

Working with Child and Youth Advisory Boards

Lessons learned from National Committees



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Introduction

Over the past years, a growing number of National Committees have started investing in the participation of children and young people in their own governance structures to ensure their work truly considers the priorities of children and young people. Often, though not always, this happens through the establishment of formal child and youth advisory boards that may be institutionalized as part of the National Committee's structure or statute.

This document summarizes some of the existing examples of child and youth advisory boards within National Committees. At the end of this document, you can find a compilation of lessons learned across the different country experiences. However, it is important to remember that participation does not and should not be limited to formal participation structures that are always by nature limited to a small group of children and young people.

This document shows that, over the years, National Committees have each found different ways to establish, support and engage with child and youth advisory boards in their own work. All of them are marked by participation happening at different levels: consultative, collaborative and child- and youth-led participation are all part of the toolbox. All National Committees with established child and youth advisory boards share a commitment to making participation inclusive, meaningful, and integrated across all areas of work – including outside the traditional spheres of advocacy. There is also a growing commitment to giving children and young people a seat at the table where decisions are made by inviting them to participate in, or regularly interact with, National Committee boards.

All these examples also demonstrate that meaningful participation requires dedicated resources, an organization-wide commitment, time, and a change in working culture. However, when done well, it adds a lot of value to the work of National Committees to advocate for child rights. Not least because it demonstrates that we are ready to walk the talk.

If you wish to learn more about the principles of quality child participation, please refer to the resources listed at the end of this document. It is also important to remember that child safeguarding should be a central consideration in any activities involving children. You can find key child safeguarding resources also at the end of the document.

Country examples

The United Kingdom: Youth Advisory Board

Start date: 2019

Number of members: 8 children and young people, aged 14-18 years on application date

Contact person: Jess Bool, Strategic Lead – Youth Engagement, JessicaB@unicef.org.uk

More information: [Website](#)



Strategy

The UNICEF UK Youth Advisory Board (YAB) includes eight children and young people from across the United Kingdom. Members apply to join the YAB through the UNICEF UK website. At the beginning of their term, young people meet at the UNICEF office in London over the course of two days to agree on priorities and projects for the coming year. With the onset of COVID-19, meetings shifted online, and take place once every two

weeks. In between meetings, the group communicates through Telegram and email.

As we emerge from the pandemic the group began to meet in-person: four times a year, with fortnightly Teams calls in between.

The aim from the beginning is to offer the members opportunities to engage in as many opportunities as possible, both internally and externally, while giving each member the opportunity to engage in the opportunities they are most interested in. The YAB is divided into different thematic working groups on topics the young people find important, such as mental health and climate change.

The group has made an important contribution to the National Committee's approach to child and youth participation. The group has developed staff training materials to facilitate youth engagement across the National Committee, as well as participated in staff recruitment (for example of the new Executive Director).

"It has been a genuinely amazing opportunity to do some properly good work that genuinely feels like it matters. I hope other young people have the opportunity to participate as well."

- UNICEF UK Youth Advisory Board member

The group played a critical role in the recruitment, selection and onboarding process of the National Committee's new Youth Campaigns Officer and Executive Director who began meeting them within their first two weeks in post.

The first cohort completed their term in November 2021 and had an in-person meeting with the new group, to 'hand over'. The new group will be in post, unless any of their personal circumstances change, until late 2023.

Results achieved

The YAB has become a central part of UNICEF UK's advocacy efforts from the Convention on the Rights of the Child periodic review process, to the organization's response to the impact of the pandemic on children and young people.

Some of the most successful activations include an [open letter](#) written by the YAB and signed by over 16,000 campaigners, calling for a children's address in response to the pandemic. It was re-purposed and published in the [Daily Telegraph](#), and led to sector-wide collaboration on the issue including 150 children and young peoples' organizations. Content on the pandemic produced by the YAB also performed very well on UNICEF UK's social media channels.

The group were actively engaged in the National Committee's climate change campaign and ahead of COP26, the group wrote an open letter to world leaders that was signed by 25 high-profile UNICEF UK supporters and published in the Times.

A year before COP26 took place the YAB collaborated with their counterparts at UNICEF Australia to create content which they shared on World Children's Day. They stood in solidarity with young people around the world, calling on decision makers to recognize the impact of the climate crisis on children.

Resources used

The group is supported by a full-time staff member focused on child and youth participation. Additional resources for travel, accommodation, and potential personal care and translation needs, are budgeted for annually.

["I think we've had a really significant impact within the organization - helping it move further towards a participatory, non-tokenistic approach for youth engagement and promoting youth engagement generally."](#)

- [UNICEF UK Youth Advisory Board member](#)

The Netherlands: Youth Panel

Start date: 2013

Number of members: 15 young people, aged 13 to 18

Contact person: Myrna Lemmen, Specialist, Child Rights Education and Participation, mlemmen@unicef.nl

More information: [Website](#)

Strategy

The Youth Panel of the Dutch National Committee includes 15 young people, between the ages of 13 to 18. Selection of the members is done by the sitting Youth Panel in May. All members commit for a year at a time, and members can stay for a maximum of three years. Reach-out to interested members is done mainly through social media.



The group meets once a month for a dedicated 'Youth Panel day' (that lasts for a full day), but members often also take part in additional (online) activities.

Ensuring the diversity of the group was a clear commitment for the National Committee from the beginning, and young people are instructed to consider the diversity of the group when selecting new members.

On domestic advocacy, members of the Youth Panel are actively engaged in the Committee's advocacy priorities, including mental well-being, healthy food and nutrition, migration, and COVID-19. In pairs or smaller groups, they work directly with the relevant advocacy leads. They give advice, attend events, and participate in meetings with decision-makers. They also contribute to the Committee's youth engagement activities, such as Speak up, the Youth Challenge, and Child Rights Education projects.

Apart from contributing actively to the National Committee's advocacy, the Panel also has its own project for every year. From 2019 to 2020, this was a workshop on mental well-being for schools, and the following year the Panel produced interactive videos to raise awareness on discrimination. This year's topic focuses on young refugees in the Netherlands. The Panel also manages its own Instagram account.

Finally, the Panel also contributes to the National Committee's internal governance. It meets regularly with the Committee's board, and with the Board of Directors. The Committee is working on identifying ways to make this interaction even more impactful.

Currently, three panel members are working with one board member to share ideas on how they can support each other's work.

Results achieved

According to the National Committee, it is challenging to attribute specific results to the work of the Panel. The young people have influenced and impacted the work of the National Committee (and beyond) on many levels, but direct impact is difficult to show. Some highlights are:

- Two youth panel members joining the EU Child Rights Strategy consultations and speaking at the high-level launch event.
- Youth panel interviewing high-level politicians during Dutch elections.
- Advice and support to the National Committee's advocacy on mental health.
- Advice and assistance on the National Committee's research on healthy food, and one of the members personally handing over the research to the Minister of Health.

Resources used

The panel is facilitated by a dedicated coach (approx. one day a week) whose role is to support the young people in their activities. Other staff (such as the Specialist on Child Rights Education and Participation) also support their activities. The Panel has an annual budget of 20,000 euros for travel, food, communications materials, and external training.

Germany: Youth Council

Start date: 2014

Contact person: Jessica Hanschur, Initiatives and Consultation Adolescent Engagement, jessica.hanschur@unicef.de

Number of members: 12 children, aged 14 to 17 at the time of election



Strategy

UNICEF Germany's Youth Council includes twelve young people aged 14 to 17. Members are elected every two years by youth volunteers at the National Committee's Youth Festival. Often, members are a mix of young people with previous volunteering experience with UNICEF and those who have not worked with the organization before. The working atmosphere and surroundings initiated by the National Committee colleagues responsible aim to make every single member feel safe, welcome, accepted, and free to bring forward topics and opinions at any time. During the first meeting the youth council develops a short 'code of conduct' on how they would like to work together for the duration of their two years in office.

Since 2021, the council is officially recognized as part of the National Committee's statute. Its role is to advise the National Committee on actions and decisions that affect young people or young volunteers, support and participate in the National Committee's youth events as well as advocacy and media moments and participate in the organization's communications work. The group meets in person twice a year, and via Zoom every six weeks. Regular updates are shared via a WhatsApp group.

Results achieved:

The work with the Youth Council is regularly evaluated together with the young people. At the end of the year, the National Committee and the Council look back and reflect on best practices and learnings. Here the young people look at their own work with each other as well as with the National Committee.

The work is again evaluated collaboratively after the children and young people complete their two-year term to formulate best practices and lessons learned to inform the work with the next cohort. In the case of media and advocacy events, there is an evaluation together with the relevant colleagues involved.

Some activities that the young people have contributed to recently include international and national events; meetings and events with decision-makers; advising the Committee on its new strategic plan priorities; and co-creation of a social media campaign, titled #GenZukunft ('Generation Future') that also informed the National Committee's advocacy priorities around federal elections.

Participation is a key focus of the Committee's new strategic plan for 2022 to 2025. The Committee is now working on a participation strategy to support the participation of children and young people across programming, advocacy, research, and supporter engagement.

Resources used:

Two staff members are responsible for organizing, structuring, and supporting the youth council. Both are part of the Department of Adolescent Engagement and have other tasks within the Department besides the Youth Council. Additionally, colleagues from other Departments support the Council selectively, depending on the occasion and topic, e.g., in preparing for media or advocacy moments.

There is a dedicated budget, managed by the two responsible colleagues, which is used for workshops, training, travel, and materials for the young people.

Iceland: Children's Council

Start date: 2008

Number of members: currently 10 members

Contact person: Pétur Hjörvar Porkelsson, Child participation specialist, petur@unicef.is

Strategy:

The Icelandic National Committee's Children's Council has been active since 2008. Applications for joining the Council are open twice a year to all children and young people aged 14 to 18 (with the maximum number of members being 15). New members are selected by young people themselves. Previously, the selection process included an interview, which the National Committee has decided together with the young people to abandon to make participation less intimidating and more inclusive. For the same reason, the National Committee has also decided not to create designated roles within the Council.

The Council is formally recognized as an important part of the National Committee's activities, and representatives of the Council have sat on the Committee's board for several years (one of them has a voting right, while the other is an observer). This has however required investment in capacity building of both children and the staff and board members. This year, the Committee has planned for a training on participation and child safeguarding for all staff and board members.

Over the years, the strategic aim of the Council has shifted from an advisory role to a more youth-led one. However, following a drive towards making the Council fully child-led, the National Committee noticed that a certain level of adult support and engagement is needed to make participation meaningful, inclusive, and safe, while leaving young people the space to define their own priorities and projects. The Council, while independent, is associated with the National Committee, and their activities need to be related to UNICEF's overall mission to promote child rights. The National Committee is now in the process of spelling out its advocacy and programming strategy, which will be done together with the Council.

The Council meets once or twice a month at the National Committee's premises together with the child participation focal point. Responsibility for coordinating and documenting the meetings rotates monthly, as young people found having formal leadership roles within the Council led to uneven distribution of responsibilities. Priority projects are decided at the beginning of the Council year in September. The Council communicates about its work through Instagram and its own Facebook page.

This year, the Council has focused on non-discrimination, and worked with the communications team and other youth activist groups to script and produce a [campaign video](#) for World Children's Day 2021. The National Committee is working to find ways in which the Council could further contribute to different priorities and activities in the entire

National Committee beyond the Advocacy and Child Rights Education teams, and plans are being developed on their involvement in this year's telethon.

Results achieved:

Over the years, the Council has contributed to numerous successful campaigns and advocacy activities in areas such as mental health (see [youth-led campaign video from 2016](#)), fundraising, discussions with decision-makers, and the World Children's Day campaign mentioned above.

Most importantly, successful engagement with young people has led to a change in perception on the importance (and feasibility) of child and youth participation within the National Committee. The National Committee is now committed to offer more children and young people opportunities to be heard beyond the Council. Participation is a key pillar in the National Committee's new strategy, and a shared commitment across the Committee.

Resources used:

The Council has an annual budget of 200,000 ISK (approx. 1,600 USD) that they can use for their own projects. It is supported by a focal point focusing on child participation, who provides overall direction, support and feedback. The focal spends around 2 to 3 hours every week supporting the Council, with an aim to increase this to approximately 25 per cent of the working time.

However, work with the Council benefits from pooling resources from the entire National Committee. The child participation focal point acts as a bridge between the Council and other teams within the National Committee and gives ownership of co-creating projects with young people to the relevant technical focal points.

Australia: Youth Ambassador programme

Start date: 2014

Number of members: 12, aged 14 to 24

Contact person: Angus Lonergan, Child and Youth Engagement Manager, aloneran@unicef.org.au and Lizzie Heath, Child and Youth Engagement Coordinator lheath@unicef.org.au

More information: [Youth Ambassador programme toolkit 2022](#) and [programme website](#)

Strategy:

UNICEF Australia established the one-year Youth Ambassador programme in 2014. The programme has slightly changed between cohorts of Ambassadors (including shortening the term to one from two years), but once a year, the National Committee recruits a group of 12 young activists to work alongside the Committee on advocacy, while bringing their own lived experiences into the issues UNICEF advocates for.

The application to join the programme is open for all children and young people aged 14 to 24 across the country, focusing on their interests, experience, and ambitions for change. Last year, more than 250 children and young people applied, and the final cohort was selected through a round of interviews to ensure representation from all regions of the country, while paying attention to ensuring a diversity of backgrounds. Reach-out to children and young people was done mainly through diverse youth services across the country – including organizations working with indigenous groups or children with disabilities. However, this skewed the applicants slightly towards older adolescents and young adults, leading the team to reconsider further reach out to schools in the future.

Usually, the programme kicks off with an in-person induction training and planning meeting, but due to COVID-19 these have been moved online. Engagement with the young people in-between meetings on Teams and via email. The coordinators also make sure to take to meet with the Ambassadors one-on-one regularly to get to know them and map their interests.

The Child and Youth Engagement Manager plays a key role in identifying opportunities for young people to engage – for example, to join the Committee's board meetings, or representing the organization in external events. The Committee is also working on bringing the Young Ambassadors together with the National Committee's National Ambassadors and framing the Young Ambassadors as much spokespeople as adults.

While the team has found this ‘opportunistic’ approach to participation has been very successful, they are also working on institutionalizing the role of young people in the Committee’s governance, as well as spelling out the Ambassadors’ contribution to the Committee’s broader programming strategy. Introducing child and youth participation training into staff induction trainings has also been discussed.

[...] Sometimes, UA [UNICEF Australia] was the reason why I was getting up in the morning. It kept me going in some really hard times. UA really went above and beyond in every aspect. When we came to the office, our faces on posters around the office, they knew our names, when they saw our face, they had a blurb about us, we were a part of something and grew our confidence. It wasn’t just being a trophy child. You were actually doing something which was really important.’

- UNICEF Australia Youth Ambassador

The main project of the Young Ambassadors is to work an annual piece of research and consultations with children and young people across Australia. The results of those consultations are compiled into a report, and Ambassadors present them to key decision-makers. In the future, the plan is to focus these reports on a particular theme every year and empower young people to take charge of drafting policy recommendations to tackle the key issues arising from their research, along with experts and community leaders.

In addition to the Young Ambassador programme, the National Committee is managing a Steering Committee with young people for a foundation partnership. Engaging children and young people throughout the National Committee’s decision-making is still in the works.

Results achieved:

In the past year, the Committee has invested in further measuring the impact of child and youth participation. An external evaluation of the programme showed that the programme has a significant positive impact on the children and young people themselves, but also in influencing the National Committee’s policy agenda and raising awareness about children’s issues, and UNICEF, among the general public.

The Young Ambassadors have played a central role in the National Committee’s advocacy efforts, and their annual research reports have sparked nation-wide interest. Each year, the Young Ambassadors meet with thousands of children in their communities to find out what matters to young people. This youth-led research is conducted in partnership with design agency DrawHistory, followed up by a series of ‘policy hackathons’ to turn the findings into concrete recommendations. The young people then raise these issues with the nation’s key decision-makers.

As an example, in June 2021, the Young Ambassadors launched ‘[Children’s Voices in a Changing World](#)’, the final report of a three-part series of youth-led research released during the COVID-19 pandemic. The surveys gathered the opinions of more than 4,000

children and young people aged seven to 20 years old from around the nation, over a 12-month period. These findings were presented to the country leaders in Canberra.

Resources used:

The Young Ambassador programme is supported by a full-time Child and Youth Engagement Manager, as well as a part-time staff member. The programme benefits from private sector support from IKEA and BUPA. In addition to IKEA and BUPA's global commitments, which the National Committee continues to prioritize, the Committee has been working with them domestically to drive staff engagement and awareness of the National Committee's child rights work in Australia. This has resulted in some additional financial support for advocacy initiatives in Australia which include the Young Ambassador programme and a Youth Forum event.

France: National and Territorial Youth Councils

Start date: 2019

Number of members: 25 (and 25 additional deputies, aged between 13 to 26 years for this mandate (membership is open to children and young people from 10 to 26). Altogether more than 180 children and young people engaged in territorial UNICEF Youth Councils.

Contact person: Noémie Hervé, Youth Engagement Officer, nherve@unicef.fr

More information: [UNICEF France's youth engagement portal](#)

Strategy:

The French National Committee established its national Youth Council in 2019 with an aim to engage children and young people at the national level. The work with the Council is strongly anchored in the Committee's vast volunteer network that includes more than 6,000 members participating in [25 local committees](#) across the country. More than half of the members of these local volunteer groups are less than 18 years old, and the Committee wanted to offer them a way to be more engaged in their decision-making processes.

Following feedback from young people from the previous Youth Council cohort (2019-2021), the National Committee has strengthened collaboration with the local volunteer committees by establishing a territorial Youth Council in all 25 local committees and ensuring there is a representative from all those groups in the national Youth Council ([see guidance on selecting candidates for local focal points](#)). Each member also has a deputy from the same local group. An adult volunteer, trained by the National Committee, supports each territorial Council. The National Committee organizes a monthly call for these adult facilitators to support coordination between territorial and national levels.

Since the beginning, the national Youth Council members have been elected by other volunteers for a two-year term. This continues to be the case: each local volunteer committee selects two candidates for the national Council, one of which is selected by the National Committee as the actual member and one as a deputy depending on their background and interests. In this selection process, the National Committee seeks to ensure a diverse representation of young people.

The national Youth Council members act as representatives of children and young people nationally, participate in the committee's projects and initiatives and lead their own advocacy project. Recent projects have included [sexual education](#) and mental health. The National Committee is now seeking to ensure that the young people's projects are more closely linked to the Committee's national advocacy priorities by engaging them in internal working groups and moving from a more event-focused and 'community mobilizer' approach to more programmatic engagement. The Council is already engaged in the national steering group for the Child Friendly Cities Initiative, different advocacy events and meetings with decision-makers. The children and young people also play an important role in mobilizing other volunteers from their local committees around UNICEF

priorities. For example, it is very important that their advocacy campaign is also picked up by all territorial Youth Councils, which allows them to have a broader impact across the country.

The National Committee offers a variety of trainings for the young people throughout their term. The national Youth Council comes together for a weekend-long meeting and workshop three times a year. Communication between meetings happens mostly through WhatsApp, video conference calls and email. The group is divided into smaller working groups. A specificity of the French Youth Council is that it includes children and young people from a very broad age range – from 13 to 26 years in the current Council. Although this requires extra efforts from the side of adults to ensure everyone can contribute meaningfully and safely, but the National Committee sees that this variety in ages brings real added value.

The National Committee is now in the process of rethinking the engagement of children and young people in its own governance structures – for example, by lowering the minimum age for board representation from the current 21 years. Whenever a new Youth Council is introduced, the team facilitates an exchange between the children and young people and the National Committee's leadership. They also meet annually with the Committee's board. At the beginning of its mandate, the Youth Council also gives a speech at the Committee's annual meeting for the whole volunteer network. The children and young people are very present in the Committee's internal communications and have their own Instagram account. Whenever new colleagues engage with the young people on their projects, they are trained and supported on both participation and safeguarding.

Results achieved:

The Youth Council has changed the National Committee's culture in terms of opening both staff and volunteers' eyes to participation. The young people have pushed the Committee to advocate on and explore partnerships around new issues that are important to young people, such as a partnership with '[Planning Familial](#)' on sexual education. The campaign led to a meeting with a Member of the Parliament, who raised a written question about the application of the legislation on sexual education.

The engagement of the children and young people has also opened new doors for participation beyond the National Committee itself. A government official invited the Youth Council to participate in a national working group on mental health following their intervention at the World Summit on mental health, organized by the French Government. This first successful engagement has now led to many other opportunities for child participation within the government, going beyond the members of the Youth Council.

Resources used:

The National Committee has a full time Youth Engagement Officer who supports the National Youth Council and other participation work in the Committee. Since November 2021, the Committee also has another staff member focusing on participation and youth engagement. The Committee has a budget for operational costs (approx. 30,000 euros annually) and additional funds for youth-led campaigns. Each of the local Youth Councils also has a small operational budget but is also supported to raise funds for their own projects externally.

Spain: Diverse advisory groups

Start date: 2018

Number of members: around 15 children and young people engaged in the current advisory group

Contact person: Silvia Casanovas, Child and Youth Participation Specialist, scasanovas@unicef.es

More information: [Website](#)

Strategy:

UNICEF Spain's work with children and young people is strongly anchored in the Committee's local presence and collaboration with local child and youth councils through the Child Friendly Cities Initiative. Until the end of last year, the Committee did not have an institutionalized advisory body, but invited children and young people to form project-based groups where children have had the opportunity to engage in projects that they found meaningful. These groups have included:

- A '[driving group](#)' of children and young people from local child and youth councils who lead the organization of the national meetings of child and youth councils that the National Committee organizes bi-annually with its Child Friendly Cities network. Children and young people (between 15 and 20) from across the country have defined the themes, methodology and activities of the last two state meetings. Following the events, the driving group has presented the conclusions of the meetings to political decision-makers. For example, in 2020, they presented the conclusions of the fifth state meeting to the [Secretary of State for the 2030 Agenda](#) and to the [joint commission of the Congress and the Senate to monitor the Sustainable Development Strategy](#).
- An 'advisory group' of children and young people who co-created the fifth bi-annual conference of Child Friendly Cities, focusing on child participation. In addition to actively contributing to the conference agenda, they [organized a parallel workshop](#) for children and young people. This group has continued to be active beyond the conference, for example by organizing online sessions for children during the COVID-19 lockdowns and advising the National Committee on its recent guidelines on child participation.
- A 'youth group', active since 2020, that provides opportunities for children and young people over 15 years old to continue being engaged after their mandates in local child and youth councils. This group has worked with UNICEF for example as spokespeople in [events](#), and [EU-level consultations](#).

These groups have also worked on joined projects, such as an environmental assembly in 2021. However, following feedback from the young people themselves, the Committee has now consolidated these different groups into one advisory group that works with UNICEF when opportunities arise. Geographical, age and socio-economic diversity and

strong links to the local child and youth participation groups have been important to the success of these groups and continue to be so today.

Results achieved:

Working with children and young people has had a positive impact on the work of the National Committee and helped ensure that children's voices are central to all activities related to the Child Friendly Cities Initiative. For example, ahead of World Children's Day 2021, a group of children (titled 'League for the Planet') worked with the National Committee to design [materials on the environment](#) for local activations.

Through these participatory structures, children have been involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of state activities that have culminated in meetings with public authorities. The National Committee's strong leadership in supporting local child and youth participation structures has even led to the establishment of a government-supported national children's council and a greater recognition of child and youth participation by government actors. This state-led children's council is supported by the National Committee and other children's organizations.

Resources used:

The Child Friendly Cities team has one full-time staff member dedicated to child and youth participation who supports the advisory groups and other activities related to participation. The team is supported by an annual grant from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Agenda 2030.

Lessons learned

Commitment and resourcing

- A long-term commitment to participation is needed to make sure that opportunities are regularly available. However, be flexible and ready to jump on opportunities to make young people's voices heard.
- Ensure you have a dedicated resource person on participation within the National Committee. This 1) ensures that participation is not seen as an 'add-on' and 2) builds trust with the young people.
- Give ownership of supporting child and youth participation to colleagues across the organization. With the right capacity building and support, responsibility for supporting children and young people in engaging in different opportunities across the National Committee can be divided.
- Take advantage of the UNICEF network – from the sharing of best practice to the use of common resources, there is a lot of learning to draw on!
- Although much can be achieved online, regular in-person meetings are crucial to fostering team spirit. Consider this, and the required time and budget, in your planning. Dedicate ample time for team-building and social activities, especially in the beginning.

Organizational change

- Internal change takes time. A clear strategy or vision, championed by the senior management, is key to integrating child and youth participation in the National Committee's working culture.
- Identify allies within the organization early on. Introducing child and youth participation is a gradual shift, and not everything can be achieved at once. Find colleagues who are passionate about participation and open to collaborating with children and young people.
- Invest time in communicating about the impact of child and youth participation internally. Remind colleagues that advisory boards are groups of volunteers who choose which activities they participate in, not focus groups that can be consulted at any time and any topic.
- Young people themselves also play a key role in demonstrating the value of participation. Do not hesitate to invite them to take part and educate staff about participation and working with children and young people.
- Participation in formal decision-making structures such as the board can be intimidating for young people. This requires capacity building for both children and adults. Onboarding new members can take time.

Meaningful engagement

- Be conscious of tokenism. Opportunities need to be meaningful, offer a tangible quantitative and qualitative impact, and support learning.
- Offering children and young people their own projects is important to foster their motivation, ownership, and space for creating something on their own. It also helps ensure that young people are able to achieve something concrete and tangible during their term, as achieving advocacy results can sometimes be a painstakingly slow process from their perspective. Readily available adult support, however, is important to guide them in seeing through their projects and linking them to the broader advocacy agenda of the National Committee.
- While leaving young people space to define their own agenda and interests, build as much links to the National Committee's agenda as possible. Most impact can be achieved by engaging young people around UNICEF's advocacy priorities. Consider bringing them into internal working groups, contributing to your strategy development work, and offering perspectives on how to engage children and young people more broadly in your engagement with the public.
- Investment in diversity is important – not only from a child rights perspective, but also to ensure the group brings in perspectives that may otherwise be overlooked. Young people themselves also place a lot of value in diversity. Consider this in the way young people are recruited. Current members can also play a role in selecting the new cohort.
- When there are both children and young adults involved, pay special attention to safeguarding implications.
- While a dedicated advisory board brings a lot of added value, remember to also think of whether they are always the right group to consult. Are they the experts in an issue you would like to collect children's perspectives on? Are there other youth groups out there that should also be considered?
- Remember to regularly collect feedback from participating children and young people and use this feedback to continuously improve the process.

Capacity building and support

- Learning and capacity building are key to meaningful engagement. Consider delivering specific sessions to upskill the group throughout their mandate. Bring in colleagues, or external experts, with specific skills and knowledge to support the young people.
- Consider ways in which former youth advisory board members can continue contributing to UNICEF's work after their term. This may include for example young trustee/board member trainings, whereby young people can transition to board member roles in the future.

Child safeguarding

- As with all work that relates to child and youth participation, child safeguarding should be a key consideration in the work with child and youth councils. The National Committee's child safeguarding policies and standards should be followed in all activities with children.
- Any activities with children should be risk assessed, and mitigations to put in place to address these risks. Each activity should also have its own child safeguarding lead who children and adults alike can reach out to.
- Think for example of:
 - **The platforms** on which children will be communicating and the spaces they will be meeting: Are they safe and child-friendly?
 - **The people** who are 1) participating as children and young people and 2) facilitating this work as adults: Are supporting adults sufficiently vetted and trained? Is there a dedicated child safeguarding focal point for the group? How are barriers to enable the participation of diverse, or particularly at-risk, children and young people overcome?
 - **The working methods applied:** Are staff supported while working on evenings and weekends to accommodate children's schedules? Staff should not be left in situations where they cannot access support or where they will be left supervising children alone.
 - **The frameworks and guidance in place to protect children:** Does the National Committee have a safeguarding guidance in place? Are staff members trained on child safeguarding? Is there a code of conduct in place? How about the young people themselves - what information have they been given and what behaviors have they signed up to?
 - **Accountability and evaluation:** Is feedback regularly collected from children, also from a child safeguarding perspective? Is their feedback taken into consideration?

Key resources

- UNICEF: [ENGAGED AND HEARD! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement](#) (Also includes resources on child safeguarding)
- UNICEF: [UNICEF Tip Sheets for Adults, Adolescents and Youth on Adolescent and Youth Participation in Different Settings](#)
- UNICEF: [Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation](#)
- Eurochild: [We are here: a child participation toolbox](#)

While National Committees will have their own safeguarding policies and procedures in place, UNICEF's policy and standards may also be useful for reference. See for example:

- UNICEF: [Online Child Safeguarding Training](#)
- UNICEF: [Standards on child safeguarding in interactions through public-facing websites, social media & digital apps](#)
- UNICEF: [Standard on child safeguarding in multimedia - photo and video](#)
- UNICEF: [Standard on child safeguarding in media engagement and interactions](#)