



RAISING OUR VOICES

Children's Recommendations to the Spanish Presidency
of the Council of the European Union



GOBIERNO
DE ESPAÑA

MINISTERIO
DE DERECHOS SOCIALES
Y AGENCIA 2030



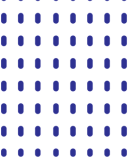
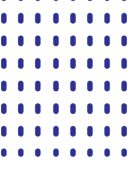


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Acknowledgements

We extend our deepest gratitude to the children across Europe who have participated in the online consultations. We also want to extend our gratitude to the governments of Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Sweden, and Malta for making this participatory process possible.

A particular word of appreciation goes to the Children’s Advisory Group for your valuable guidance, shaping the themes and survey questions and interpreting the feedback and inputs received from children across Europe – and last but not least – for developing this report and sharing your recommendations. Thank you, Anna (Austria), Aleksej (Croatia), Anna (Czech Republic), Magdaléna (Czech Republic), Alexandru (France), Solal (France), Bao (Germany), Faisal (Greece/Germany), Isobel (Ireland), Patricia (Spain), René (Spain), Rim (Spain), Sonsoles (Spain), Vidar (Sweden), Tekla (Sweden), Jewel (Malta) and Tasneem (Malta).

We are truly appreciative of your participation.

We are impressed by your keen observations, sincere concerns, and creative solutions. This report is a reflection of your aspirations and your genuine desire for positive change. We promise to take your input seriously and to work towards addressing the issues you've raised. Thank you for sharing your thoughts, dreams, and hopes with us. You have made an invaluable contribution, and we are excited to continue working together towards a brighter future.

Lucía Lósoviz

Director of Child Rights
Ministry of Social Affairs and Agenda 2030



Chema Vera

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Carles López Picó

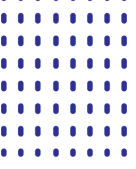
President
Plataforma de Infancia



Louise Thivant

Executive Director
The Child Friendly Governance Project





Foreword

Dear adults, dear decision-makers,

Imagine a world where children like us have a real say in what goes on in school, in our communities, and even in the world. That's what this report is all about! We're here to tell you what's on our minds and what we think needs to change – and we also have ideas for how we can help you change the world and our future towards the better.

We consulted with children across Europe, and guess what? We, children in Europe, worry about a bunch of stuff. From school and jobs to war, feeling down sometimes, and the planet getting all weird because of climate change. We want you to know these things matter to us, and we want you to listen.

Help Us Learn What We Need to Know to Navigate this World!

School is cool, but we want more than just books and tests. We want to learn stuff that helps us in real life, like how to deal with our feelings, get along with others, and make important choices in our schools. We want to have a say in what we learn, and we want to enjoy going to school.

Mental Health Matters!

As you can see from the report, children in Europe worry about their mental and physical health. Children often feel worried or sad, and they want help and support. We don't want to feel like we're alone in this. Let's talk more about our feelings and make sure we have the right help when we need it. It's important that we know how we can develop coping mechanisms in a world that is constantly changing, and it's important that we can help each other. We need the guidance and support of adults, and we should not be afraid of talking about it and finding solutions together.

Let Us Be Part of the Plan!

We want to be part of the big decisions that affect us. Sometimes it feels like grown-ups don't listen to us, and that's not cool. We want to help make the choices that matter for our future, and we want you to see the awesome ideas we have.

Keep Us Safe!

We want to feel safe in school and when we're out and about. Some of us worry about bullying, and we think there should be programs to stop that. We also want to learn about our emotions and how to handle them. If we need help, we want it to be easy to get.

We Children are Equal!

We believe that all children have the same rights. We also believe that some children need a little more support or an extra hand reaching out to them before they can realise their rights. Whether we are children from an ethnic minority, the migrant and refugee community, neurodivergent children, children living in care, children with disabilities, and LGBTQI+ children – we are all children with equal rights. And we would like adults to remember that.



We Care About the Future

We children worry about many things we are experiencing in our lives right now, but we are also concerned about the future. Will we find a job or a place to live? What does climate change mean for our future? We want adults to take our concerns for the future seriously.

We've Got Ideas!

Guess what? We've got solutions to some of these problems, too! We want to work together with the adults and those who make the decisions to make things better. We're not just worried; we're ready to do something about it!

So, as you read this report, we hope you'll hear our voices and see that we've got ideas, too. If you give us a chance, you will see that we are responsible, innovative, and most importantly that we take the future very seriously. Let's listen to each other, learn, and make things better together!

Thank you for reading, and thank you for listening,

The Children's Advisory Board

Anna

Anna

Magdaléna

Bao

Faisal

Izzie

René

Sonsoles

Rim

Jewel

Tasneem

Patricia

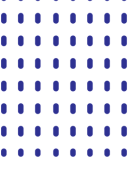
Solal

Alexandru

Tekla

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Introduction

Background and rationale

Every six months, the presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) rotates among its member states. Spain assumed the presidency in July 2023, playing a critical role in shaping the EU's agenda. Spain has a long-standing commitment to promoting children's participation at various levels, from local to national, and is now advocating for broader recognition of children's involvement in EU decision-making. Building on the example set by the Romanian Government in 2019, the Spanish Government has made children's participation a core priority during its presidency, hoping to inspire other European governments to follow suit.

To this end, the Spanish Government has partnered with UNICEF Spain, Plataforma de Infancia, The Child Friendly Governance Project, and a Children's Advisory Board to bring children's voices to the forefront of the EU's agenda. Together, they have facilitated a pan-European consultation with children to hear their opinions on matters that affect them.

“There is no difference between people, we are all human. If we recognise that, we can achieve anything.”

Faisal, Children's Advisory Board Member, Greece/Germany

In addition to the Government of Spain, the governments of Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Sweden, and Malta actively supported the participatory process by nominating members to the Children's Advisory Board and disseminating the consultations in their respective countries.

In this report, the Children's Advisory Board presents their concerns and recommendations, based on findings from the consultations with children in Europe.

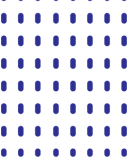
A note on methodology

A Children's Advisory Board was established to guide the consultations with children in Europe. The Board comprised of 17 children aged 11 to 17 from ten European countries, nominated by their respective governments. This diverse group represents various experiences from across Europe.

The Children's Advisory Board took the lead in formulating an online survey, which was used for the consultations. The children identified education, safety, mental health, and participation as their main issues, and developed a 14-question survey to establish children's priorities in these areas.

The survey was run online throughout July, August, and early September 2023. The results are not representative of all children in the EU and should not be interpreted as scientific facts – rather, they help point to things that children care about and decision-makers should pay attention to. The Children's Advisory Board analysed the findings from the consultations and developed a set of recommendations for the Spanish Government and other EU decision-makers.

The Child Friendly Governance Project led the participatory process and supported the Children's Advisory Board in their work. As part of this process, The Child Friendly Governance Project trained the children on child rights and child safeguarding. The consultative process was guided by strict child safeguarding measures to ensure that children's participation was safe and meaningful.



Children's Recommendations to European Union Decision-makers

One key finding emerges clearly from these consultations: children have concerns about a wide range of issues, including education, job prospects, war, mental health, and climate change. Another key finding is that children want their concerns to be heard.

Based on the findings from the consultations, the Children's Advisory Board has formulated the following recommendations for the Spanish and subsequent EU presidencies:

- 1 Include life skills and practical learning in school curricula and include children in decision-making in schools**

Children request a greater emphasis on practical learning, including lessons on life skills, mental health, relationships, and political decision-making. They also seek more flexibility in their choice of subjects and more opportunities to have a say in shaping their school experience.
- 2 Invest more in mental health, particularly combating stigma, and improving access to services**

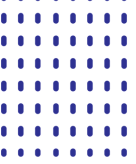
Children express significant concerns about their mental health but feel they lack the proper support and tools to address mental health challenges effectively. They desire more open conversations about mental health and a stronger emphasis on providing support that caters to their specific needs.
- 3 Focus on meaningful child participation that creates an impact that children can see**

Children frequently feel that adults who make decisions affecting them do not listen to them. They may lack opportunities to participate, and even when they do express their views, they often do not see any tangible impact. It is crucial for adults not only to hear what children say but also to actively listen. Adequate budget allocation is necessary to support these activities.
- 4 Invest in children's safety at home, in schools and in public spaces**

While most children feel safe at home, it is concerning that a relatively high number of children feel either 'unsafe' or 'very unsafe' at home. A significant number of children do not feel safe in school or public spaces. Children are calling for the implementation of preventive measures, anti-bullying programs, and emotional education in schools, as well as improved access to support when they need it.
- 5 Take children's concerns seriously – and work with them to find solutions**

Children have concerns about numerous issues, yet they also possess numerous solutions to the problems they encounter, and they are eager to collaborate with adults to implement these solutions together. Children expect adults to honour their promises and follow through on their commitments.
- 6 Keep on listening to children**

Children desire to have their voices heard in decisions that affect their lives, including those made by the EU presidencies. They urge future presidencies to continue seeking input from children. Additionally, they encourage each country to collaborate closely with children to understand local challenges and identify solutions.



Education

Education stands out as one of children's top priorities. They spend a significant portion of their waking hours in school and recognise its critical role in shaping their future. As a member of the Children's Advisory Board pointed out, children often spend more time in school than with their families.

"We spend most of our time in school - it needs to be worth it!"

Anna, Children's Advisory Board Member, Czech Republic

While children recognise the importance of school, many children feel that their educational experiences fall short of adequately preparing them for adulthood. Only 31% agreed that what they learn in school is 'very useful' for their future. Children also express a desire for more opportunities to acquire life skills, such as financial management, as well as skills related to mental health and relationships. Many also wish for increased autonomy in deciding what they want to learn, especially as they grow older.

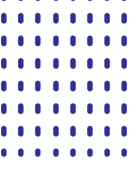
Furthermore, many children believe that teaching methods are not keeping pace with modern times. They aspire to have more engaging lessons and more opportunities to express their ideas about enhancing their learning experiences and school environment.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEARN IN SCHOOL? - TOP 5

1. Life skills (managing my own money and my time, setting goals...) - **74%**
2. Mental health and healthy life choices - **67%**
3. Emotional skills (empathy, understanding and managing emotions) - **66%**
4. Relationships and sexual education - **60%**
5. Politics and decision-making (how to participate and make my voice heard) - **60%**

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO CHANGE IN SCHOOL?

1. More training of teachers on new teaching methods - **67%**
2. More opportunities for students to share their ideas - **66%**
3. More practical learning - **65%**
4. Better school buildings - **52%**
5. To have a safe space - **42%**
6. Smaller classes - **41%**
7. Less homework - **39%**
8. More time for play or sports - **31%**
9. Less punishment - **24%**



Safety

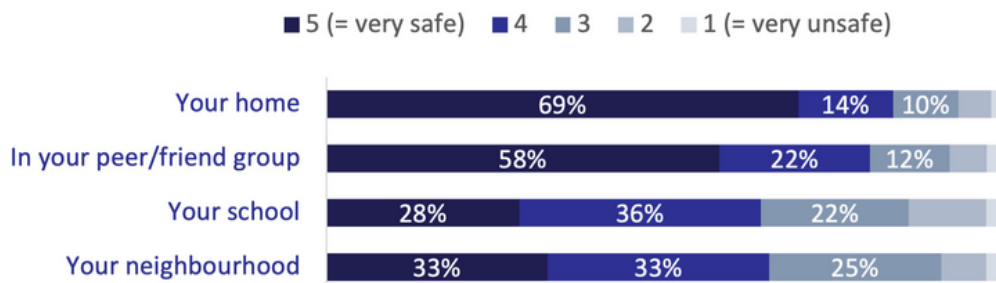
Safety from violence is a significant concern for children. It is very concerning that 31% of children responding to the survey have indicated that they do not feel 'very safe' at home, while 7% feel either 'unsafe' or 'very unsafe'. Children's concerns over safety increase further when it comes to public spaces and the school environment.

"School should be a place that everyone is happy to go to."

Anna, Children's Advisory Board Member, Austria

The Children's Advisory Board highlighted that it is troubling that so many children do not feel safe in school, a place where they spend most of their day. The Advisory Board also stressed that many children encounter various forms of physical or psychological violence, such as bullying and peer pressure, within their school environments.

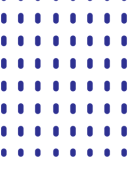
HOW SAFE DO YOU FEEL IN THE FOLLOWING PLACES?



Most children want more action on protecting children from violence, ranging from anti-bullying programs to engaging children in identifying solutions. The Children's Advisory Board noted that while support to victims is very important, more efforts should be put to preventing violence from happening in the first place.

HOW CAN ADULTS BETTER PREVENT VIOLENCE AND BULLYING?

1. Social and psychological support to children suffering from violence - **76%**
2. Anti-bullying and violence prevention programs in school - **69%**
3. Promote education on emotional and mental well-being - **65%**
4. Being able to talk to someone about getting hurt (e.g. helplines) - **61%**
5. Better laws to make violence against children illegal - **60%**
6. More support to parents to manage problems at home - **59%**
7. Involve children in identifying problems and solutions - **59%**
8. Public information campaigns to prevent violence - **48%**



Mental Health

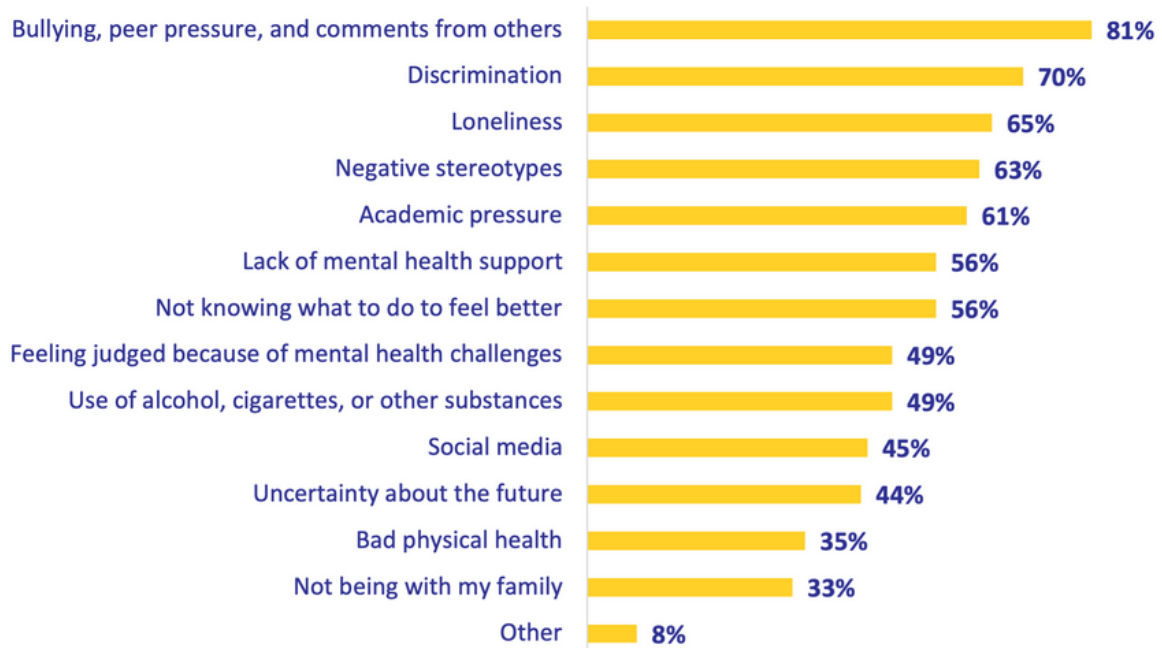
Mental health emerges as a significant concern among children. The factors contributing to the mental health crisis are diverse, including issues like bullying and peer pressure, which are amplified by social media; discrimination and negative stereotypes; and academic pressures, among others.

“Mental health is the most important thing, the key to everything.”

Faisal, Children’s Advisory Board Member, Greece/Germany

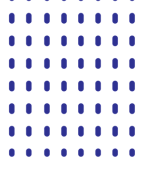
The Children’s Advisory Board also stressed the crucial link between physical health and mental well-being. Exercise improves mental well-being and the children express a desire for more opportunities for physical activity. However, they often find sports facilities to be too expensive, making them inaccessible to many young people.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES TO CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH?



The Children’s Advisory Board emphasised the challenges in accessing support services and underscored the necessity of offering more assistance to families grappling with mental health issues. Even when services are available, they are not always tailored to the specific needs of children and young people.

The Children’s Advisory Board further stressed the importance of mental health support to refugee and migrant children, including in the asylum process, as well as to other children and their families living in vulnerable and marginalised contexts.



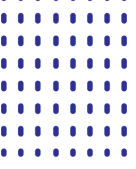
Stigma and a lack of awareness about mental health problems also create barriers to open discussions about challenges with peers, teachers, or family members. In addressing this issue, most children (80%) responding to the survey express a desire for mental health topics to have a more prominent presence in schools.

“Mental health is a problem for everyone, not only a few of us. We may need help at any point in our lives, and it is important to take care of that.”

Sonsoles, Children’s Advisory Board Member, Spain

HOW CAN ADULTS SUPPORT CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH?

1. Teach about mental health in schools and elsewhere - **77%**
2. More mental health support services - **77%**
3. Address the root causes of mental health issues - **63%**
4. Change attitudes so that people with mental health problems are not judged - **62%**
5. Ensure that public services are adapted to children’s needs - **60%**
6. Involve children in identifying solutions and services - **55%**
7. Ensure mental health support is adapted to different mental health challenges - **53%**



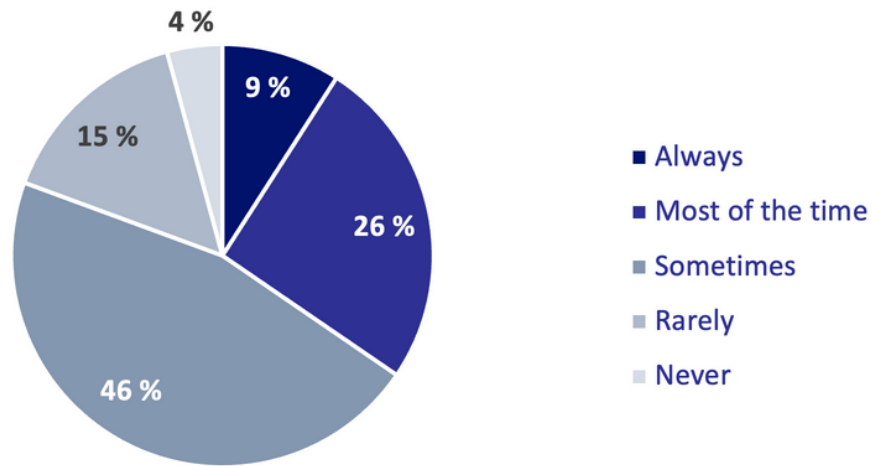
Children's Voices Being Heard

Children have the right to be heard in decisions that affect their lives, and this right should be given the consideration it deserves. Children express a desire to have their voices heard in all aspects of their lives. However, the reality is that most children do not have sufficient opportunities to express their opinions on decisions that impact their lives.

“In our school, our teachers do not respect our opinions.”

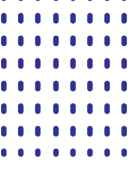
Patricia Children's Advisory Board Member, Spain

WHEN ADULTS TAKE DECISIONS THAT AFFECT YOU, DO THEY ASK FOR YOUR OPINION?



HOW CAN ADULTS HELP CHILDREN PARTICIPATE IN DECISIONS THAT IMPACT THEM?

1. Adults should listen, not only talk - **83%**
2. Give children more opportunities to participate in decisions - **72%**
3. Teach children and adults about child rights and children's right to participate - **57%**
4. Change adults' attitudes towards children and what we are able to do - **57%**
5. Use language that children can understand - **53%**
6. More meetings between politicians and children - **46%**
7. More interaction between children and adults in media - **38%**
8. More feedback from adults on how our participation has made a difference - **37%**



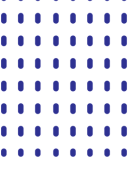
The overall message to adults is clear: they should prioritise listening over speaking.

Members of the Children’s Advisory Board revealed that they frequently encounter indifference or a lack of respect from adults who may not perceive them as old enough to offer valuable contributions. Even when adults inquire about children's opinions, their inputs often do not seem to result in concrete actions, and children often do not receive feedback about the outcomes of their contributions. Children not only wish to be heard by decision-makers but also by teachers and other adults they interact with in their daily lives.

“In our school, adults often ask our opinion, but we never see any results. They want to hear our opinion, but they don’t take it seriously.”

Anna, Children’s Advisory Board Member, Czech Republic





Children's Priorities

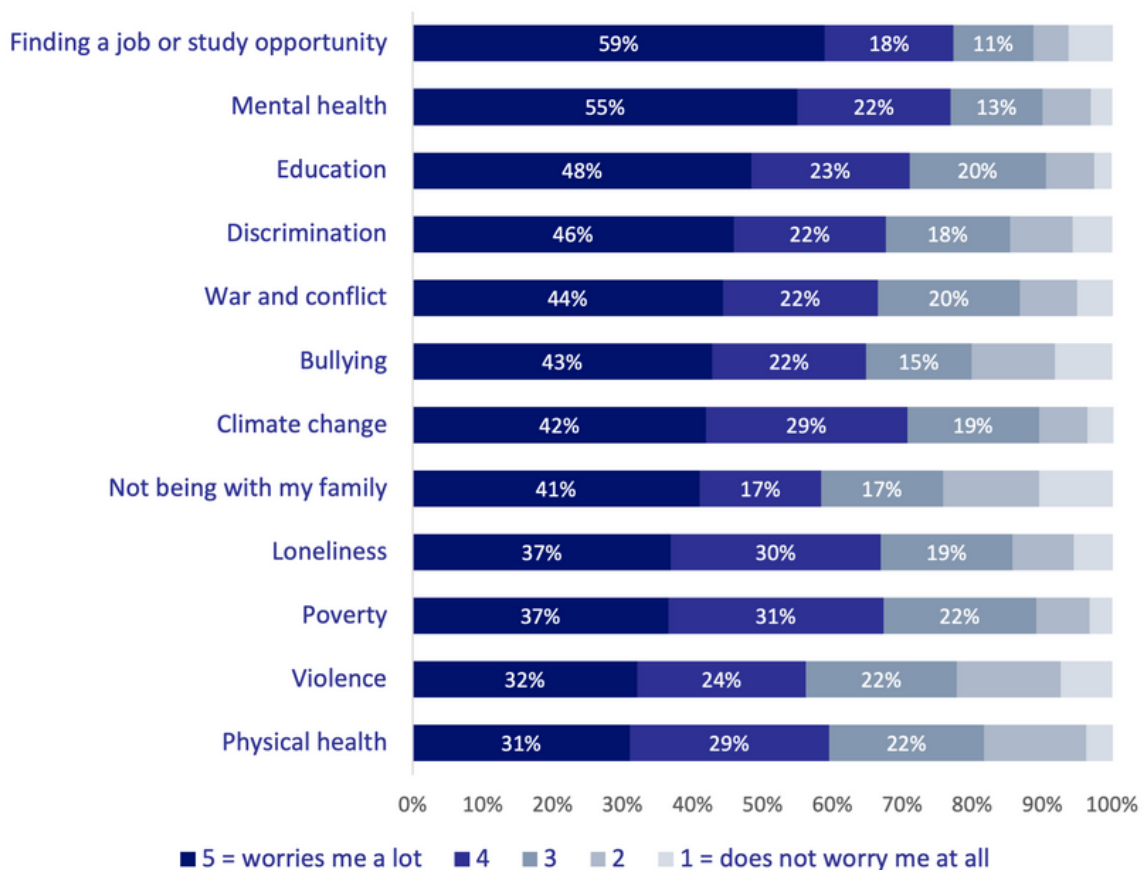
The primary finding from the consultations is evident: children are concerned about a wide range of issues, including job opportunities, mental health, discrimination, war, and climate change. More than half of the respondents express significant concern about all the topics on the list.

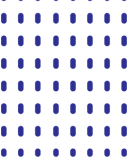
“These days having a degree does not guarantee you a job.”

Rim, Children's Advisory Board Member, Spain

Children's responses convey a powerful message to decision-makers: children bear significant concerns about the future, and they not only desire for these concerns to be acknowledged but also aspire to be actively involved in finding solutions.

THINKING ABOUT YOUR FUTURE, HOW MUCH DO THE FOLLOWING THINGS WORRY YOU?





Conclusions

One key finding emerges clearly from these consultations: children have concerns about a wide range of issues, including education, job prospects, war, mental health, and climate change. They are concerned about their lives and their well-being now. They are concerned about their lives and well-being in the future.

Another critical insight is that children want their concerns to be heard. They would like adults to recognise that they are well placed to help find solutions together with adults, let that be parents, teachers, governments, or the EU.

As highlighted in the recommendations by the Children's Advisory Board, children call for:

- Practical learning and skills development, as many children do not feel equipped for adulthood by the time they turn 18.
- Increased investment in mental health, addressing stigma, enhancing access to services, and building the capacity of both children and adults to navigate an ever-evolving world.
- Greater commitment, both in principle and in practice, to listening to children's voices and involving them in decisions that shape their lives.
- Enhanced investment in children's safety at home, in school, in public spaces, and online.

The Children's Advisory Board expresses profound happiness and appreciation with being consulted by the Spanish EU presidency. They urge future presidencies to maintain this practice, emphasising the importance of ongoing collaboration with children. This collaboration is not only encouraged within the EU but also extended to EU member states, urging them to strengthen partnerships with children to understand local challenges and identify solutions that align with children's needs and priorities.



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THE CHILD FRIENDLY
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