



EU Children's Participation Platform

# TOGETHER FOR WELL-BEING

What happened at the study visit in Berlin

April 2026

## WE CAME TOGETHER IN BERLIN

16 of us from different EU Member States, all part of the EU Children’s Participation Platform, came together in Berlin for a Study Visit called **Together for Well-being**. At the Embassy of Children, run by SOS Children’s Villages, we spent two days exploring what helps children feel safe, supported, heard, and able to ask for help. We were not there only to reflect — but to turn our ideas into recommendations for adults and decision-makers.



## WHAT WAS THE STUDY VISIT ABOUT?

The focus of our Study Visit was **well-being**: what helps children feel safe, supported, respected, and listened to, and how support systems can work better for us. We joined activities, listened to speakers, explored examples from different countries, reflected on our own experiences, and then turned our ideas into recommendations for adults and decision-makers.



### The visit had two parts:

Day 1	Day 2
Building trust, sharing ideas, and understanding what support feels like for children	Turning our ideas into proposals, messages, and recommendations for policy and practice

## HOW DID WE START?

Day 1 began by helping everyone feel comfortable, welcomed, and ready to participate. In the opening session, children were welcomed by **Ayata** and **Helene**, **members of the Platform’s Children’s Panel**, who shared moving words on why young people’s voices matter and why mental health and well-being should be taken seriously.

**Astrid Brandl**, **CEO of SOS Children’s Villages Germany**, welcomed everyone and explained that child participation and well-being are very important to SOS. She highlighted that, through the Embassy of Children in Germany, SOS has created a real physical space where children and young people can speak about the issues that affect them and carry those matters forward.

**Marie-Cécile Rouillon**, **coordinator for the Rights of the Child of the European Commission** explained that mental health is already an important part of the Commission’s work, including through projects linked to health services, online protection, and children’s rights. She also said that the Study Visit was important be-

cause it helped us learn what is happening in different countries, what can be done better, and how our ideas could be taken forward through recommendations.

**Zahid**, a former member of the **SOS Children’s Villages and Youth Council**, explained that the Embassy of Children is an important space for young people to speak up and be heard about topics that matter to them and can even take these issues forward through political petitions, just like the example that would be shared later that day.



“We have the right to be heard, and I’d like to see it - our opinions of everyone here - reflected in a policy and helping more children.” - David, Portugal

## WHAT DID WE LEARN ABOUT SUPPORT?

A big highlight of Day 1 was the session **What Makes Support Work?** led by **Helene Wittek**, founder and co-CEO of [Dare2Care: Working together for mentally and socially strong schools](#). We explored how stress develops, how feelings can be understood, and what kinds of self-care and coping strategies can help. We also reflected on what schools can do to support students’ well-being.

Helene showed us the image of a “stress bucket” to explain how stress can build up and why support matters before things overflow. Through activities like the mood meter and self-care exercises, we reflected on open feelings, stress, and what can help in different situations. Helene shared that mentally and socially strong schools need emotional learning, communication, empathy, stress management, and peer support, and that schools can become safer when students, teachers, and parents are all involved.

We also had a quiet **Reflection Time**, led by Youth Expert **Adriyana Vasheva**, to write, draw, make poems, or create messages about what had stood out so far. This gave us space to pause, notice how we were feeling, and think about what we wanted to carry into the rest of the day and what we wanted to leave in the space we created.



## WHAT DID WE LEARN ABOUT PEER SUPPORT AND YOUTH VOICES?

A favourite session was **Peer Support Spotlight: SOS Mental Health Peers Program** led by Lucas Meinecke. We explored how young people can support each other while also understanding the limits of peer support. The message was clear: adults are responsible for helping children, this is not children's task. Peers are not therapists, but they can listen, care, and help connect others to trusted adults or professional support. Through activities and discussion, we reflected on stress, coping strategies, and what makes a school feel safe and supportive.

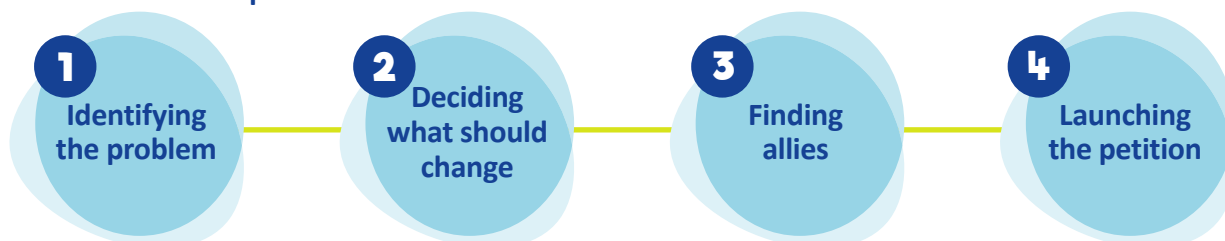


Later in Day 1, we joined a session led by **Zahid** and **Eliot** from the Children and Youth Council of SOS Children's Villages Germany.

They showed us how young people in Germany turned concerns about mental health and access to therapy into a political petition.



We learned the main steps:



We also explored how young people can help by raising awareness, using social media, collecting signatures, and reaching out to people and organisations who can make a problem heard. This session helped us understand how young people can turn concerns into action.

## HOW DID WE TURN IDEAS INTO A "SUPPORT WALL"?

At the end of Day 1, we worked together on a shared **Support Wall**. This helped us turn the ideas of **prevention** and **protection/support** into categories and organise what we had heard throughout the day. We used the wall to show both what already helps and what is still missing.

What we said already helps:	What we said is still missing:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friendships, peer support, and trusted adults</li> <li>• Family support and a healthy environment at home</li> <li>• Hobbies, outdoor activities, and safe spaces</li> <li>• Therapy, crisis hotlines, and places to talk without judgement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More emotional education, empathy, and self-confidence</li> <li>• Less stigma around mental health</li> <li>• More accessible and professional support</li> <li>• Better communication, safe spaces, and support that is easier to trust</li> </ul>

We also linked these ideas to the people and systems that should act, such as schools, families, health and social services, governments, youth organisations, online platforms, and children themselves.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM OTHER COUNTRIES?



Day 2 began with a session called **How Countries Support Children’s Mental Health – What Works for Us?** We moved around different country stations and explored examples of how support can be organised in practice. At each station, we listened, asked questions, and noted what felt helpful, what seemed missing, and what ideas we might want to take forward.

Each country station brought a different perspective:



**Cyprus** – Maria Peyiotti, a parliamentary committee leader, shared “Young Voices Shaping the Future”. We learned how children and young people can shape policies, meet national authorities, and make their voices heard through strong groups, helplines, and other support structures.



**Poland** – Łucja Dorota and Zuzanna, two high school students, presented “3Lab: Innovation Workplace Lab for All”. They showed us a community space where students create projects on topics that matter to them, including digital disinformation, online safety, and peer support for school stress, exams, and presentations.



**Spain** – Olalla García Pineda, a mental health advisor, presented “Child & Youth Well-being and Mental Health First”. We learned about the importance of early support, adults working together, and making sure children have one trusted person to guide them through the help they need.



**Romania** – Valeria Ungur, a school counsellor and clinical psychotherapist, presented “Policies and Resources for Safe and Supportive Schools”. She showed how schools can help through emotional learning, self-awareness, early support, and teamwork between adults.



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Together, these stations helped us see that support can be organised in different ways across countries but that we share similar challenges and questions:



**How to make schools safer**



**How to reduce barriers to support**



**How to involve children’s voices**



**How to build systems that respond better to children’s needs**

## WHAT MATTERED MOST TO US?

Using the Support Wall and the notes from the country stations, we worked together to choose the themes we most wanted to turn into recommendations for adults and decision-makers.

In the end, **four key themes** stood out:



Access to therapy



Mental health stigma



Emotional intelligence



Family support



“It’s easy to dismiss what children are saying because: “They’re kids and they’ll grow out of it.” But sometimes you do actually have to listen and take them seriously, and trust that they know what they need” - Elliot, Germany

## WHAT DID WE RECOMMEND?

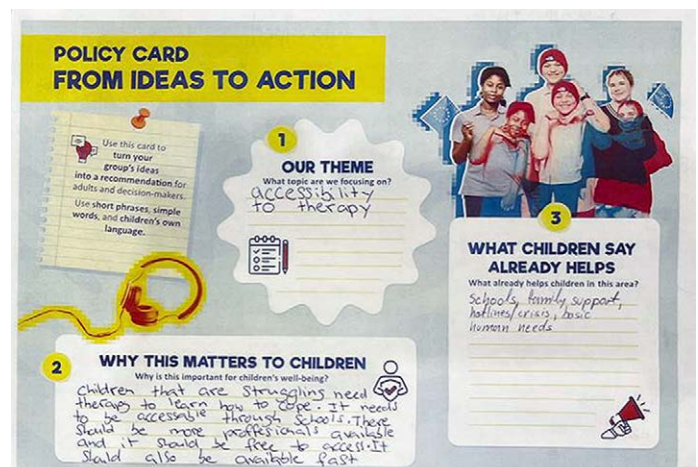
In the Policy Labs we turned our ideas into real recommendations that we want adults and decision-makers to hear. We worked in groups around the priority themes and created Policy Cards.

For each theme, four strong recommendations emerged.



### 1. Access to therapy

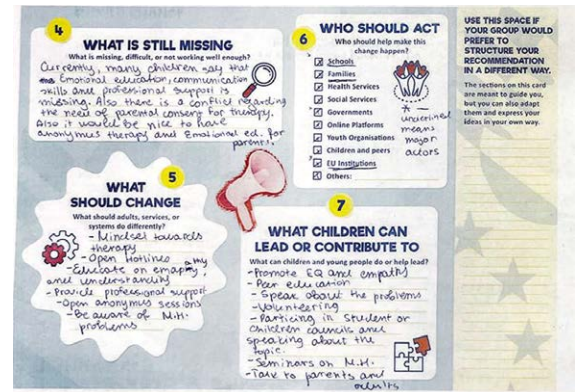
- Therapy should be easier to access, faster, available through schools, and free where possible.
- We highlighted the lack of professionals, emotional education, and support from parents when children need help.
- We called for more investment, more cooperation between services, and better information about available support.
- Children can help by speaking up, raising awareness, and organising petitions.





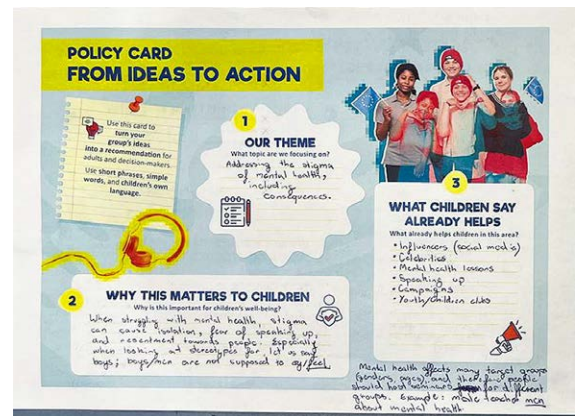
## 2. Emotional intelligence

- Emotional intelligence helps with stress, feelings, empathy, and communication.
- We highlighted the importance of hotlines, a healthy home environment, therapy, and safe spaces.
- We called for more emotional education, stronger communication skills, and better professional support. We also recommended more empathy and understanding, open hotlines, anonymous support, and greater awareness of mental health problems.
- Children can help in promoting empathy, speaking up, and taking part in youth groups and councils.



## 3. Mental health stigma

- Stigma can create fear, silence, and judgement, especially when stereotypes influence how children are expected to behave.
- We highlighted that mental health lessons, campaigns, youth clubs, celebrities speaking openly, and people speaking up already help.
- We called for more adult acceptance, teacher training, and programmes for adults. We also recommend better language, more awareness from brands and public figures, and more careful use of social media.
- Children can help through youth-led initiatives and seminars from children's perspectives.



## 4. Family support

- Family support matters because parents are role models and their behaviour influences children.
- We highlighted that some support already exists, such as school meals, SOS campaigns, and safe spaces.
- We called for more empathy, more direct support for families, and easier ways to ask for help. We also recommend stronger support for parents, less academic pressure for students (to allow more family time), and an SOS line for families.
- Children can help by being more respectful, empathetic and careful with each other.



## WHAT BIG MESSAGES DID WE TAKE AWAY?

At the end of Day 2, we shared our Policy Cards in Collective Messages from Berlin, listened to each other's ideas, and gave feedback to make them even stronger. This final step helped us see that many of the themes we had worked on were deeply connected.

Access to therapy, emotional intelligence, stigma, and family support are not separate issues, they affect each other and need joined-up solutions.

We also made it clear that we do not only want adults to fix things for us. We see ourselves as part of the solution too, by raising awareness, supporting each other, speaking up, and helping shape better systems.



Trusted adults and relationships matter



Support should be easier to find and easier to trust



Schools have an important role, but cannot do everything alone



Children should be involved, not just spoken about



Support systems work best when different people and services work together



## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The recommendations we created in Berlin will help inform follow-up work with:

- the Network for Children's Rights
- Expert Groups on Mental Health and Wellbeing at School
- the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child

So even though the Study Visit ended, **our ideas will keep moving forward.**





**I also have a message for all the politicians and the whole world... Please invest more in the youth and make sure that we are fine and have proper resources. And to all the kids and teens: please never give up, your voices are heard, always stay curious, enjoy your life, and stop comparing yourselves. You are fine!**

-Ayata, Germany





**#EUChildParticipation**