



”You could always begin by listening to us”

A consultation with children on the EC Communication
“Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child”

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“They [children] can and should be involved because they have another vision of things. They don’t care about political problems; they only want what is best for them and their future. I think the authorities would be surprised by the complexity of children’s minds and by their questions and proposals”

In July 2006, the European Commission presented a Communication entitled “Towards a European Strategy on the Rights of the Child”¹, committing to the creation of an EU strategy on the rights of the child as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The European Parliament will deliver its opinion on the Communication by late Spring/early Summer 2007.

One of the central aspects of the Communication refers to children’s right to be heard (UNCRC Article 12), including the commitment “to involve children in decision-making as of 2007.”²

While children and young people were not systematically involved in the drafting of the Communication, an important opportunity presented itself through the EP reporting process – children and young people were invited to express their views and have them presented to the European Parliament.

The consultation process supported children and young people to say what they think about how the Communication should be put into action and how they would like to participate in activities to achieve the Strategy’s objectives. Questionnaires were disseminated electronically through various children’s rights organizations and networks as well as by MEPs. A website was set up by Save the Children with child friendly material and the questionnaire in most EU languages.

By end March 2007, Save the Children had received 486 questionnaires completed by up to a thousand children from all over Europe. Children told us what they feel are the most important issues that affect their and other children’s lives; they expressed their views on what the EU should prioritise in its children’s rights strategy; they gave ideas on the way forward and commented on the objectives set out in the Communication, and finally children told us how they would like to be involved.

Children listed **violence against children** in its different manifestations and settings as the single most important issue to address. They mentioned widespread violence in schools, bullying both in and outside school, being hit by their parents and other adults, child abuse, sexual abuse, and security concerns. They emphasised the need for adults to listen and act on what children and young people tell them. Many children felt that their concerns were not being taken seriously or were ignored altogether by adults.

¹ COM (2006) 367 final, 4.7. 2006

² COM (2006) 367 final, 4.7. 2006, Objective 4, page 9

Other important issues highlighted include **discrimination, social exclusion and racism**. Children expressed concerns about discrimination on the basis of age, race, religion, nationality, gender or just “being different”. They called for educational programmes and responsible reporting in media. Some called for more efficient measures and legislation to combat discrimination and racism.

The effects of **drugs, alcohol and smoking** were identified as affecting children across Europe. Children proposed stricter legislation, more information and education in schools and positive alternatives as possible ways of addressing the problem.

Poverty was identified as a concern that affected children lives in different ways. Children made a strong link between poverty, social exclusion and exploitation of children. **Child labour, child prostitution and trafficking in children** was a concern to many of the respondents. Children proposed harsher laws, strengthened child protection measures, awareness-raising and social support to stop exploitation of children.

Environmental degradation was listed as a priority area in several questionnaires, coupled with concerns for the future and proposals for strict measures to **protect the environment**.

Children see the need for **more information** to ensure that their rights are better protected, to ensure that they can also help to protect themselves and other children. They feel that other people – including the government – should do more to help young people. Lack of parental support, respect and understanding for children was mentioned as important issues to address.

Children clearly expressed their wish to be involved and felt that they can contribute to the development and implementation of the Communication: through questionnaires, meetings between children and decision makers, national meetings of children and young people, European meetings of children and young people and, last but not least, through internet discussions.

With its Communication on the Rights of the Child, the EU has committed to ensure that their policies which affect children take into consideration the views of those who will be affected. This means an obligation to ask the right people the right questions when designing policies. This means promoting a broad movement for children’s participation which is perhaps the only – and best – way to reach out to and engage as many children as possible in the most relevant ways. A commitment is now also needed to make sure that more adults commit to engaging in a dialogue with children on their terms.

Save the Children urges all involved stakeholders to make sure that the views, ideas and experiences expressed by the children and young people who participated in the consultation - summarised in this report - are taken into account in the development of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

Brussels May 2007

INTRODUCTION

*“Grown ups should listen to children’s ideas –
sometimes we notice things others don’t.”*

This report presents the process and outcomes of a Europe wide consultation with children and young people on the European Commission Communication “Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child”.

The principle aim of the consultation was to ensure an opportunity for children and young people to influence the EU strategy on children’s rights through the European Parliament’s report on the Communication “Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child”.

The consultation process supported children and young people to say what they think about how the EU Strategy should be put into action and how they would like to participate in activities to achieve the Strategy’s objectives.

The consultation took place between the beginning of February and the end of March 2007. A total of 508 completed questionnaires were received by the 30th March 2007. This however represented up to a thousand children and young people who actively participated in the consultation and who submitted questionnaires individually or collectively from their school classes, children and youth groups, children’s councils and so on.³

A parallel consultation was also conducted by Plan International with children and young people from some of their projects in non-EU Member States. This consultation, conducted between January and March 2007, aimed to provide a better understanding of what children outside Europe’s boundaries think of the Strategy, how they would like to see it implemented and the best ways in which they could be involved in its future development. The findings from this consultation can be found in a separate report.⁴

This report is being submitted to Members of the Parliament (including the rapporteur, shadow rapporteurs and members of relevant committees) with the request that they incorporate the views, experience, ideas and recommendations of the children and young people who took part in the consultation and which are presented in this report.

Save the Children urges all involved stakeholders to make sure that the views, ideas and experiences expressed by the children and young people who participated in the consultation - summarised in this report - are taken into account in the development of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

³ Austria (118 individual), Estonia (21 individual), Germany (3 individual), Italy (62 individual, 9 collective), Ireland (34 individual), Latvia (54 individual, 6 collective), Lithuania (1 collective representing 27 respondents), Spain (47 individual, 6 collective), Sweden (68), Romania (65 individual, 9 collective), the UK (1 collective representing 6 respondents)

⁴ Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. Findings of a consultation with children and young people in non-EU Member States. April 2007. Report written by Elena Ahmed, Plan UK for Plan International

CONSULTATION PROCESS

“I would pretty much need a robot, in the shape of an adult person, who can speak on my behalf. Then maybe someone would listen to what I have to say.”

PROCESS AND METHODS

Background: identifying opportunities for children to be involved in EU decision-making

Child participation is a right according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁵ For Save the Children the core purpose of children’s participation is to empower them as individuals and members of civil society so that they have the opportunity to express their views, to be involved in decision making and to take action to bring about positive changes in the position of and lives of girls and boys.

In April 2006, Save the Children member organisations in Europe⁶ launched a child participation initiative with a focus on EU decision making. The aim of the initiative is to support and influence the EU to involve children in a meaningful dialogue, to help build understanding and capacity with key EU staff, and to undertake activities linked to EU policy, strategy and communication to support children’s participation.

Children and young people were not systematically involved in the European Commission’s drafting process of the Communication. However, one of its central aspects refers to children’s right to be heard (UNCRC Article 12), including the commitment “*to involve children in decision-making as of 2007.*”⁷

When the Communication ‘Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child’ was issued in 2006 Save the Children and Plan International recognized that it was important to make this information available to children and young people in formats and language that they could work with and understand. A **child friendly version of the Communication** was therefore developed for the 12-17 years age group.⁸ In addition, a child friendly version for younger children – 7-11 years – was also developed.⁹ With the help of the EC these child friendly versions were made available in all official EC languages except for Bulgarian, Maltese and Welsh.¹⁰

⁵ Article 12

⁶ Save the Children in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

⁷ COM (2006) 367 final, 4.7. 2006, Objective 4, page 9

⁸ Available on http://www.savethechildren.net/alliance/where_we_work/europegrp_downloads.html

⁹ Available on http://www.savethechildren.net/alliance/where_we_work/europegrp_haveyoursay.html

¹⁰ Available on http://www.savethechildren.net/alliance/where_we_work/europegrp_downloads.html

In the autumn of 2006, Save the Children identified an opportunity for children's voices to be heard through the reporting process of the European Parliament on the Communication. The idea was promoted with the European Parliament's rapporteur on the Communication, who supported and facilitated a consultation with children and young people across EU Member States.

Developing a method and process for consultation

A questionnaire was developed for the consultation with children and young people aged 12-17 years which could be used together with the child friendly version of the Communication for this age group.¹¹ Before being finalized the questionnaire was pre-tested on a reference group of children and young people who were involved in a web chat on the White Paper on a European Communication Policy that took place in Brussels in November 2006. Besides the English and Romanian versions produced by Save the Children, the European Parliament translation services translated the questionnaire into 11 other EU languages.

The consultation with children followed the format of the child friendly version of the Communication. Children were first asked about the most important issues affecting girls and boys in their community or country, why these issues are important and what needs to be done about them. The consultation then took children through the 7 objectives of the Communication and asked their opinion about the key action points for each objective being proposed by the EU. The consultation concluded by asking children how they wish to be involved in the implementation of the Communication and the development of the EU strategy on the Rights of the Child.

Save the Children Brussels office created a central web-page on which the child friendly versions of the Communication, the questionnaire and information about how to participate were posted. National Save the Children websites, MEP websites and EP political groups' websites posted links to this website. The questionnaire was also circulated electronically through other children's rights NGOs and networks. It could be used by individual children or be used with groups of children, for example in structured focus group discussions or workshops.

The consultation was open to all and was promoted extensively by Save the Children and MEPs so that as many children and young people as possible could be reached. A wide range of NGOs were invited to promote, disseminate and organize consultations among children and young people. These included among others various child rights networks including the European Children's Network, Eurochild, Terre des Hommes, Save the Children, Plan International, national coalitions of child rights organizations, youth groups and networks.

Save the Children asked participating organizations to make sure that they had a child protection strategy in place for web-based consultations. For example, a closed discussion space/secure chat room for children and young people only that is moderated by an adult

¹¹ For more details on how the questionnaire was structured, please refer "Consultation Findings" below. The English version of the questionnaire is attached to this report.

facilitator. They were able to contact the Save the Children Brussels office for more information about being safe on the web. Those organizing consultations were encouraged to translate replies into English as there was only a limited budget available for translation.

The consultation ran from the beginning of February through to 30th March 2007.

Presenting the findings

Save the Children committed to compile, analyse and summarise the replies to the questionnaires and to prepare a report for presentation to the European Parliament.

By 30th March, Save the Children had received a total of 508 completed questionnaires representing the views of up to a thousand children and young people aged 7-18 years of age across Europe. Children from Austria, Bulgaria, China, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Korea, Latvia, Macedonia, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States participated in the consultation.¹²

The responses collectively revealed clear reflections from children on the issues they find important and which they think that the EU should be dealing with as well as ways in which they think adults at all different levels – including the EU - could and should involve children in decisions that affect them. It is evident from the responses that many children and young people are clear about their rights to participate and the role they feel they should and would like to play in decision making at all the various different levels. A summary and analysis of the consultations findings are presented in the next chapter.¹³

The findings summarised in this report were submitted to the European Parliament in May 2007.

CONSTRAINTS (METHODS AND FINDINGS)

The aim was to reach and involve as many children and young people as possible through a wide ranging promotion and dissemination of the questionnaire as highlighted in the previous section. However, the process and results of the consultation do not claim to represent the views of all different groups of children and young people in Europe. They do however represent the views and opinions of those who were able to get involved and express their views to the EU and, as such, these views are valid and important. The responses reflect the voices of children from different age groups, different backgrounds, different nationalities, a mix of gender and abilities.

¹² Note that children and young people from countries outside the EU Member States are currently residing in an EU Member State country.

¹³ The full results of the compiled questionnaires can be retrieved by sending an email to info@savethechildren.be

Responses to the questionnaire revealed some limitations to this method of consultation. For example, the most extensive answers either came from groups of children who responded to the questionnaire as part of a process of a structured group discussion or from children and young people who are actively engaged in child rights work through volunteer networks and so on. Prior knowledge of child rights and more structured discussions helped these groups to answer the questions and engage with the issues under discussion in a confident and competent way.

The fact that some children stopped or limited their response, in particular to open questions, towards the end suggests that children found the questions too many, sometimes complicated and overlapping.

Replies to questions sometimes reflected particular trends and definitely country or local contexts. For example, the issue of kidnapping was reflected in replies from the Vienna International School but was not really an issue for other respondents from countries outside Austria. This probably reflects the high profile case of Natasha, an Austrian girl who was kidnapped on her way to school and held captive for eight years.

In Romania the issues of poverty and child trafficking featured more highly than in other countries, although poverty was a general concern of children regardless of background. In other countries such as Italy, the most important issues highlighted by children sometimes reflected the fact that, prior to completing the questionnaire, class lessons or lectures had been held around that particular topic.

The “forum” used to reach out to children and spread the questionnaire had an affect on who participated. For example, the Swedish website used generated only 4 answers from boys under 18, which could be interpreted as a lack of interest among boys. However, it is more probable that the site used is rarely visited by boys under 18.

In some cases, the responses suggest that children have been influenced by examples and/or alternatives integrated into the questions, choosing between or ranking the alternatives given rather than thinking of “own” alternatives.

Through the use of individual questionnaires it is harder to accurately document and record the data collected and differentiate the responses generated according to age, gender, dis/ability, socio-economic background and so on. When using the questionnaire and child friendly document as a tool in focus group discussions or workshop settings it is much easier to collect and log this sort of information.

CONSULTATION FINDINGS

“All children are the same and have the same rights no matter where they are”

PROMOTING AND SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN’S RIGHTS – WHAT THE EU STRATEGY SHOULD FOCUS ON

The European Commission’s communication “Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child” proposes to establish a comprehensive EU strategy to “effectively promote and safeguard the rights of the child in the European Union’s internal and external policies and to support the Member States’ efforts in this field”¹⁴.

The consultation with children and young people in Europe supported children to express their views on what they think that the EU should prioritise in terms of promoting and safeguarding children’s rights and how this best can be done.

Children were first asked about the most important issues affecting girls and boys in their community or country, why these issues are important and what needs to be done about them. The statistics stated in the footnotes refers to the number (in brackets) of questionnaires – which sometime represent the voices of many children – that listed the issue as a priority.

Violence

In the consultation, of all the issues children listed as important in relation to their effect upon boys and girls, **violence against children** in its different manifestations and settings came out as the single most important issue to address.

Children mentioned widespread violence in schools, bullying both in and outside school, being hit by their parents and other adults, child abuse, sexual abuse, security concerns especially on the streets and in urban areas and the need for more police and security at all times of day and night.¹⁵

Children emphasised the need for adults to listen and act on what children and young people tell them. Many children felt that their concerns were not being taken seriously or were ignored altogether by adults.

¹⁴ COM (2006) 367 final, 4.7. 2006

¹⁵ Violence against children, including “beating”, “killing” (195), child abuse (46), bullying/harassment/peer pressure/cruelty with other children/mean people (47), sexual abuse/sexual exploitation/rape etc. (32), crime/safety issues (19), gender violence (3). For more items, statistics and details please request complete compilation from info@savethechildren

Voices on violence

“These issues are important because we all have rights that should be respected equally. The law should be the same for all.”

“I think that we have to make sure that people show each other more respect than they do today. A human being can only learn to show respect if he/she gets respect from other people. I think that those who bully, hit etc are pretty unsure of themselves, and therefore it is important to already from the beginning show that everyone is equally important. If a child is treated unfairly when it is small, it will stick with them in adulthood and therefore it will be difficult for both children and adults to respect each other.”

“Children grow up in fear. I think that children are afraid. So they don’t tell anyone about the violence used against them. There should be places where a child can come and tell about his/her problems.”

“Adults should listen to children. We are not stupid. [They should] come to the schools and see for themselves what it is like: the mess and the humiliating things that are said.”

“There have to be MORE TRUSTWORTHY people that children and young people can talk to so that issues like violence are brought into daylight”

“Children’s environment in classes in schools is bad”

“Protect children more, especially victims of violence – including more police around schools.”

“Violence is very frequent in families. Children are being beaten by their parents because they think that in this way they solve problems. I think that each family should visit a psychologist to understand that beating is not the solution to educate a child”

“Violence and exclusion are both very bad and make people hurt physically and mentally.”

“More should be done to prevent abuse in schools and children should learn that violence is not a method to solve conflicts”

Discrimination, social exclusion and racism

Other important issues highlighted include **discrimination, social exclusion and racism**.¹⁶ Children expressed concerns about discrimination on the basis of age, race, religion, nationality, gender or just “being different”. They called for educational programmes and responsible reporting in the media. Some called for more efficient measures and legislation to combat discrimination and racism.

Drugs, alcohol and smoking

The effects of **drugs, alcohol and smoking** was identified as another important issue that affect children across Europe.¹⁷ Children proposed stricter legislation, more information and education in schools and positive alternatives as possible ways of addressing the problem.

¹⁶ Discrimination (145), social exclusion (83), racism/intolerance (14). For more items, statistics and details please request complete compilation from info@savethechildren

¹⁷ Drugs (83), drinks/alcohol/drunken people (63), smoking (37). For more items, statistics and details please request complete compilation from info@savethechildren

Voices on discrimination, social exclusion and racism

“They [adults] should give hope to children, not discriminate against them”

“Being different = being excluded”

“Create laws to stop discrimination and racism”

“To solve this problem, children should be educated in schools and through mass-media about the disadvantages of discrimination”

“Stop discrimination by making different age groups work together.”

“Children should learn about all different countries and be proud of their own identity.”

“There should be educational programmes in schools and high schools developed by the teachers or by the school counselor. In the framework of this program the causes of discrimination should be discussed and children should be made aware of that not the colour, religion or nationality shows us what kind of people we are.”

“We have to make young people want to stand up, to show that they are not stupid and that they care about their future and their fellow human beings, irrespective of their nationality”

“People have a right to be different.”

“The police should be less racist.”

“Also the media can ‘brainwash’ people – for example, to be scared of people in Muslim dress.”

Voices on drugs, alcohol and smoking

“Teach children to see other things besides alcohol and cigarettes. They have to learn that there are more fun things in life than drugs”

“Put up the price of alcohol.”

“Ban dangerous drugs.”

“Stop selling alcohol and cigarettes to under age people.”

“Stop advertising alcohol and cigarettes.”

“There should be more education about smoking in schools. The laws should be changed to ban smoking. It’s bad for your health.”

“Make cities drug and tobacco free.” “Make campaigns against drugs.”

Child poverty

Poverty, and child poverty, was identified as a concern that affected children lives in different ways, including health, dignity/social exclusion/discrimination, exploitation, crime etc.¹⁸

Voices on Poverty

“Every child needs a good home and more money is needed”

“We see children that beg on the street and we don’t do anything, we pretend that we pity them, we pass on and in a minute we forget about them. We must build more shelters for them and not to let them die on the streets.”

“Help poor children”

“All children should have enough food and money”

“[The] State should run [a] policy which helps people to find a job and get a salary, which meets families demands”

Exploitation of children

Children made a strong link between poverty, social exclusion and the exploitation of children. **Child labour, child prostitution and trafficking in children** was a concern to many of the respondents, in particular among children in Romania and Italy, as well as children who had recently learnt more about different types of exploitation of children.¹⁹ Children proposed harsher laws, strengthened child protection measures, awareness-raising and social support to stop exploitation of children.

Voices on exploitation of children

“Child trafficking is one of the most severe problems in the country because it is very frequent. The authorities should be more efficient in trying to eliminate this problem and the guilty ones should be punished.”

“Prostitution in general is caused by the absence of money and social problems, so the authorities should ensure an allocation for teenagers which can ensure all the needs they have.”

“The state institutions and organizations for child protection don’t take enough measures to prevent child labor or other forms of exploitation and the future of the society depends on them.”

“Awareness-raising about child labour and problems with child prostitution”

“Have strict controls by the borders to eliminate trafficking”

“There should be harsher laws – drugs, child prostitution, child labour, violence”

¹⁸ Poverty (53), child poverty (26), ghettos (2)

¹⁹ Child prostitution (71), child trafficking (64), child labour/slavery (42), child exploitation (12). For more items, statistics and details please request complete compilation from info@savethechildren

Protection of the environment

Environmental degradation was listed as a priority area in many questionnaires, coupled with concerns for the future and proposals for strict measures to **protect the environment**.²⁰

Voices on protection of the environment

“We need to reduce or prevent actions which increase the effect of climate change.”

“There should be stricter rules by governments against climate change.”

“Children should be trained to not to ruin the environment and to make a positive difference to global warming.”

“People should stop using cars for everything.”

“The environment is the place where we live”

“Reduce or prevent action which increase the effect of climate change”

“If nature collapses the places for children to play will be less”

Attitudes, information and support

Children see the need for more information to ensure that their rights are better protected, to ensure that they can also help to protect themselves and other children. They also feel that other people – including the government – should do more to help young people. Lack of parental support, lack of respect and understanding and negative attitudes against children were frequently mentioned as important issues to address.²¹

Voices on attitudes, information and support

“We need to be told more about ‘grown up’ issues”

“Help children inform other children”

“There should be awareness projects and respect for rights”.

“There should be child agencies where children can get help.”

“We need more social workers – full time to check on houses that might be in danger.”

“Parents should be more often with us”

²⁰ Environment/pollution/rubbish (57), traffic noise/noise (3), public work (4), energy (1). For more items, statistics and details please request complete compilation from info@savethechildren

²¹ For more items, statistics and details please request complete compilation from info@savethechildren

THE WAY FORWARD – CHILDREN’S VIEWS AND IDEAS ON THE OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMUNICATION

“To support people you need to ask them what they need. In this case children’s problems are discussed, so give them the floor to express their opinion”

The Communication sets out 7 objectives towards a strategy on the rights of the child. The questionnaire took children through the objectives and asked their opinion about the key action points for each objective being proposed by the EU. Children were also asked to rank the objectives of the Communication in order of importance. Their answers should inform the EU when it considers ways of implementing the Communication and future strategy. The footnotes refer to how many (in brackets) questionnaires – sometimes representing more than one child – ranked an objective as number 1-7 in relation to the other objectives.

Objective One: to get the most out of existing activities while addressing urgent needs

“I think that solving the most urgent problems is extremely important. This can’t be postponed. I also think that being negligent in resolving problems may have drastic consequences and the priorities of EU actions must not be taken into effect before this.”

When asked to consider proposed EU action on objective one, children were clearly in favour of a single number for child helplines and a number for child hotlines [for missing and sexually exploited children within the EU]. Those who answered ‘yes’ felt that single numbers are easier to remember and that, in this way, more children might be helped. The answers – both yes and no – however revealed confusion about the nature, purpose and accessibility of helplines and hotlines: a call for further information about them perhaps, especially if a single number throughout the EU becomes a reality.

When asked about the key issues that should be included in an action plan to improve the situation of children and young people around the world, and especially in developing countries, the children consulted listed the following priorities: HIV AIDS, sexual abuse, education [especially access to primary school education], health care and nutrition, preventing diseases, access to food, safe water and sanitation, children with disabilities and special needs, child labour, pollution, the environment, climate change and global warming and young or early marriages.

The majority of children ranked objective 1 low on their list of priority objectives.²²

²² 1 (61), 2 (56), 3 (29), 4 (43), 5 (44), 6 (69), 7 (100)

Objective Two: to find out priorities for future EU action

“I think that first the EU has to find out the priorities for the future and find ways for organizations to work together and discuss what are the best solutions for children.”

“I think that it is very important that the EU has an action plan and establishes some priorities. Also, authorities must uphold the organizations in their actions.”

“I think that the principal cause of adult misunderstanding is the absence of communication.”

“Adults don’t always make the right decisions or think about children”

In considering objective two, children are clear that they can contribute to making adults and the EU more aware of the issues important to them. Children emphasised that the EU must play a role in ensuring that consultations with children in relation to this objective take place. They suggested this could be done through sending letters or making calls, through meetings, filling out questionnaires, through talking to adults about the issues and about children’s rights, through organising projects and so on to make the issues visible and make adults listen, through forming and joining children’s organisations, clubs and societies, through campaigning – *stand up and fight for your rights* –, through protests and strikes, through advertisements and media such as television, radio and the internet, and in particular through schools.

While there was a fairly mixed response, more children tended to rank objective 2 low rather than high in relation to the other objectives.²³

Objective Three: to mainstream children’s rights in EU actions (to include children’s rights in everything the EU does)

“Mainstreaming children’s rights is very important”

“It is useless to mainstream EU actions on children’s rights when people are not really involved and are not informed and educated about them [children’s rights]”

“There should be more discussions between children and politicians so that their voices can be heard.”

“They could start by thinking of how they themselves would like to be heard if they were in our situation”

In considering objective three on mainstreaming children’s rights in EU actions children mentioned the need to create a children’s rights specialist unit to make sure that children’s rights are taken into consideration as well as calling for child or teenage representation in the European Parliament and in the EU. Some proposed that the EU should adopt binding legislation to ensure that children’s rights can’t be ignored by the Member States, *“not even a little bit”*.

²³ 1 (55), 2 (48), 3 (25), 4 (58), 5 (57), 6 (88), 7 (75)

Involving children in discussions with adults, campaigning, the use of media outlets and better/more training and education on children's rights were stated as means to create more understanding of children's rights – a prerequisite for successful mainstreaming. *"The EU can promote children's rights through mass-media and the internet which are widely used to resolve daily problems. I think that in this case children's rights will be taken into consideration."*

A majority of the children ranked objective 3 high.²⁴

Objective Four: to find ways for organizations to work together and discuss children's rights

"We need to be heard by adults."

"It is good because we are working together as a community. We need to work together to find solutions."

"Some issues are very complicated and then it can be difficult to think of all aspects"

"Sometimes the kind of decisions taken by children are immature but realistic and therefore we need an adult to model it according to our opinion"

"Sometimes it is difficult for children and younger people to understand certain issues, for example in politics, but sometimes I think that things are made more complicated than they actually are. The support from adults could consist of explaining the issues so that children can create their own opinion about it."

"I would pretty much need a robot, in the shape of an adult person, who can speak on my behalf. Then maybe someone would listen to what I have to say."

For objective four children were very clear that they should be involved in the process that leads to EU decisions that affect children: *children must be involved in decisions that affect them; because it's our right; children's opinions, thoughts, voices should be heard and listened to.* Some respondents mentioned the right to vote while others asked for representation in decision making structures – through children's advisory panels and through direct interaction between children and politicians. However a significant minority felt that children under the age of 18 were not old or mature enough to be involved in decision making or to know what is right, what is important or what are the potential consequences.

When asked which methods they preferred to use to express their views children chose questionnaires and discussions in groups slightly **above** use of the internet and meetings.²⁵

Regarding the **European Forum on Children's Rights** most responses were in favour of children and young people being members of the Forum. A considerable number felt that members of the Forum should represent children and their issues through close links with children's groups. Less were in favour of appointing a coordinator who makes the links between the Forum and children and young people's groups.

²⁴ 1 (104), 2 (68), 3 (52), 4 (56), 5 (55), 6 (41), 7 (22)

²⁵ Questionnaires (185), Discussions in a group (221), Internet (for example through a chat) (158) and Meetings (156)

When asked when and why children need support from adults so that they can be involved in decision making and what sort of support they need children felt that they need to be better heard by adults – “adults make the decisions and have the vote so we should tell them that they need to listen to children”. They feel that adults can help to get them into decision making forums and can give financial support. “You need support from adults to bring your rights and issues to attention.” However, they also feel that children are able to be much more active in decision making – “I think that adults must encourage children to make their own decisions. Legally, at the age of 18 years, children can make their own decisions but I think that regarding some of the issues affecting them teenagers can and should be involved. Adults must coordinate their actions and help only if it is necessary.”

Objective 4 – to find ways for organisations to work together and discuss children’s rights – received a positive response with most questionnaires ranking it between 1 and 4.²⁶

Objective Five: to improve people’s understanding, skills, expertise on children’s rights AND Objective Six: to produce an awareness-raising strategy for children on children’s rights

“Because if people are not aware of children’s rights nothing can be done to protect them. If everyone knew about children’s rights it would be much easier to support children and solve their problems.”

When asked about **Objectives Five and Six** most children stated that they had not been involved in either child rights training or awareness raising and advocacy work on children’s rights. Of course this may reveal a genuine lack of interest in undertaking such activities OR it may reveal a real gap in these sorts of opportunities being offered to children. As one respondent mentioned “you have to inform children more – we have gone through our rights but this is not enough”.

Some children have however been actively involved in training on children’s rights and child rights awareness-raising activities. Some examples:

“I am active as a volunteer in the program ‘Children’s Rights’. Here, I work with children between 10 and 16 years. I inform them about their rights and responsibilities by using interactive methods that encourage children to participate and express their opinions: role play, case studies, discussion groups and creative activities.”

“We raised awareness on HIV/AIDS when we met with the Undersecretary of International Development, through media articles and speaking on BBC radio, through attending an international conference on gender, through taking part in a PLAN hot-seat on slavery – all of these things raised awareness about children’s rights.”

“[I was involved in the] process of consultation about the implementation of the UN CRC in Latvia, training seminar on human rights and the rights of the child, Youth Cano if Baltic States on child participation, work on preparing child friendly text of the UNCRC, in a project against mobbing in schools...”

²⁶ 1 (74), 2 (80), 3 (63), 4 (70), 5 (53), 6 (35), 7 (22)

Children were very much in favour of providing information on children's rights in a child friendly way.²⁷ They felt that the European Commission should communicate its ideas on policy and action to children and young people primarily through television and radio programmes. The internet, newspapers and magazines also proved to be popular choices for information channels.²⁸ Other methods mentioned included: letters, sending EU members into schools, through schools, e-mail, meetings, public hearings, talks and through videos/DVD's.

Objective 5 – to improve people's understanding, skills and expertise on children's rights – received a fairly positive rating, with most children rating it between 1 and 4.²⁹

Reaction to Objective 6 – to produce an awareness raising strategy for children on children's rights – was fairly mixed with opinion leaning slightly towards a higher ranking.³⁰

"It is important to plan strategies in order to overcome and find the best solutions to difficulties and obstacles encountered. However, action is also needed and should be maximized."

Objective Seven: to promote the rights of the child in external relations with countries outside the EU

"All children are the same and have the same rights no matter where they are"

"Children will grow up to be adults that, if treated in the right way when young, will make a big contribution to the country's economy. If they are given a good education and treated with respect they will grow up to be good strong members of the community."

"You should get people outside Europe to know because they should know their rights."

"I think it is important for children to be aware of what is happening around the world."

"If adults support us and care about us more, we will become better at helping the next generation of children and young people."

"There is so much that needs to be said to different countries. I get frustrated just thinking about it"

"EU should stay out of it all since they are sending bad signals already as it is"

Objective 7 – to raise and support children's rights with countries and organisations outside Europe – received a high ranking.³¹ This may either reflect a perception that the fulfilment of children's rights is more needed outside Europe as child rights awareness is sufficient within

²⁷ Strongly agree (240), Agree (142), No opinion (21), Disagree (4), Strongly disagree (2)

²⁸ Through the internet (206), Through SMS messaging (58), Through a newsletter (103), Through newspapers and magazines (190), Through television and radio programs (256)

²⁹ 1 (66), 2 (72), 3 (54), 4 (81), 5 (50), 6 (23), 7 (23)

³⁰ 1 (77), 2 (72), 3 (72), 4 (51), 5 (45), 6 (54), 7 (35)

³¹ 1 (120), 2 (51), 3 (42), 4 (40), 5 (37), 6 (43), 7 (56)

Europe. Or, it could reflect a genuine feeling that children – as well as adults – in today’s global community look increasingly beyond the borders of Europe.

The reaction to objective 7 reflected the ‘rights’ discourse - *children’s rights are important, children should know what rights they have, every child should have the same rights, it’s about us – we should speak up*. Also reflected in the responses was the need to raise awareness as a first step to promoting children’s rights and protecting children. Responses further reflected the need to go beyond talking and take action. When asked about the messages that the EU should give other countries and organizations to help realize children’s rights outside the borders of the EU, children again mentioned the importance of involving children and increasing the importance of children and their rights. Other respondents focused on children as future adults and citizens – *“help children so they can be a successful next generation”*. Raising awareness about what’s happening in other parts of the world was thought to be important as well as a clear role for the EU in helping other countries – *“the EU should show other countries that raising the rights of children helps them and also raises the quality of life for children.”* The EU should act as role model.

Only one group of children – the PLAN UK Children’s Advisory Panel – responded specifically to what needs to be done to *promote the rights of girls, promote the rights of children belonging to minorities, promote the rights of children affected by armed conflict and protect children from violence against them* – as summarized below:

Girls - gender equity should be promoted in everything. Girls should be encouraged to do the same things as boys.

Minorities – there should be education about minority groups at schools and the workplace.

Children affected by war – there should be counseling and a safe place for them to go to. They should have access to social services, shelter and food. There should also be a tracing service if they have been separated from their families.

Children suffering from violence – should receive counseling and there should be social services. Peer mentoring could be offered as an effective way to help. There should be a hotline to help them.

There should be leisure activities for all children.

WHAT CHILDREN CAN DO

The consultation concluded by asking children how they wish to be involved in the development and implementation of the Communication and the Strategy.

Children clearly expressed their wish to be involved in the development of the EU strategy on the Rights of the Child and implementation of the Communication on Children’s Rights: through questionnaires, through meetings between children and adult decision makers, through national meetings of children and young people, through European meetings of children and young people and, last but not least, through internet discussions. Quite a few young people expressed the wish to work on children’s rights issues outside of Europe where they believe that the need is greater.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“The adults must come to our world. Not until they’ve done that, with all it entails, will they be able to do something.”

Through this consultation – as well as many others that have preceded it - children and young people have shown that they can and want to be involved in decisions that affect their lives. **The Communication is now a vital step towards implementing children’s meaningful and ethical participation in the EU wherever it works – in development, in internal affairs, in the work of Member States.**

In many of their responses to the different questions children asked the EU to engage in children’s lives where they are – particularly in schools but also in out of school activities and so on. They feel that it is important that the EU makes an effort to understand the everyday lives of children and young people across Europe.

The EU has, through its Communication, committed itself to ensuring that its policies which affect children take into consideration the views of those who will be affected. This means an obligation to ask the right people the right questions when designing policies. This means promoting a broad movement for children’s participation which is perhaps the only – and best – way to reach out to and engage as many children as possible in the most relevant ways. **A commitment is now also needed to make sure that more adults commit to engaging in a dialogue with children on their terms.**

Up to a thousand children and young people – experts of their own lives - across Europe spent time and effort to share with us what they think the EU should be prioritising in terms of children’s rights, how the EU should put these priorities into action, and how children can be involved in EU decisions that affect them. **Save the Children urges all involved stakeholders to make sure that the views, ideas and experiences expressed by these children and young people - summarised in this report - are taken into account in the development of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.**

ANNEX 1. THANK YOU!

Please note that names are only listed if there was explicit consent to including the name of the respondent.

Children and young people in Austria (not named) and Sabrina Schwärzer, Michael Felder, Mattias Ritter, Florian Winder; Geraldine Assmann; Anna Bayer; Jennifer Rossi; Scheila Werle; Michelle Alge as well as children and young people at Vienna International School

Children and young people in Estonia (not named) and Aiki Arro; Anna-Helena Purre; Kerli Suder

Children and young people in Germany (not named) and Christine de Groot, Sandra Queisser

Children and young people in Italy (not named) and children at Liceo Scientifico Statale, G. Galilei, Children Istituto Fusinato di Padova, Altea, Jasmin, Irene Zaccaro, Sara, Iris, Annalisa Scabia, Jenny Chiarello, Elisa Garro, Sara Trovato, Vigo Gianlugallaria Audeido, Giado Mazzuesto, Sara Borgato, Elena Vagrotelli, Rizzi Giucia, Melissa Barraca Perez, Serena Tasinato, Sabrina Boaretto, Maria Rampazio, Elisa Galtarossa, Kawtar Barghout, Veronica Audzea Venoze, Marina Manfhedo, Mattia Lincetti, Claudia, Paola, Silvia and Valentina, Valentina, Giueia, Federica Milanetto, Elisabetta, Francesca Gambato, Alessandra Carporeale, Elena, Ellonora, Givanni Fregnan, Giovanni Festo, Murood Laysousse

Children and young people at St Nessans Community College, Limerick, Ireland

Children and young people from Latvia including Elza Oļeinika Riga Branch Children's Forum of Latvia, Edijs Mihailovs Children's Forum of Latvia, Uljana Sidoroviča Jelgava Branch Children's Forum of Latvia, Marta Radvinskaite Children's Forum of Latvia, Džūlija Vozņesenka Cesis Primary School No. 2, Līga Bebre Cesis Evening School, Kristīna Žizņevska Association „Dzīvesprieks” Līga Līce Association „Dzīvesprieks”, Karīna Lūre Limbazi Secondary School No.2, Agnese Bernāte Riga City Pupils' Council, Sofija Uljanova, Eva Daģe Riga Centre Scholl of Applied Arts, Signe Smilga Riga Commercial Gymnasium, Alisa Baranova Riga Secondary School “Anņimuiža”, Fradkins Ruslans Riga Secondary School “Anņimuiža”, Kirils Kozarevs Riga Secondary School “Anņimuiža”, Sanda Gailite Riga Secondary School “Imanta”, Diāna Fjodorova Riga Secondary School “Ilģuciems”, Justīne Barone Riga Secondary School “Ilģuciems”, Santa Kraukle Riga Secondary School “Ilģuciems”, Inga Murāne Riga Secondary School “Ilģuciems”, Līva Geistarte Riga Secondary School named after J. Poruks, Agnese Jansone Riga Secondary School named after J. Poruks, Zane Geistarte Riga Secondary School named after J. Poruks, Kristīne Nevero Riga Secondary School No. 25, Māra Cīrule Riga Secondary School No. 25, Daina Paegle Riga Secondary School No. 25, Marina Pribitkova Riga Secondary School No. 25, Liene Rozenburga Riga Secondary School No. 25, Egita Krasovska Riga Secondary School No. 28, Madara Staceviča Riga Secondary School No. 28, Ģirts Leimanis Riga Secondary School No. 62, Valerija Rudņeva Riga Secondary School No. 96, Aleksandrs Tiškovs Rīnūži Secondary School, Anete Serečenko School Council of Salacgrīva Secondary School, Members of Children's Forum of Latvia 13, Pupils of Majori Primary School, Group of pupils of Mežmala Secondary School, Jurmala, School Council of Cesis Primary School No. 2, Group of young people from Riga City organisation “Child of Care”

Children and young people at Ventos secondary school, Lithuania

Children in Romania (not named) and Anghel Georgel, Badiu Vlad, Gabrian Eduard, Bogdan, Canipeanu Carmen, Daciu Mirela, Datru Dănuț, Deacu Cristian, Fusea Cristian, Gabriela Vasile, Gelea Ionut, Gheorghita Anamaria, Georgiana Savalache, Proca Tudor, Hintiu Adela, Iacomi Georgian, Iacomi Marian, Luca Viorica, Ionita Denisa, Iulia, Lascu Iulian, Laura, Marin Cristina,

Marin Ionela, Marin Viorel, Mocanu Denisa, Musat Ionela, Nedelcu Ionel, Nicolae Ionela, Petrea Sorin, Radu Larisa, Radu Mihaela, Sirbu Ionut, Sîrbu Mădălina – Ionela, Sirbu Oana, Sirbu Sorin, Stoian Costel, Bujoreanu Andreea, Cristea Ana-Maria, Tudorache Madalin Georgian, Vrinceanu Georgiana, Corleanu Raluca , Popescu Andrei, Penciu Catalina, Pernes Ionut, Pintica Andrei Cezar, Bulugea Roxana ,Teianu Ruxandra, Ianos Vlad, Oprisan Lucian, Marin Iuliana Madalina, 5th grade B, School from Adjudeni, Neamt County, Benchea Roxana Maria, M Danca Madalina, Baciui Florentin Sergiu, Ghiuzan Florin Iosif, Gabor Razvan, Ghiuzan Andreea, Boglis Antonela, Dragomir Alexandru Costin , Hliban Simona-Theodora , Dinu Ancuta Florentina, Georgina, Bulugea Roxana, Teianu Ruxandra

Children in Spain (not named) and Ruth María Arrogante Molina, Angélica Bautista Muñoz, Mohamed Bouskani, Marta (Childhood council), Nabil El Fahsi Bsabsa, Iván González Marín, Mario González Marín, Lorena López Jiménez, Carla Lucas, Ángel Molina Jiménez, Víctor Núñez Álvarez-Lillo, Rachid Rabah, Miguel Ángel Ramírez, Alberto Romero Cifuentes, Israel Ruiz Valero, Mauro, Suárez Uceta, Laura Villajos Santos, Alejandro, Sara, Patricia and Carlos from "Consejo de Infancia de San Nicasio (Leganés)", Ahmed Bousiaani, Verónica Moreno Pérez, Zara Benda Han, Zaida Martín Fernández, Tatiana Encinas Vega, Sami El Fahsi, Daniel Godino Rubio, Ioana Cristina Cucu Héctor Balboa

Children and young people in Sweden

Plan UK Children's Advisory Panel