

# Poverty takes away the right to childhood

Children's perceptions of poverty in 4 EU Member States



**Eurochild**  
Putting children at  
the heart of Europe

# A child-friendly abstract

In this report, Eurochild presents the results of conversations with children from Malta, Bulgaria, Croatia and Estonia on child poverty.

We at Eurochild wanted to understand how children view poverty and how they believe it affects children's experiences at home, in school, in their community, and with their friends. We wanted to hear their opinions and see things from their perspective because no one knows children's lives better than they do. That is why we also asked them what they think must be done to make the situation better in their communities and countries.

By having these conversations with children from all over Europe and by publishing them for the world to read, Eurochild is trying to make sure that children's voices can be heard and then used by those that are making the decisions, to make sure the changes the children want to see can become a reality.

Mainly, through this report, we wanted to show how together we can work towards a world where poverty cannot take away any child's right to a happy, healthy and fulfilling childhood.



**Eurochild**  
Putting children at  
the heart of Europe

## **Eurochild AISBL**

Avenue des Arts 7/8, 1210  
Brussels  
Tel. +32 (0)2 511 70 83  
[info@eurochild.org](mailto:info@eurochild.org)  
[www.eurochild.org](http://www.eurochild.org)

Eurochild advocates for children's rights and well-being to be at the heart of policymaking. We are a network of organisations working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. We influence policies, build internal capacities, facilitate mutual learning and exchange practice and research. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the foundation of all our work.

For more information, contact:

[Mieke Schuurman](#), Eurochild Director of Child Rights and Capacity Building

# Table of contents

A note on the methodology used to gather children's views	2
Introduction	3
Eurochild's approach to the meaningful participation of children	4
Consultations with children on child poverty – results and discussion	5
Children's general understanding of poverty	6
Children's understanding of the impact of poverty on other children and young people	7
Poverty and school	8
Poverty and bullying	10
Poverty and home	11
Poverty and community	12
Children's recommendations for decision-makers: What needs to change?	13

## Acknowledgements

This report is the final product of a series of consultations and surveys with children carried out by the four National Eurochild Forums.

The National Eurochild Forums (NEFs) are spaces where ideas and views on particular issues of concern to children within their communities, countries and Europe are exchanged. Eurochild member organisations support the existing four NEFs and involve children below the age of 18 from diverse backgrounds and with different experiences. They connect issues of local and national relevance with European debates and policies.

**The National Eurochild Forums provide a framework to reach out to children in their communities and countries**, particularly children in the most vulnerable situations, to ensure that a wider range of children's views and experiences are represented in Eurochild's work. These are:

- **Bulgaria:** [National Network for Children](#)
- **Croatia:** [Society 'Our Children' Opatija](#)
- **Estonia:** [Estonian Union for Child Welfare](#)
- **Malta:** [Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society](#)

The Eurochild Secretariat would like to acknowledge and thank the National Eurochild Forums for coordinating and carrying out this research. In particular we would like to thank Kristina Nenova from the National Network for Children, Antonia Katić from Society 'Our Children' Opatija, Triin Sooäär and Kristi Märk from the Estonian Union for Child Welfare and Lorella Gatt and Angela Caruana from the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society. We extend our special gratitude to all the children who participated in this process and shared their experiences, opinions and recommendations. We are very grateful for their time and invaluable input.

Eurochild would additionally like to thank the staff members from the four NEFs who carried out the translation work for the consultations, which was crucial to facilitate the participation of a more diverse group of children. Eurochild would furthermore like to acknowledge that the framework of the consultations drew inspiration from the annual Child and Family Poverty Survey produced by Eurochild member [Children in Wales](#)<sup>1</sup>, and would like to express its gratitude to Children in Wales for their work, which influenced the development of this report.

The report was written by Lenia Kriki, with support from Ally Dunhill, Mieke Schuurman, Sebastian Lindt, Alice Hagger-Vaughan, Zuzana Konradova and Nell Fingleton. The report was edited by Ciaran O'Donnell and Federica Marra. Design by Davide Rambaldi.

1 McFarlane, K., Children in Wales, Report on the 6th Annual Child and Family Poverty Surveys 2022, September 2022, [https://www.childreninwales.org.uk/application/files/6416/6487/3691/CIW\\_Poverty\\_report\\_2022\\_English.pdf](https://www.childreninwales.org.uk/application/files/6416/6487/3691/CIW_Poverty_report_2022_English.pdf)

# A note on the methodology used to gather children’s views

For the report, the National Eurochild Forums (NEFs) in Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, and Malta adopted different research methods in gathering children’s views on poverty under detailed guidelines produced by Eurochild. In total, 203 children from the four countries were consulted using a mixed-methods approach to adapt and respond to national and local circumstances<sup>2</sup>. Three focus groups with children were conducted and an additional three groups of children filled out an online survey. The table below summarises the format and number of children consulted across the four countries.

## Overview of children consulted through surveys and focus groups.

National Eurochild Forum	Method	Number of children	Age groups (number)
National Network for Children Bulgaria	Focus group	8	14-16 (5) 17-18 (3)
Estonian Union for Child Welfare	Survey	90	10-17 (90)
Society “Our Children” Opatija, Croatia	Focus group	9	10-13 (4) 14-16 (4) 17-18 (1)
	Survey	80	<10 (1) 10-13 (39) 14-16 (31) 17-18 (1) 19-21 (8)
Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society	Focus group	9	10-18 (9)
	Survey	7	10-13 (1) 14-16 (4) 17-18 (2)
Total = 203			

The consultations and surveys were conducted in the children’s (working/common) language in the four NEF countries: Bulgarian, Croatian, and Estonian, with Malta carrying out the consultations in a bilingual manner, utilising both Maltese and English. The translation process – from English to the respective national languages and then back to English – was carried out by staff from the four NEFs, including the direct quotes by children highlighted in this report.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants and all applicable child protection and child safeguarding standards were upheld in this child participatory process. Each child was made aware that even after giving their informed consent, they could withdraw it at any time and choose not to answer any questions.

**At no stage of this process were any of the children asked to, directly or indirectly, share possible personal experiences of poverty, past or present.** The consultation process and this report aimed to grasp how children understand the causes, manifestations, and effects of poverty on their peers and/or other children, and to provide a space for children to voice their opinions, concerns, and finally, their ideas on what needs to change.

As a final note, this report and its authors recognise that certain methodological constraints restrict the wider quantification of the findings, including the differences in sample sizes across the four countries surveyed. However, the purpose of this consultation was to bring children’s voices into the conversation on child poverty and serve as a reminder that children have a right to share their perspectives, voice their opinions and have their recommendations heard. Consultations such as those carried out with the Eurochild NEFs are a first step in mainstreaming child participation in civic dialogue. They highlight children’s invaluable input while simultaneously being engaged and empowered as actors of change in their lives and those of their peers.

<sup>2</sup> The surveys distributed contained both qualitative and quantitative elements aiming for a more holistic understanding of the situation.

# Introduction



***Sometimes it is difficult to accept that you cannot be like other children.”***

**- Child from Malta**

## Child poverty in the European Union

According to the latest data from Eurostat for 2022, 24.7% of children in Europe are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. According to the latest Eurostat data, this amounts to approximately 20 million children in the European Union. The pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, followed by and coupled with the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, have exposed and exacerbated inequalities, plunging many children and families, particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds, deeper into poverty and further into social exclusion. The detrimental impact of poverty on the health, education and overall development and well-being of children cannot be overstated.

There is a clear understanding of this devastating impact of poverty on the lives of children in the European Union and a clear commitment to addressing child poverty through establishing the *European Child Guarantee* to address root causes of poverty by guaranteeing access to key services<sup>3</sup>.

As part of the Child Guarantee, each EU Member State is tasked with drafting National Action Plans (NAPs) covering the period until 2030. The NAPs should be tailored to the unique realities of each country — addressing the specific needs of children and in close cooperation with civil society and children themselves. An integrated approach is needed, focusing on the causes of poverty and social exclusion, and utilising a cross-sectional approach to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

The countries surveyed - Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, and Malta – reflect the range of child poverty in the European Union. In Bulgaria, 33% of children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This is above the current EU average of 24.4%. Malta is close to the EU average with 22.6%, the lowest rates in this report being found

in Croatia with 18.4% and Estonia with 17.4%. This is depicted in the consultations with children across the four countries, reflecting various experiences across different socio-economic circumstances.

Eurochild has released overviews for [22 of the published NAPs](#), highlighting the key services and actions governments are planning to focus on<sup>4</sup>. These overviews signpost national stakeholders to key aspects of each NAP, including groups of children in need, key actions planned, funding, stakeholder engagement, and monitoring and evaluation.

In Eurochild's 2022 *(In)visible Children* report, most of the 35 members who contributed to the report across 22 countries participated in consultations organised by the Child Guarantee National Coordinators to inform the NAPs. Unfortunately, in some cases members described the consultations as a box-ticking exercise and barriers to meaningful participation included: tight deadlines, low transparency, low representation of the organisations working with children invited to provide input, and lack of feedback from the authorities. Only a few members confirmed meaningful child participation took place during the consultations.

For the purpose of this report, however, the existing NAPs provide a valuable starting point to build upon in order to understand the contextual situation on the ground in the countries where the four National Eurochild Forums are based.

<sup>3</sup> The European Child Guarantee states that disadvantage and exclusion at an early age have an impact on children's ability to succeed later. It means they are more likely to drop out of school and have fewer chances to find decent jobs later. This often creates a cycle of disadvantage across generations. The Child Guarantee was included in European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's Political Guidelines upon her acceptance as President in 2019.

<sup>4</sup> The deadline for the submission of National Action Plans expired on 15 March 2022, however two Member States have yet to submit. Eurochild and its members continue to call on Member States to release their plans and to work on ensuring the Child Guarantee National Action Plans help end child poverty.

# Eurochild's approach to the meaningful participation of children



*Children living in poverty live a difficult life and struggle with problems that most do not recognise.”*  
- Child from Croatia

Eurochild is committed to working towards a society where children grow up happy, healthy, confident, and respected as individuals in their own right. Our capacity building and advocacy are focused on several thematic areas, including child poverty and its impact on children from disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds.

**Bringing children's voices to such conversations is crucial to this work.** Eurochild operates on the principle and belief that children are experts in their own lives and must be able to participate in decisions that affect them.

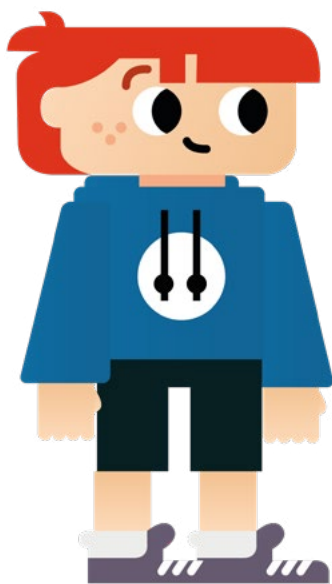
This is enshrined in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 24 of the Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and has been integrated into the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child as Thematic Area 1.

Participation serves a dual purpose. It improves the quality of decision-making by understanding the lived experiences of children, and ensuring that the evidence base for actions and strategies includes children's perspectives. At the same time, it contributes to the children's own holistic development by actively involving

them in the decision-making process. This is done by creating a space that is often missing for their voices to be heard and for them to become actors of change – in their lives, in their families, in their communities, in their countries. Children's involvement in decision-making is a foundational pillar for healthy democracies and responsible citizenship.

Although child participation is increasingly recognised as an essential component of civil dialogue, the under-representation of children's voices in conversations is still pervasive. This holds true for conversations, analyses, and recommendations related to child poverty where the primary sources of qualitative data are often limited to caregivers, parents, guardians, government and non-governmental officials and institutions.

That is why the main aim of this report is to bring into the conversation the voices of children, to hear their perspectives, acknowledge their experiences and consult them for their recommendations. Because no one understands the lived experiences of children better than children themselves.



# Consultations with children on child poverty – results and discussion

The children that completed the surveys and participated in the consultations were invited to consider and share their perspectives on the manifestations of poverty in five areas of children's lives:

1. Children's general understanding of poverty;
- 1a. Children's understanding of the general impact of poverty on other children and young people
2. Poverty and school;
3. Poverty and bullying;
4. Poverty and home;
5. Poverty and community.

These five areas do not manifest separately and are not independent from one another. Instead, the above differentiation was made to provide children who participated in this consultation process with a disaggregated framework that would allow them to better express and explore their points of view in a detailed way and ensure that their views were reflected meaningfully.

## Interpretation of statistics on children in poverty

Eurostat provides two different measurements of risk of poverty: AROP (at risk of poverty) and AROPE (at risk of poverty or social exclusion\*). Eurostat data on child poverty is derived from EU-SILC (European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions), compiled annually. AROPE is the main headline indicator to monitor the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan poverty target, including for children.

It reflects the share of the population fulfilling at least one of the following three conditions:

- People with low income (AROP);
- Severely materially or socially deprived people;
- Living in a household with very low work intensity.

In the consultation with children, the distinctions between AROP and AROPE were not included in the consultations. However, in all four countries, the children highlighted social exclusion and deprivation as often as strictly financial and income-related aspects of poverty. This illustrates that children tend to understand poverty from a holistic and multi-dimensional lens and identify its root causes and effects beyond strictly financial interpretations.

\* The poverty threshold is set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers. According to Eurostat this measurement does not measure poverty per se, but low income when compared to other people in the country. Eurochild supports the use of AROPE over AROP as it provides greater nuance to understanding the multi-dimensionality of poverty and social exclusion.



# Children's general understanding of poverty



*Everyone has the right to be happy and due to certain circumstances people who experience poverty might feel unhappy.”*

- Child from Malta

The first question to introduce and lay the foundations of the consultation process to the children was: *‘What do you understand by the word poverty?’*

Across all four countries, the children's most common association when discussing the term 'poverty' was primarily a **lack of money**, followed by a lack of basic resources and **necessities**, such as water, food, home and/or shelter, heating, and electricity. These understandings were accompanied by mentions of **'harsh living conditions'** in which children live and a general difficulty in going about one's daily life.

Another connection made by several of the children consulted was the **emotional aspect and impact of poverty**. This was mostly discussed among the children from Croatia, two of whom, when asked what poverty meant for them, replied 'sadness'. Other similar responses from Croatia involved definitions of poverty primarily in relation to adults and children constantly 'worrying' about their situation.

A common tendency throughout the responses from children was to view poverty as something **'not normal'** and to define it from within the comparative context of the situation of 'other' children and adults.

*“They lack similarity with their peers.”* - Child from Croatia

*“For me, poverty is when a person cannot afford things for normal life.”* - Child from Estonia

This defining characteristic of poverty as being unlike other children also emerged when the discussions

centred around how poverty can affect children's peers, especially when bullying and social exclusion were discussed (this is explored later in the report).

Furthermore, although not numerous, mentions of the **labour market** were made by several children when defining poverty. Associations ranged from 'someone [...] working multiple jobs every day just to survive that week', to several mentions of unemployment and either not having a job or the inability to find one.

According to a child from Malta, this can be a vicious cycle as **'poor people might be discriminated against and might not find a job'**. These perspectives illustrate children's acute awareness of the **social stigma and cyclical nature of unemployment** and poverty.

For some children, however, the term 'poverty' triggered extremely nuanced responses, such as the one below:

*“Poverty is the lack of something: some people are poor because they have no friends, others are poor in knowledge and so on. Most people would say that people who don't have money are poor, but poverty isn't just about our income.”* - Child from Malta

Several children from Croatia and Estonia echoed this sentiment. A child from Estonia shared that being: 'poor, it means **lacking happiness** from someone's life - this person is poor', with another adding that to them poverty is a situation where: 'you don't have a person who can help you'. Similar responses were elicited from a number of children in Croatia, with two of them sharing that, for them, **the term poverty is related to not having a family**.



# Children's understanding of the general impact of poverty on other children and young people



*In my opinion, poverty also leads to oppression and worry. It negatively reflects on young people's self-confidence, because teenagers pay attention to clothing and physical appearance, and poverty can leave traces in the human psyche."*

– Child from Bulgaria

One of the children who participated in the Maltese focus group noted: **'poverty might affect children and adults differently'**.

Adults' perceptions of daily life often differ drastically from those of children, a reality that can be magnified in situations of hardship. For an adult who is a parent and/or a guardian, poverty might signify long hours at work for insufficient remuneration or the struggle to support dependent family members.

For a child, poverty at times means not seeing their parents and/or guardians for days at a time, feeling inadequate at school, and having to sacrifice their childhood so they can double as adults in their homes<sup>5</sup>.

**"[Poverty] takes away their right to childhood."**  
– Child from Croatia

When the children were asked, 'What do you think affects children and young people living in poverty?', the most common reply was that they and their families would not have enough money to pay for things like food, heating, electricity or gas.

**Bullying and/or being excluded** was the second most identified impact of poverty on children, and the one which generated the most comments in the discussions, as were remarks about the impact of bullying on the mental health of children. The most common explicit responses referred to feelings of constant worry, sadness and loneliness. This was coupled with and discussed alongside children in poverty feeling different to other children; due to the bullying and social exclusion, but also because, in many instances, they did not have the financial resources to participate in the same social activities, even those as simple as 'going out' with their peers.

**"They think they are less valuable than other children."**

- Child from Croatia

**The responses during the consultation demonstrated a clear understanding among children that the effects of poverty on the lives of children are not the children's fault.** Despite this, children were acutely aware that poverty can negatively affect their peers' development even in the youngest age groups.

**"They start to worry about themselves if they'll have enough food tomorrow, although they shouldn't worry about such problems yet."** - Child from Estonia

**"They have to grow up much faster than other children."** - Child from Croatia

Discussions regarding the **long-term impact of poverty** were also common, especially in the Croatian focus group. One of the children commented that: **'[poverty] has a bad effect because then children can't possibly discover their potential'** with another adding that: **'I think it affects them a lot, because they can't grow normally'**.

Overall, most children were acutely aware of the role of socio-economic status in defining the lives and futures of children and adults alike. A child from Malta argued that: 'nowadays having enough money is the only way a child can secure a life that they want'. Another child from the same focus group added that: 'children nowadays must learn to accept that you can't have everything in life' - a statement that indicates that experiences of poverty can lead to fewer aspirations for some children.

<sup>5</sup> McFarlane, K., Children in Wales, Report on the 6th Annual Child and Family Poverty Surveys 2022, September 2022, [https://www.childreninwales.org.uk/application/files/6416/6487/3691/CIW\\_Poverty\\_report\\_2022\\_English.pdf](https://www.childreninwales.org.uk/application/files/6416/6487/3691/CIW_Poverty_report_2022_English.pdf)

## Poverty and school



***Bullying was even coming from teachers, with certain teachers favouring the rich children and looking down on students who come from poor situations.”***  
– Child from Malta

The school environment featured prominently in the perspectives shared by children during the consultation. School not only serves as a core part of a child's socialisation and integration into their wider community; it also has the potential to be a powerful vehicle of upward social mobility.

But child poverty can also be felt as a significant barrier for children to reach their full potential in school environments. As part of this consultation, children were asked: *'In school, what do you think affects children and young people who live in poverty the most?'*

The most common response was that **poverty can make children targets of bullying and social exclusion in school**. Children shared that they have witnessed peer-led bullying and stigmatisation due to poverty, which they said created an unhealthy school environment.

Children experiencing poverty and social exclusion can also be prevented from participating in activities, during school hours, such as field trips, or extracurricular and after-school activities, such as eating in restaurants or attending birthday parties. As one child from Estonia explained: ***“the child is constantly uncomfortable when it is assumed that everyone always has money to do some things”***.

A child from Bulgaria shared the following experience of a school excursion being cancelled due to some children being unable to afford its cost:

***“The case is as follows: an excursion to a wonderful destination has been organised within the school setting. A certain number of people were financially sustainable and responded that they can visit the place. However, the number of people which was needed was insufficient. The groups of people who did not have the financial resources to take part in the excursion were psychologically abused as a result of that.”***

Alarmingly, some children also added that bullying was not limited to peer-to-peer interactions but also coming from the teachers.

Schools should be a safe space for all children, especially those from disadvantaged and vulnerable situations who may not have access to safe spaces elsewhere. Unfortunately, as one child from Estonia explained, poverty can make children 'afraid to go to school'.

Another dimension that children identified in relation to poverty and school was the **emotional dimension** of experiencing poverty as a child in school:

***“It can also be a sense of security because if you have trouble with money at home and you have to constantly worry about it, then going to school is not the most comfortable either.”*** - Child from Estonia

A child from Malta explained that because of poverty, ***“some children might feel they are alone, and [that] no one understands them”***.

The third most frequently mentioned impact of poverty on children's experience of school was around **financial issues to access school materials and participate** in school. This included buying books and necessary equipment for school, and having enough money to buy school lunches or eat during lunchtime.

In Malta, for example, a child explained that each school year, children must purchase school supplies such as stationery, uniforms, and books. This can pose an issue for families unable to afford these hidden education costs. The participants in the Maltese focus group were aware of a scheme where schools provide children with uniforms and school supplies, but they were not sure how this scheme worked.

Financial issues and poverty were identified by children in Malta and Estonia as factors hindering children's ability to **access online classes** during the COVID-19 pandemic and especially during the periods of lockdown.

Digital tools are no longer optional for children growing up and attending school today. A growing number of school activities occur online, so children who cannot access online spaces due to experiencing digital poverty will be disproportionately affected.

*“The lack of a computer or internet can affect learning, as it is necessary to do work on the internet.”* – Child from Estonia



# Poverty and bullying



*He mostly hid the fact that he was poor. When they told me, nothing changed [but] they were happy. I would defend them and fight for them if necessary”.*

– Child from Malta

Part of the consultations was devoted to the conversation around poverty and bullying. However, **mentions of peer-to-peer psychological and physical violence spanned all thematic sub-areas of the consultations in all four countries.**

Children were asked if they knew of any children and young people that had been bullied because they did not have as much money or could not buy the same things as other children<sup>6</sup>.

In the focus groups in Estonia and Malta, children consulted stated that they knew classmates, or other children and young people in general, that have experienced bullying because of their financial situation. However, many children chose not to share whether they knew of someone that had experienced bullying or social exclusion for financial reasons.

When asked how they thought children in that situation would feel, several negative emotions were recurrent, ranging from: ‘bad’ and ‘sad’ to ‘helpless’, ‘guilty’, ‘humiliated’, ‘angry’, and ‘lonely’.

When discussing a friend’s situation, one child from Croatia shared that: **‘[they] felt very uncomfortable and humiliated and they were very sad and had no one around them’.**

When discussing these **negative feelings**, different responses from children showed that these emotions were aimed towards three different directions: Firstly, **themselves**, with a significant number of mentions of the word ‘guilt’, ‘shame’, a lack of self-confidence and self-hatred. Secondly, their **parents**, with many children explaining how children can often express their anger towards their parents if/when they are in a situation where they are being targeted or bullied for financial reasons.

This was further discussed in the following part of the consultations on ‘poverty and home’. Finally, these negative feelings, according to the children, could often be directed towards **society as a whole**, as illustrated by the quote below:

**“I think that [the children] feel disappointed in people.”** – Child from Estonia

However, a number of children in all four countries explained that to them, **it is not the children’s fault** because they cannot help it if they grow up in poverty. Many children mentioned personal experiences where they or their school, family or community took steps to help other children experiencing poverty financially or emotionally.



6 This was the only question in the consultations asking children to explicitly share personal experiences

## Poverty and home



*They may not be comfortable  
in their own home.”*  
– Child from Estonia

Poverty manifests itself in every area of an adult or a child's life, directly due to financial limitations and indirectly through the stigma attached. Home life is no exception to this. In this part of the consultations, we wanted to understand how children think poverty affects their peers and other young people at home.

The children's most common response to how poverty manifests in the home environment was that children might be **unable to afford to stay in their homes**, and would either be evicted or forced to move, perhaps even regularly.

Other children shared that **living in poverty would mean that children's quality of living would decrease**, as their homes would be in a worse state, by being colder, humid, and/or without (warm) running water, and that children would be ashamed to invite their friends over like other children do.

The children then shared that living in poverty can also translate into smaller accommodation leading to a complete lack of private spaces and thus moments of privacy. This **'can often lead to a very bad atmosphere'**, according to one child from Croatia.

Instead of being able to spend time with their peers and growing up in safe conditions, many children living in poverty have to set their priorities differently. The participants mentioned the constant fear of not knowing what comes next, and what an enormous burden for other children this fear can create.

*“Survival from month to month comes in the foreground, and fun, companionship and love fall into the background.”* – Child from Croatia

A common theme throughout this part of the discussions was that the children consulted felt that poverty can leave a lasting impact on the overall development and mental health of children:

*“Children's lives will be accompanied by the fear of poverty.”* – Child from Bulgaria

According to the children, this can then be exacerbated by an unhealthy family environment.

*“Parents are under stress, so it passes to the children.”* – Child from Croatia

In each country consultation group, children identified the role of poverty as something that could contribute to **tensions within the home environment, constant arguments, and children feeling anger towards their parents**. In the Croatian consultations, a significant part of the discussion centred around children in poverty being put in situations where they had to be separated from their parents:

*“If the parents do not have enough money, the children even have to leave the family and the home, and after that, the children are psychologically destroyed.”* – Child from Croatia

*“Children often end up in a home without parents.”* – Child from Croatia

*“Bad, children are often adopted.”* – Child from Croatia

In Malta, children also mentioned limited or restricted access to **adequate health services or sufficient legal representation** for children and families in poverty. They also spoke about the danger of children becoming addicted to **substances** from a very young age to cope with their reality.

As before, the children consulted once again demonstrate a nuanced understanding of how poverty affects the lives of children. For example, children in Croatia observed that financial deprivation does not necessarily have to mean a worse home environment:

*“From what I heard from my friends, their family is very happy that they have each other and it doesn't matter if they don't have money as long as they have each other.”* – Child from Croatia

## Poverty and community



*Certain people might take advantage of you because they know you need the money.”*

– Child from Malta

The community children grow up in plays a fundamental role in shaping their development and well-being. Healthy relationships in the community can reinforce a sense of belonging. In contrast, isolation can reinforce feelings of alienation, impacting children's sense of identity and self-worth.

In answering the question: *‘What do you think affects children and young people who live in poverty in their community the most?’*, most **children identified that these children and young people will have to work to financially support their families**. As mentioned by the participants from Bulgaria, this can negatively impact their free time, with children sacrificing time they should be spending with family and friends. It can also affect their education due to children feeling tired from work, and being ‘more unfocused or exhausted’ at school.

*“Often the focus becomes more on getting money and school can take a backseat for school-aged children.”* – Child from Estonia

Other responses from children in relation to poverty and the community referred to **living in an unsafe neighbourhood, and distinctly, living in a hostile neighbourhood environment**. Children explained that children and families in poverty may ‘lack respect’ in their communities, and often find themselves isolated due to stigmatisation. They highlighted that their peers could miss out on participating in community activities because of financial restrictions caused by poverty, and that the isolation caused by this intra-community isolation could have long-lasting adverse effects.

*“A child can feel ashamed and bad, which can lead to many insecurities even when they grow up.”* – Child from Croatia

In comparison to the other questions, the children provided less feedback on the relationship between child poverty and the community. Our analysis identified two possible reasons for this. The first is that the areas in which poverty manifests itself in the lives of children are interrelated, so discussions almost always veer towards another area, and by this point at the end of the consultation process, most of the major topics were already covered. The second reason is that, as with most child participation processes, this consultation process was lengthy and by this stage the children were less engaged at the end, as any participants would be.





# Children's recommendations for decision-makers: What needs to change?



*“In fact it does not matter whether someone is poor or rich, we must not look at the cover but at the soul.”*

– Child from Estonia

As part of the consultation, children were asked to suggest recommendations based on the following questions:

- If you were in charge of your community or country, what would you do to stop poverty?
- How can schools support children living in poverty?
- Is there anything we can do in order to combat school bullying?

The aim of asking the children to share recommendations on these questions was threefold.

Firstly, these recommendations demonstrate that meaningful child participation is essential to policy discussions on all aspects that impact the children's lives. Their range and insight illustrates that children are experts in their own lives and that no one can understand their reality better than they can. Therefore, when their voices are missing from conversations on matters that affect them, the policy debate is effectively not fully informed and thus leads to decisions that often have no positive impact on the lives of children. The plans designed and the actions taken by decision-makers can only be fully informed if they are in part shaped by children's voices and recommendations.

It is, secondly, a harmful misconception that by not having conversations with children on potentially sensitive issues – such as child poverty – we are shielding them from exposure to potential harm and the harsh realities of the world. Children are acutely aware of what is happening around them and how it affects them and their peers – as is evident this report. By excluding them from such conversations, we deny their agency.

Thirdly, we wanted to hear and understand what measures children in the four EU Member States recommend to inform Eurochild's policy and advocacy work on combatting child poverty. As a network representing children's rights, we have a responsibility to make sure that children's recommendations are documented and shared with

decision-makers to push for meaningful change. The National Eurochild Forums are one of our greatest tools at local and national levels to do precisely that. The children's recommendations are highly insightful and provide a diverse range of recommendations that relate to their local and national realities. Therefore, the authors have chosen to present these recommendations by country below.

The children in the **Maltese** focus group provided diverse answers, bringing into the discussion a sustainable welfare state, state-level social schemes, and the role of education and teachers in preventing bullying and ending the stigma surrounding (child) poverty.

In **Bulgaria**, the children's recommendations focused on the establishment of need-based school scholarships, the importance of structured peer support in the effort to combat bullying, and the need for innovative awareness-raising and sensitisation measures.

In **Croatia**, the need for (sufficient and affordable) housing schemes was prominent, as well as school-specific measures, such as fund-raising campaigns and free school meals.

The children in the **Estonian** focus group emphasised the need for a minimum, sufficient income for all, as well as targeted financial support for families in poverty, including child support, and the importance of education in combatting the stigma around (child) poverty.

By presenting their recommendations below this report aims to operate as a step in achieving these three aims. In sharing the children's responses below, the authors of this report chose not to paraphrase, interpret or edit their recommendations. The children have articulated clearly their ideas and recommendations, and these speak for themselves. Therefore, the recommendations presented below represent the views of children on how decision-makers in their respective countries can address issues around child poverty.



## Malta

### • If you were in charge of your community or country, what would you do to stop poverty?

*“Try to increase the minimum wage while also maintaining a sustainable welfare state.”*

*“Make healthcare free.”*

*“Provide poor families with affordable well-kept housing.”*

*“Provide social security and benefits to the families that are undergoing poverty.”*

*“Educate children regarding money management.”*

*“Provide food at schools.”*

*“Advertise pop-up community kitchens which provide free food for those who can’t afford it.”*

*“Invest more money in children and families in need.”*

*“Sometimes even when help is available poor people might not feel comfortable to ask for help as they don’t want to burden the other person.”*

### • How can schools support children living in poverty?

*“By establishing funds that aid children in these types of circumstances.”*

*“Offering free lunches to students in need.”*

*“Talk to all children and make them aware of what poverty really means and teach them to be understanding of each other.”*

*“Raising awareness amongst kids and grown-ups.”*

*“Having safe spaces where to talk and feel heard and ensure that anything that the children share in this safe space will not be shared around.”*

### • Is there anything we can do in order to combat school bullying?

*“Educating children about bullying.”*

*“Proper intervention and awareness from teachers/staff.”*

*“Greater emotional and economical support should be given to the children via the educational department or via the school itself.”*

*“Courses for parents regarding money management.”*

## Bulgaria

### • How can schools support children living in poverty?

*“The schools can organise awareness raising campaigns in order to sensitize children and parents in terms of the problem.”*

*“The social scholarships [should] be increased.”*

*“All school representatives, especially teachers and psychologists should take care of those children, gain their trust and provide support.”*

*“Fundraising campaigns can also be organised.”*

### • Is there anything we can do in order to combat school bullying?

*“We should pay more attention to the topic within of the school setting but also within other setting, such as the family environment. We should explore various approaches in order to support people who need that.”*

*“Bullying can be stopped with the help of a person who is a member of youth organizations and who understands what stands behind such a thing, and has the skills of an educator. If a person has such an experience, he/she can provide an advice to those who suffered and also to the others who mocking/torturing them.”*

*“Bullying can be stopped with education. However, the educators should use an unconventional approach. People should be able to put the shoes of the others and to explore what it is to live in poverty.”*

## Croatia

### • If you were in charge of your community or country, what would you do to stop poverty?

*“Everyone should have a job and a roof over their heads.”*

*“Increase the number of jobs.”*

*“Try to provide everyone with a safe home and I would try to help everyone find something to do!”*

*“For those who are in poverty, build some houses for them and employ them more so that they can take care of their children.”*

*“Advocate that the projects of building squares in my city be postponed and that homes/canteens for the poor be built.”*

*“Build homes for the poor, sick and elderly.”*

*"It would create a program of financial and social assistance for all demographic groups that are at risk of poverty."*

*"Education."*

*"Set aside part of the money received by the community monthly and at the end of the year donate that money to those who need it."*

*"Give all the people at least a small job or give them food every week. Maybe organise a donation of money for them, for example, everyone would give at least HRK 20 or so – start more charity parties so maybe I would play in the streets to collect money for all the poor in my country and later in the world."*

*"Increase the number of soup kitchens and inform the state about it, then concentrate on agricultural justice in the Republic. In Croatia, since the number of arable lands is decreasing due to the urbanisation of rural areas."*

*"Socialist economy, set and acceptable prices, free education, free healthcare, state housing...education."  
"Make it so that you don't need grades to get a job, only for jobs, for example doctor."*

*"Set up camps somewhere under the roof where the poor can come and go voluntarily and for free."*

*"Improve wages, first of all, after that lower SOME prices, and it would be good if there were more jobs, for the poor without work, make sure that they also receive some kind of monthly payment."*

**• How can schools support children living in poverty?**

*"Co-finance lunch and school supplies."*

*"Pay for brunch."*

*"To give local meals."*

*"They can provide free books and free meals at school."  
"Free meal, help with grades."*

*"Schools can buy them books, notebooks, pencils..."  
"Giving free school supplies."*

*"Maybe help them buy books and school supplies, like our class did."*

*"Maybe if the schools provide free meals and reduce the prices around field trips so that children can go on field trips."*

*"They should provide them with everything they need."*

*"Maybe they organise humanitarian events."*

*"Start humanitarian actions."*

*"Organise humanitarian actions, collect food and clothes."*

*"Schools can donate things, such as hygiene items, food, etc."*

*"To do raffles and help children."*

*"To do raffles' (which our school also does every year), humanitarian actions..."*

*"Donate them books, donate and give them school supplies, free school lunch..."*

*"Educate all children about this problem and establish support groups."*

*"Raise and teach other children to accept them and help them."*

*"Free insurance."*

*"To help them financially and to guide them on the right path and to help them discover their 'potentials'."*

*"That the teachers do not count on them to buy something, to warn those who make fun of these children."*

*"To play with them."*

*"Protect them."*

**• Is there anything we can do in order to combat school bullying?**

*"Stop them by telling them to try to solve the argument by talking."*

*"Stop it by telling them that it is not nice."*

*"Stop it by informing the adults."*

**Estonia**

**• If you were in charge of your community or country, what would you do to stop poverty?**

*"Raise the salary so that everyone had a normal life."*

*"Raise wages."*

*"Raise wages and pay more attention to poverty in the country and solve these problems."*

*"Increase the average pension and salary and the diversity of work."*

*"Every person could get about the same amount. And that this amount is enough to live."*

*"Make the law that if you were teasing someone then a*

*fine of 600€.*

*“Give 100€ every month to poor families.”*

*“Grants, job generation and lower electricity prices and gas prices.”*

*“Lower prices and apartment rent.”*

*“Give people the things they need like food, clothes, hygiene supplies, etc.”*

*“Financial support.”*

*“Would pay support for poor families.”*

*“Would increase child support.”*

*“Raise different support or add some support to help families improve their financial position.”*

*“Do not know.”*

*“Support as much as possible to find funding, collect donations.”*

*“More organisations where children are helped.”*

*“Would try to find this deeper reason why children live in poverty.”*

*“Rely more on the state.”*

*“Educate people.”*

*“To give each child an education.”*

*“I think it could not be directly stopped, rather reduced. I would raise the benefits and would try to help the community more evenly, or rather just a society so that no one should worry about their financial status.”*

**• Is there anything we can do in order to combat school bullying?**

*“Talk more about such topics.”*

*“Explain that this is not a reason to bully as it could happen to everyone.”*

*“Explain that not everyone is rich.”*

*“Explain to bullies. To say that not everyone makes the same amount of money as others.”*

*“Accept the fact that not everyone has enough money.”  
“It is necessary to make it clear to young people in advance that poverty is not something that the child can change by him/herself.”*

*“Accept that not everyone is financially free.”*

*“Explain to the children that a person should not be judged by their financial status or how they look.”*

*“Tell the children more deeply about this topic so that they can understand what it really is.”*

*“The most common thing is to just step in.”*

*“Tell someone.”*

*“Tell the teachers about it.”*

*“Help this child somehow and step in.”*

*“Get involved.”*

*“Children and young people should realise from an early age that by bullying you are not only harming others but also yourself.”*



**Funded by  
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.