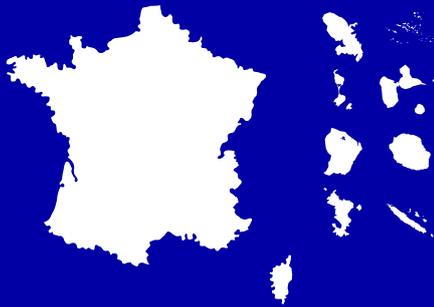


first years
first priority



Early Childhood Development in

FRANCE

Country Profile 2021*



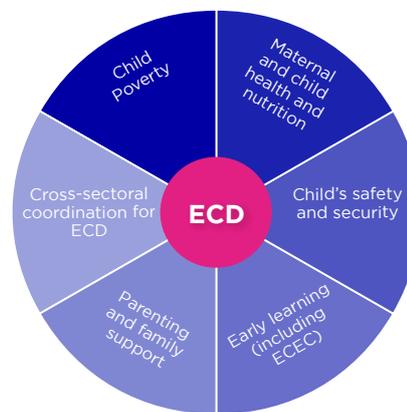
In recent years, France has made good progress in bringing further visibility to **early childhood development (ECD)** and the situation of young children and their families, by delivering policies and national strategies aimed at creating the right conditions for children's development from the very early years. The report on the first 1.000 days of life, released in September 2020, represents key foundations for the early years, through a holistic approach to education, health, child protection, and parenting support.

Despite those promising steps, building and planning an integrated ECD system is yet to be reinforced in France's split system, with policies more strongly targeting children aged three to six years. Steps have been taken to bridge the gap between settings for children under the age of three and school settings (for three to six years old) to ensure the continuity of children's development and quality transitions. However, recent data across ECD policy areas are insufficient, indicating that more efforts are needed to give more visibility and to deliver effective policies for the age group of children from birth to three years old. Further quality social investments need to be made to better address the needs of children and families,

Country PRIORITIES

- Track data on a regular basis across all ECD policy areas, with a comprehensive focus on child poverty for children under three, prioritising single parent families and large families with more than three children.
- Ensure ECD policies take a preventive approach prioritising early learning and parenting support
- Ensure that quality perinatal care is being addressed, in particular for those who are undocumented and in migration situations.
- Accelerate the implementation of existing ECD related policies at national, regional, and local levels to meet the needs of children and their families, in particular those in the most vulnerable situations.
- Establish coordination mechanisms to mainstream the Whole Child Development approach across different levels of the system and sectors.

especially those in the most vulnerable situations and to reinforce ECD as a public policy priority, most specifically during this period following the COVID-19 pandemic. ECD governance across sectors and across decentralised authorities remains a challenge to ensure an efficient reach across the country.



POLICY AREAS IMPACTING ECD →

1

CHILD POVERTY

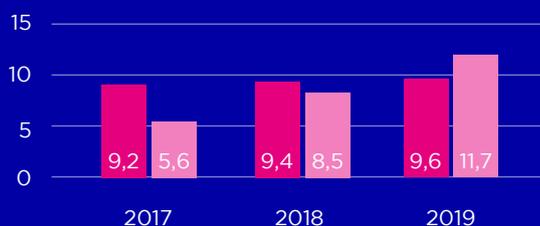
In France, there is a **lack of specific data on child poverty and social exclusion for children under three years of age**.

Data available highlight that there is an increase in the percentage of children under six years of age living in extreme poverty and suffering from severe housing deprivation (Figure 1).

Also, the most recently available data indicate that parents' **educational attainment level and the household type are related to the at-risk-of-poverty rate**. In 2019, children under six whose parents have completed less than primary or primary and lower secondary education were by far more at risk of poverty (68,8%), than the 8,2% of children under six whose parents had tertiary level of education (Figure 2). In addition, **single-parent families and large families with three or more children are particularly affected** (Figure 3).

Child poverty

(Figure 1)



- Percentage of children under six living with less than 50% of median equivalised disposable income
- At-risk of poverty rate for children under six suffering from severe housing deprivation

Source: Eurostat EU-SILC

At-risk-of-poverty rate by educational attainment level of their parents

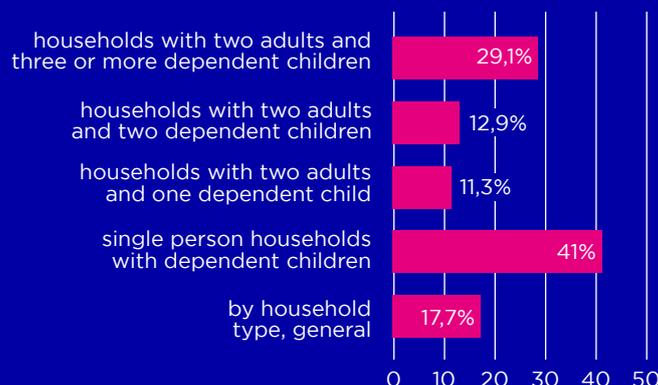
(Figure 2)



Source: Eurostat EU-SILC, 2019

At-risk-of-poverty rate by household type

(Figure 3)



Source: Eurostat EU-SILC, 2019

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

In France, universal access to medical services is granted by the services of the Public Health Insurance, which provides entitlement for partial reimbursement. The Solidarity Health Package is also granted, depending on the resources of the most vulnerable families. In 2019, there were 5,2 million beneficiaries.

Under maternity insurance, from the sixth month of pregnancy up to 12 days after delivery, medical services are fully covered. **Though access is granted during pregnancy and at the child's birth, quality care needs to be improved** (Figure 4). No recent data are available on postpartum depression or high psychosocial risk that can prevent maternal sensitivity and infant attachment, essential for child development.

A specific health package, known as State Medical Assistance, is being granted for a year for undocumented individuals, although it is on the condition of three months of justified residency in France. **Despite this, 40,3% of migrant women received inadequate prenatal care** (Figure 4).



Maternal and child health

(Figure 4)

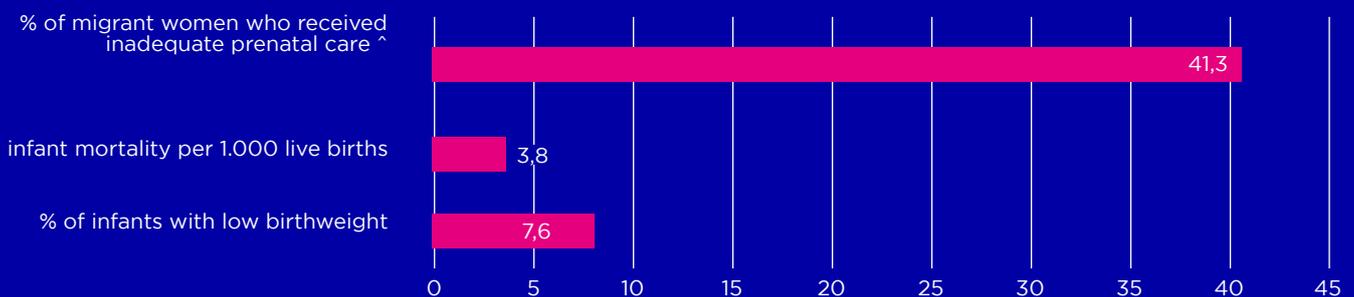


Figure 4: Low birthweight: OECD, 2017; Infant mortality: Eurostat, 2019; Migrants with inadequate prenatal care: Association between Migrant Women's Legal Status and Prenatal Care Utilisation in the PreCARE Cohort. *Int J. Environ Res Public Health*, 2020 (^Not representative data).

CHILD SAFETY AND SECURITY

After adopting the law against ordinary educational violence in July 2019, France became a pathfinding country, later adopting a national plan to fight violence against children and including this issue in the National Strategy on Child Protection (Figure 5). **Yet, consistent recent figures (latest data are from 2016) on child abuse, neglect, maltreatment, or any kind of violence** are rare, particularly for children under six.

In France, there are no existing data for undocumented children under six.

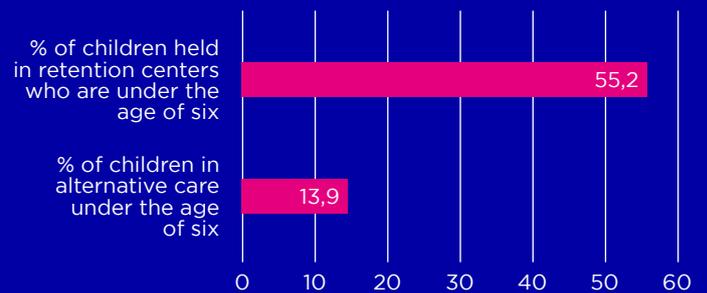
However, the available data highlight that the percentage of children held in centres for immigrants (“centres de rétention”) in France (excluding overseas territories) significantly increased in 2019 by 34%, with a relatively high percentage of children (55,2%) under six (Figure 5).

Photo: Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance



Child safety and security

(Figure 5)



Source: France Terre d'Asile, Centres et Locaux de rétention administrative, 2019. (Upper figure)

Source: Direction de la recherche, des études, de l'évaluation et des statistiques (DREES), 2018 (Figure below)

EARLY LEARNING

In France, although access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) services is guaranteed for children from three to six years old, access for children under three years old to formal settings is fairly limited. **There is no legal entitlement to a place in ECEC for children under three years of age, including for the most vulnerable ones.**

Since 2018, national efforts have created better access for children under three attending formal childcare or education (Figure 6). Specifically, the Poverty Plan includes three **measures targeting children living in poverty and those with disabilities, that need yet to be further assessed.**

- Diversity Incentive,
- Territory Incentive and
- Disability Incentive.

As part of the Poverty National Strategy, the National Training Plan, officially launched in May 2021, aims to increase the qualifications of 600.000 ECEC professionals. No data is available regarding the percentage of staff with a minimum bachelor's degree working with children under three.

Reform is underway thanks to the National Charter on quality care for the young child (established in 2017) enforced by law from September 2021 onwards. This is an important milestone. **Yet, no measures for monitoring and evaluating quality ECEC are available to date in France.**

The capacity of ECEC services to ensure the inclusion of children under six from historically marginalised groups

Services for children under three: According to the ECEC National Charter, ECEC services are expected to address each family's needs regardless of background. However, one recent study ("Etude GESTE / Direction Générale de la Cohésion Sociale - Oct 2018) indicates that the actual ECEC services capacity to ensure the inclusion of all children, most specifically those with disabilities, appears to be insufficient due to: lack of financial support, lack of skills to respond to a child's specific needs, reorganisation of the day care team, lack of knowledge/contact with other health stakeholders. In most cases, parents are the main ones providing guidance that can reinforce ECEC services capacity.

Services for children from three to six years: Under the rules governing school inclusion for children with disability, enforced by the law from 11 February 2005, support is provided through coordination between multiple stakeholders, specific materials and resources, specific pedagogical adjustments, and evaluation of needs (in cooperation with MDPH).

Since 2019, schooling is compulsory from the age of three. Pre-primary school follows the same procedures and interventions as other schools. Children with disabilities can benefit from specific support from a specialized professional.

Early learning

(Figure 5)



Source: Eurostat EU-SILC

PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORT

France remains the European country most committed to social benefits, with almost a third of French GDP spent on social services in 2019. More specifically, in 2018, public expenditure on family benefits by type of expenditure was 2,8% of GDP.

Progress has been made on policies to ensure a balance between work and private life. In 2018, full paid leave was available for 18 weeks for mothers and 5,4 weeks for fathers. From July 2021 onwards, paid paternity leave will be extended from 11 days to 28 days. Seven days will be compulsory.

Several family support services and mechanisms are in place including networks, meeting places, home visits, etc. In 2019, the National Pact for Childhood was launched to address parenting support and prevention as part of its key three pillars. This (1) has reinforced the National Strategy on Parenting support 2018-2022 (“Dessine-moi un parent”) and (2) has set out **future perspectives for the House of the 1,000 days (*La Maison de 1,000 jours*) as a support pathway for parents of children from pregnancy up to two years old**. At the end of 2020, Departmental committees for family services were announced to initiate a local dialogue between multiple stakeholders, including families. It should reinforce the implementation of parenting support at local level.

However, existing national strategies addressing refugee families, migrants, or Travellers need to be further reinforced by not only tackling housing issues but also offering parenting support that fosters a nurturing and safe environment for their young children.

Benefits available to parents with young children

- Child-related cash transfers to families with children:
Basic benefits: Child benefits, flat-rate allowance, family income supplement, family support allowance
Birth and early childcare benefits: Birth/Adoption grant, basic allowance, shared child-rearing benefit, supplement for free choice of working time; supplement for free choice of childcare
Specific benefits: Education allowance for a disabled child; back-to-school allowance; daily parental attendance allowance; family housing allowance, moving allowance, employment incentive.
Other benefits: Card offering discounts for large families, the VACAF mechanism to facilitate holidays for families and children living in difficult conditions.
- Child-related cash transfers to families with direct spending on services for families with children or subsidies for childcare and early childhood education facilities
A unique delivery model (Prestation de Service Unique) provided to daycare centres to complement families' spending on ECEC.
- Financial support for families provided through the tax system
Child tax allowance is not included in taxable income; “Nombre de parts fiscales” - Support for families with children is embedded in the tax unit so that, at a given income level, the larger the family, the lower the taxable income.



CROSS-SECTORAL COORDINATION

In France, **there is a rather fragmented approach across different sectors, along with different funding and spending accountabilities** depending on the level of governance at the national, regional, department, or municipality level. As such, no explicitly stated national multi-sectoral ECD strategy (or any other policy document) fostering a whole-of-government approach is available. There are some attempts to break out of organisational silos, with the creation of inter-ministerial bodies and local committees and with the appointments of regional High Commissioners to fight against poverty. **Yet, the country still lacks a clear set of policy frameworks and capacities to foster a holistic, coordinated, and cross-sectoral approach, targeting the needs of ALL young children and families at all levels of public policies.** Very few inter-ministerial decentralised services are available, with low visibility for a better territorial reach at the local level.

A recent evaluation (April 2021) of the National Strategy to Fight Against Poverty outlines a lack of steering tools, the need for reinforcement at the inter-ministerial level, a misalignment of multiple ministerial calls for a project linked to the strategy. More in-depth evaluation findings on the strategy's governance will be published at the end of 2021.

National multisectoral ECD policies

There is not one strategy, but different cross-sectoral policies/strategies that focus on different ECD issues, such as child protection, poverty, early learning, and pre-primary education:

- [Law n° 2019-791/26.07.2019 “School for a school you can trust”](#)
- [Law n° 2016-297/14.03.2016 on Child Protection](#)
- [National Pact for Childhood](#)
- [National Plan on Violence Against Children](#)
- [Law on Acceleration and Simplification of Public Action](#)
- [National Strategy of Prevention and Protection of Childhood](#)
- [National Strategy to fight against Poverty of children and youth](#)
- [National Strategy for Parenting Support](#)
- [National Inter-ministerial Strategy for autism and neuro-developmental problems](#)
- [Early Childhood Rebound Plan](#)



*The information provided in this Country Profile reflects the situation at the end of May 2021.



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

Country Profile Contributor

ENSEMBLE POUR L'ÉDUCATION DE LA PETITE ENFANCE

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 programmes and services connects 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 programmes 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 organisation 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 organisation supports policies and programmes which ensure quality education for Roma, including the desegregation of education systems.

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

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