

“ Listen – Act – Change

Council of Europe Handbook on children’s participation

For professionals working for and with children



www.coe.int/children

Building a Europe
for and with children



Annex 4

**CHALLENGING DISCRIMINATION:
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**





Annex 4

CHALLENGING DISCRIMINATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The principle of non-discrimination, which is a cross cutting principle of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Children and a key element of the Council of Europe Recommendation on Participation, has two important implications for professionals working with children.

- ▶ Children should not be treated differently just because of one or more of their characteristics.
- ▶ Some children may require a different approach because of their needs or abilities so that they can benefit from the same opportunities as other children.

Both aspects are important in ensuring that children are able to access the same rights, opportunities and privileges. Special efforts are therefore required to ensure that all children are supported to participate in public decision making. Discrimination can be challenged by reaching out and making participation processes more accessible and inclusive to children in vulnerable situations. Here are a few suggestions of successful strategies identified by practitioners across Europe:

- ▶ Use clear and accessible language that children can understand and a range of communication methods that they use and can relate to.
- ▶ Publicise the ways that children can get engaged, including in places that they frequent (online and offline).
- ▶ Audit participation activities to remove barriers and ensure they are accessible to children from a range of different circumstances. For example, whether transport costs can be reimbursed promptly, whether buildings are physically accessible to wheelchairs, whether interpreters are available to support children who have newly arrived in the country.
- ▶ Use multiple methods to engage and support children's participation not just 'one' way.
- ▶ Be strategic. Monitor who is coming and who is not and work at encouraging or finding ways to engage others.
- ▶ Get advice from children and young people.
- ▶ Create opportunities for reflection and evaluation to build an evidence base of what approaches work best with particular populations in particular contexts.
- ▶ Experiment with a range of methods. Explore how best to deploy capacity building programmes to enhance engagement with children from under-represented groups. For example, training for staff and volunteers working with children; training for children; establishing quality mentoring programmes. Work with children should be delivered in spaces that they find safe and accessible with the longer term aim of establishing an integrated approach.

Since coming into force over 30 years ago, Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has affirmed children's right to express their views on all matters that affect them. The Council of Europe has sought to make this right real and concrete in the member states through its Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18, and has also embedded child participation in its own standard-setting, monitoring and capacity building work as well as at its international events. This Handbook represents a substantive contribution to the Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016 to 2021) promoting child participation under its second priority area.

The Handbook was produced by the Children's Rights Division of the Council of Europe in collaboration with international child participation experts and following the consultation of more than 50 children and young people on the challenges to be addressed.

It is meant to be a hands-on tool for people who work with children in a professional capacity, for example in schools, hospitals, alternative care settings, child protection services, and other social services. It is designed for social workers, teachers, judges, lawyers, immigration officers, psychologists, civil servants, youth workers and day care workers, offering them practical approaches to "do" children's participation and make it work for all children, including those in vulnerable situations, both at an individual and a collective level.

Professionals using this Handbook are invited to improve their capacities and skills to "listen" to children, to "act" upon the lessons learned and to "change" any decision making involving or concerning children. They are also invited to spread the good practice promoted through this tool and thus, in the end, to make a life-changing impact for children in those contexts where decisions are made without truly listening to them.

www.coe.int

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.