

Implementation of methods and materials supporting the strengthening of consultation and participation of children and young people

Summary

SOS Children's Villages Finland

Commissioned by the Ministry of Justice, SOS Children's Villages Finland carried out a set of activities as part of the Voice of Children and Young People in Europe project. The aim of the SOS Children's Villages Finland's activities was to 1) implement measures for children and young people to participate and be consulted and to describe and report on these measures, 2) compile case examples, good practices, and a material package, and 3) plan a challenge and communication campaign as well as produce campaign materials.

The activities were carried out between February and December 2022. Additionally, as part of the communication campaign materials, a video was completed in January 2023. The experts responsible for the implementation of the activities at SOS Children's Villages Finland were Specialist Elina Stenvall, Manager of Preventive Digital Support, Johanna Virtanen, and Communications Specialist, Sanna Karlsson.

Six workshops were organised during the first part of the set of activities (one open-to-all online workshop, one workshop for a group of child protection experts by experience, SOS Kehittäjänuoret (group of young developers), one workshop for the customers of child protection services, one workshop for sexual and gender minorities, one workshop for Sámi speakers, and one workshop for Swedish speakers). A total of 29 children and young people participated in the workshops.

Workshop	Number of participants	Age of participants
Open-to-all online workshop	3	11 –12
Workshop for sexual and gender minorities	6	Age not asked
SOS Kehittäjänuoret workshop	5	13 –16
Workshop for the customers of child protection services	3	13 –15
Workshop for Swedish speakers	4	9 –13
Workshop for Sámi speakers	10	9 –16
Total	29	9 –16

In addition to the workshops, other methods were also used to reach out to children and young people. Children and young people who communicate in sign language were reached out to during a summer camp arranged for them. During the camp, they were interviewed by a researcher who communicated in sign language. With the help of the researcher, eight deaf or hard-of-hearing children and young people (aged 13–17) and three hearing children and young people who communicate in sign language (aged 8–17) were reached. Children

and young people of Roma origin were reached out to in cooperation with researchers who carried out a survey of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children. The survey discussions also included questions relevant to this project. These measures helped to reach 18 children and young people between the ages of 11 and 17. In addition, children and young people from migrant backgrounds were reached out to in an open meeting place arranged for them. There, the project was able to reach a pre-school-age child and two school-age children along with their parents. During the project, materials were also produced for working with pre-school-age children.

The workshops and other activities discussed substantive issues in relation to democracy as well as general views on participation and consultation of children and young people. The thematic content was formed in cooperation with young people during a workshop where they were introduced to the National Democracy Programme 2025. The young people selected from the programme the themes that they found the most relevant to themselves. These themes were voting, new methods of consultation, and access to and comprehensibility of information. These themes were then worked on to make them easy for children and young people to understand. The workshop materials were created based on the chosen themes.

The project was able to reach particularly well children and young people in vulnerable situations. A digital platform for the purpose of consulting young people (Digiraati.fi) was supposed to be used to reach out to a wider group of children and young people. However, the platform's development work was delayed and as such, this part of the project was not carried out as planned. The number of children and young people that was reached was lower than was initially intended. However, the special groups that had been identified as important to reach were well reached.

The project further reinforced the understanding that various means of consulting children and young people are needed. With regard to consulting vulnerable children and young people in particular, it is important to pay attention to confidentiality and safety. In such cases, written communication on a closed online platform could be a viable option. Online workshops where participants meet up under the guidance of a familiar adult also proved to be a good way to reach all kinds of children and young people.

When working with children and young people, it is important to share information about the topic at hand, the objectives of gathering their views and the ways to monitor the progress achieved. Children and young people appreciate working methods that are honest, transparent and clear. In general, using formal but clear language, slideshows, and writing down discussions for all to see and approve, made children and young people feel empowered.

Reinforcing cooperation with early childhood education, schools, and educational institutions is necessary to reach children and young people. Children and young people also pointed out that using a simple digital platform would facilitate reaching them. Information should be shared to children and young people in a variety of ways using social media and school channels, and, in the case of small localities, newspapers and notice boards were also listed as sources of information.

Information feedback to the participants could be developed towards a more cohesive direction. Knowing which of their ideas are taken forward and where to find information when needed, was seen as adequate information feedback by the children and young people. Cooperation needs to be built systematically in particular when working with special groups that are small in numbers.

According to children and young people, the best way to make them interested in contributing and participating is the opportunity to bring about concrete changes, interesting topics and themes, clarity and adequate amount of shared information as well as safety, sensitivity and fairness when participating. In addition, refreshments and rewards can motivate to take part. With regard to these viewpoints, there were no significant differences between different kinds of children and young people. Instead, all the participants saw these points as important. Children and young people belonging to sexual and gender minorities emphasised sensitivity and safety a little bit more than others did. In turn, children and young people with a child protection background underlined the significance of refreshments for participation motivation slightly more than other groups.

Children and young people of all kinds are best reached in their own habitat (such as their hometown, school/daycare/educational institution, hobbies or youth spaces) or on the Internet (e.g. Discord, TikTok or a YouTube channel). Children and young people mostly wanted to receive information on the progress achieved via websites or an application or shared by a familiar adult. When reaching out to small special groups such as children and young people who communicate in sign language, it is vital to cooperate with parties working with these groups.

The project reinforced the idea that adults working on facilitating the consultation and participation of children and young people must be willing to put in the effort to create materials, be able to use various means and creativity to reach children and young people, and be transparent and honest about the kind of influence participation may have. Children and young people are happy to participate and view participation as important if they are offered information in a comprehensible format, clear opportunities for participation, and the support of familiar and trustworthy adults when they participate.