

Report on child consultations informing the elaboration of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2022-2027



www.coe.int/children

Building a Europe
for and with children



Report on child consultations informing the elaboration of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2022-2027

Caterina Parodi
Pippo Costella
Barbara Melamed (editing)
Defence for Children
International – Italy

Council of Europe

French edition:

*« Rapport sur les consultations d'enfants
visant à éclairer l'élaboration de la
Stratégie du Conseil de l'Europe pour
les droits de l'enfant (2022-2027) »*

The reproduction of extracts
(up to 500 words) is authorised, except for
commercial purposes as long as the integrity
of the text is preserved, the excerpt is not used
out of context, does not provide incomplete
information or does not otherwise mislead
the reader as to the nature, scope or content
of the text. The source text must always be
acknowledged as follows

“© Council of Europe, year of the publication”.

All other requests concerning the
reproduction/translation of all or part
of the document, should be addressed
to the Directorate of Communications,
Council of Europe (F-67075 Strasbourg
Cedex or publishing@coe.int).

All other correspondence concerning this
document should be addressed to the of the
Directorate General of Democracy

Council of Europe,
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex,
E-mail: children@coe.int

Cover photo: Timon Studler
Illustrations: Norma Nardi

This publication has not been copy-edited
by the DPDP Editorial Unit to correct
typographical and grammatical errors.

Cover and layout: Documents and
Publications Production Department
(SPDP), Council of Europe and DCI Italy

© Council of Europe, March 2022

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	5
PREFACE	7
BY THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE	7
BY DCI ITALY	8
INTRODUCTION	9
METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH	11
PREPARATORY DESK RESEARCH: MAPPING OF CHILD CONSULTATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THEMATIC FACT SHEETS	11
COORDINATION MEETINGS: ENABLE CO-OPERATION AND ADAPTATION TO NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXTS	11
CHILD SAFEGUARDING AND WELLBEING PROTOCOL: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONSULTING CHILDREN	12
COMPOSITION OF THE GROUPS FOR NATIONAL CONSULTATIONS	12
CONSULTATIVE PARTICIPATION: CHILDREN CONTRIBUTE TO A PROCESS OF CHANGE	12
A RIGHTS-BASED AND EMPOWERING APPROACH	13
STRUCTURE OF THE CHILD CONSULTATIONS: SEVEN STEPS TO ENABLE AN INFORMED DISCUSSION OF THE THEME	13
IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS	16
FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE FOR ALL CHILDREN	17
EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR ALL CHILDREN	26
ACCESS TO AND SAFE USE OF TECHNOLOGIES FOR ALL CHILDREN	34
CHILD-FRIENDLY JUSTICE FOR ALL CHILDREN	42
GIVING A VOICE TO EVERY CHILD	46
CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN CRISIS AND EMERGENCY SITUATIONS	52
CHILDREN'S ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE CDENF	55
1. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE RECENT CONSULTATION PROCESS?	55
2. IS IT CLEAR FOR YOU WHAT THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE IS DOING FOR CHILDREN?	55
3. DO YOU THINK THAT THE THEMATIC PRIORITIES CHOSEN BY THE COE REFLECT THE REAL CONCERNS OF CHILDREN IN EUROPE? IF YOU HAD TO PICK ONE, WHAT IS FOR YOU THE MOST IMPORTANT CONCERN OR WORRY OF ALL CHILDREN TODAY?	55
4. DURING THE CHILD CONSULTATION PROCESS FOR THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE STRATEGY, DID YOU FEEL THAT YOU COULD FREELY EXPRESS YOURSELF? DID YOU FEEL THAT YOUR VIEWS COULD HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE STRATEGY?	56
5. WHAT DO YOU EXPECT FROM THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AFTER THIS CONSULTATION?	56
6. HOW COULD THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE MAKE SURE CHILDREN ARE TRULY HEARD?	56
7. WHAT DO YOU EXPECT FROM YOUR NATIONAL GOVERNMENT?	57
CONCLUSION, NEXT STEPS AND FOLLOW-UP	58

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout this process we encountered extremely dedicated professionals, without whom this action would not have been possible.

Firstly, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to all the representatives of the National Delegations having supported the child consultation process towards the Strategy - Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Portugal, Slovak Republic and Spain - and namely to Alfredo Ferrante, Eftychia Katsigaraki, Ester di Napoli, Gelly Aroni, Joos Callens, Joost Van Haelst, Laura Saarinen, Maria Belichovska, María Gracia Juste, Milica Joskimović, Mária Vargová, Stefan Aelbrecht, Stefania Chiru and Sónia Lourenço Rosa.

Secondly, we would like to sincerely thank all the NGOs, Associations, State Agencies which came together to coordinate and facilitate this consultation. In particular, Amélia Carneiro, Chara Galanou, Célia Chamiça, Elina Stenvall, Filomena Menna, Francesco Chezzi, François Turcan, Georgia Baltira, Julia Todorova, Larisa Lukačević, Laura Tiitinen, Léa Margery, Mabel Taravilla Herrera, Magdaléna Jačalová, Marina Boznou, Morgane Roualt-Mouraine, Nadia-Elpida Romanidou, Nuria Chocano García, Pelios Dimitrios Stavrou, Rosa Lourenço, Sanna Valtonen, Sergi Morales Pérez, Silvia Casanovas Abanco, Simos (Symeon) Papadopoulos, Sotirios Efstratiadis, Stefan Lazarov, Stefania Chiru, Vasiliki Kalogera and Lubomíra Mrázová.

Thirdly, we would like to thank the Children's Rights Division of the Council of Europe, and in particular Maren Lambrecht and Audrey Winum for their continuous support and involvement.

And finally, we would like to thank each and every one of the 220 children involved in this consultation process. This report aims at sharing your integral voices. All the quotes used have been shared with us by the facilitators of the consultations, and while being anonymous, we believe they greatly enrich both this document and also the Strategy itself where some of them appear. We hope you can identify yourself with the messages of this report and we hope this encourages you to continue to speak out for what you believe in and feel empowered to contribute to change.

Caterina PARODI, Pippo COSTELLA
Authors

PREFACE

By the Council of Europe

Thanks to the amazing work undertaken in recent years by child activists and different organisations supporting them across Europe, we all know that children are not only capable of understanding complex challenges and developments, but also of speaking up to their rights and triggering major movements aimed at improving the world from their unique perspective.

The child consultation process undertaken towards the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) which is the object of this report is not entirely new, as the Council of Europe has strategically sought children's views to inform work of the Council of Europe, in setting and monitoring standards and in capacity building activities. By involving children at European level in its work our Organisation is recognising the value of child participation as children have a true expertise at different levels. The consecutive Council of Europe Strategies for the Rights of the Child have always promoted child participation amongst the priorities, and so does the 4th Strategy adopted in February 2022. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18 remain the "lighthouses" guiding European and national activities.

What is new about the child participation process summarised in this report is its scope: 220 children in 10 Council of Europe member states were directly invited to discover the strategic objectives defined by national governments and their partners and express their opinions about challenges to be met and responses to be provided. Thanks to the professional support by Defence for Children (DCI) Italy, the consultations have been a great success for all parties involved. The results of children's work on the Strategy are now clearly presented in the Strategy which will guide the work of the Council of Europe from 2022 to 2027. Some of the proposals by children have been directly included into the core text; others have been kept as a "stand-alone" product in boxes entitled "What children suggest", where their opinions are given visibility without filtering and compromise. May their suggestions serve as additional inspirations to all adult decision makers using the Strategy for guidance when policies on the rights of the child are developed in their member states in the years to come.

"Give voice to all children and young people of all member states, allowing to build a society with more equity, inclusion, solidarity, rich and diverse".

This quote reflects the visions and hopes expressed by children in Portugal, as they were contributing to the new Strategy. It should not only remain the vision of children but be implemented by adults in power throughout Europe. The quote reflects a paradigm, that all lawmakers and political decision makers should keep in mind when preparing laws and policies: building equal, inclusive and diverse societies must start with children's human rights education and awareness-raising from an early age onwards, and children themselves must be given a voice and be heard in decision-making processes.

With this in mind – the actual needs of children – the Council of Europe is all set to implement the new Strategy over the next six years and will not miss out on further opportunities to involve children directly in its work.

I would like to thank all the children who contributed so actively and diligently to the Strategy, always in distant mode and at times under difficult conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They have proved their resilience and their commitment to making the world a better place. I invite all of them to stay alert, committed to speaking up and defending their rights, and always ready to challenge us, the adults making decisions which impact their lives!

Regina JENSDOTTIR

Head of the Children's Rights Division/Council of Europe

By DCI Italy

The ideas and words of children and adolescents can generate significant and decisive perspectives for the present and for the future. Building the capacities, contexts and the right attitude to be able to listen to their voices is certainly a complex exercise yet a simple one. The consultations with children carried out in 10 Council of Europe member states to inform the 2022-2027 Strategy for the Rights of the Child were a valuable moment in this direction. The voices of children interacted with those of adults, and the methodological choice for this process was to develop a conversation that could have meaning and significance for all who took part in it.

It was one of those fruitful exchanges that leave us with the feeling of having been able to express ourselves and of having acquired something that was not there before. Not only answers but many questions, which are expected and fair. This report contains the full conversations we had with children and young people over the past months. The thoughts and ideas generated in this process have substantially informed the Council of Europe's Strategy for the Rights of the Child for the next five years.

We would like to express our gratitude to all the children who decided to put their trust in us by participating actively and creatively in this exchange, as well to all the adults who made this precious consultation possible. This trust will not go to waste but instead we hope it will generate an increasingly significant process over time to think and do what still needs to be thought and done.

Pippo Costella,
Defence for Children International (DCI) – Italy

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of 2021, a total of 220 children were consulted throughout Europe and their thoughts, voices and perspectives informed the drafting process of the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child for the period 2022-2027. In continuity with the previous Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021), this new Strategy sets out the organisation's priorities in this area and the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) oversees its implementation. The Steering Committee considered child consultations a necessary input to the drafting process. Defence for Children International (DCI) – Italy collaborated with the Council of Europe in planning and coordinating the consultative process carried out by 10 National Delegations: Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Portugal, Slovak Republic and Spain.

The Steering Committee identified six priority areas for the Strategy to consult with children corresponding to the six objectives of the Strategy: freedom from violence for all children, equal opportunities and social inclusion for all children, access to and safe use of technologies for all children, child-friendly justice for all children, giving a voice to every child, and children's rights in crisis and emergency situations.

The overall goal of the consultation process was to ensure that the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child considers and addresses the main challenges faced by children and responds to children's priorities as perceived and expressed by the participants in the consultations. The specific objectives were to:

- i) ensure continuity of the work promoted by the Council of Europe Children's Rights Division concerning children's participation;
- ii) facilitate children's involvement in the development and implementation of the new Strategy from the onset; and
- iii) advise the CDENF on how to further include children in its work, in particular in the implementation and monitoring of the new Strategy.

Under the Programme "Building a Europe for and with children", the Children's Rights Division (CRD) of the Council of Europe has established a tradition of involving children in its work in all the relevant areas of its international co-operation – standard-setting on the rights of the child, monitoring member states' progressive implementation of these standards and developing co-operation and capacity-building activities to support implementation. In accordance with priority area 2 of the previous Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021), which aimed at promoting "the participation of all children", the organisation consulted children on several occasions and various topics, such as child-friendly justice, preventing and combatting sexual violence, child-friendly health care and migration. It invited children to major events and reached out to them in the production of child-friendly material, for example for Roma and Traveller children, or children acting in the digital environment.

DCI Italy has a long-standing experience of engaging children in its work, including as a coordinator of multi-country initiatives. For over a decade, the organisation has consulted with children in the context of research and policy analysis, programming and advocacy, and involved children and young people as co-trainers in capacity-building initiatives. In light of this experience, DCI Italy has elaborated a compendium of methods for consulting children of different age groups, in different life situations and from different social and national backgrounds. Although consulting with children is always a sensitive and challenging task, DCI Italy has been able to inspire, together with children, considerable processes of change in policy making, research, service practice and training across many thematic fields, at national, regional and local levels in Italy, in Europe and beyond.

The child consultation process towards the new Strategy took place between January 2021 and January 2022, coming from the first contacts made between national delegations and the Council of Europe and up until the final presentation of results by children.

After an initial period of exchange between DCI Italy and the National Delegations (between May and July 2021), the consultations took place in the 10 member states involved in this process, with continued assistance from DCI Italy. The fourth plenary meeting of the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF), held in October 2021, dedicated a space to the presentation of the proposals by children and facilitators for the future Council of Europe Strategy. During this meeting, each member state involved showed a video with the children who participated in the consultations illustrating the results. Following this, a representative of each National Delegation presented the respective consultation process, highlighting the most significant moments of this action. At the end of the meeting, an exchange between members and children who would answer questions put forward by members of the CDENF took place. Despite the efforts of everyone in attendance, some children did not have the opportunity to share their views, due to lack of time. Therefore, the Children's Rights Division of the Council of Europe invited all children who participated in the consultations, and in particular those who should have addressed the CDENF, to participate in the afternoon session of the CDENF Bureau meeting in January 2022. During this meeting, child representatives from the National Delegation of Italy, Portugal and Bulgaria presented their views on the thematic priorities access to and safe use of technologies for all children, equal opportunities by all children and giving a voice to every child, respectively.

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

The child consultations in the participating 10 member states were planned, coordinated and implemented by DCI Italy through a multi-step process between February and December 2021. DCI Italy developed an implementation protocol and held periodic coordination meetings with the National Delegations to guide them and their local partners throughout all phases of the process. The implementation protocol included a detailed methodology for the child consultations and the Child Safeguarding and Wellbeing Protocol, as well as a set of technical guidance documents such as fact sheets for the six thematic priority themes, a research protocol for the desk review and a template for reporting by National Delegations.

In the launching phase, each National Delegation identified one of the priority theme of the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child (“Strategy” hereafter) to consult children on. Some of the priority themes were chosen by two or more countries (see Table 1).

Priority theme	Countries
Freedom from violence for all children	France, Slovak Republic, Spain
Equal opportunities and social inclusion for all children	Montenegro, Portugal
Access to and safe use of technologies for all children	Belgium, Italy
Child-friendly justice for all children	Greece (Ministry of Justice)
Giving a voice to every child	Bulgaria, Finland
Children’s rights in crisis and emergency situations	Greece (Ministry of Migration and Asylum)

Table 1: Overview of participating countries and thematic priority areas

Preparatory desk research: Mapping of child consultations and development of thematic fact sheets

The National Delegations contributed to a desk review with the aim of gathering examples of child consultations and participation processes from their respective countries. Literature and documentation of child consultation processes in participating member states and throughout the Council of Europe region were identified and were instrumental to ensure the consultation process took into account existing approaches of engaging children in policy analysis and development, as well as documented recommendations of children.

Preparatory research was essential to develop factsheets on the six priority themes of the Strategy. The factsheets provided an overview on the rights of the child in regards to the specific theme and some key data and statistics on the implementation of these rights in the Council of Europe region and in the member state where children were consulted on. The factsheets supported facilitators in preparing the consultations with children.

Coordination meetings: Enable co-operation and adaptation to national and local contexts

DCI Italy held periodic coordination meetings and orientation sessions for National Delegations and facilitators to present and solicit feedback on the common methodology and foster co-operation between all delegations throughout the process. During these sessions, delegations had the opportunity to discuss the methodology and its adaptability to the national contexts, update each other, discuss emerging issues and questions, and strengthen with National Delegations who had chosen the same thematic priority, to maximise the results and scope of the consultations.

The coordination meetings were essential to ensure the consultations were implemented in respect of ethical standards for engaging children in research. In particular, DCI Italy explored together with National Delegations questions regarding the informed consent of participating children and their parents or guardians; applicable laws and regulations concerning data protection, the use, storage and sharing of personal data; reporting obligations where any acts of violence or related concerns were disclosed; the right to opt-out from the consultations at any given moment; and how to explain these matters to the children in a language they understand.

Consultations were held online and/or face-to-face, depending on the COVID-19 restrictions in the participating countries. The methodology guide included considerations regarding the format of the consultations, the team of facilitators, the timing and preparation of the sessions and supporting materials, as well as an agenda for the consultations, which consisted ideally of three sessions of 1.5 to 2 hours each. DCI Italy held bilateral meetings with several National Delegations to assist in the adaptation of the methodology to the national context and with the modality of the consultations in a residential setting, online or hybrid.

While the actual consultations of the participating children took place from May to July 2021, DCI Italy held several meetings with the National Delegations to exchange information and discuss the implementation of the sessions. In June and July 2021, two follow-up meetings were held, aimed at exchanging views on the results of the consultations and next steps.

Child Safeguarding and Wellbeing Protocol: Ethical considerations for consulting children

The organisers of the child consultations and in particular the facilitators were responsible for ensuring that the consultation process was carried out in the full respect of ethical standards of conducting research with children. To this end, DCI Italy developed a “Child Safeguarding and Wellbeing Protocol” to be applied to all activities directly or indirectly involving children throughout the consultations. This document provided guidance and considerations on child safeguarding before, during and after the activities involving children.

Composition of the groups for national consultations

The National Delegations created groups of 10 to 20 children for each consultation, taking into account different factors, such as age, gender, national and social origin, diverse abilities, specific vulnerabilities, or the status of children or parents. National Delegations were advised to ensure diversity within each group and to take into account the experience made in previous consultations and knowledge gathered from other processes of engaging with the specific groups of children.

Participants included children from a wide range of cultural, social and national backgrounds. Gender balance was achieved. It was suggested that the National Delegations create groups of children aged between 13 and 17 years old, unless there was a demonstrated and consolidated experience in consulting younger age groups and adapting the methodology accordingly. Given their previous experience in consulting children, some National Delegations involved children from nine years old. The Greek Ministry of Justice consulted children and young people up to 20 years old, in light of the subject of their consultations on child-friendly justice.

Consultative participation: Children contribute to a process of change

Children were involved in the development of the new Strategy through a consultative participation, meaning that the Council of Europe, through National Delegations, sought children’s views, perspectives and suggestions and committed to work with the results in a way that is transparent to the children and all actors involved. A consultative participation allows children to influence a change process more than a single event of child participation.

A consultative participation exercise is dynamic and complex and stimulates a process of change. Change refers not only to the thematic priorities as such and the way they are reflected in the new Strategy, but also to the capacity of listening and engaging with children in an open-minded dialogue. The common methodology for the consultations in all 10 countries embraced this understanding. It guided the National Delegations in carrying out a dynamic process of an active listening approach with the participating children and facilitators, National Delegations and the Council of Europe to discover new perspectives. Whereas the thematic priorities had been proposed as fields where conversations with children should take place, the children’s statements and contributions, as anticipated, went beyond this pre-determined field.

The methodology for the consultations with children was based on the assumption that the children should be able to participate in a way that reflects their personal views, thoughts and experiences, placing the child at the centre of all processes, taking into account the child's personality, individual characteristics, life circumstances, experiences and other relevant factors.¹ In practice, this requires from the organisers and facilitators the capacity to create a space and opportunities where children are able to discuss the thematic priorities openly and constructively in accordance with their own characteristics – as individuals and as children – and, where possible, free from adult-constructed perceptions or predetermined expectations.

Asking children to express themselves on such big matters – matters for which we, as adults and professionals, do not always have convincing answers or solutions – should be accompanied by an openness and willingness to question our way of thinking, our language and our methods and recognise that it is not at all an easy task to consult with children on these themes and committing to their views, positions and recommendations being reflected in the new Strategy. Approaching the consultation process with an open attitude and the willingness to listen, to wonder and be astonished, is therefore a key dimension to be explored, in addition to questions of efficiency in implementing a pre-determined task.

A rights-based and empowering approach

The methodology for the consultations was primarily based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a desk review of previous experiences of child participation initiatives carried out in Council of Europe member states, the Council of Europe Recommendation on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18,² recommendations by the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child, as well as other international documents of relevance for consulting children in policy analysis and development.

The consultations were inspired by the “Philosophy for Children” movement. Philosophy for Children is an educational model based on collaborative inquiry-based teaching and learning, which considers the classroom – or group of children – as an “inquiring community”. This educational model emphasises the critical, creative and caring thinking of children and adults and supports the development of cognitive and social skills, abilities and dispositions. The approach aims to support children in their development as active democratic citizens who have “an open inquiring outlook and are prepared to arrive at judgements on the basis of reason and evidence”. The overall goal of this approach is to uphold the rights of the child and to recognise each individual child as an agent of his/her own life and empower each child throughout the process.³

Structure of the child consultations: Seven steps to enable an informed discussion of the theme

In all countries, the consultations followed a standardised structure of seven main steps (see Figure 1). By following these steps, facilitators clarified the purpose of the consultation and established a “field of reference” related to the specific theme, allowing the children to engage in an informed conversation on the theme that could eventually lead to suggestions, recommendations and even questions to be addressed by the new Strategy. From the micro to the macro level, participants were able to familiarise with the theme and engage in a discussion to inform the drafting process of the Strategy.

This standardised process ensured that the consultations were organised as a progressive and structured interaction between facilitators and children with the aim of sharing information and thoughts and spur discussion. It enabled the children to familiarise themselves with the theme and understand the current situation concerning the specific thematic priority. Achieving this understanding is a necessary precondition for the children to be in a better position to form their own opinions, to exchange their thoughts and considerations and to propose actions to improve the situation. Through this progressive interaction, the children were enabled to inform the new Strategy in a meaningful way.

1. For the complete methodology, child safeguarding and wellbeing protocol and fact sheets for the thematic priorities please refer to the Methodological Package available, upon request.
2. Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18 (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 28 March 2012 at the 1138th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies).
3. *Oxford Bibliographies*, Philosophy for Children, last modified 15 January 2019.



Figure 1: Steps of the consultation process

The first step, **introduction of participants**, aimed at creating an informal, safe and child-friendly common framework allowing the children to feel at ease. Through a narrative biographic exercise, participants established a personal connection with the theme of the consultation. This exercise helped participants to get to know each other and to ‘warm up’ for their subsequent interaction and collaboration.

The second phase, **setting the scene**, aimed at clarifying the purpose and objectives of the consultations, while answering questions such as “Why are we here? What is the Council of Europe? What is the Strategy for the Rights of the Child? What are we expected to do?”. The children were informed, in a clear and concise manner and in a language they understand, of why they were invited to participate in the consultation, what the Council of Europe is, the background to the development of the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child and its meaning. This informative briefing aimed at consolidating the information children had already received prior to the consultation. It aimed to further foster an understanding of the purpose and scope of the consultation and what the children were expected to do.

The third step, dedicated to the **thematic priorities and key definitions**, followed an open discussion approach, based on active listening. In particular, the facilitators were asked not to provide the children with a definition of the thematic priority, but rather to engage the group in a brainstorming exercise, using a flipchart if face-to-face, or jamboard (or other similar platforms) if online. After discussing the thematic priority and reaching a definition that all participants agreed with, the facilitator presented a brief situation overview concerning the thematic priority. The presentation conveyed information, data and evidence, and specific findings that emerged from the evaluation of the current Strategy for the Rights of the Child of the Council of Europe (2016-2021), information compiled by National Delegations specifically on the situation in the country where the consultation took place, and information from other national or international sources. The aim of this phase was to bring participants closer to the theme by sharing data, information and analysis on a range of different aspects that are relevant to the thematic priority. The methodology guide supported the facilitators in delivering the presentation and steering the discussion in an accessible way, using child-friendly language.

After the presentation of the evidence and the sharing of experiences, it was time to compare the outcomes of these first steps of the consultation with human rights principles and the rights of the child. The fifth step aimed therefore to present some key **human rights and child rights principles** and norms, related to the thematic priority, in a child-friendly language and an accessible manner for the participating children. The objective was to contribute to the empowerment of participants and information about their own rights, while preparing the ground for them to form and share their opinions on “what should be in place for all children”.

In the sixth phase, “**And now what? Recommendations, considerations and proposals**”, the children developed and discussed their own proposals, expectations and recommendations, as well as questions, with regards to improving the identified issues to be addressed. At this stage, the facilitators gathered children’s contributions, which were to subsequently inform the drafting process of the new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child.

The last step was dedicated to **closing the consultation**. The facilitators invited the participants to share their thoughts on their experience and explained the next steps.

IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS

From May to July 2021, the 10 National Delegations consulted 220 children on the thematic priorities or “strategic objectives”, with the aim of developing specific contributions and recommendations to be included in the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027). In particular, France, Slovak Republic and Spain consulted 43 children on the thematic priority freedom from “violence for all children”. Belgium and Italy focused on “access to and safe use of technologies” for all children, consulting 28 children. The thematic priority “giving a voice to every child” was addressed by Bulgaria and Finland, which consulted 42 children. Montenegro and Portugal focused on “equal opportunities and social inclusion for all children”, and consulted 68 children. In Greece, the Ministry of Justice consulted 17 children on “child-friendly justice for all children” and the Ministry of Migration and Asylum consulted 22 children on the thematic priority of “children’s rights in crisis and emergency situations”.

The 10 National Delegations reported that all children were highly motivated and eager to be part of this initiative and that, on a general basis, all children expressed their willingness to continue the process, and their wish to be involved in other similar activities in the future. In fact, the common denominator in all the consultations was the expectation of children to be heard and included in consultations on a more regular basis, contributing to the policies that will shape their future. Many participants observed that, even where consultations effectively take place, the recommendations of children are often not followed through by adults and that there is a lack of feedback and follow-up. The participants shared several ideas on how children could be involved in decision-making processes, for example through the creation of web platforms to directly participate in public consultations on specific subjects, including the development of legislation and policies concerning them.

Through the participatory methodology which was applied, it was possible to create a safe space, which created the basis for a nurturing discussion. The National Delegations were provided with a reporting template and the facilitators in charge of the consultations were invited to provide children with the means and space to share their voices in a meaningful way. The present chapter is divided into the six thematic priorities and the countries which respectively worked on the priority and summarises the implementation and results of the consultation sessions, as reported by the National Delegations. For more detailed information on the implementation of the consultations it is possible to consult the reports of the National Delegations.

In accordance with the methodology, the results of the consultations expand from the micro to the macro context. First, some thoughts and considerations on the thematic priority. Secondly, children’s expectations of their governments (national, local), public institutions, schools, parents, communities, relevant associations or other entities, to advance the situation of children in relation to the thematic priority, and thirdly, children’s expectations of the Council of Europe and the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child. In relation with the proposals advanced by children, and in line with the structure of the new Strategy, the participants were requested to develop proposals with regards to three aspects: **challenges to be urgently addressed, possible action to be taken, and how children can be involved**. This structured approach allowed the contributions of children to be as specific and as concrete as possible, avoiding unnecessary and excessive processing of their statements, which could change the words they chose and undermine their proposals.



FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE FOR ALL CHILDREN

The thematic priority **freedom from violence for all children** was analysed by 43 children from **France, Slovak Republic** and **Spain**. The children identified as challenges to be urgently addressed the number of cases of violence and gender-based violence and the low level of attention to issues of neglect and emotional or psychological violence. The participants felt that adults should listen to the voices of children and take children's complaints seriously. Laws and procedures should be more accessible to children and easier for them to understand, so that they are not dependent on adults, especially where children are afraid of the reaction of their parents or other adults of reference. Children should learn about their rights from a young age and adults should be reminded of the rights of the child, for instance through dedicated campaigns. In school, the children recommended the introduction of compulsory workshops on gender-equality and the prevention of gender-based violence for students, teachers and families to help them detect violence in their families and communities and to learn how to help people experiencing these forms of violence. Children suggested that psychological check-ups should be added to regular medical check-ups and that the public health system should be equipped with a higher number of psychologists and psychiatrists so that children and young people can receive immediate help if they need it. Students could be trained as mediators or peace agents to make it easier for those who are victims of violence to ask for help, since it is easier for them to confide in someone their own age. The children proposed to set up regular meetings, preferably in school, as peer groups or groups with facilitators, where they can talk about their rights, about experiences with respect or disrespect of their rights, support each other and keep asking questions and offer ideas to authorities. The children suggested to develop and widely disseminate an online quiz for children "Do you know your rights?" and/or a survey questionnaire "Are my rights respected?".



France

Neglect is neither physical nor verbal, it is when the adult fails to meet the child's needs. It is not the act of intentionally doing harm, it is the act of doing nothing at all or doing too much.

The consultations were organised by Stefania Chiru and Morgane Roualt-Mouraine from the French Ministry of Solidarity and Health and facilitated by Léa Margery and François Turcan with children pertaining to the Children's College of the High Council for Family, Children and Age (HCFEA). The consultations were divided in one preparatory meeting and three online sessions. Ten children between 10 and 17 years old took part in the consultations. The children who took part in the consultation are current or former members of the HCFEA Children's Forum and were asked to contribute to the consultation on a voluntary basis. The discussion focused on the theme of child neglect.

According to the report of the National Delegation, children highlighted that neglect can have long-term consequences such as low self-esteem. According to the participants, paying attention to the mental health of today's children is preparing generations that will be less likely to harm children.

Children's thoughts and considerations on the thematic priority

- ▶ Neglect of leaving children in front of screens. Even if there are young people who, if they don't have a phone, will be excluded by other young people. Also, for example, lack of sleep is neglect.
- ▶ Family neglect: not providing basic needs properly. Most of the time it is not voluntary.
- ▶ The fact that there is neglect at school will lead to inequalities between students, jealousy. If a child is neglected, he feels left out. Examples of neglect in schools: schools without a nurse, without a psychologist, without toilet paper, without soap, etc.
- ▶ Negative impacts of direct neglect of the child: unhappiness; alienation of pupils; unimportance. It can also have an impact on the child's mental health, as neglect affects the child's self-esteem and unhappiness.
- ▶ Neglect is difficult to identify and is not given as much importance as other forms of abuse so it is hard to help the victims.
- ▶ Neglect is due to a lack of experience of parents in the family setting or a physical or mental difference in the school setting. And because we don't know enough about what the word means. The word neglect doesn't seem strong enough, it's a complicated notion.
- ▶ It is harder for children to realise that they are being neglected (e.g., a child who can only eat McDonalds because his parents don't prepare food for him will think it's cool at first).
- ▶ Children are not necessarily aware of their needs and therefore of what adults should do.

Children's expectations of their governments, public institutions, schools, parents, communities, relevant associations or other entities to advance the situation of children in relation to the thematic priority

- ▶ That the government listens and hears the voice of the child.
- ▶ That adults take children's complaints seriously and make them as serious a matter as physical and moral violence. A child's voice is as legitimate as an adult's, even more legitimate.
- ▶ That the members of the government create laws that are more accessible to children.
- ▶ Members of the government should create simpler care procedures, easier for the child to understand, so that he or she can deal with them alone without being totally dependent on an adult. By the time children have the strength and the means to say that they are being treated badly, it is often too late. It has to be child-friendly. How do we help them to have the strength and means? Create aids to defamiliarise [terminology used by children] children from the admiration of parents. Children are afraid that parents will not love them anymore, that they will scold them, that they will react badly. Children are afraid of the parents' reaction. You have to try to make the parents understand their wrongs.

Children's expectations of the Council of Europe and the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child

- ▶ The CRC is a text written by adults for children, they think for us, they cannot know exactly what we want. We need to create texts with children for children, more accessible texts.
- ▶ The Council of Europe should consult children in the creation of their texts and give feedback to show children that their opinions are really taken into account.

Challenges to be urgently addressed / Possible action to be taken

- ▶ Make everyone aware of what the word negligence means.
- ▶ Awareness-raising: there is a distinction between the different audiences to which this awareness-raising applies. For example, with kindergarten and primary school pupils, you can raise awareness in a playful way, with secondary school pupils, you can't do it in the same way.
- ▶ Bring in outside speakers to talk, dialogue. Bring in people from school life, bring in peers.
- ▶ Assess the child's situation to see if he or she is being neglected, look at what the child lacks in terms of needs. This assessment should be done with children and parents, from the first months of life.

How children can be involved

- ▶ Legitimising children's speech, including at the level of the law: equality of the child's and the adult's speech.
- ▶ Teach children that they have the right to speak, and help them to think together as we try to do at the HCFEA.
- ▶ Do something with the children's words, respond to them, and explain to them whether or not there are consequences.
- ▶ This is the role of the children's forum (HCFEA): to act as a link between the children and the government.



Slovak Republic

“Violence during the pandemic has been rising. Children were locked in flats or houses with threatening parents or siblings and had no place to go to and no trustful people around to talk with.”

The National Coordination Centre for Resolving the Issues of Violence against Children was in charge of the organisation together with external experts. Psychologists Ľubomíra Mrázová and Magdaléna Jačalová (working in NGO Náruč: Child Advocacy Centre and Child Crisis Centre) were the facilitators. Two sessions were held face-to-face. Thirteen children participated in the consultations. In particular four boys aged 15 to 17 years old and nine girls aged 13 to 17 years old. Of the children consulted, three are from a county town, one from a small town, and nine children living in rural municipalities. The sessions took place in the north of central Slovakia (in Žilina, which is the county town), the children were from Kysucké Nové Mesto a smaller urban municipality (with the rank of a district town) and Žilina, a bigger city (with the rank of a higher territorial unit seat) and the adjacent villages.

According to the report of the National Delegation, children in Slovakia are not very used to apply a participatory approach and maybe this contributed to a more difficult start of sessions. However, on the second day, children were already more open, sharing their opinions, realising that adults were willing to listen to them not only in Slovakia but also in Europe. When presenting some statistics on violence, children were very surprised by learning that of 90% of mistreatment is undiscovered. They were also very surprised, even outraged, with the fact that in Slovakia and in Europe in general, there is a phenomenon of forced marriages, which opened the discussion about violence.

Children’s thoughts and considerations on the thematic priority

After presenting the thematic priority, children often spoke about courage, trust, freedom of expression and love from parents. A very strong message from the children was: “Listen to our voice and take our opinion seriously!”. Children said that they should have more freedom to express their opinions, they should not be afraid to say something is wrong. They also expressed the need to have someone to talk to. For them, love and protection provided by their parents is very important. Some children reported that no child should feel that parents are not interested in them. Also, on the issue of violence, children said that they should have not been forced into something they did not want to - even in activities such as hobby groups, school, etc. Privacy was also an important topic for children - data protection on social networks, as well as privacy in terms of space and place where they can have privacy and talk safely.

Children’s expectations of their governments, public institutions, schools, parents, communities, relevant associations or other entities to advance the situation of children in relation to the thematic priority

- ▶ There is a need to employ more psychologists, especially at schools.
- ▶ Penalties should be higher for perpetrators - for adult perpetrators but also for children who bully.
- ▶ The government and important organisations should ask children more often for their opinions. They would like to meet in groups on a regular basis and communicate their rights.
- ▶ It is also necessary to remind adults about the rights (not only) of children.
- ▶ Teach children about their rights at a young age (the topic of children’s rights takes place at school only in the 8th year of primary school or at high school).
- ▶ There should be lectures in schools on how to behave if someone threatens us (children) and adults should be taught how to behave when, for example, they see violence (battle, quarrel) on the street or in the neighbourhood.
- ▶ Teachers should treat all children equally (regardless of religion, colour or sexual orientation) but should do more for those who need specific attention and care. For example, for children who have disorders it is not enough just to change the scoring in tests and give more time for some tasks.

Children's expectations of the Council of Europe and the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child

- ▶ Prepare grants to support the work of psychologists.
- ▶ Ask more for children's opinions and listen to them.
- ▶ Resolve the issue of children's work in other countries.
- ▶ Remind adults of children's rights (campaigns, billboards, etc.).

"Many families argue about money. Now, after the pandemic, the situation is worse, because many families have literally no money."

Challenges to be urgently addressed

Online safety and the age restriction for using the Internet: there is no need for age restrictions for apps such as Messenger or WhatsApp because these apps are for communication with family, friends. They can create groups and chat in a family group or group of friends. But using Facebook, Instagram or browsing on some web pages can be very dangerous. Some children can be attacked or can communicate with strange people who can cause them harm. Also, the whole world can see information about children. The identity of a potential perpetrator is better protected than the identity of a child. The existing tool for checking the age of a child is only the field with the question "are you 18+?" and simple answer yes/no without checking the real age.

Possible action to be taken

- ▶ Self-defence and self-protection courses in the school: these courses should teach children how to protect themselves not only physically. It is very important to know what to do if somebody threatens a child, in particular in situations where there is no obvious or physical violence – such as hate speech, sexual harassment, stalking, grooming, shaming, etc. It is important to recognise what violence is, who should children contact when they experience some, whether to strike back, what to say when they do not feel safe, how to behave face-to-face a threatening person.
- ▶ Teaching parents how to be receptive to children: this should start while a mother is pregnant with a child - the parents should be told what it means to be parents, how to prepare themselves for being parents, what will happen when they become a family, how to be more sensitive to children's behaviour and children's worries as well. The children in Slovakia are very sensitive to the issue of abortion which is very much discussed in Slovakia and in their opinion, parents could be more responsible in their decisions whether to be a parent or not, when they are educated.
- ▶ Teaching children about their rights: it is not sufficient to hear about rights at the age of 14 or more during a subject at school. Children should not only be told that they have some rights but they should know what this means in real life and how to apply them.
- ▶ Introduce supervision in schools: supervision should not only be for controlling, but also for protection, based on peer-to-peer principles, or older brother principles. When a child is bullied, he or she should be able to talk to a peer or an older student responsible for safety in school. The "supervisor" can accompany the bullied child, help him or her to report the violence etc. Teachers are often not so involved in social groups of children and cannot see or they even do not want to see violence. If violence is well hidden in the social group of students, the "supervisor" can investigate and uncover it better than an adult.
- ▶ Have regular meetings about rights and safety: The children would like to have some regular meetings – peer groups/groups with facilitators (preferred in school), where they could talk about their rights, experiences with application of their rights, about news in Slovakia (about e.g., legislative measures). They can talk about experiences with respect or disrespect of their rights, be supportive for others and keep asking questions and offer ideas to authorities.

How children can be involved

- ▶ Establish a “European day of child’s voice/Child voice day” to underline that a child voice is relevant and important with activities for raising awareness about rights.
- ▶ Keep asking about specific issues through social media (Facebook, Instagram...) directly through CoE or delegations.
- ▶ Develop a quiz (online) “Do you know your rights?” and/or a questionnaire “Are my rights respected?”. The children particularly enjoyed one of the activities from the participation process – voting – are the rights of children in our country respected?

Spain

"We need governments to raise public awareness on violence against children, for justice to be swift and for the child to be put at the centre of the response."

Sergi Morales Pérez and Nuria Chocano García from the Asociación QUERA facilitated the consultations. A total of two sessions were held online and a total of 20 adolescents (seven boys and 13 girls) were consulted. Ages ranged from 13 to 17 years old. Participants came from Galicia, Valencia, Canary Islands, Madrid, Catalonia, Castilla La Mancha and Andalusia, meaning seven of Spain's 17 Autonomous Communities were represented.

According to the report from the National Delegation, the facilitator team used a highly participatory method based on dialogue and respect as sources of learning and community building, taking into account the methodology provided by DCI Italy. Establishing a climate that would favour active listening, transparency and the use of assertiveness as cornerstones of this dialogic learning process was essential. This type of learning is the result of an egalitarian dialogue, in other words, the consequence of a dialogue in which the different participants in the dialogue or in the teaching/learning process itself provide arguments based on validity claims, from their thoughts and opinions, from a place of equality, and not based on hierarchy or power claims. This method has an important potential for social transformation.

Children's thoughts and considerations on the thematic priority

Participants feel that the prevention of violence is essential for eradicating violence; they talk about raising awareness about the issue, particularly about teaching how to detect and combat it in schools. When it comes to taking action, participants focus on two main individuals: the victim, the most important person to support through the processes they go through, from the physical act of reporting to emotional support; and the aggressor, with concrete guidelines for the actions that need to be taken.

Through a poll, the group decided to focus on emotional and psychological violence and gender-based violence.

Children's expectations of their governments, public institutions, schools, parents, communities, relevant associations or other entities to advance the situation of children in relation to the thematic priority

What the adolescent participants want and need is for the number of cases of violence to go down and for this kind of violence to end. In order to put an end to this form of violence, they propose, as one of the main measures, increasing the number of psychologists and psychiatrists so that help can be immediately provided when needed. The group divided their proposals according to the target audience:

► The government:

"We need governments to raise public awareness about violence against children, for justice to be swift and for the child to be put at the centre of the response".

"Governments should listen to us more when it comes to their policies for children, more consultations like these should be held so that these topics become commonplace and encourage victims of violence to come forward and ask for help".

"We not only need laws to protect us, we need the resources to enforce those laws, we need more staff for social services so that they can meet the needs of the population in terms of violence, more and better trained police so that they can help more people, more people trained in schools to be able to detect possible cases of violence... If we only make laws and don't equip people who can enforce those laws, we're not doing anything".

► Schools and other institutions:

“We need teachers who focus on more than just academic performance, and for that we need teachers who are evaluated on more than just their students’ academic results. We need teachers to be involved in the mental and emotional health of their students. Their training is essential, as well as institutions and regulations (and this includes society, families, etc.) that value other less curricular but equally important lessons within the education system”.

► Families/friendships:

“Whenever I notice sexist or micro-sexist behaviour or comments around me, I recognise it, don’t ignore it and put a stop to it if possible. Example: in my class I see that some students are insulting another student with “jokes” like: What are you doing when you’re not in the kitchen? Why are you wearing such short clothes if you don’t want us to look at you? You’ve been out with x boys because you’re a slut...”.

“I should react to these comments by cutting them off and making them understand that they are engaging in gender-based violence and that there is no justification for them to be doing it because we have to remember that, boys or girls, we’re all equal”.

“We have to raise the awareness of the people around us about how important mental and emotional health is”.

“We have to encourage our loved ones to seek professional help if they need it, removing the stigma that seeing a psychologist is for weak people”.

“Governments should listen to us more when it comes to their policies for children, more consultations like these should be held so that these topics become commonplace and encourage victims of violence to come forward and ask for help.”

Children’s expectations of the Council of Europe and the new strategy for the Rights of the Child

- “We hope that our proposals will actually be taken into consideration; we would even like to receive the draft of the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child before it’s published, so that we can approve it and check that we have truly been taken into consideration”.

Challenges to be urgently addressed

The group proposed a number of issues that need to be urgently addressed to prevent emotional or psychological violence and gender-based violence:

- Add psychological check-ups to regular medical check-ups to assess the mental health of children.
- Provide the public health system with a greater number of psychologists and psychiatrists so young people can receive immediate help if they need it.
- Provide schools with social educators or psychologists who can provide emotional support to students.
- More workshops or subjects in primary/secondary schools that promote equality.
- Education in classrooms to encourage effective communication and assertiveness among peers.

Possible action to be taken

- Compulsory gender-equality classes in primary/secondary schools, which is already the case in some autonomous communities.
- Compulsory gender-based violence workshops for students, teachers and families to help them detect violence in their families and communities and how to help people experiencing these forms of violence.
- Talks in schools to normalise psychological issues and disorders.
- Provide the public health system with more paediatric psychology teams.

- ▶ Include mental health in paediatric check-ups for the earliest possible detection cases of violence.
- ▶ Provide schools with social educators or psychologists who can provide emotional and social support to students.
- ▶ A TV or radio programme so that more people learn about violence, in all its forms, with a special focus on the prevention of violence.
- ▶ Informative videos that raise people's awareness of how important it is to know how to detect all forms of violence in order to fight it.
- ▶ Train students as mediators or peace agents to make it easier for people who are victims of violence to ask for help, since it is easier for them to confide in someone their own age.

How children can be involved

- ▶ The group was very conscientious and engaged in the process and they would like to be involved in any measures implemented post-consultation, including the production of awareness-raising videos and the creation of content, working together in their schools with expert staff to develop content on gender equality and mental illnesses resulting from emotional violence, among other forms of violence.
- ▶ They are particularly interested in ensuring that this consultation does not stop at just that, a consultation, and that some sort of action can be taken to address the issue of violence against children both in Spain and in Europe, something in which they also feel involved.



EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR ALL CHILDREN

The thematic priority of **equal opportunities and social inclusion for all children** was analysed by 68 children in **Montenegro and Portugal**. Children identified many challenges to be addressed, mainly relating to education, awareness raising and inclusion. The children recommended that education on the rights of the child should start at the earliest age, in kindergarten, through adapted content using for instance songs, games, cartoons and play, and that both parents and school staff should be trained on the rights of the child. They identified a need to increase the number psychologists, social assistants, nutritionists and nurses in all schools and at all levels of education. With regard to the Roma population, the children noted that some Roma parents should be more closely involved in the education of their children and participation in society should be promoted. The participants underlined that children should be heard more often and in many different ways, through child consultations, through a consultative body of student representatives or student parliaments, and also through youth councils or similar organisations. Children feel that it was crucial to encourage a stronger representation of minority groups, namely by giving them a voice in the media, making their culture known more widely, and strengthening their participation in leadership positions and in the society. In addition, in the children's perspective, it could be useful to create a fund with the financial support of all member states to offer the same things and provide the same opportunities to all children of all member states. A very specific recommendation was to build sensorial parks where children with disabilities could experience nature through their sense of smell, touch and hearing and a visual sense of colours.



Montenegro

“We need to talk about violence. It is not anonymous like voting. We need to fight against it and not just to talk about politics”

Larisa Lukačević and Milica Joksimović, independent advisors in the Ministry of Justice, Human and Minority Rights were in charge of organising and moderating the consultations. A total number of 17 children, 11 girls and six boys between 11 and 18 years old attended the meetings that were held in blended modality. Children were divided into two groups and two sessions were held with each group.

There was great diversity within the group in terms of national/social origin, situations of vulnerability or other specific characteristics. Among the children, who come from the northern and central regions of Montenegro, there were members of the Roma population, LGBTI+, children with disabilities, children of Christian faith (Orthodox and Catholic) background, Islamic, as well as children belonging to Montenegrin, Serbian, Bosnian and Albanian nationalities. Moreover, there were children with hearing impairment, developmental dysphasia (a language disorder that develops in children or insufficiently developed speech) and children who attend school according to an individual developmental-educational program.

According to the report of the National Delegation, the dynamics and interaction between the children and between the children and the facilitators was excellent. The children relaxed during the consultations and started trusting the facilitators. They talked openly about their problems, wishes and suggestions. They also talked about their relationship with their parents, educators, psychologists and pedagogues, health workers, friends. Comments given by children after the meeting were very positive. They pointed out that the atmosphere was relaxing and that the tension disappeared when they start talking to the facilitators. It was very useful for most of them to hear the opinions of others, which helped them to open up and talk about the things they face every day, as well as to be more interested in their rights and to further advance their knowledge in that field. They especially pointed out that it is very important for them that there are people who listen carefully to them, who care about hearing what they think and respect the voice of children. They expressed a desire for more similar activities.

Children pointed out that the children's parliaments, organised in the Parliament of Montenegro with the representatives of the Government of Montenegro, had an effect, and that the child's voice really reached the relevant people. Therefore, they concluded that it would be useful to continue this practice, but in larger numbers.

Children's thoughts and considerations on the thematic priority

- ▶ Inclusion means that society should accept everyone (for who they are) within their communities and this is a problem that society continues to face with in terms of physical, religious, national and other areas.
- ▶ Inclusion is equal enjoyment of rights and to respect the differences we all have.
- ▶ Children agree that it is very important that even one person initiate changes because it will motivate others.
- ▶ Children's rights are very important. Unfortunately, not all children are familiar with the content of the Convention so it should be promoted more in schools. Parents should also be familiar with content of the Convention.

Children's expectations of their governments, public institutions, schools, parents, communities, relevant associations or other entities to advance the situation of children in relation to the thematic priority

- ▶ Children believe that schools should provide elevators for children with disabilities and to organise activities for children with disabilities and developmental disabilities.
- ▶ Schools have an important role in protecting children. School officials and education authorities should pay more attention to peer violence. It would be advisable to educate the teaching staff on how to act in these situations, to provide quality psychological assistance to child victims but also to child attackers. To educate children about peer violence but also about sexual violence. Children also suggested installing cameras in school classrooms, in order to combat peer violence.
- ▶ Schools or institutions should provide free excursions and field trips for children who cannot afford money for that occasion and high school attendance should be compulsory.

- ▶ There are already anonymous boxes in schools, where children can ask questions, and it is advisable that employees, in charge of opening the boxes, take the issues more seriously.
- ▶ High school students to put on plays to cover topics that are relevant to children and to play them in schools.
- ▶ Schools and institutions to fight against violence attributed to online hate speech.
- ▶ Schools need to value school parliaments more and take their proposals seriously.
- ▶ Renovate the interiors and the furniture of schools, modernise classrooms with digitalised equipment, air-condition the rooms where children stay, renovate physical education halls, provide free internet.
- ▶ To act upon teaching staff in a sense that for holidays, such as Women's Day, they should not accept gifts from children in order to eradicate this custom, because children who do not have money feel ashamed. Encourage children to independently make creative gifts such as songs, drawings, boxes, jewellery, etc. It is recommended to introduce the organisation of creative workshops in schools.
- ▶ Meals sold in schools to be healthier, by including more fruits and vegetables.
- ▶ It is obligatory to sensitise and educate pedagogues, psychologists, but also all teachers.
- ▶ Encourage all schools, especially vocational schools, to organise more educational events and activities.
- ▶ There ought to be more trained teaching assistants for children with disabilities.
- ▶ It would be nice to have more green areas around schools.
- ▶ It is necessary for state, local authorities and schools to provide transportation for students from the village, which will be regular and good maintained.
- ▶ Supporting children who lack parental care, to help them to develop skills that will be useful and help live independently, when they turn 18 years old; introduce course attendance, learn trades, encourage volunteering, include them in youth activism.
- ▶ Having in mind that children trust celebrities, they think it would be useful to engage them to address children, or visit them in schools, in order to speak with them about topics that affect children's rights.
- ▶ The importance of spending time with parents (parents to dedicate time talking to their children, hear them and understand their needs) is also something that children pointed out.
- ▶ When building new buildings and facilities, the obligatory condition should be the provision of access for individuals with disabilities.
- ▶ The state should motivate children to stay in their country to study and then provide them with conditions for employment. Prevent brain drain.
- ▶ Dispose of plastic from use, in order to protect the environment.
- ▶ Institutions to ensure that more medications and tests are at the expense of the fund. Many people are skipping medically necessary prescriptions because of the cost. A lot of medicines we need are not available in Montenegro, so we have to get them from other countries.

Children's expectations of the Council of Europe and the new strategy for the Rights of the Child

Concerning expectations of the Council of Europe and the new Strategy, children stated that they expect their voice to be respected and truly heard. To ask them for their opinion on things that concern them. To involve them in decision making. To organise more similar meetings and consultations, but also other activities for children. "To respect the opinion of children and to listen to us"; that the Council of Europe will accept at least some of their proposals and that our country will respect the strategy and present it to all children.

Challenges to be urgently addressed

"We cannot insult others because they are different. We are all the same in some way. We are all human. Although we love different things, differences should not divide us."

- ▶ Urgently educate pedagogues in schools on how to approach children, how to talk to them in a sensitive way, how to respect their opinions and how to approach their problems with special attention. Not to neglect children who needs help and who have certain problem.

- ▶ Roma parents' involvement in their children education is something that children also pointed out. It is necessary to influence them not to punish their children in a way that they will prevent them to attend school (in our county we have such examples).
- ▶ Children praised the fact that the number of contracted and underage marriages has decreased but stressed out that we still have to work on this.
- ▶ Educate teaching staff in kindergartens and schools about children's rights, about the problems that children face and how to help them. Children must be aware of the fact that if they have any kind of problem, they should tell it and that there are people willing to help them.
- ▶ Workshops and education in schools need to be conducted, in order to combat with and prevent peer violence.
- ▶ Educate parents whose children attend kindergartens as well as children who attend kindergartens, through content adapted to them (songs, plays, cartoons, through play, etc.). Children believe that education on children's rights should start at the earliest age - kindergarten, because that is the period when children most easily adopt the right values.
- ▶ Make parents aware that political topics and events should not be discussed in front of children, nor should children be involved in the mentioned activities.

Possible action to be taken

- ▶ Organise trainings for teaching staff, especially for pedagogues and psychologists. Educate children attending schools regarding the issue of peer and sexual violence.
- ▶ Educate and teach children to embrace diversity. They should not make differences and they should not exclude from society children who have health problems, problems of any kind, children of other faiths, nationalities, children from socially disadvantaged families, children different due to physical appearance and similar.
- ▶ Encourage and promote youth activism. Motivate children to participate in humanitarian activities in order to help children become more empathetic. During the humanitarian collection of things that children plan to donate to children who are in hospitals, draw attention to the fact that should not be any kind of sweets, but toys and educational games. One of the recommendations was also that the primary and secondary school students organise performances and plays for children in hospitals.
- ▶ Peer educators - educate a number of children about priority areas relating children's rights so that they can transfer their knowledge through workshops and lectures and organise workshops and consultations in schools and other premises that are suitable for that purpose more often.
- ▶ Reintroduce civic education as a compulsory subject in schools. Introduce the subject of sex education or conduct workshops on this topic in schools more frequently.
- ▶ Introduce a police unit that will patrol through the city, on bicycles, in order to prevent children from begging on the streets or working at intersections, which is very dangerous for children.
- ▶ Encourage teachers to teach about children's rights and to acquaint them with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. To make more educational books and cartoons for children so they can learn about children's rights through everyday activities.
- ▶ Organise activities in kindergartens and schools that will teach children to protect the environment, not throw garbage around and similar.
- ▶ All brochures and flyers made for children should also be made in audio format. Promote and make audio books available. Books should be in audio format and not in Braille, because it is easier for children with poor eyesight to listen to audio than to read Braille.

How children can be involved

- ▶ Through such and similar events. Organise more consultations with children and inform them of what has been done concerning their proposals.
- ▶ Organise more student parliaments and consultations in the Parliament of Montenegro with deputies and representatives of the Government. Respect the suggestions of student parliaments and involve children in decision making on issues that concern them.
- ▶ Include more children to be the part of the Council on Child Rights (there is only one for now).



Portugal

“Give voice to all children and young people of all member states, allowing to build a society with more equity, inclusion, justice, solidarity, rich and diverse.”

The National Delegation of Portugal represented by the National Commission, Ms Rosário Farmhouse, Vice-Chair of the CDENF, President of the National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights of Protection of Children and Young People, consulted with seven groups of children, totalling 51 children. The sessions were, facilitated and organised by Amélia Carneiro, Rosa Lourenço and Célia Chamiça, with the contributions of Sónia Lourenço Rosa (all representing the National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights of Protection of Children and Young People) and the support of the partner’s professionals who work directly with the participating children.

Group 1 met online and included 15 children and young people of the National Council of Children and Young People, of which six were girls and nine were boys, aged 11 to 18, coming from five regions of the country (North, Centre, Lisbon and Tagus Valley, Algarve and Archipelago of Madeira). Group 2 met in a blended modality and was a sixth-grade class of a public school in Lisbon composed by 18 children – of which seven girls and 11 boys – aged between 11 and 13 years old, including children of four nationalities residing in Lisbon and its Metropolitan Area. Lastly, groups 3 to 7 included 18 children, of which four girls and 14 boys. The children, aged between seven and 17 years old were of three nationalities, and were all placed in residential care under the responsibility of Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa.

According to the report of the National Delegation, some of the consulted children didn’t know any of the rights presented. In addition, some of the children consulted had an idea that adults should protect them but didn’t know that they had the right to be protected; they knew that some of the mentioned rights are important to children but didn’t know that those were their rights.

Children’s thoughts and considerations on the thematic priority

- ▶ Accessibility, in all spaces, for people with mobility disabilities. Some schools already have adapted facilities, but if a student suffers an accident and his/her class has lessons in another floor and the school has no elevator, sometimes adjustments are not made to let the class have lessons to the floor level that is accessible to that student; sometimes, even libraries are in floors which are only accessible by taking elevators and children with reduced mobility cannot have access to those facilities.
- ▶ Access to education and health care for all, eradication of child labour and eradication of child poverty.
- ▶ Access to specific education for children with learning difficulties.
- ▶ Availability of vegan and vegetarian options in school canteens.
- ▶ Reduce the burden on children during school evaluations [tests/exams/other assessment means].
- ▶ Less violence in schools, more non-teaching staff and fair school directors.
- ▶ Adapting the evaluation on physical tests to the physical condition of each child.
- ▶ Increasing the number of psychologists, social assistants, nutritionists and nurses in schools in co-operation with health centres.
- ▶ Awareness-raising on mental diseases.
- ▶ Decentralising schools from the centres of the cities and villages.
- ▶ Specialisation of education and other services for each gender and type of children aiming to promote comfortable and practical conditions and environments and education on taboo subjects, such as homosexuality, transgender people, abortion, etc.;
- ▶ There are already very important steps taken in fighting discrimination, but some ways of discrimination still exist among children, namely those related to children who don’t express themselves very well, who don’t speak a language known by the others or who dress or behave differently from the majority.
- ▶ Children and young people with gender and identity issues still don’t feel completely accepted and socially included and integrated, they feel excluded and sometimes mutilate themselves in result of psychological suffering.

“Support families that don’t have living conditions that are good enough to raise their children, to help them make it possible to raise their children at home and not in residential care institutions.”

Children’s expectations of their governments, public institutions, schools, parents, communities, relevant associations or other entities to advance the situation of children in relation to the thematic priority

- ▶ Equal treatment of all children in order to help them make their plans come true.
- ▶ The full compliance of States with the rights of the child, which is yet to be achieved since “not everyone complies with them and since children are not taken seriously”.
- ▶ “Letting children’s dreams come true”.
- ▶ Creating conditions for all children up for adoption be given a new family and a new home.
- ▶ Ensuring children’s right to food, clothing, education and transportation.
- ▶ Ensuring children are not obliged to work nor to being physically and/or psychologically explored.
- ▶ Providing free food and clothing to children in need.
- ▶ Provide financial support to parents whose children have health issues.
- ▶ Governments should fund therapies for disabled children, in order to help them overcome their problems and have a better social life.
- ▶ When a child goes into residential care, attention should be paid by the authorities that sometimes pick them up at school, since they arrive without previous notice, without telling the child what is going to happen and why. When it occurs, the child feels scared and angry, sometimes tries to escape and becomes violent because he/she feels that he/she would like to be with his/her family; countries should support families in overcoming their difficulties to make it possible for them to keep their children at home.
- ▶ “To help children avoid disciplinary procedures due to their behaviour because, if they were educated and oriented, sooner they could behave differently and avoid bad consequences in their lives”.
- ▶ Governments should support families that suffered the effects of the pandemic, namely by losing jobs, and improve their living conditions and of their children.
- ▶ There is social assistance for all families and their children, but it is not yet enough, namely for migrant children, many of which live with several families in an apartment. Children receive good meals at school, but, when school closes or during holidays, these children don’t have appropriate meals.
- ▶ There are families that need economic and social support but are ashamed to ask for them and their children. Social assistance should be for all those in need and the criteria that are used may not be the best ones. Support should be attributed according to the real needs of the families. Some support is not enough for a person and still it has to serve/be enough to the whole family.
- ▶ The Government should continue making compulsory education mandatory for all children, even for those whose family traditions keep them excluded from school.
- ▶ In mainland Portugal, school handbooks are free for students in compulsory education, but that is not the case in the Island of Madeira, for example; school books should be free in the whole country, mainland and islands.
- ▶ Governments should fund therapies for disabled children, in order to help them overcome their problems and have a better social life.
- ▶ Adults sometimes listen to the children, but don’t take them seriously. Awareness must be raised regarding the idea that age brings more experience and knowledge, but that there are no ages that are more important than others, they are just different. All ages and all opinions are valuable and must be equally respected.
- ▶ Adults and older children sometimes don’t respect children or younger children while queuing up in line in supermarkets and other services.
- ▶ There are children who have diseases and that the school knows about, but that shouldn’t be revealed to protect the child identity because it may consist of a basis for discrimination. Schools should give information on several diseases to help demystify them and fight discrimination based on these grounds.
- ▶ Public spaces should have information in other languages and not only in Portuguese, so that it can be understood by migrant children.

Children's expectations of the Council of Europe and the new strategy for the Rights of the Child

- ▶ The full compliance of the States with the rights of the child, which is yet to be achieved since "not everyone complies with them and since children are not taken seriously".
- ▶ Good conditions for all children.
- ▶ "Support families that don't have living conditions that are good enough to raise their children, to help them making possible to raise their children at home and not in residential care institutions".
- ▶ "To support families in situation of poverty and not only in Europe but also in other continents".

Challenges to be urgently addressed

- ▶ There are still children who work and children who don't work but that would rather prefer to, in order to remain with their families and their families would prefer it, too.
- ▶ Early intervention in child protection, namely through the involvement of families and friends, in order to avoid danger by realising earlier what is going on with a child before problems emerge.
- ▶ Social inclusion for all children, of all ages, genders, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity, culture, colour, religion, beliefs, disabilities, learning problems, and equal opportunities in all regions, in the Council of Europe's member states but also inside each member states.
- ▶ Fight child poverty and bad living conditions.
- ▶ Fight discrimination and eradicate prejudices, namely racism, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia.
- ▶ Ensure freedom of expression and of dressing without making it correspond to a gender stereotype, accepting each one's preferences without judgment or prejudices.
- ▶ Create conditions to promote a comfortable environment for all children.
- ▶ Fight reluctance or refusal to receive and integrate Roma children and children with disabilities.
- ▶ Eradicate bullying and cyber bullying in schools and support its victims. Ensure health care for all children.

"There are opportunities for artistic and cultural expression, but children's expressions are not as valued as those of adults and those of the youngest children are not taken as seriously as those of older children."

Possible action to be taken

- ▶ Creating a fund with the financial support of all member states to offer the same things/provide the same opportunities to all children of all member states (for example, there is an episode of a cartoon series revolving around the objective of creating a fund to buy balls for the children of the whole world, providing equal opportunities regarding the right of children to play, and play sports).
- ▶ Providing support to children in difficult situations (e.g., depression, parents' divorce, a relative's death, lack of friends, institutionalisation).
- ▶ Promote the participation of the families in schools. Schools should create projects that involve families in a more active way.
- ▶ Extending kindergarten opening hours to meet the needs of parents working in shifts and of single-parent families and creating the same kind of support for children attending primary education.
- ▶ Offering families' help to resource IT tools and to fundraise in case of need to fulfil the basic needs of their children.
- ▶ Ensuring children's right to be free regarding social, school or family issues.
- ▶ Providing poor families with more financial resources.
- ▶ Try to reduce poverty by imposing less and lower taxes.
- ▶ Creating news channels for children, in a child-friendly language.
- ▶ Increasing the number of psychologists, social assistants, nutritionists and nurses in schools at all levels of education or start recruiting in establishments that still do not have support of these professionals.

- ▶ Increase the number of specialised staff that give support to children with special education needs since kindergarten.
- ▶ Ensuring children are taught from an early age about the inclusion of different ethnic groups in society.
- ▶ Ensuring children are heard more often, whether it is regarding their opinion, choices and needs.
- ▶ During the pandemic, children were not heard on how to solve education problems and therefore the solutions found by adults didn't correspond to the real needs and interests of children; as a result, several children gave up on trying to learn.
- ▶ All children in school need support for inclusion and integration, and not only migrant, refugee or disabled children. There are children that are not from different national origins that are also, for example, introverted and need to be supported by teachers and other students in order to be included and integrated.
- ▶ Encouraging representativeness that inspires children from minority groups to have different opportunities, namely by giving them voice in the media, to make their culture be known and thus allowing them to achieve representativeness in leadership positions and in the society.
- ▶ Building/rebuilding public spaces, adapting them to all kinds of children that may use them.
- ▶ Within the scope of final school/academic evaluations, criteria should be included and valued that are relevant for the development of students (such as on soft skills).
- ▶ Building sensorial parks where senses may be experienced by allowing children with different disabilities to enjoy the pleasure of nature through the five senses.
- ▶ Reinforcing the resources allocated to social actions at all education levels; enlarging social support to include several areas, such as housing conditions.
- ▶ Investment in education adapted to mute/deaf children or with other types of disabilities.
- ▶ Co-fund therapies for disabled children.
- ▶ Increasing access to projects in a way that offers all children equal opportunities.
- ▶ Creating study rooms/multidisciplinary support in schools to help children overcome difficulties due to lack of support they may have at home.
- ▶ Let kindergarten and pre-school education become mandatory and totally free of charge.
- ▶ Municipalities should listen to children and young people before taking measures and actions that affect them.
- ▶ More flexible and inclusive criteria to grant economic support, prioritising single-parent families, families with numerous children or families with lower incomes.
- ▶ Improving the public transportations network, bus, subway and train, both in cities and in rural areas.

How children can be involved

- ▶ Carrying out more child consultations.
- ▶ Extending the participatory budget national consultation to students of the 5th grade.
- ▶ Creating regular activities, from time to time, for children to interact socially, and also to have discipline and interact with several materials.
- ▶ Creating school prizes related to areas of interest at national and international level.
- ▶ Creating international networks for co-operation with schools and other institutions in other countries where students may develop joint projects.
- ▶ Making English language a compulsory subject since the 1st grade.
- ▶ Resuming the establishment of the National Federation of the Students of Elementary and Secondary Education (Federação Nacional dos Alunos dos Ensinos Básico e Secundário -FNAEBS).
- ▶ Creating a consultative body of students that participate in school life and that is heard by the school's board of directors.
- ▶ Ensuring the representativeness of the students in the schools' General Council, including in elementary schools.
- ▶ Creating, at national level, reading clubs, maths clubs and other clubs in the various school levels.



ACCESS TO AND SAFE USE OF TECHNOLOGIES FOR ALL CHILDREN

Belgium and Italy focused on access to and safe use of technologies for all children, and consulted 28 children. It emerges clearly from the children's contributions that the younger generation is very aware of the hazards and downsides of technologies. In fact, the challenges participants suggested should be urgently addressed are connected mainly with safeguarding and protection, inequalities in accessing the internet and risks of exposure to "people with bad intentions". As risks for children in the digital environment, the participants identified cyberbullying, stalking, sexting, identity fraud/theft, chatting with strangers and the ease with which children share sensitive and personal data, as well as the risk of becoming addicted to social media and gaming. The children recommended that the new Council of Europe Strategy should include specific measures to promote education, reduce inequalities, and raise awareness on how to use technologies safely, including mandatory courses for children, teachers, and parents on technologies and social media. In what concerns the possible actions, participants shared several concrete ideas. Regarding equity of access, the group underlined the importance of the Council of Europe - and all the relevant European and national institutions - making a considerable effort to ensure broader and more widespread access to the internet and technologies for all children, by removing inequalities and the digital divide. Over the past year, with distance learning, children experienced how social differences still exist and how they affected children, such as digital disparities, lack of devices, a reduced possibility and ability to attend and participate in school, and receive an adequate education. The participants noted that there must be guidelines from the European level for national and local or regional actions regarding distance learning. They felt it was necessary to create spaces for a safe exchange between adults and children, integrating intergenerational perspectives. The children observed a need for consultation processes for children to inform policymaking, to identify priorities, understand emerging needs and define relevant measures and interventions.

Belgium

"No more hate comments, they are really unnecessary."

Mediaraven and the Children's Rights Knowledge Centre jointly facilitated the consultation session, commissioned by the Flemish Authority (Department of Culture, Youth and Media). Two sessions were held face-to-face and seven participants (two male and five female) aged between 13 and 16 years old partook in the consultation session. All of the participants were native Dutch speakers.

According to the report from the National Delegation, the sessions followed the methodology designed by DCI Italy and, as suggested, was adapted to the participants as much as possible.



Children's thoughts and considerations on the thematic priority

The 'online tree' allowed participants to engage with the question of what happens in their lives with regard to technologies and digital media. The participants were asked to draw a tree, and build it up as follows:

- ▶ The roots represent what the participants like to do online, which apps and devices they use: TikTok, Instagram, Netflix, Discord, Steam, Youtube, Music, Gaming, Chatting, Education, Safari, Mobile Application for navigating public transport, Photo's, Disney+.
- ▶ The tree trunk symbolises what the participants like about technology: gaming with friends, using TikTok and Instagram, memes & vines, news, being able to follow fashion trends and famous people, games, chatting with friends – close by and far away; also linked to the pandemic, in that it has made staying in contact easier.
- ▶ Wounds and chops – symbolise the negative aspects of their online realities: people who seek attention, quarrelling, fights & online bullying, momo-challenge, online hate, privacy – as in, not putting everything online, the issue of portrayal of your own life as perfect, hackers...
- ▶ The gardener symbolises who participants have contact with in the online world: friends, family, acquaintances.
- ▶ Branches and leaves – symbolise what children like to do, what are their on- and offline dreams and aspirations: more chatting with friends, becoming famous, becoming a doctor, being famous on Instagram (for one month), becoming a neurosurgeon, traveling to Japan, flying an airplane, parasailing, seeing friends in the flesh more often, taking pictures and printing them and hanging them on the wall(s).
- ▶ The sun represents what gives children energy, what do you like doing a lot: music, food, sleep, talking to people.
- ▶ Clouds symbolise any issues and/or problems: cookies, advertising, soccer, people who think they can say anything and everything online.

Participants reported almost unanimously, that they think some children are too young to have a smartphone or to be on social media (e.g., TikTok). When asked what they considered to be 'too young', they replied that 10 years old was acceptable for apps such as TikTok. Ideally, children and young people should get a smartphone when they start attending secondary school, as they will then need it more for school, communicating with peers and parents.

Participants also discussed the fact that some apps and platforms have a minimum age from which it can be used, but one criticism was that this is easily circumvented by lying and pretending to be of an age that would allow you to enter the platform. As for chatting to strangers, participants felt that protection is needed. To make this aspect of Internet use safer, the responsibility was placed mainly on the parents. Parents should be stricter in this area and, for example, they should not allow children under a certain age to have a mobile phone. Parents should also be more involved, argued some. Others said that parents should not be involved and know about everything that happens online, as that goes too far.

Most of the participants felt that children and youth need more control when using digital media. Initiatives such as Netflix kids, Youtube kids and Ketnet were seen as positive, because a team of experts checks what is put on the platform. The parents can then be confident that the child can use appropriate digital content. Platforms such as TikTok, on the other hand, are almost impossible to control, partly because they consist mainly of user-generated content. These kinds of apps seemed less ideal for children. From the age of 12 onwards, the participants felt that there should be more freedom because young people of that age are better able to think about consequences etc. It was mentioned that young people in youth facilities can only use their mobile phones a few times a week and reach their parents. Some participants said that it was important for them to be able to contact their parents and the outside world every day.

Children's expectations of their governments, public institutions, schools, parents, communities, relevant associations or other entities to advance the situation of children in relation to the thematic priority

- ▶ When taking and developing measures, age-appropriateness should be a leading consideration. Indeed, age-appropriate measures were a big topic throughout the consultation.
- ▶ Using your eID to log in on apps and make use of digital media and technologies, as a measure of control and protection.
- ▶ Protection for children under 13-year-old by making their online profiles automatically private – alternatively denying access to social media to under 13.

Children's expectations of the Council of Europe and the new strategy for the Rights of the Child

- ▶ Tolerance – in the context of free speech. The participants seemed eager to discuss and talk about their freedom of speech online, and how the phenomena of hate speech, racism, echo chambers, fake news the issue of tolerance related to their freedom of speech. Many concerns about these interrelated topics were shared, in that many of the participants reported that one way or another, they are all impacted by fake news, hate speech, etc. On the other hand, they feel the need to maintain plenty of space for freedom of speech: where do we need to draw the line?
- ▶ More relevant curriculum for youngsters in terms of technologies – what they learn at school is perceived to be not relevant to the topics that they have brought forward throughout the consultation. Education that includes the dos and don'ts of being on the internet could be helpful – how to perform simple tasks on the internet – less focus on hardware, deemed not super relevant.
- ▶ The participants expect freedom – both in terms of their 'individually' – 'being able to pursue and consume what they want, as an individual' - as well as screen time.
- ▶ Commercial advertising was seen as an issue, the participants expect to see change concerning commercial advertising. Best case scenario would be to forbid commercial advertising online altogether.

"I think everyone has the right to a stable Wi-Fi connection."

Challenges to be urgently addressed

- ▶ Tackling the issue of people with bad intentions and how to protect children against those people.
- ▶ Protection and control of young children – as reflected in many other discussions held during the consultations. Many different approaches were put forward throughout the day, ranging from private profiles, to complete denial of access before a certain age.

Possible action to be taken

- ▶ Make sure there are no more negative or hateful comments on the internet. Another participant raised the question how we would cope with genuine criticism, how this relates to the freedom of expression.
- ▶ Disabling and removing all advertising online, as it is irritating and takes away from a pleasant experience surfing the web.
- ▶ Deleting fake websites and websites that contain content or owners with bad intentions.
- ▶ Every child and young person has right to a cell phone, a stable Wi-Fi connection and the right to be protected online.
- ▶ Age-appropriate use of the internet through means of age-control; both a responsibility of providers as well as parents. The participants mostly agreed that as an older sibling, they have no responsibility to help their younger siblings on their way. Their argument for this, was that they shouldn't know what their siblings do online, as much as their siblings have no business with what they do online. Making mistakes, in addition, is part of the learning curve on the internet. The participants further argued that this was clearly a responsibility of the parents or caretaker with the parental role. They would however help their siblings if the need would arise.
- ▶ Need for better education at school, when it comes to technologies and the internet. The participants are all in agreement that the current curriculum does not sufficiently cover what skills they need to engage with technologies.

"I would advise the Council of Europe to listen to all young people who, in my opinion, have many things to say."

The Department for Family Policies of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers was in charge of the consultation process, while the "Istituto Degli Innocenti" (hereinafter also "the Istituto") was in charge for its coordination and execution. Two facilitators coordinated and led the online consultations, assisted by two co-facilitators who kept track of and supported the groups' activities. The consultations involved 21 children (13 boys and eight girls) aged 13 to 17 years old and a special effort was made to create a diverse group involving girls and boys through contacts with high schools, secondary schools, daycare centres, residential communities, etc. In addition, particular attention was paid to the geographical distribution (North-Centre-South), gender, and the involvement of ethnic minorities.

Children's thoughts and considerations on the thematic priority

The participants consider "the correct use of new technologies" a crucial subject for them and society in general. It is a topic that directly and closely affects them. Young people recognise the importance of being at the centre of the discussion and the need to empower their thinking through the actual consultation process and in the future. They also very clearly perceive a gap between their generation and the older generations with regard to the ability to use new technologies. However, they consider the opinion of adults, and in particular of their parents, very relevant. At the same time, they require autonomy in using new technologies and demand greater attention and supervision by adults. They perceive the potential but also the risks of these new tools. This gap in adults' knowledge creates a sort of relational displacement in the transmission of information and orientation, compared to other areas, where, on the contrary, knowledge, and experience is held mainly by adults. In this specific case, the children's understanding is often more significant than that of adults. However, they would like to have much more attention and guidance to the safe use of the vast - and constantly evolving - world of new technologies and social networks.

The young people involved in the consultation perceive the topic of new technologies with great clarity as a sensitive issue, in some ways dangerous, but also having great potential for the future: in the fields of communication, education, information, and for the environment against ecosystem exploitation.

As the theme of "access to and proper use of new technologies" is extensive, to facilitate a fruitful discussion, the facilitators decided to split the central topic into several sub-topics to analyse in a timelier manner.

During the discussions, two topics emerged as central: education in the use of new technologies and distance learning, so present in the students' daily lives in recent months.

Children's expectations of their governments, public institutions, schools, parents, communities, relevant associations or other entities to advance the situation of children in relation to the thematic priority

The children believe that adults need digital education, especially their parents. They are aware of the importance of the parental role, which - according to some - is far too weak and delegating, ending up entrusting to children the responsibility of dealing with a dangerous world. Some point out that parents spend too little time with their children.

The subject of distance learning has been brought up several times during the consultation.

The children agree on considering the last school year, mostly spent in front of a computer, very tiring. The main issue is around the internet connection not always being guaranteed for every student. Moreover, the participants raised other problems due to this challenging situation: studying has been much more difficult, lack of devices for every student, poor interaction with teachers and peers. In particular, they are suffering from the loss of relationships with their peers.

However, the group recognises the importance of new technologies and web platforms, emphasising their role during the pandemic. There is also a general idea among the students that, once back to normal, distance learning can be used synergistically and integrated with daily attendance at school.

The group underlines how distance learning can facilitate, for example, the connection to national and international events, the participation of famous people online, and the promotion of afternoon courses. The participants believe that all these ideas should be supported and oriented by national and European institutions and included in the Strategy.

These resolutions can help to reduce time, costs, and pollution caused by travels, concretely and efficiently support children with more significant difficulties and promote new and stimulating interactions by broadcasting information and relationships.

While firmly considering that face-to-face schooling is better than a school attended online, young people perceive the potential of using new technologies, considering it an inevitable process that integrates contemporary and traditional ways of doing education.

"If I was in front of the member states of the Council of Europe, I would say that we need more awareness and control of new technologies."

Children's expectations of the Council of Europe and the new strategy for the Rights of the Child

As already mentioned, education is central for children. According to young people, the new Council of Europe Strategy should include specific indications to promote education about how to use new technologies, reduce access inequalities, and raise awareness on how to use these technologies safely.

There are different ways to achieve such purposes:

- ▶ Creating groups to exchange experiences and share knowledge.
- ▶ Education among peers (peer to peer).
- ▶ Specific online platforms and applications.

However, the most effective place to promote a proper education that involves all children is at school. First of all, all boys and girls attend a school, regardless of their family and social status. In addition, educators are trained to develop their skills to share accurate and reliable information.

Youngsters talk about articulated and structured processes - some even think of curricular subjects - that can spread a correct use of the internet in the new generations.

And what are the risks that children see? On the one hand, the danger of becoming addicted to virtual reality and the web, and on the other, the exposure to people with bad intentions (primarily through fake profiles) and the easiness of sharing a wide range of sensitive and personal data.

In particular, this second aspect, the lack of protection and safeguard on the web, is perceived very clearly by the participants. With the group, we discussed several risks of web browsing through social networks and beyond: cyberbullying, stalking, sexting, identity fraud/theft, chatting with strangers, etc...

Young people believe that these risks must be countered through mandatory courses for children, teachers, and parents. At the same time, they expect institutions to establish parameters and regulations to protect children's right to privacy (creating limits to the power of multinational companies of the web) and to contrast the phenomena of abuse, especially in social networks.

Part of the discussion focused on the appropriate age to have a personal smartphone and access social networks or web platforms. There were different opinions, but the majority considered the correct age between 12 and 13 years old. Once again, according to young people, the responsibility lies with the parents, who must understand when it is the right time to buy a smartphone and allow children to surf the web.

Equally important for children is that standard rules need to be strict and complex to circumvent; they confirm that "circumvention of the rules" happens for almost all access and accreditation to applications, platforms, and social networks that require a minimum age of access.

Young people perceive significant ambiguity on this issue and an enormous confusion that allows everyone to circumvent the rules without great difficulty.

A specific proposal from the participants is to define a regulated and verified platform that every child needs to access. After this first subscription, they can enter media and social networks according to their age. In this way, protecting the privacy of the single user, it would be possible to verify who accesses what. In particular, the aspect of false or unidentifiable profiles is an issue that worries young people a lot.

Concerning the development and positive aspects of the web, young people realise the enormous potential for the future in terms of new knowledge, expansion of relationships, and developing a more ecological and equitable world. This is an aspect that European institutions should consider, and therefore they ask for explicit references in the Strategy.

The ecological topic, as mentioned above, is very much felt by young people. Concern about the current environmental crisis is widespread and also comes back up in the discussions of the consultation. Discouraging non-essential travel by favouring online communication, promoting platforms for reuse and exchange of second-hand goods, giving impetus to education for sustainability on the web are ideas that the network can enable to counteract the environmental decline in progress.

Even without a precise vision of how new technologies and the web can promote a sustainable future, young people underline how central and urgent this issue is. And how much institutions should commit firmly and without putting off the problem.

Regarding equity of access, the group stresses the importance that the Council of Europe - and all the institutions - make a considerable effort to ensure broader and more widespread access to all children by removing inequalities and the digital divide. In the past year, with distance learning, children have directly verified how social differences still exist, such as digital disparities, lack of devices availability, less possibility and ability to attend school, and receive an adequate education. Many children received digital devices during the pandemic. Still, many others - among those present at the consultation or among their friends - did not receive them or had severe difficulties using them.

Specifically, distance learning has already been addressed in the previous section dedicated to National Institutions and local communities. Nevertheless, the participants believe that there must be guidelines for national and territorial actions even at the European level.

Challenges to be urgently addressed

- ▶ The definition of transparent and verifiable criteria for access to web platforms and social network.
- ▶ Countering the digital divide in order to facilitate and promote access for all young people, regardless of their social status.

Possible action to be taken

- ▶ The preparation of digital education courses for children (but also for adults and parents in particular) regarding the risks of the web (cyberbullying, stalking, sexting, identity fraud/theft but also addictions to social, games and the web) and the potential of new technologies. The school needs to be in charge for this part as it is inclusive for all children.
- ▶ Adapting and standardising the rules for access to social networks and web platforms, which protects the right to privacy and guarantees and protects users - especially minors - from all risks encountered on the web (specifically, the idea of single access for accreditation in relation to age, described above).
- ▶ Guiding and directing schools to promote distance learning that is intelligently integrated with traditional teaching (e.g., afternoon courses, events with celebrities, creative workshops on digital subjects, etc.).
- ▶ Support access to digital tools for all European children and adolescents, as an essential action against inequalities.
- ▶ Promote opportunities to listen to children and share their ideas on a regular basis.

How children can be involved

According to some, to involve young people, it is necessary to create places for debate between the adults and children. Also, to have consultation processes to identify priorities, understand emerging needs, define intervention policies and regulations. An example is setting up groups of adolescents who are representatives at a territorial level and who can interact with authorities at local, national, and European levels.

Others propose web platforms (ad hoc sites, for example) where it is possible to directly participate in public consultations on specific subjects, including the development of regulations and legislations concerning safe access to technology for children. By sharing online through dedicated tools, it is possible to interact and participate in discussions and decision making on issues that directly concern them.

Therefore, girls and boys would like to be directly involved, sometimes without any adult intervention. They feel the need to integrate knowledge and perspectives from multiple generations.

Finally, the group emphasises how the question of participation remains closely linked to the topic of education. Strengthening educational processes can also encourage ways of greater involvement.



CHILD-FRIENDLY JUSTICE FOR ALL CHILDREN

The Greek Ministry of Justice consulted 17 children on **child-friendly justice for all children**. As challenges to be urgently addressed, the children identified mainly a lack of respect for the rights of the child during all stages of investigations and proceedings concerning children. The participants identified a need to address police attitudes and behaviour towards children, in particular with regard to the right of the child to be protected from violence, their right to non-discrimination and their right to care. Children should be timely and thoroughly informed about their rights in a child-friendly manner and should be able to freely express their opinions on issues affecting them. Training children and adults, in particular police officers, on the rights of the child and child-friendly procedures is key. To this end, strict recommendations should be sent to all police stations, and there should be control of the non-law-abiding behaviour of individual police officers, as well as punishment where the rights of the child are infringed or violated. The participants reported that the procedure to hire an interpreter for children in contact with the justice system was complicated and time-consuming and this created obstacles to the children's participation, thus the interpretation process should be improved. Participants highlighted that media should be forced to respect children's privacy and personal data. Anyone who provides confidential information to journalists regarding the criminal file of the case and the children concerned, should be prosecuted and punished.



Greece (Ministry of Justice)

"I would love to attend an online programme on my rights in the Criminal Justice Sector and on my duties, on human rights in general and also on citizen's rights."

The consultations with the participating children were realized face-to-face in 2 sessions each, in two cities of Greece, in Athens and in Thessaloniki. The participants were 17 youngsters in total, 15 boys and two girls, aged 14-20, coming from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, who referred to the Athens Juvenile Probation Service. All of them had experienced difficulties in their lives, some had experienced stigma at school and prejudice in their neighbourhood. The meetings were facilitated by Chara Galanou, Vasiliki Kalogera, Marina Boznou, Sotirios Efstratiadis, Pelios Dimitrios Stavrou, Simos (Symeon) Papadopoulos, Nadia-Elpida Romanidou and Georgia Baltira.

Children's thoughts and considerations on the thematic priority

All of the children considered that the juvenile justice should give minors a second chance by imposing alternative measures of education and assistance and that children should be treated differently than adults.

Children were not informed of their rights and the procedures after the arrest by the police but only when they came in touch with their lawyers who explained the procedure to them.

Four children complained that they were detained for several days at the police station after their arrest, before they were taken to the public prosecutor and the investigating judge.

One unaccompanied minor claimed that during the first two days of his detention at the police station he was not given any food at all, while a second unaccompanied minor said that during his detention he was not permitted to communicate with his mother who lives in Iran.

One child suggested that home detention with electronic monitoring should be imposed to juveniles instead of being held in custody by the police.

Three children - two unaccompanied minors and one Roma - complained about the behaviour of the policemen towards them. They said that they insulted them and beat them. One child said that he felt very bad when the police officers handcuffed him in front of many people.

All of the children believe that foreign minors suffer discriminatory behaviour by the police.

One foreign child stated that the police officer told him to sign his statement without giving to him any explanations and later found out that the facts that were written in the statement were completely different from what he had said, probably because the interpreter had mistaken his words since he did not speak the same dialect as he speaks.

All of the children believe that there are good and bad police officers. There were police officers who treated them with dignity and respect and others who were aggressive and violent. One child suggested that the 'cruel' police officers should be trained in order to treat children well.

They disliked the offices at the police station and the place where they were detained since they were not child friendly.

Regarding the infringement of their private life and the violation of the protection of their personal data, three children stated that the media announced personal information related to them and false and not accurate information concerning the offence they were accused of. There were journalists and reporters with cameras all over and many people identified them by their body type and by the clothes they were wearing. The police did not protect them from the reporters. One child said that photos of her were displayed on the internet and the reporters were chasing her in order to take photos. As a result, children were stigmatised and marginalised.

They all said that they were content with the investigating judges, the juvenile judges and the juvenile probation officers because they treated them with respect, they listened to them, allowed them to pose questions, speak freely and they were supportive.

In order to be informed of their rights, they considered a good idea to be given information leaflets concerning their rights and the procedures.

They all agreed that an internet platform which could give children the chance to ask questions concerning their rights in the framework of the child friendly justice and at the same time to register their thoughts, opinions, complaints and proposals anonymously, would be a very helpful instrument for them and for other children who are involved in the criminal justice system.

"I would like to say to the Council of Europe that children shouldn't be treated badly. We learn from our mistakes, we are children. I want to ask them to stop violence in the police detention centres."

Children's expectations of their governments, public institutions, schools, parents, communities, relevant associations or other entities to advance the situation of children in relation to the thematic priority

- ▶ Children should be heard. There should be a way for children to talk freely about their negative and positive experiences they have when they are involved in the criminal justice system and raise questions regarding various matters connected with their rights and child friendly justice in a way that confidentiality and anonymity are ensured.
- ▶ Children should be explicitly informed about their rights and the process to be followed as soon as they enter the juvenile criminal procedure.
- ▶ They demand the assurance that all children are treated with respect and in accordance with their needs by all the professionals with whom they come in touch with in the criminal justice system and they ask police officers treat them well and without discrimination based on the race, the nationality, the language they speak and the religion.
- ▶ They expect the safeguard of the confidentiality of their criminal files so that no related information is provided to the journalists and they demand the protection of their privacy and their personal data by the media and by all people involved in the procedures.
- ▶ Children do not want to be detained for a long period without serious reason before they are taken to the public prosecutor to decide upon criminal charges and in any case, they demand the safeguard of their rights during the detention (food, child friendly venue, their families to be informed, communication with the family, decent treatment).
- ▶ There should be further development and empowerment of article 12 of the UNCRC and the right to be heard in the Juvenile Probation Services but also in all the stages of the experience of a child in the criminal justice sector. Children expressed their wish to have a stronger voice concerning the decisions affecting them, they would like to have a more energetic participation. In their opinion, Juvenile Probation Services are still services organised and managed predominantly by adults.

Children's expectations of the Council of Europe and the new strategy for the Rights of the Child

- ▶ Children should be encouraged to express concerns and complaints through mechanisms which do not exist in the services without fearing punishment or retributive treatment.
- ▶ Children should be informed on their rights in the Juvenile Probation Services, there should be a more "rights centred" and "rights education" approach during probation counselling sessions.
- ▶ Children would like to be part of regular consultation groups.
- ▶ Group work and group approaches should be used more extensively in juvenile probation in Greece instead of individual sessions.
- ▶ Article 13 of the UNCRC should be further developed and the right to the freedom of expression should be further strengthened and probation practice.
- ▶ Children would like to be treated with respect by the Police and with empathy by all professionals-key players in the Criminal Justice System.

- ▶ A child-friendly language used by professionals is still missing from the overall experience of a child in the Criminal Justice. Juvenile Probation Officers should be trained sufficiently in order to know how to build trust and comfort for the children who are referred to them and more elements of a child-friendly justice should be introduced, for example, continuous learning and multidisciplinary training of professionals.
- ▶ Victims' rights should be further strengthened in the Juvenile Probation, as well as the presence and the voice of victims.

"I would like to have a virtual space where I can voice my concerns and my opinion without shame and without being intimidated for my beliefs."

Challenges to be urgently addressed

- ▶ Police attitude towards children-violation of their right to be protected from violence, of their right to non-discrimination and of their right to protection and care.
- ▶ Infringement of their privacy and their personal data through media.
- ▶ Improvement of the interpretation process.
- ▶ Children should be readily and thoroughly informed about their rights regarding child-friendly justice.
- ▶ Children should express their opinion freely on issues they affect them.

Possible action to be taken

- ▶ Strict recommendations to all police stations, control of the non-law-abiding behaviour of certain police officers and punishment.
- ▶ Continuing training of police officers and in general training of all the professionals who are involved in the juvenile criminal justice system.
- ▶ Media should be forced to respect children's privacy and personal data. Anyone who provides confidential information to journalists regarding the criminal file of the case and the children, should be prosecuted and punished.
- ▶ Procedures concerning interpreters' compensation should not be complicated and time consuming so that it is easier to find a proper interpreter for each case and each child.
- ▶ Children could be informed of their rights and procedures through informative documents in a child-friendly structure and language, in order to fully understand their rights and the legal procedures that concern them. Or through an internet site or platform.
- ▶ The creation of an internet platform where children could upload questions, comments, complaints and proposals regarding the child-friendly justice, in a way that they could remain anonymous, would give voice and the freedom of expression to all children.
- ▶ Home detention with electronic monitoring instead of being held by the police.

"The police should refrain from racist and discriminatory behaviors, they should treat children with dignity and respect and they should be informed on the case without judging because if their behavior is bad towards a kid, they can be easily hurt and traumatised since this is a very delicate age."

How children can be involved

Through the above-mentioned platform and through regularly organised child consultations.

TAKE THEIR OPINION INTO ACCOUNT



GIVING A VOICE TO EVERY CHILD

Bulgaria and Finland involved 42 children in the consultation regarding the thematic priority giving a voice to every child. According to the participants, there is limited theoretical knowledge of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The participation of children and youth and the opportunities to discuss the rights of the child in a structured and in-depth manner are very rare. The participants reported that, at times, even children questioned basic concepts such as every child's right to form an opinion and wondered if a child should have the right to an opinion at any age and on any topic. Children felt that in schools, adults take their opinions and views seriously, nonetheless, teachers and parents should improve the equal treatment of all children. The children recommended that parents give children space to form their own opinions. This was especially important in multicultural families where parents might have different views than their children. The children highlighted that it was crucial to create opportunities for children with special needs and disabilities to participate: every day we see these children closed, sad, without their peers, communicating only with the school psychologist." Children in contact with the law should also be able to exercise their right to form an opinion and to participate, as well as children living in institutions and children from minority groups. Education and training were identified as an essential feature to promote participation, for example through peer educators, training for children in schools and training for teaching staff. The participants put forward the idea of a safe website where children could send their thoughts and questions, or a new digital platform offering different ways for children to participate.

"It is necessary to talk more with children and give them more information."

The sessions were planned and conducted by the facilitator Julia Todorova and the co-facilitator Stefan Lazarov with the assistance of representatives from the State Agency for Child Protection in the town of Primorsko, for a total of three sessions. 21 children aged between 15 and 17 years old from the Children's Council of the State Agency for Child Protection participated in the consultation, 12 girls and nine boys, representatives of 15 districts in Bulgaria.

According to the National Delegation's report, the children were extremely motivated to participate and assume a role of responsibility. In a sense, they showed higher than expected responsibility and maturity, constantly reminding the facilitators and other participants that as representatives of the Children's Council, they not only speak on their own behalf, but also on behalf of the children in the area they represent in the council.

Despite the practical experience they shared and demonstrated, the thematic priority: "Giving a voice to every child" was somewhat abstract for the participants. This may be due to various factors: limited theoretical knowledge directly related to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the participation of children and youth; the rare opportunities to discuss such issues in a structured and in-depth manner and, last but not least, the need to consult processes that go far beyond their school and local communities. There were even times when children questioned basic concepts such as every child's right to an opinion and wondered if a child should have a right to an opinion at any age and on any topic.

Children's thoughts and considerations on the thematic priority

Children associate "Giving a voice to every child" with the words: freedom, respect, justice, purpose, knowledge, opportunity, responsibility, education, perspective, support, equality, improvement, attitude, happiness, determination, fulfilment, with the connection between problem and solution, with initiative, with a way, opinion, fighting spirit, independence, love ("there must be more love for children, those who are at a higher level determine our right to opinion. These people must love us and to realise that we can express our opinion"), progress, expression.

While the children thought about how to write the meaning of the thematic priority in a definition, they expressed the opinion that the right to an opinion for every child means: children to be able to speak freely about their opinion without worrying, without being offended, reproached or discriminated against. They said they knew of children who were afraid to express their opinions so as not to be abused - for example, children living in institutions. They discussed that their opinion should be respected everywhere: at home, at school, in various institutions and that the right to opinion is related to activity on their part, not only on the part of adults. In order to express their opinion and participate, according to the children it is necessary: to be heard by the adults; for adults to give them more "rights" and opportunities to participate; to have more courage to express their opinion - they said that courage is related to upbringing at home and encouragement from parents; to have more self-confidence; be more supported to participate.

Regarding school - their opinions were mixed - it was concluded that in smaller schools, children have more opportunities to participate in decision making that concerns them, because the relationship with management is more accessible, but in larger schools this is rare - principals are very busy and children cannot easily reach them to talk.

In regards to participation in healthcare, children stood behind the thesis that: "The material base is very bad and there is a bad attitude towards the children by the medical staff." They explained that the doctors refused to talk to them about their illness, told them they did not understand and insisted on talking to their parents. The children emphasised that they trust doctors as professionals and would like doctors to perceive them as separate from their parents and to talk to them, as well as to give guidance on what children need to change in order to stay healthy.

Regarding participation at the national level, the group's opinion was that often, when they participate in decision making, they do not receive feedback on development, and often do not have enough information from adults on various issues concerning their lives and future - e.g. lack of information about the role that the assessments of the National External Evaluation hold in the tenth grade or lack of information about the decisions and activities in which the children from the school council can participate.

When they voted with a show of hands on the question: "Is your opinion heard enough when a decision is made at home, at school, local, regional or national level?", with possible answers "yes", "not enough", "no", one child voted "yes" and twenty children voted "no". The group united around the position that they have enough opportunities to express their opinion, but then "no one hears it and nothing changes."

"We expect a systematised common standard. For all areas, schools should have youth councils and have a common communication platform in which the various youth councils can communicate. To have communication between all of us young people who are in the EU."

Children's expectations of their governments, public institutions, schools, parents, communities, relevant associations or other entities to advance the situation of children in relation to the thematic priority

- ▶ Children to receive feedback from adults when they have been involved in decision making.
- ▶ To create opportunities for children with special needs and disabilities to participate: "Every day we see these children closed, sad, without their peers, communicating only with the school psychologist."
- ▶ Children in contact with the law should also have access to the right to opinion and participation, as well as children living in institutions and children from minority groups.
- ▶ To improve the functioning and activity of the mechanism for children's participation in Bulgaria (school, municipal, district councils), as well as to create quality criteria. Children to receive more information, to have more opportunities to participate, to have a platform in which children from different councils can communicate and coordinate the ideas, questions, suggestions they have.
- ▶ Parents should be interested in the opinion of children and support them so that they are more courageous to participate.
- ▶ Doctors to talk to children and explain to them in an accessible way about their illness and what it takes to heal.
- ▶ Psychologists in schools to work ethically and respect confidentiality, because often they make consultations with children available to teachers and principals. The exact word used by the children was "independence", and their expectation is that increasing the autonomy of a school psychologist would lead to greater security and professionalism in the performance of their duties.
- ▶ Create clear and accessible channels for communication between students and school management, even in large schools.
- ▶ In the field of education, to have regular consultation with students on issues directly related to them, as well as taking into account their opinion in making final decisions. Especially valid, given the frequent changes related to the epidemiological situation in the country: "The Ministry of Education and Science should introduce mandatory surveys among children about the changes it introduces and these results must be taken into account in decisions."

Children's expectations of the Council of Europe and the new strategy for the Rights of the Child

- ▶ Promote the rights of the child, children's participation and motivate more children to be interested in participating in decisions that concern them.
- ▶ Plan actions so that the children can be heard (in Bulgaria, because according to them this is not fully happening at the moment).
- ▶ Create a platform for communication between children in Europe or online forums through which they will be able to exchange various opportunities for participation, ideas, difficulties, problems and suggestions related to their quality of life, development and well-being.

Challenges to be urgently addressed

Create a mechanism to guarantee the right of opinion and participation of children living in institutional care. The participants in the consultation raised this as an urgent issue because they pointed out that children living in institutions often do not express an opinion and do not participate for fear that their opinion will be sanctioned and/or limited by the adults who are taking care of them in the institution.

In the field of education, as an area directly affecting all children and an area where: “Bulgaria may need to undergo the most changes”, students should have full access to information on issues that concern them (such as the role of the National External Evaluation for example), as well as more freedom of choice (e.g., choice of general education subjects, etc.). When children have to make choices related to their education, they should be provided with all the information, because now, they sometimes feel manipulated and/or misinformed when making choices related to the National External Evaluation, scholarships and other important issues which are part of their school life.

Possible action to be taken

- ▶ For more countries to have a Ministry of Children to work with children.
- ▶ Establishment of a new institution “Children’s Ombudsman in Bulgaria”, in order for the children to be more listened to, have someone to turn to with their problems which creates opportunities for children to participate in decision making. The children’s ombudsman should be accessible to all children and there should be information on the television regarding how can children contact them.
- ▶ If a child stays in a hospital, when being discharged, they should have the opportunity to fill out a questionnaire in which to express his/her impressions of the stay and thus to develop the general environment of children’s hospitals and the relationship between children and doctors.
- ▶ Create children’s television/children’s news so that people are more informed about the success of children and where children can receive more information.
- ▶ To develop the National Children’s Helpline in Bulgaria so that children can talk about the difficulties they have with other children. The line should also reach children in institutions, in order to create an opportunity for them to express their opinion, to participate and to report when their rights have been revoked. According to the participants, in Bulgaria children living in institutions are often abused and afraid to talk about the situation in which they live.
- ▶ To develop special seminars for parents to improve the relationship between parents and children.
- ▶ Create possibilities for the children living in institutional care to connect and communicate with each other to share experiences and advocate together to find solutions to the difficulties they face.
- ▶ To have more information about the problems of children in Bulgaria on the news and through the news to spread the phone of the National Hotline for Children, where children can talk about the difficulties they have, ask any questions that interest them and get support or help from specialists.
- ▶ The Ministry of Education and Science to introduce a practice of conducting surveys among students, through which they can express ideas, suggestions, questions, complaints related to the educational process and other topics concerning the life and well-being of children.

“Children have limited experience, but that doesn’t mean they can’t help.”

How children can be involved

- ▶ Children’s television/radio/news to be managed through a partnership between children and adults.
- ▶ By creating more/different opportunities for communication and activity involving children at national and European level.
- ▶ By maintaining and developing student councils at school, municipal and district level.

Finland

“Policymakers should promote that parents listen to their children.”

Two consultation sessions were held online and were facilitated by Laura Saarinen (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health) and Elina Stenvall (SOS-Children’s Village). Laura Tiitinen was present as secretary and Sanna Valtonen as support to the refugee children. Twenty-one children from 10 to 18 years old participated in the consultations, including nine children from Muurame. Among the children there was a mentally disabled girl, a former client of child protection, a deaf person and two refugee children. In addition, one child participated with her mother’s help at home and the mother sent a video of the consultation. Children were from all around Finland.

Children’s thoughts and considerations on the thematic priority

Participating children thought in general that the thematic priority “Giving a voice to every child” is important. According to them, it should be something universal for everyone. They described giving a voice to every child to be “normal human right”.

Children voted for their views of what “giving voice to every child” means and votes divided this way (total votes 12): five votes for “normal human right”, four votes for “opportunities to participate”, two votes for “fairness” and one vote for “justice”.

Children’s expectations of their governments, public institutions, schools, parents, communities, relevant associations or other entities to advance the situation of children in relation to the thematic priority

Children had expectations from adults in general; they should respect children and their opinions. Adults should negotiate with children and give them time to explain their views.

Children felt that in school and hobbies adults take their opinions and views seriously but still teachers and parents should be better in treating children equally. Parents should give children space to create their own opinions. This is especially important in multicultural families where parents might value different aspects than children.

Children expect that Finland fulfils the expectations presented in the new National Child Strategy. Also, important expectation for Finland was to ensure that children would have more opportunities to participate despite their age. Children felt that even younger children have skills to participate if they are given opportunities. Adults should not deprecate children’s views and should not decide what children are capable of but should ask and talk with children. Also important is for adults to respect children’s wishes and support them to reach their dreams. Finland as a nation should also invest in education.

A deaf girl mentioned that schools should have more sign language interpreters to help children with impaired hearing. Otherwise, the opinions of these children are poorly taken into account. Sign language should be better taken into account in other aspects of children’s lives, such as hobbies.

Children’s expectations of the Council of Europe and the new strategy for the Rights of the Child

These expectations are same for Council of Europe that they were for Finland. Most importantly children need space and time to create and speak their opinions. Adults should understand that they cannot decide for children but with children and they should respect children views even when they are opposite to adults’ point of view.

“Talking more as equals, no babytalk. Adults should trust children more.”

Challenges to be urgently addressed

Children felt that social exclusion should be handled somehow or at least not be forgotten. They also pointed out that for children there should be an easy access digital platform and questionnaires should be created to understand different children's point of views.

Possible action to be taken and How children can be involved

Children voted for the actions and votes divided as follow (total votes 18, including those from the classroom): 11 votes for support and respect (from adults towards children's opinions), three votes for asking opinions, two votes for creating easy platforms, one vote for giving space and one vote for ensuring good feeling (for participating).



CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN CRISIS AND EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

The Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum consulted 22 children from two different reception centres for unaccompanied children on the thematic priority of children's rights in crisis and emergency situations. For these children, it was necessary to improve the registration, asylum and relocation procedures for unaccompanied children, as well as ensure a faster and less complicated family reunification procedure. In addition, the children highlighted that they should be placed immediately in specialised accommodation for children and that more child-friendly reception conditions and policies were needed. The children underlined the rights of unaccompanied children to access to education, which will allow them to fulfill their life dreams and objectives, for instance to find a good job and to move freely.



Greece (Ministry of Migration and Asylum)

"I want to have the right to grow up and develop. Not just survive."

The Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, Gelly Aroni, was in charge of the consultations with 22 girls aged 13 to 17 in two reception centres for unaccompanied children. One group of 11 unaccompanied minor girls was formed in each shelter.

According to the report from the National Delegation, the countries of origin of the participants are Syria, Afghanistan, Palestine, Somalia, Kuwait, Congo, Ivory Coast, Cameroun, Bangladesh. Interpretation was done from Greek to Arabic, French, English, Farsi and vice versa. The interpretation for the Arabic speaking persons at the Dafni shelter was provided free of charge by NGO METADRASI in response to the request of the facilitator. In several cases, the girls themselves provided further clarification to each other as in the case of the English-speaking Afghans that discussed and elaborated in Farsi their thoughts and input. The girls from Somalia commented on the scarcity of interpreters in Somali which is a fact.

The girl from Kuwait, being a Bidoon brought the right to identity as the most important issue. She proceeded to explain that she belongs to a stateless minority in Kuwait who are being denied Kuwaiti citizenship. She informed us about how Bidoon are confronted with significant difficulties when attempting to obtain civil documents, education and employment status, healthcare, and social services. Despite these struggles, their experience has been largely met with silence from the international community.

Children's thoughts and considerations on the thematic priority

Children feel they have lost their childhood, their right of being a child during the emergency situations they have experienced. They also said that during crisis and emergency situations all rights of the child are violated. After these initial thoughts they concluded to the following definition:

In crisis and emergency situations children have no rights and lose their childhood. For unaccompanied minors there is a contradiction in the thematic priority as children's rights do not go together with crisis and emergency.

Children's expectations of their governments, public institutions, schools, parents, communities, relevant associations or other entities to advance the situation of children in relation to the thematic priority

- ▶ Children should be placed immediately in specialised shelters. More child-friendly reception policies are needed.
- ▶ Registration, asylum, relocation, and reunification procedures should be faster. Time consuming asylum procedures.
- ▶ School education regardless of gender.
- ▶ Access to education which will allow them to fulfil their life dreams and objectives e.g., find a good job, travel.
- ▶ Skills profiling and capacity building.
- ▶ Friendly school situations.
- ▶ Family reunification to other European countries where their parents within reasonable timeframes.
- ▶ Equal rights for minors and adults.
- ▶ Free access to the health system and speed on procedures in the health system.
- ▶ Gender equality: women's right to decide about abortion.
- ▶ Freedom and a comfortable life.
- ▶ Free borders.
- ▶ International co-operation to handle refugee issues.

"In my country I have never heard of the word right."

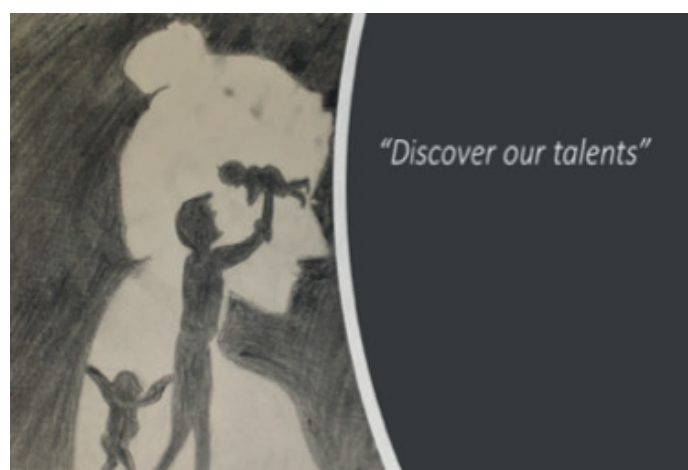
Children's expectations of the Council of Europe and the new strategy for the Rights of the Child

To hear their voices and discover their talents. They mentioned how in the educational public system their talents go unnoticed and unused. More specifically, in one of the shelters we had two such cases of girls. A girl who is a member of the young journalist's team that writes for "Migratory Birds". The newspaper "Migratory birds" is an initiative of the Network for Children's Rights, and the texts are produced exclusively by teenagers and youth, refugees, immigrants, and Greeks. She informed us that in November's issue she had written an article titled: "Will you hear the refugee children"?⁴ with a drawing of her friend and roommate.

She recited the epilogue:

"If you believe that children are innocent, that they are not responsible for war going on in their countries, that they did not choose to leave their homeland and to be migrants, take action and bring a change to their lives, a change that they deserve! If you are not so sure about it... then at least hear what they want to share with us".

Her friend gave us the following drawing to highlight what refugee children need: family.



Challenges to be urgently addressed

- ▶ Children must be protected especially in crisis and emergency situations like war and civil war.
- ▶ Children cannot be safe in war situation since survival is the first priority during that period.
- ▶ Faster procedures for unaccompanied children.
- ▶ Faster and less complicated family reunification procedures.
- ▶ All children should have the opportunity to attend school education.

"Adults make promises they don't keep. Do as you promise."

Possible action to be taken

- ▶ Institutional reforms are necessary in order to change inequality and promote inclusion of young people in decision-making processes.
- ▶ Prevention of poverty.
- ▶ Gender equality.

How children can be involved

Young people should be mobilised in changing the attitudes and point of view of the older ones especially regarding gender equality.

4. <https://migratorybirds.gr/will-you-hear-the-refugee-children/>

CHILDREN'S ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE CDENF

Following the consultations, and in preparation for the fourth plenary meeting of the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child - held in October 2021 - children were provided with some questions put forward by Council of Europe member states. The answers to those questions are presented below.

1. How do you feel about the recent consultation process?

"We are confident that the recent consultation process will have positive results, as teenagers and children are being involved in meetings to discuss and express their views on issues that affect society today. It has been interesting and stimulating to share views and ideas among us, examining issues that are very important for our daily lives and our future. This process can bring new ideas, suggestions, and maybe even resolutions from the youngsters to help manage or change views on particular issues."

Francesco, Italy

2. Is it clear for you what the Council of Europe is doing for children?

"Yes, for me it is clear. However, I think for the children it might not really matter, for they don't know about the European Council. In my school I was given a voice through what we call "parliament assembly". It was used to inform us about changes and new things happening in the school. Before the Strategy consultation meetings in Spain, the teachers and friends I spoke to told me that they had to explain it to the students as they didn't know what it was. I was shocked by what they were telling me, since we had long before studied it in school, in history class.

Unfortunately, I don't think European children care much about it. Of course, it would be ideal if everyone knew about it. The Council of Europe needs to be explained to children, in order for them to know how they can benefit and learn from it. To make the Council of Europe well-known, you could maybe focus on marketing and advertising. For instance, The Climate Pledge, where different children of different nationalities and different idioms come together for a common good. Not only campaign on TV, but also on all social media platforms that the children use, like Tik Tok, Instagram and even (some of them) on Twitter. It is important to bring decisions and information about the Council of Europe and its Strategy closer to our community and goals, through town halls, local councils, etc. to reach as many children as possible."

Jorge, Spain

3. Do you think that the thematic priorities chosen by the CoE reflect the real concerns of children in Europe? If you had to pick one, what is for you the most important concern or worry of all children today?

"I think the choices are pretty adequate because children nowadays seem to only care about the internet or social media, which we do, but I think a large part of us also cares about our future and the rights that we deserve. Some areas like equal opportunities and participation are necessary, but if I had to choose one of the options as the main concern, I think it would be violence against children, coming both from adults and from other children. I also think that is the one that applies to all children of every age, not only teenagers or little kids. Violence can affect children in their growing process and adulthood, and I think it is sad how normalised it is. Many people think that hitting your child as a way of punishment is ok, and that is just parenting when it only makes your children afraid of you, and no one should be scared of their supposed loving figure. Many teens think that fights are cool and mature and that some people deserve to be beaten up or made fun of, and that makes children afraid of going to school and they maybe have to hide their true selves so the other kids won't laugh at them. Kids are violent against each other in primary school and it is seen as a game and does not have consequences most of the time, because, as I said before, violence against and among children is way more normalised than it should especially verbal violence.

Violence during childhood can cause long term mental struggles, so it is vital that every child has the safe environment, either at school or home, that they deserve, and as not every child has that, it is the main concern."

Claudia, Spain

4. During the child consultation process for the Council of Europe Strategy, did you feel that you could freely express yourself? Did you feel that your views could have an impact on the Strategy?

"The consultations were very child-friendly, most importantly, the people who talked to us were very open to conversation. I think there should be more consultations like this. I am glad that I was a participant in these consultations, because this is another opportunity for my voice to be heard louder, outside the borders of my state."

Jasmina, Montenegro

"I found the procedure of the consultation very interesting. Through this consultation process I had the chance to express my own experience with the justice system and share it for the first time with other children who could feel me and understand me.

Although I was in a place I didn't know before with other people I didn't know, those who were responsible for the procedure and the Juvenile Probation Officers who I know and cooperate with, created a familiar and cosy atmosphere. At the beginning we felt uncomfortable and distant, but after a while the exercises that we did helped us to relax and brought us closer. Through those exercises we had the chance to get to know each other and trust the others so we could share our experiences and our views. We expressed our feelings, we heard the concerns of other children and we continued to communicate with some of them even during the breaks. During those two days, I felt that I did something different regarding my everyday life. I felt that we, the children, joined our forces and made suggestions concerning our rights. I believe that many important things were said and I had the feeling that we were sending a message to the Council of Europe which will take into account for the new Strategy for the Rights of the Children. I wish people who have the power to change things which are difficult and unpleasant for children involved in the criminal justice system, were informed of what we said. All children should defend our rights, but first we must be aware of our rights."

Nadia, Greece (Ministry of Justice)

5. What do you expect from the Council of Europe after this consultation?

"I expect that all our recommendations and answers will be considered and taken into account. I expect that they will become part of the Strategy of the children's rights for the period 2022-2027, and that with that Strategy all children will have equal rights no matter from where they come, what religion they are, skin colour or social status."

Ognjen, Montenegro

6. How could the Council of Europe make sure children are truly heard?

"In our opinion the Council of Europe, to make sure children are truly heard, can create places or organisations of constant dialogue between the adult world and the world of young people; for example, by setting up groups of adolescents who are spokesmen at a territorial level and who can talk to the authorities at a local, national and European level. In this way, regular consultations can be held to identify priorities, understand emerging needs and define intervention policies and regulations.

Even the creation of web platforms can allow direct participation in public consultations on particular issues or develop new regulations. The possibility of intervening remotely can enable us to interact constantly and participate actively in discussions and decision making on themes that are important to us. We, as young people, would like to be directly involved with the adult world so that we can integrate the knowledge and perspectives of multiple generations. I hope that the collaboration between adults and kids can bring a renewal of ideas and solutions that consider different points of view and will help to build a society based on common sense and to create a better world."

Francesco, Italy

7. What do you expect from your national government?

"I expect the Bulgarian government to organise the institutions and services so that our voice is heard more in school, the city and our district. We, the members of the Children's Council, expect the government to adopt a National Strategy for the Child. In Bulgaria, we participated in the preparation of the document in 2019, but subsequently there was no political will and despite our desire, participation and the opinions we expressed, the strategy was not adopted. I learned from my participation in the consultation process that the draft European strategy has similar principles to the national one, so I want it to be adopted. I hope that our participation in this consultation on the strategy at European level will become an occasion at national level for our interests to also be protected in a strategic document."

Dyian, Bulgaria

"I want a special Ministry for the Child and the Family to be established to protect the interests of all children in Bulgaria. I expect our government to build a National Specialised Children's Hospital, in which doctors will talk to children about their health, not just adults, and there will be more campaigns for children's health. I want a quality education for all children, no matter where they live – in a big city or a small village, because I notice that there are many differences in the quality of education and I want all my peers to have a chance for a better future. I hope that the national government will pay more attention to what we think."

Vayana, Bulgaria

"As a Portuguese teenage girl, I expect my country to be a place where I can be secure and free to express myself. A place where I have at least the essential knowledge to make good decisions. I want my government to hear my voice as all the other young voices around the country that have something to say about their realities and the problems that they face every day, in the way to achieve a better future. In the way to achieve the progress!

New challenges are awaiting us, and we, as young people, need to know how to act, we have to throw away our differences and work together to the same goal. Therefore, what I want is my country to walk with me, at the same pace, adapting itself to the problems of nowadays.

In this moment my generation is the most well prepared to the future. However, unhappily it is necessary to remember that if we don't change there's no future, so it is really important to be conscious about the climate changes and to end up the consumerism, the greed of power and to start acting for the wellbeing of our planet."

Vanessa, Portugal

CONCLUSION, NEXT STEPS AND FOLLOW-UP

Following consultations with children in the 10 member states it is possible to conclude that children are generally aware that their rights are not consistently and effectively respected and implemented. The participants expressed their concerns about not being sufficiently heard by adults, in particular parents, and by governments. Children emphasised how the question of participation remains closely linked to the topic of education. A core recommendation was to strengthen educational processes, targeting children, parents, teachers and other service providers, as well as state officials, as this has the potential to encourage a stronger involvement of children in all matters concerning them. The participants underlined the need to recognise the legitimacy of children's experiences, views and recommendations, while creating spaces – online and offline – for children to participate in a continuous and sustained manner.

All the actors involved in this consultation process remain in contact, in order to nurture the common ground created throughout the year. It is expected that a delegation composed of 10-12 young delegates will be present during the public presentation of the new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027), in order to continue the dialogue with member states, European Institutions and other key actors.



The present child consultation towards the Strategy process represents a pioneering milestone for meaningful and effective participation of children in policy-making processes. During the process, 220 children were heard through an inclusive and comprehensive process and their voices are effectively and transparently reflected in the new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027). Their opinions are even reproduced more extensively in the present report. It is important to highlight the outstanding commitment and spirit of co-operation of the National Delegations, their facilitators and all participating children that contributed to these results.

The Council of Europe and National Delegations are encouraged to reflect how the consultations with children could influence change beyond the specific goal of the present process and how to ensure stronger continuity in hearing and taking into account the views of children for decision-making processes. The consultations could be considered as the foundation for a continuous and relevant exchange with children to orient civil, cultural, political, social and economic decision-making processes.

www.coe.int/children

www.coe.int

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.