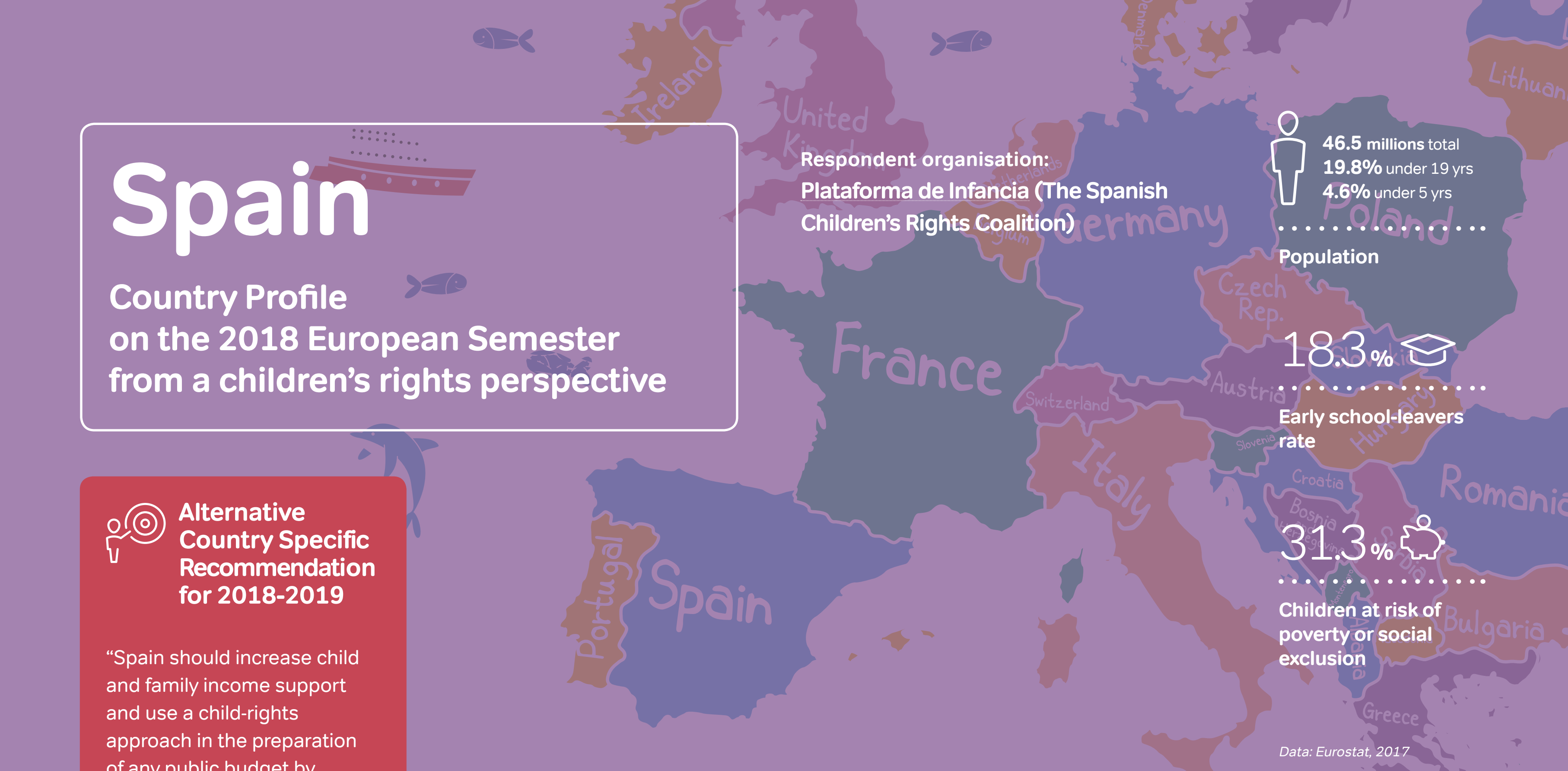
Spain

Country Profile on the 2018 European Semester from a children's rights perspective



Respondent organisation:
Plataforma de Infancia (The Spanish Children's Rights Coalition)

46.5 millions total
19.8% under 19 yrs
4.6% under 5 yrs

Population

18.3%

Early school-leavers rate

31.3%

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion

Data: Eurostat, 2017

Alternative Country Specific Recommendation for 2018-2019

"Spain should increase child and family income support and use a child-rights approach in the preparation of any public budget by implementing a tracking system for the allocation and use of resources for children throughout the budget."

There is definitely room for improvement in terms of investing in children in Spain. The outgoing government was seen as being less active in its last months in office on the fight against child poverty and promoting children's rights more generally. It remains to be seen how the new government (in place since May 2018) will tackle the issue, but the fact that a minister for children was appointed is a sign of commitment.

Spain's most recent National Child Strategy (PENIA) ended in 2016, and while a possible national anti-poverty strategy and national childhood plan were announced in the National Reform Programme (NRP) of 2017, progress is lagging in terms of content, timeline and budget. Plataforma de Infancia believes that **a new children's strategy which prioritises tackling child poverty**, and ensures quality and accessible Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) for 0-3 year-olds, as well as tangible child protection measures, should be created and implemented. This would be in line with the European Commission Recommendation on Investing in Children from 2013, and would contribute greatly to improving children's well-being in Spain. Indeed, according to Eurostat, children's relative poverty levels in Spain are high: around 29.7% (after social transfers), and unfortunately, according to data from Eurostat ESSPROS[1], the Spanish government invests only 1.3% of its GDP on children. This compares to the European Union average of 2.4%.

Contributing to these child poverty levels is the fact that **Spain has one of the lowest family benefits of the European Union in terms of quantity and coverage**. The annual subsidy given per child to low-income families is about €291 per year and is only for families with an income below €11,548 per year. Additionally, ECEC service provision has been privatised in Spain, which means those most in need do not have access to quality, affordable childcare. The 2018 CSRs for Spain importantly mentioned the need to improve family support, reduce early school leaving rates and provide better support for students and teachers. However, unlike the 2017 CSRs, no special mention was given to the lack of access and affordability of ECEC. As the situation regarding ECEC has not yet improved over the last year the CSR should have again mentioned the lack of quality and affordable childcare by highlighting the share of children below 3 years old enrolled in formal childcare in public centres. It is necessary to increase the educational offer for the 0-3 age group with the aim of guaranteeing that this education is accessible to the most vulnerable groups. This policy should be reinforced with an adequate scholarship policy oriented towards equity.

It can be argued that EU guidance has the potential to be a powerful tool to promote children's rights and push for a more social dimension in Spanish politics. For example, the second PENIA (National Child Strategy), which ended in 2016, was developed because of a Country Specific Recommendation (CSR). Sadly, in recent years, while child poverty rates in Spain are frequently highlighted by the EU´s analysis, major improvements have not followed. The Spanish government has addressed child poverty through tax reductions for middle-class families, some initiatives on reconciliation, and through improvements in the employment rate. However, **tackling child poverty through the labour market perspective is not sufficient** and can create a greater degree of social exclusion. Other initiatives have such a low impact on the overall poverty figure that they cannot be considered meaningful.

Identifying budget lines would allow better analysis on the subject of child poverty and is a specific recommendation of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child as specified in General Comment 19 on public budgeting for the realisation of children's rights.[2]

Yet, while in Spain the new law of 2015 established the obligation to make impact reports on all new regulations, the Spanish general budget is exempt from any impact report on children. As such, Plataforma de Infancia urges the Spanish State to remove this exemption and implement a tracking system for the allocation and use of resources for children throughout the budget. This would ensure a political impact which can drive proper allocation of funds for investing in children. The European Commission (EC) should also push for the removal of this exemption and more generally call for the European Commission Recommendation on Investing in Children (2013) to guide the Spanish government in the creation of all policies and future plans.

It is positive that the 2018 Country Report for Spain provided relevant and important information on social policies (pp. 43-46) and education (pp. 40-43). Notably, the EC highlighted the low impact of social transfers on reducing child poverty (below the EU average), the high rates of early school leavers, the low participation of children aged 0-3 in public childcare, the difference in coverage and adequacy of the regional minimum income

1 European System of integrated Social Protection Statistics
2 United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child General comment No. 19 (2016) on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights (art. 4)

schemes between regions, and the low investment in education (below the EU average). It is necessary to bring these issues to the attention of the Spanish government; however, it would be better and more effective to place these observations within a holistic vision which pinpoints how these policies affect the children and their ability to exercise their rights. It would also be useful to provide more CSRs regarding child policy which are concrete and can easily be translated into country or region-specific reports.

However, it is important to be cautious when placing a social CSR next to stringent demands to reduce public spending. It is difficult to reconcile the 2018 CSR to reduce the Spanish public deficit by 0.65% of GDP (around €7 billion), with recommendations such as improving family support. The European Commission could better support national policy making decisions in Spain by addressing this contradiction and taking on a more holistic vision when drafting their reports.

Plataforma de Infancia participates in the European Semester process indirectly through the 'Third Sector Platform', which represents civil society towards the government. Although child rights organisations are thereby consulted in the European Semester process in Spain, the process is not meaningful enough as there is only one meeting per cycle and it is not influential. Civil society would like to secure stronger involvement throughout the Semester process, and more transparency in this process both towards other stakeholders, and towards the public.

For more information, please consult the 2018 Eurochild Report on the European Semester or contact Reka.Tunyogi@eurochild.org.