



Reaching the heights for the rights of the child

Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2016-2021

High-Level Launching Conference

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Statements

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Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to take part in this working session, in my capacity as Congress Thematic Spokesperson on Children.

For those who are not yet familiar with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, it is an institution of the Council of Europe, responsible for strengthening local and regional democracy in its 47 member states. It brings together 648 elected officials representing more than 200 000 local and regional authorities.

In my country, the Netherlands, I am a member of the executive of the Provincial Council of the Region of North-Brabant, and it is the view point of a regional elected representative on participation of children in the budgetary process that I would like to share with you today.

This conference is organised at a time where our children suffer the consequences of the austerity measures introduced by our governments. This is also a time where children's social rights, notably those of the poorest and most vulnerable groups, are being seriously challenged.



Bulgarian Chairmanship
Council of Europe
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Présidence de la Bulgarie
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Moreover, there is unfortunately still not enough space for children to express their views on decisions that affect their lives.

The video we have just seen demonstrates that our children are very well aware of the areas where the different levels of government should spend money: security, education, health, housing, recreation, and access to justice for all. Here is proof, among others, that citizenship knows no age, and that we should consult children and ask their opinion about how we can make their lives better.

So the question for us, local and regional authorities, is how can we improve children's participation in the budgetary process?

First we have to make the process intelligible for them. Secondly, we have to give them the desire to participate. We must make the issue interesting for them.

We can provide children with information on what a municipal budget means and how we take decisions. To do this, we must produce child friendly documents that all children can understand, including those with disabilities or with an immigrant background.

To reach out and work with children and their caretakers, we can meet with schools, with children's organisation representatives and hear children's views. We can also use a wide range of tools at our disposal: websites, social networks, games and web applications.

Then there is the question of feedback. I agree with the children in this video: We must give them feedback on the decisions taken later on, to foster transparency and accountability.

For this purpose we can set up children's parliaments within local councils in order for them to express their views. We can also appoint a focal person to give children appropriate information and process their recommendations to the council members.

A bolder initiative would be to set up a children's participatory budget council. This has proven to be very successful in some municipalities and the experience has shown that children, when empowered, take their job very seriously.

I can give one example of children's budgeting from Wales. Every year during the budget setting process of the county Rhonda Cynon Taff, young people are consulted. Workshops on the budget setting process are held at three comprehensive schools in the region to inform them about the process and find out the young people's priorities on the spending. A couple of months later, the young people will be informed by the authority on how their priorities have been taken into account in the budget strategy

Unfortunately, participation of children in the budgetary process might be difficult to put into practice.

Very often, our local and regional authorities in Europe lack financial resources and improving children participation do not fall in their core priorities. Last but not least, children are not electors. Elected representatives often consider that children are not citizens whose voice need

to be taken into account - although their right to express an opinion and to have their view given due consideration for the decisions that affect their lives is enshrined in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

We must work on convincing local authorities on the necessity and usefulness of this action. This is what I tried to do with our report last year.

Ladies and gentlemen our children are both our present and our future. Ignoring their views and opinion is not investing in our future.

Thank you very much for your attention.