



**Building a Europe
for and with children**

**Construire une Europe
pour et avec les enfants**

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 11 January 2021

Consultation of children in the process of building a new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027)

- Concept note -

OVERVIEW

- Activity:** Child consultation in the preparatory process of the new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027), guiding the intergovernmental work of the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF)
- Organisation:** Children's Rights Division of the Council of Europe, in collaboration with national governments of member states and their respective partners.
- Project launch:** 1 January 2021
- End of project:** 31 December 2021
- Website:** www.coe.int/children
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BACKGROUND, AIMS AND RESOURCES

The Council of Europe Children's Rights Division (CRD) has a long-standing tradition of involving children in its work in all the relevant areas of the 'strategic triangle' of international co-operation, including standard-setting activities on the rights of the child, monitoring member states' commitments in implementing these standards and developing co-operation and capacity-building activities. In the context of the current Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021), and in line with its priority area 2 on "the participation of all children", the Organisation has involved children on several occasions and various topics, such as, for example, child-friendly justice, sexual violence or child-friendly health. It has also invited children to major events and reached out to them in the production of child-friendly material, for example for Roma and Traveller children, or for all children acting in the digital environment.

In the process of preparing the new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027), the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) has identified child consultations in a number of member states as a necessary input. The aim will be to ensure that the new Strategy considers and addresses the main challenges faced by children, thus actually responding to children's priorities as perceived and expressed by their representatives.

The participatory process will be led by the Council of Europe Children's Rights Division for the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child. In the light of resources available it is suggested to organise child consultations in collaboration with 10 to 12 national governments and their respective partners (including different government services and agencies, ombudspersons, NGOs and children themselves). The results of the overall process, a consultation process based on semi-structured questions put to well-identified groups of children, will be presented to the Council of Europe in September 2021, through an event gathering key stakeholders, including children themselves (*exact setting and dates to be confirmed*) and will finally feed into the new Strategy to be submitted for approval by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe towards the end of 2021. The priority areas to be addressed by the new Strategy are currently being identified in a "multilevel consultative process", i.e. in collaboration with different Council of Europe bodies and external partners of the Council of Europe (international organisations, NGOs etc.). The questions to be submitted to children will be formulated on this basis in the framework of the preparatory and conceptualising phase, in collaboration with the consultants to be selected.

In 2020, the Council of Europe has developed a new tool to support the implementation of child participation activities run by professionals working for and with children: the Handbook on Children's Participation "Listen – Act – Change" which will be a valuable reference and resource for various activities, including the development of concrete child consultations towards the new Strategy. To be launched in January 2021 (in English and French), it will be available in time as a new tool to inspire the child consultation process ahead.

THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS AHEAD

Consultation meetings taking place in 10 to 12 selected member states will be targeted to one of the priority areas that will have been identified in the multilevel consultative process carried out between September 2020 and February 2021, notably involving governments and observer organisations/bodies represented on the CDENF. Each of the 5-6 priority areas will ideally be assigned to two national governments, selected on the basis of their demonstrated capacity to consult with children in a professional and balanced manner (i.e. with the support of specialised organisations and facilitators, and by involving children of various backgrounds, including vulnerable situations (e.g. minority children, children with disabilities etc.)) and willingness to engage in a process which may require additional resources to be mobilised by respective governments.

To plan the child consultations toward the new Council of Europe Strategy, the Children's Rights Division (CRD) will seek the support of national stakeholders and their partners through member states' delegations of the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF). While the Council of Europe will engage with the conceptualisation, preparation, coordination, professional support and follow-up of specific activities and reporting back on them, the national partners will be in charge of concretely organising and implementing the consultations with children in their respective countries, and transmitting the outcomes back to the Council of Europe and to the children involved. The consultants to be identified through the present call are meant to support both the European work process and assist national delegations with professional advice and guidance as needed. At the European level, the results of child consultations will then be analysed with the support of the consultants to be taken into consideration for the Strategy. According to the timeline envisaged, the CDENF will once again be involved towards the end of the process, once the input provided by children will have been analysed, and when formally deciding on the final draft of the Strategy. At the end of the process, national delegations, along with their partners and support from the consultants, will organise a written feedback to the children involved, to explain, in an age appropriate manner, how their views and opinions have been taken into consideration and have influenced the final draft of the Strategy.

Stakeholders and partners supporting the child consultation process

A general call for national delegations to volunteer for supporting the child consultation process was made in the framework of the recent survey on the Strategy priorities undertaken within the CDENF, and notably via the questionnaire addressed to national governments. In this exercise, more than 20 national delegations have expressed their interest in supporting the child consultation process. However, in line with the resources available, only 10 to 12 delegations will be invited to take an active part in the initiative and will also be expected to support the child consultation process from their respective sides.

The call for experts launched in January 2021 is meant to identify international consultants able to provide professional support, coordination and guidance to the Council of Europe Secretariat and national governments and their respective partners in this process (NGOs, facilitators etc.). Besides their general knowledge and experience in organising child consultation processes, and in the current context (of large-scale confinements under the Covid-19 pandemic), the consultants should be in a position to conceptualise and propose an appropriate methodology to follow when consulting children by means of communication technologies and advise participating national delegations in this respect.

Distribution of tasks in the child consultation process

Jointly with the consultants to be selected, the Council of Europe will seek to conceptualise a process that is as inclusive as possible by, *inter alia*, formally involving 10 to 12 national delegations in a geographically balanced manner, as well as by proposing a number of criteria leading to the constitutions of balanced child consultation groups (e.g. ensuring gender balance and representation of different categories of children, some of which are seldom heard, such as ethnic minorities, children with disabilities or children in other vulnerable situations).

National delegations themselves will be choosing their partner organisations or experts to support them in reaching out to children, identifying children willing to take part in the consultations and actually running the child consultations, with the help of adequately trained, experienced and trustful facilitators who will put the key questions agreed with the Council of Europe to children in a child-friendly manner and oversee the process. National delegations participating in the process will be supported in running child consultation activities and receive a small grant from the Council of Europe to this purpose, even though they will also be expected to raise additional resources needed from their side.

Methodology and aim of the child consultation process

The consultation of children will be based on semi-structured questions relating to pre-defined priority areas which are wide enough for children to add their own perspective and to propose more specific priorities (for example by ranking issues of concern, by defining more precisely the problems they are facing and by requesting action needed from their governments and other stakeholders). In this way, the child consultation process aims at reflecting the actual needs and expectations of European children in the new Strategy, thus informing and guiding the intergovernmental work undertaken in the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF), and, finally, involving children as agents of change for their own rights and protection.

WORK PROGRAMME ENVISAGED

Timeline

Phase of the child participation process	Partners	When
Preparatory phase		
Conceptualising and making preparations for the child consultation process Identifying member states who have an interest in supporting the child consultations	Secretariat (of the Council of Europe Children's Rights Division)	November- December 2020
Selecting a consortium of international consultant(s) to support the process at European and national levels, including through direct contacts with the national delegations Selecting the participating national delegations Formulating semi-open questions to be submitted to the children and dispatching the priority areas identified amongst participating national delegations Sharing the Council of Europe toolkit on child participation with national partners	Secretariat Supporting consultants National governments and their partners	January 2021
Implementation phase		
Preparing for and actually running meetings with diverse groups of children in different countries and on the identified priority areas <i>Proposal:</i> 1 thematic meeting per participating country, involving 10-20 children of various backgrounds and belonging to the age group 10-18 (association of girls and boys in a balanced manner)	Secretariat Supporting consultants National governments and their partners	February 2021 - May 2021

Phase of the child participation process	Partners	When
Reporting phase		
Preparing reports on the child participation meetings held at the national level	National governments and their partners Supporting consultants	June 2021
Drawing conclusions from the overall process for any suggestions still to be included into the new Strategy	Secretariat Supporting consultants CDENF Bureau	By 15 September 2021
Final event presenting and discussing the results of the child consultation process	National governments and their partners Any interested organisation or professional Supporting consultants Secretariat	End of September 2021
Reporting back on the results of the child consultations and proposals made by children to the CDENF	National governments represented on the CDENF Supporting consultants Secretariat	15-18 October 2021
Written or online feedback to children and national delegations about what suggestions coming from the children were included into the new Strategy	Secretariat National governments and their partners	November-December 2021

Working languages

The child consultations will be carried out in the children’s respective native languages, but the consultants involved in the process should be in a position to communicate with the Council of Europe Secretariat and national delegations in English mainly, which will be the main working language of this activity. Governmental representatives involved or representatives of their partner organisations reporting back to the Council of Europe may communicate their results in English or French in writing to ensure their analysis and actual consideration in the Strategy. The feedback to children by the Council of Europe will also be provided in English or French and shall be translated accordingly by national governments and their partners as needed.

Follow-up

The results of the above child consultation process to be carried out between February and September 2021 (involving a preparatory phase in December 2020/January 2021) will be presented to the Council of Europe mid-September 2021 (*format, location and exact dates to be confirmed*), where outcomes shall be discussed within the European “child participation community” and first feedback provided to the children. The results will then also be presented to national governments represented on the CDENF in October 2021. Finally, children will also be provided with written feedback on the whole consultation process and how their input was considered for the final draft of the Strategy, before the end of 2021.

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