EU Children's Participation Platform

Findings from the consultation with children on Integrated Child Protection Systems

22 February 2024

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EU Children's Participation Platform

Findings from the consultation with children on Integrated Child Protection Systems

A report submitted by ICF S.A.
In association with:

SOS Children's Villages, Save the Children, Risk & Policy Analysts Ltd. Laura Lundy, Cath Larkins

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Document Control

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Contents

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1 Executive Summary

This report presents **the findings from the consultation with children** on what helps them to feel safe. It was conducted under the **EU Children's Participation Platform** from May to October 2023. Children's views will feed into the Commission forthcoming Recommendation on **integrated child protection systems,** as a priority initiative in 2024.

Between May and October 2023, **1,095 children from 21 countries of the European Union participated in the consultations.**

Figure 1.   Number of participants by consultation type

HOW DID CHILDREN PARTICIPATE?

Focus groups, 162

Interviews, 37

Online survey, 896

Figure 2.   Percentage of children aged 7-13 and 14-17

How old were the children?

27%

73%

■ 14 to 17 y.o.   ■ 7 to 13 y.o.
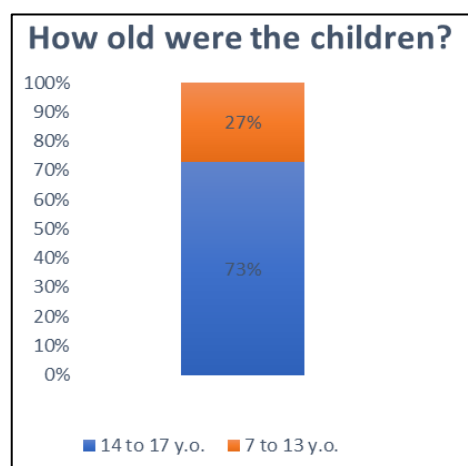
Figure 3.   Percentage of children who identified as 'Boy', 'Girl', 'Other' or replied 'I don't want to say'

42%   56%

■ Boy ■ Girl ■ I don't want to say ■ Other

The consultation was guided by the Lundy model of child participation and children were actively involved in designing the consultation process and content.

Children pointed out to important safety issues in places that are very important for them, including school, home, public spaces, etc.

- Home should be a stable and (financially) secure place for children to feel safe.
- Children need more spaces where they can meet together and feel safe, especially if they do not have a safe home.
- Children often feel unsafe in public spaces like parks, streets and bus stops, particularly girls.
- Lack of hygiene and bullying make children feel unsafe at school.
- Children are concerned they are not being protected enough on online spaces.

How do children seek help?

- To get help, children prefer talking to someone personally (63%) rather than going online.

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- Children would go first to family or relatives (74%), or friends (68%).

What do children want to feel safe? The key recommendations are:

1. Children want adults to listen, respect and trust them.
- Adults should establish **trusting relationships with children**, keep promises and communicate openly and respectfully through **a variety of communication and feedback channels**.
- Children want to be involved in developing solutions and in designing processes and measures to ensure their safety at home, in schools, local areas (parks, lighting, transport), or healthcare facilities.

2. Children want adults to identify the issues they face early on and to provide them with continuous and preventive support.
- Adults should provide comprehensive psychological and material support to ensure children's safety.
- Governments should ensure financial stability in families.
- Children want holistic approaches to ensure safe environments in schools and actions taken to improve their feeling of safety in public spaces.
- Health professionals and healthcare facilities should be more child friendly.

3. Children think that adults (professionals and families) should work together to keep children safe.
- Adults, such as teachers, social workers and doctors should be trained and learn about each other's work and responsibilities.
- Various professionals and services should better cooperate, at local levels, national levels and across countries, to ensure safety and well-being of children.
- Children advocate for one contact point (one person to go to for support) and stronger collaboration between schools and home environments.
- Children want access to specialised support, when required.

4. Children want more information on how to deal with potential risks and dangers and want adults to provide it.
- Children want to know whom to ask for help and support, how to report unsafe situations.
- Children ask to **be informed and educated about potential risks and dangers**, both online and offline.
- **Information, reporting platforms and tools should be more accessible, user-friendly and efficient**.
- Children want **clear information** on what happens after seeking help.

5. Children asked for more mental health support.
- Children need **mental health support to manage stress and improve their well-being** and better access to psychological support to address issues early on.
- **More awareness raising, guidance, tools and tailored information** on mental health issues.
- **Continuous support** from adults through educational settings and counselling services for children.
- Children want adults to **reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues**.

6. Children asked for more guidance on online safety, and effective regulations to be protect them in the digital world.

- Children ask for **increased guidance, education, training and prevention measures** to protect them from online threats related to cyberbullying and personal data security.
- More **effective and efficient online regulations should be in place**, including age-appropriate content access, e.g. stricter age restrictions for social media platforms.
- **More involvement from parents** in explaining social media safety rules to children and targeted outreach campaigns.

2 Introduction

This report presents findings from the first consultation with children conducted for the EU Children's Participation Platform.

- Section 2 outlines the consultation theme and methodology;
- Section 3 presents the characteristics of children participating in the consultation activities;
- Section 4 reports on the consultation findings and key recommendations from children;
- Section 5 summarises feedback from children on the consultation process; and,
- Section 6 outlines the next steps.

2.1 Consultation theme, policy context, and aims and objectives

This first consultation run under the EU Children's Participation Platform[1] **focused on integrated child protection systems.** The Commission wanted to hear from children what they need to feel safe and to hear their views on a priority initiative of the Commission in 2024 on integrated child protection[2]. The results of this child consultation, together with the open public consultation[3] for adults and a mapping of the Fundamental Rights Agency, will contribute to this initiative.

Children underlined in their responses that adults need to work better together. The Recommendation will focus on how different experts and responsible services in the EU Member States can better work together to focus on children's needs to feel safe and to prevent violence.

The current consultation, which ran from May to October 2023, will aid the EU in acquiring feedback from children across Europe on how adults can work together to support children's rights to be safe from harm and how the EU can make sure that children are protected.

2.2 Consultation methodology

2.2.1 Consultation design

Children's contribution to EU-level consultation addresses the first objective of the Platform 'to gather the views of and to consult children, across several EU Member States, on matters that concern them, including on future specific policy and legislative initiatives.'

The Platform consultations were designed to provide a meaningful, inclusive and safe space for children to share their ideas. The Platform's consultations are implemented via online surveys, and online and in-person focus groups and interviews.

All consultations were guided by the Lundy model[4].

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[1] The EU Children's Participation Platform aims to strengthen children's rights and participation across the EU. One of the ways the Platform promises to achieve this is through direct consultation with children.

[2] Commission work programme 2024 (europa.eu)

[3] Have your say (europa.eu)

[4] https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/lundy_model_of_participation_0.pdf

- The design of the consultation process and the consultation materials, topic and features were co-created with children at the Children's Panel and General Assembly. The consultation questions involved discussion points that the children considered important for the consultation topic. However, child participation experts, Laura Lundy and Cath Larkins were also instrumental in designing questions (included in the data collection tools, such as a survey questionnaire and interview and focus group topic guides) that would be appropriate for children, especially given the highly sensitive nature of this topic.

- Child Empowerment Officers (CEOs) and Central Office Colleagues from Save the Children and SOS Children's Villages, experts in child participation, also contributed to designing the consultation process. The CEOs had an active role in shaping children's participation to ensure it is aligned with their expectations and level of understanding. The topic guides provided suggestions on how to conduct interviews and focus group discussions, however, they could be implemented up to the discretion of the facilitating CEO/other personnel. This meant that, while maintaining the high standards, all the consultations were appropriate and dependant on the background of the children, age, and group size.

- All facilitators of interviews and focus groups shared reports from their discussions with children. These reports, together with the online survey data, were systematically analysed and synthesised in an analytical report by the Platform Secretariat staff from RPA and ICF.

- All children were briefed on how their input would be recorded and feed into the ICPS 2024 Recommendation.

2.2.2 Outreach & Recruitment

The CEOs, Central Office Colleagues and Secretariat all shared and promoted the survey online, on social media, the Platform's website and newsletter, and the European Commission Rights of the Child's newsletter. Through the Platform outreach, a school in Ireland widely disseminated the survey among their students, accounting for the high percentage of Irish respondents.

Outreach for the focus groups and interviews involved contacting all organisations and children who had expressed an interest in participating in focus groups and interviews. Children who participated at the General Assembly were all contacted and invited to participate in the focus groups and interviews. Furthermore, all those organisations mentioned above were also contacted and informed on the possibility to conduct their own consultations (this is how the Cypriot focus group came to be).

The CEOs promoted a diverse and representative response to the survey and attendance of focus groups and interviews by diffusing the information, sign-up etc to underrepresented groups of children while managing it with sensitivity given the topic of ICPS.

2.2.3 Challenges and limitations

As this is the first consultation conducted as part of the EU Children's Participation Platform, there were challenges and limitations; these include technical issues with survey traction and the EU Survey tool, the child-friendliness of the design, content and accessibility of the survey, issues with the survey translation, timelines, and engagement with the theme. However, the team developed adaptation and mitigation measures, and will employ these in future

consultations. Further reference to these and other challenges is addressed in Section 5 , alongside feedback.

3 Characteristics of children participating in the consultation activities

3.1 The consultation in numbers

In total, 1,095 children participated in the consultation activities, including 896 children providing valid responses in the online survey, 37 children participating in the interviews and 162 children participating across 23 focus groups[5]. Table 1 provides a break down for each consultation format.

Table 1 The consultation in numbers

	Survey	Focus groups	Interviews
Number of participating children	Total number of responses: 1199. 896 valid responses included in the analysis	162 (including 12 focus groups involving 89 children in Germany and 11 focus groups involving 73 children in other EU member states)	37[6]
Location	20 EU Member States (apart from Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Malta, Slovakia and Slovenia).	Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal and Romania	Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Romania, Sweden

3.2 Characteristics of survey respondents

The online consultation received **1199 responses**. In total, 49 respondents indicated that they did not want to participate in the online consultation, while the 95 respondents who indicated they were 18 years and over or gave an unknown answer were unable to complete the rest of the survey questions and automatically screened out. An additional 159 responses were removed afterwards as they were from non-EU countries or gave no responses (referred to as unclassified countries). In total, there were **896 valid responses**, and the analysis of closed and open-ended questions from the online consultation are based on this value. Survey findings are integrated into various sections of the report based on their thematic scope.

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[5] In Germany, the respective facilities of SOS Children's Village e.V. regularly conducts in-person focus groups with children. These focus groups serve to evaluate the programmes and find out about the problems and wishes of children. Child protection is an important topic of these discussions, and as such, the consultation report from Germany included findings from 12 focus group discussions with children conducted by SOS Children's Village e.V. between January and September 2023. In total, 89 children participated in these 12 focus groups, of which 42 children were aged 8 to 12 years and 47 adolescents aged 13 to 17 years. A nearly equal share of girls and boys participated in these focus groups. A total of 5 focus groups were conducted in urban areas and 7 in more rural areas. In addition, 2 focus groups include 'umA' participants. 'umA' is a German abbreviation often used to refer to "unbegleitete minderjährige Ausländer", which translates to "unaccompanied migrant children" in English.

[6] In total, 37 interviews were conducted but findings from one interview are not included in the analysis due to confidentiality.

3.2.1 Location

Over a third of children reported that they live **in Ireland**[7] (see Figure 4). This was closely followed by **Romania** (25% of children stated they lived here). There were no responses from Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Malta, Slovakia and Slovenia. In total, 154 respondents indicated that they were from a non-EU country, such as Albania, Macedonia and Uzbekistan. A further 5 respondents did not respond to the question (leaving the response blank).

From the respondents that were screened out when indicating they were 18 years and older, most said that they were from another country (22%), followed by 19% from Romania, and 17% from Ireland. This followed the trend of the valid responses, where most respondents indicated they are from Ireland and Romania.

Figure 4.   Where do you live? N=896

Country	Value
Ireland	34%, 302
Romania	25%, 222
Portugal	9%, 83
Lithuania	5%, 49
Poland	5%, 49
Spain	5%, 48
Italy	4%, 35
France	3%, 31
Croatia	3%, 27
Bulgaria	1%, 12
Greece	1%, 12
Cyprus	1%, 10
Czechia	0%, 4
Belgium	0%, 2
Germany	0%, 2
Hungary	0%, 2
Netherlands	0%, 2
Sweden	0%, 2
Finland	0%, 1
Luxembourg	0%, 1
Austria	0%, 0
Denmark	0%, 0
Estonia	0%, 0
Latvia	0%, 0
Malta	0%, 0
Slovakia	0%, 0
Slovenia	0%, 0
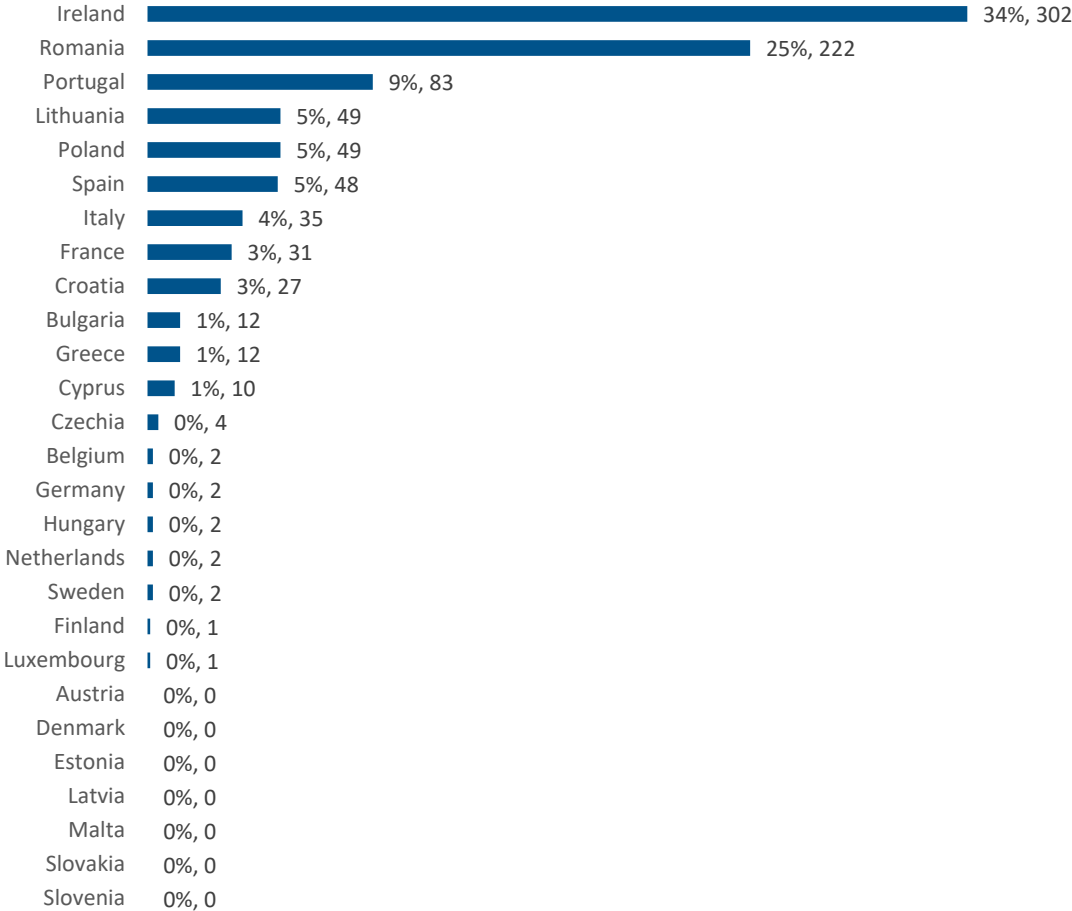
3.2.2 Age

Overall, **73% of children from the 896 valid responses were aged between 14 and 17** (see Figure 2). Although omitted from the analysis, 23 responses indicated that 'I am not sure' or 'I don't want to say', and 72 reported that they were 18 years or older.

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[7] A secondary school in Ireland is a Platform member organisation. The survey was shared with all students from this school. In addition, one of the Platform experts is based in Ireland and has a broad outreach with a number of schools. These two factors mostly likely contributed to the high survey uptake in Ireland.

Figure 5.   How old are you? N=896
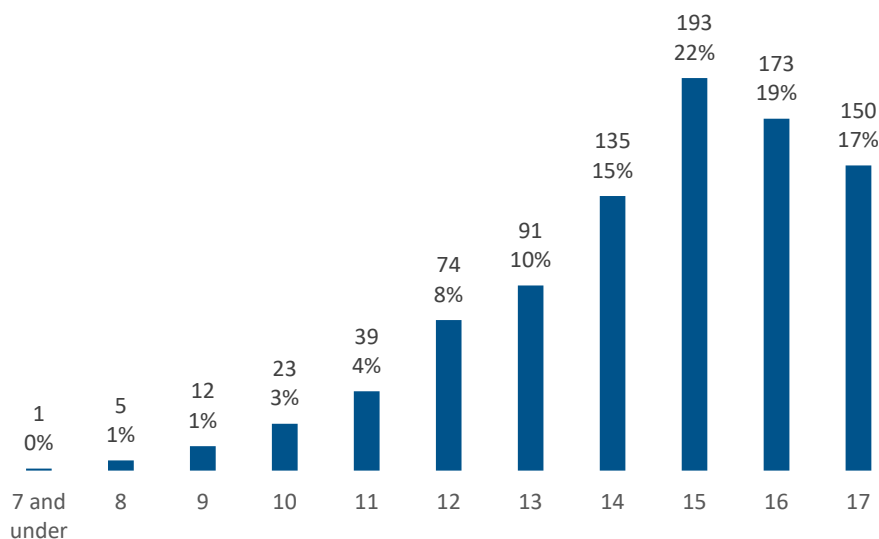
3.2.3 Gender

More than half of the children were girls (56%), 43% were boys, and 1% indicated that 'other' best described them (see Figures 3 and 6).

From the respondents that were removed as they indicated they were 18 years and older, 62% were girls, 28% were boys, and 3% described themselves as 'other'.

Figure 6.   I am a… (N=879)
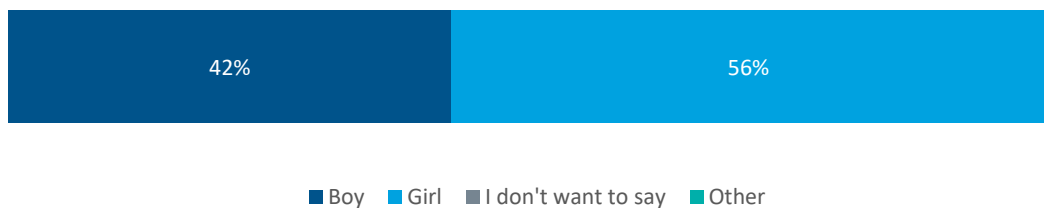
3.2.4 Family situation

In total, 86% of children stated that they lived with their mother, 73% said they lived with their father, and 59% lived with a brother and/or sister (see Figure 7). Overall, 705 children (79%) indicated that they lived with more than one of the options to the question on 'Who do you live with now?'.

Figure 7.   Who do you live with now? N=896

More than half of the children (56%) said they did not belong to any of the following groups: minority ethnic or religious group, LGBTIQ+, asylum seekers or refugee, Roma community,
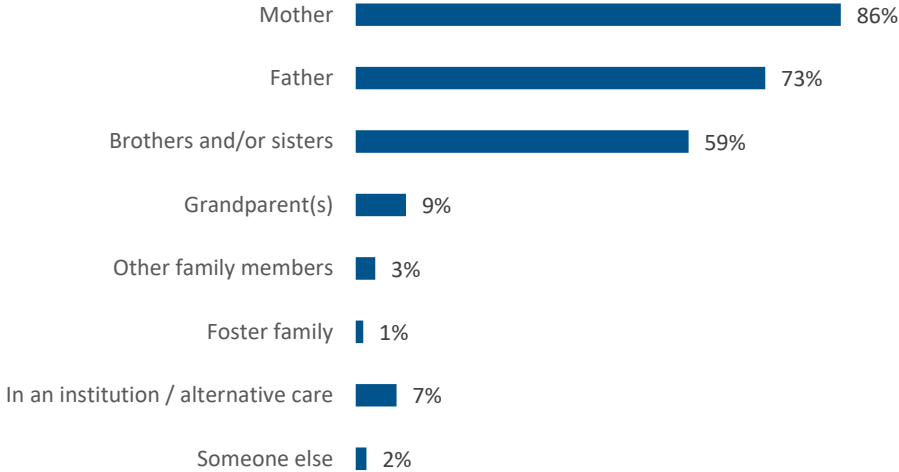
3.2.5 Disadvantage, vulnerability and disability

In total, 10% of the children said that they have a disability or medical difficulty, whilst 80% indicated they did not, and 11% of children said that they do not know if they have a disability or medical difficulty[8]. Out of the 10% of children who indicated they had a disability or health difficulty, 30% indicated that they had Autism (see Figure 8). This was closely followed by children having mental health conditions (26%), or other long-term conditions (26%).

Figure 8.   What disability/health difficulties do you have? N=86.
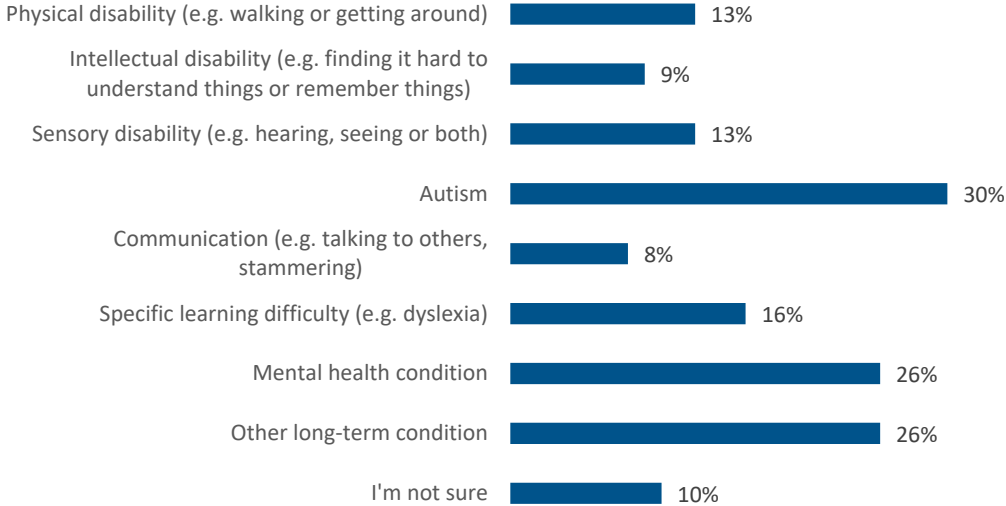
More than half of the children (56%) said they did not belong to any of the following groups: minority ethnic or religious group, LGBTIQ+, asylum seekers or refugee, Roma community,

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[8] The figures were rounded to the nearest whole number; in this case they add to 101 percent.

and other groups reflected in Figure 9 below, and 18% of children indicated they did not know
or did not want to say if they belonged to any of the following groups. In total, 14% of children
identified themselves as belonging to LGBTIQ+ group and 8% as belonging to a minority ethnic
or religious group.

Figure 9.   Which of the following groups, if any, do you feel you belong to? N=896

Group	Percentage
I don't know or I don't want to say	18%
Minority ethnic or religious group	8%
LGBTIQ+	14%
Asylum seekers and refugee	1%
Roma community	1%
Other groups	6%
None of these	56%

3.3 Characteristics of children participating in focus groups and interviews

The selection of locations where focus groups and interviews were conducted was influenced
by the national presence of Save the Children and SOS Children's Villages in particular EU
Member States, and interest and availability of the Platform members. Save the Children and
SOS Children's Villages as well as the Platform members who signed up for consultation
activities were responsible for carrying out focus groups and interviews with children and
preparing the reports summarising the focus group and interview activities and discussions.

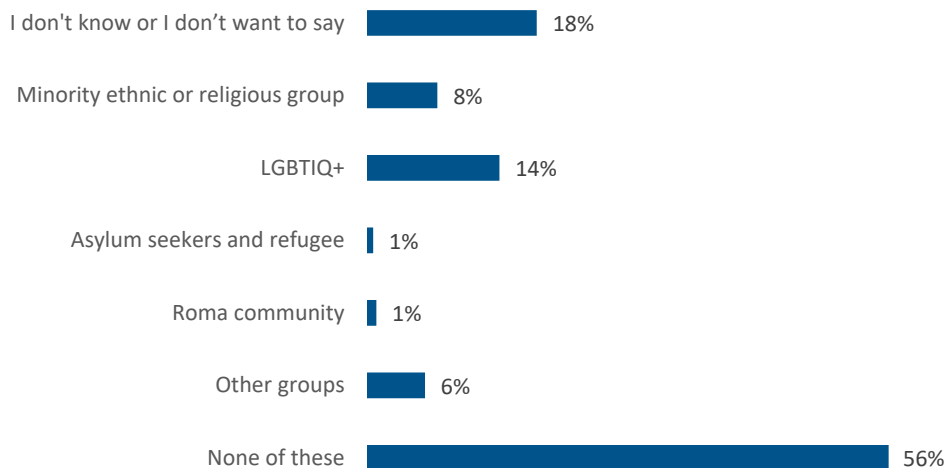### 3.3.1 Characteristics of children taking part in focus groups

There was a **mix of online and offline focus group consultations**. Reasons for this include
the availability of space, the logistics of travelling to locations for children and children's
preferences. The consultations taking place during the summer holidays likely had an impact.
The children involved across the 11 Member States represented a wide variety of ages,
geographic locations, backgrounds and experiences; a few had or were currently involved in
additional child's rights groups. **A total of 162 children aged 8 to 17 participated** and most
consultations involved **children between the ages of 12 and 17**. Of these 162 children, 89
children participated in 12 focus groups in Germany and 73 children participating in 11 focus
groups in other EU member states.

Focus groups took place across **11 EU member states** (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark,
France, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal and Romania).

In focus groups conducted in Germany nearly the same number of girls and boys participated, however, in focus groups conducted in other Member States, there was an unequal gender balance, with a total of 23 boys and 44 girls. A further 6 are unknown[9].

Across the different Member States, **children from vulnerable backgrounds were consulted** and were present in 22 out of 23 focus groups. The following vulnerable backgrounds were represented in the following amount of focus groups: children living in or with experience in alternative care (15), (history of) living with violence (4)[10], (history of) living with poverty (4), living in a city (8), children from ethnic minorities (2), children from remote rural areas (8), with disabilities, from religious groups, Roma children (1) and asylum seekers and refugees (3). When appropriate, the report includes information on children's vulnerable backgrounds.

Some organisations managed to organise focus groups with specific groups of children, including a focus group with Roma children in Hungary and four focus groups across Bulgaria, Croatia, France and Portugal with all children participating having an experience or currently living in alternative care.

3.3.2   Characteristics of children taking part in interviews

There was a **mix of online and offline interview consultations**. Reasons for this include the availability of space, the logistics of travelling to locations for children and children's preferences. A total of **37 interviews[11] took place**. These interviews took place across **8 Member States** (Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Romania). Children involved in the interview consultations represented a wide variety of ages, geographic locations, backgrounds, experiences; some had previous knowledge of children's rights and participation. Participating children were **aged 11 to 17**; the majority of children were aged between 15 and 17.

There were significantly more girls involved than boys; in total 16 girls and 9 boys. However, there are 11 children that did not provide information about their gender and so further comments on the gender ratio are not possible.

Across the different Member States, **children with vulnerable backgrounds were consulted. Nearly all children had at least one type of vulnerable background**. Children from the following backgrounds were represented: children in alternative care, children living in a city, children living in rural or remote areas, children who experienced abuse, violence and neglect, children living at risk of and in poverty, children from ethnic and religious minorities and Roma children. Children from the aforementioned vulnerable backgrounds were represented and included in the reporting summary when appropriate.

3.3.3   Reporting

Reporting styles varied across the Member States, though most consultation reports provided:

- an overview of the backgrounds of the children involved in focus groups and interviews,

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[9] The six unknown children referred to here are from the Bulgarian SOS Children's Villages consultation, with children aged 12 to 17 years.

[10] Appears in four focus groups.

[11] In total, 37 interviews were conducted but findings from one interview are not included in the analysis due to confidentiality. The team is still awaiting confirmation from Ireland, for the moment we do not count Ireland in the analysis.

- ■ a summary of the consultative processes and approaches taken, and
- ■ an overview of the responses to the research questions.

Reports also provided an evaluation of and feedback on the consultation process itself through feedback forms verbal discussion and drawings where appropriate.

Summary tables providing an overview of the characteristics of children participating in interviews and focus groups are presented below (Table 2 and 3).

Table 2 Characteristics of children participating in focus groups

Member State	Date, location and format	Number of children	Age	Gender	Vulnerabilities /disadvantages
Bulgaria	1 FG. 29th September, in-person, 60 minutes	6	12 – 17	boys and girls unknown mix	All 6 children in alternative care, all 6 children living in a city.
Croatia	1 FG. 23rd September, in-person, 1 hour 40 minutes.	5	14 – 17	2 boys; 3 girls	Children from alternative care, history of abuse and neglect in their biological families, (history of) living in poverty,
	1 FG. 23rd September, online format. 1hour 30 minutes.	4	16 – 17	2 boys: 2 girls	N/A
Cyprus	1 FG. 29th September, online, 1hour 30 minutes.	8	15 – 17	4 boys: 4 girls	1 child with a disability.
Denmark	1 FG. 2nd October, in-person at a school. 1 hour 15 minutes.	6	14-15	1 boy: 5 girls	Ethnic minority, living in a city.
France	1 FG. 27th September, Online, 30 minutes.	5	9 – 16	2 boys: 3 girls	2/5 from a religious group, all 5 in child protection care.

Member State	Date, location and format	Number of children	Age	Gender	Vulnerabilities /disadvantages
Germany	12 FGs, in-person conducted in 9 different locations across Germany[12]	89	42 children aged 8 to 12 years 47 adolescents aged 13 to 17 years	Equal split between girls and boys	2 focus groups with unaccompanied migrant children (umA - "unbegleitete minderjährige Ausländer")
Hungary	1 FG. 23rd September, in-person, 60 minutes.	10	13 – 17	5 boys: 5 girls	9/10 from the Roma community, all (History of) living with violence, all (history of) living with poverty, all living in remote rural location.
Lithuania	1 FG. 18th September, in-person, 1 hour 30 minutes.	12	12 - 17	4 boys: 8 girls	Most from vulnerable backgrounds: low-income, poverty, living with poverty, living with violence
The Netherlands	1 FG. 28th September, online, approx. 1 hour 30 minutes.	3	15 – 17	1 boy; 2 girls	Asylum seekers and refugee, poverty, living with violence
Portugal	1 FG. 22nd September, in-person	4	11 – 14	1 boy: 3 girls	All: children in alternative care, All: Ethnic minorities

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[12] Focus groups were conducted between January and September 2023 as part of a regular consultation with children. These focus group discussions serve to evaluate the programmes and to find out about problems and wishes of children. Child protection is an important topic of these discussions, and as such, the consultation report included findings from 12 focus group discussions.

Member State	Date, location and format	Number of children	Age	Gender	Vulnerabilities /disadvantages
Romania	1 FG. 25th September, online, approx. 1 hour 30 minutes.	10	15 – 17	1 boy: 9 girls	All: living in a city.

Table 1 Characteristics of children participating in interviews

Member State	Date, location and format	No of children	Age	Gender	Vulnerabilities /disadvantages
Bulgaria	4 interviews. All on the 28th September and were in-person, lasting between 25 and 30 minutes.	4	12,14,16,17	Boys and girls unknown mix	All: children in alternative care, living in a city
Croatia	5 interviews. Took place between the 17th and 27th September, lasting approximately 30 minutes. Three interviews took place online, two were in-person	5	15, 15, 16, 16, 17	1 boy: 4 girls	Alternative care, History of abuse and neglect in their biological families, including living in poverty.
Denmark	1 interview. 3rd October and lasted 45 minutes. In-person	1	14	1 boy	Ethnic and religious minority, Living in a city
Hungary	5 interviews. Held between 13th and 29th September, online, lasting between 30 and 35 minutes.	5	16, 15, 15, 15, 16	4 boys: 1 girl	3/5: Roma community, all: care experience, 2/5 living in a city, 3/5 living in remote and rural locations, (3/5) previously living with violence.
Italy	3 interviews. All on 29th September, were in-person and all together lasted around three hours.	3	15, 15, 16	3 girls	Low income, living with adopted family, rural

Member State	Date, location and format	No of children	Age	Gender	Vulnerabilities /disadvantages
Lithuania	2 interviews. Took place on the 13th and 14th September; both online. The interviews lasted around 40 minutes.	2	15, 15	1 boy: 1 girl	1 minority group.
The Netherlands	2 interviews. All took place on the 29th September and were held in-person, lasting around 45 minutes.	2	15, 15	1 boy: 1 girl	1/2 with youth care experience, 1/2 living with violence.
Romania	7 interviews.	7	15 – 17 unknown specific ages of children	1 boy: 6 girls	All: living in a city
	7 interviews. took place between the 27th and 28th September and were all carried out online on Zoom, lasting between 30 to 40 minutes.	7	11 - 16	Boys and girls, unknown mix	Religious group, living in remote rural locations, living in a city
Sweden	1	1	N/A	N/A	N/A

4 Children's views on how to better protect them from violence

This section reports on findings and outlines the key recommendations provided across all consultation activities with children. The recommendations include both explicitly stated recommendations, as well as extrapolated ones based on the experiences or implicit statements the consulted children made. The structure of this section is aligned with actions, measures and activities across a range of thematic areas:

- Being listened to and being respected and taken seriously.

- Early identification of issues and prevention.

- Getting support before the situation or the problem gets worse.

- Continuation of access to support.

- Information sharing, training and communication between adults. Information available for children. Working together and coordination, having processes in place.

In addition to these thematic recommendations presented above, children provided recommendations aligned with two horizontal aspects:

- Keeping children safe in the online / digital environment; and,

- Providing mental health support to children.

Analysis and recommendations related to these two horizontal themes are included under theme 'Working together and coordination, having processes in place'.

This section builds on the comparative analysis and synthesis of the online survey results and consultation reports shared by organisations conducting consultation activities with children. The Platform team analysing and synthesising evidence reported in all consultation reports and responses from the online survey, made every effort to provide an objective and comprehensive overview of all findings from across all countries where consultations were conducted. However, we acknowledge that the absolute number of focus group and interview discussions differed between countries; there were more focus groups and interviews organised in Germany, Romania and Croatia than in other Member States. In addition, the breadth, length and method of presentation of findings in consultation reports varied significantly[13]. Some reports were more factual, others were more analytical. In addition, the length of reports also varied greatly. Consequently, findings from some countries and groups of children may be presented more broadly than others.

Furthermore, during discussions, children also prioritised and were keener to discuss specific themes. This uneven level of detail is reflected in this summary report.

Children's feedback about the 'keep, start and stop doing' has been integrated into relevant thematic and horizontal sections.

When citations are used, these refer to specific words and sentences used by children (in the survey as well as during interviews and focus groups) and to paragraphs from the consultation reports. On

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[13] These variations in report presentation (as well as being due to the authors writing style), may have been influenced by the ages of the children participating (the level of discussion and willingness to provide concrete suggestions), the level of experiences children had experienced and therefore the breadth of what they spoke about, and whether the conversation was a general one (discussing multiple areas and therefore applicable throughout the sections) or whether they focus on a specific aspect of safety, such as public spaces, online environment or health.

some occasions it was not feasible to clearly identify characteristics of a specific child who shared a thought (e.g. child's gender, age etc.) In such instances, a more generic description is used, e.g. 'child' and the country name.

Regarding the recommendations, it should be noted that due to their experiences and backgrounds, such as particular socio-economic characteristics (in alternative care, living in poverty, and living with violence) some children also identified specific issues that may have been already resolved among other groups of children. Recommendations related to specific vulnerabilities experienced by children have been included in the thematic and horizontal sub-sections.

Despite their differences, **all children want to and deserve to grow-up safely, without fear and the recommendations reflect this**. As stated in the Italian report detailing three interviews with girls from vastly different backgrounds and individual life experiences, the three girls '*did not show particular inclinations or distinctions in their answers. Certainly, each of them highlighted different aspects but still not too distant from the others'*.

4.1 Children mentioned people and places with whom and where they feel safe

It should be noted that many of the people and places referred to in Section 4.1, in particular common experiences and elements such as teachers, family and caregivers and the importance of their behaviour, appear in later sections of the report; Section 4.1 seeks to outline these individuals and places, and where relevant, later sections develop these further. As such, some repetition is unavoidable.

4.1.1 Children are most likely to seek help from family or relatives

Children responding to **the online survey** believed that **the best way to find information about help and support was by talking to someone personally** (63%). Internet was the second most common method to find information about help, with 17% of children selecting so (see Figure 10). The large gap between the share of children indicating these two methods is noteworthy as it indicated that children prefer in-person information provision rather than online.

When broken down into two age categories (ages 11 years and under, and ages 12 years and above), similar patterns were shown where most children believed talking to someone was the best way to find information about help and support (80% of younger children and 62% of children aged 12 years and above respectively).

Figure 10.   Where do you think children can find information about help and support? N=874

Legend:
- Talking to someone personally (e.g. family, teachers)
- Telephone helplines
- Text helplines
- Magazines, leaflets, posters
- Websites
- Internet forums
- Other, please specify

Values shown: 63%, 5%, 2%, 17%, 9%, 2%
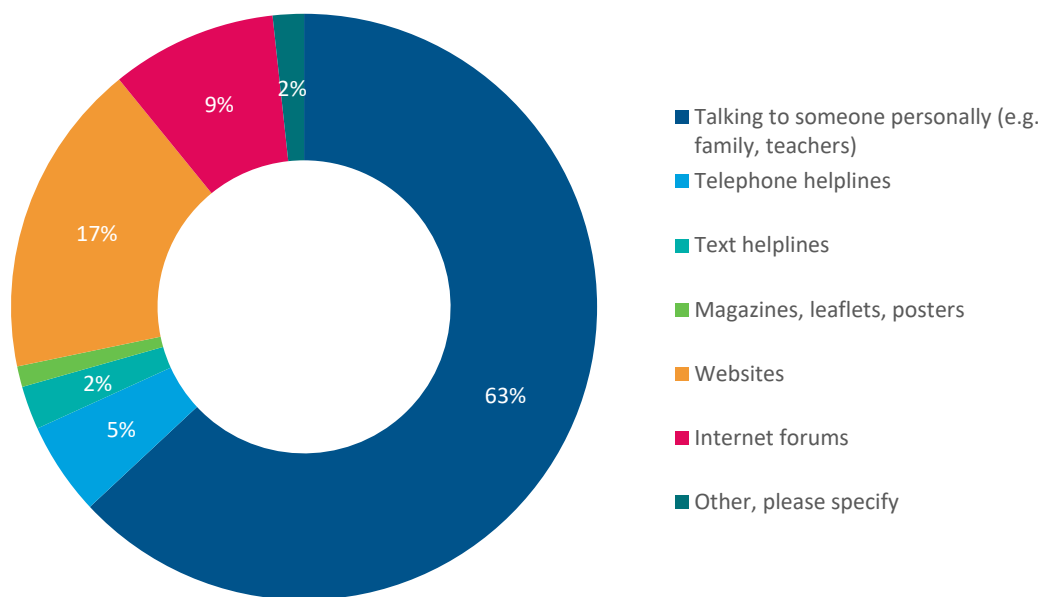
When asked more specifically who they would seek help from, children participating in the online survey indicated that they were **most likely to get help from family or relatives (74%), closely followed by friends (68%)** (this was a multiselect question and children could select several options) (see Figure 11). When this was broken down by age (children aged 11 and under, and 12 and over), family and/or relatives continued to be the most sought out contact to seek help.

Figure 11.   Who do you think children are most likely to seek help from? N=896

Category	Overall	Ages 11 years and under	Ages 12 years and older
Family, relatives	74%	75%	74%
Guardian / legal representative / carer / care staff	27%	25%	27%
Friends	68%	41%	71%
Teachers and educators (e.g., school teachers, sports coaches)	34%	39%	34%
Health staff (e.g., doctors, nurses)	13%	16%	12%
Social services staff	11%	14%	11%
Social/youth workers	13%	19%	13%
World leaders, government in my country	2%	4%	2%
Other places, please name them	2%	3%	1%
I don't know	3%	5%	3%

4.1.2 School

Schools are places where children spend a lot of time and where feeling safe is necessary

School is one of the places in which children spend the most time, and feeling safe at school is necessary. School was discussed extensively in the focus groups and interviews. Children tended to feel safe in school when they felt listened to and had their needs respected (i.e., when the teachers had enough time to listen to them, protect them and respected them in their interactions; when their health was looked after (mental and physical); and, when they were provided an education in a safe environment. For instance, children in the focus group and interviews in Croatia[14] agreed that:

> *'They generally feel secure and safe in their youth facilities, at school and when attending free time activities, know who they can turn to for help if they feel insecure or that their safety is threatened'.* (Consultation report from Croatia)

Further, children interviewed in Romania shared that they feel safe in school as:

> *'They are supported while doing their activities, listened to by their parents/guardians or professors and also when they are trusted by adults in general. In this way they can open up to show more of their knowledge, to speak up and to express their feelings regarding their particular situations during their childhood.'* (Interviews in Romania)

> However, the facilitator noted that there were differences in children's opinion on this[15]: *'Some of the participating children feel safe at school, if there are teachers, guardians, accompanying adults around or friends they can trust, while some of them mentioned that they don't feel safe at school.* (Interviews in Romania)

An **unsafe school environment** means not meeting basic **need such as hygiene and health, inadequate educational provisions**, and **bullying.** In **one consultation** for example[16], children mentioned:

> *'Some cases of **non-acceptable educational methods**, when the teacher could not get their attention, they threw their keychain at the children. One child told the group that **his bag was stolen** just last week in the school. There are **mice/rats** in the school building, from which the children are afraid of. Other issues they mentioned were the **hygiene** here as well, the **community** – some of them are exiled and bullied by older kids. They raised some concerns that the teachers don't provide enough help for children who are behind in their knowledge, and they can't keep up with the classes.'* (Focus Group in one consultation country)

Teachers are seen as playing an important role in ensuring children's safety

Teachers play a vital role in schools' safety; up to **and including head teachers and principals** fostering a positive and trusting atmosphere. For example, some of the children from the focus group[17] said that *'the head class teacher makes them feel safe (he/she listens to the children, gives advice on certain things and takes action if needed)'.* In Romania, interviewed children said their school environment was safe as they could **rely on their friends and teachers**. School as a safe place due to teachers listening, providing respect and helping children both with school and personal

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[14] These consultations involved children who all lived in alternative care.

[15] This is elaborated on in greater detail in Section 4.2, which deals with trust and respect.

[16] This is based on a focus group discussion with children from the Roma community living in poverty, with experience of violence, in rural areas. As this is a sensitive issue, we are not naming the country.

[17] Roma community children living in poverty, with experience of violence, in rural areas. Children in this focus group disagreed on the safety they felt in school; some had positive experiences and others felt very unsafe. As this is a sensitive issue, we are not naming the country.

matter was consistent across multiple consultations; it is elaborated on in later sections (see Section 4.2).

Children **do not always want teachers to be involved in conflicts between peers**, instead desiring space to resolve the conflict between themselves. For instance, one of the children interviewed in Hungary, described a 'safe situation' as their day-to-day school experience. The facilitator recorded this situation, stating:

> *'There are conflicts, but they are always resolved within the community, they prefer if no teacher is involved. If a teacher enters the conflict, it becomes biased, and the children should be able to learn how to resolve these situations. It was very interesting for me that he brought up such an unusual situation when talking about feeling safe. But we can see that the role of teachers is also an issue here. These conflicts are later not discussed among the children and the teachers also do not talk about it'.* (Interview in Hungary)

Younger children seem to desire teachers to be involved in conflict resolution to a greater extent than older children, however, the responses did vary. For example, the facilitator of the interviews with Bulgarian children concluded:

> *'As intersection point from all 4 interviews, I can conclude that the school is one of the main environments where the children can feel safe and at the same time, there are conflict situations in which they prefer to resolve the issue by themselves and as a last resort to seek help from teachers. Older children have built better skills to feel safe through extracurricular activities or friendships. Younger children recognized the conflict at school as a situation where they do not feel safe'* and believed that teachers *'should be more perceptive of the interactions between classes and during breaks'.* (Interviews in Bulgaria)

Experiences of bullying as a key component of schools' safety

Whether children experienced or were aware of bullying incidents was often noted as a key component in how children viewed schools' safety. For instance, children in Romania felt that school was not a safe place as they faced significant **bullying and cyberbullying**. And although these children have groups of friends and feel safe within these, they still viewed the school environment as unsafe. A similar sentiment was shared in a focus group where Cypriot children stated that to improve ICPS, ***'more needs to be done to look at reasons for bullying and address the issue'.***

Children experienced **bullying both from peers in their age groups and older children**; while discussing schools, the Romanian children shared that they fear being targeted by older children who may bully or judge them for their appearance, manner of speaking, and behaviour[18].

In addition to teachers' presence and influence, children also felt safer from bullying when they were in a group of friends, as *'that way they don't worry that something bad could happen to them.'* (Interviews in Romania).

Mixed views on the presence of non-teacher adults

As well as teachers, the **presence of other authority figures in schools** was viewed as **both positive and negative**, depending on the children's experience. Children interviewed in Romania said that the '*presence of the bodyguard or the policeman is a sign they are in the correct place'[19].* Other interviews[20] carried out with Romanian children also found that they felt **safer with the presence of enforcers,** as it provides them a sense of comfort and safety, knowing that they are watched and protected in the event of any conflict or danger.

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[18] A particular example involved a high school student who was 'much older' than the interviewee.

[19] These children lived in a city.

[20] Two organisations carried out interviews in Romania and published their reports separately. Discussion of enforcers in school was included in both reports.

> *'Seeing police around the city makes me feel safe, the security guard at school, teachers, cleaning ladies they make me feel safe at school'* (girl from Romania[21])

However, in the same series of interviews, some of the Romanian children[22] **disliked the presence of enforcers** and were *'bothered by the strict security guards who check them at the school entrance'*.

Likewise, the **presence of additional security measures can be both intrusive and reassuring.** Children interviewed in Romania expressed this difference of opinion; The high fences of the school yard, windows protection, CCTV cameras make some children feel safe, while some others find this discomforting, it makes them worry more that something it is going to happen, to wonder why they need 'extra protection'. Moreover, extra protection rules in schools are appreciated by some children, they relate this to discipline and safety, while others find them overly intrusive.

However, **the presence of additional non-enforcer staff tends to be seen as positive**; The focus group with Lithuanian children agreed on a list of staff in schools that made them feel safe. It included social workers, teachers, deputies and principals. Children also suggested **increasing the number of staff and dedicated roles to provide better safeguarding**. For example, children in the Romanian focus group explained that their school counsellor is stretched too thin over too many schools, and so is in each one for a very limited amount of time. They do not trust him, and they need an adult who wants to fight for their rights and to solve their problems.

4.1.3 Home

Children feel safe at home when it is a stable and secure place

The '**home**' was frequently discussed in both the focus groups and interviews across the Member States as a place that children frequent and feel safe (and unsafe) in. This is in its capacity as both **a location** and as a **place of 'family'** (biological, adopted and fostered).

A safe home is one where there is **stability**; Children from the Netherlands said that a safe home is stable: they defined this as '*no worries about money issues, one parent or caregiver who's always available for the children and having a brother or sister you can go to'*. This also makes clear the **need for an adult caregiver to offer support in the home,** a sentiment shared by children participating in the Romanian focus group defined a safe home as a place where a care giver is able to provide support (see Section 4.2 for more detail).

The lack of a caregiver figure can make children feel unsafe

In Romanian interviews, safe spaces were:

> *'They mentioned about the context of being single at **home**. This space is not so safe for them because they are feeling vulnerable – if their parents answer the phone, even if they are alone, it feels more comfortable than the opposite situation'.* (Interviews in Romania)

In Denmark, children identified '***family and friends'*** as one of the four key 'spaces' that children go to and feel safe. Adults can help children identify what they can do if they feel bad and show them what they do themselves. However, they noted that it can be difficult to talk to their parents. It helps to talk to people who have been through the same as you have.

Children also value **boundaries and a home where they can relax** (see Section 4.2 for more detail)**.**

Children like having a space on their own

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[21] This is from a series of interviews conducted by a different organisation to the interviews referenced earlier in the paragraph.

[22] No further detail is available regarding the cause of a specific attitude towards enforcers.

A **space to call their own** is also seen as a safe place; this was identified by children interviewed in Romania, who stated when listing locations that they felt safe in, they identified '*at home with their parents*' and '*home in his/her room*' as separate places. This is likely due to the interviewed children's different relationships with their families. The country report explains:

> '*Some participating children feel safe at home with their parents, making abstract of the neighbourhood they live in, while some others did not feel safe due to some extra factors, like neighbours; they feel the need to take extra caution even when their parents/ accompanying adults/ siblings are with them at home.*' (Interviews in Romania)

This is also emphasised by children who participated in the Dutch focus group: '*in the home, (*among other factors), *what works is a place where you can retreat (your room), and what is needed is your own space*' (Focus group in the Netherlands)*.*

Financial stability in families is important for children's sense of security

The Dutch focus group also stressed the importance of **financial stability** in creating a safe environment. As mentioned above, children consulted in the Netherlands said that a safe home is a stable one, with '***no worries about money issues…*'** as a component of stability. The Dutch focus group emphasised this further by stating that (among other factors) '*what **works in the family** is not money issues, what doesn't work is having money issues and what is needed is finical support*'. Likewise, when discussing the **requirements for a safe home,** '*what works is financial stability, and what is needed is financial support*' (among other factors).

For some children home is not a safe place

However**, homes can also be a place of danger and fear**; Children participating in the focus group and interviews in Croatia, saw the home as having the potential to be the greatest threat to their safety. The report states:

> '*What was noticeable and can be attributed to the fact they are placed in alternative care, were the situations they were pointing out as examples, especially in the interviews were the were describing from their life in their biological family as situations they felt the biggest threat to their security and wellbeing.*' (Consultation report from Croatia)

Children from these same consultations, identified school, and homes as the two areas where they felt the most **unsecure and unprotected**. The 'home' was '*connected to the situation they experienced in life with their biological families, where they were neglected and abused, and felt they **did not receive the necessary support and protection on time***.' (See 4.3 and 4.4).

4.1.4 Alternative care settings

It should be noted that the above 'home' section does discuss alternative care in some capacity, as what is required in a home with biological parents is also necessary in alternative care situations. Further, some of the above comments and requirements were made by children in alternative care.

Children with experience of alternative care settings shared views about their understanding of home

Children across multiple consultations actively recognised and discussed **alternative care,** such as **institutions** as places that children frequent and should feel safe in. For example, children in the Croatian focus group said that '*adults help keep children safe, namely youth facility leader and youth educators in the SOS youth facility, teachers, psychologist and pedagogue in school and teachers and trainers during their free time activities.*'

It is important that children in alternative care have places that they can turn to and trust. Children who participated in the Dutch consultations also highlighted institutions as an important place to help children feel safe; Under this heading the children included:

> '*Municipality who helps children, Police, Veilig Thuis (organisation called Safe at home); and Leger des Heils (Salvation Army, organisation who helps people in troubled situations)'* (Consultation report from the Netherlands)

One focus group with vulnerable children[23] highlighted key areas in homes and group dormitories where **child safety is adequate (the calmness, being listened to and private spaces)** and areas that must be improved, namely **providing children with clean and hygienic living spaces, and to foster a culture with no bullying.** The facilitator recorded this as:

> '*Regarding home/dormitory, they said that they feel safe, because **it's a calm place (especially when everyone is asleep), they feel listened to/heard, and they have a private area where the doors can be closed**. They feel unsafe, because of the* [lack of] ***hygiene** in the dormitory: the **sick children are not provided separate rooms** and the bed sheets are not washed after them. Also, there are **bugs** in the rooms and the common areas. They reported that sometimes different groups of children are **bullying** younger ones, which also makes them feel unsafe'.* (Consultation report from a Member State)

> '*It is good that I live here now, I really like it – I have a place where I can play football and go home afterwards'.* (12-year-old boy from Bulgaria)

> '*I know I'm safe here [in the foster family] because my foster mom told me many times that she is worried about me'. (16-year-old girl from Romania)*

Foster parents provide children with a sense of safety

Some consulted children provided details specific to their foster or adoptive care situation. For example, a feeling of **greater safety not living in a city**. Two of the interviewed children in Bulgaria shared that they feel more secure living with their foster parents in a smaller town as they are able to walk to school and play outside without worrying that '*something bad could happen'* to them.

There is a common theme of **children feeling safer in alternative care settings, (in particular foster situations) than in their biological parents' care[24] or children's homes**; it is **necessary to ensure that provisions are in place to move children out from their family homes, at least temporarily, if unsafe**. For example, as mentioned above, some consulted children associated their biological families' homes as a source of danger, feeling that '*they did not receive the necessary support and protection on time.'* Furthermore, two of the five children interviewed in another Member State[25] interpreted a 'safe situation' as the process of getting to their current foster families, and the period after that as a continuous 'safe feeling'. The reasons for this greater feeling of safety were also relayed.

One of the interviewed children felt **safer as there were fewer people in the family** compared to the children's home he was staying earlier. In the children's home, there were **older children who would bully them** in the yard; this is no longer a problem. Furthermore, having **a bond with the foster parents is very important**:

> '*He says that the foster parents really do love him and not only say that they do… In his opinion, it helped a lot that they previously knew the foster parents and had an emotional bond[26] with them before they got placed to their family'.* (Interviews in one Member State country).

The child also felt safe because the foster parents **offered the option of regular sports classes**. The child also found it '*much easier to explain in new environments that he lives in a foster family compared to the group home'.*

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[23] Roma community children living in poverty, with experience of violence, in rural areas.

[24] In one of the interviews, the greater feeling of safety applied to both leaving the biological family and leaving the institution; greater safety was felt once they were in a foster situation.

[25] Roma community children living in poverty, with experience of violence, in alternative care settings living rurally.

[26] See also section 3.2.1 where 'trust and respect' are discussed.

The child did offer some recommendations to make group homes safer for children; stating **'that smoking and drugs should be banned and school visitation for older children should be monitored more strictly (in group homes).'** (Interviews in one Member State country).

In the other interview, it is apparent that the **foster homes need to be chosen and vetted appropriately** and **caregivers should express concern and care for their charges**. The female child was placed with a foster family as her family of origin was a physically abusive environment, perpetrated by the paternal figure. The child expressed that:

> *'It helps a lot that now the foster parent is a single woman and there is no partner involved. She said it helps a lot that the foster mom is not drinking any alcohol and **told the children that she is worried about them**. In her opinion, the dormitory and the school are both safe, but because of her past, the **male educators are strange for her**.'* (Interview in with one Member State country).

4.1.5 Peer groups and friends

Children across the consultations saw their peer groups and friends as 'safe places'.

Talking to friends helps children to feel and be kept safe

For example, children who participated in the Romanian focus group agreed that they felt safe, listened to and helped when they were with their friends. Friends are also empathetic and the '*fear of losing them is not present*' (Focus group in Romania see also Section 4.2). Likewise, children form the Lithuanian focus group agreed that children's safety among family and friends is ensured by the family itself, however their '***closest friends also help children to feel safe in the family***' (Focus group in Lithuania).

> *'A 15-year-old boy mentioned that he feels safe with his team mates during their basket (ball) trainings because they trust each other since they were younger, they can freely express themselves without being judged by them or different people, they can enjoy food together can they care have a great time talking about age related topics such as school topics, sports, video games'.* (Consultation report from Romania)

> *'A 15-year-old girl said that 'safety is interconnected with the people around me and their behaviour. Feeling included makes a huge difference''.* (Consultation report from Romania)

Younger children appear to rely on adults to a greater extent, while older children will also turn to their friends. The facilitator for the Romanian interviews remarked that '*Younger children feel safer in the spaces where there are adults around, which is not the case for older ones, where they feel as safe as being with their peers as with their parents/ other adults.*' This is echoed by the German facilitator:

> *'One focus for children and young people is the question of who the right people are when they have problems. It can be seen that **from around the age of 12, the importance of the peer group increases.** When there were problems before, the carers were in charge of the children. But as you get older, your peers become more and more important.*' (Focus group in Germany)

Because of the growing importance of peers in child safety as children age, the facilitator for Germany raised the need to expand training courses for children so that they are able to act and cope when they are told secrets by their friends. (See also 4.6.1)

However, **regardless of whether the children are younger or older, they still require a wide safety network, and the preference can vary from child to child.** In the Danish consultations there was some disagreement between how much they wanted to share with friends, or if they wanted to talk to their family instead. One person would go to friends with issues, while the rest felt that their friends could not solve their issues. Most agreed that while talking to friends does help and

they are a valuable resource, it is not sufficient. Additionally, some recognised that some secrets can be large burdens to put on their friends and that additional help is necessary to shoulder it.

4.1.6 At activities (after school activities, clubs)

Afterschool activities and sports were regularly identified by children as a 'place' that they frequent, and often feel safe during these activities. Children in the Croatian focus group for example, elected three areas where children are kept safe well and choose '*the SOS Youth facility, school and free time activities (sports, arts and crafts…)'.*

The presence of staff, family and/or guardians contributed to children feeling safe. For instance, children in Bulgarian consultations recognised '*extracurricular activities and fun activities (swimming pools, park), sport facilities'* as places that they frequent; while there they always have **an adult** (foster parents, social worker, pedagogue, teacher) accompany them. Likewise, the children from the Lithuanian focus group agreed that **social workers and older children** attending centres help children feel safe in daycare centres and during afternoon activities. During the Romanian interviews, some of the children chose the dance club, children's debate conference and sports training centre as places where they felt especially safe. Furthermore, when discussing their hobbies in general, most of the children tended to feel safe during their hobbies when there is an adult who guides them, a trainer, a parental figure or an adult they can trust; these activities included dance club, basketball court, with volleyball team, conferences and book clubs.

It is **important that the children know which adult they can seek help from at a given activity**. Children consulted in Croatia generally agreed that they felt secure and safe in their youth facilities, at school and when attending free time activities, as they know who they can turn to for help if they feel insecure or that their safety is threatened.

4.1.7 Online 'internet space'

The online 'space' and internet was a reoccurring theme across Member States and was discussed in at least five of them (Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark the Netherlands and Romania). There was definitive interest and engagement in the topic: For example, in Demark, children viewed 'online', as one of four places that children frequent the most. It was also identified as a 'space' children spend time in by Croatian children, in two focus groups and interviews. Children in the Bulgaria focus groups were 'very interested in online access and communication in social media'.

Online safety is viewed differently depending on the age of the child

In a Croatian focus group, the children disagreed when discussing their different experiences in online safety and security. The facilitator attributed this disagreement to the differences in age (14 to 17)[27].

Children are aware that social media can contribute to bullying

Children interviewed in Romania discussed **social media** with contrasting views on how to cope with online comments. Some children felt safe as they did not post on social media; if they did, they felt they would have to struggle with worrying about what people such as friends and colleagues may say. Other children said that they simply ignore all the 'opinions'.

Children have some knowledge of online threats and safety issues but need more information to be safe on the internet

Children repeatedly expressed a desire to be provided with more information on how to keep themselves safe on the internet and social media, with a focus on prevention, not mitigation.

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[27] The focus group report provided no further detail on the differences between the children's experiences.

Danish children identified some of the **safety measures** in place on social media. These are: terms of agreements, age limits on apps, and parental guidance on apps. However, **the children desire greater clarity on the use of their personal data** and believe that **children can too easily lie about their age**, thus avoiding age restrictions and can then get access to apps and content that is not appropriate.

During the Bulgarian focus group discussion, the children were very interested in online access and communication in social media. When discussing the online space, **social media specifically was recognised as one of the 'places'** in which they spend time. When prompted about their knowledge of the dangers of browsing the internet and communication on social channels, the children seemed very confident that 'nothing bad could happen to them'. The children had discussed the topic of online safety at home with their foster parents, (who try to limit their time in internet), and with the social workers in SOS FS Facility, and at school as well.

However, based on this discussion, the facilitator concluded that online browsing is an area that may warrant more attention. Children communicate on several different social channels; **They need to be more aware of the dangers in the online environment** and need to have **more discussions about how to be safe when browsing online.**

The interviewed Romanian children expressed the importance of knowing all the measures they can take to be safe on internet. For example, how to have a 'safe' account on Instagram and Facebook. Likewise, children in the Romanian focus group stated that education on **well-being in the digital environment** is lacking. One of the participants affirmed that he feels unsafe on the internet as '*people with bad intentions are at every corner*' (Boy from Romania). The children believe that **prevention is more important than 'combating',** and the children **want workshops and courses in school to teach them about the possible problems on the internet.**

> '*Children want to be more educated in order not to be victims on the internet and their data to be stolen.*' (Consultation report from Romania)

Children in both the Croatian focus group and interviews agreed that 'online settings' are the second area where they feel most unsecure: they feel that the adults in charge of their safety do not know enough to protect them from possible online threats and abuse; and that children do not know enough to protect themselves online/are not aware of the possible threats. As such, **both adults and children require education and information on online safety.**

4.1.8 Public places

Children have concerns about their safety in public spaces

Children identified and discussed '*public places*' across several Member States (Croatia, Cyprus, the Netherlands and Romania). The identified public spaces included **streets, parks, playgrounds, roads, trams, buses, taxis and general safety**. For instance, a Croatian focus group identified **public spaces as one of the key spaces that children frequent** and chose to discuss it in more detail; this is also the case in several other consultation reports. Unlike at school and in their homes, where children both felt safe and unsafe, depending on their experiences, few consultation reports indicated a feeling of safety in public spaces, tending towards concern, lack of safety and insecurity.

Children in some Member States agreed that there is a general **lack of spaces where young people can socialise and feel safe**. In some places, there are centres for children, but not everywhere. Furthermore, children interviewed in Romania **showed anger and sadness while speaking about their safety in public spaces**, especially the city environment. Most of them expressed a particular concern talking about public spaces such as parks, streets, and bus stops where they can be a target for adults.

While only mentioned once, Croatian children identified **exploited children in public places (begging),** as an area where the topic of children's safety should be addressed.

Girls had more concerns that boys regarding being safe in public places

There is a **gendered dimension** to safety in public spaces; In public spaces, girls tended to feel more unsafe than boys; In Croatia, many of the young girls feel insecure in the presence of adult men on the street, especially in the evening.

> '*No one reacts anymore when an adult behaves inappropriately towards a child in a public place, which contributes to the feeling of insecurity in such an environment.*' (Consultation report from Croatia)

In Romania, of the seven children interviewed by one organisation, the participating girls felt more unsafe on public spaces such as pedestrian streets and bus stops among others, than the boys.

> '*It should be ensured that there are bus lines that will run throughout the night, especially on weekends. Young girls do not feel safe in a taxi at night, so this should be taken into account.*' (17-year-old child from Croatia)

The quality of **public transport** connections was also raised in the Netherlands; poor public transport connections were seen as contributing to a lack of safety. This could be due to causing the need to walk the streets alone, which the Dutch children also saw as unsafe.

Children do not feel safe on the streets and expressed lack of trust in authorities

Safety on the streets was brought up across multiple consultations and at times elaborated on. Children interviewed in Romania, commented on their (lack of) **trust in authorities[28]:** The children discussed the role of the countries' enforcers and expressed a lack of trust. The children have witnessed many situations in the media where forces such as policemen did '*not act like they were supposed to*'. However, the children would still call the police and other forces in the case of an emergency as they 'do not have another option'. However, this is contrasted by children from the Netherlands' experience, saying that local police officers on the street who are well-known in the neighbourhood increased their feeling of safety. **If the authority figures are well-known, then the police can be seen as increasing safety.**

Street lighting also impacts children's perception of streets; Croatian children agreed that: '***Street lighting in public spaces is very important, so that there are no dark and unlit streets. This can contribute to the feeling of safety in public places.***' Lighting was also discussed in the Netherlands, where the children in the focus group emphasised that good lighting is necessary, and that *poor lighting is not good and does not work* and were concerned about having to walk through dark alleys and parks at nighttime.

Children made suggestions regarding local level decision-making…

Children also discussed **playgrounds and parks** in greater detail: Of the children interviewed in Romania most expressed that they **felt safer in parks when they were younger.** When they were younger, they didn't see themselves as a target of bullying, in danger of physical violence, being mocked or judged, now they do.

> '*I found the park the most fun space when I was younger, now I feel targeted, I find it the most unsafe, I avoid going by myself*'. (13-year-old child from Romania)

The location of parks also matters. In Cyprus, children said that parks and playgrounds should not be built around **'big unsafe roads.'** Furthermore, park lighting can be an important feature to make parks safer, with children from the Netherlands expressing the lack of safety in walking through parks at night. The Dutch children also emphasised the need for '***nice and happy playgrounds for children in asylum centres'.***

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[28] See also in 3.2.1.

Cypriot children said that when in their free time, the '*facilities where they spend time are often in neighbourhoods which are not the safest'*.

To increase safety across all these locations, as well as any measure already discussed, **mobile phone networks need to be improved**. This was raised in the Netherlands as being reachable on your mobile phone increases safety and allows you to call for help when you are in danger.

All of the discussions demonstrate how important the topic of protecting children's safety in different places and in different situations is to children and young people. It is also clear that adults play an extremely important role in creating a safe environment for children and young people.

4.1.9 Health care facilities

Children asked for health professionals to interact with them in a child-friendly way

Health care facilities were identified by two consultations in Croatia and Romania. While the discussions about safety at these locations were quite different, they illustrate the importance and need for child-friendly professionals and facilities; the children interviewed in Romania felt safe during hospital visits as '*nobody would pay attention to them… because everyone is focused on their own activities',* while the Croatia focus group children recommended that healthcare professionals should improve their interactions with children and ensure that the facilities are child friendly.

The Croatian children discussed both healthcare professionals and the premises: All **health professionals that interact with children** (doctors, paediatricians, etcetera) should approach children differently than they do adults. This is very important as it is much more stressful for a child to be in a health facility, and it is important that they feel safe and are helped. Furthermore, the **health facilities should be appropriate for children**; Children feel safer in health institutions when the premises and space are **well-maintained, child-friendly and bright**.

4.1.10   Other

'**Court proceedings'** was identified as a place that children frequent in Croatia, however it was not discussed further.

Place of **work** was identified in at least one of Member States' consultations, as a place that children may frequent. The children identified *'contracts'* as the measure of child safety in place. However, this 'place' was not discussed further in the focus group as only one child had a job.

4.1.11   A feeling/atmosphere (relaxed, calm place)

While some of the above 'spaces' do include a general feeling, some of the children did not anchor their feeling of safety to a location at all, and instead discussed the feeling and atmosphere of being safe. For example, in Romania, the interviewed children were very enthusiastic when speaking about their hobbies and the **spaces where they feel they can be themselves, without judgement and communication barriers**.

Two Bulgarian interviews provided a poignant example of this. Two older children interpreted 'a safe situation' differently. One of them shared that she feels safe when she can do her drawings in a **calm and relaxed atmosphere either at home or at school**. The second girl said that she feels safe **when she can listen to her favourite pop music** (a popular Korean boy band). The facilitator recorded the interactions as follows:

> *'In the first interview, the girl is in a school where the painting is one of the main subjects.* ***She can express herself through her drawings and she feels safe that she is able to do that.*** *Sometimes she feels distracted when there is a lot of noise in the surroundings*

and she prefers to do her paintings when there are less people around her. That is why she uses her free time at home or at school. We discussed that in many cases the school helps her to feel safe as the teachers at her school are helping her to develop her skills and support her in her achievements. She feels in control of her personal wellbeing and development that makes her feel safe and secure for her future.' (Interview in Bulgaria)

*'The second interview was a bit difficult as the girl was very shy and was not ready to share much. I asked her when she feels safe and if she can such situation. She replied **she feels safe when she can listen her favourite pop group** (a popular Korean boy band). I started asking questions in that regard as I saw that this is one of the topic she is very interested in. She shared that with her friends (girls from her school) have a 'fen club' of this band and they shared many things through the band's music. **In a way this is her 'safe place' when she is surrounded by close friends who shared the same passion for music as her'.*** (Interview in Bulgaria)

In one Member State, one of the interviewed children chose Christmas as an example of being safe. The boy expressed that Christmas, (except from one year) was always about love and safety. In his family of origin this was the only occasion when the whole family got together, and no one was arguing. He talked about one occasion when his mom's partner was drunk and spoiled the whole day. He thinks the situation could have been better if **there was no alcohol involved**. He thinks it's the **adults' responsibility to make sure these occasions are safe and happy** – they have to **change their own circumstances** and **way of thinking.**

4.2 Children want adults to respect them, listen to them and take them seriously

4.2.1 Children want adults to trust them and respect them

Most children consulted via interviews and focus groups **associated safety with respect, trust, and being listened to and taken seriously**. When asked what safety means to them and how they understand safety, children in a focus group in Lithuania mentioned *'respect for children's rights'*, and *'support, peace, trust, and happiness'*. Consulted children in Lithuania also distinguished between **physical and psychological safety** and highlighted that these two types of safety go hand in hand. They noted that *'they feel safe, when they can be themselves in any place'*.

Home and family are usually places where children feel safe

Home and family are the first place where children learn to build trust and develop relationships with others. Children consulted via interviews in the Netherlands highlighted the importance of **having a stable home situation** and at least one parent or caregiver that is always available for the child to provide support. These views were echoed by children from Croatia, for whom the feeling of trust and familiar processes in the home environment were important for their feeling of safety.

Similar views were shared with children in a focus group in Lithuania, who noted that they **trust their parents, guardians, and friends**. This sense of security is created by *'communicating respectfully, supporting them and being friendly'*. The interviewed Dutch children also added that they valued having a **good relationship and bond of trust with a brother or sister** who they can go to if needed. Children participating in a focus group in Lithuania added that they would befriend children who do not feel safe and respected in their families to give them a safer atmosphere, and a similar idea was shared by children participating in a focus group in Romania about befriending other children at school.

However, sometimes home is also a place where children experience violence and this harms their sense of trust in adults

Being abused in their family of origin or at a previous placement, children were clear about the advantages for their own safety resulting from a placement in a foster family. This was poignantly expressed by a 16-year-old child from Romania who experienced violence in her biological family. For her, the fact that her foster parent cared for her and expressed their feelings towards her was a clear sign of attachment and respect.

> *'I know I'm safe here* [in the foster family] *because my foster mom told me many times that she is worried about me'.* (16-year-old child from Romania)

Many children have trust in schools and teachers

Schools were also often noted as places where **children experience respect** and **many children had trust in their teachers**. For instance, interviewed older children in Bulgaria considered *'teachers as someone they can trust'*. Similarly, children consulted during a focus group and interviews in the Netherlands specifically called for teachers to be a person that children can trust and be their *'trusty confidential person'*. They asked **teachers to empower children** so they do not feel left out, and for teachers to give children the feeling that they can tell them anything. The **importance of developing and nurturing a relationship** with children based on **trust and mutual cooperation** between adults and children was also emphasised by children in one of the focus groups[29] in Croatia. Children highlighted that willingness to devote time to children and listening to them were vital as were investing in children's empowerment, and capacity and competence building.

But sometimes schools can be an unsafe place for children

However, some **children clearly distinguished and demarcated teachers' responsibilities**. As noted by one interviewed child[30] in Lithuania, in an event of bullying at school, turning to a teacher to seek help would be appropriate but other communication channels and support persons might need to facilitate support in other situations. This was clearly echoed by an interviewed child in Denmark who **distinguished between school-related and personal problems**. He observed that family members and friends may be more relevant for more personal issues.

> *'Children feel that they can go to the school with school problems, but not personal problems. They don't trust the teachers to tell personal stuff, or if they are being bullied – they are worried that the teachers would not act. And they are not close with teachers, so they prefer to talk with friends or family on personal issues.'* (14-year-old boy from Denmark).

A similar conclusion about children not trusting schools was raised by children participating in a focus group and interviews in Romania. As part of a recommendation, the Romanian consultation report from this consultation concluded:

> *'Their* [children's] *voice is not heard sufficiently, and this prevents them from trusting the school as an organism. In many times, their ideas are ignored and they need a protection mechanism so that their right to participate is real and effective'.* (Romanian consultation report)

Children also asked teachers to **show them mutual respect**. This was particularly clearly expressed by **children with experience of alternative care**. In the interviews in one Member State country, most children agreed that teachers should pay more attention to children and be more open and empathetic to their individual situation. This was poignantly expressed by one of the consulted children.

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[29] Focus group 2.

[30] Interview 1.

> *'It's sad and doesn't make any sense that teachers treat children differently who are in alternative care compared to normal kids. We should be treated the same. We are the same, not any less.'* (Child from one Member State country)

Children with experience of inpatient services of SOS Children's Villages (with frequent experience of relationship breakdowns and being heavily stressed) pointed that schools often contribute negatively to their wellbeing. As concluded in the German consultation report:

> *'Children describe it* [school] *as a place in which they can hardly make any decisions and sometimes don't like being there because they always run the risk of being outed as children from the children's village. Teachers also only partially display sensitive behaviour'.* (Focus group in Germany).

Asked what they would start, continue and stop doing if they were the president of Lithuania, one child participating in a focus group noted that *'they would do everything to create more safe and happy families in Lithuania, where children would be loved and happy'*. Whereas older children consulted in a focus group said that *'they would stop promising children what adults cannot do'*. This highlights the importance of adults keeping promises given to children to uphold the relationship of trust and mutual respect.

4.2.2 Children ask adults to listen to children and to take children's voice more seriously

Surveyed children want adults to take time to listen to them patiently and to believe them

Overall, majority of surveyed children agreed that **it is important for adults to listen carefully, take time to listen and be patient, believe children and do something to keep children safe** (see Figure 12)**.** Of the four areas, 94% indicated that it was (very) important for adults to do something to keep them safe. This trend was evident when broken by the two age groups (ages 11 years and under, and ages 12 years and older), by gender and by living situation, as children indicated either a 4 or 5 star rating on importance.

Figure 12.   In your opinion, how important is it for adults to do these things if children tell them they feel unsafe? (N=876)
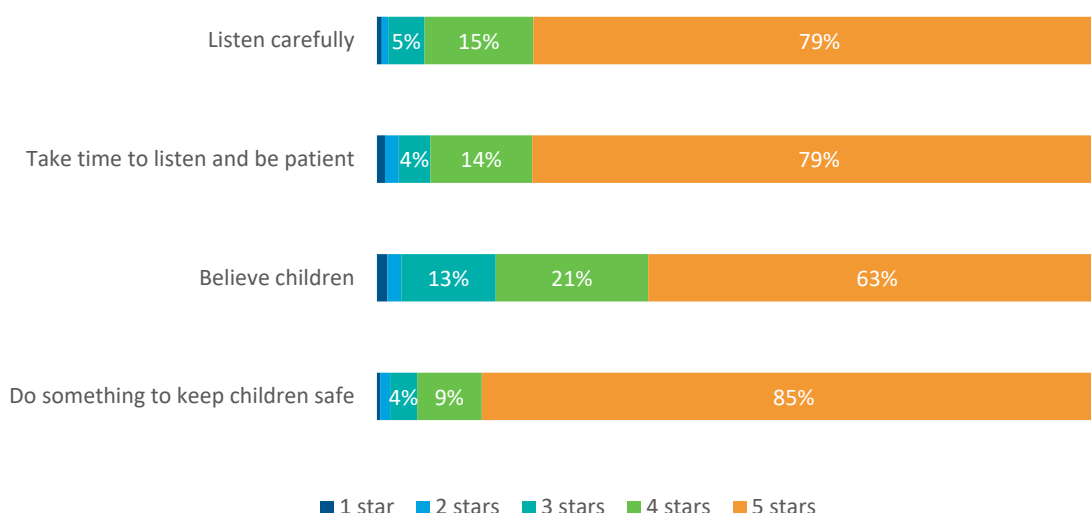
In an open survey question about what adults should stop doing to keep children safe, a few respondents, particularly those aged 11 and under, felt that **adults should stop, as well as prevent others from, inflicting harm on children – be it in the form of physical or verbal abuse.** This

theme was most prominent among responses from Portugal and Romania. Respondents who indicated that they lived with a foster family more frequently mentioned this topic.

The need to engage in communication with children and to start and continue to listen to children was also clearly pointed by children in the open-ended survey questions. Asked about what adults should keep doing to keep children safe, children most commonly reported that adults should **keep talking to children and listening to any concerns or feelings they might have**. It was also stressed that **adults ought to remind children that they can discuss anything they want with them**. As explained by a respondent from Czechia, *'They need to listen because children need to know they can talk to them.'* The theme of maintaining communication with children was more prevalent among responses from EU member states, particularly Ireland, Poland and Portugal. Irish and Portuguese respondents who mentioned talking to children more frequently felt that **adults should focus on making sure that children feel safe when communicating with them**. Interestingly, talking to children received little mention from children aged 11 or under and was most frequently discussed by children aged 14. This topic was more prominent among respondents who indicated that they lived in a single parent household.

There were a few children across countries who felt that adults should **start listening to children more carefully.** Among other things, they reported that this would help adults to gain a **better understanding of children's needs as well as their opinions and any concerns they might have.** With regards to EU member states, respondents from France, Italy and Poland more frequently mentioned this topic. For instance, a respondent from Italy said that *'they should start listening more and they should try to understand the pain the children might feel.'* Proportionally speaking, those aged 11 and under, as well as those living with foster families, mentioned this topic the most.

A few respondents from EU countries, particular those from Ireland and Romania, felt that **adults should aim to engage in communication with children more often**. Various suggestions were made as to the topics that adults could discuss with children, including any issues the child is experiencing and potential solutions, as well as more difficult topics. As stated by one respondent from Romania, *'I think they should start talking freely and honestly to them about subjects that many would consider taboo […] and that we need to be aware of.'* A couple of responses also stated that **increasing the frequency of communication would help to build trust between adults and children.** This theme was reported consistently across all age ranges, however it was more prominent among those who indicated that they lived with one or both parents.

There were a few children, particularly from Croatia and Portugal, who felt that **adults should stop ignoring children and their problems to keep children safe**. Those aged between 15 and 17 mentioned this topic most frequently, however the topic was consistently reported across living situations. As explained by one respondent from Croatia, *'They should stop ignoring what children have to say and actually hear them out.'* They expressed that **adults ought to stop disregarding children who approach them with concerns.** Within this context, a few respondents also felt that **adults should stop downplaying or minimising the problems experienced by children.**

Children appreciate the opportunity to share their views in this consultation

Most children consulted in focus groups and interviews applauded on a fact that the European Union wanted to listen to their opinions through this consultation. Expressions of gratitude and appreciation were common, as exemplified by a boy from Denmark.

> *'It is nice that someone wants to listen to young people'.* (14-year-old boy from Denmark)

One interviewed child from Italy also made a positive comment that the Platform's General Assembly in Brussels promoted linguistic inclusion and listening to children by providing interpretation service[31]. This way, the child could follow and contribute to the discussions, and felt safe.

Listening to children gives children a sense of being supported and accepted

In general, children highlighted that **adults should listen to children more to hear children's voices and to take children's issues seriously. Being listened to provides children with a sense of being supported, accepted and safe**. As noted by interviewed children in Romania, a safe space at home is a place where parents have time to children and do not ignore children despite working hard, listen to children, encourage and support children. It is a place where *'you can sleep in peace'*. Empathetic friends with whom children can speak to without the fear of losing them are also important for children's sense of feeling safe.

Children consulted in focus groups in interviews in Romania noted:

'Adults who are friendly, positive, who have the patience to listen to their [children's] opinions and views, understand their [children's] feelings make the place and activity they are in safer and more accepted'. (Child from Romania).

'Most of the children feel safe when they are supported while doing their activities, listen by their parents/guardians or professors and also when they are trusted by adults in general. In this way they can open up to show more of their knowledge, to speak up and to express their feelings regarding their particular situations during their childhood.' (Child from Romania)

Overall, children feel that parents and teachers listen to them…

Overall, many **children** expressed that they are **listened to by their parents and teachers**, and that this experience provides children with **a sense of psychological safety** and makes a positive impact on their feeling of being safe. Several children provided examples how their family, relatives and friends listen to them and respect their opinions. Children also reported on situations where adults listened to children leading to positive outcomes. For instance, one child interviewed in Lithuania recalled on a situation when they were a witness to bullying at school. The child observed that the teacher reacted promptly giving them their full attention and by listening to each child separately (the victim and the bully), agreeing together on next steps and talking to the children's parents. A similar prompt reaction of adults who listen to children and taken children's needs and their point of view seriously was also observed by one interviewed girl in Italy. As concluded by this girl, this experience was positive *'because from an initial situation of vulnerability we moved on to a situation in which the children felt protected and safe'*. Another interviewed girl from Italy also noted how she and her whole family benefited from **receiving psychological and material support during a difficult experience**. She felt that the support services listened carefully to their needs and provided relevant provisions to help resolve this difficult situation. The girl felt inspired by this experience and she decided to be an educator and work with children when she grows up.

Examples of positive experience were also shared by some children consulted in Romania. The children applauded some teachers who *'take time to listen to them'* as this was important to children to express their views and thoughts and be heard. Another child participating in a focus group in Hungary was also positive about their class teacher noting that this teacher was really caring about children and talking with children about different topics. However, other children in this focus group assessed that the teachers' and educators' role is quite low in general because they do not really care about children and *'only do their necessary job: teach a class or make them write a test'*. Other children participating in a focus group in Hungary also gave examples of children being bullied in school upon which teachers did not react.

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[31] The child received support from an Italian Child Empowerment Officer.

But children want adults to listen to them more and be more proactive in reaching out to children

In fact, **a pledge for adults to listen more to what children have to say was a common trait across all consultation discussions with children. Children also called for more attention and patience from adults to listen to them**. Consulted children across Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Italy, Hungary, the Netherlands and Romania pointed that **families, schools and broader communities are natural places for children to be listened to**.

Consulted children in Romania mentioned that for them to feel safe, it is important that adults listen to their opinions and **make them feel viewed and heard**. Children consulted in a focus group and interviews in the Netherlands, asked **parents to** listen more to children and their ideas, and to **treat children as equal when making decisions**. The Dutch children also highlighted the importance of having *'a place where you are accepted as you are, a place that gives you peace'*. Furthermore, children suggested that they should work together with adults to create rules, rather than children conforming to rules established by adults. Children from Cyprus pointed that this mutual understanding is sometimes difficult due to the generational differences and decisionmakers (headteachers) at school being *'older people'*. Cypriot children suggested to that *'younger adults are also accepted for these positions'*. The Dutch children also asked for teachers to talk to children, **to give children their honest and sincere attention and to take children's issues seriously**.

Referring to a situation in school, one interviewed boy from Denmark also pointed out that teachers *'maybe listen to you if you tell them something, but they don't ask or initiate the conversation'*. The real interest in children's views and problems and openness to talk about a variety of issues was also highlighted by children from Romania. They advised teachers *'not to judge children's opinions and not to treat children's problems as if they were not significant'*. To do it efficiently, teachers may need some training and acquire additional skills, e.g. knowing better instrument of non-formal education and some counselling / therapeutic techniques (see Section 3.6).

Children consulted in Romania suggested that **teachers should have a more holistic approach to children**. In their view, teachers should be asking children about aspects related to education (*'homework, projects for schools and so on'*) but also *'different matters about your emotional state'*.[32] Children from Bulgaria noted that the school is one of the most important places where most of the social interactions are happening. Children felt that their teachers should listen more to them and respect their opinions and views. Younger children also asked teachers to be fairer in their decisions and take children's opinions into consideration. Older children confirmed that they felt safe at schools and acknowledged that they can refer to teachers in case of conflict situations. Children from Bulgaria also pointed that teachers should pay more attention to what was happening during the breaks between the classes.

> *'I think teachers should listen us more carefully because even though they think we are very young, we have our opinion and they should not ignore it'*. (14-year-old child from Bulgaria)

Children participating in a focus group in Portugal mentioned **the importance of being heard about situations that may affect their safety and protection** (referring to school) but recognised that sometimes they would need more information and feedback on how to deal or prevent unsafety situations when they occur They normally report those incidents to the SOS family house social educator, they consider a trust person, or sometimes to an older SOS brother.

In a focus group[33] in Croatia, children noted that adults should be more understanding towards current problems that children face nowadays, and to listen to children more. In their view, **children**

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[32] This is different to the views of children from Lithuania and Denmark mentioned in Section 3.2.1.

[33] Focus group 2.

and adults should come up together with satisfactory solutions through discussions and collaboration. Some children consulted in Hungary noted that the teachers are the reason why they feel unsafe in school because *'teachers are condescending and don't have patience for anything'*.

Referring to **police officers and social workers**, consulted Croatian children noted that these professionals protected children by **listening to them, taking children seriously, and acting on what they've heard from children**. Children were positive about this experience because **adults really believed** in what children said as promptly acted upon it to ensure children's safety. According to this consulted group of children from Croatia, this was a typical experience of children in alternative care. Similar views were shared by children taking part in a focus group discussion in Lithuania when reporting on their experiences of **daycare centres and other after-school activities and the work of social workers**. Children felt that these places created a safe environment for them because offering many activities that helped them being themselves and because of looking for ways to solve children's problems.

As summarised in a consultation report from Romania: *'Children need more attention and trust from adults in order to be supported in their daily activities. They need to be listened to by adults and to express their feelings openly'*. *'Adults taking children's voice more seriously'* was a clear recommendation for adults, as shared by Croatian children.

4.2.3 Children want effective communication channels with adults

Having clear, open and effective communication between children and adults was a common suggestion coming from discussions with children, and children suggested **establishing and maintaining a variety of communication and feedback channels**. In addition, an issue of **a power imbalance between adults and children** emerged from a focus group discussion in Germany. Children asked how they can overcome this power imbalance and be heard, and what measures can be put in place to strengthen their confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy and broader skills.

A range of practical solutions to improve communication between children and adults have been discussed during consultation with children

Some children pointed out that open communication should include **different ways to express themselves**. For instance, one Bulgarian child noted that non-verbal communication through her drawings is an important way for her to share her views.

> *'I am an artist and this is the way to express my emotions – whether I feel safe, anxious, worried or happy!'* (17-year-old child from Bulgaria)

One girl from Lithuania observed that children have to be *'brave to share their experiences when they had a hard time'*. This stresses that it is often difficult for children to ask for help and receive it. The girl suggested that *'children's voices should be empowered more and this could encourage other children not to hide their problems'*. Children from Romania also asked **adults not to judge children** because of the way children *'behave, speak, dress, act in public with other people or do their activities'*.

Referring to situations at home and in families, children consulted in Romania suggested that *'parents need to understand how to communicate and about the importance of emotional health for adults and children'*.

During a focus group in Croatia, children suggested that using **an intermediary channel** could facilitate and improve communication processes and exchange of views between adults and children, albeit further detail was not provided how such a channel could work in practice.

Discussing situation in school, children in Romania noted that **creating the council of pupils in every school** would help hearing voices of children. They observed that school decisions are still

based predominantly on teachers' opinions. In children's view, consulting school decisions with a council of pupils will help children's opinions being heard. Children consulted in Bulgaria also noted that **improving the relationships between students and the attitudes of teachers towards children** would have a positive impact on the quality of their time spent together. Children suggested that there should be open communication channels for children's views to be heard and taken into consideration.

One child interviewed in Italy shared their experience of the weekly meetings at the Youth Movement for a child rights organisation. For her, this was a protected space in which she was able **to share her personal experience** of living in an orphanage and the adoption process. Sharing it with her peers and educators, it helped this girl to normalise the adoption experience and not to be ashamed of it and of her origin. She believed that this **open conversation helped the broader community as it raised awareness among peers on issues related to racism and inclusion**, both at school and outside of school. The peers played a key role in welcoming and making other children at ease.

Having more opportunities to **share their views via online surveys** was a suggestion shared by children participating in a focus group in Cyprus. However, as noted by children from Bulgaria **online spaces may also create some safety risks**, and some children already experienced cyber bullying and encountered danger situations when online browsing (see Section 4.6.5 for more detail).

The Dutch children noted that **police officers should more proactively ask for children's** views and opinions **and involve children in their work using creative communication channels**, e.g. through play and games. Regular meetings of policymakers and children, and having an orientation day was another suggestion coming from the consulted children in the Netherlands. Children believed that having these **direct interactions** and talking with children would improve policymakers understanding of issues faced by children and children's ideas on how these issues could be resolved.

Key findings and recommendations from children on what can be done with EU support

- Children emphasised the need for adults to listen to them, to treat them with respect and to have trusting relationships between them. To achieve this, children recommended that adults:

Listen to children

- Children emphasised that adults – this includes family members and professionals such as teachers, police, social workers- must be **willing to devote time to children**; listening to them is vital. When listening, adults should **listen more carefully and patiently**; this will help adults to better understand children's needs, opinions and concerns. Children also stated that being listened to can aid prevention.

- Some children also indicated that increasing the **frequency of communication** would help to build trust between adults and children.

- Children suggested establishing and maintaining **a variety of communication and feedback channels**. Open communication should include different ways to express themselves, including verbal and non-verbal, e.g. drawings, pictures etc. Other alternative communication channels include:

  o Consulting school decisions with a council of pupils will help children's opinions be heard.

  o Children should be able to share they views via online surveys (though some children did also not the issue of online safety).

  o Children also recommended boxes placed in schools (or other frequented areas), where they can communicate any concerns.

- Professionals should better act on what they heard from children.

- ■ Children would like to get information on how to manage situations when **power imbalances** arise in discussions between children and adults (how they can be heard, and what measures can be put in place to strengthen their confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy and broader skills).

Respect children

- ■ Children need **'spaces'** – at home and at schools - where they feel they can be themselves, without judgement and communication barriers.

- ■ Adults can build a sense of security by '*communicating respectfully, supporting (children) and being friendly'* (consultation report from Lithuania)*.

- ■ Adults ought to **remind children that they can discuss anything they want** with them.

- ■ Adults should stop ignoring children and their problems to keep children safe. Adults ought to stop disregarding children who approach them with concerns. Within this context, some children also felt that adults should stop downplaying or minimising the problems experienced by children.

- ■ Adults should not judge children because of the way children 'behave, speak, dress, act in public with other people or do their activities' (consultation report from Romania). Further, teachers should treat all children well and not be biased against them. Some children felt they were treated worse and respected less as they were in foster care.

- ■ All **health professionals** that interact with children (doctors, paediatricians, etc) should approach children differently than they do adults; they can do this by explaining what is happening and why it is happening, among others.

Trust children

Listening and respect are the building blocks of a trusting relationship. However, there are some further actions and behaviours that children recommended adults should take:

- ■ **Adults need to keep their promises to children**; this is key in upholding a relationship of trust and mutual respect.

- ■ **Children and adults should develop satisfactory solutions together; through discussions and collaboration**.

- ■ Trust in their teachers is built when the children were listen to children, support children and have enough time for children.

- ■ Teachers should not be condescending. Teachers should be patient.

- ■ Children value a good relationship and bond of trust between siblings and feel that they can go to if they need help.
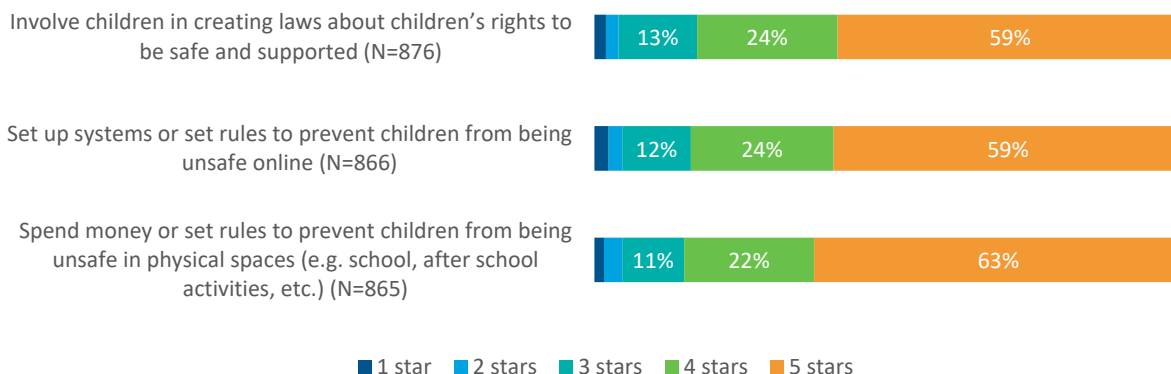
4.3 Children want adults to identify the issues early on and prevent them

4.3.1 Children want rules to protect children and to make sure adults follow them

As seen in Figure 13, the survey results suggest that overall, children agree that **importance should be given in creating laws about children's rights to be safe** (83% indicated either a 4 or 5 star rating), **setting up systems or rules to prevent children being unsafe online** (83% indicated either a 4 or 5 star rating), **and spending money to prevent children from being unsafe in physical spaces** (85% indicated either a 4 or 5 star rating).The majority of children rated the above statements as 'important' or 'very important' (a 4 or 5 star rating). Meanwhile, children living with foster families had more neutral opinions about the first two statements and strong opinions for the

third (spending money or setting rules to prevent children from being unsafe in physical spaces), with 55% indicating that this is 'not very important' to them (1 star).

Figure 13.   Adults have a duty to keep children safe and supported. How important is it that adults do these things? (N=876, N=866, N=865)

Involve children in creating laws about children's rights to be safe and supported (N=876)	13%	24%	59%
Set up systems or set rules to prevent children from being unsafe online (N=866)	12%	24%	59%
Spend money or set rules to prevent children from being unsafe in physical spaces (e.g. school, after school activities, etc.) (N=865)	11%	22%	63%

■ 1 star ■ 2 stars ■ 3 stars ■ 4 stars ■ 5 stars

Overall, 84% of children who participated in the online survey believed that **making rules to make children safe was (very) important to them** (see Figure 14). In Addition, 13% of children had a neutral opinion on the importance of the government making rules to make children safe in various areas. This trend was evident in the breakdown of age by two categories (ages 11 years and under, and ages 12 years and older).

Figure 14.   It is government's responsibility to make sure that children are protected from harm. In your opinion, how important is it that the government does these things? Make rules to make children safe for example, online, in education, health, sport, culture or other activities (N=878)

| 13% | 24% | 60% |

■ 1 star ■ 2 stars ■ 3 stars ■ 4 stars ■ 5 stars

Children want governments to keep providing information and support families

In an open-ended question about what governments should keep doing to make sure children are safe, a total of 83 children provided suggestions. As it can be observed in Figure 15, the two most reported actions were **to make sure children know where to get help** (80%, 66 respondents) followed by **making sure families have lots of support** (77%, 64 respondents). The other options were all selected by over 50% of respondents, but less than 60%.

A total of 52 of the respondents that selected one or more of the actions they felt the government should continue doing to make sure children are safe, stated the reason for their response (see section 4.2.2). However, most of the respondents reported that they felt the actions were important and should continue but did not elaborate further.

Figure 15.   Open question: What do you think governments should keep doing to make sure children are safe? N=83

Overview of responses from children on what the government should keep doing to make sure children are safe

Children want adults to follow the rules and involve children in creating rules

Among children participating in the survey, 73% of children reported that it was very important and 20% that it was important to them that adults follow the rules to ensure that children are safe. When broken down by two age categories, there was a slightly higher proportion of children aged 11 years and under that felt this statement to be very important to them compared to children aged 12 years and over.

During the interviews and focus groups, children highlighted that having clear preventive processes in place is essential to keep children safe. Those **processes should be designed with a single purpose in mind – to best protect the children**, as noted in the Croatian report from the second focus group:

> *'It is necessary that the procedures result in the protection of the child.'* (Consultation report from a focus group in Croatia)

For instance, children from Romania were very clear that *'it is more about prevention and less about tackling'*. They also suggested that children should be involved in designing these preventive processes. **An active involvement of children in the creation of rules** was also mentioned by one interviewed child from Lithuania[34], who was disappointed that *'his classmates and himself were not involved in the creation of such agreements' at school'*.

Children participating in a focus group[35] in Croatia noted that it is **essential to set clear rules and boundaries for children and adult behaviour**, and also **to make sure that basic needs of children are met** (adequate food, clothes, heating, having a person of trust and someone to provide ongoing support them *'with daily things'*). Children participating in the focus group in Croatia also pointed that children and adults should be familiar with those processes and key people with responsibilities for keeping children safe. At the same time, referring to the school context, children agreed that in many schools such processes have not yet been established.

> *'In school, the feeling of safety is contributed by the knowledge that students, professors and staff know that there are people and processes that children can turn to if something makes them angry or worried, that **they know that there is an effective process that will lead to a solution**.'* (17-year-old child from Croatia).

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[34] Interview 1 in Lithuania.

[35] Focus group 1 in Croatia.

> *'In schools, clear procedures and clear processes are needed so that if a child has a problem, he/she knows exactly who he can turn to and tell his/her problem, so that he/she can be sure that that person will approach it seriously and continue to do everything to protect the child.'* (Child from Croatia)

As concluded in the Croatian report:

> *'They point out that in many schools these processes do not exist and that many students are afraid to say what they want and need, which can lead to bigger problems and endanger their safety.'* (Consultation report from a second focus group in Croatia)

Some views on rules were also shared in an open survey question asking children about what adults should stop doing to keep children safe.

Children want rules to be explained more

A few respondents felt that **adults should stop creating strict rules for children** and that rules should be easy for children to understand and to follow. This topic was more frequently mentioned by respondents aged 14 and over, as well as those who indicated that they lived in an institution or alternative care provision[36].

It is important to establish safe places for reporting and applying sanctions consistently

Children also highlighted that **ensuring that processes are followed and sanctions are applied is sometimes a challenge**. For instance, children from the focus group in Croatia provided an example of a home environment. In their view, *'approaching a child with whom something is happening'* may be difficult, this could be *'an obstacle for adults'*, even when adults are aware of the processes they need to follow. Adults may *'give up (…) and be discouraged'*, and consequently, the processes are not effective. A more efficient system to make sure that *'adults and children do not break the rules'* was also echoed in another focus group in Croatia[37]. A similar example was shared by children participating in a focus group in Cyprus, who observed that **disclosing experiences of violence and abuse in the family is difficult** for children. Even if such experiences are typically reported, children *'actually fear police involvement and hint to fear of retaliation if details are disclosed'*. Children from Cyprus pointed out **an urgent need to establish and inform about safe places for reporting**. As noted in the report from Cyprus:

> *'A law is needed to address domestic violence that also entails penalties for the abuser and protects all victims concerned / all family members affected.'* (Consultation report from Cyprus)

A set of similar concrete suggestions was also shared by children participating in a focus group in Croatia and Lithuania. Children from Croatia[38] recommended that the biological families, foster families and other care settings should be monitored more closely and frequently, as a preventive measure. In addition, Croatian children also recommended that social workers should visit and speak to children more often and that children should have more opportunities to report harm or abuse. Asked what they would do if they were the president of Lithuania, children noted:

> *'They would order certain organisations to check all families at least once a month in order to find out whether all children feel safe in them and are not abused (if there is violence in the family, they advise to do everything to stop it).'* (Consultation report from a focus group in Lithuania)

> *'The children said that, as presidents of Lithuania, they would communicate more widely through public spaces about ensuring children's safety, look for more volunteers to help*

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[36] The consultation reports did not elaborate on what rules the children found too strict.
[37] Focus group 1 in Croatia.
[38] Focus group 1 in Croatia.

children feel safe, hire more people so that children who do not feel safe now would be better provided for.' (Consultation report from a focus group in Lithuania)

Children in focus groups in Lithuania and the Netherlands also made practical suggestions, such as better lighting in the streets, more places for children to play, better CCTV monitoring and police officers making themselves more visible on the streets and in residential areas (see Section 4.1).

4.3.2 Children want support to be provided promptly

During consultations, children shared that it was **important for them to ask for help and get it**. As indicated in Figure 16 reporting on the online survey findings, over 90% of children indicated that it was (very) important to them that children get support when they need it and that they should be able to report when they are not getting the support they need. Similar results were reflecting in the breakdown by the two age categories (ages 11 years and under, and ages 12 years and older), gender and the children's living situation.

Figure 16.　　Children have a right to ask for help and get it. In your opinion, how important is it for adults to do these things for children who need support? (N=869)
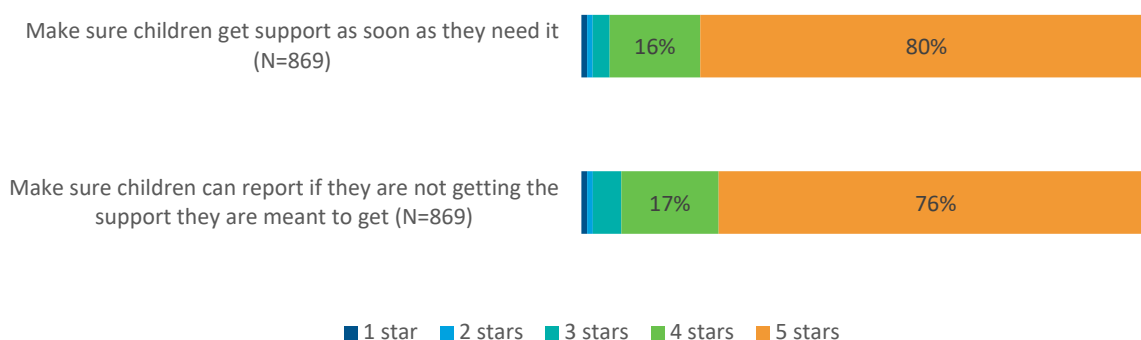
Also in the online survey, **94% of children said that it was (very) important to them that adults tell each other how to notice when children are not feeling safe**. The same trend was shown when answers were broken down by children's living situation and by two age categories: ages 11 years and under, and ages 12 years and older.

During the interviews and focus groups children mentioned that it was **important that adults react when they notice that a child does not feel safe**. Children from Denmark recommended that adults should look for and help with early signs or prevention, e.g. by keeping the stress levels down, whereas children with experience of alternative care consulted in Croatia[39] pointed that this protection should include protecting from other adults and children, including in children's own families.

> *'Adults should react faster in situations where children are not safe in their own families'.* (Report from a Croatia focus group with children with experience of alternative care)

Examples of an effective protection and the use of sanctions were mentioned during interviews in Lithuania. Reporting on a situation of bullying at school, one child[40] noted that *'everything ended well because the teacher immediately reacted to the inappropriate behavior and started to deal with*

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[39] Focus group 1 in Croatia.

[40] Interview 1 in Lithuania.

the situation here and now'. Another interviewed child[41] recalled a situation from school when a classmate who damaged other child's belongings had to buy it back and could not go on a school trip, whereas the child victim was comforted and provided with a psychological support.

Key findings and recommendations from children on what can be done with EU support

Early identification and prevention are very important for keeping children safe and protected from harm. This is the most extensive section on recommendations, as many children had felt unsafe at one point or another and had suggestions to prevent their situations and feelings from occurring. This section is divided into thematic areas relevant to children, such as schools, home and other living situations and public spaces, among others[42][43].

Overarching recommendations

■ Children recommended that they should be involved in designing the preventive processes. This includes involvement in designing rules and preventative measures in schools, their local areas and authorities (parks, lighting, transport), and laws at governmental level.

■ Children stressed the importance of knowing which adult they can seek help from at a given activity.

■ Children should be able to freely access any support and services they may need in both the prevention and intervention of the abuse.

■ It is essential to set clear rules and boundaries for children and adult behaviour, and to make sure that basic needs of children are met (adequate food, clothes, heating, having a person of trust and someone to provide ongoing support them 'with daily things'). Children and adults should be familiar with those processes and key people with responsibilities for keeping children safe. Children acknowledged that ensuring that processes are followed, and sanctions are applied can be challenging, however, these are necessary.

■ Children requested that adults should stop creating overly strict rules for children.[44]

Home, caregivers and alternative care

■ Caregivers need to understand how to effectively communicate with children and about the importance of emotional health and wellbeing. This could involve training, information sharing and communication between adults, thorough vetting and training of foster parents and other alternative care providers, among others.

■ Adults have to notice when children feel unsafe and be able to act on this quickly. To achieve this, children recommended that:

  o Biological families, foster families and other care settings should be monitored more closely and frequently, as a preventive measure and offered support, as required.

  o Social workers should visit and speak to children more often and that children should have more opportunities to report harm or abuse.

  o Adults should look for and help with early signs or prevention, e.g., by keeping the stress levels down (these are discussed across the Sections and involve recommendations such as: at school this can be down by carrying out regular mental wellbeing sessions and

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[41] Interview 2 in Lithuania.

[42] While many of these recommendations appear in Section 4.1, they are classified as preventive and so are included under 4.3, retaining the thematic structure of 4.1.

[43] Preventative and early identification recommendations that involve training of some sort have been included only in Section 4.6 to prevent repetition.

[44] This was not elaborated on further.

classes, and for teachers to acknowledge the pressure of homework. At home, adults should ensure stability, among other factors.

- There should be financial stability, and where this is lacking, there should be financial support available. Parents/caregivers should also be provided with other material and emotional support.

- Care givers need to have enough time to be there to offer support. For children it is important to have a stable home situation and at least one parent or caregiver that is always available to provide the child with support.

- Children need to have a space that they can retreat to and feel safe, be able to sleep in peace. For example, children felt safe when they had private areas where a door could be closed. Children also felt safer in 'calm' places.

- Alternative care would be improved by improving hygiene standards and provisions. This includes having sick children sleep in designated sick rooms, away from healthy children, not having pest infestations, and by reducing bullying (particularly older children bullying younger children).

- To make group homes safer for children, some children recommended banning smoking and employing a stricter control of drugs.

School

- To meet children's needs at school, children recommended that teachers should: Adopt a more holistic approach to children. Some children suggested that teachers should be asking children about aspects related to both their education and wider wellbeing. Educational staff should also care about the children. Teachers and wider school staff (e.g. the social pedagogue) should listen to children, give advice, take action, and implement sanctions if needed, to make children feel safe. Teachers must behave well around children, and not lose their patience and intimidate or threaten them.

- Children suggested that schools should implement a punishment system to sanction teachers' behaviours when they do not behave properly (such as when they do not uphold a code of conduct if there is one, or if they threaten children).

- Children stressed that teachers need to prevent bullying from beginning, and if it does occur, they need to act appropriately, (including understanding the root cause of the bullying).

  o Adult should be aware of bullying being perpetrated by older children, in schools and in group homes. If this occur, they should take appropriate steps and either step in, or offer support depending on the individual circumstances.

  o When performing conflict resolution, teachers should endeavour to not be biased.

  o Younger children suggested that teachers should be more perceptive of children's interactions between classes, to be able to prevent bullying.

  o Both adults and children should be aware of and educated on cyberbullying and know that it is as harmful as bullying (see Section 4.6 for further details).

  o Teachers should raise awareness and educate about violence prevention and the importance of treating other children well. Teachers should implement more safety measures at schools.

- Children stressed the role that teachers have in ensuring a good environment between children at school. As well as the aforementioned strategies to prevent and stop bullying, children recommended that:

  o Teachers should also organise classes during which all children are taught and reminded of the importance of safe, respectful behaviour with each other. Teachers' role is also to keep children, parents and wider community informed about actions taken and the agreements on the prevention of bullying.

  o Schools should reduce the atmosphere of competition between children. They should motivate children to work together in groups as this would teach children to connect and collaborate with peers.

- Children also recommended that schools have additional staff and dedicated staff. For example, children placed importance in having school councillors and social workers that are dedicated to a singular school, so that they can provide more effective safeguarding and be more trusted and known to the children.

- Teachers need to make sure that children that are educationally behind receive the support they need, so that they do not fall further behind.

- Children suggested that teachers should be open to and initiate conversations to normalise the adoption experience to reduce stigma so that children are not ashamed of their origin; open conversation like this aids the broader community by raising awareness among peers on issues related to racism and inclusion, both at school and outside of school.

- School facilities should be up to a certain standard. School environments need to be safe, and basic needs like hygiene and health must be met.

- The presence of police and other enforcer figures in schools can be both positive and negative in helping children to feel safe. To make this as successful as possible, the enforcers should be non-intimidating where possible and not overly intrusive. The same applies to surveillance equipment.

- Children felt safer when an adult (e.g., teachers, parents, social worker) is present during afterschool activities.

Public spaces

- Children suggested good mobile data coverage so that children are able to call for help.

- Street lighting is important as it contributes to children's feeling of safety in public spaces. Children were concerned about having to walk through dark alleys and parks in nighttime.

- Children recommended having better CCTV monitoring and police officers making themselves more visible on the streets and in residential areas. Children felt safer among police officers that were known to them.

- Children requested more spaces where they can socialise and feel safe. There are some places like that available to children in some areas, but this is still not everywhere. This includes parks, rooms and buildings dedicated to children's recreational use.

- Adults must address and help exploited children in public places, e.g., children begging on the streets.

- There should be awareness raising campaigns and more vigilance for girls in public spaces as they are significantly more likely than boys to feel intimidated and scared in public spaces such as streets and public transport.

- Children recommended improving public transport. This is related to a general lack of safety in public transport, the range of connections, and their coverage and reliability (e.g., evening and night buses). Poor public transport is also causing children to walk on the streets alone, and this contributes to children feeling unsafe.

- Children recommended having more and safer playgrounds and parks: being built in safe places (not near big roads), available to all children (including children in asylum centres) and well-lit so walking through them is less intimidating and dangerous.

Health institutions

- Medical professionals should clearly explain to children all the medical procedures using language that children can understand.

- Children suggested that older children could attend medical consultations on their own because it would help them to confide and ask something they want to know without the presence of their parents.

- Health facilities should be appropriate for children. Children feel safer in health institutions when the premises and space are well-maintained, child-friendly and bright.

4.4 Children want to get support

Children believed that it was adults' responsibility to provide children with support

In the online survey, children expressed the same level of importance to the government providing support to children and families who are in difficult situations (for instance children in migration, children in disabilities, families experiencing poverty), and governments making sure children get support before the situation gets worse (see Figure 17). Overall, 75% of children said that it was very important, 17% said it was important and 6% gave a neutral opinion. Similar proportions were shown in children group in ages 11 years and under, and 12 years and older, showing that it remained important that support was available before and after a difficult situation. In addition, 84% of children participating in an online survey expressed that it is (very) important that adults spend money to immediately alert on and end situations where children are unsafe. This across different living situations and age groups agreed with this statement.

Figure 17.   It is government's responsibility to make sure that children are protected from harm. In your opinion, how important is it that government does these things? (N=869, N=868)
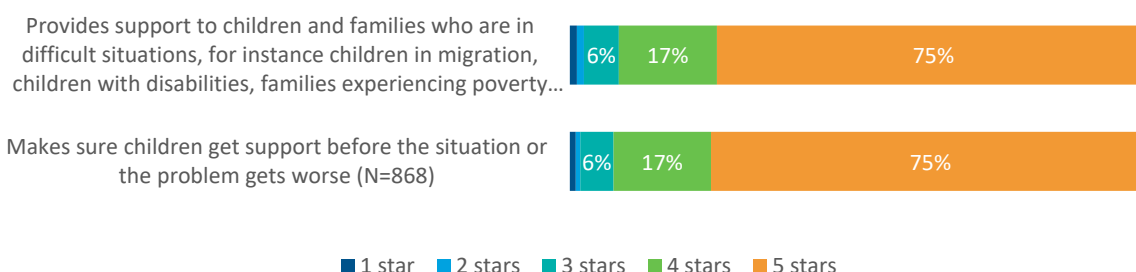
In an open survey question asking children what adults should keep doing to keep children safe, a few respondents from EU countries, particularly from Bulgaria and Spain, said that adults ought to keep supporting children. They felt that **support should be in line with children's emotional and material needs and be unconditional**. For instance, one response from Ireland explained that adults *'should make sure they're supportive and don't yell at their children when the children open up to them.'* Interestingly, this theme was not prevalent among respondents from countries outside of the EU. Respondents aged 14 to 17 most frequently mentioned the topic of supporting children. It was also more prominent among those that reported that they lived with family members other than their parents.

When asked what adults should stop doing to keep children safe, a few respondents from Poland and a respondent from Finland (representing the only response to the survey from Finland) felt that **adults should stop drinking alcohol and, in a few instances, stop smoking** (see also Section 4.1.11)**.** A few comments linked the use of alcohol to the mistreatment of children. For instance, one respondent from Poland felt that *adults should not 'Drink, bully mentally and physically, shout to humiliate.'* This theme was only mentioned by respondents aged 12 and over, and was more prominent among those who reported that they lived in an institution or alternative care provision.

Children suggested to focus on mental health support…

Firstly, many children highlighted **the importance of mental health and wider psychological support**. Children noted that there is still a lot of stigma around the mental health issues and counselling services and more should be done to combat these prejudices. Children from Denmark recommended that EU should initiate more open discussion about mental health and fund more mental health services. They noted that it is often difficult for children to acknowledge that they need help and that adults should help them to recognise it and provide support.

In addition, many children suggested **concrete support measures that could be provided in schools and communities**. For instance, children in Denmark recommended having **anonymous boxes** in schools and other places where children go to, for children to post questions or seek advice anonymously. A similar observation was made by a child interviewed in Lithuania who mentioned that *'bullying boxes'* are present in their school to report on difficulties a child may experience. These boxes provide an opportunity to anonymously report case of violence against children and on other aspects that are important to children.

To strengthen relationships between children and adults, children in a focus group in Croatia also recommended more quality interactions between children, schoolteachers, educators and wider staff.

> *'Adults should talk more with children in schools. Adults should identify with the child and adapt to the child, it should be a two-way conversation with the child, to examine the background of the violence. Trust is important, that the person be someone the child trusts at school. School psychologist and other expert staff in school should do their work in such a way that children can trust them, and not only in the case of imposing pedagogic measures'.* (17-year-old boy from Croatia[45])

And children's wellbeing in schools and wider communities

Children from Croatia[46] also suggested that **schools should reduce the atmosphere of competition between children**. Instead, schools should **motivate children to work together in groups as this would teach children to connect and collaborate with peers**. In addition, Croatian children highlighted the importance of peer support and asked for more workshops and guidance in schools on the topic of peer violence.

> *'It is very important to work on how to reduce peer violence in schools. Everyone will feel safe if they know that no one will make fun of them at school and that they will not abuse them'* (16-year-old girl from Croatia)

> *'Most of the peers do not like to intervene and get involved in the problem so that it does not happen to them, afraid that they too will become victims of a violent person. The 'silent majority' should become more involved in protecting the victim and it would be helpful for them to know that the victim needs to be protected and that there will be consequences for violence.'* (second focus group report from Croatia).

More attention to **a continuous support from teachers** was also a recurring topic in the focus group discussion in Croatia[47]. Children observed that adults typically only get involved when violence escalates, *'when it becomes physical'*. Instead, children suggested, adults should talk more with children at schools and take a more proactive approach as school staff is key to solve peer violence in schools, because peer violence *'happens every day and all day* [and] *all teachers should be aware and participate in the solution of the problem and the fight against violence'*.

Asked about recommendations how adults should provide support, children in a focus group in Croatia[48] mentioned provisions in the health institutions. Children suggested that older children could attend medical consultations on their own because it would help them to confide and ask something they want to know without the presence of their parents. One child also asked for medical professionals clearly explaining to children all medical procedures.

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[45] Focus group 2 in Croatia.

[46] Focus group 2 in Croatia.

[47] Focus group 2 in Croatia.

[48] Focus group 2 in Croatia.

> *'Children should be informed about the process and the method of treatment that is true and adapted to the child'.* (16-year-old girl from Croatia)

Finally, children participating in a focus group in Croatia[49] were positive about **a prompt and continuous support received from police officers and social workers**. Children felt that these professionals kept them safe by *'really listening to them'* and taking them seriously, and by acting on what they heard. The professionals initiated required procedures to move children to a safer place and sometimes it was a foster family or a children's home.

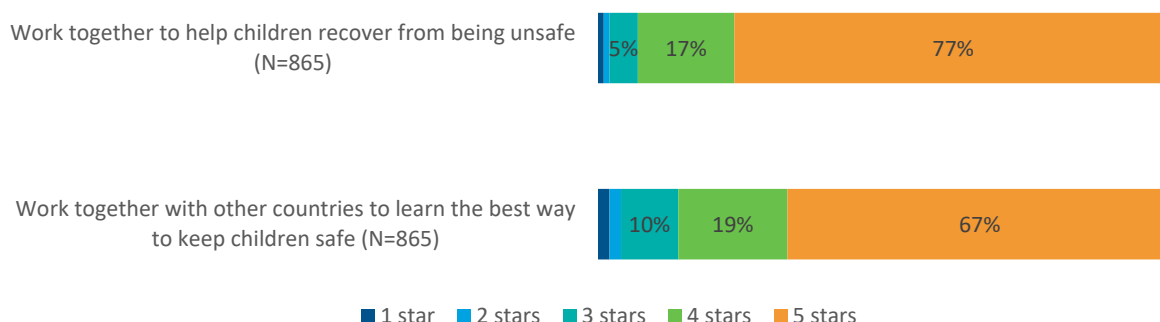**Key findings and recommendations from children on what can be done with EU support**

- Children acknowledge that adults are responsible for creating a comprehensive support system providing timely and continuous support and assistance. Children want issues to be detected, identified and addressed early and receive holistic emotional, material and mental well-being support.

- Recommendations for measures tend to have been provided by children who live in alternative care and who may have experiences violence and poverty. This group of children highlighted that getting support before the situation gets worse is very important.

- Children stated that it is necessary to ensure that provisions are in place to move children out from their family homes, at least temporarily, if unsafe. Police officers and social workers are vital for protecting children from dangerous care situations.

- Children noted that creating peaceful environments and strong bonds between children and adults, both at homes and schools, is important for children's safety. This involves being available and maintaining open communication, and providing spaces where children can relax and engage in calming activities.

- Empowering children in alternative care to have a sense of control over their personal wellbeing and development is beneficial for their future security. Foster homes and care givers need to be chosen appropriately. Schools and teachers should be understanding of children's backgrounds and fears due to their prior experiences, which may include violence.

4.5 Children think that adults should work together to keep children safe

Children participating in an online survey **believed it was (very) important for adults to work together**. As seen in Figure 18, children gave slightly more importance to adults **working together to help children recover from being unsafe** (94% with a 4 or 5 star rating), compared to **adults working together with other countries to learn the best way to keep children safe** (86%). This could suggest that children would like more immediate support than prevention of difficult situations that make children unsafe. When looking at the distribution of responses between children aged 11 years and under, and children aged 12 years and older, as well as children's living situation, the trend continued to show with similar percentages for each star rating.

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[49] Focus group 1 in Croatia.

Figure 18. Adults have a duty to keep children safe and supported. How important is it that adults do these things? (N=865)

Work together to help children recover from being unsafe (N=865) | 5% | 17% | 77%

Work together with other countries to learn the best way to keep children safe (N=865) | 10% | 19% | 67%

■ 1 star ■ 2 stars ■ 3 stars ■ 4 stars ■ 5 stars

In addition, survey **children were really appreciative of having a centralised process and for adults to work together in order to keep children safe** (see Figure 19). Overall, 93% of children indicated 4 or 5 star rating for adults working together to make sure children get the help they need. A slightly lower percentage of 84% rating 4 or 5 stars on importance towards the statement 'Make sure children have one person to go to so that they don't have to talk about their experiences lots of times'. Similar distributions were seen across children's living situations and age.

Figure 19. Adults must work together to keep children safe. How important is it that adults do these things? (N=876, N=871)

Work together to make sure children get the help they need (N=876) | 5% | 21% | 72%

Make sure children have one person to go to so that they don't have to talk about their experiences lots of times (N=871) | 12% | 22% | 62%

■ 1 star ■ 2 stars ■ 3 stars ■ 4 stars ■ 5 stars
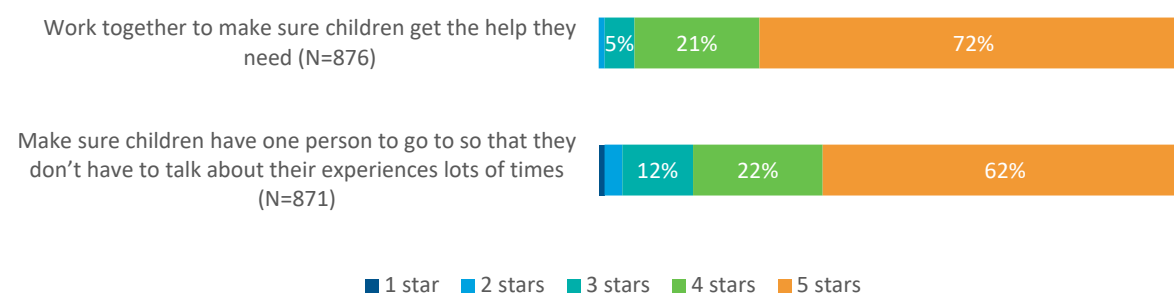
The topic of collaborative work of adults and children was also raised by children participating in focus groups and interviews. Many children mentioned **schools as a natural place for them to receive support from adults, and good school-home working relationships** were also mentioned during several discussions. For instance, one interviewed child from Lithuania reported how a teachers and parents working together helped to resolve the problem of bullying in their school. Children from a focus group in Lithuania also suggested that parents and children should work together to create an app to use on their phones to help parents know the location of their child. However, some children consulted in Hungary were sceptical about sharing information with schools about their home situation. In their view, children should have a right to refuse sharing information as their home life should be kept separate and be respected by the teachers.

At the same time, children also noted that **specialist support is sometimes needed**, and in such instances, teachers and other professionals should get in touch with other professionals or services to keep children safe. This was mentioned by children from Croatia and Romania. In addition, children participating in a focus group in Lithuania listed several institutional child support services and how they are integrated, including day care centres and the Children's Rights Service. Furthermore, some children consulted in Hungary also suggested **a better coordination between health and school services**, with the school nurse providing children with band-aids and sanitary

pads / tampons if needed, and also having a right to send sick children home so they do not infect other children.

Key findings and recommendations from children what can be done with EU support

- Children acknowledge the need for adults to work together and coordinate their actions, with effective processes in place to better safeguard children. This involves their immediate circle (caregivers and relatives), adult professionals such as teachers and doctors, and higher authorities such as governments.

- Children suggested that governments should try to understand and accept the values of the new young generations. Further, governments should also increase investment on non-discrimination policies and public opinion campaigns to keep children safe.

- Children recommended that:

  o governments should provide more assistance to alleviate child poverty and to migrant and ethnic minority groups that are often discriminated,

  o governments should issue supportive measures and incentives so that children and young people have better opportunities in the future,

  o they have regular meetings and direct interactions with policymakers to improve policymakers understanding of issues faced by children and solutions proposed by children, and for children to understand better the policymaking processes,

  o police officers should more proactively ask for children's views and opinions and involve children in their work using creative communication channels, e.g. through play and games.

4.6 Adults should share information and communicate with each other

4.6.1 Children want to receive more information and want adults to provide it

In the online survey, **the majority of children agreed that adults should tell children who they can ask for help and support** (68%) and **adults should make sure that children know how to tell someone if they feel a child is not safe** (76%) (both based on a 5 star rating, see Figure 20). The importance of these questions was evident in the breakdown of gender, children's living situation and the two age categories (ages 11 years and under, ages 12 years and older).

Figure 20. Children have a right to ask for help and get it. In your opinion, how important is it for adults to do these things for children who need support? (N=878, N=869)

Tell children who they can ask for help and support (N=878)	8% 21% 68%
Make sure children know how to tell someone if they feel a child is not safe (N=869)	6% 17% 76%

■ 1 star ■ 2 stars ■ 3 stars ■ 4 stars ■ 5 stars
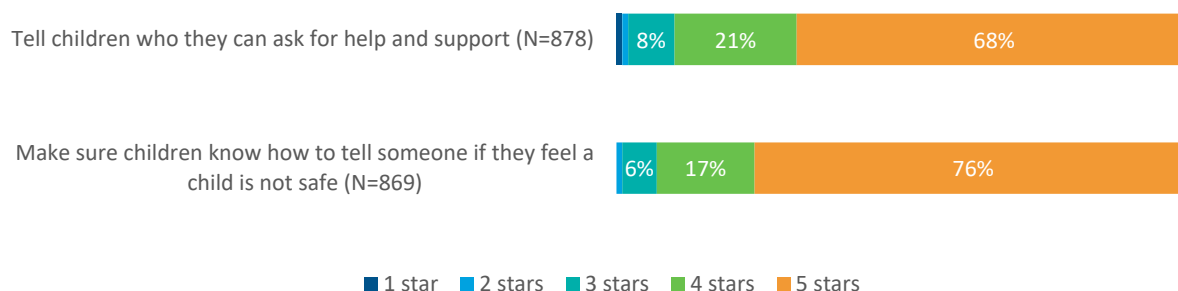
In addition, 82% of children said that it would be important/ very important for adults to create social media campaigns about children's right to be safe and supported. When broken down by the two age categories and children's living situation, similar proportion of children suggested that social media campaigns would be (very) important.

In an open survey question about what adults should keep doing, there were a few respondents who felt that adults should **keep informing children of risks and dangers**, including those encountered on the Internet, out in public and at home. A few others said that parents should explain to children what they should do if they encounter danger. As explained by one response from an unclassified country, adults ought to inform children of *'how to avoid dangerous situations and what to do if they face problems'.* This topic was most prevalent among respondents aged 17, as well as those who specified that they lived in an institution or alternative care provision.

There were a few respondents who felt that **adults should start doing more to ensure that children are physically safe and that they feel safe**. This topic was most frequently mentioned by respondents aged between 15 and 17, and consistently reported across family situations. Some examples of specific steps that could be taken included creating rules to protect safety, monitoring children's activity online, and taking note of who the child is spending time with. Among EU member states, the topic of ensuring safety was mentioned most frequently by respondents from Romania and Lithuania. Respondents from these countries placed more emphasis on ensuring safety through open communication with children about dangers. For example, one child from Lithuania stated that adults ought to *'Teach children what is safe and what is not safe and also lead by example (ex: tell a kid not to smoke, but you also must not smoke).'*

Children emphasised that they need more guidance in general

In a focus group in Cyprus and Croatia[50], children asked for more education about children's rights. They mentioned that a subject called 'civic education' used to be offered in schools but it no longer exists. They made a suggestion to **dedicate one school day across all EU Member States to teach children about children's rights and how children can protect themselves**.

Children from Romania[51] also shared the need for more information: *'different workshops, courses to find out useful information, beyond the usual subjects they do at school'* so they can *'be better prepared for life'*. They specifically mentioned topics such as *'emotional health, bullying, cyberbullying or how to face problems at school'*. **Children** also noted how they **benefit from observing the attitudes and behaviour of adults**, and then applying such attitudes and behaviours themselves. For instance, children praised adults for seeing 'the big picture and only then making a decision'. When information is shared with them, children feel comfortable and grateful.

Children participating in a focus group in Portugal recognised **the need to get more information about children's rights**, albeit they also noted that most unsafe situations occur during peer interactions rather than when adults and children interact. Also making a similar observation, one interviewed child in Lithuania[52] commented that information and social campaigns on the topic of bullying and violence prevention are most effective when delivered in an active format in a small setting, e.g. during lessons in school, during afterschool activities etc. when children can share between each other their direct experiences, ideas and suggestions. Related to that, children from Hungary observed that *'adults should talk to children about how to build relationships'* and that parents have an important role to play in this respect. Yet, they also suggested that both parents and teachers should have discussions with children on why it is important to have friends, and that **schools should introduce wellbeing classes**.

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[50] Focus group 1 in Croatia.

[51] Focus group 2 in Romania.

[52] Interview 2 in Lithuania.

As summarised in a consultation report from Germany:

> *'It becomes obvious that children have a general idea that they have rights, but significantly fewer know the exact content and how they can enforce their rights. Child-friendly information material is important here, i.e. both child-friendly language and the design must be child-friendly'*. (consultation report from Germany)

4.6.2 Children suggested that adults should be trained and learn about each other's work

In an online survey, 90% of **children agreed that it was (very) important that the government provides training to adults** (such as teachers, social workers and doctors) **who work with children who might be unsafe in order to ensure they are able to provide the best support and guidance to children**. This was evident in the two age categories; children aged 11 years and under, and children aged 12 years and over (see Figure 21).

Figure 21. It is government's responsibility to make sure that children are protected from harm. In your opinion, how important is it that government does these things? Trains adults (such as teachers, social workers and doctors) who work with children to help children who might be unsafe (N=868)
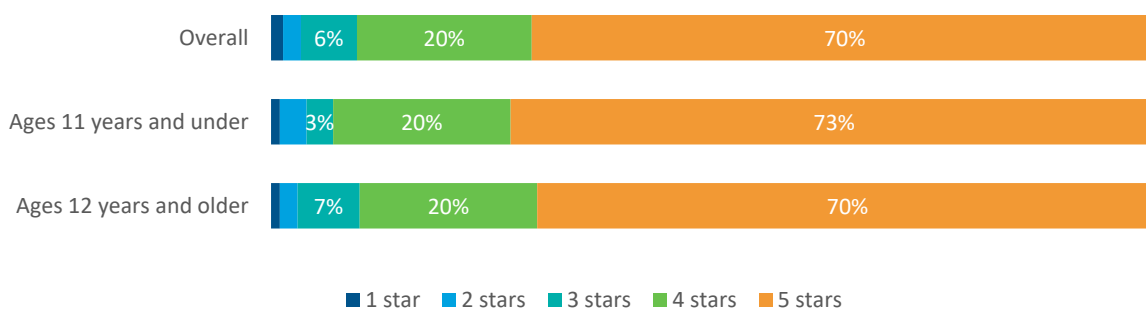
In addition, 59% of children thought that it was **very important for adults to learn about each other's work and their different role in keeping children safe to ensure specialised support can be given**, 26% said that it was important to them and 10% had a neutral opinion to this (see Figure 22). Similar trends were shown in the breakdown on children's living situations and the two age categories (ages 11 years and under, and ages 12 years and over).

Figure 22. Adults must work together to keep children safe. How important is it that adults do these things? Learn about each other's work and their different roles in keeping children safe e.g. social workers and teachers working together (N=866)
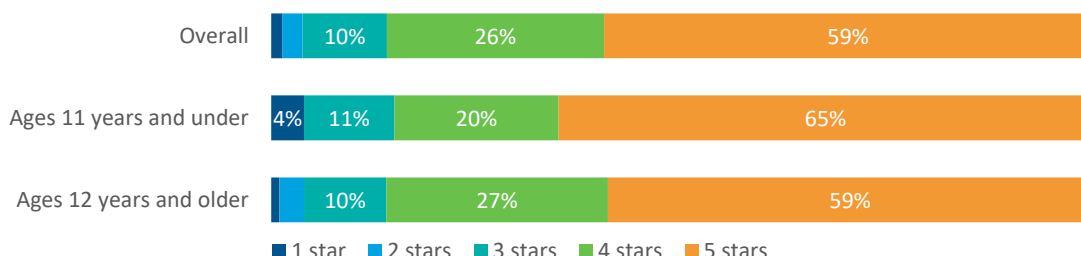
Children asked for more collaboration between adult professionals and families

For instance, children from Portugal believed that **more *'cooperation between adults will provide a more protective environment'* for children**. This was echoed by children from Croatia who suggested more collaboration and exchange between home and professionals.

> *'It is necessary for adults who are in contact with the child in their various roles to be alert and focused on children in such a way that they notice when the child is having a hard time at home and then talk to him/her, to be interested in the child, to ask him/her what is going on.'* (Report from focus group in Croatia)

This **continuity of care between home and professional services** was also mentioned by children with experience of alternative care. Children suggested to ensure provision of support and monitoring of biological families to prevent abuse and neglect, and adequate alternative care setting if the child cannot longer live with the biological family. In fact, some children who have been abused in their families of origin or at previous placements expressed the advantages of living with their current foster families for their own safety.

Teachers are essentials to facilitate support and information exchanges

The role of **teachers and schools in facilitating support and information exchange** was also mentioned in several countries. Children from Cyprus recommended that teachers should learn about how children participate and introduce participatory methods when working with children in schools. Children from Romania noted that teachers need to be 'persons that are truly interested about children' and prepared to help them using a variety of skills, approaches and tools. Some children from Hungary suggested that teachers should **be aware of a trauma-informed approach**, especially towards children in alternative care or who are at risk of losing parental care. According to children, adapting this approach would help teachers understand better children from vulnerable backgrounds and *'see the reasons behind the child's behaviour'*. Teachers being open to conversations and emphatic was also mentioned by some children from Hungary. Furthermore, children suggested that when placing children into foster families, children's physical and psychological safety should be always a priority. In this respect, teachers should work closely with social workers and other professionals helping children transition to new placements.

Healthcare professionals should adopt child-friendly approaches when working with children

Collaborative working with the healthcare professionals was mentioned in a focus group discussion in Croatia[53]. Children suggested that **health staff working with children should adapt their approach towards children** and use different methods then when working with adults. According to children, *'a slightly softer attitude of the doctor towards the parent and the child would help, and they don't need much more time for that'*. This is because *'it is much more stressful for a child to be in a health facility and it is important that they feel safe and that they will be helped'*.

Children also mentioned that it is important that **health staff work closely with the child's parents**, show empathy and accommodate to the children's needs to feel safe. Croatian children[54] suggested that doctors should communicate better with parents and sick children but *'do not give children promises that cannot be fulfilled'*.

> *'There is a lack of communication between doctors and parents and empathy towards parents regarding the child's condition. There is a lack of time for parents and empathy for parents, I understand that this is due to the great pressure on doctors every day'*. (17-year-old boy from Croatia)

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[53] Focus group 2 in Croatia.

[54] Focus group 2 in Croatia.

In addition, Croatian children suggested to expand the possibilities for parents to stay with their sick children in hospitals during overnight stays, in particular in case of serious medical condition and treatment. Children recommended that for the best interests of the child:

> '*Hospitals should be committed to providing children under 18 with this option* [accompanying parent staying in hospital with a child]*, as this will make them feel much safer'*. (Report from the focus group in Croatia)

Furthermore, children from Croatia recommended establishing better cooperation between health institutions and schools, in particular in the area of sexual health education and wider health promotion. In this respect, children noted that it may be easier for younger doctors (in contrast to older doctors) to establish rapport with children so younger medical professionals should be prioritised for working with schools.

Decisionmakers should promote good practices in child protection

Finally, children from Portugal highlighted **the role of decision makers and legislators to promote good practices** based on respect and mutual acceptance of differences. And children from the Netherlands mentioned that **police need more information about how to work with children**, e.g. during football games they still sometimes use tear gas, even when there are children involved.

4.6.3 Children reported difficulty in reaching out for help and some inefficiencies with support platforms and tools

However, asking for help is often difficult for children. For instance, children from Denmark observed that **some children may be *'scared to reach out for help'*** because they do not know what would happen next. They suggested that children should be provided with clear information on steps and actions that would be undertaken when they ask for help. Similar observation was shared by children from Croatia[55]:

> '*It is important for every child that he/she knows that there are people they can contact, who will explain to them what the whole process looks like, that they feel safe while doing so, because children are afraid of what will happen to them if they report.'* (Report from the focus group in Croatia)

Children across several countries noted that **teachers and wider school staff play an important role in keeping children informed**. When referring to a bullying situation at school and how it was resolved by a teacher, one interviewed child from Lithuania[56] praised their teacher for promptly acting on her request for support, keeping them informed about various next steps and processes, as well as keeping this child involved in developing new rules to keep children safe. Children from Romania also noted that it is essential for children to know their school team, whereas children from Denmark mentioned that school staff should provide to children a list of resources where children can seek help.

Some consulted children mentioned **existing tools and platforms to keep children informed and to report when they are not safe**. However, children were often sceptical about children using these tools, and provided some suggestions for improvements. For instance, one interviewed child from Lithuania[57] mentioned children's line and youth line, and another interviewed child in Lithuania[58] named 'Vaikai linija', which operate throughout Lithuania. However, both children suggested that these lines are not well known to children, and they could not recall any children who have sought help using these lines. One reason for it is that some children may be afraid to call and

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[55] Focus group 2 in Croatia.

[56] Interview 1 in Lithuania.

[57] Interview 1 in Lithuania.

[58] Interview 2 in Lithuania.

report, and another reason mentioned was that these numbers are very long and difficult to remember by children. One child suggested setting up more message / text channel options for children to seek help and be informed. (See also 4.2.3 and 4.4 for suggestions on anonymous boxes, placed in areas children frequent such as school, for children to post questions or seek advice anonymously).

Discussions with children in Germany also touched upon the available support structures and how they function. As summarised by the consultation report from Germany:

> *'Legally stipulated structures such as external ombudsman offices are sometimes known but are rarely used as initial contact; in many cases an exchange with reference persons takes place beforehand. It is therefore necessary to expand training courses for children so that they know how to deal with themselves when they are told secrets by their friends.'* (consultation report from Germany)

4.6.4 Children asked for more mental health support

Many consulted children mentioned that **mental health** is an important topic to them and suggested that schools **should be equipped to help children manage stress and mental health.**

Children consulted in Denmark suggested that schools **should provide mental health and stress management aid**, as it is a place that they frequent regularly and can access easily. As well as having aid available, the Danish children recommended having thematic days at school to discuss mental health[59]. However, as it is sensitive topic, adults must create a setting and atmosphere where children feel comfortable to talk about these issues.

Homework can also cause mental stress and negatively impact children's mental health. This featured in the Danish focus group; however, the facilitator did acknowledge that between the focus group and the interview there was a disagreement on whether homework and stress should be a focus for adults to change.

> *'I think that most of my stress comes from homework, so maybe there should be a specific time where you can ask for no homework (if you are very stressed), so you could get 2-4 weeks if you feel very stressed to have more time on your hands (like sick days for work) for leisure time'.* (Consultation report from Denmark)

> *'Less homework = less stress. I would stop homework because it is the main reason that young people are stressed in their day-to-day life. I would enforce test in what children like to do after school. E.g. if you like swimming in your free time your school should reward you for that'.* (Consultation report from Denmark)

Children from Denmark reported that they would like to receive more support from their schoolteachers. However, they noted that teachers are not trained to deal with mental health issues. Yet, children believed that teachers should be trained *'just like they have first aid training'*.

Danish children also asked to **'normalise mental health concerns'** and ensure that teachers and other adults consider mental health as a valid health issue. This could be achieved if **teachers and other adults were provided with more training to understand mental health issues and how to help others** (children and adults) if they are struggling psychologically. This aspect was also raised by children from Romania who observed that on some occasions adults were not convinced about the experiences of children and their need to receive mental health help. They noted that sharing problems with adults sometimes turned them against children, which made the children stop talking about it and asking for help. Children want teachers to adapt *'a perspective of seeing the pupils like humans and not only as persons who are at school and are here to learn'*, and noted that:

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[59] They likened it to the 6th week of term, where sexual education is a dedicated topic for the week.

> *'Children do not need attitudes which discredits them in front of their colleagues by teachers, they want to be encouraged to express themselves as they are in real life'.* (Consultation report from Romania)

To improve mental health, children from Denmark suggested introducing more sport activities in schools and more collaborative activities that bring children together and allow meeting new people. According to children, this would improve their mental health.

Children from Romania and Cyprus wanted the **EU to introduce the role of a psychologist or a school counsellor in every school**. They wanted these professionals **'to be present in school for real, not just in a formal way'**[60]. According to children, this professional could be contacted in a confidential manner about any concerns of children and would not judge children's behaviour. Romanian children also suggested regular psychological tests for all teachers.

The focus group facilitator asked Danish children for their ideas for improvements, and this is what children have suggested:

> *'If you are down with fever, it is okey if you didn't do your homework. But not if you are stressed or down for other reasons'.* (Child from Denmark)

> *'Educate students on mental health (awareness). Bring counselling to those who struggle with it'.* (Child from Denmark)

> *'Use class time more efficiently to not overload students with homework. Have like once a week just a class where you could talk about how your week has been. Get extensions on deadlines if you feel stressed or mentally overburdened. Mandatory mental health time'.* (Child from Denmark)

> *'I would put awareness on mental health, stress, and teach about it in school. Help people come up with solutions, make events. Bring awareness to after school activities, like out of school life. Bring some physical activities in school'.* (Child from Denmark)

4.6.5 Children asked for more guidance on online safety

The topic of digital safety was also prominent in discussions. A request for **more guidance on how to operate safely online and more efficient regulation to keep children safe online was a common** theme raised by children across consulted countries. Children from Bulgaria asked for more information on how to be safe online while browsing. This was echoed by children from Croatia[61] who wanted more online safety training available for all children and adults responsible for them to better protect children. Children from the Netherlands asked that social media be made *'more unattractive for children'* and suggested that this could be achieved with a similar approach as for commercials on unhealthy food. Children also noticed that a lot of information on social media is not age friendly and not suitable for children, in particular younger children.

Children in Romania[62] noted that ***'cyberbullying is as painful as bullying'*** and asked for more education to prevent children becoming victims online and their data being stolen. Children from Denmark had doubts whether *'efficient online regulations that keep children safe online'* are possible. They believed that even if measures are in place to keep children safe, some forms of cyberbullying are *'unavoidable'* and will still take place, e.g. unvoluntary sharing of pictures, scamming etc. Yet, children were positive that more actions can be put in place, e.g. more education on online safety at schools, to prevent and address these risks. Children from Hungary also noted

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[60] See also 4.3, where children recommended that school councillors be dedicated to a single school (not spread over several). Children suggested that that would increase the visibility of the councillor and improve their trust in them, therefore aiding prevention and early identification of issues.

[61] Focus group 1 in Croatia.

[62] Focus group 2 in Romania.

the dangers of social media platforms, in particular for younger children. They suggested that there should be more strict restrictions on age limit for social media apps. For instance, TikTok should be only available to children over the age of 16 years, and registration process should include age verification (e.g. by showing ID). They also provided a suggestion that parents should be more involved in explaining the social media safety rules to children and more outreach campaigns for children not to befriend strangers on social media platforms.

Key findings and recommendations from children on what can be done with EU support

- Children acknowledge the need for strengthened communication between adults, so that they are better equipped to safeguard children. Children also acknowledge the need for adults to intervene among children, both in times of conflict and to provide them with training and information so that they are equipped with the skills to safeguard themselves.

- Children suggested that families (parents, alternative care settings) and wide professional services (schools, healthcare, social workers etc.) should have well established communication channels to share and exchange information and support.

- When specialist support is needed, teachers and other professionals should get in touch with other professionals or services to keep children safe.

- Adults should receive training on how to best intervene between children.

- There should be better coordination between health and school services, with the school nurse providing children with band-aids and sanitary pads / tampons if needed, and also having a right to send sick children home so they do not infect other children.

Key findings and recommendations on what can be done with EU support related to the online world and digital participation

- Children recognised that they spend much of their time online and they were very interested in discussing it and sharing their observations and recommendations, with an **emphasis on the request for more information on how they can prevent harm and stay safe**.

- Many children acknowledged[63] that they have already experienced digital attacks through inappropriate content. However, their suggestions were less towards 'examining and banning everything' and more towards **education and resilience training** in order for them to be equipped to deal with it confidently.

Relating to information, education and training for children on how to stay safe on the internet and social media, children recommended:

- To focus efforts on preventing harm from happening, e.g. how to have a 'safe account' on social media websites. Education on online well-being should be improved so that it is taught up to a certain standard, as it is lacking in some schools.

- Focus on mitigation strategies to mitigate harmful situations once they have happened. Some children felt they did not know enough about what dangers existed, and therefore could not protect themselves from these.

- Children want information and greater clarity on the use of their personal data, such as data shared to social media sites, the use of 'cookies' on websites, and other tracking software.

- Adults in charge of children's safety need to be prepared and equipped to protect children from possible online threats and abuse.

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[63] This was particularly pronounced in the findings from consultation in Germany.

■ Some children also recommended implementing stronger safeguards to prevent children accessing content that is not age appropriate.

Key findings and recommendations on what can be done with EU support related to mental health support

■ Children were keen to discuss mental health, stressing the importance of mental health and wider psychological support. Children highlighted that physical and psychological safety go hand in hand and attention and support is needed in relation to them both.

Children offered suggestions for how they could be more supported to prevent and mitigate mental health issues:

■ Adults should help children to recognise that they may need help and provide them with support. Children noted that it is often difficult for children to acknowledge that they need help.

■ Adults should provide continuous support to children, and not wait to step in until a situation becomes violent between peers, or a child is very mentally stressed.

■ Teachers need to provide more support when children feel stressed at school. For example, extensions on deadlines if you feel stressed or mentally overburdened.

■ Children recommended that schools should have dedicated school councillors to provide children with support.

Children also want to be provided with the skills and knowledge to support their mental health, and provided several recommendations on the type and content of information and training they would like to be offered:

■ More guidance in general, and more tailored information and support about mental health issues.

■ Children requested to have access to information about people and places that they can turn to for support and guidance. Children also requested that adults know about the available support. This way they can signpost children to specific places and services.

■ Dedicated counselling to those children who struggle with mental health.

■ Children suggested developing and expanding training courses for children so that they are able to act and cope when they are told secrets by their friends. This is especially needed past age 12, when there is the growing importance of and reliance on peers in child safety.

■ More awareness raising and education on mental health issues. Children recommended implementing a weekly class where children can talk about how their week went. This could also include 'mandatory mental health time'[64]. Schools should have wellbeing classes; here children could discuss school wellbeing, and also home well-being as school is a place children frequent regularly and so easy place for children to receive support from adults.

■ Workshops and guidance in schools on the topic of peer violence.

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[64] Danish focus group recommendation.

5 Children's and adults' feedback on the consultation process

In this section, we summarise feedback received from children related to the consultation theme, the process of consulting children, and children's suggestions on how the future consultations planned for the EU Children's Participation Platform could be improved.

5.1 Children and facilitators provided a lot of feedback about this consultation

In the online survey, 64% of children reported 4 or 5 stars on how easy the online survey was to complete, indicating the survey was fairly easy to complete. Additional 26% of children said that the survey was average in the level of difficulty. In the open-ended questions, some respondents shared more comments, with respondents aged 15 or above accounting for the largest share of comments.

Some of the respondents gave their **feedback on the survey** itself and this was quite evenly split between positive and negative feedback. The respondents that **reported positively** on the survey had various views including expressing support for the questions, stating that learnings were achieved from completing the survey, and that more research in this manner should be conducted. Among the respondents that provided a **negative response**, some felt the survey was difficult to understand. These respondents were generally under the age of 15. In contrast, the few respondents over the age of 15 that provided a negative response, felt that the survey could have been more in-depth. This suggests that the survey could potentially have benefitted from a more tailored design catering to the needs of younger children and another for elder children.

The other responses were varied. Examples of areas that were stated, included looking at ways of reporting abuse, the specific support needed for LGBTQIA children, and that some kinds of physical abuse (in the home) are normalised in some countries and should be stopped.

Box 1 Open-ended comments received from children in the online survey

"The questionnaire is very difficult to interpret myself, I have needed help." (Spain)

"Do more research like that!" (Portugal)

"LGBTQIA children don't feel safe in school often because teachers could discriminate or parents might find out and take bad measures and no one would protect them." (Romania)

During interviews and focus groups, facilitators were encouraged to ask children for their feedback and record any key points[65]; The facilitators did so, using a variety of methods and approaches. Feedback to the interviews and focus groups was discussed and/or provided by the following means: oral (not recorded), oral (recorded), forms sent and not returned, google forms in the relevant language, a filled in print out and summarised in the reporting template.

Due to the differing method and type of feedback, this section provides the key messages. It does not seek to provide a country-by-country overview as it is not feasible given the variety of methods in which feedback was provided.

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[65] They were provided with feedback forms that they could choose to use and take forward as they saw fit.

Overall, feedback provided by facilitators can be grouped into four main categories. Table 4 summarises key feedback points and provides suggestions how this feedback can be addressed in future consultations.

Table 2 Feedback on feedback forms

Feedback received	Suggested way forward
When meetings were organised in-person, facilitators completed the forms with the children present, so that they were able to offer support and guidance.	This should also be offered online, though may be more complicated. Perhaps children should be asked if they want to complete the paper version, and if they do not, then offer the option for oral feedback.
Feedback form was not always sufficient clear for children.	The feedback form can be revised. Facilitators may adapt feedback forms as they see fit.
The feedback form was too long. Facilitator used another method (more visual) to gather feedback from children.[66]	The more visual type of feedback collection was appreciated by the children. This form of feedback can be suggested as an alternative for facilitators to implement.
Feedback forms were sent, and not always returned.	Facilitators should follow up about feedback and if not possible to collect via written forms, another approach to collecting feedback should be applied.

5.2 Children think that the topic of Integrated Child Protection is relevant

Among children participating in the online survey, more than 75% of children agreed that the theme of 'keeping children safe' is relevant to them, as they indicated either a 4 or 5 star rating. When broken down by the two age categories (aged 11 years and under, and ages 12 years and older), there was a similar trend with the majority of children selecting either a 4 or 5 star rating (89% from 11 years and under, and 83% from 12 years and above). When living situation is considered against the relevancy of 'keeping children safe', most children gave a positive rating.

Children who participated in the focus groups and consultations also found the topic of children's rights and safety relevant to them. The focus group and interview directions appear to have followed the aspect of child safety and ICPS where children had the most interest. For example, in the Danish focus group:

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[66] The facilitator sent a picture of a visual feedback method. The picture shows: different activities are on different slices of the circle and the colourful dots represents each child's opinion on the activity. The closer the dot is to the middle, the more they enjoyed that particular activity.

> *'The majority of the children found the consultation relevant to them… most of the children spoke about the topic with enthusiasm – at first it was difficult but when the conversation turned to mental health, they all had a lot to say'.* (Consultation report from Denmark)

Likewise, the facilitator of the Cypriot focus group observed that:

> '*General enthusiasm, noticeable that the children regularly speak about issues concerning their rights and situation; they are aware other children in their surroundings do not have this child rights awareness; clear messages, some linking to their own situation (disability), some sensitivity noticed around safety in the family; children managed well to summarise what needs to happen (i.e. via the topic of school, how outside the family there should be people whom they can report to); no moments of exposing any personal situations.*' (Consultation report from Cyprus)

5.3 Children enjoyed the process of being consulted

Children enjoyed participating in consultations, sharing ideas, and being asked about their opinions and having them listened to. Below we share some quotes from children that emphasise their enjoyment with the process.

> *'It's nice that someone wants to listen to young people'* (Child from Denmark)

> *'I enjoyed all the activities carried out. I found them very interesting and informative. I greatly appreciated the support of my facilitator and the care of our well-being as child. The working environment was very nice, and I believe that each of us had no difficulty in feeling at ease.'* (Girl from Italy)

> *'You're doing a great job, keep it up! Make children feel safe and listen!'* (Child from Romania)

> *'We can feel ourselves, the event was well organised and we knew what to expect, we were well informed. I feel respected at the training session and understood'.* (Child from Romania)

Three girls from Italy also shared that **participating in this consultation helped them realise how important it is for children's voices to be heard**.

> *'In a short period of time I have learned many things, the most important is certainly that we must not take anything for granted, on the contrary, it is precisely the small things that are important and that if from an early age we understand the importance of sharing our points of view we will probably we can truly hope for a better future that respects everyone's rights and no longer has inequalities'.* (Girl from Italy)

> *'I understood better how important it is to share one's points of view and how collaboration and working in synergy can lead to implement even ideas that apparently seem complex. Finally, I learned to be grateful even for the little things and small* gestures'. (Girl from Italy)

> *'I learned new things that I didn't know before. I also learned that even though we have different nationalities, cultures and experiences, it is very easy to make friends, sharing ideas, thoughts and points of view which, if put together, can give rise to great projects. Sharing is the basis for planning. I feel very lucky to have had the opportunity to take part in this activity and to have had the opportunity to make my personal contribution as a small piece of the big picture'.* (Girl from Italy)

One girl from Italy also offered broader enthusiasm for her involvement in the Platform activities and opportunities it created for her at a personal and professional level.

'Participating in this project, the Platform, is an experience that I will remember and continue to tell everyone about. I am also happy to be involved in this interview. It is not a given to feel at ease when you are born and raised in a small city and are involved in a project that involves comparison with other kids who come from large cities across Europe. I accepted immediately with great enthusiasm, but at the same time I initially felt inadequate.... but everything was overcome in a very short time because the organization was very welcoming and immediately put me at ease…'. (Girl from Italy)

5.4 The consultations were largely seen by children as informative

Children found the consultation informative, and most agreed that they had learnt something new. For instance, Danish children reported that they learnt information on where to seek free and anonymous counselling in Denmark, as this was a concern for them. Children from Romania reported on the importance of feeling safe and that they are not alone as there are other children going through similar situations.

'I learned about how important it is to feel safe in any environment.' (Child from Romania)

'I have seen many people go through situations that I have been through, which made me feel less excluded from society in general.' (Child from Romania)

Children from Croatia commented that the topic of children's safety is a much more important topic than they thought. They also shared that participating in the consultation discussion helped them to realise about the importance of cooperation between different institutions and procedures to improve children's safety. Learning about interesting proposals on how to improve child safety was also appreciated by children from Romania.

[Children learnt that] '*new things concerning the fulfilment of their rights, namely the right to be protected from harm, what can they do in the situations when they feel unsafe or threatened, who can they contact or turn to for help. Also, they learned on the importance of being more careful while using internet and socializing online'.* (Consultation report from Croatia)

'We can take a stand; we just need a helping hand to implement inventive and useful ideas.'. (Child from Romania)

Finally, asked what they have learnt during this consultation, children from Lithuania offered a range of answers.

'I have learned about various measures that could be taken in order to ensure that all children are safe.' (Child from Lithuania)

'I have learned that if I notice that a child is feeling unsafe, I should talk to him or her, ask how she or he feels, and look for adults who I trust so they could help a child who is feeling unsafe.' (Child from Lithuania)

'I have learned more about the safety of children and how to support children who are in need'. (Child from Lithuania)

'I have learned that adults have a duty to ensure that children are safe'. (Child from Lithuania)

'I have learned that children can cooperate with each other more working in groups. I was reminded of the reporting channels that we can use in case our rights are violated'. (Child from Lithuania)

'I have learned that no one should ever be mistreated.' (Child from Lithuania)

5.5 Children liked the consultation topic, but some found it challenging

Most children indicated that they enjoyed all the topics and discussion points. Some children provided the topics that were of particular interest and enjoyment to them included discussions about education and schools, what can be done to improve the safety of children and questions when children were asked to come up with creative solutions by imagining that they had the political power.

'I liked the discussion about education in schools and appreciated that he asked us what we would change'. (Child from Romania)

'The school environment was the most interesting, punctual, and practical'. (Child from Romania)

'I really liked the questions about safety in schools, because I am sure that we can make relatively easy and effective improvements in education'. (Child from Romania)

'I liked that the questions included the variety of the children's surroundings (family, school, after-school activities, etc.)'. (Child from Lithuania)

'The topic of children's safety in healthcare institutions, in public places and at home'. (Child from Croatia)

'The theme I appreciated most was material and educational poverty. We young people who live in prosperity do not always realise that poverty does not only concern the economic part but is the sum of various social, relational, family and other aspects. The activities proposed on the topic opened me up too many reflections and sharing with the other kids was very educational for me'. (Girl from Italy)

'What measures I would choose not to take anymore, what, in my opinion, is currently not working in order to ensure the safety of children'. (Child from Lithuania)

'The question about the hypothetical position of being president of the United Nations was definitely the one that made me think outside of my powers as a student'. (Child from Romania)

'What measures to ensure the safety of children I would suggest taking if I were a president of the Republic of Lithuania'. (Child from Lithuania)

Children acknowledged that the topic of child safety and Integrated Child Protection Systems is very important. However, **by nature it is a topic that involves sensitive discussions that may be triggering**. It was important that facilitators approached this topic appropriately, and that safeguards were in place to keep children safe. This process was largely successful, as most children replied that there was 'no topic they did not like', as all were necessary. For example, one Italian girl said this in reply to the question 'Are there any areas you dislike'?

'Absolutely not. The enthusiasm of being an active protagonist led me to experience everything with great passion and perhaps even in the moments when I felt most tired, I tried to be concentrated on the activities and issues. The support of the adults who helped us in everything was invaluable'. (Girl from Italy)

In response to the same question, children in Romania said:

'There were no points addressed that I did not like because they all had their importance in the discussion about safety, but there were questions that were a little more difficult for me to answer'. (Child from Romania)

'The questions were very well thought out and at the same time made me think more carefully about the actions that are happening around us, avoiding possible unpleasant situations to be in a safe way'. (Child from Romania)

Nonetheless, some feedback from adult facilitators noted that this topic was challenging for some children, despite all children being briefed prior to the consultation discussion and being given ample opportunities to opt-out. Facilitators are experts in child consultations and should act as the circumstances call for. As noted by a Hungarian facilitator:

'*In the interviews, fortunately, none of the children mentioned any difficulties, but still, for many of them this was a triggering topic as the safe situation triggered the memories of unsafe situations, which they usually shared'.* (Consultation report from Hungary)

5.6 Children offered suggestions for improvement of future consultations

Most feedback forms did not offer suggestions for improvement as they were already very positive about the experience and consultation. When feedback was provided, main suggestions included:

- **A preference for in-person activities**. Those that attended in-person consultations expressed that they were glad and happy that it was in-person. Some that attended online expressed they would have preferred an in-person meeting. However, this was not possible due to time constraints.

- **More frequent consultations** and more opportunities **for a wider group of children** to contribute to policymaking processes,

- Consider whether a specific topic is more suited for a group or interview discussion. Briefing children before discussions and informing them that they could withdraw at any point was essential.

- Consider how to **better tailor consultation topic guides / surveys to the capacities of children** across age groups. Facilitators should adapt the topic guides to the ages, experiences and preferences of children.

- **Collecting consent forms was challenging for some facilitators**, in particular those who work with vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Alternative measures were adopted.

'The consultation went wonderfully and only suggestion would be to do it more often so that we can become familiar with the interview concept and make it easier for us to share our own experiences with others'. (Child from Romania)

'With reference to the Platform activities in general, in my opinion, more kids should be given the opportunity to participate, perhaps involving schools and other countries'. (Girl from Italy)

'The consent forms were also difficult to manage. The guardians signed the consent forms for the interviews and the children who participated in the focus group also gave their signature to participate. For the focus group we used the consent forms of the [Name of project] – there is a paragraph about all kinds of participation consultations that covers the Platform's focus group as well and it is already signed by the parents – but this took more than 6 months! It was not realistic that the parents would send the filled-out consent forms back until the deadline. In my experience, it is hard to acquire documentation and written

feedback from the target group, as there are many immaterial barriers to this: parents of marginalised children are still in some cases illiterate, their basic needs are not satisfied in everyday life and so, they don't consider filling out consent forms a priority. Children in alternative care are not used to documentation and this expectation is too high for them'.
(Feedback from facilitator from Hungary)

6 Next steps

Children participating in consultation discussions and filling in the survey questionnaire were keen to learn how their ideas and feedback will inspire and influence the forthcoming Recommendation on Integrated Child Protection Systems. Children were informed that feedback will include:

- A feedback session organised by DG JUST to communicate key findings from this consultation (planned for January 2024).

- A child-friendly written information summarising key findings from this consultation (planned for autumn 2023).

- A feedback session organised by DG JUST to inform children how children's ideas and suggestions were integrated into the Recommendation (planned for spring 2024).

- A child-friendly version of the Recommendation (planned for mid-2024).

- Opportunity for children to share feedback on the Recommendation (planned for mid-2024).