

When involving children and young people in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers

Principles and approaches



Nordic Council
of Ministers

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Nordic Council of Ministers

Nordens Hus

Ved Stranden 18

DK-1061 Copenhagen

www.norden.org

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INTRODUCTION

The well-being of children and young people, and their ability to exercise their rights, is a pre-requisite for the continued development of the Nordic region. The Council of Ministers will help to ensure that the Nordic region is a leader and pioneer in the work to create a society in which the rights and different perspectives of children and young people are respected and contribute to the development of society. The Nordic Council of Ministers will work from the perspective that all children and young people are important here and now, not just in the future. Children and young people are therefore priority target groups for the Nordic Council of Ministers, so the Council will integrate a children's rights and youth perspective in its work.

The ambition for greater integration of a children's rights and youth perspective also brings a responsibility to ensure that the work is based on a number of guiding principles. There must be a common minimum level of the involvement of children and young people and, above all, the work must be carried out in a way that protects and promotes children's safety and security. This document is relevant for all situations in which children and young people are contacted or involved in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers, for example on a panel (participant), in a focus group (expressing their own

opinions or representing the views of a group of children and young people), or featuring in the media.

In this document, the Nordic Council of Ministers establishes common starting points and guidelines for integrating a children's rights and youth perspective in its work. The Nordic Committee for Children and Young People (NORDBUK) and advisors with special responsibility for children and young people in the Nordic Council of Ministers can always be contacted for support in the work.

Within the Nordic Council of Ministers, the target group comprises all children and young people aged 0-25. This is somewhat broader than the definition applied in, for example, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which concerns individuals up to age 18.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES WHEN INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE WORK OF THE NORDIC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

On the basis of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Nordic Council of Ministers will work to protect and promote the rights of children and young people, and enable them to exercise these rights and participate in society. In its work, the Nordic Council of Ministers will therefore apply the following fundamental principles in all work that involves children and young people. The principles are taken from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12 (2009), and comprise fundamental conditions that should guide all processes in which children and young people are involved.

THE PROCESSES MUST BE:

Transparent and informative. Children and young people must be provided with full, accessible, diversity-sensitive and age-appropriate information.

Voluntary. Children and young people should never be coerced into expressing views against their wishes.

Respectful. Children's and young people's views must be treated with respect, and children should be provided with opportunities to initiate ideas and activities.

Relevant. The issues on which children and young people have the right to express their views must be of real relevance to their lives and enable them to draw on their knowledge, skills and abilities.

Child friendly. Environments and working methods should be adapted to children's capacities.

Inclusive. Children and young people are not a homogeneous group, and participation must provide for equality of opportunity for all, without discrimination on any grounds.

Supported by training. Adults need preparation, skills and support to facilitate children's participation effectively. Children and young people who are involved as trainers and facilitators also need specific knowledge, such as awareness of their rights, and training in organising meetings, dealing with the media, public speaking, and advocacy.

Safe and sensitive for risk. Expression of views may involve risks. Adults have a responsibility to minimise the risk to children of violence, exploitation or any other negative consequence of their participation.

Accountable. In any research or consultation process, children and young people must be informed as to how their views have been interpreted, and provided with the opportunity to influence the analysis. Children should also be given the opportunity to put forward complaints regarding the outcome of the analysis.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE WORK OF THE NORDIC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

All units within the Nordic Council of Ministers are themselves responsible for integrating a perspective of children's rights and young people in their work. Naturally, areas vary in how prominent a children's rights and youth perspective can and needs to be. In those cases where employees in the Nordic Council of Ministers or partners have identified a need to involve young people, it is also important that this is done in a consistent manner. Through the following minimum requirements, the Nordic Council of Ministers wants to establish the lowest common denominator that is to apply in situations where children and young people are involved or are consulted in the work.

BEFORE INVOLVEMENT

- In initiatives where children or young people should be consulted, time is allocated for planning the participation, with a budget that enables this in accordance with the guidelines presented in this document. This may concern, for example, time for consultation and expenses for interpreters and accompanying adults.
- The criteria for choosing which children and young people are to be involved are clear and transparent (see next section).

- Child-appropriate information has been produced and translated into relevant languages.
- The role that the children and young people are expected to take is clearly described, and the role of the Nordic Council of Ministers in relation to the activity in question is also clear.
- The premises in which children are involved are child friendly and accessible for all children, young people and adults.

DURING INVOLVEMENT

- The children who are involved have the same opportunities as adults to make contributions, give presentations, or make their voices heard, and their input is documented in the same way as that of other participants.
- Children can express themselves in their mother tongue (including sign language and/or text interpretation), regardless of whether or not an interpreter is needed.
- In cases where children will be seen or speak in the media, it is important to ensure that the children understand what this means and are aware of how it can be used and viewed.
- Those people who are in direct contact with children in the consultation have the experience and skills to meet children in an inclusive and non-discriminatory way.

- In situations where children and young people of different ages are involved, it is important that there are designated adults whose focus is to take care of the younger children so that this responsibility does not fall upon the older children.
- The child's best interests are in focus throughout the participation process.

AFTER INVOLVEMENT

- The children's experience of the involvement is assessed, and the participating children are asked to share their experiences.
- The children are given feedback on what their involvement has led to, or how their involvement has been considered.

Remember: There is not just ONE child and youth perspective. Like adults, children and young people are a heterogeneous group, with many different perspectives and experiences. Consequently, a child or young person can never be assumed to speak on behalf of children and young people as a group. Only children and young people who are officially representing an organisation can be expected to speak from anything other than their own perspective.

INFORMED SELECTION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

In all situations where children and young people are involved in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers, it is important to make informed choices concerning WHICH children and young people are invited to participate. As in all other cases, the selection is based on the purpose of the involvement. In addition to the guiding principles, the following issues must be considered in the selection process.

RELEVANCE and COMPETENCE: What are the children and young people expected to contribute to or gain from their involvement? Here, it is important to ensure that the purpose of the involvement is clear – otherwise it is also difficult to identify which children and young people should be involved.

REPRESENTATIVE OF A GROUP or individual EXPERTS: Are the children and young people expected to speak on behalf of a larger group of children and young people? If so, you should ask the child and youth organisations that select their representatives in democratic structures. There is a broad spectrum of organisations with different types of focus and core activities. If you want to highlight a specific issue, you can instead invite children and young people who are experts on that particular issue – regardless of whether they are part of an organisation or not. It is very impor-

tant to make clear, both in selection and communication, whether the participants are representing themselves, an organisation or a group of young people.

DIVERSITY: It is important to involve children and young people with different backgrounds and life experiences. Here, parameters such as gender, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs, disabilities, sexual orientation or age can be considered.

AGE: The target ages of children and young people that are most important to engage with naturally depends on the issue. In addition to the relevance of age to the issue, the level of maturity may also need to be included in the equation. It is generally easiest to select older children and young people for involvement, as they may require less extensive adaptations than younger children, but even the youngest children have the right to express their opinion and have it respected.

OUTREACH CHANNELS: What channels can be used to reach out to the target children and young people? Methods of engaging with children and young people must be identified. The first question is, where are they? Examples may be schools, social media or civil society organisations. Often, a specific actor may become the key person for effective outreach – a head teacher, for example, can forward an enquiry to many teachers, and thereby reach out to children and young people.

GUIDELINES FOR PROTECTING AND PROMOTING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

In addition to ensuring that children and young people are involved in a well-considered and respectful way in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers, it is also crucial that their safety is protected and promoted during their involvement. The Nordic Council of Ministers applies the following safeguarding principles, establishing the responsibility of employees and Council partners to act in a way that protects and promotes children's safety, and drawing attention to situations where children and young people may be at risk of harm.

Particularly when children and young people under 18 are involved in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers, you as employee or partner have the following responsibilities:

- 1.** Provide children and young people with the opportunity to give written consent to their personal information being shared. Where children are too young to give consent themselves, provide their parents/guardians with the opportunity to give written consent to the child's personal information being shared.
- 2.** Report all forms of physical or psychological abuse, or concern that a child or young person is at risk of harm. If this concerns an employee behaving

inappropriately to a child, the HR department of the Council of Ministers must be contacted in accordance with principles regarding inappropriate behaviour. If it is another actor behaving inappropriately to a child, the incident must be reported in accordance with the regulatory framework in the country in question.

- 3.** Do not share personal contact information with children and young people, or accept contact invitations in anything other than work-related social media.
- 4.** Give children under 18 the right to an accompanying adult, someone who is with the child when they participate in activities or initiatives. Accompanying adults must be included in the budget when children's participation is planned.
- 5.** Ensure a 'two-to-one' relationship, where a child involved in the work always has at least two adults with them.
- 6.** Never use or exploit a child or act in a way that violates the child's rights or that can jeopardise the child's safety. Asking children or young people for permission to waive any of the principles stipulated in this document would be an example of such a violation.

REFERENCES AND SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

Council of Europe: Child safeguarding policy:

<https://rm.coe.int/child-safeguarding-policy-children-s-rights-division-22-may-2018-as-up/16808c8b91>

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

Save the Children International: Child safeguarding – safe and secure programmes for children:

https://www.raddabarnen.se/globalassets/dokument/medlem--volontar/tryggare-tillsammans/tryggare-tillsammans-child-safeguarding-policy_inkl_bilagor_-eng.pdf

RESOURCE MATERIAL FROM THE NORDIC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

Are you wearing the right glasses?

A guide to integrating a child rights and youth perspective in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-4400>

Do rights!

Nordic perspectives on child and youth participation

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-4387>



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The ambition for greater integration of a children's rights and youth perspective also brings a responsibility to ensure that the work is based on a number of guiding principles. There must be a common minimum level of the involvement of children and young people and, above all, the work must be carried out in a way that protects and promotes children's safety and security. This document is relevant for all situations in which children and young people are contacted or involved in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers.