

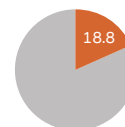
“ Country recommendation

Slovakia should take robust and targeted action to ensure that rights of all children are respected regardless of their background, colour of skin, religion, country of origin and family status.

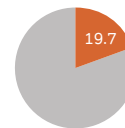
Country Profile 2022



Slovakia



Child Population:
1.02 million
(18.8% of total population)



Child Poverty Rate:
19.7% (2021) ▼*

* lower compared to pre-covid rates in 2019

RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

Coalition for Children Slovakia

European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

Overview of the country report: identification of the children in need

According to the assessment of Coalition for Children Slovakia, the [European Semester Country Report for Slovakia](#) adequately covers child poverty and social exclusion, early childhood education, and education.

The number of children under 3 years old in formal childcare in Slovakia was 4.8% in 2020, among the lowest in the EU (EU average is 32.3% in 2020). Factors that prevent children attending pre-school education are an **acute shortage of places in public kindergartens** and high fees in private-run kindergartens. Coalition for Children Slovakia identifies the newly adopted *National strategy of development*

*of early intervention and early care 2022-2030*¹ as an important step forward to comprehensively address early childhood education and care in Slovakia.

The country report further outlines that Slovakia is also facing a **high rate of school drop-outs and training among Roma children**. There are also regional disparities in educational outcomes, with lower educational achievements in rural areas. To address persistent challenges such as accessibility, quality, and segregation, the Coalition welcomes the recommendation **to strengthen the quality and inclusiveness of education and training at all levels**, as disadvantaged children, including those with special needs, still face many obstacles to access their rights to education.

However, the Coalition of Children Slovakia draws attention to **the insufficient financing of early**

intervention services for children with disabilities, limited availability of services including crisis intervention services, and lack of support for children from socially disadvantaged communities.

According to the Coalition for Children Slovakia, there is a lack of cross-sectoral cooperation between ministries. Moreover, the financing of many projects is not sustainable, and therefore it's difficult to make the desired impact.

Additionally, the country report fails to mention children in alternative care, children's rights to be heard, the impact of the pandemic on children, children's mental health and wellbeing, children's rights in the digital environment, and the involvement of civil society organisations.

In 2022, Slovakia was shocked by serious cases of violence against and between children and by their

brutality. However, these cases are not mentioned in the report, which **does not address the system of effective protection of children from violence**, torture, and sexual abuse in all environments. Given the clear need for prevention programmes, initiatives aimed at eliminating violence against and between children, ensuring a system of help and support or the availability of services for children should be prioritised.

In the light of the high number of Ukrainians arriving in Slovakia, the country report only examines the situation of **Ukrainian refugees and children** in the context of integration of Ukrainian children in pre-school and school education but it fails to address the needs of other children with a migration background, including child refugees.

Similarly, the country report points out that disadvantaged

¹ Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, *National Strategy Development of Coordinated Timely Services Intervention and Early Care 2022-2030 (in Slovakian)*, 2022.

groups face many challenges and constraints to access the social housing. The Coalition for Children Slovakia adds that public authorities are really struggling to develop **social housing schemes**, and that rental housing for vulnerable family is highly limited and not easily accessible. The long expected national strategy for preventing and ending homelessness has not been approved yet, despite this being a growing problem.

Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

This year's *Country Specific Recommendations for Slovakia* correspond to reform needs of the country. **Slovakia should address the most serious shortcomings**, such as the low quality and inclusiveness of education, fragmented research and innovation policy coordination, insufficient public-private cooperation, and weak research

and innovation performance with the comprehensive measures. While the recommendation on improving education most directly relates to children, the other recommendations, such as improvements to research and innovation and strengthening public-private cooperation can also have a positive effect on long-standing challenges in childcare, healthcare and housing.

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

Child poverty in Slovakia

Slovakia has a total child population of 1.02 million, 19.7% of which live at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021.

Roma children and children from socially disadvantaged background are the most affected by poverty in Slovakia. In light of

this context, **anti-discrimination policies** should address social stigma and discrimination and be more visible and implemented at national, regional, and local levels of administration.

The Coalition for Children Slovakia also calls on the government to provide quality and accessible services in areas such as nutrition, education, and health to make sure **all children, and especially the most vulnerable, are able to reach their full potential** and end the cycle of poverty.

Families and households should be supported by a **minimum income** scheme to ensure financial barriers do not prevent children from attending schools or being separated from their families due to housing deprivation. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is crucial for healthy development of children as well as a form of prevention of early leaving

from education. **Family centres should be expanded** and focus on enhancing parents' skills and on offering other support to keep families and children together. In this context, it is important to highlight that the **number of children separated from their families is not decreasing**, and neither is the number of children in Child and Family Centres, despite the change in legislation that emphasises preventative and community work. Low involvement of local governments in the social protection of children also persists.

Poverty and an unstimulating environment are risk factors for several negative phenomena, including **violence against children**. This topic is addressed by the National Strategy for the Protection of Children from Violence, which was **co-designed by children** themselves for the first time.² Children shared that one lecture a year does not

² Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, *The children themselves help with the preparation of the National Strategy for the Protection of Children from Violence (in Slovakian)*, 2022.

provide adequate information and that overall there is a lack of learning opportunities on children's rights as well as adequate information on bullying, sexual, and parental education.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the General Prosecutor's Office of the Slovak Republic warned that there was an increase in sexual abuse of children by almost 140%, especially in the digital environment. The government of the Slovak Republic approved the Action Plan for 2022 and 2023 for the National Concept for the Protection of Children in the Digital Space.³

From a legislative perspective, the Slovakian government has some strategies in place to combat social issues, namely a **national framework strategy for the promotion of social**

inclusion and the fight against poverty,⁴ a **deinstitutionalisation strategy** to tackle the needs of children in alternative care system,⁵ and the recently **adopted national strategy for the development of coordinated early intervention services** and early care for children under 7 years old.⁶

The Coalition for Children Slovakia welcomes these strategies and calls for an **integrated approach to deliver best outcomes**.

Example of good practice

Launched in 2016 by a member of the Coalition for Children Slovakia, the Open Society Foundation, the Aflatoun Programme is making a real difference for the lives of children from the Roma community. The

project is based in the Eastern region of the country, and supports up to **1,000 children and parents/caregivers** each year in improving their social and financial skills, parenting skills, and cooperation with teachers and other professionals in social services. Families were also involved in the decision making and evaluation of this intervention. The programme has been funded by Erasmus+, as well as country embassies and other donors in Slovakia.

Another example of good practice is the Slovak preventive program for children between 4 and 7 years old, accredited by the Ministry of the Slovak Republic, aimed at eliminating violence between children and fostering acceptance of otherness, called [Kozmo and his adventures](#).

European Child Guarantee

Slovakia National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) outlining how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022. However, some countries had not published their NAP when Eurochild members provided input for this report. This is the case of Slovakia.

The National Coordination Centre for Resolving the Issues of Violence against Children is responsible for the drafting and implementation of the NAP and the Coalition for Children Slovakia was informed that the NAP should be submitted to the government by end of the year.

³ [National Concept for the Protection of Children in the Digital Space \(in Slovakian\)](#), 2022.

⁴ [National Framework Strategy for the Promotion of Social Inclusion and the Fight against Poverty \(in Slovakian\)](#), 2015.

⁵ Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, [National Strategy of Deinstitutionalisation System of Social Services and Substitute Care \(in Slovakian\)](#), 2021.

⁶ Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, [National Strategy Development of Coordinated Timely Services Intervention and Early Care 2022-2030 \(in Slovakian\)](#), 2022.

There is an ambition to **involve NGOs, regional structures, and children in the implementation of the NAP**, provided there is capacity for this. The Coalition for Children Slovakia has not been involved or consulted so far, although they are aware that there has been **cross-sectoral consultation for the NAP**. So far, no information about engaging children in the process has been shared.

According to the Coalition for Children Slovakia, appointing the Centre as a Coordinator will be the cause of several **structural and logistical problems**. Since the Centre's main area of work is violence against children, they lack the competencies needed to lead on such a comprehensive policy and they require extra consultations and guidance required from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and Family. This is most likely the cause of the delays, according to Eurochild members.

The Coalition regrets not to have been consulted, as they could have brought their expertise and experience working on inclusion, education of children – especially Roma children, violence against children prevention, digital environment, and deinstitutionalisation to ensure these areas are adequately covered in the NAP.

EU Funding

Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

The Coalition has been following EU funding, calls and processes at national level.

Open Society Foundation Slovakia, a member of Coalition for Children Slovakia, has implemented a project on **child participation** funded by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) as part of Slovakia's Operational Programme *Effective Public Administration*.

The main purpose of this project, entitled *Creating mechanisms for the participation of children and youth in school decision-making processes and the creation of public youth policies*, is to improve public policies by strengthening the participation of children and young people. The project also promoted participation and **increase the interest of young people in getting involved in school administration** and later in the life of civil society.

Priorities for EU funding in Slovakia

Coalition for Children Slovakia calls on the government of Slovakia to prioritise investment in:

- **inclusive and accessible education** and early childhood education;
- address the needs of **children living in poverty and social exclusion**;

- **scale up of free services** such as crisis intervention and anonymous psychological care;
- **green economy** to support rural areas and local communities and families.

