



EU Children's Participation Platform
Fourth Consultation

CHILDREN'S VOICES ON POVERTY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Summary of what children said

March 2026

WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

Every child and teenager should be able to live a happy and healthy life. Some children need extra support, for example with education, healthcare, food, or housing.

To help with this, European Union (EU) countries have national plans to help those children.

These plans are guided by the **European Child Guarantee**. The EU is checking how the Guarantee and the national plans are working.

That is why it was important to hear directly from children and teenagers under 18 about what life is like and how things are going in their countries.



Between 17 October and 8 December 2025, children from across the EU took part in an online survey, focus groups and interviews through the EU Children's Participation Platform.

WHO PARTICIPATED?



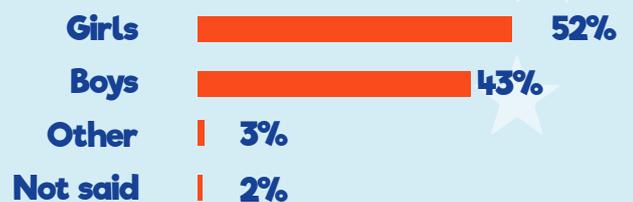
41,736 children and teenagers
aged 8 to 17



From all **27 EU countries** and some citizens living abroad



Through an **online survey**, **26 focus groups** and **45 individual interviews**



WORDS TO KNOW

 Poverty	when a family does not have enough money for the basics, like food, housing, and heating
 Social Inclusion	when you feel you belong, you are treated fairly, and you can take part in all aspects of everyday life
 European Child Guarantee	an EU plan that helps countries improve children's access to essential services
 Discrimination	when someone is treated unfairly because of who they are, or because of something about them
 Barrier	something that makes it harder for a person to get the help and support they need or to join in with others and feel included.

THE BIG MESSAGE FROM CHILDREN



Many children said that help and services do exist, and that some things have improved. But not every child can use this support in the same way.

This means that **even if children have the same rights, they do not always get the same chances in everyday life.**



THE ACTIONS CHILDREN WANT!



Treat children with respect, help them feel safe, protect their privacy, and do not single them out



Make support practical, on time, and reliable, especially for children facing bigger barriers



Make costs lower, or free for families who need it, so all children are included



Listen to children in decisions that affect their lives, and show what changed because of what they said



BEING INCLUDED AND TREATED FAIRLY

What children said

- **Poverty can make children feel ashamed or excluded**, even when support services are available, because they may worry about being treated differently or judged by others
- Some children face **discrimination linked to disability, ethnicity, migration, gender, and other differences**
- Children feel safe when **adults support them, follow clear rules and procedures, and act in a fair and consistent way**
- Children feel included when they **have adults around them who they can trust**, and who take them seriously and listen to what they have to say

What children asked for

- **Support that is practical**, given at the right time, and provided consistently, especially for children who face greater barriers or need extra help
- Adults should **challenge bullying and discrimination** when they see it, and protect children's dignity by treating them with respect and standing up for their rights
- Support should **protect children's privacy** and be provided in a way that does not single them out or make them feel different from others
- Provide meaningful ways for children to **take part in decisions**, and to see what changed because of what they said

Children's concerns are real and deserve to be taken seriously and validated, even if adults see them as not important.

-Boy, 16-17, Romania



Every child deserves a home, internet, food, resources, healthcare, and education regardless of their ethnic, religious, or other group, but not every child gets them - this needs to change.

-Boy, 15, Bulgaria





LIFE AT SCHOOL

What children said

- Trips, activities, and equipment can cost money, and these **costs may create barriers for children to participate**
- **Extra learning help is not always available** when children need it
- Tests, homework, and exams can create **heavy pressure and stress**
- **Bullying and discrimination** can make school feel unsafe
- **Support for children with disabilities and extra needs does not always work well** in daily school life

What children asked for

- **Make school activities free or cheaper**, and clearly explain the full cost in advance, including any extra charges for things like materials, trips or equipment that families might not expect at first
- **Set clear rules about bullying and discrimination**, make sure everyone understands them, and apply them consistently, so that there are clear consequences for harmful behaviour and children feel safe, respected and able to take part in school life
- **Make sure children can get support with their learning**, and school counsellors and school nurses are available when children need them
- **Include children in school decisions**, listen to what children say and make changes based on it

Many students cannot afford trips or paid events, and even small costs can make them feel excluded.

-Focus group, 16 to 17, Romania



It would be nice if there was some time in school to talk about what's happening and how we feel.

-Girl, 15, Denmark





HEALTHCARE

What children said

- **Long waiting times** can stop children getting help and support, especially for mental health
- Some families find it **hard to travel to health services**, especially specialist services, and this can be quite difficult for families who live in rural areas
- **Costs can be a barrier**, especially for dentists, mental health support and other specialist therapies
- Some children are **not sure where to go for help**, especially if parents cannot support them

What children asked for

- **Faster access to doctors and specialist care** when children need it
- **Affordable care for families** who need extra support, including dental and specialised care, such as eye tests and glasses, mental health support, and speech and language therapy
- **Clear, child friendly information** about where to get support
- **Better and quicker mental health support**, including support provided in schools

It can be like this: I gather up my courage, "okay, today I'm going to tell," and then she's [school nurse] not even there.

-Girl, 17, Sweden



There should be a requirement for at least one psychologist and one social worker per school.

-Girl, 8, Portugal





FOOD, INCLUDING ONE SCHOOL MEAL A DAY

What children said

- **Healthy food matters** for health and learning, but not all children get it every day
- **Free school meals are not available in all schools**, and some older pupils cannot get them because the rules say they are not eligible, even if their families are struggling
- **School food is not always good quality**, or it does not look and taste good
- **Healthier food often costs more** than processed and less healthy food, so families may choose it because they need to save money, even if they would prefer healthier choices
- **When schools are closed**, for example during holidays, free school meals can stop, which means **some children may not get the same support with food** during that time

What children asked for

- **At least one healthy meal** during the school day to be free or affordable
- **Cheap and healthy snacks and drinks to be available** in school
- **Better quality and variety** in school meals, including fruit and vegetables
- **Food support during holidays and school closures**, for example holiday meal clubs or food vouchers to help make sure children still have enough to eat when school is closed

Schools should provide free, healthy meals or snacks at school. School should be a safe place.

-Boy, 16, Poland



We should focus on showing parents and kids how to eat healthy at home. It should be taught more.

-Boy, 17, Hungary





HOUSING

What children said

- A safe home helps children feel secure and cared for, which supports their learning and health
- Some children live in cold, damp or overcrowded homes
- Paying for rent, gas, electricity and water can put families under pressure, and this can make some children worry about other children losing homes or having to move away from their friends and school
- Young people leaving care may not always get enough housing support when they start living on their own

What children asked for

- Make sure homes are warm, safe, and in good condition, and that problems are fixed quickly so children can live comfortably and stay healthy
- Help families pay for rent, heating, water, and energy when the family has less money
- Make sure children have enough space and privacy, including somewhere quiet to study
- Give better support to young people when they leave foster care or children's home

It is a matter of dignity or shame: have your own space, clean, heated spaces.

-Child, France



Landlords should be legally obligated to adhere to minimum standards, clean water must come out of the tap, insulation must be good enough.

-Girl, 17, Germany



WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

In 2026, the EU will use what children said, together with information from adults in each country, to review progress and improve plans to tackle child poverty and exclusion. Children's views will help the EU review the European Child Guarantee and national plans.



https://eu-for-children.europa.eu/childrens-voices_en



If you are under 18 and you need to talk to someone about how you are feeling, please speak to a trusted adult, or contact a child helpline in your country.





#EUChildParticipation