

**UPR Portugal
Portuguese Committee for UNICEF**

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30th August 2024

Mister President,

Distinguished delegates and colleagues,

The Portuguese Committee for UNICEF, working in the country for over 45 years, is honoured to join you here today.

Since 2019, the last reporting cycle, important policies were implemented to safeguard children's rights; however, poverty, violence, climate change and the absence of strong and coordinated political leadership continue to jeopardise the full enjoyment of these rights.

To begin, I will focus on child poverty.

Key strategies to combat child poverty have been adopted, such as a National Strategy to Combat Poverty and the European Child Guarantee National Plan, addressing some of the 36 recommendations made here in 2019.

As children continue to be the most affected by poverty, much work remains, and needs to be done. In fact:

- 1 in each 5 children lives at risk of poverty.
- The effectiveness of social transfers fell by 22% in the last decade, unlike in OECD and EU countries.
- 25% of children live in houses with poor conditions.
- Data on monetary poverty shows regional disparities and is more prevalent among families with children.
- Poverty has been a reason for institutionalisation, as alerted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Considering the above, UNICEF Portugal recommends the Portuguese government to:

- Accelerate the effective and coordinated implementation of national strategies across sectors.
- Adopt multidimensional poverty measures to capture deprivations beyond income.
- Fully implement the Child Guarantee Action Plan to address child poverty locally, aligning with the decentralization process and ensuring that it does not lead to discrimination in different regions.

- Implement automatic adjustments in social transfers to reflect the evolving socio-economic landscape impact on children.

The next critical issue is protection from all forms of violence.

Violence against children affects their development and has lasting consequences. It is the greatest preventable cause of mental illness and a driver of poor physical health and learning outcomes.

As we said: violence is preventable. Strong political leadership, action and adequate finance are needed.

In the last cycle, 50 recommendations were made on the need to protect children from violence and exploitation. UNICEF Portugal remains concerned about the lack of a coordinated strategy, and the quality of support services for children.

Sexual abuse remains a form of violence that is underreported in statistics.

- Based on European data, it is estimated that over 140,000 children in Portugal may be victims of sexual violence.
- For every school day, there is one reported sexual offense against children.

Child marriage is also a major concern. Although a working group was established by the Government, in 2021, to assess the issue and propose a course of action, no further developments have been reported.

- In the past decade, more than one thousand children officially married, and data shows that it is increasing since 2010.
- International data links child marriage to school drop-out and adverse effects on health and development.

Therefore, UNICEF Portugal calls on the Government of Portugal to:

- Amend its legislation to remove all exceptions that allow marriage under the age of 18.
- Implement prevention programmes and improve access to quality and specialized support services accessible to all children, including for reporting all forms of violence.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the current Child Protection System commissions, in their form, competences and safeguarding role, preventing violence and supporting families as a pillar for success.

We must also focus on protecting children from climate change.

Climate change is changing children. It is impacting almost every aspect of child health and well-being from pregnancy to adolescence. Portugal is no exception.

Despite that, environment and climate strategies fail to consider children.

- 20% of children were affected by extreme drought in the Summer of 2023.
- Each year, Portugal experiences at least two weeks of temperatures exceeding 35 degrees Celsius. School exams frequently occur during these periods.
- Children living in houses with poor conditions are more vulnerable. Climate hazards impact their academic performance and health.

In a recent consultation conducted by UNICEF Portugal, children have indicated that they lack sufficient knowledge about climate change and wish to learn and participate more.

UNICEF Portugal recommends the Government to:

- Prioritize children in climate policy strategies aimed at mitigating and adapting to climate change.
- Strengthen child-critical social services to be more climate and disaster resilient, such as health and education systems.
- Ensure meaningful engagement of children in climate action.

To conclude, it is essential to enhance governance and national coordination.

Protecting and promoting children's rights requires systematic and integrated action.

While the first National Strategy for the Rights of the Child, adopted in 2020, was a significant step, Portugal still lacks a coordinated governance structure addressing all dimensions affecting children.

Strong leadership and accountability are required to ensure their well-being. A dedicated entity is essential to guarantee the coordination of action for the multiple dimensions that affect children's lives, assuring political cooperation and resource mobilization are in place to achieve the full realization of children's rights.

UNICEF Portugal calls on the Portuguese Government to:

- Establish a high-level entity responsible for children's welfare, equipped with the authority and resources to coordinate policies and promote comprehensive, cross-sectoral strategies and monitor the realisation of children's rights.

We hope the mentioned recommendations will be adopted and implemented, especially bearing in mind the children living in the most vulnerable and fragile situations, in accordance with the Portuguese Government's mandate to uphold the rights of every child in Portugal.

Thank you.