

Children's rights, as they see them

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Introduction

Children have good ideas. They can think of things that adults would not. Furthermore, full respect of the best interests of the child, which is among the key principles in child rights protection, requires that children are given opportunities to voice their opinions on matters that affect them.

The Commission's Directorate General for Justice sought the views of girls and boys from all 27 EU Member States on the topic of children's rights. Teenagers from a variety of backgrounds discussed what it meant to be a child in the year 2010. They talked about the obstacles they faced in exercising their rights and the actions they would like to see from the adult world.

In February 2011, the Commission adopted "An EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child". When preparing this document, the Commission drew on ideas from the consultation with children, the results of which are presented in this publication.

In their own words, children explain that they want adults to have more confidence in them, show greater respect for their views and involve them more in decision making processes. Children want to be active participants in the decisions being made about them and to feel that their opinions are respected.



1. Executive Summary

In February 2010 TNS Qual+ conducted a Qualitative Eurobarometer study on behalf of the European Commission's Directorate General for Justice amongst young people in all 27 Member States of the EU. The study consisted of 170 focus groups and looked at the topic of children's rights. The respondents, all aged between 15 and 17, from different socio-economical and ethnic backgrounds - including Roma, Sinti, Traveller children, and children with special needs - discussed the issues they see as most important in terms of their rights and the rights of children in general and the various obstacles children face in exercising these rights. The discussion then went on to explore the solutions they felt would help overcome these obstacles and the respondents' explicit suggestions for what the 'adult world' could do to better protect and defend the rights of children.

1.1 BEING A CHILD IN EUROPE TODAY

As young people in the European Union today, the respondents talk in **positive terms** and in almost equal measure about:

- Their relative freedom from responsibility and pressure
- Their ability to have fun
- The support they receive

- Their opportunities
- The positive role technology plays in their lives

The areas of their lives which they feel are **less good** include:

- Adults not having enough confidence in them
- Pressure to succeed
- Bullying both physical and, sometimes, mental
- Restrictions on the decisions they can make about their own lives,
- The risk of addiction and mental and physical threats to well-being
- The rush to grow up
- Having insufficient activities to occupy their leisure time

Young people see their parents, family, friends and sports/activity coaches as largely positive influences on their lives. They are more ambivalent about teachers and 'the law' including the police and see the media exerting influence both in very good and in negative ways.

1.2 DEFINING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Few young people think much, if at all, about human rights and do not automatically associate them with their own

situation and the situations of those they know. They think even less about children's specific rights although they believe that most human rights also apply to children. However, it is felt that children should have a particular **'right to education'**.

Beyond education, the right which is felt to be most important for children is the **'right to be a child'**; to have freedom from responsibility and the opportunity to play, grow and develop. Other key freedoms identified by our respondents include freedom of speech, access to shelter and food, to healthcare, the right to a family life and to respect and not to be bullied.

The **'right to participate'** was something which many children referred to, some wanting to be active participants in decision-making processes which affected them directly, from educational choices to the right to vote. This desire was repeatedly expressed in relation to areas of their lives where there are expectations being set and things are being demanded of them in terms of achievement and attainment (school, further education or jobs). It is also expressed in the context of families undergoing the fractures of separation and divorce; the children want to be active participants in the decisions being made about them and to feel that their opinions are being respected.

1.3 PROTECTING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Within the research clear distinctions were made between the majority of children who took part in the study and who are not deemed to be at serious risk of their rights being infringed and various specific groups of children who respondents consider to be more 'vulnerable'. Amongst the groups of children deemed to be particularly vulnerable are: those vulnerable to violence or abuse; victims of bullying; those who are very poor; children in institutions; homeless children; children with special needs; those from minority ethnic groups, such as the Roma, Sinti or Traveller children.

When considering what could be done to better ensure and protect children's rights the respondents considered both their own situations and those of the different groups of vulnerable children.

Young European citizens believe that most of the responsibility for ensuring children's rights lies with parents and teachers in relation to them as individuals and 'the State'¹ in relation to children in general and the vulnerable and disadvantaged in particular.

The participants would like adults who are close to children to listen to them more carefully and look out for warning signs of threats to their rights. They would also like more to be done via technology and the internet to engage children in the issues and inform them about the dangers.

1 The term "the State" here denotes policy makers and implementers at local, regional, national or even European level and is used rather loosely reflecting the children's use of the term.

More specifically, there are a number of ways in which children would like to see the 'adult world' better ensure and protect the rights of children:

■ They want adults to have more trust in children and involve them more in decisions

They would like parents to involve children more in the decisions and issues which affect them closely such as educational choices, where to live on parental separation and trusting them with more information on the risks associated with drugs and alcohol.

In order to ensure their rights at school, they would like teachers to be better trained in listening more to children, looking out for signs of rights infringements and taking them more seriously when they report instances of bullying in particular.

When looking to policy makers, they would like to see increased efforts in improving the general public's opinion of young people, positive investment in children's recreation and future work opportunities and increased enforcement of existing laws.

They want the State (at the local, regional and national level) to encourage more forums so that the children's voices can be heard, whether that is by lowering the voting age, providing children's ombudspersons or champions² or other forms of political empowerment. They want children to be asked their views and to see that these opinions count.

They would like greater promotion of positive attitudes to the needs of children from minority groups and more educational and other opportunities to encourage such children to integrate fully into mainstream culture and society.

■ They want adults to respect children's freedom to be children

They would like the 'adult world' to finance more play areas and centres where children in general, and in particular the vulnerable, may go for sport, play or shelter.

They would like to ensure that children are not too pressured to perform at school and take extra curricular classes at the expense of genuinely 'free' time.

■ They want more communication about children's rights

Within the family and school contexts they want children to have the confidence to speak out if they feel their rights are being infringed; encouraging dialogue

2 By 'champion' we mean person or persons who stand up for children, act as their spokesperson and uphold their rights.

is important. Children need to be secure that they are acting legitimately by voicing concerns.

They want more information such as talks about children's rights in schools and information on places they can go for help. Both these should also be delivered using the interactive technologies with which they are familiar, for example, a children's website about bullying. They are aware of cyber bullying and, to some extent the caution needed in using the internet/ social media.

They would welcome more promotion of existing children's Help Lines or ombudspersons. They would welcome information campaigns for parents on the damage alcohol or drug influenced neglectful behaviour can cause.

■ **They want more support where it is needed**

They feel that the situations of most vulnerable children should be better monitored (whether at home, at school or elsewhere) with strong social service support where needed. They are looking for more psychological support for children in need at school and, in particular, for support groups and therapy for victims of bullying.

Parents need to be made more aware of the importance of spending time with their children.



2. Objectives and Methodology

2.1 BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

This Qualitative Eurobarometer study into the Rights of the Child was commissioned by the Directorate General for Justice of the European Commission. The overall objectives of the study were:

- To understand which issues children find most important in terms of their rights
- To understand the obstacles children face in exercising their rights
- To have the view of children as to possible solutions to overcome these problems

This qualitative study follows two quantitative Eurobarometer surveys conducted in the previous two years aimed at finding the level of children's awareness of their rights and understanding what critical issues they face in terms of their rights³.

2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Across the EU, 170 discussion groups were organised with the participation of 1,445 children. Within each Member State, the sample was broadly representative of boys and girls aged 15 to 17, from urban and provincial areas, lower and higher economic groups and from a mix of ethnic backgrounds. Our respondents also included 51 children with some form of physical special needs. Fieldwork was conducted in February and March 2010 and consisted of six focus groups in 23 Member States and eight groups in the remaining four (Romania, Hungary, Spain and UK),

including two with children from the Roma, Sinti or Traveller communities⁴; one group of girls and one of boys in each.

DG Justice provided a detailed background briefing for moderators and agreed the topic guide (included as an annex to this report). The identity of the project sponsor was not revealed to participants until the end of the focus groups.

The reader should note that, although respondents were encouraged during the discussions to consider the needs of children from younger age groups, the findings of the study are strongly reflective of the views and opinions of the age group amongst which the research was conducted.

The focus groups were two hours long and conducted between 1st and 12th March 2010.

Verbatim quotations from respondents are used extensively in this report since they provide an opportunity for respondents to 'speak for themselves' and allow the reader to gain a better understanding of the perspective from which children view the issues under discussion. In all cases the nationality and gender of the respondent are given but the selected quotes are representative of similar sentiments expressed by respondents from other Member States and this attribution should not be seen as implying any specific link to the country in question.

³ See Eurobarometer Flash 235, available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_235_en.pdf and Eurobarometer Flash 273 available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_273_en.pdf

⁴ In the remainder of this report the term 'Roma' is used to denote references to the Roma, Sinti and Traveller communities and, in all cases where it is not quoted directly from a respondent is taken to refer to all three groups.



3. Being a child in 2010

We began the groups with a discussion of the issues which are of immediate concern to our respondents in their everyday lives. A short pre-task was given to respondents, asking them to consider what is 'great' and what is 'rubbish' about being a child today. The initial discussion in the groups focussed on these considerations, by way of introducing the concept of influences on children's lives and identifying some themes for later discussion.

3.1 ADVANTAGES OF BEING A CHILD TODAY

Children aged 15-17 feel there are many **good things** about being a child in the EU today but four main themes emerged from the discussion; most children appreciate that:

- Youth is a time of **fun and freedom from responsibility**, many now having more opportunities to travel and have chances than in the past
- Recognition of the **support networks** of family and friends and appreciation of the financial support provided by a secure family
- **Technology** is liberating and providing new opportunities for entertainment, interaction and communication

- The provision of **health services**, access to **education**, increasing **well-being** and **respect from adults** is welcome

"Everything is more reachable for us than it used to be for our parents and grandparents. Everything is more at hand. There is no control like it used to be." (Slovenia, girl)

"We have none of the politically-imposed limits our parents had." (Czech Republic, boy)

"Mobile phones, the internet; my mum didn't have all those things and I can't even imagine a life without them." (Germany, girl)

"I'm at a school for children who have learning difficulties. There are around eight of us in a class. So I get much more attention from the teacher than if I'd been at an ordinary school. In the past, I don't think this existed." (Netherlands, boy)

Young people in a few Member States also talked about how this freedom is extended, formally, in terms of the protection their youth gives them under the law:

"[Children] are more protected by the law with regards to mistreatment." (France, girl)

Children in some Member States also identified the respect they receive from adults as one of the good things about being a child today:

"We can take part in decision-making and we are taken more seriously by adults." (Austria, girl)

Most children feel protected and supported by those around them, in particular in the family, although there were some who do not enjoy such stability.

3.2 DISADVANTAGES OF BEING A CHILD TODAY

As with the things they see as good about being a child today, there was much commonality in the things the respondents identified as bad about being a child today. The key themes mentioned are:

- Lack of respect by the adult world
- Pressure to succeed
- Lack of parental support
- External restrictions and influences
- Peer pressure, addiction and violence

LACK OF RESPECT

Some children feel that they are not given sufficient respect by adults and the 'adult world':

"Nobody hears us, nobody knows what we want and especially politicians do not have a clue what is best for us. It is very disappointing when I talk to someone older and the answer is, 'you are too young to know.'" (Greece, girl)

"In terms of politics, I have absolutely no say as an individual." (Poland, boy)

Not being listened to at school is a particular issue for many. Some see this disregard as being due to their youth. Quite a number feel that they are actively discriminated against:

"I think young people get blamed and labelled a lot. The general attitude is sometimes like 'everything' is our fault somehow; like we are some type of a problem to society or something." (Finland, boy)

"The police are pretty hard on you, you can risk getting arrested without any reason, just because you are wearing big jackets, they think you are a criminal." (Denmark, boy)

Not being part of key decisions affecting their lives is one of the bad things cited, in particular at critical times such as parents divorcing:

"When my parents got themselves divorced, there were loads of people who took the decision 'in my interest'. No-one asked my advice. They put before me faits accomplis and I had to accept the decisions that were taken on my behalf. I am not stupid or incapable of having my own opinions about the situation." (Luxembourg, boy)

PRESSURE TO SUCCEED

Many feel that there is a lot of pressure on them to succeed in education and exams and to 'do well' in the future:

"Too much learning; they demand too much from us." (Slovenia, girl)

"Parents, society and teachers; they expect very much from us and want us to go to the university and be successful in the future." (Estonia, girl)

Some feel there is too much emphasis on educational success, and at the same time, too few opportunities from them as late-teenagers for leisure:

"When you're young, there's loads to do but, for people our age [there's nothing], unless you're [interested] in sports." (Ireland, girl)

LACK OF PARENTAL SUPPORT

Some children feel that they are not given enough family support. In several countries, there were comments about working parents being so busy earning a living that they do not have time for their children:

"You feel pretty lonely, having in mind what it would feel like if your parents were at home and would look after you and ask you how you feel." (Germany, girl)

EXTERNAL RESTRICTIONS AND INFLUENCES

The restrictions on what they are allowed to do (in particular not being allowed to drive) are a cause of annoyance to many of this 15-17 year old age group.

Lack of opportunities to earn money via part time jobs or other work was mentioned by many respondents as being a bad thing about their lives. There is a sense that the economy 'turned against them' just as they wanted to start earning:

"There's a lot of youth unemployment at the moment, and I don't like the fact that if you're not 16 yet, you can only find dumb jobs like a newspaper round. Formerly, you could find nice little jobs much more easily." (Netherlands, girl)

PEER PRESSURE, ADDICTION AND VIOLENCE

The risk of being drawn into potentially destructive habits and addiction by undesirable acquaintances is recognised by many as a risk and a threat in their lives. The influence of young people on each other was recognised as potentially threatening, with peer pressure to conform:

"More bad enticements; drugs, tobacco, alcohol." (Estonia, boy)

"You try to smoke and take snuff just to be cool and to fit in the group." (Sweden, boy)

Violence was mentioned in over half the Member States as one of the bad things in children's lives:

"There are gangs that may kill for a cigarette and get mean when they are [acting as a] group." (Italy, boy)

"Some children think it is normal when your father beats you when he's upset..." (Bulgaria, girl)

"People are more scared. So your parents will worry about you. Society is scarier." (Ireland, girl)

3.3 INFLUENCES IN CHILDREN'S LIVES

The respondents were asked to consider who and what they felt were the biggest influences on their lives, their choices and their decisions.

Parents, the extended family and close friends are perceived as the most important influencers of children's lives and those whose views most influence the decisions they take:

"Family is everything; tradition, when you get married, everything for Roma. They have a lot of expectations, marriage, children, the type of family you enter." (UK, girl)

"For me, friends influence me in a good way. When I have problems, they help me." (Romania, boy)

Beyond this immediate circle, **teachers** are almost always listed next in the list of key influencers. However, this is the relationship and influence about which there is most ambiguity:

"If they don't like us, we are broken, we cannot do anything." (France, boy)

"A teacher could be a kind of second parent; we spend half of our time with them. For smaller children they are really like parents." (Bulgaria, girl)

Sports coaches are often felt to play a significant role for many young people:

"Coaches are a bit like teachers, if you practice a sport really seriously, of course it will matter what they think or say." (Finland, girl)

The **media** is another identified source of influence about which children are ambivalent. It is seen as positive in that it provides access to information and allows you to hear about the wider world but negative in showing violence, promoting materialism and allowing the possibility of contact with people trying to harm children:

"There is a lot of violence on TV. It has a good side too, brings us information." (Romania, boy)

The police and 'the law' also tend to be seen in very disparate ways, some positive and some negative:

"It's important for a society to live by certain laws in order to keep the peace." (Germany, boy)

"If you're in a big group then the police judge you straight away. We are discriminated against for nothing." (Ireland, girl)

For most children politics and politicians are perceived to be rather remote:

"A rather feeble influence. For the moment, when one does not really have big responsibilities, their influence remains modest." (France, boy)

3.4 CHILDREN HAVING THEIR VOICES HEARD

Finally, in reviewing the respondents' experiences of being children in 2010, they were asked specifically about the extent to which they felt their voices were heard within society.

The vast majority of children expressed themselves to be satisfied with how their voices are heard by parents, wider family and friends.

"We know that our parents are our parents. They listen to me and also accept my opinion. Sometimes they respect it, and sometimes they don't." (Luxembourg, girl)

"I have parents who try to work with me as an equal and to respect my opinions, but my best friend's mother treats him like a baby who can't make sensible choices." (Czech Republic, boy)

Parental authority is largely accepted, though a few in this age group are beginning to resent it:

"To be free, to get away from my parents; to be alone in my own house. I don't like it when they shout at me, where did you go? What did you do?" (Romania, girl)

"They bother you. This is my house and these rules apply here." (Slovenia, boy)

Outside this immediate circle of family and friends, most children acknowledge that they can often say what they think and have input to decisions but what many feel is missing is being heard on the 'important topics' which influence their lives, such as laws regarding the educational system.

"I want them to take action after listening to us. Now there's no difference whether you tell them or not. That conversation is just a waste of time, it's fruitless." (Lithuania, boy)

"I would like to say something about the environment. The adults decide everything for us, but presently we'll be saddled with it and be left to solve it." (Netherlands, girl)

"To have more rights not only to be able to express our views but also to have our voices heard and taken into account. We enjoy this right but it is disregarded." (Lithuania, girl)

However, there were some instances of young people expressing more positive views about the way they are listened to:

"When they removed the basketball fields I sent a letter and a month later they reinstalled a basketball playground." (Belgium, boy)

"They are paying more attention to youngsters now... every person can contribute a little to society." (Denmark, boy)

The main areas where the participants feel their voice is insufficiently heard relate to school and, to a lesser degree, politics. In relation to politics, some would welcome the opportunity for greater participation on politics:

"An independent school newsletter, prepared by students for students is sometimes censored by the school principal's office." (Poland, girl)

"At my school, however much we have said, it has been pointless. They don't listen to you just because of your age." (Spain, girl)

"We have no influence over political matters, we could run around with banners and have teenage riots but it wouldn't change anything because we have no political standing." (UK, girl)

"In relation to laws, we do not decide, we do not vote; there are mandatory laws but we do not choose; it's our parents." (France, girl)

Young people tend to feel they are currently more likely to have influence as part of a group:

"We have a Pupil's parliament in school, there are 3 representatives from each class and our proposals are discussed and normally accepted." (Bulgaria, boy)

"I don't think that if I come with a suggestion suddenly they are going to lower the taxes, but if you are gathered in a group, who think the same as you, then you can get something done." (Denmark, boy)



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4. Children's Rights

Having investigated the children's views of what it is like to be a child in 2010 the discussion progressed to the concept of human rights in general and children's rights in particular. At this point respondents were encouraged to think more broadly; about the rights of children in general and not just about their personal perspectives.

4.1 THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights and children's rights do not appear to be topics much thought about in everyday life by young citizens of the EU. They are able to talk fairly freely about human rights when prompted but find it more difficult when considering children's specific rights.

Most children are aware of the concept of human rights, albeit very generally and in a rather abstract way. Interpretations of the concept of human rights, where they originate and how they are expressed vary:

"Human rights are the rights of each person, man or woman; it came after the [French] Revolution, that is to say that everyone is equal, that the individual must be respected, the rights of children are the same concept." (France, boy)

"Those are the primal things that a person has a right to, the things that you really need and that you can't do without." (Netherlands, girl)

"One person's rights should stop where another person's rights begin." (Cyprus, boy)

"I have heard of it [human rights] but I don't know what it is." (Spain, girl)

In the great majority of countries, school lessons are the main way in which respondents had heard about the concept of human rights and liberties. Television, the internet, other media and parents are also avenues through which respondents had heard about these concepts. However, these sources were only mentioned in isolated instances.

When asked spontaneously what human rights they felt people (should) have the respondents produced a lengthy list, clearly influenced by their concerns as and for children. The list below includes all those mentioned relatively widely and ranks them in order broadly based on those mentioned most frequently:

- Right to education
- Freedom of Speech / Expression

- Food / Drink / Clothing
- Place to live / Shelter
- Right to have Healthcare
- Right to equality / avoid discrimination
- Religious choice
- Freedom of Choice
- Right to family / love
- Right to life
- Right to protection from abuse / violence
- Right to justice
- Right to work
- Right to safety
- Right to sexual options / orientation
- Right to vote / co-determination
- Right to free time
- Right against racism

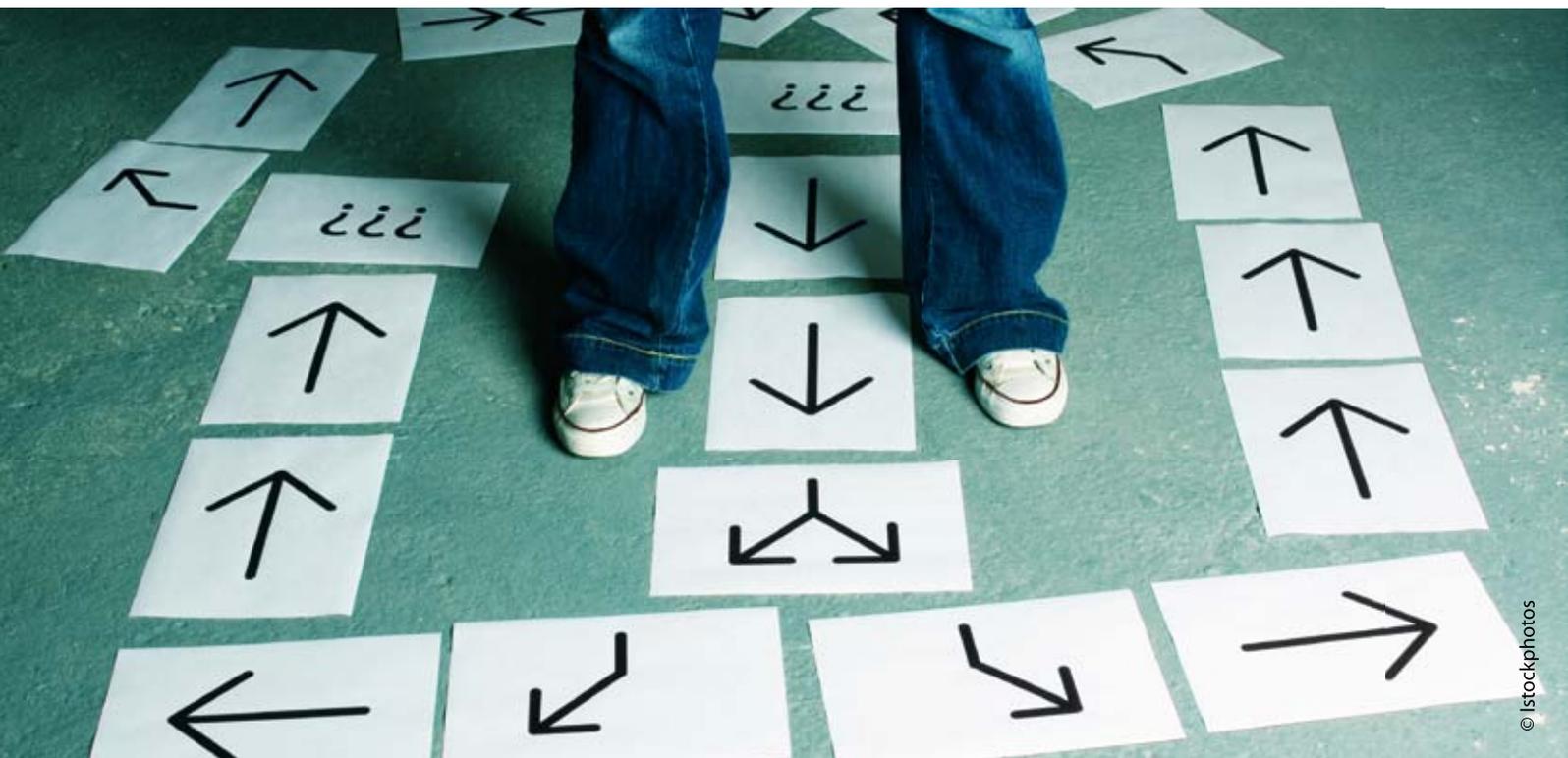
- Right to play / have a childhood
- Right to choose where to live (if parents divorce)
- Right to play (afford) sport
- Protection of child victims of pornography / molestation / prostitution
- The right to make mistakes / not to be punished
- Right to information
- Right to have identity protected / internet security / freedom from cyber bullying
- The right to be taught / equipped to live independently when older
- Right to more information before choosing school subjects
- Right not to have to work
- The right to be listened to
- Right to mature slowly

4.2 CHILDREN'S SPECIFIC RIGHTS

The majority of respondents felt that children's rights should be broadly the same as the more general human rights they had identified.

However, when the respondents were asked what rights they might suggest specifically for children, a wide range of further suggestions was put forward. The main suggestions, again ranked by how often they were mentioned, are included in the following list:

Most of these suggested rights relate to relatively abstract concepts; information, love, respect, living in a good society. A second group relate to supporting the rights of others, perceived to be more vulnerable (those with physical problems, slow learners).



5. Help and Support

Respondents were continually encouraged to consider ways in which the 'adult world' could better **support and protect children's rights** and **provide information to children** about those rights. This chapter summarises the main themes that emerged in this area and provides examples of the specific suggestions made by children during the groups. As well as suggesting the key issues they would like to see addressed and the kind of support that children would welcome, they also provided ideas about which groups of children are most vulnerable and provided ideas about the specific issues to be addressed and areas where support could be provided.

Respondents discussed possible ways in which children's rights could be better protected. Priorities vary across Member States but some common themes emerge about what is wanted:

- **More financial support** for those in society who are less well off
- **More information** on children's rights and where to go to for help and guidance
- **More psychological support** provided in schools for those at risk
- **More facilities for young people** – centres, youth organizations, sports facilities so that they can have a safe place to go

- **Existing laws to be implemented** to provide a greater safeguard for children; particularly in relation to laws protecting children from bullying and greater readiness by the police to listen to children and respect their rights.

In the first part of this section the current sources of support mentioned by children is covered, followed, second, by their ideas on what additional sources and types of support they would prefer, and thirdly, a description of the different types of children they consider vulnerable and what might be particular solutions to help and support these vulnerable groups.

5.1 CURRENT SOURCES OF SUPPORT

When considering the issue of their rights it is clear that children tend to think most immediately about rights and what they mean for them in the context of their **home life** and of **school**. It is, therefore, in these two contexts that most felt able to discuss how they would react if they felt their rights were under threat. The emphasis here was on what are currently seen as sources of support. First the major sources of support relied on by children are considered, then those which they use only occasionally or in specific circumstances.

When asked to consider what they would do if faced with a situation where their rights were being denied or infringed **at home** (through, for example, violence, neglect or abuse) the majority of children throughout the EU **say they would initially turn to their family and friends:**

"Our family tell us what to do because, after all, they do know us and they do know life. They do not always know us best, but sometimes they can really help us out." (Poland, boy)

"I take my problems to someone I know well." (Netherlands, girl)

"A girl that was beaten by her dad, she could go to her grandma." (Belgium, girl)

"You can talk more with your siblings than with your parents." (Italy, boy)

"For me, friends influence me in a good way. When I have problems, they help me." (Romania, boy)

However, some say they would prefer not to talk about such problems with their parents or friends but use more remote means to address them:

"I would first go and search the internet I wouldn't want to go and talk face-to-face with anyone." (Finland, girl)

Some would prefer not to talk about such problems at all:

"Most children will just bear it, because they think that it is too minor to turn to the teacher or to the police." (Estonia, boy)

In the context of **infringement of rights at school**, the biggest problems are perceived to be **bullying** by other children and **teacher behaviour**, particularly not taking allegations of bullying seriously enough and placing children under unreasonable pressure with the amount of work they expect.

If subject to an infringement of their rights at school, most anticipate that they would first involve their parents, although not all young people are comfortable with involving their parents about all events at school:

"I would tell my parents... but you feel bad telling your parents that you get hit at school." (Spain, boy)

Considering bullying in particular, many would not take the problem to their parents preferring to 'find their own solutions':

"I would sort out this situation with my friends. You don't need police or adults." (Luxembourg, boy)

Children also see their teachers or more senior members of school staff as a possible source of help in all kinds of difficult situations:

"They're always there. If there was something that you needed to talk to them about, I can think of some teachers who you'd go to, to get advice from." (Ireland, girl)

However, in situations where a teacher might be the person infringing the child's rights some children talked about being reluctant to turn to other teachers or even their parents because of what they saw as the possible repercussions:

"If you tell about problems with a teacher e.g. [that he/she is] being racist, you can have the teacher over you [the teacher can turn against you] afterwards and the school won't do anything." (Belgium, boy)

In some Member States children mentioned psychological help being available to them through their schools. Where this is available it is seen as a valuable, relevant and appreciated service:

"I speak to a psychiatrist about mistreatment; someone I don't know in whom I have confidence, but I know he can help me." (France, boy)

"The right to speak to a person you can trust, without your parents knowing it. With privacy... who does not tell it further, with whom you can feel a bond." (Belgium, girl)

Other well regarded forms of additional support provided via the school in some instances were also mentioned including school counsellors, youth advocates, pastoral support and Child Protection Agencies.

Children appear to be generally happy with the support they receive at school but many would like 'a lot more of it'; in particular support from psychologists who can provide expert input or teachers who are able to spot problems.

5.2 OTHER SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Many **children** in all parts of the EU, **are not aware of the existence of any specific services and resources they can turn to**, beyond family, friends or teachers, **if they have problems**. However, across the study a number of possible other sources of support were identified, including **the police, dedicated help lines** and **social services** and the **courts**.

There is a lot of ambivalence about the police amongst children in the age group covered by this study; for very serious problems they are seen as people to turn to but there is also a lot of quite negative feeling about them.

In some instances this is because they are seen as part of society's restrictive influence on the lives ('rights') of 15-17 year olds and, in other cases, because they are not felt to always take children's concerns sufficiently seriously or, in more extreme instances, to make sufficient efforts to investigate cases of abuse of children's rights.

Turning to 'officialdom' is seen by 15-17 year olds as a last resort but it is clear that some do go to the police in extreme circumstances, such as when they have been subjected to street violence:

*"We wrote to the police because there's nowhere else to go."
(Lithuania, boy)*

The provision of **help lines** is generally appreciated. The respondents think it is important that there is somewhere to find help and guidance from an independent source when the need arises. In a few countries children talked appreciatively also of specific official or voluntary organisations set up to help them.

Social services are seen as useful additional sources of help where they are available. Although few children mentioned them, those who do welcomed them.

As with the social services, the role of the **courts** in supporting children's rights was mentioned infrequently but, when referred to, the comments tended to be positive. The courts are seen as offering not just 'reprimands' but ways to find solutions for young people in trouble.

5.3 PREFERRED SOURCES OF SUPPORT

As well as discussing where they would currently go to seek support if they felt their rights were being infringed, the respondents were also encouraged to provide suggestions on ways in which they would like to see children's rights better communicated and protected by the 'adult world'. From these discussions it is clear that children do not feel strongly empowered in this area and recognise their own inexperience. So, when considering where support for the rights of children should originate, they tended to focus on two main sources:

- The adults close to children, particularly **parents and teachers**
- **Public authorities and institutions** (at local, regional, national or even European level)

Parents and teachers: It is felt that, in many cases, those adults close to children could play more of a role in preventing violations or breaches of their rights and that they should be 'looking out for warning signs'. For example, it was suggested that adults should 'notice' if children become quieter, withdraw or seem insecure:

*"Parents should chat more with their kids."
(Czech Republic, girl)*

*"We cannot do a lot; it's for our parents to look after things."
(France, girl)*



Usually children want support from an adult in privacy and face to face, but some said that they would appreciate the support of independent experts even if this has to be given remotely, such as on-line support for victims of cyber-bullying.

In some instances children feel that otherwise good parents can be 'too busy' for their children, not giving them enough time and attention because of the influence of their work or other responsibilities. Parents just 'being available' is clearly important to children.

The role of **public authorities and institutions** is widely recognised, although the children taking part in the research were somewhat vague in the designations and terminology they employed when discussing them. However, from the discussion it is clear that children see the public authorities as having a major role to play in five key areas:

- Supporting initiatives for the young
- Changing public attitudes and providing information
- Engaging the young in decisions (both those which affect them directly and more general decisions)
- Specific development programmes
- Upholding and enforcing the law

It is clear that children expect the public authorities' involvement to be both generous and firm; they do not simply want the State to provide material support to the families of at risk children, they also want it to be firm in its dealings, to ensure people respect its legislation with regard to children's rights and enforce it actively where it is breached.

They suggested that it is important that children know that help is available and that things can be improved:

"Adults should do their best to make children understand that the problem can be solved, [so] that children do not have an impression that the world is evil." (Latvia, girl)

The main suggestions from the children for support are described below:

5.3.1 SUPPORTING INITIATIVES FOR THE YOUNG

Better provision of facilities for children, including dedicated children's spaces such as recreation grounds, playgrounds and sports pitches, children's centres and children's activities was a common theme. They feel these would benefit all children as well as, in particular, the most vulnerable:

"More places for youngsters to congregate together without causing a nuisance to others." (Netherlands, boy)

"As a teenager, you're in the middle. When you're a kid you can go to a playground and parks and when you're an adult or over eighteen you can literally do what you want, but when you're a teenager there's nothing there. You're just stuck in the middle." (Ireland, girl)

"More youth recreation centres." (Sweden, girl)

It is not just that more places for congregating and undertaking activities are wanted, some suggested these would provide a place of shelter and refuge for the poor or disadvantaged:

"Establish free centres where children and young adults could associate, get together, have fun, play, have a competent person to turn to in case of personal distress and similar." (Slovenia, girl)

5.3.2 CHANGING PUBLIC ATTITUDES AND PROVIDING INFORMATION

Young people across the EU suggest that 'the State' could be more proactive in raising public awareness and changing attitudes about children's rights and the risks faced by children.

"Have representatives from shelters and other institutions go to schools to inform students about issues related to the shelters they work for and about children's rights." (Cyprus, boy)

"Set up a 'Rights of the Child' Foundation." (Netherlands, girl)

The provision of information to the children themselves was a recurring theme and many suggested there should be more focus on raising awareness of children's rights through schools:

"Start early [talking about human rights] and play it in so it will be a matter of course." (Sweden, girl)

"The school as a place of enlightenment on human rights." (Germany, boy)

It is clear that children would welcome more information on both the potential threats to their rights and where to go for help. There were numerous suggestions for ways in which this information could be provided including:

- Schools, both in lessons and less formal routes
- Specific organisations set up for the purpose
- The provision of special telephone numbers
- Events or communication campaigns
- Public/ social awareness TV programmes, at prime time, featuring easily accessible contact data

- On the internet
- Advertisements or discussions in places where children meet in their leisure time

"Produce information leaflets with numbers that young people can call, and place them in schools, town halls, shops." (France, girl)

"The information we are missing is the name and the contact details of the child protection agency and all the institutions responsible for children's rights." (Bulgaria, girl)

"They could create centres for young people, with a 24 hour hotline. They could advise where one should go in case of emergency... to trigger local social services. The 112 is for health emergencies, we are not going to dial it." (Portugal, girl)

The respondents stressed the importance of using today's technology, the same media that they use every day, to communicate with them:

"There should be an internet site with all the addresses to help a child." (Luxembourg, boy)

"We are often on the internet, sites like Facebook, we communicate a lot, you can see everything and we know what's happening." (France, boy)

The idea of a special group or entity specifically established to defend children's rights, a 'children's champion' or 'children's ombudsperson, would be welcomed. A number

of respondents recognised the need for someone to be an advocate and spokesperson for children's rights:

"We need special institutions for younger kids. It is very bureaucratic here and a 10 to 14 year-old has no idea how to fight through this." (Germany, boy)

5.3.3 ENGAGING THE YOUNG IN DECISIONS

Some of the young people made it clear that they would like to play a greater part in discussions about the decisions which affect their lives and their communities, or at least have the opportunity to do so. Some would welcome having youth parliaments or other forms of youth engagement in the political process:

"We need a youth parliament... There's a European one but we need an Irish one." (Ireland, boy)

"They do not understand what good ideas we youths have." (Sweden, boy)

Some feel frustrated with their current lack of empowerment, even where they have ostensibly been given a voice:

"As a [school] student, you don't even have chance to be heard when you have the position of the students' representative. You just have to accept everything, no matter how many arguments you bring to the table." (Germany, girl)



Some young people feel that older children should be able to vote but more expressed the view, in some cases quite forcefully, that their governments should more often seek children's opinions, in particular when developing laws that affect them.

5.3.4 SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

A range of specific development programmes were proposed by respondents during the groups, a number of them in the education system. For example, it was suggested that there should be investment in training teachers to help them take the problems of violence and bullying seriously:

"Further training for teachers to recognise signs of abuse and home problems." (UK girls)

"When it's at school, teachers should help; it's them that can notice a child being mistreated and the one that is doing the mistreatment." (France, girl)

In some Member States the children were more concerned with overall levels of investment in schools:

"Invest in schools. Why is there no hot water in the schools?" (Hungary, girl)

"Teachers' salaries should be raised and they would take their work more seriously." (Lithuania, boy)

Young people also called for greater support for education and educational facilities such as scholarships and more financial relief and support for extra curricular activities for children living in poverty. Many also wanted more support from psychologists in schools and other children's institutions:

"Have a psychologist available in every school, every orphanage." (Slovakia, boy)

Others suggested the provision of systematic health checks for older children (not just for babies and young children).

5.3.5 UPHOLDING AND ENFORCING THE LAW

In many Member States there was a recurrent theme that children feel that the law relating to children's rights is not being upheld with sufficient force. Young people feel that it is important to encourage teachers and others to respect the rules that protect the young:

"I would make people follow the rules that exist already now, but are not followed, for example in school there mustn't be tests on Monday, the weekend should be a time to rest, but when teachers give much homework then you do not have a weekend as you have to study all the time." (Estonia, girl)

Children in a number of Member States suggested that there could be more severe punishments for perpetrators of violence against children:

"There is the law, you do not need to make anything up... They should just make it respected... Stricter enforcement and more police controls from the Government." (Italy, boy)

Children want more enforcement of existing laws to protect them and Society:

"You always hear about domestic violence, and cases in which the child protection service comes to the house of an abused child and does nothing... and afterwards everyone acts surprised." (Austria, boy)

Along similar lines, legal reforms including more severe punishment for those violating children's rights and more police control to prevent such violations were frequently suggested as a priority by the respondents.

5.4 TOP PRIORITIES

At the end of each group and taking into account all the issues covered and suggestions made, the participants were asked to identify the action they would most like to see taken by the 'adult world' to strengthen, support or better protect children's rights. There was a good deal of consistency in the suggestions put forward and three main priorities emerged:

- The provision of facilities for children to be able to access information and help
- Financial input from local or central government (the State) for the provision of psychological support and places for children to play / enjoy themselves safely
- More stringent enforcement of the laws protecting children's rights

In addition, a number of secondary priorities emerged, including:

That **adults** living or working with children should:

- Look out more for signals of distress among children

That the **State** and those in authority should:

- Raise awareness / prevent discrimination in attitudes
- Provide material aid to those who need it (financial support, education, help)
- Involve children more in decisions which affect them and in social and political life

5.5 SUGGESTED SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS

Respondents were asked to think about groups of children they would consider particularly vulnerable and the main ones mentioned are listed below. One aspect of this discussion focussed on what the respondents felt should be done to better protect and ensure the rights of these various groups of vulnerable children.

5.5.1 CHILDREN SUBJECT TO PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ABUSE

The main suggested ways to address children's rights issues for this group included:

- Greater vigilance from teachers
- More attention paid to families where abuse is suspected
- Reduction of parental access to alcohol/ drugs
- More information on sources of advice and help
- Access to psychological support
- Encouraging young people to talk if they are victims of violence
- Attention to on-line and electronic channels which can facilitate abuse

There was a consensus amongst respondents across all Member States that there are children at risk of violence who need protection. The respondents saw such violence falling under three main headings:

- Physical violence and abuse in the home;
- Emotional, verbal and psychological abuse in the home;
- Violence in the community: knife and gun crime.

Violence in the home is where our respondents perceive that children are most at risk over prolonged periods.

"If a child has problems, psychological or other, the origin is most probably in the family and the opposite naturally, a good stable family will raise a good person." (Bulgaria, girl)

This type of violence is often hidden and children who are victims do not dare to speak out. This was mentioned consistently throughout all Member States:

"People who are beaten up by their mums and dads, they don't have the right to be part of a family because they're not, if they are being beaten up. It's not a loving family. People call you a family, but they don't necessarily know what's going on behind everything." (UK, girl)

There was a relatively high level of awareness of the issue of **sexual abuse**. The view was expressed by some that girls are more at risk in this area than boys. For example, some girls reported feeling 'extremely helpless' when boys try to touch them against their will in 'hidden corners' of the school and then insist they 'tell no one' about it.

Respondents also discussed the situation of children who are victims of **kidnapping and abduction** for sexual purposes:

"Some children are stolen and then forced to do that and they shouldn't, that is wrong. That is against the child's rights." (UK, girl)

Violence in the community was felt to lead to children and young people not having the freedom to move around as readily as they might like or to be as fully socially integrated.

"Children can't go to the parks because they are afraid. They are afraid to get bullied, they are afraid to get stabbed. You can't go anywhere. I sit at home because I can't go anywhere. We need to have a safe, positive place." (UK, boy)

"I don't go anywhere alone in the evening and I constantly look back over my shoulder if anyone is following me. I'm really scared." (Hungary, girl)

The main dangers to those caught up in such situations were seen as: the physical or mental mistreatment itself; not being able to discuss the abuse; not being able to move around as freely as others; the associated risks of poverty and all that goes with it; and, in extreme cases, being subjected to sexual abuse or being separated from their family.

Many suggestions were made on how best to address the issue of children who are victims of violence and abuse. One suggested way is by giving children more information about the resources provided which they could access if they should be a victim.

Enabling children to discuss it more candidly or the availability of people to talk to was seen as important and, in this regard, schools were seen as having a central role to play:

"I would put into the school programme some lessons that would concentrate on talking about violence and on giving information; what should be done when you suffer from violence at home, in school or on the streets. In school they do not talk about it at all." (Estonia girl)

"There needs to be the ability for teachers to make a complaint, to signal certain parents to the authorities." (France, girl)

In several Member States **drugs** and, in particular **alcohol**, were mentioned **as a contributory factor to violence against children** and it was felt that control of the sale of alcoholic drinks should be even stronger:

"It is very important to stop this. The consequences especially of alcohol consumption can be fatal." (Bulgaria, boy)

Many children feel that children's rights in this area would be better protected if the punishment for those committing offences against them was stricter:

"Persons who have abused children should be sentenced to longer imprisonments." (Sweden, girl)

5.5.2 CHILDREN SUBJECT TO BULLYING

The main suggested ways to address children's rights issue for this group included:

- Teachers and parents listening more and taking action on bullying
- Children speaking to and gaining support from their friends
- Psychological support for victims

Bullying emerged as an issue that worries children in almost all Member States and one that they feel is not taken sufficiently seriously; many had experience of it or had seen it at first hand, mainly at school.

The risks associated with bullying by respondents include: the dangers of physical violence; feelings of degradation and humiliation; not being able to discuss it; social exclusion and hurt from not having the situation taken seriously by those in authority.

"If you talk about it [bullying] at home and your parents contact the school it only gets worse." (Finland, boy)

'Virtual' bullying, whether through the internet or via mobile phones, was mentioned relatively rarely. However, there was recognition that there were specific issues associated with such bullying:

"Through the internet, you can hide behind a false identity that makes bullying ('le mobbing') easier." (Luxembourg, boy)

"A few weeks ago I got an sms with threats to murder me, without a number on my gsm... in the end it seemed to have been a friend but I was scared... but how can you control this? And they cannot control all numbers, that's violating privacy laws..." (Belgium, girl)

The view was expressed by respondents in almost all Member States that not enough is being done to address bullying. It is not felt to be taken sufficiently seriously; victims are not felt to be listened to and not enough is done to prevent it.

Some of the suggestions for solutions made in relation to the wider issue of violence against children were also made with regard to bullying, especially encouraging children to speak to their parents and teachers and getting those people to act:





"The teacher has to take an interest in the issue, investigate and talk to the parents." (Spain, girl)

"In the beginning we had a newcomer from another school and we bullied her and when our tutor found out she spoke with us and we apologised... we understood that it was difficult for that person." (Lithuania, boy)

It was also suggested that the presence of school psychologists would go some way to addressing the problems of bullying but it was stressed the confidentiality is important to children when talking to adults about bullying or violence.

5.5.3 CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY

The main suggested ways to address children's rights issue for this group included:

- More scholarships and educational support for the poor
- The State providing more work for parents of families living in poverty
- More places for poor children to go to / events to improve social inclusion

Young people in all Member States talk of poverty as a key factor in terms of children having their rights threatened. The respondents tended to find it relatively easy to identify and empathise with those living poverty. They were in agreement that children living in poverty tend to have

a poorer quality of life and restricted opportunities, not just whilst they are children but also into their adult lives.

"The poor people are excluded from everywhere because they do not have good enough clothes." (Hungary, boy)

Young people in some Member States expressed the view that childhood poverty leads to reduced long term chances in life:

"She won't get any support from home, when her mom is on welfare and then she won't have many chances to change the pattern, to get a great career." (Denmark, boy)

Some also associate the negative impact of poverty with some of its less acute manifestations such as having fewer choices of which clothes to wear and not having enough money to join in events or to go on outings:

"[Poverty means] missing class trips or not being able to go out with friends." (Germany, girl)

The areas in which the rights of children living in poverty are most felt to be under threat are: their living conditions; discrimination; social exclusion; fewer opportunities for experiences / entertainment; reduced access to healthcare and to continuing education.

Financial support for those living in poverty, in particular from the State or local community, is one of the main areas

that young people feel should be prioritised in addressing these children's rights:

"For poor children, financial support." (France, boy)

"I would increase the State allowance for children." (Romania, girl)

A number of respondents also suggested that children living in poverty should be given access to better educational opportunities through, for example, free school lunches, textbooks, scholarship or sponsorship opportunities.

The provision of work for the parents of children living in poverty was also widely mentioned. Children are aware of how easily those in poverty can be excluded from activities and suggest more places for them to go as one way of increasing social inclusion.

5.5.4 CHILDREN LIVING IN INSTITUTIONS

The main suggested ways to address children's rights issue for this group included:

- More efforts to introduce children to a foster or adoption home
- Retention of family links where possible
- Enabling children to be part of mainstream society and hence have a 'good future'

Few feel that they know very much about children in institutions and the respondents were primarily focussing their thoughts on children living in orphanages. However, young people in a significant number of Member States identify children in State homes as a particularly vulnerable group and in need of support, especially emotional support:

"They live in isolation from other people." (Bulgaria, girl)

"I don't think they can sit at the computer or open the fridge and take anything they want from it." (Lithuania, boy)

"They are alone and will become an adult at an early age, take responsibility. They need to play and have fun, someone to talk with." (Denmark, girl)

Children who are in institutions are felt to be denied emotional support, being neglected physically, being denied an ordinary home life and family, unequal educational access and having to 'find their own way' after 18.

Many of the respondents recognised the importance of family life in ensuring the full range of children's rights. Hence, in a majority of countries, the young people interviewed would like to see all children cared for in

families if possible, via adoption or foster homes, not in institutions.

It was suggested that every effort should be made to allow children to stay with brothers and sisters and for children to retain some form of 'family connection' if at all possible:

"Children who live in orphanages should have at least some relatives to whom they can turn to and talk to and feel that at least they have some kind of family." (Estonia, boy)

5.5.5 HOMELESS CHILDREN, THOSE LIVING ON THE STREET, AND CHILDREN WITH NO OFFICIAL STATUS

The main suggested ways to address children's rights issue for this group included:

- Provide material care
- Make sure they know what help is available

Children are aware, when being asked to think of vulnerable children, of those who live outside the normal structures of society and, as a result, are in danger of having their rights ignored or violated. They felt that children alone without a home or those from homeless families were especially vulnerable and exposed to risk.

"Children who live on the street are prone to great danger and violence. They risk not having enough to eat and drink and therefore are more prone to illness." (Malta, boy)

"Sometimes I see these poor children in the underground station, they have to sleep there but then I think that it's the fault of their mothers." (Austria, boy)

The main areas in which the rights of these children are felt to be at risk include risks to health and to education, 'missing out' on childhood, lacking identity and having fewer life chances long term.

"We have to be home at ten o'clock; the drug scene only begins then. Those children see it happening on the street and are exposed to it." (Netherlands, boy)

The main suggestions related to how to help such children by 'getting them off the street' and providing for their immediate physical needs.

5.5.6 CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The main suggested ways to address children's rights issue for this group included:

- Provision of material aid (equipment) and access
- More opportunities for integration with non disabled children
- Ensuring full access to educational opportunities

In about half the Member States included in our study young people talked specifically of those with physical or mental special needs as a group of children who are particularly vulnerable:

“Some disabled children are isolated from society. They cannot communicate with their family, they cannot play, they don’t have free time.” (Latvia, girl)

Our respondents felt that such children’s rights are at risk in the following areas: poorer physical access to places; being ‘shut away’ with others who have special needs; not having opportunities for experiences; lack of understanding from and poor integration into the wider community

“Whenever I go to the supermarket the young people laugh at me because I have curved legs and I limp. This is pretty bad. I asked them why you do this to me, and that I have not done anything against you.” (Hungary, girl)

In most countries the respondents understood that children with special needs face a degree of social isolation and they also recognised that their own responses can sometimes be inappropriate or unhelpful, due to awkwardness rather than anything else. They made the point that some of the risks

to the rights of children with special needs could arise from other children not knowing how to behave and what to do.

It was felt that children with special needs are at risk of being marginalised if they are prevented from mixing fully with others or having access to the same facilities or resources. Many acknowledge that having children with special needs integrated with children without special needs can be a good thing:

“In our school there is a boy who needs wheelchair help. But he does not want to be treated any differently. The only thing that’s different about him is that he has his own bus that brings him to school and we help him to buy his own milk chocolate at break. There are some idiots that discriminate, but there are loads that help him.” (Luxembourg, boy)

There was a broad consensus about the kinds of support that should be offered to children with special needs, whether physical or mental. The main themes were that there should be more inclusion, more practical support and provision of equipment and greater freedom of access:

“[There should be] money to finance medicines, wheelchairs, special therapies such as therapy with horses. Integrate disabled children with healthy ones, educate healthy children to understand the difficulties disabled children face, make them useful members of the community, avoid treating these children, particularly with visible physical disability, with pity.” (Slovakia, girl with special needs)

“Education: disabled children quite often are being put in special schools, which isn’t very helpful when you are looking for a job later in your life.” (Austria, boy)



5.5.7 CHILDREN FROM MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS AND IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

The main suggested ways to address children's rights issue for this group included:

- Improving general integration into local communities
- Access to equal opportunities and information on where to get help if needed
- Support for those on their own / the most needy

Although most respondents acknowledge that immigrant children are a group who might be at risk of having their rights denied or infringed, many were far more reluctant to accept that they should be supported or helped in the same way as other groups of vulnerable children.

There was quite a lot of discussion about the issue of racism. Some respondents suggested that they thought such attitudes were in decline:

"I think that racism is no longer as serious as it used to be, now we are more used to children of different colour or whatever at school." (Spain, boy)

"There remains discrimination, particularly with older people, but amongst young people I do not think there is much racism." (France, boy)

Not all comments about immigrant children were made from a supportive or positive perspective. Another frequent perception was that, rather than being a vulnerable group, immigrants and their children were accorded special privileges and this led to a feeling of resentment and some strong claims about the attitudes of immigrant children:

"We had a boy from... a centre for immigrants. The State takes more care of such children than of us. They get education, different courses, later a job." (Bulgaria, girl)

"Many foreigners don't want to have the Austrians in school, even if it is our country. That's discrimination!" (Austria, girl)

"They are too busy funding people like asylum seekers and they are not funding British people." (UK, boy)

The **main risks** to these children's rights are felt to be in the areas of:

- Reduced participation in school and society due to limited language skills;
- Poverty;
- Reduced access to healthcare;
- Discrimination and social exclusion.

Learning the local language is seen to be key to the protection of the rights of these children. Reference was also made to the importance of integration (and willingness to integrate from both sides):

"If the individual cultures each just stick together, they will only speak their own languages and they won't make any other contacts either." (Netherlands, boy)

Many of the ideas put forward about **how the rights of this group could be better protected or assured** related to the need for **more integration and mutual understanding**; that ingrained attitudes to be addressed:

"Talk more about tolerant attitudes and natural human relations." (Latvia, girl)

In some Member States, the young people proposed that the State could take more of a role in **encouraging integration**:

"To have society acknowledge that it should also accept other nationalities." (Lithuania, boy)

"Children coming into the country without knowing the language need care and to have a mentor... There should be people, focused to welcome them in a way that will calm them down, speaking their language." (UK, girl)

A few suggested **more multicultural activities to foster mutual knowledge**:

"We have days in school with different themes. For example we had Russian days, then some Russian folk dancers came to school and we had different Russian food." (Estonia, girl)

5.5.8 CHILDREN FROM ROMA, SINTI, TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES

Looking now in more detail at the Roma, Sinti, and Traveller communities that were specifically mentioned, first we summarise the **views of the Roma children** themselves and second, the **views of other children** talking about these communities. The background vulnerability of immigrant or ethnic children was often shared by the Roma children. They share the risks of reduced participation in school and society due to limited language skills, poverty, reduced access to healthcare, discrimination and social exclusion.

Separate groups of Roma children were interviewed in four representative Member States (Hungary, Romania, Spain, UK) and they were asked to talk about their perceptions of the problems and to give suggestions on what could be done to improve the situation.

Roma children's suggestions to address children's rights issue for this group included:

- More information and positive messages about Roma culture to be disseminated
- Being allowed to blend in
- Being given equal educational opportunities
- Being informed of where to get help

In Hungary and UK there were many suggestions on how to address the discrimination towards the young Roma population. Many feel that more face to face contact between those of Roma or non Roma origin is essential, as is the promotion of more positive messages about Roma culture. Some feel it is important to emphasise mutuality and understanding to reduce problems of isolation:

"It should be explained that I'm not like what you see on television." (Hungary, girl)

The Hungarian children recognize that direct, face to face contact between Roma and non Roma children is essential if attitudes are going to change.

In the UK, young Roma would also welcome wider dissemination of knowledge about their culture and their people:

"I would let Romany culture be known. Let people know about what we do, how we do it, so all the stereotypes would be gone. Show people that we are a strong community, that they can't put us down just because of what they say about us. We are dancing, singing, playing, doing our stuff." (UK, boy)

The role that popular culture can play in making different ethnic populations more acceptable to the mainstream population was highlighted by Roma girls in the UK with reference to pop and hip hop.

Roma children in Spain express the view that, if they were better educated, this would help reduce discrimination, a view shared by Roma children in other countries. The greater role the schools can take in helping Roma children was mentioned:

"Tutors should be close and when they find out that there is this person from a poorer [Roma] family, they should propose a meeting with that family and offer to get them help, whether it's financial or whatever, pupil meetings or whatever, I think tutors have a big influence." (UK, girl)

Talking of her Roma community, one Roma girl expressed the view that her compatriots were not aware of their rights and needed more information:

"There should be people to tell them what their rights are, they're not aware of what rights they can have." (UK, girl)

Some Roma young people also see certain institutions as not offering the same support provided to other groups. For example, the police are not seen as helpful to their community:

"You go to the police, and you make a report and they do nothing, they should focus on stopping those abusing children." (Spain, boy)

Other children's suggestions to address children's rights issue for this group included:

- More education for Roma children so they can be better integrated into the community (and, where needed, provide parental incentives to get the children to school)
- Material help

The views of other young people about Roma children were extremely mixed. Some expressed concern for them as a vulnerable group. However, as with the children of immigrant families, there was quite extensive prejudice expressed in a number of countries. These attitudes can add to their vulnerability.

"They are automatically looked upon, as their stereotype, like you need to be aware [of them]. That's a bad thing. They could be on the receiving end of violence." (Ireland, girl)

"When something bad was happening, they were always blamed." (Romania, girl)

The comments and suggestions about how the rights of Roma children could be supported came primarily from respondents in those Member States where there are significant Roma populations.

Spanish respondents suggested a link between between the Roma and homelessness. A programme of support was suggested to reduce the marginalisation of Roma children in Spanish society:

"Lots of people don't even look at them, they marginalise them and they shouldn't be avoided so much." (Spain, girl)

"Let them see that you don't pity them and talk to them, telling them where to go." (Spain, girl)

They suggested creating more shelters and increasing the police presence to protect them, provide them with

information and give work to their parents so that they don't have to beg and more education of the general population to 'erase the image of Roma people as ignorant'.

Many non Roma children stressed that integration into schools is a key first step to removing the barriers of misunderstanding and to equipping Roma children to better realize their rights. It is also felt that Roma children may need additional support to ensure they can benefit from the education available:

"Roma parents do not encourage their children to go to school ... I have a Roma classmate, but he has no PC at home. He is trying so hard to be better at computers, but simply cannot." (Slovakia, girl)

The attitudes of children are very similar in Bulgaria, where many believe that change for Roma children must come primarily via their parents.

"Maybe if you put things this way; 'you send your child to school, you get your financial aid.' This would change things a little." (Bulgaria, girl)

Annex – Discussion Guide

EUROBAROMETER QUALITATIVE STUDY – RIGHTS OF THE CHILD FOCUS GROUP TOPIC GUIDE

RESPONDENT PRE-TASK

Before they attend the group the children will be asked to undertake a short pre-task in order to help the early stages of the groups run quickly and smoothly.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research study. The aim of the study is to find out about the things that children and young people like you think are important in terms of their well-being. We are also going to be talking about some of the things that can damage children and young people's well-being and thinking about what can be done to stop such things happening or what children might be able to do if they find themselves being treated or dealt with in ways they are not happy about.

Before you attend the group, we would like to ask you to spend a bit of time thinking about what it is like to be a child / young adult today.

In the table below can you please write down five things you think are great about being a child / young adult today and five things you think are rubbish about being a child / young adult today?

	What's great about being a child / young adult today	What's rubbish about being a child / young adult today
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

If you are having trouble thinking of things, why not discuss it with some of your friends or with your family.

Please remember to bring your list with you. They will form an important part of the evening and, unfortunately, we will not be able to include people in the group if they do not bring them.

Focus group topic guide

1. INTRODUCTIONS (10-15 MINUTES)

Initial warm-up and getting to know the children and allowing them to begin to get comfortable with one another. Also to start to gain an understanding of their personal situations, family circumstances and priorities so we can tailor and adapt our questioning later in the discussion.

- Moderator
- Self
- TNS
- Independent

- Process
- Confidential
- No right / wrong answers
- All views important
- Thinking about what it's like to be a child / young adult in the world today
- Project being done across the whole of the EU, talking to people like you in every country
- Audio / video recording (as appropriate)
- Viewing (if applicable)

Explain to the participants that when using the word 'child' we mean anyone under the age of 18.

- Respondents
- Name
- Family (parents, brothers / sisters etc.)
- What you like doing

2. BEING A CHILD TODAY (15-20 MINUTES)

To establish the issues which concern children and which they feel strongly about. To understand why these issues are important and establish any areas of life where they might feel constrained, limited or thwarted – areas where their rights might not be upheld.

Respondents are asked to look at the pre-task - ask what they've written for 'what's great' developing a summary of their main issues on a flip chart or large sheet of paper for future reference

- What's great about being a child / young adult today
- How did you come up with these ideas
- What do the rest of you think of them

Looking again at the pre-task – ask them now to look at 'what's rubbish' and compile a list of the main issues

- What's rubbish about being a child / young adult today
- How did you come up with these ideas
- What do the rest of you think of them

Keep both lists available for reference as the group progresses

3. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS – UNDERSTANDING AND ATTITUDES (25 MINUTES)

To introduce the idea of rights and establish the extent to which they understand the concept. From there, to think about the possible breadth of children's rights and to explore their views of the rights that might apply for other groups of children.

Using a flip chart work with the group to develop a diagram of all the people (individuals or groups) who influence their lives

- Apart from you, who else makes decisions that influence your life
- These can be big influences, things that affect everyone
- Or little influences, things that just affect you or your friends
- In what way(s) do they influence your life
- Is this a good or a bad thing (or does it depend on the circumstances)

Keep this diagram available for reference as the group progresses

- Do you feel you have enough say over decisions that affect your life
- Why (not)
- What say do you have
- Where do you the opportunity to express your opinions
- How do your opinions get heard

Please do not let the discussion get stuck in details surrounding parental control, such as not being allowed to stay out late at night, having to do the home-work etc. If necessary refer back to the first point of this section; people that influence a young person's life

- Where and how would you like to have more say
- Why do you think you don't have more say
- How else would you like to have your point of view taken into account

Briefly sum-up the key points of the discussion so far and link this to the concept of human rights

- Do any of you know the phrase 'human rights'
- What does it mean
- What rights do you think people have
- What about children's' rights, are they different to adults'
- In what ways / how
- Why

Stress at this point that we're now thinking more broadly about the rights of children in general, i.e. Children from different backgrounds, younger children as well as their age group. If necessary, remind the participants that by children we mean anyone under 18 years

- What rights do you think children have
- What rights do you think children should have

Work with the group to develop a list of children's rights

The list does not need to be exhaustive but should aim to try and capture the respondents' main issues and concerns – if appropriate, refer back to the earlier exercises.

The exercise should also be used by the moderator to help the respondents develop a clear consensus about and understanding of the concept of rights

4. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS – PROTECTION (20 MINUTES)

To provide them with a broader perspective on children's rights and then explore their perceptions of how such rights could be protected and violations prevented. Wherever possible, turning the discussion to specifics about what they would want / have experienced / how they would react etc. At the end of the section we will introduce some scenarios to help focus on the key areas of violence, poverty and invisible children

In case a list of important rights has not come up spontaneously - introduce showcard 1 listing rights that are often mentioned by children / young adults and discuss them

- What do you think of these
- Do they seem like the sorts of rights children should have

- Are there any things on this list that don't belong there
- Why
- Having looked at this list of rights, can you think of any groups of children and teenagers in your country and in Europe who might be particularly at risk (i.e. their rights might not be well established or well protected)
- In what areas do you think they might be particularly at risk
- Why do you think that is the case

If necessary, clarify that with 'Europe' we mean the EU, therefore not Russia, the Balkans and so on.

If not raised spontaneously, introduce each of the following with the focus on the eu and cover the questions above:

- Children living on the streets / begging
- Children from extremely poor families
- Immigrant children arriving alone or with their family to Europe.
- Children who are the subject of physical/emotional violence or bullying (at home, at school etc.)
- Children that are victims of discrimination and racism
- Children (disabled or not) living in institutions (such as special needs institutions or orphanages where the threat of abuse may be higher)
- Children who do not have parents or whose parents are unable to care for them
- Are there any other groups of children that you think need to have their rights particularly protected or promoted
- Which groups
- Why do they need a particular focus

Make a note of particular groups of children or situations that are raised so these can be probed in section 5

5. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS – HELP AND SUPPORT (20 MINUTES)

To explore what they think should / could be done to better support and protect children's rights. We will start by looking at the vulnerable groups discussed in section 4, asking what more the adult world could do. We will then ask the respondents what they would do if they felt their rights were being violated and what the adult world can do to help them.

Thinking about these more at risk groups of children in the EU, what could the adult world do to better support / protect them

- What can children in these sorts of situations do if they want help in protecting their rights
- What more do you think could / should be done for them
- What do you think would most help them
- How should they be cared for / supported / protected

Reintroduce the particular areas of focus from section 4 as necessary (plus any others the group have come up with):

- Children living on the streets / begging
- Children from extremely poor families
- Immigrant children that arrive to Europe alone or with their family.
- Children who are the subject of violence or bullying (at home, at school etc.)
- Children that are victims of discrimination and racism
- Children (disabled or not) living in institutions (such as special needs institutions or orphanages where the threat of abuse may be higher)
- Children who do not have parents or whose parents are unable to care for them

Then focus more on the group themselves. Asking them to work in pairs:

- What would you do if you thought your rights were being threatened or you were not being allowed your rights at home; at school; elsewhere
- Where would you go
- Who would you talk to
- What do you think would happen

If needed, remind the participants that with rights we are not referring to staying out late at night, etc. Once they have completed the task, ask them to discuss what they have written and probe around why

So, do you feel you know what to do if you feel your rights are under threat:

- At home
 - At school
 - Elsewhere
 - Why (not)
-
- What more could the adult world do to support you or other children and teenagers in each of these situations
 - What sorts of things would you change if you could
 - If there are other ways of responding / complaining / getting something done, how would you like to find out about them
 - If someone wants to get information to children / young adults, how could they do it
 - Where do you go if you want to find out about something
 - What sort of things would you find helpful

6. CLOSING THOUGHTS (20-25 MINUTES)

This section is a chance to pick up on any issues or topics which have not been fully discussed during the earlier parts of the groups and to draw out the key things the children would like to see changed. We have allowed quite a lot of time for this section so you can explore any avenues of interest to the respondents and pick up issues that didn't get explored earlier in the discussion. This is also a section where you can probe some of the issues from the briefing materials which you think the group might have views about.

If you could be the Prime Minister for a day what would you do to better support and protect the children in <COUNTRY>

- What thing(s) would most help to protect the right so children
- How would you make this happen
- Is there anything else that you would like to add
- Anything you didn't have a chance to say earlier
- Thank respondents and close discussion

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