

France

Country Profile on the 2019 European Semester from a children's rights perspective



Alternative Country Specific Recommendation for 2020

“France should take action to develop a real prevention policy for children and families, to better prevent risks of poverty and social exclusion and contribute to the well-being of children.”

Respondent organisation:
CNAPE (Convention
Nationale des Associations
de Protection de l'Enfant);

There is considerable discussion in the 2019 Country Report¹ and the Country Specific Recommendations² (CSRs) for France on employment of vulnerable groups, including youth. In line with this focus, France received a CSR in 2019 to foster

“labour market integration for all job seekers, ensure equal opportunities with a particular focus on vulnerable groups including people with a migrant background and address skill shortages and mismatches.”



67 millions total
24.3% under 19 yrs
5.7% under 5 yrs

Population

22.3^{***} %

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion

Source: Eurostat *2019 **2018 ***2017

1 European Commission, Country Report France, 2019: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/2019-european-semester-country-report-france_en.pdf.
2 European Commission, Country Specific Recommendations for France, 2019: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1560258256826&uri=CELEX%3A52019DC0510>.

The inclusion in the Country Report that France should invest to reduce disparity in opportunities does, however, give hope for a shift towards preventive policymaking so that children living in vulnerable situations and poorly served by society are allowed to flourish and succeed just like other children.

Child poverty and social exclusion

In its assessment of the 2019 Country Report for France, the Convention Nationale des Associations de Protection de l'Enfant (CNAPE) found that child poverty is mentioned once, with regards to the situation of children with parents born outside of France. This demographic had a 41.3 % risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2017, far higher than the average for all French children for the same year (22.3 %).

CNAPE welcomes the attention paid to the experiences of children and families with migrant backgrounds,

yet regrets that other children exposed to poverty and social exclusion are not discussed in any detail elsewhere in the Country Report. For example, many children are not provided with sufficient after-care support upon leaving the national child welfare system on reaching adult age. CNAPE believes that this vulnerable demographic of children deserves greater attention.

Child protection reforms

As with the 2018 assessment, CNAPE calls for a real respect of the child protection laws enacted in 2007 and 2016. France needs to do more to deliver holistic support for children and young people in the current social service system and to put in place effective preventive policies and actions. There is a lack of family support, financial resources and access to housing for young adults leaving care. This means they face significant risks of poverty, social exclusion, violence and abuse – cementing, rather than breaking, cycles of disadvantage.

Positively, a draft law is being considered by the Senate to improve support for young adults ('loi Bourguignon') and the post of Secretary of State for Child protection was created in 2018, showing the government's interest in child protection and raising hopes for the development of children's rights in France. However, there is still an urgent need for much greater preparation of children to be autonomous and CNAPE regrets that this has not been addressed in the 2019 Country Report.

Education

CNAPE welcomes that education and the widening inequality of opportunities among children receives attention in the 2019 European Semester. In the case of France, this widening is especially based on socio-economic differences.

In response to persistent inequalities, and emerging skills shortages that are linked to these inequalities, the French government

adopted a comprehensive reform package in 2018 to raise basic skills and increase the relevance, attractiveness and quality of vocational education and training. This seeks to address, among other challenges, France's higher-than-EU-average rate of young people not in education, employment, education or training (NEET) (11.1 % compared to EU28 average of 10.5 %).

Furthermore, a wider reform of the education system has just been adopted. Dubbed Blanquer's 'trusted schools' Law³ (after Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer), the law of July 2019 is based on the following measures:

- Lowering the age of compulsory education from six to three from the next school year (targeting those few children who are not participating in early childhood education and care⁴);
- obligatory training up to the age of 18 to 'combat early school leaving and social exclusion of the most vulnerable young people' starting from 2020;

³ LOI n° 2019-791 du 26 juillet 2019 "pour une école de la confiance"

⁴ Eurydice, France Overview: Key features of the Education System, 2019: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/france_en

- a new ‘pre-professionalisation’ system for gradual introduction to the profession;
- strengthening of an inclusive public school service to improve access to the education system for students with disabilities.

CNAPE welcomes the objectives of these reforms that are aimed at addressing inequalities in both the education system and the labour market for disadvantaged groups. CNAPE looks forward to monitoring their implementation in the years to come to ensure they have a positive impact on children’s outcomes in France.

Investment Guidance on EU funding 2021-2027

Ahead of the new EU funding period for 2021-2027, CNAPE regretted to see that none of the 2019 Country Specific Recommendations directly concerned children. Instead, they focused on reducing debt, labour market integration (notably, for vulnerable groups, including people with a migrant background),

research and innovation and tax system reform.

While the recommendations were disappointing from a children’s rights perspective, CNAPE welcomes a number of recommended investment priorities highlighted in Annex D of the 2019 Country Report.

Recommended investment in the integration of young people into the labour market and efforts to tackle early school leaving are particularly welcomed as this should contribute to the reduction of young people not in employment, education or training in France.

In addition, the European Commission has recommended that France “provides targeted support for early intervention, including second-chance schools” and “integrated active inclusion policies” that pave the way for use of future European funds to improve the situation for children at risk of poverty and social exclusion in France.