

Children's participation in the democratic life of the EU

SUMMARY

Present-day European children have been through a lot: a global pandemic, a global financial crisis and wars in the EU's neighbouring regions. In just a few years, once they become adults, they will have to face the consequences of the decisions taken today. Therefore whether these decisions have to do with the protection of the environment, public health policies or demographics, governments should seek to ensure that children are sufficiently empowered to contribute to responsible choices for their generation's future.

According to EU and international instruments, children have the right to be heard and to have a say in all decisions that may affect them and their well-being, whether in their home, community, school, or in legal and administrative matters. Ensuring children's right to express their views on matters relevant to them is a key objective of the European Union. Children's participation can take many forms, in ways that are adapted to their age and maturity; for instance they can express their views through writing and speech but also through painting and drawing. The upcoming European elections in June 2024 further highlight the importance of engaging children in the EU's democratic processes. Four Member States (Belgium, Germany, Malta and Austria) allow their 16-year-old citizens to vote.

Stakeholders call for more extensive consultations with children while stressing the need to make policy and decision making in areas concerning children both accessible and child-friendly. An open and inclusive consultation would provide children with the opportunity to contribute to the definition of new policy priorities and to the evaluation and revision of existing measures.

This briefing looks at the international and EU policy framework relevant to children's participation in democratic life. It also gives practical examples of how this participation is enabled through local youth parliaments, municipal children's councils and ad hoc consultations.



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Introduction

Even though [one in five people](#) in the EU is a child, only a small number of policies and relevant materials is adapted to children or prepared together with children. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ([UNCRC](#)) defines a child as a human being below the age of 18 years. The term *children* includes both children and young people, as it is often used for teenagers. However, although there is no universally agreed definition for young people, the [United Nations](#) (UN) defines 'youth' as individuals between the ages of 15 and 24. According to [Unicef](#), child participation can be defined as the engagement of children – individually and/or collectively – with opportunities to form and express their views and to influence matters that concern them directly and indirectly. Children's participation in topics relevant to their school or family life, or to government and legal policies that concern them, is crucial for the realisation of their rights and also one of the core principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In particular, [child participation in EU political and democratic life](#) refers to distinctive opportunities for children to be involved in the various stages of the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of policy and legislation.

Across the EU, the participation and consultation of children in public decision- and policymaking processes has been gradually receiving wider attention. At present, a number of [initiatives and stakeholders](#) support and strengthen the participation of children in democratic life through forums such as children's and youth parliaments and councils, or institutions such as the national [Ombudsperson for Children](#). Given that the majority of children's policies is made for them but not with them, it is important that children become part of the policymaking cycle. In particular, it is worth stressing that not only does child participation have a positive influence on children's development but it also improves their civic and social awareness. It may also have a strong impact on children's level of community engagement and active citizenship, should they be encouraged to actively participate in societal procedures, co-decide on matters that affect them directly and have their voices heard. Thus, children's participation contributes not only to raising awareness on policy issues but also to promoting political change.

Children traditionally do not enjoy the [right to vote](#), based on the argument that they are not mature enough to make reasoned and autonomous decisions that affect the life of the community. However, this approach has been questioned in recent years, and some Member States recognise the right of persons below the age of 18 to vote in European but also in other elections. For instance, since 2007, Austria has allowed 16-year-olds to vote in municipal council elections; provincial council elections; national council elections; federal presidential elections; European elections and referendums, as well as petitions, referendums and public consultations. [Greece](#) allows 17-year-olds to vote in municipal and European elections. Concerning [European elections](#), Belgium, Austria, Germany and Malta have allowed 16-year-olds to vote in the June 2024 elections. Ahead of the 2024 European elections, the European Parliament's spring 2023 [Eurobarometer](#) results highlighted citizens' growing awareness and interest in the elections and in participating in the EU's political life. However, challenges to children's participation in the EU persist, perhaps due to children's views being ignored or children being prevented from participating. This could potentially lead to children feeling disconnected and to policies affecting their lives being less and less accessible.

International and EU policy framework

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,¹ ratified by all EU Member States, clearly states in its [Article 12](#) that children who are capable of expressing their own views have the right to be heard on matters that affect them. Consideration to children's views will be given based on their age and maturity,² and states parties have the obligation to assess children's capacity to form their own views. In particular, the concept of maturity, understood as the capacity of having sufficient understanding (not comprehensive knowledge) of a given subject matter, clarifies that the biological age of a child must be considered on a case-by-case basis together with other elements such as their experience and their social, cultural and economic environment. Children can express

their views in writing or orally, but also through [other forms](#) that are most appropriate in relation to their age and maturity, such as drawing, painting or body language. This also implies that states parties have the obligation (as the text clearly states: 'States Parties shall assure') to inform the child about the subject matter and ensure that they have a sufficient understanding of it. States parties thus must put in place mechanisms and tools to ensure children's access to information, access to support and feedback. Last but not least, states parties must ensure that children are provided with the conditions to freely express themselves without being pressured or manipulated by adults. Article 12 does not provide a list of matters that affect children, as the lawmakers considered that, in order not to violate or limit the rights of children, they should have the right to be heard in all matters affecting them – from health to education, environment and inclusion. Other articles relevant to children's participation include Article 15 on their rights to freedom of association and Article 17 on their rights to access to information.

During the UN General Assembly of 2002, with [Resolution S-27/2](#) on 'A world fit for children', the states parties confirmed their commitment to implementing and achieving the objectives set in Article 12. In 2006, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child had a general [discussion](#) to explore the meaning of Article 12. In its view, this article establishes children's right '[t]o speak, to participate, to have their views taken into account'. Based on this understanding, the committee encouraged the states parties to take the proper measure to ensure that children have the tools to actively participate in society. As recognised by Unicef, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has [four principles](#) that underpin and support the new 'ethical and ideological dimension to the convention'. These are: 1) non-discrimination; 2) the best interest of the child; 3) the right to survival and development; and 4) the views of the child. This latter clarifies that a pre-condition to achieve the best interest of children is to listen to them as required in Article 12(1) of the convention.³

The UN [commentary](#) on Article 12 recognises how this article expresses the idea of the 'child as a rights holder', as a subject of rights. This means that Article 12 not only recognises the right *stricto sensu* but also serves to interpret and implement all the other rights recognised by the convention. When it comes to understanding the scope of application of the right to be heard, the commentary explains how the concept of 'participation' has evolved over time and is now widely used to describe 'ongoing processes not a momentary act, which include information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes'. In addition to that, [Article 7\(3\)](#) of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNRPD) invites states parties not only to recognise children with a disability's 'right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them' but also to provide assistance to children with a disability in order to exercise that right.⁴

The Council of Europe (CoE) Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2012\)2](#) on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18 invited CoE member states to take a number of steps to enhance children's opportunities to express themselves and to participate in public life, 'including as representatives'. Participation is understood within the meaning of Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. CoE member states, among others, should encourage children's active participation in schools, associations and community life, promote the establishment of consultative bodies for children, allocate adequate funding and take appropriate measures for vulnerable children. In order for children to make their voices heard, member states are invited to provide information adequate to the age and circumstances of children and to offer them support. This means that non-written forms of communications are welcome and that the process is not a one-off event but a continuous process that requires time and appropriate resources. This process should be 'transparent, informative, voluntary, respectful, relevant to children's lives, in child-friendly environments, inclusive (non-discriminatory)....'

Prior to Recommendation CM/REC(2012)2, the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities had adopted other instruments on children's participation.⁵ In addition to that, the Council of Europe strategies for the rights of the

child ([2016-2021](#)) and ([2022-2027](#)) referred to the participation of children as a priority area for action. The latter in particular recognises that despite some progress, improvements are still possible in the area of children's democratic engagement, by building synergies with the [EU strategy](#) on the rights of the child. The same document highlights the need to respond to the raised expectations, in other words, to act in line with the views expressed by children when consulted. Along [similar lines](#), in 2021 the CoE Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, stressed the importance of 'moving away from symbolic approaches to child participation', as a formal, unresponsive process may lead to frustration and future disengagement. Children may feel manipulated if, after they have been consulted, there has been no appropriate follow-up and all the decisions have been taken by the adults with no consideration for the views expressed by the children or worse, if the adults have manipulated the children to achieve their own interests. According to the CoE Commissioner for Human Rights, children have proven their willingness and ability to provide meaningful input to a vast array of subject areas, ranging from environmental and health policies, to education and economic recovery.

The Council of Europe has developed a [Child Participation Assessment Tool](#) with 10 specific and measurable [indicators](#) to gauge progress in the area of children's participation. These indicators can also be used to gauge progress in implementing the Recommendation on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18. The tool has already been successfully tested in certain EU Member States such as Estonia, Ireland and Romania. With the use of this tool governments can ensure that children and young people in their countries can exercise their right to be heard and to participate in decision making in all matters affecting them. In addition, the Commissioner for Human Rights has also stressed the many ways in which children's concerns were neglected during the Covid-19 pandemic by the Council of Europe's member states. In addition, the Council of Europe has developed [guidelines](#) for developing a national children's participation strategy or a participation strategy within the national children's rights strategy.

The promotion and protection of the rights of the child are among the objectives of the European Union. Various policy documents and other non-binding measures have helped to define the overall framework for action, suffice to mention the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, as well as subsequent Commission communications on the rights of the child and recommendations. In addition, [Article 3\(3\) of the Treaty on European Union](#) establishes the objective for the EU to promote the protection of the rights of the child. The right to be heard is further spelled out in [Article 24\(1\)](#) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights: 'Children ... may express their views freely. Such views shall be taken into consideration on matters which concern them in accordance with their age and maturity'.⁶ The 2006 communication on [Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#) announced the Commission's intention to gradually involve children in the decision-making process as well as to promote and strengthen networking and children's representation in the European Union. This communication led to the setting up of the post of [Commission coordinator](#) for the rights of the child in 2007. The 2011 EU [agenda for the rights of the child](#) recognised once again the importance of voicing children opinions. For this to happen, children must be informed of their rights in an accessible way. Acting on this understanding, the Commission announced the creation of a single easy access point on the [Europa site](#) providing a host of information on children rights. Moreover, in 2013 the Commission recommendation on [Investing in Children](#) promoted children's participation in the decision-making related to areas affecting their lives, such as health care and education. In 2019, the [European Platform for Investing in Children](#) (EPIC) published a relevant policy memo providing an overview of how children's rights are mainstreamed into EU and national policy frameworks and practices, as well as how children's participation is realised in national policy and decision-making at EU and national levels.

The 2011 agenda also stressed the need to involve children from disadvantaged backgrounds and to implement the 'right to be heard' in all justice-related decisions as well as to promote [child-friendly justice](#). In 2019, the Bucharest [Declaration](#) on child participation in decision-making at national and EU levels listed the key actions that should drive children's participation in policy-

making. These include, among others, drawing up dedicated school and civic programmes; establishing specific children consultation mechanisms; and introducing child participation as guiding principle for attribution of funding under the EU structural and cohesion funds.

In March 2021, the Commission adopted the [EU strategy](#) on the rights of the child, which sets six priority areas: 1) [participation in political and democratic life](#); 2) socio-economic inclusion, health and education; 3) combating violence against children and ensuring child protection; 4) child-friendly justice; 5) children's safety in a digital and information society; and 6) supporting, protecting and empowering children globally. Specifically, concerning children's participation in political and democratic life, the strategy stresses the need for the EU to promote and improve children's participation at all levels of governance: local, national and EU. The strategy envisages actions to strengthen the collaboration between the EU Children's Participation Platform, the European Parliament and the child rights organisations. Other actions include promoting a children-friendly version of the Charter of Fundamental Rights; conducting child-specific consultations; promoting children's active participation in the European Climate Pact; and systematically mainstreaming children's rights in all relevant EU policies and actions. At the same time, Member States are invited to promote school curricula that include education on citizenship, equality and participation in democratic processes.

The Council [welcomed](#) the strategy and stressed the need to support the existing tools for the participation of children as well as the need to develop age-appropriate information and further participation mechanisms. It is worth mentioning that around 10 000 children [contributed](#) to the preparation of the EU strategy. These children called for an inclusive Europe with a particular focus on vulnerable children. A large majority of the contributors felt that 'their participation often does not make a difference'. This is why they called on the EU and on the Member States to develop processes to ensure an effective and meaningful children's participation in the decision-making.

Ahead of the 2024 European elections, the Commission released its [recommendation](#) on inclusive and resilient electoral processes in the EU, which suggested *inter alia* to support young citizens in the exercise of their right to vote and more generally to support their participation in the democratic life of the EU. This would include 'fostering citizenship education, organising election simulations in schools, knowledge tests or art competitions on elections, youth-friendly communication campaigns, election guides to familiarise children and teenagers with the registration and voting process, encouraging students to become election'. The Commission also invited Member States to promote the 'Guide to EU citizenship' in order to help young citizens to become acquainted with the EU values and EU history and to make specific efforts to strengthen children's participation in the EU political and democratic life.

In 2020, the European Commission commissioned a [study](#) on child participation in EU political and democratic life. Moreover, the 2024 Commission communication on the [European Year of Youth 2022](#) recommended building on the momentum created by this initiative, in particular by creating synergies between youth participation and children's participation actions responding to their right to be heard and by continuing the implementation of the [EU Children's Participation Platform](#).

Recently, the Commission has opened a call for proposals, with €12 million of [funding](#) dedicated to children's rights, their mental health and initiatives on their participation. Proposals under this call must ensure that children's involvement is central and integral in every stage of the project's design, implementation and evaluation.

EU actions to empower child participation in the democratic life

Under the EU strategy on the rights of the child, the Commission committed to establishing, in collaboration with the European Parliament and child rights organisations, the [EU Children's Participation Platform](#), which would liaise between existing child participation mechanisms at all levels – local, national and EU – and further engage children in the decision-making processes at EU level. Furthermore, the Commission also works towards developing and promoting accessible,

digitally inclusive and child-friendly versions and formats of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, other key EU instruments relevant to children, and related documents and events. In addition, steps are being taken in the direction of including children in the [Fundamental Rights Forum of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights](#) (FRA), but also in the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) (more details on this initiative are given further down). In parallel, the Commission and the relevant agencies, are also working on child participation.

Moreover, the Commission is dedicated to fostering an environment for children to become active participants in the European Climate Pact by making pledges or by becoming [Pact Ambassadors](#). By involving schools in sustainable climate, energy and environment education, the [Education for Climate Coalition](#) – the European participatory community supporting teaching and learning for the green transition and sustainable development – aims to help children to become agents of change in the implementation of the Climate Pact and the European Green Deal. Furthermore, launched by Commission [Vice-President Dubravka Šuica](#) on 31 March 2022, the EU Network for Children's Rights seeks to reinforce the dialogue and mutual learning between the EU and the Member States on children's rights. In particular, it supports the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the EU strategy on the rights of the child.

Overall, [voting](#) in elections is the highest form of participation in modern democracies. By voting for any level of governance, one may exercise their democratic right to take part in decisions regarding their own future. Structures such as the European Youth Forum also contribute to engaging young citizens. The [European Youth Forum](#) (YFJ) – the platform of youth organisations in Europe – is composed of national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations. It functions as an advocacy organisation, working on the basis of high visibility campaigns in collaboration with EU institutions and other international organisations aiming to make the views of young people heard. The forum is also part of the steering group of the [EU Youth Dialogue](#) (EUYD), which seeks to encourage the dialogue between young people and EU decision-makers in the framework of the [EU youth strategy 2019-2027](#) (see more on the strategy in the following paragraph). Moreover, as mentioned above, 2022 was the [European Year of Youth](#) (EYY), an initiative that sought to underline the importance of youth in shaping the EU's future, while calling for a strong youth dimension in EU priorities and policies. During the EYY, young people engaged in more than 13 000 activities in 67 countries, and more than 300 young people took part in youth policy dialogues with European Commissioners. Young people's most common expectation throughout the EYY was for decision-makers to listen more to their demands and to follow up on them, and to support their personal, social and professional development.

The [European Youth Portal](#) offers information on EU- and national-level opportunities and initiatives that are of interest to young people who are living, learning or working in Europe. For instance, it contains information on the [European Youth Dialogue \(EUYD\)](#), which supports the implementation of the EU youth strategy 2019-2027. This strategy focuses on three core actions – 'connect, engage and empower' – and encourages cooperation between the EU Member States in respect of all issues concerning young people. It also invites Member States to 'Encourage and promote inclusive democratic participation of all young people in society and democratic processes' and to 'include diverse voices of young people in decision-making processes on all levels' through the EUYD. Furthermore, the members of the [Youth Partnership](#) – an initiative of the European Commission and the Council of Europe – have been working on the evaluation of the quality of social inclusion of participants in the EUYD, through analysis of the data on their social backgrounds.

The [European Youth Parliament](#) (EYP) is one of the best platforms for young European citizens to get involved in the political debate, while exchanging ideas with other young Europeans of similar or different backgrounds. In February 2024, the EYP held an event – '[Have Your Say! Young Citizens' Dialogue on Climate and Energy Policy](#)' – with the participation of MEP Heidi Hautala. The aim was to create a connection between policymakers and young Europeans so as to enable the latter to get directly involved in climate and energy policies. In addition, the [Euroscola](#) scheme gives students aged 16 to 18 from all EU countries a chance to spend a day as an MEP in Strasbourg. Similarly, the

[Model European Union \(MEU\)](#) is a simulation of the EU decision-making processes. Every year in Strasbourg, participants re-enact the work of the EU institutions in the [European Parliament](#), debating on real-life legislative proposals drafted by the [European Commission](#).

Another initiative worth mentioning is the new [European strategy for a better internet for kids](#) (BIK+), aiming to ensure that children and young people are protected, respected and empowered online. In particular, the third pillar of BIK+ aims to promote the active participation of children so as to ensure respect for their views and that their voices are heard in the digital environment. Moreover, children will be actively involved in the drafting of the EU code of conduct and in the evaluation of the strategy. Finally, the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) (CoFE) was a citizen-led series of debates and discussions that took place between April 2021 and May 2022, with the aim to enable people from all over Europe to share their ideas and contribute in shaping EU's future. It was actually the first time that such a major pan-European democratic exercise had been organised, stressing the importance of citizen engagement and active participation. However, it was mainly for [adults](#). Children and young people below the age of 18 were encouraged to participate through an adult they could trust. Overall, only one third of each [citizen panel](#) was made up of young people aged between 16 and 25.

Examples of children's participation in democratic life

Children's participation generates great added value both for the policy and decision-making processes, and for the children who participate themselves. Across the EU but also beyond it, opportunities for children to participate in democratic life are growing. As mentioned earlier, the existing [structures and mechanisms](#) put in place with the aim to enhance child participation in the EU and in its Member States include local youth parliaments, municipal children's councils and *ad hoc* consultations, which enable children to voice their concerns and provide input into the decision-making process.

[Children's parliaments](#) – a formal structure for the participation of children and young people – convene on a regular or semi-regular basis. Similar structures in different parts of the world play the same role yet go by different names: child councils, child forums, and youth councils or youth parliaments. Overall, the majority of these structures cater mostly to young people below and above the age of 18, than to children. An example of such a structure, at a global scale, was the [World Children's Parliament](#), which was active between November 2023 and January 2024. It was organised by the Milestone International School and the Sailee International School in Mumbai, India, with the guidance of the International Association for Quality Education. In Europe, young people's voices were represented through the local youth councils in [Ireland](#), while the EU Youth Dialogue is delivered by the [National Youth Council of Ireland](#) through the Young Voices programme. Moreover, at national level, [children's and youth councils](#) that act in an advisory capacity to the government exist in 11 Member States, while children's and youth parliaments have been set up in 15 Member States. In Denmark, for instance, there are three separate structures under the [National Council for Children](#): the child and youth panel, the mini child panel and the expert groups representing vulnerable or disadvantaged children and youth.

According to the [European Network of Ombudspersons for Children](#) (ENOC) has members in many Council of Europe countries, which consequently put in place customised structures – such as children's advisory panels – while member countries may also hold consultations with children. At the UN level, [examples](#) of initiatives aiming to boost child and youth participation in democratic processes include, among others, actively involving children in the [general discussions](#) coordinated by the [Committee on the Rights of the Child](#). Children have the opportunity to make submissions on the discussion themes, while participating in the design and planning of the agenda, taking the role of session co-chairs and actively participating in all debates taking place in the context of the committee. One of the main stakeholders advocating for child participation, [Eurochild](#), brought on board children to help draw up its [Strategic plan 2019-2021](#) in a collaborative process, engaging

them in activity planning, campaigns and strategic planning events, and in policy development through monitoring and evaluation.

Table 1 – Overview of key structures and mechanisms facilitating children's participation

Member State	Children's council / youth	Children's/ youth parliament	Structures / mechanisms facilitated by the Ombudsperson for Children's office
EU	✓	✓	✓ (ENOC)
Belgium	✓	✓	✓
Bulgaria	✓		
Czechia		✓	
Denmark	✓		
Germany	✓		
Ireland	✓	✓	✓
Greece	✓	✓	✓
Spain	✓		✓
Estonia	✓		
France	✓	✓	✓
Croatia	✓		✓
Italy	✓		
Cyprus	✓	✓	
Latvia	✓	✓	
Lithuania	✓	✓	
Luxembourg	✓	✓	
Hungary	✓		
Malta	✓	✓	✓
The Netherlands	✓		
Austria	✓		
Poland	✓	✓	
Portugal	✓	✓	
Romania	✓		
Slovakia	✓		
Slovenia	✓	✓	
Finland	✓	✓	✓
Sweden	✓		✓

Data source: [Study on child participation in EU political and democratic life](#), RAND Europe and Eurochild, p 12.⁷

At the local level, the [Child Citizens Project](#) in Budapest, Hungary, aims to strengthen child participation practices to allow children to express their opinion on issues that may affect them in their local community and become active participants in local democratic processes. The project specifically addresses the active inclusion and participation of children in vulnerable situations, especially Roma and disadvantaged children, in particular the 4 to 6 year olds. In the city of Naples, Italy, the [DAY project](#) involves children and young people who are between 14 and 18 years old, as well as schools, local public authorities, policymakers at local, national and EU level, and civil society organisations. In [Milan](#), nine school gardens were renovated with the participation of the city's children thanks to a [Milan City Council](#) initiative. In the Netherlands, the [Little Embassy](#) (De Kleine Ambassade) is a foundation that aims to empower children to discover and experience how they can contribute to their surroundings as active citizens.

The [Child-friendly Cities Initiative](#) (CFCI), a municipal-level Unicef project launched back in 1996, has been taken up by the municipalities or cities in nearly [half](#) of the EU Member States. It has been a driver for establishing good practices with regard to children's participation in these places. Another initiative – the [European Network of Young Advisors](#) (ENYA) – facilitated by ENOC and launched in 2010, is a child and youth participation project. Its main aim is to actively involve children and young people in ENOC's annual work, while giving them the opportunity to be heard at EU level.

Stakeholders' positions

Several ways can be pursued to better involve children in policymaking, according to a [study](#) on child participation in EU political and democratic life, prepared jointly by [RAND Europe](#) and Eurochild for the European Commission's Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers. The study, which involved more than 200 children and young people, examined how children aged 0-18 participate in decision-making processes across the EU, while highlighting both the challenges and the opportunities for improvement in this area at all levels. The [main goals](#) of the study were to contribute to informing the [EU strategy on the rights of the child 2021-2024](#), as well as future strategies focusing on children's participation in society, and similarly further possible actions for the EU in this area. Among its many conclusions have been that mechanisms are mostly adult-initiated and established during the 1990s and the 2000s. In addition, although these mechanisms may help to engender ideas, they need evaluation to practically show proof of their impact. Furthermore, the majority of the mechanisms in place are geared towards both girls and boys, yet tend to target older children. Thus, steps need to be taken to equally include younger, but also vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Eurochild also collaborates closely with other children's rights organisations active at EU level through the Children's Rights Action Group ([CRAG](#)). For instance, in the run-up to the 2014 European elections, CRAG co-authored and launched the [Child Rights Manifesto](#), which served as the basis for creating an Intergroup on Children's Rights at the European Parliament. Furthermore, ahead of the 2019 European elections, several CRAG members collaborated in the Vote4Children campaign. A 2021 position paper by a number of NGOs – the [Joint reaction to the new EU strategy on the rights of the child](#) – highlighted the steps taken by the European Commission regarding child participation and empowerment, while at the same stressing the need to pay particular attention to the importance of informing children about their rights and of ensuring the participation of young children, children in vulnerable situations or socially excluded, and children outside the EU. Moreover, in 2011, [Save the Children](#) called on the EU to take a leading role in setting examples of collaboration with children, in parallel to promoting the idea of children's participation among other stakeholders. It also called for the adoption of a systematic approach, including common definitions and principles in the area of children's participation.

The ENOC promotes the active participation of children and young people in decision-making and policymaking that are relevant to them. In addition, it aims to ensure active engagement with children and young people and their participation in every aspect of its work, including inter alia through consultations, engagement, and other activities. [Eurochild](#) has also expressed its

commitment to supporting the direct involvement of children and young people in its work through: the Eurochild Children's Council; the National Eurochild Forums; and a Child Participation Reference Group. Moreover, it has repeatedly called for the creation [of child-friendly versions of written documents](#), for instance, in the context of the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#).

Eurochild, in collaboration with the University of Central Lancashire, was contracted by the Children's Rights Division of the Council of Europe to organise, coordinate and implement the participation of children at a Council of Europe [conference](#) in Strasbourg in November 2019, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, the [European Forum on the rights of the child](#) in 2020 was supported through the participation of an estimated 60 children from several organisations representing different countries, and the involvement of Eurochild.

European Parliament position

Several European Parliament resolutions have underlined the importance of involving children in the democratic life of the EU. The 2019 [resolution](#) on children's rights on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child called for the implementation of the Bucharest Declaration; for the creation of structures ensuring children's participation at all levels (local, national and EU) and for the involvement of children in the Conference on the Future of Europe. In a 2021 [resolution](#), Parliament once again called for the establishment of 'formal mechanisms for dialogue and consultation' to ensure a 'meaningful participation' of children, including vulnerable or marginalised ones. The following year, in a [resolution](#) on the impact of COVID-19, Parliament recalled the importance of giving a voice to young people and children in the definition and implementation of policies and programmes affecting them. In its [resolution](#) of 6 April 2022, Parliament recognised the importance of learning about citizenship since early childhood, as having such an awareness plays 'an important role in the development of critical social and emotional skills, and plants the seeds of well-being, dialogue, mutual respect, understanding and common values'.

In June 2023, the first General Assembly of the [EU Children's Participation Platform](#)⁸ took place in Brussels. Over 60 children and teenagers from across Europe met with policymakers, national representatives, international organisations and civil society organisations to debate key issues of concern. These included children's rights, the protection of children from violence and climate change. The General Assembly also [met](#) with Ewa Kopacz, the European Parliament [Coordinator on Children's Rights](#). Furthermore, the EU Children's Participation Platform's [2023-2024 work plan](#) outlines the four main areas on which the work with children will focus until October 2024, namely: feeling safe; democracy and voting; website co-creation; and past, present and future. Activities in the area of democracy and voting aim to give children hands-on training on how to access accurate information online and what democracy means in practice. These activities also involve holding discussions with the Member States on the results from consultations with children, and providing the EU with additional insights on how youth perceives democracy and participates in it.

Prior to that, in 2017, Unicef and [Eurochild](#) released a report on '[Europe Kids Want](#)', presenting the results of a survey conducted over 13 500 children and young people across Europe. Children reported on their main concerns (e.g. finding a job, war or terrorist attacks and climate change) and also had some recommendations for the EU to act (to support peace in the world, to protect the environment and to ensure equal treatment for everybody). In November 2018, the survey was presented at a [special plenary session](#) of the European Parliament, hosted by the Parliament President, Antonio Tajani, and attended by a delegation of children and young people. Moreover, the European Parliament's [Intergroup on Children's rights](#) constitutes a forum for informal exchanges on topics related to children across different political groups, and for contacts between Members and civil society.

During the [European Youth Event](#) (EYE) – a biennial initiative led by the European Parliament, European citizens aged 16 to 30 have a unique opportunity to interact, inspire each other and exchange views with experts, activists, influencers and decision-makers, right at the heart of European democracy. The EYE aims to promote equality, inclusiveness and sustainability, with a strong commitment to accessibility for everyone. During EYE2023, more than 1 000 ideas for the EU's future were collected.

MAIN REFERENCES

Bacian I. and Huemer M.A., [Citizenship education in national curricula](#), EPRS, European Parliament, November 2023.

Shreeves R., [Children's rights in the EU in the light of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), EPRS, European Parliament, November 2022.

[Study on child participation in EU political and democratic life](#), European Commission, April 2021.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Other relevant articles of the convention include: Article 2 on non-discrimination; Article 3 on the best interest of the child; Article 6 on the right to life; Article 13 on the right to freedom of expression; Article 15 on the right to freedom of association; Article 17 on the right to access to information.
- ² Paragraph two of the same article adds that children should be given the 'opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting them' also through a representative or a body in accordance with procedural domestic rules.
- ³ Article 12(1) states that 'States parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the rights to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the view of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'.
- ⁴ Other relevant articles the UNCRPD are: Article 21: Freedom of expression and opinion; and Article 29 Participation in political and public life. For more information on participation in political life, see: M. Lecerf, [Political participation of people with disabilities in the EU](#), EPRS, May 2023.
- ⁵ Committee of Ministers: Recommendation [Rec\(2005\)5](#) on the rights of children living in residential institutions; Recommendation [Rec\(2006\)14](#) on citizenship and participation of young people in public life; Recommendation [Rec\(2006\)19](#) on policy to support positive parenting; Recommendation [Rec\(2009\)10](#) on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence; Recommendation [Rec\(2010\)7](#) on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education and Guidelines [on Child-friendly Justice \(2010\)](#). PACE Recommendation [1864 \(2009\)](#) on 'Promoting the participation by children in decisions affecting them'; Congress of Local and Regional Authorities Recommendation [128 \(2003\)](#) on the revised European Charter on 'The Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life'.
- ⁶ Other relevant articles of the Charter are: Article 10: Freedom of thought, conscience and religion; Article 12: Freedom of assembly and of association; and Article 22: Cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.
- ⁷ Table 1 has been sourced from the '[Study on child participation in EU political and democratic life](#)', produced by RAND Europe and Eurochild. However, this study cannot guarantee that all existing mechanisms have been registered and described.
- ⁸ In October 2023, the Advisory Board, consisting of experts and children, met and [discussed](#) the work plan and the activities of the EU Children's Platform.

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