low unemployment rate is also significant. Using the Danish data, there was a decrease in child poverty from 2017 to 2022, but a political decision to remove a special child allowance has since caused the number to rise again.

The Joint Council for Child Issues in Denmark identified three key areas where Denmark should take action to address child poverty and social exclusion:

- Raise the lowest transfer incomes<sup>3</sup> and increase the special allowances for children at risk of poverty.
- Adopt a national action plan to combat child poverty.
- Maintain the very low unemployment rate in Denmark.

<sup>2</sup> At Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion.

<sup>3</sup> These are the social benefits for people who cannot be entitled to unemployment benefits under the unemployment insurance scheme. And there are a number of benefits that are in some cases very low. For example, maintenance and repatriation allowance; training allowance; Activity Readiness Service; benefits within the social security ceiling. People from ethnic minorities are very over-represented in these groups.

According to The Joint Council for Child Issues in Denmark, the children who are most at risk of poverty are those living in families with very low social security benefits. A disproportionate number are from ethnic minorities.

There has been a lot of discussion about child poverty in Denmark, and pressure on the government to do something about it. However, there has not been much focus on groups that are disproportionately affected.

### European Social Fund + (ESF+)

Denmark has a national ESF+ programme with a budget of DKK 120 million from the EU and DKK 143 million from the Danish state. The programme is primarily aimed at qualifying the workforce and promoting the inclusion of highly vulnerable groups in the workforce, many of whom have

children. The programme does not have a particular focus on poverty.

The Joint Council for Child Issues in Denmark is not part of the Monitoring Committee of the ESF+.<sup>4</sup>

### Example of good practice to mitigate child poverty

In several of the vulnerable housing areas (misleadingly called ‘ghettos’) there are projects that have good results in supporting particularly vulnerable children and families. A concrete example is the project *Staircase to Staircase* from a social housing area called the [Gellerup Plan in Aarhus](#). The Joint Council for Child Issues in Denmark believe this is a success due to the holistic approach it takes and that, working directly with the families, they identify what support is needed. For example, supporting a child to access a sports activity

by ensuring they can get to the venue and have the equipment they need to participate; if a child is having problems in school they will identify someone to visit the school with the parents to find a solution to support the child; if the parents cannot speak Danish, they will find a language course that they can access; if there is a medical issue in the family, they will support the family to get medical care.

### The European Child Guarantee

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing has prepared Denmark’s [Child Guarantee National Action \(NAP\)](#) and the first biennial evaluation of its implementation.

The Joint Council for Child Issues in Denmark has not been involved in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the European Child Guarantee, but other

organisations may have engaged in this process. The Joint Council for Child Issues in Denmark is not aware of any cooperation and coordination between different Danish stakeholders regarding the Child Guarantee initiative.

**“In general, the Child Guarantee does not take up much space in the discussions in Denmark about vulnerable and poor children.”**

### European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

#### Overview of the Country Report

The [Country Report](#) for Denmark recognises that the country has low rates of both adults and children at risk of poverty, with strong impacts of social transfers on poverty reduction.

<sup>4</sup> In order to examine the performance of programmes, Member States should set up monitoring committees, whose composition should include representatives of relevant partners, including civil society organisations. Member States may set up a single monitoring committee to cover more than one programme.

Denmark also has very high participation rates in early childhood education and care (ECEC), especially for children under three. In 2021, 97% of children between three and the age of compulsory primary education were participating in ECEC (above the 96% EU target). The share of children under three in formal childcare is the highest in the EU. However, Denmark also lacks qualified staff.

The report states that in ECEC about one third of staff does not have a pedagogical education and only 10% of assistants have had training. However, there are not enough assistants with a qualification and there are too few educated pedagogues, so that it can be difficult to fill the vacant roles.

Health is a priority area, with increased funding allocated to psychiatric care. Denmark has launched a 10-year plan to improve mental health, specifically targeting children and young people. Although there are gaps in stakeholder consultations, the

government has indicated plans to strengthen the policy-making process and enhance public involvement in consultations.

Despite these positive developments, there is no mention of deinstitutionalisation nor is there any reference to children with migrant or ethnic backgrounds or children with disabilities.



## “Country Recommendation

The government must take urgent action to address the concerns raised by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, following its examination of the UK in 2023, by taking forwarding the six steps set out in our Children's Rights Charter. This includes developing a children's rights strategy, incorporating the UNCRC into domestic law and making Child Rights Impact Assessments a statutory requirement.

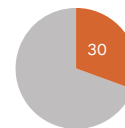
## Country Profile 2024



# England



**Child Population:**  
12,400,000



**Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:**  
**3,700,000 (2022-2023)**  
30% (2022-2023)  
No major change compared to 2021-2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

[Children's Rights Alliance for England \(CRAE\)](#), part of Just for Kids Law

<sup>1</sup> Figures calculated from the [Annual Income and Living Standards data](#), based on accredited official statistics from the UK Government's Department for Work and Pensions and are calculated based on the 2021/22 and 2022/23 data points only.



## Children's Rights in England

There was no progress on incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by the previous UK Government, despite positive developments in Wales and Scotland. The new government, elected in July 2024, has not yet indicated a commitment to incorporate the UNCRC, despite a clear call in CRAE's [Children's Rights Charter for the new UK Government](#), supported by nearly 90 organisations.

In England there is no statutory obligation for policymakers to carry out Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs). Despite the [previous UK Government claim](#) that “*careful consideration is given to the UNCRC when developing new legislation*” and the development of a CRIA template for officials, there is little evidence that CRIAs are consistently carried out for policy or budgetary decisions. The UK Government response to

the Covid-19 pandemic clearly showed the [devastating impact](#) that decision-making can have on children when their rights are not fully considered.

The Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) is [calling for](#) the introduction of a mandatory, transparent system of [CRIAs for all policy and spending decisions](#), to improve government decision-making for children.

There has not been a national child rights strategy since 2010, nor sufficient cross-departmental coordination and monitoring mechanisms. [CRAE](#) and many other [organisations](#) have consistently called for a cross-government children's rights strategy setting out how the 2023 Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child will be addressed, with clear, resourced, timebound actions and a monitoring framework.

The previous UK Government did not issue a response to the most

recent Concluding Observations of the UN Committee, in contrast to [Scotland](#) and [Wales](#). It is not yet clear if there will be a formal response from the new government.

There is still no Cabinet minister with responsibility for children's rights, despite [growing calls](#) for one to be established. The new government has again included responsibility for children and families within the portfolio of a [junior minister](#) and there is no specific reference to the UNCRC or children's rights in her portfolio.

There have been some positive developments to raise awareness and understanding of the UNCRC among policymakers, for example a civil service e-learning tool and workshops in civil service recruitment. However, much more is needed to ensure that knowledge is fully embedded and that children's rights are fully considered in policy-making (for example through CRIAs).

While the UNCRC is referred to in parliamentary debates by Ministers, parliamentarians and Select Committees on occasion, this is patchy and not consistent across all policy areas.

CRAE, jointly with UNICEF UK and the Equality and Human Rights Commission, published a [briefing](#) on how well the UK is putting in place the right laws, mechanisms and structures to make sure the UNCRC is fully implemented.

CRAE's [Children's Rights Charter](#) sets out the key steps that are needed to ensure that children's rights are embedded in government decision-making, including the appointment of a Cabinet Minister for Children and a strategy for increasing awareness, knowledge and understanding of the UNCRC, including for all professionals working with and for children.

### Children's mental health

A fifth of those aged 8-25 in England had a probable mental

disorder in 2023, [according to NHS data](#). Children from the poorest 20% of households are [four times as likely](#) to have serious mental health difficulties by age 11 as those from the wealthiest. [949,200 \(8% of all children\) were referred](#) to Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS).

In 2022-23, 270,300 children and young people [were still waiting](#) for mental health support after referrals to NHS CYPMHS. For the 305,000 children and young people who accessed support, the average waiting time was 35 days. Insufficient access to early intervention means children [increasingly turn to Accident & Emergency services](#) for support, spending [over 900,000 hours](#) there in 2022.

Racial inequality means [Black and mixed-race children](#) accounted for 36% of young people detained

in acute mental health services<sup>2</sup> but 5% of those accessing community-based services. There is currently no coherent strategy to combat racial disparities in children's mental health.

The UK Government has made some commitments relating to children's mental health including [reforming the Mental Health Act](#), mental health support in every school and the development of young futures hubs, but full details are yet to be set out. There are also plans for a Children's Wellbeing Bill, although it is currently unclear how it will help address the crisis in children's mental health.

CRAE is calling on the government to:

- Develop a strategy that tackles the underlying causes of mental ill-health, such as child poverty and poor housing.

- Prioritise the provision of preventative and early intervention support within education and community settings, including the national roll-out of early support hubs and mental health support teams in schools.

## Child protection systems

### *Trafficked and missing children*

The number of potential child victims of exploitation [referred to the National Referral Mechanism](#)<sup>3</sup> has continued to rise and is the highest on record, at 7,430 (44%) in 2023, while adult victims saw a decrease.

Additionally, [research shows](#) many unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are still missing after being placed in Home Office hotels and are assumed trafficked; 118 unaccompanied children are

unaccounted for, some as young as 12.

Victims of child criminal exploitation (CCE) continue to be seen as offenders rather than victims although, more positively, [the new government has committed to introducing a statutory definition of CCE](#).

CRAE is calling on the government to ensure that all children arriving in the UK are cared for by Local Authorities, as required by child welfare legislation, and that all victims of CCE are treated as victims and receive care and support rather than being criminalised.

## Education

There are still widespread inequalities in education for children in poverty and from racialised groups. For example, there is a [widening attainment](#)

<sup>2</sup> Despite making up 11% of the population.

<sup>3</sup> The Modern Slavery Act 2015 requires potential victims of trafficking and modern slavery to be referred to the NRM by authorised organisations (e.g. local authorities, some NGOs, the police, and specified government agencies).

gap in schools. By the end of secondary school disadvantaged pupils were over 18.8 months behind their peers. By the end of primary school Gypsy, Roma and Traveller<sup>4</sup> children lagged behind White British pupils by 19.2 and 18.2 months, respectively.

Gypsy and Roma children are four times more likely to be permanently excluded, with Mixed white and Black Caribbean two times more likely. Disproportionate exclusions of Black children have been attributed to adultification.<sup>5</sup> School exclusions can have wide-ranging and long-lasting impacts on children's futures, not only disrupting their educational attainment and affecting their

mental health, but also making them more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, including CCE.

The school curriculum is largely euro-centric with little progress on decolonising it.

The new government launched a Curriculum and Assessment Review to look at key challenges to attainment and the barriers which hold children back – especially those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, or with special educational needs or disabilities - and to create a more inclusive national curriculum.

Police presence in schools is increasing, creating unsafe school environments particularly

for marginalised students, and increasing criminalisation of children. Police in schools are targeted at 'high deprivation' areas which are more likely to be inhabited by Black and racialised communities.

### Child participation

Despite progress, many do not take children's views seriously, statutory participation rights remain ad hoc and do not apply to all children in all settings. There is often more willingness to involve children in individual rather than strategic decision-making.

There are some welcome structures for involving children in national policy-making, but this

is not systematic. Government consultations do not consistently involve children, and often do not use child-friendly language, despite some positive examples.

The UK Government has not participated in implementing the Council of Europe's Child Participation Assessment Tool.

Labour, in its 2024 Election manifesto, committed to granting 16-year-olds the right to vote, but this wasn't included in the King's Speech. However, the Commons leader told the BBC that votes for 16 and 17-year-olds remained a commitment.

CRAE is calling on the government to:

<sup>4</sup> In the UK, it is common in data collections to differentiate between:

- Gypsies (including English Gypsies, Scottish Gypsies or Travellers, Welsh Gypsies and other Romany people)
- Irish Travellers (who have specific Irish roots)
- Roma, understood to be more recent migrants from Central and Eastern Europe

The term Traveller can also encompass groups that travel. This includes, but is not limited to, New Travellers, Boaters, Bargees and Showpeople. See the House of Commons Committee report on Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and the UK Government's Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller ethnicity summary.

<sup>5</sup> The concept of Adultification is when notions of innocence and vulnerability are not afforded to certain children. When Adultification occurs outside of the home it is always founded within discrimination and bias. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (2022) *Adultification bias within child protection and safeguarding*.

<sup>6</sup> A decolonised and anti-racist curriculum provides a complete education in which teaching fully examines imperialism and racism, as well as histories and cultures from around the world.



- Implement a cross-government mechanism with associated funding to ensure children's views are systematically considered in policy-making, particularly younger children and those from under-represented groups.
- Lower the voting age to 16.

### Additional children's rights concerns

#### *Children in contact with policing and the justice system*

Despite [progress](#) with some areas of the system recognising the need for a 'Child First' approach, urgent reform of the child justice system is needed to respect children's rights, including significantly raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

Police use of force on children continues to increase. For the [year ending March 2023](#), there were 74,470 use of force tactics

involving children (11% of all recorded incidents); of those, 763 involved children under 11. Types of force include limb and body restraints, batons, irritant spray, tasers and spit-hoods. Children's rights are [also being violated through strip searching](#), and despite being completely unsuitable and traumatic for children [thousands of children](#) are detained in police custody each year.

In spite of many recommendations made in the UK Government-commissioned [Lammy Review \(2017\)](#) to address racial disparities in the justice system, little has changed. There is [significant racial disproportionality](#) in use of force on children. Black children were involved in 20% of stop and search incidents [between 2022-23](#), and [are 6 times more likely](#) to be strip searched. Racialised children make up [51% of those imprisoned](#). Racist narratives of 'aggression',

alongside adultification, follow Black children throughout the systems they engage with, constructing them as risks to the public.

#### *Children in migration and refugees*

The [Illegal Migration Act 2023](#) has been scrapped by the new UK Government but it remains to be seen if the government's new approach will respect children's rights, will repeal previous regressions to their rights and end negative rhetoric and narratives about asylum and immigration.

#### *Protest rights*

The recent approach to policing protests, particularly under new legislation,<sup>7</sup> threatens the fundamental rights of children. [Analysis of the policing of Palestine solidarity demonstrations](#) shows how the last UK Government failed to

recognise the rights to freedom of assembly. These findings echo [previous research](#) looking at excessive policing of Black-led protest. There have been multiple instances of [excessive force and intimidating tactics](#) that serve to frighten young participants rather than protect public order.

Moreover, the current government is [continuing its appeal](#) against Liberty's legal challenge to anti-protest rules, which the High Court previously found unlawful. The legislation was introduced by the previous Conservative Government and gives the police 'almost unlimited' powers to impose restrictions on protests causing 'more than minor' disruption.

<sup>7</sup> Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and Public Order Act 2023.

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

### Child poverty in England

3.7 million children are in poverty. Rates of child poverty have risen faster in the UK than in any other OECD country, affecting many areas of children's rights, including increased child homelessness, poor health and educational attainment. Despite this, the previous government had no strategy or binding targets to reduce child poverty. However, the new government has launched a child poverty unit which will develop a Child Poverty Strategy.

Significant investment is required across a range of policy areas, including:

- In welfare reform so all families can afford essentials, including by scrapping the two-child limit and benefit cap<sup>8</sup> and expanding free school meals for all families that receive Universal Credit.
- £13.5bn of educational recovery funding directly focusing on children's social and emotional development and mental health.
- A comprehensive, long-term funding settlement for children's services that invests at least £4.6 billion in early intervention, therapeutic services and children's social care.

In terms of children most affected by poverty and social exclusion, racialised children face a greater risk of poverty than White children, and levels of child poverty among Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black children are especially high.

Children in larger families are also more likely to be in poverty. There

are almost 1.6 million children in 440,000 families affected by the two-child limit policy. These families are missing out on up to £3,455 per child annually. Removing the limit would lift 300,000 children out of poverty and mean 700,000 are in less deep poverty. Some ethnic and religious groups are more likely to have larger families and are therefore disproportionately affected, exacerbating inequalities.

Alongside this, households with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) cannot access mainstream benefits – either because they are undocumented and have an unresolved immigration status, or because they have a legal right to remain in the country but have an attached NRPF condition on their leave to remain. There is widespread evidence that this puts children at

risk of destitution, exploitation and abuse.

CRAE is calling on the UK Government to:

- End regressive welfare policies - including by abolishing the two-child limit, the benefit cap and the NRPF condition.
- Tackle the housing crisis to address the fact that two million children in England live in overcrowded, unaffordable or unsuitable homes.
- Ensure greater employment security and an increased minimum wage to address the fact that 71% children in poverty have at least one parent in employment.

<sup>8</sup> The two-child limit prevents parents from receiving any extra financial support (through universal credit or child tax credit) for a third or subsequent child born after 6 April 2017. The benefit cap restricts the total amount of support a working-age household can receive from the social security system for households with no work and those earning less than the equivalent of 16 hours a week at the minimum wage.

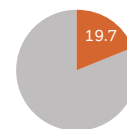
## “Country Recommendation

Estonia needs to invest in children and families so they get help as early as possible and without delay, with improvement of the quality and diversity of services provided in all regions. Children are people here and now, and merely passing laws to guarantee their rights is not enough – supportive action is also needed.

## Country Profile 2024



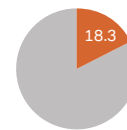
# Estonia



### Child Population:

**269,111 (2023)**

19.7% of total population



### Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:

**49,000 (2023)**

18.3% (2023)

▲ +1.7% compared to 2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

[Estonian Union for Child Welfare](#)

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)

## Children's Rights in Estonia

Estonia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1991 and the provisions of the Convention are integrated into the country's legal framework. In Estonia, international treaties, once ratified, become a direct part of domestic law without the need for additional legislation. Therefore, the rights and protections outlined in the UNCRC are directly applicable and enforceable in Estonia.

For example, the [Child Protection Act](#) does not explicitly reference the UNCRC but does include the following principles of the Convention:

- Every child has the inherent right to life, survival and development.
- Every child has the right to equal treatment without any discrimination.
- In all action concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

- Every child has the right to independent opinion in all matters affecting them and the right to express his or her views.

However, there is still no Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) process. In its 2024 [Concluding Observations](#) on Estonia, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child emphasised the need to use CRIAs when developing national legislation and policies relevant to children, and to track how investments at national and local levels consider the best interests of the child.

The Estonian Union for Child Welfare has been advocating for a CRIA process, but this is still not in place.

Estonia has approved [The Welfare Development Plan 2023-2030](#), which focuses on promoting parental education, creating a more family-friendly environment, and reforming the organisation of child protection. However, there is no specific strategy for children's rights. A new Development Plan for

Children and Families has not been drafted – instead, topics were integrated with other areas and several important issues, including child participation, were lost.

In Estonia, children's issues fall under the purview of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Policymakers in the field of social protection are aware of, and understand, the UNCRC, but in other areas affecting children (e.g. healthcare, education) the Convention or its principles are not referred to frequently.

The government has not yet responded publicly to the 2024 [Concluding Observations](#) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on Estonia.

In 2023 the Estonian Union for Child Welfare and other organisations published an [Additional Report on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) highlighting the most important developments and issues affecting children's rights.

The Estonian Union for Child Welfare does not believe that there is shrinking space for civil society organisations (CSOs) working on children's rights in Estonia. Cooperation between the state and CSOs has evolved from short-term funding to a multi-annual strategic partnership. This has supported the activities of large organisations like the Estonian Union for Child Welfare, but has left small and new organisations in a difficult position.

### Children's mental health

Mental ill-health and behavioural disorders among children in Estonia are increasing. A 2022 Survey of the Mental Health of the Estonian Population showed that young girls are at an alarmingly high risk of mental health disorders compared to other age groups.

The shortage of mental health professionals is a major challenge. There is insufficient access to psychologists or psychiatric care for those living in remote areas

and a shortage of specialist help for children with addictions.

In recent years Estonia has set up a mental health department in the Ministry of Social Affairs, and published the Mental Health Action Plan 2023-2026, which also focuses on children and adolescents. A strategy for the prevention of suicide in children, which was included in the 2017 Concluding Observations by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, is in development.

In 2021 the Mental Health Act was amended so that a child with sufficient capacity to exercise discretion can now seek help from a psychiatrist independently, without the permission of parents, legal representatives or a court. This is a welcome development.

The Estonian Union for Child Welfare recommends that Estonia should:

- Increase access to mental health support services where they are scarce and ensure universal access to existing

evidence-based mental health prevention programmes, with the necessary funding.

- Increase the mental health component of in-service training for all primary care professionals, including kindergarten teachers, teachers, family nurses and family doctors.
- Train professionals working with children to recognise suicidal tendencies and intervene early.
- Adopt a strategy to prevent suicide among children and adolescents.
- Ensure that educational institutions provide the necessary support services for children with disabilities and children with mental health needs (including the employment of mental health nurses in schools), and upgrade teacher training accordingly.
- Train alternative care providers (including foster families and guardians) on trauma-informed care and ensure access to mental health services for children and families in the alternative care system.

## Child safety and well-being online

The Estonian Union for Child Welfare highlighted several issues of concern:

- It is important to ensure the full implementation of existing strategies, including the Better Internet for Kids + Strategy, while also conducting research on children's safety and well-being online.
- Not all teachers know how to follow data protection laws and there are cases when students' personal data is shared without their knowledge and consent.
- There should be better cooperation between schools and parents in supporting children to understand how to navigate the Internet safely.

## Child protection systems

The Estonian Union for Child Welfare highlighted several issues regarding the child protection system:

- There is insufficient attention to, and investment in, early

intervention and prevention work, by both local authorities and child protection professionals.

- Regulation in the area of child welfare is fragmented across different pieces of legislation, making it difficult for local authorities and others to understand and implement requirements. Specialists in other areas, such as healthcare, education and youth workers do not have a full understanding of their role in ensuring children's welfare.
- There are not enough child protection workers.
- Child protection workers themselves have identified several issues, including excessive workloads, inadequate salaries, lack of support, the poor reputation of child protection work and a lack of understanding across society of what it entails.

Reforms to the child protection system, agreed in 2023, are still under development.



## Education

The Estonian Union for Child Welfare highlighted several issues of concern.

There is a shortage of both subject teachers and support specialists. Nearly a fifth of all children in primary and secondary education need educational support services and this number is growing. Schools and kindergartens do not have enough teachers, assistants or support specialists with the necessary skills, so many are not getting the help they need.

Up to 4% of children with disabilities are excluded from the education system and inclusive education is not sufficiently implemented. The share of these children is highest in pre-school and among 16-17 year-olds. The availability of services for children with disabilities varies from region

to region and the shortage of specialists is a concern.

Given the growing number of children with special needs in schools and kindergartens, there are a number of challenges that need to be urgently addressed for inclusive education to become a reality - such as early identification of special educational needs, timely special education intervention, teacher training and educational support services for children.

Many [refugee parents](#) from Ukraine do not have enough trust in the education system and do not enrol their children in school. According to a survey in 2022, by the Estonian Refugee Council, [8% of families with a child of school age do not have at least one child in school](#).

The Estonian Education Strategy 2021-2035 foresees the re-organisation of the school

network<sup>2</sup> but there is also a need for planning in the transport network, to ensure that pupils can get to school safely and on time, and that transport is affordable.

## Child participation

Estonia has several child participation mechanisms:

- Youth councils at the local level;
- Children from the age of 16 can participate in municipal elections;
- Pupil councils in schools;
- The Advisory Board of the Ombudsman for Children involves children in discussions on issues that concern them and allows children to express their views and raise issues, including their opinions on draft laws and policies;
- The Estonian Union for Child Welfare works with a group of 'child rights ambassadors' who voice their views on laws and policies affecting them. In 2023,

children prepared [an overview of the situation of children's rights in Estonia](#) for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and presented the results in meetings with ministers and other stakeholders.

However, there are many children who do not belong to representative organisations and whose voices do not reach decision-makers. A study in 2020, showed that the involvement of children depends to a large extent on the size of the local authority, its financial capacity, the availability of supportive adults and how open local authorities are to the participation of children.

Even very active young people feel that their involvement is often rather formal and tokenistic. For some children, geographical distance, language barriers or health issues prevent them from participating.

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<sup>2</sup> The re-organisation includes merging or closing underperforming schools or schools with not enough pupils, and aims to provide equal access to quality education and to ensure inclusive education for students with special needs.

Estonia piloted the [Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool](#) in 2015, but since then it has not been used.

## Poverty and Social Exclusion - Experiences of children, families and communities

### Child poverty in Estonia

According to Eurostat EU-SILC data for 2023 (income year 2022), [18.3% of children lived in poverty or social exclusion in Estonia](#). This is a 1.7% increase from 2022.

The Estonian Union for Child Welfare identified several areas where Estonia should increase public investment in children:

- Invest in support services for foster, guardian and adoptive families, including psycho-social support for families, and create a more stable system for the provision of family-based care for children with complex needs.
- Establish cross-sector cooperation for more targeted and integrated activities in the

health, social and education sectors.

- Recruit more child protection workers and increase the qualifications and competences of child protection staff and the quality of interventions.
- Allocate consistent resources to create a safe and nurturing learning environment for all, including children and young people with special needs, at all levels of education, starting from kindergarten. This includes training, adapting the necessary learning environment and supporting anti-bullying programmes.

Child poverty tends to be higher among children with disabilities, Russian-speaking children and children growing up in single-parent households. Some children are at greater risk of poverty due to combined factors e.g. disabled children living with a single parent.

### European Social Fund + (ESF+)

The Estonian Union for Child Welfare identified an ESF+ funded programme that will finance the

modernisation of IT systems used in child protection work. Starting in 2024, support services for family-based alternative care will receive nearly €1.2 million (€1.5 million from 2025 onwards) from the state budget (previously developed and financed under the ESF). With the initial support from the ESF, the development and provision of foster care has continued.

## The European Child Guarantee

Estonia has published its [biennial report](#) on the implementation of the Child Guarantee.

Data on children is fragmented and there is little data on children's participation, and on children's views and opinions. Existing initiatives do not have a complete and comprehensive up-to-date set of child welfare indicators. The Estonia Ministry of Social Affairs has launched a project on the development of cross-sector child welfare indicators, based on practices in Iceland. The aim is to analyse Iceland's experience in

the development of a child welfare scoreboard and evaluate the applicability of a similar approach in Estonia.

**“Although the number of children living in poverty has only slightly increased in Estonia, and access to education and healthcare has improved through the implementation of the Estonian Child Guarantee, access to suitable housing and mental health services remains a challenge.”**

## European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report

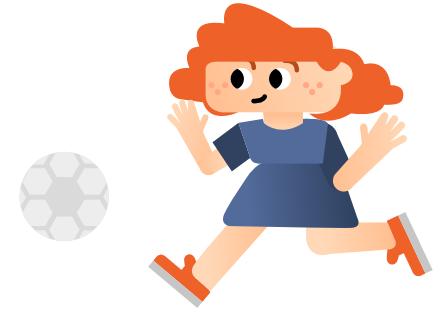
Estonia's [Country Report](#) primarily focuses on education, including early childhood education and care (ECEC). Participation in ECEC is increasing for children under three, but is still below the EU

average. A draft reform act, to be adopted in 2024, aims to ensure that all children aged 18 months to three years have access to childcare upon their parents' request. The reform also envisions establishing an integrated ECEC system with common quality standards and a unified curriculum.

The report also addresses the issue of high early school drop-outs, noting that nearly one in 10 young people leave the education and training system with very low or no qualifications, with boys more affected than girls (11.4% vs. 8% in 2023). To tackle this challenge, the Ministry of Education is working on the integration of formal and non-formal education and support for students with special educational needs. In 2023, the government began implementing measures such as updating the national curriculum for primary and secondary education to focus on cross-cutting competences and raising the mandatory school-leaving age from 17 to 18. However, addressing the shortage

of teachers remains a significant challenge for Estonia.

Unfortunately, no child-specific policies were included in Estonia's Country Specific Recommendations. Children were only mentioned in relation to child benefits, which were cited as a cause of increased public expenditure. Nonetheless, the recommendation to strengthen social protection is welcome, as it may lead to better support for vulnerable families.



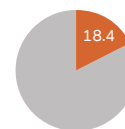
## “Country Recommendation

Finland should efficiently and consistently respect human rights, including children's best interests, in its legislative work.

## Country Profile 2024



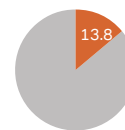
# Finland



### Child Population:

**1,026,192 (2023)**

18.4% of total population



### Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:

**144,000 (2023)**

13.8% (2023)

▼ -1.1% compared to 2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Central Union for Child Welfare

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)

## Children's Rights in Finland

Finland has incorporated the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in its [national legislation](#). However, its implementation is not adequately coordinated. Child-related issues are spread across different ministries and cooperation is weak (e.g. when drafting legislation).

Finland has a requirement to carry out Child Right Impact Assessments (CRIAs) as part of the [Government's Impact Assessment Guidelines](#). However, civil society organisations (CSOs) have repeatedly highlighted some shortcomings. For example, the assessments often emphasise positive and short-term impacts, while negative and longer-term impacts are overlooked. The cumulative impacts of legislation are rarely assessed.

Finland has a [National Child Strategy](#) (2021) which aims to strengthen a child rights-based approach in public

policy and decision-making. However, in a [recent statement](#), the Central Union for Child Welfare pointed out that the National Strategy has not been a guiding document for child policy or for the implementation of children's rights. The government's programme has not been examined against the goals of the strategy, and the programme's impacts on children have not been comprehensively assessed. On the contrary, the government programme and its implementation are partly in conflict with the goals of the National Child Strategy. For example, the strategy aims to reduce child poverty, but [it has been estimated](#) that due to cuts in social security, the number of children living in poverty will increase by 17,000 in 2024.

The Central Union for Child Welfare [has encouraged](#) the government not only to strengthen the implementation of the National Child Strategy, but also to ensure parliamentary cooperation and dialogue with civil society. Otherwise, there is a

risk that efforts will be weakened or scarce resources will be used for overlapping work.

The UNCRC is fairly well-known in Finland, but awareness of its obligations is somewhat weak. The Central Union for Child Welfare sees the [Concluding Observations on Finland by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#), published in June 2023, as an excellent opportunity to discuss the state of children's rights in Finland. CSOs have been advocating for the Concluding Observations to be discussed publicly in the Finnish parliament.

The government has decided to implement significant cuts in subsidies for organisations working on health and social issues. The Central Union for Child Welfare, together with others, [has stated](#) that the cuts are too severe and too fast, and will weaken CSOs' ability to do preventive work, e.g. supporting mental health or combating bullying and domestic violence.

The number of legislative drafting working groups, in which CSOs have been represented, has decreased and replaced by less efficient forms of participation, such as roundtables.

### Early childhood development

The current government has introduced several cuts to social security benefits and these also affect families with young children. Child poverty is expected to increase due to these cuts. Child benefits were raised for the youngest children, but the increase does not compensate for the cuts. The current government's lack of vision and coordination regarding policies affecting children also applies to early childhood.

### Children's mental health

The government has proposed new legislation on early mental health support for children, the so-called 'therapy guarantee'. The proposal is welcome in many respects. The focus of mental health care would be shifted to

primary healthcare and access to early mental health support would not require a doctor's diagnosis. Support could be provided in settings which are close to children and young people, such as in student welfare services, which would be a positive development. However, the Central Union for Child Welfare has concerns about how the proposed change would work in practice, and whether sufficient resources would be allocated for it. There is a huge

lack of personnel in the social and health care sectors, posing severe challenges for the implementation of the 'therapy guarantee'.

In addition, many children require intensive and long-term mental health support and access to specialised services is currently challenging. Strengthening primary mental health services is crucial, but does not negate the need to also invest in specialised mental health services at secondary care level.

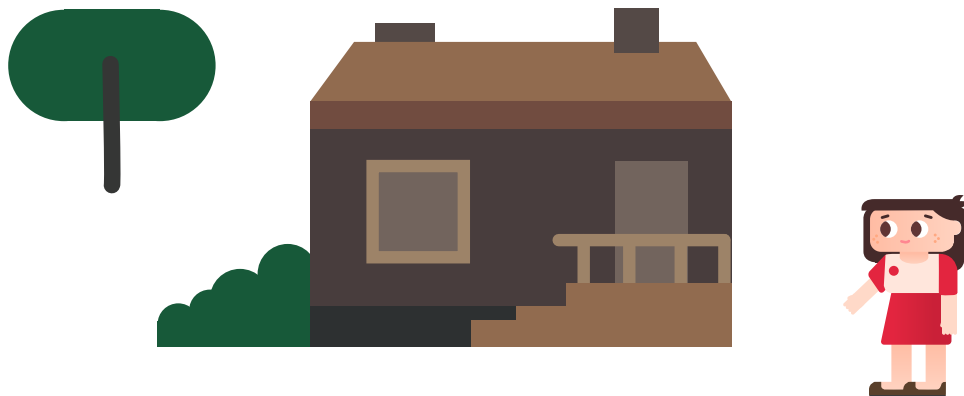
The Central Union for Child Welfare has emphasised that support for children, young people and families must focus on prevention and early intervention.

### Child safety and well-being online

There is an ongoing discussion regarding the safety and well-being of children in the digital environment, particularly in relation to the European Commission's Directive on

combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child sexual abuse material. However, Finland lacks a comprehensive approach. Various national and regional networks and platforms exist, but they do not form a cohesive system that addresses the issues in a coordinated manner, and the expertise of CSOs and the private sector has not been utilised.

Finland has very little regulation regarding children's rights



in the digital environment. Without adequate oversight and regulation, there is a risk that too much power is concentrated in private sector developers and tech companies, potentially making the digital environment more unsafe for children. Promoting children's safety and well-being online requires regulation.

### Child protection systems

The need for child and family support has increased in Finland, and the demand for child welfare services has risen over the past decades. According to 2023 statistics, the number of child welfare notifications and the number of children subject to notifications increased by 11% from the previous year. [The number of children placed outside the home](#) has remained high, affecting 17,300 children (1.6% of children) in 2023.

The reform of the Social Welfare Act (2015) aimed to shift the focus towards early intervention and prevention. Efforts have been

made to organise child and family services under the unified roof of family centres. However, this shift towards preventive services has [not been sufficiently successful](#).

In recent years, Finland has developed a systemic practice model for children's social care, which aims to combine trust-based, multidisciplinary work, including child protection in difficult family situations.

The previous government initiated a comprehensive reform of child welfare legislation to make services more effective. Child and family CSOs have supported a holistic reform that would transition from fragmented services to comprehensive support to families.

### Education

The structure and legislation for learning and school attendance is currently being developed. [The Central Union for Child Welfare believes](#) the support system should be uniform,

starting from early childhood education and continuing to primary and secondary education. Furthermore, a mere change in legislation will not guarantee that children will actually receive support earlier and more efficiently, and that support will be equally available across the regions. The lack of special education teachers continues to be a challenge.

The principle of inclusion is in the national core curriculum. However, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recently recommended that Finland strengthen efforts to provide inclusive education in mainstream schools for all children with disabilities, with adequate resources, expertise and specialised professionals.

### Climate change and the environment

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child called on Finland to ensure that efforts on climate change mitigation and adaptation

are implemented in accordance with the UNCRC and take into account children's needs and views. It also recommended that Finland evaluate the possible effects of climate action on children, including Sami children, and their rights.

### Child participation

In 2023, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Finland strengthen measures for the meaningful participation of all children, including those in disadvantaged situations, as well as efforts to include children in policy-making at municipal and national levels. For the Central Union for Child Welfare the most significant challenge is reaching those children who are at risk of social exclusion.

Finland piloted the [Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool](#) in 2019. One of the findings was that while children's right to participate in decision-making is included in the Constitution, in the Youth Act

and through mandatory youth councils at municipal and regional level, there are no structures for children to participate in the UNCRC reporting process.

### Asylum-seeking and refugee children

The rights of asylum-seeking and refugee children have been weakened by the current government, which has further tightened the already strict immigration policy. In 2024, a law was passed in parliament that would, in certain circumstances, allow border guards to push back migrants without processing their asylum applications at the Finland-Russia border, despite acknowledging that doing so is a breach of international human rights obligations.

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

### Child poverty in Finland

The child poverty rate decreased from 14.9% in 2022 to 13.8% in 2023. However, this figure is expected to rise due to cuts to social security in 2024.

The Finnish social security system is based on the principle of universality. There are benefits and services for all families with children, such as child allowance and early childhood education. In addition, there are need-based benefits and services. Cuts to social security means the number of those in need of social assistance is expected to increase.

The Central Union for Child Welfare identified three areas for

Finland to address child poverty and social exclusion:

- Maintain a strong universal approach to child and family policy (both services and benefits).
- Avoid decisions that lead to an increase in child poverty.
- Avoid decisions that lead to an increased need for social assistance.

The concept of the [wellbeing economy](#) is also interesting in relation to advancing children's rights.

The children most in need in Finland are those in single-parent households, in large families and in immigrant families. Like other families, these also benefit from universal services. In addition to universal services, it is important to support parents with employment, flexible working conditions and childcare.

### European Social Fund + (ESF+)

The Central Union for Child Welfare identified the ESF+ funded programme [Social Innovations in Child Welfare](#), in which they are also a partner. This supports social innovation and the development of child welfare services throughout Finland, working together with child welfare actors, young people, families and others.

The Central Union for Child Welfare is not involved in the Monitoring Committee of the ESF+.<sup>2</sup>

### Example of good practice to mitigate child poverty

The Finnish Model for Leisure Activities seeks to provide all children with leisure activities, free of charge and in connection with their school day. It was [evaluated in 2023](#) - children,

<sup>2</sup> In order to examine the performance of programmes, Member States should set up monitoring committees, whose composition should include representatives of relevant partners, including civil society organisations. Member States may set up a single monitoring committee to cover more than one programme.



guardians and municipal decision-makers all found it helpful, with leisure activities offering opportunities that not all children had before. While attention was paid to accessibility (physical, psychological and social) there is still room for improvement.

## The European Child Guarantee

The Child Guarantee in Finland is implemented under the National Child Strategy, which is a logical choice. However, because of this, it is challenging to pinpoint what, if anything, is happening in the framework of Finland's [Child Guarantee National Action Plan](#), and what its actual budget allocations are.

Finland's biennial [report](#), submitted in 2024, does not reflect the current situation. For example, it falls short in analysing the expected impacts of the cuts to social security.

CSOs were not included in the preparation of the report. It is unclear what opportunities they

will have in future in monitoring the implementation of the National Child Strategy and the Child Guarantee. It is critically important to have a mechanism for CSOs' continuous participation in the monitoring and evaluation of both initiatives.

**“Overall we think the goals and implementation of the Child Guarantee are jeopardised by the significant cuts to social security. Finland is currently not working consistently towards ending child poverty.”**

## European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report

The Semester [Country Report](#) for Finland states that while the poverty rate remains relatively low, it is showing an 'upward trend', which is expected to be exacerbated by cuts to social security. These are expected to affect low-income and single-parent households in particular.

Efforts are also underway to expand participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC), especially for low-income families, by increasing eligibility for access to free ECEC services. Approximately 30,000 families will be entitled to free ECEC. While participation rates have been increasing, they remain below EU targets. In general, ECEC services are considered to be of high quality, although there is a shortage of ECEC teachers.

ESF+ programmes support efforts to reduce child poverty, reform

child protection services and promote inclusion, helping Finland reach its poverty reduction target, but additional efforts are needed.

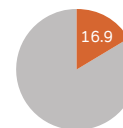
## “Country Recommendation

Germany should agree an amendment to the constitution that meets the requirements of the UNCRC. Children's rights must be enshrined in a separate paragraph of the constitution and contribute to real improvement in the legal position of children in Germany.

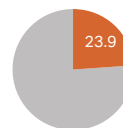
## Country Profile 2024



# Germany



**Child Population:**  
16.9% of total population



**Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:**  
**3,526,000 (2023)**  
23.9% (2023)  
▼ -0.5% compared to 2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Child and Youth Welfare Association (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe - AGJ)

National Coalition Germany - Network for the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (NC)

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)

## Children's Rights in Germany

In Germany, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has not been fully incorporated into domestic law. The federal government has declared an intent to enshrine children's rights in the German constitution, but this has not happened yet. However, children's rights are embedded in the constitutions of 15 federal states in Germany, and there have been various legislative measures to implement the UNCRC.<sup>2</sup>

There have been some significant developments regarding the rights of children in court proceedings, including [an Act to strengthen the procedural rights of accused persons in juvenile criminal proceedings](#) and an [Act on Modernising Criminal Procedures](#). However, the implementation of child-friendly justice in Germany is progressing very differently in

each federal state, and is too often dependent on individual courts or the commitment of professionals.

Despite these positive developments, further structural and legal measures are needed for UNCRC implementation. This includes the establishment of commissioners in all federal states, as well as comprehensive measures to prevent child poverty and address increasing inequality. Implementation of many legal measures is hampered by a lack of sufficient funding for child welfare and education and a shortage of skilled professionals in these fields.

There is no mandatory Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) process to assess whether policy or legislation is consistent with the UNCRC. However, Germany has the 'Youth-Check', a tool to analyse the impact of federal legislation on young people aged 12-27. The long-term funding for

the [Competence Centre Youth Check](#) is welcome, however there is still no binding obligation to use the Youth Check for legislative projects from all ministries, or for the results to be considered in the further development of legislation.

Germany does not have a comprehensive national strategy for children's rights. However, there is a [youth strategy at federal level](#) and strategies in various federal states and municipalities aimed at young people aged 12-27. These place the interests of young people at the centre of youth policy, and promote participation opportunities.

There is currently no minister or commissioner responsible for children's rights in Germany. However, there are commissioners for children's rights in four of Germany's sixteen federal states. In addition, a working group on child policy has been in place since 1988 as part

of the Bundestag Committee for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, and its members refer frequently to the UNCRC. Respective government ministers also refer to the UNCRC. The Ministry for Family Affairs has [responded publicly](#) to the [Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#), and identified areas for improvement. The Ministry also funded a child-friendly version of the Concluding Observations.

Eurochild members are concerned that civil society space is becoming more limited and are calling for increased federal funding for organisations working on children's rights.

Organisations and youth associations defending climate protection and the rights of refugees have been attacked by right-wing groups, including with intimidation or appeals for the withdrawal of funding.

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<sup>2</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child *Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Germany*\* CRC/C/DEU/CO/5-6, 13 October 2022, Section II

## Early childhood development

Germany established the [National Centre for Early Support](#) in 2007 as part of the *Early Support for Parents and Children and Social Early Warning Systems* programme. The Centre supports the well-being of expectant parents and parents of young children aged 0-3. There has been a legal entitlement to daycare facilities since 2013. Every child from the age of one is entitled to those kinds of services.

## Children's mental health

The significant increase in mental health diagnosis, treatment and inpatient psychiatric care among children and adolescents is concerning. Mental stress and illnesses in children increased significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic, without a corresponding increase in available care. As a result, [waiting times for therapy](#) rose from 14.4 to 25.3 weeks between 2020-2022.

The wars in Ukraine and Gaza, the rising cost of living, poverty and inequality, and the effects of the climate crisis have increased psychological stress among children, and demand for mental health support is not adequately met.

The National Coalition Germany and the Child and Youth Welfare Association are advocating for more accessible counselling services and healthcare for children with mental health problems, especially in regions with particularly poor care. In addition, more action is needed to improve children's living conditions, to reduce inequalities and the risk factors for mental health problems among young people.

## Child safety and well-being online

Germany has taken important steps to protect children's rights in the digital world, including the [Youth Protection Act in 2021](#) and a new [Act to strengthen structures](#)

## [against sexual violence against children and adolescents](#) (2024)

which aims to ensure protection in all contexts, including in the digital environment. However, in light of the ongoing developments in digital technologies, these protections must be monitored, reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

## Child protection systems

The National Coalition Germany and the Child and Youth Welfare Association highlighted concerns related to the protection of asylum-seeking children. [In the first half of 2024, 35.6% of all asylum applicants were younger than 18, 14% were younger than four.](#)

The situation of children in refugee shelters in Germany is a cause for concern. Refugee children [report experiences](#) of violence and discrimination and difficulties in accessing education and psychological care. The legal situation of refugee children, and unaccompanied

minors in particular, remains worrying. Unaccompanied minors are subject to the accelerated procedure, in accordance with Germany's [Asylum Act](#), and the obligation to live in special reception facilities. This has led to difficulties in accessing legal advice, shortened appeal periods and tighter restrictions on freedom of movement. Violations of these restrictions can lead to the asylum application being rejected.

The National Coalition Germany and the Child and Youth Welfare Association believe that such reception centres should be abolished and replaced by more suitable structures that can provide care and protection for refugee children.

## Education

There are several issues affecting children's access to education in Germany. National expenditure on education has increased by 46% in the last 10 years but this increase is not

enough for rising needs. The multi-track school system, the underfunding of early childhood and primary education and the lack of nationwide educational standards mean that educational opportunities are unequally distributed. Children's educational success is still linked to their socio-economic background. The

lack of teachers and staff has been an ongoing problem, with no nationwide recruitment strategy. Almost 50,000 young people leave school every year without any qualifications, with little improvement in the last 10 years.

As the current education report makes clear, there is a lack

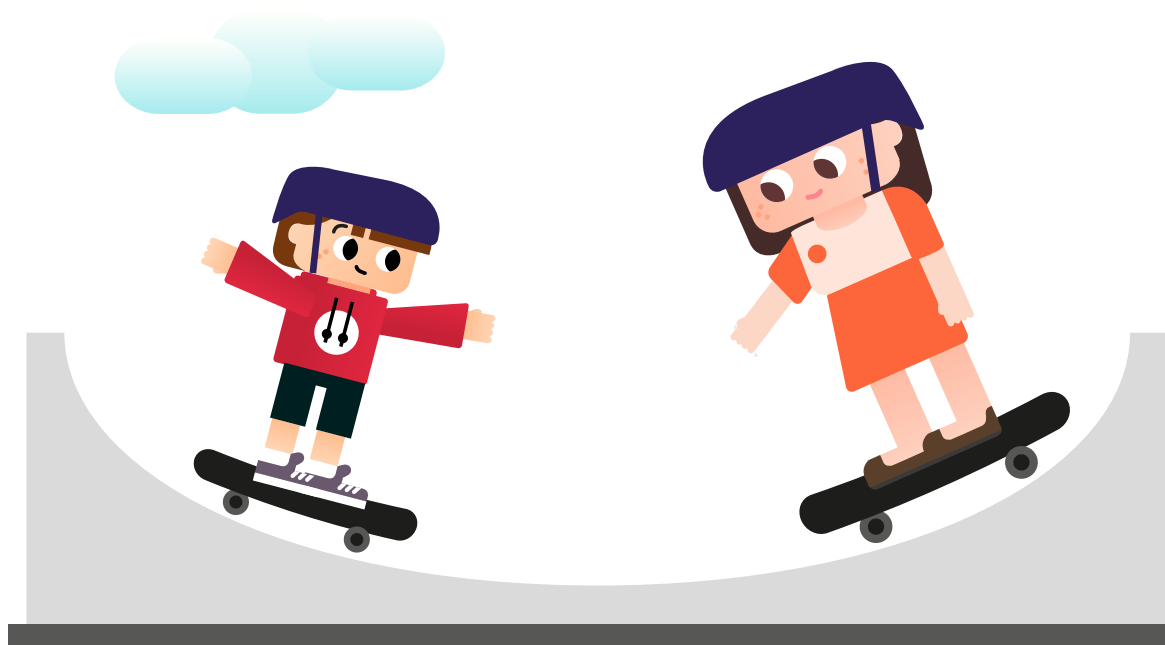
of investment and structural changes to the education system in Germany despite comparatively high expenditure. There is an urgent need for teacher recruitment strategies, and for binding qualitative standards for a fairer and more inclusive education system.

## Climate change and the environment

Germany needs to ensure that environmental issues affecting children are taken into account in policy-making. In 2021, Germany's highest court reminded the government to consider climate protection and children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment in national legislation. Groups affected by environmental harm include children from minority groups, children from poorer socio-economic backgrounds and children with disabilities.

Young people taking part in peaceful protest to demand more government action on environmental protection and climate change have sometimes been met with repressive responses, including heavy-handed policing, physical violence, detention and criminalisation of protesters.

Germany should systematically adopt the obligations set out in



[General Comment N. 26 \(2023\) on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change.](#)

## Child participation

With the Youth Protection Act of May 2021, child participation is now enshrined in law. The [National Action Plan for Child and Youth Participation](#) runs until 2025.

The German Children's Fund tested the application of the [Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool in Germany](#) and concluded that while there are structures at all levels (federal, state and local) that contribute to the participation of children and young people, these are not equally well-established.

Positive developments in this area are welcome, but there is room for improvement in enabling children to participate in all decisions that affect them. Most adults in Germany are

against lowering the voting age to 16. The government should strengthen the participation of children in democratic processes and promote a more democratic, inclusive, sustainable and child-friendly society.

## Asylum-seeking and refugee children

In all areas of life, children of colour and particularly those with refugee experience are stereotyped, disadvantaged and sometimes verbally or physically attacked. Refugee children and young people are confronted with discrimination and racism on a daily basis. The [interim report of the National Coalition Germany on the child rights situation in Germany \(2023\)](#) documents the issues that refugee children are facing.

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

### Child poverty in Germany

The rate of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Germany was 23.9% in 2023, down slightly from 24.4% in 2022.

Areas where Germany should increase public investment to address child poverty and social exclusion:

- Increase [federal funding for child benefit support](#) and provide unconditional child benefits (Kindergrundsicherung).
- Improve financing for the early childhood and primary education system, and enable all children to have equal opportunities in education.
- Increase funding for the National Action Plan 'New Opportunities for Children in Germany'.
- Develop a needs-based,

poverty-sensitive [social infrastructure for children, young people and families.](#)

- Enable parents to combine work and parenting and ensure that parenthood is no longer a risk of poverty.

The groups of children most in need are children from single-parent households, those in families with more than three children, children with refugee experience, children with disabilities and children of parents with a lower educational attainment.

### European Social Fund + (ESF+)

The *Active for Families and their Children (Akti(F) Plus)* programme, funded by the ESF+ and the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has been operating since 2023. The [55 projects](#) currently being funded are designed to meet the individual support needs of families and children at risk of poverty and exclusion.

The Child and Youth Welfare Association and National Coalition Germany are not involved in the Monitoring Committee of the ESF+.<sup>3</sup>

### Example of good practice to mitigate child poverty

The introduction of a system of early support (Frühe Hilfen) has been a success story in Germany. The system is based on an understanding that early intervention is needed for families in difficult situations, with a comprehensive range of support services, stronger preventative child protection systems and greater cooperation between stakeholders.

### The European Child Guarantee

So far, [Germany's National Action Plan \(NAP\)](#) does not include a monitoring framework with robust indicators. However, it stipulates

a wish to improve data collection and indicators to evaluate child poverty and social exclusion. This is a positive development, as the NAP identifies a number of data gaps, such as data on homeless children or children from families with addiction problems. There is also scarce data on how many children are simultaneously affected by poverty and other factors (e.g. refugee children with disabilities).

Quantitative and qualitative targets are also missing from Germany's NAP, with no clear measures to evaluate progress. However, the German Youth Institute has been tasked by the Ministry for Family Affairs with monitoring the NAP's implementation, developing indicators and conducting studies on children's well-being.

Germany's NAP does not prioritise all children in need and should focus more on refugee children

and their families, as they are particularly disadvantaged. Special attention should be given to unaccompanied refugee minors and to children in alternative care.

No special funds have been allocated for the implementation of the Child Guarantee. All initiatives in the NAP were agreed prior to the Child Guarantee. Since the NAP contains no new measures, its primary merit is the creation of a committee responsible for overseeing the implementation and evaluation of the NAP. The Committee - made up of researchers, civil society, national ministries and regional/local entities - provides a useful forum for coordination and exchanging best practice. However, state actors, especially the relevant national ministries (apart from the Ministry for Family Affairs which leads the process) seem to lack commitment to closer collaboration.

The Child and Youth Welfare Association is monitoring the Child Guarantee and is a member of the NAP Committee and its steering group.

Germany's biennial report is expected by the end of 2024.

**“In Germany the implementation of the Child Guarantee lacks the necessary political will, especially at national level, to combat child poverty with a consistent and integrated strategy. So far, implementation depends heavily on the initiative of civil society and some regional or local (state) actors, to move forward.”**

<sup>3</sup> In order to examine the performance of programmes, Member States should set up monitoring committees, whose composition should include representatives of relevant partners, including civil society organisations. Member States may set up a single monitoring committee to cover more than one programme.

## European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report

While [Germany](#) performs relatively well on the European Pillar of Social Rights and has a strong social protection system, almost one in four children were at risk of poverty or exclusion in 2022 and there are considerable wealth inequalities. Germany's target of reducing the number of children living in (quasi) jobless households by 300,000 by 2030 is in jeopardy.

The implementation of the European Child Guarantee is ongoing, but the planned measures lack specific targets. The introduction of the Citizen's Benefit and the anticipated Guaranteed Child Allowance aim to address poverty and maintain incentives for parents to participate in the labour market.

In 2022, 93.7% of children aged between 3 and school age were in early childhood education and

care (ECEC), below the 96% EU target. With funding from the Recovery and Resilience Facility Germany is creating 90,000 additional ECEC places, building new facilities and refurbishing existing ones, but 430,000 places are needed. Increasing the supply of whole-day school places is also necessary. ESF+ programmes are funding training for childcare staff. Even if these figures are to be welcomed, in view of the shortage of skilled professionals, there are worries that the planned expansion of all-day care will come at the expense of provision in other areas of child and youth welfare.

The share of young people leaving school early was above the EU average, 12.2% in 2022. Pupils from disadvantaged and migration backgrounds tend to have poorer educational outcomes. Germany has introduced an Education and Training Guarantee for young people.

The Country-Specific Recommendations emphasise gaps in the education system and

call for improving educational outcomes, including by providing targeted support to disadvantaged groups.



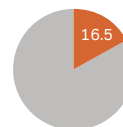
## “Country Recommendation

Greece should take action to promote child participation and include children's opinions in matters that concern them.

## Country Profile 2024



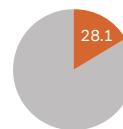
# Greece



### Child Population:

**1,715,781 (2023)**

16.5% of total population



### Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:

**480,000 (2023)**

28.1% (2023)

No change compared to 2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

[Network for Children's Rights](#)

[The Smile of the Child](#)

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)

## Children's Rights in Greece

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has been incorporated into Greek domestic law since 1992.

Greece has also ratified the UNCRC's Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on child trafficking, child prostitution and child pornography. However, Greece has not ratified the third Optional Protocol on a communications procedure, which provides for the possibility of direct recourse by children or their representatives in case of violation of their rights.

Eurochild members are not aware of a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) process in Greece, but believe that CRIsAs should be built into government decision-making at all levels, and as early as possible in the development of laws, policies, budget decisions, programmes and services concerning children.

Greece published its [National Action Plan for Children's Rights](#) in 2021, but there are no specific results, deadlines or indicators to evaluate its implementation.

There is no Ministry or Cabinet Minister for children's rights in Greece. However, in June 2023 a Presidential Decree established the [Ministry for Social Cohesion and Family Affairs](#) and its mandate includes children's rights, together with other Ministries and the [National Centre for Social Solidarity](#).

Parliamentarians and government ministers do not generally refer to the UNCRC. However, reference to the Convention and to the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is made when drafting specific laws and plans (e.g. the [National Strategy for the Protection of Unaccompanied Children 2021-2025](#), and the [National Action Plan for the protection of children from sexual abuse and exploitation 2022-2027](#)).

The [latest Concluding Observations](#) were published in 2022 but there has been no official Greek translation or public response from the government.

There is no shrinking space for civil society organisations (CSOs) working on children's rights, and relevant ministries collaborate with CSOs in the delivery of services. However, there are no regular meetings or institutional mechanisms for children's rights organisations to engage in the development of public policy.

### Early childhood development

The Greek Government recognises the importance of children's early years mainly through the provision of allowances and subsidies to nurseries, pre-schools and kindergartens.

The Ministry for Social Cohesion and Family Affairs has a project entitled [Technical Support to implement reforms to support the development of family-centred](#)

[early childhood intervention services in Greece](#). This recognises the importance of early childhood (including children aged 0-3 years) in policy-making, and aims to develop a modern, evidence-based legislative and financial framework for early childhood intervention services, as a crucial step towards deinstitutionalisation and the effective inclusion of children with disabilities in society.

Greece has also adopted a [pilot programme for early childhood development](#).

However, there are concerns with the lack of sustainable funding for these programmes.

### Children's mental health

Eurochild members outlined several issues affecting children's access to mental health services:

- A lack of sufficient staff and insufficient free services for socio-economically disadvantaged families.

- There is only one mental health clinic in a public hospital with capacity to host up to 10 adolescents, and long waiting lists for appointments with public mental health services, especially for child psychiatrists.
- Some schools have social workers or psychologists that provide mental health support, but they are not enough to cover all schools. One mental health worker is assigned to work in 5 schools. A recent regulation which gives children the option to meet with a school psychologist without parental consent is a positive development, especially in cases of abuse.
- The fragmented child protection system and the lack of collaboration between relevant services (social services, public prosecutor, psychologists, teachers, etc.), as well as understaffed services are working against children's mental health.

There is a need for more mental health specialists and support

staff, with more collaboration across sectors.

### Child safety and well-being online

Children in Greece face considerable dangers online. According to a [recent survey](#) 9 out of 10 children (5-12 years old) are Internet users. 97% of children over 10 and 100% of children over 12 use the Internet. Furthermore, [children spend at least 100 minutes per day online](#), mainly on social media and gaming. Studies show that longer Internet use could lead to poorer mental health outcomes, affecting children's overall emotional and psychological well-being. However, there are several gaps in the protection of children in the digital environment.

Parenting courses and training on protecting children's rights in the digital sphere should be a requirement for every carer. Greece should prioritise legislation that protects children online by mandating the necessary safeguards in online

platforms, raising awareness and putting in place measures to prevent online harm.

### Child protection systems

The child protection system in Greece has gaps and inefficiencies due to its fragmentation and a lack of coordination between ministries and public authorities. This leads to delays or non-implementation of legal provisions.

There is very little focus on preventing family separation and as a result many children are placed in institutional care, often until they reach adulthood.

When children are placed in foster care or with adoptive parents, there is not enough support for these families, which leads to difficulties and to the return of some children to the child protection system, including their placement in institutional care.

There are also concerns for refugee and asylum-seeking children housed in EU-funded

Closed Controlled Accessed Centres (CCACs). [Asylum seekers residing in CCACs on five Aegean islands, including children, are living under increased surveillance and repression, with limited access to medical facilities and daily necessities.](#) For example, there are no healthcare professionals in some centres, and no child protection actor is providing services in these centres.

Eurochild members in Greece recommend a legal framework for a comprehensive child protection system, with a centralised agency with overall responsibility for child protection and for coordinating other authorities at national, regional and local level. More action is needed to promote deinstitutionalisation.

### Education

While primary and secondary education is compulsory for all children, regardless of their legal status, children living in poverty, Roma children, those living in CCACs in the Greek islands, and

children in remote areas are disadvantaged compared to other children.

Greek legislation also guarantees access to education for children with varying abilities and requirements and prevents any form of exclusion and/or discrimination. Recently, a national strategy for persons with disabilities was open for public consultation, and accessibility for children in school was one of the topics presented.

More disaggregated data on children and education is needed, including school drop-out rates and information on the reasons why children are dropping out of school.

## Climate change and the environment

Greece has been hit hard by climate change, with extreme events like heatwaves, droughts, floods and forest fires occurring regularly. This is affecting children in their daily lives and their right to grow up in safety. [Air pollution](#) levels frequently exceed the recommended guidelines, despite improvements in emissions. In 2023, the [Court of Justice of the EU](#) found that Greece has for many years been violating EU Directives over air pollution in Athens.

There are no specific policies in place regarding children and the environment. Information and education on recycling and reforestation should be added to the school curriculum.

## Child participation

The most widespread way children participate in decision-making is at the community level, specifically within school settings in the form of [school councils](#). Additionally, a [Youth Parliament](#) allows children from high schools all over Greece to participate in the political life of the country and be empowered to become active and responsible citizens. However, their opinions and suggestions are not binding.

The National Mechanism for Elaboration, Monitoring and Evaluation of Action Plans for the Rights of the Child<sup>2</sup> does not include children or children's organisations in its composition. This has been raised as a concern [by the Network for Children's Rights](#).

Greece has not yet implemented the [Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool](#).

Active citizenship and participation should be encouraged, from pre-school age, and children's councils should be set up in local and national decision-making processes.

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

### Child poverty in Greece

The rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Greece was 28.1% in 2023, the same as in 2022.

Eurochild members highlighted three areas where Greece should increase public investment in children:

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<sup>2</sup> The National Mechanism prepares national action plans for children's rights, in consultation with CSOs and children, and is responsible for the presentation, promotion, monitoring and evaluation of the plans. It is composed of representatives from 10 Ministries, from the Child Health Institute, from the National Commission for Human Rights, from the General Secretariat of Government Project Coordination, from the UNICEF Greece Country Office and the Hellenic Police. The Ombudswoman for children's rights participates in an advisory role.

- Provide support to Roma families, through dedicated programmes, and with the participation of Roma communities in programme design and implementation.
- Invest in social services and in dedicated personnel to prevent child abuse and neglect, and provide financial and psycho-social support to vulnerable families.
- Support children with disabilities and with physical and mental health issues.



The children most affected by poverty and social exclusion in Greece are:

- children in large families
- children of single-parent households
- children of migrants and refugees
- children with special needs or disabilities
- Roma children
- children in low-income households or with unemployed parents
- children in alternative care
- children in prison, as there are no policies for reintegration and inclusion into society

Eurochild members identified several priorities for Greece to end child poverty:

Strengthen the social welfare system:

- Provide low-income families and the unemployed with sufficient

social assistance benefits.

- Provide social housing and rent support so every family has access to a secure and affordable home.
- Improve social welfare services by including free psycho-social assistance and counselling.

Education and training:

- Guarantee that every child, from early childhood, has free, high-quality education.
- Offer free school meals, scholarships, and extra financial aid to students from low-income households.

Employment:

- Increase employment opportunities by investing in green growth, infrastructure and innovation.
- Support small and medium enterprises to foster entrepreneurship and create new jobs.

- Guarantee equal benefits and appropriate working conditions for all workers.

### European Social Fund + (ESF+)

The EU will invest over €5.3 billion in ESF+ funds in Greece to promote employment, skills (including for the digital and green transitions), quality and inclusive education and training, as well as social inclusion. The ESF+ in Greece is implemented via the national Human Resources and Social Cohesion Programme, as well as three sectoral and 13 regional programmes, comprising funding from both the European Regional Development Fund and the ESF+.

Eurochild members are not involved in the Monitoring Committee of the ESF+.<sup>3</sup> They are not aware of funding programmes or specific calls for proposals for the implementation of the

<sup>3</sup> In order to examine the performance of programmes, Member States should set up monitoring committees, whose composition should include representatives of relevant partners, including civil society organisations. Member States may set up a single monitoring committee to cover more than one programme.

European Child Guarantee that are open to CSOs.

### Example of good practice to mitigate child poverty

The project *Immediate and holistic support of refugee families from Ukraine*, funded by European Economic Area Grants, provided holistic support to 110 refugee families with children from Ukraine. This included psycho-social support, material support (e.g. food and basic necessities), access to health services, legal support, access to the labour market and help with children's integration in education and in extracurricular activities. It also provided support to child victims/potential victims of trafficking and to victims of domestic violence. Most families eventually returned to Ukraine.

## The European Child Guarantee

The Greek [National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee](#) unfortunately does not include specific indicators for monitoring and evaluation. A central database on children, with disaggregated data on all areas of the UNCRC, has yet to be developed.

Children's rights CSOs are advocating for the creation of platforms to collect data and make it publicly available to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the NAP, but also to prepare projects which can cover existing gaps.

The NAP includes measures for all groups of children, except children in correctional facilities who are not included. It is being implemented with mixed funding, from both domestic and European

sources. However, increased funding is needed.

The most promising measure included in the NAP addresses early childhood care and education. For example, the creation of at least 50,000 new early care places in existing facilities for infants and toddlers from 2 months to 2.5 years.

Greece published its biennial report in October 2024.<sup>4</sup>

There has been limited participation of CSOs and children themselves in the implementation, monitoring or evaluation of the Child Guarantee. Eurochild members believe the participation of children is essential in the monitoring and evaluation process. The expertise of children's organisations should also be harnessed. While there is some cooperation, there should be stronger and

continuous participation of children's organisations in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Child Guarantee.

**“Overall, our assessment of the Child Guarantee is that efforts are being made to implement it in the best possible way, but are not always successful, due to a lack of staff, poor communication between services, lack of political and economic stability, and insufficient financial resources. In addition, the European Child Guarantee needs to introduce specific indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of its measures.”**

<sup>4</sup> The biennial report was not available during the preparation of this report.

<sup>5</sup> This refers to a sub-indicator 'at risk of poverty' included in the 'at risk of poverty or social exclusion' (AROPE) indicator. AROPE is a composite indicator that corresponds to the sum of persons who are either at risk of poverty, or severely materially and socially deprived, or living in a household with a very low work intensity.

## European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

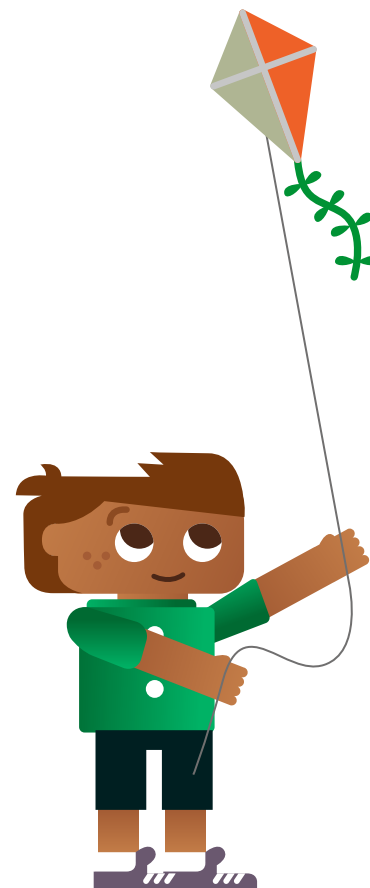
### Overview of the Country Report

The [Country Report](#) for Greece notes a decrease in child poverty, from 22.4% in 2022 to 21.8% in 2023.<sup>5</sup> This improvement is attributed to policy measures such as the emergency heating allowance and a special electricity tariff for households with four or more children, benefiting up to 30,000 families. The report also acknowledges that tackling child poverty through the implementation of the Child Guarantee is a main focus of ESF+ action.

In the area of early childhood education and care (ECEC), there are plans to create up to 200,000 new places, supported by the Recovery and Resilience Plan and other measures. Additionally, a pilot programme for early childhood intervention, targeting around 1,400 children with disabilities under the age of six, is underway. The report

also highlights the integration of education for environmental sustainability into Greek legislation and new school curricula.

The [Country Specific Recommendations for Greece](#) emphasise the need to continue implementing Cohesion policy programmes, including the Child Guarantee, which requires strengthening administrative capacity. Increasing participation in ECEC, currently the lowest in the EU, should be a priority, along with a comprehensive reform of the education system. Recommendations also call for the development of policies to tackle climate change.



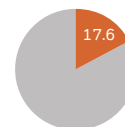
## “Country Recommendation

The government should take action to establish a social policy that ensures equal opportunities for every child.

## Country Profile 2024



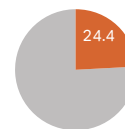
# Hungary



### Child Population:

**1,685,878 (2023)**

17.6 % of total population



### Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:

**416,000 (2023)**

24.4% (2023)

▲ +6.3 % compared to 2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

[Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation \(HCR\)](#)

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)



## Children's Rights in Hungary

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has been incorporated into Hungary's domestic law with Act No. LXIV/1991.

Hungary does not have a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) process in place, despite Eurochild members advocating for child budgeting and CRIAs since 2017.

There is no national strategy on children's rights in Hungary, and advocacy for such a strategy is not easy as human rights issues (including children's rights) are over-politicised in Hungary.

There is no lead Ministry or dedicated cabinet minister for children's rights. Instead, children's rights issues are fragmented across government institutions.

The Concluding Observations by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child are not widely known and were not translated into Hungarian by the government but

by UNICEF. The Hintonalovon Child Rights Foundation has a [website](#) with all relevant international documents on children's rights, including the Concluding Observations and country reports.

According to [regional reports](#), civic space for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is shrinking, with restrictions to their operating environment and increasing stigmatisation of LGBT children, disabled children, children living in alternative care, children living in poverty and migrant children, among others.

Children's rights issues are over-politicised and the government has changed the meaning of some narratives, such as distorting child protection to mean 'protecting children from LGBT propaganda'.

NGOs working on human rights issues are often stigmatised or ignored by government bodies, and they do not have access to state funds and support.

Democratic institutions do not function properly. For example,

the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights does not publish any statement or report on important children's rights issues if these are critical of the government.

### Children's mental health

The Covid 19 pandemic, along with the subsequent war in Ukraine and the deteriorating economic situation in recent years, have been harmful to children's mental health. However, the capacity of the healthcare system has not increased, and there are substantial shortcomings in current services. Based on data provided by the National Public Health Centre, the capacity of outpatient child and youth psychiatric care has decreased since 2022, and nationwide, with care being provided at fewer locations (66) than in 2018 (69).

Inpatient psychiatric care is available in only seven out of 19 counties, and in the capital. Although its capacity has increased, as new facilities have

been established in counties where previously there were none, there is a serious shortage of staff.

Each and every kindergarten and school is supposed to have a 'social helper' and a psychologist. Regulations stipulate that there must be one social helper for every 1,000 children and one school psychologist for every 500 pupils, so their workload is enormous.

Improvements in the mental health system are needed at every level.

### Child safety and well-being online

Hungary had a strategy on Digital Welfare (2015-2019) and the Hungarian Parliament adopted a [digital child protection strategy in 2016](#).

A [study](#) published in 2023, examining children's digital activities, found that almost all children aged 5-15 use the Internet every day. Internet use increases with age and over time.

Data indicates that the number of Hungarian children with their own mobile phones has significantly increased in recent years. In a 2023 survey, children and young people aged 14-25 were asked about their Internet habits.

More than 43% of respondents spend more than 4 hours online daily, and almost 50% feel they spend too much time on their phones, using social media and gaming. More than 90% of the respondents had received messages from people they do not know, and approximately 55% had experienced harassment online.

Nationally representative data on online abuse and mistreatment of children in 2023 is not available. According to a public data request response from the Internet Hotline service operated by Hungary's media regulatory body, 1983 reports were received in 2023, of which 850 were related to child sexual abuse material and 375 to online harassment.

In 2024, the Hungarian Parliament voted on new legislation that

authorises schools to prohibit the use of mobile phones during school hours.

Since 2022, NGOs have not been allowed to provide training in schools on staying safe online.

### Child protection systems

The Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation highlighted several concerns in relation to Hungary's child protection system:

- Fragmented public administration and management give rise to critical issues, such as inadequate inter-agency cooperation, inefficiencies in reporting systems, and difficulties in managing both human and financial resources. When created in 1997, the child protection system was decentralised. With successive changes the system has evolved towards a centralised system. Several child protection specialised institutions have been transferred to state ownership (most of these were

previously municipally owned) and taken over by a central directorate, the Directorate General for Social Affairs and Child Protection. Competencies have been transferred from municipalities to the newly centralised directorate, and local entities have lost their financial and professional autonomy. Decision-making is now entirely done at national level, which disregards local specificities in children's needs.

- Insufficient financial support puts foster parents in a very difficult situation.
- 'Outsourcing' of social services and child protection state responsibilities to the Church. In 2010, 7% of children placed in foster care were under the care of a church-run network, while by 2019 this had risen to around 50%. By the end of 2022, 91% of licensed [foster care organisations were church-affiliated](#).

### Education

The rapid increase in the number of pupils with special educational

needs (more than 100,000 in 2023) and the shortage of special needs teachers are a growing problem.

According to information received from the Office of Education in response to a data request, 5,232 children and 5,645 children received special educational guidance and early intervention services in the school year 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 respectively, while 25,921 children and 28,056 children received services from the travelling network of special educators and teachers in the school. This means that if only children with special educational needs in kindergarten and primary school are taken into account, less than half of the children had access to special needs education.

A 2022 publication, the 'SNI Information Booklet' provides useful guidance for teachers supporting children with special educational needs.

There is also systematic segregation of Roma children in schools.

### Climate change and the environment

According to UNICEF's 2021 climate change risk assessment [\*The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis\*](#), Hungary ranks 130th out of 163 countries with a climate risk index of 3.2/10.

The climate crisis has led to increasing climate anxiety among people, including children. According to a 2022 study by Publicus Research and UNICEF Hungary, 90% of Hungarian youth aged 13-25 feel some level of anxiety about climate change, and 30% feel particularly intense anxiety. Young people expressed fear and concern (60%), helplessness (53%), and anger (30%) on this issue.

In 2023, Hungarian youth actively participated in and organised events related to the climate crisis. As part of its climate

education children's participation programme, UNICEF Hungary organized the Climate Heroes Conference.

### Child participation

In 2023 there were no programmes that significantly promoted children's meaningful participation at the national level. However, seven organisations of the Child Rights Civil Coalition's Children's Participation Working Group implemented activities that facilitated safe and genuine participation of children.

After a three-year hiatus, the National Student Parliament convened again, with meetings in each county and in the capital city. The Student Parliament is convened every two years by the Minister responsible for public education and is a national forum for students to review the enforcement of student rights and adopt recommendations which express students' opinions and suggestions.

Nevertheless, it is important to mention in relation to children's participatory rights that the Unified Student Front and the Adom Student Movement (two movements primarily organised by school students) mobilised thousands of school student participants for protests related to the state of the Hungarian education system.

### Additional children's rights issues

Hungary had a National Programme for People with Disability, which included provisions to promote the adoption of children with disabilities, support integrated and inclusive education of children with special educational needs and increase foster care places for children with disabilities. However, the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights identified several cases of fundamental rights violations and breaches of the law in cases of children with disabilities, most of which involved children suffering discrimination

as a result of institutional negligence.

## Poverty and Social Exclusion - Experiences of children, families and communities

### Child poverty in Hungary

According to the dataset used at national level, in 2023, the [rate of children at risk of poverty](#) was 17.2%, which is 7.1% higher than in 2022.

The Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation highlighted three areas where Hungary should increase public investment in children:

1. Children in institutional care: there was no change in the placement of children with special educational needs in institutional care in 2023.
2. Segregation, social exclusion and ethnic discrimination: a 2023 [Eurobarometer survey](#) indicated that the most severe discrimination in

Hungary is experienced by Roma people. This is followed by discrimination based on ethnicity and skin colour, and then discrimination due to socio-economic status. These factors intersect and accumulate for Roma children.

3. Children's access to healthcare: the [number of general practitioners and paediatricians decreased](#) again in 2023, worsening the availability of care. As of December 2022, 103,731 children aged 0-18 did not have access to local paediatric care, and there are significant regional differences.

The children most in need in Hungary are:

- children living in poverty
- children experiencing mental health challenges
- children in institutional and alternative care
- children with disabilities
- children from third countries
- children with special educational needs and complex developmental disorders

- Roma girls
- LGBTQ children
- children living in disadvantaged regions
- children with multiple and intersecting needs or vulnerability factors

The Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation highlighted two policy priorities for Hungary:

- Address housing poverty: a [study](#) showed that hundreds of thousands are affected by housing poverty. There is currently no legal framework in place to help families with children in case of eviction, and there is also a lack of temporary accommodation. In addition, the government is increasingly outsourcing the assistance for those living in housing poverty to the Church and charitable organisations.
- Address segregation in schools: school segregation has increased significantly, particularly for children in the lowest income quintile, partly due to the increasing

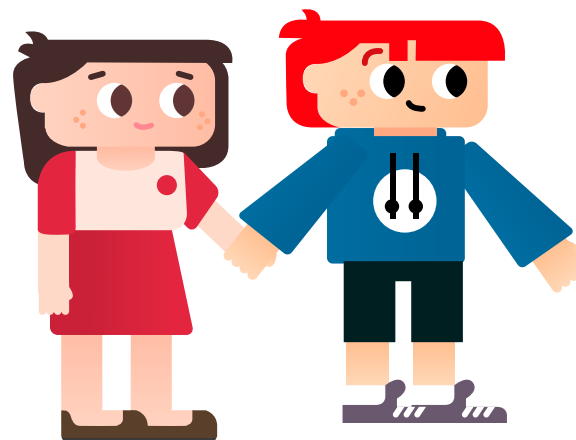
geographic concentration of poor and wealthy children. Poor families are increasingly being pushed out of the more developed areas. There is a widening performance gap, with pupils in segregated schools less likely to obtain secondary education diplomas and participate in higher education. Pupils in segregated schools are disadvantaged due to the lower quality of education they receive. In 2023, the European Court of Human Rights ruled against Hungary in the [Szolcsán v. Hungary case](#), for segregation in schools and discrimination

against Roma people more generally.

## The European Child Guarantee

Hungary's [Child Guarantee National Action Plan \(NAP\)](#) was adopted in 2023, with a one-year delay. While the NAP highlights concerns related to children in poverty and social exclusion, it lacks concrete measures to address these issues. The [biennial report](#) was published in May 2024.

The Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation recommends action



to ensure available and accessible data to monitor progress on the measures included in the NAP, with a standard data reporting process and a feedback mechanism.

Implementation of the NAP is expected to be funded by the national budget as well as EU funding from the Recovery and Resilience Facility and EFOP+.<sup>2</sup>

The Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation has not been involved in the development or the implementation of the NAP.

**“Overall, the Hungarian Child Guarantee National Action Plan does not apply a child rights approach. Rather than an action plan, the NAP is more focused on reporting, and its implementation and feasibility are questionable.”**

## European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report

The [Country Report](#) points to multiple social issues and the inter-generational transmission of poverty, and states that more efforts are needed to improve social protection, alleviate poverty and ensure equal access to quality social, education, employment and housing services for all. Regional disparities are significant in Hungary, with some regions lagging behind in terms of employment, poverty reduction, skills and educational outcomes.

The rate of child poverty and social exclusion has increased significantly, with a high increase in children's severe material and social deprivation. The family tax benefit helps higher-earning families with several children more than it does poorer families with one child.

Participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) is above the EU average (from age 3, 93.4% of children participate in ECEC, against an EU average of 92.5%). However, quality is affected by a shortage of teachers and there are regional disparities in kindergarten coverage. While the share of children under three in formal childcare rose to 20.3% in 2023, it is still below the EU average.

Hungary has a high school drop-out rate (11.6% vs 9.5% in the EU, in 2023), with higher rates among pupils in Northern Hungary and rural areas, among children with disabilities, the socio-economically disadvantaged and Roma children.

Social dialogue is limited, hindering social partners' involvement in decision-making.

While government expenditure on social protection is still among the lowest in the EU, a few measures have been set in motion, such as

the “catching up municipalities” initiative, aimed at helping 300 municipalities. Steps have also been taken to modernise the education system, make the teaching profession more attractive and promote greater participation of disadvantaged groups.

In the [Country Specific Recommendations](#), the Commission encourages Hungary to improve the social protection system, improve educational attainment and ensure effective social dialogue.

<sup>2</sup> The Human Resources Development Operational Program Plus (EFOP Plus).

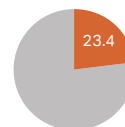
## “Country Recommendation

Ireland should lower the voting age to 16 to strengthen young people's involvement and participation in decision-making that impacts them.

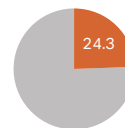
## Country Profile 2024



# Ireland



**Child Population:**  
23.4% of total population



**Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:**  
**293,000 (2023)**  
24.3% (2023)  
▲ +2 % compared to 2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Children's Rights Alliance (Ireland)

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)

## Children's Rights in Ireland

In Ireland, international conventions must be given effect in domestic law to be justiciable before the courts.<sup>2</sup> This has not happened. Elements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) have been given legal effect. These include the Adoption Act 2010, the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, and the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015.

The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth has responsibility for children's rights. Ireland was last examined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2023. As part of this examination, the Minister led a cross-government delegation of senior officials at the hearing in Geneva, and engaged with civil society organisations (CSOs) and national human rights institutions in this process. The Minister issued a

[press release](#) in response to the publication of the [Concluding Observations](#). A [Child Summit](#) was held in November 2023 to provide policymakers and other stakeholders with opportunities to share their views on the UNCRC's recommendations.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2023 recommended that Ireland develop systematic child rights impact assessment (CRIA) procedures for legislation and policies relevant to children. *Young Ireland* acknowledges the importance of CRIAs, commits to developing a prototype CRIA tool in 2024, with roll-out in other government departments and agencies between 2024-2028.

In 2023, Ireland launched a new policy framework, [Young Ireland](#) to ensure all children and young people can fully access their rights. It seeks to tackle the biggest challenges facing children and young people and

ensure that children's rights are at the forefront of decision-making about issues affecting their lives. The framework includes three areas of focus called spotlights. These are: The Child Poverty and Wellbeing Office, Child and Youth Mental Health, and Well-Being and Disability Services.

Since 2006, a Special Rapporteur on Child Protection has been appointed by the government. The Special Rapporteur's role includes reporting on national and international legal developments connected to the protection of children.

In 2022, the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) committed to establishing a Child Poverty and Wellbeing Unit in his department. In 2023, this unit published its plan [From Poverty to Potential: A Programme Plan for Child Poverty and Well-Being 2023-2025](#) setting out priorities on child poverty for the next 2.5 years.

## Early childhood development

Ireland has a ten-year government strategy - [First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028](#) - which sets out the priorities for early childhood. In November 2023 the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth published the latest [implementation plan](#) for the strategy, for 2023-2025.

Traveller and Roma children are significantly less likely to attend early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, and the latest [First 5 Implementation Plan](#) contains plans to increase their participation in ECEC.

## Children's mental health

Children's Rights Alliance raised a number of concerns regarding access to mental health support. The increased need for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) meant that

<sup>2</sup> Constitution of Ireland, Article 29.6.

there were 3,911 children on a waiting list for services in July 2023. The Mental Health Commission published an [Independent Review](#) of CAMHS provision, raising concerns and making 49 recommendations for action. The current system cannot guarantee that children and families will get the support they need.

The Mental Health Commission's Review also draws renewed attention to some children facing particular difficulties accessing support, such as children from the Traveller Community, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, children in care and young LGBTI people.

It is important for children and young people to have access to mental health support at school, and [the Minister for Education has announced](#) her Department's intention to initiate a process

to deliver additional support for well-being and mental health, to complement existing structures in post-primary schools.

The total allocation in Budget 2024 for mental health services is over €1.3 billion, which provides an increase of €100 million to enable additional CAMHS staff recruitment. One of the challenges in meeting the demand for services is the limited number of newly-qualified psychologists that graduate each year. In the run up to Budget 2024 the [Psychological Society of Ireland](#) estimated that a modest investment of €2.52m per year for five years would help increase the workforce by providing funding for an additional 50 trainee psychologists.

### **Child safety and well-being online**

Many of the digital services children use are not designed to

protect children from online harm and ensure their rights and needs are respected online.

Online Safety Codes are being developed by the new *Commissiún na Méan* (Media Commission) which is also overseeing the implementation of the EU Digital Safety Act in Ireland. There is a need for future Online Safety Codes to require safety by design to be standard for all online and digital services. CRIAs could be conducted by online and digital platforms before their digital products or services reach or affect children. Online and digital platforms could also be required to regularly undertake CRIAs and demonstrate that they are taking reasonable steps to mitigate risks. While age verification tools are not the 'silver bullet' for keeping children safe online, they are an essential mechanism to protect children. Age verification must be carried out in compliance

with children's rights. Without prescriptive guidance on acceptable age verification systems there is simply no way to ensure that children's rights are respected online and that there are sufficiently robust protections to safeguard children from online harm.

Online safety and digital literacy must be fully integrated into the school curriculum, from pre-school to secondary level. While there has been progress in reforming the primary school curriculum<sup>3</sup>, education and training on using digital technology safely needs to be accelerated to ensure that children are equipped with the necessary skills for a safe, rights-based digital future.

### **Child protection systems**

Tusla is the state agency with statutory responsibility to promote the 'welfare' of children under

<sup>3</sup> Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (2020). The proposed framework includes '*Being a digital learner*' as a key competency which aims to ensure children are 'creative, confident and critical users of digital technology'. The new [literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy](#) (2024-2025) was launched on 15 May 2024.



the Child Care Act 1991. In its [Annual Report for 2022](#), Tusla documented a 13% increase in the number of referrals to child protection and welfare services compared to 2021. A steady increase in referrals has been observed in the past four years, with a cumulative increase of 46% since 2019.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, staffing levels have only increased by 13% due to the lack of social workers.<sup>5</sup> The recruitment of sufficient foster carers was identified as another challenge in the Annual Report for 2022. There are ongoing challenges in the recruitment and retention of social workers, in [Quarter 1 2024](#), 17% or 983 children in care were without a designated social worker. One-fifth of all children in care do not have a care plan.

Tusla's services are inspected by the [Health Information and Quality Authority \(HIQA\)](#). A [report](#) on the inspections carried out in 2022

highlights much good practice in these services. The inspection found instances of good practice across all children's services, with staff routinely advocating on behalf of children and encouraging them to participate in decision-making about their support and care. HIQA found that children were regularly consulted during assessments and in their day-to-day lives. As part of the inspection, HIQA engaged and consulted with children about their experience in accessing these services. While the [children and young people reported](#) that they were generally well cared for, they also mentioned areas for improvement including better planning for aftercare, the conditions in one secure setting and better onward placement.

## Education

School completion rates for Travellers are significantly lower

than the general population. In its Concluding Observations the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child called on Ireland to strengthen measures to ensure Roma and Traveller children have equal access to quality education, take targeted measures to improve their educational outcomes, and develop the National Traveller Education Strategy.

## Child participation

The [National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020](#) aimed to ensure children have a voice in their everyday lives and in community, education, health and legal settings. A successor to this strategy, [Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making: Action Plan 2024-2028](#) was published in April 2024. Its purpose is 'to strengthen existing good practice and expand

capacity to include more children and young people in decision-making, maximising opportunities for them to engage meaningfully with the issues relevant to them'.

[Comhairle na nÓg](#) are child and youth councils in Ireland's 31 local authorities, which give children opportunities to engage in the development of local services and policies.

The right to vote is restricted to those aged 18 and above. Despite a commitment to hold a referendum on reducing the voting age to 16, no referendum is currently planned.

<sup>4</sup> In the four-year period 2015 to 2019 the increase in referrals was 26% (rising from 43,596 referrals in 2015 to 55,136 in 2018).

See Tusla Annual Reports, 2015; 2016; 2017 and 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Data from Tusla Quarterly Integrated Performance and Activity Report, Q4 2019; Q4 2020; Q4 2021 and Q4 2022.

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

### Child poverty in Ireland

In 2023, the rate of child poverty was 14.3%, higher than in the general population (10.6%).<sup>6</sup>

Children's Rights Alliance identified two areas where Ireland should increase public investment in children in order to address child poverty and social exclusion:

- Provide increased investment in Income Support which targets low-income families, with increased support for older children.
- Target investment in early childhood education and care towards [Equal Start](#), a new model of funding to tackle disadvantage.

Children's Rights Alliance identified the groups of children most in need in Ireland:

#### *Traveller children*

The prevalence of poverty in Traveller<sup>7</sup> and Roma households is not captured in official statistics. However, [research](#) shows they have greater difficulty making ends meet when compared to the general population. Traveller families face significant barriers to accessing their right to housing and approximately 39% of Travellers experience homelessness.

#### *Children experiencing homelessness*

The number of children living in homeless accommodation continued to increase in 2023.

The [latest statistics](#) from July 2024 show 4,401 children living in Emergency Accommodation,

a significant increase since [May 2023](#).

Children's Rights Alliance highlighted two policy priorities for Ireland:

- Ensure sustained investment over multiple budget cycles in the new Equal Start funding model of early childhood education and care.
- Ensure sustained investment in targeted income support for families on lower incomes, in particular for families with older children.

## The European Child Guarantee

Ireland's [interim report](#) on the implementation of the [Child Guarantee National Action Plan \(NAP\)](#) provides a comprehensive overview of activities being undertaken, while acknowledging

that some were underway prior to the Guarantee being adopted.

Ireland's NAP relies on data from the Central Statistics Office Survey on Income and Living Conditions to monitor trends in child poverty and provides an overview of different cohorts of children who are not always visible in datasets.

Spending on the Child Guarantee is not easily identifiable as some actions were already underway prior to its inception.

In 2023 Ireland hosted a meeting of Child Guarantee National Coordinators. CSOs also took part and were able to network with colleagues from across the EU as well as with key Irish Government officials. There is a close working relationship between civil society and officials charged with coordinating this work in the

<sup>6</sup> Based on statistics published by Ireland's National Statistics Agency – Central Statistics Office.

<sup>7</sup> Irish Travellers: traditionally, Irish Travellers are a nomadic group of people from Ireland but have a separate identity, heritage and culture to the community in general. An Irish Traveller presence can be traced back to 12th century Ireland, with migrations to Great Britain in the early 19th century. The Irish Traveller community is categorised as an ethnic minority group under the Race Relations Act, 1976 (amended 2000); the Human Rights Act 1998; and the Equality Act 2010. Some Travellers of Irish heritage identify as Pavée or Minceir, which are words from the Irish Traveller language, Shelta.

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

There is also evidence of collaboration between government agencies on a wide range of child poverty issues in Ireland, and the Child Poverty and Wellbeing Programme Office has strong relationships with CSOs.

## European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report

The [Report](#) acknowledges that Ireland faces significant challenges in housing, with homelessness at record levels. Social housing is high on the government's agenda, but since the introduction of the 'housing for all' plan in September 2021, child and family homelessness almost doubled, with single-parent families most affected.

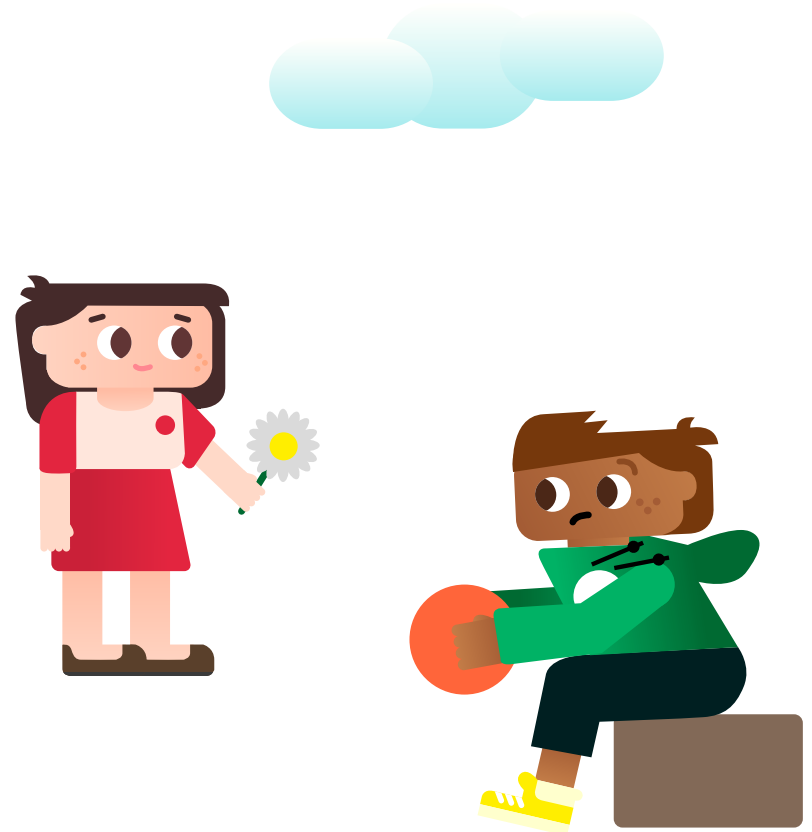
The Country Report notes that the expansion of the National Childcare Scheme has helped to significantly reduce the poverty

risk for single parents and enabled them to work. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy reforms are underway, with Ireland achieving or surpassing its interim targets under the First 5 strategy. However, there is still more to be done to improve access to childcare for those in poverty and improve social support for single parents. In 2022, 19.1% of children under-3 attended childcare, well below the EU target of 45%. The 2024 national budget proposes increased public funding and subsidies, along with the introduction of an 'equal participation model' benefiting disadvantaged families, thereby aligning with the Child Guarantee. Children in immigrant households are less likely to be in informal and formal care.

EU funding supports the improvement of social services for children and the professionalisation of childcare workers.

The report notes the need to improve social protection for single parents and to maintain

adequate welfare benefits as children grow and as single parents enter employment.



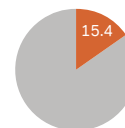
## “Country Recommendation

Italy should take action to increase support services for children and parents, and increase extracurricular activities with a special focus on families and children in socio-economically vulnerable conditions.

## Country Profile 2024



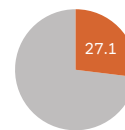
# Italy



### Child Population:

**9,075,713 (2023)**

15.4% of total population



### Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:

**2,471,000 (2023)**

27.1% (2023)

▼ -1.4 % compared to 2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Fondazione L'Albero della Vita ETS

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)

## Children's Rights in Italy

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was ratified in Italy in 1991, with [Law 176-1991](#). In Italy, the President has the power to ratify treaties (article 87, c 8 of the Italian Constitution) upon the Parliament's approval. Throughout the years, Italy has amended legislation and issued new laws to align with the UNCRC.

As foreseen by the Convention, Italy reports on the status of implementation on a regular basis. Periodically, Gruppo CRC, a network of civil society organisations (CSOs) working on the promotion and protection of children's rights, publishes a monitoring report on the implementation of the UNCRC in Italy, with recommendations for policymakers.

Italy's national strategy for children's rights is published

by the [Osservatorio nazionale per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza](#) every two years, and adopted by Presidential decree. The latest available plan is the [5° Piano nazionale di azione e di interventi per la tutela dei diritti e lo sviluppo dei soggetti in età evolutiva 2022-2023](#) (National Action Plan for the protection and development of children 2022-2023). It focuses on three main areas: education, equity and empowerment.

In Italy, policies related to children's rights and child protection are under the responsibility of the Department for Family Policies of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

Overall, space for CSOs working on children's rights is not shrinking in Italy. Nevertheless, sometimes children's rights are politicised by the right-wing media, in relation to issues such as migration and foster care.

In these cases, the work of CSOs can be affected.

### Child protection systems

L'Albero della Vita identified some gaps in the child protection system:

- There is an urgent need to collect uniform data on children in alternative care, across all of Italy's regions, through the information system on the care and protection of children and their families.
- There is a need to strengthen data collection on children with disabilities and children subject to abuse.

Italy has a national programme to prevent family separation.<sup>2</sup> The programme aims to reduce the risk of ill-treatment of children and their removal from their family of origin, taking into consideration the perspective of the parents and children themselves in analysing

and responding to their needs. In 2021 this programme was included in Italy's national Plan for Recovery and Resilience, under the Next Generation EU funding scheme, with financing for interventions aimed at supporting parenting skills and families and children in vulnerable conditions across Italy, for the period 2022-2027.

### Education

School segregation is a phenomenon characterised by a high concentration of ethnic and social groups within the student population. This is influenced not only by the concentration of disadvantaged communities in certain urban areas, but also by school choices made by families. Urban segregation perpetuates marginalisation and low levels of academic performance (studies have been produced for the cities of Milan<sup>3</sup> and Turin<sup>4</sup>).

<sup>2</sup> Programma di Intervento per la Prevenzione dell'Istituzionalizzazione (P.I.P.P.I.)

<sup>3</sup> *Separati a scuola. La segregazione scolastica a Milano*, Costanzo Ranci, Social Cohesion Papers, 2019

<sup>4</sup> *Traiettorie di mobilità e segregazione scolastica: la città di Torino*, Fondazione per la Scuola, May 2024

The Italian constitution guarantees the right to a free quality education. However, there is an urgent need to address growing inequalities in education, with increasing numbers of children from low-income families, children with learning difficulties, children living in large urban peripheries with poor educational facilities, and children from families with a history of migration who are in difficulty, including socio-economic fragility, social exclusion and low levels of literacy.

Regarding school inclusion, starting with Law 170 of 2010 and the subsequent Ministerial Directive of 27 December 2012, a significant step forward has been made, with particular attention to students with special educational needs - both those with clinical diagnoses and those with uncertified difficulties who still require personalised support. According to this legislation, schools are tasked with supporting these students by adopting measures that counter marginalisation and promote an inclusive environment, identifying

the specific difficulties of each child and working to break down barriers to learning. Teachers at all levels are responsible for recognising students' needs and adapting their teaching methods.

With Legislative Decree No. 66/2017, school inclusion regulations were introduced in Italy. These establish a system based on shared responsibility of the school community and the participation of families, and respond to different educational needs. The decree aims to enhance individual education plans for pupils, to identify barriers to their learning and the support they need. Italy's education system is based on the principles of subsidiarity and school autonomy, with legislative authority shared between the State and the regions. Additionally, regions are required to adhere to national legislation. Schools have autonomy in their teaching methods, organisational structure, and research activities.

With regard to teaching, there are ongoing challenges, with critical

issues on the quality of teacher training and the turnover of support teachers.

### Child participation

In Italy the right of children to participate in decision-making lacks coordination and a comprehensive legal framework. In terms of democratic governance, the *Consigli comunali dei ragazzi/e* - youth municipal councils - made up of children and young people, are the most widespread participation mechanism. However, there is a lack of consistency in the laws governing these mechanisms, and a lack of accountability.

In fact, the [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child \(2019\)](#) recommended that Italy "institutionalize the Communal Children's Councils as a regular event and ensure that they are provided with a meaningful mandate and adequate human, technical and financial resources, in order to facilitate children's effective engagement with

national legislative processes on issues that affect them."

### Other children's rights issues

L'Albero della Vita identified additional children's rights concerns in Italy, highlighting the need to:

- Reduce the duration of court proceedings involving children in alternative care and ensure proper and continuous support for vulnerable families.
- Invest resources in, and promote awareness of, foster care, after 41 years since the adoption of law N. 184 in 1983.
- Intensify efforts to apply the UNCRC's right to participation (Article 12).
- Ensure quality and inclusive education for all age groups.

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

### Child poverty in Italy

Child poverty has risen in Italy, due to the cost of living and climate crisis, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the economic instability caused by the conflict in Ukraine.

The rate of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Italy was 27.1% in 2023.

L'Albero della Vita highlighted three areas where Italy should increase public investment in children in order to address child poverty and social exclusion:

- Ensure access to quality education for all age groups.
- Intensify the provision of early childhood services and parental support in the suburbs and marginalised areas.
- Improve the dissemination of information on existing services available for families.

Statistics show there are significant regional disparities in levels of extreme and relative child poverty in Italy. Extreme poverty is higher in the south of the country, 15.9% compared to 12.3% in the north and 11.5% in the centre.

Data on relative poverty also shows significant differences between Italian regions: in the south and the islands the incidence of poverty is particularly high, and in some cases exceeds 30% and 40%. This is the case in Sardinia (32.9%), Basilicata (36.7%), Campania (37.1%), Molise (42.1%) and Calabria (44.9%), where almost one in two children is in relative poverty.

Children who are most affected by poverty and social exclusion:

- children in large families - households with three or more children are particularly vulnerable to poverty due to higher maintenance and education costs
- children in single-parent families
- children in families with low levels of education - families where parents have a low level

of education tend to have fewer economic opportunities, affecting the economic status of households and children

- children with disabilities or with parents with disabilities - families with disabilities often face additional costs for care and assistance, increasing the risk of poverty
- migrant children, including unaccompanied migrant children

L'Albero della Vita identified three policy priorities that would contribute to ending child poverty and social exclusion in Italy:

- Ensure access to sport for minors from vulnerable groups guaranteeing the right to play for children and adolescents, and promote sport to foster social integration. In Italy 1 in 5 children above 6 years old are not practicing a sport and there are regional disparities in the availability of sports facilities and participation in sports activities.
- Facilitate access to digitalisation for children and adults in

vulnerable situations.

- Ensure the universal right to healthcare for all children and families.

### European Social Fund + (ESF+)

The ESF+ is one of the key European Union funding instruments aimed at supporting social inclusion, employment and poverty reduction, including efforts to combat child poverty.

In 2024, Fondazione L'Albero della Vita will implement a new ESF+ Social Innovation + initiative project to foster the socio-economic inclusion of children and young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). PRODIGY (PROmoting Digital and Green skills for Youth) aims to promote skills development of 240 NEETs in Italy, Greece and Bulgaria to facilitate their inclusion in the labour market and their active participation in civic life. There is a special focus on Roma children and young people, migrants and those with disabilities.

## The European Child Guarantee

Italy is among the countries to have published the [biennial Child Guarantee monitoring report](#). However, L'Albero della Vita observed that the European Child Guarantee is not part of public debate in Italy.

The monitoring report does not include all the objectives that were detailed in the [National Action Plan \(NAP\)](#). For example, school canteens, which were to become an essential public service have completely disappeared.

L'Albero della Vita was involved in the [Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce](#) in 2021. The Taskforce members worked to monitor the design of the NAP and to amplify the voices of CSOs. However, since then, it has been difficult to follow the Child Guarantee's implementation process, due to a lack of information from the relevant government institutions.

Italy set up a National Steering Committee for the

Child Guarantee in 2022, for collaboration across government institutions and departments. The Steering Group is composed of policymakers, with UNICEF Istituto degli Innocenti providing technical support. A Youth Advisory Board supports the planning and monitoring of the NAP.

The government should make more efforts to involve CSOs and networks that work on children's rights in the implementation and monitoring of Italy's Child Guarantee NAP.

## European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report

The [Country Report](#) reiterates the fact that children and young people are at higher risk of poverty in Italy, compared to older people. Poverty is also higher for single-parent households, and foreign citizens face almost double the risk of poverty and exclusion compared to Italian citizens. Italy's southern regions have more than

double the risk of poverty than the rest of the country. Income inequality is high.

The share of children under three in formal childcare was 30.9% in 2022, but even lower among those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. There are significant regional disparities, with childcare coverage significantly lower in some southern regions of the country. The construction of new childcare places, as outlined in the Recovery and Resilience Plan, could help address this.

The ESF+ supports the implementation of the European Child Guarantee with a total budget of over €1.1 billion.

Preventing early leaving from education remains a challenge, especially for students with a migrant background. Numerical skills have worsened, with a third of 15-year-olds underachieving in maths. However, the share of 15-year-olds without basic science or reading skills fell slightly.

The Country Specific Recommendations mention the need to increase the supply of affordable and quality early childcare (in order to support women's employment).

Italy's birth rate is among the lowest in the EU. The European Commission suggests that family-related policies, promoting work-life balance and equal opportunities, and increasing accessible and high-quality care services could play an important role in addressing Italy's demographic challenges.





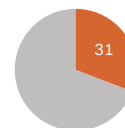
## “Country Recommendation

Kosovo has a big gap between approved legislation and its implementation and should make financial investments to build capacities to reduce this implementation gap and develop a wide range of services to strengthen the child protection system.

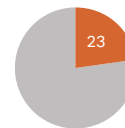
## Country Profile 2024



# Kosovo



**Child Population<sup>1</sup>:**  
31% of total population



**Child Poverty<sup>2</sup>:**  
23% (2023)

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

CONCORDIA Projekte Sociale

Coalition of NGOs for Child Protection-KOMF

<sup>1</sup> [UNICEF, Children in Kosovo.](#)

<sup>2</sup> “The persistent scarcity of available administrative data, and the weakness of administrative data systems across sectors, further complicates provision of updated and disaggregated information on the situation of children in Kosovo, including data on child poverty” – [UNICEF country report 2023](#). The last available data is from [UNICEF report 2022](#).

## Children's Rights in Kosovo

The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo recognises the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The principles of the UNCRC are fully incorporated in the domestic legislation of Kosovo, starting from the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo and all other relevant laws in the country. Although Kosovo is not a signatory to international conventions due to its political status, Article 22 of the Constitution defines the direct implementation of international agreements and instruments, including the UNCRC.

In 2014 UNICEF issued a detailed [study](#) on the compatibility of Kosovo's existing legislation with the UNCRC, and provided recommendations for better alignment of legislation with the Convention, including in relation to non-discrimination, the rights of children with disabilities, the right to leisure and play, and other issues.

Kosovo's latest [Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2019-2023](#) focused on improving governance for the realisation of children's rights, on involving children in decision-making, on integrated services for early childhood development and education, and on children's health, protection and well-being. The strategy included references to the UNCRC and recommendations by UN agencies about children's rights in Kosovo. The [Office for Good Governance](#), within the Office of the Prime Minister, is the main body that leads government action on good governance and human rights, including children's rights. It has prepared annual 'Progress Reports' aimed at monitoring the implementation of the Strategy. There is no Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) process in Kosovo. Eurochild members in Kosovo would recommend such a process.

In general, there is not enough knowledge of the UNCRC among policymakers, and there is a need to increase awareness of its importance for children.

Discussions on children and children's rights are mostly absent in the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo.

However, there is an Inter-ministerial Committee for Children's Rights which provides advice and coordinates policy on the rights and protection of children in all areas, especially education, justice, social services, health and culture.

Teams for children's rights, responsible for coordinating initiatives and policies, have been established in 34 municipalities.

A new allowance scheme for children will begin implementation. Under the new scheme, allowances will be €20 per month for the first and second child. For mothers with three or more children, the allowance will be €30 per month per child, including an additional €30 per month for both the first and second child. However, the new scheme maintains the maximum eligible age at 16 years, not 18.

Eurochild members in Kosovo believe there should be more support, monitoring and inspection for civil society organisations (CSOs) in the country, and more sustainable funding so they can provide essential professional and specialised services for children.

### Early childhood development

The government has recognised the importance of early childhood development (ECD) and is making efforts towards a thorough and integrated approach.

In 2022 Kosovo drafted its [National Development Strategy 2030](#) which included a focus on increasing the participation of children in quality early childhood education and care (ECEC).

The enrolment rate of children in early childhood education is very low. Currently, only 15% of children aged 3-4 attend early childhood education programmes. [Only 46.2% of pre-school children are girls](#), while the number of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian

children included in the early childhood education system is low.

The government has [Early Learning Development Standards for Children Aged 0-6](#), issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. A [Law on Early Childhood Education](#) came into force in 2023, and foresees mechanisms for ensuring the provision of integrated services. The curriculum for Early Childhood Education is being developed.

The government has incorporated positive discipline in parenting programmes and also in the [Law on Child Protection](#). There are also efforts to increase early identification of children with disabilities for early intervention.

Nutrition has been recognised as an important aspect of ECD and the Ministry of Education has finalised the national diet for pre-school settings, developed in consultation with nutritionists.

However, a lot remains to be done. According to [KOMF's analysis](#),

ECD services are not integrated with education, health and social care sectors. Services are isolated and not coordinated – with families having to go to various institutions to receive support.

### Children's mental health

Requests from children for mental health services have increased, especially since the Covid 19 pandemic. The Ministry of Health approved an Action Plan for Mental Health, but resources available for children's mental health in public health facilities are very limited. 52 psychiatrists are employed in public health institutions nationwide, with only 7 psychiatrists for children and adolescents in the country. The Prizren Mental Health Unit for Children provides outpatient services for children and adolescents up to the age of 18.

Children with mental health problems are often neglected by the family and the community, and often isolated with very little social interaction. Social workers have limited capacities to provide

adequate and long-term support for these children.

Schools do not have enough professionals and support staff - not even a quarter of schools have psychologists available - making it impossible to offer proper mental health support to children in these settings.

### Child safety and well-being online

In Kosovo there is high degree of mobile phone and Internet usage among children. To ensure that children can fully benefit from technology, while navigating potential challenges, it is essential to equip them with the necessary skills. By integrating [guidance](#) into school curricula, we can provide students with valuable information on how to use the internet safely and responsibly, empowering them to make the most of the opportunities technology offers while mitigating any associated risks.

### Child protection systems

Gaps in Kosovo's child protection system include the lack of integration of health, social and education services and a lack of daycare facilities, learning and community centres and parent support groups.

A law on Child Protection was adopted in 2019 - a significant achievement in the protection of children's rights - but further adjustments and secondary legislation are needed for Kosovo to be fully compliant with the country's commitment to the UNCRC and to EU requirements. Physical violence against children remains a concern.

The Centre for Social Work (CSW) has the mandate for social service delivery at the municipal level. Social workers are present in each municipality, providing services close to people in need. The CSW is also responsible for child protection services. However, it has insufficient human resources and inadequate infrastructure, which hinders coordination with

other services at local level. Moreover, there is a lack of social workers designated to work on child protection issues.

A new Law on Social and Family Services entered into force in January 2024. It includes measures to develop and strengthen family and community-based services, and expands forms of protection, introducing family-based care for children once they reach the age of 18 and 'supervised independent living.' However there has not been any progress on increased funding for social services.

An emerging concern is the unexpected closure of the only national community-based shelter, due to lack of public sustainable funding, that was providing 24-hour care and services for children victims of trafficking, abuse and violence, with other providers struggling to care for these children.

According to the [2020 UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys data](#), 72% of children

reported experiencing corporal punishment. This represents an increase from previous years, despite such practices being legally forbidden.

## Education

While [legislation](#) mandates inclusive and quality education for all, there are many challenges. These include the inadequate training of teachers, a lack of inclusive teaching methods and support equipment, social norms and attitudes, socio-economic factors and a lack of human resources and funds. The education system is not able to ensure inclusion, quality and equal opportunities for all children.

The most vulnerable children, such as children with disabilities and children from non-majority communities, do not receive adequate support in education.

The lack of official statistics on the number of children with disabilities is a significant obstacle in addressing their educational needs, along with

the small number of specialised support teachers and assistants. However, in a significant effort to address this, 100 assistants for children with special educational needs in regular schools and three sign language interpreters were hired in 2023. Eighty directors of vocational secondary schools, 25 teachers of vocational schools, and 18 teachers of primary and lower secondary schools were trained in inclusive education.

Public spending on education was 4.1% of GDP in 2021 (down from 4.6% in 2020), which is broadly in line with the EU average. However, in terms of outcomes, Kosovo performs worse. Learning materials were adapted after Kosovo registered its lowest-ever ranking in 2018.

## Climate change and the environment

One of the main environmental issues affecting children's health in Kosovo is poor air quality. [UNICEF](#) states that children in Kosovo are exposed to excessive

levels of air pollution, also due to coal burning in winter.

## Child participation

Inclusion and empowerment of children in decision-making is one of the strategic objectives in Kosovo's Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2019-2023.

Article 13 of the Law no. 03/L-145 on Empowerment and Participation of Youth is the only article dedicated to youth participation in decision-making. However, it does not provide a definition for youth participation, so this term remains vague. It limits the areas of participation to education, employment, public health, social issues, culture and sports, citizenship and democracy, the environment, spatial planning and rural development. The Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports is currently working to improve participatory policy-making processes and provide sustainable legal and policy solutions for the youth in Kosovo.

While there are some child participation initiatives in education, at national and local level, these are not meaningful and not adequately funded. CSOs, such as [CONCORDIA Projecte Sociale](#), also engage in child participation.

Schools are the first place where children are given the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect them, their peers and the school community. However, despite some good examples of School Councils where pupils are represented, participation of children in schools is hindered by low awareness and knowledge and a lack of mechanisms and opportunities.

Participation at local level is enabled by mechanisms such as Local Youth Action Councils and Youth Assemblies (which are NGOs), while at the central level youth participation is secured by organisations such as the Central Youth Action Council and the Kosovo Youth Assembly.

Children under the age of 18 are part of Children's Municipal Assemblies, but their participation remains partial as their considerations are not heard or taken into account.

In general, children's participation is limited by the fact that neither central nor local level officials are aware of the importance of including children and youth in these processes. The inclusion of children from rural areas and from marginalised groups, as well as girls and young women is a particular challenge.

KOMF is currently working to start Megaphone, a children's network that will ensure their voice is heard in all policies and decisions that affect their lives.

### **Additional and emerging children's rights issues**

In the juvenile justice sector, children are placed in closed institutions, including correctional centres, in violation of the Juvenile Justice Code. Another concern is that girls are placed in centres

with adult female detainees. The current system is focused on security, while largely neglecting the rehabilitation, education and reintegration of children. Often, children are placed in correctional centres despite court decisions mandating their placement in educational centres.

Another emerging issue is the increasing number of children victims of drug abuse who need rehabilitation and reintegration services which are totally lacking in the country.

CONCORDIA and KOMF emphasise the critical need for comprehensive and disaggregated data in the country. Currently, there is a significant lack of detailed information on vulnerable groups such as children at risk of poverty, children with disabilities, children in street situations, children who are victims of substance abuse, and those involved in child labour. Although data exists for other groups of children, it is often inaccurate and fails to reflect the reality on the ground.

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

### **Child poverty in Kosovo**

There is lack of up-to-date data on child poverty. According to available data from the 2022 UNICEF report, [nearly 23% of children live in poverty and 7% of children live in extreme poverty](#).

Eurochild members identified several areas where Kosovo should increase public investment in children:

- Early childhood programmes.
- Measures to prevent vulnerabilities in the child protection systems.
- Prevention of school drop-out, especially among the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian minorities.
- Initiatives to prevent early marriage and early parenting among girls.
- The implementation of the Law on Child Protection and the Law on Social and Family Services. Investments are needed in

services for the most vulnerable groups of children.

- A stronger child benefit scheme, as a key mechanism for poverty reduction.
- The promotion of employment, vocational training and skills development for vulnerable groups.
- The development of public transport infrastructure to enable children and families to access schools, services and employment.

In addition, after advocacy by civil society, the Law on Social Assistance Scheme has been amended to remove the age limit whereby families could only benefit from social assistance until their children reached the age of five. The new scheme is now being piloted and KOMF will advocate to ensure this change is permanent in the legislation's final approval.

The children most in need are:

- children with disabilities
- children from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities

- children from poor households
- children in rural or isolated areas
- children with parents with limited education
- children in street situations
- children victims of drug abuse

In 2022, Kosovo adopted the 2022-2026 Strategy for the Advancement of the Rights of the Roma and Ashkali Communities with objectives in the areas of education, employment, social protection, health, housing and discrimination.

### European Social Fund + (ESF+)

The most comprehensive EU financial instrument in Kosovo is the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance. Kosovo also benefits from the [European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights](#), the [Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace](#), the [Foreign Policy Instrument](#) and other EU programmes.

### Example of good practice to mitigate child poverty

CONCORDIA Projekte Sociale provides community services for the most vulnerable children and families, including from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities in the municipalities of Prizren and Gjakova. This includes early childhood education for children aged 3-6, music and art workshops, counseling for children and their families and health and nutrition support. The project has led to positive changes in the community, including increased school attendance.



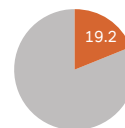
## “Country Recommendation

Latvia should develop a common strategy to ensure children's safety in all settings - family, school, community.

## Country Profile 2024



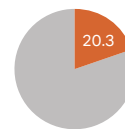
# Latvia



### Child Population:

**361,384 (2023)**

19.2% of total population



### Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:

**75,000 (2023)**

20.3% (2023)

▲ +0.5% compared to 2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

[Latvian Child Welfare Network](#)

[Latvian Protect the Children](#), Public Ombudsman (Glābiet bērnus - Sabiedriskais tiesībsargs)

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)

## Children's Rights in Latvia

Latvia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1992, incorporating many provisions into national law, such as the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, but not the principle of child participation. In 1996, Latvia became the sixth European country to ban physical punishment of children. However, gaps remain due to limited understanding and insufficient funding. For instance, children face delays in receiving free healthcare due to budget constraints.

Latvia lacks a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) process, though draft legislation must assess compliance with children's best interests. The country's children's policies are guided by the [Guidelines for the Development of Children, Youth and Families 2022-2027](#), but there is no specific strategy on children's rights. Fragmented policy-making and limited reference to the UNCRC hinder

progress and Latvia lacks a vision for protecting children's rights.

Reports under the UNCRC process are often delayed, and many recommendations from 2016 remain unaddressed. The Ombudsman publishes an alternative report on UNCRC implementation, and in his annual report on the human rights situation children's rights are discussed in one chapter.

### Early childhood development

The government has expressed commitment to develop an early preventive support system for young children.

In 2023, Latvian Ministers set up an inter-institutional working group for the development of draft legislation to support children's development needs.

Latvia's Child Development Support System is based on a screening programme tool developed by the University of Latvia for pre-school children aged 1.5-6 years, which includes

a comprehensive assessment of the child's development by a doctor, psychologist, parent and pre-school teacher. Due to the lack of human resources and limited cooperation in the public administration system, there are concerns about its implementation, but this is a small positive step forward.

Together with the Latvian Paediatric Association, Latvian Protect the Children has repeatedly urged the government to commission a health education course for schools, prepared by university medical professors, to develop attention deficit syndrome early recognition questionnaires and train parents and pre-school teachers to use them.

### Children's mental health

Mental health problems have increased significantly in the last four years.

In its 2023 report [Problem children - a mirror of adult failure](#), the State Audit Office

acknowledged that mental health services for families in Latvia are inadequate. The availability of services depends to a large extent on the capacity of municipalities to finance them, thus discriminating against children living in poorer municipalities.

Mental health services are highly fragmented, with a lack of cooperation between professionals. Although psychiatric care is free, long waiting times force parents to seek paid services. Access to free psychological help is very limited. The Children and Adolescent Resource Centre provides assistance funded by the Ministries of Welfare and Health, for adolescents at risk of addiction, depression and suicide. In 2022 more than 500 adolescents were waiting for support with waiting lists of up to four months, and the outpatient service is available in only seven locations, with long waiting times.

Schools have educational psychologists focused on addressing learning, educational,



emotional, cognitive, behavioural or communication difficulties.

More funding is needed for mental health prevention and treatment. A single inter-institutional system in which psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers work as a team is also needed, with common quality criteria for the provision of mental health services. It is also important to increase public education on mental health to reduce stigma.

### **Child safety and well-being online**

With high income inequality and child poverty rates in Latvia, many children's rights in the digital environment are not being fulfilled. Children from low-income families and in rural areas lack access to digital devices, creating a digital divide among children from an early age. The education system is still not fully adapted to digital learning.

There is also insufficient education and support on digital

safety. Many children and their parents do not know how to protect themselves online, with risks to children's psychological and physical safety. It is essential to educate both children and parents on staying safe online.

Promising practice in this area is the Latvian initiative "Skola2030", which was conceived as a way to promote digital literacy from an early age by providing learning materials, training for teachers and integrating digital literacy at all stages of education.

### **Child protection systems**

Families with children are not sufficiently supported and social work in Latvia is ineffective. Social work is provided and funded by local authorities, and with limited finances many municipalities are reducing the number of social workers. There are no dedicated social workers for children in Latvia - social services work with the family unit. Families are also supported by family assistants, who provide support

and training for family members in the acquisition of social skills, childcare and parenting, in the management of a household in accordance with an individually developed social rehabilitation plan. However, there are far too few of them.

When children are separated from their family, and are placed in alternative care, they are cared for in a very fragmented system. In practice, children who have to be removed from their families have complex problems and are often separated from their families too late. Fewer and fewer children return to their families.

There is currently a severe shortage of foster families in Latvia and many children are left in dangerous and unsuitable conditions because there is no alternative care for them.

There is no adequate system of prevention, treatment and rehabilitation for children with addiction and children at risk of committing crimes.

## **Education**

Although Latvia's Constitution provides for equal educational opportunities for every child, there are significant disparities, with children's opportunities dependent on their parents' financial situation and the municipality where they live.

Although support for children with special needs is available in large parts of the country, it is limited due to insufficient financial resources and specialist provision. Regional disparities and resource scarcity lead to unequal quality of education between urban and rural schools.

The current policy document National Education Development Guidelines 2021-2027 foresees significant changes to improve the quality and accessibility of education.

The closure of small rural schools, due to demographic changes and growing urbanisation, is also concerning, as they are often

the centre of social community activities. School closures mean that children have to travel longer distances to attend the nearest school, which can lead to additional fatigue and mental health problems. Many children are forced to stay in boarding schools because of the long distances. It is also more difficult for children to attend extracurricular activities, which are so important for children's development.

One of the biggest problems is the shortage of teachers. At the beginning of the 2023/2024 school year there was a shortage of 1,013 teachers. This leads to teachers being exhausted and children not receiving education in key subjects, and to an increase in insufficiently qualified teachers, including for children with special educational needs.

### Climate change and the environment

The [Latvian Climate Change Adaptation Plan](#) identifies families with young children as

a vulnerable group, highlighting the need for specific measures to protect children's health from climate risks. The Plan includes commitments to improve air quality, reduce pollution, and ensure access to clean drinking water, particularly in rural areas.

Local authorities, supported by EU Structural Funds, play a key role in implementing solutions like creating green spaces for children. Schools are encouraged to teach environmental protection, but no extra funding is provided. Many households still lack access to centralised water and sanitation, with private wells at risk of contamination.

### Child participation

Latvia has many challenges in terms of children's participation. Opportunities for children under 18 to participate in public decision-making are limited, sporadic and sometimes only implemented because they are required by the EU or other foreign funders. Slowly this is changing, and there are some initiatives to

promote children's participation in public processes at local level.

Youth organisations in Latvia, such as the Latvian Youth Council, promote the participation of young people in public and political processes.

Many schools in Latvia have established school parliaments where students can participate in school governance and decision-making.

Local authorities are also encouraged to set up advisory councils to involve young people in local decision-making. However, there are no evidence-based evaluations of the benefits of these activities.

It is essential to raise awareness and support for children's participation, to develop mechanisms for children's voices to be heard, and to meaningfully involve children in policy-making and legislative processes.

### Additional children's rights issues

- Addictions in children are a growing problem. While addiction prevention programmes are available, there are no treatment options or rehabilitation programmes.
- Cities have insufficient suitable and safe areas for children to play in.
- Latvia should establish a family court to ensure children's right to quick and fair decision-making in the best interests of the child. This is possible only by involving highly qualified professionals specialised in children's rights in investigation and decision-making processes.

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

#### Child poverty in Latvia

The proportion of children [at risk of poverty and social exclusion](#) was 20.3% in 2023.

Eurochild members identified several areas where Latvia should increase public investment in children:

- Decent housing: many families live in inadequate conditions and there is a need to increase the supply of affordable rented housing provided by local authorities.
- Inclusive education: free from segregation, bullying and discrimination.
- Social support: there is a need for a system based on children's needs, to promote a safer and more stable family life for children.
- Early childhood development.
- Access to healthcare in rural areas.

The children most in need in Latvia are:

- minority children
- street children
- children in single-parent

households

- children with parents with severe physical and mental health problems or addictions
- children with parents who are, or have been, incarcerated

### European Social Fund + (ESF+)

To help children from low-income households and families in crisis to start school, the Society Integration Foundation is providing school kits for children aged 5-16 under the [European Social Fund Plus \(ESF+\) programme in Latvia](#). Families can receive support kits at distribution points throughout Latvia. However, much more can be done with such funding.

The Latvian Child Welfare Network is not on the Monitoring Committee of the ESF+.<sup>2</sup>

## The European Child Guarantee

Latvia's [Child Guarantee National Action Plan](#) (NAP) has been adopted, but with no new activities. The NAP includes a range of activities that are already contained in the country's national policy documents.

The NAP identifies as target groups those children and families for which the State has provided special status and/or support in its legal framework. For example, large families in Latvia are given special support to promote childbearing, because the mortality rate is higher than the birth rate, and low-income families have special status.

According to the Latvian Child Welfare Network, children living in single-parent households, children of ethnic minorities, street

children, adolescent parents, and children of seriously ill parents should also be considered as target groups.

Latvia has not yet published its biennial report on the implementation of the Child Guarantee.

While the Latvian Child Welfare Network was involved in consultations with government representatives and other civil society organisations (CSOs), the proposals gathered during these workshops were not used in the preparation of the NAP. The one discussion with children did not represent the Child Guarantee target groups, and CSOs' proposals to include children and families in the development of the NAP were also not acted on. The [Latvian Child Network has carried out a critical assessment of the National Action Plan](#).

<sup>2</sup> In order to examine the performance of programmes, Member States should set up monitoring committees, whose composition should include representatives of relevant partners, including civil society organisations. Member States may set up a single monitoring committee to cover more than one programme.

**“Latvia must consult all stakeholders, including children, in Child Guarantee consultations.”**

## European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report

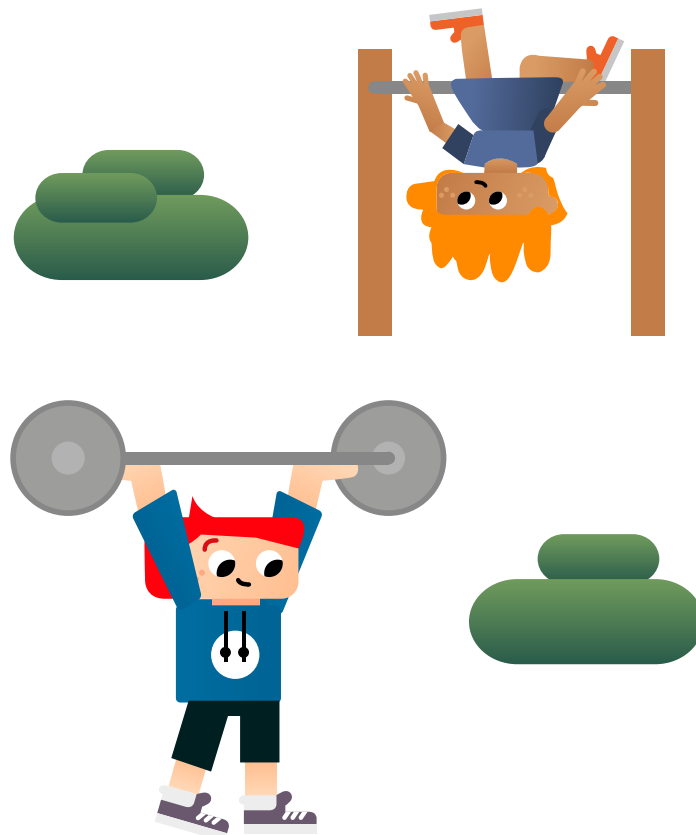
In [Latvia](#), challenges persist in improving the adequacy of social assistance and access to services, particularly for vulnerable groups needing affordable care and social housing. EU funding from the ESF+ and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) will support infrastructure for children with disabilities and provide access to early childhood education for over 1,200 disadvantaged children.

There are significant disparities between urban and rural areas regarding poverty, social exclusion and access to quality education.

Although participation in early childhood education is almost universal for children aged between 3 and the start of compulsory education, the share of children under 3 in formal childcare is still below the EU average, but growing. However, in Latvia there are [parental benefits](#) that allow absence from work until the child is 18 months old.

High levels of inequality and poverty are linked to inadequate income redistribution through the tax and benefit system, with social transfers having limited impact on poverty reduction. Public spending on social protection is among the lowest in the EU.

Access to quality education is dependent on place of residence, with urban schools performing better than rural ones. Low pay and high workloads make the teaching profession unattractive. With EU funding Latvia is seeking to improve the quality of education in regional schools.



## “Country Recommendation

Malta should address the gaps in the system concerning children with disabilities, stateless and migrant children, and children from the LGBTIQ community

## Country Profile 2024



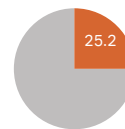
# Malta



### Child Population:

**81,963 (2023)**

15.1% of total population



### Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:

**21,000 (2023)**

25.2% (2023)

▲ +2.1% compared to 2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

[The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society](#)

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)

## Children's Right in Malta

Malta ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in January 1990. Several aspects of the UNCRC have been incorporated into Maltese law but not all. Recent legislation that reflects aspects of the UNCRC includes the Child Protection (Alternative Care) Act (Act No. III of 2017), the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act, Chapter 413 (which ensures rights and protections for children with disabilities) and the Criminal Code (Act III of 2014) which prohibits corporal punishment of children.<sup>2</sup>

The last [examination of Malta by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) was in 2019.

Malta has several policy initiatives that aim to promote and protect

children's rights, including the [Children's Policy Framework \(2024-2030\)](#) which includes a comprehensive approach to children's issues, including education, health, welfare and protection.

The [MaltaCAN \(Malta Children's Associations Network\)](#) and [CROM \(Children's Rights Observatory Malta\)](#) both advocate for children's rights. CROM published [The Children's Manifesto](#), which compiles the voices of hundreds of children, highlighting gaps in children's rights that need to be addressed.

Malta has a dedicated Minister for Family and Children's Rights, as well as a Commissioner for Children. Malta's laws and strategies show there is knowledge and awareness of children's rights.

## Early childhood development

Malta recognises the importance of early childhood development (ECD), including children aged 0-3, through various policies and initiatives. Key documents include the National Children's Policy (2017-2024) which emphasises the importance of the early years and aims to provide a strong foundation for children's development. Malta's approach to ECD goes beyond childcare, with a holistic approach that includes National Standards for early childhood education and care (ECEC) to ensure that services are comprehensive. Malta also provides support for families and communities through the National Strategic Policy for Positive Parenting.

Malta offers early intervention support for children up to the age

of five. Children are referred to a Child Development Assessment Unit if they show signs of developmental delays in their first five years.

Malta's ECD policies involve collaboration between different sectors, including health, education, and social services, to provide integrated support for young children. There is a focus on training and development for professionals to ensure they are equipped to provide comprehensive care and education.

However, additional funding is needed for early childhood programmes, to ensure they are adequately resourced. It is crucial that all children, including stateless and migrant children, have access to ECEC services.

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<sup>2</sup> Other legislation that reflects aspects of the UNCRC:

- National Children's Policy (2017–2024);
- Equality Bill and Human Rights and Equality Commission Bill;
- Civil Code Art 16 and Marriage Act, Chapter 255;
- Victims of Crime Act (Act IX of 2015 Cap. 539);
- Mental Health Act (2012);
- Amendment to Article 35 (1) of the Criminal Code;
- Amendment to Article 339 of the Criminal Code.

## Children's mental health

Mental health services are part of the national education and health system.

At school children have access to therapy with counsellors and psychotherapists from a very young age. Psycho-social teams, made up of counsellors, psychotherapists, education psychologists, social workers and career advisors, provide assistance to children and young people. However, there are insufficient professionals available to meet children's needs.

Children have access to specialist mental health services, including through Children and Young People Psychological Services, the Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Malta and Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Emergency Services. However, there are long waiting lists due to high demand and a lack of human resources.

The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society believes that play, drama and art therapy should be part of the school curriculum, especially during the early years, and that there is a need for more mental health professionals, with improved working conditions. It is also important to extend services to baby and peri-natal clinics in order to support families at risk.

## Child safety and well-being online

There are still disparities in access to technology in Malta, contributing to the digital divide which affects children from deprived families in particular. This further increases social exclusion as deprived children cannot make use of digital tools, including for playing and communicating with their friends.

Children's safety in the digital environment is a growing concern, with significant gaps in the protection and prevention of online abuse. A

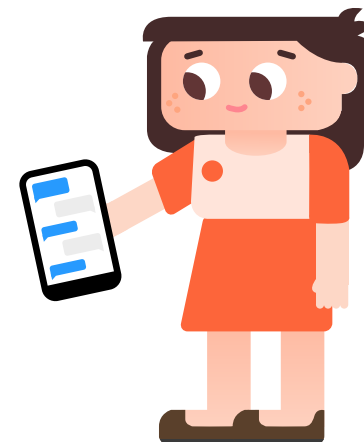
significant proportion of children, approximately 15% between Year 3 and Year 11, have reported experiencing abuse online – including cyberbullying, emotional abuse and sexual abuse. Extended screen-time, especially among older children, highlights the need for more balanced digital exposure and healthy online habits.

There is a clear need for comprehensive digital safety policies at both the national and EU levels. At national level, Malta needs policies that encompass digital safety for children, addressing critical issues such as cyberbullying, online abuse, digital literacy, and the safe use of social media. Policies should empower children with the knowledge and skills to navigate the digital world safely.

At the EU level, there should be more efforts to standardise digital safety measures across Member States, and sharing resources and best practices. Policies should also focus on ensuring

equitable access to digital technology and the Internet for all children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

There is a need to integrate digital literacy and online safety into the national curriculum. Educators must be equipped with the necessary training to guide students in adopting safe digital practices. This holistic approach will help create a safer and more inclusive digital environment for all children.



## Child protection systems

Malta has made significant developments in child protection, but gaps still exist. For example:

- The Juvenile Court deals with children up to sixteen years old, yet Maltese law defines a minor as a person under 18. This inconsistency leads to different treatment for those aged 16-18, who are tried as adults, potentially facing harsher penalties and less age-appropriate interventions.
- Children under 18 cannot bring a case to court in their own right, or appeal against court or administrative decisions on their own, thus limiting their ability to seek justice independently.
- There is a need for educational, social, and health services to provide holistic and integrated support including psycho-social support to all disadvantaged children, such as migrant children and those in state care.

Malta has implemented several policies aimed at preventing

family separation and supporting families in vulnerable situations. Counselling and support services are available for parents. The Child Protection (Alternative Care) Act (2017), focuses on protecting children from harm and ensuring their well-being in cases where they cannot stay with their families. It also ensures efforts are made to reunify children with their families when it is in their best interest. There is provision of support and training for foster families to care for children temporarily while working towards family reunification.

## Education

The education system strives to provide quality education for all. Malta's education strategy is built on three main pillars: well-being; growth and empowerment; and equity and inclusion. Initiatives include the integration of digital and green skills, promoting lifelong learning, and fostering emotional intelligence and resilience.

Malta has implemented several legislative measures and policies to guarantee education for children with varying abilities and prevent exclusion or discrimination. The National Inclusive Education Framework provides guidelines for inclusive practices in schools, ensuring that children with disabilities and special needs receive appropriate support and resources.

However, there are insufficient human resources to address the needs of different groups of children, and not enough professionals to meet the needs of children with disabilities, migrant children, children with mental health issues and children facing poverty and exclusion.

## Climate change and the environment

Malta has implemented a range of policies to address environmental issues and protect the rights of children. These policies aim to create a sustainable and healthy environment, ensuring that all

children have access to clean air, safe water, and healthy living conditions.

However, there are several environmental issues affecting children:

- High levels of air pollution, which affects children's health and can lead to conditions such as asthma. The increase in urbanisation is leading to fewer green spaces where children can play without being at risk of car emissions or other hazards.
- Inefficient waste management contributes to environmental degradation, affecting the health and living conditions of children. Children living in deprived areas might be exposed to pollutant chemicals that can be damaging to their health.
- Children living in poverty suffer from heat stress due to limited access to air conditioning.
- Fresh water is becoming scarcer, with possible increases in water bills and more limited access to drinking water for



children.

- Malta may suffer from food insecurity, which may affect some children's access to healthy food.

While Malta has enacted several policies to address environmental issues, none specifically address children's needs.

### Child participation

Since 2018, children from the age of 16 have the right to vote in local and national elections, and are considered active participants in Maltese democracy.

Through various projects and initiatives, The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society shares the views, voices and opinions of children with parliamentarians and collaborates with various organisations to represent children's rights issues. In its communication with ministers and other government representatives, the Foundation has found them to be open to discussion,

consultation and action on children's rights.

### Additional children's rights issues

The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society is also concerned about:

- The need to establish an appropriate child-friendly justice system.
- The rights of Stateless Children and Children with Temporary Protection (including refugee children fleeing armed conflict or countries experiencing the severe effects of climate change) and all the challenges they face.

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

#### Child poverty in Malta

The rate of children at risk of poverty in 2023 for households

with dependent children was 25.2%.

The children most in need are:

- children living in single-parent and cohabitant families
- children living in an abusive family environment
- children with disabilities
- migrant and refugee children

The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society highlighted three policy priorities for the Maltese Government:

- Develop a policy on education and digital exclusion.
- Develop a policy to ensure access to healthcare, nutrition and safe neighbourhood environments for all children.
- Ensure adequate and equal pay for parents and quality family time.

#### Example of good practice to mitigate child poverty

The Malta Trust Foundation runs the Adopt-a-Family project,

which provides financial support to disadvantaged families to help them meet their children's health and educational needs. The project also links families to psycho-social services.

### The European Child Guarantee

Malta's National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee (2022-2030) is a comprehensive strategy to combat child poverty and social exclusion. It includes mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation, using specific indicators on material and social deprivation and educational attainment. Data collection relies on national statistics and the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions to track progress. Material and social deprivation indicators are used to assess access to essential resources and services. However, the monitoring and reporting section of the NAP needs to be stronger.

The Ministry of Social Policy and Children's Rights led the

development of the NAP, but did not consult with relevant civil society organisations including MaltaCAN and CROM.

The NAP prioritises various groups of children in need, including those from low-income families, children with disabilities, and children in single-parent households. However, some are not adequately included, such as migrant and refugee children who face additional barriers to accessing education, healthcare, and social services. The NAP should also include more support services and anti-discrimination measures for LGBTQ+ youth to ensure their safety and well-being.

The NAP will be implemented with significant financial commitments, including €145 million from a mix of national and EU funds (such as the ESF+). However, more long-term, sustainable and diverse funding is needed, from both national budgets and EU funds.

**“Overall, our assessment of the Child Guarantee is that in Malta there is a strong commitment to addressing child poverty and social exclusion through comprehensive measures and significant financial investments. However, several areas require improvement, particularly data collection, inclusion and funding, to enhance the National Action Plan’s effectiveness and ensure that all vulnerable groups are adequately supported.”**

## European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report

Although the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion is below the EU average, children of single parents or children with low-skilled parents face a greater risk. The poverty-reducing impact of social transfers (excluding pensions) remains at 26.4%, one of the lowest in the EU.

Free childcare is available to parents in employment or education. In 2022, the share of children under three in formal childcare increased to 43.1%, in stark contrast to the declining participation rate of children above the age of three, which was 86.2% in 2021 (compared with the 92.5% EU average).

The rate of early school leavers is on a downward trend but remains slightly above the EU average in 2023. In 2022, around 47.7% of students from the bottom socio-economic quartile lacked

basic skills in mathematics. The rate for the top quartile was also high (17.2% vs 11% at EU level). According to the [Country Report](#) this suggests that under-achievement does not only concern disadvantaged students but other children too.

The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society thinks more can be done so that Malta can adequately support students with specific needs to develop their skills and competencies. They also note that the Education Department is launching a new Education Strategy at the beginning of the 2024 scholastic year, which was written following consultations with civil society, educators and children.

The Commission [recommends](#) that Malta improve the quality of education in the country, particularly by fostering students’ basic skills and the professional development of teachers.

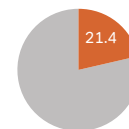
## “Country Recommendation

Moldova should take measures to develop community-based support services for families with children in vulnerable situations, to prevent the separation of children from their biological or extended family.

## Country Profile 2024



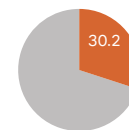
# Moldova



### Child Population:

**539,400 (2023)**

21.4% of total population



### Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:

**30.2% (2023)**

▲ +1.8% compared to 2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

A.O. CONCORDIA. Proiecte Sociale

<sup>1</sup> Based on official [national data](#).

## Children's Rights in Moldova

The Republic of Moldova, referred to as 'Moldova', ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1990. The Convention came into force in 1993 and has been fully incorporated into national law.

In Moldova, a few institutions have the mandate to promote, monitor and assess children's rights. One of these is the [Ombudsman for the Rights of the Child](#) which is responsible for promoting and monitoring the implementation of the UNCRC at national level, and for providing protection and assistance to children at risk. The Ombudsman produces annual, thematic and special reports on the implementation of the Convention. The [National Council for Child Rights Protection](#) also monitors implementation of the UNCRC and the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The [Ministry of Labour and Social Protection](#) is responsible for

ensuring the implementation of the UNCRC, and the Parliamentary Committee on Social Protection and Health monitors the implementation of the Convention. UNICEF works in partnership with the government and provides support to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and other institutions involved in children's rights.

The [Alliance of NGOs](#) — made up of about 64 civil society organisations (CSOs) active in social protection — is a reliable partner for central, district, and local authorities in developing positive practices, promoting normative frameworks, providing services for children and families, and monitoring the implementation of the UNCRC. CONCORDIA is part of the Alliance.

All these institutions periodically assess the situation of children's rights in Moldova.

## Early childhood development

Moldova focuses on early child intervention services, especially for children aged 0-3. These are based on a 'social model' that combines care in different sectors (medical, social, psychological and educational), with integration of services and inter-disciplinary engagement. Moldova also has an [Action Plan on the system of early intervention services for children for 2023-2027](#).

In addition, there is a [National Programme](#) of childcare services for children aged 0-3, based on three objectives:

1. The development of a normative framework and expansion of daycare services for children aged 4-36 months.
2. The development of alternative childcare services for children (4-36 months): workplace childcare facilities; individual childcare (nannies); family-based care services.
3. The development and expansion of private daycare centres for children aged 4-36 months.

## Children's mental health

The mental health of children and young people continues to be a challenge. For children, the [main causes of disability remain mental and behavioural disorders \(26.9%\) and congenital malformations \(25.0%\)](#). Overall mental well-being declines as children get older, with girls more at risk than boys.

The medical system places children with mental illness within the remit of community mental health centres or psychiatric hospitals, but there are not enough professionals to meet children's individual needs. There are challenges in the provision of mental health services at the primary healthcare level, with a shortage of psychiatrists, social workers, psychologists and psychiatric nurses. The acute shortage of staff also leads to a lack of systematic interventions to prevent mental health problems and promote good mental health.

## Child safety and well-being online

Children's online safety came to the authorities' attention at the start of the Covid 19 pandemic. EU support in developing effective mechanisms for child safeguarding online would be welcome.

The Ministry of Education and Research developed programmes on online safety, for both teachers and children. Another [platform](#) contains guidance for parents and children to be safe online. In Moldova there is a wealth of information and guidance on online safety for children, and information on preventing internet addiction and potential consequences such as developmental delays, aggression and anxiety.

There are disparities in access to the Internet, children in urban

areas have greater access than children in rural areas.

## Child protection systems

In 2022, the government approved the second [National Programme for Child Protection for the years 2022-2026](#), but there are many challenges in implementation.

The child social protection system tends to react when families with children are already in crisis, rather than taking preventive measures or offering early and timely support to parents.

Moldova still lacks effective community programmes to support families and children. In 2024, for the first time, the Moldovan Government allocated budget to set up child protection specialists at community level, but there are far too few and many more need to be recruited.

In rural areas, children are more likely to become victims of child labour and exploitation, due to the lack of child protection infrastructure. While girls are more at risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking, boys are more likely to be used as farm labourers. Many children without parental care - left-behind children<sup>2</sup> - become carers for their younger siblings and elderly relatives.

## Education

Education in Moldova is free of charge. Academic performance and the quality of education depend on human resources. Small rural schools in vulnerable environments offer poor learning conditions and continue to perform poorly. The educational infrastructure is inefficient and not adapted to social and economic changes. A large proportion of rural schools are poorly equipped and maintained, have outside

toilets, lack hot water, and have poor-quality drinking water.

Absenteeism and school drop-out is a significant concern. Children most at risk of abandoning school are typically those from disadvantaged, low-income families, and children without parental care.

In a report [Knowledge, attitudes and practices on Child Protection in the school environment](#) about 84% of surveyed pupils said the school environment is friendly. The presence of bullying or violence was mentioned by 16-30% of pupils.

The reform of inclusive education has created a regulatory framework to ensure an accessible education for all children, but it is not fully implemented. Children with complex needs remain segregated. According to the

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<sup>2</sup> Children left-behind - children separated from their parents, children whose parents (or only parent) are temporarily in another locality or abroad, children temporarily or permanently left without parental care, children taken from their parents due to imminent danger to their life or health.

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Education Code still allows segregated schooling by denying admission to children with psycho-social and intellectual disabilities in schools for all children.

While the number of children with special educational needs in general schools has increased, inclusive education programmes differ from one district to another, with insufficient human and financial resources and poor infrastructure.

### Child participation

Moldova facilitates children's involvement and participation in decision-making that affects them and the community. The [Children's Consultative Council](#) is consulted on the protection and promotion of children's rights. The Child Rights Information and Documentation Centre also

operates a Children's Council, where children express their views on the realisation of their rights. In 2016, they drafted a [Children's Report from Moldova to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#), which was presented to the Committee by the [children](#) themselves. Educational institutions have also developed mechanisms to consult children.

CONCORDIA is one of the organisations that supports the Children's Parliament, in accordance with the principles of the UNCRC. The aim is to provide a safe, inclusive space for children to express their views, receive information, and collaborate. Through regular meetings, they discuss issues and propose solutions, translating discussions into activities that empower them to influence their community and participate in decision-making.

### Additional children's rights issues

An ongoing challenge in Moldova is ensuring that children can live in their family or in family-based care. The government needs to develop more effective programmes to prevent children being separated from their families. The number of children left behind or separated from their parents (33,830 children in 2023), children at risk<sup>3</sup> (11,619 children in 2023), children placed in foster care (4,320 children in 2023) and children placed in residential care (617 in 2023) [is increasing every year](#). CONCORDIA notes an increasing trend of institutionalisation or placement in foster care services of children aged 4-8 years.

There is also a lack of services for children leaving residential or foster care. Once out of the care system, care leavers have no

support to develop their skills and move to an independent life.

Access to services for children with autism spectrum disorders remains challenging despite the approval of a legal framework. Moldova has prioritised these services in its National Programme for Mental Health and developed a separate regulatory framework for a Specialised Centre for Intervention in Autism Spectrum Disorders.

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

#### Child poverty in Moldova

CONCORDIA believe that poverty poses the most severe risk for children's rights. Child poverty rates are still very high, including extreme poverty. According to [official data](#), child poverty

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<sup>3</sup> Children at risk - children who are victims of violence, neglected children, children who are engaged in vagrancy, begging and prostitution, children whose parents are deceased, children who live on the street, have been shot or have been driven away from home, children who are victims of crime, children in conflict with the law.

increased in 2023. The proportion of children living in poverty is 30.2% (1.8% higher than 2022). Children in rural areas are at greater risk of poverty than those in urban areas.

CONCORDIA highlighted several areas where Moldova should act to tackle child poverty and social exclusion:

- Women's empowerment, with employment opportunities for women and efforts to tackle violence against women, including domestic violence.
- The provision of financial and other support for children and families in need.
- Support for children and young people leaving the care system at 16 and/or 18.
- Economic and agricultural development and employment opportunities in rural areas.
- Support to parents and households facing particular difficulties, to prevent violence in families and separation of children from their parents.
- Community services such as childcare services, after-school

programmes, parent clubs and youth clubs.

- Support for strengthening the positive role of fatherhood.
- Social services at community level for children at risk and care services for young children.
- Programmes to promote digital safety among children and parents.
- Programmes to identify risk factors and prevent abuse, violence, exploitation and human trafficking.
- Programmes to encourage children's participation and involvement in civic life and community activities.

The most vulnerable children in Moldova are:

- children in households with low levels of parental education
- children whose parents have low levels of employment
- children in single-parent households
- children in families where parents consume alcohol and where there is aggressive behaviour
- families where there is at

least one member with severe disabilities and/or psycho-social or intellectual disabilities

- children left behind or without parental care or separated from their parents

According to a 2023 [report by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection](#) there were 33,830



children left behind or separated from their parents in Moldova.

### Example of good practice to mitigate child poverty

One out of three children is a victim of violence, abuse, neglect or human trafficking in Moldova. CONCORDIA Moldova is providing care for affected children and their mothers and support in overcoming trauma. Since 2021, CONCORDIA has been providing psycho-social support and re-integration into the community in collaboration with school psychologists, social workers and other specialists.

## Enlargement Countries

The process of joining the EU, also called accession, has three main steps: candidacy, accession negotiations and treaty ratification. The Enlargement Package aims to provide a detailed assessment of the state of play in enlargement countries, including the progress concerning upholding human rights and children's rights. For the 2024 Enlargement Package of the European Commission, Eurochild consulted with members to share their insights into the situation of children in the EU enlargement countries.

This contribution can inform the annual Enlargement Package presented by the European Commission, with overviews of the most pressing issues and progress by Moldova towards EU accession.

According to CONCORDIA, Moldova has integrated children's rights issues in the [2023 Enlargement Package](#). In [Chapter 19: Social Policy and Employment](#)

[in the Commission Staff Working Document](#) Moldova outlines progress made on child protection and its future plans.

CONCORDIA identified the implementation of the National Programme for Child Protection 2022-2026 as a top priority. The plan is focused on 3 objectives:

- Strengthening the child protection system to respond promptly and effectively to the needs of each child, with increased spending on family and child protection to 6.6% of the national budget.
- Ensuring zero tolerance for any form of violence against children.
- Ensuring the upbringing of children in a safe and protective family setting, guaranteeing their well-being through prevention programmes and the provision of quality services for children and families.

It is also necessary to implement other programmes that support children's well-being and protection, including the [National](#)

[Programme for Preventing and Tackling Violence against Women and Violence in the Family 2023-2027](#) and the [National Programme for Employment 2022-2026](#).

While Moldova has made progress in developing regulatory frameworks, diversifying services and ensuring cohesion between different actors responsible for the social protection of children, it has made less progress in the development and financing of support services for children and families.

According to CONCORDIA, there are mechanisms in place to involve stakeholders, including children and CSOs, to shape national policies affecting children. Both the Government of Moldova and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection work in partnership with CSOs and other institutions. There are commissions and working groups on issues related to the promotion and protection of children's rights.

CONCORDIA recommends that the EU supports smaller CSOs working with children, families and communities and social service providers in Moldova, with more accessible funding application procedures. Long-term projects should be more accessible to small CSOs, particularly those working with children in rural areas.



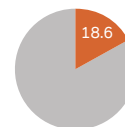
## “Country Recommendation

The Netherlands should develop a long-term and holistic vision on children and youth, and introduce mandatory Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) in all relevant policy areas, and Child Participation Assessments (CPAs).

## Country Profile 2024



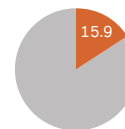
# Netherlands



### Child Population:

**3,313,102 (2023)**

18.6% of total population



### Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:

**472,000 (2023)**

15.9% (2023)

▲ +2% compared to 2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights

Utrecht University, Dynamics of Youth

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)

## Children's Rights in The Netherlands

The Netherlands ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1995. The Convention took immediate domestic effect in the Netherlands, with no further legal action required to incorporate it into national law. However, this does not mean that all UNCRC provisions can successfully be invoked before national courts.

In 2023 the Dutch government [agreed to ratify the Third Optional Protocol to the UNCRC](#), but this has not happened yet. This will only be done once the ratification process of the complaints procedure to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been completed and after an evaluation.

There is currently no Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) process in government decision-making. This was taken up by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its [2022 Concluding](#)

[Observations](#), but the [government has not addressed this in its response](#). In 2023, the Dutch Council for Public Health and Society recommended that the rights of children be consistently taken into account in legislation, regulations and policy, and that [CRIAs are a concrete step to identify the impacts on children in priority areas such as housing and health](#).

The Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights is calling for mandatory CRIAs. The Dutch Children's Ombudsman is currently developing a CRIA tool and several ministries are involved in the pilot phase. However, under current plans CRIAs would be optional. Since child participation is an important element of CRIAs, the Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights is also advocating for a child participation assessment process.

Currently there is no national strategy on children's rights. There are plans to develop a national youth strategy focused on people

aged 12-29, and the new Dutch Government (installed in July 2024) will decide on its design, focus and duration.

The implementation of the UNCRC is led by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, which coordinates cross-department work on children's rights between five ministries. The government responded to the Concluding Observations in a [letter to the Parliament](#) in 2022.

Together with UNICEF Netherlands and the Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport also organises an annual National Children's Rights Dialogue between children's rights organisations and civil servants, to discuss government action on the latest Concluding Observations. The basis for this dialogue is the [Children's Rights in Motion](#) monitor, developed by the Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights every year, which analyses the extent to which the UNCRC

recommendations are being implemented.

Between March 2022 and July 2024, the Dutch Government referred to the UNCRC in 30 letters to the Parliament. Government responses to the Concluding Observations were sent to Parliament and made public online.

The new government programme by the new far-right government contains measures for strengthening youth care and tackling poverty among children, but does not provide a structural vision that will bring long-term solutions and improvements for guaranteeing children's rights. In the new programme, the government emphasises stabilising poverty figures instead of reducing them.

### Children's mental health

Children say they experience increasing pressures from school and homework. They are [concerned about their future](#) and

issues such as housing shortages and climate change.

Mental health support for children is within a system that aims to integrate healthcare, education and social services. This includes Primary Care and General Practitioners, Youth Health Care Services (for children from birth to 18) and School Health Services, which have dedicated professionals for children with mental health issues. Care and Advice Teams in schools work with teachers, parents and specialists to support students with mental health needs. Schools provide tailored education plans and support for children with mental health issues, ensuring they receive appropriate care and education. Community Mental Health Teams provide support and intervention within the community, working closely with schools, families, and other services. For more complex cases, children are referred to specialised psychiatric care, and immediate support is available for children experiencing acute mental health crises.

However, there are concerns that (announced) budget cuts will reduce the support available and exacerbate already long waiting lists. There are also concerns that more vulnerable children, including those with a migration background, are less likely to receive care.

Recommendations by civil society organisations (CSOs):

- Improve coordination between services, to enhance the effectiveness of mental health care for children.
- Focus on prevention and recruit sufficient staff.
- Introduce centralised case management systems where a single case manager oversees a child's mental health care across services, to maintain continuity and ensure all aspects of the child's needs are addressed.
- Reduce waiting times for specialist mental health services.
- Improve data collection on child mental health to better understand prevalence,

treatment outcomes and areas needing improvement.

- Actively involve parents and guardians and provide them with clear information about available services and care pathways.

### Child safety and well-being online

The government has published guidance for a '[Kinderrechten \(child's rights\) impact assessment](#)' in the digital context, as a tool to assess the impact of digital platforms on children, and to facilitate discussion.

Children's rights organisations have concerns on the role that [social media](#) plays in the mental health of children and young people.

Although there is a restrictive approach on the use of mobile phones in the classroom, including social media, there is no regulation of so-called 'childfluencers', child exploitation online, nor online gambling, especially in video games.

Stronger regulations in these areas are needed.

### Child protection systems

The Child Protection Act and the Youth Act in 2015 heralded a major change in the Dutch Child Protection system. One of the most prominent changes being the transition of youth services from national/provincial responsibility to the local/municipal level. The implementation of the transition is still hampered by several factors including: insufficient funding, long waiting lists and processing times, a shortage of child protection workers, a complex child protection system with different organisations involved, and high staff turnover.

The child protection system is under considerable pressure, particularly in the enforcement of short or long-term out-of-home placements for children. As a result, it is questionable whether the national authorities fulfill their international obligations with regard to family reunification and

legal protection of children and parents.

## Education

There is an agenda for inclusive education, but no resources for implementation. A number of experimental schemes are currently underway to bring mainstream and special education closer together and remove barriers between care and education.

A new approach to absenteeism has been announced, the effects of which remain to be seen. Absenteeism has increased, as has the number of exemptions from compulsory education. It is not clear exactly how many children are home-schooled. The [Bill on home education](#), which should ensure monitoring of home-schooling, appears to have stalled.



## Climate change and the environment

About 70% of Dutch children and young people are concerned about climate change. Fear and sadness are mentioned by children as common feelings, with some literally losing sleep over it.

[Research in 2023](#) concluded that children are active in the climate movement because they are very concerned about climate change, are frustrated that not enough is being done and want to speak out.

There is no policy/law in place to ensure a sustainable, healthy physical environment for children in The Netherlands.

## Child participation

The participation of children in public decision-making is limited and fragmented at both national and local level. The Dutch National Youth Council is developing a [National Youth Strategy](#) with the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, to ensure participation of

12-29 year-olds in public policy, but it is up to the new government to introduce concrete measures.

There is no sign of implementation of the [Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool](#). The Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights is advocating for a Child Participation Assessment to provide indicators with which states can measure progress in implementing the [Council of Europe Recommendation on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18](#).

Child participation concerns several ministries but there are no figures available on how many recommendations from children and youth councils are included in public policy-making. Therefore, little is known about the extent to which children are given the opportunity to participate in a meaningful way in issues that are important to them.

Participation in the context of family law proceedings remains largely limited to children aged 12

and older, although this is subject to discussion and research in the [Hear, Hear project by Utrecht University](#).

## Children in migration

In January 2023 there were 12,519 children in the Central Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers. Due to a shortage of locations, many refugees and asylum seekers are moved to temporary emergency shelters that are not suitable for children and have limited or no education and healthcare services. Often there is no privacy and a lack of suitable food.

The Netherlands should include the best interests of the child in the Aliens Act so that it is aligned with the UNCRC and provide durable solutions for children in The Netherlands without a residence permit. The detention of children on the grounds of immigration status should be abolished.

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

### Child poverty in The Netherlands

According to Eurostat data, child poverty has increased from 13.9% in 2022 to 15.9% in 2023.

However, The Netherlands' national statistics on child poverty consider only financial indicators and, according to these, child poverty has decreased due to an active policy in this area.

Child poverty is rising and there is a need to increase child-related benefits to ensure all children have an adequate standard of living, including on the Dutch Caribbean islands. The Netherlands should also, in certain cases, make sure that children are able to receive social security

directly and lift [reservation to Article 26 of the UNCRC](#).

We are happy to learn that the new coalition government has decided to continue free school breakfasts for schools with at least 30% of their students coming from low-income families.

Eurochild members highlighted several priorities for The Netherlands to address child poverty and social exclusion:

- Stop funding cuts to municipalities that provide support to households living in poverty.
- Develop a long-term, integrated vision for children and youth and ensure that they participate in the process.
- Allocate more ESF+ funds to combating child poverty.

The Dutch statistics agency has identified single-parent

households and households with a non-European immigration background as among those at higher risk of poverty.

### European Social Fund + (ESF+)

Under the ESF+, the Netherlands has not allocated money to fight child poverty via the ESF+ category “Secondary Theme code 06: addressing child poverty”. However, it does spend €2.5 million combatting material deprivation among children. This [constitutes around 0.6% of the total ESF+ budget](#) (€413 million).

Eurochild members are not involved in the Monitoring Committee of the ESF+.<sup>2</sup>

### The European Child Guarantee

Eurochild members do not share the view that The Netherlands' [National Action Plan \(NAP\)](#)

includes relevant data collection and indicators to effectively monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Child Guarantee, and point to Portugal's NAP as a useful reference. The former Dutch Government was more ambitious in its child poverty reduction targets than the current government. The Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis says [child poverty is due to increase by 2028](#).

The Dutch NAP does not include measures to prioritise all groups of children in need. Some of the groups of children that should be included are:

- Children with migrant backgrounds: [almost 7 out of 10 children with a long-term risk of poverty have a non-European background](#).
- Children from single-parent families: [11.9% from single-parent families were at risk of](#)

<sup>2</sup> In order to examine the performance of programmes, Member States should set up monitoring committees, whose composition should include representatives of relevant partners, including civil society organisations. Member States may set up a single monitoring committee to cover more than one programme.

poverty, compared to 4% from two-parent families.<sup>3</sup>

- Roma children.
- Children affected by homelessness.

The Netherlands has published its biennial report on the implementation of the Child Guarantee.

Eurochild members are aware of only a couple of meetings with CSOs during the development of the Dutch NAP and the biennial monitoring report. The Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights would like to see effective participation of children in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Child Guarantee. The government should organise regular discussions with CSOs working with children on the implementation of the NAP.

**“Overall, the Dutch NAP seems to be a list of activities rather than a clear plan. We are worried about how the 2024 Dutch Government coalition agreement will influence the current Plan. The new government seems to give less priority to combating child poverty than the previous government.”**

## **European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations**

### **Overview of the Country Report**

According to the latest Country Report by the European Commission the share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in The Netherlands is stable and below the EU average. However,

people with a migrant background, children with disabilities, and children with parents born outside The Netherlands are disproportionately affected.

There is a growing teacher shortage, including in primary education. This is highest in urban areas, in special education and in schools with a disadvantaged student population. Shortages mean that schools need to use emergency solutions such as employing unqualified teachers, merging classes, or asking pupils to stay home for a day. The share of early school leavers is below the EU target, but slightly increased in 2023.

Participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) from age 3 is higher than the EU average (93%), but below the EU target of 96%. A special ECEC scheme for disadvantaged children is in place but there is a shortage of available places, affecting children who most need these services.

There is an extensive system of support for households to cover the costs of housing, healthcare and childcare, with a targeted approach for disadvantaged families. However, the system is highly complex, thereby hindering implementation. The need for reform became evident when over 20,000 families were wrongly accused of fraud after requesting childcare benefits. Eurochild members in The Netherlands highlighted that some parents were told that they had to pay back thousands of euros even though they were entitled to this money. As a result, some of those affected had to deal with a profound disruption of their lives due to, among other things, losing their job or home and/or psychological problems. At home there was often little money and a lot of stress for a long time. For example, children and young people had no money to play sports or go on holiday. And young people, for example, have fallen behind in their studies.

<sup>3</sup> These numbers are national statistics, and are different from the AROPE figures.

## “Country Recommendation

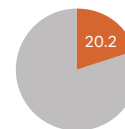
Northern Ireland should fully implement and utilise our unique legal framework that mandates cooperation between children's services to maximise limited resources, drive forward transformation and fulfil children's rights.

## Country Profile 2024

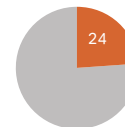


# Northern Ireland

### Statistics



**Child Population 0-15:**  
**388,200 (2023)**  
20.2% (2023)<sup>1</sup>



**Poverty rate<sup>2</sup>:**  
**109,000 (2022-2023)**  
24% (2022-2023)  
▲ +6% compared to 2021-2022

### RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI)

<sup>1</sup> 2023 Mid-year Population Estimates for Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Northern Ireland Poverty and Income Inequality Report, 2022/23, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2024.

## Children's Rights in Northern Ireland

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has not been formally incorporated into domestic law in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) has called for this, and in a joint statement with Commissioners in Scotland and Wales in 2022 said: 'Incorporation of the UNCRC into NI domestic law is the most effective way to make sure every child that lives here has the best start in life and is supported throughout their childhood to grow, learn and flourish.'

Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) are currently optional for government departments in Northern Ireland, and there is no systematic approach to conducting such assessments across the various relevant policy areas and statutory duty

bearers. So CRIAs and associated processes are patchy and piecemeal. There are examples of good practice, such as the [decision by the Executive Office](#) to highlight the impact on children and young people of their budgetary constraints in 2023-2024, which resulted in reduced funding for youth diversionary activities and community integration projects. However, there are also worrying examples of retrospective policy screening, suggesting some government departments view such assessments as a bureaucratic or box-ticking exercise to be completed after decisions are made. For example, the Department of Education's Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment of the discontinuation of the School Holiday Food Grant was conducted in July 2023, months after this essential financial support was cut during the Easter period.

Children in Northern Ireland believes comprehensive CRIAs should be placed on a statutory footing, with sufficient detail on the potential impacts of decisions and with government working closely with the Community and Voluntary Sector to assess a wide range of evidence.

The Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 mandates the Executive to develop and implement a strategy for improving the well-being of children and young people. The [current strategy \(2020-2030\)](#) aims to achieve the high-level outcome that 'children and young people live in a society which respects their rights' and includes other aims such as 'children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted.'<sup>3</sup> Children in Northern Ireland is calling for a national strategy as a platform and framework to help break down barriers to integration

and siloed working within government. It is also key to help monitor and track progress on a wide range of children's outcomes across various sectors.

The NICCY promotes awareness and understanding of the UNCRC, but there is often little reference made to the Convention by senior officials in government departments or by Ministers. The Northern Ireland Executive does not formally respond to the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, because this remains a responsibility of the state party, the United Kingdom, and therefore a matter for the government in Westminster. However, the [Children's Law Centre](#) in Northern Ireland plays a key role in the Committee's reporting process, and gathers extensive evidence from children and young people, and from civil society organisations, in order to inform

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<sup>3</sup> 'Good relations' in the Northern Ireland context, and in government initiatives, usually refers to cross-community integration between Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist populations.



the content of the Concluding Observations.

In 2023, the independent [Review of Children's Social Care Services](#) in Northern Ireland recommended that the Northern Ireland Executive should create a new Ministerial portfolio for Children and Families, which Children in Northern Ireland strongly supports.

The decision, by the Northern Ireland Department of Health in 2023, to cut core funding for around 60 community and voluntary sector organisations by 50% has been [hugely damaging](#). This has led to some organisations no longer operating and others reducing their services. There is a growing concern that the government is failing to properly value and appreciate the importance of effective advocacy and the work of child rights defenders, which is reflected in ongoing budgetary cuts and an incredibly difficult funding environment.

## Children's mental health

The NICCY's rights-based review of mental health services '[Still Waiting](#)', in 2018, highlighted a number of serious issues including 'chronic under-investment', 'alarming gaps in data' and 'a very mixed experience from young people on the availability, accessibility and quality of services provided.' Subsequent [monitoring reports](#), examining progress on the key recommendations made by the NICCY, have continued to highlight worrying trends in waiting lists and the quality of support services. Children in Northern Ireland agrees with the NICCY's assessment that current services are still not addressing needs, and that closer cooperation with the Community and Voluntary Sector, as well as long-term ring-fenced funding, are necessary to strengthen early intervention, offer more specialist support (including within school settings) and improve outcomes for children and young people.

## Child safety and well-being online

Children in Northern Ireland believes the UK's Online Safety legislation must be strengthened to place more stringent duties on digital media companies to protect children and young people from harm, including more effective regulation and enforcement. In June 2024, Children in Northern Ireland published [youth-led research](#) on the impact of social media on teenage girls in Northern Ireland, highlighting experiences of cyberbullying, impacts on self-esteem and body image, and some of the ways that social media can contribute to serious mental health conditions and self-harm. This report also highlighted what needs to change to better support young girls, including: stricter controls from app developers and social media companies to prevent cyberbullying and stop harmful content; more government support to educate and equip parents/carers with appropriate knowledge; and more guidance

from parents/carers, and adults in general, with regard to the negative impacts.

## Child protection systems

Northern Ireland has extensive early intervention and family support infrastructure to help families in vulnerable situations and prevent separation, but too often the work of the Community and Voluntary Sector in this field is undervalued and not properly resourced. According to Children in Northern Ireland, there is a strong case and relevant evidence base for continuing to expand and bolster these support services so that problems are identified sooner and help is offered earlier.

Children in Northern Ireland also remains deeply concerned about the government's failure to establish a Child Death Overview Panel, which is a significant gap in the child protection system. A statutory duty to convene the Panel was placed on the Northern Ireland Safeguarding Board in 2011 but was never commenced by the Department of Health. The

Panel was also recommended in a [report of the Inquiry into Hyponatraemia-Related Deaths](#) that was published following an extensive investigation into the deaths of five children in hospitals in Northern Ireland in 2018.

## Education

Some children and young people in Northern Ireland face significant barriers to accessing education due to lack of capacity within specialist settings, difficulties and delays in getting specialist support in mainstream schools, and a lack of understanding and awareness of issues surrounding school avoidance.

Support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is governed by a comprehensive legal framework and code of practice, delivered by the centralised Education Authority. However, in practice, very often the process and procedure-driven system fails to

recognise the specific needs of individual children. The system is also struggling to cope with ever-increasing demand for SEND support. In April 2024, the Education Minister [announced a significant investment programme](#) to increase capacity in facilities for children with SEND that was widely welcomed. However, significant questions remain around whether proposals for reform will dilute specialist support, and there has been a lack of attention and focus given to the issue of children unable to attend school due to emotional difficulties, anxiety, and psychological distress.

## Climate change and the environment

The NICCY has facilitated important [contributions from children and young people](#) regarding climate change adaptation, mitigation and environmental policy. However, official climate action and policy

is still in its infancy in the region, and the first proposed Carbon Budget was only published in June 2023, following the passing of the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act in 2022, which set out clear targets and timescales. Government departments need to do much more to involve children and young people in this work and reflect their voices and concerns in policy-making in this area.

## Child participation

Children's participation in policy-making, and the decisions that affect their lives, remains inconsistent and patchy across government departments in Northern Ireland. There are examples of good practice, such as the role of the Experts by Experience group of young people involved in the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services, facilitated by the Voice of Young People in Care.<sup>4</sup> There is also a significant amount of ongoing work across

community and voluntary sector organisations, such as the [Northern Ireland Youth Forum](#) and [Include Youth](#), to promote the voice of children and young people on issues that affect them.

Northern Ireland has not completed a baseline assessment of the state of play regarding child participation, or implemented the [Council of Europe's Child Participation Assessment Tool](#).

## Additional children's rights issues

Children in Northern Ireland has continued to highlight children and young people's experience of food insecurity and the impact of poverty. Its Youth Advisory Group, attached to the *Gets Active Project* – a range of food and holiday activity programmes funded through charitable grants – has conducted peer research to understand the effects of the extreme rise in living costs on children and their

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<sup>4</sup> Kilpatrick B. *Overview of the Experts by Experience Reference Group: Key Messages*, 2023.

families. Children in Northern Ireland has also supported a range of work and lobbying for increased provision and support for children with disabilities, including educational reform, and improvements in social care and family support.

## Poverty and Social Exclusion - Experiences of children, families and communities

### Child poverty in Northern Ireland

24% of children in Northern Ireland were living in relative poverty in 2022-2023, a significant increase from 18% in 2021-2022.<sup>5</sup>

A child is defined as an individual aged under 16. A person is also defined as a child if they are 16 to 19 years old and they are:

- not married nor in a Civil

Partnership nor living with a partner; and

- living with parents/a responsible adult; and
- in full-time non-advanced education or in unwaged government training.

Children in Northern Ireland identified three key issues to address child poverty and social exclusion.

Firstly, the government should strengthen social security and tackle low pay. As part of this, it is essential to bolster child-related benefits. That means fully implementing the recommendations of the [Independent Advisory Panel's Report on Welfare Mitigations](#) in 2022, which includes offsetting the two-child<sup>6</sup> benefit limit and introducing grants and payments to support specific groups such as disabled children. These measures would help ensure that

every family's level of income is sufficient to afford the essentials and prevent food insecurity.

Secondly, for those on the lowest incomes, the government needs to invest more in early years programmes, childcare, and family support services. For example, the 2023 [Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services](#) recommended that Sure Start (an integrated programme for 0-3 year-olds in disadvantaged communities) should be

expanded and that there should be greater investment in the non-stigmatising support delivered by the Community and Voluntary Sector. The Education Minister announced a £25 million investment in early years and childcare in 2024, which was widely welcomed, but there remain considerable obstacles to delivering a universal subsidy that effectively reduces costs and supports the sector to be fully inclusive for children with additional needs.



<sup>5</sup> [Northern Ireland Poverty and Income Inequality Report, 2022/23](#), Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2024.

<sup>6</sup> The two-child limit prevents parents from receiving any extra financial support (through universal credit or child tax credit) for a third or subsequent child born after 6 April 2017.

Thirdly, Northern Ireland is still in a public funding crisis, and many cuts to educational support services made in 2023 have not been restored, such as the decision to cease the School Holiday Food Grant scheme and Happy Healthy Minds (counselling and psychotherapy for primary school age children). [Analysis by local academics](#) highlighted the ‘cumulative impact on groups which are already disadvantaged’ and called for these cuts to be reversed.

**“Access to educational support such as Free School Meals and Uniform Grants should be widened to more children and young people, as the current eligibility criteria does not even fully account for those deemed to be living in poverty according to official statistics.”**

According to Children in Northern Ireland, refugees and those seeking asylum are some of the children most in need, as they often struggle to access basic services such as healthcare and education. They are also often more exposed to safeguarding risks and child criminal exploitation, as highlighted in a [report by ECPAT UK and University College London](#).

Other marginalised [minority groups](#) such as Roma and Irish Travellers continue to experience significant structural barriers, particularly with regard to education. Children with disabilities and those with additional needs are also disproportionately affected by poverty, and by the failure of government to adequately invest in relevant healthcare and educational support services.

Children in Northern Ireland identified three policy priorities that would contribute to ending child poverty and social exclusion:

- investing in child-related social security benefits;
- rolling out universal Free School Meals;
- expanding early years programmes and inclusive childcare provision.

### Example of good practice to mitigate child poverty

Since 2021 Children in Northern Ireland has been working in partnership with youth organisations and family centres to deliver food and activities for children and young people in disadvantaged areas. They also established a Youth Advisory Group to shape these programmes and get young people directly involved in campaigning for policy change on social inclusion and tackling poverty. The [Gets Active Project](#), named after each town (e.g. Portadown Gets Active), is unique because it addresses essential needs such as food – mitigating some of the most harmful impacts of poverty – and also offers young people the opportunity to engage

with policymakers and advocate for the changes that they want to see in their communities.

Children in Northern Ireland's Youth Advisory Group has conducted peer research on the impact of rising inflation and the cost of living, and the young people have also developed a [manifesto](#) with key policy recommendations and discussed these with local political representatives. However, funding for the Gets Active Project and the Youth Advisory Group comes mainly from charitable grants and only covers short time periods. While some statutory bodies have supported this work, and recognise the significance of the outcomes, there are currently no plans to provide long-term government funding, which is a major concern for the project's sustainability.

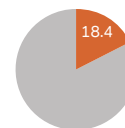
## “Country Recommendation

Poland should take action to enhance mental health services for children, particularly for those in alternative care and those with migrant backgrounds, ensuring timely access to both psychological and psychiatric support, and urgently address the growing mental health crisis among these vulnerable groups.

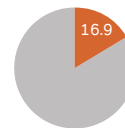
## Country Profile 2024



# Poland



**Child Population:**  
18.4% of total population



**Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:**  
**1,136,000 (2023)**  
16.9% (2023)  
▲ +0.2% compared to 2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Fundacja Happy Kids (Happy Kids Foundation)

Koalicja na rzecz Rodzinnej Opieki Zastępczej (Polish Foster Care Coalition)

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)

## Children's Rights in Poland

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has been partly incorporated into domestic law in Poland. The latest [Concluding Observations](#) by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in 2021, listed several pieces of legislation that aim to improve the situation of children.

However, there is no Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) tool or process in Poland, to assess the impact of policies and legislation on children's rights. In the 2020 [civil society alternative report](#) to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, organisations pointed to the need for a national strategy for children, for a mechanism to monitor the implementation of the UNCRC and an adequate budget for children. The UN Committee has also urged Poland to develop these. This could be the first step towards Poland adopting a CRIA process.

According to Eurochild members in Poland there is some awareness

and understanding of the UNCRC among policymakers. For example, Poland has the [Office of the Ombudsman for Children](#). There is also a [Parliamentary Commission on Children and Youth](#) and other thematic bodies such as the [Parliamentary Group on Foster Care](#).

However, the last Concluding Observations included a recommendation for Poland to provide the Office of the Ombudsman with the resources necessary to ensure that it can effectively, independently and fully implement its mandate for the promotion, protection and monitoring of children's rights.

So far, the government has not responded publicly to the Committee's Concluding Observations.

Since 2014 the Ombudsman for Human Rights [has been urging Poland to ratify the UNCRC Optional Protocol III on a communications procedure](#), with no results yet.

## Children's mental health

Children in Poland face a mental health crisis, particularly those in alternative care and from migrant backgrounds. The increasing number of refugee children, especially from Ukraine, highlights the urgent need for better integration and mental health services.

There is a dedicated mental health workforce, but it is insufficient to meet increasing demand for support. Major barriers include long waiting lists and a shortage of specialists.

Early intervention support and access to specialist mental health services are limited due to a lack of resources and trained professionals. There are currently 555 child psychiatrists, which means there is one doctor for every 12,400 children and adolescents under the age of 18.

[Some schools offer mental health support](#), however the availability of support varies widely across different regions and schools.

Mental health services are not fully integrated into a cohesive system. Initiatives such as [WHO's Mental Health Gap Action Programme](#) aim to improve integration, but progress is ongoing.

Eurochild members in Poland recommend the following measures to improve mental health support services:

- increased funding and an expanded workforce;
- enhanced early intervention services;
- better integration of mental health services in the healthcare and education systems;
- raised awareness to reduce stigma associated with seeking psychological/psychiatric help.

## Child safety and well-being online

Children in Poland face significant risks online, including cyberbullying, data privacy issues and exposure to harmful content, with insufficient measures to

safeguard children in the digital sphere.

In 2024, the Polish data protection authority provided guidance on the adoption and implementation of the 2023 amendments to the Act on Counteracting Threats of Sexual Offences (the Lex Kamilek) that provides new standards for the protection of minors in alignment with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation.

There is a [Parliamentary Group for Children's Cybersecurity](#) - a group of politicians focused on digital safety of children – established in November 2023, but so far its activities have been minimal.

There is a need for stronger national policy or legislation, even if only to strengthen data protection measures and avoid easy access to children's data.

Poland has launched the [Digital Competence Development Programme 2020-2030](#), which focuses on enhancing digital skills across various sectors, including education. This is designed to boost digital literacy starting from pre-school and continuing to secondary schools. The goal is to prepare pupils to navigate the digital world, with an emphasis on safety, critical analysis, and the use of artificial intelligence tools.

The implementation of digital literacy programmes in Polish schools to enhance children's safety and digital competence is welcome. Increasing parents' awareness is also crucial.

### Child protection systems

The 2011 Act on Family Support and the Alternative Care System that includes both family-based care and institutional care, as well as the Family and Guardianship Code, govern the placement

of children in alternative care. The Act mandates a system of support for families in vulnerable situations in order to prevent the unnecessary separation of children. Each year the Polish Council of Ministers presents [information](#) to the Polish parliament on the implementation of the 2011 Act.

There is a shortage of alternative care placements for vulnerable children, in both family-based care and institutional care. At least 1,370 children cannot be placed in a safe alternative environment. The [Ombudsman for Human Rights has intervened](#) with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy on this issue. A response and well-designed action plan from government and local authorities is urgently needed. The increase of children taken into alternative care is due to various reasons such as long procedures to decide on a child's withdrawal from family and the 'Lex Kamilek'<sup>2</sup>

law passed in 2023, introducing stronger measures to protect children from all forms of violence and abuse. This law was adopted following a case of child abuse and neglect and the failure of child protection services to respond in a timely manner.

The "Lex Kamilek" law is also a response to recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child which has called on Poland to take urgent action to protect children from all forms of violence and sexual exploitation and abuse. The Committee emphasised the need for a comprehensive national strategy to combat violence against children.

### Education

Poland's education system emphasises inclusivity and quality through diverse programmes and institutions catering to children's different needs.

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<sup>2</sup> The 2023 Lex Kamilek law, which came into force in 2024, obliges every entity involved in children's leisure, care, education, health and so on to implement child protection measures.

Initiatives include multicultural education, support services for marginalised communities, and programmes for children with disabilities. However, there are disparities in resource allocation, especially in underserved areas. In addition, diversity requires a shift in mindset and attitudes, so awareness campaigns and diversity training programmes for both students and staff should be introduced.

Poland has implemented legislative measures to ensure educational accessibility - the Act on the Education System that mandates inclusive education. Policies focus on providing support services, teacher training and resources to prevent exclusion and discrimination of children with disabilities and other special needs. However, access to inclusive education remains challenging.

### Climate change and the environment

High levels of emissions and the use of coal and wood burning

contribute to air pollution, exacerbating respiratory problems and other health issues among children. Children in urban areas and those from low-income families are more vulnerable to environmental hazards due to higher exposure to pollution and/or limited access to green spaces.

In 2024, the government took significant steps to enhance climate education as part of the national curriculum. The Ministry of Climate and Environment and education authorities emphasised the importance of teaching climate change and environmental protection in schools.

### Child participation

The Ombudsman for Children has been establishing a [Council for Children and Young People](#), which will become an expert body for the Ombudsperson.

The [Children and Youth Parliament](#) campaigns to promote parliamentary democracy among young people since

1994, currently in primary and secondary schools.

[Youth councils](#) are established in some local authorities. A youth council is an optional consultative local government body and can also act as an advisory body for the district, municipality, county or province. However, the real impact of youth councils needs to be measured.

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

### Child poverty in Poland

In 2023, 16.9% of children in Poland were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, a 0.2% increase from 2022.

Eurochild members in Poland identified the following areas where the government should increase public investment in children:

- There is an urgent need for deinstitutionalisation and to

strengthen family-based forms of alternative care, including family-style residential care facilities. Attention to youth in alternative care who are transitioning into adulthood should also be a priority.

- There is a need to improve access to healthcare services, including mental health support, to ensure children's well-being and address health disparities.
- There is a need to invest in an inclusive education system that supports children with disabilities and those from marginalised communities to reduce social exclusion.
- There is a need to expand social support services, including healthcare, housing and nutrition.

The children most in need in Poland are:

- Care leavers, especially those with disabilities. There is no community-based care offer for young care leavers with disability. The support offered to many care leavers is ineffective and insufficient, driving many



- young people into poverty.
- Children from low-income families. Economic hardship limits access to essential services and educational opportunities, exacerbating poverty.
- Children with disabilities face barriers to inclusive education and healthcare that lead to social exclusion, including children with disabilities in alternative care who are disproportionately placed in institutional care.
- Refugee and migrant children, in particular those from Ukraine, who experience difficulties integrating into the education system and accessing social services, and increasingly are placed in alternative care.

These children need:

- Social support (effective and adequate financial assistance, housing assistance, counselling);
- Inclusive education (access to quality education tailored to diverse needs);
- Healthcare services (both

- physical and mental health);
- Quality family-based alternative care for children with a migrant background.

### Example of good practice to mitigate child poverty

The [Project Helping Hand](#) is a comprehensive child and family support programme focused on increasing caring and parental skills, and developing life skills and new competences.

Neither the Polish Foster Care Coalition nor Happy Kids took part in this project.

### The European Child Guarantee

Poland's [Child Guarantee National Action Plan \(NAP\)](#) only includes one indicator on children in alternative care, namely the development of a digital central register of vacancies in alternative care. This system is not in place and Poland has stated that it will only be ready by 2029. It is expected that this will be financed

by the European Social Fund + and domestic funding.

There are no indicators on improving the quality of alternative care and addressing challenges such as the shortage of foster parents. The indicator used by the government is the number of larger institutions transformed into small group homes. Indicators for the quality of alternative care should be developed instead. Likewise, there are no indicators for the deinstitutionalisation of children with disabilities, who are the most institutionalised in the alternative care system. Poland has been urged by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to end their institutionalisation. There are also no indicators for children with a migrant background other than refugees from Ukraine.

Poland published its [biennial Child Guarantee report](#) in 2024 and it captures the range of target groups indicated in the NAP. However, there is no critical reflection on progress made on the NAP's proposed measures.

While the biennial report recalls all groups indicated in the NAP, the section on 'planned activities' only mentions a few target groups and does not include valuable practices and innovative approaches.

The Polish Foster Care Coalition engaged in dialogue with the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy to advocate for the inclusion of deinstitutionalisation of children in alternative care in the NAP. However, neither the Polish Foster Care Coalition nor Happy Kids have been engaged in monitoring the Child Guarantee.

No children were involved in the processes described above.

**“Overall, our assessment of the implementation of the Child Guarantee is that it should be done in dialogue and collaboration with NGOs and community organisations.”**

## European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report

Poland's [Country Report](#) indicates that the country's poverty rates are below the EU average, but challenges remain. These include a low participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC), which is being addressed through Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) funding and the Maluch Plus programme. RRF funding will support the creation of 47,500 new places in childcare facilities, through infrastructure development for ECEC for children under three.

Concerns about the quality and equity of education are highlighted, as performance in basic skills has decreased in Poland more than the EU average, moving further away from EU targets. This decline is partly due to teacher shortages. To address this, Poland introduced a 30% increase in teacher salaries at

all levels of education starting in January 2024.

During the 2022/23 school year, over 192,000 of the estimated 500,000 displaced Ukrainian children in Poland were enrolled in schools and pre-schools. The government has relied heavily on support from CSOs to meet the needs of Ukrainian refugees. Proper integration of Ukrainian children should be a priority, as neither online schooling nor general support from CSOs is sustainable in the long term.

The [Country Specific Recommendations](#) for Poland point to the fact that the social benefits system is untargeted and not means-tested, so the welfare system has limited redistributive power. However, in 2023 universal child benefits were significantly increased. A further priority should be closing geographical gaps in access to quality and affordable childcare.

The Polish Foster Care Coalition points out that regional disparities should be addressed by the

provision of ECEC in rural areas. Encouraging higher participation in ECEC also involves raising awareness among parents about the benefits of early education. Policies should include outreach and support for families, particularly those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, to increase enrolment.



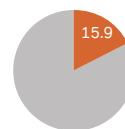
## “Country Recommendation

Portugal should ensure the effective participation of all children in the design, monitoring and evaluation of public policies that concern them, including matters relating to climate change. Portugal must also fight for the effective implementation of the legislation it has in several areas, such as children's rights, children's participation, health and education.

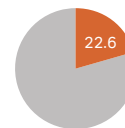
## Country Profile 2024



# Portugal



**Child Population:**  
15.9% of total population



**Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:**  
**379,000 (2023)**  
22.6% (2023)  
▲ +1.9% compared to 2022

### RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Fundação Nossa Senhora do Bom Sucesso

Instituto de Apoio à Criança

Sérgio Costa Araújo

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)

## Children's Rights in Portugal

Portugal ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1990.

The UNCRC has played a key role in the development of Portugal's current child protection system, as set out in the Law for the Protection of Children and Young People in Danger ("Lei de Protecção de Crianças e Jovens em Perigo").

There is no Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) process in Portugal.

Portugal does not have a Children's Ombudsperson. However, the Justice Ombudsman prepares a 'shadow report' on the implementation of the UNCRC in Portugal.

Portugal has a [National Strategy for the Rights of the Child](#) for 2021-2024, an important cross-cutting instrument which brings together action across different

government departments. It is based on five strategic priorities:

1. Promoting well-being and equal opportunities (including a need to intensify efforts to ensure adequate living standards for children and young people);
2. Supporting families and parenting;
3. Promoting access to information and participation of children and young people;
4. Preventing and combating violence against children and young people;
5. Promoting knowledge to enhance a global vision for the rights of children and young people.

Eurochild members believe there is significant awareness and understanding of the UNCRC among policymakers in Portugal. The UNCRC is a cross-cutting reference for policymakers, government and civil society organisations (CSOs) working with children. Entities such as the Portuguese Committee for UNICEF, the Child Support Institute and the Public

Prosecutor's Office work to ensure the fulfilment of rights and promote the well-being of children in Portugal.

Eurochild members are not aware of Portugal's public response to the Concluding Observations by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

### Early childhood development

Portugal has free crèches for children aged 0-3 who were born after 01/09/2024, but there are not enough available places.

The [National System of Early Childhood Intervention](#) is based on coordination between the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, and the Ministries of Health and Education, working directly with families and the community, and is available to all children aged 0-6, with disabilities or developmental delays or at risk. It works through local intervention multidisciplinary teams and aims to give social, educational and health support to children, their

families and other caregivers, in a cooperative approach.

However, Portugal is still one of the few countries in the European Union that places children between 0-3 years old, taken from parents, in residential care.

### Children's mental health

Eurochild members highlighted the need to invest resources to ensure access to mental health support for all children who need it. Many children don't have access despite the fact that mental health services are integrated into Portugal's National Health System, which is free for those under 18. CSOs have made significant efforts to respond to this need.

Public schools do not provide mental health support.

### Child safety and well-being online

There are several laws regarding children and the digital sphere but there are concerns with

their effective implementation. [Portugal's Charter of Human Rights in the Digital Age](#) states:

“Children have the right to special protection and care necessary for their well-being and security in cyberspace.”

However, further efforts are needed to protect children online:

- Strong financial and criminal penalties for technology companies that do not detect, report, and remove child sexual abuse materials;
- Psychological support for victims (children and families).

[The Safer Internet Centre](#) aims to promote the safe, healthy and conscious use of the internet, as well as to contribute to the development of skills that enhance a more informed and inclusive citizenship.

The organisation [Miúdos seguros na net](#) has been working for 20 years helping families, schools and communities to promote

online safety for children and young people.

### Child protection systems

Eurochild members in Portugal identified ways in which the child protection system could be improved:

- Invest more in prevention and provide additional resources to social sector projects.
- Invest more in family and community-based care, including foster families. The focus continues to be on placing children in institutions - more than 90% of children in alternative care are placed in institutions.
- Improve the information system (also for the children themselves) and training for all professionals.
- Improve coordination between the justice system and the child protection system. The participation of children in the context of justice and in the Portuguese protection system is very disappointing.

## Education

Portugal has legislation that guarantees inclusive education, but implementation is hindered by constraints. These include the insufficient capacity of the National Health Service to enable timely diagnoses for children to receive additional support in school. The health system has long waiting lists for consultations, leading to classes with several children with special educational needs but without the required minimum level of dedicated staff to support them. Schools don't have enough human resources (special education teachers, therapists, classroom assistants) to meet children's needs.

### Child participation

Despite improvements there is still a long way to go to ensure effective child participation in Portugal.

Children are involved in Children's Assemblies or “Orçamento Participativo” in schools, but

are not really involved in public decision-making.

The Comissão Nacional de Promoção dos Direitos e Proteção das Crianças e Jovens is launching the 2nd edition of the National Council of Children and Young People. This initiative is aimed at children and young people aged 8-15, with the aim of reaching children from the most diverse backgrounds. It aims to promote access to children and young people to new spaces for social and political participation.

CSOs such as Instituto de Apoio à Criança and UNICEF have been very active in child participation projects.

Overall, Portuguese society is still in favor of keeping the voting age at 18.

### Additional children's rights issues

The Portuguese alternative care system continues to place the children in institutional care, while the number of children in foster

families is minimal. Portugal still has a long way to go in this regard. Children in alternative care tend to remain institutionalised well beyond the time stipulated by law. Policymakers should take more action on deinstitutionalisation.

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

### Child poverty in Portugal

The child poverty rate increased from 20.7% in 2022 to 22.6% in 2023.

Eurochild members in Portugal highlighted three areas where the government should increase public investment in order to address child poverty and social exclusion:

- Children's health and well-being;
- The education system;
- Children in families with housing deprivation or at risk of housing deprivation.

The groups of children most in need are children under the age of three, children with disabilities, children in alternative care, Roma children, children from migrant backgrounds and children in vulnerable families. These children need high quality healthcare, early childhood education and care (ECEC), social services, more effective social protection, and parenting support.

Eurochild members identified three policy priorities that would contribute to ending child poverty and social exclusion in Portugal:

- Healthcare: the government should take action to reduce inequalities in access to healthcare, by improving timely access to high quality health services for all, with special attention to children. One way to achieve this is to subsidise private and third sector healthcare providers that complement the public health system, in order to satisfy unmet healthcare needs with community-based integrated

health services. Portugal has one of the highest out-of-pocket health expenditures in the EU (30% of health expenses are paid directly by families), and waiting times for specialised care (only available in hospitals) are too long, especially for children.

- Early learning: ECEC should not just be seen as a way to allow parents to go to work but needs to focus on early childhood development and learning, with professionals who can respond to children's specific needs.
- Income: Portuguese families need adequate financial support, as current social security is not very effective in tackling poverty and social exclusion. Current levels of high inflation, especially the rising costs of energy and food, are disproportionately affecting the poorest households in Portugal.

Eurochild members welcome the creation of a [Complemento Garantia Para a Infância](#), intended to provide support for children and

young people aged 3-17 whose families are in extreme poverty.

## The European Child Guarantee

There is relevant data and there are indicators to effectively monitor and evaluate Portugal's [Child Guarantee National Action Plan](#) (NAP). However, these are already existing indicators, and there is ongoing work with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development to develop new disaggregated indicators on children under six.

Portugal's NAP identifies five groups of children in need:

- children in situations of abandonment or severe housing deprivation
- children and young people with disabilities
- children and young people with a migrant background
- children and young people from Roma communities
- children in alternative care

In addition, children in vulnerable families should also be included, as they also need special attention regarding access to health, social services and education.

Portugal's implementation of the Child Guarantee is funded by a combination of national and EU funding, but mostly from the ESF+ and the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

Portugal's [biennial report](#) accurately captures the range of activities implemented as outlined in the NAP. However, it does not focus on the target groups identified in the NAP. It gives a broad picture of pre-existing measures and some data on existing indicators.

Eurochild members have not been engaged in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Child Guarantee NAP and are not aware of any formal or consultative mechanism that allows the involvement of stakeholders in this process.

**“Overall, our assessment of the implementation of the Child Guarantee is that it tries to encompass already existing policies and measures regarding vulnerable children and young people. It lacks some innovation.”**

## **European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations**

### **Overview of the Country Report**

The regions of Azores and Madeira have the highest population at risk of poverty or social exclusion in [the country](#).

Energy poverty indicators have improved but still remain high, especially for those at risk of poverty.

Housing is a growing concern in Portugal, with limited access

to social housing and rising homelessness (a 78% increase in 4 years). 90,000 families are considered to be living in undignified conditions. There is also an increase in homelessness among migrants and their families.

Public provision for early childhood education and care (ECEC) is expanding, with Portugal aiming to offer free childcare and family daycare centres for all children born on or after 1 September 2021, covering 100,000 children by 2024. Portugal aims to create 15,000 new ECEC places by 2026, through the PARES programme.

Portugal has adopted legislation to organise and manage mental health services, but there is a shortage of mental health professionals, leading to long waiting lists to access services. Working conditions and low pay for health professionals are a significant factor in staff shortages.

The share of foreign-born students in compulsory education has increased in the last 3 years, requiring the educational system to facilitate the integration of migrant students into Portuguese society from an early age. Underachievement rates for students from disadvantaged groups is worsening, and the underachievement gap between students born in Portugal and those born outside the country is still significant, despite improvements.

There are also significant regional disparities in school drop-out rates.

The Plano 21/23 Escola+, aimed at compensating for loss of learning during Covid-19 has been extended until the end of 2024.

Digital vulnerabilities persist, with low access to broadband Internet in rural areas and limited access to digital public services.

There is no mention of deinstitutionalisation efforts.

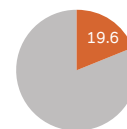
## “Country Recommendation

Romania should take stronger action to ensure equal opportunities for all children, full access to education, rapidly reduce school drop-out rates and provide services for children and families at risk.

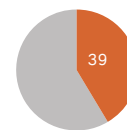
Country  
Profile 2024



# Romania



**Child Population:**  
19.6% of total population



**Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:**  
**1,360,000 (2023)**  
39% (2023)  
▼ -2.5% compared to 2022

**RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):**

FONCP

Organizatia Umanitara CONCORDIA

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)



## Children's Rights in Romania

Romania has incorporated the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into its domestic law. A key piece of legislation is the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of the Child, which details the responsibilities of the state and other entities to uphold these rights.

Despite these legal frameworks, Romania lacks a mandatory Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) process, though impacts on children are considered within broader human rights or social impact assessments. Instituting a mandatory CRIA could ensure that children's rights are central in legislative and policy decisions.

[Romania's National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights 2023-2027 \(Protected Children, Safe Romania\)](#) was developed through a collaborative effort involving various stakeholders, including the National Authority for the

Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (ANPDCA), ministries, public institutions, civil society organisations (CSOs) and in consultation with children.

The Ministry of Family, Youth, and Equal Opportunities and ANPDCA are responsible for overseeing children's policies. Overall, policymakers have a good understanding of the UNCRC.

CSOs focusing on children's rights navigate a dynamic legal and regulatory landscape, which presents both challenges and opportunities. Efforts are being made to increase public contracts for childcare services provided by CSOs, promoting growth in this sector. Advocacy initiatives, such as those for child abuse prevention and comprehensive sexuality education, are progressing despite some resistance, with CSOs actively engaging with various stakeholders.

### Early childhood development

Romania recognises the importance of children's early years, as reflected in several areas:

- *Protected Children, Safe Romania* focuses on improving the quality and accessibility of services for children under three.
- Legislation, such as the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of the Child, ensures the well-being and development of young children, and underscores the state's commitment to support children and their families during the early years.
- The government has taken steps to enhance early childhood education and care (ECEC), including by increasing the number of nurseries and kindergartens.
- There is a focus on improving maternal and child health services, recognising the critical impact of the first three years of life on long-term health and development. Pre-natal care,

nutrition, and early health intervention are part of the national health strategy.

- Romania benefits from EU funds and programmes aimed at supporting early childhood development, including the ESF+ which helps finance projects that promote social inclusion and access to quality education and care for young children.

### Children's mental health

Approximately [22,000 children and adolescents live with a diagnosed mental illness](#), and many others face various developmental, emotional, or cognitive difficulties. It is estimated that a significantly larger number of individuals with psycho-emotional needs remain undiagnosed and do not receive appropriate support.

In the public health system, mental health care for children and adolescents is provided primarily in psychiatric hospitals, and Mental Health Centers are available nationwide. However,

these facilities are focused on treatment rather than prevention.

### Child safety and well-being online

The Internet exposes children to a wealth of opportunities, but also risks that impact their rights, such as cyberbullying, data protection issues, grooming, cybercrime and child sexual abuse material. A [report from 2020](#) shows that the percentage of children in Romania who engage in online activities is high, but many have little or no protection against potential risks. A law protecting children from bullying and cyberbullying was adopted in 2019.<sup>2</sup>

There is also a digital divide with many children with limited or no access to technology (e.g. those in rural communities). The project *Let's Click on Romania* is designed to reduce this divide by providing schools and children in vulnerable areas with refurbished devices to develop their digital skills. The

project has supported over 450 schools, including 80,000 children and teachers with over 8,000 refurbished computers.

### Child protection systems

There are a number of gaps in Romania's child protection system:

- Inadequate funding and insufficient staff to effectively manage cases.
- Significant regional disparities in the quality and availability of child protection services between urban and rural areas. Poorer municipalities struggle to afford daycare centres, school meals, or after school programmes.
- Child protection professionals sometimes lack continuous professional training and development opportunities, affecting the quality of care and support they provide.

However, several measures are in place to support vulnerable families, including:

- Family support services to prevent family separation, including counselling, financial aid, and social services for families in crisis.
- Early intervention programmes to identify and support families at risk of separation.
- Legislation and policies to protect children's rights and prioritise efforts to keep them within their families whenever possible.
- Partnerships with CSOs that play an important role in supporting child protection efforts in Romania, with additional resources, training, and direct services to vulnerable families and children.
- Efforts are being made to better integrate social services with healthcare and education to provide a more holistic approach to families in vulnerable situations.

In 2023, legislation aimed at reducing the number of children entering the child protection system and supporting vulnerable families to avoid family separation was adopted.<sup>3</sup> This law also introduces a Child Observatory to improve case management. There was also allocated funding for projects aimed at preventing family separation, including for CSOs.

### Education

Children in Romania face barriers in accessing quality education and extracurricular activities.

Early school leaving remains an important challenge in Romania, especially in rural areas and among marginalised communities. [The rate of early leavers from education and training is one of the highest in the EU \(16.6% vs 9.5% in 2023\)](#). Nearly 1 in 4 young people in rural areas leaves school before completing secondary education. Access is a factor,

<sup>2</sup> Legii nr. 221 din 18 noiembrie 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Legea nr. 156/2023 privind organizarea activităţii de prevenire a separării copilului de familie.

with long distances to attend high school. The segregation of Roma children in education has significantly increased - [51% in 2021 compared to 28% in 2016](#).

A 2022 study points to 1 in 10 children from rural areas not attending education, and 1 in 3 teenagers being absent from school temporarily or permanently because of household work, highlighting the challenges faced by many children in rural areas.

The National Programme for Reducing School Dropout aims to address the root causes of early school leaving. Schools with higher risks of school dropout are identified through an early warning mechanism, develop plans and then receive additional grant funding. Romania's education system remains one of the most vulnerable in the EU, with insufficient progress in several areas including equal opportunities, early school leaving, performance, infrastructure and funding.

## Climate change and the environment

Environmental issues affecting children in Romania include poor air quality, inadequate access to clean water and sanitation, exposure to hazardous waste, and environmental racism which particularly affects Roma communities. These issues significantly impact children's health, development and well-being, affecting their fundamental rights.

Certain groups of children in Romania are more vulnerable to environmental issues, primarily due to socio-economic factors, geographical location, and systemic discrimination.

Romania has enacted several laws and policies to address environmental challenges and protect children's rights. *Protected Children, Safe Romania* includes plans to address environmental issues affecting children, such as access to clean water and safe living conditions. Other

measures include the National Strategy on Education for the Environment and Climate Change 2023–2030, and legislation on environmental protection and waste management.

## Child participation

Romania has some opportunities for children to participate in public decision-making. Local governments and institutions have established children's councils or youth parliaments to provide a platform for children to express their views. Student councils in schools allow children to participate in decisions related to their education and school environment. Initiatives like the National Children's Forum bring together children from across Romania to discuss issues and present their views to policymakers.

The president of ANPDCA has three honorary advisors who are young people. CSOs have created Consultative Councils to foster collaboration and ensure

that children's voices are heard. The Government for Children, a structure created by 14 CSOs, allows children to envision and shape their ideal world as if they were ministers. In 2022, the FONPC Children and Youth Council was established.

Romania was one of the pilot countries participating in the implementation of the [Council of Europe's Child Participation Assessment Tool](#).

## Additional children's rights issues

Rising levels of domestic violence, with an increase in cases involving children, is a growing concern. In addition, the introduction of a new law defining parental estrangement is extremely worrying as it may allow for the removal of a child from the non-abusive parent in cases of domestic violence.

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

### Child poverty in Romania

The rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) was at 39% in 2023 - down from 41.5%.

Romania should prioritise public investment in the following areas:

- Education and early childhood development: ensure all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to quality education. This includes investing in infrastructure, teacher training, and resources for schools in disadvantaged areas.
- Healthcare: ensure all children have access to comprehensive healthcare services, including preventive care, vaccinations, regular check-ups and access to mental health services.
- Social protection and family support: enhance child

allowances and benefits to provide financial support to families with children. Support parents with parenting classes and employment support, to help families achieve financial stability and provide a nurturing environment for their children.

- Housing: improve affordable housing and living conditions in impoverished areas to ensure children grow up in safe and healthy environments.

In Romania, the children most in need include, but are not limited to:

- children living in poverty
- Roma children
- children living in rural areas
- children with disabilities or who have parents with disabilities
- children of migrant workers
- adolescent mothers

Teenage mothers face unique challenges and need targeted support including healthcare, education and protection from abuse. Children with disabilities need tailored services, including accessible healthcare

and specialised educational programmes to ensure their full participation in society.

Eurochild members highlighted three policy priorities for Romania:

- Increase access to high-quality education, social services, healthcare, nutrition programmes, and after-school activities for disadvantaged children.
- Implement targeted interventions for children from vulnerable groups, such as those from low-income families, Roma communities, and children with disabilities.
- Set up a national mechanism to identify cases of violence against children, and have a clear process for reporting and addressing cases of abuse, with training for professionals and public awareness campaigns.

### European Social Fund +

Romania is currently implementing two ESF+ funded programmes aimed at tackling child poverty, the [Inclusion and](#)

[Social Dignity Programme](#) and the [Education and Employment Programme](#).

While there are substantial European funds available, absorption capacity remains a significant challenge. CSOs are often not eligible to apply for EU funding, despite their experience. Eligibility for CSOs would enhance project implementation and effectiveness in addressing poverty and social exclusion.

### Example of good practice to mitigate child poverty

A project to [improve the quality of life for families in Odobesti/Dâmbovița and Ploiești/Prahova](#) at risk of social exclusion supported 230 children with integrated educational and social services to reduce the risk of abandonment and family separation.

Another project aimed to prevent the separation of children from their families in Gorj County, with material support for at least 270 children at risk and

counselling and support services for at least 100 children. It also carried out awareness campaigns on children's rights, equal opportunities and non-discrimination among Gorj County communities.

## The European Child Guarantee

Romania's [Child Guarantee National Action Plan](#) (NAP) aims to decrease child poverty by 500,000 by 2030. Romania's NAP focuses on children from low-income families, Roma children, children with disabilities, and those in institutional care. However, Eurochild members recommend a more inclusive approach that also focuses on migrant children, children from rural areas, and LGBTQ+ children.

Data for the NAP is collected by institutions such as the National Institute of Statistics and the Ministries of Education and Health. Eurochild members recommend an integrated data management system and also highlight the need for data

disaggregated by age, gender, disability and location.

The NAP's emphasis on integrating education, health, and social services is welcome, as are measures to reduce school drop-out rates and improve access to quality education for marginalised children.

Romania's 2024 biennial report on the implementation of the Child Guarantee provides a comprehensive overview of progress made. This includes the construction of new nurseries and kindergartens, the *Hot Meal* programme, the modernisation of primary healthcare facilities, and the provision of financial aid and school supplies to high school students.

While the NAP and the biennial report cover many vulnerable groups, continuous assessment and adjustment are necessary to ensure all children in need are supported.

There is collaboration between relevant stakeholders in Romania

in implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the Child Guarantee. FONPC is a member of the Monitoring Committee for the Child Guarantee. The FONPC Youth and Children's Council has translated parts of the Child Guarantee into child-friendly language and has asked ANPDCA to be involved in monitoring the implementation of the NAP.

The success of the NAP depends on adequate and sustainable funding, from a combination of the national budget and EU funding, including the ESF+.

**“Overall, we believe the implementation of the Child Guarantee in Romania shows promising results. Significant progress has been made in providing vulnerable children with access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and adequate housing. The collaborative efforts between government agencies, NGOs, and local communities have been instrumental in driving this positive change. However, there is still work to be done to ensure that every child benefits from this initiative, and we remain committed to addressing any challenges that arise to fully realise the goals of the Child Guarantee.”**

## European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report

The [Country Report](#) for Romania acknowledges that vulnerable groups such as children, people with disabilities, Roma communities, and rural residents are disproportionately affected by poverty, though disaggregated data is lacking. Despite improvements, Romania still has some of the highest poverty and inequality in Europe, including child poverty. ESF+ funding is expected to benefit more than 700,000 vulnerable children and young people, via the Child Guarantee.

Inequalities in education start early and particularly affect rural areas and the Roma. In 2021, only 75.6% of children between age 3 and compulsory primary education were enrolled in early childhood education. Few children under three are in formal childcare (12.3% in 2022), and the early school leaving rate is

among the highest in the EU, disproportionately affecting young people in rural areas, Roma children and children with disabilities. The impact of a person's socio-economic background on their educational outcomes is very high, and the school network is fragmented. Healthcare access varies widely between urban and rural areas.

Positively, the Recovery and Resilience Plan in Romania supports a new legal framework to prevent children from being separated from their families. EU funding is also supporting day-centres and other facilities to prevent child separation. However, the low availability and affordability of quality, non-residential, community-based care services are also delaying deinstitutionalisation for people with disabilities.

The introduction of the [Country-Specific Recommendation](#) includes a reference to early childhood education services. However, children are not mentioned.



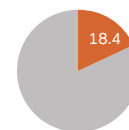
## “Country Recommendation

The Scottish Government should take action to ensure the UNCRC Implementation Scheme is properly resourced and integrated across all levels and areas of government to ensure that the *UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024* delivers the revolution in children's rights that children and young people have called for and that the First Minister has committed to.

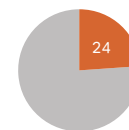
Country  
Profile 2024



# Scotland



**Child Population:**  
**1,006,212 (2022)**  
18.4 % of total population



**Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:**  
**241,490 (2023)**  
24% (2020-2023)

### RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)  
Children in Scotland

<sup>1</sup> [Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2020-23.](#)

## Children's Rights in Scotland

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has been incorporated in Scotland's domestic law, with limitations. Despite significant progress in Scotland more is needed at UK Government level.

The [UNCRC \(Incorporation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#) ('2024 Act') entered into force on 16 July 2024 and incorporated the UNCRC into Scots law subject to certain limitations, such as 'reserved matters'<sup>2</sup> on which only the UK Parliament has the power to legislate.

While the 2024 Act is a significant achievement for all those who campaigned for it for over a decade - *full* incorporation in Scotland relies on political will at UK level. Together continues to call on the UK Government to incorporate the UNCRC across the

UK to ensure that children's rights are upheld across all areas of their lives.

Scotland has a Child Rights Impact assessment (CRIA) process in place and developed its own model, the [Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment \(CRWIA\)](#).

The 2024 Act placed a mandatory duty on the Scottish Government to conduct and publish CRIAs for certain decisions.

The 2024 Act does not place a CRIA duty on local government bodies, but these are encouraged to conduct CRIAs on a voluntary basis.

The Scottish Government has published two plans on children's rights, the [2018-21 Action Plan](#) and the [2021-24 Action Plan](#). It prepared formal responses to the Concluding Observations by the UN Committee on the Rights

of the Child in 2008 and 2016, setting out its plans to address the Committee's recommendations. It has published an [Initial response to the 2023 Concluding Observations](#) and also a [version for children](#).

There has been progress in raising awareness and understanding of the UNCRC among policymakers. *The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014* placed an [awareness raising duty](#) on the Scottish Government. The 2024 Act aims to strengthen this progress and to spark continued culture change in how children's rights are understood and implemented.

Scotland has a [Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping The Promise](#). This is a junior ministerial position and reports to the [Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills](#) who has overall responsibility and is a member of the Cabinet.

Responsibility for UNCRC incorporation is held by the [Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice](#).

Children's rights are increasingly referred to in parliamentary questions, motions and debates – with 624 references in the Parliament's 2016-2021 session.

Members of the Scottish Parliament have drawn attention to [children and young people's participation in the UN Committee pre-session](#) and referenced the 2023 Concluding Observations in debates. This has included, for example, [calls to increase Scotland's minimum age of marriage from 16 to 18](#) and [reforms to child justice legislation](#).

Children have indicated that raising awareness and learning about rights is important but that Scotland needs to go beyond this - "[we need culture change.... Everyone who works with children](#)".

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<sup>2</sup> The Scottish Parliament has limited powers. This means there are some topics it cannot make laws about. These are known as "reserved matters" and include immigration, defence, the constitution and the related power of the UK Parliament to make laws for Scotland. [You can find out more here](#).



and young people, or makes decisions that affect us, should live and breathe rights”.

Despite growing recognition of children's rights by the Scottish Government, gaps in awareness remain, particularly for babies and non-verbal children. There's also an over-reliance on key individuals rather than widespread responsibility. The children's sector faces funding shortages, with civil society organisations (CSOs) calling for adequate resources to implement the 2024 Act.



## Early childhood development

The Scottish Government recognises the importance of children's early years (including children aged 0-3) in policy-making but more could be done.

Scotland provides a range of universal resources for families including the [Baby Box](#) and the [Bookbug](#) and [Read, Write, Count](#) book-gifting programmes. A range of targeted financial support for parents with young children is also available, including the Scottish Child

Payment and Best Start Grants and Best Start Foods.

Scotland also has a Health Visiting Pathway, delivers the Family Nurse Partnership programme, and supports various parenting programmes across Scotland. Since 2021, 1,140 hours a year of funded early learning and childcare has been available to all three and four-year-olds, and eligible two-year-olds. However, there are challenges relating to availability and accessibility of childcare as well as the overall sustainability

of funding. The government is piloting early learning and childcare expansion for children under two in a small number of areas.

Despite this provision, Scotland still lacks a comprehensive and integrated approach. There is a lack of relationship-based support for families with children aged 0-3 years. While this stage is crucial for brain development, parents/carers say they often feel isolated during this period and lack community-based support. Some early years family support projects are currently funded by the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund initiative, but there isn't a comprehensive offering across Scotland.



With the incorporation of the UNCRC in Scotland there is growing interest in the 'voice' of infants and babies. There is some way to go in this area but there has been progress and examples of positive partnership working.

## Children's mental health

A new [Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) was published in 2023. Its delivery plan is currently being developed, covering four key areas: mental health support during pregnancy and the early years; children, young people and families in vulnerable situations; crisis support; and prevention.

There is still insufficient focus on early intervention and prevention. Many children in Scotland lack opportunities to take part in hobbies and youth groups, for reasons including financial and geographic limitations and additional support needs. Children and young people in rural areas face challenges with poor public transport links, which affects their ability to access work, services and leisure opportunities and can lead to feelings of isolation.

Children can be referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) delivered by NHS Scotland. However, there are significant pressures on this

service, with a high threshold for support and long waiting lists. Schools are supposed to have access to a counsellor but waiting lists for these services can also be long.

There have been some positive developments in crisis support. The [Creating Hope Together](#) suicide prevention strategy has ensured that children with lived experience are central to work to improve mental health support. The Scottish Government has also rolled out the [Distress Brief Intervention programme](#) to those aged 14-18.

More funding is needed for school-based mental health support and CAMHS. Children have also called for a stronger focus on well-being within the Scottish school system.

## Child safety and well-being online

Children in Scotland continues to highlight the barriers to digital inclusion for many children, including children affected by poverty, care experienced young

people, and children and families with additional support needs.

[Children's Parliament](#) and [Scottish Youth Parliament](#) were commissioned by the Scottish Government to engage with children on the design of [Mind Yer Time](#) – a website with information for children on screen time and on the use of social media.

## Child protection systems

Child protection in Scotland is underpinned by [Getting it right for every child](#), a multi-agency approach to ensure children and families get timely help. This approach aligns with the UNCRC. The [National Child Protection Guidance](#) was reviewed and updated in 2023.

The Promise is a national programme of work (2020-2030) developed following the [Independent Care Review](#). It includes the principles of whole-family support and aims to ensure that children who enter the care system feel loved, safe and respected.

The Scottish Government has committed investment in the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund between 2022-2026 to deliver holistic family support, aiming to support families in vulnerable situations and prevent family separation. However, progress has been slower than hoped and discussions are ongoing about extending the funding. While the funding is positive, the approach does not offer a systemic package of support for families and is delivered against a backdrop of cuts to public services.

## Education

There has been a wide-ranging [national discussion on education](#) with engagement from pupils, children's organisations, education professionals, parent and carer groups. However, there has been no clear move to reform the education system in line with what children have said.

Legislation is in place to support pupils with additional support needs (ASN) through the [Education \(Additional Support](#)

[for Learning\) \(Scotland\) Act](#).

However, a 2024 parliamentary enquiry [report](#) concluded that the majority of ASN pupils do not have their needs met, and recommended the government act urgently to address current challenges.

Debates have arisen around violence and behaviour in Scottish schools, with teachers expressing safety concerns. While the Scottish Government is working with professionals to develop an improvement plan, there has been no direct engagement with children and limited reference to children's rights. School absences have also risen, likely influenced by the pandemic and insufficient support for pupils with additional needs. Teachers are facing significant pressure from high workloads, large class sizes, and increasing demands to support students with additional learning needs, leading some to leave the profession early.

## Climate change and the environment

In the [2023 children's report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#), children voiced their concerns about the environment and climate change.

“Making sure we have a healthy environment is a big issue but it's a local one too – we want streets, playparks, greenspaces, and schools that are clean and safe environments to be in. We want to have a say in decisions about the environment and climate change at the local, national and international level.”

Together's [2023 State of Children's Rights Report](#) recommended that the UK and Scottish Governments ensure children's rights are considered when developing and implementing all strategies to reduce environmental degradation and climate change.

Children from deprived areas are disproportionately affected by air pollution and more

likely to live near major roads. Positive changes have included investment in public transport – including free travel for under 21s, although uptake has been inconsistent.

Children have clear ideas on how to protect their health, the planet and their right to a healthy environment. They must be actively involved in identifying solutions and policy and legislative changes to the environmental emergency.

**“People often talk about how ‘young people are the future!’, but neglect to acknowledge that we are right here in this moment, watching our planet being picked apart - and we do not want any role in this future that is being built on our behalf.”**  
**- Member of Scottish Youth Parliament**

## Child participation

- The [2024 Act](#) places duties on the Scottish Government to consult with children in some situations.
- The Presiding Officer and Children's Parliament have a [joint commitment](#) to increase children's involvement in the work of the Scottish Parliament.
- The Scottish Parliament's Outreach Team liaises with CSOs to identify ways to strengthen children's participation in the Parliament's work.
- Every year, members of the Children's Parliament and Scottish Youth Parliament participate in a Cabinet meeting, and share calls to action from [children](#) and [young people](#) with the First Minister and his Cabinet. There is also an annual Executive Team Takeover, where Children's Parliament and Scottish Youth Parliament share [children](#) and [young people's](#) calls to action with representatives of the Scottish Government.
- Children in Scotland has

positive examples of delivering youth-led national advisory groups through the [Inclusion Ambassadors](#) and the [Suicide Prevention Youth Advisory Group](#).

- The [Young Carer and Young Adult Carer Advisory Group](#) and the delivery of regional Champions Boards, representing the views of young people with care experience.

However, children and young people were clear in their [2023 report to the UN Committee](#) that more needs to be done to uphold their rights under Article 12.

The [voting age for Scottish elections is 16](#). The voting age for UK elections remains 18. The new UK Government was elected with a [manifesto commitment](#) to lower the voting age to 16.

The Scottish Government has not taken specific action to implement the [Council of Europe's Child](#)

[Participation Assessment Tool](#). In 2018, the Scottish Government commissioned Children in Scotland to [conduct research into the impact of children and young people's participation in policy making](#) – the Assessment Tool was used to inform questions for interviews and focus groups.

### Additional children's rights issues

- Artificial intelligence – there are concerns with its regulation, use and [impacts on children](#), including issues of informed consent.
- Vaping – there is a rise in vaping among young people. Children in Scotland's youth advisory group has delivered awareness-raising and influencing work on this, and developed a [Vaping Evidence Paper](#).
- Housing – there are significant issues with families' access to quality, affordable housing, and a shortage of social housing.

[Nearly 10,000 children in Scotland are growing up in temporary accommodation](#).

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

### Child poverty in Scotland

The proportion of children in relative poverty (after housing costs) was [24% between 2020-2023](#), and has remained relatively static in recent years.

The Scottish Government has convened an expert group to explore a [Minimum Income Guarantee](#) to ensure no one falls below an income level that enables them to live a dignified life.

Groups identified by the Scottish Government as most affected by poverty are:

- lone parent families

- disabled families
- families with three or more children
- minority ethnic families
- families where the youngest child is under 1
- families where the mother is under 25

Other children affected by poverty include young carers and care experienced children.

Eurochild members highlighted areas where Scotland should increase public investment in children:

- Increase the weekly [Scottish Child Payment](#), to counteract the cost of living crisis. In addition, there are calls for the UK Government to abolish the two-child limit,<sup>3</sup> which would lift thousands of children out of poverty in Scotland.
- Increase investment in early intervention and prevention, including through The Whole

<sup>3</sup> The two-child limit prevents parents from receiving any extra financial support (through universal credit or child tax credit) for a third or subsequent child born after 6 April 2017.

Family Wellbeing Fund.

- Increase access to affordable, flexible and high-quality childcare for families affected by poverty.
- Increased investment in free school meals and cancel existing school meal debt.
- Improve the Child Maintenance System.
- Improve public transport links, especially in rural communities.

was funded by the European Social Fund and concluded in 2020. A new phase has just been funded by the Scottish Government.

### Example of good practice to mitigate child poverty

The [Open Kindergarten pilot project](#) was delivered in two areas of Scotland exploring family support for parents and carers with children aged 0-3 years. The aim of the project was to improve relationship-based family support for parents and carers, providing opportunities to connect with other parents and professionals. This project helped to address social isolation, supported parents experiencing poor mental health and parents affected by poverty. Parents can attend free drop-in sessions in their local communities. The pilot project

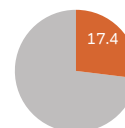
## “Country Recommendation

The adoption of a comprehensive Law on the Rights of the Child would be a crucial step for Serbia to ensure that children's rights are effectively protected and promoted. It would provide the necessary legal foundation to address existing gaps and challenges, ultimately fostering a more supportive environment for all children in the country.

## Country Profile 2024



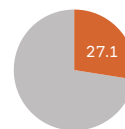
# Serbia



### Child Population:

**1,157,008 (2023)**

17.4% of total population



### Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:

**317.000 (2022)**

27.1% (2022)

▼ -0.4% compared to 2021

### RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

[The Network of Organisations for Children of Serbia - MODS](#)

[Pomoć deci](#)

[SOS Children Villages Serbia](#)

[Child Rights Center](#)

[Friends of Children of Serbia](#)

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)

## Children's Rights in Serbia

The Constitution of Serbia recognises international treaties and conventions, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), as an integral part of its legal framework. It specifies that ratified international treaties and universally accepted international law principles are essential parts of the legal system and are directly enforceable. Article 64 of the Constitution guarantees that children enjoy human rights appropriate to their age and maturity. It affirms every child's right to a name, registration at birth, knowledge of their ancestry, and protection from exploitation or abuse.

The institutional framework for the protection of children and the rights of the child is incorporated into specific legislation on education, health, culture, home affairs, justice, and social welfare.

There is currently no mandatory or voluntary Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) process at government level. However, efforts have been made to evaluate the impact of government measures on children's rights - particularly through the special report on the impact of Covid 19 on children by the Ombudsman of Serbia<sup>2</sup> in collaboration with the [European Network of Ombudspersons for Children](#) and UNICEF. A CRIA process would significantly enhance the protection and promotion of children's rights in Serbia.

Given the absence of a national strategy for children's rights since 2015, civil society is advocating for the development of a new and comprehensive strategy to ensure the protection and promotion of children's rights across Serbia, particularly for vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities, Roma children, and those living in poverty.

The Council for the Rights of a Child, a national coordination body, has not yet been re-established since the parliamentary elections in 2024. Its role is only advisory and its mandate expires every time the government is dissolved. It meets rarely and with no clear agenda, and its decisions are rarely implemented in practice. For it to be effective, and make an impact on children's lives, it should have sufficient authority to coordinate activities for the implementation of children's rights and have the necessary human, technical and financial resources to function effectively.

No specific cabinet minister is responsible for children's issues in Serbia. However, several key institutions are responsible. These include the Committee for Children's Rights of the National Assembly, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Family Care and Demography, the Ministry of

Education, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue (which has responsibility for child rights policy and monitoring), and the Council for the Rights of the Child.

The Serbian Government [has responded](#) to the [Concluding Observations by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#), reflecting a commitment to address the Committee's recommendations. There is still a need to increase understanding and implementation of children's rights at all levels of government.

There is a shrinking space for children's rights civil society organisations (CSOs) in Serbia, influenced by political and social factors. These include: hostility towards CSOs advocating for children's rights due to the political climate in Serbia; a clear lack of capacity among decision-makers in the field of children's rights; and growing public perception that prioritises

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<sup>2</sup> In Serbia, there is no dedicated Ombudsperson for children but there is a Protector of Citizens – Ombudsman of Serbia with a deputy who is responsible for children's rights.



parental rights over child rights, complicating the advocacy landscape for CSOs. For example, CSOs have been advocating for the prohibition of corporal punishment, but face opposition from groups advocating for 'traditional family values' and 'parental autonomy.' CSOs also struggle with limited financial and human resources.

### Early childhood development

Serbia partially recognises the importance of early childhood development (ECD). In 2016, it initiated the National Programme for early years' development. The Education Strategy also includes a section on children's early years. In 2018, the government adopted a Call for Action on ECD, emphasising a cross-sector approach. As part of the civil society campaign *First Years, First Priority*, Pomoc deci established a coalition of CSOs working together across sectors for the improvement of ECD at both local and national level.

### Children's mental health

Many children in Serbia face a variety of mental health challenges: anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. As many as 17% of children and young people in Serbia noticed a deterioration in their mental health during the Covid 19 pandemic, every sixth adolescent aged 16-17 is at risk of poor mental health, and more than 21% report a feeling of nervousness on a weekly basis.

According to research, adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.

The shortage of mental health professionals, combined with limited access to psychotherapy, has worsened the situation. Furthermore, children in institutional care often only receive medication without therapeutic support. There are ad hoc, project-based attempts to support children's mental health, but they are not systematically linked and available throughout Serbia.

### Child safety and well-being online

Research shows that 86% of children use the Internet daily, but many lack the necessary digital literacy skills to navigate it safely. The government has taken steps to promote awareness and safe Internet use through the establishment of the National Contact Center for the Safety of Children on the Internet. However, concerns about protection for children online, including exploitation and cyberbullying persist. Measures are needed to harmonise legislation with EU laws on children's online safety and empower children and educators for safe Internet use. In addition, many vulnerable children do not have access to the Internet, particularly in rural areas.

### Child protection systems

There is insufficient support to prevent family separation and help vulnerable families. SOS Children's Villages Serbia has been providing a Family Strengthening Service



since 2013, to assist families at risk of child separation in 9 municipalities and cities with the help of donors and local funds.

Data shows a 20.6% increase in child separations in 2022 compared to 2021, with 18.4% of separated children under the age of three. Reasons for child separations include inadequate or absent parental care and violence against children. There is a clear need to establish organised support for families at risk of child separation through social protection services and adequate financial resources.

## Education

Serbia has made progress in promoting inclusive education through legislative measures and policies to prevent discrimination. These include the Law on the Prevention of Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities which mandates equal access to education for all children, and the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma (2016-2025), which aims

to enhance educational access for Roma children. The new Education Development Strategy emphasises inclusivity and quality education for all children.

However, challenges persist in implementing inclusive practices and addressing barriers faced by Roma children, children with disabilities, and children in institutional care.

## Climate change and the environment

Children in Serbia are affected by [environmental crises and also experience eco-anxiety](#).

There is a lack of specific provisions to address children's unique vulnerabilities to environmental issues. Legislative measures exist, but there are gaps.

Serbia has a plan for adapting to climate change but there is no assessment of the impact on children. It does not take into account children's specific

vulnerabilities and the impacts of environmental degradation on children's health and well-being. While there are some environmental laws focusing on clean water, air pollution and disposal of hazardous waste they do not take children into consideration. This lack of targeted provision means that children's rights to a safe and healthy environment are not adequately protected, leaving them more vulnerable to the adverse effects of environmental crises and eco-anxiety.

## Child participation

Children under 18 have some opportunities to participate in public decision-making, but these are limited. Children can create their own associations from the age of 14. There are several mechanisms to support child participation, such as Youth Councils and the Youth Advisory Panel (comprised of 30 children aged 13-17) to the [Ombudsman of Serbia](#). Children were also included in public debates during

the development of a Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence. However, more efforts should be made to engage children in future consultations, including on the forthcoming strategy for social protection.

The influence of these mechanisms on policy-making remains limited. Significant barriers to effective participation include limited awareness among children and adults about participation mechanisms, traditional attitudes that do not view children as active participants, and resource constraints for initiatives aimed at fostering participation.

Serbia has taken steps to implement the [Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool](#).

## Additional children's rights issues

- Children in alternative care: according to legislation, every

child over 14 should have a plan for leaving alternative care but in practice there is inadequate preparation in the process of leaving care. There is no data on how many children over 14 have a plan drawn up, or whether children themselves are involved in the planning process. There is no information on the manner, quality and preparation of children leaving care, so the outcomes for children are unknown.

- Children with behavioural problems: in 2022 there were 6,230 children with behavioural problems on the records of the Centres for Social Work, a 20% increase from 2021. Since 2023 only two daycare centres for children with behavioural problems are providing support.
- Children in conflict with the law: there are 17,989 children in conflict with the law and systematic support for these children does not exist. There is a discrepancy between the urgency, complexity and intensity of their needs and the slow and segmented response of the social protection and

juvenile justice systems.

- Children experiencing violence, abuse and neglect: violence against children remains prevalent in Serbia. [Reports](#) indicate that such violence often occurs within the family or among peers. There are no effective mechanisms for reporting and addressing these abuses. The need for comprehensive strategies to prevent violence and protect children is critical.

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

### Child poverty in Serbia

The risk of poverty rate or social exclusion for children was 27.1% in 2022.

In Serbia, several groups of children are particularly affected by poverty and social exclusion: children from large families whose parents have a low level of education or are unemployed and living in rural areas; Roma children;

children in street situations; refugee and migrant children; children in alternative care and children with disabilities. However, child poverty is not recognised as a public policy priority.

Children in vulnerable situations need early intervention, community-based services that prevent family separation, placement in institutions and social exclusion. These services should empower parents/guardians to recognise and meet children's needs while targeting the specific challenges children face. For children in alternative care, it is important to implement programmes that promote independence and encourage socio-economic integration.

To address child poverty and social exclusion the government should increase public investment in the following areas:

- Education and early childhood development: investing in ECD is crucial as high-quality early education can have significant impacts on a child's future,

especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- Healthcare and mental health services: improving access to healthcare, including mental health services, is vital for children's well-being.
- Social protection and family support: strengthening social protection programmes can provide a safety net for vulnerable children and their families.
- Children's right to participate: ensuring that children have a voice in matters that affect them, promoting their active participation in society.

Eurochild members identified several priorities for Serbia to address child poverty and social exclusion:

- The adoption of a Social Protection Strategy with goals and measures to reduce child poverty and develop community-based services for children and families.
- A change in the Law on Social Protection to recognise children who are particularly affected

by poverty and social exclusion and prescribe measures for their protection.

- More targeted support for groups affected by poverty with revised criteria for cash benefits so that the money follows the beneficiary.
- The adoption of a comprehensive Law on the Rights of the Child and the legislation needed to establish a specific Ombudsperson for the Rights of the Child.

## Enlargement Countries

The process of joining the EU, also called accession, has three main steps: candidacy, accession negotiations and treaty ratification. The Enlargement Package aims to provide a detailed assessment of the state of play in enlargement countries, including the progress concerning upholding human rights and children's rights. For the 2024 Enlargement Package of the European Commission, Eurochild consulted with members to share their insights into the situation of

children in the EU enlargement countries.

This contribution can inform the annual Enlargement Package presented by the European Commission, with overviews of the most pressing issues and progress by Serbia towards EU accession.

According to Eurochild members, the 2023 Enlargement Package does include child rights issues in Serbia. The negative effects of poverty on children's health, education, and future opportunities are acknowledged, indicating that policymakers prioritise these issues.

Eurochild members recommend that the EU should:

- Extend the European Child Guarantee to enlargement countries. Make the implementation, monitoring and reporting on the Child Guarantee National Action Plan a mandatory requirement for Serbia as a candidate country within the enlargement process.

Serbia would benefit from being part of this policy and funding instrument to tackle child poverty and social exclusion systematically.

- Make the adoption of proposed EU legislation to prevent and combat child sexual abuse a requirement in the accession process, alongside legislative harmonisation with EU regulation on online safety.

## EU funding

The Network of Organisations for Children of Serbia – has been partnering in the project Caring Communities within Interreg Danube Region Programme over a period of 30 months (January 2024 to June 2026) The project involves 25 partners from nine countries in the Danube region.

They have also received a grant through the “Civil Society Facility” (CSF) under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) to implement their strategic plan in 2024.

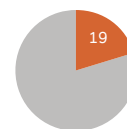
## “Country Recommendation

Slovakia should take action to create such conditions so that education, healthcare, mental health and early intervention services are available for all children without any differences.

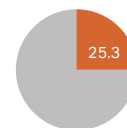
## Country Profile 2024



# Slovakia



**Child Population:**  
**1,033,987 (2023)**  
19% of total population



**Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:**  
**259,000 (2023)**  
25.3% (2023)  
▲ +0.6% since 2022

**RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):**  
Coalition for Children – Slovakia

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)

## Children's Rights in Slovakia

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has been incorporated into the domestic law of Slovakia. Even if the article of the Convention on zero tolerance to corporal punishment is not sufficiently implemented in the current legislation, it is taken as a binding legal regulation.

In March 2023 Slovakia adopted a [legal amendment which requires a Child Rights Impact Assessment \(CRIA\)](#), which was a step forward for children's rights.

In Slovakia, there are numerous strategies and plans aimed at the protection of children's rights, including the National Strategy to Protect Children from Violence, the [Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Youth](#) and the [National Action Plan for the European Child Guarantee](#).

There is awareness and understanding of the UNCRC among politicians in Slovakia.

However, some politicians and parts of society still tolerate the physical punishment of children within the family.

The Slovak Republic established a Commissioner for Children in 2015, after pressure from the EU and the public, following a tragic case of abuse against a 5-year-old girl. This case highlighted many systemic errors and as a result the Office of the Commissioner for Children was created. However, this Office has been politicised, the position has been taken over by politicians instead of human/child rights experts, for a long time.

The civil society sector has an important role in children's rights protection, but deals mainly with assistance to individual children, providing help and support. The sector does not have the necessary capacity for complex advocacy on children's rights. Over the past year, non-profit organisations, including organisations working on children's rights, have reported increased pressure from some

government representatives. The current funding mechanism that allows both individuals and companies to allocate 2% of their paid taxes to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) has been challenged. Most Slovak NGOs rely on this funding.

### Early childhood development

There are no specific action plans focused on early childhood. Early childhood development issues are part of broader national strategies, such as the national strategy for coordinated services in early intervention and early care 2022-2030.

### Children's mental health

While legislation mandates the establishment of early intervention mental health services, their implementation is fragmented.

Mental health services are insufficient and not adequately financed. Many children in Slovakia do not have access to specialised mental health

services, due to insufficient mental health professionals (child psychiatrists, child psychologists, therapists). Some schools have a psychologist available, but not every school.

While mental health services are part of an integrated system, they are not sufficient.

The Coalition for Children in Slovakia recommends the following:

- The establishment of specialised centres that can provide timely mental health support, crisis intervention and therapy for children, including children living in poverty. For example, children who were sexually abused or severely maltreated often have to wait several months for diagnosis and mental health support, and can suffer secondary victimisation where court cases take several years.
- Psychological support for children in every primary school, with the possibility of support for children in pre-school

facilities as well.

- An increase in the number of people studying to qualify as mental health practitioners, and support for their professional development, motivation and practical experience in Slovakia.

The Coalition for Children in Slovakia recommends that these actions are integrated in the newly adopted [National Mental Health Programme and Action Plan of the National Mental Health Programme for 2024-2030](#).

### Child protection systems

The Coalition for Children in Slovakia identified several gaps in the child protection system:

- Multidisciplinary and inter-departmental cooperation is not very effective.
- There is insufficient focus on preventing violence against children.
- There are no safeguarding methods in institutions in which children are present (hospitals, schools, extracurricular facilities, sports clubs, churches, etc.).

- Important services for children and families are not sustained due to short-term funding.

However, it is important to note that a legislative amendment on the social and legal protection of children has improved support for families at risk. New professional teams have been set up, which help children and families in crisis all across Slovakia. Accredited NGOs are also a part of these professional teams.

### Child participation

Children do not have many opportunities to participate in public decision-making. However, they did have a chance to express their opinions during the preparation of the National Strategy to protect children from abuse, which was subsequently adopted. Although they had no influence on whether it would be adopted or not, the quotes from children were integrated in the final document.

### Additional children's rights issues

- Children from Ukraine face barriers to access the educational system (schools, pre-school facilities, free time activities), the health system and children's mental health system. There are shortages of early childhood education and care (ECEC) placements and the Slovak education system is not equipped to deal with children whose language is not Slovak.
- Secondary victimisation by the child protection system – e.g. multiple interrogations of mistreated and sexually abused children, long waiting times for adequate treatment and support by mental health specialists.
- Hunger and poverty affecting children, with a lack of food and low-quality, non-nutritious food.

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

### Child poverty in Slovakia

According to the latest data, 25.3% of children live in poverty in Slovakia. There has been a worrying increase since 2021 when the child poverty rate was at 19.7%.

The Coalition for Children in Slovakia highlighted two areas where Slovakia should increase public investment in children, in order to address child poverty and social exclusion:

- Support for single-parent and larger families, for families on the brink of poverty, families in critical life situations, and families with children with disabilities – including financial and material support and advice.
- Ensure children's access to education, pre-school care, services, healthcare, leisure activities and nutritious food.

The children most in need in Slovakia are:

- children who experience abuse, including sexual abuse
- children of refugees from Ukraine and other countries
- children with disabilities
- children from marginalised Roma communities
- children from single-parent and large families
- children from socio-economically disadvantaged families, including families living in inadequate housing, households with disabilities and low-income families

These children need access to services, education, free time activities, affordable housing, sufficient food and nutrition, healthcare, and professional help.

The Coalition for Children in Slovakia highlighted two policy priorities for Slovakia to focus on that would contribute to ending child poverty and social exclusion:

- The development of a system of support and protection for

children, so that every child whose parents are unable to provide for their basic needs can be helped and supported by the government, with child benefits, increased parental leave benefits, housing solutions, access to healthy food.

- Complete, implement and support what is functional in the area of prevention, identification and support within the social and healthcare systems for effective child protection. In Slovakia, many institutions (in addition to the state) participate in child protection, including the police, schools and municipalities, with a very fragmented approach. Similarly, prevention is not considered a priority and the system focuses on crisis intervention. Another problem is that many unprofessional trainers, so-called 'experts', are allowed to speak to children about abuse, violence and its prevention in schools. This only worsens the situation, and the Coalition is calling for the development of an accredited programme

instead, because there is a need to standardise procedures and ensure that informal education on violence against children is carried out by professional providers.

### Example of good practice to mitigate child poverty

Project Housing First is a programme that provides affordable housing for families in crisis (homeless people, single-parent households, victims of domestic violence, etc.) Thanks to the European Social Fund, non-profit organisations were able to receive funding to provide housing support and free counselling. For example, Centre Slniecko, participated in the project and supported fifteen women and their children fleeing domestic violence, providing them with a place to live and start a new abuse-free life over the course of 24 months. However, the project was discontinued due to lack of funding.

## The European Child Guarantee

The Coalition for Children in Slovakia have not been engaged in the implementation, monitoring, and evaluating the Child Guarantee, as they were not approached. However, the organisation believes more stakeholders should be involved, including experts and specialists.

## European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report

Slovakia's [Country Report](#) places importance on the implementation of the European Child Guarantee and access to ECEC, because of the significant rise in the rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, from 19.7% in 2021 to 24.7% in 2022. The enrolment of children under three in ECEC is the lowest in the EU, at only 1% in 2023. Slovakia has introduced a legal entitlement to a place in pre-primary education for all children

aged four (from 2024) and all children aged three (from 2025). EU cohesion funds and funding from the Recovery and Resilience Plan are supporting investments in new kindergartens, including in less developed regions. Funding for ECEC is also targeted at marginalised Roma communities.

Inclusive education remains a challenge. Roma children have a much lower participation rate in pre-primary education. Roma pupils are also over-represented in schools for children with special educational needs and in classes for pupils with mental health issues or disabilities. In 2023, the European Commission referred Slovakia to the Court of Justice for failing to desegregate Roma children in education.

The Country Report also notes the deterioration in the performance of 15-year-old students. According to the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment 2022, young people lack a minimum level of proficiency in basic skills (maths, reading and science).

The [Country Specific Recommendations](#) refer to the need to “strengthen the teaching of basic skills, including for children from disadvantaged backgrounds such as from marginalised Roma communities, and increase the availability and use of affordable high-quality early childhood education and care for children under the age of 3”.





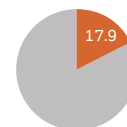
## “Country Recommendation

Slovenia should take action to shorten court proceedings involving children, especially in cases involving violence.

## Country Profile 2024



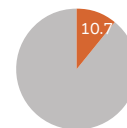
# Slovenia



### Child Population:

**378,574 (2023)**

17.9% of total population



### Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:

**43,000 (2023)**

10.7% (2023)

▲ +0.4% compared to 2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth

<sup>1</sup> [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2023, \(% of population aged less than 18 years\), Eurostat \(ilc\\_peps01n\).](#)

## Children's Rights in Slovenia

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is incorporated in Slovenia's domestic legislation through more than 40 different national laws. The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth recommends that Slovenia should adopt consolidated legislation, which would strengthen understanding of children's rights and the obligations of all stakeholders. The UNCRC's Third Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure<sup>2</sup> has been ratified but has still not been implemented.

The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth is not aware of any Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) process in government decision-making, but believes such a process is necessary to ensure that children's rights become part of budget-setting, policy development and programming.

Slovenia adopted a national [Programme for Children 2020-2025](#). Civil society organisations (CSOs) were engaged in the programme's development but due to limitations in Slovenia's national budget not all their suggestions were included.

There is some awareness and understanding of the UNCRC among policymakers, but it could be strengthened. The Slovenian Government participates in the UNCRC reporting process, with civil society engagement. The government [published information](#) on the 2013 Concluding Observations on its website. The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth collaborates with the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities on general issues related to children's rights. It is very rare to hear ministers or parliamentarians refer to the UNCRC during debates on children's issues.

The Slovenian Children's Rights Network includes 41 organisations that work with and for children. The network is somewhat constrained by limited funding, and receives no financial support from the state.

### Early childhood development

According to The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth there are no specific laws covering early childhood. Young children are included in all other laws related to children. The government's approach to early childhood development is largely limited to a focus on childcare.

### Children's mental health

There is insufficient early intervention mental health support for children. Children have access to specialist mental health services through paediatricians, regional Centres for the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents, regional support

clinics for emergency referrals, and through university psychiatric clinics. However, the currently available network of services for children with mental health problems is insufficient to meet demand.

There is a shortage of mental health specialists for children (clinical psychologists, child psychiatrists, psychotherapists, social workers). There is also a shortage of specialist clinics. Waiting times for accessing support are very long. Private practice is too expensive and only a few can afford it.

Schools offer some mental health support for children, but they are over-burdened and these services need to be strengthened.

There is a need for a stronger network of Centres for the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents, with additional staffing, to enable psychotherapeutic treatment

<sup>2</sup> The Third Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure allows individuals and groups of children to make a complaint to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child if they believe their rights under the Convention have been violated.

across Slovenia not just in the capital Ljubljana – the unit for intensive child and adolescent psychiatry (within the Ljubljana Psychiatric Clinic) is overloaded.

### **Child safety and well-being online**

Not all children receive adequate education in digital literacy and safety. Many parents lack the knowledge and skills to guide their children in the digital sphere. As a result, they may not provide sufficient support to children in navigating the digital environment, either due to a lack of understanding or because of their own digital habits. There is a lack of awareness and understanding among children about online privacy and the importance of protecting personal information.

The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth believes the EU should limit the use of smartphones for younger children. Generally speaking, parents are not familiar with the negative effects. Social media platforms

should have an age verification tool to prevent younger children from accessing inappropriate or harmful content. The EU could also encourage schools to consider limited and safer use of smartphones.

### **Child protection systems**

Centres for social work and CSOs support families in vulnerable situations, and make efforts to prevent family separation. Families have the option to attend counselling in social work centres. Where parents decide to separate there are also special meetings with children. However, there is inadequate early intervention support to help families before the point of separation. Counselling is available in the private sector but is very expensive.

Foster care in Slovenia is disappearing, with fewer and fewer foster parents. Children who are in foster families have nowhere to go when they turn 18. An amendment to the legislation on foster care is being prepared. The Slovenian Association of

Friends of Youth supported the amendments that the Slovenian Foster Care Association prepared. The amendments are about the actual standards and practice of foster care. Both organisations think that the terminology should be more adequate.

### **Education**

Slovenia's education system is quite good in ensuring quality, inclusivity and equal opportunities. For instance, migrant children and Roma children go to school with other children and have equal opportunities for learning and growth. However, language barriers and potential social differences can pose difficulties for both children and teachers. Teachers need additional support in class in general, due to the children's different backgrounds.

Children with special educational needs are included in schools with an adapted programme based on the Act on Guidance of Children with Special Needs. Additional professional support is

provided for children with special educational needs and learning disabilities.

The increasing focus on grades in school, instead of encouraging children's curiosity, means children experience high levels of stress which can lead to mental health problems.

### **Climate change and the environment**

Decision-makers don't talk about environmental rights for children. Awareness of environmental issues and positive action must become a priority for policymakers. In this area Slovenia follows the policies and measures of the EU, but faces major challenges in achieving the climate goal of becoming a carbon-neutral society by 2050.

### **Child participation**

Children under 18 cannot participate in public decision-making. They can participate if individual decision-makers are

inclined to hear their views, but this is very rare.

The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth leads a programme on Children's Parliaments where children discuss topics related to them and propose improvements to policymakers, parents and schools. However, their proposals are not taken seriously and usually children don't get any feedback.

The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth also has other smaller projects to support dialogue between children and decision-makers and has produced a [White Paper on children's participation](#).

Slovenia needs a national strategy for children's participation and guidance for decision-makers to enable safe spaces for children to participate.

[Slovenia participated](#) in the [Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool](#).

### Additional children's rights issues

The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth highlighted the following additional concerns:

- The judicial system does not pursue the best interests of children and there is a need to improve child-friendly justice. Long court proceedings in which children are involved (usually in divorce proceedings) is a major concern. In cases of where violence is present and parents are divorcing, there are two proceedings at the same time (civil and criminal) and children are exposed to double victimisation. The proceedings are much too long and should be merged.
- There is an increase in calls to child helplines from children who experience peer violence and self-harm.
- There is a lack of immediate and specialised mental health support for children who are victims of sexual violence.

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

### Child poverty in Slovenia

The rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Slovenia increased from 10.3% in 2022 to 10.7% in 2023.

The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth identified three areas where Slovenia should increase public investment:

- Increase government support for single-parent households, families on very low income and immigrant families.
- Increase public investment in the education system as education is key to breaking the cycle of poverty.
- Ensure access to employment and decently paid jobs.

According to The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth, the groups of children most in need are:

- children living in low-income families
- children in single-parent households facing financial difficulties
- children with disabilities
- children without parental care, who often don't have financial support or who are in institutional care
- Roma children - poverty rates are higher among the Roma community, affecting their well-being.

Efforts to address child poverty should focus on providing additional support for these vulnerable groups.

The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth identified three policy priorities for Slovenia:

- Modernisation of the social security system.
- Free primary education - while it is basically free, there are other costs for school supplies, school meals, excursions, etc.
- Measures to make it easier for Roma children to participate in

school.

### European Social Fund + (ESF+)

The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth is not involved in the Monitoring Committee of the ESF+. The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth was involved in the design and preparation of the Child Guarantee National Action Plan. Since then, they are not aware of any progress nor ESF+ funded programmes or calls for proposals to implement the Guarantee. However, they would welcome more information to allow CSOs to participate in the implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation of the National Action Plan.

### Example of good practice to mitigate child poverty

The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth runs the One Heart programme which provides financial assistance for children and families in poverty, across Slovenia. This includes:

- Financial help for families (e.g. payment of household bills);
- Financial support for children with disabilities (payment of medical and other accessories or therapies etc);
- Ada's scholarship fund (helping young people to achieve their educational goals);
- Support for children's participation in sports and music;
- Provision of school supplies at the beginning of the school year;
- Gifts for children in December (Fund Dedek Mraz).

In 2023 they helped 5,169 families with €346.897,00.

### The European Child Guarantee

While [Slovenia's National Action Plan \(NAP\)](#) does include measures to prioritise all children in need, one group is left out, namely children who are victims of violence. These are particularly vulnerable children who need to be protected from

stigmatisation, social exclusion and discrimination.

The NAP does not include relevant data collection and indicators to monitor progress. According to the NAP, a national framework for data collection and indicators for the monitoring of the implementation of the Child Guarantee will be set up, which will also define children's participation and a financial framework for monitoring implementation.

The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth was involved in the preparation of the NAP but has not been engaged in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Child Guarantee. They believe there should be increased involvement of stakeholders and recommend that decision-makers connect with CSOs and provide information on implementation.

Slovenia's biennial report, with details of the Child Guarantee's first two years of implementation

is due to be published in autumn 2024.

**“Overall, we think the implementation of the Child Guarantee will help children to have equal opportunities for a better life.”**

### European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

#### Overview of the Country Report

The [Country Report](#) for Slovenia highlights several issues on the state of education in the country. Participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) is relatively high, reaching 92.3% in 2021 for children aged between three and the age of compulsory primary school. However, children from vulnerable groups are less likely to participate in ECEC. It is estimated that 35% of Roma children aged five in south-eastern Slovenia do not attend pre-school education.

Inclusion and accessibility in education remain significant challenges. Only about 26% of all secondary school facilities in Slovenia are adapted for children with reduced mobility.

Slovenia has been preparing a National Education Programme (until 2033) and ongoing curricular reforms, with measures to address teacher shortages and make the teaching profession more attractive. Discussions have been running for more than a year.

The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth was involved in these discussions and also presented children's findings and recommendations. However, they are sceptical that their feedback will be taken into account.



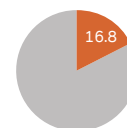
## “Country Recommendation

Spain should implement effective policies to reduce child poverty and socio-economic inequalities, especially extreme child poverty, and ensure that all children have access to basic needs such as food and adequate housing.

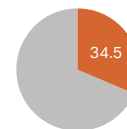
## Country Profile 2024



# Spain



**Child Population:**  
**8,078,184 (2023)**  
16.8% of total population



**Child Poverty:**  
**2,768,000 (2023)**  
34.5% (2023)  
▲ +2.3% compared to 2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

[Fedaia](#)

[Plataforma de Infancia](#)

## Children's Rights in Spain

Spain ratified the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child (UNCRC) in 1990.

According to the Spanish Constitution, once ratified international treaties become part of the domestic legal system. They have a higher legal standing than national laws but are subordinate to the Constitution.

Legislation obliges the government to carry out an evaluation of the impacts of every proposed legislation before it is approved. This evaluation is called Regulatory Impact Analysis Report, and its purpose is to ensure that, at the time of preparing and approving a project, all the necessary information is available to estimate the impact that the regulation will have on its recipients and agents. This evaluation should include the impact on the rights of children and adolescents. However, in practice this is not always carried out adequately due to the lack of a clear methodology and guidelines

on the sources, techniques and procedures to be used.

Moreover, it is worth highlighting that the General Budgetary Law establishes the obligation to prepare a specific Report on the Impact on Children, Adolescents and the Family, which must accompany the Preliminary Draft of the General State Budget Law.

The State Strategy for Childhood and Adolescence Rights 2023-2030 is a comprehensive national plan aimed at improving and protecting the rights and well-being of children and adolescents. The Strategy is based, among other frameworks, on the [2018 Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) and on the 2030 Agenda. It also aligns with the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. Eurochild members participated in its design, and are currently advocating for its full implementation.

For the first time, there is now a Ministry of Youth and Childhood, responsible for the welfare and

rights of children and youth. There is also a Youth and Childhood Committee in the parliament.

The Concluding Observations of the UN Committee are usually followed up by both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Youth and Childhood.

### Early childhood development

Protecting children's rights from the earliest years of life is included in different national strategies and regulations. However, increasing the coverage and quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services remains a challenge. In Spain, [6 out of 10 children do not have access to the first cycle of early childhood education](#).

In 2022, the Ministry of Health set up a group of early care experts, with representatives of autonomous communities and civil society organisations to develop a roadmap for early care in Spain for all children who need it.

The government has also committed to ensuring ECEC access to children aged 0-3. However, the lack of childcare places and high costs prevents many families in vulnerable situations from accessing ECEC, causing situations of inequality from the first years of life.

Investing in early childhood is a policy objective in Spain and financial assistance is directed at families with young children, so younger children have lower levels of poverty compared to older children. However, this is not enough to address the barriers faced by families with young children. A comprehensive and integrated approach to early childhood is needed, with concrete and measurable targets, indicators and disaggregated data.

As an example, the Catalan Government has developed a comprehensive approach to early childhood development that goes beyond childcare. This approach includes various measures that address different aspects of child



development, including education, health, social welfare, and family support. One of the pillars of this approach is the Comprehensive Plan for Health Promotion, which aims to guarantee quality healthcare for children from birth to six years of age, with preventive, diagnostic, and therapeutic measures, as well as health promotion and education programmes for families.

### Children's mental health

Spain is one of the European countries with the highest prevalence of mental health problems among children and adolescents. Poverty is one of the contributing factors to poor mental health.

In 2022, the Ministry of Health published the [Mental Health Strategy of the National Health System](#), which includes a focus on children's mental health. However, this strategy lacks concrete measures and indicators, and there is insufficient investment and not enough staff in child

psychiatry and psychology services.

There are concerns regarding the inadequate response to the mental health needs of migrant and refugee children, many of whom arrive in Spain having faced war, family separation, abuse, sexual exploitation and violence. On arrival, they face additional difficulties, including detention, school drop-out, discrimination and uncertainty about their status and future. Early and timely intervention to support their mental health is needed, along with other support services.

### Child safety and well-being online

The digital divide is a reality in Spain, with great inequalities in access to digital technology for children and adolescents.

Violence, including sexual violence, in the digital environment is increasingly present in the lives of children and adolescents.

There is an urgent need for a specific law to address the problems children face in the digital sphere. In June 2024 the Spanish Government announced draft legislation for the protection of children and adolescents in the digital environment. The draft bill contains measures to modify the Spanish Penal Code, with new user protections such as age verification systems. It focuses on the rights of children and adolescents in the digital environment, considering them a specific group with specific needs requiring special protection.

If approved and implemented in full, the legislation will be a significant milestone.

### Child protection systems

There are still measures from Organic Law 8/2021 on the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents against violence that need to be developed at the national level, such as the creation of the Central Information Registry and the establishment of child-

friendly justice and specialised courts. At the regional and local levels, it is crucial to develop the protection roles outlined in the law. These individuals are responsible for preventing violence and implementing action protocols in all environments where children and adolescents are present. However, regulatory development across the various autonomous communities has been inconsistent and insufficient. It is also essential to focus on the implementation of the Strategy for the Eradication of Violence against Children and Adolescents, and to ensure it is backed by sufficient funding.

### Education

Access to education for all children is a right guaranteed by Spanish law. Education is compulsory and free for all children between six and 16. However, the right to quality education is affected by socio-economic, cultural, and geographical factors.

The education system faces significant challenges in meeting the diverse needs of children and ensuring quality, inclusivity, and equal opportunities for learning and growth. There have been important legislative changes aimed at improving the situation, with an acknowledgement that socio-economically disadvantaged pupils require special educational support and with specific objectives to prevent segregation of vulnerable students and enhance the quality of early childhood education. However, the law's effectiveness is limited by vague implementation details and insufficient funding.

The school drop-out rate in 2023 was 13.6%, and disproportionately affects children living in poverty or social exclusion and Roma children. [Based on the data provided by 112 educational centres](#) in which there is a high or very high concentration, 28.6% of the centres have a high concentration of Roma children; 31.2% are segregated and 40.2% are extremely segregated.

The digital divide further exacerbates educational inequalities, as many low-income households lack Internet access and computers.

Spain's investment in education, 4.94% of GDP in 2021, remains relatively low.

Socio-economic segregation is another major issue - public schools have a much higher proportion of low-income and immigrant pupils compared to private and semi-private schools. This segregation negatively affects educational outcomes and perpetuates inequality.

To ensure equal access to education and extracurricular activities, Catalonia has support services for pupils with special educational needs, including human resources and materials (e.g. curricular adaptations and assisted technologies). This enables children with disabilities or learning difficulties to fully participate in the school environment.

## Climate change and the environment

Climate change represents one of the greatest environmental, social and economic challenges of our time. Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, with those living in the most vulnerable situations being most affected.

Despite national plans and regulations that give special consideration to vulnerable groups, these are not accompanied by concrete measures, either at the national or local level.

The lack of safe and healthy school environments and the lack of green spaces in cities, are all issues that directly affect children's rights.

## Child participation

The State Council for Childhood and Adolescence Participation supports children's involvement in policy-making. However, real

participation remains limited, with major challenges.

Awareness of children's rights and their right to participate in family, school, judicial, and policy matters is low, preventing children from fully exercising their rights in civic processes.

There is no specific regulatory framework that supports children's right to association, with legal gaps in the right to association for children under 14 and restrictions for children under 12 in student associations in schools.

Eurochild members are not aware that the [Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool](#) has been used.

In Catalonia however, municipalities have created children's councils as advisory bodies that allow minors to participate in local decisions and to express their opinions on various issues that affect them. The National Council of Children and Adolescents of Catalonia

represents children throughout the region and promotes their participation in public matters.

### **Additional children's rights issues**

#### *Children in alternative care*

While regulations prioritise foster care, in practice foster care decreased by 1.51 % in 2022, while residential care increased by 5.46 %. The difference between children in foster care (18,177) and residential care (17,061) is minimal. In 2021 and 2022, 75 % of children in the child protection system were placed directly in residential care. Young people leaving alternative care find themselves in economic and social vulnerability, without sufficient support.

The government has committed to ensure that by 2025 no child under the age of six will be living in residential care, but this objective does not seem realistic.

#### *Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children*

Unaccompanied migrant children are particularly vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion and face difficulties in accessing housing or accommodation and renewing their documentation. Reception and support services for unaccompanied and/or refugee migrant children are inadequate, with concerns about reception and identification on arrival, the lack of specialised legal advice, poor conditions in reception centres and children living on the streets or in adult facilities.

In 2023, 19.26% of asylum seekers in Spain were children, of whom 24,755 were under thirteen and 6,674 aged 14-17. However, the asylum system is not sufficiently adapted to children's needs.

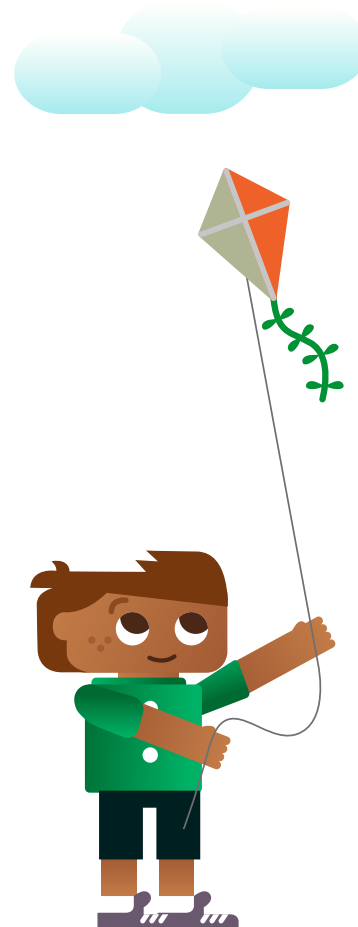
#### *Children in the justice system*

Spain still needs to create child-friendly justice and specialised

courts. Currently, children facing trial for cases of sexual violence do not have adequate processes that protect their rights or guarantee their safety and protection.

#### *Housing*

Housing costs have increased more than salaries in the last 10 years. This has created significant difficulties for many families with children, especially those on low and medium incomes and directly contributes to child poverty. Many families spend more than 30% of their income on rent or mortgages. 50% of people in insecure housing (including shanty towns) are under the age of 16.



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

### Child poverty in Spain

Spain has the second highest rate of child poverty in the EU. Data from the 2023 Living Conditions Survey shows children are the group most at risk of poverty, at 28.9%, with a 1.1% increase from last year. Children are the age group with the highest increase. The percentage of children in severe material deprivation rose from 10.1% in 2022 to 10.8% in 2023.

Three areas where the Spanish government should increase public investment are:

- Social housing;
- Universal financial support for parents, through refundable deductions in personal income tax;
- Education, especially for Roma children, children in poverty and immigrant children.

Children in need are:

- children in households with 3 or more dependent children
- children in single-parent families
- children whose parents are immigrants
- Roma children
- children in low-income households
- children with physical, intellectual, or sensory disabilities
- children in the protection system

Eurochild members highlighted three policy priorities that would contribute to reducing child poverty and social exclusion in Spain:

- Simplify and improve access to the Minimum Vital Income (Ingreso Mínimo Vital) which provides cash benefits to those at risk of severe poverty, and ensure that it reaches the most vulnerable children and families who currently cannot access it, including children with irregular migration status and families

who are in the process of applying for asylum.

- Guarantee access to [free school meals](#) for all children in poverty and invest in school canteens and kitchens in both primary and secondary schools.
- Ensure universal and free access to early childhood education (0-3 years).

### European Social Fund + (ESF+)

More than 10% of Spanish ESF+ investments will be earmarked to reduce child poverty and improve access to basic rights and services for vulnerable children and their families, in line with the European Child Guarantee. At an autonomous level, the ESF+ is managed through the regions.

### The European Child Guarantee

While Spain has adopted its [Child Guarantee National Action Plan](#) (NAP), it has yet to be implemented as operational plans need to be developed by Spain's Autonomous Communities.

The NAP identifies the children most in need in Spain and highlights them throughout the document. Spain's biennial report will be published in November 2024.

The NAP will be financed largely by ESF+ funding.

Plataforma de Infancia is part of the monitoring committee for the implementation of the Child Guarantee. The State Council for the Participation of Children and Adolescents was consulted on the elaboration of the NAP.

There is cooperation between different ministries and between the national, autonomous, and regional levels, in the implementation of the Child Guarantee. At the advisory level, there is cooperation between third sector organisations, the Childhood Observatory, and children themselves. UNICEF-Spain coordinates the organisation of children's participation.

**“Overall we think the implementation of the Child Guarantee is still in progress but there is a lack of information.”**

## European Semester 2024 - Country reports and recommendations

### Overview of the Country Report

Spain's [Country Report](#) acknowledges that the rate of child poverty remains high, with important regional disparities. Social transfers have had a limited impact on poverty reduction. The report states that more social policy action is needed to achieve Spain's child poverty reduction target.

There is no mention of early childhood development, of children in alternative care, or children with a migration background, including child refugees, or any mention of mental health.

10.5% of the ESF+ will be dedicated to the implementation of the Child Guarantee.

The proportion of students underachieving is far from the EU target, and the rate of early school leavers is above the EU average, which poses risks for future productivity.

There is no mention of children in the [Country Specific Recommendations](#), but the introduction emphasises the importance of strengthening the capacity of social transfers to reduce inequality and poverty, particularly affecting children.



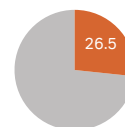
## “Country Recommendation

Türkiye should take action to ensure an evidence-based and accountable child protection system.

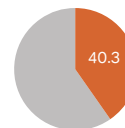
## Country Profile 2024



# Türkiye



**Child Population:**  
**22,578,378 (2023)**  
26.5% of total population



**Child Poverty:**  
**9,034,000 (2023)**  
40.3% (2023)  
▼ -3.3% compared to 2021

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

[Hayat Sende](#)

## Children's Rights in Türkiye

Türkiye ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1990 and the UNCRC has been fully incorporated into domestic law, but there are implementation gaps.

The UNCRC is reflected in legislation not only in the field of protecting children, but also in a range of areas such as ensuring equal opportunities in education, access to the right to health, and the treatment of children involved in crime. However, the challenge is in implementation. In addition, children have difficulties in accessing mechanisms to claim their rights.

Türkiye does not apply a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) tool in policy-making. Hayat Sende recommends the use of CRIAs.

The [Ministry of Family and Social Services](#) has lead responsibility for children's rights and prepares a child rights strategy and action

plan every five years. The [latest strategy covers the period 2023-2028](#). There are also [sub-committees](#) on different children's rights topics in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye.

The UNCRC is always referred to in speeches by policymakers. However, while legislation in Türkiye is very strong with regard to children's rights, in practice they are not given enough attention.

There is no information available on the government's response to, and implementation of, the Concluding Observations by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

There is a shrinking space for civil society organisations (CSOs) in Türkiye. [Research by the Civil Society Development Centre](#) shows that legal regulations are restricting the registration, operation and funding of CSOs, with some organisations facing threats and harassment. The participation of civil society in policy development and decision-making processes in Türkiye at

local and national levels has also decreased significantly in recent years.

### Children's mental health

Mental health support is very poor, with no focus on prevention. There are psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers in public hospitals but support for mental health needs is very low, and private provision is very expensive. So, if a child needs mental health support, it is not easy to access qualified services.

There is not enough mental health support in schools or in the community. Schools have counsellors but they cannot provide holistic support to children and families. There is a need for social workers in schools, for early intervention and to reduce the risks of mental health problems.

### Child safety and well-being online

According to the [Turkish Statistical Research Institute](#), the time spent

by children aged 6-15 in front of a screen has increased since 2013. By promoting activities that integrate screen time with reading, family interaction, and face-to-face socialisation, children can be helped to make the most of their digital experiences while fostering well-rounded development and reducing the risk of digital addiction.

The Ministry of Family and Social Services provides training on the dangers that children may be exposed to in the digital environment. The Social Media Working Group, established by the Ministry of Family and Social Services, intervened in 1,259 cases to protect children from harmful content. The Ministry launched a campaign to protect children online in 2023 and also published *a Guide to Protecting Children from Digital Dangers for Families* in 2022.

While there are many different projects to protect children online, there are not enough safeguarding measures and there is insufficient awareness

among families and teachers to keep children safe in the digital sphere. Families do not spend enough time with their children, and teachers cannot identify and intervene when children are at risk.

### Child protection systems

Türkiye has two main laws on child protection (5395 Child Protection Law and 2828 Social Services Law). These afford the same protections to all children in Türkiye, whether Turkish citizens or not. The Ministry of Family and Social Services is responsible for child protection and the alternative care system.

Children in other vulnerable groups (children involved in crime, refugee children, children with disabilities, etc.) are entitled to the same child protection services. However, there is no comprehensive legislation specially for these groups of children.

Türkiye also provides care for Ukrainian children alongside

Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan children. However, the capacity of the child protection system is insufficient. Overall, the child protection system suffers from a lack of timely interventions, a lack of monitoring and follow-up and relies on the conscience of individual case workers. The number of children in need of protection has increased. But the capacity of the system has not, and it mainly responds to existing vulnerabilities, rather than focusing on prevention, counselling, or empowerment.

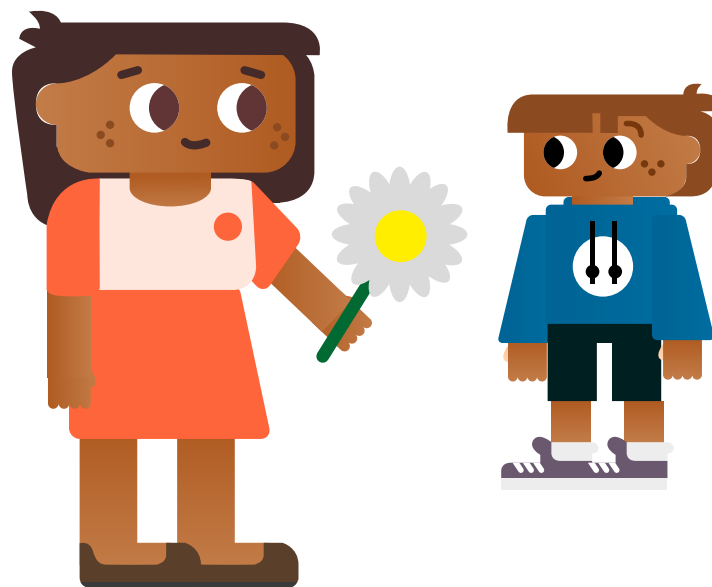
There are 24,534 children and young people living in the care system in Türkiye. Children in care in Türkiye live in institutional care and family-based care settings. 14,553 children live in institutional care and 9,981 children live in foster care. However, there are many children in informal care, including children being cared for by relatives or acquaintances.

The majority of children are still in institutional care (60% of children in alternative care). There is no government agenda to close

these institutions. Although the government encourages foster care, investments and funds go to institutions rather than to foster care. New institutions are being built to increase capacity after the earthquake and the wars in Syria and Ukraine.

Many children are supported to stay with their families instead of being placed in the care system.

There are approximately 166,000 children in Türkiye who are with their families instead of going into the care system, with the help of social and financial support payments provided by the Ministry of Family and Social Services. According to legislation, additional counselling should be provided for these children but in practice only money is given. While this helps to keep children with their families, it





is not enough to ensure that they receive the best care.

While Turkish children can benefit from financial and employment opportunities after leaving care, children from other nationalities cannot benefit from these services on leaving care at 18.

### Child participation

There are children's councils in some municipalities, but this is not a very common practice. The Ministry of Family and Social Services has established a [Children's Advisory Board](#) in each province and holds regular meetings to receive children's opinions and suggestions. However, there is no data on how many of the suggestions made by children have been implemented by the municipalities and the Ministry, and the extent to which they have been taken into account.

### Additional children's rights issues

There is a need to prioritise access to education and psycho-social protection of children from abuse in the areas affected by the earthquake in 2023. Children in the affected areas still need services to deal with the traumatic effects of the earthquake.

Children with disabilities are treated as children in need rather than as individuals with rights and there is insufficient legislation and good practice with regard to their right to participation, non-discrimination and equal opportunities in education.

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

#### Child poverty in Türkiye

Child poverty is increasing and is transmitted from generation to generation.

Families and children living in poverty are at increased risk of neglect, abuse, child labour and early marriage. The way to prevent this is for adults to have access to the labour market and earn a sufficient income.

To address child poverty and social exclusion in Türkiye, the government should prioritise:

- A stable economy and financial support for family and community well-being.
- Measures to prevent and address children's vulnerabilities in central and local areas such as villages, neighbourhoods and rural areas.
- Enhancement of the social workforce working with children at risk, including through training and specialisation on case management procedures.
- Clearly defined roles for staff working in the child protection system.
- The best interests of the child in policy and practice.
- A system of prevention of family separation and specialised programmes for the needs of

vulnerable children.

- The establishment of community-based support mechanisms.
- Support for children with disabilities to ensure children are not placed in alternative care due to lack of services in the community.
- Parenting support and measures to strengthen families.
- Measures to ensure children are supported by the extended family whenever parents cannot take care of them.

The groups of children most in need in Türkiye are children living in poor neighbourhoods, Roma children, immigrant children and children affected by the earthquake. Special attention should also be paid to children in alternative care.

#### Example of good practice to mitigate child poverty

After the earthquake, many projects supporting employment in the south-eastern Anatolia Region were implemented by

government institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). For example, the [Social Entrepreneurship, Empowerment and Cohesion Project](#) (financed by the European Union FRIT II Financial Assistance Fund) aims to improve livelihood opportunities for women and youth by supporting social entrepreneurship and local institutions that provide services to local communities.

The [Foundation for the Evaluation of Women's Labour](#) funds cooperatives that support women working as domestic workers in Türkiye to earn money, empower them locally and offer employment opportunities.

## Enlargement Countries

The process of joining the EU, also called accession, has three main steps: candidacy, accession negotiations and treaty ratification. The Enlargement Package aims to provide a detailed assessment of the state of play in enlargement countries, including the progress concerning

upholding human rights and children's rights. For the 2024 Enlargement Package of the European Commission, Eurochild consulted with members to share their insights into the situation of children in the EU enlargement countries.

This contribution can inform the annual Enlargement Package presented by the European Commission, with overviews of the most pressing issues and progress by Türkiye towards EU accession.

The 2023 Enlargement Package does include children's rights issues in Türkiye.

Hayat Sende identified five priorities for Türkiye to tackle child poverty and social exclusion:

1. Stabilising the economy and providing financial support for families and communities. Extending financial support to families and communities is essential to alleviate child poverty.
2. Ensuring an evidence-

based and accountable child protection system with sustainable services for children.

3. Implementing prevention and protection initiatives and community-based support mechanisms in villages, neighbourhoods and rural areas to safeguard vulnerable children.
4. Expanding the social work profession in schools (school social work) and community-based mechanisms to address emerging issues such as abuse and bullying, and develop prevention programmes and counselling for children at risk.
5. Increasing investment in family-based alternative care.

Children living in poor neighbourhoods, Roma children, immigrant/refugee children and children from earthquake affected areas are at higher risk of poverty, abuse, and neglect. They also face higher risks of dropping out of education, of child labour, malnutrition, and child marriage.

Children in alternative care are at higher risk of school drop-out, social exclusion, bullying, psycho-social problems, unnecessary use of psychiatric drugs, and other challenges related to institutional care such as lack of parental or other support, love and attention.

There are initiatives to involve stakeholders, including children and CSOs, in shaping national policy, but these are not sufficient or comprehensive. Engagement only happens at the government's own initiative.

Hayat Sende recommends that the EU makes funding available to small and medium-sized NGOs in Türkiye, including organisations advocating for change.

The EU should enable funding opportunities with smaller budgets from which medium-sized CSOs can benefit directly and also take steps to encourage the government to cooperate with CSOs. It is necessary to ensure that a wider variety of CSOs working on different child rights issues is financially supported.

## “Country Recommendation

Ukraine should develop a comprehensive national strategy on all children's rights, that includes all vulnerable groups and coordinates all policies, strategies, funding, legislation and initiatives linked to the implementation of the UNCRC. This strategy should be adequately funded, and should be binding.

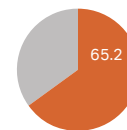
Country  
Profile 2024



# Ukraine



**Child Population:**  
6,336,505 (2022)



**Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:**  
65.2% (2022)

### RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Partnership for Every Child

Polina Klykova, Founder of Children's Rights Info  
EDUKIDS

## Children's Rights in Ukraine

Ukraine was among the first countries to adopt the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 33 years ago. Today, Ukraine has comprehensive legislation on children's rights. [The Law of Ukraine on Childhood Protection](#) is aligned with the UNCRC, with similar articles focused on children's rights. Children's rights are also included in the Civil and Family Codes, and other national legislation.

There is no approved Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) process in Ukraine. The implementation of CRIAs would help to coordinate action on children's rights protection, to set priorities and put children's rights at the forefront of government policy.

Ukraine's last action plan on UNCRC implementation covered the period 2018-2021. Currently, a few government programmes

and strategies consider children's rights, but there is no single national strategy. A national plan on children's rights is crucial to ensure a comprehensive approach to the implementation the UNCRC.

The level of awareness and understanding of the UNCRC remains unsatisfactory. The government does not often refer to the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. However, there is a Commissioner for Human Rights whose mandate also includes children's rights.

The civil society organisations (CSOs) sector is growing in response to the needs of children and families affected by war and conflict.

### Children's mental health

The ongoing war in Ukraine has precipitated a [profound mental health crisis](#), particularly among children, adolescents, and caregivers. There is not enough mental health support — and

awareness of its importance — at institutional level. Initiatives such as [How Are You](#) and [Gen.Ukrainian](#) support and raise awareness about mental health.

### Child safety and well-being online

Ukraine has not adopted a national strategy on online safety for children. So far, national companies are not obligated to remove illegal or harmful content for children, unless there is a court decision, that can take years. Without effective age-verification mechanisms and preventive measures, children are vulnerable to risks and harmful content online.

However, national legislation is aligned with the Council of Europe [Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#) (the “the Lanzarote Convention”), and also addresses some aspects of cyberbullying.

## Child protection systems

Ukrainian legislation recognises the need for child protection from all forms of child mistreatment, and defines entities responsible for identifying, reporting, and responding to such cases. However, in practice there are obstacles to ensuring effective child protection, including challenges in cross-sector collaboration. In addition, child protection professionals are not required to have specific training.

There are additional concerns regarding the child protection system in Ukraine:

Prevention of separation: according to the law, case management should have a focus on prevention. However, prevention of separation is not a criteria for social services dealing with families in crisis, leading to an over-reliance on alternative care.

Support to families in vulnerable situations: due to the large number of families that need

assistance the level of support remains unsatisfactory.

Child abduction: during the war, there have been numerous cases of child abduction by Russia. There is currently no comprehensive system that would allow for full child protection in this area.

Scarcity of staff: due to the high number of families in need of assistance and the shortage of staff, the level of support remains inadequate, especially in response to the challenges created by the war.

## Education

Ukraine's education system aims to provide every child with access to quality education. Reform initiatives have been introduced to enhance the quality of education and inclusivity, addressing the diverse needs of all pupils, including those with disabilities or special educational needs.

Ukraine has made significant strides towards inclusive education. The Ministry of

Education and Science promotes an inclusive model that allows children with special needs to learn alongside their peers in mainstream schools whenever possible.

Programmes such as *Inclusive Education for All* aim to train educators to recognise and meet various educational needs, with appropriate interventions and the adaptation of teaching methods and materials. Special educational institutions and resource centres support children with disabilities, offering customised learning plans and additional materials.

Access to education has been significantly disrupted since the beginning of the invasion.

This has resulted in:

- Interruption of education: continuous shelling and military actions have led to many schools being damaged or destroyed. The resulting danger has caused significant interruptions to learning.
- Displacement and mixed

education: many children have been displaced within the country or have fled abroad. Ukrainian pupils often attend schools in different countries, where education systems may not align with Ukraine's curriculum, leading to possible education gaps.

- Loss of teachers and educational resources: the war has affected the availability of teachers and resources, limiting access to qualified educators who can provide the necessary support for inclusive education.
- Psycho-social impacts: the emotional and psychological effects of war, including trauma from violence and loss, create barriers to effective learning for many children. Mental health support in education spaces has become crucial.

## Climate change and the environment

In [their responses](#) during consultations for the UNCRC's [General Comment 26 \(2023\) on Children's Rights and the Environment with a Special Focus](#)

[on Climate Change](#), Ukrainian children highlighted the need to take care of nature, including by recycling, and also emphasised the impact of the war on the environment and the climate.

## Child participation

Children are experts in their own lives and should participate in decisions that affect them. However, in Ukraine child participation is often tokenistic.

Often, the children who provide input to national or local councils or in school settings, are 'high achieving' children with good marks, while more disadvantaged children, children with disabilities, minority children and children from diverse communities are not often given such opportunities.

Currently there are no adequately funded and sustainable government or other consultative mechanisms for children to participate in decision-making processes on issues that affect them.

There is a lack of awareness of child participation requirements and techniques by Courts and administrative decision-makers, such as Child Protection Services.

There are no safe and confidential processes for children to report issues to a professional or representative in Ukraine. Children's views are often ignored or reported to those who are violating their rights, especially for children living in residential institutions.

### Children affected by war and conflict

Every child has been impacted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The depth of impact and the scope of rights violations include, but are not limited to, the right to life, health, education, family, identity, information, and participation.

At least 611 children have lost their lives as a direct consequence of the conflict. Around 1.5 million

children have found refuge in Europe, and approximately 800,000 children are displaced within Ukraine, struggling with the availability and affordability of housing.

In 2024 alone, at least 160 education facilities were damaged and 47 destroyed by the hostilities. In the 2022-2023 school year, millions of children in Ukraine could only access education online due to security risks, and more than half of children across Ukraine were unable to access even online education due to blackouts resulting from ongoing military conflict.

Since 2022, a total of 1,569 health facilities throughout Ukraine have been damaged. Displaced families and those residing in areas experiencing ongoing hostilities encounter difficulties accessing primary healthcare services and medicines. Particularly impacted are pregnant women and infants,

as maternal and newborn care services are significantly scarcer in areas affected by hostilities.<sup>2</sup>

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

### Child poverty in Ukraine

In 2023, the Ptoukha Institute for Demography and Social Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, in partnership with UNICEF, [published information](#) on child poverty, emphasising the high risk of 'sudden' poverty (caused by damage to homes, internal displacement etc) becoming 'chronic' poverty. The report states that in 2022 poverty levels increased from 39.1% to 60.2%, and child poverty increased from 43.2% to 65.2%.

Eurochild members in Ukraine identified three areas where Ukraine should increase public investment in children, in order to

address child poverty and social exclusion:

- education
- mental health recovery
- early childhood support

## Enlargement Countries

The process of joining the EU, also called accession, has three main steps: candidacy, accession negotiations and treaty ratification. The Enlargement Package aims to provide a detailed assessment of the state of play in enlargement countries, including the progress concerning upholding human rights and children's rights. For the 2024 Enlargement Package of the European Commission, Eurochild consulted with members to share their insights into the situation of children in the EU enlargement countries.

This contribution can inform the annual Enlargement Package presented by the European

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<sup>2</sup> UN Ukraine (2024) International day for protection of children: the continued impact of the war on children's rights in Ukraine

Commission, with overviews of the most pressing issues and progress by Ukraine towards EU accession.

The [Enlargement Package report on Ukraine 2023](#) included different issues related to children's rights, with an overview of adopted international legislation and current national data. It included information on the impact of the war on children's access to medical services and education, and violations caused by occupations and deportations, and provided information on children in alternative care and deinstitutionalisation, child mistreatment (including abuse and child trafficking), children with disabilities and Roma children.

However, the report did not cover issues related to children in conflict with the law, and issues affecting children in detention and how prison affects their rights, including their access to education. It also failed to include

issues affecting children in court proceedings, especially where there are no child or family courts. Issues affecting children include (but are not limited to): delays in case processing, the lack of expertise regarding children among judges and attorneys and no real implementation of children's right to be heard.

Eurochild members in Ukraine identified five priorities to address child poverty and social exclusion in the country:

1. Develop a National Strategy for Children's Rights, with an action plan, and ensure all government programmes fulfil children's rights and consider the effects of war on children and their wellbeing.
2. Collect relevant data on children and use it to prioritise policy decisions. The data should be made available through open sources.
3. Develop and implement a minimum framework for child participation at local level and ensure all children, including

those from vulnerable groups, are represented.

4. Create an inter-ministerial and cross-sector national body or authority responsible for monitoring, evaluating and reporting on all children's rights enshrined in the UNCRC.
5. Ensure better access to justice for children, including better implementation of their right to be heard in administrative and court proceedings.

The most vulnerable groups of children in Ukraine are:

- Roma children without birth certificates, without access to education or healthcare, and who often experience labour exploitation from a young age
- children whose parents are in occupied territories
- children in occupied territories and displaced children
- children orphaned due to military action
- children in institutional care (including children who have their biological family but live in residential settings)

CSOs and children are often involved in shaping national policies in Ukraine. Some ministries and local administrations organise consultations and public hearings, or form civic councils with citizens and CSOs. However, monitoring and evaluating such activities is impossible as there is no follow-up after these events, and often no changes to the programmes and policies being reviewed or considered. Petitions initiated by civil society are used to advocate for a range of topics in Ukraine.

Eurochild members in Ukraine recommend that the EU should:

- Cooperate with local NGOs to exchange information and data on the children's rights context in the country.
- Provide funding for programmes on children's rights, based on country priorities.

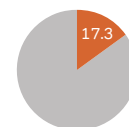
## “Country Recommendation

Wales should introduce legislation to fully and directly incorporate the UNCRC into Welsh law, and make Child Rights Impact Assessments a mandatory requirement.

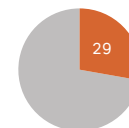
## Country Profile 2024



# Wales



**Child population (0-15 years):**  
**549,000 (2023)**  
17.3% of total population



**Child Poverty<sup>1</sup>:**  
29% (2021-2023)  
▲ +1% compared to 2020-2022

## RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Children in Wales

<sup>1</sup> Relative income poverty: April 2022 to March 2023, Welsh Government, 2024.



## Children's Rights in Wales

Wales was the first UK jurisdiction to legislate to incorporate the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into domestic law through the [Rights of Children and Young Persons \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#). This law requires all Welsh Ministers to have due regard to the UNCRC when exercising any of their functions, including all policy and legislative decisions. However, as an example of indirect incorporation, the due regard approach has its limitations as it does not confer a legal remedy for a child who considers their rights to have been violated and it has not enhanced judicial accountability.

Wales has a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CIA) [process](#) in place. It is the tool officials are expected to use to support Welsh Ministers in ensuring the due regard duty enshrined in the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 is fulfilled. The Welsh Government

has produced a [manual](#) and [template](#) to support officials to undertake CRIAs, and regularly produces and publishes CRIAs in support of public consultations on various policy matters. However, CRIAs are not mandatory, their application is inconsistent and the content is variable.

Children in Wales has called for the Welsh Government to systematically complete and publish CRIAs on all policy and legislative proposals which are likely to directly or indirectly affect children, and to introduce legislation to make CRIAs a statutory requirement.

The Welsh Government has published a [national plan of action](#) for children. However, the plan does not effectively communicate how Welsh Ministers will implement the UNCRC or the most recent Concluding Observations from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. Rather, it presents a list of priorities to be achieved without setting clear targets and

without a roadmap explaining how priorities will be translated into practice.

Children in Wales has called on the Welsh Government to publish a comprehensive and fully resourced children's rights national strategy, with achievable and measurable rights-based targets subject to robust monitoring, evaluation and scrutiny arrangements. More encouragingly, the Welsh Government has recently published their [response](#) to the UN's Concluding Observations following prior engagement with Children in Wales and other key stakeholders.

Overall, there is significant awareness of the UNCRC in Wales' devolved government. The Welsh Government recognises the need for officials to have knowledge about children's rights to enable them to provide comprehensive advice to Welsh Ministers. An [online training approach](#) has been developed for Welsh Ministers and Officials. However, the

content of this training is not publicly available, and data on how many ministers and officials are accessing the training is not routinely published.

Following a concerted [campaign](#) for a named cabinet minister for children and young people, the Welsh Government have recently appointed a [Minister for Children and Social Care](#). Responsibility for children sits within this Minister's portfolio, though it is unclear how responsibility for implementing the UNCRC is discharged across all ministerial departments.

Reference to the UNCRC by parliamentarians and ministers in debates is limited at best, often reserved to a few strong and reliable advocates. Recent [research](#) examining the legal integration of UNCRC legislation supported this, finding that reference was restricted to certain debates, committees and personnel. However, reference to the UNCRC is more prominent across Welsh Government policy, especially where there is

considered to be a direct impact on children and young people.

Overall, Children in Wales believes that cross-party commitment to children's rights and the fulfilment of the UNCRC remains strong in Wales, in spite of increasing hostility to human rights from the previous UK Government in policy matters which are reserved to Westminster.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to the space that civil society organisations are operating in, the main challenge is having sufficient capacity to be able to effectively advocate on behalf of children's rights and ensure that any violations can be challenged within the parameters of the existing law.

### Early childhood development

The Welsh Government recognises the importance of babies, children's first 1000 days and pre-school children in policy-making, and has a dedicated

Minister with responsibility for children's early years. In 2024, Wales launched the [Early Childhood, Play, Learning and Care \(ECPLC\) Plan](#), which sets out a range of commitments for children aged 0-5. The plan is complemented by a [suite of resources](#) and tools for childcare, play and pre-school providers, including [children's rights guidance](#) for parents and carers. A [10 year early years workforce plan](#) has also been reviewed and refreshed.

### Children's mental health

The Welsh Government's [NEST Framework](#) has been designed to create an integrated, whole-system approach to improving mental health and well-being services for babies, children, young people and their families in Wales. The government has also recently consulted on a new all-age [Mental Health Strategy](#) with an action plan to follow. Schools are required to offer counselling

services for children aged 10-18. Child and adolescent mental health services are available for children who are referred for specialist intervention and who meet the criteria. There are waiting lists in place to access these services. There is also a National Health Service 24hr/7days a week mental health helpline available. The [alternative civil society report on the situation of children's rights in Wales](#) to the United Nations focuses on some of the mental health challenges faced by children and young people, particularly since the pandemic, and sets out a number of recommendations.

### Child safety and well-being online

The Welsh government published a [Digital Inclusion Strategy](#) and action plan in 2022. Many of the gaps for children include lack of access to digital equipment and broadband, which can compromise their education

and social network. This can be exacerbated for children living in rural areas, in disadvantage or with certain characteristics. In respect of safeguarding, the UK government is currently implementing the [Online Safety Act 2023](#) for England and Wales to better protect children and adults online.

### Child protection systems

The [All Wales National Safeguarding Procedures](#) is nationally recognised as the central resource for responding to child protection concerns. The Welsh Government has also produced detailed statutory guidance for schools and a plethora of [guidance](#) across a range of safeguarding matters, including child sexual abuse and exploitation, domestic abuse and harmful practices. There are a range of programmes and initiatives in place designed to keep families together, notably the Families First programme.

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<sup>2</sup> For example in relation to immigration or the European Convention on Human Rights.

This is administrated through local authorities, and provides interventions and support to families at risk and to specific groups of children such as young carers and disabled children.

## Education

All children have access to education in Wales. However, with regard to inclusive education and the rights of disabled and neurodivergent children, a recent report<sup>3</sup> concluded that “A significant number of children and young people’s rights to an education as set out in Articles 28 and 29 of United Convention on the Rights of Child are currently being breached in Wales”. Provision and support is patchy, affecting children’s health and education. There is increasing complexity of need and reduced funding.

Another concern is the correlation between socio-economic disadvantage and levels of school attendance and exclusion. The Welsh Government has issued [guidance](#) for schools, parents and pupils to help improve levels of attendance, and is reviewing guidance on school exclusions. Recent figures on [attendance rates](#) show a slight improvement but 29% of all pupils still reached the persistent absence threshold. There is a lack of detailed data for some groups of children.

## Climate change and the environment

Environmental rights remain a key priority for children and young people in Wales. [75% of children](#) think governments need to take more action to tackle climate change and inequality, and 70% are worried about the world they will inherit. Children want more opportunities to connect

with green spaces and outdoor learning environments.

The Welsh Government made a climate emergency [declaration](#) and some positive steps have been taken to reduce the speed limit on residential roads; to introduce legislation to improve air quality; ban single-use plastic and lower pollution levels. However, further progress is needed to promote and support active travel arrangements and to address the prohibitive cost and poor availability of [public transport](#), disproportionately affecting children in low-income families and in rural communities.

## Child participation

Wales has made some progress through the establishment of an independent Youth Parliament and Young Wales, the Welsh Government’s national consultation mechanism —

which operates alongside other established local and regional structures. However, children’s views are still not systematically heard on all decisions affecting them. In practice there are more meaningful opportunities for children aged seven and above, as methods are often based around verbal communication, limiting both younger children and in some instances, children with additional needs.

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

### Child poverty in Wales

In Wales, [29% of children were living in relative income poverty<sup>4</sup> in 2021-2023](#). This figure has increased slightly from 28% in the previous period (2020-2022).

<sup>3</sup> Welsh Parliament, Children, Young People and Education Committee [Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?](#) p. 23, July 2024.

<sup>4</sup> A person is defined as living in relative income poverty if they are in a household where the total income is less than 60% of the average UK household income.

Children in Wales identified three areas where the Welsh and UK governments should increase public investment in children in order to address child poverty and social exclusion:

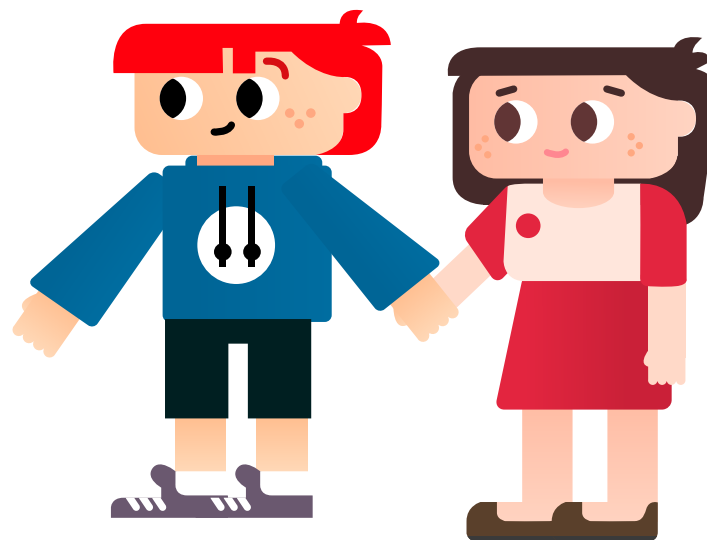
- Social security/welfare benefits: fix the 'safety net' for all families and take steps which include abolishing the two-child limit<sup>5</sup> and benefit cap<sup>6</sup>; reverse reductions in spending to social security payments and ensure that benefits are increased in line with inflation.
- Ensure childcare and early years education, free at the point of access.
- Ensure free school meals for all children, starting with the youngest, including provision during the school holidays.

According to Children in Wales, those who are most in need are:

- children in large families
- children in families with a disabled child or adult
- children in households with lone parents
- children from some minority ethnic backgrounds
- children with protected characteristics (e.g. Gypsies<sup>7</sup>, Roma and Travellers)
- children in families with low pay

The annual [Child and Family Poverty Surveys](#) provide a snapshot of the main trends and issues identified by professionals and young people in Wales, which identify increases in levels of debt, hunger and mental health challenges, as well as barriers to

education, school attendance and professional support.



<sup>5</sup> The two-child limit prevents parents from receiving any extra financial support (through universal credit or child tax credit) for a third or subsequent child born after 6 April 2017.

<sup>6</sup> The benefit cap restricts the total amount of support a working-age household can receive from the social security system for households with no work and those earning less than the equivalent of 16 hours a week at the minimum wage.

<sup>7</sup> In the UK, it is common in data collections to differentiate between:



-Gypsies (including English Gypsies, Scottish Gypsies or Travellers, Welsh Gypsies and other Romany people)

-Irish Travellers (who have specific Irish roots)

-Roma, understood to be more recent migrants from Central and Eastern Europe

The term Traveller can also encompass groups that travel. This includes, but is not limited to, New Travellers, Boaters, Bargees and Showpeople. [See the House of Commons Committee report on Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and the UK Government's Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller ethnicity summary.](#)

# Statistics explained

The arrow (  /  ) displayed on the cover for each country report reflects an increase or decrease in the 2023 (or 2022/2021) child poverty rate for that country over the previous year.

The data on population and child poverty provided in this publication were retrieved from Eurostat (October 2024).

Data on the child population is not always available or complete on Eurostat. For this reason, in some countries only the ratio of children is presented. As for non-EU countries, sources have been provided by members.

No data is currently available from Eurostat for child poverty in Ukraine, Moldova and Kosovo, for which other sources provided by members have been used when available.

As England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are not a geopolitical entity for which Eurostat provides data, the data included in this report is drawn from national data available in each country. The source of these specific datasets can be found in each of the country reports.

Eurostat data on child poverty is derived from [EU-SILC](#) (European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions), compiled annually, which is a key instrument for providing information required by the European Semester and the European Pillar of Social Right. AROPE (at risk of poverty or social exclusion) remains crucial to monitor European social policies. It reflects the share of the population fulfilling at least one of the following three conditions:

- at risk of poverty, meaning below the poverty threshold,
- in a situation of severe material deprivation,
- living in a household with a very low work intensity.

Population numbers are rounded to the nearest person. The most recent data on children [at risk of poverty or social exclusion](#) (AROPE) was taken from 2023, 2022 or 2021 data, depending on availability.

[More information on poverty rates in Europe](#)

[More information on AROPE methodology](#)

# Other recent Eurochild Publications

## Child Poverty

- [Poverty takes away the right to childhood](#)

## Child Guarantee

- [European Child Guarantee National Action Plans at a glance](#)
- [Eurochild overview of the European Child Guarantee Biennial Reports](#)

## Child Protection

- [Eurochild's statement on European Commission Recommendation to develop and strengthen integrated child protection systems](#)
- [Better Data for Better Child Protection Systems in Europe – technical report on data on children in alternative care across Europe](#)

## The Digital Sphere

- [Protecting children's rights in the digital environment](#)
- [Speaking up for change: Children's and caregivers' voices for safer online experiences](#)

## Early Childhood

- [Lessons Learned and Recommendations from the \*First Years, First Priority\* European campaign - \*First Years, First Priority\*](#)
- [Young refugee and migrant children and their families - \*First Years, First Priority\*](#)

- [Young children with disabilities and their families - \*First Years, First Priority\*](#)
- [Young Roma children and their families - \*First Years, First Priority\*](#)
- [Putting early childhood at the heart of the European Child Guarantee - \*First Years, First Priority\*](#)
- [Prioritising the professionalisation of early childhood education and care staff - \*First Years, First Priority\*](#)
- [Ensure universal access to maternal healthcare in the European Union - \*First Years, First Priority\*](#)

## Child Participation

- [DAY – Democratic Activation of Youth](#)
- [Child Citizens Project – Creating meaningful local child participation in Hungary](#)
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