

## Report from the kickoff event of the CP4Europe project in Finland on 17 September 2021

The kickoff event of the CP4Europe – Voice of Children and Young People in Europe project was held on Friday 17 September 2021. The event was aimed at all government experts interested in supporting the participation and consultation of children and young people. The aim of the event was to present operations and actions of the Voice of Children and Young People in Europe project, as well as those of the National Democracy Program and the National Children's Strategy, to promote the participation of children and young people. Furthermore, the aim was to provide participants with practical case examples of consulting children in preparation processes at governmental level and to present the project's European-level activities. The event was organized online via MS Teams and was attended by 69 experts from various ministries, agencies and institutions, as well as from a few NGOs.

The event was opened by **Niklas Wilhelmsson**, Head of Unit from the Ministry of Justice, and **Marine Braun**, Senior Project Officer from the Council of Europe. The CP4Europe project aims, among other things, to strengthen children's participation, to create a European network for children's participation and to make more widely available tools, such as guides and training materials, to increase children's participation.

**Liisa Männistö**, Senior Specialist from the Ministry of Justice, presented the activities of the National Democracy Program and the Secretary General of the National Child Strategy **Johanna Laisaari** presented the measures of the National Child Strategy to promote children's participation and consultation. These introductions were followed by presentations of case studies on projects where special attention had been paid to the consultation and participation of children and young people in decision-making.

The first case example was the reform of the Child Welfare Act, presented by postdoctoral researcher **Laura Tiitinen** from the University of Lapland. During the reform process of the Child Welfare Act, young people who themselves had experience of child welfare substitute care had been consulted. Significant in this case study was the support for the participation

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of particularly vulnerable young people. Based on their own experiences, young people had brought completely new perspectives to the drafting of the law.

Another case example was the reform of the Climate Act, which was reported by **Heta-Elena Heiskanen**, Senior Specialist from the Ministry of the Environment. In the reform of the Climate Act, children and young people had been involved and consulted in many different ways, such as on social media and in workshops. The model in which young people consulted other young people about climate change was considered particularly successful. Based on the responses to a survey, children and young people themselves hoped to be consulted on climate issues in the school context more than at present.

Finally, young people's own experiences of participating in the legislative process were heard. Three young people from the organization called SOS Children's Villages told how they had experienced participation and how the experience could have been further improved from the young people's point of view. The young people gave participants good practical examples of how to make the participation situation more approachable and enjoyable, for example with adequate breaks and shared meals.

After the presentations, participants were divided into small groups, where the task was to discuss the question "What are your needs and ideas for the participation and consultation of children and young people from the perspective of your own work?". The ideas were compiled on a common Jamboard platform. A summary of the small group discussions is presented in Table 1.

Themes	Ideas/Needs
Language used and communication for children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear language, information and communication for children and young people</li> <li>• Direct inquiries and questions asked</li> <li>• Peer activity / voluntary activity</li> </ul>
Small children and vulnerable groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking into account also the experiences of younger children</li> <li>• Using a variety of means</li> <li>• Building competence in meeting special groups</li> </ul>
Practical implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compulsory course on inclusion for public administration</li> <li>• Principles of safe space principles and multi-channel participation ("tailored" way of working)</li> <li>• From projects and experiments towards regular activities</li> <li>• Promoting and maintaining collaboration</li> <li>• Ensuring adequate preparation time</li> </ul>

Training and information to adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion, impact, information on factors influencing participation opportunities</li> <li>• Information on voluntary participation of children / young people</li> </ul>
Everyday life of children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilizing the everyday environments of children and young people, take consultation tools into everyday life (counseling, early childhood education, school)</li> <li>• Distinguish between various ways of consulting</li> <li>• Clarifying what the possible impacts of the consultation may be</li> <li>• Creating, together with municipalities, stepmarks for co-operation with, for example, schools / youth services</li> </ul>

**Table 1.** Summary of the small group discussions.

Finally, three recently published handbooks to support the participation and consultation of children and young people were presented. **Laura Saarinen**, Project Secretary of the National Child Strategy, presented handbooks for law drafters on consulting children and young people and assessing impacts on children. **Cath Larkins**, Professor at the University of Central Lancashire and independent consultant for the Council of Europe, presented the Council of Europe Handbook on children's participation "Listen – Act – Change" aimed at all professionals working with children to support their participation.

In his closing remarks, **Niklas Wilhelmsson** told about the future events of the project, both at national and European level, as well as the forthcoming publications and the training module on participation and consultation of children and young people, to be published on the government's eLearning platform.