

Country
FACT SHEET
2020*



HUNGARY

Contributor: Family, Child, Youth Association

* 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

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

Hungary 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. YES

The current legislative framework on early childhood development (ECD) comprises different pieces of legislation on services for children up to the age of six in the areas of health, education, social protection, and child protection. However, the implementation of these provisions has been very limited and selective. Children and families who are not in a privileged socio-economic situation have a very restricted and even decreasing access to services. The number of health specialists, paediatricians and general practitioners has been steadily decreasing, especially in the most remote and deprived parts of the country, where they are often not available at all. Access to adequate healthcare for marginalised children, children with disabilities or other special needs has become worse and often impossible. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services for children under the age of three are very limited, and the compulsory kindergarten from the ages of three to six does not match the needs of the communities. Issues include overcrowded settings, shortage or lack of trained and properly remunerated professionals, fast growing segregation, and a punitive approach in cases where children do not attend the services regularly. There is also a lack of a coordinated approach to ECD-related actions. In principle, according to the child protection legislation, child welfare services must operate a network of cross-sectorial collaboration and a signalling system (mandatory reporting). In practice, the signalling obligation is not enforced, and therefore the reporting system does not function effectively. Last but not least, the desired co-operation between the different stakeholders in designing and implementing plans to support families has not been put into practice. According to the respondent organisation, the **biggest challenges** in Hungary from the perspective of early childhood development are:

- 1. Lack of knowledge and understanding of children's developmental needs and parenting issues in early years;**
- 2. Lack of availability of support services related to ECD;**
- 3. Mixed messages on Early Childhood Education and Care on the part of the government.**

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

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE DURING THE FIRST WAVE

The COVID-19 crisis had a serious impact on society as a whole, and the effects of it on families with children have been similar to the rest of Europe. However, there has been no attempt to measure or consider the impact of the pandemic on families with young children.

As one of the biggest challenges in Hungary has been the systematic lack of available services for support and care, whose capacity is far below the needs of the population, access to them was further restricted during the lockdown, having a hugely negative impact on families who need support.

The government initiated no action to support families with young children as part of its crisis response. There has been neither financial, nor professional support offered, and even communication on the needs of this specific group was not present. This illustrated the government's blindness regarding the issues and difficulties that children and families have been facing since the beginning of the pandemic.

EUROPEAN SEMESTER

The 2020 Country Report on Hungary covers an extensive range of issues that present challenges for early childhood development. Limited childcare provision results in low participation rates. Even though it increased from 13.8% in 2017 to 16.5% in 2018, it is still well below the EU average of 35.1%. The report also indicates that children experience higher deprivation rates compared with the rest of the population. The severe material deprivation rate among children (15.2%) and families with three or more children (22.0%) is among the highest in the EU and is partially responsible for the high number of children in alternative care. Regional disparities are highly correlated with poverty and social exclusion rates. Educational outcomes also differ greatly among different groups, and as a whole, are below the EU average. In fact, according to the report, the impact of students' socio-economic background on their educational outcomes is one of the strongest in the EU. Public spending on healthcare is low, and access is not ensured for persons with low incomes and/or living in remote areas.

An important issue not mentioned by the Country Report is the **quality** of ECEC care, which is one of the contributing factors for low school performance. There is also no attempt to include children and parents in decision making. Asking their views on policies that affect them and taking them into consideration would have an important impact. The growing number of children entering alternative care in general, but especially at a young age is also worrying, especially in the case of children with disabilities and Roma children.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations Hungary receives from the European institutions are often not disseminated/being implemented, and have little impact therefore on the national situation. The Family, Child, Youth Association believes that social recommendations need much stronger enforcement. Avoiding corruption by **including independent monitoring and evaluation** of government initiatives is also necessary.

Other important steps to be taken to improve ECD-related issues in the country include:

- Improve the coordination between different government structures to ensure coherent and effective ECD policies;
- Provide knowledge to policy-makers about the developmental needs of children and the need of support for parents;
- Increase the capacity of high quality, flexible ECD-related services, including childcare, healthcare, and education;
- Improve access to Early Childhood Education and Care services for children under the age of three;
- Ensure equal access to healthcare and other essential services for children from marginalised groups, such as children with disabilities, Roma children, and others;
- Devise more flexible approaches to support families with children in their current needs;
- Acknowledge the high impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and families;
- Offer targeted financial and professional support for the children and families, especially those in vulnerable situations, as part of the COVID-19 response actions;
- Improve access to services needed in the course of the pandemic.



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**OPEN SOCIETY
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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.

Campaign coordinator: Dr. Agata D'Addato, Senior Project Manager Eurochild (agata.daddato@eurochild.org).

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).