

“ 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



SECTION 4

SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S COLLECTIVE PARTICIPATION



SECTION 4

COLLECTIVE PARTICIPATION

This section of the Handbook focuses on the rights of groups of children to express their views and for these to be given due weight in decisions that affect them, for example regarding professional practice, services and facilities, planning, policy, law and research. It includes advice on issues to consider, guidance on approaches and examples from practice to help professionals deliver collective participation activities, examining each of the seven stages in turn:

- ▶ 4.1 Preparation and planning
- ▶ 4.2 Connecting with children
- ▶ 4.3 Identifying issues and priorities
- ▶ 4.4 Investigating children's views
- ▶ 4.5 Taking action
- ▶ 4.6 Following up actions
- ▶ 4.7 Reviewing, reflecting and starting again

The Council of Europe's standards make it clear that the views of groups of children should be heard and given due weight by professionals in all settings, including in schools, hospitals, prisons, child protection systems and education services. *The Recommendation on Participation* calls for all public services to have mechanisms in place to consult with, and receive feedback from children. There are very few public services, policies or issues that do not affect children as either direct or indirect users. As well as services that are targeted at children such as schools, education, early years, children's units in hospitals and alternative care institutions, other services and policies such as transport, housing, planning, immigration, health care and environmental, have a huge impact on children.

In some countries, national law and policy will also help provide additional guidance and legal requirements regarding how collective participation should be delivered. For example, Section 6 of Finland's constitution provides for equality, including that children should be allowed to influence matters pertaining to them.

Some settings (for example, schools, healthcare providers, social and welfare services, and local governments) have written strategies describing how children's participation will be supported and they have created spaces for direct dialogue between children and decision makers. See [Section 2](#) for ideas on how to create a participatory organisation and environments.

Professionals should look at these standards and guidance alongside the laws in countries and contexts where they are working. This will give an overview of professional responsibilities and children's collective rights in their areas of work, whether that be in a school, a health care setting, a court, immigration proceedings or in child welfare.

4.1 PREPARATION AND PLANNING

Professionals have a responsibility to prepare and plan for collective participation, who they will work with to achieve what aims and the resources they can secure to facilitate this work. From the very start, children can be involved in setting aims, preparing and planning activities, or advising professionals on activities that are more collaborative or consultative. See [Annex Z](#), a checklist for making preparations for collective participation.

Children's participation processes are more successful when they are supported by groups of children, professionals and community members who work together on the chosen issues. Professionals are often in contact with groups of children affected by their area of professional practice (e.g. patients, children in contact with legal systems, children in alternative care, students, all children living in a particular area) and may need to reach out to be more inclusive of all children (e.g. children with disabilities, Roma children, asylum seeking children). Particular adults (e.g. family and community members, young people with prior experience of participation, advocates, service providers, policy makers and politicians) are important potential allies in contacting children, supporting their involvement and ensuring their views result in action.

■ Professionals should reflect on who could and should be involved to maximise the potential for impactful and inclusive participation processes. They should think about the level of influence within the process – for example:

- ▶ Are students to be involved in the governing board of a school? Is there opportunity for more of a collaborative approach, working with children to co-design the format for the governing board? Or a space for children themselves to set agenda items for governing board discussions?
- ▶ Professionals should also think about the opportunities to increase children's influence: Are there particular moments (for example, when planning new services, consulting on changes in policy) when feeding children's views about a particular issue into a governing board meeting will have more of an impact?
- ▶ Or are there other opportunities for direct dialogue with head teachers and parents' associations that may be useful, to help amplify the weight given to children's views?

■ Professionals should identify all arenas and avenues in their organisation where children's views can be taken forward and where possible, get organisational commitments to actively consider views arising from children's participation activities.

4.2 CONNECTING WITH CHILDREN

■ Professionals will have choices about how and where to connect with children. There may be relevant collective structures and networks already established by organisations or institutions, for example schools' councils, advisory groups or care networks. There may be places where groups of children affected by the issues are meeting or living, for example a youth club or a playground. There may be a need to create a new group by contacting children who have previously only been involved with a service as individuals, for example patients, children of divorcing parents or children affected by migration.

■ When connecting with children professionals should provide information on:

- ▶ The likely issues to be discussed and the planned activities.
- ▶ Practical matters such as where and when to connect or meet.
- ▶ How and to what extent they can influence the process and the outcomes.
- ▶ What is expected of them.
- ▶ Confidentiality and safety.
- ▶ How to consent to taking part.

■ In some situations, parents will also need to be informed, particularly if they are required to give consent as well as children themselves. See *Annex 2*, a checklist for producing accessible information for children. Information is more accessible when children themselves are involved in its design and development.

■ Invitations to participate can be shared with children in a variety of ways. For example, children can be approached in person, through contacts and networks, through services, through existing forums and councils, and online. Professionals can make these contacts themselves, or children may make direct contact with other children. Different approaches are suitable in different situations. In one example encountered in the preparation of this Handbook, some asylum-seeking children decided to set up a group to explore the problems they were encountering at their institution. They went to classrooms in their language support unit and used a presentation to share information about the participation process they were organising. In another example, Roma children supported by an NGO, set up a Facebook page which invited children to share their ideas about community safety and hate crime. Professionals should aim to use a variety of approaches in order to be inclusive.

■ A new group may need to be established, so that more children have on-going opportunities to be involved. *The Recommendation on Participation* encourages member states to establish consultative bodies and advisory groups for children and young people at local, regional or national levels. It also states that children should be given adequate support for self-advocacy.

- ▶ **Consultative bodies** are forums or networks set up for groups of children to meet regularly, for the main purpose of influencing decision making. They often involve wider groups of children choosing representatives. For example, school councils, service user forums and children's parliaments (see *examples* from Croatia, Cyprus and Lithuania below).

- ▶ **Advisory groups** of children and young people can be supported to meet on a regular basis, to help manage or steer a service or policy. The children comment on service provision, approve policies, suggest developments in the service and monitor implementation of their ideas in practice (see *examples* below).
- ▶ **Collective self-advocacy** involves children standing up for their own rights and ideas through child-led groups, campaigning and activism. Children may take on roles as human rights defenders, take part in campaigns or set up unions (see *examples* below).

Forums and networks for specific groups of children who tend to be left out of formal structures may be needed. Over time these can enable children to take part in more mainstream participation processes. For example, Roma NGOs can be supported to run local groups and national networks for children from Roma communities, and these children may eventually develop their own participation strategies or build alliances with and join youth councils.

Children who face particular discrimination such as asylum and refugee children, children from Roma and other minority communities and children who engage in campaigns and other self-advocacy may be particularly vulnerable because their ideas may challenge accepted norms. It is worth remembering that the Council of Europe recommendation asserts 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.'



EXAMPLE

Intergenerational support for activism

In France, in late 2018, some students opposed the government's recent education reforms of the upper secondary school which orientated students toward specific degrees sooner, and therefore removed the three broad subject choices of science, literature or social sciences. Students also opposed tightening of university entrance procedures which they considered too selective. In response, children, teachers and parents became engaged in activism. A high school [student's union](#) has been in place in France since 1994. This has supported students to demonstrate and stand up for their rights. Alliances of teachers' unions, parents and lawyers have also organised to show their support for demonstrating students by publishing letters in papers, asking for children to be given the right to strike and demanding protection from retribution, in support of children's rights to freedom of expression. The French Ministry of Education [website](#) provides guidance on high school students' rights to put up posters, set up groups, meet and publish.

Professionals should set up or support children's forums, advisory groups and self-advocacy networks to enable and protect the participation of children in vulnerable situations. Teachers and other professionals can support children's rights to express their views by ensuring that children know their rights, communicating their support for children's views and their rights to expression, protesting against any unfair treatment, and by providing access to space and other resources. Children and young people may wish to set up unions for school children in order to protect their rights, as they have in for example France and Norway (See *Annex 8*, a checklist for supporting children's right to freedom of expression and association).

In all groups, facilitators should create a safe and relaxed environment in which children can choose to speak or not speak and which supports their well-being. Icebreakers, games and informal activities are helpful for this. *Section 5* of this Handbook provides links to a number of activity manuals, the majority of which are available online.



EXAMPLE

Youth advisory group in child-friendly cities conference

In Spain, the 5th Congress of Child Friendly Cities held in November 2019 invited a Young Advisory Group composed of 12 young people (aged 12 to 18 years old) representing local youth councils from six different Spanish communities. The group advised the organisers on the programme of the congress, participated as speakers in a panel and conducted their own workshop exclusively dedicated to children and young people. The workshop involved four discussion tables dedicated to themes identified by the group: equality, leisure and free time, environment and education.

The workshops gathered additional 40 children and young people in the discussions (aged 12 to 18 years old). During the workshop, the members of the advisory group and the other young participants reflected on different issues that concern children and youth. Ideas and slogans emerged from the discussions, and the conclusions were presented to the whole congress on the following day. Young people made clear they were concerned by issues such as climate change, gender inequality, and education. They also stated they feel engaged in promoting inclusion and considered that being listened to was still a challenge to them.



EXAMPLE

Collaborative priority setting

In Cyprus, the Children's Parliament was set up in 2001 as a development of a recurring event called "Children's Week", during which children "took over" seats in the country's Parliament. The parliament was set up as standing body where trained volunteers facilitate the children's parliament sessions and discussions. The children's parliament is composed of 80 child representatives (aged 13 to 18 years old) of Cyprus social groups, including the three constitutionally recognized Cypriot minorities. Children themselves identify issues and introduce measures for implementing the Convention for the Rights of the Child. They are also asked about issues that are on the government agenda. In 2017, the Children's Parliament was invited by the Cyprus government to influence the National Strategy on Sexual and Reproductive Health of Children and Young people. Children were given information about existing policies in Cyprus and other countries, which were discussed in session. Their suggestions were included in an early draft of the strategy, and were then taken by the committees responsible for planning action (including budget) and monitoring.



EXAMPLE

2getherLAND Camp Advisory Group

Groups of children and young people can be supported to meet on a regular basis, to manage or steer a service. The children and young people comment on service provision, approve policies and suggest developments in the service. In Germany, [2getherLAND Camp](#) was a gathering organized by the Bertelsmann Foundation, together with partners that gathered 220 adults and children (8-18 years old) in October 2018. The participants discussed the topic of inequality in Germany and left the event with 15 projects to address local inequalities through intergenerational partnership. An advisory group of young people was selected one year before the event to participate in defining the priority themes, decide the branding, the programme offerings and support other young people's integration in the event. The advisory group members also led some of the workshops organised at the camp, and were key in evaluation of the camp's impact and follow-up. The event led to a long-term commitment from the organising partners to support local action carried out through young people's participation.



EXAMPLE

Lithuanian School Students' Union

The Lithuanian School Students' Union (LMS) is a voluntary, non-profit association, uniting Lithuanian school students' councils. LMS is an umbrella structure representing secondary school students in autonomous secondary school students' councils, cities/district students' councils and student's council information centres.

In March 2020, the Youth Policy Committee of the Lithuanian Students' Union focused on the COVID-19 pandemic situation and participated in meetings with the Interdepartmental Child Welfare Commission, the Lithuanian Education Council, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports. They shared thoughts on issues related to distance learning, exams and emotional environments. They also participated in a press conference with the Government and created a student questionnaire. The existence of this network enabled the government to rapidly get information that could improve policy.

<https://www.moksleiviai.lt/naujienos/ka-geguzes-menesi-veike-jaunimo-politikos-komitetas/>

4.3 IDENTIFYING ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

Issues and priorities for children's participation processes can be identified in consultative, collaborative or child-led ways. When priority setting is consultative, adults seek the views of groups of children on issues they have already chosen. For example, a care home manager might draft a policy and then ask children to make choices between options about elements to include. Identifying priority issues can become increasingly collaborative when children and adults gain in confidence and understanding. In a more collaborative approach, adults may suggest issues, because they know about matters that may affect children or because they are seeking advice, but children will also have space to put forward their own priorities. In other words, it involves a degree of partnership between adults and children. In a child-led approach the role of adults is to act as facilitators to enable children to identify their own objectives, by providing opportunities or support and by following children's agendas. Professionals should consider the extent to which they can enable children to select their own issues and priorities (see the following example from Wales).



EXAMPLE

Child-led priority setting

The National Assembly for Wales asked 2,700 children (aged 8 to 18 years old) in Wales what concerned them. Respondents included children living in poverty, disabled, asylum seeking and children from Roma and other minority ethnic backgrounds. Results revealed that children lacked safe places to play and hang out, which led the Committee to investigate the issue. The Committee held a public consultation with both professionals and children. Children said they wanted safe places to play, with adult supervision. Their views were passed on by adults, but children also had an opportunity to engage directly with decision makers on the topic. A report containing children's views was published in 2010 and this influenced the development of the statutory guidance for the [Play Sufficiency Duties](#) within the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010. This initiative was started and led by adults. Children and adults decided on the question to explore – safe places to play – and children gave their views. Adults then decided on the goals, recommendations and action plans.

An activity that enables a child-led or collaborative approach to identifying priority issues is community mapping (see example below). This has worked well across Europe with groups of children of all ages and a variety of communication styles. Participants work in small groups to put the places that are important in their everyday lives on a large piece of paper, using drawing, words, objects or photographs. This produces a 'map' of their community, a service or even a building. Children then use pens, post it notes, stickers or objects to show where things are going well and where they would like to change something. This can be given a rights' focus by saying 'Show the places where your rights are respected and where they are not'. Groups show each other the important places on their maps, discuss difficulties and solutions, share ideas about changes they want to work towards and may then vote on priority issues for their participation process.



EXAMPLE

Roma Children Map Community strengths and needs

In nine countries across Europe, 550 Roma children and young people, supported by Roma NGOs and academics, took part in community mapping. This identified concerns which they then investigated and followed up with further action to bring change for themselves and their communities. See www.peeryouth.eu

This mapping activity can be used in many ways. For example, Roma teenagers can produce a map of the road to a health clinic and show the barriers and enablers to entering the clinic. They can also view each other's maps and choose priorities to investigate and follow up, to create more successful services (such as health clinic outreach) or positive attitudes that have helped. In a collaborative approach, adults will then provide ideas about their concerns and the opportunities for change they may be able to offer.

■ In many situations it is not possible to instantly take forward all the children's priorities for change. Professionals and children facilitating participation processes should therefore provide opportunities for children to prioritise which issues to investigate further.

4.4 INVESTIGATING CHILDREN'S VIEWS

■ Children can communicate their ideas through a variety of methods and mechanisms, both online and offline. The approach required will depend on the group of children and the issues being considered. Being inclusive demands that professionals provide a variety of opportunities, catering for a range of interests and needs. Activities designed to facilitate children's participation should aim to involve all children who are affected including children who are vulnerable or seldom heard. Even very young children are able to participate if care is taken to choose appropriate methods. Children themselves are the best people to advise on what will work with them. Some of the most common ways of investigating children's views are:

■ **Conversations and Surveys:** These can be face to face or online and formal or informal. They can obtain simple or detailed information depending on the questions used and how answers are recorded. Surveys can be simple tick box questionnaires or complex written responses. Remember to use colour and graphics in all written material (see following example).



EXAMPLE

Online surveys for children

In Serbia, in 2020, 1,571 children (aged 5 to 18 years) took part in an online anonymous questionnaire. The children were from urban and less urban areas. They answered questions about the COVID-19 crisis, and how emergency measures had affected them. They were asked about how they accessed information about the virus, how they spend their free time, how they access support and the support they were receiving with education. They also gave their views on what they cared about most and what they missed.

The [survey results](#) showed that what children missed most was their social life and freedom. What worried them most was uncertainty. They reported extensive problems with access to computers, and the challenges of the move to online teaching. Some children identified the need for more information about whether families will have enough money and food. Their concerns were fed into advocacy work and policy papers at national and European levels.

■ **Group activities:** A small group can be brought together to focus on a particular subject or an issue. Alternatively, a larger group could be split into smaller groups. Think of the different questions that you want children's views on. Choose a few open questions to guide the discussion or provide creative activities through which children can express their ideas. Ensure the event is enjoyable. This means plenty of breaks and some time spent doing fun activities.



EXAMPLE

Using photovoice as a method to listen

Photovoice is a range of methods in which children use photography to capture and reflect on different aspects of their life. In the Netherlands, the health care professionals in a new paediatric ward wondered what children thought of the new space. Children were asked to take pictures of the things they liked, and the ones they liked less. They were requested to explain why each picture was taken. The children received a copy of all pictures, a small book and some hobby supplies.

For instance, a child (girl, aged 12) took a picture of the glass door and explained she had trouble sleeping because of the light. In a later discussion with the parents about the photos, they said they liked to see their daughter from the hall. This shows how children's perspectives are important, and how they might differ from those around them. The photo project produced valuable information for the ward. Children's concerns about privacy and light have been solved by darkening and covering the windows.

See Lorenz, L. S., & Kolb, B. (2009). Involving the public through participatory visual research methods. *Health Expectations*, 12(3), 262-274.

■ **Consultation events:** These involve gathering large numbers of children together in one place to engage them in a variety of types of consultation and other activities. Consultation activities can also be taken out to children and young people in their communities. There are a huge variety of techniques and models for consultation. Take a look at one of the books in the resources section for ideas on the kinds of activities to use. Involve children in the design and planning of the events to encourage fuller participation of other children.



EXAMPLE

Consulting young children on the quality of services

In Ireland, throughout 2017, the [Children and Young People's Services Committee of Roscommon](#) ran consultation sessions with groups of children aged 3 ½ - 4 years in the county as a means to improve their services. The theme of the consultation was 'What do young children in Roscommon think would help them to live healthier, happier and more active lives?' The consultation involved preparation with children, families and professionals and was carried out through games and interactive activities. Some of children's demands included opportunities to play outside, 'hugs and cuddles' from important adults, enough sleep and water, and they are reminded and helped to brush their teeth. The results were synthesized through the metaphor of a volcano representing the things children said they needed every day, often, and sometimes. The 'Happy & Healthy Volcano' was used to inform the Early Years' Health and Well-being Plan for Roscommon and was shared with all the county's early childhood services.

■ **Expert Witnesses:** These involve conversations or meetings with people who can advise on how children's views can be transformed into action.

■ When organising investigation activities in order to maintain children's interest as well as enable them to express views it can help to be creative and make the group activities fun. This is about the attitude of the facilitator(s), the activities and meeting places. Facilitators should show a sense of humour, be relaxed, creative and participate. They can use cameras, recorders, computers, webcams, and art material. They can involve children as co-facilitators, invite them to design and run sessions.

■ Resources listed in [Section 5](#) give details of activities, methods and tools to use when working with groups of children. Organisers should think about the venues, ideally involving children in identifying suitable online and offline venues and make sure they are accessible and easy for children to get to. Facilitators of collective participation opportunities should ensure they allow time to establish ground rules or a group contract with all participants (see practice note below). See also [Annex 1](#), a checklist for professionals on the implications of the nine basic requirements for safe, meaningful and ethical children's participation and [Annex 3](#), a checklist for professionals on promoting the safety and well-being of children at collective participatory events and activities.



PRACTICE NOTE

Ground rules or group contracts

It is recommended that facilitators involve adults and children in establishing ground rules for participation activities at the beginning of the process and keeping them under review to ensure that activities are experienced as positive and safe for everyone involved. Sometimes it is better to call this a 'how we agree to work together' as the word 'rules' can be off putting.

Points to cover include:

- Health and safety considerations – for example, fire, access, numbers.
- Listening to and valuing what is said.
- Respecting everyone.
- Discriminatory or bullying language and actions.
- Confidentiality and child protection.
- Use of jargon.
- Support available for raising any concerns.
- Social media use.

4.5 TAKING ACTION

Helping children express their views is only part of the process as emphasised throughout the Handbook. Children's participation needs *Space* and *Voice* but it also involves children having an *Audience* and some *Influence*. Children's views need to be considered and due weight given to them when decisions are made. Ideally, in the preparation stage there will have been some planning for how children's views and ideas can best be presented and used as evidence to help bring about change. For example, a school may want to consult with children about a policy it is developing on the use of gender-neutral toilets. At the planning stage, the head teacher and governing body should agree to meet with child representatives and facilitators, and make time to listen and properly consider the children's views and suggestions. A date should be set for children to receive feedback on how their views have been taken into account, and the way for communicating this feedback and follow-up action to all the children involved should be agreed. At the stage of taking action, children can lead or be involved in reviewing these plans and what other children have said and making further recommendations for action.



EXAMPLE

Identifying people who can be asked to act

From 2012 to 2020, young researchers from across the UK supported by [The Centre for Children and Young People's Participation](#), directed and conducted research on the rights of disabled children. They were able to consider interview transcripts, pictures and summary stories of other disabled children's experiences and used the graphic below to identify what other children were asking for and to think about who would help them achieve these goals. They then used this information to write recommendations for community, service and governmental action. They presented these recommendations to the ombudsperson, who funded the first year of work, and also took action at the UK parliament, in local municipalities, with family and friends and reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. They then spread this model internationally, and worked with disabled young people and communities in Japan to conduct similar research there, again contributing to an alternative report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. In both countries, the UN Committee's Concluding Observations support implementation of some of the young researchers' recommendations.

Children asking for:		<input type="text"/>
How can these people help?	Fill in idea about they should do:	
Children	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Families	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Children's services	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Local Communities	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Governments	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Companies	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Children may also want professionals' support with self-advocacy – taking steps to raise awareness of their concerns and the changes they would like to see through training, campaigns, petitions, writing to politicians, giving evidence to formal inquires, or strikes and demonstrations. Wherever possible, they should be empowered to act as human rights defenders; the Geneva-based organisation [Child Rights Connect](#) is undertaking substantive work in this area and is currently working towards a Guide for Children Human Rights Defenders (to be published in 2021); see also *reference to their work* under 5.4.



EXAMPLE

Self-advocacy – banning the use of garbage bags

Children in alternative care in England complained about the fact that when they moved from one placement to another, they had to pack their belongings into garbage bags. They didn't own suitcases and the moves were taking place at short notice. When the municipality refused to act, the young people supported by their social workers and foster carers spoke to the local newspaper and explained just how awful carrying your possessions in a garbage bag felt. In 2015, in response to the children's representation, a new policy was introduced which banned the use of garbage bags and ensured the availability of storage and luggage solutions in the event of an emergency placement move.

4.6 FOLLOWING UP ACTION

Professionals and facilitators should feedback to children regularly, and as soon as possible, on what has happened as a result of listening to children's views. Sometimes, waiting for an official document can take too long and it's hard to keep participants motivated if it takes months (or years!) for feedback to be given. All the children involved should be given prompt feedback on their involvement, the impact, outcomes and next steps. As UN *General Comment 12* explains:

Since the child enjoys the right that her or his views are given due weight, the decision maker has to inform the child of the outcome of the process and explain how her or his views were considered. The feedback is a guarantee that the views of the child are not only heard as a formality, but are taken seriously.

Where possible, children should be invited and supported to participate in follow-up processes, to take further action and to share their experiences of participation with peer groups, their local communities and other organisations.



EXAMPLE

Follow-up actions after consulting with children

In Milan, Italy on the occasion of a special session of the city council open to children, many children had expressed the desire to intervene on their school gardens. This led the Municipality of Milan to involve the city's children in a participatory path of planning, transforming and co-managing the renewal of nine school gardens in the nine areas of Milan. The [School Garden Project](#) involved 16 kindergartens and primary schools, the referred communities, the local councils and the technical sector, and aimed at improving the city's green resources by listening to children's priorities and promoting their sense of belonging.

The process lasted over three years, and children were involved in investigating the needs of their communities, formulating and choosing ideas, testing the chosen ideas in the field, and preparing the gardens with painting and planting. Once the gardens were open, children and families defined the rules of the garden's co-management and created the instruction panels that were placed in the different gardens.

Reports from participation activities can take many different forms. For maximum impact it is important to select formats that can speak to the 'audience' of the decision makers as well as involving children directly in their production. *Annex 2* provides advice on designing accessible information for children. As well as traditional written reports, there could be posters, stories, audio or video footage, drama, visual diagrams and summaries, exhibitions and maps. Feedback should contain the following information:

- ▶ A summary of children's views and recommendations.
- ▶ The action that has been planned and taken.
- ▶ Any response from decision makers and their agreed next steps.
- ▶ Plans for more follow-up action with decision makers.
- ▶ How children can be involved further follow up action.

Further follow-up actions that maintain momentum behind children's demands include children lobbying and doing social media campaigning to make sure that people are aware of the commitments that any decision makers have or have not made. The ongoing climate strike movement is an example of this.



EXAMPLE

Follow-up actions after children make demands

Globally children have been asking for action to reduce climate change, and the student strikes are an ongoing example of stating and restating demands using different actions and communication strategies at different times. For example, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, young climate activists have organised virtual strikes in Poland on 3 April 2020, using the mobilising slogan: Wash your hands, but don't wash your hands of responsibility for the climate. This involved six actions:

- Take a photo with a banner / card containing hashtags. Post a photo on your social media and tag us!
- Hang the climate banner from the window or balcony, take a picture and put it on your social media.
- Check in to our event on Facebook! Follow us on our social media.
- Put our overlay on your FB profile picture! Share our posts on Instagram to how many people heard about our strike!
- Wash your hands, but do not give politicians wash their hands of responsibility for the climate!
- Join the protest group in your city!

See in Poland <https://www.msk.earth/strajk>

See also in Germany <https://fridaysforfuture.org/digital-strike-24th-april/>

Children may also become involved in the next stages of implementing decisions by taking part in groups or committees that use the evidence they have received from children to inform new policies or services. If possible, professionals should support children if they wish to follow up on the feedback and continue to press for improved services, greater respect for their rights, or reforms to legislation and policy. But professional engagement may be time limited. Windows of opportunity for change take time to be revealed. Creating large scale change is a long process and there are greater opportunities for change in some moments compared with others.

4.7 REVIEWING, REFLECTING AND STARTING AGAIN

The Handbook has emphasised the importance of reviewing, reflecting and learning from practice. Facilitators should consider how children are engaging in activities, whether future activities should be modified to be more inclusive, and which communication styles are being effective. Participating children should be encouraged to contribute. Professionals should ask children about their satisfaction with participatory processes and their views on how they could be improved. Here are some simple questions for professionals to reflect on with everyone involved:

- ▶ What did we want to achieve?
- ▶ What have we achieved so far?
- ▶ What are the challenges?
- ▶ What have we learned about what works?
- ▶ What else could we do?
- ▶ What are we proud of?
- ▶ What could be improved next time?

To evaluate group participation contexts in more detail, Save the Children's [Toolkit for monitoring and evaluating children's participation](#) provides useful guidance to those working with children on how to undertake participatory monitoring and evaluation and practical tools that can help gather the information needed at an organisational level.



HINTS AND TIPS

Practitioner's priorities for collective participation

Learning from other people's experience is beneficial. Practitioners working in health, education, justice and youth from across Europe reflected on their own experiences of facilitating participation and identified the following priorities for fellow practitioners who are working ensure that children's participation is effective, inclusive and leads to change.

- Create supportive contexts: Children need to be seen as rights holders, and recognised as active and activist citizens.
- Aim to represent all children: Reflect, monitor and try to understand how representative those who are participating are and how more inclusive practice can be promoted.
- Think about time: Be aware that changes to policy may happen months or even years after the children participated.
- Create 'interpersonal processes of influence': Success is more likely when influence happens through liaison and co-ordination. If children do not have dialogue with decision makers, or contact is confrontational and adversarial, their views are less likely to have influence.
- Have a clear message for what changes the children are seeking and communicate this clearly to decision makers: Change is harder to achieve if goals are unclear or if nobody understands the organisational or policy landscape. It is helpful if decision makers provide information about possibilities for discussion and change.
- Increase awareness and understanding: Awareness raising helps create support for children's messages and this may lead to getting their concerns higher up the agenda. If dialogue does not bring about change, using mainstream and social media can help to raise awareness. Demonstrations and strikes combined with media publicity can ensure that at least people are aware of children's concerns.

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.