



**Our Rights. Our Future.
The Europe We Want.**

Children's recommendations to
European Union decision makers

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the children from across Europe who took part in the online consultations and focus group discussions. Your input has been critical in shaping this report and identifying what really matters to children in Europe.

We would also like to thank Child Fund Alliance, Eurochild, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages, and UNICEF for making sure our voices are heard. It is thanks to you that we are able to share our concerns and recommendations to tackle important issues that lie ahead of us all.

To the decision-makers reading this, especially those in the EU and its member states, we're grateful for your willingness to listen and consider our perspectives. Your commitment to represent our voices and advocate for our needs and priorities means the world to us.

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Foreword by the Child Advisory Board

Dear adults, dear decision-makers,

Children in the EU have something to tell you. We have tried many times to make our voices heard. We have seen young people from all over the world devoting their years, lives, and hearts to a certain goal: making this world a better place. A safer, more equal, more inclusive one. Although the EU has put incredible effort into assuring our rights and freedoms are respected and protected, there is still a lot to be done.

We agree that our plans towards a better future will never be realised if we keep the children away from the adults, acting as if we are two separate groups with different goals, ambitions, and interests. How can we achieve equality, justice, inclusion in this world if we cannot even collaborate across generations when planning for the future? We believe it's time to come together, recognising the value and importance of each other's contributions to effecting change. It is time that we unite our wings to protect the most vulnerable.

As you will see, all our recommendations share a common theme: involving children and young people in decision-making that shapes their lives and futures. Most of the time, we do not have a say or a chance to impact the way our schools and communities work. We cannot shape the educational system to fit our own needs and dreams. We cannot have a say in the decisions concerning the climate crisis and decisions that affect the future, even if the world you are leading is being borrowed from future generations.

We, children in the EU and beyond, share a dream for a future where both you and us hold the same dreams and priorities. While we acknowledge your contributions to uniting the world, we also believe in your potential to be leaders that prioritise children's rights more than you have so far. We can all be these leaders when we collaborate, act, and dream together.

Turning our dream into a reality is our next step. To achieve it, we've outlined our recommendations to the leaders of the EU to bridge the gap between adults and children and improve society overall.

Educational system

We want to reassess the aims and functionality of the educational system. We do not want schools to be hostile, stressful environments where only adult teachers talk and where students passively absorb information without reflection and dialogue. We advocate for an education system that fosters dialogue between teachers and students. We promote practical learning that nurtures emotional, social, digital, and soft skills alongside traditional subjects like grammar and mathematics. We desire schools that adapt to the evolving needs and opportunities of society.

Mental health

The stigmatisation of mental health needs to end. We should invest in and raise awareness around mental health helplines to ensure that all children and adults know where to ask for help. Additionally, we need to improve access to mental health support, especially in poorer communities, and provide each school with a psychologist.

Discrimination

Through the findings in this report, it is clear that discrimination is linked to gender inequality, racism, discrimination against LGBTQ+ children, people with disabilities, and so on. Let's allocate EU funds towards initiatives that train adults working with children to address discrimination effectively, as well as introduce an annual ranking system evaluating countries based on their efforts to combat discrimination.

Protection

Bullying is the type of violence that concerns most children. It is time to officially recognise 'bullying' and 'cyberbullying' as forms of violence that should be taken seriously and addressed. We should train more teachers and parents on how to address any form of violent and aggravating behavior against children. We should also create 'safety centers' where victims of violence can seek support from experts.

Participation

Adults and decision-makers should facilitate children's participation in public debates and discussions as equal partners, emphasising their voices and perspectives rather than just consulting them, since they can contribute to holding an ambitious yet productive and up-to-date conversation. We should also establish a Children's EU Parliament, hosting biannual events where young people can express their opinions and contribute to discussions on EU policies.

Climate change

We should find ways to push for stronger climate action everywhere. To us, the annual COP meetings rarely seem to lead to anything concrete. Let's focus on solutions and actions rather than abstract goals or debates on who is more responsible. All countries should take action, even if this means investing money. The EU could invest more money in tackling the climate crisis.

Our plans and suggestions may seem over-ambitious. But as Martin Luther King Jr. said, the time is always right to do what is right. In order to achieve all of this, an unbelievable amount of effort and money needs to be invested. But let's keep it simple. Let's start making small steps towards a big goal. If not now, when? If not us, who?

Thank you for listening to our voices and for considering our dreams, goals, and suggestions.

Foreword by the supporting organisations

Dear children,

We hear you.

We heard that you are concerned. Worried about the future, the world we live in, and what this does to your mental health and well-being. Concerned by the challenges of your daily life, what will be your place in the future and whether your schools are preparing you well for it. Disappointed by politicians not delivering on their promises, especially on fighting climate change.

You told us that changes in the education system and better mental health services could make a difference in your life. That innovative teaching methods and more practical skills would better equip you.

You are interested, want to better understand Europe and engage with your peers; you want European Union (EU) institutions to speak a language that you understand and – most of all – you want to be involved in the decisions that the European Union takes. In some EU countries, you will be able to vote in the European elections for the first time, but you want to go beyond having a say only at the end of the process – you want to be part of it from the very beginning.

You recognise that many issues, such as mental health, climate change, bullying, education, and inclusion, have a European dimension and should be addressed with European solutions too. Maybe that is something to change in the future architecture of the EU – and maybe the way decisions are made needs to change too? Most of all: you claim your seat at the table. Any decision made with your input is a better decision – a future-proof decision, an inclusive and democratic decision. Our organisations are fully committed to supporting you in turning your requests into reality: together we can create a more inclusive, child-friendly Europe where every child's voice is heard and respected.

Let's build together the EU you want.*

Catherine

Sabine

Willy

Lidia

Bertrand





Introduction

Every five years, the citizens of the European Union elect their representatives as Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). The next elections are scheduled for June 2024. As the EU makes critical decisions that impact the lives of children, ChildFund Alliance, Eurochild, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages, and UNICEF wanted to consult children on the issues that matter most to them ahead of the elections. To facilitate this, they partnered with the Child and Youth Friendly Governance Project, an organisation specialised in children's participation in decision-making, to conduct a consultation with children aged 10 to 18 across the European Union. The results of this consultation are presented in this report. They depict the issues that matter most to children in Europe and serve as a useful guide on matters that decision-makers in the EU should prioritise.

A Child Advisory Board was established to advise and guide the consultations with children. The Board included ten children from six European countries, nominated by the organisations leading the consultation process.

Supported by the Child and Youth Friendly Governance Project, the Child Advisory Board developed an online survey consisting of 21 questions focused on topics ranging from education to mental health.

The survey was translated into 15 languages and disseminated from November 2023 to January 2024 throughout Europe. Over 9,200 children responded. Although this is not a representative group of children all across the EU, it gives a good insight into what children find important.

In addition to the online survey, focus group discussions were organised in Bulgaria, Croatia, the Netherlands, and Malta involving a total of 47 children to support the survey findings with qualitative information.

In Annex I, you can find more information about the children who responded. The Child Advisory Board analysed the findings from the consultations and, based on the findings, developed a set of recommendations to decision-makers. Their thoughts on the findings are reflected throughout the report. The consultative process was guided by strict child safeguarding measures to ensure that children's participation was safe and meaningful.

This report is divided into different thematic chapters based on the topics of the consultations: education, mental health, discrimination, protection, participation, climate change, and children's priorities. Under each topic, we have proposed recommendations for the new Members of the European Parliament and European Commission leadership.

Learning skills for the future

From theoretical to practical learning

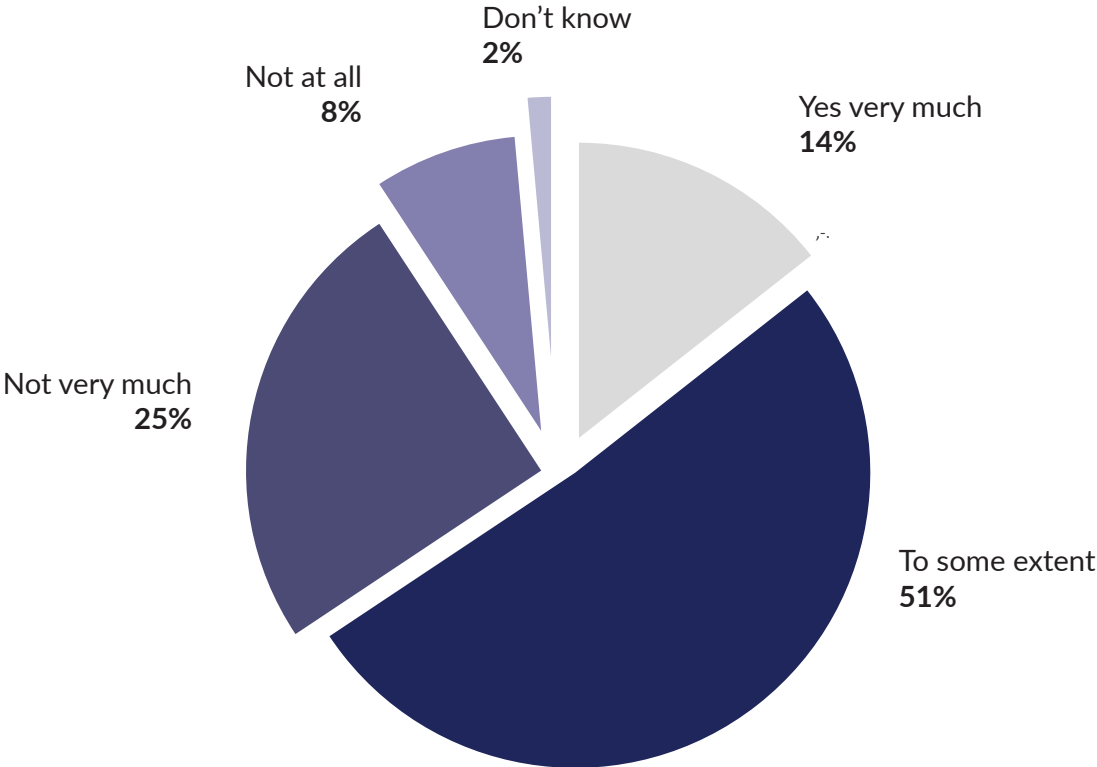
Education is a top priority for children across Europe. Unfortunately, children feel that the education system does not respond to their needs and prepare them adequately for the future. Only **14%** of children consider learning in school very useful, while **51%** consider it useful to some extent. A staggering **33% do not find learning in school useful for their future**. The Child Advisory Board further highlighted that the school system often feels outdated and does not reflect the realities they experience every day.

The question then becomes: What do children want to learn? The findings from the consultations are clear: children want to learn life skills, such as how to apply for a

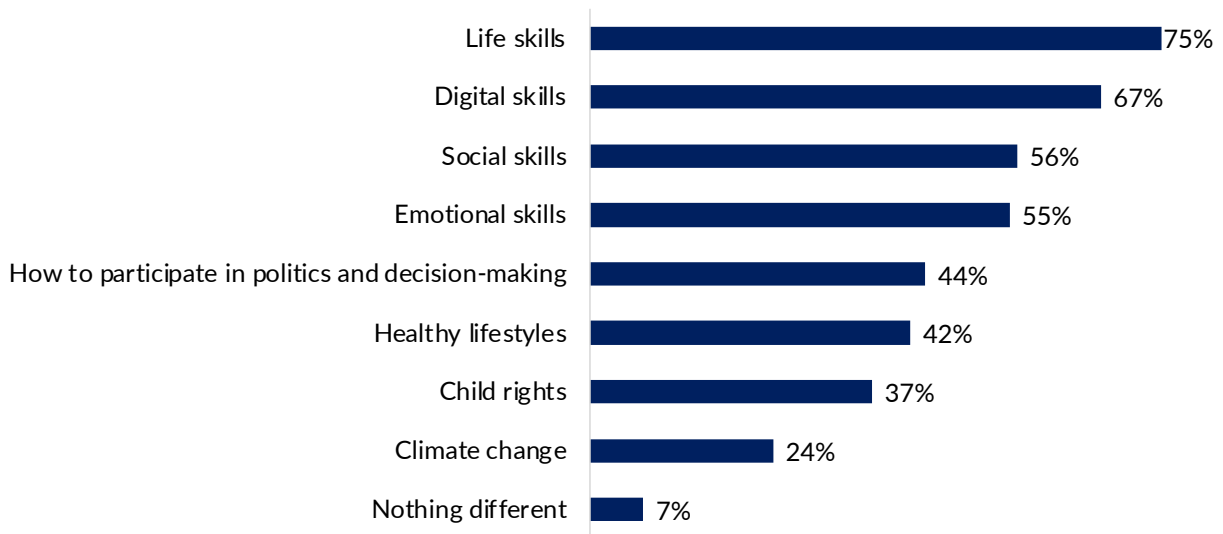
job, manage their own money, or pay taxes. Additionally, there is a strong demand for learning digital literacy, as well as a strong desire for more focus on soft skills, such as supporting children in developing strong social and emotional skills. Finally, almost half of the children consulted would like to learn more about democracy, participation, and how they can concretely participate in decision-making today and later as adults.

The overall message from children is strong: **in addition to academic skills, schools need to prepare children for the transition to adulthood and the responsibilities that come with it.**

When asked if current teaching in school is useful for your future, children responded:



When asked what they would like to learn in school, children across the EU responded:



Call for new teaching methods

In addition to the content of school curricula, children would like to see changes in current teaching methods and advocate for more inclusive decision-making in schools. Specifically, children are calling for greater freedom to choose their subjects and a shift from traditional teaching to more practical learning, group work, and interactive teaching methods. Moreover, almost half of the children surveyed express a desire for a stronger voice in decision-making within their schools overall.

A better balance between school and free time is also important to children. More than half of those consulted find the amount of homework overwhelming, and almost half would like to have more opportunities for play and sports both in and around school premises.

Children also call for improvements in the physical learning environment, less punitive teaching methods, and enhanced safety in schools to promote children's learning and well-being.



I believe that there should more additional subjects focusing on topics important for our future, such as those related to the labour market.

Denis, 16, Bulgaria

To the question on what children would like to change in school, they responded:

- More liberty to choose what we study: **66%**
- More practical learning and skills development: **59%**
- Less homework: **53%**
- More group work and interactive learning: **44%**
- More time for play or sports: **43%**
- More opportunities for students to share their ideas: **41%**
- Better school buildings: **40%**
- Less punishment: **25%**
- Better safety in school: **24%**
- Smaller classes: **22%**
- Nothing: **3%**



Children's recommendations

- Invest in more practical learning and teaching of life skills in school. Children would like to learn skills like financial literacy. The adults teaching children at school do not always have to be teachers - bring in professionals from other areas of life too to share more about their work.
- Give children more flexibility and freedom to choose what they study in school and build their own school experience. Children have different strengths, talents, and interests, and would like to have the freedom to explore these in school.
- Invest in digital skills. Children spend a lot of time online and need support to navigate the online environment. Teachers should be equipped to teach children these skills, and not the other way around.
- Support teachers in rethinking how they teach. Children would like more interactive lessons, group work, and learning through practice.
- Offer teachers support in their work to ensure they stay motivated. This can include for example mental health support, good working conditions, and the possibility to get additional training. Often, children feel teachers are overwhelmed, tired, and unhappy.
- Increase awareness of existing programs that support children and young people in gaining new experiences, such as the Erasmus program.
- Propose a specific annual theme to focus on for all schools in the EU countries, based on children's priorities, to help children define solutions together to challenges across Europe.
- Expand opportunities for children to interact with peers from other EU countries, such as establishing exchange programs, to facilitate collaborative development of education systems.
- Make teaching methods more inclusive and adapted to children with special needs. Teachers should be well-equipped to communicate with children with special needs and disabilities and develop learning objectives that meet their needs. The EU should develop standard learning objectives for children with disabilities across all EU countries, supported by an EU-led plan to enhance teacher support for children with disabilities.

A mental health crisis unfolding

Mental health is a significant concern for children, and there are various reasons behind their concerns. Children report that school pressure is one of the main contributors to mental health challenges, with two in three feeling its negative effects. **Girls express slightly more concern about school pressure than boys, with 74% of girls mentioning it compared to 59% of boys.**

Worryingly, many children also feel that not being heard or taken seriously contributes to their mental health challenges. The Child Advisory Board has noted that children often feel dismissed or not taken seriously when discussing their challenges with adults such as teachers or parents.

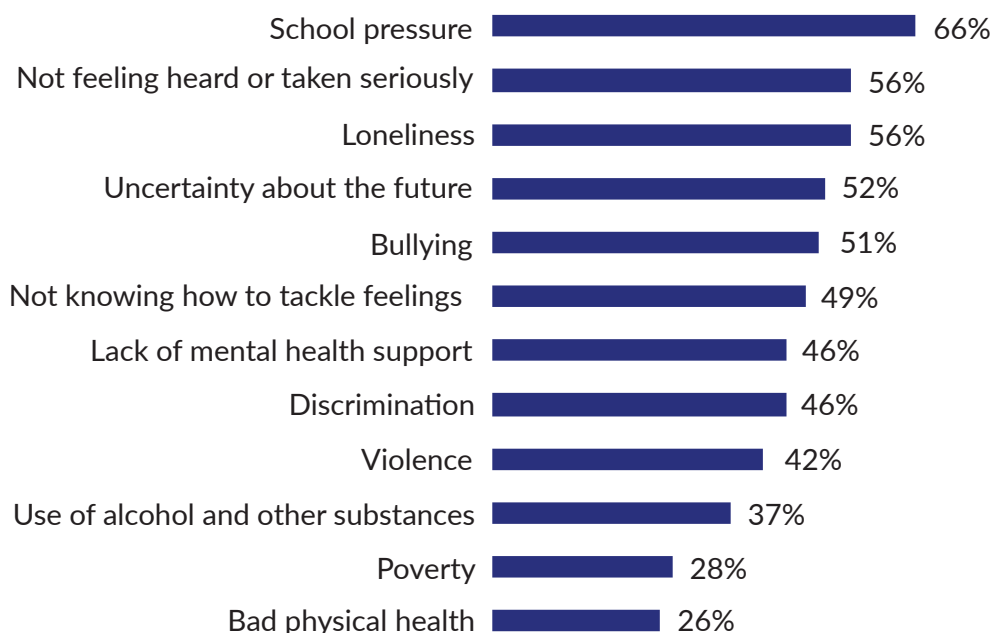
In focus group discussions, children raised the challenge of finding and accessing mental health support tailored to their needs, and available at an affordable or no cost. The Child Advisory Board highlighted that for many peers, the cost of private mental health services is prohibitive.

Furthermore, children express worry about their future, with more than half feeling that uncertainty about the future impacts their mental health. **Concern about the future is particularly common among minority groups, with 67% of LGBTQI+ children expressing such concerns.** Social challenges, such as loneliness, bullying, or discrimination, are significant contributors to mental health challenges. Children from minority groups mention these challenges more often than others, particularly LGBTQI+ children.

More than a third of children mention substance abuse and social media as sources of mental health challenges. Additionally, more than one in four children are worried about the impact of poverty on mental health, with 64% of children living in poverty stating that poverty is a major challenge to children's mental well-being.

Mental health challenges impact girls more than boys, particularly school pressure, feeling unheard, or experiencing loneliness.

When asked what are the biggest challenges to children's mental health, children responded:





A major drawback for me is that children are not taken seriously when they speak up on serious mental health issues such as depression.

Amelie, 15, Malta

Creating a culture of acceptance

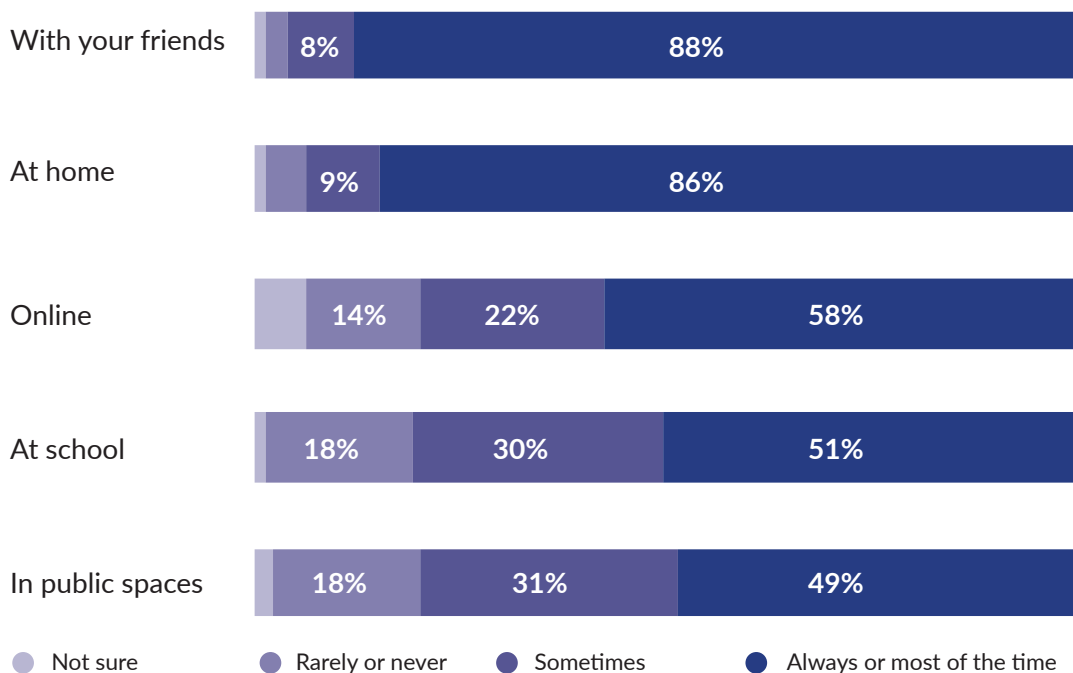
The Child Advisory Board highlighted the importance of creating environments where children feel accepted to protect their mental health. Consultations indicate that children feel most accepted among their friends and at home. However, concerning feeling accepted at home, there is one important exception: 36% of LGBTQI+ children do not feel that they can be themselves at home most of the time.

A very concerning finding is that in environments where children spend a significant amount of their time, such as school, public spaces, and the online environment, they feel significantly less accepted as they are. **Almost half of children feel like they cannot be themselves at school on a regular basis.** The school environment is particularly challenging for children from minority groups.

Only around a third of LGBTQI+ children (34%), children with disabilities (38%), or children living in poverty (26%) feel that they can be themselves at school most of the time.

Despite the importance of digital environments in children’s lives, in focus group discussions, children call for more attention to protection from online harassment and bullying. On the other hand, for some children, online spaces are more accepting than school or public spaces. For example, 64% of LGBTQI+ children felt that they could be themselves online most of the time, compared to 33% being able to be themselves in public spaces. The anonymity of online spaces can be stressful for children, but for others, it offers a safe space to be oneself and explore one’s identity.

When asked whether children can be themselves in the following places, they responded:



Solving the mental health crisis

The multitude of factors that impact children's mental health means that mental health challenges cannot be solved through one solution alone. Children need support in many aspects of their lives to thrive.

Over half of children find addressing the stigma related to mental health as key to tackling mental health challenges.

Children want adults to lead by example, raise awareness about mental health, and

demonstrate that mental health problems are not something to be ashamed of. Almost equally important is teaching about mental health and coping mechanisms in schools, as well as making it easier for children to access mental health support, including doing so without parental consent. Many children would like themselves and their peers to be involved in finding solutions together with adults.

When asked how adults can support children's mental health and well-being, children responded that adults can:

- Show children that mental health problems are not something to be ashamed of: **56%**
- Teach children about mental health and what they can do to feel better: **54%**
- Make it easier and faster to access mental health support: **51%**
- Help children access support without asking permission from parents: **49%**
- Involve children in finding solutions: **46%**
- Address the origin of mental health issues: **44%**
- Have more open discussions about mental health challenges and solutions: **43%**
- Share more information about healthy habits: **34%**



Children's recommendations

- Teach about mental health in schools to help children cope with mental health challenges. This should not only include students: teachers and other adults working with children should also be trained to provide mental health support and guidance to children who are in distress.
- Improve access to free mental health support, especially in the most vulnerable communities. This can mean, for example, ensuring that there is a psychologist available in every school, and raising awareness around mental health helplines to ensure all children know where to ask for help. Children should be able to seek this support anonymously or without parental consent.
- Tackle bullying, violence, and discrimination between children at all levels, including online. Bullying is a big source of mental health challenges, and professionals working with children should be supported to prevent, identify and respond to bullying effectively.
- Support children suffering of loneliness. Community projects at school to tackle loneliness can support children in making friends and ensuring no one is left behind.
- Reduce stigma around mental health by raising awareness on social media, in communities, and at school, through EU programs, and by celebrating the World Mental Health Day more visibly.

Breaking barriers to inclusion

Children's encounters with multi-faceted discrimination

Discrimination emerges as a major concern among children: **only 23% of children report not having experienced or witnessed discrimination so far.** Often, this is related to physical appearance: over half of children have been, or know someone who has been, treated badly because of the way they look. In line with children's concerns about academic pressure and failing to meet the expectations of others, discriminatory treatment is a significant issue. Sexual orientation, lack of money, and mental health problems are also mentioned by around 1 in 4 children.

Experiences of discrimination are particularly worrying among children belonging to minority groups. For example, LGBTQI+ children face discrimination because of their sexual orientation (71%) and gender identity (51%). Almost half (49%) of children with disabilities report discrimination based on their disability.

When asked whether children have, or know someone who has, been treated badly for the following reasons, children responded:

- Looks and physical appearance: **51%**
- Not doing well in school: **32%**
- Not meeting the expectations of others: **28%**
- Not enough money: **24%**
- Mental health problems: **23%**
- A disability: **18%**
- Gender (identity): **18%**
- Race or ethnicity: **18%**
- Country of origin: **16%**
- Special needs in education: **13%**
- Belonging to a minority: **9%**
- Being a migrant: **8%**
- Living in care: **6%**
- **23% of children have not experienced or witnessed discrimination**

Discrimination also occurs based on ethnicity or country of origin. Almost half (46%) of respondents from ethnic minorities report discrimination based on ethnicity, and over a third (39%) of refugee, asylum seeker, or migrant children report discrimination based on their country of origin.

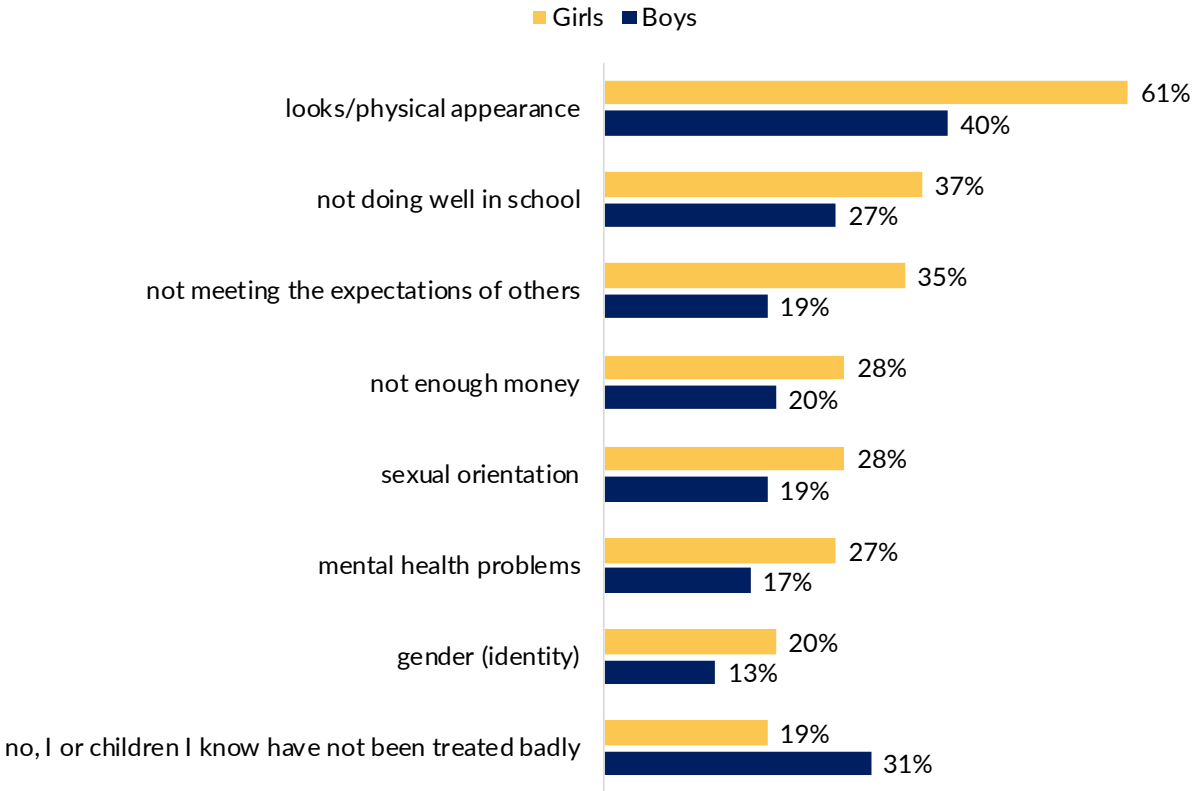
Being in alternative care may also contribute to discrimination. One in four (24%) children living in alternative care report discrimination based on their care status.

Identifying and addressing discrimination will require particular attention to these children and their experiences.

Discrimination also impacts girls more than boys - for example:

- 81% of girls have experienced or witnessed discrimination, compared to 61% of boys.
- The difference is particularly stark when it comes to discrimination based on looks or not filling the expectations of others, as 61% of girls report discrimination based on their looks or appearance, compared to 40% of boys.
- 35% of girls report discrimination based on not fulfilling the expectations of others, compared to 19% of boys.
- Girls experience more discrimination because of mental health challenges, not doing well in school, or based on their gender.

When asked whether children have, or know someone who has, been treated badly for the following reasons, boys and girls responded:



Children stress that adults can play a critical role in tackling discrimination by setting the right example and treating others with kindness. Adults should also play an important role in providing adequate support services and creating safe environments where children feel comfortable to speak up about discrimination. Children also support efforts to raise awareness about discrimination and work together with children who have experienced discrimination to tackle the problem.



There is a lot of exclusion towards children with disabilities and without interventions of the whole community this will not be solved.

Helena, 14, Croatia

When asked how adults can support children's mental health and well-being, children responded that adults can:

- Show children that mental health problems are not something to be ashamed of: **56%**
- Teach children about mental health and what they can do to feel better: **54%**
- Make it easier and faster to access mental health support: **51%**
- Help children access support without asking permission from parents: **49%**
- Involve children in finding solutions: **46%**
- Address the origin of mental health issues: **44%**
- Have more open discussions about mental health challenges and solutions: **43%**
- Share more information about healthy habits: **34%**

Children's recommendations

- Allocate psychologists to every school to provide mental health support and intervention for students, including students that have been impacted by discrimination.
- Develop programs facilitating meaningful collaboration between children and minority groups, fostering empathy and understanding towards diversity and a culture of respect and tolerance amongst children and young people.
- Encourage EU member countries to combat discrimination, by introducing an annual ranking system evaluating countries based on their efforts to combat discrimination (for example, the number of policies they have introduced), with recognition for progress and encouragement for improvement. Establish a system to reward countries that have made significant efforts to tackle discrimination.
- Launch an online tool (a "panic button" or hotline) that allows children to quickly seek assistance when they feel threatened or in need of help, and raise awareness of existing hot-lines.
- Establish an online database providing tips, resources, and guidance for students, teachers, and parents on how to address discrimination, along with contact information for support.
- Allocate EU funds to train professionals working with children to address discrimination effectively.

“ I have been discriminated against because of the colour of my skin. Adults should be sensible in terms of the fact that we are living in a mix of cultures, and we should accept those differences between us.

Harry, 14, Bulgaria

Protect children from harm

Safe spaces

Safety from violence is a major concern for children. This particularly concerns the online environment: **only 50% of children feel safe online**. It is important to note that this is very different for boys and girls: **66% of boys feel safe online, compared to 41% of girls**. In focus group discussions, children highlighted harassment and online bullying as major concerns, particularly for girls.

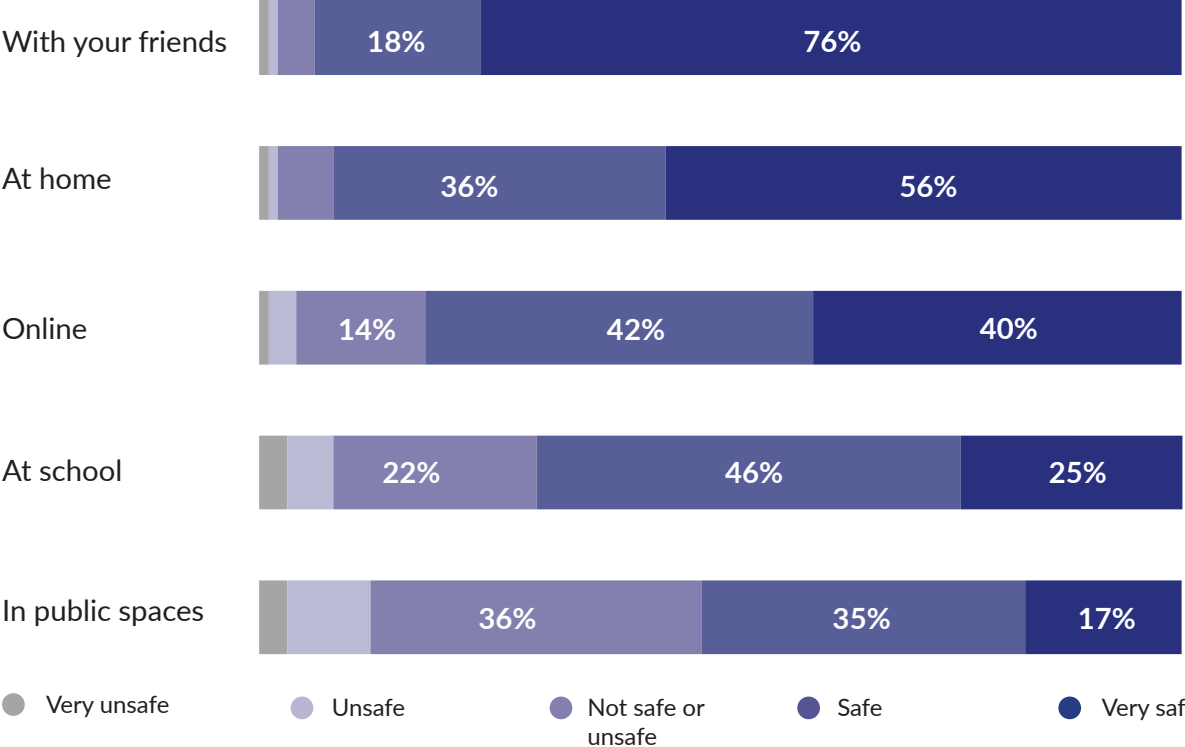
Children also have safety concerns in their everyday living environments, particularly outside the home.

In focus group discussions, children mention the lack of streetlights, the threat of violence, and the use of alcohol and drugs in public spaces as issues they are concerned about.

I don't feel safe when I as a girl walk at night alone.

Fatima, 16, The Netherlands

When asked how safe children feel in the following places, children responded:



Creating safer spaces for children

To be safer, children wish for action in both online and offline spaces. In the survey, **children's main call to action is to improve overall safety in public spaces.** In focus group discussions, children highlight that this does not necessarily mean more police presence. Sometimes, children have found the police to be aggressive towards children and young people, instead of increasing their overall sense of safety.

The need for better emotional education is also among children's priorities to reduce violence. The Child Advisory Board highlighted emotional education and anti-bullying programs as some of the most efficient ways to reduce violence, particularly among children.

In addition to preventing violence from happening, children are in need of more and safer "safety centers" where victims can be taken care of, including through services like child helplines. The Child Advisory Board emphasised the importance of having a safe adult to speak to when being treated badly, aggressively, or violently.

In focus group discussions, children highlight the need for better protection in online spaces. Online spaces often feel unsafe and hostile, and children lack the tools to protect themselves and seek support.

When asked how adults can help children feel safe, children responded that adults can invest in:

- Better safety in public spaces (e.g. street lights): **54%**
- Better social and psychological support to children suffering from violence and bullying: **53%**
- Teaching children about emotions and mental well-being: **50%**
- Being able to talk to someone about getting hurt (e.g. child helplines): **49%**
- Better laws on violence against children: **49%**
- Involving and listening to children in identifying problems and solutions: **46%**
- Anti-bullying and violence prevention programs in school: **43%**
- Better support to parents and caregivers to help them manage problems at home: **41%**
- Better rules for online spaces (e.g. social media platforms): **29%**

Children's recommendations

- Invest in making public spaces safer for children, for example by improving streetlights, investing in better interactions between children and law enforcement, and tackling substance abuse challenges.
- Tackle bullying and violence between children. Anti-bullying programs in school can help children solve challenges in a non-violent way, and emotional education can help prevent bullying in the first place.
- Make it easier for children to access support services when they experience or witness violence. This can mean for example the creation of 'safety centres' where victims can seek support or raising awareness or child helplines. Invest more in promoting existing support services.
- Create more and better legislation to put pressure on social media and tech companies to protect children online. Advocate for tech companies to inform children better on how to keep themselves safe online and establish support services on social media platforms where they can inform if they have been victims of harassment.
- Advocate for more action to support victims of bullying and give bullying more public recognition as a specific form of violence that should be addressed.

“ I think that there is a need for more restrictions in terms of inappropriate online behaviors.

Niya, 16, Bulgaria



Making children’s voices heard

Listened to but not heard

Throughout the consultations, both through the online survey and in focus group discussions, children have called for more participation in solving issues impacting their lives, whether that be mental health, education, or discrimination. Fortunately, most children (62%) report that adults ask for their opinion most of the time when making decisions impacting them, and 23% report this happening at least sometimes.

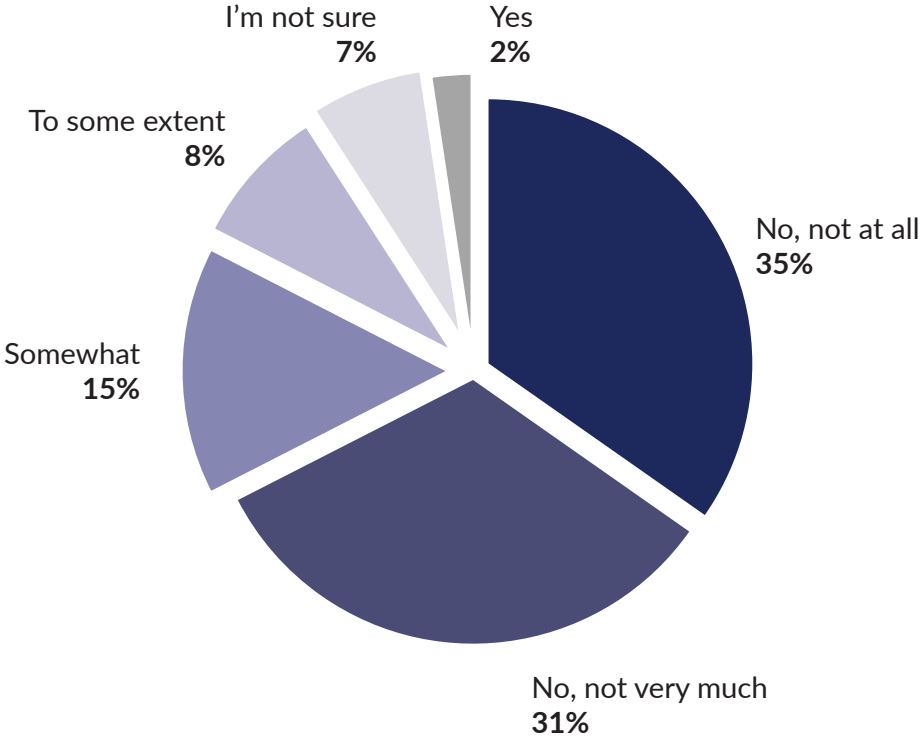
Asking for children’s opinions is not enough. While a minority of children feel that their opinion has always made a difference (9%) or most of the time (28%), most children’s experience is that their opinion has had an impact on the final decisions only sometimes (34%), rarely (17%), or never (5%).

Furthermore, the Child Advisory Board highlighted that children often feel that their concerns are left out of political decision-making and public debate. The survey respondents agree: most children feel that politicians are not at all or not very much worried about the same things as they are.

“ Politicians are not interested in children because they cannot vote. This is why they are not aware of our problems. They believe that we will grow up and our problems will disappear.

Harry, 14, Bulgaria

When asked whether they think politicians in their country worry about the same things as children, children responded:



A call for opportunities to be heard

There is a strong call from children to be heard in decision-making impacting their lives now and in the future. **70% of children consulted ask for more opportunities to be heard**, and almost half of children would like adults to consider them as equal partners in finding solutions. The Child Advisory Board further reflects that children are often better placed not only to identify the challenges they face but also to propose solutions that meet their needs and priorities.

Children also stress the importance of raising awareness of children's rights, notably the right to participate in decision-making processes. Without this knowledge, children will not be able to meaningfully and effectively realise their rights.

In addition to creating new opportunities, many children are also asking to make existing spaces for participation more accessible to all children.

This includes communicating to children in a child-friendly language (39%) and sharing information with children about how and where they can participate (38%). Children highlight how participatory opportunities are often hard to find, and there is a general lack of awareness of their existence.

It is important to also make participation more inclusive (37%). Inclusivity was particularly important to LGBTQI+ children (54%), children with disabilities (46%), and children from ethnic minorities (44%).

Almost a third of children would also like governments to consider lowering the voting age to increase children's opportunities to make their voices heard. Several EU Member States have already done so for the European Parliament elections .

When asked how adults can make sure that children have a say in decisions that affect their lives, children responded:

- Give children more opportunities to participate in decision-making: **70%**
- Work with children as equal partners in finding solutions: **48%**
- Teach children and adults about child rights and children's right to participate: **41%**
- Use child-friendly language: **39%**
- Share information on how children can participate in decision-making: **38%**
- Organise more meetings and exchanges between politicians and children: **37%**
- Act on children's recommendations: **37%**
- Make participation inclusive and accessible for all children: **37%**
- Share more information on how participation has made a difference: **32%**
- Lower voting age to 16: **30%**
- Be more active on social media: **20%**

Children's recommendations

- Advocate for countries to empower local and national child and youth advisory boards with responsibilities, authority, and budget allocations to ensure effective representation of children's interests.
- Encourage adults to actively listen to and implement recommendations from children.
- Develop a guidebook aimed at simplifying decision-making processes at the local, national, and EU levels for children and distribute it to every school.
- Advocate for the reduction of the voting age for EU elections. The EU elections can be used as a way to test the approach and to see how the lowering of the voting age could be for national elections as well.
- Facilitate children's participation in public debates and discussions as equal partners, taking in-to account their views and perspectives rather than just consulting them.
- Propose a mechanism that ensures that children are consulted by EU politicians to discuss proposed laws.
- Promote the EU Children's Participation Platform to ensure it is accessible for children across the EU, and ensure it is systematically involved in EU decision-making.
- Encourage adults to listen to all children, regardless of who they are and where they come from.
- Increase awareness among children about opportunities for participation and engagement within the EU, and at the national and local levels.
- Expand activities like the Europe Kids Want consultations where children can engage and discuss their rights and ensure sufficient resources are available to make them accessible to all children.



Tackling climate change

On climate change, children's messages are clear: **70% of children are worried or very worried about the impacts of climate change.**

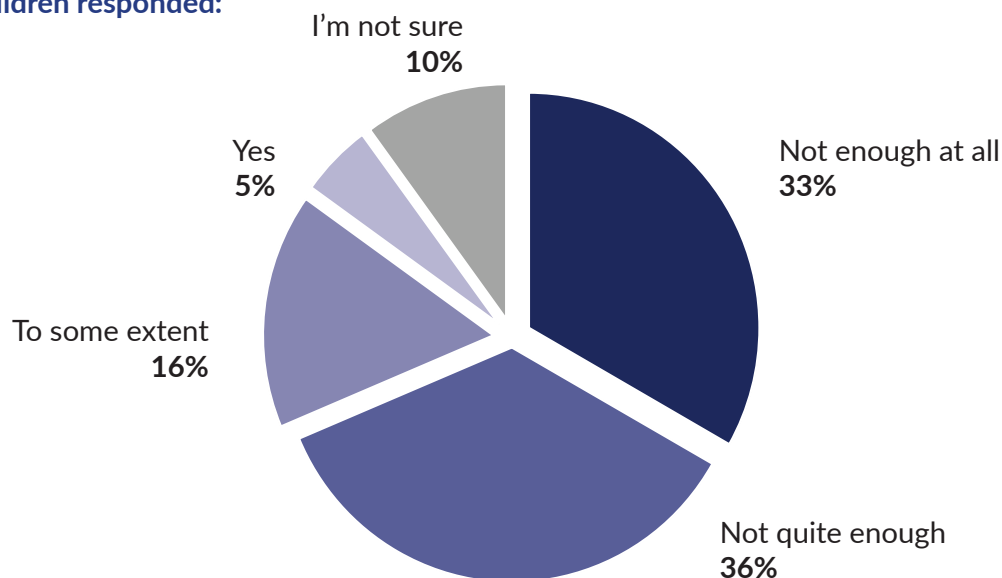
In children's view, action to tackle climate change leaves much to be desired. **69% of children assess that politicians are not doing enough to tackle climate change.** Half of these children feel that this action is 'not enough at all'. In consultations, children mentioned a deep sense of hopelessness and lack of trust in politicians' will to take the necessary actions to tackle climate change.



We are often discussing climate change at school. I think that the topic concerns all of us. I think that maybe politicians believe that they are doing enough but they should do more.

Denis, 16, Bulgaria

When asked whether children think politicians do enough to tackle climate change, children responded:



Children's recommendations

- Find ways to push for stronger climate action everywhere. The annual COP meetings rarely seem to lead to anything concrete. Focus on solutions and action and not on who is responsible.
- Push companies to do more by requiring them to invest in green solutions.
- Reduce the impact of climate change by making schools and communities greener.
- Invest in local projects and initiatives that will enable children and young people to take action in their schools and communities.

Children’s priorities

The overall finding of the consultation is clear: children are worried. They are concerned about many things impacting their lives here and now, as well as in the future. Children are particularly concerned with the ongoing wars in the world. 43% of children were ‘very worried’ about war and conflict, and 39% are ‘worried’. This is also one of the issues that children would like European Union decision-makers to prioritise for children.

Other major concerns have also been highlighted throughout this report. Some of them are issues that impact children’s everyday lives here and now: education, mental health, bullying, and violence.

Finding a job or study opportunity is an additional concern that many children share for their future.

In consultations, children call on adults to remember that children are not just the future; they are also the present. They would like their priorities to matter here and now. Children’s priority issues are all ones where the European Union and its member states have the power to act. The children’s ask is clear: they want the EU decision-makers to take action to improve children’s lives here and now.

Children’s biggest concerns

- War and conflict: **82%**
- Mental health: **79%**
- Finding a job or study opportunity: **76%**
- Education: **76%**
- Harassment and bullying: **71%**

What children think the EU should prioritise for children

- Education: **64%**
- Mental health: **59%**
- Bullying and violence against children: **51%**
- More job or study opportunities: **42%**
- Addressing war and conflict: **39%**

Annex I. Online consultation respondents

Total number of responses to the survey: 9,265

Respondents by country:

Country	Respondents
Poland	3089
Romania	1876
Croatia	1570
Spain	923
Germany	283
Greece	224
Netherlands	151
Austria	121
Bulgaria	100
France	72
Hungary	67
Italy	58
Ireland	58
Slovenia	42
Belgium	41
Czech Republic	35
Luxembourg	34
Sweden	32
Cyprus	27
Portugal	25
Denmark	10
Malta	6
Slovakia	5
Finland	4
Estonia	3
Lithuania	2
No response	407

Gender:

Gender	Respondents
Girl	5076
Boy	3340
Other	178
I don't want to say	312
No response	359

Age:

Age	Respondents
10 to 13 years	1859
14 to 17 years	5958
18 years	1094
No response	354

Minority group:

Group	Respondents
Ethnic minority	318
Asylum seekers, refugees or migrants	195
Children living in care	490
LGBTQI+	1115
Children with disabilities	325
Children living in poverty	200
Other group	631

“ We are the present,
not the future,
we are here.

Valentina, 15, Croatia

For more information, visit
www.childrightsmanifesto.eu