

The Rights of the Child

Summary

Fieldwork: February 2008

Report: April 2008

This survey was requested by Directorate - General for Justice, Freedom and Security and coordinated by Directorate-General Communication

This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission. The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

Flash EB Series #235

The Rights of the Child

Survey conducted by The Gallup Organization,
Hungary upon the request of Directorate-
General for Justice, Freedom and Security



Coordinated by Directorate-General
Communication

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THE GALLUP ORGANIZATION

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Introduction

This survey (Flash Eurobarometer 235: The Rights of the Child) was conducted to determine how much young people (15-18 years old) knew about the Rights of the Child¹, the extent to which these rights were protected and which actions should be taken as a priority to improve them at national and European levels.

In detail, the survey examined respondents’:

- knowledge about their specific rights
- opinions to how those rights were protected
- experiences in asking for help
- opinions about the main areas of legislation that affected them
- ideas about national and Europe-wide actions to be taken
- opinions about the easiest ways of finding out more information about their rights

The charts in the report present the results from all 27 EU Member States, broken down by the following socio-demographic characteristics of respondents:

- Sex (male; female)
- Age (15-16; 17-18)
- Full-time student (yes or no)
- Subjective urbanisation
- Occupation of main contributor to household budget (self-employed; employee; manual worker; not working).

The survey’s fieldwork was carried out between the 16th and 25th February 2008. Over 10,000 randomly selected young people (15-18 years old) were interviewed across the EU. The survey was carried out by telephone, with WebCATI (web-based computer assisted telephone interviewing). To correct for sampling disparities, a post-stratification weighting of the results was implemented, based on socio-demographic variables.

¹ According to the UN New York Convention on *the Rights of the Child* and to Article 24 of the EU Charter of fundamental rights, "a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years".

Main findings

Awareness and information about the Rights of the Child

- The majority of young people (15-18 years old) from the 27 EU Member States (67%) were aware that people under 18 enjoyed specific rights compared to adults.
- Nevertheless, when asked which problems they thought might be encountered by others in their age group trying to defend their rights, the most commonly mentioned problems were that children *would not know how to go about it and whom to contact* (79%) and that they were simply *not aware of their rights* (76%).
- Similarly, when asked which actions to promote and protect the Rights of the Child should be taken as a priority at the European level, 88% of respondents mentioned *more information to children about their rights and where to enquire about them (e.g. through information campaigns, or via the creation of a website)*
- Finally, over two thirds (70%) of young people (15-18 years old) considered the Internet to be the easiest information channel to be used in order to find out information about their rights.

Protection of the Rights of the Child

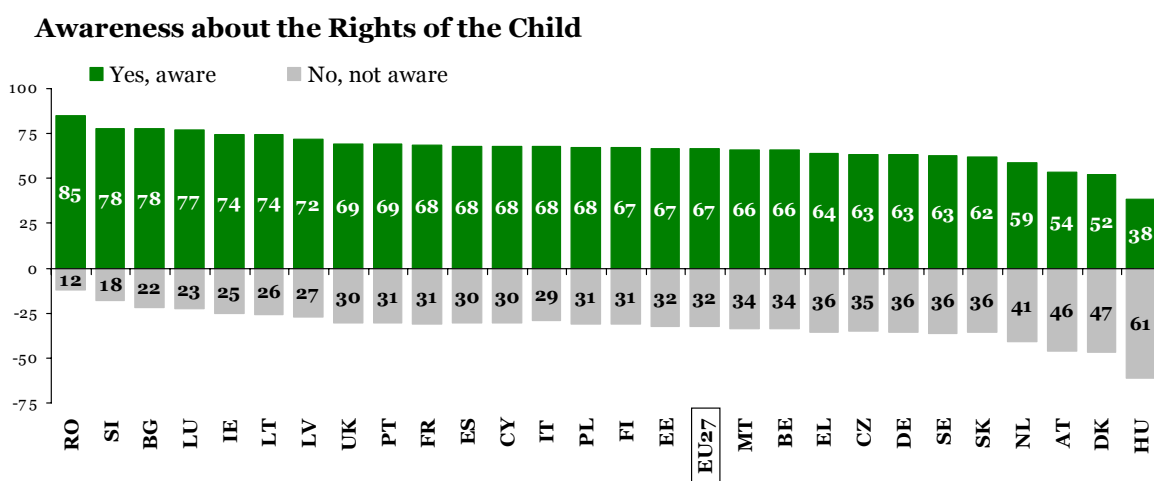
- Overall, approximately three-quarters of respondents (74%) considered the Rights of the Child *very well or fairly well protected* in their country. Nineteen percent of interviewees across the EU stated that these rights were *incompletely protected* in their country, and 3% believed they were *not protected at all*.
- Nevertheless, the vast majority of respondents (82%) said that neither they, nor anyone they knew (under 18) had ever tried to seek help when they thought their rights had been violated. Only 7% said that they personally looked for help in such a case and 10% stated that they did know someone who tried to look for help when they thought that a child's rights had been violated.

Policy areas of interest regarding the Rights of the Child

- The survey asked for opinions about the areas that governments or public administrations should particularly take the interests of children into account, when adopting legislation or making decisions. *Education* was mentioned most frequently, by three-quarters of respondents (74%). The second most frequently mentioned topic (43%) was *security (e.g. protection against violence)*, followed by (40%) *health and social affairs (e.g. access to hospital care or public transport)*.
- Respondents were asked which one of a number of problems should be addressed as a *top priority* in their country. *Violence against children* was considered the most important problem to be tackled by almost a quarter of young people (15-18 years old) in all Member States (23%). One out of five respondents (20%) indicated that *sexual exploitation of children* should be addressed as a priority at a national level, and almost the same percentage mentioned the problem of *drugs* (18%).

1. Awareness about the Rights of the Child

Two-thirds (67%) of young people (15-18 years old) were aware that people under 18 enjoy specific rights compared to adults. Looking at the country results, we saw that a majority of EU Member States followed a similar distribution in their awareness of children's rights compared to the EU overall (i.e. two-thirds of respondents were aware of the issue versus one-third who were not). The level of awareness of the Rights of the Child was the highest in Romania (85%; 18 percentage points above the EU27 average). Respondents from Slovenia and Bulgaria (both 78%) and Luxembourg (77%) were also among those that were the most aware that people under 18 enjoy specific rights. At the other end of the distribution, we found that Hungarian respondents were the least informed (38%). Hungary was also the only country where a majority of respondents were unaware of the specific rights of people under 18 (61%).



Q1. Are you aware that people under 18 enjoy specific rights compared to adults?
Base: all respondents - % by country

Socio-demographic considerations

Looking at the differences in the awareness of the Rights of the Child by socio-demographic groups, we only saw small differences. The awareness levels of the Rights of the Child were slightly higher for 17-18 year-olds, respondents who were not full-time students, metropolitan city dwellers and respondents living in a household where the main financial contributor was either a manual worker or self-employed. For example, 71% of respondents living in metropolitan areas were aware of the Rights of the Child compared to two-thirds of respondents living in rural areas.

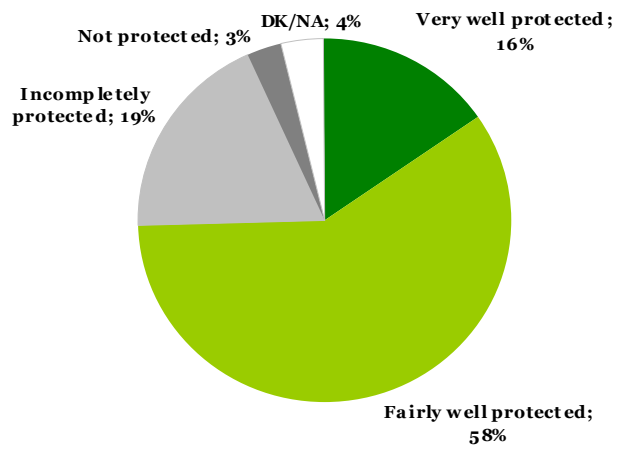
2. Perceived levels of protection of the Rights of the Child across the EU

The dominant opinion of young people (15-18 years old) about the level of protection of the children's rights, in their own country, was that they were *fairly well protected* (58%). Overall, three-quarters of respondents (74%) considered the Rights of the Child to be *very well* or *fairly well* protected in their country. Nevertheless, one in five interviewees across the EU (18%) thought that the specific rights of the under-18s were *incompletely protected* in their country and 3% believed that these were *not protected* at all.

The highest percentages of respondents who believed that the Rights of the Child were *very well* or *fairly well* protected in their country were found in Finland (94%), followed by the Netherlands (93%) and the UK (92%). On the other hand, the lowest proportions of respondents who thought that the children's rights were *well protected* in their country were found in Portugal (39%; 55 percentage points less than in Finland) and Romania (42%).

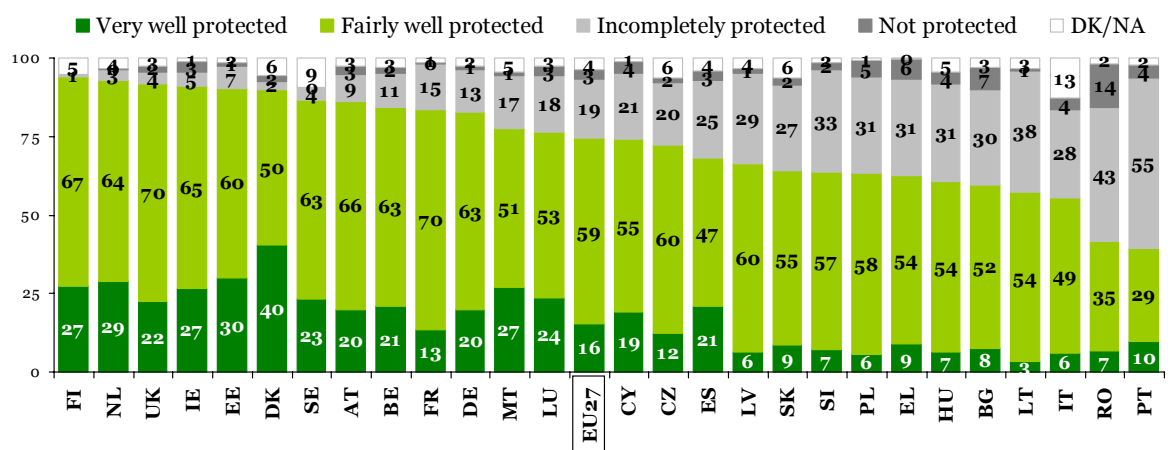
Portugal and Romania were also the only EU Member States where a majority of respondents had a negative opinion on this issue. Almost six out of 10 respondents in Portugal (59%) and Romania (57%) said that the Rights of the Child were *not at all* or *incompletely* protected in their country. Although the overall negative feeling in Portugal and Romania was similar, the Romanian respondents were more likely to say that the Rights of the Child were *not at all* protected in their country (14% versus 4% for Portugal). Taking into account the findings from the previous chapter, we can conclude that the Romanian young people (15-18 years old) were not only the most aware of the rights of under-18s, but they were also the most sceptical about the protection of those rights in their country.

Perceived levels of protection of the Rights of the Child across the EU



Q2. Do you think that the specific rights of children are in [YOUR COUNTRY]...?
Base: all respondents % EU27

Perceived levels of protection of the Rights of the Child across the EU



Q2. Do you think that the specific rights of children are in [YOUR COUNTRY]...?
Base: all respondents % by country

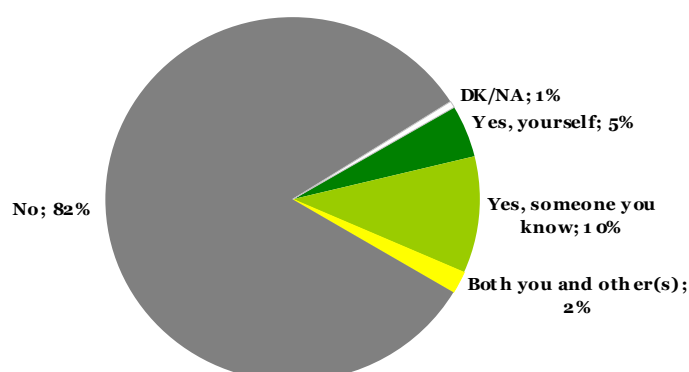
Socio-demographic considerations

The socio-demographic analysis did not reveal any great differences in the various groupings' opinions about the level of protection of the Rights of the Child. It could, however, be noticed that young men were slightly more likely to answer that under-18s rights were *very well* protected in their country (17% vs. 14%), while young women were slightly more likely to say that the Rights of the Child were *incompletely* protected in their country (21% vs. 17%).

3. Looking for help when the rights of a child had been violated

A large majority of respondents (82%) said that neither they, nor anyone else in their age group that they knew, had ever tried to seek help when they thought that their rights had been violated. Only 7% said that they personally looked for help in such a case; 5% sought help themselves and 2% said that both they and others looked for help. Finally, one in 10 respondents (10%) stated that they knew someone who tried to look for help when they thought that their rights had been violated.

Likelihood of seeking for help when the rights of a child had been violated



Q3. Did you, yourself ever try to seek help in a matter when you thought your rights were violated, or did someone else below 18 years-of-age you know try that?
Base: all respondents
% EU27

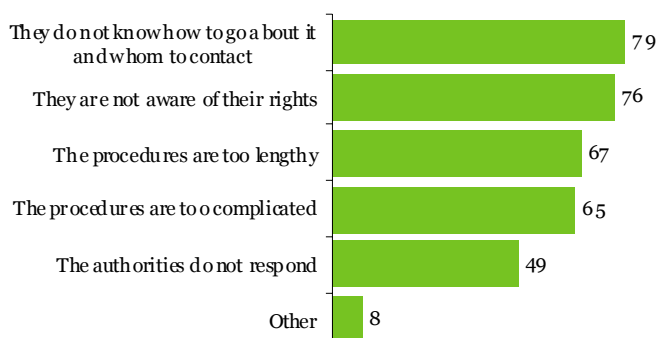
Summing all the “Yes” answers (“Yes yourself”, “Yes, someone you know” and “Both you and others”) and examining the resulting country breakdown, we found that Greek respondents were the most likely to say that they, or someone else that they knew of a similar age, had tried to seek help when they thought that their rights had been violated (32%; 15 percentage points above the EU27 average). Luxembourg and Cyprus joined Greece at the higher end of the distribution, with 29% and 25%, respectively, of interviewees responding in the same way. On the other hand, only 12% of Italian, Finnish and Czech respondents said that they, or someone else they knew, had tried to seek help in such circumstances.

Looking at the socio-demographic groups, we again noticed hardly any differences in the responses on this topic in the various groups.

4. Problems likely to be encountered when help is needed to defend the rights of a child

When young people (15-18 years old) were asked about the problems that their age group might encounter when they needed to defend their rights, we saw that respondents were most likely to think that they would **not know how to go about (defending their rights) and whom to contact (79%)** or simply that they would **not be aware of their rights (76%)**. The respondents were slightly less likely to expect problems relating to the procedures to follow to defend one’s rights: two-thirds (67%) of respondents thought that people under 18 might encounter problems because the **procedures were too lengthy**, and 65% thought that the **procedures were too complicated**.

Problems likely to be encountered when people under 18 years-of-age need help to defend their rights



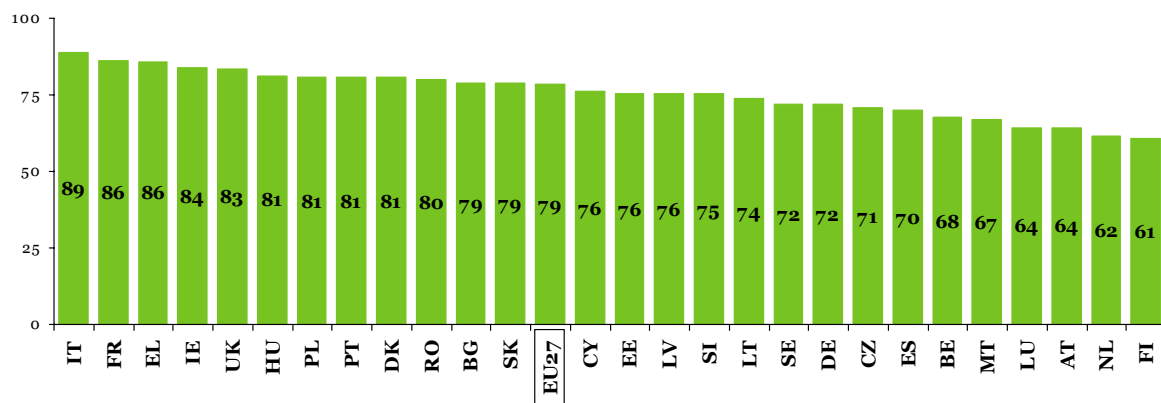
Q4. What are the problems you think people under 18 years-of-age might encounter when they need help to defend their rights?
Base: all respondents
% of mentions, EU27

In almost all EU Member States, each problem listed in the survey that people under 18 years-of-age might encounter when they needed help to defend their rights was considered to be a potential problem by a plurality of respondents.

Furthermore, in all Member States, with the exception of Slovenia, **not knowing how to go about (defending one's rights) and whom to contact** and **a lack of awareness** about one's rights were considered to be the most likely problems to be met. The proportion of respondents who selected the former problem ranged from 61% in Finland and 62% in the Netherlands to 89% in Italy, while the proportion of respondents who selected the latter ranged from 53% in the Netherlands and 55% in Finland to 91% in Italy.

Problems likely to be encountered when people under 18 years-of-age need help to defend their rights

They do not know how to go about it and whom to contact



Looking at the individual country results for problems related to *the procedures* to defend one's rights, we noted *once again* that Italian respondents scored the highest. Eighty-eight percent of Italian respondents thought that people under 18 needing help to defend their rights would face **procedures that were too lengthy** and 87% expected the **procedures to be too complicated** (respectively, 21 and 22 percentage points above the EU27 average).

Finally, in all Member States, the **problem of the authorities** (i.e. the public administration, for example, city councils or ombudsman) **not responding** was perceived as the least likely to occur when people under 18 needed help to defend their rights. Italy stood out from the pack again, with 84% of respondents who thought that this was a problem that was very likely to occur, while in most other countries around just half of the respondents expected this outcome. This means that young people in Italy were the most likely to think that someone in their age group might encounter each of the problems listed in the survey when needing help to defend their rights.

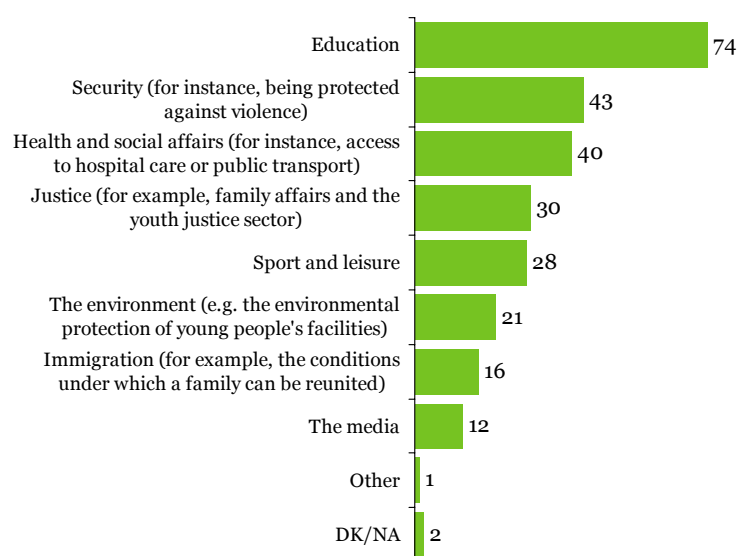
Socio-demographic considerations

The socio-demographic analysis showed that the different groups agreed about the order of importance of the problems that people under 18 might encounter when needing help to defend their rights, e.g., not knowing how to go about (defending their rights) was each time selected by the largest proportion of respondents, while the problem of non-responsive authorities was each time selected by the lowest proportion of respondents.

5. Policy areas thought to be of particular interest regarding the Rights of the Child

Young people (15-18 years old) were also asked in which areas they thought that the government or public administration should take the particular interest of children into account when adopting legislation or taking decisions. **Education** was by far the most selected policy (75%), with the second most frequently mentioned topic being **security** (e.g. protection against violence), followed by **health and social affairs** (e.g. access to hospital care or public transport) – both the latter areas were selected by roughly four out of 10 respondents.

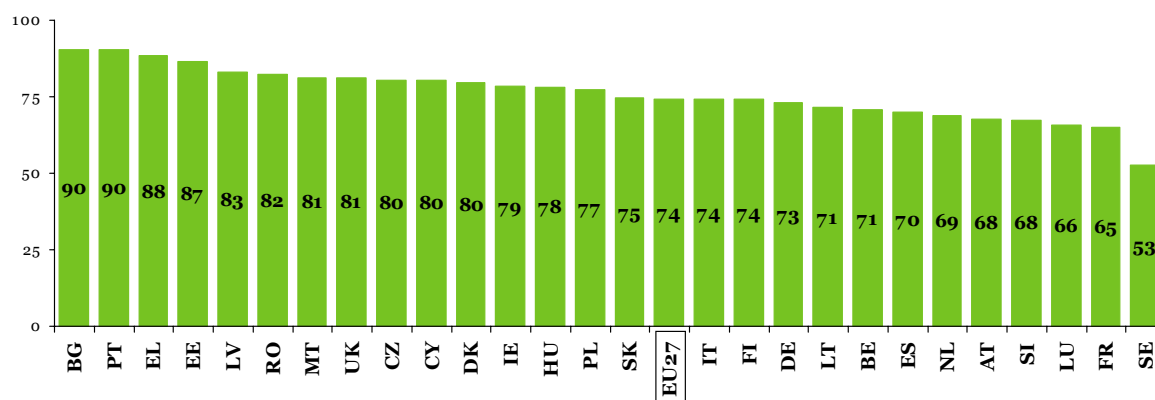
Areas where the government or public administration should take the particular interests of children into account



Q5. In which areas do you think that the government or public administration should take the particular interests of children into account when adopting legislation or taking decisions?
 Base: all respondents
 % of mentions, EU27

Looking at individual country results, we saw that in all countries, except Sweden, at least six out of 10 interviewees (between 65% and 90%) mentioned **education** as one of the areas where the government or public administration should take the particular interests of children into account. In Sweden, only slightly more than half of the respondents (53%) mentioned this policy area.

Areas where the government or public administration should take the particular interests of children into account: Education



Q5. In which areas do you think that the government or public administration should take the particular interests of children into account when adopting legislation or taking decisions?
 Base: all respondents - % of mentions, by country

In almost all Member States, at least one-third of respondents mentioned the area of **security**, for example, protection against violence, as a field where the government or public administration should take children's interests into account. Portuguese respondents (53%; 10 percentage points above the EU27 average), followed by those from Lithuania (52%) and Poland (51%), were the most likely to select this policy area. The proportion of respondents who thought that the government or public administration should take the particular interests of children into account in the area of **health and social affairs** (for example, access to hospital care or public transport) ranged from just 26% in Poland and 28% in Sweden to 73% in Portugal.

In all Member States, less than half of respondents said that the government should take particular interests of children into account in the area of **justice** (e.g. family affairs and the youth justice sector). The proportion of respondents who selected this policy area ranged from 7% in Sweden to 46% in Spain. In Slovenia and Estonia, twice as many respondents as the EU27 average mentioned **sport and leisure** as an area in which the interests of children should be given special attention by policy makers (56% in both countries selected this category, compared to the EU27 average of 28%).

The **environment** (for example, the environmental protection of children's facilities) was chosen by less than three respondents in each country as an area where the government or public administration should pay special attention to the interests of children. The highest percentages of those who mentioned the environment were recorded in the UK and Latvia (both 32%). In all EU Member States, except Luxembourg, a quarter or less of the respondents chose **immigration** (for example, the conditions under which a family could be reunited) as an area where the government or public administration should take the particular interests of children into account. Finally, the proportion of respondents who thought that the government or public administration should take the particular interests of children into account in the area of **the media** ranged from 5% in Portugal and Finland to 23% in Malta.

Two conclusions that could be seen looking across all policy areas were:

- Swedish respondents were towards the extreme low end of the distribution in all areas with the exception of immigration, where they were in line with the EU27 average.
- Portuguese respondents were either at the extreme high end of the distribution (education, security, health & social affairs) or at the extreme low end (media, immigration, environment and sport & leisure) in all areas with the exception of justice (where they were in line with the EU27 average).

Socio-demographic considerations

The socio-demographic analysis showed that young men were more likely to select sports and leisure as an area where the government or public administration should take the particular interests of children into account (35% vs. 21% of young women), while young women were more likely to select security, health and social affairs and justice. For example, while one in three young women selected "justice" (33%), only one in four young men (26%) selected this policy area.

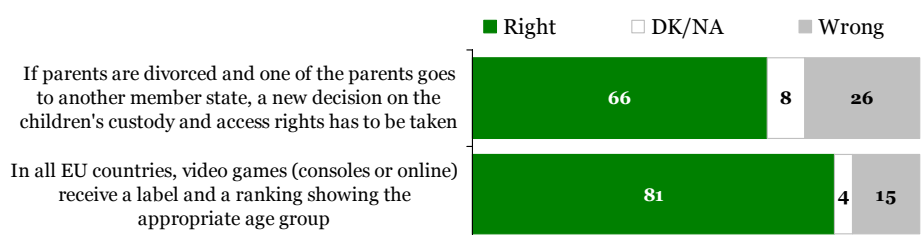
A rather similar difference in answering patterns could be observed when comparing 15-16 year-olds and 17-18 years-olds. While 31% of the former selected sports and leisure as an area where the government or public administration should take the particular interests of children into account, only 26% of the latter selected this answering category. However, while 77% of the 17-18 year-olds selected "security" and 42% selected "health and social affairs", the corresponding percentages for 15-16 year-olds were 71% and 38%.

6. Knowledge about the Rights of the Child

Two-thirds of interviewees thought, incorrectly, that the statement that “*if parents are divorced and one of the parents goes to another Member State, a new decision on a child’s custody and access rights has to be taken*” was right. Only one in four respondents (26%) correctly assumed that this statement was wrong. Finally, 8% of respondents said they did not know if the statement was true or false, or said they had no opinion on this issue.

Eight out of 10 respondents (81%) answered correctly that “*in all EU countries, video games (consoles or online) receive a label and a ranking showing the appropriate age group*”. Only 15% of respondents thought that this statement was wrong, and 4% did not know if the statement was true or not or had no opinion on this issue.

Knowledge about specific Rights of the Child



Q6. Are the following statements right or wrong?
Base: all respondents
% EU27

7. Problems that should receive priority at a national level

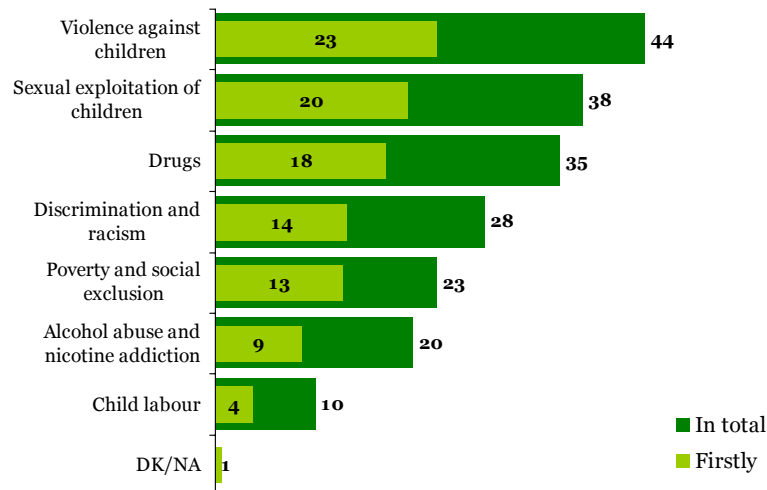
When young people (15-18 years old) were asked which problem impacting children should be addressed *as a first priority* in their country, they primarily chose **violence against children** (23%). One in five respondents (20%) indicated that **sexual exploitation of children** should be addressed at a national level, and almost the same percentage mentioned the problem of **drugs** (18%).

About one out of seven respondents considered that **discrimination and racism** should be addressed first (14%), and a similar proportion mentioned **poverty and social exclusion** (13%). All other issues were chosen by less than 10% of respondents.

Respondents were also asked which one of the above problems should be addressed *as a second priority* in their country. Adding up the percentages of the *first* and *second* selections, we found that the above ranking of problems remained the same at the EU level.

Forty-four percent of respondents considered violence against children to be either the problem that should be given the first or second priority in their country. Using the same logic, sexual exploitation of children was considered to be the main problem by 38% of respondents, and almost the same proportion (35%) mentioned drugs. Other ratings were discrimination and racism (28%), poverty and social exclusion (23%), alcohol abuse and nicotine addiction (20%) and child labour (just 10%).

Which problems should be tackled as a priority?



Q7a. In your opinion, which among the following problems should be tackled first [IN YOUR COUNTRY]?
 Q7b. And which should be addressed secondly?
 Base: all respondents
 % EU27

Out of the topics presented, **drugs** proved to be the main problem in 12 Member States. It was selected as a priority problem by over 40% of respondents in: Cyprus (80%), Greece and Bulgaria (both 62%), Malta (58%), Ireland and Slovakia (both 54%), Estonia and Romania (both 53%), Hungary (49%), Spain (48%), Luxembourg (46%) and Slovenia (42%). **Violence against children** was the most commonly mentioned problem in 11 Member States: the Netherlands (55%), the Czech Republic (52%), UK, Finland, Lithuania (all 51%), Latvia (48%), Poland (46%), Austria (42%), Germany and France (both 41%) and Belgium (39%). **Sexual exploitation of children** was the most mentioned issue in four countries: 65% of respondents in Denmark, 57% in Sweden, 52% in Portugal and 47% of respondents in Italy chose that topic as the one to be tackled above all others. **Alcohol abuse and nicotine addiction** was the main issue in just one country – Latvia – together with *violence against children* – both were mentioned by the same proportion of respondents (48%). *Discrimination and racism*, *poverty and social exclusion* were only rated in second or third place as one of the most pressing issues. Out of the topics presented, *child labour* did not appear among the top three problems in any country.

Socio-demographic considerations

Gender: Out of the problems reviewed, young women were more likely to indicate *violence against children* (51% vs. 38% of young men) and *sexual exploitation of children* (42% vs. 33% of young men) as problems that should be tackled at a national level. Young men tended to be more concerned than young women about *discrimination and racism* (31% men, 24% women) and the problem of *drugs* (39% men, 31% women). **Age:** Younger respondents (15-16 year-olds) were more likely than the older ones (17-18 year-olds) to say that the problem of *drugs* should be tackled as a priority (38% vs. 33%).

8. Priority of actions to promote and protect the Rights of the Child to be taken at a European level

The respondents were also asked which actions, to promote and protect the Rights of the Child, should be taken as a priority at the European level. Overall, we found that **a large majority of respondents supported all actions** covered in the survey. Each of the proposed action to promote and protect the children's rights was selected as a priority to be tackled at the European level by at least seven out of 10 respondents (between 73% and 88%).

The largest percentage of respondents said that it should be a priority to **provide more information to children about their rights and where to enquire about them** (88%). The action that came second was giving **more support to organisations working in the fields of the protection of children's rights**; 86% of respondents considered this a priority to be tackled at the European level. Slightly more than eight out of 10 respondents (83%) thought that it would be important to **promote the rights of children in countries outside the EU** and 80% mentioned the action of **making a 'missing children' alert system operational throughout the EU**.

Priority of actions to promote and protect the rights of children to be taken at a European level



Q8. Which actions should be taken as a priority at the European level to promote and protect the rights of children?
Base: all respondents
% of mentions, EU27

In 21 Member States, at least 80% of respondents mentioned **the provision of information to children about their rights and where to enquire about them** (e.g. through information campaigns, or via the creation of a website) as a priority action at the European level to promote and protect the Rights of the Child. In the other six Member States, at least six out of 10 respondents thought that way.

Almost all respondents in Italy (98%), and Ireland (97%) selected this action, while respondents in Luxembourg (63%), the Netherlands (65%), Finland (67%) and Spain (71%) were the least likely to think that this should be a priority at the European level.

Priority of actions to promote and protect the rights of children to be taken at a European level

Providing more information to children about their rights and where to inquire about them (for instance, through information campaigns, or the creation of a website)



Q8. Which actions should be taken as a priority at the European level to promote and protect the rights of children?
Base: all respondents
% of mentions, by country

Giving more support to organisations working in the field of the protection of children’s rights and promoting children’s rights in countries outside Europe were also perceived as a priority by more than half of the respondents in all EU Member States. The proportion of respondents who mentioned the priority of giving more support to organisations working in the field of children’s rights ranged from 56% in the Netherlands to 97% in Ireland and Italy, and very similarly, the proportion of respondents who mentioned promoting children’s rights in non-European countries ranged from 51% in the Netherlands to 95% in Ireland and Italy.

The individual country results for the action to make a **‘missing children’ alert system operational throughout the EU** showed that in a majority of countries (19 out of 27) at least three-quarters of respondents considered this to be a priority. The highest percentages of respondents who selected this action were found in Bulgaria (96%; 16 percentage points above the EU average) and Ireland (94%). At the lowest end of the scale, we found again the Netherlands and Finland, with less than half of respondents (48% and 49%, respectively) who said that a ‘missing children’ alert system should be a priority action. Finally, 73% of respondents across the EU thought it was important to **involve children more in the definition of policies that concerned them**, for example, by organising a forum on these topics.

Two conclusions that could be seen looking across all policy areas were:

- British, Irish and Italian respondents were at the high end of the distribution (always in the top three countries) in all five policy areas when it came to supporting action to be taken at a European level.
- Bulgarian respondents were at the high end of the distribution (in the top six countries) in all policy areas with the exception of the *promoting children’s rights outside of Europe*, where it was five percentage points below the EU27 average.

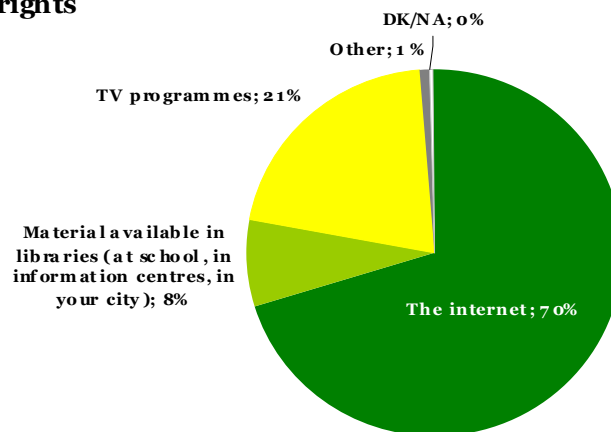
9. Information channels that seem to offer the easiest way of learning more out about the Rights of the Child

Seven out of 10 interviewees (70%) said the Internet seemed the easiest way to find out about their rights as a child. The other information channels were selected by a smaller proportion of respondents: one in five respondents (21%) thought that TV programmes would be the easiest way for them to find out about their rights, and only a minority of 8% selected material available in the school or city library.

In all EU Member States, a majority of respondents said the **Internet** would be the easiest information channel for finding out about their rights as a child. We found that more than eight of 10 respondents in the Czech Republic (89%), Estonia (88%), Finland (87%), the Netherlands (86%), Malta (83%), Poland, Germany (82% in each) and Denmark (81%) selected this information source as the easiest. The Internet was the least popular information channel in Italy (51%), Cyprus (55%) and France (56%).

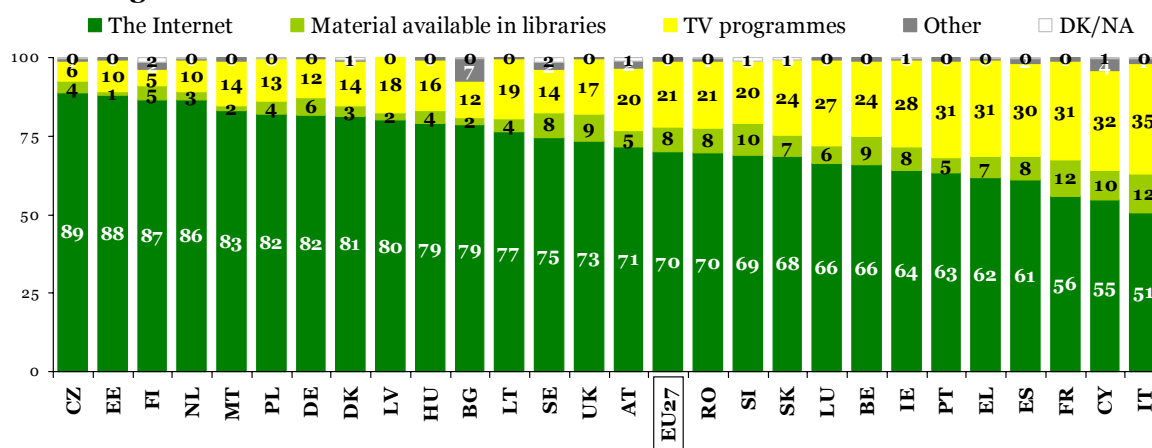
One in three respondents in Italy (35%) and Cyprus (32%) said that **TV programmes** seemed the easiest way for them to find out about their rights. In France, Greece and Portugal, a slightly lower proportion of 31% selected this information channel.

Information channels that people under 18 consider the easiest to find out about their rights



Q9. Which information channels seems easiest for you to use to find out about your rights?
Base: all respondents
% EU27

Information channels that people under 18 consider the easiest to find out about their rights



Q9. Which information channel seems easiest for you to use to find out about your rights?
Base: all respondents
% by country