



Child Participation Toolkit

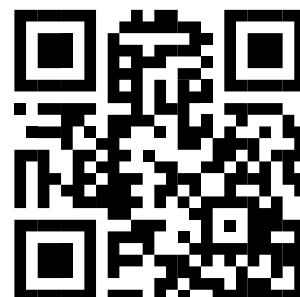


ELTE | LAW



UMCS
WYDZIAŁ PRAW I ADMINISTRACJI

clap-child.eu



Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
I. General questions related to the use of child participation tools	6
1. Using child participation tools: key implementation challenges	6
1.1. Symbolic/formal child participation and the dangers of tokenism.	6
1.2. Exclusion, marginalisation, elitism and the accessibility of child participation	7
1.3. Adult dominance and an adult-centred approach: the dangers of adultism	8
2. Implementation principles to be followed when using child participation tools	9
2.1. Ensure participation is meaningful, relevant and consistent	10
2.2. Creating a safe and supportive environment.	10
2.3. Ensure inclusive and accessible approach	11
2.4. Provide information, preparation and support.	12
3. Criteria for the selection and differentiation of child participation tools.	13
3.1. Age and maturity of children	13
3.2. Levels of child participation.	15
4. Additional implementation considerations in the use of child participation tools	17
4.1. Child participation and the question of parental consent.	18
4.2. Basic requirements related to the processing of children's data.	19
II. Specific local child participation tools that may be used by municipalities	21
1. Focus group participation	22
1.1. Considerations for establishing a focus group	25
1.2. The use of focus group participation and municipal support for it	27
1.3. Municipal evaluation and monitoring of focus group participation	29
2. The child and youth council	30
2.1. Establishing the child and youth council, selection of the members of the council	33
2.2. The operation of the child and youth council and support for its activities.	36
2.3. Evaluation and monitoring of the operation of the child and youth council	40
3. Child participatory budgeting	42
3.1. Considerations in the design of child participatory budgeting	44
3.2. The use of child participatory budgeting and municipal support for it	46
3.3. Municipal evaluation and monitoring of child participatory budgeting	48
4. Online questionnaire survey and data collection	49
5. Operating a digital child e-participation platform.	53
6. Additional alternative creative tools supporting local child participation	57
6.1. Participatory video.	58
6.2. Photovoice	62
6.3. Storytelling workshop	65
Sources	70

INTRODUCTION

The **Child Participation Toolkit** is a practical guide and methodological resource designed for municipalities. Its purpose is to help local municipalities involve children in public policy and decision-making processes in a meaningful, structured and child-friendly way.

The Toolkit is **innovative** in that it was specifically designed for municipalities that implement local child participation, taking into account the unique needs of municipalities. The Toolkit is **grounded in practice**; it addresses only those issues that come up in practice and recommends only those child participation tools that are well known and tried and tested.

The Toolkit provides **methodological support** to municipalities in selecting child participation tools. In offering this support, the Toolkit is based on the premise that **municipalities have the best understanding of local conditions** and know which child participation tools — and how they should be implemented — are **best suited to those local contexts**.

The Toolkit is primarily designed to assist municipalities in choosing child participation tools by providing **practical and flexible guidance**. It establishes a **common basis** that local governments can refer to whenever questions or dilemmas regarding the use of a child participation tool arise.

The Toolkit brings together:

- the common implementation challenges,
- the key implementation principles of child participation,
- practical considerations for implementation,
- and a collection of tested participation tools that municipalities can adapt to their local context.

In line with Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Toolkit **understands a child as every person below the age of 18 years, unless national law sets an earlier age of majority**. Following **Article 12 of the CRC**, the Toolkit recognises that **children have the right to express their views on all matters affecting them**, and that decision-makers should take these views into account wherever possible.

Child participation means more than simply listening to children. It is a process of **meaningful dialogue** between children and adults, where:

- children can safely share their experiences, ideas and proposals,
- adults genuinely consider children's perspectives,
- children receive feedback about decisions and outcomes and
- participation has a visible influence on local decision-making processes.

Municipalities that actively involve children can:

- make better and more responsive decisions,
- strengthen trust between children, young people and local institutions,
- improve democratic culture,
- and support children in exercising their rights.

Child participation is not a separate or symbolic activity. It is an **important element** of:

- good governance,
- democratic accountability,
- and the implementation of children's rights at local level.

When municipalities include children's experiences and perspectives in public policy processes, they strengthen the local community as a whole.

Why the local municipal level is especially important?

Child participation can be particularly effective at the local municipal level because:

- local decisions directly shape children's daily lives,
- municipalities are closer and more accessible to children,
- participation processes are often easier to organise locally than nationally,
- and children are often more motivated to contribute to issues affecting their immediate community.

Local child participation therefore creates opportunities for ongoing dialogue between municipalities and young residents.

How to use this Toolkit?

The Toolkit is designed as a **practical resource**. Its aim is not simply to answer the question:

“Which participation tool should we use?” but rather:

“How can we choose the most appropriate participation method for our local context?”

The Toolkit supports municipalities in making informed and child-centred decisions about participation methods.

Structure of the Toolkit

The Toolkit is divided into two main parts. The **first chapter** of the Toolkit deals with **the general questions and considerations** related to the use of child participation tools. After this, in the **second chapter**, the **Toolkit presents child participation tools that are already proven and work well in practice**.

Part I – General questions and practical considerations

This section introduces the foundations of child participation and helps municipalities prepare for implementation. It covers:

- the implementation principles of child participation,
- common challenges and risks, and
- the main practical implementation criteria (levels of participation, age-related considerations, parental consent, and data protection safeguards).

This section supports local municipalities in **choosing participation methods responsibly and effectively**.

Part II – Child participation tools in practice

This section presents practical child participation tools that have already been tested and successfully used in different contexts. For each child participation tool, the Toolkit explains:

- its purpose,
- how it works,
- its strengths and limitations,
- when it is most useful,
- implementation steps,
- monitoring and evaluation considerations,
- and ways to ensure motivation, feedback and inclusion.

The Toolkit approaches participation as a dynamic and ongoing process rather than a one-time activity.

A child-centred Toolkit development process

The development of the Toolkit itself was based on the principle of participation. Children involved in the project contributed directly to the design and content of the Toolkit, recognising that: **children are the best experts of their own experiences.**

During the development process, several simulation sessions and participatory workshops were organised in both partner countries (Hungary and Poland). The participating children shared their views, experiences and recommendations, which were then incorporated into the Toolkit. This collaborative process helped ensure that the Toolkit reflects children's real needs, expectations and perspectives.

I. GENERAL QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE USE OF CHILD PARTICIPATION TOOLS

Before selecting and applying child participation tools, municipalities should carefully consider **several practical aspects and general questions**.

Successful child participation does not depend only on choosing the “right” tool, but also on **how participation is organised, implemented and followed up**.

This section of the Toolkit helps municipalities:

- identify common implementation challenges,
- avoid typical mistakes,
- understand the principles of meaningful participation,
- and choose participation methods that fit their local context and capacities.

The aim is to support municipalities in creating participation processes that are meaningful, inclusive and effective for **both children and local decision-makers**.

1. Using child participation tools: key implementation challenges

The Toolkit not only introduces specific child participation tools but also explains why meaningful child participation can sometimes be difficult to implement in practice.

Even well-designed participation mechanisms may fail if:

- children are involved too late,
- participation is only symbolic,
- some groups of children are excluded,
- or adults do not genuinely value children's perspectives.

For this reason, municipalities should understand and identify the most common challenges before introducing local participation mechanisms. An **implementation challenge** is any practical or structural obstacle that can limit the effectiveness, inclusiveness or credibility of child participation. This section presents three key challenges that municipalities should consider when planning and using any child participation tool.

1.1. Symbolic/formal child participation and the dangers of tokenism

For municipalities, one of the most typical challenges is that child participation remains formal and symbolic.

What is tokenism?

One of the most common risks in child participation is **tokenism** — when children appear to be involved in decision-making, but their participation has little or no real influence.

In tokenistic processes:

- children are consulted only formally,
- their views are not genuinely considered,

- participation is used mainly for communication or image-building purposes,
- or decisions have already been made before children are involved.

In some cases, tokenism may even lead to the use of children as political symbols or instruments, which contradicts children's rights and undermines trust in participation processes. **The problem lies in the process: children's participation serves formal, representational or communication purposes, and in reality, has no influence on decisions.**

Typical warning signs of tokenism

Municipalities should pay attention to situations where:

- children are invited only at the final stage of a project,
- there is no realistic possibility to modify decisions,
- children receive no feedback,
- adults have already decided the outcome,
- or participation is organised mainly for visibility or public relations purposes.

Practical example

Park development consultation

A municipality plans to develop a new public park. The design plans are already finalised when the local child council is invited to review the project.

The children propose:

- additional sports equipment,
- shaded areas,
- and community seating spaces.

However, the park is ultimately built according to the original plans, and none of the children's ideas are included.

In this case, the problem is not necessarily that decision-makers ignored the children intentionally. The main issue is that children were involved too late, when there was no longer a real opportunity to influence the project.

1.2. Exclusion, marginalisation, elitism and the accessibility of child participation

Another typical challenge of local child participation is that, when using a child participation tool, the municipality does not reach all groups of children.

The risks of exclusion and marginalisation

In practice, municipalities often reach:

- children who are already active,
- students from well-resourced schools,
- or children who are confident and easy to engage.

At the same time, other groups may remain excluded because of:

- poverty,
- disability,
- discrimination,
- or lack of information and support.

As a result, participation may reflect only the experiences of a limited group of children, while the perspectives of the most affected or vulnerable children remain invisible.

The risks of elitism

If participation repeatedly involves only the same groups of children:

- local policies may become unbalanced,
- inequalities may be reinforced,
- and trust in participation processes may weaken.

An overemphasis on efficiency can unintentionally reduce inclusiveness and undermine the democratic value of child participation.

It is important to distinguish between tokenism, which concerns the influence of participation, and lack of inclusion, which concerns the accessibility of participation. Both challenges may appear together and reinforce one another.

Practical example

Child Council representation

A municipality establishes a child council. Most members are selected from schools in the city centre and are chosen based on academic performance and existing school engagement.

The child council later proposes:

- new sports facilities,
- public events,
- and improvements to recreational areas.

These proposals are included in municipal development plans. However, children living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods or remote areas are not represented in the council. Issues affecting them — such as unsafe transport routes or lack of local leisure opportunities — do not appear in the discussion.

As a result, important experiences and needs remain absent from the decision-making process.

1.3. Adult dominance and an adult-centred approach: the dangers of adultism

One structural challenge of child participation is so-called adultism (or adult-centredness).

What is adultism?

A further structural challenge is **adultism** — an adult-centred approach in which adults are automatically considered more competent, while children's experiences and opinions are treated as less valuable or less realistic.

In participation processes affected by adultism:

- adults control what children may discuss,
- children's proposals are minimised or dismissed,
- participation becomes overly directed,
- and children have little real influence over the process.

Adultism is not always intentional. It may result from long-established institutional habits, attitudes or assumptions within local governance systems.

In the case of adultism, the problem lies in the approach itself: the municipality fundamentally considers children automatically less competent, and for this reason their views do not receive real weight.

How adultism affects participation

When municipalities underestimate children's competence:

- children's motivation may decrease,
- trust between children and institutions may weaken,
- participation becomes less authentic,
- and valuable local knowledge may be lost.

Adult-centred approaches also reduce opportunities for children to develop civic confidence and democratic engagement.

Practical example

Public space planning

A municipality asks its child council to suggest improvements for public spaces. The children propose:

- additional seating areas,
- meeting spaces for young people,
- and more community-friendly gathering places in the town square.

Adult decision-makers reject the proposal because they believe young people should spend less time in public spaces and prefer to focus on enclosed playgrounds designed by adults.

Although the children formally participated in the process, their proposal was not taken seriously because of pre-existing adult assumptions about how children should use public space.

Implementation challenges - key message for municipalities

Implementation challenges often appear together and may reinforce one another — especially in municipalities that are beginning to develop child participation practices.

For this reason, successful child participation requires:

- preparation,
- reflection,
- flexibility,
- and continuous learning.

Understanding these challenges is the first step toward building meaningful, inclusive and sustainable child participation at the local level.

2. Implementation principles to be followed when using child participation tools

Municipalities can successfully prevent and manage the common challenges of child participation if they use participation tools in a carefully planned, child-friendly and rights-based way and on the **basis of the implementation principles**. This requires more than simply creating participation opportunities.

Municipalities should ensure that participation processes are meaningful, safe, inclusive, transparent, and properly prepared.

The following implementation principles provide practical guidance for municipalities when planning and operating child participation mechanisms. These principles should guide every stage of the process — from preparation and communication to implementation and feedback.

Children's real involvement can be achieved in the use of these tools only if the steps of the process and the process as a whole are aligned with the following implementation principles.

2.1. Ensure participation is meaningful, relevant and consistent

Why this matters?

Child participation is not only about hearing children's opinions. The goal is to ensure that children's views can genuinely contribute to local decision-making processes.

Participation becomes meaningful when:

- children understand the issue,
- their views are seriously considered,
- they can influence the process,
- and they receive feedback about outcomes.

Municipalities are not expected to accept every proposal made by children. However, they should explain clearly:

- how children's ideas were considered,
- which proposals were used,
- and why certain suggestions could not be implemented,
- transparency and feedback are essential for maintaining trust and credibility.

Municipalities should...

- involve children early in the process,
- choose topics that are relevant to children's lives,
- explain issues in a child-friendly way,
- ensure participation has a realistic connection to decision-making, and
- provide clear follow-up communication.

2.2. Creating a safe and supportive environment

Why safety is essential?

Children can only participate meaningfully if they feel safe, respected and supported. Municipalities must ensure that participation takes place in environments that:

- protect children's dignity,
- promote wellbeing,
- minimise risks,
- and support voluntary participation.

Safety includes both physical safety, and emotional and psychological safety.

Municipalities should...

- establish transparent participation rules,

- use child-friendly communication,
- assess risks before activities,
- ensure adult facilitators are properly prepared,
- and protect children from manipulation, discrimination or harm.

Special attention should be given to situations where children may express criticism or sensitive opinions. Children must feel confident that they can speak openly without fear of negative consequences. Participation must always be **voluntary**. Children should never be pressured to participate and always have the right to leave the process.

2.3. Ensure inclusive and accessible approach

Why inclusion matters?

Children are not a single, uniform group. Social, economic, cultural and personal factors all influence whether children can participate. Without conscious planning, some groups of children may remain excluded from participation processes. Inclusive participation is therefore not an optional extra — it is a basic requirement of quality child participation.

Removing barriers to participation

Municipalities should identify and reduce barriers that prevent children from participating. Barriers may include disability, poverty, language differences, discrimination, or limited confidence and previous experience. Special attention should be given to children belonging to **vulnerable or underrepresented groups**, including:

- children living with disabilities,
- children from disadvantaged backgrounds,
- minority children,
- migrant children and
- children in alternative care systems.

Flexible and diverse approach

No single participation tool can reach all children equally, for this reason, municipalities should aim to:

- combine different participation methods,
- offer both formal and informal opportunities,
- and adapt participation formats to different needs and life situations.

The goal is **not perfect representation in every case**, but a conscious and continuous effort to reduce exclusion and improve accessibility.

Municipalities should

- use accessible venues and communication,
- offer online and offline participation options,
- cooperate with schools and social services,
- provide interpretation or additional support where needed,
- and actively reach out to underrepresented children.

2.4. Provide information, preparation and support

Why preparation is important?

Children can only participate meaningfully if they understand:

- the issue being discussed,
- the participation process,
- and the possible impact of their involvement.

Municipal decision-making processes are often **complex**. Children therefore need information that is understandable, accessible, age-appropriate, and relevant to their level of maturity. Preparation is equally important for adults involved in participation processes.

Municipalities should...

- explain topics clearly and simply and without influence,
- avoid technical or administrative language,
- train municipal staff and facilitators,
- provide information in child-friendly formats, and
- allow enough time for children to ask questions and prepare their views.

Children do not need expert-level knowledge. However, they should understand the issue well enough to form and express their own opinion.

Preparing adults and facilitators

Adults working with children also require preparation and support.

Facilitators should have:

- communication skills,
- understanding of child participation principles,
- safeguarding knowledge,
- and experience in supporting inclusive dialogue.

If the municipality lacks expertise, external professional partners should be involved.

Implementation principles - key message for municipalities

When these implementation principles are applied consistently, municipalities are better able to:

- prevent common participation problems,
- build trust with children,
- strengthen democratic culture,
- and create meaningful participation processes.

These principles can also help municipalities respond to unexpected situations and practical questions during implementation.

A useful guiding question for municipalities is: *"Is our chosen solution consistent with the principles of meaningful, safe, inclusive and child-friendly participation?"* **If the answer is yes, the municipality is likely moving in the right direction.**

3. Criteria for the selection and differentiation of child participation tools

When using child participation tools, the municipality must take the implementation principles into account, but beyond these frameworks it has a **broader margin of consideration in deciding** which participation tool to choose and exactly how to apply it. However, these decisions should always be guided by clear criteria.

Two key considerations are especially important:

1. the age and maturity of the children involved,
2. and the level of participation the municipality wants to achieve.

3.1. Age and maturity of children

Why age and maturity matter?

When using local child participation tools, one of the basic questions is exactly what age and maturity of children can be involved in participation in public policy decision-making.

Children's ability to participate develops gradually over time. According to the CRC, children's participation should be assessed not only by age, but also by maturity, understanding, experience and evolving capacities.

This means municipalities should focus not only on how old children are, but also on:

- whether they understand the issue,
- whether they can form their own opinion, and
- what type of support they need.

It is precisely these latter factors to which attention must be paid when developing participation policy.

When using a specific, selected child participation tool, the municipality must consider first of all **whether the child is capable of forming his or her own views on the given issue**. It is not necessary for the child to know every detail; it is enough if the child is able to understand the given issue at a basic level and form an opinion on it.

Understanding the concept of "evolving capacities"

A key component of children's participation in the CRC is the principle of taking **evolving capacities into account**. Children's capacities develop continuously as they grow. As children become older and gain experience:

- they are increasingly able to understand complex issues,
- express their opinions,
- and contribute to decision-making.

Participation should therefore be gradual and adapted to:

- age,
- maturity,
- communication needs,
- and the complexity of the issue.

There is no strict minimum age for participation. However, different age groups usually require different methods and levels of involvement.

Child participation and age groups

At the same time, meaningful involvement in local decision-making processes typically becomes realistic only from a certain age, which is linked to children's level of understanding, maturity and the complexity of public policy issues.

AG1 – Early childhood (approximately children aged 3–6)

They may be capable of forming their own views and expressing preferences, even if they often do so in a non-verbal way. The involvement of young children is possible with the help of appropriate methodological tools, but not in decision-making processes; rather, it can take place in the form of collecting experiences or consultation.

AG2 – Lower primary age group (approximately children aged 6–10)

They are already capable of understanding simpler community issues, expressing opinions and taking part in group discussions. According to international child participation practice, at this age children may take part in a consultative role in structured occasions.

AG3 – Upper primary age group (approximately children aged 10–14)

They can already be meaningfully involved in the discussion of local public policy issues, and are capable of understanding more complex problems, making arguments and representing community interests. According to international examples, this is the age at which institutional child participation mechanisms such as child councils appear.

UNICEF guidance also presents several programmes in which members of child councils take part in the decision-making processes of local governments from the age of 10–12.

AG4 – Adolescent age group (approximately children aged 14–18)

Children belonging to this age group may already be full participants in any participation process and may engage in regular dialogue in any element of the municipal decision-making procedure. At this age, children are capable of understanding complex public policy issues, representing interests, developing proposals and taking part in debates.

For example, they may do so in a child and youth council or by making meaningful proposals in a participatory budgeting process. Experience shows that they are the most active participants in local institutional child participation mechanisms.

In summary, based on international experience

- **Lower primary age group:** creative, visual and playful methods are the most effective; other child participation tools may be used in a simplified and more limited form, and with active facilitation.
- **Upper primary age group:** can be effectively involved through structured consultation tools; in their case, participation tools such as a child and youth council or participatory budgeting may already function in a limited way.
- **Adolescent children:** more formal tools linked to local public policy decision-making may be used; all relevant participation techniques can be operated safely and as a real dialogue.

Key messages for municipalities – Age and maturity

Municipalities should aim to create participation systems that:

- combine different participation methods,
- adapt tools to children's age and maturity,
- and offer multiple ways to participate.

Different children will need different forms of support and engagement. A flexible and diverse participation system is usually more effective and inclusive than relying on a single participation mechanism.

3.2. Levels of child participation

When selecting child participation tools, municipalities should also consider **what level of participation they want to achieve**.

Different participation tools support different levels of involvement. Some tools mainly help municipalities gather children's opinions, while others allow children to actively shape decisions or even lead initiatives themselves.

Understanding these **participation levels helps municipalities**:

- choose the most appropriate participation method,
- clarify the role of children in the process,
- and design realistic and meaningful participation opportunities.

Understanding the levels of participation

The concept of participation levels was developed by Gerison Lansdown and is based on:

- how much influence children have,
- how decisions are made,
- who initiates the process,
- and what role children play during participation.

The model is useful because it does not treat participation as a single fixed method. Instead, it provides a flexible framework that municipalities can adapt to different situations and local needs.

Importantly: there is no “best” or “highest” level in every situation and no hierarchy between the levels.

The **appropriate level always depends on**:

- the purpose of participation,
- the topic being discussed,
- the age and maturity of the children,
- and the local context.

At every level, municipalities should **still follow the core implementation principles** described earlier in this Toolkit.

Lansdown identified three main levels of child participation:

1. Consultative participation
2. Collaborative participation

3. Child-led participation

L1 – The level of consultative participation

At this level:

- adults initiate and manage the participation process,
- children are invited to express their views,
- and the municipality listens to and considers these views.

The main goal is to better understand children's experiences, perspectives and needs in order to support better-informed public policy decisions.

Children receive the information needed to participate, but **decision-making remains primarily in adult hands**. This level focuses mainly on listening, consultation and gathering children's opinions. Children may influence decisions indirectly, but they do not usually share responsibility for decision-making itself.

Consultative participation may be especially useful when:

- municipalities need children's perspectives on a specific issue,
- a quick consultation process is needed,
- or the topic requires formal decision-making procedures led by adults.

L2 – The level of collaborative participation

At this level:

- adults usually initiate and support the process,
- but children and adults work together more closely,
- and responsibility is shared to some extent.

Children actively contribute to planning, discussion, problem-solving and implementation. Collaborative participation creates a stronger partnership between children and adults. **Children are not only consulted:** they become active contributors whose ideas can meaningfully influence decisions and projects.

Collaborative participation is especially useful when municipalities want to:

- build long-term dialogue with children,
- involve children in developing solutions,
- or strengthen democratic engagement and shared responsibility.

L3 – The level of child-led participation

At this level

- children themselves initiate activities or raise issues,
- children help define priorities and agendas and
- children can meaningfully influence decisions through their own proposals and actions.

Adults still play an important role, but mainly as facilitators, supporters, mentors, and providers of safe frameworks. The goal is not to leave children alone with responsibility, but to support their autonomy and leadership.

Child-led participation strengthens:

- initiative,
- confidence,
- civic engagement,
- and democratic participation skills.

Child-led participation may work particularly well:

- with older children and adolescents,
- in long-term participation structures,
- or when children want to address issues that directly affect them.

So why to choose the right participation level?

Different participation tools may support only one participation level, or several levels depending on how they are used. Municipalities should therefore ask:

- What role should children play in this process?
- How much influence can realistically be shared?
- What level of participation is appropriate for the topic and age group?
- What support will children need?

Key message for municipalities – Levels of participation

Meaningful child participation does not require every process to be fully child-led. The most important goal is to ensure that:

- participation is genuine,
- children are respected,
- and the chosen participation level matches the local context and purpose.

A municipality can successfully build child participation step by step by combining different levels and methods over time.

4. Additional implementation considerations in the use of child participation tools

When planning and implementing child participation tools, municipalities should not only consider the age and maturity of children and the level of participation they want to achieve, but also, several additional practical and ethical issues.

Two areas are especially important:

1. parental consent and cooperation with parents,
2. and the protection of children's personal data.

These considerations help municipalities create participation processes that are safe, trustworthy and compliant with children's rights and data protection standards

4.1. Child participation and the question of parental consent

Why parental consent matters?

Child participation should always take place in a safe, supportive and ethical environment. Parental consent is an important safeguard, especially:

- when participation takes place outside school or home,
- when children join organised programmes or events,
- when personal data are collected,
- when photos or videos are taken or
- when children participate in public activities.

At the same time, parental consent should not replace or override the child's own voluntary decision to participate. Participation must always remain voluntary for the child.

The role of the child's age and maturity

The importance of parental consent changes according to the child's age, maturity and evolving capacities. In general:

- parental involvement is usually stronger for younger children,
- while adolescents should increasingly be able to make informed decisions about their own participation.

Municipalities should therefore balance parental responsibility and the child's growing autonomy.

Practical requirements for parental consent

1. Use clear written consent forms

Written parental consent is recommended in **most organised participation activities**, especially:

- when children join child or youth councils,
- when events take place outside school,
- when interviews or recordings are made or
- when personal data are processed.

Consent forms should clearly explain:

- the purpose of the activity,
- the form of participation,
- the planned use of personal data and
- the voluntary nature of participation.

2. Ensure parents receive understandable information

Consent is meaningful only if parents fully understand:

- what the activity involves,
- what the child's role will be and
- how participation will take place.

This is **particularly important** in research activities, consultations, media appearances, or online participation processes. Municipalities should avoid overly technical or legalistic language and provide information in a clear and accessible way.

3. Work through schools and institutions carefully

In some cases, schools or institutions may help organise consent procedures. However, municipalities should still ensure that:

- parents receive direct and understandable information,
- participation remains voluntary,

- and consent is not treated as a purely formal administrative step.

4. Building trust with parents

Successful child participation depends greatly on whether parents trust the process. Parents are more likely to support participation when municipalities:

- communicate openly,
- explain the purpose of participation clearly,
- provide regular feedback,
- and demonstrate that children's safety and wellbeing are taken seriously.

Trust-building is therefore an important part of sustainable child participation policy.

4.2. Basic requirements related to the processing of children's data

Why data protection matters?

When municipalities use child participation tools, they often **process children's personal data**. This may include:

- names and contact details,
- opinions and experiences,
- photos or videos,
- online participation data,
- or information connected to children's personal circumstances.

Because children are considered particularly vulnerable data subjects, municipalities must apply a **high level of care and protection when processing their data**.

Core principles of children's personal data protection

Municipalities should ensure that:

- personal data are collected only for a clear and specific purpose,
- only necessary data are collected,
- data are stored securely,
- and access to data is limited.

Children and parents should **always understand**:

- what data are being collected,
- why the data are needed,
- and how the data will be used.

Consent and transparency

Participation-related data processing should be based on informed consent, transparency and child-friendly communication. Municipalities should explain data processing in ways that children can understand, taking account of their age and maturity.

Protecting sensitive information

Special care is required when participation involves sensitive information, for example:

- health-related information,
- vulnerable social situations,
- personal experiences,
- discrimination,
- or safeguarding concerns.

Municipalities should carefully assess whether collecting such information is necessary and how risks can be reduced.

Anonymity and confidentiality

Where possible, municipalities should allow anonymous participation, especially in surveys, questionnaires and opinion collection activities. Anonymity can help children feel safer, express opinions more freely, and reduce fear of criticism or negative consequences.

Digital Safety and Secure Storage

Municipalities should also ensure:

- secure storage of participation data,
- protection of digital systems,
- controlled access to files and recordings,
- and safe use of online participation platforms.

Children's information should never be shared unnecessarily or used for purposes unrelated to participation.

Key messages for municipalities – Additional considerations

Parental cooperation and data protection are not only legal or administrative obligations — they are essential elements of trustworthy and ethical child participation.

Municipalities that:

- **communicate transparently,**
- **protect children's rights and privacy,**
- **and create safe participation environments**

are more likely to build long-term trust and meaningful engagement with children and families.

II. SPECIFIC LOCAL CHILD PARTICIPATION TOOLS THAT MAY BE USED BY MUNICIPALITIES

In this chapter, the Toolkit presents in detail the specific child participation tools from which municipalities may choose those that are the most appropriate and most usable for them in the given situation and circumstances.

The aim of these participation tools is to help municipalities:

- understand children's experiences and perspectives,
- create meaningful dialogue with children,
- and strengthen children's participation in local community life.

Each participation tool offers a **different way for municipalities to engage children**. Some tools are better suited for collecting opinions and feedback, while others support long-term cooperation and shared decision-making.

The Toolkit presents tools that are:

- practical and adaptable,
- tested in practice,
- suitable for different municipal contexts and
- flexible enough to work in municipalities of different sizes and capacities.

Why use different participation tools?

No single participation tool is suitable for every situation. Different tools may:

- involve different age groups,
- support different levels of participation,
- require different resources,
- or fit different stages of decision-making.

For this reason, municipalities are encouraged to:

- combine participation methods,
- use different tools at different levels,
- and build a flexible participation system rather than relying on only one mechanism.

Participation tools work best when they complement each other.

Below, the Toolkit presents in more detail five established and well-known child participation tools that may be used to involve children in municipal public policy decision-making processes. **The tools proposed by the Toolkit include**

- focus group participation,
- the child and youth council,
- child participatory budgeting,
- online questionnaire-based data collection, and
- the operation of e-participation platforms.

As a sixth category, the list of tools is complemented by a further group of **creative, alternative participation tools** that is capable of further diversifying and meaningfully supplementing the municipality's local child participation toolkit.

From international child rights and child participation documents, as well as from toolkits and guidance materials describing child participation tools, a logic and complementary system can be identified from which the use of the child participation tools recommended by the Toolkit may follow. **The Toolkit** builds on the

recommendations and professional guidance of:

- **the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child,**
- **the UNICEF,**
- **the Council of Europe,**
- **the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and**
- **European Union** guidance and practice,

which are set out in detail in the detailed list of sources at the end of the Toolkit.

These participation tools were selected because they:

- are already widely used in practice,
- are supported by international guidance,
- and can realistically be implemented by municipalities.

The Toolkit focuses mainly on participation tools that:

- have already been tested in practice,
- are supported by existing experience,
- and are commonly used in European local government contexts.

In addition, the Toolkit consciously complements the established child participation tools with **alternative tools** in respect of which there is less comprehensive experience, but whose use is professionally justifiable.

Using participation tools as a complementary system

International experience shows that child participation is most effective when municipalities combine different participation methods into a connected system. A combination of tools can help municipalities ensure:

- broader reach,
- deeper dialogue,
- continuity of participation,
- and stronger impact on local decision-making.

For example, surveys can provide broad feedback, focus groups can explore issues in depth, child and youth councils can support long-term cooperation.

1. Focus group participation

What is focus group participation?

Focus group participation is a small-group discussion led by a trained facilitator. Its purpose is to explore children's experiences, opinions and perspectives in greater depth.

This method allows municipalities to gather detailed feedback from children about a specific issue, service or public policy question.

In a focus group:

- a small group of children discuss a topic together,
- the discussion follows a planned structure,
- and children can react to each other's ideas and experiences.

The aim is not to reach agreement or consensus, but to understand different viewpoints and experiences.

Main characteristics of focus group participation

1. Interactive and discussion-based

Unlike surveys or individual interviews, focus groups are based on interaction between participants. Children can:

- respond to each other's ideas,
- build on shared experiences and
- explore issues together.

This often helps municipalities discover new perspectives and ideas that may not emerge through written questionnaires.

2. Structured but flexible

Focus groups usually follow a prepared discussion guide, but the conversation should remain flexible and open. The facilitator:

- guides the discussion,
- supports equal participation,
- keeps the group focused,
- and creates a safe and respectful atmosphere.

The facilitator should not influence children's opinions or suggest "correct" answers.

3. Small groups and targeted participation

Focus groups work best with relatively small groups of children who:

- are affected by the issue,
- have relevant experience,
- or can provide useful perspectives.

Municipalities can use focus groups to involve:

- specific age groups,
- children using a service,
- or children from underrepresented or vulnerable groups.

This makes focus groups particularly useful for **inclusive and targeted participation**.

Possible participation level

L1 – Consultative participation

Focus groups are mainly consultation tools. They help municipalities understand children's views and experiences in greater depth, but decision-making responsibility usually remains with adults.

Recommended age groups

Focus group participation can usually be adapted for:

- AG2 – Lower primary age group** (6–10 years),
- AG3 – Upper primary age group** (10–14 years),
- AG4 – Adolescents** (14–18 years).

Working with younger children

With younger age groups, focus groups should:

- use shorter sessions,

- include visual and playful elements,
- and focus on concrete, experience-based topics.

Working with older children and adolescents

Older children and adolescents are generally able to:

- discuss more complex issues,
- reflect critically,
- debate different viewpoints,
- and participate in longer discussions.

From approximately age 14, children can usually participate in “classical” focus group discussions with minimal adaptation.

Advantages and strengths

1. Ensuring quality information and deeper understanding

During focus group participation, dimensions, experiences, feelings and motivations can be revealed on the part of children in relation to the local public policy decision and its context that may not necessarily be identifiable through purely quantitative methods.

During the discussion, it is possible to reach a **deeper level of understanding of experiences**, because children are able to inspire each other and to clarify or modify their views.

2. The role of the group format and the exploration of community patterns

The small-group discussion format used in focus group participation, together with the active presence of the facilitator, is suitable for creating a more relaxed and safer environment for children. The discussions may also indirectly help the municipality, beyond the specific issue itself, to explore community norms and patterns, and may show common values in relation to decision-making, but also differences within the group and even conflicts.

3. A versatile role in the local public policy decision-making process

Focus group child participation can be used effectively at several points in the local public policy decision-making process of municipalities and is therefore suitable for evaluating local public services and for the targeted exploration of children's needs during the preparation process.

Risks and weaknesses

1. The effect of group dynamic distortions and social expectations

During focus group participation, attention must also be paid to the fact that more dominant children may suppress the views of others, more withdrawn children may not speak up in the discussion, and conformity and adaptation to the majority may also appear.

Alongside group dynamic factors, there is also the risk that participating children, in relation to more difficult or sensitive issues, may give socially accepted and expected answers and may not express their real views.

2. Lack of representativeness and limited individual depth

During focus group participation, children are spoken to in small groups, which means that the individual views and the group dynamics that develop cannot be generalised to the views of the children living in the settlement, and do not represent their peers.

From another side, during the use of the tool the emphasis is on the group process, and individual stories necessarily unfold less in this tool than in an individual interview.

3. High methodological and facilitation requirements of operation

The success of focus group participation as a tool depends strongly on the selection of the facilitator, on his or her competence and experience, and on the proper prior planning of the discussion, and the complexity of preparation, implementation and analysis must be considered. If it is not used properly, it may lead to distorted results and in some cases may even be harmful to children.

4. Managing ethical and child safety risks

During focus group participation, a key risk in the case of sensitive topics is the creation of an ethical and safe participation environment. For this reason, before the use of the tool it is justified to develop a detailed child safety guide addressing the risks, and to communicate it transparently to the participating children before the discussion.

1.1. Considerations for establishing a focus group

Recommended group size

According to international standards, a focus group works effectively in a small and manageable group, and the **recommended number is generally 6–10 children**.

In the **lower primary age group** (children aged 6–10), a **group of 4–6** may be more ideal because of different communication characteristics.

With this number, a **balance can be maintained between**

- the diversity of opinions and
- the management of group dynamics and interaction, and
- every child can be given an opportunity to speak.

A more homogeneous age group by age results in better discussion dynamics.

It is worth considering: if the municipality nevertheless needs the views of more children for well-grounded decision-making, then several parallel focus groups may also be established.

Possible mechanisms of selection

The targeted selection of children participating in the focus group is a key issue: it affects whether participation is meaningful and relevant.

It is justified to select for the focus group children who are affected by the given public policy decision and have their own experience, and who may have shareable and relevant information on the subject.

Criteria for selecting participants

In the case of a focus group, a conscious balance must be created between group homogeneity and ensuring diversity. Under the former, open communication and interaction between the children are supported

- by **similar age**, for example, adolescents or even an age subgroup within that, and
- by a **similar life situation**, for example, primary school pupils.

Under the latter, different individual experiences and different social backgrounds are important, which guarantee the richness of perspectives, but it is not expected that the municipality should strive for full representativeness.

Possible selection methods

During focus group participation, in light of the given public policy decision and the phase of the decision-making process, the target group must be defined

- on the **basis of age** (for example, 10–14 years) and
- **affectedness** (for example, uses the given local public service on a daily basis);
- here it is also worth paying special attention to the possible involvement of specific, **vulnerable groups of children**.

It is important that the group should have a shared experiential basis, otherwise the discussion will be difficult to start.

Municipalities may use:

- school recommendations,
- open calls,
- targeted outreach to vulnerable groups,
- or mixed selection models.

Combining different recruitment methods is often the most inclusive solution.

1. Selection with the help of institutional intermediaries

The most typical method used in focus group participation is that children are selected through the recommendations, proposals and mediation of teachers in local schools, the municipality's youth officers, or social professionals.

- **Advantage:** that they know the children well and are in daily contact with them, so an appropriate group can be quickly put together in cooperation with them.
- **Disadvantage:** elitism, if they propose the most active children, and therefore it is important that the municipality require diverse selection criteria.

2. Selection through an open call

For focus group participation, the municipality may also publish, in a transparent way, an open call or application in local schools, child protection institutions, community spaces, and on its online platforms.

- **Advantage:** through voluntary participation, more motivated children may become part of the group, which can support interaction and dynamics.
- **Disadvantage:** that it may create a distorted sample, since typically the children who are already more active and more self-confident apply.

3. Selection through the targeted involvement of specific groups

During focus group participation, it may be an explicit and conscious objective to select children belonging to specific vulnerable, marginalised or minority groups

- children with disabilities,
- children belonging to a nationality, or
- children with a migration background,

who can be recruited directly into the focus group with the help of specialised intermediaries, communities or civil society organisations.

4. Selection using a mixed, multi-stage model

During focus group participation, the different selection methods may also be used well in a mixed and combined way. To prevent distortions, the use of multi-stage selection may be useful and recommended.

At the municipality's request, the school or another institution or organisation may draw up a list of children and may determine the screening criteria depending on the given decision, and on this basis the final focus group may be formed.

Ensuring inclusiveness when designing focus group participation

In the case of focus group participation, efforts must be made towards targeted inclusive planning, and it must be assessed in advance which children in which life situations or statuses may be expected to be at risk of being left out.

It is possible to define specific groups, and therefore the relevant vulnerable groups must be identified (for example children with disabilities, children growing up in institutional care). Attention must be paid to assessing participation barriers, what may distort participation from this point of view (lack of information, access problems, mistrust), and how these may be removed.

A multi-channel recruitment solution, for example the combination of an open call and targeted selection, is suitable for reducing distortion, and it provides an opportunity to involve members of vulnerable groups of children.

1.2. The use of focus group participation and municipal support for it

It is essential that the municipality considers in advance whether

- focus group participation is appropriate for supporting the given public policy decision-making at the given point of the decision-making process,
- there is time for proper preparation and
- there is capacity for analysing the information.

When using it, the following requirements must be considered.

The role and importance of facilitation

Meaningful facilitation is one of the critical factors of focus group participation, the facilitator is one of the most important elements of a successful focus group. **The facilitator should:**

- create a safe atmosphere,
- encourage equal participation,
- manage group dynamics,
- support quieter participants,
- and respond appropriately to sensitive situations.

Municipalities are encouraged to:

- involve trained external facilitators,
- or provide specialised training for municipal staff.

Ensuring child safety and ethical standards

When applying focus group participation, children's safety and the risks that may arise must be considered in advance and in a planned way, with special attention to sensitive situations.

Regardless of the selection mechanism, understandable information related to participation must be ensured voluntariness and informed consent, and attention must be paid to parental consent.

Feedback and follow-up

In the case of focus group participation as well, it is justified for the municipality to make children's views visible, to summarise what the children said in the discussions, and to inform them about these in an understandable way.

Children should always receive feedback after participation. Municipalities should explain:

- what children said,
- how their views were used,
- what decisions were influenced,
- and why some proposals may not have been implemented.

Feedback can be provided through:

- follow-up meetings,
- child-friendly summaries,
- presentations,
- digital communication,
- or cooperation with schools and youth organisations.

Providing feedback strengthens trust, transparency and future participation willingness.

The motivation and recognition

It is a basic requirement that children's participation should be voluntary, and that motivation and recognition techniques and solutions should not distort children's views; incentives that influence answers or are disproportionately large must be avoided.

However, municipalities may recognise children's contribution through:

- certificates,
- thank-you letters,
- symbolic gifts,
- travel reimbursement,
- refreshments,
- or shared experience-based activities.

Recognition should focus on appreciation, participation and collective contribution, rather than competition or individual reward.

Ensuring inclusiveness during the use of focus group participation

During the use of focus group participation, in the spirit of an inclusive approach, attention must be paid to child-centred and adapted methodology; adjusting the method used to the children's abilities is of key importance in the case of children in vulnerable situations.

The facilitator's task is

- to ensure equal opportunities to speak,
- to involve quieter children, and
- to manage dominance, which in the case of children belonging to vulnerable groups are guarantee elements of inclusion.

Better involvement is served by flexible solutions, by adapting the possible times of the discussion to the children's situation, and by ensuring the accessibility and physical accessibility of the venue, as well as by creating an accepting and safe atmosphere for the children.

In order to achieve broader reach, in the case of using the open selection model it is justified to establish several entry points and to create flexible forms of participation for children.

1.3. Municipal evaluation and monitoring of focus group participation

In the case of focus group participation as well, the monitoring and evaluation process is fundamental, because evaluation helps municipalities:

- improve participation quality,
- identify exclusion or distortion,
- strengthen legitimacy,
- and improve future participation processes.

Prior definition of participation indicators

In the case of focus group participation, it is worth recording the basic indicators already at the planning stage:

- how many children should participate in total,
- how diverse the group is,

which ensures comparability after the discussion.

Observation during the participation process

During focus group participation, in addition to the facilitator it is worth having another adult present as an observer, whose role is note-taking and tracking group dynamics and participation rates. Observation is part of the methodology of focus group participation, and the observer may be an employee of the municipality or a person invited by the municipality.

Ensuring children's feedback

A key consideration in the case of focus group participation as well is the assessment of how the participating children felt during the discussion, whether they understood the process, and whether they felt that they were listened to in the discussion and were able to express their views.

The expectation of facilitator reflection during the process

It is worth setting it as a requirement for the facilitator to assess afterwards which elements worked during the focus group discussion, whether the topic guide and the question structure were appropriate, what did not work, and where and why distortions occurred.

Ensuring inclusiveness during the evaluation of focus group participation

During the monitoring and evaluation of focus group participation, it is important to track inclusiveness. In relation to the data, it is justified to carry out a targeted examination of who participated by age and social situation, and which groups were left out. With regard to the quality of participation, it must be examined

- whether every child was able to speak during the group discussion and interactions,
- whether there were dominant speakers, and, according to the children's feedback,
- whether there was a safe environment and
- whether their views were meaningfully listened to.

The inclusiveness of the impact will also be relevant in this regard: whether the views of every group were actually able to appear in the process. The role, depth and quality of facilitation must also be analysed from the perspective of inclusiveness.

Focus group participation – Good practice Bratislava, Slovakia

Focus group meeting and discussions

In 2011 an electronic survey of children and young people throughout the Slovak Republic was carried out with the aim of contributing to the Council of Europe's policy review on child and youth participation in the Slovak Republic. The survey was tested by the children and young people taking part in the focus group discussions.

One facilitator and 15 children (7 boys, 8 girls) participated between the ages of 9 and 18 from the capital of Slovakia and cities and villages at a distance of 100 to 150 kilometres to the north-east and south-east of Bratislava.

They used to meet at the ÚNIK Cafe, in child-friendly location, „kaleidoscope of experience” method and world café technique was used (introduction, ice-breaker game and team-building activity, common agreement on basic rules, discussing everyday situations and life experiences in smaller groups, discussions on children's right to participate in different settings, suggestions on possible solutions to improve their right to be heard), and evaluation and feedback was made at the end.

Source: <https://www.employment.gov.sk/files/slovensky/ministerstvo/poradne-organy/ludske-prava-narodnostne-mensiny-rodovu-rovnost-sr/vybor-deti-mladez/participacia-deti-a-mladeze-v-slovenskej-republike-anglicke-znenie.pdf>

Key recommendation – Focus group participation

Focus group participation is most effective when municipalities use it:

- as part of a broader participation strategy,
- together with other participation tools,
- and within a safe, inclusive and well-prepared participation process.

When properly facilitated, focus groups can provide municipalities with rich insights that are often difficult to capture through surveys or formal consultations alone.

2. The child and youth council

What is a child and youth council?

A child and youth council is a formal participation structure through which children and young people can take part in local decision-making in an organised and continuous way.

It is usually a group of children and adolescents who:

- meet regularly,
- discuss local issues affecting children and young people,
- share ideas and recommendations,
- and communicate these directly to municipal decision-makers.

A child and youth council creates a structured and ongoing dialogue between the municipality and local children.

Its purpose is to ensure that children's experiences, needs and perspectives are regularly considered in local public policy and community development.

Main characteristics of child and youth councils

1. Formal connection to the municipality

A child and youth council usually has an official relationship with the municipality.

This may include:

- regular meetings with decision-makers,
- participation in consultations,
- cooperation with municipal committees,
- or the possibility to submit recommendations and proposals.

In many municipalities, the council operates under:

- a municipal resolution,
- a local regulation,
- or written rules of procedure.

2. Representative and democratic structure

Members of the council do not represent only themselves. Their role is to:

- bring forward the perspectives of their peers,
- maintain contact with children and young people in the community,
- and help communicate local youth concerns.

Child and youth councils often:

- hold regular meetings,
- create thematic working groups,
- organise consultations,
- and prepare recommendations for the municipality.

3. Flexible role in local decision-making

Child and youth councils may have different functions depending on the local context. For example, they may:

- advise the municipality,
- provide feedback on local policies,
- propose new ideas and projects,
- participate in consultations,
- or independently raise issues important to children and young people.

Possible participation levels

Child and youth councils may operate at different participation levels:

L1 – Consultative participation

L2 – Collaborative participation

L3 – Child-led participation

The exact level depends on:

- how the council is organised,
- how much influence children have,
- and how open the municipality is to shared decision-making.

Recommended age groups

Child and youth councils are generally most suitable for:

AG3 – Upper primary age group (10–14 years),

AG4 – Adolescents (14–18 years).

At this age, children are usually able to:

- understand community issues,
- participate in structured discussions,
- represent peers,
- and contribute to local decision-making.

Working with younger participants

When involving younger children:

- meetings should be less formal,
- discussions should use more visual and interactive methods,
- and stronger facilitation and support may be needed.

Advantages and strengths

1. Ensuring regular and long-term work and cooperation

Through the child and youth council, children's meaningful involvement in public policy decision-making is continuously available to the municipality and can be made possible more quickly, and over a longer period of time it is easier to build trust within the council.

2. Developing the democratic competence of local children

Participation in the child and youth council promotes, for the participants, the development of critical thinking, the advancement of social responsibility and public engagement, that is, it develops democratic skills that support children in exercising their rights.

3. Bringing in innovative perspectives and the possibility of autonomous operation

The members of the child and youth council are children with different experiences and perspectives, who may bring innovative ideas and solutions, or ideas and solutions previously overlooked for some reason, in relation to local public policy issues.

In addition, the child and youth council is able, in an autonomous way, to make its own proposals independently of submissions and opinions.

Risks and weaknesses

1. It requires stable commitment and is resource-intensive

For the operation of child and youth councils, the municipality needs

- constant professional facilitation, support and
- in this connection the involvement of a professional partner,
- coordination, creation and provision of an appropriate financial and organisational background.

2. The significant risk of symbolic participation and tokenism

In the case of the child and youth council, the general child participation risk may typically arise that, despite the institutionalised involvement of children,

- participation in reality remains formal, and
- the council's views and proposals have no real and meaningful impact on decisions.

3. Limited representativeness and the risk of exclusion

During the selection and recruitment of the members of the child and youth council, increased account must be taken of the trend that, without targeted intervention, the majority of members will come from active children in a better social position.

Children in other social situations may be excluded, and children belonging to vulnerable and marginalised groups may remain invisible.

2.1. Establishing the child and youth council, selection of the members of the council

The size and homogeneity of the child and youth council

The size of child and youth councils may vary significantly, and it is advisable to adapt it to the local context. Determining the exact size of the council is a **strategic decision**.

Recommended child and youth council size

The ideal size depends on:

- the municipality,
- local population size,
- available resources,
- and participation goals.

International practice often recommends approximately 10–25 members.

Larger councils may benefit from:

- thematic working groups,
- smaller committees,
- or rotating participation structures.

Choosing the age structure of the council

Municipalities should decide whether the council will include:

- a more homogeneous age group,
- or a mixed-age structure.

A similar age group may simplify communication and support smoother discussions.

Mixed-age councils may:

- provide more diverse perspectives,
- encourage peer learning,
- and support mentoring between older and younger participants.

Selection models for council members

There is no single “correct” selection model. The best approach depends on:

- the local context,
- participation culture,
- and inclusion goals.

However, the council selection processes should always be transparent, inclusive, fair and understandable for children.

Direct election model

In this model: children directly elect child and youth council members.

Elections may take place: in schools, online, or at community level.

Practical steps

1. Determining the election framework: the age group, the duration of the mandate, the number of representatives, and, where appropriate, the constituencies (schools, parts of the settlement); children's participation must be voluntary and informed, and they must receive appropriate information.

2. Determining the nomination process: providing for self-nomination or peer nomination, school or community recommendation, and prescribing minimum application criteria.

3. Determining the campaign and introduction: where and in what way candidates may introduce themselves (for example, in schools or on online platforms), and whether debates or forums may be held.

4. Conducting the vote: organising a school vote or an online voting system, while ensuring secret voting and broad access.

5. Public announcement of the election result and feedback for every candidate.

When is this selection model recommended?

It is advisable for the municipality to choose this selection model

- if a stable partnership operates between the municipality and the school network,
- if the participation activity of young people is high, and
- if the explicit aim during selection is also the development of democratic skills.

Advantages • strengthens democratic legitimacy, • encourages civic participation, • and supports democratic learning.	Risks • may favour already active or popular children, • may unintentionally exclude vulnerable groups, • and requires significant organisation and resources.
--	---

Selection model based on delegation

In this model: schools, youth organisations, NGOs, or community groups delegate members to the child and youth council.

Practical steps

1. Determining the delegating organisations: designating which schools, youth organisations, civil society organisations, child protection institutions and minority communities may delegate.

2. Determining the delegation criteria: fixing the possible age of the delegated members, the necessary motivations, the skills related to representation, and availability.

3. The framework of internal selection processes: the scope and autonomy of the delegating bodies, the role of school elections and teacher recommendations, and the use of an application system.

4. Municipal control of delegation: gender ratio, inclusiveness and territorial coverage.

When is this selection model recommended?

It is advisable for the municipality to choose the delegation-based model if the necessary partnership and trust exist between the municipality and the delegating institutions and organisations, if the municipality actively wishes to ensure inclusiveness in the selection mechanism, if hard-to-reach groups must be reached, and if there are active youth organisations in the settlement.

Advantages • helps reach underrepresented groups, • supports inclusion, • and may strengthen diversity.	Risks • democratic legitimacy may be weaker, • and selection quality depends on the delegating organisations.
--	---

Mixed selection model

This model **combines direct election and institutional or organisational delegation**. It is one of the most recommended approaches because it balances democratic legitimacy, diversity and inclusion.

Practical steps

1. Allocation of the places in the child and youth council

What proportion of the council members will be directly elected and what proportion will be delegated members, ensuring equality.

2. Determining the multi-level selection process

Determining the individual elements of

- **direct election** (for example, election taking place at school level) and
- **organisational and institutional delegation**.

3. The aims to be achieved through delegation

An active role in the inclusive approach and in ensuring that certain groups of children are not left out, and in ensuring diversity.

When is this selection model recommended?

On the basis of international practice and standards, it may be workable in many cases, especially if the local youth community is heterogeneous, if the balance of inclusiveness and democratic legitimacy is important, and if long-term and stable operation is the aim.

According to research, this selection model is able to **reduce the risk of elitism and strengthens the legitimacy and quality of participation**.

Ensuring inclusiveness when selecting the members of the child and youth council

Developing a targeted inclusion strategy

The municipality must consciously identify which groups of children participate less: disadvantaged children, children with disabilities, children living in child protection institutional care, children belonging to minorities, and children with a migration background. According to international recommendations, in the case of the child and youth council as well, the first step towards achieving inclusiveness is the identification and targeted outreach of these groups.

Developing a multi-channel selection system

In the selection of council members, inclusion is best ensured by the mixed model, which may rely, for example, on school election and on institutional, organisational or community delegation. In the multi-channel system, children may also get into the council who otherwise are not particularly active in the school environment, would not stand in a direct election, or require specific support during selection. A certain number of places in the council may even be reserved for marginalised groups of children, for example children with disabilities.

Involving intermediary actors in the selection process

In order to reach marginalised groups, it may be necessary to involve youth and social professionals and civil society organisations, who are capable of creating and maintaining a relationship of trust with those children who cannot be reached through formal channels.

Creating a child-centred and accessible selection system

During the selection process, an inclusive approach can be ensured only if language that is understandable and accessible for children is used, if several forms of application are provided (for example, online and in person), and if informational accessibility is considered.

2.2. The operation of the child and youth council and support for its activities

Municipalities have significant discretion as regards the design and structure of the child and youth council; in the case of this tool, the quality of local child participation in fact depends on the way it operates and on its concrete implementation. In relation to operation, it is necessary to review and consider the following standards.

Regular and predictable meetings

A basic condition of the operation of the child and youth council is regularity, which means at least monthly or bi-monthly meetings on the basis of a pre-determined annual meeting plan, with predictable and plannable dates.

The meetings of the child and youth council must be

- physically accessible for children (venue, transport), and
- their timing must be compatible with their other important commitments (school).

Regularity ensures continuity and the impact on decision-making, and at the same time is also able to give the municipality better temporal predictability for involvement.

Continuous adult facilitation during meetings

It is advisable that the meeting of the child and youth council should be chaired by a child member of the council, whom the members of the council elect from among themselves in order to strengthen

democratic operation. At the meetings of the council, the continuous presence of at least one adult facilitator with the appropriate competence is important. Facilitators should support children without controlling the process.

The adult facilitator

- observes and helps the process of the discussion,
- provides information as a supporter, and
- where appropriate links the council with the decision-makers as a contact person,
- monitors compliance with the rules relating to a safe environment and
- supports inclusive operation.

Continuous municipal presence during meetings

The different facilitation roles may even be fulfilled simultaneously by several adults together. The facilitator may be

- directly an employee of the municipality, or
- a staff member of a civil society partner, who on the basis of prior training and experience is able to collaborate with children as a partner.

If the municipality entrusts the facilitation role to a civil society partner, it is still worth ensuring the continuous presence of the municipality at least as an observer.

The advantage of this is the direct connection to decision-making, more effective information transfer, and direct feedback.

Ensuring a safe environment at the meetings of the council

The municipality must ensure that the operation of the child and youth council is based on clear, transparent rules that are knowable by everyone, and that within this framework it contains child protection and ethical guidelines.

The basis of safe meetings is that the **participating children**

- understand the processes,
- know what their role is in the operation of the council and
- are aware of their rights.

Children must be ensured that they can indicate at any time if they find themselves in an uncomfortable situation or one that threatens their safety, and that they can also give feedback anonymously. All this at the same time strengthens trust and the quality of participation.

Structured and sufficiently flexible meetings

The meetings of the child and youth council must be structured, but they must provide sufficient flexibility for children, as long as this does not affect meaningful meetings.

- **Structured operation:** served by the prior development and sending out of the agenda, documentation, including the keeping of minutes, the role of a child council member as minute-taker at the meetings, and the preparation of reports.
- **Flexibility:** supported if the meeting is not formalised, and if – following discussion with the children and with the involvement of a facilitator – interactive and playful methods (small-group work, workshop) also have a place in it.

Ensuring limited operational autonomy

The child and youth council must be ensured real, but not full, autonomy, which may extend to the development of its own agenda, the determination of its own priorities, and the establishment of its own operating rules within the given legal and regulatory framework.

During operation, the municipality must

- ensure the conditions for and enforcement of democratic debate and decision-making,

- continuously follow the meetings and through child-centred communication, draw the council's attention to the enforcement of these as well.

Ensuring real influence

For participation to remain meaningful:

- councils should not exist only symbolically,
- and municipalities should clearly explain how proposals are considered.

Municipalities should establish:

- clear communication channels,
- official contact persons,
- and transparent feedback systems.

Feedback and follow-up as a key element of the credibility of operation

Feedback and follow-up are essential for maintaining trust and motivation, one of the basic elements of the credibility of the operation of child and youth councils, namely that the municipality should make visible and traceable for children the path of the council's views and proposals and their effect on local public policy decision-making.

1. Feedback on all proposals of the child and youth council

A basic consideration is that the municipality must indicate in every case what happened to the proposal and must briefly give reasons for the decision: whether it was accepted or rejected or accepted with modifications.

2. Making the public policy decision-making process transparent for the council

It is the task of the municipality to present how the proposals of the councils are incorporated into the different public policy decisions, and to explain the decision-making process itself in an understandable way, because these increase the comprehensibility of participation.

3. Creating regular feedback points

It is not sufficient for the municipality to react to the opinion of the child and youth council only occasionally, but it is justified to make this regular and to organise feedback occasions quarterly.

4. Making results and impacts visible

The municipality must actively communicate to the council the impact of their proposals, what changes took place on the basis of the council's proposals, and in which matters these had an effect.

5. Ensuring two-way communication

Feedback towards the child and youth council must not be one-way; an opportunity must be ensured for children, during the feedback occasions, to ask questions and give feedback in relation to the municipality's operation and the impacts, to which the municipality can respond in a meaningful way.

The motivation and recognition

Participation should remain voluntary and should not depend on excessive rewards. However, municipalities **can support motivation** through:

- certificates (which may be valuable during later studies or employment),
- public recognition (may recognise the work of the members at events, and may communicate about this in an appreciative way in the media),

- training opportunities,
- community events,
- and meaningful participation experiences.

Support such as travel reimbursement, meals, or participation materials may also reduce barriers to inclusion.

1. Public forums of recognition

The municipality may present the work of the child and youth council in public forums, may recognise the work of the members at events, and may communicate about this in an appreciative way in the media.

2. Issuing certificates and attestations

The municipality has the possibility to give the members of the council a proof of participation, a certificate, or a letter of recommendation, which may be valuable during later studies or employment.

3. Providing skills development opportunities

Participation in the child and youth council may be motivated if the municipality offers training and skills development opportunities to the members (communication, project work).

4. Providing community experiences

From the point of view of participation in the child and youth council, it may be a motivation if community programmes, team building and meetings with other young people are connected to it.

International child rights standards do not in themselves exclude financial support, but they subject its use to strict conditions. What may be regarded as ethical primarily is

- the reimbursement of travel costs,
- meals before or after the meetings, and
- the provision of tools necessary for participation.

This is because these solutions reduce barriers to participation and do not function as rewards. The municipality may give a **symbolic reward**, but attention must be paid to ensuring that the reward

- does not become the main motivation for participation and
- that it is equally accessible to everyone.

It is advisable for the municipality consciously to develop, in the case of the child and youth council, a balanced motivation system that recognises the work connected to participation, supports development, ensures equality, and does not distort children's participation.

Ensuring inclusiveness during the operation of the child and youth council

Creating a safe, supportive environment and active facilitation

A general condition of child participation is safety, a respectful atmosphere, psychological safety, and discrimination-free operation, which are important in the case of vulnerable groups. In participation practice, a necessary element for ensuring inclusiveness is the presence of a moderator or facilitator, smaller group work, and structured opportunities to speak. It is also possible, through a team-teaching method, to involve two or more professionals as

facilitators, at least one of whom has pedagogical or specialised special-education methodological knowledge in order to ensure smoother cooperation with vulnerable groups.

Preparation and training

International practice and standards emphasise that inclusive participation requires the preparation and training of children and of the adults working with children and helping them to understand how to collaborate with children belonging to vulnerable groups.

Flexible operation

For the inclusive operation of the child and youth council, it is necessary to choose the timing of meetings flexibly, to support travel for certain members, and, where appropriate, to create the possibility of online participation in the meeting.

2.3. Evaluation and monitoring of the operation of the child and youth council

Alongside the operation and support of child and youth councils on the basis of appropriate standards, it is of key importance to build in **effective and conscious monitoring**, to check operation in line with the principles, and to create municipal accountability for the process.

Monitoring helps municipalities understand:

- whether the council functions effectively,
- whether participation is meaningful,
- and whether inclusion goals are being achieved.

Evaluation should consider:

- participation levels,
- diversity of members,
- meeting attendance,
- proposal outcomes,
- and children's own feedback.

In addition to quantitative, measurable indicators

- the number of meetings,
- the number of participants in meetings,
- the number of proposals and discussed submissions),

monitoring must also extend to qualitative aspects, such as whether the participants understand the process and whether facilitation worked.

Impact assessment and the use of indicators

One of the most essential elements of monitoring is what happens, during the municipal decision-making process, to the proposals of the child and youth council, and how these proposals are used. Within impact assessment, the municipality must analyse in detail whether the decision-maker person/body dealt meaningfully with the individual proposals of the council, and if not, why not. It must also be examined whether the municipal decision was in part or in whole in line with the council's proposal, and whether any change took place.

Levels of monitoring and evaluation of operation

It is advisable for the municipality to gather information about the operation of the child and youth council through regular data collection, and to monitor attendance data and the activity of the council.

Efforts should be made to ensure that the staff members responsible for the operation of the council and for contact with it regularly, at least once a year, report on their activities before the public of the representative body.

The involvement of children is of fundamental importance, because in this way they will be not only participants in the meetings, but also evaluators of them - for example, through online questionnaires or within the framework of joint evaluation workshops.

Periodically, every 3–5 years, it is also worth the municipality inviting an external expert, for example a civil society organisation, to conduct an evaluation.

Ensuring inclusiveness during the monitoring and evaluation of the child and youth council

Collecting participation data and ensuring feedback mechanisms

It is worth the municipality tracking the operation of the child and youth council and who takes part in meetings, who is left out, and how active the individual members are. The possibility of anonymous feedback must be created for children, and it is advisable to hold regular evaluation discussions in order to support feedback.

Examining inclusion aspects during impact assessment

The municipality must regularly examine what happened to the proposals of the child and youth council, and how the extent of their incorporation into public policy decisions developed; in doing so, special attention must be paid to the impact of separate groups.

Creating the possibility of continuous correction

It is advisable for the municipality to monitor whether, on the basis of the feedback and impact assessment, it is necessary to modify the selection system used, for example through the targeted involvement of new groups in relation to the inclusive approach, or through the fine-tuning of the operating rules.

It is also possible, through a team-teaching method, to involve two or more professionals as facilitators, at least one of whom has pedagogical or specialised special-education methodological knowledge to ensure smoother cooperation with vulnerable groups.

Child and youth councils – Good practice Helsinki, Finland

Ruuti youth participation system

The City of Helsinki operates the Ruuti participation system, one of the best-known municipal youth participation models in Europe. The system includes youth councils, municipal budgeting, school-based participation, online participation, and direct dialogue with city decision-makers. Young people have contributed to discussions on various issues, e.g. public transport, climate policy, education, and public space development.

Participation tool used: Youth council, collaborative participation structures, hybrid online/offline participation

Source: <https://www.hel.fi/static/kasko/yhteiset/participate-and-influence.pdf>
https://intercityyouth.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/IP_Ruutia-lsl.pdf

3. Child participatory budgeting

What is child participatory budgeting?

Child participatory budgeting is a participation tool that allows children and young people to take part in decisions about how a specific part of the municipal budget should be used.

In this process, children can:

- suggest ideas and projects,
- discuss priorities,
- develop proposals and
- in some cases, vote on how public funds should be spent.

This means that children can have a **real influence** on local spending decisions related to issues that affect them and their community.

Main characteristics of child participatory budgeting

1. Participation throughout the process

Child participatory budgeting is more than simply asking children for ideas. It is usually a structured process that may include:

- idea generation,
- project development,
- discussion and prioritisation,
- voting or decision-making,
- implementation and
- follow-up and evaluation.

Children therefore participate not only by expressing opinions, but by contributing throughout different stages of the process.

2. A dedicated municipal budget

The municipality sets aside a specific budget that children can influence or help allocate. This budget may support:

- playground improvements,
- youth activities,
- public space projects,
- environmental initiatives,
- school-related ideas,
- or other child- and youth-focused projects.

The budget should be realistic, visible and large enough to create meaningful impact.

3. Shared decision-making with children

Child participatory budgeting creates cooperation between municipalities, adults and children.

Depending on the model used, children may:

- give opinions,
- help prioritise projects,
- or directly participate in decision-making.

4. Supporting democratic learning

Participatory budgeting is not only about public spending. It also helps children:

- understand how public budgets work,
- learn about local democracy,

- develop negotiation and discussion skills,
- and experience shared responsibility.

Possible participation levels

Child participatory budgeting may operate at:

L1 – Consultative participation

L2 – Collaborative participation

The exact level depends on:

- how much influence children have,
- and how decisions are organised.

Recommended age groups

Child participatory budgeting is generally most suitable for:

AG3 – Upper primary age group (10–14 years),

AG4 – Adolescents (14–18 years).

Working with younger children

Younger children may still contribute through:

- simple idea generation,
- visual voting methods,
- and facilitated project discussions.

However, they usually need stronger support, simplified explanations and more interactive methods.

Working with adolescents

Adolescents are usually able to:

- discuss priorities,
- evaluate proposals,
- understand budget concepts and
- participate in more complex decision-making processes.

Advantages and strengths

1. More effective and better use of public funds at municipal level

Through child participatory budgeting, the municipality is able, at least within the limits of the dedicated framework, to use the budgetary resources available to it in a more relevant and more targeted way that better corresponds to the needs of local children, including children belonging to vulnerable groups.

For example, the acceptance of these developments will be higher, since they are decided upon by the very people who will be using them. The developments will be of higher quality, since user perspectives are incorporated into the process from the outset.

2. A participation tool that strengthens local democracy at the social level

Child participatory budgeting is a child participation tool that may be suitable for strengthening and deepening local democracy, and for ensuring transparency and accountability in relation to the local budget, and for building trust in public institutions.

3. Institutional learning in relation to the use of public funds and children's needs

By using child participatory budgeting, municipalities, beyond the targeted use of the dedicated framework, may on the basis of opinions and decisions become better able to understand the real needs of local children, while also developing the scope of their participation policy.

Disadvantages and weaknesses

1. Limited impact and limited financial weight

A typical problem of child participatory budgeting is that children's views do not lead to actual change and do not have a concrete impact on the process of municipal budgetary decision-making. If the municipality provides only a smaller budgetary framework, then this will have a limited structural effect and will lead to local, micro-level results.

2. The resource-intensiveness and complexity of participation

Child participatory budgeting is not merely about making it possible for participating children to generate ideas concerning resources; beyond making the dedicated framework available, it is also necessary to ensure adequate resources in terms of facilitation, communication and organisation. The budgetary decision-making process is complex and technically complicated for children, and without proper support and information they will find it difficult to understand.

3. The problems of sustainability and institutionalisation

In the case of the use of child participatory budgeting, a typical problem is ensuring sustainability, because in the case of project-like operation child participatory budgeting cannot become institutionalised in practice, and the process may be interrupted.

3.1. Considerations in the design of child participatory budgeting

When deciding on the use of child participatory budgeting, the municipality must make decisions on several key issues that determine the model to be applied.

Defining the municipality's goals

Before starting, municipalities should decide:

- what they want to achieve,
- and what role children will play.

For example:

- Is the goal mainly democratic learning?
- Or is the goal stronger influence on public spending decisions?
- Is the process project-based or long-term?

Setting the budget framework

A key issue in the use of child participatory budgeting is the size of the separate municipal budgetary framework over which children can exercise real influence.

The municipality should define:

- the size of the budget,

- the timeline,
- and the types of projects that may be supported.

There is no ideal budget size.

However, the budget should:

- be realistic,
- create visible outcomes,
- and demonstrate genuine municipal commitment.

Regular or annual budgeting processes can help institutionalise participation over time.

Possible models of child participatory budgeting

During the prior planning of child participatory budgeting, it will be relevant what kind of powers the municipality grants to children, and whether they participate in it in a consultative (opinion-giving), participatory (prioritising) or decision-making capacity.

On the basis of the depth of children's participation and the role they play in the process, three models can be distinguished from one another.

1. Consultative model

In this model children share opinions and ideas, but adults make the final decisions.

Advantages • simpler to organise, • useful for municipalities with limited experience, • and suitable as a first step.	Risks • lower level of influence, • and greater risk of tokenism.
---	---

2. Collaborative model

In this model children and adults jointly develop projects, discuss priorities, and participate together in decision-making.

Advantages • encourages partnership, • strengthens dialogue, • and increases children's influence.	Risks • requires stronger facilitation and coordination, • and may take more time and resources.
---	--

3. Empowering model

In this model children directly vote on projects, and municipalities commit to implementing the selected projects.

Advantages • strongest level of child influence, • highly motivating, • and strengthens democratic ownership.	Risks • requires high trust, • careful preparation, • and strong institutional commitment.
--	---

Ensuring inclusiveness in the design of child participatory budgeting

Inclusive participatory budgeting requires municipalities to actively reach:

- vulnerable groups,
- marginalised children,
- and children who may otherwise remain excluded.

Municipalities should consider:

- accessibility,
- flexible participation options,
- different communication channels,
- and cooperation with schools, NGOs and youth organisations.

Open participation alone does not automatically guarantee inclusion.

3.2. The use of child participatory budgeting and municipal support for it

According to the participation structure, child participatory budgeting may have three forms.

- **Open participation model** – any child belonging to the given target group (for example, an adolescent) may freely join and participate in the process.
- **Representative participation model** – relies on institutionalised forms, for example the operation of the child and youth council, and it is the members of this body who may participate as representatives of their age group.
- **Mixed participation model** – the open participation element and the representative participation element may be combined.

Participatory budgeting models in practice

Open participation model

This is one of the most inclusive solutions of child participatory budgeting, but at the same time it requires great care; in such a case, participation and involvement are open not only to a limited, delegated group of children, but to the full range of local children concerned. In such a case, the objective is to involve as wide a range of children as possible, to democratise participation, and to reach marginalised and “invisible” groups of children.

In this model all children within the target group may participate.

This is often the most inclusive approach, but it also requires strong communication, facilitation and careful organisation.

1. Broad outreach and communication

Children's participation and involvement in the process do not happen “by themselves,” but require consciously designed, time-scheduled, multi-channel communication and a prior campaign.

Municipalities should use

- schools,
- youth organisations,
- social media,
- online platforms,
- and community spaces

to reach children and explain the process.

Special attention should be given to underrepresented groups.

2. Easy-to-understand and accessible information

Budget processes should be explained using simple language, visuals, infographics, videos and practical examples. Children should understand:

- how the process works,
- what influence they have,
- and how decisions are made.

3. Low entry access

Participation should be easy, accessible, and flexible. Online platforms and simplified registration systems can help increase participation.

4. Structured and transparent process

- The municipality should clearly explain:
- the stages of the process,
- voting rules,
- timelines,
- and project selection criteria.

Transparency strengthens trust and legitimacy.

5. Support for project development

Children often need support turning ideas into realistic projects.

In the case of child participatory budgeting, if children may vote on the use of the dedicated framework, then the municipality must define clear rules on who may participate in the vote, how many stages the voting has, how many rounds it consists of, when the voting is closed, and how the final result of the voting is established. The basis of trust is that all children participating in the process must be informed of the decision

Municipalities can help through:

- workshops,
- facilitation,
- mentoring,
- and technical guidance.

The aim is to support children without taking control away from them.

6. Clear feedback and accountability

Children should always receive feedback about:

- which projects were selected,
- what was implemented,
- and why certain ideas could not move forward.

This is essential for meaningful participation.

Representative and mixed participation models

If a municipality already has a child or youth council, it may involve the council in:

- project development,
- consultations,
- proposal-making,
- or voting.

Municipalities may also combine open participation and representative participation. For example: project development may happen within a youth council, while voting remains open to all local children.

Ensuring inclusiveness during the operation of child participatory budgeting

In child participatory budgeting, especially in its open solution, targeted outreach is a key issue. Children belonging to vulnerable and marginalised groups must be reached, and for this purpose it is advisable for the municipality to cooperate with schools, children's homes and civil society organisations and to use several communication channels.

From the municipality's side, inclusion is supported by supported and facilitated participation elements, which can ensure that this group of children is also really able to express its views, and at the same time they play a significant role in achieving a safe participation environment. It is worth creating the possibility of choosing between alternative forms of participation, for example group-based work and an online/offline combination.

During voting, it is necessary to ensure a broad and equal-weight opportunity for participation.

3.3. Municipal evaluation and monitoring of child participatory budgeting

When using child participatory budgeting as well, proper feedback and the monitoring of the process are basic requirements. This is because **children's participation can be regarded as successful**

- if it results in actual change, in the present case
- if children meaningfully influenced the use of the given budgetary framework,
- if the projects proposed by them can be implemented, or
- if it is recognisable what obstacle stood in the way of implementation and how it can be remedied.

Monitoring must be transparent and regular, and children must also be involved in it. The monitoring of child participatory budgeting must extend to several dimensions, including the budgetary process itself and, within it, the participation process, as well as its results and impacts.

Evaluation and measurement dimensions of child participatory budgeting

Within the framework of monitoring, the data of

- the participation process (number of participants, outreach),
- the quality of participation (comprehensibility of the process, effectiveness of the support),
- the quality and feasibility of decisions and projects, their alignment with local needs, the parameters of concrete implementation (data, timing, budgetary framework), and
- their impact on public policy and on children (democratic competence, willingness to participate) must be evaluated.

Implementation of the evaluation of child participatory budgeting

The effectiveness of evaluation may be increased by a simplified and structured indicator system, which contains

- quantitative (participation rate, number of projects) and
- qualitative (satisfaction, experiences) elements.

Involving children in evaluation

Children themselves should also help evaluate the process. The effectiveness of evaluation may be increased by a **simplified, structured indicator system**, which contains quantitative (participation rate, number of projects) and qualitative (satisfaction, experiences) elements.

Municipalities may use:

- surveys,
- focus groups,

- workshops,
- or feedback sessions.

Continuous feedback helps improve future budgeting cycles.

Ensuring inclusiveness during the evaluation of child participatory budgeting

In every element and step of the evaluation of child participatory budgeting, an important focal point is the degree of inclusiveness, which is a measurable and analysable dimension.

Municipalities should regularly examine:

- which groups participated,
- which groups were missing,
- and whether barriers affected participation.

Monitoring inclusion supports:

- institutional learning,
- continuous improvement,
- and more equitable participation systems.

Child participatory budgeting – Good practice Cascais, Portugal

Youth participatory budget

The Municipality of Cascais introduced a youth participatory budgeting programme allowing young people to submit project ideas, campaign for proposals, and vote on local projects funded by the municipality. Projects included: developing sports facilities, environmental initiatives, and cultural programmes. Close to 15,000 students from public schools in Cascais were invited to participate in the Youth Participatory Budget. In the implementation of the Youth PB 2021/22, 349 students and 27 teachers from 15 schools directly participate.

For each school, the Municipality of Cascais provides a sum of 10,000 euros to be applied in ideas to improve the space or the students' experience. Young people are also asked for ideas to improve the community through a budget worth up to 350,000 euros, which will be integrated into the Cascais Participatory Budget 2022.

Participation tool used: Participatory budgeting, youth voting, collaborative local decision-making

Source: <https://participa.cascais.pt/pages/620266bb61fda300a873a6d4>

4. Online questionnaire survey and data collection

What are online questionnaires and digital surveys?

Online questionnaires and digital surveys are child participation tools that allow municipalities to collect children's opinions, experiences and feedback through structured digital forms.

Children answer questions about a specific local issue or public policy topic, and the municipality uses the collected information to support planning and decision-making.

Online surveys are one of the most commonly used participation tools because they are:

- easy to organise,
- relatively low-cost,

- and capable of reaching large numbers of children quickly.

Why use online surveys?

Online questionnaires can help municipalities:

- understand children's needs and priorities,
- gather feedback on local services and projects,
- identify community problems,
- evaluate municipal initiatives,
- and support evidence-based decision-making.

They are especially useful when municipalities need:

- broad outreach,
- rapid data collection,
- or input from a large number of children.

Main characteristics of online questionnaires surveys

1. Structured and easy to distribute

Online surveys usually contain:

- closed questions (multiple choice, ratings, yes/no answers),
- and open questions where children can share ideas or comments.

Online surveys can be distributed through:

- schools,
- youth organisations,
- municipal websites,
- social media,
- or digital participation platforms.

2. Fast collection and processing of data

One of the main advantages of online surveys is that:

- responses can be collected quickly,
- data can be processed efficiently,
- and results can easily be compared and analysed.

This makes online surveys especially useful for:

- consultations,
- needs assessments,
- service evaluations,
- and preparation for local policy decisions.

3. Possibility for anonymous participation

Anonymous participation may help children:

- answer more honestly,
- feel safer expressing opinions,
- and provide feedback on sensitive issues.

However, municipalities should still ensure:

- safe data handling,
- child-friendly communication,
- and clear information about privacy and data use.

Possible participation level

Online surveys usually operate at:

L1 – Consultative participation

They are mainly tools for:

- gathering opinions,
- collecting feedback,
- and understanding children's experiences.
- Decision-making responsibility usually remains with adults.

Recommended age groups

Online surveys are generally suitable for:

AG2 – Lower primary age group (with support),

AG3 – Upper primary age group,

AG4 – Adolescents.

Working with younger children

With younger children, surveys should:

- use simple language,
- include visuals and icons,
- contain fewer questions,
- and provide adult support where necessary.

In some cases, surveys may be completed:

- in schools,
- with teacher support,
- or through guided activities.

Working with older children and adolescents

Older children and adolescents are generally able to:

- complete surveys independently,
- understand more complex questions,
- and provide more detailed opinions and feedback.

Advantages

It is capable of broad outreach at low cost, makes rapid data collection and processing possible, anonymous completion of answers to the questions can support honest responding well, and it can typically be useful for municipal decision preparation.

Disadvantages

The online questionnaire survey is able to provide only answers of limited depth to the questions raised, and these are less nuanced than tools based on in-person participation. In the case of younger age groups, difficulties in interpreting the questions may also easily arise. Its weaknesses also include the risk of a low response rate, the risk of exclusion because of differences in digital access, and, without feedback, answering may also become formal.

Preparing an online questionnaires survey

1. Clear purpose and communication

Children and parents should clearly understand:

- why the survey is being organised,
- what topic it concerns,
- and how the municipality will use the results.

Transparent communication helps strengthen trust, motivation and participation quality.

2. Child-friendly design

Questions should be:

- age-appropriate,
- easy to understand,
- short and clear,
- and adapted to children's communication abilities.

Municipalities should avoid:

- technical language,
- complicated wording,
- and excessively long questionnaires.

Visual elements such as icons, emojis, colours, or illustrations can improve accessibility and engagement.

3. Feedback and impact

One of the most important parts of online participation is feedback.

Children should be informed:

- what the survey results showed,
- how the municipality used the information,
- and whether the results influenced decisions.

Municipalities can share results through:

- child-friendly summaries,
- school presentations,
- social media,
- websites,
- or youth meetings.

Without feedback, children may feel that participation has no real purpose.

4. Monitoring and evaluation

Municipalities should evaluate:

- participation rates,
- diversity of respondents,
- accessibility,
- quality of responses,
- and the impact of survey findings on decision-making.

It is also important to examine:

- whether all groups of children were reached,
- and whether barriers affected participation.

This helps improve future participation processes.

Accessibility and inclusion

Municipalities should consider:

- digital accessibility,
- language accessibility,
- and support for children with additional needs.

Where necessary, alternative participation options should also be offered.

Online questionnaires and digital surveys – Good practice Melbourne, Australia

Children's experiences in public spaces

The City of Melbourne frequently runs digital consultations on urban spaces through the Participate Melbourne platform. Initiatives focus on how local children — who prioritize accessible play areas and social connection — experience public areas like Birrarung Marr Playground and Lincoln Square.

For parents and young people looking to shape urban design and share their voice, below are the primary avenues for engagement in Melbourne:

- **Participate Melbourne:** The primary digital portal where the council lists active surveys for playground renewals, street updates, and community visions. Access it directly via the Participate Melbourne portal.
- **ArtPlay:** A dedicated creative arts centre near Birrarung Marr that frequently partners with professional artists to host immersive workshops and consultation sessions for children.

Participation tool used: Online questionnaires, child-friendly digital consultation

Source: <https://participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au/community-vision/community-consultation>

5. Operating a digital child e-participation platform

What is a digital child e-participation platform?

A digital e-participation platform is an online participation tool that allows children and young people to engage with the municipality through a dedicated digital space.

Through the platform, children can:

- share opinions,
- submit ideas and proposals,
- participate in consultations,
- comment on local issues,
- vote on initiatives,
- and receive feedback from the municipality.

Digital platforms create an **ongoing channel of communication** between children and local government rather than a one-time participation activity.

Why use a digital child e-participation platform?

Digital participation platforms help municipalities:

- maintain regular dialogue with children,
- reach larger groups of young people,
- support flexible participation,

- and create more continuous and visible participation processes.

They are especially useful for municipalities that want to:

- strengthen long-term participation,
- combine online and offline participation methods,
- and communicate regularly with children and adolescents.

Main characteristics of digital child e-participation platforms

1. Continuous participation

Unlike surveys or one-time consultations, digital platforms support ongoing participation.

Children can participate:

- regularly,
- at different times,
- and on different local topics.

This allows municipalities to create a more permanent participation culture.

2. Interactive functions

Platforms may include idea submission, online discussions, polls and voting, commenting functions, consultations, project tracking or feedback systems.

Interactive features can help increase children's motivation and engagement.

3. Combination of participation and communication

Digital platforms can also support information sharing, updates from the municipality and communication about decisions and projects.

This helps children better understand:

- what is happening locally,
- how decisions are made,
- and how their participation contributes to local processes.

Possible participation level

Digital child e-participation platforms usually operate at:

L1 – Consultative participation

However, depending on how they are designed, some platforms may also support elements of:

- collaborative participation,
- especially when children can actively contribute to discussions or project development.

Recommended age groups

Digital child e-participation platforms are generally most suitable for:

AG3 – Upper primary age group (10–14 years),

AG4 – Adolescents (14–18 years).

Working with younger users

Children in the upper primary age group may already use digital tools actively, but they often still need:

- guidance,
- moderation,
- and adult support.

Platforms for younger users should therefore:

- use simple navigation,
- contain visual elements,
- and provide child-friendly explanations.

Working with adolescents

Adolescents are usually able to:

- participate independently,
- discuss issues online,
- submit proposals,
- and engage continuously with digital participation processes.
- For this age group, digital platforms can be particularly effective and motivating.

Advantages

Through the platform, continuous dialogue can be created between children and the municipality, and it can be a flexible and easily accessible tool for children. Continuity and structure serve the active role of children, and it can be combined with other participation tools.

Disadvantages

In the use of the platform, digital inequality must be taken particularly into account: not every child has access to the use of such tools. The municipality must not only create the platform, but must also maintain it and moderate it continuously, and in addition data protection and online safety risks may arise. Among its weaknesses is that the quality of participation may vary, and that it may easily become “apparent participation” if it has no real impact.

Preparing and operating a digital child e-participation platform

1. Creating a safe participation environment

Safety is one of the most important requirements for digital participation.

Municipalities should ensure:

- respectful communication,
- moderation of comments,
- clear participation rules,
- protection against online harassment,
- and child-friendly reporting systems.

Children should know:

- how the platform works,
- what behaviour is expected,
- and where to seek support if needed.

2. Child-friendly design and usability

Platforms should be:

- easy to navigate,
- visually accessible,
- mobile-friendly,
- and adapted to children's age and communication style.

Good practice includes:

- short texts,
- icons and visuals,
- videos,
- and simple participation steps.

Complex systems may discourage participation.

3. Data protection and privacy

Municipalities must clearly explain:

- how registration works,
- what personal data are collected,
- how data are stored,
- and how privacy is protected.

Anonymous or partially anonymous participation may help children feel safer expressing opinions.

4. Feedback and impact

Digital platforms are particularly well suited for:

- regular updates,
- transparent communication,
- and continuous feedback.

Municipalities should inform children:

- what happened to their ideas,
- how decisions were made,
- and what actions were taken.

Feedback should be simple, understandable and visible on the platform itself where possible.

5. Monitoring and evaluation

Municipalities should regularly evaluate:

- participation rates,
- diversity of users,
- quality of interaction,
- platform accessibility,
- and the influence of participation on local decision-making.

It is also important to monitor online safety, inclusion and user satisfaction.

Accessibility and inclusion

To reduce exclusion, municipalities should:

- combine online and offline participation methods,
- cooperate with schools and youth organisations,
- provide access points where needed,
- and ensure accessibility for children with disabilities.

Inclusive participation requires more than simply making a platform available.

Monitoring inclusion

Municipalities should regularly examine:

- which groups of children are participating,
- which groups are underrepresented,
- and whether digital barriers affect participation.

This supports:

- continuous improvement,
- better accessibility,
- and more inclusive participation systems.

Digital e-participation platforms for children – Good practice Tallinn, Estonia

Digital youth participation initiatives

The Tallinn City Government has used digital participation tools and online youth consultations to involve young people in urban development, education and environmental discussions.

Participation tool used: E-participation platform, Digital consultations

Source: <https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/impact-shapers/good-practices/digital-leap-youth-field-estonia>

6. Additional alternative creative tools supporting local child participation

Their common characteristic is that they **make non-traditional (verbal) self-expression possible for children, may be useful for involving younger age groups or children belonging to marginalised groups**, and may help local decision-makers to better understand children's experiences.

At the same time, it must be considered that these tools have significant facilitation needs, **are more sensitive from the point of view of child safety and data protection and require conscious planning** by the municipality in order for the results to be incorporated into local public policy decision-making.

Creative participation methods can help municipalities **involve children in ways that are:**

- more engaging,
- more inclusive,
- and more accessible for different age groups and communication styles.

These tools are **especially useful** when municipalities want to:

- encourage self-expression,
- involve children who may not feel comfortable in formal discussions,
- or explore emotional and experience-based topics.

Creative methods can **complement more traditional child participation tools** such as:

- surveys,
- youth councils,
- or consultations.

They are often **particularly effective** for younger children, vulnerable groups and children who communicate more easily through visual or creative expression.

6.1. Participatory video

What is participatory video?

Participatory video is a child participation method in which children actively create videos to express their experiences, opinions, ideas or proposals about a local issue or community problem.

Children are not only participants in the video — they are also creators of the content.

The process may include:

- developing ideas,
- planning scenes,
- filming,
- interviewing,
- storytelling,
- and presenting the final video to the municipality or local community.

Participatory video allows children to communicate their perspectives in a visual and creative way.

Why use participatory video?

Participatory video can help municipalities:

- better understand children lived experiences,
- explore complex or emotional topics,
- strengthen children's confidence and creativity,
- and make children's voices more visible in public discussions.

Videos can also create a strong emotional and visual impact for decision-makers.

Advantages

It is able to actively support children's self-expression, especially that of those who, because of their age, situation or disposition, express themselves with more difficulty orally or in writing. A further strength of the tool is that it strengthens children's active involvement and motivation, and because of its visual form it may in some cases have a stronger impact on decision-makers. In addition, participatory video can be used effectively to present complex or emotionally charged topics.

Disadvantages

Its use may be time- and resource-intensive (technology, facilitation), and it may also raise data protection and copyright issues; in addition, not every child feels comfortable in front of a camera, and processing and interpretation require structuring.

Main characteristics of participatory video

1. Children as active creators

Children do not simply answer questions or appear on camera.

They actively participate in:

- creating the message,
- shaping the story,
- and deciding what they want to communicate.

This strengthens ownership and engagement.

2. Creative and flexible participation

Participatory video can be adapted to:

- different age groups,
- different abilities,
- and different participation goals.

Children may use interviews, storytelling, drawings, role play, photography, animation or documentary-style filming. The process can therefore be **highly inclusive and child friendly**.

3. Group-based participation

Participatory video is usually created collaboratively.

Children often work together in:

- small groups,
- workshops,
- or project teams.

This encourages:

- teamwork,
- discussion,
- peer learning,
- and collective problem-solving.

Possible participation levels

Participatory video may support:

L1 – Consultative participation

L2 – Collaborative participation

The level depends on:

- how much control children have over the process,
- and whether they participate only in expressing opinions or also in shaping decisions and messages.

Recommended age groups

Participatory video can be adapted for:

AG2 – Lower primary age group,

AG3 – Upper primary age group,

AG4 – Adolescents.

Working with younger children

With younger children:

- activities should be shorter,
- strongly facilitated,
- and experience based.

At this stage, participatory video is mainly useful for:

- creative expression,
- sharing experiences,
- and simple storytelling.

Working with upper primary age groups

Children in this age group are usually able to:

- structure ideas,
- build stories,
- and work collaboratively on visual content.

Digital and visual creativity can be highly motivating for this group.

Working with adolescents

Adolescents are generally able to:

- explore more complex topics,
- communicate messages intentionally,
- and present arguments and proposals more independently.

Participatory video can therefore become a strong advocacy and communication tool for older children and young people.

Preparing a participatory video project

1. Clear goals and purpose

Municipalities should clearly define:

- what issue the video project addresses,
- how the video will be used,
- and what role children will play.

Children should also understand:

- who the audience is,
- and how their work may influence local discussions or decisions.

2. Creating a safe and supportive environment

Participatory video projects should:

- encourage respectful collaboration,
- support emotional safety,
- and provide clear participation rules.

Children should know:

- that participation is voluntary,
- how recordings will be used,
- and how they can ask for support if needed.

3. Feedback and follow-up

Children should receive feedback about:

- how the video was used,
- how decision-makers responded,
- and whether the project influenced discussions or decisions.

This helps strengthen trust, motivation and the meaningfulness of participation.

4. Monitoring and evaluation

Municipalities should evaluate:

- participation quality,
- inclusion,
- children's experiences,
- project impact,
- and audience response.

It is also important to assess:

- whether children felt heard,
- whether the process was safe,
- and whether participation remained genuinely child centred.

Inclusion and accessibility

Municipalities should ensure:

- flexible participation roles,
- accessible equipment and spaces,
- and support for children with different communication needs.

Alternative ways of contributing should always be available.

Participatory video – Good practice Scotland

Young people filming problems in local green spaces

Researchers in central Scotland used an adapted InsightShare participatory video method with young people to explore problems in local public green spaces. The young people (15-16 years old school pupils) had previously had very limited engagement with local greenspaces. They filmed bullying, violence, littering, and safety concerns in parks.

They wanted local people and authorities to understand why these spaces felt unsafe.

This became a form of youth participation in local environmental governance because the videos: documented community problems, gave young people a public voice, and supported discussions about improving local spaces and services.

The project also increased participants' confidence and sense of agency.

Participation tool used: Participatory video

Source : <https://insightshare.org/the-power-of-participatory-video-an-unexpected-outcome>

6.2. Photovoice

What is photovoice?

Photovoice is a creative child participation method in which children use photography to document and present:

- their experiences,
- their everyday environment,
- local challenges,
- and issues that are important to them.

Children take photographs of places, situations or problems in their community and then explain the meaning behind the images through discussions, captions, stories, presentations or exhibitions. Photovoice helps municipalities **better understand how children see and experience their local environment**.

Why use photovoice?

Photovoice can help municipalities:

- explore children lived experiences,
- identify hidden or overlooked local problems,
- encourage reflection and discussion,
- and strengthen children's confidence and self-expression.

The method is especially valuable when municipalities want to:

- understand everyday realities from children's perspectives,
- involve children creatively,
- or address sensitive or experience-based topics.

Main characteristics of photovoice

1. Visual and experience-based participation

Photovoice allows children to communicate through images rather than relying only on written or spoken explanations.

Children visually document:

- places they like or dislike,
- problems they face,
- community strengths,
- or ideas for improvement.

This makes participation more accessible for children with different communication styles and abilities.

2. Combination of creativity and reflection

Photovoice is not only about taking pictures.

Children are also encouraged to:

- reflect on what the images mean,
- explain why they chose them,
- and discuss their experiences and perspectives.

This strengthens:

- observation skills,
- critical thinking,
- and self-reflection.

3. Public presentation and dialogue

Photovoice projects often end with:

- exhibitions,
- presentations,
- workshops,
- or discussions with municipal decision-makers.

This creates opportunities for direct dialogue between children and adults.

Advantages

It is especially suitable for presenting everyday experiences, helps make invisible problems visible, may also be accessible for children with weaker verbal skills, and strengthens reflection and observation skills.

Disadvantages

Data protection and image-use risks may arise, proper facilitation is necessary for the interpretation of the images, in itself it is less structured, linking it to municipal decision-making may pose a challenge, and it may require resources.

Possible participation levels

Photovoice may support:

L1 – Consultative participation

L2 – Collaborative participation

The participation level depends on:

- how much influence children have over the process,
- and whether they only share experiences or also help shape solutions and discussions.

Recommended age groups

Photovoice can be adapted for:

AG2 – Lower primary age group,

AG3 – Upper primary age group,

AG4 – Adolescents.

Working with younger children

For younger children, photovoice works especially well because:

- it supports non-verbal expression,
- it does not require advanced writing skills,
- and children can communicate experiences visually.

At this age, activities should remain simple, guided and strongly facilitated.

Working with upper primary age groups

Children in this age group are usually able to:

- explain the meaning behind photographs,
- reflect on their local environment,
- and connect images with experiences and ideas.

Photovoice can also be combined effectively with discussions, workshops or group presentations.

Working with adolescents

Adolescents are generally able to:

- document more complex local issues,
 - express critical perspectives,
 - and connect personal experiences to broader community challenges.
- Photovoice can therefore become a powerful advocacy and awareness-raising tool for older children and young people.

Preparing a photovoice project**1. Define a clear theme or topic**

Municipalities should clearly explain:

- what issue the project focuses on,
- what children are being asked to document,
- and how the photographs will contribute to participation and dialogue.

2. Create a safe and supportive environment

Children should understand:

- that participation is voluntary,
- how photographs may be used,
- and how to ask for support if needed.

Municipalities should also establish:

- safeguarding rules,
- photography guidelines,
- and clear consent procedures.

3. Feedback and follow-up

Municipalities should inform children:

- how the photographs were used,
- what responses were received,
- and whether the project influenced local discussions or decisions.

Visible follow-up helps strengthen trust, motivation and meaningful participation.

4. Monitoring and evaluation

Municipalities should evaluate:

- participation quality,
- inclusion,
- children's experiences,
- project outcomes,
- and impact on local discussions or decisions.

It is also **important to assess**:

- whether children felt safe and respected,
- whether their perspectives were understood,
- and whether the process remained genuinely child centred.

Ensure accessibility and inclusion

Photovoice projects should provide:

- flexible participation options,
- accessible equipment where possible,
- and support for children with different needs and abilities.

Children should also have **different ways to contribute beyond photography** itself, including storytelling, discussions, captions or exhibitions.

Photovoice – Good practice Toronto, Canada

Child-friendly city projects

The City of Toronto has recognized that designing spaces for children and youth results in a more inclusive and sustainable city for all users. Photovoice methods were used in child-friendly city initiatives to understand children's mobility, accessibility, and experiences in urban spaces. Photographs and stories were presented to planners and policymakers.

Participation tool used: Photovoice, Urban planning participation

Source: <https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/a92a8daa-3e50-4424-afc5-1681ea1975fd/content>

6.3. Storytelling workshop

What is a storytelling workshop?

A storytelling workshop is a child participation method in which children share:

- personal experiences,
- ideas,
- feelings,
- and perspectives

through stories connected to a local issue, challenge or community topic.

The process is guided by a facilitator who helps children express themselves in a safe, supportive and child-friendly environment.

Storytelling workshops help municipalities better understand how children experience their community, local services, relationships, public spaces and social challenges.

Why use storytelling workshops?

Storytelling workshops can help municipalities:

explore children lived experiences in depth,
better understand sensitive or complex issues,
strengthen trust and dialogue with children,
and support more child-centred decision-making.

Stories often provide richer and more emotional insights than surveys, formal consultations or statistical data.

Main characteristics of storytelling workshops

1. Narrative and experience-based participation

Storytelling workshops are built around:

- stories,
- memories,
- personal experiences,
- and reflections.

Children may share stories through speaking, writing, drawing, drama, role play, or creative group activities. This makes storytelling workshops flexible and adaptable to different age groups and communication styles.

2. Safe and supportive environment

Storytelling often involves emotions, personal experiences and sensitive topics.

For this reason, workshops require:

- careful facilitation,
- trust-building,
- and emotionally safe participation spaces.

Children should always feel respected, listened to and free to participate voluntarily.

3. Individual and group participation

Storytelling workshops may take place individually, in pairs or in groups.

Group storytelling activities can strengthen:

- peer learning,
- empathy,
- and group cohesion.

Storytelling can also be combined effectively with drawing, photography, participatory video, theatre or other creative participation methods.

Possible participation levels

Storytelling workshops may support:

L1 – Consultative participation

L2 – Collaborative participation

The participation level depends on:

- how much influence children have over the process,
- and whether their stories contribute only to understanding experiences or also to shaping local responses and solutions.

Recommended age groups

Storytelling workshops can be adapted for:

AG2 – Lower primary age group,

AG3 – Upper primary age group,

AG4 – Adolescents.

Working with younger children

For younger children, storytelling is often a natural form of communication.

At this age, storytelling works especially well when combined with games, drawing, puppets, role play or drama-based activities.

These methods help children express experiences in accessible and non-threatening ways.

Working with upper primary age groups

Children in this age group are usually able to:

- build coherent stories,
- reflect on experiences,
- and connect personal experiences with community issues.

Storytelling workshops can therefore support:

- discussion,
- problem identification,
- and exploration of local needs.

Working with adolescents

Adolescents are generally able to:

- discuss more complex social issues,
- express critical perspectives,
- and explore sensitive or emotional topics in greater depth.

At this age, storytelling workshops can create stronger links between:

- children's experiences,
- and local public policy discussions.

Preparing a storytelling workshop

1. Define a clear purpose

Municipalities should clearly explain:

- the topic of the workshop,
- the purpose of participation,
- and how children's stories may contribute to local discussions or decisions.

2. Create a child-friendly and safe environment

Workshops should:

- encourage respectful listening,
- avoid judgment,
- and allow children to participate at their own comfort level.

Children should always know:

- participation is voluntary,
- they may stop at any time,

- and support is available if needed.

3. Encourage different forms of expression

Not all children feel comfortable speaking publicly.

Municipalities should therefore allow:

- drawing,
- writing,
- role play,
- visual storytelling,
- or small-group discussions

as alternative ways of participating.

4. Feedback and follow-up

Children should receive feedback about:

- how their stories were used,
- what themes emerged,
- and whether the workshop influenced local discussions or decisions.

This helps maintain trust, transparency and meaningful participation.

5. Monitoring and evaluation

Municipalities should evaluate:

- participation quality,
- emotional safety,
- inclusion,
- children's experiences,
- and the impact of the workshop on local understanding and decision-making.

It is also important to assess:

- whether children felt respected,
- whether participation was meaningful,
- and whether safeguarding measures worked effectively.

Storytelling workshops – Good practice Malmö, Sweden

Children's stories in urban planning

The City of Malmö used storytelling-based workshops to involve children in discussions about: neighbourhood development, public space design, and social inclusion. Children's stories and reflections were integrated into planning discussions.

Participation tool used: Storytelling workshops, child-centred urban planning

„Play and learning. At Malmöfestivalen, children were asked to mark their favourite places in the city. The activity was a way to help children understand the value of their surroundings - and gave researchers and planners insights into which places children appreciate.” 27/08/2025

Soruce: <https://www.slu.se/en/news/2025/08/barnens-stad--nar-lek-moter-stadsutveckling-och-natur/>

Summary – Creative participation tools

Creative child participation methods such as:

- participatory video,
- photovoice,
- and storytelling workshops

can effectively complement more traditional participation tools.

Their shared strengths include:

- supporting non-traditional forms of expression,
- helping involve younger or marginalised children,
- and giving municipalities deeper insight into children lived experiences.

At the same time, **municipalities should recognise that creative methods:**

- require careful facilitation,
- involve safeguarding and data protection considerations,
- and need clear planning to ensure that results contribute meaningfully to local decision-making.

SOURCES

Anne, CROWLEY – Cath, LARKINS - Luís Manuel, PINTO: Listen – Act – Change Council of Europe Handbook on children's participation for professionals working for and with children, Council of Europe, October 2020.

<https://edoc.coe.int/en/children-s-rights/9288-listen-act-change-council-of-europe-handbook-on-childrens-participation.html>

Francesca, GOTTSCHALK - Hannah, BORHAN (2023). OECD Education Working Papers No. 301 Child participation in decision making: Implications for education and beyond.

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/a37eba6c-en>

Gerison, LANSDOWN (2018). National human rights institutions (NHRIs) Series: Tools to support child-friendly practices. The UNICEF "Children's Participation in the Work of NHRIs" tool.

Gerison, LANSDOWN (2018). Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation.

<https://participationpool.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Lansdown-G.-2018-Conceptual-Framework-for-Measuring-Outcomes-of-Adolescent-Participation.pdf>

Gerison LANSDOWN - Vanessa SEDLETZKI (2022). Child and Youth Councils: Guidance to Support Meaningful Participation, UNICEF.

<https://www.unicef.org/youthledaction/documents/child-and-youth-councils>

Thomas, NIGEL (2007). Towards a Theory of Children's Participation. The International Journal of Children's Rights. 15. 199-218. 10.1163/092755607X206489.

Rhian, POWELL (2024). Child-Friendly Cities and Communities: opportunities and challenges, Children's Geographies, 22:5, 716-729, DOI: 10.1080/14733285.2024.2353746

Committee on the Rights of the Child. Geneva, 25 May-12 June 2009 General Comment No. 12 (2009) The right of the child to be heard. <https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/crc/2009/70207>

Child Participation in Local Governance: A UNICEF Guidance Note, UNICEF, 2020.

<https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/UNICEF-Child-Participation-in-Local-Governance.pdf>

Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life. Council of Europe, March 2015. <https://rm.coe.int/168071b4d6>

Effective, representative, and inclusive child participation at the local level A study on child and youth councils in UNICEF National Committee countries Based on the views of child and youth council members in selected National Committee countries. 2022.

<https://www.childfriendlycities.org/media/1491/file/Child%20participation%20at%20local%20level.pdf>

Structured and Meaningful Youth Participation in Policy and Decision-Making Processes - Mapping Local, National, EU, and International Good Practices, 2024.

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/structured-and-meaningful-youth-participation-policy-and-decision-making-processes-mapping-local-national-eu-and>

Guidance and Tools. Using focus group discussions with children and adolescents: a practical guide for maximising their effectiveness. Terre des Hommes, April 2019.

<https://alnap.org/help-library/resources/using-focus-group-discussions-children-adolescents-guide/>