



# **GUIDELINES**

## **Setting up a Children's Advisory Board at the Council of the Baltic Sea States**

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Eurochild Children's Council

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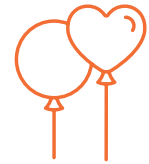


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## Part 1: Introduction



These guidelines aim to give an introduction and practical overview of how to go about establishing a children's advisory board with the purpose of bringing children's perspectives and expertise into the work of the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

Effective, sustainable and relevant decisions can only be made if those concerned are meaningfully involved in the decision-making process. Children are not only rights holders with a right to be heard and participate in decisions that affect them, but are experts in their own lives with significant contributions to make to bringing about positive change in the lives of children and young people as well as their wider communities. Participation improves the quality of decision-making, contributes to children's holistic development and lays the foundation for healthy democracies and responsible citizenship. Furthermore, by listening to children and ensuring policies are informed by their views and experiences, more effective, sustainable and meaningful approaches to addressing key social challenges such as child poverty, inequality and child protection can be determined. Therefore, finding ways to bring children's views into the work of organisations, whose work impacts their lives, is essential.

One way an organisation's work can be meaningfully informed by the perspectives of children is through the establishment of an advisory/participatory structure whereby a group of children are selected to sit on board or council for an allotted amount of time with a view to contributing their views and ideas in impactful ways. These guidelines will provide an insight into the initial steps and considerations involved in going about establishing such a structure.

### **Acknowledgement of the contribution of Eurochild's Children's Council in the development of these guidelines**

In line with Eurochild's commitment to involving children throughout its work, children have been involved in the development of these guidelines and have provided valuable input and perspectives to its content.

A focus group was organised with members of the Eurochild Children's Council, a group of 11 children from 11 European countries, who work with Eurochild over a two-year mandate in order to bring their perspectives, expertise and experience into many aspects of Eurochild's work. In the focus group the children shared some of the key points that they felt were important to be included in the guidelines including guidance on creating safe and comfortable environments, group dynamics, time allocation and necessary characteristics of adults involved in supporting the board. All of their comments have been included in the guidelines in some way and the council members were informed of this following the focus group.

Members of the children's council were also consulted on the overall layout and contents of the guidelines as well as the check list for child participation, to which they gave their comments and additions. We would like to express our appreciation to the Eurochild Children's Council for supporting the creation of these guidelines, which we expect will contribute to meaningfully involving children in the work of the Council of Baltic Sea States.

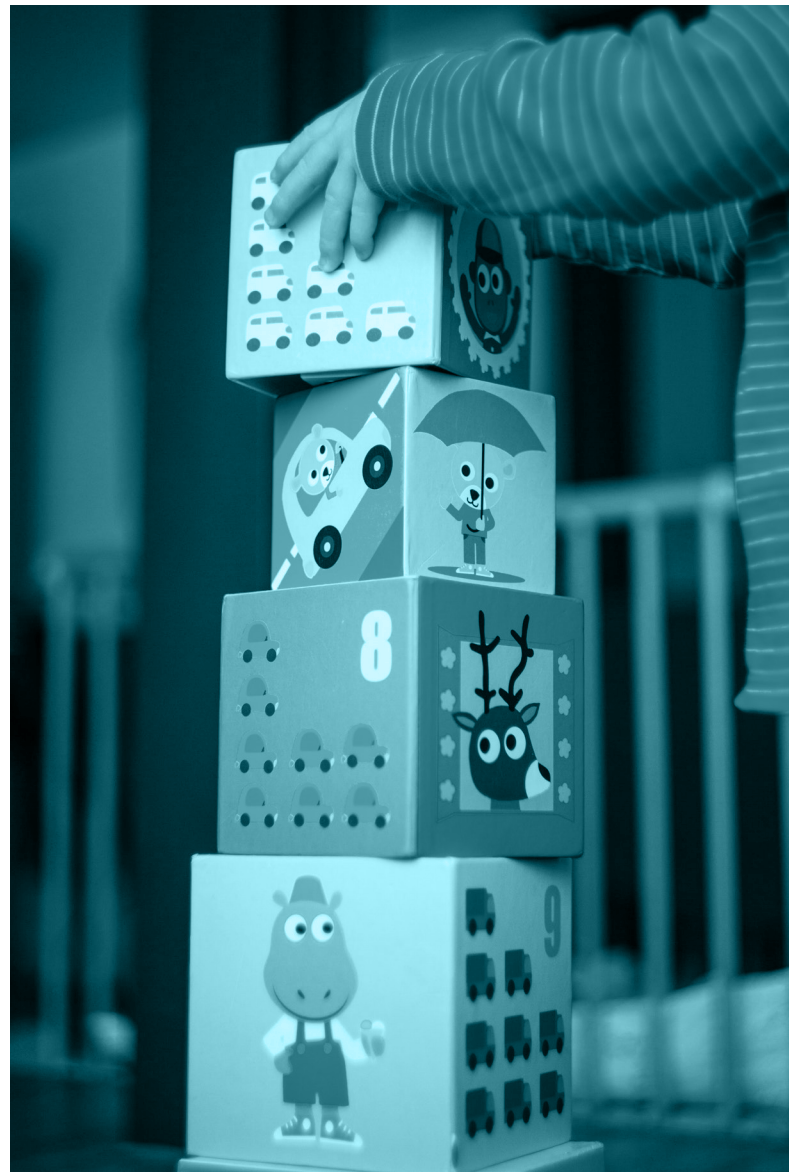


## Part 2: Before You Begin



Prior to commencing the process of selecting children to join a children's advisory board, the following points should be considered:

- **Goals and aims of the board:** Whilst the exact focus and programme of the board should be agreed collaboratively with the children, it is important that CBSS determines its general child participation goals and purpose for establishing the board ahead of developing the call for applications. This could be, for example, the general themes and topics that CBSS would like to work with children on or a particular goal to work towards.
- **Establishing roles and responsibilities of the staff:** Ahead of preparing the call for the board, it should be agreed which staff members will be taking on which roles in regards to the children. It should be decided who will be the main contact point for the children, who will be facilitating meetings and who will be the safe guarding focal point, as well as any other roles that are needed.
- **Potential activities:** Activities vary greatly in child participation and depend on a variety of factors including the group of children, the topic or the context. Prior to establishing the board it could be useful to think of some of the kinds of activities that you would like to work with them on for example consultations, focus groups, events, drafting documents etc. Capacity and funding resources should also be considered when thinking about the types of activities that might be undertaken during their mandate.
- **Reaching beyond the board:** Whilst the board will be working closely with CBSS, it might also be considered how the creation of the board could help reach out to other children as well. This could, for example, involve working with the board to develop online consultations to be carried out with other children or it could be that members of the board reach out to other children in their communities and collect their views. If this is foreseen it might be considered in the selection process which demographics of children board members might be in contact with.
- **Level of (time) commitment expected:** In order for children to be able to participate in a meaningful way they must have adequate time to dedicate to the activities of the board whilst balancing their other extra-curricular activities, home life and school work. Whilst exact levels of time commitment might be hard to establish in advance, it is important that an estimate is communicated early on in order to allow interested applicants to decide if they have enough time to be involved. This avoids children feeling overwhelmed and makes it less likely that activities will be short-numbered.
- **Time frame:** The length of the board's mandate should also be agreed prior to launching the call.
- **Determine selection and application procedures:** An application and selection procedure should be clearly defined before communicating about the call for applications. This contributes to transparency and fairness as well as a more efficient application period. If young people are involved in developing the call, the selection process or any other part of the establishment of the board, they should also be involved in discussions and decisions around the development of these procedures.
- **Legal considerations:** All legalities should be followed in the establishment of the board, including the establishment of safeguarding procedures and respect for GDPR. Where specific rules and laws, for example ratios of adults to children or any other rules for working with minors, exist in the country where the board is being established, they must be taken into account and respected.



## Part 3: Child Protection and Safeguarding



Child participation goes hand in hand with child protection and it is not possible to have one without the other. An essential component of supporting meaningful participation is the creation of safe and comfortable spaces where children feel able and willing to speak about their views, experiences and ideas, free from any form of discrimination, harm or shame. Creating spaces such as these empowers them not only to exercise their right to participate but also allows them to become aware of their other rights including their rights to respect, safety, protection and freedom from discrimination.

In order to create a safe environment for the children on the board, high child protection and safeguarding policies should be upheld both in theory and in practice. All advisory board activities and the selection procedures that precede them should adhere to your [child protection policy](#), so as to ensure the safety of all participants and any adults supporting them. All applicants/board members should understand the aims, goals and typical activities of the **advisory board** and that their participation will be in line with the '9 principles of child participation':

- **Transparent and informative** - Children need to be given as much information as possible, so that, should they get involved, they know what they are getting into.
- **Voluntary** - Children should always have the right not to participate and to opt out.
- **Respectful** - All participants, adults and children, respect each other and other people's ideas.
- **Relevant** - Children have to be involved in decisions that are relevant to them.
- **Child friendly** - Everything should be designed in a way that allows children to contribute.
- **Inclusive** - All children are treated equally and are given a chance to participate.
- **Supported by training** - Training should be offered by trained and experienced adult staff.
- **Safe** - Children are not exposed to situations that can harm them.
- **Accountable** - Adults keep their promises, and children can let them know if something is not working. Children receive feedback on what is done with their opinions.

Whilst it is essential to develop safeguarding policies to support the work of the board, ensuring these policies are implementable in practice holds even greater importance. To take child protection and safeguarding from theory to practice, clear safeguarding, reporting and follow up procedures and actions need to be designed. These actions and procedures allow for the creation of a safe environment for the children and also help ensure that their safety is being prioritised before, during

and after all of the activities in which they are involved. When working to implement a child protection policy and develop related procedures and actions a number of things should be considered.

### Safeguarding training for staff

All staff involved in working with the children's advisory board should receive comprehensive child protection and safeguarding training as well as training on child participation. They should not only understand the theoretical aspects of child protection at CBSS but also what this means in practice. Trainings should be delivered by someone with experience and expertise in this area in order to ensure proper understanding and ability to implement procedures amongst staff. Furthermore, all staff should have the necessary background checks for working with children.

[Keeping children safe](#) has a wealth of information and resources to plan and support protection trainings and also offer trainings and safeguarding certification of their own.

### Extra considerations for more vulnerable children

Depending on the make-up of the advisory board, it may well be that a number of members come from vulnerable backgrounds that might have cause for additional safeguarding measures. A child growing up in care for example might have certain legal requirements attached to their participation, for example the presence of an additional guardian at in person meetings. Meanwhile a child with a migration background might have specific sensitivities that need to be carefully considered and possibly be provided with additional support. Respecting legal requirements and also working with each child's supporting adult, guardian and the child themselves to understand their individual needs from the outset and then implementing measures that support that child's needs is essential to ensuring that they can participate safely and meaningfully.

### Cultural diversity and safeguarding

Often, children from different cultural backgrounds have different experiences and understandings of safety measures and this is essential to consider when developing safeguarding procedures for a multicultural advisory board. It is important to make sure that

cultural sensitivities are considered in the development of safeguarding procedures and that all procedures and the reasons for them are fully explained to children and their supporting adults so they understand why they are in place, particularly if they are not rules or procedures that they are used to. Whilst cultural sensitivity and intercultural understanding are essential, the highest [international standards of safeguarding](#) should be upheld and all rights respected within them.

## Child participation in safeguarding

Children should not be passive objects to safeguarding measures. Children are aware of what makes them feel safe and comfortable as well as unsafe and uncomfortable and can make valuable contributions to the development of safeguarding and protection procedures for the advisory board. By creating space for children to express what does and does not allow them to feel safe and comfortable, children can be empowered to become actors in their own protection.

Children might be involved in co-developing documents, for example code of conducts (**see example in annex I**) and guidelines for adults to help young people feel comfortable to express their views. They might help develop child friendly ways of explaining different safeguarding procedures including reporting procedures so that they can be easily understood by children of all ages. Children could (and should) also be involved in reviewing safeguarding procedures in order to ensure that they are working effectively for them. By involving children in safeguarding in this participatory way, considerably more relevant and effective safeguarding measures can be developed.

It is important to note that responsible adults have a **duty of care to children** on the board and therefore should ensure that when involving children in creating relevant and appropriate safeguarding procedures, no harm is brought to any children through the process or in the implementation of new measures.

## Gaining Informed Consent

Children and their parents/carers or guardians must fully consent to children's involvement in all board activities. In order to do this, both children and adults should fully understand what the advisory board is, its purpose, some foreseen activities, time scope and any other essential information. They must also be informed how any views and personal information shared by the child or parent/carer or guardian as well as any photos, videos, views will be used and stored. In order to ensure this, different approaches might need to be taken depending on the age, background, linguistic competence, sensitivities (etc) of the child and their parents/carers/guardians. This might involve the use of written information, oral conversations with the child and their guardian, videos, accessible materials for children with visual impairments etc. It is important to remember that neither the child nor the parents/carers/guardian is



under any obligation to give consent and that in order for a child to fully give consent, their legal guardian must agree too. Consent must be given through formal means, for example through the completion of a consent form and verbal consent should not be considered sufficient. Consent forms should always be filed in a protected environment.

## Informed consent and data protection in the selection process

Prior to the selection process for board members, efforts should be made to ensure interested children fully understand the scope, activities and time commitment involved in participating in the advisory board as well as the requirements of the application.

If intermediary organisations are involved in supporting children during their mandate, then it is also important that they are informed that a child wishes to make an application. This ensures that the organisation has an opportunity to assess their capacity to support the child should they be successful.

Within the call for applicants, we encourage you to reference your child protection policy and mention any other essential safeguarding information. An example can be found in Eurochild's [child protection policy](#). Within the application itself, a privacy statement (in child friendly language) should be included.

## Consent once board members are selected

Once members have been selected for the advisory board, consent forms should be filled in by both the child and their parent/carer or guardian. Example consent forms can be found in the Appendix of Eurochild's [child protection policy](#). That said, the following information outlines certain elements that should ideally be included in consent forms.

- **Permission to participate as a member of the advisory board** for the allotted amount of time.
- **How information and image/film will be used:** Informed consent means that participating children and their parents/guardians are receiving how information or image/film will be used in writing and that they are under no obligation to agree to its use.
- **The kinds of activities, topics and projects that the advisory board will focus on.**
- **How your organisation will communicate with the advisory board members.**
- **A privacy statement:** In line with GDPR rules, all consent forms should contain a privacy statement explaining how the data of the applicant will be processed.

**It is vital to remember that** consent can be withdrawn at any point of any activity of the **advisory board**. Obtaining prior written consent does not mean that there is no

requirement to obtain verbal consent when taking photographs/video/asking for information or views.

## Supporting adults and their role

Each child's supporting adult (from outside CBSS if applicable) has an essential role to play in ensuring the child's safety and wellbeing throughout their time on the board. Depending on the needs of the child as well as the expectations and requirements of CBSS, the role of the supporting adults will have a number of components. The roles and responsibilities of supporting adults might for example involve joining communication platforms, ensuring consent forms are filled in, assisting with activities, and accompanying the child to events. These responsibilities should be defined in advance and clearly communicated to the supporting adult. They should fully understand their role and consent to it, ideally by signing a document to agree to their role once each member is selected. If they accompany children to events they should also fill in consent forms and provide practical information (ie. dietary requirements, emergency contacts).

## Communicating reporting and safeguarding procedures

Once safeguarding and reporting procedures have been established, they must be clearly communicated to the board and everyone coming into contact with them in an accessible way. Communicating them verbally and giving opportunity for questions is a good way of ensuring everyone, especially the young people, understand the measures. The procedures should also be shared in writing so that children and adults have them to hand. This might involve creating posters, pamphlets or safeguarding packs for specific events including housekeeping rules, reporting procedures with contact numbers, guidance for adult speakers and moderators for working with children, code of conduct and any other necessary material.

## Child-friendly and accessible information

Throughout the establishment process and mandate of the board, it is essential to ensure that all involved children stay fully informed and updated in an accessible way. All information and documents provided to children in relation to the children's board and its activities, as well as consent forms and other safeguarding materials/measures, should be presented in a clear and child-friendly way, whenever possible using visuals, infographics, bullet points, and even videos. Children should also have the option to reach out and ask questions to the secretariat.

**Example guidance for facilitators on working with children and using child friendly language is available in Annex II.**

## Risk Assessment

An effective way of ensuring utmost attention is paid to ensuring the safety of children throughout their participation in different activities is through a thorough risk assessment. Carrying out a risk assessment entails listing all potential risks associated with a given activity and identifying what concrete measures can be taken in order to mitigate each of those risks. Such an assessment should be carried out before all projects and activities involving children and where new risks are identified through the course of different activities, these can be added to future risk assessments along with their own mitigating measures.

## Safeguarding incidents: Transparency and learning

When working with children, safeguarding incidents do sometimes occur. Even with all procedures in place and full risk assessments carried out, every now and then something unforeseen happens. When this happens, it is essential to remain fully transparent about what has

happened. Once the issue is resolved and the children safe, the incident should be logged (and stored in a confidential place) and efforts made to learn from it and ensure that mitigating measures are put in place going forward.

## If in doubt, seek expert advice

No one can be expected to know everything there is to know about child protection and safeguarding from the outset. In order to ensure the safety of all children involved in the board, it is important to seek expertise if ever in doubt about how best to ensure their wellbeing and safety. Organisations such as Keeping Children Safe have a wealth of expertise and knowledge that can be invaluable in developing and implementing safeguarding procedures. Meanwhile, supporting adults and those working on the ground with vulnerable groups of children also have a key role to play in helping CBSS to be informed of the needs of the children and to understand what safeguarding measures are required in order to sufficiently support each child and their needs.





## Part 4: Application, Selection and Set Up



This chapter explores how to approach the selection process including drafting a call, reaching children from a variety of backgrounds, involving children in the selection process and informing candidates of outcomes.

### APPLICATION PROCESS

#### Call development and launch

In order to begin the process of selecting members for the children's advisory board, the selection procedure should be designed and an approach for reaching out to potentially interested children determined. It should be decided in advance whether children will be reached out to directly, for example via schools or children that CBSS has worked with previously, or whether CBSS will first contact intermediaries such as national organisations working with children. Once these decisions have been made a call should be prepared and disseminated to the established target audiences. Within the call, general information about the foreseen activities of the children's board as well the selection criteria for members, timeframes and any other essential information should be included. The call should also give ample time for young people to learn about the opportunity and then apply.

#### Setting the deadline

Clear deadlines should be set for the application process and communicated on the call for applications. Enough time should be given to allow for the call to reach interested children and for them to complete the application process. A minimum of three months is recommended.

#### Application requirements

In order to determine who will become a member of the board, all interested children should go through an application process. Exactly what children should include in the application will depend on the vision and goals of CBSS in establishing a children's board. That said, the application should give them a chance to express their interests, motivations for joining the board and any skills, experience or knowledge they might have that they think they could bring to the board. The application could take the form of a questionnaire, a written task, a video, an artistic project or the option can be given to use any one of these methods to demonstrate their motivation and skills. Interviews are not encouraged as often children who are

more shy but no less motivated or qualified to join the board feel less comfortable expressing themselves in such environments.

### Application Period

During the application period, it may be that children and potential supporting adults will have various questions about applying. As well as being in direct contact via email or social media, one option to consider is to hold one or more online information sessions at different times where interested children can learn more about the opportunity and ask any questions they have. This also gives an alternative way of receiving information to written form. Information about the board can also be shared in different ways, for example through video, copy and even cartoons.

### SELECTION PROCESS

#### Equality and fairness

When selecting advisory board members, it is essential that the process to do so be fair, transparent and democratic, in order to ensure that all interested children are given fair and equal chances to participate. Selecting children with personal links to staff members or other adults linked to CBSS is highly discouraged and efforts should be made to ensure children from diverse backgrounds with diverse abilities are able to apply.

#### Key Selection Criteria

Selection criteria for the board should be agreed ahead of developing and sharing the call and, as much as possible, adhered to in the final selection. Criteria will vary amongst participatory mechanisms but the following are some useful considerations of things to include:

**Board size:** The first consideration is the board's size. It should be established ahead of the selection process how many members the board will have. This should also consider budget, staff capacity to support children and anything else that might affect the size. The size should then be clearly stated in the call.

**Age:** Members of children's boards should be aged under 18 (for the duration of their mandate) and ideally represent a diverse age range. Where much younger children are involved (i.e. below age ten), additional

support might be required from trained professionals with expertise working with that age bracket.

**Gender:** Children's boards should aim to have children with a balance of genders.

**Geographical representation:** As well as selecting children from a variety of countries, it is valuable to include children from a range of geographical regions (e.g. rural areas, areas with a second language, from ethnic minorities).

**Background:** We recommend aiming to include children from diverse backgrounds and vulnerable children or children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is to ensure a wide range of views and experiences are represented. This may include (but is not limited to):

- Children with experience of living in care
- Children from a migrant background, including asylum seeking/ refugee children
- Children with experience of living in poverty
- Young carers
- LGBTIQ+ children
- Children with disabilities
- Children with contact with the juvenile justice systems
- Children from minority ethnic backgrounds, including Roma children

Children with these backgrounds may need a variety of different support measures in order to facilitate their application and eventual participation such as additional language support, visual impairment friendly materials etc.

**Language:** Language should not create a barrier for children to participate in the advisory board. It should be agreed early on within the secretariat what linguistic approach to take: eg. conducting meetings in one or multiple languages; sharing documents in one or multiple languages. Efforts should be made to include and support children with a variety of linguistic backgrounds, including migrant children. Where one language is chosen, children will need to have a basic level of understanding of that language.

Please note that whilst a multiple language approach is possible, it can disrupt the flow of meetings and make them considerably longer. If this approach is taken it is necessary to plan carefully and ensure enough time is given to meetings.

**Interests, experience and motivation:** When selecting a group of children to form an advisory board, it is important to consider their interests, experiences and motivations and how they might bring value to the work of the board. Rather than looking for children with similar interests and experiences, aiming for a range is recommended in order to enrich the dialogue and diversity of contributions within the advisory board.

Children participating in other participatory bodies, such as an organisation, school, and community, might be encouraged to participate, so that they can represent the voices of other children and young people that they are connected with. On the other hand, including

disadvantaged groups of children who may not previously have had access to participatory mechanisms is also highly recommended. Including some children with experience in children's participation in political and democratic decision-making might be valuable to aid peer-to-peer exchange, but it should not be required of all members. All children should have an interest in at least some of the main goals and aims of CBSS/the board.

**Cultural contexts:** As the advisory board will be formed of children from a number of different countries, it is important to consider different national and cultural contexts. In practice, this might mean selecting children from a range of places in order to maximise intercultural dialogue.

**Ability to travel:** If in person meetings are foreseen, it should be highlighted that participating children should have the necessary documentation to be able to travel.

## Involving Children in the Selection Process

Involving young people in the establishment and selection of a board is highly encouraged. As in all participatory processes, children bring new and different perspectives on the applicants that might not be considered by adults. In practice, there are various ways of including children in the establishment of a new board. Some ideas include:

- Ahead of developing the call, asking children what kind of qualities and characteristics the board members should have.
- Asking children if they can think of any additional criteria that should be included.
- Asking children if they have suggestions for how to run the selection procedure, information sessions, selection sessions etc.
- For the selection itself:
  - The CBSS secretariat could prepare an overview of the applications (which also protects any private data of the applicants) to be shared with children involved in selection.
  - Online meeting/s could be held with children to run through applications and to get on the spot feedback.
  - Children could be given the opportunity to share their views about the applications in different ways (verbally, in written form etc).
  - Children might be given the option of anonymously giving their short list/ top candidates.

## Selection of board members

Once the application deadline has passed all applications should be properly considered in order to make a final shortlist.

Following any meetings held with young people involved in the selection process, an internal discussion should

be held in the secretariat, taking on board the views and comments shared by the young people. The selection criteria should also be looked at, so that a balanced and diverse group of children is represented.

Upon agreeing on the final selection, **all** applicants should be informed of the outcome. Those who are unsuccessful should ideally be notified first, also giving an explanation and indicating that they would be welcome to join in other activities organised if applicable. The young people who gave their input should then also be informed of the final selection outcome.

## Set up

As the selected children prepare to be installed as board members, the designated participation team/ staff members should maintain regular contact with the children and their supporting organisations to ensure informed consent to take part in board activities is collected from children and parents/ guardians and that they are fully informed about their future role as board members. Members should then be informed of the next steps, including any kick-off meetings foreseen to be held.



## Part 5: Getting Started



The following provides guidance on what to keep in mind in the early stages of establishing the board, following the selection of its members.

### Beginning communication with the selected board members

Once the board has been selected and all consent forms have been filled in by the children and their guardians, direct communication with the children can begin. It should be decided in advance how communication with the children will be done, for example through email, video calls, a dedicated and child friendly platform or (ideally) a mixture. For safeguarding reasons, supporting adults should be CC'd into communications or given access to the platform in order for them to be able to follow activities.

Initially, it is better if communications to children come through one or two staff members in order to begin building trusted relationships. Later on other relevant staff might be brought in to work with the children. Children should know from the beginning who to go to with questions and concerns. Where online platforms are used, some time should be dedicated to make sure children know their way around its features and begin using different areas of it, for example via introducing themselves and answering some ice breaker questions in the chat area. Children should also be informed of any safeguarding measures related to communicating with them from the outset.

### Introductory meetings, trainings and activities

In the early stages of the board's mandate, a period of getting to know each other and the staff, building group dynamics, taking part in trainings and beginning some board activities will allow the board to start to collaborate and find how they best work together. As well as running kick off sessions so the children can meet each other and start to discuss what they will be working on, they might also need to be provided with training and information sessions. This might include advocacy training, media training, trainings on different topics worked on by CBSS etc. Asking the children themselves about any kind of trainings or introductory sessions that they themselves would find useful is also a good way of ensuring that children get the most out of the experience.

To begin with, activities should allow children to learn more about the work of the organisation and the topics it works on. It should not be assumed that children can

immediately be consulted or work on an activity without first receiving appropriate training, learning more about the organisation and building trust with the team and with supporting staff. All activities should have relevance and meaning for the children and ideally allow them to develop knowledge or skills in different areas. One way of ensuring that each activity is fulfilling these criteria is for the facilitator to develop session plans prior to each activity. **An example session plan can be found in annex III.**

Furthermore, the [We Are Here Toolbox](#), has a plethora of session ideas to aid the initial phase of the board.

### Different ways of participating

There is no one size fits all approach to child participation. Whilst children's rights are universal, how children exercise these rights depends on the individual. It is therefore important to ensure that children are given different options for ways of participating as well as the opportunity to suggest their own way of participating. Whether through writing, joining focus groups and meetings, art, giving a speech, writing an article, meeting with decision makers, there are many ways children can participate and express their views. Discussing what works best for each child during initial activities is important to facilitating their participation in a meaningful and safe way over their mandate.

It is also important that all children's board activities are truly voluntary, and that children understand that they can decide not to take part at any point.

### Creating a safe, comfortable and sociable environment

In order for children to participate and feel able to share their views freely and safely, special attention should be paid to the kind of spaces created for these purposes. Group dynamics are important for creating a friendly and welcoming atmosphere and ample time should be given for children to bond with each other as well as with those facilitating their participation. Children report overly structured meetings as being less productive than those that leave space for unstructured conversations, laughter and space to share on topics unrelated to the activity. Doing so allows groups to bond, trust to be developed and spaces to feel more comfortable and free. This is a foundational element to participation work and an important component to children eventually being able to confidently contribute to discussions and decisions on issues that affect them.

## Support: Trusted and experienced adults and mentors

It is essential that child participation is supported by qualified, trusted and experienced adults who are committed to supporting children to participate in meaningful and impactful ways. As the advisory board will likely include children from disadvantaged backgrounds, psychosocial training of at least one staff member would also be valuable. Children on the board might also be supported by other young people, for example through a mentor system following the graduation of the first board.

## Openness and flexibility

Once activities have begun, a level of openness and flexibility to change is needed by CBSS supporting staff in case initial plans do not work out in practice or the children prefer to take a different direction with an activity. As a result, ensuring plenty of time is allocated to each activity helps create room for adaptations, changes and new ideas for ways of doing things. In doing so, children are able to contribute to activities in the way that feels most meaningful and appropriate to them.

## Patience and trust

Patience is vital to supporting children's meaningful participation. Children have different ways of participating, come from different contexts and experiences that might change how they approach activities and it may also take some children more or less time to grasp certain concepts, think up ideas, or respond to consultations for example. It is important that everyone working with them is sensitive to this, and allows them to participate at their own speed and in their own way and that children feel able to trust that these adults are there for them however they choose to approach things.

## Time allocation

Children often report that adults do not always understand or recognise the many time pressures that they have between school, home life, extracurricular activities and in some cases, part time work. As a result, children can be left feeling pressured or overwhelmed by participatory activities. It is therefore important to hold continuous dialogue with children and where necessary their supporting adult/guardian, about their current priorities and workload to ensure that they are not taking on too much.

A flexible approach to planning meetings is also recommended, for example by giving a number of date and time options to the group via a poll. This allows them to organise their time in a manageable way and allows the facilitator to gain a better idea of each child's availability. It is also encouraged to get an overview of the children's exam timetables over the year in order to ensure that clashes occur as little as possible.

## Conflict resolution and intercultural understanding

Differences in education, background, experiences, upbringing, culture and many other factors means children on the board may have different views on certain topics as well as ideas for solutions. Sometimes, this can create conflict between children. It is important to listen to the children without judgement and try to understand where each child is coming from. Supporting staff should help ensure that the children understand that it is okay to disagree on different topics and the importance of respecting each other's views. Depending on the issue, it may be necessary to further discuss the issue with the child's supporting adult and/or guardian in order to find a resolution.

## School

Whilst the majority of activities undertaken by the board should take place outside of school hours, there might be occasions where clashes occur, for example in the case of in person meetings. In these instances, all children should be provided with letters to share with their schools explaining the reason for them missing school and sharing contact details of a CBSS staff member in case of any concerns.



## Part 6: Follow Up, Monitoring and Evaluation



Often, where children participate, emphasis is placed on developing and implementing the activity itself, whilst proper follow up, monitoring and evaluation to the activity is given less focus. However, follow up, monitoring and evaluation are in fact the most essential elements of child participation as it is through these processes that the extent to which views are being taken into account and translated into policy and concrete decisions can be evaluated. Monitoring and evaluation processes also ensure that the structures and methods of participation, the dynamics and environment for participation as well as the safeguarding procedures are working well and that areas for improvement are identified. The following section provides some tips and guidance on effective follow up as well as monitoring and evaluation methods.

### Follow up

When an activity is developed, a plan for follow up should be made. Whilst not all outcomes and follow up steps can be anticipated for every activity a number of things can usually be foreseen ahead of time. Depending on the activity, it could be decided how and when children will receive final versions of documents, media material and interviews they have been involved in. Meanwhile it could be agreed when and how children will receive updates on the impact of their work. It might also be organised for decision makers and other involved parties to come to speak to the children in order to share how their views are being taken into account. As much as possible, children should be informed ahead of time what they can expect in terms of follow up once they have participated in an activity. Children should also be asked how they think an activity can best be followed up on and when.

### Monitoring and evaluation

A proper monitoring & evaluation system helps keep track of the steps taken in a participatory process, and how successful they have been. It is important to assess if child participation activities have met their goals and made an impact.

As part of a global initiative, a number of the major international NGOs collaborated in the development of measurement tools<sup>1</sup> for the evaluation of children's participation in the context of any particular project or programme. These tools provide a useful conceptual

framework for the analysis of children's participation using the following approach:

- **Scope:** What degree of participation has been achieved (consultative, collaborative or child-led), at what stages of programme development, and with which children? In other words – what is being done?
- **Quality:** To what extent have participatory processes complied with requirements for ethical and effective practice? In other words – how is it being done?
- **Outcomes:** What have been the outcomes of children's participation, on children's personal development and communities, and on the wider realisation of their rights? In other words – why is it being done and what has changed? The indicators of effectiveness are determined by those involved both children and adults.

In the case of the CBSS child advisory board, both the activities of the board and the board itself should be continuously monitored and evaluated. Practical ideas for how to do this can be found in the We are Here Child Participation Toolbox listed in Useful Resources.

### Gathering feedback

Being open to feedback and highlighting this to the children from the outset is essential to developing an open and trusting environment. Children should feel comfortable to say that they do not like something or do not feel safe. Responsible adults should be willing to listen to this feedback and take it on board without belittling or ignoring the views of the child. Having debrief discussions with children after activities is also encouraged so that they can share their feedback. Alternatively, an anonymous way of sharing feedback through a feedback form is also a good idea.

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1 14 Lansdown G and O'Kane C, (2014) A Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation, Booklet Three, Save the Children/WVI/Plan/UNICEF/The Concerned for Working Children

## Concluding remarks

These guidelines have been designed to give an introduction to the steps involved in the initial planning and establishment of an advisory body of children. However, these guidelines are exactly that, guidance, and they should not be rigidly applied but rather used as building blocks for the development of an advisory board that serves the specific needs of both CBSS and all children involved.

Child participation is a continuous learning process that should not remain static. Once the board is set up therefore, it is encouraged to work alongside the children to continuously assess what is and is not working, what could change, what can be improved and to create a board that truly fits the needs of its members. This way the board and its management become a joint exchange between children and adults that is a participatory process in itself and is more likely to lead to meaningful and impactful contributions to the work of CBSS.

Involving children in decision making in a way that is meaningful, safe and relevant to them takes significant time and capacity commitment. It can involve long hours and high volumes of administrative work to ensure all safeguarding measures are in place, however committing to listening to children in meaningful and sustainable ways, can be immensely rewarding for all involved. Through involving children in decision making and taking their views into account in concrete ways that impact future decisions and policies we not only empower children to exercise their rights, but can also gain unique perspectives and expertise that can lead to positive and lasting change to the lives of children across our communities.





# Check list for working with children

**This checklist reflects the 9 principles of child participation, based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and General Comment No 12 'the right of the child to be heard'.**



## Legal aspects

- All data is protected in line with GDPR
- A comprehensive child protection policy is in place and implemented in practice
- Any laws/ rules related to children's participation are respected
- Adults working with children have a comprehensive understanding of child protection and safeguarding as well as the necessary background checks and training
- Where school is missed due to activities, all legalities are followed and any necessary documentation is provided to each child's school

## Safeguarding

- All requirements and standards of the CBSS Child protection policy are met in practice through appropriate safeguarding measures and processes
- A risk assessment is carried out prior to each activity and protection report written up following the activity
- Relevant consent forms are signed by children, parent/ guardians and (where relevant) accompanying/ supporting adults
- Information on additional needs is collected prior to events, such as adaptations for visual impairments, provisions made for religious or spiritual needs, wheel chair access to buildings, etc.
- Housekeeping and a code of conduct is established for activities to agree key rules for keeping everyone safe (see annex for an example)
- Reporting procedures are clearly defined and communicated to children and adults
- Designated safeguarding adults are identified ahead of events and meetings and contact information is shared with participants
- A confidential folder is created on CBSS' server for storing private details of minors
- If possible, a separate space both online and offline that is just for children and supervised by one trusted adult is provided during events
- All work involving children follows the 9 principles of child participation and children are aware of what these principles are, including the voluntary nature of all activities

## Staff requirements

- Roles for supporting the children are clearly determined from the outset
- Child protection training is given to all staff working with the advisory board
- Background checks are carried out on adults working with children
- Main support/ facilitating staff have adequate experience, knowledge, training and skills to support children during their mandate
- Ideally at least one staff member has training in psychosocial support
- Enough staff per number of children are available to support them in their activities (especially in countries where legal ratios of adults to children apply)

## Resources

- Activities are planned in line with available resources and funds to ensure sustainability of activities
- Specific resources for children's additional needs are established prior to starting activities (such as for children with disabilities, interpretation, specific meals)
- Facilitator's agendas are developed prior to meetings and activities to determine what resources, including human resources are required for each activity (see annex)

## Communications

- Means of communication with children, parents and supporting adults are established from the outset
- Language of communication is established early on and provisions made for children for whom linguistic support is needed
- Child friendly language is used throughout communications and supporting staff are aware of what this means in practice
- Ideally a designated platform (such as Basecamp) is used to allow more child friendly and accessible communication
- Communications staff are briefed on all safeguarding requirements when communicating publicly on the board and their activities

## Accessibility

- Resources and materials are accessible to children of all ages and linguistic abilities
- Materials are adapted for children with disabilities where relevant
- Expertise is sought on accessibility of documents and other materials where necessary
- Guidance is given to third parties interacting with the children on how to communicate and share materials with them in an accessible way

## Activity planning

- Ample time is allocated to each activity
- As much as possible, children are involved from the outset when planning activities
- Activities take into account any sensitivities or additional needs of the children
- Facilitators have all necessary material and session plans organised ahead of time
- Options for when the activity is to take place are given to the children
- Follow up, monitoring and evaluation are implemented

## Useful Resources

The following resources may be helpful in establishing your advisory board:

- Eurochild's [child participation strategy](#), developed in collaboration with its own children's council
- Eurochild's dedicated [child participation web page](#)
- Eurochild's [Child Protection Policy](#)
- **Comprehensive safeguarding information and resources provided by the [keeping children safe network](#)**
- **European Commission (DG Just) [report on child participation in EU political and democratic life](#)**
- **Examples of child friendly documents developed with children:**
  - [Child friendly version](#) of the DG just study
  - [Child friendly version](#) of the Strategy on the rights of the child
- **[Monitoring and Evaluating Child Participation toolkit](#)** developed by Gerison Lansdown and Claire O'Kane
- **[We Are Here Child participation Toolbox](#) developed in collaboration with the Learning4WellBeing Foundation.** It offers a practical set of tools to implement meaningful children's participation and encourage collaboration between generations. The Toolbox builds on a child rights perspective to support meaningful child participation in a variety of settings. It builds on an understanding that participation can come in many forms. Through a variety of engaging activities children are prepared for these different situations. Uniquely, the Toolbox also offers tools to help find meaningful ways for children and adults to work together, thereby contributing towards building a culture of child participation across Europe as well as greater understanding and collaboration between generations.
- **[Basecamp](#) is a child friendly online group project platform**
- Interactive presentation tool [Ahaslides](#)

# Annexes

**Below you will find a number of templates and example documents to aid in the establishment of a children's board. Please note that these examples are for inspiration only and should not be directly replicated. In cases where aspects of the templates are used, Eurochild should be credited.**

## ANNEX I

### Code of Conduct

During Eurochild events, **we are all responsible for making sure that everyone's wellbeing and safety is taken into consideration.** To make it easier for us all to ensure this, and for us all to be able to feel safe, happy and engaged, here are a few rules that we should keep in mind at all times:

- **Treat others as you would like to be treated:** do not shout, discriminate, tease, bully or use any forms of violence or bad language.
- **Everyone is to be treated with respect:** we are all equal, regardless of race, gender, age, religion, education, cultural background or anything else.
- **Use user-friendly language:** Keep in mind that most participants have English as their second language, so be careful to speak slowly and clearly when communicating and try to use simple words. It is also alright to ask if you don't understand something that is being said.
- **Make sure that you listen and allow space for everyone to participate:** We want to hear what all participants have to say. Everyone should feel welcome and respected.
- Some of you will be **sharing a room with someone you are comfortable with** who is around the same age as you. In these cases we will allocate people of the same gender to share a room. Show respect to your roommate; don't touch their possessions or invite others to the room without their approval.
- There is no strict dress-code. We ask that you **dress appropriately and respectfully** but in a way you feel comfortable and that represents who you are.
- You will not need a computer or the internet during the event, but you are welcome to use both if you want to. **WIFI will be available at the venue.**
- Social media will be used to promote the event and all participants are encouraged to use this as well and use the hashtag provided. **Please keep in mind to be respectful towards others in your use of social media at all times.** Be careful to follow the activities

and discussions of the event and do not post pictures or remarks about others without asking them first.

- This Eurochild event is a **smoke and drug free zone.**
- At Eurochild events **no alcohol will be served. Children and young people below the age of 18, their accompanying adults and Eurochild staff** who have a direct responsibility for children during an event, should refrain from drinking alcohol. All participants are expected to respect Eurochild's Child Protection Policy and to act as role models for the children and refrain from drinking alcohol in the presence of children.
- **We all need to protect the environment** and keep our surroundings neat. Please clean up after yourself, pick up your trash and treat the event venue, your hotel and other places you might visit with respect.
- **Be yourself!** You have been asked to participate because we want to hear what you have to say. No suggestions or questions are wrong or bad. Let's all remember to welcome and appreciate diversity.

*If anyone (child or an adult) treats you in a way you think is not appropriate, or if you notice someone behaving badly towards another person, or going against the Code of Conduct in any way, then please share that information with your accompanying adult, any of the staff members at the event, or Eurochild's Child Protection Focal Person **NAME**. They will take care of the situation or assist you in any way needed.*

## ANNEX II

# Guidelines for Speakers and Facilitators Working with Children Online meetings/events

In order to support effective participation and engagement of children and young people during online meetings and events, we have created these guidelines for speakers/facilitators to keep in mind.

### Our vision of children and young people's participation

One of Eurochild's goals is to engage children and young people in meaningful, ongoing dialogue and to enable them to have effective and fulfilling participation across the different areas of our work. We aspire to empower children and young people both directly and by supporting our members so that, together, we ensure their voices influence the decisions and practices of policy makers and practitioners. We believe that in all participation and engagement work, children and young people should be actively listened to, treated fairly and have their opinions respected and taken seriously.

### Golden rules for speakers and facilitators

- » Use clear, accessible and inclusive language.
- » Do not use difficult words. Or make sure you always explain them clearly. It is OK to explain difficult words more than once.
- » Consider rephrasing or writing in the message function (if available) if participants indicate they do not understand.
- » Avoid using abbreviations and acronyms, or explain them clearly.
- » Use the same word to describe the same thing throughout your intervention.
- » Do not send direct private messages to children during meetings. The child participation team and technical hosts are available to support if messages need to be passed on to child participants.
- » If any subject matter has the potential to be particularly sensitive, the child participation team should be informed in advance so that they can appropriately prepare the children participating.
- » Do not take photos of or record children without prior permission.
- » Be aware that we never share the last name of child participants.

### Other things to keep in mind

- » Remember the value in hearing children's opinions. Be sure you listen carefully.
- » It might be very intimidating for a child to speak up in an online meeting with many adults, particularly as the online nature means all focus is on the person speaking. Every time you reply to a child try to compliment them on some parts of their comments, and if you are to disagree with the point made by a child then be careful to frame it so that the child does not feel humiliated.
  - For example: *"That is a very good question"; "Actually, many people think so but the fact is..."*
- » Never tell a child that their opinion/answer is wrong.
- » Never insist a child uses their microphone or turns their camera on. Use of the microphone/camera is entirely voluntary for all participants.
- » Never speak down to a child or use phrases that imply that they know less because of their young age.
- » If a question or a comment from a child is unclear, then offer assistance by asking them questions to clarify what they are trying to say or repeating your understanding of the question/comment and confirm that this is what they meant to ask. If it is not, then help the child guide you in the right direction by asking them clarifying questions.
- » Keep the same tone in your voice as you would when speaking to an adult, but ensure you use accessible language.
- » Show respect to the different opinions children might have from yours. Remember that they are participating because we want to hear what they have to say.
- » **Be careful when you pose a question to a child. They should never feel pressured to answer, but rather be offered the opportunity to; never put a child in a position where they have to answer for their whole generation.**
  - **Tip: Ask "what do you think" rather than "what do children in Europe think"**
- » If you are asking a child a question, be sure to make the question short and easy to understand.
- » When providing information, keep it easily understood and relevant.
  - **Tip: Use "One of every three individuals applying for asylum were children" rather than "398,123 of the 1.259.950 people that applied for asylum were children"**

## ANNEX III

# TITLE OF SESSION

## Facilitator's Session Plan

### Dates – Time

Session title			
Time of session		Duration	
Challenges			
Core content	Method used	Location	Resources/Material
Desired outcomes			

Time	Activity	Segment leader	Info	Resources

