

Listen to the children.

**Alternative Report 2021 on
the Implementation of the
United Nations Convention
on the Rights of the Child
in Switzerland**

Supplement to the combined fifth and sixth
State Party Report of Switzerland

Legal notice

The Alternative Report on the Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Switzerland was created by Désirée Zaugg and Sybille Gloor (Child Rights Advocacy, UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein) with the support of the team, especially Anja Bernet (Team Leader, Child-Friendly Cities Initiative) and Nicole Hinder (Division Manager, Child Rights Advocacy).

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Preface

With this report, the children¹ of Switzerland are given a say in state party reporting procedure. Its aim is to make their voices heard at the highest political levels and to illustrate children's perspectives regarding the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Switzerland.

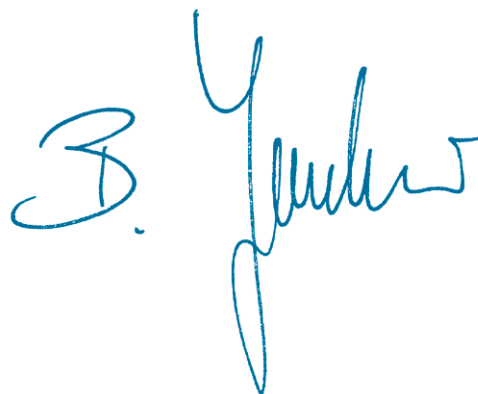
The Alternative Report of the Committee for UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein was created in collaboration with the IFSAR - Institute of Social Work and Social Spaces of Eastern Switzerland University of Applied Sciences. It is based on findings from a collaborative research project. This report contains current information collected in a survey from 1,428 children living in Switzerland. Their participation gave the researchers insights into the daily lives of children.

This Alternative Report is meant to be seen as a supplement to the report from the Child Rights Network Switzerland, to which UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein also contributed and which provides a comprehensive response to the "List of Issues" with reference to state party report procedure. Its methodology also distinguishes it from Child Rights Network Switzerland's report on children and adolescents. For this report, children from all across Switzerland were consulted through an online survey. They were asked to provide information on their lives, highlight challenges, and voice their desires for change. UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein conveyed the report's recommendations to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. For a full overview we also recommend consulting the supplementary reports of Child Rights Network Switzerland. Because of the chosen procedure, this Alternative Report does not address all the points and topics of the Committee on the Rights of the Child contained in the "List of Issues," but instead focuses on specific key areas. However, the chapters correspond to the numbering in the "List of Issues" and the State Party Report for clear reference.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child calls on UNICEF to include children in marginalized and vulnerable situations in state party reports. We are therefore very pleased that we were able to reach such children through the survey. In addition, 12 interviews were conducted with children living in poverty. This allowed vulnerable children the opportunity to speak of their living situations in detail. The findings were integrated into the Alternative Report in the form of text passages. The special involvement of this group was made possible through the generous assistance of Caritas Switzerland, which established contact with these families. Thank you.

We'd also like to take this opportunity to cordially thank all families, caregivers, and teachers for their support; our very special thanks, however, go out to all the children who made this report possible.

With this report, we hope to communicate their specific concerns to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and thus to public policy-makers. Children's voices are important, and being able to express their opinions and be heard is their right.



Bettina Junker, Executive Director
UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein

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Content and Methodology

The statistics cited here are based on the study “Kinderrechte in der Schweiz und Liechtenstein – aus Kindersicht,” which was created in 2019/2020 by UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein together with the IFSAR – Institute of Social Work and Social Spaces of Eastern Switzerland University of Applied Sciences. The aim of the study was to explore children’s perspectives on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Switzerland and Liechtenstein. In order to obtain as broad and comprehensive a picture as possible, the survey focused on the four basic principles of non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival, and healthy development; and the right to participate. The selected criteria also allowed for the collection of important information on other rights, such as a non-violent upbringing and material well-being. Children between the ages of 9 and 17 living in Switzerland and Liechtenstein were invited to provide information on their personal situations with regard to their families, schools, leisure time, neighborhoods, and social media. Here, priority was given to questions concerning experiences of discrimination as well as well-being, safety, and participation. The survey was available online between November 20, 2019 and June 1, 2020. It was conceived and designed in such a way that children could fill it out by themselves. The results show that the report can provide important insights for the following topics found in the “List of Issues prior to Report (LoIPR)”: non-discrimination, respect for the views of the child, violence against children, standard of living, and general well-being. The report is therefore presented in corresponding chapters. The issue of the well-being of children living in Switzerland was identified as a shortcoming in the “List of Issues”; for this reason, the last chapter stands independently from the list. The needs, concerns, and demands articulated by the children have also been included in the report independently.

The sampling was not random, meaning that an invitation to participate in the survey was extended to some children who are more likely to participate as well as to others less likely to do so. The survey was distributed and advertised through various professional associations and networks involved in childhood and adolescence, and through schools. The collected data was thoroughly anonymized and analyzed with descriptive methods of quantitative social research. The open answers were evaluated through content analysis.

1,826 individuals took part in the online survey. Of these, 111 were not included in the report following data cleansing because they either did not correspond to the target age group, did not live in Switzerland or Liechtenstein, or repeatedly gave non-credible answers. The responses of 287 children living in the Principality of Liechtenstein were not included for this alternative report, so the results presented are based exclusively on the responses from 1,428 children living in Switzerland. Of these, 1,246 (87%) completed the survey in German, 69 (5%) in French, and 113 (8%) in Italian. The German-speaking area of Switzerland is therefore overrepresented, and its French-speaking area underrepresented. The Italian-speaking area is represented in line with its proportion of the national population. 56.8% of respondents identified themselves as “female,” 43% as “male,” and 0.2% as “other.” 21% of respondents are between the ages of 9 and 11, 52% between the ages of 12 and 14, and 27% between the ages of 15 and 17. 83% of respondents have Swiss citizenship.

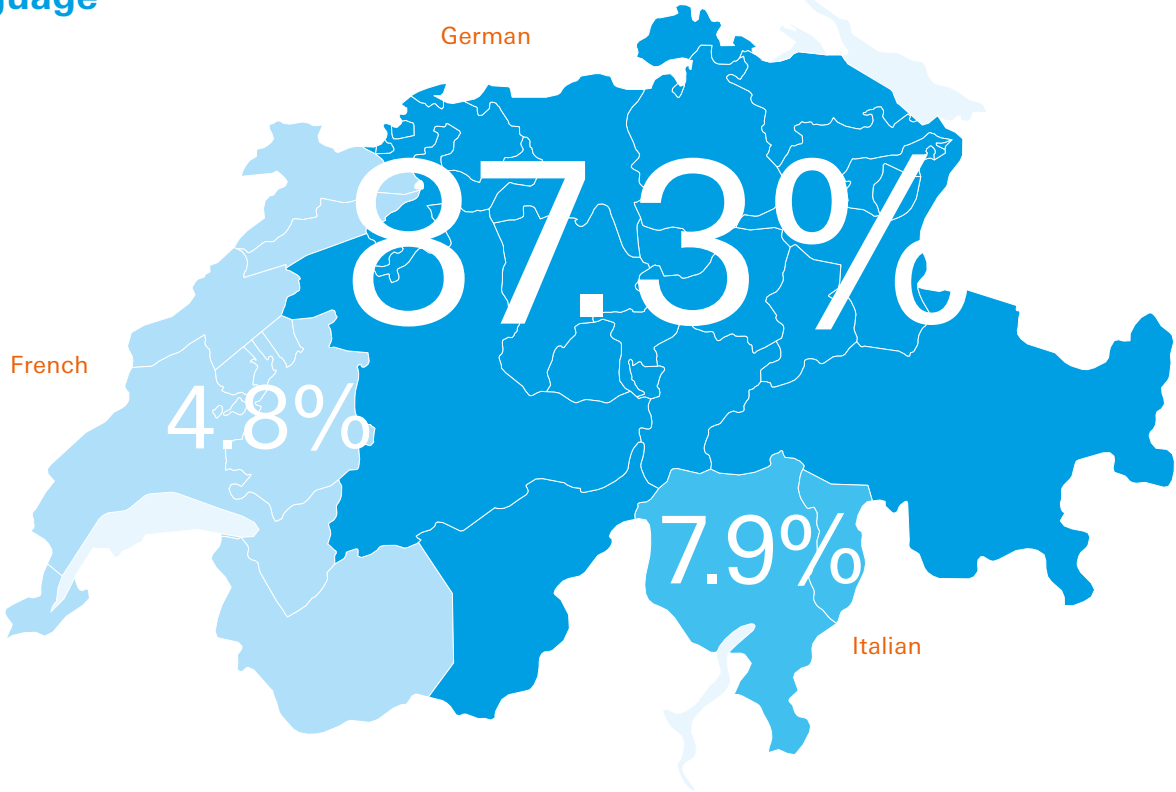
In addition to the online survey, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted with children from poor families. These 12 children were asked to give an in-depth account of their lives in the areas of family, home, school, and leisure time. They were also asked about their needs and concerns, particularly with regard to policy. This approach allowed for the inclusion of statements from a particularly vulnerable group in the report and for this group’s voices to be given special emphasis. The 12 children interviewed came from eight different families living in German-speaking regions of Switzerland and were aged between 7 and 15.



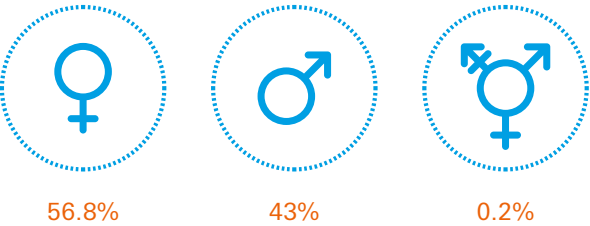
Their statements are integrated into this report in the form of interview excerpts and indicated by the corresponding icon. (C = child, I = interviewer)

Sample N = 1428

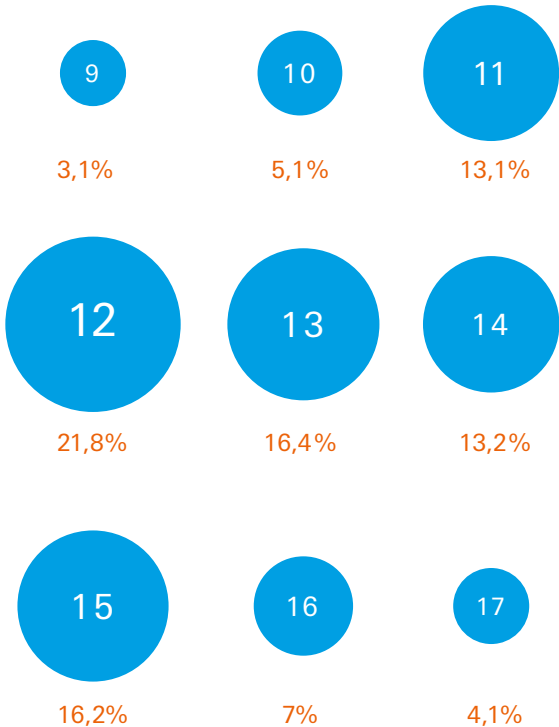
Language



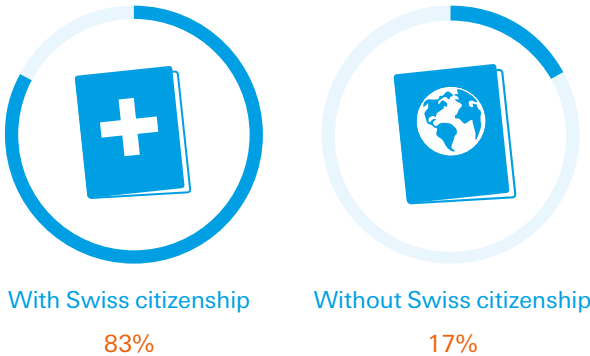
Gender



Age



Nationality



"The
discrimination
must
stop."

Child, 13, from Canton Geneva

Non-Discrimination

→ State Party Report: Paragraph 10

This chapter shows to what extent and on what grounds children in Switzerland see themselves as experiencing discrimination. Special attention is paid to children living in poverty and to those with migrant backgrounds. The findings point to these children being particularly vulnerable. In addition, the increased correlation between experiences of discrimination and bullying is explored in greater detail.

Discrimination in general

Many children in Switzerland report having experienced discrimination. The findings of the survey paint a clear picture: nearly half of all the children (43%) have experienced discriminatory, unequal treatment because of their gender, age, migrant background or religious affiliation, among other things.

The number of experiences of bad treatment due to appearance stands out in particular (22.4%). The findings are so clear that the question arises as to how much pressure children experience today with regard to appearance. We know that a positive body image greatly influences satisfaction in life and well-being, especially in girls.² In the interviews and the open answers, children brought up the issue repeatedly and very specifically. From an interview with a child:



C: "It happened to me in first grade. They made fun of me just because of my hair, because it was a little bit long. So I cut it, but then they made fun of me even more."³

However, children also report relatively widespread discrimination based on age (7.5%) or gender (7.1%). Moreover, age is not only a reason for discrimination in and of

itself. The older a child, the higher the likelihood that they have experienced discriminatory or unequal treatment in their life: while 36.1% of children aged 9 to 11 have experienced discrimination, the figure rises to 41.3% for children aged 12 to 14, and up to 51.1% for those between the ages of 15 and 17.

Seventy-seven children reported experiencing discrimination for other reasons, although the reasons here are varied. In the open answers as well, there was mention made of appearance, for example body size or weight. The children also reported physical disabilities and psychological disorders as reasons for discrimination.

Three children explicitly reported discrimination due to their skin color as the reason why they were treated more badly than others.

More than one child in ten (11.3%) experienced multiple discrimination, i.e., they experienced discrimination for more than one reason. A significant correlation was found between appearance and gender as well as between appearance and religion. The greatest correlation, however, was found between religious affiliation and a migrant background: many children reported having experienced discrimination based on both their religion and their ethnic background. The following section illustrates that children with migrant backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to discriminatory and unequal treatment.

“ Showing off isn’t cool. Taunting other people doesn’t make you clever. Just because somebody brings a snack to recess doesn’t mean they’re fat. ”

Child, 12, from Canton St. Gallen

Children with migrant backgrounds

Since information on migrant backgrounds was not explicitly collected in the survey, we refer in the following statements to those children without Swiss citizenship, showing that one in four children without Swiss citizenship feel that they are treated badly because of their migrant background. It is also interesting to note that, of the 118 children who feel badly treated because of their ethnic backgrounds, half have Swiss citizenship. A Swiss passport by itself does not offer protection from discrimination based on ethnic origin.

Nevertheless, children without Swiss citizenship are significantly more likely to suffer discrimination than children with Swiss citizenship. While 40.7% of children with Swiss citizenship claimed to experience discrimination, the percentage for children without Swiss citizenship was significantly higher at 54.2%. This points to the increased vulnerability of children with migrant backgrounds. The following experience was related by a child during an interview:



C: “I don’t speak the language well. When I was in first grade, I was talking and I said ‘tooths’ instead of ‘teeth.’ The other kids made fun of me and said, ‘She can’t even speak right.’”

Since children without Swiss citizenship are much more likely to experience discrimination, the issue of structural inequalities reflected in the children’s personal experiences of discrimination must also be addressed.

Alongside a migrant background, socio-economic status also plays a significant role in experiences of discrimination.

Children living in poverty

The results of the survey illustrate that children’s economic situations can lead to unequal treatment both in the case of poverty and prosperity.

The data shows very clearly the vulnerability of those children living in material poverty. The graph below shows that the more materially disadvantaged children are, the greater the likelihood that they experience discrimination. 65.4% of children living in extreme poverty experience frequent discrimination, which is a disturbing figure. Two out of every three children living in extreme poverty feel that they are treated poorly. In contrast, only one in two children (40.9%) not living in poverty reported having experienced discrimination.

Ethnic background and experiences of discrimination N = 1385

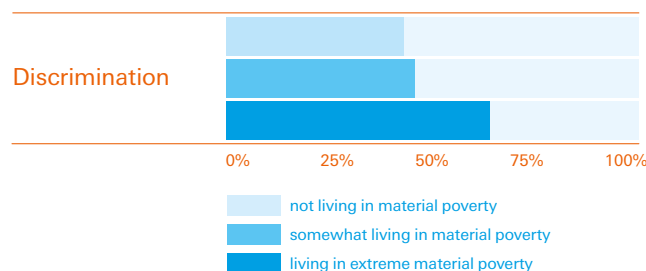


With Swiss citizenship
40.7%



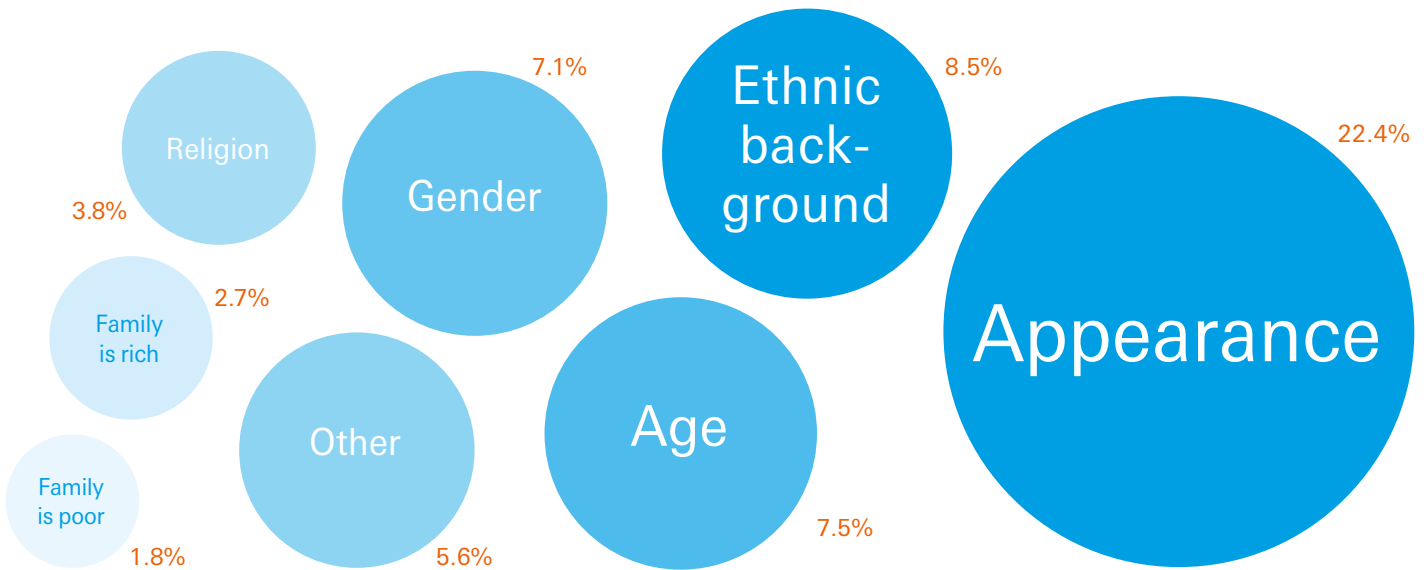
Without Swiss citizenship
54.2%

Poverty and experiences of discrimination N = 1431



One out of every two children has experienced mistreatment N = 1385

Reasons children say they felt they were treated badly:



Bullying

In the case of individual experiences of discrimination brought on by other children, bullying is often involved. The more often the children interviewed had already experienced discrimination on average, the more often they were also subjected to bullying by their classmates. This generally involves being shunned by classmates. More than half of the children (58.2%, or N=1363) have had negative experiences in this context (see the chapter on violence against children). The 2018 PISA Study, which compares 37 OECD countries and 42 partner countries, also states that no other country has more children experiencing bullying than Switzerland.⁴ Since bullying has a strong impact on well-being, influences the long-term establishment of social contacts, and affects mental and physical health,⁵ appropriate measures are urgently needed.

Relevance for Switzerland

The findings make clear the prevalence of experiences of discrimination among children in Switzerland and the complexity of the problem. A need for action exists at very different levels; in particular, children with migrant backgrounds as well as children living in poverty must be better protected. The fact that so many children experience and feel discriminatory and unequal treatment necessitates improvements in the implementation of Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, regardless of whether the children's experiences of discrimination are due to structural factors or other reasons. Although important resources are already available in Switzerland, their impact is called into question by these findings. A key step would therefore appear to be to review the presently available resources.

Recommendations on non-discrimination

UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein recommends to include the following measures in the concluding observations for Switzerland:

- the eradication of both individual and structural discrimination, especially with regard to children with migrant backgrounds and children living in poverty;
- the evaluation of existing anti-discrimination and anti-bullying measures while taking children's perspectives into account;
- the creation of effective services by planning new or recurring measures according to need;
- the strengthening of prevention in schools – because this is where many children experience discrimination and bullying.

"Grown-ups
should
listen
more."

Child, 9, from Canton Schwyz

Respect for the Views of the Child

→ State Party Report: Paragraph 12

This chapter provides insight into how children in Switzerland view their opportunities to be heard in decisions affecting them. The findings here are mixed. In the survey, children responded positively with regard to opportunities for decision-making and participation within their families and in their leisure time. In contrast, they feel that their schools and communities present fewer opportunities for their views to be heard. Older children in particular see few opportunities to become actively involved.

Decisions concerning family and leisure time

Children in Switzerland enjoy a high degree of decision-making authority and autonomy within their families. Many of the children surveyed said they are able to decide for themselves which friends they'd like to meet (78.3%) or who may enter their room (73.6%). A majority of the children (74.9%) also said that they have a say in where the family goes on vacation. The majority of children therefore have a say and participate in family decision-making. This is also illustrated by the observation that 83.8% of the children feel that their parents listen to them. For example, one child related in their interview that their family always decides on what should be saved for next together:



I: "So you always decide on what to save up for together as a family. And do you have a say in what your family's next goal is, and who decides?"

C: "Sometimes we do, sometimes my mom does. We don't alternate, but we each offer suggestions and then we vote. For what makes the most sense and what we really need right then."

Despite these positive findings, one out of every five children said that they wish that their parents would pay more attention to them. 27.3% of the children said that they are only sometimes, rarely, or never asked their opinion by their family. One out of five children (20.9%) said that their parents alone decide where the family goes on vacation.

Parental time resources appear to be influenced by economic, social, and cultural standing. For example, children without Swiss citizenship, children living in poverty, and children who do not live with both parents said that their parents have less time for them, in comparison with other families. Children without Swiss citizenship are also less frequently asked for their opinion within their family than those with Swiss citizenship.

As far as children's leisure time is concerned, they are generally positive about adults listening to their views. The majority of children said that, outside of school, adults do listen to them, make time for them, and ask their opinion. Nevertheless, more than one in three children surveyed (37.8%) said that adults ask their opinion only sometimes, rarely, or never. Children living in poverty also have significantly fewer opportunities to participate in leisure/recreational activities than children not living in poverty (see chapter on standard of living).

These values drop significantly with regard to adults at the children's place of residence, as the following section illustrates.

“ Children should have more say in things. Because grown-ups deciding on what a new playground will look like is weird. ”

Child, 12, from Canton Aargau

Participation at place of residence

The majority of the children surveyed estimated their opportunities for participation at their place of residence to be minimal. Here, more than half said that they are listened to by adults only sometimes, rarely or even never. Almost one in three children (31.3%) said that adults in their environment seldom or never have time for them, and one in two said that they are not asked for their personal opinion. The children’s perceptions depend strongly on their age: the older the child, the less they feel listened to from the adults in their place of residence. The 15- to 17-year-old group in particular sees little possibility for participation there. However, their definite interest in this and their consideration of such opportunities to be important is made clear by one child’s appeal to Switzerland:

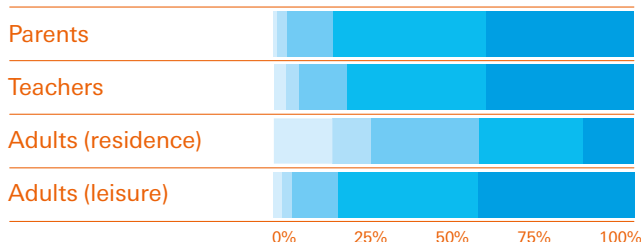
“Active participation in decisions at the ‘political’ level. It is important from an early age that we learn to express our opinions and discuss what is best for everyone.”

Child, 17, from Canton Ticino

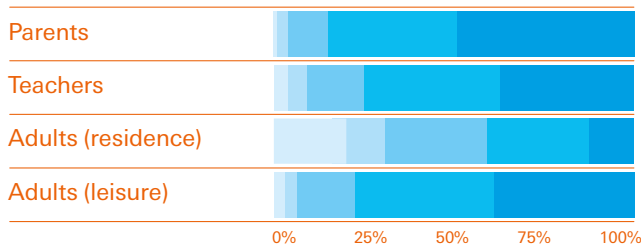
There exists a need to be heard: one in five children wish that adults would listen more to their concerns. As also seen in the chapter on non-discrimination, children with migrant backgrounds and children living in material poverty can only make use of their rights to a comparatively lesser extent. Children living in poverty and children without Swiss citizenship feel that they are listened to less by adults, who also make less time for them. The survey findings show that the children’s communities of residence offer few opportunities for their participation in political decision-making. 44% of the children reported that there are no opportunities for them to participate in political decisions. Of particular concern is the fact that

Many adults don’t have enough time and don’t really listen to children

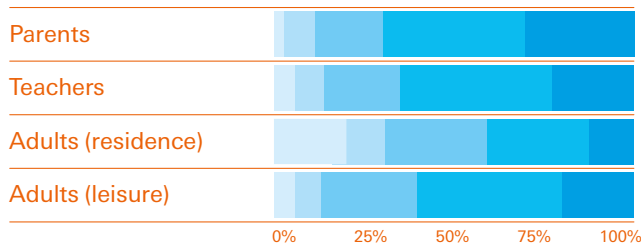
Do the people around you listen?



Do the people around you have time for you?



Do the people around you ask you for your opinion?



never rarely sometimes often always

one in three children do not know who has the power to make political decisions in their community and to whom they could turn with a request. Just over half (50.6%) of all children surveyed said that adults alone decide on the design of playgrounds and leisure/recreational facilities, without seeking the opinions of children. One in four children would like to have more say and be more involved in such matters. Another area where children see only limited opportunities for participation is school, as the following section illustrates.

Participation in schools

Schools should not only help children to acquire knowledge, but also teach them to discuss and question things. This requires attentive listening by their teachers. Happily, the majority of the children surveyed said that their teachers listen to them, but one in five wishes that teachers would listen to them more.

Almost one in three children said that their teachers never, rarely or only sometimes have time to listen to their concerns. The children surveyed reported feeling that their teachers listen to them more often than they feel that their teachers have time for them. This is an important finding which should be investigated further. The Swiss school curricula stipulate that cross-curricular competencies must be actively promoted. This includes the children's ability to reflect and pursue their own goals and values as well as to express their own opinions and beliefs. However, about one in three children (35.1%) said that they are only sometimes, rarely, or never asked for their opinion about school matters. This is a strong contradiction, because general skills are learned only through active participation. More than half of the children report that they have no say in the design of school spaces (55.8%), school activities (65.3%), or structural guidelines such as school codes (62.1%) – these matters are decided exclusively by educators. As at the community level, a significant correlation exists with the ages of the respondents: the older the children, the less they feel that their needs are recognized and heard by their teachers. Respondents between the ages of 15 and 17 see considerably fewer opportunities for participation in their schools or training programs than do younger respondents.

Relevance for Switzerland

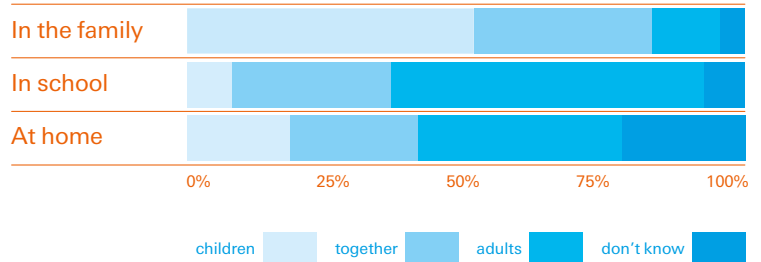
The survey findings clearly show that, both at school and at home, too little attention is paid to children's needs and wishes. In particular, children find little opportunity to participate in planning, decision-making, and implementation processes in these areas. The fundamentals of these findings also correspond to earlier studies on participation.⁶ The issue now belongs even more urgently on the political agenda. Switzerland should further promote and expand the participation of its children.

Lastly, adult leaders from all areas are called upon to listen to and consider the views and opinions of children.

The 2013 federal law on the promotion of extracurricular youth welfare (KJFG) calls on the cantons to further develop and expand their child and youth policies and to promote the participation of children. The cantons are supported in their efforts by financial assistance from the Confederation. The federal division of tasks in Swiss child and youth policy allows for much freedom in the implementation of participation, and is applied by the cantons and municipalities differently. The prepared guidelines are solely for the purposes of orientation and are not binding.⁷

Two out of three children have no say in matters regarding school

Who decides?



Recommendations on respect for the views of the child

UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein recommends to include the following measures in the concluding observations for Switzerland:

- the allocation of funds under the federal law on the promotion of extracurricular youth (KJFG) according to binding criteria. The co-financing of programs should only be made possible if such programs include participation as an integral part;
- the establishment of binding canton and municipality participation guidelines that allow children to freely express their opinions on all matters and decisions affecting them, and which give their opinions due consideration;
- the intensification of efforts to ensure that all children (especially vulnerable children) have the opportunity to participate in all planning, decision-making, and implementation processes affecting them. This applies especially to professionals working with children in the schools and at the community level;
- systematic training for professionals who work with children in how participation can be effectively encouraged, enshrined, and made possible for all.

"It should
be illegal
to hit
children!"

Child, 15, from Canton Basel-Stadt

Violence Against Children

→ State Party Report: Paragraph 15

This chapter shows the extent to which the different areas of children's lives are marked by violence. Violence impairs a child's development, health, and well-being.⁸ The survey findings are therefore all the more worrying, as they show that physical and psychological violence – at home, in school, and on social media – have become part of everyday life for many children in Switzerland.

Domestic violence

More than one in four children (28.2%) have experienced physical violence by a parent. The older the child, the higher the likelihood of having experienced physical violence by a parent. While 21.9% of respondents between the ages of 9 and 11 answered this question with "Yes," this number climbed to 26.8% for respondents between the ages of 12 and 14, and 35.6% for children between the ages of 15 and 17.

The findings on psychological violence paint a very similar picture: 23.3% of the children said that they had been laughed at, imitated, cursed at, or insulted by their parents. The figure is somewhat lower (18.7%) for children who reported that their parents ignore them or stop speaking to them.

The incidence of both physical and psychological violence was significantly higher among children living in poverty and among children who do not live with both parents. The survey revealed that financial resources and housing situations were the main factors determining the degree to which physical and psychological violence is used as a form of child rearing (see also the chapter on standard of living).

Violence in schools

Viewed across areas of life and groups of people, children are most often subjected to violence by other children. 43.7% of the children surveyed reported being made fun of, insulted, cursed at, or imitated by their classmates. 23% say that they have experienced ostracism or bullying

by their classmates. 15.5% have had personal property taken away from them, for example phones. Nearly one in three children (31.7%) have experienced physical violence by other children. A discrepancy emerges involving gender: the average value for responses from girls who experienced violence was 1.06, significantly lower than from boys (1.25). Boys are thus exposed to physical and psychological violence by other children significantly more often than girls. The children referred to these forms of violence and expressed the desire for change. The comment from one child, for example:

"The class shouldn't be divided into two groups that are always fighting and saying bad things about each other."

Child, 12, from Canton Grisons

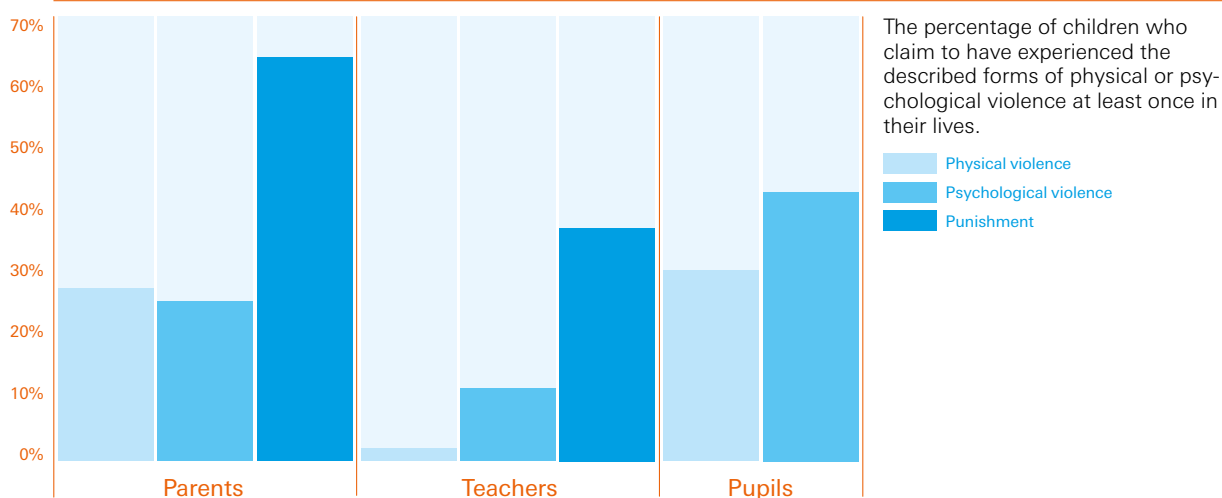
The survey's findings are more positive with regard to teachers. More than half of the children surveyed have never experienced corporal punishment or violence from their teachers. Instances of physical and psychological violence in this context are less widespread than within the family, for example. More than one in three children (37.6%) are still subject to such punishments as detention, being sent out of the classroom, or being given extra work. 14.6% of the children surveyed have experienced their personal property being confiscated by teachers. The number of children who said they have been subjected to

“ I wish that my brother wasn't so mean and that my mother didn't yell and hit us. And that she didn't look at her phone so much. ”

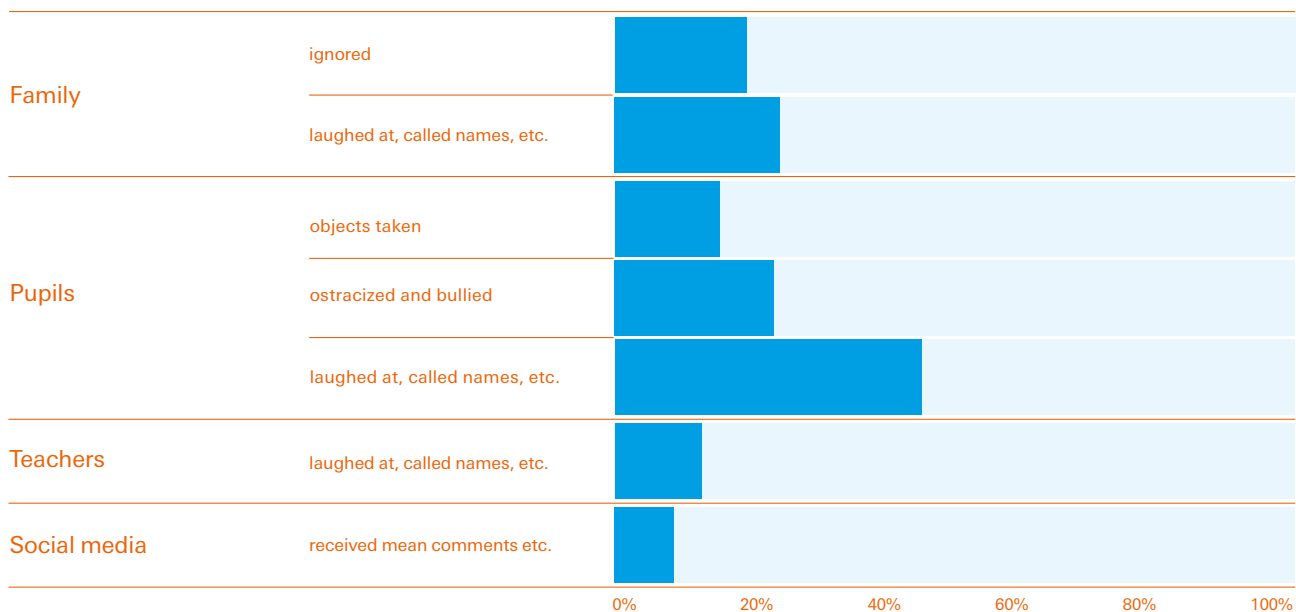
Child, 14, from Canton Aargau

Many children experience violence in their daily lives

Experiences of violence and corporal punishment



Experiences of psychological violence



The percentage of children who claim to have experienced the described forms of psychological violence at least once in their lives.

psychological violence through taunts, insults, curses, or imitation by teachers is somewhat lower (11.4%). 2.3% of the children surveyed said they were subjected to physical violence by their teachers.

It is encouraging that these figures are lower than those for other contexts. Schools in particular, however, should be safe places where well-trained professionals know and respect the rights of children. Nevertheless, 37 of the children surveyed reported being subjected to physical violence by teachers despite their educational mission and legal regulations. This is food for thought, as are the distinctly higher numbers for psychological violence and punishment. Here, a significant difference can be observed in terms of age and gender: the mean value for experiencing punishment and violence increases with age. It is especially clear that boys experience violence at school significantly more often than girls. On average, more than twice as many boys (3.9%) as girls (1.8%) have experienced physical violence by their teachers. But children are also subjected to much more frequent psychological violence and punishment in school.

Violence through social media

Digital mobile devices such as smartphones, computers, and tablets have become staples in the lives of children aged 9 to 17. Only 1.8% of the children surveyed said that they consume no digital media at home. Almost one in four (22.9%) follow influencers on social media and view them as role models.

Experiences of violence occur apparently somewhat less frequently on social media than during direct contact with classmates. 8.1% of the children surveyed experienced psychological violence on social media through other users. 9.2% experienced personal privacy infringements through the sharing of information, photos, or videos. More than one in seven children (16.7%) have been confronted with sexual content or approached in this context on social media. Here again, there is a strong correlation of such statements to age. The older the child, the greater the likelihood that such experiences have occurred.

Relevance for Switzerland

The findings clearly show the extent to which children experience violence in a variety of forms. None of the areas discussed in the survey came away untouched by violence. Combating such violations of child rights requires commitment at very different levels. The implementation of appropriate legislation, including enforcement and monitoring, seems essential. Only in this way can other prevention measures, programs, and services be completely successful.⁹ Switzerland still lacks legislation explicitly prohibiting corporal punishment and ensuring the right to an upbringing free of violence. All attempts to create such legislation have failed to date.¹⁰



I: "What would you like to tell the Swiss government – what do you and other children need?"

C: "People shouldn't act out – people should use their words."

Recommendations on violence against children

UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein recommends to include the following measures in the concluding observations for Switzerland:

- the adoption of unambiguous legislation in the Swiss Civil Code (ZGB) which explicitly prohibits violence in child rearing;
- the development of instruments and procedures for the systematic collection of data on violence against children to ensure extensive monitoring;
- the development of a national plan of action to eradicate all forms of violence against children by the year 2030 – as called for in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- the provision of more and easily accessible counseling and support services, especially for vulnerable children and families.

"Fewer
poor
families."

Child, 15, from Canton Aargau

Standard of Living

→ State Party Report: Paragraph 24

During the analysis of the data, it emerged that children living in poverty can only make use of their rights to a comparatively small extent. The particular vulnerability of children living in poverty has already been noted in the context of non-discrimination and is discussed in more detail in the corresponding chapter. However, similar inequalities also emerge in terms of participation, non-violence, and general well-being. In this chapter we would like to examine how poverty affects these three areas.

Poverty in general

A majority of the children who took part in the survey said they do not live in material poverty (76.6%). However, 19.5% said they are at least partly subject to material limitations, and 3.9% said they are extremely so. Forty-five children (3.3%) said that their families don't have adequate financial resources for them to join a club or take music lessons. Just as many children live in cramped housing conditions with virtually no opportunities for privacy. A somewhat smaller number say they have to wear hand-me-down clothing (2.2%) or stay home during school vacations because of a lack of financial resources (1.4%). Children living in poverty often have unhealthy or unbalanced diets, not least because healthy and nutritious food is more expensive and money is often saved in this area.¹¹ It is therefore encouraging that four in five children (81.9%) said they regularly eat fruit and vegetables at home and thus enjoy a healthy diet. Children cited poverty as a problem in the survey and wished for changes in this regard, including in the following appeal:

“Less of a divide between rich and poor.”

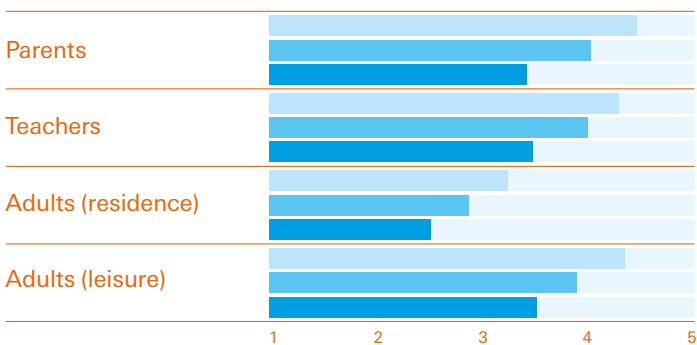
Child, 14, from Canton Bern

Poverty and well-being

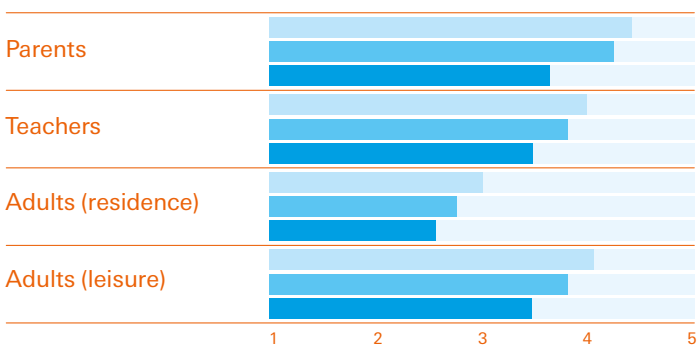
The general well-being of children depends on their feeling comfortable and safe in their environment. Having someone to offer support and advice when problems arise also plays a major role.¹² Children living in material poverty rated their well-being significantly more negatively than others. They feel less safe in all the areas examined here – with the exception of internet use – than children not living in material poverty. In other words, within the family, at school, in their free time, and at home. Children who are not living in poverty feel very safe in all of the areas examined. From a scale of one (not safe) to five (very safe), their overall average response was between 4.4 and 4.7. For children whose families are partly affected by poverty, this value lies between 4.2 and 4.5. For children living in poverty, the mean values are significantly lower (between 3.7 and 3.9). The number of trusted persons also differs greatly. While the average number of trusted persons to whom children living in extreme poverty can turn with their problems is just 1.4, for children not living in poverty the average is greater than two. The reasons for these differences will have to be the subject of further study.

Children living in poverty are less likely to be heard

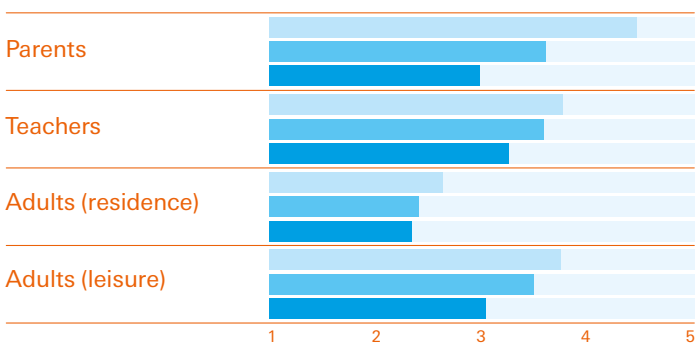
Do the people around you listen?



Do the people around you have time for you?



Do the people around you ask for your opinion?



1 never
2 rarely
3 sometimes
4 often
5 always

not living in material poverty
somewhat living in material poverty
living in extreme material poverty

Poverty and participation

The picture for participatory rights is similar to that for the perception of safety. Children living in poverty feel less heard in all areas of life, estimate the time adults devote to them as less, and say that on average they are asked for their opinion much less frequently.

On a scale from one (never) to five (always) when asked to what extent adults from the children's residential environments – for example community leaders – listen to children living in poverty, the mean value was 2.67. This indicates that adults listen to children living in poverty in their communities only rarely, or sometimes. By comparison, for children not living in poverty the mean value was 3.23, between "sometimes" and "most of the time." But children living in poverty also feel less heard by their parents, teachers, and adults in leisure/recreational areas.

As can be seen from the graph, a nearly identical picture emerges when it comes to the question of how much time adults have for them.

The greatest difference between children not living in poverty and children living in extreme poverty lies in participation within the family. While the former said that they are asked for their opinion in a family context "most of the time," the latter said "sometimes" at most.

Poverty and violence

Children living in poverty experience violence in the family much more frequently. The difference is particularly striking with regard to physical violence. Even among children not living in poverty, one in four (25.3%) said that they had experienced violence in their family at least once. The value is 37.4% for children partly affected by poverty and 40.4% for children living in extreme poverty. The figures are somewhat lower for experiences of psychological violence in the family, but the picture is basically the same.

One interviewed child described a stressful and physically violent family situation thus:



I: "And if you could change something in your apartment or in your house, what would it be?"

C: "The fighting."

I: "And what does fighting look like in your home?"

C: "Hitting, yelling, and then ... crying."

At school, whether or not a child lives in poverty has no influence on experiencing violence. However, experiences of violence though the use of digital media are linked to economic resources: the probability that a child living in extreme poverty will have negative experiences with digital media is more than twice as high as for other children.

Relevance for Switzerland

The findings clearly confirm that material poverty causes children to be disadvantaged in all areas of life in comparison to other children. Their lack of material security means that they can only make limited use of their rights.

From a child rights perspective, it is therefore essential to address child poverty in Switzerland.

“ All young people should have equality, no matter where or what social class they come from. So that everyone – not just the ones who can afford it – can do what they want in their free time. ”

Child, 16, from Canton Bern

The advancement of equal opportunities through early childhood education and care (ECEC) has proven to be an effective preventive measure against poverty. In addition, supplementary family benefits in Switzerland have proven to be a good means of reducing child poverty and preventing families from becoming dependent on social assistance. These, however, still only apply to the cantons of Ticino, Vaud, Geneva and Solothurn. Efforts to implement them at the federal level have failed to date. Moreover, of all age categories, children represent the largest group of social welfare recipients in Switzerland.¹³ It is therefore concerning that social welfare has come under increasing political pressure in recent years and that the Swiss Conference of Welfare Organizations (SKOS) guidelines on the minimum subsistence level are not binding. This social and political dynamic is all the more disconcerting in light of the current Covid-19 pandemic. In May 2020, the SKOS published an article in which it stated that a further 36,500 to 72,500 social assistance recipients are to be expected. It is understood that this will include many children. There is also the problem that many people do not receive social assistance despite being entitled to it. Children and families without Swiss citizenship are particularly affected, since receiving social assistance may have negative effects on their residence permit status.¹⁴



I: “And do you have a wish?”

C: “That poor people have food to eat and money.”

Recommendations on standards of living

UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein recommends to include the following measures in the concluding observations for Switzerland:

- an increase in investments in family policy, particularly in early childhood education and care (ECEC), and bring it in line with the European average of 2.4% of GDP;
- codification of the SKOS guidelines to make them binding across Switzerland through federal legislation;
- introduction or coordination of means-tested benefits for families (supplementary family benefits and advances on alimony) throughout Switzerland at cantonal level and enshrining them in law at federal level;
- assurance that children and families without Swiss citizenship can claim their entitlement to social assistance without the fear of negative effects on their residence status.

"Maybe
just
make
everyone
feel
safer."

Child, 11, from Canton Lucerne

General Well-Being

→ Chapter supplementing the “List of Issues”

Many survey responses, as well as individual suggestions for improvement and concerns about safety, relationships, and well-being, provide key insights into the lives of children in Switzerland. In our view, the state of their general welfare allows important conclusions to be drawn about the exercising of various rights. The last chapter therefore focuses on the three main topics mentioned above. It serves as a supplement to the report and is independent of the “List of Issues.”

Well-being in general

Most of the children surveyed assessed their own situation in the various areas of life as a positive one. They are aware that they have rights. 90.5% of the children said that they have heard of child rights. Schools appear to be an important conveyor of this knowledge, with most children (79.4%) saying that they first learned of their rights in school.

School plays a major role in children’s daily lives. It is an independent environment where the children are present primarily during the week. It is therefore encouraging that the clear majority (84.7%) of children feel safe in their school environments. Almost half offered no suggestions for changes.

Similar findings are shown for children’s home environments. More than half of the children surveyed assess their family situation as positive and expressed no desire for changes within the family. A significant majority of children (93.2%) also said that they feel safe at home. The home environment emerges as a safe haven even in the face of difficult situations. 95.9% of the children surveyed say that they know at least one person to whom they can turn with their problems and concerns. These trusted people are most often described as family members or friends. Satisfaction is also evident in the home environment. 86% of the children surveyed like where they live. 90.1% say

they feel safe in their environment. One in four children expressed no desire for changes at the community level. The majority rated their places for play and leisure in particular as positive and satisfactory. The majority (92.1%) of children surveyed confirmed that they feel safe in their free time in their neighborhoods.

Although these results can be taken as very positive overall, and one may therefore assume a generally high well-being for children in Switzerland, there are still some aspects and situations that concern the children in their everyday life.

Well-being in the digital world

Today’s children are digital natives and use the internet on a daily basis. While 67.4% of the children surveyed perceive the internet as safe, one in three (32.6%) said they feel moderately safe, less safe or not safe at all online. Here one finds significant gender-specific differences. Girls on average say that they feel safe online much less often than boys do. While half of the children generally see the internet as a good thing and would not want to change anything about it, some see room for improvement. In particular, data privacy and dealing with photos and contacts is an area where children wish for more security and control. Compared to the other areas, the internet is rated as the area where children feel the least safe.

“ I think we should be told things differently. For example, not just what we should do, but also what could happen, even though we’re doing the right thing. Because we’re never told that. ”

Child, 14, from Canton Zurich

Well-being in school

Similar findings emerge for the school environment. Despite its generally positive rating, just over one in six children say they feel “moderately” to “not” safe in school. Reasons vary as to why feelings of well-being are somewhat diminished. For one in eleven children, the school environment is a place of excessive conflict. 6% would like to see more respect and more solidarity in the classroom. The survey also shows that the children are highly concerned with issues such as racism, discrimination, and bullying and are confronted with these issues repeatedly in everyday life. Furthermore, 5.1% of the children surveyed feel that the pressure to perform and the amount of work they are given is too high, which results in their feeling that there is not enough time left for leisure each day.



I: “Do you sometimes spend time with friends?”

C: “Not so much. It’s hard to find time, because there are two tests during the week and I have to study for them. And I have homework too. And then on Monday I have school until five o’clock, and then we’re back in school.”

One issue that many children repeatedly raise is the right to participation. Many would like to be more involved in decision-making at their schools and to have the opportunity to express their own wishes and views.

“It would be cool if we could give a presentation and decide on the topic ourselves. Or if we could contribute ideas for a project day.”

Child, 12, from Canton St. Gallen

Well-being within the family

The findings also apply to the family context. The children surveyed reported discord or unfulfilled needs within the family. Some of them, for example, expressed a desire for more freedom and self-determination in their lives. Repeated disputes within the family are also an oft-cited reason for personal dissatisfaction – here a lack of respect and support from family members plays a major role. Such situations were cited as grounds for dissatisfaction in the family context by the children surveyed.

“My parents should listen to me and they should notice that this is how I am, it’s not just a phase. They should accept this. They should leave me room to do what I want and listen to my opinion.”

Child, 16, from Canton Aargau

Well-being in one's immediate community

More self-determination and the right to a say are also sought at the community level. The children have a particularly strong desire to be involved in political decision-making processes. Many children stated that they are not satisfied with their living environment. The reasons for dissatisfaction are varied. One in ten children said that they don't feel safe in their environment and 22.2% wish they had more options for their leisure time. Nearly one in five children (17.8%) find that the existing options for play and leisure are inadequate. One child's wish:

"More places that don't cost anything, where I can meet my friends."

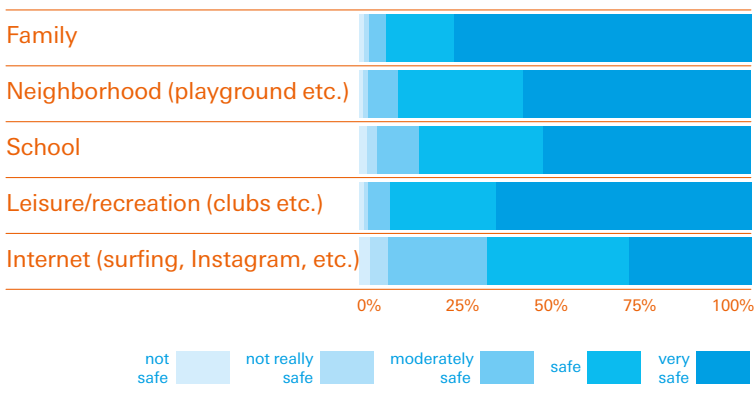
Child, 15, from Canton Uri

15.9% of the children surveyed said they know places where they would not want to stay for long. Overall, it is clear from the open answers that the children wish for more green spaces, a clean environment, and enough room to run around or relax. The issues of climate change and the environment were raised frequently, and they account for a large part of the children's general well-being. As can be seen in the graph, the children said they feel safest with their families (~75% feel very safe) and the least safe at school (~50%) and online (~25%).

The survey clearly indicates that children in Switzerland enjoy a high level of general well-being. However, there are also various issues that affect the children in their day-to-day lives and which have a negative impact on their well-being. The following contents, concerns, and wishes pertain to the current everyday lives of children. It is hoped that they may resonate directly where children live, and inspire change!

Of all areas of life, children feel the least safe online

How safe do you feel?



"We should be asked our opinions more, ESPECIALLY about climate change, because it's our future!!"

Child, 15, from Canton Neuchâtel

What can be made better for children in Switzerland?

This open question was answered by 1,205 children with both long and short responses. The responses were analyzed for content and assigned to the following categories, represented here according to the number of mentions. Many children also responded with "Nothing" or "Don't know." These two categories were not included in the graph.

More say in political issues

The school situation

More space
for activities

A more just society

Less violence and racism

More free time, less pressure

More respect for the environment

Safer use of the internet

More safety in public spaces

No drugs

Financial assistance

More traffic safety



Annex

¹ The Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as any person who has not yet reached the age of eighteen. For this reason, the term “adolescent” is consciously omitted in the following text.

² UNICEF Innocenti, 2020: “Worlds of Influence: Understanding what shapes child well-being in rich countries,” Innocenti Report Card 16, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, p. 17.

³ The sample of children living in poverty is very small. No further information is disclosed in order to preserve their anonymity.

⁴ Konsortium PISA.ch (2019). PISA 2018: “Schülerinnen und Schüler der Schweiz im internationalen Vergleich.” SBF/EDK and Konsortium PISA.ch, Bern and Geneva, p. 71.

⁵ UNICEF Innocenti, 2020: “Worlds of Influence: Understanding what shapes child well-being in rich countries,” Innocenti Report Card 16, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, pp. 23–24.

⁶ Institute of Education, University of Zurich on behalf of UNICEF Schweiz, 2015: “Von der Stimme zur Wirkung,” UNICEF Schweiz, Zurich.

⁷ SODK, 2016: “Empfehlungen der Konferenz der Sozialdirektorinnen und Sozialdirektoren (SODK) für die Weiterentwicklung der Kinder- und Jugendpolitik in den Kantonen.” Accessed on September 1, 2020, from https://ch-sodk.s3.amazonaws.com/media/files/2016.06.21_SODK_Empf_KJP_d_ES_RZ.pdf.

⁸ UNICEF, 2014: “Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children,” UNICEF, New York, p. 31.

⁹ Ibid. p. 170.

¹⁰ Federal Commission of Child and Youth Affairs (EKKJ), 2019: “Das Recht des Kindes auf eine Erziehung ohne Gewalt. Situation in der Schweiz, Handlungsbedarf und Forderungen der EKKJ.” Bern, pp. 15–16.

¹¹ Swiss Society for Nutrition (SGE), 2010: “Ernährung und Armut in der Schweiz.” Tabula, Zeitschrift für Ernährung, No. 1, March 2010; Society of Nutrition and Food Science e.V and the University of Hohenheim, 2018: Comment on “Kinder und Ernährungsarmut.” Accessed on September 18, 2020, from <http://snfs.org/downloads/snfs-stellungnahme-ernahrun.pdf>; Swiss Conference of Welfare Organizations (SKOS), 2015: “Grundlagenpapier Armut und Armutsgrenze.” Accessed on September 21, 2020, from https://skos.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/skos_main/public/pdf/grundlagen_und_positionen/grundlagen_und_studien/2015_Die_Armutsgrenze_der_SKOS-d.pdf.

¹² UNICEF Innocenti, 2020: “Worlds of Influence: Understanding what shapes child well-being in rich countries,” Innocenti Report Card 16, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, pp. 12–13, 23–24.

¹³ Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2020: “Wirtschaftliche Sozialhilfe.” Accessed on September 2, 2020, from <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/soziale-sicherheit/sozialhilfe/sozialhilfebeziehende/wirtschaftliche-sozialhilfe.html>.

¹⁴ SKOS, 2020: “Analysepapier. Corona-Epidemie: Aktuelle Lage und zukünftige Herausforderungen für die Sozialhilfe,” pp. 4–7. Accessed on September 2, 2020 from https://skos.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/skos_main/public/pdf/grundlagen_und_positionen/positionen/200518_Analysepapier_Herausforderungen_Sozialhilfe_def_d.pdf.

