

2024

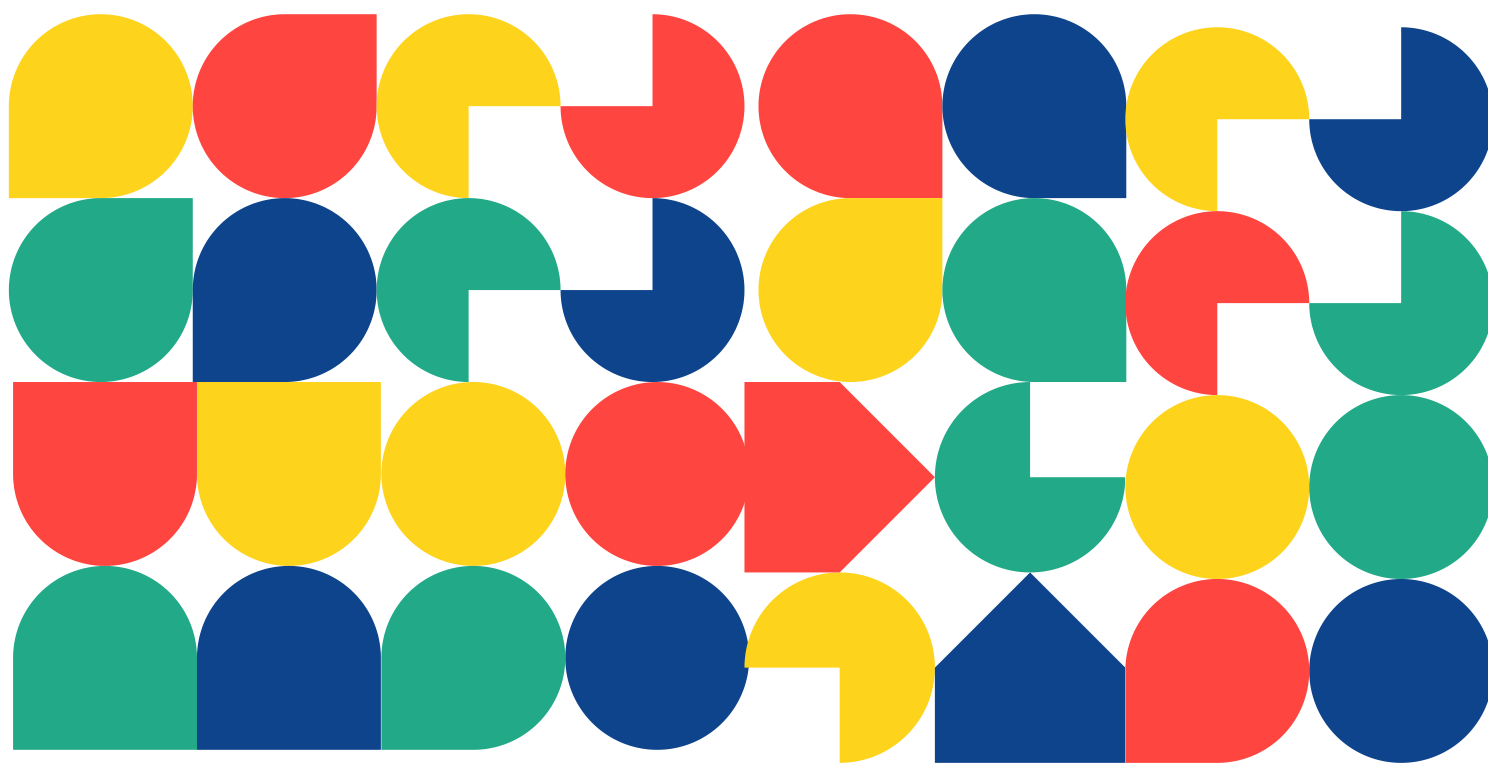


# Child Guarantee analysis

# LITHUANIA

Support to children with disabilities within the  
National Action Plan for the implementation of the  
EU Child Guarantee

Country Fact Sheets



## Date of publication

National Action Plan (2023) [EN](#) / [LT](#)

Biennial report (2024) [LT](#)

## Overall Opinion

Fighting poverty and social exclusion, while fostering the well-being, welfare, and inclusion of children, is central to Lithuania's political agenda. It is clearly reflected in its ambitious National Action Plan (NAP) and Biennial report. Building on its commitment through piloting the EU Child Guarantee, the NAP identifies children in vulnerable situations, providing detailed data and key information on the challenges and barriers they face. It sets clear targets, objectives and indicators for monitoring progress, alongside specific actions supported by a dedicated budget of €98.98 million – 8.7% of its ESF+. Support for children with disabilities, special needs, and those in foster care is considered a priority. Key actions include upholding comprehensive family services, supporting independent living in line with deinstitutionalisation objectives, fostering inclusive and special needs-responsive Early Child Education and Care (ECEC), inclusive education and providing access to culture and leisure. The NAP comprehensively covers all the key services identified by the EU Child Guarantee for these children. Nevertheless, regional disparities in access to essential services remain with villages and towns still providing critically few services. Addressing this gap should be a key focus of the country's ongoing efforts.



## Key data and figures

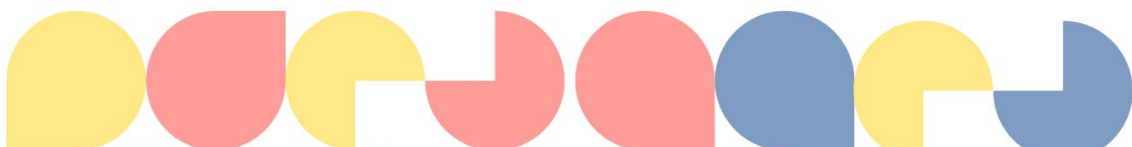
The government carried out two in-depth analyses that identified families and children in vulnerable situations and the challenges they face in accessing key services. This offers comprehensive statistical data and information on children with disabilities, children with special needs and children in foster care<sup>1</sup>:

### Children with disabilities

- **Children with disabilities:** In 2023, the number of children with disabilities increased slightly compared to 2022, reaching a total of 16,9 thousand. Mainly mental and behavioural issues, congenital conditions, genetic conditions and neurological variations.
- **Children in families receiving social assistance:** A total of 11,411 families received social assistance benefits, covering 19,433 children, including 1,651 children with disabilities.
- **Children in pre-primary education:** According to preliminary data for 2023-2024, out of 102,077 children in pre-primary education, 2,805 had a disability and 18,121 special education needs (SEN).
- **Children in pre-school and pre-primary education:** Preliminary data for 2023-2024 shows that 132,073 children were enrolled in these programmes, including 29,967 children with SEN.
- **Targeted services in ECEC settings:** In 2020, 56 out of 716 early childhood education and care (ECEC), all in urban areas, provided targeted services for children with SEN in specialised groups integrated into regular ECEC.
- **Inclusion in general education:** In 2018, 98.57% of children studied in general education classes, surpassing the EU average.
- **Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in inclusive education:** According to preliminary data for 2023-2024, during the same academic

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<sup>1</sup> An in-depth analysis of the implementation of the Child Guarantee System in Lithuania covering 2020-2021 was carried out to identify the categories of vulnerable children that face poverty and social exclusion. In addition, in 2021, the Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour commissioned the [study](#) with the aim to identify the specific needs, supply, effectiveness, accessibility, quality and relevance of services for different type of families, providing notably information on which of them face the greatest challenges.



year, 42,372 with SEN pupils participated in education, of whom 5,053 were children with disabilities.

- **Special education schools:** In 2019, 44 special education schools with 3,800 pupils were still operating. Only 30% of children with SEN or disabilities attended non-formal education due to limited opportunities.

#### Children in alternative care

- As of 2024, 1025 out of 6076 children were in family home care.

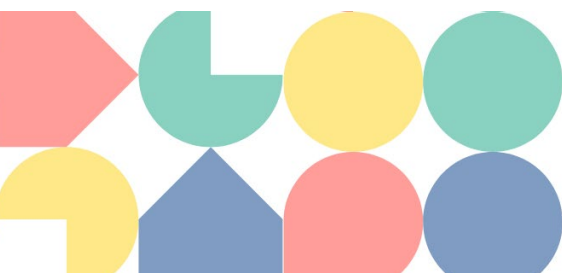
## Key challenges

#### ECEC

- **Lack of a comprehensive network of childcare services:** The system focuses mainly on pre-primary education for children aged 0 to 3, with limited access to childcare services.
- **Lack of childcare services in rural areas:** While childcare services for children aged 0 to 3 years target families with children with SEN, these services are not universally available, especially in rural areas, notably due to a lack of funding and a shortage of qualified professionals.

#### Access to education and leisure activities

- **Challenges in quality education:** Children with SEN and disabilities are among the most excluded when it comes to accessing quality education. While their participation in general education exceeds the EU average, challenges remain, including a lack of quality assistance, limited individual support and insufficient expertise among education specialists. These issues are particularly pronounced in rural areas.
- **Regional disparities in schools' accessibility:** Accessibility of schools vary significantly among municipalities. In 2022, there were 1,097 educational settings (state and non-state schools), of whom:
  - 76.75% were partially or fully accessible for people with reduced mobility.
  - 5.28% were fully accessible to people with visual impairments.
  - 53.50% had accessible canteen facilities for people with disabilities.
  - 27.16% allowed people with disabilities to move freely between floors.
  - 61.53% had accessible corridors for wheelchair users.



- Accessibility improved with 41 facilities in 20 municipalities becoming accessible for reduced mobility. 18 schools in 13 municipalities were fully accessible for mobility and visual impairments, and 61 schools in 25 municipalities were fully accessible for mobility impairments.

- **Lack of school's specialists:** In 2018, 9% of general education schools lacked specialists, 53% lacked psychologists, and 28% lacked special pedagogues or speech therapists.
- **Limited training and specialised services:** Municipalities often lack the necessary training centres and courses for education specialists. As a result, no settings are providing targeted services for children with SEN in specialised groups integrated into regular schools.
- **Difficulties for families:** Families face significant challenges due to limited access to educational and psychological support services, leisure activities and adapted infrastructure. Life-work balance is a major difficulty for them.

#### Access to healthcare

- **Limited access to early rehabilitation services:** Although universal and free early rehabilitation should be available to all children with developmental disabilities, fewer than 13,000 children received such services in 2022 due to long waiting times and a shortage of specialists.
- **Insufficient support services for families:** Families of children with disabilities often lack essential services like psychological support, speech, massage and physiotherapy, as well as early rehabilitation. Deprivation is higher for children with developmental and behavioural conditions.
- **Lack of access to mental health services:** Long waiting queues, limited compensation for psychotherapy, and lack of availability and continuity of psychological counselling persist.

#### **National legal framework**

While Lithuania lacks a unified and comprehensive strategy on the rights of the child, the implementation and protection of children's rights and well-being is reflected in several national strategic documents:

- **State Progress Strategy 'Lithuania vision for the future'** ('Lithuania 2050'): Adopted in 2023, it aims to reduce social inequalities by focusing on

vulnerable groups. It ensures quality education by enhancing pre-school education, identifying children's needs early, implementing support measures and providing necessary educational support within families.

- **18<sup>th</sup> Government Program Goals:** It aligns with the Child Guarantee by promoting quality education, accessible ECEC and inclusion of children with special education needs (SEN). Emphasis is placed on inclusive education and its success along with improving access to social services and support for families, especially those with children with disabilities.

Individual measures that contribute to the implementation of the Child Guarantee are also included in the following development programmes:

- Development Programme for Strengthening Family Policy 2021-2030: Focuses on developing services for all children and families
- Income Inequality Reduction Programme: Aims to reduce income inequality
- Inclusive Labor Market Programme: Promotes inclusive labour practices
- Social Solidarity Programme: Enhances social solidarity
- Education Development Program (2021-2030): Increases educational opportunities
- Health Preservation Programme: Improves health conditions for children.

### Key targets

- **Uphold foster care:** Increase the percentage of children in family-based foster care from 77.9% (2022) to 90% by 2030.
- **Foster mental health services:** Reduce the percentage of children with unmet mental health needs from 31.3% (2018) to 22% by 2030.
- **Increase access for children with SEN:** Ensure 100% of children with SEN in ECEC and mainstream schools receive attention within 6 months by 2030. However, the European Commission asked for clarity on what constitutes "attention".
- **Better targeting children with disabilities and SEN in schools:** These objectives are part of the Education Development Programme (2021-2030):
  - Inclusive education: Aim to have 97% of children with special educational needs and 75% of children with disabilities studying in mainstream schools by 2030.
  - Non-formal education: Target 75% of all pupils and 50% of children with SEN and disabilities to attend non-formal education classes.



- **Increase children in family-based care:** The goal is to have 77.9% of children in temporary and permanent care placed in family environments. As of October 2024, 80.9% of children in foster care (6,076 children, 4,915 in family care) are in family settings, aligning with the EU's deinstitutionalisation agenda.

## Key measures

### Care and social benefits

- **Universal child allowance:** Since 2018, Lithuania has provided a universal child allowance to all children, with varying amounts. As of 2024, children with disabilities receive the highest amount, €152.90 per month.
- **Guardianship care allowance:** As of January 1, 2022, amendments to the Law on Child Benefits introduced differentiated guardianship allowances based on the child's age and needs. Previously, allowances were uniform regardless of age or disability. The targeted supplement to foster care allowances was increased and extended to former foster carers until the child reaches 23, including those in education or training. The guardianship allowance for children with disabilities is set at €357.50, regardless of age.
- **Childcare benefits for working parents:** Amendments to the Law on Childcare Benefits, adopted in December 2023, introduced a new childcare compensation benefit of 5.2 BSI per month for employed parents of preschool children cared for by a nanny. This helps balance work and childcare responsibilities and is expected to support around 2,500 children. It does cover those caring for their own child or a spouse's/partner's child.

### Community-based services

- **Expansion of foster care:** Lithuania is enhancing family-like care for children, especially those with disabilities, severe behavioural challenges or previous failed placements. Amendments to the Law on Social Services, effective from July 1, 2024, will increase the number of parental homes and introduce permanent guardianship to support children needing extra attention due to failed foster care or adoption.
- **Assistance for children with disabilities:** Integral assistance by mobile teams provides day care and nursing for children with disabilities. In 2023, it was available in 52 out of 60 municipalities and is expanding to pre-schools with €43.9 million allocated from EU Structural Funds for 2021-2027.

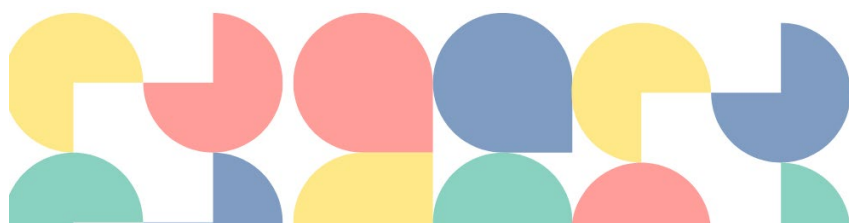





- **‘Comprehensive Services project’:** Funded by the EU Structural Funds, it started in June 2023, and offers services such as counselling, parenting training, and family mediation. With a budget of over €60 million for 2023-2029, 61 Community Family Homes provide these services across Lithuania, supported by a €1.49 million allocation from the State budget in 2023.

## ECEC

- **Hygiene standards:** Requirements for adapting rooms and equipment for children with SEN are in place. Pre-school and pre-primary groups for children with moderate to severe SEN may provide teaching assistants, following special assistance procedures managed by municipal education departments, pedagogical psychological services and school staff. These procedures apply to all schools, excluding higher education.
- **Educational assistance and social and health services:** It is coordinated for children and their families in pre-school and pre-primary education, covering ages from birth to 18 (or up to 21 for severe SEN) and extending to 23 for those with educational interruptions due to illness. As of September 2023, 103 general-purpose classrooms in 15 municipalities accommodate up to 3 children with severe ADHD, supported by a second teacher and teaching assistant.
- **Education Development Programme’s Progress Measure ‘Implement inclusive education’:** It aims to enhance the inclusion of vulnerable children in pre-school. It focuses on improving educational conditions for those with diverse needs through coordinated support services, ensuring equal opportunities, and expanding access to ECEC and full-day school services for excluded groups. The plan funds municipal projects to enhance educational, social and healthcare services for pre-school children and their families and initiatives to implement inclusive education and provide special education resources for children with SEN.
- **Guidelines for pre-School education:** It is based on holistic education, universal design for learning, play, and experiential activities. This approach guides the development and updating of the pre-school curriculum. Full inclusion is ensured by recognising each child’s unique learning style and implementing key educational areas—engaging children in activities, deepening understanding through various learning methods and allowing them to express their experiences according to their potential.





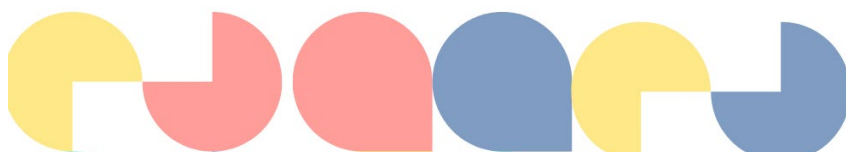
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- **Developing a support system within the pre-primary curriculum:** A support system for children, teachers and families encourages collaboration between educators and educational support professionals, focusing on vulnerable groups. Teachers address participation barriers, while specialists support physical, cognitive, and language development for children with learning difficulties. Educational support specialists help optimise the learning process and environment. Parents and guardians are involved to understand their child's needs and educational strategies. Schools collaborate with external institutions and NGOs to tackle complex educational issues.
  - **Addressing the lack of ECEC services:** Amendments to the Law on the Framework for the Protection of Children's Rights, effective from 1 January 2023, require state institutions and organisations with 100+ staff to set up children's rooms for short-term care. Private and other organisations are encouraged to do so as needed. These rooms help children wait or do homework when their school day ends before their parents' work hours.

#### Inclusive education

- **Hygiene Standards:** These requirements – presented in the above part dedicated to ECEC – also apply to primary and general education, excluding higher education.
- **'Implementing inclusive education progress measure':** Launched in March 2023, it aims to improve education accessibility and inclusion by 2030. With €115 million from the EU and Lithuanian funding, it focuses on including children with SEN into mainstream schools and creating a network of Regional Special Education Centres. These centres provide methodological and consultative support to schools, enhancing educational support services for students with special educational needs. The Lithuanian Centre for Inclusion in Education, launched in January 2023, and other national centres will offer free monthly consultations for educators starting in autumn 2023.
- **Educational aid and curriculum updates:** Since 1 January 2023, pupils receive €130 in annual educational aid, with adjusted support for those with disabilities based on their SEN. In 2023, general and pre-primary curricula were updated, and guidelines for working with SEN children were introduced. These guidelines, adapted for different impairments, ensure curriculum adjustments based on educational psychological service recommendations. To support pre-school educators, additional resources

like 'Play and Discovery' and 'Let's Explore Childhood' were developed to enhance understanding of children's development.

- **'Millennium Schools Programme'**: Adopted in February 2022, this programme aims to ensure high-quality education in all Lithuanian municipalities by 2030. It seeks to close achievement gaps between municipalities and schools, providing equal learning opportunities for all children. The programme focuses on reducing disparities, improving learning conditions, and strengthening schools.
- **Adapted school environment and curriculum**: All general education schools must adhere to the 'Lithuanian Hygienic Standard HN 21:2017', which sets health safety requirements for schools and mandates appropriate conditions the full inclusion of children with SEN in the educational process. Pupils with severe or very severe disabilities are required to follow an adapted curriculum to support their educational needs.
- **Textbook requirements for pupils with SEN**: All textbooks and teaching materials are free of charge. Those for children with SEN must meet special requirements to address cognitive, information reception and comprehension needs and be developed in consultation with special education specialists. In 2024, the allocation of funds was €12.1 million with an additional €10 million EU Structural Funds.
- **'Developing Diverse Education through Full Day Schools'**: The programme supports full-day school spaces for students with diverse needs, including those with SEN. €17.65 million is allocated for universal design features (ramps, lifts, tactile elements) in mainstream schools and €10 million for accessible transport.
- **'EdTech project' - Hybrid and digital education tools**: Hybrid training kits, 121 kits for higher education, and computerised workstations will enable both contact and distance teaching. The EdTech project is developing adaptable digital activity models for blended learning. Digital competence training has been completed for 2,200 teachers, with 433 currently enrolled in informatics courses and 142 teachers having graduated.
- **Teacher training for inclusive education**: National qualification development programmes have been launched to equip teachers with skills to work with SEN and children with diverse needs. Coordinated by the



National Agency for Education and developed by Vilnius University and Vytautas Magnus University, these programmes started in autumn 2023 and will run until 2026 with free participation.

- **Training and resources for inclusive education:** In 2022, 99 municipal consultants in 42 municipalities were trained to help adapt the curriculum for pupils with SEN. Thirteen methodological publications were developed on autism spectrum and social competencies, aimed at parents/guardians and teachers. These resources cover individual support plans, behaviour assessment, communication skills and parental engagement. Draft guidelines on SEN assessment, diagnosis and inclusive education support were also developed.
- **Guidelines for the regional measure 'Increasing access to education for excluded children'** were approved. The initiative includes €150.875 million (2023-2029) for adapting learning environments, acquiring educational tools, developing specialists and expanding support services.
- **Teacher training for inclusive education:** More than 5,000 teachers were trained by mid-2023 to implement updated curricula for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Inclusion was adopted as a national priority for teacher training for 2023-2025.
- **Pupil information system for career education:** The platform [www.mukis.lt](http://www.mukis.lt) was updated in September 2023. It offers students, parents, guardians, and professionals support and advice on career choices, news, events, and other opportunities within specific professions or fields. The Lithuanian Agency for Non-formal Education is preparing distance learning modules specifically for career professionals working with students with SEN, which will be available on the platform.
- **Educational needs of Roma children with SEN:** The same assessment procedures and criteria apply to Roma children with SEN. As part of the reform of the special education school network and the development of inclusive education, a reassessment of the educational needs of pupils enrolled in special education institutions will be initiated.

#### Culture and leisure activities

- **Financial support:** All children in pre-primary, preschool education and mainstream schools are allocated funds for educational activities.



Reimbursement for expenses for children with SEN, among others, is decided at the local level.

- **Cultural passport:** Each child in general education (primary, secondary) is provided with a Cultural Passport, strengthening access to selected cultural and artistic services. This initiative is particularly aimed at pupils who face limited access due to their place of residence, social situation, or disability.

### Healthcare

- **Better early identification:** Efforts to strengthen early diagnosis led to a significant increase in the identification of developmental conditions, particularly among children aged 0-3, with a threefold increase between 2016 and 2021. The prevalence among children 7-10 also rose by 1.5.
- **Medical rehabilitation services:** Medical rehabilitation services are prescribed by doctors following an assessment of a child's condition, medical history and rehabilitation needs. It covers musculoskeletal, neurological and other health conditions as per legal procedures.
- **Early childhood developmental conditions rehabilitation:** It offers licensed outpatient and inpatient services for early identification and support for developmental conditions. The service prioritises children under 4 years and has expanded significantly, supporting over 16,000 children in 2023, following an increase in funding and revised service requirements.

### Housing

- **Support service for youth leaving care:** Lithuania provides a support service for young people leaving care or at social risk to help them integrate into society. It helps them in adapting, developing life skills and addressing social challenges, ensuring a smoother transition to independent living. An independent living plan is created, outlining necessary actions, resources and professional support, tailored to their needs. The plan is reviewed every three months to ensure it continues to meet evolving needs.

### Data collection

- **Disaggregated data on disability:** The amendments to the resolution 'On the Strengthening of the List of Statistical Information Indicators on Children' (2023) aim to enable the collection of more detailed data on children across various areas. New indicators are disaggregated by age group, gender, area of residence, and disability. This should improve the comprehensiveness and accuracy of data on children's welfare.



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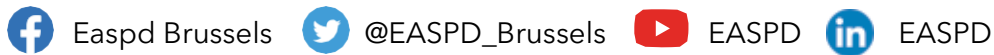


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