

Strasbourg, 12 October 2020

**Child participation Assessments  
undertaken in Finland, Malta and Slovenia (2018-2020):  
“From Assessment to Action”**

**Online Evaluation Meeting  
of work cycle III of assessments undertaken with the  
Council of Europe Participation Assessment Tool (CPAT)**

Meeting by videoconference  
Monday 14 September 2020, from 9 to 13 hrs

**Meeting report**

*Prepared by the Children's Rights Division  
Directorate of Anti-Discrimination  
Directorate General II Democracy*

## Agenda item 1: Opening and welcome

1. The evaluation of child participation assessments undertaken with the Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool (CPAT) under work cycle III of the CPAT project by Finland, Malta and Slovenia took place by videoconference on the 17 September 2020 (see Agenda in Annex I). The meeting was opened by **Regina JENSDOTTIR**, Head of the Children's Rights Division, who welcomed national delegations and experts, commending the commitment by national delegations, the efforts made, and the results achieved in the area of child participation. She noted that the Council of Europe (CoE) was one of the first international organisations to identify member states' need for support in implementing child participation and to make it an absolute priority. It would continue to do so in the next Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) which was currently under preparation. Participants to the evaluation meeting were encouraged to contribute on what could be some of the new objectives in the area of child participation.
2. **Maren LAMBRECHT**, from the Secretariat, reminded participants of previous evaluation cycles and recalled the objectives of the present meeting, which included gathering:
  - Suggestions for improvements to the CPAT and updating the relevant documents;
  - Lessons learned and ideas for how to support and develop further child participation activities;
  - Ideas on what activities the CoE could develop in the future in the area of child participation.
3. A *tour de table* was held, during which all participants (as they appear in Annex II) had the opportunity to introduce themselves and their role in the CPAT assessment process.

## Agenda item 2a: Review of work cycle III of the Child Participation Assessment Tool (CPAT) – Sharing country reports and experiences

4. The country delegations presented their reports and outlined their experiences made in the different phases of the evaluation process. The following observations were made recurrently and may therefore be retained as experiences shared by different countries under evaluation:
  - The **national legislation** on children's right to participate is often fragmented and, even when that is not the case, its implementation is poor;
  - **Cultural perceptions** of children are an obstacle for them to be heard in many matters in which they should have a voice and to be taken seriously;
  - There is a general **lack of information** regarding the right of the child to participate, sometimes on the side of the different authorities/services or on the side of the children themselves. Children's right to information also needs to apply to the time after the consultation in the form of feedback to be provided and this aspect is regularly overlooked;
  - The **infrastructure** is fundamental to carry out child participation successfully; however, adequate infrastructure is regularly lacking entirely or insufficient due to a lack of resources;
  - Poor **cooperation** among state, regional and local authorities is important to stimulate action at all levels and ensure child participation.

5. The most *systematic challenges* faced by the countries under assessment were summarised as follows:

- Underlying cultural attitudes that need to change for children to participate meaningfully;
- Political willingness and engagement; even if there is political will, gaps regularly remain between policy, legal and hands-on practical level;
- Difficulties in reaching children in vulnerable situations such as children in out-of-home care;
- Lack of resources;
- Lack of training and support for professionals;
- Lack of specific services:

#### Lessons learned and good practices

- Legislation should be made accessible to children by translating it into child-friendly terms and language.
- Timing is crucial wherever the CPAT process fits within a broader, governmental, strategic framework or the work towards such a framework.
- Child participation can be a critical dimension in re-energising democracy. Children's fora and councils are arenas where children are assigned specific roles, are adequately informed about how and why they are being involved and are given feedback on the impact of their views on decisions. However, it is often challenging to ensure institutions engage children from marginalised groups.
- Providing feedback should be facilitated to children (e.g. by visual signs (emojis or smileys) to be raised to express their feelings on a specific matter (sad, neutral, happy). This practice is generally well received by children and encourages them to participate and voice their opinions.

6. Furthermore, country delegations outlined the most relevant *methodological and practical challenges* met during the assessment process, specifically related to the use of CPAT:

- The **scope** of the tool is very broad which makes it complex to gather information on all the indicators. Some limitations on the number of settings selected must be imposed.
- Gathering feedback from children through **focus groups** is challenging, especially when consulting children on matters that are far from their every-day lives, and even if the questions are formulated in a child-friendly manner. However, this direct approach to data gathering remains fundamental for the success of the self-assessment.
- The tool was at the same time acknowledged and appreciated for its **clear structure** and considered challenging when appearing too **rigid** in the face of "real-life" situations.

### Suggestions for improving the CPAT

- Try to reduce the overlap of topics across the indicators
- Include quality and outcome indicators
- On this basis, create a system of periodic review of any process made
- Also assess the effectiveness of participation structures from an equality perspective: how are the participation rights of children in vulnerable situations realised and are they equally enforced?
- Make the CPAT reports public for increased public awareness

### Agenda item 2b: Feedback from consultants, Anne Crowley and Gerison Lansdown

7. **Anne CROWLEY** and **Gerison LANSDOWN**, the two child participation consultants who had followed the CPAT assessment process since the very beginning of its implementation, presented their impressions gained from the most recent CPAT round, the main challenges in the area of child participation and advice for future action, while also reacting to the country delegations' presentations. In the light of the information provided by the consultants, participants agreed that the following were the most common challenges:
- There is a lot of legislation concerning child participation indeed, but it is seldom fully implemented. This shows that it is not enough to have a law; it needs to make a difference in people's lives. This must be a process rather than a one-off event. Law and policy implementation therefore need to be strengthened;
  - Checking progress of countries having implemented CPAT is an important issue to move on to;
  - Changing mindsets of the people for them to embrace, understand and accept the value of child participation is a precondition for any action to be taken;
  - Improving coordination and inclusion is fundamental to reaching out to all children, particularly those in vulnerable situations;
  - Setting up more child-friendly, accessible and safe complaint systems is crucial. The systems in place are usually designed for adults, which leads to a scarce engagement on the side of children. Innovative ways to allow for children's complaints (e.g. social media, better promotion of mechanisms and different use of language) could help. However, there might be other reasons for which children are not willing to speak up and more research is needed;
  - Making better use of the features of ICTs and social media to improve the reach and engagement of children, keeping in mind the risks;
  - Further promoting the dissemination of good practice.
8. Following the presentation, the floor was opened to all participants for further comments or questions. **Regina Jensdottir** underlined the possible interest of producing a progress report on the work done over the past years, which could give inspiration and ideas to countries that had not yet done any assessment. Furthermore, she asked participants what kind of support could be developed for different levels of government for implementing child participation, including for the local level. **Gerison Lansdown** recalled the importance of

always hearing children with direct experience on a specific subject matter, irrespective of the level of government. Children should be encouraged to take the lead wherever their attitude was proactive. Country delegations further highlighted the lack of participatory structures at local and regional levels, the difficulty of giving feedback in the absence of mechanisms that are accountable to children, as well as the influence of individual politicians and mayors on the likelihood of child participation processes to be carried out.

9. The Secretariat further encouraged the participants to make proposals on prominent issues that should come up in the new CoE Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) and possibly in national strategies, not least in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **Suggestions for topics and activities to be included in the new CoE Strategy**

- Opportunities and challenges offered by IT tools in the context of child participation;
- Complaint mechanisms for children who see their right to participation infringed;
- Child participation as an expedient to strengthening democracy;
- Child consultations on sex education with the aim of drafting a recommendation.

#### **Agenda item 3: Thematic discussion: National Strategies as an effective tool to implement more solid child participation mechanisms? – the example of Ireland**

10. **Olive MCGOVERN**, from the Department of Children, Disability, Equality and Integration in Ireland, presented the unique Irish experience developing and implementing a National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making (2015-2020).
11. Following her presentation, the floor was opened for questions and discussion. **Anne Crowley** asked whether Ireland was considering storing the child consultation outcomes in order to be able to revert to them and review them over time. The speaker answered that this was usually not the case but consultations were stored occasionally when they included issues that could not be tackled immediately, so that children's views could be considered years later when the system was ready to make changes. **Gerison Lansdown** asked what were the main factors that enabled the success of the Irish National Strategy in terms of child participation. **Olive McGovern** argued that one of the major success factors was to have an expert on child and youth participation at a high level of government, which allowed this topic to reach the top of the political agenda.

#### **Agenda item 4: Close of the meeting**

12. The Secretariat thanked all participants for their contributions and reminded them about their possibility to propose further action by the CoE in relation to child participation. The following ideas were put forward:
  - The CoE could support countries in keeping the process of CPAT alive, as often ministries and people in charge changed and the projects were forgotten about or left behind. It was important to have a solid contact point in the government or central unit.
  - Work with Children Human Rights Defenders could be interesting to explore ways for further strengthening the accountability of national governments toward children.

- The CoE could both develop an in-house training for colleagues to consult children in their work and training modules to be used by different categories of professionals in member states.
- More support could be provided to developing and sharing good practice on engaging children who are seldom heard in public decision-making including Roma and Traveller children, disabled children, displaced children etc. Planning and prioritising such support could be informed through the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (e.g. by means of a survey) or through other CoE networks.
- Specific guidance could be provided on areas which are particularly problematic (e.g. healthcare, schools, family) – again, possibly informed by a survey.

# Annex I

## Agenda

9:00 – 9:30	<b>Opening and welcome</b>	
	<b>Welcome address</b> by <b>Regína Jensdóttir</b> , Head of the Children’s Rights Division (CRD)	5 min
	<b>Thematic introduction</b> by <b>Maren Lambrecht-Feigl</b> , Programme Officer, CRD: Reminder of Council of Europe action on child participation and purpose of this meeting	10 min
	<b>Short introduction</b> by each national expert present and the consultant accompanying the CPAT process, and formulation of respective expectations towards the meeting:	
	- <b>Liisa Mannisto</b> , Finland	
	- <b>Lorella Gatt</b> , Malta	
	- <b>Urban Boljka</b> , Slovenia	
	- <b>Anne Crowley</b> , Consultant	3 min
	- <b>Gerison Lansdown</b> , Consultant	each
9:30 –	<b>Review of work cycle III of the Child Participation Assessment Tool (CPAT)</b>	
11:45	<b>Sharing country reports and experiences:</b>	
	<div data-bbox="292 981 598 1070"><i><b>Finland</b></i></div> <div data-bbox="665 981 970 1070"><i><b>Malta</b></i></div> <div data-bbox="1023 981 1329 1070"><i><b>Slovenia</b></i></div>	15 min
		each
<u>Short break</u>		
<u>from 10:30</u>		
<u>– 10:45</u>	>>> <i>Presentation by each country, addressing the following aspects amongst others:</i>	
	- Methodological or practical challenges met during the assessment process (e.g. with specific indicators or focus groups)	
	- Findings (good practices and shortcomings in the area of child participation) and results of the assessment	
	- Follow-up to be given to the assessment and next steps ahead (e.g. an action plan)	
	- “Political” impact (e.g. development of awareness, capacities and political willingness)	
	- Experiences with and suggestions for the assessment tool itself	
	- Any other aspect judged important by delegations	
	<b>Feedback from the consultants, Anne Crowley and Gerison Lansdown:</b>	
	- Impressions gained from the CPAT processes	15 min
	- Main challenges in the area of child participation	each
	- Advice for further action	
	- Reaction to earlier presentations	
	<i>Discussion</i>	30 min

11:45 – 12:35	<b>Thematic discussion: National Strategies as an effective tool to implement more solid child participation mechanisms? – the example of Ireland</b>	
	Presentation by <b>Olive McGovern</b> , Principal Officer, Head of Participation Unit, Department of Children, Disability, Equality and Integration, Ireland, on the Irish National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020	20 min
	<i>Discussion</i>	20 min
12:35 – 13:00	<b>Close of the meeting</b>	15-25 min
	Conclusions and next steps ahead	



## **Annex II**

### **List of participants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Function/institution</b>	
<b><i>National delegations participating in work cycle III</i></b>		
<b><i>Finland</i></b>		
<b>Liisa Männistö</b>	Senior Specialist Unit for Democracy and Elections Department for Democracy and Public Law Ministry of Justice, Finland	
<b>Terhi Tuukkanen</b>	Senior Researcher, Office of the Ombudsman for Children	
<b>Sanna Koulu</b>	Senior Specialist, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (National Child Strategy team)	
<b>Laura Saarinen</b>	Project Secretary, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health	
<b><i>Malta</i></b>		
<b>Angela Caruana</b>	Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society	
<b>Lorella Gatt</b>	Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society	
<b>Sandra Hili-Vassallo</b>	Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity (MFSS)	
<b><i>Slovenia</i></b>		
<b>Urban Boljka</b>	Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia	
<b>Ruzica Boskic</b> <i>Excused</i>	Social Affairs Directorate, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Slovenia	
<b>Jasmina Rosič</b>	Researcher	
<b>Tamara Narat</b>	PhD, senior researcher	
<b><i>Invited guests</i></b>		
<b>Olive McGovern</b>	Head of Participation Unit, Department of Children, Disability, Equality and Integration, Ireland	
<b>Lara Hynes</b>	Principal Officer, Child Care Legislation & Children's Rights Policy Unit, Department of Children, Disability, Equality and Integration, Ireland	
<b><i>Consultants accompanying the CPAT process</i></b>		
<b>Anne Crowley</b>	International Child Participation Consultant	
<b>Gerison Lansdown</b>	International Child Participation Consultant	
<b><i>Secretariat</i></b>		
<b>Regína Jensdóttir</b>	Head of the Children's Rights Division (CRD)	
<b>Maren Lambrecht-Feigl</b>	Programme Officer, CRD	
<b>Anna Bracco</b>	Policy Officer, CRD	
<b>Valentyna Kryvenkova</b>	Assistant, CRD	
<b>Valérie Giret</b>	Assistant, CRD	