

Summary Report

**PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN IN THE HIGH-LEVEL LAUNCHING CONFERENCE
FOR THE NEW STRATEGY FOR THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (2022-2027)**

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Introduction

A delegation of 10 “young delegates”, mostly under 18, participated in the High-level Launching Conference for the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) of the Council of Europe in Rome on 7-8 April 2022. They had been part of the 220 children consulted during the preparation of the new Strategy in Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Portugal, Slovak Republic and Spain, and represented a number of these countries themselves.

During the high-level event, several spaces were foreseen for member States’ representatives, international organisations and other stakeholders to engage with the young delegates and exchange on the thematic priorities of the Strategy. The main objective was to contribute to a meaningful opportunity for participation where children were placed at the centre, assuming a leading role during these two days, whilst being supported by several professional facilitators from DCI Italy.

The aim of this report is thus to provide an overview of the child participation activities in the framework of the Launching Conference for the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027). At the beginning of each section some methodological hints - that oriented our reflections and actions along the process - are proposed.

The specific experience of the child consultations led in the course of the preparation of the Council of Europe Strategy - together with the methodological orientations that informed the overall process and were derived from it - could be perceived as the attempt to solidly connect theory and practice in favouring meaningful child participation.¹ In this perspective, the two foreseen deliverables aimed at i) providing a report on the Rome conference and ii) highlighting general orientations on child participation to be applied in other Council of Europe events, might be considered and read as complementary contents.

¹ For the full picture of the child consultation and participation process related to the Strategy please refer to Defence for Children Italy, Council of Europe Child Consultations to Inform the Development of the new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child: Methodological Hints and Orientations, 2021; Defence for Children Italy, Child Safeguarding and Wellbeing Protocol: Child Consultations to Inform the Development of the new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child, 2021; Defence for Children, Report on child consultations informing the formulation of the Strategy for the Rights of the Child, <<https://rm.coe.int/council-of-europe-child-consultations-to-inform-the-elaboration-of-the/1680a697d5>>, 2022.

Overall approach

Defence for Children International (DCI) Italia operates both autonomously and in co-operation with other associations and institutions for the establishment of a new cultural model for young people to be recognised as citizens entitled to rights and able to actively participate in family, social, cultural and civil life. Following a child-rights based approach in all its projects and activities, this movement considers the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as a systemic and comprehensive platform which can help to redefine the approach towards children and the relationship between adults and young people.

Children, understood as all persons under 18 according to the CRC, should be able to participate in a way that reflects their personal views, thoughts and experiences. In practice, this requires from the organisers and facilitators of events the capacity to create a space and opportunities where children are able to discuss the different questions openly and constructively in accordance with their own characteristics (as individuals and as children) and, to the extent possible, free from adult constructed perceptions or predetermined expectations.

Throughout the process, the child shall be placed at the centre, taking into account each child's personality, individual characteristics, life circumstances, experiences and other relevant influences. The final goal of such an approach is that children's rights are upheld and that each individual child is recognised as an agent of his/her own life and empowered throughout the process.

The concept of rights, means, spaces, opportunities and support, as referred to in the "Listen - Act - Change: Council of Europe Handbook on children's participation for professionals working for and with children"² and other documents of the Council of Europe, are directly related to the capacity of adults and the adult world to create appropriate contexts, conditions and dynamics for consulting with children, including by considering specific situations of vulnerability and the evolving capacities of children. They require relevant stakeholders and facilitators to be generally willing and ready to keep the process of consultation/participation open to unexpected needs and contributions by the children.

The child participation methodology implemented by Defence for Children (DCI) Italy builds on this shared understanding of creating the means and space for adequate and meaningful participation for all children. This approach has been implemented throughout the consultation process aimed at informing the new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2022-2027 during its preparation. In particular, these child consultations were planned, coordinated and implemented through a multi-step process between February and December 2021, involving clear implementation protocols and regular coordination meetings. Accordingly, the collaboration and relationship nurtured during the consultations process with the National Delegations and facilitators - as well as the shared understanding of the methodology - contributed to ensure ownership of the process and prepared the young delegation well for the Rome Conference.

² Council of Europe, Listen - Act - Change: Council of Europe Handbook on children's participation for professionals working for and with children, 2020 <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/-/listen-act-change-launch-of-a-new-council-of-europe-guide-on-children-s-participation>>.

Methodological Considerations and their connection to the High-level Launching Conference for the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027)

The methodology used to involve a number of young delegates of various backgrounds and nationalities into an international event, needs to be clear and systemic by concentrating the attention on creating an appropriate context and a meaningful process for all the young persons involved: a comfortable and inclusive environment, the capacity to consider diversities as an added value in achieving meaningful results, the possibility to suspend or limit predetermined judgements, the ability to not impose adult's contingencies, agenda, protagonism and needs, and the openness to be surprised or challenged, by welcoming new and unexpected perspectives.

On the other hand, it is necessary to understand, and make others understand, that children may not identify with the established power structures or connect with the adult agenda. If on the one side it is true that children should relate with the “real world”, it is also true that this “real world” is more than often shaped along adults priorities, which might not correspond to the ones of children.

“It is important not to impose standards of legitimacy for children that are not imposed on adults. Most adult speakers at most conferences are presenting their own personal work, opinions, or experience. No more should be demanded of children. However, children should be encouraged to be critical among themselves about representation in order that such choices are not overly controlled by adults. There is a danger that adults will select ‘convenient’, accessible or articulate children, leading to the “professionalisation” of child speakers who meet an adult agenda rather than speaking for children themselves.”

Gerison Lansdown, Promoting Children

Purpose of involving children

It is necessary to consider the ratio behind the decision of involving children in the event. What is the role of children? Is the participation of children in the event a means to achieve long term change or is it an end in itself? Also, in order to value children's time and to avoid instrumentalising the participation of children, it is important to assess till what extent their participation could provide a meaningful contribution - will it contribute to inform the decision-making processes in place or contribute to long-term or institutional change?

It is essential that these elements are clear and that they are shared with children, in a language they can understand. Participants in online or in-person events are most likely involved in full-time education and may be engaged in other activities, such as children's councils and / or extracurricular activities. In addition, children have the right to play and leisure. Having a clear and accessible ratio will allow to inform/consult children regarding the aim and framework of their participation enabling them to make an informed decision on their voluntary participation, providing a sense of responsibility and ownership.

If the group is coordinated/mediated by external actors, such as National Delegations, facilitators and/or NGOs, they should be involved since the beginning of the process, in order to ensure an adequate contact with the participating children and possibly consult them regarding the objectives, agenda, formats and contents.

With regard to the Council of Europe High-level Launching Conference for the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027), the ratio for the participation of children was clear. Young delegates were involved in the consultations which contributed to the development of the Strategy and their views directly informed the decision-making process and the final text as adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers. After presenting their perspectives to the Council of Europe Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) during the fourth plenary meeting of the Committee, held in October 2021, participating children were invited to be present during the Launching Conference in Rome, amongst the main stakeholders.

DCI Italy maintained the contact with the National Delegations (CDENF members from competent ministries and their colleagues) involved in the previous consultation processes, informing them on the possibility for children to be involved in the launch event. As soon as the framework of participation was clear, DCI Italy organised two online meetings with the National Delegations in order to present this opportunity, while clarifying the practical and logistical requirements.

Selection and representativeness

Depending on the size and type of event or activity, the selection process should include more or less strict - but very clear - selection requirements. Nonetheless, it is essential to ensure opportunity for all interested children, to the extent possible. As clearly articulated by Gerison Lansdown in “Promoting Children’s Participation in Democratic Decision Making”, “[t]here is a danger that the only children who get involved are the articulate, better off, able individuals who, while having a valid contribution to make, do not reflect the breadth of children’s experience.” In fact, similarly to adults, each child is a unique human being with self-resources, interests and aspirations - children are not an homogenous group and their priorities and perspectives may differ greatly. It is ideal that children are given the opportunity to participate based on their legitimate interest and that adults are prepared to welcome their individual viewpoints.

Lastly, while for in-person events it is key to thoroughly review the logistics, travel, accommodation and other practical matters, for online events/activities it may be essential to ensure that children have a good connection to the internet, that their camera is working well and that they have a space where they can participate freely.

The selection process for the Rome Conference built on the consultations previously carried out by the National Delegations involved in the process. In the light of logistical challenges and budgetary limitations, the Council of Europe suggested to include a total of 10 children from different countries. Moreover, in order to ensure that all children had a meaningful experience it was advised that participating children were 13 – 17 years old, spoke sufficient English to exchange between them and with adult participants in the conference, and possibly already had some experience in children’s rights advocacy and speaking in public.

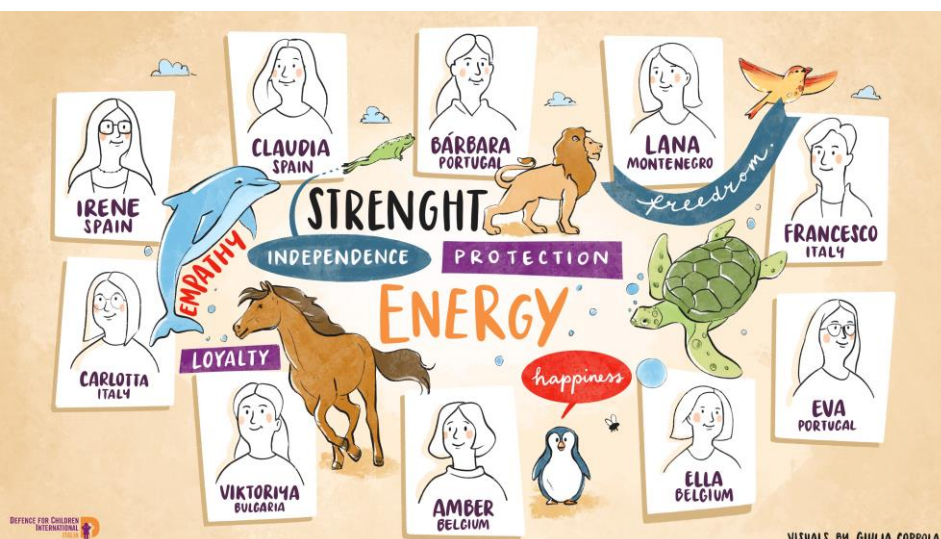
DCI Italy suggested one child and one facilitator (or “chaperone”) per National Delegation. Nonetheless, as highlighted during the preliminary meetings, the aim was that all children and National Delegations who participated in the consultation could be represented in different ways (through the quotes reflected in the previous report, through the videos children prepared for the CDENF meeting and possibly other videos). In fact, during the event, in the conference venue some of the quotes of children from the consultations and the final report were presented on posters and have been widely disseminated to the participants through the distribution of the final consultation report.

At the end of the selection process, and given that some National Delegations which participated in the selection process were not available to send representatives to Rome, the Young Delegation was composed of:

- Ella and Amber from Belgium, accompanied by Annelies;
- Claudia and Irene from Spain accompanied by Eva and Raquel;
- Lana from Montenegro, accompanied by Larisa;
- Carlotta and Francesco from Italy, accompanied by Filomena;

- Viktoryia from Bulgaria, accompanied by Maria;
- Barbara and Eva from Portugal, accompanied by Rosa;
- Caterina Parodi, Daja Wenke, Davide Ingenito and Pippo Costella from Defence for Children Italy and Giulia Coppola, graphic recorder.

In close collaboration with the Council of Europe Secretariat and the event agency mandated by the Italian government, Defence for Children Italy supported the National Delegations in all the logistical questions and contributed to overseeing that all children travelled safely to Rome and back home.



Role, attitude and capacities of the facilitators

Facilitators and moderators have a key role in ensuring that children feel at ease during their participation and on making sure each child has adequate time to express their views, opinions or ideas, avoiding time and/or performance pressure.

The facilitator/s should be able to engage the children in a trust-based conversation, treating them with respect, showing empathy and being non-judgmental about the statements children make. Facilitators should feel responsible for recognising boundaries when behaviour or communication of individual children or other participants becomes offensive or hurts the dignity of an individual or a group of persons and ensure that such boundaries are respected. Facilitators have to be familiar with national laws and regulations concerning the reporting in cases of risks, threats or violence against a child and the relevant referral mechanisms for children, in line with the child safeguarding procedures in place.

The facilitators should be prepared to be challenged. It is necessary to create a safe space that allows free discussion and exchange and it is essential to welcome children's ideas, perspectives and expectation, which may greatly differ from the initial plan. It is key to be open to their suggestions and prepared to transparently re-negotiate the process and direction. Answers or clear recommendations should not be the ultimate goal - questions, doubts and reflections, springing from children's stories and experiences can be considered as a result in itself.

Pippo Costella, Caterina Parodi and Davide Ingenito from Defence for Children (DCI) Italy were respectively the facilitator and co-facilitators, while Daja Wenke was supporting the process and available to support children in any questions regarding international events and the connection to international organisations and panelists. From the first moment, the DCI team presented themselves as available and ready to discuss any questions by the Young Delegates. Throughout the meetings and the event, the team maintained a positive and inclusive attitude, aimed at empowering children to engage in valuable exchanges ultimately contributing to a meaningful experience.

During the preparation weeks DCI Italy sent an information package to the Young Delegation, presenting the team and the activities. The information package included all the practical and logistical information, as well as the child safeguarding explanations and protocol.

MEET THE TEAM!

The team from Defence for Children Italia will accompany you during your stay in Rome. You can refer to them in case you have any doubts, concerns, wishes or anything you might want to say!



Hi! I'm Pippo and I am the Director of DCI Italia. I will be coordinating our young delegations and hope to make this a meaningful opportunity and to support you in making your voices and perspectives being heard by adults. See you soon!



Hi! My name is Caterina and I will be with you during your stay in Rome. Hopefully we will have lots of fun and will learn so many new things from each other. I am the Child Safeguarding Contact for Defence for Children. This means that if there is something that makes you feel uncomfortable, or you are concerned, or if there is something you wish to talk about... I am available to hear you!



Hi! I'm Davide and I am a Young Trainer of DCI Italy. I think this will be a great opportunity to work together as a team for the promotion of children's rights and to represent all children that do not have the opportunity to be present in this conference.



Hi! I'm Daga and I am an independent consultant in children's rights. This means I do research and engage with many different associations. If you have any doubts on how to address high-level representatives or if you want some advice, I would love to help you!

BEFORE THE CONFERENCE

Please fill in the form or do what to read this booklet!

PREPARATION:

There is a lot of preparation in order to organise such a big event with people coming from all over the world. Therefore, there are some deadlines we have to make sure to respect in order for everything to run smoothly!

Online Meetings:

In order to prepare for all the activities we have prepared, we have organized three online meetings, through zoom:

- 16 March 2022, 17:00 - 18:00 CET
- 23 March 2022, 17:00 - 18:30 CET
- 31 March 2022, 17:00 - 18:30 CET

Link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/7653307000>

WEEK 7

Children are expected to participate in the two full days of the conference and in the preparatory day. Advised travel dates:

- 5 April 2022: Travel and arrival to Rome
- 6 April 2022: Preparatory activities
- 7 - 8 April 2022: Participation in the conference
- 9 April 2022 (in the morning): Departure

Once you arrive to the Hotel our team will be already there waiting for you! Defence for Children Italia will accompany you at all times.

Once you arrive to the Hotel our team will be already there waiting for you! Defence for Children Italia will accompany you at all times.

If needed you can choose to arrive on the 6th of April instead of the 5th and leave on the 8th of April (after 18:00). Please fill your registration form accordingly.

FLIGHTS AND HOTEL

To participate in the conference you have to travel to Rome!

Everyone will be accommodated at the Venue where the Conference will take place: Ergif Palace Hotel & Conference Center, in Rome.

DURING THE CONFERENCE

YOUNG DELEGATION'S ACTIVITIES

Young delegates will participate in the conference in many ways! You will be present and actively participate in the plenary meetings, parallel meetings with high-level representatives and between yourselves, you will report back to plenary, and you can be part of the media group or the steering group.

Young Delegates will participate in the plenary sessions presenting their thoughts and the results of the consultations carried-out by the respective National Delegations during 2021.

MEDIA GROUP

The media group will be composed of 2-3 young delegates. During breaks (registration, coffee-breaks, before/after lunch/dinner...) the media group will go around asking questions to the participants present in the conference. The questions and answers will be recorded and after the conference the videos will be assembled, edited and disseminated.

To do: Prepare list with 15-20 questions to put to the participants.

STEERING GROUP

The Steering group will be composed of 3-4 young delegates in charge of gather the views/impressions/recommendations of all the young delegates to formulate the final recommendations.

If your wish to be part of the Media Group or of the Steering group please send an e-mail to caterina@defenceforchildren.it

Time and preparation

Including children in activities, events, conferences and/or consultations requires time and dedication. Children should be given adequate time to prepare the sessions and should be provided with sufficient background information to inform their participation. Moreover, children should not - in any way - be forced to assume leading roles nor should they be led to assuming a pre-imposed standpoint. It is essential to create trust through active listening, in order for children to be capable of expressing their views freely, without judgement.

Depending on the size and extent of the participation of children in the activity/event, a minimum of 3 preparatory meetings are advised, which can take place online. The aim of such meetings should be to create the grounds for common work during the event. Rather than immediately start working on the results, it may be useful to dedicate appropriate space and time to develop a strong and positive group dynamics, while developing an easy and comfortable relation with the facilitators - it will be useful to ensure the necessary group resilience and flexibility to overcome potential obstacles during the event.

In what concerns time, it is key to be mindful of the length and intensity of the sessions/activities. The agenda should be organised taking into consideration the wellbeing and needs of children and include, where appropriate, frequent pauses. Children should be consulted and asked whether they need a break. Participating in international events can be overwhelming, especially for children attending for the first time. Being able to have a genuine laugh together is always an important ingredient for a smooth dynamic.

As soon as the selection had taken place and before the Conference, DCI Italy organised three online meetings aimed at meeting the group, presenting the activities and supporting the Young Delegates in preparing for the Conference. These three meetings were scheduled in three consecutive weeks (preparation weeks) and an invitation was sent to the participating children by e-mail.

The first meeting was entirely dedicated to an exchange between the participants. The meeting started with a biographic exercise, aimed at breaking the ice between the participants and at recognising that each participant has a valuable story that should be acknowledge. Pippo Costella explained the framework of the event and the ratio for the participation of children. The session was meant to be very "light" and smooth, switching from working to playful moments to help the participants feel at ease. During the second and third meetings DCI, always by soliciting an interactive dynamic, presented the programme of the meeting focusing on the moments the Young Delegation was foreseen to participate, although leaving space for negotiating their participation. Giulia Coppola graphically recorded these meetings. At the end of each meeting an e-mail was sent to children, including the result of the graphic recording, sharing useful materials and recalling the next meeting.



All meetings started with music and a biographic exercise. This helped the participants connect with each other on a more empathetic level and promote active listening and trust throughout the session.³

Reaching out and engaging children

Before the event children should be provided with an appropriate information pack with all background and instrumental information to the specific event. Following, if all children agree, a WhatsApp group could be created. The purpose of a WhatsApp group could serve the basic function of providing information, but beyond this it could provide a means for the children to relate to each other and develop a sense of belonging to the group. It is important that the facilitator do not overload the group with messages, leaving space for the children to lead the group autonomously.

For online events and activities, for example preparatory meetings, it may be important to establish some ground rules, presenting them in a positive manner - saying for example: "feel free to stand up or walk, but we would like to ask you to keep your camera on, as it helps the group feeling more connected".

If the event and/or activity takes place in-person, it may be useful to dedicate some space to do an ice-breaker before the beginning of the session.

Language and communication should always be child-friendly and inclusive, and participants should be aware of the necessity to adapt their language to children and their specific needs. Considering the fact that international events involve the use of not native languages, particular attention should be paid to the speed and clarity of pronunciation.

Defence for Children Italy dedicated a great amount of time to engage children in a way that they could feel interested and included throughout. During the preparation weeks DCI maintained continued contact with children, providing their information and ensuring them of the process.

The ten Young Delegates were invited to participate according with their previous work on the consultations, but also according to their personal interests and resources. The attempt was to create the context for free and adequate participation without forcing children to be in a prominent position if they did not feel comfortable.

DCI Italy suggested the creation of two parallel groups: a Steering Group and a Media Group. These groups were presented during the second meeting and Young Delegates were invited to think in which - if any - group they wish to participate. It was important to highlight that it was not mandatory to be part of the groups. Some of the children felt anxious at the idea of having to be part of a group which could have more visibility and preferred not participating.

³ For more information on the biographic exercise please see Defence for Children Italy, Council of Europe Child Consultations to Inform the Development of the new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child: Methodological Hints and Orientations, 2021.

The Steering Group was responsible for gathering the perspectives and opinions of the Young Delegations, while assisting in the Reporting Back from the sessions and the final recommendations. The Media Group, on the other hand, was responsible for carrying out informal and extemporary interviews to the participants. Both groups worked thoroughly, and all Young Delegates directly or indirectly participate in the group activities. In fact, it was observed that even children who initially stated not wanting to be part of the groups were interested in joining the activities. The media group started working on the questions to the participants before the group meeting in Rome and finalised the list during the preparatory day. In fact, although the Conference took place during 7 and 8th April 2022, the Young Delegation arrived in Rome on the 5th April 2022 in order to meet in person and prepare the sessions.

The initial in-person meeting took place on the 5th April. It was good weather therefore the group decided to meet outside, in a circular setting. Everyone presented itself with some biographical element - this first meeting was very important to build a pleasant and strong group dynamics. Later in the same day the group had dinner together and this contributed to continuing to get to know each other. Young Delegates were given free time after dinner in order to bond.

The 6th April was dedicated to preparing the different moments where the Young Delegates would participate in the Conference. The day started with a circle singing ice-breaker exercise, in which the Defence for Children Italy's team was supported by Filomena Menna. This exercise helped children and facilitators energizing and set the grounds for a very intense day of work. During the morning the Young Delegation reviewed the agenda and the participatory activities, and the group proceeded with the division of the tasks. The Media group finalised the questions for the interviews and all the group prepared for the sessions presenting the results of the consultations together. Later on the same day the Young Delegation visited Rome and had dinner in the city center. Undoubtedly this was a moment of bonding and exchange that helped reinforcing a positive and resilient group dynamics.



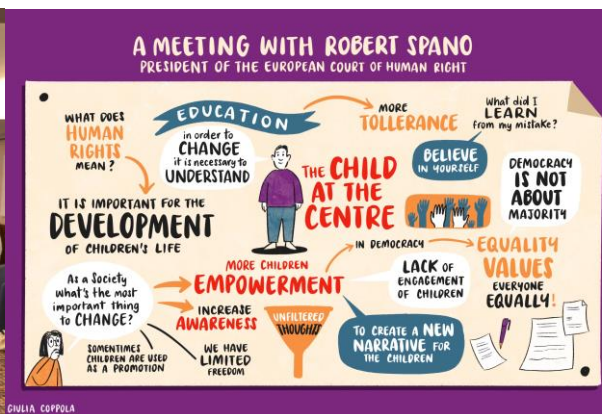
On the 7th April, the Young Delegation met very early in the morning and engaged in some positive exchange before entering the plenary. During the plenary, Young Delegates proposed a biographic exercise to the audience. They asked the participants to reflect in silence for one minute on a significant moment of their childhood. The aim of this exercise was to promote empathy and hopefully help everyone to adjust themselves with the objectives of the conference.

Immediately after, the Young Delegates presented what it means to be a child in 2022 - their expectations, hopes and fears. The aim of this presentation was to set the grounds for a fruitful and meaningful exchange between adult and child participants. For the rest of the morning the Young Delegates were in the plenary assisting to the presentations. During the afternoon, the Young Delegates had scheduled a dialogue with High-level representatives. Elena Bonetti, Italian Minister for Family and Equal Opportunities joined the Young Delegation in the dedicated room and there was a rich and engaging exchange between the participants.

Giulia Coppola, connected in distance, graphically recorded the sessions and helped the Young Delegations prepare the dynamic presentations to report to the plenary.



On the 8th April the Young Delegation met after breakfast to prepare the sessions of the day. The aim of this day was to present the results of the consultations to all the interested participants. Nonetheless, The Young Delegation was informed that many delegates were not available. Yet, the Young Delegation did present the results of the consultation to the interested adults who joined them in the Young Delegate's room. In addition, the Young Delegates had a very rich exchange with Mr Robert Spano, President of the European Court of Human Rights. Mr Spano showed himself available to answer all the questions put forward by the Young Delegates and the group felt that their voice was heard. Later, the Young Delegation met with Ms Maria-Andriani Kostopoulou, Chairperson of the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) and Rosario Farmhouse, CDENF Vice-Chair. Ms Kostopoulou and Ms Rosario dedicated their time and complete attention to the Young Delegates and engaged in a substantive and yet fun dialogue.

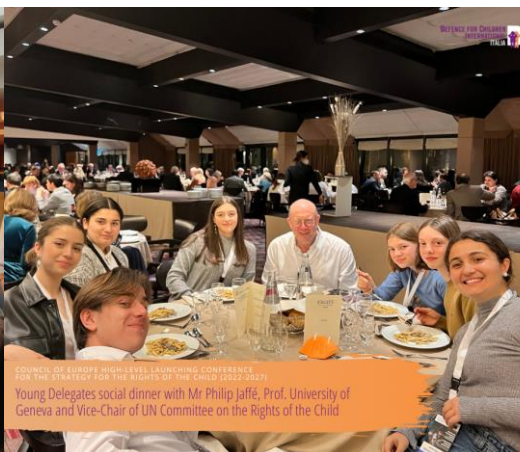
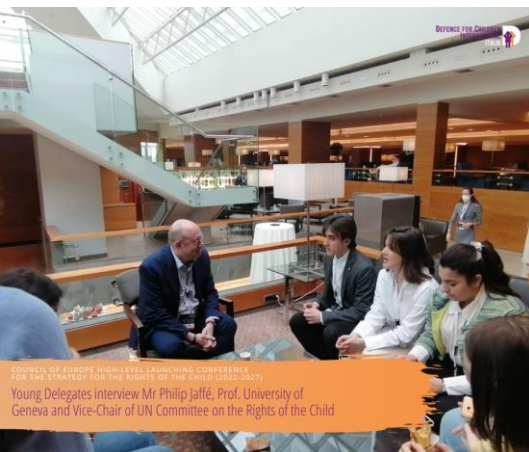


Later in the same day, the Young Delegation worked together to prepare the reporting back on the two days' conference. Mr Philip Jaffé, Professor at Geneva University, invited two Young Delegates to join him reporting back from the session "Recognising and enforcing children's environmental rights", where the Young Delegation was present. The Young Delegates worked together to finalize their recommendations regarding the question: "What do we take along on our journey towards a new era for the rights of the child?" The recommendations issued by the Young Delegates were based not only in the two days conference, but mainly on the consultations and their personal perspectives.

The group resilience and positive attitude was essential during these last sessions. This was the end of three very intense days and some of the Young Delegates were losing focus and motivation. The facilitators adapted and did small breaks in order for the Young Delegation to concentrate during the sessions. The group stayed together until the end of the conference and each one of the children was immensely proud of the results achieved.



In parallel, during the two days conference, the Media Group did several interviews to the participants and informally engaged with the the adults present. In particular the Young Delegation recalls the dinner shared with Mr Philippe Jaffe as a very interesting moment which they cherished.



Finding appropriate balance between programmed activities and autonomous spaces

Acknowledging children's resources and autonomy is essential for creating the grounds to effective participation. Many times, adults feel the need to excessively organise children and their time, not giving them the space to freely express themselves, not only as speakers and/or participants, but as human beings as well.

As stated by Gerison Lansdown, "[t]reating children with excessive caution is as bad as ignoring them. It can lead to an underestimation of children's capacities, the placing of expectations on their contribution that are too low, and to a reduction in the potential gains from their involvement. While children should be allowed to participate as children – forcing them to behave as 'mini-adults' is neither desirable nor appropriate – they are capable of making informed and analytical contributions and should be recognised as such."

Accordingly, children should be allowed free time and space to bond and connect, especially if meeting other children for the first time. If they are in a protected environment, it may be advised to allow them time without direct adult supervision, - for example after lunch - while setting a specific time to re-group. This stimulates self-confidence, trust and responsibility.

When meetings and activities take place online children can find autonomous in sub-groups in order to connect and meet each other and groups might also change in order for them to have the opportunity of knowing everyone involved.

DCI Italy aimed at creating a trustful and open relationship with the Young Delegates from the beginning. They were allowed time to rest, bond and exchange between themselves. At the same time, clear schedules were shared, in order for Young Delegates to understand the importance of being on time. Everyone showed great responsibility and respect for the colleagues and no issues were raised.

The Young Delegates created true friendships during those few days in Rome, which contributed to the resilience and positivity of the group.



Safeguarding and Wellbeing

Events which include children as participants ought to be carefully designed following a child-centered approach. It is essential to develop a child safeguarding protocol and informed consent forms for the participating children and their parents or guardians.

A child safeguarding policy - or protocol - provides a set of directives and guidelines to be implemented at organisational and staff management level to promote the highest standards of personal and professional behaviour and practice, in order to create safe environments and prevent harmful situations from occurring for children during their involvement in activities, events, projects or programmes.

During activities, events and/or consultations many child safeguarding concerns may arise. These concerns may depend on the context, modality and participants. Potential risks should be assessed and – to the possible extent – addressed previously. All participants should be made aware previously of the participation of children and, if possible, should read and agree with the child safeguarding protocol when registering for the event.

During and at the end of the event the facilitator and co-facilitators should be sensitive to observe if all children are leaving the event with a sense of wellbeing and fulfillment, also by spotting eventual situations of uneasiness of individual participants.

Caterina from DCI Italy was the designated child safeguarding officer for the Young Delegation. Audrey Winum, from the Council of Europe was the other designated officer. During the preparatory meetings online, the child safeguarding protocol was explained to the Young Delegates in a child-friendly language and in each meeting the Child Safeguarding Officer made herself available to any doubts and / or concerns which may arise.

In parallel, DCI Italy's team was sensitive to the well-being of children throughout the Conference. Some of the Young Delegates experienced some moments of anxiety which were dealt with carefully.

Follow-up and expectations

There are many cases where children are involved in an extemporary way, disconnected from a process that can be followed up over time and contribute to medium and long-term perspectives and results. It is essential to be clear regarding both the purpose of involving children and the purpose of the event in itself. What are the intended outcomes of the activity? In which way can children be included in achieving these results?

Participation of children should always be conceived as a process that starts and ends with a substantial degree of coherence that could be perceived by children. In this sense, the possibility for participation of children is directly connected with a precise planning that includes follow-up phases before closing the process.

During the event the facilitator and co-facilitators should clarify the means through which the follow-up will take place and before closing the event should ensure a moment to make common sense of the experience of what happened. Materials and results should be shared with the group, possibly through a google drive. In order to understand how children perceived the activity and/or event, an essential questionnaire might be proposed to them through google forms. This can include easy and direct closed questions but also allowing them the opportunity to express in a more articulate manner. A debriefing session could be advisable to share feelings and expectations and eventually collect ideas on next steps, which might have been inspired by the experience.

After the Conference the WhatsApp group created for the purpose continued active and engaging. Everyone sent pictures of their journeys back home and there was a general feeling of trust a genuine achievement.

Just a few days after the event, DCI Italy sent the Young Delegates an appreciation message from the Council of Europe and one from the facilitators, expressing gratitude and explaining the next steps.

A google drive was created aimed at sharing materials and the results of the Conference and the link was shared by e-mail with the Young Delegates. The Debriefing session took place on 4 May 2022 through ZOOM platform. During this session the Young Delegates expressed how they were feeling after the conference and what were their expectations for the future. The facilitators invited the participants to divide in groups - answer to four questions based on their experience. These are the main results:

1. What did you like the most during the conference?

- Social moments, dinner with Philip Jaffé;
- Pizza dinner;
- Totally new experience - it was a beautiful experience;
- The choir concert;
- Interviews with adults and speaking with Philip Jaffé.

2. What did you find most challenging?

- Very difficult to speak in front of so many people;
- Sometimes it was difficult to speak in English and it was difficult to understand what adults said;
- Too many sessions - we did not have necessary time to prepare in the last day, it was difficult putting everything in English;
- It was a bit overwhelming meeting so many people - sometimes we did not remember the names of everyone and we would feel embarrassed;
- Little time to prepare the presentations - but it was good because I learned so much and now I can do more things;
- We didn't have much time to talk so we had to put all of our ideas in a short speech - also difficult to be direct when we spoke;

3. If you could give an advice to adults organising the next events... What advice would you give?

- Respect the schedule because it's very confusing to change things last minute;
- Give us more time. Is very stressful to prepare so much in so little time;
- Visit more rome - we are children and we would have liked to visit the city more;
- Give children more time to speak! Each time we spoke they were all so impressed but then they didn't give us much space to participate;
- Really strict schedule with the activities - some time I needed some rest. More time for the Young Delegates to do other activities like dances;

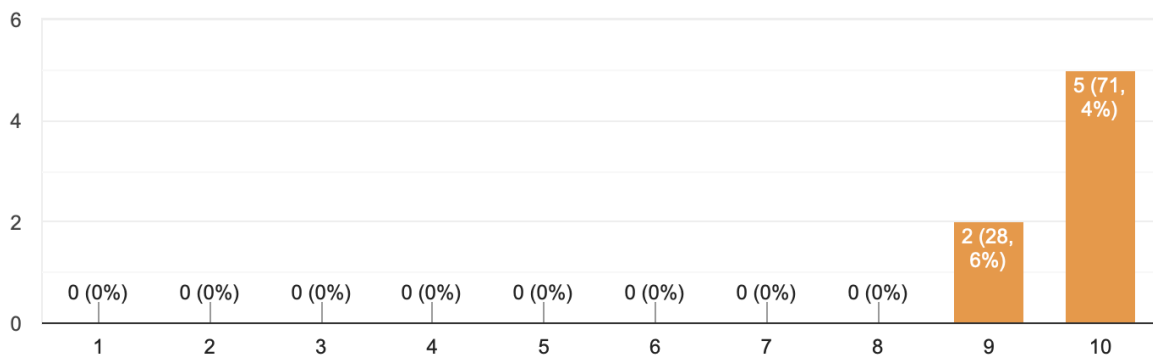
4. What do you take from this experience for the future?

- Now we are more able to manage and organise a lot of work in a little time and speak in front of a lot of people;
- Now I know I am capable;
- More confident to talk about my ideas and I felt important;
- Confidence boost - friendships, meeting people that can and should help us when we have ideas;
- More confidence to speak to groups of people - now I think that if I was capable to speak to people from other countries and ministers I am capable and everything will going well!;
- More confidence - I learned a lot. On how to do presentations, speak in public,... Now in the council of children I even speak more because I am more confident!

In addition, DCI Italy developed a Google Form in order to gather the views of children on the overall organization of the Conference, their feelings and their expectations. Seven children answered the questionnaire up to today and these are the main results:

How satisfied are you with the participation of the Young Delegation in the Conference in general?

7 risposte



Do you believe the preparation meetings were useful? Would you like that anything would have been done differently?

- *I think preparation meetings were very useful, so that we could coordinate our work at the best*
- *It was really useful the preparation meetings to understand how the conference would be and who and how are the people that we will work and live with on those days.*
- *I think they were useful to meet each other, but we could have taken more advantage from them, because at the conference days we had to do a lot of work, and some of that could have been done during the online meetings.*
- *Yes! They were so useful. Now I feel useful to my country, and they are inviting me everywhere to talk about the conference.*

Do you feel your participation was meaningful? Why? (This means, do you feel you were heard by the adults present in the conference, you were given space to speak freely, etc.)

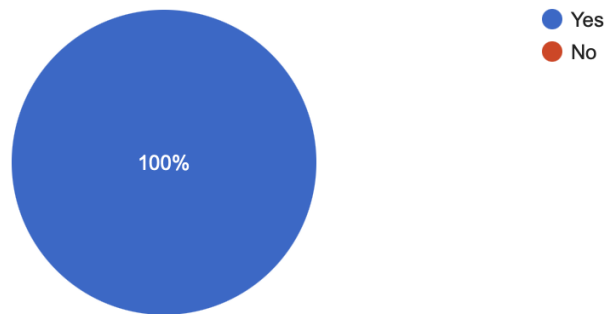
- *I think that my participation but also the participation of all young delegates was meaningful, because we met some people that were very interested in what we were doing, in particular those who attended our session.*
- *Honestly, I've never felt that I wasn't being heard on the conference, unless on the first day when some things changed, I actually felt that I wasn't, but then people starting to be more interested of what we had to say and I felt extremely good on that.*
- *Yes, of course, mainly because it was one of the firsts, but also because the adults were there for us and were open to answer to our questions.*
- *I feel like most people were watching us, keeping an eye on us or interested in talking or listening to us, but at the same time I feel like we could have had more "importance" at the plenary. Although some people came to talk to us, we were in a separate room for most of the time.*
- *It was meaningful, I felt that I am heard. Everyone was so kind.*
- *I felt my participation was meaningful because I truly felt like they were listening, and they were actually paying attention and trying to do something for us.*
- *I felt listened to by adults. But sometimes, during the plenary sessions I felt like they didn't care at all*

Would you like to participate in other similar consultations/activities? Why?

- *Yes, it would be a great opportunity for me because I like to know others' opinion about this kind of problems or themes*
- *I would love it. First because I meet such incredible people that I would like to see again and express my interest and my ideas. Second because I learned A LOT, right now, on school I made a presentation and the teachers said that I was more confident and I was speaking better in public and that the presentation was pretty good on the organization and they told me that they saw a big improvement since last month (before the conference). And last, I really liked to meet Italy and people around the world which is one of my dreams since I'm a baby.*
- *Yes, because it was a fulfilling experience.*
- *I would love to participate again in a similar activity because I had a great time and I liked the experience, and I would like not to stop here and participate in more consultations*
- *Yes, it gave me literally everything. I would love to be in another activity because now I feel so informed and it is so interesting.*
- *Of course. I love these activities and I'd do everything to help other people like me*
- *Yes, I'd love to participate in other similar activities because in this one I met people from all over Europe, I talked and learned about an important issue and it was interesting to see what other kids and adults think about this topic.*

The Council of Europe is preparing a child-friendly version of the Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2022-2027. They have invited you for a consultation session online (3 hours), in order for you to give your opinion on the document. Would you like to participate?

7 risposte



Do you wish Defence for Children Italy would have done something differently?

- *No, I think everything was perfectly fine*
- *I loved working with everyone, and I would not change anything.*
- *No, not really*
- *Except for the mentioned above relating the online meetings, I am very happy with the work of DCI and I felt very comfortable with them*
- *Yes, more going out in the country. Yes, we are there for work, but still, we are kids and we are in another country and I think it would have been better if we went to some museums and go inside in cultural buildings. History is important.*
- *I think they did it more than fine. They made me feel super comfortable. I wouldn't have changed anything.*
- *Not really*

What did you like the most during the Conference?

- *The interviews with adults and children's session*
- *The people and the variety perspectives of the things.*
- *Apart from my participation itself and to meet other representatives, the food.*
- *I liked feeling important and feeling like I am taking part in something that is going to affect us in the future*
- *I liked the most that I was heard and I was given the chance to participate.*
- *Meeting a lot of new people and seeing different points of view*
- *I liked the most the fact that I could say whatever I wanted and that everybody cares about my opinion. I also liked the plenary sessions because they were really challenging.*

What did you like the least during the Conference?

- *The fact that very few people attended children session. I think that maybe it should have received more attention*
- *I think it was when they changed our program.*
- *I think the flights were the worst part.*
- *At times I felt a lot of pressure on us, and I got a little anxious about the public interventions*
- *That it was too long. Most of the conferences that I was to were 5-6 hours, and these were like 7 hours long. For me was too tiring.*
- *The last time changes because they made me feel not prepared enough.*
- *The thing I liked the least is that we were often late, so some activities slipped on schedule or lasted less than they had to.*

Would you like to leave a message to include in our report?

- *Yes. I would say that you guys did perfect, and it was really interesting. I love the fact that now I m informed and I know more what I am doing. One big thank you for the chance.*
- *Just really a thank you, for finally listening to us.*
- *No*
- *Thank you for helping us and taking care of us during the conference days :)*
- *Nope :)*

Final considerations and next steps

The participation of the Young Delegation in the High-level Launching Conference for the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) was the result of process lasting more than one year in direct connection with the National Delegations and the Council of Europe. During this time adults repositioned themselves, adapted and worked together, with the objective of truly upholding children's right to participate in a way which reflects their personal views and interests.

Asking children to express themselves on such big matters – matters for which we, as adults and professionals, do not always have convincing answers or solutions – should be accompanied by an openness and willingness to question our way of thinking, our language and our methods and recognise that it is not at all an easy task to consult with children on these themes and committing to their views, positions and recommendations being reflected in the new Strategy. Approaching consultative and participatory processes with an open-minded attitude and the willingness to listen, to wonder and be astonished, is therefore a key dimension to be explored.

In general - from the views expressed by children during and after the conference - there is an overall sense of well-being and fulfilment regarding the whole process. National Delegations, the Council of Europe, Defence for Children Italy and the participating children assumed a flexible and empathetic position of openness, transparency and exchange, which greatly contributed to the resilience of the group and the process.

On the one hand, the participating children feel empowered, informed and willing to continue to contribute to the public debate and, on the other, adults openly understand the necessity to bringing generations closer to reach common goals.

The Council of Europe and National Delegations are encouraged to reflect how the consultations with children could influence change beyond the specific goal of the present process and how to ensure stronger continuity in hearing and taking into account the views of children for decision-making processes. This consultative and participatory exercise could be considered as the foundation for a continuous and relevant exchange with children to orient civil, cultural, political, social and economic decision-making processes.

Lastly, it is important to highlight that the success of this process is directly connected with the outstanding commitment of the Council of Europe and the National Delegations and excellent co-operation between all the professionals involved.

Annexes

Media Group - List of questions:

1. Can you tell us what did you imagine when we asked you to think of an important moment of your childhood?
2. Who/what was your idol when you were a child?
3. What would you do if you found a child alone in the street?
4. If you could change one thing from your childhood, what would it be?
5. If you could have a superpower what would it be?
6. If you could have dinner with any person in the world who would it be?
7. What would you say to your 12 years old self?
8. Can you give us 3 advises for young people?
9. What's the best thing that happen to you last year?
10. What does "success" mean to you?
11. What does "equality" mean to you?
12. What is your first memory?
13. If you could choose a title of a book / song / film to explain your life, what would it be?
14. What was the dumbest thing you did when you were a child?
15. Do you ever think of children when you make a decision?

What does it mean to be a child in 2022?

(Participation in the plenary)

Thank you for remembering an important moment of your childhood. In fact, since everybody has been a child, it should not be so difficult to understand children, but for some reason it seems that becoming an adult makes you forget... This is one of the reasons why we proposed you this important memory exercise.

You will find the full results of the child consultation process in the report that has been made available. We would like here and now to share with you briefly some of our reflections on what does it mean to be a child in 2022.

There are problems but of course there are also positive aspects that we want to acknowledge.

1) We have more opportunities to be connected with each other through communication technologies, however it seems that for many children this relation with technologies is leading to many concerns, insecurities and also to situations that are affecting mental health.

2) Many of us live in safe environments that allow us to grow up and make mistakes, but we feel often that there is a pressure on us to perform and become adults real quick.

3) We feel that we are playing a bigger role in society, but at the same time when we want to say something we are not always taken seriously and many children are experiencing a condition of overprotection from the family and adults around them.

3) Although legal protection for children has increased in various situations, from what we shared during the consultation there are still many situations where children are experiencing institutional violence. Especially when they are in certain conditions of disadvantage like migrant children or children who have problems with the law or children who are carrying some disabilities. It seems that there is a strong connection between discrimination and what we call violence or violation.

4) For some reason this violence is often reflected also in the relations among children themselves. During the consultation many children expressed their fear of bullying.

5) Many children still do not have access to education or proper healthcare. Many reported a feeling of isolation and the lack of friendly and competent adults to talk with when they have a problem.

6) Although more and more children are being helped, it seems that in times of crisis, such as the one that we are experiencing in these days, it is very difficult to think about children's rights as a priority as something that could guide us in finding a solution.

You can find these and other considerations from children in the full report of the consultations. We thank you for the opportunity for being here representing all children. We hope that this is the beginning of a true relation between the present and the future of our societies.

Final recommendations to the Council of Europe

1. ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR EVERY CHILD

We think that every child has the right to talk with a psychologist if her or him feels uncomfortable or in danger. We need to cancel the stigma about mental health and take care of our serenity as children

2. IMPLEMENT THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE DAY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CHILDREN'S MALTREATMENT

We think that it is crucial to raise awareness about children suffering from violence and mistreatment. The world needs to talk and take action about this situation

3. TO EDUCATE PEOPLE ON HOW TO TAKE ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

We all know about the state of our planet and how urgent it is to do something about it. But apart from talking we need to take action together as human beings. Education is key to find a way to have a clean and safe way

4. IMPROVE ONLINE ACCESS AND SAFETY

The world, and especially young people are more and more familiar with new technologies. There are many positive points but it is also a dangerous endeavor, we all know the reasons and the consequences. This is why we need to educate both children and adults about how to safely use new technologies and social media

5. MORE FINANCIAL RESOURCES FOR EDUCATION AND HEALTHCARE

We strongly think that free access to high quality education and health care is the turning point to a more equal and inclusive world - being both in good health and educated is a fundamental right and should really be implemented.

6. MORE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN'S INCLUSION IN SCHOOL

We need to embrace all diversities and points of view. Differences are a plus if we all share the willingness to hear and feel each other. School, has the fundamental education institution, is the place where inclusion should always be present.

7. INSTITUTE A COUNCIL OF EUROPE EVENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL ROMA PEOPLE'S DAY

We strongly believe that the event should be dedicated to their participation and inclusion in the society. We also believe in the importance of getting to know better their culture.

8. ERADICATE THE GAP BETWEEN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE WORLD

We think that we should eliminate the gap between different countries of Europe, and the world. It is urgent to solve this issue at an economic, social and cultural level, to build our world on equality and stability.

9. THE CREATION OF A EUROPEAN COUNCIL OF CHILDREN

It's necessary to create a stable "European Council of Children" to give the opportunity to young delegates to meet and discuss about important matters and decisions. We believe that in this way we can build a steady relationship between different generations.

10. CREATE AN INTERNATIONAL ONLINE PLATFORM FOR CHILDREN CONSULTATION

We believe it's crucial to raise the importance of giving children a safe space where they feel comfortable and free to share their opinions without judgment and be heard.