

# REPORT OF ESTONIAN CHILDREN TO THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD



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## Introduction

Estonia has joined the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the compliance with the Convention is monitored by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, to which states are required to submit regular reports on the situation of children's rights. On the basis of these reviews, the Committee assesses the implementation of children's rights and sends recommendations to the state to improve the situation of children.

The report to be sent to the Committee on the Rights of the Child is an overview compiled by Estonian children of how Estonian children are doing and what causes them concern and joy.

The idea of preparing a children's report came from the Office of the Chancellor of Justice. The report was compiled by the children's rights ambassadors of the Estonian Union for Child Welfare, i.e. the children themselves, and they were technically supported by the advisers of the Children's and Youths' Rights Department of the Office of the Chancellor of Justice and the employees of the Estonian Union for Child Welfare.

The overview includes children's thoughts on how the rights of the child are protected in Estonia and what could be different in the lives of Estonian children. The children's thoughts and suggestions are presented in the report by topics. The introduction to each topic describes the principles of the rights of the child and highlights the key words that children consider important for that topic. The keywords are followed by real-life examples given by the children. **These examples do not explain the extent of the problems in Estonia but describe the respondents' own feelings, perceptions, and experiences.** Each topic summarises proposals on how to improve the lives of children in Estonia.

Estonian children are sending their messages to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for the first time.

## Preparation of children's report

The children's rights ambassadors met for the first time at the Chancellor's Office in May 2022. At this meeting, advisers from the Office of the Chancellor of Justice introduced the principles for preparing the children's report, the activities of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the nature of the rights of the child. They talked about the concerns of Estonian children and discussed how to collect thoughts and opinions from as many children as possible for the report. Participation in the initiative was voluntary for the children's rights ambassadors, they did so with the consent of their parents (see Annex 1).

It was decided to organise workshops to introduce their rights to children of different ages and to explore what could be better in their lives. An anonymous online [survey](#) was also opened, which could be answered in both Estonian and Russian. Schools and youth centres were informed of the possibility to answer the questions, an invitation was published in the media and social media, the project was presented at the annual conference of the Estonian Union for Child Welfare and at the Black Nights Film Festival within the framework of the special programme on the rights of the child.

Workshops for children were organised in several regions of Estonia. Discussions were held in schools and kindergartens, at meetings of children's and youth organisations, at the Opinion Festival, with children in foster care, and with children who had fled to Estonia from Ukraine. The workshops were mostly<sup>1</sup> led by children's rights ambassadors, who were supported by employees of the Office of the Chancellor of Justice and the Estonian Union for Child Welfare.

In the workshops, the children's rights ambassadors explained the purpose of the report, talked about the rights of the child and asked the children to share their thoughts on what they think could be different in the children's lives and what concerns they have. Children could do this in small groups or on their own. Younger children were given pictures to help with the discussion and a teddy bear to keep the conversation going, the pictures were drawn and then discussed. Older children wrote down important keywords and thoughts, and then discussed those thoughts together and made additions.

The suggestions and thoughts of the children who participated in the workshops were collected anonymously. When finishing the workshop, it was always clarified who children and young people can turn to if they have questions about the rights of the child or if they want to talk about their concerns (e.g. school psychologists, [Child Helpline](#), child protection worker, [police](#), [Chancellor of Justice](#)). The children who participated in the workshops received an [information leaflet](#) that describes the rights of the child. The children participated in the workshops voluntarily.

Almost a thousand children and young people shared their ideas in workshops and through the online survey. This report has been compiled on the basis of these responses.

Based on the children's thoughts, the children's rights ambassadors made<sup>2</sup> a [video clip](#), which has also been translated into [Russian](#) and [English](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Ukrainian children were met on the ship where they were temporarily accommodated, and employees of the Office of the Chancellor of Justice and the Social Insurance Board also participated in the meeting. Most of the conversations with children in alternative care were also carried out by employees of the Office of the Chancellor of Justice and the Estonian Union for Child Welfare.

<sup>2</sup> This took place in an animation workshop, which was carried out with the help of [Estonian Animation School of the Puppet Film Studio](#).

The organisational costs related to the initiative (transport, printing of information materials, tools, translation of materials, film making workshop) were covered by the Office of the Chancellor of Justice.

# 1. THE RIGHT TO LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT



**RIGHT OF THE CHILD:** Every child has the right to life and every child must be able to develop both physically and mentally and develop their own abilities in the best possible way. The child's well-being and development must be supported by the child's family. If, for whatever reason, the family cannot provide such conditions for the child, the state must do so.

**Keywords:** the family's limited economic opportunities limit children's development; children cannot always go to hobby groups; limited opportunities affect children's relationships with other children; children with special needs are not always supported in schools.

The children explained that the child's development opportunities depend on the family, the family's economic situation, as well as the region in which they live. Not all children are able to attend a hobby group because the family has no money to pay for it, or the group is too far away from home and the child cannot get there. Another reason given was that there are no hobby education instructors.

*"Some families are too poor and cannot provide the child with everything they need."*

*"There are no interesting activities offered near home and the nearest option is too far away from the community to get there reasonably."*

*"There is a shortage of coaches and sports facilities in some counties."*

*"In the case of an interest or a hobby, it's difficult to take part because of lack of transport or access. The lack of healthy and varied food on the table due to financial constraints is holding*

The children found that limited economic circumstances affect the child's relationships and development.

*"Training and recreational activities are too expensive, and many children therefore cannot develop physically or psychologically. Additionally, communication skills cannot be developed sufficiently if you cannot attend any hobby groups."*

*"Families don't have enough money to support the child. For example, a child needs to buy school supplies, but parents don't buy them because they can't afford them."*

*"For example, if parents don't have enough money, children can't go to hobby or sports groups and this can also have a psychological impact if other children socialise at the same time."*

The children pointed out that teachers do not always consider the child's specific needs and that support specialists are not always available.

*"There aren't enough psychologists and support services in schools and/or they don't know how to spot children with problems."*

*"Classes are too large and it's almost impossible for children with special needs to get into small classes or special schools in order to develop as much as they can. This means they will never reach their maximum potential."*

They also mentioned concerns about their friends who have mental health problems.




*"My friend has mental health problems that make her life difficult and unpleasant, the pills don't work and her difficulties have been there for a long time and not gone away, I'm afraid things will never get better."*

According to the children, some parents impose too many responsibilities on their children and don't leave enough free time for them to use at their own discretion.

*"Some parents don't have time for their child and he or she can end up in bad company."*

*"If the family (especially the parents) pressurise the child to do too many things, the child can quickly lose so to say the will to live. Some parents don't understand that a child is not a robot who doesn't need free time. It is also believed that when a child is older, it's normal for him or her to go training almost every day and study on the side, so there is practically no free time."*

#### CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS:

-  Improve public transport, especially in rural areas, so that children can travel independently to a hobby group.
-  Living has become more expensive, so families with children need more financial support and free services. Single parents in particular need support.
-  Offer more free hobby groups for children.

## 2. HEALTH



**RIGHT OF THE CHILD:** All children have the right to health protection, medical products and treatment, and the right to assistance and care. However, neither the state nor doctors can ensure good health for the child if the child does not look after his or her own health. Therefore, the child is also responsible for looking after his or her health. The doctor must explain the aspects of the child’s health and treatment in a way that the child understands, and listen to what the child thinks about his or her health and treatment.

**Keywords:** it is important to listen and talk to children; children are hesitant to talk about their concerns; there are many mental health concerns; the environment affects children’s health; medicinal products are expensive; both children’s and adults’ knowledge of health should be improved; children themselves should take more care of their own health; children do not exercise enough; children do not always get the help they need; not all children who would like it get it get it.

There is free medical care for children in Estonia and children receive help. However, children are very concerned about their mental health.

*“My mental health is not very good at the moment. Unfortunately, no one notices it, and I don't dare tell anyone. I do see the school psychologist and at least I can talk to them.”*

*“Lack of motivation, stress, depression, eating disorders and other mental health problems have an immediate impact on physical health (which is terribly common these days).”*

*“A lot of children are depressed – they don't get support from parents, they don't get support from friends. A lot of children are online, which is both a plus and a minus, because they don't talk to their friends online about their problems, but chat about other topics. Children don't trust their friends and parents.”*

*“The problem of loneliness is very big.”*

The children said how important it is to them that people listen and believe them. Doctors should also more talk to children.

*“Sometimes I feel that nobody believes what I really feel, the school psychologist didn't help me and I felt that even the psychologist didn't believe me.”*

*“My classmate went to hospital because she cut herself.”*

*“Sometimes school is put before health, for example, my old classmate once came to school when sick because his mother wouldn't let him stay home even though he had vomited in the morning.”*

*“A child may be afraid to talk to parents or doctors about their health problems and try to treat themselves with the advice found on the internet.”*

Children pointed out that they need advice on how to take care of their health.

*“Many of my friends and classmates don't know much about healthy eating, they eat a lot of sweets and junk food.”*



Some children explained how their physical activity depends on how busy their daily schedule is.

*"I think a lot of kids wouldn't be active if they had the chance, because they want/need to do schoolwork or because they want to spend time on electronic devices. For example, you come home and you see that it's already 6 p.m. and you still have to do your homework and then you have to go to sleep and then you don't have time to be physically active all week."*

They were also worried that medicinal products and health products are expensive and that it is not always possible for the family to buy the necessary products.

*"For some children, treatment may not be available because there is no money for medicines."*

*"Medicines cost too much and there is no way to buy them for a child."*

*"Special food is expensive."*

Children were happy to have a school nurse at school. However they admitted that they do not always get to the doctor quickly enough.

*"It's good to have a school nurse at school. It's easy to go to her to talk about your concerns and seek help when you need it. Going to the family doctor is more difficult."*

*"When you go to emergency care, you have to wait 4-6 hours, maybe more."*

*"If there's a serious problem, you may not get to a specialist as quickly. Queues are long and waiting times are long."*

Although dental care is free for children in Estonia, the children said that sometimes it is still not possible for them to receive free dental care.

*"There's no money for braces."*

*"Receiving free braces depends on the dentist's assessment. Different dentists may assess the need for braces differently."*

#### CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS:

👉 There could be breaks for exercise and rest in class, as children generally have to sit for long periods. In order to have more opportunities to move around in the school building, appropriate space and equipment would be needed.

👉 School lunchtimes could be longer to allow more time to move, take a breath and have time for oneself. School meals could be healthier, more nutritious and tastier.

👉 Children urgently need supportive and free mental health care that is accessible everywhere. There is a need to talk more about ways to maintain mental health.

👉 Children should be regularly told about health and health care opportunities, for example, promotional campaigns could be carried out, etc.

👉 Adults need to listen to children, believe in them and help them when they need it.

### 3. HARMFUL SUBSTANCES



**RIGHT OF THE CHILD:** No harmful substances (e.g. alcohol, tobacco, drugs) may be given or sold to children. The state needs to prevent the dangers of harmful substances, to treat children who are addicted and help them overcome addiction.

**Keywords:** widespread use of illicit substances; access to illicit substances is too easy; increasingly younger children among dealers and users; widespread use of e-cigarettes; use of substances under pressure from friends or because of worries; little knowledge about the harmfulness of substances; more support and understanding to break addiction.

Children said that the use of harmful substances is very common among them. There are increasingly younger children among users and dealers.

*"Children can get hold of all the banned substances without too much trouble and they are very common at the moment, a lot of young people are doing substances because they don't understand that they are harmful or they're trying to be cool."*

*"Ninth-grade students vape at school and drink prohibited energy drinks."*

*"I've heard that dealers younger than me (I'm 11) are selling vapes (e-cigarettes)."*

*"Well, I've seen in the lives of my underage friends that they have some kind of dealers for vapes, and quite a few are addicted. I've never tried it because I don't want to get addicted."*

*"Right now, children are starting to use harmful substances early on. I think they should be helped to understand why they've started using them, to help them break their habits."*

Children noted that banned substances are very easy to obtain.

*"Nowadays, in particular, many young people have a strong addiction to snus/nicotine. It's difficult to prevent this risk because these things are sold everywhere."*

*"Teenagers usually find tricks to avoid getting caught, so nobody knows anything."*

*"The concern is that they're all too easily available."*

*"Some in our class smoke e-cigarettes, they buy them from other children at school or get them from their older siblings at home. Their parents probably don't talk about how bad these things are for them, they talk about it at school."*

The children explained that they mostly start using harmful substances under peer pressure. This can also be due to poor relations with parents or other concerns.

*“Children can start using everything not only because of the company, which can be changed, but also because of the parents' attitude towards their child. This is why children take the forbidden path, which is very difficult to change.”*

*“Some kids use harmful substances to make them look cooler to their friends.”*

*“Most of the minors I know (12-17-year-olds) vape, smoke, use alcohol and drugs. It's actually very disturbing, and I've been in the company of people like that myself, even though I've never tried them or used them and never want to either. It's very unpleasant to be around these people, and the minors who use these things usually become very angry and start hurting others both mentally and physically.”*

The children found that young people need to be more informed about the effects of harmful substances. Many children are addicted to these substances and need help and support to get off of them.

*“It certainly doesn't help if you immediately start telling off the child. Of course, they have to understand it, but addiction is a very difficult thing and it's not easy to get rid of it.”*

*“Helping teenagers who are addicted is necessary, but how...”*

*“A lot of young people don't realise they have an addiction.”*

*“Well, there are a lot of young people nowadays who use harmful substances. Someone should talk to them about it and discuss why it's not good for your health.”*

*“Young people and children who are addicted are afraid to seek help, fearing that in seeking help, the evil police will come, etc. But isn't the number one priority that the child gets help, not the fear of the police?”*

*“The state can try to help children with this, but it doesn't help many of them. They usually don't care what harmful substances do to them. But they usually start using because of some other concern. This concern should be identified and addressed first, and only then should more attention be given to harmful substances.”*

#### CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS:



Adults should set an example for children. It's necessary to curb the use of harmful substances among adults and deal with their addicts, to reduce the negative examples set for children.



Young people's curiosity about the unknown is understandable, but a child should be aware of the dangers and talk to their parents about them.



It is difficult to find help for addiction. This help is also expensive, treatment takes a long time and is often not available to those who immediately need it. Addicted children need help right away, and this support should be free of charge.



People who use illicit substances need more attention. Prevention should be carried out in schools, youth centres, as well as in training and hobby groups.

## 4. EDUCATION



**RIGHT OF THE CHILD:** The child must be able to learn in a way that is appropriate to his or her age and abilities. Basic and upper secondary education must be free. Learning conditions must be child-friendly and the child must have the necessary learning materials. The child must also be able to participate in hobby education if he or she wishes to do so. Children with special needs have the same right. The state is responsible for ensuring that every child receives a quality education.

**Keywords:** school supplies are expensive; not all children can go to hobby groups; children with special needs do not receive enough support at school; children suffer from bullying at school; there are many mental health problems; children have a high learning burden because they are given a lot of assignments; examinations accumulate over a short period of time; it is not always possible to study close to home (e.g. in upper secondary school).

All children can go to school in Estonia. It is possible to study up to the highest level of education for free of charge. However, children mentioned a number of concerns about school and learning.

*“There must be a good school and there must be good teachers who are not nasty, and the school day must not last too long, and the food should be good.”*

*“Educational equipment cost a lot, especially for primary school pupils, and not everyone can afford to spend so much money on them.”*

*“... teachers think we have a computer and a printer at home, but we don't. The school doesn't take this into account.”*

*“In our school, it is a concern that pupils have to buy their own materials for the craft class, when this should be the school's responsibility.”*

The concerns of children with special needs and disabilities were specifically mentioned: for example, being bullied at school because of differences. Children found that these children also do not get the support they need at school, and it is not always possible for them to go to a class or school that meets their needs.

*"There is a child with special needs in the classroom, but learning is not made easier for them."*

*"Children with special needs are not given enough help. Schools do not take this into account and there are not many support classes/groups."*

*"The school doesn't take it into account that I have an individual curriculum because I have ADHD, they even mock me."*

*"Children with special needs are left out."*

Bullying at school was discussed a lot among children.

*"There's a lot going on at school that teachers don't see. People start gossiping or just laughing at others, and I can say it's very unpleasant."*

*"Many teachers judge children by who their parents, siblings, grandparents have been in the past. This discrimination must stop."*

*"There's a lot of bullying at school and then the child doesn't want to go to school."*

School life has a major impact on children's mental health.

*"Stress caused by the workload, depression, other mental disorders."*

*"School causes a lot of depression and anxiety in pupils because people worry too much about their grades and get depressed because they think they can't cope with work."*

*"Everybody gets an education, but I don't feel that everything is very fun. Learning is very stressful."*

*"Children are overburdened with schoolwork and homework, which causes them a lot of stress, which in turn causes mental health problems."*

Children repeatedly admitted that there are children who do not want to go to school. This can be due to poor relationships with teachers or fellow students, but also to overwhelming workloads or a backlog in learning. Lack of school supplies or appropriate clothing can also be one of the reasons.

*"Some students need more time to learn a particular subject."*

*"I'm often bored in class, or I don't understand what I'm being asked to do. When you ask for an explanation, it's long and confusing."*

*"A child may lose motivation to study if teachers or fellow students are not nice and understanding. Yes, teachers can be strict at times, but if you're strict for no reason, the child may lose the desire to go to school."*

*"Bullying, teachers are not accommodating or friendly. The child doesn't feel comfortable and respected at school."*

Children living in substitute home pointed out that teachers should be understanding, supportive and encouraging, no matter what the child’s past.

*“[So that] teachers understand children's situations, help find solutions, motivate learning – so that teachers don't have prejudices. To look further/leave the past behind. So that teachers don't judge a child by their appearance. If it is a case that a child hasn't done their schoolwork because of depression or something, they shouldn't be told off all the time, but you could move on, give them a new chance, start afresh, motivate and support.”*

Children were also worried about the burden of learning and schoolwork. The number of assignments given by teachers leaves no time for anything but learning.

*“Support and help are needed when doing schoolwork and studying.”*

*“Too many learning assignments are given, the workload is too big and the school day is too long (until 4 p.m.). That's too much. There is no time left for yourself. Then you go home and study for 2-3 hours and there's no time for any hobbies and no time left over unless you want to go to bed at 12.”*

Children were critical of what they were taught in school.

*“In basic schools, you don't get enough knowledge about life itself.”*

*“Learning could be more fun.”*

*“There could be electives in basic school.”*

*“A child should have the right to choose the type of education he or she wants, so that the child can choose what field and what he or she is studying already in primary school.”*

*“... [so that] you also get skills from the education system on how to cope in life: e.g. money skills, communication skills, for example to apply for a job.”*

Children also criticised the school environment.

*“The school is not child-friendly, the benches are uncomfortable and your back starts to hurt...”*

*“The problem is old, stuffy and cramped schools. There are more children than there is room in the school and the coronavirus years showed that there are also major problems with air and ventilation.”*

*“Children should be able to choose how they spend their breaks.”*

*“There could be more space in the school.”*

*“There aren't enough places in dorms.”*

*“There isn't enough time for rest between classes.”*

*“There are too few private places in the school library.”*

## CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS:

- 👉 Curricula should be reviewed and updated. Textbooks and other study materials must be up-to-date and reflect modern knowledge.
- 👉 There could be more formative assessment at all levels and in all subjects.
- 👉 There is a lot of pressure and stress in schools, with too much schoolwork being given. It is necessary to regulate the workload of pupils so that children have enough rest time.
- 👉 Ensure equal access to education for all – so that children in rural areas can go to school close to home.

## 5. HOME, CLOTHES, FOOD



**RIGHT OF THE CHILD:** The child must have a warm home, suitable clothes, food. The state must support the families with children who cannot give these to their children for some reason (for example, due to unemployment, illness, special needs, old age).

**Keywords:** economic developments have a big impact on the livelihoods of families and children; prices have risen, which means that families have fewer opportunities to provide children with a warm home and get them enough clothes and food; allowances do not always cover the needs of families; due to the tight conditions, children often eat unhealthy food; school food is important, some children only get hot food at school; children grow up deprived; parents do not consider it important to support their children's development and offer them minimal opportunities; the poor health or addiction of parents affects the economic status of the family; it is important for children that the home is comfortable and warm, that they can eat hot food at home, that there are toys at home and also some pets, and that they can be on their own.

Although mostly Estonian children have good living conditions, the children still pointed out that the general economic situation also affects the livelihoods of families.

*"The income of parents can be low and they can't afford everything they need."*

The mentioned that the poor health and addiction problems of parents can also affect the coping of the family.

*"When mom and dad are ill and have no money."*

*"In the meantime, the money received from the unemployment fund is not enough and the family can't live on it, even if the house is paid for, there may not be money left for clothes and hot meals."*

The children felt that the state has not supported families in a difficult economic situation enough.

*"The state supports families with financial problems, but the money is not enough."*

*"In some families, children can't eat because they have no money. The father spends all the money on drink, the children are dirty and unfed, they're often sick, they have no electricity, etc. Schools could talk about where to go for help in cases like*

The children said that not enough attention is given to children's healthy eating.

*"Too little money is given to schools for meals. Parents do not pay enough attention to nutrition – there are too many overweight children in Estonia. School buffets predominantly sell pastries and chocolate."*

*"School food could be better – no one has asked the children what they'd like to eat."*

School meals were seen as important by children.

*"I eat the maximum number of times at school, just to make it easier for my mum at home."*

*"A lot of children can only get hot food at school because parents have long working days and are therefore unable to prepare their children's food themselves. Then the child has no choice but to go to the store and buy something to eat (usually something that is not nutritious). Clothes have become very expensive and child benefits are very low, so parents can't afford to buy new clothes when necessary."*

It was noted that there are families where children are deprived.

*"I have a home, but in winter when it's freezing outside, it's cold because our house needs renovation to make it warmer. My sister and I have never had our own room, we have a small house with a kitchen and 2 rooms only. My dad has a visual impairment, my mum was also ill, now she has no job. I have clean clothes that are in good order, properly warm clothes for the winter. We grow our own vegetables, have berries and fruit in the garden."*

*"For example, your mum died and now your dad can't even keep the heating on at night because it would be too expensive."*

Children gave examples of some parents providing only minimum living conditions for their children, even though the family's economic situation would allow for more, but the parents themselves do not consider this important. Children are afraid to seek help.

*"Some parents just don't care about their children and give them the bare minimum."*

*"Parents don't understand when a child needs new clothes, for example, and they don't care. Also, if parents are out late and the child doesn't have food at home because the parents forgot."*

*"For example, children don't want to show their parents in a bad light."*

*"Unhealthy and cheap food at home. There's no contribution to hobbies – go and play football outdoors."*

*"It's difficult to find the people who need help."*

*"Very few benefits reach children. More oversight is needed."*



Children pointed out that economic difficulties of families affect children’s opportunities to participate in activities and mutual relationships.

*“Some kids can't go on school trips because there's no money.”*

*“Bullying at school because the child doesn't have the newest clothes and there's a financial gap overall.”*

The children living in substitute homes said that having their own room and everything they need is important to them.

*“I'd like to have my own room, so I don't have to share it, and I'd like to move to another house because there's a good substitute parent there.”*




*“So that there'd be no need to keep telling others not to eat the food for others.”*

For younger children, it is important to have a comfortable home with toys and a pet.

*“That there's hot food, that they can eat hot food.”*

*“I wish I had a lot more teddies and toys.”*

*“I want a very big dog and a small dog.”*

- CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS:**
-  The subsistence and financial opportunities of families need to be improved.
  -  Child protection workers should monitor how families are coping, visit more homes and also talk directly to children.
  -  Schools and child protection workers should work more closely together. Schools could notice and let child protection workers know if something seems wrong with a child.

**6. FAMILY AND PARENTAL CARE**



**RIGHT OF THE CHILD:** A child has the right to a family. A child has the right to communicate with both parents even if the parents do not live together. A child may only be separated from his or her parents if this is necessary in the best interests of the child. A child must not be forced to interact with a parent he or she is afraid of or who is a danger to the child.

**Keywords:** children should be listened to more and have more opportunities to spend time with their parents; children have too few opportunities to interact with separated parents; relationships with parents affect children's behaviour and mental health; children should be better cared for; children in alternative care should be given opportunities to interact with their parents; children should not be forced to interact with their parents if they do not want to.

Home and family are very important to children. The opinion of family members matters a lot to children. However, parents were sometimes found to be too strict and children avoid talking to parents about certain topics. Relationships with parents influence children's behaviour.

*"Many parents have been too strict about some things and we're now afraid to communicate with them. When my mother was angry about some small thing, I removed the subject completely from my conversations, knowing that I was too tired to listen to that shouting again."*

*"Many children don't have the best relationship with their parents, so communicating with them is something rather difficult."*

*"Many children's parents do not take care of their children and this can affect their behaviour."*

Examples of parents who do not take care of their children were given.

*"The parents of many children don't take good care of their children. For example, they drink and do drugs."*

*"When parents get divorced, they sometimes forget about the child, they just argue and forget to take care of the child."*

Children mentioned that they want their parents to look after them and stand up for them.

*"That parents could come and pick us up in the car more often when the distances are long."*

*"That parents would know how to listen more to and understand the children's concerns."*

*"Listen to the child more calmly, explain, calmly, not yell at them."*

Children said that when parents separate, children do not always have a say in which parent they will live with.

*"When parents divorce, the child does not always have a choice of which parent to stay with."*

Children of separated parents admitted that they do not always have enough contact with their separated parent. This may be because one parent prevents access or because the other parent does not want to contact the child.

*"Sometimes, parents prohibit children from talking to the other parent after a divorce. They're trying to pay the child off financially and manipulate the child to like them more."*

*"My kindergarten friend doesn't see his sister or mother, because he lives with his father and his new partner."*

*"Some parents don't allow communication with the other parent after they've broken up."*

Children pointed out that family relationships affect children's mental balance. It can be difficult for children to maintain a relationship with their parents after they have separated.

*"A child can fall into depression after their parents' divorce."*

*"My parents are divorced and I communicate with both of them equally and love them equally, but because my parents can't stand each other, I've become the go-between."*

*"There are situations when one parent starts to intimidate or threaten the child when the child communicates or meets with the other parent."*

*"Some adults forbid communication with the other parent, but children continue to communicate secretly so as not to offend that parent."*

The children said they would like to spend more time with their parents, to be together, to spend time together.

*"Lack of events for children and parents. There could be events (e.g. hikes, competitions, etc.) where the whole family could participate."*

*"Some people don't get enough attention at home because parents are busy with work, or because parents can't cope with themselves."*

Ukrainian children miss their parents and loved ones left behind in Ukraine. Some of them found that they had to support the parents themselves. Children are waiting for the war to end so they can return home.

*"I wish I could be with my dad, but he's in Ukraine. I hope we can be together soon."*

*"I would like to be with my father and brothers again – they are my family."*

*"I'm a grown-up now and I have to manage on my own, help my mother."*

*"Estonia has already done a lot for children, but it's never better here than at home in Ukraine."*

Children living in a substitute home wanted to communicate with their parents.

*"One of my classmates is a substitute home child and really longs to be with his real parents."*

*"I'd like to communicate more with my parents. I'd like to get out of this house to my parents. Not to be held back or banned."*

Some children indicated that they do not always want to communicate with their parents.

*"If the father is in prison and the child is afraid to talk to him, then the child must not speak to him."*

*"Many are afraid of one of their divorced parents (the one they don't live with) because the usual reason for divorce in the first place is violence or something like that."*

## CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS:



A child should be able to be with their parents as much as they want. Parents need to find time to be with their child as much as the child wants. Parents should not work so long that they have no time to be with their child.



Parents should do all kinds of things together with their children.



The parent who lives away should initiate the meeting with the child. A child is not a means of communication between two parents – parents should communicate directly.

## 7. WORKING



**RIGHT OF THE CHILD: The Estonian Constitution prohibits forced labour of both children and adults. Children must not be exploited to do work that is dangerous, interferes with their schooling or is harmful to their health or development.**

**Keywords:** more child-friendly work opportunities; children go to work so they or their families could cope better; some children work without an employment contract; taking care of younger siblings should not be the responsibility of children.

The children found that, in general, children do not have problems related to work and the rights of the child are not violated. The money earned by working gives one freedom, so more information about job opportunities could be shared.

*“I think children could be encouraged to work more, but it shouldn't be made compulsory, I really like the freedom that comes with earning your own money, it's not talked about enough.”*

*“I've never had to go to work. I don't have any work experience, but I'd like to get some. I have friends who have gone to work and they have been given perfectly normal work that matches their abilities.”*

Flexibility is important for children when it comes to working.

*“A lot of young people, myself included, are interested in small jobs, where you can sign up for a time that suits you, and about 2 days before you start you find out if you've got the job. Such flexible option, exists and there are definitely more of them, I would say everything is quite good in this regard.”*

The children said that sometimes rules are not respected when children are working.

*"My friend had a summer job, where he secretly worked longer than he was actually allowed to."*

The children said that some children work to cope better on their own or to help their families.

*"The child sometimes works so much that it interferes with school attendance, for example because of fatigue."*

*"Some children have to work during the summer/weekends to support their families financially."*

Some children admitted to having to look after younger siblings.

*"Parents should not make their children babysit their younger siblings when they should actually be at school. It's a parent's job."*

It was acknowledged that it is difficult to find suitable work for children.

*"Some children want to work, for example in summer. But many employers turn them down. I think that in the future, there may be problems in finding a job because people with experience are being taken on, but at the same time the person who actually wants to do the job may not get the opportunity."*

*"Very few employers in Estonia are willing to employ children because of restrictions."*

*"Employers want people with experience, but young people don't have that."*

#### CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS:



Create more suitable and meaningful work opportunities for children and young people, with fair pay.



Take on young people with no work experience – you have to get it from somewhere.

## 8. PLAY AND REST TIME



**RIGHT OF THE CHILD:** Every child has the right to play and rest. The child must have time to engage in his or her hobbies alongside school, studying, homework and work, as well as to relax and rest sufficiently so as not to become overtired. The child has the right to participate in culture and art.

**Keywords:** teachers giving too much schoolwork; over-organised days; too little time for just being; too much pressure from parents to attend hobby groups and achieve good academic results; insufficient sleep time; unhealthy diet due to busy daily schedules; cost of living keeps children away from interests and hobbies; more leisure activities in public spaces, parks, green areas for children of different ages; more time to spend with parents.

The children complained that they did not have enough time for play and rest. The reason cited was the high volume of schoolwork, which takes up a large part of their time outside school and leaves little opportunity for rest, hobbies and socialising with friends. The children found that teachers should not give schoolwork for the weekend.

"Every subject teacher thinks we have time to do a bit more after school, and when you add it all up, I've got at least three hours of studying, leaving very little time for sleep."

"I don't live in the same county where I go to school. This means I lose two hours of my day just on commuting. In addition, I only have three hobbies outside school, which I only do once a week or on weekends."

"With school workloads and homework, there isn't enough time, and there are strict parents who don't let the child relax or do what they want."

"Many students have no such thing as free time. Homework is also given for weekends, which is why they also take a significant part of the weekend."

"With so much homework, the child has no time for themselves and their friends."

"I don't think teachers should give homework for the weekend, because the weekend is for rest."

"I don't have a lot of time to do things I like, school takes up most of my time."

"I don't have enough time to rest, so sometimes I have to miss school because I can't cope otherwise, even though I only have one training session."

Children and young people want to spend more time outdoors. Young people noted that there are no places where they can go together and spend time in a way that is age-appropriate.

"There are very few opportunities to do this in public space. There should be a safe and healthy park or other outdoor space suitable for playing and resting within 300 metres of every child's home."

"More training equipment in the open air – playgrounds are for younger people. The existing places are falling apart."

"There could be outdoor activities for children of different ages, including, for example, 14-17-year-olds."

The children gave examples of how parents put a lot of pressure on them.

"No parent should force their child to go to too many hobby groups so that they can also just spend time at home."

"There are parents who care a lot about their child's grades, who force their child to study without any breaks or playtime."

Children's day schedules affect their nighttime sleep. Due to schedules that are too busy, there is not enough time for children to eat properly and go outside.

*"The only proper meal is the school lunch, but the hobby sessions are very close to each other and there is no time to eat properly, and there's nowhere to get or buy a proper meal in between."*

*"They don't let us go outside."*

*"It worries me that school starts TOO early and there's very little time to sleep."*

Lapsed soovisid, et neil oleks aega mängida ja oma äranägemise järgi aega veeta.

*"A child must not be denied play and rest, otherwise he or she will not develop."*

*"If you're not supposed to sleep at school, you shouldn't have to study at home. And our bags are SO heavy."*

*"You can't take away a child's interests or the things they enjoy. The child must have great imagination for as long as possible."*

#### CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS:



Teachers should not give children homework to do during school holidays and weekends.



Several tests must not be planned for the same day, Monday or Friday. There could be an opportunity to take a day off before exams and tests.



Parents could make sure that the child has enough free time, which they can spend as they wish.

## 9. PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT



**RIGHT OF THE CHILD:** Every child has the right to be involved in all decisions that affect him or her and to have their say. Every child – even the smallest – has the right to be listened to and to have their opinion taken into account. A child's freedom of expression means that a child has the right to express his or her views verbally, in writing, in an artistic form or in any other way.

**Keywords:** adults do not listen to children or take their opinions seriously; young children are particularly rarely listened to; children – especially younger children – cannot have a say in their future living arrangements when parents separate; children are afraid to express their

opinions in public for fear of condemnation or ridicule; children's concerns should be listened to more and taken seriously; children could be much more involved in decision-making.

The children said that, in the opinion of some adults, children do not understand things well enough because of their age. Children are not always listened to and their opinions are not taken into account.

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*"Quite often people say, 'you're just young and don't understand real things yet', when we try to voice an opinion."*

*"Young children's opinions are often ignored. When I was younger, my opinion was heard much less than it is now."*

*"Many children, including myself, support the LGBTQ+ community and BLM<sup>3</sup>, for example, but some parents are homophobic or racist. And they don't agree with these views and they don't listen to their children."*

*"Children can't have enough of a say in the topics handled by adults, such as politics, general issues of the world."*

*"I'm not used to being asked for my opinion. Usually they say what needs to be done and I do it. Sometimes I don't want to do it, but I do it anyway. Parents and teachers tell you what to do, you can't go against them."*

*"Many older children and adults don't respect the opinions of younger children, even though they also have good ideas."*

The children gave the example that when parents get divorced, the children aren't given the opportunity to express an opinion on their future living arrangements. This is especially issue in case of younger children.

*"For example, if parents get divorced, a young child doesn't have the right to decide where and with whom he or she wants to live."*

*"My parents divorced recently and currently I spend half the time with my dad and the other half with my mum, but I don't like going back and forth between the two every 2-3 nights. I told my dad I wanted to spend more time with my mum, but he said: 'No, you're a child only once in your life, and you'll come to regret that decision later on.' [--] I understand that he wants to spend as much time with me and that he loves me. but if he loves me. he should give me a choice."*

The children said that they often do not dare to express their opinions in public. They also do not dare to be different from others in other ways.

*"Often people don't dare to express their opinion in class, because then the others can see whose opinion it was. I would also feel more confident if I could express my opinion anonymously and then the teacher would discuss it in class in general (even the teacher wouldn't know)."*

*"I can speak my mind, but I don't want to – too much attention, it also causes too many problems, I'm misunderstood and then accused, that I'm guilty, so I don't say anything."*

<sup>3</sup> Black Lives Matter – a movement that takes a stand against violence against African Americans.



"Children are not taught to stand up for themselves and have a say. Children are afraid to speak out for fear of what others will think. They don't want to express their opinion and go along with other people's opinions, even though they may not like these opinions at all."

"Friends may say: 'Don't take part, maybe it will end badly for you.' The fear of responsibility is too great (for example, if something should fail, the child/young person will be blamed for his/her choice and this will inhibit any kind of participation."

The children wanted people to listen more to their concerns.

"The child has no one to share their concerns with."

"Children are not listened to enough. We're also people, smaller than others, but that doesn't mean that our mother/father/sister/brother shouldn't listen to us if we have a problem."

"Surely there should be different psychologists who are freely available if children actually have concerns that cannot be pushed back 6 months like the waiting lists of psychologists are now."

#### CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS:



Explain to parents that they should change their attitude towards listening to children and taking their views into account. The old and the young could do things together more than they do now.



School and kindergarten teachers should listen to children's opinions and make decisions with them. Younger children, who are not yet able to stand up for themselves, should be listened to particularly carefully.



Teach parents how to involve their children more in their decision-making.

## 10. PRIVACY



**RIGHT OF THE CHILD:** A child must have the opportunity to communicate with friends and acquaintances. No child's privacy, family life or correspondence may be interfered with and no child's home may be entered arbitrarily or unlawfully. For example, a child has the right to seek legal advice and consult a doctor without having to ask the parent's consent or inform the parent. Every child's privacy must be respected, regardless of their age.

**Keywords:** parents monitor their children's smart devices, read their messages and inquire about their friends; children do not have privacy at home: for example, their room or a place where they can be undisturbed; children are annoyed when they are photographed without permission; privacy is not guaranteed on social media; children want to communicate with the separately living parent without interference; children do not always want to tell parents about their health concerns; children need to be told more about how they can protect their privacy.

Children think it is important that adults, as well as other children, respect their privacy. However, they also gave examples of situations that bother them. For example, children don't like it when their parents check on them and investigate their affairs.

*"Many parents do not give their children enough privacy. For example, they snoop on children's phones and go through their personal belongings or track their whereabouts at all times."*

*"A lot of parents snoop around on their children's mobiles and read private chats and make a big drama about their child socialising with people. Of course, it's not safe to communicate with everyone, so you must first tell the child nicely what the dangers are on the Internet."*

The children said the same about teachers.

*"Teachers who think they have the right to check your phone for whatever reason are kind of a problem. It takes privacy away from the pupil."*

Children's privacy in the school building was also considered important.

*"So that the boys have a separate wardrobe to change clothes."*

Children indicated that parents want to have an influence on who their children socialise with.

*"Parents often forbid their child to socialise with a particular friend."*

*"I can't write to my friends, my mum reads all my messages."*

The children gave examples of parents not respecting their wish for privacy.

*"For example, there should be no cameras in a child's room unless they have special needs."*

*"I've heard that some children even have the door taken away so parents can keep an eye on them at all times."*

*"My privacy is not respected by my father. He rushes into my room without knocking, he leaves the door open all the time, etc."*

Privacy is very important to children: for example, a room where they can be alone.

*"A child should have his or her own room or corner."*

*"I think privacy is important because it helps me relax and rest."*

The children living in substitute homes said they wanted their privacy to be respected.

*"So that not everyone goes to everyone's room without asking for permission."*

*"So that a person has the right to be in his or her room and the substitute parents do not go through the phone and check the messages."*

*"I would like to have my own room and a life of my own, more privacy, to be able to study in peace in my own room."*

It upsets children when they are photographed without permission. The things published on social media also infringe on the privacy of children.

*"My classmates take photos of us without permission. I don't like it."*

*"Everything is too public on social media."*

Children also want privacy when talking about health concerns.

*"A lot of doctors will still tell the parents what's going on with the child."*

*"Children are afraid to go to a gynaecologist because they don't know how their parents will react."*

It was pointed out that children can sometimes talk too much about themselves to strangers because of ignorance.

*"I think the concern for children is that they might inadvertently disclose too much private content to people to whom a child would not normally talk so much about their private life."*

#### CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS:



Explain to parents and children that children have a right to privacy and why it is important to them – this can be done in training, for example.



Parents should teach their children how to behave on the Internet so that there is no need to check what they do online. Parents could learn from their children what is happening online and how to cope there.

## 11. TAKING THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD INTO ACCOUNT IN DECISION-MAKING



**RIGHT OF THE CHILD:** When an adult makes a decision about a child, he or she must always consider what is best for the child. The adult must also ask for the child's opinion on what would be the best decision in the child's view. The solutions that are best for the child must be chosen when decisions are made. A decision concerning a child must be explained to the child in a way that the child understands.

Decisions need to be made in this way in every area of life: for example, when organising family life, at kindergarten, at school, at training, at a doctor's appointment, when drafting laws, when designing the surroundings and traffic in the home region, when planning public transport, etc.

**Keywords:** children could be consulted more and asked for their opinion when solving issues that have arisen at home, at school, at hobby groups and in the community; adults often decide what they think is best, taking into account money, time and other possibilities; more consideration could be given to children's needs when organising local life (e.g. bus services).

Some children felt that their opinions were listened to and taken into account, but there were also children who did not know how to take a position on the matter. It was clear that the subject was difficult for them. The children acknowledged that adults do not always ask for their opinion.

*"Adults don't ask children for their opinion."*

*"Often, decisions are made on behalf of the child, because it is thought that the child does not yet understand life and that his or her opinion does not count."*

*"When parents make decisions, they often don't ask for their children's opinion and make the decision without knowing the child's opinion, thinking that maybe the child thinks the same way. Many parents ask the child for his or her opinion and then start steering the child towards the answer that would be best for the parents themselves, but this does not express the child's opinion, but the view that has been imposed on the child."*

*"Very often, parents don't take into account their child's wishes and do things their way. Usually the reason is money, or that their child would get a very good education. They don't care that their child is interested in art and might want to go to art school."*

The children gave examples of situations where their needs were not considered. Several children suggested that there should be more buses.

*"Buses could be more frequent."*

*"If someone can't take you to the sports club by car, you have to take the bus, but the bus doesn't always go at the right time or to the right place."*

The children found that good parents discuss various things with the child and ask the child's opinion.

*"You need to know what the child thinks, because everyone is entitled to their own opinion. Good parents are always interested in the child's opinion."*

They wanted children to be made aware of their rights.

*"I mean, few children know about their rights, we need to talk about it more, for example at school. We also sometimes need to remind adults that we also have our rights and we are entitled to our opinions."*

#### CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS:



Ask children more often for their opinion on everything that concerns them. Even very young children need to be asked what they think. This must be done in a way that suits them.



For example, monthly discussions could be organised between children and adults in different areas to tackle local issues in a way that works for everyone. Representatives of the local authority could also be invited to the discussion.

## 12. NAME AND CITIZENSHIP



**RIGHT OF THE CHILD:** Every child is unique and that's why every child has the right to a name. A child has the right to a citizenship, which gives a person the rights and duties of a citizen and the protection of the state.

**Keywords:** a name can also be a reason of bullying; there are children in Estonia who do not have Estonian citizenship.

Most of the children felt that people in Estonia do not have problems with names and citizenship, but examples were given of what could be different.

It was acknowledged that sometimes a child may also be bullied because of his or her name.

*"People make fun of names. Some children, for example at school, make fun of other children's names because their name is not appropriate, so to speak. It makes children feel insecure, because if you make fun of someone's name, you might make fun of everything else too."*

It was noted that there are children living in Estonia who do not have Estonian citizenship.

*"I have acquaintances who are minors and have lived here all their lives, but with Russian citizenship, and because they are not 18+ they cannot change their citizenship."*

### CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS:



Deal with bullying and bullies.



Minors and their parents could have more information about obtaining citizenship. For example, a state-appointed counsellor could be available to talk to the child about citizenship, examine his or her needs and communicate with parents.

### 13. MOTHER TONGUE AND CULTURE OF THE CHILD



**RIGHT OF THE CHILD:** The official language of Estonia is Estonian, but every child has the right to his or her mother tongue and culture, regardless of which country he or she lives in. A child of another nationality has the right to share in his or her own culture and religion, and to speak his or her native language.

**Keywords:** children of different nationalities and cultural backgrounds live in Estonia; children’s language skills and attitudes to languages largely depend on the home and parents; mother tongue is important for children; some children have experienced bullying because of their different nationality or culture; language learning opportunities at school could be more diverse; the teaching of Estonian to children of other nationalities should be more supported, as should opportunities for Estonian children to learn a foreign language.

A large majority of children felt everything is well with language and culture in Estonia. However, the children talked about the problems that can arise because of nationality and language. They think that pupils could study in Estonian at schools.

*"Estonian should be compulsory in schools."*

*"There could be extra lessons at school for those who don't speak Estonian so well."*

The children said they needed to know the national language to make life easier.

*"If you don't learn the state language you might run into difficulties in life."*

The children found that the language spoken in their home influences their language skills. Sometimes, children’s language learning is made difficult by their parents’ attitudes.

*"Some children can't speak the language of the country they live in because they speak a different language at home."*

*"There are some parents from abroad who live in Estonia and they don't want you to learn Estonian."*

The topic of religion was also mentioned in connection with home.

*"A parent should respect a child's wish to have a different faith."*

Opportunities to participate in cultural life depend a lot on the area where the child lives.

*"Not every place in Estonia has the same cultural opportunities. A child who lives in the city can go to the cinema or the theatre much more easily than a child who lives far away from such opportunities."*

For children, their mother tongue is important.

*"I think that children could speak their mother tongue more often."*

However, the children found it understandable that children of other nationalities speak to their friends in the language that suits them best. Children find many languages interesting.

*"However, if a child's home language is Russian and neither parent speaks Estonian, they usually become best friends at school with someone who speaks Russian. And so it's easier and more understandable to talk to the friend in Russian."*

*"I go [to school] and there are a lot of children who speak Italian, French, English and other languages, but we all understand each other in one common language, English."*

*"My classmate is Arabic and when we celebrate birthdays we sing a birthday song in Arabic."*

The children thought that foreigners don't always find it easy to manage in Estonia.

*"It's difficult for migrants to cope in a foreign country."*

*"For example, some children had to leave Ukraine because of the war and have to learn the language of the new country."*

*"It's difficult for a child, for example a Ukrainian child, to study in an Estonian school if the school does not teach Ukrainian."*

Ukrainian children admitted that it is not easy for them to learn a new language and that this can prevent them from making new friends.

*"I'm trying to learn Estonian, but it's not going so well at the moment. There is a lot written in Ukrainian at school and on the ship, so we'd understand, and that's good."*

*"I'm afraid that because of my language I might misunderstand something or that others won't understand me and a conflict might arise. That's why it's safer to be with the Ukrainians I know and I don't really want to socialise with anyone else."*

The children were concerned about the gradual transition to teaching in Estonian in schools. They found that the state should more explain the transition to families and children and better support them in the course of it.

*"It's a big problem for me, because I studied Russian all my life and the sharp transition has a big impact on my education."*

The children noted that foreign language learning could offer more diverse options than before.

*"In some schools it's compulsory to learn Russian as a first language. This could change, and different languages could be added to the language selection."*

#### CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS:



Organise language courses for children (e.g. online), so that children and young people can learn different languages, according to their age and level. These courses could be free of charge.



Provide more free Estonian language courses for both children and adults. These could be extra lessons at school or hobby groups.

## 14. SAFETY



**RIGHT OF THE CHILD:** A child must be safe. A child must not be hurt or wronged, mistreated, exploited, abused or neglected. The family and the state must protect a child from all forms of violence and help a child who has experienced violence.

**Keywords:** bullying and violence occur at school, at home and in public; children are afraid to report violence; children do not always know how to seek help; adults do not always help children; help is not always available for children.

Children noted that it is generally very safe to live in Estonia. However, children said that bullying is rife and that not all children's homes are safe.

*"...there is violence in families that nobody knows about outside the home. Violence can be directed at the child, but also occur between other family members. Either way, the child will remember it for a very long time psychologically and it may have an impact on them as an adult. People often don't talk about it because they feel embarrassed."*

*"For example, some parents hit their children for bad grades or bad behaviour."*

*"Bullying is a very big problem in all schools. If a child is even slightly different from the others, he or she immediately becomes a victim of bullying."*

*"There are families where a child is treated very badly and no one ever finds out because they aren't talk about it because they would be punished again. After all, a child cannot just leave home, because they usually have nowhere to go."*

*"Children are particularly vulnerable to rape, especially by someone the child knows, such as a teacher, a relative or even a parent."*

The children said they did not dare to report the violence they had experienced. There are also cases that parents do not believe the child.

*"I think the biggest problem is that when children are beaten, the child is afraid to tell anyone. Children are usually beaten to punish them for it."*

*"Meanwhile, if something has happened to a child, their parent(s) don't believe them."*



*"A child who suffers from violence may not have the courage to say that this is happening."*

*"Not everyone has what it takes to ask for help. For example, it's also difficult for me to ask anyone for anything, I always try to manage on my own."*

Children admitted that they do not dare to talk about bullying and abuse because they are afraid of possible consequences. Children should be told where to look for help.

*"Unfortunately, most victims do not dare or do not want to talk about it, either to a teacher or another adult. Because when the bully finds out that the victim has 'snitched', they will bully them more and more."*

*"Children don't know how to seek help in the case of abuse."*

*"It's very difficult for children to talk about the violence that has happened (for example, what a parent has done to a child)."*

*"Children are not told about physical things (what shouldn't be done/what is wrong)."*

Help is not always accessible to children. The children gave examples of cases where adults have not helped them.

*"Psychological help is too expensive for children who've survived something difficult, so they don't get help."*

*"Many children who've experienced physical or mental abuse may later need either therapy or physiotherapy. I go to physiotherapy myself and I think that these things should be free, as they're very expensive."*

*"Bullying at school is a good example of this rule. There are times when teachers don't do anything either."*

*"The parents of children whose children bully others, those parents should give more attention to their children."*

Younger children felt it was important that their parents took care of their daily safety. Friends and pets also make children feel better.

*"So it would be safe – so that there are not so many accidents (for example with electric scooters); so that nobody gets beaten."*

*"If you're cycling near cars, you do it with your mum."*

*"The mum holds the child's hand in the pool if the child can't swim."*

*"If you're in a bad mood, a friend can help."*


*"When a child is angry, he or she will call his or her mum or dad to help."*


*"It's scary to be alone at home when mum is out walking the dog."*


*"So you don't get scared at home."*

*"Pets make you feel better."*

## CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS:

 Even in kindergarten and primary school, attention should be given to the prevention of bullying and violence, and children should be taught to be caring and friendly in their behaviour and communication. This will make it easier to spot bullies and those who really need help, and to report them.


 Members of the Riigikogu (the Estonian parliament) and other public figures should treat each other with respect. People should be able to resolve conflicts and disagreements in a way that everyone is respected. Children follow this example.


 Carry out awareness-raising campaigns to increase the safety of children. For example, some opinion leaders, who are also recognised by children, could call for children not to bully their peers.


## CONCLUSION. CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS


In a society that respects children's rights and is child-friendly, children have a say on issues that affect them and their ideas are listened to. This is true for very young children as well as older children, for children of Estonian and other nationalities, and for children with special needs. Children have the right to be heard and to have a say in decisions that affect them. Adults need to create opportunities for this everywhere: at home, at kindergarten, at school, in the community and across the country. When children need support and help, adults need to give it to them.


### We make the following proposals to improve the lives of Estonian children:


 Improve public transport, especially in rural areas, so that children can travel independently to a hobby group.


 Living has become more expensive, so families with children need more financial support and free services. Single parents in particular need support.


 Offer more free hobby groups for children.



















 There could be breaks for exercise and rest in class, as children generally have to sit for long periods. In order to have more opportunities to move around in the school building, appropriate space and equipment would be needed.















 School lunchtimes could be longer to allow more time to move, take a breath and have time for oneself. School meals could be healthier, more nutritious and tastier.

 Children urgently need supportive and free mental health care that is accessible everywhere. There is a need to talk more about ways to maintain mental health.

 Children should be regularly told about health and health care opportunities, for example, promotional campaigns could be carried out, etc.

 Adults need to listen to children, believe in them and help them when they need it.

-  Adults should set an example for children. It's necessary to curb the use of harmful substances among adults and deal with their addicts, to reduce the negative examples set for children.
-  Young people's curiosity about the unknown is understandable, but a child should be aware of the dangers and talk to their parents about them.
-  It is difficult to find help for addiction. This help is also expensive, treatment takes a long time and is often not available to those who immediately need it. Addicted children need help right away, and this support should be free of charge.
-  People who use illicit substances need more attention. Prevention should be carried out in schools, youth centres, as well as in training and hobby groups.
-  Curricula should be reviewed and updated. Textbooks and other study materials must be up-to-date and reflect modern knowledge.
-  There could be more formative assessment at all levels and in all subjects.
-  There is a lot of pressure and stress in schools, with too much schoolwork being given. It is necessary to regulate the workload of pupils so that children have enough rest time.
-  Ensure equal access to education for all – so that children in rural areas can go to school close to home.
-  The subsistence and financial opportunities of families need to be improved.
-  Child protection workers should monitor how families are coping, visit more homes and also talk directly to children.
-  Schools and child protection workers should work more closely together. Schools could notice and let child protection workers know if something seems wrong with a child.
-  A child should be able to be with their parents as much as they want. Parents need to find time to be with their child as much as the child wants. Parents should not work so long that they have no time to be with their child.
-  Parents should do all kinds of things together with their children.
-  The parent who lives away should initiate the meeting with the child. A child is not a means of communication between two parents – parents should communicate directly.
-  Create more suitable and meaningful work opportunities for children and young people, with fair pay.
-  Take on young people with no work experience – you have to get it from somewhere.
-  Teachers should not give children homework to do during school holidays and weekends.
-  Several tests must not be planned for the same day, Monday or Friday. There could be an opportunity to take a day off before exams and tests.

-  Parents could make sure that the child has enough free time, which they can spend as they wish.
-  Explain to parents that they should change their attitude towards listening to children and taking their views into account. The old and the young could do things together more than they do now.
-  School and kindergarten teachers should listen to children's opinions and make decisions with them. Younger children, who are not yet able to stand up for themselves, should be listened to particularly carefully.
-  Teach parents how to involve their children more in their decision-making.
-  Explain to parents and children that children have a right to privacy and why it is important to them – this can be done in training, for example.
-  Parents should teach their children how to behave on the Internet so that there is no need to check what they do online. Parents could learn from their children what is happening online and how to cope there.
-  Ask children more often for their opinion on everything that concerns them. Even very young children need to be asked what they think. This must be done in a way that suits them.
-  For example, monthly discussions could be organised between children and adults in different areas to tackle local issues in a way that works for everyone. Representatives of the local authority could also be invited to the discussion.
-  Deal with bullying and bullies.
-  Minors and their parents could have more information about obtaining citizenship. For example, a state-appointed counsellor could be available to talk to the child about citizenship, examine his or her needs and communicate with parents.
-  Organise language courses for children (e.g. online), so that children and young people can learn different languages, according to their age and level. These courses could be free of charge.
-  Provide more free Estonian language courses for both children and adults. These could be extra lessons at school or hobby groups.
-  Even in kindergarten and primary school, attention should be given to the prevention of bullying and violence, and children should be taught to be caring and friendly in their behaviour and communication. This will make it easier to spot bullies and those who really need help, and to report them.
-  Members of the Riigikogu (the Estonian parliament) and other public figures should treat each other with respect. People should be able to resolve conflicts and disagreements in a way that everyone is respected. Children follow this example.



Carry out awareness-raising campaigns to increase the safety of children. For example, some opinion leaders, who are also recognised by children, could call for children not to bully their peers.



## ANNEXES

### Annex 1. Consent form of children's rights ambassadors and parents

#### INFORMATION LEAFLET

We invite you to participate in a working group started by the Office of the Chancellor of Justice and the Union for Child Welfare, the purpose of which is to prepare an overview to be submitted by Estonian children to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Estonia has joined the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention is monitored by UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, to which states are required to submit regular reports on the situation of children's rights. On the basis of these reviews, the Committee assesses the implementation of children's rights and sends recommendations to the country to improve the situation.

In 2023, Estonia will once again submit a report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Various organisations and the Chancellor of Justice as the ombudsman for children also prepare their report on the situation of the rights of children. Children themselves can also let the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child know how Estonian children are doing and what needs to be done for them. For this purpose, the Committee encourages children to collect their opinions and to submit them to the Committee in a format suitable for children. The main principle is that all this is voluntary and children are free to decide how and in what form they want to collect and present their ideas to the Committee.

The collection and submission of the opinions of Estonian children to the Committee will take place for the first time and the Children's and Youth Rights Department of the Office of the Chancellor of Justice in cooperation with the Union for Child Welfare will fully support the children in this endeavour.

One of the duties of the Chancellor of Justice is to protect the rights of children and young people. You can find out more about the activities of the Chancellor of Justice on her website (<https://www.oiguskantsler.ee/et/laste-ja-noorte-%C3%B5igused>).

The objective of the nationwide network of children's rights ambassadors of the Estonian Union for Child Welfare is to amplify the voice of children and young people and to put the Convention on the Rights of the Child in practice in Estonia. For more information on the network of children's rights ambassadors, please visit the website of the Estonian Union for Child Welfare (<https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/et/lapseoigustesaadikud/>).

The working group includes 11 children's rights ambassadors from all over Estonia, who will set the principles on how to collect the ideas of Estonian children. In order to summarise the meetings, the participants in the working group will prepare an overview of the situation of children's rights in Estonia based on the thoughts and opinions of children and young people. All principles of volunteering, data protection, anonymity and security are respected in the review prepared with the help of the participants in the working group. One of the participants in the working group will also have the opportunity to present the messages and the overview to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The discussion with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child will be supported by the Office of the Chancellor of Justice and the representatives of the Estonia Union for Child Welfare, and the costs will be covered by the Office of the Chancellor of Justice. More information on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child can be found here: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/crc>.

We provide meals for all children attending the workshop and reimburse transport costs to the meeting places. The activities of the working group are covered in the outreach aimed at the public. The meetings will be chaired and facilitated by [---], Advisor to the Chancellor of Justice. Please contact if you need more information (tel. [---]; e-mail [---]). On behalf of the Estonian Union for Child Welfare, the initiative is supported by Cooperation Coordinator (tel. [---]; e-mail [---]).

**Please discuss and fill in the consent form and the essential additional information form with your parent. The parent can sign the forms either digitally or on paper. Please e-mail the digitally signed forms to [---]. If the forms are signed on paper, please take them with you to the next meeting.**

All consents may be withdrawn at any time, individually and together, by **e-mailing** the respective notice to [---].

The essential additional information form helps to ensure that we are able to meet your needs and gives you information on what to do if something should happen. This additional information is only used by the project organisers. Additional information will be deleted after the end of the project.

Your well-being and safety are important to us. If you feel that someone has done something unacceptable in the course of the project, please report it to [---] or the Director of the Office of the Chancellor of Justice, who will resolve complaints against the Office and the project staff.

#### CONSENT

Name and time of the project: **Overview of Estonian children to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child**

Your first name and surname:

Your age:

Your contact details where it is the easiest to reach you (FB, e-mail, phone, etc.):

Are you willing to participate in the project [...]?

[...] yes [...] no

Do you consent to putting your own face and image on the works produced by the project?

[...] yes [...] no

Do you consent to lending your voice to the works produced by the project?

[...] yes [...] no

Do you consent to publishing your first name in the works completed in the project?

[...] yes [...] no

Will you transfer the rights to the works produced by the project to the Office of the Chancellor of Justice?

[...] yes [...] no

Do you consent to communicating with the press to promote the project?

[...] yes [...] no

#### **Parental consent:**

My child and I have been informed about the details of the project and the information provided is understandable to me and my child. We have discussed all the points of the consent with the child and have reached a consensus on them.

First name and surname:

Signature:

Date:

Preferred contact details to get in touch if necessary:

#### IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Name and time of the project: **Overview of Estonian children to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child**

Your first name and surname:

Your age:

Your contact details where it is the easiest to reach you (FB, e-mail, phone, etc.):

Here are questions about information about you. You can choose what information you want to share with us:

Do you have any (chronic) illnesses?

[...] yes [...] no [...] not important or don't know

Specify:

Are you taking any medication?

[...] yes [...] no [...] not important or don't know

Specify:

Do you have any allergies?

[...] yes [...] no [...] not important or don't know

Specify:

Do you need a special menu (e.g. vegetarian, lactose-free, gluten-free, etc.)?

[...] yes [...] no [...] not important or don't know

Specify:

Do you have any needs where you need our support (e.g. moving around, communicating, performing, etc.)?

[...] yes [...] no [...] not important or don't know

Specify:

Is there anything else we should do to make you feel good?

[...] yes [...] no [...] not important or don't know

Specify:

#### **Parental consent:**

The above information is correct and sufficient to avoid situations that could endanger the welfare of my child.

First name and surname:

Signature:

Date:

Phone number where you can be contacted quickly in case of an emergency:

#### [Annex 2. Principles of child protection policy](#)

The Ombudsman for Children proceeds in her work from the principles of the Child Protection Policy of the European Network of Ombudsmen for Children (ENOC) (<https://enoc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Child-protection-policy-2021.pdf>).