# Study on child participation in EU political and democratic life

Final Report

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# TABLE OF TABLES

# TABLE OF BOXES

# TABLE OF FIGURES

# LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| AGM | Annual General Meeting |
| BAME | Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic |
| BME | Black and Minority Ethnic |
| CFCI | child-friendly cities initiatives |
| CPAT | Child Participation Assessment Tool |
| CoE | Council of Europe |
| CHOGM | Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings |
| COVID-19 | Novel coronavirus disease 2019 |
| DG JUST | European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers |
| EC | European Commission |
| ENOC | European Network of Ombudspersons for Children |
| ENYA | European Network of Young Advisors |
| EU | European Union |
| EYF | European Youth Forum |
| EYP | European Youth Parliament |
| LGBTQI+ | lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning) and intersex |
| MEP | Member of the European Parliament |
| MS | Member State |
| NCC | National Council for Children |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PPB | Portugal Participatory Budget |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNCRC | United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| UNCTAD | United Nations Conference on Trade and Development |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| UNICEF | The United Nations Children's Fund |

# Preface

RAND Europe and Eurochild have been contracted by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (hereafter, DG JUST) to support the 'Study on child participation in EU political and democratic life'.

This Final Report summarises the findings from all research methodologies applied in this study.

# Executive summary

Child participation is the notion that children have the right to express their views and have them taken into account on all matters that concern them, in accordance with their age and maturity[1]. Child participation in *EU political and democratic life* refers to distinctive opportunities for children to be involved in the various stages of the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of policy and legislation. Both the promotion and protection of the rights of the child are objectives of the European Union (EU).

It is within this context that the European Commission's Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST) has contracted this analysis on the participation of children in political and democratic life across the EU. The study's results and the ideas gathered during this project are intended to contribute to future work on children's participation in society at the EU level.

This study defines a 'child' as anyone under the age of 18, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child[2]. This study focuses on child participation in *EU political and democratic life*, but it does not address children's participation in other settings that are unrelated to public life (e.g. judicial proceedings, school daily life or family-related contexts), or voting.

The study covers a broad range of mechanisms – such as consultations, polls, ad hoc meetings and structural consultation bodies – that have been implemented after 2012 across 28 countries (27 EU Member States (MS) and the UK). The study covers mechanisms at the international, EU and national level, and at the local level in 10 selected MS – namely Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain.

## Research questions and methodologies

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- What is the state of play in the EU of child participation in decision-making processes at local, national and European level?
- What mechanisms of child participation exist at the international, EU, national and local levels, and what are their main characteristics?
- How could well-functioning mechanisms and examples of promising practice inspire future EU actions to support child participation at the EU, national and local level?
- What are children's perceptions and positions regarding child participation?

Research findings are informed by analyses of primary data collected via interviews with 64 adult stakeholders, focus groups with 224 children in the 10 selected EU MS, and a desk-based targeted review of policy and academic literature and data, relevant websites and social media platforms. The case study approach was applied to examine mechanisms that were particularly promising in promoting child participation. The key findings from all research methods were consolidated, triangulated and synthesised, then discussed during a workshop with members from the European Commission, academics and practitioners to inform reporting of conclusions and recommendations. The members of the informal expert group on the rights of the child (representatives of national authorities) provided feedback during the inception stage and validated tables on structures operating at the MS level. The European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) was also consulted regarding the children's participation mechanisms operating at the Ombudsperson for Children's Office (or equivalent) in the EU MS and the UK.

Children were involved in all stages of the research process. The members of the Eurochild Children's Council reviewed and provided feedback on all data collection tools, contributed to focus group discussions, commented on a final research report and co-created an accessible version of the final report.

## Key Findings

The evidence collected outlines a wide range of children's participation mechanisms at the international and European levels, and at national, regional and local levels across EU MS. However, it is essential to note that due to the limited amount of time allocated to the research and to the unavailability of public information relating to some of the mechanisms, this study cannot guarantee that all the existing mechanisms have been captured and described. All findings presented below should be read with this caveat in mind.

### Main children's participation mechanisms

Children's participation in political and democratic life is facilitated through a number of structures and stakeholders. At the national level, **children's and youth councils**, **children's and youth parliaments** and **the Ombudspersons for Children's offices** (or an equivalent institution) remain **the most prevalent mechanisms** directly involving children in political and democratic life. The differences between some councils and parliaments are purely lexical as their ways of operation, political relationships with adult institutions and forums of decision-making, and influence on decision-making processes may be similar.

**Children's and youth councils** are **found in 27 out of 28** countries, and at the international and European levels. **The term 'council' can denote a variety of structures**. The **organisational structure and responsibilities of a particular council type is not always clear-cut**, as councils can have similar characteristics and overlapping responsibilities. This **variety of council structures is particularly evident at national level** – some countries have more than one national council structure. Individual children participating in these mechanisms represent collective voices of the wider groups of children and young people. Councils' work is mostly focused on **policy planning**, with involvement in implementation or monitoring and evaluation of policies being relatively rare. **Councils are child-led** in only around **half of the countries**, and children's views and opinions are typically **limited to 'recommendations' that are not binding**. For many children participation in a council structure (typically at local or regional level) is often the first direct experience of being involved in decision-making processes.

**Children's and youth parliaments** are also a common permanent structure, and are **present at national level** in **15 MS**, and at European level. Parliaments typically operate as **annual education and training programmes** or as competitions culminating at a plenary session or a set of activities in the national parliament. Children are mostly **involved in the structure-implementation stage**, e.g. they participate as candidates, organise activities and projects, and vote for projects. Children/youth **can put forward recommendations** to the country's politicians. These are generally **not binding, but they influence policy to varying degrees**. Tangible policy impacts resulting from children's and youth parliaments' actions were identified in four countries (France, Ireland, Slovenia and the UK).

The **Ombudspersons for Children's office** (or an equivalent institution, such as the Children's Commissioners) is a prevalent stakeholder operating in all EU MS and the UK, and the majority of these national or regional/subnational offices are also members of the European Network for Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC). However, **the level and breadth of involvement of children and young people in Ombudspersons for Children's work and activities varies between countries**.

**Main stakeholders** involved in the mechanisms and processes that facilitate children's participation in political and democratic life include **international and European public organisations/bodies**, **national, regional and local-level government authorities and institutions** (Ministries, state agencies), **civil society organisations** (with presence at the international, national and/or local level), and **educational institutions**. At local level, **UNICEF's child-friendly cities initiative** is taken up in nearly half of all MS.

Many **regular and one-off** projects and children's participation processes take place **in educational institutions**. Most children participating in focus groups felt most familiar with participation practices at schools.

### Characteristics of child stakeholders

Among consulted children, **knowledge about children's rights** and **understanding of what is meant by children's participation in political and democratic life varied greatly**. Overall, most children were aware of and were able to name existing structures and mechanisms for children's participation, such as councils, parliaments and mechanisms operating at the school-level. They were **more aware of and positive about proximal local structures** for children to participate, and found it harder to discuss the more 'distant' structures at the national and EU level. However, some children questioned whether the existing structures really do take their opinions into account, and felt that the structures need to be supported and strengthened.

The collected evidence suggests an almost **equal participation of girls and boys**[3] in the mechanisms that facilitate children's participation in political and democratic life. However, this is not the case in relation to children's ages. The boundary between child and youth is often blurred, and **mixing of children and young adults (18+) is common** across mechanisms and across MS. Most mechanisms are geared towards older children (i.e. over 12 years old); mechanisms involving younger children are relatively rare. Sometimes arbitrary age limits and restrictions exclude children under (or above) certain ages. **Inclusiveness is an important goal,** but challenges remain. There are **efforts to include vulnerable or disadvantaged children**, including children from diverse geographical locations, family situations, ethnic/migration-backgrounds and with disabilities. Vulnerable and disadvantaged children are included in mainstream mechanisms. However, there are also specific mechanisms that target specific groups of children (e.g. children with care experience, migrant children) to seek their views and opinions on particular aspects. In this respect, policy-makers often consult with NGOs that work with groups of children who experience specific vulnerabilities.

### Characteristics of children's participation mechanisms and processes

The purpose of children's participation is both a **means to achieve specific legal or policy outcomes** (e.g. informing a policy document or making recommendations to decision-makers), and **an end in itself** (as an exercise of children's democratic right to participate as citizens).

Although **few mechanisms are designed by children** themselves, **children play a role in helping mechanisms evolve**. **Children** appear to be **more involved at various points of mechanism implementation**, e.g. voting on council rules and principles of operation, chairing meetings, administering research studies and (co-) creating child-friendly communication material. **Formal monitoring and evaluation of mechanisms is lacking in most mechanisms at all levels**, but feedback from children is often collected via feedback forms, questionnaires or informal feedback chats.

**Children's involvement in the policy cycles typically takes place at the start of the mechanism**, with children sharing views on policy proposals. Very few mechanisms involve children in policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages. Children are involved not only in **diverse, broad-ranging mechanisms** but also **subject-specific ones**. Common topics include gender equity, bullying and violence, health and wellbeing (including mental health) and digital technology. Several mechanisms at MS level focused on topics particularly relevant for disadvantaged and vulnerable children. Children are also consulted about children's participation itself.

Most structures and mechanisms are typically **adult-initiated**, and most of them were **established in the 1990s and 2000s – often as a result of legislative acts or regulations**. Few existing mechanisms identified in this study were initiated by children themselves.

In terms of timing of children's participation, most mechanisms represent **(semi-) permanent structures** that involve regular opportunities for children's participation (councils, parliaments and annual/regular conferences). **Project-based mechanisms** (time-limited) are put in place to respond to a particular need, e.g. initiatives related to consulting children on a Children's/Youth Strategy. **One-off consultations** include topic- and time-limited consultations, studies or events. Several one-off consultations were held at the international and national levels in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Project-based and one-off mechanisms can also be facilitated via established permanent structures.

In terms of **modes of participation** – understood as the degree to which the power is handed to or removed from adults and given to children – mechanisms are typically **high on information** (children gathering information) **and consultation** (children expressing views and opinions), but low on initiation (mechanisms being initiated by children), engagement (children's views being taken into account) and decision-making (children make a final decision).

Of the more than 300 mechanisms identified in this study, **very few show evidence of their impact** on either children's degree of influence on policy-making and/or children's participation levels. As noted by many children participating in this study, it seems that **mechanisms exist for proposing ideas, but lack monitoring and evaluation components**. There is also some evidence about the **transformative effect of participation** on the levels of **skills, confidence, empowerment and self-efficacy** among children who take part in participatory processes.

Overall, the collected evidence suggests that **children's participation is still not perceived and implemented as an integral and fundamental part of policy-/decision-making processes**. It is still often not embedded in all policy areas, but is rather a topic in itself or an add-on. It is still not a continuous process, but is only targeted at specific activities or stages.

### Facilitators of and barriers to children's participation

**The UNCRC and its implementation activities** was frequently referenced as a ubiquitous driver across a large majority of the reviewed mechanisms and processes at international, European and national levels. An important facilitator of children's participation are also **national policies, strategies and/or plans**, which were in place or being developed in around two-thirds of MS. Many such initiatives include children's right to participation. Some countries have **regulations on the operation of children's and youth councils and parliaments** – it is a legal requirement to consult youth structures in four MS, and children's structures in three MS. In addition, two MS have laws and regulations on the operation of **the youth participatory budgets** at local level. **National school curriculum on citizenship and participation** – which equips children with knowledge about children's rights and skills facilitating participation – and **children and young people themselves** (e.g. the 'Fridays for Futures' movement), were also identified as key facilitators of participatory mechanisms.

Important facilitators include **web platforms** that facilitate exchange of views on priorities for action. The **importance of online technologies and platforms for participation, education and social interactions** became particularly pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic also further highlighted that not all children have equitable access to digital technologies, digital skills or the internet. Limited resources can act as a barrier to recruit vulnerable children. Although many participatory processes were dramatically interrupted due to COVID-19, the study has also identified some positive examples of activities being conducted in the online environment.

**Adults with a passion for children's participation** are sometimes key drivers to establishing children's participation mechanisms. Interview data suggest that **commitment of high-ranking decision-makers** is a crucial facilitator, because these stakeholders have political power and are also passionate about children's participation.

A number of children participating in focus groups felt that **participating as a group gives greater 'weight' to children's views and opinions**. **Support by adults** with experience and knowledge **and peer-to-peer support** was considered by some children as crucial to feel empowered to share their views and ideas. Other children also considered that **safe spaces**, where children feel comfortable to share their views in a trusting environment, were an essential component of sustainable children's participation structures. **Some stakeholders are aware of insufficient inclusion of vulnerable and disadvantaged children**, and make targeted efforts to include those children.

At the same time, the collected evidence suggests that **societal views and attitudes** about children, their competencies and abilities to participate (in other words, a 'tokenistic' approach) are some of the **key barriers to impactful and inclusive children's participation**. Children mentioned that adults do not trust children to participate or believe they are too young or do not have the capacity and knowledge to participate.

**Linguistic capacities** of children (and adults) as well as shortcomings in the **availability and accessibility of information** on participation mechanisms (e.g. in accessible formats) can also act as a barrier. A considerable group of children expressed views that they or their peers are not sufficiently informed (and not aware) about participation processes and initiatives, and that children from vulnerable backgrounds have more limited access to existing structures.

Complex bureaucracies, the **lack of recognition** of children's participation **in legal frameworks** and **absence of feedback to children on the results of children's participation** may also discourage children from participating. A few children felt that this **lack of accountability and follow-up** resulted from a **power imbalance** between adults and children, with children's involvement being often a box-ticking exercise and tokenistic.

Finally, the **lack of recognition** of children's participation **in legal frameworks** (e.g. decisions made by children's/youth councils are not binding) and **not communicating to children the results of children's participation** may also discourage children from participating. Children felt that this **lack of accountability and follow up** resulted from a **power imbalance** between adults and children, with children's involvement being often a box-ticking exercise and providing a sense of tokenism.

### Lessons learnt and potential future action

Due to roles, responsibilities and relationships between children and adults not always being clear-cut in some mechanisms – and the unequal level of information about particular mechanisms – caution must be taken when comparing mechanisms and transferring lessons.

In terms of being inclusive, impactful and child-led, **the most successful children's participation mechanisms involve children in all stages of the policy-making process**. However, such approaches are relatively rare as children's participation is still often not perceived as an integral and continuous part of decision-making. Many children's participation processes and mechanisms are facilitated via collective structures and implemented via regular formats. However, it is equally important to provide opportunities for individual voices to be heard, and to channel participation via one-off and project-based mechanisms. **Information-sharing and provision of training** for children and adults **are important facilitators** of children's participatory processes. However, there is **little evidence on which training approaches work best**.

Full inclusion of children of all backgrounds and ages is still a challenge, despite representativeness and inclusiveness being important policy goals. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that the use of digital tools and communication platforms creates multiple opportunities. However, at the same time, digitalisation can also widen inequalities due to unequal levels of digital skills and access to digital devices and the internet. Investing more resources may be necessary to make children's participation processes and mechanisms a reality across all levels.

Stakeholders highlighted the **important role of the EU in promoting children's participation** in political and democratic life across all levels. As suggested by interviewees, potential future action should focus on **giving children's participation more visibility** and **ensuring involvement of children in the co-creation of policies** at European, national and local levels. Some interviewees viewed the EU's role as a **defender of human rights**, **a facilitator of information** (e.g. guidelines) **and knowledge exchanges** (e.g. on promising practices), in **capacity building**, and in enabling **collaborations and support networks** as being critical to more firmly embed children's participation mechanisms in social and democratic structures at the international, EU, national and local levels.

# 1 Introduction

In line with Article 12 of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), child participation is the notion that, on all matters affecting them, children have the right to express their views and have them taken into account, in accordance with their age and maturity[4]. Of relevance, is also Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which also states that children may express their views freely. Such views shall be taken into consideration on matters which concern them in accordance with their age and maturity. It is within this context that the main objective of this assignment is to provide the European Commission Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST) with analysis on the participation of children in political and democratic life across the European Union (EU). The study results and ideas gathered during this project may, in turn, contribute to the future work on this area at EU level.

The objective of this chapter is to provide an overview of this study. This chapter first locates the research project in the broader context of policy discussions on children's rights, and introduces the reader to the key concepts and definitions used in the report. It further highlights some of the benefits and challenges associated with children's participation. This is followed by the methodological approach – including the research questions, the analytical approach, the research methodologies and data collection methods – and an overview of the contribution from a panel of experts and the Eurochild Children's Council. It also describes the research's limitations, and their potential impact on the research findings and conclusions.

## 1.1 Policy background

The Union is founded on representative democracy and the promotion of democratic participation for all citizens is a shared responsibility among the EU, national and local levels. Both the promotion and protection of the rights of the child – including the right of the child to participate – are central objectives of the EU and key features of its identity. Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union recognises the rights of the child as fundamental rights[5], whilst Article 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union asserts, explicitly, the requirement of the EU to protect the rights of the child[6]. Of relevance in this context are Article 10 and 11 of the Treaty on European Union on democratic principles, bearing in mind the EU competences in the field. Specific to the right of the child to participate, the Council of Europe's 2012 recommendation to member states on the participation of children and young people outlines a number of key principles of child participation[7]:

- The right of a child to participate must not be restricted by age or by discrimination on any other ground, and particular efforts should be made to enable participation of children and young people with fewer opportunities. Children who exercise their right to participate and freely express their views must be protected from harm. In addition, in order for participation to be effective, meaningful and sustainable, it should be best understood as an ongoing process, rather than a one-off event.
- Children should be provided with all relevant information and support to enable them to participate meaningfully, and should be fully informed as to the scope of their participation and the expected and actual outcomes of their participation. Consideration must also be given to the idea of evolving capacity, which is the notion that children should be able to increasingly influence matters affecting them as they acquire a greater capacity to do so.

The recommendation also invokes the General Comment on Article 12 of the UNCRC, by recommending that all processes involving children should be transparent, informative, voluntary, respectful, relevant to children's lives, in child-friendly environments, inclusive (non-discriminatory), supported by training, safe, sensitive to risk and accountable.

### 1.1.1 Concepts and definitions

This study applies the following definitions.

### Child

This study applies the UNCRC definition of a 'child'. The most widely ratified human rights international treaty in the world, the CRC stipulates that a 'child' is anyone under the age of 18[8]. It should be noted that despite this legal definition, 'childhood' is a fluid concept that can encompass different terminology in different contexts[9]. Other terms used to describe children under the age of 18 include 'adolescents' and 'teenagers'. Some people use the term 'youth' and 'young people', in which case they often refer to groups that include people under 18, as well as people over 18[10]. When the term 'youth' and/or 'young people' is applied in this study, this considers mechanisms that include, at least to some degree, people under 18.

### Children's participation

This study applies a broad definition of participation, in line with Warrington and Larkins's description:

> '*[c]hild participation is variously understood as having a say, being involved in decision-making and achieving influence (through words and actions): within personal lives, communities, practice, research and policy*.'[11]

When assessing participation mechanisms, processes and initiatives in political and democratic life, this study adopts a position in line with Article 12 of the UNCRC, as well as drawing on Article 24 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Council of Europe 2012 Recommendation that children can express their ideas about government policies, guidance, budgets and services[12].

In cases where more than one child is participating, it is more common to speak of 'children's participation', rather than 'child' participation[13]. Given that this study focuses mostly on examples where multiple children were given the opportunity to participate, this report primarily refers to 'children's participation'. An important part of children's participation is that children can express their views and ideas, and that these ideas are translated into change[14]. This can include changes in understandings, training, policy and practice[15].

Children's participation can occur at any stage in the decision-making process[16]. As this study shows, children can be involved in agenda-setting, design, implementation and follow-up of policy initiatives[17].

### Political and democratic life

This study focuses on the phenomenon of children's participation in the EU's *political and democratic life*. This includes existing initiatives designed, implemented and funded by municipalities, regional/national governments or child-rights organisations at all levels (international, EU, national and regional/local). The aim of collecting children's opinions is to inform future policy or legislative developments, or to receive input on matters and issues that are considered important by children. This encompasses collecting children's views and feedback through consultations, polls, ad hoc meetings or structural consultation bodies.

The study does not address children's participation in other settings (i.e. in judicial proceedings, school daily life or family-related contexts). Instead, it focuses on issues of active citizenship and engagement in public life, through means other than voting in elections (for which the minimum age is 18, except in a couple of EU MS)[18]. While this study might consider mechanisms that are promoted by the education system, it does not provide a detailed overview of how participation features in school curricula, such as via civic education or citizenship classes.

### Mechanism

A 'mechanism' is an initiative that enables children to express their views, and for these views to be taken into account in decision-making processes at local, national and EU levels. These initiatives can be connected to the design, implementation and evaluation of legislation and public policies affecting children's lives. A mechanism can manifest itself as a regular process or as a one-off initiative or practice that is applied at a specific place and time. For that reason, the terms 'process', 'initiative' and 'practice' are used to denote children's participation mechanisms.

A mechanism can be initiated by a structure (e.g. a children's council or parliament) or a stakeholder (e.g. international institution, national/regional/local government, non-governmental organisation). It should be noted that one mechanism may involve many structures and/or stakeholders, a particular structure or stakeholder can be involved in many mechanisms, and a participation process may involve many mechanisms and structures.

## 1.1.2 The benefits of child participation

The benefits of child participation are well documented and have been recognised by both policy-makers and scholars alike: the 2013 European Commission Recommendation on 'Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage' supported and promoted children's involvement in decision-making that affects their lives[19], whilst the European Commission's 2015 study evaluating legislation, policy and practice on child participation in the EU emphasised the positive impact that child participation can have, both upon policy-making and upon children themselves[20].

In the policy sphere, children's participation can precipitate change in both policy and attitudes. Children have demonstrated ample competency to influence policy either directly or indirectly, with or without support, at international, national and – in particular – at local level. At the national level for instance, policy impact most commonly occurs when children are able to raise awareness of policy issues, or when they are included in the development of initiatives such as youth strategies or action plans (see Annex C)[21]. At the local level there is often greater scope for children to participate and a greater number of structures in place for them to do so, such as youth councils, which are often closer to the realities of their life. Levels of impact are typically higher at the local level than the national level[22].

In many areas, children's participation can contribute to changes in attitudes towards children. It is argued that as a result of children's participation, there has been greater demand for children's opinions in schools and welfare services, whilst in many cases national authorities have become more aware of the rights of children[23].

There is a clear link between children successfully exercising their right to be heard and tangible improvements to their circumstances or status (e.g. in healthcare; judicial or administrative proceedings; in cases of reported abuses, children protected from harm)[24]. There are also a number of benefits to children themselves that are derived from child participation. The best-documented of these are the personal and social benefits of participation: there is a clear link between participation and improvements in confidence and self-esteem – as well as to improvements in both practical and problem-solving skills[25].

In addition, a number of societal benefits are derived from participation associated with children's increased civic and social awareness. Democratic states desire the participation of citizens to facilitate the democratic process. But, as pointed out by Hart:

> *'[It] is unrealistic to expect them suddenly to become responsible, participating adult citizens at the age of 16, 18, or 21 without prior exposure to the skills and responsibilities involved*.'[26]

Providing children with opportunities for participation enables them to learn about the democratic process and develop the necessary skills and confidence to participate[27]. In

fact, research has shown a positive relationship between participating in political and democratic life as a child, and adult civic engagement later in life[28].

### 1.1.3 The challenges to child participation

There are a number of challenges to child participation that mean children's views are not heard or afforded proper consideration, or that children are prevented from participating in a meaningful way.

A 2016 study published by the Council of Europe (CoE) examining challenges to children's rights asserted that children are routinely denied the opportunity to participate in matters that affect their lives, and that the situation varied across countries[29]. The report found that in some European states, even if legislation to ensure child participation is in place, children are rarely listened to and often feel like their voices are not being heard. In addition, the study identified a range of obstacles to enacting their right to participation. These include adult indifference, over-complex procedures and practical barriers (for example, lack of time, language difficulties or insecure living conditions inhibiting proper participation)[30]. Other research into child participation has highlighted that there is a danger that it can be seen as tokenistic[31], whilst there are also concerns about 'consultation fatigue' amongst children – where children quickly experience disillusionment if they are not provided feedback, and if their participation does not lead to change[32]. Indeed, the Council of Europe report found that many children feel politically disengaged and do not believe that politicians represent their interests[33].

In addition, not everyone is in favour of children's participation. Some people view children as incapable of thinking about issues in the same way as adults, and regard their opinions as not being valuable[34]. Others think that childhood should be protected as a period of innocence in a person's life and that children should not be burdened with adult topics[35]. Under such views, children are not seen as active citizens and independent bearers of rights, because they do not share the same rights and responsibilities as adults[36]. This view can affect young people's self-esteem and might contribute to alienating them from the political and democratic process. Considering that in recent years concerns have grown about people's willingness to engage in political processes, including participating in elections, this is an important consideration[37].

## 1.2 Methodological approach

### 1.2.1 Research questions and analytical framework

This study answers the following research questions:

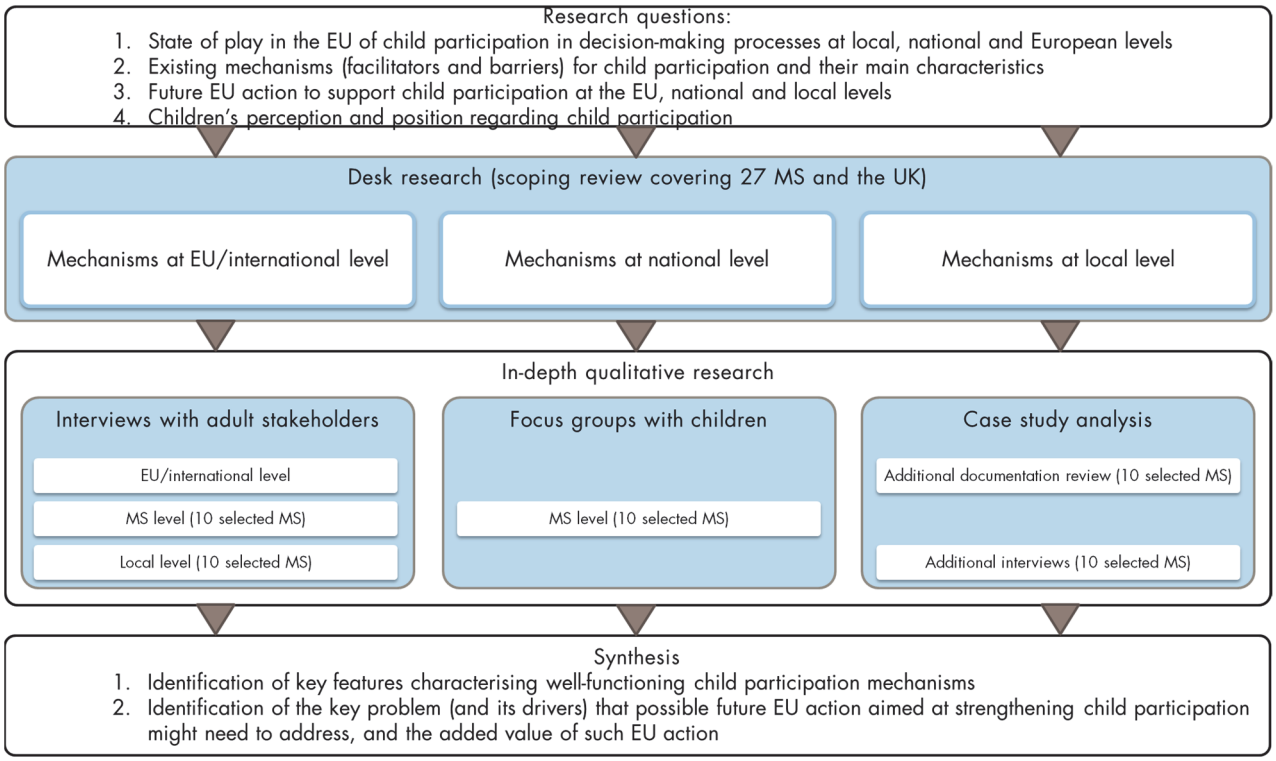
1. What is the state of play in the EU of child participation in decision-making processes at local, national and European levels?
2. What mechanisms of child participation exist at the international, EU, national and local levels, and what are their main characteristics?
3. How could well-functioning mechanisms and examples of promising practice inspire future EU actions to support child participation at the EU, national and local levels?
4. What are children's perceptions and positions regarding child participation?

These research questions feed into the analytical framework (see Figure 1. Analytical Framework) and are translated into four interrelated tasks:

**Task 1 – Mapping (review) of policy, data and practices** (at the national level in 27 EU MS and the UK, and at the local level in 10 selected MS: Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain. These countries were selected based on the criteria outlined below, see

1. Table 1).
2. **Task 2 – In-depth qualitative research** focused on the 10 selected MS states.
    a. Task 2 consists of three subtasks:
    b. Interviews with adult stakeholders;
    c. Focus groups with children; and
    d. Case studies of selected mechanisms for children's participation considered as promising practices.
3. **Task 3 – Synthesis of key features** consisting of two subtasks:
    a. Workshops: including an internal core team workshop, and a validation workshop with EC stakeholders and experts; and
    b. Child consultation on the draft final report.
4. **Task 4 – Analysis, synthesis and reporting**

**Figure 1. Analytical Framework**




The 10 MS were selected based on the following criteria, such as geographical location, size, membership in the EU, and different levels of social and political participation (as defined by an EU SILC indicator on the percentage of people aged 16 and over participating in formal and informal voluntary activities and active citizenship).

**Table 1. Criteria for selection of the 10 MS for in-depth qualitative research**

| Percentage of people aged 16 and over participating in formal or informal voluntary activities or active citizenship | Country size | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Large | Medium | Small |
| <6 | | Bulgaria | |
| 6–10 | Spain | Portugal | Slovenia<br>Malta<br>(Cyprus) |
| >10 | Netherlands<br>France<br>Germany | Finland | Ireland |

Source: RAND Europe's own compilation of data.
Note: MS that joined the EU prior to 2004 enlargement are indicated in black, MS that joined the EU in 2004 or later are indicated in red. Country size: large = MS with population over 11 million; medium = MS with population between 5 and 11 million; small = MS with population under 5 million. Eurostat EU SILC indicator 'Percentage of people aged 16 and over participating in formal or informal voluntary activities or active citizenship': less than 6%, 6–10%, 10% or more. Cyprus is placed in brackets as it was a reserve country. All Eurostat data[38].

### 1.2.2 Research methodologies

#### Mapping of mechanisms of children's participation in political and democratic life

The objective of this task was to map the mechanisms of children's participation in political and democratic life across the EU. This included mapping mechanisms at the EU and international level, at the national level in 27 MS and the UK, and at the regional/local level in 10 selected MS.

The mapping was based on a targeted literature review of sources published since 2012. This cut-off point was chosen to capture developments introduced since the Council of Europe's 2012 recommendation on the participation of children and young people[39], and the European Commission's 2013 Recommendation on Investing in Children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage[40]. It was assumed that these two policy initiatives were likely to stimulate discussions about existing and new initiatives. However, in cases where a mechanism initiated prior to 2012 appeared to be of great importance, it was also included.

To complete the targeted review, RAND Europe liaised with national experts with relevant qualifications, methodological experience and language skills. Experts were provided with detailed instructions, including a search protocol (Annex D) and a data-extraction template (Annex E).

All collected evidence was analysed (the analyses were guided by the analytical framework presented in Annex I) and summarised in tables and narrative fiches (see Annex B and Annex J for further detail).

#### Interviews with adult stakeholders

The study team carried out 64 semi-structured telephone interviews with adult stakeholders who had relevant expertise in children's participation across the EU. Potential interviewees were identified by country experts during the mapping task, as well as through recommendations from DG JUST and interviewees themselves. Interviewees were organised into six stakeholder categories: academics/experts, international organisations (e.g. UN, CoE), child-rights organisations, EU institutions (e.g. relevant services of the EC) and national and local authorities (from the selected 10 countries). The numbers of interviewees per stakeholder category and per country are shown in Table 2 and Table 3 below. A final, approved version of the topic guide for interviews with adult stakeholders is presented in Annex F, and a final approved version of the interviewee participant information sheet and consent form is presented in Annex G.

At least two researchers attended each interview – one to lead the conversation with the interviewee, and one to take detailed notes. The interview notes were then coded for information that complimented the data obtained via the mapping exercise (Task 1) and for themes that specifically emerged from the interviews.

**Table 2. Total number of interviews conducted per stakeholder category**

| Interviewee category (code) | Total number of interviews arranged | Total number of interviews conducted |
|---|---|---|
| Academics, Independent Experts (EX) | 13 | 13 |
| Child Rights Organisations (CR) | 15 | 12 |
| International Organisations (INT) | 12 | 7 |
| EU Institutions (EU) | 12 | 11 |
| National Authorities (NA) | 15 | 13 |
| Local Authorities (LA) | 11 | 8 |
| **Total** | **78** | **64** |

**Table 3. Total number of interviews conducted per country**

| Country | Total number of interviews arranged | Total number of interviews conducted |
|---|---|---|
| Bulgaria | 5 | 5 |
| Finland | 6 | 4 |
| France | 4 | 3 |
| Germany | 4 | 4 |
| Ireland | 5 | 5 |
| Malta | 6 | 5 |
| Netherlands | 6 | 5 |
| Portugal | 5 | 4 |
| Spain | 5 | 3 |
| Slovenia | 7 | 4 |
| EU/international | 25 | 22 |
| **Total** | **78** | **64** |

### Focus groups with children

A total of 29 focus groups (16 in-person, 10 online and 3 one-to-one interviews)[41] with a total of 224 children (116 girls, 96 boys, 2 non-binary, 10 no information on gender) were carried out in 10 MS (Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Cyprus). The youngest participating child was seven years old. A very small number of participants were between 18 and 20 years old ($n < 5$). As it was not feasible to conduct children's consultations in France (one of the selected countries for local analysis, as per Table 1), focus group consultation with children was conducted in Cyprus instead. The objective of this task was to consult children in order to capture their perceptions, understanding and position on children's participation mechanisms in the democratic and political life. The consultations have been facilitated by Eurochild Member Organisations (a list of each organisation involved can be found in Annex L).

Table 4 provides an overview of children's consultations in each country, Annex H lists Guidelines for consultations with children, and Annex L provides more detail about organisation of children's focus groups.

**Table 4. Summary of children's consultations**

| Country | Total number of focus groups | Online format | In-person format |
|---|---|---|---|
| BG | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| CY | 1 | - | 1 |
| DE | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| ES | 3 | 3 | - |
| FI | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| IE | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| MT | 3 | - | 3 |
| NL | 7[42] | 7 | |
| PT | 4 | - | 4 |
| SL | 1 | - | 1 |

Source: Authors' summary based on Eurochild data.

*Child protection policies*

To ensure that children are able to participate safely in this research, the study was guided by Eurochild's Child Protection Policy[43]. Eurochild's work is underpinned by the UNCRC, and provides a comprehensive framework for the protection, provision and participation of all children. All children and adolescents involved in Eurochild activities, projects and programmes have the right to:

- have their health, safety and wellbeing and best interests considered as top priority;
- have their development promoted and safeguarded so that they can achieve their full potential;
- be valued, respected and understood within the context of their own culture, religion and ethnicity; and
- be listened to and to have their views given careful consideration, and to be encouraged and helped to participate in decisions that affect them, including in child-protection decisions.

Eurochild's Child Protection Policy also applies to all Eurochild member organisations, and to external partners when they cooperate and participate with children in Eurochild events. For the purpose of this study, Eurochild's Child Protection Policy was also applied to all researchers and experts involved in data collection, analysis and synthesis in all stages of the research process.

*Conducting consultations and analyses*

Each member organisation provided a report based on the conducted consultations. The findings from these reports feature throughout this report.

### Case studies of selected mechanisms for children's participation considered as promising practices

The study team undertook a detailed analysis of 12 mechanisms, which were selected following the completion of the mapping exercise. Criteria for selection included the available evidence underpinning the mechanism, as well as transferable lessons on including vulnerable children or the use of digital tools to help foster participation. After creating an initial shortlist of 27 possible case studies, 12 were selected following consultations with the study's expert panel and DG JUST. Short case-study descriptions are provided throughout the report, and Annex A outlines the case studies' guiding document and complete versions of the case-study narratives.

### Analysis, synthesis and reporting

The objective of this task was to synthesise the main characteristics of the mechanisms and identify key themes, patterns and/or contradictions arising across the collected evidence, and to assess how the mechanisms could inspire a possible EU action in this area.

In order to systematically analyse and synthesise features of all mechanisms, the core team developed a set of guiding questions (see Annex I). This framework was developed in consultation with the panel of experts (see Annex M), and is closely linked to the main objectives and research questions of this study. This framework guided analysis and reporting for the summary tables (see Annex B), and the analysis and synthesis of findings and conclusions presented in all subsequent chapters of this report.

The analysis, synthesis and final reporting were also guided by discussions and feedback received during two workshops. The first workshop involved members of the core study team drawing out and reaching consensus on the study's findings. The second workshop involved the core study team, members of the European Commission and four experts who provided ongoing guidance to the project (expert panel). The purpose of this second workshop was to discuss and validate the study's conclusions. The validation workshop agenda can be found in Annex K.

## 1.2.3 Contributions from a panel of experts and the Eurochild Children's Council

This study benefited from the advice of an expert panel consisting of four adults with relevant expertise in children's participation mechanisms in the EU. These experts are credited for their contributions in Annex M. They supported the study by reviewing protocols and data-collection tools, providing comments on draft reports and participating in the validation workshop.

This project also consulted Eurochild's Children's Council[44]. The Eurochild Children's council is made up of 12 children from across Europe, who are supported by Eurochild members. The current Eurochild Children's Council was selected and set up in April 2019, and their term was set for two years (until April 2021). The 12 children in the Eurochild Children's Council are aged 11–16 years old, come from different European countries and have diverse backgrounds, including migrant children and children in care. The Council members provided advice at different stages of the study, e.g. they were consulted on the methodology and data-collection tools, provided advice on the report drafts, and were actively involved in the production of the accessible summary of the final report.

## 1.3 Limitation of this research

This research is subject to a few main limitations.

The first limitation is the breadth of the study. Despite rigorous research undertaken by national researchers and the core research team to map existing children's participation mechanisms across the 27 EU Member States and the UK, it is still possible that some mechanisms were not captured due to data (in)availability and access, or time and resource constraints. In order to mitigate this risk, in relation to information about relevant mechanisms present in MS, DG JUST and the study team liaised with MS delegates to confirm the obtained results. A list of identified mechanisms has been shared with the delegates, providing an opportunity to note any important mechanisms that might not have been included. Despite these efforts, it is possible that some existing mechanisms may have been overlooked.

The second limitation relates to the factual accuracy and relevance of some of the information provided by interviewees. Interviewees were asked about their experiences of, and views and opinions about, children's participation mechanisms in political and democratic life. Interviewees were also asked about possible EU action to address some of the identified challenges, as well as the future direction of EU policy-making in this thematic area. The analysis is limited to identifying possible future actions. It does not systematically

assess feasibility or examine the advantages and disadvantages of different options identified, as this would be beyond the scope of this study.

Furthermore, while the study aims to include participation mechanisms for children (i.e. persons below the age of 18 years), in practice and across a range of mechanisms the age boundary between children and youth is not always well defined. As such, this report also includes mechanisms that are focused on youth, as long as they also include, at least to some degree, children.

Finally, it should be noted that data collection for this study took place amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to accommodate an efficient, high-quality but also timely process, the consultations with children took place either as in-person meetings or online discussions (in groups and one-to-one). This varied from context to context depending on what was feasible in participating countries amidst ongoing health and safety measures.

## 1.4 Structure of this report

This draft final report presents findings from data collected in all research tasks. All data have been examined and systematically analysed to inform conclusions.

This report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 outlines the main children's participation mechanisms, structures and stakeholders. Chapter 3 provides detail on the characteristics of children's participation mechanisms. This is followed by Chapter 4, which focuses on facilitators and barriers to children's participation. Chapter 5 outlines lessons learnt and potential future action. Study conclusions are summarised in Chapter 6. The report is accompanied by Annexes A–M, which present all the data-collection tools, templates and guiding documents, summary tables and complete versions of the case-study narratives.

# 2 Main mechanisms, structures and stakeholders for children's participation

## Key findings

- The key mechanisms for children's participation in political and democratic life are facilitated through permanent (often government-initiated) institutions or structures, such as children's and/or youth councils and parliaments. The differences between some of these structures are purely lexical as their way of operation, their relationships with adult institutions and their influence on decision-making processes may be similar. The office of the Ombudsperson for children also takes an active role in children's participation mechanisms in several countries.
    - Children's and youth councils are the most prevalent structures at national level, and are found in 27 countries and at the EU level. The term 'council' can denote a variety of structures, with different roles, responsibilities and organisational structures. These characteristics, in turn, influence how each council facilitates communication of children's views and children's involvement in the policy-making processes. The variety of council structures is particularly evident at national level, with many countries having more than one type of a council structure.
    - Children's and youth parliaments constitute a common permanent structure, and are found in 15 countries and at the EU level (European Youth Parliament). These structures typically operate as annual education and training programmes that enable children to put forward policy recommendations. These are generally not binding.
    - Ombudsperson's Office for Children (or equivalent) is a structure operating in all 27 MS and the UK, and is also part of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC). The level and breadth of the Ombudsperson's involvement in children's participation mechanisms varies across Member States.
- A number of stakeholders at all levels is involved in mechanisms and processes facilitating children's participation in political and democratic life.
    - Public organisations/bodies and civil society organisations are responsible for organising events for and with children, designing and implementing tools and guidelines, providing information and conducting a variety of consultations, polls and research studies.
    - Educational institutions and teachers play an important role in helping to facilitate children's participation, e.g. via educational programmes on active citizenship and participation itself, and by helping to recruit children.
    - Children are important stakeholders and take on a variety of roles and responsibilities. However, the level of children's knowledge about children's rights varies greatly amongst children across Europe. Overall, the evidence suggests an equal participation of girls and boys, but evidence related to children's ages provides a more mixed picture, with participatory processes and practices often geared towards older children. Inclusiveness is an important goal, but the degree to which this is achieved varies across mechanisms and countries. Children themselves are aware of existing structures and mechanisms – particularly at the local level – but have low awareness and a mixed view on the role of the EU in supporting children's participation. Children have also identified several obstacles to having their voices and opinions taken into account.

This chapter outlines the main structures and stakeholders of children's participation in political and democratic life, and focuses on how these structures and stakeholders facilitate children's participation via a variety of mechanisms at the international, European, national and local (as relevant) levels.

## 2.1 Overview of key mechanisms

The collected evidence shows that the key mechanisms for children's participation in political and democratic life are facilitated through permanent (often government-initiated) institutions or structures, such as children's and/or youth councils and parliaments. The office of the Ombudsperson for Children is also active in several countries, and has implemented dedicated structures and structural mechanisms (such as children's advisory panels) and/or held regular and ad hoc consultations with children.

As discussed later in this chapter, differences between some of these structures are purely lexical as their political relationship with adult institutions and forums of political decision-making may be similar. For instance, a particular structure may be called a parliament in one country and a council in another country, but the way they operate and their influence on decision-making processes may be similar.

Table 5 summarises key mechanisms at the international, EU and national level. The subsequent sections in this chapter provide detailed information about each of these mechanisms.

**Table 5. Overview of key structures and mechanisms facilitating children's participation**

| Country | Children's/ Youth Council | Children's/ Youth Parliament | Structures/mechanisms facilitated by the Ombudsperson for Children's office |
|---|---|---|---|
| International | √ | | |
| EU | √ | √ | √ (ENOC) |
| AT | √ | | |
| BE | √ | √ | √ |
| BG | √ | | |
| CY | √ | √ | |
| CZ | | √ | |
| DE | √ | | |
| DK | √ | | |
| EE | √ | | |
| EL | √ | √ | √ |
| ES | √ | | √ |
| FI | √ | √ | √ |
| FR | √ | √ | √ |
| HR | √ | | √ |
| HU | √ | | |
| IE | √ | √ | √ |
| IT | √ | | |
| LT | √ | √ | |
| LU | √ | √ | |
| LV | √ | √ | |
| MT | √ | √ | √ |
| NL | √ | | |
| PL | √ | √ | |
| PT | √ | √ | |
| RO | √ | | |
| SE | √ | | √ |
| SI | √ | √ | |
| SK | √ | | |
| UK | √ | √ | √ |

Source: Authors' summary based on data from mapping, interviews and case study tasks.
Note: Due to the limited amount of time allocated to the research and to the unavailability of public information relating to some of the mechanisms, this study cannot guarantee that all existing mechanisms have been captured and described.

## 2.2 Children's and youth councils

**Children's and youth councils remain the most prevalent permanent structure directly involving children. However, the term 'council' can denote a variety of structures, with different roles, responsibilities and organisational structures**.

Overall, council structures can be grouped into **four main types**:

1. Children's/youth councils operating in an advisory capacity as part of:
    - international, European and national institutions/governments; and
    - non-governmental organisations;
2. Council structures/associations of child- and youth-focused organisations;
3. Networks (council structures at national level) supporting the operation of the regional and local councils; and
4. Other council-type structures focusing on particular thematic issues.

In turn, the different characteristics of the structure influence how each council facilitates communication of children's views and children's involvement in the policy-making processes. As direct dialogue between children/youth members of the councils and policy-makers takes different formats, **different councils can be viewed as separate mechanisms**.

Nevertheless, **the organisational structure and responsibilities of particular council types are not always clear-cut**, as some council types can have **similar characteristics and (sometimes) overlapping responsibilities**. In addition, there is also some overlap in terms of the age groups that participate in particular council structures, with some councils being dedicated to children and others to youth, and some including both children *and* youth. **The variety of council structures is particularly evident at national level, with many countries having more than one type of a council structure**.

**Individual children** participating in these mechanisms **typically represent voices of the wider groups of children and young people**. Overall, children's and youth **councils are found in 27 out of 28 countries** (26 EU MS and in the UK), and at the **international and European level**.

The sections below map out particular council types and outline their main functions and how children are recruited and selected to take part. Chapter 3 provides more detailed assessment of the main characteristics of each of the mechanisms of children's participation. A summary of information about the main characteristics of councils at the national level is presented in Table 6, and a more detailed overview appears in Annex C.

### 2.2.1 International and European level

#### Children's/youth councils operating in an advisory capacity

The collected evidence suggests that the **operation of mechanisms** facilitating children's participation **at international and European levels relies on close collaboration with external partners** – i.e. international, European and national NGOs **delivering services to and working with children** (see also Section 2.5.1). In this respect, the NGOs' permanent children's and youth councils and ad hoc council-type structures serve as a platform to liaise with children and support activities of relevant stakeholders, e.g. the UN, CoE and EC. NGOs are typically involved in the processes of recruitment and selection of children, briefing and debriefing children, and organising participatory activities[45]. For instance 'Child Rights Connect', a global organisation of children's networks, supports the UN and UNICEF, and Eurochild supports the CoE and the EC in facilitating children's participation processes.

In more detail, Child Rights Connect first supported a Children's Advisory Team of 21 child advisors at the 2018 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's Day of Discussion (DGD)

on Protecting and Empowering Children as Human Rights Defenders. It also supported a global Children's Advisory Team of nine child advisors in the development of UNICEF's official child-friendly UN Convention on the Rights of the Child[46]. It also plans to support the UN during the Universal Periodic Review[47]. Since February 2020, Child Rights Connect has had a permanent Children's Advisory Team structure, composed of 11 children aged 10–17 years old representing different regions around the world[48]. The child advisors have chosen a mandate of either one or two years. The role of this structure is to advance the recognition, protection and empowerment of child human-rights defenders, including through children's participation at national, regional and international levels. The activities of this permanent structure build on the experiences and lessons learned from previous children's participation activities[49].

In the European context, Eurochild and the University of Central Lancashire were contracted by the Council of Europe, Children's Rights Division to organise, coordinate and implement the participation of children at the 2019 international conference on children's rights[50]. Young delegates – consisting of 13 children and young people from across Europe – actively participated in the conference and acted as 'challengers' in 'Power Talks'. This was an innovative format of dynamic debates on a range of thought-provoking issues, with young delegates making speeches and asking questions to challenge adults and governments from across Europe[51]. In order to communicate the conference discussions to a wider audience of children, young delegates also drafted 'a report by children for children'[52].

At EU level, the European Forum on the rights of the child in 2020 – which had the objective of contributing to the EU strategy on the rights of the child (2021–2024) – was supported by the participation of around 60 children from various organisations across the EU and internationally, and the involvement of Eurochild[53]. The upcoming EU strategy on the rights of the child also consulted children[54].

#### Council structures/associations of child- and youth-focused organisations

The **European Youth Forum**[55], established in 1996, is an international non-profit association that serves as a platform and advocacy group of the national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations in Europe. It consists of a total of 105 members, including 44 national youth councils and 61 international youth NGOs. It represents youth – via several stakeholder groups – to a wide variety of EU, UN and international institutions and organisations, so that young people are provided with opportunities to directly participate and have their voices heard. The European Youth Forum – in close collaboration with the Trio Presidency, the European Commission and other youth civil society representatives – takes the lead role with regard to steering the implementation of the EU Youth Dialogue (see Box 11 and Annex A)[56].

### 2.2.2 National level

#### Children's and youth councils operating in a government advisory capacity

National-level **councils that have an advisory function to the national government bodies** have been identified in 11 countries: Bulgaria[57], Croatia[58], Cyprus[59], Denmark[60], Estonia[61], Finland[62], Lithuania[63], Latvia[64], Poland[65], Portugal[66] and Sweden.[67] These councils often operate as an interdepartmental advisory body participating in the development of public policies for children and youth.

In some countries, members of the councils are selected from youth organisations (e.g. Sweden, Latvia), but children/youth can also self-nominate and participate in a competition to be elected (e.g. Poland). In most countries, such councils are composed only of children and youth members, but there are also councils composed of children/youth and adults. In Latvia, the council is composed of 20 members, 8 of them being representatives of youth organisations. Even if the role of councils is typically advisory, they may also have other responsibilities (e.g. in Cyprus, undertaking youth-related projects). The advisory role of the council structures in Denmark has some distinctive features (see Box 1).

**Box 1. Children's participation structures at the Danish National Council for Children**

Three separate children's participation structures are working as part of the Danish National Council for Children (NCC) – a statutory national institution that is politically independent, although administratively linked with the Ministry of Family and Customer Affairs. These structures include:

- child and youth panel: a representative panel of approximately 2,000 children aged 13 years old (on average) and selected and consulted for 3 years;
- mini child panel: a representative panel of 1,000 children aged 4–7 years old (usually 5–6), with most children participating once or twice in total; and
- expert groups representing 5–15% of vulnerable or disadvantaged children and youth (due to personal and/or family situations). The expert groups are made up of 4–10 children with common characteristics, e.g. children with disabilities or mental illness, children of incarcerated parents, etc.

Across these three structures, children are typically involved in a range of activities, including the selection of topics for surveys and research studies, the design of data-collection instruments, participation in research/surveys, and the analysis of data. The results are disseminated to children, and participating children also have direct access online to the panel website[68].

### Council structures / associations of child- and youth-focused organisations

**Umbrella-type council / association of non-governmental or semi-governmental organisations working for and with children and youth are a very popular type of structure** facilitating children's and youth participation. They operate in 25 countries, namely Austria[69], Belgium (Flanders)[70], Croatia[71], Cyprus[72], Denmark[73], Estonia[74], Finland[75], Germany[76], Greece[77], Hungary,[78] Ireland[79], Italy[80], Latvia[81], Lithuania[82], Luxembourg[83], Malta[84], the Netherlands[85], Poland[86], Portugal[87], Romania[88], Slovakia[89], Slovenia[90], Spain[91], Sweden[92] and the UK[93,94].

The member organisations include political, cultural, social, leisure, environmental, voluntary, cause-specific (e.g. supporting youth with disabilities, ethnic minority children, etc.) groups, and many more. They are often member-led organisations working together to raise awareness about and advocate for aspects relevant to children and youth, and contribute to the development of civil society. One of their goals is to improve child/youth participation in policy-making. They typically aim to co-create and have impact on national and international policy development and, to a lesser degree, implementation. The national-level structures are typically coordinated by a Managing Board of elected representatives from member organisations, and make decisions via a yearly General Assembly. Many of these national-level councils are members of the European Youth Forum.

In terms of activities for members, they often organise debates and forums focusing on a particular topic or policy priority to exchange views and opinions, workshops and training sessions, consultations and projects to enable children/youth to discuss and act on issues that affect them, cultural events, and research. They are often an official representative body responsible for liaising with the national government on child- and youth-focused policy areas, and for initiating dialogue between children/youth and other stakeholders. For instance, Forum des Jeunes in Belgium can make official representative submissions to political actors, while the National Youth Council has a 'social partner status'[95] in Austria. In some countries, policy-makers at the national and local level are legally required to consult child/youth structures when developing policies (see 4.1.2).

### Networks supporting the operation of regional and local councils

Another type of child/youth council structure are **national-level networks supporting the operation of the regional and local councils**. Our research has identified that such structures operate in five countries: Croatia[96], France[97], Hungary[98], Poland[99] and Slovenia[100]. All but one were established in the 1990s (Slovenia's was founded in 2000). Their role typically involves coordination and development of the network(s) of regional/local councils, provision of support to the local authorities in setting up child/youth participation approaches, creating opportunities for representatives of regional/local councils to meet and exchange experiences, and in strengthening the idea of self-governance and child/youth participation.

### Other council-type structures focusing on particular thematic issues

There are **many other council-type structures** that facilitate participation of children, youth, students and young people across the EU. They are **typically focused on particular thematic areas**, e.g. education, employment, health etc. For example, the National Action Committee of Students (founded in 1984 in the Netherlands for 12–18-year-olds) aims to represent secondary school students in national discussions that affect them[101]. Similarly, the Lithuanian National Union of Pupils (established in 1999 for children and young people aged up to 25 years old) unites councils of Lithuanian pupils to represent their views on education and youth policy to policy-makers[102]. The National School Students' Council (for secondary school students) in Romania[103], the National Student Council[104] (secondary and university students) and the Movement for Alternative Student-centric Education[105] (both in Hungary) have similar roles. Among other topic-specific participatory mechanisms for children and young people are the FNV young (Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging Jong), the youth arm of the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions, which focuses on employment-related issues[106], and the NHS England Youth Forum focusing on health-related policies[107].

### Characteristics of children's and youth councils

There appears to be **no common trend around the age range** of the children and youth participating in council structures. However, the evidence suggests that **councils are typically geared towards older children's participation**, with the youngest participating children being around 11–12 years old (see also Section 2.7.2). In six MS council structures are dedicated to children (Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland[108], Lithuania and Portugal)[109]. In all remaining countries, the council structures focus on children and youth. Since 14 countries (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Croatia, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Spain) extend the category of 'youth' up to individuals aged 30 or above, many of these council structures are often a platform to express and hear the views of young adults, rather than children.

The **majority** of councils operating at the national level were **set up during the 1990s and 2000s**, while a small number of councils were established as early as in the 1940s (in Denmark, Germany, Sweden and the UK), and a few had councils that were launched as recently as the 2010s (in Belgium, Finland, Luxembourg, Hungary, Poland and Portugal). In countries with more than one council structure, the different councils were often established across various years[110].

The extent to which councils are **child-led varies between countries and council types**. Sometimes, there are some **inconsistencies between the specific council activities**, with some activities being entirely child-led, while other tasks rely more on adults. Typically, the councils formed of child- and youth member organisations are self-governed and set up their own agendas. There is typically more adult involvement and governance in the network council structures organised to support regional and local child/youth councils, albeit such councils also have child-led activities, e.g. peer-to-peer learning opportunities. There are also examples of child-led activities of government advisory child and youth councils, e.g. in Denmark where children and youth select topics,

decide on the research/consultation processes, and analyse results. Based on the collected evidence, the overall proportion of councils that are child- or youth-led (across all council types) is relatively small, with **councils being child-led in only around half of the countries**. However, since most councils are participatory structures for both children and youth, there are still questions about the extent to which these mechanisms are led by children or young adults.

Only a handful of councils involved children and youth in all stages of policy-making (planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation). In almost all countries **children are involved in the policy planning** stage, but involvement in the **implementation and in the evaluation processes is rare**. Children's views and opinions are typically **limited to 'policy recommendations' and are not binding**.

## Table 6. Main characteristics of child and youth councils at the European and national levels

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Child-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | Design/planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| EU | European Youth Forum | 1996 | Members of 44 national youth councils and 61 international youth NGOs. | √ | | √ | | |
| AT | Austrian National Youth Council (Bundes Jugend Vertretung) | 2001 | Under 30 y.o. | | | | | |
| BE | Flemish Youth Council (Vlaamse Jeugdraad) | 2001 | Under 26 y.o. | √ | | √ | | |
| BE | Forum des Jeunes (Youth Forum)<br>(Prior to 2019, Conseil de la Jeunesse de la Communaute Francaise – Youth Council of the French-speaking Community) | 2019 | 16–30 y.o. | √ | | √ | | |
| BE | Confederation of Youth Organisations (Confédération des Organisations de Jeunesse) | 1975 | Members of youth organisations. | √ | | √ | | |
| BG | Council of Children to the State Agency for Child Protection | 2003 | Up to 19 y.o. | | √ | √ | | |
| CY | Cyprus Youth Council (CYC) (Συμβούλιο Νεολαίας Κύπρου) | 1996 | 14–35 y.o. | | | | | |
| CY | Youth Board of Cyprus (Οργανισμός Νεολαίας) | 1994 | Members of youth organisations. | | | √ | | |
| DE | German Federal Youth Council (Deutscher Bundesjugendring (DBJR)) | 1949 | Under 26 y.o.[111] | √ | √ | | | |
| DK | The Danish National Council for Children's (NCC) consisting of (1) Child and Youth Panel, (2) Mini Child Panel, and (3) Expert groups | 1994 | 4–18 y.o. | √ | √ | √ | | |
| DK | Danish Youth Council | 1940 | 15–30 y.o. | √ | | √ | | |
| EE | Estonian National Youth Council (Eesti Noorteühenduste Liit) | 2002 | 13–26 y.o. | | | | | |
| EE | Youth Advisory Committee to the Chancellor of Justice | 2011 | 10 members under 18 y.o. representing children's and youth organisations. | | | √ | | |
| EL | Hellenic National Youth Council (ESYN) (Εθνικό Συμβούλιο Νεολαίας) | 1998 | 15-28 y.o. | √ | | √ | | √ |
| ES | The Council of Youth of Spain (El Consejo de la Juventud de España) | 1983 | under 30 y.o. | √ | | √ | √ | √ |
| FI | Finnish National Youth Council (Allianssi)<br>(also known as the Finnish National Youth Cooperative) | 1992 | 15-25 y.o.[112] | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| FI | State Youth Council | 1944[113] | Members of youth organisations. | | | | | |
| FR | National Association of Children's and Youth Councils (Association Nationale des Conseils d'Enfants et de Jeunes) | 1991 | | | | √ | | |
| HR | Children's Association | 1999 | 9–14 y.o. | | | √ | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Child-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | Design/planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| HR | Croatian Youth Network (Mreža mladih Hrvatske) | 2002 | 15–30 y.o.[114] | √ | | √ | | |
| HR | Youth Council of the Croatian Government | 2012 | 7 of the 27 members come from youth organisations. | | | √ | | |
| HU | Federation of Children's and Youth Municipal Councils (FCYMC) (Gyermek- és Ifjúsági Önkormányzati Társaság, GYIÖT) | 1996 | | | | √ | | |
| HU | National Youth Council (Nemzeti Ifjúsági Tanács) | 2012 | 18–35 y.o.[115] | | | | | |
| IE | National Executive of the Comhairle na nÓg | 2002 [116] | 12–18 y.o. | | | √ | | |
| IT | National Youth Forum (Forum Nazional Giovani) | 2004 | At least 70% under 35 y.o. | √ | | √ | | √ |
| LT | Lithuanian Youth Council (Lietuvos jaunimo organizacijų taryba (LiJOT)) | 1992 | 14–29 y.o. | √ | | √ | | |
| LT | Interinstitutional Child Welfare Council under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania | 2018 | Up to 18 y.o. | | | √ | | |
| LU | National Youth Council (de Jugendrot) | 2018 | Mainly under 35 y.o. | √ | | √ | | |
| LV | National Youth Council of Latvia (Latvijas Jauniešu Padome) | 1992 [117] | 13–25 y.o. | | | √ | | |
| LV | Youth Consultative Council (Jaunatnes konsultatīvā padome) | 2009 [118] | 8 of the 21 members come from youth organisations. | | | √ | √ | √ |
| MT | National Youth Council (Kunsill Nazzjonali Żgħażagħ) | 1992 | 13–35 years old | √ | | √ | | |
| NL | National Youth Council (Nationale Jeugdraad NJR) | 2001 | 12–30 years old | √ | | √ | | |
| PL | Polish Council of Youth Organisations (PCYO) (Polska Rada Organizacji Młodzieżowych) | 2011 | At least 2/3 of members are under 35 y.o. | | | √ | | |
| PL | National Federation of Youth Local Governments (Ogólnopolska Federacja Młodzieżowych Samorządów Lokalnych) | 1998 | Members of the local youth councils. | | | | | |
| PL | The Council of Children and Youth of the Republic of Poland at the Ministry of National Education | 2016 | 13–21 y.o. | | | √ | | |
| PL | Youth Ecological Council | 2020 | Recruitment is ongoing of 32 members aged 13–21 y.o. | | | √ | | |
| PT | National Council for Children and Young People (Conselho Nacional de Crianças e Jovens) | 2019 | 8–17 y.o. | | √ | √ | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Child-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | Design/planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| PT | National Youth Council (Conselho Nacional de Juventude) | 1985 | 12–34 y.o. | √ | | √ | | |
| RO | The Council of Romanian Youth (Consiliul Tineretului din România) | | 14–35 y.o. | √ | | √ | √ | √ |
| RO | The Forum of Romanian Youth (Forumul Tinerilor din România) | | 14–35 y.o. | | | √ | | |
| SE | National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations (Sveriges Ungdomsorganisationer, LSU) | 1949 | 13–25 y.o. | √ | | | | |
| SE | Youth Policy Council (Ungdomspolitiska rådet) | 2008 | 13–25 y.o. | | | √ | | |
| SI | Youth Council of Slovenia (Mladinski svet Slovenije) | 2000 | 15–29 y.o. | | | √ | | |
| SI | Youth Councils of Local Communities | 2000 | | | | | | |
| SK | Youth Council of Slovakia (Rada Mladeze Slovenska) | 1990 | Under 30 y.o. | √ | √ | √ | | |
| UK | British Youth Council | 1948 | 16–25 y.o. | √ | √ | √ | | √ |

Source: Authors' summary based on data from mapping, interviews and case study tasks.
Note: Due to the limited amount of time allocated to the research and to the unavailability of public information relating to some of the mechanisms, this study cannot guarantee that all existing mechanisms have been captured and described.

### 2.2.3 Regional and local levels

Data collection focusing on the regional and local levels was conducted in only 10 selected MS. Additional local- and regional-level mechanisms were identified operating across other countries[119], and it should be noted that the overview presented here may not fully represent the broad scope of all council-type mechanisms across all countries.

**Child and youth councils are prevalent mechanisms operating at the local and regional levels**. In several countries examined, the operation of local-level children/youth councils is **regulated and defined by legal acts and policy documents** (see Section 4.1.2 for more detail). Regional level councils are a prevalent mechanism in countries with autonomous regional-level government structures (e.g. Belgium, Spain), and in federal countries (e.g. Germany).

Participants represent the views of their peers to the decision-makers, ensuring that children and youth have a voice and participate in decision-making about issues that matter in their communities. The function (mechanism) of a **Young Mayor is often aligned with** the operation of – or works with the support of – the local-level child/youth **councils**, for instance at the municipality level in Portugal and in the UK[120]. In the UK, the Young Mayors Network supports young mayors to work together[121].

**For many children**, as attested by children participating in focus groups (see Section 2.7.4 for more detail), **participation in local councils is the first direct opportunity to be involved in decision-making processes**. The **selection process** to be part of the council differs across countries, with children able to nominate themselves or be nominated by peers, teachers, schools or child/youth organisations. In some countries, children can vote on who is to represent them, e.g. in classrooms or as part of the activities in their child/youth organisations. However, in some countries a nomination by a teacher or school results in being appointed in the council. As reported by some children participating in focus groups (in particular in Bulgaria), the **selection process is not always transparent to children**, and some children felt it was not always fair because it seems to favour well-performing pupils or children already actively involved in some other child/youth participatory mechanisms. A few children from disadvantaged/vulnerable backgrounds reported having doubts whether they would have sufficient skills/knowledge to take part in the council activities, whether sufficient support is available, and sometimes even whether they could be included at all (see also Section 4.2 and Box 22). For these reasons some focus group participants in Bulgaria and Germany questioned the mandate of councils to 'represent' the child population.

The collected evidence suggests that this type of **council often replicates adult participatory structures**, e.g. children attend committee and plenary meetings and utilise voting systems. Child and youth council members are also often 'ambassadors' of their councils and report back about council activities to their peers at schools or other organisations. Children and youth councils are involved in a **wide range of topics and policy areas**, including transport, environment, education, leisure, wellbeing and other matters that council members consider relevant. Typically, **councils are involved in planning and preparation of policies, and to some extend implementation and follow-up activities**. However, the evidence on the level of influence of children and youth at the local and regional councils varies considerably between countries, with **most councils having primarily an advisory role, and council recommendations not being binding** to local and regional decision-makers.

## 2.3 Children's and youth parliaments

**Children's and youth parliaments** are also permanent structures facilitating children's participation in political and democratic life. The collected evidence indicated that parliament structures are present at the EU, national and regional/local levels.

### 2.3.1 European level

Established in 1987, the European Youth Parliament (EYP)[122] is a peer-to-peer educational programme operating in 40 countries across Europe. Its mission is 'to inspire and empower young Europeans to become open-minded, tolerant and active citizens'[123]. It operates through a network of organisations of National Committees across Europe, and is focused on providing a forum for young people to develop and express opinions on a wide range of topics. Most participants are aged 16–25 years old but there is no upper age limit to membership. Overall, over 500 EYP events are organised across Europe each year at local, national and international levels and more than 30,000 young people take part in those activities. These non-formal educational activities vary in length from 2 hours to 10 days, and provide opportunities to debate a wide range of topics. Volunteers engaged in the organisation of the EYP events are provided with skills-development opportunities via a diverse range of training courses. These capacity-building training courses focus on building a wide skill set, and include facilitation, leadership, communication, fundraising, organising, project management, outreach and intercultural dialogue[124]. The EYP programme also includes project-focused activities. Current projects include *inter alia*:

- a project in cooperation with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) focusing on involving young refugees and stateless persons in the EYP sessions to bring the topics of diversity and migration to the forefront of debates[125];
- a series of health-focused projects bringing together young people from across Europe with decision-makers to debate pressing issues in the area of health[126]; and
- a project encouraging young people to explore and discuss European energy policy[127].

The flagship events of the EYP are the International Sessions. The first International Session took place in 1988 and since then more than 90 sessions have been hosted in more than 70 different cities in 29 countries. Three International Sessions are held every year, and each session brings together around 300 participants (who are selected by a selection panel) from 29 countries. At the session, participants take on a variety of roles: as moderators, organisers or members of the 'media team'[128].

### 2.3.2 National level

At the national level, **Children's and Youth Parliaments in 15 countries were mapped**. Taking into consideration the age of participants, they can be categorised into two main groups:

1. Parliaments exclusively for children (0–18 years old) were mapped in 10 countries:
   - children's parliaments operating in three countries: Cyprus (12–18 years old)[129], France (10–11 years old)[130] and Slovenia (6–15 years old)[131];
   - five parliaments were termed 'Youth Parliaments', but participants' age categories were exclusively for children: Finland (15–16 years old)[132], Lithuania (14–18 years old)[133], Ireland (12–18 years old)[134], Portugal (10–15 years old)[135] and the UK (11–18 years old)[136]; and
   - two countries had structures called 'Children and Youth Parliaments' but participants' age categories were exclusively for children: Czechia (school-age children)[137] and Poland (7–18 years old).[138]
2. Parliaments for children and youth (a combined structure for under and over 18 years old) were mapped in six countries:
   - 'Youth Parliaments' were mapped in five MS: Belgium (17–27 years old)[139], Cyprus (maximum age 21 years old)[140], Greece (maximum age 21 years old)[141], Latvia (14–24 years old)[142] and Malta (13–35 years old)[143]; and
   - 'Children and Youth Parliament', a structure combining children and youth participants, occurred in one MS: Luxembourg[144].

Cyprus is the only country with two separate parliaments, one for children participants (12–18 years old) and one for youth (maximum age 21 years old).

Most mechanisms were **initiated in the 1990s** and are still currently running as a major means of children's participation. In Ireland, Cyprus, Latvia and the UK, children elected to the Parliament represent geographical constituencies (e.g. it corresponds to a district or a local authority). Most Parliament mechanisms recruit members through schools and in this regard, this mechanism is inclusive in so far as education reaches most children in the country. However, this does not ensure that disadvantaged or marginalised children participate (see 4 for more detail on barriers to children's participation in political and democratic life). The Cyprus Children's Parliament includes a quota system for Cypriot minorities and for regional allocation that is akin to the distribution at National Parliament[145]. The UK Youth Parliament has a high participation rate of people of minority background (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, or BAME) of 32% (compared to a national population of 10%)[146].

The **parliaments typically operate as annual education and training programmes culminating at a plenary session (or a set of activities) in the national parliament**. In general, the process for a child or youth parliament is as follows. A child, or a group of children, is either nominated by their teacher or nominates themselves to participate in the programme. They go through a selection process – either competing in activities, voted for by other children, or selected by adult panels – and become Child/Youth Parliamentarians. Either throughout the year or towards the final 'sitting' of Parliament, the children are involved in debating and organising campaigns or activities around an annual theme. The programme culminates in a final debate at the Parliament (often the physical Parliament of a country) and the child/youth Parliamentarians put forward recommendations to the country's politicians. These recommendations are generally not binding but do influence policy to varying degrees (as discussed below).

**Tangible policy impacts resulting from children's/youth parliaments' actions were identified in four MS**: France[147], Ireland[148], Slovenia[149] and the UK[150]. In France, four proposals from the children's parliament have been adopted as part of French law (see overview in Box 2 and detailed case study narrative in Annex A). In Ireland in 2009, the Youth Parliament recommended that the cervical cancer vaccine be given to 12–18-year-old girls and the following year it was made available to a wider cohort of girls than had first been planned. The members of the 2009 Youth Parliament were publicly credited for this by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. In Slovenia, the following recommendations of the Children's Parliament were adopted: 24-hour hotline for children in need, safe points in cities for children, information leaflets for child victims of abuse, and more news-like programmes for children within the national TV broadcasting system. In 2008, the UK government announced plans to establish sex and relationships education as a statutory part of the curriculum as a direct result of UK Youth Parliament campaign.

**Children are mostly involved in the implementation stage of the mechanisms**, i.e. once the mechanism has been created and is running, the children participate in it as candidates and may be involved in voting for their candidates, organising activities and projects. Some mechanisms involved children in the design phase (Cyprus, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Slovenia and the UK) but very few mechanisms involved children in their evaluation (Cyprus, Greece, Slovenia and the UK). The mechanisms in Cyprus, Czechia, Greece, Malta, Slovenia and the UK were child-led, whereas in other countries, the mechanisms were to varying degrees adult-led.

Table 7 presents a summary of all children's and youth parliaments identified in this study, Annex C presents a more detailed overview of all parliament structures, Box 2 provides a case study on the Children's Parliament in France, and a more detailed version of this case study is presented in Annex A.

## Table 7. Main characteristics of children's and youth parliaments at the national level

| Country | Name of mechanism | Year | Age groups | Selection criteria | Impact on policy/ children' s participation | Child/youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Participation cycle children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| EU | European Youth Parliament | 1987 | Mostly 16–25 years old but no upper age limit. | Selection is at the country level. | | | | √ | | |
| BE | Flemish youth parliament (Vlaams jeugdparlement) | 2013 | 17–27 y.o. | National competition with individual candidates required to explain their motivation in an application form. | | | | | | |
| CY | Cyprus Children's Parliament (Κυπριακή Παιδοβουλή) | 2001 [151] | 12–18 y.o. | Quotas for different Cypriot minorities and regional allocation akin to the distribution at National Parliament. | | √ | √ | √ | √ | |
| CY | Youth Parliament (Κοινοβούλιο Νεολαίας) | 1995 | Upper secondary school students max. 21 y.o. | National competition run via schools. | | √ | | | √ | √ |
| CZ | National Parliament of Children and Youth (Národní parlament dětí a mládeže) | 1997 | School-age children. | National competition run via schools. | | √ | | √ | √ | |
| EL | Youth Parliament (Βουλή των Εφήβων) | 1995 | Targets 16–18 y.o. but max. 21 y.o. | Elections in electoral districts. | | √ | | √ | √ | √ |
| FI | Youth parliament | 1998 | 15–16 y.o. | Educational activities (clubs) open to all upper secondary school students. | | | | | | |
| FR | Children's Parliament (Parlement des Enfants) | 1994 | 10–11 y.o. | National competition evaluated by local authorities and a national panel of judges. The final four proposals voted on electronically by children. | √ | | | √ | √ | |
| IE | National Youth Parliament (Dáil na nÓg) | | 12–18 y.o. | Election via local youth council (Comhairle na nÓg). | √ | | | √ | √ | |
| LT | The EU Youth Parliament in Lithuania (Europos jaunimo parlamentas Lietuvoje) | 2013 [152] | 14–18 y.o. | Selection in schools per regions. | | | | √ | | |
| LU | Young People's Parliament (Parlement des Jeunes) | 2009 | 14–24 y.o. | Recruitment in schools. | | | | √ | | |

| Country | Name of mechanism | Year | Age groups | Selection criteria | Impact on policy/ children' s participation | Child/youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Participation cycle children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| LV | Youth Parliament (Jauniešu Saeima) | 2010 | 15–20 y.o. | Self-nomination and elected using the same principles as General Elections (i.e. through electorates, with quotas for regions). | | | | √ | √ | |
| MT | National Youth Parliament | 2002 | 13–35 y.o. | Selected members of youth organisations that are part of the National Youth Council. | | √ | | √ | | |
| PL | The Children and Youth Parliament (Sejm Dzieci i Młodzieży) | 1994 | 7–18 y.o. | National competition judged by a panel of experts. | | | | | √ | |
| PT | Youth Parliament (Parlamento dos Jovens) | 1995 | 10–15 y.o. | Selection in schools and regions. | | | | √ | | |
| SI | Children's Parliaments (Otroški parlamenti) | 1990 | 6–15 y.o. | Selection in schools to participate in the Municipal Children's Parliament, which in turn elects the delegation to the Regional Children's Parliament and National Children's Parliament. | √ | √ | | √ | √ | √ |
| UK | UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) | 1999 | 11–18 y.o. | In England, youth votes for representatives at the Local Authority (LA) level. Similar process in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |

Source: Authors' summary based on data from mapping, interviews and case study tasks.
Note: Due to the limited amount of time allocated to the research and to the unavailability of public information relating to some of the mechanisms, this study cannot guarantee that all existing mechanisms have been captured and described.

**Box 2. Case study: Children's Parliament (Parlement des Enfants) in France**

This nationwide mechanism targets school children around the age of 10 in France and French schools around the world, and aims to teach democratic debate and the understanding of law-making processes. Children write law proposals consisting of four articles related to a theme chosen annually. These articles go through a selection process by local and national authorities and four finalists are chosen. Children then vote on these final four and select the winner, who is awarded at the Parliament. Established in 1994, it is run by the National Assembly. So far, four proposals have been made into legislation and a further piece was incorporated as part of legislation. There is evidence that suggests that under this mechanism, children can shape the law and policy development, provided that their proposals are picked up by a national representative[153]. The fact that this mechanism produces bills that can be directly taken up by political leaders might offer valuable lessons for other contexts. This stands in contrast to many other children's parliaments, which perform primarily an educational role in helping children understand democratic processes.

### 2.3.3 Regional and local level

As noted previously, local and regional data collection was only conducted in 10 selected countries, and local/regional level parliaments were identified only in these countries (and in Czechia).

The collected evidence suggests that there is a considerable level of variation between countries – and sometimes between localities/regions within particular countries – in how the children's and youth parliaments operate, their structures and roles. Overall, there are two main types:

1. Local-level parliaments contributing to the national-level mechanism (Slovenia[154]); and
2. Children's/youth parliaments operating independently at local/regional levels in:
    a. countries without national-level structures: Bulgaria[155] and Spain[156]; and
    b. countries with national-level structures: Czechia[157], Finland[158] and France[159].

Below we provide more detail about each of these types.

#### Local-level parliaments contributing to the national-level mechanism

Children's Parliaments operating in Slovenia act as a programme for raising children for active citizenship and democracy[160]. As a form of democratic dialogue, they are implemented in most elementary schools across Slovenia and all children (aged 6–15 years old) are welcome to participate in the first stage at the school/local level. The initial sessions take place in classrooms and in school parliaments. Selected delegates represent schools at municipal and regional Children's Parliaments, and regional representatives represent their regions (and schools) at the National Children's Parliament, which takes place at the Slovenian National Assembly once a year.

#### Children's/youth parliaments operating only at the local/regional levels (no national-level structures)

The evidence suggests that when children's youth parliaments operate at local level only, there is some variation in their structure between localities and regions. For instance, several local-level structures of the Youth Parliament operate across Bulgaria, but there is no legal framework establishing and synchronising their structure, composition, rules or funding.

In Spain, the operation of the children's parliaments at the regional level (as well as children's annual meetings) is closely linked with the UNICEF Child Friendly City Initiative (see also Section 2.5.2). Typically, this mechanism is a one-day meeting that takes place

on or around 20 November[161], usually each year. During the event, the appointed children's representatives present their proposals to regional politicians and policy-makers, who can follow up on their proposals. In addition, children are also provided with an opportunity to participate in a parliamentary session in the regional parliaments of the Spanish regions. The aim of this mechanism is to promote child and adolescent participation, and to have accountability at the regional level to the proposals made by children and young people. The event is typically attended by around 50 children, but there is variation across regions and some meetings are attended by over 250 children. The mechanism was established across regions at different points in time. For instance, by 2018 in the Castilla y León region there were already five annual events. However, by 2018 there were only three meetings in the Canary Islands and two meetings in the Valencia region. A booklet published in 2011 provides guidance on how to organise an online children's parliament[162]. However, it is not clear whether and how this booklet is being used.

### Local/regional level parliaments operating independently in countries with national-level structures

This type of children's parliament was identified in Czechia, Finland and France. In Czechia, the operation of the local and regional parliaments is supported financially by local authorities and NGOs. These local/regional structures work independently from the National Parliament of Children and Youth, which falls under a national government project called 'Participation'[163].

In France, there is a considerable level of variation between regions. For instance, the Regional Youth Parliament has been established only recently in the South Region[164]. It is made up of around 100 high-school students, apprentices and young people in vocational and health and social training, all aged 15 to 25 years old. The parliament, framed as a 'democratic laboratory', facilitates young people's participation in civic life, and involves their contributions to regional decisions. For instance, it has already taken concrete measures made by young people, such as 'the internship bank' and the 'youth e-pass', which offers €80 to young people in the area to spend on concerts, cinema tickets or sports participation.

By contrast, the Alsacian Youth Parliament was established in 2011 but ceased to exist as an independent mechanism in 2017, when it was superseded by the Youth Regional Council for the Greater East Region[165]. When operational, it was composed of 30–40 members between 15–28 years old with were no hierarchies between them (no Bureau, Presidents or Vice-Presidents were elected). Its role was policy initiation (setting out proposals), dialogue and consultation, and it participated in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of (most notably youth) policies, including the implementation of the 2030 Alsacian Youth Forum (Forum Jeunes Alsace 2030). It also took decisions on, for example, projects proposed by youth organisations in the region in the context of calls for projects on how to increase young people's participation.

In Finland, the national-level parliament was created in 1998 but the first local-level parliament was only created in Tampere in 2001, and later in other municipalities. This first parliament served as a pilot project and informed the establishment of parliaments in other localities. Nevertheless, each of these local/municipal structures still have a large degree of freedom in how they function. Overall, the aims of the local/municipal level children's parliament in Tampere are two-fold: (1) to make the opinions of primary school children heard in regional decision-making; and (2) to teach children democracy and ways to influence decision-making with methods appropriate to their age. The parliament provides space for democratic dialogue among and between children and local authorities, and is strongly based on co-operation with schools. Participation methods utilise voting and other traditional meeting methods (like groups and committees). The parliament board members and active representatives are usually those children (7–12 years old) who do well in school, who come from middle-class families, and are actively engaged in hobbies[166]. School councils can send two representatives to the General Meetings.

## 2.4 Children's participation in the work of Ombudspersons for Children's Offices

Our analysis shows that the Ombudsperson for Children's Office (or equivalent) is a prevalent stakeholder operating in all MS and the UK, and the majority of these national or regional/sub-national offices are also members of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC). However, **the level and breadth of involvement of children and young people in Ombudspersons for Children's work and activities vary across the countries, as well as across children's participation mechanisms, models, tools and methodologies**.

According to information provided by ENOC, most ENOC members have pre-established children's participation platforms (such as youth councils, focus groups or a decentralised approach), processes and methodologies[167]. This experience and expertise contributes to ENOC members' participation in ENOC's child participation structure – the European Network of Young Advisors (ENYA). To some extent, ENYA can contribute to national/regional capacity building in supporting ENOC members with little or no experience in child participation. Nevertheless, according to ENOC, this is rather not the case. For instance, only one ENOC member involved in ENYA activities in 2020 did not have a previously established and already running permanent children's participation platform (independent of ENYA)[168]. In most cases, ENOC members involved in the ENYA project have a good level of expertise and experience in child participation.

The results of the mapping task suggest that information about the involvement of Ombudsperson's Offices in children's participation initiatives, processes and mechanisms is often not provided by the Office's websites, official documentation and/or annual reports. While the list of countried provided below is not exhaustive, we have identified, among others, that the Ombudspersons for Children's offices in Belgium (French speaking community), Croatia, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Malta, Spain (some regions), Sweden and the UK have facilitated direct work with children, such as collaborative work with a panel of children and regular consultations with children from diverse backgrounds[169,170].

A summary of identified evidence on child participation processes and activities across relevant Ombudspersons for Children's offices, members of ENOC, is presented in Table 8[171]. A case study on the European Network of Young Advisors is available in Box 3, and a more detailed version of this case study is presented in Annex A

**Table 8. Involvement in child participation processes and mechanisms by Ombudspersons for Children's Offices**

| Country | Description of children's participation processes and mechanisms, and their impact |
|---|---|
| ENOC | European Network of Young Advisors (ENYA) is a children's/young people's participatory structure of ENOC[172]. |
| BE (French-speaking community) | The DGDE (Délégué Géneral aux Droits de l'Enfant) is running, among others, a long-standing thematic child consultation and participation initiatives called 'Paroles Jeunes, Parlons….'. These initiatives typically focus on a specific theme. For instance, the last consultation gathered views on the experiences of lockdown and lifting of lockdown restrictions. Previous initiatives were focused on stereotypes and young Muslims, mental health and poverty[173]. |
| EL | The Greek Ombudsman's Office involves children and young people in their work on a regular basis. The office also advocates strongly for the setting up of Youth Advisory Boards at local level. The Ombudsman's Office also has a website dedicated to children aged 0–18 years old[174]. |
| ES | Most of the Spanish regional Ombudspersons Offices (e.g. in Andalusia, Catalonia and Basque country) have Youth Advisory Panels or similar structures that provide advice to the Authority in all matters affecting the rights of the child in the Ombudsperson's operating area[175]. |
| FI | The Ombudsman holds regular consultations/meetings with Young Counsellors (experts by experience), runs a bi-annual survey of the |

| | |
|---|---|
| | lives of 6-year-old children (Child Barometer, latest editions in 2016 and 2018, 6-year-old Finnish speaking research participants are selected using random sampling) and conducts a variety of other surveys and interviews[176]. Expert classes/consultations were to start in 2020 involving children selected from different parts of Finland on the basis of region-specific random sampling. |
| FR | The Ombudsperson (Defender of Rights – Défenseur des droits) promotes involvement of children in research studies and by running surveys with children. For instance, in 2019 the Ombudsperson's Office mobilised 50 organisations working on children's rights in France to collect children's reflections, proposals and recommendations on the implementation of their rights in France as part of a study 'I Have Rights, Hear Me' (*J'ai des droits, entends-moi*). A total of 2,200 children aged 4–18 participated in this study (majority of children were aged 8–14), including the most vulnerable children[177]. |
| HR | Ombudsman for Children is supported by a network of Young Advisors[178]. |
| IE | The Ombudsman for Children's Office conducted several consultations with children[179]. |
| MT | The Office of the Commissioner for Children is supported by an advisory body of a Council for Children, and commissions research studies involving children's participation activities[180]. |
| SE | The Child Ombudsman Office includes a panel of children, and carries out a variety of consultations with children, including vulnerable and disadvantaged children[181]. |
| UK | The Children's Commissioners in the UK (in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) hold a variety of consultations and other children's participation activities, e.g. the Children's Future Food Inquiry seeking the views of almost 400 children and young people (aged 11–18) living in poverty across Scotland and the rest of the UK[182]. |

Source: Authors' summary based on data from mapping, interviews and case study tasks.
Note: Due to the limited amount of time allocated to the research and to the unavailability of public information relating to some of the mechanisms, this study cannot guarantee that all existing mechanisms have been captured and described.

**Box 3. Case study: European Network of Young Advisors working with the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children**

Launched in 2010, the European Network of Young Advisors (ENYA) is a child and youth participation project facilitated via the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC).

All children under the age of 18 living in ENOC member countries can participate in ENYA projects[183]. Participants of ENYA projects are recruited mainly through identified processes put in place by their respective Ombudspersons for Children's offices. In some cases, ENOC members involved in the ENYA project may seek support from partner child rights organisations to reach out to children and young people[184].

The purpose of the ENYA project is to actively involve children and young people in ENOC's annual work, i.e. in the development of thematic policy position statements, and to give them the opportunity to be heard at a level that exceeds their national boundaries, at European level.

Children and young people take part in ENOC activities to share their experience and to give Ombudspersons for Children a sense of which matters concern them and how to ensure the protection and promotion of their rights as guaranteed by the UNCRC[185].

There is some evidence that suggests that this mechanism has some impact. Through the ENYA project, ENOC aims to ensure a meaningful and effective participation of children and young people by giving them a say on specific topics. They have the opportunity to express their concerns and views regarding their rights, to make their proposals heard, and to participate in the elaboration of common recommendations (policy statements). They can also influence ENOC's thematic agenda. Thus, in the last

couple of years, ENYA young people expressed views and provided recommendations on all the thematic issues that have been addressed at ENOC level: CRIA, children's rights in the digital environment, mental health, relationship and sexuality education, etc. ENYA young people are also actively involved in the ENOC Annual Conference where they present the outcomes of their activities and hold an important leading role throughout the event.
This mechanism also constitutes an example of producing research and consultation outputs (e.g. a film screening) to gain interest, attention and commitment from policy-makers, who may have the power to take action and implement new policies.

## 2.5 Main stakeholders involved in the mechanisms and processes that facilitate children's participation in political and democratic life

The key stakeholders involved in children's participation in political and democratic life include national-, regional- and local-level government authorities and institutions (ministries, state agencies), civil society organisations (with a presence at the international, national and/or local levels), and educational institutions. Annex C lists each relevant group of stakeholders. Following below is an overview of how main stakeholders at each level are involved in children's participation mechanisms and processes (excluding mechanisms related to children's/youth councils, parliaments and the work of the Ombudsperson described above).

### 2.5.1 International and European levels

At the international and European levels, a wide range of stakeholders is involved in initiatives and mechanisms that facilitate children's participation in political and democratic life. Many of those stakeholders are also highly active at the national level (see subsequent section in this chapter, and Section 3.1).

**Table 9. Overview of key international and European stakeholders involved in children's participation mechanisms and processes**

| | Public organisations/bodies | Civil society organisations |
|---|---|---|
| International | United Nations (UN), including:<br>• Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)[186];<br>• The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)[187]; and<br>• UNICEF[188] (e.g. the Child Friendly Cities Initiative)[189].<br><br>Council of Europe[190]<br><br>OECD[191] | World Vision International[192]<br>Terre des Homme International Federation[193]<br>Save the Children[194]<br>SOS Children's Villages International[195]<br>Child Rights Connect[196]<br>The Commonwealth Youth Forum[197]<br><br>International civil society organisations, e.g.:<br>• African Caribbean and Pacific Young Professionals Network (ACPYPN);<br>• Network of International Youth Organisations in Africa (NIOYA);<br>• Pan African Youth Union (PYU); and<br>• African Diaspora Youth Forum in Europe (ADYFE)[198]. |
| EU | European Commission and its agencies, including:<br>• European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) – Rights of the Child[199]<br>Platforms/forums developed by the EC:<br>• European Forum on the rights of the child[200];<br>• Better Internet for Kids Youth panel at the Safer Internet Forum[201]; and<br>• Learning corner[202].<br><br>European Parliament – Intergroup on Children's Rights[203]<br><br>Council of the European Union[204] | Eurochild[205]<br>SALTO (Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities for Youth)[206] |

Source: Authors' summary based on data from mapping, interviews and case study tasks.
Note: Due to the limited amount of time allocated to the research and to the unavailability of public information relating to some of the mechanisms, this study cannot guarantee that all existing mechanisms have been captured and described.

International stakeholders have been involved in a range of mechanisms and processes that facilitate children's participation, and each has a different thematic scope and focuses on different cycles of policy development, implementation and evaluation across multiple countries and continents. Below we provide an overview of the main types of mechanisms:

1. Events for and with children and young people;
2. Tools, guidelines and information provision; and
3. Consultations, polls and research studies.

### Events for and with children and young people

Multiple stakeholders have been involved in the organisation of events specifically for children and youth participants, and events where children and young people participate alongside adult participants. These events can take the form of regular and ad-hoc forums,

conferences and meetings, and provide children and youth with an opportunity to share their views, develop new policy proposals, network and learn about developments related to child and youth rights, policies and practices.

At the international level, several events have incorporated 'youth forum' components. They include, for instance, the biennial Commonwealth Youth Forum (children and youth aged 15–29 years old) that has taken place prior to Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM) since 1998, and the Africa EU Youth summit[207] building on the framework of EU–Africa Summits[208]. These regular events bring together young representatives from around the world and offer the opportunity of interactive dialogue with global leaders, discussion of the priorities for action, and formulation of recommendations for policy development. A Day of General Discussion – the biannual meetings organised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva – also include active participation of children and young people[209].

At the European level, the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) Youth Panel at the Safer Internet Forum (SIF)[210] is organised in a similar format. This annual conference (the 17th edition occurred in 2020) takes a multi-stakeholder approach to considering the impact of technology on individuals and society.

During the 13th edition of the European Forum on the rights of the child[211] in 2020, a group of child moderators, panellists and experts shared not just their personal opinions on and challenges related to children's rights, but also those of their peers whom they were representing at a European level. Children were involved in the preparation and implementation of the Forum and in the follow-up activities. In addition, more than 10,000 children and young people replied to the targeted online questionnaire about the new EU Child Rights Strategy and the Child Guarantee. Facilitated by leading Rights of the child organisations, children were consulted both through an online tool and focus group discussions.

Eurochild's 13th Conference in 2018[212] focused on the theme of children's participation in public decision-making, and brought children and young people together with practitioners, researchers, civil society actors and policy- and decision-makers to contribute to improving children's participation in public decision-making.

Finally, children can contribute to the reporting process of MS parties' implementation of the UNCRC as part of the Committee's review. During this process, children can make submissions and give oral presentations during meetings of the pre-sessional working group, participate in private meetings with Committee members and observe the plenary sessions (see also Section 3.14.1.1)[213].

### Tools, guidelines and information provision

Stakeholders have been actively **developing tools and guidelines to facilitate and assess children's participation**, and to **provide information about children's participation rights and opportunities**. The assessment tools have been deployed across several countries to measure the inclusiveness and impact of children's participation mechanisms, processes and initiatives.

For instance, when developing specific tools or training materials – e.g. handbooks for professionals – the Council of Europe (CoE) seeks input from children. The purpose of this process is to make '[children's participation] mechanisms more meaningful to children', to ensure that the CoE is 'really addressing the children's needs and using their language'[214]. This process involves national and international NGOs working with children, and partners who are responsible for briefing and debriefing children. One of the CoE's tools includes the Child Participation Assessment Tool (CPAT). It was developed and piloted in 2016/2017 in Estonia, Ireland and Romania, a revised version was applied in Bulgaria, Italy and Latvia in 2017–18, and an evaluation meeting of the work cycle took place in Bulgaria in 2018[215]. It aims to support states in meeting the goals of the UNCRC on participation of children and young people under the age of 18. The Assessment Tool offers a method, at European level, to facilitate and support the implementation of the child's right to participate.

Accompanied by an Implementation Guide, this tool can be used by a variety of actors across many levels, including national government ministries, local authority administrations, the courts and judicial systems, professionals working with children, academic and civil society partners, and by organisations of children and young people[216]. As of May 2020 the tool had been piloted in 10 countries, which provided feedback to aid its further development[217]. In September 2019, the CoE published a handbook on children's participation[218].

A guide aimed at practitioners, 'Practice Standards in children's participation', was developed by Save the Children (StC). It describes practice standards, an expected level of performance that is applied in all StC's child participation work and represents minimum expectations of the ways in which StC's staff should behave and operate[219].

**Material aimed at children explaining the principles and practical ways of participating** has also been developed. For instance, the UN's Committee on the Rights of the Child has a dedicated website with information for children. The website provides information in plain language about the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the role and responsibilities of the Committee and how children can get involved in its work. Multiple cross-links to other relevant pages provide more detail, and present links to some documents in a child-friendly version[220]. Similarly, the 'Learning corner' website[221] – developed as part of the EC services – provides a variety of activities, such as games, competitions and activity books, that aim to help children learn more about the EU and studying and volunteering abroad. Material is organised by age groups (up to 9 years, ages 9 to 12, ages 12 to 15, and ages 15 and over) and by topics (e.g. EU laws and institutions, climate and environment, culture, EU history and countries), and is available in all EU official languages. The website also has a dedicated section for teachers who want to help pupils learn about the EU and how it works, and discover networking opportunities for schools, teachers and students.

#### Consultations, polls and research studies

Children and young people were **consulted on a number of policy developments and processes** at the international level. For instance, in 2015 their views were sought via e-consultation about the draft UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Declaration[222]. Similarly, children and young people were consulted on environmental issues, with their input contributing to the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action[223]. Furthermore, the views of nearly 2,700 children from 71 countries contributed to a review of global practice on child rights budgeting[224], and views of children's work collected from over 1,800 children from 36 countries were heard during the IV Global Conference on the Sustained Eradication of Child Labour in November 2017[225].

Consultations with children and young people have also contributed to **research studies**, e.g. a study by World Vision International exploring how children's participation in child-led research contributes to decision-making in humanitarian and international development programmes[226]. More recently, World Vision International held consultations with children and young people to understand their views on the COVID-19 outbreak, and in May 2020 the Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University Belfast launched the '#CovidUnder19 – Life Under Coronavirus' initiative to meaningfully involve children in responses to the COVID-19 pandemic[227]. At the European level, a poll organised by UNICEF and Eurochild in 2018 – 'Europe Kids Want' survey – collected responses from nearly 13,700 children and young people from over 23 countries in Europe on their experiences of family life, school and society, and their thoughts on Europe[228].

### 2.5.2 National, regional and local levels

At the national level across Europe, **ministries of education and ministries of social affairs (and equivalent ministries)** seem to be **the most active stakeholders among government departments** in driving forward children's participatory practices. Their work is focused on three types of activities: (1) creating specific structures dedicated to children's participation; (2) supporting specific mechanisms; and (3) providing funding.

However, as indicated in Section 2.2, children's panels or other structures/bodies that scrutinise work of ministries – or provide advice on policy developments and processes – were identified in less than half of the countries, and most of these structures were developed in the last few years.

In some countries, **special state agencies** responsible for child protection have a children's participatory structure, e.g. Tusla (The Child and Family Agency) in Ireland, Agency for Youth and Society in Sweden, the State Agency for Child Protection in Bulgaria and Amadora Children and Youth Protection Commission (CPCJ, Comissão de Proteção de Crianças e Jovens da Amadora) in Portugal[229].

Many mechanisms are also implemented by **institutions focusing on children's rights and welfare**, such as the National Commission for the Rights of the Child in Belgium[230], the General Assembly on the Rights of the Child in France[231], the Childhood and Adolescence Commission in France[232] and the Estonian Union for Child Welfare and Youth Work Centre in Estonia[233]. Local branches of UNICEF are also active stakeholders across MS countries, for instance coordinating multiple projects in Romania, and operating through Slovenia's Junior Ambassadors programme, in which young people volunteer in developing countries[234]. Other stakeholders include academic departments, teachers' unions, charitable foundations and research institutes.

At municipality level, UNICEF is an important stakeholder via **the child-friendly cities initiatives** (CFCI) taken up at municipalities/cities in nearly half of EU MS, including Austria, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden[235]. First launched in 1996, the initiative seeks to support municipal governments in improving the lives of children within their jurisdiction, in line with rights as set out in the UNCRC. UNICEF describe a child-friendly city as 'a city, town, or community in which the voices, needs, priorities and rights of children are an integral part of public policies, programmes and decisions'[236]. To facilitate this aim, the initiative's handbook provides a range of implementation strategies, one of which focuses on the need to ensure inclusive children's participation mechanisms and approaches; UNICEF reports that municipalities participating in the initiative typically establish children's municipal councils[237]. In Finland for instance, CFCI action plans reportedly built upon and were shaped by existing children's participation structures, such as the Hämeenlinna Youth Council. There, promising children's participation practices were reported through the 'Language Project' – an initiative seeking to translate municipal and governmental terminology through a child-friendly dictionary[238]. Some more established schemes, such as the CFCI initiative in France, highlight the need for renewed 'active engagement' of children in participation mechanisms: a UNICEF visit to the Colomiers youth municipal council, for instance, reported that the mechanisms there had become 'self-centred' and isolated from other parts of the city's democratic apparatus[239]. UNICEF CFCI status is granted for a defined period, with one aspect of the evaluation criteria specifying the need for 'meaningful and inclusive child and youth participation'[240].

The UNICEF child-friendly cities initiative has also been a driver for establishing good practice with regards to children's participation. For instance, in Spain CFCI has been the basis on which several diverse consultations and gatherings of children took place across municipalities, and was called in to consult on issues ranging from bullying and the environment to how children's participation should be reformed within the municipalities in which they were meeting. These consultations became part of long-term municipal strategies, for instance in the municipalities of Andalusia and in the Basque country[241]. In Austria, 43 localities are part of CFCI[242]. In Finland, as part of this initiative, a child-friendly dictionary was developed explaining key terms used at municipal level (e.g. 'action plan', 'strategy', 'budget'). The dictionary is available online, allowing other municipalities to use it when preparing children for participation[243]. Furthermore, UNICEF offices across EU MS run various programmes aiming to facilitate children's participation, e.g. the Junior Ambassadors Programme in Slovenia[244]. The Daily Life programme (*La Vida Cotidiana*, presented in Box 6) in Granada, Spain is an example of the UNICEF CFCI.

Member states such as Germany, France, Portugal and Austria have **substantially more governmental stakeholders involved in children's participation than civil society**

**organisations**. On the other hand, in the Netherlands and Hungary civil society organisations outnumber national authority actors. The mapping analysis showed that in the Netherlands, in particular, many non-governmental local stakeholders were actively involved in children's participation mechanisms and processes. Some of the initiatives implemented by these stakeholders include The Little Embassy (De Kleine Ambassade, presented in

Box 4, with more detail in Annex A), Advice-catchers, and the International Debate Education Association[245]. Furthermore, while the national government in Ireland has driven most of the action on children's participation in democratic and political life, NGOs and associations have also been influential stakeholders (e.g. Foróige)[246].

**Civil society organisations are also influential at the local level in some countries**, such as the Association of the Friends of Youth in Slovenia (founded in 1953 as an advocacy body for children's rights)[247], in Bulgaria (e.g. organisations such as Lumos and the National Network for Children)[248] and in Slovakia[249]. In Finland, a collaborative approach between NGOs, schools and municipalities has resulted in Ideas by Young People, a joint online platform facilitating democratic participation and advocacy[250].

Additionally, certain mechanisms may have had national impacts, such as policy influence, but were administered with geographic targeting, such as in Slovakia where eight localities were targeted for inclusion of rural youth, or a consultation with youth who live on the Northern Irish border following Brexit[251]. Other examples of local interventions effecting national change include Youth Work Ireland Youth Participation Policy (resulting in the promotion of youth participation as a strategic objective)[252].

**Box 4. Case study: The Little Embassy (De Kleine Ambassade)**

The Little Embassy (De Kleine Ambassade) is a foundation that aims to enable children to discover and experience how they can contribute as active citizens to their surroundings[253]. The foundation initiates projects, but also implements projects commissioned by its partners, including companies, schools and town councils in the Netherlands. It mostly operates in the area around Schiedam.
In general, most of the available documents evidencing project work have been produced by the foundation itself. Some of these sources suggest that there has been tangible impact from the Little Embassy projects. For instance, following the foundation's projects on garbage, waste sorting increased in Schiedam[254].
The work of the Little Embassy offers several lessons that could be transferable to other foundations with similar goals. The Little Embassy works closely with local and national partners to develop and implement their projects. In this way, the foundation's projects are well-embedded in the local contexts and answer the real needs of the local population. In addition, the foundation encourages children and youth to be active actors at the local level, e.g. expressing their views and suggestions via the work of youth councils. Other municipalities could use a similar approach to foster and embed children's participation in their local communities.

**In some countries, the primary organisation of children's participation mechanisms occurs differently according to regional or sub-national government**, such as in Spain where mechanisms were organised by each autonomous region (e.g. the Basque country, Andalusia, Catalonia) and in Belgium where participation mechanisms were organised within the Flemish and French-speaking communities (e.g. the Flemish Government aspire for youths to become 'co-owners' of the Flemish Youth Policy Plan, and the Wallonie organisations are run by children/youth themselves)[255]. For instance, the Grand Priority Debate took place in Brussels at the end of April 2019, and around 150 representatives of the various policy areas of the Flemish Government, experts, young people and actors from civil society and local authorities discussed the major cross-policy – or 'transversal' – challenges that children and young people recognised, and on which efforts must be made in the coming years. This was an important milestone in the preparation of the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan 2020–2024. This plan

gathers all the points of attention for children, young people and their rights that the Flemish ministers want to address with their policy in the coming years[256].

Germany too has a federal youth council that connects 29 youth organisations and 16 regional youth councils across the country[257]. The UK has a Children's Commissioner for each of the four regions, and regionally focused projects, such as Growing up North, are coordinated by the Children's Commissioner. The place-based approach taken by mechanisms such as this seems to have been particularly impactful in terms of understanding regional discrepancies in children's outcomes and identifying what local areas can do to address them. This is evidenced by the fact that the UK mechanism will be followed up with work towards children's wellbeing, aspirations and outcomes (reached post-16 years of age), and the interrelation between these factors[258].

**Box 5. Case study: Children and youth participation, Model Herrenberg**

**Children and youth participation, Model Herrenberg**

This mechanism represents a whole-city approach (rather than a range of individual mechanisms) to enable children's and youth participation in the city of Herrenberg in Germany. The mechanism targets 12–21-year-old children and young people[259]. Children and young people work closely with decision-makers on a regular basis, by taking part in the youth forum, participating through an online platform and being part of a youth delegation[260]. Participation can also be facilitated via other formats when inputs from a larger group of children is needed. The mechanism has not been formally evaluated, but the administering team seeks feedback from children on a regularly basis[261]. They also collect feedback from both adults and children following the annual youth forum[262].

## 2.6 Educational institutions and teachers

**Educational institutions** are also an important stakeholder across Europe, as schools run many regular and one-off **education and training projects on active citizenship and children's participation**. Schools also serve as an important **tool to recruit children to take part in participatory mechanisms**. For instance, the Office for Ombudsman in Croatia worked with schools to recruit high-school students to participate in a focus group to explore their perspectives on the age of sexual consent[263]. Bottom-up activism involving school stakeholders is present in Romania, which saw the creation of the Association of School Students[264], and in Hungary, with the school-initiated Movement for Alternative Student-centric Education[265]. Similarly, a grassroots movement in Portugal known as the 'Northern Teacher's Movement' strives to implement democratic education by encouraging children's participation in the school curriculum[266]. Other examples include Education on Active Citizenship and Participation, which is part of the national school curriculum in Slovenia[267], and civic education classes in Estonia[268], while in Belgium (Flanders), the KRAS project offers participatory training for students in the third stage of secondary education to facilitate debates in the Flemish Parliament[269].

Additionally, **schools are key stakeholders insofar as they can also provide access to vulnerable children**[270]. The French Children's Parliament, for example, has indicated the importance of building relationships with schools working with children who have complex needs, in order to include children with disabilities within the mechanism[271]. Another example is The Consultancy Group on Roma Youth Participation (CGRYP), which worked in primary and secondary schools to improve school performance and social inclusion among the Roma community[272]. At the local level (e.g. in Bulgaria, Finland and Ireland) schools are also an important stakeholder as the facilitator of student councils that can get involved in policy-making processes within the school and wider community[273].

At the EU level, schools and teachers contribute via a **panel of teachers** as part of the work of the European Commission's DG for Communication for the Learning Corner website[274]. This DG works with a panel of teachers composed of one primary and one secondary school teacher from each member state, who advise and act as a sounding board during the development process of learning materials about the EU for children[275].

## 2.7 Characteristics of child stakeholders

The collected evidence shows that children are undoubtedly the key stakeholders in children's participation processes, taking on a variety of roles and responsibilities across all mechanisms.

### 2.7.1 Children's knowledge about children's rights and the right to participate

According to the outcomes of the focus groups with children, **knowledge about children's rights varied greatly amongst the participants**. Some child participants thought they knew their rights but could not name any (e.g. in Spain), while other participating children (e.g. in Germany and Ireland) knew their rights and named several during the focus-group discussions. Some participating children from vulnerable backgrounds were very aware of their rights and how important these were in their lives (e.g. children in residential care in Malta), but some others (e.g. in Portugal) were unaware of their rights.

Overall, many **children participating in focus groups**, and in particular children from disadvantaged backgrounds, **lacked a strong understanding of what is meant by children's participation in political and democratic life**, and often found it difficult to relate to this kind of participation. Instead, they had a better understanding of how participation in decision-making works in schools or within their families. Having said this, most focus group participants who were already active in local or national children's councils or parliaments tended to have more knowledge of their right to participate and were also more aware about opportunities to participate.

Many children participating in focus groups said that they did not feel that they were consulted on decisions that directly affect them, and commented that decision-making is usually done by adults, or even that it was an 'adult thing' and 'not a natural impulse for children'[276]. There was a clear desire amongst many children participating in the focus-group discussions to contribute their views to public decision-making processes across the countries. **Most participating children wanted their views on many different topics to be taken seriously**. Education was a topic mentioned by several children across many focus groups, and some child participants mentioned topics that were closely linked to their own experiences, e.g. changes to the transgender act was suggested by LGBTQI young people. A recurring theme expressed by many children in the focus groups was that of **citizens voting in elections as a means of expressing their participation**. Lowering the voting age to 15 or 16 was mentioned by several participating children.

### 2.7.2 Children's sex and age

The collected evidence suggests **an equal participation of girls and boys** in the mechanisms that facilitate children's participation in political and democratic life. However, information on children's sex is not routinely gender-disaggregated, and is often not provided at all. Having said that, most of the interviewed stakeholders had a general perception that participatory structures, mechanisms and processes are open to and include equal representations of girls and boys. Similarly, the data collected in the mapping task suggest that access is open to all children. For instance, the analysis of the gender representation across the children's and youth council hierarchies indicate that girls and boys are represented in the Council Board and Secretariat functions. When information on mechanism participants was gender-disaggregated, it also suggested equal representation. For instance, boys and girls are equally represented in the Croatian Network of Young Advisors to the Ombudsman for Children in Croatia[277], the research study on the health and wellbeing of foreign children in Malta collected views of 457 students (52% female, 48% male)[278], the NHS England Youth Forum had 33 male and 35 female members[279] and 53% of the members of the British Youth Council were female in 2018–2019[280]. A slightly higher share of girls than boys was reported participating in some mechanisms in Ireland. For example, an Irish government consultation with young people on how they are taught and how they learn attracted response from 3,242 young people (55% female, 43% male)[281], and consultations with children and young people on their vision for Ireland

remembering the children who died in 1916 involved a total of 215 children and young people (96 males and 119 females)[282]. Girls also appear overrepresented in the local youth councils (Comhairle na nÓg) in Ireland. According to data collected in 2014, 5,032 children and young people attended Comhairle na nÓg AGMs, consisting of 57% female and 43% male participants[283].

The assessment of the collected evidence related to **children's ages** provides a more mixed picture. Overall, our analysis shows that there is no clear **age boundary between child and youth mechanisms**. Even if there is an agreement on what age range qualifies an individual as a child (e.g. up to 18 years old, as per the UNCRC), according to some interviewees[284], arbitrary age limits can be set in particular processes, mechanisms and projects that exclude children under (or above) certain age (see Section 4.2.3).

Indeed, data from child and youth councils from EU27 and the UK reflect this **lack of distinction between the categories of 'child' and 'youth'**. Several countries, for example, had youth councils that included children but also young people up to the age of 30 (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Netherlands, Slovakia and Spain), some even extending it up to the age of 35 (Cyprus, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland and Romania – see Section 2.2.2). The mixing of children and young adults appeared widespread across various other mechanisms, for example at national level the Austrian Youth Strategy worked with 14–24 year olds[285], and at the local level the Youth Participation Model Herrenberg in Germany involved 12–21 year olds[286]. The concern that children are somehow 'lost' in mechanisms dominated by young adults was a view shared by some interviewees[287].

In addition, various participatory processes and practices are typically geared towards children above the age of 12 years old, with a particular lack of mechanisms geared towards younger children. This **underrepresentation of younger children** was noted by several international and EU-level interviewees who observed it across many countries[288].

**Young children are still only a minority when they are consulted as part of polls and surveys**. For instance, only 3.2% of respondents taking part in the Eurochild/UNICEF Poll 'Europe Kids Want' were aged 9 or younger[289], and only 15% of children participating in World Vision International's consultations to understand their views on the COVID-19 outbreak were aged 8–13[290]. Similarly, a survey about growing up in Hungary by the Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation was completed by just 1% of children aged 9 and under (compared with 70% of responders from the group aged 15–17)[291].

However, **some** of the identified **mechanisms did appear to focus on including younger children**, for instance the children's councils in Malta (8–12 years old)[292] and Portugal (8–17 years old)[293], and the children's parliament in Slovenia (6–15 years old)[294]. Moreover, the Child Barometer survey conducted every two years in Finland focuses on the lives of 6-year-old children specifically[295], the Danish National Council for Children's Mini Child Panel includes approximately 1,000 children aged 4–7 years[296], and the My Voice Matters survey in Bulgaria included children as young as 7[297]. A case study on the programme 'Everyday life' (La Vida Cotidiana) implemented at the municipal level in Spain (see Box 6 below; a more detailed overview of this mechanism is presented in Annex F) outlines how children from the youngest age groups can be actively involved in children's participation processes and mechanisms.

Overall, however, **there is a clear need for adult stakeholders to do more** to engage children from younger age groups, as their voices may be lost among older children and young adults. It also raises issues about the adaptability of the mechanisms to different groups, e.g. the communication material to target children and provide feedback, and the required skills from facilitators/adults supporting children's participation mechanisms and processes.

**Box 6. Case study: 'Everyday life' – La Vida Cotidiana**

'Everyday life': The Framework for Child Participation, 0–6 Years (La Vida Cotidiana – El Marco Para La Participación De La Infancia, 0–6 Años) is a programme that enables the participation of children aged 0–6 in daily life decisions, such as nutrition, how their spaces are created and organised, and their interpretation of current events that affect them. This process helps children to understand what participation means and how it can be applied in everyday practice. The programme is administered in four early childhood centres (Escuelas Infantiles Municipales) in Granada in four municipalities run by Fundación Granada Educa[298]. The Granada Educa Foundation was established in 2008 by the Granada City Council to gain deeper understanding about the education of children aged 0–6 in the city of Granada and to provide quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Granada[299]. La Vida Cotidiana is an example of a good practice in the UNICEF Child-Friendly Cities Initiative[300]. Although evidence of this mechanism's effectiveness and impact is limited, the organisers monitor them via built-in evaluations that amount to a continuous feedback loop, as part of the early childhood centres' overall learning strategies.

### 2.7.3 Inclusion of vulnerable and disadvantaged children

The collected data suggest that a number of initiatives strive to reach out to **vulnerable or disadvantaged children**, including children from **diverse geographical locations, family situations, ethnical/migration backgrounds and with various forms of disability**.

In Belgium, the National Commission on the Rights of the Child devotes specific participation activities (e.g. ad hoc consultations, in the form of surveys) to vulnerable children, such as migrant children and children placed in youth protection institutions[301]. The Ombudsman's Office for Children in Sweden has held special consultations with migrant children and children in care[302]. Similarly, in Denmark the Danish National Council for Children has established expert groups consisting of children with particular experiences of vulnerability and disadvantage, e.g. children of incarcerated parents and from families in poverty, or children with mental illness. The aim of this expert panel is to ensure that the perspectives of marginalised and at-risk children and young people are represented[303].

The new procedure for the Council of Children established in Bulgaria in 2018 seeks to ensure a broad representation of children from across the country, of different ages (all under 18), and including those from vulnerable and marginalised communities, all participating on a voluntary basis[304]. The Council consists of one representative from all 28 administrative districts, 4 quotas (places) for children from vulnerable groups and 1 quota (place) for a representative of children who have received international protection in Bulgaria[305].

Wider mechanisms in Bulgaria also seem to be inclusive. For instance, as part of one adult-initiated mechanism, **children with intellectual disabilities** were part of focus groups and working groups that were able to design their own research on meaningful participation of children with intellectual disabilities[306]. Bulgaria's Megaphone programme also aims to specifically include children with disabilities who live in foster care or other alternative care provisions, and to strengthen the network for reaching vulnerable children[307]. More extensive consultations in Bulgaria also ensured that a diversity of children from different **regional, socio-economic and family settings** (single parent, children living in care)[308] was included. In Finland's 'Takeover of the Prime Minister's office', 100 children participated ranging from the ages of 6 to 17 and from different parts of the country, including children with disabilities and from ethnic minority backgrounds[309].

In Finland, a recent advocacy campaign appealed to decision-makers to improve the quality of care offered to **children and young people living in state residential care**. This activism included and was led by young people **living in care**, who became known as 'experts by experience'. Along with NGOs and social workers, this campaign by the young people resulted in a reform of the Child Welfare Act[310]. Finland's Experts by experience enables children who have experienced the foster care system to participate in a small

group that policy-makers can consult[311]. Box 7 presents a case study on this mechanism, and a more detailed overview is presented in Annex A.

**Box 7. Case study: 'Experts by Experience'**

'Experts by Experience'[312], sometimes referred to as 'Young Advisors', are terms used in Finland to describe children and young people who are consulted, primarily by the Ombudsperson for Children, on a specific policy or topic due to their personal experience of being in a particular situation, e.g. the care system, or being a migrant or asylum seeker. The children and young people are chosen to represent diverse groups, including those from minority backgrounds, and can also provide peer support to other children and young people going through similar experiences to them[313]. There is no formal evidence of the effectiveness or impact of this mechanism, but information obtained via expert interviews suggested that a consultation with children living in foster care led to the reform to the Children's Welfare Act, extending aftercare up to the age of 25 years old[314]. The contribution of the Experts by Experience initiative can also be considered in terms of the personal impact on participating children and adult stakeholders[315].

To better include a broader range of child stakeholders, and to avoid the same children participating in projects every year or representing children at conferences, some interviewees reported using a randomised system to select children from across the country[316]. For instance, the Danish National Council for Children's (NCC) Child and Youth Panel randomly selects children from across Denmark. The focus is on recruiting a cohort of children of the same age, who are representative of children of that age across the country, and who are part of the panel for 3 years[317].

Another inclusion strategy mentioned by interviewees focused on working with various NGOs who specialise in a certain child demographic, such as **Roma children or children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods**[318], such as the Consultancy Group on Roma Youth Participation (CGRYP) in Cyprus[319]. Similarly, in Slovakia the Office of the Government's Representative for Roma Communities conducted a series of consultations with Roma youth to map the needs and expectations of young people vis-à-vis national youth policy[320]. The Slovenian Association for the Friends of Youth makes efforts to involve children from low-income backgrounds and those with disabilities, but encounters challenges in reaching out to and including children from Roma backgrounds[321].

In Malta, a special platform for children from migrant families ensures that these children are included in various mechanisms[322]. In addition, the Maltese Rainbow Family Network brings together families from the LGBTIQ+ community in Malta, and an interfaith harmony week initiative also brought together children from different religious backgrounds living in Malta[323]. The Speaking Minds initiative in the Netherlands works specifically with children and young people who have experienced child abuse and domestic violence[324].

Overall, the evidence shows that inclusiveness is becoming an important goal and a fundamental parameter for the involvement of children, but the degree to which this is achieved across countries still varies.

### 2.7.4 Children's experiences with particular mechanisms

Many children participating in focus groups were **aware of and could name existing structures and mechanisms for children's participation**, especially at the local level, but found it harder to discuss the more 'distant' structures (national and EU).

#### National and local structures

Overall, most children mentioned **various ways of expressing their ideas to adults and decision-makers**. Examples given included holding meetings, plenary sessions and events where public representatives were present, video calls, emails, social media, political youth organisations, student associations and other youth associations. **School, youth and children's councils/parliaments** were mentioned in all focus groups. A

number of participants in most groups also mentioned one-off and ad-hoc activities – such as surveys, questionnaires, etc – as ways of sharing their views and ideas. One example given was the 'Kids Take Over' campaign in Slovenia. The 'Fridays for Future' movement was also brought up by several participating children in Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Spain as an example of how children can participate in political and democratic life[325].

Most children in the focus groups felt **most familiar with participation practices at schools**, and a majority of participating children also acknowledged the possibility to be involved in local decision-making. One reason suggested was that, as described by the Irish children, school leaders and local leaders demand less formal encounters thereby making participation for children more accessible. Yet, in two focus groups in Bulgaria some children reported that they believed that involvement in decision-making at school and in their villages was enough. This was partly because they found it difficult to engage with national government and to be involved in politics, and some children had a mistrust towards institutions and believed that they would succeed in having an impact locally, rather than at the EU and national levels.

Overall, **focus group participants were generally more aware of and positive about local structures for children to participate, than those at a national level**. In Portugal, child-friendly cities and children's assemblies at district level were highlighted, whilst in Bulgaria, most children were reported to feel mostly listened to at local level, but to have a mistrust towards the state at national level. In Malta, some children in residential care also seemed to be aware of local structures and mechanisms for participation. Some of the participants also mentioned decision-makers who influence children's participation, including guardians, social workers, health-care professionals, police and politicians, but also mentioned legal proceedings where children were not heard. However, most of the migrant children in Malta were unable to give any examples of mechanisms or structures at national level.

In Finland, some children participating in focus groups were also critical of municipal councils, which they considered to be 'old-fashioned', fighting over insignificant things or being too distant, while the national parliament was considered to be filled with 'smart' people (regarded as a desirable place where the best, 'smartest' people go). Furthermore, many child participants in Finland highlighted the significance of having four female ministers and a young woman as a prime minister.

Some children also observed that those **'higher up' in decision-making are harder to reach**. For instance, in Slovenia many children participating in focus groups noted opportunities to participate in certain decision-making processes, but overall felt they had no influence on decisions taken at the national level. In Spain, some participating children felt they had some influence through national participation bodies, but acknowledged that this influence is limited. Bulgaria stood out as a country where most participating children had a mistrust of the state, and felt more heard at local level.

Cyprus stood out as a country where children participating in the focus groups often reported structures to be better at the national level compared with the local level. Whilst some children in Cyprus acknowledged that certain municipalities and communities had good practices and mechanisms to enable children's participation, they also mentioned that such structures were not embedded in other places, or that there was no will to involve children.

Even within the existing structures, some **children participating in focus groups questioned whether their opinions are taken into account, and felt that structures need to be supported and strengthened**. Many child participants observed that the extent of participation was limited, as decision-makers had little obligation to collect and consider the views of children. For example, some children in Portugal reported to have little faith in politicians listening to children. In general, several children in a number of focus groups across countries (in particular in Cyprus and Spain) argued for the institutionalisation of participation by the state, and suggested some form of a **'legal**

**obligation' for 'those in charge' to consult with children on all matters that affect them**. As expressed by one child from Cyprus:

> *'If you are not in an organised group, your opinion is not heard immediately. No one is obliged to listen to you. Organised groups help to promote and make your opinion heard. There is a need for State mechanisms to facilitate child participation. Currently it is not easy. We must pursue it… first we must have an interest, then study and then formulate a substantiated point of view. Therefore, we need top-down structures to also exist, not just bottom-up.'*[326]

In addition, there was a sense amongst many children participating in focus groups that even if their views were given, they would rarely be taken seriously or considered. The outcomes from many focus groups suggest that mechanisms exist for proposing ideas, but the fate of these ideas is unknown and **monitoring and evaluation processes in the mechanisms are either absent or failing to demonstrate their impact for children**. For example, although some participating Spanish children were familiar with mechanisms to facilitate the translation of proposals to politicians allowing them to be heard, they noted a **lack of follow-up** to proposals, requests and ideas, which left them feeling ignored. As voiced by one child from Spain:

> '*We have no way to control the people responsible for decision-making. There are structures for participation, but reaching the institutions depends solely on the will of the people responsible.'*[327]

It is also noteworthy that German and Spanish children pointed out that in most cases relationships between children and decision-makers are **mediated by civil society organisations** and other entities that accompany the children and facilitate their participation in these processes. They are considered to be important allies and intermediaries between young people and public administrations.

### European level

Most consulted children had **little knowledge of the EU and were unable to specify how it promotes and protects children's rights or listens to children's views**. Most children saw the EU as a large, distant and remote structure with little connection to their daily reality, and generally did not consider the EU to be actively involving them in decision-making. However, a small number of children did have experiences of being listened to by the EU, and the Bulgarian children from the National Children's Council mentioned the 2019 Bucharest EU Children's Declaration[328].

Among the few children who were familiar with the EU, some had positive views. For instance, some participating German children who were active in local children's and youth councils were the only ones that could give detailed information on EU structures. They also noted that the EU conducts consultations and organizes youth talks and youth conferences. Some of them also mentioned that EU parliamentarians talk to children and young people, and that children's views are heard through studies of the European Commission or through NGOs that are funded by EU funds. One participating child in the Netherlands also mentioned having spoken with a candidate for the EU Parliament.

In other focus group consultations, some participating children aware of the EU were more critical. For instance, some Irish children considered the EU to only be concerned with Brexit and COVID-19, whilst one child participant in Malta noted that there is no Commissioner for children[329], but there is one for fish, which made them wonder whether fish are more important than children in the EU. Many migrant children consulted in Malta felt that the EU has not been giving sufficient support to unaccompanied children, and has been putting children in detention. Yet, some children acknowledged the role of the EU in helping them reach safety at the end of migrant sea crossings.

Though they were not necessarily aware of existing opportunities to participate in political and democratic life at EU level, several participating children (in Bulgaria, Cyprus and Malta) viewed the EU as having significant potential in terms of providing opportunities for

children to be involved in decision-making. Some children in the Netherlands, Germany and Cyprus meanwhile considered the consultations themselves to be proof that the EU is increasingly listening to children and actively seeking out their opinions.

During discussions, several children across different countries mentioned UNICEF and other UN structures, and civil society organisations such as Eurochild as examples of international organisations that can and do support children's rights and children's participation in Europe. Also mentioned by some children in several countries was the Fridays for Future movement, through which they reported that they did feel heard.

# 3 Characteristics of children's participation mechanisms

## Key findings

- Children's participation has many purposes. It can be used as a means to achieve a specific outcome, or as an end in itself (as an exercise of children's democratic right to participate as citizens).
- Few mechanisms were initiated (and designed) by children, who are more likely to play an active role in their implementation or help mechanisms evolve.
- Formal, robust and systematic evaluation is lacking in most mechanisms at all levels. However, there is some evidence that feedback from children is collected in some mechanisms (e.g. via feedback forms, questionnaires or informal feedback chats).
- Children report feeling disappointed, lack confidence in authorities and – in the absence of feedback and follow up – perceive that children's views do not matter.
- Mechanisms cover a wide range of topics. They may include any topic relevant to children and can be broad or subject-specific (e.g. education, environment, health and city planning). They might also be about participation itself. Several mechanisms identified in this study focused on topics particularly relevant to vulnerable children.
- A number of structures facilitating children's participation in political and democratic life have been operating at the national level for a long time. However, most of the current permanent structures were established during the last 25 years (since 1995).
- There are three main categories of mechanisms in terms of the timeframe of participation: (semi)-permanent, project-based (time-limited) or one-off.
- Children and young people commonly participate via structures that have been created to represent the collective views of children.
- In terms of the mode of participation, participatory mechanisms are typically high on information and consultation. Some adult-led mechanisms involve a lot of co-creation with children, and communications are usually child-friendly.
- Children's views are commonly understood only as 'recommendations'. Only a few mechanisms ensure that children's proposals are binding. Evidence on the impact of mechanisms is quite limited.
- The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of online technologies and platforms for participation, but raised questions of equitable accesses.

This chapter presents details of the characteristics of mechanisms that facilitate children's participation in political and democratic life. It focuses on the purpose, stages, topics, timing and format of participation, and the effect that these characteristics have on the effectiveness and impact of children's participation.

## 3.1 Purpose of children's participation in the political and democratic life

Our analysis indicates that children's participation in political and democratic life across the EU is taken as both **a means (to achieve specific outcomes) as well as an end in itself (as an exercise of children's democratic right to participate as citizens)**.

In some member states, **children's participation has been used to achieve social outcomes**, such as ensuring greater visibility of marginalised groups, greater inclusion of their voices in decision-making, and creating attitudinal change in wider society. For instance, the National Children's Policy in Malta was drafted in consultation with children to ensure that the policy captured the realities and experiences of children and their various needs, wants and aspirations[330].

However, children's participation has also been **an end in itself**, in that **participatory mechanisms, processes and structures are set up, audited and improved upon**, in

order to ensure that children's participation within countries, organisations and internationally remains optimised for children and makes meaningful use of their inclusion. In this sense, our analysis revealed mechanisms from across the EU where children embody the participatory structure (e.g. children's councils) and are involved in revising and improving it themselves, e.g. the improvements made to the operation of the Comhairle na nÓg (network of local youth councils in Ireland)[331].

Children's participation may also be **a combination of a means and an end**: children participate in a mechanism and express their views about a specific topic but their feedback is also sought about the participatory mechanism itself, so that improvements are continuously made to better cater for children's needs. For example, the World Vision International consultations with children and young people to understand their views on the COVID-19 outbreak also involved gathering feedback about participants' experiences of using online platforms for child activism, and to support others with information and emotional support. It was intended that this feedback would also inform the format of future engagements with children[332].

Some interviewed stakeholders were **careful to make (or emphasised the importance of making) children's participation meaningful**, although the interviewees **views on the extent of meaningfulness** (i.e. having the right audience and being acted upon) **varied across mechanisms at various levels**[333]. Even if most interviewees agreed that **tokenistic children's participation appeared to be low across the EU**, several interviewees (in particular international and EU-level interviewees) were still able to provide examples of processes and mechanisms in which children's participation was tokenistic, and children were patronised[334]. Some Irish children participating in the focus groups also described participation (referring to a wide range of mechanisms) as **often being a box-ticking exercise, where children are only invited to events as contributors**. The idea that children's participation can feel tokenistic was a feeling shared by several children in other consultations. One child in Malta commented in agreement with this, that '*a child who is aware that he has a right to speak believes it is useless to use his voice unless the adults around him listen to what he says*.'

## 3.2 Stages of children's participation in the political and democratic lifecycle

Following are definitions of the three stages of children's participation in the political and democratic lifecycle: design and planning, implementation, and evaluation.

### 3.2.1 Design and planning

#### Design and planning of structures and mechanisms

Our review outlined that **very few children's participation mechanisms at the Member State level have been initiated (and designed) by children themselves**. However, typically, even if structures – such as national or local children's and youth councils, parliaments or advisory groups – were initiated by adults, they **often then evolved over time, partly as a result of children's participation**. That is, the nature of participation and the decisions on which topics to address eventually come from the children themselves, and children are also involved in changing aspects of the mechanism itself. For example, the design and establishment of the National Helpline for Children in Bulgaria, Czechia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia drew upon the experience of a British charity, 'ChildLine'. However, when the helplines were put in operation across the Central and Eastern European countries, children expressed their views and opinions to adapt and shape the operation of the child helpline services to the national context in their countries[335].

**For child-initiated mechanisms, the design of the mechanism as well as its activities involve children**, as exemplified by the Hungarian student movement, Movement for Alternative Student-centric Education (*Alternativ Diákközpontú Oktatásért Mogalom – ADOM Diákmozgalom*), a self-organised student network aiming to promote democracy and students' rights[336]. In Cyprus, children were involved in the design of the

National Youth Strategy during the first National Youth Conference in 2015[337]. In addition, the structure, goals and working procedures of the Young People's parliament in Luxembourg were designed by children[338]. In Malta, children were involved in drafting alternative care legislation[339] and two focus groups of year 6 and year 10 students carried out a pilot questionnaire to investigate the wellbeing of migrant children in the country[340].

The collected evidence provides several examples of how children were involved in the design stages of shaping international and European-level participatory mechanisms. For instance, during the Bulgarian Presidency of the Structured Dialogue on Youth, children and young people designed and ran national consultations to inform the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 (see Box 11)[341]. Romanian children were involved in drafting a paper supporting the Bucharest Declarations, which entails children's reviews on mechanisms that could be used to strengthen children's participation in EU institutions[342]. Similarly, Eurochild's 2018 conference on children's participation in public decision-making was co-organised with an advisory group of children and young people during the planning phase and the event itself[343].

Several initiatives in Ireland were found to involve children at the design phase of setting up participatory structures. Youth Work Ireland held consensus-building workshops with children and young people aged 16 to 22 in four counties in Ireland to inform how youth services should cater to the needs of young people[344]. Children's participation in design was also facilitated and supported by adults, such as the consultation on children and young people's experiences of mental-health services in Ireland[345]. The Irish Government's consultation with children and young people on their vision of how Ireland could remember children who died in 1916 was initially piloted with children, so the final form of the surveys involved the design feedback of the pilot group[346]. Moreover, children and young people involved in the Irish Comhairle na nÓg National Executive were in control of the design and implementation of a questionnaire about the school classroom[347].

Children have also been involved, to some degree, in the design and planning of research studies on children's participation. For instance, World Vision International's consultation with children about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic involved a collaborative approach between adults and young researchers aged 12–18, who co-created the research design and implementation[348].

### Design and planning policies

Children's participation mechanisms also serve as a **means for children to be involved in policy planning**, particularly at national level. As expressed by one interviewee, consultations with children almost always take place at the start of the mechanism, and rarely are children consulted as part of evaluations of mechanisms[349].

For instance, in France the Children's Parliament (Parlement des Enfants) drafts legislative proposals that can become law if picked up by national representatives, and four such proposals from the Children's Parliament have become law over the years (see Box 2)[350]. Children are involved in the development of school policy in Romania through the schools' administration councils (Consiliile de aministrație ale școlilor)[351] while children in the National Children's Forum (Forumul Național al Copiilor) are involved in suggesting policy ideas[352]. The UK Youth Parliament was set up by adults, but each year the Parliament's Manifesto is written by children and then actions are designed, implemented and evaluated by the children themselves[353]. In Croatia, Kecejme do toho! (Have your Say) was designed by adults, but children shape the focus of the project and its content[354].

In Ireland, children from the local youth councils (Comhairle na nÓg) are involved in various processes at the policy design stage. For instance, they were involved in reviewing Youth Survey questions used in developing the County Mayo Children and Young People's Plan; since the children were part of the local youth council (which has its own admission criteria), they were also representative of different age profiles, gender and other demographics[355]. Also at local level, the Youth Participatory Budget in Portugal enables children to decide what a municipal council does with a certain amount of funds allocated for this budget (see Box 12)[356].

### 3.2.2 Implementation

#### Implementation of structures and mechanisms

The collected evidence suggests that **children appear to be involved at various points of implementation of participation mechanisms**.

At international level, 20 children involved in a Day of General Discussions with the Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child decided their own roadmap for the kind of activities they wanted to focus on throughout the year[357]. At the EU level, children are involved in developing communication tools for use during the implementation of mechanisms (e.g. producing learning materials that are posted on EC websites), and have contributed to the design and dissemination plan of information leaflets[358].

At national level across most countries children and young people themselves implement activities of the Children's/Youth Parliaments and Children's/Youth Councils (see Section 2.2 and 2.3)[359]. As parliament/council delegates, children set up agendas, goals and activities; participate in working groups, committees and plenary sessions; and participate in elections and voting by standing for posts, collecting and counting ballots, voting and scrutinising the process. For instance, children participating in the Bulgarian Council of Children are extensively involved in implementation: they vote on the council rules, outline the goals tasks, activities, structure and principles of operation, create their own agenda and chair their own meetings[360]. Similarly, in the EU Youth Parliament of Lithuania, children are actively involved in organising activities through the year as part of the programme[361]. In the Portuguese Young Mayor (Jovem Autarca) programme[362], children carry out the following activities themselves: they are nominated to be mayors, stand for elections, are involved in ballot collection and counting, vote for their mayors, and then carry out mayoral duties once elected[363].

Children may also implement activities that are organised by institutions responsible for supporting the rights of the child or children's participation, such as the Young Ambassadors in Wales, who organize events around the objectives of the Welsh Children's Commissioner[364], or children similarly involved in activities of the Children's Commissioner of Scotland[365].

Data from a small number of countries suggests that **the involvement of children in the implementation of the mechanisms also includes the administration of research**, e.g. surveys carried out in Bulgaria on deinstitutionalisation processes from institutional care to small-group homes for children with intellectual disabilities[366]. A consultation on Brexit for children on both sides of the Northern Ireland border involved 20 young people who contributed throughout to the implementation process, deciding how discussions would occur, publishing op-ed pieces through the programme, and communicating the findings to the European Parliament[367]. In Malta, the 'Let me Thrive' research study on foster care in Malta had an interview that was open and child-led in format[368].

Children are also involved in **creating child-friendly communications of the activities of various mechanisms**, such as the children's version of the Flemish 'integrated youth and children's rights policy' website, or the children's version of the Council of Europe's new policy guidelines aimed at safeguarding the rights and interests of children with imprisoned parents (Recommendation CM/REC (2018)5 on Children of imprisoned parents)[369].

### 3.2.3 Monitoring and evaluation

**Few mechanisms and policies** were identified through mapping **that involved children in monitoring and evaluation**. One notable exception includes the Youth Board of Cyprus, which ran consultations with children and young people to evaluate their first Action Plan of the National Youth Strategy (2017–2019), the results of which informed the development of their second Action Plan (2020–2022)[370]. However, as explained by some interviewees, **most mechanisms included various feedback forms, questionnaires,**

**or informal feedback chats between organisers and participants**[371]. For example, in Malta, adult organisers used focus groups in order to gain feedback from children about their participation[372]. Often, as explained by one international stakeholder, this feedback is not publicly available but is instead used for internal purposes for improving or informing changes to mechanisms[373]. Feedback (through an online survey) was also sought from the 5,230 participants in the 'How do you see it?' (Te hogy látod?) consultation in Hungary[374].

**The most common form of child-initiated evaluation** occurred when the **participatory structures themselves were run by children**, such as in some children's or youth councils or forums, and **when children and young people reviewed activities in a form of regular reports through a time period** (e.g. annual report). This has been the case for the European Youth Forum Activities (and thereby any sub-activities they are involved in, such as the European Youth Dialogues, formerly Structured Dialogues)[375], the British Youth Council and its many subsidiary activities, such as the UK Youth Parliament (for children aged 11–18), and the Belgian Confederation of Youth Organisations (Confédération des Organisations de Jeunesse)[376]. In Ireland, a children's advisory group consisting of migrant children will be involved in evaluating a methodology for an upcoming research project related to children's participation in political and democratic life[377].

In addition, **children have been involved in assessing policy or available facilities for children**, e.g. as part of the Dutch Paja! (Participation Audits in Shelter, Care and Welfare) mechanism, children themselves conducted an audit and inspection of facilities in shelter, care and welfare, and interviewed each other[378]. In Bulgaria, child consultations were run to evaluate the deinstitutionalisation process from institutional care to small-group homes in 2015[379]. Children also evaluated projects through surveys administered by a body that facilitates children's participation, e.g. children evaluate the programmes of the Belgian National Commission for the Rights of the Child via a survey instrument administered by this body[380].

## 3.3 Topics of children's participation mechanisms in political and democratic life

**Children participate** in political and democratic life across the EU and within member states **on as varied topics as adults**. The analysis of the data shows that most mechanisms at the Member State level may include **any topic relevant to children**. This ranges from conventional topics of immediate impact to children, such as education, environment and health, to broader topics such as transport. Topic-specific mechanisms undertaken at the international, EU and national levels are discussed in the following paragraphs.

In some countries, the remit of national or local children's/youth councils, children's parliaments, and child panels/advisory structures include facilitating children's participation in any topic relevant to children, as is the case for the Youth Monitor in the Netherlands[381], Youth Council of Latvia[382] and the Yearbook of Youth Monitoring in Estonia[383].

There are also **several mechanisms** in Member States **that focus on topics particularly relevant for disadvantaged and vulnerable children, and which involved a subset of children to address these vulnerabilities**, such as children in alternative care, Roma children, LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning) and intersex) families and children, migrants and children with physical and intellectual disabilities[384]. Spain has explored the topic of refugee children through its national version of the UNICEF Child-Friendly Cities Initiative (Ciudad de las Amigas)[385], Ireland has created a specific children's advisory group consisting of migrant children[386], while Roma children's participation is an important topic in mechanisms in Croatia[387], Cyprus[388] and Bulgaria[389]. Children are also involved in the topic of alternative care, including foster care and visitation rights of parents, although this is often facilitated through national Ombudspersons, as seen in Austria[390] and in the Netherlands[391]. The Youth Monitor in the Netherlands also considers the issue of youth probation[392].

The **environment and climate change have seen growing interest** in MS, such as the focus on climate change in Austria[393] and Spain[394], and the environment more generally in Italy[395] and Portugal[396]. **Gender equality and sex education** (including age of consent) were also widespread topics of children's participation in MS: gender equality was a theme found in participation mechanisms in France, Spain and Austria[397]; and activities regarding the age of consent and sex education were found in mechanisms in Croatia, Ireland, Belgium, Hungary, Portugal and Spain[398].

The **issues of bullying, violence and child abuse are often pushed by adult stakeholders** – such as the office of the Ombudsman for Children in Poland[399] or the international non-governmental organisation Save the Children in Romania[400] – but more localised approaches are also seen. For instance in Spain, the municipalities of Castilla and León organised a forum to discuss bullying in addition to drug dependency, discrimination and other topics[401].

**At the international level, children are involved in similarly diverse, broad-ranging, but also subject-specific mechanisms**. Children are involved as part of diplomatic initiatives, such as the Africa–Europe Summit, the EU Forum on the rights of the child and EU Youth Dialogues, and have expressed their views in the international development sphere (both as children from donor countries and recipient countries)[402]. National consultations, such as those in Romania, may also consider the effect of the EU at the member state level[403].

**At both member state and international levels, children also express their views about children's participation itself**: how it should function at local governance level, in national instruments such as youth councils, or in consultations, as witnessed in Austria[404], Bulgaria[405], Romania[406] and Poland[407], as well as at the broader EU level[408]. At the national and local levels, for the most part, children are involved in mechanisms that relate to issues of direct impact to children, such as education and child-related town planning (e.g. parks, playgrounds, traffic and crossings around schools)[409]. In Munich, Germany, for example, children expressed their views during the design of a new district[410], and the UNICEF Child-Friendly Cities Initiative more generally aims to involve children in locality-specific planning, e.g. children were involved in city planning in Poland[411]. Children also often participate in education-related decisions: in Italy, student representatives (Consulte provinciali degli studenti) act as a representative body to facilitate collaboration between students and government bodies involved in education[412], and a similar mechanism takes place in Netherlands through the National Action Committee (Landelijk Aktie Komitee Scholiere)[413].

Children are thus participating on topics that affect them immediately (their care situations, schools) and in a broader, systemic sense (national health plans, legislation about incarceration or migration), as well as about the workings of children's participation itself.

## 3.4 Timing of children's participation mechanisms in political and democratic life

The mechanisms can be categorised by when they were established and how often children can express their views.

### 3.4.1 Time of establishment

The methodology of this study prioritised a mapping of mechanisms that are currently running and have been instituted since 2012 (see Annex D). However, significant mechanisms that were established prior to 2012 have been included if they currently play a significant role in facilitating children's participation.

The mapping data indicate that some structures that facilitate children's participation were established a long time ago, such as the Danish Youth Council (established in 1940)[414], the British Youth Council (established in 1948)[415], the National Council for Swedish Youth Organisations (established in 1949)[416] and the German Federal Youth Council (established in 1949)[417]. A small number of structures were also established in the 1970s and 1980s,

including the Confederation of Youth Organisations in Belgium (established in 1975)[418], the Council of Youth of Spain (established in 1983)[419] and the National Youth Council in Portugal (established in 1985)[420]. At the EU level, the European Youth Parliament (established in 1987) has also been operating for over three decades[421].

The adoption of the UNCRC in 1989 and the political changes in Central and Eastern Europe that also started in 1989 trigged the establishment of permanent structures that facilitate children's participation. However, it has to be noted that most of these structures are geared towards older children and youth. This includes:

- Councils: Youth Council of Slovakia (established in 1990)[422], National Association of Children's and Youth Councils in France (1991)[423], National Youth Council of Latvia (1992)[424], National Youth Council in Malta (1992)[425], Lithuanian Youth Council (established in 1992)[426] and the Youth Board of Cyprus (established in 1994)[427].
- Child/youth student parliaments: Child Parliament in Slovenia (established in 1990)[428], Children and Youth Parliament in Poland (established in 1994)[429], Children's Parliament in France (established in 1994)[430], Greek Youth Parliament (established in 1995)[431], Youth Parliament in Cyprus (1995)[432] and Youth Parliament in Portugal (established in 1995)[433].

Other permanent structures facilitating children's participation have been established during the last 25 years (since 1995).

However, even if some mechanisms were established for a long time, many of them have evolved over the years. For instance, the Danish Youth Council established in 1940 set up a Democracy Commission in 2019[434].

### 3.4.2 Timeframe of operation

Mechanisms can be grouped into three main categories: (semi-)permanent, project-based (time-limited), and one-off.

#### (Semi-)permanent

**This mostly includes** structures that facilitate children's participation, such as children's and youth councils[435], children's and youth parliaments[436] and Offices of Children's Commissioners[437] (see Section 2.2. to 2.4). There may also be youth panels or children's panels, such as that in Denmark where the National Council for Children has a children's panel consisting of 2,000 children aged around 13 years old who volunteer their opinions on subjects taken up by the Council[438].

The **EU Youth Dialogue** (formerly Structured Dialogues), is a central participation tool for young people aged 13–30 that takes place through continuous activity for a period of 18 months[439] (see also Box 11).

(Semi-)permanent participation opportunities also include **well-established events and regular conferences**, such as the European Forum on the Rights of the Child[440], Eurochild's bi-annual conference on children's participation in political and democratic life[441], and the annual conference organised by the European Network for Ombudspersons for Children[442]. The Youth People's Festival run in Denmark from 2016 has also become a permanent annual event promoting youth and children's participation in democracy by allowing youth groups – and others working for and with children and youth – to come together and create new platforms for youth engagement[443].

Some regular events may be **thematically arranged** as well, such as the annual conference of the Safer Internet Forum, which brings together children, young people and adult stakeholders to consider the impact of technology on individuals and society[444], or the Africa–Europe Summit, which brings young people together to discuss issues facing youth in the two continents[445].

Mechanisms may also **take place regularly at larger intervals**: the Flemish government in Belgium holds the Great Priorities Debate (Grote prioriteitendebat) every five years, bringing together diverse stakeholders including young people and decision-makers to decide the main goals for the new Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Plan[446]. The European Youth Week takes place every two years and is organised by the Erasmus+ National Agencies, most recently taking place from 29 April to 5 May 2019[447].

### Project-based (time-limited)

Mechanisms in this category include the **development of youth strategies and policies**[448], **specific projects**, e.g. 'Youth Participation academy'[449] and **research studies**[450]. On many occasions, these mechanisms rely on permanent structures, e.g. children's/youth councils.

Children's participation mechanisms have been a part of the development of national youth strategies, such as the 2014 working group in Czechia that involved young people in decision-making processes relevant to the government's Youth Support Strategy[451]. As part of the Austrian Youth Strategy, the 'Your Projects' (Eure Projekte) programme offered youth aged 14–24 €500 to implement a project of their choice, submitted as part of a competition[452], and the 'Youth Monitor' (Jugendmonitor) is a tool to capture opinions of Austrian youth aged 14–24 about work, education and family[453].

The 'Turning Words into Action' project in Bulgaria was held through 2010–2013 and consisted of several activities to better the lives of children and young people with intellectual disabilities and their families (see Box 13)[454]. Similarly, the Bulgarian 'STEPS together against violence and bullying at school' project lasted for three years, and facilitated children to express their views about activities aimed at preventing and responding to bullying and violence at school[455].

### One-off initiatives

This **mostly includes consultations that were held on a particular topic of interest**, which may be organised by stakeholders who otherwise have a regular interest in children's participation in political and democratic life. For example, Eurochild organised the 'Speak Up!' consultations between November 2011 and March 2012. Other examples include the 'Europe Kids Want' survey[456], the consultation with children on Brexit[457], and specific ad-hoc initiatives and consultations at the European and Member State levels, e.g. in Estonia, France and Slovenia[458]. Croatian civil society organisation Our Children organised a session for children with the Croatian Parliament to promote children's participation in decision-making[459].

In Slovenia, a call for 'Letters to the Members of the Parliament' was addressed to the pupils in the 7th–9th grade of elementary school in 2013 (elementary school starts at the age of six and lasts 9 years; it includes primary and lower secondary education). The aim was to encourage children to reflect about society, the developments they were facing, values, and ways to actively participate in a democratic society and impact society and policy-makers. As many as 433 letters were received by Members of Parliament (MPs)[460].

**One-off international and national consultations were held in response to the COVID-19 pandemic**, such as that carried out during March and April 2020 by World Vision International among 101 children and young people from 13 countries, using online platforms for children and young people to share their reflections about the outbreak[461], and the '#CovidUnder19 – Life Under Coronavirus' children's consultation undertaken by Queen's University Belfast to meaningfully involve children in responses to the COVID-19 pandemic[462].

One-off consultations also occurred at the local level, such as that organised by the General Assembly of Ardèche for children aged 13–17 to present policy proposals to public authorities[463].

## 3.5 Format of children's participation in political and democratic life

The collected data suggest **a variety of formats** of children's participation in political and democratic life.

### Structural/group participation vs. individual child participation

At the **international level, young people most commonly participate via structures** that have been created to **represent the views of children**, such as councils, parliaments, forums and panels, e.g. the Africa–Europe Youth Summit, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence against Children and the European Youth Parliament[464]. European children and young people have also participated in **diverse consultations capturing the voices of individual children**, e.g. the 'Europe Kids Want' survey[465], the online consultation for the EU strategy on the rights of the child[466] and focus groups with children as part of the Child guarantee study[467].

Similarly, the collected data suggest that **national and local-level mechanisms tend to facilitate children's participation via collective action and representation** through children/youth boards, councils or parliaments. The formats of this type of engagement vary, from inviting individual children to speak on behalf of a group of children at events or meetings[468], inviting children to ask questions at councils and parliaments[469] and involving children in focus groups[470]. One interesting example specified that children participated by evaluating a candidate for the role of child and youth coordinator within that mechanism[471]. Another interviewee described giving the children themselves the freedom to decide how they wanted to discuss their ideas, with the adult stakeholders only serving to bring them together in one location[472]. When participation takes place at **an individual child/young person level**, this typically involves participation in the surveys/studies[473], and opportunities to develop and implement ideas at the local level, e.g. cafes with politicians in Estonia and Latvia[474].

### Modes of participation

The analytical framework to analyse modes of children's participation outlines five modes of participation[475]. These **modes are related to the issue of power and the degree to which power is handed to or removed from adults and given to children** (e.g. who has the power to define objectives or to direct the activity). These modes include:

1. Initiation: is the mechanism initiated by children or by other stakeholders?
2. Information: is the child gathering or being given information?
3. Consultation: are children expressing their views, opinions or interests on a matter?
4. Engagement: are the child's views taken into account? Is the child able to act in association with other participants?
5. Decision: does the child have the final say on an action (alone or with an adult)?

Analysis of collected data suggests that typically, there is some level of all five modes of participation, albeit to a varying degree. Participatory mechanisms are **typically high on information and consultation, but low on initiation, decision and engagement**.

The evidence collected in the mapping tasks and during interviews shows that **the most common mode of participation** implemented in nearly all member states **has been consultations**, where children's voices are sought, included and (to varying degrees) acted upon to inform policies, laws and initiatives that focus on specific issues[476]. As part of the consultative process, children also often **gather information**, e.g. consult their peers, and collect and analyse information to form their opinion and views. These consultative processes could entail consultations with groups of children identified for a specific topic or referrals to organised bodies such as children's councils or child advisors, who are regularly called upon to advise on such issues. This mode of participation was used often by Ombudspersons in Bulgaria[477], Finland[478], Ireland[479] and Sweden, when

children were asked their views on certain topics such as Brexit, foster care and school life. For instance, the Irish government held consultations with children and young people on healthy lifestyles, and the Swedish Ombudsperson held meetings with migrant children and young people[480]. Another example comes from the Netherlands, where 450 children were consulted in the development of the Raaz foundation in Zaandam[481]. In Bulgaria, the 'Childhood for All' project conducted consultations with children on the deinstitutionalisation process, whereby five children and youth with intellectual disabilities carried out their own research and set up a focus group to find out what life in the new small-group homes felt like from a peer-to-peer perspective[482]. Similarly, six Child Rights Ambassadors participated in the design of a survey asking children about their experiences of growing up in Hungary. The children were also responsible for planning an awareness-raising campaign about the survey[483].

### Style of participation

While children's participation structures (both off- and online; offline spaces are discussed below; for discussion about online participatory spaces, see Section 4.1.3 and 4.2.6) are **often adult-led and tend to repeat the ways in which adults act** (e.g. children's parliaments utilise voting and meeting methods, such as committees, groups, plenary sessions)[484], **some** of the adult-led mechanisms **involve a lot of co-creation with children, and communications are usually child-friendly** (and at times developed by children). Examples of child-friendly communication were identified as part of international/EU mechanisms, for example in the Council of Europe[485], Ombudsperson Offices[486] and World Vision International[487]. Furthermore, training and learning materials are prepared for and with children to prepare children for their participation. For instance, at the EU level such materials are continuously being prepared as part of the Learning Corner website (see also Section 2.5, 2.6, and 4.1.5)[488].

**Examples of child-led structures** include young people setting the agenda for the local youth councils in Ireland (see Box 9), and children/youth being involved in the design of the Local Youth Participatory Budget in Portugal (see Box 12)[489]. In different countries children have also been active in putting up proposals for debates, for instance the Great Priorities Debate with policy-makers in Belgium, national letter writings to politicians in Slovenia, and the 'Ideas by Young' people online platform in Finland[490]. The 'Peaceful School, Peaceful Neighbourhood' initiative in Utrecht in the Netherlands also encouraged children to come up with their own ideas to debate, such as children's rights[491].

There is also **some evidence of creative, accessible ways in which children are encouraged to participate**, i.e. the Ombudsman for Children's Office in Ireland consulted children on their experiences of mental health services, and the participants were asked to decide how they wanted to express their views. The methods chosen by young people were painting, collage, photography, mind maps and semi-structured interviews[492]. Similarly, children with intellectual disabilities involved in 'Turning Words into Action' wrote and published a book about their experiences of institutionalisation (see Box 13)[493]. Such mechanisms reflect the importance of allowing children to decide on the means through which they express their views, rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all solution that may be unsuitable for their age group or intellectual ability. There are also **recent examples of bottom-up activism or instances where children and young people have organised themselves**. For example, the Movement for Alternative Student-centric Education in Hungary was formed in 2014 and recruits students online, organising workshops, protests and meetings around educational reform[494]. Created in 2013 in particular cities/localities in Romania, the Association of the Schools Students creates petitions to effect change in areas such as bursaries and transportation[495]. Young people have also began **mobilising** themselves **on the internet**, with the most notable example being the 'Fridays for Future' movement initiated by Greta Thunberg[496]. All of these examples indicate that most forms of self-organised activism are facilitated by students using school networks[497].

## 3.6 Impact of children's participation in political and democratic life

Our analyses explored the extent to which children's participation mechanisms in political and democratic life have been judged to be effective, and whether they made a positive difference to children, communities, society, countries and the EU, and policy- and decision-making at these levels. In line with the analytical framework, we have analysed two types of impact:

- children's degree of influence on policy- and decision-making (external impact); and
- children's degree of influence on children's participation levels and children themselves (internal impact).

One of the main findings is that, compared to the multitude of mechanisms that have been identified through this research study, there is **little evidence whether the mechanisms are effective and whether they have impact**. Where evidence did exist, it was often limited to interviewees' perceptions and views on the impacts of children's participation mechanisms, rather than robust impact evaluation studies. This means that, even though there are many mechanisms that may be impactful in many ways, documentation of such impact is largely lacking.

As this study coincided with the COVID-19 outbreak, we have also collected **emerging evidence on the impact of the pandemic on children's participation levels and identified lessons that can** enable children's participation more effectively in such situations in the future. For consistency, this evidence is presented in Chapter 4, where we discuss the opportunities and challenges created by the pandemic.

### 3.6.1 Children's degree of influence on policies and decision-making

**The evidence on children's degree of influence on policies is patchy across the international, national and local levels**.

#### International and EU levels

The analyses suggest that at the international level, it was common for a series of recommendations to be produced as a result of the children's participation mechanisms, but there was little evidence on whether/how those recommendations had an impact on policy- or decision-making. For instance, children and young people provided input to the UN's Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action[498], were consulted during the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's project 'Protecting and Empowering Children as Human Rights Defenders'[499], drafted the supporting document to the Bucharest EU Children's Declaration[500], and produced a set of recommendations during a consultation to understand their views on the COVID-19 outbreak[501]. However, there was little indication as to whether these processes and contributions shaped views, policies or decision-making in any way. This may also have been due to the time needed between action and effect to assess whether a particular mechanism had an external impact. Another example, while concurring with the limited impact children have on international policy-making, does point to the **influence that international action can have on national-level decision-making**. According to one EU-level interviewee, ENYA's project on social media contributed to a section on self-harm online being added to a government action plan on suicide in Norway – a direct result of the ENYA recommendations[502]. Overall, however, evidence of external impact / influence at the international level is limited.

#### National level

At the **national level**, the evidence on the degree of children's influence resulting from children's participation mechanisms is patchy – while there is some evidence in some countries, there is less or no evidence in others. Overall, **the majority of EU countries demonstrated limited evidence of external impact of children's participation**, and only a few mechanisms ensured that children's proposals were binding. This indicates that

**although children's voices are being heard, their views have minimal impact**. Similarly to the international/European levels, at national level **children's views are commonly understood only as 'recommendations'**.

In some instances, **the legal changes were proposed as a result of children's consultation**. For instance, as a result of consultations with children the Ombudsmen for Children in Sweden made four proposals for new laws to strengthen the rights of migrant children[503], and several proposals for legislative change to protect children from violence and harassment in schools[504]. Similarly, the proposals initiated by the children's parliament in France resulted in new laws being introduced (see Box 2)[505]. In Finland, the aforementioned Child Welfare Act was reformed following a consultation with children and young people living in care, who expressed a wish for aftercare to be extended up to the age of 25, which became a legal reality shortly afterwards[506]. Another example of children influencing legal change comes from the Netherlands. As reported by a national authority interviewee, a consultation led by the Ombudsperson for Children resulted in a change in the law affecting children with mentally ill parents, such that if a parent is treated for a psychiatric disease the child also has to be informed[507]. Children were also involved in drafting the Minor Protection Act in Malta (see Box 8 and Annex A).

Additional **promising cases of impact and influence were found in a small number of countries**. This included some structural and regular mechanisms, e.g. Cyprus's National Youth Strategy, the Danish Parliamentary Ombudsman[508] and the work of the Children's Commissioner in the UK[509].

**Box 8. Case study: Involvement of children in drafting of the Minor Protection Act in Malta**

This mechanism takes the form of a study commissioned by the Office for the Commissioner for Children. The research adopted a 'child-centred' qualitative methodology to understand the perceived experiences of fostered children in Malta. Children who were either in care or had previously experienced care proceedings in Malta were interviewed in order to understand their experiences of the Maltese system. In light of the study, the Commissioner for Children put forward a chapter of recommendations, the majority of which were reportedly addressed directly in the Minor Protection (Alternative Care) Act, therefore informing Maltese law[510]. Adopting such an open interview methodology may be important when seeking the participation of younger children and identified vulnerable populations – those who are often the missing but necessary voices in such consultations.

### Local level

Our analyses suggest that children's participation has **limited external impact at the local level**. This is despite the fact, as indicated by many children during focus groups, that participation in public decision-making at the local level was more relatable to them, and that many of them were more aware of existing local structures and mechanisms of participation.

The evidence collected during the mapping task and interviews suggests that across several countries, children were consulted about local issues that were relevant to the life of children, such as city planning, culture, sports, leisure and recreation. For instance, children were consulted about the construction of specific facilities in the municipality, e.g. a city pool and playgrounds at the municipal level in Germany[511] and a library building in a city in Finland[512]. However, these consultations are rarely binding for the local authority and other stakeholders. Similarly, the decisions and recommendations made by the majority of the children's and youth municipal/community structures – such as the children's and youth councils and parliaments – are not binding either. For instance, in Bulgaria municipal council committees give students the opportunity to present proposals for the improvement of their cities[513]. However, as highlighted earlier, these proposals rarely become anything more than just advice or recommendations. They do however allow children and young people to set the agenda on the matters that affect them.

The results from focus groups with children suggest that **schools** are a key point of reference for children. As the place where children spend a lot of their time, schools play a key role in how children relate to adults and how included they feel in decision-making. Also, as suggested by some children participating in focus groups, decision-making in **families** also evidently impacts on children's understanding of participation in other spheres (especially younger children).

However, overall most children taking part in the focus group across MS reported that they generally **do not feel listened to by local politicians and decision-makers**. Most of them stated that they do not know or have confidence in politicians, and some even suggested that since they do not have a right to vote, children are not of interest to politicians. This perhaps helps understand why lowering the voting age was discussed in a number of the focus groups.

The evidence collected in the mapping task indicates that Ireland is a notable example of a MS with some impact at the local level.

For instance, Youth Work Ireland, a youth organisation in Ireland comprised of 21 Local Member Youth Services, integrates participatory practices and structures into its work[514]. Another example is the presence and operation of the local youth councils – Comhairle na nÓg – in every county in Ireland[515]. The Irish youth councils are child-led in the sense that topics and areas for future action are decided at the Annual General Meeting of each Comhairli. Some evidence seems to indicate that these structures have impact on policies and decision-making at the local level in Ireland[516]. Furthermore, participants of consultations to inform local and national policies often make use of Comhairle na nÓg to recruit children and young people. This local mechanism seems to be a foundation that facilitates and ensures that other mechanisms at the local and national level in Ireland can work/have an impact, where possible. However, one interviewee representing a national authority highlighted that there are still some issues with this structure, e.g. ensuring equal representation of all children in the councils (see Box 9 and Annex A)[517].

**Box 9. Case study: Local youth councils (Comhairle na nÓg) in Ireland**

Local youth councils – Comhairle na nÓg in Irish – were established in 2001 as part of the Irish National Children's Strategy 2000. They have been described as 'a consultative and participative space' for children and young people aged 12–18 to provide input into the decision-making and development of local services and polices in Ireland[518]. Whilst initially established by the National Children's Office through local-level initiatives under the City and County Development Boards, the councils are now overseen and part-funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs[519].
The longevity of this participation mechanism is underlined by a consistent and clear vision, supported by robust scientific evidence, such as the Lundy model. Key learning from this period has been identified, including: (i) the need for an appropriate budget to facilitate the running of the youth council and consultation activities; and (ii) establishment of bodies or departments whose function is to enhance children's participation to bring about culture change[520].

*Ideal town or country*

To better understand what children consider to be enablers of children's participation at a local level, children in five of the 10 countries (Bulgaria, Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands and Portugal) were asked to describe their **ideal town or country** in terms of relations between adults and children. All of the participating children **emphasised mutual respect** between children and adults along with **equality**. The importance of **creating spaces for being listened to** was also raised by many children (see also Section 4.1), which was picked up literally by some Maltese children who suggested creating safe spaces for children and families, including playing fields and recreational hubs for children where everyone can equally play and interact, including those experiencing poverty, and minority groups. In these spaces regular discussions could be held with children on how to improve their localities.

Children were also asked about **ideal mechanisms for them to participate in decision-making** at the municipal and national levels. Some mentioned that the municipality could send regular questionnaires, organise panel debates or Zoom meetings; invitations from politicians and decision-makers; online solutions to participate; and via school representatives. Other suggestions made by children included: setting up regular meetings with the mayor and experts in the municipality; organising trainings for professional and personal advancement; setting up a children's council next to the adult council; setting up a youth House of Representatives; developing a website on which children can share their opinions; and setting up a voting system for children in cities. Creating child-friendly cities and lowering the voting age were mentioned as well.

**Some Spanish child participants came up with a proposal for their ideal mechanism for facilitating participation in decision-making**. As suggested by some children, this mechanism should be based on the following principles:

- spaces and processes adapted to children's schedules (current times and realities) to enable children to develop personally and socially;
- the use of accessible and inclusive language;
- balanced horizontal relationships enabling children to express themselves on equal footing with adult decision-makers, so children feel that they are respected and recognised as capable stakeholders;
- less 'red tape' by reducing the number and complexity of administrative procedures and processes; and
- Children's Advisory Council working in partnership with councillors and policy-makers.

Some Bulgarian participating children also considered the international aspect and suggested exchanges with counterparts in other cities in the world.

### 3.6.2 Children's degree of influence on children's participation levels and children themselves

Generally, evidence of the impact of children's participation mechanisms on the participating children themselves was not as comprehensive as reporting of the external impacts (which itself was patchy in certain regions). However, a number of different impacts were highlighted nonetheless.

First, **a number of mechanisms emanating from various international, national and local contexts involved training and support for participation** (see also Section 4.1.5). For instance, children's parliaments have established activities to provide children with the knowledge and skills needed for the active inclusion of children in decision-making processes at the national level. In France, each year the Children's Parliament (Parlement des Enfants)[521] structures these activities along a different thematic focus (for example, gender equality in 2019–2020). Such opportunities allow children to upskill in ways that may influence future levels of participation, while also providing opportunities to develop new skills that might be useful for their learning and development more generally. 'Paja!'[522] projects taking place locally in the Netherlands can serve as another example of activities involving training. This is a peer-to-peer participatory project in which participating children have an opportunity to practise research skills, conversation techniques, surveying and processing data, and where residents/clients of the institute interview one another about their experiences/ideas for improvements, with this feedback processed into an implementation plan.

Second, a few examples emerged of participatory processes that incorporate **the views of young children** (e.g. up to 6 years old) to inform the policy- and decision-making process. For instance, in Germany efforts were made to reach out to very young children

to include them in the decision-making processes (see Box 5 and Annex A)[523]. A structural approach to include very young children has also been adopted at the national level in Denmark, with the set-up in 2010 of the Danish National Council for Children's mini child panel (see Box 1). The panel includes approximately 1,000 children aged 4–7 years, from about 120 kindergartens around the country. The Mini Child Panel provides unique insights into opinions, perspectives and experiences of pre-school children. The mechanism is grounded in a computer programme, where questions are read aloud to children, who listen and click on images that illustrate possible responses. The questionnaire takes about 10–15 minutes for the children to complete a maximum of 20 questions, and the quantitative questionnaire results are complemented by follow-up qualitative interviews with 10–15 children[524]. Some evidence suggests that it is plausible that children who participate in policy-/decision-making processes earlier in life may be more likely to do so in late childhood/adolescence, although more research on this topic is needed to verify this claim[525]. For example, at the municipal level in Spain, the Daily Life (La Vida Cotidiana)[526] programme aims to gather the views of young children to implement evidence-based improvement strategies to adjust to the needs of the children (see Box 6).

Third, **participatory practices seemingly have a transformative effect on levels of confidence, empowerment and self-efficacy among those who take part in such processes**[527]. This was something that many interviewees elaborated on[528]. Some interviewees suggested that participatory processes/structures provided children with a sense of belonging or identity with a collective group, which in itself was **important in allowing children to value themselves as agents of change in the present** (rather than feeling that they had to wait to fulfil their potential to have any impact as an adult)[529]. One interviewee from an international organisation working on children's rights observed that participatory processes allow children to challenge normative power relations and tackle key social, political, environmental and cultural issues, e.g. climate change, gender inequality and gender-based violence[530].

However, in order for any transformative effect on children to take place, it is important that children are listened to. For example, during a focus group in Germany, some children explained that when others did not listen to them, they felt stupid or as if they were talking to a wall. **Many children taking part in focus groups** (in particular in Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain) **commented that when they were listened to, it made a positive impact on their level of self-confidence**. This was most commonly mentioned in connection with the local structures. Some participating children in Ireland expressed views that they felt hopeful, happy, motivated, respected and compelled to speak more when they felt that their opinions mattered to adults. One child taking part in a focus group in the Netherlands described that they were becoming 'a bit more assertive' and they 'do not take "no" for an answer'[531]. Another Dutch child added: 'being heard motivates you to keep fighting for what you believe is important' and that 'when you are fighting for the climate, or children's rights, especially if it really matters to you, you don't stop'[532]. This was echoed by some children participating in a focus group in Slovenia saying that they do not give up. In a focus group in Spain, some participating children explained that they were familiar with mechanisms to facilitate the translation of proposals to politicians that allowed children to be heard. However, they believed that there was a lack of follow-up to proposals, requests and ideas, leaving them feeling ignored. As expressed by one child:

> *'We do not have control mechanisms over the people responsible for taking decisions. There are participation structures, but whether they reach the institutions depends solely on the will of the responsible persons.'*[533]

Overall, one of the main findings is that **participatory practices, processes and structures seem important in the learning, development and self-efficacy of children and young people that participate**. It is relevant to note that many of these practices and structures have emanated from the local level, which indicates the importance of the local level in empowering children and maximising their learning and development from participatory processes.

# 4 Facilitators and barriers to children's participation

## Key findings

Facilitators:

- Article 12 of the UNCRC is a common driver of children's participation mechanisms. Activities undertaken by Council of Europe, UNICEF and the EU also play a major role.
- Many of the offices of the Ombudspersons for Children / Children's Commissioners were created as a response to the UNCRC. Some of these offices help drive children's participation within countries.
- EU and national-level policies, legislation, strategies and action plans are important instruments driving children's participation.
- Other important facilitators include web platforms facilitating generation of ideas and exchange of views on priorities for action, commitment to children's participation from high-ranking decision-making individuals, and children themselves.
- Provision of education and training for adults and children can support meaningful participatory processes, as can availability of – and access to – participatory spaces.

Barriers:

- Linguistic capacities of children (and adults) and a lack of child-friendly versions of documents act as barriers in broadening access.
- Regulations can limit the influence of some mechanisms, and safeguarding measures can at times deter or even prevent children from participating (depending on how they are used).
- Societal views and attitudes about children, their competencies and ability to participate can be patronising and discourage children from participating.
- Lack of information about opportunities to participate and feedback after participation can also act as barriers.
- There are still challenges to include vulnerable and disadvantaged children, as their recruitment usually requires additional resources, but some efforts have been made to overcome these challenges.
- Covid-19 caused several challenges, but stakeholders worked to address them.

This chapter outlines some of the key facilitators and barriers to effective children's participation in political and democratic life. The chapter also provides an overview of the barriers faced by vulnerable children, as well a suggestion on how inclusion of these children can be better facilitated. Lastly, the chapter outlines how stakeholders managed to address some of the challenges to children's participation posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 4.1 Facilitators of children's participation mechanisms in political and democratic life

The main facilitators or drivers of children's participation mechanisms could be grouped as follows: international and EU policies, legislations and programmes; national laws, governance and bodies; use of digital tools; support from high-ranking decision-makers dedicated to the cause of children's participation; training and preparation activities; and children and young people themselves. These are outlined below.

### 4.1.1 International and EU policies, legislation and programmes

#### International policies, legislations and programmes

Our analysis shows that the **UNCRC and its implementation activities (such as state party reports** submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on how a country is fulfilling its obligation under the UNCRC)[534] was frequently referenced **as a ubiquitous driver across a large majority of the reviewed processes and mechanisms**. Article 12 of the UNCRC was often the basis of definition for children's participation in political and democratic life at both national and international levels, and its implementation often drove the development of national laws and governance bodies dedicated to supporting children's rights and children's participation (e.g. Youth Strategy in Germany)[535]. Similarly, in Hungary, the results of a study 'How do you see it?' (Te hogy látod?) informed the country reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and led to an awareness-raising campaign and several engagements with government representatives and bodies at the national level[536].

Box 10 provides a case study outlining the consultation process on the implementation of the UNCRC in Germany.

**Box 10. Case study: Consultation on the UNCRC in Germany**

This mechanism was a consultation process on the implementation of the UNCRC in Germany. The objective of this process was to give children the opportunity to share their impressions of progress made on the UNCRC implementation. All children living in Germany were eligible to take part through a variety of methods, such as a nationwide survey and report writing, organised over the course of one year by a project core team comprised of both children and adults. The process was initiated by the Network for the Implementation of the UNCRC: National Coalition Germany[537]. The final report, which was co-produced by children, was shared with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. There was no formal independent evaluation of this mechanism as there was no dedicated budget for evaluation activities[538]. However, one interviewee noted that the project was evaluated by the organisers and the children themselves[539]. This mechanism can serve to inform other countries on how to run a nationwide participatory project related to the state party reporting to the UN's Committee. The mechanism includes many valuable lessons, for example that is possible to enable children to play an active part throughout the whole participation cycle, including report writing.

**Many of the Ombudspersons for Children Offices / Children's Commissioners were created as a response to the UNCRC**[540], and some of these offices then evolved into major drivers of children's participation within particular countries. For instance, in Ireland, after the ratification of the UNCRC a report on the status of children's rights showed poor performance under their obligation under the UNCRC, especially in children's participation[541]. This spurred the country to develop and incorporate children's participation processes and mechanisms, and the country now has widespread horizontal and vertical structures for children to participate in Irish political and democratic life, e.g. Tusla – the Child and Family Agency[542], the National Youth Parliament[543] and national (Comhairle na nÓg National Executive ) and local (Comhairlí na nÓg) youth councils.

**UNICEF** has also been a major driver of children's participation in political and democratic life, for example via **the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative** (CFCI) (see Section 2.5.2). Furthermore, the initiatives undertaken by **the Council of Europe**, such as the Child Participation Assessment Tool (CPAT), offers a method to support states in facilitating the implementation of children's right to participate (see Section 2.5.1)[544].

#### EU policies, legislations and programmes

At the EU level, our analysis indicates several driving forces initiating children's participation mechanisms across countries, *inter alia* the 2011 EU Agenda for the rights of

the child, which re-enforced the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights[545] and highlighted that the standards and principles of the UNCRC must continue to guide EU policies and actions that have an impact on the rights of the child. In addition, the Treaty of Functioning of the European Union (Article 165 Education, Vocational Training, Youth and Sport) encourages the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe[546]. Other initiatives that either inspired new or supported existing children's participation mechanisms include the EU Youth Dialogue, EU Youth Strategy, Erasmus+, Better Internet for Kids, and the Lisbon Strategy 2000[547]. These initiatives often have broader subject issues but are frequently the stimulus of children's participation on a specific topic. Box 11 presents a case study on the consultation process to inform the EU Youth Strategy.

The 'Bucharest EU Children's Declaration on Child Participation in decision-making at national and EU levels' adopted at a conference held by the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union encourages MS to adopt mechanisms to encourage children's participation[548]. This was further supported by a European Parliament Resolution, calling onto the European Commission and MS to implemented the Bucharest Declaration[549]. As explained in Section 2.5.1, children were consulted on the forthcoming EU Strategy on the rights of the child.

**Box 11. Case study: 'Youth in Europe – what next?' Consultation to inform the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027**

The 'Youth in Europe: What's Next' consultation was the 6th cycle (2017–2018) of the Structured Dialogue on Youth, an 18-month process for youth aged 13 to 30 established by the European Commission to facilitate a space where young people can interact with policy-makers from the local to the European level. The mechanism occurs in three phases: planning for how consultations will run, implementing consultations at national level, and finally, preparing and submitting recommendations.
The 'Youth in Europe: What's Next?' consultation was overseen through the Estonian, Bulgarian and Austrian presidencies of the EU. These presidencies were responsible for implementing the dialogue at the EU level, but the consultation processes were managed and implemented at the national level across all MS. This consultation was used to inform the Youth Strategy 2019–2027.
The European Youth Goals were included in full as an annex to the European Council's Resolution on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: The European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027 (2018/C 456/01)[550]. These goals are now an annex to the European Youth Strategy, which can serve as a guide for all future activities related to youth up to 2027[551]. Future EU presidencies are encouraged to make use of these goals to focus on during their presidency. For example, the 2020 Croatian presidency worked towards 'Goal 6: moving rural youth forward'[552]. At the time of drafting this report, the presidency of the Council of the EU consists of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia. Their programme for their first 18 months included a commitment to 'promoting youth participation'[553].

### 4.1.2 National laws, policies and dedicated government bodies

The national **policies, strategies and/or plans** on children and/or youth are in place or being developed in around two-thirds of MS[554]. Many of these programmatic documents focus broadly on the rights of the child, including the right to participation. Detailed information about key documents that guide children's participation activities in particular countries is provided in Annex C.

In addition, national-level enquiries on specific topics related to EU legislation or regulations have also stimulated participation processes. For instance, enquiries into the health and wellbeing of migrant children in Malta were carried out as a response to Article 14 of the Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council providing that children and asylum seekers share access to the education system of the MS[555].

#### Regulations related to the establishment and operation of children's and youth councils

The **establishment and operation of children's and youth councils is often regulated by specific legislation, regulations or policies**. These might cover aspects related to the aims and responsibilities of councils, format and frequency of meetings, funding structure, connections with other child/youth and adult participatory mechanisms at all levels, and many more. Overall, the collected evidence indicates that such acts play a role (to a varying degree) in eight member states, namely Estonia, Finland, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Hungary, Malta and Romania.

For instance, the 2010 Youth Work Act provided a legal framework for organisation of the youth councils in Estonia (e.g. children and young people aged 13 to 26 years old can participate in the local youth council structures), and the 2007 Law on the Youth Councils defined this structure in Greece (children and young people between the age of 15 to 28 years old are eligible to register to their Local Youth Councils)[556]. In Finland, the 2015 Local Government Act stipulated that every municipality in Finland must have a youth council or equivalent participatory organ for young people[557]. Wider regulations, such as the 1997 Law 285 'Provisions for the promotion of rights and opportunities for children and adolescents' in Italy and the 2015 Participation Act, the Youth Act and the Social Support Act in the Netherlands, also define operation of children's participation mechanisms[558]. In Hungary, local and national child and youth councils are incorporated in the National Youth Strategy (2009–2024) and Malta established the Commissioner for Children Act to set up the Council for Children, which aims to assist and advise the Commissioner in the work carried out by their Office[559]. In Ireland, child and youth councils were established by the City and County Development Boards in 2001 as part of the National Children's Strategy (2000), to give children and young people a voice in the development of local services and policies – the councils are recognised as the official structures for the participation of children and young people in the development of policies and services[560].

Our analysis also shows that **stakeholders at the national and local levels are legally required in four countries** (out of all 27 MS) –Belgium, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Spain (Catalonia) – and in the UK (Scotland)[561] stakeholders are required **to consult representatives of the youth structures**. For instance, in Slovenia the Youth Council Act created an umbrella council to represent interests of and to advocate for young people and youth organisations at the national level[562]. In Luxembourg, Article 14 of the Youth Law of 4 July 2008 (Loi de la jeunesse du 4 juillet 2008) established the National Assembly of Young People[563]. In Belgium, the 2001 decree on youth work policy helped put children's participation at the forefront of democratic life, leading to the establishment of the Flemish Youth Council[564]. Likewise, Law 14/2010 on the rights and opportunities for childhood and adolescence in Catalonia facilitated the growth of child and youth councils in this region. The legal status of these instruments increases their impact, as discussed in Section 3.6.

Even if the national laws state that children need to be consulted, the collected evidence suggests that national laws introduced requirements to **consult children** in the decision-making process in only a small number of Member States (Cyprus, the Netherlands and Portugal). For instance, in the Netherlands the Jeugdwet (or 'Youth Law') of 2014 dictates that youth should be consulted during the development of youth care policies (the term youth is applied to children and young people up to 24 years of age in the Netherlands)[565]. Similarly, in Portugal the law on protection for young people at risk includes children's participation as mandatory, and in Cyprus, the National Roma Integration Strategy necessitates the participation of young Roma citizens in consultations about challenges facing them and their communities[566].

### Regulations related to the operation of children's and youth parliaments

The parliaments in Cyprus, Czechia, Hungary, Luxembourg and Portugal are also regulated by national laws and regulations. Provisions in the laws and regulations may stipulate the procedure for running the parliament and frequency of convening it, such as in Hungary where Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education, EMMI Decree 20/2012 ensures that the National Student Parliament should be summoned every three years, and that it is constituted of 220 student-parliament delegates[567]. The details of regulations may also ensure the inclusivity of children participating in the mechanism, such as is seen in the inclusion of minorities in the Cyprus Children's Parliament[568]. The Cyprus Children's

Parliament (Κυπριακή Παιδοβουλή) is regulated by The Regulation of the Cyprus Children's Parliament, which was decided upon unanimously by the Cyprus Children's Parliament in 2004 and turned into a statute consisting of 16 articles[569]. The article ensures that out of the 80 voting members of the parliament, there is a quota for the different Cypriot minorities and a regional distribution of Child Parliamentarians that mirrors the representation in the National Parliament[570]. Inclusion in legislation can also ensure that an audience with policy-makers is part of the participation process, as is the case in Portugal, where it ensures that the recommendations concluded in the Youth Parliament are communicated to the Assembly of the Republic (although it does not ensure the recommendations are binding)[571].

#### Laws and regulations on youth participatory budgets

Wider regulations include guidelines and laws on the youth participatory budgets at a local level in municipal councils in Portugal and Slovenia (see Box 12 and Annex A)[572]. The Municipal Youth Participatory Budget (Orçamento Participativo Jovem Municipal) in Portugal is a local-level initiative created with the intention of the government to enable progressive participation of children in national life[573]. It is regulated by the Resolution of the Council of Ministers, which details the technical principles, methodology and operational rules[574]. In Slovenia, Participatory Budgeting (Participativni proračun) is only implemented in a few municipalities and is regulated by local-level regulations. It enables young people aged 15 and over to decide how to spend part of the municipal budget in their local communities, e.g. building a playground or purchasing new books[575]. Once the projects are selected, it is binding for their communities[576].

**Box 12. Case study: Youth Participatory Budget in Portugal**

Established in 2017, the Youth Participatory Budget (Orçamento Participativo Jovem or 'OPJ') is a process of democratic participation in which children and young people aged 14–30 can propose and decide upon public investment projects, which the authorities then have the responsibility to implement. This mechanism is open to all children and young people legally residing in Portugal, and they can take part either by submitting a proposal for funding or voting on existing proposals. It is overseen by the Ministry of Education and the Portuguese Institute for Youth and Sport, and is funded by the Ministry of Finances (following approval from the state budget). The mechanism claims to be the first national participation budget in the world to specifically target children and young people[577]. The available sources suggest that this is a long-term process with strong evidence of changes to policies, procedures and practices, and which facilitates participation more effectively[578]. This mechanism is an example of children's involvement in the design of policy by allowing children and young people to propose policy ideas, rather than just vote on policy ideas that are preselected by adults[579]. As such, it can serve as an example of a mechanism that is 'child-led'.

### 4.1.3 Use of digital tools

**Web platforms facilitate generation of ideas and exchange of views on priorities for action.** Examples of web platforms include the Finnish 'Ideas by Young People' website, the Estonian 'Pick Up!' Facebook page, a German online platform that provides tools on how to facilitate successful children's participation ('jugend.beteiligen.jetzt' – 'youth participation now'), and the platform 'Have Your Say!' ('Kecejme do toho!') operating in Czechia[580].

'Ideas by Young People' in Finland is a website funded by the Ministry of education and culture. It acts as a nationwide platform to connect young people to municipalities, educational institutions, organisations and other decision-makers with the aim of enabling young people to voice their opinions and ideas, and exerting influence on public and social affairs[581]. The Estonian 'Pick Up!' Facebook page aims to support the implementation of community ideas from young people. Children and youth aged 7 to 26 years old can propose and vote for projects that promote active lifestyles for young people, an event, training, or purchase of equipment. During the second funding period, projects could

receive a grant up to €1,800[582]. The German web platform 'jugend.beteiligen.jetzt' provides tools for those working with digital youth participation, such as municipalities, youth organisations or political decision-makers. The platform provides digital tools and methods for participation as well as links to networks, and examples of good digital youth participation practices[583]. Also in Germany, an online platform in the region of Baden-Württemberg enables young people to express their wishes for city design and to comment on existing proposals; past ideas have included a trampoline in a city park and a water dispenser at a skate park[584]. In Czechia, the platform 'Have Your Say!' ('Kecejme do toho!') has been used since 2010–2011 as an overarching platform to enable the exchange of ideas amongst children and young people (e.g. for national structured dialogue as part of the EU Structured Dialogue with Youth)[585]. It facilitated children in selecting topics for discussion during events and for capture in web surveys, to participate in the surveys, discussions, and workshops, to have live discussions with experts and policy practitioners, and to disseminate this information to decision-makers[586].

Noted during the study's validation workshop that took place with policy-makers, academics and practitioners to confirm findings was that attending stakeholders mentioned that **a key enabling factor of ensuring that digital use facilitates children's participation is that children have the right skills to engage virtually**[587]. At the same time, **this is also the case for adult facilitators, as different skills are needed for facilitating participation via digital means than face-to-face**[588].

The case study research also revealed some **important considerations regarding the additional use of digital media to facilitate participation**. In the example of the Children's Parliament in France, one interviewee suggested that the mechanism could be improved by engaging digital technologies to encourage different ways of submitting proposals[589]. The 'Youth in Europe – what next' consultation on the EU Youth Strategy also embraced digital technologies by using web-streaming, introducing start-up solutions for communications, and hosting a presentation from an 11-year-old who created a YouTube channel to teach maths to other children[590]. In the case of the Children and youth participation, Model Herrenberg mechanism, an external agency was used to moderate the online platform, which is part of the city-wide participation model[591]. At €6,000 per year, this external moderation does represent a cost. However, this helps contribute to ensuring that the space is used in a safe manner. The Herrenberg participation model further uses YouTube videos – which are produced by young people – to explain what child and youth participation means, how it works, and what opportunities for child and youth participation exist in Herrenberg[592]. These examples illustrate how digital tools can be used to help facilitate children's participation, at least for those children who have access to technology and have the skills to participate via these channels.

The use of digital tools and their advantages and disadvantages (see Section 4.2) received increased attention during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. During this time, many children were confined to their homes for long periods of time, leading to multiple challenges[593]. But the interview data also revealed many **creative ways in which COVID-related barriers had been overcome**. Many interviewees noted that they had moved participatory meetings, processes, studies and other practices online to maintain them[594]. For example, in the international context, group meetings involving children that were typically taking place in person were adapted and moved online within a week of the lockdown being imposed[595]. One interviewee from an international organisation noted that activity on their website had increased noticeably since the lockdown[596]. Some children in focus groups, e.g. in Ireland, also noted that there were more regular (online) meetings, which made it easier for children to participate in them and progress with activities.

An additional problem was that during lockdown, the children of prisoners were cut off from seeing their parents. As reported by an international-level interviewee, in Croatia, UNICEF responded to this curtailing of child rights by funding hardware for children at home to speak to their parent, who logged on from the prison, while in Italy a video link was set up at the child's home, with a built-in safeguarding mechanism of a professional in a third location who was sitting in on the meeting[597].

Another international interviewee mentioned online peer-to-peer support and a community radio as means to reach isolated children during the pandemic[598]. Several interviewees (representing international, EU and national stakeholders) mentioned ongoing surveys and studies to collect data from children about their experiences during COVID-19[599]. One of these surveys was published in Braille to include children with sight disabilities[600]. A national authority stakeholder mentioned hosting a webinar to discuss COVID issues in which four children took part[601]. Portugal's special Young Mayor mechanism connected with children via zoom to share experiences of the pandemic[602]. Furthermore, in Malta a webinar was held in which children were able to speak about the consequences of the lockdown on their lives, which included a lack of social interaction with friends, and the challenging home environments that they were immersed in[603]. This illustrates how rapidly some organisations responded to the changing circumstances to continue to enable participation during the COVID-19 crisis.

In addition, an EU stakeholder discussed how one of their participation groups created and delivered an arts pack during lockdown, which the children used to complete online activities together[604]. This interviewee also mentioned 'The Students Safeguarding Group', whereby students started a campaign to enable children (particularly those experiencing domestic abuse) to reach out if they needed help. The children came up with a codeword/phrase to let youth workers know that they need support[605]. Special COVID-19 press conferences for children also took place in Estonia, Finland and in the Netherlands[606].

The main sentiment echoed by many interviewees was that digital technologies could be mobilised far more effectively to enable children's participation during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. Many interviewees highlighted that their organisation had begun to use online tools and platforms for participation, and suggested that this would be a practice that would be continued in the long-term future[607]. However, some interviewees cautioned that it **should not be assumed that children have equitable access to the internet and therefore, to having a voice** (see Section 4.2.6)[608].

### 4.1.4 Support from high-ranking decision-makers

According to a number of interviewees, **certain government officials and individual civil servants have been instrumental in driving children's participation, especially as a consequence of having political power while being personally passionate about children's participation**. In many cases, according to these interviewees, individual commitment to the cause of children's participation has continued even after the person's departure from office[609]. For instance, the former president of Malta has been considered by some interviewees as a significant driver of including children in political and democratic life, later establishing the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, which continues to ensure children's participation in Malta[610]. In Belgium, the Youth Pact 2020 of the Flemish Government (Jongerenpact 2020 van de Vlaamse Regering), a binding mechanism that sees Belgian youth's concerns being taken up by government, has also been developed due to the drive of dedicated policy-makers[611]. One EU-level interviewee discussed the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative and recounted how the leader of a government unit tasked with making a city child-friendly really drove the process, creating a clear vision, instilling his team with the same vision, getting training for staff and inviting external evaluation; the spirit of his vision remains in the workplace even after his departure from the role[612]. A national expert in Germany discussing the situation in their own municipality also stated 'on the individual level, if there [are] politicians who are motivated to work on this topic, there's a big effect on the local level.'[613] As summed up by one child taking part in a focus group in Ireland:

> '*I feel it depends on the individual politician, they are very into children's rights and advocating or they're, just like, not at all.*'[614]

While the commitment of individuals to children's participation is commendable and welcomed, there is also the risk of children's participation losing its influence should the individual leave. An interviewee from Ireland also noted that being dependent on individuals can be a barrier to promoting children's rights, including participation[615].

Embedding children's participation firmly into existing structures would be preferable to ensure its continuous presence.

### 4.1.5 Training and preparation

For both participating children and facilitating adults, training and preparation can help facilitate children's participation. In terms of training adults, international and European children's rights organisations developed several training guidelines and codes of conduct related to participation. For instance, Save the Children has published several resource guides and practice standards to support managers and field staff in applying meaningful and safe participation, as well as a toolkit for monitoring and evaluating children's participation[616]. At the national and local level, a local authority in the UK trained councillors in implementing a vision of creating a child-friendly city[617], while an NGO created an awareness campaign to train professionals in this manner[618]. There does, however, seem to be a **lack of adult training in facilitating children's participation at national and local levels**, which might contribute to **some adult stakeholders not fully understanding children's rights in practice**.

**Children's participation is often facilitated and encouraged via various forms of training activities and training material available to children and young people**[619]. For example, national participation officers in the European Network of Young Advisors (ENYA) help children understand their rights as well as providing training around the logistics of a mechanism, e.g. how to run a meeting (see

Box 3)[620]. Similarly, a local authority in Germany trains children in public speaking ahead of a parliamentary session[621].

Some evidence suggests that an efficient way of providing training to children is a 'learning by doing' approach – providing children with opportunities to learn by being practically involved in a particular activity. This **'learning by doing'** approach featured prominently in the examples given by children in focus groups. As noted by a Spanish child, *'Participate and you learn by participating'*[622]. This way, as children gain experience of participating in decision-making and sharing their views, they develop skills and increased understanding of participation, which allows them to get further involved in decision-making. Indeed, according to a number of focus group consultations with children (in Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Slovenia), **taking part in participation processes and receiving positive feedback** appeared to **positively reinforce** in children the belief that their views matter and should be taken into account in decision-making. Illustrating the effect of these positive experiences, in Slovenia one child participant commented that when decision-makers and adults *'listen to what [children] have to say, they feel heard and seen*.'

Another concrete example of such 'learning by doing' activity was provided by one interviewee. To provide a specific example of **the type of training provided to children**, a moot court was held to trial the Belgian state on child detention, and invited children to form a jury. The court spent a long time preparing the children, explaining to them what it meant to be a migrant, a judge and to be in detention. The format of the training took place through games and activities, as well as meetings with judges and the president of the constitutional court[623]. The success of this mechanism conveys the impact of **facilitating children's participation training in a child-friendly manner** rather than placing young people in adult settings and situations, which may be intimidating.

The evidence from the focus groups with children reveals that **support during participation is very important for children**. Some children taking part in focus groups reported that **support for children's participation in political and democratic life at local level primarily came from civil society organisations**. For instance, some children participants in Spain mentioned that *'organisations are important allies'* and *'intermediaries'* between young people and public administration. This is because they facilitate access to (political) channels and support the processing of requests from young people. In Germany and Bulgaria meanwhile, several children participating in focus groups who are also involved in local youth councils believe that these structures are highly

supportive for them to participate. Some consulted children from Germany mentioned that they were also supported by other children. Overall, it was asserted by a number of focus group participants that participating in decision-making as part of a group of likeminded peers was motivating and gave greater 'weight' to their views and ideas.

Some **children** reported that they **prefer to have someone to guide them through participation processes as opposed to doing it completely alone**. Views on who should provide this support varied, but it was generally agreed that they should have expert knowledge of working directly with young people and also ideally be a 'trusted' person. This person could either be a peer or an adult, including professionals working with children. Several children also mentioned the important role of parents/guardians in supporting and facilitating children's participation in political and democratic life. For instance, children who were active in the local youth parliament and the national council in Bulgaria saw parents as important supporters for children's participation.

Several interviewees representing EU, national and local public authorities acknowledged that, in order to conduct meaningful children's participation, they collaborate with a variety of organisations working with children[624]. While involving people with expertise in children's issues can be beneficial, **there is a need that all relevant stakeholders have the knowledge and skills on how to engage with children**[625].

However, a few interviewees also thought that there is also **a need to build awareness among children themselves of their rights to participate**[626]. Some countries include education on citizenship and participation in their national school curriculum, such as the Education on Active Citizenship and Participation in Slovenia[627]. Through school, children are taught children's rights during the 4th and 5th grades, and in the 7th and 8th grades they learn about the importance of active citizenship and participation[628]. The inclusion in curricula is important since lack of awareness or poor information about available options to participate can limit children's participatory behaviour[629]. In an evaluation of this citizenship and participation education, some children from these classes stated they found the classes and teaching methods engaging. Yet, the children who said they had difficulty in understanding the lectures were mostly from underprivileged or migrant background[630].

Data from the children's focus groups also show that training and preparations are important to help 'level the playing field' and make sure that all children can participate equally. For example, one child participating in a consultation in Slovenia observed that decision-makers give preference to 'those [children] who are more capable as they are easier to work with'[631]. They noted that this can lead to some perspectives being excluded. It was also highlighted in the focus group in the Netherlands that it can be difficult for younger children to be involved in decision-making, with one child noting '*an 8-year old is taken less seriously than a 16-year old.*'[632]

### 4.1.6 Ways to facilitate the inclusion of vulnerable children

The data suggest that some stakeholders are aware of the **insufficient inclusion of vulnerable and disadvantaged children**, and make **targeted efforts to include these children**, e.g. those in alternative care, children from rural areas, children of low socio-economic background, asylum-seekers). Yet several countries still struggle to have representation that reflects national demographics in the mainstream mechanisms, such as youth parliaments or youth councils. This can also be due to distance and the need to travel, which can hinder children's involvement[633]. As some interviewees suggested, the need to travel to attend council meetings, even in the child's own municipality, is a privilege that only some children (whose parents can afford the time to take them) can enjoy[634].

An interesting counterexample to this is the Cyprus Children's Parliament, which has a quota for each ethnic group so that the composition of the children's parliament reflects that of the population[635]. Likewise, in Denmark National Council for Children's Expert Groups targets populations belonging to the 5–15% most marginalised/at risk children and young people in Denmark, e.g. children of incarcerated parents, from families in poverty, or children with mental health challenges[636].

At the EU level, in 2012 DG JUST commissioned various child-led research projects that paid special attention to working with children 'in situations of vulnerability'. To reach out to these children, their partners approached organisations working with children from a variety of backgrounds, such as migrants, asylum-seekers or refugees (Yohri, the Netherlands, Somali Development Group, UK, and Roots, Greece); those living in foster or residential care (SOS Children's Villages, Croatia and Poland); children experiencing mental health issues (Off the Record, UK); young carers (Black Young Carers, UK); and children from different areas of the country (Greek Children's Ombudsman, Croatian Children's Ombudsperson, and SOS Children's Villages in Croatia and Poland)[637]. In the Netherlands, children were included in subject-specific initiatives (for instance audits on care facilities)[638]. This reflects the importance of **building relationships with specialised children's organisations in order to reach vulnerable or disadvantaged groups**.

### 4.1.7 Children and young people themselves

In some cases, **children might have initiated mechanisms themselves, making them a key facilitator**. However, as already indicated earlier in this report, our analysis shows that very few major children's participation mechanisms identified in this study have been child-initiated. Notable exceptions include the 'Fridays for Future' movement, which is a global child-initiated movement that aims to involve children and young people in political decisions about the environment[639]. Other child-initiated mechanisms focused on issues related to education and included national student unions that were created by students themselves, such as secondary school student unions in Slovakia, the National Action Committee of Students in the Netherlands and the Association of the School Students from Constanta[640]. This latter example began with a group in one locality lobbying for education policy changes, but was then replicated in other localities. Hungary's ADOM student movement, Movement for Alternative Student-centric Education (ADOM diákmozgalom, Alternativ Diákközpontú Oktatásért Mogalom) is also child-initiated: it is a self-organised network of students that aims to promote democracy and students' rights that organises student demonstrations and raises youth voices in the media[641].

Although the Children's Parliament in Cyprus was not child-initiated, the official regulations that govern its operations were child-initiated. They were the result of one of the Children's Parliament sittings, when a statute on regulations was unanimously agreed to by the Child Parliamentarians[642]. The international Annual Forum of the international NGO 'Initiatives of Change' is co-designed and co-delivered by children and adults with an agenda created by a core team of 20–25 people[643].

During the validation workshop, it was noted that **children can also** perform an important facilitating role by **inviting other children to participate in an opportunity they are already participating in themselves**[644]. This observation was also noted by a child from Spain who shared their experience of encouraging other children to become active:

> '*I've recommended the Child and Youth Council to several friends and [my] sisters because I think it's a place where you can feel involved in policy*.'[645]

### 4.1.8 Availability of and access to participatory spaces

Another important facilitator of participation highlighted through the focus groups with children related to the nature and type of **participatory spaces**. For instance, some children in Spain noted that participatory spaces that have been running for a long time have more direct access to public representatives, making it easier for children to share their views directly with decision-makers.

Children's **knowledge of or access to relevant and understandable information about existing participatory spaces and opportunities to participate** in structures and mechanisms was also considered an important facilitator of children's participation in political and democratic life. For example, one Finnish child commented:

> '*When you know how to find [the] right places and have courage to do so, you may get real nice opportunities to be heard – like this one. It's somehow really cool and encourages you to participate when you see and feel that, us, young people are genuinely listened to and our things matter.*'[646]

## 4.2 Barriers to children's participation mechanisms in political and democratic life

While many stakeholders recognise the benefits of children's participation, it has also been noted that applying the principle in practice can be challenging[647]. This research has identified several obstacles to children's participation in political and democratic life.

### 4.2.1 Lack of accessible language

Firstly, the **linguistic capacities of children (and adults**) were identified by some EU stakeholders as a barrier to access. EU stakeholders shared observations that children are typically required to speak French or English at the international and European-level initiatives[648]. In addition, as observed by some international and European-level interviewees, the inclusion of children from diverse linguistic backgrounds was also limited if documents were not translated into national languages or meetings with children were not facilitated by the use of interpreters[649]. At the national level, language was also a barrier for migrant children who did not speak the official language of a particular country[650].

The issue of language was also brought up during the children's focus groups. Some children mentioned that the **political language** and decision-making processes used by adults can be difficult for children to understand. One Bulgarian child commented:

> '*We do not understand the language the adults speak and we cannot pitch the idea…their talks and meetings are so boring*.'[651]

This view was shared by a few children in focus groups in Bulgaria, Germany and Spain. One international interviewee noted that there is a need for documents in **accessible and inclusive language**, away from technicalities and jargon, e.g. by creating 'child-friendly' versions of international instruments[652].

### 4.2.2 Complex bureaucracies

Several interviewees shared views that **the lack of coordination between government departments, the competition for resources, and the lack of autonomy at local levels for municipalities** can also act as a barrier[653]. Many interviewees from across all stakeholder groups also mentioned slow bureaucracy, for example children's rights legislation or strategies that were drafted years ago but are still in the pipeline to become law or national policies[654].

### 4.2.3 Adult attitudes towards children

Many interviewees mentioned **attitudes and perceptions about children and their place in society** as a key barrier to children's participation. The **societal attitudes of not seeing children as competent social actors who can contribute to decisions in a meaningful way is still common**. Furthermore, several interviewees noted that **condescending attitudes towards children persist**, such that they are still talked down to when expressing an opinion[655]. This might also be an issue to keep in mind when involving adults to act as supporters during consultations. Adult facilitators could also prove a challenge to adequate and meaningful participation due to their own opinion bias and/or inability to view children as competent participants[656].

Some children taking part in the focus groups believed adults often **do not trust** children to participate, believe they are **too young** or do not have the capacity and knowledge to participate. As expressed by one child from the Netherlands:

> *'I am only 13 years old and since I am so young it would be special if I could share my opinion about something so big.'*[657]

During focus groups in Slovenia and Germany, some children reported that they are often not taken seriously or viewed as active members of society by adults and they are instead seen as 'only children'. Some children participating in consultations in Malta believed that adults in power take decisions about children's rights without giving anyone else the chance to speak. Among the Finnish children consulted, some had experiences and examples of having been belittled or even insulted by adults because of being active or voicing their opinions. This was also mentioned by some children during consultations in the Netherlands in relation to adults making jokes about Greta Thunberg and the Fridays for Future movement. During the focus groups conducted with children from vulnerable backgrounds in Bulgaria and Malta, some children noted that although adults can be **important supporters for children's participation**, some children felt that their opinions were not heard at home / by parents.

One interviewee also suggested that adult attitudes towards children can play a role in deciding which child is competent enough to participate[658]. They said that this is because the UNCRC does not really address age other than stating that children's views should be 'given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'[659]. The question is how 'maturity' is assessed and what role adults' attitudes towards children can play in this assessment.

The failure to view children as capable actors in their own right can also contribute to **children's participation being more of a tokenistic exercise, rather than a meaningful engagement**. For example, many stakeholders from EU and international institutions mentioned that children are sometimes used tokenistically for public relations purposes or to 'put on a show' of caring about child rights to maintain a favourable public image[660]. It seems that on occasion the children themselves were aware of this issue. One national-level interviewee recalled talking to a group of children who were asked to attend a meeting with their local authority. The children accused the mayor of staging a photo opportunity rather than taking their concerns seriously, as he posted pictures of the meeting on his Instagram page afterwards[661]. Some interviewees reported that tokenism in children's participation mechanisms can also be due to the fact **decision-makers still do not fully recognise the importance of children's rights, and** within that, **the right to participation**[662]. Furthermore, decision-makers may not know how to engage children in all stages of policy-making, on matters which affect them[663]. This lack of understanding can also prevent meaningful children's participation from taking place.

A example of changing societal and individual attitudes towards children was 'Turning Words Into Action'[664] a mechanism that took place in Bulgaria, Czechia and Serbia. The mechanism – which ran over two years – brought together stakeholders and children/young people with intellectual disabilities and their families to convene on approaching the health and lives of these children/young people. As reported, the mechanism was found to result in a noticeable changes in parents' and carers' behaviours and attitudes, thus it showcased the potential for children's participation to have impact (see Box 13 below[665]).

**Box 13. Case study: Turning Words into Action**

**Turning Words into Action**

The Turning Words into Action mechanism brought together stakeholders (such as adult self-advocates[666], expert mentors and academics) and children and young people with intellectual disabilities, including those from both families and institutions, from across Serbia, Bulgaria and Czechia. The purpose was to provide training and support related to children's health and wider needs, and it entailed the planning, design and implementation of a series of activities and events that took place over 21 months between 2011 and 2013. This mechanism also examined the practical ways of implementing the WHO's Europe Declaration 'Better Health, Better Lives' (BHBL) for children and young people with intellectual disabilities'[667].

Turning Words into Action has facilitated the creation of child-led offshoot events and initiatives. It was run by the NGO Lumos, along with partners in each project country, and was fully endorsed and funded by the European Commission[668]. In order to evaluate this mechanism, Lumos developed a self-evaluation toolkit that was used in all participating countries to measure changes in knowledge, attitudes and practice. According to Lumos' report, the mechanism led to improvements at the individual child level in terms of children's ability to communicate and improve their self-esteem levels, and at societal level in changing public perceptions towards disability[669].

### 4.2.4 Lack of information on opportunities for participation and follow-up after participation

**Insufficient sharing of information about opportunities for participation** can also represent a barrier to children's participation. According to the data from focus groups, this was considered to be a particular barrier for children from poorer areas, remote areas and from vulnerable backgrounds. One child during a focus group in Cyprus shared an observation:

> *'Mechanisms do exist, but they are not widespread. They must also be increased in number and power, and the children must be better informed for their existence and actions.'*[670]

**Lack of information about children's participation in political and democratic life at EU level** was also noted by a number of children. During one consultation in Spain children were not able to find clear and accessible information when running a search on the internet during the session. Some children also felt that this lack of information discouraged children to participate in decision-making. One child participating in a focus group in Germany felt that many children often do not know who to turn to about participation[671]. Thus, there is a need for adults to more proactively approach children.

Another barrier identified by one national-level interviewee is that **the tangible results of children's participation are not being communicated**, which may be 'discouraging or harmful to children'[672]. Similarly, another interviewee indicated the need to 'manage expectations' around the potential impact of children's participation, and to set realistic expectations[673].

From the children's perspective, as reported by some children taking part in the focus groups, a **lack of feedback and follow-up** after they participated in decision-making processes was a major barrier. This results in many **children feeling disappointed and developing a lack of confidence in authorities**, who may albeit be willing to listen but not to implement children's contributions. This **loss of faith in the power of their voices**, and a sense that their views make no difference was illustrated by two Spanish children:

> '*I don't think most of the advice will be heard. High-ranking and even low-ranking politicians don't listen to us. Nothing we've proposed has been implemented during the pandemic, except close parks and go outside in summer during the hottest part of the day.'*[674]

> '*They have listened to us, but then they have made the decisions that they have wanted.'*[675]

Not being listened to, as expressed by children taking part in focus groups, reportedly led to disappointment, anger, frustration, feeling sad and pessimistic and ignored. Some participating children sometimes felt defeated or rebellious as a result, whilst others felt apathetic or that the problems were too big for them to tackle. For some children however, not being listened to motivated them to keep persevering. One child in the Slovenian consultation commented:

> '*Many children are not motivated because they are not listened to and they give up despite the fact that they could find new alternatives that could be much more effective.*'[676]

Indeed, some children were keen to keep on having their voice heard, and reflected on how they could do better next time.

### 4.2.5 Lack of resources to include vulnerable children

In a broad sense, the evidence suggests that **vulnerable or disadvantaged children are underrepresented in the mainstream children's participation projects**. This **underrepresentation** of these groups of children often results from **insufficient targeted efforts to include them**. For instance, while several countries have covered the topic of **migrant children** or migrant rights across various mechanisms (EU/international[677], Denmark[678] and Malta[679]), our analysis indicates that there is little evidence that such children are routinely included in children's participation mechanisms. In addition, some interviewees (representing national authorities and an international organisation) revealed the challenge of engaging children with **severe mental or physical disability** in participation mechanisms, particularly if the child is non-verbal or does not comprehend the questions or topics under discussion[680]. Student councils in particular were highlighted by one international interviewee as an example of unequal representation, in which (according to the interviewee) many disadvantaged pupils feel like their voices are not being heard[681].

Overall, most children participating in focus groups felt that **all children should have equal opportunities to participate**, which was also one of the outcomes when children described their ideal cities (see Section 3.6) and ideal ways to participate. Only one child in Germany felt there are **more opportunities for children from marginalised backgrounds**.

Several children participating in focus groups in a number of countries noted the particular difficulty to involve children from **vulnerable backgrounds** in political and democratic life. In addition, children involved in existing mechanisms such as children's councils and parliaments noted that participation in these mechanisms is **often limited to more privileged children**, and they would like more children from vulnerable backgrounds to be involved. Some participating children in Spain were very concerned about **discrimination**, including social class, gender and age as barriers to participation. Illustrating this, one child noted:

> '*People with different abilities do not like to participate, they have stage fright. They don't like talking to people, they are shy.*'[682]

During focus groups in Malta, many children from vulnerable backgrounds **focused more on their basic needs (provisional rights**). Consulted children living in a corrective juvenile justice facility discussed being uprooted and trying to find their way in new living conditions. For them, **children's participation came secondary**:

> '*These children yearn to be part of a normative community, with a desire for stability, status and identity, surrounded by people they love and objects they own and care for. For these children it may be that having a voice means first having your basic needs met. Without them, they might feel as though they might not even qualify to have a voice.*'[683]

One case-study interview on the consultation on the UNCRC in Germany (see Box 10) provided insight into the challenges associated with the lack of resources to include vulnerable children[684]. Despite children having access to an extensive network of NGOs, children participate in these networks on a voluntary basis, and this made it difficult to participate for less privileged children. For example, no organisation in the network that this interviewee was working within had access to children from low-income families[685]. The interviewee felt that more resources would have been needed to make additional efforts to recruit children who are not already part of organisations[686]. The interviewee also

noted a lack of experience in targeting children affected by poverty[687]. Even if the interviewee would like to change this in future mechanisms, it would require dedicated funding and expertise[688]. This observation was echoed by another interviewee who reported that the main obstacle to including all children is the fact that recruiting children who are not yet active – who are usually from less privileged backgrounds – requires additional efforts and resources[689].

As stated by the interviewee:

> *'[…] there are commonly not enough resources to reach all children. With the resources that are available, you commonly reach the children and youth who can be reached rather easily. For example, you might put up a leaflet in a school saying 'Participate!' […] And then there are many who say: well, I am not interested. Then there are others who say: I know what this is. I have familiarity with this. For example, because it is something that has been discussed at home. I will go and participate. […] Any children who are not reached by this method, means more effort […] for example like: hey, have you seen this? We would like to talk to you about […]. I will have to talk to the children and make clear that: I want to hear your opinion. You are competent. We won't ask too much of you. It is just so that you can share your ideas. It needs more educational resources than just putting up a leaflet […] [and] there often are not enough resources to make these extra efforts. I would say this is a key barrier [to facilitating inclusion of all children].'*[690]

### 4.2.6 Digital inequalities

While the use of digital tools can help facilitate participation, it is important to keep in mind that many children face barriers to participate online. These barriers were particularly highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The impact of the pandemic exposed the **digital inequalities between children of different socio-economic backgrounds**. Not having digital skills, a stable internet connection or a digital device can hinder the inclusion of child stakeholders from underprivileged backgrounds[691]. Digital inequalities were reported by several children themselves during the focus groups in Cyprus, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain. A number of interviewees from international organisations and member states mentioned that for children without access to the internet, the impact of COVID-19 has been detrimental in terms of social isolation, loneliness, mental health issues and learning and development[692]. However, interviewees also tended to mention that things were beginning to be put in place to counter these effects. For example, one interviewee from a local organisation in the Netherlands mentioned that 500 laptops were provided to children without access to the internet[693].

Yet, even when children are able to participate in mechanisms virtually, there remains a struggle to create bonds between groups online – both with each other and with adults.

One international stakeholder suggested that having partners at local and national levels would be effective in ensuring sustainable relationships with children[694]. Furthermore, some children felt unsafe to participate and discuss certain topics at home, for example one LGBTQI+ child was not able to participate in the online focus group, since they could not safely talk about LGBTIQ+ issues at home. Also, concerns around children's online safety mean that many online platforms prohibit the participation of children under the age of 13. Accordingly, the ability of younger children to participate via online tools is limited[695].

### 4.2.7 COVID-19-specific barriers

As expressed by a number of interviewees, **many participatory processes and activities** across international, national and local levels have been **dramatically interrupted** by the COVID-19 crisis, with many participatory events, processes and studies being disrupted, postponed or even cancelled[696]. It has also created difficulties in engaging children in participatory practices remotely (via online tools) (see Section 4.2.6), whilst the use of masks as well as social distancing were reported to have made it difficult to see non-verbal facial expressions during focus groups with children (e.g. Malta). A few

interviewees also suggested that participation had slipped off the political and public agenda since the crisis began[697]. This was also confirmed by the participating children themselves, some of whom reported that many processes that were in progress before the start of the pandemic were put on hold, or in some cases cancelled.

Across focus groups, some children also mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic had negative effects in terms of increased poverty resulting in serious financial problems, lower self-esteem and becoming sadder. Furthermore, according to some children consulted in Spain, **confinement alienated young people from their reality and thus limited their ability to reflect and develop proposals for change**. On this one child said:

> '*When it came to making proposals, we didn't have much idea of what to say because as we were stuck at home we did not see what had worsened or what had improved, the only thing we could see was through the window and that's it. Furthermore, [we] could not do anything until we were no longer confined*.'[698]

Many **children** taking part in the focus groups across all 10 countries where focus groups with children were held, stressed that they **were not included in decisions related to Covid-19**. For some children (e.g. in Cyprus) therefore the discussion on the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact it had on their lives was considered the most interesting part of the consultation, because it gave them the opportunity to express their views and feelings in a way they had not done before. As suggested by one child from Cyprus, the pandemic has demonstrated that there should always be a plan B, in case something does not work or go to plan:

> '*We were indeed deprived of many things, but we were able to keep in touch. We were able to continue to participate and be active citizens. I have learnt that things will not always be as expected, but a lot can be done, and we must learn to adapt*.'[699]

Overall, it can be concluded that the COVID-19 crisis has had a dramatic impact on children's participation across Europe. Many participatory processes and practices have been disrupted, delayed or even cancelled as a result of the outbreak of the virus. However, the collected evidence has also highlighted a number of promising examples of participation being facilitated during the lockdown, yet there is emerging evidence about the paucity of examples of children's ideas being taken into account in decision-making[700]. Many of these ideas centred on the mobilisation of digital tools and technologies, and many interviewees and some children taking part in focus groups argued that this is something that should be carried forward for participation beyond COVID-19 too.

# 5 Lessons learnt and ways to increase participation

### Key findings

Lessons learnt:

- The most successful children's participation mechanisms involve children in all stages of the policy-making process. However, such approaches are relatively rare as children's participation is still often perceived as an add-on rather than an integral and continuous part of the decision-making process.
- Collective structures (when an individual child represents groups of children) are important facilitators of children's participation processes and mechanisms, with participation often taking place via regular formats. However, it is also crucial to provide opportunities for individual voices to be heard, and channel child participation via one-off and project-based mechanisms.
- Information-sharing and provision of training for children and adults are important facilitators of children's participatory processes. However, there is little evidence on which training approaches work best.
- Representativeness and inclusiveness are important policy goals, but full inclusion of children of all backgrounds and ages is still a challenge, and more resources are needed to make children's participation processes and mechanisms a reality.
- Digital tools and communication platforms create multiple opportunities. However, unequal level of skills and access to digital devices and the internet can deepen inequalities.
- Research identified that the EU can give visibility to the issue, lead by example by ensuring implementation of children's participation mechanisms across all levels, support exchanging ideas and promising practices. This could include more targeted efforts to include disadvantaged and vulnerable children in participatory mechanisms and processes, as well as provision of funds to cover the costs of children's participation activities, as participatory processes involving children are costly. However, difficulties in applying for EU funding, and frustrations with the short programme lengths, were mentioned on a number of occasions.

The objective of this chapter is to present findings on the lessons learnt and on the relevance of, and elements for, possible future actions – at EU institutional and Member State levels – that could shape and encourage children's participation in political and democratic life.

## 5.1 Lessons learnt

The analysis of evidence collected in this study provides us with a better understanding of key factors that contribute to children's participation mechanisms being inclusive, impactful and child-led. This section outlines common features of 'what works' in facilitating children's participation, and discuses remaining challenges and how they are being addressed.

### 5.1.1 Comparison of structures, stakeholders and mechanisms is challenging

Overall, this study collected and analysed over 300 mechanisms facilitating children's participation in political and democratic life. These mechanisms were / are being implemented via a variety of structures and stakeholders. However, making **comparisons between countries and mechanisms was challenging for a number of reasons**.

Firstly, **the level and breadth of information differed considerably between MS and levels of analysis** (international, EU, national, local). While there is a lot of evidence

about children's participation mechanisms, structures and stakeholders in some countries (e.g. Estonia, Ireland, Malta, Slovenia and the UK), the number of sources (e.g. reports, academic articles, websites) was more limited in other countries. Similarly, more information was typically available in the public domain about mechanisms and structures operating at the international, European and national levels then those at the regional and local levels.

Secondly, **while information about permanent, well-established structures is typically available in the public domain, it is more challenging to identify less regular and one-off mechanisms and initiatives**. This unequal level of information about how mechanisms operate and how structures and stakeholders work presented challenges for systematic assessment. Typically, evidence was available about the overall aims and objectives of particular mechanisms and structures, their key characteristics, groups of children involved, and when and how often children participated. However, less detailed information was typically available about the content and format of children's participation (details of how exactly children's participation was/is facilitated) and degree of influence (e.g. implementation of monitoring and evaluation activities, impact of children's participation).

In addition, **inter-country and, to a lesser degree, intra-country comparisons are a challenge**. This is **because the roles and responsibilities, the ways of operating, and the political relationship between adults and children facilitated via particular structures and mechanisms are not always clear-cut**. On one hand, this complexity results from multiple structures within one country facilitating similar mechanisms of children's participation. This was particularly evident when analysing data on children's and youth councils, with multiple structures within particular countries facilitating similar participatory processes and types of engagement with children. On the other hand, some structures in different countries with different names (e.g. councils, parliaments, advisory panels working in the Ombudspersons for Children offices) had ways of operating that were similar. For instance, while children's and youth parliaments typically have an educational role, in some countries (France, Ireland, Slovenia and the UK) parliaments' actions have led to tangible policy impacts (see Section 2.3.2). Similarly, even if children's voices in the consultations conducted by the Ombudspersons for Children's Offices were typically advisory, in some countries (Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden) the proposals made by children brought legal changes (see Section 3.6.1). Finally, an overall assessment on whether a particular structure was child-led or not was often difficult, because some activities could have been entirely child-led while other activities within the same structure were not.

Therefore, **caution must be taken when comparing mechanisms and transferring lessons**. The way mechanisms operate, the roles and responsibilities of children, and the political and power relationships between children and adult stakeholders seem to be more important factors to consider than the actual name of a particular mechanism.

### 5.1.2 Children's participation is still perceived as an add-on and children are not routinely involved in all stages of the policy-making cycle

The research evidence suggests that **the most successful children's participation mechanisms** – in terms of being inclusive, impactful and child-led – **involve children in all stages of the policy-making process**[701]. Yet, the evidence collected in this study shows that children's participation processes and mechanisms in political and democratic life are still often considered an add-on rather than an integral and fundamental element of the policy- and decision-making processes. This partly results from societal perceptions of and attitudes towards children, e.g. adults questioning children's ability to have – or capacity to share – informed views, and the value of these views to shape policy decisions.

In addition, inclusion of children in political and democratic life is typically focused on the initial stage of the policy-making cycle, when children are provided with opportunities to generate ideas, and share views on the design and planning of policies. Children are also included (to some extent) in the implementation of the participation mechanisms.

However, it is still very rare for children to be involved in both the implementation of policies, and the monitoring and evaluation of polices (and the mechanisms themselves). This lack of continuity in the inclusion of children means that children's participation is often perceived by adult stakeholders as a topic in itself, or as an add-on implemented in specific activities or at specific stages of decision-making processes. Some children consulted in the focus groups seemed to be aware of it, and expressed views that this can contribute to children becoming disengaged.

Furthermore, the research evidence also suggests that **the power dynamics between adult stakeholders and children also affects the impact that children's participation can have in political and democratic life**[702]. Even when children are able to initiate participatory action, and generate and share ideas via a range of consultation formats, children's views are still mostly considered 'recommendations'. They are usually not given equal weight with adult stakeholder preferences, and are not binding. This can give children the impression that their opinions carry little weight, which can lead to disengagement.

Regulations and laws requiring policy-makers to consult children can ensure that children's views are given due consideration. However, the legal requirements to consult representatives of children's/youth structures are only in place in a small number of MS, and predominantly focus on policies/topics that are considered by adult stakeholders as relevant to children (e.g. the policies related to the care system provision or protection of children at risk) (see Section 4.1.2). Nevertheless, there are also examples of mechanisms in which children and young people acted as experts because of their particular experience (e.g. being part of the care system, having a migrant background). In some instances the involvement of children from such vulnerable backgrounds led to a policy change (e.g. in Malta, Finland and Sweden)[703].

Children also value receiving feedback on their suggestions and ideas, and being informed about policy developments to which they have contributed. The data collected via interviews indicates that most mechanisms across all levels include some form of feedback, either formal or informal[704]. Some children participating in focus groups expressed views that being provided with feedback on the impact of their participation encourages them to stay involved.

Dedicated funding also raises the profile of children's participation and ensures continuity of involvement of particular structures in the decision-making processes. In this respect, the structures of children's/youth councils in Finland and Ireland provide examples of how legal and financial provisions can embed children's participation in countries' political and democratic processes[705].

### 5.1.3 Collective voices expressed via established structures seem to carry more weight, but individual voices and children's activism are gaining momentum

Across countries and levels, the study has identified several established structures that facilitate participation of individual children who represent and express voices of larger groups of children. It seems that **the collective voices raised via established participation channels and falling within the specific policy stages/timeframes are typically given more consideration by decision-makers**. This finding was also supported by the views of children participating in the focus groups carried out as part of this study. Many participating children seemed to have greater awareness of permanent collective participation structures than one-off projects or initiatives, and held a general perception that collective voices of children carry more weight. **Some evidence questioned the representativeness of** these **collective structures** and it seems that at least some of the participating children were aware of their privileged status (see also Section 2.7.4 and 5.1.5).

Typically, mechanisms are initiated by adult stakeholders, with adults responsible for the design of the participation format and the selection of topics. For instance, the decision to establish children's/youth councils acting in an advisory capacity to the government (at

national and local levels) was initiated by adults, and participating children issue opinions on topics and policies selected and developed by policy-makers. The council structures of the child- and youth-focused organisations also engage in adult-initiated policy debates, but these types of councils also put forward topics for discussions.

Furthermore, there has also been some structured response to gather views of individual children and involve them in all stages of the decision-making processes. For instance, online platforms (in Czechia, Estonia, Finland and Germany)[706] facilitate the generation of children's ideas, and enable the selection of projects that children consider important. Similarly, regular surveys run by the Ombudsperson's Offices in Finland and Sweden, the child and youth panels at the Danish National Council for Children as well as other regular debating opportunities (e.g. the Great Priorities Debate in Belgium) facilitate children's involvement in the selection of political priorities and actions[707]. Children also come up with their own ideas and projects to be funded, and select projects and allocate funding to projects as part of the participatory budget mechanisms in Slovenia and Portugal[708].

In addition, there is also an increasing mobilisation among individual children and young people to initiate debates on topics that are important to them. This often takes the format of individual activism, with children and young people expressing their personal views and opinions (at least initially, even if over time more permanent and collective structures are formed). This activism often focuses on topics that are more of a policy priority and urgency for children than for adult stakeholders (e.g. environment, democratic voting, human rights, street violence, digitalisation) because children (rather than adults) will bear the long-term consequences of these decisions (or the lack of decisions on these topics and policy areas).

From the lessons-learnt perspective, it is **important to continue supporting collective structures to gather children's views in political and democratic life, but at the same time, to create opportunities for individual children to express their views and have their voice heard in topics that affect them**.

### 5.1.4 Provision of information and training to children and adults facilitates participation, but little evidence exists on what works best

**The preparation of children and adults can be an important facilitator of children's participatory processes**. This can involve the provision of information and knowledge about democratic processes and structures, as well as practical skills.

For children, civic education classes, awareness-raising and practical activities that prepare children and youth to participate in democratic processes can provide a better understanding of political and democratic structures, and how they operate. Children can also learn about their rights to participate and the benefits of being involved, and gain practical knowledge about how they can take part in the democratic structures and processes at their school and/or in their local communities. Children's preparation also includes gaining practical skills (e.g. public speaking, preparation for and facilitation of meetings), often via participating in specific mechanisms and by 'learning by doing'. As attested by a number of children participating in the focus groups, being involved in a participatory activity or process and receiving guidance and feedback can empower children and positively reinforce the belief of the value of their participation and their views for the democratic decision-making processes.

For adults, the provision of information about children's rights and the value of children's participation is important in changing attitudes and perceptions towards children's involvement in decision-making processes. In addition, adult stakeholders gain the practical understanding of children's rights, and how these rights are implemented in the operation of various structures.

Moreover, adults also play an important role in supporting children in the participatory processes. As expressed by many children taking part in the focus groups, receiving support during participation from adult 'allies' and 'a trusted person' facilitated active

involvement of children. This points to the importance of equipping adults with knowledge, skills and expertise on how to effectively and efficiently support and guide children, and facilitate participatory activities and events (e.g. by involving children in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of activities). In this respect, the available resources (e.g. training guidelines, codes of conduct, monitoring toolkits, etc.) are helpful tools in preparing adults for meaningful children's participation. However, as expressed by a number of interviewees, it is essential that this knowledge and skills are shared among a wider range of stakeholders (in particular those with decision-making capacities), not just members of civil society organisations who work with children.

It is also important to point out that **many of the training resources are not documented and/or available in the public domain, and hardly any training and preparation approaches have been evaluated. It is, therefore, a challenge to assess the effectiveness and impact of particular approaches as well as to replicate them in other contexts**.

### 5.1.5 Ensuring inclusion and representativeness of children of all backgrounds and ages is still a challenge

**The representativeness and inclusion of children of different backgrounds and life experiences is an important policy goal across many mechanisms and structures**. Several mechanisms operating at national level apply a quota system to ensure that participants reflect the national demographic composition of the country. There are also targeted efforts in mainstream mechanisms to recruit a diverse range of children, as well as a number of mechanisms (at all levels) focused on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of children. Aiming to ensure that voices of all children are heard, these developments are built in close collaboration with specialised organisations that support children.

**However, reaching full representation of children is still a challenge across all levels**. As expressed by several interviewees and some children participating in the focus groups, participants are often recruited from the same pool of high-achieving children, and this contributes to the inequality of access[709]. In addition, there are also inequalities in children's participation in terms of the linguistic capabilities of children and adults, and the (un)availability of material in accessible formats (e.g. materials without political and technical jargon) and national languages. The collected data also suggest that most mechanisms are geared towards older children and youth.

The study findings suggest that **more effort and resources (human and financial) are still needed to make mechanisms more inclusive towards all children**.

### 5.1.6 Digitalisation creates opportunities but can also lead to widening inequalities

**The emergence of digital tools and communication platforms is one of the factors contributing to voices of individual children and young people being heard**. Digital media are used to communicate about mechanisms, recruit participants, facilitate participation (e.g. submit proposals, vote on proposals) and provide feedback. This way, digital tools can be perceived as contributing to democratisation of children's participatory processes.

During the periods of COVID-19 confinement, digital media have been used in many creative and innovative ways. As attested by a number of interviewees, many of these new methods of working and communication can be adopted to effectively enable children's participation processes in the future[710]. For instance, international-level consultations with children and young people to understand their views on the COVID-19 outbreak were conducted via peer-to-peer awareness campaigns on social platforms[711], and this mode of working with children could be applied in other contexts to explore a wide range of topics.

However, it is also essential to apply strict safeguarding measures when conducting children's consultation activities online. In this respect, proceedings from the Safer Internet Forum offer insights in how to respond to demands for increased accessibility of

technological solutions and, at the same time, ensure user safety, in particular for children and other vulnerable users (e.g. by providing accessible terms and conditions)[712]. In addition, recommendations from the 'European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) 23rd Annual Conference on children's rights in a digital environment' emphasise the importance of strengthening the collaboration between ENOC and the European Data Protection Boards to hold tech companies and national governments to account when designing online games, social media platforms, educational websites, and streaming services, to ensure the best interests of children are protected[713]. ENOC's report also recommended that European policy-makers should make it mandatory for companies to **have terms and conditions that are accessible, easily read and understood by people of all ages**[714]. In addition to considerations around safeguarding, it is also important to address the barriers to online participation – both in terms of access and skills – to ensure that online participation does not deepen the gaps for vulnerable populations. So long as these barriers remain, it is important to use digital tools primarily to compliment other forms of participation, rather than replacing them.

In addition, the pandemic has also exposed that **digitalisation can deepen inequalities between children from different socio-economic backgrounds**. This is because children's opportunities to participate online largely depend on children's digital skills, and access to internet and ICT equipment[715]. Therefore, stakeholders considering digitalisation of children's participation processes and mechanisms should not assume that all children enjoy equal access and the same level of digital skills. In addition, digitalisation of children's participatory processes also requires that adult facilitators utilise different skills[716] to build rapport with participants, as well as (in the case of collective participation mechanisms) to provide sustainable relationships and social interactions between participants. The safety measures prohibiting online participation of younger children[717] should also be considered to ensure participation of children under the age of 13.

## 5.2 Ways to increase child participation at the EU, national and local level

**The findings from the interview data reflect the recommendations generated by a 2012 evaluation on child participation in the EU**[718]. Funded by DG JUST, this evaluation included a child-led research element that issued several recommendations. One of them suggested that children's participation should be factored into the design and implementation as a cross-cutting theme in any future EU initiatives[719]. The evaluation further suggested that future EU-level recommendations or directives should **include information on children's participation, such as information on what children's participation entails and practical guidance on how to involve children**[720]. The evaluation concluded that this could help contribute to fostering a more consistent understanding of the requirements and characteristics of effective and impactful children's participation among stakeholders at various levels[721]. Based on the interviews conducted during the current study on children's participation in the EU's political and democratic life, it seems that further work in this area is still needed to ensure that the study findings of the 2012 evaluation – as well as the findings and conclusions of this current study – become more fully embedded.

The following sections outline the main findings from this current study on possible future actions at EU, national and local levels to increase overall participation of children in political and democratic life.

### 5.2.1 Firmly embedding children's participation at all levels

Firstly, the interview data highlighted the importance of **ensuring that children's participation mechanisms are firmly embedded at EU level**. As suggested by some national-level interviewees representing all types of stakeholders, this approach would ensure that children's participation becomes a fundamental part of the policy-making process, and is **structurally embedded in all policy areas rather than a topic in itself or an 'add-on'**. This could also **help to send a strong message to MS about the importance of involving children in the decision-making processes at national and local levels**. This approach would require firmly embedding children's participation in the

EU, a long-term plan, and potentially a permanent/standing committee to ensure that children are systematically involved in decision-making processes at European and national levels.

The idea of **leading by example**, as suggested by some interviewees representing national authorities, should include:

- involving children in planning projects (e.g. adult and children stakeholders jointly decide on a project's priorities, implementation strategies, etc.)[722];
- providing opportunities to children to co-create EU policy (e.g. greater involvement of children in events that focus on issues directly affecting children)[723]; and
- better communication with children on how they can participate and be involved at European level (e.g. more direct contact with individual children rather than channelling communication via established children/youth structures)[724].

For instance, one interviewee applauded the Bucharest Declaration[725], but did not feel that the follow-up activities and impacts were examined and/or communicated sufficiently[726]. Furthermore, the evidence from the mapping task also provides recommendations to develop training and awareness-raising activities for officials (across EU and national levels) on children's rights, including the child's right to participation[727]. One interviewee also suggested that children should be involved in drafting tenders, in particular tenders at the national level related to commissioning children's services[728].

However, one interviewee cautioned that stakeholders would also need to make sure that the participation of children is not 'tokenistic', but 'meaningful'[729]. In this respect, the interviewee suggested that a more meaningful engagement with children could be achieved by inclusion of a requirement for children's participation activities/components as part of EU grant/funding opportunities[730].

### 5.2.2 Providing guidance on ethics and safeguarding principles

A few interviewees representing international organisations and bodies also mentioned the **EU's role in providing guidance on ethics and safeguarding principles**, including the European institutions' power to enshrine ethical approaches in practices concerning children,[731] safeguarding policies at MS level[732], and being 'a guardian and defender of human rights' – including the right of children to participate[733]. This could help ensure that children's participation is conducted in a safe manner.

### 5.2.3 Promoting children's participation

The collected evidence highlights the **role of the EU in setting examples and leading the way in terms of implementing and adhering to standards on children's participatory processes and mechanisms**. This includes the important role of the EU in promoting children's participation and increasing its visibility[734], and the position of the EU as being a powerful 'trendsetter' internationally[735].

It is noteworthy that several children participating in focus groups were not aware of existing opportunities to participate in political and democratic life at the EU level (see Section 2.7.4). However, several children (in Bulgaria, Cyprus and Malta) viewed the EU as having significant potential in terms of providing opportunities for children to be involved in decision-making. In addition, some children in Cyprus, Germany and the Netherlands considered the focus groups themselves to be proof that the EU is increasingly listening to children and actively seeking out their opinions (see also Section 2.7.4). As expressed by one child from Germany:

> '*We feel that the EU generally does not listen to children. But the fact that we are doing this study right now means they are changing their minds*.'[736]

### 5.2.4 The EU as 'regulator': Can children's participation be made a requirement?

Interviewees also suggested that the EU should have the ability to fulfil a certain regulatory and legislative function in relation to children's participation in political and democratic life[737]. For instance, one national expert expressed that '*you need advocacy, but you also need laws*'[738]. This was echoed by two interviewees (one representing a local authority stakeholder, and the other a representative from a children's rights organisation) who also felt that the EU could help by issuing regulations[739] and making children's participation mandatory[740]. One interviewee, however, cautioned that a 'top-down' approach may be perceived negatively. But at the same time, a representative of a children's rights organisation also acknowledged that **EU inaction could result in MS not engaging in children's participation** if this is left to national governments[741].

While these are interesting perspectives, it is outside of EU competencies to issue children's participation requirements to national or local actors in MS[742]. The EU can, however, promote such participation by facilitating exchanges (as explained in Section 5.2.5) and deciding the priorities for funding programmes[743], which is discussed in section 5.2.7.

### 5.2.5 Facilitating knowledge and learning exchanges

**Facilitating knowledge and learning exchanges** was identified as another area where the role of the EU as well as national stakeholders could be expanded. A few interviewees suggested that the EU could better support civil society by **enabling exchange and collaboration between NGOs and civil society organisations across nations**[744], setting up a database on children's participation projects and mechanisms across the EU MS[745], and helping to create networks of schools in municipalities[746]. Similar actions could also be facilitated by national-level stakeholders at the MS levels.

Evidence also signalled the need for **better collaboration and synergies between local, national and EU/international actions**. In addition, to help foster increased collaboration between stakeholders at national levels, there were also recommendations to consider the merits of establishing a **national cross-government strategy and/or action group** for children's participation, with representation from all key ministries[747]. Further suggestions on how to strengthen collaborations between policy-making levels were provided by interviewees. For instance, one EU-level interviewee suggested that children will feel more comfortable speaking at EU level if they have previously had the chance to experience public speaking at local level[748]. In this respect, another interviewee representing a local authority suggested that **more regular connections and opportunities for meetings between local and EU politicians and policy-makers** should be created to foster children's interests in EU-level policy-making and children's participation, and called for improved channels of dialogue and communication with Brussels and Strasburg to strengthen children's and young people's interest and participation in EU elections[749].

Evidence also suggests that more efforts are required to encourage participation in elections[750]. According to one national authority representative, this could be achieved by establishing a European Children's Parliament as a platform for children to learn about the democratic processes (e.g. how voting contributes to political decision-making)[751]. In this respect, evidence from across the EU can serve as examples of how to set up and run a children's parliament, or an advisory group at European level. Eurochild's study also suggests that children's advisory groups could be set up for particular enquiries, if setting up a general children's parliament or advisory board is not feasible at EU level[752]. This could, for instance, facilitate the realisation of the Bucharest Declaration, when such children's advisory groups work in accordance with good standards for children's participation[753]. The formulation of such advisory group(s) could also be informed by similar advisory structures operating at the MS level.

As suggested by national- and local-level interviewees (representing all stakeholder groups), facilitation of learning and monitoring of progress could also be encouraged via **introduction of an EU-wide set of indicators on children's participation**[754]. Such

indicators would ensure that EU frameworks (existing and new) are strengthened and can be transformed into national realities[755], e.g. via the Youth Dialogue[756] and Erasmus+ programmes[757]. The monitoring of the implementation of children's rights and participation could be further supported by implementing 'national report cards' facilitating benchmarking on how young people's rights are being realised and adhered to across policy-making levels[758]. In addition, one interviewee suggested putting necessary structures in place to make children's participation a mandatory requirement[759].

### 5.2.6 Offering more support to ensure participation of vulnerable children

There is also evidence that further action (at all levels) might be needed in regard to provision of support to vulnerable children to ensure that they can participate. In this regard, the evidence focuses both on doing more to **protect vulnerable children and their rights in general, as well as on ensuring the protection and advancement of their right to participate**[760].

The collected evidence highlights underrepresentation of children in vulnerable situations in children's participatory mechanisms at every level: local, national and EU. This results, on one hand, from their vulnerability (for instance being harder to reach, in disadvantaged areas, having no internet connection) and insufficient awareness of their rights (which is also shared by other groups of children), and on the other hand, because children are rarely asked about their opinion on matters that affect them (see Sections 2.7 and 4.2.5).

The evidence from focus groups with children provides further detail on this aspect. While many children seemed to lack an understanding of the meaning of children's participation in political and democratic life, that was particularly the case for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (see Section 2.7.1). It was also argued by one of the national-level organisations running children's focus groups, as well as by one interviewee, that for children to be able to exercise their right to participation, their basic needs must be met first[761]. During the consultations undertaken in Malta, young migrant children **below the age of 10** made paintings of their ideal world. They all painted colourful homes with space for all family members, pets, toys and their own play areas. This demonstrates that it can be challenging to think about participating in public life, if children's daily lives are a struggle. This point was also made by one international-level interviewee, who explained that children who feel at risk or are somehow struggling will be less keen to participate in political or democratic decision-making processes[762]. The interviewee argued that **the right to participation is strongly linked with ensuring the protection of vulnerable children**[763].

In this respect, the evidence collected in this study identified **mechanisms that could inspire future action relating to protection of vulnerable children**. For instance:

- The Consultancy Group on Roma Youth Participation (CGRYP) project, which was implemented in Cyprus, offers insights on how to involve Roma children in decision-making[764].
- The Finnish mechanism Nuorten ideat (Ideas by Young People), which allows youth to directly submit their ideas, offers transferable potential as an online service that could be initiated at EU level and in other MS. If such a platform could operate in several languages, it would facilitate the sharing of grassroots development ideas (including ideas from migrant children) with decision-makers[765].
- The consultation with children and young people in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on the implications of Brexit involved children from diverse backgrounds, and showcases how to include children in debates about pressing political issues[766].
- The work of the Irish agency Tusla – the Child and Family Agency, as well as the local youth council structures (Comhairle na nÓg) (see Box 9) illustrates how to involve vulnerable children (e.g. living in alternative care settings), and how to set

up a body aimed at specifically enabling children's participation in the space of care[767].
- The Irish government's consultations to inform the Ireland Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016–2025 could inspire future EU and national-level consultations on specific topic-focused policies that have impacts on children[768].
- The Portuguese mechanism A Voz dos Alunos (Student's Voice) involved vulnerable children in the design of the new school curricula (OECD has already indicated plans to replicate this mechanisms)[769].
- The children's participation mechanisms involving vulnerable children developed by the German Development Cooperation have already been applied across several countries, and can inform development of similar mechanisms at the EU and MS levels[770].

The individual case studies also provide inspiring examples of how to include groups of vulnerable children in participation opportunities:

- The mechanism 'Turning Words into Action' (see Box 13) included children with disabilities.
- 'Experts by Experience' focused on children in care or migrant children (see Box 7).

'The Little Embassy' targeted children from vulnerable groups, such as refugees or children with disabilities (see

- Box 4).
- The Spanish local mechanism 'Daily Life' ('La Vida Cotidiana') could serve as an inspiration on how very young children can learn about participation through daily life experiences (see Box 6)[771].

As already mentioned in Chapter 4, ensuring that vulnerable children can participate requires additional effort and resources. Supporting such efforts might be a relevant and targeted focus area for future action (as explored further in the next section).

### 5.2.7 Strengthening funding opportunities

Many interviewees shared insights about how EU, national and local funds are currently being used to support their projects, and offered suggestions related to how the processes of application and allocation of funds could be improved in the future.

Firstly, many interviewees confirmed **the importance of EU funds to cover the costs of children's participation activities**[772]. For instance, some interviewees observed that a large share of their organisation's budget for children's participation comes from EU sources, and this created additional opportunities to engage children, in particular where financial support was not available nationally[773]. In addition, a few interviewees expressed views that allocation of EU funds for mechanisms involving children should be regarded as a priority, as it raises the profile of children's participation[774].

Two interviewees mentioned that EU funds can be used for developing and supporting children's participation mechanisms, such as Erasmus+[775]. One interviewee suggested that the scope of such programmes and the allocation of funds should also be consulted with children and young people[776].

One local authority representative also pointed out that **the participation processes involving children are costly**, and suggested that if no EU funds are available to support these processes, it is likely that only 'wealthy cities' could afford to involve children[777].

EU funding was also critical for large international organisations[778]. Yet, as expressed by one international-level interviewee, because participation activities were essential for their international organisation, even if there is 'no funding from the EU', this organisation would continue 'doing children's participation'[779]. Another national children's rights interviewee

felt that the level of national funding in their country was sufficient to cover children's participation activities[780].

EU- and national-level interviewees representing national authorities and children's rights organisations pointed out **the difficulties of getting grants and applying for EU funding**. One common difficulty was the complexity of funding applications and human resources required to submit an application. As attested by several interviewees, this was a persistent challenge for many NGOs, local-level organisations or organisations with staff working on a voluntary basis that for practical reasons, may find it easier to apply for local sources[781,782]. One national authority interviewee also noted that it is important to raise awareness about EU funding, as not all stakeholders may be aware of all potential funding opportunities[783].

Another **common challenge was that some EU funding only supports projects for a relatively short length of time**. Several interviewees felt that this was sometimes a tokenistic exercise rather than a real support to combat complex social challenges that require longer term funding[784]. Another local authority representative observed that in order to achieve long-lasting structural change in children's participation, structural financing was necessary. According to this interviewee, this was because short-term projects may work for one-off research studies or projects with clear short-term goals (see Section 3.4), but more permanent structural change could only be achieved with a dedicated stream of funding available long-term[785]. This interviewee also suggested that children's participation could, for example, be supported by a Youth Fund for cities with deprived neighbourhoods[786].

A common suggestion was also that **EU funding could be used to further support networks, by preparing guidelines and good practice examples**. This also relates to the EU role to facilitate exchanges and support collaboration at various levels, as outlined in Section 5.2.5. Several interviewees supported the sharing of knowledge, expertise and learning from each other through the exchange of practices, and also through financial support for required translation services[787]. One national authority interviewee suggested preparing a ranking of countries assessing how well they perform on children's participation indicators to motivate stakeholders lagging behind to take more action[788]. Some national-level interviewees also suggested providing more practical information, guidance and training to national policy-makers and national authorities to help them better understand how children's participation works in practice, and to inspire them to establish a national strategy on children's participation[789]. One international interviewee observed that EU funding could be also used to promote children's participation globally, for example by supporting local capacity building, and advocacy and engagement activities[790]. This is because children's participation mechanisms need to match the local context, which in other countries can differ from the situation in the EU.

Some children participating in focus groups also expressed interest in increased exchanges and partnerships, in particular in forums that allow partnerships between decision-makers and children across countries. Some children from Ireland confirmed that there is a need to create organisations to connect children and young people[791]. As one child from Bulgaria expressed:

> '*[it would be great if] something like a portal for feedback can be created – for us and for other children*.'[792]

In the view of some of the consulted children, such further EU action in these areas could strengthen children's participation at the EU and national levels.

Finally, one national authority interviewee also noted that scholarly research in the area of children's participation is underdeveloped, and that an allocation of funds to support academic research in this area would strengthen this field[793].

### 5.2.8 Learning from the EU Youth Strategy and youth participation mechanisms

Only a small number of interviewees representing all stakeholder groups (10 out of 64 conducted interviews) were able to comment on the EU Youth Strategy and assess how lessons from this strategy could be transferable to children's participation[794]. Some transferable lessons can also be drawn from the case study on the consultation to inform the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 (see Box 11).

The main observation from international-level interviewees was that **child and youth participation should not be viewed as two separate issues** (even if children have some specific rights under the UNCRC), and that **applying a life-course approach** would be more valuable[795]. As suggested by one international-level interviewee, this approach would allow stakeholders to **perceive human beings in a more holistic way and avoid setting cut-off dates specifying when a child becomes a youth and then an adult**[796]. According to international-level interviewees, **fostering cross-sectoral cooperation** at the national level would be beneficial[797], as would the application of **the reporting system and indicators for accountability used in the youth strategy**[798]. However, this contradicted an assessment of the Youth Strategy provided by a national government stakeholder from Ireland[799]. According to this interviewee, the main challenge with the Youth Strategy was that it was 'a strategy' and, in that sense, its provisions constituted non-binding recommendations[800]. In view of this interviewee, it would be important that any child strategy includes 'clear criteria that you need to adhere to' in order to, for example, be eligible for funding[801].

The consultation 'Youth in Europe' was able to achieve inclusion of some vulnerable youth, including young people identified as being from minority ethnic backgrounds, having a disability or being LGBTQI+[802]. This was achieved by working closely with organisations able to reach out to a wide demographic of participants[803], and by applying methodological approaches suggested by youth researchers[804]. This offers transferable lessons by indicating working methods that promote inclusion of all children and youth.

# 6 Conclusions

This study has identified evidence from over 300 mechanisms that facilitate children's participation in political and democratic life. Most of this evidence was identified and collected during the mapping task. However, when conducting interviews, the study team gained knowledge about mechanisms that were not well-documented in the public domain, indicating that information about such mechanisms is not always widely accessible. Some children taking part in focus groups expressed that they lacked awareness of and information about many mechanisms that were implemented in their countries – and sometimes in their localities – and had even more limited knowledge and awareness of EU and international mechanisms. This raises questions about **the availability and accessibility of information** (more broadly, but also for children in particular).

This study also raises questions about **the representativeness of children across mechanisms**. Most mechanisms are facilitated via structures that represent collective voices of a wider group of children (e.g. councils, panels, forums), and many of these structures have been established for a number of years. Many mechanisms have inclusiveness as an objective, but some still seem to be elitist and disproportionately attract high-achieving children or those from wealthy families. A selection bias has also been observed in mechanisms focusing on capturing voices of individual children. This points to **a challenge of ensuring that voices of children from different backgrounds or vulnerable groups are present and heard**. More targeted efforts may be needed to make (more) mechanisms more inclusive, to create opportunities for individual children to have their voice heard, as well as to channel participation via ad-hoc mechanisms.

**Some of the differences between these structures are not clear-cut**, with structures with different names (e.g. council, parliament) having similar rules of operation, roles and responsibilities across different countries. Consequently, the degree of influence children can have in differently named structures may be similar.

**Many mechanisms are still geared towards older children and youth** (often young adults). Even if efforts are made to make participation formats align with the capacities of children across different ages, the format of most children's consultations still often replicates those of adults (meetings, voting). As such, existing mechanisms may not fully respond to the needs of children from younger age groups, thus failing to give them relevant and appropriate opportunities to express their views and opinions, even if all children (including younger children) are given this right under the UNCRC.

**Mechanisms involving children in all stages of the policy-making process tend to be the most successful in terms of being inclusive, impactful and child-led**. However, **assessing** whether a particular structure or mechanism was **child-led is often a challenge**. This is because within a mechanism some activities could have been entirely child-led – with power completely handed to children – while in other activities the level of power given to children could have been completely different.

**Children's views and opinions are typically limited to 'recommendations' and they are not binding**. The evidence suggests that children's voices and opinions are given more consideration if there are: (1) regulations and/or legal instruments outlining the operation of a particular mechanism; and (2) a dedicated source of funding that ensures continuity of its operation (e.g. the structure of children's/youth councils in Finland and Ireland). Yet, one-off mechanisms still offer valuable inputs as a way to respond to emerging or new issues and challenges that may require a more rapid or more targeted response.

The analysis also revealed that children's participation in political and democratic life is **still not perceived and implemented as an integral and fundamental part of the policy- and decision-making processes**. Despite efforts across levels (international, EU and in some MS – both at national and local levels), children's participation is still not a continuous process, but rather a topic in itself or an add-on implemented in specific activities or stages. The lack of feedback and follow-up activities also contribute to this challenge. Children can be discouraged from participating if they are kept in the dark as to

whether their participation has had any impact. There is also little evidence on the effectiveness or impact of children's participation mechanisms on the children's degree of influence on policies and decision-making – hence the increased monitoring and evaluation would therefore be desirable.

This also results from **societal attitudes and perceptions of children's participation**. Some children participating in focus groups were not aware of their rights and not familiar with the concept of participation. However, children who did have an understanding of these issues welcomed opportunities to participate. The bottom-up activism that has emerged in recent years among children and young people can be seen as the young generation taking action on issues and topics that they consider important, but for which a sufficient level of action and measures have not yet been taken by adults (e.g. the environment, equality, human rights, street violence). This highlights the issue of raising the profile of children's participation. However, one key barrier still seems to be the attitudes of adults. It is still common for adults to question children's capabilities to participate, or to express the opinion that children's views are not valuable. This hinders the proper embedding of children's participation in the policy-making process, and can lead to 'tokenistic' exercises.

In many cases **the digitalisation of children's participatory processes** is the driving force for many of these activism movements. This is because the digital space offers a platform to democratically take action, and because the digital space has an important role in the lives of children and young people. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic exposed, it still cannot be taken for granted that all children and young people have equal access to digital equipment, internet or ICT skills. It is likely that without support, the digital divides between children may deepen, thus leading to lower levels of representativeness and higher levels of inequalities. In addition, it is important that the necessary safeguarding measures commonly applied in offline children's participation mechanisms are also put in place during online participation.

The **preparation of children for participation in** – **and adults for facilitation of – children's participation** can also play a role in facilitating political and democratic participation in the future. For children, this mostly relates to educational structures teaching and empowering children about democratic principles, and allowing children to experience them first-hand by taking part in democratic structures at school and in their local community. For adults, it means providing tools and structures to learn about effective and efficient ways of engaging with children. However, better understanding is needed of which training approaches have most impact, and replicating these approaches in other contexts should be promoted.

In addition, even if schools and organisations working with children are currently most involved in recruiting children to take part in particular mechanisms, the long-term goal should be to ensure that all adults (and in particular those in decision-making positions) have an understanding of children's rights to participate (and of adults' obligations to facilitate it, according to UNCRC), the benefits of children's participation, and the necessary skills to meaningfully engage children in political and democratic processes. The EU can play an important role in many of these transformative processes.

# Annex A Case studies guiding documents and templates

**Case studies guiding documents**

This document outlines our approach to conducting case studies on mechanisms that enable children's participation. It is intended to support decision to select a final list of 12 case studies for further investigation.
This document consists of:

- Table 10: A list of 24 potential case studies
  - These examples have been drawn from the mapping task (Task 1) and interviews with adult stakeholders (Task 2.1).
  - Case study selection criteria (Table 2) have been used to identify this initial list.
  - Case studies focus on children's participation mechanisms operating in the 10 selected Member States at national and/or local level, namely Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain. There is also one example from a reserve country (Cyprus) and two examples from the international context.
- Table 11. Case studies selection criteria
  - These criteria have been used to select a preliminary list of 24 case studies, and to further narrow down the list to 12 case studies.
- Table 12. Case study research approach
  - This table outlines case studies research approach to data collection and analysis.
- Table 13. A preliminary case study template
  - This table outlines the proposed structure and content of the case study narratives. We plan to pilot this template with one case study example to ensure it summarises evidence in a structured and detailed yet succinct manner.

**Table 10. List of potential case studies**

| | Name of the mechanism | Geographic coverage of the mechanism | Rationale for inclusion as a case study | Brief description of the mechanism | Source |
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| 1. | **Turning Words into Action** | Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Serbia | PROS:<br>- Promise of transferability since it is already working across three national contexts<br>- Focused on vulnerable children – children with intellectual disability<br>- Implementation arrangements include integrated approach of training and support to children by bringing together all stakeholders involved in the lives of this group of children<br>CONS:<br>- No cost / resources information<br>- No clear information on evaluation methodology and results | Mechanism brings together stakeholders and children/young people with intellectual disabilities and their families to provide training and support related to children's health and wider needs. The mechanism also facilitates creation of the children-led offshoot events and initiatives.<br>The mechanism builds on and strengthens partnership: brings together children, advocates, health and education professionals, legislators and family members. It is run by an NGO (Lumos) and it is funded by the EU.<br>It is a one-off mechanism running through 2 years. The attitudes of parents and carers towards children with intellectual disabilities have been measured by a survey administered at the beginning and end of their participation in the mechanism.<br>The mechanism has a built-in evaluation component but the evaluation methodology and results are not clear. | Bulgaria mapping task |
| 2 | **'Experts by experience'/ Young advisors** | Finland – national level | PROS:<br>- Promise of transferability across other national contexts since other countries may already have similar platforms | 'Experts by experience' / Young Advisors is a term used to describe children and young people who are considered experts on a particular policy/theme due to having personal experience of being in a particular situation, e.g. in the care | Finland interviews |

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| | | | - Focused on vulnerable children that have direct practical experience of a particular issue / policy area<br>- Implementation arrangements include active inclusion of the individual and collective expertise of children. Child experts can support better decision-making processes meeting the needs of children and young people<br>CONS:<br>- No cost / resources information<br>- No clear information on evaluation methodology | system, being a migrant / asylum seeker. Experts by experience work via thematic groups / fora and actively participate and support public authorities across all stages of policy planning, implementation and evaluation. For instance, children with experience of the care system were involved in the re-design of the Child Welfare Act to better meet the needs of young people leaving the care system, former asylum seeking children were involved in the creation of videos and other educational material for newly arriving migrants and asylum seeking children.<br>These experts also provide peer support to other children and young people going through similar experience to their own. | |
| 3 | **Ideas by Young People (Nuorten ideat Nuortenideat.fi)** | Finland – national and local levels | PROS:<br>- Promise of transferability across other national contexts since similar websites may be already operating in other countries<br>- Focused on initiating and encouraging grassroots children and youth activism both at the municipal and national policy levels. The mechanism supports interaction and cooperation between children / youth and municipalities brining young people's ideas into considerations in decision-making processes.<br>- Implementation arrangements include setting up an easily accessible website and not restricting children in terms of | This mechanism is an online platform allowing children and young people to submit suggestions and comments on local and national public and social affairs and policies that affect their lives. Each comment and suggestion is visible to all users, who can provide additional comments and support for action. Ideas with reasoned proposals for change are forwarded for consideration to relevant local and national authorities. This platform is part of Demokratia.fi portal, which brings together the various online services for democratic participation and decision-making. | Finland mapping task |

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| | | | themes or policy areas they want to raise. Children /youth can follow ideas and receive feedback and decisions to the proposals submitted via the service.<br>CONS:<br>- No cost / resources information<br>- No clear information on evaluation methodology | | |
| 4 | **Alsacian Youth Parliament (Parlement de la jeunesse alsacienne)** | France – local level | PROS:<br>- Promise of transferability across other national contexts since similar youth structures already operate in other regions/localities<br>- Children are elected in a random draw<br>- Implementation arrangements allow children to be included in discussions across a range of policy areas<br>- A strong evaluation component to projects is an integral part of this mechanism.<br>CONS:<br>- No cost / resources information<br>- Results of the evaluation are not communicated | Established in 2011, the Youth Parliament is composed of 30-40 members between 15-28 years old. There are no hierarchies between them (no Bureau, Presidents or Vice-Presidents were elected).<br>The Parliament covers a broad range of topics, such as citizenship, mobility, access to culture, life conditions, training and vocational orientation.<br>It had a consultation role in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of (most notably youth) policies. It also ensures the implementation of the 2030 Alsacian Youth Forum (forum Jeunes Alsace 2030). It also took decisions on, for example, projects proposed by youth organisations in the region in the context of calls for projects on how to increase young people's participation. | France mapping task |
| 5 | **Children's Parliament (Parlement des Enfants)** | France – national level | PROS:<br>- Promise of transferability across other national contexts since similar children's parliaments already operate in other countries<br>- Any child can sign up to participate in this mechanism | Established in 1994 by the National Assembly, Children's Parliament is an annual programme providing children with knowledge and skills on different policy areas and active participation. Each year children focus on a different topic (gender equality in 2019-2020). | France mapping task |

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| | | | - Implementation arrangements include a year-long activity programme provides children with the knowledge and skills needed for active inclusion of children in decision-making processes at the national level.<br>- There is evidence that proposals by children become national laws.<br>CONS:<br>- No cost / resources information | Children aged 10-11 years old are invited to apply to and participate in the mechanism. Participating children are given classes and a set of child friendly materials to help them prepare i.e. brochures, comics, a "how to" guide for professors, etc. Classes work throughout the year on a legislative proposal.<br>Towards the end of the programme, 577 students gather at the National Assembly (Palais Bourbon) and, guided by their tutors/teachers, prepare a legislative proposal that can become national law. Four proposals drafted by children over the years have become laws. | |
| 6 | **Development of the Youth Strategy** | Germany – federal level | PROS:<br>- Promise of transferability across other national contexts given that Children and Youth Strategies are being developed across EU member states. This can serve as an example of a nation-wide consultation efforts during a process of large policy change.<br>- Inclusive approach involving various groups of children<br>- Implementation arrangement included a broad range of consultation modes. It shows commitment to youth participation on different levels of government.<br>CONS:<br>- No cost / resources information<br>- A one-off mechanism. It is not clear whether and how the experience gained during this strategy development informed further | Children and youth participation was a cornerstone of the Youth Strategy development.<br>Children and youth were consulted by all levels of government (city, regional, federal) during the design and planning phase of the youth strategy and helped shape its scope. The youth strategy was also regularly debated via different events targeted towards youth, young adults, and experts, e.g. two conferences in 2015 and 2017, forums as part of the 16th Children and Youth Helpday in 2017, and the Youth Politics Day of the Federal Ministry attended by 450 16- to 27-year-old youth and young adults from youth parliaments, youth councils and pupil councils.<br>This mechanism was implemented by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth | Germany mapping task and interviews |

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| | | | involvement of children and youth in the development of other strategies. | (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend) (BMFSFJ). | |
| 7 | **Consultation on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** | Germany – federal level (international) | PROS:<br>- Promise of transferability across other national and local contexts since it focuses on the basic rights covered by the UNCRC<br>- Large number of children was consulted in a variety of participatory modes (survey, children's projects, writing up results of consultation).<br>- Implementation arrangements related to creating own projects respected children's views and preferences and facilitated children's participation across all stages of project development<br>CONS:<br>- No cost / resources information<br>- The extent to which children from vulnerable/disadvantaged background were included is not clear.<br>- Information on the impact is not reported | This mechanism constitutes a children's consultation on the UNCRC in Germany. As part of this mechanism, 2,700 children were surveyed regarding different aspects of the CRC. In addition, 20 children were selected to meet and create their own projects, which, for example, included starting a children's parliament in their city or making a film about how the football pitch in their city was not sufficient to meet the needs of the local children.<br>This example presents a mechanism that involved children in a variety of participatory modes, including conducting a large survey, allowing children to start their own projects, and involving children in writing up the results of the consultation. | Germany interview |
| 8 | **Youth participation Herrenberg (Jugendpartic ipation Herrenberg)** | Germany - Local level (city of Herrenberg) | PROS:<br>- Example of involving children in the design of the mechanism.<br>- Example of putting in place mechanisms ensuring children's participation in all stages of local policy development and implementation | The objective of this mechanism is to ensure participation of children and young people aged 12 to 21 in the city planning in Herrenberg. It was designed and created by children in 2012 as a result of a series of workshops. This mechanism facilitates participation of the members of the local youth organisations, schools, teachers, others | Germany interview |

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| | | | - The data on costs and resources needed to implement this mechanism may be of interest of others considering introduction of a similar mechanism<br>- Promise of transferability since other local level stakeholders across EU are guided by similar objectives of increasing children's participation levels<br>- Large number of children was consulted in a variety of participatory modes<br>CONS:<br>- Not clear whether and how this mechanism was evaluated since its introduction in 2012 | working with youth in a variety of local decision-making.<br>The mechanism includes three main forms of participation: (1) youth forum which is held once a year in schools providing young people with an opportunity to discuss and raise topics important to them; (2) a youth delegation liaising with the city council on a continuous basis; (3) an online forum available to children from the age of 13 (in line with standard regulations for the social media platforms).<br>This is an example of how children and young people can be involved in the design of a mechanism. This mechanism also facilitates different forms of participation to reach out and appeal to different children. | |
| 9 | **National consultation with children about the impact of Brexit** | Ireland and the UK – national and local level (children in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) | PROS:<br>- This consultation appeared to be a successful and inclusive participatory process on a subject where children seem to have been absent from the public debate.<br>- This was a child-led process on a topic that children were very engaged with, but had not been able to express their views on until this point.<br>- The impact of this mechanism is potentially strong: the report from this consultation was shared with the European Parliament and participating children met with several MEPs and Michel Barnier to discuss the findings. | This was a one-off consultation organised by the Ombudsman for Children in Republic of Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY).<br>There is little information on the children that participated and how they were recruited, apart from the fact that children from both sides of the Irish border were invited to participate in the consultation, and most were aged 16-17.<br>The evidence base on the impact of this mechanism on policy and decision making is potentially strong – the report reached decision makers in the EU, and children got to voice their opinions to key decision makers such as Michel Barnier. | Ireland mapping task and interviews |

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| | | | - The researchers remained in contact with the children for a year following the consultation, which the children felt made it seem that their views were taken seriously.<br>CONS:<br>- This mechanism was implemented as a one-off addressing the particular socio-political context. It means that the transferability of this mechanism may be potentially somehow limited. | | |
| 10 | **Local youth councils *(Comhairle na nÓg*)** | Ireland – local level | PROS:<br>- The local youth councils are well-developed and unique structures in that every county in Ireland has a *Comhairli na nÓg*, and these structures have existed for 17 years now. The experience of Irish local councils offers transferability to other local contexts across EU.<br>- It allows for children to participate in local and national policy making by contributing their views on the development of services and policies.<br>- There is some evidence of impact on policy and decision-making, in particular at the local level.<br>CONS:<br>- There are issues with representation of all children and ensuring that the process is child-led. | This is a structural mechanism as the *Comhairle na nÓg* (a collection of local youth councils) regularly meet to participate in local policy and decision making processes.<br>Every county in Ireland has a local youth council (*Comhairli na nÓg*).<br>The Department for Children and Youth Affairs (a Department within the Irish government) is responsible for funding and overseeing this structure. Children aged 12-17 are allowed to participate in this structure (although there appears to be much higher representation of older children/young people). There are issues with the accessibility/representation of the structure in terms of including the voices of particular social groups.<br>Recruitment takes place via the Annual General Meetings (AGM) of the councils. The councils decide on topics for discussion/action at their AGMs, which children from local schools, youth clubs and other projects are invited to. The councils then take action on these topics | Ireland mapping task and interviews |

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| | | | | in the coming year. This is a long-term structure providing some evidence of impact, particularly at the local level. | |
| 11 | **Let Me Thrive - Research Study on Foster Care in Malta** and **Involvement of children in the drafting of the Minor Protection Act** | Malta – national level | PROS:<br>- The research study established an evidence base on challenges and barriers faced by foster children (children representing vulnerable group).<br>- Building on their practical experiences of foster care, children were directly involved in the design of new laws and helped shaping other decision-making processes. This experience offers transferability potential for other policy areas and other contexts.<br>- The new laws offers example of impact.<br>CONS:<br>- No cost / resources information | The aim of this study was to obtain in-depth knowledge on (i) factors that contribute to meet the holistic needs of the fostered child; and (ii) factors that may contribute to foster care placement breakdowns in Malta. The final report was published in 2016 and fed into several recommendations of the Minor Protection (Alternative Care) Act.<br>Children were actively involved in drafting this Act. They were meeting with the legislators, representatives of the judiciary and policymakers and expressing their views how the law should better protect children and holistically respond to children's needs. | Malta interview |
| 12 | **The President's Secret Garden** | Malta – national and local level | PROS:<br>- This example of an intergenerational dialogue shows how sharing a space can foster participation and inclusion.<br>- The implementation arrangement of bringing adult and children together created an opportunity to express views and ideas and to listen to viewpoints of others.<br>- The reported impacts included changed mindsets and mentality of adults related to involvement of children in the decision-making | The Secret Garden concept is focused on the peace building and bringing people together in a safe space. It provides a safe, interactive and creative space at the Presidential Private Gardens giving children and a variety of adult stakeholders an opportunity to meet and discuss a range of topics and policy issues.<br>Participants are also provided with a range of informal education activities including self-expression, healthy eating, nurture, diversity and art.<br>The concept is also being explored in the local schools and communities. | Malta interview |

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| | | | processes; and a feeling of empowerment for children.<br>CONS:<br>- No cost / resources information<br>- It is not clear how the meetings contributed to policy design, implementation and evaluation. | | |
| 13 | **The Little Embassy (De Kleine Ambassade)** | Netherlands – national and local level | PROS:<br>- This mechanism covers participation of children and young people aged 8 to 27 years old, focusing on the 9 to 12 years old children. It targets children from vulnerable groups, such as Muslims, refugees or children with disabilities. As such, it can serve as an example how to involve younger and marginalised children.<br>- An example of an independent organisation using participation as a means to *sustainably* involve children and others in decision making and to show the importance and usefulness of child and youth participation.<br>CONS:<br>- No cost / resources information<br>- The impacts of mechanism are not clear. | The Little Embassy (De kleine Ambassade) is a foundation specialised in child and youth participation. The foundation runs educational participation projects and consultations on neighbourhood, city or organisational level, familiarising them with (the value of) participation and active citizenship. Children are involved in the design of each project, with the project commissioned by local level actors.<br>The foundation also organised a children's version of a municipality council, inviting children to give advice to the municipality on different policy areas.<br>Mechanism is well established as it is active since 2009. | Netherlands mapping task |
| 14 | **PAja!** | Netherlands – local level | PROS:<br>- This example serves as a peer-to-peer level feedback from young people to improve policies of the facility. Residents/clients of the institute interview one another about their experiences/ideas for | PAja! stands for Participation Audits in shelter, care and welfare. Established in 2007, PAja! Encourages and facilities activities in these areas to do bottom-up inspections, i.e. the 'clients' interview fellow clients about their experiences. A team of residents / clients have an | Netherlands mapping task |

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| | | | improvements and this feedback is processed into an implementation plan.<br>- The transferability potential of this mechanism relates to the provision of training allowing participants to implement and assess change and improvement. It would be possible to implement similar structures in other contexts and countries, and at different levels.<br>- A feedback loop is built into this mechanism. This creates an opportunity for an improvement in outcomes.<br>- Since one/two PAja! Projects have been carried out in a municipality every year since 2007, this offers transferable experience of implementing a regular structural mechanism.<br>CONS:<br>- No cost / resources information | opportunity to practice research skills, conversation technique, surveying, processing data and presenting. After this, they take a closer look at their institution: they interview fellow clients and approve the facilities and the guidance offered.<br>During an "inspection meeting" they present the results of this research to the leadership of the institution and propose changes. Their suggestions are, in cooperation with the supervisors, presented in a repair plan and then potentially implemented. The institution starts working on a joint 'improvement plan'. After a while, a "re-examination" takes place: this allows the research team to check whether the promised quality improvement has taken place.<br>This way the facilities are improved, and participation of the clients structurally embedded. The youth inspection team and the management of the facilities also ensure that results are properly fed back to the residents / 'clients' of the facility. | |
| 15 | **Youth Partipatory Budget (*Orçamento Participativo Jovem*)** | Portugal – national level | PROS:<br>- Focused on initiating and encouraging grassroots children and youth activism as any child and young person can suggest and vote for a project<br>- Since the results of the votes are binding, this can serve as an example of a child-initiated and | The Youth Participatory Budget is an example of a participatory process in which children and young people aged between 14-30 can decide on public investment projects. The mechanism is open to all children/young people legally residing in Portugal – either by submitting a proposal for funding, or voting on existing proposals. The results of votes are binding, and there is | Portugal mapping task |

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| | | | effective process initiating policy and practice change.<br>- Some funding data are available<br>CONS:<br>- It is not clear whether additional efforts are undertaken to engage disadvantaged/vulnerable groups of children | evidence that the mechanism has been undergoing transformations to enable participation more effectively, e.g. improving the facilitation of co-decision making, developing ICTs to enable participation, training and qualifying local professionals in participatory approaches.<br>While there are no specific strategies to reach children and youth, anyone legally residing in Portugal can submit a proposal for funding or vote on existing proposals for funding. Proposals must fall within the following thematic areas: education, employment, lodging, health, environment and sustainable development, governance and participation, equality and social inclusion. This is a long-term process with strong evidence of changes to policies, procedures and practices with the aim of facilitating participation more effectively, but not much evidence of the impact of the funded proposals themselves.<br>This is a structural mechanism overseen by the Ministry of Education and the Portuguese Institute for Youth and Sport, and funded by the Ministry of Finances. | |
| 16 | **Municipal Youth Councils (*Conselho Municipal de Juventude*)** | Portugal – local (municipal) level | PROS:<br>- Promise of transferability across other national contexts since similar youth structures already operate in other regions/localities<br>- Albeit Youth Councils are not implemented equally in Portugal and opinions and discussions are | This is a structural mechanism that has existed in some parts of Portugal since 2000, although laws regulating them were only drafted in 2009.<br>The councils welcome diversity, but it is limited by the fact that the recruitment into the council takes place via election from peers in schools or other | Portugal mapping task |

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| | | | not binding, there are several examples of councils that have been effective in facilitating active inclusion of children on a range of areas including: municipal youth policies, municipal budgets, other policy areas that may affect children/youth.<br>CONS:<br>- It is not always clear how and why particular ideas raised by Youth Councils were selected and implemented by local authorities.<br>- It is not clear whether sufficient efforts are made to ensure participation of youth from disadvantaged/vulnerable groups<br>- No cost / resources information | organisations. Any child under 18 years old may participate in the municipal youth councils. The municipal youth councils meet four times a year to hold discussions and formulate opinions on various topics including: municipal youth policies, municipal budgets, other policy areas that may affect children/youth. | |
| 17 | **Youth Council of Slovenia** | Slovenia – national level | PROS:<br>- This example offers transferable lessons how structural/collective action can support individual participation. Another transferability potential results from the training activities and how they empower and prepare young people to be active citizens.<br>- At the structural level, this mechanism offers transferability potential since similar youth structures already operate in other regions/localities<br>- This mechanism can also serve as an example of fostering dialogue, participation and inclusion by bringing together young people | It is an umbrella association of youth organizations operating at the national level. It brings together 16 NGOs of different interests, views or political orientations. It represents the interests of young people in relation to national authorities and in international associations and participates in promoting the development of youth policy. It also encourages active citizenship through training and a range of voluntary activities. Run by NGOs with funds from national government, it came about as a result of Youth Council Act (2000) and is ongoing. | Slovenia mapping task and interviews |

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| | | | from across the country and involving them in policy planning.<br>CONS:<br>- No cost / resources information<br>- The impact of the Youth Council on decision-making is not clear. | | |
| 18 | **Children's Parliaments** | Slovenia – national level | PROS:<br>- Promise of transferability across other national contexts since similar children's parliaments already operate in other countries<br>- Any child can sign up to participate in this mechanism<br>- It is a national level mechanism but linked to local and regional child councils thus provide example of collaboration and coordination of national and local efforts<br>- Implementation arrangements include a year-long activity programme provides children with the knowledge and skills needed for active inclusion of children in decision-making processes at the national level<br>- The programme involves training the trainers and educating children about active citizenship and democracy thus there is a potential for having effect on children's participation levels<br>CONS:<br>- No cost / resources information<br>- It is not clear whether and how proposals made by children were included in new laws and policies | Children's Parliaments are an annual programme of activities for raising children for active citizenship and democracy. Children are educated on human and civil rights and are encouraged to participate in social life (participation) and express their own opinions on issues they choose. As a form of democratic dialogue, they are implemented and well-established part of the school lives in most elementary schools across Slovenia, upgraded with parliaments at the municipal and regional levels, and concluded at the National Children's Parliament.<br>The mechanism has a low participation threshold – all elementary school children (6-15 years old) are able to participate, and choose a delegation to represent them at the municipal and national child parliaments.<br>Children involved in all stages of policy: design, implementation and evaluation (in form of focus groups). The mechanism reports positive effects such as enhanced social skills and development of critical thinking, as well as levels of children's participation and active citizenship.<br>The mechanism also involves training of mentors for children. Children participate | Slovenia mapping task |

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| | | | | in the programme with the support of mentors and regional coordinators.<br>This mechanism is organised by Association of Friends of Youth Slovenia (NGO) and has been running for 30 years and is ongoing. | |
| 19 | **Education on active citizenship and participation** | Slovenia – national level | PROS:<br>- This mechanism can serve as an example of a training activity embedding the values of participation and active citizenship in the society. It offers a transferability potential, in particular for countries that do not yet have similar programmes.<br>- A built-in evaluation component of the programme offers opportunity to regularly update the curriculum to best meet the needs of children.<br>CONS:<br>- It is not clear whether and how participation in this programme changes the levels of active citizenship among children and youth. Some of the impacts may only materialise after several years of implementing the programme.<br>- No cost / resources information | This mechanism teaches children aged 10+ about importance of active citizenship. Children are introduced to children's rights for the first time in the 4th and 5th grades of elementary school. They learn about the importance of basic human and children's rights, duties and responsibilities. In the 7th and 8th grades, in the course/subject on "Patriotic and Citizenship Culture and Ethics", children learn about the importance of active citizenship and participation. They are taught about human and children's rights as well as the basic principles of democratic decision-making. In upper secondary and vocational schools, students deepen their knowledge about these topics through the subject.<br>The lessons are designed in a child-friendly and simple to understand format. The curriculum is regularly evaluated by asking children (including migrant and underprivileged children) about their thoughts during focus groups. | Slovenia mapping task and interviews |
| 20 | **Daily life: Framework for child participation 0-6 year olds (La Vida** | Spain - municipal level (Grenada) | PROS:<br>- This mechanism can serve as a rare example of including very young children (up to 6 years old) in a participation mechanism. | This is an education programme implemented in four early childhood centres that belong to a network of/are linked to the Granada Educa foundation, in Granada, Spain. It is an initiative stemming from the Childhood and | Spain mapping task |

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| | **Cotidiana: El Marco Para La Participación De La Infancia 0-6 Años)** | | - It can also serve as an example of an evidence-based approach to implementing policies and practices with potential for impact and effectiveness.<br>CONS:<br>- No cost / resources information<br>- It is not clear how/to what extent the feedback and evaluation is incorporated to improve the functioning of this mechanism. | Adolescence Plan of the Granada municipality (ayuntamiento). The municipality is part of the Ciudades Amigas para la Infancia (UNICEF Child Friendly Cities initiative).<br>The mechanism seeks to develop educational strategies that foster listening to children. It aims to promote evaluation/research-action (i.e. linking research and action) between professionals and schools, to implement evidence-based improvement strategies to adjust to the needs of the children. As well as assisting teachers with implementing child participation measures, the mechanism also offers parents proposals with examples of how to respect and listen to young children.<br>The mechanism has been recognised by UNICEF in 2018. | |
| 21 | **Child friendly city initiative (Sello de Ciudad Amiga de la Infancia)** | Spain – national and local level | PROS:<br>- This mechanism can serve as an example of recognising local level actions and efforts to introduce and sustain child-friendly policies and programmes.<br>- The built-in evaluation element offers potential for effectiveness and improvement.<br>- Implementation arrangements allow children to be included in discussions across a range of policy areas<br>CONS:<br>- It is not clear whether specific actions are undertaken to include disadvanted/vulnerable children. | This mechanism entails giving a certificate (stamp or 'sello') to recognise the efforts and compromise of municipalities, municipality associations (mancomunidades) and the government to incorporate childhood and adolescence at the centre of their political agenda. A Friend(ly) city is one where children priorities and rights are an integral part of policies, programmes and public decisions. The mechanism is organised by a collaboration of stakeholder at national and local level.<br>This mechanism involves collaboration between national authorities (Spanish UNICEF) and local authorities. It recognises efforts and actions at the local | Spain mapping task |

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| | | | - No cost / resources information. | level to prioritise children's rights in the local policies and programmes. These actions and programmes can cover a diverse range of topics such as environmental action, bullying / cyberbullying and social media, refugee children, discrimination, gender equality, identity and diversity/ violence in the family.<br>The stamp is awarded every 2 years and has external evaluation to assess effectiveness of initiative. | |
| 22 | **UNCTAD Youth Forum** | International | PROS:<br>- While this mechanism is open only to people aged 18-30, it still represents an important example of youth participation that may have transferrable lessons for children's participation.<br>- There is some evidence that this mechanism has influence on the decision-making processes, e.g. securing an invite to UNCTAD meetings to share youth views on UNCTAD's work; submit news to UNCTAD on youth-related activities in support of the SDGs.<br>CONS:<br>- It is not clear how children are selected to take part in this mechanism.<br>- The effectiveness of this mechanism is not clear. | The last UNCTAD Youth Forum took place in 2018 in Geneva, involving over 150 young people from across 70 countries.<br>It is a 5-day event held on a biannual basis where young people aged 18-30 are invited to have an open and interactive dialogue with global actors in sustainable development via a series of presentations, discussion panels and workshops on various related topics. It is organised and overseen by the UNCTAD and UNCTAD Youth Network. There is little information on the young people that take part and how they are invited to the event, but it is limited to those aged 18-30. This appears to be a long-term structure for youth participation, with moderate evidence for changes to policy and decision making. | EU / international mapping task |
| 23 | **Consultations with children and young** | Albania, Bangladesh, Bosnia and | PROS:<br>- A clear set of recommendations emerging from this research | This was a one-off series of consultations during the COVID-19 outbreak. It was conducted and overseen by World Vision | EU / international mapping |

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| | **people to understand their views on the COVID-19 outbreak** | Herzegovina, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Sierra Leone and Syrian refugee children living in refugee camps near the Turkish-Syrian border | mechanism can help shaping effective and impactful children's consultations in the future. This offers promise of transferability for other stakeholders planning to conduct similar children's consultations, evaluations and/or studies on the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak.<br>- It was a cross-national consultative process using innovative methods (e.g. social media, WhatsApp, Viber) to gather the views on the COVID-19 outbreak, thus it offers lessons how to use IT-enabled communication technologies to involve children.<br>CONS:<br>- Albeit the mechanism aimed to include a diverse range of children, all children were already part of existing structures. As such, these children might have already demonstrated attitudes of empowerment.<br>- The impact of this mechanism is not clear.<br>- No cost / resources information | International, an international civil society organisation.<br><br>The consultation included 101 children and young people (58 girls and 43 boys) between the ages of 8 and 18 from 13 countries: Albania, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Sierra Leone and Syrian refugee children living in refugee camps near the Turkish-Syrian border. 44% of participants were aged 16-18; 41% were aged 14-15; 15% were aged 8-13. Selection criteria considered gender, age, ability, religion, geographic region, context (i.e. fragile context representation), location (i.e. rural versus urban areas), and ethnicity to ensure diverse perspectives. Many were members of World Vision's Young Leaders advocacy programme, while others were active in child parliaments and clubs in World Vision programme areas.<br>The study also included young people as peer researchers, while four children were also included as part of a consultation team to support adults.<br>A clear set of recommendations for policy makers has been produced from this research. | task and interviews |
| 24 | **Cyprus Children's Parliament** | Cyprus – national level | PROS:<br>- The mechanism serves as an example of an inclusive and democratic process involving children aged 12-18 with quotas | It is a structural mechanism involving child parliamentarians elected through a process through the year and meeting for a week in November to convene on issues. The mechanisms is adult-initiated | Cyprus mapping task |

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| | (Cyprus is a reserve country for children's consultations thus we are also including a case study suggestion) | | representative of the 5 districts of Cyprus in the same proportion as Cyprus House of Representatives. It offers a promise of transferability across other national contexts since similar child parliament structures already operate in other regions/localities.<br>- This mechanism seems to have high impact & degree of influence as it creates a permanent line of contact between Cyprus House of Representatives and the Children's Parliament. In addition, matters arising at Children's Parliament are taken up twice a year by the Ministry of Education and Culture and progress of implementation is also assessed.<br>CONS:<br>- No cost / resources information | (government) but the selection of issues is child-led. There are no restrictions on the range of topics as long as they relate to children and their experiences.<br>It involves children aged 13 and over recruited on voluntary bases, aiming to be geographically and ethnically representative. | |

**Table 11. Case studies selection criteria**

| | Criterion | Categories | Explanation |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Primary criterion** | **Transferability** | Potential for implementation in other contexts | This criterion focuses on the lessons learned from this mechanism and the potential transferability of it in other contexts.<br>This can also include examples of mechanisms that were implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic and transferable lessons that can be carried forward from this crisis to enable children's participation more effectively in the future. |
| **Primary criterion** | **Extent of equal and inclusive participation of children** | Children's age (children up to 13 y.o./ children 13+y.o / youth (typically children 16+y.o.)<br><br>Vulnerable / disadvantaged children | This selection criterion will examine steps undertaken to ensure equal and inclusive participation of all children.<br><br>We suggest that at least one case study is focused on aspects related to vulnerability / disadvantage, highlighting promising examples of combating discrimination and facilitating active inclusion of children from these groups. |
| **Primary criterion** | **Effectiveness** | Effects on children's participation levels<br><br>Effects on children's degree of influence | Case study examples would be examined whether they resulted in the improved current and future levels of children's participation (short- and long-term impact; effect on particular groups of children; individual and collective participation levels).<br>Examples would be also examined against the degree of children's influence on decision-making, e.g. the extent to which children's views and preferences were respected and included in the policy change that have resulted from children participation in this mechanism. |
| **Secondary criterion** | **Purpose, mode and style of participation** | Participation as means vs. ends<br><br>Regular / one-off / *ad hoc*<br><br>Stage of the policy process<br><br>Individual children vs. structural / collective action<br><br>Frequency | These selection criteria will provide coverage with respect to the nature and on-the-ground implementation of the mechanism included in the case study. It will examine the purpose of the mechanism (the extent to which it was a means to an outcome, e.g. legal, political, social vs. an ends in and of itself, e.g. enacting of child's citizen-based or human rights-based right to participate), the context of participation, the stage of the policy process (design and planning, implementation, evaluation), the extent to which children are active participants able to initiate and control the process vs. participating in activities defined by other stakeholders). This aspect also distinguishes between established and one-off mechanisms looking at issues of sustainability and scalability for each respective example. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Secondary criterion** | **Participation content** | Topic | The selection of case studies will ensure an even split between examples addressing different aspects of what children might be expressing an opinion on; or what specific activity they might be participating in. Case studies will also examine how issues/topics to focus were chosen or prioritised, and who set the agenda (adults, children, in partnership). |

**Table 12. Case study research approach**

| Methods | Description |
|---|---|
| **Desk research** | Part of the desk research for the case studies has been conducted during the mapping stage (Task 1). It supported identification of specific examples of mechanisms that fulfil the selection criteria.<br>Once the children's participation mechanisms have been selected for case studies investigation, a further detailed review of policy, programme, and implementation documents will be carried out, in parallel with any reports that identify the evidence around the effectiveness of the respective mechanism for improving children's participation.<br>These documents include literature in English and national languages in the selected countries and will be supported by national experts. |
| **Interviews** | The desk research will be complemented with relevant stakeholder interviews (1-2 per case study). The aim of these is to gain an in-depth understanding of the working of each mechanism selected for the case studies. This includes the way the selected mechanisms work in practice, the barriers and facilitators they face in fostering inclusive and meaningful children's participation, and evidence of impact or effectiveness of the approach, and the relevance and added-value of EU action. As such we hope to speak to those involved in the design, implementation or evaluation of the selected mechanisms and cover issues such as:<br>• Stakeholder's background, experience with, and role in the mechanism<br>• Factual overview of the mechanism (implementing entity, including resources, governance, and key stakeholders; children and adult populations involved, content /social and political issues / topics addressed<br>• Driving forces, facilitators and barriers to impactful and inclusive children's participation<br>• Perspectives on the key features in the design, implementation and evaluation of the mechanism, on-the-ground implementation, experiences of participants<br>• Degree of influence on the lives of children/society/communities, impact on children's participation levels and children's degree of influence (policy changes that have resulted from children's participation in this mechanism)<br>• Existing evidence base, including definitions of, and approaches to evidencing success<br>The project team will conduct the interviews, and, if needed, will be supported by respective national experts. |

Source: developed by RAND Europe.

**Table 13. A preliminary case study template**

| Case study of children's participation in democratic and political life / decision-making |
|---|
| **Description**<br>• Short description of the mechanism, including type of mechanism and the responsible entity. |
| **Context**<br>• Brief description of the international/national/regional/local context and its influence on the mechanism, including description of the key structures / processes for participation in this context, and the level of commitment to take action on the children's right to participate. |
| **Participants**<br>• Characteristics of participants, including any targeting for specific socio-demographic / vulnerabilities / disadvantage, age groups, or other.<br>• Description of steps undertaken to ensure equal participation of all children, i.e. participant recruitment approach, modes of participation. |
| **Participation process and content**<br>• Purpose of participation (as means vs. ends).<br>• Format of participation (regular vs. one-off, structural / collective action vs. individual children, stage of the policy process).<br>• Topics covered, issues addressed, and the process by which these are agreed upon, i.e. selection of topics and agenda setting (child- vs. adult-led).<br>• What participation in the mechanism looks like for the participant, including practical requirements, time commitments, etc.<br>• Driving forces, facilitators and barriers to impactful and inclusive children's participation. |
| **Effectiveness, impact and consequences**<br>• Definitions of success, effectiveness and strength of evidence<br>• Impact on: the lives of children / society / communities, children's participation levels and children's degree of influence. |
| **Transferability and lessons that can be drawn for EU / national / local approaches**<br>• Lessons learned and potential for their transferability to promote children's participation in other contexts. |
| **Sources**<br>• List of sources |

Source: developed by RAND Europe.

## Case studies narratives

This section presents long version of the case studies to complement short narratives presented in the main body of the report.

### Box 14. Case study: Children's Parliament in France

**Children's Parliament in France (*Parlement des Enfants*)**

**Overview**

This nationwide mechanism targets school children around the age of 10, in France and French schools around the world, and aims to teach democratic debate and the understanding of law-making processes. Children write law proposals consisting of four articles related to a theme chosen annually. These articles go through a selection process by local and national authorities and 4 finalists are chosen. Children then vote on these final four and select the winner, who is awarded at the Children's Parliament.

Established in 1994, it is run by the National Assembly. So far, four proposals have been made into legislation and a further piece incorporated as part of legislation.

**Context**

The mechanism was originally designed and planned by the National Assembly in cooperation with the Ministry for Education[805]. Participation in the mechanism teaches the values of the French Republic: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity[806]. The mechanism is part of civic and moral education, which aims to teach children to respect others, and create a culture of citizenship[807].

Evidence suggests that participation in the Children's Parliament supports and cultivates a sense of respect for the political system and the work of the political class, enabling children to understand through experience the difficulties of coming to a consensus between over 500 participating children on a single law to be put forward by the Children's Parliament[808]. It helps children understand (i) the process of legislation, (ii) that they have the right to participate in this process as children, and (iii) their potential influence once they reach the age allowing them to take part in elections[809].

The National Assembly is responsible for the implementation of this mechanism, in partnership with the Ministry for Education, the French secular mission (*La mission laïque française* – hereon MLF), and the Agency for French Education Abroad (*L'Agence pour l'enseignement français à l'étranger* – hereon AEFE)[810]. Partnership with MLF and AEFE were established to coordinated French schools overseas[811].

**Participants**

The principle of adopting the law proposed by children began from the Parliament cycle that took place in the 1994-1995 academic year[812]. Participation in the Parliament to overseas French schools commenced in 2012-2013 (18th cycle) and the use of electronic voting to select final winning proposals commenced in the 19th cycle[813]. In addition, as noted by one interviewee, it is important to engage children of this age range in this type of mechanism so they are familiar with the process at a local and national level before they get involved in similar mechanisms at the EU level when they are slightly older[814].

This mechanism is designed as part of the civics education of children in the the final year of primary school (5th grade in *CM2 – cours moyen 2ème année*)[815]. Children are about 10 years old at this point. All CM2 classes from public and private schools are eligible to apply but only 2 CM2 classes per electoral district are selected to participate[816]. Annually, 577 classes participate in the final elections of the Children's Parliament[817].

Although elementary schools include children of wide demographics, including children with disabilities, interview findings suggest that there is low participation of marginalised or disadvantaged children in this mechanism[818]. The interviewee suggested that in order to address this challenge, better connections with specialist institutions could be made instead of relying solely on the mainstream school system. In addition, another barriers to participating in this programme is the reluctance of teachers to volunteer the classes for participation, either because they are not aware of the mechanism, or may be reluctant to take on the extra workload[819]. Engaging digital technologies to encourage different ways of submitting proposals could be also a helpful step, according to this interviewee[820].

**Participation process and content**

The mechanism is a regular process, with a clearly defined structure and format. Each participatory cycle lasts one academic year. At the beginning of the academic year, each teacher receives a letter from the national assembly and Ministry for Education inviting participation in the mechanism[821]. In November, the classes that wish to participate submit their candidacy by writing a letter explaining their motivations to either their relevant department for national education, the AEFE, or the MLF[822]. These institutions then choose which classes are to participate in the Children's Parliament[823]. The organising team from the National Assembly then sends them materials and information on the process and information is made available on the website[824]. The selection criteria are as follows:

- the proposition must relate to the annual topic,
- it has to contain four articles maximum,
- it must be a real creation of children that respect their reasoning and expression,
- it is true to the reflections of the children on future problems of society, and
- the proposition must translate into actionable measures[825].

The same school cannot be chosen for several years in a row[826]. In the following February, each of the selected CM2 classes is invited to propose a law and these proposals are then submitted to an academic jury which subsequently chooses (between March and April) about 50-60 proposals and submits them to a national jury[827]. The National jury then selects 4 proposals, announces the finalists and asks them to submit their videos to accompany the vote. The final list of 4 proposals is put online on the Children's Parliament website and voting takes place in May. The participating CM2 classes debate the proposals and vote to select the law to be proposed by the Children's Parliament. In the final step, the classes of the 4 finalist proposals convene at the National Assembly (*l'Assemblée Nationale*) in June where the President of the National Assembly and the Minister of Youth and National Education awards a prize to the winning team (*la classe lauréate*)[828]. Representatives from the AEGE and MLF are also present on this day[829].

During the participation cycle, the selected classes draft a proposal law on a predetermined topic. The children are able to discuss and debate this topic with their local MP, if they visit the school, and with politicians if the school is one of the four finalists[830]. The children are neither involved in suggesting nor selecting the overall theme but are able to choose the specifics of law proposal they put forward[831]. In 2019-2020, the topic to discuss is gender equality[832]. and previous topics have included: the protection of biodiversity, effects of climate change on society, good use of digital technologies, children's rights, health and new technologies[833]. During the cycle, the schools may request that their local MP visit so they can talk to them about the role of an MP, what they do every day, and the children may have a discussion with them about the theme chosen for the Children's Parliament that year[834]. The participating classes also have the opportunity to visit the meeting place of the National Assembly, the Bourbon Palace (*le Palais de Bourbon*), to further discover the workings of the Parliament and National Assembly[835]. On the final event day, the whole class from the 4 finalists spend the day at the Parliament and attend a meetings with: the committee responsible for choosing the year's theme, MPs, experts from society concerning the year's theme, the Minister of Education, and the President of the National Assembly[836].

During the COVID19 crisis, this mechanism had already begun so the process stayed intact for the most part except for the final day at Parliament[837]. In lieu of this, the MP went to the classes of the 4 finalists to debate what they thought of the other ideas[838].

Materials to guide participation are made available through the official Children's Parliament site (www.parlementdesenfants.fr) and the Éduscolaire website, run by the Ministry for National Education and Youth (www.eduscol.education.fr). Teachers from the classes are able to request pedagogical material to help them support students in these activities and further information about deadlines and processes are made available on the government's Education Ministry website and on the official Parlement des Enfants website[839]. Separate sets of materials are available for both the children and teachers. The children's materials are presented in a child-friendly manner, using accessible language, appealing visuals and formats (e.g. one resource is presented as a comic strip)[840].

**Effectiveness, impact and consequences**

There is evidence that suggests that under this mechanism children can shape the law and policy development, provided that their proposals are picked up by a national representative[841]. Four proposals from the Children's Parliament have been adopted as part of French law. Specifically:

- Law No. 96-1238 of 30 December 1996, relating to non-separation of siblings placed in care, apart from exceptional cases[842],
- Law No. 98-381 of 14 May 1998, allowing orphan children to participate in the board of guardians[843],
- Law No. 99-478 of 9 June 1999, to forbid the purchase of school furniture produced by child labour in countries that do not respect children's rights[844], and
- Law no. 2000-197 of 6 March 2000, relating to strengthening the involvement of schools in preventing and detecting child abuse[845].

Additionally, in the 12th cycle (2004-2005), the Children's Parliament proposal to make the use of biodegradable bags compulsory, as part of the fight against plastic pollution, was absorbed as part of Article 47 of Law No. 2006-11 of 5 January 2006 on agriculture[846].

Despite these legal and policy impacts, the reviewed literature identifies several aspects that could further improve children participation in democratic life as part of this mechanism. Firstly, some academics evaluate the Children's Parliament processes as purely consultative. This is because the voice of children in this mechanism is not binding and not guaranteed by law but is dependent on the uptake by government officials. Secondly, previous research has also suggested that children may have insufficient input in the decision-making in this mechanism due to many processes being adult-led[847]. For instance, the themes are pre-selected by adults and the proposals put forward go through selection processes led by adults (except for the very last stage). In addition, since the selection process (of participating children) occurs through formal academic systems (schools, departments of education), some children may be left out and the mechanism itself may not offer a true avenue for democratic expression and participation in political life[848]. Furthermore, as the aim of the mechanism is focused on providing a lesson in civic education rather than involving children in decision-making, there is still scope to strengthen the role of the children's parliament to fully encompass children's participation in the democratic and political life[849]. Finally, as observed by one interviewee, the involvement of MPs could be seen as a negative feature, where it may be interpreted as a political manoeuvre[850].

**Transferable lessons**

There is no direct evidence on transferability but the concept of a Children's Parliament is widely used across countries in the EU. Whereas Children and Youth Parliaments in other member states generally involve individual children from schools participating in an electoral process and parliamentary debates akin to national Parliament, these programs are largely to train children in the process of debating and democratic participation without necessarily being tailored to involving children in influencing policy-making. France's Children Parliament, on the other hand, produces bills that can be directly taken up by political leaders and enable children to have direct influence on policies.

**Box 15. Case study: European Network of Young Advisors working with the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children**

**European Network of Young Advisors working with the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children**

**Overview**

Launched in 2010, European Network of Young Advisors (ENYA) is a child and youth participation project facilitated via the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC).

Children and young people take part in ENOC activities to share their experience and to give Ombudspersons for Children a sense of what matters concern them and how to ensure the protection and promotion of their rights as guaranteed by the UNCRC[851].

**Context**

Established in 1997, ENOC is a not-for-profit association of independent children's rights institutions (ICRIs), whose mandate is to facilitate the promotion and protection of the rights of children, as formulated in the UNCRC.

ENYA is a child participative project, facilitated through membership to ENOC, that provides children and young people the opportunity to be heard at the European level, in line with Article 12 of the UNCRC. The project operates with the financial support of the European Commission. ENYA aims to ensure a meaningful and effective participation of children by allowing them to voice their opinion on the thematic issues addressed simultaneously by ENOC. The idea behind the ENYA project is that ENOC's policy statements, addressing a specific child rights area (one thematic priority area is extensively addressed every year), are informed and influenced by the views of children and young people from across the ENOC membership

Children have the opportunity to express their concerns and views regarding their rights, to make their proposals heard, and to participate in the elaboration of common recommendations[852].

Recent ENYA projects have focused on topics such as children's rights in decision-making, children's rights in the digital environment, and mental health[853].

**Participants**

All children under the age of 18 living in the ENOC member countries can participate in ENYA projects[854]. Participation in the ENYA project is open to all ENOC members following an open call for interest. For the sake of quality of the project management and outcomes, the number of participating countries may be limited to 15 up to 17 maximum.

For example, children and young people from Azerbaijan, Belgium (French speaking community), Cyprus, Georgia, Italy, Malta, Spain (Catalonia and Basque country), and the UK (Northern Ireland and Scotland) participated in the 2018 edition of ENYA's 'Let's Talk Young, Let's Talk about mental health' project. ENOC members participating in the ENYA project are encouraged to involve as much as possible children and young people from as various backgrounds as possible, and whenever possible children directly affected by the issue at stake. ENYA participants are recruited through previously set up processes at their respective Ombudsperson for Children's level. In some cases, the Ombudsperson for Children's office may seek assistance from other child rights organizations operating in their country or national youth agencies to reach out to children[855].

**Participation process, content and format**

The format and design of the ENYA project have changed over the years and currently the way and level of engagement with children and young people can be described as follows: once the group of ENYA participants is set up at countries' level, ENYA Coordinators (project dedicated staff at Ombudspersons for Children's offices) lead a number of domestic activities (usually taking place between February and June) on the priority area; then ENYA country teams elect two young people to represent them at the joint ENYA Annual Forum (in June-July) where young people present the outcomes of their country activities and collate domestic findings into common recommendations on the issue at stake; then one young person per country among those who have participated in the ENYA Forum is elected (by peers) to participate at the ENOC Annual Conference (September-October) where the young people present the ENYA recommendations and lead the main parts of the Conference related to the annual theme. It should be noted that the ENOC Annual Conference is the main annual event of the Network and the one where the outcomes of the annual priority theme are disseminated. The ENYA recommendations are integrated in the ENOC policy position statement on that year's topic[856].

Project work:

Past projects focused on a wide range of topics:

- ENYA 2013: Children on the move: children first!' (concerning refugees, children affected by migration, asylum seekers, trafficked children and Roma children),
- ENYA 2014: 'Austerity bites: children's voices',
- ENYA 2015: 'Let's talk young, let's talk about violence',
- ENYA 2016: 'Equal opportunities in Education',
- ENYA 2017: 'The Road to Rio: exploring and empowering youth identity and relationships' (relationship and sexuality education was the main theme of the project),
- ENYA 2018:'Let's talk young, let's talk about mental health', and
- ENYA 2019: 'Let's talk young, let's talk about children's rights in the digital environment'[857].

For instance, in 2017, at the first phase of the project, there were between four and six physical meetings conducted with young people in participating countries. Those meetings made use of a large number of participation tools put in place by ENYA coordinators (national child participation officers), including group discussions with independent experts, drama techniques, freeze framing, theatrical plays of fictional stories, writing and singing songs, rap songs[858]. In 2018, ENYA country teams conducted between six and ten physical meetings with young people using formats such as group discussions with relevant experts in the field, arts, writing and singing songs, setting up different plays and stories, visiting a specialised museum on mental health and others[859]. ENYA projects have also taken the form of youth fora[860]. All these forms were used to collect and reflect participating young people's views and stories.

Youth Advisory Panels (YAP): these are created by most of ENOC member institutions. These youth bodies, acting in an advisory capacity to the Ombudsperson for children, are integrated in the general structure of Ombudspersons for children's offices and have an overall understanding of their functions, activities, and challenges they face.

Depending on the theme and on the operational model and capacity of country offices, young people can also be specially recruited to take part in the ENYA project. This is often the case when the Ombudsperson for Children's Office in a particular country does not have a permanent YAP or when the YAP has a different thematic agenda. Participation officers within participating ENOC members' offices are designated as "ENYA Coordinators" in order to liaise between ENYA's operational team on one side and young people on the other. ENYA Coordinators have an important role in securing the successful completion of the 1st phase of the implementation of the ENYA project consisting in a series of meetings and relevant activities at country level aiming at helping the young people to express an informed view on the priority theme. The ENYA Coordinators also accompany and support the young people participating in the ENYA Annual Forum.

The first ENYA Forum, a one day event, was held in 2010 in Strasbourg at the same time as the ENOC 2010 Annual Conference. For the first time the ENYA group had the opportunity to present to ENOC their recommendations related to the four focus issues for that year – education, privacy and risks related to the use of new technologies, health and violence[861].

Two key facilitators of the ENYA projects have been the support of the EC and the underpinning of the UNCRC[862]. The former support has been provided in the form of financial aid for the ENOC work programme, which has been co-funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (REC 2014-2020). Another driving force has been the possibility for ENYA to build exclusively on the network of member states established by ENOC and thus reach out to children and young people from different geographical areas[863].

According to one EU-level interviewee, the main barrier for an impactful children's participation via ENYA structures includes the difficulties around allowing children to set the agenda or select discussion topics, particularly about aspects adults do not want to involve children in[864]. Moreover, as also noted by the same interviewee, although evaluation forms are given out to children on the final day of ENYA events, the available evidence suggests that these findings, as well as the outcome of theirrecommendations, are not communicated to children[865].

Some ENYA projects also brought tangible results. For instance, at the back of the 2013 ENYA project 'Children on the move' ENOC produced a documentary film collecting the experiences of children who were affected by the migration. The film had its premiere at the European Parliament on the occasion of the 17th ENOC Annual Conference in September 2013. Following this, all ENOC members disseminated the film in their home countries and the ENOC Bureau also shared the film across EU institutions and agencies, as well as with the Council of Europe and the UN Commissioner for Human Rights.

**Effectiveness, impact and consequences**

There is some evidence that suggests that this mechanism has some impact.

In 2017, ENYA focused on relationship and sexuality education which resulted in a series of national consultations on the matter[866]. While the outcomes of these consultations varied between countries[867], all participating member countries agreed with the children to 'translate' this work in a written recommendations format, which were addressed first to ENOC and then to national, European and international authorities[868].

Children participating in ENYA 2019 made their own report on children's rights in the digital environment and presented it to government departments in one interviewee's country.

Following this a high-level meeting was held in February 2020 which resulted in 35 organisations from across the country signing a commitment statement to work towards promoting and protecting children's rights in the digital environment)[869]. In the same country children involved in ENYA 2019 presented their recommendations to, amongst others, the President of Parliament, Ministers and leaders of governmental agencies and NGO's. This is an example of a possible impact of this mechanism on policy.

One interviewee also offered some information on the mechanism's impact. According to this interviewee, a concrete policy change was facilitated via ENYA's 2019 project focusing on children's rights in the digital environment. As part of this project, children wrote a chapter in a national report on self-harm and presented it at the project's final conference in that country. This presentation and the accompanying report were picked up by the government's health representatives and they invited the children to a meeting to discuss it more extensively. Subsequently, a section on self-harm online was added to the new action plan on suicide in that country. This exemplifies how young people are crucial in setting the agenda on this topic[870]. According to the same interviewee, having the children themselves present their findings to policymakers has also been said to have had a powerful impact, far more than if representative adults were to deliver them in their place[871].

In addition, the same interviewee reported how participation in ENYA projects equips children with knowledge about how organisations work and how decisions are made[872].

**Transferable Lessons**

The work of ENYA points to a number of aspects that could be transferable into other contexts. The ENYA project includes direct involvement of children in project activities, in building up and presenting project outputs. This mechanism also constitutes an example of producing engaging research and consultation outputs (e.g. a film screening) to gain interest, attention and commitment of policymakers who may have the power to take action and implement new policies.

One EU-level interviewee felt that having a member of staff dedicated to children's participation and a dedicated funding can further strengthen and encourage the growth of mechanisms in member states[873].

ENYA further conveys the necessity of creating strong links between authorities at the local, national and EU level. ENYA structure shows that it is possible to involve a variety of stakeholders to work effectively and collaboratively towards a common goal. On one hand, this supports and strengthens child participation structures at local and national level, and, at the same time, it also contributes to the EU- and international-level developments (e.g. via CoE).

As one interviewee put it, *'we cannot expect children to have an opinion on the European level if they haven't felt it at the local level. That's what's good about the ENYA project, that children get to talk about it at a national level and then take that to the European level'*[874].

**Box 16. Case study: The Little Embassy**

**The Little Embassy (De Kleine Ambassade)**

**Overview**

The Little Embassy ("De Kleine Ambassade") is a foundation that aims to enable children to discover and experience how they can contribute as active citizens to their surroundings[875]. The foundation initiates projects, but also implements projects commissioned by its partners, including companies, schools and town councils in the Netherlands. The Foundation mostly operates in the area around Schiedam.

**Context**

The Little Embassy was founded in 2014. The foundation emerged out of two organisations: Aunt Yo ("Tante Yo"), which specialised in communication and media, and Foundation Kick'r ("Stichting Kik'r"), which focused on children's participation[876]. The foundation currently consists of a team of 17 professionals, including people with a background in education, communication, policymaking, film production and graphic design (De Kleine Ambassade 2020b). The number of projects the foundation organises has increased over time: in 2014 the Foundation organised 20 projects and 40 projects in 2019[877].

The foundation is located in Schiedam, a town in the south west of the Netherlands between The Hague and Rotterdam. In 2019, out of 79 thousand citizens of Schiedam, just over 7 thousand were primary school children (usually aged 3 to 12) and nearly 4 thousand children in secondary education (usually aged 12 to 18)[878].

One of the goals of the Schiedam municipality is to empower citizens, including children and youth[879]. The municipality therefore financially supports organisations such as the Little Embassy that design and implement programmes and initiatives fostering participation[880].

The foundation also receives financial support from other foundations, donations and clients[881].

The main goal of The Little Embassy foundation is to enable children to actively participate in society[882]. In this respect, the foundation and its partners develop projects and educational programmes allowing children to explore specific issues, such as waste sorting, organisation of cultural events, such as a local movie festival, and the prevention of bullying[883]. Participating in projects equips children with knowledge and experience how to express their opinion and provide advice to the municipalities or companies on the issue(s) they have studied[884]. The Little Embassy team, in turn, ensures the children's advice is heard by the relevant actors, such as the municipality and companies, for example through a youth council such as the Shell Moerdijk youth council, or conversations between the children and local politicians[885]. Depending on the project, the foundation may be involved in the translation of the children's advice into policies, follow up with children informing them on progress how the children's advice is being used, and provide feedback to children[886].

**Participants**

Children and adolescents between 8 and 27 years old can participate in the Little Embassy projects, but the majority of projects is focussed on children between 9 and 12 years old living in the area around Schiedam[887]. The foundation assesses that their work reaches all children in primary schools and a large share of teenagers in the Schiedam area[888].

The foundation aims to involve children coming from different backgrounds, such as refugee children and children with special needs (e.g. children with a physical disability, mental disorder or learning disability)[889]. If needed, the foundation adjusts its projects to allow all children to participate. For instance, the foundation can provide extra explanations about the project, contact parents or discuss the project with a teacher[890].

Before commencing individual projects, the Little Embassy undertakes some steps to ensure equal participation of all children. Firstly, it assesses best strategies on how to inform, recruit and involve relevant children. Children can be recruited in various ways, for example through key figures, such as popular teachers or the Dutch Refugee Council, social media and workshops at schools[891]. Once the project participants are selected, the foundation also decides how to inform wider stakeholders (other people in the local area) about the projects and their outcomes, which can include the results of a survey on being young in Schiedam or the advice of a municipal youth council[892].

**Participation process and content**

The foundation's goal is to show children and youth how they can make a difference in their society[893]. The foundation tries to achieve this goal through a variety of projects covering diverse topics, including citizenship, environment, economy, rights, bullying, poverty, health, literacy, rights, art and culture[894]. The organisation also tries to present children with real-life issues[895]. and issues that are interesting for children[896].

The Little Embassy initiates projects (including projects based on suggestions of children), but also implements project commissioned by its partners[897]. The foundation always has an initial conversation with its partners about the project to ensure that children will actually be able to have an impact. One interviewee emphasised that participation does not consist of having a structured mechanism like a youth council but it should ensure that children have a voice[898].

The foundation's children and youth councils examine the Little Embassy's projects, provide advise how the foundation can improve its projects and how to develop a better connection with children[899].

Most of the foundation's projects are structural and run regularly or continuously, but some are one-off events. An example of a structural event is the children's municipal council in Schiedam[900]. In 2019, the council was formed for the fifth time. The project involved 35 classes from 21 schools in 9 different areas of the town. Over the course of two years, 800 children were trained about local democratic institutions and how children can participate in the local decision-making.

Two meetings were held between the youth council and citizens of Schiedam about the future of the town. The final suggestions of the children's council on sustainability and outdoor space were considered in the Housing vision of Schiedam for 2030.
Another example of a multi-annual project is 'Garbage the Challenge' ("Afval the Challenge"). The project aims to raise awareness about waste sorting. In 2016, children in Schiedam, supported by the foundation, developed a plan to reduce waste in Schiedam to 160 kilos per person per year by 2020. In 2019 this goal was not yet achieved as the amount of waste per citizen had decreased to 186 kilos, but the project has led to an overall reduction in waste in the local area.
An example of a one-off event is a workshop on youth participation in the municipality Heemstede. The foundation organised a workshop about youth participation for 23 civil servants and members of the municipal council. The outcome of this workshop was an agreement among the participants that children's and youth participation in decision-making is valuable. The participants therefore decided to consider how children and youth could be provided with more opportunities to actively contribute to the decision-making in their municipality.
The Little Embassy's annual reports outline the results of every project. However, children and young people's views on these results are not captured, and neither are the long-term effects of the projects. Recently, the foundation started using evaluation cards to ask children and teachers at the end of every project how they evaluate the projects and what they have learned from it[901].
Additionally, the foundation has conversations with its partners to reflect on the projects.
At the same time, according to the foundation, one of the main remaining barriers to children's participation are the attitudes of adult stakeholders, with policymakers often forgetting to capture the views and opinions of children, even though they develop and implement policies that concern children[902]. Moreover, some policymakers and organisations want to involve children in decision-making, but do not want to pay for professional support, such as support from the foundation, for children's participation[903]. Finally, the foundation indicated that many government institutions believe that children and teenagers do not want to participate. One interviewee considered it a missed opportunity, as the foundation found in their local survey that 40% of the teenagers wants to give input on local issues[904].

**Effectiveness, impact and consequences**

In general, most of the available documents evidencing project work have been produced by the foundation itself. Some of these sources suggest that there has been tangible impact from the Little Embassy projects. For instance, as a result of implementing the foundation's projects on garbage, waste sorting increased in Schiedam[905]. In addition, a quality mark for playgrounds was developed for the municipality in response to a request from the youth council (set up by the foundation) asking for better playgrounds in Schiedam[906]. Overall, the available evidence suggests that by teaching children about local issues and actively engaging children and teenagers in participatory projects, project participants are becoming more aware about their role as active stakeholders and about opportunities to get involved at the local level[907].
One interviewee explained that the team's expertise in teaching and media in combination with civil servants and organisations who are committed to children's participation contribute to the success of projects[908].

**Transferable Lessons**

The work of the Little Embassy offers several lessons that could be transferable to other foundations with similar goals. Firstly, the Little Embassy works closely together with local and national partners to develop and implement their projects. In this way, the foundation's projects are well-embedded in the local contexts answering to the real needs of the local population. This highlights the importance of partnership, especially at the local level.
In addition, the foundation encourages children and youth to be active actors at the local level, e.g. expressing their views and suggestions via the work of youth councils. Other municipalities could use a similar approach to foster and embed children's participation at a local level[909].
Finally, the foundation indicates that working with professionals, who are trained in communication or teaching, in an organisation can make it easier to reach children and to enable them to participate in decision-making[910].

**Box 17. Case study: Everyday life - La Vida Cotidiana**

**Everyday life: The Framework for Child Participation 0-6 Years (La Vida Cotidiana: El Marco Para La Participación De La Infancia 0-6 Años)**

**Overview**

La Vida Cotidiana is a programme that enables the participation of children aged 0-6 in daily life decisions, such as nutrition, how their spaces are created and organized, and their interpretation of current events that affect them. The programme focuses on teaching children what participation means in practice.

The programme is administered in four early childhood centres in Granada in four municipalities (*Escuelas Infantiles Municipales*) run by the Granada Educa Foundation (*Fondacíon Granada Educa*)[911]. The Granada Educa Foundation was established in 2008 by the Granada City Council to gain deeper understanding about the education of children aged 0-6 in the city of Granada and to provide quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Granada[912]. La Vida Cotidian is an example of a good practice in the UNICEF Child-Friendly Cities initiative[913].

**Context**

La Vida Cotidiana was a one of the initiatives taken by the Granada municipality to receive the Child-Friendly City Stamp (*Sello de Ciudad Amiga de la Infancía*) as part of the Spanish UNICEF Child-Friendly Cities initiative[914]. A child-friendly city is one where children priorities and rights are an integral part of policies, programmes and public decisions[915]. The certification (stamp or 'sello') recognises the efforts of municipalities, municipality associations (*mancomunidades*) and the government to incorporate childhood and adolescence at the centre of their political agenda[916]. A child-friendly city receives the Child-Friendly City Stamp, which is a certification that is valid for 4 years[917]. The Child-Friendly Cities Initiative in Spain is organised by the Spanish UNICEF committee in collaboration with the Ministry of health, consumption and social wellbeing (*Ministerio de Sanidad, Consumo y Bienestar Social*), the Federation of Minicipalities and provinces (*Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias*), and the IUNDIA (*Instituto Universitario de Necesidades y Derechos de la Infancia y la Adolescencia*).

La Vida Cotidiana is thus a local-level initiative, functioning in four select early childhood education and care (ECEC) centres and the programme is administered by professionals working in these ECEC settings. The children participate to their own ECEC settings.

La Vida Cotidiana is an initiative stemming from the Childhood and Adolescence Plan of the Granada municipality[918]. For Granada, the municipal action plan also serves as guidance for the operationalising of the child-friendly initiatives such as La Vida Cotidiana[919].

**Participants**

The programme is aimed at children aged 4 months to 6 years who attend four early childhood centres in Granada (*Escuelas Infantiles Municipales,* or EIM) that are connected to the Granada Educa Foundation. These are EIM Arlequín, EIM Belén, EIM Duende, and EIM Luna[920].

**Participation process and content**

By providing participation mechanisms that are built into the daily lives of children and impact their everyday reality, children learn about and gain familiarity with participating in decisions impacting their lives. The objective of the programme is to ensure that all children enjoy the right to a high quality childhood and education from birth. The quality and characteristics of education they receive in ECEC is thus important. The programme seeks to:

- Promote incorporating the active listening of children in educational practice. i.e. ensuring children participate and that their opinions are taken into account to make decisions that influence their daily experience,
- Enable parents and teachers to support this process and offer parents proposals with examples of how to respect and listen to young children,
- Facilitate the development of children towards independence,
- Create a community feeling between children, families and centre professionals,
- Develop educational strategies that foster listening to children,
- Promote evaluation/research-action (i.e. linking research and action) between professionals and schools, to implement evidence based improvement strategies to adjust to the needs of the children.

La Vida Cotidiana seeks to foster child participation, development and autonomy through three specific strategies[921].

1) "The command": building inter-age networks (*La comanda*): This strategy entails having two children (or a small group of children) from the older age groups go around the classrooms in the centre (so also to the younger classes) before lunch time to check how many kids are present and whether anyone has special dietary requests for the day. They provide this information to the kitchen. In this way, the children play a role in a daily (important) activity (that is nutrition). Then the two children that did the task delegate/select the next two kids that will be in charge the next day.
2) "Today at school": listening to the interest of children (*El hoy de escuela*). This strategy is about capturing interesting events/news that happened in the school. The children need to identify what news/information they want to share, then they prepare a news panel. The children act as interpreters/translators of the reality at the centre. The activity seeks to favour the group and relationships between the children at the centre. It also helps in getting information to the children families about what is happening at the centre, something that can help foster a sense of community at the centre.
3) "Work project": Imagine, dream, devise… a patio (*Proyectos de trabajo - Imaginar, soñar, idear… un patio*): This strategy entails involving the children in designing/shaping the playground. The children at the centre prepare plans/maps of the layout of the playground, i.e. how they would like it to look. They make not only maps but also small scale representations of the 'dream playground'. Currently, the four centres are revising their infrastructure. Two of these centres have actively involved (consulted) the children aged 3-6 to make decisions on the changes they will make on the spaces.

**Effectiveness, impact and consequences**

Evidence of this mechanisms' effectiveness and impact is limited. However, the organisers monitor the mechanisms via built-in evaluations which amount to a continuous feedback loop as part of the childhood centres' overall learning strategies. La Vida Cotidiana was an adult-initiated initiative, and the programme cyclically collects feedback from adults (participating ECEC professionals, parents and carers) and children (through conversation, notes, drawings) in order to improve the programme. The interpretation of feedback and consequent courses of action are then decided upon by the adult ECEC professionals. Evaluation materials report that the programme has increased children's self-esteem and confidence, that children show adults what they know and that they have an opinion on what happens to themselves, that they can participate, and that daily activities serve as a medium to transition slowly towards independence until they become 6 years-old[922].

**Transferable Lessons**

There is no formal evidence for transferability but this is a 'compact' idea that could be adopted in other ECEC centres in Spain and across the EU MS. As this mechanism in implemented in the ECEC centres, there is a relatively low cost of implementation as such centres operate in (nearly) all countries. This is because this programme relies on many typical activities in ECEC so it would require an adaptation of the existing curricula and current models of working rather than a completely new set-up and learning plans.

**Box 18. Case study: 'Experts by Experience'**

**'Experts by Experience'**

**Overview**

'Experts by experience'[923], sometimes referred to as 'Young Advisors', are terms used in Finland to describe children and young people who are consulted, primarily by the Ombudsperson for Children, on a specific policy or topic due to personal experience of being in a particular situation, e.g. in the care system, being a migrant or asylum seeker. The children and young people are chosen to represent diverse groups, including those from minority backgrounds. These experts can also provide peer support to other children and young people going through similar experiences to them[924].

**Context**

The 2011 Council of Europe's report on 'Child and youth participation in Finland' influenced the development of the young advisors initiative. Developed together with the in-country review team, this report was part of a policy review on the implementation of the UNCRC's Article 12 across Council of Europe member states. The work on the Finnish version of the report included a focus group of 6 children and young people, aged between 10 and 21. During the focus group discussions, children talked about their own experiences and the everyday activities in which they are involved. They also discussed whether or not adults listened to them, and when that was not the case, they thought of solutions on how to improve it.

To ensure children's participation, the report recommended to invite children and young people as experts from the start of the decision making process. The report suggested that children can be involved in participation mechanisms on three different levels: as clients, as experts, and as citizens. In this respect, the report suggested arranging new focus groups when children are consulted as experts on a particular topic, and holding collective consultations with child experts to give a 'wider perspective' on the views of different groups of children[925].

The children's consultations with 'experts by experience' are primary conducted by the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children[926].

**Participants**

The experts by experience initiative has involved a wide range of participants. Consultations have included children who have experienced domestic violence, children who live in foster care, care homes and institutions, children of prisoners, indigenous Saami children and children of migrants[927]. For instance, children with experience of the care system were involved in the re-design of the Child Welfare Act to better meet the needs of young people leaving the care system, and former asylum seeking children were involved in the creation of videos and other educational material for newly arriving migrants and asylum seeking children.

Over recent years, there have been efforts to ensure that 'experts by experience' are recruited from all over Finland. As the Local Government Act from 2015 has obliged each municipality in Finland to form its own youth council, this participatory mechanism facilitates liaison with youth structures at the municipal level across the country, including 'hard-to-reach' populations in the northern territories such as Lapland. There is also evidence showing that the Ombudsperson's office recruits experts by experience through liaising with primary and secondary schools[928].

**Participation process and content**

Experts by experience work via thematic groups and fora and actively participate and support the Ombudsperson across all stages of policy planning, implementation and evaluation[929]. The Ombudsperson for Children consults 4-5 groups of these child experts each year. At the hearings, children and young people share their past experiences and episodes from their daily lives. Their experience is then used in the work of the Ombudsperson for Children, for example in statements concerning the lives of children and young people. This work is guided by objectives set out by Maria Kaisa Aula, the former Ombudsperson for Children. She prioritised working with experts by experience because children can 'provide very useful guidance to adults who develop these general and special services'[930]. In addition, as explained by one interviewee: 'this model of young advisors is used in the Ombudsperson's office to find out what children think about different themes, what they think about their everyday life. One of the important tasks we have is to convey children's views to decision makers'[931].

The content and topics of consultations with experts by experience were set up by the Ombudsperson and in consultations with children. The 2012 article written by the former Ombudsperson for Children recommended that children should be consulted on the following areas of interests: day-care, school, public transport, library, sports. In addition, the article also mentioned the need to consult children who have had a 'different range of experiences' i.e. those who have stayed in foster care or alternative care, children with parents in prison, children who have experienced domestic abuse and children with disabilities. This 'wish-list' of topics of interest was extended during meetings with children. In 2012 the Ombudsperson conducted a study involving surveys with Finnish primary and secondary children and asked them about suggestions for improvements in their schools. This included aspects related to food, breaks, discipline, decoration and activities[932].

In this respect, the Ombudsperson collects data from experts by experience using surveys, peer support groups and focus groups, as a way to channel children's feedback and ideas. Participation also took the form of unannounced Ombudsperson visits to foster units, to hear from the child

residents themselves (rather than only communicating with social workers, as was the case before). There is, however, no known evidence that the children themselves were involved in the development of the experts by experience initiative, or initiated any of the consultations with the Ombudspersons

Furthermore, the Ombudsperson's visit to a child foster unit sparked debates about the quality of institutions and issues with the Child Welfare Act, particularly the aftercare children receive one they turn 18 years old. In anticipation of this event, the older children living at the institutions met with the Ombudsperson and argued that they thought this age was too low because even though they do not want to be looked after anymore they realised that they still need support. As a result of this consultation, in 2020 the law changed, increasing the age limit to 25, requiring social services to provide help with educating and housing, among other things[933].

**Facilitators and barriers**

This mechanism was established upon the CoE's study recommendation regarding child experts (at the backing of the UNCRC's Article 12), and due to the mandate and commitment of the first Finnish Ombudsperson for Children, Maria Kaisa Aula. In addition, as highlighted by one interviewee, the lobbying of child welfare NGOs was also one of the key driving forces. This was in particular in relation to the reform of the Child Welfare Act that established structures (such as a student council in every school and a youth council in every municipality) that facilitate recruitment and selection of experts by experience from across all Finish regions[934].

The main barriers include a lack of policies that support all children and provide opportunities for all children to participate, also at the EU level. As noted by one interviewee, the EU has policies to support vulnerable children, but wider initiatives supporting the needs of all children are still missing[935]. This echoes remarks made by the former Ombudsperson, who claimed the EU was missing the 'big picture' and failed to communicate that objectives relating to children's participation should be prioritised in all member states[936]. Consequently, as observed by an interviewee from the national government in Finland, politicians and the general public were still not sufficiently familiar with the concept of children's rights and did not incorporate the perspective and views of children across all policy-making activities[937]. Instead, as suggested by this interviewee, children's participation was perceived as a 'hobby' practised by those who had a special interest in the topic.

Another barrier is a lack of awareness among children about the participatory mechanisms. This is particularly a challenge for vulnerable children who, according to the former Ombudsperson, have no knowledge of special services for young people outside of school (e.g. the youth councils) and rarely approach them on their own[938]. Some interviewees also pointed to this challenges of children's representation because young advisors are recruited mainly through the youth councils, and the council members are unlikely to be vulnerable or disadvantaged[939]. Moreover, the experts by experience have also lamented the frequency with which they are invited to the place of the politicians, rather than the politicians coming to where they are[940]. This also creates a barrier for younger children who, because of their age, are not able to be part of the council structure[941].

Moreover, in Finland, the experts by experience mechanism (as most other mechanisms) are still predominantly adult-led[942]. This relates to the format and content of children's consultation, e.g. the selection of topics, format of meetings etc.

There are also barriers in terms of translating complex child rights laws into the language of children, which can lead to conflict when children feel their advice and views are not being taken into account[943].

This consultation led to the publication of a book written by the children themselves[944]. The children could process their ideas during the writing workshops with a Swedish novelist. Many blog posts and messages were posted on social media following the publication of the book, and according to this interviewee, it was indicating that the book was an eye-opener for those who were not aware of how children themselves felt about the condition of their care homes and the quality of care they received.

**Effectiveness, impact and consequences**

There is no formal evidence of the effectiveness or impact of this mechanism available. This section, however, presents views of interviewees on the mechanism's impact.

According to one expert interviewee, one of the most notable contributions of this mechanisms were the consultation with children living in foster care. Firstly, as noted by this interviewee, this consultation led to the reform to the Children Welfare Act extending aftercare up to the age of 25.

The lobbying for this legislative change started around 2015 with a public campaign initiated by social workers, NGOs and experts by experience indicating that child welfare needed more resources. It culminated with the Ombudsperson's consultation with children that had lived in foster care who shared their personal experiences and provided suggestions how to improve the situation of children who were still part of the system[945]. As a result, the Children Welfare Act extended the age for aftercare meaning that young people until the age of 25 would now qualify to receive financial and psychological support.
An interviewee representing a children's rights organisation suggested that the children's accounts of their experiences in care also led to a meeting in parliament on the topic[946].
According to this interviewee, the contribution of the experts by experience initiative can also be considered in terms of the personal impact on the participating children and adult stakeholders. The interviewee observed that the child experts felt empowered, as they were revisited months after the participation event and were 'still speaking about it' and how it helped boost their confidence[947]. This interviewee reported that several of these experts by experience have since trained to become social workers themselves[948]. Finally, the interviewee also observed that politicians and policymakers, who took part in such events, 'echoed the children's ideas', shared them with others and stated 'how they will implement them'[949].

**Transferable lessons**

This case study illustrates that it is possible to involve children in all stages of policy development – from the initial stage of identifying the challenges, to proposing solutions and working with other stakeholders to implement and evaluate the specific change. However, as note by one interviewee[950], the possibilities for idea sharing and working together require a common working platform for children and adults, and for such structures to reach out to vulnerable children not typically heard at policy level.
In terms of methods of participation within this mechanism, as suggested by interviewees[951], the creative writing workshop helped facilitate this inclusion by creating child-friendly space to allow children reflect on their experiences. Moreover, publishing their views in the form of creative writing seemed to have contributed to stimulating wider media and public interest in their stories.

### Box 19. Case study: Consultation on the UNCRC in Germany

**Consultation on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in Germany**

**Overview**

The objective of this process was to give children the opportunity to share their impressions on progress made on the UNCRC implementation in Germany. All children living in Germany were eligible to take part in this participatory process. Children could participate through a variety of methods, such as a national-wide survey and report writing, organised over the course of one year by a project core team comprised of both children and adults. The process was initiated by the Network for the Implementation of the UNCRC: National Coalition Germany[952]. The final report, which was co-produced by children, was shared with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

**Context**

Germany signed the UNCRC in 1992. According to Article 44 of the Convention, each signatory country is required to provide the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child with a report on progress of the implementation of the convention every five years[953]. Germany submitted a combined version of the 3rd and 4th report in 2014[954], and a combined version of its 5th and 6th report in 2019[955]. The German Children Fund produced a child-friendly version of this report[956]. In parallel to the national governments' report submission, other stakeholders with relevant expertise, such as domestic non-governmental children's rights organisations, also submit reports to the UN Committee[957]. This process enables the UN Committee to examine different perspectives on the progress made in Germany on the implementation of the convention, as well as areas for improvement.
The Network for the Implementation of the UNCRC – National Coalition Germany [hereinafter 'National Coalition'] submitted their own report, complimentary to the national government report[958]. In addition, the National Coalition of Children's Rights in Germany, which is a network of

more than 100 child-rights organisations across Germany, works to produce a report that is co-produced by children[959]. The National Coalition was founded in 1995 by a group of civil society organisations under the name Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe – AGJ [Working group for child and youth welfare] when the first monitoring report of the CRC was to be submitted[960]. Since 2013, the network is known by its aforementioned name and functions as an independent association. The coalition is funded by the Federal Ministry for Families, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth[961].

Thus far, the National Coalition has produced two children's rights reports which were co-produced by children. The first children rights report was produced in 2010. This case study outlines the consultations for the second children rights report. The report was launched in November 2019 by the Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth in Germany[962]. A delegation of children presented the report to the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child in 2020[963].

**Participants**

In line with the CRC, this mechanism targeted children under the age of 18. It was important to the organisers that there were very few barriers to participation, for instance children were not required to have any prior knowledge of children's rights or the CRC[964].

The mechanism included different formats of participation to enable children of different ages to participate. Overall, 2,725 children participated in a survey, 22 children between the ages of 8 and 17 carried out individual projects[965], 32 children were consulted in three child care centres for very young children in Berlin, and several children were involved in writing of the report.

A survey was conducted to reach a large number of children. To ensure that the survey was age appropriate, two different questionnaires had been designed and were distributed in accordance to the children's ages[966].

The 2,725 children who participated in the survey had the following characteristics:

- Age:
  - 39% were between six and nine years old,
  - 34% were between ten and 13 years old, and
  - 27% were between 14 and 17 years old[967].
- Gender:
  - 52% were female
  - 46% males
  - 2% were 'other'.
- Place of living:
  - 28% of participating children lived in the country,
  - 37% in a medium-sized town (less than 100,000 inhabitants), and
  - 35% in a larger city[968].

In addition, survey participants represented seven different types of schools, with about 46% of the participating children attending primary schools. Only 11% of participating children were born in a country other than Germany[969]. As observed by an interviewee representing a children's rights organisation, migrant children are the most difficult to reach group among vulnerable children[970].

**Participation process and content**

The purpose of this participatory process was to produce a report that reflected children's perspectives and experiences on children's rights, as outlined by the CRC[971]. The process took one year and led to the production of the 'Child rights report' [*Kinderrechtsreport*]. The children's experiences and views formed the basis for the report[972].

In addition to the survey and consulting children in pre-schools, as outlined above, a group of 22 children between the ages of 8 -17 initiated and executed 12 creative projects on topics related to children's rights. Examples of projects included short films, surveys, and focus groups in schools[973].

In terms of the consultations with very young children, topics covered included expressing an opinion, participation, and privacy. As these concepts can be difficult to grasp for young children, the project team read a book to children illustrating children's rights through a day in the life of a fictional five-year-old boy. Children then expressed their personal experiences and views on these topics through written pieces or by drawing pictures. This facilitated the introduction of these

concepts in a child-friendly format and made them easier to understand by children as young as four years old[974].

The findings from the different methods of participation were collated by a core project team, who also drafted the final report. The core project team consisted of six of the children who have conducted their own independent projects, as well as three adults. The work was further supported by an expert advisory group. Experts provided guidance throughout the whole process, including the selection of children who became part of the core project team, the development of the survey questions, and the report writing process. Some members of the advisory group also attended some project team meetings to share their expertise. Experts have also attended the presentation of the first 'Child rights report' to the United Nations when they were still youths themselves[975]. As such, they had direct experience with the process.

Topics covered in the report included the following aspects as related to children's rights: participation, discrimination, protection from violence, the right to privacy, family and related care, children with disabilities, health, environment, poverty and social security, education, play and leisure, refuge and asylum, and awareness of children's rights. The report produced recommendations on each of these topics[976].

In terms of facilitators and barriers to impactful and inclusive children's participation, according to an interviewee from a children's rights organisation, this mechanism provided a lot of learning[977]. However, another interviewee from a different children's right organisation observed that the set up of the funding structures made it difficult to make this process child-led[978]. This is because when organisations apply for funding for children's participation activities, they have to stipulate the project goals from the outset, and specify how the project will meet these goals[979]. This process is contrary to the actual child-led participation as ideally children should be involved in the goal setting and planning. In addition, the implementation of the children's participation mechanisms typically requires resources dedicated to communication activities to ensure high levels of participation among children. This communication is part of the planning tasks, that typically take place at the beginning of the project. Therefore, involving children in these tasks also proved challenging[980]. As observed by interviewees, the process could have been even more engaging for children if children were involved from the start e.g. setting the goals of projects, jointly drafting funding applications, and planning activities[981].

One interviewee from a children's rights organisation also observed that the organisers struggled to reach children from disadvantaged backgrounds, e.g. children from low-income families[982]. This was the case despite engaging with an extensive network of NGOs. One reason for this was that children participate in these networks on a voluntary basis and children from less privileged families do not always have the human and social capital, skills, nor an understanding of the benefits of getting involved in such activities. For that reason, this interviewee believed that more resources and effort would be needed to recruit children who were not already part of child and youth organisations[983]. However, according to the same interviewee, this would still not alleviate all challenges, because even when the network had established connections, the organisers still encountered challenges to include some children, e.g. children with disabilities, because of the insufficient fund allocation[984]. For instance, the survey was not programmed to make it accessible for children with disabilities[985]. Furthermore, inclusion of children affected by poverty was also a challenge as neither the organisers nor members of their networks had relevant experience to target this group of children[986]. Interviewees from the children's rights organisations observed the willingness of organisers and networks to address this need for greater inclusion of children in mechanisms implemented in the future but this would require building additional capacity (e.g. knowledge and expertise among relevant organisations) and additional dedicated funding[987].

**Effectiveness, impact and consequences**

There was no formal independent evaluation of this mechanism as there was no dedicated budget to evaluation activities[988]. However, one interviewee noted that the project was evaluated by the organisers and the children themselves[989].

In terms of the contribution of this mechanism, an interviewee from a children's right organisations shared the following observations:[990]

- the recommendations that resulted from the report were mentioned by a minister who is involved in drafting policies and legal acts[991]. The report was presented by Dr. Franziska Giffey, Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth[992]. The report launch coincided with the 30th Anniversary of the adoption of the UNCRC. The adult

and children stakeholders involved in the report drafting were able to attend the report launch[993] and meet with the minister conveying main messages from this report[994]. The feedback provided by the minister to children was collected and shared with other participating children[995]. In addition, the report received good press coverage[996]. To promote the report, the 'Children's Rights Bus' toured through 20 cities in Germany, covering all of Germany's regions, promoting children's rights[997].

- The report was further shared with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva[998]. A delegation of children who had contributed to the report drafting travelled to Geneva to attend the presentation of this report[999]. In preparation for the Committee meeting, the children were trained in relevant presentation and media skills. The delegation also produced material and short films for social media to share this experience with as many people as possible[1000].
- In terms of the ongoing policy debate about whether children's rights should be incorporated into Germany's constitution, this far this mechanism did not have a direct impact for this debate.

**Transferable Lessons**

This mechanism can serve to inform other countries on how to run a nation-wide participatory project. The mechanism includes many valuable lessons, for example that is possible to have children play an active part throughout the whole participation cycle, including report writing.

This case study highlights the importance of dedicating resources to reaching vulnerable children. Children who do not have prior experience of participating may need more encouragement to take part than children who are already aware that such engagement opportunities exist and that these opportunities are relevant to children's experiences. Therefore, to facilitate the participation of vulnerable children, dedicated resources would need to be invested to help these children understand the benefits of participation. In addition, the participation process and approaches may need to be tailored to better respond to the particular experiences and needs of vulnerable children.

This case study further illustrated that it is possible to consult very young children even on complex topics, such as children's rights. It is essential, however, to use appropriate methods that help children grasp the objectives, content and format of participation and to fully express themselves through their typical activities (e.g. drawings, role playing).

This case study shows that children can be involved in all stages of the process and independently manage their own projects. However, this requires equipping children with the relevant skills, provision of guidance and support. Children can be also very effective in presenting project outputs and recommendations, and engaging with policymakers.

### Box 20. Case study: "Youth in Europe - what next?" consultation to inform the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027

**"Youth in Europe - what next?" consultation to inform the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027**

**Overview**

The 'Youth in Europe: What's Next' consultation was the 6th cycle (2017-2018) of the Structured Dialogue on Youth, which is a 18-month process for youth aged 13 to 30 established by the European Commission to facilitate a space where young people can interact with policy-makers from the local to the European level. The mechanism occurs in three phases: the first involving planning for how consultations will run, implementing consultations at national level, and finally preparing and submitting recommendations.

The 'Youth in Europe: What's Next?' consultation was overseen through the Estonian, Bulgarian, and Austrian presidencies of the EU. These presidencies were responsible for the implementation of the dialogue at the EU level but the consultations processes were managed and implemented at the national level across all MS. This consultation was used to inform the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027.

**Context**

The Structured Dialogue on Youth is a participatory tool established by the European Commission to facilitate young people to participate in democratic life, foster debate about youth-related issues, and enable young people to interact with local and EU-level policy-makers[1001]. It was first launched in 2005 by the EU Council of Youth Ministers in order to creater a stronger, more binding

involvement of youth in EU policy and was part of the EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018 (Council Resolution 2009)[1002]. The Structured Dialogue occurs in 18-month cycles, with each cycle taking on a theme and each 6-month segment matching the duration of one presidency (thus spanning 3 presidencies in total). At the EU level, the Structured Dialogues are governed by the European Steering Committee comprising of Youth Ministry representatives of the three EU Presidency countries, representatives of national youth councils of these three countries, representatives of the Erasmus+ National Agencies of the three EU Presidency countries, representatives of the European Commission and the European Youth Forum[1003].

Three conferences are held through the process. In the first, a framework for national-level consultations is decided upon between youth and decision-makers. At the second, the outcomes of the national consultations are debated and Joint Recommendations to increase youth participation in political life are drafted. In the third and final conference, the recommendations are debated by Youth Ministers from national governments and endorsed. The final recommendations are then the basis of the Council Resolutions addressed to European institutions and national authorities, which are to be endosed by Youth Ministers at the end of the cycle of the Structured Dialogue[1004].

The theme for the 2017-2018 cycle was 'Youth in Europe: What's Next' and was overseen by the Estonian, Bulgarian, and Austrian presidencies[1005]. The cycle took place between July 2017 and December 2019[1006]. The cycle focussed around the issues that young people want to see tackled in the EU for the future long-term, over the course of the Estonian, Bulgarian and Austrian presidencies of the EU. This cycle further serves as a foundation for the new EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, and for the reforms and creation of a new, better and improved Structured Dialogue process, to be renamed as the EU Youth Dialogue[1007].

**Participants**

Young people aged 13 to 30 are able to participate[1008]. Youth is expected to lead the activities and is actively involved at all stages of the project[1009]. During each cycle, national consultations with young people and youth organisations are conducted in each EU member state and is organized by national working groups consisting of representatives of youth ministries, national youth councils, local and regional youth councils, youth organisations, youth workers and researchers, and young people from all backgrounds[1010]. The consultations are primarily organized through the National Youth Councils of each country and as such, would involve children's participation in so far as the National Youth Council itself includes children under 18, or that the mechanisms they use to run consultations explicitly included children under 18[1011]. 55.6% of the nearly 50,000 participants were under 18 in this consultation[1012].

Previous assessments of the EU Youth Strategy and Structured Dialogues stressed the need to have greater inclusion of youth, not only those from youth organisations, but to include youth from diverse backgrounds, with fewer opportunities, and non-organised youth[1013]. For the 'Youth in Europe: what's next' consultation, overall, 49,389 young people's ideas and opinions from across Europe were incorporated into the consultations during this Structured Dialogue[1014]. Of these participants, 55.6% were children under 18, 12% were LGBTQI+, 10% identified as being from minority ethnic backgrounds, and almost 5% identified as having a disability[1015].

Researchers attribute the inclusivity to the fact that national consultations are run by National Working Groups that are usually National Youth Councils in the respective country, which are umbrella organisations that are well connected and are able to reach out to a wide demographic of participants nationally[1016].

**Participation process and content**

The overall aim of the Structured Dialogues is to have top-down and bottom-up participatory processes at the national and EU levels to enable youth to have a more integral, binding role in shaping EU Youth policy[1017]. Children's participation in 'Youth in Europe: What's Next' was continuous through the 18 month cycle. Young people were involved in the design and implementation of the mechanism at the national level. Diverse range of stakeholders were involved including professional youth researchers, and government officials[1018].

The 18 month long cycle is divided into three working phases:

Phase 1 Mapping the issue and planning: During the Estonian presidency, young people and decision makers from all around the EU collected data and evidence on the annual topic 'Youth in Europe: What's Next', mapping the current state of play[1019]. Half way through the Estonian presidency, the 1st EU Youth Conference took place in Tallinn, where all the young delegates and

decision makers agreed on a common framework that would guide the national consultations on the designated topic in each country[1020]. This phase directly involved children's participation at the design level for the whole consultation process as well as participation in the conference[1021]. A series of consultation questions were designed by youth researchers that served the basis for the further national consultations, but the consultation design was calibrated to national abilities and needs by the national working groups who ran the consultations at the MS level[1022].
The 'Youth in Europe: What's Next' consultation was held with the express intent to inform the next EU Youth Strategy and to also inform how to re-shape the Structured Dialogues as EU Youth Dialogue. During the first phase of the Dialogue (planning phase), lessons learnt were taken to create the guidelines for open youth consultation (which guided the process of this cycle of Structured Dialogue) and the creation of propositions for the next EU Youth Strategy. The changes made to the process of the Structured Dialogue included:

- Participation was diversified by asking national authorities to nominate young people coming from different backgrounds to form the delegations, and participation included countries from the Eastern Partnership, European Free Trade Association, and EU candidate countries.
- Fewer facilitators were involved than usual and more diversified methodologies of participation were used (mixing up plenaries with workshops and self-expression tools).
- Digital technology was embraced through web-streaming, introducing start-up solutions for communications, and a presentation from an 11-year old who created a YouTube channel to teach maths to other children.

Phase 2 National consultation: During the Bulgarian presidency, young people designed and ran the national consultations[1023]. This phase also heavily involved young people's participation, including children, in terms of running the consultation and also participating in the consultation[1024]. After the collection of data nationally, results were analysed and submitted centrally and then synthesised into a common report[1025]. The results of the national data collection were presented at the EU Youth conference that took place in Sofia[1026]. During the conference, young delegates and decision makers from all over Europe engaged in the drafting of a list of Joint Recommendations for the development of youth policy, based on the results from the consultation[1027].
Phase 3 Towards implementation: During the Austrian presidency, the process focussed on the national state of play and works to incorporate the outlined recommendations into national policy[1028].
Through the National Working Groups, Member State Young Ambassadors drafted an advocacy plan for implementation, and together with the other stakeholders, agreed on a common and feasible approach. At the final conference in Vienna, different delegations presented and debated their plans of action with the Youth Ministers, before the final endorsement and action. These plans continued being implemented differently in each country, and work continued beyond the end of the cycle of the Structured Dialogue on Youth. The EU Council of ministers approved and endorsed the final list of recommendations for development and created an approved and recognized EU Council Resolution, which addresses different level of governance, including regional, national and local.
A major barrier for children's participation is that travel for under 18s is difficult, considering the conferences were international[1029]. Additionally, the EU's category of 'young people' in this consultation combines youth over 18 up to 30 as well as children between 13 and 18, which is a large range, and often the viewpoint or voices of children would actually be represented by young people just over 18 rather than children themselves[1030]. There is also a need for greater transparency to enable children and young people to participate, in the form of creating child-friendly communications to explain goals, processes, and outcomes clearly[1031].

One of the outputs of this mechanisms was to develop the European Youth Goals, which would contribute as recommendations for government officials and policymakers[1032]. During the second phase, young people debated the findings of the consultations and announced 11 Youth Goals at the end of the conference held in Bulgaria, which was later also discussed during the Vienna conference where youth convened on how best to communicate these goals to policy-makers[1033].

These goals and recommendation were based on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and included:

1) Connecting EU with Youth,
2) Equality of all genders,
3) Inclusive societies,
4) Information and constructive dialogue,
5) Mental health and wellbeing,
6) Moving rural youth forward,
7) Quality employment for all,
8) Quality learning,
9) Space and Participation for all,
10) Sustainable Green Europe,
11) Youth Organisations and European Programmes[1034].

During the 7th cycle of EU Youth Dialogues (formerly Structured Dialogues), three thematic priorities have been taken from the EU Youth Goals, namely Quality Employment for All, Quality Learning and Moving Rural Youth Forward[1035].

**Effectiveness, impact and consequences**

The European Youth Goals have been made widely available through official documents and resources intended for the wider public[1036]. Importantly, they were included in full as an annex to the European Council's Resolution on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 (2018/C 456/01)[1037]. These goals are now an annex to the European Youth Strategy, which can serve as a guide for all future activities related to youth up to 2027[1038]. Future EU presidencies are encouraged to make use of these goals to focus on during their presidency; for example, the 2020 Croatian presidency is working on Goal 6: moving rural youth forward[1039]. At the time of drafting this report, the presidency of the Council of the EU consists of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia. Their programme for their first 18 month included a commitment to 'promoting youth participation'[1040].

The overall EU Youth Strategy has been formally evaluated[1041]. An evaluation of the overall EU Youth Strategy also notes that while joint recommendations from the Structured Dialogues were adopted at the EU Youth Conferences for earlier cycles of the Structured Dialogues, there had been no mechanism for evaluation of their effectiveness and there has been no comprehensive analysis of their impact[1042]. However, out of the instruments of the EU Youth Strategy, the Structured Dialogue was deemed one of the most influential through evaluations as well as assessment by the European Youth Forum (which includes teenagers under 18, thus meaning it is child-evaluated)[1043]. The European Youth Forum assessed the Structured Dialogue recommendations as reaching policy-makers but with low follow-up at national and local levels, partly due to a lack of awareness about the Structured Dialogue.

An internal evaluation was carried out by the European Youth Forum (EYF) to see how participants felt about the consultation process and what worked and how it can be improved, as well as gathering information about participant demographics[1044].

The EYF were mostly positive about the quality of the conference outcomes but were also critical about many missed opportunities to fully include young people during the consultation, for instance the omission of young Europeans from high-level panels at conferences[1045]. EYF further insists that youth should be considered equal partners and not mere spectators.

As a result of this consultation cycle, two position papers were adopted and one set of recommendations was issued:

- Position paper European Youth Forum, Proposal for the governance of the EU Youth Strategy, 2017
- Position paper 'Engage. Inform. Empower', 2017, by European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA), European Youth Card Association (EYCA), and EURODESK
- European Confederation of Youth Clubs' recommendations for the next EU Youth Strategy, 2018[1046].

**Transferable Lessons**

This mechanism was able to achieve inclusion of some vulnerable children. For the 'Youth in Europe: what's next' consultation, overall, 49,389 young people's ideas and opinions from across Europe were incorporated into the consultations during this Structured Dialogue[1047]. Of these participants, 55.6% were children under 18, 12% were LGBTQI+, 10% identified as being from minority ethnic backgrounds, and almost 5% identified as having a disability[1048]. Researchers attribute the inclusivity to the fact that national consultations are run by National Working Groups that are usually National Youth Councils in the respective country, which are umbrella organisations that are well connected and are able to reach out to a wide demographic of participants nationally[1049]. According to one interviewee, achieving this inclusiveness and a full picture about participant characteristics was also facilitated by applying methodological approaches suggested by youth researchers[1050].

**Box 21. Case study: Youth Participatory Budget in Portugal**

**Youth Participatory Budget (*Orçamento Participativo Jovem*)**

**Overview**

Established in 2017, the Youth Participatory Budget, *Orçamento Participativo Jovem or 'OPJ',* is a process of democratic participation in which children and young people aged between 14-30 can propose and decide upon on public investment projects, which the authorities then have the responsibility to implement. This mechanism is open to all children and young people legally residing in Portugal and they can take part either by submitting a proposal for funding or voting on existing proposals. It is overseen by the Ministry of Education and the Portuguese Institute for Youth and Sport and is funded by the Ministry of Finances (following approval from the state budget). The mechanism claims to be the first national participation budget in the world specifically targeting children and young people[1051].

**Context**

The Youth Participatory Budget was inspired by other (non-child related) mechanisms such as local participatory budgets, the Portugal Participatory Budget, as well as the Schools Participatory Budget. Like the youth budget, the Portugal Participatory Budget (PPB), which allows civil society to decide on public investment, is reportedly the first of its kind in the world. To ensure maximum participation from all walks of civil society, the PPB uses a model that combines face-to-face interactions between the public and the state with ICT tools. Open to any citizen, the PPB tries to engage communities who do not tend to be heard as much in policy making, such as rural inhabitants. This mechanism occurs nation-wide and first took place in 2017. Since the first edition, the PPB has increased its budget from three to five million euros and has opened proposals to all governmental areas rather than the initial six[1052]. Moreover, the Schools Participatory Budget aimed to build in students a better understanding of democratic institutions, promote financial literacy and enhance critical thinking and debate skills. This mechanism was also launched in 2017 and covers over half a million students in Portugal[1053].

The advent of the youth budget was also strengthened by the approval of the 'National Plan for Youth' in 2018, through a Resolution of the Council of Ministers (114-A / 2018 of 4 Sep). This is an instrument that will remain in force until the end of 2021, with the purpose of implementing 'transversal youth policies' to protect the rights of young people, as provided for in article 70 of the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic. With this objective in mind, the National Youth Plan foresees, among various measures contemplated, the Youth Participatory Budget as being a central part of this plan[1054]. This context leading up to the creation of the mechanism was supported by the remarks of an interviewee representing a national authority, who claimed that the youth budget stemmed from a problem the government had about making it a special responsibility to enable the progressive participation of children in national life[1055].

**Participants**

The mechanism is open to all citizens, residents, workers and students in Portugal aged between 14 and 30 years old. It is not clear whether additional efforts are undertaken to engage disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of children. The focus of this mechanism is not the selection of children or young people per se, but rather their proposals. The selected projects are implemented across all territories/regions in Portugal[1056].

**Participation process and content**

The central purpose of the participatory budget is to empower children and youth. In this respect, it encourages the active and informed participation of children and young citizens in decision-making processes, fostering a strong and active civil society. As children and young people are able to propose and select projects to be funded, this promotes their participation in the definition of public policies appropriate to their needs and in line with their opinions. In a broader sense, the objective of this mechanism is to reinforce the quality of democracy and its instruments, valuing participatory democracy within the framework of the Constitution of the

Portuguese Republic. As such, this mechanism aims to reinforce citizenship education and the feeling of belonging to the community as a whole[1057].

Introduced in 2017, the mechanism is an annual competition of projects to be funded from the state budget. Applications may be submitted by individuals or groups by completing a proposal and application form on the OPJ (*Orçamento Participativo Jovem*) website[1058]. Young people can also vote on existing proposals listed online. While children and young people are involved in proposing and voting projects, there is little evidence that indicates their involvement in the implementation or evaluation of the project.

The proposal procedure contains the following steps:

- Phase I: submission. All candidates must submit the proposal via the website opjovem.gov.pt, or in participatory or self-organised meetings.
- Phase II is Technical analysis by public administration services, in the four thematic areas.
- Phase III is the public consultation, entailing the online publication of a provisional list of projects to be voted on.
- Phase IV is the voting, either via the aforementioned website or through a free of charge SMS.
- Phase V is the presentation of the outcomes.

In 2017, at the Lisbon Youth Centre, this took place informally, as an online show presented by a well-known entertainer.

As well as following these steps, all proposals must meet the following criteria:

- To fit the thematic areas of cultural innovation, environmental sustainability, inclusive sport and intergenerational dialogue;
- To have a budget until the maximum ceiling of €100,000;
- Do not require the building of new infrastructures;
- Do not ask for subsidies or involve a pre-established service supply;
- To be concrete and technically feasible;
- To benefit more than one municipality;
- Do not go against the Government´s policy, or projects and programmes already implemented in the different policy fields[1059].

The first edition of the OPJ, in 2017, had a total of 167 projects voted on (from more than 400 proposals submitted), divided into four thematic areas: inclusive sport; science education, social innovation and environmental sustainability. €300.000 was invested in the seven winning projects in the thematic areas of environmental sustainability, inclusive sport and science education. In 2018, seven winning projects from 232 proposals were voted on, related to the thematic areas of inclusive sports, cultural innovation, environmental sustainability and intergenerational dialogue[1060].

One of the main driving forces for the operation of this mechanism include the support and backing of national government, as well as funding by the Ministry of Finances including 500,000 EUR annual budget[1061]. The implementation of the mechanism is also facilitated by the other existing (not child specific) participatory mechanisms at the local and national levels in Portugal.

The available evidence provides a critical assessment of the general version of Participatory Budget in Portugal. One common criticism is that the mechanism reveals the fragile potential of expansion due, among other factors, to the political-legal polarization between the central government and the local authorities. Another criticism was directed towards the model of 'diffused' participation in the country, which only allows for the direct participation of citizens, without intermediate forms of representation and articulation between of local and regional

demands[1062]. Furthermore, in some municipal councils, the local authorities define the projects the children can vote on rather than the children defining the options themselves[1063].

The law Lei 75/2013 of 12 September[1064] empowers municipalities to create mechanisms such as the participatory budget for young people but it does not require municipal councils to do so, hence there is an uneven distribution of youth participatory budgeting in municipalities across Portugal[1065].

In addition, because this mechanism applies a model of direct democracy (people choose the projects) some selected and funded initiatives and projects may be contradictory in nature/values. For instance, in one year, two projects were successful: one supporting bullfights as a cultural right and another banning bullfights as an affront to animal rights.

The fact that there is no evidence that the mechanism engages specifically with disadvantaged and vulnerable groups has been identified as another barrier to impactful participation. In relation to this, there is some evidence pertaining to the dominance of young adults over the children involved in the mechanism[1066].

**Effectiveness, impact and consequences**

The available sources suggest that this is a long-term process with strong evidence of changes to policies, procedures and practices and facilitating participation more effectively[1067]. As the results of votes are binding, this allows children and young people to have a decisive voice about projects selected for funding. On the other hand, there are questions about how meaningful the participation of children and young people is in the process, and whether they are tokens in elaborating proposals that are potentially written and led by adults[1068].

Yet, there is evidence that the mechanism has been undergoing transformations to enable participation more effectively, e.g. improving the facilitation of co-decision making, developing ICTs to enable wider participation, and training and qualifying local professionals in participatory approaches[1069]. Nevertheless, some disadvantages remain. For instance, the fact that age groups (within the age range of 14 to 30 years old) are not treated differently potentially creates disadvantage, and gives privilege to young adults, who are more skilled, supported and for whom information is more accessible[1070].

Finally, evidence pertaining to the impact of the funded proposals themselves is limited, in the sense that no known evaluation has been conducted assessing the results of the proposals on communities, and on children and young people themselves.

**Transferable lessons**

This mechanism is an example of involving children in the design of policy by allowing children and young people to propose policy ideas rather than just vote on policy ideas pre-selected by adults[1071]. Therefore, this is an example of a mechanism that is 'child-led'.

Furthermore, the youth budget illustrates how children's participation mechanisms could be built adopting similar structures and principles as those designed for adults (e.g. the Portugal Participatory Budget)[1072]. In addition, the evidence suggests that the operation of this mechanism is guaranteed by an overarching National Plan for Youth and this provides this project with stability, funding and longevity[1073].

In terms of access to children's participation mechanisms, the data suggest that the Youth Participation Budget has set a good example by reaching out to participants face-to-face and online, as children and young people are able to submit proposals either on the website or in person at meetings. Additionally, the evidence indicates that by entrusting children and young people to propose and vote on ideas of their own, the Youth Participatory Budget empowers children to become aware of their potential to influence policy decision making and make a difference in their communities[1074].

Finally, this mechanism requires collaboration between different municipalities and stakeholders, and as the data suggest, this, in turn, strengthens interregional and interdepartmental collaboration and promotes shared learning.[1075]

**Box 22. Case study: Children and youth participation Model Herrenberg**

**Children and youth participation Model Herrenberg**

**Overview**

This mechanism represents a whole city approach to fostering children and youth participation in the city of Herrenberg in Germany. The mechanism targets 12 to 21 year old children and young people. Children and young people work closely with decision-makers on a regular basis taking part in the youth forum, participating through an online platform and being part of a youth delegation. Participation can also be facilitated via other formats when inputs from a larger group of children is needed.

**Context**

The mechanism was designed in cooperation between the City of Herrenberg and its City Youth Council (Stadtjugendring)[1076]. The mechanism is funded through the Local Action Plan Herrenberg, which is part of the programme 'Fostering Tolerance – Strengthen Competencies' [Toleranz Fördern – Kompetenzen Stärken] by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth[1077]. The city of Herrenberg is located in the region of Baden-Württemberg, which is in the south-west of Germany[1078]. The city has a population of approximately 33,000 people.

**Participants**

The target group are children and young people aged 12-21 who live in Herrenberg. For some projects, this target group is expanded depending on the content and topic of participation, for example consultations might include very young children or young adults[1079]. In order to participate online, children must be at least 13 years of age, in accordance with social media use regulations[1080].

**Participation process and content**

Children and youth were involved in planning and creating the Herrenberg model[1081]. This was feasible through cooperation with partners from youth work, schools, the city council and the city administration, and youth members of the responsible organising committee. In 2012, a two-day workshop was held with 200 children and youth to explore the existing options for child and youth participation in the city. Results from this workshop were used to develop new models of participation, which were further developed via additional workshops[1082].

Since then, youth is actively involved every year in setting the policy agenda for the city[1083]. Members of the city administration regularly meet with youth representatives and discuss topics relevant at the city level. The youth officers then advise for which topics youth participation should be sought, and through which mechanisms/formats this participation should take place[1084].

There are three main mechanisms of children and youth participation:

- the youth forum,
- the youth delegation, and
- through 'online-participation'[1085].

The first youth forum took place in 2014[1086]. The Youth Forum is implemented in cooperation with schools in Herrenberg. It aims to discuss ideas and wishes of children and youth, and develop clear goals and action points[1087]. It takes place once a year, usually over the course of 1.5-2 days, during term time (most commonly at the beginning of the school year). Overall, at least two students per class can participate, however, the youth who lives in Herrenberg and attends schools from surrounding areas as well as those young people who are in training and work, are also invited to participate in the forum. Youth officers and people from the city administration can also take part[1088].

Prior to 2019, the participation in the forum was open to children from grade 5 and above, but the age requirement was raised and now the forum only takes children from grage 7 and above[1089]. Young people are involved in the practical aspects related to the organisation of the forum and in the selection of discussion topics[1090]. Children and youth have the possibility to continue discussions online about individual topics[1091]. The costs of the youth forum are estimated at a total of 5,000

EUR annually, and covers the costs of 2 days for 200 participants, but excludes room rental costs[1092]. The format of past fora included an opening plenary sessions when the participants were briefed about the outcomes of the last fora, small group discussions focused on particular topics of interest, and a concluding session when the groups' discussions are reported back to the plenary. This final session is attended by the city's major and other local officials[1093].

The Youth Delegation meets every four to six weeks and is open to children and youth between the ages of 13 and 21. Between two and four young people are appointed to serve as youth representatives, and they are responsible for coordination and liaison with city / local authority officials. The right of the youth delegation to be heard and to submit proposals is enshrined in the city laws[1094]. The costs of the youth delegation are budgeted at 1,000 EUR per year[1095]. The youth delegation receives additional 2,000 EUR per year (on average) to spend on materials and resources[1096].

'Online-participation' refers to the discussion group on a social media platform. The groups' content is moderated by an external media agency. As of 2020, the group was hosted on Facebook as it was the most widely used social media platform by children and youth in Herrenberg[1097]. With nearly 1,400 members participating on a regular basis, this online group is one of the most successful social media participation mechanisms at a local level in Germany[1098]. The costs of maintaining the online participation tool are about 6,000 EUR per year. This is largely the cost of the external moderation[1099].

Other methods of participation (e.g. surveys, idea competitions, and youth action days) can be implemented on an *ad hoc* basis as agreed between the members of the city administration and children and youth representatives[1100]. These activities generate additional costs of approximately 10,500 EUR per year, and these costs are covered by public grants as well as funds from the City Youth Council and cooperation partners. Any activities that develop as a result of these participation methods require additional financing[1101].

All participation opportunities are advertised via two YouTube videos which are produced by young people in Herrenberg. This includes a two minute animated YouTube video which explains what child and youth participation means and how it works in Herrenberg[1102], and a 1.5 minute video from the local youth council [Jugendring] in which young people explain how they can participate in Herrenberg[1103].

Thus far, children and youth were involved in the following topics: the development of the city's public pool, the planning of western part of the city centre, and the planning of the playgrounds[1104].

**Effectiveness, impact and consequences**

The mechanism has not been formally evaluated[1105]. The administering team, however, does seek feedback from participating adults and youth following the youth forum, both on contents and structure. Feedback from individual youth is also sought following the completion of individual project[1106].

An interviewee representing a child rights organisation considered this mechanism a promising example of children's participation[1107]. Firstly, this was because the Herrenberg model adopts different methods of participation to ensure they are reaching out to a diverse group of children, and secondly, because the methods of participation respond to the local needs as they have all been adapted to the local context. Furthermore, this was because the necessary resources have been allocated to each participatory method, including funding and resources to cover the costs of the adult staff members supporting children and youth in the participation processes and methods[1108]. As concluded by this interviewee:

*"You can't just start a youth parliament and then wait and see what happens. Professional supervision is needed. This has been done in Herrenberg"*[1109].

**Transferable Lessons**

The Herrenberg participation model represents a 'whole city approach' to children's participation[1110]. It centres around the concept of participation via cooperation between different stakeholders (individuals, organisations and local authority structures)[1111]. This enables reaching a diverse range of children and youth, and ensuring that their ideas and perspectives are absorbed by the appropriate channels[1112]. In addition, this model offers an integrated approach and is incorporated in all activities at the city level (rather than facilitating children's participation on a case by case basis). Children and young people are active in agenda setting, selection of topics and participatory methods. An online platform allows for discussions to continue after in-person participation has

taken place, and also ensures that child and youth participation remains ongoing throughout the year, and this seems important to guarantee the continuity of the participation processes.
In terms of involving vulnerable children, the youth forum is open to youth with special educational needs[1113]. There are a few things that are being done to help facilitate accessibility of the youth forum to this group. First, the organisers insure that the location is accessible. Second, on the day of the forum, youth are accompanied by their respective social worker from their school who supports them during the day. Third, contrary to the participation of other youth structures which permits 1-2 pupils per each class to participate, there is no limit on the numbers of pupils with SEN. Any pupil with SEN who would like to participate in the youth forum may do so. Fourth, organisers of the youth forum organise a mock youth forum in advance with participating SEN pupils to help them understand the process[1114].

**Box 23. Case study: Involvement of children in drafting of the Minor Protection Act in Malta**

**Involvement of children in drafting of the Minor Protection Act in Malta**

**Overview**

The mechanism takes the form of a study commissioned by the Office for the Commissioner for Children. The research adopted a 'child-centred' qualitative methodology to understand the perceived experiences of fostered children in Malta. Children who were either in care or had previously experienced care proceedings in Malta were interviewed in order to understand their experiences of the Maltese system. In light of the study, the Commissioner for Children put forward a chapter of recommendations, the majority of which were reportedly addressed directly in the Minor Protection (Alternative Care) Act, therefore informing Maltese law[1115].

**Context**

The study was commissioned by the Office for the Commissioner for Children. Established in 2003, the Office promotes the welfare of children and compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international treaties, conventions or agreements as ratified by Malta. The Office is an advisory body, who seek to raise awareness of children's rights and promote children's participation[1116].
As part of this remit, the Office commissioned a research study into children's experiences of foster care in Malta. This qualitative study was facilitated by interviews with a range of stakeholders including children who have experienced foster care, birth parents, foster carers, professionals working in the field and policy makers. The research was guided by a children's rights-based approach – to be informed by and compliant with UNCRC standards[1117]. In light of the qualitative research findings deduced from analysed interviews, the Commissioner for Children put forward a series of recommendations, many of which were reportedly taken forward into the Minor Protection (Alternative Care) Act (Ministry of Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity, 2020). Interviewees reported that 'the voice' of children interviewed as part of the study influenced the drafting of this legislation[1118]. The Act itself further enshrines children's right to participate in future judicial care proceedings as a means to safeguard the best interests of children[1119].
One interviewee suggested that reviewing the Act involved a wider processes of children's participation, including with child asylum seekers[1120]. In 2019, the Office for the Commissioner of Children published a series of studies conducted by the Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health at the University of Malta[1121]. Given the broader scope of that mechanism concerning education, access to services, and integration into Maltese society, this case study concentrates on the aforementioned foster care study 'Let me thrive', where the relationship between recommendations made and legislative reform is more apparent.
The resultant Minor Protection (Alternative Care) Act 2019 was enacted by the Maltese Parliament, and promulgated by the President on 16 July 2019. It is said to consolidate and develop previous measures[1122] and substitutes The Child Protection (Alternative Care) Act (Act No III of 2017).

**Participants**

The study interviewed children who were in foster care or who had previously experienced foster care across Malta. In total, 13 children were interviewed across the following groups:

- children in foster care aged 11 to 13 (0 male|5 female);

- children in foster care aged 14 to 18 (1 male | 5 female);
- children who had recently been fostered and whose placement had failed aged 16 to 18 (0 male | 2 female).

Seven young adults over the age of 18 who had been fostered in the recent past were also interviewed (4 male | 3 female). No children under the age of 11 were interviewed, as a means of limiting the harms caused by interviewing such a vulnerable population[1123]. The authors of the study recognise a number of limitations with the small sample size. Findings may have been biased by the fact that those children who elected to be part of the study were likely to have more positive experiences in care; those who refused, having experienced 'placement breakdowns' and wanting to move on from traumatic experiences were not captured[1124].

The sample were recruited through Appogg social workers. Appogg is the largest social welfare organisation in Malta, providing services and support to those in vulnerable situations. Social workers initially compiled a list of children in Malta who they deemed appropriate to interview; they then brokered contact with the children, and hose who were willing to participate in principle were then contacted through their foster carers. Foster carers subsequently asked children (on behalf of the researchers) whether they would like to participate in an interview about their experiences. Through this process some foster carers or social workers of children advised against conducting interviews with those children selected due to ongoing crises[1125]. Given the vulnerable sample population, it appears that the researchers placed ethical considerations at the forefront of their sampling strategy in seeking to minimise trauma to child participants.

The aim of the research was to explore the personalised manner (i.e. individual experiences) in which children perceived, experienced and made sense of their lives as fostered children, how the processes and outcomes of fostering mattered to them and how far these were being realised. Findings from these experiences (along with contributions from other interviewees) then informed recommendations made by the Commissioner for Children for reform to existing procedures and legislation. The conclusions developed by the study's authors make reference to both the adult and child interviewees, although it is unclear as to how findings were weighted across groups. The participation of children was therefore one-off, as a means of voicing children's experiences of the existing foster care provision in Malta[1126].

**Participation process and content**

Children were interviewed about their experiences through an open-interview (i.e. unstructured) methodology. The flexibility of this methodology is stated to 'allow the child to feel a certain amount of control of the general direction of the interview', thus seeking to foster their participation[1127]. Whilst interviews were recorded, child participants were asked to start, pause or stop the recording device whenever they wished to. Interviews were therefore said to be adapted in response to each child participant. Children were informed that 'the benefits that may arise from their contribution may not be realisable within the timescale that can be of direct benefit to them', to mitigate feeling of loss if their expectations were not met; however children were also told that their views would be taken seriously and valued[1128].

Interview transcripts were analysed by researchers and findings presented thematically in their research report, exploring children's experiences and their day to day lives as fostered children. This included their relationships with foster family and birth family; their education; and the social services they receive as children in out of home residential care[1129]. The study authors then produced their own conclusions by triangulating interview data (adults and children).

**Effectiveness, impact and consequences**

The Commissioner for Children put forward a number of recommendations, some which were related specifically to enhancing the voice of the children in care: (i) that children should have automatic representation in decision-making processes and a right to judicial review of decisions affecting their lives; (ii) that decision-making process should be child friendly and easier to navigate including that the child is empowered and supported; (iii) that the child feels decisions are taken by persons who are well informed about the child's day to day life; (iv) that logistics respect the child's expressed needs such as the need not to miss school; and (v) that social workers allow for sufficient and timely meaningful communication with the child[1130].

Many of these recommendations were reportedly taken forward into the Minor Protection (Alternative Care) Act (Ministry of Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity, 2020). Resultantly, the Act includes a number of provisions which now require the participation and involvement of children in their care decisions[1131]. In speaking about the mechanism, one

interviewee noted that children voiced that they did not feel they participated in the development of their care plans, and that speaking in front of a board of adults was a daunting prospect.[1132] Accordingly, the space and means of participation are to considered in line with the child's age in the legislation[1133]. One criticism noted however is that is unclear how the new safeguards will be regulated going forward[1134].

One interviewee articulated that the Act was sourced from children's perspectives: 'for the first time, we had legislation that did not start from the desk of legal drafters'[1135]. From the sources consulted it appears that the voice of children in shaping these provisions comes through the analysis of interviews and subsequent recommendations made by the Commissioner for Children. The impact of the Minor Protection (Alternative Care) Act may be delayed due to COVID-19 having temporarily closed Maltese courts[1136].

**Transferable Lessons**

Adopting such a child-led, open interview methodology may be important when seeking the participation of younger children and identified vulnerable populations – those who at times are the missing but necessary voices in such consultations. The mechanism duly considered the importance of research ethics and only sought the participation of children who would not be potentially harmed by their speaking about experiences. The fact that findings were translated into actionable recommendations by a department whose purpose is to promote the welfare of children in Malta may have assisted their passage into legislation.

**Box 24. Case study: Turning words into action**

**Turning Words into Action**

**Description**

The Turning Words into Action (TWIA) mechanism brought together stakeholders (such as adult self-advocates[1137], expert mentors and academics) and children and young people with intellectual disabilities, including those from both families and institutions, from across Serbia, Bulgaria and Czechia. The purpose was to provide training and support related to children's health and wider needs, and it entailed the planning, design and implementation of a series of activities and events that took place over 21 months between 2011 and 2013. This mechanism also examined the practical ways of implementing the WHO's Europe Declaration 'Better Health, Better Lives' (BHBL) children and young people with intellectual disabilities'[1138].

Despite being a one-off mechanism, TWIA facilitated the creation of children-led offshoot events and initiatives.

It was run by the NGO Lumos, along with partners in each project country, and was fully endorsed and funded by the European Commission Social Innovation Fund[1139].

**Context**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union many children with intellectual disabilities living in Central and Eastern Europe remained institutionalied, voiceless, and with development delays due to lack of love and stimulation. Despite some improvements over the past thirty years, data show that across Central and Eastern Europe children with disabilities are still significantly overrepresented in institutions. This is mainly due to the lack of support available to parents. Because they need to provide extra care for their child, they have limited access to employment and this often leads to them living in poverty and at a greater risk of becoming institutionalised[1140].

In order to address this challenge, the NGO Lumos, implemented the TWIA mechanism in Bulgaria, Czechia and Serbia, as all these countries were identified as facing challenges concerning children in institutions and all three countries have commitment to transforming their systems. The four partner organisations included Lumos (international), Karin Dom (Bulgaria), Pardubice County Authority (Czechia) and The Centre for Child Rights (Serbia)[1141].

TWIA was also heeded by UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), prompting many European countries to ratify the CRPD Optional Protocol. The European Union's Disability Strategy from 2010-2020 similarly aims to break down the barriers which prevent Europeans with disabilities from participating fully in society. Moreover, pre-existing initiatives such as the Social Investment Package and the Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage have also helped pave the way for TWIA[1142]. As one local Bulgarian stakeholder

phrased it, the declaration 'fills the gaps' of three previous conventions pertaining to children's rights, the rights of people with disabilities, and human rights[1143].

**Participants**

Within each country, a group of institutionalised children and children with disabilities were selected. The participant selection process aimed to ensure a full representation of children from different backgrounds, and included the following selection criteria: gender balance, different age ranges (10-30 years old), inclusion of Roma children, children from both institutions and families, and children with a range of intellectual disabilities[1144].

**Participation process and content**

The purpose of participation was quite literally to turn words into action, to make the WHO's BHBL declaration a reality and to provide children with intellectual disabilities an opportunity to express their voices on their care options, and thus improve their care provision. More specifically, this mechanism had four key aims:

1) To provide opportunities for the genuine inclusion of the voices of children and young people with intellectual disabilities, their families and carers. To provide a model of good practice in inclusive participation.
2) Using the WHO's BHBL Declaration as a framework to assist countries to develop national action plans for deinstitutionalisation, specifically including in the process the opinions of children with intellectual disability.
3) To increase mutually beneficial partnerships, both in-country and internationally.
4) To strengthen the understanding and implementation of international law and human rights instruments in meeting the needs of children with intellectual disabilities and their families. In particular, the harm caused by institutionalisation and children's rights to live with their families[1145].

The participation process included a range of activities. Firstly, children participated in the group activities preparing them to learn how to make choices. It began with learning about simple choices, e.g. about what snack they would like to eat, and gradually leading to more complex choices once the children's confidence with expressing themselves grew. The group work also aimed to empower children by building their self-esteem and instilling the belief that their opinions have value. Children were also encouraged to speak up for themselves and for other children. Other preparation exercises included the development of creativity and leadership skills through play and theatre. Additionally, children made the WHO's BHBL declaration into an easy read book and poster, using jargon free language and pictures to explain complex issues[1146].

As part of the local participation groups, the children learned about themselves and others, they discussed their likes, dislikes and dreams for the future. The children also looked at an easy read version of the BHBL declaration, breaking down sections into 'what does "declaration" mean?' or 'how do you describe a politician?' In Czechia, older children preparing to leave institutions worked with a 'Book Beyond Words' to help them understand what it might be like to live independently. The young people were then able to express whether they preferred to live alone or with friends[1147].

Children and young people in all groups contributed to the development of an easy read publication called 'Our Words, Our Actions', in order to share young people's views of the BHBL declaration. The book was translated into several languages and was intended to inform future national policy making in the three project countries and across the region of Central and Eastern Europe[1148]. Activities in all three countries culminated in three 'child choice' events, whereby children and young people provided with support and resources, designed, planned and carried out an event of their choice. The events were deliberately open and visible to the public in order to demonstrate the children's right to inclusion in their communities and 'demystify disability'. The events brought together children and policy makers and politicians. In Bulgaria, the children organised a 'tour of dreams' from Varna to Sofia, meeting and debating with other groups of young people along the way about their rights and how to make the BHBL declaration a reality. In Czechia children decided to hold a concert, which included a performance by young musicians with disabilities. Finally, in Serbia, the child choice event was held at a shopping centre in Belgrade and featured two large cubes with pictures and mottos from their discussions about the BHBL declaration[1149].

All activities as part of this mechanism included guidance and support structures provided by adults and children themselves. This included:

- a steering committee, involving adult self-advocates as well as children with disabilities and their families;
- expert mentors, with each country allocated a senior academic/practitioner for guidance;
- project implementation team (provided by Lumos) including the child and youth participation coordinators and an external evaluator, and an internationally renowned expert in the matter.

This mechanism also relied on transnational cooperation, which involved self-advocates and members of the three National Working Group coming together for meetings to share challenges, successes, form relationships and ultimately learn from one another[1150].

**Effectiveness, impact and consequences**

In order to evaluate this mechanism, Lumos developed a self evaluation toolkit[1151]. It was translated into five languages (for application in a broader range of countries) and used in all participating countries. Impact was also measured by the Lumos team using the 'KAP analysis' method (knowledge, attitudes and practice) comparing the changes between baseline data and follow-up data. According to this report, the results show improvements at the individual child level in terms of children's ability to communicate and improve their self-esteem levels. The mechanism also reportedly resulted in wider societal and policy changes. There is some evidence, for example, of changing public perceptions towards disability during the project period. For example, at the beginning of the project only 50% of Czech National Working Group respondents agreed that people in their society were "welcoming to individuals with intellectual disabilities". By the end of this project the figure had risen to 64%. This change was not noted in other countries, however. Another key piece of evidence relating to the impact of the project is that in Czechia at the start of the project, 50% of children and young people with intellectual disabilities agreed that "people often ignore or avoid me", whereas this figure had dropped to 20% by the end of the project. Contrastingly, in Serbia meanwhile, the figure dropped from 100% to 57%. Yet similar results were not recorded in Bulgaria[1152]. The report further noted that the activities that took place throughout this mechanism potentially informed the development of a new national action plan focusing on the BHBL declaration in Serbia; improvements to existing education policies in Bulgaria, and improvements to local policies in institutions as well as recommendations for national action were implemented in Czechia[1153].

The project also seemed to have had an impact on adults' attitudes. According to the study report, politicians, parents, carers and practitioners involved in the project admitted that they underestimated the children's ability to express an opinion and contribute to society. The participation of children in this project thus shows that with time and support, even the most vulnerable citizens can be empowered to influence policymaking and shape decisions[1154]. The children themselves noted an improved ability to express themselves.

**Transferable Lessons**

This mechanism constitutes an interesting example of a mechanism involving children with intellectual disabilities. Considering that it has been implemented in three countries suggests that it can be transferred into additional settings. Lumos also believes that collaboration between various stakeholders i.e. families, carers and professionals, is important in ensuring the mechanism's impact is long-lasting. In the years since the mechanism took place, Lumos has provided ongoing support to new groups formed under TWIA in Bulgaria and Czechia. Lumos meets regularly with these groups and still advocates for the rights of children at national and local level. In addition to the three project countries, Lumos has also started to support groups of young people in Moldova[1155]. This continuous support could be a facilitating factor in ensuring that the benefits of the mechanism are long-lasting.

**Box 25. Case study: Local youth councils (Comhairle na nÓg) in Ireland**

**Local Youth Councils (Comhairle na nÓg) Ireland**

**Overview**

The local youth councils – Comhairle na nÓg in Irish – were established in 2001 as part of the Irish National Children's Strategy 2000. They have been described as 'a consultative and participative space' for children and young people, aged 12-18 to provide input into the decision-making and development of local services and polices in Ireland[1156]. Whilst initially established by the National Children's Office through local level initiatives under the City and County Development Boards, the Councils are now overseen and part-funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs[1157].

**Context**

Reviewed sources suggest that the Comhairle na nÓg allow young people's voices to be heard by (i) working on topics of importance to young people; and (ii) acting as a consultative forum for adult decision makers[1158]. As of August 2020, there are 31 local youth councils operating within each local authority area in Ireland. A Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund is administered by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs; the fund allocates up to €20,000 to each local authority to run their Comhairle na nÓg. In addition, local authorities and other statutory and voluntary organisations may provide funding for the Comhairle na nÓg at the local level[1159].

Irish Government sources state that local youth councils are a 'nationally recognised structure'[1160]. Academic commentators have noted that local decision makers are under no obligation to demonstrate how they connect with or are accountable to their respective Comhairle[1161]. The contributions and recommendations made by local youth councils are therefore non-binding. Local authorities are however required to report on their level of engagement with Comhairle na nÓg and local children in the Annual Report of the Department for Children and Youth Affairs Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund, ensuring administration and expenditure occurs in accordance with funding criteria[1162].

After a 2005 review of local youth councils found inconsistencies in how they engaged with young people, a Comhairle na nÓg Implementation Group was established to improve their operation[1163]. Since then, the cross-government *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020* sets out priority areas of action to ensure children and young people have a 'voice' in decisions that affect their lives[1164]. According to one stakeholder, this demonstrates commitment to facilitating children's participation in Comhairle na nÓg mechanism into the future[1165].

**Participants**

Each Comhairle is required to hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM) which allows for the election of new members and to host discussions for setting topics as part of its ongoing work plan. In 2019, a total of 3,988 young people attended Comhairle na nÓg AGMs, an increase by 7% as compared to 2018[1166]. Each local AGM varies in approach: some reportedly facilitate workshops / icebreaker activities, whilst others had formal chairing (Pobal, 2020). AGMs are promoted through letters and visits to schools, youth organisations and youth projects; posters, emails, and information packs were also distributed in advance of meetings[1167].

The standard 'term of office' for those elected to their local Comhairle na nÓg is two years[1168]. There is a process of recruitment annually, identified as fostering organisational stability of the Comhairle, with older members mentoring new participants[1169]. The process of election to each Comhairle is noted to vary: members may be elected after expressing interest at a AGM; may be appointed through self-nomination; may be appointed after some form of election; or may be nominated by local schools or youth organisations[1170]. Whilst the latter is suggested to be a way of 'prioritising the membership for seldom heard young people, or to ensure representation of a particular school in the area', a number of interviewees noted that efforts to ensure representation of different socio-economic groups were inconsistent and not embedded in all local Comhairle practices (Interview IE-NA-04 and IE-NA-03). The absence of those from the Irish Traveller community in local youth councils has been observed[1171].

In 2019, the reported national membership of Comhairle na nÓg was 1,035, with an average of 33 members per Comhairle. Females made up 61% of the overall membership. 61.6% of the Comhairle na nÓg membership are aged between 16-18 years of age, with 38.1% aged 12-15

years of age, with the remaining 0.3% under 12 years old[1172]. The report notes recent improvements to the participation of 'seldom heard' young people in Ireland, with local youth councils working with organisations such as local youth services, Youthreach (programme for those who leave school with no qualifications), organisations supporting the Travelling Community, and LGBTI+[1173].

**Participation process and content**

Comhairle na nÓg are recognised as a key national structure in Ireland for ensuring the participation of young people in local decision making across the 31 local authorities[1174]. Guidance issued by the DCYA[1175] states that Comhairle na nÓg allows young people's voices to be heard in the following ways:

1. *Working on topics of importance to young people* – where children and young people should be facilitated to select and work on topics of importance to them, such as for instance mental health awareness, facilities for children and young people, and homophobic bullying. Work on these topics may include doing background research, developing surveys and consulting views of other children and young people, meeting with local decision makers and producing promotional or awareness-raising materials (flyers, posters, online materials).
2. *Acting as a consultative forum for adult-decision makers in the locality* – involving Comhairle members' participation in consultations, seeking input and feedback on new and existing polices and services affecting young people. Members of local Comhairle can also make formal submissions on local policies. Comhairle na nÓg are often invited to sit on adult committees to input the views of young people.

Agendas are therefore mixed, with topics of interest set by young people through the AGM, and others in response to current policy making i.e. being top-down in nature[1176].

At the local level, Comhairle groups meet, on average, every month; this varies by the nature of work and features of the locality (e.g. where transport costs may be higher this can absorb most of the allocated budget)[1177]. The most common observed method of involvement in local decision-making processes were through presentations to local authorities[1178]. Other observed events included submissions to local strategic or environmental plans, political speed dating, development of local service directories and conferences organised by the youth councils[1179]. Key topics selected by Comhairlí in 2019 included mental health (top priority), drugs and alcohol, safer communities and socialising, education, health and wellbeing, discrimination and equality and relationships / sexuality[1180].

At the national level, all Comhairle na nÓg come together to participate in the Dáil na nÓg (National Youth Parliament) or a National Showcase Event (biennial, alternate years). These are typically themed: in 2019, Dáil na nÓg centred around climate change[1181]; the 2018 Showcase hosted workshop sessions centred around school rules, subjects and management[1182]. In 2019, 155 Comhairle na nÓg delegates attended the Dáil na nÓg event, which included workshops to formulate propositions in relation to climate change. After voting on propositions, the National Executive of the Dáil na nÓg then formulate a list to take forward and lobby the government. This included notions to reduce the cost of public transport, facilitate more cycle lanes, address barriers to cycling to school[1183].

One of the reported strengths of the Comhairle na nÓg model is that its objectives have been consistent since inception, enabling a policy focus on improving outcomes[1184]. The long-term vision for the Comhairle na nÓg is conveyed through Lundy's[1185] rights-based model for children and young people's participation which requires: space for children to express views; to give support for them to voice their views; provide an audience to hear their views; and a commitment that views will have influence[1186].

The observed development of the Comhairle na nÓg appears to have been encouraged through a number of structural changes. A 2005 review of Comhairle na nÓg – known as Murphy's report - identified that they were not, at the time, effectively engaging with young people, with variation in practices across Ireland[1187]. This led to the establishment of a Comhairle na nÓg Implementation Group, and the Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund. Enhanced funding provision (from an annual grant of €2,500 per Comhairle na nÓg to around €20,000 per annum today) appears to have therefore enabled improvement in Comhairle na nÓg operations, and is noted to still represent 'remarkable value for money' for a nation-wide infrastructure of citizen

engagement[1188]. Adult facilitators and participation champions are also recognised to have instigated a cultural shift in children's participation in Ireland[1189].

Comhairle na nÓg participated in around 66 consultations in 2019, delivering 30 submissions and / or presentations to local and national decision makers[1190]. This was slightly lower than in 2018, where Comhairle na nÓg were involved in 71 consultations[1191]. Consultations varied from informal discussions between Comhairle members and organisations through to participation in wider consultations alongside other stakeholders[1192]. Comhairle highest level of engagement was with Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC), which are county-level committees bringing together statutory, community and voluntary providers who provide services to children and young people. Activities with city and local councils involved consultations on new strategic planning, such as Fingal's digital strategic plan, or Wicklow's climate adaption strategy, represented the second most common areas of Comhairle's influence[1193].

**Effectiveness, impact and consequences**

Previous research found that young Comhairle na nÓg participants were positive about their perceptions of being listened to by adults and their youth member peers, and that they were able to communicate ideas and issues to their local Comhairle na nÓg[1194]. The research further found a shift in feedback on participation and on the perceived impact of work: of those surveyed, 75% of current youth council participants were positive about receiving feedback on their work compared to 52.6% of previous members[1195]. This is indicative of a continued commitment to Comhairle na nÓg in Ireland as a means of facilitating local children's participation[1196]. Whilst Comhairle na nÓg members were positive about being listened to by people in power (71%), they were less positive about their perception of affected influence (55%)[1197].

**Transferable lessons**

The Comhairle na nÓg has been established in Ireland for nearly two decades. Recent policy documents suggest a continued commitment to these local youth councils into the future[1198]. This longevity of this participation mechanism is underlined by a consistent and clear vision, supported by robust scientific evidence such as the Lundy model. Key learning from this period has been identified, including: (i) the need for an appropriate budget to facilitate the running of the youth council and consultation activities; and (ii) establishment of bodies or departments whose function is to enhance children's participation to bring about culture change[1199]. As such, a clear political will and commitment to foster children's participation is necessary when embedding such a widespread mechanisms. A number of interviewees noted that improvements are needed with regards to ensuring the make-up of local Comhairle na nÓg is representative of the population[1200]. Hence, even with enhanced organisational provision in place it is important to develop actionable processes to ensure broad and representative children's participation in political and democratic life.

# Annex B Summary tables on child participation in decision-making processes

The objective of the summary tables is to capture the overall country situation of children's participation in decision making processes at the local and national level. This table complements evidence presented in the Mapping fiches providing detail on each of the identified mechanisms (see Annex H).

## EU LEVEL

- Key EU practices/structures include: consultations with children across countries on various topics, conferences/fora/panels/dialogues/surveys, awareness raising events (e.g. Europe Kids Want survey, European Forum on the rights of the child, EC's Learning Corner, EC's Safer Internet Forum, the annual conference of the ENOC, bi-annual conference of Eurochild), international youth councils/parliaments (e.g. European Youth Parliament, Commonwealth Youth Council) and networks of organisations representing children (e.g. and the European Network of Young Advisors (ENYA) – a child / young people participatory project supported by the ENOC members).
- The purpose of these practices/structures include: to gather children's experiences and views on particular topics; to bring children closer to practitioners, researchers, civil society actors and policy/decision makers; to discuss topics relevant to children/youth; to empower children and increase knowledge and awareness of children's rights; to ensure that the views of children are heard in policy and decision making at local, national and EU levels of decision-making; to identify priority areas for future action in the area of children's rights, to produce policy recommendations for future action on issues that affect children, to develop a culture of participation through increased awareness and practice.
- Consultative processes and structures have generally been implemented in the last few years (mostly 2013 and later), although structures such as councils, parliaments and fora have been established for longer in some cases Many of the structures/processes have been informed by Article 12 of the UN CRC (and the 30$^{th}$ anniversary of the UN CRC in 2019), but other policies/events have also been important in shaping participatory practices, e.g., EU Youth Strategy, European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children, World Children's Day.
- Topics include: family life; children's role in public decision-making; children's participation in decision making; democracy and society; climate change; creating a safer internet; attitudes towards migrants; employment; youth work.
- A diverse set of actors shape the participatory actions/structures at this level, including: policy and decision makers (e.g. the ENOC, EU institutions), academic/research institutions, NGOs and other third sector organisations (e.g. Eurochild, SALTO,). The majority of structures/practices appear to be embedded within or linked to policy/decision making institutions.
- Modes of participation include: online surveys, participation in conferences/fora/debates, focus groups, interviews, drawing, story telling, "flipped consultations", workshops, participatory visual methods.
- Participatory practices/structures at the EU level are mixture of individual and collective: consultative processes tend to be individual, while there are many structures in place whereby a council/parliament/forum/panel has been created to represent the views of children. The structures/processes tend to facilitate only passive participation, but there is some evidence that there is scope for children to: be

involved in the design of some processes/structures; set the agenda for topics/themes to be discussed, and contribute their views on issues that matter most to them.
- Compared to the number of practices/structures identified, there was relatively little evidence of impact/influence on policy and decision making at the EU level. It was common for a series of recommendations to be produced as a result of the processes/structures, but little evidence on whether/how those recommendations had impact on policy or decision making. However, a few examples of impact were identified, e.g. organisations taking part in conferences/fora related to children's participation embed children's participation into their work/processes,

## INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

- Major international structures include: UN (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Committee on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF), Council of Europe, NGOs (World Vision International, Terre des Hommes, Save the Children, Childs Rights Connect), The Commonwealth Youth Forum, The Commonwealth Youth Council, and The Africa-Europe Youth Summit. Most of permanent international structures are youth-focused, while involvement of children tends to be project-based.
- Modes of participation are a mixture of consultations with children on matters such as the COVID-19 crisis, children as human rights defenders, humanitarianism and international development, conferences (e.g. Global Conference on Child Labour), focus groups, online surveys, workshops and panel sessions.
- Like the EU structures, international practices tend to be quite recent, emerging between 2012 and 2019 although some date back over twenty years (e.g. the Commonwealth Youth Forum was established in 1998) and even thirty years (the first UN Committee on the Rights of the Child met in 1991).
- The main actors involved in child participation practices at the international level are NGOs / third sector organisations (e.g. UNICEF, OECD, World Vision International and Save the Children)
- Topics include children as human rights' defenders; cooperation between Africa and Europe; children deprived of liberty; child pornography and prostitution, the sustainable development goals, and most recently the experiences of the COVID-19 crisis.
- There are many examples of international participatory mechanisms having impact: children's participatory measures have been strengthened through German development cooperation projects, and COVID-19-related research reaching large audiences and allowing young researchers' views to be included in debates where children/youth voices would often not reach.

# NATIONAL LEVEL COMPARATIVE TABLE

| Country | Local practices | National practices |
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| **Austria** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • One of the key national structures in Austria to facilitate children and youth participation is the Austrian Youth Strategy *(Österreichische Jugendstrategie)* for 14-24 years old, of which 'Your Projects' *(Eure Projekte)* is a relevant sub-mechanism. Other key national mechanisms include the Austrian National Youth Council *(Bundesdjugendvertretung)*, the Youth Monitor *(Jugenmonitor)*. Each of the nine regions in Austria have a Children and Youth Advocate *(Kinder- und Jugendanwaltschaften Österreichs)* which advises and supports children in all matters of life.<br>• Significantly, Austria is one of the few EU Member States that have a right to vote for people age 16 and older.<br>• Since 2018, there has also been an active Friday's for Future movement which is organised by children and young people themselves.<br>• The common purpose of mechanisms is to help achieve the goals set out by the Austrian Youth Strategy, of which children and youth participation is a key component. This also includes 'strengthening direct democracy'. The Austrian National Youth Council believes that only by consulting children and youth can sustainable solutions to problems be found.<br>• Most of the mechanisms mentioned above are nation-wide. A significant local practice worth mentioning is the Child-friendly City Initiative *(Kinder-freundliche Gemeinden)*, with 43 localities in Austria being 'child-friendly cities'.<br>• Common format of participation includes youth council sessions and conferences. The youth monitor conducts representative telephone surveys with 14-24 years old. There are also focus groups and online surveys. In Your Projects, 14-24 years old may apply for funding for projects for which they can receive expert guidance and up to 500 EUR. In 2013/2014, there was a large national project called Young Politics, which hosted several workshops with young people over the course of a year where they could discuss topics of importance to them. In the end they met with politicians to discuss their ideas on political topics of their choice.<br>• Topics include issue areas such as the environment, youth work, and urban development of children's communities. |

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| | | • Key stakeholders apart from children and young people themselves include the Federal Minister of Economy, Family and Youth as well as civil society organisations and agencies tasked with overseeing mechanisms. The latter includes the 'Familie & Beruf Management Gmbh' which conducts the audit for the Austrian UNICEF Child-friendly City Initiative.<br>• Hardly any evaluation evidence has been found as part of this research and no information on outcomes and impacts has been identified. |
| **Belgium** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • Several mechanisms exist at national and regional levels. A National Commission for the Rights of the Child operates nationally.<br>• There are separate mechanisms for Flanders and Wallonie. Those in Flanders have mostly been set up through policy/legal changes from the 1990s onwards, whereas those from Wallonie appear to have existed for longer (one from 1975) and established by the community (then formalized).The following networks and offices operate in Flanders (all initiated by Flemish government): Network group on policy participation of children and young people (as part of the integrated youth and children's rights policy (JKP)), Flemish office of the Children's Rights Commissioner, Great Priorities Debate, Youth Pact 2020, Flemish Youth Council, and each government department has a youth 'contact point' (a person). In Wallonie, the following mechanisms operate: Youth Forum (covering children and young people aged 16 to 30 years old; formerly Youth Council of the French Community) and Confederation of Youth Organizations.<br>• The stakeholders are the Belgian governments and children themselves. Children from 10 to youth aged 30 included in the various mechanisms. Children are participating to policy decisions/planning on a very wide range of aspects of life (transport, environment, education, etc.). The French-speaking community organisations are also participating internationally, making policy submissions representing their community. Vulnerable children have specific attention from the National & Flemish Office of the Commissioner for Child Rights when implementing the UNCRC.<br>• There are some one-off mechanisms like surveys and consultations but the Flemish Government aspire for youths to become 'co-owners' of the Flemish Youth Policy Plan, and the Wallonie organizations are run by children/youth themselves. There is some level of all five modes of participation (initiation, information, consultation, engagement, decision). There is a mix of individual (e.g. consultations) and collective (e.g. youth forum) actions, and |

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| | | active (great debate with policy-makers) and passive (surveys) styles of participation.<br>• Some mechanisms have binding impact for the Flemish governments, since youth opinions are sought for the express purpose of informing policy. Communications about impact are largely through official websites. Communication for recruiting children/youth to participate is more diverse, including radio, tv, and magazine adverts.<br>• There were not any evaluations but the two French-speaking community mechanisms involved committee/organizations run by youth, so they hold themselves to account. |
| **Bulgaria** | Megaphone – Children and Youth Participation in Voluntary Citizenship was identified as a relevant local level mechanism encouraging child participation. It started in 2012 and ended in 2015, and was piloted in three regions.<br>○ Mechanism was adult initiated (government & NGO) and trained/built capacity in local communities (adults and children) to involve children more in decision-making and familiarising with the UNCRC.<br>○ Mechanism involved 12-17 years old children from diverse backgrounds.<br>○ Mechanism's mode were consultations.<br>○ Children were involved in policy planning and implementation. | • Documented child participation mechanisms are consultations rather than permanent mechanisms. Some of these are one-off others years-long consultations, and initiated by adults (UNICEF, National Network for Children, Lumos, Eurochild).<br>• All mechanisms were established from 2010 onwards with a national scope. Stakeholders are children, government and NGOs, there were no mechanism identified involving parents or family participation.<br>• Overall, mechanism modes are high on consultation and information, low on initiation, decision, and engagement. One of the exceptions was a research study that involved children with intellectual disabilities. As part of focus groups/working groups, these children were able to design their own research on meaningful participation of children with intellectual disabilities (although the mechanism was adult-initiated).<br>• Consultations aim to include children across all age groups. In one study, the youngest children involved were age 4 (study on institutional care & children with intellectual disabilities). The consultation participants were selected to ensure diversity within the target group (e.g. gender balance, inclusion of Roma in the study on institutional care) but the numbers of participating individuals representing these groups are generally low so the mechanisms seem to lack broad inclusion in general. Larger consultations also ensured diversity of regional, socio-economic background, and family setting, e.g. single parent, children in care, etc.<br>• Children are participating in mechanisms involving matters that directly affect them, such as alternative care, bullying, leisure and education.<br>• The mechanisms have had impact: informing policy updates on the National Strategy for the Child and child-related government institutions, inclusion of section supporting needs of children with disabilities in the Draft Education |

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| | | Act, workshops had impact on the attitudes of parents and carers of children with intellectual disabilities, and participating in consultations also had an impact on the children's confidence levels.<br>• There are no formal evaluations. Results of one survey were communicated through a report (so not child-friendly communications). Children with intellectual disabilities were trained for participation and results verbally communicated back to them. |
| **Croatia** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • Main mechanisms include: children's councils, network of Young advisors to the Ombudsperson for Children, Child-friendly cities (UNICEF). Earliest mechanism (Children's Councils) was established in 1999, others from 2007 onwards, almost all mechanisms (with the exception of the child friendly cities initiative) with a national scope.<br>• The stakeholders are children, UNICEF, municipalities, national government, NGOs/civil society, and parents/family. Youngest Children involved are aged 9 (in the Children's Councils). Other mechanisms ensure certain degree of diversity (gender, region).<br>• Mode of participation vary and include *ad hoc* consultations carried out through the Ombudsperson on issues that directly affect children (e.g. age of sexual consent), one-off events such as parliamentary consultation with children on policy organised by an NGO, and more structural mechanisms like the Network of Young Advisors to the Ombudsperson and Children's Councils who are periodically involved in workshops, discussions, forums, focus groups and meeting.<br>• Generally, mechanisms do not involve children in initiation and decision-making but do work on engagement, information, and consultation with children.<br>• No information on evaluations, communications. Recruitment for the Network of Young Advisors to the Ombudsperson occurs through primary and secondary schools.<br>• No information on impact apart from Network's involvement with the Council of Europe's recommendation. |
| **Cyprus** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • Key national practices/structures include: the Youth Board of Cyprus (*Οργανισμός Νεολαίας*), the Cyprus Children's Parliament (*Κυπριακή Παιδοβουλή*), the Youth Parliament programme (*Κοινοβούλιο Νεολαίας*), Cyprus Youth Council (*Συμβούλιο Νεολαίας Κύπρου*), the Consultancy Group on Roma Youth Participation (CGRYP) and National Youth Conferences (*Εθνική Σύνοδος για την Νεολαία*). |

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| | | • The aim of these structures/practices is to: progress the welfare of young people, provide opportunities for children and young people to participate in the development of their community and country, to involve children in decision making processes on matters that affect them, to promote children's involvement in "citizenship", to promote dialogue and discussion between youth on issues related to children's rights and participation.<br>• Most of the mechanisms were founded in the late 1990s or early 2000s, although the mechanisms related to the development of the National Youth Strategy took place around 2015. The Youth Board of Cyprus and the policies/legislations surrounding this structure have been important in shaping participatory structures/processes. Other national policies and events have also been important, e.g. Children's Week, as well as European policies/structures, e.g. Council of Europe research. a<br>• Topics include: education & training, employment & entrepreneurship, health & well-being, participation, voluntary activities, youth and the world, creativity & culture, youth volunteering, counselling services, democracy, the identities and experiences of Roma children, health and environment, human rights, and equality.<br>• The national government (especially the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth) is influential in facilitating some of the mechanisms. The President of the Parliament of Cyprus has also been influential in some practices/structures, as well as the UNCRC Policy Centre. However, there is little evidence of involvement from national or local level independent organisations/NGOs. The University of Cyprus had some involvement in the participatory processes involving Roma children in Cyprus.<br>• Modes of participation include: meetings, working sessions, seminars, workshops and consultations focusing on policy development and programme implementation, development of studies concerning the needs of young people, participation in the National Youth Conferences, surveys, interviews, and participation in parliamentary processes.<br>• Participation is mainly via collective action and representation through Youth boards, councils and parliaments, with just one national-level consultation identified. There is some evidence of active participation (e.g. Cyprus Children's Parliament and Youth Parliament appear to be child/youth led). However, most mechanisms are designed and guided at least to some degree by the structures that facilitate them, either in terms of topic or method of participation (or both). |

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| | | • There is limited evidence of impact/influence of participatory processes/structures on decision making, policy and processes. For instance, following meetings with the Children's Parliament, it was decided that the Children's Parliament should join some Parliament sessions to bring the two closer together. |
| **Czech Republic** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • Key national practices/structures include: the National Parliament for Children and Youth (*Národní parlament dětí a mládeže*) and structures for promoting dialogue with youth (e.g. *Kecejme do toho!* - Have Your Say!), a Healthy Cities Association's Public Forum and Youth Forum (*Veřejné fórum a Mladé fórum Zdravého města*), Creative Democratic School: Cultivate space (*Kreativní demokratická škola: Pěstuj prostor*).<br>• The aims of these structures/practices are to facilitate youth involvement and input on selected issues, to increase engagement and involvement in decision-making processes, to improve the civic competencies of students, and to promote the interests and needs of children in the public domain.<br>• Most practices/structures were implemented after 2012, although the Healthy Cities Association's Public Forum and Youth Forum, and the National Parliament of Children and Youth have been in place since 1994 and 1997 respectively. Legislation and policy/decision making developed by governmental actors (e.g. the Ministry of Education) have been very influential in facilitating participation at the national level.<br>• Topics include: school exams, bullying, cyberbullying, playground renovations, park revitalization, freedom, marijuana laws, youth policy, the EU.<br>• The national government has been very influential in facilitating participation at the national level (particularly the Ministry of Education). Some NGOs and local authorities have also been crucial actors for some practices/structures. Schools and municipalities have also been influential in facilitating the implementation of mechanisms.<br>• Modes of participation include: online surveys, workshops, conferences, discussions with experts and advisors, meetings, roundtables, consultations.<br>• Structures/practices are a mixture of individual (e.g. Creative Democratic School: Cultivate spaces) and collective action via representation in parliaments/fora (e.g. National Parliament of Children and Youth, Healthy Cities Association's Public Forum and Youth Forum). Structures/processes seem to be targeted more at youth rather than younger children (e.g. focusing on topic such as marijuana laws, support for young families). |

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| | | • It also seems that despite having different ways for children/young people to provide their views, there is limited scope for children/youth to help design/lead the process or set the agenda for topics to be discussed.<br>• There is little concrete evidence of impact/influence on policy or decision making. The National Parliament of Children and Youth has created a good level of engagement with national policymakers and politicians (although there was no evidence that this led to any changes), and the Creative Democratic School has had some impact on a few projects (e.g. the opening of a monastery garden to the public), but there is little evidence outside of this. |
| **Denmark** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • Key national practices/structures include: The Danish Parliamentary Ombudsman's Children's Office (*Ombudsmandens børnekontor*), The Danish National Council for Children (NCC - *Børnerådets børne- og ungepanel*) and the Danish Youth Councils (*DUF - Dansk Ungdom's Fællesråd*).<br>• The purpose of these practices are to ensure that perspectives of children on issues that impact them are heard, and to create spaces for children to engage in more meaningfully in democracy.<br>• Practices have been developed since the late 1990s, although most since 2012. There is limited evidence on the policy context underpinning practices/structures, although legislation implemented by government ministries appears to be crucial.<br>• Topics include: health, migration, schooling, disability, family and work life, pressure on youth culture, sport, and complaints/concerns that children may have.<br>• Practices are largely child-led and independent of the government (aside from the Danish Parliamentary Ombudsperson's Children's Office), with many processes/structures linked to non-political organisations, e.g. universities, NGOs, child/youth-led organisations.<br>• Modes of participation are diverse, including brainstorming sessions, questionnaire surveys, focus groups, feedback on participation analysis findings, expert group meetings, child/youth consultations and filing complaints. These appear to be co-creative in some cases, but adult-led in others.<br>• The style of participation tends to be via collective action and representation, e.g. The Danish National Council for Children representing children in participatory processes. However, there are some examples of processes/structures where participation is at the individual level. There is some strong evidence of active participation in this context (e.g. the Danish |

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| | | Youth Council is member-led), although this is not the case for all structures/processes. There is limited evidence that children have been involved in designing the practices, although information was sparsely available.<br>• While in some cases the results/findings of participatory practices are legally binding (e.g. for The Danish Parliamentary Ombudsperson's Children's Office), and there have been efforts to promote practices in the mainstream, there is little evidence of practices shaping policy or decision making. |
| **Estonia** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • Key practices include: Estonian National Youth Council (Eesti Noorteühenduste Liit), Estonian Youth Work Centre / Eesti Noorsootöö Keskus, Estonian Union for Child Welfare (Lastekaitse Liit), regional and local/municipal youth councils.<br>• The aims of these structures are: to advocate for youth organisations, to set agendas for child and youth participation by actively shaping public opinion and the legislative environment to be more supportive of young people, capacity building by providing training and funding opportunities at the individual and structural level, provide physical and virtual platforms for children and young people to participate in decision-making.<br>• The establishment of the national structures for youth organisations and councils started in the early 2000. The 2010 Youth Work Act (Noorsootöö seadus) provided a legal framework for organisation of these structures. As of 2020, there are 45 local/municipal youth councils and 6 regional youth councils operating across Estonia.<br>• One of the key facilitators were surveys of individual children and representatives of child and youth organisations, and studies conducted in recent years assessing the levels and range of children's participation at the municipal level, and the impact of children's involvement. The findings show increase in the levels of meaningful children's participation since 2013, with more diverse forms and channels of involvement and greater levels of communication and information exchanges.<br>• Another key facilitator of children's participation in Estonia are the various forms of training activities and training material available to children and young people (e.g. a training programme 'Youth Participation Academy', civic education classes) and for other stakeholders and decisionmakers (e.g. 'Youth Participation Booklet' and a handbook on youth participation providing guidance on why and how to actively involve young people in the development of local life). There are also funds dedicated for children and young people to develop and implement ideas at the local level (e.g. Youth Participation Fund, projects |

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| | | 'Participate! Say when you think' (Osale! Ütle, kui mõtled!) and 'Pick Up! ' (Nopi üles!).<br>• Participation takes place at an individual child/young person level, e.g. opportunities to develop and implement ideas at the local level (via local youth councils, cafes with politicians, participation in the surveys/studies), as well as collective via established youth council structures. In spite of varied modes of participation currently in place (including initiating and participating in discussions and meetings at various levels, national surveys), recent studies suggest the need to use even more varied forms of participation and to develop a broader range of supporting material for children.<br>• Most initiatives are available for older age groups (youth) and organised via established structures (mostly the National Youth Council).<br>• Despite a broad range of activities and mechanisms in place, information about impact of these mechanism on children and on the levels of children involvement in decision-making is limited. |
| **Finland** | • Key mechanisms include: local youth councils and children's parliament organised at the municipality level, and UNESCO Child-Friendly City Initiative (Lapsiystävällinen kunta). There are also some one-off initiatives related to setting up and/or evaluating services for children (e.g. a library, children's hospital).<br>• The youth councils started operating from the 1990s, and in line with the Local Government Act (2015) every municipality in Finland must have a youth council or equivalent participation organ for young people. First children's parliament was established in 2001, and since then many more municipalities established children's parliaments.<br>• Youth Councils and Children's Parliament are adult-structured | • Key mechanisms include: the Ombudsperson for Children (Lapsiasiavaltuutettu), and a web-platform Ideas by Young People (Nuorten ideat Nuortenideat.fi). In addition, in line with the Local Government Act (2015), every municipality in Finland must have a youth council or equivalent participation organ for young people (see column on local practices).<br>• The aim of the mechanisms is to provide children with accessible and equal opportunities to express ideas, ask questions, and be heard, and to support interaction, communication and cooperation between young people and the national and local governments, educational institutions and other relevant organisations. The Ombudsperson's role also involves ensuring that the status and rights of children are upheld by legislators and decisionmakers.<br>• The Ombudsperson can make proposals, issue statements and contribute to public debate. The Ombudsperson monitors the situation of children by holding consultations and running surveys. This includes: meetings / consultations with 4-5 groups of children each year (Young Counsellors) sharing experiences of their daily lives, and a bi-annual survey on the lives of 6-year-old children (Child Barometer) conducted via phone and in-person interviews. The survey was focused on the following topics: children's experiences of trust (2016), leisure and sports. (2018), and children's perceptions of good life, the future of the planet and climate change (planned for 2020).<br>• The Ideas by Young People online platform is part of a wider internet-based platform facilitating democracy services. It has been developed with children |

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| | mechanisms and participation structures repeat the ways in which adults act. Participation methods in children's parliament utilize voting and other traditional meeting methods.<br>• The main objective is to provide children an opportunity to initiate ideas and participate in planning, preparation, implementation and follow-up activities across different sectors, including residents' well-being, health, studying, environment, living and public transport and other relevant. The objectives also include teaching children and young people the skills of democracy and ways to influence with methods appropriate to their age.<br>• The operation of youth councils and children's parliament differs across locations. Typically, youth council members are aged 9 to 18, and children's parliaments representative are 7-12 (primary school children). There are efforts to include disadvantaged / vulnerable children but these children are nevertheless reported to be less involved than other children. In case of the youth councils, the selection of children differs across the country, with some children being nominated, others elected is schools, and some municipalities accepting any child willing to participate. Children's parliament members are | and youth (via NGOs, schools and municipalities). This user-friendly platform provides opportunities to express views, gives opinions, provide comments on other children's suggestions, thus influence the development of organisations, policies and concrete actions. There are no restrictions on the range or level (national/local) of topics raised and discussed. It is possible to follow up and receive feedback to the proposals submitted via the service.<br>• The platform encourages grassroot activism at the individual level, and collective actions taken at the local and national level.<br>• The platform is available in Finnish and in Swedish, which might limit the participation of newly arrived migrant children.<br>• Participation is encouraged via social media and direct contact with children and youth via schools and other services. Since 2015, a total of 1,200 suggestions have been submitted, most of them on planning and implementation of services. This number of suggestions is considered low and there are efforts to increase the number of service users. However, available evidence suggests that even if children and young people are aware of this service, it is also often challenging to motivate them to participate. Viewing others' ideas, especially those that have resulted in real actions, was considered motivating. However, many children still do not understand the process whether and how ideas result in concrete actions. |

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| | representatives of schools thus previous research studies often criticized them for representing a relatively small group of well-off children.<br>• Young council members organise their own meetings, usually once a month. In addition, a representative of the youth council can participate in and speak at the board and municipal council meetings on a range of topics. Children's parliament have a general meeting twice a year.<br>• In general, available evidence suggests that children's and young people ability to have influence on decisions and budget allocations remain relatively small. The participation still often is just a formal requirement rather than a consultative process. Young people often feel that they do not receive sufficient feedback on the suggestions/initiatives they proposed.<br>• Young councils have their own budget for additional events and activities.<br>• Many practices have been developed (also in the context of the UNESCO Child-Friendly City project) but gathered evidence suggests that more effort is needed to share them with other municipalities to inspire learning and good practice. Example include the development of a child-friendly dictionary explaining key | |

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| | terms used at municipal level (e.g. 'action plan', 'strategy', 'budget'). The dictionary is available online thus (other) municipalities can use it when preparing children for participation. The UNESCO project also highlights that promoting children's rights is a continuous process, not a one-off project. | |
| **France** | • All mechanisms reported are regional children's and youth parliaments and youth councils, organised by local government.<br>• The aims of these councils are to prepare, implement and evaluate youth policies, to offer a new framework for expression of the youth, to better take into account their needs, projects and aspirations and to contribute to the active learning of the exercise of citizenship.<br>• Most regional councils formed in the past decade but a couple, the Children's Municipal Council of Rouen (Conseil Municipal des Enfants Rouen) and the Children's Municipal Council of Bordeaux (Conseil Municipal des Enfants Bordeaux), were established in 1991 and 1995 respectively.<br>• Modes of participation: commissions, demonstrations and exhibitions, meetings, working groups and plenary sessions. | • National mechanisms include children and adolescent's college, UNICEF survey, Children's parliament, 30th anniversary celebrations on the UN Convention (which made an effort to reach out to vulnerable children), General Assembly on the Rights of the Child, Childhood and Adolescence Commission, National Children's Debate and National Consultation with Children.<br>• Mechanisms are mostly organised by government with little evidence of the involvement of NGOs and civil society organisation. Governmental bodies responsible for mechanisms include Directorate General for Social Cohesion, the National Assembly, the Commissariat General for Strategy and Foresight (Commissariat General a la strategie et la prospecive - CGSP). Some mechanisms are also organised by UNICEF.<br>• The aims of the mechanisms include: to teach children what the democratic debate is and the republican values of Liberté, Égalité et Fraternité; to federate different participants around good practices, new ideas and action principles; to foster the development of practices and reflections around the right to be heard; and to promote the spirit of co-creation of projects. The Childhood and Adolescent Commission emphasises the need to allow *all* children and adolescents to share their points of view and contributions.<br>• With the exception of the Children's Parliament, founded in 1994, most mechanisms formed in the past 10 years.<br>• The evidence on modes of participation is limited. Some examples of modes of participation are school work on legislative proposals, and focus groups consultations.<br>• Topics: child rights, gender equality, family law, education, health, family life, justice adapted to their age, protection against violence, digital technologies and non-accompanied minors.<br>• Monitoring and evaluation of mechanisms: no available written evidence. |

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| | • Among the topics covered by the councils are culture, leisure, and societal questions.<br>• Report on the Issy-Les-Moulineaux youth council suggested such mechanisms result in lasting engagement in public life. However, the evaluation also found that youth don't have the feeling of participating in a "truly municipal action." | |
| **Germany** | • Baden-Württemberg was one of the first regions in Germany to introduce a youth council in the 1980s. The region has implemented the legal requirement for cities to consult children (paragraph § 41). Some other key local mechanism includes the Youth Appropriate Communities *(Jugendgerechte Kommunen),* which include 16 localities across Germany. Three other prominent examples of local mechanisms include Plan North East (Plan Nord Ost), Model of Youth Participation of the City of Herrenberg (*Jugendbeteiligung Herrenberg*), and Geislinger *Youth (Geilsinger Jugend).*<br>• Purposes of children and youth participation include involving children and young people in the development of their community. In general, most sources report that children and youth should be involved in decisions in their 'immediate' environment. | • Key national mechanisms include the Youth Strategy *(Jugendstrategie)*, the German Federal Youth Council (Deutscher Bundesjugendring), and youth.participation.now (*jugend.beteiligen.jetzt*).<br>• One of the key stakeholders is the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. The Youth Strategy was celebrated as a cross-departmental effort which suggests that other sections of the German federal government were involved, but no further information was identified.<br>• The purposes of these children's participation mechanisms are to encourage the social and political participation of young people on a federal level and to raise awareness of the importance of considering children and young people's interests in political decision-making.<br>• Most of the identified mechanisms are operating nation-wide and have been in operation since 2012.<br>• In terms of at what stage of the policy-making process children's participation occurs: it appears that children and youth are consulted at one point in time or another rather than throughout and at different stages of the process. Children, however, were consulted in the design phase of the Youth Strategy.<br>• Mode of child participation include youth council, annual conferences and quarterly sessions and digital participation.<br>• Topics include a wide range of issues including but not limited to children and youth participation itself, the environment, any legal developments, violence against children, and urban planning.<br>• Little to no information is available in terms of the impacts and consequences of mechanisms and practices in children's participation. |

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| | • In terms of important stakeholders, other than children and youth themselves, this includes local government, schools (which are used as places to conduct consultations and/or recruit children) and members of civil society organisations or research institutes who might help facilitate the organisation of mechanisms.<br>• Common modes of participation include the use of online platforms enabling children to express ideas for and about their city and also comment on proposals; in-class room workshops with children, youth forums, and surveying children on the street.<br>• There are variations between mechanisms regarding the stage at which children participate. In the case of Plan North East, children were consulted once plans for the city had been made and they were asked to provide feedback on these plans. In the case of the Model of Youth Participation in the City of Herrenberg, children and youth were involved in the design of the mechanism itself to ensure that they would be included 'right from the start'.<br>• In terms of impacts, children participating in the city development in the city of Munich as part of the project Plan North East reported that the fact that their views were | |

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| | disseminated to a wider audience (e.g. on the local radio), made them feel heard. However, beyond that, no evaluation activity was identified. | |
| **Greece** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • Key mechanisms include: Youth Parliament (Βουλή των Εφήβων), Hellenic National Youth Council (ESYN) (Εθνικό Συμβούλιο Νεολαίας) and Local Youth Councils (Τοπικά Συμβούλια Νέων)<br>• The main objectives of these mechanisms include: representing young people to promote the adoption and implementation of child and youth friendly policies, promoting the rights of children and youth and promoting young people's participation and engagement in civil society and democratic dialogue, participating in state and public initiatives dealing with children and youth, representing Greek youth in the EU and international fora, strengthening the role of its member organisations by exchanging experiences, training and informing young people about the issues that concern them and engaging them in political life, conducting research on youth, organising political, social and cultural events.<br>• The mechanisms have been in operation for 15-20 years. They are aimed at older children and youth.<br>• The Hellenic National Youth Council, established in 1998, consists of 59 youth organisations, and represents over 350,000 children and youth. Many of the Council members are also part of the Local Youth Councils (any young person aged 15-28 is eligible to express their interest to participate in it). It is one of the largest and most represented youth federations in Europe.<br>• The Youth Parliament, established in 2005, includes 300 young people from secondary schools (until the age of 21). It is an annual educational programme. Until 2018/19, each school in Greece was eligible to make one application to participate in this programme. Since then, active young people are selected from those who have developed activities of social interest in schools and in their communities.<br>• The Parliament and Council's operation is based on the participation at the local and national level. At the structural level, members of the Council take part in meetings, networking events and issue position papers. At the individual member level, the Council organises workshops, conferences, cultural and other programs, seminars and activities aimed directly at young people. Similarly, during the whole year members of the Youth Parliament discuss, plan and implement their actions at the local community level via child-led |

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| | | Participatory Action Groups. Once a year, a local representative attends a five-day session of the Parliament Summit in Athens, when young people present and discuss their ideas with Members of Parliament and experts.<br>• There is comparatively little evidence of whether participatory practices/structures influence policy and or decision making. |
| **Hungary** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • Key national practices/structures include: National Student Council (ODT - *Országos Diáktanács*); National Student Parliament (ODP - *Országos Diákparlament*), Federation of Children's and Youth Municipal Councils (GYIÖT - *Gyermek- és Ifjúsági Önkormányzati Társaság*), UNICEF Child-Friendly Cities Program, National Youth Council (*Nemzeti Ifjúsági Tanács*).<br>• National mechanisms tend to have two purposes: create structures to learn and represent the views of as many children as possible to ensure that children's views are heard on matters that affect them, and to promote the citizenship and participatory rights of children.<br>• Many of the processes were implemented recently (2015 or later). The EU Youth Strategy and the UN CRC provide the policy background for many practices/structures, as well as national policies including the National Youth Strategy and the Fundamental Law of Hungary on Demonstrations.<br>• Topics are diverse, including: school, safety, child rights, sexual education, online abuse, European identity, education, family and health.<br>• Practices seemed to be a mixture of independent foundations and NGOs campaigning for children's rights and national and municipal governments.<br>• Modes of participation: online surveys, focus groups, regular meetings/consultations, annual/biannual plenary meetings, skills building workshops.<br>• Participation is a mixture of collective representation through Councils, and individual participation through NGO-run or child level movements, e.g. Movement for Alternative Student-centric Education (*Alternative Diákközpontú Oktatásért Mogalom*). There is some evidence that some participatory processes/structures are child/youth-led (e.g. student movements), but this is not evident across all identified processes/structures.<br>• There is little evidence of impact/influence of participatory practices/structures on policy/decision making at the national level. |
| **Ireland** | • Practices/structures at the local level are: local youth councils (*Comhairle na nÓg*), youth advisory committees/panels on independent | • Key practices include: the national youth parliament (*Dáil na nÓg*), the local youth council (*Comhairle na nÓg*) National Executive, various Youth Advisory panels/committees and consultations with children to inform national policies. |

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| | local/regional organisations and consultations with children on specific topics.<br>• Practices at this level are predominantly aimed at gathering the views of children on matters that affect them, and to include the voices of seldom-heard children.<br>• *Comhairle na nÓg* has been in place since 2002. Consultations have taken place mainly since 2012. National policies (e.g. National Children's Strategy) and structures, as well as Article 12 of the UN CRC are the main factors that have informed practices.<br>• Topics include: active engagement, the community, experiences of care meetings, service delivery for young people with disabilities, romantic relationships. In the case of *Comhairle na nÓg*, topics are defined by each *Comhairli* at their Annual General Meetings (AGM).<br>• *Comhairli na nÓg* are integrated into the local councils. Other governmental actors at the national and local level are involved in some local mechanisms, but generally they are led by independent organisations/NGOs (e.g. Barnados, Carlow Regional Youth Service, Youth Work Ireland). Children and Young People's Services Committees are also quite active at the local level.<br>• Modes of participation: group sessions, ice breaker games, team- | • The aim of consultations is to ensure that the views of children are heard on issues that affect them, and to inform national policy and decision making (e.g. children's views on Brexit, the National Obesity Policy, policies around afterschool care). *Dáil na nÓg* and Youth Advisory structures aim to ensure that the views of children on topics that matter to them are heard.<br>• Many consultations have taken place since 2015. National policies (e.g. National Children's Strategy) and Article 12 of the UN CRC are the main policies that have informed practices/structures.<br>• Topics are diverse, including: healthy lifestyles, afterschool care, child protection, mental health, sustainable development, Brexit, delivery of services for children in hospitals.<br>• Government is very active in children's participation in Ireland – especially via the Department for Children and Youth Affairs and the Ombudsman for Children's Office. Some participatory structures/practices do exist beyond the government via independent agencies/NGOs (e.g. Foróige).<br>• Modes of participation: consultations, listening games, lifelines, body mapping, meetings, forums, ice breaker games, timeline activities, voting, post-it sessions, World Café placemat sessions, recommendation walls, opinion polls/surveys, videos, movement and games.<br>• Both individual and collective participatory practices/structures, although participation tends to be adult-led.<br>• Topics for discussion are usually defined by the structures (mainly governmental, although *Dáil na nÓg* is very much child-led). However, many efforts are made to ensure that children have different ways of expressing their views on a topic.<br>• Some strong evidence of impact/influence of participation on policy and practices, both in governmental structures/processes and child-led/NGO processes. This includes informing national policies, provision of a cervical cancer vaccine to 12-18 year old girls following consultations with *Dáil na nÓg*. However, evaluation /impact data are still not always systematically collected during all participatory processes/structures. |

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| | building activities, semi structured interviews, forums, consultations, storyboard activities, consensus-building workshop, visual consultations, annual general meetings, consultative meetings, surveys, workshops, focus groups, wishboard activity.<br>• Mechanisms include both individual and collection participatory practices. As with *Dáil na nÓg*, *Comhairle na nÓg* is very much child-led – their agenda is set by children at the AGM. Other practices are mixed – some are informed by policy needs, while others allow children to give their views on issues that matter to them. As with the national level in Ireland, many efforts are made to ensure that children have different ways of expressing their views on a topic.<br>• There was some evidence of impact/influence on local policy and decision making with regards to *Comhairle na nÓg*, and some evidence of impact on processes and practices among other independent organisations. For example, *Comhairle na nÓg* has been found to have a substantial impact on decision making at local levels (although not so much at a societal and institutional level), and consultations with children by Youth Work Ireland has resulted in the formation of: a youth panel, youth board members, youth participation as a strategic | |

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| | objective and, voting rights for youth at AGMs. | |
| **Italy** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • Main mechanisms include: Municipal youth council (Consiglio comunale dei giovani), students' representatives (Consulte provinciali degli studenti), Children Council (Consiglio dei Bambini).<br>• The aims of the mechanisms include: providing children with an opportunity to express opinion on policy concerning the young population; to connect children and young people with local, regional and national bodies to give them the possibility to plan, organise and realize national activities; to create extracurricular activities, and to enhance collaboration between secondary schools.<br>• Most of the mechanisms started operating in the 1990s and are enshrined in the national law, e.g. 1997 Law 285 'Provisions for the promotion of rights and opportunities for children and adolescents'.<br>• Despite national laws, most of these mechanisms operate at the local level and their operation varies depending on locality.<br>• Mechanisms are geared towards participation of older children and youth.<br>• Mechanisms' style is collective as participating children and youth represent groups of children at the municipal and national level.<br>• Children are involved in the planning and implementation policy development, suggesting ideas and projects during regular meetings and sessions (typically once a month).<br>• The is no information on the degree of children's influence and impact on the decision-making processes. |
| **Latvia** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • Key national practices/structures include: the National Children's Rights Protectorate (Bērnu tiesību aizsardzības inspekcija), the 'youth law' (Jaunatnes likums), which provides the rights of young people's (13-25 years old) participation in decision-making, especially in decision making related to youth policies at the national and local authority levels. Also bodies such as the Youth Consultative Council (Jaunatnes konsultatīvā padome) and youth parliament aim at promoting the development and implementation of a coherent youth policy.<br>• The law for the protection of children's rights was established in 1998 and the Youth Law (covering children and young people aged 13-25) was put in place in 2009. Youth councils and parliament emerging between 2005-2014, and all these mechanisms are still active and ongoing. |

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| | | • Key topics include children's rights, youth policy and children and young people's involvement in decision-making.<br>• Mixture of government and NGO involvement in child participation initiatives, with most mechanisms implemented by the national and local government, for example the National Inspectorate for Children's Rights was set up by the Ministry for Children and Family Affairs.<br>• Mode of mechanisms includes informal group discussions, workshops, conferences.<br>• No evidence relating to the impact of the mechanisms was identified. |
| **Lithuania** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • Key national mechanisms included: (1) the EU Youth Parliament (EYP) *(Europos jaunimo parlamentas Lietuvoje)*, which was established in 2013; (2) Lithuanian Youth Council *(Lietuvos jaunimo organizacijų taryba (LiJOT)),* which is an umbrella structure for 68 regional unions and youth organisations, and was established in 1992; (3) Office of the Ombudsperson for Children *(Lietuvos Respublikos vaikų teisių apsaugos kontrolieriaus tarnyba),* established in 2000.<br>• The purpose of the EYP includes encouraging young people to think independently and to foster active participation in public life. The Lithuanian Youth Council advocates on policy issues affecting children and youth. One of its projects called "Work2Change" aimed to promote cultural diversity, tolerance and the elimination of stereotypes. The project also aimed to discuss the topics of non-formal education, volunteering and the promotion of democracy in youth organization.<br>• As part of the EYP, different activities for children are organized at both the regional and national level, often in schools. There are also children parliament sessions and children are able to organise their own projects.<br>• Mechanisms tend to involve older children and youth (aged 14-18 years old). No information on national child participation mechanisms aimed at the youngest children could be identified.<br>• The project "Youth4Democracy", organised by the Lithuanian Youth Council, focused on knowledge of European youth policy and national and local youth policy in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. The project also raised awareness of youth interests at local and national level in each partner country.<br>• Main stakeholders include national government, local governments and civil society organisations.<br>• No written sources on outcomes and/or impacts were identified. |

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| **Luxembourg** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • Information on only one national mechanism could be found - the Young People's Parliament.<br>• Young People's parliament is for people aged 14-24 who are registered in school. Mechanism exists since 2009. The idea for the mechanism came from children and they were involved in its design (including its structure, goals and working procedures).<br>• Content of participation is not specified: topics relate to young people.<br>• Main stakeholders include the Ministry of Family and Integration, the Youth Information Centre, young people, educators, professors and parents.<br>• Regular body: permanent institution composed of committees of which the children are members. Committees meet once or twice per month and the Plenary session is held in May/June, although an intermediate session can be held if needed. Opinions and resolutions are approved in the last Plenary session and are formally presented to the Deputies Chamber in a Hearing. Some weekend away trainings are also organised |
| **Malta** | • Main structure include the Children's councils, which are affiliated to local councils in Malta. But these councils appear only to be in place in two localities in Malta (Hamrun and Siggiewi).<br>• The aim of the councils are to advise on social and infrastructural needs of children in the locality.<br>• Information about when these councils were established was not available. While the policy context for these participatory structures is not too clear, the Office of the Commissioner for Children supported these local Children's Councils to be set up.<br>• Topics discussed are any related to the social and infrastructural needs of children in the locality.<br>• The Office of the Commissioner for Children appears to be important in | • Key practices include: the Council for Children and consultations/dialogues with children regarding policies that affect them.<br>• Aims of mechanisms include: to inform children about policy changes that will affect them; to capture the experiences, needs and realities of children to inform policy making; and to advise decision makers on their needs and views on topics that affect them.<br>• Many of the consultations have taken place in the last few years (mainly since 2015). As in most countries, international level policies and directives have been crucial in shaping practices in Malta (e.g. Article 12 of the UN CRC, Article 14 of Directive 2013/33/EU on standards for the reception of applicants for international protection). At the national level, the Office of the Commissioner for Children is very influential in driving forward participatory practices/processes.<br>• Topics include: the National Children's Policy, experiences in foster care, wellbeing, education/schools, social inclusion, the home, the community, physical and mental health, attitudes towards migrants and the role of children/youth in democracy.<br>• Government actors are very active in facilitating children's participation, especially via the Office of the Commissioner for Children and the Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity. There is also some involvement of academics, but little activity among NGOs or other independent organisations campaigning for children's rights/participation. |

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| | assisting the facilitation of these Children's Councils.<br>• It is not clear what methods are used to facilitate children's participation within these Children's Councils, but there is some evidence that it is via consultative meetings.<br>• Participation style is collective, whereby the Council represents the views of children in the locality. Participation is typically adult-led, but children are able to communicate the issues that matter most to them in relation to their social and infrastructural needs.<br>• No written evidence was identified on the impact/influence of these Councils on policy or decision making. | • Modes of participation include school workshops, surveys, council meetings, interviews, focus groups, mapping exercises (involving discussions of drawings, colourings, pictures created by children), and brainstorming sessions.<br>• Participatory practices tend to capture the views of individual children via consultative methods. However, through the Council of Children, there is some representative/collective participatory practice, but only seven children are on the council. There is some evidence that children are involved in the design of processes/structures for participation, however some mechanisms are adult-initiated and led either by topic or by method to be used for participation.<br>• Many participatory practices result in a clear set of recommendations for policy makers, but there is comparatively little evidence of whether participatory practices/structures influence policy and or decision making. However, one strong example of impact is the way that participatory practices shaped the Maltese National Children's Policy. |
| **Netherlands** | • Since 2015, the 355 municipalities are the key public authorities in youth consultation processes. However, the degree of attention for youth participation in decision-making processes varies between municipalities. Some of these local mechanisms include: International Debate Education Association (IDEA), Jongerenraad / youth council, The Little Embassy / De Kleine Ambassade, Jongerenraad CARDEA Leiden / Youth Council CARDEA Leiden, Adviesvangers / "Advice catchers", ABC-Methode / ABC-method, Kinderraad de Bascule / Children's Council the Bascule. | • In 2015, the Dutch government decentralised the Participation Act, the Youth Act and the Social Support Act (Wmo) 2015, which means that most child participation mechanisms operate at a local level. However some key national practices/structures include: Het Landelijk Aktie Komitee Scholieren (LAKS) / National Action Committee Students, De Kinderombudsman / Ombudsman for Children and the National Youth Council / Nationale Jeugdraad NJR.<br>• National mechanisms have the purpose of improving youth participation in decision making and representing the voice of young people in political discussions.<br>• The National Action Committee Students was formed as far back as 1984, while the National Youth Council formed in 2001. The Ombudsman for Children was established in 2014.<br>• Practices are a mixture of government offices, youth associations and student movements.<br>• Modes of participation: self-evaluation about the impact on children, Q and A sessions for children, helplines, projects (both online and in person), surveys, meetings with the youth association, 'theme' days and *ad hoc* consultations. |

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| | • The purpose of these practices are to involve children in sustainable decision-making processes, to represent the interests of a wide range of children, and to get feedback to improve certain facilities used by children.<br>• The content of child participation varies. In some municipalities children are encouraged to participate in the design of their psychiatric care. In others, children are offered financial support to implement projects and 'social internships.' Children's councils in some areas promote the idea of active citizenship through educational participation projects. Auditing child shelters is another example.<br>• Modes of participation include debates, discussions, peer-to-peer feedback and training (e.g. in social skills, research, data processing and presenting)<br>• Mechanisms were established between 2002-2010; all are ongoing.<br>• Most local mechanisms established by independent organisations with little initiative from children. However, the organisation 'Raaz' in Zaanstad was founded based on consultations with 450 children.<br>• Limited evidence of impact/influence, although Raaz reported an increase in child/youth participation in its municipality of Zaanstad. | • There is little evidence of impact/influence of participatory practices/structures on policy/decision making at the national level. However, in 2017 the Ombudsman for Children produced an evaluation report on its impact, which identified several areas for improvement. |

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| **Poland** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • Main structures include: Polish Council of Youth Organizations (PCYO) (Polska Rada Organizacji Młodzieżowych), the Office of Ombudsman (Rzecznik Praw Dziecka), The Annual Children and Youth Parliament.<br>• At the local level, there are several Youth Councils across Poland, and many municipalities also include children in participatory budget activities. In 2018, Poland has also started participating in the UNESCO Child Friendly Cities Initiative.<br>• There are also several organisations / programmes that promote citizenship education, including inclusion of children in decision-making processes.<br>• The mechanisms focus on protection and raising awareness of children's rights, bringing children and young people voices to the attention of policymakers, supporting young people in building connections between local/national authorities, strengthening cooperation between youth organisations, organise events and activities for children and youth.<br>• Most of participation is channelled through established structures when children/youth represent voices of organisations. There are also training and education activities at the individual level aiming to mobilise civic participation and activism.<br>• The idea of active participation and inclusion of children has been long present in Poland. For instance, established in 1994, the Children and Youth Parliament is the oldest mechanism of this type in Europe. However, the extent of impact and consequences of children and youth participation on decision-making processes is still low. |
| **Portugal** | • Key practices include: Municipal Youth Councils (*Conselho Municipal de Juventude do Porto*), Local youth participatory budget (*Orçamento Participativo Jovem Municipal*), Child Rights Workshop (*Oficina dos Direitos da Criança*), Young Mayor (*Jovem Autarca*), Child Friendly Cities programme (*Cidade Amiga das Crianças*) and the Municipal Youth Plan (*Plano Jovem Municipal*).<br>• Aims of these structures/processes include: to enable children to define their own objectives, to co-create | • Key practices include: a National Council for Children and Young People (*Conselho Nacional de Crianças e Jovens*, CNCJ), a national youth parliament (*Parlamento dos Jovens*), a national student voice (*A Voz dos Alunos*) and a Youth Participatory Budget (*Orçamento Participativo Jovem*, OPJP). There appears to be a lack of consultative practices/processes in Portugal.<br>• Aims of these practices include: promote new spaces for children's/youth participation, develop the knowledge and skills of children/youth to participate effectively, provide dialogue between policy makers and youth, encourage active participation, consult children about their views on specific topics (e.g. school life), encourage children to develop their thoughts, express their views and engage in debates on themes or topics relevant to their lives.<br>• While the youth parliament was set up in 1995, the other structures have been set up in the last few years (since 2016). Mainly national level policies and strategies (e.g. the National Strategy for Children's Rights 2019-2022, the |

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| | and implement local child/youth policies, to ensure that the voices of children/youth in relation to their own rights and participation are heard, to disseminate research work related to children/youth, to promote the discussion of issues that affect and matter to children, to enhance the participatory capacities of young people in the local municipality, training children in skills that are useful for participation, bringing young people closer to local political structures and local policies, and to support/promote learning about active participation.<br>• Local structures were set up at different times across the last few decades, starting from 1996, up to one developed and implemented in 2019/2020. A mixture of international (e.g. UNICEF Child Friendly Cities initiative) and national (e.g. legal establishment of local youth councils in 2009) legislation and policies have informed these structures.<br>• Topics include: municipal youth policy, municipal budget allocation, children's rights, wellbeing, ideas for local development, the municipality youth activity plan.<br>• At the local level, the municipalities are very important structures for facilitating the participatory practices. In almost all cases, the municipalities are the sole or part funders of the | National Plan for Youth) have provided the policy context for these mechanisms. There is space for children to participate in topics that they define by putting proposals together themselves. Common topics include: education, housing, health, environmental/sustainable development, equality and social inclusion, and schooling.<br>• At the national level, it is mostly governmental Ministries and the national parliament that facilitate the structures for children's/youth participation. There is also a National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and Protection of Young Children that is active in the area of participation in Portugal.<br>• Modes of participation: gatherings, meetings, submission of proposals for new funded projects, presentation of results, consultations, conferences, debates, electoral processes.<br>• Most practices at this level are collective, and involve a group of children representing the views of other children/youth. However, the national Student's Voice is individual, involving consultations with children. Participatory practices tend to offer active forms of engagement, whereby children can discuss topics that matter to them, and even submit proposals for government funding for projects that would then be involved in implementing.<br>• Little evidence of impact/influence on policy/decision making. Although within the Youth Participatory Budget, there is evidence of positive changes to procedures and decision making processes, e.g. training of professionals to facilitate child participation, and outcomes of votes on proposals are binding. |

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| | practices. However, there is also some involvement from non-governmental actors, e.g. Amadora Municipality Children and Youth Protection Commission (CPCJ, *Comissão de Proteção de Crianças e Jovens da Amadora*), civil society organisations, local businesses.<br>• Modes of participation: plenary meetings, proposal submissions, workshops, consultative methods, awareness sessions, training days, election campaigns.<br>• Participatory practices are a mixture of individual and collective. While most structures are adult-led and guided by the municipalities, there is scope for child-led active participation too (e.g. children can submit proposals for funded projects, the municipal youth councils can meet extraordinarily if more than one-third of its voting members request this). There is also some evidence that children/youth have been involved in the design of structures/processes at the local level, e.g. the Local Youth Participatory Budget.<br>• Very little evidence of impact/influence of participatory structures/processes on policy or decision making at the local level. Only one example was found (voting in the *Orçamento Participativo Jovem Municipal* is binding). | |

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| **Romania** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • Main mechanisms include: the National Children's Forum (Forumul Național al Copiilor), the Children's Advocate / Ombudsperson (Avocatul Copilului), The Council of Romanian Youth (Consiliul Tineretului din România), The Forum of Romanian Youth (Forumul Tinerilor din România), The National School Students' Council (Consiliul Național al Elevilor).<br>• There were also various public debates and meetings related to the Romania's Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2019, e.g. The Board of Romanian Children (Boardul Copiilor din România) drafting the Bucharest Declaration, Children's Europe (Europa Copiilor), as well as other one-off events/mechanisms, e.g. The National Caravan of The structured Dialogue with YOUth (Caravana Națională a Dialogului Structurat cu TINErii) initiated by the The Forum of Romanian Youth.<br>• The aims of mechanisms include: to protect and promote children's and youth rights and children's and youth participation, to bring children's and youth voices to the forefront in dialogue with authorities, to help children and youth organise and express their needs and queries to the relevant authorities, to represent school students at various decision-making levels, and to monitor abuse of students' rights, to promote youth participation in policy-making, but also social, economic and political life.<br>• Children and youth activities focus on education, healthcare, employment, volunteering and civic and political participation.<br>• Mechanisms mostly engage secondary school children and youth, but there are also efforts to include younger children (from the age of 10 years old).<br>• Most mechanisms facilitate participation through collective action, as representatives of specific organisation, body or association.<br>• The Children's Forum is an annual event, while other mechanisms function via more regular engagement meetings and events. The Forum organises online and offline workshops and meetings.<br>• There seems to be some bottom-up activism, e.g. the creation of the Association of the Schools Students from particular cities/localities. The first association was created in 2013 and since there have been several more established. However, their main issues of interest focus on education- and school-life.<br>• The extent of children's participation in all stages of the process (development, implementation, evaluation) varies. Some mechanisms are youth-led (e.g. the Council of Romanian Youth), while others seem more adult-led mechanisms. |

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| | | • Impact of mechanisms: the institution of Children's Advocate was established as a result of action of the National Children's Forum. In addition, the Forum's discussions on bullying resulted in an anti-bullying legislation adopted by the Parliament. The National School Students' Council was successful in advocating for students' free transportation to schools, the law of the Student Statue (legal document detailing students' rights and obligations), and for scholarships and financial aid for school students. The Council has been influential in the internship law, the National Strategy on Youth Policy 2014-2020 and is continuously consulted by the government. |
| **Slovakia** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • Key practices include: Youth panel, Workshops of the Future [Dielne budúcnosti], By One Rope (Za jedno lano, an initiative to bring together young people and decision makers), student unions, village associations, regional youth councils and *ad hoc* consultations.<br>• The aim of these practices are to facilitate dialogue between young people and decision makers, to map the needs of young people and to represent their interests.<br>• First recorded consultation with youth took place in 2000. Youth panel and workshops of the future were carried out in 2016/17 and are no longer active.<br>• Consultations are initiated by the Slovak Youth Institute on behalf of the Ministry of Education. Student councils are student-led but most practices are implemented by NGOs who seem to dominate in this area.<br>• Modes of participation: consultations, online surveys, discussions, personal development training, local meetings, seminars, workshops, drafting strategy documents.<br>• Topics include political representation, policymaking, inclusion of the Roma and rural communities, effective running of student unions.<br>• There is some evidence of impact at policy level. For instance, data from the youth panel has informed the Slovak 2018 Youth Report. There is also a regular assessment of the quality of life of children and youth in the country. Consultations resulting from 'Workshops of the future' led to the establishment by the Government's representative for Roma communities of an advisory body comprising Roma youth. |
| **Slovenia** | • The local sphere of child participation seems very active, with the main structures at this level being children's parliaments, child municipal councils, participatory | • Key practices include: discussion on the contents of the future Programme for Children 2020–2025, conference on children's participation, youth council of Slovenia, UNICEF's Junior Ambassadors, Education on Active Citizenship and Participation (part of national school curriculum) and 'Letters to members of |

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| | budgeting, and youth councils of local communities.<br>• The aims of the councils are to represent the needs of young people at a local level and to give them a say in budgeting matters.<br>• Children's Parliament launched 1990 and all other local mechanisms established in the past two decades.<br>• Topics include participation in social life, active citizenship, budgeting, boosting awareness among the general public about child rights issues.<br>• Local governments are responsible for the initiation of the councils, along with the Association of the Friends of Youth, who are also the likely evaluators of the local children's councils.<br>• Modes of participation include voluntary activities with youth councils, discussions, and budgeting.<br>• Lots of evidence of evaluation / impact assessment across local mechanisms. Of the children's parliament, for example, it was found that the effect is weak at local and regional levels, due to the fragmentation of the Slovenian governance system and lack of regionally organised government structures. However positive impacts include 'the enhancement of social skills, knowledge, experience, positive self-image and development | parliament' in which over 450 children aged 6-9 sent letters to MPs reflecting on society and their values.<br>• Aims of practices include: to inform children about the importance of children's rights and active citizenship and to advocate for children and youth interests at a national level.<br>• Letters to MPs initiative was a one-off event in 2013, and it is unclear whether this has happened since. The conference and discussion on the programme for children both took place in 2019.<br>• Topics include: the role of children/youth in democracy, equal representation for all, a life with violence and discrimination, education on rights issues, societal values.<br>• Children are key actors across a range of mechanisms, for example leading the UNICEF Junior Ambassador programme, electing their own delegation to the children's parliament or participating in their own evaluation.<br>• Modes of participation: training, community events, school curriculum, parliaments, letter writing and conferences.<br>• Focus groups organised by researchers at the Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for the 'education on active citizenship' curriculum found that children praised their teacher(s) and were very engaged in the topic. However an evaluation of the letter writing initiative found that evidence for impact of child participation was lacking.<br>• Overall minimal evidence for impact on policymaking at a national level. |

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| | of critical thinking of the participants.' | |
| **Spain** | • There are municipal plans in place to support the rights of children in political and democratic life across Spanish regions / municipalities. Such localities receive a 'CAI' (Child Friendly City – initiative of UNICEF and implemented in several EU member states) certificate for their work. There are 59 active child councils in Catalonia alone.<br>• Aims include: strengthening municipal capacity in a coherent way in all its functions; promote the active participation of children and adolescents as political subjects; individual and collective empowerment by turning children and adolescents into political subjects, working together with children and adolescents to visualize the political contribution that children and adolescents can make in the life of the municipality.<br>• Modes of participation: school forums district forums and online forms for children to raise discussion topics ahead of in person meetings. Other municipalities offer school workshops on child rights, face to face meetings, blog writing, theatre performances, school surveys and making YouTube videos. | • Key practices include: The Council of Youth of Spain (El Consejo de la Juventud de España) and many similar children's annual meetings and children's parliaments held across regions. Child friendly city initiative (Sello de Ciudad Amiga de la Infancia) is an important practice at a local level across numerous regions and communities. Local government is heavily involved in initiatives, occasionally pairing with schools and government ministries.<br>• These practices aim that each child is valued and treated justly in their communities and that their voices are heard in the decision making that affects them, and to promote awareness of the situation of children and adolescents.<br>• Topics covered include family life, play and leisure, health, safe and clean environments, policymaking and budgeting.<br>• Child friendly city initiative stamp initiated by UNICEF in collaboration with the Ministry of Health in 2018 and is ongoing. Other mechanisms set up between 2014 and 2018 and are also ongoing.<br>• Modes of participation: consultations, face-to-face and group activities, school sessions, municipality events, council meetings and workshops.<br>• Some but not much evidence of evaluation; in the framework for child participation practitioners are asked to document materials made by children and their views. The 'we make a plan' consultation methodology provides a handout given to participating children to evaluate the sessions they attended and whether they were useful.<br>• There is no evidence to suggest any of the mechanisms cited above have influenced policy/decision making. |

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| | • Topics centred on child friendly city initiative; focusing on safety and cleanliness, education (including sex education), equality, rights, freedom of speech, bullying, free time and leisure and career guidance.<br>• Most municipal mechanisms developed 2015-2018.<br>• No standardised age limits / definition of child. Some work with those 7-17 years old, others 8-12.<br>• Sparse evidence for monitoring and evaluation of such mechanisms. | |
| **Sweden** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • Key mechanisms include: The Ombudsman for Children, The National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations (Sveriges Ungdomsorganisationer, LSU), Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF), Youth Policy Council (Ungdomspolitiska rådet), The Delegation on the Right of the Child (Barnrättsdelegationen). The children's and youth participation is regulated by the Youth Policy Bill. The new youth policy is currently being drafted.<br>• Key stakeholders are the government, the Ombudsperson, Agency for Youth and Society (MUCF), organisations working with children or youth, and children or youth themselves.<br>• UN CRC was implemented into national law in January 2020 to help stress the legal rights of children in practice. A few organisations representing children or consisting of young people constituted referral bodies to the Bill about making the Convention into law.<br>• Child Ombudsman Office includes a panel of children. Ombudsman office carries out a variety of consultations with children, including vulnerable children (migrant children, children in care). The Agency for Youth and Society (MUCF) also seems to conduct many consultations.<br>• In many municipalities, there are forums for children to exert their influence.<br>• Government currently in the process of devising new youth policy and youth action plan. The youth policy bill stipulates that all young people should have the power to shape their lives and influence over developments in society (so not just on decisions that affect them, but also take apart in political decisions that affect society at large (aimed at people between the ages of 13 and 25) |

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|---|---|---|
| | | • Topics covered included gender equality, youth leisure and organisation; the environment; sexual and re-productive rights, social exclusion and living conditions (e.g. rural areas), the lived experiences of LGBT+ persons, opportunities for children's participation on the local level, violence in close relationships, education, health.<br>• Mode of participation: face-to face meetings with groups of children or individual children, surveys, youth councils, focus groups, polls.<br>• No evidence of evaluation and monitoring activities. |
| **United Kingdom** | Local practices in this country were not covered in this study. | • A variety of mechanisms for child participation exists, ranging from consultations for research to inform policy to child-led structural mechanisms. Main structural mechanisms are the Children's Commissioners (individual for countries within the UK) and the British Youth Council (BYC) which is run by 16-25 years old under which are most of the other child-led mechanisms (Youth Voice, UK Youth Parliament, Young Mayors Network, Youth Select Committee, NHS England Youth Forum, All Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs, Work Experience Action Group). BYC and the Commissioners Offices were all established by law but the groups under BYC are initiatives created by the youth.<br>• Child-led mechanisms involve children aged 11 and above while consultations have involved children from age 4. Child-led mechanisms ensure diversity in geography, gender, disability, ethnic, and religious background. They are also elected by children and youth themselves. Adult-led mechanisms (initiatives from the Children's Commissioner) involve a lot of co-creation with children, communications are usually made child-friendly (at times developed by children), and children's submissions are binding. Commissioners Offices have a budget between £1.3-1.6 mn, except The English Commissioner who has £2.4m.<br>• The mechanisms seem to have strong impact. Children's Commissioners have used children's submissions to change policy and law, including a draft statutory duty of care law, a #RighttoFoodCharter that pressures the Scottish government on human rights obligations regarding children living in poverty, inclusion of sex and relationships education in curriculum as a result of UK Youth Parliament campaigns, changes to NHS complaints policy, changes in foster care policy.<br>• UK appears to be strong in terms of initiation, engagement, consultation, information, and decision-making as modes of participation in general, but |

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| | | individual mechanisms have mixed features (e.g. Commissioners' Officers are high on consultation but low on information and decision).<br>• There have been some formal evaluations (studies by academia) and the organisations themselves have reports that overview activities and effectiveness, highlighting areas for improvement, that are available publicly. Evaluations in general show positive progress in child participation and impact though with space to improve.<br>• Mechanisms have impact at EU level as well: consultation on impact of Brexit with children across Northern Irish border will be communicated to EU27. |

# Annex C Supplementary information on children's / youth councils, parliaments, key stakeholders and key documents guiding children's participation

**Table 14. Characteristics of child and youth councils**

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Key characteristics | Impact on policy / society | Child / youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| EU | European Youth Forum | 1996 | | An international non-profit association and serves as a platform and advocacy group of the national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations in Europe. It consists of 44 National Youth Councils and 61 international youth NGOs, a total of 105. | It is part of several stakeholder groups that make representations to a wide variety of EU, UN and international outfits, so the youth can an opportunity to directly participate and making their voice heard. | √ | | √ | | √ |
| AT | Austrian National Youth Council (Bundes Jugend Vertretung) | 2001 | Young people up to the age of 30 | Linked with EU Youth Goals and covers topics, including: international/EU policy, employment, education, sexuality, gender equality & housing. | Organisation has 'social partner status' in Austria. | | | | | |
| BE | Flemish Youth Council (Vlaamse Jeugdraad) | 2001 | At least 16 and at most 24 members, at least one third of whom shall be younger than 25 at the start of the mandate. | Positions and advice are prepared in committees, working groups and other meetings. | Advice from the youth council is passed on to the General Assembly, which delivers the final result to the Flemish government. | √ | | √ | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Key characteristics | Impact on policy / society | Child / youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| BE | Forum des Jeunes (Youth Forum) (Prior to 2019, Conseil de la Jeunesse de la Communaute Francaise (Youth Council of the French-speaking Community) | 2019 | 16-30 | Official advisory body for young people of the French-speaking community of Belgium. Organise debates, events, forums, projects and more to enable youth to discuss and act on issues that affect them. | Can make official representative submissions to political actors. | √ | | √ | | |
| BE | Confederation of Youth Organisations (Confédération des Organisations de Jeunesse) | 1975 | Members of youth organisations | A confederation of youth organisations of French-speaking Belgium. A youth organisation is defined as one that contributes to the development of youth by youth, enabling their personal aptitude development towards becomes responsible, critical, actives, and united citizens. It consists of 39 youth organisations. | Decisions are binding for COJ and member organisations, but submissions made by COJ and member organisations are not binding for stakeholders they communicate to (e.g. politicians, civil society). | √ | | √ | | |
| BG | Council of Children to the State Agency for Child Protection | 2003 | Any child (up to 18 y.o.) can self-nominate, initial selection at municipality and regional level, final selection by the Council Committee. | A forum for children to express their views and to participate in the drafting of legislation and in the formulation of policies that affect them. | Advisory body serving a consultative purposes. | | Council includes one representative of all 28 administrative districts, 4 quotas for children from vulnerable groups and 1 quota for a representative of children who | √ | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Key characteristics | Impact on policy / society | Child / youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | | | | have received international protection in Bulgaria. | | | |
| CY | Cyprus Youth Council (CYC) (Συμβούλιο Νεολαίας Κύπρου) | 1996 | 14-35 years old | The CYC organises events, seminars, workshops and activities.<br>Areas of interest, always in relation to youth, include human rights and equality, employment and social issues, active citizenship and life-long learning, non-formal education and youth policies. | | | The group has no Roma or Turkish-Cypriot representatives. | | | |
| CY | Youth Board of Cyprus (Οργανισμός Νεολαίας) | 1994 | representatives of youth organisations from each political party in the House of Representatives | It is a semi-governmental organisation funded by the State representing the top national agency for youth and playing a significant role in youth policy shaping, offering services and programmes. | The organization's main role is advisory, but it also undertakes youth related projects, following the approval of the Council of Ministers, either during the approval on the organization's annual budget or under another special decision. | | | √ | | |
| DE | German Federal Youth Council (Deutscher Bundesjugendring (DBJR)) | 1949 | Under 26 years old8[1201] | Topics include environment, child and youth participation, any legal developments | | √ | Council website includes statement that it represents young people regardless of background, religion, etc. | | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Key characteristics | Impact on policy / society | Child / youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| DK | The Danish National Council for Children's (NCC) | 1994 (as a trial), 1997 made permanent 1998 – Child and Youth Panel, 2010 Mini and Expert panel | between 4 and 18 years old. | This mechanism consists of three children's participation structures:<br>(1) Child and Youth Panel (Børnerådets børne- og ungepanel) (approx. 2,000 children aged 13 years old),<br>(2) Mini Child Panel (Børnerådets minibørnepanel) (approx. 1,000 pre-school age children 4-7 years old),<br>(3) Expert groups (Børnerådets eksertgrupper) (4-10 vulnerable children with common characteristics) | The findings are not binding. The results inform advocacy and information to policy-makers and other stakeholders. | √ | Children are selected through a randomised sample to ensure equal representation. | √ | | |
| DK | Danish Youth Council | 1940 | between 15 and 30 years old. The focus is on youth, rather than children | It aims to promote youth participation in organizations and democracy – locally, nationally and internationally. | Results are not binding, but inform child- and youth-related policy and projects, as well as form the basis of consultations with government and other funders. | √ | | √ | | |
| EE | Estonian National Youth Council (Eesti Noorteühenduste Liit) | 2002 | 13-26 years old | It aims to represent all youth organisations to pool information and consolidate policy positions and inputs for decision-making processes at the national level. | | | | | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Key characteristics | Impact on policy / society | Child / youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| EL | Hellenic National Youth Council (ESYN) (Εθνικό Συμβούλιο Νεολαίας) | 1998 | 15 - 28 years old | HNYC is an independent, non-governmental, non-profit federation of youth organizations. It consists of fifty-nine youth organizations (six youth political parties and a large number of non-governmental youth organizations), that is, most of the organized Greek youth. Its purpose is to strengthen the role and coordinate the actions of its member organizations. HNYC is one of the largest and most represented youth federations in Europe. | It is the official national youth structure. It is independent of the state, but participates in any state or public initiative dealing with youth and children representing young people and their organizations and promoting the adoption and implementation of the optimum policy for the new generation in Greece. | √ | | √ | | √ |
| ES | The Council of Youth of Spain (El Consejo de la Juventud de España) | 1983 | youth until the age of 30 can sit in the Council commissions | It focuses on the promotion of the participation of youth in political, social, economic and cultural development at the national and international level. Currently 60 youth organizations are part of this Council. | | √ | | √ | √ | √ |
| FI | Finnish National Youth Council (Allianssi) (also referred to as the Finnish National Youth Cooperative) | 1992 | youth organisations include children and young people aged 15–25. Finland's Youth Act and youth decree that | It aims to promote the development of youth into responsible members of the society and to youth encourage participation in decision-making as well as international activities. It also serves youth | | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Key characteristics | Impact on policy / society | Child / youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | came into force in 2017 define youth as those under 29 years of age | organisations and youth work. | | | | | | |
| FI | State Youth Council | 1944 (the predecessor of the current Council structure) | Members of youth organisations | An expert body on youth work and youth policy appointed by the Government | | | | | | |
| FR | National Association of Children's and Youth Councils (Association Nationale des Conseils d'Enfants et de Jeunes | 1991 | | It aims to promote the participation of children and young people in public decision-making and to support local authorities in setting up youth participation approaches | | | | √ | | |
| HR | Children's Association | 1999 | 9 -14 years old | It is the national coordinator of the Children's Councils network across 40 cities and municipalities in Croatia. Projects are conducted through fieldwork, interviews, surveys and polls. The results are presented at children's city council meetings. | This mechanism has motivated Croatian cities and municipalities to fully realise the rights and needs of children recognised in the UNCRC. | | | √ | | |
| HR | Croatian Youth Network (Mreža mladih Hrvatske) | 2002 | Croatia's National Youth Programme (2014) defines youth as aged 15-30 years old | It represents 65 non-governmental youth organisations in Croatia. Its main goals are to raise awareness about young people, co-create and advocate for quality youth | | √ | | √ | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Key characteristics | Impact on policy / society | Child / youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | policies, and contribute to the development of civil society. | | | | | | |
| HR | Youth Council of the Croatian Government | 2012 | comprised of 27 members, with 17 representing government departments, 7 from youth organisations and 3 from scientific and educational institutions. | interdepartmental advisory body on public policies for youth | | | | √ | | |
| HU | Federation of Children's and Youth Municipal Councils (FCYMC) (Gyermek- és Ifjúsági Önkormányzati Társaság, GYIÖT) | 1996 | | An umbrella organization of local children's and youth councils. Among their members, there are nearly 40 municipalities and 455 participants. Their main goal is to represent local youth communities at a national level, creating opportunities for them to meet, and to help them develop. | | | | √ | | |
| HU | National Youth Council (Nemzeti Ifjúsági Tanács) | 2012 | Target group are young people aged 18-35 years old, but support is also provided to student associations | An umbrella organisation established to support young people and represent different youth organizations to form unified voice in the decision-making process on issues concerning youth. It focuses on improving domestic | | | | | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Key characteristics | Impact on policy / society | Child / youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | and children's councils. | policy and collaborating with youth organisations internationally. | | | | | | |
| IE | Comhairle na nÓg National Executive (of the local youth council in Ireland) | Comhairle na nÓg implemented in 2002 | 12-18 years old | One representative from each of the 31 Comhairle na nÓg is elected to the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive. It has a term of office of two years and meets once a month. It is supported by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs Participation Support Team, who ensure that they get the opportunity to engage with appropriate Government ministers, policy-makers, Oireachtas committees and other decision makers. | | | | √ | | |
| IT | National Youth Forum (Forum Nazional Giovani) | 2004 | At least 70% under the age of 35 | National platform formed by different Italian organisations that represent young people and youth interests. It aims to share experiences between the organisations in regards to youth policies and to facilitate the involvement of young people in the social and political life of the nation. | | √ | | √ | | √ |
| LT | Interinstitutional Child Welfare Council under | 2018 | Children representatives, | A structure under the Government, involving four | The Council makes decisions or | | | √ | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Key characteristics | Impact on policy / society | Child / youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | the Government of the Republic of Lithuania | | i.e., up until 18 y.o. | representatives of children (children from Lithuanian Pupils' Union – two main members and two – alternate members), as well as representatives of the NGOs, main ministries, Association of Local Authorities, Child Rights Protection Ombudsman Institution. | recommendations related to the implementation and protection of the rights of the child, child well-being, child and family welfare, and therefore, children/young people are involved in decision-making too. | | | | | |
| LT | Lithuanian Youth Council (Lietuvos jaunimo organizacijų taryba (LiJOT)) | 1992 | 14 to 29 years old | Non-profit umbrella structure for youth organisations and regional unions of youth organisations. Currently Lijot has 68 members. It actively promotes knowledge and evidence-based youth representation, and informally monitors legislation adoption and acts on behalf of youth representatives. | | √ | | √ | | |
| LU | National Youth Council (de Jugendrot) | 2018 | mainly young people under 35 | Umbrella organisation of youth organisations which are active in a great variety of different areas in the youth sector. | | √ | | √ | | |
| LV | National Youth Council of Latvia (Latvijas Jauniešu Padome) | Founded in 1992, registered in 1996 | The Youth law defines the rights of young people aged 13 to 25 years old. | Umbrella organization of youth organizations. Its mission is to improve the living conditions of young people and to represent the interests of youth | | | | √ | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Key characteristics | Impact on policy / society | Child / youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | organizations on national and international level. It provides information to the public and promotes civic participation of young people, encouraging them to engage themselves in youth organizations and non-formal education activities. | | | | | | |
| LV | Youth Consultative Council (Jaunatnes konsultatīvā padome) | Since 2009 when it replaced the Youth Policy Coordination Board that was active since 1992. | 8 of the 21 Council members are the representatives of youth organisations. | An advisory / consultative body aimed at promoting the development and implementation of a coherent youth policy as well as the participation of young people in decision-making and public life. | Representatives of youth organisations assess the situation in implementation of youth policy and help to identify the priorities for it. They also give recommendations about implementing this policy, including suggestions for necessary youth projects, policy initiatives and changes in legislation at the national and local authority level. | | | √ | √ | √ |
| MT | National Youth Council (Kunsill Nazzjonali Żgħażagħ) | 1992 | 13-35 years old | A political body is tasked with providing a forum of dialogue for young people on various national and international issues, while bridging policymakers and various key actors in Malta's political and social spheres | | √ | | √ | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Key characteristics | Impact on policy / society | Child / youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | to young people and their organisations. It strives to be a proactive primary source of information, idea-generation and innovation. It is composed of over 30 member organisations that span from the political, environment to human rights groups. | | | | | | |
| NL | National Youth Council (Nationale Jeugdraad NJR) | 2001 | 12-30 years old | An umbrella organisation of over 40 youth councils representing youth interests at the national and local level. One of its goals is to improve youth participation in policy-making. It also provides advise to governments and other organisation on youth policies and youth participation. | | √ | | √ | | |
| PL | Polish Council of Youth Organizations (PCYO) (Polska Rada Organizacji Młodzieżowych ) | 2011 | At least 2/3 of members are under 35. | Federation of non-governmental organizations representing the opinions and needs of young people in dealing with decision-makers at the national level. It represents over 36 youth organisations. It aims to collect, strengthen and represent the voices of Polish youth by participating | | | | √ | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Key characteristics | Impact on policy / society | Child / youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | in activities at the EU, national and local level. | | | | | | |
| PL | National Federation of Youth Local Governments (Ogólnopolska Federacja Młodzieżowych Samorządów Lokalnych) | 1998 | Members of the local Youth Councils | An association of municipalities and localities in which youth local governments operate. The Federation focuses on supporting and strengthening the activities of local youth authorities by organising meetings, seminars and workshops. It is focused on promoting the idea of self-governance and entrepreneurship and on increasing youth activity in the local environment by supporting youth councils or similar forms of youth activity. | | | | | | |
| PL | The Council of Children and Youth of the Republic of Poland at the Ministry of National Education | 2016 | 13-21 y.o. | Working in an advisory capacity. Its tasks include expressing opinions, including presenting proposals on matters relating to children and adolescents, in particular presenting opinions on planned changes and proposed solutions. | | | | √ | | |
| PL | Youth Ecological Council | 2020 | Recruitment is ongoing of 32 members aged 13-21 y.o. | Expressing opinions on matters related to environment, in particular on planned strategies, and | | | | √ | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Key characteristics | Impact on policy / society | Child / youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | policy and legislative changes. | | | | | | |
| PT | National Council for Children and Young People (Conselho Nacional de Crianças e Jovens) | 2019 | 8-17 years old | A permanent advisory body focusing action on public policies affecting children and social transformation. Once fully established, it will function as a regular and structural consultative body of the National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and Protection of Young Children. | Mechanism not fully implemented yet | | Selection has taken in consideration diversity of gender, age, and geographic distribution. Children with disabilities were also included, although it was not a deliberate intention of the mechanism. Several ethnic and migrant minorities are represented in the group. | √ | | |
| PT | National Youth Council (Conselho Nacional de Juventude) | 1985 | Not specified | A representative platform of national youth organizations, covering the most diverse expressions of youth associations (cultural, environmental, scout, party, student, union). It provides a national forum for members of Youth City Councils (CMJ) to discuss the situation of youth across the country. It is recognized by the State as a partner in | | √ | | √ | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Key characteristics | Impact on policy / society | Child / youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | matters of politics and youth. | | | | | | |
| RO | The Council of Romanian Youth (Consiliul Tineretului din România) | | 14-35 years old | The council advocates on behalf of Romanian youth in Romania and abroad and is the main governmental partner in matters concerning youth. The Council's aims are to promote youth rights and voices in policy-making on topics such as education, healthcare, employment, volunteering and civic and political participation. One of its aims is to increase the participation of youth in decision-making processes and democratic life. It represents around 500 youth organisations. | The council has been influential in the internship law, the National Strategy on Youth Policy 2014-2020 and is continuously consulted by the government, particularly the Ministry of Youth and Sport. | √ | | √ | √ | √ |
| RO | The Forum of Romanian Youth (Forumul Tinerilor din România) | | 14-35 years old | Federation of 155 youth organisations. It reunites NGOs with the vision of achieving a society in which all youth can achieve their full potential. Its aims are related to youth employment and youth | | | | √ | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Key characteristics | Impact on policy / society | Child / youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | personal development through volunteering and other activities, but also monitoring the youth policy development processes and contributing to policy-making to better represent youth in civic life. | | | | | | |
| SE | National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations (Sveriges Ungdomsorganisationer, LSU) | 1949 | 13-25 years old | A coordinating body for almost 100 Swedish youth organisations operating as a platform on issues concerning youth, both national and international, and provides a network for organisations dealing with youth cooperation. It aims to strengthen youth democratic organisation with diversity and human rights as points of departure. The work is organised in two areas Politics and influence and Cooperation and leadership. | | √ | | | | |
| SE | Youth Policy Council (Ungdomspolitiska rådet) | 2008 | 13-25 years old | It gathers representatives for different youth organisations and is a forum for dialogue between the government and the young civil society. It consists of six permanent members and 20 rotating members | | | | √ | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Key characteristics | Impact on policy / society | Child / youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | which are chosen for a term of four years. New forms for influence by youth and participation in processes of discussion have been given special focus. | | | | | | |
| SI | Youth Council of Slovenia (Mladinski svet Slovenije) | 2000 | 15-29 years old | Umbrella association of youth organizations operating at the national level. It brings together 16 NGOs of different interests, views or political orientations. It represents the interests of young people in relation to national authorities and in international associations and participates in promoting the development of youth policy. | | | | √ | | |
| SI | Youth Councils of Local Communities | 2000 | | An umbrella association of youth organizations representing the interests of young people and youth organizations at the local level. It represents the interests of young people in local (municipal) authorities and cooperate with them regarding activities, resources and infrastructure aimed at young people. | | | | | | |
| SK | Youth Council of Slovakia (Rada Mladeze Slovenska) | 1990 | Youth under the age of 30 | It brings together 25 non-governmental organisations dedicated to children and | | √ | The Council unites organizations | √ | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age groups | Key characteristics | Impact on policy / society | Child / youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | young people. It aims to influence state policy in compliance with legal order and to create conditions for the universal, free and democratic development of children and young people and to achieve their legitimate interests. | | | with various target regardless of political, religious, national and ethnic status. | | | |
| UK | British Youth Council | 1948 | 16 to 25 years old | A youth-led charity comprised of young people for young people empowering youth to create social and political change. Consists of >200 member organisations. It runs campaigns targeting youth-related issues. | Positive for Youth –a new approach developed by the BYC to create cross-government policy for young people aged 13 to 19. It brings together all of the Government's policies for this age group, presenting a single vision across the interests of at least nine departments | √ | Council members come from a diverse group of young people (low-income, LGBTQ, different religions, children with disabilities, children leaving care). | √ | | √ |

Source: Authors' summary based on data from mapping, interviews and case study tasks.
Note: Please note that due to the limited amount of time allocated to the research and to the unavailability of public information relating to some of the mechanisms, this study cannot guarantee the all existing mechanisms have been captured and described.

## Table 15. Characteristics of children and youth parliaments

| Country | Name of mechanism | Year | Age groups | Selection criteria | Key characteristics | Impact on policy and children's participation levels | Child/youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Participation cycle children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| EU | European Youth Parliament | 1987 | Mostly 16-25 years old but no upper age limit | Selection is at the country level. Overall, more than 30,000 young people, including 3,500 volunteers, take part in EYP events every year | Active in 40 countries across Europe.<br>A peer-to-peer educational programme that inspires and empowers young people from across Europe to be open-minded, tolerant and active citizens. | | | | √ | | |
| BE | Flemish youth parliament (Vlaams jeugdparlement) | 2013 | 17-27 y.o. | National competition with individual candidates required to explain their motivation in an application form. Young people can be assigned a role of a parliamentarian or a journalist. | It aims to encourage young people to be politically active and provides them with the necessary tools and skills to represent the voice of youth in decision-making processes at various levels.<br>Its activities include talks and formative events teaching young people specific skills.<br>In 2020, it planned to organise a 7th edition of the parliamentary simulation. This is a 4-day event held in the Flemish Parliament gathering 140 youth representatives and journalist. Young people debate three decrees presented by the Youth Ministers. | | | | | | |

| Country | Name of mechanism | Year | Age groups | Selection criteria | Key characteristics | Impact on policy and children's participation levels | Child/youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Participation cycle children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| CY | Cyprus Children's Parliament (Κυπριακή Παιδοβουλή) | 2001 Regulation of the Cyprus Children's Parliament 2004 | 12-18 years old with permanent residence in Cyprus | The Children's Parliament consists of 80 voting members, with quotas for different Cypriot minorities and regional distribution analogous to the Republic's House of Representatives. Parliamentarians are elected by District electoral assembles consisting of nominated delegates from secondary schools and non-school members. They have a two-year term in office. They are elected by District electoral assemblies which consist of delegates nominated by the Pupil's Councils of secondary schools and of non-school delegates (up to 10%) who apply for membership. | Every two months, the parliament is convened in Plenary Working Sessions and there is an annual celebration session during Children's Week in November. | Since 2019, the Cyprus Children's Parliament is expected to join some Parliament sessions with the aim of bringing the Parliament closer to and listening to children. In November 2019, the House of Representatives established a permanent line of contact and communication between the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Children's Parliament. | √ | √ | √ | √ | |
| CY | Youth Parliament (Κοινοβούλιο Νεολαίας) | 1995 | Children in upper secondary school max. 21 years old | In each participating schools, the headteacher and teachers collaboratively decide who will be responsible for the Participatory Action Group. Students answer two questions posed in an application process and an | It has been running on an annual basis in the Hellenic Parliament in Athens and results from the collaboration between the Greek Parliament and the Ministries of Education in Cyprus and Greece. The Youth Parliament is organised every academic year | | √ | | | √ | √ |

| Country | Name of mechanism | Year | Age groups | Selection criteria | Key characteristics | Impact on policy and children's participation levels | Child/youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Participation cycle children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | evaluation committee in Greece selects which ones can participate. Finally, 300 participants are chosen at random from this shortlist. | starting in October and ending in July with the Youth Parliament Meeting. Throughout the Youth Parliament programme, young people participate in discussions, meetings, group activities, campaigns, interventions, and events. The programme aims to offer students, besides knowledge, a step for personal expression and creativity, opportunities for reflection, dialogue and participation.<br>The Participatory Action Group is involved in evaluating the activities taken by their own group and those taken in collaboration with other participating groups. | | | | | | |
| CZ | National Parliament of Children and Youth (Národní parlament dětí a mládeže) | 1997 Included in the Czech Act on Schools. | School-age children | Children and youth self-select to form a parliament or to run for an existing one. Members and staff of the national parliament are elected from the lower parliaments. | Annual parliament sessions are organised by school years and at the national level, there is one session a year. The format is roundtables and discussions with political representatives and experts. The mechanism is run by students themselves and supported by a project coordinator. Different projects | Although there is no systematic evidence of impact, the Children's Parliament enjoys a relatively high profile among policy makers and easily secures meetings with politicians to present | √ | | √ | √ | |

| Country | Name of mechanism | Year | Age groups | Selection criteria | Key characteristics | Impact on policy and children's participation levels | Child/youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Participation cycle children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | | are tailored for specific age groups. Previous topics include freedom, youth policy preferences, European Union, supporting young adults. | and discuss their perspective. This level of documented exposure is greater than other mechanisms mapped in Czechia in this study. | | | | | |
| EL | Youth Parliament (Βουλή των Εφήβων) | 1995 | targets children from the 1st and 2nd grade of high school (aged16-18) but the maximum age of participation is 21 years old. | Students in the 1st and 2nd years of high school, the Greek schools of expatriate Hellenism, and technical schools, under 21 years of age, are all eligible to participate. Youth Parliamentarians are elected by their electoral districts. | Youth Parliament begins every academic year in October and ends in July with the Youth Parliament Meeting. 300 young people from around Greece are elected to represent their electorate districts by serving for one year as Young Members of the Parliament. The parliament's main organ in the plenary, which is made up of all delegates. Students also form 5 parliamentary committees each one addressing different issues related to school life and young adult life. At the end of the Session each Committee chooses a Representative for representation in the General Assembly of the Youth Parliament which many politicians attend. The mechanism culminates in the | | √ | | √ | √ | √ |

| Country | Name of mechanism | Year | Age groups | Selection criteria | Key characteristics | Impact on policy and children's participation levels | Child/youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Participation cycle children involved in | | |
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| | | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | | five-day session of the Summit in Athens (July). Through discussions with Members and Experts and a variety of experiential workshops, the 300 student representatives present their own opinions and suggestions while attending a specially designed programme of cultural events.<br>Students in each participating school form a Participatory Action Group that organises projects and discussions on a collaborative basis. The Group also organizes community action and connects with other Groups who have selected similar thematic areas. The Group also evaluates these actions and share their findings in the school or other public spaces. | | | | | | |
| FI | Youth parliament | 1998 | 15-16 years old (students in 8th and 9th year) | The mechanism is organised by an NGO called Opinkirjo. Participation is open to upper secondary school students. | Participation is primarily in the form of a school club, student union or other adult-led group. The aim of the activity is to support the participation of children and young people and to influence what matters to them. The activity culminates in | | | | | | |

| Country | Name of mechanism | Year | Age groups | Selection criteria | Key characteristics | Impact on policy and children's participation levels | Child/youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Participation cycle children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | | the biennial plenary session of the Youth Parliament in the National Parliament. That's when MPs give up their seats to 199 student MPs. Only the Speaker of Parliament retains his/her seat. | | | | | | |
| FR | Children's Parliament (Parlement des Enfants) | 1994 | 10-11 years old (CM2 classes) | Proposals are evaluated by a local authority and through a national panel of judges. The final four are then voted on electronically by children. | CM2 classes who wish to participate in the Parliament formulate a legal proposal based on the theme selected for the year. They spend the year debating the proposal, drafting articles for the proposal and some classes are visited by their local Deputy (politician) to discuss the proposal and theme. After a two-tier selection process, 4 proposal finalists are chosen and children vote on the winner. Children also visit the Palace of Bourbon and have audience with political leaders. | Children have the potential to influence the law and policy development if their proposals are picked up by a national representative.[1202] Four proposals from the Children's Parliament have been adopted as part of French law relating to children in care (Law No. 96-1238 of 30 December 1996 and Law No. 98-381 of 14 May 1998), child labour (Law No. 99-478 of 9 June 1999), child abuse (Law no. 2000-197 of 6 March 2000), and plastic pollution (Article 47 of | | | √ | √ | |

| Country | Name of mechanism | Year | Age groups | Selection criteria | Key characteristics | Impact on policy and children's participation levels | Child/youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Participation cycle children involved in | | |
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| | | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | | | Law No. 2006-11 of 5 January 2006) | | | | | |
| IE | National Youth Parliament (Dáil na nÓg) | | 12 – 18 years old. | Delegates are elected to the parliament through their local youth council (Comhairle na nÓg). Numbers vary but most Comhairlí na nÓg send three to four young people to Dáil na nÓg, resulting in about 250 attendees annually. Each Comhairle na nÓg nominates one young person to sit on the National Youth Parliament Council. | The Youth Parliament is an annual one-day event, usually held in March each year. There are nine meetings through the year and subgroups also meet through the year to research issues and prepare presentations. | While the Youth Parliament's public profile is stronger than that of Youth Councils, evidence suggests that it too has little impact beyond its own members. However, in 2009, the Youth Parliament recommended that the cervical cancer vaccine be given to 12-18 year old girls and the following year it was made available to a wider cohort of girls than had first been planned and the members of the 2009 Youth Parliament were publicly credited for this by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. | | | √ | √ | |

| Country | Name of mechanism | Year | Age groups | Selection criteria | Key characteristics | Impact on policy and children's participation levels | Child/youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Participation cycle children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| LT | The EU Youth Parliament in Lithuania (Europos jaunimo parlamentas Lietuvoje) | 2013 (previously 'Lithuanian Pupil's Parliament) | 14 – 18 years old | For regional events, children are elected from different schools in the regions. For participation in national events, children are elected from the regional sessions. | Different activities for children are organized at schools, regional and national levels. Participation occurs in face-to-face meetings, Children's Parliament sessions, and through participation in projects. | | | | √ | | |
| LU | Young People's Parliament (Parlement des Jeunes) | 2009 Youth Law of 4 July 2008 (Loi de la jeunesse du 4 juillet 2008) | 14 – 24 years old | Youth aged 14-24 living in Luxembourg or enrolled in a Luxembourgish school can participate. In total, 60 members are recruited. | The Parliament runs from October to May/June. Parliamentarians draft and approve resolutions and opinions. The Parliament Committees meet once or twice a month beginning in October (on Saturdays, to allow children's involvement) and have Plenary meetings in May/June. Every Member of the Young People's Parliament needs to sign up to at least one Committee. A self-evaluation of the Parliament is also meant to be carried out after the first Parliamentary term. | The outcomes of the Parliament (opinions and resolutions) feed to the political process more broadly (through a Hearing in the Luxembourgish Parliament). | | | √ | | |
| LV | Youth Parliament (Jauniešu Saeima) | 2010 | 15 – 20 years old | Children and youth aged 15-20 can nominate themselves, children under 18 must have their parents' written permission. Parliamentarians are | Members of Youth Parliament are involved in the same activities as the national Parliament (Saeima): working in working groups, parliamentarian debates about | At the end of the day in which the Youth Parliament is convened, the specific policy proposals and recommendations | | | √ | √ | |

| Country | Name of mechanism | Year | Age groups | Selection criteria | Key characteristics | Impact on policy and children's participation levels | Child/youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Participation cycle children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | elected using the same principles as General Elections (i.e. through electorates, with quotas for regions comprising the total 100 Youth Parliamentarians) | specific policy proposals, voting about proposals etc. This all happens in one session held once a year. | associated with them are submitted to the Saeima working groups and members. There is no evidence on how this is incorporated into Parliamentary activity. | | | | | |
| MT | National Youth Parliament | 2002 | 13-35 years old | Members of the youth organisations that are part of the National Youth Council | Annual event giving youth opportunity to join themed 'parties' and draft resolution. It culminates in a session in parliament in which the motion is presented, debated, voted upon. Later on the resolutions are presented to the Prime Minister, the Opposition Leader and the President on separate specifically organised events. | | √ | | √ | | |
| PL | The Children and Youth Parliament (Sejm Dzieci i Młodzieży) | 1994 | Children in primary and secondary schools. | Completion of pre-defined tasks and activities. 460 best candidates are selected. | A year-long competition with young people completing democracy-related tasks and activities in their communities. 460 competition winners become Parliamentarians for one day, traditionally 1st June (Poland's Children's Day). A few days before the session, children and young people meet in the Parliament forming commissions, debating, | This mechanism is an independent educational project. The resolutions of the Children and Youth Parliament are not binding and have only declarative force. Children have meetings with Polish parliamentarians, with children and young | | | | √ | |

| Country | Name of mechanism | Year | Age groups | Selection criteria | Key characteristics | Impact on policy and children's participation levels | Child/youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Participation cycle children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | | selecting representatives to present the results of these debates during the final session, and practicing speeches. | people having opportunity to participate in the Parlament committees' meetings. | | | | | |
| PT | Youth Parliament (Parlamento dos Jovens) | 1995 | 10-15 years old (2nd and 3rd cycle of education). | All children in the 2nd cycle of education in public, private and cooperative schools can participate. The selection of students is at the discretion of each participating school. | Children must develop a proposal and promote it through street activities and debates. Up to three proposals are selected by their school, then by their district. As deputies, the children then debate and vote on the proposals and decide the theme for the next year. The main aim is to educate children on political participation so the mechanism mimics the process of electing deputies to the national Parliament | The results of children's discussions on their peers' proposals are captured in a series of recommendation made to the Assembly of the Republic. These recommendations are not binding. | | | √ | | |
| SI | Children's Parliaments (Otroški parlamenti) | 1990 | 6 – 15 years old | Children go through a selection process from their school to participate in the Municipal Children's Parliament, which in turn elects the delegation to be sent for the Regional Children's Parliament and National Children's Parliament. | Children's Parliaments operate in the form of sessions (debates) that allow all elementary school children to participate. The sessions are held as a regular part of their school lives in elementary schools in the class communities and at the school parliament. At each school, | Children have reported fewer effects of the Children's Parliaments at the local level and fewer still at the regional level. Although opportunities to participate are available, often it is | √ | | √ | √ | √ |

| Country | Name of mechanism | Year | Age groups | Selection criteria | Key characteristics | Impact on policy and children's participation levels | Child/youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Participation cycle children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | | students choose a delegation for the municipal children's parliament. The Municipal Children's Parliament elects a delegation for the Regional Children's Parliament, where representatives represent the interests of peers at the National Children's Parliament. It is held once a year, in the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia. Children's parliaments have to consider the conclusions of previous children's parliaments; and representatives of the government have to report on the progress of implementation of the decisions. | children from larger schools that are selected.<br>Some of the Children's Parliament recommendations have been realised fully or partially including: 24h hotline for children in need, safe points in cities for children, information leaflets for child victims of abuse, and more news-like programmes for children within the national TV broadcasting system. The mechanism has also been documented to enhance children's social skills, knowledge, experience, positive self-image and critical thinking. | | | | | |
| UK | UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) | 1999 | 11 – 18 years old. | Youth aged 11-18 vote for a representives who is also 11-18 to represent their views in the Youth | The Youth Parliament consists of 369 democratically elected persons aged 11-18 to represent views of young | Decisions made by the UKYP about its own running (including | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |

| Country | Name of mechanism | Year | Age groups | Selection criteria | Key characteristics | Impact on policy and children's participation levels | Child/youth-led | Reaches out to disadvantaged children | Participation cycle children involved in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | Design and planning | Implementation | Monitoring and evaluation |
| | | | | Parliament. Each Local Authority (LA) across England represents a UKYP constituency, which elects at least one member to the Parliament. UKYP works with agencies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to ensure young people there are represented in the Youth Parliament.<br>Youth are also involved at stages of voting/balloting for which issues are the top five debated in Parliament. | people in their respective constituencies to government and service providers. It consists of 600 Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs). Youth participate in elections once a year. But Youth Parliamentarians are involved in UKYP throughout the year in diverse activities such as running youth-interest campaigns, writing the UKYP manifesto, regional meetings, dialogues with Ministers and civil servants to guide youth inputs into policy and programme development. Once a year, all MYP meet for an Annual Sitting, and once a year five issues balloted by national youth are debated in the House of Commons. | manifesto) are binding for it.<br>The 'campaigns' run by UKYP through the year and debated in the House of Commons have the potential to influence policy. In 2008, Government announced plans to put sex and relationships education as a statutory part of the curriculum as a direct result of UK Youth Parliament campaign | | | | | |

Source: Authors' summary based on data from mapping, interviews and case study tasks.
Note: Please note that due to the limited amount of time allocated to the research and to the unavailability of public information relating to some of the mechanisms, this study cannot guarantee the all existing mechanisms have been captured and described.

## Table 16. Key stakeholders involved in the children's participation processes and mechanisms

| Country / level | Public organisations / bodies | Civil society organisations | Other |
|---|---|---|---|
| International | United Nations, including Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and UNICEF,<br>Council of Europe<br>OECD | Child Rights Connect<br>World Vision International<br>Terre des Homme International Federation<br>Save the Children<br>SOS Children's Villages International<br>The Commonwealth Youth Forum<br>African Caribbean and Pacific Young Professionals Network (ACPYPN)<br>African Diaspora Youth Forum in Europe (ADYFE)<br>Pan African Youth Union (PYU)<br>Network of International Youth Organisations in Africa (NIOYA)<br>Regional Platform for the Defence of the Rights of Children and Adolescents<br>Gurises Unidos<br>Regional Platform for the Defence of the Rights of Children and Adolescents, Custodial Adults who are Deprived of their Freedom (Platform NNAPES)<br>Kindernothilfe | |
| EU | European Commission, including European Forum on the rights of the child, Better Internet for Kids Youth panel at the Safer Internet Forum, Learning corner, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), INHOPE-INSAFE<br>Council of the European Union<br>European Parliament | Eurochild<br>SALTO-YOUTH (Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities for Youth) | |
| AT | Ministry of Youth<br>Federal Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth<br>Federal Chancellery Austria (Bundeskanzleramt)<br>The Youth Competence Centre | | |
| BE | Department of Culture, Youth and Media (Department Culture, Jeugd en Media)<br>Government of Flanders<br>Federal Government of Belgium | | |
| BG | Ministry of Education in Bulgaria<br>State Agency for Child Protection<br>Ministry of Education and Science | National Network for Children<br>Karin Dom<br>Lumos<br>Partners Bulgaria Foundation | Megaphone Youth Network |
| CY | Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth<br>President of the Parliament of Cyprus | The Hellenic Parliament Foundation for Parliamentarism and Democracy<br>UNCRC Policy Centre | |

| Country / level | Public organisations / bodies | Civil society organisations | Other |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children) | | |
| CZ | Ministry of Education | The Centre for Community Organising | |
| DE | Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend)<br>Specialized Agency for International Youth Work of the Federal Republic of Germany (IJAB - IJAB – Fachstelle für Internationale Jugendarbeit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland)<br>jugend.beteiligen.jetzt<br>German Institute for Human Rights<br>German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development | The German Children and Youth Foundation (Die Deutsche Kinder- und Jugendstiftung) | The city of Herrenberg (local) |
| DK | Nordic Council of Ministers (Nordisk Ministerråd) | Egmont Foundation<br>Youth Bureau (Ungdomsbureauet) | Denmark University of Education (Danmark Pædagogiske Universitet)<br>National Union of Child and Youth Teachers (BUPL, Børne- og Ungdomspædagogernes Landsforbund)<br>The Youth Island Foundation (Fonden Ungdomsøen |
| EE | Estonian Youth Work Centre, Ministry of Education and Research<br>The Ministry of Education and Research<br>Integration Foundation | Association of Estonian Cities (Eesti Linnade Liit)<br>Estonian Union for Child Welfare (Lastekaitse Liit)<br>Association of Estonian Municipalities (Eesti Maaomavalitsuste Liit),<br>Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres (AEYC) | University of Tartu |
| EL | Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs<br>Hellenic Parliament | The Foundation of Hellenic Parliament | |
| ES | Ministry of Health, Consumers, Welfare and Social Wellbeing<br>Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) | Spanish Children's Rights Coalition (Plataforma de Infancia)<br>Centro Matices<br>Granada Educa foundation | |
| FI | Ministry of Education and Culture<br>Ministry of Justice | Finland's Slot Machine Association<br>Koordinaatti (Centre of Expertise in youth information and counselling) | |
| FR | National Assembly (Assemblée nationale)<br>Ministry of Education<br>Ministry of Family | French Laic House (Maison Laique Francaise)<br>COFRADE - French Council of Associations for the Rights of the Child (Conseil Francais des Associations pour les Droits de l'Enfant) | |

| Country / level | Public organisations / bodies | Civil society organisations | Other |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Directorate General for Social Cohesion (Direction Générale de la Cohésion sociale)<br>Agency for French Education Abroad (Agence pour l'Enseignement Francais a l'Exterieur)<br>General for Strategy and Foresight (Commissariat General a la strategie et la prospecive)<br>Youth and High Schools Directorate (Direction de la Jeunesse et des Lycée | AEDE association - Acting together for the rights of the child (Agir ensemble pour les droits de l'enfant) | |
| HR | Croatian Parliament | Union of Societies "Our Children Croatia" | |
| HU | Ministry of Human Capacities | Hintalovon Foundation<br>Child Rights NGO Coalition<br>Foundation for Student Public Life (Diákközéletért Alapítvány)<br>IFI PONT Youth Information and Counselling Centre | |
| IE | Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA)<br>Joint Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children<br>Tusla<br>Department of Health<br>Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht | Headstrong<br>Foróige<br>Barnardo's<br>Empowering People in Care (EPIC)<br>Youth Work Ireland | Children's Hospital Group<br>Pobal |
| IT | Ministry of Education and Ministry of Universities and Research (Ministero dell' istruzione e ministero dell'universita e della ricercar) | | |
| LT | Lithuanian Parliament (Seimas) | | |
| LU | Luxembourgish Parliament<br>Luxembourgish Committee for the Rights of the Children | Youth Information Centre (Centre Information Jeunes - CIJ) | |
| LV | The Ministry for Children and Family Affairs<br>Ministry of Education<br>Parliament of Latvia (Saeima) | Association 'Next' (Biedrība Next' - a youth association (it seems to have ceased to exist) | |
| MT | Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity | Agenzija Zghazagh<br>Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society (MFWS) | University of Malta |
| NL | Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport<br>Children's Council of the Bascule (Kinderraad de Bascule) | Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging)<br>The Landelijk Aktie Komitee Scholieren (LAKS)<br>The Little Embassy (De Kleine Ambassade)<br>Raaz<br>Cardea<br>Stichting de Volksbond | Verwey-Jonker Institute (research institute) |

| Country / level | Public organisations / bodies | Civil society organisations | Other |
|---|---|---|---|
| PL | Chancellery of the Lower Chamber of the Polish Parliament (Sejm) | Centre for Citizenship Education (Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej)<br>"We Give Children Strength" Foundation (Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę) (previously known as Nobody's Children Foundation - Fundacja Dzieci Niczyje) | |
| PT | National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and Protection of Young Children (Comissão Nacional de Promoção dos Direitos e Proteção da Crianças e Jovens)<br>Ministry of Education<br>Directorate-General for School (DGEstE)<br>Directorate-General for Consular Affairs and Portuguese Communities<br>Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth, IP (IPDJ)<br>Regional Directions for Education and Youth in the Autonomous Region of the Azores<br>Regional Directions for Education and Youth and Sports in the Autonomous Region of Madeira | UN – Habitat<br>Amadora Children and Youth Protection Commission (CPCJ, Comissão de Proteção de Crianças e Jovens da Amadora) (at local level) | |
| RO | The Parliament of Romania<br>The Ministry of Education<br>The Ministry of Foreign Affairs | The European Institute, Romania | |
| SE | Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF) | | |
| SI | Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities<br>Commission for the Prevention of Corruption | Association of Friends of Youth of Slovenia<br>Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia | |
| SK | Ministry of Education<br>IUVENTA - Slovak Youth Institute (a government agency in charge of implementing national youth policy)<br>Office of the Government's Representative for Roma Communities | Association of Youth Information and Counselling Centers (ZIPCeM), | |
| UK | House of Commons<br>All Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs<br>NHS England<br>Public Health England<br>Department of Health | Participation Works (a consortium of six national children and young people's agencies made up of the British Youth Council, the Children's Rights Alliance for England, National Children's Bureau, the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services, Save the Children and The National Youth Agency)<br>Young Mayors Network | Queen's University Belfast (Centre for Children's Rights)<br>University of Central Lancashire (The Centre for children and Young people's participation) |

Source: Authors' summary based on data from mapping, interviews and case study tasks.
Note: Please note that due to the limited amount of time allocated to the research and to the unavailability of public information relating to some of the mechanisms, this study cannot guarantee the all existing mechanisms have been captured and described.

## Table 17. National policies, strategies and / or plans guiding children's participation

| Country | Name | Year | Age | Body responsible | Main aims | How it guides children's participation | Related legislation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AT | Youth Strategies | 2013 - 2018, 2019 - 2027 | 14 to 24 years old | Ministry of Youth | This strategy has three main objectives and the second one is "participation and initiative". The strategy proclaims that young people "should be able to speak out, offer suggestions and participate in decisions that affect their lives" | | It is the result of the EU Youth Strategy. |
| BE | Flemish youth and children's rights policy plan | 2012 - 2020 | 10 to 20 years old | Flemish government | This Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan shall lay down the youth and children's rights policy of the Government of Flanders. It shall present, for the next policy period and within an overall vision on youth and the youth and children's rights policy, the priority objectives of the Government of Flanders and define the performance indicators. | It shall describe the way in which the Government implements policies to increase the participation of children and young people in society. | Article 3 of the Flemish Parliament Act on a revised youth and children's rights policy |
| BG | National Strategy for the Child | 2019-2030 | N/A | Strategy was prepared as a result of the work of a specially created working group, comprising representatives of the child protection bodies in Bulgaria, non-governmental organizations, experts and university professors. | The Strategy declares as its mission "mobilization, financial support, integration and directing the efforts of state institutions and civil society to improve the environment, as well as to increase the life chances of each child to realize his or her opportunities by building a certain degree of social competence and support of the parents." | | Pursuant to Art. 1 of the Child Protection Act. |
| CY | National Youth Strategy | Since 2016 | 14 to 35 years old | Youth Board of Cyprus | It aims to address issues facing young people in Cyprus. | It included consultations with young people aiming to bridge the gap between young people and policy makers in an effort to achieve a positive change. | |
| CZ | Strategy of youth support policy | 2014-2020 | 13-30 years old | | Supporting active participation of children and youth in decision-making processes and | Involvement of young people in the decision-making processes related to the | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age | Body responsible | Main aims | How it guides children's participation | Related legislation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | in influencing social and political life is one of the strategy's strategic goals. | implementation and evaluation of the strategy is in the purview of the National Working Group for a Structured Dialogue with Young People, led by the Czech Council of Children and Youth. | |
| DE | Youth Strategy | 2015-2018 | 12 to 26 years old | Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend) | The strategy focuses on 4 main areas: meaningful participation, creating opportunities for space and leisure for youth, ensuring fair chance for a future and social inclusion, and recognising the diversity of "youth". | The strategy discusses three forms of participations: (1) consulting young people without them actually having any influences on decisions-made, (2) taking children's perspectives into consideration (e.g. partly making decisions to topics affecting youth), and (3) giving young people the power to decide. | The "Comprehensive Concept for the Protection of Children and Juveniles against Sexual Violence" was presented in 2014. The Action Plan "Agents of Change – Children and youth rights in German development cooperation activities" was presented in 2017. |
| EE | Strategy of Children and Families | 2012-2020 | | | One of the five strategic objectives of the Strategy is that the rights of children are guaranteed and a functional child protection system is created in order to value each child and the kind of safe environment that supports the development and welfare of children. | | |
| EL | National Action Plan on the Rights of the Child | 2018 | | General Secretariat of Human Rights, with the participation of the Children's Ombudsman and the National Commission of Human Rights | It has 7 aims including: (1) Combatting child poverty and alleviating the negative impact of the economic crisis on children, and (2) Protecting children in the context of refugee crisis. | One of the most important functions of the mechanism is to involve both the civil society organizations and the children in the consultation process. | |
| ES | Strategic Plan of National Action for Children and Adolescents | 2019-2022 | | This plan is designed by the Central Government and it is implemented by Autonomous Communities and the | These plans include the main strategic lines for the development of childhood policies and for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. | | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age | Body responsible | Main aims | How it guides children's participation | Related legislation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Cities of Ceuta and Melilla. | | | |
| FI | The present Government is preparing the National Strategy for Children. | 2019-2022 | | Finnish government | It has 7 aims including that 'every child and young person has safe adults in their lives who are close to them and act with their best interests at heart'. | It is based on 'a culture led by families and children'. | |
| FI | National youth work and youth policy programme (VANUPO) | 2020-2023 | | Government | Adopted by the Government every four years with the aim of improving the conditions in which young people live and grow. In this programme, the Government defines its youth policy objectives and the measures for attaining them. | | |
| FI | National Democracy Programme 2025 | 2019-2023 | | | To promote participation and engagement between the government and civil society. The programme also aims to explore and develop new forms of participation | | |
| FR | Launched a three-pronged Child Pact | 2019 | | | It aims to guarantee the rights of children: rights to health, education, emotional security, autonomy after the age of 18 years old. It also aims to give children voice and to take better account of their opinions and experiences. | | It builds on the National Child Prevention and Protection Strategy, the Child Protection National Consultation and the Violence against Children Action Plan. |
| HR | National Strategy on the Rights of Children in the Republic of Croatia | 2014-2019 | | Croatian government | It aims to achieve more effective promotion and protection of children's rights in the Republic of Croatia through the implementation of existing international and national standards in the field of children's rights. | | In accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. |

| Country | Name | Year | Age | Body responsible | Main aims | How it guides children's participation | Related legislation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| HU | No national strategy or policy found | | | | | | The Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy, the National Disability Program, the Digital Child Protection Strategy and the National Youth Strategy contain large-scale measures for specific areas of children's rights and for certain groups of children. |
| IE | National Youth Strategy 2015-2020 | | 15 to 24 years old | | | | Also adopted Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2014 – 2020). |
| IT | National Plan to Protect the Rights and the Development of the Child | Sept 2019 | | The Italian Ministry of Labour and Employment | It aims to prevent the poverty of the children and their families and provide services for scholastic quality and integration. | | |
| LT | There is no specific comprehensive national strategy on the rights of the child, even though there is Concept of State Policy on Child Welfare, approved in 2003. | | | | | | Various separate programmes and action plans have been adopted to ensure the proper implementation and protection of children's rights, for instance Child Welfare Program (2013-2018), Child Welfare Action Plan (2016-2018; 2019-2021), Action plan for the transition from institutional care to family and community-based services for persons with disabilities and children without parental care 2014-2020 and other. |

| Country | Name | Year | Age | Body responsible | Main aims | How it guides children's participation | Related legislation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| LV | Currently the Latvian government is aiming at the consolidation of policy documents, therefore policy measures on the rights of the child are going to be an integral part of the national policy planning documents. | | | | | | There is no single policy document on the rights of the child. However, there are number of policy documents aiming at the protection of children in vulnerable situations, e.g. children who are victims of sexual abuse, children who are victims of illegal acts and children who have violated the law. |
| LX | There are different strategies (e.g. combatting sex tourism, national strategy for LGBTI, strategy for sexual and affective education, on internet safety, a package of initiatives to protect children from sexual abuse) but there is not one document that contains all the strategies. | | | | | | |
| MT | National Children's Policy | 2017 | 3-17 years old | Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity | It aims to capture the vast realities and experiences of children and their wide needs, wants and aspiration. | The National Children's Policy was said to have been 'drafted in consultation with children'. | |
| NL | Jeugdwet /Youth Law | 2014 | | Dutch coalition government | It dictates that during the development of youth care | It involves children in the development of youth care policies. | |

| Country | Name | Year | Age | Body responsible | Main aims | How it guides children's participation | Related legislation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | policies, youths should be consulted. | | |
| PT | National Strategy for the Rights of the Child | | 18-25 years old | | | | |
| SI | Programme for Children | 2020-2025 | Under 18 years old | | It focuses on equality and non-discrimination, life without violence, child-friendly justice, children in digital environment, and participation | | The first comprehensive Programme for Children and Youth 2006-2016 was adopted in 2006. Two-year action plans followed to monitor the implementation of the programme. In 2013, the Programme was amended – the chapter on participation was added based on the analysis of child participation in Slovenia. |
| SE | National Strategy to strengthen the rights of the child | Since 2010 | Under 18 | Swedish government | The strategy is based on the human rights that every child up to the age of 18 is to be ensured under international agreements, especially the commitments arising from the CRC. | | Other action plans that includes children: (1) The Swedish Government´s action plan to protect children from human trafficking, exploitation and sexual abuse, 2016-2018; (2) National strategy to prevent and combat men's violence against women (2016); (3) Action plan to combat prostitution and trafficking in human beings (2018), (4) National action plan to combat female genital mutilation (2018). |

Source: European Commission data (unpublished).
Note: Please note that due to the limited amount of time allocated to the research and to the unavailability of public information relating to some of the mechanisms, this study cannot guarantee the all existing mechanisms have been captured and described.

# Annex D Guiding document for mapping task

*Guiding document for researchers contributing to the review and mapping of the mechanisms for child participation in the EU political and democratic life*

## Background to the project

**Child participation** is the notion that, on all matters affecting them, **children have the right to express their views and have them taken seriously**, in accordance with their age and maturity.[1203] Both the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, including the right of the child to participate in political and democratic life, are central objectives of the European Union (EU) and key features of its identity.

It is within this context that the main objective of this assignment is to provide the European Commission, DG JUST with analysis on the participation of children across the EU in the decision-making process on matters that affect them. The results and ideas gathered during this project would, in turn, contribute to the future work on this area at EU level.

### A. Concepts and Definitions

| Concept | Definition |
|---|---|
| **Child** | A 'child' for the purpose of this study is anyone under the age of 18, in line with the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child |
| **Child participation in the EU political and democratic life** | The **distinctive opportunities for children to be involved in the various stages of policy and legislation planning, design, implementation and evaluation.**<br><br>The study **will not address children's participation in other settings unrelated to public life** (e.g. judicial proceedings, school daily life or family-related contexts), **or voting in elections**. |
| **Mechanism** | **Opportunity for children to be involved and shape political and democratic decisions**.<br><br>The study will cover a broad range of **mechanisms**, such as consultations, polls, *ad hoc* meetings and structural consultation bodies, **that can facilitate as well as hinder opportunities for children to express views, provide feedback and contribute to future policy or legislative developments.**<br><br>The **initiatives promoting active citizenship and engagement** in political and democratic life **should not be reported as a standalone mechanism**. For instance, any awareness raising campaign, initiatives or programme encouraging children participation in a national or local consultation should not be included as a separate mechanism but could be included as part of other mechanisms.<br><br>The study covers **mechanisms initiated from 2012 onwards**. |

## B. Mapping of Child Mechanisms

This project first task constitutes a **review, mapping and analysis of the existing mechanisms of and obstacles to child participation**, as well as any evidence behind the mechanisms. This review will include policy/legislative environment, documents, data, mechanisms and practices at:

1. International and EU level;
2. **national level in all EU 27 countries and the UK**; and
3. **Local level in 10 selected MS**

***We are asking for your help for conducting reviews on national level of the 28 EU Member States and for the local level of 10 selected EU Member States. Detailed instructions on the task are below.***

***You should have already been assigned a country and been informed as to whether or not the country assigned to you is one of the 10 countries selected for local level analysis.*** *If you are unsure about which country you should review, please contact us at child-participation@randeurope.org.*

This study is guided by **two research questions**:

1. What is **the state of play** in the EU of child participation in decision-making processes at local, national and European level?
2. What **mechanisms of child participation** exist at the international, EU, national and local level, and what are their main characteristics?

The evidence gathered in this task will support analysis of two subsequent research questions:

3. How could the **well-functioning mechanisms** and promising practice examples **inspire future EU actions** to support child participation at the EU, national and local level?
4. What are **children's perceptions and positions** regarding child participation?

### I. Introduction to the task

#### A. Scope of review

The review and mapping will adopt definitions of 'child participation' and 'mechanism' as outlined in the earlier section of this document.

The review and mapping will also aim to **facilitate understandings(s) and definition(s) of well-functioning mechanisms** (e.g. evidence on how they improve child participation, their success rates in engaging children, the inclusiveness of children from different backgrounds, etc.), and include **examples of mechanisms that work well and examples of mechanisms that work less well** to capture **factors facilitating and hindering child participation**.

We ask **national experts** to spend indicatively **1.5 days per country and per level of review** (e.g. if you have been asked to national and local level analysis, that is a total of 3 days maximum). We ask that you do not exceed this time without letting us know.

Equally, should it transpire after a few hours of work that little to no information is available, please let us know. We anticipate the available data to vary between countries.

The range and breath of mechanisms that facilitate/hinder opportunities for children to be involved and share political and democratic decisions is likely to vary across MS and in some cases there may be little evidence.

- If a preliminary search yields a large number of results, **please focus on reviewing material in the national language** (or languages) and prioritise the most robust evidence – in case of doubt, please check with us at child-participation@rand.org
- If there are sources you do not have time to review in the allocated time, please briefly summarise for the project team (e.g. copy over abstract, include a digital copy or a link to the source).
- Please keep note of other relevant material in English and also include a digital copy or a link to the source.
- If the search yields little or no results – please contact us at child-participation@rand.org as a matter of urgency.

### B. Search methodology

This is a **mapping exercise** rather than a systematic review. Although we are not placing restrictions on the nature of evidence included or the methodological robustness of sources identified, please try to avoid using opinion-based sources (e.g. media, blogs). Sources listed in Table 1 are indicative only and geared towards English-language literature; please consult the most appropriate sources for each Member State.

**Table 18. List of sources**

| | Academic literature | Grey literature | Other sources |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Database** | Lexis/Nexis Academic; Web of Knowledge; JSTOR | Google Scholar; OpenGrey | Google; Government websites; National statistics repositories |
| **Type of source** | Journal articles; Books | Reports | Official statistics; Policy documents; Legislative documents |

National experts should consult the relevant databases combining key search terms with terms to limit and define the search e.g. AND, OR (OR is used to find sources that mention **either** of the topics you search for; AND is used to find sources that mention **both** of the searched topics) – if these search functionalities are supported by a given database. We suggest combining search terms relating to child participation, children rights, decision-making and the geographical context (see Table 2 below). This list is not intended to be exhaustive; please adapt to the national language and/or context.

National experts should translate a **search string** into the official language (or languages) of the Member State if required, e.g. "child participation" AND "child rights" AND "politics" AND "Netherlands".

**Table 19. Suggested search terms (non-exhaustive list)**

| Terms related to child participation | Terms related to rights | Terms related to decision-making | Terms related to EU/MS |
|---|---|---|---|
| "child participation" OR "children participation" OR "youth participation" OR "participation" OR "hearing of the child" or "hear children" | "child rights" OR "children rights" OR "youth rights" OR "rights" | "child" OR "child-friendly" OR "politics" OR "legislation" OR "democracy" OR "decision-making" OR "mechanism(s)" OR "action" OR "initiative" OR "institutions" OR "organisations" OR "policy" OR "practice" OR "example" OR "consultation" OR "conference" OR "survey" | "EU" OR "Europe" OR<br><br>terms relating to specific Member States for analyses at Member State and local level, e.g. "Netherlands" OR "Holland*" OR "Dutch" |

**Table 20. List of potential sources (non-exhaustive list)**

| **Sources at Member State/local level** |
|---|
| National or regional Ombudsperson (for children) in each MS<br>Relevant national ministries responsible for children's rights (typically Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Children and Youth)<br>Children and Youth Council at local, regional, federal level<br>Umbrella organisations for children and youth (work)<br><br>Knowledge centres<br><br>UNICEF in each MS<br>United cities, Eurocities or another network of cities<br>Child in the city<br>Other organisations focused on issues relevant to children, e.g. Union for Child Welfare, Council for Children's Rights, Council for Child Issues, Children's Rights Foundation, National Authority on the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption, National Coalition for the Implementation of the UNCRC etc. |

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:**

- Include mechanisms implemented during or **after 2012**. However, if there is a mechanism that has been implemented before that but that seems to be of great significance, then please include.
- Exclude educational initiatives that teach children skills, or how to engage with, or about the democratic and political life, but that do not constitute actual opportunities to participate.

  For example: *Model UN.* In this initiative, children pretend to be a UN country and participate in an artificial setting that functions just like the United Nations. However, the children are not really being consulted on actual UN policy. Therefore, such an initiative is beyond this study's scope.

- Include sources in the national language

**C. Output**

As an output for this review and mapping exercise, we would like you to **populate an Excel data extraction template** shared with you.

The template contains **three main tabs**: **1) Mechanisms, 2) Potential Interviewees, and 3) EXAMPLE**. In tabs 1 and 2, we are asking you to enter data. Tab 3 continues a completed example for one country that may be helpful to you in better understanding the task.

**Tab 1 – Mechanism:** We would like you to **summarise each mechanism in one column**, provide key characteristics of each identified mechanism, include source of information for each mechanism. We acknowledge that a mechanism can be described across several sources. Please capture each of these sources, and if needed describe the same mechanism across two or more columns, clearly indicating the name of this mechanism at the top of each column in the specified cell.

**The fields in the data extraction template have been designed to capture the diversity of sources that might be identified as part of the review and mapping. Not all fields in the data extraction template will be relevant to all sources,** some relate to academic evidence whereas other are more relevant to legislation/policy documents. **To ensure consistency in outputs, please do not edit or delete any columns in the spreadsheet.** If a column in the data template is not relevant to the source please note 'not applicable' or 'not included' rather than leaving this cell blank. Relevant information not captured by existing columns can be added in the final 'other comments' column.

**Tab 2 – Potential Interviewees:** The next step in the research process is conducting interviews with relevant stakeholders to gather more data and understanding about particular mechanisms. When you **identify researchers, policymakers, stakeholders and other individuals that could be potential interviewees, please note down their names and contact details – if these details are available in public domain – in a designated tab** (Potential Interviewees).

**Deadlines**

Deadline for returning the populated extraction template to us is **Friday, 27 March 2020.**

The RAND Europe core research team will collate findings from MS and develop this into a research report. This report will include your name as a contributor to the study.

**Questions**

Please do not hesitate to contact us at child-participation@rand.org if you have any questions. We will get back to you as soon as possible.

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH!**

# Annex E Template for mapping spreadsheets

The template for data collection from Task 1 Mapping was originally developed in Excel. Below we copy all template cells.

| Main characteristics of mechanism | Sub-questions | Mechanism 1 |
|---|---|---|
| **Name of mechanism** | *What is the name of mechanism (in English and in national language)?* | |
| **Key information about mechanism** | *Describe in 5-7 sentences the information that you consider most important. Please describe the key characteristics of the mechanism, how it functions to facilitate children participation, why it works (or does not work), and its impact on decision-making* | |
| **Date implemented** | *Initial date when mechanism implemented; if no longer in place, date when ceased; if the mechanism characteristics changed since it was implemented, please provide key data points when it changed.* | |
| **Geographical scope of the mechanism** | *Where is the mechanism implemented, e.g. in a particular country, region, city? If more than in one location, was the mechanism implemented from the start in more than one location or were some locations pioneers in implementing it?* | |
| **Background on mechanism design / planning (why mechanism came into force, what were the facilitators and barriers)** | *Where there any specific policies or actions implemented at the EU level (e.g. the Council of Europe's 2012 recommendation, 2013 Recommendation or any other EU policies etc., that facilitated introduction of this mechanism?). Please name these polices and actions.*<br>*Are there any ongoing legal or policy debates that would have impact on the design of this mechanism?`* | |
| | *Where there any specific policies or actions, including legislation implemented at the national/country level that facilitated introduction of this mechanism? In federal countries, e.g. Germany, do these policies or actions differ across the country?*<br>*Are there any ongoing legal or policy debates that would have impact on the design of this mechanism?* | |
| | *Where there any specific policies or actions, including legislation implemented at the regional/local/city level that facilitated introduction of this mechanism?*<br>*Are there any ongoing legal or policy debates that would have impact on the design of this mechanism?* | |
| | *Were there any barriers to introduce this mechanism? If so, what type of barriers, e.g. legal, policy, financial, societal attitudes and interest etc. How were they overcame so that the mechanism was introduced?* | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | *Who (organisation, body, coalition of foundations etc.) was responsible for designing and planning this mechanism?* | |
| | *Were children involved in the design of the mechanism itself? If yes, how? If not, why not?* | |
| | *Is this mechanism related to any other mechanism? If yes, how?* | |
| **Key characteristics and principles of mechanism** | *What are the aims and objectives of this mechanism?* | |
| | *How is this mechanism designed to function to facilitate children participation? Why is it designed this way?* | |
| | *Is there an element of evaluation built-in in this mechanism to assess child participation?*<br>*If yes, what are the quality criteria that would allow assessment that this mechanism facilitates/hinders children participation? How were the well-functioning features / functioning less well features of this mechanism identified and by whom?*<br>*If not, why evaluation of how this mechanism facilitates/hinders children participation is not built-in in this mechanism?* | |
| **Child population targeted by the mechanism** | *What are the characteristics of the child population participating in this mechanism? Is this mechanism designed to include children representing a diversity of children? Are there any specific groups of children that are particularly targeted by this mechanism? If yes, why?*<br>*How representative are children participating in this mechanism for a variety of characteristics, e.g. their age range, socio-economic background, vulnerable / disadvantaged children (with disabilities, migrant or ethnic diversity)?* | |
| | *How are children recruited and selected?* | |
| **Content and format of child participation** | *What is the content of children participation? What are children expressing opinion on? What are children participating to?* | |
| | *What is the format of children participation? How is children participation facilitated, e.g. regular/structural body vs. ad hoc consultation; face-to-face meetings vs. online; group of children vs. individual child?* | |
| **Actors responsible for mechanism** | *Who is responsible for the implementation of this mechanism (e.g. national government, local government, specific ministry, civil society organisation, NGO, private company, a mixed partnership etc.)?* | |
| | *Is the implementing actor (per information above) the same as who is funding the mechanism? If not, who is funding it?* | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | *Did the body/organisation implementing the mechanism change since the mechanism was introduced? Are the bodies/organisation implementing the mechanism the same across the country/region/city? If yes, how? If not, why not?* | |
| | *Is this body/organisation involved in managing children participation? If yes, how? If not, why not?* | |
| **Participation cycle** | *How often is the children participation organised as part of this mechanism?*<br>*How many times did children participate throught this mechanism, e.g. in the last 12 months, since it was introduced?* | |
| | *At what stage of the policy development do children participate, e.g. policy planning, policy implementation, policy evaluation?* | |
| | *Were children involved in the implementation of the mechanism itself? (e.g. organising meetings; communication, administrative tasks to support implementation, other)*<br>*If yes, how were children involved?*<br>*If not, why were children not involved?* | |
| **Communication, information, awareness raising and training for children and adults involved** | *Is the child participation mechanism advertised? If yes, how? What type of information about planned, ongoing and completed children participation is provided to children? In what format (e.g. leaflets, sessions for children, peer-support network activities etc.).*<br>*If not, why not?* | |
| | *How are children and adults involved in the process of developing communications/advertising, etc.?* | |
| | *What training is available to children to facilitate their participation? What training is available to adults to facilitate their participation?*<br>*How are children involved in the process of developing this training?*<br>*How does this training facilitate children's and adults' participation?*<br>*If training is not available and/or children were not involved in the process of developing it, why?* | |
| | *Is training availability, quality and relevance monitored and evaluated?*<br>*If yes, by whom? To what effect? Are there any changes implemented as a result of the monitoring and evaluation activities?*<br>*If not, why not?* | |
| | *Are the participation mechanisms and results communicated to children and a wider range of stakeholders?*<br>*If yes, how? Is there any evidence / assessment that the information was communicated to children in a child-friendly language?*<br>*If not, why not?* | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Evidence on effectiveness and feedback loops built-in the mechanism** | *Is there any evidence / monitoring data collected about the effectiveness of the mechanism (whether, how and why this mechanism facilitates/hinders child participation)?*<br>*If yes, who is collecting this information, e.g. independent evaluators, mechanism designers and/or implementors?*<br>*If not, why monitoring data is not collected?* | |
| | *If evidence exists, what does the evidence say about the elements of this mechanism that work well /work less well? What are the main contributing actions / activities / elements of this mechanism that facilitate/hinder children participation? In other words, what are the facilitators and barriers of children participation in this mechanism?*<br>*Who compiled this evidence and how (e.g. independent evaluator, sponsor, implementor of the mechanism)?* | |
| | *If evidence / monitoring data exist, how is this evidence / monitoring data used? Are there any changes implemented in the mechanism characteristics as a result of the monitoring and evaluation activities, e.g. children participation taking place more often, in different format?*<br>*Are there plans to make changes to this mechanism to improve its functioning in the future?* | |
| | *Were children involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the mechanism itself?*<br>*If yes, how were children involved?*<br>*If not, why were children not involved?* | |
| | *Is there any evidence/data about the cost of implementation of this mechanism? If yes, how much does it cost to implement it, e.g. per year, per consultation, cost per child participating etc.* | |
| **Degree of influence** | *To what extent are the results/findings of the child participation / consultation binding for the organisation/body conducting it?* | |
| | *What is the evidence on the impact of children participation/ consultations and their degree of influence on decision-making? Have there been any policy challenges that result from children participation in this mechanism? Are there any such changes that are planned to happen in the future?* | |
| | *Is the impact and degree of influence of children participation advertised?*<br>*If yes, how? What communication channels are being used?*<br>*If not, why not? Are there any plans to advertise it in the future?* | |
| | *Are children followed-up and informed about the impact and degree of children's influence?*<br>*If yes, how?*<br>*If not, why not?* | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | *Have there been any assessments/reviews on how children understand the effectiveness of this mechanism?*<br>*Were there any assessments/reviews about the impact of this mechanism on current and future levels of children participation (short- and long-term)?* | |
| | *Have there been any assessments / reviews how children are affected by this mechanism, e.g. introduction of child-friendly policies, greater opportunity for children to shape policy change?*<br>*If yes, were any groups of children particularly affected by this mechanism, e.g. vulnerable children, children from different socio-economic background, children with disabilities, migrant children, children living in institutions? How were these children affected?*<br>*Was there any geographical variation in how children were affected by this mechanism across the country/region?* | |
| **Mechanism's inspiration for future action** | *Is there any evidence how this mechanism could inspire future EU action?* | |
| | *Is there any evidence whether any future EU action could substantially shape the outlook of this mechanism in the future? If yes, how? What would be the added-value?* | |
| | *Is there any evidence how this mechanism could inspire future action at the national /regional/ local level?* | |
| **Full reference** | *Provide complete citation of all source, including web links* | |
| **Type(s) of sources** | *e.g. journal article, book, policy document, report, website, government document* | |
| **Database where source was found** | *e.g. google scholar, specific organisation website etc.* | |
| **Document saved in Task 1 folder?** | *Please ensure that you save all documents in the relevant folder by 'First Author Surname Year Title', e.g. Smith 2018 Impact of…* | |
| **Relevant interviewees** | *Did you identify any stakeholders that could be potentially interviewed in the later stage of this research study? Please note down their names in a separate tab - Potential interviewees* | |
| **Other relevant information** | *Is there anything else we should know about this mechanism?* | |

# Annex F Topic guide for interviews with adult stakeholders

**Study of Child Participation in the EU Political and Democratic Life**
As outlined in the Inception Report, the main objective of this assignment is to provide the European Commission, DG JUST with analysis on the participation of children across the European Union (EU) in the decision-making process on matters that affect them. The study results and ideas gathered during this project would, in turn, contribute to the future work on this area at EU level.

**Key concepts and definitions**

**Child participation** is the notion that, on all matters affecting them, **children have the right to express their views and have them taken seriously**, in accordance with their age and maturity.[1204] Both the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, including the right of the child to participate in political and democratic life, are central objectives of the EU and key features of its identity.

| Concept | Definition |
|---|---|
| **Child** | A 'child' for the purpose of this study is anyone under the age of 18, in line with the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child |
| **Child participation in the EU political and democratic life** | The **distinctive opportunities for children to be involved in the various stages of policy and legislation planning, design, implementation and evaluation.**<br><br>The study **will not address children's participation in other settings unrelated to public life** (e.g. judicial proceedings, school daily life or family-related contexts), **or voting in elections**. |
| **Mechanism** | **Opportunity for children to be involved and shape political and democratic decisions**.<br><br>The study will cover a broad range of **mechanisms**, such as consultations, polls, *ad hoc* meetings and structural consultation bodies, **that can facilitate as well as hinder opportunities for children to express views, provide feedback and contribute to future policy or legislative developments** (e.g. an establishment and functioning of a Comhairle na nÓg - child and youth councils in the 31 local authorities in Ireland, an establishment and functioning of a Dáil na nÓg – a national youth parliament in Ireland, a government consultation with young people in Ireland to inform the National Obesity Policy).<br><br>The **initiatives promoting active citizenship and engagement** in political and democratic life **should not be reported as a standalone mechanism**. For instance, any awareness raising campaign, initiatives or programme encouraging children participation in a national or local consultation should not be included as a separate mechanism but could be included as part of other mechanisms.<br><br>The study covers **mechanisms initiated from 2012 onwards**. |

This study is guided by three overarching research questions

1. What is the state of play in the EU of child participation in decision-making processes at local, national and European level?
2. What mechanisms of child participation exist at the international, EU, national and local level, and what are their main characteristics?
3. How could the well-functioning mechanisms and promising practice examples inspire future EU actions to support child participation at the EU, national and local level?

These questions served to develop a methodological framework for this study. Table 1 below (copied from the Inception Report) outlines how the specific sources of evidence / information gathered for this study are mapped out and contribute to answering the research questions. These overall research questions were used to inform formulation of interview questions.

**Table 21. Methodological approach: research questions and data sources**

| Research questions | Task 1 | Task 2 | | | Task 3 | | Task 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Review of policy, data and practices | Interviews with adult stakeholders | Focus groups with children | Case studies and promising practice examples | Workshops (internal and with DG JUST) | Child consultation | Analysis and synthesis, and reporting |
| State of play in the EU of child participation in decision-making processes at local, national and European level<br>• Level of participation, including vulnerable children<br>• Progress since 2012 (the Council of Europe recommendation, the need for additional action to comply with EU recommendations)<br>• Existence of policies or actions, and dedicated funding<br>Facilitators and barriers | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Existing mechanisms for child participation and their main characteristics<br>• Key features of mechanisms (types, content, how and why they function or do not function, how they are managed, how often, and at what phase of the policy process used)<br>• Definitions of well-functioning mechanisms<br>• Impact of mechanisms on the participating child population (who participates, how and why), how is the impact evaluated and communicated to children<br>• Input and degree of influence of the mechanisms for decision-making<br>• Contribution of the EU to promotion of child participation, and opportunities to contribute in the future | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Mechanisms for youth participation under the Youth Strategy and transferable lessons for child participation | | | | | | | |
| Future EU action to support child participation at the EU, national and local level<br>• The need for and the added-value of additional EU action<br>• The features of additional future action mechanisms<br>• Potential impact of an additional EU future action | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Children's perception and position regarding child participation<br>• The perception of children on existing opportunities, how they work and how they could be improved<br>• The main challenges and success factors for child participation | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ |

**Interview Research Questions - Topic Guide for National/local interviewees**

**Preparation (before an interview)**

Send a briefing email asking interviewees to reflect before the interview and to choose example(s) of children's participation process(es) (this can involve a number of one-off mechanisms, e.g. surveys, consultations, and structures, such as established fora, bodies), that they know well, which they think has been successful in terms of being inclusive, impactful and / or child-led. Tell them that during the interview they will be asked, as much as possible, to discuss that process(es) through from beginning to end.

**Introduction to study (3-5 minutes)**

- Introduce self and RAND Europe
- Purpose of the interview
    - European Commission Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST) has appointed RAND Europe to conduct analysis on the participation of children across the EU in the decision-making processes on matters that affect them. The study results gathered in this project are intended to contribute to the future work on this area at the EU level.
    - The aim of the interviews with a range of stakeholders at the international/EU, national and local levels is to gain more in-depth qualitative data on the specific opportunities and challenges, and how they are being/were resolved in relation to participation of children in political and democratic life.
- Permission to record: Explanation that we'll be making notes but recording means that we don't have to scribble everything down. Any questions?
- Voluntary. You don't have to take part and don't have to answer anything you don't want to – free to withdraw from study at any time.
- Confidentiality. The analysis will not be written up in such a way as to identify any individuals or organisations
- Clarify: Ask if they have any questions before starting the interview – this is a chance to clarify any questions on the Participant Information Sheet, Privacy notice and or Consent form.

    If respondent requires clarification:
    - RAND Europe is an independent not-for-profit research institute whose mission is to help improve policy and decision making through research and analysis
    - Definitions – as per explanations in the introduction to this document.

**Introduction to interviewee (3 minutes)**

1. **Role:** To start, could you please tell me a bit about your role/experience/background related to child participation? (*Prompt: how long have you worked in this role, what does your role involve)*
2. **Scope**: Could you please briefly describe the size and geographical scope of your organisation (*Prompts: EU/international institution, national, regional, local authority, public-governmental organisation, private, NGO, child-rights organisation, independent/academic expert, other?*)
3. **Organisational profile / type of organisation**: (*Prompt as relevant per interviewee profile*)
    - Do you have direct contact with children and young people (until the age of 18) How, where and when? (*Note to interviewer: please be attentive to the potential differences in the barriers and the purpose of participation when talking about children vs. youth*).

- Do you *work with* any specific organisations/stakeholders/actors/partners involved in child participation? If yes, who? In what capacity? (*Prompt: a day to day work with other organisation in which child participation is important but not the main focus of their work versus with groups such as Eurochild whose main focus is youth participation*)? What does this organisation/stakeholder/actor do to make child participation participatory? (*e.g. work directly with children, develop tools to facilitate participatory process, fund child participation projects*). Are there any types of organisations that are hard to reach or engage with? How do you engage with them?
- Does your organisation employ someone directly to oversee child (youth) participation? Or does someone within your organisation have a specific role to ensure good child (youth) participation standards?
- How does your organisation inform children and young people about their right to participate and what good child (youth) participation standards look like?
- Is the effectiveness of child (youth) participation strategies in your organisation(s) reviewed (*e.g. themselves or an external body*)? If yes, by who?
- (*for international/EU/national/local level policymakers and political representatives*) What do you do at the international/national/regional/local level regarding child participation? Do you see child participation as a priority? Do you consult with young people/organisations?

**Interviewees' experience/story of children's participation (c. 10 minutes depending on interviewee's example(s))**

4. **Definition and purpose of child participation**: How do you understand children's participation?
    - What are the key elements of child participation according to you? What is it and what it is not? Do you believe there are preconditions or competences required for participating in decision-making?
    - Why do you think it is important to involve children in decision-making processes in matters that affect them?
5. **Children's participatory process(es)**: Please tell me about a children's participation process(es), that you know well, which you think has been successful in terms of being inclusive, impactful and / or child-led.

    (*Prompts: follow interviewee's narrative and try to deepen understanding of the following aspects. Please also prompt on any other interview questions listed in the subsequent sections of this interview guide as and when relevant to avoid repetition later in the process*).

    - The context in which it occurred *(what opportunities for influence, commitments to participation and relationships already existed?)*
    - The planning for it *(what new measures did they implement for this particular process(es))*
    - How children and adults or other children connected with each other to get started on it *(What practices enabled the process to make connections within and between generations and existing structures?)*
    - How issues to focus on were chosen or prioritised *(Who set the agenda?)*
    - How those issues were investigated – to share understanding of the issue or of children's views about it *(E.g. What reflective, consultation, research, involvement, artistic or other mechanisms were used?)*
    - How action with those views was taken (*E.g. Sending of reports, direct presentation, lobbying through personal connections, linking with adult campaigns?)*
    - How that action was followed up with further action and feedback?
    - How learning from the process was evaluated and shared?

- How typical is your experience compared with other child participation processes at the international/EU/national/regional/local level?

**Key characteristics of child participation (3-5 minutes)**

*(only prompt on aspects not discussed yet during the interviewee's story/experience of child participation)*

6. **Overview:** How would you describe child participation overall at the international/national (including regional)/local level (as relevant for interviewee) in this context?
   - How does child participation in your context compare to the situation that you have just described at the EU/international/national level? (*Prompt: is it better/worse, more/less developed*)
7. **Current debates**: Are there any ongoing legal or policy debates related to child participation in your context / at the international/EU/national/local level? Are there any policy/legal/practice/other changes planned in the future that will bring change on how children are involved in decision-making at this level/in this context? (*Prompt: At what timescales, what would be the direction of change: positive vs. negative?*)

**Driving forces, facilitators and barriers to impactful and inclusive child participation (10-15 minutes)**

8. **Inclusion of children**:
   - Generally speaking, how are these mechanisms/practices designed to facilitate children participation? (Prompt: Why are they designed this way?).
   - What form do child participation mechanisms generally take in your local/national/international/EU context? To what extent are children involved in child participation? To what extent are children's views and preferences respected?
     (*Note to interviewer: see below forms/extents of child participation:*
     i. *initiation – the child starts up the process,*
     ii. *information: the child gets information,*
     iii. *consultation: the child can express his/her views/opinions,*
     iv. *engagement: the child is consulted and his/her views are taken into account,*
     v. *decision – the child takes the final decision (alone or with an adult)*

   - At what stage of the policy development do children mostly participate? (*Prompt: policy planning, policy implementation, policy evaluation*)
   - What is being done at this level/in this context to ensure equal participation of all children? Are all children involved in child participation mechanisms/practices/processes to the same extent? (*Prompt: children's background, age, socio-economic status, vulnerability/marginalised children, e.g. with a disability, migrant or ethnic background, living in alternative care (foster care or institutional care), children in juvenile justice institutions, Traveller children, Roma children, or other aspects potentially associated with negative effects of discrimination*).
   - What prevents or acts as a barrier to equal involvement of all children?
   - If not all children are equally involved/are not provided with opportunities to be involved and/or being heard why is that? How do children who are not so often involved included in your policy process? (*Prompt: are there any specific groups of children in a particularly vulnerable situation in regard to child participation? How are they? What are the key reasons why these children are not involved in child participation*?)

- Are the mechanisms/practices tailored to meet the (specific) needs of vulnerable children? How? To what extent? If not, why is that (*Prompt: tailoring not considered necessary, the mechanism/practice already allows full participation of all children*).

9. What is the ability of public authorities at this level/in this context to include children in decision making? Is it the same across the country/region or in all policy areas? To what extent is the input from children's participation used to its full potential by public authorities? (*Prompt: are there visible results from children's consultations in policymaking*)?
10. **Strengths**: What do you think works well in regard to child participation at this level/in this context?
    - What are the key features of well-functioning mechanisms/practices? (*Prompts: types, content, how and why they function or do not function, how they are managed, how often, how they facilitate participation, and at what phase of the policy process used*).
11. **Drivers**:
    - What are the driving forces/facilitators for these well-functioning mechanisms/initiatives? Are there any important contextual factors to consider? Are there any national/regional variations that are important to consider? (*Prompt: legal/policy changes introduced at the international/EU/national/local level, available funding, contextual factors: political, societal, economic, regional, national; specific organisations/bodies/individuals (who are they/their position/role/level of influence*)?
12. **Good/promising practice**:
    (*Note to interviewer: This question can be omitted if an interviewee provides his/her own example/story at the beginning of an interview*)
    - Are there any particular good/promising practices/mechanisms fostering meaningful children's participation to signal? (*Prompt: what makes these practices/mechanisms good/promising practices?*)
    - How does this practice/mechanism facilitate child participation? (*Prompt: provide a summary of key characteristics of mechanisms/practices identified during the mapping exercise to allow interviewee to choose/select/delineate between these mechanisms/practices and provide their judgement on the effectiveness/quality/relevance/usefulness/other features of these mechanisms*)
13. **Evaluation**: Are the mechanisms/practices at this level/in this context assessed/evaluated? What are the quality/effectiveness criteria for assessing whether the mechanism works well/facilitates/hinders children participation? If the mechanisms/practices are not assessed/evaluated/monitoring data not collected, why is that? (*Prompt: Who collects this information? How is this information used to improve the functioning of a mechanism/practice? Have there been any assessments/reviews on how children understand the effectiveness of this mechanism? Where there any changes implemented as a result of the evaluation/assessment data?*)
14. **Opportunities for improvement**: Are there aspects of child participation at this level/in this context that could be improved?
    - What is the main challenge/problem? (*Prompt: legal, policy, financial, societal attitudes and interests, other aspects that can act as a barrier/can lead to a failure*)?
    - What actions are currently undertaken to address these challenge(s)/problems? Are there any indications that these challenges/problems will be overcome in the future? If no improvement actions have been undertaken, why is that?

**Impact and consequences of mechanisms and practices in child participation (7-10 minutes)**

15. **Present impact on children/society/communities/country/EU**:
    - What is the main impact of child participation mechanisms on the lives of children/society/community at your policy level now?
    - What would be the impact(s) of improved facilitation of child participation in the short-term and long-term future? Are there any significant variations in the impact of these mechanisms/practices across the EU/nationally/locally (*ask as relevant*)? Is this variation geographic, socioeconomic, per policy area, or some other type? (*Prompt: Why? Why not*)
16. **Impact on children's participation levels**: What is the impact of these mechanisms on current and/or future levels of children participation (short- and long-term)?
    - Are there any groups of children that are particularly affected by the impact(s) of these mechanisms? (*Prompt: how are children affected, how many children, what profile of children / which groups of children, geographical variation in how children are affected*).
    - Are you considering the implementation of more child participation mechanisms in the future? Do you feel that alterations should be made to the mechanism(s) in the future? (*Prompt: would the situation in the future be different from current situation, and how*)?
17. **Impact on children's degree of influence**: Do these mechanisms impact on/change the degree of influence of children on decision-making?
    - Have there been any policy changes that have resulted from children participation in these mechanisms? (*Prompt: type of changes, e.g. introduction of child-friendly policies; greater opportunity for children to shape policy change; how were these changes evaluated, e.g. formal feedback, research, anecdotal evidence; were children involved in gathering the feedback or evaluating impact; how did policy changes materialised*).

18. **Impact of COVID-19 on children's participation:**
    - How has child participation been affected by the COVID-19 outbreak locally/nationally/internationally/in the EU?
    - Are there ways in which child participation can (or could) still be enabled during the lockdown? *If yes, are those ways being acted on? If not, why not?*
    - What do children/young people think about the impact of COVID-19 on their lives?
    - What lessons can be carried forward from the COVID-19 crisis to enable child participation more effectively in the future?

**Future EU action (5-7 minutes)**

19. **Relevance of EU**:
    - Do you think it is important that the EU should take action on the issue of child participation? Why? Are you aware of any examples of EU action that have been undertaken already? (*Note to interviewer: if asked by interviewee, please provide examples of past/current EU actions from the mapping spreadsheet of international/EU level. A few examples include: European Youth Week; European Youth Parliament; European Youth Forum; Poll on the 'Europe Kids Want'*).
    - Are there any additional actions at the EU institutional level that could/should be undertaken on the issue of child participation? If yes, what actions? If not, why not? Are there any actions that should be avoided?
20. **Need for EU action:**
    - In your view, what would be the added-value of EU-level action for child participation compared to the existing legal and policy frameworks?

21. What would be the potential impact of possible future action at the EU level on future mechanisms/practices related to child participation?
22. **Consequences of EU inaction**: What do you think will happen if the EU will not do anything?
23. **EU funding possibilities**:
    - How are (if at all) EU institutions contributing to promoting child participation at the national and local level, through EU funding programmes? (*prompt as relevant per interviewee type*)
    - How could the EU make people/organisations more aware of the work it is undertaking at a local, national and international level on child participation?
    - Have you been using any EU funding to introduce child participation mechanisms/practices in your country/locality? (*Prompt: what is your experience, what are the main advantages, what are the challenges to use the EU funding and how these challenges could be addressed/overcome*).
    - Do you have an understanding about the possibilities to fund child participation mechanisms under the next Multi-annual Financial Framework? Do you have suggestions how these processes could be improved in the future?
24. **Youth Strategy**: (*Note to interviewer: ask interviewee if s/he is familiar with the Youth Strategy. If yes, ask the following questions*) Are there any lessons from the Youth Strategy 2019-2027 framework contributing to promotion of youth participation that could be transferable to children participation?

**Final comments (3 min)**

25. Is there *anything you would like to add, or feel that I should have asked about but didn't*?
26. **Next steps**: Interviewer to explain next steps of the study (continue with interviews, drafting case studies on promising examples, consultations with children, analysis and reporting), including publication of the final report, and ask for consent to send a copy of final report by email.

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND PARTICIPATION**

# Annex G Interviewee participant information sheet and consent form

## Information sheet for participants asked to take part in interviews

## *Study on Child Participation in the EU Political and Democratic Life*

### Information about the research

The European Commission Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers has contracted RAND Europe, in collaboration with Eurochild, to conduct this study and explore child participation in the EU political and democratic life across European member states.

RAND Europe is an independent not-for-profit research institute whose mission is to help improve policy and decision making through research and analysis.

Eurochild is a network of organisations working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children.

**Child participation** is the notion that, on all matters affecting them, **children have the right to express their views and have them taken seriously**, in accordance with their age and maturity.[1205] Both the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, including the right of the child to participate in political and democratic life, are central objectives of the European Union (EU) and key features of its identity.

It is within this context that the main objective of this assignment is to provide the European Commission, DG JUST with analysis on the participation of children across the EU in the decision-making process on matters that affect them. The results and ideas gathered during this project would, in turn, contribute to the future work on this area at EU level.

The study findings build on data collected via desk research, interviews and case studies approaches. All data would be systematically analysed and summarised in the comparative reports and other publications.

### What will taking part in the interview involve?

We would like to invite you to take part in an interview with a member of the study team.

The interview would be conducted by telephone. The interview would be arranged at a time that is convenient for you, and would last approximately between 45 minutes and one hour. We can send you information about the topics we would like to cover in the interview in advance, if you prefer.

The interview will include questions on international, EU-level actions, and national, including regional and local child participation mechanisms in your member state, as relevant to your expertise. This may include questions around what child participation mechanisms exist, which have shown to work well or what could potentially be improved.

There are no right or wrong answers to questions asked during the interview. We are interested in hearing about your experiences and views, and your perceptions and understandings. You don’t have to answer any questions you don’t want to, and you can stop and take a break at any point. You can also change your mind about taking part at any point during the interview. Everything you say will be anonymized and treated confidentially.

With your permission, we will make a digital audio-recording of the interview. Recordings will be kept securely, not accessible to anyone outside the study team, will be used exclusively for notetaking and transcription purposes, and will be deleted at the end of the study.

**How will the information from the interview be used?**

The information that you provide will be used only for the purposes of this study. Findings from the interviews will be included in interim and final reports, which will be published and made available to the public. The results of the study may also be published in academic journals and other short summaries available to the public.

All these reports will bring together the data for all interviewees and it will not be possible to identify any individuals or organisations. Findings (including any direct quotes) used in the reports will be anonymised. Statements from this interview may be used, referring to aggregated categories such as country, but not your name or any other personal information that could identify you or your organisation, in any publications from this study.

**What about the security of my personal information?**

Strict arrangements will be in place to make sure that information collected from you in the interview is stored securely. The research team will follow data protection guidelines. These guidelines ensure the safety and security of your information.

All data will be kept in confidence. The material from this interview discussion will be transcribed, translated (if needed) and stored in an anonymised way. All transcripts and audio files will be password protected and access will be limited to study team members. After the study is completed all recordings will be deleted, along with any information that can be used to identify you, such as your name. The study team will only keep written notes of the interview.

**Do I have to take part?**

No. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or refuse to answer specific questions at any time without penalty. Your contribution will provide valuable information that will inform the 'Study on child participation in the EU political and democratic life' and we do hope that you decide to take part. However, participation is voluntary, and you can change your mind about participating in the study at any stage.

**What happens next?**

Before participating in the interview we will ask you to confirm your voluntary agreement to take part. At the beginning of the interview, we will ask you to verbally confirm that you agree to participate in the study. Your agreement confirms that you have received and understood the participant information sheet (this document) and have had time to decide if you want to take part. You can withdraw from participation at any time without giving a reason and there will not be a penalty of any kind.

**What are my rights?**

If you agree to take part in the interview but change your mind at a later stage, you have the right to ask for the information collected from you in the interview to be deleted and not used in the research. You can ask for your data to be deleted by emailing child-participation@randeurope.org

**Do you have any questions?**

If you have any questions about the interview or the 'Study on Child Participation in the EU political and democratic life', please get in touch with a member of the study team using the following email address: child-participation@randeurope.org

**Consent form for participants asked to take part in interviews**

***Study on Child Participation in the EU Political and Democratic Life***

| | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| 1. I confirm that I have received and understood the participant information sheet and have had time to decide whether or not I want to participate in the study conducted by RAND Europe and Eurochild for the European Commission. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2. I understand that taking part is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without there being a penalty of any kind. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3. I consent to taking part in this interview. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4. I consent to this interview being digitally audio-recorded. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5. I consent that the digital audio-recording and any notes takes of the interview can be used by RAND Europe for this study. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6. I consent to the use of quotes from what I have said in the interview in published reports, in a format in which it will not be possible to identify me. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 7. I consent to RAND Europe holding the recordings and anonymised transcripts, for the duration of the study and thereafter these being securely erased. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 8. I consent to RAND Europe holding the anonymised transcripts indefinitely and for these data to be further processed in certain areas of further scientific research. | ☐ | ☐ |

| **Name of the person giving the consent** | **Date** | **Signature** (if in person) |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

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**If consent is taken over the telephone**

| | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| I confirm that I have explained the nature of the study to the above named participant and have given adequate time to answer any questions concerning it. | ☐ | ☐ |

| **Name of interviewer taking the consent** | **Date** | **Signature** |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

If you change your mind about any of your choices above, please contact child-participation@randeurope.org or RAND Europe's Data Protection Officer at redpo@rand.org quoting "Study on child participation in the EU political and democratic life".

# Annex H Eurochild guidelines for consultations with children

***Guidelines for Consultations with children***
***DG JUST study on child participation in political and democratic life***

The promotion and protection of the rights of the child, including the right of the child to participate in political and democratic life, are central objectives of the European Union (EU) and key features of its identity. It is within this context that the European Commission (DG JUST) has set out to make an analysis of the participation of children across the EU in decision-making processes on matters that affect them. The study results and ideas gathered during this project will contribute to future work on this area at EU level.

For the context of this study, child participation is defined as the "notion that, on all matters affecting them, children have the right to express their views and have them taken seriously, in accordance with their age and maturity." Child participation in the EU political and democratic life meanwhile refers to the distinctive opportunities for children to be involved in the various stages of policy and legislation planning and design, implementation and evaluation. The study will therefore look at a broad range of mechanisms, such as consultations, polls, *ad hoc* meetings and structural consultation bodies, that can facilitate as well as hinder opportunities for children to express views, provide feedback and contribute to future policy or legislative developments.

This document offers guidelines on the selection and successful implementation of child focus groups, to be used by the Eurochild member organisations leading on coordinating focus groups at the national level.

This document also provides guidance on the role of the facilitator and rapporteur, which each focus group is required to have.

**Consulting children on child participation**

A key aspect of the qualitative side of this study consists of consultations with children through focus groups organized in 10 EU Member States: Spain, Germany, Portugal, Slovenia, France, Ireland, Bulgaria, Malta, Finland and the Netherlands. These focus groups are coordinated by the Eurochild secretariat in close collaboration with Eurochild members through whom the focus groups are to be carried out.

The objective of the focus groups is to collect the perspectives of children, and to capture their perceptions, understanding and positions on child participation mechanisms. Through this, the study will gain a qualitative input from children about the state of play of children's right to participate in public decision-making. The findings from the consultations with children will contribute to final reports prepared by the study team.

**What are focus group consultations with children?**

A focus group is a discussion involving a small number of participants, led by a moderator or facilitator, which seeks to gain an insight into the participants' experiences, attitudes and perceptions. Focus groups have long been viewed as having certain advantages and are particularly suitable for use with children. For example, they create a safe peer environment and replicate the type of small group settings that children are familiar with from their classroom work. Focus groups enable children to discuss and reflect in more depth on questions that are pertinent to this study. Children may also be (more) encouraged to give their opinions when they hear others do so and their memory may be stimulated by the contributions of other participants.[1206]

### Child safeguarding

Eurochild aims to empower children by making them aware about their rights and creating a safe environment in which they can exercise their rights. As such, Eurochild has a comprehensive **child protection policy,** which will guide all child participation in the study. All focus groups must be organized and run in full adherence of this policy (as well as in accordance with the member organisation's policy) so as to ensure the safety of all participants and the adults supporting. An organisation's own child protection policy should be leading when this is adhering to standards set in Eurochild's child protection policy. Focus groups and the adults supporting them should also respect Eurochild's code of conduct (*Annex H.3)* at all times. Finally, each child (and their parent/guardian) participating in the focus group, will be asked to **sign consent forms** (*see Annex H.1*) based on informed consent. This means that they should understand the task as well as that their participation in the focus groups will be in line with the '9 principles of child participation':

- **Transparent and informative** - Children need to be given as much information as possible, so that, should they get involved, they know what they are getting into.
- **Voluntary** - Children should always have the right not to participate and to opt out.
- **Respectful** - All participants, adult and children, respect each other and other people's ideas.
- **Relevant** - Children have to be involved in decisions that are relevant to them.
- **Child friendly** - Everything should be designed in a way that allows children to contribute.
- **Inclusive** - All children are treated equally and are given a chance to participate.
- **Supported by training** - Training should be offered by adult staff.
- **Safe** - Children are not exposed to situations that make them vulnerable.
- **Accountable** - Adults keep their promises, and children can let them know if something is not working.

### Timing of children consultations

As timing is fundamental to organising focus groups, we encourage organisations to begin the selection process for your groups as soon as possible. Consultations should be completed by end of September 2020 or at a time when physical child focus groups can be organized in 2020. Organisations are asked to keep Eurochild staff informed about the planning and timing of the child focus group meeting(s).

### Characteristics of children to be consulted

A number of factors need to be considered when planning the composition of focus groups with children. These include group size, children's age and gender, language of discussion, etc.

Eurochild member organisations will be responsible for selecting children to participate in the children's focus group meetings, taking into account the guiding principles presented below.

### Selection process for children

The selection of children for focus groups will be facilitated by national Eurochild member organisations with guidance and support from Eurochild. All children should be selected through a fair and transparent process and, prior to their selection, should be informed of what will be expected including the time requirements involved. It should also be made clear from the outset that participation is voluntary and guided by the 9 principles of child

participation. Finally, in order to ensure specific groups of disadvantaged children are involved and represented in the focus groups, efforts should be made to provide any additional support/ implement any specific measures to ensure all children are able to participate.

**The specific criteria for the selection of focus groups is as follows:**

**Group size:** Focus groups should be made up of between 15 – 30 participants. In some cases, in order to reflect a diverse range of backgrounds, multiple focus groups with a smaller number of participants may be organized.

**Age:** All focus group participants should be aged under 18 and need a diverse age range. Where much younger children are involved (i.e. below aged ten) separate focus groups should be arranged and a facilitator with the requisite skills to work with younger children should have responsibility for running the focus group.

**Gender balance:** The focus group should have, as much as possible, an equal gender balance.

**Internal geographical representation:** Where possible, focus groups should include children from a range of geographical regions in the country where the focus groups are taking place (e.g. rural areas, areas with a second language, from ethnic minorities, etc.).

**Background**: Focus groups should involve children from diverse backgrounds and vulnerable children or children from disadvantaged backgrounds should be represented. This may include (but is not limited to):

- Children with experience of living in care
- Children from a migrant background, including asylum seeking/ refugee children
- Children with experience of living in poverty
- Young carers
- Children with disabilities
- Children with contact with the juvenile justice systems Children from minority ethnic backgrounds, including Roma children

**Language:** Language should not create a barrier for children to participate in the focus groups. Where possible, focus groups should be carried out in the national language of the country where the focus group is taking place. In countries with multiple official languages (e.g. Spain) efforts should be made to both include and support children with a variety of linguistic backgrounds.

**Experience:** Children participating in other bodies, such as an organisation, school, and community, are encouraged to participate, so that they can represent the voice of other children and young people that they are connected with - including disadvantaged groups of children. Furthermore, where possible, children with experience in children's participation in political and democratic decision making should be among those selected. We would like to also note that existing groups of children, such as children's councils and children's advisory groups, can be invited to take part in the consultations.

**Context:** We recognize that depending on the national context in which the focus groups are taking place, focus groups may take different forms. Having said this, we ask that the aforementioned criteria are kept to as much as possible. Please contact the Eurochild secretariat if you have any questions regarding the formation of the focus groups (see contact details below).

**Child-friendly information**

All information and data provided to children should be presented in a clear and child-friendly way, whenever possible using visuals, infographics, bullet points, and videos. Eurochild will provide child-friendly information on the EU decision-making processes.

**Composition of focus groups**

Sufficient time should be dedicated to run the focus group consultations. We suggest that each of the focus groups should ideally take around half a day to one day.

**Obtaining Participants' Consent**

Prior to conducting consultations, children and their parents/guardians must be informed about the child protection policy of the organisation carrying out the focus groups and be asked to complete consent forms.

All Eurochild member organisations are also required to adhere to Eurochild's child protection policies. Copies of these policies can also be shared with participations. An example can be found in Eurochild's **child protection policy** and template consent forms can be found in *Annex H.1*.

**Informed consent through the completion of media consent forms from all focus group participants is obligatory and** must be sought before taking any photos, videos, or requesting personal information about children's lives that may then be used in the study (*see template form in Annex H.1).*

The organisations working with the children should lead on asking for consent forms to be signed of children and families, as they may feel more comfortable to refuse consent when asked by someone they already know and trust.

Example consent forms can be found in the Appendix of Eurochild's **child protection policy** and *Annex H.2.* That said, **the following information outlines certain elements that must be included in all focus group consent forms.**

- **How information and image/film will be used:** Informed consent means that participating children and their parents/guardians are receiving how information or image/film will be used in writing and that they are under no obligation to agree to its use.
- **Topics that will be covered:** It also includes explaining what subjects are likely to be covered during the focus groups. At the beginning of each focus group the facilitator should revisit everyone's understanding of consent and ensure they understand that they can withdraw consent to participate in any aspects of the focus group, at any time.
- **A privacy statement:** In line with GDPR rules, all **consent forms should contain a privacy statement** explaining how the data of the participant will be processed. The following can be adapted for your use:

  *Eurochild respects the privacy of the people involved in our activities and ensures the confidentiality of the personal data participants provide to Eurochild. We believe it is important to be transparent about how we collect and process data provided by participants.*

  *Please make sure you have read and understood the event registration privacy statement https://www.eurochild.org/fileadmin/public/02_Events/2018/Eurochild_event_registration_statement.pdf which describes the types of information we may collect and process, the purposes for which we use the information, the circumstances in which we may share the information and the steps that we take to safeguard the information to protect your privacy.*

- **Permission to share data:** Furthermore, for the purposes of this study, consent forms must also ask participants and their parent/ guardians to consent to having their **data shared with RAND and the European Commission**.

Consent is **also required from the child's parent/carer or guardian**, who must countersign the consent form.

In some cases **a researcher from our study partner RAND may visit certain focus groups**. Special care must be taken in these cases, therefore the following points should be taken into consideration:

- Children, parents and guardians must be informed about the researcher's presence and consent for this must obtained. **Therefore, a line should be included in all consent forms asking for consent in the event of an external researcher attending focus groups sessions.**
- Researchers must be fully briefed about Eurochild's child protection policy before they meet the children. They must sign their commitment to adhere to this policy. Eurochild and Rand take responsibility for ensuring this.
- They should not be allowed to spend time with or have access to children without supervision. They have to be accompanied by facilitating staff at all times.

- In order to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the children, children and their parents/carers will be informed that the purpose of the child focus groups are only to inform the study carried out by Eurochild and RAND Europe for the European Commission. The information resulting from the child focus group consultations will only be limited to be used for the purpose of the study.

**PLEASE NOTE**: Consent can be withdrawn at any point throughout the focus group process. Obtaining prior written consent, does not mean that there is no requirement to obtain verbal consent at the time of taking photographs/video/asking for information.

**Model consent forms can be found in *Annex H.1* and be adapted for your use.**

**A model project information form can be found in *Annex H.2.***

**The role of the focus group facilitator**

The success of the focus group discussions and the quality of the data obtained will be strongly influenced by the skills of the facilitator and her/his ability to stimulate and maintain discussion among the participants.

**The facilitator has three major functions:**
1. to make the group feel comfortable and at ease;
2. to keep the group discussion focused on the topic of interest and to ensure that all children have the opportunity to contribute; and
3. to enhance the clarity of the children's contributions by seeking clarification when responses seem ambiguous or when there are contributions from the same child that appear contradictory.

Each focus group should be run by a professional facilitator(s) who is an experienced professional working with children. The preparation for the focus group requires the facilitator to:
☐ Get acquainted with the questions aimed at guiding discussions.
☐ Prepare the focus group consultation(s): develop a programme, ensuring it includes sufficient
breaks and energizers and safeguarding and that the key questions get discussed. This can be done in various ways: group discussions, world café discussions, theatre and role plays, creative work, etc.[1207]
☐ Carrying out the focus group meeting (*estimate time/length - 1 day, depending on the age and*

*backgrounds of the group*).

Each focus group facilitator(s) will also hold responsibility in cooperation with the **reporter** for collecting and summarising the consultation outputs in a written format (see section on reporting guidelines).

### Agenda for consultations with children

Prior to each of the consultations with children, the facilitator should develop an agenda for running the workshop. Below, we summarise the outline of a proposed agenda including research questions that should be addressed during each of the children's focus group consultations. These agendas can be adapted to suit the needs and contexts of the focus groups. However, **the research questions should form the basis of all focus group sessions.**

**Questions for consultations with children**

**Introductory Session**

*The objective of the introductory session is to get to know each other, explain what the objectives of the consultation are; talk about what the rights of the child are and explain these when needed, and opinions on child participation in general.*

**Introductory Questions**

- Can you think about ways how children can be involved in decision-making? *(Info for the facilitator – these could be polls, consultations like we have today,…).*
- Can you think of what kind of meetings children can participate in with decision-makers? *(Info for the facilitator: children can make a presentation, participate in digital meetings, it can be regular meetings or ad hoc, etc.)*

**Ice-breaking questions**

**Children's knowledge of children's rights and especially the child's right to be heard on decisions concerning them (according to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child).**

- Are you aware of children's rights? Can you name what rights children have?

***When needed explain what children's rights are[1208].***

**Children's opinions and views on child participation in general.**

- What does children's participation in decision making mean to you?

**The current situation in the EU of child participation in decision-making processes at local, national and European level.**

*This session aims to get an idea about the current mechanisms and structures that exist in which children can participate and whether children believe they can have a real influence on the decisions taking in their villages, cities, countries and the EU. It also aims to find out whether children believe they are well supported to enable them to participate, regardless of their background or ability. Have they received any training*

*that enables them to participate and makes them feel more confident to share their opinions?*

**Mechanisms/structures of child participation that exist at the international, EU, national and local level, including their main features and characteristics.**

- Can you express ideas to decision makers? How can you do it – through which process/ activities/action/institution? Discuss this for your village/town/region and country.
- Do the politicians where you live include solving the problems of children into their policy/work? Can you explain/ give any examples?
- Is there any kind of support for all children, without any discrimination, to participate in decision making where you live (village/town/region/country)? Can you describe what kind of support that is, for example did you receive training on how you can participate in decision-making?
- Do you believe that your country or your community has developed the right structures, so that children's opinions can be taken into consideration, including of children from different backgrounds? Do these allow you to meet regularly (and if so how often?) and do you believe that these structures help you to have a real influence on decisions? Please explain.

*Explain what the European Union is (documents in child-friendly languages will be provided by Eurochild)*

- Do you know which institutions in Europe are taking care of children's rights?
- Do you believe that the EU listens to children, and if so how can you explain how?

**Children's experiences and knowledge of child participation actions in their own country.**

*This session aims to find out what experiences children have in participatory structures within their country, listening to examples where they felt they are listened to and challenges they are facing to have their opinions heard. Are they able to indicate if their opinions have made a difference in the decisions taken? It also aims to find out what the hopes of children are for improving structures to participate in.*

- Do you know organisations that represent children's voices in your village/town/region? In your country?
- How can you get in contact with authorities/decision makers in your village/town/region/country? Are there organizations that can help?

**Whether children feel that they are listened to by decision makers & politicians in their towns/countries/ in the EU.**

- Do you think your voice is heard by the people who make decisions where you live/ nationally and at European level? If yes, what has been the impact of the decisions taken?

**The main challenges to child participation in their countries.**

- What are some of the main challenges children face in your country in terms of having their views heard by decision makers?
- Can you give some examples of when children's voices are heard in decision making in your community? How do you feel when your voice is heard / not

heard? *For those not heard*: Do you give up or find another way to express your opinion (and what is it)?

**Children's hopes for the future in terms of improving child participation (in decision making) practices.**

- Describe your ideal village/town/region/ country in terms of relations between adults & children.
- What would be your ideal way to participate in decision making?
- (If they don't already) would you like it if someone helped guide you through this process, including informing you about how your opinion influenced the decision taken? Who do you think is better suited to guiding someone through a child participation process, an adult, or older/ other more experienced children?

**Anything that children feel they should have more of a voice in/ be listened to including how this could be done.**

- How would you encourage more children to participate?
- What can adults do to help make sure more children can participate in decisions in their towns/ countries?
- Is there anything in particular that you don't feel listened to about but would like to be? How could this be done?

**Examples of child participation that could inspire future EU activities to support child participation.**

*This session aims for children to share successful examples of where they have participated in decision-making in their village/town/region or country and could influence the decisions taken. Successful examples can inspire future EU activities to support child participation.*

- Have you or your friends ever succeeded in influencing decision-making in your village/town/ region/ country? In what way? Did this happen through a formal process or not?
- Can you share some examples on how children are participating in decisions in your village/town/region/country?

**How has child participation been affected by the COVID-19 crisis?**
*This session has been added given the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the possibility for children to participate in decision-making at local, regional and national level.*

- Can you explain how the COVID-19 crisis has affected children's ability to participate in decision-making?
- Do you know of ways how children still participate(d) in decisions in their village/town/regions or countries during the lockdown?
- Can you think of lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis and how we can make sure children can participate more effectively in decisions in the future?

**Evaluate the focus group consultations (see below)**

### Evaluation of the consultation process

As indicated in the agenda above, the final step of the focus group is dedicated to the evaluation of the consultation process itself. This could be done by a quick exercise, e.g. using a scale of 1-5 and marking these numbers on a piece of paper. In addition, children

should be asked specific questions on the length of the consultation, if it was useful, if it was clear, how they found the facilitator, if they learned something new, etc. Children could also be asked to give an overall mark for the consultation process and provide suggestions for future consultations that would be 'even better if…'.

Children could also indicate their marks by walking or running to the numbers in the room: 1 means that they found it was not very bad and 5 marks that it was very good. The facilitator could also use another evaluation method which they consider would be suitable for the groups of children consulted.

**The role of the Eurochild Children's Council**

Eurochild's Children's Council are involved in the study in an advisory capacity. They are being consulted on different stages of the study including on the accessibility of various documents and the relevance of different data tools. They have also been collaborating in developing the research questions above. The Children's Council members will be consulted on the final findings which will then feed into the report.

**Reporting consultations findings**

The findings from the focus groups consultations should be reported in writing by a reporter. We envisage that there will be at least one rapporteur appointed for each of the focus groups. The main role of the rapporteur(s) should be to take notes, without intervening with the group discussions. The notes should then be drafted and shared with the facilitator. The final reporting on the focus groups findings is to be completed by the rapporteur in consultation with the facilitator.

We envisage that focus group discussions would be conducted in the national languages of the countries where the meetings would take place. Therefore, the notes from the focus groups would be first prepared in the languages of discussions, and later translated into English. The responsibility for organizing the translation lies with the organization conducting the child focus group.

**Preliminary structure and content of the focus group reports**

Background information on the children who participated: number of children, ages, gender, background (from a large city, rural area, part of the country), other specific background information such as children with experience of living in care, children from a migrant background, including asylum seeking/ refugee children, children with experience of living in poverty, young carers, children with disabilities, children with contact with the juvenile justice systems, children from minority ethnic backgrounds, including Roma children

Process of the consultations: this needs to include information on the environment where the consultations took place, the programme of the consultation (activities), the length of the consultation, the number of adults (facilitators, other adults) present, etc.

Outcomes of the consultations per question: describe what the children said with regard to each question, but also note down physical observations which were found striking, e.g. if children spoke about an issue with enthusiasm, with anger or with sadness. Other observations could include if the children found it very difficult to speak about certain questions. Add if views expressed were generally shared by all/most/some participating children and if there were cases where views were divided. Where possible also include if there are characteristics of children who held similar or different views (e.g. younger children felt more or less optimistic; children with a migrant background had different views; children with a disability had other views which were…)
Next to the descriptive part, the rapporteur will draw conclusions on what he/she observed as the key outcomes of the consultation process. The rapporteur consults with the facilitator before concluding the report.
Evaluation: describe the evaluation method used and the outcomes of the evaluation of the focus group consultations.

### Communicating with Eurochild

The Eurochild secretariat should be kept updated throughout the organization and implementation of focus groups. If you are in any doubt as to whether your selected focus group meets the above criteria, please contact us prior to the focus group meeting, so that we can discuss.

### Contact

For any questions related to the organization or implementation of focus groups, please contact Mieke.Schuurman@Eurochild.org or Alice.Hagger-Vaughan@Eurochild.org

# Annex H.1 Eurochild template consent forms

At Eurochild we want to follow all rules about privacy for everyone who gives us their personal information. We therefore have a an **Event Registration Privacy Statement** to be found at https://www.eurochild.org/fileadmin/public/02_Events/2018/Eurochild_event_registration_statement.pdf There we go through what kind of information we may collect and process, how we use the information, how we might share the information and how we make sure to protect your privacy.

The study that this event is informing is being undertaken in collaboration with RAND Europe for the European Commission. We would therefor also like your consent to share any data collected with both RAND Europe and the European Commission.

We recommend that you look at the Eurochild Event Registration Privacy Statement together with your parent/legal guardian, or someone from the organisation you are coming with, to make sure you understand what it says.

Do you consent to Eurochild collecting and processing your personal data as described above? Please ask your parent/guardian to explain this if it is not clear to you what it means.

*Please tick Yes or No:*

⑥ Yes

⑥ No

**PERSONAL INFORMATION AND INFORMATION IN CASES OF EMERGENCY**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Your name and age** | |
| **Your address** | |
| **Your phone number** | |
| **Your mobile number (if available):** | |
| **Your email address:** | |

- **Are you happy to take part in ……. (e.g. meeting/event/etc)?**

*Please tick Yes or No:*

⑥ Yes

⑥ No

**WE WANT TO MAKE SURE YOU FEEL WELCOME AND COMFORTABLE TO TAKE PART**

| | |
|---|---|
| Do you have any allergies we should know about?<br><br>Yes ⑥ No ⑥ | Details: |

| | |
|---|---|
| Do you have any additional support needs you'd like us to know about (physical or learning disability, mental health issues, low confidence, difficulties with communication, things you find it hard to talk about)?<br><br>Yes ⑥ No ⑥ | Details: |
| Is there anything extra we can do to make sure that you can come along and participate fully?<br><br>Yes ⑥ No ⑥ | Details: |
| Are you taking any medication we should know about?<br><br>Yes ⑥ No ⑥ | Details: |
| Do you have any dietary requirements?<br><br>Yes ⑥ No ⑥ | Details: |
| **If you practice a religion, please tell us if there's anything connected to taking part in the event that we should know about** | **Details:** |

**IN THE EVENT OF EMERGENCY**

**Contact persons in case of EMERGENCY. It is very important you fill in this section fully**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name 1:**<br><br>Relationship to you:<br><br>Phone number:<br><br>Mobile: | **Name 2:**<br><br>Relationship to you:<br><br>Phone number:<br><br>Mobile: |
| In the event of emergency, do you agree that you can receive hospital or dental treatment, including an anaesthetic?<br><br>Yes ⑥ No ⑥ | Details: |

| **My Consent** | **Parent/Legal Guardian Consent (if under 18)** |
|---|---|
| Signature:<br><br>Location (where you live):<br><br>Today's date: | This child/young person under 18:<br>• is allowed to participate in ……..(*event*)<br>• is allowed to take part in media activities at …….. (*event)*<br>• has been informed about the …….. (*event*) goals, the voluntary nature of participation and anonymity in an age-appropriate way<br>• has been informed that they can refuse to participate at any time with no consequences<br>• has been informed that the information they provide will also be shared with RAND Europe and the European Commission for the purposes of this research study<br>• is allowed to receive appropriate medical attention from a registered practitioner if at any time my child requires urgent medical attention,<br><br>Full name:<br><br>Relationship to child/young person:<br><br>Location:<br><br>Date: |

## MEDIA CONSENT FORM

**WE WANT TO MAKE SURE YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE TO TAKE PART IN MEDIA ACTIVITIES**

Eurochild and its Communications Team are actively promoting …… (*e.g. activities/events/etc*). **We publish photos and or statements of participants.** In this way we inform the public and decision makers about ……. (*event*)

If you or your parents/carers are interested in following the Eurochild's work via social media, you can do this by following the Eurochild Facebook page and/or twitter feed or the Eurochild website: www.eurochild.org

- Is it okay for you participate in visual documentation during the Eurochild…… (*event*)?
  If you say it is ok, we might share photos, film, audio, writing or art on our website or social media; in our reports or leaflets; at our events; and/or in the promotion work we do to people around Europe who help to support children and adolescents.

*Please tick Yes or No:*

⑥ Yes

⑥ No

- Is it ok for us to capture your voice in film, photos, audio, writing and/or art and to share this content in the ways listed above?

*Please tick Yes or No:*

⑥ Yes

⑥ No

- Is it ok if we tell people your first name when we share this content? (*you can still take part in ……. (event) even if you don't want us to tell people your name).*

*Please tick Yes or No:*

⑥ Yes you can share my first name

⑥ No you cannot share my first name

- Is it ok for you to talk to the press during ……. (*event*) (including photos, television/video/camera coverage)? *All media interviews will be conducted in consultation with and in the presence of your accompanying adult and a Eurochild staff member. You have a right not to respond to any questions that you do not want to answer.*

*Please tick Yes or No:*

⑥ Yes

⑥ No

# Annex H.2 Eurochild template project information sheet

**Information on the study and the purpose of the data collection**

The European Commission (Directorate General Justice and Consumers) has set out to make an analysis of the participation of children across the EU in decision-making processes on matters that affect them. They have commissioned RAND Europe and Eurochild to carry out the study. The study results and ideas gathered during this project will contribute to future work on this area at EU level. The study will look at a broad range of mechanisms, such as consultations, polls, *ad hoc* meetings and structural consultation bodies, that can facilitate as well as hinder opportunities for children to express views, provide feedback and contribute to future policy or legislative developments.

A key aspect of the qualitative side of this study consists of consultations with children through focus groups organized in 10 EU Member States: Spain, Germany, Portugal, Slovenia, France, Ireland, Bulgaria, Malta, Finland and the Netherlands. These focus groups are coordinated by the Eurochild secretariat in close collaboration with Eurochild members through whom the focus groups are to be carried out.

The objective of the focus groups is to collect the perspectives of children, and to capture their perceptions, understanding and positions on child participation mechanisms. Through this, the study will gain a qualitative input from children about the state of play of children's right to participate in public decision-making. The findings from the consultations with children will contribute to final reports prepared by the study team.

The information resulting from the child focus group consultations will only be limited to be used for the purpose of the study and will be included in the final report to be submitted to the European Commission.

**Controlling your personal data**

You have the right at any time to consult and correct your personal data processed by Eurochild and RAND Europe. You also have the right to suppress your personal data and to limit its use and transferability to the extent that the applicable regulations provide for it. You may at any time cancel your authorization for certain processing of your data and oppose the use of your personal data, the transmission of your personal data to third parties (where this transmission is not essential for the provision of services of Eurochild) and to establish your profile. You can contact Eurochild for this purpose at the contact address below.

You also have the right to complain to the supervisory authority.

**Eurochild's security policy**

**Data security**

In order to protect your personal data at the best, Eurochild takes all reasonable measures and best practices are applied to prevent loss, misuse, disclosure, unauthorized access or loss of privacy or the alteration of these personal data. Adequate measures are taken, both technically and organisationally, to ensure an adequate level of security.

**Retention of data**

Eurochild will not keep your data for longer than necessary in the processing of these data, taking into account Eurochild's administrative and legal obligations towards the Belgian authorities and its mission to respond correctly to the expectations of its members, donors in order to improve the quality of its work.

**Children under 18**

Unless otherwise stated by law Eurochild treat young people as "minor" until they are aged 18 and Eurochild never deliberately collects or processes personal data from minors without the consent of a parent, guardian or legal representative.

**Questions, concerns or complaints**

If you have any questions or requests concerning the personal data collected for the event you registered for, please contact the event organiser at the email address indicated on the event's registration form or webpage, or use our general contacts:

Eurochild AISBL
Rue de Trèves 9B-1000
Brussels
info@eurochild.org

# Annex H.3 Code of conduct at Eurochild events

During Eurochild events, we are all responsible for making sure that everyone's wellbeing and safety is taken into consideration. To make it easier for us all to ensure this, and for us all to be able to feel safe, happy and engaged, here are a few rules that we should keep in mind at all times:

1. **Treat others as you would like to be treated**: do not shout, discriminate, tease, bully or use any forms of violence or bad language

2. **Everyone is to be treated with respect**: we are all equal, regardless of race, gender, age, religion, education, cultural background or anything else.

3. **Use user-friendly language:** Keep in mind that most participants have English as their second language, so be careful to speak slowly and clearly when communicating and try to use simple words. It is also alright to ask if you don't understand something that is being said.

4. **Make sure that you listen and allow space for everyone to participate:** We want to hear what all participants have to say. Everyone should feel welcome and respected.

5. Some of you will be **sharing a room with someone you are comfortable with** who is around the same age as you. In these cases we will allocate people of the same gender to share a room. Show respect to your roommate; don't touch their possessions or invite others to the room without their approval.

6. There is no strict dress-code. We ask that you **dress appropriately and respectfully** but in a way you feel comfortable and that represents who you are.
7. You will not need a computer or the internet during the event, but you are welcome to use both if you want to. **WIFI will be available at the venue**. Social media will be used to promote the event and all participants are encouraged to use this as well and use the hashtag provided. **Please keep in mind to be respectful towards others in your use of social media at all times.** Be careful to follow the activities and discussions of the event and do not post pictures or remarks about others without asking them first.

8. This Eurochild event is **a smoke and drug free zone.**

9. At Eurochild events **no alcohol will be served. Children and young people below the age of 18, their accompanying adults and Eurochild staff** who have a direct responsibility for children during an event, should refrain from drinking alcohol. All participants are expected to respect Eurochild's Child Protection Policy and to act as role models for the children and refrain from drinking alcohol in the presence of children.

10. **We all need to protect the environment** and keep our surroundings neat. Please clean up after yourself, pick up your trash and treat the event venue, your hotel and other places you might visit with respect.

11. **Be yourself!** You have been asked to participate because we want to hear what you have to say. No suggestions or questions are wrong or bad. Let's all remember to welcome and appreciate diversity.

*If anyone (child or an adult) treats you in a way you think is not appropriate, or if you notice someone behaving badly towards another person, or going against the Code of*

*Conduct in any way, then please share that information with your accompanying adult, any of the staff members at the event, or Eurochild's Child Protection Focal Person* ***Mieke Schuurman.*** *They will take care of the situation or assist you in any way needed.*

# Annex I Framework for analysing and synthesising evidence

The summary of evidence was guided by a set of questions informed by the current theoretical and practical understandings of children's participation mechanisms, including Hart (1992), Herbot & Puts (2015) participation disc framework, the Council of Europe's Child Participation Assessment Tool,[1209] and the research questions included in our offer to conduct this study.

**Structural Indicators**

1. What are **the key structures / processes for participation** in this context– a national/local level commitment to take action on the children's right to participate, for instance the existence of institutions (e.g. an independent children's rights institution), policies and laws aligned with the UNCRC and Council of Europe standards protecting children and young people's right to participate in decision-making?

**Process Indicators**

2. What is the **purpose** of the child participation mechanisms? (Participation as means vs. ends)
    a. Is it as a means to an outcome? If so, is it to achieve a legal, political, or social outcome?
    b. Is it as an ends in and of itself? (e.g. enacting of child's citizen-based or human rights-based right to participate)
3. What is the **context** of the child participation mechanisms?
    a. Geographic, dates active
    b. Key facilitators and barriers (e.g. legal, societal, financial)
    c. What topics? (education, justice, health, etc)
    d. At what level does the participation activity place? Micro, meso, or macro? (i.e. micro=private/personal/immediate sphere of individual child, macro=systems, meso= in-between e.g. individual cases not immediately linked to everyday context)
    e. How often and at what phase of the policy process (design and planning, implementation, evaluation) is children's participation facilitated?
4. Who are the **stakeholders**? Child, parents, or other adults
    a. What are the societal attitudes towards children (the child as a subject of rights and/or simultaneously as a subject of care, guidance and protection, or just one of these aspects)? Are they participating as competent beings (rather than tokenistically or patronizingly)?
    b. Are children adequately supported and facilitated to participate, in line with their evolving capacities? Are/how are disadvantaged/vulnerable children supported to participate?
    c. What stakes do 'other adults' have in it? (e.g. are they funding it, organising, supporting)
5. What is the **mode** of participation? The mode of participation is related to the issue of power and the decree to which power is handed over to or removed from adults and given to children (e.g. who has the power to define objectives or to direct the activity). Power can be understood as ambivalent; at the same time agency and subjection, self-realisation and control, compliance and subordination, being governed and the basis of autonomy and freedom. *(If not feasible to assess mechanisms according to the criteria listed below (a-e), please use Hart' ladder of participation- see next pages*)
    a. Initiation: is the mechanism initiated by children or by other stakeholders?
    b. Information: is the child gathering or being given information?
    c. Consultation: are children expressing their views, opinions or interests on a matter?

   d. Engagement: are the child's views taken into account? Is the child able to act in association with other participants?
   e. Decision: does the child have the final say on an action (alone or with an adult)?
6. What is the **style** of participation?
   a. Individual children or collective action (representation through of a group of children)?
   b. Active participation (e.g. the child initiates and controls his/her participation, alone or together with adults, children making decisions) or passive (participating in activities defined by others without giving children guarantees that their voices, ideas, suggestions, etc. become part of the decision-making process itself, e.g. consultations to a wider mechanism)

**Outcome and Impact Indicators**

7. What is the **impact and consequences** of mechanisms and practices in children's participation:
   a. Present and future impact on children/society/communities/country/EU (as relevant)
   b. Impact on children's participation levels
   c. Impact on children's degree of influence
   d. Impact of and lessons learned from COVID-19 on children's participation

# Annex J Mapping fiches on child participation in decision-making processes

The mapping fiches include a summary information about the key features of each of the identified mechanisms. The structure of the fiches has been developed in collaboration with and approved by DG JUST. The fiches complement the summary tables presented in Annex H.

Due to the size and format of the document listing all mapping fiches, this document was submitted as a separate Excel file.

# Annex K Validation Workshop Agenda

## Study on Child Participation in the EU Political and Democratic Life – *Validation workshop agenda*

Date: 19 October 2020, 13.30-16.30 CET (12.30-15.30 BST)
Location: online (zoom)

### I. Workshop participants

European Commission: Valeria Setti (JUST), Marta Tarragona-Fenosa (JUST), Harry Panagopulos (JUST), Marta Kuljon (JUST), Andras Alfoldi (JUST)

Academic and policy experts: Cath Larkins, Ellen Van Vooren, Stephaine Cook, Luis Manuel Pinto

Eurochild: Mieke Schuurman, Alice Hagger-Vaughan

RAND Europe: Michaela Bruckmayer, Barbara Janta

### II. Workshop Agenda

| Timing | Agenda |
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| 13.30 - 13.40<br><br>(10min) | Welcome and opening<br><br>General introductions<br><br>Aims and objectives of the workshop |
| 13.40 - 13.50pm<br><br>(10 min) | Overview of the study<br><br>Study aims and objectives<br><br>Methodological approaches<br><br>Overall study progress |
| 13.50 – 14.35<br><br>(45 min) | Reporting on study findings<br><br>RAND Europe reporting on findings from the mapping task, interviews and case studies<br><br>Eurochild reporting on findings from children's consultations<br><br>Reactions from participants<br><br>There would be opportunity for the workshop participants to ask questions during the presentation. |
| 14.35 - 14.45<br><br>(10 min) | Short break |

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| 14.45 – 15.05<br><br>(20 min) | Group discussions<br><br>We will return to the plenary initially. This would be followed by group discussions.<br><br>We suggest splitting workshop participants into four groups. Each group would consist of a European Commission representative (either one or two participants), one academic or policy expert, and one study team representative (either RAND Europe or Eurochild). RAND Europe and Eurochild participants will moderate discussions in each group.<br><br>Each group will discuss findings related to a particular area of interest:<br><br>Facilitators and barriers<br><br>Characteristics of children's participation<br><br>Role of EU<br><br>Impact of COVID-19 and lessons learned<br><br>Each group discussion will aim to cover the following questions:<br><br>• Initial remarks / observations and general feedback<br>• Do you find some of the findings unexpected and if so why?<br>• Do you miss anything or disagree with any of the findings on this topic?<br>• What are the main conclusions/messages you would distill from this topic? (The outcomes of this discussion can be brought into the plenary discussion) |
| 15.05-15.25<br><br>(20 min) | Reporting back to the plenary<br><br>Each group moderator will report back to the plenary key points discussed in the group discussions. |
| 15.25-16.15<br><br>(50min) | Plenary discussion focusing on key findings and finetuning conclusions. |
| 16.15 – 16.30<br><br>(15 min) | Concluding remarks and next steps. |

# Annex L Organisation of children's focus groups

Eurochild and its member organisations were responsible for the organisation of the focus groups with children, and drafting national-level and the overview report summarising focus groups activities and discussions.

**Characteristics of children taking part in focus groups**

There were a **mix of online and offline focus group consultations** depending (in most cases) on the enforced pandemic protocols in the different national contexts. Children involved in the consultations in 10 EU Member States represented a wide variety of ages, geographic locations, backgrounds, experiences and previous knowledge of children's rights and participation. **A total of 224 children aged 7-17** (but also including a handful of 19 - 20 years old from DKHW Germany and Portugal) participated. Most consultations involved children between the age of 12-17, while a few of focus groups also consulted younger children below the age of 10 (Malta and Germany).

There was a relatively equal gender balance, though there were slightly more girls involved in the focus group consultations. Two non-binary children were represented in the consultations and one child did not disclose their gender identity.

Across the different countries, **children with vulnerable backgrounds were consulted**. Overall, children from the following backgrounds were involved in the focus groups: children with disabilities, LGBTIQ children, migrant children, refugee and asylum seeking children, children from ethnic minorities, children living in or at risk of poverty, children with experience in care (short and long term), children with mental health care experience, children living in supported accommodation, Roma children, children in contact with justice systems, children in juvenile corrective facilities, children out of school, children with experience of early pregnancy, children from remote rural areas.

Some organisations managed to organise separate focus groups with specific groups of children, including a meeting with LGBTIQ children in Finland and a meeting with migrant children in Malta. Others were able to organise meetings with diverse groups of children (Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain). Limitations to the organization of the consultations with diverse groups were caused by the national Covid-19 measures.

**Reporting**

Reporting styles varied across the countries though all national report provided:

- an overview of the backgrounds of the children involved in focus groups,
- a summary of the consultative processes and approaches taken, and
- a detailed overview of the responses to the research questions.

National reports also provided an evaluation of and feedback on the consultation process itself. As part of the consultation process, the Spanish children were asked to prepare a video about a participatory experience "My YouTuber moment", which were watched during the second meeting and commented on by the group.

**Organisation of focus groups with children at the national and local level**

In **Bulgaria**, **NNC (the national child rights coalition)** organised three focus groups in August. The first one was held on 3 August in Gorna Oryahovitsa – a small town in Central Bulgaria, and involved in-person meeting with children from the town's youth parliament. The second consultation was held on 11 August as an online meeting with the Child Council of the State Agency for Child Protection. The Child Councils represents children coming from different part of the country. The meeting lasted for 3 hours, and the feedback from the children's facilitators was very positive. The third focus group was organised on 24

August in Tarnava – a little village in Bulgaria. This in-person meeting involved children from a local school.

In **Germany, the German National Children's Rights Coalition** organised an online consultation on 12 August with a group of 9 children between 10-17 years old. The agenda from the guidelines was used and they were able to discuss all the questions. The session lasted about 3 hours and received very positive feedback from participating children. A researcher from RAND Europe also participated in this session as an observer. On the 1st of September, a second consultation with a group of 8 younger children (10-11 years old) was held in a school. The German children's focus group facilitator has offered support and shared experience of running this children's consultation with the organisations in other countries.

In **Spain**, **the Plataforma de Infancia** was responsible for organising children's focus groups. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only online consultations were feasible. The organisers have reached out to children by sending a call to the members of the Plataforma. Children could register until the 4th of September. The first meeting with children took place on the 9th of September, the second meeting took place on the 16th of September and the third meeting on the 23rd of September. The consultations involved 32 children between 10-17 years, who work in two different groups (10-14) and (14-17). The meetings take two hours each.

In **Cyprus**, **the Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children** (which coordinates the Cypriot Children's Parliament) organised a face-to-face focus group with 25 children aged 12-17 from different regions in Cyprus and representing different backgrounds. Children represented urban, suburban and rural areas to percentages corresponding to the Cypriot population strata and with migrant background, economic migrants' children, recognised ethnic minority and Greek Cypriots. This open air meeting was held on the 29th of August.

In **Finland**, **the Central Union for Child Welfare** conducted three different children's focus groups. The first consultation with the schools children's union took place on the 31st of August and was in a face-to-face format. This meeting involved children (aged 13 to 15 years old) in a small municipality. The second consultation took place online on the 9th of September with children involved in the youth climate team, they were aged 15-18 years. The youth group was set up because young people themselves wanted more ways to influence the fight against climate change. A third consultation was organised with a group of LGBTI children.

In **Ireland, Foroige** organised face-to-face consultation with a small group of more hard to reach/seldom heard young people on the 11th of September. A second online consultation was organised with a larger group of children from across Ireland on the 24th of September. Foroige has met online with this group of children before, thus these children have experience of being involved in discussions in the online format.

In **Malta, the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society** conducted a total of three consultations with children. The first one took place with a group of migrant children on the 4th of September. The second one was on the 22nd of September at YOURS corrective youth facility. The third one took place towards the end of September at a children's home.

In the **Netherlands**, the **National Youth Council** consulted 14 children in total as part of seven children's consultation meetings. On the 2nd and 3rd September, there were two online consultation with 2 participants at each of the meetings, on the 6th of September there was in-person meeting with 5 participants, on the 8th of September there was an online meeting with one participant, on the 9th of September there were two online meetings with one participant at each meeting and on the 10th of September there was an

online consultation with two 2 participants. Children were aged 11-18 years and coming from diverse backgrounds. The consultations on 2 and 3 September lasted for 2 hours. Due to the small number of participants in the consultations on 2nd, 3rd and 6th September, more individual consultations were organised to ensure a more diverse group of children as well as a larger number of children contributing to the consultations. To meet online with groups of children and young people has been a challenge since children start experiencing an online fatigue, therefore several individual meetings were set up.

In **Portugal** the **Instituto de Apoio à Criança** has conducted 4 focus groups with school children across different regions of the country. There was one focus group (20 October) with a group of children and young people (aged 9 to 20 years old) from disadvantaged backgrounds living in Lisbon.

In **Slovenia the Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth (ZPMS)** organised a face-to-face child focus group meeting with 13 children from across the country and different backgrounds (though could not manage to have all groups of vulnerable children included) on the 15th of September. The organisers had deliberately chosen not to organise an online meeting. Due to the health situation not all 20 participants who had planned to participate could join, some had to cancel participation just before the event since some schools do not allow children to attend events outside of school. Children found the topic of participation quite difficult to discuss, but overall facilitators were happy with discussions during the meeting.

**Table 22. Information on background characteristics of children participating in focus groups for study on child participation in the EU political and democratic life**

| Country | General background | Ages | Gender | Location | Vulnerable/ disadvantaged group |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Netherlands** | All participants were born in the Netherlands<br>Two online consultations (1 for 2 hrs. and 1 for 1,5 hrs.)<br>One offline consultation at the office of the Dutch National Youth Council (3,5 hrs.)<br>Individual interviews were added since several children cancelled their participation in the online sessions. | 14 children 12-17 y | 4 boys<br>9 girls<br>1 non-binary | Online and Utrecht | At least one parent born outside Europe (3)<br>One parent from another European country (1)<br>Youth care experience (3)<br>Mental health care experience (4)<br>Physical disability (3)<br>Lgbtqi+ (5) |
| **Cyprus** | 1 focus group | 16 Children 11-17 y | 9 boys<br>7 girls | Nicosia, Limassol, Famagusta, Larnaca, Paphos (mix of rural and urban) | Migrant background (3)<br>At risk of poverty (2)<br>Ethnic minority (1)<br>Disability (1)<br>Single parent household (2) |
| **Bulgaria** | 1rd focus group – 'youth parliament – Gorna Oryahovitsa' – large regional town<br>2nd focus group: Children's Council, State Agency for Child Protection<br>3rd focus group: Students from Hristo Botev Primary School, village of Turnava (underdeveloped region)<br>*Due to covid-19 no access to children at risk or marginalized groups* | 31 children 12-17 y | 8 boys<br>23 girls | 1rd North Central Bulgaria<br><br>2nd All Bulgaria<br><br>3d North-West Bulgaria | Roma (4) |
| **Germany** | 1rd focus group: 9 children. Knew each other from previous participation and can be considered child right experts but not | 9 children 10-17 y | 4 Boys<br>5 Girls | 1rd Represent 6 different states - online | Migration history and adoptive parents (1)<br>In foster care (2)<br>Direct experience of poverty (1) |

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| | necessarily child participation experts.<br><br>2nd focus group: 5 children at an elementary school in Berlin from the same class. No previous contact with National coalition Germany. Some previous knowledge of children's rights and engaged in a participatory project at their school. | 5 children 9-10 y | 2 Boys 3 Girls | 2nd Berlin (suburban area former east Berlin) | Experience with poverty and living with foster parents (1) |
| **Germany DKHW** | All of the children are members of children and youth parliaments | 7 participants 14-19 y | 4 boys 3 girls | (6) Nord Rhine Westphalia, (1)Thuringia | |
| **Slovenia** | | 13 children 12-17 y (majority 14) | 8 boys 5 girls | 5 from rural areas<br>8 from urban areas | experience of living in care (2)<br>migrant background (one of them also with experience with juvenile justice system) (2)<br>minority ethnic background (Italian and Hungarian) (2) |
| **Spain** | 30 children divided into two sub groups depending on age. | 30 children 10-17 y | 11 boys 19 girls | From 6 autonomous communities. Most from urban areas only 2 from rural. (online) | Disability (4)<br>Roma (2)<br>live in supervised accommodation (4) |
| **Malta** | 1rd group – migrant children in open centre (6 participants)<br>2nd group – children in juvenile corrective facility (extremely disadvantaged children, all but one | 38 children 7-17 y | 25 boys 3 girls<br><br>*No figures for* | | Migrant children in open centre (6)<br>Children in juvenile corrective facility (20)<br>Children in residential home (2) |

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| | with migrant background) (20, all boys)<br>3rd group- children in out of home care (2, only girls)<br><br>Additionally, 2 groups in children's homes:<br>4 children (7-12 y) and 6 children (8-16y) | | *gender for last 2 groups* | | Children in residential home (10) |
| **Finland** | 1rd group – student council of school (small town in Southern Finland) – worked with group before<br>2nd group – LGBTIQ+ youths (online)<br>3rd group "The Climate team" from mid-Finland (online) | 25 children<br>13-18 y | 10 boys<br>14 girls<br>1 non-binary | Small town S-Finland<br><br>From across Finland<br><br>Mid-Finland | LGBTIQ youth<br><br>*Also contacted Roma group but couldn't schedule consultation.* |
| **Ireland** | 1rd group with children with disadvantaged backgrounds<br>2nd group met online | 15 children<br>14-17 y | 3 boys<br>12 girls | County Mayo in West Ireland | In long-term care (1)<br>Autism (1)<br>Direct Provision (1)<br>Rural Isolation (1)<br>School Refusal (1)<br>Short term Care (1)<br>Racially diverse backgrounds (1) |
| **Portugal** | 4 focus groups with children<br>1st group - September 30th Oeiras (village near Lisbon – urban area)<br><br>2nd group - October 3rd (city of Lisbon)<br>All girls, are from different parts of the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon. They all live in poor conditions, | 21 children<br>14-20y<br>(*2 of the young people are 19y and 1 is 20y)* | 8 boys<br>13 girls | Lisbon region | Vulnerable communities – poor conditions (8)<br>Living in care - ran away from care (1)<br>Early pregnancy (1)<br>Migrant background (2)<br>Behaviour problems (1) |

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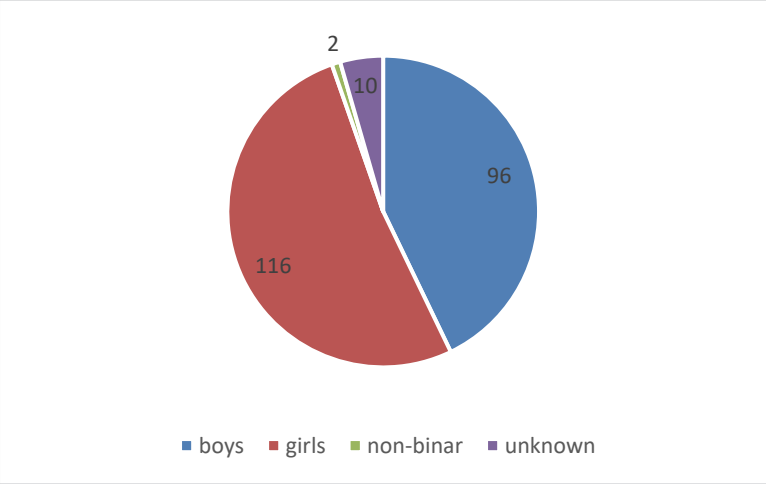
| | in vulnerable communities, ethnical diversity.<br>3rd group - October 10th (city of Lisbon) – from vulnerable communities on the outskirts of Lisbon.<br>4rd group October 20th – all of the group lives in a vulnerable community. Ethnical diversity. | | | | |

**Figure 2. Gender of children participating in focus groups for study on child participation in the EU political and democratic life, N=224**



# Annex M Study experts

The following experts were involved in this study:

1. Dr Cath Larkins, The Centre for Children and Young People's Participation, Reader in Children's Citizenship, School of Social Work, Care & Community, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK
2. Ellen Van Vooren, Children's Rights Knowledge Centre, Ghent, Belgium
3. Luis Manuel Pinto, Director for Programmes, Learning and Branding, Learning for Well-being Foundation, Portugal
4. Stephaine Cook, Project Worker with responsibility for Youth Participation, Foróige Mayo, Ireland

# Endnotes

[1] UN General Assembly. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. United Nations. [Accessed 27 January 2021]. Available from: http://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf; European Union (2000). *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*. Article 12, Article 24.
[2] UN General Assembly. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. United Nations. [Accessed 27 January 2021]. Available from: http://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf
[3] It has to be noted that two children participating in focus groups identified themselves as non-binary. Gender data provided on some mechanisms also included non-binary and other categories.
[4] UN General Assembly. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. United Nations. [Accessed 27 January 2021]. Available from: http://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf; European Union (2000). *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*. Article 12, Article 24.
[5] European Union. (2000). *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.* Article 24.
[6] European Union. (2012). *Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union.* Article 3.
[7] Council of Europe. (2012). *Council of Europe Recommendation on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18.* [Accessed 2 September 2019]. Available from: https://rm.coe.int/168046c478
[8] UN Commission on Human Rights. (1990). 'Convention on the Rights of the Child., 7 March 1990, E/CN.4/RES/1990/74'. [Accessed 9 November 2020]. Available from: https://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f03d30.html
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[10] For instance, the term 'youth' is used by the UN to describe people aged 15 and 24 years old, and by the EC to describe people aged 15 to 30 years old. Source: UN.(N.d.). *Youth*. [Accessed 27 January 2021]. Available from: https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/youth-0/#:~:text=For%20statistical%20purposes%2C%20however%2C%20the,of%2015%20and%2024%20years.&text=This%20statistically%20oriented%20definition%20of,under%20the%20age%20of%2014; European Commission. (2011). *COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT On EU indicators in the field of youth.* [Accessed 27 January 2021]. Available from: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/library/publications/indicator-dashboard_en.pdf
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[12] Crowley, A. and Larkins, C. (2018). 'Children's Participation in Public Decision-making: A Review of Practice in Europe', Eurochild, Brussels.
[13] Hart, R. (1992). 'Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Clientship', UNICEF. [Accessed 27 January 2021]. Available from: https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/childrens_participation.pdf; Crowley, A. and Larkins, C. (2018), 'Children's Participation in Public Decision-making: A Review of Practice in Europe', Eurochild, Brussels.
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[15] Crowley, A. and Larkins, C. (2018). 'Children's Participation in Public Decision-making: A Review of Practice in Europe', Eurochild, Brussels.
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[17] Crowley, A. and Larkins, C. (2018). 'Children's Participation in Public Decision-making: A Review of Practice in Europe', Eurochild, Brussels.
[18] At present, children's right to vote depends on the type of elections and varies to some degree across EU MS. In Austria, 16-year-old children and in Greece, 17-year-old children can vote in EU and national elections. However, countries also have different age limits for different elections. For example, Belgium allows children to vote in referendums from age 16, while Estonia, Malta, Germany and Scotland all implement lower voting ages for local and regional elections. See: Iakovidou, E., Janta, B., Stewart, K. (2019), 'Embedding a children's rights perspective in policy and decision-making', Produced for the European Platform for Investing in Children, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
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[108] Despite being called Comhairle na nÓg National Executive of the local youth councils in Ireland, this structure only includes children aged 12 to 18 years old.

[109] The 'National Council for Children and Young People' only includes children aged 8 to 17 years old.

[110] For instance, the Confederation of Youth Organisations in Belgium was set up in 1975 while both the Flemish Youth Council and the Youth Forum were established in the last 20 years. Similarly, in Denmark and Sweden, the Danish Youth Council has been operating since the 1940 and the National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations since 1949, and additional council structures were established in the 1990s and 2000s. Various council structures were also created across years in Croatia, Hungary, Poland and Portugal.

[111] The Social Code in Germany on child and youth welfare services defines a young person as between 14 and 26 years old, whereas the Federal Child and Youth Plan and the Youth Strategy 2015-2018 allows projects to include children and young persons from 12 up to 26 years old. For more information, see: https://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/germany/

[112] Finland's Youth Act and youth decree that came into force in 2017 defines youth as those under 29 years of age. For more information, see: https://minedu.fi/en/legislation-youth

[113] The predecessor of the current Council structure was established in 1944.

[114] Croatia's National Youth Programme (2014) defines youth as aged 15–30 years old.
[115] Target group is aged 18–35 years old, but support is also provided to student associations and children's councils.
[116] Comhairle na nÓg was implemented in 2002.
[117] Founded in 1992, registered in 1996.
[118] Since 2009 when it replaced the Youth Policy Coordination Board that was active since 1992.
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[730] Interview INT-02.
[731] Interview INT-03.
[732] Interview INT-03.
[733] Interview INT-02.
[734] Interview PT-NA-01.
[735] Interview INT-08.
[736] Child, focus group with children in Germany.
[737] This was mentioned by at least three interviewees from different countries and different stakeholder groups, including interviewees PT-EX-05, GER-LA-01, NL-CR-03.
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[739] Interview GER-LA-01.
[740] Interview NL-CR-03.
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[772] Interviews INT-13, SI-EX-02, PT-NA-02; IE-NA-01 and NL-CR-01.
[773] Interview INT-13, SI-EX-02 and PT-NA-02.
[774] Interview IE-NA-01 and NL-CR-01.
[775] Interviews MT-EX -02, INT-11.
[776] Interview NL-NA-05.
[777] Interview NL-LA-02.
[778] Interview INT-08 and INT-02.
[779] Interview INT-02.
[780] Interview NL-CR-01.
[781] Interview MT-NA-04, MT-EX -02 and NL-CR-03.
[782] Interview EU-04 and NL-CR-03.
[783] Interview PT-NA-02.
[784] Interview EU-06.
[785] Interview NL-LA-02.
[786] Interview NL-LA-02.
[787] Interview PT-NA-02 and PT-NA-01.
[788] Interview PT-NA-01.
[789] Interviews NL-CR-01 and SI-EX-02.
[790] Interview INT-05.
[791] There is already an EU-level youth forum. This suggestion from children indicates that they are not aware of existing structures, in line with findings from this study.
[792] Child aged 16, children's focus group in Bulgaria.
[793] Interview IE-NA-03.
[794] Interviews INT-01; INT-02; INT-09; GER-EX-02; IE-NA-04; MT-NA-05; NL-CR-01; SI-EX-02; SI-CR-03; SI-CR-04. Additionally, seven interviewees said they had some familiarity with the strategy but did not have a strong enough understanding to comment on it (Interviews INT-04; INT-13; BG-LA-05; FI-CR-01; FI-NA-04, NL-NA-04, PT-NA-02). Data on the Youth Strategy was not gathered as part of the mapping exercise.
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[796] Interview INT-02.
[797] Interview INT-01.
[798] Interview INT-09.
[799] Interview IE-NA-04.
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