



European Social  
Policy Analysis  
Network (ESPAN)

# Access for children in need to the key services covered by the European Child Guarantee

Slovenia

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Social Europe



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Nada Stropnik and Valentina Prevolnik Rupel

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## Summary

On 14 June 2021, the Council of the European Union adopted a Recommendation establishing a “European Child Guarantee”, with a view to guaranteeing access to six key services for “children in need”:

- effective and free access to four services: high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC); education and school-based activities; at least one healthy meal each school day; and healthcare; and
- effective access to two services: healthy nutrition and adequate housing.

The purpose of the present report is to assess the extent to which low-income children in Slovenia do indeed have effective (or effective and free) access to these services.

ECEC is available from the age of 11 months and is free for children from low-income families in Slovenia. Around 20% of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) have free access. The fees for children at risk of poverty (AROP), for whom ECEC is not free, are (mostly) 10% or 20% of the programme price. Some low-income families (particularly Roma) prefer a higher child allowance to (free) ECEC. In rare cases, waiting lists may be a barrier to exercising the right to free ECEC. The prices of ECEC services include the costs of meals provided there. Consequently, if ECEC is free, the meals are free as well. Since services are provided on a full-time basis, at least three healthy meals are provided, but usually there are four: breakfast, morning snack, lunch and afternoon snack.

In primary education, textbooks are either free for all children or can be borrowed free of charge. The same applies to workbooks for grades 1-3. Low-income children sometimes do not take part in extramural activities that are part of the curriculum, access to which is associated with out-of-pocket costs. In secondary education, there are no groups of children with free access to books, basic materials, extramural activities or transport; but there are income-tested state educational grants.

Free school snacks are received each school day by low-income children in primary and secondary education. The same applies to free school lunches in primary education. Judging by the income thresholds, free snacks are likely to be available to most AROPE children, particularly in primary education. Free lunches for children in primary education are likely to be available to all, or most, AROP children.

All children under 18 (under 26 if in schooling) are fully covered for all the rights included in compulsory health insurance. They are exempt from any payment for health services provided by general practitioners, visits by infant nurses, specialist care, dental care, prescribed medicines, medical devices, and other healthcare technologies. Consequently, there are no cash benefits that would cover out-of-pocket expenditure for children. Attendance rates at preventive healthcare programmes and check-ups are generally lower for low-income children.

Low family income and the cost of some healthy food (such as fruit and vegetables) undoubtedly hinder access for low-income children to healthy meals. Rather than a lack of knowledge, it is the (low-income) parents’ and children’s habits and tastes that lead to the consumption of unhealthy foods.

Income-tested housing benefit (up to 85% of the estimated non-profit rent) is available to lessees in non-profit housing, market housing, janitor housing, and assigned rented housing. The lack of social housing is an important barrier that hinders access for low-income children to social housing. There are no comprehensive data for all municipalities.

## Introduction

On 14 June 2021, the EU Member States unanimously adopted the Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 establishing a “European Child Guarantee” (ECG).<sup>1</sup>

The objective of the ECG is to offset the impact of poverty on children and to prevent and combat their social exclusion. To this end, it is recommended that Member States guarantee for “children in need” (defined as people **under 18** who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion – AROPE):

- effective and free access to four services: high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC); education and school-based activities;<sup>2</sup> at least one healthy meal each school day; and healthcare; and
- effective access to two services: healthy nutrition and adequate housing.

According to the ECG Recommendation, **effective access** means “a situation in which services are readily available, affordable, accessible, of good quality, provided in a timely manner, and where the potential users are aware of their existence, as well as of entitlements to use them” (Article 3d). **Effective and free access** means “effective access” to the services, as well as free-of-charge provision – either by organising and supplying such services or by providing “adequate benefits to cover the costs or the charges of the services, or in such a way that financial circumstances will not pose an obstacle to equal access” (Article 3e).

The Recommendation directs the Member States to prepare action plans, covering the period until 2030, to explain how they will implement the Recommendation.<sup>3</sup> These plans are to be submitted to the European Commission.

The purpose of the present report is to assess the extent to which children AROPE have effective and free access to four of the six services covered by the ECG and effective access to the other two (see above). Given that the eligibility criterion (or criteria) for accessing those services in individual Member States (at national and/or sub-national level, depending on how the service is organised) is/are not based on the EU definition of the risk of poverty or social exclusion,<sup>4</sup> the report focuses on access for **low-income children** to each of these services, using the national low-income criterion (or criteria) that apply (e.g. having a household income below a certain threshold or receiving the minimum income). Throughout this report, “low-income children” is to be understood as children living in low-income households.

In Slovenia, all six services covered by the ECG are primarily regulated at national level. Therefore, the report seeks to provide a general picture of the (effective/free) access for low-income children in the country.

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<sup>1</sup> The full text of the ECG Recommendation is available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L.2021.223.01.0014.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2021%3A223%3ATOC>.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Recommendation (Article 3f), “school-based activities” means “learning by means of sport, leisure or cultural activities that take place within or outside of regular school hours or are organised by the school community”.

<sup>3</sup> Once they have been submitted to the European Commission, the plans are made publicly available online at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en>.

<sup>4</sup> According to the EU definition, children are AROPE if they live in a household that is at risk of poverty (below 60% of median income; hereafter AROP) and/or severely materially and socially deprived, and/or (quasi-)jobless. For the detailed definition of this indicator and all other EU social indicators agreed to date, see: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=756&langId=en>. In 2021, EU Member States agreed a target to be reached by 2030: a reduction in the number of people AROPE in the EU by at least 15 million, including at least **5 million children**.



The report is structured by service:

- effective and free access to high-quality ECEC;
- effective and free access to education and school-based activities;
- effective and free access to at least one healthy meal each school day;
- effective and free access to healthcare (e.g. free regular health examinations and follow-up treatment, and access to medicines, treatments and support);
- effective access to healthy nutrition;<sup>5</sup> and
- effective access to adequate housing.<sup>6</sup>

## 1. Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

This section describes the situation regarding effective and free access for low-income children to ECEC services.

### 1.1 Mapping accessibility and affordability of ECEC

**Table 1.1: Accessibility and affordability of ECEC**

Childcare (usually under age 3)		Pre-school setting (usually age 3 to compulsory school age)	
Accessibility	Affordability	Accessibility	Affordability
ENT-ALL11months PRIOR-11months	FREE-POOR11months	Same as childcare (*)	

*Note: "ENT-ALL11months" means a legal entitlement for all children from the age of 11 months. "PRIOR11months" means priority access for low-income children from the age of 11 months. "FREE-POOR11months" means free for low-income children from the age of 11months. If the information differs between centre-based and home-based care, the information provided applies to centre-based care. (\*) The entire Slovenian ECEC system is based on one single, integrated piece of legislation (the Kindertgartens Act); it is referred to as "pre-school education" and starts at the age of 11 months.*

**Accessibility:** The Kindertgartens Act (1996, Article 20) provides a legal entitlement to ECEC for all children from the age of 11 months (Table 1.1). It requires that ECEC services be made available on a full-time basis to all children from that age onwards and directs municipalities to open additional classes or units, or to grant a concession, if the number of parents who have expressed interest in enrolling their children in ECEC programmes is high enough to open at least one pre-school class. In addition, it grants priority access to ECEC to low-income children (to be understood here as children whom the centre for social work deem to be at risk due to the poor socio-economic status of their family), also from the age of 11 months.

**Affordability:** ECEC is free for children from low-income families (Table 1.1). It is also free for some children from families with higher income: if there are two children from the same family concurrently enrolled in ECEC, it is free for the younger child regardless of the family

<sup>5</sup> According to the Recommendation (Article 3g), "healthy meal" or "healthy nutrition" means "a balanced meal consumption, which provides children with nutrients necessary for their physical and mental development and for physical activity that complies with their physiological needs".

<sup>6</sup> According to the Recommendation (Article 3h), "adequate housing" means "a dwelling that meets the current national technical standards, is in a reasonable state of repair, provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort, and is available and accessible at an affordable cost".

income. ECEC is also free for the third and every subsequent child from the same family, regardless of whether they are concurrently enrolled.

### 1.1.1 Conditions for qualifying as a “low-income child”

Low-income children are not defined as such. According to the Exercise of Rights from Public Funds Act (2010) and the Order on the harmonisation of income limits for annual entitlements for 2023 (2023), since 1 February 2023 families have been exempt from paying fees for ECEC if their net income per family member is €221.46 per month or less. There are no other conditions to be met.

### 1.1.2 Relation between the group(s) of children who have free access and the AROPE population of children in the relevant age group(s)

The criterion for free ECEC is not linked to the AROPE definition, and not even to the definition of children AROP (the thresholds, definitions of household members and equivalence scales are different). For a household consisting of two adults and two children, the monthly net income threshold for free access to ECEC is €885.84, while the 2021 AROP threshold was €1,618.58<sup>7</sup>. This means that parents are paying a subsidised (reduced) fee only for a certain proportion of AROP children (see Section 1.2.1). As noted in Section 1.1, if there are two children from the same family concurrently enrolled in ECEC, it is free for the younger child regardless of the family income. It is also free for the third and every subsequent child from the same family, regardless of whether they are concurrently enrolled.

On 1 January 2023, ECEC was free for 2,170 low-income children who were the younger/youngest or only children in the family, 10,428 second children in the family concurrently enrolled in ECEC, and 13,211 third children in the family.<sup>8</sup> They accounted for 2.5%, 11.9% and 15.0% of all children included in ECEC (87,993), respectively. The younger/youngest or only children in the family were almost certainly AROP and very likely AROPE as well. In 2021, there were 12,000 AROPE children aged under 6.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, at least 18.1% of them (being younger/youngest or only children in the family) benefited from free ECEC, but it is likely that the proportion (including second and third children) was over 20%. It should additionally be considered that, due to maternity and parental leave provisions, children under 11 months are not included in ECEC, whereas they are included among AROPE children under 6. The proportion of AROPE children among second and third children is not evident from the available data.

There are no data readily available on non-take-up. Additionally, it is not possible to identify groups of children who are over-represented in the AROPE population but lack free access to ECEC.

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<sup>7</sup> Eurostat, EU-SILC and ECHP surveys [ILC\_LI01\_\_custom\_4566916], downloaded on 17 January 2023.

<sup>8</sup> The data on children with free access were provided by the Ministry of Education.

<sup>9</sup> Eurostat, EU-SILC and ECHP surveys [ILC\_PEPS01N\_\_custom\_4568269], downloaded on 17 January 2023.

## 1.2 Main barriers to effective and free access to ECEC for low-income children

### 1.2.1 Financial barriers

There are no recent studies/data addressing this issue. Studies and discussion from more than 10 years ago did not find financial barriers for low-income children included in public ECEC.<sup>10</sup>

As noted in Section 1.1.2, some AROP parents have to pay a reduced fee. The Exercise of Rights from Public Funds Act (2010, Article 24) defines nine income brackets, expressed in terms of per capita monthly family income net of taxes (including the one for which ECEC is free).<sup>11</sup> The fee reduction is lower for higher income brackets. The fees for AROP children (for whom ECEC is not free) are (mostly) 10%<sup>12</sup> or 20% of the programme price.<sup>13</sup> The AROP threshold for a household consisting of two adults and two children, divided by four, is €404.65 per month. A household with a net per capita income between €221.47 and €369.11 per month would need to pay 10% of the ECEC programme price, while a household with a net per capita income between €369.12 and €404.65 per month would need to pay 20%. This may be a relatively heavy burden for these families. However, some municipalities reduce parent fees further. For instance, the municipality of Ljubljana – where the full price is €576 per month for children up to age 3 and €418 per month for an older child – reduces the fee by 23.5% for children up to age 3 and by 15% for older children (City Municipality of Ljubljana, 2023).

### 1.2.2 Non-financial barriers

There are no significant non-financial barriers faced by low-income children in their actual access to ECEC services. In rare cases, the problem may be waiting lists – mostly because the parents want to place their children in a particular kindergarten (close to their home or workplace).<sup>14</sup> However, as mentioned in Section 1.1, children deemed by the centre for social work to be at risk due to the poor socio-economic status of their family are granted priority for admission to ECEC (Kindergartens Act, 2005, Article 20).

There may also be a subjectively perceived barrier for the inclusion of younger children in ECEC, resulting from the child allowance regulation. Child allowance is higher by 20% for each pre-school child under 4 not attending a publicly subsidised ECEC programme (Parental Protection and Family Benefits Act, 2014, Article 72). Some low-income families (particularly Roma) prefer a higher child allowance to (free) ECEC, since they mostly do not see any added value in pre-school education and do not want to include their children in a system they do not fully trust. According to the appendix to the national programme of measures for Roma, some Roma probably weigh whether it is more important for them to

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<sup>10</sup> A subsidy (paid from municipality budgets) is also received by registered childminders caring for children on kindergarten waiting lists. It amounts to 20% of the costs of the ECEC programme into which the child would be included if there were enough vacancies (Kindergartens Act, 2005, Article 24b). This means that childminding of such a child is not free for any child, since the remaining 80% has to be paid by parents.

<sup>11</sup> Parent fees range from 0% to 77% of the programme price.

<sup>12</sup> According to data provided by the Ministry of Education, on 1 January 2023 parents paid 10% of the price for 9,558 children, or 10.1% of all children in ECEC.

<sup>13</sup> Municipalities may decide to grant larger price reductions than those requested by the national regulation, but not all do.

<sup>14</sup> The public network of ECEC service-providers is dense and generally meets the demand. The regional distribution of providers (MESS, 2023) is thus mainly a consequence of demand.

have the money and the child with them, or to forego money and have the child separated from them, in which case the decision is clear from their point of view (GRS, 2017).

Regional differences in ECEC attendance for both age groups are generally the consequence of differences in adults' educational attainment. In the less developed Zasavska region in the east of the country, where the proportion of low-educated people is higher than in the west of the country, the attendance rate is the lowest (Resolution on Family Policy 2018-2028 "Family Friendly Society", 2018). However, there are no data available to prove the impact of adults' educational attainment on the attendance of low-income children with free access to ECEC.

The fact that mothers of Roma children are mostly unemployed (with childcare being their main task) and very attached to their children also contributes to children's non-enrolment in ECEC (GRS, 2017). An important step in promoting the inclusion of Roma was the introduction of Roma assistants who help Roma children overcome emotional and linguistic impediments prior to inclusion in kindergarten. Roma children's command over the Slovenian language nevertheless remains poor and is an important barrier to their successful integration. Since the 2021/2022 school year, Roma assistants have been formally included as kindergarten staff (GRS, 2022a). The number of children per pre-school class is smaller if the group includes Roma children and the ratio of children to professional staff is more favourable. Free transport is organised where a higher number of Roma children attend ECEC. In spite of all programmes and efforts, the attendance on ECEC programmes by Roma children remains irregular.

### 1.3 Free meals provision for low-income children in ECEC

The prices of ECEC services include the costs of meals provided there. Consequently, if ECEC is free, the meals are free as well.<sup>15</sup> Since services are provided on a full-time basis, at least three meals are provided, but usually there are four: breakfast, morning snack, lunch and afternoon snack. An additional late afternoon snack may be provided as well. Nutritionists take care that the composition of the menus is as varied, healthy and balanced as possible – meeting the child's physiological and psychological needs in accordance with the current guidelines for the nutrition of children in kindergartens.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. Education and school-based activities

This section describes the situation regarding effective and free access for low-income children to education and school-based activities.

Section 2.1 maps the main school costs in public primary and secondary education, distinguishing between the following:<sup>17</sup>

- compulsory basic school materials (schoolbag, pens, glue, scissors, etc.);
- compulsory school materials (textbooks, school supplies, notebooks, etc.);
- compulsory specific clothing (uniform, sports clothing);
- IT equipment requested by the school;

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<sup>15</sup> See Section 1.1.1 for eligibility conditions.

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance: <https://www.gov.si/teme/prehrana-v-vrtcu/>, <https://www.bibaleze.si/rubrika/malcek/vrtec/obrok-vrtec-malica-hrana-zdravje-otrok.html> and <https://www.vrtec-ig.si/content/prehrana> (all accessed 17 February 2023).

<sup>17</sup> Tuition fees charged by private schools are not covered.

- sports equipment or musical instruments requested by the school;
- compulsory extramural activities (e.g. school trips, sport, culture) that are part of the curriculum;
- other compulsory fees or costs; and
- transport costs to or from school.

Section 2.2 briefly describes the cash benefits specifically intended to help meet educational costs.

Finally, Section 2.3 seeks to identify the main barriers that prevent low-income children from having effective and free access to “school-based activities” as defined in the Council Recommendation establishing the ECG (see "Introduction" section). Given that the distinction between these activities and some of the activities covered above – especially the “compulsory extramural activities (e.g. school trips, sport, culture) that are part of the curriculum” – may not always be clear-cut, the focus of Section 2.3 is specifically on school-based activities that are not part of the curriculum.

## 2.1 Mapping the main school costs in public primary and secondary education

**Table 2.1a: School costs of primary education (free for all/low-income children)**

Basic material	Books	Clothing	IT	Sports or music equipment	Extramural activities	Other fees or costs	Transport
NO	POOR	NO	NA	NA	MOST ITEMS	NA	NO

*Note: “POOR” means that it is free for low-income children. “MOST ITEMS” means that most but not all items in the category are free for low-income children, “NO” means that most/all items in the category are not free for low-income children. “NA” (not applicable) means that this category is not requested/compulsory in the country.*

Textbooks and workbooks are free for all children in grades 1-3 (out of 9) of primary education (Table 2.1a). In all public primary schools, textbooks for all grades can be borrowed from school textbook funds free of charge by any child (Organisation and Financing of Education Act, 1996). However, in grades 4-9 workbooks may be granted free of charge only to low-income children (i.e. financed from school funds or other sources).

Extramural activities may be free for low-income children, but there is no regulation guaranteeing this. The Ministry of Education contributes additional funds for one week (out of several) of out-of-school classes that is compulsory during the nine years of primary education. This means that all children have at least one week of out-of-school classes (the “school in nature”) co-financed from public sources. This is regulated by the Rules on Funding Out-of-school Classes (2004). Children from low-income families additionally have the right to a reduced price. The criteria include: receipt of cash social assistance; per capita family income; the amount of child allowances; parents’ unemployment; long-term illness in the family; longer-term social problems; and other family particularities. Based on these criteria, and after obtaining the opinion of the parents' council, the school council adopts the more detailed criteria for the allocation of funds. This means that there is no exact definition of a low-income child guaranteeing a (full) fee reduction. The rules/regulation do not guarantee (all) low-income children a 100% fee reduction – although, in practice, this is often the case, also due to additional financing from municipality budgets, school funds, and donations, etc. (Kuralt, 2022). Consequently, low-income children in primary education sometimes do not take part in extramural activities (e.g. school trips, sport or cultural activities) that are part of the curriculum and access to which is associated with out-of-pocket

costs (Kuralt, 2022; Narat *et al.*, 2016). The situation largely depends on the readiness of the municipality to cover the costs of extramural activities for low-income children, on school funds, and on the effort and performance of the school staff in raising donations for such purposes.

Basic materials, sports clothing and transport are not free. Children in primary education have the right to free transport if their residence is more than 4 kilometres away from the primary school. Regardless of the distance of their residence from the primary school, the right to free transport is held by: (a) children in grade 1 of primary education; and (b) children in other grades of primary education if the competent authority for the prevention of road traffic accidents determines that their safety is at risk on the way to school. Pupils who attend a school outside their school district have the right to reimbursement of expenses in the amount that would be due to them if they attended a school in the district where they live.<sup>18</sup>

There are no school uniforms. IT equipment, special sports equipment or music equipment are not requested.

**Table 2.1b: School costs of secondary education (free for all/low-income children)**

Basic material	Books	Clothing	IT	Sports or music equipment	Extramural activities	Other fees or costs	Transport
NO	NO	NO	NA	NA	NO	NA	NO

*Note: "NO" means that most/all items in the category are not free for low-income children. "NA" (not applicable) means that this category is not requested/compulsory in the country.*

Basic materials, books, sports clothing, extramural activities and transport are not free (Table 2.1b). Children in secondary education are entitled to purchase tickets on public passenger transport (bus, train and city transport) at a reduced price if their place of education is at least 2 kilometres from their place of residence.<sup>19</sup>

There are no school uniforms. IT equipment, special sports equipment or music equipment are not requested.

### 2.1.1 Conditions for qualifying as a "low-income child"

For children in primary education who, due to their social situation, are not able to pay the full contribution for out-of-school classes, the school takes into account the following criteria in determining the (full) fee reduction:

- receipt of cash social assistance;
- income per family member;
- amount of child allowances;
- parental unemployment;
- long-term illness in the family; and
- longer-term social problems and other specific family circumstances (Rules on Funding Out-of-school Classes, 2004, Article 13).

The criteria for granting free access to workbooks (in grades 4-9 of primary school) and extramural activities (other than out-of-school classes) are set by primary schools (see

<sup>18</sup> See: <https://e-uprava.gov.si/podrocja/izobrazevanje-kultura/osnovna-sola/brezplacen-prevoz-v-osnovno-solo.html> (accessed 12 February 2023).

<sup>19</sup> See: <https://e-uprava.gov.si/en/podrocja/education-culture/secondary-school/subsidized-ticket.html> (accessed 9 February 2023).

Section 2.2) and are not available online. They are therefore not readily available if there are other conditions that have to be met on top of the low-income criterion/a.

### 2.1.2 Relation between the group(s) of children who have free access and the AROPE population of children in the relevant age group(s)

Books (and, in most cases, textbooks) are free for AROPE children in primary education.

Extramural activities are likely to be free for a large proportion of AROPE children in primary education. Due to a lack of data, it is not possible to analyse the relationship between the eligible groups and the AROPE population.

There are no groups of children with free access to basic materials and transport. In secondary education, the same applies to free access to books and extramural activities.

It is not possible to identify groups of children who are over-represented in the AROPE population but lack free access.

There have been no evaluations of non-take-up among children entitled to free access to textbooks and workbooks in grades 4-9 of primary school. In grades 1-3, take-up is 100% since schools organise the distribution to all children.

There have been no evaluations of the non-take-up of free access to out-of-school classes and other extramural activities in primary education.

## 2.2 Cash benefits whose specific purpose is to help meet educational costs

Although there are several kinds of educational grants,<sup>20</sup> state educational grants are those that are primarily meant to help children from low-income families in secondary education continue their education after primary education. The basic amount of the state educational grant depends on the per capita family income per month. There are seven income brackets. Basic amounts of the state educational grant are lower for those in higher income brackets (Exercise of Rights from Public Funds Act, 2010).

For a household consisting of two adults and two children, the 2021 AROP threshold was €1,618.58 per month.<sup>21</sup> The income threshold for the highest basic amount of the state educational grant (€129.44 net per month since 1 March 2023) is €1,476.44 net per month (Order on the harmonisation of income limits for annual entitlements for 2023, 2023; Decision on the adjusted transfers determined in nominal amount and on the percentage of adjustment of other transfers to individuals and households in the Republic of Slovenia, 2023). Up to a family income of €1,771.76, it is €109.01, both net per month. There are additions to the state educational grant for lodging and educational achievement (Scholarship Act, 2013). The first one is the right of students whose place of permanent residence is more than 25 kilometres from their place of education, whose lodging cost is at least €65 per month, who (or whose parents) do not own real estate in the place of education, and who do not stay in a subsidised student lodging. Since 1 March 2023, the addition for lodging has been €94.78 (net) per month. The supplement for educational achievement is from €20.14 to €47.40 (net) per month.

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<sup>20</sup> See: <https://www.gov.si/en/policies/education-science-and-sport/scholarships/> (accessed 9 February 2023).

<sup>21</sup> Eurostat, EU-SILC and ECHP surveys [ILC\_LI01\_\_custom\_4566916], downloaded on 17 January 2023.

In 2021, 34,460 secondary school students were receiving a state educational grant.<sup>22</sup> Available data do not allow for a proper comparison with the total number of AROPE children in the relevant age group.

Existing data are not sufficient to address the issue of the adequacy of the state educational grant, in terms of covering the costs of education. There have been no studies on this topic.<sup>23</sup> The same applies to data/studies addressing non-take-up of the state educational grant and/or groups of children over-represented in the AROPE population but not receiving that grant.

If there are two or more children from the same family residing in a student dormitory, the second and each following child concurrently residing in any student dormitory in Slovenia are entitled to a subsidised (reduced) price, irrespective of the family income.

There are no cash benefits to meet the education costs of other groups.

## 2.3 Main barriers to effective and free access to school-based activities for low-income children

### 2.3.1 Financial barriers

Some sport, leisure or cultural activities that take place within or outside regular school hours, or are organised by the school, are free for all children. Existing studies/data are not sufficient to address the issue of financial barriers faced by low-income children in their actual access to school-based activities that must be paid for. Access may be made free in a similar way as for extramural activities, but the situation may be less favourable for low-income children.

### 2.3.2 Non-financial barriers

There are no studies on non-financial barriers faced by low-income children in their actual access to free school-based activities.

## 3. Free meals at school

This section describes the situation regarding effective and free access for low-income children to at least one free healthy meal each school day.

### 3.1 Mapping free provision of school meals

On school days, every school (primary and secondary) must provide snacks to all children who sign up for them. As an additional offer, schools can also organise breakfasts, lunches and/or afternoon snacks (School Meals Act, 2013).

Low-income children in primary education who sign up for them can receive a free school snack and a free warm school lunch each school day. Low-income children in secondary education who sign up for it can receive a free school snack.

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<sup>22</sup> See: <https://www.gov.si/teme/drzavna-stipendija/> (accessed 9 February 2023).

<sup>23</sup> Information was provided by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.



### 3.1.1 Conditions for qualifying as a “low-income child”

For the purpose of free school snacks, low-income children in primary education are defined as those from families whose net per capita income does not exceed €652.12 per month (since 1 February 2023) (Exercise of Rights from Public Funds Act, 2010; Order on the harmonisation of income limits for annual entitlements for 2022, 2023). Low-income children in secondary education are those from families whose net per capita income does not exceed €516.76 per month (since 1 February 2023). Children in secondary education whose family net per capita income is €516.77-€652.12 per month are entitled to a 70% school snack cost reduction, while those with family net per capita income of €652.13-€787.44 per month are entitled to a 40% cost reduction (Exercise of Rights from Public Funds Act, 2010; Order on the harmonisation of income limits for annual entitlements for 2022, 2023).

For the purpose of free school lunches, low-income children in primary education are those from families whose net per capita income does not exceed €442.94 per month.

There are no other conditions to be met on top of the low-income criterion.

### 3.1.2 Relation between the group(s) of children who have free access and the AROPE population of children in the relevant age group(s)

For a household consisting of two adults and two children, the 2021 AROP threshold was €1,618.58 per month,<sup>24</sup> while the income threshold for having:

- a free snack for a child in primary education is €2,608.48 net per month;
- a free snack for a child in secondary education is €2,067.04 net per month; and
- a free lunch for a child in primary education is €1,771.76 net per month.

This means that the free meals provided are also available to children from families with income (far) exceeding the AROP threshold if they sign up for them.

According to the information provided by the Ministry of Education, in the 2022/2023 school year:

- 97,163 children in primary education were provided with free snacks – 49.8% of all children in primary education who signed up for school snacks, and 48.8% of all children in primary education;
- 15,439 children in secondary education were provided with free snacks – 19.84% of all children in secondary education (October 2022 data); and
- 43,006 children in primary education were provided with free lunches – 25.6% of all children in primary education who signed up for school lunches, and 21.6% of all children in primary education.

The available data do not allow a comparison between children receiving free school meals and AROPE children. Judging from the income thresholds, free snacks are likely to be available to most AROPE children, particularly in primary education. Free lunches for children in primary education are likely to be available to all, or most, AROP children.

It is not possible to evaluate non-take-up of free meals by children who would be eligible for them, because there is no available information.

It is also not possible to identify groups of children who are over-represented in the AROPE population but lack free access to school meals.

<sup>24</sup> Eurostat, EU-SILC and ECHP surveys [ILC\_LI01\_\_custom\_4566916], downloaded on 17 January 2023.

## 3.2 Main barriers to effective and free access to school meals for low-income children

### 3.2.1 Financial barriers

There have been no studies on financial barriers to effective and free access to school meals for low-income children.

### 3.2.2 Non-financial barriers

(Free) lunches are not provided in secondary schools, because the schools are not adequately equipped to offer warm meals. Another non-financial barrier may be children's tastes, resulting in an unwillingness to consume school meals (i.e. not signing up for school meals), even if available free of charge.

## 4. Healthcare

This section describes the situation regarding effective and free access for low-income children to healthcare, focusing on vaccinations, care from a general practitioner (GP) or infant nurses, specialist care, dental care (not orthodontics) and prescribed medicines.

### 4.1 Mapping the provision of free healthcare services and products

**Table 4.1: Healthcare costs (free for all/low-income children)**

Vaccination	GP	Infant nurses	Specialist care	Dental care (not orthodontics)	Prescribed medicines
ALL	ALL	ALL	ALL	ALL	ALL

*Note: "ALL" means that all services/products in the category are free for all children.*

According to the Healthcare<sup>25</sup> and Health Insurance Act (1992), all children under 18 (or 26, if in schooling) are fully covered for all rights included in the compulsory insurance system. They are exempt from any payment for health services provided by their GP,<sup>26</sup> visits by infant nurses, specialist care, dental care, prescribed medicines, medical devices, and other healthcare technologies (Table 4.1). The basic benefit package includes systematic preventive check-ups of new-borns, pre-school children, and children in primary and secondary education. Preventive check-ups include vaccinations, regular and systematic examinations by a dentist, and health education. All specialist and hospital services are fully covered for children by compulsory health insurance.

In Slovenia, community nurses visit new-born children at home after their discharge from the maternity ward (six home visits during the first year, with the first visit occurring within 24

<sup>25</sup> In 2021, many initiatives were started in Slovenia to introduce value-based healthcare. Value-based healthcare focuses on health and not on care; or, stated differently, according to the Donabedian model, it focuses on the outcome and not on the process. A significant difference therefore exists between "health care" and "healthcare", where the latter focuses on the process. According to the instructions for this Thematic Report, healthcare is always to be written as one word, which is the sole reason for using that term.

<sup>26</sup> In Slovenia, the GP refers to primary care physicians without specialisation in family medicine, who are not allowed to work as primary care physicians. Upon completing specialisation in family medicine, the physicians dealing with family medicine at the primary care level are called family doctors.

hours after the return from hospital). All children are invited for regular check-ups with the paediatrician in the local primary healthcare centre. These regular check-ups – which include screening programmes for 18 diseases – are provided in the first, third, sixth, ninth, 12th, and 18<sup>th</sup> month, at the ages of 3 and 5 years, and before the start of schooling. Check-ups include immunisations and examinations of general health. At age 3, there is also a check-up with a psychologist. At age 5, there is a check-up with a speech therapist.

Preventive health check-ups for children in compulsory (primary) and (four- or five-year) secondary education are organised so that all children from the same class are invited for a health check-up on the same day. All children therefore have the same opportunities for preventive healthcare. Preventive health check-ups are provided in grades 1, 3, 6 and 8 of (nine-year) primary education and in grade 1 and 3 of secondary education. These check-ups are not compulsory and include a general health examination, vision screening, hearing screening and immunisation.

Similarly, regular dental check-ups (at the dentist) for schoolchildren are organised and are free for all children. However, no regular dental care monitoring is guaranteed for those who dropped out of school before completing their education. Preventive dental check-ups are at the age of 6-12 months, each year at pre-school age, each year of primary education, and in grade 1 and 3 of secondary education. Dental check-ups are not compulsory.

Immunisations that are part of the compulsory vaccination programme are free of charge. The immunisation programme is part of regular preventive health check-ups and the preventive healthcare system of Slovenia, as defined by legislation. Compulsory vaccinations cover nine communicable diseases (Communicable Diseases Act, 2006): haemophilus influenza B, diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, polio, measles, mumps, rubella and hepatitis B. Children cannot attend public or private ECEC if they are not vaccinated against measles, mumps and rubella. Each year, there are between 250 and 300 applications for the waiver of vaccination requirements. Most are overturned, as they are not based on medical reasons (Zupan, 2021). Non-compulsory vaccinations need to be paid for out of pocket.

Finally, there is health education provided by registered nurses during preventive health check-ups at primary healthcare centres or kindergartens and schools. There is also dental care education every year in kindergartens and schools.

#### 4.1.1 Conditions for qualifying as a “low-income child”

Not applicable.

#### 4.1.2 Relation between the group(s) of children who have free access and the AROPE population of children in the relevant age group(s)

Not applicable: access is free for all children.

### 4.2 Cash benefits whose specific purpose is to help meet healthcare costs

Cash benefits whose specific purpose is to help meet healthcare costs are not needed, as all healthcare services and products are free for children. The services that are not covered by compulsory insurance need to be paid for out of pocket, and there is no cash benefit with a specific purpose to help meet the costs of these services. A good example is the human papillomavirus vaccination.

## 4.3 Non-financial barriers to effective and free access to healthcare

In some regions, some low-income children do not attend systematic medical check-ups during primary education. Only 90% of some generations of children have had at least one preventive check-up (NIPH, 2016a, p. 18). In the case of the Roma population, this is mainly related to their traditional way of life, where such check-ups are not considered important. Besides, some Roma families tend to migrate, so children are changing schools, which results in lower take-up of medical check-ups (NIPH, 2016a, p. 62). Important differences in the health of new-borns still pertain according to the socio-economic position (education) of mothers (NIPH, 2016a, p. 46).

High-quality mental health promotion is not equally accessible to low-income children (particularly immigrants and Roma) (Resolution on the National Healthcare Plan, 2016). The waiting time for initial consultations with clinical and child psychologists may be long in some areas, depending on the urgency level. For example, the waiting times for “regular” urgency cases in 2023 reach up to 22 months for a pediatric psychologist, and up to 51 months for a clinical psychologist; for urgency level “fast”, they reach up to 22 months and 36 months, respectively; and for urgency level “very fast”, they reach up to 15 months and 27 months, respectively (MoH, 2023).

## 5. Healthy nutrition

This section describes the situation regarding effective access for low-income children to healthy nutrition.

### 5.1 Main barriers to effective access to healthy nutrition

#### 5.1.1 Financial barriers

Low family income undoubtedly hinders access for low-income children to healthy meals.<sup>27</sup> Healthy food and meals cost more than unhealthy (or less healthy) ones, particularly due to the relatively high prices of fruit and vegetables. However, one can also eat healthy at a relatively low cost. The calculation of the minimum costs of living in Slovenia (Stropnik, 2020 and 2022) takes account of the monetary value of a food basket that meets nutritional requirements for a healthy diet at the minimum cost, set by the nutritionists at the Institute for Public Health (Gregorič *et al.*, 2017). The basic amount of minimum income (i.e. the reference amount for cash social assistance) is based on the short-term minimum costs of living.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> According to the health behaviour in school-aged children survey for 2013/2014 (Inchley *et al.*, 2016), family affluence had a significant impact on overweight and obesity among boys and girls in Slovenia.

<sup>28</sup> These include expenditure on food, non-alcoholic beverages, clothing, footwear, housing, electricity, water, gas and other fuel, healthcare, transport, communications and education. Excluded is expenditure on furniture, household equipment, recreation, culture, dining out, stays in hotels, personal hygiene, housing and vehicle insurance, and financial services – i.e. items that do not need to be purchased in the period of three months or so (Stropnik, 2020 and 2022).

### 5.1.2 Non-financial barriers

Rather than a lack of knowledge,<sup>29</sup> it is the parents' (Dolinšek, 2016; Kotnik and Dravec, 2016) and children's habits and tastes that lead to the consumption of unhealthy foods. The Institute of Nutrition<sup>30</sup> and the National Institute of Public Health (NIPH)<sup>31</sup> report that – due to inappropriate eating habits (including an inadequate choice of foods at mealtimes and the consumption of fast food) – children are exposed from a very early age to constant excess consumption of harmful fats, sugar, salt and artificial additives. The unavailability of healthy food at home and easy access to fast food contribute to the consumption of unhealthy foods/meals (Dolinšek, 2016). Dietary habits are also heavily influenced by junk food (chains) marketing (Dolinšek, 2016; Kotnik and Dravec, 2016)

## 5.2 Publicly funded measures supporting access to healthy nutrition

The new programme for the elimination of material deprivation in the Republic of Slovenia for 2021-2027, co-funded by the European Commission, was approved in November 2022 (GRS, 2022b). Children under 18 are among the target groups (those with low income) to which aid has been provided (in the form of food packages). Eligible for aid are, *inter alia*, households with dependent children without active working members or with partly active working adult members.

Slovenia has adopted a national programme on nutrition and physical activity for health for 2015-2025 (Resolution on the National Programme on Nutrition and Physical Activity for Health 2015-2025, 2015). On its website,<sup>32</sup> the NIPH provides information on healthy diets and lifestyles and related programmes, projects and publications. In 2017, it conducted nutrition monitoring and counselling in kindergartens.<sup>33</sup> It also published a leaflet on “12 steps to healthy nutrition”<sup>34</sup> and a booklet for parents on healthy nutrition at pre-school age.<sup>35</sup> Within the framework of the national preventive programme “Together for health”,<sup>36</sup> the Task Force on Prevention of Obesity and Healthy Lifestyle of the Child and Family published the preventive programme for children and young people aimed at recognising and treating excessive nutrition and obesity (NIPH, 2016b).

## 6. Adequate housing

This section describes the situation regarding effective access for low-income children to adequate housing.

<sup>29</sup> Dolinšek (2016) reported on a study that found out that the children were relatively well informed about a healthy diet.

<sup>30</sup> See: <https://www.nutris.org/prehrana/novice/zdravje/80-prehranjevalne-navade-slovencev-se-ne-izboljsujejo.html> (accessed 12 March 2023).

<sup>31</sup> See: [https://www.nijz.si/sites/www.nijz.si/files/uploaded/najti\\_pot\\_k\\_zravemu\\_kaj\\_vse\\_vpliva\\_na\\_prehranjevanje\\_otrok\\_in\\_kako\\_privzgojiti\\_zdrave\\_prehranske\\_navade\\_-\\_nijz.pdf](https://www.nijz.si/sites/www.nijz.si/files/uploaded/najti_pot_k_zravemu_kaj_vse_vpliva_na_prehranjevanje_otrok_in_kako_privzgojiti_zdrave_prehranske_navade_-_nijz.pdf) (accessed 12 March 2023).

<sup>32</sup> See: <https://nijz.si/zivljenjski-slog/prehrana/> (accessed 24 April 2023).

<sup>33</sup> See: <https://nijz.si/publikacije/strokovno-spremljanje-prehrane-s-svetovanjem-v-vzgojno-izobrazevalnih-zavodih-v-letu-2017/> (accessed 24 April 2023).

<sup>34</sup> See: [https://nijz.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/12\\_korakov\\_plakat\\_0.pdf](https://nijz.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/12_korakov_plakat_0.pdf) (accessed 24 April 2023).

<sup>35</sup> See: <https://nijz.si/publikacije/zdrava-prehrana-v-predsolsem-obdobju/> (accessed 24 April 2023).

<sup>36</sup> See: <https://www.skupajzazdravje.si/> (accessed 24 April 2023).

## 6.1 Publicly funded measures supporting access to adequate housing – Housing allowances

Housing benefit is available to lessees in non-profit housing, market housing, janitor housing, and assigned rented housing: (a) who do not own an apartment/house; and (b) whose total income does not exceed a threshold equal to the sum of the individual/family minimum income (without activity supplements), 30% of their actual income,<sup>37</sup> and the non-profit rent (Housing Act, 2003, Article 121; Exercise of Rights to Public Funds Act, 2010, Article 28). The benefit is equal to the difference between the estimated non-profit rent (where the actual size of the apartment, up to the appropriate size,<sup>38</sup> is taken into account) and the individual's or family's own income reduced by the respective minimum income<sup>39</sup> (without activity supplements) and 30% of own income. It must not exceed 85% of the estimated non-profit rent (Housing Act, 2003, Article 121; Decree on the methodology for determining non-profit rent and on the determining the amount of rent subsidies, 2021).

Due to a shortage of non-profit housing, there is also a means-tested rent reduction (housing benefit) covering the difference between the market (for-profit) rent and the non-profit rent. Consequently, for beneficiaries renting at market prices, the housing benefit consists of a subsidised estimated non-profit rent and the difference between estimated (recognised) market and non-profit rent (Housing Act, 2003, Article 121b). However, when renting at market prices, the rent reduction can be obtained only in connection with the municipalities' calls for the allocation of non-profit housing, which are published at long and irregular intervals (due to the lack of housing). It is not sufficient to apply for the rent reduction in the latest public tender for the allocation of non-profit rented housing: the tenant has to be placed on the priority list. If the public tender for the allocation of non-profit rented housing was last published more than a year ago, those who meet the conditions according to that tender are also entitled to the rent reduction. If the public tender for the allocation of a non-profit rented apartment in the municipality of the applicant's permanent residence has not been published, an applicant meeting the conditions and criteria for obtaining a non-profit rented apartment and renting at a market price is entitled to a rent reduction.

There have been no studies on the adequacy of housing benefit to cover the housing costs for low-income households with children.

Electricity suppliers must not disconnect vulnerable customers (Electricity Supply Act, 2021). These are households that – due to their property/financial situation, the share of energy expenditure in their disposable income, or other social circumstances and living conditions – cannot secure any other source of energy that would result in the same or lower costs for the most necessary household use. Along with proof(s) regarding heating and/or a health condition, the customer must provide a certificate from the social work centre to show that they had applied for cash social assistance before the notification of disconnection arrived (Legal Act on the Criteria and Rules for Providing Emergency Supply of Electricity, 2016). A vulnerable customer is entitled to a supply of an absolutely necessary amount of electricity given the circumstances (season, temperature conditions, place of residence, state of health and other similar circumstances), to avoid endangering the life and health of the customer and the people residing with them (i.e. the critical electricity supply). Such supply is provided

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<sup>37</sup> Determined according to the Exercise of Rights to Public Funds Act (2010).

<sup>38</sup> The appropriate size for an apartment (living space) depends on the number of family members and is increased in the case of people with disabilities that hinder or prevent their normal movement (Rules on the Rental of Non-profit Apartments, 2004, Article 14).

<sup>39</sup> In the case of a person living alone, the respective minimum income is increased by 10% of the basic amount of minimum income.

for the period between the intended disconnection and the final decision by the social work centre on whether or not to grant cash social assistance. If the social work centre decides not to grant cash social assistance, the critical electricity supply must be paid for by the household. The critical electricity supply also ceases if cash social assistance is granted, as the household is no longer considered vulnerable (cash social assistance is meant to cover basic living costs, including energy expenses). In this case, the cost of necessary electricity consumption is borne by the system operator. There were no vulnerable customers in 2021; there was only one application, and it was not approved (Agencija za energijo, 2022).

Similarly, gas suppliers must not disconnect or limit the consumption of vulnerable customers to below the amount absolutely necessary, given the circumstances (season, temperature conditions, place of residence, state of health and other similar circumstances), to avoid endangering the life and health of the customer and the people residing with them (Gas Supply Act, 2021, Article 18). However, the costs of gas consumption by vulnerable customers are borne by the distribution system operator only until the vulnerable customer pays for them. In 2021, there were only three applications for the status of a vulnerable customer, and these were not approved (Agencija za energijo, 2022).

## 6.2 Publicly funded measures supporting access to adequate housing – Social housing

### 6.2.1 Mapping the provision of social housing

The supply of social housing is frequently reported to be lacking. However, there is very little evidence, data and reporting in general on the developments in social housing in Slovenia. There are no comprehensive data for all municipalities in Slovenia. The demand for social housing is exercised and observable only when public tenders for the allocation of social housing are open in individual municipalities, and these occasions prove a shortage of social housing. Responsibility for the delivery of non-profit housing rests at the local level (municipal housing funds).

In recent decades, the central and local authorities had no interest in the construction of non-profit housing because non-profit rents were fixed by administrative procedure, fell in real terms and did not cover the maintenance costs. The 2021 amendments to the Housing Act provided key solutions for ensuring a sustainable housing policy, a sufficient quantity of affordable rented housing, and a fair non-profit rent. The non-profit rent has gradually increased (over three years) by around 30%.

The Rules on the Rental of Non-profit Apartments (2004, Article 5) set the income threshold for the entitlement to the allocation of non-profit housing. The threshold depends on household size and is expressed in percentages of the average national salary net of contributions and taxes (e.g. 200% for a single-person household and 370% for a four-member household). Taking into account the 2021 net average salary, the threshold would be €2,540.66 and €4,700.22 per month, respectively, which is relatively high. Household members must not own housing or other property worth more than 40% of the value of appropriate housing.

According to the Rules on the Rental of Non-profit Apartments (2004, Article 6), priority in the consideration of applications for non-profit housing is given to (among others) families with the most children, families with the least number of employed members, young families, and victims of domestic violence (Article 6). When allocating a non-profit apartment, priority is given to those applicants who have the worst housing conditions and the largest number of family members, and who live in the worst social and health conditions (Article 8).

Exceptional circumstances for awarding non-profit housing include the case of families where temporary relocation is needed because of the protection of children's interests (Article 29).

Non-profit housing is allocated by municipalities. Subject to the Housing Act (2003) and Rules on the Rental of Non-profit Apartments (2004), which set the framework, the municipalities are free to define additional/priority criteria for the allocation of non-profit housing in their public calls.<sup>40</sup> Since the number of applicants tends to greatly exceed the number of housing units, the priority criteria are decisive for the chance to be successful. For instance, in its 2021 public call, the public housing fund of the city municipality of Ljubljana set 19 priority criteria. These included: (a) young families and young people; (b) three or more children in the family; (c) children (or other family members) with disabilities; and (d) victims of family violence.<sup>41</sup>

The Resolution on Family Policy 2018-2028 “The Society Friendly to All Families” (2018) stressed the risk position of single-parent families and the need to support them in the area of housing.

## 6.2.2 Main barriers to effective access to social housing

### 6.2.2.1 Financial barriers

There are no financial barriers to effective access to social housing by the low-income population. Such barriers exist on the side of the municipalities that allocate non-profit housing – namely, the lack of funds allocated for constructing social housing in their budgets. Once residing in a non-profit housing (or market housing, under additional conditions), low-income people are eligible for housing benefit.

### 6.2.2.2 Non-financial barriers

The lack of non-profit housing is generally considered an important barrier that hinders access for low-income children to social housing (see Section 6.2.1). For instance, in Ljubljana the waiting time is up to three years for housing units that do not meet the standards that otherwise apply to non-profit housing and are intended to temporarily solve the housing problems of the most vulnerable groups of the population (i.e. people who are homeless or live in extremely intolerable conditions) (Public Housing Fund of the City of Ljubljana, 2023). Those who were awarded non-profit housing wait up to three years as well (Pušnik, 2020) – and only a small minority of applicants are awarded non-profit housing in biennial public calls.

The unmet demand for social housing is higher in urban environments and depends on irregular calls. The spatial development strategy of Slovenia stipulates that, in accordance with the national housing programme, special attention is to be devoted to creating the conditions for an accelerated construction of rented (especially non-profit rented) apartments in urban settlements (Court of Audit, 2022).

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<sup>40</sup> The maximum possible number of points based on the additional criteria may not exceed by more than 25% the maximum possible number of points based on criteria set in the Rules on the Rental of Non-profit Apartments (2004).

<sup>41</sup> See: <https://www.jssmol.si/objave-in-razpisi/19-javni-razpis-za-dodelitev-neprofitnih-stanovanj-v-najem> (accessed 17 February 2023).



### 6.3 Publicly funded measures supporting access to adequate housing – Other measures

There are no other measures.

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