

Erasmus+ Youth in Action
Project

„Best practice of child and youth participation
in the child rights networks
in Austria, Germany and Switzerland“

September 2016 - February 2018

Conclusion document 1

International Survey
Child participation in the work of child rights networks

International Survey Child participation in the work of child rights networks

Final results

Report by
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January 2018

1. Introduction and key findings

This report forms part of project activities under this Erasmus+ Youth in Action Project to better understand the current state of experiences on direct involvement of children in the work of National Coalitions (NC) for the implementation of the UN Convention in the Rights of the Child (CRC) and perspectives for the future. For this purpose online surveys have been devised and implemented, both on the regional/international level and on the national level of the three project partner networks (see separate reports "Kinder- und Jugendbeteiligung in den Kinderrechtsnetzwerken Deutschland, Österreich und Schweiz").

The focus of this report lies on the process and results concerning the regional/international Survey, which was conducted over a period of two months from mid-July to mid-September 2017. The Survey looks into four core dimensions of child participation, namely space, voice, audience and influence, based on the well-known "Lundy model"¹, from the perspective of the work of child rights networks.

The Survey and this report have been intended as a snapshot on the situation only, not as a full-fledged empirical study process, taking into account also the very limited resources in the implementation of this activity.

Key findings include:

- There is currently only limited experience available among child rights networks on direct engagement with children, with almost half of responding networks not directly working with them.
- There is a need to clarify roles and responsibilities for networks vis-à-vis their member organisations (which to a majority already work with children), in order to identify areas of added value for direct child engagement also on the network level.

¹ See, for instance, at the Website of the European Commission, http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/lundy_model_child_participation.pdf.



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- Child participation on network level requires clear commitment by all member organisations, in order to successfully set up necessary structures and ensure resources internally as well as to contribute to a supportive environment and framework.
- On the dimension of "Space": currently, in terms of areas of engagement with children, the focus lies on the CRC reporting process, as far as international processes are concerned; apart from that, advocacy and consultation on the national level play a key role; however, in terms of age groups, most experience relates to young people above 12 years only; ensuring inclusive processes remains a challenge; there appears a potential gap in relation to child protection policies between policies on the network level and on the member organisation level.
- On the dimension of "Voice": while there is significant support from Coalitions to develop and support child-friendly material, other means of providing information access and making children's views heard remain less developed.
- On the dimension of "Audience": again, potential may be seen in further strengthening the role of Coalitions in sensitizing key stakeholders, especially the media, and the general public on the importance of child participation.
- On the dimension of "Influence": follow-up and feedback remain rather limited, to processes undertaken only by the networks itself, but consideration may be given to how network-level "influence" activities could further complement member organisations efforts in this respect.

2. Methodology and process

During the **first project partner meeting** in Vienna in December 2016 it was decided to engage in a survey on National Coalitions' experience with child participation. The focus of this survey would be on activities by those networks themselves, leaving out participatory processes undertaken by member organisations of such networks. Thus, the objective of this effort was on better understanding the relationship between networks and children they are working for.

Eventually, the project partners asked the author to devise such survey. Starting with the key questions described above, further level of detail was added, by using the "Lundy model" of child participation as a starting point of reference. In the end, a set of questions was formulated along the four main dimensions of that model, namely to what extent opportunities for participation ("space") have been created, facilitating children to be heard ("voice") by target groups prepared to listen to them ("audience") in order to ensure maximum impact of such participation ("influence").



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For the operational aspect of the survey, the SurveyMonkey **web-based tool**² has been used, with Winfried Moser, Institute of Children's Rights and Parental Education, Vienna, leading the process of integrating the questions into the application format, and Elisabeth Schaffelhofer-Garcia Marquez, Erasmus+ Project coordinator, providing further support and feedback to the process.

The Coalition child participation online Survey was launched on 17 July 2017, with the support of the leading regional child rights network in Europe, **Eurochild**.³ Eurochild's more than 160 members strong constituency not only consists of individual member organisations, but also includes 21 National Partner Networks. Eurochild's support was instrumental in achieving a high number of fully completed responses to the survey for the European region. Furthermore, the project coordinator engaged with **Child Rights Connect**, the leading international child rights platform,⁴ for international distribution.⁵ Deadline for completion of the Survey has been set for 14 September 2017, almost two month after its launch. In total, 79 responses to the Survey have been received, but after validation, it turned out that some responses have been filled out only partly (including from e.g. Peru, focusing mostly on structures; Sri Lanka, emphasizing the CRC reporting process), in some cases respondents did not qualify as networks/Coalitions of child rights organisations (e.g. several NGOs responding from New Zealand). In the end it was decided for the sake of consistency and comparability of information to focus on complete and valid responses from the European region only, which covered 19 networks from 18 European countries,⁶ including a majority of Eurochild's National Partner Networks.

3. Survey results

3.1. Coalitions' direct engagement with children in general

The focus of this Survey has been on the question whether/to what extent do child rights networks/National Coalitions themselves directly engage with children in their work – in contrast to activities by member organisations, which quite commonly would work with children.

As a result the survey showed almost a tie on the network level: 10 of 19 responding Coalitions in Europe (53 %) do **work directly with children**, whereas 9 answered "no"

² See, the website at <https://www.surveymonkey.com>.

³ See, Eurochild's website at <http://www.eurochild.org>.

⁴ See, the platform's website, at <http://www.childrightsconnect.org>.

⁵ The Erasmus+ Project partners would like to express their gratitude for the support in the dissemination of this Survey by Eurochild and Child Rights Connect.

⁶ Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Kosovo, Lithuania, Netherlands, Romania, Scotland, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland.



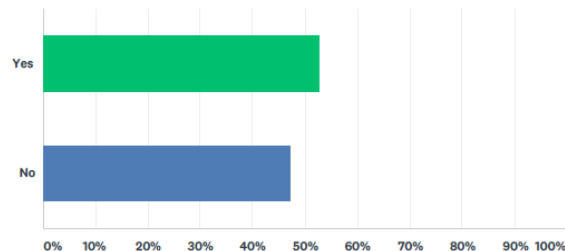
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(Q1).⁷ Compared to this, a clear majority of member organisations of such networks engages with children (Q 32), typical areas of work for them being child protection, social services, education and non-discrimination (Q34).

Q1 Does your Coalition itself work directly with children?(apart from eventual direct engagement through member organisations)

Answered: 19 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	52.63% 10
No	47.37% 9
TOTAL	19

When asked about the typical **age groups** for such collaboration on the network level, all (100 %) of the 11 networks answering to this question work with young people between 13-18 years; however, only 4 networks involve children between 6-12 years, and only 1 networks indicates experience in working with small children below 6 years. For comparison purposes, the question on age groups was also asked in relation to the level of member organisations (Q 33), with similar results (majority with young people above 12 years). Interestingly, 8 of the 19 networks (42 %) replied by stating "information not available" – which may raise questions to what extent the Coalition's membership profile in relation to child participation is sufficiently documented at the network coordinating level.

Furthermore, on the general level, the survey asked for the existence, in principle, of **structures** and mechanisms at Coalition level for regular and meaningful child participation (Q14). As the replies from all 19 participating networks show, only roughly a third of them (7 networks/37 %) responded positively. This should, clearly, be seen linked to the matter of **resources**: the question on availability of funding to Coalitions for child participatory processes revealed that only 3 networks (16 % of all 19 respondents) may

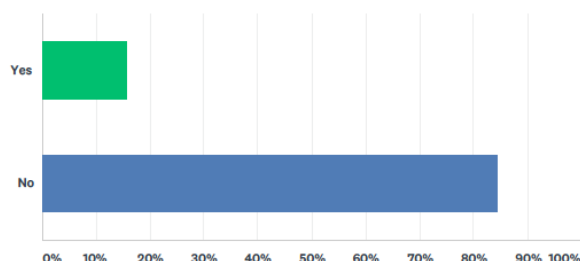
⁷ In the following, "Qx" indicates reference to the respective survey question; see the annex for a full list of questions and responses.



offer such resources (Q 36).

Q36 Does your Coalition get regular funding for participatory processes with children?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	15.79%	3
No	84.21%	16
TOTAL		19

#	POSSIBLE COMMENT	DATE
1	Only in relation to the reporting procedure for the Committee on the Rights of the Child.	9/14/2017 3:47 PM
2	We have to apply regularly	8/2/2017 12:46 PM
3	there is no specific grant programme for HR monitoring	8/1/2017 10:33 PM
4	Ad hoc funding only and generally project based	7/25/2017 11:41 AM
5	Project funding aimed at the right to opinion (or something closely related) is extremely rare.	7/18/2017 9:53 AM
6	The government does not consider child participation a priority. Our funding comes through membership fees and private donations.	7/17/2017 12:23 PM

In relation to **methodological guidance** for meaningful child participation, Survey questions addressed the relevance of General Comment Nr. 12 (2009) of the UN CRC Committee, which provides interpretation on child participation standards, and which is used by a strong 79 %/15 of all 19 responding networks (Q37); on the other hand, the CRC Committee's "Working methods for the participation of children in the reporting process" showed relevance to only about half of the networks (Q38) – at the same time, this is broadly in line with the responses to the question on how many Coalitions actually work with children in the Geneva reporting process (8 of 10 responding networks, see Q 7). As far as other methodological guidelines have been used by Coalitions (working with children), the responses from 11 networks show broad variety, including general national child participation guidelines, standards developed by UNICEF, Council of Europe, Eurochild, Save the Children as well as networks' own guiding documents (Q 39).

An additional question enquired into the reasons of networks **not directly working** with children in the implementation of their tasks (Q5). Among the 8 valid responses received, almost all cited lack of capacity/resources for such engagement, with one network



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explaining that direct work with children is “not part of the strategic planning nor of strategic objectives” (while member organisations do work with children).

3.2. Space – opportunities for child participation

According to the Lundy model, the “Space” dimension addresses availability and conditions for safe and inclusive opportunities for child participation. In the Survey, questions are related to the regular nature and frequency of direct engagement, the type of activities and issues where children are involved, including the CRC monitoring process with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, as well as means and structures allowing for such participation. A final subchapter is devoted to child protection standards in relation to such efforts.

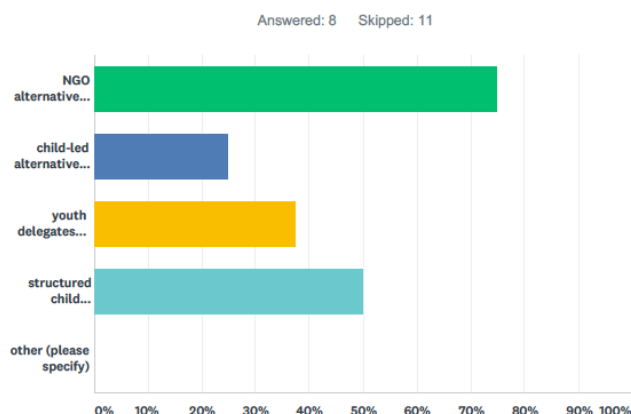
Among those networks working directly with children, a clear majority (9 of 11 Coalitions) does so on a **regular basis** (Q3), most of them having developed ways to engage children every month, but in one case even “day-to-day tasks from distance” were mentioned (Q4).

In terms of areas where children have been involved in work with Coalitions, the Survey – in line with the overall Erasmus+ Project - had a particular interest in the **reporting process with the UN CRC Committee**. 8 out of 10 networks working with children do include them in this mechanism (Q7),⁸ mostly through an “NGO alternative report [...] informed by input from children” (3/4 of the responses), followed by “structured child participation in the national follow-up process”. In the case of two networks, child-led alternative reporting was made possible, and in three cases, youth delegates attended the Committee hearing in Geneva (Q8).

⁸ The other two networks have referred to division of labour with another network offering such involvement of children, on the one hand, and stated, on the other hand that CRC reporting involvement of children “has never been put consistently on discussion“(Q9).



Q8 In which manner does your Coalition work with children in the UN-CRC monitoring process?(multiple answers possible)



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
NGO alternative report is informed by input from children	75.00% 6
child-led alternative report preparation and writing	25.00% 2
youth delegates attending CRC Committee hearing in Geneva	37.50% 3
structured child participation in the national follow-up process	50.00% 4
other (please specify)	0.00% 0
Total Respondents: 8	

When asked for **other processes** offering consultation with children (e.g. through the European Union, Council of Europe, Eurochild, national human rights institutions), a small majority (60 %) of the networks has experience on this as well, giving examples such as national consultation processes (e.g. on draft legislation) or national monitoring reports; however, none of the responding 7 networks has ever worked with children in relation to fact-finding and monitoring processes by UN Special Rapporteurs, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights or CoE monitoring bodies (Q11). As reasons for this rather limitation to the UN CRC process it has been stated that on the one hand, other processes may not equally strong encourage such involvement of children, as well as practical challenges, such as short deadlines for responding to Questionnaires (Q12). Asked for other ways of child participation than monitoring processes, most respondents referred to "campaign development" and "priority setting for advocacy", but activities include also projects with children, provision of services to children, child rights capacity building and advocacy (Q13).

On the **structural** level, the Survey shows as a key measure to ensure regular child participation the establishment of a "dedicated contact person for child participation matters", with 100% of all 8 responding networks stating such measure. 5 of 8 networks have further established a dedicated budget for child participation and guidelines for selection of children; further supportive measures include children advisory boards and other dedicated bodies, steering groups for particular projects, capacity building



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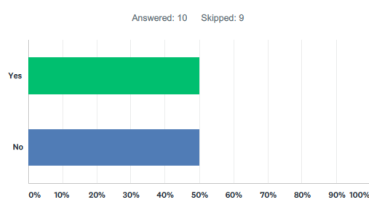


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programmes or institutionalised cooperation with other participatory bodies, such as Children’s Parliaments (Q15). Less developed appears the area of inclusive and non-discriminatory access to participation: while some networks refer to outreach e.g. to traveller and migrant communities or the use of subtitles for video material produced, still only 7 of the 19 networks have developed a “Coalition policy for inclusive participation”, contrasted by 11 networks which “have not yet taken such steps” (Q16).

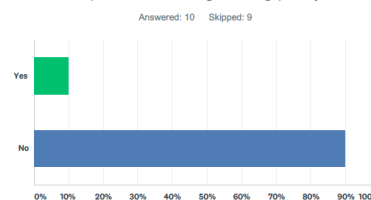
Another aspect the Survey wanted to touch upon has been the **transition phase** of children turning 18 years and to what extent Coalitions have means to continue to stay in contact with them (and benefit e.g. from their experiences). 10 out of 19 networks stated to offer no specific activities in this respect; some, however, refer to “alumni groups” and other platforms for volunteer engagement of young adults, including through social media, newsletters as well as specific projects (Q17).

Q19 Is your Coalition's child protection/safeguarding policy binding also for its members?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	50.00%	5
No	50.00%	5
TOTAL		10

Q20 Is it mandatory for all members of your Coalition to adopt their own child protection/safeguarding policy?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	10.00%	1
No	90.00%	9
TOTAL		10

Finally, in relation to providing participation space which is also safe for children, a set of questions addressed the role of **child protection policies**. According to the replies to Q18 a slight majority of networks (10 out of 19) has no such policy adopted yet, which would deal with standards, responsibilities and structures within organisations to prevent violence and exploitation within the organisation and respond properly in case of violations.⁹ While taking into account that also only about half of the 19 networks have initially declared to work with children (Q1), nevertheless, the combination of the following two Survey questions appears to reveal a protection gap. When asked whether child protection policies adopted by Coalitions are binding also for members, only half of them responded to the affirmative (Q19). On the other hand, in almost all cases of responding networks (9 out of 10) they explained that it is *not* mandatory for member organisations to adopt their own child protection policies (Q20). Taking these two responses together, this may indicate that in some cases children may be left without such structural protection on the level of member organisations.

⁹ See, for instance, the standards developed at Keeping Children Safe, <https://www.keepingchildrensafe.org.uk>.



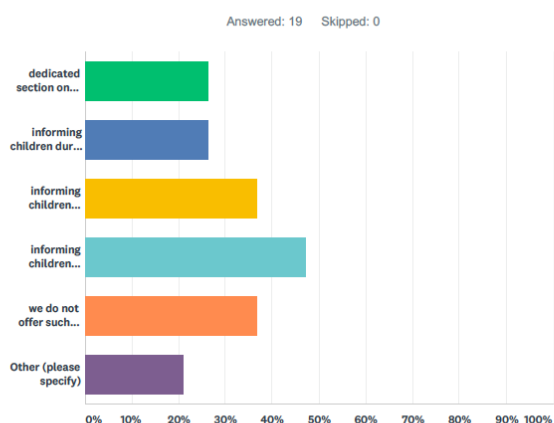
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3.3. Voices – expression of children’s views

In this section emphasis is placed on measures to make the voice of children properly heard, including through access to information and child-friendly material and providing means of communication for children.

In terms of **child-friendly material** made available through Coalitions, a clear majority (63 %) of all 19 networks refer to copies of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in child-friendly language; three networks have produced specific Coalition leaflets for children. Apart from that the Survey shows great variety of documents and services adapted for children, ranging from adapted Concluding Observations of the CRC Committee, National Strategic Plans and alternative reports to campaign and training material and posters and postcards (Q21). Furthermore, Coalitions assist children in **access to information** through partnerships with youth groups (9 of 19 networks), school projects, national consultations and dedicated sections for children at Coalition websites (Q22).

Q22 To what extent does the Coalition provide access to appropriate information for children to form an opinion?(multiple answers possible)



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
dedicated section on children's rights for children at Coalition website	26.32% 5
informing children during national consultations	26.32% 5
informing children through school projects	36.84% 7
informing children through partnerships with youth groups	47.37% 9
we do not offer such service	36.84% 7
Other (please specify)	21.05% 4
Total Respondents: 19	

Social media plays an increasingly important role in this regard, mostly through Facebook (9 of 19), Twitter and Instagram, but also via closed/internal groups for exchange (7 of 19; Q23). However, in respect to all three last questions on the “Voice” of children, a still significant number of networks responded: “we do not offer such service”



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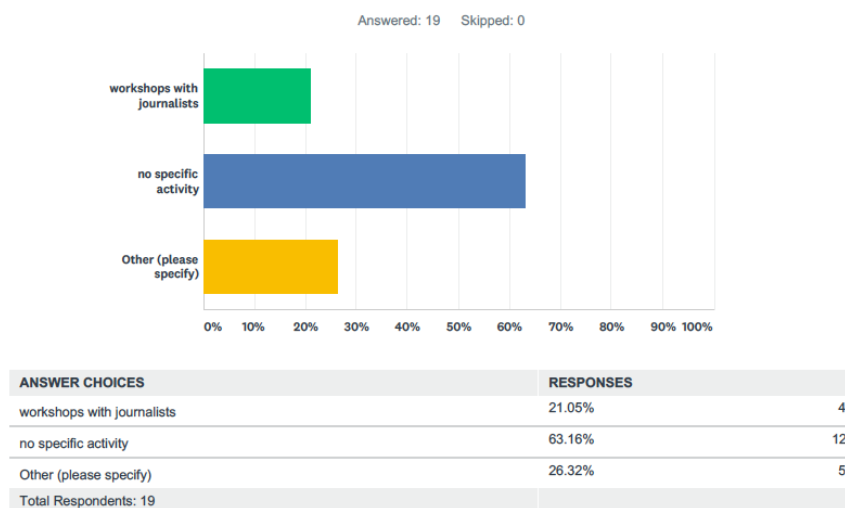
(child-friendly material: 6/19; other information access: 7/19; social media: 10/19). Apart from that the Survey shows that among **other key activities** offered by Coalitions to make the views of children heard arranging meeting with politicians/decision makers plays a particularly important role (12 of 19 responses); moreover, support to video production has been mentioned in 7 cases (Q24).

3.4. Audience: capacity building for child participation

In order to make child participation meaningful and effective, targeting the audience and preparing it to listen to children is equally essential. Consequently, the Survey included questions on the Coalitions' role on sensitizing various stakeholders as well as on preparation of children to interact with others.

A relative majority of activities aimed at Coalition **capacity building** for public bodies (6 of 19 responses), schools and communities (5) and parent education programmes (4). Further target groups include local community leaders, politicians, lawyers, social workers, teachers, as well as NGO staff and members of the Coalition (Q25 and Q29). Interestingly, a separate question devoted to Coalition work with **media** brought to light that actually a majority of networks offer "no specific activity" in this regard (12 of 19 networks responding), with only 4 networks stating to offer workshops with journalists, while other explained that they "have talked about organising workshops but the plans are not ready" (Q28).

Q28 To what extent does the Coalition work with media to sensitize them about listening to children?(multiple answers possible)



As far as Coalition support for **communicating the views** of children is concerned, almost 2/3 of the networks rely on "publications/research/briefings on the views of children relating to certain thematic areas" (12 out of 19 networks), about half of the



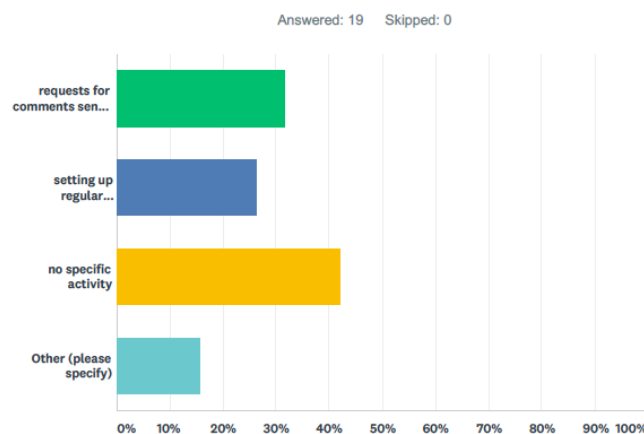
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networks also on “cooperation activities with external partners (schools, parliamentarians/politicians, private sector)” (9 of 19), followed by press conferences with children. Other activities include social media use, blogs, films or reports by children (Q26). When asked how Coalitions would take care to **prepare children** to whom they will speak, almost half of them (47%) referred to briefings for children and preparatory workshops (42 %); a similar high number of networks stated to take “no specific activity” (9 out of 19 networks, Q27); for both questions it should be taken into account that the total number of respondents also includes those networks who initially declared that they do not actively engage with children.

3.5. Influence: children’s views taken seriously

It is not sufficient to offer mere opportunities for participation, the actual question relates to the impact of such efforts, to what extent lead children’s views to actual consequences, with impact on their environment. Such impact is both difficult to capture and assess, but the Survey responses reveal the potential for further strengthening of follow-up in Coalition activities, at least, as a potential complementing measure for member organisation efforts.

Q30 How does the Coalition work with external stakeholders to ensure follow-up to children’s views?(multiple answers possible)



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
requests for comments sent to decision-makers on follow-up measures taken	31.58% 6
setting up regular meetings of exchange on progress	26.32% 5
no specific activity	42.11% 8
Other (please specify)	15.79% 3
Total Respondents: 19	

Asked for measures to ensure **follow-up** to child participation, a relative majority of responses (8 of 19) declared: “no specific activity” (Q30). Only second and third came “requests for comments sent to decision-makers on follow-up measures taken (6



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networks) and “setting up regular meetings of exchange on progress” (5 networks). In relation to **feedback to children** on the results of the participatory process, the highest number of responses included: “no specific activity”, together with “follow-up meetings with children after events” (9 of 19 networks, each). Much less common activities include updates via social media and newsletters (4 networks, Q31).



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4. Final reflections and prospects

The survey has shown that so far rather limited experience exists among child rights Coalitions in direct engagement with children. This may not be simply attributed to questions of lack of resources and capacities, but rather highlight the need for further discussions about the functions of a Coalition, the division of tasks between networks and their member organisations and, ultimately, the **added value** of working with children not only on the member level, but also on the level of the network itself. At the same time, there is already significant experience available of Coalitions which started to regularly engage with children, including in the course of such complex processes like monitoring of child rights implementation through reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

After all, when the Survey asked (Q35) whether Coalitions “consider working more closely with children within the **next year**”, it received a strong positive response by 13 of 19 networks (68 %), with several respondents referring to concrete plans to set up e.g. groups of younger children for cooperation, strong commitments (“it’s their right and our duty”) and ongoing discussions within their networks to embark on such activities - while others remain more cautious (“potentially, depending on projects that arise”) or outright sceptical (“it is not our mandate”).



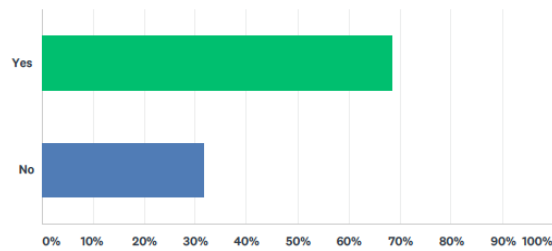
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Q35 Does your Coalition consider working more closely with children within the next year?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	68.42%	13
No	31.58%	6
TOTAL		19

#	PLEASE EXPLAIN WHY/WHY NOT	DATE
1	We have recently been restructuring the coalition, in terms of internal structure but also in terms of priorities. We have been discussing how to start working with children more regularly, and actual activities regarding this will start in 2018.	9/14/2017 3:47 PM
2	As we have the lead in this project we realize again and again the big advantages and benefits of youth participation. It's their right and our duty!	8/16/2017 2:05 PM
3	Improving participation will be the focus of next year	8/16/2017 1:48 PM
4	Potentially, depending on projects that arise.	8/14/2017 12:40 PM
5	We are considering working more closely with children within the years to come. The next year, however, we will need to develop ideas and mechanisms in order to ensure meaningful participation.	8/11/2017 11:14 AM
6	It is not our mandate.	7/31/2017 11:28 AM
7	The same level as currently	7/25/2017 11:41 AM
8	The Coalition has not got many formal activities, it has started its work relatively recently and there are very limited resources, capacities even for the basic activities	7/20/2017 5:19 AM
9	We have child participation as a strategic priority (one out of three). So we just follow the growth and logic inherent to that strategy.	7/18/2017 9:53 AM
10	We are in the process of setting up a group of younger children (ages 9-12) to work in parallel with the Children's Parliament and we hope to be able to commence this by mid 2018.	7/17/2017 12:23 PM

Those Coalitions **interested in direct work** with children showed particular interest in having children involved in their priority setting for advocacy (8 of 10 responses) and in the CRC Committee monitoring process (7 of 10). Further areas flagged for working with children include other consultation processes, campaign development and awareness-raising (e.g. on refugee children, violence against children), child participation in indicator development (Q6).

Interestingly, when specifically asked about greatest **obstacles** for Coalitions to work directly with children (Q43), it was not so much about conceptual aspects and questions of added value, but instead, the overwhelming majority of responding networks stated lack of budget/ resources/ capacities/ equipment (13 of 17 responses), while few also noted the need "to convince all board members to engage directly with children", "lack of tradition, resistance, other issues overshadowing the need for including children" or the general neglect of the "interest of the child in the society/politics/media".

The Survey was also interested to listen to positive experiences, asking also for Coalitions



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“greatest **achievements**” in working with children, as well as for examples of good practices. Among the most common replies for achievements (Q40) have been: child participation in CRC alternative reporting, including youth delegates meeting with the CRC Committee in Geneva, in strategy development (National Action Plan) and establishment of structures (youth councils, children’s parliaments, students parliaments), as well as “very positive feedback from the involved children. This is our greatest achievement that we didn’t disappoint them, they trust us and they liked the activities.” Concerning examples of **good practices** (Q41), most described the experience with child involvement with CRC reporting, successful structures both for children themselves (steering groups, advisory boards) as well as for interaction with adults (Parliamentary committees, enquete events, meeting with politicians and decision-makers, “library of experiences”), communication platforms, involvement in surveys, consultation in draft legislation, child involvement in publications, advocacy, training, innovative methodologies, event co-organisation and “feedback and follow-up on projects”.

Finally, respondents were asked to share the “three most **supportive factors**” concerning such good practices (Q42). Taken together, the following aspects have been highlighted: from the outside, a supportive legal, policy and institutional framework (e.g. CRC commitment, national participation strategy, good practice sharing platforms, budget/funding programmes) and positive attitudes among society and professionals (e.g. “strong youth work culture”, “adults/politicians who are willing to listen to young children”, “willingness of schools to engage”). Internally, within the networks, key factors identified include: foremost, a clear decision and commitment by Coalitions whether to engage in child participation (“great support through the broad network of our members”, “broad member base supporting these organisational developments”, “internal child participation strategy, binding for all members”), linked to dedicated structures and resources (“dedicated post for this work”, budget, quality standards, good practice sharing), investment in necessary skills (“staff expertise”, “imaginative techniques particularly for younger children”, methodological guides) and an “organisations culture of brave ideas.”

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