



AS/Soc/Inf (2025) 08

11 June 2025

This briefing note has been prepared by the Secretariat with the contribution of Raluca Verweijen Slamnescu, international expert on child participation. It aims at raising awareness amongst parliamentarians on child participation in decision making processes and gives in a concise way the requirements for meaningful, inclusive and safe child participation, some examples of actions that can be taken to enhance child participation in decision making processes and what should be done or not be done when engaging with children in decision making processes.

Giving a voice to every child: child participation in decision making processes

Briefing note for parliamentarians

“Children and young people’s voices are not just valuable, they are essential for shaping effective policies. Recognising children as active members of our society strengthens democracy and social cohesion. It is our responsibility to provide them with the opportunities and tools to engage, express their views, and influence the policies that concern them.”

Elena Bonetti, PACE General Rapporteur on child participation

WHY DO WE NEED MORE CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCESSES?

Because:

- child participation is a human right
- children have a legitimate right to participate in shaping policies for their communities
- children have unique perspectives that, when considered, strengthen the relevance and effectiveness of policies, laws and programmes

Article 12 of the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** – the child’s right to be heard – is the fundamental tenet for children’s participation

The *PACE Resolution 2414 (2022)* *The right to be heard – Child participation: a foundation for democratic societies* reflects the Assembly conviction that considering children’s views on any decisions affecting their lives is an essential precondition for building democratic societies.

The *Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022 - 2027)* includes a strategic objective on giving a voice to every child

- children will have a better understanding of governance, social responsibility, and the importance of their voices
- children’s participation can promote the development of democratic societies that are more likely to be inclusive, peaceful and empower their most vulnerable members.

Studies suggest that when children are actively engaged, they express higher satisfaction with policy outcomes and contribute to stronger trust between young people and their politicians.

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR MEANINGFUL, INCLUSIVE AND SAFE CHILD PARTICIPATION?

For child participation to be meaningful, inclusive and safe, it shall be:

- **transparent and informative:** children should receive age-appropriate information about their right to express views and the scope, and potential impact of their participation
- **voluntary:** children should never be coerced to participate, and they should be informed that they can cease involvement at any stage
- **respectful:** children's views must be respected, and they shall be encouraged to initiate ideas and activities
- **relevant:** children's participation must address issues of real relevance to them allowing them to use their knowledge, while also creating space for them to raise issues they find important
- **child-friendly:** environments and methods should cater to children's age and evolving capacities, offering sufficient time and support for confident participation
- **inclusive:** ensure all children, of different ages, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and especially vulnerable ones, have equal opportunities to participate
- **supported by training:** adults need preparation and support to facilitate children's participation effectively
- **safe and sensitive to risks:** minimize risks of harm or any other negative consequence of their participation, by using child safeguarding strategy including a child-friendly format
- **accountable:** inform children about how their views were used, provide immediate feedback and offer opportunities of participation in follow-up activities and evaluation processes.

The concept of "*meaningful participation*" refers to the freedom of expression, thought, conscience, religion, association, peaceful assembly, protection of privacy and access to information

In addition, effective and sustainable child participation in decision-making requires that it be:

- an ongoing process rather than a one-off event
- supported by comprehensive policies
- funded with sufficient resources (including budgets for training and inclusive activities)
- supported by civil society organisations and child-led organisations working with vulnerable children.

WHICH POSSIBLE ACTIONS CAN BE TAKEN TO ENHANCE CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCESSES?

Before planning for engaging children in collective participation processes, it is necessary to consider:

- how does the national legislation regulate the involvement of citizens, including children, in decision-making processes of public authorities
- which standard procedures of Parliament refer to obligations of consulting with children when developing and approving new laws and ordinances, with a focus on Parliamentary Committees responsible for education, health, child protection and care
- how has children's participation already made a difference in the decisions taken by public authorities.

Professor Laura Lundy has created a [*model of child participation*](#) which provides decision makers with a path to help conceptualise children's right to participation. In her approach, Professor Lundy emphasises that it is not enough to give children a VOICE. Children also need a SPACE with opportunities to express their views, they shall be exposed to a relevant AUDIENCE, that listens to their views, and their views must be acted upon as appropriate to have an INFLUENCE.

When asked about issues on which they would like to be consulted, children have identified the following priority topics: education, public transport and infrastructure, health and social care systems, and the environment¹.

Parliamentarians can promote children's participation in decision-making in a number of ways, including by:

- establishing **children's advisory boards** where children from different backgrounds provide input on decisions related to children's rights, education, health and welfare
- creating **digital platforms or surveys** where children can express their views on various issues (e.g. Sweden often conducts surveys to consult children on policies that affect them)
- inviting children to participate in **public consultations, submit written statements, take part in debates or attend public meetings**. Workshops, focus groups or creative media (e.g. art, games, digital tools) help children to express their views in an accessible and engaging way
- organising **regular simulations of decision-making processes**, where children take on the role of MPs and debate issues relevant to their lives. This educational experience gives children a deep understanding of international diplomacy and decision-making
- organising **international conferences and study visits** where children from different countries discuss global issues
- inviting children to **present their views on specific laws or policies** at public hearings, by giving testimony or participating in panel discussions
- **visiting children in institutions** where they learn and spend their leisure time.

¹ Council of Europe, 2023 - [*Let's decide together! - Guide to meaningful and effective engagement of children in decision-making, p. 14.*](#)

DOs AND DON'Ts WHEN ENGAGING WITH CHILDREN IN DECISION MAKING PROCESSES

✓ DOs:

- involve children strategically in long-term planning, not just in emergency situations
- respect the best interests of the child in all participation activities
- facilitate the participation of children of different ages, backgrounds and abilities, and encourage the participation of children from marginalised and vulnerable groups
- use child-friendly methods of communication
- encourage participating adults to be well prepared and to adapt their communication when working with children
- create safe and supportive spaces where children feel emotionally and physically secure and can freely express their views without fear of judgement or backlash
- actively listen to children's views and respond to their concerns
- ensure that children receive feedback and understand how their ideas will be considered.

✗ DON'Ts:

- “tokenise” children’s participation, for symbolic purposes or to meet a requirement
- ignore diversity among children and assume that all children can engage in the same way
- overwhelm with technical language, complicated concepts and lack of breaks
- use children for political leverage or media attention
- undermine children’s ability or interest to contribute
- pressure children to conform to adult views or encourage them to express opinions that may not necessarily be in line with dominant adult views.