

# Children Count 2022

Report on risks to children's safety  
and development in Poland



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# About *Children Count 2022* Report

**M**onitoring the implementation of children's rights is one of the state government's obligations resulting from the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is also a statutory task of numerous non-governmental organisations and a moral duty of all of us to ensure safety and harmonious development for the youngest citizens of our country.

Fulfilling this obligation requires a valid and reliable assessment of the risks and effectiveness of the country's social policy. It is particularly important in times of rapid change, when civilisation challenges co-occur with epidemic or warfare risks.

Therefore, we present the third edition of the *Children Count* report, which describes the current risks to children's safety and development in Poland. The first edition of the report was published in 2011, and the second one – in 2017. The authors set themselves a task of collecting the most up-to-date statistics and research data describing the situation of children in Poland, mainly in terms of various forms of maltreatment and deprivation and their determining factors.

This report aims to describe the reality based on the available body of knowledge, but also to identify gaps in knowledge resulting from a lack of systemic collection of data on childhood risks. Without such data, it is impossible to reliably plan child protection strategies and evaluate the effectiveness of the measures taken.

The problem of child maltreatment and the areas of risks to children's safety and development, are characterised in this report using two categories of data: official statistics, collected mostly by state institutions, and research data. Whenever possible, we present statistical or research data from different years, or compare Polish data to findings from other countries.

The problems discussed in this report are illustrated with quotes from children and young people, mainly from phone calls and emails to the Empowering Children Foundation's 116 111 Helpline for Children and Young People.

Based on the assessment of the childhood risks described in the report, a number of recommendations have been formulated for the Polish government and institutions responsible for protecting children. We hope that the recommended directions of change will inspire efforts to improve the situation of children in Poland.

The Empowering Children Foundation would like to thank all persons and institutions that have contributed to this publication. In particular, we express our gratitude to:

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Content editors of the report



# Child population in Poland

Katarzyna Drabarek – Empowering Children Foundation



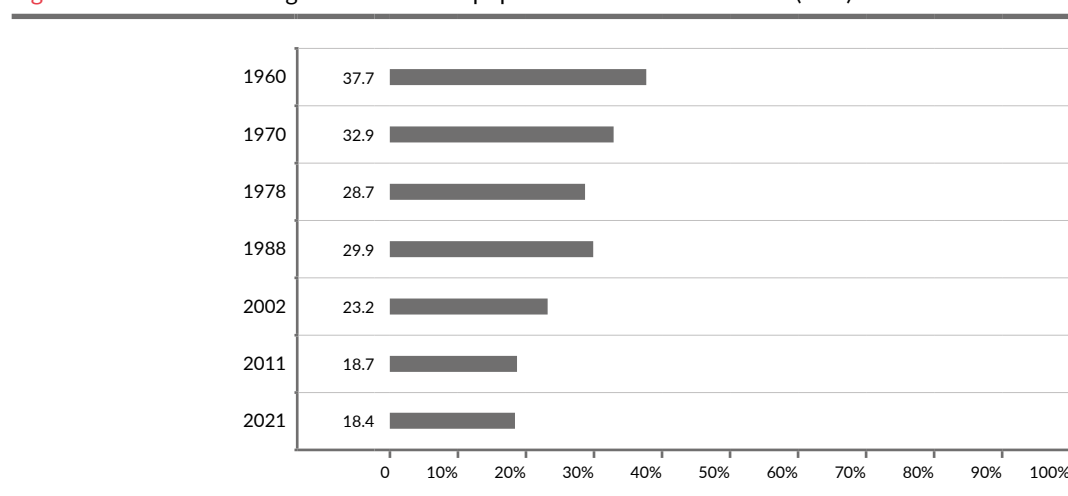


**T**he Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989, defines a child as “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (Article 1 CRC). In the Polish legislation, it is assumed that a person who turns 18 years of age attains majority, which is usually associated with the acquisition of the capacity for civil law transactions and certain rights (e.g. to enter into marriage) and obligations. Before the age of 18, a minor may attain majority through marriage. This possibility is available to a woman who has reached the age of 16 and the circumstances indicate that entering into marriage will be in the best interests of the family to be established (Article 10 of the Family and Guardianship Code).

According to the census conducted in 2021, there were nearly 7,000,600 children aged 0–17 in Poland (Statistics Poland [GUS], 2022). Fifty-one per cent of children in Poland are boys (GUS, 2021). More and more Polish children are being born abroad (GUS, 2022). According to data from 2011, there were 101.8 thousand foreign-born children aged 0–14; currently, there has been a large increase in this group and it already numbers 264.4 thousand. This upward trend has continued since Poland’s accession to the European Union (GUS, 2022).

The share of children in the total population of Poland has been declining since the early 1990s. (GUS, 2015). In 2001, children under 18 years of age accounted for nearly 21% of the total population (GUS, 2001), while in 2021 this proportion was approximately 18% (figure; GUS, 2022).

**Figure.** Share of children aged 0–17 in total population based on censuses (in %)



Source: Own analysis based on: GUS, 2022.

A decrease in the percentage of children in the total population was recorded both in urban (by 0.1 percentage points, down to 16.9%) and rural areas (by 0.8 percentage points, down to 20.6%). The trend of a lower proportion of children in the urban population compared to the rural population continues (GUS, 2022).

The decreasing proportion of children and young people in the population is accompanied by an increase in the proportion of elderly people, which exacerbates the ageing of the Polish population (GUS, 2022). The direct causes of this process include increasing life expectancy, rising quality of life and falling fertility rates. The phenomenon of population ageing is observed not only in Poland, but in the entire European Union (Eurostat, 2020).

The decline in the fertility rate, and the consequent reduction in the number of children, is the result of many factors: social, economic, health-related and moral. This worrying demographic trend poses a threat to the future economic and social situation of Poles and also affects the current situation of children. More than one third of children have no siblings. On the one hand, this may lead to more parental attention concentrated on the only child and better care, on the other hand, these children are deprived of the natural chance to develop social skills in contact with their siblings. Similarly, the increasing age of parents at the birth of their first child may mean that they are better prepared for their role and have a more stable financial and professional situation. However, the likelihood of parents of minor children experiencing health problems themselves or having to share time and attention between care of the children and of their ailing parents or grandparents is also increasing (the so-called sandwich generation; Szukalski, 2022). The distance between generations is also increasing, which may result in lower understanding of children's experiences, needs and rights (Gańko, 2011).

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