

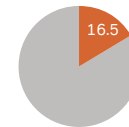
“Country recommendation

Germany should recognise that education is key to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and should therefore take action to improve educational equality by creating a learning environment inside and outside of school that promotes educational success and supports children, regardless of the resources their families have at their disposal.

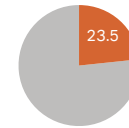
Country
Profile 2022



Germany



Child Population:
13.74 million
(16.5% of total population)



Child Poverty Rate:
23.5% (2021) ▲*

* higher compared to pre-covid rates in 2019

RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

Child and Youth Welfare Organisation (AGJ)

German Children's Fund (DKHW)

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

European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

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

The *European Semester Country Report for Germany* has **no particular focus on investing in children**. However, children's issues are mentioned, superficially, in the context of other issues. For example, the report states that 'the proportion of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion is relatively high in Germany, notably among children [...]. In 2020, energy poverty was higher than the EU average'.¹

Eurochild members, the Child and Youth Welfare Organisation (AGJ), the German Children's Fund (DKHW) and the National Coalition Germany – Network for the Implementation of the UN

Convention of the Rights of the Child (NC) were pleased to see that the country report reaffirms the rising levels of poverty in Germany, 'from 21.4% to 22.5%, above the EU average of 21.9%' in 2020. The country report also states that 'there is scope for reinforced social policy action in order for Germany to contribute to lifting people out of poverty and in this way reaching the 2030 EU headline target on poverty reduction'.

Early childhood development is mentioned in the report from the perspective of **improving access to, and quality of, early childhood education and care (ECEC)** – especially for children under-3-year-old – and providing all-day schooling to help improve both the educational outcomes of pupils and the full-time participation of women in the labour market. However, there is a **clear priority on childcare**

facilities as being primarily important to facilitate women's labour market participation and less to promote childhood development, participation, and democracy building.

The focus on education is on investing in skills to achieve the 2030 EU headline target on adult learning and to counter the labour and skills shortages, which in turn is likely to boost productivity. There is a **specific skills shortage in child and youth services** (e.g. youthwork, childcare, family support and assistance). The need for skilled workers in child and youth welfare service until 2025 is outlined in the position paper by AGJ³, while the lack of specialists in childcare facilities is outlined in Bertelsmann Stiftung's report *2023 fehlen in Deutschland rund 384.000 Kita-Plätze*. These skills shortages are not included in the list of affected sectors in the country report.

There is **no focus on child refugees**. However, children with a migrant background are mentioned as to being 'highly underrepresented in early childhood education and care'⁴, high rates of school dropouts, and under-achieving pupils.

Children impacted by the pandemic and the exacerbated inequalities are referred to as 'concerning inequalities in educational attainments', and **pandemic restrictions on school attendance disproportionately affected disadvantaged families and children**, which risks exacerbating socio-economic inequalities.

The green transition and Germany's ambitious climate goals feature heavily in the country report. The report also mentioned that the social dimension of the green transition might become a significant

¹ *European Semester Country Report for Germany* p. 3.

² *European Semester Country Report for Germany*, Annex 12, p. 43.

³ Child and Youth Welfare Organisation, *Dem wachsenden Fachkräftebedarf richtig begegnen! Entwicklung einer Gesamtstrategie zur Personalentwicklung mit verantwortungsvollem Weitblick*, 2018.

⁴ *European Semester Country Report for Germany*, Annex 12, p. 42.

challenge. Yet, it **needs to be taken into account that the negative impact of climate change affects children and young adults** to a considerable extent, as environmental degradation will continue to affect their lives for decades to come, endangering their health, and development opportunities. Unfortunately, children's environmental rights are not mentioned. This has been a concern for AGJ, as outlined in their position paper [*How dare you? The responsibility of child and youth welfare for the implementation of children's environmental rights*](#), published in December 2021.

The country report also failed to include children in alternative care and deinstitutionalisation, children's right to be heard, children's mental health and wellbeing, and involvement of civil society. Additionally, while digitalisation, including the investment and policy action needed for the envisaged digital transition, is prominent in the country report, children's rights

in the digital environment are not mentioned.

AGJ, DKHW and NC state that the country report needs to prioritise investment in children. The report does, however, mention the need for investment in both the green and the digital transition, both of utmost importance for young people in Germany.

The fact that the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) is incorporated into the European Semester and that one of the headline targets under the EPSR regards poverty reduction, including among children, is promising.

Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

The [*Country Specific Recommendations*](#) are aimed at investments in both the green and the digital transition, and in high-capacity digital communications networks. Moreover, it states that energy security should be secured and reliance on fossil fuels reduced. While all this is important

for the lives of all people, young people included, **none of the recommendations are specifically aimed at children, young adults or families**. Given that the country report finds that Germany, among others, needs to take measures to reduce inequalities (SDG 10) and address poverty (SDG 1), these aspects should have been included in the Recommendations.

In September 2022, AGJ published a [*position paper on the European Semester*](#), focusing on aspects of the European Semester that are important for children, youth, and families. The paper comments on these aspects and recommends improving the process to pay more attention to young people's concerns.

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

Child poverty in Germany

Germany has a total [*child population of 13.74 million*](#); [*23.5%*](#)

[*of which lived at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021*](#).

According to Child and Youth Welfare Organisation, the German Children's Fund and the National Coalition Germany – Network for the Implementation of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, the children most at risk of poverty in Germany are children with a migrant background, particularly refugee children; children from single-parent households; and children from families with more than two children. Homeless children, children with disabilities and children in alternative care are also at risk of social exclusion and should be a priority in the NAP.

The NAP should also prioritise ensuring equal access to services for children in rural areas. These recommendations are aligned with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recent [*Concluding Observations for Germany*](#), published in September 2022. They call on the Federal Government to 'strengthen measures to ensure equal access of children in disadvantaged

groups, including asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children, children with disabilities and children from socio-economically disadvantaged families, to comprehensive schools, higher education and vocational training’.

To fight child poverty, **financial and infrastructural measures need to be combined.**

The Child Basic Income (Kindergrundsicherung) is an essential tool for all children’s financial security. However, it needs to fit the real needs of children and young people. This requires a **reassessment of the subsistence minimum for children with the participation of children and young people.**

DKHW is part of the [Bündnis Kindergrundsicherung](#), an alliance of NGOs which has advocated for a Child Basic Income for many years and has put forward concrete proposals for its effective implementation. The Kindergrundsicherung must also consider the impact of inflation

and rising energy costs, and ensure an appropriate balance.

At the same time, we need a **strong social infrastructure consisting of high quality and easily accessible institutions**, which support children and families living in poverty (e.g. family centres and youth work institutions). Unfortunately, instead of being strengthened, this infrastructure is increasingly at risk due to rising costs. A strong social infrastructure also includes well-trained professionals, so the government must increase its efforts to fill the current personnel gaps in childcare, schools, youth and social work, and other relevant fields.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has also **emphasised the need for a comprehensive policy against child poverty** and recommended Germany to ‘develop a national strategy, with the participation of children, to address the root causes of

child poverty and ensure that all children have an adequate standard of living. The strategy should encompass: (i) a reform of social benefits based on an adequate subsistence level and a stronger method of calculation that takes into account other factors contributing to eligibility; and (ii) include a particular focus on children from disadvantaged families, including migrant children, children without a regular residence status and children of single parents’.⁵

A good example of interventions that can contribute to the mitigation of child poverty rates are networks for the prevention of child poverty (Präventionsketten or Präventionsnetzwerke). Many federal states have been **promoting prevention networks on the local level.** They aim to connect services and professionals from relevant organisations and projects to ensure ongoing support for families throughout a

child’s life. This can lead to different measures in different municipalities based on identified needs, for example, creating opportunities for exchange for professionals, or offering new services for children and/or parents. There are significant differences regarding which ages the networks focus on and how the networks are financed. Often, there is initial funding from the Länder level with a contribution from the communal level, with the goal to establish permanent funding from the communes. In some cases, (initial) funding from (private) foundations plays an important role. For example, the state of Nordrhein-Westfalen uses ESF+ funds for the [Kinderstark](#) project, which focuses on early, preventive support to improve the wellbeing and life perspectives of children and young adults and promote equal opportunities.

⁵ Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding observations on the combined fifth to sixth periodic reports of Germany*, 23 Sept 2022.

European Child Guarantee

Germany 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 Germany.

However, Child and Youth Welfare Organisation, the German Children's Fund and the National Coalition Germany – Network for the Implementation of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child have been involved in drafting the NAP called *Neue Chancen für Kinder in Deutschland*. In general, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth has involved relevant actors in the drafting process. **Civil society organisations were asked to**

share their views on the Child Guarantee implementation during two conferences in May and September 2022, bringing together the other Federal Ministries, the Länder level, municipalities and civil society. In July, the Ministry also met with smaller stakeholder groups, one them including DKHW and five other civil society organisations. Following these meetings, different political levels and civil society organisations were asked to provide input on their projects and measures relevant to the NAP. The organisations are also expecting to be asked to comment on the draft of the NAP. However, to what degree their input will be included in the final NAP is unclear. At this time, **the NAP is expected to go through the Federal Cabinet in February 2023.**

Initiated by the Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce and other civil society organisations, DKHW published a paper on key issues regarding the [implementation from a children's rights perspective](#) in February 2022.

Since then, there has been regular exchanges with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.

DKHW supported the Ministry by including children's perspectives in the kick-off conference in May and was asked to give a statement from a civil society perspective at the conference in September.

After adopting the NAP, a committee will be formed consisting of the most important stakeholder groups, including civil society. This committee will be tasked with recommending concrete measures to implement the NAP; however, more information about the composition of said committee still needs to be revealed. From the perspective of civil society, **regular monitoring of progress in implementing the NAP must also be ensured.**

Children were involved in the drafting process of the NAP. At the first conference in May, in a session facilitated by DKHW, ten children and young people between 13 and 19 years old

from different regions in Germany were invited to speak about their expectations and wishes for the Child Guarantee. Several of them had experiences with poverty/ precarious family situations, including two refugees from Syria. **While the children's inputs made a significant impression on policymakers, their statements were not documented,** and children have not been informed if and how their inputs influenced the development of the NAP. No children attended the conference in September.

Over the summer, the Child Guarantee Coordinator visited 30 projects and institutions in nine Bundesländer focusing on children in need, such as, children in alternative care or refugee children. Unfortunately, while she talked to many children, there is **no evidence of meaningful child participation.**

According to the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, there have been focus groups with children

and young people to influence the development of the NAP. In September 2022, the Child Guarantee Coordinator also stated that she had met with a group of young people living in institutional care.

There are plans to invite children and young people to participate in the implementation of the NAP. A service and monitoring point, *ServiKiD*, has been established at the German Youth Institute (DJI) to advise and monitor the implementation of the NAP, conduct research, and ensure the participation of children and young people. Furthermore, in cooperation with independent advisors from the project *Jugendpolitikberatung*, they are **developing a concept for meaningful child participation**. This concept includes developing appropriate participation formats for implementing the NAP and it is expected to be published as part of the NAP.

EU Funding

Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

A variety of European funds are available in Germany for actions that invest in children. The Child and Youth Welfare Organisation, the German Children's Fund and the National Coalition Germany – Network for the Implementation of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child are aware of EU funding that can be used at national, regional, and local levels to invest in children.

Priorities for EU funding in Germany

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.⁶ The rest of the Member States, such as Germany, should allocate an 'appropriate' amount of their ESF+ resources to combat child poverty.

AGJ, DKHW, and NC call the Government of Germany to prioritise EU investment in:

- reducing poverty and social exclusion, including mitigating the social-economic impact of the green transition;
- fostering social inclusion and equality in formal and informal education;
- promoting child and youth participation by enabling dialogue between young people and decision-makers, allowing them to shape policies and initiatives that affect them.

'Developing the National Action Plan is only the first step in implementing the European Child Guarantee. It is vital that civil society, as well as children and young people, will also be involved in deciding on which concrete measures should follow to make the Child Guarantee a reality in Germany'



⁶ 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.