

# CONSULTATION CONDUCTED WITH CHILDREN RECEIVING FAMILY STRENGTHENING SERVICES AND IN RESIDENTIAL CARE



SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES

A Summary of Findings

November 2020



## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments .....	3
1. Introduction.....	4
2. Aim of the research .....	4
3. Children participating in the study.....	4
4. Background .....	6
4.1. Family Strengthening services of SOS Children's Villages .....	6
4.2 Residential Care provided by SOS Children's Villages.....	6
5. Research methodology .....	7
5.1. Development and administration of two surveys.....	7
5.2. Research tools .....	7
5.3. Ethical considerations .....	7
5.4. Analysis and reporting findings.....	7
5.5. Challenges .....	8
6. A summary of key findings .....	8
7. My Feelings .....	9
7.1. Feeling Happy .....	9
7.1.1. My family .....	9
7.1.2. Having friends .....	10
7.1.3. Enjoying school .....	11
7.1.4. The opportunity to engage in my local community.....	13
7.1.5. Feeling supported, cared for and loved .....	14
8. Feeling sad or worried .....	15
8.1. My family.....	15
8.2. Having friends .....	16
8.3. Difficulties at school .....	16
8.4. The opportunity to engage in my local community .....	17
8.5. Not feeling supported, cared for and loved .....	18
8.6. Stability .....	19
9. The changes children would like to see in their lives .....	20
9.1. Being included in decisions that affect my life .....	19
9.1.1. Involvement in decisions being made about myself and my family.....	19
9.1.2. Involvement in decision making in residential care .....	19
9.2. My Family .....	22
9.2.1. Support for myself and my family .....	22

9.2.2.	Improving my relationship with my family .....	23
9.3.	Enjoying school more .....	24
9.4.	Being part of my local community .....	25
9.4.1.	The opportunity to attend more activities in the local community.....	26
9.4.2.	Being able to do the same things as other children in the local community .....	27
9.5.	Being supported, cared for and loved.....	29
10.	Stability .....	30
11.	Being in residential care.....	31
11.1	What do you think are the most difficult things for children living in alternative care?.....	31
11.2	What works best for children living in alternative care .....	31
11.3	Preparing to leave care .....	31
11.4	Who I would like to live with when I leave care.....	31
12	Support for other children .....	32
12.1	What children participating in the Family Strengthening service think other children in their community would like support with .....	32
12.2	What is difficult for other children living in residential care .....	33
12.3	List of Figures.....	34

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## 1. Introduction

The current state of research highlights a lack of evidence drawn directly from the experiences of children and young people receiving family support services or living in alternative care across different regions of the world.

The European Commission is taking steps to prioritise child rights through two key initiatives:

- A child rights strategy, which will define the global EU policy directions and framework to advance child rights inside the EU and worldwide.
- A child guarantee that will focus on supporting and funding responses to increase the access to basic services for the most vulnerable children living in countries of the European Union (EU), including children without or at risk of losing parental care.

In addition, the European Commission and Parliament will continue supporting and increasing meaningful child participation in EU policy-making.

The EU child rights strategy should be finalised during the first quarter of 2021. In order to ensure children inform this important initiative, the European Commission has engaged with a number of children's rights organisations, including SOS Children Villages (SOS CV), to consult children on their views and recommendations for change. In particular, the Commission is interested in the input of children in programmes provided by SOS CV to better understand the situation and needs of children deprived, or at risk, of losing parental care both in the EU and worldwide. This input will inform actions to prevent separation of children from parental care and promote suitable, quality alternative care when needed.

## 2. Aim of the research

SOS CV has undertaken this research project with children who, along with their families, are participating in family strengthening services (FS), as well as children who are living in residential care provided by SOS Children's Villages. The aim of the study was to gather the perspectives and ideas of children that would help answer the following questions:

- What are the main challenges for children at risk of separation from parental care and what are their main concerns?
- What will help improve the quality of support to prevent separation from parental care?
- What are the main challenges that children without parental care are confronted with today?
- What does quality in their experience of alternative care mean for children and what are their main recommendations to improve these services?

## 3. Children participating in the study

The research process involved children from nine countries: Austria, Ethiopia, Greece, Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, Philippines, Romania and Sri Lanka (Figure 1). Due to certain restrictions, including on international travel, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was decided to undertake the research with children through an online survey.



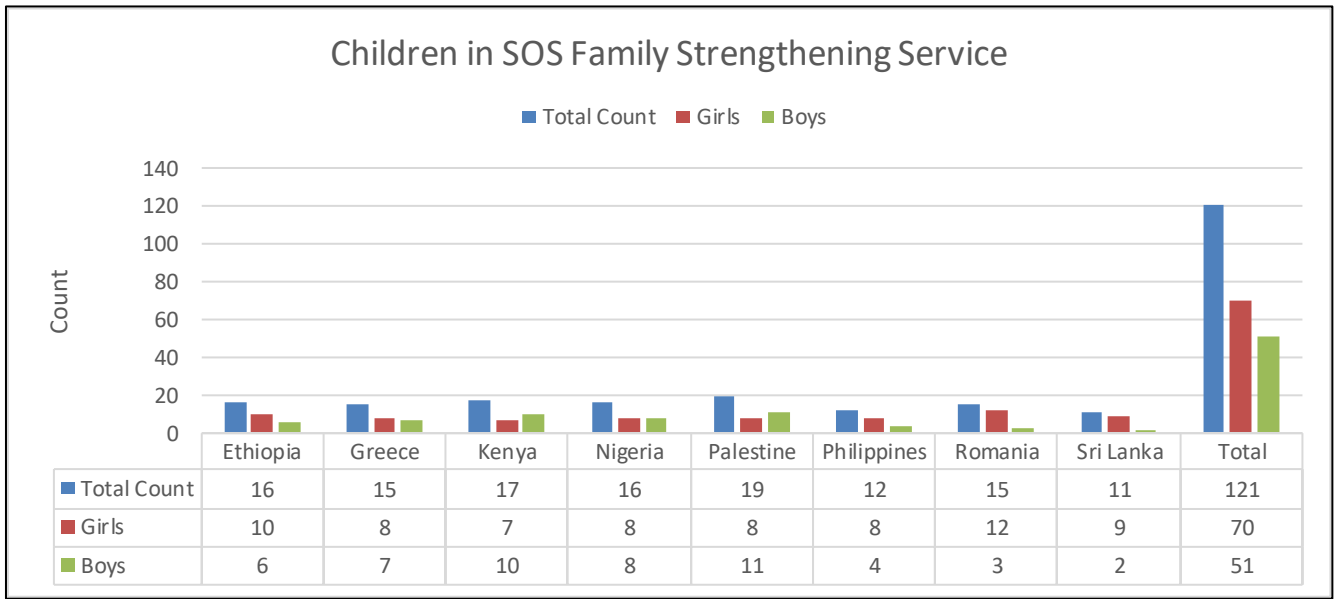
Figure 1. Participation of children from Austria, Ethiopia, Greece, Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, Philippines, Romania and Sri Lanka



Two surveys were developed, one for children who are participants, along with their families, in family strengthening services. This service aims to prevent children from losing the care of their family. The second survey was developed for children living in residential care. Each country was encouraged to seek a balanced number of girls and boys aged between 12 and 17 years old in their sampling.

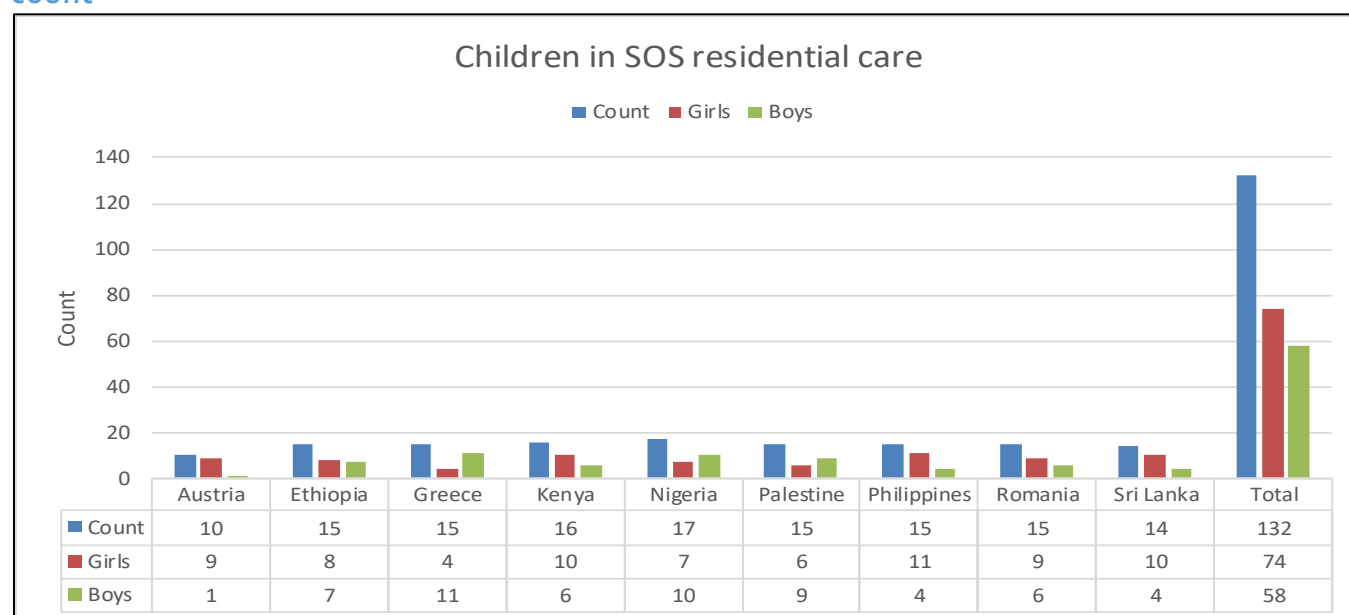
The family strengthening (FS) service survey was completed by 121 children from eight countries: Ethiopia, Greece, Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, the Philippines, Romania and Sri Lanka (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Children who completed the Family Strengthening Service survey by country and count



The survey for children in residential care was completed by 132 children from nine countries: Austria, Ethiopia, Greece, Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, the Philippines, Romania and Sri Lanka (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Children who completed the survey for children in residential care by country and count**



Many more details of the information, perspectives and ideas that children provided whilst responding to the survey can be found in two accompanying detailed reports: 'Consultation Conducted with Children Receiving Family Strengthening Services' and 'Consultation Conducted with Children in Residential Care'.

## 4. Background

### 4.1. Family Strengthening services of SOS Children's Villages

Family Strengthening aims to prevent children from losing the care of their family. It focuses on empowering families, to strengthen their capacity to protect and care for their children, and to strengthen safety nets for vulnerable children and their families within the community. The service is directed towards families with children under 18 years of age, but the service may also continue while young adults are still in full-time education and considered dependent upon the parental care of their family. Services are made available to the family as a whole, including all of the children and care-givers within the family. While children at risk of losing the care of their family are the principal target group, the service also works with their care-givers to develop their capacity to protect and care for their children. The service works in partnership with individuals, families, communities, local authorities and others to build a society where all children can enjoy a caring family environment. To do so, a developmental and case-management approach is followed, which goes beyond the provision of essential services, and recognises the resources and potential of children, their families and communities to lead their own self-reliant development.

### 4.2 Residential Care provided by SOS Children's Villages

The children that participated in this study are without parental care and are living in a range of residential care settings provided by SOS Children's Villages. This includes those living in an SOS family together with other SOS families in a Children's Village, those living in an SOS family in the community alongside other families, those in a small group home and those in a youth home. The definitions used to describe the different residential care settings in the actual survey were based on information provided by staff of National Associations in the participating countries. All alternative care services provided by SOS Children's Villages follow a developmental, child-centred and strengths-based approach, using case management. The primary aim is for children to grow in a safe

and caring family-like environment, until they are able to be reintegrated with their family of origin or to step out into independent life as an adult.

## 5. Research methodology

Below is a summary of the research methodology applied to this study. Further details can be found in the two accompanying reports that provide more in-depth information.

### 5.1. Development and administration of two surveys

Care was taken in the development of two surveys: one for children who are participating in family strengthening, consisting of 52 questions, and a survey for children in residential care containing 62 questions. Children were offered a series of multiple choice questions as well as opportunities to provide qualitative information which they could write into text boxes. The data software package Qualtrics was used to administer the surveys. The software is compliant with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) governing data collection and processing in European countries.

A pilot of the survey was conducted in Nigeria and the Philippines. The completed pilot surveys were analysed and checked for quality of responses and any indications that changes were necessary. A final set of questions was developed for both surveys in English and translated into five other languages.

### 5.2. Research tools

Information sheets were developed for members of participating National Associations containing guidance on research methodology, research ethics and child safeguarding protocols. Age appropriate information sheets were developed for children, providing them with information about the purpose of the study, what their involvement would entail, and issues of confidentiality. An information sheet and consent form were also prepared for responsible adults of children who would be invited to participate in the research. Additionally, the consent form for children was built into the online survey. All information sheets and consent forms were translated into relevant languages.

### 5.3. Ethical considerations

Careful consideration was given to safeguarding children and maintaining the dignity of those involved at all stages of the research process. All data has been collected and stored securely and only the researcher has access to the completed surveys. Great care has been taken to anonymise the dataset for analysis and reporting. All consent forms have been stored securely and separately from the completed surveys and results.

The research protocol followed SOS CV guidance on safeguarding. Should there have been any protection concerns for a child, or of anyone else the children mentioned, the researcher would have contacted the nominated child safeguarding officer from SOS CV who in turn would have investigated any disclosed information. In addition, preparations were made to provide support to children by staff should they experience any distress whilst completing the survey.

### 5.4. Analysis and reporting findings

Analysis of the data has been run in Qualtrics and consideration was given to differences between age, gender and countries. All percentages have been rounded up to the nearest decimal point by 0.5% meaning that some of the percentages will not equal 100%. Where questions provided participants the opportunity to select more than one answer, these percentages will also not equal 100%.

## 5.5. Challenges

The global COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on research and evaluation worldwide. As a result, the research could only be pursued through the use of online surveys, meaning that there was no additional scope to gain a deeper insight into children's experiences through more qualitative face-to-face methods. Overall, the types of questions that could be asked sensitively were limited.

Children were also purposively selected by staff of National Associations which may have unconsciously caused an unknown bias. Whilst care was taken to encourage the staff of National Associations not to prompt children when answering their questions, and to make sure they did not feel they were being scrutinised, it is not possible to validate whether there was any impact of staff presence on children or, on their completing the survey in SOS Children's Villages' premises.

## 6. A summary of key findings

In order to learn more about the main challenges facing children at risk of separation from parental care and those in residential care, we asked children in nine countries to tell us about different aspects of, and views on, their lives. We sought their perspectives about their current circumstances as well as ideas about changes they would like to see. A number of principal themes emerged from the responses that children provided in both surveys which are summarised below. To be noted, is that overall, analysis of findings from both surveys has not shown any notably strong statistical differences between the responses according to gender. Where there is any specific differential, this has been highlighted in the submitted reports.

The most significant factor children identify as impacting on their lives is **the relationships children have with others**. Most prominent is relationships with their **family**, both children who have remained living with their families and those who have been separated from them. **Having friends** greatly impacts on children's lives as well as the relationship they have with others that are tasked to care for them. This includes relationships with friends at school and in the local community, as well as friendships with the children they are living with if they are in residential care. It also includes the importance children place on their **bond with siblings**.

**Going to school** is important to children. Not only do they 'enjoy' going to school but they identified the opportunities this offers in terms of **preparing them for their futures** and their hope of success in life. It also offers them an opportunity to be with friends as well as participate in **recreational activities**, something else that children identify as being important to them.

Concern for their **place in society** is another recurring finding. Children want to participate in activities in their local community: actions that will allow not just to have 'fun' but also in part, to help them integrate with and, feel like, other children. Some children also wrote about their concerns related to **stigmatisation** they experience, either because of their '**social status**' or because they are children who live in alternative care. They also want to know how they will fit into society in the future.

In conclusion, children indicated they want **stability**, they want to be **loved and cared for**, and most particularly, they want reassurance that everything is going to be okay for them, and their families, both now and in the future.

We will continue with this summary of findings by further exploring the topics children were asked about in the family strengthening (FS) survey and the residential care survey.



## 7. My Feelings

A principal aim of the study was to listen to children and gain a better understanding of the issues that impact their lives, including their feelings and wishes. To this end, we sought children's own perspectives about being happy or, sad and worried, and what factors influence these feelings.

### 7.1. Feeling Happy

When asked about feeling happy, almost a third of children who participated in the FS survey indicated they 'always' feel happy and just over another third answered they feel happy 'most of the time'. Children in residential care responded to the same question, which resulted in 40% of children answering they 'always' feel happy and 43% responding as feeling happy 'most of the time'. We did not find any significant difference in the responses according to gender.

#### 7.1.1. My family

Children who responded to both surveys identified their relationships with their birth family as being very significant to their happiness. Children from the FS service, specifically told us their happiness is dependent on the positive well-being of their family. The reassurance they seek is not just related to material well-being but also harmonious relationships being achieved and sustained between family members. Being with family, and feeling they belong, makes them happy. For example, it is significant that children, when asked what makes them feel safe at home, said the principle reason is being part of their family. We have included many quotations throughout the report because we believe it is important for us to 'hear' what children themselves have told us.

#### ***Children from the FS service: What makes you feel happy?***

##### **Caring Relationships with Family and Friends**

*'It makes me happy to see my mother healthy, her children happy, and we all rejoice when we all have a healthy life' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'One of the things that makes me happy is the family moments with my family and my friends' (a child in Greece)*

*'What makes me feel happy is that me and my family have survived this far no matter how much we struggle' (a child in Kenya)*

*'I feel happy when I am with my parents because they take good care of me. They never maltreat me they try their best to give me a good education. They provide for my needs. I am always happy because they always lead me to the right place not the wrong place' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'When I see my mom happy' (a child in Palestine)*

*'I live in a complete family united by love and mutual respect' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Having a complete family that is healthy and full of love' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'The love is in our family and how my mother takes care of me' (a child in Kenya)*

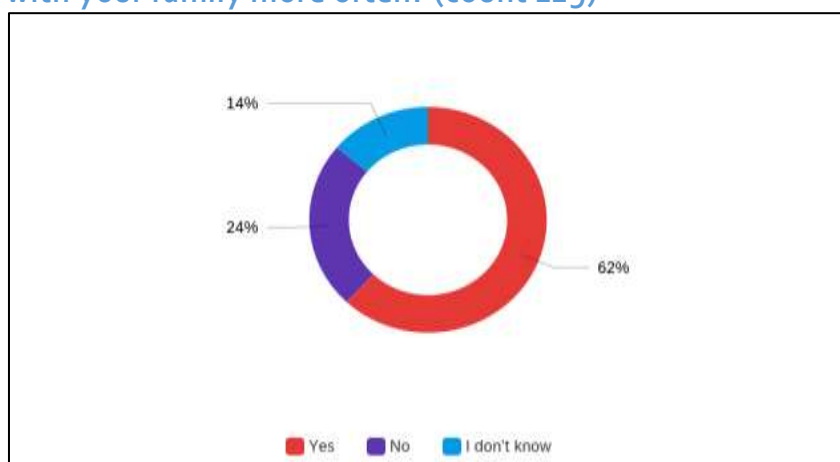
*'I am happy because my mother is with me' (a child in Romania)*

*'When I have a good house' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Food. My mum' (a child in Nigeria)*

Throughout the survey, children in residential care repeatedly told us how significant their relationship with their birth family is in respect to their happiness. For many, this includes the opportunity to both visit, and having visits from, members of their birth family, and especially parents. Many also welcome other forms of contact such as being able to call them on the phone. As seen in Figure 4, 62% of children said they would like to see or have other types of contact with their family more often. Two-thirds of children (67%) who completed the residential care survey have brothers or sisters from their birth family also living with them in residential care. This is significant, as children wrote in the survey that being with their siblings is something important to their happiness and was especially comforting when they first arrived in residential care. In other sections of the survey children wrote about the hopes they have of returning to their families.

**Figure 4. Children in residential care: Would you like to see or have other types of contact with your family more often? (count 129)**



#### **Children in residential care: What makes you feel happy?**

*'When my parents visit' (a child in Austria)*

*'When I see the people I love. When I can visit my mother. When I do something with my sister' (a child in Greece)*

*'When I can visit my mother and some aunts' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'My family makes me happy whenever I am with them, whenever we are together' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'When I visit my natural family' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Family bonding, playing together with my friends and siblings and when my father visited us here in SOS' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'When I go home to nana and nanu, when I go out with friends in the city and when I win competitions' (a child in Romania)*

*'Good Mother' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

*'The thing I was hoping was to bring my brothers and be together, and it really happened' (a child from Palestine)*

*'Yes my brother being with me' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

#### **7.1.2. Having friends**

Another significant factor contributing to children's happiness is having the opportunity for friendship. Children who participated in both surveys identified this important issue.

### **Children from the FS service: What makes you feel happy?**

*'One of the things that makes me happy is my friends' (a child in Greece)*

*'My friends and those I love and care about and people who give me meaning in my life' (a child in Greece)*

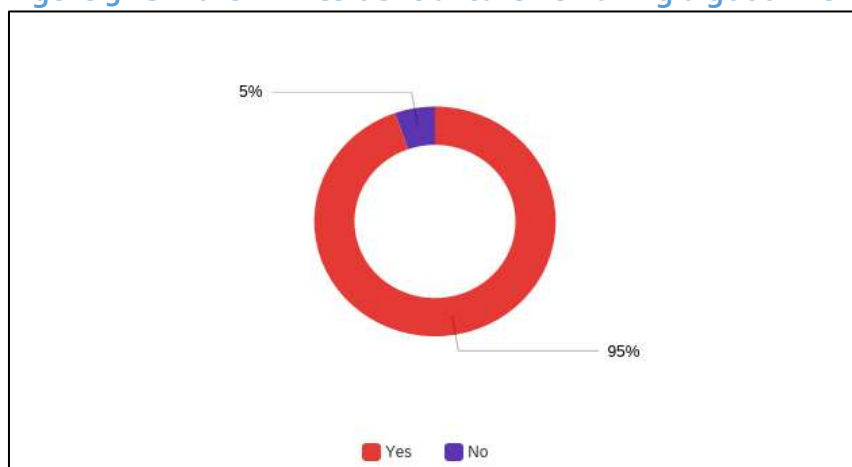
*'When I am with friends' (a child in Kenya)*

*'I feel happy playing with my friends' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'Being with friends' (a child in the Philippines)*

When children in residential care were asked if having a good friend is important, children again signified friendship is indeed important. As illustrated in Figure 5, almost all children (95%) responded 'yes' to this question. This is related to friendships both with children they live with in residential care as well as those living in the local community. Children in both surveys wrote about feeling happy at school because of the opportunity this brings to make and be with friends. There was no difference in the responses as per gender and the majority of children across all age groups signalled they have at least one really good friend.

**Figure 5. Children in residential care: Is having a good friend important? (count 129)**



### **Children in residential care: What makes you feel happy?**

*'My friends' (a child in Austria)*

*'My friends' (a child in Greece)*

*'Being with my friends' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Playing with my friends' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'Socializing with friends, being with my SOS mother' (a child in Romania)*

*'Playing with my friends. Studying' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

#### **7.1.3. Enjoying school**

Children were asked whether they enjoy going to school and were invited to tell us about anything that contributed to such enjoyment. School is important to children: they enjoy going to school and they enjoy learning. Seventy-two percent of children from the FS service told us they 'always' enjoy going to school, and 22% said 'most of the time' (Figure 6). Almost two-thirds of children in residential care (67%) of children said they 'always' enjoy going to school and 18% said they enjoy going to school 'most of the time' (Figure 7).

Figure 6. Children from the FS service: Do you enjoy going to school? (116)

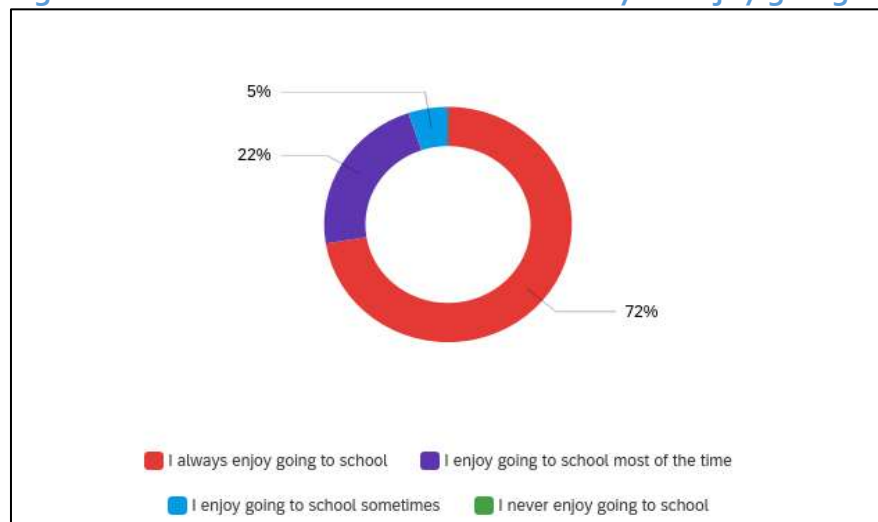
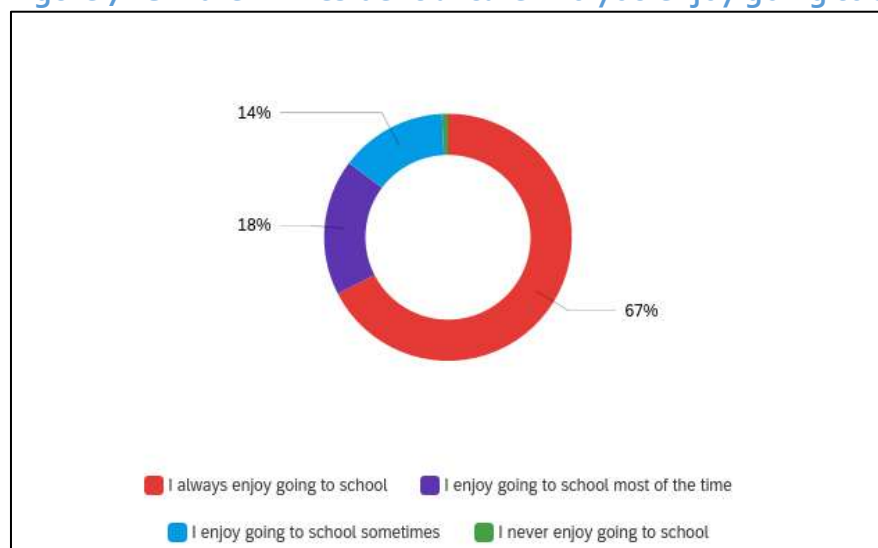


Figure 7. Children in residential care: Do you enjoy going to school? (count 129)



Many children in both surveys expressed the pleasure of learning in itself. Most important for them is the link education has in achieving their potential and contributing to, and enhancing, their future prospects. In other parts of the survey, children wrote about wanting a sense of fulfilment and achievement and doing well at school helps contribute to this realisation. Children from the FS service specifically referred to this as also being a way they can also help their families in the future. Furthermore, contributing to their enjoyment of school is having teachers they like and who support them. Children also told us an important aspect of going to school is the opportunity it offers them to participate in sports, cultural and other recreational activities, and to have 'fun'. A number of children in residential care also told us that being at school allows them to spend time away from their alternative care setting, and to be able to socialise with children who do not live in residential care.

#### Children from the FS service: What do you enjoy about going to school?

*'I like spending time with my friends at school and learning new things because I gain experiences' (a child in Greece)*

*'Because I like to learn and because I see my friends again' (a child in Romania)*

*'It helps improve my career' (a child in Kenya)*

*'I enjoy going to school because I get to learn new things after I finish I will get a good job and help my mother' (a child in Kenya)*

*'When I learn things that will make me better at what I want to be' (a child in Greece)*

*'To learn and became a great person in life so I can take care of my mum' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'That I can acquire new information that will help me in the future' (a child in Romania)*

*'Participate in activities. Play and activities' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Play sports. Studying. See friends. Seeing teachers' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Good teachers' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

*'I feel happy when I understand what my teacher teaches me at school and also I feel happy whenever I pass my examination' (a child in Nigeria)*

### **Children in residential care: What do you enjoy about going to school?**

*'My friends' (a child in Austria)*

*'Having good friends' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

*'I want know new thing or I want add and learn new thing in my life. Also I have an aim so I must learn. I have this thinking in my life' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'This is where your life gets sharpened' (a child in Kenya)*

*'To learn new things ... As I am now in high school to get to know how to live independently without being told to do something. How life is outside in comparison at SOS' (a child in Kenya)*

*'I like going to school, because I want to learn, and I also want to have wisdom and knowledge and understanding how to succeed in life' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'So I study and become an important person' (a child in Palestine)*

*'That I exercise in sports activities' (a child in Greece)*

*'Sports, my friends, dancing' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

*'The fact of meeting other new faces rather than the ones we are used to in the village and the bond with the teachers' (a child in Kenya)*

*'I get to interact with other children from different backgrounds' (a child in Kenya)*

*'I get to know how people from the community behave and live' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Change of atmosphere, play and be happy because I went outside the village walls' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Social interaction' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'Because the teachers are kind' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

#### **7.1.4. The opportunity to engage in my local community**

Children participating in both surveys told us that the opportunity to engage in activities in their local community is important to them and makes them happy. We asked them how often they are able to participate in recreational activities in their local community. Only 33% of children from the FS service said they had the opportunity to participate in such activities, including sports and cultural activities, 'a lot' of the time. Almost a third (21%) of children indicated they 'never' attend such activities in their local community and 36% answered 'sometimes'. Almost two-thirds of children (62%) in residential care told us that they do attend activities in their local community 'a lot' and 25% answered



'sometimes'. Of some interest, amongst children in residential care, those aged between 12 years and 14 years old indicated they are more likely to attend these activities than those in other age groups

#### 7.1.5. Feeling supported, cared for and loved

Children told us throughout the survey about the importance of feeling 'supported', 'cared for' and 'loved'. This makes them happy as well as offering them a sense of security. This includes the importance of the quality of care offered to them by their own families as well as others tasked with their alternative care.

##### ***Children from the FS service : What makes you feel happy?***

*'The love is in our family and how my mother takes care of me' (a child in Kenya)*

*'I live in a complete family united by love and mutual respect' (a child in Palestine)*

*'My family...my friends and those I love and care about and people who give me meaning in my life' (a child in Greece)*

*'Having a complete family that is healthy and full of love. Being with friends' (a child in the Philippines)*

##### ***Children in residential care : What makes you feel happy?***

*'I feel happy because I am always surrounded with love' (a child in Kenya)* *'The care I am given and the support' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Someone caring about me' (a child in Palestine)*

*'I have someone to support me' (a child in Greece)*

*Understanding and loving care' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

*Feeling loved by the teachers' (a child in Palestine)*

Having someone they can turn to when feeling worried or unhappy is also important to them. We asked children from the FS service whether there is an adult either in, or outside of, their family they can turn to for help if they feel unhappy, worried or frightened. Approximately half of the children who responded to this question indicated there is an adult within their family they can 'always' turn to and a third answered this is possible 'sometimes'. In addition, approximately a third of the children indicated they are 'always' able to turn to someone outside the family if they feel unhappy or frightened, and almost half said this was possible 'sometimes'. Almost half of the children from the FS service also noted friends as being someone they can turn to 'always' or 'sometimes'. This further endorses the significant role identified by children throughout the study that family and friends play in their lives. Of further significance, particularly to the FS service, is the role the social worker from this programme plays. The vast majority of children (87%) answered 'yes', when asked if they like their social worker and 82%, that they trusted them. There was no difference between responses according to gender.

In terms of quality of support, we also wanted to explore the frequency by which they can talk to their social worker about their problems in particular. Only 9% of children indicated they can 'never' talk to the social worker about their problems, 23% of children can 'always' speak about their problems, 24% can speak about them 'most of the time' and 44% 'sometimes'. Girls indicated they are slightly more likely to 'always' be able to speak to their social worker (28%) than boys (18%). Only 6% of children aged 17 signalled they can 'always' speak to the social worker about their problems, in comparison to 40% of 12 years olds. Seventeen year olds also indicated that they are more likely than children in other age categories to 'never' speak to the social worker about their problems (18%).

We also asked children in residential care if they would tell us about relationships that matter to them and asked them to identify the person who provides them with the most care. Overwhelmingly this is their SOS mother. As identified in other sections of the survey, feeling cared for is important to children and offers them a sense of security. Wanting to explore this further, we asked children how the person they had identified as their main care makes them feel. Almost all children (95%) indicated they 'always' feel cared for by this person. Likewise, 90% answered this person 'always' makes them feel safe and 78% said they 'always' felt loved by this main carer.

## 8. Feeling sad or worried

In order to understand the concerns that children have in their lives and explore ways to support positive changes in this respect, we asked children about feeling sad and worried. Interestingly, the same percentage of children (17%) from both surveys said they 'never' feel sad. Seventy-four percent of children from the FS service and 81% of children in residential care told us they feel sad 'sometimes'. Only 7% of children from the FS service and 2% in residential care indicated they feel sad 'most of the time'.

### 8.1. My family

Children who participated from the FS service survey highlighted the manner in which they feel worried and unhappy is closely related to the general well-being of their family. This includes their concern when their family is struggling in a number of ways, and in turn, contributes to a overall sense of insecurity, both about the immediate challenges and what the future holds. Exploring this issue further, children indicated a range of concerns related to the financial instability of their families. In a specific multiple-answer question, three quarters of children identified they are worried when their family cannot afford new clothes, and well over half (64%) because they may not have enough food. Over half the children said they are worried by the condition of their house, as well as any possibility they will have to help earn money. The latter perhaps also relating to their concerns that members of their household are not able to go to work, or are sick and cannot get the medical care they need.

Almost two thirds of children are sad or worried when family members have arguments or fights, and over a third are concerned that someone will hurt them, either a family member or someone else. It is recognised that as this was an online survey it may not be a platform through which children would reveal serious harmful experiences. What is significant, is that only 17% of children said they are worried about being separated from their family and sent to live somewhere else.

#### **Children from the FS service: What makes you feel sad?**

*'My mother's separation from my father and the lack of brothers to share with' (a child in Palestine)*

*'I feel sad when my family is sad' (a child in Palestine)*

*'I feel sad if my parents quarrel' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'When I see my grieving mother upset' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'I feel sad because sometimes my father fights with my grandmother in the house' (a child in Greece)*

*'When my mother does not have the school fees' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Because of the financial situation and living conditions. Loss of a family member' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Because we don't have enough income' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'Not having enough money for my family and sometimes my parent's health condition' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

*'Looking at the financial hardships that my parents are having' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

*'Because we don't have enough income' (a child in Ethiopia)*

For many children in SOS residential care, it is the impact of not being with their birth family that concerns most of them. This is coupled with the way many children are also upset when not knowing why their families relinquished them into care, and feelings of insecurity not knowing if they will return to them. One-third of the answers children provided in the residential care survey signified they are sad when they cannot see the people they love, with many referring in particular to not being able to actually be with and/or spend sufficient time with members of their birth family.

#### ***Children in residential care - Question: What makes you sad?***

*'When I can't see my parents' (a child in Austria)*

*'My father did not visit me in the village and I did not go to visit my family' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Missing my mother' (a child in Palestine)*

*'My emotional feelings about where I came from which is unknown' (a child in Kenya)*

*'I would like to know why and where my parents had to abandon me and where they are right now' (a child in Kenya)*

### **8.2. Having friends**

Children did not mention the impact of lacking friends in particular anywhere in the surveys, however, they did tell us that a cause of unhappiness is when they argue and have disagreements with their friends.

#### ***Children from the FS service: What makes you sad or worried?***

*'Fighting with a friend' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'Quarrelling with friends and cheating' (a child in Palestine)*

*'I don't like problems among students' (a child in Palestine)*

#### ***Children in residential care : What makes you sad ?***

*'When one of the children makes fun of me' (a child in Palestine)*

*'When I argue with someone' (a child in Romania)*

### **8.3. Difficulties at school**

A number of children told us that bullying and bad behaviour at school is something that negatively impacts their enjoyment of school. This, children indicated, is both the manner in which some teachers treat them and also peer-to-peer bullying. Only a few children mentioned the impact of COVID-19 on their schooling.

#### ***Children from the FS service: Question: What do you not like about going to school?***

*'Bullying in schools' (a child in Kenya)*

*'When teachers shout for no reason' (a child in Greece)*

*'The teachers beating children' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Sometimes some children are bullying others' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

*'Certain teachers, certain children who do not behave very well' (a child in Romania)*

*'In the school I am in now I do not like to be discriminated against and to exist lower or higher. I consider everyone equal and that everyone has something special they can give' (a child in Greece)*

*'I don't like going to school because I am different from some students' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Being chased back home going for money and yet at home my mother does not have money' (a child in Kenya)*

#### **Children in residential care: What do you not like about going to school?**

*'Fights between student and teachers' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'Violence between children' (a child in Palestine)*

*'The behaviour of my teachers and classmates' (a child in Greece)*

*'The misbehaviour of some student in the other class when they noticed and picked me, sometimes it bothers me' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'I do not like the relationship between the teacher and the students (and the relationship of the teacher and the students became worse when the corona came and there were internal crises)' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Life with COVID at school' (a child in Greece)*

Children participating in the SOS residential care survey also wrote about the unhappiness they experience due to issues of stigmatisation related to being a child living in alternative care, and as one child refers to, their 'social status', that is inflicted by others at school.

#### **Children in residential care: What do you not like about going to school?**

*'Sometimes I am exposed to violence and bullying at school because I live in an institution far from my original family' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Children from S.O.S being called CV children or S.O.S children at school. Whenever something bad happens us being taken as first suspects' (a child in Kenya)*

*'When others at school criticize me for my social status and make fun of me' (a child in Romania)*

*'Yes, being looked down upon by my fellow students' (a child in Kenya)*

*'The atmosphere and students despising us' (a child in Kenya)*

### **8.4. The opportunity to engage in my local community**

Children who responded to both surveys told us it saddens them if they feel they are not able to engage in their local community. For example, although earlier in this report we noted how the majority of children do take part in recreational activities in their local community, this is not to the degree they would like and is a matter of concern to them. Some children participating in the residential care survey wrote about their life not being like those of their friends who do not live in residential care but are able to live with their own families. We were also told by some children that

being like others in their local community meant being with their own families. Some children also told of concerns related to the stigmatisation they experience because they live in alternative care.

#### **Children in residential care - Question: What makes you sad?**

*'When I get teased' (a child in Kenya)*

*'When someone insults me about my parents' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'When children make fun of me' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Other's negative perceptions of charitable organizations' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'I am sad when I see how some people deal with me because I live in an institution and that my family left me and each of them went to his own life' (a child in Palestine)*

*'I feel sad when I see my friends with their parents... even the village children have a mum and a dad they can spend holidays with' (a child in Palestine)*

*'When I see my classmates with their parents and when their parents get their report card at school. I feel sad that my mother cannot see my progress in school and awards. I want to see my mother to be proud of me in every little success I have' (a child in the Philippines)*

#### **8.5. Not feeling supported, cared for and loved**

Children are unhappy if they feel they are not loved or cared for. Overall, responses from children from the FS service indicated this is less of a concern for them. For some children in residential care, however, there are ongoing worries related to feeling cared for and particular concerns related to whether or not their birth families care about them. This for example, is indicated in their concern as to why they have been relinquished into care. Some children in residential care also told us they are unhappy when they feel they are being misunderstood.

#### **Children in residential care - Question: What makes you sad?**

*'I think they should have told me the reason as to why they brought me here and my background story' (a child from Kenya)*

*'I thought they would help me trace where I came from or where my family are' (a child from Nigeria)*

*'When they don't understand me' (a child in Greece)*

*'When I am not understood' (a child in Kenya)*

When children in residential care were asked about less positive feelings and the role the person they identified as their main carer contributed to these, very few children answered 'always' when asked if this person makes them feel worried, frightened, angry, ashamed and confused. They did answer however select the response 'sometimes' in relation to this person making them feel 'sometimes' in 'angry' (53%), 'confused' (37%), 'frightened' (27%), or 'ashamed' (22%).

#### **8.6. Stability**

In terms of how it feels to lack stability, we invited children participating in the residential care survey who had lived in more than one other alternative care placement to tell us how being in, or moving between, these placements had made them feel. They told us that their lives had lacked stability and they felt disorientated by the change(s). For example, they are unhappy when those tasked with their care changes or, having friends that 'leave'. Children also spoke about their fear of losing those they care for.



### **Children in residential care - Question: What makes you sad?**

*'Death of friends, families/relatives. Friends/siblings leaving' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'Fear to lose those people whom I trust. When I think about my biological mother. Had she been with me, I would have been with her' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'When people I value leave' (a child in Greece)*

*'It makes me sad when I remember my late-mother who left us when we were still young and our youngest sister who died at an early age' (a child in the Philippines)*

## **9. The changes children would like to see in their lives**

We sought children's ideas about different ways they think their challenges and concerns might be addressed and improvements that could be made to the quality of support that prevents separation from parental care as well as improves the experience of alternative care.

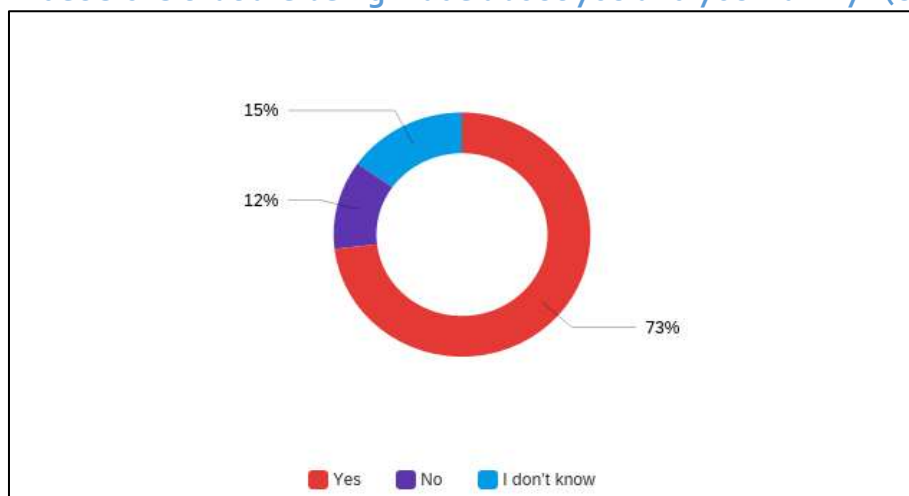
### **9.1. Being included in decisions that affect my life**

First and foremost, children were asked a series of questions about being involved in decision making and the opportunity to be able to share their ideas and opinions. They told us they do want more inclusion in decisions being made about themselves, and in the case of children from the FS service, also in decisions making that affect their families.

#### **9.1.1. Involvement in decisions being made about myself and my family**

Almost a third of children who responded in the FS service survey to a question about the frequency the social worker involves them in decisions being made about themselves and/or their family, answered they are 'always' included with approximately another third (33%) indicating they are likely to be included 'most of the time'. Combined, almost a third of children (36%) are only included in decision making 'sometimes' or 'never'. When they were asked if they wanted more inclusion in decisions being made about themselves and their families, approximately three quarters said 'yes' (73%) (Figure 8).

**Figure 8. Children from the FS service: Would you like the social worker to include you more in decisions that are being made about you and your family? (count 119)**

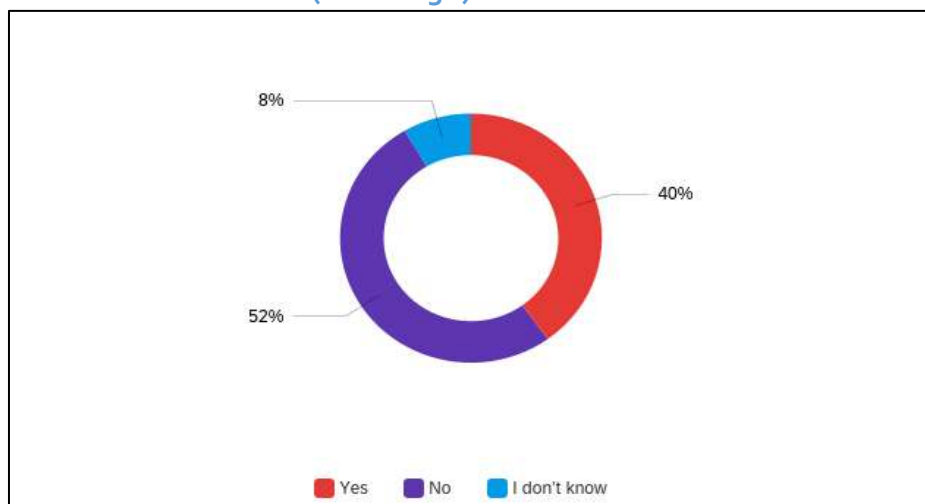


#### **9.1.2. Involvement in decision making in residential care**

Important to decision making is the provision of information to assist and inform any choices being made. Many children who participated in the residential care survey said that having information and

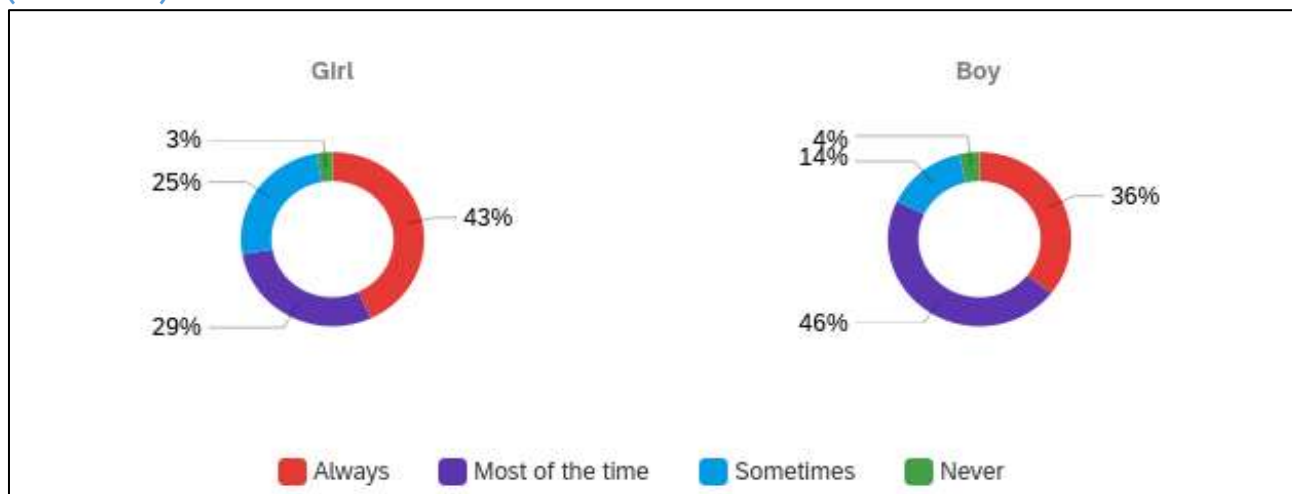
being kept informed about decisions that affect their lives is important to them. This issue was explored further by asking whether or not they are provided information that helps them make decisions including whether anyone had told them why they were in care upon arrival at residential care provided by SOS CV. In total, 45% of children answered 'yes' and 25% 'no'. Almost one-third (29%) of children answered that they 'cannot remember'. When asked whether they would have like more information, 42% of children answered 'yes' (Figure 9Error! Reference source not found.).

**Figure 9. Children in residential care: Would you have liked more information about why you came into SOS care? (count 130)**



We also asked children whether or not someone had asked them what they wanted to happen when they first arrived in SOS care. A total of 27% of children responded that 'yes' they had been asked, 36% answered 'no', and 37% that they did not remember. If children had been offered an opportunity to say what they wanted to happen, it was important to know whether they felt their opinions had been taken seriously. Of the few children (36 in total) that did respond to this question, they overwhelmingly (92%) answered 'yes'. There were differences in the answers provided by girls and boys. Thirty-six percent of boys think they are 'always' listened to and their ideas taken seriously in comparison to 43% of girls (Figure 10). Forty-six percent of boys think they are listened to and their ideas taken seriously 'most of the time' in comparison to 29% of girls.

**Figure 10. Children in residential care: If you were asked what you wanted to happen, do you think they listened and took your ideas about what you wanted seriously? (by gender) (count 128)**



We also asked children their ideas about improving the experience of first arriving in residential care and any additional information they would have liked to have received. For some it was a positive experience but others told us they it would be important to have additional information that would reassure them about such concerns as, what it is like to live in residential care, what would be expected of them, and what will their life be like in the future.

***Children in residential care: Is there anything you think should have happened when you first came into SOS care that would have made you feel happier?***

*'I would have thought if they had explained to me about the nature of life in the village and the nature of the care provided, I would have been happy from the first time I entered and I would not feel anxious and afraid' (a child from Palestine)*

*'All things when I came to live in the village' (a child from Palestine)*

*'I wanted a welcome that would help me understand and accept the new situation quickly' (a child from Palestine)*

*'It wasn't because of the supervisors that I was so introverted and confused. But I felt like I was in another world and had to adapt to it. It was a long process to get used to the new situation. Me I don't know how to solve such problems now' (a child from Austria)*

*'They welcomed us with love and respect' (a child from the Philippines)*

*'I can't tell because I was only three years old' (a child from Kenya)*

*'I would like to have more information about the reasons I came and how my daily life will be' (a child in Greece)*

*'I wanted to know the situation and family circumstances of each child in the village. And when would I return to live with a normal family?' (a child in Palestine)*

In addition, we were told that it would help greatly if children were given more information about their birth family.

***Children in residential care: If you would have liked more information, what sort of information would you have liked someone to give you?***

*'All about the reason I came here' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'I would like to know why I came and who brought me' (a child in Greece)*

*'How it came about for me to be in SOS' (a child in Kenya)*

*'I would like to know why and where my parents had to abandon me and where they are right now' (a child in Kenya)*

*'I would have been loved to be told why I was brought to SOS children's village and about my family' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'All the information about my biological family and why I was put in SOS Children's Villages' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Why and how I was referred to the care of the organization?' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'The sort of information that I would like to know: why did my biological mother agreed to transfer here in SOS' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'Why I was placed here in SOS and why is it that my mother could not take care of us anymore' (a child in the Philippines)*

'Well, why did I get here and how did I get here?' (a child in Romania)

'The reason why my mother left me' (a child in Sri Lanka)

'I would like to know about the place I lived before' (a child in Sri Lanka)

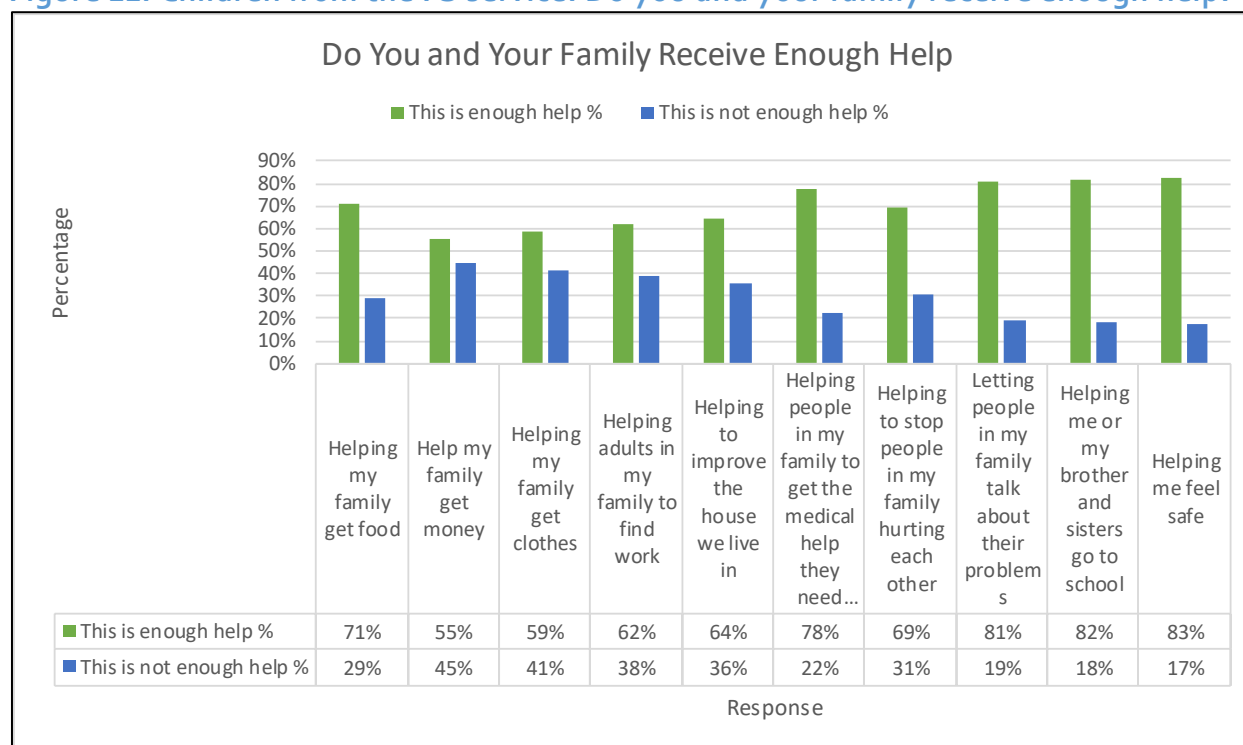
## 9.2. My Family

Children told us about ideas that could help address some of the principle concerns they identified in relation to both the well-being of their family, and relationships with their family.

### 9.2.1. Support for myself and my family

Children from the FS service told us that a significant concern in their lives relates to the well-being of their family and identified additional support they think would help some of the challenges still being faced. Almost half the children that participated in the survey told us that the monetary support their family receives is not enough (Figure 11). Over a third of children think adults in their family are not receiving sufficient help to find work, and would also like to see more improvements being made to the housing they live in. Almost a third of children said there is not enough help with food, and approximately a fifth see assistance in accessing medical services when needed as insufficient.

**Figure 11. Children from the FS service: Do you and your family receive enough help?**



Children from the FS service also identified the need for more support that would prevent family members from hurting each other as well as creating more opportunities for family members to talk about their problems. In this respect, in different parts of the survey, children wrote about the importance of both themselves and their families receiving 'guidance' and 'counselling'. Almost a quarter of children think there should be more reassurance that they and their siblings go to school, and that they will receive support that keeps them feeling safe. These areas of support are also indicative to the overall sense they provided of wanting more stability and reassurance as to opportunities for themselves and their families.

### **Children from the FS service: What other support would you like your family to receive?**

*'It is better to have better training, a place to work and a place to sell things so that you can have better income generation' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'Food support: Financial support, counselling Services; Psychological support' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'To have a more stable job for my father' (a child in Greece)*

*'To provide school fees' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Give my parents money to boost their own business' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'To find my mom a job' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Give some foods and money to my family' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'Things that can help us find better work that is associated with the skills of adults in the family' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'Advice and support' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Multi-support' (a child in Romania)*

*'Some more support for family development' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

*'I would like to help my family restore a house that was built and which I cannot live in' (a child in Palestine)*

*'For us the medical support because for us medical support is not usually given to us' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'I wish there were no fights in my family and we all spend time together' (a child in Greece)*

*'Reduce the problems in the family, and the behaviour of someone in the family can change' (a child in Greece)*

We also asked children participating in the FS service if there is anything else they would like the social worker to help them with personally. Overall, their responses reiterated the support they would like for their families as well as addressing concerns they raised in other sections of the survey.

### **Children from the FS service: Is there anything else you would you like the social worker to help you with?**

*'To get my education properly, about my health care, about children's well-being' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'I would like more time with her for advice from my family' (a child in Greece)*

*'Support my talent' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Helping me concentrate on my weak points' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Help about me and the younger ones with school' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'Give some thoughts to make my life better' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'To participate in recreational activities' (a child in Palestine)*

#### **9.2.2. Improving my relationship with my family**

For many children in residential care, significantly impacting on their happiness and causing them concerns, is the relationship they have with their birth families. They told us that ongoing help to improve their relationships with their families is important to them with a principal consideration being the ability to have more contact with them: almost two-thirds of children (62%) in the residential care



survey told us they would like more contact. Furthermore, throughout the survey, children let us know that having a greater understanding of the reasons why their family relinquished them into care would be of particular significance to them and their feeling of happiness.

***Children in residential care: Is there anything else that could be done to help you to have the best relationship possible with your birth family?***

*'To be able to meet them more often and spend more time with them' (a child in Greece)*

*'Increasing opportunity for more contact' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'If my family could come and visit me whenever they want' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'By allowing me to visit and spend time with them more often' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Visiting and telephone calls' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'Regular family visits to my natural family. My family's participation in the events that concern me inside the village' (a child in Palestine)*

*'I don't want anything to help me because I don't want this. But I want the rest of the children to make a good relationship through contacts and visits, however if a child refuses, the child's opinion should be taken seriously. I am with the idea of integrating children but properly. I do not want the child to be integrated if he does not want or it is not correct. I want the reality of the child's living with his family and the family situation to be studied in all respects. The opinion of the child and the parents must be taken as well. So that one child does not fall victim to this act if the child is integrated into a situation that does not allow for their integration, he will be affected psychologically, and this...will affect his life and his future as well' (a child in Palestine)*

*'I want to have a talk face to face with my Aunties and Uncles, especially my father' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'I would like to have a home visit or vacation with my birth family so that I can be updated about their lives and strengthen our relationship' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'To see my family more often' (a child in Romania)*

*'Looking for my biological background' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Understanding my family background' (a child in Kenya)*

### **9.3. Enjoying school more**

We asked children if there was anything that would help them enjoy school more. Children identified school as being somewhere important to them that offers them opportunities that will safeguard their futures as well as a place to find the comfort of friendship. Children provided their recommendations for enhancing and improving these opportunities. They told us they would like the situation of bullying and conflict in school to be addressed and preventing bad behaviour by both teachers and other children. Some would like a better relationship with their teachers. A few children raised the issue of preventing stigmatisation. Other children said that improving the quality of their education would help them to enjoy school more. Addressing support with school fees was raised particularly by children in Kenya many times throughout the survey. Some children also told us that increased access to recreational activities at school would make them happy.

### **Children from the FS service: What would help you to enjoy school more?**

*'I would love if there was friendship and cooperation, relaxation, respect, and overcoming the stereotypes and bullying that has prevailed in many children as a bad memory' (a child in Greece)*

*'When teachers shout for no reason' (a child in Greece)*

*'If they are not beating us' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'The goodwill and patience of teachers should be greater' (a child in Romania)*

*'Better interaction between teachers and students' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Going for games in other schools. Participating in something that makes me happy' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Recreational activities' (a child in Palestine)*

*'More activities that would give students fun yet still learn' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'More time to play' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

*'Love and playing with my friends' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'If I can find someone to pay my school fees' (a child in Kenya)*

*'New school uniform just like my friend, good books for learning' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Take measures other than masks' (a child in Greece)*

*'Because of Corona, I try to avoid playing and mingling, so I don't have a good time' (a child in Palestine)*

### **Children in residential care: Is there anything that would help you to enjoy school more?**

*'If there is no bullying in the school. Teachers treat all the students equally. Identify misbehaving students and take action' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'Us to be treated equally' (a child in Kenya)*

*'The community children should stop looking down on us' (a child in Kenya)*

*'If there are certain things in school (football handball)' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'More learning and more outdoor activities' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Yes like doing dancing and music' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'Excursions and football competitions' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'I would like to engage more in cultural subjects and sports' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

*'Better quality of education' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'Teachers support' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'Feeling loved by the teachers as well as my participation in school activities and school radio' (a child in Palestine)*

*'I want my teacher to encourage me a lot and never bring me down' (a child in the Philippines)*

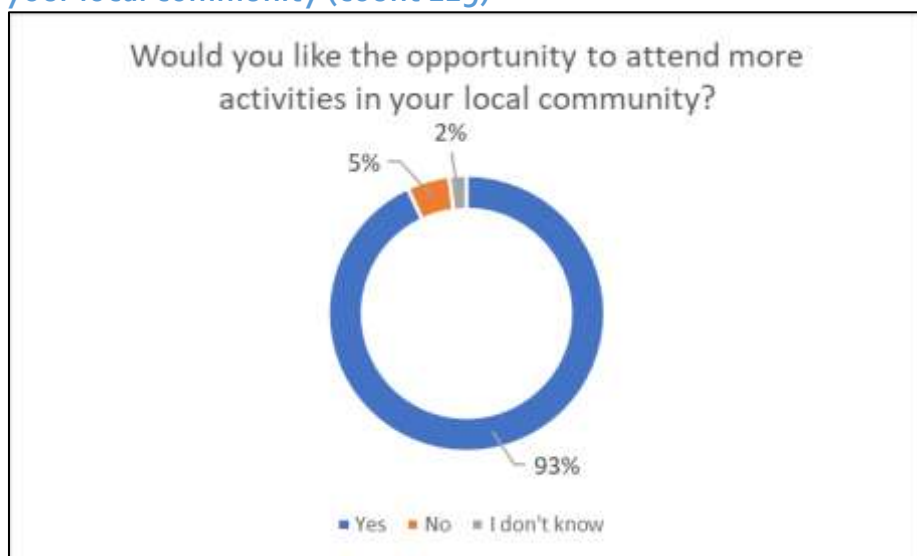
## **9.4. Being part of my local community**

Almost all of the children who participated in both services told us they would like the opportunity to be more involved in their local community.

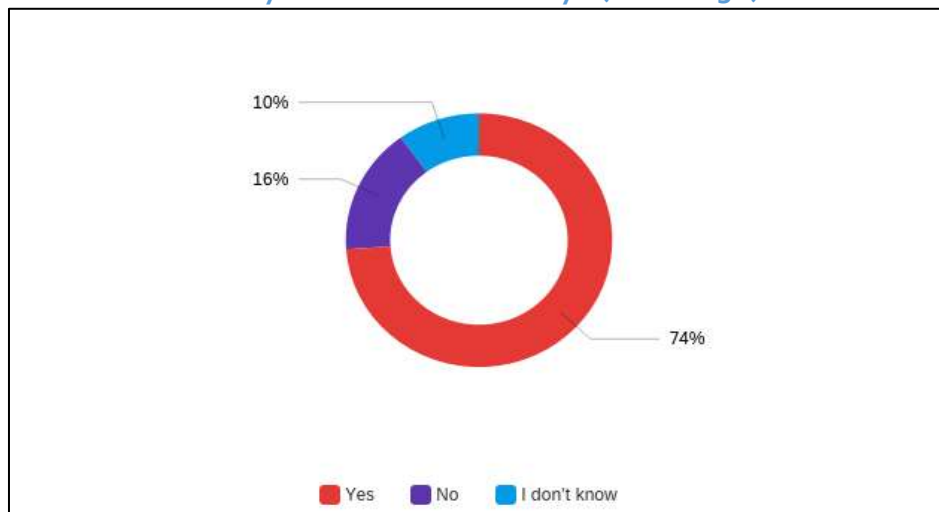
#### 9.4.1. The opportunity to attend more activities in the local community

Overwhelmingly (93%), children participating in the FS service said they would like more opportunities to take part in activities in the community (Figure 12). Likewise, 74% of children in residential care said they too would like to attend more activities in their local community (Figure 13). There was no significant difference according to gender in either of the surveys.

**Figure 12. Children in FS service: Would you like the opportunity to attend more activities in your local community (count 119)**



**Figure 13. Children in residential care: Would you like the opportunity to attend more activities more in your local community? (count 130)**



Children participating in both surveys said they would like to participate in a range of different sports and cultural activities such as football, netball, swimming, music, drama, dancing and painting.

#### **Children from the FS service: What kind of activities would you like more opportunities to attend in your local community?**

*'Drama, reading poetry' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'I would like to attend sports activities, concerts and theatrical performances since I have only had the opportunity to attend once in the past' (a child in Greece)*

*'at an art studio were we could draw and play' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Dance club' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'Acting, dancing, singing, handicrafts, costume design and various activities' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Sports and music' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'Sports, dancing' (a child in Romania)*

*'Child clubs, sports, community events' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

***Children in residential care: What kind of activities would you like more opportunities to attend in your local community?***

*'Martial arts, swimming, singing, dancing...' (a child in Austria)*

*'Latin dance' (a child in Greece)*

*'Cultural, dance, music' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'I want participate on youth club in the town' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'Basketball clubs, and engaging in bands and social clubs' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'I like participating in football games in a specialized club, participating in a cultural centre, joining a centre to strengthen English language skills' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Sports, Writing sessions I'd love to have more opportunities those I mentioned. Especially in writing because I want to learn more and I wanted to boost my capabilities in writing' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'Football, swimming, boxing and other sports activities' (a child in Romania)*

*'Swimming, arts and crafts' (a child in Kenya)*

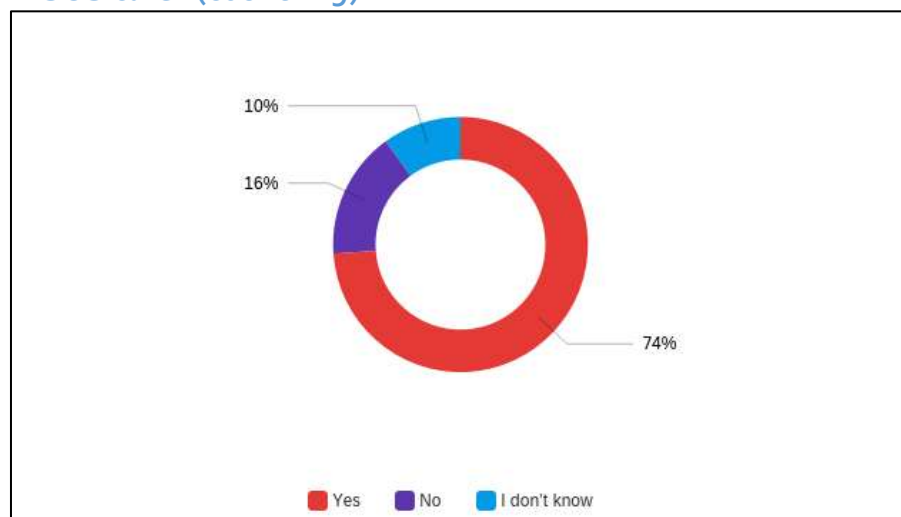
*'Sports. Musical programmes' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

#### **9.4.2. Being able to do the same things as other children in the local community**

In other parts of the survey, some children in SOS residential care wrote about feeling different from children they know who are not living in alternative care. We asked a number of other questions that also related to this issue. When asked how often they do the same things as other children who do not live in SOS residential care, almost two-thirds answered this happens 'very often', and 25% this happens 'sometimes', 8% said 'not very much', and 5% responded 'not at all' (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

When asked if they would like to be able to do the same things as other children who do not live in SOS care, approximately three-quarters of children answered 'yes' (Figure 14). The responses were similar between girls (75%) and boys (72%).

**Figure 14. Would you like to be able to do the same things as other children who do not live in SOS care? (count 129)**



In relation to engaging in their local community in the same manner as children who do not live in alternative care, we invited children in SOS residential care to tell us what kinds of things they would like to do that are the same as children. Their answers included going out of SOS care more often and taking part in local recreational activities. Children told us they would like to be able to go out more to meet friends. This includes visiting their homes and being with the families of their friends. Some children wrote about wanting their life to be more like their friends' who do not live in SOS residential care but are able to live with their own families. We were also told by some children that being like other children meant being able to live with their own families.

#### ***Children in residential care: What other opportunities would you like to participate in your local community?***

*'Spending the night at a friends house' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'When I can go to other places like visiting my classmates' house outside SOS' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'I would like to spend more time with friends who are with their biological families' (a child in Romania)*

*'Just to go out of the village more often' (a child in Greece)*

*'Being with my school friends. Enjoying being out of the village' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'To go out to meet my friends more often' (a child in Greece)*

*'Given the opportunity to go to our friends and visit some good places' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Playing in the street' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Participation in community activities, as the village is isolated from the community, so all activities take place inside the village' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Just like my friends who are not living in SOS, I would also like to attend occasions outside and meet my other relatives' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'Spending most of the time with my parents discussing issues concerning me and the full percentage of love that I deserve from a parent' (a child in Kenya)*

*'I want to go out of my home to school and back, not from an institution' (a child in Palestine)*

*'To do everything' (a child in Palestine)*

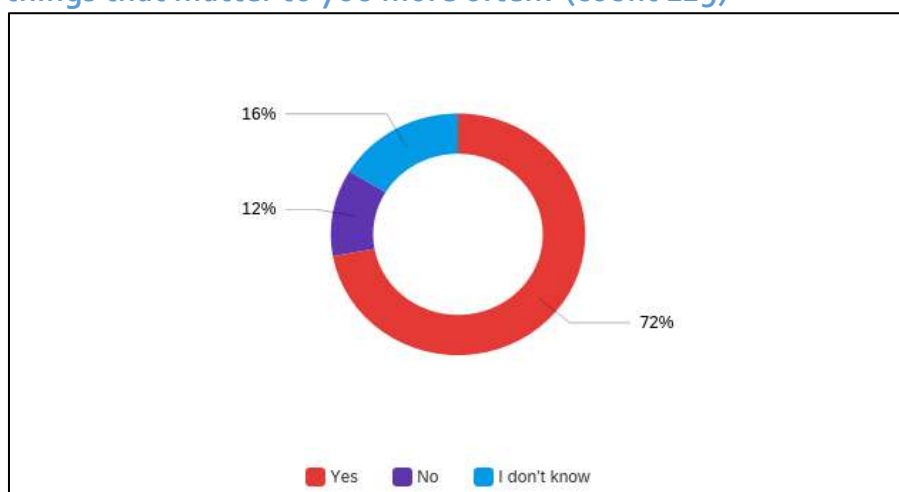


### 9.5. Being supported, cared for and loved

An underlying theme drawn from analysis of the survey findings is, although many children told us they are happy most of the time, they also have concerns and doubts about their lives now and for the future. When they are concerned in this way, or worried or unhappy, children told us they would like more opportunities to turn to someone they can talk to about their feelings and concerns.

For example, when children in residential care were asked if they wanted to talk to their main carer more often about things that matter to them, 72% answered 'yes' ( Figure 15).

**Figure 15. Children in residential care: Would you like to be able to talk to this person about things that matter to you more often? (count 129)**



Children who participated in the residential care survey told us they would like the opportunity to be able to talk more about their everyday lives, for example their school achievements or seek comfort if they have disagreements with friends for example. They would like someone who will really listen to them and offer them support and advice. Throughout the survey some children referred to their wish to have more 'guidance', 'counselling' and 'psychosocial' support. They would like to be offered reassurance about not just what is happening in their lives now, but also to be able to discuss their future, about growing up, and what will happen to themselves, and their families when applicable, in the future. They would also like reassurance that such support will be constant, whether living in their families or in residential care, and available both now and in the future when and if needed.

#### **Children in residential care: Things I would like to talk to my main carer about**

*'Being able to openly telling him /her every thing' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'Yes like listening to me. Understanding me more. Helping me more' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'They have to pay attention' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'Concerned for my education' (a child in Kenya)*

*'To listen to me when I'm sad and explaining my side, and not easily get angry' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'To be able to speak more openly, to remain confidential about what we are talking about, not to tell everyone' (a child in Romania)*

When asked what else could be done to make them happier children said they would like to have more love, understanding and to feel more cared for.

#### ***Children in residential care: What would make you feel happier?***

- 'Providing love' (a child in Ethiopia)*
- 'Just to be understood' (a child in Kenya)*
- 'More love' (a child in Kenya)*
- 'To be my shield whenever I am in deep troubles with the care givers' (a child in Kenya)*
- 'To always stay with me only' (a child in Palestine)*
- 'Sitting with me and sharing all the moments of joy, fear and help always' (a child in Palestine)*
- 'I would like you to stay by my side always' (a child in Palestine)*
- 'Giving me more love and affection' (a child in Sri Lanka)*
- 'Love and caring' (a child in Sri Lanka)*
- 'Understanding and loving care' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

## **10. Stability**

As discussed previously in this study, children would like reassurance in terms of stability and prosperity both now and in the future. In this respect, children want to know they will continued to be loved, kept safe and have access to future opportunities in their life. These aspirations are as previously noted, linked to ongoing access to school, the opportunity to gain a good education. In this regard, school can also play a significant role in offering stability to children and a place they like to be. They want to be able to achieve goals that will also contribute to their future.

#### ***Children from the FS service: What makes you feel happy?***

- 'I feel happy when I know that I have or can achieve my goals... I try to achieve things that I like to do and develop as much as I can and still become better' (a child in Greece)*
- 'Because I have a vision that I think I will achieve in the future' (a child in Ethiopia)*
- 'My achievements' (a child in Sri Lanka)*
- 'When I satisfy my mother and when I achieve something' (a child in Palestine)*

Stability in terms of family relationships is also important. As mentioned above in this report, children participating in the FS service want assurance that all aspects of family life will not only improve, but also these improvements will be long lasting. This means not only the stability brought through better financial security, permanent employment, access to services such as medical attention and improved housing conditions, but also support that ensures ongoing good relationships both between family members, and especially for children in residential care, constancy in their connections with their birth families.

## 11. Being in residential care

In addition to the perspectives and ideas of children already mentioned above in this report, there are additional specific challenges children in residential care would like to be addressed.

### 11.1 What do you think are the most difficult things for children living in alternative care?

We asked children if they could tell us about the things they think are difficult for other children living in alternative care. Once again, they reiterated many of the issues they had highlighted through the whole survey. This included how not being part of their birth family is one of the most difficult things children in alternative care face. Not having love or feeling cared for is also something children find difficult. In addition, they identified a lack of stability as being a problem, particularly when those with the role of caring for them changes. Furthermore, not feeling fully part of their local society was also identified as one of the most difficult things for children living in alternative care.

### 11.2 What works best for children living in alternative care

We also invited children to tell us about things they think work best for children who live in alternative care. Answers included being able to have contact with their birth families. They also identified the role of the SOS mother as being someone to care for them and the importance of receiving love and being happy. Children wrote that having a good education and acquiring skills that would help them in the future is an important aspect of things that work best for children living in alternative care. Furthermore, being an active member of the local community beyond the residential care setting is also a good thing.

### 11.3 Preparing to leave care

Preparing for leaving their residential care placement is a further topic we explored with children. In particular, we asked questions about activities that would prepare them for independent living. Fifty-five per cent of children told us that they 'always' share in tasks such as cooking, cleaning and washing clothes, with 44% of children saying that they 'sometimes' share these responsibilities. Girls and boys share in these responsibilities to almost the same degree. When asked, a total of 57% children indicated they would like to be involved in household tasks 'a lot more' and 37% answered they would 'sometimes' like to be involved more often.

Although children of all ages indicated they are involved in making plans for when they leave SOS care, including younger children, they also told us about ways they could be more involved in this planning. They wrote about the general principle of being more involved in making plans, as well as wanting more information about practical matters, such as financial support and finding employment. A few children also wrote of their wish to remain in contact with their carers from SOS and others they had lived with.

### 11.4 Who I would like to live with when I leave care

We asked children who they would like to live with when they leave SOS care. Overwhelmingly, the children who responded to this question told us they want to live with their birth family, specifically their mothers, fathers, grandparents and siblings: 84 children from the 124 who answered the question identified living with family members as their main goal. Some children specified their SOS mothers as being the person they wanted to remain with. Some children also want to live with friends, and a small number said they wanted to live 'alone'. A few indicated they 'do not know' yet.

## 12 Support for other children

### 12.1 What children participating in the Family Strengthening service think other children in their community would like support with

When children participating in the FS service were asked to help us identify any problems they think other children and their families in their local community are experiencing and that should be addressed, responses mostly identified the same issues they had already reflected on when thinking about their own circumstances. These included poverty, lack of food, the importance of children being able to go to school and, in some instances, help with family relationships. In summary, they wrote that other children and families need the same sort of support they and their families are currently receiving.

#### **Question: What problems do you think other children and their families in your community have?**

##### Support with Finances, Food and Medicine

*'In general, the world we live in suffers from poverty. I believe that other families face problems of poverty and integration into society' (a child in Greece)*

*'Most children have financial problems in their family and cannot take part in activities they want' (a child in Greece)*

*'Lack of food and parental protection' (a child in Kenya)*

*'They lack foods, clothes, no school fees and need better houses' (a child in Kenya)*

*'They don't have enough food and rent' (a child in Kenya)*

*'The financial condition of the children is bad, as well as the presence of the occupation army, which causes insecurity for them. There are also children who do not have parents' (a child in Palestine)*

*'What other problems that my community have is the decreasing number of the donors that is helping us and the decreasing budget that we have to sustain our needs' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'They have not enough money to buy food and other needs of their families' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'Financial, foods, shelter and clothes. And family problems' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'They have no food and are left alone when their parents go to work in the village' (a child in Romania)*

*'Everyone is in one room they have no food and no clothes' (a child in Romania)*

*'Financial issues having unmet needs due to poverty. Issues in nutrition' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

*'More job opportunities for my parents' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

##### Support to Encourage Caring Relationships with Family and Friends

*'Parents lack parenting skills' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'I believe that there is no communication between families and this does not help children' (a child in Greece)*

*'Behavioural problems, financial problems, comprehensive problems that the family cannot talk about' (a child in Greece)*

*'Poor parental care. Food. Clothing' (a child in Nigeria)*

##### Support to Attend Education and School

*'They are getting problem of paying school fees' (a child in Kenya)*

*'Education problems. Money for feeding themselves and their children' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'They lack education support' (a child in Nigeria)*

*Support to Overcome Violence, Bullying and Discrimination*

*'Violence, beatings, depression, poor economic situation, the emergence of Corona virus and home quarantine, which increased violence and problems in society' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Bullying and difficult economic situation' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Bullying' (a child in Romania)*

*Psychological Support and Counselling*

*'Lack of psychological support' (a child in Palestine)*

*'The inability to provide what is necessary to develop their capabilities from a practical point of view' (a child in Palestine)*

*Supporting Family and Friends to Overcome their Addictions*

*'Addictions of parents. Lack of family support to make decisions' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

*'Alcohol misuse. Financial issues' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

*Encouraging Community Support and Cohesion*

*'Lack of community support. Nobody is there to talk to them when they need support' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

*Support with General Problems, Giving Advice and Being Helpful*

*'They have issues about themselves' (a child in Kenya)*

## 12.2 What is difficult for other children living in residential care

We asked children who participated in the residential care survey if they could tell us about the things they think are difficult for other children living in alternative care. Once again, they reiterated many of the issues they had highlighted throughout the survey. Not being part of their birth family is something they identifies as being one of the most difficult things children in alternative care face. Not having love or feeling cared for is also something that makes children unhappy. In addition, they identified a lack of stability as being a concern, particularly when those with the role of caring for them changes, or friends leave. Furthermore, not feeling fully part of their local society was identified as something that can be difficult for children living in alternative care.

Finally, we invited children to tell us about things that work best for children who live in alternative care and what should be drawn from this that will inform us about ways to improve their experience of children in residential care. Answers included being able to have contact with their birth families. They also identified the role of the SOS mother as being someone to care for them and the importance of receiving love and being happy. Children wrote that being able to access good education and acquiring skills that would help them in the future is another important consideration. Furthermore, they stress that being able to feel part of the local community is a good thing and something that children should have support achieving. We will end by letting the children's words speak for themselves:

***Question: What do you think works best for children who are in living in alternative care?***

*Providing an Environment that Makes Children Feel Happy, Loved and Cared For*

*'Making them happy' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'Giving family love' (a child in Ethiopia)*

*'When you don't make them feel like they are not with their biological family, when you treat them like your biological child' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'A good lifestyle' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'Genuine love of family' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'Openness' (a child in Philippines)*

*'All children should live in a supportive, protective and caring environment' (a child in the Philippines)*

*'That people who take care of them' (a child in Romania)*

*'Offering love, attention' (a child in Romania)*

*'Paying attention more often, more love and attachment to children' (a child in Romania)*

*'Love and affection. Security' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

*'Kindness' (a child in Sri Lanka)*

#### Having Relationships with Parents and family Members

*'A mom' (a child in Austria)*

*'Helping them to live with families in the community' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'Constant contact with their biological families' (a child in Palestine)*

*'Weekly visits to their biological families' (a child in Palestine)*

*'It is better for there to be permanent and continuous contact with our families and for the Foundation to work with our people so that we can return to live with them in safety and peace' (a child in Palestine)*

*'That the relationship with the original family is always improved' (a child in Palestine)*

*'To know that their biological family is close and that they have not forgotten that person and to get along with those from the centre where that person lives' (a child in Ethiopia)*

#### Prioritising Children's Education and Ambitions

*'By being serious about their studies' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'Educational opportunities' (a child in Nigeria)*

*'To focus on education because it is the basis for everything' (a child in the Philippines)*

#### Providing Opportunities to Integrate into the Local Community

*'It is better for them to get involved in the outside community and not to stay active in the village' (a child in Palestine)*

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Participation of children from Austria, Ethiopia, Greece, Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine,

Philippines, Romania and Sri Lanka .....4

Figure 2. Children who completed the Family Strengthening Service survey by country and count.....4

Figure 3.Children who completed the survey for children in SOS residential care by country and count 5



Figure 4. Children in SOS residential care: Would you like to see or have other types of contact with your family more often? (count 129) .....	9
Figure 5. Children in SOS residential care: Is having a good friend important? (count 129) .....	10
Figure 6. Children from the FS service: Do you enjoy going to school? (116) .....	11
Figure 7. Children in SOS residential care: Do you enjoy going to school? (count 129) .....	11
Figure 8. Children from the FS service: Would you like the social worker to include you more in decisions that are being made about you and your family? (count 119) .....	18
Figure 9. Children in SOS residential care: Would you have liked more information about why you came into SOS care? (count 130) .....	19
Figure 10. Children in SOS residential care: If you were asked what you wanted to happen, do you think they listened and took your ideas about what you wanted seriously? (by sex) (count 128) .....	19
Figure 11. Children from the FS service: Do you and your family receive enough help? .....	21
Figure 12. Children in FS service: Would you like the opportunity to attend more activities in your local community (count 119) .....	25
Figure 13. Children in SOS residential care: Would you like the opportunity to attend more activities more in your local community? (count 130) .....	25
Figure 14. Would you like to be able to do the same things as other children who do not live in SOS care? (count 129) .....	27
Figure 15. Children in SOS residential care: Would you like to be able to talk to this person about things that matter to you more often? (count 129) .....	28

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