

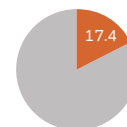
## “ Country recommendation

Families with children are the ones who are suffering the most from the consequences of the pandemic. In this context, Spain must implement specific policies to fight the growth in poverty and inequality which will fall especially on the most vulnerable groups.

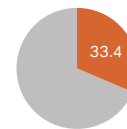
## Country Profile 2022



# Spain



**Child Population:**  
**8.24 million**  
(17.4% of total population)



**Child Poverty Rate:**  
**33.4% (2021) ▲\***

\* [higher compared to pre-covid rates in 2019](#)

## RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

[Plataforma de Infancia](#)

## European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

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

This year's *European Semester Country Report for Spain* does not clearly outline the main vulnerable groups of children that should be targeted by national policy-makers, and the **areas covered are not representative of the reality on the ground.**

Although the text mentions the levels of child poverty and identifies children as a vulnerable group, it does not provide a more serious analysis and does not propose solutions. There is a lack of data, such as poverty levels for single-parent families, and no comparative analysis of how child poverty has been increasing in the last ten years.

Worryingly, there is no acknowledgement of the acute poverty and social exclusion experienced by children living in segregated settlements in Spain.

The country report **fails to include a comprehensive and holistic reference to the importance of early childhood development**, despite the government's commitment to early childhood care, which is not even mentioned.

There is also no mention of children's mental health and wellbeing, of children's right to be heard or children's rights in the digital environment, despite the worrying increase in suicides among adolescents and the **lack of specialised mental health support** for children and adolescents.

There is no adequate mention of the impact of the pandemic on children and the exacerbation of inequalities.

While the text acknowledges that investments in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) also have to support deinstitutionalisation and support for primary care, there is **no recognition of the devastating impact that living in institutions has on children's lives**, and the specific needs of children in alternative care are not addressed.

In addition to addressing school drop-out as a priority issue, there should be a specific focus on children who drop out of compulsory education. There are some children, including many Roma children, who do not complete compulsory education in Spain: 64% of Roma students between 16 and 24 years old do not finish compulsory studies compared to 13% of overall students.

The social exclusion experienced by Roma children is not

addressed, despite the severity of this problem. In fact, 89% of all Roma children live in poverty;<sup>1</sup> therefore, Plataforma de Infancia believes that the country report should **prioritise certain investments for this particular group of children**, among others.

Our member identified one welcome reference to investing in children in the country report: 'The share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion is high, with significant regional disparities, and it worsened during the pandemic. Close to one in three children was at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Spain in 2020 (well above the 24% EU average). The pandemic is likely to have increased the risk of poverty. In this regard, the entry into force of a national minimum income scheme (part of the RRP's first set of milestones) has boosted support to poor families. The RRP also includes a reform to reorganise and simplify

<sup>1</sup> Fundación Secretariado Gitano, *Comparative study on the situation of the Roma population in Spain in relation to employment and poverty*, 2019.

non-contributory benefits in 2022. Tax benefits will also be reviewed in order to improve support to low- and middle-income families. A new law seeks to encourage the availability of affordable and social housing, which remains a significant challenge, especially for young people and low-income households’.

### Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

At a global level, the recommendations included in the Country Report correspond to macroeconomic reforms that Spain needs. However, there is **no mention of the rights of children.**

In previous years, the [Country Specific Recommendations for Spain](#) have always included a recommendation to reduce child poverty so it is striking that, despite the increase in child poverty in Spain, this year there is no such recommendation.

Spain has developed a **social safety net through the Minimum Vital Income (MVI) scheme**, and

integrated the Child Benefit (CB) for dependent children. While this represents a substantial improvement in the amount of support for families with children living in severe poverty, the number of eligible households has been reduced. A child allowance under the MVI scheme has been also developed and this measure is extendable to families whose income does not exceed 300% of the MVI threshold (€100 in the case of children from 0 to 3 years of age, €70 in the case of children from 0 to 3 years of age, and €50 for children between 6 and 18 years of age).

Plataforma de Infancia stresses that the first recommendation addressed to Spain, in addition to maintaining a prudent fiscal policy and **targeted support for the most vulnerable households**, should also include parenting support and the need to prioritise child poverty in use of European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) funding. In particular, Eurochild members welcome the recommendation for continued temporary and targeted support to the most vulnerable

households in light of the current energy price rises. They also recommend **expanding public investment to benefit the most vulnerable families**, through tax reform and priority investment in child poverty reduction. This recommendation could ensure that the ESF+ is used to address child poverty and social exclusion, considering the traditionally high level of child poverty in Spain compared to the European average.

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

#### Child poverty in Spain

Spain has a total [child population of 8.24 million](#), [33.4% of which lived at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021](#).

As the Child Guarantee National Action Plan (NAP) properly illustrates, the most vulnerable children in Spain are the following: children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, children living in

single-parent households, children with a migrant background, Roma children, children with disabilities, children in a situation of severe housing hardship, refugees and asylum seekers, and children in residential care or under guardianship. In this context, it is **hard to identify a group less forgotten than the others**, because they are all in need of substantial support and protection measures.

These children specifically need overall improvement of the social security system coverage, **free access to all health and education services**, the promotion of foster care, and an increased availability of public housing with priority access for families with children and adolescents.

The MVI has been the main step towards ending inequalities in Spain, and it is expected to **help alleviate child poverty** by supporting the most vulnerable households. In [October 2022](#), two years after its implementation, this measure had reached

509.574 households and around 1.4 million people with financial aid. However, there are **some shortcomings**. For example, families and communities eligible for the MVI have not been involved in the decision-making and/or evaluation of this financial support mechanism. Additionally, some delays and difficulties in processing the MVI requests and receiving the payments have also been reported.

Since this measure is specifically aimed at families living in severe poverty, other families in need that however do not meet the eligibility criteria are effectively left out from the measure.

Finally, the introduction of this measure has also meant the **disappearance of the benefit for a dependent child** and uncertainty as to whether some of Spain's Autonomous Regions will continue to provide their minimum income support to households in need

Although the approval of the MVI and the additional allowance are

positive measures for families living in poverty, **Spain still does not have a universal child allowance**. Overall, there is confusion about the objectives of the fight against poverty and the support given to children in families with fewer resources but who are not necessarily at risk of poverty. **This results in a significant underinvestment in childhood in Spain.**

To end child poverty and social exclusion, Plataforma de Infancia calls on the Spanish government to:

1. Establish a **universal child-benefit** provided through refundable deductions in personal income tax. The aim of this measure is to increase financial support to cover the costs of raising children, to reduce inequality in access to tax benefits by households with lower incomes, and prevent and reduce child poverty and its intensity.
2. Guarantee **access to school services for all boys and girls living in poverty**, by

providing free meals at the school canteen; by improving new and existing educational infrastructure, in line with the European strategic framework for education and training 2021-2030; and by tackling school segregation based on economic and ethnic background as a form of discrimination, which undermines equal rights to education.

3. Improve **access to the Minimum Vital Income** and guarantee that it reaches the most vulnerable children.
4. **Eradicate segregated settlements**, where many Roma and migrant children live.

## European Child Guarantee

### Spain National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation for a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022.

In January 2022, Eurochild published a [Country Report for Spain](#) that included recommendations for the Spanish government to consider when drafting their action plan. The reports also included overall recommendations for all Member States to consider.

National Action Plans should outline the children most in need, the planned and existing policy actions and measures to support them, and a monitoring and evaluation framework. The plans should also be drafted in consultation with children, civil society, and national authorities.

[The National Action Plan of Spain](#), published on 11 July 2022, focuses on:

- Increasing the **number of public places in early education** and prioritising free access for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, particularly in rural areas.
- Increasing **public spending on education** to 5% of GDP by 2030.

- Reinforcing **social protection systems** and prioritising the most vulnerable children.
- Expanding **health service coverage** (especially in mental health and ophthalmology).
- Promoting **foster care and deinstitutionalisation**.
- Improving access to housing, **reducing energy poverty**, and eliminating substandard housing.
- Increasing **public housing** and prioritising access to families with young children and adolescents.
- Implementing **mechanisms for child and youth participation** in public policies and services.

Focus groups were set up with NGOs prior to the drafting of the NAP, but there was **no opportunity for formal input** before or after the drafting of the plan. In particular, Plataforma de Infancia believes they were not provided with the same opportunities to be deeply involved in the process as other civil society organisations in the country. In general, civil society was not involved to the extent they would have expected.

**Children were involved in the drafting of the NAP** through the 'State Council for the Participation of Children and Adolescents', which meets at least twice a year. This Council is made up of 34 boys and girls between the ages of 8 and 17, representatives of local or regional councils, and includes children from groups with a vulnerable background and those who are part of state level participatory processes. 12 children were involved by completing a pre-evaluation form of the NAP. However, Plataforma de Infancia had no access to these documents and has not received further details about this process.

Overall, the Eurochild member agrees with the three strategic priorities included in the NAP:

- the **fight against poverty** and the strengthening of social protection (axis 1);
- the **universalisation of social rights** through access to, and enjoyment of, services (axis 2);
- the **promotion of country-**

**wide equity**, and of protective, egalitarian, inclusive, and participatory environments (axis 3).

However, it should be recognised that **some objectives are not ambitious enough**. For instance, the goal to reduce substandard housing settlements should instead propose to eradicate them. Besides, unlike axis 1 and 2, axis 3 presents only a very general section of 'Vision to 2030' and **fails to include a concrete indicator or goal to achieve by 2030**.

Plataforma de Infancia expressed some **concerns regarding the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation** of the NAP, especially related to the fact that, from a governance point of view, civil society has only a consultative role through the [Childhood Observatory](#). This contradicts the aspiration of multi-level governance that should include the social sector as an equal partner in all the development phases of the NAP. The Eurochild member also

commented that children are intended to be involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the NAPs but that plans for this have not been clearly communicated yet.

## EU Funding

### Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

There are a variety of European funds available in Spain for actions that invest in children. At national level, information about funds can be found [on this website](#). Plataforma de Infancia is aware of EU funding that can be used at national, regional, and local levels to invest in children. However they highlighted that **information related to EU funding is not very accessible to civil society**.

One of the main principles of ESF+ regulation is social dialogue and civil society engagement. However, our member stated that social dialogue is limited and fragmented.

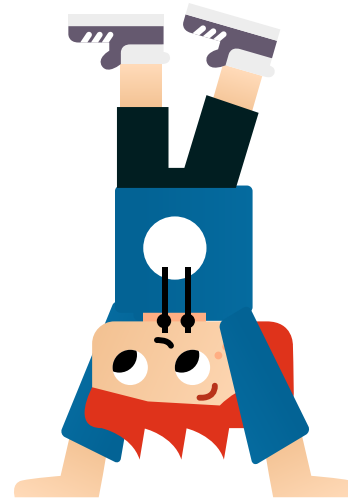
## Projects funded by the EU in Spain

Since 2019 Plataforma de Infancia has been involved in an EU-funded project through the National Cybersecurity Institute (INCIBE). This project provides funds for the **development of a participation programme**, within the framework of the Safe Internet Centre of Spain (SIC Spain) project. Under this programme, Plataforma de Infancia works with a network of young journalists, [the cyber-correspondents](#). The girls and boys who participate in this network acquire skills and competencies in digital tools and in child participation processes, in order to know and defend children's rights. **Addressing children's rights in the digital sphere contributes to safe and responsible use of the Internet.**

## Priorities for EU funding in Spain

On 28 January 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement that compels Member States with a level of child poverty above the EU average (23.4% - AROPE 2017 – 2019) to allocate 5% of ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty.<sup>2</sup> Spain is one of the countries bound by this agreement.

Plataforma de Infancia calls on the government of Spain to **prioritise investment in the areas related to the above mentioned 3 axes** included in the NAP and to **support the completion of compulsory education** for the most disadvantage groups, focusing especially on Roma girls, by working with children, families, and schools.



<sup>2</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013