

# “ Listen – Act – Change

## Council of Europe Handbook on children’s participation

For professionals working for and with children



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## SECTION 3

# SUPPORTING PARTICIPATION OF INDIVIDUAL CHILDREN



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This section of the Handbook focuses on the rights of **individual** children to have their views taken into account in day-to-day decision making, meetings, interviews, hearings and proceedings, for example in schools, early years centres, hospitals, health clinics, offices and justice or child protection systems. It includes guidance for professionals working with children on different approaches, methods and tools they can use. The advice is structured on the seven stages set out in the rolling process (see [Figure 2](#)):

- ▶ 3.1 Preparation and planning
- ▶ 3.2 Connecting with children
- ▶ 3.3 Identifying issues and priorities
- ▶ 3.4 Investigating children's views
- ▶ 3.5 Taking action
- ▶ 3.6 Following up actions
- ▶ 3.7 Reviewing, reflecting and starting again

■ The Council of Europe standards encourage member states to incorporate legal requirements into their own frameworks thereby mandating relevant agencies and institutions such as social services, health care providers, courts and schools to establish mechanisms for hearing the views of individual children on matters that affect them and giving due weight to these views in matters that affect them. The Council of Europe's [Mid-term evaluation of its Strategy for the Rights of the Child](#) (November 2019) identified that in the majority of Council of Europe member states, this commitment is included in national laws directly affecting children in a variety of settings, including:

- ▶ homes;
- ▶ schools and education services;
- ▶ community centres and parks;
- ▶ child welfare, child protection and alternative care services and placements;
- ▶ family proceedings, including divorce, separation, adoption, custody and access;
- ▶ health care and medical treatment;
- ▶ immigration and asylum;
- ▶ criminal justice services and settings.

■ The Council of Europe has created various standards and guidelines on the rights of individual children to be heard in judicial and administrative proceedings. While national legal and policy frameworks will vary, these European standards are universal. They include:

- ▶ Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers on child-friendly justice
- ▶ The Council of Europe guidelines on child-friendly health care
- ▶ Recommendation CM/ Rec(2011) 12 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on children's rights and social services friendly to children and families
- ▶ Council of Europe's Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (The Lanzarote Convention).

■ Case Law in the European Court of Human Rights has also emphasised the child's right to express their views in judicial proceedings. Article 3 of the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights (ETS No. 160) combines the right to be heard with the right to be informed. It states that in judicial proceedings, children should receive all relevant information, be consulted and express their views, and be informed of the possible consequences of compliance with these views or any other decision. 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 their responsibilities and those of other professionals as well as children's specific rights in the setting – be that in education, health care, social care, immigration or in civil or criminal justice.



## EXAMPLE

### The right to be heard

In Andorra, in the event of annulment of marriage, separation or divorce, the judge must, wherever possible, seek the opinion of the minor child, when taking measures relating to his or her education and to custody. Similarly, in case of adoption, the judge must hear the opinion of the minor, this being mandatory from the age of 10 and optional before that age. Once the minor attains the age of 12, his or her consent is necessary for agreement to adoption.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, States Party Report, Andorra, [CRC/C/61/Add.3](#)

## 3.1 PREPARATION AND PLANNING

— The professionals who have the responsibility to listen to and take children's views into account include social workers, lawyers, judges, teachers, health care workers, psychologists, court welfare officers and politicians. Research on individual children's participation from across Europe and beyond shows that professionals' attitudes can be the biggest barrier to or facilitator of children's participation. So, professionals should reflect on their attitude towards children's participation and possible barriers that might come from the attitudes of other professionals. [Section 2](#) of the Handbook provides guidance on creating enabling participation environments.

— Children may feel very confused and vulnerable when facing a court hearing, discussing a medical decision or even in more informal meetings, for example about their education. Being less powerful than the adults in control, and without knowledge and experience of how things work, increases feelings of being threatened and intimidated. Clear practical information for children can help children feel more comfortable and express their views. This includes in advance information about their rights to participate, what will happen and how decisions are made. So, professionals should prepare accessible information for children about any decision-making process that might affect them as individuals. This includes in conversations, meetings, interviews, hearings and proceedings. Make sure it covers:

- ▶ The situation under discussion and who will be involved in decision making.
- ▶ The child's role in the decision-making process, including: their rights, support they can ask for and receive, options for how they can choose to participate or not, how their views will be considered, potential limitations on how their views will affect decision making and ways of reviewing decisions.
- ▶ The practical arrangements, including when and where any hearing will take place, how long it will last, who will be there, what representation and protection will be provided, when and how decisions will be made, and how they can influence any practical arrangements.

— Information can be provided face to face, in printed form and through digital media (see [Annex 2](#), producing accessible information). Providing information in multiple forms increases children's opportunities to fully understand. To plan for and respond to these information needs, work through the checklist in [Annex 5](#) on the detail of things to cover when explaining to children their role in the proceedings.

— Professionals will need to protect children's rights to respect for privacy and confidentiality. The Council of Europe's Guidelines on child-friendly justice, for example, specify that a child's privacy should be protected, including from the media. In particular, no one without consent should print a child's name, picture or personal information about them and their family in the newspaper or on the internet. Laws govern what information must be shared between organisations, and that which must remain private. So, professionals should become familiar with their organisational policies on privacy and confidentiality and amend them if necessary.

— Children cannot be heard effectively where the environment is intimidating, hostile, insensitive or inappropriate so it is important to create child-rights friendly environments (see example below). It helps if physical spaces are made as informal as possible, and if children feel ownership of these, for example by being in the room before adults enter and by showing adults where they should sit. If children are being heard in court or other official settings only the concerned people should be present. The guidelines on child-friendly justice cite the example of judges omitting certain formalities, such as wearing a wig or a gown, to help the child feel at ease. Thinking about the time when meetings will be held is also important – children are more likely to participate in their own meetings if they do not have to miss school activities in order to be there. So, professionals should prepare for children's participation by thinking through how they can provide the space and time to build comfortable relationships in which communication is possible.



## EXAMPLE

### Child-rights friendly environment

In England, children involved in an advisory group for the Ministry of Justice's [Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service](#) have a role in advising family courts on how to create child-friendly environments. The children from the advisory group visit the court buildings and assessment settings and conduct audits. Their views are then fed back to the authorities. Based on the feedback, changes have been made to court buildings in some locations to provide for more appropriate, child-friendly spaces. Changes include the provision of more spaces to protect privacy and the provision of things for children and young people to play with or occupy themselves with.

## 3.2 CONNECTING WITH CHILDREN

Participation depends on both adults and children believing in each other and in the process. Children need to know that professionals are interested in their opinion and want to find a solution which takes their views into account. Where professionals involved in decision making are doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, early years workers or managers who already know the child or children involved, children will use past experiences of those individuals as the basis for decisions about whether to trust them. For example, children who feel their teachers listen to and take seriously their idea during day-to-day classroom activities are more likely to talk to that teacher about serious concerns when they arise, such as bullying or sexual violence. Known professionals can build trusting connections with children through respecting their views.

Professionals should provide information about themselves, their role, the limits of confidentiality that will apply and the length of time they are likely to be involved in a child's life. This can be done with the support of accessible information (e.g. leaflets or videos) prepared as described in the subsection above. But it is also important that this is provided to children in a personalised way. Sometimes known professionals will need to provide this kind of information because the decision-making process is new to the child. When the meeting is with a new person, and is not an emergency, children should be given information beforehand about what will happen. Where possible, professionals meeting children for the first time should be introduced by someone a child knows. For example, a parent or foster carer might introduce a new social worker to their child and stay with them until the child feels confident to meet with the social worker alone. Information is often best provided through a personalised conversation, so that children are encouraged to speak and feel listened to at the very start.

Even in the shortest encounter and in difficult circumstances, research evidence shows that effective communication can be established when professionals, such as immigration workers, share a little of themselves. With one question, about for example hobbies, doctors can create an atmosphere in which it is easier for a child to speak. One of the goals of this interaction is to ensure that children feel comfortable in stating or showing their preferences, and that they feel their wishes will be taken into account. Professionals should consider how they can build at least one moment of human connection into their first encounters with children.

The extent of time taken to build effective connections will depend on each child's circumstances and on the skills of the professional. Investing the necessary time in this phase will help improve the quality of the process for everyone concerned. There may also be times throughout the participation processes where returning to this phase of building a connection and rapport becomes necessary. This is particularly likely in circumstances where a child has lost trust in adults who are meant to be responsible for them or their care. Professionals can promote sustained meaningful connections with children by being honest and available.

## 3.3 IDENTIFYING ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

Each participation situation is different, they are more or less formal, and some have strict or less strict limits on the issues that are relevant. Often children can shape the issues adults discuss and express their views about matters that adults have identified as of concern. For example, in situations of family separation, children affected by divorce may suggest to the family judge (or equivalent professional) that custody arrangements for the household pet should be on the agenda. Professionals should be clear about their own objectives and the opportunities for children to put their own issues on the agenda of any discussions.

Those practitioners facilitating children’s participation can use informal and creative activities to enable children to put their agenda ideas forward. In structured discussions, for example, one technique for ensuring that information about and content of agendas are shared and agreed is to use cards (containing words and pictures if possible and including blank cards). Giving these cards to children, professionals can then discuss which issues have to be on the agenda, whether add more onto this agenda, and if so to encourage children to write additional issues on the blank cards.

Children may raise more issues than there is time to cover, especially if adult agendas are already very full. Practitioners therefore need to have clear understanding of timescales for addressing any issues, and providing opportunities for issues to be discussed wherever needed. For example, in a meeting with a child, an asylum support worker may find that the child has concerns for their health, their education, their contact with family and friends, and their current living situation. Arranging a health assessment may be a priority for the service provider but contact with family may be the child’s priority. Responding to children’s priorities as soon as possible is part of ensuring their meaningful involvement in any process. At a minimum, ensure that children have information about when their priority issues will be addressed. Professionals should discuss children’s priorities for what issues should be addressed first, and respect these whenever possible.

In some instances, a child may raise an issue which is outside of the field of the professional they are meeting with or beyond the current process under discussion. For example, a child talking to their teacher may raise an issue about difficulties in friendships, when they have been asked to discuss their education subject choices. In these circumstances, professionals should provide children with information about and connections to relevant services or professionals who can help take forward concerns which are beyond their area of competence.

### 3.4 INVESTIGATING CHILDREN’S VIEWS

Once the agenda for discussion has been agreed children can express their views in many ways. Some children will be happy to just talk, taking one issue at a time. Other children prefer to use more creative means. This can include talking about their wishes using the framework of time (an ideal day, an ideal week, an ideal special event) or using arts-based materials to convey these experiences and preferences. Communication methods should be adapted to each individual child. Some children communicate their wishes through their behaviour, so spending time together to observe this may be important. Professionals should provide a variety of means through which children can be supported to express their views. See [Annex 6](#), for advice on communicating with children.

Identifying or creating specific safe spaces and times to investigate views can be particularly useful in situations where children may feel nervous about the implications of sharing their experiences or ideas (see “Barnahus” example below). Professionals should ask children themselves to advise about where they would feel safe to discuss personal matters. Offer places that may provide safety and explain why. Where time allows, taking part in shared activities can help create safe space, whether that is having a conversation while playing, going for a walk together or making/choosing food or drink. This may happen naturally in some situations, where professionals and children regularly share a same space preparing meals or cleaning up classrooms. In these spaces, for example shared car or train journeys, children often feel more able to name their concerns as there is less intense focus on them. Children may, of course, choose to not comment on some or all of the issues that are on the agenda and it is important here to respect the principle that participation is voluntary (see [Annex 1](#), a checklist for professionals on the implications of the nine basic requirements for safe, meaningful and ethical children’s participation).



#### EXAMPLE

#### “BARNAHUS” (Children’s House) special safe settings

In Iceland, Norway and Sweden, cases of sexual or other forms of violence and abuse can be dealt with in so-called “Children’s Houses” (i.e. “Barnahus” following the original, Icelandic name), where children suspected of having been exposed to sexual or other forms of violence are being heard in safe settings.

The central goals of this response model are:

- to coordinate the parallel criminal and child welfare investigations, gathering all relevant services under one roof, and
- to ensure that children are listened to in a child-friendly and positive environment responding to their needs.

Professionals from social services, forensic medical experts, paediatricians, the police and the judiciary work together within Barnahus to provide the child support and assistance. Interviews are carried out by specialised staff, and the number of interviews is limited to the minimum required for the criminal investigation and judicial process. All interviews are audio-visually recorded, with the possibility for interaction with observers in adjacent rooms, and there are child-friendly rooms for medical examination and counselling.

The Barnahus model was adopted in order to create a specific mechanism that responds to the special needs of suspected child victims of sexual violence and abuse, which are different from adults' needs in similar situations. The Council of Europe promotes the model as a good practice example and supports the development of "Children's Houses" in different European countries.

For further information see:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/barnahus-project-in-slovenia>

<https://childhub.org/en/promising-child-protection-practices/what-barnahus-and-how-it-works>

<https://www.childrenatrisk.eu/promise/>

■ In some situations, children would rather talk to someone who is not directly involved in decision making. This might be a legal representative, appointed guardian or advocate. These people, who can be professionals or peers, can support children to voice their views and represent views on children's behalf, if they do not wish to speak in person. Unlike many professionals working directly with children, advocates do not have a responsibility to advise on what action is in a child's best interests, they have a formal responsibility to ensure that children's wishes are heard, regardless of what these wishes are. When directly involved in decision making, professionals should make sure that children have information about where to get independent help in order to express their views. Children may need additional information in order to form a clear decision about specific options or risks. Professionals should therefore, where possible, facilitate children's access to independent support.



#### EXAMPLE

### Accessing independent support to express views

In some Council of Europe member states, independent services are available for children and young people where they can either get information on children's rights in general, as well as legal advice on their own specific issue or situation.

In Belgium and the Netherlands there are 'Children's rights shops' ([Kinderrechtswinkels](#) or KRWs) in some areas. In Bruges and in Ghent there has been a '[children's rights shop](#)' in place since 1987. The KRWs provide information services and advice to children and young people. In a weekly drop in session in Ghent, children and adults (including youth workers) can come and ask questions related to children's rights (including the rights of minors in conflict with the law) and receive free information and advice. Questions can also be asked by e-mail and on a forum on the association's website. The KRWs also develop teaching materials for children and professionals and deliver training.

The KRWs in Belgium also provide an anonymous helpline for children and young people called [Awel](#). Volunteers can provide children and young people with advice and information – answering their questions and addressing their concerns. Advice is provided via a free phone number, by e-mail, chat or in a forum – all accessible through their website.



## PRACTICE NOTE

### Respect for evolving capacities

When investigating children's views, professionals are required to take them seriously and to recognise the diverse and evolving capacities of each individual child. Children can form and express views from the earliest age, but the nature of their participation, and the range of decisions in which they are involved, will necessarily increase in accordance with their age and evolving capacities. This requires professionals to recognise the diverse capacities of each individual child and tailor their interactions with them in a way that neither overestimates nor underestimates their capacity. For some this may be a fundamental shift from the way they view children, by not seeing age as a barrier. Clearly, young children and some children with disabilities cannot do certain things and have limited capacities to cope with adults. This does not generally question their capacities and abilities.

Children can make or contribute to complex decisions. Research reveals that adults frequently underestimate children's capacities and deny them these opportunities. Paragraph 20 of UN *General Comment 12* states that the phrase 'the right to be heard' of every child 'capable of forming his or her own views' should be seen as an obligation, not a limitation. It continues:

*States Parties should presume that a child has the capacity to form her or his own views and recognize that she or he has the right to express them; it is not up to the child to first prove her or his capacity.*

UN *General Comment 12* also states that there can be no assessment of a child's best interest without an understanding of their views. Professionals must take care to facilitate opportunities for children to express their views, supporting children's evolving capacity in decision making.



## EXAMPLE

### Presuming capacity

In Slovenia, the Law for Children with Special Needs (2011) states that a child with special needs, i.e. with physical or learning disabilities, must be involved in preparing and monitoring their Individualised Programme in Education, depending on their age and maturity. This is felt to be bringing about a cultural change in how children with disabilities are perceived, as it sets out an obligation, but also a legal presumption, for the first time, that children with disabilities were presumed to be capable of making decisions about their education.

## 3.5 TAKING ACTION

Alongside developing a clear understanding of a child's view on the matters that are on the agenda, professionals will also need to develop an understanding of how children wish to input their views into these decision-making arenas and what actions decision makers might be asked to take. Different settings involve opportunities and limits regarding how children's views can be expressed to an 'audience' of decision makers. In consultative decision making, such as in criminal proceedings which are highly formal, children have little control over decisions or about how they might express their views. In almost every other situation, a collaborative approach is possible. For example, children may choose to speak for themselves, or through an intermediary (such as an advocate). They may wish to be physically present when their views are shared, or they may wish to join via live or pre-recorded video.

They may choose to be present at all times and take part in the decision making themselves. In child-led decision making, children decide for themselves on all aspects of the action taken with their views.

When children share their views outside of formal processes, there are a variety of ways these can be taken forward, such as in conversations with peers or professionals, in meetings, in case notes or emails. All professionals, not just those involved in investigating children's views, should follow children's preferences, wherever possible, regarding how their views are expressed in decision making. Professionals then have a responsibility to take action in response to hearing children's views.



For example, a child in an early years setting may express discomfort with a particular worker, the worker and their team leader may investigate with the child to see if a change in worker or activity helps increase their comfort. The worker, team leader and their manager have a responsibility to act on the child's wishes.

Action that gives children's views "due weight" in decisions can include following children's wishes to the letter and considering which aspects of children's views can be implemented instantly and which cannot. Professionals giving children's views due weight in decisions should identify the relationships, resources and services that can be brought together, to enable the action children request. For example, disabled children, their families and professionals working with them, might need information about the available community and specialist services and more personal assistance in order to fulfil children's wishes to, for example, engage in more leisure activities.



#### PRACTICE NOTE

### Best interests of the child

When determining decisions in proceedings affecting children, a number of factors must be taken into account in addition to the child's wishes and feelings. The best interests of the child are paramount. The state has to do whatever they think is best for the children's protection, development and well-being. The child's views on what is 'best' is also very important and their views must be taken seriously. Professionals cannot assess the child's best interests without taking their views into account. In any decision made by adults as to the best interests of the child, the weight given to children's expressed wishes increases with their age and maturity. The best interests' principle does not override other rights in the UNCRC and so should not be used to dismiss a child's views. Judgements have to be made, for example, about whether to exclude a child from a court hearing that they wish to participate in because of concerns about possible harm. Rather, the decision as to whether to grant the child's wish to attend court should be considered and weighed up in accordance with the child's age and maturity.

## 3.6 FOLLOWING UP ACTIONS

Feedback about action taken and further follow-up is a crucial element of children's participation since it demonstrates that the views of children are being heard and respected. Professionals should feedback regularly and as soon as possible what has happened as a result of listening to children's views (See [Annex 2](#) for ideas on how to provide accessible feedback). Whether or not children are present during decision making, they should have opportunities to discuss any decisions as soon as possible. Professionals should provide information and opportunities for children to discuss any decisions they have tried to influence. For example, if a child is trying to challenge a decision to exclude them from school, teachers should let the child know whether their challenge has been accepted, and if not why not.

Decisions are not set in stone, and information is needed about possibilities to review and challenge these. Children should be provided with advice and information about how they make a complaint or seek redress if they feel that their rights have not been upheld (see [Section 2.5](#) on complaints mechanisms). To enable children to take follow-up action they should receive continued support from the adult who has been hearing their views, or from another organisation if this is not possible. One option for children to challenge decisions may be through collective participation activities (See [Section 4](#)).

Relationships with children (and their families) need to be maintained so that children can continue to express their views and feed these into further decision-making opportunities. The process through which a child is heard and has influence on decisions that affect their own everyday life can be very emotionally charged. When things go well, regardless of whether children get the outcome they seek, they may build a positive relationship with person who helps them express their views. To promote children's well-being and their confidence in future participation processes it is important to ensure that the ending, or transformation, of these relationships are well managed. As already stated, this involves informing children of timescales from the very beginning. It also involves, wherever possible, meeting with the child to say goodbye in person. A physical marking of such a process ending can be useful, particularly in longer or more intense processes.

### 3.7 REVIEWING, REFLECTING AND STARTING AGAIN

Participation is a process, not a one-off event or meeting. To maximise the learning, it will be useful to reflect on individual experiences and organisational or contextual factors that have affected any process. This learning can then feed into plans about how to facilitate individual children's participation in the future, as well as how to create participatory environments (see Section 2). Prevailing social attitudes and organisational practices may limit the space for children to voice their views, the ways in which these are heard by different audiences and the influence that their views have. It is therefore important to reflect on personal and organisational practices. These questions can help guide such reflections.

#### What do I or my organisation need to change to:

- ▶ Ensure children are clear about who I am and my role?
- ▶ Know what personal information am I comfortable sharing about myself?
- ▶ Ensure children have the information they need about this process?
- ▶ Make space for children's priority concerns alongside my own?
- ▶ Be sure that I/my organisation hear everything that children are telling us and do not dismiss things because they do not seem serious to the adults involved?
- ▶ Ensure that children's views are represented as clearly and safely as possible in any decision making?
- ▶ Ensure that more of children's wishes can be put into action through any decision-making processes?
- ▶ Give children a clear account of how their views can or have influenced decision making?

In addition to opportunities for self-reflection, those working with children should create spaces for reflective dialogues with children, colleagues, families and wider community members. Through such processes all stakeholders can review achievements and shared goals. These people may then also become allies involved in collective participatory processes to bring about these goals or changes.



#### CHECKLIST

### Reflecting on discrimination

As attitudes towards children are one of the major barriers to their views being taken into account in decisions use the checklist below to reflect on discrimination in your practice and context. Ask yourself:

1. Is there any evidence of internalised adultism, where children are questioning the legitimacy of their own views? If so, what can you do to reassure them and encourage their expression of views?
2. Is there any evidence of institutionalised adultism, where age is used to include or exclude children from particular rights? What can be done to challenge any age-based limits and assumptions about children's competence?
3. Is there any evidence of cultural adultism affecting the people and processes you have contact with? What can be done to raise people's awareness of this phenomenon?

Finally, reviewing and sharing what has gone well is an important part of preparing for further children's participation processes, and will inspire others. Ask yourself, and the children you are working with:

1. What are we proud of in terms of how we share information with children?
2. What are we proud of in terms of how we make space for children's priority concerns alongside my own?
3. What are we proud of in terms of how we make sure that I/my organisation hear everything that children are telling us?

4. What are we proud of in terms of how we ensure that children's views are represented as clearly and safely as possible in any decision making?
5. What are we proud of in terms of how we ensure that children's wishes can increasingly be put into action through any decision-making processes?
6. What are we proud of in terms of how we give children a clear account of how their views can or have influenced decision making?



## HINTS AND TIPS

### Connecting with children

Trusting connections with individual children are enabled when:

- Children are involved throughout any process.
- Children receive the information about the process, in a form they can understand, and with time to discuss it.
- Children's questions are listened to and they are encouraged to express concerns.
- Children see clear evidence of their preferences and needs being taken into account in relevant decisions.
- Children are kept informed about what is happening and why things are happening in this way.

Individual child participation processes can become more child-led when children are:

- Supported to chair their own meetings.
- Decide when and where meetings are held.
- Decide who is present.
- Given opportunities to pause the meeting and ensure discussion cease while they temporarily leave the room (perhaps to seek advice or to revise their views on the options available).
- The meeting celebrates successes as well as discussing challenges.

Remember:

- Children have rights to information, advice and support.
- Children have a right to express their opinion on every matter which affects them.
- Adults have a duty to listen to children and take their opinions into account.
- The impact children's view has on decisions will depend on the age and maturity of the child and on the particular decision. Always explain to the child why their wishes have or have not been followed in any particular situation.

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.