



# Future Trends and Scenarios Shaping the Future of Child and Youth Wellbeing in Europe

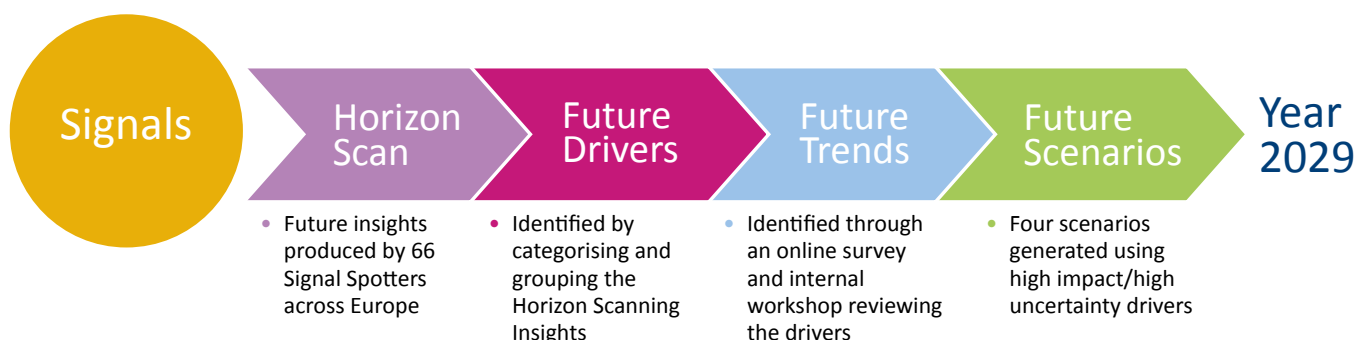
**The world around us is constantly changing. The future of children and young people in Europe will be shaped by decisions that are made now. It is therefore crucial when undertaking a long-term project such as the EuroCohort survey that we identify the variety of drivers and forces that will have an impact on child and youth wellbeing in the future. In this briefing paper we set out future trends and scenarios that can be used when thinking about child and youth wellbeing in Europe.**

The European Cohort Development Project (ECDP) is a Design Study, which will create the specification and business case for a European Research Infrastructure that will provide, over the next 25 years, comparative longitudinal survey data for children and young people – EuroCohort. To futureproof the EuroCohort survey, the ECDP team undertook a Scenario Planning Exercise. Our aim was to future proof EuroCohort by developing scenarios of the world in ten years time and considering the implications of these scenarios for child and youth wellbeing. We used the insights created to assess the relevance of survey instruments developed as part of ECDP. The future scenarios we have developed will also be of wider interest to policy-makers, practitioners and researchers interested in child and youth wellbeing.

## The ECDP Foresight Process

First, material was gathered by our signal scanners in 13 European countries. Then survey participants from across Europe were presented with our analysis of the signals identified and asked to consider their significance and further refine them. The trends that emerged from that survey have then been grouped together by the project team into a set of seven broader trends, each underpinned by drivers identified through the earlier stages of the process. The seven identified future trends are:

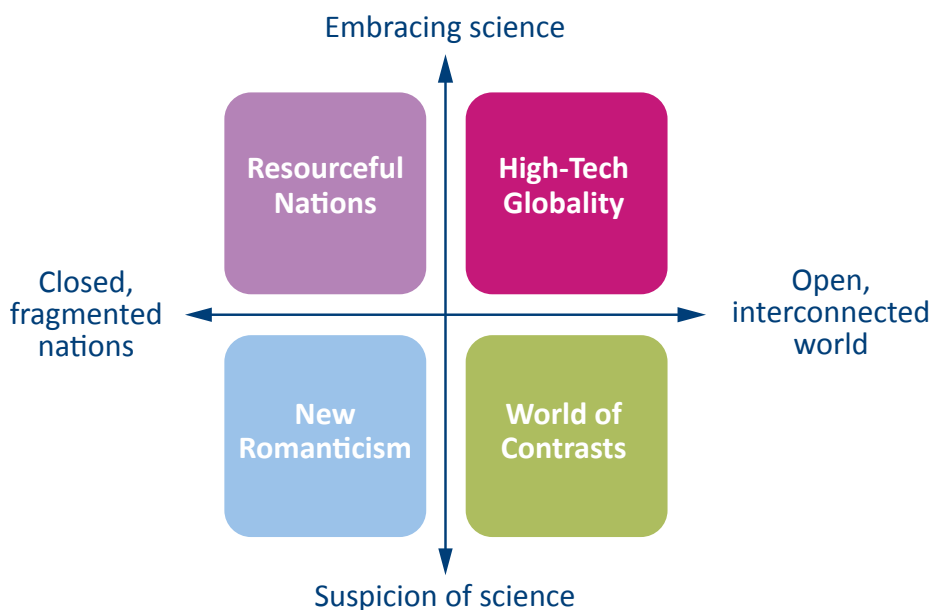
- Global changes, local challenges
- Digitisation and automation in everyday life
- Polarising inequality
- Quality of life and work
- Child-centred society
- Contested Science
- New world of politics



**The seven trends and their underpinning drivers have been used in developing the future scenarios and storylines outlined in this briefing.**

The most critical future drivers were reviewed and an internal project workshop and two scenario axes were chosen by looking at the future drivers identified as having high impact and high uncertainty. The x-axis describes manifestations of global economic and political relations and the extent to which traditional economic, social and political boundaries are being surmounted. These trends will affect child and youth wellbeing through having impacts on the domains of European integration, mobility, labour market security, economic growth and regional inequalities.

The y-axis describes the societal attitudes towards science, technology and expertise. One side of the spectrum represents embracing of positivism, the scientific method, deductive rationality and evidence-based governance. The other end of the spectrum represents rejection of or suspicion towards new technologies, the scientific consensus and conventional medicine. These trends can affect the lives of children and young people in a multitude of ways, including the uptake of vaccines and rejection of or scepticism towards the use of innovative technologies in domains such as healthcare, agriculture, energy, environment management and work.



*Figure 1: The axes of uncertainty and the four scenarios*

In order to develop these scenarios into more complete descriptions of possible futures, we considered how the Future Trends would fit in and interact with the scenarios. The descriptions of each scenarios, highlighting the differences within the domains of economy, politics, society, education, health and environment, are presented below.

These scenarios allow us to explore the uncertainties about the future of child and youth wellbeing in Europe. They do not suggest that we know exactly what will happen or outline the direction of preferred developments, but rather allow us to examine highly differentiated, even extreme, possible futures. These scenarios highlight possible threats, opportunities, and challenges for the EuroCohort Project.

## Resourceful Nations Scenario

<b>Economy</b>	Slow overall economic growth, but continued high growth in certain countries, gaps between richest and poorer countries reducing but remaining large
<b>Politics</b>	Limited international collaboration and prioritisation of national goals, striving for accountability and regulatory frameworks but lack of standardisation and knowledge exchange between countries
<b>Society</b>	Emphasis on national identities, tensions between migrant and non-migrant communities, barriers to legal migration and high levels of inequality between countries result in clandestine migrants at risk of exploitation
<b>Education</b>	Use of innovative technologies in education and focus on evidence based education practices in some countries and regions, poor people and migrants struggle to access high quality education
<b>Health</b>	Use of new technologies in health sciences and development of innovative treatments but with high variations in levels of access in different countries and between sections of populations
<b>Environment</b>	Nations attempt to combat climate change with varied effectiveness and lack of international collaboration, new technologies help to deal with some effects of global warming but flooding and desertification is a significant problem in some regions

## High-Tech Globality Scenario

<b>Economy</b>	Fast, globalisation and technology driven growth; highly interdependent markets, focus on sustainable development and reduction of inequality
<b>Politics</b>	Focus on government effectiveness and accountability, regulatory frameworks, evidence-based policy, focus on international solidarity and shared global goals
<b>Society</b>	Emphasis on global, cosmopolitan identities, emphasis on universalist values, issues around social inequality actively addressed, high levels of mobility
<b>Education</b>	Use of innovative technologies in education and focus on evidence based education practices, emphasis on high-quality, accessible public education, increased popularity of remote/online learning
<b>Health</b>	Use of new technologies in health sciences, widespread use of innovative technologies such as in vitro genome editing, embracing of science as a force for good, improved quality of life for disabled people, high-quality, accessible, affordable care
<b>Environment</b>	Active environmental management through innovative technologies and international collaboration, reduced rate of warming and pollution, new technologies for sustainable energy, agriculture and water management

## New Romanticism Scenario

<b>Economy</b>	Stagnant world economy, gaps between richest and poorest countries remaining large
<b>Politics</b>	Lack of trust in government, lack of regulatory frameworks, questionable rule of law, risk of instability, strained international relations
<b>Society</b>	Emphasis on local cultural identities, organic communities, nostalgia for a pre-capitalist way of life, anarcho-primitivism, agrarianism
<b>Education</b>	Public education in decline as more parents opt for home schooling or establishment of community schools, non-standardised, highly ideological educational practices
<b>Health</b>	Mistrust of science and conventional medicine, less children are vaccinated and infectious disease outbreaks become common, high death rates from curable diseases, reliance on alternative medicine and 'natural' remedies
<b>Environment</b>	Some efforts to curb climate change but with low effectiveness, resistance to use of any new technologies for environment management, increased reliance on small-scale food production, flooding and desertification is a significant problem in some regions

## World of contrasts Scenario

<b>Economy</b>	High growth and open markets, high levels of regional and global inequalities, economic dominance of most powerful countries
<b>Politics</b>	Lack of regulatory frameworks, questionable rule of law and diminished political trust, political integration through bilateral agreements but high levels of power imbalance between countries
<b>Society</b>	Lack of emphasis on national identities, tension between different socio-economic groups, high levels of inequality, high levels of migration with little barriers, poorer countries and regions suffer from depopulation and decline
<b>Education</b>	Highly ideological educational practices, high inequalities in the education system, poorer people struggle to access high quality education
<b>Health</b>	Mistrust of science and conventional medicine, less children are vaccinated and infectious disease outbreaks become common, high death rates from curable diseases, reliance on alternative medicine and 'natural' remedies
<b>Environment</b>	Biodiversity under threat, high-intensity farming, stressed water systems, no or limited efforts to curb climate change, high levels of pollution, reliance on fossil fuels, high rates of desertification and flooding



# Seven Future Trends

Global changes, local challenges

Digitisation and automation  
in everyday life

Polarising inequality

Quality of life and work

Child-centred society

Contested Science

New world of politics



# Global changes, local challenges

## Underpinning Drivers:

- Climate change
- Ageing populations
- Depopulation due to migration from certain countries and regions

Global warming increases the risk of flooding and communities in Europe are forced to relocate. Reduced precipitation, extreme weather events and reduced crop yields in the global south encourage migration to the safer, northern parts of the world. At the same time, the population in Europe is ageing; however, individuals and families often do not live in the same areas as their older relatives due to increasing urbanisation and migration within Europe. Some countries and cities benefit from these trends, attracting high-skilled migrants who were trained abroad. However, depopulation from other countries and rural regions has a detrimental effect on some local economies. These patterns reinforce regional inequalities and affect the ability of families and young people to access services, education and employment depending on their location.

Global Warming  
Climate Change  
Migration  
Demographic Change







# Digitalisation and automation in everyday life

## Underpinning Drivers:

- Childhood use of the internet is increasing and starting at younger age
- Online dependencies/addictions (social media, gaming, pornography, gambling)
- Artificial intelligence and automation changing the labour market

Technology and digitalisation become a central part of childhood and growing up and have an effect on all areas of human life. There are many ways in which technology improves people's lives. Big data helps to improve many facets of social policy. Developments in automation and robotics transform healthcare, education and childcare. They help those affected by disabilities to live independently, smart home devices help to manage everyday chores, allow parents to watch over their children without being in the same room and can even notify law enforcement in cases of child abuse or neglect. Artificial intelligence is used as a diagnostic tool, allowing for much earlier detection of many developmental disorders and targeted treatment. However, there are issues of inequality in the access to technology and parts of society are not able to take advantage of these technological developments.

A large portion of human activity takes place online and virtually, which facilitates connection and interaction between people but also poses risks such as hacking, data breaches, online dependencies and addictions, and financial and sexual exploitation. Children are particularly vulnerable to the risk of sexual exploitation and efforts are made to ensure their safety online through education and legislation.

Artificial Intelligence

Online Life

Automation

Virtual and Augmented Reality

Big Data

Machine Learning

Internet Of Things

Robotics





# Polarising Inequality

## Underpinning Drivers:

- High rates of youth unemployment
- Childhood poverty
- Privatisation and commodification of public services (social care, healthcare, education)
- Rising inequalities in education

## Underpinning Drivers:

The gap between the rich and the poor increases and generational disadvantage is exacerbated. This has a disproportionate effect on children and young people. Privatisation and commodification of public services leads to further separation between the classes, with poorer people, particularly in disadvantaged areas, struggling to access services.

Inequalities in education and training opportunities result in an unequal access to the labour market. Significant portions of young people are in precarious employment or unemployed, which has detrimental effects on their mental health as well as on opportunities to leave home, live independently, start families or buy their first homes. Unemployment disproportionately affects young people with disabilities and learning difficulties, significantly delaying, or completely preventing them reaching conventional 'adult' milestones.

Inequality

Under and Unemployment

Poverty

Social Care

Public Services







# Child-centred society

## Underpinning Drivers:

- Increasing recognition of children's rights

Children's rights become key priorities for European governments and policymakers are committed to ensuring children's voices are heard. Built environments are increasingly adapted to be child friendly and more children are visible in the public sphere.

A lot of effort is put into ensuring that the justice system is child friendly and the children being heard. Child participation and engagement becomes a core aspect of the democratic process, ensuring it is built into the functioning of the core institutions. Legislation is developed to regulate social media platforms, Internet service providers and online game providers to ensure special protection of children and young people on the Internet and the development of child friendly guidance.



Children's rights

Child participation

Child friendly justice

Violence against children

Children friendly environments



# Contested Science

## Underpinning Drivers:

- Vaccination rates falling
- Increased use of genome editing to engineer the traits of future children and generations

On the one hand, parts of the population become increasingly mistrustful of science, and turn to movements such as anti-Vaxxing and alternative medicine. As an outcome, less children are vaccinated and infectious disease outbreaks become more common. Parents mistrustful of mainstream medicine refuse established medications and treatments and instead turn to alternative medicine practices, that risk sabotaging chances of recovery.

On the other hand, scientific advancements allow for the creation of personalised medicines and new technologies to give more choice and control to disabled children and young people. Easier than ever genome editing of embryos during In-Vitro Fertilisation is used both to prevent genetic diseases and disorders and to select and enhance desirable characteristics in future children. This leads to heated ethical debates and public disapproval and some governments develop detailed legislation regarding the process. However, some people embrace the possibility of 'designer babies' and seek treatments in parts of the world where gene editing for desirable characteristics, such as intelligence, is legal or not effectively regulated.

Science

Vaccinations

Anti-vaxx movement

Alternative medicine

Genome editing





# Quality of Life and Work

## Underpinning Drivers:

- Young people are in increasingly precarious employment
- Guaranteed income welfare reforms

Changes in the labour market lead to large portions of society being in precarious employment. Permanent contracts are nearly unheard of and a lot young people entering the labour market engage in portfolio careers or work in the 'gig economy'. Some enjoy the flexibility that these modes of work provide but many worry about their employment security, particularly around life transitions, such as buying a home or starting a family. Governments of some countries address these issues by introducing guaranteed universal basic income for their citizens, which helps them stay afloat between periods of employment.

Work is more often done remotely as many employers hope to save on office costs. This allows employees more flexibility; however, it is often hard to draw a line between where work starts and ends and many workers feel they do not have sufficient time for other aspects of life, such as family time and leisure. More employers begin to recognise the issues around work-life balance and burn-out and 4-day working weeks become common in large organisations that still offer employment contracts to the privileged few.

Changing nature of work

Work-Life Balance

Un- and Under-Employment Guaranteed

Income

Gig Economy

Virtual Work

Labour Market

Guaranteed Income





# New world of politics

## Underpinning Drivers:

- Anti-democratic tendencies and populism
- Euroscepticism on the rise
- Widespread civic and democratic citizenship education
- Online political participation embraced by policymaker

Populist parties in Europe have been gaining strength for years, changing the political scene. Some worry about the impact of voters departing from the mainstream will have on European Union and Democracy. Others view it as an opportunity to exercise their democratic will and express their anxieties and fears about society.

Disengagement from mainstream politics is common amongst young people. However, some young people are very vocal about issues affecting the younger generations. New forms of online political participation become increasingly popular, although are often centred on single issues. Nevertheless, some countries recognise the value of non-traditional forms of political participation and start looking at new ways to engage with the younger generations through targeted online campaigns, democratic citizenship education, and innovative virtual political participation.

Populism

Euroscepticism

Civic Participation

Democracy

Online Participation







# Storylines

The following storylines were developed to highlight the differences between the four scenarios, representing the perspectives of four hypothetical children inhabiting these futures. These storylines allow us to imagine the various challenges and opportunities that children and young people might face in 10 years' time.

The four children and young people presented in these storylines have different characteristics that have been highlighted as particularly pertinent during the signal-spotting phase of this exercise, and chosen to emphasise the contrasting trajectories in the four highly different futures.

Some of these storylines are more probable or close to the current status quo than others, nevertheless they allow us to imagine how much can change in a period of just 10 years and help us think of the best ways in which EuroCohort can monitor and address these changes that are likely to have a profound impact on child and youth wellbeing.





## Resourceful Nations

### Adam (age 8, 2029)

#### Life situation:

- Uses a wheelchair
- New technologies help him be more independent
- Health: Cerebral palsy

#### Needs and wishes:

- To have more friends

#### Challenges and struggles:

- Feels isolated from peers
- Cannot access quality education that would meet his needs so learning at home

#### Interests:

- Cartoons, Animals

*In 2029, 8-year-old Adam* lives in a small town with his parents. He has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair. The family has recently moved out of a bigger city in order to afford a house that is more easily adapted to Adam's needs. His parents always investigate new smart technologies that might help Adam be more independent as he grows up. His smart wheelchair helps him get around and smart home devices allow him to operate the lights, TV and toilet easily on his own.

During weekdays, Adam is attending school via online classes. He completes his assignments and communicates with the teacher via instant messaging and video chat within the school application. Adam's parents opted for this virtual school because there were no options that would accommodate for his needs locally and face-to-face tutoring options were too expensive. Online learning works well for Adam and his teacher is happy with his progress; however, his parents worry about his lack of socialisation with other children. Their small town is inhabited mostly by seniors and there are not many families with children for Adam to socialise with.

In his free time, Adam likes watching cartoons and videos about animals. He uses online streaming services and likes to watch vlogs made by other children as well. He particularly likes the channel ran by a teenager with cerebral palsy, which gives him sense of community. Unfortunately, while browsing he discovered some inappropriate disturbing content and since then his mum monitors all of his online activity.

Adam's mum stays at home with him and even though his dad has a good job, they often struggle financially. His parents are aware of new and innovative treatments and devices that could be helpful to Adam; however, these are too expensive for them to access. Health service fees and transportation fees are a huge financial burden. The smart wheelchair Adam uses was co-funded by a charity, but his parents are anxious about the expense of getting a replacement when Adam grows out of it. When Adam gets a little older, his mum intends to find a job, trusting that she will be able to monitor him thanks to their smart home devices.

Despite financial worries, Adam's parents are hopeful about his future. Technology already helps Adam in his everyday life and they trust that the technological developments mean that Adam will be able to become a largely independent adult. Now however, Adam struggles with not having face-to-face contact with his peers. He often feels lonely and usually turns to the internet for entertainment. His social skills are lacking and he feels very anxious when meeting new people.



# High-Tech Globality

## Anna (age 12, 2029)

### Life situation:

- Studying remotely at home via online classes,
- Parents work takes them across the world,
- Health: came from a trial of in vitro gene editing and needs to get frequent tests and check-ups; often feels anxious and distracted.

### Needs and wishes:

- She would like to go to university in the future to study design

### Challenges and struggles:

- Feels isolated from peers
- Cannot access quality education that would meet his needs so learning at home

### Interests:

- Art, Virtual Reality, Photography

*In 2029, 12-year-old Anna* lives in a large European City with her parents. Her parents run a successful architecture firm together and their work often takes them abroad. When Anna was in primary school, she often stayed with her grandparents when her parents had to relocate abroad for a project. Now that Anna is going to middle school, her parents opted for a virtual education provider for Anna, as they believe she will benefit from going abroad with them and experiencing different cultures.

Anna's parents were struggling to conceive and used a new trial in-vitro service, which included gene editing to make Anna not susceptible to a number of diseases and disorders. As this technology only recently became publicly available in Europe, Anna and children like her must come to regular tests and check-ups as their health must be consistently monitored. This often makes Anna anxious and she wishes she did not have to do this.

Online learning suits Anna, as it gives her plenty of time to explore creatively. She generally performs well in her studies but often gets distracted and struggles completing some of her assignments on time. She often feels tired and spaced out as she spends most of the time indoors on her computer or smartphone. She lacks physical activity and her eyesight and posture suffer.

Anna has been learning programming since young age and is quite talented in developing small games and aps. In her free time, she mostly enjoys designing augmented reality masks and filters that she shares to her social media platforms. Her AR face filters are becoming increasingly popular and she is gaining a steady social media following. Her aspiration is to study digital design at a university.

She regularly communicates virtually with her friends and grandparents. She also has a number of online friends and fans from across the world and is hoping to meet some of them when they are in the same city. Even though she does not have face-to-face interaction with her peers, she feels quite content with her social life.



## New Romanticism

### Lina (age 5, 2029)

#### Life situation:

- Lives in a self-contained community, home schooled
- Flooding in the area begins to become a problem
- Health: has not been vaccinated, survived a mumps outbreak in her village

#### Needs and wishes:

- To go on adventures with her friends

#### Challenges and struggles:

- Lost a close friend in the mumps outbreak and has herself fallen sick

#### Interests:

- Playing with friends

*In 2029, 5-year-old Lina* lives in an autonomous, self-sufficient community with her family. A collective that sustains itself through farming and foraging. They reject any use of modern technologies and strive for a 'natural' way of living, where they produce most of needed things themselves. Lina's parents were among the founding members of the community.

Lina's childhood so far has been relatively happy. She spends most of her days playing with other children and animals in the community and enjoys a lot of freedom for her age. She enjoys a lot of physical activity and spends most of her free time outdoors.

The children are schooled by members of the community through classes focusing mostly on practical aspects of the village life. The lessons are rather short and the community member who acts as the childminder decides what will be taught on any given day. More often than not, children are allowed to spend a lot of time playing and exploring under the supervision of the childminder.

Children in the community have not been vaccinated and the village has recently experienced a mumps outbreak. Lina fell sick and survived, but a couple of her friends did not. She does not fully understand what has happened to her friends and often asks the adults about them. Since then she has been acting very clingy with her parents and experiencing anxiety and nightmares. She has also become more withdrawn and quiet, with occasional outbursts or tantrums.

Lina's parents try to support her the best they can, however the community's land is being flooded more frequently than before and they spend a lot of time worrying about their farming prospects and the possible need for relocating the community. The flooding, along with the recent child deaths from mumps, created a sense of uncertainty within the community. The atmosphere is becoming a lot more tense and conflicts between members more frequent. Although Lina does not understand her parents worry about the future, she can sense their anxiety and feels a lot less secure.



## World of Contrasts

### Armin (age 16, 2029)

#### Life situation:

- His family had to relocate due to lack of resources in their country of origin
- Lives with parent and younger sister
- Health: Suffers from asthma

#### Needs and wishes:

- He wants to find his community
- Would like to have more money

#### Needs and wishes:

- Had bad experiences at school in his new country, does not enjoy learning
- His parents in precarious employment, uncertainty about the future

#### Interests:

- Music, Sports

*In 2029, 16-year-old Armin* lives in a large European city with his parents and younger sister. They moved there due to food shortages and poverty in their country of origin. Some of their extended family has moved before them and helped to find work for Armin's parents.

The area in which they live in does not have a limit on carbon emissions and the air quality is very poor. This causes Armin's asthma to flare up often. This makes his parents worry and has a considerable impact on his quality of life. His family often struggles with money and Armin's asthma medication is a considerable financial burden.

Armin himself worries about money often. His family lives from paycheck to paycheck as his parents are in minimum wage employment with no guarantee of working hours. They make the ends meet but the money is often lacking for new clothes and other everyday items. Armin's parents often feel anxious about their future but they hope their children will have more opportunities in their new homeland than in their country of origin.

Armin goes to a local school, which has very low staff to student ratio and has problems with bullying and violence. As a new student, Armin has often been targeted and he does not feel very welcome at his school. He is often teased about his second-hand clothes and not being able to afford the social activities his peers participate in. His parents are trying to encourage him to improve his academic performance, but he does not enjoy learning and wants to leave education and start working as soon as he can.

In his free time, Armin likes listening to music and following sport tournaments. As he feels excluded by his peers, he mostly spends time alone in his bedroom or helps his family around the house. He also helps to take care of his younger sister and walks her to school every day. He does not know yet what he would like to do in the future, but he would like to start earning his own money as soon as he can.

