



**Council of Europe
The Child Participation Assessment Tool
for children**

Governments, organizations and people around the world are committed to ensuring the rights of the child. Almost all countries around the world have joined **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** which is the main international document that is protecting rights of the child all around the world. This document ensures that your rights are guaranteed by the state and explains the government what they have to do in order to guarantee your rights are respected. **Article 12** of the **Convention**, says that every child has a **right to be heard** and his or her views to be **taken seriously**. This article is also known as "**the right to participate**". Participation is one of the 4 main principles of the convention, which means participation is one of the most important aspects. But sometimes it is very hard for governments to actually put child participation in practice.

This booklet is a **Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool for children**, that aims to make it easier for governments to measure how well they are doing with children's participation in different situations (for examples at schools, in hospitals, in court). This tool also helps the governments to map what needs to be improved. This assessment tool has 10 indicators (guides on how to measure the child participation), that helps the government to evaluate their situation in child participation issues (how they are doing, where still to improve and what is going well).

PS! You might find some difficult terms in this text, but we have included explanations to them as well! We hope you find this helpful!

PROTECTING THE RIGHT OF THE CHILD

Indicator No. 1	Children's rights to participate are written in the Constitution and other important laws
-----------------	---

NB! Difficult words:

Constitution - this is the most important law in your country, we can call it the most important law in your country. Other laws are built on it or take it into account/follow.


Rights - Every person in the world has certain rights (e.g. the right to live, the right for food etc). These rights have been collected and written down as laws and they give direction for all people on how they should act. For example, all children have the right to go to school. In other word rights are "things" every child should have or be able to do.

Laws - rights represent things that every person in the world should do or have (e.g. right to live, right for food and etc). These rights are collected together in laws to give direction for all people on how they should act.

Procedures or proceedings - these are very concrete steps or activities that should be carried out before any decision concerning children's rights is made. The process of deciding further legal steps or activities to solve a very difficult problem. If children are involved in this problem, then they should have a freedom to express their opinion about it.

Custody - a right and duty of a parent or other care giver to take care of a child.

What does it mean - the right to participate in decisions that affect you most (such as your home, school, free time) should be written in and brought out in all important laws and regulations that can affect your life and your future. Governments pay a lot of attention to these rights if they are written down in the most important document - the Constitution. But it is not enough to only have these rights written down. There should be clear rules and requirements that children's views are taken seriously. It is also important to take into account child's age and capability (language skills for expressing views etc). Governments should never forget to pay attention to children with special needs or to those who are in any other way vulnerable (financial or social situation of the family, geographic location etc.) and therefore need special attention and protection!



Check if you have this in your country!

The right to participation should be written down especially in following situations, places or laws and regulations:

- **School and other places for education** - existence of special school councils that represent their students views and opinions.
- **Child protection, care and adoption offices-** places and institutions for those children who need more care and support, because of the situation in their family of birth.

- **Custody and family proceedings** - when children are separated from their parents, children's views and opinions should be heard in matters concerning them.
- **Family decision making** - rules that regulate relations in the family should also include and highlight child participation.
- **Health care consent for treatment** - if a child goes to the hospital or visit family doctor and need to be treated, he or she should always be asked their consent.
- **Immigration and asylum proceedings** - some children live in the areas of war and danger. Those children have the right to escape to a safer country, but they need to follow some legal steps first. Children in these situations need special care and treatment.
- **Criminal justice proceedings** - if children come in contact with the police and judges, then their opinion should be heard and taken seriously.

Indicator No. 2	Right to participate is written in the national strategy to ensure children's rights
-----------------	--

NB! Difficult words:

National strategy - it is a document that sets common goals to all organisations and people who work with children and for children in that country.

Implement - to put ideas and rules into practice

Ministries and agencies - national organisations that are writing the laws and strategies for all people living in the country. For example, Ministry of Education is responsible for schools and kindergartens, Ministry of Health is responsible for hospitals and doctors, Ministry of Finances is responsible for how much money government spends.

What does it mean - Children have a right to participate in decision making when it concerns them. This means that children's opinion should be asked when taking decisions in family, school, kindergarten or even when planning to build a school or a playground. Children's participation should be mentioned in a strategy that regulates many different areas. In addition, there should be rules and regulations to measure if that strategy is actually being followed by the responsible people at the ministries and state agencies (such as in the areas of justice, health, education, play, culture, environment). Everyone who is responsible for those areas should be aware of this strategy and must follow it. But to actually use the strategy, there should be also a special amount of money to enable the goals written in the strategy to become real in life and to promote and protect children's right to participate.

Check out if you have special strategy!

It is important that this strategy would:

- Have a focus on children's rights.
- Have a focus on children's right to participate in decision making and be heard.
- Be for all children in this country, and would not vary in different parts of the country.
- Set concrete goals, such as creating special Child or Youth Ministry or other places that focus only on children's rights.

NB! It is very important that this strategy pays special attention also to vulnerable children and children with disabilities, because they might need more help and attention! These children should also have a possibility to express their opinion in regards this strategy.

Indicator No. 3	There is independent ombudsman for children in your country
-----------------	---

NB! Difficult words:

Ombudsman for children - is a special person whose job is to protect and promote children's rights in your country. Ombudsman follows the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Children can turn (write, draw, call) to him or her with their concerns and complaints. In some countries ombudsman for children is the same person as the one who protects rights of the adults (Chancellor for Justice or Commissioner). This person is independent in his opinion from Government or any political party or anyone else.

What does it mean - ombudsman's or ombudsperson's tasks, obligations and rights should be written down in a special law. This law will give him or her the power to act and protect children (for example with strong public opinions and speeches) so that no one can stand against the children's rights. Ombudsman should have money to hire other people who would work together with him or her and help to protect children's rights. These people should be specially trained and should know what is important for children and how to protect them in the best way.

Do you have a special ombudsman in your country?

Ombudsperson works on behalf of children, if he or she:

- **Is protected by the law** - this gives him or her the right to act on behalf of the children.
- **Is independent** - it means that he or she can not be affected by political powers and government.
- **Is following the "Paris Principles"** - these are special rules for ombudsman equally valid for all countries of the Council of Europe. For example writing the report about the situation of children in a particular country; saying it out loud if children's rights are not respected; asking children's opinions; consulting with other organizations who also work on behalf of children.

NB! All children no matter of their nationality, age, disability, immigration status or economical situation should be able to turn to ombudsman. Ombudsman should be child-friendly and his or her work should be understandable for every child.


Indicator No. 4	Special rules exist to participate for children who come in contact with the law
-----------------	--

NB! Difficult words:

Mechanism - this is used to describe a bigger system that contains different actions and activities in different levels, but for the same purpose.

Conflict or contact with the law - sometimes children come in contact with the police, prosecutor or a judge. This may happen if something is seriously wrong or a crime has been committed. If a child is in contact with the law he or she can be either offender (the one who committed something bad), accuser (the one who says that someone else committed something bad), victim (the one who has been hurt very badly and needs protection) or a witness (the one who saw when someone else did something bad and is ready to share that information with the police or judge).

What does it mean - special protective and child-friendly rules should be in place and accessible if a child comes in contact or in conflict with the law. Children may come in conflict or in contact with the law through their family (divorce), police or court (a serious wrongdoing), migration and asylum (when families escape from the war or the child escapes alone), child protection (adoption).



Do you have those rules in your country?

Children should have following rights when they come in contact with the law:

- **The right to be heard** - children should be listened to in things concerning them and their views should be taken seriously.
- **The right to privacy** - children in conflict or in contact with the law should be given their space and their privacy which should be respected. No one should interview a child when a child is not ready to be heard. It should not be disclosed who this child is, if this is not in the best interest of the child.
- **The right to information** - adults should explain to children what is court and what happens in court, how long children can stay at the court and who will help them during that time, what can police do and where can children turn to if they feel uncomfortable. This should be done in a way that the child understands and the child should have possibility to ask questions if he or she does not understand something or is not sure.
- **The right to have a lawyer** - special lawyer (legal protector) should be appointed to the child free of charge, to protect the rights of the child during the time the child is in contact with the law.

NB! All of those rights should be accessible also for vulnerable children, such as children with disabilities (for example a special translator should be available for deaf children), asylum seeking children (for example if migrant children speak other language, a special translator should be provided) or children of small age (important

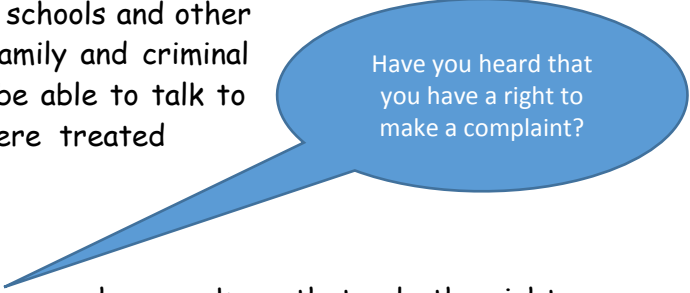
information should be written down in understandable way and taking into account the age of the child).

Indicator No. 5	Child friendly individual complaint rules are in place
-----------------	--

NB! Difficult words:

Complaint - when someone has been treated unfairly, adults and children should have the possibility to inform about that wrongdoing. Places where children stay and go should also have special rules where and how to make a complaint. For example, children should have possibility to make a complaint at school, in the hospital or in the institution if they feel that they have been treated badly.

What does it mean - all children have a right to submit complaint when they have been treated unfairly. This should be guaranteed in schools and other places of education; care and health areas; family and criminal cases and immigration cases. Children should be able to talk to someone about it if they feel that they were treated unfairly.



Have you heard that you have a right to make a complaint?

Complaint rules are child friendly, if:

- **It is safe to submit a complaint** - when you know that only the right and responsible people will know that you submitted a complaint.
- **It is accessible to everyone** - any child should be able to complaint no matter of their age, nationality or disability.
- **Children are provided with information** - children should know how to submit a complaint and to whom.
- **It is understandable for all children** - information about the needed steps are given in appropriate formats for children, for example by posters, leaflets, videos or websites and taking into account their age, disability and language.
- **There is a system that protects children** - Good and protected system is in place to protect the privacy of the child who has submitted a complaint. This system should assure that needed changes are made after the wrongdoing expressed in the complaint has been confirmed.
- **Rules are in place** - Special rules are in place to make sure that the complaint is taken seriously and someone is responsible to respond to that complaint.

PROMOTING AWARENESS OF THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE

Indicator No. 6 Children's right to participate in decision-making is important and presented in education programmes for professionals working with and for children

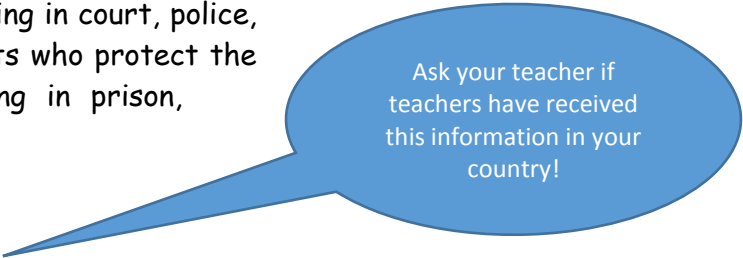
NB! Difficult words:

Education programmes - adults who work with children, such as teachers, doctors, nurses, youth workers, lawyers for children, learn and get special skills in universities before starting to work with children.

Professionals - adults who have had special preparation and training for their work. For example, doctors learn about the human body and how it works, policemen learn laws and how to catch thieves, chefs learn how to cook delicious food. Adults become professionals after learning everything there is to learn about special subjects.

What does it mean - adults who work with children and for children, such as teachers, doctors, nurses, youth workers, lawyers for children, etc. should have special courses in universities that explain the importance of children's rights and a right to participate. Learning about children's rights will help those adults to better understand children's development and views, or solve problems when they appear, taking into account what is best for the child.

It is very good, if at least 6 of the following professionals/adult groups have special trainings: teachers, lawyers, adults working in court, police, social workers, doctors and nurses, adults who protect the borders of the country, adults working in prison, youth workers.



Ask your teacher if teachers have received this information in your country!

Training programmes for adults should:

- **Focus on the theory and practice** - adults should not only read books about children's rights and the right to participate, but during their studies they must practice what they learn, so they would be ready to work with children in the real life.
- **Be taught in different institutions**- adults can get their skills in different schools for adults, such as university, special trainings centre, college. These places should also focus on children's rights.
- **Respect vulnerable children** - these training programmes should also pay special attention to the rights of children with disabilities; children of different age and development; children of different ethnic background and speaking different languages - mother tongues and children of different gender.


Indicator No. 7	Children have information about their right to participate in decision-making
-----------------	---

NB! Difficult words:

Participate in decision making - children have the right to give their opinion in the questions that concern them. Whenever adults are making decisions that concern you directly, they have to ask your opinion. Decision making can take place at home, kindergarten, school, after school activities, in your home municipality and even when state parliament or government make decisions. When decision is taken it means that it is official and the decision now has to be fulfilled by someone. This also means that children have a right to create their own children or young people's organisations where they can come together and make something good happen (for example school councils, youth clubs).

Detention centres or prison - children who have done something very wrong - broke the law, can be sent to detention centres or prison by the judge. These detention centres or prisons are made specially for children and young people to stay out of trouble. Adults with special skills work there to help children and young people to act in a good way and not to be in trouble in the future.

What does it mean - adults who are responsible to create services and places for children and who are planning something on behalf of children, should consult with children and ask for their opinions. This information should be available for all children and children should receive this information in a child friendly way, for example through internet, booklets, books, pictures and posters in a language clear to a child - no difficult or unclear words should be used.



Check if you have all that in your country!

Information about the right to participate should be:

- **Accessible for all children** - child friendly information should be available for children of different ages and for children with different abilities. For example, information should be available for children who can't hear.
- **Understandable for all children** - children should receive this information in understandable way at school at all levels (primary and secondary school). Schools should have special teaching materials to explain children their rights.
- **Accessible for vulnerable children** - this information should be given also to children who stay in hospitals, youth prisons, detention centres, care institutions or asylum seeking centres.
- **Accessible for big cities and small villages** - all children around the country in small villages and big cities should receive information on their right to participate.

NB! It is a good idea for adults to do questionnaires among children and ask them if children know about the right to participate and where they got this information from!

CREATING SPACES FOR PARTICIPATION

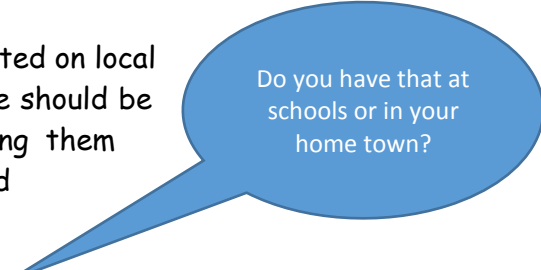
Indicator No. 8	Children are represented in special forums for children and young people at different levels
-----------------	--

NB! Difficult words:

Policy makers - adults who are responsible for making important documents that regulate the work of schools, hospitals or police. These people also write laws (rules) that everyone has to follow.

Forums and organisations for children and young people - special places that are created for children and young people and by children and young people where they can come together and decide on their activities with special goals.

What does it mean - Special forums must be created on local and national level, where children and young people should be able to participate and make decisions concerning them together. Forums can be created by children and together with children.



Do you have that at schools or in your home town?

Children are well represented, if:

- **Children and young people have a possibility to join a school or youth council** - at school or in your home municipality (city or village) there should be created special councils. They are meant for children and there children can come together and decide on important questions and report back to those adults, who ask for children's and young person's opinion and intend to take that into account when making decisions.
- **They have access to these places** - all children should have free access to those forums. Children and young people can also choose a representative among themselves to be their "spokesperson" who then has to consult with other children.
- **Children are represented at the national level** - special Youth Parliaments are created to represent children on very high level, where children can work together with Parliamentarians and the Government to make the country better place for everyone.
- **Special laws are in place** - in order to guarantee that these forums and organizations exist, there should be special laws and rules created.


NB! It is important that those forums are open to all children of all ages, abilities, nationality, gender and religion. Responsible adults should collect information if all children have information that they can participate on forums and form their own organizations.

Indicator No. 9	Special child-targeted feedback mechanisms are in place for local services
-----------------	--

NB! Difficult words:

Feedback mechanism – when children receive services, for example, when they visit a doctor or a therapist, then it is important to ask children how did it go and if they felt comfortable and received necessary help and information. This information can be asked verbally or in writing through questionnaires. This is called feedback and there should be some special rules about how to ask and analyse received feedback.

What does it mean – organizations, institutions and adults that work for children in their home towns (such as social workers, health workers, police, museums, schools, kindergartens and children's homes) should consult with children and ask for feedback from them. Feedback is important to make services better for children. Feedback can be asked via questionnaires, surveys, drawings or just by talking to the child. It is important that it would be comfortable for a child.



Have you ever
been asked to
give your
feedback?

Child-targeted feedback mechanisms should be:

- **Accessible for all children** – different ways of asking and giving feedback should be in place. This means that children may give feedback online or through surveys, by drawing or by talking to the adults. This also means that feedback should be asked from children of different age, gender, language, disabilities or social status and in a way suitable for them.
- **Received feedback should be analysed** – thoughts and ideas that children give concerning provided services should be analysed and children's views should be taken into account. This also means that after making the decision concerning information that was given by children, children themselves should be informed what will happen with their feedback.

NB! It would be especially good if adults would ask children and young people's opinion when they design special feedback mechanisms.

Indicator No. 10	Children are supported to participate in different reporting processes of the children's rights instruments
------------------	---

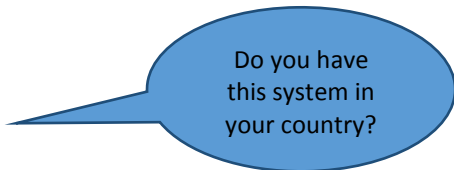
NB! Difficult words:

Reporting processes - very often there are special controlling mechanisms made for very important documents that protect children's rights. These mechanisms make sure that important documents are being followed by the responsible people. Normally there are committees (group of very professional people) in place that read those reports and give feedback to the governments.

Children's rights instruments - collection of documents that protect children's rights. One of the most important documents is the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

What does it mean - Children, young people and organizations that represent children's opinions have a right to participate in the monitoring process aiming to see how countries are doing in respecting child rights. There exist special bodies that do the monitoring. Children's rights instruments are being controlled on regular bases by many organizations, who represent the rights of the children and speak on behalf of them. Children should be actively involved in this process and their opinion should be asked on issues concerning them.

Reporting process should have following components:



Do you have this system in your country?

- **Children's participation** - children's opinions and views should be asked when writing the report. This means that not only already active children should participate, but adults should involve children with different backgrounds and participation experience.
- **Organizations are supported** - organizations lead by children and organizations that stand for children's rights should get money to be able to control if and how children's rights are followed by the government.
- **All children should be represented** - it is very important to also ask opinions of children from vulnerable situations, such as children with disabilities, children from different cultures, asylum seeking children.

NB! It would be a good idea for children to write their own report and separate report on these children's rights instruments! Adults should help children to do so.