My voice matters

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INTRODUCTION


The National consultation was carried out in three stages:

During the first stage (10 March–10 April 2015), a broad media and social campaign, called “My Voice Matters”, was conducted and an online survey was launched. Around 6,000 children completed the survey and shared their opinions on topics such as family environment, education, child participation, leisure time, and challenges that affect the lives of children in Bulgaria.

During the second stage (19 March–7 April 2015), UNICEF in partnership with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) organised direct consultations on the same topics with children from vulnerable communities: children living in Roma communities, children with disabilities, and children in the care system.

In the third stage (22-24 April 2015), a National children's forum “My Voice Matters” was organised, where the results of the online survey and the direct consultations were presented. The results were discussed by 30 children in total, 26 of whom participated in the previous two stages and 4 represented child and youth structures. The children gave recommendations and proposed specific actions to be undertaken in six thematic areas: Children in Bulgaria; Leisure Time and Sharing/Looking for Help; Education and School; Family and Family Environment; Right to Opinion; and Solidarity (children worldwide) in order to make their lives better.

The proposals and the recommendations made by the children during the National Forum are provided in Annex 2'.

1 A “close-ended” question is where a number of possible responses have been formulated in advance based on hypotheses about opinions and statements developed by a researcher or based on previous research.
The current report summarises the results of the first two stages of the National Consultations with children and aims to outline the key topics that children in Bulgaria are interested in and excited about.

**Limitation in the interpretation of data**

The surveys were conducted using the methodology of child respondents, and in the case of direct consultations – by direct invitation.

While the data is not representative of the entire Bulgarian population aged 7–18, in view of the high number of participants, the results might be interpreted as trends with a high level of validity.

**Registration tool**

The child opinion survey was conducted using a single tool – a semi-standardised questionnaire with 37 questions (substantive and demographic) in language appropriate for children and young people.

The questions were mainly close-ended questions with an option for one or more replies.

The scale had 3-4 reply options in average. Part of the scales had an option “other” which allowed for other replies to be added. There were no reply options like “don’t know”, “can’t decide/hesitant”. There were also no forced questions.

The questionnaire consisted of general and specific blocks, depending on whether and what type of school the respondent was attending at the time of the survey.

The block structure was designed in a way that allowed the respondent to gradually enter into the topic, to develop trust and honest reply reflex, and to minimise fatigue and attention loss.

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2 A “close-ended” question is where a number of possible responses have been formulated in advance based on hypotheses about opinions and statements developed by a researcher or based on previous research.

3 A “forced” question is a closed-ended question, where the respondent has to choose some of the statements given as possible replies to the question, and could not deny giving a reply.
In terms of content, the questionnaire covered three of the main areas of intervention (operational objectives) of the National Strategy for the Child (2008-2018):

- reducing child poverty and encouraging social inclusion of children;
- ensuring equal access to education;
- promoting child participation in the development and implementation of child-centred policies.

The operational objective “Improving Child Health” remained outside the scope of the survey.

The tool enabled children to freely comment on and add to each of the areas through open-ended questions to be filled out on their own.

The structure of the questionnaire followed the thematic sequence given below:

- expectations for the future, and current problems the children are facing;
- education and school life;
- leisure and recreation;
- family life;
- relationships with peers and adults;
- child participation and inclusion in public life.

The results of the completed questionnaires are presented in the same order.

**Methodology**

Methodologically, the survey included conduction of an online survey poll and direct consultations.

**Online survey**

The online survey “My Voice Matters” is a quantitative tool designed for self-completion by children aged 7-18.

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4 An “open-ended” question is a question without answers given in advance. This type of questions allows sharing an opinion without any limits. The replies provided are summarised using a transformation technology, which allows weighting the opinion called coding. In this survey 5 questions were fully “open-ended”, while 8 were semi-open-ended/semi-standardised.

5 Annex 1. My Voice Matters Questionnaire
The questionnaire was published on the UNICEF Bulgaria website in the period 10 March – 10 April 2015. The information and a link to it were sent to the media, to all Regional Inspectorates of Education, NGOs working with children, and to partners of UNICEF Bulgaria. An advertising banner inviting children to take part in the campaign “My Voice Matters” with a link to the questionnaire was published on 51 websites, selected on the basis of the biggest share of child presence. Internet banners generated a total of 12.97 million impressions (clicks).

In the period 10 March – 10 April 2015, the questionnaires were filled out by 6,531 children, who shared their opinion on a number of questions related to their relationships with parents, peers and friends; they shared their views about their school and school life and their dreams for the future; they wrote about the right of children to have a say and the right to be heard and taken seriously.

373 questionnaires were not included in the analysis for different reasons: the questionnaire was filled out in less than 5 minutes; the replies were inconsistent; the stylistics clearly showed that the opinion belonged to somebody over the age of 18 (38 cases).

The online questionnaire was anonymous; it did not collect personal information, and did not allow identifying directly the individuals who had filled it out.

**Direct consultation**

Direct consultation refers to the application of the quantitative survey tool in a group of 8 to 30 children, with the help of a facilitator.

Every child participating in the consultation noted a reply to the questions in the online questionnaire or expressed an opinion in the group.

139 children with different social status and ethnic origin and specific needs took part in the direct consultations: children from small settlements, children with disabilities, children of Roma origin, children in residential institutions (homes for children deprived of parental care), and children with special educational needs.

Foundation *Partners Bulgaria*, Foundation *Social Practices in the Community*, Bulgarian Youth Red Cross, Association *Future for the Children* and Foundation *Health and Social...
Development facilitated the communication with the children and invited them for participation in the direct consultations.

The children who took part in the direct consultations use the services provided by the organisations or get actively involved in their programmes and projects.

The direct consultations included 8 direct consultation events with children and a National Forum “My Voice Matters”

The following consultations were conducted in the period 19 March – 7 April:

- 3 groups of children from small settlements – 30+30+30 (90 children);
- 1 group of children from a Roma community – 21 children;
- 2 groups of children with disabilities – 7+7 children;
- 1 group of children in the social care system – 8 children;

A comprehensive description of the methodology for the consultations is provided in Annex 2^6_.

This report analyses the data from the quantitative survey. It contains quotes of the opinions expressed by the children during the direct consultations, where the original spelling and stylistics have been retained. All quotes are given in quotation marks and in italics.

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PARTICIPANT’S PROFILE

Gender

According to the National Statistical Institute\(^7\) data (Census of population and housing, 2011) children in Bulgaria in the age group 7-18 are 807,520, with almost half (51%) boys, and 49% - girls.

Over two-thirds (72%) of children live in urban areas, and 15% - in Sofia.

Girls accounted to over half - 56% or 3,435 of all the 6,158 children who filled out the “My Voice Matters” Survey.

The ratio between the boys and girls who participated in the survey (44%-56%) is opposite to the ratio in the total child population in Bulgaria (51%-49%):

Figure 1: Breakdown of the children participating in “My Voice Matters” by gender compared to NSI data, 2011

\(^7\) Main source of data on the total population, quoted below as NSI, 2011, in the National Statistical Institute of the Republic of Bulgaria, last population census from 2011 http://censusresults.nsi.bg/Census/
Age

The age distribution of participants revealed bigger deviations from the total child population aged 7-18.

Mainly children ages 12 and older took part in the survey. The participation of younger children (below 12) was quite insignificant, and the data submitted was insufficient to allow analysis of the reasons.

One-third of the totality of opinions shared was contributed by 14-15 year-olds. The tendencies exhibited by 16-18 year-olds were close to the general values.

Figure 2: Age of the children participating in “My Voice Matters” compared to NSI data, 2011

Place of residence

Children from different settlements took part in the “My Voice Matters” survey.

Children from villages accounted for one-fourth of all the participants, which is 4% less than the total child population.

The biggest share - 42% was that of children living in small towns. This had an overall effect on the opinions shared and the analysis took into account the fact that the prevailing opinions were expressed by this particular group of children.
It should be noted that it was left to the children to identify the type of settlement in which they live. They decided on their own whether it was “small” or “big”, where their guesses were not so much based on statistical data about the number of citizens, but rather on personal perception or previous experience. Therefore, it is possible that a town which statistically qualifies as big” or “a regional centre” was categorised as “small” by the children, and the vice versa.

67% of the children indicated that they live in a town other than the capital. Participants from Sofia accounted for 9%, which smaller than the share of children in the total child population living in the capital by 6 points (15%).

*Figure 3: Type of settlement as indicated by the children participating in “My Voice Matters” compared to NSI data*

![Chart showing type of settlement as indicated by children](chart.png)

N=6158, data from “May Voice Matters” n= 807520, NSI 2011,

In terms of socio-demographic characteristics, the most active group was children aged 12 and over, and among them – girls from smaller settlements (small towns and villages).

Boys were less active, in addition to children aged between 7 and 11, and those living in the capital city.
Education

The majority of the children who filled out the questionnaire attend school. 45% of them study in secondary general education schools, 11% - in vocational technical schools, 7% - in foreign language schools, 5% - in high schools of mathematics (Figure 4).

28 participants aged under 10 (0.5%) stated that they do not attend school as they are home-schooled. Other 44 participants (0.7%) said that they do not attend school.

Figure 4: Type of school attended by the children participating in “My Voice Matters”

The data analysis showed that 37% of the young children attending primary school (PS) come from villages. This high percentage is indicative of the fact that children attending PS accessed the questionnaire more easily and managed to express their opinion.

Children from private primary schools and from foreign language schools come mainly from Sofia.

The share of boys from vocational-technical schools having filled out the questionnaire exceeded that of girls. The ratio among the students in foreign language schools and high schools with advanced foreign language training is opposite – the share of girls there was higher than the share of boys.
Family

Family and family models have a significant impact on children’s behaviour. After school, this is the second most important social factor affecting the lives of children.

The majority of the respondents (82%) stated that they live in two-parent families.

18% of the respondents come from incomplete (single-parent) families, live with another adult (grandparent), with one parent and another adult, with a more distant relative (uncle, aunt), live alone (in rented housing) or in a home for children deprived of parental care.

Every tenth child (9.5%) lives with only one parent.

In 2% of the cases, children live with one parent and another adult (grandparent).

3% of the children are raised only by a grandparent.

Each of the groups of children living alone or with friends (in rented housing outside their home) or in a home for children deprived of parental care accounts for 1% of the sample group.

Figure 5: Family models, “My Voice Matters”
The share of children from Sofia living in incomplete families (other than two-parent families) accounts for one quarter of all respondents (25%).

The data show that the change in family structure – from two parents to one - is linked to the size of the place of residence, and the share of two-parent families in smaller settlements is higher than in cities.

The share of children from small settlements living in incomplete (single-parent) families is only 7%. In cities, this share increases to 10%, while in Sofia it is already 16%.

Although the data is not nationally representative, the above trend is confirmed by other studies of family models in Bulgaria (“Family Models and Migration”, 2007, Agency for Social and Economic Analysis, p. 32).^8^

The significance of different family models for the formation of specific behaviours, values and attitudes towards the world in children resulting from different parent-child relationships in two- or one-member family models, extended families or other types of family structure is the subject of numerous modern psychological and social family theories.^9^

It is very likely that children living in different family models may have different needs and issues, and require different approaches on behalf of adults.

The analysis below monitors whether there is a correlation between children’s opinions and the family model in which they live.

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^8^ [http://www.asa.bg/index.php?pages=%D0%98%D0%B7%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F&id=97&l=bg](http://www.asa.bg/index.php?pages=%D0%98%D0%B7%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F&id=97&l=bg)


CHILDREN’S VIEWS ON THEIR FUTURE

“How do you see your future?” - for the majority of the respondents the future includes having a job (63%) and a family of their own (61%).

In addition to sample answers, this question also allowed children to give their own response. However, only 5% chose to do so, and those who did described themselves as “rich” (18%), “successful” (12%) and “happy” (6%).

In general, children’s dreams of the future are connected with having a good work-life balance, financial security and opportunities to travel. The achievement of those goals is seen as a major source of satisfaction.

Strategic documents on child policies need to ensure that children can have good career opportunities and can rely on support to start their own families in Bulgaria.

The responses given to the question “What do you want to do for a living?” indicate that the majority of children are interested in professions requiring solid and continuing training, as well as high qualifications.

Children are drawn to professions in the field of medicine and healthcare, information technologies and telecommunications, law, journalism, advertising, hospitality, tourism, as well as opportunities to set up in business.

Every tenth respondent is interested in becoming a doctor, nurse, dentist and pharmacist or, alternatively - a theatre actor, dancer, designer or photographer.

The IT sector is the third most attractive professional group (with jobs such as computer programmer, software developer or designer), as indicated by 9% of the respondents.

Less than 1% envisage themselves as having a job in an office (administrative or office staff), in manufacturing (factory workers), or in retail (sales assistants).
The data show that children are strongly intrigued by career opportunities requiring ambition, entrepreneurship and independence.
The preference for a specific area of professional development is age-dependent: the youngest participants want to become cinema or theatre actors, or veterinary surgeons; 14-15 year-olds are mostly drawn to legal professions; while 16-18 year-olds, who will soon finish their secondary studies, express an interest in economics and finance, medicine, IT, pedagogy and psychology.

The results are further indicative of distinct migration and emigration trends, since in response to the question “Where do you most want to live?” 65% chose a location other than their current residence.

A total of 43% of the respondents stated an interest in living abroad in the future. The majority are from Sofia – 60%, but the same opinion is shared by one half of the children living in big cities. The share of the children willing to live abroad is higher among 14-17 year-olds, and is considerably lower among children under 12 living in villages.

One-fifth of the respondents are interested in migrating to a larger city or to the capital.

The data are also indicative of the directional model of such migration – children from villages want to relocate to the city, while those from the city are interested in living in the capital.

Just over one-third (35%) of the respondents would like to spend their lives in their current places of residence. These are mainly children in the younger age group (under 12) who live in a village with both of their parents.

“You can’t ever make your dreams for a good future come true; because of education, employment and other things most are just impossible in Bulgaria” (girl, age 14-15, small town)
The data are suggestive of the strong statistical correlation that exists between the choice of profession and the preferred place of residence.

In more than 50% of all cases, children envisaging themselves as lawyers, entrepreneurs, artists and IT experts said that they want to emigrate.

The respective number for those willing to work in media and journalism is 65%.

The chosen jobs of children having indicated Bulgaria as their preferred place of residence include police officer, car mechanic, as well as jobs in architecture, town planning or social work.

The intention to emigrate is most strongly pronounced among girls, in particular those studying in foreign language schools. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to start a family and to look for a job in Bulgaria.

Children’s concepts of lifestyle and career opportunities in a foreign country are the underlying reason for the prevalence of the desire to emigrate.

In many cases, this is the result of conversations held in the family or of their parents’ intentions.

It is very likely that for the majority of the children the opinions voiced will eventually become lasting patterns of emigration, education or employment in a foreign country.
Overall, the data suggest that children have a strong interest and a desire to learn and grow professionally. However, there is also a hidden risk of frustration should either of the above fail, or should the expected career and life prospects and support turn out to be non-existent.
MAIN PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED BY THE CHILDREN

Right at the start, the questionnaire included some questions related to the understanding and perception of problems concerning children in Bulgaria and worldwide.

The questions were open-ended and aimed to capture spontaneous responses before the respondent can get to the thematic blocks of the questionnaire.

Albeit close in essence, the replies given to “What are the three biggest problems of children in Bulgaria?”, on the one hand, and “What are the three biggest problems of children worldwide?”, on the other, differ in both focus and weight. The sources of the formation of children’s opinions on such issues are not covered by this study, but they certainly include both personal impressions and projections of their ways of living and thinking.

As major problems for children in Bulgaria the respondents indicated poverty, the trouble-free access to tobacco, alcohol and drugs, the poor quality of education, and various forms of aggression and violence.

As far as global problems are concerned, the responses again centred on issues such as poverty, poor quality of education, access to tobacco, alcohol and drugs, and violence. As regards the nature of their impact on children in Bulgaria and worldwide, however, the situation is completely different.

Poverty was identified as the biggest problem, accounting for 46% for children in Bulgaria and 75% - for children worldwide.

Children in Bulgaria experience poverty both as a lack of basics and as a lack of daily care. It becomes noticeable as a result of their parents’ absences due to consistent hard work or, in some cases, as a result of working far from home.

“it should be possible for mothers and fathers to stay with the children, and not to have to go abroad or to the city to look for a job to provide for us, while we, the children, grow up with our grandmothers” (girl, age 12-13, village)
Poverty is further associated with a low social status and a limited access to material goods. Some children said that they have no money for lunch, and their families eat junk or unhealthy food.

Moreover, poverty is the root of inequality among children and of a division into rich and poor. The latter can also be witnessed in school, where children from wealthier families are given preferential treatment, as well as in certain patterns of psychological violence (such as ridicule and bullying of poorer children by their better-off peers).

Children from villages and smaller towns are most sensitive to such issues.

“Help poorer children so they too can be educated and civilised like the rest, and not stand apart.” (boy, age 12-13, small town)

“I don’t want financial problems in the family. More places for entertainment.” (girl, age 12-13, small town)

“… it doesn’t matter how we are - poor, rich, Gipsies, or Turks - we are all the same. I say this because many get isolated.” (boy, age 12-13, small town)

While poverty in Bulgaria is described in terms of deficiencies, money shortages and difficult life, global poverty, mostly in African countries, is associated with the lack of shelter, food shortages, destitution and water shortages, and utter deprivation.

“Well, to be down and out is one of the biggest problems in the world, as well as to have nothing to eat and nothing to drink” (boy, age 16-17, big town)

The trouble-free access to tobacco, alcohol and drugs was identified as the second major problem for children in Bulgaria by 44% of the respondents, and as the third major global problem – by 38%.

About a half of the participants directly pointed to the easy and free access to drugs as a problem, while the rest discussed opioids, tobacco and alcohol in more general terms.

Many children said that they were worried of the possibility of their younger siblings taking up bad habits associated with tobacco, alcohol and drugs.

The children also mentioned that smoking on school premises is quite common, and that it is very easy to obtain tobacco, alcohol and drugs.
As far as the global picture is concerned, the situation is similar: according to the respondents, children worldwide can also easily fall victim to tobacco, alcohol and drugs.

Children show awareness of the risks associated with tobacco, alcohol and drugs, and their attitude is one of dismissal.

Another problem identified by the respondents was education, ranked as the third most critical issue for children in Bulgaria - 39%, and the second for children worldwide - 42%.

Most often, this problem is referred to as “poor education”. Children recognise the need to update the learning content and the methods of teaching, and show a preference for interactive training and introduction of new technologies in the learning process.

They want to acquire practically-oriented knowledge and look for opportunities to gain experience:

“I don’t like how we’re never going to need 50% of what we learn, and we never study about many important things in life that we might need.” (girl, age 14-15, small town)

The statements below are indicative of what children’s expectations look like:

“… we need to start learning more modern things.” (boy, age 18, big city).

“I wish we used more interesting ways to learn in school, and had more fun. They shouldn’t take up all of our time with lessons; they should show us how it is in real life.” (girl, age 18, big city)

Other educational issues include conflicting relationships between teachers and students, and the use of educational methods perceived as outdated. Further mention was made of disciplinary methods, which can even resort to violence.

The ideas Bulgarian children have of global educational issues are quite contrasting.

A clear distinction is made between children “in Africa” and those “in the West”.

Africa and war-torn countries are perceived as places of absolute poverty, where children die of hunger and thirst, and have no clothes, homes or schools. Deadly diseases like Ebola and AIDS, as well as the lack of medical staff were often brought up with regard to Africa.
The respondents believe that the access to education is a serious problem for children worldwide, and that many of their peers have no chance of ever going to school. The underlying reasons identified are quite different: in poorer countries children have to work to help their families, whereas in other countries education is not free, which is a problem for many families; elsewhere, there are military conflicts etc.

Where the problems concerning children “in Africa” are mostly associated with the lack of normal living conditions, those concerning children “in the West” are typically rooted in “oversaturation”.

“The West” was used to refer to Western European countries and the USA, where children experience similar problems - obesity, poor health, disease – as a result of oversaturation and the lack of exercise and movement.

Americans, for example, eat “nasty food, don’t exercise, and are fat”, and they are not fully free.

“Their mindset is too “grey” and uncreative. They are not aware of the surrounding world. They spend too much time eating and too little - exercising.” (girl, age 16-17, small town)

Bulgarian children said of their Western peers that they: are much better-off; do not need to work as hard to secure a good job; are not interested in anyone other than themselves; only crave material possessions; are dismissive of everyone else.

“… discrimination, social status, i.e. as educated as they might be, they’ll never consider the others their equals. The psychological attack of the other.” (boy, age 18, big city)

The problems experienced by children “in the West” were described as “superficial”: “all they think about is make-up, discos and celebs.” 1% of the respondents even indicated that children worldwide have no problems.

Violence was ranked the forth most serious problem facing children. 38% of the respondents referred to it as a local issue, and 35% - as a global problem.
Violence is a problem primarily for children from smaller towns. Girls are particularly sensitive to domestic or school violence, while boys feel very negative towards violence among children.

Violence can be manifested quite differently: primarily as bullying, humiliation and insult, but also as sexual harassment and physical violence. As far as Bulgaria is concerned, one in four children (around 25%) specifically referred to the violence among school children.

**Aggression**, which is also associated with violence, was similarly mentioned as a problem. It is mostly manifested as verbal aggression, both among children and between children and adults, children and teachers, and children and parents.

Cases of aggression manifested as physical violence among children or towards children were also mentioned.

Not surprisingly, the request “**We would be grateful if you could share with us something that you find personally important and would like the others to know**” produced responses along the lines of:

“we should ‘understand each other’, ‘help each other’, ‘support each other’; we shouldn’t ‘fight’; we should ‘put an end to the violent ways of seniors towards juniors’.” (boy, age 14-15, village)

“I don’t want children in Bulgaria to have so much aggression inside and to be so over-assertive! At the end of the day, we all have rights, no?” (boy, age 16-17, big city)

“If only children would be better and would stop fighting.” (boy, age 10-11, small town)

During the direct consultations, children living in Roma communities often mentioned experiencing violence as a means of psychological pressure against them, which, along with the aggression among their peers, they find particularly difficult to deal with.

Their message, therefore, was: “don’t beat children; adults, you should listen to them first before you do anything; don’t tell them off; don’t hit them.” (direct consultation with Roma children living in Roma communities, Sofia)
Bulgarian children find that globally aggression is manifested in a different way and is most often associated with war. The respondents recognise current warfare hotspots, such as Afghanistan and Syria, or are aware of the local population and children being involved in military action.

*Figure 8: Problems of children*

The outlined major problems of Bulgarian children should be given proper consideration in the revision of the National Strategy for the Child 2008-2018. Appropriate solutions need to be sought to: curb children poverty and reduce all forms of violence, including verbal aggression among and against children; modernise teaching methods; limit the access to drugs, alcohol and tobacco.
CHILDREN AND SCHOOL

Nearly all respondents attend school, and 99% spend at least half of their day in school.

Home-taught children or children not attending school account for less than 1%.

A total of 77 respondents claimed not to attend school. Their overall reaction to the questionnaire was highly controversial, as a result of which it is difficult to interpret their behaviour.

The majority of the respondents attending school perceive it as an institution rather than a place for fun and games.

The study further captured a high degree of criticism and dissatisfaction with educational institutions.

Figure 9: Willingness to attend school

The willingness to attend school is one of the tools making it possible to measure the overall satisfaction with the educational process.
Just under a half of the respondents (47%) said that they like going to school. Almost as many are dissatisfied as going to school does not always make them feel good.

The older children get, the more pronounced their critical attitude towards school tends to become. Boys, children over 14, children living in the capital, and children living in bigger cities are more critical of school compared with children aged 7-10, and children living in villages.

The data indicate that there is a direct connection between the “Do you like going to school?” indicator and the desire to emigrate.

Over one half of the children saying they want to continue to live in their current place of residence like their school. On the other hand, more than half of those stating a desire to live abroad only like their school to some extent and in some ways.

This group contained the highest share of children disliking school. (Table 1)

Table 1. Satisfaction with going to school and the desire to emigrate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where do most want to live?</th>
<th>Do you like going to school?</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not always, Depends on the day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depends on the day</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the same place where I live now</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In another town in Bulgaria</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
<td>45.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abroad</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children’s motivation to go to school is associated with the desire to have a better life and a better future, which is the leading factor for over two-thirds of the respondents (71%) in the survey (Figure 10).

The second and third most important motivating factors are the desires to learn new things (45%), and to acquire a profession (42%).
About one-third of the children share the desire to spend time with their peers in school and the belief that going to school is an obligation.

Only one-tenth admit that they go to school because they enjoy it.

Going to school is perceived as entitlement in only 8% of the cases, and as obligation – in 28%. Such findings can be interpreted in different ways: on the one hand, the rather small share of the children who consider going to school an entitlement may be associated with the fact that schools in Bulgaria are accessible to everyone, and that the entitlement to schooling is therefore guaranteed. On the other hand, however, it can be assumed that most of the children are not aware of the concept of entitlement.

*Figure 10: Motivation to go to school*

Analysing the data reveals that children have developed a stable notion of the school as a place that opens up opportunities for future development.

Regardless of whether they enjoy going to school or not, children realise that their future depends on attending school and taking an active part in the learning process.

The level of satisfaction derived from attending school impacts the preference for employment in Bulgaria or abroad.

**What is liked and what is disliked about school?**

The thing children love the most about going to school is that there they can spend time with their classmates and friends and learn new things, as stated by more than one half of the respondents. The share of those indicating extracurricular activities, classes and teachers as most enjoyable aspects is significantly lower (between 15% and 20%).
The underlying factors for the negative attitude towards school include relationships between students (55%), followed by, with a lag of nearly 10%, the relationship between students and teachers (42%).

Each fourth child admitted to disliking learning (26%) and the classroom environment or sports facilities (25%), which are in need of improvement.

Note: The total exceeds 100% as more than one reply was provided.
The severe mistrust towards the student-student and student-teacher relationships is suggestive of the need to analyse the factors leading to the formation of these relationships, incl. conflicts between the participants in the learning process and targeted efforts to improve the atmosphere in school, in much greater detail.

**What needs to change to make the school more attractive?**

Above all, children would prefer teaching to become more interesting and learning to be more practically-oriented and useful.

*Figure 13: Willingness to visit school*

Children’s ideas about how to make teaching more interesting

17% of the children find school particularly important and recommend bringing the educational system up to date with modern developments so as to ensure professional growth and competitive advantages over their peers abroad.

Children want textbooks to be more clearly written and relevant to their interests, practically-oriented and supportive of their future careers.

“I want the entire school system to change, and I want better teachers. Modern works such as The Lord of the Rings, Hobbit, and Harry Potter should be studied.” (boy, age 18, small town)
“I want to learn things that I’ll use in real life. Most lessons are difficult and shouldn’t be taught …” (boy, age 14-15, small town)

“Textbooks should be easy to understand and should include interesting material …” (girl, age 12-13, small town)

After the completion of a certain grade, children expect to be able to freely choose what subjects to study and to have a wider choice of extracurricular activities.

“I think that some subjects are useless, and it’d be better if we could split into groups so each student could choose 5 or 6 subjects that are important for the future, and which they are good at and want to study.” (girl, age 16-17, small town)

The respondents recommended introducing more advanced technologies in schools and improving school facilities, especially sports facilities such as gyms and playing fields. They further wish that more trips could be organised, more sport activities offered, incl. optional sports activities and championships.

“I want to say what I think of the Bulgarian educational system – namely, that European children don’t study all subjects in such detail. They only do so for subjects that they want to use in their future professions. I wish that more money could be given for sport. For example, cycle lanes and playing fields.” (boy, age 12-13, small town)

“The things in school should change a lot. If things could be done so as to attract children (for example, technology), it would be different.” (girl, age 18, village)

Children are also critical of their teachers and would expect a friendlier, less patronising and more encouraging attitude. They would also like to have younger teachers and would prefer to see more modern methods of teaching the learning content. They are similarly sensitive to the favouritism given to certain students.

“... they should be nicer and not tell children off for each mistake; children should be teaching children.” (direct consultation, children with SEN)
“I want teachers to be more particular about their teaching methods, and not to require students to study or pay attention in class, but to show why it must be so. The same goes for parents. They praise us for our good marks and behaviour in school, without paying much attention to how we feel about these.” (boy, age 16-17, small town)

“Teachers should allow children to have a more active role in class; they shouldn’t tell them off for not knowing their lessons; they should allow children to stand up and walk around rather than have them sit all the time; they shouldn’t make us sit at desks arranged in a particular way.” (direct consultation, Roma children)

“They tell us off a lot, and they beat us and insult us!”

“Teachers are very strict; there should be no violence towards students, it just isn’t right!” (direct consultation, children from social institutions)

The respondents further voiced opinions on the format and organisation of the learning process: they want morning shift classes to start later (8:00 to 8:30 am); they would prefer longer breaks between classes than the current five minutes; student scholarships should be raised.

“There shouldn’t be seven or eight classes per day because it is very tiring, and in such classes students are already very tired and can’t learn anything! These classes are useless, and I think that instead of seven or eight, classes such as music, arts and information technologies, in which we don’t learn anything either way and which are simply a waste of time and so we come back home quite late, should be dropped! It’s pointless to study complex systems and programmes in Informatics and IT. These is useless stuff that can only come handy in very few jobs, and so it should be studied in higher schools, in universities. I think we should start classes later, because early in the morning everyone is still sleepy and we learn anything in our first class of the day. Sometimes, in winter, to get to school on time, you must get up very early in the morning and walk in dark and dimly lit streets, and this is very dangerous. Last but not least, I believe that Bulgarian schools should focus more on Bulgarian rather than foreign history; what’s more, we should be learning Bulgarian History only!!!” (girl, age 14-15, small town)
“I think there should be more breaks for students. There should be fewer classes and teachers shouldn’t be so strict. Classes should start at 8:00, and not 7:30, so students can get enough sleep.” (boy, age 14-15, small town)

During the direct consultations with children from residential social care institutions, several groups of problems were identified: unreasonable severity of teachers; use of disciplinary measures verging on violence; violence between children. Children also mentioned cases of teacher violence and recommended that teachers should not interfere in the relations between students.

Children with special educational needs and children from Roma communities also mentioned that teachers can be rude and authoritative.

Children expect to be given more support, cooperation, attention and time by their teachers. They further want the teachers to help them adapt to the code of conduct in the classroom and in the school, and specifically wish to be instructed and shown how to behave in class.

The respondents also said that teachers should be patient and should encourage participation in class, regardless of whether the answers they get are right or wrong.

Children with special educational needs want “to learn how to stay silent and focused during lessons and how to help each other.” (direct consultation, children with special educational needs)

The respondents were quite critical of teachers’ punctuality and behaviour in class:

“Teachers shouldn’t be late nor disappear from class.”
(direct consultation, children with special educational needs)

“In so-called “Roma schools”, teachers are racist and insult and hit the students the whole time. They make Roma and Bulgarian children hate each other. I don’t want to blame them for how they are, but there definitely needs to be someone to look after their mental and emotional health. A teacher with 39 years of experience has surely built a lot of frustration, which is let out onto the students; it shouldn’t be like that. I study in one such school, and I’ve had enough of teachers calling Roma children crazy and dull, or saying that they are only good for digging in bins. Younger students (grades 1-4) start to copy this attitude from the teachers, and it all gets out of control.” (girl, age 18, small town)
Poverty and inequality issues have an immediate impact on the learning process and on school life.

Some children perceive their failure as a consequence of their low economic status or of their teachers’ favouritism of children with a higher economic status.

This most strongly concerns Roma children:

“Many often get hurt and offended because of looks or money; that’s why they misbehave - if we had uniforms, things would be different.” (direct consultation, Roma children)

“Weaker students are always scorned by smarter students for not doing well enough.” (direct consultation, Roma children)

“It sucks that teachers have pets among students; it sucks that some often get away because their parents are rich; it sucks that you can get punished without being heard ...” (boy, age 14-15, Sofia)
CHILDREN AND FREE TIME

All children have the right to rest, play, and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.

The feeling that one can have command of one’s life and do what one wants is an essential element of children’s assessments about life.

The results of the survey show that over 80% of the respondents have free time for things they are interested in outside school.

The survey used the question “Do you have enough free time for ...?” and a list of different types of activities to capture children’s time availability and the things they love to do in their free time.

89% of the respondents have time to browse the Internet, and 86% and 85% respectively – to go out with friends and to spend with their families. These are the highest ranked free time activities in the survey.

As children grow up, however, they find it more and more difficult to find time to go out with their friends. The data show that girls aged 16-18 who study at foreign language schools in the capital and in big cities do not have enough time to spend with friends. This is not the case with younger children, as well as with children, incl. older ones, living in smaller towns and villages.

81% of the respondents, the majority of whom are children under 13 and boys, especially from smaller towns and villages, have time to play computer and board games etc. Computer games tend to gradually lose their appeal after age 14, when they become replaced by Internet activities.

77% of the children have time for sport and 76% - for watching TV.

The time dedicated to books is most scarce and is enjoyed by 67% of the children.
**Figure 14: Free time for…**

Q.21. Do you have enough free time for these activities...?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>have fun (computer games, board games etc.)</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go out with friends</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do sport</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watch TV</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spend time with my family</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>read</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Internet</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What do children most like to do in their free time?**

Figure 15 shows the 10 most popular activities as ranked by the respondents.

**Figure 15: Preferred free time activities**

Q.22. What do you most like to do in your free time?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>be with friends or...</td>
<td>30,4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do sport</td>
<td>20,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>read</td>
<td>9,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>play computer games</td>
<td>8,4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have fun or play</td>
<td>6,4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>draw</td>
<td>4,9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listen to music</td>
<td>4,5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go for a walk</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sleep or rest</td>
<td>3,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watch TV</td>
<td>3,4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>browse the Internet</td>
<td>5,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dance</td>
<td>2,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>19,5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The total exceeds 100% as more than one reply was provided.
The preferred activity of most children is going out with friends and every fifth child likes to do sport.

Free time activities are diverse and are dominated by group activities, favoured in 60% of replies. The remaining activities are more independent and individual, but they tend to gain on significance as children get older.

The more children grow up, the less interest they show in getting together with their peers.

The size of the place of residence also affects the type of activities practised: in smaller towns and villages most children know each other, study in the same school, and are quite close, which justifies the prevalence of group activities.

Children from smaller towns and villages spend more time outdoors and with friends, while children from the city tend to favour the Internet and indoor activities.

Individual activities are much more common among city children, and particularly girls show a tendency to become interested in them from an earlier age.
CHILDREN AND FAMILY

Just over one half the children (55%) live in a family of four (two parents and two children), which, according to the data collected, is the most common model of co-habitation.

Over 100 children indicated that they live only with a sibling or with friends.

Every tenth child (12%) lives with just the two parents but no brothers or sisters (a family of three).

The families of 9% of the participants consist of three children and two parents.

Families of four, five or more members (a large or extended family living together) are more common in smaller settlements. In big cities and in the capital, the number of family members tends to be smaller.

Single-parent families are more common in bigger cities and in the capital. Children living with a single parent or with a single parent and another family member account for 11% of the families. Among these, 5% consist of a single parent and two children, 4% - of a single parent and one child, and 1.5% - of three and more children.

With the help of a series of questions, the survey tried to identify whether children do any work to support their families.

Asked “Do you help earn money for the family?”, 6% replied affirmatively. The majority are children between 13 and 17, mostly from smaller towns and villages, where the number of working boys is twice that of girls.

Contributing to the family budget mostly takes the form of helping with the livelihood of the family – farming, livestock breeding and “tending the family garden”.
Asked whether they want to earn pocket money, 38% of the respondents expressed a clear desire to do so most of the time, and 40% - only during school holidays, i.e. over two-thirds would be happy to earn their own money.

4% of the children do not want to work but recognise the need to support themselves and their families (“I don’t want to work for pocket money, but I have to.”)

Approximately one percent of the respondents admitted to working against their will.

**Communication in the family**

The children indicated that they get on well with and/or take care of the people with whom they live. They mentioned that their parents are interested in them and in their school affairs, and that they listen to them when they have problems.

The survey revealed that positive communication exists in the families of 80-90% of the respondents. Two-thirds (75%) of the respondents stated that adults spend time with them when asked to.

Listening to children talk about their problems, however, does not always involve the support or assistance of parents/adult family members, as was explained by 15% of the children.
Compared with the overall high level of satisfaction with the communication in the family expressed by the children, 117 (c. 5%) responded negatively to all questions related to communication.

They believe that their parents are not interested in them, do not take the time to listen to them or support them, and they do not get on well with each other.

The above opinion is most common among girls aged 16 to 17 coming from small towns. Most of them live with a single parent or grandparent(s), or reside in homes for children deprived of parental care.

Such children feel rejected and have a negative attitude to both their parents and their friends (of whom they only have few or none), as well as to school (20% dislike school). 56% of the children in this group want to live abroad.

The responses given by these children to each of the thematic blocks of the survey exhibit a sense of rejection and negativism, where drugs and poverty resurface as the major problems.
Since the survey sample is rather small, the views expressed by this group cannot be fully considered as representative conclusions. Yet, any policy planning relevant to this group should take into account their profile specifics - sex, age, place of residence, family environment, as well as their significantly higher vulnerability status.

Two further groups of children discovered to be in need of public support based on the results of the survey are described below.

**Children raised in families consisting of single-parents, grandparents or more distant relatives**

Such children accounted for approximately 16% of the sample population.

Whether the perception of the world is affected by the family model is the subject of numerous scientific studies in the field of psychology, family planning and sociology. The results of the present study show a clear connection between certain features of family models and children’s perception of the world, their overall satisfaction and their assessment of their lifestyle. The conclusions below are indicative of several correlations:

- Children of single parents who live with their grandparents or with other distant relatives contribute to the family budget less often, although they are often willing to do so.

- The share of children who confide health- or school-related issues to their parents or to another adult is significantly lower among single-parented children, compared to children with two parents, who prefer to share their problems with another adult or with their friends. (Table 2)
Table 2: “Who do you most often talk to when you have questions about your health?” – based on family model (breakdown by percent, to be read horizontally)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health</th>
<th>With my parents</th>
<th>With a sibling</th>
<th>With an adult I can trust</th>
<th>With a teacher</th>
<th>With a friend</th>
<th>Online</th>
<th>I don't talk to anyone</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>with both parents</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with a grandparent only</td>
<td>75.3%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with a single parent</td>
<td>76.8%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with a sibling only</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with a single parent and another adult</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I live alone/in an institution</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I live with another distant relative</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with friends</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no answer</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80.2%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children living in single-parent families admitted to having many friends less often than children living with both parents.

4.7% of single-parented children said that they have no friends, whereas in families with two parents the share of such children is just 1.6%.

43% of single-parented children indicated that they have only a few friends; the same category grows to 48% among children living with both parents.

Single-parented children are more prone to introspection. They would prefer to work in areas that support other people, such as psychology, social work and veterinary medicine. The main things that they would like to change include reduction of violence and the learning format in school.

On average, 55% of the children living with a single parent, only with a grandparent or with another more distant relative definitely want to live abroad, and almost as many dislike their school.

Considering the above-mentioned characteristics of single-parented children, such as less confidence in the family, limited interaction with peers, stronger urge to live abroad,
and higher dissatisfaction with school, we might conclude that the overall satisfaction experienced by such children is lower compared to that of other children. Therefore, the needs of such children should be analysed in detail, and support measures should be developed.

How do children imagine parenthood?

“To be a good parent, you must learn to say “YES” more often; you must have confidence in children; you must listen more and spend more time with your child; you must make it more comfortable for your child and you must go on holiday together, but you mustn’t give too many tasks; you must help the child have more friends; you must compromise; you mustn’t treat the two children differently. Don’t hit them! Don’t pull their hair! Don’t make them work! Don’t make them hate you! Don’t abuse them with words! Bring them up properly! Don’t leave them alone and don’t underestimate them, be kind to them, and give them hugs and kisses.” (direct consultation, Roma children)

“They should provide food, water and home to their children. They should never leave them alone or in an institution! Give them love, give them a hug and a kiss, talk to them and listen to them, go for walks together. Don’t hit them, don’t push them, don’t leave them home alone. Never pull their hair!” (direct consultation, children with special educational needs)

“Adults should be patient when we make mistakes, because no one is faultless. They should stop beating their children when they’ve done something bad.” (boy, age 12-13, small town)

Institutionalised children

The quantitative study involved 68 children residing in institutions (homes for children deprived of parental care): 46 girls (68%) and 22 boys (32%). The direct consultations involved 8 such children. Nearly 80% of the opinions in the survey were provided by children over 13.
The most crucial problem of such children is poverty, followed by drug issues, aggression, and poor education. They are worried whether they will be able to find a job and develop professionally in Bulgaria.

“They want to have a job when they finish school.” (girl, age 18, village)

The most attractive jobs for children from social institutions are in the arts and hospitality industries, as well as in law, medicine, sport and teaching.

The eight children from residential homes included in the direct consultations protested against the violence and corrective methods in their schools.

They were also the sole respondents to use the survey to voice their appeal for improved hygiene and basic living conditions in the homes where they live:

“... the bathrooms should be repaired (there’s no hot water, toilet tissue or soap), as well as the back yard and the gym (the ceiling is going to fall), and the corridors are dirty.”
(direct consultation with children from social institutions)
CHILDREN AND COMMUNICATION

Children try to find answers to questions they are concerned about by using different data sources or by talking to their peers or to adults.

The survey “My Voice Matters” tried to find out what kind of people children are prepared to confide in about issues related to health, love and sex.

Generally, children are open to share information, talk and actively seek answers to issues that are of interest to them, and, as the survey discovered, they are ready to discuss all three of the above-mentioned topics.

Most children prefer to consult a person they can trust. Around 3% of the respondents indicated that they do not talk to anyone about anything, but seek to resolve their issues alone.

Questions concerning sex are considered more intimate and personal. Therefore, children are less keen to discuss sexual issues, and even online consultations on this subject are quite limited.

Health-related issues are most often discussed with parents (80%), whereas for matters relating to love and sex, children usually tend to turn to friends (52% and 36% respectively).

When children are unable to find an answer to such questions from the people they feel closest to, such as parents or siblings, they turn to their teachers or to another adult they can trust.
In a crisis situation, when children experience problems with a teacher, another adult, a friend or with lessons, they again seek support first and foremost from their parents, and only after that from friends. Only when a problem concerns lessons are parents and teachers seen as more or less equal counsellors.
The younger children are, the more they rely on their parents in all situations.

As they grow up, however, the sources of information tend to become more diverse. In the case of older children, the Internet gains a lot of significance.

The data of the survey indicate that gender has an effect on communication: boys tend to challenge authority or resolve conflict face-to-face more often, while girls mainly look for support from their closest family, most often - the parents.

For example, when girls have difficulties with lessons, they tend to seek advice from someone other than their teacher, most often - a friend or the Internet. When the problem concerns a friend or another adult, they prefer to turn to their parents or siblings; and in cases of problems with a teacher, they mainly seek support from their parents.

Boys, on the other hand, said that when they have a problem with a teacher, they would consult him/her directly rather than seek advice from their parents.

Interesting behavioural patterns were also registered with regard to the issue of health.

Children living in villages tend to seek the opinion of their parents, teachers and friends much more often.

Children from Sofia mainly consult their parents and the Internet.

As regards difficulties with lessons, children from smaller towns and villages tend to turn directly to their teachers, while children from bigger cities and the capital tend to rely more on their parents.

Given the fact that children from cities are more critical of school, it can be concluded that there has been a decline in the confidence role of the teachers as an authority.

The results clearly show that in order to feel satisfied and confident, children need extensive close interaction with their peers and with the adults in their inner circle.

Children who live with both parents and have friends feel well in school, want to continue to live in their current places of residence, and consider themselves happy more frequently. This trend is most clearly seen among children between ages 7 and 12.

As children grow up, their criticism and alienation from others tends to increase. Older children living in a big city or in the capital tend to share less information with adults or friends, and their dissatisfaction with relationships with other people tends to grow. This tendency is particularly strong among girls aged 14 and over who live in big cities or in the capital.
CHILDREN AND THE RIGHT TO OPINION

91% of the respondents in “My Voice Matters” declared having awareness of children’s rights. This was confirmed by 89% of the boys and 92% of the girls. (Figure 20)

In the youngest group, ages 7 to 9, 86% said that they have heard of children’s rights, whereas in the group of 18 year-olds the proportion reaches 95%.

The share of the respondents living in villages who gave an affirmative response to this question was relatively smaller (86%).

**Figure 20: General awareness of children’s rights**

Children are also aware of their right to express an opinion and to have it taken into account, and 92% were able to specifically indicate the source of acquiring such information.

The children who admitted to not be aware of such right belong to the youngest age group (7 to 10 year-olds), or are children living in villages or boys.

Children living in single-parent families or living with a grandparent and children from institutions also belong to the above group.
Two-fifths of the children (42%) said that they are aware of the right to express an opinion because they heard about it in their families and/or from people they live with. (Figure 21)

Another quarter (24%) claimed that they learned about this from someone in school (this reply was most common among the group of children aged 7 to 9, as well as among the girls).

Between 7% and 9% of the children indicated another adult as the source of such information. Most often, these are children from homes for children deprived of parental care, single-parent families, or children living only with a sibling.

Children who have never been of the freedom of expression of their opinions accounted for 8% of all respondents, and were mostly boys aged 7 to 10, 14-15 year-olds living in institutions, children from single-parent families, or children living with grandparents or friends.

*Figure 21: Awareness and sources concerning the right to opinion*

![Bar chart showing responses to Q. 30. Have you been told of the right to express your opinion and to have it taken into account?]

Over one half of the respondents admitted to feeling comfortable with the opportunity to freely express their opinion. (Figure 21)
One-third of the respondents said that they express free opinions on certain issues only, and 15% claimed to rarely or never share their thoughts.

Almost one half of the children claiming to always express their position freely identified their family or the adults they live with as the main source of information. The majority of the group (62%) are confident that they can always voice their opinion.

55% of the respondents indicated having learned about the right to freely express their opinion in school. (Table 3)

**Table 3: Exercising the freedom of opinion and opinion-friendly environments (total sample breakdown, to be read vertically)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Can you freely express your opinion on issues that affect you?</th>
<th>Have you been told of the right to express your opinion and to have it taken into account?</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, by my family / the people I live with</td>
<td>Yes, by another adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, always</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only about certain things</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I rarely say what I think</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I never express my opinion</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data in Figure 23 are representative of the extent to which children believe that their expressed opinions are taken into account by adults.

This indicator can be used to measure the degree to which children exercise their right to voice an opinion. It is further indicative of the level of confidence towards the environment and/or of the child’s self-evaluation.

*Figure 23: Respect for the right to opinion*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q. 32. Do adults respect your words / opinion?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes, always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>only about certain things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I rarely say what I think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I never express my opinion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The share of the children who are confident that their opinion is always taken into account totals 38%.

Nearly one half said that sometimes their opinions are respected by adults, and at other times – they are not.

Analysing the data collected under the indicators represented in Figures 22 and 23 ("I always express my opinion and it is always taken into account") shows that one-third of the children (28%) are **fully confident** that they can express their opinion and that it will always be taken into account, i.e. one-third of the respondents are highly confident in themselves and in their environments, and believe that their positions will be respected.

The most favourable environment for the expression of children’s opinions is the family, as was indicated by the responses to the question “*Have you been told of the right to express your opinion and to have it taken into account?*”

20% of all children believe that their parents will always listen to them.
Only 8% of the children, however, are confident that their opinions will be respected in school.

32% of the children believe that their friends will listen to their views. (Table 4)

**Table 4: Exercising the freedom of opinion and opinion-friendly environments (total sample breakdown, to be read vertically)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do adults listen to your words / opinion?</th>
<th>Has anyone told you that you have the right to express your opinion and for your opinion to be taken into account?</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yes, my family / the people I live with</td>
<td>yes, another adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes, always</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>only on some issues</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I rarely say what I think</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I never express my opinion</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The concept of “respect” can be interpreted in different ways and is indicative of the extent of children’s confidence and willingness to share their views and speak freely.

Such confidence was demonstrated by just under one-third of the participants, mainly children having learned about the right to opinion from their parents.

A quarter of the children learned about the freedom of opinion in school. However, few believe that their opinion will be respected there.

Children are most likely to argue and defend their opinion in situations involving other children. (Figure 24)

The share of children who stand up to their parents when there is a clash of opinions is 33%. In the case of clash with a teacher, 22% show readiness to assert their opinion in school.
Almost a quarter of the respondents said that they would never argue or object to a teacher.

The share of children admitting that they rarely or never say what they think in response to all questions in the opinion block is approximately 15%.

This is the most vulnerable and least supported group in terms of the expression of a personal opinion.

The children belonging to the above group are mostly 14-15 year-olds, children living in villages, children from single-parent families or children living with grandparents only, of whom a large part are residents in homes for children deprived of parental care.

*Figure 24: Attitudes towards the expression of the right to opinion*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q. 33. When you disagree with something, do you object / argue with...?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>parents</strong>&lt;br&gt;yes, always: 33%&lt;br&gt;only about certain things: 35%&lt;br&gt;rarely: 20%&lt;br&gt;never: 9%&lt;br&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>teachers</strong>&lt;br&gt;yes, always: 22%&lt;br&gt;only about certain things: 27%&lt;br&gt;rarely: 28%&lt;br&gt;never: 23%&lt;br&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>other children</strong>&lt;br&gt;yes, always: 47%&lt;br&gt;only about certain things: 33%&lt;br&gt;rarely: 15%&lt;br&gt;never: 5%&lt;br&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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CHILDREN AND SOLIDARITY

Children show sensitivity to the subject of other children being treated differently.

This reaction was captured through the question “Do you believe that there are children who receive different treatment?”

Perceptions of such cases are not always identical.

For example, 46% of the respondents believe that children with disabilities receive better treatment compared to other children.

The largest part said that refugee children and children from worse-off families receive poorer treatment (62% and 54% respectively).

Figure 25: Groups of children subject to different treatment

The majority of the respondents (93%) declared a willingness to support children in need of help. The attitude of peer support is more pronounced among girls, younger children, children living outside Sofia, and children living in families with parents and siblings.

The desire to support other children is particularly strong, as can be seen from the opinion below:
“Well, I feel bad when I walk in the street and I see many poor people. I feel sorry for them. I want to go home and grab some of my own clothes to give them to wear.” (girl, age 10-11, village)

Increasing the satisfaction of learning and the interest in the lives of other children could enhance the willingness for peer support and cooperation. Over one half of the children willing to support other children are interested in the lives of their peers in the country, while one-fifth do not wish to take part in such activities.

The tendency for peer cooperation is more strongly pronounced among children who enjoy going to school and whose need to receive new information is satisfied.

Children who are interested in the lives of other children also show a strong sense of compassion towards their peers from minority groups, children from poorer families (over 60%), and children of refugees (over 50%).

 Compassion towards other children tends to increase as children grow up, and is strongest among 18 year-olds and children living in bigger cities, particularly in Sofia.

Although they are willing to help their needy peers, children quite often do not know what they can do in such circumstances.

Children are mostly interested in the lives of their peers in Bulgaria. Only 6% are interested in the lives of children in other countries. (Figure 26)

The share of the respondents directly denying any interest in the lives of others is relatively big (about one-third of all participants).

The countries that children find the most exciting are the UK, Germany and the USA, probably because of the perceptions they have of the lifestyle of their peers there. Africa and developing countries were mentioned by only about 1% of the respondents. At the time of the survey, children showed greatest interest in the lives of refugee children and of children from poorer families.
Figure 26: Interest in the lives of other children and young people

Q. 35. Are you interested in how other children and young people live?

- No: 31%
- Yes, in other towns and villages in Bulgaria: 50%
- Yes, in other countries: 6%

N = 6158
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

A total of 6,297 children took part in the online survey and direct consultations held under the campaign “My Voice Matters”. 6,158 opinions were registered through the online survey and 139 children were involved in the direct consultations.

The majority of the opinions collected were expressed by children over 12 and children from smaller settlements, with girls having a slight domination over boys. The survey appeared to be less easily accessible or less attractive to boys and younger children (aged between 7 and 11, and attending grades one to four), as well as to children from Sofia.

Nearly 99% of all participants appear to attend school. The statistic significance of the group of children having dropped out or not in attendance was negligible to justify any interpretation of their opinions. Analysing their views will require the conduction of a different type of study.

The data collected in the online survey show that on average 82% of the respondents live in families with both parents. Just under one-fifth, or 18%, of the participants live in families outside the two-parent model; however, in Sofia, this percentage reaches 25%. This group is further broken down into children living in single-parent families or with a grandparent, children living in mixed forms of co-habitation with one parent and another adult, and children living in families with a wider range of relationships. According to the data, the type of family model has an effect on children’s attitudes towards peer communication, career development, and school and overall satisfaction.

As regards their futures, the majority of children envisage starting a family of their own and having the desired occupation. They show interest in jobs requiring good and solid training and high qualifications, which more often than not fall into the category of liberal professions. According to the data, children are keen and motivated to become successful in their personal and professional lives.
Two-thirds of the children expressed a desire to leave their current place of residence in favour of opportunities for professional and personal growth in another city or in a foreign country. This attitude can be interpreted in different ways: looking for a new place to live and work is a consequence, as well as an indicator, of the lack of opportunities for development in the current place of residence. This finding should be taken into account in the update of the National Strategy for the Child 2008-2018.

The responses of the participants outline four main problem areas for children in Bulgaria. The first is poverty, which rather than as deprivation of basics, such as food and water, is mostly construed in terms of status, and therefore inequality, due to differences in the financial circumstances of the family, or to the impossibility of children to have possessions considered as values at their age. Poverty is also expressed in the need for their parents to work all the time, or to be absent because of doing several jobs or working in another country. For children, this is a painful experience, which is reflected onto their relationships with other children.

The second major problem is the access to tobacco, drugs and alcohol. Children are seriously worried about such issues as, on the one hand, they realise the potential health consequences of becoming addicted to any of the above, and, on the other, they are aware that tobacco, alcohol and drugs are easily available and greatly tempting. Reasons like these make children feel unsafe and vulnerable.

The third most acute problem is education. “Poor education” is commonly understood as a lack of practical relevance and a gap between learning content and real life, as well as an inability on behalf of schools to prepare children for their future professional growth. Children’s most common recommendations and requests are associated with the need for more relevant knowledge, the opportunity to gain practical skills and experience, the use of interactive teaching methods, and the introduction of new technologies in education.

Verbal abuse, harassment, physical violence and aggression among children and between children and adults constitute the fourth major problem arising from the survey. Verbal and physical abuse is particularly strong among Roma children and children residing in social institutions. The reasons for the increased sensitivity to verbal abuse and aggression in relationships are not discussed in this study.
99% of respondents appear to attend school. One half of them generally enjoy schooling, while the others only enjoy it sometimes. Nearly 17% of the children made direct recommendations for the improvement of their school lives. In addition to the need to simplify the learning content and to make it more practical, most children believe that classes should start later. Their requests include new methods of instruction, a higher number of young teachers, ability to choose among school subjects, and a change of the optional subjects scheme, including a change in the method of selection to match students’ interests. The direct consultations with children residing in social institutions revealed problems with the living conditions of the buildings and basic hygiene.

Support from parents and friends appears to be crucial for children. When they experience problems associated with their health, with a teacher or with another adult, children tend to seek advice mostly from their parents, whereas questions of a more intimate nature are generally shared with friends. The sense of being supported by their parents and friends is a key factor for children’s contentment and satisfaction. 24% think that “parents don’t always spend time with me when I ask”, and therefore wish to be given more time by their parents.

According to the data, nearly one-third (28%) of the children are fully confident that they can express their opinion, and that it will always be taken into account. The most favourable environment for voicing a personal opinion is the family, and 20% of the children believe that their parents will always hear them. As regards school, only 8% of the children believe that their voice will be heard if expressed in class.

The survey found that the support and interaction of friends and parents is a key part of children’s lives. The promotion of child participation and the creation of a supportive environment should be embraced and developed by all people working with children, and should become one of the main goals of the National Strategy for the Child.
Hello, we are the UNCEF team and we want to hear your voice!

Do you know that in Bulgaria there is a National Strategy for the Child? This is an important document seeking to help the government make the lives of children in own country better. If you share with us your views on important for you issues, you will help to improve the strategy and this will be useful for both you and your friends and for the thousands of other children you don’t even know.

Thank you!

* This questionnaire is intended only for children and young people aged UP TO 18!
Q1 You are?
- boy
- girl

Q.2. How old are you?
- 7-9
- 10-11
- 12-13
- 14-15
- 16-17
- 18

Q.3. Where do you live?
- village
- small town
- big city
- the capital

Q.4. Where do you most want to live?
- where I live now
- in another town in Bulgaria
- abroad

Q.5. What do you want to do for a living?

Q.9. What type of school do you attend?
- Primary School
- Secondary General Education School
- Private Primary School
- High school - foreign languages
- High school - science/maths
- Vocational technical school
- Other type
- Home-schooled
- I don't go to school
Q. 10. Do you like going to school?
- yes
- not always, depending on the day
- no

Q. 11. I go to school to.
- ... have a better future
- ... learn new things
- ... have a profession
- ... see other children
- ... because I have to (it is my obligation)
- ... because I enjoy it
- ... because I’m entitled to it

Q. 12. What DO you like about school?
- learning new things
- teachers
- spending time with classmates/friends
- classes
- arts / music / sport classes
- extracurricular activities
- other (specify) .............................................................

1. What DON’T you like about school?
- student-teacher relationship
- student-student relationship
- environment: school building / classroom / sports facilities
- learning: textbooks / classes / extracurricular activities
- other (specify)).............................................................

Q. 14. What should change in your school
- student-teacher relationship
- renovation of classrooms / toilets / gym / playing field
- learning should be more useful
- teaching should be more interesting
- other (specify).............................................................
Q. 19. Who do you most often talk to if you have questions about:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>my parents</th>
<th>a sibling</th>
<th>an adult I can trust</th>
<th>a teacher</th>
<th>a friend</th>
<th>the Internet</th>
<th>I don’t talk to anyone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q. 20. Who would you ask for advice if you have a problem with …?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>my parents</th>
<th>a sibling</th>
<th>an adult I can trust</th>
<th>a teacher</th>
<th>a friend</th>
<th>the Internet</th>
<th>I don’t talk to anyone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a friend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lessons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>another adult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q. 21. Do you have enough free time for these activities …?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>I have time</th>
<th>I don’t have time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to have fun (computer games, board games etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to go out with friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to do sport</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to watch TV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to spend time with your family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to read</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to use the Internet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q. 22. What do you most like to do in your free time?

............................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................
Q.23. Who do you live with?
- with my parents and siblings
- with my grandparents
- with one parent
- only with a sibling
- others (specify) ..........................................

Q.25 Which of the following is true of you and your parents/the people you live with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>they spend time with me whenever I ask</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they are interested in how I feel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they are interested in what / how I do at school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they listen to me when I have a problem and they support me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they listen to me when I have a problem but they don't support me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they support me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get on well with my parents / the people I live with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q.27. Do you contribute to the family budget?
- yes, most of the time
- from time to time
- no

Q.29. Have you heard of children’s rights?
- Yes
- NO

Q.30. Have you been told of the right to express your opinion and to have it taken into account?
- yes, by my family / the people I live with
- yes, by another adult
- yes, at school
- yes, by my friends
- yes, I learned from the Internet / TV
- no, I haven’t
Q. 31. Can you freely express your opinion about things that affect you?
- yes, always
- only about certain things
- I rarely say what I think
- I never express my opinion

Q. 32. Do adults respect your words / opinion?
- yes, always
- only about certain things
- I rarely say what I think
- I never express my opinion

Q. 33. When you disagree with something, do you object / argue with …

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>yes, always</th>
<th>only about certain things</th>
<th>rarely</th>
<th>never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other adults</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q. 34. Do you believe that there are groups of children who receive different treatment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>yes, poorer treatment</th>
<th>yes, better treatment</th>
<th>no, the same treatment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>children with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children from minority groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children from poor families</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q. 35. Are you interested in how other children and young people live?
- yes, in other towns and villages in Bulgaria
- yes, in other countries. Please, specify: ....................
- no

Q. 36. Do you want to support children who need help?
- yes
- no

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Annex 2

Summary of Recommendations by Child Participants in the National Children’s Forum
My Voice Matters Conducted as Consultation with Children for Updating the National Strategy for the Child 2008 – 2018

The National Children’s Forum My Voice Matters was conducted in the period 22 to 24 April 2015 and a total of 30 children participated in it, 26 of whom had previously participated in the focus groups while the remaining ones were child representatives of children’s and youth structures.

Child participants in National Children’s Forum My Voice Matters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Number.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Children from small settlements (regions of Montana, Blagoevgrad and Sliven) | 5  
| 5  
| 5 |
| Child users of social services (Pazardzhik) | 3 |
| Children from the Bulgarian Youth Red Cross (BYRC) | 3 |
| Children with disabilities (Kazanluk) | 3 |
| Children of Roma origin | 4 |
| The Megaphone Group, National Network for Children | 2 |
| Children’s Council at the State Agency for Child Protection (SACP) | 3 |
| Total number of children | 30 |

During the two-day forum child participants were presented with selected information and data from the earlier stages. What was shared with the children covered six thematic areas– the Children who completed the Questionnaire, Leisure Time and Sharing/ Seeking Help, Education and School, Family and Family Environment, Children’s Views, Solidarity (Children around the World). Children had the chance to select one of the six previously considered areas which they found of particular interest and this was how six working groups of young experts were set up.
Each group was provided with selected summary information and the comments by child respondents to the questionnaire under their preferred thematic area (presented below by means of a series of pictures). In completing a series of activities the children were asked to use their specific expertise on child-related topics and issues, their impressions as representatives of different regions and groups of children in order to analyse the information they were provided with and come up with their proposals for change that could make a qualitative and positive difference to the life of Bulgarian children in these spheres of their life.

The proposals they were to come up with were to meet the following requirements:

- Select three proposals under each area to be acted on as soon as possible;
- These should have the potential for wide-scope application (nationally, throughout Bulgaria) and should concern all children;
- The proposed solutions should address specific issues from the ones presented;
- They are to include actions and measures that most children are likely to like as a response to the specific problem.

**Recommendations and proposals by child participants in the National Children’s Forum My Voice Matters**

All proposals and measures for action proposed by child participants at the meeting, as listed below, are the outcome of their work in the children’s expert groups and meet the above listed four criteria for finding timely, adequate, children-consulted and viable solutions to problems they find important under each thematic area.

All shared proposed solutions should be regarded as solutions child participants have accepted and included as adequate and applicable nationally across all groups of children in Bulgaria.
**“Children in Bulgaria” Thematic Area**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who were the child participants?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6531 children have completed the online questionnaire. 139 children participated in focus groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 4 out of 10 children were boys and 6 out of 10 children were girls.
- The majority of children were aged 14 to 15 years – 3 out of 10.
- The smallest proportion of children were aged 7 to 9 years – less than 1 out of 10.
- 4 out of 10 children want to live abroad.

**Solutions proposed by the group to alter Tendency 3:**

**Solution 1:** DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT a European social policy for young people to stay in Bulgaria.

**Solution 2:** MORAL AND FINANCIAL incentives for young people who choose to study in Bulgaria despite their being admitted to schools abroad.

**Solution 3:** ACCESSIBLE information about the PROs and CONs of studying abroad and in Bulgaria.

**Solution 4:** An initiative aimed at the young under the motto: *Let’s Keep Things Bulgarian* – traditions, products, history.

**Solution 5:** Promote opportunities for training and development in Bulgaria through flexible curricula in universities and schools.
Solutions proposed by the group to alter Tendency 1:
**Solution 1:** Build new or rehabilitate old sport facilities and playgrounds at schools.
**Solution 2:** Organise a sports scholarship for students who have a talent in a particular sport and are practised at school or elsewhere.

Solutions proposed by the group to alter Tendency 2:
**Solution 3:** Organise new formats, different from the so-called “consultation session”, for students to meet and work with their teachers in the regular school time. Teachers should regard this form of working with children as part of their overall obligations rather than as an extra burden; and children to be able to get involved in this without fear; neither should they face difficulties getting home afterwards or having their meal nor should they do this in a slot of time meant for something else.

Solutions proposed by the group to alter Tendency 3:
**Solution 4:** Schools and institutions should be visited by psychologists or people who actually can and want to talk to children about sex. Invest time to explain it all, from conception to diseases and the meaning of sex, rather than hand out materials. Let all children be included in such meetings.
**Solution 5:** Distribute questionnaires about sex to find out what it is that we are really interested in as opposed to saying the same things over and over again and not taking into account what is important to us.
A quote with summarised comments and statements by child respondents to the questionnaire and child participants in the groups under the *Leisure Time and Sharing/ Seeking Help* thematic area

A girl: We love to listen to music, do our hair, make ourselves beautiful, go out with friends, go shopping, sometimes to read; we also like to make selfies and spend time in Facebook;

A boy: We love playing football, basketball. We have fun playing computer games and going out with friends. Some of our favourite things to do are eat, sleep, party.
Solutions proposed by the group to alter Tendencies 1 and 3:

Solution 1: CREATE opportunities and conditions for children with special educational needs or disabilities to go to school on equal footing with the remaining children, without them having to face additional difficulties (there should be access ramps, wheelchairs, assistive technology and assistants).

Solution 2: Organise team activities to boost the team spirit of children in class and across classes, these extracurricular activities, sport events, competitions and logical games being regarded as an equally important occupation by students and teachers alike.

Solutions proposed by the group to alter Tendency 2:
Solution 3: Work systematically towards a practically-oriented education and developing such skills in children that will prepare them well for their post-school life, teach the really important things.
A quote with summarised comments and statements by child respondents to the questionnaire and child participants in the groups under the Education and School thematic area

1/ I would like it if subjects at school had to do with life - if they taught us skills we actually need; I wish we used equipment and the internet rather than squared paper and cardboard; I wish we had practical sessions in all subjects and do experiments; a lot of stuff we learn should be dropped out of the curriculum; I wish there was an end to mugging up; let us have younger teachers, learn by play and games; get involved in more sports and dancing and move.

2/ It would be lovely if teachers gave children more opportunity to interact and stopped criticising us for not knowing; I believe children should be allowed to stand up and walk in class rather than sit all the time. I so much wish we were regarded as equals, let us meet and communicate informally.

3/ It would be nice to organise more discussions between students with difficult behaviour in the presence of adults. Class teachers should work more with children and spend time with their class to make it a strong team. To do something to stop discrimination and abuse. I wish older and younger ones got along well and stopped looking at what clothes you wear.

4/ It is necessary to improve the doors and windows in school, put new desks and chairs which are more comfortable; paint the walls and make it clean; toilets should be new and clean; the building should be centrally heated.
Solutions proposed by the group to alter Tendencies 1 and 3:

**Solution 1:** Workshops for children and parents to improve their relationships and the communication between them. These are to be organised in all regions. They should happen at least twice a year and be externally funded (best state-financed) so as to be accessible and for everyone to wish to participate.

**Solution 2:** Free-of-charge counselling by family psychologists capable of working with children of a particular age. These should exist in face-to-face and online formats.

**Solution 3:** Sexual education seminars to be conducted by specialists in the field – to take place in each Bulgarian school for all children from Grade 5 to 12.
A quote with summarized comments and statements by child respondents to the questionnaire and child participants in the groups under the Family and Family Environment thematic area

I believe that to make a good parent one should learn to say ‘YES’ more often.

One should trust their children, listen more to what they have to say, spend more time with their kid.

It would be nice if parents can make things comfortable, organise a vacation together, not overburden their children with tasks and assignments, help them have more friends: make compromises.
"Children’s Views/ Right to Express One’s Views"

**Thematic Area**

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<tr>
<th>Children and their Right to Express their Views</th>
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<td><img src="image" alt="Diagram" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 out of 10 children does not know they have rights.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 out of 10 children learned they have the right to express their views from their families and from school.</td>
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<td>6 out of 10 children believe they can always express their views freely but only 3 out of 10 would argue with their parents.</td>
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**Solutions proposed by the group to alter Tendencies 1 and 2:**

**Solution 1:** Disseminate the Convention on the Rights of the Child (in the media, through the social networks, flyers, peer-to-peer training).

**Solution 2:** Increase the number of lessons devoted to children’s rights, allowing for the issue to be discussed in depth and for free participation by all children (not only during the class-time sessions).

**Solution 3:** Strong presence of NGOs which deliver training on children’s rights and their protection as extracurricular activities or as summer academies for children of all ages.

**Solutions proposed by the group to alter Tendency 3:**

**Solution 4:** Competitions and presentations on sport topics to be delivered by children and adults in teams (jointly and separately).

**Solution 5:** Consistent support for children who are shy to know the demarcation line between being shy and needing to assert one’s rights.

**Solution 6:** Joint projects, activities, tasks for children and parents to enable them to revisit their roles and regard each other as equals, as partners.

**Solution 7:** More debates and sketches on taboo topics, where different perspectives can be unfolded.
A quote with summarised comments and statements by child respondents to the questionnaire and child participants in the groups under the Children’s Views/ Right to Express One’s Views thematic area

Please listen to us and consider the problems that concern us; believe in us – you so often miss to consult with us on the things that matter to us!!!

Listen to the younger ones! After all, we are also there… Hear what we are saying!

We would like to be included in discussions on the family budget, on the issue of our freedom, talk about how we are feeling;

You first listen to the children, and then do something for them – especially when we talk about our education, about problems at school, when implementing new type of training and changes in the setting. For projects, at teachers ‘councils, for projects in the town, for children’s councils
“Solidarity” (“Children around the World”) Thematic Area

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<th>Children in Bulgaria and Children around the World</th>
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Solutions proposed by the group based on Tendency 2,3 seeking to alter Tendency 1:

**Solution 1:** Set up and support youth volunteer organisations

**Solution 2:** Assist children’s participation in international activities and projects that have to do with sports and arts so as to make them accessible for more children of various ages and from different regions.

**Solution 3:** Develop special portals and websites providing information in a user-friendly language about children in other countries and their life.

**Solution 4:** 30% of class-time sessions to be devoted to films, presentations, projects, demonstrations, stories about the life of other children around the world living in a different situation or related to some problems the children are experiencing.

**Solution 5:** Introduce a special subject in schools where children are taught in a meaningful way about the place of children in society.

**Solution 6:** More information campaigns for parents and children to focus on the life of children round the world.

**Solution 7:** More scholarships of increased size for children in need

**Solution 8:** Amendments to the penalty system (for crimes against children and their rights and as regards crime-prone children)
Problems of children around the world considered by the child participants under the *Solidarity* thematic area

Even though it was not spelled out as a separate topic, the topic of *poverty* and severe social differences was extensively discussed among children and it was pointed out as the reason, trigger or rationale for various tendencies registered (for example, parents work far too many hours and they have no time for their children; however, parents have to do this for financial reasons; children do not play sports because for the interesting sports training sessions one has to pay; many children are not aware of their rights because it is children in certain more privileged situations who participate in clubs or organisations that provide them with access to this knowledge; only better-off children can afford to help other children or travel around to get to know other countries; the shortage of money and the sense of doom in Bulgaria makes children choose to go abroad; the better education and nicer schools are affordable for richer or more talented children; the health, security and the rights of children living in poverty are at greater risk).

*Children get included in military and terrorist acts on equal footing with adults.*

*There are children in all parts of the world living in extreme poverty, destitution and deprivation.*

*Children are forced to take part in pornography films or suchlike materials.*
National Children’s Forum My Voice Matters – official presentation of children’s position

On April 24 child participants in this stage of consultation presented their views for change in the six key areas to the Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the United Nations, Mr. Stefan Tafrov; the UNICEF representative for Bulgaria, Ms. Tanja Radocaj; the Chairperson of the State Agency for Child Protection, Ms. Eva Zhecheva, and the representative of the Republic of Bulgaria to the Committee of Experts in charge of drafting the Council of Europe’s new Strategy for the Rights of the Child, Ms. Velina Todorova. Information and the solutions under the individual thematic areas were presented by child participants in three-minute presentations and posters summarising the decision-making process in each group.
Моят глас е важен
Защото ние сме бъдещето
Моят глас е важен
Защото имам какво да кажа
Моят глас е важен
Защото е друга гледна точка
Моят глас е важен
Защото макар и малък, понякога съм прав

More information about child participation at www.unicef.bg