

Bucharest EU Children's Declaration

Call to Action for Child Participation in Decision-Making at National and EU levels

Adopted at the International Conference on "Children's Participation in Decision-Making and Policy-Making at European Union level" 6-7 May 2019, Bucharest

Children from all over the European Union have gathered in Bucharest to present their commitment and to call on the leaders of EU Member States and of the European Union to make child participation a priority and a reality.

We are dreaming of a European Community that enables and encourages the involvement of children in decision-making. Why? Because we want to be consulted on issues that influence our lives directly, both as citizens of our respective countries and as Europeans. Because we are a significant part of Europe's population and we are writing our own story through marches, vocalization, and representation. Because our opinions, feelings and voices are forming now, and we are part of the present time. Because we want to live in a Europe that requires and values our involvement in the decision-making process.

We live in a new world with new challenges and new obstacles, let's address them with fresh solutions like real, genuine child participation.

Child, 17, France

The context. Thirty years have passed since the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by all EU countries. Under Article 12, it stipulates the right of all children to be heard and have their views given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. Article 24 in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union¹

recognizes the child's right to be heard and the European Commission's Recommendation on Investing in Children² asks for a mechanism that promotes children's participation in decision-making that affects their lives to be put in place.

The 'Evaluation of legislation, policy and practice on child participation in the European Union', published by the European Commission in 2015, concluded that "legislative arrangements relating to child participation vary considerably across the EU" and drew attention to "the gap that so often exists between legislation and practice". The Europe Kids Want survey³, conducted by Eurochild and UNICEF last year and gathering responses from over 20,000 children from all over the EU, reveals that only 43% of the children think that the EU makes their lives better. With regards to their participation, only 14.6% feel that adults listen to their opinions when making decisions in school and less than 8% feel that adults listen to their opinions when making decisions in their community.

¹<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT&from=EN>

²<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013H0112&from=EN>

³https://www.eurochild.org/fileadmin/public/05_Library/Thematic_priorities/05_Child_Participation/Eurochild/Europe_Kids_Want_Brochure.pdf



Bucharest EU Children's Declaration

During the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, in the first half of 2019, key decisions about the future of Europe are being made, shaping the next decade of the EU, and elections for a new Parliament and a new Commission are being organized.

This initiative started with the Romanian Children's Board - a child-led group, with members of different ages, from various cities, from urban and rural areas, growing up in families and in public care, with various ethnic backgrounds, and diverse experience in representation. For some, it is the first time our voices are reaching decision-makers. We reached out to children from other EU countries, met online and face to face and we consulted as many other children as we could. We are citizens of our countries and we are part of one fifth of the EU population under 18 years old. We are demanding that our voices be listened and considered and we are offering our commitment to participate in good faith, to build the future EU together with you.

The challenge. Participation starts in the family from the earliest age. Parents and guardians should be able to help us building self-trust and independence along with helping us understand the consequences of our actions. Parents and guardians should be able to encourage us to engage in our community and ask for our opinions to be listened to, valued, and used.

It is about matters that affect the children most and for which they have no opportunity to appeal. What would it feel like to have someone thinking instead of you and you to have no way to change this?

Child, 15, Germany

School is the place where we receive information, acquire knowledge, and develop skills. Therefore, we believe that it should become a place where we learn about participation and can exercise participation outside our family. This can only happen if, in school, we are involved in the education process as partners.

We should all have the right to participate, regardless of age, gender, origin, ethnicity, and ability. We should be learning how to be inclusive and support each other in an environment that is prepared to listen to all children. Opportunities should be created to support and encourage the participation of the most vulnerable children, whose voices are most often never heard.

The capacity to participate that we can develop in the family and in school should then be used in our communities. No public structure is too small or too big to involve us; any problem that may affect us could be translated into a child-friendly language and adapted to our level of understanding, so we can voice our opinion. Age limits and the age of emancipation should not be barriers to child participation and experiences from several countries show that this is possible.

The opportunity. Children represent over 20% of the EU population and we are, as our parents and decision makers say, the future of Europe. We are aware that, to be that future, we must be involved in the present as early as possible and we must be looked upon as a resource, not only as an investment. Supporting our participation could generate several results: citizens that are more prepared and ready



Bucharest EU Children's Declaration

to engage and contribute, an improved culture of participation, and an increased likelihood that the decisions that are made with our input will be implemented and have results.

We, children are more accountable and reliable than society gives us credit for. Give us the opportunity to participate and we can prove that and become better adults.

Child, 9, Romania

The culture of child participation can be built at all levels: family, community, local, regional, national and European levels. It can bring short and long-term benefits and can shape, in a meaningful way, the next level of civic engagement, reducing some of the risks that are now present at national and EU levels and shaping the future in a more acceptable and sustainable way. It is often said that

participation is complicated, expensive and difficult to measure and evaluate. Several good practices from different EU countries show, however, that participation is possible and sustainable, while the development of digital technologies and children's increased access to them can be used to facilitate and stimulate participation.

Civil society organizations and community organizations are already in place and, with structured and strategic investment, they can help boost children's participation the same way they have helped with citizen and community participation. Social dialogue structures that have been developed over the last decades can be improved to accommodate the dimension of child participation.

Our demands. We are asking for a clear roadmap for implementing the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the EU Charter on Human Rights, the Recommendations of the European Parliament and the European Commission related to child participation. We are asking that the recommendations of the European Commission's Report on Child Participation⁴ be implemented in a timely manner.

We are asking that clear and simple monitoring and evaluation mechanism be in place for equitable child participation and regular reports should be provided at local, national and EU levels. Any mechanism to report on child rights should have a dedicated section on child participation and a special day to celebrate child participation should be instituted at EU level.

We are asking that child participation be supported through dedicated programs, starting with pre-school and school to educate children about their right to participate and develop their skills related to participation. These should be complemented with building the capacity of parents and guardians to engage their own children. In parallel, programs aimed to include children into community consultation mechanisms should be initiated at local level. At national level, child participation spaces and mechanisms

More effort needs to be made to include children in decision making process because of the inherent power balance between us and adults. We control your future - listen to us. Child 17, UK

⁴ Evaluation of legislation, policy and practice on child participation in the European Union (EU) Final Report, European Commission March 2015



should be attached to all relevant consultation and decision-making processes that are now only reserved for adults. Parliaments should consider having an established mechanism for consulting children when legislation affecting them is being drafted.

We are asking that child participation become a horizontal principle guiding the investments made by EU. 'Nothing for children without child participation' should be the principle that would allow EU funding to be deployed for starting new and innovative ways to engage children into all levels of program development and to monitor the results of such an engagement.

We are asking that support for child participation platforms and forums be established at national and EU levels to inform children on political decisions and measures implemented by various national and international programs and projects, but also as a mechanism of scrutinizing children's opinions on various issues. We are asking that civil society is provided with support at national and EU level to be able to uphold, guide and monitor child participation. Legal formulas for involving children in civil society organizations as a way for them to participate should be designed to allow child participation.

We commend any authority at community, regional, national or EU level willing to seek our opinions, but we ask that this be part of a process that is structured, continuous, meaningful, respectful and protective of our rights and values, and that uses our inputs. We are more than our ad hoc presence at public events and the nice pictures of us smiling together with decision-makers. Often, when children are involved, they are not properly informed beforehand, nor do they receive feedback on their participation's contribution.

Our commitments. The present generation of children, who has already demonstrated its capacity of analyzing and taking action on the pressing issues of today (Fridays for future, the #NeverAgain March, results of Europe We Want survey and the popularity of U-Report), can bring not only honesty, creativity, common-sense, experience and insight, but also an objective and non-partisan contribution. As children and future adults in our societies and in the EU, we are directly concerned about how the future is being shaped and committed to contributing in a positive way.

We would welcome any participation opportunities offered at all levels and the experience with the group involved in this process shows that we can provide our inputs and contribution from the community level up to the level of national and EU conversations. Creating the space and culture for child participation will allow us to make a meaningful change in the inter-generational dialogue to facilitate synergies between generations, to learn from each other, and to shift the so-called "conflict" between generations into a bridge between generations.

We do not have the life experience adults have, we have imagination, determination and we have a thousand questions for which we have answers. The first to mention would be "what if?" What if we make child participation a reality? How could that not lead to a better Europe? Child, 13, Romania

We stand for participation as part of our commitment to giving back to our families and our



Bucharest EU Children's Declaration

communities a part of what was invested in us, as early as possible. We stand for participation as we believe that this is one of the ways to make us better EU citizens in a better Europe.



Bucharest EU Children's Declaration