



EU CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION PLATFORM

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Report



#EUChildParticipation



WHO TOOK PART IN WHICH SESSION






- Children 
- Accompanying adults 
- Member State representatives 
- Other adult participants 
- Thematic experts 

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Introduction

The EU Children’s Participation Platform organised its first big meeting in Brussels with children from across Europe, to:

- discuss the issues important to them,
- share more about the European Union (EU for short), and
- talk about how children can shape the future and direction of the EU Children’s Participation Platform (the Platform for short).

This meeting was called the General Assembly, and it was organised by the EU Children’s Participation Platform that encourages children to be active citizens and members of democratic societies.

58 children from 16 European countries, and adults who work in the EU and children’s rights organisations came to Brussels for the meeting.

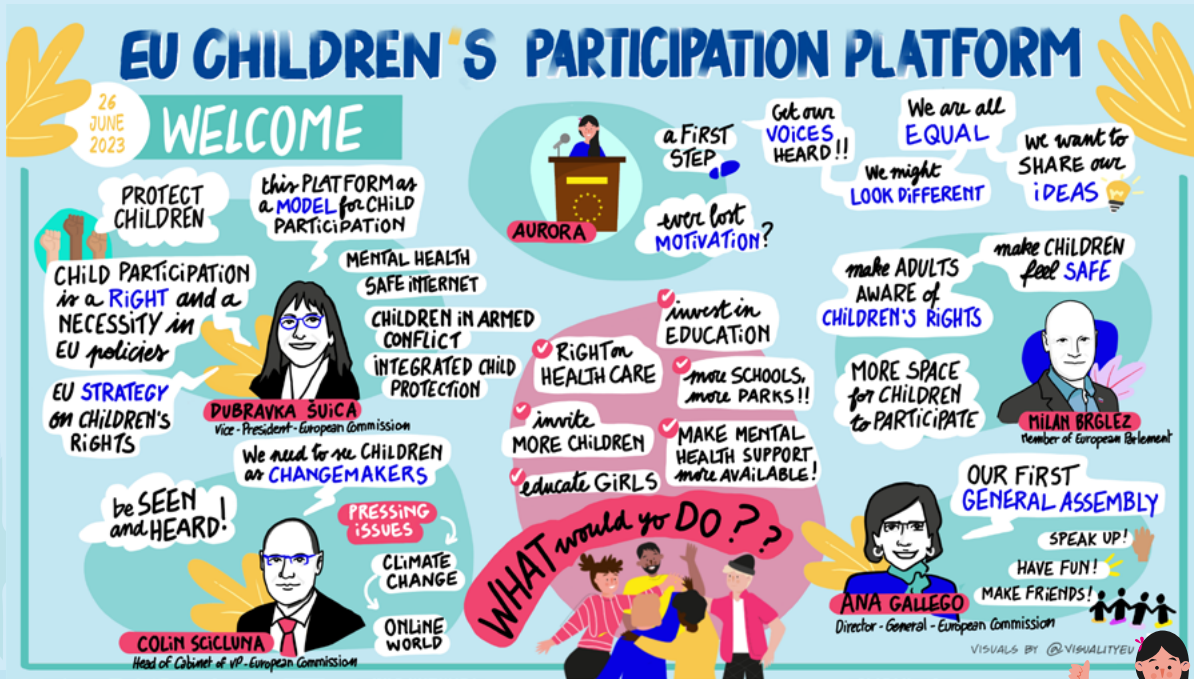
It took place over two days, with main sessions which were co-led by the Children’s Panel, and smaller workshops to discuss topics in more detail.

The children also shared their suggestions, opinions, and ideas about how the Platform can make child participation better around Europe.

A [dedicated page](#) was created for the General Assembly on the new website of the [EU Children’s Participation Platform](#).



Opening session



The opening session was co-led by members of the Children's Panel and EU representatives:

Anas (Denmark), Aurora (Lithuania), Gabrielius (Lithuania), Maria (Romania), Tala (Sweden) and Tea (Croatia) as well as Milan Brglez, (Member of the European Parliament, Co-chair of the Child Rights Intergroup of the European Parliament), Dubravka Šuica (Vice-President of the European Commission for Democracy and Demography) and her Head of Cabinet, Colin Scicluna, Ana Gallego (Director-General for Justice and Consumers, European Commission – DG JUST), Ingrid Bellander Todino (Head of the Fundamental Rights Policy Unit, DG JUST).



Children's Panel is Platform's co-creation group whose valuable input helps shape the design and implementation of the Platform.



Opening session



Policy-makers underlined the importance of giving children a voice:

- **Milan Brglez** said that children need to be represented in the European Union so they can share their opinions on important problems like climate change and online safety.
- **Dubravka Šuica** reminded everyone that child participation is a fundamental right and a priority of the EU. That means it is a promise that the EU, and other international organisations made to children. The Platform is now helping realise this promise as written down in the [EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#).
- **Colin Scicluna** said that when he was a child, he felt like he was not heard by adults. Colin shared his happiness because he is now able to make a change and make sure children are heard.
- **Ana Gallego** shared why it is so important for children to speak up and voice their opinions: *'You're speaking up for other children and you're speaking up for your future selves.'*

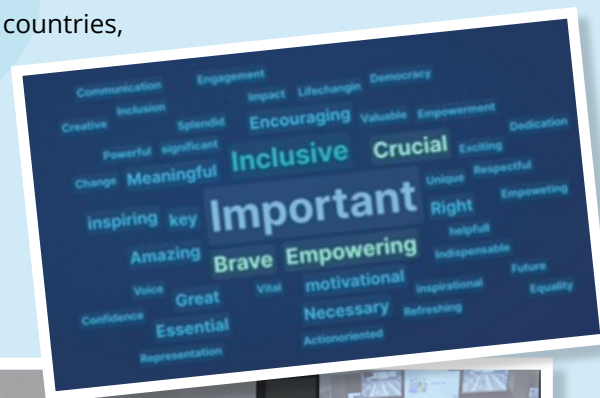


Opening session

Participating children shared why the Platform is important to them:

- **Tala** (Sweden) said that **empowering young people and ensuring their active involvement in decision-making is key.** *'We are not just the future; we are also the present. We bring fresh perspectives and ideas, and we have valuable knowledge to give. It's important that we are included in society and have a say in matters that affect us.'*
- **Aurora** (Lithuania) shared her personal experiences of child participation: *'A journey of a thousand miles begins with a small step. Let the General Assembly be our first step to the EU Children's Participation Platform and to a brighter European kids' future.'*
- **Anas** (Denmark) wants the Platform to help children have roles in their communities.
- **Maria** (Romania) hopes for the Platform to motivate more children to join.
- **Kalina** and **Ralitsa** (Bulgaria) spoke about their work with vulnerable groups and their hope to learn about children's rights to be able to help others more. *'I hope we can form new connections and that people will be able to hear voices because even though we might not be able to do much alone, I'm sure we can do a lot together.'* **Kalina**
- **Radoslaw** (Poland) encouraged everyone to think about tolerance: *'some of us are being overlooked simply because we don't look like everyone else or conform to expectations of society.'*
- **Emanuele** (Italy) said the Platform can become a powerful tool for children to make their voices heard at European level, as it can reach children in all countries, including those without child councils.

Participants described in one word what child participation means to them:



Creating connections across Europe



In this workshop, children and adults worked together to make sure that the General Assembly was meaningful, inclusive, and safe. Children co-created common rules of working together.

'We need to listen to each other if we want adults to listen to us.' Flavio (Italy)



As many children were not able to attend, the participating children felt they needed to speak up for themselves and for other children too.

'I am here speaking not just for myself but for other children in Cyprus – children who may not always fit the expectations and that are not always listened to or seen.' Loizos (Cyprus)

CREATING CONNECTIONS ACROSS GENERATIONS



Marie-Cécile Rouillon, European Commission's Coordinator for the Rights of the Child, Fundamental Rights Policy Unit, DG JUST.

EU country representatives joined a workshop to learn how they can help the Platform reach children and involve them in its activities in their countries.

Marie-Cécile shared more about the Platform, and what it hopes to do.

The Platform has nearly 50 members from across 27 EU countries and continues to grow. It is important that EU country representatives and other organisations spread the word to make it easier for more children to join the Platform.

Cath and **Laura** led the session and explained why meaningful, inclusive, and safe child participation is important.

'Rights' based participation is more than good communicating. It is participation with purpose to make sure children can influence their lives.'
Prof. Laura Lundy



Prof. Laura Lundy, Co-Director of the Centre for Children's Rights and Professor of Education Law and Children's Rights at Queen's University, Belfast and Professor of Law at University College Cork.

Laura explained that the Platform works to make sure that children are given: Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence in all of its activities:



Prof. Cath Larkins, independent expert working with a variety of NGOs, governments and universities.

Cath highlighted that child participation is a process that helps make connections between children and adults. That's why it is important that adults always talk to children and follow up on the promises they make to children.

'Adults can help children bring about change children care about.'
Prof. Cath Larkins

EU, ME & YOU

This workshop talked about the EU and what participating in the life of the EU means. EU country representatives came to discuss with children their rights, child participation and the work of national governments.



What was discussed:

- Not all countries listen to children equally: a lot do not have the right tools in place to listen to children and do not consider children's voices important.
- It is important that all governments focus more on children's rights.
- Children should be given the tools to say what they think.
- Children have a right to information, from politics to understanding what opportunities there are for them to get involved.
- Children are exposed to many issues and challenges they should have a say on, including mental health, bullying, addiction, intolerance, online safety, inclusion.

Proposed solutions:

- It is very important to educate and raise awareness, for example, to educate young men on women's rights and women's safety.
- Listening to others.
- Involving children in political activities and in decision-making at national and local level.
- Having more discussions and being able to ask respectful questions.



Day 1

Visit to the European Parliament

In the afternoon of the first day, children visited the European Parliament to learn about the history of the EU and see how the European Parliament works.



Thematic workshops

Day 2 was dedicated to hearing children's ideas about the Platform. In smaller workshops, children examined a theme and its connection to child participation, and suggested ideas for activities of the Platform.

Children chose the topic that they found the most interesting and important.

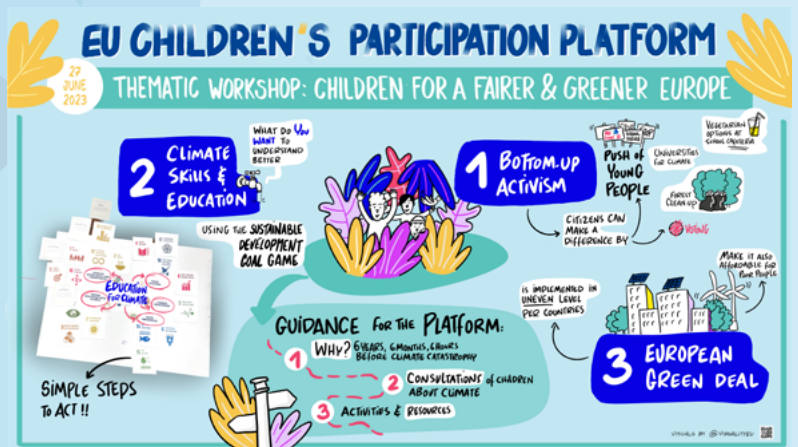


Children's rights

This session was facilitated by **Laura, Marie, Elisabeth** (Platform team), **Marta** (DG JUST) and **Oana** (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Commission).

Children for a fairer and greener Europe

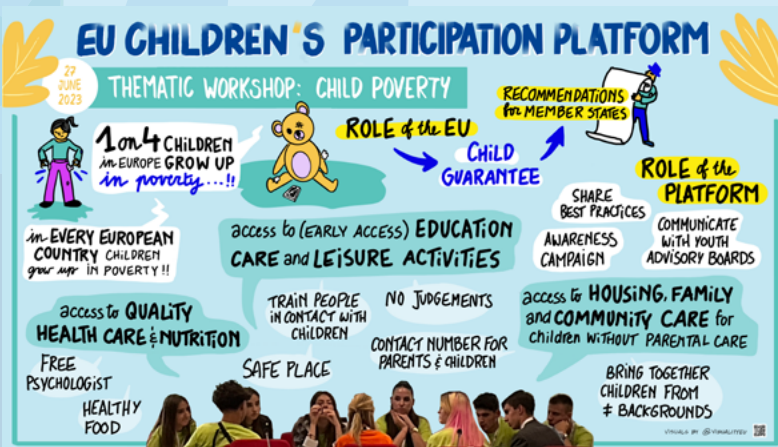
This session was facilitated by **Gabrielle, Noemi, Ingvild** (Platform team) and **Susanne** (Joint Research Centre, European Commission).



Thematic workshops

Protection from violence

This session was facilitated by **Katerina, Almandina, Henk** (Platform team) and **Marie-Cécile** (European Commission's Coordinator for the rights of the child, DG JUST).

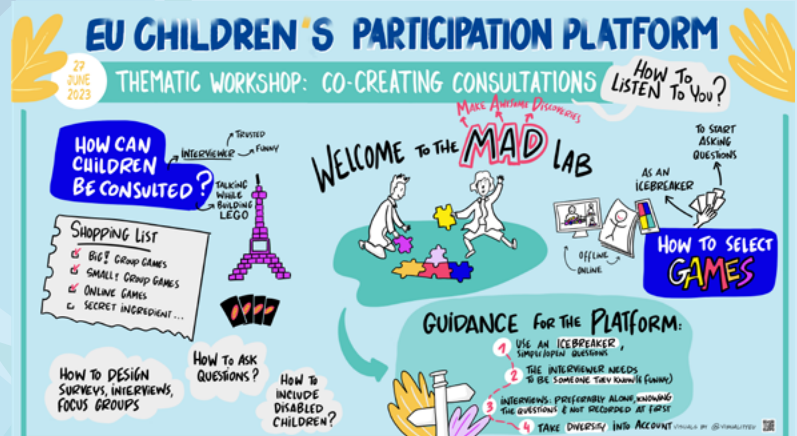


Child poverty

This session was facilitated by **Katerina, Hanna, Lilla** (Platform team) and **Jiri** (Head of Unit, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission).

Co-creating consultations

This session was facilitated by **Cath, Andrea, Ruth, Barbara** (Platform team).



Sharing our learning

In this session, everyone came together to share their ideas from the workshops. Children presented their suggestions to all children and adults at the meeting.

Group 1 – Children’s rights

- Not all EU countries realise children’s right to political participation, so the Platform could create a campaign advocating for this right across the EU.
- Voting age should be lowered to 16 years old, *‘16- and 17-year-olds have no way of holding politicians accountable for their actions, but if they can vote, they can influence political discussions that can change their lives.’* **Gabrielius** (Lithuania)
- **Mental health** is a problem that knows no borders. The Platform could *‘create a social media campaign to give young people the confidence they need to ask for help and #stopstigma.’* **Maria** (Romania)
- **Children’s rights must be realised in education:** A good education is a fundamental right for every child. *‘The change we want to see is for children to have school programmes teaching them life skills which are more useful.’* **Andon** (Bulgaria)
- Children need practice-oriented education and time for personal development. The Platform’s website can help children share their views. The Platform should be visible to teachers so they can talk about it to children at schools and do information campaigns. The Platform should also be for policy-makers, so that they can share information which encourages children’s participation on topics that affect children’s lives.



Group 2 – Children for a fairer and greener Europe

- **We are all living in a society that is destroying our planet.** The Platform could use child-friendly consultations to address climate change, because *‘children have the planet’s fate in their own hands.’* **Marketa** (Czech Republic)
- We can **make change through discussions with politicians and webinars** where children could share their views. Adults *‘tend to think global warming is not a problem [...] Sometimes they know it is a problem, but they don’t know how to talk about it.’* **Radoslaw** (Poland). **Supporting adults and teachers with special tools** and resources is another way to address this.



The Platform should *‘facilitate mutual learning, study visits and peer visits and meet-ups. This is important because the people on the Platform can look at what different schools or cities are doing to help to prevent climate change.’* **Katie** (Ireland)

Group 3 – Protection from violence

'Some of the main groups at risk of violence are immigrants, people of colour and also children in poverty.' **Eva** (Spain).

The Platform can address violence against children by:

- Creating and uploading information videos to raise awareness.
- Holding online and off-line consultations.
- Establishing safe chat rooms to chat with other children.
- Developing information booklets and newsletters for parents.
- Involving children in developing the consultations to prepare a Commission's plan.



Group 4 – Child poverty

Child poverty causes problems in education, health, and housing. The European Child Guarantee is one example of action which helps children get access to education, health, housing. The Platform could help by:

- Organising awareness-raising campaigns about accessible education and extracurricular activities for all.
- Creating safe spaces for children to talk to each other without anyone judging them.
- Hiring professionals (e.g. psychologists) to advise children and parents.
- Helping children share experiences among other children.
- Creating a space on the website which talks about good practices from all around the world that children can contribute to, including for example healthy food and eating where children can share recipes.
- Assisting children to connect with experts and national children and youth advisory boards.
- Providing training for adults to working with children to better communicate and understand children's needs.

'Create content that would facilitate the creation of events with children from different backgrounds, such as children living institutions and those in families. This would promote the integration of children raised in institutions.' **Antonis** (Cyprus)



Group 5 – Co-creating consultations

This group presented how the consultations organised by the Platform can be child-friendly and engaging.

- *'Consulting should involve ice breakers to make children more comfortable.'* **Emily** (Bulgaria)
- Discussions should be facilitated by someone who children know.
- *'When doing an interview, it is important for children to know the questions in advance.'* **Emily** (Bulgaria)
- Include open-ended question that allow children to give their opinions.
- Use simple language and use the chat to explain the activities and make sure questions are clearly understood.
- Use anti-stress toys during consultations.
- *'Adapt all activities so that children with disabilities can participate.'* **Emily** (Bulgaria)
- Consultations should last no longer than 20-30 minutes, with breaks in between.
- Include breakout rooms of 6-9 children.
- Allow children to choose the activities or games they want to use.



Closing session



The closing session was co-led by members of the Children's Panel and EU representatives:

- **Aurora** (Lithuania), **Georgi** (Bulgaria), **Naya** (Netherlands), **Tabassum** (Netherlands), **Tala** (Sweden), **Yassmin** (Spain) and **Zahira** (Spain).
- **Ewa Kopacz** (Vice-President and Coordinator on children's rights of the European Parliament), **Minna Ljunggren** (State Secretary to the Swedish Minister for Social Services), **Didier Reynders** (Commissioner for Justice at the European Commission), **Ana Gallego** and **Ingrid Bellander Todino**.



Closing session

Tabassum, Yasmin and **Zahira** summed up the sessions and discussions of the two days. **Tabassum** reflected on the themes explored during the workshops and said she found discussing mental health very important and called on adults to listen and take care of children who are struggling.

Ewa Kopacz encouraged all children to actively take part: *'You are the future of Europe. You will be deciding under what law you and your children will be living. That's why it is important that you start thinking and discussing these issues now, already, with your peers. Nothing is impossible.'*

Minna Ljunggren talked about how important it is for children to be active citizens. As active citizens, children are able to meet other children and discuss questions that are important to children and to society.

Didier Reynders acknowledged the struggles of children in the EU and shared that the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee are just a few examples that help governments make progress, help children and involve children more. *'At the European Commission we are committed to bring the young generation to the table.'*

Ana Gallego reminded everyone that *'every action that our Union takes should be inspired by a simple principle: we should not harm our children's future, we should leave the world a better place for the next generation.'* (**Ana Gallego**, citing **Ursula von der Leyen**, President of the European Commission)

The final address was made by **Naya** (Sweden) and **Tala** (Netherlands). **Tala** said she was very happy with the energy and passion of all children. **Naya** said that she felt empowered and hoped that everyone else in the room does too. *'You are not only the future but also the present, and your voice, and your commitment are important to shape a better world. Show all of us that age is not a limit when it comes to influencing a change and making a difference.'* **Tala**

'Power to the Youth!' Tala



OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

Evening programme

Children had the chance to explore Brussels during their stay. They went on the Brussels Chocolate Tour, a walking tour of the city centre with stories and legends and tasted Brussels' great chocolate.



NEXT STEPS

The General Assembly was an important step in developing the Platform.

The suggestions shared by children will be considered for the Work Programme of the Platform. The Work Programme is a short document that will say what themes the Platform will address and what activities it will organise and when.

The Work Programme will help all children understand how to get involved in the Platform.



MORE INFORMATION

Read more about the General Assembly

Get photos from the General Assembly

See the child-friendly welcome pack

Read more about the EU Children's Participation Platform.

Get involved and tell us what you think!

Complete the EU Children's Participation Platform consultation survey.

A survey for all children is live until 30 September 2023. The survey asks children what adults and the EU should do to keep children safe.

Go to the survey

