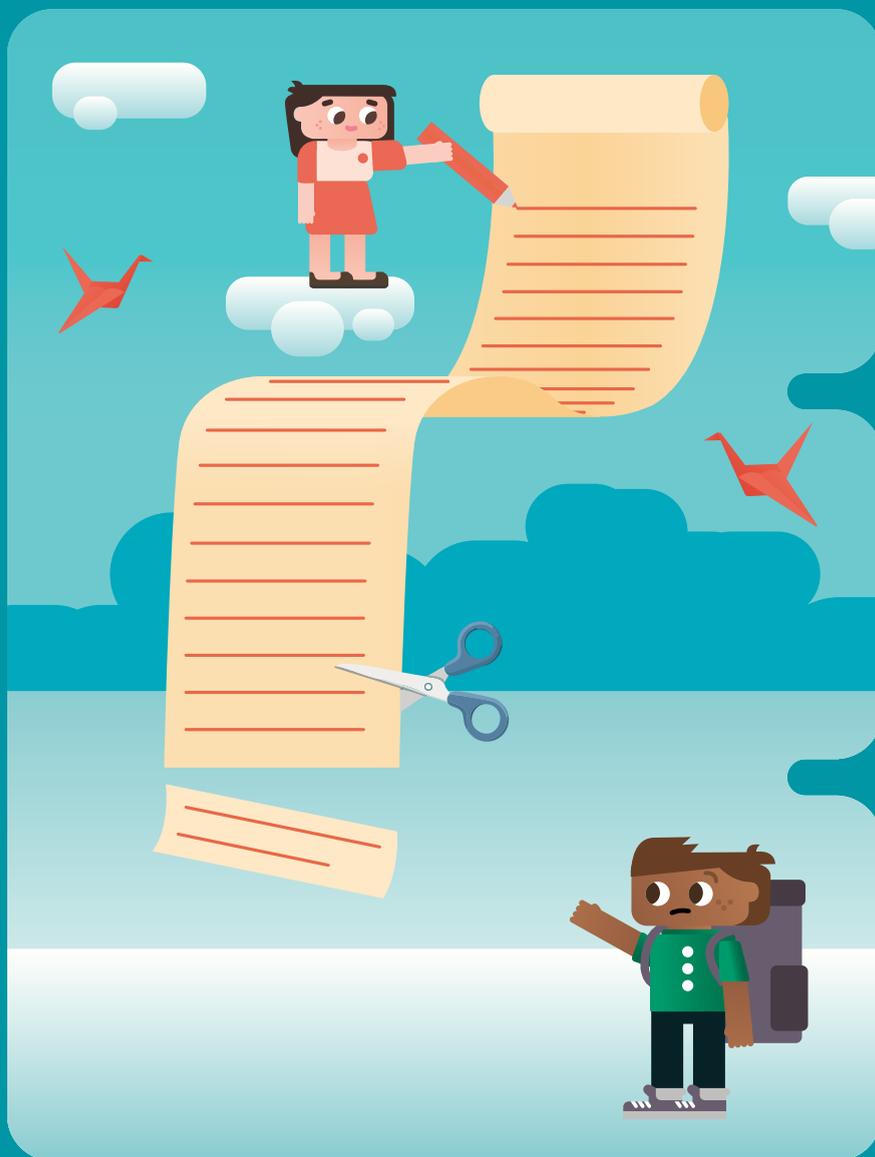Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

Unequal Childhoods: Rights on paper should be rights in practice

Eurochild 2025 report on children in need across Europe

Eurochild is the largest network of organisations working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects, protects and promotes the rights of all children. We represent over 225 organisations and individuals from across 41 European countries, reaching approximately 5,000 organisations and individuals on the ground. 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. Acting as a bridge between professionals and practitioners on the ground, who understand the realities and challenges faced by children and families, and the European Union (EU) institutions and other international stakeholders, we facilitate dialogue and monitoring processes to ensure that children's voices are heard and their rights are upheld. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the foundation of all our work.

Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

Contents

Purpose of the report

Eurochild's Flagship Report is a leading annual, comprehensive assessment of children's rights in Europe, led by civil society. Drawing on evidence from organisations and professionals working with children, the report provides an in-depth analysis, through a children's rights lens, to ensure that rights on paper become rights in practice. The report helps bridge key evidence and accountability gaps, strengthening efforts to uphold and advance children's rights.

The report focuses on three main themes:

1 **Evaluating Progress and Remaining Challenges on Children's Rights in Europe.** This includes reviewing the implementation of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** across European countries regarding:
  - Child poverty and social rights.
  - Child protection systems and online safety.
  - Children's mental health and well-being.
  - The rise of anti-child rights movements and the status of child participation.

2 **Enhancing Understanding of Poverty and Social Exclusion.** This focus aims to analyse current data on poverty, exploring the role of public investment and social safety nets (in areas like education, healthcare, and housing). Specific attention is given to children most at risk, such as those with disabilities, in alternative care, or of migrant/ethnic minority backgrounds.

3 **Assessing Implementation and Policy Integration.** This involves a multi-faceted review of policy instruments and country-specific reports:
  - **Highlighting positive initiatives and developments** in the implementation of the European Child Guarantee.
  - **Analysing the European Semester 2025 reports** from a child rights perspective to identify how they address children's real-life needs.
  - **Reviewing priorities in Enlargement Countries** to assess how the 2025 enlargement package and related EU support address children's rights.

Acknowledgements

Background

Children across Europe continue to experience poverty and social exclusion, while growing anti-rights movements and political shifts risk undermining progress in the field of children's rights. In this challenging context, collective action is more necessary than ever to safeguard and advance the rights of all children.

The 'Unequal Childhoods: Rights on paper should be rights in practice' report highlights the essential role of civil society in shaping evidence-based policy-making and monitoring implementation at the national level. With a particular focus on children in situations of vulnerability, the report examines current efforts to tackle poverty and exclusion, including progress on the implementation of the European Child Guarantee (ECG).

The report addresses a wide range of rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, including child participation, protection systems, mental health, and child poverty. It also focuses on children's rights in the digital environment, affordable housing, public investment in social protection, and recent findings from the 2025 European Semester and EU enlargement process.

"Despite progress made in some countries, child poverty and social exclusion remain too high across Europe. Lack of access to basic services and ongoing discrimination continue to affect the most vulnerable children. As more countries face attacks that undermine democracy and limit actions of those defending children's rights, European leaders must join forces with civil society to protect and promote the rights of every child in Europe and beyond. "
– Tanya Ward, President of Eurochild

Introduction

Children's rights

The cornerstone of Eurochild's work on children's rights is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). However, many countries still lack institutional measures to promote and enhance knowledge and understanding of the UNCRC among policymakers and professionals working with children. This persistent gap extends both to the systematic training of staff and to children's own learning about their rights. According to our members, in most European countries, there are either no measures or insufficient efforts to promote understanding of the UNCRC.

Moreover, in countries where such measures are stronger, members noted that training is often provided by civil society or international organisations rather than by public institutions. Furthermore, decision makers and those who shape legislation, budgets and systems affecting children are often not aware of the UNCRC to which their country is legally bound.

In addition to exposing gaps in UNCRC-related training and awareness, the country profiles in this report draw on the expertise of our members to shed light on the overall status of children's rights in each country. They also offer concrete recommendations for how countries can strengthen their efforts to protect and promote children's rights.

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

Every child is entitled to grow up free from poverty and social exclusion. This report aims to gather examples of promising initiatives and good practices identified by our members working at the national and local level. The objective is to share this evidence with EU, international and national policymakers, shaping effective strategies,

initiatives, and funding to address child poverty.

According to the latest Eurostat data for 2024, 24.2% of children in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. While across the EU there was a slight improvement, from a rate of 24.8% in 2023, child poverty increased in 10 countries, decreased in 16 countries and remained unchanged in one country. Bulgaria has the highest rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, at 35.1%, followed by Spain with 34.6%, and Romania with 33.8%.

The highest increases in child poverty since 2023 have been in Finland and Croatia, recording increases of 3.5 and 2 percentage points respectively. The most significant decreases were observed in Romania (-5.2 percentage points), Ireland (-3.4 percentage points) and Hungary (-3.3 percentage points). As for Enlargement Countries (candidates and potential candidates), Eurostat data for Kosovo and Moldova is not

available, so national data has been used, and data for Albania is only available up to 2021. 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 Kosovo has a lower rate of 22.7%. No data is available for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine at this time.

For the United Kingdom, as Eurostat does not provide data for England, Scotland, and Wales, this report uses national data. In 2023-2024, England and Wales reported that 31% of children were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

The European Child Guarantee

2025 marks the fourth year of the European Child Guarantee's implementation. It has been widely recognised by national and EU decision-makers, as well as stakeholders, as an

important instrument dedicated to tackling child poverty in the EU. All EU Member States have now submitted their first biennial reports on progress, a significant milestone in evaluating the initiative's impact. These reports, due every two years, offer valuable insights into national efforts to tackle child poverty and social exclusion. At the same time, Eurochild is publishing overviews of these reports, drawing attention to key trends, lessons learnt, and areas for improvement.

This section of the report highlights good practices in the implementation of the European Child Guarantee, drawing on the experience and evidence provided by our members. These practices are based on the key services outlined in the Child Guarantee, as well as integrated approaches and targeted measures for specific groups.

The primary areas of focus include measures to address child poverty and to support children and families, and efforts to strengthen integrated support systems. Additional areas covered by the report include early childhood education and care (ECEC), support for children with disabilities, inclusive education, child participation, school meals, mental health, and housing.

European Semester 2025

The European Semester (ES) is the EU's annual framework for coordinating economic, fiscal, employment, and social policies across its Member States. As the European Child Guarantee enters its fourth year of implementation in 2025, for the first time, all European Semester Country Reports include updates on national progress. These updates provide a more comprehensive picture by including information from the biennial reports and on the allocation of EU funding, helping to track progress by Member States.

This year's Country Specific Recommendations are more robust and place greater emphasis on addressing social challenges, alongside priorities such as defence, economic and fiscal stability, and environmental sustainability. Several Member States, including Bulgaria, Czechia, Croatia, Estonia, Greece, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Portugal, Romania and Spain, have been advised to address poverty and energy poverty, and to strengthen systems of social protection and income support.

France and Spain have received specific recommendations focused on the prevention and reduction of child poverty. In addition, a number of Country Reports indicate that, despite some progress, ensuring equitable and universal access to high-quality ECEC is still a major challenge. The reports also point to the need for more coordinated efforts at both national and EU level to reverse declining educational performance.

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 2025 consultation on the Enlargement Package, providing a child-rights perspective and insights into the situation of children in need. This contribution can inform the European Commission's annual enlargement reports, providing overviews of the most pressing issues and progress linked to Chapter 23 (Judiciary and fundamental rights), Chapter 19 (Social policy and employment) and Chapter 26 (Education and culture) made by each country towards EU accession under these chapters.

According to Eurochild members in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Moldova, Serbia, Türkiye, and Ukraine, the EU should increase its targeted financial and technical assistance to Enlargement Countries to strengthen their child protection systems. All members contributing to the report expressed their readiness to support and engage in the implementation of the Child Guarantee in these countries, recognising it as a significant opportunity. Some nations, such as Albania and Ukraine, have already begun preparing Child Guarantee National Action Plans. However, without financial support from the EU, there is a risk that these efforts will only reach a limited number of children. Updated data on child poverty is also urgently needed. Lastly, members in countries such as Serbia and Ukraine emphasised the urgent need to reduce the number of children in institutional care, particularly children with disabilities.

Eurochild Country Reports at a glance

Children's Rights Education
Few countries have established systematic training on children's rights for professionals and institutions working with or for children. Despite some positive practices in this area, significant gaps remain, highlighting the need for more consistent institutional training and capacity building across countries.

Children's Rights in the Digital Environment
The use of artificial intelligence, the spread of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), cyberbullying, the rise of 'child influencers' and 'sharenting', and growing risks linked to exposure to harmful content, online gambling and excessive gaming are increasingly concerning. At the same time, several countries reported positive initiatives and services aimed at strengthening online safety and protecting children's rights in the digital environment.

Anti-rights Movements
In several countries, there is growing pressure from proponents of traditional and conservative values and anti-rights movements which challenge children's rights, especially the rights of marginalised groups, including LGBTQI+ people and migrants. There are also several instances of clampdowns on protests involving children and youth. In some cases, individuals and organisations advocating for the rights of vulnerable groups face harassment and intimidation.

Early Childhood Development
Early childhood services are often fragmented and insufficient, highlighting the need for an integrated approach with cross-sector coordination. Despite investment in early childhood education and care (ECEC), participation gaps remain, especially for the youngest and the most disadvantaged children. A shortage of ECEC places and of qualified professionals hinders progress. There is a general lack of disaggregated data on early childhood development, which limits the ability of policymakers and service providers to design and implement targeted, effective interventions.

Child Protection

Many countries are experiencing a rise in the number of children being separated from their families. There is a growing shortage of alternative care placements, both residential and family-based foster care, for vulnerable children. Although the reasons for separation vary, most cases are preventable. While the number of children placed in institutional care is declining, there remains a shortage of adequately trained foster carers, particularly for children with disabilities. Also, young people ageing out of care do not receive adequate support and often become homeless. The persistent issue is the shortage of social workers relative to the number of referrals, coupled with chronic underfunding of the sector.

Public Investment and Social Safety Nets

Despite social welfare support in several countries, significant gaps remain, and social assistance is often inadequate and inefficient to lift all families out of poverty. There is a need to strengthen financial support for families and to address economic vulnerability and the rising cost of living with inclusive and comprehensive measures.

European Child Guarantee

The European Child Guarantee is bringing about change in the lives of children in several countries, has helped expand access to key services and provided funding to civil society organisations through the European Social Fund Plus. However, there are concerns that it often supports existing initiatives and relies on short-term, project-based interventions rather than long-term, sustainable public reforms and accompanied investment. In most countries, regular consultation with civil society organisations and with children themselves remains a critical gap.

Children in Contact with the Justice System

Proposals to lower the age of criminal responsibility, and a trend towards a more punitive approach to children in contact with the law, in some countries, are of significant concern. Such actions directly contravene the protective and rehabilitative spirit of the UNCRC, risking the stigmatisation and long-term harm of children in the justice system.

Affordable Housing

Despite housing support in several countries, high housing costs and rent overburden severely affect children and their families in most countries, especially families on low incomes and disadvantaged groups. Such burdens lead to increased rates of homelessness, overcrowding, and inadequate living conditions, and pose a threat to children's well-being. This crisis is compounded by systemic failures, including insufficient social housing stock, restrictive access rules, and a pervasive failure to implement comprehensive, child-rights-based national housing strategies.

Children with a Migrant Background and Ethnic Minority Origin
Children with a migrant background and ethnic minority origin are particularly vulnerable to discrimination in all countries. These children are often excluded from basic services and are over-represented among those at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The system for protecting children on the move is characterised by the absence of proper child-friendly procedures, detention of children and a lack of continuous support. Some countries highlight continued pushbacks at borders and practices that violate asylum and protection standards. Children on the move, including asylum-seeking children, also face persistent discrimination and racism, leading to human rights violations and a lack of access to key services.

Violence Against Children
Violence against children remains widespread, including neglect, physical abuse, and psychological violence. Violence often happens within the home, and includes gender-based violence and corporal punishment. Cases of violence and abuse are often under-reported due to stigma and low levels of awareness.

Mental Health
Mental health support for children remains insufficient in many countries, with notable gaps in services provided within schools and communities, in rural areas in particular. There is very little preventive support, including suicide prevention. When services are available, there are often long waiting lists, and private provision is expensive.

Child Poverty and Social Exclusion
With 24.2% of EU children remaining at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2024, rates reaching 31% in England and Wales, and a critical 50.1% in Albania, the persistence of this issue demands urgent policy action. Policymakers must utilise evidence of local and national measures that are effective in addressing child poverty, and ensure sustained investment and attention in this area. Progress is hindered by systemic challenges, including insufficient social assistance and barriers in accessing key services.

Education
Many countries face challenges in providing high-quality inclusive education due to factors including staff shortages, insufficient training, and a lack of suitable facilities. Family income and parents' educational attainment affect children's educational outcomes, with disadvantaged families showing lower attainment levels. Even when education is free, there are hidden costs — such as transport, school books, digital equipment and tutoring — which further widen the gap between children from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Child Participation Although there are several positive initiatives, many countries lack regular and institutionalised mechanisms for child participation, particularly for young children and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Although children have opportunities to raise issues, there is rarely any follow-up, and it is often unclear whether their views are taken into account.

" Recommendations from Eurochild members

Albania "Albania should strengthen legal and institutional safeguards for child human rights defenders, including by establishing clear mechanisms to protect them from online and offline harassment, smear campaigns, and digital attacks."

Austria "Given rising levels of child poverty, there needs to be a binding children's rights implementation plan for Austria, with an inclusive participation strategy for all children (including refugee children and children with disabilities), and with political leadership and resources to strengthen civil society in the area of children's rights."

Belgium "Belgium should take action to ensure access to healthcare and welfare for everyone, including the most vulnerable, and guarantee children's rights to participation and to peaceful assembly."

Bosnia and Herzegovina "Bosnia and Herzegovina should take action to ensure sustainable and unrestricted funding, legal protection, and meaningful involvement of civil society organisations working with and for children, especially at the local level, as a cornerstone of protecting civic space and promoting children's rights."

Bulgaria "Bulgaria should adopt a National Strategy for the Child that prioritises children's rights, strengthens protection systems, ensures meaningful participation, and invests in early childhood development, inclusive education, mental health, safe housing, and online safety, to reduce child poverty and promote well-being."

Croatia "In order for Croatia to truly prioritise investment in children, it is necessary to transform and align the work of key systems that serve children — education, health, and social welfare — by integrating child-focused policies and actively involving children and those who work with them in the process of shaping and implementing public policy."

Cyprus "Cyprus should take action to facilitate children's participation in all decisions that affect them and seriously consider the effects of political, spending and legislative decisions on children before these decisions are taken."

Czechia "Czechia as a rich country should guarantee at least one warm meal a day for all pupils - not as charity for some but as an indivisible part of the education process."

Denmark　"Denmark should incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into national legislation and ensure that children – especially the most vulnerable – are genuinely included in decisions that affect their lives, both within the public system and in society in general."

England　"The UK Government should take action to embed children's rights in decision-making by introducing a statutory duty on Ministers to consider children's rights and publish Child Rights Impact Assessments. This is widely supported by 121 civil society organisations, including all major national children's charities, and was proposed during the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill as a clear and practical first step towards the full incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law."

Estonia　"Estonia should take action to enforce a structured and transparent civic engagement framework that guarantees consistent and meaningful participation of civil society in policy-making at all levels, including through the systematic use of child rights impact assessments (CRIA), as recommended by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2024)."

Finland　"Finland should take action to reverse the trend of shrinking space for civil society and ensure that the voices of children's rights defenders are heard in public discourse, especially during times of economic hardship and increasing security concerns."

France　"France should take action to ensure the protection of children in its overseas departments. In some departments, the demographic, health, social and economic context is particularly concerning. In Mayotte, for instance, many minors were left to fend for themselves after a critical cyclonic event last year, out of school and marginalised, due to a lack of resources and effective measures to protect them."

Germany　"Germany should reject political narratives that view civil society as adversarial — especially given its vital role in democracy, protecting children's rights, delivering social services, and fulfilling human rights obligations. Instead, policymakers must value civil society, and ensure stable, independent funding — particularly for actors working with children and in social services. It is also time to incorporate children's rights into the German constitution in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child."

Greece　"Greece should take action to ensure early intervention within the school environment, promoting real inclusion and active consultation with children and children's rights organisations."

Hungary　"Hungary should ensure an enabling environment for independent civil society organisations and child human rights defenders, by safeguarding freedom of expression and participation, and by integrating children's voices systematically into decision-making processes that affect them."

Ireland　"Ireland should invest in improving access to affordable housing and in strengthening our child welfare and protection services."

Italy　"Italy should provide sustained financial support to schools in the most deprived areas, and deliver programmes and interventions that are robustly supported and rigorously evaluated."

Kosovo　"Kosovo has made progress in aligning its legal framework with international child rights requirements, but gaps remain. The country urgently needs a stronger and more inclusive social safety net. This requires developing an integrated, adequately funded, and preventive child protection system, expanding early intervention and inclusive education services, and strengthening coordination across sectors, with a particular focus on families living in poverty and marginalised communities."

Latvia　"Latvia should develop a common strategy to ensure children's safety in all settings - family, school, community."

Luxembourg　"Luxembourg should take action to combat all forms of violence against children, whether psychological, physical, economic, institutional, structural, or whether it be abuse or neglect."

Malta　"Malta adheres to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the state upholds children's rights through appropriate legislation and policy initiatives. Yet, it would be truly impactful if, as a nation, we could collaborate more strategically to build a holistic and genuinely child-friendly society."

Moldova　"The Republic of Moldova should develop and implement dedicated policies and programmes that encourage the involvement of children and their rights defenders in decision-making processes, while ensuring they have the necessary protection and access to resources to exercise their rights safely."

The Netherlands　"The Netherlands should develop a long-term, cross-ministerial vision for all children and young people, ensuring that children's rights are safeguarded in legislation, policy, budgeting, and practice."

Poland　"Child-related policies, such as the Child Guarantee, must include effective mechanisms to inform and consult with stakeholders, including NGOs. The government and local authorities should urgently address the shortage of places in alternative care, including both family-based and residential facilities. Decision-makers should also address the growing xenophobia in public rhetoric, as well as the harmful impact of detaining migrant children and families."

Portugal   "Portugal should ensure the effective participation of all children and young people in the design, monitoring and evaluation of public policies that concern them. Portugal should take action to strengthen the role of civil society organisations as strategic partners in fighting all forms of violence against children."

Romania   "Romania should increase civic space by improving civil society engagement, including child participation, and prioritise investment in social, educational and health services for marginalised children, including Roma, children with disabilities and those from rural areas, ensuring equal and effective access."

Scotland   "The Scottish Government should ensure the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 is properly resourced, with investment in workforce capacity, civil society and accountability mechanisms so that the Act delivers real change for children and young people. This includes closing gaps in protection caused by reserved matters and pre-1999 laws, embedding robust children's rights impact assessments across all decision-making, and creating genuine opportunities for babies, children and young people – particularly those whose rights are most at risk – to participate in shaping the policies and services that affect them."

Serbia   "Serbia should take action to ensure the protection of child human rights defenders by establishing legal safeguards, preventing intimidation and retaliation, and promoting a safe environment where children can freely express their views and advocate for their rights."

Slovenia   "Slovenia should take action to implement children's right to participate at local and national levels."

Spain   "Spain should increase investment in children and families in order to meet children's needs."

Sweden   "Sweden should take action to implement child rights budgeting by ensuring that national budget decisions are guided by clear child rights objectives that are properly resourced, monitored, and evaluated. This strengthens accountability, enables long-term planning, and guarantees that children's rights are at the core of public spending."

Switzerland   "Switzerland should take action to explicitly recognise and protect child human rights defenders in national law, ensuring that children who advocate for their rights are empowered through dedicated funding, legal safeguards, and accessible, child-friendly participation and complaint mechanisms."

Türkiye

"Türkiye should take action to increase comprehensive policies and cross-sector partnerships that promote an open civic space, increase dialogue with civil society organisations for effective cooperation with public institutions, and ensure that children and young people, including child human rights defenders, are systematically involved in the development, implementation, and monitoring of laws and policies that impact their lives."

Ukraine

"Ukraine should take action to strengthen the legal framework protecting child human rights defenders by implementing comprehensive policies that promote their safety, ensure their participation in decision-making processes, and provide necessary resources for their advocacy efforts. Amending national legislation to regulate the Barnahus model for providing services to children and their families is also important."

Wales

"Wales should take every opportunity to act decisively to promote and protect the human rights of all babies, children and young people, through introducing legislation to fully and directly incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Welsh law."

Policy recommendations

1 **Uphold the rights of all children and counter anti-rights movements**

Beyond merely mentioning them in political speeches without genuine action, governments should actively promote awareness of the rights enshrined in the UNCRC. It is crucial to ensure that all actors (not only professionals working directly with children) are trained to understand the obligations that states have committed to under the UNCRC. Anti-rights movements, which deny or restrict the rights of marginalised groups and instrumentalise child protection to create narratives against vulnerable communities and spread misinformation, must be countered by governments. Regressive rhetoric, attitudes, or legislation that undermine the rights of certain groups - such as children on the move, LGBTQ+ children, or those in contact with the criminal justice system or participating in protests - must be actively challenged. All forms of discrimination, including racism and xenophobia, should be confronted and condemned at the highest levels of government. Governments should provide targeted support to children at risk of discrimination, including those from migrant backgrounds and ethnic minority origins. Civil society organisations and child human rights defenders should be protected and empowered to work independently and denounce injustices against children.

2 **Ensure integrated child protection systems and strengthen families**

Strengthening child protection systems and preventing family separation requires investments in early intervention and family support. Governments should support prevention by mandating early identification of families at risk and providing tailored support, coordinated across social, health, and education services.

Access to family support and adequate housing must be guaranteed to address the root causes of separation, such as poverty, ill health, domestic violence, unemployment, and inadequate living conditions. Coordinated social, health, and employment measures can help families remain together. A strong, professional workforce is essential to upholding quality standards across child protection systems. Governments should establish national staffing ratios, training and supervision standards for both foster and residential care, while urgently addressing shortages in care professionals, including foster carers for children with special needs.

Family-based care should remain the priority for all children, including those with disabilities. At the same time, efforts must continue to improve the quality of residential care where it is still needed and to support its gradual transition towards family-based alternatives.

Children in migration and asylum procedures require special protection. All forms of child and family detention should be ended, and individual best-interest assessments conducted by child rights experts should guide all decisions. Pathways to family reunification must be restored, and unaccompanied children provided with legal representation, guardianship, and psycho-social support.

3 Uphold children's rights in the digital environment

It is crucial to adopt and enforce legal frameworks that require platforms to design and operate in line with children's rights, with outcome-based enforcement, technical standards, and regular monitoring with children's input. Companies should embed child-rights-by-design and safety-by-design, respond rapidly to violations, avoid business practices that prioritise commercial interests over children's best interests, and co-design with civil society and children, including the most vulnerable. It is imperative for platforms to prevent, detect (with strong safeguards), remove and report child sexual abuse material, alongside stronger referral and law-enforcement capacity. Further, there is a need to fund inclusive digital literacy, support diverse age-appropriate content, and equip practitioners and child protection systems to tackle evolving online harms, such as exposure to harmful content and additional challenges created by the misuse of artificial intelligence. To address the increase in cyberbullying, it is imperative to provide safeguards to protect children (e.g. tools to filter or block comments, accounts or posts) and to prevent cyberbullying attitudes.

4 Eradicate child poverty and social exclusion

Providing a wide range of services and support measures and guaranteeing income security for families with children is essential to break the cycle of poverty. Governments should introduce or strengthen universal child allowances and redesign linked supplements/subsidies so that they are accessible independently of minimum-income schemes. At the same time, administrative barriers that exclude the most vulnerable must be removed. Simplifying application procedures can significantly reduce non-take-up, while reforming residency and eligibility rules would ensure that the children who are under-represented, such as those in international protection or from Traveller and Roma families, can access child benefits and other subsidies on an equal footing. Increasing visibility and providing direct support for parents would further enhance uptake.

Policies must prioritise groups at highest risk, including large families, single parents, Roma children, children with disabilities, and children with a migrant background, by providing tailored measures such as free school meals, transport subsidies, free textbooks, and access to cultural or sports activities. Investment should focus on early and local interventions by expanding free, high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC), inclusive education, and community-based services, particularly in rural or underserved areas.

Addressing the digital divide is equally important: funding for device access, internet connectivity, and digital skills training should be targeted to low-income households, single-parent families, and migrant children.

5 Strengthen the European Child Guarantee

To ensure effective and sustainable implementation of the European Child Guarantee (ECG), Member States should adopt a cross-ministerial strategy that ensures intersectoral cooperation and coordination. Objectives must be time-bound and measurable, and budgets should be protected from cuts to secure continuity and impact. The implementation of the National Action Plans should follow a prevention-first approach and guarantee meaningful, transparent participation of children, young people, and civil society organisations in both design and monitoring processes.

Scaling up integrated community models is equally important. Countries should expand social, medical, and educational services that work in coordination at the local level. In parallel, ECG measures must improve in precision and targeting to effectively reach the most vulnerable children, such as children with a migrant background and ethnic minority origin. Both the ECG monitoring and evaluation frameworks provide valuable tools to track progress, but their implementation by Member States remains limited. Strengthening data collection and indicator coverage is essential, particularly regarding violence against children, homeless children, access to healthcare (including mental health), and the number of parents supported to prevent family separation.

Investing in early childhood education and care (ECEC) remains central to the Child Guarantee's success. Governments should continue expanding ECEC for children aged 0–3 and strengthen inclusive education.

Sustained investment in combating child poverty and advancing the ECG must remain a key EU priority under the second Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The first EU Anti-Poverty Strategy should explicitly target child poverty and social exclusion to address their higher prevalence and break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage. Dedicated funding for child poverty should be maintained within the new EU budget, the Partnership and Regional Plans, matching at least the current 5% ESF+ allocation and scaled up to 10% for high-poverty countries. Minimum allocations of 25% for social inclusion, 5% for the Child Guarantee, and 3% for material deprivation should be preserved. Stronger safeguards must ensure compliance with the UNCRC, UNCRPD, and EU rights frameworks, alongside a reinforced partnership with civil society and children. The EU should also enhance technical assistance and capacity-building to support Member States in implementing and monitoring effective child-focused investments.

To strengthen NGO participation in ECG funding programmes, administrative rules and reporting requirements should be simplified, and targeted technical assistance and capacity building should be provided. Flexible multi-annual financing should be introduced to ensure sustainability, while partnerships between NGOs and municipalities should be actively promoted to scale up proven local initiatives.

6 Ensure adequate housing for all children

Governments must prioritise providing every child with safe, secure, and appropriate housing that supports their physical, mental, and social development. A child rights-based approach should guide the early identification of housing-related risks, including homelessness. Governments should implement adequate legal protections to prevent forced evictions and ensure families facing eviction can access safe alternative housing options.

States must substantially increase the social housing stock, lower access barriers, and develop comprehensive national strategies rooted in children's rights. These strategies should include long-term planning, accelerating the construction of affordable homes, addressing regional disparities, and improving the quality of existing housing. Inclusive and child-sensitive housing policies must be reinforced to maintain affordability.

The financial burden of high housing costs needs to be tackled, especially for low-income families. Countries should adopt policies to regulate housing prices and prevent families from being overwhelmed by disproportionately high costs, particularly during the current economic and cost-of-living crises. Measures such as rent control policies, subsidies for low-income households, and targeted support for families at risk of poverty should be introduced.

7 Anchor child-related priorities in the European Semester to invest in children post-2027

Building on positive progress in the 2025 European Semester, children's rights should be further mainstreamed throughout the Semester process. To uphold the commitments of the European Pillar of Social Rights and to ensure sustained investment in children, the 2026 European Semester should ensure that every Member State receives targeted Country Specific Recommendations on children's rights. In line with the Council Recommendation on the European Child Guarantee, every Country Report should continue to include a summary of national implementation, highlighting progress, challenges, and allocations from ESF+ and other relevant EU funds. This would oblige Member States to address these priorities in their National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPs) 2028 - 2034 through measurable reforms, dedicated funding, and clear milestones.

8 **Support children's rights in the Enlargement Countries**

The EU accession process should be leveraged to promote reforms and progress that positively impact children's lives. The process should also strengthen child protection and justice for children within the country. This includes safeguarding against violence, addressing legislative gaps, and supporting the rights of children without parental care. Civil society organisations should also be empowered as part of the accession process. As some European Child Guarantee National Action Plans begin to be drafted, it is essential that the expertise of these organisations is utilised. The EU should foster meaningful, institutionalised cooperation between the state and civil society, especially in child protection and human rights. Specific financial support through the new EU budget is also required to provide key services in line with the European Child Guarantee.

Country Recommendation

"Albania should strengthen legal and institutional safeguards for child human rights defenders, including by establishing clear mechanisms to protect them from online and offline harassment, smear campaigns, and digital attacks."

Country Profile 2025

Albania

Child Population:
542,174 (2023)[1]
19.6% of total population

(pie chart: 19.6)

Child Poverty[2]:
290,000 (2021)
50.1% (2021)
▼ -0.9 percentage points compared to 2020

(pie chart: 50.1)

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Child Rights Centre Albania/ECPAT Albania

Children's Rights in Albania

Despite advancements on children's rights, Albania lacks a national government-funded programme to train civil servants and child protection workers on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). There is no requirement for civil servants and child protection officers to receive such training. Teachers, psychologists and social workers are required to attend accredited training, but there is no requirement for them to have training on children's rights specifically.

In 2025, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and UNICEF drafted a national action plan to address the Concluding Observations on Albania adopted in 2023 by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Ministry followed a donor-led process that excluded children and civil society from participating in the drafting of the plan. The plan was approved by the National Council on Child Rights and Protection, an inter-ministerial body tasked with developing government policy on child rights and protection across all relevant sectors. A mid-term review by the end of 2025 will assess its implementation.

Despite positive examples of judges and prosecutors promoting children's rights in criminal processes, the level of knowledge of the UNCRC in the juvenile justice system is very low.

Overall, while Albania has made legal and institutional progress, challenges remain in mainstreaming knowledge of the UNCRC across all relevant areas. A systematic and sustainable national training framework on children's rights is needed to ensure that all professionals working with or for children are equipped to uphold the UNCRC in practice.

Anti-child rights movements

An anti-rights movement has become stronger in Albania, including cyber-attacks against civil society organisations (CSOs). This movement has close links with Hungarian and American anti-rights movements and some religious communities in Albania. For example, the Pro-Life and Pro-Family Coalition has been working with the main opposition party to oppose draft legislation on gender recognition and changes to the law on reproductive health. The anti-rights movement has also called for sanctions against CSOs that support trans children, claiming that trans children don't exist.

Human rights defenders, especially women andLesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ+) activists, face frequent hate speech, violent threats, and smear campaigns. The National Safer Internet Centre (iSIGURT.al) reported that hate speech and cyberbullying - especially against women, girls and LGBTIQ+ persons - increased three-fold between 2022 and 2024. In 2024, 46 organisations issued a public call demanding the prohibition of rising hate speech targeting the LGBTIQ+ community, noting increasingly harmful online rhetoric.

There is no dedicated legislation to safeguard human rights defenders, and intimidation and threats are often ignored or poorly investigated. A 2019 resolution by the Albanian Parliament in support of human rights defenders lacks an enforceable action plan, leaving defenders exposed to hate speech, violence, public shaming and accusations.

Child participation

In Albania, children from vulnerable backgrounds generally lack meaningful opportunities to express their views in public decision-making. Despite some positive initiatives, they face significant barriers that prevent their voices from being heard in

spaces such as schools, local government, or child protection services.

One of the main challenges is the poor representation of vulnerable children in governance structures. Although many municipalities have youth coordinators, these roles often lack the necessary budgets and influence to make real change. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are rarely included in decision-making bodies or in policy consultations.

Discrimination in education continues to be a serious obstacle. Roma children, children with disabilities, and LGBTIQ+ youth often face exclusion in schools and are not given meaningful opportunities to influence educational policies or environments that affect their daily lives.

Child protection systems

Albania has made important progress in strengthening its child protection system, through a solid legal and institutional foundation. The 2017 Law on the Rights and Protection of the Child, along with the Criminal Justice for Children Code, created the basis for a national child protection framework that includes the State Agency for Child Rights and Protection and a network of Child Protection Workers in every municipality.

The 2021-2026 National Agenda for the Rights of the Child has guided child-focused policies and local plans, supported by dedicated budgets. As a result, 54 new child-focused services and eight specialised centres have been established across the country, including services for autistic children and victims of trafficking. The Social Fund, the national instrument for funding social service delivery in Albania, has also been instrumental in funding community-based

services aimed at preventing institutionalisation and strengthening family-based care.

Albania has taken steps toward deinstitutionalisation by transforming residential facilities into community-based services. The government is also expanding foster care and family reintegration efforts. Organisations like Save the Children have contributed by supporting the development of the Foster Care Law, training professionals in the judiciary, promoting positive parenting, and strengthening the role of social workers in municipalities.

Despite these advances, major challenges remain. Implementation of child protection laws and policies is uneven across the country and many child protection workers are under-resourced and overstretched, especially in smaller/rural municipalities. Around 700 children still live in long-term institutional care, highlighting the slow progress in

fully transitioning to family- and community-based alternatives. Child Rights Centre Albania (CRCA) and other CSOs have repeatedly called for the closure of these institutions, citing ongoing cases of neglect, physical harm, and sexual abuse.

Children on the move

Albania continues to be a country of transit and origin for unaccompanied migrant children. In 2023 CRCA published a report criticising the government's approach to unaccompanied foreign children. The report found that the children who arrive in Albania irregularly are not afforded safety and protection, as required by law. Almost all the children who were supposed to be kept safe in a shelter in Tirana have disappeared, but none have been declared missing, as required by law. Although there are no official statistics, CRCA has estimated that at least 7,000 foreign unaccompanied children have passed through Albania, with

the authorities turning a blind eye to child trafficking.

In 2025, the European Union (EU) provided €10 million to help Albania overhaul its response to migration. However, the focus is mostly on adults, with no specific provisions for supporting children. Despite calls by CRCA/ECPAT Albania to revise the project, and several reports submitted to EU institutions, the issue remains unresolved.

Child safety and well-being online

Technology-facilitated violence against children requires urgent attention.

The National Internet Safety Hotline (iSIGURT.al) publishes an annual report on child online safety in Albania. In 2024, 407 serious incidents were reported, marking an increase of almost 67% compared to the previous year. Girls continue to remain at greater risk of online harm, with 62% of reports made by girls and 34% by boys.

The National Child Helpline (ALO 116-111), in collaboration with CRCA/ECPAT Albania and iSIGURT.al has also reported a significant increase in online abuse cases, with 93 instances of child sexual abuse material reported in 2024. 66% of these cases involved girls, with TikTok identified as the most problematic platform, accounting for 64% of incidents. The predominant issues included threatening and degrading messages (63%), image theft (19%) and non-consensual intimate imagery (6%).

CRCA/ECPAT Albania has been advocating for legal reforms to better protect children from online violence. This includes urging the General Prosecutor to ensure prosecution of all cases involving online harm to children. In addition, CRCA proposed amendments to the Criminal Code, including raising the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16 and introducing specific penalties for grooming and sexting. However, the parliamentary committee never considered these

amendments for discussion and approval. More than a year has passed and many children cannot bring their perpetrators to justice.

However, Albania has also made significant strides in enhancing child online safety - through a combination of innovative platforms, strategic agreements, and collaborative projects.

iSIGURT.al s a cornerstone of these efforts - a vital platform where children, parents, and educators can report cases of online child sexual exploitation and abuse, cyberbullying, and other online harm. It provides timely responses, assistance, and referrals to law enforcement and child protection agencies, and plays a crucial role in raising awareness about online safety and promoting responsible internet use.

The *NetSMARTkids* campaign was launched in 2025, reaching over 7,400 pupils and 600 parents and teachers across 170 schools nationwide, and aiming to enhance digital

literacy and promote safer online environments for children.

The Safer Internet Day activities also represent a model of integrated child protection in the digital space. Collaborations between ALO 116-111, iSIGURT.al, the Ministry of Education and local police have led to the development of professional protocols for child protection and increased parental involvement in online safety initiatives.

In 2023, the Albanian government signed the National Pact Against Sexual Violence Against Children. This involves key ministries and stakeholders working together to strengthen inter-institutional coordination in preventing and responding to sexual violence against children, including online abuse. The pact includes commitments to update relevant legislation, enhance support services for victims, and improve prevention strategies, marking an important step toward a more protective legal and social framework.

Children's mental health

Albania doesn't have a centralised data system on children's mental health. The Ministry of Health collects data only on the number of children who seek psychiatric support in hospitals but not from primary healthcare providers.

The Helpline ALO 116-111 offers confidential support, counselling, and guidance to children facing mental health challenges or distressing situations. The iSIGURT.al platform can also provide psychological support and referrals to specialised services.

Albania urgently needs to reform its mental health care sector to be able to respond to children's needs.

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

Child poverty

In Albania, child poverty is measures by the INSTAT Living Standards Measurement Survey and by UNICEF surveys.

The children most affected by poverty and social exclusion are:

- Children living in rural and remote areas who frequently endure poor living conditions, inadequate nutrition, and restricted access to essential services.
- Ethnic minority children, especially those from Roma and Egyptian communities, who face systemic discrimination, live in poor housing conditions, and have limited access to education and healthcare.
- Children with physical or intellectual disabilities who face additional barriers to education, healthcare, and

social participation.
- Children in families with single parents or many children.
- Children of migrant or internally displaced families who experience a lack of secure housing and social support networks.

Albania has only 0.2 computers per 15-year-old pupil in schools. This lack of access to devices and stable internet connections directly affects education.

The digital divide particularly affects children living in rural areas, where infrastructure is limited and schools often lack basic technologies such as Wi-Fi. Roma and Egyptian communities, as well as children with disabilities, face multiple layers of exclusion - lack of devices and of training opportunities, and systemic neglect within the education system.

The digital divide is a challenge to fundamental rights, social inclusion, and human development.

Public investment and social safety nets

Albania does not currently offer comprehensive social protection for children. What exists is partial, reactive, and unable to prevent or break the cycle of poverty and exclusion. To meet the needs of all children, the government must shift towards a rights-based, child-centred model of social protection, ensuring universal access, equitable distribution, and coordinated services.

The Economic Aid programme remains the main form of social assistance for low-income families, but is highly targeted and excludes many families due to strict eligibility criteria or lack of documentation. Coverage is low, only a fraction of families living in poverty actually receive support, and the amount provided is insufficient to lift children out of deprivation. Moreover, it is not child-focused, and does not adjust benefits based on the number of children or their specific needs.

There is no universal child allowance, and services for children with disabilities, children from Roma and Egyptian communities, or children in single-parent households are inconsistent and under-resourced. Access to quality healthcare, education, and nutrition remains unequal, especially in rural and peri-urban areas. Services like family counselling, parenting support, housing assistance, or mental health support for children are either unavailable or only offered through donor-funded projects in a limited number of municipalities.

For long-term, sustainable change, the government should:

1. Establish a Universal Child Benefit Scheme with a monthly universal child benefit, indexed to the cost of living. Such a scheme should prioritise low-income families but also include middle-income households, ensuring broad coverage and reducing stigma. A universal model would also support families dealing with rising costs, especially during economic shocks or inflation.
2. Strengthen social services and child protection systems by expanding and professionalising local, integrated services. Social workers, psychologists, and community-based child protection units should be available in every municipality, with clear referral pathways and sustainable funding.

Education

Many children face challenges that negatively affect their education. Poverty remains a significant barrier, as some families cannot afford school-related costs such as uniforms, supplies, or transportation.

Children living in rural and remote areas often struggle with limited access to schools due to poor infrastructure, long travel distances, and lack of transport. This reduces their attendance and educational opportunities and can lead to higher drop-out rates.

Marginalised groups such as Roma and Egyptian children often encounter discrimination and social exclusion within the education system, affecting their motivation and retention.

Bullying has become a major concern. A Council of Europe study found that almost 20% of children attending public education were victims of bullying in school. The case of a 14-year-old child killed by his friend because of online bullying obliged the government to draft a new National Action Plan for Safety in Schools.

Positively, there is increasing recognition of the importance of inclusive education, with efforts to integrate children with disabilities and marginalised groups into mainstream schools. This fosters a more supportive and diverse learning environment.

The gradual introduction of digital access in schools has opened new opportunities for learning and skills development among children, especially in urban areas.

Early childhood development

Albania has undertaken two major initiatives that reflect effective and promising investments in early childhood development.

National Programme for Early Childhood Development (2022–2026)
Adopted in 2022, this multi-sector programme aims to guarantee the healthy, inclusive, and equitable development of all children aged 0–6. It integrates health, nutrition, early education, parenting support, and social protection services. Key interventions include screenings and routine health checks, the expansion of access to pre-schools and childcare in under-served areas, community-based parenting programmes and professional training for educators and health workers. The programme targets the most vulnerable children, especially those from Roma, Egyptian, rural, and low-income families.

Positive Parenting Support Programme
Implemented by CSOs such as CRCA, and supported by UNICEF, this initiative provides training and awareness-raising to strengthen parenting skills, promote non-violent child-rearing practices, and improve child development outcomes. It also provides tailored support for high-risk families, including Roma and Egyptian communities.

Albania has also launched efforts to improve the inclusion of Roma children. The 'Every Roma Child in Kindergarten' initiative, led by UNICEF, CRCA and others, is working to ensure Roma children's access to early education. In addition to monitoring trends and mapping services, the programme encourages local governments to improve by recognising their efforts and sharing best practices.

Despite ongoing efforts, access to nurseries and pre-schools remains unequal across the country, particularly in rural areas and among Roma, Egyptian, and

low-income communities. The government should focus on:

- Building and rehabilitating public childcare and pre-school facilities in under-served municipalities.
- Ensuring low-cost or free access for vulnerable families.
- Increasing investment in the professional training of early childhood educators.

- Implementing national, community-based, evidence-based parenting programmes, targeting disadvantaged areas.

Housing

Legislation on social housing establishes rent support, low-cost housing, emergency shelters, and safeguards against forced eviction, including a 5% housing

quota for Roma and Egyptian families, and priority access for survivors of domestic violence.

However, implementation remains weak across most municipalities. Many local authorities lack systems to assess needs, while restrictive eligibility and banking criteria exclude the poorest families. In Durrës, families affected by

the earthquake continue to live without permanent housing, despite government pledges. Survivors of domestic violence face bureaucratic obstacles and inadequate long-term housing options.

To ensure access to secure and adequate housing for all children, the government should:

- Strengthen and monitor the implementation of the Social Housing Law, with clear accountability mechanisms and targeted funding, to ensure vulnerable families have real access to rent support, emergency shelters, and protection from forced eviction.
- Establish a national housing needs database, with real-time data across municipalities, to assess housing needs, track overcrowding and homelessness, and ensure fair and efficient distribution of housing support.

Enlargement Countries

The 2024 Enlargement Package Progress Report incorporates several children's rights issues - violence, child marriage, deinstitutionalisation, inclusion of minorities and juvenile justice. However, it falls short on mental health, data transparency, legislation enforcement, and LGBTIQ+ inclusive policies.

Albania has started implementing the European Child Guarantee. Despite questions on how it will be financed, civil society has strongly supported the preparatory phase. CRCA/ECPAT and Save the Children in Albania have a leading role in consulting children and young people. However, without financial support from the EU the Child Guarantee will only become a reality for a limited number of children.

Civil society in Albania has petitioned both the Albanian government and the EU for substantial support for the work of CSOs. The government still favours large United Nations organisations, which still receive the majority of EU funding.

Country Profile 2025

Austria

Child Population:
1,580,227 (2024)
17.25% of total population

17.25

Child Poverty[1]:
344,000 (2024)
20.9% (2024)
▼ -1.8 percentage points compared to 2023

20.9

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):
Katholische Jungschar Österreichs (Catholic Children's Movement of Austria)
Ludwig Boltzmann Institut für Grund-und Menschenrechte (Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Fundamental and Human Rights)
Diakonie Österreich (Diaconia)
Österreichische Liga für Kinder und Jugendgesundheit (Austrian League for Children and Youth Health)
Österreichischer Behindertenrat – Dachorganisation der Behindertenverbände

Österreichs (Austrian Disability Council – umbrella organisation for disability associations in Austria)
Kinderbüro (Children's office in Styria)
bOJA - bundesweites Netzwerk Offene Jugendarbeit (Service and networking agency for Open Youth Work in Austria)
Bundesjugendvertretung (BJV, Federal Youth Council)
UNICEF Österreich (UNICEF Austria)
Volkshilfe Österreich (Volkshilfe Austria)

Österreichische Gesellschaft für Kinder- und Jugendpsychiatrie, Psychosomatik und Psychotherapie (ÖGKJP, Austrian Society for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Psychosomatics and Psychotherapy)
Kinder- und Jugendbotschafter:innen für UN-Kinderrechte & SDG Vorarlberg (Children and Youth Ambassadors for UN Children's Rights & SDG Vorarlberg)
VertretungsNetz, Bewohnervertretung (Representation network, residents' representation of institutional facilities)

OVERALL COORDINATION: CONCORDIA Social Projects on behalf of the Austrian Network for Children's Rights

1 Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2024, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc_peps01n).

Children's Rights in Austria

Overall, Austria has not taken sufficient measures to increase knowledge and understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) among policymakers, professionals working with children, and among children themselves.

Austria is one of the few countries which has enshrined a set of key child rights principles (best interests, participation, protection from violence and exploitation, non-discrimination of children with disabilities) in its constitutional law. However, a legal study in 2025 revealed only limited application of such guarantees in case law.

A children's rights board was set up by the (then) Ministry of Family Affairs, which acts as an advisory body on children's rights. The Ministry has developed a funding line for promoting information and education on children's rights. However, there has been no children's rights national action plan in Austria since 2004.

Training on children's rights is usually provided by civil society organisations and research institutions. There is no consistent training programme on children's rights for school students, or for teachers' training. Similarly, there is no dedicated awareness-raising programme on the rights of children with disabilities across the nine regions of Austria. The national youth policy framework recently started to include references to children's rights. There is a great need for training on children's rights within the judiciary.

Anti-child rights movements

In recent years, some child rights defenders were at risk of intimidation when protesting against inaction on climate change in Austria. For example, leading politicians have called for prison sentences against protesters.

Child participation

Participation formats at the political level vary, with no uniform participation of young people, and there are large participation gaps for certain groups (e.g. children with German as a foreign language, or children with disabilities). Children at the age of 16 years have the right to vote in Austria, however, large proportions of young people living in Austria (up to 30% in Vienna) are excluded due to lack of Austrian citizenship. Moreover, insufficient resources are devoted to civic education in school.

In schools, children's participation is only partially effective, and children with disabilities or children that are learning German encounter many barriers.

There is hardly any awareness of the rights of children with disabilities, who are largely seen as passive recipients of services rather than self-determined individuals with their own opinions and needs.

Participation processes are still often tokenistic. Real participation would require more resources (time, finances) and participation formats for children who have less affinity with education and need more creative, open formats.

Age-appropriate participatory processes are also needed for children and adolescents in court proceedings, including for children with disabilities, to ensure access to justice without discrimination.

The KIPA (children's parliament) Graz is a best practice example of children's participation at the local level. For more than 15 years, it has been open to all children aged 8-14 and has had a dedicated budget and strong political support.

Child protection systems

Austria has an extensive child protection system, but without uniform quality standards, due to its decentralised structure - legislation, quality standards and services differ across the

nine regions. In general, there is an urgent need for investment in child and youth welfare programmes and staffing.

The interface between child protection, school, health, the police and justice is weak, and sometimes fails due to data protection issues. Alternatives to detention of children sometimes fail due to lack of capacities and coordination of services between justice and child protection systems. Contrary to international child rights standards, in 2024/25 there were political efforts to lower the age of criminal responsibility (currently 14) in Austria and place younger children in closed institutions.

The National Action Plan on Disabilities 2022-30 contains only a few measures specifically for children and no strategy to avoid institutional, segregated accommodation. Children with disabilities are still often placed in segregated residential and school facilities, putting them at risk of

psychological, physical and sexual violence.

A positive development is the mandatory introduction of child protection guidelines in all schools in Austria. However, these were often not developed with pupils' participation and there is a lack of resources for implementation.

At the initiative of the Federal Chancellery, organisations and companies can now have their child protection concepts certified with the Child Protection Quality Seal. After a positive evaluation of the contents and implementation of their child protection standards, the quality seal is awarded to companies and organisations that work with children and adolescents and want to provide them with a safe and supportive environment.

Children are affected by domestic violence, bullying, and sexual violence. A recent study on values revealed that 20% of adults think it is okay to slap a child in the face.

Children with disabilities are at a high risk of psychological, physical and sexualised violence, especially in institutional care, and to online and offline bullying.

The main issues affecting children with a migrant or minority ethnic background are:

- Discrimination and segregation in education and a lack of integration support, as well as racism and prejudice.
- A disregard for child welfare and the best interests of the child in asylum procedures

for unaccompanied children, including lack of immediate guardianship services; deprivation of liberty for children placed in reception centres; lack of school access for children above the age of mandatory schooling; and a lack of sufficient, reasonable accommodation for unaccompanied children.
- The recent (2025) suspension of family reunification for children with asylum status (based on arguments of national 'emergency') contravenes children's rights.

Child safety and well-being online

Children face several risks in the digital environment. These include cyberbullying, sexual abuse, grooming, disinformation, and exposure to toxic role models (e.g. toxic masculinity).

Online risks also include the economic exploitation of children through 'sharenting'[2] or online gambling. 'Childfluencers'[3] are also at risk, when too much information about children is shared online.

Despite these risks, there are only limited efforts to comprehensively strengthen media literacy in schools, including among teachers or parents, and to clarify the responsibility of online platforms and the state with appropriate legislation.

Educators must also be empowered to help children use digital media responsibly.

There is a need for basic digital education, for example from Saferinternet.at (e.g. workshops, studies, flyers for young people, parents, educators), including education and prevention among parents. There is also a need for regulation, such as age verification, and stronger, child-friendly responses to online violence and abuse through trained social workers, lawyers, law enforcement agencies, and specialised cybercrime units.

Children's mental health

Regular data collection on mental health is carried out by Gesundheit Österreich GmbH, as part of the Child and Youth Health Strategy Austria. Data continues to show persistent psychological stress among young people, including suicidal thoughts, increased propensity to violence and substance abuse.

A report on children's health showed that 28.5% of all 11th graders said they suffered from symptoms of depression.

There are services available to support children's mental health, but they are limited and there can be long waiting lists. There is insufficient access to psychotherapy and paediatric psychiatry.

Waiting times are excessive in all areas of paediatrics, including child psychiatric care.

There is a lack of access to therapy services to ensure that all children with mental health problems can receive low-threshold therapeutic support.

The care network needs to be expanded and more investment in the training of specialists is needed. This includes expanding the number of places available in health insurance schemes and the public funding of therapy programmes for children from families in financially precarious situations.

Studies have shown a strong negative impact on children's mental health due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is a need to expand psychosocial support in schools, with at least one school social worker for each school location and at least one school psychologist per 1,000 pupils, to ensure that trained staff are available for psychological counselling.

The 'Healthy from the crisis' flagship model for low-threshold

---

2 'Sharenting' refers to the practice of parents sharing a large amount of potentially sensitive content about their children on social media, especially when done by an account with a large following base.
3 'Childfluencer' or 'kidfluencer' refers to children who have gained a considerable online following by creating content on social media channels, often linked to advertisement, and in most cases managed and guided by their parents.

free psychotherapy for young people is a positive initiative, but requires long-term sustainability.

Additional children's rights issues

Worryingly, some politicians have called for the age of criminal responsibility to be lowered to 12.

There is a lack of political will and of funding for an Austria-wide protection centre for victims of child trafficking. For several years, Austria has been criticised by international monitoring bodies, such as the Council of Europe, for the lack of a dedicated shelter for child victims of human trafficking. With expert support, an organisational concept for such a shelter was developed in 2021 but due to lack of political agreement on funding, decisions for implementation were postponed. Instead, a feasibility study has been commissioned, with findings expected in 2026.

Austria has still not ratified the 3rd Optional Protocol to the UNCRC.

Austria has nine child and youth ombudspersons at the regional level *(Länder),* but a permanent, independent children's rights monitoring body at national level with sufficient resources is missing and urgently needed.

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

Child poverty

Compared to the population as a whole, children are more likely to be affected by poverty or social exclusion than the rest of the population. Those under 18 accounted for around a quarter (22.5%) of all those at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2024.

79,000 children and young people (5%) in Austria were affected by absolute poverty or severe material and social deprivation in 2024, with only a slight decrease compared to the previous year. Children make up a quarter (24%) of those affected by significant

material and social deprivation in Austria.

The children most affected by poverty are:

- Refugee children;
- Children of young parents;
- Children of single parents;
- Children of parents with illnesses;
- Children with a migration background;
- Children with disabilities;
- Children from families with many children.

There is a digital divide in Austria. Children in wealthier households are more likely to have access to technology.

The teaching of digital literacy as a subject in school currently depends on the school location and on individual teachers, exacerbating the existing divide. National standards and further training and education for teachers are needed in this area.

Public investment and social safety nets

Austria has social benefits (as well as almost free primary healthcare, compulsory schooling, and early support) but there are large gaps in the system.

To invest in children and address child poverty and social exclusion, Austria should:

1. Introduce a nationwide universal basic child allowance and expand social infrastructure to strengthen social security and combat child poverty effectively.
2. Implement the National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee, involving children and experts.
3. Provide childcare places with full-day and year-round opening hours and free, healthy meals in kindergartens.

Education

There is a lack of inclusive education. Children with disabilities are taught in separate educational institutions. There is a need to create an inclusive

education system for children with disabilities, from nursery to tertiary education.

There is discrimination and exclusion based on origin, skin colour, disability or social status.

Austria is experiencing a regression in inclusive education, accompanied by a lack of comprehensive data on the education of children with disabilities.

There is a lack of opportunities for children and young people to participate in school as a place of learning for democracy. In addition, there is a need to revise the school curriculum to ensure that content is up to date, with the involvement of young people.

There is a need for motivated, well-trained teachers who are familiar with current challenges (multilingualism, diversity, conflict management, etc.) and for education on children's rights (starting in kindergarten).

Early childhood development

Austria has early support interventions for children in their early years. Family support workers provide free and confidential assistance. They accompany families, strengthen parent-child relationships, and, if necessary, seek out suitable additional support services. The support is free of charge and confidential from pregnancy until a child's third birthday.

The main obstacles to quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) are a lack of childcare places and a lack of human resources, with poor working conditions and high staff turnover. There is a need to strengthen the quality of ECEC by creating a shared vision, developing and implementing tools to measure quality, and improving the collection of comparable data.

To further strengthen support for early childhood development, Austria should:

- Combat child poverty;
- Support measures for non-violent parenting;
- Expand and improve paediatric care;
- Expand high-quality ECEC services.

Housing

Projects such as *Wohnschirm or Housing First* support access to adequate and secure housing for children and families.

To ensure that all children and families have adequate housing and a decent standard of living Austria should:

- Address the excessive burden of housing costs.
- Ensure that housing subsidies take into account housing options for families.
- Ensure affordable housing for young people and specific support for first-time home buyers.
- Support climate change adaptation measures for those at risk of poverty who are particularly affected.

The European Child Guarantee

The implementation of the European Child Guarantee in Austria is inadequate. While a National Action Plan exists, it is not mentioned in the current government programme. In its Biennial progress report, Austria highlights some measures, particularly in the area of education. However, the Concluding Observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities clearly demonstrate that the required systemic reform (from segregated schools to inclusive schools) is not taking place. On the contrary, in recent years segregation has been further reinforced, including in early childhood education.

"Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by the introduction of a basic child allowance."

European Semester 2025

Austria's [Country Report](#) refers to ongoing challenges with child poverty and social exclusion, access to ECEC and inclusive education. In 2024, 20.9% of children (approximately 344,000) were affected by poverty or exclusion. Vulnerable groups include children from migrant backgrounds, single-parent households, and larger families. 11.9% of single-parent households experience severe material or social deprivation, versus 2.7% of two-parent households.

Progress toward Austria's goal of reducing child poverty by 102,000 (from 2019 levels) by 2030 is at risk.

In 2023, only 24.1% of children under three were enrolled in ECEC (against the EU average of 37.5%), missing the national goal of 31.9%. Participation varies regionally. Educational disparities are widening. The early school leaving rate is 15.2% among foreign-born youth.

Efforts such as expanding full-time childcare and implementing the Child Guarantee show progress, though further action is needed. The *Schulstartklar* programme, funded by the European Social Fund Plus, provides school supply vouchers to support low-income pupils. Austria's €4.5 billion Recovery and Resilience Plan funds ECEC, child health, and education reforms. This includes €500 million annually to create 50,000 new ECEC places by 2030. However, staff shortages and funding gaps persist.

Initiatives like 'Early Aid' and the electronic mother-child pass aim to improve health access for disadvantaged families. Meanwhile, Broadband Austria 2030 seeks to bridge the urban-rural digital divide, supporting children's digital rights and inclusion.

The 2025 [Country Specific Recommendations](#) highlight key structural challenges in Austria's labour market and education system, and underscore the need to increase women's full-time employment by improving the availability and quality of childcare services. They also emphasise addressing low participation rates in early childhood education, especially for children under three, and reducing regional disparities and staff shortages in this sector. Additionally, the recommendations point to declining basic skill levels among pupils, particularly those from migrant and disadvantaged backgrounds.

European Union Funding

Eurochild members in Austria pointed to the need for training and less complex procedures and criteria for EU funding applications.

Country Recommendation

"Belgium should take action to ensure access to healthcare and welfare for everyone, including the most vulnerable, and guarantee children's rights to participation and to peaceful assembly."

Country Profile 2025

Belgium*

Child Population:
2,341,916 (2024)
19.8% of total population

Child Poverty:
497,000 (2024)
20.2% (2024)
▲ +1.2 percentage points compared to 2023

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Kenniscentrum Kinderrechten

Kinderrechtencoalitie Vlaanderen

Francesca Stuer (individual member)

ZoJong

1 Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2024, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc_peps01n).
* As participating Eurochild members are based in Flanders, this country profile focuses primarily on Flanders.

Children's Rights in Belgium

In Flanders, several organisations carry out child rights and human rights education initiatives. For example School for Rights, a partnership of several civil society organisations (CSOs), supports schools and teachers to promote children's rights. Mobile School has developed a toolkit with training modules about children's rights for youth workers.

Children's rights education is included in the curriculum in primary and secondary education. In the recently reformed minimum targets in primary education, child rights education was strengthened following a joint statement by Child Rights Coalition Flanders, UNICEF Belgium, and the Flemish Commissioner for Children's Rights.

Anti-child rights movements

In general, there is a shrinking space for CSOs. Research into the quality of civic space in Belgium, by the Federal Institute of Human Rights, showed that many organisations are faced with pressure and intimidation, and several believe that the situation has deteriorated over the past two years. The research also showed that many organisations are financially insecure and struggle to engage in the policy-making process. Some staff working in human rights organisations also report being subjected to online and verbal attacks and negative media campaigns, as well as physical aggression and vandalism.

Amnesty International has documented negative rhetoric around children and the right to protest. Children have also been among the victims of the violent repression of pro-Palestine protests in Brussels.

Child participation

In Flanders, children from vulnerable backgrounds have several opportunities to express their opinions in public decision-making processes: in schools, through participatory projects, action research, and other mechanisms. However, challenges persist and it is difficult for them to have a real impact on decision-making and policy. There is a risk that children are included symbolically, but that structures, processes and measures that affect them are left unchanged.

The Flemish Youth Council enables young people to advise and comment on draft decrees and regulations by the Flemish government. During the preparation of the new Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan opportunities for child participation were set up with children from vulnerable backgrounds.

In theory, children in Flanders can also engage in legislative initiatives through child rights impact assessments. In practice, however, the involvement of children in these processes is very limited.

The Flemish government encourages local administrations to set up local youth councils. Some cities and municipalities also have ad hoc, thematic participation initiatives or outreach activities.

The Flemish Decree on Participation in primary and secondary schools obliges schools to set up participation mechanisms for pupils. Secondary school pupils are also represented through the Flemish umbrella organisation Scholierenkoepel, which is subsidised by the Flemish government.

Child protection systems

The Flemish child protection system emphasises the prevention of family separation wherever possible.

Foster care is the first option when a child needs to be placed in alternative care. Various forms of foster care exist. 'Support family foster care' helps parents overcome crises and provides

a supportive social network for children. Professional foster care in 'family homes' is a positive development. Crisis and intervention centres in Flanders can host full families, not only children, reducing unnecessary family separation. The new Flemish government (2024–2029) has announced plans to expand integrated, family-based care where children and parents receive support together. Confidential Centres on Child Abuse play a central role in early detection and cross-sector coordination of services for children at risk.

However, challenges remain. The right to youth care ('jeugdhulp') is under pressure due to chronic waiting lists and bottlenecks, resulting in delayed or crisis-driven placements. Children do not always receive timely support, with problems becoming more complex before help is offered. The system also faces staff shortages.

Children placed in care often experience poor outcomes, as timely transitions are hindered by the lack of suitable follow-up services — particularly when moving into adult care or psychiatric care.

The transition from youth care to independent living remains difficult for many young people, also due to challenges such as housing costs.

There is no targeted child protection policy for children with a minority ethnic background, including Roma children, in Flanders.

Minor-Ndako, an organisation working with unaccompanied minors and vulnerable families (including Roma), plays a key role in culturally sensitive support. Their expertise could be further used in system-wide strategies for inclusion.

In Flanders, CSOs are concerned about recent developments regarding children who have

committed an offence, and that care for these children will be replaced by a more punitive approach. The principle that the detention of children is a last resort is under pressure. Psychiatric support for these children is also lacking.

Despite prevention efforts, the risk of female genital mutilation persists. In Belgium girls are also exposed to domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, forced marriage and crimes committed in the name of so-called 'honour'.

In 2024, Child Focus (the Belgian Centre for Missing and Sexually Exploited Children) saw a doubling of reports of missing children and an increase in reports of online sexual exploitation.

Children with a migrant or minority ethnic background face several issues. The ongoing reduction of accommodation for unaccompanied minors, combined with growing right-wing rhetoric and political pressure, threaten continuity of care and protection for migrant children. Many of these children struggle with integration and experience exclusion and discrimination.

Child safety and well-being online

Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and cyberbullying remain key risks faced by children. A recent report by Child Focus highlights the alarming rise in cases of non-consensual sexting, grooming and sexual extortion. 'Childfluencers'[1] and 'sharenting'[2] are also concerns, and a new bill to regulate this phenomenon is being discussed in parliament.

Emerging risks include:

- Artificial intelligence (AI), including chatbots, deepfakes and manipulative algorithms.
- Online gaming, and the combination with social features, advertising and AI, especially as it is often unclear under which legal framework online games are regulated.
- Toxic masculinity online and its impact on children's understanding of gender roles.

Child Focus also notes a trend of younger grooming victims, with several under the age of 12-13.

There are numerous policies, programmes and good practices being developed to keep children safe online. However, Belgium still lags behind other countries and promising practices face scalability issues.

There is also a need to centralise policies concerning children's online safety. Protection of minors in the digital environment is fragmented across policy domains and authorities. In 2023, the Belgian government voted to fund a national coordination centre for the online safety of children but this needs to be operational and properly funded.

To protect children from online harm, Belgium should:

- Introduce a content classification system focused on social media platforms, channels and content creators, such as Flimmo in Germany.
- Develop a centralised hub for complaints concerning children's rights violations online, where children can find information tailored to their needs and professional support, including psychological support. New Zealand has developed Netsafe, for example.
- Invest in existing support services such as child helplines, hotlines, Safer Internet Centres, and Sexual Assault Centres. These play a critical role in prevention, support, and intervention for children at risk.
- Raise awareness among children about the impacts of AI-generated and manipulated content. Through their awareness campaign the 'unwearable wardrobe', Child

---

2 'Sharenting' refers to the practice of parents sharing a large amount of potentially sensitive content about their children on social media, especially when done by an account with a large following base.

3 'Childfluencer' or 'kidfluencer' refers to children who have gained a considerable online following by creating content on social media channels, often linked to advertisement, and in most cases managed and guided by their parents.

Focus has educated children about the harmful impacts of this content.

- Promote awareness of the Digital Services Act and roll out targeted educational campaigns and training initiatives.

Children's mental health

The large scale 'JOP' survey contains some questions related to mental health.

There are services available to help children with mental health problems, including from their local doctor.

Children can contact Awel, a children's helpline. The Centre for Student Guidance helps school-age children and their parents with questions about health problems, vaccinations, feelings of depression, fear of failure, bullying, and much more. Children can also visit a team of doctors, nurses, psychologists, educationalists and social workers for free. However, there are increasing (and increasingly complex) requests

for assistance and a shortage of resources to respond to children's needs.

Young people up to the age of 25 can stay in an 'OverKop' house, a free and walk-in centre which provide a safe place for fun activities and to seek professional therapeutic help.

Additional children's rights issues

Other issues affecting children in Belgium are environmental challenges and the impact of the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, affecting children's mental health and fostering polarisation within society.

There have also been cases of police violence against children, including the death of a child aged 11. These are rarely met with accountability.

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

Child poverty

In Flanders, the government agency Kind & Gezin publishes data on family income, poverty and deprivation. In Flanders, the poverty risk is high for children in single-parent and large households, children in low work intensity households, children whose parents have low levels of education, and those who have one parent that is born outside the European Union.

When it comes to digital skills and access, five factors determine the risk of digital exclusion: income, education, age, family composition, and country of birth. In recent years, the Flemish government has invested in media and digital literacy, but initiatives need to be scaled up and more efforts are needed to reach children in vulnerable positions.

Public investment and social safety nets

Belgium offers a relatively comprehensive social security safety net for children and their families, but gaps and challenges remain. Families with average incomes often fall through the cracks - they earn too much for social assistance but too little to absorb rising living costs.

Since COVID-19 and the energy crisis, social security payments have increased, to reflect inflation and bring the minimum closer to the poverty threshold. It remains unclear whether the new government (2025) will continue these measures, as further increases in the social security minimum payment are not forecast.

To invest in children and lift them out of poverty and social exclusion Belgium should:

- Provide adequate social security benefits (unemployment benefits, sickness benefits, and

the social assistance minimum above the poverty threshold), at federal level.

- Guarantee accessible and quality care for babies, toddlers and school children and tackle the disproportionate representation of children in poverty in special education in Flanders.

Education

The education system in Flanders continues to reproduce social inequalities, with a high level of (ethnic and socio-economic) segregation and a lack of inclusion of children with disabilities and special needs. CSOs have voiced concerns about punitive measures announced by the new Flanders Education Minister, including financial sanctions for parents from vulnerable backgrounds who 'do not fulfil their parental responsibilities'. Flemish education has a high percentage of early school leavers, primarily affecting socio-economically disadvantaged children.

Some teachers hold implicit biases that affect the expectations of children with a migrant background (e.g. they may assume that they will perform poorly at school). This makes these children feel less motivated and sometimes less confident. From the start of their school career, some children from immigrant or minority backgrounds are steered towards technical or vocational options, despite their real potential.

In many schools, pupils are not allowed to wear religious symbols. This violates a wide range of children's rights.

Belgium has a disproportionate number of pupils in special education. The new Flemish minister is currently developing a plan to transition towards a (more) inclusive education system.

While education is nominally free, in practice this is often not the case. School-related costs can be a barrier for pupils from low-income families, particularly

in secondary education, where school costs can be high (e.g. transport, laptops, school trips, textbooks, school uniform).

Many pupils experience stress, fear of failure or academic pressure in school.

Belgium is facing a major teacher shortage.

Young carers face barriers to realising their right to education because of their care responsibilities. They miss school and have difficulties in preparing for exams and doing homework. Some struggle to finish high school or are forced to give up on education path of their choice.

Early childhood development

There are several initiatives that support children and families in early childhood.

Parents and children can go to 'Houses of the Child' for support and advice on parenting and early childhood development (ECD).

These provide a basic service for all parents and an additional service for families in vulnerable situations.

At 10 key points in a child's development, a free consultation is provided at consultation centres, to monitor children's growth, health and development. Children can also receive vaccinations.

Organisations offering home-based support, such as Home-Start, support families from pregnancy. Trained volunteer 'family buddies' offer weekly home visits and support parents with outreach and empowerment.

'Walk-in teams' offer support for families with young children (0–3) without requiring formal referrals.

Child and Family Support Centres provide short-term, intensive guidance to families with young children who are at risk of parenting breakdown. Their early intervention includes home-based

coaching, parental skills training, and psycho-social support.

However, the Flemish government should invest more in preventive family and parenting support, with specific attention for the most vulnerable, within an overarching policy framework and with sustainable funding.

There is a significant lack of accessible, integrated data on ECD in Belgium, particularly in Flanders. Currently, data is managed at local, regional or organisational levels, making it difficult to compare, track impact, or shape policy. New data is especially needed for children under five, to understand developmental milestones, access to services, and gender disparities. Disaggregated data on enrolment and attendance in early childhood education and care (ECEC) by region, socio-economic status, and family background is also needed, as well as data on the quality of ECEC services (staff qualifications, child-to-staff ratios, availability of inclusive education).

The main barriers to children's participation in quality ECEC are:

- Lack of capacity in childcare (waiting lists, affordability, distance), especially for children with special needs.
- Affordability for low- and middle-income families.
- Accessibility due to priority rules for working parents or specific requirements such as care plans.
- Cultural and language barriers.

Housing

The Belgian constitution guarantees the right to adequate housing but its policy power is limited. Residency status (immigration, family reunification, registration, etc.) determines rights at the regional level. There is a significant shortage of affordable housing suitable for larger families, both in social housing and in the private housing market.

Social housing and rent support are available but largely insufficient. There are long waiting lists for social housing, especially for large families.

To ensure all children can have adequate housing, Belgium should:

- Increase the supply and quality of affordable rentals in the social and private housing market. Adequate housing for families should be a priority and a 'child norm' should be applied to housing quality standards.
- Accelerate support for tenants on the private rental market.
- Prevent homelessness of families with children at all times. Forced evictions should be prohibited when children are involved, especially when no suitable alternative is available.

The European Child Guarantee

Kinderrechtencoalitie Vlaanderen offers the following recommendations to strengthen the Child Guarantee in Belgium:

- Develop a concrete, politically supported, and cross-cutting plan to realise the Child Guarantee.
- Design measures based on a thorough analysis of the situation of children in vulnerable circumstances.
- Provide a framework for monitoring and evaluating the (revised) action plan.
- Ensure that the Child Guarantee National Coordinator has a clear mandate and adequate resources.
- Guarantee the meaningful involvement of CSOs at all stages of the implementation process.

European Semester 2025

Belgium's Country Report focuses on child poverty, ECEC and education. In 2023, the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion fell to 460,000, already meeting Belgium's 2030 poverty reduction target.

In single-parent households, 23.7% experienced very low work intensity, and 13.9% faced in-work poverty (compared to 3.5% in two-parent households) in 2024.

The implementation of the Child Guarantee, supported by cohesion funds and the Recovery and Resilience Facility builds on existing measures to promote social inclusion in the country. The 2024 Child Guarantee implementation report highlights persistent service delivery challenges due to institutional complexity.

€423 million from the European Social Fund Plus (31% of the total allocation) is earmarked for social inclusion, with a particular focus on vulnerable children and disadvantaged groups.

Belgium has met its Barcelona targets for ECEC participation, with rates of 98.4% for children aged three and above and 56.3% for those under three. However, attendance gaps remain, with 42.5% attendance among children at risk of poverty versus 58.6% for others. Childcare worker shortages and poor working conditions continue to affect service quality and availability. Disadvantaged pupils in advantaged schools perform better than advantaged peers in disadvantaged schools. Structural barriers like early tracking[4] and grade retention[5] remain widespread.

The 2025 Country Specific Recommendations highlight structural challenges in the education system (including socio-economic and migrant backgrounds as important predictors of performance) and urge Belgium to improve school performance and equity.

---

4 When children are separated into different school types, streams, or levels at a young age.
5 Making a student repeat a school year if they don't meet the required performance.

Country Recommendation

"Bosnia and Herzegovina should take action to ensure sustainable and unrestricted funding, legal protection, and meaningful involvement of civil society organisations working with and for children, especially at the local level, as a cornerstone of protecting civic space and promoting children's rights."

Country Profile 2025

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Child Population:
620,000 children (2020)[1]
18% of total population

Child Poverty:
Data not available

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Association 'Novi put' (New Road)

1 UNICEF *Situation Analysis of Children in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 2020.

Children's Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The institutional framework for children's rights remains fragmented across entities. Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a highly decentralised state, with competencies for social protection, education, healthcare, and child protection divided between several entities within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FB&H). Different parts of the country operate under distinct political and administrative systems, each with its own laws, policies, and institutional frameworks, including those concerning children. The country currently stands at a critical juncture in its commitment to upholding children's rights. While many strategic frameworks have been adopted, implementation remains partial and uneven. 'Novi put' is not aware of any recent institutional measures to increase knowledge and understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) among policymakers and professionals working with children.

Anti-child rights movements

There has not been any recent evidence of organised anti-child rights campaigns in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Generally speaking, children's rights are not a focus area in the country. However, children's rights are at risk, especially for Roma children, who are consistently vulnerable to the worst forms of child labour, human trafficking and/or sexual exploitation.

Child participation

Children from vulnerable groups (e.g. Roma children, disabled children, and children in foster care) have very limited or no influence in decisions affecting them. Persistent obstacles include entrenched ethnic divisions, racism, prejudices against Roma children, underfunded civil society, and limited outreach by authorities.

Child protection systems

Bosnia and Herzegovina has some institutional mechanisms in place to support child protection, including the role of the Ombudsman and a legal framework aligned with the UNCRC. Some positive steps have been taken with the development of pilot roadmaps for deinstitutionalisation and with the establishment of a Council for Persons with Disabilities, which is an encouraging initiative towards inclusion.

In response to European Court of Human Rights judgments concerning unlawful placement in social care homes (institutions for children and adults with disabilities), the government of the FB&H adopted a bill amending the Family and Non-contentious Proceedings Act. The proposed amendments stipulate that placement in social care homes must be based on a court decision, subject to regular judicial review, ensuring legal safeguards for children in institutional care.

In 2024, the House of Peoples of the FB&H Parliament approved the Strategy for the Development of the Social and Child Protection System for 2024–2030. This strategic framework aims to enhance the protection and welfare of children, aligning with international standards and addressing the evolving needs of vulnerable groups.

However, significant challenges persist. Since the expiry of the last national action plan on children's rights in 2018, no new strategy has been adopted to guide and coordinate child protection efforts. Institutional care still dominates over community-based services, and measures to prevent family separation remain under-developed. Many Roma children are returned to their parents even when their parents were involved in their exploitation.

Peer violence, bullying, and cyberbullying are very present among children, and increasing domestic violence continues to pose a grave threat to children's safety. Both Roma and non-Roma

children are subjected to online and offline sexual violence. Many Roma children are subjected to labour exploitation, child trafficking, forced criminality, sexual exploitation, and child marriage. In 2025, several Roma children were found in inhumane conditions without parental care in three locations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The cases underscore the systemic nature of child trafficking risks in the country, and the urgent need for a coordinated national response.

Unaccompanied migrant children face specific challenges, such as access to safe accommodation and asylum procedures.

Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to strengthen the implementation of child-friendly justice for migrant children.

Child safety and well-being online

Over recent years, Bosnia and Herzegovina has seen increasing online child exploitation. This includes child sexual abuse materials (CSAM) which now also involves content generated by artificial intelligence (AI). The country's involvement in Europol's Operation Cumberland in late 2024 marked a significant development in uncovering AI-generated CSAM, including material featuring virtual depictions of children under 12. One individual was arrested during this operation, but the scale of the problem suggests that Bosnia and Herzegovina may be a significant point on the CSAM trafficking route, due to its limited law enforcement resources and a lack of robust child protection measures. Children in the country remain vulnerable to exploitation due to limited digital forensic capabilities and under-resourced child protection systems.

Online child sexual exploitation and cyberbullying are growing risks, with no current laws or data that can effectively address these issues. Digital safeguarding policies, data collection and reporting systems should be developed. There is also an urgent need to develop awareness campaigns and initiatives to educate children, parents, and educators about online risks, to promote safe digital behaviour, and to empower young people to recognise, report, and prevent online abuse and exploitation. Prevention should be a key activity, given the insufficient and under-funded support mechanisms available for victims, the lack of specialised services, and the limited institutional capacity to respond effectively to cases of Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

Children's mental health

'Novi put' is not aware of any government initiatives to collect data on children's mental health. UNICEF conducted a survey of young people in 2024. Out of the total sample, 65% reported having experienced symptoms of depression or anxiety in the previous 12 months.

Mental health services for children and adolescents are almost non-existent in many parts of the country, with only a handful of centres offering specialised care.

Existing mental health services remain predominantly institution-based. Gaps include a lack of community counselling, school-based support, and trauma-informed care. In this context, 'Novi put' operates a specialised counselling centre that provides psycho-social support to children and youth from vulnerable backgrounds, including victims of violence, trafficking, and exploitation. However, such services remain limited and

require greater institutional recognition and funding.

To address the gaps in services for children's mental health in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 'Novi put' recommends the following:

- Increase access to mental health services, including counselling and therapy, especially for those experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Raise awareness about mental health issues and reduce stigma through education and community programmes.

Encourage the development of peer support networks where children and young people can discuss their feelings and thoughts in a safe environment.

Additional children's rights issues

Trafficking in children has been, and remains, a very serious issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Children constitute a significant proportion of identified victims of trafficking, with an increase in online and offline child sexual exploitation of children and in forced criminality. These figures likely under-represent the true extent of the issue, as many cases go unreported due to systemic weaknesses in victim identification and support. Systemic issues such as inadequate victim identification, insufficient support services, and cultural justifications for exploitation continue to hinder progress.

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

Child poverty

Bosnia and Herzegovina uses Eurostat data on the general population that is at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE).

Roma children, and increasingly non-Roma children whose parents are addicted to either drugs, gambling and/or alcohol, are those most affected by poverty and social exclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The digital divide is high, particularly affecting low-income families, rural areas, Roma communities, and children in care. Barriers include unaffordable internet, a lack of devices, low digital literacy and poor infrastructure. It is also important to highlight the lack of education on safe internet use, especially among vulnerable children, and in rural and socio-economically deprived areas.

The FB&H Ministry for Labour and Social Policy allocated KM 16 million in the 2024 budget to provide one-off financial assistance of BAM 1,000 for each newborn child. The initiative aims to support families and encourage population growth, with plans to streamline the application process through digital platforms. In December 2024, the Ministry of Finance disbursed 46 million BAM to beneficiaries, including families with four or more children.

Public investment and social safety nets

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a fragmented social support system, often tied to limiting and unfair criteria to access social benefits and considerable bureaucracy. The system is especially weak for migrant, Roma, and children in institutional care. While some benefits exist, they do not cover many vulnerable children, especially from marginalised backgrounds.

'Novi put' pointed to three key measures that Bosnia and

Herzegovina should take to invest in children and lift them out of poverty and social exclusion:

1. Adopt a child-focused national strategy on poverty reduction and social inclusion.
2. Introduce financial and service support to prevent family separation (e.g. parenting programmes, cash transfers).
3. Close the institutionalisation gap by financing community-based foster care and alternative models.

Education

Ethnic segregation in schools continues to affect social cohesion, particularly through the controversial 'two schools under one roof' model, where children of different ethnic backgrounds are physically separated and taught different curricula within the same building. The problem persists, particularly in Central Bosnia and Herzegovina Neretva Cantons. Despite legal obligations and past commitments to put in place an integrated education system, public schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina are still not organised as multicultural, multilingual, open and inclusive institutions for all children. Ethnic segregation, based on a politicised notion of mother-tongue education, continues. In 2024, there were still more than 50 cases of 'two schools under one roof', in which children were segregated based on their ethnicity. Also, there is no teaching in the Romani language, and public awareness of Roma culture is very limited.

Vulnerable groups — especially Roma children, children with disabilities, and those living in poverty or rural areas — face significant barriers to accessing quality education. Many do not attend school regularly, and those who do often experience exclusion and lower educational outcomes.

Learning outcomes are also a major concern. International assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) consistently show that a large proportion of 15-year-olds in Bosnia and Herzegovina struggle with basic proficiency in reading, maths, and science. These challenges are compounded by outdated curricula, limited support for teachers, and insufficient investment in infrastructure and educational resources.

For the 2024/2025 academic year, the government allocated 5.72 million BAM to provide free textbooks to approximately 43,870 elementary school pupils. Beneficiaries include students from grades one to four, those from large families, students with disabilities, and winners of national competitions.

Early childhood development

Given the country's fragmented governance structure, Bosnia and Herzegovina urgently needs a unified, cross-sector strategy for early childhood development. This strategy should align health, education and social protection services under clear standards, and ensure data sharing between sectors. A centralised monitoring system and common quality standards would improve effectiveness and equity, particularly for vulnerable groups such as Roma children and children with disabilities.

Housing

In the past, there were more efforts by the international community and foreign non-governmental organisations to ensure that Roma children and families had adequate, affordable and secure housing, whereas other children and families were mostly left out from such initiatives. Now, these efforts are limited, despite rising housing costs disproportionately affecting all families living in poverty. State-supported rental assistance, social housing schemes, and better regulation of the rental market are essential to prevent housing cost overburden and reduce the risk of homelessness.

'Novi put' has the following recommendations to ensure that children and families have

adequate housing and a decent standard of living:

- Introduce inclusive housing policies that prioritise Roma children's right to adequate, safe, and stable housing by legalising informal settlements where possible and improving access to essential services such as water, sanitation, and electricity.
- Provide state-supported rental assistance, social housing schemes, and better regulation of the rental market for all families in need.

Enlargement Countries

According to 'Novi put', the main children's rights issues were mentioned in Bosnia and Herzegovina's 2024 Enlargement Package progress report. These include: the lack of a new national action plan on child rights; delays in transitioning to community-based care; insufficient support for foster care and care leavers; no action on child exploitation, begging, or poverty; under-reporting of violence against children; the vulnerability of Roma children to child labour; the challenges faced by unaccompanied migrant children; and a lack of universal health insurance for children.

'Novi put' highlights some ways in which the European Union (EU) could provide technical and financial support to Bosnia and Herzegovina to better protect children. They recommend that the EU provide targeted technical and financial support to Bosnia and Herzegovina to strengthen child protection systems, with a focus on:

- Developing and implementing local action plans aligned with the Child Guarantee.
- Supporting specialised services for vulnerable children, particularly victims of trafficking and exploitation.
- Ensuring sustainable funding for community-based care, psycho-social support and child protection mechanisms at the local level.

'Novi put' has over a decade of experience working directly with vulnerable children, including victims of human trafficking, child labour, and contemporary forms of slavery. As the largest child-focused organisation in the Herzegovina region, 'Novi put' provides a comprehensive range of services, including prevention programmes, trauma-informed care, legal assistance, and reintegration support.

'Novi put' would welcome the opportunity to be involved in the preparatory work and implementation of the Child Guarantee in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its field experience and local presence enables the organisation to contribute to the design of practical, inclusive, and effective interventions for the children most at risk.

'Novi put' also stresses that while Bosnia and Herzegovina has made some progress in adopting strategic frameworks and increasing awareness of children's rights, structural weaknesses, legal fragmentation, and political instability continue to undermine real and sustained improvements. Initiatives launched since September 2024, including new strategies and financial support measures, are steps forward, but their reach is limited by insufficient funding, uneven implementation, lack of coordination, and institutional fragility. Vulnerable groups, particularly Roma children, children with disabilities, victims of violence, and those exposed to trafficking, remain at heightened risk.

Country Recommendation

"Bulgaria should adopt a National Strategy for the Child that prioritises children's rights, strengthens protection systems, ensures meaningful participation, and invests in early childhood development, inclusive education, mental health, safe housing, and online safety, to reduce child poverty and promote well-being."

Country Profile 2025

Bulgaria

Child Population:
1,104,198 (2024)
17.13% of total population

Child Poverty[1]:
394,000 (2024)
35.1% (2024)
▲ +1.2 percentage points compared to 2023

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

For Our Children Foundation

National Network for Children

Know-how Centre for Alternative Care for Children – New Bulgarian University

CONCORDIA-Bulgaria

---

1 Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2024, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc_peps01n).

Children's Rights in Bulgaria

Training delivered in 2024-2025 strengthened the ability of policymakers and professionals to apply the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Workshops on children's rights were delivered mainly by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international organisations such as UNICEF Bulgaria. The capacity building training targeted professionals working with children in social services, legal guardians, social workers working with migrant children, and teachers and school professionals.

Bulgaria's National Strategy for the Child has still not been adopted. While the current draft was developed through broad consultation with civil society organisations (CSOs), a previous version was opposed by some parental organisations, fearing that children's rights would take precedence over those of adults.

Anti-child rights movements

Children's rights and the safety of child human rights defenders in Bulgaria have faced significant challenges in recent years. In 2024, Bulgaria enacted amendments to the Preschool and School Education Act that prohibit the 'promotion of non-traditional sexual orientation or gender identity' in educational settings. These changes have been criticised for violating children's rights to information, identity, and freedom of expression, especially affecting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex + children and families.

Additionally, proposed legislation threatened to severely limit CSOs, including those advocating for children's rights, by targeting entities receiving foreign funding or challenging government narratives.

Child participation

Ensuring the genuine and meaningful participation of children from diverse communities remains a challenge. Despite efforts by CSOs, there are still institutional and societal barriers to creating spaces for dialogue on issues that affect children's lives. There is a lack of age-appropriate information for children about laws and policies relevant to them.

The only progress is the child-friendly version of General Comment No. 26 of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, adapted by UNICEF Bulgaria.

The state and municipalities do not use digital tools to consult with children. According to children themselves, authorities do not sufficiently value their perspectives. Nonetheless, some politicians' engagement in discussions with children at CSO-hosted fora is a welcome development.

Pilot initiatives aimed at educating children on human rights and civic activism remain limited in scope, resources, and impact.

Participation of children from vulnerable backgrounds in public decision-making remains limited and promoted only by the National Network for Children and by UNICEF.

Child protection systems

The child protection system is challenged by inconsistent case assessment practices and insufficient inter-agency coordination. Collaboration between child protection services, health, education, the police, and the justice system is often fragmented, slowing responses and creating gaps in continuity of care.

There is no unified register for cases of violence against children. The draft coordination mechanism for assistance and support for victims of domestic violence was published but not approved. The National Plan for Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence for 2024-2026 was adopted late, thereby not allowing the use of planned budgetary

allocations for prevention and protection projects.

[According to a 2024 study by The Childhood 2025 Coalition](#), the reasons for child-family separation in Bulgaria are rooted in poverty, often combined with parental ill-health, domestic violence, lack of education and employment, social isolation, and inadequate housing.

Bulgarian legislation prioritises family-based protection measures before out-of-family placements. In 2019-2024 reports of children at risk remained stable, with about 25-30% of cases resulting in family separation and around 35% of separated children placed in residential care.

Children whose parents have migrated overseas face emotional and behavioural issues, and can perform less well at school. Children who are looked after by other adults (usually a grandmother, aunt, or neighbours) without power of attorney to act as their legal guardians can face significant challenges in accessing services.

There are 760 social services for children in the country with a total capacity of 16,523 places. Some services are operating beyond capacity, so the actual number of assisted children exceeds official limits.

In 2024, there was a revision of the Ordinance on the Quality of Social Services, with the participation of key agencies, NGO service providers and municipalities. New standards for residential and daycare services for children using psychoactive substances have also been developed.

Community-based social services play a key role in supporting children with disabilities, through individualised care and assistance to their parents. However, more efforts are needed to increase the capacity and geographical coverage of social services for parents of children with disabilities. Services for children with severe and complex disabilities remain insufficient in both quantity and quality.

There are no specific social services or assistance for migrant and refugee children to remain safely in Bulgaria, to help them with their education, learn Bulgarian, and build their life in Bulgaria.

Child safety and well-being online

According to the State Agency for Child Protection, ensuring a safe online environment for children is a top priority. However, the [National Safer Internet Centre](#) (safenet.bg) lacks state funding, even though in 2024 it processed 79,000 alerts concerning online abuse, exploitation, harassment, and extortion involving children.

In 2024, the European Commission-funded *Digital Children* project (which supports safenet.bg) organised educational initiatives on online safety for 27,000 children, trained over 100 young people, over 1,000 parents and 797 teachers. In 2024, the Centre organised a series of meetings with parents in cities across Bulgaria, focusing on the development of digital media literacy in children and online safety.

[Studies](#) by the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF rank Bulgarian children third in Europe for excessive use of social media and demonstration of problematic symptoms. For 17% of Bulgarian children, time on digital devices is problematic – against the European Union (EU) average of 11%. Additionally, 26% are intensive users, almost continuously online. An up-to-date, comprehensive analysis of screen- and gaming-related addictions in Bulgaria is urgently needed.

The implementation of the Digital Services Act and the adaptation of existing legislation to address emerging technologies are crucial for effectively safeguarding children online.

Children's mental health

In 2024, child and adolescent psychiatric practices under the National Health Insurance Fund were available in only seven cities. A draft medical standard for child psychiatry has been developed and is pending consultation.

Children, parents, and professionals repeatedly flag the lack of quality mental health care and socio-emotional learning in schools, as well as insufficient emotional and professional support for nursery staff, teachers, and social workers (including supervision).

Data shows that life satisfaction, obesity, and academic skills among Bulgarian children have deteriorated. In UNICEF's *Report Card 19: Child Well-being in an Unpredictable World*, Bulgaria ranks 28th out of 36 countries in the overall ranking on the six indicators of child well-being.

Collecting data and information on the number of children with mental health difficulties and assessing the effectiveness of existing mental health programmes and services for children should be a government priority.

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

Child poverty

According to Eurostat 2024 data, 35.1% of children in Bulgaria were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, an increase of 1.2 percentage points from 2023. The highest poverty rate in 2024 was found among households with two adults and three or more children (56.1%) and single-parent households with children (44%). The education level and occupation of parents are also key factors. In 2024, eight out of ten children (84.1%) whose parents had only primary or no education lived in poverty. In contrast, only 5.6% of children of parents with higher education were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Bulgaria also had one of the highest rates of child material deprivation in the EU, with 30.4% of children under 16 unable to afford at least three essential items or activities. Roma children are disproportionately affected by material deprivation (as high as 77%).

In 2024, social transfers in Bulgaria contributed to a 27.7% reduction in the risk of poverty. However, Bulgaria remains among the ten EU countries where social transfers have the weakest impact on poverty reduction, significantly below the EU average of 33.9%.

The National Strategy for Reducing Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion 2030 emphasises poverty reduction and support for children.

There is inequality in internet access – those from more affluent households and with more education have higher rates of access.

Sustainable and affordable housing is a key measure needed to counter child poverty.

Public investment and social safety nets

Bulgaria's social security net is fragmented, underfunded, and poorly coordinated. Inadequate social benefits, restrictive unemployment protection, and contribution-dependent healthcare access leave many vulnerable families without effective protection. This weakens the welfare system's capacity to prevent poverty, protect child well-being, and reduce health and social inequalities. Family allowances fail to cover actual child-related costs.

However, in 2024, the amount of some family benefits (under the Family Benefits for Children Act) was increased, which is a positive development.

Education

Poverty and social exclusion remain significant barriers to quality and inclusive education, especially in rural and marginalised communities. Children from low-income families often lack resources for school materials, transport, or digital devices for online learning.

Roma children are disproportionately affected, facing higher rates of school drop-out and limited access to quality pre-school education.

De facto, school segregation persists, particularly for Roma children who are often placed in under-resourced or ethnically homogenous schools.

Discriminatory attitudes from peers, educators, or institutions may discourage school attendance.

Although inclusive education is legally mandated, implementation is uneven. Many schools lack trained support staff, accessible infrastructure and assistive technologies. Families often face bureaucratic hurdles in obtaining individual educational plans or necessary accommodation.

Early childhood development

Among the positive initiatives that support children's early years is the first-ever Annual Plan for the Promotion of Early Childhood Development (ECD), adopted in 2024. It includes detailed activities based on international good practice, including the WHO Nurturing Care Framework. Regrettably, as of September 2025, there is no publicly available report on the Plan's implementation. A new plan for 2025 has not been adopted and a long-term national vision for the promotion of ECD has not been developed.

Positively, the National Health Strategy 2030 outlines important goals such as improving the reach, access and quality of maternal and infant healthcare, with a focus on overcoming regional disparities, boosting the healthy habits of mothers-to-be, and improving the professional qualifications of health specialists.

To further strengthen support for ECD Bulgaria should:

- Develop a network of services to support parents with young children, including home visiting by health professionals.
- Develop a system for early childhood intervention, with cross-sector coordination, and introduce a national screening programme to monitor the health and development of every child, with appropriate referral pathways.

Bulgaria has an established regulatory framework for early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, including stand-alone nurseries and kindergartens. These can be municipal, state-run, or private. However, in practice, children are only guaranteed a place at age four, the age of compulsory pre-school education.

The main obstacles to children's participation in quality ECEC are:

- A split ECEC system governed by the Ministry of Health (for children under three) and by the Ministry of Education (for children aged 4-7), without unified quality standards.
- Poverty and social exclusion which affect the participation of the most vulnerable children.
- Insufficient availability, with a shortage of places in major cities and a complete lack of services in small settlements, remote areas, and among vulnerable communities.

Data on ECD in Bulgaria is scarce and fragmented. There is no data on poverty and social exclusion for children under three, no data for children with unmet medical needs, and no disaggregated data on ECEC quality or enrolment.

Housing

There is no systemic support for children and families with acute housing needs in Bulgaria.

Eviction of Roma families without appropriate alternative accommodation is an ongoing practice. In April 2025, a mayor ordered the demolition of a whole Roma neighbourhood in Sofia, and the same action was replicated in Stara Zagora in August 2025. Municipal authorities in both cities have not yet provided a durable solution for those left homeless. Some of the 64 families from the Sofia neighbourhood accepted accommodation in temporary shelters, others went to live with extended family. Authorities are slow to provide temporary housing and sustainable solutions

to families left homeless in Stara Zagora.

To ensure all children can have adequate housing Bulgaria should:

- Introduce housing support mechanisms for families, including increased public spending on housing assistance and on more and better-quality dwellings in social rented housing.
- Establish an inter-institutional mechanism to support families with children who have lost their homes, including as a result of the demolition of illegal constructions.

The European Child Guarantee

Bulgaria's implementation of the Child Guarantee combines state budget resources with €120 million from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), aiming to improve the living conditions of over 200,000 children. According to Bulgaria's

biennial progress report, vulnerable children have been supported through the Child Guarantee's Human Resources Development and Education programmes. Projects such as *Strong Start* and *Success for You* supported children with special educational needs, those at risk, and those with chronic illnesses. *Success for You* reached about 96,000 pupils, including 11,746 with special needs or chronic illnesses and 64,271 from vulnerable groups, while *Strong Start* supported over 37,000 children.

The Child Guarantee also ensured the sustainability of maternal and child health consultation centres in regional capitals. These provide advice and support for children with disabilities and chronic illnesses, and for pregnant women at increased medical risk. Further healthcare measures include the development of integrated health and social services and the introduction of a home-visiting model for young children. To date, over 15,000 children have benefited from ECD and health services.

Despite progress, the implementation of the Child Guarantee highlights the need for more integrated measures for children and families from vulnerable communities, for strengthened inter-institutional cooperation, an enhanced role for local authorities, and a system for monitoring and evaluating social transfers.

"Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by improving housing conditions for children living in extreme poverty and expanding the scope of early childhood development services and community-based social services — ensuring that social support reaches children and families not only in the form of social assistance, but through effective integrated

services, and that it covers disadvantaged regions."

European Semester 2025

Bulgaria's Country Report addresses child poverty, ECEC and education, but omits issues related to deinstitutionalisation, the digital divide, mental health and the impacts of climate change on children.

Implementation of the Child Guarantee, supported by EU cohesion funds and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, includes investments in kindergartens, food aid, education, and integrated services. Despite progress, key challenges remain in nutrition, housing, and early childhood education. Under the ESF+, €137 million is allocated to combat child poverty, aiming to benefit over 200,000 children by 2027.

Participation in early childhood education in Bulgaria remains among the lowest in the EU, 21.1% for children under three

and 87.8% for children from the age of three to compulsory school age, with even lower rates for disadvantaged children. Limited capacity and quality of childcare facilities remain a concern, and there has been little improvement. While the government has begun integrating nurseries into the education system and improving staff qualifications, progress is slow.

In the EU, Bulgaria has one of the highest rates of 15-year-olds lacking basic skills in maths (53.6%), reading (52.9%), and science (48%), but efforts to support at-risk pupils and reintegrate out-of-school children have helped reduce early school leaving from 13.9% in 2019 to 8.2% in 2024 (though rates remain high in rural areas). Social segregation increases learning disadvantages, and 64% of Roma children aged 6-15 attend schools where all or most pupils are Roma.

The 2025 Country Specific Recommendations highlight persistently high child poverty in Bulgaria, with social protection

spending among the EU's lowest (18.3% of GDP vs an EU average of 26.8%). The Recommendations call for improving teaching quality, competence-based learning, and access to integrated social and employment services, including more effective minimum income support.

European Union Funding

EU funding is crucial for addressing social issues in Bulgaria. ESF+ funding supports Bulgaria's implementation of the Child Guarantee, aiming to reduce school drop-out, boost employment, and lift nearly 800,000 people out of poverty by 2030. The European Regional Development Fund is a main source of funding for the national housing policy.

Croatia

Country Recommendation

"In order for Croatia to truly prioritise investment in children, it is necessary to transform and align the work of key systems that serve children — education, health, and social welfare — by integrating child-focused policies and actively involving children and those who work with them in the process of shaping and implementing public policy."

Child Population:
658,510 (2024)
17% of total population

Child Poverty[1]:
125,000 (2024)
19.3% (2024)
▲ +2 percentage points compared to 2023

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Network of Associations for Children

FICE Croatia

1 Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2024, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc_peps01n).

Children's Rights in Croatia

In Croatia, there are no institutional measures directly aimed at increasing knowledge of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) among decision-makers. Although there is some training for professionals working with children, some of which includes children's rights, there is a lack of systematic education on children's rights for professionals or public officials.

However, training was conducted for 900 professionals in the social welfare system as part of the _Strengthening the Capacity of Professionals – Coordinators of Family Law Protection Measures in the Social Welfare System_ programme, implemented by the Croatian Association of Social Workers (funded through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021–2026).

The National Plan for Children's Rights 2022–2026 includes measures to train professionals working with children and highlights the importance of training judges and prosecutors to ensure better application of children's rights.

In 2015, SOS Children's Village Croatia published _Realising Children's Rights – A Training Manual for Professionals Working with Children in the Alternative Care System,_ part of a project co-funded by the European Commission's _Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme_. 18 trainers completed a 'training for trainers' programme on children's rights, and 200 professionals from the care system received training.

Anti-child rights movements

There are no public campaigns against children's rights or against organisations that protect those rights. However, all civil society organisations (CSOs) engaged in monitoring and advocacy face significant challenges due to uncertain financial sustainability.

There can sometimes be hostility towards those who advocate publicly for vulnerable groups.

Child participation

The participation of children from vulnerable groups is recognised at legislative and institutional levels, but is often symbolic and inadequate, with limited impact on decision-making.

There are student councils in schools, but there is little information about their influence. Within the foster care system, it is possible to establish councils of fostered children, but there is no data on their impact.

There are some positive examples, such as the inclusion of children from vulnerable groups in local-level decision-making through the _Child Friendly Cities and Municipalities_ programme led by the Union of Societies 'Our Children' Croatia, and through the _National Forum_ coordinated by DND Opatija. DND Opatija's child representatives participate in the work of European and global children's rights organisations.

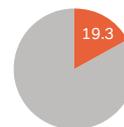The _ISKORAK_ programme and the _Young Advisors Network of the Ombudsperson for Children_ are additional mechanisms for children's participation.

Despite these positive initiatives, the practice of child participation has not yet been embedded to ensure meaningful engagement. The main obstacle is a lack of genuine understanding of children's rights and adult biases that children are incapable of making or contributing to important decisions.

To ensure that the voices of children are heard and respected, it is necessary to educate all decision-makers, public officials, and professionals working with children. The impact of child participation on decision-making processes should be systematically monitored and evaluated.

Child protection systems

There are laws and protocols in place for child protection, but there are challenges in implementation and insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the child protection system.

Despite reforms to strengthen family support and prevent child-family separation, the number of children entering the child protection system continues to rise. Services providing early intervention for families at risk are underdeveloped.

There is uneven quality and availability of services, with regional disparities, especially in smaller communities. Psycho-social support and counselling services are often insufficient or overburdened.

There are limited human resources in the health and social welfare systems, with high workloads and a chronic shortage of professionals (social workers, psychologists, child psychiatrists).

Improvements in the foster care and alternative care system are needed. While the number of institutionalised children is decreasing, there is still a lack of adequately trained foster carers, especially for children with disabilities or special needs. While family-based foster care should be continuously developed and prioritised where appropriate, it is equally essential to invest in the transformation and quality improvement of existing residential care settings, as they remain a necessary part of the child protection system.

Violence against children in Croatia takes several forms, from physical, emotional, and sexual abuse to increasingly prevalent cyberbullying and online exploitation. Online violence, grooming, cyberbullying, and bullying are among the most common issues, alongside physical punishment, which persists in child-rearing practices.

Challenges remain in implementing prevention programmes, early intervention, protecting children in digital environments, and ensuring a systematic cross-sector response to violence.

There is a need to strengthen the capacity of professionals, to involve children in policy-making, and to ensure the effective implementation of protocols and action plans that already exist in legislation.

The main challenges affecting children with a migrant or minority ethnic background are:

- Insufficient inclusion of children in decisions that affect them. During the care and reception of children from Ukraine, children's opinions were often overlooked. Professionals and guardians reported that, due to the urgency of the situation and limited capacity, decisions were made without the active involvement of children or without providing information in a language they could understand.

- Lack of resources, poor coordination, and insufficient professional support in the guardianship system.
- Difficulties in accessing education, healthcare, and social services. Children with migrant backgrounds and Roma children face language, cultural, and administrative barriers that hinder their integration in schools and access to healthcare and social rights.

Child safety and well-being online

Cyberbullying and online abuse are prevalent, with children as both victims – 12% to 16% – and perpetrators – from 8% to 19% depending on the study.

Online sexual violence against children is on the rise, especially affecting adolescents. However, prevalence rates of victimisation vary between 7% and 55.3% depending on the study.

The number of reports of sexual content involving minors

increased during and after the pandemic. Sexting, sexual extortion, grooming, and the sharing of explicit content among peers are on the rise.

However, there are some innovative solutions and practices to protect children in the digital sphere.

The Centre for Safer Internet provides free and anonymous services such as helplines. They also provide education on online safety through workshops, lectures and school programmes for children, parents, and professionals.

The 'Red Button' is a tool for reporting online abuse and sexual exploitation of children. It is integrated into websites, especially educational systems and apps.

Children's mental health

The Ministry of Health collects data on children's mental health, but this only includes children who are registered within the healthcare system. The main sources of data on children's mental health in Croatia are:

- Health Behaviour in School-aged Children - an international study monitoring the health and well-being of children aged 11, 13, and 15. Findings show an increase in feelings of depression, stress, and psychosomatic complaints, especially among girls and older adolescents.
- The Children's Worlds study, which measures children's subjective well-being from their own perspective. Children aged 10 and 12 report relatively high life satisfaction, but lower satisfaction in areas such as the school environment, perception of support from adults and peers, and their sense of safety.
- The European Union (EU) 4PROTECT 5C project analyses digital well-being and children's mental health. Initial findings indicate a connection between excessive social media use and lower emotional well-being and increased stress among young people.

Support services for children with mental health difficulties are mainly available through the healthcare system, but there are long waiting times to see specialists, due to long-standing staff shortages.

Counselling support services can also be accessed through the social welfare system, in family centres.

Mental health support for children is also provided by members of the Network of Associations for Children, as well as by other associations and NGOs, through counselling centres where services are mostly free.

Within the school system, professionals often cannot dedicate enough time to children in need due to other tasks. Schools often lack psychologists, and mental health topics are not systematically included in the curriculum. The strong focus on academic success has led to more mental health difficulties among children.

There is a need to train all professionals working with children in early intervention for children with mental health difficulties, to increase the number of specialists and service providers, to ensure systematic funding for organisations that provide mental health support, to expand the capacity for inpatient psychiatric treatment and to ensure equal availability of services throughout the country.

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

Child poverty

Croatia's national report on child poverty is based on data collected by the Household Income Survey, an annual study conducted by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics.

The children most affected by poverty and exclusion in Croatia are:

- Roma children, who live in extremely poor conditions, in isolated settlements with no electricity, water, or registered residence. They often lack legal status, access to healthcare, and do not attend school.

- Children with developmental difficulties, who do not receive sufficient support, and are at greater risk of social exclusion, institutionalisation, and poverty. Families of children with disabilities often have to pay for services from private providers and travel to other counties, or are forced to leave the labour market to care for their child.

- Children in rural and isolated communities who lack access to services due to a lack of public transport, and do not have access to educational, cultural, recreational, and entertainment activities.

- Children in alternative care, who are among the most vulnerable in Croatian society.

- Children of single parents, children of parents with disabilities and children with health impairments and severe disabilities face long delays in obtaining benefits. Currently, over 120,000 applications for these benefits are waiting to be processed, with delays due to under-staffing in public administration systems.

The digital divide persists, especially affecting children from poor families, living in rural areas, Roma children, migrant children, and children with developmental difficulties. Although infrastructure is generally available, there is uneven access to quality devices and stable internet. A national strategy on digital equity focused on disadvantaged children is needed.

Public investment and social safety nets

Croatia has a basic social safety net for children and families, but it is not comprehensive or effective enough to prevent child poverty.

Croatia needs to move from a fragmented, project-oriented approach to structural, long-term and inclusive measures to break the inter-generational cycle of poverty and ensure equality of opportunity for every child.

There is a need to expand social rights, with an emphasis on universal and comprehensive measures.

The Croatian government should:

1. Develop universal and accessible community-based services for children, including pre-school education, healthcare, and social services, especially in rural and less developed areas.
2.
3. Establish a unified child allowance system, accessible to all families with children and that takes into account additional necessary costs.
4. Introduce child budgeting and systematic monitoring of investments in children in order to determine the effectiveness of measures to combat child poverty.
5. Ensure targeted measures for children in poverty, Roma children, children with disabilities, unaccompanied minors, and children in institutions or alternative care. Measures should include access to free school meals, textbooks, cultural and sports activities, and support for parents through family policies that combine financial assistance and parenting support.

Education

In Croatia, primary education is compulsory and free for all. Most children have access to schools, including children with disabilities.

While there have been positive changes and investments, many challenges remain, particularly affecting children from vulnerable groups. The quality of school life and educational opportunities still largely depend on place of residence, family situation, and school support.

Children from rural areas, the Roma community, poor families, as well as migrant and refugee children, often lack equal learning opportunities. Lack of transportation, internet access, learning aids, school meals, and other support deepens these gaps.

Despite national strategies for inclusive education, implementation remains slow and uneven. Inclusion of children with developmental difficulties in early education also remains problematic, with rising complaints to the Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities.

There is insufficient inclusion of children with developmental difficulties and children from vulnerable groups, a limited number of specialists (psychologists, speech therapists) and limited training for educational staff. A coalition of NGOs has called for improvements in schooling for children with disabilities.

Early childhood development

The development of the National Early Childhood Intervention Plan for 2025-2030 is underway. This supports an early intervention system based on cross-sector cooperation, with an emphasis on regional equity.

To further strengthen support for early childhood development (ECD), Croatia should:

• Establish early childhood intervention service access points to provide families with guidance on where to obtain support.
• Strengthen paediatric teams for more effective and early monitoring in children's early years.
• Strengthen early and pre-school education by ensuring state funding across all cities and municipalities and universally accessible, quality early learning programmes.

There is a need for more disaggregated data on ECD in Croatia. There is no data on the number of children with developmental risks and difficulties, or on how many children are included in the support system, on service provision and waiting lists.

The main obstacles to children's participation in quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) are:

• Lack of capacity and places in kindergartens, with long waiting lists, especially in larger cities, and poorer coverage in rural/ remote areas.
• Financial barriers for poorer families.
• Insufficient adaptation and support for children from vulnerable groups.

Housing

Despite plans to build affordable housing for young families, and a National Housing Policy, there is no systematic solution for families at risk of poverty, single-parent families, the Roma community, and families with many children.

Many families spend more than 40% of their income on housing.

There is a need to expand the availability of social housing, clearly define eligibility criteria, and provide supportive community services to maintain housing security and prevent evictions.

To protect the right of children to adequate housing and a decent standard of living Croatia should develop a social and affordable housing system tailored to families with children and introduce measures to reduce excessive housing cost with targeted subsidies and caps on utility costs.

The European Child Guarantee

In the early stages of implementing the Child Guarantee, Croatia is developing promising local models that are socially inclusive, participatory, and sustainable. For the full implementation of the Child Guarantee, stronger national coverage is needed, with clearly defined state responsibility, stable and sufficient funding, and genuine commitment from decision-makers. Local initiatives provide a foundation, but without strategic national governance and investment, their impact and reach will remain limited.

To strengthen the implementation of the Child Guarantee in Croatia, it is essential to ensure clear institutional responsibility by the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, stable and accessible funding, and the integration of successful local practices into national policy.

"The Guarantee must not remain a project-based initiative but serve as the foundation for a long-term transformation of systems working with children. As part of the mid-term evaluation, we recommend strengthening cross-sector coordination, involving NGOs, children and parents in the design, monitoring and evaluation of measures, and establishing mechanisms for tracking investments in children through budgetary and programmatic indicators."

European Semester 2025

The Country Report for Croatia acknowledges challenges related to child poverty, ECEC participation, education and community-based services. Child poverty is rising in Croatia, reversing previous gains. To reach its 2030 target of reducing the number of children at risk from 134,000 (2019) to 94,000, Croatia must step up its efforts. The Child Guarantee, supported by the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), is being implemented alongside the National Plans for Social Inclusion and Social Services (2021–2027). Key measures include poverty diagnostics, county social plans, deinstitutionalisation, and expanded community-based services.

ESF+ funding is investing €600 million in social inclusion, including €200 million for teaching and personal assistants. However, early childcare access remains limited, only 30.2% of children under three attend formal care (just 8.2% among those at risk of poverty).

Croatia's Country Specific Recommendations emphasise the need to reduce poverty and income inequality by improving social benefits.

European Union Funding

Members in Croatia benefit from EU funds, particularly Erasmus+ and ESF+. The national Erasmus+ administration provides clear information and additional support with project applications and management. New calls have also been launched for the implementation of the Child Guarantee, in which members plan to participate. They also welcome the simplified procedures introduced in the latest ESF+ programmes.

Technical assistance, accessible training, and simplified access to EU funds are key to strengthening Croatia's capacity to protect children. These measures enable the effective implementation of European policies in the local context and ensure that no child is left behind.

**Country
Recommendation**

"Cyprus should take action to facilitate children's participation in all decisions that affect them and seriously consider the effects of political, spending and legislative decisions on children before these decisions are taken."

Cyprus

Child Population:
175,432 (2024)
18.15% of total population

Child Poverty[1]:
26,000 (2024)
14.8% (2024)
▼ -2.3 percentage points compared to 2023

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

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

1 Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2024, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc_peps01n).

Children's Rights in Cyprus

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is part of the training for educators, social workers and special sections of the police. The extent to which this training is considered important is not clear. However, in the context of the welfare system, it is key to actions and decisions. Policymakers such as parliamentarians and ministers do not undergo any training, and PCCPWC does not believe they consider the UNCRC when making decisions.

Anti-child rights movements

There is no evidence of an anti-rights movement in Cyprus. For the moment, children's rights can be openly discussed without facing opposition from organised groups.

Nevertheless, there are concerns due to the rise of far-right and racist attitudes that mostly affect children coming from other countries, or who have a different skin colour, religion or language.

Child participation

Children in general do not have real opportunities to express their opinion, let alone children from vulnerable backgrounds. Participation is valued on paper, but there are no structures to facilitate it and no budget to support it. Efforts have been made to 'ask the opinion of young people' above the age of 16, but there is no system to include younger children or children from vulnerable backgrounds.

There are Student School Councils, but they do not have a significant role in decision-making. The Central School Council expresses an opinion when requested by the Ministry of Education, but it is unclear how much of its input is taken into consideration.

PCCPWC is advocating for the creation of children's local councils in all municipalities. However, this is a long-term process.

We are aware that the Ombudswoman for Children's Rights, in selecting her youth advisors, does take into consideration applicants' backgrounds, in order to have a group that is representative of Cyprus' child population. In the Cyprus Children's Parliament, children are elected by their peers, and there is a fair representation of children from vulnerable groups.

The Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare reports that it is working to embed child participation in its governance. It is also exploring new ways to engage children and gather their views in the preparation of the second Biennial report on the Child Guarantee, due to be submitted by March 2026.

Child protection systems

Violence against children seems to be on the rise, especially with the inclusion of online violence.

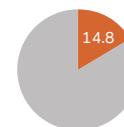Reporting is now easier, and children feel safe to report as structures are in place and the system seems to be able to protect them much better than in previous years, especially when reporting online violence. However, preventative strategies are missing.

The main issues affecting children with a migrant or minority ethnic background in Cyprus are language barriers that affect all aspects of their lives, the lack of participation in decisions that affect them and the lack of recognition of their equal rights compared to Cypriot children.

Unaccompanied minors face particular challenges, including institutionalisation, inadequate housing conditions, no schooling/education, and limited access to services.

Child safety and well-being online

Cyberbullying and (to a lesser extent) online child sexual

exploitation and abuse are prevalent in Cyprus. Gaming and the phenomenon of 'childfluencers'[1] pose alarming risks.

Children use the internet mostly for recreation, peer-to-peer communication and gaming. Crucially, online safety issues are not adequately addressed.

There are some positive initiatives that aim to keep children safe in the digital sphere. For example, the Safe Internet Youth Panel (formed under the European co-funded project *CYberSafety – A Better Internet for Children*) enables children to express opinions and exchange knowledge and experiences on the creative and safe use of the internet and digital technologies. Children and adolescents in the group act as ambassadors of best practice and action, aiming to create innovative resources and disseminate

messages on the safe use of the internet to their peers as well as others.

Children's mental health

Children's mental well-being should be considered in a holistic way, and there is a need to eliminate the stigma attached to mental health issues and to provide preventive and support services to those in need (recognising contributing factors such as stress, bullying, personal relationships, family/living conditions, poverty, etc.). As far as PCCPWC is aware there is no relevant data on mental health for under 16-year-olds.

Mental health services are very limited despite ongoing and repeated calls for school psychologists.

To improve mental health support for children, there is a need

for walk-in clinics (as per the Ministry of Health Strategy on Child Health) and to ensure that children can receive support and counselling without the need for parental consent.

Additional children's rights issues

There is a need to ensure that the rights of all children in Cyprus are equally recognised and respected. This includes guaranteeing equal treatment for all children residing in Cyprus, including migrant children.

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

Child poverty

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

- Children in single-parent families;
- Migrant children, especially unaccompanied minors;
- Children in families with long-term unemployment.

Digital divide

In 2023, less than half the population (49.5%) had at least a basic level of digital skills, which is below the European Union (EU) average of 55.6%. The digital divide persists across age groups. 71.8% of young people (16–24) have at least basic digital skills.

---

2 'Childfluencer' or 'kidfluencer' refers to children who have gained a considerable online following by creating content on social media channels, often linked to advertisement, and in most cases managed and guided by their parents.

However, children under 16 are not included in the statistics, as they are still classified as part of a household rather than as individuals. This leaves children largely invisible in official data.

As under 60% of adults aged 25–54 have basic digital skills, many lack the knowledge to guide or support their children effectively.

The Ministry of Education has set a high priority on integrating Information and Communication Technologies in education, and on developing digital skills for pupils and teachers. However, there is currently no concrete curriculum starting from an early age, leaving children to acquire skills — and navigate online safety — largely on their own.

Overall, the scale of current initiatives is inadequate and fails to reach the majority of children on the island.

Public investment and social safety nets

Cyprus has a social safety net for children and families in need, but it is not comprehensive enough. Available support includes: a Minimum Guaranteed Income with housing and childcare supplements; extra grants for families with triplets, single parents, and large households; the Child Benefit and Single Parent Allowance; school meal subsidies and the *Feeding Students in Need* breakfast programme; and the *Neighbourhood Social Worker* outreach initiative linking families to benefits.

To make the safety net more comprehensive, the government should ensure a full day of schooling[3] in all schools - providing skills development and extracurricular activities, strengthening self-confidence by promoting a sense of belonging in peer groups, and securing healthy eating for all children.

Education

There are no barriers to inclusive education for Cypriot children and for children residing on the island 'legally'. However, there are significant barriers for migrant children. As for quality education, reforms and significant improvements are needed.

Early childhood development

Over the past two years, several positive steps have been taken to support early childhood development.

The age of free pre-school education has been lowered, with the aim of making it available to children from the age of four by 2028. There have also been subsidies for pre-school education and care for those in need.

A new strategy is being developed for children aged 0-3.

Disaggregated data on children is non-existent, so there is a general need for this, including data on children's early years. There is a need for both qualitative and quantitative data.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is available, and parents take advantage of it. It should be extended to cover all children from the age of one.

The main obstacles to children's participation in quality ECEC are:

• Limited provision of ECEC services for lower age groups, especially children aged 0-3.
• Unaffordable costs for families with children aged 0-3, despite the extension of the Tuition and Nutrition Subsidy Scheme offered to children up to four years old.

---

3 Currently, many schools have limited hours (e.g. 07.30-13.30) which leaves parents having to pay for additional tuition.

Absence of a unified pedagogical framework for the entire ECEC sector (for children aged 0-6), as well as of pedagogical guidelines/curriculum for children aged 0-3 and for children from the age of three to four years and five months who attend childcare centres or home childminders.

The Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare is in the process of preparing a new bill that will modernise existing legislation on childcare and protection in Cyprus.

Housing

In Cyprus, homelessness is almost non-existent, and overcrowded housing is not a pressing issue, as families tend to be small. However, inadequate housing remains a concern, particularly in older urban and rural areas where living conditions are often poor. The greatest challenge is the high cost of housing, with families facing a heavy financial burden due to expensive rents and ongoing maintenance costs.

Forced evictions are relatively rare, but the lack of affordable options puts many households under pressure.

To ensure that all children and families have access to adequate housing, Cyprus needs to invest in government and social housing, which is currently almost non-existent, and introduce targeted subsidies to support young couples in purchasing their first home.

The European Child Guarantee

The Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare has rolled out a suite of interlinked initiatives that collectively exemplify good practice. For example, The Tuition Subsidy and Feeding Scheme for 0–4 year-olds cuts childcare fees by up to 80% and subsidises meals. Launched with €12 million in 2022–2023, it increased to €16 million in 2023–2024 to reach 21,500 children, co-funded by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). By making formal ECEC more

affordable, the scheme reduces a key poverty barrier, supports parental employment, and helps Cyprus meet its childcare coverage targets.

Simultaneously, free pre-primary education from age four will be phased in by 2031–2032 under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, guaranteeing universal, cost-free early education.

Through Inclusive Education for Students with Special Needs, provincial committees tailor placements and deliver support, therapy, transportation, and facility adaptations, enabling the vast majority to learn alongside their peers in mainstream settings.

However, non-governmental organisations do not seem to be involved in the implementation or assessment of the Child Guarantee.

There is a need to ensure that the Child Guarantee National Action Plan provides sustainable

and impactful actions that really lift children out of poverty and provide equal opportunities for all, not only on paper. This can only be achieved if disaggregated data is collected on children and from children themselves.

"Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by children's participation in the assessment process and in any amendments to the National Action Plan."

European Semester 2025

Cyprus' Country Report addresses child poverty, ECEC, and education, but does not cover digital inclusion, children's mental health or the impact of climate change on children.

In 2024, 14.8% of children in Cyprus were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE), well

below the EU average of 24.2%, while the overall AROPE rate stood at 17.1%. Cyprus exceeded its 2030 target to reduce child poverty, cutting the number of children at risk by 9,000 against a goal of 3,000.

Implementation of the European Child Guarantee is backed by EU cohesion policy and the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Of the ESF+ allocation, 47% (€104.2 million) is dedicated to social inclusion and 18% (€40.5 million) to combating child poverty and supporting the most deprived. These funds prioritise fairness, social cohesion and improved access to basic services.

ECEC participation rose by 2.3% for children over three between 2022 and 2023, reaching 86.7% (against the EU target of 96% and the EU average of 93.3%). However, only 26.5% of children under three in poverty attend ECEC versus 42% of all those under three, indicating persistent barriers. ESF+ funded subsidy schemes help lower costs and expand affordable ECEC for children up to four years old.

Education outcomes remain a concern. In the 2022 PISA[4] score, 60.6% of 15-year-olds under-performed in reading, 53.2% in mathematics and 51.8% in science — among the highest in the EU. Cyprus also saw the largest rise in under-achievement since 2018 and recorded the highest rate of simultaneous severe under-achievement across all three subjects (over 40.3%).

PCCPWC highlights the need for radical reform in the education system.

The 2025 Country Specific Recommendations for Cyprus highlight the need to improve education skills, to tackle attainment inequalities in education and to implement measures to improve the affordability of housing, a key factor for children's well-being.

European Union Funding

EU funding underpins Cyprus's approach to child poverty. The National Action Plan blends national budgets with ESF+ (THALEIA), the Recovery and Resilience Plan, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Technical Support Instrument, and Erasmus+ from 2022 to 2030, to strengthen key services across the Child Guarantee.

However, the implementation of the Child Guarantee has not improved organisations' ability to access EU funding. Simplified guidelines for accessing and managing EU funding would be welcome.

---

4 Programme for International Student Assessment

" Country Recommendation

"Czechia as a rich country should guarantee at least one warm meal a day for all pupils - not as charity for some but as an indivisible part of the education process."

Country Profile 2025
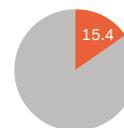
Czechia

Child Population:
2,094,077 (2024)
19.2% of total population

Child Poverty[1]:
322,500 (2024)
15.4% (2024)
▲ +0.4 percentage points compared to 2023

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Alliance for Children's Rights Czechia

Children's Rights in Czechia

Institutional measures to increase knowledge and understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) among policymakers and professionals working with children are very weak and not systematic.

Anti-child rights movements

Children's rights and child human rights defenders are not at risk in Czechia, but are neglected by lawmakers and other politicians, and by the media. Defending children's rights is not a popular topic for Czech politicians as most of the Czech voting population are senior citizens.

Czechia lacks a long-term perspective and does not perceive investing in children as an investment for the future. Overall, Czechia is not yet child friendly, and children are not viewed as fully-fledged members of society.

Child participation

Children from vulnerable backgrounds (such as children living in poverty, in foster care, with disabilities, or from minority communities) do not have real opportunities to express their opinions in public decision-making. Some may be chosen randomly to take part in projects funded by the European Union (EU) or by the Council of Europe.

The only child participation structures anchored in legislation are school parliaments, but children from vulnerable backgrounds are not guaranteed places in these. Participation structures at higher levels (municipal, regional, national) lack a legal basis. The Czech legal system has yet to adopt legislation that would guarantee children's participation rights and ensure that bodies supporting child participation receive adequate financial support.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has stopped financial support to the National Parliament of Children and Youth (PDM), despite the fact that PDM has existed and been led by children since 1998.

Child protection systems

Child protection responsibilities are split between the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Health. While more integration between ministries was part of the government's programme, it was dropped by the current coalition government as none of the parties was willing to give up part of their remit. There is hardly any coordination between ministries responsible for child protection.

One important improvement was the successful dissolution of institutional care for children under three, from 1 January 2025, after twenty years of debate.

Domestic violence - exacerbated by multiple factors (economic, financial, the pandemic, war and climate change) - means that more than 30% of the population need psychological and psychiatric care, which is rarely available. This has repercussions on children who do not feel safe either within the family or in society, and affects their mental health.

After 30 years of debate, the Civic Code was amended in July 2025, with a declaratory sentence that violence against children in the family is inappropriate. However, the law does not prohibit violence against children in the family or make it punishable. It does not explicitly prohibit corporal punishment for educational purposes and only punishes those cases that reach a particular degree of severity, thereby violating Article 17 of the European Social Charter.

Child safety and well-being online

The biggest problem is digital addiction, including nomophobia.[2] Issues such as body-shaming and grooming online are also present.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are the main actors addressing issues of child online safety in the Czechia. Although there are very few systemic programmes and measures in place, the state does cooperate with NGOs and other bodies on certain preventive projects or at least provides them with financial support. Examples include: *Don't Create Digital Footprints for Children*, co-led by the Police of Czechia; *E-safety*, developed by the Centre for Prevention of the Risks of Virtual Communication with support from the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs; and the *Safety Line*, which receives grants from the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Labour

and Social Affairs. Nevertheless, online child safety is not included in the National Strategy for the Protection of Children's Rights 2021–2029.

Children's mental health

Recent data shows that 40% of 15-years olds have symptoms of depression and 30% experience anxiety.

The National Parliament of Children and Youth repeatedly concludes that mental health is children's number one concern.

There is a shortage of child psychologists and psychiatrists and it is necessary to train more, in universities, but this process takes 6-10 years.

Additional children's rights issues

Czechia needs a legislative Act on Children's Rights, as recommended by the United

Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

In 2025 the Ministry of Finance submitted a proposal for the new state budget. This included minimal resources for NGOs, especially those working with and for children. Overall, the financial support is allocated to Czechia's senior citizens.

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

Child poverty

The rate of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion (AROPE) in Czechia increased slightly from 15% in 2023 to 15.4% in 2024.

---

2 Fear or anxiety of being without one's mobile phone or being unable to use it.

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

- Children in single-parent families with more than two children;
- Children with parents who are unemployed, or disabled, or long-term ill;
- Children with disabilities or long-term illnesses;
- Roma and other children living in socially excluded areas.

The children most affected by the digital divide are those living in socially excluded areas ('ghettoes').

Public investment and social safety nets

Czechia does not have an adequate and comprehensive social security safety net for children and their families.

To invest in children and lift them out of poverty and social exclusion Czechia should take the following measures:

1. Separate benefits for children from any other social benefits. The current social benefit system, which includes child benefits, is income-based. A parent is eligible for the child benefit if the household income does not exceed four times the subsistence level. This means that when a parent's income increases, they lose this financial support, which can discourage families from improving their socio-economic situation. As a result, some parents choose to remain dependent on the benefit in order to secure a stable source of income.
2. Put in place a more effective mechanism that gradually incentivises parents to improve their financial situation while ensuring that financial support from the state directly benefits children.
3. Gradually introduce an unconditional basic income.
4. Provide at least one free, hot meal a day for all school pupils.

Education

2025 marks 20 years since the introduction of inclusion in the Czech education system. Despite progress, significant challenges remain, including insufficient funding, regional disparities and limited capacity. One of the most persistent issues is the reproduction of educational disadvantage. Generational cycles of low educational attainment create a situation that is extremely difficult to break. Children from low-income families and households with low levels of parental education face the greatest barriers. Many are unable to afford learning materials, tutoring or other resources that could support their education. Current measures remain insufficient and do not address the root causes of these challenges. Greater support for vulnerable families, particularly through investment in housing, early childhood education and care (ECEC) and improved access to quality learning opportunities, is essential to reduce these inequalities.

Pupils and students are considered objects, not subjects, in education.

Children's participation in schools is merely formal.

School classes are too big to ensure high-quality education (the legal limit is 34 pupils in a classroom).

Ukrainian refugee children face difficulties integrating in school, because of language barriers.

Early childhood development

In 2022, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs requested support from the European Commission through the EU Technical Support Instrument. This resulted in a two-year project (September 2023 – June 2025) *Creating a Comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care in the Czech Republic.* The project aimed to improve the quality of, and access to, ECEC, particularly for children aged 0–3. It was implemented by

UNICEF Czechia with the objective of fostering collaboration between the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The practical outcomes, however, are still to be seen.

The main obstacle to children's participation in ECEC is a lack of government funding.

Children above the age of three should have free access to pre-school education.

Housing

There is very little support for social housing in Czechia, as almost all of it was privatised after 1989.

All governments since 1989 have left the housing issue to the 'free market'. Modern houses and new apartment complexes are not inhabited but rented out short-term to tourists or used as an investment. Housing costs are some of the highest in Europe. According to Deloitte's latest Property Index, Prague was the

third least affordable major city in Europe for homeownership, requiring 15 gross average annual salaries, making it one of the least accessible cities in Europe.

Over 150,000 people in Czechia, including around 61,000 children, are in housing need, according to the 2024 Report on Housing Exclusion. EU-funded projects have helped thousands, but these initiatives are short-term, lasting only up to three years. The new 2025 Housing Support Act aims to provide nationwide assistance, protect 1.6 million people from housing poverty, and reduce the number of children entering state care. However, political commitment to housing remains insufficient. There is legal protection of families with children against eviction but it is not absolute.

There is some (weak) support with housing costs for households, regardless of children, such as the 'příspěvek na bydlení' (housing benefit) which is available for low-income families.

The European Child Guarantee

"Overall the implementation of the Child Guarantee cannot be achieved by any government by simply signing it but not taking any action or reporting any progress in its implementation to the European Commission."

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, responsible for implementing the European Child Guarantee in Czechia, tends to consult only its existing partners, excluding other NGOs. For instance, it recently created its own child participation platform without considering established structures such as the National Parliament of Children and Youth. Its isolated approach and limited cooperation with civil society have resulted in very low public awareness of the Child Guarantee's implementation. Reported activities largely reflect

existing initiatives, leaving little scope for new ones.

European Semester 2025

The Country Report for Czechia highlights concerns related to child poverty, a shortage of ECEC services, and weaknesses in the education system, particularly regarding the inclusion of Roma children. Czechia shows a generally low risk of poverty and social exclusion, though children and Roma communities face growing challenges. The country aims to reduce the number of people at risk by 50,000 children by 2030. However, between 2019 and 2023, while the overall population at risk of poverty or exclusion decreased by 17,000, the number of at-risk children rose by 55,000.

To address this, Czechia is implementing the Child Guarantee and using the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), which is investing €434 million from 2021–2027 to promote inclusion and equal opportunities. €15 million of this supports Roma

communities through community programmes, early childhood services, and initiatives to combat discrimination and violence. These efforts align with the Roma Integration Strategy 2021–2030 to address structural issues such as anti-Gypsyism and child poverty.

Educational outcomes are increasingly shaped by socio-economic status, with a wide and persistent performance gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils. Roma children remain disproportionately affected by segregation and reduced access to quality education. At the same time, limited access to early childhood education hinders women's labour market participation and reinforces inequality from an early age.

Czechia is taking important steps through EU-funded programmes and reforms to improve inclusion, expand ECEC services, and support disadvantaged schools. However, many initiatives remain at the planning or pilot stage, and structural issues like educational segregation and housing discrimination persist.

The Country Specific Recommendations call for a reduction of tax and benefit disincentives for parents returning to work and for improvements in childcare to boost female labour participation. They also recommend improving educational outcomes by expanding tertiary education access, reducing school drop-out, enabling transitions between general and vocational education, and supporting disadvantaged pupils, including Roma children.

European Union Funding

EU funding gets used to finance 'children's groups' and 'neighbour groups' for younger children, intended to help parents return to the labour market. These groups have qualified staff but are not part of the mandatory last year of pre-school education in Czechia's pre-school education system.

There is absolutely no funding available for defenders of the rights of the child, nor for the monitoring and reporting activities of NGOs.

Denmark

Country Recommendation

"Denmark should incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into national legislation and ensure that children – especially the most vulnerable – are genuinely included in decisions that affect their lives, both within the public system and in society in general."

Child Population:
1,148,515 (2024)
19.3% of total population

Child Poverty[1]:
182,000 (2024)
15.9% (2024)
▲ +0.6 percentage points compared to 2023

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Børnesagens Fællesråd (Joint Council for Child Issues)

Børns Vilkår (Children's Welfare)

1 Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2024, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc_peps01n).

Children's Rights in Denmark

There is no national strategy for increasing knowledge of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) among professionals. While some civil society organisations (CSOs) offer training, and human rights education is included in school curricula, there is no systematic or mandatory child rights training for civil servants, educators, or the judiciary. The Danish National Council for Children recommends wider use of the child rights impact assessment tool developed by the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC).

Anti-child rights movements

Children's rights and child human rights defenders are not systematically at risk in Denmark. CSOs work freely. However, the lack of a national children's ombudsperson and the fact that the UNCRC is not incorporated into national legislation limit the formal recognition and legal protection of children's rights advocacy, especially compared to other Nordic countries, such as Sweden and Norway.

Child participation

Children in vulnerable situations - such as those in alternative care, in poverty or with disabilities - have limited opportunities to influence decisions that affect them. Although the new Children's Act formalises their right to be heard, implementation is weak due to a lack of resources and training. Many are not meaningfully involved in case decisions, and structural participation mechanisms rarely include the most marginalised. Stronger legal guarantees and dedicated support are needed.

Child protection systems

Denmark has a well-developed child protection system with a strong legal framework and formal rights for children. However, the new Children's Act reduces legal safeguards and increases professional discretion. There is limited support to prevent family separation, and forced adoptions are on the rise. Children in care face instability and weak complaint mechanisms. Roma children are not specifically addressed in policy or practice. Implementation varies due to a lack of national guidance and funding.

Despite the legal prohibition of physical and psychological violence against children in Denmark, a significant number of children continue to experience violence by their primary caregivers. A recent national survey showed that 16% had been subjected to physical violence and 17% to psychological violence by their legal guardian, within the past year.
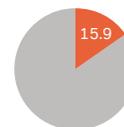
Despite the criminalisation of psychological violence in 2019, both the general population and professionals lack knowledge on how to define it.

There is currently no comprehensive strategy for preventing and combating child abuse, and there are very limited awareness-raising, education and campaigning initiatives in this area.

Bullying remains widespread, and many children do not feel safe in school. Online risks such as harassment and sexual exploitation are increasing. Children in care are particularly vulnerable due to inadequate oversight and ineffective complaint mechanisms. Reduced monitoring capacity weakens protection across settings.

The top three issues affecting children with migrant or ethnic minority backgrounds in Denmark are:

1) A higher risk of poverty and material deprivation, often without targeted support.

2) Limited access to culturally sensitive and inclusive services, including language barriers and weak complaint mechanisms.

3) A later average age at the time of placement in residential care compared to children of ethnic Danish origin.

Child safety and well-being online

Danish children rank among the most digitalised in the world, with almost all of them engaging with social media before the age of 13, and nearly half creating a profile before they turn 10.

A 2023 study found that more than four in ten people have experienced unwanted online encounters. As many as one in ten pupils in 5th and 8th grade (typically aged 11-15 years) are subjected to digital bullying very often, often, or occasionally.

Digital literacy from an early age is crucial to equip children and young people with the skills they need to navigate the online world safely and responsibly.

However, digital literacy alone is not enough. It is equally important that digital platforms are designed with the best interests of the child in mind and based on safety-by-design principles, ensuring that the protection of children's privacy, well-being, and safety is integrated from the outset.

Children's mental health

Denmark collects both quantitative and qualitative data on children's mental health. National surveys show a rise in mental distress: 15% of children have a diagnosed mental disorder, and 16% of 0–9-year-olds show signs of poor mental well-being. In Denmark in 2025, *ON was launched* — a comprehensive initiative aimed at strengthening digital literacy and promoting the well-being of children and young people. Schools across the country are given free access to educational materials and peer-to-peer programmes, alongside resources for youth clubs and families.

Surveys among adolescents (16-20) reveal high rates of low life satisfaction, loneliness, and stress. Children from low-income families experience significantly worse mental health outcomes.

Mental health services are provided through both municipal social services and regional child psychiatry. Early intervention is possible, but it is limited by long waiting times and poor coordination between sectors. Schools offer little structured mental health support.

To address gaps in services for children's mental health in Denmark, Børnesagens Fællesråd (Joint Council for Child Issues) and Børns Vilkår (Children's Welfare) recommend:

- Expanding capacity in child psychiatry to reduce waiting times.
- Strengthening coordination between health, education, and social services for integrated support.

Additional children's rights issues

- Denmark's increased use of forced adoptions under the new Children's Act raises serious concerns for children's rights, including limited legal oversight and risks to family contact.
- Children in care face barriers to participation and access to complaints mechanisms. These trends challenge the best interests of the child and require monitoring.
- Public schools struggle with children showing distress and violent behaviour due to structural issues. Political proposals suggest removing these children to alternative schools, effectively punishing them instead of addressing systemic failures.

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

Child poverty

The rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) in Denmark has increased slightly, from 15.3% in 2023 to 15.9% in 2024.

In addition to Eurostat AROPE data, Denmark uses national statistics from Statistics Denmark (Danmarks Statistik) to monitor child poverty. This data includes measures of low income (e.g. children living in households below 50% of the median income) and material deprivation. CSOs highlight the lack of an official poverty line in Denmark.

The children most affected by poverty in Denmark include those in single-parent families, children from ethnic minority backgrounds,

children with disabilities, and children in alternative care. CSOs also emphasise the vulnerability of children affected by parental mental illness, substance abuse, or imprisonment. These groups face overlapping disadvantages and lack adequate, coordinated support across systems.

The digital divide in Denmark persists for vulnerable children, especially those in low-income families, children in out-of-home care, and children with disabilities.[2] Lack of access to devices, stable internet, and digital support affects their ability to participate in education and social life. CSOs are concerned that some children are being left behind due to insufficient digital inclusion strategies, particularly when digital tools replace in-person support without alternatives for those with special needs.

Public investment and social safety nets

Denmark lacks a comprehensive and adequate social security safety net for all children. CSOs highlight the absence of an official poverty line and of a national anti-poverty strategy. Existing social benefits are insufficient for many low-income families, especially due to restrictive eligibility criteria and benefit caps. As a result, some children are left without the support needed to ensure basic rights and equal opportunities.

Eurochild members pointed to three key measures that Denmark should take to invest in children and lift them out of poverty:

1) Introduce an official poverty limit.

2) Strengthen financial support for low-income families by revising benefit schemes and removing restrictive limits on social

assistance (e.g. benefit caps) that negatively affect children.

3) Ensure access to quality services, including mental health care, housing, education, and digital resources, especially for children with disabilities, children from minority backgrounds, or in out-of-home care.

Education

Eurochild members identified some barriers to children's access to quality education in Denmark. These include insufficient support for children with disabilities, a lack of inclusive practices in mainstream schools, and high levels of school absence among vulnerable groups.

Many schools lack resources and specialist staff, limiting inclusion for children with special needs. Children in alternative care and from minority backgrounds face lower expectations and

---

2 Civil Society Organisations Denmark – *List of Issues Submissions to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child*, 2024, pp. 6–9.

inadequate support, leading to unequal outcomes. Children in vulnerable positions often report exclusion, stress, and lack of recognition in schools, while civil society highlights school pressure and testing as sources of anxiety. At the same time, there is growing policy attention to well-being and mental health.

Early childhood development

Eurochild members highlighted two positive initiatives in Denmark that support young children and their families:

• Municipal home-visiting programmes by health nurses ('sundhedsplejersker'), which provide early screening, parenting support, and referrals during a child's first years.

• Early intervention in daycare settings, where staff identify and support children with developmental needs, often

in cooperation with social or health services. These programmes are seen as effective when resources and staffing levels are adequate.

Denmark should prioritise two additional measures to strengthen support for early childhood development:

• Ensure equal access to high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) by increasing funding, especially in disadvantaged areas.

• Strengthen early detection and cross-sector support, particularly for children with developmental delays or psycho-social risks. Civil society stresses the need for coordinated services between health, education, and social sectors to ensure early and sustained support for young children and their families.

Civil society highlights the lack of systematic data on ECEC access, quality, and outcomes for vulnerable groups, including children in alternative care, ethnic minorities, and children with disabilities. Such data is essential for informing inclusive and equitable policies and for monitoring whether support reaches those most in need.

The three main obstacles to children's participation in quality ECEC in Denmark are:

• Staff shortages and inconsistent quality – despite legislation on minimum staff-child ratios, many institutions are understaffed, affecting children's well-being and learning.[3]

3 Børns Vilkår & FOA (Trade Union for Public Employees) *Analysis of staffing levels and shortages in Danish ECEC institutions*, 2023.

- Social inequality – children from socio-economically disadvantaged families, particularly those with a migrant background or parents with low education, tend to enter ECEC later, reducing their access to early support and learning opportunities.
- Lack of inclusive pedagogy – services are often not adapted to the needs of children with disabilities or with different linguistic/cultural backgrounds.

Housing

Denmark generally ensures high housing standards and supports families through rent subsidies and access to social housing. However, families on low incomes and from ethnic minorities face overcrowding, poor housing, and rising rent burdens. Recent evictions under the 'ghetto law' have disproportionately affected children in racialised communities, destabilising family life.

Civil society highlights limited access to affordable family housing, inadequate child-sensitive eviction protections, and the harmful impact of 'parallel society' policies — the targeting of communities seen as isolated from mainstream society, with little contact or desire to integrate — which have led to family evictions and displacement.

To ensure that children and families have adequate housing and a decent standard of living, Denmark should strengthen protections against evictions and ensure equal access to affordable, child-friendly housing.

The European Child Guarantee

Denmark has introduced promising measures under the Child Guarantee. The 1000-day initiative ('*De første 1000 dage*') provides early support to vulnerable families from pregnancy to age two and a half, through home visits, guidance and subsidised childcare. Free or subsidised school and daycare meals reduce nutritional inequality. Housing benefits and child-specific allowances improve housing stability and living conditions for low-income families.

"Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by establishing an independent child rights institution and incorporating the UNCRC into Danish law. Unlike Norway and Sweden, Denmark lacks a national ombudsman for children and does not apply child rights impact assessments systematically. This weakens accountability. Strengthening cross-sector coordination and involving civil society in monitoring are also essential to ensure the Child Guarantee benefits all children."

European Semester 2025

Denmark's Country Report addresses child poverty, ECEC, education, and environmental rights, but does not cover deinstitutionalisation, mental health, or the digital divide.

Denmark's 2024 biennial report on the implementation of the Child Guarantee confirms progress but highlights the need to improve equal opportunities for vulnerable children. Recent reforms to the minimum income scheme aim to ease financial pressure on low-income families, including a tax-free allowance for after-school activities, full subsidies for medicines for recipients and their children, and a measure to ensure that those in receipt of social benefits can earn up to €335/670 per month without a benefits deduction.

ECEC participation remains high. In 2024, 62.9% of children under three attended formal childcare (close to the 67.5% target), and 95.7% of children from three to the compulsory school age were

enrolled in 2023. Participation drops to 89% for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and quality varies across municipalities.

The [2025 Country Specific Recommendations](#) highlight Denmark's progress in implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights. They call for action on attainment inequalities in education and on improving the affordability of housing.

European Union Funding

European Union (EU) funding plays a limited yet essential role in addressing social issues in Denmark, primarily by supporting employment and inclusion initiatives. One example is the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) funded project *Opgang til Opgang* (*'Staircase to Staircase'*) in Aarhus, Jutland, which supports vulnerable families through outreach, job training, and community-based interventions aimed at reducing social exclusion and improving children's living conditions.

However, Danish CSOs, especially those working with children, face significant barriers in accessing EU funds, including the ESF+, due to complex procedures, limited transparency, and a lack of national coordination. Most funding goes to municipalities or large institutions, and the Child Guarantee has not improved access. Simplified procedures, targeted calls, Danish-language guidance, earmarked child rights funding, and a national strategy for civil society inclusion in ESF+ governance are needed.

Country Recommendation

"The UK Government should take action to embed children's rights in decision-making by introducing a statutory duty on Ministers to consider children's rights and publish Child Rights Impact Assessments. This is widely supported by 121 civil society organisations, including all major national children's charities, and was proposed during the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill as a clear and practical first step towards the full incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law."

Country Profile 2025

England

Child Population:
12,183,016 (2024)
20.8% of total population

Child Poverty[1]:
3.77 million (2024)
31% (2024)

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Children's Rights Alliance for England, part of Just for Kids Law, with contributions from:

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG)

Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition

Coram Children's Legal Centre

Howard League for Penal Reform

NSPCC

Refugee Council
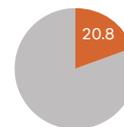
1 ONS (2025) Mid-Year Population Estimates, England and Wales, June 2024
2 Evidence from Child Poverty Action Group

Children's Rights in England

While there have been some positive steps to increase knowledge and understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) among civil servants - e.g. an e-learning tool on children's rights and a template to undertake child rights impact assessments (CRIA) - there is no comprehensive institutional framework in England to embed the UNCRC across government or public services. The Convention is not mandatory in professional training for all those working with children. Lack of statutory requirements around the UNCRC mean that knowledge of children's rights is patchy.

In 2025, CRAE and sector partners led a campaign to strengthen protections for children's rights through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. Two key amendments — (1) a duty on Ministers to consider children's rights and (2) a requirement to publish CRIA — secured support from over 121 organisations, including major national charities, highlighting strong civil society backing for more robust child rights consideration in policy-making.

Anti-child rights movements

Threats by leading politicians to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) or replace the Human Rights Act (HRA) remain a serious concern. The HRA is particularly important for children, as the UNCRC has not been incorporated into domestic law. United Kingdom (UK) courts have held that when applying the HRA to cases involving children, rights under the ECHR must be interpreted in light of the UNCRC.

The government's proposed reforms to the HRA and its interpretation of Article 8 of the ECHR, outlined in the 2025 Immigration White Paper, signal a more restrictive approach to family and private life claims. For children in the UK asylum system, particularly those in care, this raises serious concerns. The introduction of a stricter 'insurmountable obstacles' test, and fast-track appeals for asylum refusals, could undermine protections against detention and deportation, especially once children turn 18. Without robust safeguards, these changes risk breaching the UK's obligations under international law and exposing care-experienced young people to removal despite deep ties to the UK and histories of trauma.

Child protection systems

Preventative support has been significantly weakened over the last 14+ years.

Since 2010-11, council spending on early intervention services has fallen by over £2bn (42%) whilst residential care spending reached a record £3bn in 2024. Cuts have hit the most deprived areas hardest, with per-child spending falling by over 50% vs. 30% in the least deprived areas. Over 1,000 children's centres and 750 youth centres have closed since 2010.

The number of children in care remains nearly 40% higher than two decades ago, reaching over 83,000 in 2024, reflecting both rising demand and a lack of support to keep families together safely. Cuts to early help, inconsistent access to family support under section 17 (children in need), and the absence of a national reunification strategy all contribute to children entering and remaining in care when better preventative support might have avoided it.

England's child protection system is currently undergoing major reform, including proposals for a new national Child Protection Authority and new local Family Help and Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs). It will be a statutory requirement to have at least one MACPT in every local area, involving all statutory safeguarding partners and other relevant experts. These proposals aim to improve multi-agency

safeguarding and child protection practice and are broadly positive developments. New funding has been allocated to children's social care reform in the most recent Spending Review, an important recognition of the need for a rebalancing of the system to intervene early, and ensure that resources are in place for effective child protection practice. However, further investment will be needed to achieve the government's ambitions.

The Family Help reforms aim to simplify the provision of support with a focus on bringing together multi-agency expertise for families with the greatest need, earlier in the system. Family Help Lead Practitioners will be put in place to provide consistency for families, and to liaise with the MACPT where risks/needs have escalated to require a child protection response.

However, across several key areas, there remains no national strategy. This includes neglect — the most prevalent form of harm

to children. At present, Family Help and MACPT reforms remain under-developed in terms of workforce and implementation plans.

Serious protection gaps also remain for migrant children.

Many unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are wrongly assessed as adults based on superficial visual assessments and placed in adult asylum accommodation, where they are exposed to significant risks, including detention and, in some cases, imprisonment. This not only breaches child protection standards but also reflects a deeper systemic issue, as immigration control increasingly encroaches on the child welfare framework, creating a two-tier system in which children with irregular immigration status are worse off than British children. This undermines the principle that all children, regardless of background, are entitled to equal care and protection under the law.

Violence against children remains an issue in both online and offline settings. NSPCC helpline and Childline data consistently show high levels of concern about emotional abuse, sexual abuse (including online), and physical abuse. A recent report from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel has highlighted an urgent need for practice improvements in cases of intra-familial abuse.

Children continue to experience domestic abuse, and although they are now recognised in law as victims, support services are often not available. While there is local and national funding for specialist support services for children experiencing sexual abuse and exploitation, this remains insufficient. Many children are experiencing long waiting lists and a postcode lottery to access both advocacy and therapeutic support.

England remains one of the few European countries where children do not have equal protection from assault in law. The "reasonable punishment" defence still applies, [despite longstanding calls](#) from children's organisations and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to remove it. This legal gap undermines efforts to prevent physical abuse and sends a contradictory message about children's right to safety and dignity.

The top three issues affecting children with a migrant or ethnic minority background in England are:

1. Children's rights realisation is affected by systemic racism. For example, Black and some Mixed ethnic groups are over-represented in [care](#) and [custody](#), while Gypsy, Roma and Traveller[3] (GRT) and Black Caribbean pupils face the [highest exclusion rates](#).

2. Babies and children in families subject to immigration control face hurdles exercising their rights to stay in the UK, including complex rules, very high fees and a lack of legal aid. The government is proposing to put many more children on ten-year routes to settlement, during which time they have unequal early years education entitlements and are excluded from mainstream social security and other measures to support children, including child benefit. There are [around 1.5 million children in families with migrant parents in poverty; this represents over a third of children in relative poverty](#).

3. Children in refugee families or who arrive alone face significant barriers to realising their rights. Families in the asylum system rely on subsistence support that is below the poverty threshold, sometimes for years. This affected over 15,500 children receiving asylum support at the end of 2022.. Refugee children face barriers accessing suitable education. [According to the Education Policy Institute](#), resettled refugees and asylum-seekers are on average 17 months behind at GCSE.[4] Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are 34 months behind. The UK's approach continues to deny unaccompanied children the right to reunite with their families, and now further restricts access for refugee families with the pausing of the refugee family reunion route. This undermines safe and regular routes for family unity and increases the risk of exploitation, contrary to the UK's stated commitments to child welfare and international protection standards.

Child safety and well-being online

Online abuse is a growing threat. The NSPCC has led calls for stronger protections in the Online Safety Act to tackle harms including grooming, sexual exploitation, and harmful content. Online platforms' failure to embed a safety-by-design approach places children at an increased risk of direct and indirect harm. On average 11–14-year-old boys [are exposed](#) to harmful content within 30 minutes of being online, with 79% being exposed to violent content.

---

3 In the UK, it is common in data collections to differentiate between:
  -Gypsies (including English Gypsies, Scottish Gypsies or Travellers, Welsh Gypsies and other Romani 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](#).
4 General Certificate of Secondary Education

Children's mental health

[NHS Digital have conducted Mental Health of Children and Young People Surveys](#) since 2017 and there have since been four waves of the survey, most recently in 2023. However, there is no clarity on when, or if, the next one will take place.

The latest findings (2023) include:

- One in five 8-25-year-olds had a probable mental health disorder — 20.3% of 8–16-year-olds.
- The prevalence of a probable mental disorder in children aged 8-16 rose from 12.5% in 2017 to 17.1% in 2020. Rates have since remained stable.

There is a range of services to support children's mental health across education settings, the National Health Service (NHS), the voluntary and community sector (VCS), youth services and informal networks.

NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) provide assessment and treatment for children up to 18. However, these services have high thresholds to access support and long waiting times. Consequently, many are turned away.

Support is provided in schools and colleges through NHS-funded Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs), which provide evidence-based interventions to those aged 5-18 for mild to moderate mental health needs. However, in 2024-25, only 41% of schools and colleges received MHST. Some educational settings provide additional mental health support, such as counselling, but this is paid for through existing budgets.

In the 2025 Spending Review, announced in June 2025, [the Government confirmed its commitment to rolling out MHSTs](#) to 100% of schools and colleges in England by 2029-30.

The VCS plays a key role in providing support services, often plugging gaps left by statutory services, including helplines, youth groups, peer support, and drop-in hub services. Whilst the VCS play a crucial role in providing early support, this is often precariously funded.

Expanded early intervention services to ensure universal access and investment in CAMHS are urgently needed.

Additional children's rights issues

In April 2025, the UK government approved the use of PAVA spray (a chemical irritant, classified as a prohibited weapon under the Firearms Act 1968) against children in England's youth custody institutions. Its use poses serious physical and psychological risks, especially given the lack of research on its effects on children. The psychological harm caused by deliberately inflicting pain on children by means of PAVA (particularly when the children held in prison are known to be highly vulnerable and more likely to have experienced trauma) can be severe.

Its use is particularly concerning given existing overuse of force against Black children and those with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), who are disproportionately represented in custody.

Serious concerns remain about police treatment of children —

particularly Black children. Five years on from the case of Child Q — a 15-year-old Black girl strip-searched at school by police — a police disciplinary panel found officers had committed gross misconduct and failed to respect her rights as a child. Despite government promises, reforms to strip search laws and guidance have been slow. Strip searching is traumatic and degrading and needs to end, alongside a shift in policing culture to address the adultification and over-criminalisation of Black children. While there have been some positive developments — including initiatives such as the Police Race Action Plan and wider work — there remain significant concerns about the quality of implementation, with persistent problems on the ground, including police use of force and overnight detention in police cells.

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

Child poverty

31% of children are living in poverty (three-year average rate for 2021/22-2023/24), up from 28% in 2010/11-2012/13. Some groups of children face a much higher than average rate poverty — 44% in families with 3+ children; 48% in Black and Asian families; 45% living in lone-parent families; and 44% in a family where someone is disabled.

The main source of data is the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) dataset. The headline measure preferred by organisations is the rate and number of children living in households with income below 60% of contemporary median income after housing costs. This is because it conceives of poverty as existing in relation to living standards in wider society.

Public investment and social safety nets

There is not an adequate and comprehensive social security safety net for children and their families. The key barrier to achieving adequacy and comprehensive coverage is the two-child limit policy, which prevents many families with 2+ children from receiving sufficient income to live above the poverty line.

The adequacy of social security needs to increase across the board to improve support for families. The following three measures would help ensure the social security safety net better protects children.

1. Scrap the two-child limit, the key driver of the alarming rise in child poverty, preventing families from receiving the child element of universal credit for any third or subsequent children born from April 2017 onwards. This would lift 350,000 children

out of poverty and mean 700,000 children are in less deep poverty in the UK.

2. Remove the benefit cap which restricts the amount of support a working-age household can receive from the social security system. Getting rid of it would mean that about 300,000 children would be living in less deep poverty in the UK.

3. Increase child benefit by £20 a week for all children to reduce child poverty and improve living standards for almost all families. Child benefit is extremely effective at reaching families, because of its simplicity, predictability and near universality. Increasing child benefit by £20 a week would pull 600,000 children out of poverty in the UK.

Education

Schools across England are working hard to ensure that all children reach their potential, but hidden costs are hindering children's full participation in all aspects of education. CPAG's research shows that the minimum annual cost of school is over £1,000 for primary and £2,200 for secondary pupils. Families must often cover expenses for learning materials, laptops, uniforms, and subject-specific resources.

Poverty is also stretching the role of schools beyond education. Staff are increasingly supporting families with housing, food, and basic essentials such as beds and mattresses, topping up electricity meters and washing clothes. 79% of staff report that poverty is limiting their capacity to deliver education effectively. From trips to clubs, to taking part in special occasions such as leavers events and themed days, hidden cost barriers mean that children from lower-income households have a different school experience to their peers and are often excluded from ordinary childhood experiences.

Punitive approaches to behaviour management are harming children and young people's mental health. Suspensions surged by 21% in 2023-24 compared with the previous year, reaching 945,952 incidents. Permanent exclusions rose by 16%, with 10,885 pupils excluded. Both have risen to record highs. This trend is worrying as suspensions, exclusions and absences increase the risk of later involvement with the criminal justice system. The most common reason for suspensions and permanent exclusions was persistent disruptive behaviour.

Research shows that the use of behaviour management techniques such as removal rooms, exclusions, and fines and penalties for non-attendance are some of the most detrimental techniques used by schools. Research also shows that behaviour is a form of communication or a reaction to unmet or undiagnosed needs, and punitive responses can exacerbate existing needs and actually be counter-productive.

Certain groups of children are more likely to be suspended, excluded, or absent, including those in poverty, children with SEND, or racialised children. Where children and young people had existing mental health problems or special educational needs and disabilities, punitive techniques exacerbate these difficulties. Survey data also shows that they are less likely to report feeling safe at school and having a sense of belonging at school than their peers, and more likely to report that they have been the victim of bullying or to spend time playing alone.

Country Recommendation

"Estonia should take action to enforce a structured and transparent civic engagement framework that guarantees consistent and meaningful participation of civil society in policy-making at all levels, including through the systematic use of child rights impact assessments (CRIA), as recommended by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2024)."

Country Profile 2025

Estonia

Child Population:
267,879 (2024)
19.5% of total population

Child Poverty[1]:
44,200 (2024)
16.5% (2024)
▼ -1.8 percentage points compared to 2023

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Estonian Union for Child Welfare

Children's Rights in Estonia

There have been several initiatives aimed at enhancing knowledge of the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) among civil servants, educators, social workers, law enforcement officials, and the judiciary.

University and vocational training programmes for teachers, social workers, the police, health professionals, and legal personnel often include modules on children's rights.

Legislation mandates that schools foster a culture where children's rights are integral to the learning process.

Efforts have been made to strengthen understanding of children's rights within juvenile justice systems, with training for legal and justice professionals.

The Estonian Union for Child Welfare has a long-term partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs to implement the

Child Rights and Participation Programme. This includes professional training, advocacy campaigns, youth engagement, and annual events such as Children's Rights Month - aimed at increasing understanding among policymakers and civil servants through direct child participation.

Positively, in January 2025, Estonia expanded protection of children's rights by acceding to the Optional Protocol to the UNCRC on a communications procedure, enabling children to submit complaints if domestic remedies are exhausted.

Anti-child rights movements

While Estonia has a supportive legal and institutional environment for children's rights, there are emerging concerns about the polarisation of public discourse and the spread of misinformation that can undermine the work of child rights organisations and individual defenders.

In late 2024, a new civil society group was established in

connection with a high-profile child protection case. Since then, the organisation's social media activity has increasingly included misleading information about established child rights organisations and professionals. These posts are often hostile in tone, targeting individuals and institutions, and can damage reputations and public trust in child protection systems.

Child participation

Estonia has taken steps to promote child participation, including for children from vulnerable backgrounds. While mechanisms in place, barriers remain. Meaningful and inclusive involvement remains inconsistent, with structural and practical challenges that limit access for the most disadvantaged.

Positive initiatives include *Children's Rights Ambassadors* which engages children (including those from remote areas) in dialogue with policymakers and experts.

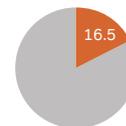The *Child Rights and Participation Programme* includes consultations, youth-led initiatives, co-creation of materials, and participation in national strategies like the Child Guarantee. The Estonian Union for Child Welfare also seeks to capture the perspectives of more vulnerable groups of children, for example by studying child participation among those living in alternative care, or through focus groups with children who have been in contact with child protection services.

Meaningfully engaging children aged 5–12 is a challenge, resulting in their under-representation in participation processes. The Estonian Union for Child Welfare is due to launch a pilot project to involve young children.

In 2025, the Estonian Union for Child Welfare and the Chancellor of Justice jointly published *10 Principles of Child Participation*, a child-friendly resource promoting inclusive, respectful, safe, and meaningful participation.

However, obstacles to meaningful participation still persist:

- Many participation opportunities are school-based or rely on youth councils, which often do not reach children in foster care, with disabilities, or those experiencing poverty.
- Consultations with children often lack follow-up, and outcomes are not communicated.
- Adults may undervalue input from children with behavioural challenges or disabilities.

Engaging vulnerable children in meaningful participation requires peer-led outreach, inclusive design, and partnerships with care institutions, disability networks and other organisations.

There is also a need to track and report participation outcomes, for mechanisms to measure who is being reached, and to share outcomes with children to build trust and accountability.

Child protection systems

There have been amendments to the Child Protection Act and related legislation, to enhance the role of professionals in identifying children in need, improve data protection and ensure consistent support for children with high care needs. In 2025, Estonia strengthened the legal obligation of professionals (e.g. teachers, health workers, youth leaders) to identify and report children in need, bringing the country in line with best practice in early detection and multi-agency responses.

The state has introduced clear regulations and funding mechanisms for support services to foster, guardianship, and adoptive families, moving away from institutional care. There is active recruitment of crisis and specialist foster families, to ensure temporary placements remain family-based.

A cross-sector *Parenting Support Action Plan (2024–2030)* aims to strengthen parental awareness

and capacity, helping to reduce family separation.

Continuous efforts are being made to upskill professionals, including on detecting and preventing sexual abuse in institutional and alternative care settings, and to provide trauma-informed support.

A new system is being developed to gather feedback from children and families in contact with child protection services to guide improvements. Yet challenges persist: regional inequalities limit access, and children in remote areas struggle to receive timely support. A system-wide transformation is needed to make child protection more child- and family-centred, effective, and supported by a motivated, professional workforce.

Estonia's violence prevention framework includes measures against violence towards children. Since January 2025, professionals must report suspected abuse or neglect, and affected children are offered rapid psychological support. Social workers are

trained to assist families, and new confidential digital reporting tools are being developed.

However, uneven implementation, weak monitoring, and limited frontline capacity hinder progress.

Violence in the home remains under-reported, with fewer cases recorded in recent years likely reflecting under-reporting. Bullying is widespread, though serious juvenile crimes are rare. Efforts are underway to improve detection and reporting of sexual violence, exploitation, and trafficking, but these cases remain under-identified. National law and practice must be aligned with EU directives and international conventions, including the Istanbul Convention, by 2027.

The main issues affecting children with a migrant or minority ethnic background are:

- Language learning: Ukrainian children acknowledged that learning a new language is not easy and can hinder their ability to form new friendships.

- Bullying: less than half of the refugee [children surveyed](#) felt their classmates cared about them. 44% of refugee respondents had experienced bullying at least once, and 26% had experienced physical violence.

Child safety and well-being online

According to research on Health Behaviour in School-aged Children 2022, 19% of Estonian pupils aged 11–15 had experienced cyberbullying at least once in the last few months. Girls and adolescents from single-parent families are more likely to report being victims of cyberbullying. At least half of children aged 12–17 have been exposed to sexual content online.

In a 2024 study, *Children's Internet Use and Opportunities for Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Online*, 29% of parents indicated that their children had been exposed to abuse or potential abuse online. 14% said their

children had exchanged personal information with someone they had never met. Parents estimated that 4% of children aged 6–13 had experienced unwanted sexual communication from a peer and 12% exposed to unwanted sexual material.

The [Estonian Safer Internet Centre](#) promotes a safer and better use of digital technologies among children, parents and teachers.

The Estonian Union for Child Welfare operates a free [Hotline](#) which enables the public to report child sexual abuse material anonymously.

Children's mental health

The Estonian government has launched its first nationwide survey on children's mental health (2023–2025), commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Combining quantitative research and child participation, it reveals that mental health problems are more prevalent among girls and increase with age, while

behavioural issues are more common among boys.

The Estonian Union for Child Welfare collected qualitative input from children as part of Eurochild's report [How Children Feel](#).

"A child can have good mental health because of friends, but poor mental health because of school and bullies. It can be at risk if there's no supportive adult to talk to. Family problems can also play a role. Positive influence comes from doing things you enjoy. A violent home, on the other hand, affects you negatively."
Girls aged 16, 12, 12, 15, and 12

While Estonia has improved adult mental health services, those for children remain underdeveloped. Existing mental health support is provided by mental health centres (mainly in larger cities) and school-based services, but the latter are often overstretched and vary significantly in availability and quality.

To address gaps in services for children's mental health, Estonia should:

- Develop a national plan for child suicide prevention, in line with recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.
- Establish a coordinated, multidisciplinary system with a strong focus on prevention, and clear responsibilities across healthcare, education, and social services to ensure early detection and support.
- Develop a national strategy that empowers teachers, early childhood professionals, and parents to recognise and respond to early signs of distress.

- Expand access to community-based services and strengthen the mental health workforce, with more low-threshold support.

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

Child poverty

According to Eurostat, 16.5% of children in Estonia were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2024.

Those most affected by poverty and exclusion are:

- Children in single-parent households;
- Families with three or more children;
- Households experiencing unemployment;
- High-risk households that meet at least one of the following criteria: unemployment, four or more children, low parental education.

While internet coverage and digital services are widely available, there are disparities in access, skills, and usage. Economic inequality, lack of digital skills, inadequate inclusive solutions for children with disabilities, and language barriers for children and parents remain key factors.

Public investment and social safety nets

Estonia's social security system offers important but incomplete protections for children and families. Progress has been made but significant gaps remain in both coverage and accessibility, especially for vulnerable groups.

To ensure no child is left behind, the government must build a more cohesive, equitable, and preventative safety net, with targeted investments in early intervention and local capacity.

The strengths of the current safety net include universal child benefits, free early childhood education and free school meals.

Low-income families can also apply for subsistence benefits, housing allowances, and support for school-related expenses.

While universal child benefits are key pillars of Estonia's social safety net, they are often insufficient to lift families out of poverty.

The availability and quality of social services vary widely across municipalities, with smaller and rural areas often lacking sufficient capacity to provide adequate support.

Support across sectors (social welfare, education, healthcare) is not systematically integrated. There is no comprehensive approach ensuring families receive continuous, holistic support tailored to their needs. Much of the support is reactive rather than preventive. Families often receive help only after problems have escalated.

To further invest in children and address poverty and exclusion Estonia should:

- Strengthen integrated social support at the municipal level.
- Increase funding and staffing for local social services to provide proactive, family-centred support, with integrated services and outreach to households at risk.

Education

Estonia values learning environments that are academically enriching, emotionally supportive, and physically safe. However, despite several promising developments, barriers continue to affect children's equitable access to quality and inclusive education, especially for more vulnerable groups.

There is limited support for children with special educational needs. Children themselves, in their contributions to the UNCRC alternative report, highlighted persistent challenges in inclusion: *"Children with special needs don't receive enough help. Schools don't take it into account, and there aren't many support classes or groups."*

There is insufficient specialised support and a lack of inclusive teaching practices, especially outside urban areas, as well as gaps in teacher training in inclusive methodologies.

There are also regional disparities in teacher qualifications and school resources, which affects the quality of teaching and creates inequalities in educational outcomes.

Positive developments include the implementation of evidence-based mental health and anti-bullying programmes. Estonia is also investing in teacher in-service training and in strengthening educational leadership and multicultural competencies.

Early childhood development

Two positive initiatives that support early childhood development (ECD) are:

The *'Incredible Years' Parenting Programme* provides training for parents and other caregivers of children aged 2–8. Participants learn to set rules and boundaries,

encourage and praise their child, help children manage strong emotions, support children's social and communication skills through play and resolve conflicts and cope with stress.

Perepesa, community-based centres for parenting and family support, offer services from pregnancy until children reach school age. Parents have access to training, counselling, peer discussions and psychological support, while children are cared for in a safe and supportive playroom environment. *Perepesa* also serve as community meeting places, helping to reduce social isolation among parents.

To further strengthen support for ECD Estonia should:

- Expand Perepesa centres, as effective community-based models.
- Provide multilingual and culturally sensitive support to help prevent exclusion, strengthen parenting capacity, and build trust in public and community-based services.

The Social Insurance Board and the Estonian Foundation for the Development of Child Welfare gather relevant ECD data as part of their work to plan and improve services for young children and their families.

The main barriers to participation in quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) are:

- A shortage of qualified professionals, resulting in unequal access to services across regions, particularly in rural areas.
- Structural and legal reforms aim to integrate childcare into the national education system, but merging childcare and pre-school under one law risks lowering kindergarten standards and undermining early education quality despite harmonisation goals.
- The shortage of kindergarten places, especially in larger cities. Families with children with special educational needs report particular difficulties accessing suitable placements.

Housing

Many families, particularly those with low incomes, struggle with excessive housing costs, inadequate living conditions, and limited access to affordable rental options. Families with children are disproportionately affected by housing costs overburden.

To address these challenges, the state and local governments have targeted support measures to assist vulnerable families, particularly those with children, in accessing and maintaining adequate housing.

The KredEx home grant is a national measure aimed at improving the housing conditions of low-income families with three or more children.

Local municipalities are responsible for providing temporary accommodation, social and municipal housing, and one-off emergency housing cost support, including unexpected expenses (e.g. rent arrears, utility debts).

The state has also increased child maintenance support for single-parent families, to strengthen their financial resilience and ability to meet housing costs.

Municipalities are required to provide stable housing solutions for young people leaving care. This ensures continuity of support during the transition to independent living and helps prevent youth homelessness.

Estonia should:

- Expand access to social and affordable housing and ensure availability in areas with high demand and low-income levels, with a focus on families with children, single-parent households, and families in overcrowded or substandard dwellings.
- Develop a national housing strategy and action plan that integrates social justice and children's rights.

The European Child Guarantee

Significant progress has been made in supporting children with special needs. The establishment of automatic data exchange between the state and local authorities, which enables local authorities to proactively reach families who may need additional support due to a child's disability, is an important achievement.

There are several areas that should be addressed by the Child Guarantee, such as financial barriers to participation in leisure activities. Children themselves have identified the cost of extracurricular activities as one of the main challenges, particularly as prices continue to rise.

"Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by more structured cross-sector cooperation, and better involvement of children and young people in processes and decisions."

European Semester 2025

The Country Report for Estonia focuses on child poverty, ECEC, education and integrated social services. The risk of poverty or social exclusion among children in Estonia remains relatively low, falling to 16.5% in 2024. However, disparities persist - children of parents with low education and children in single-parent households are at higher risk.

A recent reform of ECEC aims to improve quality and participation. ECEC participation of children aged three to the start of compulsory education was 91.2% in 2023, below the EU target of 96% by 2030. The rate was 37.8% for children under three. Although municipalities are legally required to offer childcare from 18 months, some have a shortage of places.

Performance gaps in education persists, with lower achievements for disadvantaged pupils.

Estonia should address gaps in mental health treatment as the suicide rate is among the highest in the EU.

Over €33.5 million from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) will support access to services, inclusion, and prevention of risk-taking behaviour among children and youth.

The 2025 Country-Specific Recommendations call for the strengthening of social protection for single-person households and people with disabilities.

European Union Funding

An ESF+ funded project supporting children and families, run by the Ministry of Social Affairs, aims to make Estonia a good place to raise children.

From 2026, the Ministry will support municipalities to strengthen child protection, with €12 million from the ESF+. This includes funding for training and awareness-raising for professionals working with children, including those who have a duty to report concerns.

Country Recommendation

"Finland should take action to reverse the trend of shrinking space for civil society and ensure that the voices of children's rights defenders are heard in public discourse, especially during times of economic hardship and increasing security concerns."

Country Profile 2025

Finland

Child Population:
1,022,205 (2024)
18.24% of total population

18.24

Child Poverty[1]:
178,000 (2024)
17.3% (2024)
▲ +3.5 percentage points compared to 2023

17.3

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Central Union for Child Welfare

Children's Rights in Finland

Finland has had a National Child Strategy since 2021. During its first implementation period, an online training package for professionals was published. The Central Union for Child Welfare considers the package to be of good quality. However, it remains unclear how widely and by whom the material has actually been used. Training and education on children's rights should be mandatory for all professionals working with and for children, with in-service training as the absolute minimum.

Anti-child rights movements

Elements of anti-rights rhetoric can be recognised in Finnish political discourse, and the space for (traditionally strong) civil society is shrinking due to funding cuts and reduced opportunities to participate in legislative processes. Also, as security concerns grow, defending human rights is often labelled unpatriotic (e.g. in discussions concerning the withdrawal from the Ottawa landmines treaty, and the continuation of the 2024 law that would, in certain circumstances, allow border guards to push back migrants without processing their asylum applications, at the Finland-Russia border).

Child participation

There are some opportunities for children from vulnerable backgrounds to express their views in public decision-making. For example, children in child protection services can participate in peer and expert-by-experience activities and in the development of services and decision-making.

However, these opportunities largely depend on the work of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and since their funding is being cut there is a risk that there will be fewer such opportunities. It is therefore important to ensure collaboration between counties and NGOs, as child protection services are the responsibility of the counties, while participation activities are mainly organised by NGOs.

There is a need to further develop and improve children's meaningful participation and ensure that their engagement has impact. The *SOILA – Social Innovations in Child Protection* project, funded by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) aims to integrate participation activities for children and young people into the structures of Finland's counties.

The need to promote participation among younger children has been recognised relatively late, and requires special attention in terms of facilities and staff competence.

Professionals working with children must also be provided with appropriate training to support the participation of children and young people. Furthermore, cuts to social and health services should not undermine children's opportunities to participate.
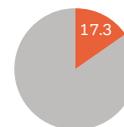
Child protection systems

Finland is in the process of reforming the Child Welfare Act. The Central Union for Child Welfare has long advocated for comprehensive reform but is concerned that this is now more limited than expected.

The Central Union for Child Welfare believes the focus of child protection should shift towards providing more support to children, their families and communities, with less emphasis on placing children in care.

Even though Finland has a Nordic welfare model, in which families are supported relatively well, this is not enough. Families should get low threshold support as early as possible. If children need to be taken into care, there should be more foster care available and increased support for foster families. The Central Union for Child Welfare produced a report, *How the costs of protecting children accumulate II*, showing how effective preventative

services could be if offered early enough.

The Central Union for Child Welfare has been monitoring trends on disciplinary violence in families in Finland since 1981. According to its latest report, the downward trend in the use of disciplinary violence has slowed and it remains common: 41% of respondents have used it in raising their children. Among men, 22% accept physical punishment of children, compared to 4% of women.

The inter-generational nature of such violence is also evident. General awareness of the illegality of disciplinary violence has decreased since 2012. Parenting with psychological violence is increasing, but physical punishment has declined.

This report, in line with previous studies, shows that increased regulation is not enough to ensure a childhood free from violence. More active measures are needed at all levels of society.

In 2023, the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Finland take urgent measures regarding violence against children. A new *Non-Violent Childhoods Action Plan for the Prevention of Violence against Children* is being drafted and the Central Union for Child Welfare understands that many of the Committee's recommendations are being taken into consideration in this work. However, there are concerns that resources for the plan's implementation will remain insufficient.

Digitalisation presents a challenge for many parents. On the one hand, some may lack the skills or resources to guide their children in the safe use of devices. On the other hand, even some very conscientious parents may feel overwhelmed by the pressure to protect and guide their child in the digital world.

Children on the move

The current government has changed legislation to tighten the position of foreigners, including asylum seekers and refugees. For example, residence permits are granted for shorter periods, and obtaining permanent residency is more difficult. This creates uncertainty and can delay the integration process for families.

The increased difficulty of family reunification is particularly concerning. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has urged Finland to remove obstacles to family reunification for asylum-seeking children, without discrimination. Of special concern is the introduction of an income requirement for family members to apply for a residence permit, even in family reunification cases where children have arrived in Finland as unaccompanied minors.

Also of particular concern is how the best interests of the child will be determined when enforcing the so-called 'push back law' passed by Finland to control its eastern boarder - despite experts viewing it as contrary to international agreements.

The government has also passed legislation granting only emergency care to undocumented migrants. While children still have access to healthcare services, parents' ability to care for children may deteriorate as a result.

Child rights impact assessments of these legislative changes have been inadequate. As recommended by the Ombudsman for Children in 2023, the government should carry out a comprehensive evaluation of the effects of these changes on the well-being and integration of children and families who seek protection.

Racism remains a problem in Finland. In 2023, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Finland strengthen the fight against discrimination, including racial discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes. hile the government has stated its commitment to fight racism, NGOs have voiced serious doubts.

Ukrainian refugees have access to Finland and get temporary protection, but more information about their well-being and integration is needed.

Children's mental health

Finland collects a vast amount of data on various topics, including mental health. The problem is the insufficient use of data in policy and decision-making.

For example, the nationwide School Health Promotion study has monitored the well-being and health of children and adolescents since 1996. The data is gathered every second year by a classroom questionnaire from grades 4, 5, 8 and 9 of primary education and from 1st and 2nd year pupils in secondary education.

The latest study (2025), showed that approximately one third of girls (and 8–9% of boys) in grades 8 and 9 of primary education and in upper secondary schools reported moderate or severe anxiety.

In Finland, mental health and substance abuse services for children and adolescents are provided mainly through the primary healthcare system. There is also specialised care within child and adolescent psychiatry. Recently, Finland has introduced the 'therapy guarantee' to ensure that children and those under the age of 23 can access certain mental health services within one month of requesting support. Support is free of charge. The guarantee applies to some psychotherapy in the healthcare system as well as short interventions in social services and healthcare.

However, child welfare services frequently find themselves compensating for gaps in mental health and substance abuse support. Child protection services, and especially alternative care

settings, do not always have adequate expertise to support children with mental health or substance abuse problems. This mismatch between children's needs and the support available can hinder children's recovery and well-being.

There are also significant regional disparities in the availability and quality of these services across Finland. Some counties have implemented Multidimensional Family Therapy in child welfare, with positive outcomes.

Overall, increased collaboration and integration between services is needed, to address disparities, along with more consistency and shared approaches across regions.

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

Child poverty

Prolonged income poverty particularly affects single-parent families and families with multiple children. One in ten single-parent families lives in prolonged low-income conditions. There are also regional differences, possibly due to varying unemployment rates. People on low incomes, single-parent families and children with parents working part-time and earning low wages have also been affected by the recent cuts to social security.

According to the Basic Education Act, all learning materials, as well as tools required for it, are free of charge. However, in practice there are differences in the digital devices that pupils use, as some families can afford more advanced equipment than others.

Recent decades have seen rapid digitalisation in schools. Now there is an ongoing discussion about *limiting* the use of digital devices in schools. From August 2025, pupils are not allowed to use mobile devices during lessons (unless permitted by the teacher for educational or health-related reasons). The aim is to help maintain a calm learning environment and support pupils' concentration. However, it is unclear how the law will be implemented in different schools.

Public investment and social safety nets

While the child poverty rate in Finland is still lower than the European average, the current trend in the welfare state is worrying. The government has already implemented several cuts to social security and to resources for civil society organisations that work with and for children and families.

In February 2025, six Finnish organisations submitted additional information to the European Commission regarding the implementation of the European Child Guarantee in Finland. They expressed concern that the direction Finland is taking is particularly worrying for children at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

The Central Union for Child Welfare believes that Finland should take the following three measures to invest in children:

1. Make the fight against child poverty and social exclusion a high political priority, against which all other policy measures are assessed.
2. Ensure that social security reform is implemented in a way that reduces child poverty.
3. Secure the quality and accessibility of services through adequate funding and qualified staff.

Early childhood development

The Central Union for Child Welfare highlighted family centres as a positive and effective intervention that supports young children and their families.

Family centres bring together various services that promote the well-being, health, growth and development of children, young people, and families (as well as early intervention, care, and rehabilitation).

The service package of a family centre includes: social and health services for children, young people and families, provided by the counties; municipal education and other services; activities and services provided by NGOs and parishes; open meeting places for families; and digital services. The goal is to strengthen multi-sector collaboration, enhance early support for families, and reduce the need for corrective services.

The 2023 social and health care reform, which transferred the responsibility for social and health services from municipalities to the counties, has had a positive impact on the operation of family centres, and their activities are becoming established across all counties.

The participation rate in early childhood education and care (ECEC) has increased since 2015. In 2023, 42% of children under three participated in ECEC. Among children aged 3–5 the rate is 90%.

However, there are concerns about participation rates for children whose mother tongue is not Finnish and those from poor socio-economic backgrounds.

Key factors hindering participation in ECEC in Finland are:

• Parents' perceptions of the quality of early childhood education, and its importance for children's growth and learning, are linked to whether their child participates in early childhood education or not. For parents, quality is primarily what they see and experience. For example, a shortage of qualified staff, especially in Southern Finland, may influence some families' views on whether early childhood education is suitable for their child.

• The 'child home care allowance' is part of the Finnish social security system which is paid when a child does not have a place in municipal early childhood education. Some municipalities also pay a municipal supplement, and although the eligibility criteria vary, there are cases where the municipal supplement is conditional on keeping all children at home. Both the child home care allowance and the municipal supplement can be incentives for not registering a child for early childhood education.

• Advice and guidance for parents/caregivers in accessing early childhood education plays a key role in increasing participation rates but is not sufficiently available. Guidance can help reach new families, inform them about available opportunities, and help them feel welcome in early childhood education services. For immigrant parents, for example, it can be challenging to understand the Finnish education system and information in their own language is not always available.

The European Child Guarantee

"Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by making the fight against child poverty and the prevention of social exclusion a high political priority, against which all other policy measures are assessed. The European Commission might want to consider requiring states to provide information on how decisions affect groups of children in vulnerable situations. The reporting guidelines should also direct states to present a comprehensive overview rather than fragmented reporting. Additionally, the guidelines should require consultation with civil society.

European Semester 2025

The 2025 Country Report for Finland highlights a rise in child poverty and low rates of at-risk children participating in ECEC (20% vs 44% overall). The rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion increased from 13.8% in 2023 to 17.3% in 2024. Finland aims to reduce child poverty by 30,000 by 2030, supported by €46 million in ESF+ funding under the Child Guarantee.

ECEC teacher shortages (estimated at 6,000 nationally) limit access, particularly for low-income families.

Educational outcomes are deteriorating, with Finland exceeding the 15% underachievement threshold in all Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) domains in 2022. Foreign-born students face the most challenges (57.2% underachieving). The early school leaving rate rose to 9.6% in 2024, with higher rates in rural areas (12.2%) and among foreign-born youth (13%).

Growing teacher shortages further threaten education quality.

The 2025 Country-Specific Recommendations do not explicitly mention children, but there is a reference to vulnerable groups through calls to improve social protection and access to healthcare services.

European Union Funding

As national funding for organisations working with children and families decreases, the importance of European Union (EU) funding is likely to grow. However, EU funding application processes remain a challenge. Low success rates, combined with the time required to prepare applications, make EU funds somewhat inaccessible, particularly for small organisations.

Country Profile 2025

France

Child Population:
14,218,235 (2024)
20.8% of total population

20.8

Child Poverty[1]:
3,591,000 (2024)
26.2% (2024)
▼ -0.4 percentage points
compared to 2023

26.2

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

CNAPE

1 Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2024, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc_peps01n).

Children's Rights in France

Child participation

Some progress has been made to consider children's rights in public decision-making - particularly through initiatives such as the *Délégation aux droits des enfants at the National Assembly*, a delegation for children's rights in the French parliament, established in 2022 to ensure that children's rights are taken into account in the development of laws and public policies. This delegation plans to evaluate the impact of legislation on young people, especially on children from vulnerable backgrounds. However, parliament still has to make significant progress in the matter.

Furthermore, there is currently no systematic framework that ensures the direct involvement of children — especially those living in poverty, in foster care, with disabilities, or from minority communities — in decisions that affect them, such as in schools, local governance, or child protection systems. The lack of accessible consultation mechanisms, limited awareness of rights among children, and social stigma are key obstacles.

The recommendation by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child to conduct systematic impact assessments on how proposed laws affect children is a step in the right direction. The proposal to establish a Délégation aux droits des enfants also in the Senate could further strengthen child participation by creating a formal space where children's voices, especially those from marginalised groups, can be heard and considered in policy-making.

To improve meaningful participation, France should ensure that children — particularly those from vulnerable groups — are actively consulted through child-friendly and inclusive methods, such as school councils, youth advisory groups, or local government consultations that include support for participation (e.g. interpreters, psychological support, child advocates).

Child protection systems

While the Taquet Law of 2022 reaffirmed the principle of non-separation of siblings in care, its implementation remains weak. In practice, most children who are taken into care are still separated from their siblings, with only 10% placed together and 50% who are completely separated.

As of 2024, around 400,000 children require state protection, but many are not adequately supported, nor are their rights fully respected. Alarmingly, 3,000 children live on the streets with their family, 3,350 await placement in a care setting, and 8,000 former foster children are homeless. The system is overwhelmed: judicial services are saturated, children's organisations are underfunded, and social workers are overstretched.

While legal frameworks exist, the lack of resources and systemic strain hinders effective prevention of family separation and proper care for children, especially those in vulnerable situations.
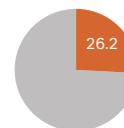
In France, children are still often victims of physical violence, particularly at the hands of their parents. It is estimated that every week one child dies as a result of parental abuse.

Children are also victims of sexual violence. According to CIIVISE, at least 160,000 children are victims of this type of abuse each year, and for 77% of them, it occurs within the family.

Even within protective structures, children remain at risk. Incidents involving the prostitution of protected minors and violent episodes are on the rise.

When it comes to unaccompanied minors, three main challenges can be highlighted:

1. Age assessments: bone age tests are still widely used, despite being a legal last resort. Unaccompanied children and young people

are also often required to provide a detailed and consistent account of their journey, even though many have endured highly traumatic experiences. The process is frequently driven by suspicion rather than protection.

2. Care and shelter: unaccompanied minors are officially under the responsibility of Child Welfare Services and should receive the same level of protection as other children in care. However, in practice, they are often placed in lower-quality accommodation, and hotel placements are still common. According to a 2020 report, 95% of minors housed in hotels are unaccompanied, and 28% of unaccompanied minors in Child Welfare Services are still being placed in hotels.

3. Legal status upon turning 18: access to a residence permit depends on a number of strict and subjective criteria, assessed at the discretion of local prefects. These

include good behaviour, regular school attendance, participation in vocational training for at least six months, a positive report from care facilities, and limited family ties in the country of origin. These requirements are particularly difficult to meet for young people facing instability and trauma.

Child safety and well-being online

According to e-enfance and the Fondation pour l'enfance, cyber-stalking and cybercrime are the main dangers for children online. France is Europe's 5th largest host of child sexual abuse material online. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) for the generation and editing of child sexual abuse material is a worrying trend. In 2024, 67,000 pieces of paedophile content involving generative AI were reported to the National Centre for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) – and it continues to rise exponentially, with over 440,000 reports received only in the first

six months of 2025. NCMEC works with families, victims, industry, law enforcement, and the public to assist with preventing child abductions, recovering missing children, and providing services to deter and combat child sexual exploitation.

Children's mental health

Launched in 2022 by Santé Publique France, with the support of the Ministry of Health and Access to Care and the Ministry of National Education, the Enabee study ('National Study on Children's Well-being') aims to deepen knowledge about the well-being and mental health of children aged 3-11. It specifically measures levels of well-being and the frequency of certain difficulties or probable disorders among children from the first year of kindergarten to the fifth year of elementary school. The study's initial results reveal that just over 8% of children attending kindergarten have at least one probable mental health difficulty (emotional, oppositional, or related to inattention/

hyperactivity) that affects their daily lives. Furthermore, around 13% of elementary school children present a probable mental health disorder.

Additional children's rights issues

There is still a collective tendency, in society and in policy-making, to consider that children's experiences, opinions, and voices are less important and less valuable than those of adults. This is reflected in phenomena of abuse and neglect, but also in the near absence of participatory structures for children and the lack of consultation of this segment of the population in decision-making processes that affect them.

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

Child poverty

In 2024, 26.2% of children were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE). Although this is a slight reduction from 26.6% in 2023, it is higher than the European Union (EU) average of 24.2%.

In France, another data set is collected by INSEE, France's national statistical institute, responsible for collecting, producing, and disseminating statistical data on the French economy and society to the government, businesses, researchers, and the public.

INSEE published the poverty rate for children under 18 in 2021 and identified this was higher than for the population as a whole: 20.6% versus 14.5%. In 2021, 2.76 million children were living in households with a standard of living below the poverty line.

Poverty affects children of all ages more or less equally.

According to INSEE's 2021 findings, the standard of living of children, and therefore the level of poverty, largely depends on family structure. Children from single-parent families are particularly at risk of poverty and social exclusion. This risk increases when the child has siblings and when the parent(s) are unemployed or inactive.

Children in France's overseas departments are even more at risk of poverty, especially in Mayotte and French Guiana - poverty affects 8 out of 10 children in Mayotte and 6 out of 10 in French Guiana, according to INSEE findings in 2017.

The Pacte des Solidarités 2023-2027 aims to reduce poverty and inequality. It focuses on early childhood support, including expanded childcare, parenting support, and free school meals. It addresses employment barriers such as childcare and housing. The Pacte also enhances access

to rights for vulnerable groups via outreach services, eviction prevention, and healthcare. It aims to reduce household costs for food, energy, and mobility. It includes a 50% funding increase compared to the previous anti-poverty strategy, and aims to lift 1.1 million people, including 300,000 children, out of poverty by 2030, in cooperation with civil society.

Public investment and social safety nets

The following three measures are essential to effectively combat child poverty and social exclusion in France:

1. Ensure universal access to early childhood services and parental support. Investing in early childhood by expanding access to affordable, high-quality childcare (especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds) and strengthening parental support services is crucial. This includes increasing public funding for early years

education and promoting social diversity in childcare placements.

2. Strengthen child protection systems and ensure proper staffing in care settings. France must set national staffing standards for child welfare facilities to improve care quality and ensure children's safety and development. It is also vital to reduce delays in implementing child protection decisions, which currently leave many children in vulnerable situations without timely support.

3. Guarantee a legally enforceable right to support for care leavers transitioning to adulthood. Young people leaving the child protection system often face poverty, homelessness, and social exclusion. CNAPE advocates for a legal right to continued educational, housing, and emotional support until at least age 21, backed by dedicated funding and individual guidance.

These structural investments would not only improve the well-being of vulnerable children but also break inter-generational cycles of poverty by ensuring equal opportunities from early childhood to independent adulthood.

Early childhood development

There are a number of positive initiatives in France that focus on early childhood development (ECD). These include the '1000 premiers jours' ('the first 1000 days') policy, which promotes understanding and awareness of the importance of early childhood, and provides a range of support measures for parents. The aim is to support young children's growth, particularly neurocognitive development, and parents' health in all its dimensions - physical, mental and social. In child protection, the Pégase programme offers standardised monitoring and early psychological care to prevent the long-term effects of child mistreatment in very young children taken into care.

To further strengthen support for ECD, within the framework of child protection, the French government must take urgent action to increase the number of foster families, which has been steadily declining for many years, primarily due to retirements. Additionally, the number of caregivers in specialised childcare facilities, known as pouponnières, as well as the ratio of professionals to children, must be significantly improved.

There is insufficient data on the number of children aged 0-3 cared for by child protection services, on the reasons for their protection, or the socio-economic profile of their parents. This type of data would be very useful for implementing policies that provide support for parents, to inform early intervention services, and strengthen support and care for young children.

European Semester 2025

The France Country Report covers child poverty, early childhood education and care (ECEC), and education. However, it lacks references to children in alternative care, the digital divide, and the impacts of climate change on children.

It reports that the poverty situation in France has worsened in recent years, especially among children.

France has a persistently high child poverty rate, with 3.5 million

children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE). Children in single-parent households, especially those headed by single mothers, and those in very low work intensity households (9%) are particularly affected. In 2024, the AROPE rate for native-born individuals was below the EU average (16.1%), while 39.3% of people born in non-EU countries faced a risk of poverty or social exclusion.

The implementation of the Child Guarantee is ongoing, with reported progress in creating youth and family support centres and distributing school breakfasts in disadvantaged areas, especially in overseas departments. Yet gaps persist, notably in housing and childcare.

An estimated 2,043 children were homeless or did not have stable housing solutions in 2024, up from 927 in 2020. Lack of access to emergency housing remains a key concern.

Access to ECEC remains uneven, with a 41.6% participation gap between disadvantaged and advantaged children, one of the highest in the EU. Education outcomes are marked by deep socio-economic disparities. According to the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), 25% of 15-year-olds lack basic skills, rising to 49.4% among disadvantaged pupils.

The 2025 Country Specific Recommendations highlight that children face a disproportionately high risk of poverty and social exclusion. 77% of poor families are unable to access childcare in 2023, and gaps in availability, cost, and flexibility especially affect those in precarious or irregular work, ultimately limiting parents' ability to access training or employment and reinforcing cycles of disadvantage for their children. The Recommendations call on France to prevent and reduce child poverty by removing barriers that hinder parents' labour market integration and

access to quality ECEC for the most disadvantaged households.

The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) supports social inclusion for the most vulnerable, including children, on mainland France, with €383.9 million. Approximately €127 million of 2021-27 ESF+ funding supports social inclusion and child-specific measures in France's five overseas departments.

Country Recommendation

"Germany should reject political narratives that view civil society as adversarial — especially given its vital role in democracy, protecting children's rights, delivering social services, and fulfilling human rights obligations. Instead, policymakers must value civil society, and ensure stable, independent funding — particularly for actors working with children and in social services. It is also time to incorporate children's rights into the German constitution in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child."

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe - AGJ

Bertelsmann Stiftung

German Children's Fund – Deutsches Kinderhilfswerk e.V. (DKHW)

National Coalition Germany – Network for the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Country Profile 2025

Germany

Child Population:
13,974,170 (2024)
16.74% of total population

Child Poverty[1]:
3,377,000 (2024)
22.9% (2024)
▼ -1 percentage points compared to 2023

Children's Rights in Germany

Germany has institutional measures to promote knowledge of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) among professionals working with children at both federal and state levels. For example, the German Judicial Academy provides courses on child-friendly justice. Child rights education is also integrated into some teacher and social work training. In-service training is offered by youth welfare offices and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

However, training is mostly voluntary, fragmented and inconsistent across different states. There is no mandatory, standard curriculum on children's rights for civil servants or professionals. Experts and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children have called for systemic reforms and mandatory training on the rights of children and their protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, including in the digital environment.

Anti-child rights movements

In Germany, there is growing concern about shrinking civic space and growing hostility towards civil society. In 2025, a parliamentary inquiry questioned the legitimacy of civil society funding, widely seen as an attempt to intimidate. This reflects a broader narrative of distrust and de-legitimisation, contributing to a repressive discourse, defamation, criminalisation, and repression. This also affects youth-led initiatives and grassroots actors.

There is a growing concern about anti-rights discourse, increasingly promoted by far-right, extremist parties, whose policies undermine human rights and have a regressive approach to child rights.

The German Federal Youth Council raised the alarm over targeted attacks at the state level, including smear campaigns and politically motivated inquiries aimed at youth associations active in democratic engagement. This leads to a climate of fear and self-censorship among youth-led and child and youth-serving organisations.

Child participation

Despite some legally enshrined participation rights, Germany lacks a cohesive strategy to ensure meaningful participation in social, political, and institutional processes for disadvantaged children. However, projects like *Demokratie leben! ('Live Democracy!')* support local youth forums and strengthen participation in disadvantaged communities.
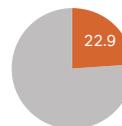
Although many state laws stipulate children's participation in school, implementation is inconsistent. Student councils and youth forums exist, but structural inequalities limit access, especially for children with disabilities, refugees, and those affected by poverty. In rural and disadvantaged areas, poor infrastructure and digital access restrict engagement.

Many participation formats lack inclusivity, accessibility, and relevance to children's lives. Early childhood participation remains poorly integrated and often contested. As a result, many children remain excluded from decision-making.

The introduction of children's councils aimed at involving children in care homes is welcome, but implementation is uneven across states. Many lack adequate support, professional guidance, and integration in the youth welfare system. There is a need for stronger, long-term support structures to ensure meaningful participation of children in care.

The German Youth Institute has led several participatory processes under the Child Guarantee. However, civil society has criticised the limited child and

youth involvement in developing Germany's Child Guarantee National Action Plan.

To ensure meaningful, equitable participation, targeted support is needed for children with disabilities, refugees, and those in poverty, alongside well-resourced and professionally supported structures.

Child protection systems

Germany's child protection system is well established. However, recent political decisions, particularly the suspension of family reunification for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection (a status granted when neither refugee protection nor an entitlement to asylum is granted, but where return would expose a person to serious harm), seriously undermine children's rights. This measure risks irreversible harm due to prolonged separation. Visa appointments already take up to two years, and the suspension exacerbates delays, disproportionately affecting children and directly contradicting the UNCRC's right to family life.

Violence against children persists. Despite legal protections, enforcement and implementation are inconsistent. There is a lack of resources and specialists, with funding cuts in child and youth welfare services. Political focus is largely on sexual violence and online risks, while other critical issues, like emotional abuse, bullying, and underlying risk factors such as child poverty, are overlooked.

Online violence is growing. The government's plans to develop a Digital Child and Youth Protection Strategy are welcome. However, this must be part of a well-funded holistic effort to protect children in all environments.

Child-friendly justice remains underdeveloped. Examples of inconsistent implementation include age-appropriate information, psycho-social support and the use of child sensitive video interviews.

Promising developments include the expansion of early support services, recognising domestic partner violence as a threat to child welfare, and implementing the law establishing the Independent Commissioner for Child Sexual Abuse Issues. However, most commitments remain vague and lack financial backing. Child protection centres, supervised visitation, and specialised professionals are under-funded.

What is urgently needed is a cross-sector approach to child protection that addresses poverty, ensures access to counselling, facilitates participation in family court procedures, and guarantees a child-friendly justice system, all backed by secure and long-term funding.

The deterioration of asylum standards under the Common European Asylum System (GEAS) reform raises serious concerns, including border procedures in detention-like conditions, even for children. In addition, children in reception and shared accommodation centres often face unsafe conditions, exposure to violence, delayed access to education and a lack of child-specific protection measures.

Child safety and well-being online

'Sharenting'[2] and commercially driven 'family influencing' are of increasing concern. A 2024 report by Terre des Hommes highlighted the need to reform legislation to address child exploitation through social media influencing.

The German Children's Fund published a legal opinion examining the publication of commercially used images of children on the internet and

---

2 'Sharenting' refers to the practice of parents sharing a large amount of potentially sensitive content about their children on social media, especially when done by an account with a large following base.

potential risks to child welfare. It outlines cases that may infringe on personal rights and endanger children's well-being, and proposes a graduated consent model that limits parental decision-making and considers the child's age and capacity.

The German Children's Fund is also looking at the implications of artificial intelligence (AI) on children's rights, with two legal assessments. The first focuses on the EU's AI Act, outlining pathways for further inclusion of children's rights in its implementation. The second focuses on the use of biometric data of children in AI training and children's right to privacy.

There are some positive interventions to protect children in the digital sphere.

Innovative work is underway on secure digital access to youth support services. The Digital Opportunities Foundation is creating a code of conduct to allow accredited hotlines and apps to operate without triggering parental controls but ensuring confidentiality.

Through the notion of 'personal integrity', the 2021 amendment to Germany's Youth Protection Act calls media self-regulation bodies to review their tools to include, beyond content risks, also contact, conduct, data safety and security. The Federal Department for Media Harmful to Young Persons and the Berlin-Brandenburg media authority have established youth councils and the German Children's Fund is developing a good practice kit on youth participation in media regulation.

Children's mental health

Germany lacks a comprehensive government-led approach to tracking children's mental health. Reliable epidemiological data remains scarce. Independent research, such as the COPSY study (children aged 7–17), shows worrying trends: in 2024, 22% of children reported serious psychological distress, 21% a low quality of life, and rising anxiety about global crises (72% war and terrorism, 62% economic instability, 57% climate). Loneliness is also increasing (21%).

By contrast, a 2024 survey of 2,167 children aged 5–11 showed more positive results - 87% reported laughing and having fun often.

The government has committed to developing a National Strategy for Mental Health in Young People, focused on prevention, awareness-raising, early intervention, parental counselling, and training for professionals.

Germany offers a range of child mental health services, including psychotherapy, counselling, school-based services, early support programmes, youth welfare offices, and NGO-led initiatives. However, demand outstrips supply. Waiting times for psychotherapy are long, paediatricians mainly provide diagnostic services or limited medication, and many school-based programmes are under-resourced and short-term.

To improve children's access to mental health support, Germany should:

- Expand and diversify access to psychotherapeutic and psycho-social care by increasing training and capacity for therapists, funding therapy, and strengthening community-based, low-threshold services.
- Further strengthen school-based mental health services, ensuring consistent access to school psychologists, crisis teams, and mental health education.

Additional children's rights issues

There is an urgent and growing inter-generational imbalance in political representation and resource allocation. Over half of voters are older than 53, while only 14% are under 30.

This means the interests of children and young people are systematically under-represented.

Climate change highlights this sharply, [threatening children's rights](#) to health, a clean environment, and participation. While children are especially vulnerable to environmental factors their voices remain marginal in political decisions that affect their present well-being and their future.

Germany needs a national strategy for inter-generational justice and equity, should lower the voting age and ensure children's best interests are systematically considered in policy-making.

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

Child poverty

The indicator on children 'at risk of poverty or social exclusion' ([AROPE](#)) is widely used as an indicator across the EU. In Germany, the AROP rate, which indicates the rate of children at risk of poverty, living in families earning less than 60% of the median income, is also used. While the [EU SILC data](#) shows a [15%](#) AROP rate in Germany, the [AROP data from Mikrozensus](#) is [21%](#). The German Statistics Office, which is responsible for both the EUSILC data for Germany and Mikrozensus, has not published studies to examine the discrepancy, creating reliability issues for research and NGOs. NGOs call for a consistent, reliable data set to accurately assess child poverty nationwide.

Children living with a single parent, children with a migrant background and children from families with lower socio-economic status, as well as children living in eastern Germany, have a [higher risk of poverty](#). Poverty risk also increases with family size.

The digital divide is closely linked to socio-economic status, migration background and geographic location. Around 40% of eighth-grade pupils demonstrate only basic digital skills, with those from low-education or migrant families particularly affected. Key barriers include limited access to digital devices, unstable or unavailable internet connection at home, and a lack of parental literacy or support. These structural inequalities [restrict vulnerable children's educational opportunities](#).

Public investment and social safety nets

There is no adequate, comprehensive social safety net for children and families.

Proposals for a basic child benefit, intended to improve support for low-income families, collapsed due to a change in government, leaving a significant gap in child-focused social protection.

Child poverty remains a structural issue. Inflation, the pandemic and the energy crisis have deepened existing inequalities.

To invest in children, Germany should:

1. Develop a coherent, comprehensive, cross-sector government strategy on child poverty reduction, with clear goals and sustained funding.
2. Make structural changes in three key areas:
   - A needs-based child benefit.
   - Accessible and inclusive social and educational infrastructure.
   - Improved work-family balance and fairer employment conditions for parents, especially single parents.

Education

Social background, parental education, and income remain decisive factors in children's access to quality, inclusive education. Inequalities begin in early education as there is a shortage of places in childcare, especially for children at risk of poverty or with migrant backgrounds.

The early tracking system, which separates pupils into educational paths after grade four, reinforces inequality, as performance at this age is strongly shaped by socio-economic background.

Inclusive education for children with disabilities remains limited. In 2022, 7.5% of pupils had special educational needs, with 4.2% still taught in separate schools. Implementation of inclusive education varies widely between states and is hampered by staff shortages and staff with insufficient qualifications.

Children with migrant or refugee backgrounds often attend separate preparatory classes with unclear pathways into mainstream education. Experiences of discrimination further undermine their school participation and self-esteem. Discrimination against children with disabilities and children with a migration background continues to hinder inclusive education.

A severe shortage of qualified personnel undermines quality. Schools in disadvantaged areas face persistent teacher shortages and lack sufficient special education and language support services.

Most children report general satisfaction with their school but highlight the need for inclusive and participatory school environments, individual learning support, empathetic and responsive teaching, and better social and emotional support.

Early childhood development

Germany has taken positive steps to support early childhood development (ECD). The Childcare Quality Act provides €4 billion over two years to improve access and quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC). Early intervention services are expanding, linking welfare, healthcare, and counselling to support families around birth. Reform of the Child and Youth Welfare Law has also strengthened integration and child-rights approaches.

Investment has led to a 130% increase in ECEC places for under-threes in the past 15 years.

However, major challenges remain. Despite a legal entitlement from age one, participation is unequal: children with highly educated parents, working mothers, or without a migration background are more likely to attend. Access is further limited by shortages of quality places (especially under-threes), staff shortages, rural gaps, high costs, and inflexible hours.

To further strengthen support for children in their early years Germany should:

- Expand and improve quality of early education and full-day care, with rights-based curricula, staff training on abuse prevention, and inclusive environments.
- Tackle workforce shortages through better conditions, retention measures, and in-service training.
- Strengthen psycho-social and early intervention support, including for postnatal depression.
- Improve disaggregated data on quality, outcomes, equal opportunities, and family support needs.

Housing

Germany provides housing support, subsidised housing, housing benefits and advisory and support services to help

low-income families. However, many families are still excluded: those in precarious employment, single parents, and families with a migration background. Several thousand children are affected by homelessness or overcrowded, precarious housing.

Recent policy commitments include expanding social housing, especially for families with children, and increasing housing support for low-income families.

There is a need to expand affordable and social housing and improve housing affordability through stronger state support.

The European Child Guarantee

Germany has been implementing the Child Guarantee since 2023 through its National Action Plan 'New Opportunities for Children'. Promising developments include the expansion of early support networks, educational support for disadvantaged children, workshops on child participation, and cross-ministerial coordination.

There is also a monitoring framework with 38 indicators to enable evaluation. These actions show that elements of the Child Guarantee are being embedded into national structures and processes.

However, the Child Guarantee has not resulted in new initiatives. Rather, existing programmes have been aligned with its goals. Its main impact is on structural coordination, particularly through the development of indicators and collaborative reporting processes.

The participation of children in the Child Guarantee process lacks transparency. There is insufficient information on how their input influenced outcomes, something that must be improved in future progress reports.

"Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by a cross-ministerial strategy with clear objectives, binding targets, and sustainable funding. Current programmes are vulnerable to budget cuts, putting essential services at risk. There is a need for a coherent, prevention-focused agenda that firmly anchors the National Action Plan in policy - with measurable outcomes, binding mechanisms for child and youth participation, and consideration of particularly vulnerable groups like children in poverty, children with disabilities, refugee children, and queer youth."

European Semester 2025

Germany's Country Report refers to child poverty, ECEC and education. Child poverty decreased slightly from 24.4% in 2022 to 22.9% in 2024. However, the number of children at risk has risen by 78,000 since 2020, reaching 3.22 million. Underachievement has increased significantly over the last decade among children from disadvantaged and migrant backgrounds. There is a severe shortage of childcare places (up to 430,000) and a shortage of teachers.

The Recovery and Resilience Plan allocates €500 million for new and upgraded childcare facilities, while over 5.5% of European Social Fund Plus funds target child poverty.

The Country Specific Recommendations call for improving education outcomes by providing targeted support to disadvantaged groups. They also highlight the need to expand and enhance the quality of ECEC.

Country Recommendation

"Greece should take action to ensure early intervention within the school environment, promoting real inclusion and active consultation with children and children's rights organisations."

Country Profile 2025

Greece

Child Population:
1,692,002 (2024)
16.27% of total population

16.27

Child Poverty[1]:
473,000 (2024)
27.9% (2024)
▼ -0.2 percentage points compared to 2023

27.9

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Network for Children's Rights

Panhellenic Association for Adapted Activities (ALMA)

The Smile of the Child

Children's Rights in Greece

The 2021 National Action Plan for the Rights of the Child provides for ongoing professional training in the Ministries of Justice and Citizen Protection. In addition, the National Action Plan for the Protection of Children from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (2022-2027) provides for the development of training for all professionals in services that come into contact with children. The aim of this training is to ensure that all professionals and volunteers in such services are able to recognise signs of abuse, to receive reports from children themselves and be aware of the reporting procedures in suspected cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation. However, in practice, training is not applied consistently and effectively across institutions. There is also a significant gap in training specifically focused on the rights and needs of children with disabilities.

Training and capacity building on children's rights for social workers and educators are organised by the Ombudswoman for the Child, UNICEF Greece and civil society organisations (CSOs), including the Network for Children's Rights, but still they are not embedded across institutions, and are largely dependent on the goodwill of organisations or on training requests from schools.

Education on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is only optional in some universities, for educators. However, UNICEF Greece and Greek universities have founded Child Rights Centres in a joint commitment to defend and promote the UNCRC through the dissemination of knowledge, research, data and documentation.

Anti-child rights movements

Children's rights and child rights defenders are not currently at risk in Greece, as the rights of the child are not considered a priority by the state. Eurochild members are not aware of child rights defenders being at risk. Indeed, since 2005, there has been significant progress, partly due to the active role of the Deputy Ombudswoman for Children's Rights. Public awareness of children's rights has gradually improved, promoting a shift in how children are perceived.

Child participation

In Greece, all children, but especially those from vulnerable backgrounds, often do not have real opportunities to participate meaningfully in public decision-making. A key obstacle is the prevailing perception that adults should think and decide for children, without taking into consideration their opinions and without understanding each child's uni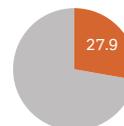que needs and characteristics. Discrimination based on nationality, gender, religion or disability, as well as language and cultural barriers, are additional obstacles to children's opportunities to express themselves freely.

Potential solutions could include the establishment of permanent local youth councils in municipalities and active school councils, ensuring the representation and participation of children facing vulnerabilities and exclusion. The use of digital tools could also be used to enable the participation of children from vulnerable backgrounds.

Finally, there should be political will to support the implementation of democratic schools, empower children and give them opportunities to express themselves.

Child protection systems

The child protection system in Greece still has many gaps and inefficiencies. The lack of coordination and communication between ministries and public authorities leads to delays or non-implementation of legal provisions.

The child protection system does not invest in support for Roma children and their families, and there has been no improvement in the living conditions of Roma children.

Family separation is the preferred option in many cases of child abuse or neglect, with insufficient attention to preventing separation and supporting vulnerable families. Despite some efforts, deinstitutionalisation has not yet been achieved. Even when children go to foster or adoptive parents, there is no substantial support for these families and, as a result, children often go back into the child protection system.

Understaffed social services and the very limited number of foster parents are additional challenges. There should be more supportive social services and a campaign to promote foster care.

Eurochild members in Greece highlight several concerns regarding violence against children.

The absence of a centralised database limits a data-driven response, and while legislation mandates the creation of a National System for Recording and Monitoring Child Abuse this is still under development.

Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable.

For victims of domestic and sexual violence, the only available 'houses of children' are in Athens and Piraeus, and they do not follow the Barnahus model.[2]

There is also a lack of comprehensive sex education, which leads to limited awareness of danger and increased fears of disclosure among children and adolescents.

The Ministry of Education has introduced an online platform for children and their parents to report cases of bullying in schools. However, this seems not to be focused on prevention and on promoting inclusive and democratic schools, but rather on the punishment of children or their parents.

Concerns have also been raised about new forms of crime through artificial intelligence (AI), including cybercrime, cyberbullying, and online sexual exploitation of children.

Greece has announced the 'National Strategy for Preventing Violence and Addressing Juvenile Delinquency' (2025–2030) in response to violence between children. Meanwhile, CSOs and child protection institutions are concerned that the reformed Penal Code includes stricter measures for child perpetrators.

Despite efforts in recent years, child trafficking remains very concerning, especially for children from outside the European Union (EU).

Eurochild members identified three main issues affecting children with a migrant background or with a minority ethnic origin in Greece:

1. Inadequate care and protection when there are high flows of unaccompanied and separated children.
2. Inadequate support for families and children with a migrant background, especially those who are recognised refugees, with slow procedures to access the health system, and language barriers.
3. Mental health issues related to trauma, displacement, loss, and social exclusion experienced by migrant and ethnic minority children,

---

2 The Barnahus (Children's House) model provides a child-friendly, multidisciplinary response to child abuse by uniting justice, protection, health, and support services under one roof.

including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and survivor's guilt.

Child safety and well-being online

There is no single protocol in Greece for recording incidents of Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and cyberbullying. A number of actors - institutions and CSOs - record incidents they are aware of, but there is no unified record.

However, recorded cases include online bullying, videos with violent or offensive content, use of AI to create offensive material, online grooming and online sexual exploitation.

In addition, the exposure of personal data and photographs of children on the internet is widespread among adult caregivers – including 'sharenting'[3], thereby increasing

the exposure of children to risks in the digital environment. Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable in this respect.

A national survey of 4,800 adolescents by the Greek Centre for Safer Internet found that almost one in two children have seen online violence. A 2025 survey stated that 34% of elementary school children and 61% of middle/high school children said they had seen harmful or inappropriate content and most (over 60%) occurred by accident.

There are some positive examples of initiatives intended to protect children in the digital sphere.

Two tools by The Smile of the Child seek to protect children in the digital world. The first is a training programme, Safe and Creative Internet Browsing, intended to enhance children's critical thinking and responsibility

in the digital world. The second is the Children's Online Redress Sandbox, which aims to create a standardised blueprint for online redress mechanisms. Young people will participate as equal experts in its co-design and are an integral part of the project.

Greece is introducing a 'Kids Wallet' age-verification tool to protect children online, but civil society is worried it may raise new risks instead of solving the problem.

Children's mental health

In Greece, data on children's mental health is collected on an occasional basis.

The Smile of the Child regularly submits reports with data to the Ministry of Health.

Some local studies show high levels of psychological distress in children with special educational needs. There is no national research directly asking

3 'Sharenting' refers to the practice of parents sharing a large amount of potentially sensitive content about their children on social media, especially when done by an account with a large following base.

children with disabilities about their mental health.

In 2022 and 2023, surveys on children's mental health were conducted. A survey sample of 4,000 children (8–17 years old) found that 16% had anxiety symptoms, 10% had depressive symptoms, 14% reported self-harm and 9% problems with aggression. In addition, 43% had experienced at least one traumatic event.

In another survey, among approximately 6,500 adolescents, 60% reported persistent psychological distress.

In research by the World Health Organisation in 2022, 15.2% of children aged 5–14 reported anxiety or nervousness at least once a week.

There are public and private organisations which provide mental health support to children for free (through day centres and child and adolescent mental health units), but there are often long waiting times for an appointment. School psychologists or social workers also provide some help, but most are not permanent staff and each is responsible for several schools so it is difficult to provide comprehensive support.

The lack of adequate personnel and infrastructure, of systematic data collection, and insufficient coordination are some of the main gaps in services for children's mental health.

A mental health professional should be appointed to a permanent position in every school, so they can provide support to children, their parents and teachers.

Additional children's rights issues

• The number of children hospitalised in paediatric hospitals under a Prosecutor's order has remained consistently high (not for medical reasons, but due to the urgent need to remove them from unsuitable family environments). More specifically, 40 neglected or abused children are currently housed in three paediatric hospitals in Attica. In many cases, these children remain in hospital for long periods, until suitable foster care or other arrangement can be secured.

• Protecting the rights of children in juvenile detention centres needs increased attention.

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

Child poverty

A comparative analysis of the years 2021 and 2024 shows a significant deterioration in the living conditions of children under 15 in poor households in Greece. There is an increasing inability to meet basic needs.

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

• Children from large families;
• Children in single-parent households;
• Children from migrant and refugee backgrounds, especially unaccompanied children;
• Children with disabilities or special needs;
• Roma children;
• Children in low-income or unemployed households;
• Children in juvenile detention centres.

There is also a digital divide in Greece, exacerbated by a lack of digital skills and limited equipment for some children and parents. Additional barriers include the lack of assistive technologies for children with disabilities, the diverse geography of the country and slow internet connection. In particular, the digital divide affects children from low-income families, children in rural or remote areas, Roma children, children from migrant/refugee backgrounds and children with disabilities.

Public investment and social safety nets

There is no adequate and comprehensive social welfare

system in Greece, in a context of high poverty rates, limited social protection expenditure, under-staffed social services and a rising cost of living.

Greece should take three key measures to invest in children and address child poverty:

1. Increase personnel in social services.
2. Invest in community-based care, by supporting vulnerable families with parental support and job opportunities, as well as targeted financial support to prevent family separation.
3. Equal educational opportunities.

Education

Children have access to free, public education until the age of 18, with mandatory education until the age of 15. However, there are several barriers which affect children's access to quality, inclusive education:

- Overcrowded classrooms.
- Segregation of Roma and migrant children in separate classes or schools.
- Complex and slow procedures for enrolling and supporting children with disabilities in adequately staffed facilities, along with a lack of continuous teacher training in modern teaching practices.
- High child poverty rates that affect attendance and learning.
- Lack of acceptance of every child's uniqueness, especially for children with disabilities.
- Socio-economic inequalities which lead to unequal educational opportunities.
- The lack of opportunities for children to participate in decision-making and to voice their opinions in schools.
- The absence of sex education in elementary school.
- The pursuit of grades and completion of schoolwork which puts pressure on pupils and teachers.
- Lack of mental health professionals in schools.
- Limited access to extracurricular activities.

Early childhood development

Eurochild members identified three positive and effective interventions that support early childhood development (ECD):

1. The shift from centre-based medical models to a structured, family-centred early childhood interventions (ECI) framework. This reform builds on good practices, raises awareness, trains professionals, and prepares legislation for integrated ECI services. For example, ALMA collaborates with the Municipality of Palaio Faliro on a pilot programme focused on the early detection of autism symptoms.
2. The Daycare Homes of The Smile of the Child provide care for children whose families face significant challenges. The services include: safe and structured environments for children; assistance with schoolwork and educational support; recreational activities and play; nutritious meals; and parental empowerment and support.
3. The Neighborhood Babysitters programme, under the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family Affairs.

There is a need for more disaggregated data on ECD in Greece, in order to create effective policies and to monitor action plans. Furthermore, data is needed to understand disparities in access to quality early childhood services across the country.

In particular, data is needed in the following areas:

- Developmental milestones and delays;
- Parental and family context;
- Health and nutrition status;
- Childcare enrolment rates;
- Geographical location and what is needed in each region.

Greece should prioritise three key measures to strengthen support for ECD:

1. Develop home visiting services that offer parenting guidance, health monitoring, and psycho-social support, especially for vulnerable families and children with disabilities.
2. Provide access to quality early childhood education without discrimination.
3. Expand and improve ECI services through paediatric training and more specialised professionals (therapists, psychologists, educators) to provide timely, tailored support to children and families.

There is also insufficient inclusive infrastructure and support services within mainstream early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings for children with disabilities.

Housing

In general, the Greek state does not do enough to provide adequate and affordable housing. However, some positive measures are being implemented.

Greece has introduced a professional foster care system for children with disabilities, offering specialised care in family settings. Foster parents receive a monthly fee of €1,561.11, along with additional financial support, to support children's stable and supportive home environment. There is also some financial assistance for housing rent. The _Housing and Employment Programme_ provides support for both housing and employment opportunities.

Eurochild members in Greece have the following recommendations to ensure that children and families have adequate housing and a decent standard of living:

• Promote social housing, rent control measures and subsidies to reduce the burden of housing cost and prevent forced evictions.
• Invest in the construction and maintenance of affordable, safe, and child-friendly housing, especially for low-income families and vulnerable groups,

also taking into consideration children with disabilities.

The European Child Guarantee

"Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by conducting regular consultations with civil society organisations working on children's rights and protection, as well as with children themselves, focusing on deinstitutionalisation of children with disabilities and community-based care."

In Greece a significant portion of European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) funding is ring-fenced for addressing child poverty under the Child Guarantee, so the role of EU funding is extremely important. ESF+ co-funding supports community-based

daycare centres, offering inclusive education and creative activities.

As described in the Child Guarantee National Action Plan and biennial progress report, the Semi-autonomous Living Apartments for children and youth, including unaccompanied children, is a good practice which should be expanded. Here, unaccompanied children aged 16-18 and youth aged 15-26, formerly residing in institutions, receive support and guidance for their transition to adulthood.

European Semester 2025

Greece's Country Report highlights child poverty, ECEC, and education.

In 2024, 13.9% of children in Greece faced severe material and social deprivation, almost double the EU average of 7.9%. From a 2019 baseline in which 31.2% of children were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Greece aims to reduce this by 6.6% by 2030. EU cohesion funds and the Recovery and Resilience Facility underpin

this goal, through strengthening social benefits and local services. The National Strategy for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction, adopted in 2022, aims to prevent and combat social exclusion at the national, regional, and local levels.

The implementation of the Child Guarantee brings together investments in new childcare facilities, the expansion of early childhood education, material assistance for the most deprived families, local action plans to tackle child poverty, and support for deinstitutionalisation. Gaps persist, notably in universal access to healthy school meals.

ECEC participation remains below EU averages, especially for the youngest and most disadvantaged children. Mandatory pre-school for children aged four has been fully implemented since 2021/22, but only 68.8% of three-year-olds were enrolled in 2019. In 2023, 29.5% of children aged 0-2 attended ECEC, with participation dropping to 19.8% for children at risk of poverty. Tracking

progress is hindered by the limited availability of up-to-date national data.

The 2025 Country Specific Recommendations call on Greece to expand ECEC and increase the participation rate of children under three to meet the revised Barcelona target of 42.8% by 2030. Greece should also increase the effectiveness of the social protection system.

European Union Funding

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Greece cannot receive funding directly through the ESF+ and the Child Guarantee. The EU could consider direct funding from the ESF+ to national NGOs. Technical assistance, training and simplified procedures would also be very useful.

Country Recommendation

"Hungary should ensure an enabling environment for independent civil society organisations and child human rights defenders, by safeguarding freedom of expression and participation, and by integrating children's voices systematically into decision-making processes that affect them."

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Boglárka Jánoskúti (individual member)

Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation

Hungarian Child Rights Coalition

Country Profile 2025

Hungary

17.54

Child Population:
1,680,782 (2024)
17.54% of total population

21.1

Child Poverty[1]:
359,000 (2024)
21.1% (2024)
▼ -3.3 percentage points compared to 2023

Children's Rights in Hungary

There is no regular, institutional-level effort to increase knowledge and understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child among policymakers and professionals working with children. Existing activities are fragmented and ad hoc, often implemented through specific projects or grant-based initiatives.

Within the police, some officers have participated in child rights training in connection with handling child abuse cases. In certain courts there have been presentations on children's rights linked to the child protection system.

Accredited child rights training is available for educators and social workers, delivered by civil society organisations (CSOs). However, there is no overarching national child rights strategy, nor a coordinated, systematic approach to professional training on children's rights across relevant sectors. In universities, child rights training is still not compulsory across all curricula for professionals who work with or for children.

This lack of a consistent, institutionalised framework means that the scope, quality, and reach of existing initiatives vary greatly, and participation often depends on individual interest, local leadership, or external funding.

Anti-child rights movements

According to 2024 research by the Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation and the Hungarian Child Rights Coalition, children's rights and child human rights defenders in Hungary face increasing risks linked to a narrowing civic space and a hostile public discourse.

Hungarian CSOs working on children's rights face growing administrative burdens, politicisation of their work, and reputational attacks, particularly when addressing issues such as sexual and reproductive rights, gender equality, or the rights of children from marginalised groups. This can discourage open advocacy, limit access to decision-makers, and reduce opportunities for meaningful participation by children themselves.

This climate also affects child human rights defenders directly, as opportunities for children to speak out on rights issues are increasingly constrained.

Child participation

Although there are institutions that are meant to guarantee children's participation within the child protection system (such as children's self-governing bodies in residential care homes) the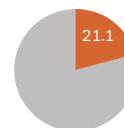re is little information on whether these are being implemented, how they function, or what impact they have on children. This may be because those working in child protection face extreme staff shortages, heavy workloads, and low pay.

Additionally, there is a considerable lack of knowledge and understanding, and many misconceptions, about the concept of child participation, even among professionals who work directly with children.

Child protection systems

The child abuse presidential pardon scandal in 2024 highlighted the critical state of the Hungarian child protection system. Legislative activity was strongly influenced by the response to the scandal, resulting in the enactment of over 30 child rights-related laws. While some legislative proposals were welcome, most amendments were not preceded by adequate debate, and the recommendations of professional child rights organisations, including the Hungarian Child Rights Coalition and UNICEF Hungary, were disregarded.

This has resulted in child protection legislation with an increased law enforcement and sanction-oriented approach, instead of a focus on prevention and family support.

The effectiveness of these measures is highly questionable, especially as the so-called 'reforms' did not include an increase in capacity, expertise or funding within the child protection system itself.

Increasingly untenable working conditions and the lack of basic infrastructure and financial resources have exacerbated an already critical situation, leading to a record shortage of child protection professionals and pushing the system to the brink of collapse. Several ombudsman reports have highlighted high staff turnover in children's homes, the lack of professional qualifications among applicants for positions, and deficiencies in the material conditions of several children's homes.

The situation for children in alternative care is especially concerning. Since 2023, the Hungarian Child Rights Coalition has repeatedly drawn attention to the more than 300 newborn babies who have spent months in hospitals because their legal status is unresolved, with no foster parents or homes available to care for them. Although Parliament adopted new legislation to address this, no preventive measures have been taken to avoid babies being separated from their mothers at birth, nor have more caring places been made available to accommodate them. The underlying problem is a lack of capacity in the child protection system and the inadequate functioning of basic child welfare services.

According to Bagázs, an organisation providing legal aid in Roma segregated settlements, children living in these settlements face discriminatory treatment, evidenced by significant delays in child protection proceedings due to a lack of available placements.

There is a rising number of children placed in state care primarily because of their families' financial situation.

The main concern regarding violence against children in Hungary is the absence of comprehensive child protection policies within schools and organisations working with children, the lack of an independent monitoring body to investigate reports of child abuse, and the lack of publicly accessible data on inquiries into systemic child abuse.

According to 2023 data from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 5,830 children experienced physical abuse, 7,618 were subject to emotional abuse, 1,039 experienced sexual abuse, and 47,286 children suffered from neglect. Children experienced all forms of abuse much more frequently within the family than outside the family.

In a positive development, in 2024 the protocol governing institutions providing specialised child protection care and foster care was updated, with improved measures to investigate and handle child abuse cases.

The main issues affecting refugee and asylum-seeking children in Hungary are:

• Restricted access to asylum procedures and serious human rights violations. With few exceptions, it is not possible to seek asylum within the country's territory. In 2024, it was only possible to submit a so-called declaration of intent to apply for asylum at Hungarian embassies in Belgrade or Kyiv. This violates the rights of asylum seekers and European Union (EU) asylum laws, leading the European Court of Justice to impose a €200 million fine on Hungary in 2024.[2] Since 2016, the Hungarian police have forced those trying to cross the frontier to the Serbian side of the border, including children. The European Court of Human Rights has also ruled that these pushbacks are unlawful[3], and in 2024 issued several decisions concerning cases involving children.

• Inadequate access to services and housing support. Refugee families, including children, struggle to access healthcare, social services, and housing support. A government decree in 2024 terminated housing support to certain Ukrainian refugees from places in Ukraine not considered war-torn areas by the government, leaving thousands homeless. Most of the approximately 3,000 people affected were Transcarpathian Roma (from western Ukraine), many of them children. According to a recent study, a substantial number of Ukrainian refugees, including children, either received no healthcare at all or only partial care.

• Lack of education for Ukrainian refugee children. According to a 2025 study on the integration of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, 21% of school-age Ukrainian refugee children were not in school. 69% preferred to participate in online education in the Ukrainian school system. Ukrainian refugees chose this both to ease the language barriers and because they expected to return to Ukraine at the end of the war.

Child safety and well-being online

Child protection legislation includes rules to increase children's safety online. The Child Protection Act explicitly states that children have the right to receive education and training that supports a responsible use of the internet and digital media.

Research in 2024 with children aged 13-16, showed that while most children are aware of the dangers, preventive measures, such as greater protection of personal data or restrictions on publicly accessible information, are often absent. The National Media and Infocommunications Authority launched a nationwide campaign, Dare to Ask for Help, to enable parents and children

---

2 The judgment of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) found that Hungary's asylum procedure violates EU asylum rules. Specifically, the ECJ ruled in June 2024 that Hungary committed an "unprecedented and exceptionally serious breach of EU law" by restricting access to asylum procedures, unlawfully detaining asylum seekers in transit zones, and ignoring their rights to appeal. Hungary was found to be deliberately evading the application of the EU's common asylum policy, transferring responsibilities to other member states, and undermining solidarity and fair sharing of responsibilities within the EU.
3 For example in Case of Shahzad v. Hungary (No. 2), (Application no. 37967/18) and in Case of S.S. and OTHERS v. HUNGARY

to recognise online abuse and seek help.

Another study revealed that one-fifth of children aged 11-17 had experienced cyberbullying.

According to a study among one-and-a-half-year-old children, the majority regularly use digital devices: 43.6% watched television daily, and 71.7% watched it weekly. Additionally, 21.2% watched videos on a mobile phone or tablet daily. On average, children spent 85.7 minutes per day in front of a screen.

A 2024 legal amendment restricting children's use of smart devices in schools sparked debate. Pupils protested against the regulation, arguing it infringes on their right to privacy and hinders their ability to communicate with their parents and peers.

Children's right to privacy has also been considered in connection with the phenomenon of 'sharenting'.[4]

Hungary has some promising initiatives to protect children in the digital sphere, but they remain fragmented and project-based, not part of a coherent national strategy. Examples include civil society–led online safety education programmes for children, parents and educators, and awareness campaigns on cyberbullying and sexting.

These efforts would benefit from systematic scaling-up and integration into the formal education and child protection systems. There is a need for comprehensive, government-supported programmes that combine digital literacy, online safety, and children's rights education, ensuring equal access across urban and rural areas.

Children's mental health

Since COVID-19, the deterioration of children's mental health has been an ongoing problem. Most of those in need of mental health support face long waiting times.

A 2024 report highlighted a worsening trend in children's mental health in Hungary, with serious problems with school bullying and online abuse. Requests for help related to sexual abuse remain consistently high. There were 301 reports of self-harm in 2020, rising to 1,627 in 2024. Similarly, requests for help related to suicidal thoughts have also increased, with an average of five daily cases reported to the helpline.

Since 2010, the number of psychiatric care institutions has decreased from 26 to 17, while the number of registered children receiving care has been increasing. Since 2022,

the number of new cases has risen rapidly. According to the latest data, there are only 50-60 practising child psychiatrists nationwide.

Additional children's rights issues

The impact of political polarisation and restrictive legislation on the availability of inclusive, rights-based education and services is a growing concern. Recent legal and policy changes affecting sex education, diversity in school materials, and the work of independent CSOs risk reducing children's access to accurate information, safe spaces and supportive networks. This is compounded by growing mistrust between state institutions and civil society, which limits cooperation in areas such as child protection, education, and online safety.

---

4 'Sharenting' refers to the practice of parents sharing a large amount of potentially sensitive content about their children on social media, especially when done by an account with a large following base.

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

Child poverty

According to 2023 [data](#) from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 21.1% of children were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

The children most at risk of poverty are those living in families with lower educational attainment and on low incomes, those in single-parent families and Roma children.

Public investment and social safety nets

The number of families receiving family allowance has declined slightly since 2010. According to the data from 2023, a total of 1,038,900 families received family allowance, covering approximately 1.7 million children.

In addition to previously existing forms of support, such as the tax allowance available until the age of 25, the 'baby expecting loan' (Babaváró hitel), and the Rural Family Housing Allowance, the family support system has been expanded. Families can now apply for the [Expanded Family Housing Support Loan](#),[5] which is available upon committing to having children.

One of the main criticisms of the Hungarian family support system is that many of its benefits tend to favour higher-income groups. In contrast, the family allowance, a universal benefit available for every child regardless of income, has remained unchanged since 2008.

To address child poverty and exclusion, Hungary should:

1. Provide quality child protection services and strengthen early intervention and prevention measures.

2. Provide comprehensive support for parents and families from disadvantaged groups.

3. Ensure equal access to quality and inclusive education from early childhood to secondary school, including affordable early childhood education and care (ECEC), targeted support for disadvantaged pupils, and programmes to reduce school segregation and drop-out.

Education

One of the main barriers to children's access to quality, inclusive education in Hungary is the severe shortage (approximately 16,000) of qualified teachers. A 2023 report highlights the decline in pupils' performance and the rising rate of early school leaving. It also emphasises the expansion of church-run schools and increasing social inequalities, which contribute to more educational segregation.

Roma children are the most disadvantaged in education because of unlawful segregation.

[Research](#) revealed that Roma children are over-represented among pupils diagnosed with mild intellectual disabilities, which is partly attributable to subjectivity or biases in diagnostic processes and the lack of procedural safeguards.

A comparative [analysis](#) examined educational inequalities affecting pupils with special educational needs from 2015 to 2024. It revealed that despite improvements in the quality of education over the past two decades, equal access to high-quality education is still not guaranteed for children with special educational needs.

---

5 CSOK Plusz

Early childhood development

Programmes led by the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service provide positive and effective interventions for young children and their families, particularly in disadvantaged communities. One notable example is their early childhood development (ECD) and parenting support work in segregated or severely deprived settlements. This aims to strengthen parental capacity, improve school readiness, and address developmental delays at an early stage. Another example is their integrated community-based child and family services, where health, social, and educational support are provided in one place.

While these initiatives are effective, their reach remains limited. Scaling them up would significantly improve outcomes for vulnerable young children across the country.

Hungary should expand and strengthen early intervention and home-visiting services by integrating health, social, and developmental support, with timely support from pregnancy. It is also critical to address growing concerns on staff shortages in the home visiting system and the risk of declining quality and accessibility in certain areas.

There is a great need for more disaggregated and up-to-date data on ECD to inform policies and programmes. Data should be disaggregated by age group (especially 0–3 years), geographic location, socio-economic background, Roma ethnicity, disability status, and access to services. There is also a need for indicators on developmental delays, participation in ECEC, service quality, and on early intervention and home-visiting programmes. Such data would enable more targeted interventions, and help to identify underserved populations and monitor progress in reducing inequalities in early childhood outcomes.

Obstacles to children's participation in quality ECEC in Hungary persist, including a lack of placements for children under three.

Compulsory kindergarten for children aged 3-6 should help children to be prepared for school, but in practice there is shortage of qualified kindergarten teachers.

There is growing segregation in kindergartens attended by Roma children, and a lack of inclusion and integration of children with special needs.

Housing

The Hungarian government introduced an Expanded Family Housing Support Loan in 2024. This is available nationwide and provides loans for families planning to have additional children. Eligibility is open to families until the mother reaches 41 years of age. For a transitional period of two years, women above this age may also apply if they can certify a pregnancy of at least 12 weeks.

The European Child Guarantee

According to Hungary's Biennial progress report, current priorities are to widen access to ECEC (especially in disadvantaged and rural areas), set up local community spaces that integrate social, educational and family support, and roll out early intervention for young children in disadvantaged settlements.

Education measures focus on preventing early school leaving and strengthening inclusion (large-scale device distribution, school reorganisation pilots, support for children with special educational needs, and teacher training in mental health and anti-bullying). Free or subsidised meals are broadly available. Health plans include expanding health-promotion offices and mental-health support.

Some digital initiatives (OkosÓvoda 2.0, Kortárs NETMENTOR) were delayed in

2023 due to restructuring/funding gaps.

An inter-ministerial expert group oversees monitoring and targeting of children in need, including those with disabilities, in alternative care and from third countries.

Implementation can be strengthened through tighter coordination between national and local actors, stable resourcing, and clearer public communication to raise awareness of the Child Guarantee among families, professionals and local decision-makers.

European Semester 2025

The 2025 Country Report for Hungary notes rising poverty and social exclusion, especially among children in need, as well as persistent social and educational challenges. While 92.6% of children aged three and above are enrolled in ECEC, access remains uneven. 31% of municipalities lacked kindergartens in 2022, and staff qualification requirements have been lowered, potentially undermining quality.

The rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion fell to 21.1% in 2024 (below the EU average of 24.2%), but remains 67.9% for children with parents with limited education. Despite a national target to reduce child poverty to 13% by 2030, social protection remains inadequate, with minimum income benefits unchanged since 2012.

There are high early school leaving rates, and a national drop-out rate of 10.3% in 2024, above the EU average of 9.3%. This is worse in rural areas, in Northern Hungary and among pupils with disabilities and Roma pupils.

EU support to Hungary includes €413 million via the Child Guarantee, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and cohesion funds, aimed at improving access to ECEC, digital education, teacher training, and integrated services in the 300 most deprived municipalities. Additionally, the Technical Support Instrument helped Hungary address youth mental health challenges, including issues related to online gambling and gaming.

The Country Specific Recommendations call for improvements in education outcomes and for greater participation of disadvantaged groups, particularly Roma, in quality mainstream education. They also call for improvements in social assistance and unemployment benefits, in access to essential services, and for targeted housing support for low-income households.

Country Profile 2025

Ireland

Child Population:
1,232,875 (2024)
23% of total population

Child Poverty[1]:
253,000 (2024)
20.9% (2024)
▼ -3.4 percentage points compared to 2023

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Children's Rights Alliance

1 Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2024, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc_peps01n).

Children's Rights in Ireland

Child protection systems

In Ireland, children are taken into care under the Child Care Act 1991. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has responsibility for family support, child welfare and protection and alternative care.

Despite an increase in the population of children and young people over the last ten years[2], the number of children in the care system has remained steady and indeed has fallen slightly. At the end of June 2025, there were 5,807 children in care. The vast majority (87%) were in foster care (of which 29% were in relative foster care), and the remaining 13% were either in residential care or other care placements.

Tusla also provides support to unaccompanied minors and separated children seeking international protection. In June 2025, 478 such children were either in care or provided with accommodation by Tusla.

Ireland's child protection services face a number of challenges. Firstly, child protection referrals to Tusla are increasing year-on-year, with a cumulative increase of 70% since 2019.[3] It is difficult to determine the causes of this increase. Secondly, Tusla experiences ongoing challenges in the recruitment and retention of social workers, with a knock-on effect on its response to referrals and on their engagement with children in care. For example, 12% of children in care do not have an allocated case worker and 17% of children in care do not have an up-to-date care plan. Thirdly, despite a positive improvement in the numbers of approved foster carers, the demand for foster carers far outnumbers the available placements. Finally, there is a shortage of residential care placements for children, in particular for children with complex needs.

Violence against children

Bullying, both online and offline, is a pressing concern. In 2024, the Ombudsman for Children reported that 47% of pupils surveyed experienced bullying in school.

There is increasing evidence of pornography's role in fuelling violence against women and girls. A 2021 study found young children had been exposed to pornography – 53% of male students and 23% of female students said they were aged 10-13 years when they first viewed pornography. Another study found that children were exposed to pornography on a regular basis – 35% of children reported seeing sexual images online at least monthly, and 6% saw sexual content daily or almost daily.
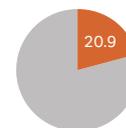
Reports from charities provide an insight into gender-based violence. For example, Women's Aid received 5,333 disclosures of domestic abuse against children in 2024. The Dublin Rape Crisis Centre reported that of 637 therapy clients in 2024, 27.4% experienced sexual violence as children.

In a 2025 report, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission expressed concern about the low rate of children identified as victims of trafficking. Children represent 8% of all identified victims of trafficking in Ireland, significantly less than the European Union (EU) average (15%). The report drew attention to the need for robust follow-up on unaccompanied and separated children who go missing while in state care.

---

2 The Central Statistics Office records an increase in the population aged 0-19 from 1.262 million in the 2011 Census to 1.349 million in the 2022 Census.

3 In the four-year period 2015 to 2018 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.

Child safety and well-being online

In Ireland, online child sexual exploitation and abuse is considered one of the main risks faced by children in the digital sphere. According to Hotline. ie, the state-funded national reporting centre, between 2022 and 2023 there was a 110% increase in the amount of child sexual abuse material identified online. In 2024, Hotline. ie processed 44,955 reports of such material, representing a substantial 55% increase from the 29,197 reports handled in 2023.

The online space poses a number of child protection concerns. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) found that cyberbullying was one of the most prevalent online harms children experience in Ireland. An ESRI report found that children

in Ireland reported being upset by verbal abuse and harassment while interacting with others online. Cyberbullying on social media was often more prevalent for girls, while more prevalent for boys on gaming platforms. Another ESRI report found certain gaming platforms create an addictive environment.

In a survey of children, only 45% reported upsetting online experiences to a parent or trusted adult, a decline from 54% in previous years.

'Sharenting'[4] and 'child-influencers'[5] have emerged as causes for investigation in Ireland, raising concerns about children's privacy and safety, child labour, and questions of consent. In a joint British-Irish study, this area has been described as a 'legal lacuna', unregulated within any

child labour, privacy, consent or online safety laws.

Positive initiatives to help children stay safe online include Media Literacy Ireland, launched by Ireland's Media Regulator, which provides educational resources to help young people, teachers and parents/caregivers to better understand children's rights in the online sphere. The regulator also has a Youth Advisory Committee which aims to include young people between 18 and 24. Ireland has an Online Safety Code which seeks to address harmful and illegal content on video-sharing platform services. It requires video-sharing platforms to implement measures to protect children from harmful content, and also expressly refers to the rights of Irish Traveller and Roma communities who are at risk of discrimination.

The Department of Education's Webwise is the Irish Internet Safety Awareness Centre, which provides information, advice and resources for schools, families and young people on online safety. Its Webwise Youth Panel gives young people the opportunity to have their views heard and inform policy on a national and European level.

Smaller scale, high impact, societal initiatives are also being developed. One example is the No Smart Device Voluntary Code, an initiative by Parents Associations from eight primary schools which encourages parents and guardians to postpone the purchase of smart devices for their children until they go to secondary school.

---

4 'Sharenting' refers to the practice of parents sharing a large amount of potentially sensitive content about their children on social media, especially when done by an account with a large following base.

5 'Childfluencer' or 'kidfluencer' refers to children who have gained a considerable online following by creating content on social media channels, often linked to advertisement, and in most cases managed and guided by their parents.

However, there is a lack of access to transparent, effective and binding complaints systems. An individual complaints mechanism was provided for in Irish law, to allow users to complain of failures by the platforms to the Online Safety Commissioner. However, this mechanism has yet to be set up.

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

Child poverty

Data on child poverty in Ireland is published in the Central Statistics Office Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2024 and in the Central Statistics Office Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC): Enforced Deprivation 2024.

While children make up just 23% of the population of Ireland, they comprise 30% of those at risk of poverty.[6] Children have the highest 'at risk of poverty' rate at 15.3%, which is higher than the rate among the general population, which is 11.7%.

Overall, the 'at risk of poverty' rate for children fell between 2021 and 2023 but increased between 2023 and 2024, resulting in an extra 12,955 children living in households at risk of poverty.

The most recent analysis showed there was over a quarter of a million children experiencing 'enforced deprivation' in 2024.[7] This means that one in every five children was living in a household that was unable to afford goods and services considered the minimum essentials for a decent standard of living (e.g. affording a winter coat or a new pair of shoes,

or being able to replace broken furniture).

Most concerning is the significant spike in 'consistent poverty' rates for children in 2024. Consistent poverty is measured by combining the proportion of the population who are 'at risk of poverty' and 'experiencing deprivation'. Children experienced the sharpest rise in this cohort, from 4.8%

in 2023 to 8.5% in 2024. This equates to an additional 45,107 children experiencing the worst form of poverty in Ireland, so there are now over 100,000 children living in consistent poverty, isolation and social exclusion.

The children most 'at risk of poverty' are those in single-parent households. Over one in ten one-parent households with children

6 The 'at risk of poverty' rate describes the proportion of the population who have an income below 60% of the national median income.

7 Individuals who experience two or more of eleven listed items are considered to be experiencing enforced deprivation. This is the basis for calculating the deprivation rate. See Background Notes Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2024 - Central Statistics Office.

experience consistent poverty (11%) compared to just 5.2% of the total population. Almost half (46.3%) of one-parent families are experiencing enforced deprivation, a rate almost three times higher than the entire population.

We know the true poverty figures are likely to be much higher as the statistics on poverty only count households so exclude children from the Traveller and Roma population, those living in homeless accommodation, in centres for those seeking international protection (asylum) and those in domestic violence refuges.

Public investment and social safety nets

The government provides both universal and targeted income support payments for families with children. Child Benefit is a universal monthly payment to parents of children under 16 and for children aged 16, 17, and 18 who are in full-time education or training or who have a disability and cannot support themselves. While Child Benefit is paid to all families, regardless of income, adults receiving a weekly social welfare payment and who have a dependent child also receive additional support with the Child Support Payment.

To access Child Benefit, recipients must meet the Habitual Residence Condition. This condition excludes certain vulnerable groups, including children from families who are seeking international protection, and may cause difficulties for Traveller and Roma children.

The Vincentian MESL Research Centre has found that the income support provided to each individual family member living in Direct Provision falls short of meeting their estimated Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) need. One way to mitigate this income inadequacy is to introduce the promised international protection child payment. Funding has been allocated to this in both Budget 2024 and Budget 2025 (following a government commitment in the 2021 White Paper to End Direct Provision), but it has yet to be implemented.

To invest in children and tackle child poverty and social exclusion, Ireland should:

1. Increase the weekly rates of the Child Support Payment in the forthcoming Budget by €15 for children over 12 and €6 for children under 12. In the medium term, commit to benchmarking social welfare rates to a MESL to ensure that all households with children can afford a minimum standard of living.
2. Invest €10 million in funding for the roll-out of a DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools) plus Programme which would support children living with complex challenges at a community level.[8]
3. Introduce a €20 million fund for schools that are not part of the Delivering Equal Opportunities in Schools Programme, so they can meet the range of diverse needs of children and families and support their educational experience, participation and achievement.
4. Implement the €4.7 million and €8.4 million allocated to the International Protection Child Payment from Budgets 2024 and 2025, for all children living in the international protection system.

Early childhood development

Ireland's *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for*

---

8 The DEIS programme is an Irish Government initiative which provides specific funding for schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019–2028 committed to improving early childhood education and care (ECEC). To this end, Equal Start, a set of universal and targeted measures to support access and participation for children and their families who experience disadvantage, was launched in May 2024. This was a very welcome development.

A total of €25.2 million will be allocated in the first two years of the *Equal Start* programme. This will include an *Enhanced Nutrition Programme* in *Equal Start* priority settings. Despite this investment, the programme is in the early stages of roll-out and further investment is needed for the programme to reach its potential.

To strengthen support for early childhood development (ECD), Ireland should:

- Adjust the income thresholds to enable more families to access higher subsidies, by aligning the base income threshold to the poverty line (as was the original intention with the scheme) and

raising it to €33,643.
- Exclude Child Benefit and child maintenance as reckonable income for the purposes of the National Childcare Scheme.
- Allocate €50 million for expenditure in 2026 to strengthen the implementation of Equal Start.

Housing

In Ireland, over the course of the last government term (June 2020 to November 2024), child and family homelessness increased by 70% and 87% respectively.

Data shows the impact of housing costs on low-income households, with many households being pulled into poverty due to the burden of housing costs. For instance, while the overall 'at risk of poverty' rate was 11.7% in 2024, it rose to 17.9% after housing costs. Increases in those at risk of poverty are evident across a range of household characteristics and are most pronounced for one-parent families, those who are renting

and those in receipt of social housing support.

To ensure that all children and families have access to adequate housing, Ireland should:

- Ensure that every child living in homeless accommodation has a support worker to help them navigate the challenges they face.
- Invest in homeless prevention services to support families and consider introducing legislative measures that increase tenancy rights and that help to secure long-term tenancies.
- Commission research on the impact of overcrowding on children and families to develop a stronger evidence base on this aspect of inadequate housing and to inform policy.

The European Child Guarantee

Ireland's Child Guarantee National Action Plan reiterates the current services, programmes and support in place across government departments,

including healthy eating and the provision of school meals.

The Department of Social Protection (DSP) funds the School Meals Programme. The objective of the scheme is to provide regular, nutritious food to children to enable them to take full advantage of education. Since 2019, the government has expanded the provision of hot school meals with annual budgetary increases.

The DSP is currently developing a strategy on school meals for the period up to 2030. This aligns with the most recent recommendations by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child that called on Ireland to expand the school meals programme and provide nutrition services.

"Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee has been a positive tool for increased investment in early years and school meals. Ireland now needs to build on this investment, take steps to address homelessness and strengthen its child protection and alternative care services."

European Semester 2025

Ireland's Country Report states that Ireland is making progress in reducing child poverty, with the rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion dropping from 24.3% in 2023 to 20.9% in 2024. The country is on track to meet its 2030 target of reducing poverty by 90,000 people, including 45,000 children.

However, homelessness has doubled in three years, with 15,000+ people in emergency accommodation, including 2,000 families and over 5,000 children. An estimated 92,000 children are among 236,000 in need of social housing.

Access to ECEC remains limited. While subsidies have reduced costs for low-income families, only 22.1% of children under three attend childcare (against the EU average of 37.5%).

In education, Ireland performs above the EU average, but disadvantaged groups (including Travellers, Roma, and children with disabilities) face lower outcomes and higher early school leaving rates.

Healthcare access for children is limited. Free access to doctors stops at age eight, and children with complex needs face fragmented care due to poor coordination across sectors.

Under the Child Guarantee, free hot meals will reach 550,000 children in 3,200 schools by 2025. Over 50% of funding from the European Social Fund Plus (€242 million) supports social inclusion, focusing on children, youth, and migrants.

The 2025 Country-Specific Recommendations call for an increase in the supply of social and affordable housing and the strengthening of social inclusion for disadvantaged groups through targeted outreach and upskilling.

" Country Recommendation

"Italy should provide sustained financial support to schools in the most deprived areas, and deliver programmes and interventions that are robustly supported and rigorously evaluated."

Country Profile 2025

Italy

Child Population:
8,930,478 (2024)
15.14% of total population

15.14

Child Poverty[1]:
2,421,000 (2024)
27.1% (2024)
No change compared to 2023

27.1

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Con I Bambini

Telefono Azzurro

Rosalba Mirci (individual member)

Children's Rights in Italy

In Italy, there are several institutional measures that contribute to increasing knowledge and understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) among policymakers and professionals working with children. These include:

1. Training and professional development courses for educators, social workers, law enforcement officials and judges which are promoted, funded or coordinated by public bodies such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Family Policies. These courses aim to raise awareness of children's rights and integrate the principles of the Convention into daily practices.
2. National plans and strategies for the rights of children and adolescents, which include awareness-raising, training and dissemination of knowledge of the Convention among policymakers and professionals.
3. Training for teachers and future professionals which includes modules on children's rights, often in collaboration with international bodies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), to spread a culture of rights from nursery and primary school.
4. Training networks of professionals and public and private bodies which have been set up to disseminate good practice and share resources on children's rights.
5. Monitoring and evaluation by ISTAT (Italy's national institute of statistics) and other public bodies to monitor and evaluate policy and practice on children's rights.

Anti-child rights movements

Activists and organisations working to protect children's rights may face hostility, lack of support or even threats when they report situations of abuse or injustice.

Child participation

With regard to promoting children's participation, the third sector plays a significant role, with children and young people working alongside adults on shared initiatives. Article 118 of Italy's Constitution recognises that citizens are active co-creators of the public good, and public institutions are obliged to support their participation in civic life.

Child protection systems

Italy has a comprehensive child protection system based on national legislation and regional services. It aims to prevent family separation and promote children's best interests. Efforts incl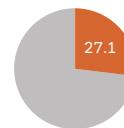ude social assistance programmes, specialised services for child welfare, multidisciplinary teams, and community-based interventions.

Challenges remain in ensuring equal access and quality of care for all children, particularly for Roma children, who often face discrimination, social exclusion, and barriers to education, healthcare, and housing. Children in alternative care may also experience instability and lack of individualised support.

Specific measures have been introduced to address these gaps, such as inclusion strategies for Roma communities and deinstitutionalisation efforts, but implementation is uneven across regions. Telefono Azzurro continues to advocate for culturally sensitive services, stronger early intervention mechanisms, and greater investment in family-based and community-based alternatives.

Although Italy has adopted important legislative measures and child protection protocols, there are still gaps in early detection, inter-agency coordination, and specialised training for professionals working with children.

Violence against children, online and offline, remains a key concern.

Key issues include emotional and physical abuse within the family, sexual exploitation, (cyber) bullying, and domestic violence.

Trafficking and exploitation, particularly of unaccompanied migrant children and children from marginalised groups, are ongoing concerns.

Children with a migrant or ethnic minority background in Italy face systemic challenges:

- Limited access to essential services, such as healthcare, education, and psychological support, often due to linguistic, cultural, or administrative barriers.
- Social exclusion and discrimination, including ethnic profiling and xenophobia.
- Vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, particularly among unaccompanied minors, who are at higher risk of trafficking, labour exploitation, and violence.

Child safety and well-being online

Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and cyberbullying are increasing concerns. National data and evidence from Telefono Azzurro's helplines show a steady rise in cases related to online grooming, non-consensual image sharing, and digital abuse, especially among younger children and adolescents.

There is an increasing need to protect children's digital identity and privacy, especially in relation to social media exposure, 'sharenting'[2], and the growing presence of 'childfluencers'[3]. There is an urgent need for regulatory frameworks to safeguard children's data, and consent in the digital sphere.

Other emerging online risks include:

- The misuse of content generated by artificial intelligence (AI), including deepfakes and child sexual abuse material.
- Online gaming and gambling platforms as spaces for grooming and risky behaviour.
- The impact of social media on mental health, contributing to anxiety, low self-esteem, and body image issues.

Several practices are being developed to strengthen child protection in the digital environment. Telefono Azzurro has integrated helpline and online reporting services, combining psychological support with referral to authorities in cases of online abuse.

There are also digital literacy programmes in schools, to build critical awareness among children and adolescents, collaborations with technology companies to promote safety-by-design features and content moderation tools, and pilot projects using AI to detect harmful content and prevent online grooming.

However, these efforts must be scaled up and integrated into a national strategy. Further investment is needed in early intervention tools, as well as stronger cooperation between public institutions and online platforms.

Children's mental health

The Italian government collects data on children's mental health through national surveys and health monitoring systems. Institutions such as ISTAT and the Ministry of Health conduct regular studies, including the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey, which gathers self-reported data directly from adolescents. Recent findings

---

2 'Sharenting' refers to the practice of parents sharing a large amount of potentially sensitive content about their children on social media, especially when done by an account with a large following base.
3 'Childfluencer' or 'kidfluencer' refers to children who have gained a considerable online following by creating content on social media channels, often linked to advertisement, and in most cases managed and guided by their parents.

show an increase in psychological distress, particularly among adolescent girls.

Data from Telefono Azzurro's helpline confirms a sharp rise in calls related to self-harm, suicidal ideation, and emotional distress, underscoring the urgent need for investment in prevention and early psychological support services.

Children's mental health is supported through the public health system, including child and adolescent neuropsychiatry units, school-based psychologists, and community mental health centres. Additionally, NGOs offer helplines, online counselling, and crisis intervention services.

The social enterprise Con i Bambini has selected 51 projects under the 'Bando BenEssere', using €30 million to promote the well-being of children aged 11-18. The projects will have multidisciplinary teams supporting both community activities and personalised interventions, in collaboration with local services.

To further strengthen support for children's mental health, Italy should:

- Strengthen access to psychological services in schools and communities, especially in underserved or rural areas.
- Invest in early identification and prevention programmes, with multidisciplinary teams trained in child mental health.

Additional children's rights issues

Climate justice and environmental rights are increasingly relevant, as more children express concern about the impact of environmental degradation on their present and future. Their participation in environmental decision-making processes remains limited and should be strengthened.

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

Child poverty

In Italy, child poverty disproportionately affects:

- Children living in large families;
- Children in single-parent households (especially those headed by single mothers);
- Minors residing in southern Italy;
- Children with a migrant background;
- Children with disabilities or special educational needs;
- Children in out-of-home care;
- Children belonging to Roma, Sinti, and Caminanti communities;
- Children living in deprived urban areas or remote rural areas.

These children often face multiple and intersecting forms of exclusion, which exacerbate their disadvantage and limit their life opportunities. They face systemic barriers in accessing essential services such as education, healthcare, housing, and social protection.

The digital divide remains a critical issue, manifesting in both access to digital infrastructure and the development of digital skills, with disproportionate impacts on vulnerable children. The most affected children are those living in southern Italy and in rural areas, children from low-income families, children with a migrant background or with disabilities and children in out-of-home care. The high costs of devices and internet subscriptions limit access for disadvantaged families. There is also a lack of inclusive digital tools and content for children with special needs. The divide is particularly acute where multiple vulnerabilities overlap.

Public investment and social safety nets

The Universal Child Allowance ('Assegno Unico Universale') is a step towards universal coverage, however its redistributive impact remains limited, particularly for

families living in absolute poverty and single-parent households.

While Italy has adopted a Child Guarantee National Action Plan, there is no comprehensive, national strategy for children with a dedicated budget.

Across regions, social services suffer from fragmentation and chronic understaffing.

To invest in children and address child poverty and social exclusion Italy should carry out the following:

1. Integrated reform of support to vulnerable families, to ensure the coordination of income support, housing policies, and local social services, to strengthen the Universal Child Allowance and community-based social services, and give priority access to public housing to families with children.
2. Reform to address educational and geographical disparities through investment in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services in

southern Italy, expansion of full-time schooling with free school meals, support for underperforming schools and upgrading school infrastructure to create inclusive and safe learning environments.

Education

Although the right to education is constitutionally guaranteed in Italy, there are significant barriers to quality education, especially for vulnerable children. Geographic inequalities are evident in the south, where access to ECEC (0–2 years) is very limited (20.2% compared to 35.3% in the north), and full-day schooling in primary education is still rare.

Drop-out rates among children with a migrant background are twice as high as among their Italian peers, often due to a lack of language support.

Children with disabilities frequently do not receive adequate educational support - 39% of support teachers

are not specifically trained and accessible learning environments remain scarce.

Poverty limits access to books, cultural opportunities, and learning resources, especially in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods and remote rural areas.

Italy still lacks a national education plan to address inclusion and geographical disparities.

More positively, there has been a slow but steady growth of services for children aged 0–2, the development of integrated tools to measure educational poverty, and initiatives that foster children's positive relationships at school and support their social and emotional well-being.

Early childhood development

Italy has some positive initiatives that support early childhood development (ECD).

'Born to Read' (*Nati per Leggere*) promotes family reading for children aged 0–6 in over 2,000 Italian municipalities. It involves paediatricians, librarians, educators, and volunteers.

Nidi Gratis ('Free Nurseries') in the Tuscany Region ensures free access to nurseries for families that qualify for the scheme, funded by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and local budgets. Between 2022-2025, the participation in nurseries of children aged 0–3 increased to 58%, reducing inequalities. The programme has been replicated in other regions.

To further strengthen support for ECD Italy should:

• Expand free early childhood services for ages 0–3. Currently, only 37% of children aged 0–3 in Italy attend early childhood education services. Extending the *Nidi Gratis* nationwide would promote equity and work-life balance and generate economic and social returns.

• Ensure a stable and well-trained early years workforce. Currently, over 17% of early years educators are on short-term contracts. Investing in staff training and job continuity improves the quality of education and enables innovative approaches such as home visiting programmes.

In Italy, there is a strong need for disaggregated data on ECD in order to design targeted and inclusive policies. More disaggregated information is essential to understand inequalities in access to services and in service quality.

Housing

Many families with children live in overcrowded conditions, particularly in urban areas and in the south, with severe repercussions on children's psychological well-being, educational outcomes, and health.

The Italian state has several measures to ensure the right to housing for vulnerable families. Social housing, although underfunded, offers rent-controlled accommodation. However, 50% of vulnerable families are unable to access adequate housing due to limited supply. The 'Rent Bonus' (*Bonus Affitto*) and tax relief for subsidised leases support low-income families in covering housing costs. However, 9% of families live in overcrowded conditions, and 30% of families with children cannot afford adequate housing. More than 20% of families spend over 30% of their income on rent.

To ensure all children have secure and adequate housing, Italy should increase the availability of high-quality public housing, reduce rental costs, and prevent evictions.

The European Child Guarantee

"Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by more effective coordination between different institutions and levels of government, to ensure more effective and integrated educational policies and services. Collaboration networks between local, regional and national authorities must be created to share resources, good practices and to respond to children's needs. The capacities of those working with children must be strengthened, through regular training to improve the quality and effectiveness of interventions.

Finally, families and communities must be more involved, to promote a more inclusive and participatory approach."

The *DesTEENazione - Desideri in azione* initiative, approved by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, has allocated €250 million from the National Programme for Inclusion and the Fight against Poverty 2021-2027 to create 60 'adolescent communities' throughout the country. These are spaces with free services for children and young people aged 11-18, designed to promote autonomy, participation, and social inclusion. In the north of Italy, the project contributes to the implementation of the Child Guarantee. The title of the initiative was chosen by a Youth Advisory Board that participates in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the Child Guarantee.

European Semester 2025

Italy's Country Report addresses child poverty, ECEC, and education, but omits deinstitutionalisation, digital inclusion, children's mental health and the impacts of climate change.

In 2024, 27.1% of children in Italy were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, with no change since 2019 and while the European Union (EU) average fell to 24.2%. To mitigate this, Italy is implementing the Child Guarantee. Italy's 2024 Biennial report notes an increase in the take-up of childcare among disadvantaged children, although data gaps remain. The Child Guarantee's implementation is supported by EU cohesion funds and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, notably through the 'Piano Asili Nido', which aims to build new nurseries and increase childcare availability.

ECEC participation for children under three has risen steadily, from 34.5% in 2023 to 39.4% in 2024, now matching the EU average (39.2%) and nearing the Barcelona target (41.7% by 2030). This reflects family support policies and demographic shifts narrowing supply–demand gaps. However, stark regional disparities persist: central and northern regions now exceed the EU's 33% target for children under two, while Campania (13.2 %) and Sicily (13.9%) lag behind.

Early school leaving decreased to 9.8% in 2024, yet remains higher among those with a migrant background.

The 2025 Country Specific Recommendations, specify that continued efforts are needed to keep expanding the provision of quality childcare, taking into account regional disparities.

European Union Funding

EU funding, and the ESF+ in particular, plays an important role in addressing child poverty in Italy, with support for initiatives to improve children's living conditions, promote social inclusion, education and access to basic services. ESF+ funding has supported programmes that have reduced inequalities and strengthened the capacity of local institutions and organisations working with children.

Application and reporting procedures for EU funding can be challenging, especially for organisations that do not have much experience with EU processes. There is a need for simplified and easier funding guidelines and reduced bureaucracy.

The Child Guarantee has contributed to improving the ability of many organisations to access and manage European funds.

Country Recommendation

"Kosovo has made progress in aligning its legal framework with international child rights requirements, but gaps remain. The country urgently needs a stronger and more inclusive social safety net. This requires developing an integrated, adequately funded, and preventive child protection system, expanding early intervention and inclusive education services, and strengthening coordination across sectors, with a particular focus on families living in poverty and marginalised communities."

Country Profile 2025
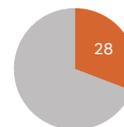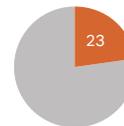
Kosovo

Child Population[1]:
470,617 (2024)
28% of total population

Child Poverty:
23%[2] (2019)

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

CONCORDIA Projekte Sociale

Coalition of NGOs for Child Protection – KOMF

Children's Rights in Kosovo

The general framework for children's rights is broadly satisfactory. Legislation is in place, but there are major challenges with its effective implementation.

There has been progress in capacity building for social service providers. An accredited training programme within the General Council for Social and Family Services was completed, with 24 modules. 312 providers of social services, including 174 from the public sector and 139 from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), have enhanced their capacity to deliver quality social services for vulnerable children and families. There was no specific module on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), but as the Convention is embedded throughout Kosovo's legal framework, starting from the Constitution, all modules were drafted on UNCRC principles.

A training programme for implementing the Law on Child Protection was developed for child protection professionals and other frontline workers. UNICEF developed the Case Management Roundtable Protocol and trained about 50% of social workers in its application, improving the quality, responsiveness and accountability in cases of children experiencing violence, abuse and neglect.

UNICEF has also contributed to improving standards for Child Protection Houses and enhancing foster care services, through improved legislation and capacity building for 103 child protection frontline workers and all foster care parents.

UNICEF directly supported Child Rights Teams in four municipalities, facilitating the implementation and monitoring of their Action Plans for quality child protection services.

In 2023, CONCORDIA Kosovo was certified at Level 1 by Keeping Children Safe. As part of our ongoing commitment to child protection and participation, we take part twice a year in meetings on children's rights, both within the country and abroad.

Child participation

Although Kosovo's legal framework, particularly the Law on Child Protection, encourages the inclusion of children and young people in decision-making processes, practical implementation is still lacking. Many municipalities do not have fully functional youth advisory bodies or child-led structures, and even where these do exist, their influence on local policy remains minimal.

In the Municipality of Prizren, steps have been taken to include young people through local youth action plans and participation in public consultations. However, structured and meaningful child participation is still missing.

At CONCORDIA Kosovo, the Children's Parliament serves as a vital forum for child and youth participation. It brings together elected representatives, giving children and youth the opportunity to express their views, raise concerns, and contribute to decisions that affect their lives. Through regular meetings and consultations, the Children's Parliament promotes active citizenship, leadership skills, and a culture of dialogue.

Child protection systems

The 2020 Law on Child Protection has not yet been fully implemented. Limited financial and human resources have created a child protection system based on reactive, emergency responses, rather than one based on prevention and early intervention. Alternative care services, such as kinship care, foster care and guardianship, should be strengthened.

According to the latest available data, 72% of children in Kosovo experience violent forms of discipline within family environments. Around 500 children are without parental

care. 5% of children in Kosovo are involved in child labour.

Currently, 47 children are in foster care, 20% of whom have disabilities, and 425 children are under kinship care. There is a shortage of professional foster care families, just 17 out of 38 municipalities have foster families. Progress has been made in providing foster care for abandoned babies, but foster care has largely failed for children who have been abused, trafficked, or exposed to violence.

Kosovo does not house children in alternative care in large institutions. However, some children continue to be placed in residential children's houses for long periods. Once a child ages out of alternative care, there are few programmes to ensure their successful transition into adulthood. Even children with disabilities or without parental care do not receive any financial support from the state or help with their transition to independent living. Legislative action, policy development,

capacity for frontline workers and new support services are crucial to improving the situation of these children.

The situation of children with disabilities remains very concerning. Coordinated services and legislation are inadequate due to limited professional understanding of disabilities and strained human and financial resources.

Children in street situations are among the most marginalised and experience severe violations of their rights. Only one in four is currently attending school. They face multiple deprivations, including lack of access to basic services, violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, as well as vulnerabilities to alcohol and substance abuse. A UNICEF study informed the approval of a National Action Plan for the Identification and Treatment of Children in Street Situations.

While institutions in Kosovo have worked to address violence against children through

legislation and policy, violent discipline and other forms of abuse continue to be socially accepted. Cases of violence against children often go unreported, and over 60% of children (70% of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children) aged 1–14 were reported to have experienced physical punishment or psychological aggression. Weak institutional responses to violence against children persist, including a lack of appropriate services to prevent, protect or reintegrate victims and witnesses of violence.

Interventions to tackle school violence and bullying are limited as they are not considered a priority by policymakers, school managers and teachers.

The government has created an inter-institutional working group on the prevention of early marriage in the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Almost all municipalities have set up committees to address this issue, but only eight have approved local action plans. School drop-out and access to quality education and

employment remain key issues affecting these communities.

Child safety and well-being online

Kosovo has adopted a new cybersecurity strategy for 2023-2027, with an accompanying action plan. Legislation on cybercrime is in line with the European Union (EU) acquis. The Directorate for Cybercrimes has continued to tackle child abuse, investigating 12 cases. The legislation on trafficking in human beings is broadly aligned with the relevant EU acquis and its implementation has improved, although ongoing action is needed.

However, the authorities need to develop policies for a safer internet for children, including effective measures to detect and respond to online child sexual abuse.

Children's mental health

Children's mental health services in public institutions are nearly non-existent.

Mental health services are constrained by low staffing, stigma, and institutional barriers, including blocked funding for school psychologists. Mental health remains a taboo topic, and children rarely have someone to talk to about emotional or family challenges.

The Ombudsperson has highlighted the need for systematic early identification, better referral systems, and municipal investment.

Additional children's rights issues

Kosovo has worked to develop a juvenile justice system to better serve children aged 14–18 in conflict with the law. Laws, procedures, institutions and capacities are broadly in place, and pre-trial detention is used only as a last resort. However,

children in the criminal justice system face persistent challenges in accessing specialised services (counselling, education, vocational training, rehabilitation). Additional challenges include the limited capacity and lack of coordination between correction and probation services and the Centres for Social Work, which hinder effective social reintegration and recidivism prevention.

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

Child poverty

The main sources of child poverty data in Kosovo are the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys conducted by UNICEF Kosovo and national poverty figures collected by the Kosovo Agency of Statistics and the World Bank.

According to the Kosovo Statistics Agency, nearly 23% of Kosovo's children lived in poverty and 7% lived in extreme poverty in 2024. Around 80% of Roma children live

in severe material deprivation, far above the national average of 34%. Housing conditions of Roma children are often inadequate, with damp, overcrowded dwellings lacking basic sanitation.

Poverty in Kosovo disproportionately affects women, children from Roma, Ashkali or Egyptian communities, children with disabilities, children with parents with limited education and children in rural communities. One in four children under five lives in the poorest households.

Child malnutrition continues to be a concern with striking inequalities for children in the poorest households and in Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

The digital divide worsens inequality. Despite high internet coverage, Kosovo ranked second to last among 35 education systems in the International Computer and Information Literacy Study. In a world where digital literacy is integral to success, Kosovo's pupils,

particularly those from low-income backgrounds, are being left behind.

UNICEF has continued efforts to advance digital education reform by advocating for the establishment of the first ministerial Department of Technology and Digitalisation. In collaboration with teachers, it has also co-created innovative learning resources and interactive courses.

Digital literacy should be integrated into the curriculum from an early age, as in Finland, where it is incorporated in all subjects from primary education.

By prioritising inclusive education, early childhood development, and digital learning, Kosovo needs to create an education system that ensure no child is left behind.

In addition, the legislation on sponsorship should be revised to make social services, education, and healthcare eligible areas for sponsorship, enabling greater support and investment from

the private sector for essential services that benefit the most vulnerable.

Public investment and social safety nets

Kosovo has taken steps to build a social protection system, but it is not yet comprehensive or adequate to ensure that all children grow up in safe, healthy, and nurturing environments. The system remains reactive, and investments are not enough to alleviate child poverty and reduce inequalities.

The Social Assistance Scheme is targeted at families living in extreme poverty. It is means-tested, with complex eligibility rules (e.g. families must have at least one child under five or a member unable to work[3]), but often excludes families just above the poverty threshold. The benefit amount is low and not indexed to inflation or household needs.

The Child Allowance was introduced in 2022 for children aged 0–16 in eligible families. Children aged 16–18 are excluded. The amount is modest, around €20/month per child.

Social services at the municipal level include limited family support, counselling, child protection, and emergency responses. These often rely on external funding (e.g. EU, UNICEF, donor-funded NGOs) and many municipalities lack trained staff and adequate budgets to implement services effectively.

The key gaps in Kosovo's social safety net are:

- Exclusion of many vulnerable families due to strict eligibility criteria for social assistance.
- Insufficient coverage of children over 16, children with disabilities, and those in informal settlements.
- Inadequate funding and

coordination of social services across municipalities.
- Lack of integration between cash assistance and services like education, healthcare, and child protection.
- Lack of a national system of early intervention or preventive services to support families before crises occur.

To build a functional safety net, the government must expand and simplify child benefits, reform the Social Assistance Scheme, invest in family services at municipal level and improve coverage for marginalised groups.

Education

Education is free and mandatory up to the end of lower secondary school, providing a basic foundation for most children. In some municipalities, and through NGOs like CONCORDIA, school meals, education materials, and psycho-social support improve the

school experience for vulnerable children. However, multiple challenges persist.

Many children from poor families lack basic school materials, appropriate clothing, or transportation to school. Child labour remains an issue as some children work to support their families. Families may prioritise short-term survival over long-term education, especially for older children.

Poor quality of education affects learning, and there is limited investment in teacher training, digital tools, and extracurricular activities. Outdated teaching methods, rote learning, and overcrowded classrooms remain common.

The main barriers to children's access to quality, inclusive education in Kosovo are poverty, discrimination and social exclusion, and inadequate

3 In May 2024, Kosovo launched the pilot phase of a reformed social assistance scheme, which replaces the old requirement (having a child under five) with a poverty-based eligibility system. However, the law itself has not yet been changed.

infrastructure and support. Only about 60% of schools are physically accessible to children with disabilities.

Children from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities face systemic discrimination and lower expectations from schools and society. School segregation, bullying, and lack of cultural sensitivity contribute to high drop-out rates, especially among girls.

Children with disabilities often face exclusion from mainstream education, despite policies on inclusion.

There is a lack of support staff (learning assistants, therapists, psychologists) and teacher training on inclusive practices. Specialised learning materials and assistive technologies are scarce or unavailable.

Traditional gender roles in some communities limit educational aspirations for girls.

Very few schools have psychologists or counsellors to support children facing trauma, anxiety, or behavioural issues.

Early childhood development

CONCORDIA provides inclusive early childhood education in two community-based centres in Prizren and Gjakova, serving some of the most disadvantaged children. The programme is socially inclusive and tailored to the specific needs of vulnerable families. It offers nutritious daily meals, music and art classes to stimulate creativity, psychological counselling, and school readiness support, ensuring smoother transitions to primary education. By combining education, care, and psycho-social support, CONCORDIA's pre-schools offer a model for inclusive early childhood services in Kosovo that are rooted in communities.

As of 2023/2024, only 36.8% of children aged 3-5 are enrolled in early childhood education and care (ECEC). Despite a significant increase in investment in ECEC (in line with priorities outlined in Kosovo's Education Strategy 2022/2026), inequalities are striking, with disproportionately lower enrolment rates for children in Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, children living in poverty and children with disabilities.

The main obstacles to children's participation in quality ECEC are a severe shortage of public pre-school institutions, especially in rural and marginalised urban areas and additional costs (transportation, food, materials), despite the fact that pre-school education is officially free.

Children with disabilities or developmental delays often face exclusion due to lack of support staff, adapted materials, or inclusive teaching strategies.

To strengthen support for early childhood development (ECD) Kosovo should:

• Increase public investment in more pre-school classes, especially in underserved areas.
• Support community-based and flexible ECD models that meet the needs of vulnerable families.
• Remove barriers such as fees, transport costs or lack of documentation that prevent access for poor and minority children.
• Establish cross-sector ECD centres or programmes that combine pre-school education with health checks, nutrition support, parenting education and social services.
• Expand home-visiting programmes, especially in high-risk communities. For example, CONCORDIA provides mobile teams of professionals who offer home-based support services for families in rural areas.

Housing

Many families, particularly from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, live in overcrowded, substandard, or informal housing without access to basic services. The lack of affordable housing options increases the risk of homelessness and forced evictions.

Inadequate housing often intersects with poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education and healthcare.

The government of Kosovo and municipalities have started to address housing needs for vulnerable groups through new social housing projects and targeted support.

To ensure all children and families have secure and dignified homes, Kosovo needs to:

- Increase public investment in social and affordable housing, prioritising families with children, single-parent households, and minority communities.
- Ensure transparent and inclusive housing allocation criteria, with monitoring to prevent discrimination or exclusion.
- Establish multi-sector programmes that link housing assistance with family support, child protection, and employment services.
- Support partnership between

municipalities and NGOs to provide mobile outreach and case management for families living in informal settlements or at risk of eviction.

Enlargement Countries

Kosovo's 2024 Enlargement Package report includes some references to children's rights and early childhood development. The report notes pilot implementation of the new ECEC law and curricula for the 2023–24 academic year, signalling initial steps to improve early childhood education standards. It urges full implementation of the 2022–2026 education strategy, including investment in inclusive pre-schools and support structures for children with disabilities. The report recognises that the legal framework for child rights is broadly aligned with EU standards and acknowledges progress on the Law on the Rights of the Child. However, critical components such as helplines, child protection houses, and a fully integrated protection system are still missing.

The EU should provide targeted technical assistance to strengthen the child protection system in Kosovo.

Through the Child Guarantee and IPA III funding, the EU should prioritise:

- Expansion of accessible, inclusive, and affordable early childhood education for children aged 0–6, particularly in Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities.
- Integration of wrap-around

services (nutrition, healthcare, psycho-social support) within pre-schools.
- Development of community-based ECD models.

CONCORDIA Kosovo is ready to engage in the development and implementation of the Child Guarantee in Kosovo, and would welcome the opportunity to contribute to national action plans, to participate in multi-stakeholder platforms and to serve as a pilot for EU-funded Child Guarantee interventions.

Country Profile 2025

Latvia

Child Population:
356,281 (2024)
19% of total population

Child Poverty[1]:
65,000 (2024)
17.9% (2024)
▼ -2.4 percentage points compared to 2023

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Latvian Child Welfare Network

1 Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2024, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc_peps01n).

Children's Rights in Latvia

Latvia's Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child defines a wide range of professionals who require specialised knowledge of child rights protection. There is required training for all professionals whose work affects the lives of children. The training programme includes the legal framework for child rights protection, the principles of the best interests of the child and non-discrimination, the right to life, survival, and development, and the principle of child participation.

The Latvian Child Welfare Network has developed a course on implementing child participation, and has organised training courses for professionals working with children, in cooperation with the Ministry of Welfare.

Child participation

Children's participation is not sufficiently implemented in Latvia, except in cases where national legislation explicitly requires that a child's opinion be taken into account. There is a need to strengthen efforts to promote the inclusion and voices of vulnerable children in decision-making processes.

Child protection systems

The social protection system in Latvia remains highly bureaucratic and largely inadequate to meet the needs of children and families at risk. One of the more effective services is the family assistance programme, but it is not provided at a sufficient scale.

Currently, the family assistance service is offered to:

- High-risk families with children, including cases involving behavioural disorders, substance abuse, or addiction.
- Persons with mental health disorders.
- Youth transitioning from out-of-home care.

There is evidence that this service is helpful to families and individuals. However, in cases where children have had to be separated from their parents, the shortage of social workers and a lack of support for parents means that fewer children are able to be reunited with their family.
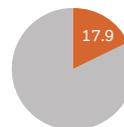
Alarming trends are emerging. In 2024, for 103 children, the custody rights of parents were revoked for the second time by the Orphans' Court. Although the number of children in Latvia is declining, the number of children whose parents have had their custody rights terminated by a court decision has increased.

There is an increasing number of children demonstrating harmful sexual behaviour. Alarmingly, the age of children involved is decreasing, with some reported cases of children as young as four exhibiting such behaviour. Currently, there is no established national framework to address this phenomenon. Social workers, psychologists, and parents are often left without effective tools or guidance to respond appropriately.

The absence of comprehensive sexuality education in schools, including education around consent and boundaries, is contributing to a rise in so-called 'date rapes' among adolescents.

In Latvia, children with a migrant or minority ethnic background are affected by particular issues.

- Detention of child asylum seekers remains one of the most concerning issues. Although, de jure, children are not officially detained, in practice they remain with their families in institutions where freedom of movement is restricted, and access to education, outdoor activities and play is severely limited. While the Border Guard facilitates some form of education (e.g. by bringing teachers to the facility) this does not constitute adequate education. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has clearly stated that children should never be detained under any circumstances, as detention is

never in a child's best interests.

- Children on the move, especially at the Latvia–Belarus border, are affected by an ongoing humanitarian crisis, as potential asylum seekers are pushed back or denied access to asylum procedures. The organisation *Gribu palīdzēt bēgļiem* ('I Want to Help Refugees') has received requests for assistance and testimonies from unaccompanied minors, mostly of Sudanese origin, indicating serious protection gaps.
- Children from different ethnic or national backgrounds do not always receive enough support to enable their successful inclusion in mainstream Latvian schools and to complete their education in the Latvian language. This issue has become particularly concerning for Ukrainian refugee children, who have faced challenges in accessing quality education in Latvia.

Child safety and well-being online

According to a 2024 report by the Children's Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia, the country still lacks clear national guidelines (in line with Article 17(e) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) to protect children from information harmful to their well-being. Violations of Article 50 of the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child, prohibits providing access to harmful content for children in Latvia. However, there are no consequences for those who disregard this, no regulatory act provides for sanctions for such violations. This legal gap endangers children's right to protection from harmful online content and limits parents' ability to ensure their children are not exposed to such content.

Online violations of children's rights are increasing each year in Latvia. Internet monitoring continues to uncover a significant number of users involved in the distribution of child sexual abuse material.

The risk of emotional abuse among peers remains high. Children create fake accounts on social media to publicly shame and humiliate their peers by posting demeaning photos, videos or comments. This form of cyberbullying is widespread and has a severe impact on children's mental health and well-being.

In 2022, the Latvian Safer Internet Centre 'Net-Safe', operated by the Latvian Internet Association in cooperation with the State Police and the State Inspectorate for the Protection of Children's Rights, developed an online self-help tool. This is designed to help children assess the safety of their online network, recognise signs of grooming, understand what actions to take, and find information on where to seek help.

Children's mental health

The Latvian government and research institutions have increasingly prioritised data collection on children's mental health, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. Both quantitative and qualitative data has been collected through large-scale population studies, service usage statistics, and surveys that directly include children's self-reported experiences.

The Prevalence of Emotional and Behavioural Problems in the Adolescent Population of Latvia study analysed data from two cohorts: a representative sample of 4,385 adolescents aged 11, 13, and 15, and a clinical sample of 207 children aged 11–17. The research found girls displaying more emotional difficulties, and boys showing more externalising behaviours.

Research on adolescents was carried out through a multi-year study (2022–2025) assessing the mental health of those aged 13–19. Data from the Children and Adolescents Resource Centres indicate a consistent rise in demand for psychological

support, with over 13,000 clients in 2024 and significant waiting lists, especially for adolescents with mood disorders or self-harm tendencies.

Direct input from children was obtained through a nationwide survey conducted in 2020-2021, involving more than 1,600 young people aged 12–24. The survey revealed that 72% reported mental health difficulties in the previous two weeks. Key reported issues included depression (50.7%), obsessive thoughts (45.8%), irritability (43.3%), loneliness (41.8%), insomnia (40%), and eating disorders (35.6%). Young respondents identified peer interaction, physical activity, and access to counselling as the most effective coping strategies.

Latvia also contributes to the international Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study, providing regular comparative data on adolescents' emotional well-being and life satisfaction and self-reported mental health concerns.

Overall, the available data paints a concerning picture of declining mental health among Latvian children and adolescents, highlighting the urgent need for expanded mental health services and preventive interventions tailored to their needs.

The state funds a limited number of visits to psychiatrists, psychologists, and addiction specialists. However, the mental health of parents significantly affects the emotional and psychological well-being of their children, making it especially important to ensure accessible support services across the country.

Additional children's rights issues

Currently, adopted children are not guaranteed the right to preserve their identity, cultural identity, language, and to be informed about their adoption, to know their family and maintain contact with them, nor is care supervision guaranteed for more than two years after adoption.

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

Child poverty

The children most at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Latvia are children with disabilities and in families where a family member has a disability, children from single-parent families, and children from large families.

Public investment and social safety nets

There is no adequate comprehensive social security safety net for children and their families and the system is fragmented. After municipal reform in 2021, social support and supervision have become less accessible to children.

To invest in children and address child poverty and social exclusion the government should:

1. Ensure the availability of free school meals, food packages, and transportation to and from school.
2. Provide free education (including school supplies, excursions etc.).

Education

The education system in Latvia has undergone several reforms over the years, including the current National Education Development Guidelines 2021-2027, which foresee significant changes to improve the quality and accessibility of education. The School 2030 project was initially seen as a major driver for introducing new teaching standards and methodologies. However, the planned changes have been slow, sometimes controversial, and have not always met their goals.

A particularly pressing problem is the closure of small rural schools, linked to demographic challenges in Latvia, including population decline in rural areas and ongoing urbanisation, with a large portion of the population concentrated in or near the capital city, Riga.

School closures mean children must travel longer distances to attend the nearest school, which can cause additional fatigue and mental health issues. Many children are forced to stay in boarding schools due to the distances involved. It is also more difficult for children to participate in extracurricular activities.

Poverty, lack of teaching materials, and a shortage of support staff in all schools are ongoing challenges.

In the 2024/2025 academic year, there were 20,800 pupils with special needs in mainstream schools in Latvia, and this number continues to grow. As a result, schools must ensure quality education for all children, including those with special needs.

Inclusive education will be further promoted through the _School in the Community_ project, funding for which is being sought in the state budget.

Some children have been denied access to education due to regulations that give schools the right to require children to study remotely at home, due to their behaviour. This often means that children have to be taught at home mostly by their parents. This affects vulnerable children in particular, such as those in alternative care, children with special needs, and children from socially disadvantaged families. Data from a survey of educational institutions shows that in the 2024 academic year, 17.7% of those surveyed had children in remote learning.

Early childhood development

Several parental support programmes exist in Latvia, although coverage is uneven. At Riga Maternity Hospital, the When a Baby is Born programme supports parents of newborns. Some municipalities offer the Child's Guardian Angel programme for parents with low parenting skills (children aged 0–2), while the Emotional

Education of the Child (BEA) programme is available to parents of children aged 0–7 in certain regions. New initiatives are being developed, but access remains largely confined to larger cities, leaving rural families underserved.

Four recommendations for improving early childhood development (ECD) support services are:

1. Autism diagnosis and treatment: waiting lists for diagnosis exceed one year, preventing timely intervention for children under four. Services must be expanded to ensure early support.
2. Addiction treatment for mothers: more comprehensive services, particularly post-treatment rehabilitation, are needed to prevent relapses and support long-term recovery.
3. Maternal and infant health: a pilot introducing midwife home visits during pregnancy and postpartum is promising. Nationwide rollout, along with

systematic early childhood health screening, is essential.
4. Integrated support: a one-stop agency should be established to provide families with information on available services, alongside a unified preventive system for early detection of risks to children's and parents' health.

With regard to early childhood education and care (ECEC), shortages of places in municipal pre-schools push families toward private options requiring co-payments. Municipal support is uneven, and pre-schools lack sufficient specialists (speech therapists, psychologists, teaching assistants) to ensure inclusive learning environments.

Housing

Social housing is available in Latvia, but only in certain locations. Families with low incomes and those in need receive support to cover housing costs.

To ensure that children and families have adequate housing and a decent standard of living Latvia needs to:

- Define minimum quality standards for housing and ensure that these are implemented by municipalities.
- Ensure the availability of loans and guarantees for real estate development that supports the construction of more affordable housing in the regions.

The European Child Guarantee

Latvia has not yet submitted its biennial report on the Child Guarantee. The Child Guarantee is still not well understood by policymakers , and there is little information on its national plan or what impact it can have.

"Overall, in Latvia, the Child Guarantee has so far been little more than a paper exercise. A genuine national plan is urgently needed — one that clearly defines the target groups of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, sets out concrete activities, and establishes effective monitoring mechanisms to ensure implementation."

European Semester 2025

Latvia's Country Report addresses child poverty, ECEC, education, healthcare and housing. In Latvia, the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) is rising, although the AROPE rate for children was 17.9% in 2024, well below the European Union (EU) average of 24.2%, and slightly down from 18.7% in 2019.

Children at risk face increased unmet medical needs and are more likely to live in overcrowded housing.

A 2023 national action plan aims to implement the European Child Guarantee yet lacks targeted measures and a 2030 poverty reduction goal.

ECEC enrolment from three to school age reached 96.1% in 2024, exceeding the EU 2030 target, but enrolment for children under three dropped to 24.9%, far below the EU average of 39.2% and the Barcelona target

of 41%, due to place shortages in public facilities, especially near Riga. Latvia's 2021–2027 strategy focuses on improving ECEC access and has introduced competence-based learning in pre-schools since 2019.

In basic education, Latvia performs well - underachievement in 2022 was 22.2% in maths and 22.8% in reading, below EU averages. Latvia also has one of the smallest socio-economic gaps in learning outcomes, but geographical and school-type disparities remain significant.

This Country-Specific Recommendations do not explicitly mention children, but ask Latvia to strengthen social protection to reduce inequality, and to increase the availability and quality of social and affordable energy-efficient housing.

Country Recommendation

"Luxembourg should take action to combat all forms of violence against children, whether psychological, physical, economic, institutional, structural, or whether it be abuse or neglect."

Child Population:
126,833 (2024)
18.9% of total population

Child Poverty[1]:
33,000 (2024)
25.6% (2024)
▼ -0.5 percentage points compared to 2022

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Ombudsman fir Kanner a Jugendlecher in Luxembourgish - The Ombudsman for Children and Youth (OKAJU)

1 Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2024, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc_peps01n).

Children's Rights in Luxembourg

The 2020 Act establishing Luxembourg's Ombudsman for Children and Youth (OKAJU) includes the Ombudsman's remit to advise on how to implement children's rights, raise children's awareness of their rights, and increase public awareness of children's rights. Every year, OKAJU offers training and conferences for professionals.

In the coming years, it will be necessary to strengthen training and skills on children's rights, particularly in the areas of justice, health and immigration.

Since 2024, OKAJU is a partner in the INTERREG Capaciti project, and in 2028 advice, training, educational games, and interactive stories will be available for practitioners, families, and children themselves.

Discussion groups have been set up with the OKAJU Young Advisors, providing children with the opportunity to share their views on OKAJU's work.

Anti-child rights movements

OKAJU is concerned about a public petition aimed at excluding Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, and Asexual+ (LGBTIQA+) related topics from children's education, as this runs counter to the full enjoyment of children's rights. Educational content should present people and relationship models as they exist in society, including LGBTIQA+ people, couples and families, just as it is necessary to provide sex education that is inclusive and respectful of this diversity. A large majority of members of parliament agreed that LGBTIQA+ issues should not be excluded from education, while ensuring that education is age-appropriate.

OKAJU encourages more efforts to promote emotional and sexual health and sexuality education from the earliest age, as this is crucial for children's development and their ability to protect and defend themselves against discrimination and abuse.

Child participation

Children from vulnerable backgrounds do not have real opportunities to express their opinions in public decision-making. Although children's rights are protected in legislation, a lack of knowledge among children and young people about their specific rights has been noted.

In October 2024, OKAJU, UNICEF and the Mediation Centre published a discussion paper, recommending an analysis of the effectiveness of existing child participation mechanisms in Luxembourg. Children often encounter barriers in exercising their rights due to procedures that are poorly adapted to their needs. The paper sets forth the rights of children in the context of procedures for child victims of violence, for children in conflict with the law, for children seeking international protection, and in existing procedures within class councils, disciplinary boards and other processes that affect children. The authors noted that children and adolescents are often unable to claim their rights without assistance, and procedures can be complex, slow, and intimidating for them.

In 2024, the Chamber of Deputies adopted a motion calling on the government to compile an inventory and analysis of all provisions related to circumstances in which a minor comes into contact with the police or judicial authorities, and to provide appropriate guidelines for child-friendly and accessible information.

Child protection systems

The majority of children in alternative care are placed in institutional care rather than in foster families. OKAJU is also concerned about cases of newborn babies placed in hospital institutions and continues to suggest alternatives.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child points to

the need for external monitoring mechanisms and periodic reviews of children's placements in families or institutions, and for accessible mechanisms for reporting cases of abuse. The Committee also notes the absence of an explicit prohibition of corporal punishment in all settings, and recommends the development of a comprehensive national strategy to prevent and respond to all forms of violence against children.

A case of child sexual abuse sparked a debate on safeguarding policies in the fields of culture, sport, and leisure, and OKAJU has engaged with the relevant ministers and with sports, cultural and leisure institutions.

On average, 20% of complaints handled by OKAJU concern children in migration and failures in international protection. In 2022 and 2024, OKAJU continued to highlight violations of children's rights in the context of migration. Reception facilities are constantly overcrowded and do not meet children's needs. The support and protection of migrant children needs to be improved to take into account their traumatic experiences and vulnerabilities.

Child safety and well-being online

The 2024 OKAJU annual report focused on protecting children from violence and other harm in the digital environment, noting the absence of a legal and political framework for protecting children online.

According to *BEE SECURE* - a government initiative operated by the National Youth Service and the 'Kannerjugendtelefon' (the helpline for children), in partnership with Luxembourg House of Cybersecurity, the Luxembourg Police, and the Public Prosecutor's Office - 1 in 5 children aged 12-16 is affected by cyberbullying. The *BEE SECURE* service is an important initiative providing prevention and assistance via a helpline and a hotline 'stopline' where one can report illegal content (e.g. sexual abuse, racism, discrimination, terrorism).

The *BEE SECURE* Radar 2024 annual report shows that around a third (31%) of teenagers in Luxembourg are 'sometimes' exposed to pornographic content. OKAJU is also concerned about the link between the exposure of minors to pornography and the increase in sexual violence between minors.

Since February 2024, the Digital Services Act (DSA) is applicable in Luxembourg. However, it has limitations as it only applies to illegal content and is based on a posteriori moderation, which does not provide exhaustive protection for children.

The main challenge for Luxembourg is to develop co-regulation, self-regulation and citizens' education, including children's education on online safety.

There has been increasing exposure to age-inappropriate content on social networks, particularly from influencers. Controlling the use of content depicting children is difficult and there is also a lack of parental awareness of the risks.

Since June 2025, a regulation prohibits the use of digital devices in the country's secondary schools for children and teachers, unless with the teacher's permission and for educational or professional purposes.

The Independent Audiovisual Authority of Luxembourg also provides education and tools for parents and others to stay safe online.

OKAJU recommends that Luxembourg ensures an ambitious implementation of the DSA regulation, updates current legislation on digital media and sets minimum legal ages for certain uses.

Children's mental health

There have been recent studies on children's mental health. A survey is carried out every four years on pupils aged 11-18.

A 2022 study showed that teenagers' mental health and well-being declined compared to 2018, that girls are worse off than boys and that adolescents' mental health and well-being decrease with age. Children living in poverty are more likely to suffer from mental ill-health.

In March 2025, the Minister for Health revealed that between 2019 and 2024 the number of antidepressant prescriptions for children aged 6-17 increased by almost 50%.

The National Mental Health Plan 2024-2028 states that measures concerning the mental health of children and young people should be given priority in the implementation timetable.

The Mental Health League provides services to support children's mental health.

To improve support for children's mental health in Luxembourg, OKAJU recommends:

- Monitoring to gather comprehensive data which can be used for targeted policies.
- The creation of a psycho-social support service in primary education, similar to what is already available in secondary school.
- The promotion of early detection, with a broader school health approach that incorporates mental health and well-being.

Additional children's rights issues

Luxembourg has not reformed its youth protection system since 1992, despite ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993. The current, long-awaited reform introduces three new developments: a criminal law for minors (Bill 7991); provisions for minors who are victims and witnesses of crimes (Bill 7992); and a revision of assistance, support and protection for minors, young people and families (Bill 7994).

While OKAJU welcomes some reforms, others raise significant concerns.

For Bill 7991, concerns include the low age of criminal responsibility (13), a risk of punitive approaches, deprivation of liberty in adult facilities, weak safeguards, and limited child participation.

For Bill 7992, there are concerns regarding hearings by non-specialised officers, insufficient focus on the child's best interests, and the lack of a Barnahus[2] model.

For Bill 7994 concerns include an under-resourced national office for children, the lack of independent appeals, and weak child participation.

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

Child poverty

In Luxembourg, almost a quarter of children are exposed to the risk of poverty, according to the Work and Social Cohesion report published in 2024. The situation is particularly critical for single-parent families, 44% of whom live below the poverty line.

---

2 Barnahus is a place where a multidisciplinary and inter-agency team of law enforcement, criminal justice, child protection services, and medical and mental health workers cooperate to provide streamlined child protective services and child-friendly justice.

One child in four, around 30,000 children, lives below the poverty line. 15% remain in a situation of persistent poverty, and 8% live in conditions of material deprivation. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, STATEC, Luxembourg has the fifth-highest child poverty rate in Europe.

Children are considered poor when they grow up in a household with an income lower than 60% of the median income. For the majority of children, this means growing up without sufficient food, clothing or access to education.

The children who are particularly at risk of poverty are:

• Children from disadvantaged backgrounds;
• Children and young people from migrant families living in shelters;
• Children living in severely deprived housing conditions;
• Children placed in institutions;
• Children in precarious family situations;
• Children with disabilities.

Some children face educational disadvantages due to a lack of access to digital media and the internet.

Public investment and social safety nets

Like UNICEF, OKAJU recommends simplifying access to existing financial aid by setting up a social counter, a one-stop point/social services desk.

Access to healthcare remains difficult for certain children. Procedures need to be clarified to facilitate equitable access to healthcare and ensure access to social benefits. For example, almost 400 children and young people[3] are not insured. It is highly likely that the number of children who could benefit from healthcare is higher.

In its 2024 annual report, OKAJU said Luxembourg needs to consider how social assistance can better reach families in need. Issues that need to be addressed include access to information about the various forms of assistance available, simplified procedures, and the importance of not stigmatising or excluding certain populations. The eligibility criteria for certain types of assistance should be fundamentally reviewed. Consideration should also be given to additional assistance that may be necessary to better combat child poverty.

---

3 March 2024 figures

Education

At the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year, OKAJU deplored the worrying increase in critical discourse about inclusive education, following a public campaign launched by the Teachers' Union called 'Stop Inclusion – it has its limits', which constitutes a huge threat to the inclusion of children with disabilities. OKAJU has reiterated that the inclusion of pupils with disabilities cannot be called into question. Inclusive education is a fundamental right for all children.

OKAJU stresses the importance of making the necessary resources available to guarantee the right to education for all children, regardless of their specific educational needs. With the deadline for the national implementation plan for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, OKAJU calls for more dialogue between all stakeholders to identify and resolve obstacles to inclusion, whether at local, regional or national level.

OKAJU is drafting a recommendation to foster and ensure inclusive education, through dialogue with the various stakeholders, trying to identify and address barriers to inclusion. Providing the necessary resources to guarantee the right to education for all children is a necessity, regardless of their educational needs.

Early childhood development

Luxembourg has a specific health policy for infants, which includes positive incentives (e.g. allowances, free healthcare) for medical check-ups and preventive examinations up to a child's 4th birthday. Current support for children's health in their first 1,000 days should be extended until a child reaches the age of three.

In many contexts and situations, infants and very young children also need appropriate professional care and support if their mental health has been compromised. Mental health is rarely explored in children's early years, but early detection of psychological distress in very young children is possible with age-appropriate assessment tools.

To strengthen support for early childhood development (ECD), Luxembourg should:

- Promote mental health among all children from an early age.
- Raise awareness of the risks of all forms of violence, in particular so-called 'shaken baby syndrome', with appropriate education.
- Raise awareness of the needs of infants and their relationship with their parents and other caregivers.

There is also a need for more disaggregated data on ECD in Luxembourg.

The main obstacles to children's participation in quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Luxembourg are a lack of awareness of existing services, language barriers and mistrust or fears.

Housing

Luxembourg is known for a property market that makes access to housing difficult. Although the state offers a wide range of financial assistance, it is insufficient for a growing number of families.

To address these challenges, a draft law proposes adding single parenthood as a new criterion in the allocation of affordable rented housing. This aims to prioritise single-parent families, recognising the heightened risk of poverty and deprivation which they face.

To ensure that all children have access to adequate housing, OKAJU recommends:

- Ending, without delay, inadequate living conditions for all migrants in first reception facilities that fail to meet children's rights and needs.
- Increasing the number of emergency accommodation units in municipalities.

The European Child Guarantee

As part of the Child Guarantee implementation, systematic screening programmes have been strengthened with new tools for diagnosing learning disabilities in schools. These tests enable a more accurate diagnosis of specific learning difficulties.

The Child Participation Platform was launched in March 2025 and initiatives will be undertaken specifically in relation to the Child Guarantee.

"Overall the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by a better mobilisation of European funds. In Luxembourg, anti-poverty policies and measures have to be improved in order to strengthen its implementation."

European Semester 2025

Luxembourg's Country Report addresses child poverty, ECEC, and language barriers in education. The rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion is rising, reaching 25.6% in 2024, above the EU average of 24.2% and up from 23.3% in 2015. Single-parent households are particularly affected. Despite a national target to reduce the number of children at risk by 1,000 from a 2019 baseline of 28,000, the number rose to 33,000 in 2024.

Luxembourg is implementing the Child Guarantee with support from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), aiming to assist at least 3,000 children.

While ECEC participation is high for children under three (60%), it falls slightly below the EU average for older children (90.5% vs 93.3%). Broader education outcomes remain tied to socio-economic and linguistic factors, with Luxembourg showing the largest achievement gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils. Only 32.2% of rural children live near a primary school (vs 83.8% in urban areas), and systemic issues —such as the absence of a national quality framework and school evaluation — risk deepening inequalities. Curriculum reforms target skills-based and digital learning but do not address existing structural disparities.

The 2025 Country Specific Recommendations call for a national school quality framework and the establishment of an external school evaluation system, and highlight the need to adapt teaching to the needs of disadvantaged pupils and those from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

European Union Funding

The KE3 project in Wiltz was funded up to 40% by the ESF+. Wiltz is a socially diverse community where 48.11% of the population is of foreign nationality. This creates greater needs in terms of inclusion, support for families and access to services for children and those involved in education. The project supports children, parents and professionals in their daily lives via a local team. It offers initial support in case of need, facilitates inclusion and directs people to further help available.

Country Recommendation

"Malta adheres to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the state upholds children's rights through appropriate legislation and policy initiatives. Yet, it would be truly impactful if, as a nation, we could collaborate more strategically to build a holistic and genuinely child-friendly society."

Country Profile 2025

Malta

Child Population:
82,897 (2024)
14.7% of total population

14.7

Child Poverty[1]:
21,000 (2024)
25.9% (2024)
▲ +0.7 percentage points compared to 2022

25.9

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society

1 Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2024, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc_peps01n).

Children's Rights in Malta

The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society delivers specialised training to educators, psycho-social professionals, mentors, facilitators, and volunteers involved in Malta's Children's Local Councils. These sessions focus on children's rights, participation, and safeguarding, with the aim of building capacity for meaningful child engagement in local governance structures.

While Malta has implemented several initiatives to promote children's rights, there is still a significant gap in institutional infrastructure.

At present, The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society is a licensed organisation with a dedicated focus on children, children's rights, and child well-being, with accredited courses for training on child participation, safeguarding, and children's online safety.

Anti-child rights movements

In Malta, the relevant authorities demonstrate a commitment to upholding and protecting the work of children's rights defenders. Nonetheless, exclusionary narratives and attitudes persist in some sectors of society, and these can hinder efforts toward inclusive and comprehensive child rights advocacy.

Child participation

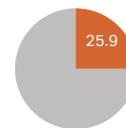Malta has made significant progress in creating inclusive environments where children, particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds, can express their views and influence decision-making. Several mechanisms support child participation, including the Empowering Children Platform, which enables children to share feedback through voice recordings, artwork, and text.

The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society promotes participation through events, school outreach, and focus groups, while the Office of the Commissioner for Children organises participatory initiatives that amplify children's voices in public discourse. Structured dialogue platforms, such as roundtables, ensure children's perspectives are regularly communicated to national authorities, ministers, and government officials.

Children's Local Councils across Malta and Gozo also provide opportunities for young people to be heard, with their views increasingly shaping local initiatives and national policy development. The Children's Policy Framework 2024-2030 further embeds a whole-of-government approach to child participation across all policy areas affecting children's lives. For example, over a hundred children gathered at Esplora Interactive Science Centre for 'Il-Ħolma għat-Tfal għal Viżjoni Malta 2050' — a special event held as part of the national Malta Vision 2050 consultation process. The event provided a creative and inclusive platform for children to share their ideas and hopes for the Malta they would like to grow up in.

Continued efforts are needed to strengthen feedback mechanisms and to embed child-led approaches not only in consultation events but also within key services such as child protection, education, and health.

Child protection systems

Audits and research consistently highlight systemic weaknesses in Malta's child protection system, including understaffing, delays in protective interventions, limited placement options, fragmented data systems, and insufficient oversight of care facilities. Additional concerns involve bureaucratic court proceedings and inconsistent child participation in judicial processes. The National Audit Office has found persistent shortages in alternative placements and delays in responding to risk, leaving some children in unsafe environments.

Child abuse remains a serious concern, and children from migrant and minority ethnic backgrounds face additional risks. Language barriers hinder school integration and inclusion, while insecurity around displacement or deportation undermines their well-being. Families with precarious legal status are especially vulnerable: some face the risk of forced return, while children of parents on work permits may face deportation if their parents lose employment, regardless of the child's residence history or level of integration in Malta.

The Malta Trust Foundation's *Blossom Project* provides essential psycho-social support and counselling services to families navigating periods of crisis. This operates in close collaboration with psycho-social teams in schools, ensuring that families receive a holistic and coordinated response. Through this partnership, the initiative reinforces community-based networks of care, promotes child well-being, and fosters an environment where families feel supported, empowered, and better equipped to overcome adversity.

Malta's child protection system requires strengthening through greater staff capacity, integrated data systems across care and education, expanded foster and kinship care, continuous monitoring of care settings, and child-centred court procedures.

Child safety and well-being online

The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society promotes children's rights online through the *P.O.P. - Up* project, which builds on national and international best practice to enhance online protection and well-being while upholding privacy, informed access, and supportive parental involvement.

A 2023 national survey of 387 pupils aged 7–15 found that 32% received inappropriate online messages and 15% experienced online abuse, including content encouraging self-harm. Younger children (7–10) were also exposed to risks, with 9% chatting with strangers, 46% accessing the internet unsupervised, and many reporting excessive screen time. The Foundation partnered with the United Nations International Telecommunications Union to train over 115 psycho-social professionals across education, and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Police Cybercrime Unit, providing specialised training to 26 officers.

Malta has introduced policies and strategies to protect children online, including compliance with the European Union (EU) Digital Services Act on content moderation and the National Cybersecurity Strategy (2023–2026). Emerging challenges include artificial intelligence (AI), youth exposure to online gambling, and oversight of 'sharenting'[2] and 'child influencers'[3]. Embedding digital rights education on privacy, consent, and media literacy in the national curriculum could help address these gaps. Looking ahead, a national digital well-being dashboard, building on *P.O.P-UP*'s data initiatives, would enable real-time monitoring of risks such as cyberbullying, screen time, and mental health impacts, supporting more proactive policy and service responses.

Children's mental health

Child and adolescent mental health services in Malta are primarily delivered through Mater

---

2 'Sharenting' refers to the practice of parents sharing a large amount of potentially sensitive content about their children on social media, especially when done by an account with a large following base.
3 Refers to children who have gained a considerable online following by creating content on social media channels, often linked to advertisement, and in most cases managed and guided by their parents.

Dei Hospital, and services are supported by mental health nurses and psychologists in healthcare centres who provide early intervention for emerging needs. Additional support is offered by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or government agencies, which provide counselling, family support and therapeutic programmes. However, significant gaps include the lack of child-focused Mental Health First Aid training and limited access to professional support services in schools, leaving children's emotional well-being unaddressed.

The Wellbeing Index Project examined the well-being of children aged 7-15. Data was collected through questionnaires completed by 364 children, covering family relationships, school life, social interactions, health, and overall well-being. Most participants reported high levels of well-being and satisfaction. However, areas of concern included limited participation in family decisions, social connection challenges, academic pressure, peer bullying, inadequate play spaces, neighbourhood pollution, and physical health complaints. Age and gender differences emerged: older children reported lower satisfaction, boys experienced more bullying, and adolescent girls reported more negative emotions. Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, migrant families, and those with disabilities reported lower well-being compared to their peers.

Additional children's rights issues

There are no dedicated resources or centres to provide appropriate interventions or support to help children with challenging behaviour reintegrate into society. Instead, they face punitive conditions and neglect.

Malta also lacks mechanisms to register stateless children, leaving their status and needs unrecognised. Malta does not have laws to register stateless children if they are not part of adoption procedures. Malta has not ratified the 1961 United Nations Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

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

Child poverty

In 2024, 25.9% of children in Malta were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE), the highest level since 2017 and above the EU average of 24.2%. The most affected groups are children in single-parent households (41.6% below the poverty line), children in large families, those in materially deprived households (5.6% in severe deprivation), and migrant and asylum-seeking children, who face barriers to healthcare, housing, education, and social services, compounded by language and documentation challenges.

To address inequality, Malta has launched digital inclusion measures. The Digital Decade Strategic Roadmap 2023–2030 prioritises digital skills for vulnerable groups, while the

Digital Education Strategy 2024–2030 focuses on equality and inclusion. The Malta Remote Learning Project provides devices and internet to disadvantaged migrant families, and national initiatives also ensure equitable digital access for persons with disabilities.

Public investment and social safety nets

Malta provides a range of social security benefits for children and families. Despite these, one in four children remains at risk of poverty or social exclusion. In 2025, the government launched the Social Plan for the Family 2025–2030, built around four priorities: social justice (equitable access to opportunities); healthy relationships (strengthening family and community ties); empowerment (through knowledge, education, and life skills); and fertility support (addressing demographic sustainability). These measures aim to reinforce social protection and ensure no child is left behind.

Malta also offers free universal childcare and after-school clubs, reducing families' financial pressures and promoting children's educational and social inclusion.

To strengthen support further, Malta should enhance income support to reflect real cost-of-living increases, provide targeted aid to single-parent families, large households, and precarious workers, and introduce automatic enrolment in benefits to cut bureaucracy and improve access.

Education

While education in Malta is universally accessible, hidden costs continue to limit full and equitable access for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. These include the cost of learning materials, internet access, extracurricular support, and the expectation of parental involvement in homework.

There are persistent concerns regarding inclusive education.

Some children are excluded from educational settings and kept at home for extended periods, raising questions about the inclusivity and responsiveness of the education system. To ensure that education is truly accessible to all, government policies must go beyond free tuition and address invisible costs by targeting support for all families.

Early childhood development

Two notable early childhood development (ECD) initiatives demonstrate effective interventions in Malta. The Early Intervention Service, a government-led and family-centred programme, supports children from birth to age five who show signs of developmental delays or disabilities. It coordinates health and education professionals to provide developmental screening, home visits, therapy, and tailored support plans. Services are delivered across homes, childcare centres, and schools, with active parental

involvement. Complementing this, the [Early Childhood Development Association of Malta](#) promotes a rights-based approach to early education and has significantly shaped early years education through professional development, research, and advocacy.

Malta has expanded accessible childcare for children under the age of three, but limited research exists on its developmental impact. Current debate emphasises the need to balance access with quality, and exploring alternatives like Nordic-style parental leave, which supports bonding and emotional development. Key challenges include the lack of mandatory professional development for educators and restrictions on free childcare, which exclude parents on parental leave. Childcare centres decide admissions individually, creating risks for equitable access.

Housing

Despite Malta's high rate of home ownership, many families with children face significant difficulties securing adequate housing due to rising rental costs, overcrowding, and limited affordable options. 2.4% of the population lives in overcrowded conditions, with low-income families most affected.

The Housing Benefit Scheme assists low- to middle-income families by subsidising private rental costs, helping households with children to maintain affordable rents. The Housing Authority is expanding social housing stock and collaborating with private landlords to broaden housing access. Protections for tenants include safeguards against unjust eviction and fair lease terms.

To address ongoing challenges, Malta should expand access to affordable housing, with more investment in social housing, prioritising low- and middle-income families with children, and provide rent subsidies to vulnerable households.

The European Child Guarantee

The Child Guarantee in Malta supports children and families through free and expanded services, including early childhood education and care (ECEC) services ([51% of children under three attend childcare](#)), as well as inclusive education, school breakfast clubs, healthcare, mental health services, housing support, and child allowances. These measures promote equal opportunities for vulnerable families while strengthening Malta's economy.

"For the Child Guarantee to be truly effective, stronger political will, adequate investment, and courageous leadership are needed. As highlighted by H.E. Marie Louise Coleiro Preca, children's rights must move beyond rhetoric into concrete policies, sustainable funding, and inclusive action. Alongside EU child rights frameworks, its success depends on prioritising peace, empathy, and equity so every child in Europe can grow up safely and with dignity."

European Semester 2025

Malta's Country Report highlights pressing challenges in child poverty, ECEC, education, and child health. Child poverty is on the increase, with key risk factors including low parental education (58.3%), single-parent households (46.2%), and non-Maltese citizenship (25.4%). While Malta's Child Guarantee National Action Plan sets out 115 measures, social spending remains low — 6.3% on families and 1.1% on housing.

In ECEC, formal childcare participation for children under three rose from 19.1% in 2015 to 51% in 2023, but then dropped to 44.1% in 2024. Education outcomes remain a concern, with Malta struggling with low basic skills among 15-year-olds. Through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) efforts focus on reducing early school leaving, strengthening vocational education and training, developing inclusive learning pathways for children with special needs, and advancing digital tools in education.

Children's well-being is also affected by environmental constraints, including air and noise pollution, as well as high car density, which reduces open spaces and limits independence for vulnerable groups. The 2025 Country-Specific Recommendations recognise the shortage of teaching staff, which harms educational outcomes, and urge Malta to strengthen inclusive education and training.

European Union Funding

ESF+ funding is helping to promote social inclusion for children, people with disabilities, and non-EU nationals.

Despite its potential, the Child Guarantee has yet to significantly improve access to EU funding due to procedural complexities and limited support, which hinder child-centred initiatives in Malta. Targeted EU support could address these barriers by providing tailored technical assistance, simplifying funding access, strengthening national monitoring and research systems, and offering specialised training and guidance to local councils, NGOs, and educators.

Given Malta's unique context, more accessible tools and resources are essential to guarantee that all children can enjoy equal opportunities for safety, inclusion, and well-being.

Moldova

" Country Recommendation

"The Republic of Moldova should develop and implement dedicated policies and programmes that encourage the involvement of children and their rights defenders in decision-making processes, while ensuring they have the necessary protection and access to resources to exercise their rights safely."

Child Population:
508,664 (2024)
21% of total population

Child Poverty[1]:
33.6% (2024)
▲ +3.4 percentage points compared to 2023

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

CONCORDIA Moldova

1 The situation of children in the Republic of Moldova in 2024

Children's Rights in Moldova

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP), in collaboration with strategic partners, has developed several training programmes on children's rights. These include training for multidisciplinary teams to enhance responses to cases of violence against children (over 6,000 specialists from across the country, including child rights protection specialists, will be trained by the end of 2025). Training manuals for educators have also been developed, as part of efforts to prevent child sexual abuse.

In partnership with the MLSP, CONCORDIA Moldova is also providing courses for those working in social services, contributing to the training of specialists in the field of child protection.

The First National Conference of Child Rights Protection Specialists was held in January 2025, bringing together over 200 professionals, decision-makers, and civil society representatives to discuss the challenges and future of the profession.

Anti-child rights movements

Law No. 370 on children's rights came into force in 2023, and included an explicit provision on children's rights defenders. The main challenges are the lack of practical guidelines and effective enforcement mechanisms of the legislation.
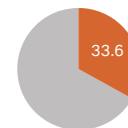
Child participation

In Moldova, there are initiatives to involve children in decision-making, but the participation of those from vulnerable backgrounds remains limited. The main obstacles are:

- Lack of information about the right to participate and how it can be exercised.
- Marginalisation of children with disabilities, from minorities, or those in the social protection system.
- Existing mechanisms (e.g. student councils, public hearings) which are not adapted to specific needs (e.g. language barriers, digital access, mobility).
- Children's opinions are not always taken into account, their participation is often symbolic.

To enable children's meaningful participation, CONCORDIA Moldova recommends the following:

- The development of school and extracurricular programmes on children's rights and how they can influence public decisions, in accessible language and inclusive formats.
- The creation of councils or advocacy groups with the active participation of vulnerable children, supported logistically (with transport, translation, assistance).
- Training for adults who work with children, to ensure they respect children's opinions and take their proposals seriously.
- Independent mechanisms to monitor how children's opinions are reflected in local and national policies.
- The involvement of non-governmental organisations that can facilitate consultation sessions, workshops and campaigns. For example, CONCORDIA Moldova created the Children's Parliament and Youth Council to increase the participation of young people from vulnerable backgrounds.

Child protection systems

There has been some progress in Moldova's child protection system.

There has been a reduction in the number of children in institutions - from 12,000 in 2007 to just 458 in 2024 - as well as positive developments in alternative care, such as an increase in the number of day centres and more foster families for the reintegration of vulnerable children. CONCORDIA Moldova has created a model day centre that prevents family separation, school drop-out, and domestic violence. There is also a moratorium on placing children under three in residential institutions.

However, challenges remain. There is limited access to services for vulnerable groups. Many children with disabilities remain in institutions with inadequate living conditions. There is also a need for training and support for foster families to address the needs of these children.

There is a need to expand alternative services, including alternative childcare services at a parent's workplace, individualised childcare services (provided at the child's home/residence), and family-type childcare services (provided at the caregiver's home/residence).

By 2025, CONCORDIA Moldova's 'Parents' School' aims to support parents to improve parenting skills, in 11 multifunctional centres.

There is also collaboration between authorities and strategic partners in the development of services for vulnerable children, including through staff training and the implementation of integrated protection systems.

In 2025, violence against children (both online and offline) remains a serious problem.

In 2024, the Ministry of Education reported 7,977 suspected cases of abuse, bullying, neglect, exploitation, and child trafficking. The most common forms of violence were: physical abuse (3,439 cases); neglect (1,911 cases); bullying (1,200 cases); and emotional violence (1,363 cases).

Children from migrant and ethnic minority families in Moldova face particular challenges:

• Limited access to education: children whose parents migrate abroad are often left in the care of grandparents or other relatives, which can lead to school drop-out or poor academic performance.
• Mental health issues: children left behind may suffer from anxiety, depression, or behavioural problems due to prolonged separation from their parents. Refugees or unaccompanied children may have trauma caused by war or forced migration and do not always have access to mental health services.
• Discrimination and social exclusion: children from refugee or ethnic minority families face stigma, racism, and marginalisation, limiting their participation in community life and access to services.

Child safety and well-being online

Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, as well as cyberbullying, are significant and growing problems. In 2024, 11,894 reports were recorded on the national portal dedicated to the protection of children online, and 29,620 abusive materials involving children were removed.

The Child Protection Information System, launched by the MLSP, is a welcome development. This is a digital system that centralises data on children at risk, facilitating case management, monitoring, and the development of policies based on accurate data.

Other positive initiatives include a programme by the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the National Centre for Digital Innovation in Education, to train 100 teachers in the use of digital technologies and to create interactive and effective learning experiences.

The Office of the Ombudsman carries out activities in schools to raise children's awareness of their fundamental rights and the importance of responsible behaviour in the digital environment.

However, to increase children's online safety, CONCORDIA Moldova highlights the need to:

- Strengthen collaboration between government institutions, international organisations, and civil society to create a safe and inclusive digital environment for children.
- Provide psycho-social support for children and young people affected by online abuse, to support their recovery and integration into the community.

Children's mental health

Authorities conduct research and collect data to evaluate and improve mental health services for children. In 2023, the government approved the National Mental Health Programme for 2023-2027, aimed at improving mental health services, raising awareness, and promoting education in this field. This programme outlines key development priorities. These include accessible, equitable mental health services for all

ages, regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion, or social category, ensuring no one is left behind. It emphasises the creation of long-term crisis intervention and psycho-social rehabilitation services, including specialised institutions, and the development of a referral system across primary, outpatient, and hospital care for continuous support for children, adolescents, and young people. The programme also aims to increase national research, the number of mental health specialists, and the development of evidence-based guidelines by 2027.

The Ministry of Education will conduct a national survey in 2025 for pupils in grades 5–9 and 10–12, with questions to allow them to express their opinions and experiences of mental health.

There is a diverse network of mental health services offering medical, psychological, and social assistance for children. The main services available are:

- Community Mental Health Centres;
- Recovery centres for children with special needs;
- Social services for families and children;
- Recovery and social integration centres;
- Child Helpline 116 111.

However, to address the significant gaps in these services, two priority measures are needed:

1. The development of specialised mental health services for children and adolescents. There is a need to train teams of paediatric psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, and occupational therapists in all community mental health centres to respond to the specific needs of children.

2. Interventions to address unequal access to mental health services in rural areas and among vulnerable communities. There is a need for mobile teams that can travel to remote locations

and to develop psychological telemedicine programmes for hard-to-reach areas.

Additional children's rights issues

Two additional emerging issues require urgent and sustained attention within child rights advocacy at European level, including in Moldova.

1. Systemic exclusion of children with physical and mental disabilities:
Despite progress in inclusive policies, many children with disabilities across Europe still face systemic marginalisation. The lack of adapted infrastructure, inclusive education, and specialised services severely limits their access to quality care, development, and participation. In many cases, support systems are fragmented or underfunded, and professionals lack adequate training. This results in the denial of basic rights and the reinforcement

of long-term inequalities. A coordinated, cross-sector approach is essential to ensure these children can fully enjoy their rights on an equal basis with others.

2. Young care leavers unprepared for independent living:
Young people leaving the care system continue to be one of the most vulnerable and overlooked groups. Many exit residential or foster care at the age of 18 without life skills, stable housing, emotional support, or access to continued education or employment. This abrupt transition exposes them to poverty, social isolation, and exploitation. There is an urgent need for comprehensive, individualised transition plans and support mechanisms to ensure that care-experienced young people are equipped for independent and dignified lives. Their voices must also be central in shaping the services meant to support them.

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

Child poverty

In the Republic of Moldova, data on child poverty is collected and analysed by the National Bureau of Statistics through the Household Budget Survey. This annual survey provides detailed information on the living standards of the population, including household income, expenditure, consumption, and living conditions, with a special focus on households with children.

In Moldova, the groups of children most affected by poverty and social exclusion include:

• Children living in rural areas, who often lack access to quality education, healthcare, and social services.
• Children with physical and mental disabilities, who face systemic barriers to inclusion, early intervention, and specialised support.

• Young people leaving the child protection system, who are frequently unprepared for independent life and lack access to stable housing, employment, and mental health services.

These groups require targeted interventions and long-term support to ensure equal opportunities and the full realisation of their rights.

The digital divide persists mainly in rural areas and among children from low-income families, children with disabilities, and those in alternative care. Limited access to devices, poor internet connectivity, and lack of digital skills are key barriers to digital equity.

CONCORDIA Moldova highlights the need to:

• Improve digital literacy by expanding digital skills training programmes for children and young people, especially in rural areas, to reduce the digital divide.

• Improve digital access by investing in digital infrastructure in schools and communities, to ensure equal access to technology.

Public investment and social safety nets

There is a social security safety net but it remains insufficiently comprehensive and unevenly accessible, especially for vulnerable children and families in rural areas.

The government of Moldova should take three key measures to invest in children and lift them out of poverty and social exclusion:

1. Increase investment in inclusive and quality early childhood and education services, especially in rural areas.
2. Ensure tailored support for children with disabilities and their families.
3. Develop comprehensive support programmes for care leavers to ensure a smooth transition to independent living.

Education

The main barriers to children's access to quality, inclusive education include limited access for children with special educational needs, an insufficient number of trained teachers, and limited teacher qualifications, especially in rural areas.

Children's lived experience of education is shaped by several factors, including a highly competitive environment that increases stress and anxiety, widespread bullying both at school and in the community, and a persistent lack of prospects (especially in rural areas) due to ongoing migration, limited job opportunities, and low wages. These factors negatively affect motivation, well-being, and educational outcomes.

Early childhood development

CONCORDIA Moldova supports early childhood development (ECD) through several programmes, including the 'Parents' School', a Maternal Crisis Centre, and support groups for parent-child relationships. These initiatives provide early intervention, parental guidance, and emotional support to young children and their families.

There is a need for more disaggregated data on ECD. Data on access to services by region, disability status, and socio-economic background is especially needed to tailor policies and programmes to vulnerable groups.

The government of Moldova should prioritise increased funding for early intervention services and expand parental support programmes, especially in under-served rural areas.

The main obstacles to children's participation in quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) are limited availability of services in rural areas, high costs for families, and insufficient trained staff to provide inclusive and quality care.

Housing

The state provides some financial support for housing costs, but protection against evictions and access to affordable and secure housing remain insufficient, especially for vulnerable families.

To help ensure that all children and families can have secure and adequate housing, the government should increase the availability of affordable and accessible housing for vulnerable families and ensure parents have access to stable and well-paid jobs to support a decent standard of living.

Enlargement Countries

The European Union should provide targeted technical and financial support to strengthen community-based services and inclusive social policies in Moldova.

CONCORDIA Moldova, as the largest non-governmental organisation in the country working with vulnerable children and families, has been invited to be involved in a working group for the preparation and implementation of the Child Guarantee.

CONCORDIA Moldova highlights the lack of integrated, cross-sector support systems for vulnerable children and families, and emphasises the need for stronger coordination between child protection, education, health, and employment services to ensure long-term impact and sustainable inclusion.

Country Recommendation

"The Netherlands should develop a long-term, cross-ministerial vision for all children and young people, ensuring that children's rights are safeguarded in legislation, policy, budgeting, and practice."

Country Profile 2025

Netherlands

Child Population:
3,303,345 (2024)
18.41% of total population

18.41

Child Poverty[1]:
518,000 (2024)
15.8% (2024)
▼ -0.1 percentage points compared to 2023

15.8

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Dutch NGO Coalition on Children's Rights (Kinderrechtencollectief)

Utrecht University- Dynamics of Youth, Netherlands Youth Institute (NJI)

Children's Rights in The Netherlands

Anti-child rights movements

There has been a worrying trend of shrinking space for freedom of expression, specifically in relation to recent protests. Alarm is being raised about how protests are being handled, especially under the Public Assemblies Act which gives local authorities a lot of room to restrict or ban protests.

Protesters, especially those speaking out on climate and social justice, are often seen as troublemakers, making it easier to justify heavy-handed responses. This is worrying given that children also take part in these protests.

Child participation

Child and youth participation - although not yet guaranteed in law - plays a role at both national and decentralised levels. There is some quantitative data on child participation, but it is difficult to assess the quality of participation, including the backgrounds of the children involved.

There are various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that actively work to include children in public decision-making, including at municipal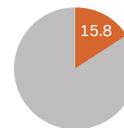 level. For example, the _Speaking Minds_ programme from Save the Children aims to foster collaboration between local municipalities and children.

Child protection systems

In recent years it has become clear that the revised Child Protection Act cannot be implemented as intended, due to inadequate funding, tendering issues, long waiting lists and processing times, staff turnover and shortages in child protection and youth care services, and a complex child protection system involving different organisations.

Research by Leiden University has shown that the Dutch practice of out-of-home placements in alternative care is problematic. These measures are meant to be temporary, aimed at returning children to their parents as soon as is possible. Emergency out-of-home placements are particularly high, and the research showed that in 42% of cases the child is transferred between different alternative care locations at least once after being placed out of home. Further problems hinder reunification of children with their parent(s) after placement in alternative care.

One of the main concerns regarding violence against children is the limited availability of reliable and up-to-date data on the prevalence of abuse and neglect. In 2024, approximately 66,000 cases of child abuse were reported to Veilig Thuis ('Safe Home'), the national advisory and reporting centre for domestic violence and child abuse in the Netherlands. However, only about one-third of these were first-time reports.

The most recent data of self-reporting from children, from 2016, indicates that each year around 105,000 children become victims of abuse or neglect. However, there is no further up-to-date research and the government does not actively monitor this. The discrepancy between cases that are reported by children themselves and cases reported by others indicated that many cases remain undetected and unreported. Moreover, there is a lack of systematic monitoring of children's access to support services, making it difficult to assess whether victims receive appropriate and timely help. Another growing concern is that professionals are reluctant to report suspicions of abuse, due to doubts about the effectiveness of the response and assistance available from Veilig Thuis. This undermines early detection and appropriate intervention.

A broader, structural issue is the slow pace of reform of the youth care system, despite numerous

alarming signals and public concern about its effectiveness.

Reports have revealed that violence and neglect can occur within the youth care system itself, e.g. in out-of-home placements or residential facilities. In addition, the support that families receive is often fragmented and reactive, with a strong focus on individual risks rather than on the broader family situation and the underlying causes of violence, such as poverty, mental health problems, or housing insecurity.

Sexual violence against children

is also an issue of concern, both physical and online. Each year, approximately 43,000 young people fall victim to physical sexual violence. In addition, estimates indicate that 3 out of 10 girls and 1 out of 10 boys become victims of online sexual violence

annually, amounting to nearly 100,000 children.

Specific issues affect children with a migrant or ethnic minority background.

In 2024 several reports of discrimination were filed with institutions including the Anti-Discrimination Services and the Public Prosecution Service. Research shows that only 1 in 10 people who experience discrimination actually report it. The Children's Ombudsman received 19 such reports in 2024.

The rights of asylum-seeking children are being violated, as their rights to protection, development and education are not guaranteed. The centres where they are housed often lack safety, stability, and access to education.

Among children living in the Netherlands, those born outside the Netherlands face a significantly higher risk of growing up in poverty, with 15.2% living in poverty. Among children born in the Netherlands to parents who were born abroad, 9.3% grow up in poverty. In comparison, only 1.5% of children whose parents were also born in the Netherlands live in poverty.

Child safety and well-being online

Recent research by Fonds Slachtofferhulp among young people aged 12-25 reveals that one in two have been exposed to online sexual abuse or inappropriate behaviour. The most frequently cited platforms where such incidents occur include Snapchat, WhatsApp, and Instagram. 37% of young people never disclosed what happened

to them, and only 4% reported the incident to the police.

There has also been a noticeable increase in the detection of illegal material created and/or manipulated using artificial intelligence (AI). In 2024, 1,472 images were identified as (partially or totally) AI-generated. AI is often used to target children already depicted in existing child sexual abuse material, compounding the harm and trauma they have experienced.[2]

'Kidfluencers'[3] are unprotected under Dutch law. It is estimated that there are around 3,000-4,000 active 'childfluencers'.[4] In June 2025, the Dutch government published non-mandatory guidelines for screen and media time, aimed at restricting the use of social media by young people under 15.

---

2 What has changed in the AI CSAM landscape? Internet Watch Foundation, 2024.
3 Childfluencer' or 'kidfluencer' refers to children who have gained a considerable online following by creating content on social media channels, often linked to advertisement, and in most cases managed and guided by their parents.
4 There are no actual numbers for 'childfluencers' in the Netherlands, this is an estimated guess.

Several promising initiatives support children's online safety, such as anonymous chat services like *Helpwanted.nl* and *Kindertelefoon*. Civil society and public-private partnerships, like the *#BetterInternet* campaign, also play a vital role. Educational materials and campaigns address issues at the intersection of digital life and sexuality.

Children's mental health

The government does not consistently collect data on children's mental health. The National Institute for Public Health and the Environment publishes a national monitor on mental health every four years, in which children and adolescents are included. On a scale from 0 to 25, children aged 10-12 give an average score of 17.2 when it comes to mental well-being.

Available mental health services for children include In je bol ('In your head') - an online platform for young people aged 16-27, and *PRAATPOWER* ('TalkPower') - a platform that offers children opportunities to think about possible solutions for mental health issues.

Additional children's rights issues

There are additional concerns in the Netherlands in relation to children's rights in asylum procedures and the effects of climate change on children's health.

The Dutch government has not included training on children's rights for new policymakers within ministries or for local government officials.

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

Child poverty

The Dutch government uses data collected by Statistics Netherlands (CBS). The most recent data was collected in 2023 and published in 2024. The CBS uses a distinct definition of poverty which is different to that used by other European Union (EU) Member States.[5] This sometimes makes it seem as if poverty figures are improving in the Netherlands compared to other EU Member States, however this isn't necessarily the case.

In 2023, 115,000 children lived in poverty - 3.6% of all children in the Netherlands. However, there is some criticism of this calculation method, as many families who live

just above the poverty threshold also struggle.

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

- Children whose parents are illiterate or have low educational attainment, limiting their access to stable employment and adequate support systems.
- Children living in families with long-term debt or reliant on welfare benefits, often resulting in persistent inter-generational poverty.
- Children whose parents are not eligible for social security or government support due to their asylum or residency status.
- Children who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, including those living in temporary shelters or unstable housing situations.
- Children growing up in

---

5 Poverty definition: A household has insufficient financial resources to meet its minimum living requirements. If, after paying fixed costs for housing, energy and healthcare, there are insufficient resources (income and possibly savings or other immediately disposable assets) left over for other basic needs, a household – and the people who form part of it – is considered poverty-stricken. Additional indicators used to describe poverty include the length of time spent below the poverty line, (problematic) debts, and the assessment of one's own financial position.

households marked by high levels of stress, including domestic violence, neglect, or substance abuse.

- Children with a migration background, particularly those from refugee or undocumented families, who face multiple barriers to education, healthcare, and social participation.

Many children still lack adequate digital access, especially those growing up in vulnerable conditions such as families on welfare, in debt, or with an uncertain residence status.

Children living in asylum reception centres, for example, often have little to no access to stable internet or digital devices, making it extremely difficult to complete homework or participate in online education. Migrant children and children in homes marked by domestic violence or neglect often lack equipment and the support needed to use it effectively.

The cost of a laptop is unaffordable for many low-income families. As a result, social support organisations have seen a sharp increase in requests.

Public investment and social safety nets

Social security for children is not provided through a dedicated child-specific system but through a complex structure of income-based allowances paid to parents or guardians. These include child benefits ('kinderbijslag'), the means-tested child-related income support budget ('kindgebonden budget'), and allowances for childcare and healthcare. While intended to support families, this system is fragmented, difficult to navigate, and highly sensitive to administrative errors, algorithmic bias and discriminatory profiling, including forms of ethnic profiling embedded in automated decision-making systems.

The top three measures the Dutch government should take to invest in children and address poverty and exclusion are:

1. Ensure access to affordable housing for families with children: housing costs in the Netherlands are among the highest in the EU relative to income, putting enormous pressure on families with low or unstable incomes. Investing in social and affordable housing is a crucial step to give all children a safe and stable home environment.
2. Guarantee all basic services as enforceable rights for children: essential needs such as housing, clean water, internet, healthcare, and education, must be treated not as privileges but as legal rights for every child.
3. Strengthen access to social security and debt relief: families must be able to rely on a safety net that is accessible, understandable and trustworthy. That means simplifying access to benefits, eliminating unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles, and ensuring that people are not deterred by fear of having to repay allowances. Moreover, the government should consider lifting barriers to social protection for undocumented children, and fully implement the European Child Guarantee so that all children, regardless of background, have equal access to essential services.

Education

The Ministries of Education, Culture and Science and of Health, Welfare and Sport are working together with relevant stakeholders towards more inclusive education. However, this process is slow, action plans lack detail, and no additional resources are being made available. On the contrary, education is facing budget cuts. The current temporary funding and pilot projects are insufficient to bring the structural change needed to guarantee the right to education.

The number of children who are not receiving any education and/or who drop out of secondary education is increasing.

Early childhood development

Data on early childhood development (ECD) is not collected on a national scale.

The main barriers to children's participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) are:

- Practical difficulties in reaching ECEC centres if they are too far away and transport is expensive.
- Lack of understanding of the importance of ECEC, or fear of stigmatisation (i.e. children from families with a migration background or from poorer families may attend pre-school settings for children who need extra support in their language, compared to those families who send their children to privatised pre-school/daycare centres).
- Financial costs of ECEC.

In order to strengthen support for ECD, the Netherlands should invest in accessible, high-quality ECEC, and ensure that all children, regardless of background, have access to affordable and inclusive early learning environments, including pre-school education.

Housing

There is rent allowance available to people on low incomes. There is currently a bill in parliament that would strengthen public housing and ensure more affordable housing. However, there are no extra measures to provide children and their parents with adequate housing.

In 2024 there was a housing shortage, and demand for housing is high. Prices are rising, creating a shortage of affordable housing for families. Overall there is a need to provide better access to adequate housing for children and families in need.

The European Child Guarantee

The implementation of the Child Guarantee has led to some positive developments.

A number of improvements have been made, such as increases in the childcare allowance and in the child-related budget, an increase in child benefit and the simplification and improvement of rent allowance. Furthermore, a Temporary Energy Emergency Fund has been made available and the School Meals Programme has been extended

"The implementation of the Child Guarantee in the Netherlands will only be effective if we recognise access to basic services, such as housing, drinking water, internet, education and social security, as enforceable rights for all children, including undocumented and asylum-seeking children."

European Semester 2025

The [Country Report for the Netherlands](#) addresses child poverty, ECEC and education (including low levels of digital skills). In the Netherlands, the share of children at risk of poverty or exclusion is below the EU average (15.8% vs 24.2% in 2024).

The 2022 [Child Guarantee National Action Plan](#) aims to halve child poverty nationally within four years. The 2024 [Biennial report](#) shows progress in areas such as access to childcare and the Early Childhood Development Programme.

However, only 31.1% of children under three in poverty accessed ECEC in 2023, compared to 71.6% for wealthier peers. Participation from age three is relatively high (93.2%), but still under the 96% EU target, and staff shortages (currently affecting 30% of facilities for disadvantaged children) are expected to grow fivefold by 2031.

Underachievement among 15-year-olds has worsened, especially among disadvantaged pupils. Digital skills are also weak and highly dependent on parental education. Despite a 2022 'Master plan for basic skills', 2025 budget cuts have reduced support for vulnerable pupils. Teacher shortages, particularly in cities and in special needs schools, further threaten educational equity. There are reforms under the Dutch Recovery and Resilience Plan that aim to strengthen social inclusion, particularly for pupils with migrant backgrounds.

The [2025 Country Specific Recommendations](#) highlight the need to improve basic skills by addressing teacher shortages and providing tailored support to disadvantaged schools.

European Union Funding

The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) in the Netherlands supports efforts to generate equal opportunities, combat discrimination and promote gender equality. ESF+ activities offer food and material aid to the most deprived, fighting social exclusion. Particular attention is given to the needs of children at risk of poverty.

The ESF+ in the Netherlands is implemented via one national programme and three regional programmes.

Applying for EU funding is very complex and time intensive, and the process could be made easier.

Country Recommendation

"Child-related policies, such as the Child Guarantee, must include effective mechanisms to inform and consult with stakeholders, including NGOs. The government and local authorities should urgently address the shortage of places in alternative care, including both family-based and residential facilities. Decision-makers should also address the growing xenophobia in public rhetoric, as well as the harmful impact of detaining migrant children and families."

Country Profile 2025

Poland

Child Population:
6,682,064 (2024)
18.25% of total population

Child Poverty[1]:
1,070,000 (2024)
16.1% (2024)
▼ -0.8 percentage points compared to 2023

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Koalicja na rzecz Rodzinnej Opieki Zastępczej/Polish Foster Care Coalition

1 Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2024, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc_peps01n).

Children's Rights in Poland

There is limited introduction to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) for policymakers and professionals working with children. However, the Ombudsman for Children's Rights runs campaigns promoting child rights.

Initiatives are being taken to raise awareness of children's rights, but they are not mainstreamed and accessible to every professional or official working with and for children.

The Polish Ministry of Justice introduced a pilot programme for judges, prosecutors, lawyers, legal advisors, social workers, family assis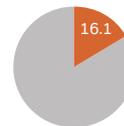tants, police officers, and medical personnel, as part of the *Child-Friendly Justice* project of the Council of Europe and European Commission/Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers.

Children's rights are included in university courses in law and social sciences, to a degree.

New legislation on Child Protection Standards, in 2024, includes a role for institutions working with children in the establishment of internal Standards of Child Protection. This will potentially lead to increase knowledge and competence among staff, as well as some public awareness of children's rights, in particular the right to a life free from violence and discrimination.

Family judges are now required to undergo training compliant with child protection standards once every four years, but the scope of the training remains unsatisfactory.

While state and local authority institutions offer workshops/training on children's rights, this is optional and children's rights are not a regular part of teacher training. On the other hand, non-governmental organisations

(NGOs) provide high-quality training in this area.

Teachers are legally obliged to know and respect children's rights, yet there is no effective monitoring and enforcement of this.

Training, for example on child-friendly law, is also provided by legal bodies such as the National Chamber of Legal Advisers and the District Bar Council, in cooperation with other stakeholders. However, it is limited in scale and outreach, and the right of the child to speak and to be heard should be strengthened. There has also been training on the role of lawyers in protecting children's rights in the context of the war in Ukraine.

There is education on children's rights in the *Child-Friendly Cities programme* run by UNICEF Poland. The programme is aimed at local governments and is intended to support cities in providing services for children and young people and to implement the UNCRC.

Poland has not developed a comprehensive strategy for children that encompasses all areas covered by the UNCRC.

Anti-child rights movements

Parallel to the intensification of anti-human rights movements there is a narrative that also includes children, especially migrants and refugees. There is increasing hostility towards migrants in public discourse, and increased discrimination based on race and religion, resulting in racially motivated crimes.

This has led to heightened risks for non-ethnic, racialised Poles, including members of the Roma minority. Roma organisations have taken a stand to protect all racialised communities and are calling on the Prime Minister to take action against the rise in xenophobia in Poland.

While regulations do not criminalise humanitarian aid provided on the Poland-Belarus border, there have been cases of harassment and criminal

charges brought against those involved in providing humanitarian assistance. Hate speech has also increased against Ukrainian refugees. Recently, the president of Poland has refused to sign new legislation on temporary protection of Ukrainian refugees living in Poland.

Child participation

Respecting children's opinions, involving them in decision-making processes, and listening to their views on matters that concern them is not yet standard practice in Poland.

Various initiatives are emerging, such as the Children and Youth Council under the Ombudsman for Children's Rights, which creates opportunities for child and youth participation. There is also the Children and Youth Participation Team, mainly composed of experts, NGOs and academics working for and with children. It is a joint initiative by the Ombudsman for Children's Rights and UNICEF Poland. One of its

tasks is to develop a strategy for the participation of children and young people.

Youth councils are established in some local authorities. These are optional, consultative local government bodies, which can also act as advisory bodies for the district, municipality, county or province. However, they face financing challenges and their real impact needs to be measured.

Overall, there is a lack of organised and systematic opportunities for children and young people to have a real influence on decisions, especially for those from disadvantaged groups.

It is crucial to raise awareness about the importance of child participation among the public and local authorities, and how to incorporate children's opinions in their work. This is particularly important for the local level.

Child protection systems

The 2011 Act on Family Support and the Alternative Care System, and the Family and Guardianship Code, govern the placement of children in alternative care, including foster care. It also outlines the support system for households in vulnerable situations, in order to prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their family.

In 2023, the number of children in alternative care was almost 76,000, an increase of 3% compared to the previous year. This number has been growing year on year since 2018, with the exception of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, when the work of public institutions, (including family courts) was suspended or subject to restrictions, resulting in a decrease in the number of children placed in alternative care.

However, 23% of children (i.e. over 17,000) live in residential care, and this rate has remained

at a similar level for years. Moreover, this number does not include several thousand children living outside their families in institutions outside the alternative care system, such as Social Welfare Homes, Care and Treatment Facilities or other places of long-term stay. Therefore, the rate of deinstitutionalisation has stagnated.

According to the law, only children over the age of 10 should be placed in residential care. However, as of 1 January 2024, there were 2,705 children under the age of 10 in residential care facilities. Of these, 42 children were with their under-age mothers.

There is an emerging shortage of alternative care placements, including family foster care, in which vulnerable children can be placed. Almost 2,000 children cannot be placed in a safe alternative environment.

The amendment to the Act on Family Support and the Alternative Care System of October 2022 was intended to speed up deinstitutionalisation. Changes included an increase in remuneration for professional foster parents and those running family-type children's homes. It also introduced restrictions on the opening of new institutional forms of alternative care, and the requirement to obtain the opinion of the Ombudsman for Children for any planned additional care institution.

The severe shortage of family-based and residential alternative care demands an urgent action plan from the government and local authorities.

For children with special needs the current law allows for emergency pre-adoption centres for infants up to the age of one. Up to 20 infants can stay in one facility. There are also institutions for regional care and therapy, designed for up to 45 children with special needs. Some of these facilities transfer children over the age of 12 to social welfare homes, where they often remain for the rest of their lives.

A new Child Protection Standard (an amendment of the Family and Guardianship Code) came into force in 2024. Care and educational institutions, medical facilities, and accommodation facilities such hotels and hostels are obliged to implement this. The Child Protection Standard obliges these institutions to respond to any observed violence toward children and report all forms of violence, including in their facilities, contributing to more frequent prosecution of perpetrators of child abuse. It also sets child-friendly standards and child-safety behaviour rules for these institutions.

The National Plan to Combat Violence Against Minors will be prepared by the end of 2025.

The government programme for combating domestic violence for the years 2024-2030 has also been adopted. In addition, the definition of domestic violence has been changed in the Domestic Violence Prevention Act to include economic violence, and to emphasise that a child who witnesses violence without being directly affected by it should also be considered a victim.

A 'Team for the analysis of events resulting in the death or serious injury of minors' has been established under the Minister of Justice. It is responsible for investigating serious cases of child abuse in order to draw conclusions about shortcomings in child protection and possible improvements.

There is still no coordination in responses to cases of child abuse, with poor cross-department communication and collaboration between services and professionals involved. For example, the so-called Blue Cards Procedure - a system to combat domestic violence, whereby institutions cooperate to ensure the safety of victims and take action against perpetrators - has not been digitised.

Due to the situation on the Poland-Belarus border, since August 2021 the number of foreign children seeking asylum in Poland has increased significantly. Third-country nationals attempting to enter Poland without the necessary documents, including families with children and unaccompanied minors, are frequently pushed back to Belarus. Since August 2021, the Ministry of Internal Affairs allows persons to be turned back at the border without any decision being issued.

It is necessary to restore procedures for granting international protection and ensuring the introduction of a special, individual assessment procedure by independent entities such as child rights experts. This would allow for decisions to be made in accordance with the best interests of the child in each administrative procedure and in court proceedings.

Currently, it is permissible to place families with children in guarded detention centres, including those who are applying for international

protection. Unaccompanied children can only be placed in detention in return procedures if they are over 15 years of age. Despite the obligation to act in a child's best interests when deciding on placement in a guarded centre, in practice, the detention of children is still routinely used, regardless of their age.

There must be a total ban on placing children in these guarded centres.

Although the number of unaccompanied children in Poland is increasing every year, the system of support for them has not improved. The Polish model of care and legal representation is fragmented and inadequate.

Since 2022, with the war in Ukraine and the increased number of unaccompanied minors, there has been a crisis in the system. The lack of places in alternative care facilities, and the low quality of guardianship and other forms of legal representation of children are becoming an increasingly

serious problem. The dramatic situation in the support system for unaccompanied children has also been highlighted by the Children's Rights Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Human Rights.

Poland needs to develop a comprehensive model of support, care and legal representation for unaccompanied foreign minors, including by:

• Extending the institution of the child representative under Article 99 of the Family and Guardianship Code to unaccompanied foreign children, while introducing mandatory training in migration and refugee law for candidates for this role.
• Introducing an obligation to hear the views of unaccompanied minors (if their age and maturity allow it) in the following procedures: legalisation, placement in a guarded centre for foreigners, obligation to return, placement in alternative/foster care, and the appointment of a temporary guardian.

Child safety and well-being online

Work is underway on a project to protect children from violence in the digital environment, including regulations aimed at preventing children from accessing pornographic content (with age verification systems).

Education

Roma children face significant problems accessing pre-school and secondary education.

The programme for the social and civic integration of Roma in Poland for 2021-2030 aims to reduce the proportion of Roma pupils in the special education system, to improve their housing conditions and improve integration. However, the Roma minority continues to be exposed to discrimination in Poland. Opinion polls show that 50% of Poles express hostility towards Roma.

Additional children's rights issues

Discrimination on the basis of nationality is intensifying. Of particular concern is the government's adoption of a migration strategy that provides for the possibility of temporary and territorial suspension of the right to asylum.

Schools report numerous incidents of peer violence based on nationality.

European Semester 2025

Poland's Country Report addresses child poverty, early childhood education and care (ECEC), education (including segregated educational settings), the digital divide and the impact of climate change on children. Poland has made modest progress in reducing child poverty, with 16.1% of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2024, below the EU average (24.2%), but with limited progress toward the 2030 goal of reducing child poverty

by 300,000 (from 1.09 million in 2019 to 1.14 million in 2023). To address this, Poland increased the universal child benefit by 60% in 2024 and is implementing the Child Guarantee. The country has allocated €704 million from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and €610 million from the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) to create over 100,000 new childcare places and improve services, especially for children with disabilities.

Access to ECEC remains a major issue. Only 15.1% of children under three attend formal childcare (just 1.6% among children at risk of poverty). In education, basic skills have declined. Under-performance among 15-year-olds rose to 23% in maths, 22.2% in reading, and 18.6% in science. The socio-economic gap in skills has widened by 10.6% since 2018. 28,000 school staff were trained in inclusive education in 2023. However, many children with special needs remain in segregated schools.

40% of homeless children in Poland are foreign-born (up from 9% in 2019). Integration efforts include language and housing support for Ukrainian refugees. ESF+ and RRF funds support housing for vulnerable groups through models like Housing First and assisted living services.

93% of households had internet access in 2023 (up from 70% in 2012), but gaps remain in rural areas.

Children face increasing risks from heatwaves and poor air quality, with no national preparedness plan.

The Country Specific Recommendations call for more quality and inclusive education, improvements in the quality of teacher education and better vocational education and training.

Country Recommendation

"Portugal should ensure the effective participation of all children and young people in the design, monitoring and evaluation of public policies that concern them. Portugal should take action to strengthen the role of civil society organisations as strategic partners in fighting all forms of violence against children."

Country Profile 2025

Portugal

Child Population:
1,675,610 (2024)
15.75% of total population

Child Poverty[1]:
351,000 (2024)
20.7% (2024)
▼ -1.9 percentage points compared to 2023

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):
Fundação Nossa Senhora do Bom Sucesso
Instituto de Apoio à Criança

1 Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2024, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc_peps01n).

Children's Rights in Portugal

Portugal's Single Strategy for the Rights of Children and Young People 2025-2035 (*Estratégia Única dos Direitos das Crianças e Jovens 2025-2035*), in force since 1 January 2025, prioritises investment in the future of children and young people. It builds on previous frameworks, including the National Strategy for the Rights of Children 2021–2024, the Child Guarantee Action Plan 2022–2030, and the National Strategy for Combating Poverty 2021–2030.

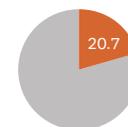The National Strategy for the Rights of Children 2021–2024 was coordinated by the National Commission for the Promotion of Rights and Protection of Children and Young People and implemented through biennial action plans, including the 2023–2024 Action Plan.

The Strategy recognised the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which Portugal ratified in 1990, as the universal standard for promoting and protecting children's rights. Its Priority III focused on raising awareness of the UNCRC and its protocols among children, families, communities, and professionals, led by the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security. Its Priority V aimed to align national legislation with the UNCRC.

Child participation

Portugal has seen improvements in child participation, but many challenges remain.

Children are involved in Children's Local Public Assemblies, or *Orçamento Participativo*, in schools, but not really involved in public decision-making.

There is a National Council for Children and Youth, under the auspices of the National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and Protection of Children and Young People.

Civil society organisations (CSOs), such as Instituto de Apoio à Criança and UNICEF Portugal, have been very active in child participation projects. Casa Pia of Lisbon, a public institute which operates under the oversight of the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, has also recently created a Youth Council.

Child protection systems

Portugal continues to struggle with the overuse of institutionalisation for children and young people. Although family foster care is foreseen in the Law for the Protection of Children and Young People in Danger (Law No. 147/99)[2], its use remains minimal compared to institutional placements. While temporary care is supposed to last a maximum of two years, many children remain in foster care far longer, creating stress for host families and causing significant psychological harm when children are eventually removed from families they have bonded with.

Violence against children remains a major concern, including sexual abuse, domestic violence, online exploitation, and violence in young couples. Signals of abuse are often overlooked. The report *Violence in Childhood: What the Numbers Say – 2023* is an important step in documenting the issue. In 2023, there were 976 reports of sexual abuse and 964 of domestic violence against minors. In 2024, sexual abuse cases rose to 1,329 (2.1% of all reports).

Portugal safeguards the rights of migrant children to education, health, and nationality, regardless of their parents' legal status. The National Health Service, through health centres and public hospitals, guarantees healthcare

---

2 For all legislation on child protection in Portugal see https://www.cnpdpcj.gov.pt/legislacao2.

access to all migrant children, and education is equally accessible.

Child safety and well-being online

The number of children abused online, either by adults or children's peers has increased.

There are more and more children and young people gambling online for money. The Service for Intervention in Addictive Behaviours and Dependencies (SICAD) reports that 5% of 13-year-olds are already doing so. Prevalence increases with age,

and by the age of 18 it is nearly 21%. The control mechanisms of legal sites can be bypassed, often with the complicity of family members, while illegal platforms (which proliferate on the internet) do not always have age verification systems in place.

The number of Portuguese children who show dependence on online games has been increasing, according to the latest report prepared for the National Plan for the Reduction of Addictive Behaviours and Dependencies. The report indicates that six out of ten children and teenagers use

electronic games during the week, on school days.

However, there are some useful interventions and mechanisms to protect children in the digital sphere. The Single Strategy for the Rights of Children and Young People 2025-2035 establishes digital safety as one of 10 priority areas. Interventions include measures that promote digital literacy for children, digital safety and responsible use of digital tools such as artificial intelligence (AI) and the promotion of access to digital public services for children and young people.

The Centro Internet Segura aims to promote a culture of responsible and healthy internet use and to boost the fight against harmful online content. It is under the coordination of the National Cybersecurity Centre. It provides 'SeguraNet', aimed at the school community, and the Safe Internet Line. This free and confidential channel supports the safe use of the internet and provides a means of reporting illegal content.

The judiciary police has developed the *Rayuela Project* a tool (videogame) for preventing cybercrime aimed at students from the 5th to the 9th grade.

Children's mental health

Eurochild members are not aware of any national statistics on children's mental health in Portugal. However, Portugal is one of the countries participating in WHO's Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study, which includes mental health. The results of the *More with You* programme, which began in 2009 and addresses mental

health and suicide prevention in schools, showed that almost half (45.4%) of a sample of 13,000 adolescents in the country exhibited depressive symptoms in the 2022-2023 school year.

Instituto de Apoio à Criança has a child helpline, which was used by 2.033 children and young people in 2024. Most of the calls concerned mental health issues (44%) and violence (17%).

In Portugal, resources for children with mental health problems are insufficient, leaving many without effective access to support. Although mental health services are integrated into the free National Health System until age 18, greater investment is needed. CSOs have stepped in to help fill the gap.

In the last decade, several schools have included school psychologists. Schools in disadvantaged areas benefit from the *TEIP (Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária)* programme, which offers multidisciplinary teams that can provide individualised mental health support.

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

Child poverty

In 2024, 20.7% of children were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE), below the European Union (EU) average of 24.2%.

According to the National Institute of Statistics (INE) in Portugal, in 2024, 11,3% of children (up to 16 years) were part of households living in material and social deprivation, a figure that has been increasing since 2021. Children in single-parent households (37.5%) and children in households with more than three children (30.3%) are the most affected by poverty.

Public investment and social safety nets

The social security system in Portugal offers different forms of support for children, including maternity and paternity benefits to cover extra costs after the birth of a child, subsidies during pregnancy and in children's early years, as well as support for children, young people, and adults with disabilities, incapacity, or mental illness. Financial assistance is also available for adoption and for supporting adopted children.

Eurochild members highlight three priorities for investing in children in Portugal:

1. Reduce inequalities in healthcare access by ensuring timely, high-quality services for all children. This could include subsidising private and third-sector providers to complement the public health system and address unmet needs through community-based care. Portugal has one of the highest out-of-pocket health costs in the EU (30% of expenses are paid directly by families), and waiting times for specialised care are particularly long for children.

2. Improve early learning by ensuring early childhood education and care (ECEC) prioritises children's development, not just parents' participation in the labour market, and is delivered by qualified professionals.

3. Strengthen financial support for families, as current social transfers are not effective in tackling poverty and social exclusion.

Education

Legislation establishes the principles and norms that guarantee inclusion in education, and identifies measures and resources to support learning and inclusion. However, there are constraints to its effective implementation.

In order to activate additional support for children with special

educational needs, a medical diagnosis of these needs is required, but the health system has long waiting lists for specialist consultations, and diagnoses are not always possible in a timely manner. In addition, schools don't have enough human resources - special education teachers, therapists, and classroom assistants.

Some education professionals also struggle with cultural diversity, with migrants arriving in Portugal from several countries.

However, the main barrier to inclusive education in Portugal is the lack of human resources in schools across the country.

Early childhood development

Portugal has free crèches for children aged 0-3. However, there are not enough available places, and the pedagogical guidelines were only approved in 2024.

From 1 September 2025 the government will progressively extend free enrolment in crèches and family crèches. This is a welcome development. Family crèches (childminders) provide care for infants and accommodate children from three months to three years old. They are an alternative to traditional crèches - the childminders operate from their homes, are authorised by Portugal's Social Security Institute and have specialised certification and training.

In the State Budget for 2025, the government reiterates its intention to strengthen 'universal and free' access to pre-school education for children from the age of three. Portugal has a National System of Early Childhood Intervention (*Sistema Nacional de Intervenção Precoce*), which involves coordination between relevant ministries at the national, regional and local levels working directly with families and the community. It is available to all children aged 0-6 with disabilities or developmental delays and works through local multidisciplinary intervention teams to provide social, educational, and health support to children, their families, and other caregivers in a cooperative approach.

The main obstacles to children's participation in quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Portugal are the insufficient number of places available and the lack of human resources to effectively include children with special needs.

To further strengthen support for early childhood development, Portugal should:

• Extend the network of crèches (without compromising adult/child ratios) and other appropriate and qualified services, with a view to achieving full national coverage of ECEC for 0–3-year-olds.
• Provide an enabling environment for attracting and retaining foster families, and invest in the transition of children from foster care to their definitive family (whether biological or foster/adoptive families).

There is a need for more disaggregated data on children aged 0-5 and for specific data on children's access to healthcare, on child development and on access to ECEC.

Housing

Portugal's *1º Direito* housing programme provides support for access to housing, and promotes solutions for people living in inadequate housing conditions.

The *Front Door* project responds to situations of urgent need for accommodation for people who are temporarily or permanently deprived of their home or who are at imminent risk of homelessness.

The *Porta 65 Jovem* programme supports young people with rental costs.

The European Child Guarantee

Portugal's National Action Plan for the Child Guarantee promotes a local approach through the creation of Local Child Guarantee Units within the Social Network programme, to ensure that vulnerable children and young people access essential services. Several Local Child Guarantee Units were established in 2024.

The Technical Committee for Monitoring the Child Guarantee brings together the Child Guarantee National Coordinator and representatives from multiple ministries, including justice, labour, social solidarity, and social security. Since October 2023, youth, sports, and culture have also been added, broadening the scope of government action.

Poverty is most prevalent in the autonomous regions of Madeira and in the Azores, prompting the adoption of regional strategies.

A key measure is the family allowance, which in the 2024 State Budget was increased by €22/month (€264/year) for all children in some income brackets. For single-parent families, the allowance was raised by 50%, with a minimum increase of €33/month per child.

"Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee in Portugal could make a real difference, as numerous concrete public policy measures have been adopted across various ministries, including in the autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira, to achieve the goal of eradicating child poverty and social exclusion by 2030."

European Semester 2025

Portugal's Country Report focuses on child poverty, ECEC, healthcare and education, but does not cover the digital divide, or the impact of climate change on children.

In 2024, the AROPE rate for children dropped to 20.7%, with 29,000 fewer children at risk since 2019, although further efforts are needed to reach the national 2030 target of reducing the number by 161,000. The AROPE rate remains particularly high in the Azores (28.4%). Implementation of the Child Guarantee is ongoing, with improvements in ECEC. Challenges remain in inclusive education and adapting services for children with disabilities. Access to healthcare is also a concern, with only 37% of children at risk reporting 'very good health'. Ensuring alignment with the European Social Funds Plus, the Recovery and Resilience Plan, and national strategies such as the Child Guarantee and Portugal's disability strategy is essential.

Portugal has exceeded the EU-level target for ECEC participation, reaching 96.3% among children from the age of three to compulsory school age in 2022. Nonetheless, disparities persist, with lower participation among children at risk and regional gaps (from 100% in Madeira to 91.4% in Lisbon). The PARES programme, supported by the Recovery and Resilience Facility, is expanding ECEC coverage, while a national quality framework (2024–2026) is in development. Early school leaving declined to 6.6% in 2024, with strong reductions in rural areas. However, regional differences persist, with the Azores still facing high rates (19.8%).

Educational outcomes are affected by declining performance in basic skills, especially in mathematics, where under-achievement is severe. Reading and science results are also below the EU average. Socio-economic gaps are widening, with under-achievement among disadvantaged pupils rising to 46.9% in 2022. Foreign-born pupils face additional challenges.

Children are not explicitly addressed in the Country Specific Recommendations, but the recommendations urge Portugal to support households experiencing energy poverty, to ensure equal access to healthcare and to address housing affordability and availability.

Country Recommendation

"Romania should increase civic space by improving civil society engagement, including child participation, and prioritise investment in social, educational and health services for marginalised children, including Roma, children with disabilities and those from rural areas, ensuring equal and effective access."

Country Profile 2025

Romania

Child Population:
3,696,262 (2024)
19.39% of total population

(pie chart: 19.39)

Child Poverty[1]:
1,255,000 (2024)
33.8% (2024)
▼ -5.0 percentage points compared to 2023

(pie chart: 33.8)

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Concordia-Romania

Federation of non-governmental organisations for child protection (FONPC)

1 Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2024, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc_peps01n).

Children's Rights in Romania

Romania has institutional measures to promote the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) among decision-makers and professionals through government initiatives and cooperation with international partners and civil society. UNICEF supports authorities in training and knowledge dissemination.

Training for civil servants and professionals is available via the National Institute of Administration and other institutions. Some schools and universities include courses on children's rights, professional ethics and the protection of minors. Judges and prosecutors receive periodic training on child-friendly justice and the UNCRC.

The Ministry of Education, together with civil society organisations (CSOs), introduced children's rights modules in teacher training. The national curriculum integrates human rights and children's rights. 'Child-Friendly Schools' and 'Student Councils' encourage participation and awareness.

The National Institute for Magistrates, in partnership with the police and CSOs, trains professionals on hearings, victim protection and abuse prevention. Guidelines on interacting with children in contact with the law follow international standards.

The National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of the Child (2021–2027) provides for continuous professional training and awareness raising for specialists and the public.

Anti-child rights movements

In 2025, human rights defenders, including youth activists, faced pressure. Representatives of the Constanta Students' Association were denied access to a City Council meeting discussing education reform. During protests over sexual abuse in schools, police disrupted demonstrators and failed to protect them from verbal assault.

Child participation

Opportunities for child participation exist through consultations, councils and some projects. The UNICEF-supported Child-Friendly Cities initiative has implemented local children's councils in at least five communities, and some children participated in the planning of local budgets for 2023.

Initiatives such as 'Child-Friendly Schools' or 'Student Councils' promote children's participation and learning about their rights. Pilot projects created spaces for vulnerable children to help shape local policies. Yet participation remains uneven across the country with limited institutional mechanisms and accessibility for disadvantaged children.

Child protection systems

The child protection system in Romania has made progress, but significant problems remain, especially in preventing family separation, supporting Roma children and children in alternative care. Procedures and staffing remain insufficient.

Reports of abusive conditions persist, and half of missing minors come from alternative care. Expansion of daycare centres and community services is urgently needed, especially in rural areas. Monitoring, qualified staff, independent controls, and complaint mechanisms are lacking.

However, there have been some positive initiatives.

Recent legislation mandates that social services identify at-risk families and provide at least 12 months of tailored support to prevent family separation.

Among positive local initiatives, Bucharest's Sector 3 project *Preventing Child Separation through Integrated Services* identified 554 children at risk, providing them with hot meals, and psychoeducational and material support.

Violence against children is widespread. In 2023, ANPDCA[2] registered 17,709 cases of child abuse. Most were due to negligence (11,605). 766 cases of domestic violence against minors were also reported, up from the previous year (676), and 10 cases were classified as murder. About half the children said they were subjected to corporal punishment at home and half were victims of bullying at school.

In 2023, 1,504 cases of sexual abuse were reported, but only 20% of cases went to court, and only 5% resulted in convictions, with only 25% of these involving a prison sentence.

Online sexual abuse reached nearly 4,000 cases in early 2024, 94% generated by children. In 2023, 428 trafficking victims were identified, including 218 children. Poverty, lack of education and corruption remain key drivers of trafficking.

Children from migrant and minority ethnic backgrounds face poor school access, a high risk of exploitation, and poverty-driven exclusion. Language barriers, missing documentation, and precarious living conditions heighten vulnerability.

Child safety and well-being online

Online exploitation and cyberbullying are growing concerns. In 2023, 40% of children experienced online harassment (20% faced such harassment on a weekly basis), leading to anxiety and depression. Two in five children report cyberbullying.

The ABUZ[3] platform received 1,254 reports of child sexual abuse in 2023, about half of which are self-generated content. A 2025 report by Justice and Care noted normalisation of sexual exploitation in vulnerable communities, with online recruitment and an increase in cases among boys.

'Sharenting'[4] and 'childfluencers'[5] also raise privacy and safety issues.

Positively, there are some innovative practices for children's protection in the digital sphere. The Safer Internet Centre has a 24/7 hotline for anonymous complaints regarding abusive material, grooming, hate speech or disinformation. Young people are involved as volunteers, contributing to digital education campaigns, educational material and public events such as 'Safer Internet Day'.

A legislative proposal sets digital consent at 16 for social platforms and games, including options for parents to suspend accounts or limit access without a child's consent.

The Adservio platform tracks pupils' emotional state and alerts teachers to risks.

Romania aligns with European standards via the Better Internet for Kids (BIK+) strategy and the Budapest and Lanzarote Conventions, but stronger coordination between technology platforms, legislation and psycho-social support is needed, in order to provide complete digital protection for children in Romania.

---

2 The National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption.
3 Digital platform for child protection connected to 112 and 119, which are emergency numbers in Romania.
4 'Sharenting' refers to the practice of parents sharing a large amount of potentially sensitive content about their children on social media, especially when done by an account with a large following base.
5 'Childfluencer' or 'kidfluencer' refers to children who have gained a considerable online following by creating content on social media channels, often linked to advertisement, and in most cases managed and guided by their parents.

Children's mental health

In 2023, 22,000 children and adolescents were diagnosed with mental disorders, though under-reporting is likely. According to a 2022 UNICEF report, 33% of adolescents aged 11–15 felt sad several times a week. Almost half had suicidal thoughts at least once, and 21% had felt depressed in the previous six months.

Under-diagnosis and poor service access persist, with UNICEF calling for better statistical data and more access to treatment. Economic barriers, lack of specialists and long waiting times limit access to mental health support for children. Children have asked for school mental health programmes and access to psychologists.

Public and NGO structures offer limited services: hospital psychiatry departments, mental health centres, school counsellors (serving 800–1,000 pupils each), mobile psychological counselling centres, free emotional support for children and parents and a free Child Helpline.

However, these services are still fragmented and insufficient to meet children's needs, especially in rural areas or among vulnerable groups. Romania has fewer than 150 paediatric psychiatrists for over four million children.

Additional children's rights issues

Romania lacks a separate juvenile justice system, and children can be detained under adult conditions. Conditions in juvenile detention centres remain inadequate.

Although the law prohibits child labour, children from vulnerable communities (especially Roma and those at risk of school drop-out) are exposed to labour exploitation in agriculture, construction and informal trades, and to forced begging (sometimes in the context of child trafficking). This phenomenon is under-reported and poorly monitored by the authorities.

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

Child poverty

According to Eurostat 33.8% of children were at risk of poverty or exclusion in 2024, a 5.2 percentage points decrease from 2023.

Most affected are rural children (40% vs 15% urban), Roma children (facing discrimination and poor living conditions), those in large or single-parent families (with a poverty risk over 50%), children with disabilities (due to limited inclusion and costly care), those in state protection, and children affected by migration.

Digital inequality compounds disadvantage. Those most affected by the digital divide are children from rural areas who have weak or non-existent internet access, lack of suitable devices, and poor school infrastructure, Roma children (many of whom live in households without electricity or a stable mobile network), and children with disabilities who lack assistive technologies, adapted software and specialist services.

Public investment and social safety nets

Romania's social safety net remains fragmented, underfunded and regionally uneven. The state child allowance is modest and often limited by restrictive criteria. The recently introduced Minimum Inclusion Income unites social benefits (replacing the guaranteed minimum income and the family support allowance). Institutional coordination between education, health and social protection is weak, and rural access is low.

Expansion of local social services, especially in rural areas, simplified digital access to benefits, and increased budgets for children and families are needed.

To invest in children Romania should:

1. Ensure equitable access to quality education, expand early childhood services, reduce school drop-out, and provide hot meals in schools and free transport.
2. Support vulnerable families through higher allowances, integrated social and health services, and access to housing.
3. Strengthen mental health care via community centres and training in early detection of children's mental health issues.

Education

Inclusive education is still hindered by social and structural barriers. Roma children, children with disabilities, those from rural areas and from poor families and migrant children are most affected. Only 78% of Roma children complete compulsory education and 22% reach high school.

Many children with disabilities are either undiagnosed or segregated in special schools, in the absence of adaptations in the mainstream education system.

In 2024, Romania was again criticised by the United Nations for the lack of progress in the deinstitutionalisation of children with disabilities and for lack of adequate support in regular schools.

The main barriers to inclusive and quality education include inequitable access, lack of qualified teachers, poor facilities, hidden costs, discrimination and chronic underfunding (under 4% of GDP).

Children's educational experience is also marked by rigidity and a lack of personalised support, with a focus on grades and rote learning over creativity. Many rural schools lack sanitation facilities or internet access.

Positive changes include the new Education Laws (2023) that promise better individualised support for inclusion. The Hot Meal in Schools programme has been expanded and there are local initiatives to prevent school drop-out. Some schools have

benefited from modern equipment and digital platforms.

Early childhood development

Romania has some positive early childhood development (ECD) initiatives that support young children.

The Minimum Service Package pilot programme offers home visits, integrated health, education and social protection services through a community team (social worker, community nurse, school

counsellor/school mediator). The initiative supports the prevention of family separation, provides care, nutrition, vaccination, and access to early education, and has reduced the risk of social exclusion for hundreds of families in disadvantaged areas.

The Community Services for Children Programme develops early intervention and parental support networks at local level. These include home visits for parents with children aged 0-3, health screening, and

psychological and educational support for parents (including teenage parents).

To further strengthen support for ECD, Romania should extend the *Minimum Service Package* nationally and introduce a national home visiting programme (through legislation and dedicated funding) for children aged 0–3, especially for young or at-risk mothers. Both these measures would directly contribute to improving the physical, cognitive and emotional development of young children – reducing inequalities before the start of school.

More detailed disaggregated data on ECD is also needed to inform effective and equitable policies and interventions.

Children's participation in quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services is still limited, especially among those from vulnerable backgrounds. The three main obstacles to ECEC are:

1. Inadequate infrastructure, with few nurseries and kindergartens in rural areas and in disadvantaged communities. Even in urban areas, places are insufficient to meet growing demand.
2. Hidden costs. Although in theory services are free, parents have to pay for school supplies, meals, optional activities, etc. Not all families benefit from financial support for ECEC. The lack of free transport is a major barrier in remote areas.
3. Discrimination against Roma and disabled children, who are often stigmatised, segregated or rejected. There is a lack of inclusion specialists in many units and no inclusive educational culture in the ECEC system.

To increase participation and equity in ECEC, Romania urgently needs to invest in rural infrastructure and personnel, provide financial support for families, and ensure training for inclusion and non-discrimination.

Housing

The Romanian state supports children and families to have adequate, accessible and safe housing through legislation and public programmes, although implementation varies significantly at the local level.

The main forms of housing support are:

- Social housing, with priority for families with children, single-parent families, victims of domestic violence, people at risk of exclusion. Local authorities manage the allocation, but funding is often insufficient and housing can be in poor condition.
- Protection against evictions, with prohibitions on evictions in the cold season, in the absence of a housing alternative, and social assistance interventions in vulnerable cases. In practice, however, there have been forced evictions without alternative accommodation, and there is no clear national mechanism for resettlement or post-eviction rehabilitation.
- Support for housing costs, e.g. assistance with heating for low-income families, help with rent, and some help with temporary housing costs for families in crisis.

The European Child Guarantee

According to Romania's Biennial report on the Child Guarantee, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan supports the construction of 110 nurseries and 358 kindergartens. The Plan has also financed 150 day centres intended to prevent the separation of children from their family. A pilot programme, supported by UNICEF and Norway, has enabled integrated social, medical and education assistance, with remarkable results. The model is now integrated into Romania's Child Guarantee Strategy and Plan.

"Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by developing an integrated and coordinated inter-institutional approach, with the sustainable allocation of financial and human resources and with the active involvement of civil society and children.

It is also important to increase the visibility and understanding of the Child Guarantee, through national information campaigns addressed to parents, children, professionals and local decision-makers."

European Semester 2025

Romania's Country Report focuses on child poverty, ECEC, healthcare and education, including digital literacy. Romania continues to face high levels of child poverty and social exclusion, with 33.8% of children at risk in 2024, well above the European Union (EU) average of 24.2%. In 2024 over half of at-risk children lived in overcrowded housing, and many lacked access to basic sanitation.

Access to ECEC is low, especially for children aged 0–3, with only 11.4% enrolled in 2024 against the EU average of 39.2%. In rural areas, barriers to access and socio-economic disadvantages limit early learning opportunities. Educational outcomes are poor, with substantial performance gaps between rural and urban populations and between poor and wealthier households.

The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is allocating €1.9 billion for social inclusion, aiming to support 350,000 children and expand services in 2,000 disadvantaged communities.

The Country Specific Recommendations call for boosting access to ECEC (especially in rural areas), and for reducing poverty and exclusion with more effective and inclusive social protection and integrated services for Roma and other disadvantaged groups.

European Union Funding

EU funds through the ESF+ are the engine of effective anti-child poverty interventions.

However, there are several challenges in the application and reporting processes for EU-funded projects, particularly for smaller NGOs and local organisations. Procedures are highly bureaucratic, with complex requirements, unclear eligibility criteria, and lengthy timelines, discouraging organisations with limited administrative capacity or experience with EU funding.

The implementation of the Child Guarantee has brought some improvements, helping to align funding priorities with the needs of vulnerable children, and has encouraged integrated community-based interventions.

The EU can improve technical and financial support by:

• Simplifying funding applications and reporting procedures.
• Providing targeted technical assistance and capacity-building.
• Facilitating flexible funding for multiannual, integrated programmes.
• Promote partnerships between NGOs and local authorities, with calls that explicitly encourage partnerships.
• Ensuring support for piloting and scaling up successful models.

Country Recommendation

"The Scottish Government should ensure the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 is properly resourced, with investment in workforce capacity, civil society and accountability mechanisms so that the Act delivers real change for children and young people. This includes closing gaps in protection caused by reserved matters and pre-1999 laws, embedding robust children's rights impact assessments across all decision-making, and creating genuine opportunities for babies, children and young people – particularly those whose rights are most at risk – to participate in shaping the policies and services that affect them."

Country Profile 2025

Scotland

Child Population:
Approx. 1,015,918 (2024)[1]
18.5% of total population

Child Poverty:
▼ Relative child poverty reduced from 26% to 22% and absolute child poverty fell from 23% to 17% (2023-2024)[2]

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Children in Scotland

Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)

Children's Rights in Scotland

Scotland has a range of measures in place to ensure full implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 (2024 Act) came into force on 16 July 2024, giving legal effect to many of the rights contained in the UNCRC within Scots law and imposing a duty on public authorities to act compatibly with those rights.

The limited scope of the 2024 Act means that not all areas of children's lives are protected by its duties. Parts of the UNCRC relating to 'reserved matters' have not been incorporated, as only the United Kingdom (UK) Parliament has the power to legislate on these. In addition, the 2024 Act does not apply to laws made for Scotland prior to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. Together, these exclusions create a patchwork of protection: there are still many areas of children's lives – from parts of education and social work to youth justice – where the Act does not apply and where children cannot seek remedy or redress if their rights are breached.

Achieving comprehensive legal protection for children's rights in Scotland will require incorporation of the UNCRC at UK level, as well as agreement between the UK and Scottish Governments to enable the 2024 Act to apply to all areas devolved to Scotland.

The 2024 Act places a legal duty on Scottish Ministers to conduct and publish Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIAs) in relation to:

- Bills introduced to the Scottish Parliament.
- Scottish statutory instruments made by Ministers, except commencement instruments.[3]
- 'Decisions of a strategic nature' relating to the rights and wellbeing of children.

Whilst the 2024 Act does not place any CRWIA duty on wider public bodies, the Scottish Government has created and made available a version of CRWIA for use by anyone.

Under the 2024 Act, listed public bodies must report every three years on steps taken (and those they intend to take) to ensure compliance and to secure better or further effect to children's rights.

In May 2024, the Scottish Government published updated guidance supporting public authorities and other organisations to implement a children's human rights approach in line with the 2024 Act. In September 2024, it published statutory guidance for Part 2 (duties on public authorities) and Part 3 (reporting duty on listed authorities) of the Act.

In early 2025, a Children's Rights Skills and Knowledge Framework was published for workers who want to build or reflect on their children's rights knowledge and take a children's human rights approach to their practice. The Framework and accompanying training plan was co-produced with a Children and Families Panel, composed of children, young people and their families, alongside a Professionals Panel of workforce representatives, ensuring that both lived experience and practitioner perspectives shaped the resource. Together has called for greater steps to be taken to raise understanding of the Framework across duty bearers.[4] An interactive version of the Framework was developed with

---

3 A commencement instrument is a type of Scottish statutory instrument (SSI) used to bring provisions of an Act of the Scottish Parliament into force. They are made by Ministers under commencement provisions in the Act itself and do not normally require parliamentary procedure, which is why they are usually excluded when referring to SSIs made by Ministers.

children and those delivering services, but has yet to be released.

The Scottish Government provides funding to key children's rights organisations, including Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights), Children's Parliament, Scottish Youth Parliament, Young Scot, Article 12 Scotland, Clan Childlaw and the Scottish Child Law Centre. In addition, it funded the roll-out of UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools (from May 2022 to April 2025), as well as public body UNCRC implementation programmes hosted at the Improvement Service and NHS Education for Scotland.

Anti-child rights movements

Children's rights and children's rights defenders are at risk in Scotland due to a reduction in funding for organisations working in this area. Budget cuts and a reduction in individual income during the cost-of-living crisis continue to affect the capacity of the voluntary sector. Without adequate funding, these pressures risk undermining the capacity of public authorities and the voluntary sector to deliver the services and support needed to support children's rights defenders.

Anti-rights movements at a Scottish and UK level are creating a hostile environment that undermines children's rights. For example, the increasingly toxic public discourse around trans rights in Scotland has fostered an environment of divisiveness and misinformation that is undermining the rights, mental health, and schooling of trans children and young people. Although immigration remains a reserved matter, the hostile climate around refugees at UK level culminated in the suspension of the family reunion visa scheme in September 2025 - which disproportionately impacts children, especially refugee children in Scotland - cutting off a vital safe route to family unity and protection.

Child participation

Children experiencing poverty, living in care, with disabilities or from ethnic minority backgrounds often can't express their views in decisions that affect them. Barriers include digital exclusion, inaccessible formats, tokenism and a lack of tailored support to help them participate.

For example, engagement work by Together (e.g. through the State of Children's Rights Report 2024) found that while participation opportunities have increased, many children whose rights are most at risk feel their views are not taken seriously or acted upon.

Child protection systems

The Promise is Scotland's commitment that all children will grow up loved, safe, and respected, focusing on families remaining together whenever possible. Plan 24–30 is the route map to implementing this.

The Promise is based on findings from extensive consultation with care experienced children during the Independent Care Review. All political parties have committed to The Promise, providing a shared mandate for change.

The Scottish Government has committed to bringing forward the Children (Care, Care Experience and Service Planning) (Scotland) Bill, which aims to provide a legislative underpinning for The Promise. Scotland's Public Service Reform Strategy commits to budgeting for early support and preventative interventions for families.

From its work with members across the children's sector, Children in Scotland recognises the need for more preventative

---

4 As noted in the June 2025 Board minutes of the UNCRC Strategic Implementation Board.

approaches. There is insufficient workforce and system capacity to respond to the actions set out in Plan 24-30. According to government data, in 2022-23, domestic abuse accounted for the highest percentage of concerns identified for children on the Child Protection Register.

The Scottish Government's *Equally Safe* strategy aims to respond to concerns about sexual violence. At least 37% of the 14,602 sexual crimes recorded in 2022-23 by the police related to a victim under the age of 18 (26% of sexual crimes recorded were cyber-crimes).

Under-18s are responsible for at least a third of recorded sexual offences against children in the UK.

In Scotland, there are three main issues affecting children with a migrant or minority ethnic background:

1. Discrimination and racism;
2. Poverty;
3. Poor-quality housing, especially for households with 'No recourse to public funds'[5], which may prevent some migrant children from accessing social housing.

Child safety and well-being online

Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA) is a significant risk to children in Scotland.

Police Scotland data shows that 2,055 cyber-enabled sexual crimes against children were recorded, and cases of OCSEA increased by 21% between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.

Children in Scotland report significant concerns about harmful content online, including catfishing[6], content generated by artificial intelligence (AI), misogynistic content, extremely violent content and the impact of AI on their data and right to privacy online.

Furthermore 7% of young people reported that they had experienced cyberbullying at least 2-3 times a month during 2022.

Excessive screen-time, problematic social media use and gaming are significant emerging risks for children in the digital sphere in Scotland, according to recent research, including the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study.

However, some initiatives are being developed to protect children online.

The Scottish Youth Parliament is carrying out a youth-led project, in partnership with the NSPCC, which aims to amplify young people's views and experiences to improve child safety online in Scotland.

The Children's Parliament has worked with the Scottish AI Alliance and the Alan Turing Institute to develop 12 calls to action to ensure that their human rights are upheld in the development and use of AI in Scotland.

Two schools in Scotland are currently piloting a 'zero-phone policy', introduced in May 2025, whereby mobile phones are locked away for the duration of the school day. The pilots will be monitored to assess the impacts on focus and well-being.

---

5 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.
6 Catfishing means creating a fake online identity, often using false information and other people's photos, to deceive someone into a relationship or scam.

Children's mental health

Public Health Scotland publishes [data on children's mental health based on various indicators](), including deaths by probable suicide of 11–25-year-olds, child well-being and happiness, the percentage of young people who feel adults take their views into account, and the percentage of children who have positive relationships (reporting three or more close friends).

Data for the indicators will be published on the ScotPHO[7] online profiles tool in 2025 and then regularly updated.

The [Scottish Learning Disabilities Observatory]() publishes evidence about the causes of poor health and health inequalities experienced by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Data is collected via surveys, including the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (last collected 2022) and the Health and Wellbeing Census.

The public health system includes Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), but there are significant waiting times. However, data in 2024 [showed an increase in the number of children receiving support within the 18-week target]().

There is also provision of school counsellors across secondary schools, and a recent roll-out of [the Distress Brief Intervention (DBI) model]() to children aged 14-18. DBI is a two-level, non-clinical intervention where trained frontline staff provide immediate compassionate support and referral (Level 1), followed within 24 hours by third-sector staff offering community-based

problem solving, wellness planning and supported connections (Level 2).

Current gaps in mental health are a lack of holistic, early intervention and preventative mental health support for children and under-investment in CAMHS.

Additional children's rights issues

Together's [State of Children's Rights Report 2024]() highlighted key children's rights issues including tackling poverty and discrimination, addressing climate change and climate anxiety, preventing violence, and promoting mental well-being, and also emphasised the importance of rights education for everyone.

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

Child poverty

According to the [latest annual statistics](), Scotland experienced a decline in child poverty between 2023-24. Relative child poverty decreased from 26% to 22%, while absolute child poverty fell from 23% to 17%.[8] Groups identified by the Scottish Government, through its [Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan](), as most at risk of poverty are:

- Lone parent families;
- Families with a disabled adult or child;
- Larger families (with three or more children);
- Minority ethnic families;
- Families with children under the age of one;

---

7 ScotPHO is a website that provides data, evidence and intelligence on public health in Scotland.
8 Across the UK, including Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, poverty is measured using the same definitions: relative poverty means having an equivalised income below 60% of the current UK median; absolute poverty means having income below 60% of the (inflation-adjusted) UK median income in a base year (2010/11). Both can be measured before or after housing costs, with the latter showing how many people are in poverty once rent, mortgage payments and other housing costs are deducted from income.

- Families with mothers under the age of 25.

The digital divide persists across Scotland. While data shows that home internet access is at an all-time high, access in the most deprived areas is lower (82%) than in the most affluent areas (96%). Research from [2020](2020) and [2023](2023) highlighted particular challenges for access to digital resources for care-experienced children.

Public investment and social safety nets

The two-child limit[9] to universal credit and child tax credit, and the benefit cap, mean that social security is neither adequate nor comprehensive for children in Scotland. The Scottish Child Payment has mitigated this to an extent. [Recent data shows that without the payment, significantly more families would be in poverty](link).

The [End Child Poverty Coalition has](link) highlighted a range of policy changes that the Scottish Government could make to provide a more comprehensive social security safety net, including an increase to the Scottish Child Payment to £40 for eligible families.

Education

There are a number of barriers to children's access to quality, inclusive education in Scotland, with an ongoing process of education reform in response to findings that education is not meeting the needs of children.

A recent [Audit Scotland report](link) and the [Education, Children and Young People Committee at the Scottish Parliament](link), have highlighted a lack of appropriate support for children with additional support needs.

Respect and inclusion in schools have been [highlighted as key concerns](link) by children.

[A report by the Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland](link) highlighted several challenges in delivering Scottish education, and called for more sustained action on education reform and on ensuring it meets the needs of children.

The costs of attendance continue to negatively impact children's engagement with school.

Bullying is a key issue – among [children who experience bullying, 80% experience it in school.](link)

Early childhood development

There are two positive interventions supporting early childhood development (ECD) in Scotland:

- Regular child health reviews - at birth, 6-8 weeks, 13–15-months, 27-30 months, and 4-5 years.
- [Best Start Grants and Best Start Food](link) - four payments (three one-off grants, and one set of monthly payments made from pregnancy until the child turns three) that help towards the costs of pregnancy or looking after a child. These payments may be made even to families with NRPF.

Data on ECD is disaggregated by deprivation level, sex, ethnicity, looked after child status and whether English is the main language spoken at home or whether the child is bi/multilingual.

Scotland provides 1,140 hours of free childcare for 3–4-year-olds and eligible 2-year-olds. However, [Audit Scotland](link) has highlighted several challenges in the scheme, including insufficient availability

---

9 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.

and flexibility of provision, staff recruitment and retention, and affordability.

In addition, many childcare providers in Scotland have highlighted challenges with the funding models for the 1,140 hours policy, which cause pressure on the system.
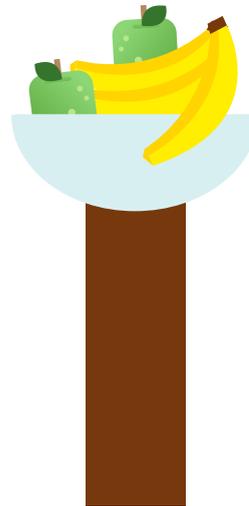
Housing

High housing costs are driving 50,000 children in Scotland into poverty. More than 10,000 children are currently trapped in temporary accommodation.

Universal credit includes support with housing costs for eligible families. However, the UK Government's household benefit cap limits the maximum amount a family can receive in benefits payments, and particularly affects families with children and those with high rents. The impact of the household benefit cap is mitigated by the Scottish Government, so that affected families can receive additional financial support to cover housing costs.

The first universal credit payment takes around five weeks to arrive, so people can fall into rent arrears and some landlords take legal action to evict those receiving universal credit.

The Scottish Government should increase the number of social homes and continue to mitigate against the impact of the UK benefit cap.

Serbia

Country Recommendation

"Serbia should take action to ensure the protection of child human rights defenders by establishing legal safeguards, preventing intimidation and retaliation, and promoting a safe environment where children can freely express their views and advocate for their rights."

Child Population:
1,150,050 (2024)
17.4% of total population

17.4

Child Poverty[1]:
272,000 (2024)
23.9% (2024)
▼ -1.8 percentage points compared to 2023

23.9

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

The Network of Organizations for Children of Serbia – MODS and its following members:

Centre for Youth Integration

Children and Youth Support Organisation (Pomoć deci)

Libero

NGO Atina

PIN – Psychosocial Innovation Network

SOS Children's Villages Serbia

Uzice Child Rights Centre (UCRC)

1 Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2024, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc_peps01n).

Children's Rights in Serbia

There are no institutional measures in place to increase knowledge and understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) among policymakers and professionals working with children. A systematic approach to children's rights training does not exist. Instead, training has been carried out on an ad hoc basis as part of civil society organisations' project activities. Professionals are not required to receive education in this area.

In recent years, there has been regression in this regard, with the dismantling of mechanisms that had been in place for many years. For example, state institutions have failed to accredit programmes developed by organisations that have been conducting children's rights training with professionals in the education sector for over 20 years.

Systematic children's rights training for professionals across sectors is needed.

Anti-child rights movements

There is growing concern for shrinking civic space for children and child human rights defenders, especially those engaging in activism.

Between November 2024 and April 2025, high school students participating in peaceful protests were subjected to intimidation, surveillance, academic retaliation, threats, violence and public discrediting by the authorities. Of particular concern was the reported use of a sonic weapon for crowd control at demonstrations involving minors, raising serious human rights concerns. These actions undermine children's rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and participation as guaranteed by the UNCRC. Unfortunately, the situation is worsening, and children taking part in protests are being detained by the police.

Child participation

Children's participation is generally very low across all sectors, mainly due to traditional attitudes and cultural norms regarding children. The participation of children from vulnerable groups is even more limited, as there are no established mechanisms, nor are professionals encouraging these children to express their views. For example, in Student Parliaments, children from vulnerable groups are scarcely represented. There is a need to enhance the legal framework regarding child participation and to provide education and training for professionals in this area.

Child protection systems

The European Union (EU) 2024 Progress Report on Serbia noted delays in deinstitutionalisation, insufficient funding, and stalled reforms. Progress in transforming residential institutions into Centres for Children, Youth and Families has stagnated, with little concrete action.

Children remain in emergency shelters beyond the 6-month legal limit. Local Social Protection Services remain underdeveloped, uneven, and poorly funded. The most common services – individual support for children and daycare centres for children with disabilities – are insufficient to meet demand. Intensive family support services, counselling for at-risk families, at-home care, and respite care remain project-based and unstable. Roma children and children in alternative care face heightened risks. While some municipalities offer structured support programmes for children leaving care, these are not consistent or available nationwide.

Violence against children remains a serious concern in Serbia. In recent years, increased awareness and reporting have highlighted multiple forms of abuse – both in person and online – affecting children's safety and well-being. Nearly 45% of children are

subjected to violent discipline at home, including 20% who are physically punished and 40% who are exposed to psychological aggression. Sexual violence is severely under-reported, though studies suggest up to 10% of children experience it. Bullying is prevalent - 24% of pupils report peer violence, andd 15% face cyberbullying. Over 8,146 cases of domestic violence involving children were reported in 2021. In 2024, according to official statistics, 49% of identified victims of human trafficking were children. The average age of an exploited child in Serbia is 12.

Children with a migrant or ethnic minority background face higher levels of vulnerability. Unaccompanied children, in particular, face high risks of violence and exploitation.

The government has not provided specialised support for child victims of human trafficking, including safe accommodation, specialised foster care, and long-term support programmes.

Children in Serbia are also forced into the most severe forms of child labour, drug dealing, begging, forced prostitution, and sexual exploitation. Roma children are particularly affected by these issues. There are government-run facilities and accommodation units that provide some support for vulnerable children, but systemic challenges remain. These include a lack of social workers and inadequate age assessment processes for migrant children.

Child safety and well-being online

Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA) and cyberbullying are significant concerns in Serbia. Cyberbullying, online harassment, and revenge pornography have become more common, especially since COVID-19. A 2022 report highlighted the existence of Telegram groups sharing explicit content, including material involving minors, prompting investigations by Serbia's Special

Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime.

These trends indicate a growing threat to children's safety online. Emerging risks include content generated by artificial intelligence (AI), online gambling, and mental health challenges linked to excessive screen time and social media exposure, particularly among adolescents.

Serbia has launched several initiatives, such as the *GovTech* programme, which funds innovative digital solutions for public sector challenges, and the Digital Serbia Initiative, which promotes AI and digital skills. However, these efforts are not yet fully mainstreamed or tailored to child online safety. There is a need to scale up targeted programmes addressing OCSEA, cyberbullying, and digital literacy for youth, parents, and educators. Integrating child protection into national digital strategies and fostering cross-sector collaboration would enhance the effectiveness of these efforts.

The government platform Pametno i bezbedno ('Smart and Safe') is an initiative focused on raising awareness about online safety among children and adults.

The National Contact Centre for Child Internet Safety is explicitly focused on protecting children online. It serves as an educational hub for children, parents, and teachers on safe internet use, provides tools to prevent cyberbullying and online exploitation, and enables reporting of harmful online content targeting children.

Children's mental health

Following the tragic school shooting in Belgrade in 2023, the government initiated a study on the prevalence of psychiatric disorders in children and adolescents. This is Serbia's first study of its kind, aimed at assessing the current situation and the need for better mental health services. Preliminary results show a severe crisis: one in five children and adolescents has

at least one psychiatric disorder. Specifically, 20.4% of older primary and secondary school pupils show symptoms, with suicidal thoughts and attempts (9%) and major depressive disorder (8.7%) being the most common issues.

According to the latest data, out of the total number of psychologists (391) working in primary healthcare, only 78 are employed in child and youth mental health services. This translates to approximately one psychologist in primary healthcare institutions for every 16,540 children. In places outside Belgrade, particularly smaller towns, institutions and services either do not exist or lack sufficient capacity to respond to the growing mental health needs of children.

To address the gaps in services for children's mental health, Serbia should:

- Ensure systematic and sustainable funding for psycho-social services for children and youth.
- Increase the number of mental health professionals (e.g. school psychologists, child psychiatrists) in educational and healthcare institutions, and strengthen cross-sector collaboration to enhance support for pupils and families.

Additional children's rights issues

The impact of climate change on children's health and living conditions is an emerging but under-recognised concern. Children in Serbia are increasingly exposed to environmental risks including extreme weather, air pollution, and poor water and sanitation, particularly in rural and informal settlements. According to the SitAn report, children from marginalised communities are disproportionately affected. Addressing this requires integrating child-sensitive climate resilience into housing, health, and environmental policies to prevent deepening inequalities.

Additionally, the ongoing social crisis in Serbia since November 2024 – following the collapse of the train station canopy that killed 16 people and subsequent student-led mass protests that disrupted the education system – has led to violations of children's right to assemble, participate and express their position.

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

Child poverty

Serbia uses several national data sources to monitor poverty and social exclusion. These include the national Statistics on Income and Living Conditions survey conducted by the State Statistical Office, Serbia's Consumer Prices Index, national administrative data on children receiving social benefits (Social Card Registry), and reports by UNICEF and civil society.

According to the latest data from Eurostat (2024), 23.9% of children in Serbia are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, and the most affected are:

- Children in large households. Children living in households with two adults and three or more dependent children face a significantly higher risk of poverty, with an at-risk-of-poverty rate of 34.7% in 2023 and 29.1% in 2024.
- Children with parents of low educational attainment. Children aged 0–17 whose parents have less than primary or lower secondary education are particularly vulnerable, with 61.7% at risk of poverty in 2024.

In Serbia, the digital divide is a significant form of social exclusion. The children most affected are:

- Children living in poverty, especially those from rural and informal settlements.
- Roma children, many of whom lack access to the internet,

digital devices, or even electricity in their households. 35% of households in Roma settlements lack internet access at home. Only 15% have computers or tablets.

- Children with disabilities face a lack of accessible educational content and insufficient support for digital learning.

As a result, children from these groups face poorer educational outcomes.

Public investment and social safety nets

There is no comprehensive social security in Serbia. Existing support measures are fragmented across sectors - such as social welfare, education, and health - with limited coordination between them. As a result, many vulnerable children and their families fall through the gaps and receive little or no support. In the past two years, access to social assistance has become even more limited.

A major concern is the Social Card Law, which came into force in 2022. While intended to improve targeted benefits, the law has had a negative impact on vulnerable families, increasing financial hardship. According to initial reports, at least 22,000 vulnerable individuals lost their social benefits in the first months of its implementation. This has further undermined the already fragile safety net and left many families with children without access to essential support.

To invest in children and address child poverty and social exclusion, Serbia should:

- Increase child benefits and financial support for families living in poverty, especially those with multiple children, Roma families, and children with disabilities.
- Support digital inclusion by expanding access to the internet and digital devices for children from low-income families, to reduce educational inequalities.

- Support the use of accessible and inclusive digital tools tailored for children with disabilities, ensuring that digital learning environments cater to their specific educational and developmental needs.
- Adopt the European Child Guarantee with a multi-sector approach.

Education

In Serbia, children face several barriers to accessing quality, inclusive education. Poverty remains a significant obstacle, as many children from low-income families, particularly those in rural or informal settlements, lack basic school supplies, transportation, and access to the internet.

Segregation persists: many Roma children and children with disabilities are placed into separate schools or special classes due to legal loopholes and weak enforcement of inclusion. Students with disabilities often lack support because buildings are inaccessible, teaching

assistants are scarce, and adapted materials are limited. Access to assistive technology and learning support is uneven and depends on local budgets or insurance.

Teacher training is another critical gap — most educators lack expertise in inclusive methodologies, and in-service training is outdated. Negative attitudes and persistent resistance to inclusion among education staff remain deeply rooted, further obstructing progress. Local disparities in funding and planning capacity

limit support for inclusive education, particularly in under-resourced municipalities. Socio-economic inequality plays a key role: children from poor households are 2.5 times more likely to be functionally illiterate than their wealthier peers.

These systemic issues require coordinated reforms across education, social protection, and health sectors.

Early childhood development

Since 2024, the one-time child and parental allowance for newborn children has been increased. The new Law on Financial Support to Families with Children now recognises and provides financial support, depending on the number of children: a first-born child (around €4,250), a second child (€5,150), a third child (€19,500), and a fourth child (€27,300), in instalments over one or two-year periods.

Another positive development is a UNICEF-led project which supports parenting through home visits by nurses to families in need, providing both medical and parenting advice. This has expanded to 34 municipalities.

To further strengthen support for early childhood development (ECD) Serbia should:

- Adopt a cross-sector approach to planning and provision of support to children and families from pre-natal care to the start of compulsory education.
- Provide timely support to households and prevent the separation of children from their families.

More and better data is needed to inform ECD policies and programmes. Currently, relevant stakeholders gather data using different methodologies, with variations between municipal records and national statistics. Accurate data, disaggregated by age and gender, is needed.

The main obstacles to participation in quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Serbia are:

- Inadequate distribution of available ECEC settings.
- The lack of organised transport for children in rural areas to reach ECEC settings.
- Insufficient staff to ensure optimum child-staff ratios.

Housing

The state of Serbia provides limited and largely insufficient support to ensure that children and families have access to adequate, affordable, and secure housing. However, some positive steps have been taken. In cities like Čačak, for example, apartments have been built and allocated at a minimal rental cost to ensure stable housing. However, despite joint initiatives with the EU and the United Nations Office for Project Services to finance housing for vulnerable groups such as Roma, women, care leavers, and persons with disabilities, efforts remain sporadic and do not meet current need.

Social housing is rarely granted, and most vulnerable families are left to manage on their own, often living in informal, makeshift dwellings without access to basic infrastructure like water, electricity, or sewage. Although some housing costs may be partially covered through social or one-off financial assistance, this support is minimal and does not address the root causes of housing insecurity or ensure long-term stability for socially excluded families.

To ensure that all children in Serbia have secure and adequate housing, the government should:

- Ensure access to social and affordable housing for families with children, with a focus on vulnerable groups, prioritising the housing needs of Roma families, single-parent households, and families with children with disabilities. This includes providing assistance with rent, supporting energy bills to reduce energy poverty, and ensuring that housing costs do not jeopardise the fulfilment

of other basic needs. As Roma settlements are often sites of deep social segregation marked by multi-generational poverty, low incomes, and limited employment opportunities, housing interventions must be accompanied by long-term support for education and employment and enable sustainable improvements in living conditions.

• Strengthen legal protections and improve infrastructure in informal settlements. Legal safeguards against forced evictions must be reinforced, and living conditions in informal settlements should be improved through state investment in essential infrastructure — including access to water, electricity, sanitation, and heating — as well as alternative accommodation and legal aid. Addressing housing insecurity must be part of a broader social inclusion strategy that empowers vulnerable communities and addresses the structural barriers they face.

Enlargement Countries

The [2024 European Commission Progress Report on Serbia](#) addresses some key children's rights issues - particularly protection from violence, institutionalisation, and the need for legal reforms. It notes the absence of a national action plan on children's rights, gaps in domestic violence legislation, and the lack of a renewed strategy on violence against children. It also highlights concerns about the high percentage of children with disabilities in institutional care and calls for reforms to address sexual exploitation and child marriage.

The EU should provide targeted technical and financial support to Serbia to strengthen child protection and effectively implement the Child Guarantee. This support should focus on expanding community-based services for vulnerable children, including Roma children, children with disabilities, and those at risk of poverty or institutionalisation.

Country Profile 2025

Slovenia

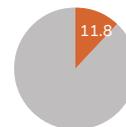**Child Population:**
377,804 (2024)
17.8% of total population

17.8

Child Poverty[1]:
47,000 (2024)
11.8% (2024)
▲ +1.1 percentage points compared to 2023

11.8

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth

Children's Rights in Slovenia

There are no systematic institutional measures to increase knowledge and understanding of children's rights or human rights in Slovenia. Occasionally, there is training for teachers to become mentors in schools, run by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Systematic training across all relevant professional groups remains patchy and is not yet mandatory. However, with the amendment to the Criminal Procedure Act, Slovenia has made it mandatory for judges, public prosecutors, police officers, defence lawyers and mediators involved in proceedings against minors to receive child rights related training in the field of juvenile justice.

Anti-child rights movements

Children's rights and child human rights defenders are not at risk in Slovenia, but children's rights are not sufficiently recognised as important.

Child participation

Children from vulnerable backgrounds don't have real opportunities for participation. Child participation is not recognised as established practice but rather as an exception. Participation activities are mostly carried out by NGOs.

There is a need for more public recognition and acceptance of child participation, for more mentors and for motivated children. The lack of motivation can be attributed to the low priority given to child participation. Schools are primarily driven by achieving academic results, which creates significant stress and leaves little time for other activities.

However, children do have opportunities to participate through Children's Parliaments supported by the Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth. These structures have been in place for 36 years, enabling children to express their views at local, regional, and national levels. Once a year, they also present their perspectives at the National Assembly. However, although children raise issues annually, there is rarely any follow-up.

Child protection systems

In general, Slovenia's child protection system is relatively strong. However, responsibility for children's rights is divided across several sectors — social policy, healthcare, and education — and policy coordination is often lacking. For example, there is an ongoing debate about which ministry should provide funding for the national child rights network, as its activities extend beyond the competence of any single ministry.

In cases of family separation or divorce, there are long court proceedings that can have a harmful impact on children.

There are insufficient foster care options for children in alternative care, and the number of foster parents is decreasing. In general, there is also a shortage of Roma professionals in child protection and alternative care services.

Violence against children is a serious concern. Peer violence is prevalent, especially online. In schools, there is a lot of bullying, teasing and exclusion of some children.

Reports from the National Helpline TOM, run by the Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth, show that sexual abuse, abuse of privacy, online fraud, unwanted online contact, and identity theft were the most frequently reported problems in 2024. Every 5th contact to the Helpline was related to mental health, including eating disorders, self-harm and thoughts of suicide.

95% of children cannot confide in their parents about their problems or do not dare to talk to them about what is bothering them. Many children are left alone with their distress.

Regarding sexual exploitation and child trafficking, there are awareness campaigns and workshops in schools, but many victims aren't formally identified. There is under-reporting because of the stigmatisation and trauma of the victims. The Spletno oko hotline enables anonymous reporting of online child sexual abuse material.

In Slovenia, there is no data on domestic violence, despite the Domestic Violence Prevention Act which recognises physical, psychological, sexual and economic abuse, and neglect. The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth has repeatedly highlighted the need for research in this area.

The main issues affecting children with a migrant or minority ethnic background are:

- Weak integration in education;
- Language barriers;
- Social exclusion and inadequate living conditions.

Child safety and well-being online

Cyberbullying is prevalent and 'sharenting'[2] is a concern. Families often post family pictures, or pictures of their children using some product/family destination they want to advertise.

Positively, an amendment to the Primary School Act has introduced computer science and digital technologies as a mandatory subject, and restrictions on the use of electronic devices on school premises. Currently, schools set their own rules about phones, but now there will be a general ban on the use of mobile devices which will only be permitted if necessary for school work.

The Safer Internet Centre Slovenia provides some protections for children in the digital sphere. It raises awareness and educates five key target groups: children, teenagers, parents, teachers, and social workers, focusing on safe and responsible use of the internet and new technologies. It also enables anonymous reporting of child sexual abuse material online, in cooperation with the police, service providers, and other organisations.

Children's mental health

The National Institute of Public Health collects some data on children's mental health. However, currently available data is a few years old.

A monograph on the mental health of children and adolescents in Slovenia was published in 2018. A survey on the health-related behaviour of school-aged children was published in 2022. There are two to three years gaps in data availability.

Research clearly shows that the situation has worsened, especially during the pandemic, and that the health system is under increasing pressure. At the same time, numerous initiatives are underway to raise awareness, strengthen prevention and improve access to care. There are a number of services available to support children's mental health.

School counsellors provide first-line emotional and behavioural support, and primary healthcare services perform regular check-ups and screening in health centres. 22 Centres for the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents offer multidisciplinary care (psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers). However, there is a persistent shortage of professionals in these centres.

UNICEF Slovenia addresses this issue with youth-friendly spaces, the campaign *Kako se počutiš?*,

---

2 'Sharenting' refers to the practice of parents sharing a large amount of potentially sensitive content about their children on social media, especially when done by an account with a large following base.

the *P-ODPORNI mladi* project, and the *Stiske iz omaric* project.

At the 2024 National Children's Parliament, 115 elementary school pupils emphasised several issues:

• Mental health must be treated as seriously as physical health.
• Mental health issues need to be de-stigmatised and taboos associated with mental health should be eliminated.
• Schools need to reduce pressure on pupils and create supportive learning environments with easier access to psychologists and more active, relaxed teaching styles.
• The Ministry of Health should enable faster access to psychologists, psychotherapists, psychiatrists and other professionals that can help children.

To address the gaps in services for children's mental health the Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth recommends the following:

• Increase the number of mental health professionals through investment in training and retention, especially child psychologists and psychiatrists, with incentives for mental health professionals to work in underserved regions.
• Shorten waiting times for mental health services (waiting times for a first evaluation often exceed six months).

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

Child poverty

The Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia collects data on child poverty, which is similar to Eurostat data on child poverty but with small differences. According to Slovenia's Statistical Office, in 2024 the rate of children at risk of poverty was 10.7%, or 43.000 children.

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

• Children in low-income families, including children of unemployed or precariously employed parents;
• Children in single-parent households;
• Children with disabilities;
• Children in immigrant families;
• Roma children.

There is a digital divide which affects certain groups disproportionately – notably low-income households, persons with disabilities, migrants and ethnic (Roma) minorities. Despite quite high internet coverage and digital infrastructure, disparities remain, especially in access, digital literacy, affordability, and usage skills. The main barriers are low digital literacy, economic barriers, language gaps, and inadequate support and training.

Public investment and social safety nets

Slovenia has an adequate social security safety net for children and their families. This includes:

• Child allowance, provided to families based on income level.
• Parental leave and benefits - maternity, paternity, and parental benefits.
• Family supplement and single parent supplement.
• Free healthcare and compulsory education.

However, the cost of living is increasing, making things harder for children and families.

The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth highlights three key measures that Slovenia should take to invest in children:

1. Provide targeted financial support to low-income and single parent families with children.
2. Ensure secure and decently paid jobs for parents.

3. Provide more flexible working solutions for single-parent families.

Education

Education in Slovenia is free and compulsory from ages six to 15. There is universal access to pre-school/kindergarten (from 11 months) and very high enrolment in primary education (98%). Early childhood education prepares most children well for primary school.

However, there are barriers to children's access to quality, inclusive education. These include insufficient support staff for children with special educational needs, and language and integration barriers for migrant and Roma children. Roma children have poorer educational outcomes than their peers and child benefits are tied to school attendance to reduce Roma truancy. There are regional disparities in the availability of kindergartens and a lack of

learning resources at home for disadvantaged children.

Children experience pressure and stress in school, with too much emphasis on grades and a competitive school environment. They also experience bullying and peer pressure.

Early childhood development

There are some positive and effective initiatives that support young children and their families. These include the Home Visiting Programme after a child's birth. There are universal, free health checks (by paediatricians) for newborns, infants, and young children (at 2-6 months, 12 months, 3 years, 5-6 years).

Kindergartens and schools have lectures for parents on different parenting topics.

To improve support for children in early childhood, Slovenia should:

• Strengthen early identification and intervention for developmental delays - early detection of developmental, behavioural and mental health challenges is still inconsistent, particularly outside urban areas, and early intervention capacity (e.g. therapists, developmental teams) is uneven.

- Provide a free cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) class for parents with children of all ages. Classes now differ based on providers, with different prices and different content quality.

There is a need for more disaggregated data on early childhood development (ECD). Existing national statistics (e.g. on pre-school enrolment or health check-ups) often do not reflect inequalities across regions, and among disadvantaged groups. Without more detailed data, it is difficult to assess who is being left behind and whether services are reaching the children who need them most.

The following data is needed to inform ECD policies and programmes:

- Pre-school enrolment and attendance – by ethnicity, income level, migrant status, disability, municipality/region (to identify under-represented groups and geographical disparities).

- Developmental screenings and outcomes - by age, gender, socio-economic status, and early intervention status (to assess early identification and referral effectiveness).
- Parenting support and service use - by family type, poverty level, parental education, and region (to understand reach and gaps in home visiting and parenting programmes).

95% of 5-year-olds attend kindergarten in Slovenia, and early childhood education and care (ECEC) is of high quality. Nutrition in kindergartens is often above standard. However, Roma children still face barriers to accessing ECEC.

The main obstacles to children's participation in quality ECEC are:

- Cultural and language barriers for children from Roma communities and from migrant backgrounds.
- Fees, which affect low-income or socially disadvantaged families, despite the fact that public ECEC is subsidised.

Housing

Housing and rents in Slovenia are very high, especially in the capital city. It is difficult for young families, single-parent families, and families where both parents work but have low incomes. Some support is provided in the form of rent subsidies and soft loans. The Housing Fund of the Republic of Slovenia manages and develops non-profit rental housing across the country, including public/ social rental housing.

Many Roma children live in inadequate conditions.

The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth highlights the need to lower housing and rental prices, provide more social housing and establish a database of public rental housing.

The European Child Guarantee

Many activities listed in Slovenia's progress report on the implementation of the Child Guarantee stem from pre-existing plans and policies. Nevertheless, Slovenia has taken important steps to improve services for children in need.

49.8% of primary school pupils receive free morning snacks, while 21.6 % receive warm free school lunches.

All children who are citizens of Slovenia have full healthcare coverage, 22 mental health centres have been established (but face staff shortages), and new programmes now address digital addiction and youth mental health.

There is increased investment in public rental housing and subsidies for low-income families.

"Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by improving data collection, expanding integrated early childhood services, and ensuring access to quality support for the most vulnerable children."

European Semester 2025

Slovenia's Country Report addresses child poverty, ECEC, education, deinstitutionalisation, and children's digital literacy. In Slovenia, the rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion was 11.8% in 2024 - the lowest in the European Union (EU) - but reached 62.6% for children of parents with low education.

Implementation of the Child Guarantee is ongoing, with progress in Roma inclusion, support for Roma families, and mental health centres for children. Gaps remain in staffing, support for single parents, and children in alternative care.

Participation in ECEC is high in Slovenia, with a rate of 93.2% for children from age three to primary school. For children under three the ECEC participation rate is 57.8% (above the EU average of 39.2%). However, there are disparities in ECEC participation between children at risk of poverty (38.9%) and those not at risk (58.3%), indicating that access barriers persist.

There is a new ECEC curriculum (2025/26) to enhance quality, fairness, and inclusion, with a focus on vulnerable groups. However, the lack of qualified teachers and assistants is still a challenge.

The Country Specific Recommendations for Slovenia call for systematic involvement of local and regional authorities, social partners, civil society and other stakeholders to ensure ownership and effective implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Plan. The Recommendations do not mention children but emphasise the need to improve working conditions in the care and education sectors.

European Union Funding

EU funding plays an important role in Slovenia's efforts to fight child poverty and social exclusion.

The Slovenian Red Cross and Slovenian Caritas provide basic material support through EU funding. *The Programme for Addressing Material Deprivation in Slovenia*, funded by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) supports the country's most deprived citizens, including children, with food aid and counselling.

There are some challenges in the application and reporting processes for EU-funded projects in Slovenia, especially for smaller NGOs and local actors working to reduce child poverty. These challenges can hinder the full use of opportunities provided by instruments like the Child Guarantee and the ESF+. Approval processes are slow and smaller organisations struggle with the administrative complexity and co-financing obligations (e.g. some NGOs would need dedicated staff just to manage documentation, audits, and procedural compliance).

The implementation of the Child Guarantee in Slovenia is a positive step, but has not yet improved access to EU funding. There is a need to simplify application and reporting requirements, and to shorten waiting times once a proposal is submitted.

There is a lack of alignment between EU priorities and local needs. EU funding priorities may not always match grassroots realities or local child poverty challenges. Organisations sometimes need to adapt their programmes to fit funding frameworks, even when those don't fully reflect children's lived experiences.

Country Profile 2025
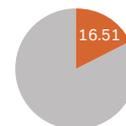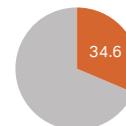
Spain

Child Population:
8,025,186 (2024)
16.51% of total population

16.51

Child Poverty[1]:
2,756,000 (2024)
34.6% (2024)
▲ +0.1 percentage points compared to 2023

34.6

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Plataforma de Infancia

Children's Rights in Spain

Spain's report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child stated that the dissemination of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a fundamental task for public administrations, especially through the Childhood Observatories, as well as for numerous non-governmental organisations. It also states that the UNCRC is disseminated in all of Spain's languages and in child-friendly versions.

Autonomous Communities play a key role in raising awareness of children's rights through campaigns, television programmes, awards, school materials, workshops on child participation, and training.

The Ministry of Education contributes to the training of teachers and offers education resources.

Anti-child rights movements

There is no general threat to children's rights, but there is an increase in hate speech (especially on social networks) towards defenders of migrant children, especially unaccompanied migrants. The public prosecutor's office has received reports of acts intended to identify children's shelters and residences, and to provoke social conflict.

Child participation

Despite progress in law and policy, the right to child participation is not fully guaranteed in practice. Participation is not accessible to many, and its effective exercise is difficult to measure given the lack of data.

There are still legal obstacles to guarantee children's participation in some areas, especially for children from vulnerable backgrounds. The right of association is recognised, but there is a legal vacuum for those under 14 and a limitation for those under 12 participating in student associations. Information on formal channels of student participation (class delegates, school councils, student associations) is very limited.

Plataforma de Infancia believes the Royal Decree establishing the legal framework for children's associations, which is currently under development, should be approved as soon as possible and should strengthen children's involvement in associations throughout Spain.

Child protection systems

By 2023, a total of 51,972 children and adolescents were registered in the child protection system in Spain - a rate of 653.1 per 100,000 individuals under 18.

There has been some positive legal reform of the child protection system. This includes the reinforcement of the principle of a child's best interests, the prioritisation of stable over temporary measures, of family-based care over residential care, and the implementation of urgent response protocols. However, in the 10 years since the reform was approved, over half the Autonomous Communities have not yet adapted their child protection laws to the revised national legislation.

Plataforma de Infancia has identified additional concerns regarding the child protection system.

While the number of children in care (both family-based and residential) has decreased by 4.1% since 2020, the number of children undergoing assessment prior to protective measures has increased by 31.4%, reaching 17,827 by 2023.

Shared data between the state and Autonomous Communities is also needed, to monitor progress. For example, there is no specific data collected on Roma children in the protection system, nor are there dedicated plans for this population, to help identify and address their specific needs.

In 2024, the government approved a *Strategy for a New Model of Community-Based Care: A Deinstitutionalisation Process (2024–2030)*.

Violence against children

The figures on violence against children and adolescents in Spain are alarming, and underscore the urgent need for increased resources, and more institutional and societal efforts in this area.

There were 65,382 official cases of violence against children in 2023. Of these, 9,185 were related to sexual offences, representing a 10.2% increase between 2022 and 2023 for the 0-17 age group. The Unified Register of Child Abuse in Spain recorded 29,770 reports of violence against minors in 2022, a 38.3% increase compared to the previous year. While data collection is due to be improved, there is still under-reporting.

A 2024 report showed an increase of 55.1% in sexual violence against girls in 2019-2023 and

also noted that the average age of children who suffer sexual violence is 12.5 years old.

A 2025 UNICEF study found that 1 in 4 adolescents has experienced family violence. In the past year, 26% reported being exposed to it, either directly or indirectly. Prevalence was 18.6% among boys and 32.9% among girls.

Between 2013-2024, 62 girls and boys were murdered in Spain as a result of gender-based violence directed at their mother or legal guardian. In 2023, 1,816 children were registered as direct victims of gender-based violence in cases involving precautionary measures or protection orders. In the same year, 9,126 children were victims of domestic violence under similar conditions, a 12% increase compared to 2022.

Children on the move

There are several, serious concerns regarding unaccompanied migrant children, particularly in the Canary Islands.

- An estimated 5,800 foreign children reside in emergency accommodation centres in the Canary Islands, in conditions that do not guarantee the protection of their rights or well-being. In 2024, some emergency centres were closed due to inadequate conditions. A 2024 report identified a range of rights violations in these centres. Issues included overcrowded and unhealthy facilities, irregularities in documentation processing, and significant shortcomings in access to education, recreational activities, and mental health services.
- A lack of safe, confidential and accessible safeguarding protocols for children and insufficiently trained and qualified staff. An Amnesty International report documented human rights violations in the reception of children arriving in the Canary Islands, including violence and excessive punishment.

With regard to mental health and migrant children, a study

commissioned by Plataforma de Infancia showed that psychological support upon arrival is weak, informal, poorly coordinated, and dependent on non-state actors. The system prioritises administrative matters over children's well-being.

Plataforma de Infancia also highlights specific concerns on the impact of the European Union (EU) Pact on Migration and Asylum.

- The Pact establishes different regimes for third-country nationals or stateless children compared to EU nationals, violating the right to non-discrimination (Article 2, UNCRC).
- The Pact does not explicitly ensure family unity, thus undermining the right of children not to be separated from their family (Article 9, UNCRC).
- The lack of provisions for legal assistance during the age determination process or the omission of access to judicial review are inconsistent

with the principle of the best interests of the child (Article 3, UNCRC). Likewise, authorising the detention of children compromises the principle of their best interests and the prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of liberty.

- Allowing a 'proportionate level of coercion'[2] to obtain biometric data during screening violates the protection against disproportionate use of force (Article 19, UNCRC).

Child safety and well-being online

While full of positive opportunities, the online space has also become a setting where children are increasingly vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and harmful content. There has been a rise in the use of artificial intelligence in cybercrime, in digital platforms to perpetrate violence against children, and in grooming. Alarmingly, easy access to

pornography has led many children to normalise abusive and violent behaviours.

In 2023, 82.1% of sexual cybercrime offenses targeted children. Furthermore, 53.8% of children and teenagers reported having accessed pornographic content before the age of 13, and 8.7% before the age of 10. In addition, 59.9% of adolescents have experienced some form of sexual violence online.

The Expert Committee Report on the Development of a Safe Digital Environment for Children and Youth offers a comprehensive overview of the situation and puts forward a series of public policy recommendations.

The Spanish Parliament is currently drafting a Law on the Protection of Minors in the Digital Environment, which includes necessary protective measures across sectors.

Children's mental health

UNICEF Spain published the fourth edition of the Childhood and Adolescence Opinion Barometer, with a special focus on mental health.

59.3% of respondents to the 2023 Youth, Health and Wellbeing Barometer said they had experienced mental health problems.

These and other analyses show that the mental health of children in Spain is a growing concern. Despite efforts to tackle the problem, significant challenges remain, including a lack of resources in the public system and the need for greater awareness and training in the education sector.

Children with the greatest mental health problems are those at risk of poverty or social exclusion, migrant and/or refugee children

and adolescents, children who are victims of violence, those in the protection system and children with disabilities.

The services available in Spain to support children´s mental health include:

- Child and adolescent mental health units, within the public healthcare system.
- School-based support services, including counsellors and school psychologists.
- Helplines, counselling and prevention programmes run by non-profit organisations.

However, these are not sufficient to meet the needs of children with mental health difficulties, and public support services (e.g. psychologists or therapists) are insufficient to meet demand. This leaves many families to seek private care, which can be unaffordable.

To address gaps in services for children's mental health, Plataforma de Infancia recommends:

- Increase data collection and analysis of children's mental health, disaggregated by age, disability, gender, and socio-economic background.
- Ensure universal access to mental health services for all children who need them, with interdisciplinary teams.

Additional children's rights issues

Spain faces challenges in ensuring children's right to a healthy environment. There are large differences in air quality, access to green spaces and exposure to pollution in different regions. Urban areas tend to have higher levels of pollution, directly affecting children's health.

Spain is experiencing an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events (e.g. heatwaves, prolonged droughts, floods, forest fires). These particularly affect children. Despite Spain's efforts to address climate change, there is a lack of child-focused climate change adaptation policies.

There is no effective and binding regulation governing food advertising directed at children. This regulatory gap allows for widespread advertising that promotes unhealthy products for children.

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

Child poverty

According to the 2024 Living Conditions Survey (LCS) by the National Institute of Statistics (INE), Spain is the European Union (EU) country with the highest rate of child poverty, 29.2% in 2024. This represents more than 2.3 million children. In comparison, the poverty rate among the adult population was 17.8%.

Children are the only age group for which the poverty rate has increased, with a rise of 0.3%. Severe poverty affects 14.1% of children.

Roma children, children with disabilities and single-parent families are particularly affected, with a poverty rate of 42.4%. Additionally, 60.6% of children with foreign-national parents live in monetary poverty.

Plataforma de Infancia highlighted the persistence of the digital divide in Spain. According to 2022 data, access to digital devices remains highly unequal among 15-year-olds, based on their household income. Among the poorest households, 51% do not have a desktop computer, compared to 23.7% of the wealthiest households. Among households experiencing severe poverty, 28.9% of single-parent families lack a computer.

Public investment and social safety nets

Spain should prioritise three key measures to address child poverty:

1. Introduce a universal child allowance for all families with children, regardless of income. Spain is one of the few EU countries without a universal child benefit, placing its most vulnerable families at a disadvantage.
2. Fully implement and expand paid parental leave provisions, in accordance with the EU's Work-Life Balance Directive (2019/1158).
3. Redesign the Child Support Supplement (CAPI) as an independent benefit, separate from the Ingreso Mínimo Vital (IMV), Spain's 'minimum subsistence income'. Currently, CAPI is tied to eligibility for the IMV, which limits its reach and contributes to a high non-take-up rate — especially among families who need it most but fall outside IMV requirements

(due to slight income differences, administrative delays, or lack of digital access). This results in thousands of eligible children missing out on support. Restructuring the CAPI as a stand-alone benefit would expand coverage and reduce inequality.

Education

For those who attend school regularly and in inclusive environments, education provides academic learning but also emotional and social development. Schools offer children structure, stimulation and opportunities to build relationships with peers and trusted adults. For many, it is a space where they can grow, play and feel supported and protected, but challenges remain.

Spain does not invest sufficiently in education, scholarships, and financial aid, preventing many children from accessing quality education. This has a direct impact on their development,

academic performance, and the enjoyment of their rights.

School segregation reduces the educational success and social inclusion of children in vulnerable situations. Those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds tend to be concentrated in the same schools and this negatively affects their educational performance and progress.

Children from low-income families, from migrant backgrounds or the Roma community often face economic, social, or systemic barriers to education. These may lead to chronic absenteeism, early school leaving, or segregation into under-resourced schools. As a result, these children miss out on the protective and enriching aspects of education, increasing their vulnerability to poverty, social exclusion, and poor mental health.

Early childhood development

Spain has adopted a roadmap to improve early childhood care

- based on universality, public responsibility, equity and quality, and on the principle of 'free at the point of use'.

The roadmap is set to be implemented by 2030, to coincide with the end of the Child Guarantee. It includes €42 million that the Ministry of Social Rights will distribute to regional governments from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). It foresees the improvement of the quality of early care services, continuous professional training for staff, and effective participation of families. This represents a major step forward in ensuring early care for all children.

In addition, the Spanish government should:

• Prioritise a universal benefit for all families with young children, to help reduce child poverty and ensure a more equal start in life.
• Ensure equitable access to early childhood intervention services across all regions, to address current disparities.
• Collect more disaggregated

and up-to-date data on early childhood development in order to design effective public policy.

The main barriers to accessing the first cycle of early childhood education and care (ECEC) are the limited number of places, high fees, a lack of specialised personnel and of coordination between administrations and public resources allocated to early years education.

Housing

Through housing legislation adopted in 2023, Spain is helping children and families to ensure they have adequate, affordable and secure housing. The legislation aims to regulate the housing market, protect tenants, and promote affordable housing. It establishes rent control mechanisms, measures to protect public housing, and introduces financial aid and support for families in vulnerable situations. However, many Autonomous Communities have not fully implemented its provisions, and

full implementation remains inconsistent across Spain.

To ensure that all children and families have adequate housing, Spain should:

1. Improve and expand social housing
• Construct 1.5 million protected housing units to align with the European average in the provision of social housing.
• Extend the legal protection period for social housing units to 50 years, ensuring long-term availability and public use.
• Prohibit large-scale property owners from purchasing public housing stock, to prevent the privatisation of public assets.

2. Strengthen support for vulnerable families
• Automate housing support mechanisms for families with children who receive the IMV or regional minimum income benefits.
• Revise eligibility criteria for housing assistance to reflect each family's needs.
• Introduce a dedicated housing

benefit to prevent excessive housing cost burdens for families with dependent children living in vulnerable situations.

The European Child Guarantee

Spain's 2024 Biennial progress report outlines significant measures to protect and promote the rights of children, highlighting key actions targeting child poverty, access to essential services, and the inclusion of children in public policy. There are two main areas of progress:

• A total of 65,000 new public places for early childhood education (ages 0–3) have been created, with priority given to families at risk of poverty or social exclusion.
• With an investment of €120 million, the *PROA+ Programme* reached 1 million pupils across 3,600 schools, aiming to reduce educational inequalities and improve digital access for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

However, there is a lack of coordination between different levels of government and poor targeting of vulnerable groups in Spain's implementation of the Child Guarantee.

"Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by designing and implementing more precise and targeted strategies focused specifically on the most vulnerable children living in poverty, and by tailoring projects to these groups to maximise their impact."

European Semester 2025

Spain's Country Report focuses on child poverty, low participation in ECEC, and under-achievement in education affecting mainly Roma and single/low-income families.

Spain faces significant challenges related to child poverty and social exclusion, with over one-third of children at risk, especially those from migrant, Roma, and single-parent families. Despite a national poverty strategy and existing income support schemes, poverty reduction efforts are hampered by low take-up rates, administrative barriers and limited impacts of social transfers.

ECEC participation is strong overall, exceeding EU targets, but children at risk of poverty still participate less, especially those under three. Efforts are underway to expand affordable childcare places, particularly in disadvantaged and rural areas. In education, regional and socio-economic disparities persist, and early school leaving remains a concern at 13%, above

the EU average. The country is implementing reforms, supported by the Recovery and Resilience Facility, to improve curricula, student support, and guidance services.

Regional disparities persist and the Country Specific Recommendations ask Spain to address child poverty and enhance social fairness and upward social convergence.

Plataforma de Infancia highlights that the EU can provide technical and financial support to better protect children in Spain through greater monitoring of the application of European programmes and policies, greater demands for compliance with programmes such as the Child Guarantee, and more pressure on non-compliance in the transposition of EU directives.
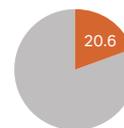
Country Recommendation

"Sweden should take action to implement child rights budgeting by ensuring that national budget decisions are guided by clear child rights objectives that are properly resourced, monitored, and evaluated. This strengthens accountability, enables long-term planning, and guarantees that children's rights are at the core of public spending."

Country Profile 2025

Sweden

Child Population:
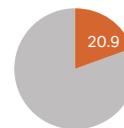**2,176,224 (2024)**
20.6% of total population

(pie chart: 20.6)

Child Poverty:
458,000 (2024)
20.9% (2024)
▼ -0.7 percentage points compared to 2023

(pie chart: 20.9)

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Bris, Barnens rätt i samhället

Children's Rights in Sweden

There are some institutional measures in place to increase knowledge and understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) among policymakers and professionals working with children.

When the UNCRC became part of Swedish law in 2020, the government launched a national initiative known as the 'Knowledge Boost for the Rights of the Child' (*Kunskapslyftet för barnets rättigheter*). This aimed to strengthen awareness and application of children's rights across sectors. An analysis by the Swedish Agency for Public Management found the initiative to be successful in certain areas. However, it also highlighted that the outcomes could have been more impactful if the government had placed greater emphasis on supporting municipalities and regions, where much of the practical implementation of children's rights occurs.

The government has also commissioned an evaluation of Sweden's current strategy for children's rights. This indicates a continued effort to review and improve the national framework for implementing the UNCRC in Sweden.
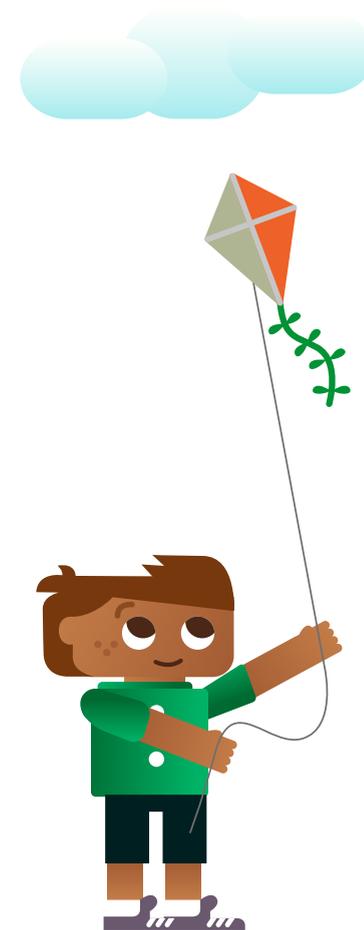
Despite these efforts, significant gaps remain. For instance, there is no mandatory training on children's rights for professionals within the justice system, such as judges, lawyers, and those working in law enforcement. This is a serious shortcoming, as systematic, compulsory training in children's rights for all relevant professional groups is essential to ensure consistent and rights-based practices.

Anti-child rights movements

There are increasing concerns about developments that risk undermining children's rights, particularly for certain groups of children.

While Sweden has a history of progressive implementation of the UNCRC, there are now clear signs that the rights of some children are being eroded — especially children in migration and children involved in, or at risk of, criminality. Several recent government proposals go against the recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and raise serious concerns.

For example, the government is considering lowering the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 13, which is in direct contradiction to the Committee's guidance. There are also proposals to introduce closed youth detention centres (prisons) for children starting in 2026. Other worrying developments include the proposed use of electronic ankle monitors for children who do not consent to social services interventions, and proposals that would deny access to basic welfare support (such as child benefits) to children in families seeking asylum.

These measures reflect a troubling trend towards punitive and exclusionary policies that do not prioritise the best interests of the child and risk violating children's rights. This situation also puts child human rights defenders, such as civil society actors advocating for the rights of these vulnerable children, in an increasingly challenging position.

Child participation

There are growing initiatives aimed at strengthening children's influence in public authority decision-making. There is a pilot project with independent child advocates from civil society who support children in their interactions with public authorities. The Ombudsman for Children engages with vulnerable children and conveys their voices to decision-makers. Barnahus[2] provides a child-friendly environment where children can express themselves when violence

is suspected. In social services, children's right to participation is enshrined in law, as it is in the Health and Medical Services Act. However, several barriers remain.

At the individual level, many children feel that adults do not listen. In HVB homes (low security children's institution) and SiS (high security children's institution) institutions, children report lacking influence. In child and adolescent psychiatry, children feel misunderstood and say they are not allowed to speak for themselves. Children with disabilities often receive inaccessible information and are not supported in expressing their views. Children in the immigration system say they are not allowed to share their perspectives — decisions are made quickly, and adults' views carry more weight.

At the organisational level, many services lack mechanisms, time,

and competence for children's participation.

At the political level, repressive legislative proposals (such as stop-and-search zones and lowering the age of criminal responsibility) are being developed without incorporating children's perspectives or conducting child rights impact assessments. Immigration policy also fails to include a child rights perspective.

To make sure that children's voices can be heard, Bris proposes the following:

- Ensure that all proposed legislation that impacts children is aligned with the UNCRC.
- Clarify children's right to participation in the implementation of legislation.
- Make training on children's rights mandatory for all professions working with children.

- Require child rights impact assessments in all public decision-making.
- Ensure accessible, understandable information and alternative communication methods.
- Strengthen children's participation in schools, in healthcare settings, and ensure children's right to be heard in the asylum process.

Child protection systems

The child protection system in Sweden faces serious challenges, particularly regarding children in state care. There are alarming developments, including a government proposal to allow the imprisonment of children starting next year. These 'child prisons' are currently being built. This marks a troubling shift where children who should fall under the responsibility of social services are instead being placed within the criminal justice system.

2 Barnahus is a place where a multidisciplinary and inter-agency team of law enforcement, criminal justice, child protection services, and medical and mental health workers cooperate to provide streamlined child protective services and child-friendly justice.

There are currently several ongoing reforms concerning children in alternative care. While these efforts are welcome, there are concerns that current reforms will be fragmented and lack coordination, weakening their overall impact.

A major concern is the state-run placements of children under the National Board of Institutional Care (SiS), where there are repeated reports of serious problems, including violence by staff and abuse of power. Of particular concern is that Sweden still permits the use of solitary confinement (so-called 'seclusion') of children within SiS institutions, a practice which is incompatible with children's rights and must end.

Although the child protection system includes important legal safeguards and prevention services, the gap between law and practice remains wide. More coherent, rights-based, and child-centred reforms are needed to protect all children.

Violence remains one of the most common reasons why children contact the national child helpline in Sweden. Children continue to live with violence, at home, in schools, in institutions, and online.

One particularly concerning issue is neglect, or lack of adequate care. Neglect often co-exists with other risk factors such as poverty, parental mental illness, substance abuse, and previous exposure to violence, but it is frequently overlooked and not detected early enough.

There is a pressing need for greater understanding of how different risk factors interact and contribute to violence against children.

A national strategy to end violence against children has been proposed. Bris is urging the government to formally adopt and implement the strategy, in order to strengthen coordination, prevention, and support systems.

A key issue affecting children with a migrant background in

Sweden is increasingly restrictive legislation. For example, temporary residence permits have become the norm instead of permanent ones. This creates a sense of insecurity and instability for children, making it significantly more difficult for them to settle, feel safe, and build a future in Sweden.

A second major concern is the growing number of policy proposals that risk undermining the living standards of people in the migration process. For instance, proposals such as introducing a cap on social assistance and requiring individuals to have resided in Sweden for five years before becoming eligible for welfare benefits pose serious threats to children's right to an adequate standard of living.

Finally, there are concerns about the cumulative impact of these developments on children's well-being, integration, and long-term prospects. The combination of legal uncertainty and economic exclusion places children with

a migrant background in an increasingly vulnerable position in Swedish society.

Child safety and well-being online

As a helpline, Bris gains insight into all aspects of children's everyday lives — lives in which online and offline experiences are fully integrated. During the annual comparison of summer contacts (2023-2024), Bris observed a 58% increase in online-related contacts. While contacts related to sexual abuse have remained at a steady level in recent years, contacts concerning bullying have increased significantly. Between 2023 and 2024 Bris saw a 10% rise.

An increasing number of children report that their private images are being shared without consent and manipulated using artificial intelligence (AI). These altered images are often combined with falsehoods and rumours, and their rapid spread contributes significantly to children's distress.

Children say they have given up on reporting inappropriate content, as nothing happens in response. A simple, effective, and responsive reporting system is crucial. However, children should not be exposed to inappropriate material in the first place, which places significant responsibility on the moderation of the content they encounter. Such moderation should be the responsibility of policymakers and the online platforms themselves.

Children's mental health

Mental health concerns are the most common reason children contact Bris, Sweden's national helpline for children — over 50% of all contacts relate to mental health issues.

The Public Health Agency conducts regular national surveys such as 'Skolbarns hälsovanor', covering children aged 11, 13, and 15. These surveys show a steady increase in self-reported mental health symptoms such as difficulty sleeping, irritability, low mood, and anxiety.

According to the Nationella folkhälsoenkäten (2024), most school-aged children still report reasonable life satisfaction, but younger teenagers (especially girls) report higher levels of mental distress compared to previous years.

The 2025 edition of *Ung idag*, an annual report issued by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society, surveyed 16–24year-olds and reported that 60% of them experienced anxiety, worry or unease in 2023, with higher rates among girls than boys. At the same time, 76% rated their general health as good, but that share has declined over time.

Other findings show worrying trends - increasingly sedentary behaviour, obesity rates, and substance use, factors known to correlate with worsening mental health.

Broader societal factors — such as economic vulnerability, increased screen time, and global crises and uncertainty — are affecting children. This highlights the importance of a holistic approach, including strong social welfare, schools with engaged and supportive adults, and access to meaningful leisure activities.

The government has just adopted a national strategy for mental health, which now needs to be effectively implemented.

A major challenge is the long waiting times for specialised mental health care for children, and the lack of sufficient mental health support within primary care. The healthcare system must work more effectively, with better coordination and fewer silos.

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

Child poverty

Bris believes that more children are living in poverty, and the gaps between groups are widening.

According to Save the Children Sweden and Bris, many more people in Sweden have been affected by inflation and rising food prices, and the economic situation continues to disproportionately affect vulnerable groups of children, such as children in migration and children of single parents or parents without income.

Public investment and social safety nets

Economic vulnerability is increasing, and there is a gradual erosion of Sweden's traditionally strong welfare system.

To invest in children and address child poverty and exclusion, Sweden should:

- Introduce child rights budgeting: implement systematic child rights budgeting to assess how the national budget impacts children's rights. This means analysing public spending and policy decisions through a child rights lens to ensure that children's needs and best interests are prioritised in all budgetary processes.

- Strengthen financial support for families: increase housing allowance and child benefits, rather than reducing economic support. These are crucial tools for reducing child poverty and ensuring that families can provide for their children's basic needs.
- Improve support for families in need: review and expand support for families who need it most, e.g. by improving access to public transportation and ensuring all children can participate in leisure and recreational activities, regardless of their socio-economic background. These measures promote inclusion, well-being, and equal opportunities.

Education

The main barriers to children's access to quality, inclusive education in Sweden are:

- Segregation driven by school choice and local inequalities. Sweden's marketisation of the school system —with independent ('friskolor') schools and extensive school choice — has fuelled segregation along socio-economic and ethnic lines. This results in uneven access to quality education across regions.
- Discrimination and insufficient resources to fulfil the right to education for every child. Racism and discrimination in school can lead to feelings of exclusion, lower self-esteem, and decreased motivation to learn.

On the positive side, a safe and supportive school environment with present and engaged adults can greatly improve children's well-being and learning outcomes. When children feel seen, heard and respected they are more likely to thrive both socially and academically.

Early childhood development

There have been shortcomings in the identification of very young children and their vulnerabilities. Bris has called for the mapping of vulnerabilities among the youngest children in Sweden and for increased knowledge about their specific needs.

Housing

Sweden has adopted a strategy to combat homelessness, but there is an increase in the number of evictions of families with children. Sweden needs to increase financial support to families, including higher housing allowances, and refrain from implementing proposals such as welfare qualification requirements and benefit caps.

Despite the homelessness strategy and a relatively strong social safety net, there are more people living in poverty and the government is pursuing policies and legislation that make it more difficult to qualify for welfare support. This will negatively affect children's living conditions.

The European Child Guarantee

"Overall, the implementation of the Child Guarantee can be strengthened by introducing child rights budgeting – the government should conduct an analysis of how the national budget impacts children, similar to the gender equality budgeting process that is already in place."

Thorough child rights impact assessments should be carried out for all proposed measures affecting children. The government has a responsibility, since the UNCRC is incorporated into Swedish law, to allocate sufficient resources to support the implementation of children's rights. This means that funding must be prioritised to ensure children's right to a good and secure upbringing.

European Semester 2025

Sweden's Country Report focuses on child poverty, low participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC), persistent educational inequality and under-achievement in education. Despite meeting the 2030 child poverty target, further action is needed. To mitigate the impact of poverty on children, Sweden is implementing the European Child Guarantee, and the 2024 biennial implementation report shows progress has been made in some areas. These include a scheme to help disadvantaged children with homework, the development of a national health programme for children and young people, parenting support, and an expansion of the home visiting programme for younger children in areas with socio-economic deprivation.

The implementation of the Child Guarantee is supported by the European Social Fund Plus, including through measures to prevent early school drop-out and the organisation of extracurricular activities for vulnerable children.

Participation gaps in early childhood education remain — 96% of native-born 3-year-olds attend versus 75% of children born abroad. Only 40% of ECEC staff were qualified in 2022.

The Country-Specific Recommendations urge improvements in education for disadvantaged pupils and those with a migrant background, by addressing teacher shortages, ensuring equitable access, and easing transitions to upper secondary school.
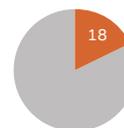
Country Recommendation

"Switzerland should take action to explicitly recognise and protect child human rights defenders in national law, ensuring that children who advocate for their rights are empowered through dedicated funding, legal safeguards, and accessible, child-friendly participation and complaint mechanisms."
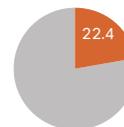
Country Profile 2025

Switzerland

Child Population:
1,609,853 (2024)
18% of total population

Child Poverty[1]:
355,000 (2023)
22.4% (2023)

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Ariel Foundation International

1 Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2024, (% of population aged less than 18 years), Eurostat (ilc_peps01n).

Children's Rights in Switzerland

The Federal Council has given financial support for organisations to educate professionals who work with and for children about their rights, especially the right to be heard in significant decisions that affect their lives, such as parental separation or out of home placement.

The Federal Social Insurance Office has introduced proposals to allocate around CHF 190,000 annually to improve awareness and implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child nationwide.

Anti-child rights movements

In Switzerland, there is currently no widespread or systemic risk to children's rights defenders. However, vulnerabilities and gaps exist, including a limited legal recognition of child human rights defenders (CHRDs). While existing child protection and children's rights laws implicitly include CHRDs, Switzerland does not yet explicitly recognise them in its legal framework. The lack of explicit recognition may leave CHRDs less visible to authorities and without specialised protection.

Child participation

Children from vulnerable backgrounds in Switzerland have some opportunities to express their opinions in public decision-making, though meaningful participation varies in scope and accessibility.

In child protection proceedings, research shows that child protection authorities actively engage children in decision-making by conducting structured 'Kindergespräche' (child interviews), particularly in the context of foster care and protective measures. A study examining proceedings in Zurich canton found that these conversations are increasingly used to respect children's autonomy and integrity in such cases.

There is a general recognition of the right to participate in schools. However, a 2021 UNICEF Switzerland study found that children, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, rarely have a say in decisions on class rules, field trips, classroom layout, or teaching content.

There are about 80 municipal youth parliaments ('Jugendparlamente'), which offer all children, including those from vulnerable groups, formal avenues to submit proposals and influence local government.

Annually, a Federal Youth Session brings together 200 young people from various backgrounds to discuss issues and provide policy recommendations directly to federal authorities.

However, there are obstacles to meaningful participation. A 2019 review found that nine cantons did not have a fully developed strategy to implement children's participation rights.

Structural barriers linked to socio-economic status, migrant status, and disability often limit access to participation. There are also school-level disparities, with some schools unintentionally excluding disadvantaged children from decision-making opportunities.

Child protection systems

In Switzerland, the child protection system has well-developed structures but also areas that need strengthening, such as family preservation, inclusive support for Roma children and children with disabilities, and quality alternative care.

Several factors contribute to the strength of the child protection system. For example, the alternative care system is overseen by cantonal authorities, and supported by community and family-based services to reduce unnecessary separation. The Disability Discrimination Act (2004) prohibits discrimination in education, transport and public buildings, with specific support for children with disabilities.

Organisations like ISS Switzerland provide advocacy and support in cases of cross-border child protection issues, ensuring that children's best interests are represented in legal proceedings.

However, challenges exist. There are reports that children, especially from low-income families, are placed in foster care due to poverty rather than genuine risk, perpetuating cycles of family separation.

Switzerland lacks explicit national strategies or disaggregated data for Roma children, leaving them vulnerable to exclusion and without tailored support, mirroring regional trends of Roma exclusion.

Violence against children persists.

33% of children reported experiencing physical violence from their parent(s). 25% of children reported emotional abuse, with higher rates among children in poverty.

In 2023, Swiss paediatric hospitals logged roughly 2,100 cases of confirmed or suspected mistreatment — 31.8% due to emotional abuse, 28% due to neglect, and 26.3% due to physical abuse. Young children (45% under 6) are most affected.

About 32% of Swiss children report experiencing physical violence at school, and 23% report bullying, exclusion or isolation by classmates. The Swiss Optimus Study 2009–2018 found that 8% of boys and 22% of girls in grade 9 had experienced sexual violence.

29% of children have witnessed domestic physical violence, while 24% have seen emotional abuse between caregivers.

41% of children have experienced discrimination, especially children from immigrant, low-income, or minority backgrounds.

The top three issues affecting children with a migrant or minority ethnic background are:

1. Language and education barriers - children from migrant backgrounds struggle to adapt to their second or third language (German, French, or Italian) and language and education challenges can lead to academic under-performance, placement in special education, and social exclusion by peers. Local schools often lack systematic language support.
2. Heightened risk of abuse or neglect - unaccompanied asylum-seeking children face particular risks in reception centres, and suffer from trauma, stress, and mental health disorders. Their protection and psycho-social needs can be neglected when they are seen primarily as immigration cases.
3. Racism, discrimination and social marginalisation - many children from ethnic minority origin or non-European migrant families experience racial discrimination, in schools, housing, and public services, affecting all aspects of their lives.

Child safety and well-being online

According to a 2022 study, 29% of adolescents reported experiencing online sexual harassment, up from 19% in 2014, with girls particularly affected. About 25% of youth affected by online abuse do not report.

About 24% of youth reported being insulted or psychologically hurt online. Cyberbullying and online sexual harassment often overlap and can escalate into online child sexual exploitation and abuse. Yet, Switzerland lacks precise data on this issue.

Adolescents spend on average four hours a day online, with 30% feeling stressed by social media.

Internet addiction affects about 3.8% of the population aged 15 and over - among those aged 12–19 problematic usage is around 8.5%. Excessive digital use is linked to sleep issues, low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression, especially among girls.

Online gaming can foster addictive patterns too - about [70,000 Swiss internet users](#) over age 15 are considered 'problematic', with gaming as a factor. For instance, [youth gambling is widespread](#), linked to broader risky behaviour, nearly half of Swiss youths have gambled.

[Exposure to artificial intelligence (AI) is rising](#) - 71% of those aged 12–19 have used ChatGPT-like tools.

Switzerland has begun implementing several innovative policies and practices in the digital sphere to improve children's online safety, education, and participation. These include:

Clickandstop.ch - managed by the Swiss Coordination Unit for Cybercrime Control and supported by the Federal Office of Police, this platform allows users to report child sexual abuse material anonymously. It links reports directly to law enforcement and international National Hotline for Online Sexual Exploitation networks.

National Digital Youth Report by UNICEF Switzerland - UNICEF's ongoing research into digital habits and vulnerabilities informs stakeholders on policy needs in key areas including digital literacy, AI, influencer culture, and online harassment.

Media literacy and cyberbullying prevention in schools - several cantons have introduced anti-cyberbullying modules in secondary education. These are usually implemented via partnerships between schools, non-governmental organisations, and technology companies.

Youth-led digital councils - initiatives such as the Federal Youth Session have discussed digital rights and AI. However, youth participation in digital policy-making is limited.

The [Swiss Digital Trust Label](#) evaluates digital services for transparency, privacy, and child data protection. Currently targeted at companies, it sets a strong precedent for broader digital accountability.
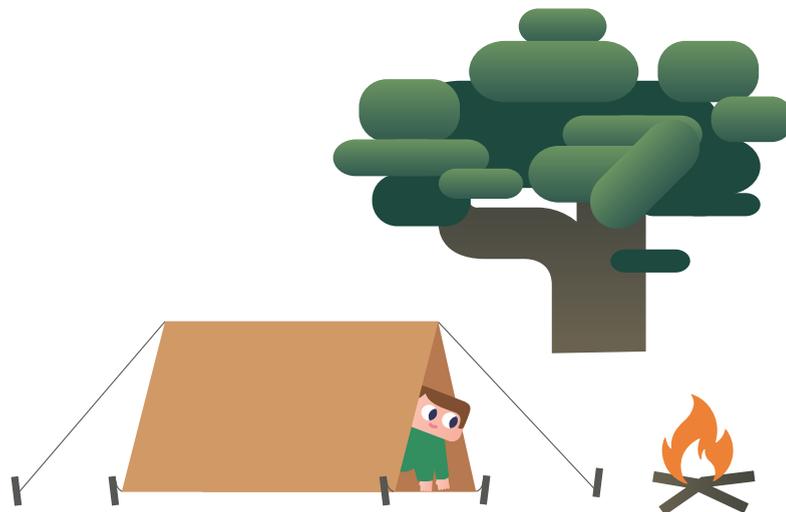
However, large gaps remain, including in statistics gathering and child participation. Scaling up successful initiatives is also critical.

Children's mental health

The Swiss government and affiliated research institutions have improved efforts to collect data on children's mental health, but systematic gaps remain. Both quantitative and qualitative data is available through national health surveys, academic research, and child-focused organisations.

The Swiss Health Survey and National Youth Reports collect data on mental health indicators every five years, but data on children under 15 is limited. Adolescents are partially covered via special youth-focused surveys such as 'JAMES' and UNICEF

Switzerland reports. According to a 2022 'JAMES' report:

- 33% of teenagers feel emotionally burdened or anxious;
- 25% report sleep difficulties due to screen use and social pressure;
- Screen-related stress is higher among girls than boys.

Data collection from child protection organisations and the 147 Helpline also provides information on children's mental health. Data from 2023 revealed cases of anxiety, depression, family conflict, or suicidal thoughts. A growing number of children and young people cite loneliness and digital overstimulation as factors.

A 2022 UNICEF Switzerland report included direct survey input from adolescents. 30% said social media negatively affects their mental health and 1 in 5 felt they lacked someone to talk to about their mental health.

However, data on children under 12 is limited and not systematically collected, and mental health statistics are not disaggregated by vulnerability.

School-based psychological services vary widely by canton.

To address the gaps in services for children's mental health, Ariel Foundation International recommends that Switzerland:

Introduces a national mental health monitoring system for children and adolescents.

Expands support for school-based mental health professionals and peer-led programmes.

Additional children's rights issues

Switzerland has strong legal protections and services for children, but there are emerging or under-addressed children's rights issues of concern.

There is discrimination against minority and stateless children who face administrative and social barriers in accessing services such as healthcare, early education, or protection, as legal residence is often a prerequisite for accessing services.

Young people in Switzerland are increasingly vocal in climate action, but legal and policy frameworks do not yet formally include children's environmental rights or participation in environmental policy-making.

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

Child poverty

The Swiss Federal Statistical Office publishes annual data on poverty and material deprivation. Switzerland does not use a single national child poverty measure, as measures differ across cantons. The risk of poverty or social exclusion rate for children

in Switzerland tends to fluctuate around 18–20%, depending on methodology.

According to the latest National Income and Living Conditions Survey 2023 report:

- Over 100,000 children in Switzerland (approximately 7–8% of the child population) live in households below the national poverty threshold.
- About 24% of children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

A 2022 report on poverty in Switzerland found that:

- 20% or 1 in 5 single-parent families in Switzerland experience persistent poverty.
- Children growing up in families with multiple disadvantages have reduced access to early childhood services, education, health, and social participation.

The children most affected by poverty and social exclusion are:

- Children in single-parent households;
- Children with a migrant background, especially from non-EU/EFTA[2] countries or with undocumented status;
- Children in households with low or no employment;
- Children in rural or linguistically isolated regions, where access to services is more limited;
- Children with disabilities or chronic health conditions.

Digital disparities persist, especially affecting households facing social or economic vulnerability. Children in low-income households may lack personal devices, stable internet connection, or quiet study environments. Children with a migrant background may lack digital literacy, familiarity with school platforms or support networks. Many digital platforms and educational technologies are not designed with accessibility in mind, excluding children with sensory, learning, or cognitive

challenges. In rural communities, broadband coverage is high but digital service reliability and affordability vary.

Switzerland does not have a national strategy focused on digital equity for children. Programmes are often local, fragmented, and short-term.

Public investment and social safety nets

Switzerland has a relatively comprehensive social protection system, but it is not enough to lift all children out of poverty. To be effective, the system must be streamlined, harmonised across cantons, and more inclusive, particularly for low-income workers, migrants, and socially excluded families.

Family allowances provide monthly cash transfers to families with children under 16 (or 25 if in education). Self-employed persons are only partially covered,

and the allowance may not reflect the real cost of raising children.

Means-tested subsidies are available to help low-income families cover mandatory child health insurance premiums. However, these vary by canton and are often difficult to access.

Last-resort social assistance safety nets are available regardless of nationality. Families with children are eligible for additional allowances, but stigma and administrative hurdles discourage use.

To invest in children and address child poverty, Switzerland should:

- Adopt a National Child Poverty Reduction Strategy with measurable targets and child-specific indicators.
- Guarantee subsidised, universally accessible, high-quality childcare and early childhood education, especially for low-income and migrant families.

- Expand income and housing support for families in need, introduce or expand child allowances and ensure access to affordable housing through rent subsidies or social housing programmes.

Education

Many children in Switzerland benefit from a high-quality education system, with well-equipped schools, small class sizes, and well-trained teachers. Schools generally provide a safe physical environment, and Swiss children consistently score high in international assessments.

However, many face challenges related to stress, peer relationships, and unequal access to emotional support. Addressing these issues through inclusive policies, mental health resources, and anti-bullying strategies would significantly improve children's experience of education.

---

2 European Union/European Free Trade Association

Children as young as 10 are tracked into different educational paths (vocational/university), which can cause anxiety and limit future options. Competitive grading and entrance exams add to stress. About 20–25% of children report experiencing bullying, exclusion or emotional distress at school.

Education systems are managed at the canton level, leading to significant differences in curricula, resources, teacher availability, and support services.

Children from low-income families may lack access to early childhood education, after-school care, and private tutoring, all of which can influence academic outcomes.

Switzerland's education system offers high quality but lacks universal inclusion. Addressing socio-economic disparities, language access, discrimination, and accessibility for children with disabilities is essential to ensure that all children can thrive in school, regardless of

background or ability. Although the Disability Discrimination Act promotes inclusive education, implementation varies. Many children with disabilities are still separated and placed in special schools. Mainstream classrooms often lack appropriate facilities or trained staff.

Migrant children with limited knowledge of the local language often struggle to follow lessons and integrate. Many cantons do not systematically provide language teaching, or support with integration.

Early childhood development

Switzerland recognises the importance of early childhood development (ECD), but significant disparities remain in access, affordability, and coordination of services.

Despite some subsidies, early education and childcare are expensive and not universally subsidised, creating barriers for children from disadvantaged households, especially those in

single-parent, low-income and migrant families. There is also a need for inclusive practices that support children with disabilities and multilingual backgrounds.

To strengthen ECD support nationally, Switzerland should:

- Introduce a national ECD strategy with clear goals, indicators, and minimum quality standards for early childhood services so that all children, regardless of postcode or background, receive consistent and high-quality early years support.
- Expand access to affordable, high-quality childcare and early education, by increasing public investment to reduce out-of-pocket costs and expanding the supply of childcare spaces, particularly in underserved regions.

Switzerland collects data on early childhood education and care through the Federal Statistical Office and cantons, but there is a need for more detailed, disaggregated data to inform

equitable and effective ECD policies.

Housing

Children in Switzerland face multiple housing-related challenges that affect their well-being, safety, and ability to thrive. These include high costs, overcrowding, and unequal access to adequate housing for vulnerable families. One in three low-income households spend more than 40% of their income on rent. Families with multiple children, from migrant backgrounds, or without permanent residency are more likely to live in overcrowded or structurally inadequate housing. Though Switzerland has relatively low formal homelessness, hidden homelessness among families (e.g. couch surfing, temporary shelters) is rising, especially in urban areas.

Cantons and municipalities provide rent subsidies or additional support through social welfare programmes for low-income families. However,

these vary widely in availability, coverage, and eligibility requirements.

Some municipalities and cities promote non-profit or cooperative housing units to address affordability. Yet, Switzerland does not have a national social housing policy, and the proportion of public housing stock remains low.

Families facing eviction can access legal aid or mediation in certain cantons. In some cases, child welfare authorities are notified, especially if eviction could lead to homelessness. However, there is no consistent national framework linking housing stability with child protection.

To ensure all children have access to secure and adequate housing, Switzerland should:

- Expand access to affordable family housing, by prioritising the construction and allocation of social and cooperative housing for families, particularly in high-demand areas.
- Integrate housing with child

and family services, through cross-sector collaboration so that families facing eviction, overcrowding, or homelessness are automatically referred to child welfare, social support, and mental health services. Housing status should be considered a key child protection factor.

Country Recommendation

"Türkiye should take action to increase comprehensive policies and cross-sector partnerships that promote an open civic space, increase dialogue with civil society organisations for effective cooperation with public institutions, and ensure that children and young people, including child human rights defenders, are systematically involved in the development, implementation, and monitoring of laws and policies that impact their lives."
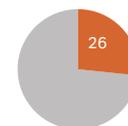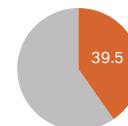
Country Profile 2025

Türkiye

Child Population:
22,206,034 (2024)
26% of total population

Child Poverty:
8,724,000 (2024)
39.5% (2024)
▼ -0.8 percentage points compared to 2023

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Association For Social Development and Aid Mobilization (ASAM)

Hayat Sende Youth Academy Association

Children's Rights in Türkiye

Public institutions such as the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of National Education, and the Ministry of Justice organise training on children's rights to improve the qualifications of their staff. For example, the Ministry of National Education is conducting the _Children's Rights and Education in Disasters and Emergencies Project_ in cooperation with UNICEF .

The Ministry of Family and Social Services has a Department of Children's Rights. In this context, studies are carried out to disseminate children's rights throughout Türkiye.

Türkiye's Children's Rights Strategy and Action Plan (2023–2028) was prepared under the leadership of the Ministry of Family and Social Services. Its priority areas are child participation, child-friendly justice, protection and support services for families and children, alternative care services, services for children affected by disasters,

crises and emergencies, access to information technologies and safe internet use.

Anti-child rights movements

Child human rights defenders, including social workers, psychologists, and civil society professionals, often face obstacles when advocating for the rights of children in vulnerable situations, such as those engaging in child labour, those experiencing abuse, and refugee children.

Child participation

Although national policy documents promote child participation in Türkiye, mechanisms such as school or municipal councils or local consultation meetings are often just symbolic and fail to include children living in poverty, refugee children, children with disabilities, or those in alternative care. These children face multiple barriers including language barriers, social stigma, and institutional inaccessibility. Public

discourse around migration and the child protection system often delegitimises the voices of refugee children and contributes to their exclusion.

In order to ensure real inclusion, there is a need to establish accessible and meaningful participation mechanisms and to train professionals on inclusive practices.

A few municipalities have established children's councils, but this is not common practice. The Ministry of Family and Social Services has established a Children's Advisory Board in each province, and states that it holds regular meetings to receive children's opinions and suggestions. However, there is no data on the extent to which children's input has been taken into account.

The Ministry of Family and Social Services has also established Children's Rights Committees, which include children with disabilities. Regular meetings are held with children, and

opinions are developed on themes identified by children on World Children's Rights Day and conveyed to relevant stakeholders. This year, the 24th Children's Forum, with the theme 'Let's Build Today Together', was held at the Presidential Complex, with the participation of children from 24 countries.

Child protection systems

The child protection system includes a range of services such as social and financial support, and institutional and family-based care. Children in alternative care, particularly those placed with foster families, benefit from support services, but there are challenges in maintaining quality standards and ensuring long-term stability.

Children in care live either in institutional settings (around 15,000) or in foster care (approximately 10,500). Institutional care remains prevalent, especially for older children.

Children from vulnerable and marginalised groups face structural barriers such as poverty, discrimination, and limited access to inclusive education and social services. The child protection system lacks targeted and holistic national policies that specifically address the needs of these children.

In Türkiye, child protection is governed primarily by two laws: Child Protection Law No. 5395 and Social Services Law No. 2828. However, the legislative and implementation framework is still fragmented and insufficient to respond to the needs of vulnerable groups, including refugee children, Roma children, and children with disabilities.

The Ministry of Family and Social Services is the main body responsible for child protection and alternative care. While other ministries share formal responsibility (e.g. education and health), in practice child protection is treated almost exclusively as the responsibility of this Ministry. This leads to delayed interventions and insufficient focus on prevention, especially in cases where early intervention and cross-sector collaboration are needed.

However, Türkiye has taken some welcomed steps to promote foster care, including the official designation of 30 June as 'Foster Family Day' to raise public awareness.

Many children are in unregistered, informal care arrangements with extended family members, outside the state's monitoring system. There are over 160,000 children who stay with their families through conditional cash support. However, these families often receive only financial aid, without the required counselling or psycho-social support.

Roma children in Türkiye often face structural discrimination and socio-economic disadvantage, but there is no specific strategy or legislation addressing their needs within the child protection system. They are largely invisible in data collection and policy design, which limits both outreach and accountability.

There is a worsening crisis of capacity in the child protection system, particularly given the large number of migrant children in the country (from Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine), the COVID-19 pandemic, and major earthquakes. Systemic issues persist: lack of evidence-based planning, frequent changes in policy direction, limited inter-ministerial coordination, and insufficient investment in frontline workers and community-based services.

Despite these challenges, Türkiye does provide equal access to basic protection services regardless of nationality. However, support after the age of 18 (when leaving care) is only available to Turkish citizens, creating critical vulnerabilities for non-Turkish children transitioning out of care.

Early and forced marriages and early pregnancies remain prevalent, particularly in rural areas and among refugee communities, driven by both traditional norms and gaps in the protection system.

Peer bullying is one of the most significant issues affecting children, not only in schools but within society in general.

Unaccompanied and undocumented children are frequently left out of formal protection systems due to complex legal procedures, fear of deportation, and the lack of child-friendly services.

Child safety and well-being online

In Türkiye, both cyberbullying and Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse are widespread. Especially during adolescence, children are increasingly targeted on social media platforms, resulting in significant mental health concerns.

Other emerging risks faced by children online include:

- Social media pressure and loss of self-esteem;
- Privacy violations;
- Exposure to harmful content on unregulated platforms;
- Social isolation and screen dependency.

Türkiye has launched a number of promising and innovative actions such as the DUY (Report) system, which allows citizens and institutions to report digital content that is harmful to children. Another innovation is the nationwide Digital Parenting and Privacy Training programme, which reaches over 35,000 parents and aims to increase digital awareness and protective behaviour.

Despite positive efforts, Türkiye still lacks a comprehensive legal framework specific to children's rights in the digital sphere. A draft Child Digital Protection and Social Media Law is under discussion, but has not yet passed.

Successful local initiatives should be scaled-up nationally.

Children's mental health

In Türkiye there is no regular, nationwide government survey focused on mental health and psycho-social support. The most comprehensive government-led effort, the Türkiye Child Survey (2022) by TÜİK and UNICEF, offers insights into children's well-being but does not directly address mental health or include children's self-reported experiences. Existing data largely relies on adult reports, highlighting the need to capture children's own voices and for more inclusive, child-centred research on mental health.

A range of services are available to support the mental health of children including school-based guidance and services provided by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Diagnostic, therapeutic, and psycho-social support services are provided through child and adolescent psychiatry clinics, hospitals, and community mental health centres under the Ministry of Health. In recent years, multidisciplinary structures such as Child and Youth Mental Health Centres have been introduced to improve both the reach and quality of services.

However, services are largely concentrated in urban areas, while rural and smaller settlements often lack access to specialised care. Moreover, the insufficient number of child and adolescent psychiatrists results in long waiting times or an inability to access appointments at public hospitals. This shortage also leads to very brief consultations, which often compromises the quality of care provided.

To address this gap, the number of specialised mental health professionals and service centres should be increased. In areas with limited resources, the establishment of mobile mental health teams is recommended. Services should be child-centred, to include children's perspectives, and there is a need for tailored support for refugee children.

Additional children's rights issues

Other issues affecting the rights of children in Türkiye include the growing impact of natural disasters, the stigmatisation of refugee children and children with disabilities and the caregiving responsibilities of older children (especially girls).

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

Child poverty

The Turkish Statistical Institute collects data on child poverty, primarily through Income and Living Conditions Surveys which provide nationally representative, age-disaggregated data.

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, the child poverty rate was 31.3% in 2023, with 7.03 million children in poverty.

The children most affected by poverty and social exclusion are:

- Refugee and migrant children;
- Unaccompanied and undocumented children;
- Children living in informal or slum settlements;
- Children with disabilities;
- Roma and Dom children (Dom communities within migration and refugee contexts);
- Children under state care/ protection.

A significant portion of the population including children from low-income households, children in institutional care, and refugee children remains digitally excluded or under-served.

The main barriers to digital access include:

- Lack of personal devices;
- Weak or unavailable internet infrastructure;
- Low digital literacy among parents;
- Exclusionary factors linked to language and legal status;
- Families' religious beliefs

leading to a cautious approach toward digitalisation.

Public investment and social safety nets

While there are several social support programmes, these remain fragmented and often fail to reach the most vulnerable, especially refugee children, children with disabilities, and those living in informal settlements.

To invest in children and lift them out of poverty Türkiye should:

- Strengthen integrated social protection systems and community-based support mechanisms for children and families.
- Ensure equal access to quality education and support services for all children, including refugees and marginalised groups and expand access to inclusive and quality early childhood education and care (ECEC).
- Ensure a stable economy and financial support for families.

Education

Migrant children often face stigma, exclusion, and xenophobia in schools and wider society. This is an important barrier to social integration. Language difficulties, financial hardship, and bullying prevent these children from attending school regularly or achieving academically.

In Türkiye, children's access to inclusive and quality ECEC is shaped by deep-rooted inequalities in service availability, social awareness, and institutional capacity. Many either lack access to ECEC services entirely or attend under-resourced institutions that fail to meet their developmental needs.

ECEC is not mandatory in Türkiye and is often not free of charge. Many families struggle to afford registration fees, transportation, or other related costs, and service hours are not always compatible with the needs of working parents. There is a lack of awareness about the developmental benefits

of early education among many caregivers.

Children from migrant, refugee, low-income, or low-education households often face barriers such as bureaucratic procedures, language challenges, or social exclusion that prevent them from accessing ECEC services. Although there are some targeted programmes, they are usually short-term, donor-funded, and not fully integrated into local or national systems.

Public investment in early years education remains insufficient, especially in areas where children face multiple vulnerabilities. Moreover, early intervention for children with disabilities or trauma-related needs is not systematically integrated into early childhood education, leading to fragmented and exclusionary practices that leave the most at-risk children behind during the most critical period of their development.

Early childhood development

There are some positive initiatives that support young children and their families. In line with the Ministry of Health's Infant, Child and Adolescent Monitoring Protocols, family physicians provide systematic monitoring of early childhood development (ECD), with periodic developmental assessments, physical examinations and counselling for caregivers.

The Guidelines for Monitoring and Supporting Development provide a holistic standard for assessing children's language, motor, cognitive and social-emotional development, and provide guidance for early identification of developmental delays and appropriate responses.

However, the system should include components that assess social risk factors related to the child's care environment (e.g. neglect, emotional deprivation and toxic stress). Health and social service professionals should be more aware of these issues, and

referral and protective intervention protocols should be strengthened.

Institutional care for children aged 0-6 should be stopped as soon as possible and replaced by foster care. The Ministry of Family and Social Services and UNICEF are carrying out a comprehensive project on this, but more resources are needed in this area.

There is a need for more disaggregated data on ECD, including in the following areas:

- The frequency of quality interactions between caregivers and children.
- The participation of children in developmental screenings at family health centres, in home visits, and in community-based ECD programmes, to highlight service gaps.
- Referral rates to services for early identification, special education and rehabilitation, and regional/institutional barriers to accessing these services.
- Children aged 0-6 in institutional care and foster care.

Housing

Türkiye has implemented mass housing projects for low-income families. However, these often do not include refugee families. There is also limited availability in high-demand urban areas where housing insecurity is most acute.

There are some (limited) financial assistance schemes, such as rent support provided under certain social assistance programmes. However, these are not sufficient to protect families from high housing costs, especially in cities where rents are high.

There are no strong legal or administrative protections from forced evictions. Families with informal tenancies or without formal ownership documents are especially vulnerable and often excluded from public assistance mechanisms.

Approximately 40% of Turkish households experience poor-quality housing, including damp, poor heating and overcrowding. Low-income families, single-

parent households, and those in informal settlements are particularly affected. High inflation and insufficient state support force parents to choose between housing and other essentials, with long-term consequences for children.

Türkiye should roll out a national housing quality improvement programme targeted at vulnerable families, to ensure safe, healthy living environments. It should also introduce targeted, means-tested housing subsidies or rent caps for low-income households with children, easing cost pressures to help families maintain stable, adequate homes.

Enlargement Countries

The Enlargement Package 2024 progress report does not include specific findings or recent data on child labour in Türkiye, which is a significant gap. The report also lacks a focus on the mental well-being and vulnerability of migrant children.

Türkiye could and should demonstrate interest in the Child Guarantee approach. However, effective implementation would require strong ownership by public institutions, active participation of civil society, and reinforced strategic cooperation with the European Union (EU). The Child Guarantee represents a significant opportunity for Türkiye to improve children's rights.

Programme grants remain a critical resource for both the government and NGOs in Türkiye. However, recent trends show a decrease in the availability of EU funds, particularly those accessible to civil society. As EU financial instruments evolve and priorities shift, the overall funding envelope for rights-based NGOs in Türkiye has narrowed, disproportionately affecting local and medium-sized NGOs, which rely heavily on international grants due to a lack of domestic funding.

To strengthen civil society and ensure pluralism, EU institutions should design more inclusive funding mechanisms. This could include smaller-scale grants that medium-sized NGOs can access directly, and encouraging partnerships between NGOs of different capacities. Furthermore, the EU should leverage its funding power to advocate for meaningful and institutionalised cooperation between the state and civil society, especially in child protection and human rights.
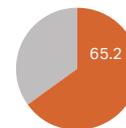
**Country
Profile 2025**

Ukraine

Child Population:
6,336,505 (2022)

Child Poverty[1]:
65% (2022)

65.2

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Ukrainian Foundation for Public Health

1 Estimate by UNICEF (2023)

Children's Rights in Ukraine

Civil servants, social workers, law enforcement officers and members of the judiciary in Ukraine have training on children's rights. These sessions include professional training and the development of a child rights strategy, as well as human rights education that incorporates children's rights. The Ukrainian Foundation for Public Health participates in these training programmes to promote inter-disciplinary cooperation among specialists in the protection of children.

Child participation

In Ukraine, children from vulnerable backgrounds do have some opportunities to express their opinions in public decision-making processes, through initiatives such as youth councils within local government bodies and school parliaments.

For example, youth councils provide a platform for children - including those living in poverty, in foster care, with disabilities, or from minority communities - to voice their concerns and influence decisions regarding local policies and programmes. Similarly, school parliaments allow pupils to participate actively in shaping school policies and addressing issues that directly affect them.

However, obstacles to meaningful participation remain. These include a lack of awareness about such platforms among children and their communities, limited training on effective advocacy, and insufficient support from adults in facilitating children's involvement.

To ensure that the voices of vulnerable children are truly heard, it is essential to enhance awareness of existing participation mechanisms, to provide training on advocacy and public speaking, and to ensure that adults are empowered to support and mentor children in these processes.

Child protection systems

The child protection system in Ukraine is undergoing significant reforms aimed at preventing family separation and supporting vulnerable groups, including Roma children and those in alternative care. One of the strengths of the current system is the ongoing reform of maternity and children's homes in various regions. Reforms are designed to provide better support for young mothers with small children who find themselves in difficult circumstances and lack safe housing options.

Ukraine is implementing a national 'better care' reform (deinstitutionalisation) that shifts from residential care toward family- and community-based services. The reform prioritises prevention and early intervention, community social services, inclusive education, disability-responsive support, foster and kinship care, and small family-type homes (only as a last resort), supported by strengthened case management and gatekeeping, and alignment with UNCRC and European Union (EU) child-rights standards. It is operationalised through multi-year strategies and action plans, with municipalities ('hromadas') playing a central role. Importantly, Eurochild members in Ukraine are embedded in this process at local level, co-designing services with municipalities, supporting workforce training, piloting community-based models, and contributing to evidence and monitoring.

However, challenges persist. Many young mothers still face risks of family separation due to inadequate support services and insufficient access to resources.

Roma children and those in alternative care often encounter barriers to accessing services and education, and face challenges with social integration.

To address these issues, specific measures are being implemented, including the enhancement of community-based support services, the establishment of safe housing options for vulnerable families, and targeted outreach programmes to ensure that marginalised groups, such as Roma children, receive the necessary assistance and support. Continued focus on these areas is essential to strengthen the child protection system and promote the well-being of all children in Ukraine.

In Ukraine, the main concerns related to violence against children include domestic violence, bullying, and online abuse. Many children experience physical and emotional abuse within their homes, exacerbated by the ongoing war and socio-economic challenges.

Bullying remains prevalent in schools, affecting children's mental health and well-being. Additionally, the rise of online violence, including cyberbullying and exploitation, poses significant risks to children's safety. Efforts to address these issues are crucial for protecting children's rights and ensuring their safety in all environments.

The top three issues affecting children with a migrant background and those from ethnic minorities include:

- Access to education: many displaced children and those with an ethnic minority origin face barriers to accessing quality education due to language differences, discrimination, and a lack of inclusive policies. This affects their ability to integrate and succeed academically.
- Social integration: displaced children and those with an ethnic minority origin often experience social exclusion and discrimination, which can lead to isolation and mental health challenges. Efforts to promote social cohesion and acceptance within communities are essential for their well-being.
- Access to health and social services: these children frequently encounter difficulties in accessing healthcare and social services, exacerbated by bureaucratic obstacles and a lack of culturally sensitive support. Ensuring that they receive adequate care and assistance is crucial for their overall development and integration into society.

Child safety and well-being online

In Ukraine, Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA) and cyberbullying are prevalent and pose significant risks to children.

On social media platforms, children are vulnerable to exploitation and exposure to harmful content. The rise of online gaming has also created opportunities for potential grooming and exposure to inappropriate behaviour.

In Ukraine, several innovative solutions and practices are being developed to enhance child protection in the digital sphere. One notable initiative is the establishment of comprehensive online safety education programmes in schools, aimed at teaching children about digital literacy, responsible online behaviour, and the risks associated with social media and online interactions. Additionally, partnerships between government agencies, non-governmental organisations and technology companies are being fostered to create resources and tools to monitor and prevent OCSEA.

Children's mental health

According to a survey by the Ukraine Children's Action Project, conducted in 2023 among approximately 2,000 Ukrainian mothers, 55% reported that their children were frightened by loud noises in the previous month, and 41% observed irritability or apathy in their children.

These findings indicate that the ongoing war has significantly affected children's mental well-being, particularly younger

children who are especially sensitive to loud noise.

In Ukraine, there are various services available to support children's mental health, including counselling and therapy through schools and community centres. However, there is a need to develop online mental health support services. The Ukrainian Public Health Foundation has established an online platform, Support Me, where psychologists and doctors provide consultations to adolescents. This platform also allows for referrals to offline services when necessary. Expanding such online support can help bridge the gap in mental health care for children, making it more accessible and responsive to their needs.

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

Child poverty

In Ukraine, the groups of children most affected by poverty and social exclusion include:

- Children from low-income families: households with limited financial resources struggle to meet basic needs.
- Children displaced by the war: those who have been internally displaced due to the ongoing war face numerous challenges, including lack of access to education, healthcare, and stable living conditions.
- Children with disabilities: this group often experiences social exclusion and barriers to accessing essential services and support, exacerbating their vulnerability.
- Children from ethnic minorities: children belonging to ethnic minority groups may face discrimination and limited access to resources, further

contributing to their social exclusion.

In Ukraine, the digital divide persists due to disparities in access to technology and the internet, particularly affecting rural areas and low-income families. Vulnerable groups, such as children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with disabilities are most affected.

The main barriers to digital equity include inadequate infrastructure in rural regions, limited financial resources to purchase devices and internet services, and a lack of digital literacy skills. These challenges hinder access to online education, health services, and job opportunities, further exacerbating social inequalities.

Public investment and social safety nets

Ukraine's social security safety net is not comprehensive enough to fully support children and their families. While there are some programmes in place, such as child benefits and social

assistance for low-income families, these often do not provide sufficient support to meet the basic needs of families, especially in the context of ongoing economic challenges and the impacts of the war.

Many families face barriers in accessing these services due to bureaucratic hurdles and lack of awareness. Strengthening and expanding the social security system is essential to ensure that all children and their families receive comprehensive support to lift them out of poverty and improve their overall well-being.

To invest in children and address poverty and social exclusion in Ukraine, the government should consider the following three measures:

1. Enhance social protection programmes by increasing financial assistance and support for low-income families, ensuring that benefits are accessible and sufficient to meet basic needs.
2. Expand access to quality

education by investing in educational infrastructure and resources, particularly in rural areas, to ensure all children have access to quality education and learning opportunities.

3. Promote mental health and well-being services, by developing and funding comprehensive mental health programmes for children, focusing on trauma support, counselling, and community-based services to address the psychological impacts of poverty and war.

Education

The main barriers to children's access to quality, inclusive education include:

- Infrastructure challenges: many schools, especially in rural areas, lack adequate facilities and resources, making it difficult to provide a conducive learning environment.
- Economic disparities: low-income families often struggle to afford educational materials

and support services, leading to unequal opportunities for their children.
- Limited special education resources: there is a shortage of trained teachers and specialised programmes for children with disabilities, which hinders their ability to receive an inclusive education.
- Impacts of the war: ongoing war has disrupted education for many children, particularly those displaced or living in affected regions, limiting their access to schooling.

Positively, many teachers are committed and passionate about their work, creating supportive learning environments that inspire pupils. Some schools have innovative programmes, creative teaching methods and provide extracurricular activities that enhance children's engagement and learning.

However, many schools face shortages of materials and facilities, affecting the quality of education. Ongoing war and

economic instability contribute to anxiety and psychological stress among children, affecting their focus and overall well-being. Disparities in access to quality education based on socio-economic status and geographic location lead to unequal learning experiences.

Early childhood development

In Ukraine, two notable early childhood development (ECD) initiatives are:

- Home visiting programmes which provide support to families with young children through regular visits by trained professionals. They offer parenting education, developmental screenings, and resources to promote healthy child development and family well-being.
- Integrated ECD centres which offer comprehensive services that combine early education, healthcare, and social support for children and their families. They aim to enhance access

to quality early childhood education and promote holistic development, particularly for vulnerable populations.

To further strengthen support for ECD in Ukraine, the government should:

- Allocate more resources to expand and improve early childhood education and intervention services, ensuring access for all families, especially those in under-served areas.
- Provide comprehensive training programmes and support for teachers and health professionals to enhance their skills in ECD, ensuring they can effectively support the growth and learning of young children.

There is a significant need for more disaggregated data on ECD in Ukraine. Specifically, there is a need for data on:

- Socio-economic status to provide information on how family income and social background affect access to

ECD services and outcomes for children.

- Geographical disparities, with disaggregated data on access to ECD programmes in urban and rural areas, as well as data on the impact of war-affected areas on children's development.
- Health and developmental outcomes, with comprehensive data on children's health, nutrition, and developmental milestones to identify areas that need intervention.

In Ukraine, the main obstacles to children's participation in quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) are due to the ongoing war. This has created safety concerns for families, making it difficult for children to attend ECEC facilities, especially in war-affected areas. There is also a shortage of available pre-schools, particularly in rural and war-affected regions, limiting access to early childhood education for many children.

The war has led to a significant outflow of professionals, resulting in a shortage of qualified ECEC staff, which affects the quality of education and care provided.

Housing

In Ukraine, the state supports children and families to access adequate, affordable, and secure housing through several measures.

The government has implemented social housing initiatives aimed at providing low-income families with access to affordable housing options, helping to reduce homelessness and overcrowding.

Legal frameworks are in place to protect families from eviction, especially during the ongoing war, ensuring that vulnerable populations have stability in their housing situation.

The state also offers various forms of financial support to help families cover housing costs, including rent subsidies and help with utilities, which helps to maintain secure living conditions.

To address the main issues that children and families face regarding adequate housing and a decent standard of living, the Ukrainian Foundation for Public Health recommends the establishment of Mother and Child Centres (halfway houses) in each region of Ukraine, to provide safe housing, psycho-social services, and resources for mothers and their children, helping to address homelessness and inadequate living conditions.

Comprehensive support services for displaced families affected by the war, including financial assistance, temporary housing solutions, and legal aid to prevent forced evictions and ensure stability for vulnerable populations are also needed.

Enlargement Countries

The main children's rights issues have been integrated into Ukraine's progress report in the 2024 Enlargement Package. Key issues include the establishment of the State Service of Ukraine for Children, which aims to implement policies that protect children's rights and support families. However, the report notes the need for clearer procedures on determining the best interests of the child. The report also emphasises the ongoing challenges in ensuring quality education for all children, particularly those displaced or living near the war zones. While progress has been made with child-friendly centres (based on the Barnahus[2] model), more services to support child-friendly justice are needed.

There is a significant focus on the reduction of children in institutional care and on the promotion of alternative family-

---

2 The Barnahus (Children's House) model provides a child-friendly, multidisciplinary response to child abuse by uniting justice, protection, health, and support services under one roof.

based care, with a noted decrease in the number of children in institutions.

While these issues are addressed, the report indicates that more comprehensive strategies and resources are required to strengthen support for children's rights and well-being in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Foundation for Public Health highlights some ways in which the EU could provide technical and financial support to Ukraine to enhance the protection of children. These include:

- The provision of financial support, with funds allocated specifically for initiatives aimed at improving child welfare, mental health services, education access, and family support programmes, all of which are crucial in the current context of war and displacement.
- The provision of technical assistance and capacity building support to local organisations, for the development and

implementation of evidence-based programmes that address children's health and social needs, ensuring they are tailored to the unique challenges in Ukraine.

The government of Ukraine is in the process of developing the National Action Plan on the implementation of the European Child Guarantee. The Ukrainian Foundation for Public Health has been involved in some discussions and events on its development.
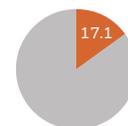
Wales

Country Recommendation

"Wales should take every opportunity to act decisively to promote and protect the human rights of all babies, children and young people, through introducing legislation to fully and directly incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Welsh law."
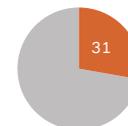
Child population (0-15 years):
546,000 (2024)
17.1% of total population

Child Poverty[1]:
31% (2022-2024)
▲ +2 percentage points compared to 2021-2023

RESPONDENT MEMBER(S):

Children in Wales – Plant Yng Nghymru

Children's Rights in Wales

The law in Wales requires all Welsh Ministers to have due regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (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 (CRIA) process in place, and it is a tool officials use to support Welsh Ministers in ensuring the due regard duty is fulfilled. However, despite the production of a manual and template to support officials, CRIAs are not mandatory, their application is inconsistent, and the content is variable.

There is no Children's Rights Strategy in Wales, despite the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child recommending that one be adopted. Instead, Wales has opted for a Children's Plan, which the Welsh Government considers preferable. While the Plan makes reference to the UNCRC, it does not fully reflect or implement the Committee's recommendations. The Welsh Government have published a separate response to the Committee's recommendations

Child rights training

Children in Wales is commissioned by the Welsh Government to deliver children's rights training to a broad range of professionals across the public, private and third sectors in Wales.

Three bespoke, full-day training courses are delivered for i) professionals working in early years settings, which focus on the rights of babies and pre-school age children, ii) professionals working with infants and primary school children, and iii) professionals working with adolescents. These courses focus on increasing awareness and knowledge of the UNCRC and its application.

Many other organisations, including the Children's Commissioner for Wales and third sector charities, also deliver awareness-raising sessions as part of their roles. The Welsh Government, through the statutory Children's Rights Scheme, provides training to civil servants.

Anti-child rights movements

There is increasing acceptance that threats to human rights are taking place globally. Wales has not been immune to such threats, and there has been a rise in hate crime and hostile rhetoric towards some minority groups, fuelled by social media, the ongoing economic crisis and populist movements across many parts of the country and the United Kingdom (UK).

Child participation

Wales benefits from a range of mechanisms which support children and young people to have an opportunity to express their opinions in decision-making.

The Welsh Senedd (Welsh Parliament) has a Youth Parliament which comprises 60 members, with 20 appointed by partner organisations to ensure representation of diverse groups of young people. Young Wales is an established national participation structure which engages children and young people on Welsh Government policies and related matters. There are also school councils and mechanisms managed by public and third sector organisations and children's rights institutions.

However, children's views, including those from vulnerable backgrounds, with protected characteristics and younger children, are not routinely sought on all decisions which affect them. Many children lack opportunities

for meaningful participation locally or lack awareness of where opportunities do exist. There are still concerns that participatory arrangements are not prioritised, sustainable, embedded, adequately funded or monitored against national standards, and that opportunities for children to discuss the issues of importance to them are often lacking.

The Getting Ready Project is an example of a project which empowers young people in local authority care by enhancing their knowledge of their rights and entitlements when planning to leave care. Through the delivery of workshops, training and the development of resources, it contributes to supporting young people to safely transition from care, thus reducing the risk of homelessness and housing instability.

Child protection systems

Wales benefits from a legal framework for safeguarding and a child protection system through the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2016, supported by statutory guidance covering the protection of children and adults. A common set of protection procedures and practice guides, to support practitioners to safeguard children who are at risk of abuse and neglect, is also in place. Steps have been taken to safely reduce the number of children coming into state care, yet recent figures show a slight rise, which continues the longer-term upward trend of children looked after in Wales.[2]

There is a broad range of national and local programmes and services to support children, parents and families at risk of separation. This includes the Families First programme,

which 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.

The Welsh Government has recently introduced the Health and Social Care (Wales) Act 2025 which will remove profit from the care of children looked after in Wales, following concerns that excessive profits were being made from the care of children. This legislation will be implemented in phases from April 2026 and sets out an intention to expand not-for-profit operating models and remove care providers' ability to make private profit from the care services provided to children looked after.

Children continue to be at risk from all forms of violence, a matter of concern for both the Welsh and UK governments,

in line with devolved and non-devolved responsibilities. The primary reasons for children needing care and support remains the risk of abuse and neglect. Substance misuse, parental mental health and domestic abuse are frequently recorded factors for children needing care and support.

Children continue to be at risk of bullying and the Welsh Government is presently consulting on a refreshed strategy to support schools to both prevent and respond to instances of bullying.

The UK Government is responsible for asylum policy and immigration and is presently reviewing and making changes to punitive legislation introduced by the previous administration. Wales continues to take steps to become a nation of sanctuary, with an emphasis on compassion

---

2 In Wales, the term 'children looked after' is the term used for children who are in the care of the local authority. This can include: children living with foster carers; children living in residential children's homes; children placed with relatives or friends under formal care arrangements; and, in some cases, children still living at home but under a care order.

and tackling inequalities, and on valuing the contribution that migrants make to Welsh communities. Some of the key issues affecting children with a migrant background coming to Wales are housing provision, support with integration into their new communities, and language provision.

Child safety and well-being online

The online space provides several benefits for children and young people, whilst also placing them at greater risk of harm. The Online Safety Act, introduced by the UK Government, is now being implemented. It aims to reduce children's risk to exposure to harmful online content, grooming and abuse by placing new duties on online service providers to address harms across all platforms.

Many of the risks faced by children in Wales are replicated across other nations in the UK, given the global reach of the digital

sphere. A report by the Youth Endowment Fund of 10,000 children in England and Wales revealed that 70% of teenagers had encountered real-life violent content online in the previous year.

Ofcom (the UK's digital regulator) has issued resources for service providers to keep children safe: the Quick guide to Protection of Children Codes - Ofcom and a guide for parents Online age checks must be in force from tomorrow - Ofcom.

Children's mental health

A range of data on mental health is collected, including access and referrals to primary and secondary care services and rates of suicide. The Welsh Government publishes an interactive dashboard on mental health statistics.

In a schools survey of adolescents, nearly a quarter reported having high levels of mental health issues, with girls reporting higher levels than boys. Other reports

focused on children highlight the link between mental health and poverty, poor attendance and self-harm and children raising concerns about their mental health, especially those in poorer households.

There are a number of helplines for children to access mental health support, including Childline, Meic and those managed by charities, such as the Samaritans. The National Health Service (NHS) manages the 111 service for urgent mental health help. Specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) offer a range of therapeutic and crisis support and are accessed through referrals from health and school professionals. The Welsh Government's NEST framework has been introduced to help improve and coordinate mental health services for babies, children and their families.

However, more resources are required to enable more children to get the support they need, when they need it. This includes

early intervention support to help prevent issues from arising or escalating. There is also a need to improve data collection, to better understand inequalities and prevalence amongst vulnerable groups of children.

Additional children's rights issues

The State of Children's Rights in Wales report sets out a comprehensive overview of the child rights issues and landscape for babies, children and young people in Wales. Ahead of the forthcoming Welsh elections, Children in Wales with other charities and child rights institutions have published a Champions for Children Manifesto which sets out the biggest challenges facing children accessing their rights for the next Welsh Government to address.

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

Child poverty

The number of [children living in relative income poverty](#) in Wales (in households with an income below 60% of the median household income for the UK) has increased by 2%, and now stands at 31%.

In Wales, the children who are most affected by poverty and social exclusion include:

- Children in large families and in single-parent families;
- Children from some minority ethnic backgrounds;
- Children with a disability or in families with a disabled adult;
- Children in families with young children under five;
- Children in working families and those on low pay;
- Children living in rented accommodation.

In Wales, many children and families living in rural areas are unable to access essential services and struggle with the increased cost of transport and low incomes. Many families lack or have poor digital connectivity and will spend more on essentials than families in urban communities.

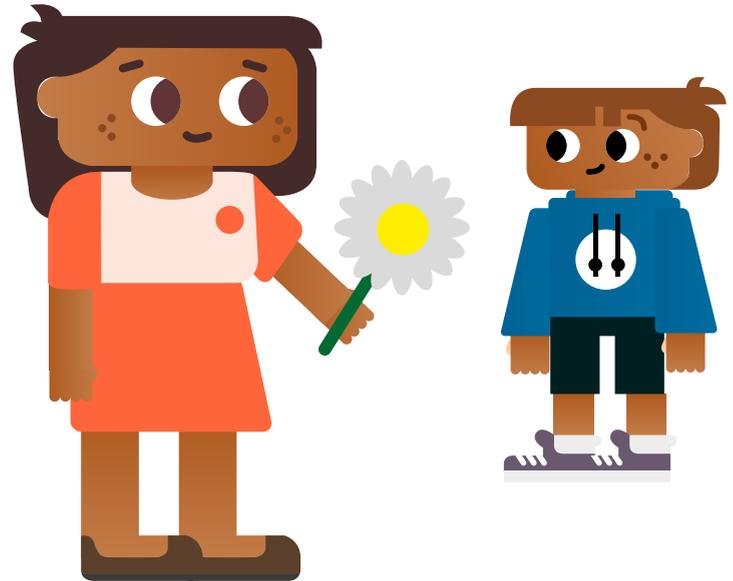### Public investment and social safety nets

There is no adequate or comprehensive social security safety net for children and their families in Wales. Access to social security is managed by the UK Government, with the Welsh Government taking steps to provide financial support for families to help mitigate the impact of poverty. This includes free school meals for all children in primary education (under 11) and for eligible children in secondary education, financial support with the extra costs of school, and a discretionary fund for families who require emergency support.

The UK Government should reform the benefit system to ensure that it provides the necessary 'safety net' for all children and families to live in dignity. There is an immediate need to abolish the two-child limit[3] and benefit cap[4], and work towards a financial guarantee for all families with children.

The Welsh Government should ensure that no child goes hungry in school, and provide quality, affordable and accessible child-

---

3 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.
4 The benefit cap restricts the total amount of support a working-age household can receive from the social security system.

centred childcare for all ages, and through jobs and growth make sure that families have an adequate income to lead a full and dignified life.

Early childhood development

Every baby and young child in Wales deserves the best start in life, to be happy, healthy and have the care and attention they need to develop and grow. The *Flying Start* programme provides support for families with children under four in disadvantaged areas in Wales, through childcare, health visiting support and speech/ language provision. In addition, Wales will soon introduce a *Baby Bundle* scheme, targeted at families in Flying Start areas of disadvantage.

There is a need for greater investment in local community hubs for all families, so that they can access a range of joined-up services, from conception, to support the healthy development of babies and young children. The Welsh Government should also develop specialist parent-infant relationship services across Wales to support families most at risk of experiencing severe or complex difficulties in early relationships.

Housing

The number of homeless families in Wales needing support from a local authority has increased considerably over the past 10 years.[5] There is a shortage of properties in Wales for families and young people to purchase or rent at affordable prices, leaving many to live in unaffordable

homes, and in temporary or poor quality accommodation. For families living in private rented accommodation, the Local Housing Allowance[6] is insufficient to cover the costs, perpetuating housing insecurity. The impact on children is profound, with the risk of harm, poor well-being and negative impacts on their health, education and social networks.

The Welsh Government should ensure that all children, including young people leaving care, are able to live and thrive in a safe, affordable and warm home, and be free from the risk of homelessness. When emergency accommodation is required, secure and accessible forms of housing should be available close to the child's environment to minimise disruption as much as possible.

5 Stats Wales - Households found to be eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need during the year.
6 The Local Housing Allowance is the mechanism used to calculate the amount of Housing Benefit that eligible families renting in the private rental sector are entitled to claim.

Statistics explained

The arrow (▽/△) displayed on the cover for each country report reflects an increase or decrease in the 2024 (or 2023/2022/2021) child poverty rate for that country over the previous year.

The data on population and child poverty provided in this publication was retrieved from Eurostat (September 2025).

No data is currently available from Eurostat for child poverty and child population in some non-EU countries, for which other sources provided by members have been used when available.

As England, 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. 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 Rights. AROPE data (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 2024, 2023, 2022, 2021 or 2020 data, depending on availability.

More information on poverty rates in Europe
More information on AROPE methodology

Other recent Eurochild publications and initiatives

Child Poverty
- Poverty takes away the right to childhood
- Eradicating child poverty in Europe
- Housing challenges faced by children in Europe
- 2025 European Semester Spring Package

Child Guarantee
- European Child Guarantee National Action Plans at a glance
- Eurochild overview of the European Child Guarantee Biennial Reports
- Promising Practices from the European Child Guarantee
- The European Child Guarantee and Roma children: Between commitment and practice

Child Protection
- Breaking the silence on racial discrimination in childhood
- Violence against children in Europe

The Digital Sphere
- Protecting children's rights in the digital environment
- The rights of children in the digital environment
- Speaking up for change: Children's and caregivers' voices for safer online experiences
- Protecting children online should not come at the expense of silencing them

Early Childhood
- Lessons Learned and Recommendations from the First Years, First Priority European campaign - First Years, First Priority

Child Participation
- DAY – Democratic Activation of Youth
- Child Citizens Project – Creating meaningful local child participation in Hungary

Mental Health
- How children feel

To keep up to date with our work, subscribe to our eNews Bulletin monthly newsletter.

Eurochild

Putting children at
the heart of Europe

Scan the QR code to
download the PDF
version of this report

SCAN ME