

“ Listen – Act – Change

Council of Europe Handbook on children’s participation

For professionals working for and with children



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Building a Europe
for and with children



Annex 8

SUPPORTING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION: A CHECKLIST



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The Council of Europe Recommendation on children's participation clearly states that,

Children and young people who exercise their right to freely express their views must be protected from harm including intimidation, reprisals, victimisation and violation of their right to privacy.

Think through how to support this aspect of children's participation, and how to promote protection for children and their rights, by working through this checklist:

- ▶ Does your organisation have a public statement or policy on children's rights to expression, association and self-advocacy?
- ▶ Does this public statement or policy on children's rights to expression, association and self-advocacy:
 - Provide rights to set up groups, meet, express concerns, publish ideas and engage in other types of campaigns and activism?
 - Cover protection of children from harm including intimidation, reprisals, victimisation and violation of their right to privacy?
 - Explain any limits on children's right to freedom of expression, including the obligation to respect the rights of other children and adults and their freedom of expression?
 - Outline how children can be protected from and complain about any unfair treatment received when exercising their rights?
- ▶ Does your organisation effectively communicate its public statement or policy on children's rights to expression, association and self-advocacy – to children, parents and other professionals?

If you answer 'no' or 'don't know' to any part of these questions, consider how you and your organisation can help establish or improve this situation, to promote and protect children's rights.

In any case, consider how to connect with children in contact with your organisation to find out whether they feel they have your support for their rights, their concerns and their protection when expressing their views. There may be additional spaces, networks and resources that you could provide to promote their rights and protect their interests.

For an example of a school children's union see an example from [Norway](#). For a public statement of freedoms, limitations and resources for high school students' rights, see the French Government [website](#).

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.

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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.