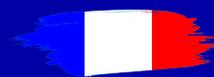


Country
FACT SHEET
2020*



FRANCE

Contributor: Ensemble pour l'Éducation de la Petite Enfance (EEPE)

* The information provided in the country fact sheets reflects the situation by end of August 2020.

first years
first priority

**A FAIR START
FOR *every* CHILD
IN EUROPE**

NATIONAL CONTEXT

France has made adequate efforts over the past year to deliver on early childhood development policies and to support families with young children. ●●○○○*

France has a national law or act guaranteeing access to basic ECD services in Education, Health, Nutrition, and/or Social and Child Protection for all children under six. **ACCESS IS GUARANTEED FOR CHILDREN AGED THREE TO SIX YEARS BUT NOT FOR CHILDREN UNDER THREE YEARS OLD**

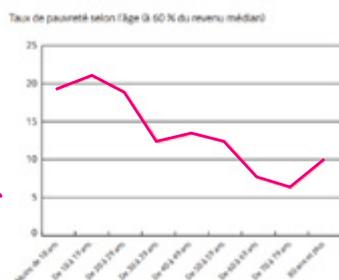
Over the past year, France has made good progress in delivering policies on early childhood development. Significant progress has been achieved for children from the age of three to six, who are guaranteed access to ECD services through the new Schools that Build Confidence Act¹.

However, this is not the case for children under the age of three, as access to collective day care centres or with individual childminders is fairly limited: there is no law or act in place guaranteeing such access, and as a result they have to attend other types of day care services. France has made a commitment to open 30,000 new nursery places by 2022 in the framework of the national Poverty Strategy², however.

That said, there has been a greater awareness in France about the importance of the first 1,000 days of life, with the launch of its Commission gathering various scientific experts' recommendations in its report³ submitted in September 2020 to the French government. Based on such scientific consensus, this has ultimately led to progress, which has resulted in the adoption in law of a paternity leave of 28 days (instead of 14 days).

**3 millions
D'ENFANTS
PAUVRES**

Source : INSEE, 2015



Le niveau de pauvreté des enfants est, en France, supérieur de près de 20 % au niveau de pauvreté de l'ensemble de la population. Parmi les 112 300 personnes sans domicile vivant dans une agglomération d'au moins 20 000 habitants recensées par l'Insee, 30 100 sont des enfants¹, dont au moins un millier vivrait à la rue.

At policy level, there has been an attempt to bridge the gap between settings for children under the age of three and school settings for those aged three to six years, which would contribute to ensuring the continuity of children's development and the quality transition to school. However, none of the above efforts specifically addresses children in vulnerable situations. Appointments of a Poverty Commissioner at the regional level (Decree N°2020-42 of 24 January 2020), responsible for implementing the National Strategy - under each Prefect - have been made, although regional conventions are yet to be signed.

Overall, even though ECD-related policies have been developed, their implementation needs to be accelerated at national, regional and local level to address the current needs of children and families, in particular those in the most vulnerable situations (poverty, disabilities, unaccompanied children, migrant children etc.).

* This country sheet is based on a contribution from national coordinators, including the ratings - between ●○○○○ (worst) and ●●●●● (best)

1 Law of 26 July 2019 on Schools that Build Confidence, <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000038829065/>
2 National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Poverty, https://solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/strategie_pauvrete_vfhd.pdf
3 French Commission of the first 1,000 days of life report, <https://solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/rapport-1000-premiers-jours.pdf>

France does not have a clear set of policy frameworks to coordinate cross-sectoral services and support targeting children. There are some attempts to break out of organisational silos, through the establishment of new mechanisms with the creation of inter-ministerial committees and fostering a whole-of-government approach. However, it is only set at government level, with few inter-ministerial decentralised services, little synergy between territorial structures and a lack of coordination of ECD services at regional and municipality level.

While there may be recommendations to ensure synergies and the coordination of ECD services and interventions, in practice ECD services operate in siloes and with territorial differences. This results in a fragmented approach. This demonstrates the clear need for the **establishment of a strong, comprehensive, coordinated and integrated policy enabling frameworks to support the mainstreaming of a Whole Child Development (WCD) approach across different levels of the system and across different sectors** (health, education, social services, childhood protection, etc.), in line with ECD-related SDGs and article 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The ongoing health crisis has revealed more than ever that prevention needs to be further considered as a critical driver of substantial economic development and social cohesion.

During the lockdown, vulnerable families and their children in France received exceptional financial assistance from the government, proportionate to the number of children. Various measures have been adopted which include but are not limited to financial and solidarity aid, flexible working arrangements, and toll-free numbers to address families' and children's needs. **The measures taken, however, have a short-term focus and seem to exclude children under the age of three, parental well-being and professionals' and local municipalities' needs to respond to the crisis.** In addition, the provision of social assistance is characterised by territorial divergences, thereby indicating a clear lack of national standards.

The well-being of families, in particular of those living with adversity and with financial distress, has been impacted dramatically. Existing data on the impact of COVID-19 in France highlights a rise in: domestic violence (an 89% increase in calls to the toll free number 119, with more than 14,000 calls since the lockdown), malnutrition, high screen time for children, physical and emotional abuse, feelings of isolation, stigmatisation of young children, as well as a lack of physical activity and school disruption. In this situation, there is a **need for better research on the impact of COVID-19 on children, considering issues such as mental health in order to better understand their needs and address the crisis. A large scale impact evaluation of all related COVID-19 measures on early childhood needs to be considered to develop a long-term approach for a more nurturing environment for children.**

Several platforms have been created to support Early Childhood professionals, parents and children during lockdown. Toll-free numbers have been set up, families and professionals have been able to share their daily difficulties and address some resources that could help them. However, such initiatives have been diluted with the high number of actors involved. **Consensus should be built among all those actors, in order to provide coherent and up-to date scientific resources to better prevent risk factors and establish strong protection factors.**

EUROPEAN SEMESTER

The 2020 Country Report and the Country-Specific Recommendations published in the framework of the European Semester do highlight the latest measures being undertaken in France in terms of social and economic progress.

The documents, however, focus primarily on economic and employment perspectives, and do not consider the benefits that a coherent approach to early years' development can bring by means of quality services and interventions. Children are not sufficiently taken into account in the European Semester process.

They also highlight the visible lack of targeted action to address child poverty as part of a wider ECD-focused action, despite article 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights. In addition, it is important to stress that the Council indicates that measures taken to tackle the COVID-19 crisis focus on the short-term impact rather than considering also the mid- and long-term impact.

Outputs from the European Semester highlight that Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is systematically positioned as an issue of secondary importance in France. It is addressed indirectly and through a non-preventive approach that tackles youth unemployment, labour market integration, debt, taxes, etc. The reports have not addressed other worrying trends related to ECD in France, including but not limited to: limited resources and capacity building for professionals and others; lack of appropriate data on children and youth facing adversity; lack of a culture of evidence-based practice; and a lack of consensus on the meaning, concept and values of ECD.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the above-mentioned challenges, and taking into account the fact that the 2020 Country-Specific Recommendations do not address early childhood and vulnerable populations, the EEPE strongly recommends:

- to channel targeted funds for children and families living in vulnerable situations and marginalised in our society at national level (including overseas territories);
- to launch an impact evaluation of interventions related to early childhood, to provide a robust data-driven strategy as well as quality-driven social investments;
- to set up a long-term evidence-based French national Child Guarantee, with proven impact on child development, by better supporting parents and all professionals involved with early childhood;
- to address early years / childhood as a national priority and consolidate all actions towards children in a consistent and relevant manner, across all sectors (health, education, social protection, cultural, social policies, private business) and across all children and families, based on shared budget mechanisms.



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The views expressed by Eurochild do not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.

**OPEN SOCIETY
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With support from Open Society Foundations.

The partnership

- **Eurochild** is a network of almost 200 member organisations from 35 European countries working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. Eurochild influences policies to build internal capacities and facilitates mutual learning and exchange practice and research.
- **International Step by Step Association (ISSA)** is an early childhood regional network founded in 1999, which through its programs and services connects the early childhood practice, research, and policy to improve the quality of early childhood systems in Europe and Central Asia. More than 90 ISSA members from 43 countries implement programs and cooperate to ensure quality and equitable early childhood services for young children, especially the most vulnerable.
- **European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)** is Europe's leading NGO alliance advocating for better health. A member-led organization made up of public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals, and disease groups, EPHA works to improve health, strengthen the voice of public health and combat health inequalities across Europe.
- **Roma Education Fund (REF)** was created in the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in 2005. Its mission and the ultimate goal is to close the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. To achieve this goal, the organization supports policies and programs which ensure quality education for Roma, including the desegregation of education systems.

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National Coordinators: Pomoc Deci (Serbia), Plataforma de Infancia (Spain), Fundação Nossa Senhora do Bom Sucesso (Portugal), Central Union for Child Welfare (Finland), Family, Child, Youth Association (Hungary), Child Rights Alliance (Ireland), Trust for Social Achievement (Bulgaria), Step by Step Center for Education and Professional Development (Romania), Ensemble pour l'Éducation de la Petite Enfance (France).