ChildACT+

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Child-ACT+ Romanian National Report

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Executive Summary



Romania has made **significant progress towards institutionalising children's participation in public decision-making,** particularly through the adoption of **Law No. 295/2024**, which establishes, for the first time, **a dedicated legal framework requiring public authorities to consult children aged 14-18 and establish permanent participation mechanisms.** This represents an important milestone in Romanian legislation and places the country among the few countries with a dedicated legal framework specifically regulating children's participation beyond the education sector. The new provisions complement the existing framework established by Law No. 350/2006 on Youth, which promotes the participation of young people aged 14–35, as well as sectoral legislation governing, for example, pre-university students representation.

Beyond the legal framework, **Romania has developed several promising participatory models** through partnerships between municipalities and civil society organisations. Initiatives such as the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative, participatory budgeting programmes for high school students, youth participatory budgeting schemes (e.g. Com'ON), and children's advisory councils established by civil society organisations demonstrate that meaningful participation is achievable when supported by dedicated institutional capacity and continuous engagement rather than one-off consultations.

Overall, Romania has established a **relatively comprehensive legal framework for children's and youth participation,** but its implementation remains largely dependent on political commitment, institutional capacity, and the existence of an active civic space. In the absence of effective monitoring, evaluation, and oversight mechanisms, Law No. 350/2006 and especially the new Law 295/2024 risk remaining largely "paper tiger" legislation, with no systematic way of assessing whether public authorities fulfil their legal obligations or whether youth and children participation influences public decision-making in practice. The strongest examples of meaningful children's participation identified in this report have emerged through dedicated initiatives developed by municipalities and civil society organisations rather than through the direct implementation of legal obligations. The coming years will therefore be critical in determining whether Law No. 295/2024 succeeds in transforming these isolated good practices into institutionalised participation mechanisms across all public authorities.

Key structural strengths:

- Adoption of Law No. 295/2024, establishing the first dedicated legal framework for children's participation in public decision-making. Legal obligation for public authorities to establish permanent consultation mechanisms and organise annual consultations with children.
- Complementary participation framework combining children's participation (Law No. 295/2024), youth participation (Law No. 350/2006), and student representation under education legislation.
- Existence of innovative local participation models, including Child Friendly Cities, participatory budgeting initiatives, and children's advisory councils, demonstrating practical approaches to meaningful participation.
- Involvement of civil society organisations in developing participation methodologies, building children's capacities, and advocating for legislative reform.

Key structural gaps:

- Significant gap between legal provisions and implementation and the absence of a national monitoring, evaluation, and accountability framework to assess compliance with Law No. 295/2024 and Law No. 350/2006.
- Lack of dedicated and predictable funding for children's participation mechanisms, while implementation of youth funding provisions under Law No. 350/2006 remains inconsistent.
- The legal framework lacks any targeted measure to overcome territorial, socio-economic, disability, minority and gender-related barriers to children's participation, risking unequal implementation across communities.
- Heavy reliance on project-based initiatives and civil society organisations rather than sustainable institutional practices within public authorities
- Territorial inequalities, with most good practices concentrated in larger and better-resourced municipalities, while rural and socio-economically disadvantaged communities remain significantly underrepresented.

Most urgent reforms needed:

- Establish a national monitoring and oversight mechanism, including annual reporting and independent evaluation of the implementation of the recently adopted Law No. 295/2024 and youth participation provisions under Law No. 350/2006.
- Move beyond one-off consultations by embedding children's participation throughout the entire policy and project cycle, including feedback mechanisms demonstrating how children's views influenced decisions.
- Introduce dedicated and transparent funding for children's participation mechanisms and strengthen the implementation of youth funding provisions through simplified grant schemes for youth organisations.
- Expand participatory budgeting programmes for children and adolescents aged 14–18 across municipalities, building on successful local models such as Timișoara.

- Strengthen support for municipalities with lower administrative capacity, particularly rural and disadvantaged communities, through technical assistance, training, and partnerships with civil society.

Gender and inclusion findings. Romania's legal framework establishes universal participation rights without differentiating by gender and generally promotes inclusive participation. However, neither Law No. 295/2024 nor Law No. 350/2006 contains detailed provisions on ensuring the participation of girls, children with disabilities, children from minority communities, or other vulnerable groups. In practice, inclusion has been addressed primarily through civil society and locally implemented initiatives rather than through national legislation. Programmes such as the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative and the World Vision Romania Children's Advisory Council have deliberately engaged children from rural and disadvantaged communities, while participatory budgeting programmes implemented through schools have broadened access to democratic participation. Nevertheless, territorial disparities remain significant, with meaningful participation opportunities concentrated in larger municipalities. Future implementation of the legal framework should therefore place greater emphasis on outreach, accessibility, safeguarding, and targeted measures to ensure that participation mechanisms effectively reach children facing social, economic, or geographical disadvantage.

KEY FINDING

Romania has a strong legal framework for youth and child participation, but implementation remains uneven and highly dependent on political will, institutional capacity, and active civic engagement. Weak monitoring and accountability mechanisms limit the ability to assess whether participation rights are effectively realised in practice.

Table of Contents

Methodological Approach 01

Findings from Desk Research 04

Findings from Interviews 18

Findings from Focus Groups 25

Findings from FOIA Institutional Audit 32

Cross-Method Analysis 33

Gender and Intersectional Analysis 34

Structural Recommendations 35



Methodological Approach

This national report applies the common methodology to assess the legal framework, implementation practices and lived experiences of children's participation in public decision-making in Romania. The analysis combines desk research, qualitative interviews and a focus group discussion in order to capture both institutional frameworks and the perspectives of children and practitioners involved in participation processes.

The research relied on a set of complementary methods as follows:

- **Desk research** and legal analysis of national legislation, policy documents, methodological guidelines, reports published by public institutions, academic literature and reports produced by international organisations and civil society organisations active in the field of children's rights and participation.
- **Semi-structured interviews with children,** aimed at understanding their awareness of participation opportunities, experiences with participation mechanisms, perceived influence on decision-making, barriers to participation, and priority policy areas. A total of 14 interviews were conducted with children aged 16-18 years from both urban and rural areas.
- **Semi-structured interviews with children's representatives and practitioners**, including teachers and professionals responsible for supporting participation mechanisms within schools and local communities. These interviews explored institutional commitment, implementation challenges, available resources, and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of existing participation structures.

- A **focus group discussion** with 9 representatives of child-focused organisations and participation structures, including civil society organisations, international organisations, and representatives of student and children's councils. The discussion focused on implementation challenges, good practices, inclusion gaps, and policy recommendations.

When available, data obtained from interviews and focus groups were cross-checked against findings from desk research and legal analysis.

Participants' recruitment approach:
Children participating in the interviews were recruited through schools and local partner organisations operating in three locations: **Bucharest** (Bucharest-Ilfov region, urban), **Dorohoi** (Botosani county, small urban) and **Sascut** (Bacau county, rural), ensuring the inclusion of participants from both urban and rural communities.
The sample sought to capture various experiences regarding access to participation opportunities, although it was not intended to be statistically representative of Romanian children as a whole.
Representatives participating in the interviews and focus group were selected using purposive sampling based on their professional involvement in children's participation mechanisms, youth participation, education, child protection, and local governance. Participants included representatives of civil society organisations, international organisations, schools, and formal participation structures operating at the national and local levels.
Several adaptations were introduced to reflect the Romanian context and the recent legislative developments affecting children's participation.
First, the desk research placed particular emphasis on the **analysis of Law No. 295/2024**, which introduced Romania's first dedicated legal framework for children's participation in public decision-making.

Given the novelty of the legislation, particular attention was paid to implementation guidance and secondary legislation adopted in 2025.
Second, because implementation of the new legislation has only recently begun, the research relied more heavily on qualitative evidence gathered through interviews and focus groups to assess existing participation practices and identify potential implementation challenges.
Third, the analysis considered participation across multiple institutional environments, including local public authorities, schools, civil society organisations, and participatory budgeting initiatives, reflecting the fragmented and multi-level nature of participation mechanisms in Romania.
Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings:

- First, the recent adoption of Law No. 295/2024 means that there is **currently limited evidence regarding implementation outcomes** or institutional compliance with the new legal obligations. As a result, many conclusions concerning implementation challenges remain prospective rather than evaluative.
- Second, the qualitative sample of interviewed children and practitioners was **relatively small and cannot be considered statistically representative of all Romanian regions or social groups.** The research design did not aim to produce representative findings across different demographic or socio-economic groups.
- Third, **participation mechanisms in Romania remain highly unequal across regions,** with many examples of good practice concentrated in municipalities benefiting from active civil society organisations or external funding. Consequently, experiences reported by participants may not fully reflect realities in localities where participation opportunities are limited or absent.

Finally, the absence of national monitoring systems and publicly available implementation data limited the possibility of systematically assessing the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and impact of participation mechanisms across public institutions.

Findings from Desk Research



National Level - The legal framework for youth and children's participation

Romania's legal framework for participation in public decision-making has evolved progressively over the past two decades. It combines a general framework for youth participation, aged 14 to 35, with more recent provisions that explicitly recognise the participation rights of children aged 14 to 18. While the initial approach promotes the civic engagement and involvement of young people in public life, the newer children's rights framework introduces specific obligations for public authorities to consult children on decisions affecting their rights and interests. As a result, children's participation has new mandatory consultation mechanisms embedded in the legislation for both local and central public authorities, underlining, at least on paper, their role in shaping public decision-making.

The evolution of the legal framework on youth and children's participation

The cornerstone of Romania's legal framework for youth participation is **Law No. 350/2006 on Youth ("Legea Tinerilor"),** which establishes the general principles, rights, and institutional mechanisms for youth policy and participation. The law defines young people as persons aged 14 to 35 years and recognises their right to actively participate in public, economic, social, cultural, and political life. It places a clear responsibility on public authorities to create opportunities for young people to contribute to decision-making processes and to support their civic engagement.

Importantly, **Law No. 350/2006 goes beyond setting general principles by introducing specific obligations for public authorities.** Central and local public authorities, as well as public institutions implementing programmes or projects for young people financed from public funds, are required to consult young people and their representative organisations when developing, implementing, and evaluating policies and measures that affect them. Furthermore, where representative structures exist at the territorial level, authorities are expected to consult the county youth federations (or the Municipality of Bucharest Youth Federation) as representative dialogue partners, thereby institutionalising youth participation in public decision-making. The law also encourages the establishment and functioning of consultative youth councils at the local and county levels, providing a formal mechanism through which young people and youth organisations can engage with public authorities, express their views, and contribute to the design of local youth policies. These consultative structures are intended to strengthen dialogue between decision-makers and young people, although their implementation and effectiveness vary significantly across the country.

A further important provision is the requirement for annual public funding dedicated to youth activities and projects. The law obliges central and local public authorities to allocate distinct budget lines for financing youth programmes, projects, and initiatives, primarily through transparent competitive grant schemes. This funding mechanism is designed to strengthen youth organisations, encourage civic participation, and support initiatives that promote active citizenship, volunteering, democratic participation, and community engagement.

While Law No. 350/2006 represents the principal legal basis for promoting youth participation in Romania and establishes important consultation and funding obligations for public authorities, its primary focus remains on young people aged 14–35 (and, in practice, on youths over 18 y.o) rather than on children's participation rights.

As a result, although adolescents benefit from these provisions, the law does not explicitly operationalise the right of children to participate in decisions-making.

A significant shift occurred however recently, driven by Law No. 295/2024 (*for the supplementation of Law no. 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of the rights of the child*), adopted in November 2024, **introducing a dedicated chapter on children's participation in decision-making (*Chapter XI^1 - Participation of Children in the Decision-Making Process*).** This represents the first legal provision specifically requiring local and national public authorities to systematically engage children aged 14 to 18 in public decision-making.

Under Article 143, **beginning in 2025, the Parliament, the Presidential Administration, the Government, local public authorities, and all public institutions under their authority or coordination are required to organise at least one annual consultation session with children.** These consultations must take the form of dedicated events or activities that provide a protected environment for dialogue and encourage children's participation on issues of interest to them.

The law goes beyond a single annual consultation by requiring these institutions to establish dedicated consultation mechanisms with children. It also requires nominating or appointing a dedicated staff to coordinate children's participation processes at the level of the institution and in collaboration with schools, civil society organisations, and other relevant stakeholders. The public institutions have to publish child-friendly information on their websites about participation opportunities. On paper, this new law makes it a legal requirement for the public authorities to consult with children and include them in decision-making processes. To support the implementation of the new legal framework, the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption adopted three methodological guidelines through Order No. 1541/2025.

- The consultation guide sets out the main stages of the participation process, from identifying the topic and selecting participants to preparing child-friendly information, facilitating discussions in a safe and inclusive environment, documenting children's views and informing them about the outcome of the consultation.
- The guidelines on participation coordinators establish the profile of the designated staff members, recommending that they have experience working with children, knowledge of children's rights and participatory methods, and the ability to communicate effectively with both children and public institutions.
- The reporting guidelines introduce a standard template requiring institutions to record key information about each consultation, including the topic discussed, the number and profile of participating children, the methods used, the main recommendations made by children and the follow-up measures taken by the institution.

While the three guidelines successfully standardize operational procedures across public institutions, they fall short of establishing implementation and monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Consequently, despite marking a significant step forward for children inclusion in public decision-making, the law suffers from a critical accountability deficit. It mandates no monitoring mechanisms, either internally within the public authorities (e.g annual report on the implementation of the law) or, preferably, externally via civil society and children's associations. Clear reporting and monitoring deadlines or a designated oversight body remain entirely unchecked.

What changed with Law 295/2024?

Law 295/2024 represents the first Romanian law (*and one of the first in the world*) to establish a dedicated legal framework for children's participation aged 14 to 18 in public decision-making, beyond the education sector. The new law introduces the following changes:

- Recognises, for the first time, the right of children aged 14-18 to participate in the public decision-making process, through a dedicated legal framework. Before this, their participation was only addressed within the general youth policy framework (law No. 350/2006), rather than through child-specific participation rights.
- Makes annual consultations with children mandatory for Parliament, the Presidential Administration, the Government, local authorities and other public institutions under their authority or coordination.
- Requires public authorities to establish permanent consultation mechanisms, allowing children to be consulted whenever decisions or activities concern their rights or interests, rather than relying only on annual events.
- Requires each public institution to appoint a staff member responsible for children's participation.
- Requires public authorities to publish child-friendly information on participation opportunities on their website.

Other formats of participation: students' participation

Alongside this broader framework, Romania also has a legislative basis for student participation in educational-related matters. Student representation has been progressively institutionalised through several legislative and regulatory acts, with the National Council of Students (Consiliul Național al Elevilor) serving as the principal representative body for pre-university students.

Originally established through Order No. 2782/2007 and adopted in December 2007, the National Council of Students functions as a consultative body to the Ministry of Education and represents students at the national level.

The legal status of student participation was further strengthened through the **Pre-University Education Law No. 198/2023,** adopted in 2023, which explicitly recognises the National Council of Students as a consultative partner of the Ministry of Education. The law establishes representative student structures at national, county and school levels, requires democratic elections of student representatives without interference from teaching staff, and recognises student councils as institutional partners of the schools. Participation is also embedded in school governance. Order No. 5231/2015, adopted in 2015, regulates the democratic election of student representatives to school administrative boards through secret ballot, establishes one-year mandates, and assigns student councils the responsibility for organising these elections. These provisions create formal opportunities for students to participate directly in school-level decision-making.

The Student Statute (Order No. 5707/2024), adopted in 2024, further reinforces these participation rights by establishing that pre-university education is centred on the learner and that major decisions concerning the education system should be taken following consultation with student representatives, including the National Council of Students and other representative student organisations. The statute also recognises students' rights to participate in representative organisations and to use school spaces for participation and representation activities.

Paper Tigers? The absence of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

Although Romania has established an increasingly comprehensive legal framework for children's participation, **the mechanisms for monitoring its implementation remain underdeveloped.** Existing legislation places clear obligations on public institutions to organise consultations with youths, and more recently, children aged 14 to 18, and establish participation mechanisms, yet it provides limited guidance on how compliance should be monitored, evaluated, or publicly reported. In practice, there is no comprehensive national system for assessing whether public authorities fulfil these obligations, nor are there common indicators to measure the quality, frequency, inclusiveness, or impact of children's participation processes.

This applies also for the new legislation on children's participation, as the methodological guidelines adopted through Order No. 1541/2025 standardise the reporting of child consultation activities but do not establish an explicit mechanism for monitoring. The document does not specify the reporting frequency, the authority responsible for collecting and analysing the reports, procedures for verifying compliance with the legal obligations, periodic evaluations, or monitoring and follow-up measures regarding how public authorities organize and conduct consultations with children. Likewise, no publicly available national implementation reports have been identified to date, and there is no evidence of a structured monitoring mechanism specifically dedicated to the implementation of Law No. 295/2024.

The legislative amendments strengthening children's participation rights have only recently entered into force, thus there is currently little evidence directly assessing their implementation or impact. Consequently, the effectiveness of Romania's legal framework can only be evaluated indirectly through broader surveys examining children's experiences of participation and civic engagement. These studies suggest that, despite the existence of legal provisions recognising children's right to be heard, opportunities for meaningful participation in public decision-making remain limited in practice.

For example, a 2021 survey conducted by World Vision Romania found that children are consulted primarily by parents and teachers rather than by public authorities. Only 4% of children reported having been consulted by their mayor or local councillors during the previous 12 months, while just 2% stated that they had participated in consultations organised by local public authorities. Similarly, only 7% of adults indicated that children in their household had proposed ideas or activities to schools or local authorities. Even where consultations occurred, children rarely perceived them as influential: 10% reported that their opinions had been sought but not implemented, while 8% stated that no action followed their proposals. These findings suggest that, although legal safeguards for participation exist, they have yet to translate into widespread, meaningful engagement between children and public authorities.

Although these findings predate the adoption of Law No. 295/2024, the Law 350/2006 on youths aged 14 to 35 was already in place for almost 15 years. These findings illustrate the implementation challenges that the new legislation seeks to address and provide an important baseline against which future progress can be measured, especially if new amendments and guidelines will provide for clear evaluation, monitoring and oversight bodies.

Taken together, these findings suggest that **Romania's main challenge is no longer the absence of legal provisions recognising children's participation, but rather the weak implementation, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms** needed to ensure that these rights are applied consistently across public institutions. In the absence of sustained public awareness efforts promoting children's participation, developed in partnership with children's associations and civil society, the recent legal reforms risk having limited practical impact. Without systematic monitoring, transparent public reporting, and regular evaluation of outcomes, it remains difficult to assess whether the new legal obligations are effectively translating into meaningful opportunities for children to influence decisions that affect their lives.

Institutional architecture of youth participation in Romania

	 Children 14-18	 Youth 14-35	 Pre-university students
Legislation	Law No. 295/2024 (for the supplementation of Law no. 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of the rights of the child)	Law No. 350/2006 on Youth ("Legea Tinerilor")	Order No. 2782/2007: The Council of Students functions as a consultative body to the Ministry of Education and represents students at the national level. Order No. 5231/2015: regulates the democratic election of student representatives to school administrative boards Order No. 5707/2024: establishes that key decisions concerning the education system should be taken following consultation with student representatives.

	 Children 14-18	 Youth 14-35	 Pre-university students
Key provisions	Establishes a legal requirement for national and local public authorities to consult children on an annual basis, as well as through permanent institutional mechanisms, regarding all decisions impacting their rights and interests. Enforces the designation of dedicated staff to facilitate and oversee child participation initiatives. Encourages collaboration with schools and external stakeholders to actively promote and mainstream child participation.	Enforces central and local public authorities to engage young people and their representative organizations throughout development, implementation, and evaluation of youth policies Promotes the creation of consultative youth councils and mandates structured cooperation with established youth federations at the level of the counties.	Ensures student representation through democratically elected student councils at school, county, and national level, with the National Council of Students functioning as the formal consultative body to the Ministry of Education in education policy development and decision-making processes.
Funding	No dedicated funding mechanism established by Law 295/2024	Law No. 350/2006 provides for dedicated public funding for youth organization and youth activities	The Students' National Council is partially funded by the Ministry of Education

	 Children 14-18	 Youth 14-35	 Pre-university students
Monitoring and Evaluation	Order No. 1541/2025: Standardised reporting framework for activities involving children, requiring publication on the public authority's website within a maximum of 60 days after each activity, but without establishing an overarching monitoring or evaluation framework.	Law No. 350/2006 contains no dedicated monitoring or evaluation framework.	Ministerial Order No. 5428/2024: CNE has internal reporting and coordination mechanisms (ex: annual report to the Ministry of Education, annual Ethics Committee report), but no public monitoring system tracking compliance with school-level election obligations or the implementation of student representations.

Findings from the local level (municipalities analysed)

Romania does not operate on the basis of a single, unified model for children's participation at the local level. Instead, municipalities function within a dual framework composed of general legal obligations applicable to all local public authorities, complemented by voluntary or partnership-based mechanisms developed in cooperation with civil society organisations. Consequently, the degree of institutionalisation of children's and youth participation varies significantly across municipalities, both in terms of structure and practice.

In terms of legal requirements, municipalities are obliged, under Law No. 295/2024 (amending Law No. 272/2004), to organise at least one annual consultation with children on matters affecting their rights and interests, a requirement applicable from 2025 onwards. Beyond this annual consultation, local public authorities are also required to establish permanent consultation mechanisms that can be activated whenever decisions concern children and, in addition, have designated staff for children's participation. While the law does not prescribe a specific institutional model, such as a Children's Council, it nevertheless obliges municipalities to ensure the existence of functional participation structures capable of facilitating continuous engagement.

Law No. 350/2006 establishes the legal basis for youth participation at local level by requiring municipalities to ensure structured dialogue with young people and their representative organisations, including through youth consultative councils and cooperation with county youth federations where these exist. However, as the establishment of such councils is not mandatory, their implementation remains uneven across the country. The law also requires local authorities to consult youth organisations in the development of policies and measures affecting young people, while Law No. 52/2003 on Transparency in Public Administration provides a broader obligation for public consultation in the drafting of normative acts, without specifically targeting youth or children.

When it comes to funding, **Law No. 350/2006 enables local authorities to allocate public resources to youth programmes, projects, youth centres, and youth organisations,** but it does not establish a compulsory minimum budget or fixed financial allocation. As a result, support for youth activities depends largely on local budgetary priorities and political discretion. Neither Law No. 295/2024 nor its methodological guidelines introduce an obligation for municipalities to allocate a dedicated budget line for children's participation mechanisms.

Alongside the formal legal framework, a number of voluntary initiatives developed by municipalities, usually in partnership with civil society organisations, **have proven particularly effective in promoting children's and young people's participation in local decision-making.** In many cases, these initiatives provide more meaningful and continuous opportunities for engagement than the minimum consultation requirements established by law, as they actively involve children in identifying community needs, developing projects, proposing solutions, and influencing local priorities.

One of the most comprehensive examples is the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative, implemented in several Romanian municipalities. Through this programme, participating municipalities develop multiannual local action plans, establish formal cooperation mechanisms with children and receive mentoring support, and work towards obtaining the Child Friendly City Label by demonstrating sustained commitment to children's rights and participation. Rather than relying on one-off consultations, the initiative encourages municipalities to embed children's participation across local governance and public service delivery.

Other municipalities have developed innovative participatory models tailored to local needs. For example, **in 2025 the Municipality of Timișoara launched a participatory budgeting programme** dedicated to high school students, enabling them to identify community needs, develop project proposals, campaign for public support, and receive funding for the winning initiatives. Beyond financing youth-led projects, the programme familiarises students with democratic decision-making processes and strengthens their understanding of how local governments allocate public resources.

Similarly, the **Com'ON participatory budgeting programme, implemented in Cluj-Napoca since 2015 and more recently piloted in Vaslui under the Romanian Youth Capital initiative, as well as in Sfântu Gheorghe and Odorheiu Secuiesc, provides young people with direct opportunities to shape their communities.** Participants are involved throughout the entire project cycle, from identifying local problems and preparing funding applications to promoting their ideas, mobilising community support, and implementing successful projects. These initiatives go beyond consultation by empowering children and young people to become active contributors to local development, while simultaneously strengthening civic education and democratic participation.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that meaningful participation often depends not only on legal obligations but also on the willingness of local authorities to create accessible, continuous, and collaborative opportunities for engagement. While legislation establishes the right to participate, voluntary initiatives implemented in partnership with civil society frequently provide the practical mechanisms through which children and young people can exercise that right and experience the tangible impact of their involvement. Unfortunately, the number of these initiatives remains low.





Findings from Interviews

Interviews with children

The analysis draws on 14 semi-structured interviews with children aged 16–18, conducted across three locations (Bucharest, Dorohoi and Sascut), capturing perspectives from both urban and rural communities. The findings broadly confirm the results of the desk research: while participation is well established within the school environment, opportunities to influence local public decision-making remain limited and are perceived as having little impact.

- **Awareness of participation opportunities**

Children demonstrated a good awareness of school-based participation mechanisms, although direct participation was less widespread. 1 in 2 interviewees had participated in a student council, while participation in other formal mechanisms was considerably lower. Only 1 respondent had participated in a public consultation, none had taken part in participatory budgeting, and only 2 children reported having participated in a youth or children's council.
Awareness of opportunities beyond school varied. While several respondents stated that they would approach the municipality or their school if they wanted to put forward an idea, 8 out of the 14 children either did not know the appropriate channel or expressed uncertainty about how to communicate with local authorities. In practice, schools remained the main gateway through which children experienced participation.

- **Perceived level of influence**

Children distinguished between being asked for their opinion and having an influence on decisions. 8 respondents described situations in which teachers modified activities, events or project plans following students' suggestions. Outside school, however, participation was perceived differently. 11 out of the 14 interviewees believed that local authorities either rarely consulted children or only did so after decisions had already been made. As a result, participation in local public affairs was generally perceived as consultative, and in some cases only informative, rather than collaborative.
As one participant put it, "*We are heard, but not always listened to*." This distinction between being given an opportunity to speak and having an influence on decisions captures one of the central themes emerging across the interviews.

- **Experience with feedback mechanisms**

One of the strongest patterns emerging from the interviews concerns the absence of systematic feedback. 8 out of 14 children reported receiving informal explanations from teachers after expressing their views, particularly within school projects. Feedback mechanisms outside education were described as inconsistent or absent. They also mentioned that they rarely learned what happened to their proposals or why particular ideas had or had not been adopted. As one respondent explained, *"It is important to know whether our ideas were taken into account and the reasons why they were or were not implemented*."

- **Main barriers identified**

The most frequently identified barrier was the limited visibility of participation opportunities. 9 out of the 14 interviewees referred to insufficient information about existing mechanisms or uncertainty about how to become involved. A second recurring theme concerned the perceived effectiveness of participation.

Eleven respondents questioned whether children's views could genuinely influence public decisions, suggesting that consultations often appear symbolic rather than consequential. Other barriers included limited time, lack of motivation among peers, lack of self-confidence and the perception that adults do not always take children's opinions seriously. Several participants also pointed to weak communication by public authorities regarding available opportunities and the outcomes of previous consultations.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the main obstacles are not legislative but operational. The legal framework for participation has expanded significantly, yet awareness, communication and follow-up remain inconsistent.

- **Differences observed across gender or background**

Gender was generally not perceived as a major obstacle to participation. 1 in 2 consider that girls and boys have broadly equal opportunities to express their views. At the same time, 10 interviewees observed differences in the way girls and boys participate, most commonly suggesting that girls tend to engage more actively in school-based activities, while boys may be more outspoken in discussions.

No clear gender divide emerged from the interviews. Both girls and boys generally agreed that participation opportunities are formally equal, while respondents of both genders observed that girls tend to participate more actively in representative structures.

Territorial and socioeconomic inequalities emerged much more consistently. 12 out of the 14 children believed that young people living in rural areas or disadvantaged communities have fewer opportunities to participate because of weaker access to information, fewer activities and lower institutional support. Participants repeatedly emphasised that more accessible information, outreach activities and local opportunities would contribute more to inclusion than gender-specific measures.

- **Priority areas of interest**

Education was the dominant area of interest across the interviews. 12 out of the 14 respondents identified school life among the issues they would most like to influence, including teaching methods, school facilities, relationships with teachers and curriculum. Other frequently mentioned priorities included helping vulnerable children (eight respondents), environmental protection (seven respondents), transport (five respondents) and equality (five respondents). Several interviewees also expressed a broader interest in contributing to community development but felt that existing participation mechanisms offered limited opportunities to do so.
When describing meaningful participation, respondents consistently referred to regular dialogue, early involvement in decision-making and visible results. One participant summarised this by explaining that *"Meaningful participation means being consulted before decisions are made, receiving enough information to understand the issue, and seeing that your opinion can influence the final outcome. It means not being invited just to tick a box."*

Interviews with children's representatives

Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers responsible for coordinating or supporting children's participation in schools from Bucharest, Dorohoi and Sascut. Children's participation was primarily discussed through the lens of the education system.

- **Description of existing mechanisms**

All interviewees identified student councils as the main formal participation mechanism available to children. Two respondents also referred to additional structures, including county student councils, children's consultative councils established by local authorities, and project-based working groups or youth forums. While these mechanisms differ across localities, they all described schools as the primary setting where participation takes place.

All three interviewees distinguished between formally regulated mechanisms, such as student councils established under education legislation, and informal or project-based initiatives developed by schools or local partners. Participation outside the education system was described as depending largely on local initiatives and external projects rather than on permanent institutional structures.

- **Institutional commitment (budget, staff, procedures)**

All three respondents considered that children's participation is recognised institutionally, but highlighted important limitations regarding implementation.

None of the interviewees identified a dedicated local budget specifically allocated to children's participation. Instead, activities are generally financed through educational projects, partnerships or broader local initiatives. Similarly, while schools usually designate teachers responsible for coordinating student councils, participation responsibilities are added to existing duties rather than supported through dedicated staff positions.

One respondent summarised this situation by noting that *"participation depends on the existence of dedicated resources and a genuine commitment from local authorities to take children's views into account".*

- **Perceived effectiveness**

All interviewees considered that participation is most effective within schools, where children can influence the organisation of activities, projects or school events. By contrast, participation in local public decision-making was perceived as weaker. Two respondents explicitly classified participation as more consultative, while acknowledging examples of collaborative participation in educational projects. The third respondent described participation as varying according to the initiative, ranging from informative to child-led, depending on the context.

One respondent explained that *"Students are consulted and express their views, but final decisions usually remain with adults".*

Although examples were provided where children's suggestions influenced school activities, none of the interviewees could identify documented changes in local public policy resulting directly from children's participation.

- **Structural barriers**

All respondents referred to resource constraints, including limited funding, lack of dedicated staff and insufficient time. Two interviewees also highlighted the absence of permanent consultation structures and clearly defined procedures, while all three considered adult attitudes to remain an important obstacle.

Several respondents noted that some adults still do not regard children as equal partners in decision-making: one respondent observed that *"Some adults are still not used to considering children and adolescents as real partners in dialogue."* A further challenge identified across the interviews was the limited continuity of participation initiatives, many of which depend on individual schools, motivated teachers or externally funded projects rather than stable institutional arrangements.

- **Inclusion practices**

All interviewees recognised the importance of including vulnerable children, but none considered existing mechanisms fully effective. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds, rural areas or with disabilities were consistently identified as facing additional barriers to participation. These included financial constraints, unequal access to information, lower participation opportunities and insufficient institutional support. While respondents referred to existing educational or social programmes promoting inclusion, they also acknowledged that these measures do not always translate into equal participation opportunities.

Regarding gender, none of the interviewees considered formal discrimination to exist. Nevertheless, all three observed differences in participation patterns, most commonly noting that girls tend to participate more actively in representative or consultative activities.

- **Gaps between policy and practice**

One of the strongest findings emerging from the interviews concerns the gap between the existing legal framework and everyday practice. Although respondents agreed that the legal basis for children's participation is largely in place, they repeatedly pointed to issues in implementation. These include the absence of dedicated budgets, lack of specialised staff, limited institutional continuity, weak feedback mechanisms and the continued dependence on individual initiatives or externally funded projects. One interviewee argued that participation requires *"permanent consultation mechanisms, dedicated resources and closer cooperation between schools, local authorities and civil society organisations".*

Findings from Focus Groups



The focus group brought together 9 representatives of children and child-focused organisations working at national and local level in Romania. Participants included representatives from UNICEF Romania, SOS Satele Copiilor România, Federația Organizațiilor Neguvernamentale pentru Copil (FONPC), as well as several members of school councils. The diversity allowed the discussion to reflect both a policy-level perspective and a practice-based perspective.

Mechanisms confirmed or challenged

Participants confirmed that Romania has made visible progress in recent years in terms of public and legislative recognition of children's participation. Several concrete mechanisms and structures were mentioned as relevant examples, including:

- **UNICEF Romania's Children's Board;**
- the **Consultative Council of Children (Consiliul Consultativ al Copiilor)** attached to **ANPDCA** (National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption - Autoritatea Națională pentru Protecția Drepturilor Copilului și Adopție);
- local mechanisms developed through the **Child Friendly Communities / Localități Prietene ale Copiilor** initiative, including the **Consiliul Local al Copiilor din Bacău** and local structures in Bucharest;
- **Vocea Tinerilor SOS** (Youth Voice SOS) within SOS Satele Copiilor România;

- the **FONPC Children and Young People's Council** (Consiliul Copiilor și Tinerilor FONPC);
- the **Consultative Council of Children** (Consiliul Consultativ al Copiilor) supported by World Vision România,
- broader participatory initiatives such as the **Children and Young People's Government** (Guvernul Copiilor și Tinerilor);
- the **National Council of Students** (Consiliul Național al Elevilor) and its county structures;
- **U-Report România** as a scalable participation platform through which children and adolescents can express their views on issues affecting them;
- **local children's councils in Deva,** in addition to Bacău, Brașov, Moinești, Corbasca, Colonești and Bucharest;
- **participatory budgeting processes for children and young people**, such as **Com'ON in Cluj** and participatory initiatives supported by **Timișoara City Hall**.

A participant also stressed that some organisational-level mechanisms are already functioning as real participation structures, not only as symbolic consultation. In the case of **Vocea Tinerilor SOS,** children and young people meet annually to set two priority directions for action, present conclusions to management, and are invited to speak in Board and General Assembly meetings. In project-based contexts, children also contribute to advocacy outputs and recommendations, for example on violence against children.

Participants also referred to examples where children's participation led to visible local changes. In the case of the UNICEF-supported children's councils created in Bacău-area communities and Brașov, **children's proposals were reportedly taken into account in local decision-making**, contributing to changes such as playground improvements, dedicated meeting spaces for children, and non-formal thematic workshops in rural areas.

At the same time, participants challenged the assumption that the existence of such mechanisms automatically means meaningful participation. A recurring point was that many structures remain dependent on specific projects, organisations, or motivated local actors, rather than being consistently embedded in institutional practice.
One contribution also stressed that recent progress is not limited to legislative change. In addition to the 2024 legal developments, operational guidance has also been developed at national level for the organisation and reporting of consultations with children, as well as for the selection and preparation of the adults responsible for facilitating children's participation in decision-making processes.

Consensus on the level of participation

There was broad consensus that children's participation in Romania is better recognised than a few years ago, both in public discourse and in the legal framework, including through the 2024 legislative developments strengthening the right of children to be heard in decisions affecting them (Law no. 295/2024). However, participants agreed that implementation remains uneven, inconsistent, and often fragile.

Romania was described as **being in a transitional moment: children's participation is more visible and more clearly placed on the public agenda than before, but there is not yet a uniform culture of participation across institutions and territories.**

Another recurring point was that participation is often still experienced as **consultation without sufficient follow-up**.
At the same time, participants pointed out that where organisations have invested in sustained internal participation structures, children's participation can be regular, meaningful, and clearly linked to organisational decision-making.

"Participation exists, but it still depends too much on who is there locally and whether someone is willing to make it happen".

Structural barriers identified

Three main structural barriers emerged consistently across the discussion:



Uneven implementation across municipalities, which creates significant territorial inequalities.



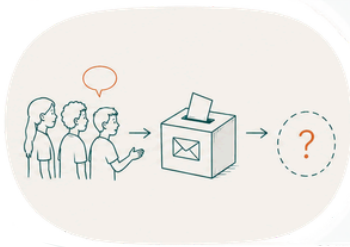
Many mechanisms are still dependent on project funding or NGO facilitation, which makes them difficult to sustain over time and limits institutional ownership.



The reluctance of adults to create genuine spaces where children are listened to on equal terms and their views are actually used.



In some institutions, children's participation is still perceived as a formal or optional exercise rather than as an essential element of rights-based governance.



The absence of standardised feedback mechanisms through which children can see how their contributions were used.

Gender-related issues

Gender was not identified as the primary dividing line in all contexts, but participants noted that **girls and boys may face different forms of visibility and participation**, depending on family expectations, local culture, and the type of mechanism involved. In some contexts, girls may participate actively in school- or NGO-based structures, while in others their mobility, confidence, or public presence may be more constrained.

More broadly, participants agreed that gender should be considered together with other factors such as poverty, disability, rural isolation, ethnicity, or care status, rather than as a standalone variable.

Inclusion gaps

A strong point of consensus was that participation mechanisms still do **not sufficiently reach the children who are most excluded**. Participants repeatedly mentioned the underrepresentation of:

- children from **rural areas**
- children at risk of **poverty or social exclusion**
- **Roma children**
- children with **disabilities**
- children in the **child protection system**
- children with limited access to **transport or the internet**
- and children affected by **trauma, instability,** or fragile relations with institutions.

Participants emphasized that these children's experiences should be central, not peripheral, when discussing social services, education, and local support systems.

"The children who most need to be heard are often the least present in participation structures".

One participant also noted that even when consultative groups are expected to exist at local administrative level, access remains unclear in practice, including because organisations are not always informed about the procedures for children's enrolment or participation.
Participants also noted that children are often recruited into participation mechanisms through schools, NGOs, educators, or existing support structures rather than through fully open and transparent processes, which means that better-connected and more confident children are more likely to participate than those in vulnerable or less visible situations.

Priority policy areas

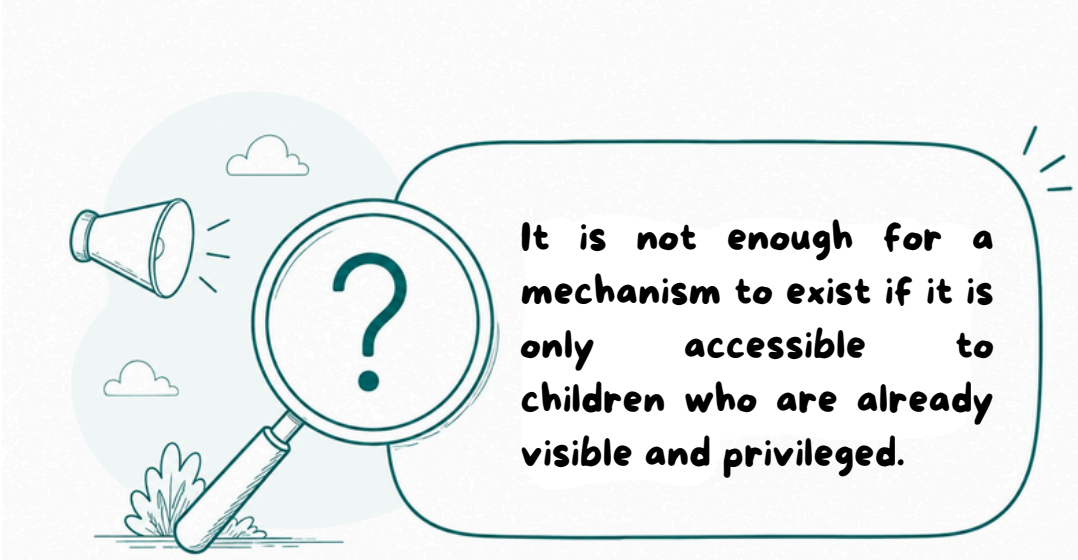
Several priority policy areas emerged from the discussion:

- **education**, including participation in school decisions and safer, more responsive school environments;
- **child protection and social services**, especially for children in alternative care, at risk of separation, or in vulnerable family contexts;
- **strengthening and operationalising consultative councils** for children at the level of each administrative unit, with clear procedures and monitoring;
- **local decision-making and community development**, including more consistent consultation by municipalities;
- **mental health and emotional support**, especially for children with difficult life experiences;
- **inclusion-oriented participation mechanisms**, ensuring that participation reaches children who are usually left out.

Institutional reform proposals

Participants pointed to a number of reforms that would make participation more meaningful and sustainable. The most frequently raised proposals were:

- Develop and implement **minimum quality standards** for child participation, based on ethical, inclusive, safe, and meaningful participation principles.
- **Strengthen the institutionalisation of participation mechanisms** so they do not depend only on projects or individual organisations
- Establish, implement, and monitor **consultative councils for children** at the level of each administrative unit, supported by practical guidance and local good practice models
- **Provide training and practical guidance for professionals and decision-makers** on how to facilitate meaningful child participation, especially in contexts where adults are not yet confident in children's input
- **Create a monitoring system** that tracks not only the number of consultations carried out, but also the extent to which children's contributions influence public decisions in practice
- **Link participation to inclusion**, by adapting mechanisms and providing emotional, logistical, and communication support for children in vulnerable situations
- **Ensure dedicated resources and stronger institutional ownership** at local and national level, including funding for facilitation, training, accessibility measures, transport, and other forms of support required for sustainable child participation.



Findings from FOIA Institutional Audit



A total of **70 FOIA requests were submitted** to 41 county capitals, the Municipality of Bucharest and its six districts, 16 ministries and 6 additional municipalities associated with the schools included in the research. Responses were received from 14 public institutions (13 municipalities and one ministry).

The institutional audit revealed substantial variation in the implementation of children's participation mechanisms across public authorities. **Most responding institutions were unable to provide evidence of permanent consultation structures or regular participation mechanisms specifically targeting children** aged 14-18. Several municipalities explicitly stated that they had not organised consultations with children in recent years or had not yet implemented the annual consultation obligations introduced by Law No. 295/2024.

Where participation mechanisms existed, they most commonly took the form of **youth councils, consultative bodies, or project-based initiatives** developed in cooperation with schools, civil society organisations, or UNICEF programmes. Examples include youth consultative councils in Bistrița (Bistrița-Năsăud County, medium-sized urban area), Craiova (Dolj County, large urban area), Focșani (Vrancea County, medium-sized urban area) and Zalău (Sălaj County, small urban area), as well as the Child Friendly Cities Initiative implemented in Bacău (Bacău County, medium-sized urban area).

However, responses frequently referred to cultural, educational or youth activities rather than to formal participation in public decision-making, suggesting that participation is often interpreted broadly and inconsistently across institutions.



Cross-method Analysis

Desk research indicates that Romania has developed an increasingly comprehensive legal framework for children's and youth participation, culminating in the adoption of Law No. 295/2024, which establishes mandatory consultations with children and requires permanent participation mechanisms within public institutions. However, interviews with children and practitioners reveal a **significant implementation gap between these formal obligations and everyday practice.** Participation is experienced most strongly within schools, where student councils and informal consultations can influence activities and school life, while opportunities to shape local public decision-making remain limited, inconsistent, and often dependent on individual initiatives, external projects, or civil society organisations rather than institutionalised public mechanisms.

Across methods, respondents repeatedly distinguished between being consulted and influencing decisions, highlighting weak feedback mechanisms and limited evidence that children's views systematically shape public policies. Overall, the findings suggest that children's participation in Romania is currently best characterised as partially meaningful: participation is increasingly recognised in legislation and supported by several promising local practices, but it has not yet become a consistent, monitored, and institutionalised feature of public decision-making across the country.

Gender and Intersectional Analysis



Romania's legal framework establishes universal participation rights without differentiating by gender and generally promotes inclusive participation. However, neither Law No. 295/2024 nor Law No. 350/2006 contains specific measures aimed at ensuring the participation of girls, children with disabilities, Roma children, children living in poverty, or other vulnerable groups. Across all research methods, gender did not emerge as a major barrier to participation, with both children and practitioners considering participation opportunities to be formally equal for girls and boys, although several respondents observed that girls tend to participate more actively in representative structures.

By contrast, territorial and socio-economic inequalities emerged consistently throughout the findings. Children interviewed perceived participation opportunities as being concentrated in larger municipalities and schools with stronger institutional support, while focus group participants highlighted the underrepresentation of children from rural areas, disadvantaged communities, minority backgrounds, the child protection system, and children with disabilities in existing participation mechanisms. The research also identified a lack of disaggregated data and monitoring mechanisms capable of assessing who participates and who remains excluded. As a result, inclusion currently relies primarily on local initiatives and civil society organisations rather than on systematic institutional safeguards or targeted public policies.



Structural Recommendations

- **Establish a national monitoring and accountability framework for children's participation.**

Romania has made significant progress by introducing a dedicated legal framework for children's participation through Law No. 295/2024. However, the legislation lacks effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. A national oversight system should be established to assess whether public institutions comply with their legal obligations, including the organisation of annual consultations, the establishment of permanent participation mechanisms, the appointment of participation coordinators, and the publication of child-friendly information. This framework should include common indicators, annual public reporting, independent compulsory evaluations made by children’s organisations and civil society, and a designated authority responsible for monitoring implementation and supporting local authorities.

- **Move beyond consultation towards meaningful participation throughout the entire policy cycle.**

Children's participation should no longer be understood as a one-off consultation exercise or a series of awareness-raising events. Instead, public authorities should adopt participation models that engage children throughout the full policy and project cycle, from identifying community needs and setting priorities to designing solutions, implementing actions, monitoring progress, and evaluating results.

Children should receive feedback demonstrating how their views have influenced decisions, ensuring that participation becomes an embedded element of public governance rather than a formal legal obligation with limited practical impact.

- **Strengthen financial and institutional support for youth and children's participation.**

The implementation of participation mechanisms requires predictable resources. Local and national public authorities should fully implement the funding provisions of Law No. 350/2006 by establishing transparent, accessible, and less bureaucratic funding schemes for youth organisations and youth federations. At the same time, municipalities should allocate dedicated resources for implementing children's participation mechanisms introduced by Law No. 295/2024. Civil society organisations remain essential partners in facilitating participation, particularly for children from vulnerable backgrounds, and should be supported as long-term contributors to local governance rather than only as project implementers.

- **Scale up participatory budgeting programmes for children and young people.**

The experience of municipalities such as Timișoara demonstrates that participatory budgeting can become one of the most effective tools for civic education and democratic participation. Similar programmes should be introduced nationwide, with dedicated components for pre-university students aged 14–18 and even younger. Beyond funding youth-led projects, these programmes expose young people to democratic processes by involving them in identifying local priorities, preparing proposals, campaigning for support, voting, implementing projects, and evaluating results. Expanding such initiatives would complement the legal consultation mechanisms by providing practical opportunities for children and young people to influence local development and experience the tangible impact of their participation.

ChildACT+

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