

# OUR RIGHTS. OUR FUTURE.

**The Europe We Want.**



Children's recommendations to  
European Union decision makers

**Executive Summary**

***Dear adults, dear decision makers,***

Children in the European Union have something to tell you.

We believe our plans towards a better future will never be realized if we keep the children away from the adults, acting as if we have different goals, ambitions, and interests. It's time to come together, recognizing the value and importance of each other's contributions to effecting change.

All our recommendations share a common theme: involving children and young people in decision-making that shapes their lives and futures.

Our plans and suggestions may seem ambitious. But hey, was Europe not created by visionaries? Let's start making small steps towards a big goal. If not now, when? If not us, who?

Thank you for listening to our voices and for considering our dreams, goals, and suggestions.



**Lana**  
Croatia



**Daniel**  
Spain



**Karlina**  
Germany



**Rahel**  
Germany



**Pavlina**  
Greece



**Bao**  
Germany



**Aleksej**  
Croatia



**Andra-Elena**  
Romania



**Iva**  
Serbia



**Ana-Maria**  
Romania

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

As the European Union (EU) makes important decisions that affect children's lives, five child rights organisations – ChildFund Alliance, Eurochild, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages and UNICEF – reached out to children and young people to collect their views on the future of Europe ahead of the European elections.

More than **9,200 children** aged 10 to 18 have spoken about the issues that matter most to them, providing their recommendations for EU decision-makers to consider and act upon.

This executive summary outlines the main results of this consultation, while a comprehensive overview of all findings can be found at <https://childfriendlygovernance.org/europe-kids-want>

## PROCESS AND RESULTS

A specially established Child Advisory Board, consisting of ten children from six European countries (Germany, Greece, Croatia, Spain, Romania and Serbia) who were nominated by the organisations leading the consultation, guided the process. Supported by the Child and Youth Friendly Governance Project (<https://childfriendlygovernance.org/europe-kids-want>), the Board developed an online survey in 15 languages with 21 questions disseminated throughout Europe from November 2023 to January 2024. In addition, 47 children participated in focus group discussions held in Bulgaria, Croatia, the Netherlands, and Malta.

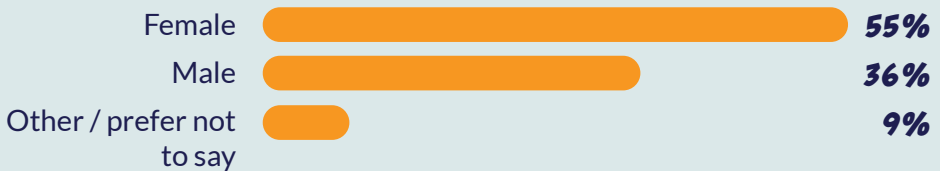
# The children and young people who responded to the survey are...

**Total number of children and young people who responded** **9,265**

## Average age range of the respondents:



## Respondents mostly identified as:



**26 out of 27 EU countries represented (except for Latvia)**

## Children's biggest concerns



# What should the EU prioritise for children?



Photo: Alba Lajarin / Save the Children

# UNDERSTANDING KEY RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

## EDUCATION

Education is a top priority for children across Europe. However, children unanimously express dissatisfaction with the current education system.

- ★ Only 14% of children are absolutely certain that what they are learning in school is useful for their future.
- ★ A staggering 33% do not find learning in school useful for their future.

**When asked what they would like to learn in school, children across the EU responded:**





**"We all need to acquire practical skills which will help us to live our everyday life. For example, it is very important how to save money."**

(Niya, 16, Bulgaria)

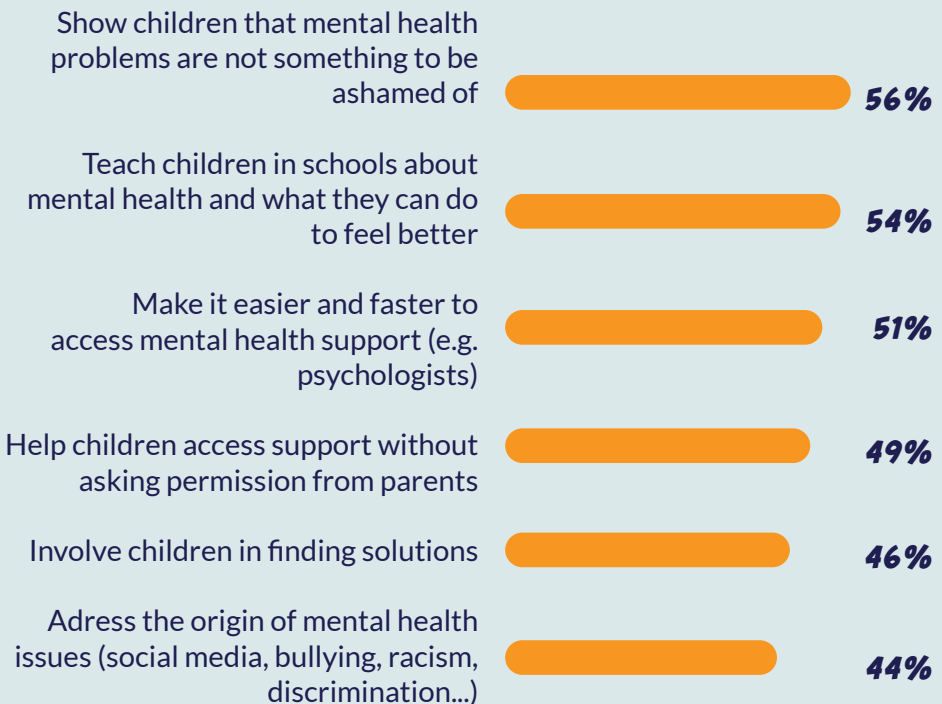


# MENTAL HEALTH

Addressing mental health challenges is a key concern for children.

- ★ Two in three children feel that school pressure has a negative effect on their mental health.
- ★ More than half of children, particularly from minority groups such as LGBTQI+ children (67%), feel that uncertainty about the future impacts their mental health.
- ★ Social challenges, such as loneliness (56%), bullying (51%) or discrimination (46%), are also big contributors to mental health challenges.

## When asked how adults can support children's mental health and well-being, children responded that adults can:





Have more open discussions about mental health challenges and solutions



43%

Share more information about healthy risks



34%

***“A major drawback for me is that children are not taken seriously when they speak up on serious mental health issues such as depression.”***  
(Amelie, 15, Malta)

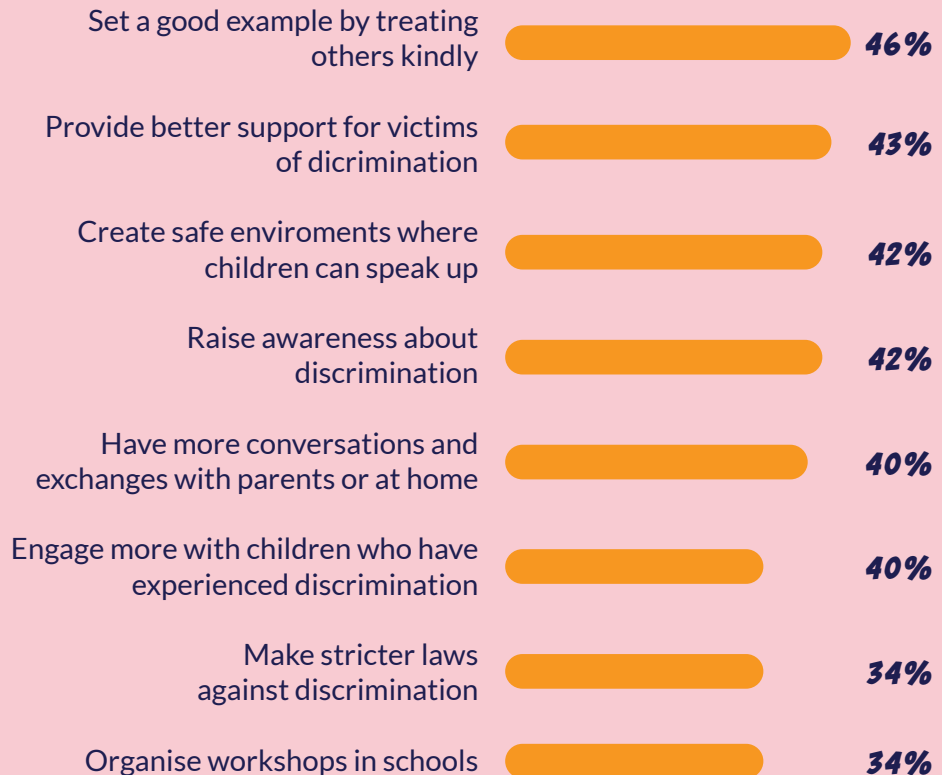


# BREAKING BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

Discrimination remains a pervasive concern, particularly among minority groups.

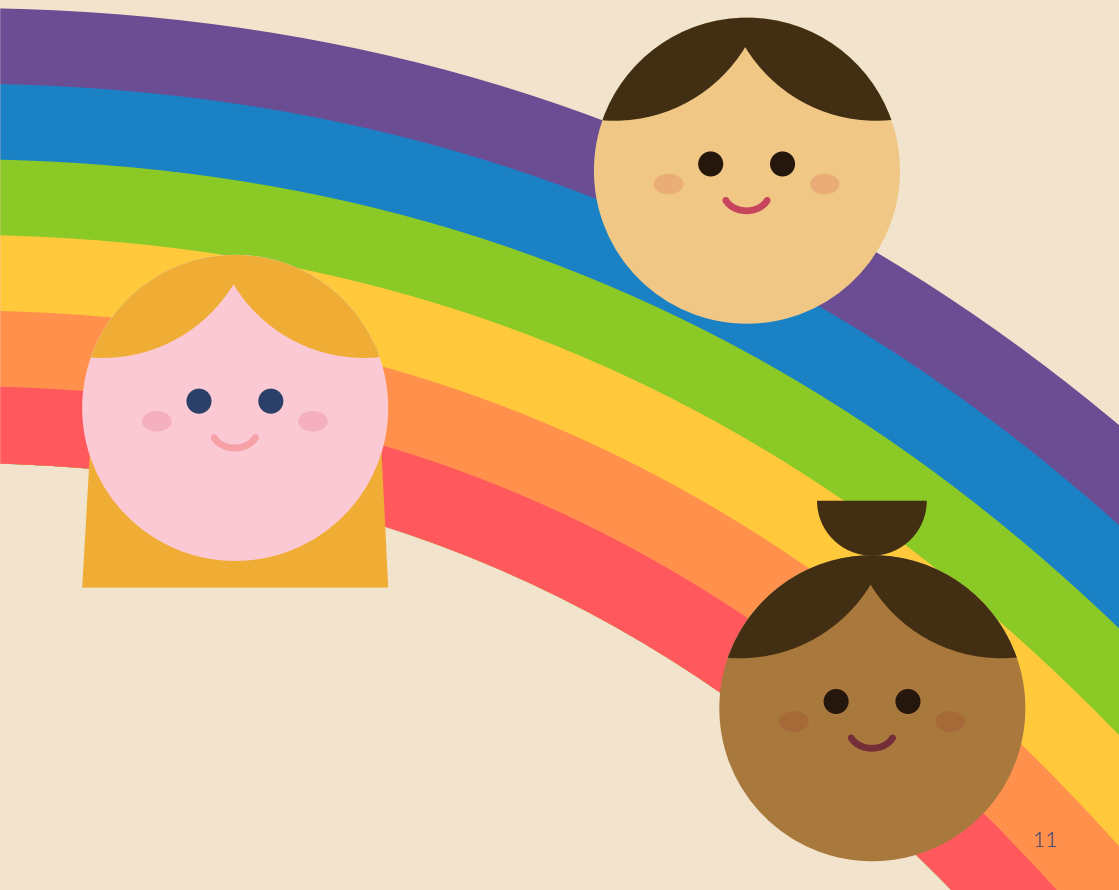
- ★ 71% of LGBTQI+ children face discrimination because of their sexual orientation.
- ★ One in four (24%) children living in alternative care report discrimination based on their care status.
- ★ Only 23% of children report not having experienced or witnessed discrimination so far.

## When asked how adults can help tackle discrimination, children said that adults can:





***“There is a lot of exclusion towards children with disabilities and without interventions of the whole community this will not be solved.”***  
*(Helena, 14, Croatia)*



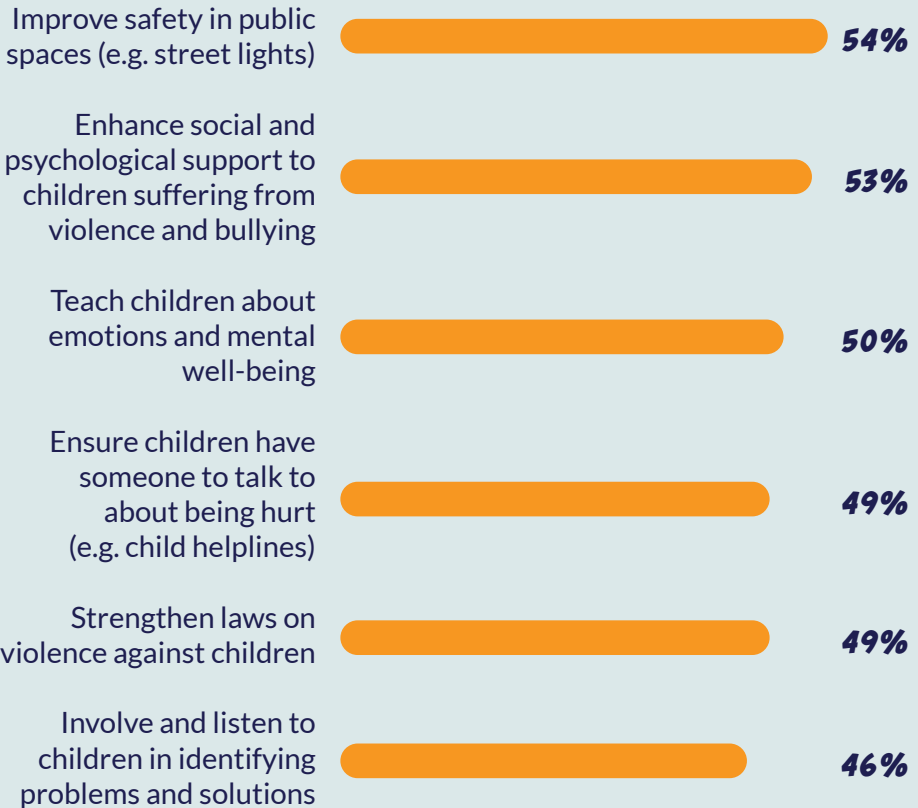
# PROTECTION FROM HARM

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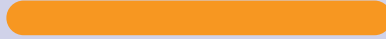
Safety, especially in public spaces and online, is another pressing issue for children.

- ★ Only 50% of children feel safe online.
- ★ Less than ½ of children feel safe in school.

## When asked how adults can help children feel safe, children responded that adults can:



Implement anti-bullying and violence prevention programs in school



43%

Provide better support to parents and caregivers to help them manage problems at home



41%

Enforce better rules for online spaces (e.g. social media platforms)



29%

***“We don’t have lights in all parts of our city, so it is scary to walk alone at night and it is not safe.”***  
(Marin, 15, Croatia)

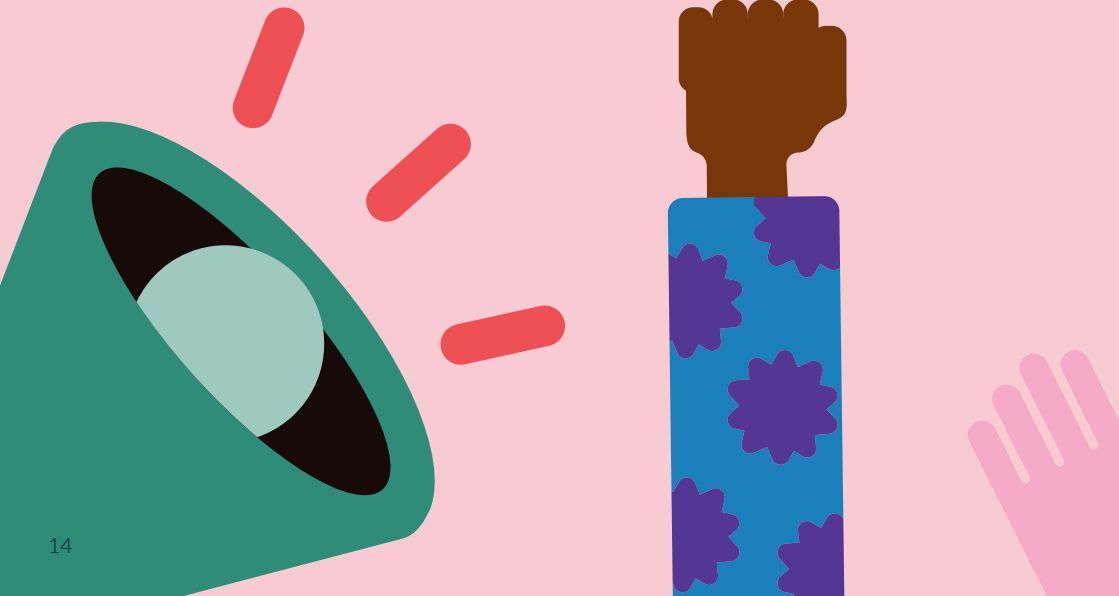


# MAKING CHILDREN'S VOICES HEARD

While children appreciate being consulted, they assert the need for meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

- ★ 70% of children recommended providing them with more opportunities to participate in decision-making to ensure their voices are heard in matters affecting their lives.

**When asked whether they think politicians in their country worry about the same things as children, children responded:**



***“Politicians are not interested in children because they cannot vote. This is why they are not aware of our problems. They believe that we will grow up and our problems will disappear.”***

*(Harry, 14, Bulgaria)*

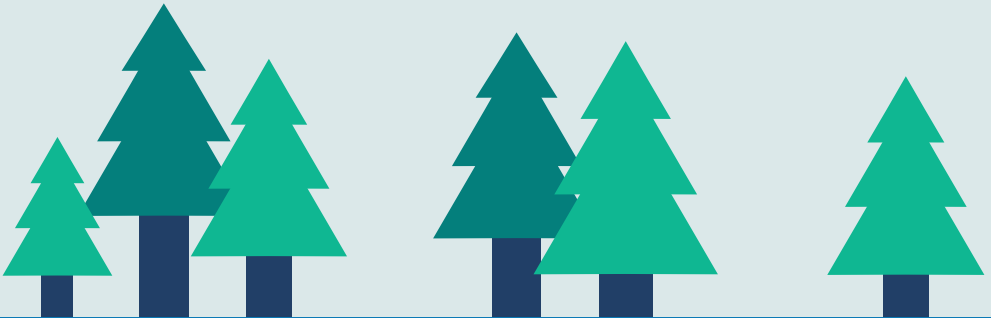
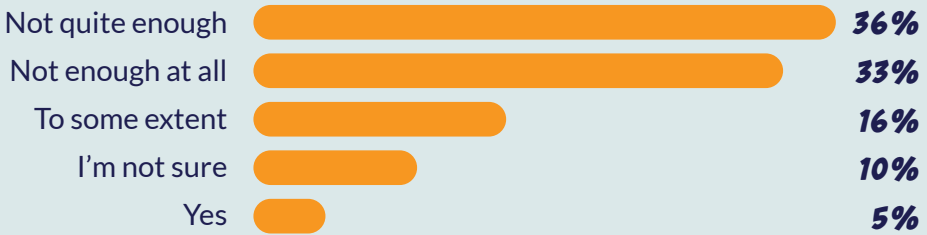


# CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is another key concern that many children share for their future.

- ★ 70% of children are worried or very worried about the impacts of climate change.
- ★ 69% of children feel that politicians are not doing enough to address climate change.

## When asked whether children think politicians do enough to tackle climate change, children responded:





***“We are often discussing the climate change at school. I think that the topic concerns all of us. I think that maybe politicians believe that they are doing enough but they should do more.”***

*(Denis, 16, Bulgaria)*



# WHAT THE EUROPEAN UNION CAN DO

Children call on adults to remember that they are not just the future. Their priorities matter here and now.

## What children think the EU should prioritise to improve children's lives or future opportunities





# TOP TEN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EU

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## **Rethink current education system**

- ★ Implement innovative teaching methods to incorporate interactive lessons and group work.
- ★ Ensure better physical learning environment and safety in schools.
- ★ Promote a balanced approach to schoolwork and leisure time to support overall well-being



## **Empower children in education**

- ★ Provide children with more freedom to choose subjects based on their interests, talents and strengths.
- ★ Invest in practical life skills education alongside academic learning.
- ★ Promote digital skills education for children and teachers.



## **Enhance mental health support**

- ★ Implement comprehensive mental health education programmes in schools to raise awareness, promote emotional well-being and resilience among children.
- ★ Work towards destigmatizing mental health problems through education and advocacy.
- ★ Develop comprehensive solutions addressing the root causes of mental health challenges.



## **Expand access to mental health services**

- ★ Incorporate mental health support, including interventions for discrimination-affected students, in all schools.
- ★ Ensure that counseling, therapy and other mental health resources are readily available and easily accessible in schools and communities.
- ★ Introduce mental health education in schools and train educators to provide mental health support.



## **Combat bullying and discrimination**

- ★ Implement anti-bullying programmes and initiatives in schools.
- ★ Establish an online tool for children to seek assistance when threatened, raising awareness of available hotlines.
- ★ Allocate EU funds to train professionals to address discrimination effectively in children's settings.
- ★ Introduce collaboration between children and minority groups to promote inclusion, empathy and respect for diversity.



### **Provide safety and support services**

- ★ Improve safety in public spaces for children.
- ★ Address bullying and violence among children through anti-bullying programs in schools and emotional education to prevent such behaviors.
- ★ Enhance access to support services for children affected by violence, including creating safety centers and promoting awareness of helplines.
- ★ Enact stricter legislation to hold social media companies accountable for protecting children online.



### **Advocate for stronger climate action**

- ★ Find ways to push for stronger climate action.
- ★ Focus on practical, actionable solutions and not on who is responsible.



### **Promote corporate accountability and green initiatives**

- ★ Encourage corporate responsibility by pushing companies to invest in green solutions.
- ★ Invest in projects and initiatives that enable children and youth to take environmental action locally.
- ★ Make schools and communities greener to reduce the impact of climate change.



### **Facilitate EU engagement**

- ★ Increase awareness among children about opportunities for participation within the EU.
- ★ Implement child-friendly communication and inclusive participation mechanisms.
- ★ Expand activities like the Europe Kids Want consultations to engage children in discussing their rights.



### **Strengthen children and youth participation**

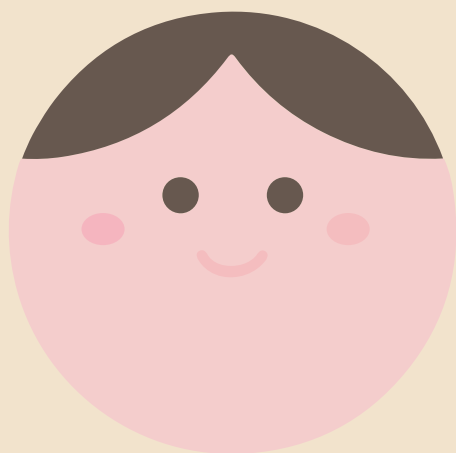
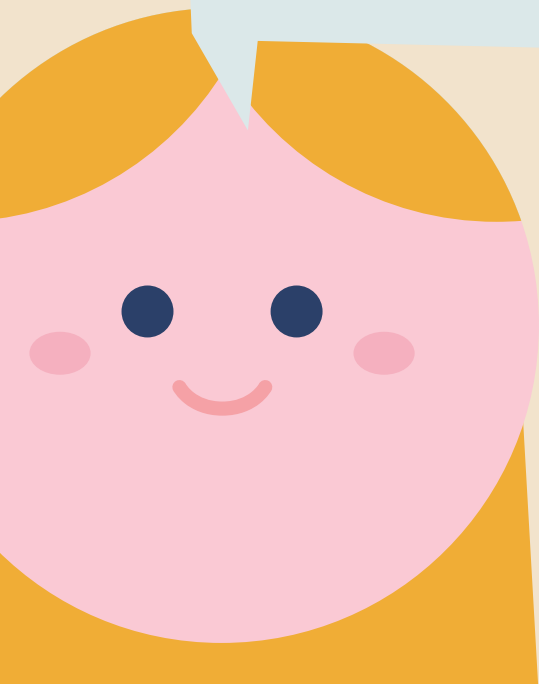
- ★ Establish a Teen EU Parliament to allow young people to contribute to discussions on EU policies.
- ★ Advocate for the reduction of the voting age for EU elections to empower young people's participation.
- ★ Empower child and youth advisory boards by allocating responsibilities, authority, and budgets to them.

*As children, we want policymakers to heed our calls and take decisive action to build a more inclusive, supportive, and sustainable Europe for all children. As the voters of tomorrow, our voices and perspectives must be included in today's decision-making processes for a Europe where every child can thrive – now and in the future.*



**“WE ARE THE PRESENT,  
NOT THE FUTURE,  
WE ARE HERE.”**

*(Valentina, 15, Croatia)*



To find out more about 'Our Rights. Our Future. The Europe We Want.'  
visit: <https://childfriendlygovernance.org/europe-kids-want>

Discover how child rights should be prioritised in EU action with the  
#VoteForChildren campaign: [www.childrightsmanifesto.eu](http://www.childrightsmanifesto.eu)

