

**LIST OF ISSUES PRIOR TO REPORTING  
ROMANIA, MARCH 2023**

**CHILDREN'S ALTERNATIVE REPORT  
Written inputs to LOIPR for the 95th pre-session**

**Made by**

**Federation of Non-Governmental Organisations for Children - FONPC**

**With the help of our member organizations**

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Timișoara

**And**

The Council of Youth in Special Protection

## Table of Contents

<b>We, the Children...</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>I. Education, leisure and cultural activities (art. 28, 29, 31)</b>	<b>4</b>
a) School supplies	4
b) Food	5
c) Access to free transport	5
d) Time to play	6
List of questions and issues:	7
<b>II. Basic health and welfare (art. 6, 18(3), 23, 24, 26, 27 (1)-(3))</b>	<b>7</b>
a) Mental Health and Bullying	7
Issues and questions we would like to raise:	9
b) Sexual abuse in schools	9
List of issues and questions:	10
c) Contraception	11
List of issues and questions:	12
<b>III. Civil rights and freedoms (art. 7, 8, 13-17, 37 (a))</b>	<b>12</b>
a) Children Human Rights Defenders	12
b) Participation at school and in community	13
List of issues and questions:	15
<b>IV. Family environment and alternative care (art. 5, 9-11, 19-21, 25, 39, 18(1)(2), 27(4))</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>18</b>

## **We, the Children...**

When adults look at us, they see the future, but rarely the present. We are either regarded as in need of help, and thus, our opinions are rarely considered since we rely on adults too much. Or we are left to create our own networks of support, to fend for ourselves. But we do not want to be left alone, nor do we want to be infantilized. Children and adults should be partners - we wish for support that does not undermine our agency, we wish for a safe space. We want to reimagine, alongside our caretakers, a better world, where every child truly has access to the care they need to have a happy childhood.

We are tired of our resilience to be celebrated, when it is actually a reaction to the loneliness and lack of trust we receive from teachers, parents, coordinators and other figures with power in our lives. We need trust. You can support us to motivate us! If you consult us in making decisions and show us that our opinion is important for you and for the organization, then we will gain more confidence, open up more, express our opinions more and be motivated to participate in change.

We, children, do not ask for much. In the next pages, we have written about our needs and we have also noted the questions/topics we would like you to address with our state.

We count on you to protect and listen to us!

*The Children of FONPC*

## **I. Education, leisure and cultural activities (art. 28, 29, 31)**

School should be the place we spend most of our time, alongside our homes. But, unfortunately, this is not the case for some of us who, because of poverty, have to drop out to support their families. Education should not be a burden. For years, student councils and associations have sounded the alarm that this sector is underfinanced, even if the law says 6% of the GDP should go to everything school related. In reality, we do not get even half of that promise. This has devastating consequences on the quality of care we receive in institutions.

**We need...**

### **a) School supplies**

Both the Constitution<sup>1</sup> and the National Education Law<sup>2</sup> say that we are supposed to have free access to education. But we are expected to buy our own school supplies, which can be a financial hardship on our families. Moreover, we are sometimes requested to contribute collectively to the fund of the class, money that is used to buy whiteboard markers or other materials we use during the educational process. This is an illegal practice, yet we are still subjected to it because the school does not receive enough funding or it is not using the funding properly.

Teaching resources are insufficient and overdated, even if their distribution should be without charge. World Vision Romania has shown that more than two thirds of pupils are asked by teachers to bring money from home for workbooks and compendiums<sup>3</sup>.

“They could provide support, food cards, clothing cards, bill support, free school supplies for children as well as uniforms, they should be more generous about increasing salaries, allowances because they don't want to do more... At least they should do that much... They have been promising for many years that the situation will change in Romania and every day it is getting more difficult to live in this country” - Lavinia, 16.

### **b) Food**

Learning on an empty stomach is hard for us kids, and nowadays 2 out of 10 children say their family sometimes or never provides enough food. While the Hot Meals in Schools program will be implemented in 450 schools on paper, the infrastructure of most of them is not favorable for distributing and storing amounts of food. In the report published when the project was in its pilot phase, we can see that only 10% of schools have canteens, while most of them have had problems with finding caterers to deliver the food<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/gq4deojv/dreptul-la-invatatura-constitutia?dp=gqztemrwgizti>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/legea-educatiei\\_actualizata%20august%202018.pdf](https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/legea-educatiei_actualizata%20august%202018.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://worldvision.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Drepturile-copilor-in-comunitatile-defavorizate.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>

<https://www.edupedu.ro/lipsa-cantinelor-principala-problema-in-desfasurarea-programului-masa-calda>

“An example of extra help is hot meals because not all children can afford to eat, extra help such as meal vouchers or some pocket money.” - Bianca, 16

“Governments could provide more money through allowances, implement more Erasmus-type school programs, provide school supplies to all children regardless of social status, and build school canteens with healthy food.” - Antonia, 16

### **c) Access to free transport**

“Free transport is important, because in many communities a bus comes once every 6 hours and then children have to stay so many hours in the cold, waiting. In the last 2 years, the prices have risen a lot. For example the ticket for a minibus was 5 lei, now it is triple 10, 15 lei. Some children go hungry to continue their studies because the money is not enough.” - Lavinia, 16

Despite pressure from civil society, on 25.06.2019, the Romanian Government issued GEO (Government Emergency Ordinance) no. 51/2019, which removed county passenger transport from the scope of public services, thus making it impossible to impose public service obligations on transport operators. As a result of the Ordinance, in the summer of 2019, the tragedy of Caracal took place, where 2 schoolgirls who had to hitchhike were kidnapped, raped and killed, as the Public Prosecutor's Office also held in its indictment.<sup>5</sup>

Following this tragedy, the Romanian Parliament rejected GEO no. 51/2019 through Law no. 34/2020. The Romanian Government issued GEO no. 70/2020 establishing a transitional situation for the termination of public service contracts, which also introduced free transport for students, but was implemented with a deficient budgetary mechanism.

Right now, children from the rural areas might not receive reimbursement for transport, but rather a lump sum allowance at the beginning of the year<sup>6</sup>. This will make it harder for their parents to receive other types of help, since this allowance would be calculated as part of the family income. For many of us, the transport is much more expensive than what the state can reimburse or offer.

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[-in-scoli-arata-un-raport-al-ministerului-existenta-unei-cantine-nu-este-criteriu-in-alegerea-scolilor-din-programul/](#)

<sup>5</sup> “Given the lack of public transport between villages in Romania, hitchhiking is a common activity, and it was not the first time the victims had hitchhiked.”.

<sup>6</sup>

<https://www.edupedu.ro/alocatie-forfetara-de-200-300-de-lei-pe-luna-pentru-transportul-elevilor-din-mediul-rural-anuntata-de-ministrul-educatiei-in-incercarea-de-a-devia-discutia-de-la-criticile-publice-p/>

#### **d) Time to play**

A third of us spend over 3 hours for homework outside school hours, sometimes even spending more than 4 hours on homework, even if we have a document that tells schools to give no more than two hours a day<sup>7</sup>. We need rest and leisure time to recharge<sup>8</sup>.

In the new Education Law proposed<sup>9</sup>, high schools will be able to organize admittance exams which will only put more stress on us, children, while also creating a hierarchy between children who can afford private practices and others that cannot.

Lack of time is also an important barrier in participation. We invest a lot of time in educational activities (school curriculum, mediation, courses). For some of us, early work responsibilities are added to school responsibilities. All this makes it difficult to get involved in workshops, meetings, forums where our voice can be heard loud enough<sup>10</sup>.

#### **List of questions and issues:**

1. We are uncertain of the future of education since Romania has exchanged too many Ministers of Educations in a short timeframe - how will the state make sure there is continuity, since every time students must resume the talks on the same topics with the new administrations?
2. There are some big changes coming with the introduction of the new educational laws. How is the state going to fund them, given that, in recent years, the budget has not lived up to the promised 6% of the GDP?
3. As we have seen in the case of school supplies above, how is the state monitoring that the funds received by schools are used for what they were destined?
4. Even if homework time is regulated, how is the government making sure that it is put into practice?
5. How will the state implement the Hot Meals in Schools program if the schools do not have proper infrastructure? What type of support will they provide regarding this?
6. Why has the transport allowance been replaced by a flat-rate allowance, knowing that it will be taken into account in families' income and they will no longer be eligible for benefits such as inclusion income, heating aid?
7. Introduce dedicated personnel that will help children and their families apply for allowances, scholarships and other programs that allow them to access funds.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/OMENCS%205893%20teme.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://worldvision.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Drepturile-copiilor-in-comunitatile-defavorizate.pdf>

<sup>9</sup>

[https://edu.ro/sites/default/files/fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2023/proiecte\\_Legi\\_Romania\\_educata\\_2023/Legea\\_invatamantului\\_preuniversitar.pdf](https://edu.ro/sites/default/files/fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2023/proiecte_Legi_Romania_educata_2023/Legea_invatamantului_preuniversitar.pdf)

<sup>10</sup>

<https://www.sos-satelecopiiilor.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Manifest-pentru-participarea-copiilor-%C8%99i-tinerilor-1.pdf>

8. What are the plans of the government in expanding transportation infrastructure, so that wait times for children are lower?
9. Commuting is taking a lot of time for us, children. What is the government doing to prevent commuting long distances, especially in rural communities.
10. What measures has the government taken in making intr-county transport more accessible, especially after the Caracal tragedy?

## **II. Basic health and welfare (art. 6, 18(3), 23, 24, 26, 27 (1)-(3))**

### **a) Mental Health and Bullying**

Mental health is very important for our development, for all children. We are happiest in environments where our voices are heard and we can share our feelings with adults. We need free time for recreation and a safe space.

The school climate is not safe: 2 out of 10 children say violence is present in their school a lot. As proof of this, we rank 3rd in Europe when it comes to bullying in schools. Increasing the number of school counselors to support children and ensure a healthy school climate is essential.

Nearly half of us have peers in our class who discriminate on the basis of intellectual ability, physical appearance, religion, dress or disability. A third of us have teachers who do the same. Children from vulnerable communities are most likely to be bullied.

Bullying in schools occurs when there are differences between children that create a power and dominance relationship. Children who have health problems or disabilities, who come from poor backgrounds, who look or dress differently from others are more vulnerable to being targeted. Another cause of violence between children in schools is discrimination and stereotyping. Violence tends to escalate if there is a group dynamic that supports it. The environment has a huge influence on children. If there is no real and honest discussion about violence in schools with pupils, then the phenomenon will not go away.

On the other hand, if the phenomenon is not addressed and stopped, it can have a long-term negative impact on us. It will lead to low self-esteem, social anxiety, marginalization, distrust of others, a tendency to enter into toxic relationships, depression.

Such is the case of those of us that belong to the LGBTQ+ community or the Roma community.

On 16 June 2020, the Romanian Senate adopted an amendment to the National Education Law that would ban public information about gender identity in school, university and vocational education. This amendment outlawed any discussion in schools, colleges and universities about gender identity and transgender people, instigating discrimination against transgender and intersex people in Romania. Thanks to an impressive mobilization of academics and activists, the law did not pass.

On 2 May 2022, the Romanian Senate tacitly adopted a draft law to amend and supplement Law No 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of the rights of the child, which prohibits the dissemination of information on sexual orientation and gender identity to minors. It later received a favorable response from the Romanian Human Rights Committee in the Chamber of Deputies on 8 June 2022. This bill, if adopted, would lead to disastrous consequences for the LGBTQI+ community in Romania, for our right to a full education and for the universal right to free expression. Such a bill is also worryingly similar to a type of censorship.

At the educational level, from our own experience working with our queer peers, we have noticed that many of them are bullied by both teachers and students. The testimony of one of them has stayed with us in our work. He told us *We can't keep saving each other from dying*, referring to the high level of suicides or attempted suicides among queer youth.

Today, the main problems faced by the Roma community in Romania are: access to education, access to the health system, access to decent living, insufficient social protection, lack of representation, anti-Roma propaganda and social exclusion. **Prohibition of access to recreational services has been.** "Ora din Sibiu" ("Sibiu's hour") documents the case of a group of Roma children who were denied access to the only waterpark nearby. The group of children, accompanied by representatives of a local NGO, were denied access to the recreational place because of the owner's alleged past experiences with other groups of Roma children.<sup>11</sup>

"I think mental health is more important than money. In the face of immense social pressure like being a "good" parent we end up creating stressed parents who project onto their children." - Alexandra, 18

### **Issues and questions we would like to raise:**

1. How will the Romanian authorities recognise LGBTQ+ youth in schools and ensure their safety, especially since we have already had two bills trying to erase them?
2. While Romania has a national initiative for free therapy, we still need to be officially sent by a physician to the psychologist and we need parental/guardian consent<sup>12</sup>. How will the state make sure children can access free and safe psychological support since these services continue to be stigmatized by our caretakers?
3. Beyond passing laws and making strategies, in what tangible, grassroot way is the government supporting Roma children's inclusion?
4. How will the state ensure LGBTQ+ children, Roma children and children from other marginalized communities are not discriminated against in psychological therapy? Will the psychologists receive special training? Will teachers receive the same training?

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<sup>11</sup>

<https://www.oradesibiu.ro/2022/07/01/copiii-romi-au-interdictie-la-strandul-din-sibiu-patron-imi-selectez-client-ela-mi-au-umplut-piscinele-cu-mustar/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://zch.ro/program-gratuit-de-terapie-pentru-copii/>

5. Many schools lack counselors to help us. How is the government addressing this issue?
6. How is the government supporting our caretakers, who also need access to free mental health services?

## **b) Sexual abuse in schools**

Currently in Romania, although the country has developed legislation on prohibiting, combating and punishing cases of sexual abuse in lower education institutions, in practice the problem is not a priority for the authorities within the education system. This has been repeatedly demonstrated to us by the attitude of teachers, headmasters, counselors and inspectors and by the countless testimonies the feminist group Girl Up Romania has from students. Another element that highlights the lack of interest of the Ministry of Education in sexual abuse in schools is the absence of a centralised data network documenting both individual case information and the post-complaint process (i.e. the consequences suffered by the perpetrator and the help offered to the victim).

The lack of an official database becomes an excuse for inaction by the authorities, so reported cases end up being ignored, only to be reopened and punished in an unserious and damaging way. Excessive bureaucracy, unclear accountability structure and splitting the procedure between far too many documents makes it difficult to report the case and reduces its chances of being resolved.

A recent case illustrating the procedural inconsistency and triviality with which the phenomenon is treated occurred in Constanta. Several children were touched indecently by one of the teachers, the headmistress of the school noticed it on the cameras and reported it to the County School Inspectorate, hoping to receive support. The General School Inspector called the serious acts *a stupid prank*, even though the victims, pupils of the high school, were visibly affected by what had happened to them. The headmistress appealed to the police in the case, but admitted that procedures are not clear enough in such cases and you don't know who you should turn to<sup>13</sup>.

The cases exist and we are aware that they exist precisely because of the courage of victims to speak out about their experiences, but also because of the new World Vision Romania report, which revealed that one in four children interviewed had been subjected to sexual comments about their bodies at school<sup>14</sup>.

“In 6th grade I was sitting at the school desk, a classmate grabbed me by the head and started hitting me with his penis in the face, it was quick, I didn't even have time to react. I was in tears of shock and all the head teacher did was to tell me to stop crying because that spurred

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/elevi-dintr-o-comuna-din-constantia-abuzati-sexual-de-profesorul-lor-de-romana-timp-de-mai-multi-ani-4225618>

<sup>14</sup> [https://fb.watch/F-Kqtt\\_LFU/](https://fb.watch/F-Kqtt_LFU/)

the boy on. She said I was an easy target and that's why he was doing what he was doing. He didn't face any sanctions.” - testimony collected through Girl Up Romania

### **List of issues and questions:**

1. When will the government create a database of cases of sexual abuse in school, so numbers reported could be even to all institutions and we would get a better understanding of the phenomenon?
2. Why is the state not recognising sexual abuse in schools as a problem?
3. What are the state's plans in addressing the phenomenon - e.g introducing a safeguarding person?
4. The discussion on sexual abuse should be open to other NGOs that have been working in the field for many years - especially children should be involved.
5. How will the procedure for reporting and investigating allegations of abuse be made more transparent, so survivors can monitor the situation?
6. How will the procedure be structured so as to not re-traumatise the survivors?
7. What is the level of intergovernmental partnership on the issue, since sexual abuse has important effects on children's relationships (Ministry of the Family, Youth and Equality of chance should be involved), as well as on their health (Ministry of Health should be involved)?

### **c) Contraception**

Currently, in Romania, sex education is not compulsory in school curricula, the choice to teach this subject being left to the direction of each educational institution by Law 272/2004, Article 46, point i) which states that educational establishments must do their utmost to provide “systematic implementation in schools of life education programmes, including sex education for children, in order to prevent the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy of minors.” However, there is no tool to check which schools have implemented sex education programmes during the semester.

In June 2022, the term sex education was replaced by health education, which drastically limits the discipline to just a few ideas about personal hygiene and does not address broader topics such as relational health, consent, power relations or gender equality. The reluctance to call sex education by its name comes from a preconception among Romanian politicians that such education leads to the sexualisation of children. On the contrary, the purpose of this subject, as highlighted by the WHO time and time again, is to prevent possible dangers in our lives - from sexually transmitted diseases to sexual abuse. We are already sexualised by our environments (according to a World Vision study, over 25% of children surveyed said they had heard sexual comments about their bodies at school), we need tools to protect ourselves. Moreover, law 272/2004 was changed by a bill, later promulgated, which states that health

education can only be taught from grade 8 and only with the consent of the legal representative of the child, on an opt-in basis.

The SECS Association has conducted a survey on Romanians' perceptions of sex education in schools<sup>15</sup> which shows that 74% of the subjects think that sex and health education should be taught in schools. A similar percentage knows the differences between sex and health education. Respondents gave positive connotations to the term sex education. This study may show us that we have a general understanding of what sex education entails and parents see it as beneficial, with public discourse stigmatizing the discipline.

**Disruption of the family planning network and absence of free contraceptives<sup>16</sup>.** The Journal of the Decree conducted a documentation of family planning offices in 2021. Asking the Ministry of Health for information on their numbers, the latter were unable to provide an answer at first. The request reached the National Health Insurance House, which had in its database 9 family planning offices and 15 doctors<sup>17</sup>. The Association Sexul vs. Barza (Sex vs. Stork) has centralized the situation of family planning clinics in Romania. Using infographics, they revealed that in 2020, around 117 family planning clinics were operating, 36 fewer than in 2014<sup>18</sup>. Of the 117, only two offered free contraceptives and condoms<sup>19</sup>. The provision of free contraceptives by gynecologists was regulated by the Women's Health Subprogramme - doctors could provide contraceptives free of charge to the unemployed, pupils and students, welfare recipients, women in rural areas or people who had had an abortion on request, and other people without income. However, the reality is that the programme only received funding in 2016 and 2017. In 2022, through the efforts of Sex vs. Stork and partners, €10 million was allocated from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan to rehabilitate and equip family planning clinics<sup>20</sup>.

It is vital for us, children, to have access to both information but also tools to protect and take care of our reproductive health.

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[https://secs.ro/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Prezentare-raport-Cult-Research-SECS\\_conferinta-12-iulie.pdf](https://secs.ro/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Prezentare-raport-Cult-Research-SECS_conferinta-12-iulie.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> The details provided in this paragraph were written by our colleague Dominique Ogreau for the Wikipedia page Abortion in Romania - [https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avortul\\_în\\_România](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avortul_în_România)

<sup>17</sup> [Coman, Oana \(2022\). „Ne-au tras pe linie moartă”. Jurnalul Decretului.](#)

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[https://web.facebook.com/sexulvsbarza/posts/pfbid02BqwFsDjncwyQDqZqUMUvb56kjunG3LhypQqcGMioCG6rZn7Eh1m2ywrCOfCoXSwl?\\_rdc=1&\\_rdr](https://web.facebook.com/sexulvsbarza/posts/pfbid02BqwFsDjncwyQDqZqUMUvb56kjunG3LhypQqcGMioCG6rZn7Eh1m2ywrCOfCoXSwl?_rdc=1&_rdr)

19

[https://web.facebook.com/sexulvsbarza/posts/pfbid0KpzHrzMUBDAsqCn367tRzptHLnpVVueScASSrzhDnFv\\_xQGtcPB8ywhzRSczcy9y1?\\_rdc=1&\\_rdr](https://web.facebook.com/sexulvsbarza/posts/pfbid0KpzHrzMUBDAsqCn367tRzptHLnpVVueScASSrzhDnFv_xQGtcPB8ywhzRSczcy9y1?_rdc=1&_rdr)

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[https://web.facebook.com/sexulvsbarza/posts/pfbid0g668qhJTSF1JcPoSdXfwj6BbyEENTA7wBAriTk1dHda3xPsPDRBfSdvxTshqxGDLI?\\_rdc=1&\\_rdr](https://web.facebook.com/sexulvsbarza/posts/pfbid0g668qhJTSF1JcPoSdXfwj6BbyEENTA7wBAriTk1dHda3xPsPDRBfSdvxTshqxGDLI?_rdc=1&_rdr)

### **List of issues and questions:**

1. We know that even if the money has been allocated, many clinics have not applied for funding because they do not have necessary personnel. How will the state support family planning clinics in accessing funds, so they can restart distributing free contraception?
2. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health should work together with NGOs who have been teaching sexual education for years.
3. How does the Ministry of Education involve us, children, in their plans on teaching sexual education?
4. How will the Ministry of Education document the schools that implement sexual education?
5. Why is the government reluctant to introduce a framework based on WHO's comprehensive sexual education guidelines?
6. How will the government make sure the people they are hiring to teach sexual education are best equipped for this? Will background checks be made?

### **III. Civil rights and freedoms (art. 7, 8, 13-17, 37 (a))**

#### **a) Children Human Rights Defenders**

We often hear adults say that children are the backbone of the communities. They admire our perseverance and determination when we take action. But they stop there - at watching, at observing. Too rarely, as adults, as caretakers, as decision makers, they build frameworks to protect us when we fight against systems that oppress our rights.

Adults have in mind a stylized version of activists. They imagine us calm, always ready for dialogue and compromise. The moment we protest, the moment we refuse to give up our demands, the moment we rebel against a system that hurts us, adults turn their backs on us. Activists are meant to tear the fabrics of unjust communities and forge a new social order.

“There should be no adult expectations that young people will be activists. Children shouldn't have to constantly fight for a better world because adults don't care. Children should play. Too often in our activism, because we are the only points of support for our peers, we don't have time to enjoy childhood. That's what we want at FONPC - for children to be able to access their right to play, and that means protecting children's rights advocates.” - Dominique, FONPC

In Romania, child advocates are not taken seriously, largely because they are considered too young and unprepared. In our work as youth, we interact with other child activists every day and are aware of the power imbalance between us and different actors - from teachers to authorities. We detail below two cases where children's protests were disconsidered, although their motivation was strong:

- Representatives of the Constanta Students' Association were denied access to the public meeting of the Constanta City Council. On the agenda were the new education reform laws - an important conversation for student representatives and children's interests. Students protested to attend the discussions - discussions to which they should have had unrestricted access. They recorded the incident<sup>21</sup>.
- During the Girl Up protest on sexual abuse cases in schools, the crew sent by the Gendarmerie to protect the protesters behaved in a manner contrary to their intended purpose: the actions of the gendarmes disrupted the action as they directed participants onto the pavement shouting over the victims' speeches. When several participants were verbally assaulted by a man in the street, they did not intervene.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, a representative of Girl Up Romania was called to a private meeting in the School Inspectorate where she was told that "more important than anything is school and children should not protest on a day when there were classes."<sup>23</sup>

#### **b) Participation at school and in community**

The children of World Vision<sup>24</sup> have conducted surveys on child participation, so we could all get a better understanding of how our peers perceive their involvement at community level:

- 55% of children say they are disappointed when they are not consulted on decisions that directly affect them.
- 27% of children have become indifferent about participating in decision-making. They have not had contexts over the years in which they have been encouraged to express their ideas, and confidence in their own opinions and decisions has not been built in school or promoted by local authorities.
- Only 2% responded that they had been consulted in the last 12 months by their local authority/town hall
- More than half (54%) of children say they have not been consulted even once about decisions made during the pandemic regarding education: online school, holidays and educational context
- More than 4 out of 10 pupils were not consulted even once last year by teachers about teaching and assessment in class.
- Nearly 1 in 2 children do not feel free to express their opinions to teachers.

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<sup>21</sup> [https://web.facebook.com/aeconstanta/videos/1100574557534907/?\\_rdc=1&\\_rdr](https://web.facebook.com/aeconstanta/videos/1100574557534907/?_rdc=1&_rdr)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/CelGPhFKtOn/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cen4efsqebf/>

<sup>24</sup>

<https://worldvision.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Studiul-Participarea-Copiiilor-la-deciziile-care-ii-privesc.pdf>

Attached to this report is a video manifesto produced by the World Vision Children's Advisory Council: <https://www.wvi.org/stories/romania/childrens-participation-manifest>.

SOS Children's Villages Romania listened to us and composed a report on why we, the children, do not have access to participation<sup>25</sup>.

One reason for our low participation in decision making is that we don't know where and how we can be involved.

When asked about changes they have tried to bring about in their communities, young people who have not previously interacted with a Youth Council type of participation body gave hesitant answers. Participation does not happen spontaneously if there is no dedicated space and not enough training and information for young people.

Another main reason for our demotivation is that we cannot always determine what the impact of involvement has been.

Where there are spaces for participation and expression of ideas, if there are not also spaces where young people can produce real change, then they can even lead to drop-out, abandon, demobilization on the part of young people.

We are able to understand that participation in decision-making does not mean that things will always be done the way we want. What we want is to have a space where we can talk about our needs and concerns and contribute, together with adults, to finding the best solutions.

“Let's have an engagement that is more friendly. Not the boss-child type. In the form that, 'I make the decisions so you have to do as I do. Even if you say correctly, I'm the boss, you have to do as I do'.” - SOS Children's Villages child

“I think it would motivate young people very much that when they tell adults what they want changes, the adults will actually take into consideration their proposals. Children should see their proposals integrated into strategies, they should see the real change they are producing.”  
- SOS Children's Villages child

#### **List of issues and questions:**

- How is the government involving children in the decision-making process of every institution that protects their rights?
- How much is the government spending on children's initiatives?
- How are children directly involved in the passing of laws that affect them, since they are rarely represented - especially because they do not have the right to vote?

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<https://www.sos-satelecopiiilor.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Manifest-pentru-participarea-copiiilor-%C8%99i-tinerilor-1.pdf>

- How is the state informing children of their opportunities? How are they planning to develop a platform that would reach even the most marginalized?
- Will the state commit to creating child friendly versions of institutional websites, so children could keep up with what is happening in the Parliament and other legislative/executive/judicial bodies?
- How is the state protecting Children Human Rights Defenders? Why are they not passing formal legislation on the matter?
- The new Educational Law lists only the National Student Council as a partner for dialogue with the Ministry of Education, leaving out Student Associations across the country. Is the Ministry planning to extend the list of partners of dialogue?

#### **IV. Family environment and alternative care (art. 5, 9-11, 19-21, 25, 39, 18(1)(2), 27(4))**

This chapter includes Recommendations from the Children and Young People's Group, set up under the project “Applying Safe Behaviours: Preventing and Responding to Peer Violence Amongst Children Without or At Risk of Losing Parental Care”. This is a two-year project (2021-2023) co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the European Union, implemented by SOS Children's Villages Romania.

The causes of violence between children in the social protection system identified by the young people are:

- Too many children in relation to the number of educators; When an educator is in charge of too many children with very different needs, they do not always have the resources to relate to individual needs and cannot have a personalized approach.
- Insufficiently qualified staff and too little training on violence between children.
- Carers are not always sufficiently emotionally prepared to deal with situations of violence between children; Children report that where carers do not act with empathy, patience, calm and understanding of each child's needs, the risk of violence between children may be greater.

To reduce the risk of violence each child needs to feel loved, understood, accepted as they are. Children do not report violent situations because they are afraid that they will not be taken seriously, that they will be told they are overreacting. Some don't trust carers to handle the situation appropriately or don't know the right person to turn to.

The Council of Youth in Special Protection asked children in special care to draw their fears and challenges. They mentioned the need for a stable income, the fear of continued discrimination, and the lack of friends. The young people said it would be difficult for them to find a job and adapt to it at first.

## **Issues and questions to be addressed:**

1. What is the strategy proposed by the state to make sure more youth feel prepared to join the workforce?
2. How is the state providing help to the personnel that work with children in special protection dealing with situations of violence? How is the state providing help to the children that report situations of violence?
3. How will the government mediate the power dynamics between caretakers and children in special protection?
4. What is the state's strategy to make sure children have a say in how special protection is reformed? The Council of Youth in Special Protection should be represented in all the centers for special protection.
5. How does the government assure the inclusion of children in special care in the educational system? Many of them reported being bullied by their peers.

## **Methodology**

This report was produced by the Federation of Non-Governmental Organisations for the Child - FONPC within the project "'Shape of Change' Young people and FONPC - dialogue for change", implemented with the financial support of Active Citizens Fund Romania, a programme funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through EEA Grants 2014-2021.

The aim of the project is to improve the capacity of FONPC, its member organisations and the Federation's partners to actively engage and encourage the participation of young people in the development and monitoring of public policies concerning children. Constructive dialogue between representatives of civil society and public authorities is one of the priorities of this project, so that together we can influence decision making on the rights of children, vulnerable or at risk of marginalisation/exclusion, with the aim of empowering decision makers and contributing to strengthening of the democratic culture at local/national level.

The report contains the views of the children who participated in the project activities:

- In November 2022, FONPC organized the Youth Forum in which 186 people participated, including 104 children - from 5 counties of the country, Romanian children and children from Ukraine. During this Forum the priorities that the children think the alternative report should contain were discussed.
- In the framework of the FONPC Children and Youth Participation Department, a series of workshops for children and young people were organized from March 2022 to September 2022 with the aim of personal development, but also to prepare children and young people to monitor the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children understood which institutions they can turn to for support and the existing mechanisms for consultation. Working meetings were also held on the

UPR report and the Alternative Report on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- 22 children participated in the review of the Child Friendly Versions of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, in collaboration with EuroChild.
- A further 13 thematic workshops on personal development and the preparation of the UPR alternative report were held to identify topics that are considered a priority by children.
- Fourteen workshops were organised with 152 children and young people on different child rights themes.

All the children and young people who participated in these activities came from different backgrounds and organisations, from different schools or areas in Romania:

- Children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Children and young beneficiaries of FONPC member organisations (e.g. SCOP, Star of Hope Foundation Romania, Buna ziua Copii din România, World Vision etc)
- Children/young people with disabilities
- Children and young beneficiaries of partner organisations (e.g. UNICEF)
- Children from the General Department for the Protection of Children's Rights
- Children from various schools

The areas from which they came from cover a large part of Romania's counties: Bucharest, Ilfov, Constanța, Iași, Vaslui, Timișoara, Cluj, Botoșani, Vâlcea, etc.

FONPC has had meetings with children and youth organisations such as the Romanian Students Union, Girl Up Romania, Romanian Youth Delegates to the UN, Youth for Youth Romania, Valcea Students Association, Constanta Students Association, CTR Romania.

#### **Appendix:**

- [Manifest-pentru-participarea-copiilor-și-tinerilor-1.pdf \(sos-satelecopiilor.ro\)](#)
- [VEAC\\_infografice\\_f\(worldvision.ro\)](#)
- [Infographic \(worldvision.ro\)](#)
- <https://www.sos-satelecopiilor.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Ce-ne-au-spus-tinerii-d-espre-violen%C8%9Ba-%C3%AEntre-copii.pdf>
- Images and drawings from the event "OUR VOICE: Summit of Childrens and Young people under the care of the state" - Council of Youth in Special Protection