



Nordic Welfare
Centre

Child and youth participation during crisis

Recommendations for decision makers in the Nordic region

Give youth real
POWER

Participate
in all parts
of a process

Table of content

Foreword	3
Introduction	5
Method	8
Definition of a crisis	11
Wall of arguments	16
Participation during the Covid-19 pandemic – voices of children and youth	21
Learning examples regarding child and youth participation during times of crises	28
Recommendations for successful child and youth participation during times of crises	46
Checklist	78
Final conclusions	81
Reference list	82
Abstract – Sammanfattning på svenska	85
About the publication	89

Foreword

The Nordic countries have ratified international declarations that emphasise the responsibility of authorities to facilitate young people's social involvement and influence on all matters concerning themselves, in accordance with article 12 of the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child. The goal has been to promote their democratic and civil rights, as well as their well-being. Promoting their rights helps ensuring democracy and representation for groups that are otherwise not heard, it also helps ensure that the consequences of political measures and tools are adequately investigated to ensure compliance with children's rights. However, there is a need to acquire more knowledge about how to ensure that all authorities recognise their responsibility for safeguarding such rights during a crisis. When the Nordic region was hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, these rights were neglected, or at best acknowledged at a late stage and had minimal impact.

The Nordic Welfare Centre is an institution under the Nordic Council of Ministers that provides knowledge and facilitates co-operation on welfare issues. An important objective is the well-being of our youth. The Nordic Council of Ministers has a common vision of a sustainable Nordic region, a region that is also the best place in the world for children and youth. The goal is equal opportunities for participation and development for all children and young people, which is a requirement for sustainable, democratic and socially inclusive Nordic societies in the future.

This report is the first of three reports to investigate the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic for children and youth, and their right to be heard. The reports are a part of a four-year Nordic cooperation project led by the Nordic Welfare Centre on behalf of the Nordic Council of Ministers. The second report, Children's and young people's participation during the corona pandemic – Nordic initiatives (2023), describes the Nordic authorities' participation and involvement of children and young people during the pandemic. The third report, *Restricted childhood, interrupted youth: research observations on education, leisure, and participation*, summarizes new Nordic research on the consequences of the pandemic (to be published spring of 2023). The two latter are written by the Finnish Youth Research Society and the Danish Center for Social Science Research.

We would like to dedicate this report to all Nordic decision-makers, government officials and employees in local communities throughout the Nordic region. Consulting children and young people is especially important during crises. We encourage you to make use of the insights given from our Nordic youth- and adult experts in this report. Finally, we would like to thank every all experts that has contributed and made this report possible!

Eva Franzén, Director

Nordic Welfare Centre

Merethe Løberg, Senior
Adviser

Nordic Welfare Centre



Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide effective and useful advice on how to involve children and youth locally during a crisis. The report contains analyses based on key learnings from the Covid-19 pandemic, inspiring and promising practices, as well as knowledge-based recommendations that will support child and youth participation in local decision making. In addition, children and young people provide reflections and insights that will give you an edge in handling any future crises.

The Nordic region has a long history of promoting the rights and well-being of children and young people by emphasising their right to be heard and involved in all matters that concern them. However, the Covid-19 pandemic challenged this right.

During the pandemic, a range of restrictions and measures were implemented across the Nordic region to protect the population. Both schools and cultural and recreational centres were entirely or partially closed for extended periods and many services related to health care, welfare and assistance were less accessible. These are important arenas for the quality of life of children and young people and for the fulfilment of their rights. Many children and young people faced challenges because of the restrictions. Their right to be heard was often neglected or recognised too late.

Children and young people have the right to be heard, seen and involved in all matters that concern them. The right to participation for children, i.e. anyone under 18 years of age, is regulated by the [UN Convention on The Rights of the Child](#). For children with disabilities, this right is also recognised in the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#). Furthermore, structures and procedures for child and youth participation in decision making are often regulated by national laws and practise. When involving [children and young people in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers](#), the target group are children and young people aged 0–25 and is thus

somewhat more comprehensive than the UN Convention on The Rights of the Child.

This publication is authored by Tove Kjellander and Lisa Sjöblom. The analyse and recommendations are based on the results of the consultation process. We want to thank all participants who have generously shared their thoughts, reflections and knowledge. We encourage local authorities and decision makers in the Nordic region to use the recommendations in this publication and build resilient structures for child and youth participation. If a new crisis strikes, the Nordic region must ensure that the perspectives and experiences of children and youth are included in the decision-making processes.

FACTS

Guiding principles for implementing child rights

The United Nations [Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) has pointed out four guiding principles emphasising authorities' responsibilities:

Article 2: The principle of non-discrimination

Article 3: Ensure best interests of the child

Article 6: The child's right to life and development

Article 12: The child's right to be heard

FACTS

The child's right to express his or her views

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law

[UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12](#)

FACTS

Children with disabilities

1. States Parties shall take all necessary measures to ensure the full enjoyment by children with disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children.
2. In all actions concerning children with disabilities, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
3. States Parties shall ensure that children with disabilities have the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity, on an equal basis with other children, and to be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance to realize that right.

[UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 7](#)

Method

The analysis and recommendations in this report are based on conversations with around 100 representatives of youth and national experts in the Nordic region, covering the Nordic countries and Greenland, Åland and the Faroe Islands.

The conversations with youth and adult experts were carried out through eight transnational focus groups and concluded during a youth summit in Oslo from 17–18 October 2022. The summit was jointly organised by the Nordic Welfare Centre and the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir).

Children and youth representatives from a wide range of organisations have participated. These include national umbrella organisations for child and youth organisations, national pupil and student council organisations, national and local youth councils, as well as organisations representing children and youth with disabilities. In addition, the Association of Local and Regional Authorities for all local governments in the Nordic countries and the Children's Ombudsmen's offices were invited. At the conference decision makers and youth representatives jointly discussed child and youth participation in crises and made recommendations for decision makers, many of which are included in this report.

A [Nordic expert group](#) comprising a wide range of experts from the Nordic region has contributed to the report in focus groups and during the conference, as well as research teams at the Finnish Youth Research Society and the Danish Center for Social Science Research.

The authors of this report have also conducted a brief literature review of promising practice and recommendations for crisis management, disaster risk reduction and child and youth participation.

The quotes in the report are from participants in the focus groups and from the conference. Most of the quotes indicate name and organisation but some of the participants have asked to have their names removed, meaning these quotes are anonymous. The analysis is based on perspectives and input from conversations with participating youth representatives and decision makers, combined with evidence, research and best practice on child and youth participation in times of crises. In some cases, the quotes have been slightly adjusted or shortened for the sake of clarification.



Structures for child and youth participation

The structures for the participation of children and youth vary between and within countries, as well as throughout the Nordic region. For instance, they differ in how they are implemented and at what level, and in how or whether they are regulated.

This report describes some of the most common structures for child and youth participation. Below is a brief description of these structures: child and youth organisations, including organisations that represent children and youth with disabilities, local youth councils, student councils and national umbrella organisations. For further reading, we would recommend the report [Children's and young people's participation during the corona pandemic – Nordic initiatives](#). This report covers important initiatives that were used in the Nordic region during the pandemic.

Child and youth organisations

Child and youth organisations is a broad term that describes a wide range of civil society organisations led by children or youth. Some of these organisations focus on promoting children's and young people's rights, while others offer opportunities for personal and social development through various kinds of activities. Many of the organisations combine both types of work. It is common for child and youth organisations to be active on both a local and a national level.

Organisations representing children and youth with disabilities

Some of the Nordic countries have youth organisations that represent children and youth with disabilities. The focus of these organisations ranges from specifically covering only one type of disability to a more general focus, representing children and youth

with different kinds of disabilities. In some cases, children and youth with disabilities are not organised in separate child and youth organisations but are part of an advisory board in a disability organisation that caters for all ages.

Local youth councils

In local youth councils, young people engage with municipal decision makers. The council is often initiated and organised by the municipality. Depending on the structures and regulations in place, the purpose of local youth councils varies, but can include giving advice to local decision makers, sharing young people's views, or in other ways advocating for the rights of children and youth in the municipality.

Student councils

Student councils comprise a group of students in primary or secondary school elected by their student peers to represent them in relation to the head teacher and/or other teachers. Through student councils, students can share their ideas, interests and concerns with the school management. Student councils may also be involved in social events and/or community projects. On a local level, youth councils and student councils sometimes work together.

National umbrella organisations

Some of the Nordic countries have a cooperative body or national umbrella organisation for disability organisations, local youth councils and/or student councils. Most parts of the Nordic region also have a national umbrella organisation for all child and youth organisations. They aim to collectively improve the democratic rights and conditions for their members.

Definition of a crisis

In this report we use the following definition of a crisis: a time of intense difficulty or danger for society, or groups in society.

The terms *disaster*, *crisis* and *emergency* are often used as synonyms even though there are important differences between them. None of these terms has a universally accepted definition but below we differentiate between the terms and clarify how the term *crisis* is used in this analysis.

Disasters occur as a result of a combination of hazards, vulnerabilities and a lack of measures that could have reduced the adverse impact of a disaster. One definition of a crisis is a "situation faced by an individual, group or organisation which they are unable to cope with by the use of normal procedures and in which stress is created by sudden change" (Booth 2003 cited in Moe and Pathranarakul 2006). Both disasters and crises trigger rapid public policy changes. Emergencies are unanticipated events that threaten people, property or the environment and which require a coordinated and rapid response. An emergency is not always a sudden occurrence. Both a crisis and an emergency can lead to a disaster if not dealt with appropriately ([Al-Dahash, Thayaparan and Kulatunga 2016](#)).

In other words, a crisis is a situation that cannot be dealt with through regular procedures and therefore triggers rapid changes in public policy. An emergency is an impending crisis that has not yet resulted in a need for change of policy. A disaster can sometimes be avoided if a crisis and/or an emergency are properly handled. In other words, a crisis occurs at a specific point in time when it may still be possible to avoid a disaster.

In this analysis we have limited the use of the term *crisis* to crises that occur at the local or national level; this report does not cover individual and organisational crises.

Local structures for crisis management in the Nordic region

Government authorities and other public sector actors in the Nordic region have developed several toolkits and recommendations to help local municipalities prepare for a crisis.^[1] In general, existing crisis management structures do not include guidelines on how to ensure the right to participation for children and youth.

Even though the frameworks differ slightly in terminology and content, they usually include three elements:

1) Risk and vulnerability analysis: Local municipalities should regularly assess risks and vulnerabilities. In a risk analysis, municipalities identify risks and analyse the likelihood of the risks, as well as the consequences and the potential impact such risks may have. In a vulnerability analysis, municipalities identify major vulnerabilities in the system that relate to these risks. Such an analysis should also include measures to reduce risks and vulnerabilities.

2) Crisis plan: Local municipalities should also have a crisis plan that describes what measures to take during a crisis, as well as roles and responsibilities, including how a crisis response organisation should operate. Local municipalities should have a dedicated staff member who is responsible for coordinating the work to prepare for a crisis and ensuring coordinated work during crises.

3) Crisis simulation and training: In order to develop skills in crisis management it is important to conduct crisis simulations and provide regular training.



Basic requirements for meaningful child and youth participation

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has developed nine principles for meaningful participation that also apply in times of crisis. The principles are developed in [General Comment No. 12 to the Convention on the Rights of the Child \(2009\)](#) and comprise fundamental conditions that should guide all processes in which children are involved. Even though the principles have been developed with children under 18 in mind, the principles are also relevant for participatory processes with youth over 18 years of age.

All child and youth participation processes should be:

- 1. Transparent and informative:** Children and youth must be provided with full, accessible and age-appropriate information about the participatory process, the topic and expectations.
- 2. Voluntary:** Child and youth participation is a right, not an obligation. Children and youth should never be forced into expressing their views, and all aspects of the process should be voluntary.
- 3. Respectful:** Children and youth should be treated with respect both for their person and for their views in all aspects of the participatory processes.
- 4. Relevant:** The issues must be of real relevance to the participants' lives and they should be able to draw on their knowledge, skills and abilities.

5. Adapted to the target group: Environments and working methods should be adapted to the individual capacities of the participants

6. Inclusive: Children and youth are not a homogeneous group, and participation must provide for equality of opportunity for all, with zero discrimination.

7. Supported by training: Adults need preparation, skills and support in order to facilitate children's participation. This is also applies to children and youth who are involved as trainers and facilitators.

8. Safe and sensitive to risk: Adults are responsible for ensuring that the participatory processes are conducted in a way that safeguards the interest of the child and for minimising any risk of violence, exploitation or any other negative consequences.

9. Accountable: Children and youth must be informed about how their views have been interpreted and what conclusions and/or decisions have been made. The participants should also be given the opportunity to submit complaints regarding the outcome of the analysis.

The nine principles are also used in the guide called [When involving children and young people in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers: Principles and approaches](#) (2020).

[1] For example, this can be found here:

The Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection (15 September 2022). *Risiko, sårbarhet og beredskap*.
<https://www.dsb.no/lover/risiko-sarbarhet-og-beredskap/>

Swedish Civil Contingencies Agencies (15 September 2022). *Krisberedskap och civilt försvar*.
<https://www.msb.se/sv/amnesomraden/krisberedskap--civilt-forsvar/>

Danish Emergency Management Agency (15 September 2022) *Helhedsorienteret beredskabsplanlægning*.
<https://www.brs.dk/da/nyheder-og-publikationer/publikationer2/alle-publikationer/2022/helhedsorienteret-beredskabsplanlagning/>

Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management (15 September 2022). *Áætlanir fyrir fyrirtæki, sveitarfélög og stofnanir*
<https://www.almannavarnir.is/forvarnir-og-fraedsla/aaetlun-fyrir-fyrirtaeki/>

Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management (15 September 2022). *Viðbragðsáætlanir almannavarna*
<https://www.almannavarnir.is/forvarnir-og-fraedsla/vidbragdsaaetlanir/>

Association of Finnish Municipalities (15 September 2022). *Ny handbok om beredskap och beredskapsplanering i välfärdsområdena*
<https://www.kommunforbundet.fi/aktuellt/2022/ny-handbok-om-beredskap-och-beredskapsplanering-i-valfardsomradena>



Wall of arguments

Child and youth participation is both a right and a benefit to society. In this chapter, youth and decision makers share this and many other arguments about why child and youth participation is important during times of crisis.

The arguments below are selected examples from a wall of arguments that was created anonymously by youth and decision makers during the focus groups and the conference. The [wall of arguments from the focus groups](#) comprises around 150 arguments, with contributions in all the Nordic languages.

Why child and youth participation during times of crises is essential

It is not optional

“The UN child convention, a convention all Nordic countries have signed, makes it obligatory that the child should be allowed to raise their voice, and that the best of the child should be the groundwork of all political decisions involving children. Who knows better what is best for children than children?”

Everyone's perspective is needed

"We need everyone's perspective to make great decisions for everyone. Youths will look at the problem differently and have different needs than other age groups."

"Often it is easy to make decisions based on your own view of the world, but children are raised in a completely different time frame than decision makers. The norms and culture are different, and so is the generational worldview. Therefore, young people will look at the world and thus the problems in a different way than the elected politicians."

"Listening to children and young people might give politicians new ideas and better solutions, that they themselves didn't think about."

"Youth will live in the future that is built from today's decision making!"

Children and youth are equal members of society

"Children and young people usually make up one-fifth of the population. I think that speaks for itself."

"Children and young people live under the decisions made by adults. We cannot preach democracy while completely excluding 20 percent of society. Just because children and young people do not have the right to vote does not mean that they are incapable of contributing to society."

"Young people make up a significant part of society whose wishes can or cannot be taken into consideration when making important decisions about not just educational, but also financial and infrastructural matters, for example. The youth use the same services as people of any other age group. Just because we don't have the same experiences and, perhaps, cannot afford to do the same thing adults can, does not mean we are not a part of society, or that we can be ignored whenever it is of convenience to other groups."

Preparing for the next crisis

"When a crisis hits, measures are often required to be both quickly implementable and effective. In order to assure this, it would be of great need to have plans prepared for how to quickly gather input from the groups most affected by the crisis. This would enable

decision makers at all levels to make more well-informed and grounded decisions, even under extreme conditions."

Good processes lead to better decisions

"Firstly, it creates the sense that consulting parties are being listened to, which will in general increase satisfaction with a given process. Secondly, you consult to get experiences which you yourself do not have. It's one thing to make the rules, it's another thing to live under them."

"In times of crisis, it's understood that some areas have to be prioritised in favour of others, so not everyone can get their way. But by continuously listening to the affected groups, you create a sense of empowerment, which can be crucial to the motivation and morale of said group. You show that there is a will to listen and improve conditions, and that you value the input of the affected groups."

In times of crises children and youth are often hit the hardest

"The effects of crises hit children and youth hardest. If we want to avoid consequences, we have to listen to them."

"If you don't include youth, you risk that consequences will be disproportionate for young people."

"The best decisions are made when everyone and every group of people are kept in mind when making decisions. In a crisis, decision-making can be hard, but often crises can drastically affect youth, so it is very important to consult with everyone before taking drastic actions."



Participation during the Covid-19 pandemic – voices of children and youth

The Covid-19 pandemic put many participatory structures for children and youth to the test. In this chapter, children and youth share their experiences of child and youth participation during the Covid-19 pandemic. They discuss the vulnerability of both children and youth and youth organisations during the crisis and share what they perceived to be some of the obstacles to participation in decision making.

The chapter does not provide a full picture of how children and youth participated in decision-making during the pandemic, but it offers insights based on discussions with children and youth representatives.

The lessons and direct experiences of the representatives of Nordic youth organisations during the pandemic serve as an important source of information in preparing for potential crises in the future.

The learnings will be useful for all decision makers who are in the process of building or strengthening participation, or crisis management structures.

Consultations and conversations

**"Lots of decisions were made very quickly. Youth were not included."
(Chiara Bergmark, Sweden's Student Union)**

"Everything had to happen very quickly. When things happen quickly, it is seldom well done." (Ingrid Thunem, The Norwegian Association of Youth with Disabilities)

Many young people have stated that, at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, decisions were taken quickly and with minimal consultation with children and youth. This changed as the crisis continued and evolved.

In Sweden, Denmark and Norway, national youth organisations state that they were invited to engage in dialogue with decision makers. For example, student council associations were invited to meetings with the Minister of Education and the Ministry for Education in the respective country and associations working for youth with disabilities were invited to meetings with the respective Ministers of Health. However, the consultations often took place after major decisions had been taken and youth representatives were not invited to any processes in which they should have been involved. In Greenland and the Faroe Islands, the children and youth who participated in the focus groups felt that there had been no dialogue during the pandemic, on either a regional or a local level.

"We could have been involved in so many processes but we were not." (Embla Líf Hallsdóttir, UMFI, Icelandic Youth Association)

As the crisis evolved, youth representatives in some parts of the Nordic region felt that more consultations were being held on the national level than before the crisis. They had the impression that

online meetings removed the barriers for decision makers to contact young people.

"My understanding is that it was much easier to invite us to consultations from the government when they were digital. I don't think that politicians like to meet students in person." (Petter Lona, School Student Union of Norway)

Local involvement differed greatly, not only between countries but also within countries. Many youth representatives had the impression that it was harder to reach and speak to local decision makers than politicians at the national level.

During the discussions with youth representatives from all over the Nordic region, some common pitfalls in the municipalities were identified. Interestingly, many of the challenges were similar across the Nordic region. The obstacles to child and youth participation caused much frustration and resignation.

It was often the case that young people felt that they were meeting decision makers at the wrong level. The decision makers that invited the youth to consultations had little or no decision-making power themselves.

"My school is a public school and is governed by a central School Director at the municipal level. Sometimes we were consulted by the principal at our school on what was working and what was not working. But when we brought suggestions forward, they often said that this was decided at a higher level and that they could not do anything." (Malcolm Alencar, Student Association at Kungsholmen's Gymnasium in Stockholm)

It was also difficult to find information about the right person or institution to contact. This information gap, in combination with poor resources for the youth organisations, made it hard to engage in meaningful consultations.

Young people also found it difficult to get sufficient information from decision makers and that, as a result, they did not have the knowledge to participate.

Many decision makers seemed afraid to consult with children and youth. They appeared to be unsure of how to relate to and communicate with young people, and even more so with young people with disabilities.

According to many youth representatives, the decision makers did not consider how their decisions might impact children and youth. Their focus was exclusively on the pandemic and the potential adverse effects on the for-profit sector, as well as the economy as a whole.



Children and youth in vulnerable life situations

In the focus groups, it was agreed that individuals and groups who were already in vulnerable life situations became even more vulnerable during the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, young people with disabilities were denied access to important health services such as rehabilitation or physical exercise and became more isolated because of the pandemic. However, they were rarely consulted or invited to present their views on the consequences of different decisions.

Even when it came to decisions that seriously impacted children's rights and the rights and well-being of youth, the various organisations were rarely invited or consulted. In Sweden, schools for children with special needs did not provide distance learning options although many students were in risk groups. In Norway, schools for children with special needs were closed but were not replaced by adequate alternative options; either there was no schooling at all, or the students were expected to take part in distance learning through digital platforms that were not adapted to their special needs. Information and communication were inclusive. There were initially no sign language interpreters at press conferences and in both Sweden and Norway, information was not provided in an accessible and easy language

Nevertheless, for some groups of children and youth, the Covid-19 pandemic improved their life situations. For example, it became possible for children and youth with chronic disabilities to follow the school curriculum from home through distance learning. The national youth disability organisation in Norway had been trying to achieve this for years. However, after the pandemic was considered 'over', this option was removed.

"Overall, for the group with chronic disabilities, the pandemic was a blessing in disguise. Those that needed a lot of rest at home were still able to attend lectures, and many of them were able to finish on time in a way that they would not have been able to do otherwise. There were also lots of social activities online. But now those things are gone."

(Ingrid Thunem, The Norwegian Association of Youth with Disabilities)

It is important to acknowledge that for some groups of children and youth, the crisis resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic remains. They may be part of a risk group and have a disease that is so rare that they cannot be advised to take the vaccine. This means that they must remain in isolation and few adaptations are made to meet their needs and few adaptations are made to meet the needs of this group when it comes to school and leisure activities. In other words, once the majority of society has decided what constitutes a crisis, as well as when it starts and ends, children and youth in vulnerable life situations often risk being left behind.

The impact on youth organisations

Youth civil society plays a key role in promoting and advocating for the rights of children and youth, as well as in empowering and strengthening individuals. The pandemic had severe consequences on the structures, budgets and operations for many of these youth organisations.

Covid-19 restrictions made it difficult for youth organisations to implement activities which, in turn, made it harder to recruit members. This affected their financial well-being since much of the funding of youth organisations is tied to activities with a certain number of participants and/or number of members. In some cases, government authorities, regions and municipalities decided to let youth organisations keep their funding despite the reduced number of activities and members. This was key to the survival of many organisations.

In the focus groups, the participants agreed that throughout the Nordic region, government guidelines and restrictions tended to be unclear and changed rapidly. Consequently, youth organisations cancelled activities that could have taken place if they had received better and more timely information. This was particularly frustrating for organisations whose activities or operations were targeted at children and youth in vulnerable life situations, since the consequences of a cancelled activity could be hard for the individual child or young person.

Student councils play a key role in school democracy. However, during the pandemic, the national student council associations

noted that few schools provided the necessary support to maintain well-functioning student councils. Some student councils managed to transfer their meetings to digital platforms but some student councils, particularly those for younger age groups, found this transition difficult.

"There are many ways that young people are participating, all those forms of participation were put on hold during the pandemic. Many of our members felt that it did not function. Especially for younger children it was more difficult to mobilise online. For upper secondary school students, it was easier, many of them could continue to have activities."
(Edvin Johansson, Swedish Federation of Student Councils)

"The situation was very different depending on the school board. There is a law (in Sweden) that all principals are responsible to offer support to democratic work – but this was completely forgotten during the pandemic. The student councils that survived did so because the students put in a lot of effort and had a lot of resources." (Chiara Bergmark, Sweden's Student Union)



Learning examples regarding child and youth participation during times of crises

This section provides nine learning examples regarding child and youth participation during times of crises. These examples are not only from the Covid-19 pandemic but also include examples from other crises. There is a brief description of each example, along with some key learnings.

- [Child and youth participation in disaster risk reduction](#)
- [Municipal Student Advisory Board in Stockholm](#)
- [A youth panel made recommendations to the Danish government on the well-being of children and youth](#)
- [Youth organisations in Greenland demanded a better consultation process](#)
- [Teachers adapted their digital teaching according to their students' requirements](#)
- [Citizen dialogue with young people in Åland during the Covid-19 pandemic](#)
- [A model for cooperation between a youth council and a municipality developed in Norway](#)
- [Improved decision-making processes in the Faroe Islands](#)
- [Youth councils excluded from the Municipalities online meetings in Finland](#)



Child and youth participation in disaster risk reduction

Children's rights and the youth perspective in times of crisis are rare and underrepresented in the existing toolkits and recommendations of local municipalities. However, inspiration can be found in the global work on disaster risk reduction.

Work on disaster risk reduction is internationally governed by the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 2030](#). The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) has issued a 'words into action' guiding framework on [Engaging Children and Youth in Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience Building](#). According to the UN framework, meaningful child and youth engagement in disaster risk reduction involves both self-driven participation (child- and youth-led engagement) and collaborative participation (adult-owned and youth-led engagement). It includes the following elements:

Space: Children and youth can safely explore and express their views before and after a hazardous event. For children and youth from marginalised groups, creating an enabling environment may require legislation and policies for inclusion, or a focus on shifting inequitable power that could limit spaces in which they could safely share their unique views.

Voice: Children and youth have the skills, capacities and self-confidence to express their views in all stages of disaster risk reduction. Strengthening their voice includes an active focus on addressing issues of poverty, discriminatory cultural norms or other factors that can limit participation.

Audience: Children and youth are heard, and their

perspectives valued in assessing, mitigating, preparing for and responding to hazards. This includes having sustainable mechanisms and opportunities in place for children and youth to participate in disaster risk reduction strategic plans from the local to global level.

Influence: Children's rights and youth perspectives are not only heard, but they are also acted upon in risk reduction and are incorporated into resilience policies, programmes and standards that affect their lives, as well as the lives of society at large.

UNDRR has also identified several red flags in the process of engagement with children and youth

- Children and youth have little or no opportunity to express their views.
- Children's views are manipulated or coerced due to inequitable power dynamics.
- Adults tell young persons what to say or do in a tokenistic or directive process.
- Children and youth express their views, but they are not heard, valued or acted upon.
- The engagement is adult-led and managed and does not give children or youth the opportunity to control both the process and its outcomes; the needs and capabilities of children and youth are ignored.
- Engagement is initiated by adults without any clearly formulated benefit for children and youth as a constituency.
- Adults acknowledge the added value of child and youth perspectives, knowledge and experience can contribute, but the engagement does not acknowledge children and youth as contributors and hence the "looping-back" mechanism is absent.

Key learning: Participatory processes with children and youth is possible in times of crisis. The example of child and youth participation in disaster risk reduction can serve as an inspiration since it has successfully involved children and youth in crisis management in many parts of the world.



Municipal student advisory board in Stockholm

In Stockholm Municipality, the politician employed as city commissioner with responsibility for schools ('skolborgarråd') created a student advisory board in spring 2021, in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. The intention was not specifically to get the perspectives of students on how the pandemic was affecting them but rather to create a permanent structure. Nevertheless, the theme of the first meeting was the students' views about distance learning. They then discussed the mental well-being of the students following the pandemic and issues such as how to create a good learning environment.

The advisory board comprised approximately 20 students from different schools in the Stockholm area. The students were from both lower and upper secondary schools and their ages ranged from 13 to 19 years. They were not elected representatives of student councils, although the board did include representatives of the three national student associations. The advisory board met five times during the first year, for two hours at a time. The politician in charge participated in all the meetings. Minutes were taken and sent to the students, but no feedback was given on how their input was used. However, the students' impression was that the politician was genuinely interested and listened with interest. They also felt that their opinions made a difference in the decisions she made. Their impression was that decision makers became more interested in discussions with the students and consulted with them more often. At the end of the first year, they were even invited to an additional meeting because of the war in Ukraine and the integration of refugee children into Swedish schools.

Key learning: Sometimes during a crisis, decision makers need to create new participatory structures to ensure that the knowledge and perspectives of children and youth are taken into account. Once these structures have been created, many decision makers realise the importance and value of talking to children and youth. However, even when decision makers have a genuine interest in taking into account the perspectives of children and youth, it is easy for them to forget to give feedback to the children and youth on how their input was used in decision making.



Youth panel made recommendations to the Danish government on the well-being of children and youth

In March 2021, the Danish government formed a youth panel and asked it to make recommendations on how to reduce the discontent resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. The panel comprised 15 representatives of student organisations, civil society organisations, youth political associations and others. The work was led by the headmaster of an upper secondary school. Over a period of six weeks, the panel met six times in online meetings and came up with 15 recommendations on how to improve the well-being of children and youth in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. [The recommendations](#) were handed over to Danish Prime Minister Mette Fredriksen, as well as Minister for Children and Education Pernille Rosenkrantz-Theil in May 2021.

One key recommendation was that resuming civil society activities must be a priority so that children and youth could feel a sense of community and engage in meaningful after-school activities. When the recommendations were published, the DUF (Danish Youth Council), highlighted them in the media by pointing out that volunteers had worked hard to maintain the activities for youth in civil society during the lockdown, but that new political priorities were needed. The work was successful as social activities in civil society were given more resources.^[1]

In May 2022, Christine Ravn from the DUF reflected on the participatory process resulting in the recommendations, her observation is that while some of the recommendations were implemented, others were not.

"The recommendations were not binding and more could have been done to implement them. But one of the most important recommendations; more money for social activities was implemented." (Christine Ravn Lund, DUF – Danish Youth Council)

On the process itself, she could see that there was room for improvement but concluded that given the circumstances it was acceptable:

"The process was very speedy and not very flexible in order to be able to implement the recommendations right away. But it worked alright given the context." (Christine Ravn Lund, DUF – Danish Youth Council)

Key learning: During a crisis, there may not be time to design the perfect process. Even though minimum standards of qualitative participation must be maintained, inviting children and youth to a flawed process is better than not involving them at all.

^[1] DUF (15 November 2022). [Ungdomspanelen för ungas välbefinnande presenterar 15 rekommendationer till regeringen.](#)



Youth organisations in Greenland demanded a better consultation process

In Greenland, the suicide prevention strategy expired in 2019. A new strategy was developed and was going to be approved in 2022. Late in the process, youth organisations were invited to offer their input. However, they realised that they would have limited influence as they had been invited late in the process and were only given a short time frame in which to provide their input.

The youth organisations had the impression that they were only invited so that politicians would be able to tell the media they had consulted with young people. The youth organisations responded by saying they would not come to the consultative meeting unless they were properly listened to. The responsible politician, Mimi Karlsen, moved the deadline and designed the process so that the decision makers could properly listen to the young people.

"We needed to force them but then it worked." (Erni Kristiansen Red Cross Youth Greenland)

When the responsible politician was asked why the process was delayed and why they had not involved the young people before, she said that this was something they now regretted.

"Yes, we can regret that we have not

involved the young people before. But now we have, and that's what counts." (Mimi Karlsen, national board member responsible for health) ^[1]

Key learning: Youth organisations can influence participatory structures and improve their level of influence by not accepting flawed, destructive, or undemocratic forms of consultation and engagement.

A positive side effect of flawed participatory processes can be increased skills of decision makers on how to consult with children and youth. It is important that decision makers listen to youth organisations when they try to influence the issues about which they are being consulted, but also the consultation process itself.

^[1] Greenlandic Broadcasting Corporation (25 October 2022). [*Mimi Karlsen om forsinket strategi mod selvmord: Unge skulle være hørt tidligere.*](#)



Teachers adapted their teaching according to their students' requirements

During the Covid-19 pandemic in the Norwegian town of Drammen, students in a small private upper secondary school suggested that the teachers should change their digital platform for distance learning from Zoom to Discord, which is an online tool used for voice and text communication.

The students felt that the audio quality of Zoom was too poor and that other key features were missing, such as a chat function that was available both before and after classes. The suggestion was made by one of the students and a decision was made to change the platform. Both teachers and students found that the new platform provided easy and intuitive information sharing. However, the platform did not allow for video meetings and some teachers therefore continued to use Zoom for the actual classes, while using Discord for other purposes.

"We very much appreciated being listened to. And I think it was possible because I went to a small private school, where it was easy for the teachers to make this decision without too much bureaucracy." (Jesper Strøm, student)

The importance of individual teachers and other adults who meet children and youth on a daily basis was emphasised by many participants in the focus groups. Adults who engage with children and youth both in school and during their leisure time play a key role in creating opportunities for participation in decision-making in their everyday lives. The participants from Greenland and Iceland, who felt they had had little or no conversations with political decision makers during the Covid-19 pandemic, described how their teachers listened to them and made the necessary changes in order to improve their learning environment.

“Teachers were checking up on us. They really tried to improve their education.”
(Embla Líf Hallsdóttir, UMFI, Icelandic Youth Association)

Key learning: Decision makers at all levels can make a difference in the lives of children and youth and affect their level of participation in matters that influence their life situations. These adults do not necessarily see themselves as decision makers but will often play a key role in the lives of children and youth in times of crises. However, the role they play is also influenced by their mandate and the flexibility of the structures within which they operate.



Citizen dialogues with young people in Åland during the Covid-19 pandemic

In the Åland Islands, the local government carried out consultations with their citizens about their perspectives on the Covid-19 crisis in the spring of 2020, when the crisis was not yet over. Ten consultations were conducted, of which two were carried out exclusively with young people.

The results from the dialogue were compiled in [a report](#) that was presented to the regional government. For many young people, the pandemic had been disruptive, with distance learning instead of physical classes and the suspension of many after-school activities. They felt it had been difficult to engage in their hobbies and maintain social relations and they also missed their elderly relatives. As a final reflection, the young people stated that it was good that the regional government was interested in their experiences and that they hoped to be invited to more consultations.

Key learning: Citizen dialogue with specific focus groups comprising children and youth can provide important perspectives during a crisis. However, it is important to ensure that the perspectives of children and youth are really taken into account, and to show how they have influenced decision making.



A model developed in Norway for cooperation between a youth council and a municipality

The municipality of Vefsn in the north of Norway received the Youth Municipality of the Year award in 2021. According to members of the youth council, its greatest achievement was that it managed to maintain its work and procedures during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We did everything we were supposed to do. We got all the things we always do, done also during the crisis." (Adam Ulvang, leader of the youth council)

This is a rare achievement.

The Mosjø model for participation is named after a town in Vefsn Municipality in Nordland County. The model comprises two interconnecting zones, one political and administrative zone and one youth zone. The zones constitute different areas of work. At the heart of the model is cooperation between the youth council and the local decision-making bodies in the municipality, as well as cooperation between the youth council and other local children and youth.

A key part of the success of the model is an activity in the intersection between the political and administrative zone and the youth zone: an annual day for local youth politics, which is open to all children and youth in the municipality between the age of 13 and 19. The key points from the day are raised in a discussion between youth, politicians and civil servants in a political workshop. The results form the basis of the work, of both the youth council and the municipality.

Key learning: Stable and well-functioning structures for child and youth participation before a crisis will result in better child and youth participation during the crisis. Successful child and youth participation needs planning, resources and continuity. In the case of Vefsn, political support has also been an important factor in the model's success.



Improved decision-making processes in the Faroe Islands

In the Faroe Islands, in the early stages of the pandemic in spring 2020, a school decided to cancel a trip to Paris for 300 students. The decision was made the night before the trip was supposed to take place following a meeting at which the student council was not consulted.

The consequences were dramatic as the students had paid for the trip themselves. The cost of the trip was DKK 7500 (approximately EUR 1000) per person. The media immediately contacted the student council and the council stated that it understood the decision but said "it was unfortunate that the student council was not included in the decision." The student council also noted that many students bought tickets to Denmark, to party, anyway.

"Since we were not consulted, people rebelled against the decision." (Danjál Hátún Augustinussen, Faroe Islands)

The student council was soon contacted by the Minister of Culture, who said that he would try to help them, and the students ended up being refunded by the state for their expenses.

The student council and school management agreed that the decision-making process had not worked well. So they discussed how they could avoid repeating the same mistake. The following

year, they had a meeting at a much earlier stage and, as it looked like the trip might have to be cancelled again, they made a joint decision to postpone it.

**"We were not under as much time pressure. When our trip was cancelled, things changed very rapidly. But it made it much easier to defend the decision when we had been part of making it."
(Danjál Hátún Augustinussen, Faroe Islands)**

Key learning: In times of crisis, it is sometimes necessary to make rapid and drastic decisions, but it is crucial to involve children and youth in decisions that will significantly affect them. Moreover, when a decision-making process is not successful, there is always an opportunity to improve in the next decision-making process. It is important to be able to learn from your mistakes. This will result in better decisions that children and youth will perceive as being fair and legitimate.



Youth councils excluded from digital municipal meetings in Finland

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, many municipalities in Finland did not invite youth councils to municipal meetings when they were transferred to an online setting. Nuva Ry, the union of local youth councils in Finland, was contacted by so many youth councils that it had to take drastic measures to solve the problem.

"It was a big problem to get youths to have the same position as they had before the crisis." (Nette Rimpioja, Nuva Ry, Finland).

[Nuva Ry published a statement on its website](#) explaining that the municipalities must ensure that youth councils were invited to online meetings:

"Despite the state of emergency, the activities of the youth councils should not be suspended, even temporarily. On the contrary, in a state of emergency, we all have to work together and young people are needed for decision-making more than ever

Despite the exceptional circumstances, municipalities must guarantee youth councils the opportunity to influence municipal decision-making in accordance with Section 26 of the Municipal Act, and municipalities have no right to ignore young people in decision making, even if the meetings are held remotely. (...) The Association of Finnish Youth Councils recommends the following measures to


youth councils and municipalities:

- 1) Youth council meetings are organised as remote meetings
- 2) The representatives of the youth council will be included in possible remote meetings of the municipal boards, the municipal board and the municipal council with the right to speak and attend as before
- 3) Remote events are organised in the municipality to reach young people"

Nuva Ry also contacted the municipalities that had actively excluded young people from their meetings. Several municipalities stated they were very busy and that they were organising a transformation from physical to online meetings". With the assistance of Nuva Ry, the problem was resolved, and the youth councils were invited to digital municipal meetings.

However, several problems remained because of a lack of technical skills among the politicians. Even though everyone was affected by this problem, not the youth representatives, the youth councils were negatively impacted. According to [a survey conducted by Nuva Ry in 2021](#), 59% of young people thought that the exceptional circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic had a negative or very negative effect on the activities of their youth council and the participation of young people in their municipality.

Key learning: Even when statutory structures are in place to ensure child and youth participation, these can be side-stepped or forgotten during a crisis. When this happens, national youth organisations can play a key role in supporting local youth activists to demand their rights to participate and ensure that decision makers continue to make use of the existing structures.



Give youth real
POWER

Participation
in all parts
of a process

Meaningful
participation

Recommendations for successful child and youth participation during times of crises

The Covid-19 pandemic has provided many lessons, including when it comes to child and youth participation in times of crises. Despite traditions, statutory structures, and intentions, Nordic children and youth have stated that their right to participate was poorly implemented.

Decision makers in different sectors, other key actors and organisations must all prepare for a future crisis, and participation measures must be implemented in a way that include and reach all groups of society. To achieve child and youth participation, we need participatory structures, positive attitudes toward children and youth, necessary skills, and competence, as well as conscious choices of methods and levels of participation.

This section includes recommendations for local decision makers on how to ensure child and youth participation during times of crises, and analyses and presentations of the fundamentals that need to be in place to achieve child and youth participation.

You can also read a summarised version of the recommendations in [the checklist at the end](#).

- [Recommendations on the establishment of participatory structures before a crisis](#)
- [Recommendations on positive attitudes and habits](#)

- Recommendations on child rights and youth competences among decision makers
- Recommendations on knowledge-based and conscious choice of level and method
- Recommendations on inclusion and non-discrimination
- Recommendations on quality of participation in times of crises

Recommendations on the establishment of participatory structures before a crisis

Ensuring meaningful child and youth participation in decision-making during a non-crisis is the first important step to achieving high-quality participation during a crisis. In addition to having formal robust participatory structures in place, it is crucial to give young people knowledge and democratic confidence.

Build robust participatory structures before a crisis: Ensure that policy documents, decisions, staff resources and the allocated budget are in place, allowing children and youth participation in decision-making at the local level. For participation to work during a crisis, the basis structures must already be in place.

Include procedures for children and youth participation in risk and vulnerability analysis, crisis plans, as well as crisis simulation and training: The entire crisis management structure should include routines for how decision makers should involve children and youth in decision-making during times of crises and how to enable make it possible for children and youth to contact and influence decision makers themselves. Decision makers should include children and youth in crisis simulation and training exercises and preparedness.

Include plans for inclusion and non-discrimination in the crisis management guidelines: Plans for inclusion and non-discrimination should be part of the crisis management guidelines.

Build democratic confidence in children and youth: For children and youth to effectively engage in consultations and dialogue with decision makers, they need to have democratic confidence.

Educate children and youth about their rights and give them

the tools they need to exercise them: Developing knowledge and empowerment among youth does not happen automatically but can be achieved through persistent procedures and robust participatory structures.

Background and analysis

It is essential to have well-functioning and robust participatory structures for child and youth participation in non-crisis situations and having measures for applying a child and youth perspective in any crisis management structures.

In other words, participatory structures should be working properly before a crisis. This means that policy documents, decisions, staff resources and the allocated budget must be in place, allowing child and youth participation in day-to-day decision-making at the local level. The quality of the participatory structures and the practice is equally important.

Moreover, child and youth participation must be integrated into the local crisis management structures, as presented in the section on local structures for crisis management in the Nordic region. This includes risk and vulnerability analysis, crisis plans, as well as crisis simulation and training. These participatory structures must be accessible and provide for non-discriminatory participation for children and youth.

However, structures alone are not enough. During the focus groups, one youth coined the term “democratic confidence” and elaborated on how it is important to build democratic confidence in children and youth so that they feel they can have any impact in decision making processes.

“We need to build knowledge among youth organisations and young people on how to reach decision makers. Both on a smaller scale; have accessible decision makers but also on a larger scale –make sure that we build democratic confidence among young people and that they know how the democratic system works.”
(Kristoffer Elverkilde, The Union of

Danish Upper Secondary School Students)

"It can seem overwhelming to get adults to listen to you. But if you get the democratic confidence and the knowledge on how to influence, then more young people will do it." (Cecilia Huhtala, Finlandssvenska Skolungdomsförbundet, Finland)

"Encourage young people to speak their mind. Ensure this happens from a young age, so that when the crisis strikes, they know how to express themselves and ask for what they need." (post-it from conference)

One important aspect in building democratic confidence in children and youth is to educate them about their rights and give them the tools they need to exercise them. Moreover, during the focus groups, young people emphasise how important it was for decision makers to be persistent in inviting in inviting children and youth and having sustainable structures that last over time.

The quality of the participatory structures and a continuous use of them, should not dependent a few and candid individuals, but rather build on long-term interactions and relationships across organisations. Regardless of how involved individual children and youth are in a specific meeting, the decision makers are responsible for inviting them to future meetings. Participatory structures allows opportunities for children and youth to build democratic confidence.

"In Trøndelag we have been invited to a lot of online meetings with the city council. At the first meeting we said

nothing but they continued to invite us."
(Petter Lona, School Student Union of
Norway)

Recommendations on positive attitudes and habits

The genuine desire to know what children and youth think and want will enable meaningful participation. Many of the participants emphasised this point in the focus groups. Also, participants with intellectual disabilities highlighted the importance of the quality of the interaction and relationship between adults and children as a way of achieving more qualitative and meaningful conversations.

Invest time in building relations before a crisis: Build strong institutional bonds between public institutions and youth organisations, as well as positive social relations between individual children and decision makers who are close to their everyday lives.

"If you only do consultations in times of crises and not in normal times, you don't have the relationship with youth organisations and know how to do it. This is true at all levels, both national, regional, local and schools." (Christine Ravn Lund, DUF - Danish Youth Council)

"Friendship. I speak to adults that I know. Friendship is important." (Ella Schauman, youth representative from Åland Disability Federation)

Build an attitude among decision makers in which children and youth are regarded as invaluable resources: Children and youth are experts about their own lives and life situations. When the perspectives of children and youth are taken into account in the decision-making process then they will also be

consulted in a time of crisis.

Create good habits: Ensure that decision makers and children and youth meet on a regular basis so that the habit of involving children and youth in decision-making is in place there before a crisis. Many adult decision-makers are uncertain about how to engage with children and youth and needs to practice.

Background and analysis

The importance of positive attitudes towards children and youth among decision makers is highlighted by both adults and youth representatives who have worked successfully with child and youth participation. Moreover, youth representatives in the focus groups emphasised that decision makers should make it a habit to consult with children and youth.

"Young people have so much more knowledge than adults know. They have prejudices against us." (Embla Líf Hallsdóttir, UMFI, Icelandic Youth Association)

"We have to be seen as experts of our lives, both in school and outside. A principal or decision maker cannot have our own perspective because they don't see the world as we do. They also need to see young people as constructive. Often they say that we don't want changes, cannot make compromises, just want more and more." (Kristoffer Elverkilde, The Union of Danish Upper Secondary School Students)

"I just feel that sometimes politicians don't see young people as experts and

see that we have the information that we have and don't see our voices. Not every time but sometimes it feels like they don't really understand us." (Cecilia Huhtala, Finlandssvenska Skolungdomsförbundet, Finland)

During a crisis, the attitude towards children and youth is not only important for the quality of participation, but is critical for the implementation of robust participatory structures. During a crisis, it is often necessary to make rapid decisions and decision makers will generally have to prioritise between a range of critical challenges. Thus, consulting with children and youth is much more likely to happen if their input is regarded as being crucial for making better decisions. Otherwise, decision makers may perceive it as legitimate and even reasonable to avoid consultation processes. Experience from the pandemic shows that decision makers who only consult children and youth because this is a requirement, are more likely to stop consultations with children and youth during a crisis.

"They stop considering the youth perspectives. Even if you have youth perspectives in ordinary instances because you have the time, but in times of crises it is not prioritised." (Petter Lona, School Student Union of Norway)

Having said that, participatory structures that are mandatory are still valuable. Decision makers seem to view the perspectives of children and youth as increasingly valuable the more they interact with them. The obligation to consult may contribute to a changed and improved attitude among decision makers. Some youth representatives believe that youth organisations also need to show persistence to build a more positive attitude among decision makers.

"Sometimes decision makers are asking our opinions just to check a box. They

want to seem like they care or have done everything that is required from them but then they don't take our views into consideration in the process. However, we often continue to go to these meetings anyway. If we meet the same people and decision makers over and over again, maybe in the end they will listen to us. (Siri Espe, The Norwegian Association of Youth with Disabilities)

Decision makers and youth who have built habits of meeting each other regularly appear to find more constructive solutions to complex societal problems. Thus, it is important to meet on a regular basis before a crisis. Developing this relationship and engaging in conversation is an ongoing effort since there is a high turnover among the representatives of youth organisations.

"The politicians don't know what my organisation does, we always must tell them and teach them and make them understand what we do." (Cecilia Huhtala, Finlandssvenska Skolungdomsförbundet, Finland)

Recommendations on child rights and youth competences among decision makers

It is essential to provide regular training about what child and youth participation entails and how it is carried out. Too often, consultations are conducted by decision makers who have insufficient skills.

Educate all decision makers, including those in crisis organisations, about what child and youth participation is and what it means: It is important that such competence is developed before a crisis, since many crises are characterised by a need for rapid decision making.

Educate all decision makers about communicating with children and youth: There is a continuous need to develop the ability of adults to communicate with and reach out to youth. This must take place on a regular basis and include the expertise of children and youth themselves.

Cultivate awareness of position and power: It is of great importance that decision makers understand that they have more power than children and youth, and that it is their responsibility to ensure that children and youth can exercise their right to be heard and involved.

Develop knowledge about non-discrimination and inclusion: It is essential that decision makers have skills and knowledge about how to work in a non-discriminatory manner to and engage with children and youth with different needs and life situations. This must be recognised as a specific skill among decision makers.

Background and analysis

Competence is key, yet the value of having competences in children's rights as well as child and youth participation is often overlooked. It is important for all decision makers at local, regional, or national level: to be knowledgeable about the right to participation, as stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Few decision makers would state that they are opposed to children's rights. Nevertheless, long-term, and relevant high-quality child and youth participation in local decision-making is rare. It is important to acknowledge that kindness or the right intentions are not enough. Structures, knowledge, competence, and a genuine desire to learn and involve children and youth must be in place in order to succeed in respecting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of children and youth.

Decision makers must be aware of the power that they hold. They must have knowledge about the right of children and youth to influence decisions that impact their life situations. This knowledge and competence are best developed through both theoretical understanding and practice. Decision makers gain a significant and valuable practice and competence when they engage regularly in participation and decision-making processes with children and youth.

All decision makers who engage in consultation processes with children and youth need to understand the [nine principles for meaningful participation developed by the UN](#) Committee on the Rights of the Child, including in-depth knowledge of non-discrimination and inclusion in order to ensure equal and inclusive participation for all.

"It is harmful when youth is not listened to – then they stop caring and raise their voice because they feel that they are not being heard. This will affect children and youth today but what about the consequences when they are adults – then they will continue to think that their meaning does not matter. This will affect the situation both today and in the time ahead." (Siri Espe, The Norwegian Association of Youth with Disabilities)

One particularly crucial skill is understanding domination techniques and how to avoid unconsciously using them when interacting with children and youth. Poorly executed consultations with children and youth can have a detrimental effect on them. There is a higher risk of this happening in the case of children in vulnerable life situations.

Thus, consultations with such children call for an even higher level of competence for the decision makers responsible for their involvement.

**"We have to look at domination strategies and how people interact in the room. In local student councils, students have to interact with teachers and principals. Many students don't want to speak out about teachers because they don't think they will be believed or because the teachers may take revenge on students. They don't participate on an equal footing. It's important to build structures to work against this."
(Kristoffer Elverkilde, The Union of Danish Upper Secondary School Students)**

Recommendations on knowledge-based and conscious choice of level and method

It is important to decide on the method and level of participation in order to create meaningful participatory processes. Most methods and levels overlap, and many processes cover not one but multiple levels of participation. Knowledge about inclusion and non-discrimination is essential at every level.

Gather the perspectives of children and youth through a range of methods: During a prolonged crisis, it is important to take into account the perspectives of children and youth by combining broad consultative meetings with quantitative surveys and meetings with specific subgroups.

Information

Provide information through channels that children and youth understand and follow: Be prepared to communicate clearly with all children and youth. Children and youth are experts on the communications channels they prefer. This is why they should be consulted.

Ensure that information is provided in an inclusive and accessible way: Since children and youth are a heterogeneous group, it is important to analyse how to convey crucial information to all children and youth during a crisis. For example, adaptations may be necessary for children with disabilities, children who speak different languages, younger children, and older youth.

Limit the spread of misinformation: Engage in dialogue with children and youth to understand the kind of misinformation they are receiving and ensure that you take measures to make sure to counteract the spread of misinformation.

Consultation, cooperation and joint decision-making

Use established structures for children and youth involvement also during times of crises: Uphold existing participation structures even when decisions need to be made rapidly and the location and format of meetings may change.

Regularly consult with children and youth on questions that concern them: Show persistence and continue to invite children and youth to meetings, even when their level of participation does not initially meet their expectations.

Give children and youth the opportunity to have a say in defining a crisis: This is particularly important for children and youth in vulnerable life situations. There is a risk that a crisis will be defined as being 'over', when this is the case for most people, even though the crisis still might be affecting vulnerable groups.

"Youth should be involved in defining what is a crisis for them. If the youth say that this is pressing in our society, that should be considered and be something to be worried about. Power privilege determines who gets to name what it is that is defined as a crisis." (Petter Lona, School Student Union of Norway)

"It is important how and by whom the crisis is defined. Is it defined only by decision makers? Is it only important to majority people?" (Oscar Sjökvist, National Association for Youth with Reduced Mobility)

Use competences that were developed before the crisis: It is important that, as far as possible, consultative meetings during a crisis are consciously designed ensuring that the children and youth who participate in the meetings have the

required knowledge and preparatory material, as well as the meeting format, to be able to effectively offer their perspectives.

"Decision makers should ask our opinion about the crisis, how we are doing and how decision makers can support us. They should make us feel heard, and not just do it for the cover. Ask us how we are doing and how we are coping." (Kaisu Laine, The Union of Upper Secondary School Students in Finland)

Use different platforms for participation and find creative ways to include children and youth: It is important to engage children and youth not only through spoken and written language, but through a range of methods. Ensure that meetings are held in schools and other locations where youth spend time.

"Meetings should be in everyday places for the youth, like in school. That is where we feel comfortable, and it makes meetings easier." (Felix Dennstedt, youth representative from Åland Disability Federation)

Child and youth-led participation

Build structures so that children and youth can engage with decision makers on their own initiative: These structures should include a clear and concrete framework on how to include their input in decision making. The structures should be sufficiently robust to work in times of crises.

Compensate for the vulnerability of youth organisations: Children and youth are particularly vulnerable during a crisis, and this includes organisations in which they self-organise. It is important to recognise that there is a risk that youth

organisations might disappear during a crisis if they do not receive sufficient support. This is not only because their funding is often linked to the number of activities they engage in and their level of membership, but also because their activities may be more difficult to carry out, resulting in recruitment challenges and keeping their members active and engaged. This seems to be particularly true for the younger age groups.

Non-participation and manipulated participation

Also make conscious choices when not consulting with

children and youth: If it is decided that children and youth cannot or should not be consulted or involved in any way, it is important to still make a clear choice and to document and evaluate the consequences of such a decision.

Never engage in or initiate manipulated participation: Respect the significant effort that children and youth put into participation in decision-making processes. Do not initiate a process for involving children and youth if there if it is unlikely that they will have real influence over the outcome.

Be candid about the perspectives of children and youth: Many children and youth have expressed the view that having been consulted, they were then referred to by decision makers in ways that they did not feel were truthful. This can have detrimental consequences whereby the trust of children and youth in decision makers and democratic processes is eroded.

"Sometimes politicians make your comments a bit reversed, even when you have been very clear. There is a problem with that, you don't get the chance to speak for yourself - politicians deliver your words to the public, but they may misinterpret or misrepresent what it was that you said and meant." (Polina Tashinova, The Union of Upper Secondary School Students in Finland)



Background and analysis

There is no single method that works for every process or situation, but the method and level of participation should be determined by the purpose and the context of the participation process. The choice of level of participation and method will influence how much power decision makers share with youth. Regardless of the method and scope, the choice of method should be conscious and active and the nine principles for meaningful participation developed by the [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) should always be met.

Information

It is vital that all participants have access to the information they need – this is a prerequisite for being and feeling included in society. Information should be adapted to different target groups, including various age groups, in an inclusive way. This provides a basis for meaningful and real participation in all its various forms. A lack of information makes it hard or even impossible for children and youth to participate in decision-making and consultations. Nevertheless, it is often the case that children and youth often do not receive sufficient information before, during and after participatory processes.

"In many student councils in Norway, the delegates don't get the information that you need in order to make good contributions." (Petter Lona, School Student Union of Norway)

**"Among decision makers there is a common view of youth as only visionaries who are not in touch with reality. We see that youth has a lot of respect for limitations. But then you need to know what the limitations are."
(Pelle Enocsson, Swedish Federation of Student Unions)**

During a crisis, decision makers should ensure that information is provided to all children and youth in an inclusive way. In order for this to happen, it is important to consider children and youth in vulnerable life situations. Groups who are often overlooked include children who, for various reasons, are not in the school system, children and youth who cannot access written information, children with intellectual disabilities, as well as newly arrived children and youth.

"Adults don't prioritise to provide information to young people in crisis where the speed is high." (Cecilia Huhtala, Finlandssvenska Skolungdomsförbundet, Finland)

Everyone has a right to receive information about the decisions that affect them. Thus, the responsibility to reach out to all members of society rests heavily on decision makers. There is an ongoing need to develop the ability of adults to interact and communicate with and reach out to children and youth.

**"Adults don't know how to reach out, they don't know how to speak and communicate with youth."
(representative from a Nordic student union)**

Since the style of communication can differ with different groups of young people and will often change with each new generation, there needs to be an ongoing effort to adapt the style of communication and channels for communication.

"Policy makers have so much to learn about how to communicate with youth. If they would understand how they can communicate they have so much to learn, the student union might have an instagram account bigger than the schools." (Pelle Enocsson, Swedish Federation of Student Unions)

During a crisis, it is also important that decision makers engage in dialogue with young people so that they understand the current myths and misconceptions that are circulating. This can help decision makers and public sector actors to counteract the spread of misinformation.

It is important to acknowledge that providing information is not enough to achieve meaningful child and youth participation. Information in this case is one-way communication from decision makers to children and youth. However important the information may be, it offers little or no opportunity for children and youth to make their voices heard and provide their perspectives.

Consultation

During a consultation, decision makers ask children and youth for their opinions about a specific issue. This can take place via focus groups, interviews, or surveys. A consultation is usually a one-off participatory activity in which the decision makers have specific questions they would like to see answered. It is additionally important to consult with children and youth who find the questions relevant.

"You need to know what you want. Often this is missing when decision makers contact young people. Just want the youth perspectives on a broad level. Principals often ask us as a national

organisation about what to do in a situation. Then we always advise them to talk to their local student councils. But we, as a national organisation, are not invited to national education summits which is strange since we are also experts on education from a youth perspective." (Kristoffer Elverkilde, The Union of Danish Upper Secondary School Students)

Children and youth who participate in consultations have the right to receive information about the process and get feedback about the overall results and how their opinions have been taken into account. During a crisis, consultations work well if the questions have been properly defined. Even though decisions need to be made quickly, decision makers should ensure that children and youth are involved before any major decisions are made. In the focus groups, many children and youth encouraged the decision makers to be more creative with the format of the consultations.

"Decision makers should think more about in which format youth participation is best performed. A traditional meeting may not be the format in which young people feel the most comfortable. Important knowledge to know what forms and fora in which young people can contribute the most." (Pelle Enocsson, Swedish Federation of Student Unions, Sweden)

Cooperation

Cooperation between decision makers and youth can happen in various ways but decision makers typically meet with children and youth multiple times over an extended period. Decision makers and children and youth should be able to influence both the process and

the outcome. For example, this can be achieved through regular meetings with a youth advisory board or reference group, collaboration with youth civil society, or by organising activities together with children and youth. In the focus groups, children and youth emphasised that they not only want to be able to influence the outcome of a participatory process but also be able to influence the entire philosophy of the process.

In the focus groups, the children and youth discussed that in one-off consultations, it is important to have well-prepared and concrete questions. However, in long-term cooperation, it is also possible for decision makers to build a relationship with children and youth that enables discussions regarding complex issues in which the questions are more open. In a rapidly changing crisis, it can be valuable for decision makers to search for answers together with children and youth.

"In some cases, decision makers cannot expect very concrete answers. Sometimes neither young people nor the decision makers have the knowledge to come up with a concrete answer. (...) Important for decision makers to understand that they also need to have answers and to do this together with young people." (Pelle Enocsson, Swedish Federation of Student Unions)

Joint decision-making

Joint decision-making means that decisions are taken by children and youth together with adults. For example, this often happens when children and youth are part of a school board or a steering group. In this specific case, adults share their power with children and youth and the decision-making is on equal terms. However, it is still important to acknowledge the special role of children and youth.

"We are experts but not the standard type of experts. (...) Students often have perspectives that decision makers cannot have. We don't usually look

heavily into research and finances –you cannot expect that. Student organisations can support that but to a limited extent. You have to respect the youth and their opinions but you cannot hold them to the same standards as other experts that you would draw into the room.” (Kristoffer Elverkilde, The Union of Danish Upper Secondary School Students)

In times of crisis, it is important that existing joint decision-making structures are maintained. This requires resources and dedicated staff. The timing of meetings must enable youth and decision makers to participate in the decision-making, including when it is necessary to make rapid decisions.

Child and youth-led participation

Child and youth-led participation means that children and youth are given opportunities to influence decision makers on their own initiative. In order for this to happen during a crisis, structures must be in place that are sufficiently robust. This includes well-developed communication channels between child and youth organisations and the municipality, procedures for information sharing, and structures that require accountability on decisions, and structures for accountability.

“There should be a way to contact decision makers at any time in any subject in all conversations. Not occasional – regular both if there is a crisis or if there is not a crisis.” (Filip Godlewski, Youth Council in Vantaa, Finland)

Youth organisations are an important part of child and youth-led participation. Since they are represented by elected representatives of children and youth, they can speak for a large groups of young people.

During a crisis, it can become even more difficult for children and youth to make their voices heard. One representative from a youth organisation pointed out that access to the media becomes more challenging during times of crises.

"The media is a big part of youth participation. When there is no crisis, adults and young people have more or less equal possibilities to get their voices heard there. During crisis, youth's voice is being pushed out. The space becomes smaller and the pace is higher so we need to compensate for that." (Petter Lona, School Student Union of Norway)

However, it is important to acknowledge that not all youth are part of or represented by young civil society. During the conference, one person shared this reflection on a whiteboard:

"Participation is a tricky subject. Non organised youth don't have a voice – even if they'd want to." (Post-it from the conference)

Non-participation

In some cases, the choice might be made to not involve, consult or even inform children and youth. This is defined as non-participation and should always be a conscious choice.

It is important to also discuss child and youth participation and document the decisions, even when decision makers choose not to involve children and youth. This can happen for a number of reasons, for example, because children and youth are not affected by the decision or because it is not practically possible to involve children and youth in the decision-making process.

When this happens, it is important to consider how the perspectives of children and youth could be taken into account using methods other than direct involvement.

Manipulated participation

Manipulated participation is characterised by artificial processes in which children and youth believe there is an opportunity for them to influence the outcome but there is actually no such opportunity.

"The consultation has to be timely. Often adults do a lot of work and then at the last stage they ask what do you think about that is almost finalised – important that youth get to influence during the entire process." (Kristoffer Elverkilde, The Union of Danish Upper Secondary School Students)

"Often want to talk to us at the last minute. They need to want to listen to us, it cannot just be because it is said in a paper that they need to do it. They need to want to do it, it cannot just because they have to. Then they often don't have the expertise to do it well." (Cecilia Huhtala, Finlandssvenska Skolungdomsförbundet, Finland)

This can also happen when decisions makers interpret or even change the opinions expressed by children and youth based on assumptions or prejudices. Manipulated participation is sometimes called *tokenism*, meaning that children and youth are only involved on a superficial level so that it appears as if they have been consulted, but their opinions are not actually taken into account. One example is when children and youth are included in a reference group but are not able to influence the outcome on the subjects discussed.

Recommendations on inclusion and non-discrimination

A crisis will test the structures and functioning of society. Every crisis will have groups that are more severely impacted and that need more support and resources in order to make their voices heard. Thus, accessible structures and processes must be prioritised.

Ensure that all processes and consultations are accessible:

Language and physical accessibility are key, as well as the skills of the facilitators and the meeting design.

Work with both inclusive and separate processes: In general, all processes should be inclusive. However, some issues and groups of children and youth might need additional and separate processes.

Take responsibility: In a crisis and a non-crisis, things sometimes go wrong. Always take your responsibility as a duty bearer and have procedures in place for follow ups and documentation.



Background and analysis

Children and youth in vulnerable life situations are often more seriously impacted by a crisis. Decision makers must possess the knowledge and skills to interact with children and youth from different backgrounds and of different ages, life situations and abilities. This means that decision makers need to be active and take responsibility in identifying the adaptations and measures that need to be in place in order for children and youth to participate in a respectful and meaningful way.

The power that decision makers hold over children and youth is even more significant in relation to those children and youth who live in vulnerable life situations. This places extra responsibility on decision makers to ensure that the right to participation is fulfilled in a non-discriminatory manner. For example, merely complying with legal or formal obligations is not enough. Decision makers must also ensure that the participation of children and youth is fully accessible and safe in practice.

If the process fails to be inclusive or discriminates against children and youth, it is important not only to take responsibility, but also to communicate to the affected children and youth how you take responsibility and that you are open to learning from your mistakes.

"Decision makers need to separate the intent from the action. Even if you don't mean to discriminate against anyone, it doesn't mean that you don't discriminate." (Danjál Hátún Augustinussen, Faroe Islands)

In general, it is preferable that children and youth from different groups are included in participation processes rather than always having separate groups for different needs. This means that all participatory processes must be accessible: physically, in the language used and in how the process is designed.

"Everyone should be invited to and included in general processes. A separate process can be as an addition, but not

instead of a process where everyone is included. Sometimes you need a safer space to talk about non-discrimination so that you can highlight issues and share those special challenges." (Ingrid Thunem, The Norwegian Association of Youth with Disabilities)

In an inclusive process, the participants can learn from each other and benefit from the overlap between the needs and rights of different groups. However, general processes alone are not always enough. Some minority groups might have specific issues that are better discussed in smaller settings to ensure that no nuances are missed.

There are some groups that could benefit from both inclusive and separate processes. One example is children and youth with cognitive disabilities. In an inclusive process, all participants will have the opportunity to gain an understanding of different life situations and conditions. When young people with cognitive disabilities are included in participation processes, in the long term this could also change how we understand inclusion. However, an adapted process might also be necessary to ensure that the participation is genuinely meaningful for the participants.

"People with cognitive challenges; important to create a space where there is time to understand and interact at the right pace. You need to be aware of how the processes need to be adapted to everyone, and this can be difficult in a general fora." (Christine Ravn Lund, Danish Youth Council)

The focus groups also discussed how children and youth in vulnerable life situations are at risk of being excluded from participatory processes by the adults who want to protect them.

"We sometimes make children and youth vulnerable. As a professional, you often say what is best for the child or the youth rather than asking what the child or the youth needs. If you are a part of a vulnerable group - you are put in a position where adults say what is best for you, so you become vulnerable. It is not harmful to include those groups in different types of processes, they know what they are going through and what they need. They may need support to express what they need but they are experts on their situations. You need to include those children and youth, otherwise you just make assumptions based on conversations that adults have had with those children and youth." (Siri Espe, The Norwegian Association of Youth with Disabilities)

Recommendations on the quality of participation in times of crises

The nine principles for meaningful participation

developed by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child are a minimum in all conversations with children and youth during a crisis.

Involve children and youth before, rather than after, decisions are made: In situations in which decisions need to be taken quickly, engaging children and youth in a decision-making process without preparations and at a short notice can be acceptable since this makes it possible to consult children and youth before important decisions are made.

Be open and transparent: A crisis might require new or different participatory processes and choice of methods. Communication and an open conversation about the design of the process is key.

Ensure diversity and inclusion: Children and youth are a heterogeneous group, and it is therefore important to consult and cooperate with a diverse group of children and youth. A crisis is no excuse for not including all groups.

Do not promise too much: It is important that decision makers do not make promises they cannot keep during consultations with children and youth. If there are constraints – for example, in terms of resources – these should be known and communicated before the consultation starts. It is important to keep any promises that are made.

Let children and youth know how their input was used: Decision makers should always tell children and youth how their input was taken into account in their decisions.

“Often they listen to us but then they don’t do what they say that they will do. They say they agree that this is a big

problem and say that they will do something but then two years later, nothing has happened and they have forgotten about it." (Filip Godlewski, Youth Council in Vantaa, Finland)



Background and analysis

Many of the success factors for child and youth participation at the local level are the same, regardless of whether there is a crisis. The structures and measures that need to be in place, as well as [the nine principles for meaningful participation developed by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#). However, in some cases, the pace of the process and the trade-offs will require a different approach during a crisis.

During a non-crisis, decision makers should gather the available knowledge and information before children and youth are consulted in order to identify where there is a lack of information and knowledge. In this way, the conversations will focus on the most relevant issues.

However, it should be noted that a crisis is characterised by a high level of uncertainty in which decisions must often be made rapidly with insufficient information at hand. This means that the goals for participation may have to be modified. Rather than trying to engage in well-prepared consultations, it may be more relevant to

invite children and youth to less optimal forms of participation before major decisions are made. This should be clearly communicated to the participants, and also be specified in the process documentation.

Having said that, a crisis cannot be used as an excuse for conducting participatory processes that are harmful or risk being harmful to the participating children and youth. The decision makers must ensure that the consultations are safe and sensitive to risk.

"It's a fine balance between finding a way to on the one side be effective with your dealing with the crisis but also encourage people to give feedback and hopefully make that work and to make a difference. If people feel that they are speaking to a void they will stop speaking eventually." (Jesper Strøm, Network of Youth Councils, Denmark)

This can be a challenge, and sometimes the concern that a participation process will not succeed is used as an excuse for not involving children and youth in decision-making at all. It can also be used as an excuse for excluding children from certain groups. Nevertheless, however important it is to be sensitive to risk, participation is a right. It is the responsibility of the decision makers to ensure that a child or young person is protected *in* the process rather than protecting vulnerable children and youth *from* the process.

Clear and honest communication with participants is key to managing their expectations and making them clearly aware of the level of influence they will have from the outset. By being conscious of the potential risks and sensitive in the choice of method, it is also possible to involve children and youth in safe and meaningful participation processes during a crisis.

Checklist

This checklist is a summarized version of the recommendations on how to ensure the right to child and youth participation during times of crises. It can be used as a tool for local decision makers and as a guide for youth civil society organisations in their dialogue with decision makers.

The establishment of participatory structures before a crisis

- ☐ Build resilient participatory structures before a crisis
- ☐ Include procedures for children and youth participation in risk and vulnerability analysis, crisis plans, as well as crisis simulation and training
- ☐ Include plans for inclusion and non-discrimination in the crisis management guidelines
- ☐ Build democratic confidence in children and youth
- ☐ Educate children and youth about their rights and give them the tools they need to exercise them

Positive attitudes and habits

- ☐ Invest time in building relationships before a crisis
- ☐ Build an attitude among decision makers in which children and youth are regarded as an resourceful and invaluable resources
- ☐ Create good habits

Child rights and youth competences among decision makers

- ☐ Educate all decision makers, including those in crisis organisations, about what child and youth participation is and what it means
- ☐ Educate all decision makers about communication with children and youth

- ☐ Cultivate awareness of position and power
- ☐ Build knowledge about non-discrimination and inclusion

Knowledge-based and conscious choice of level and method

- ☐ Gather the perspectives of children and youth through a range of methods

Information

- ☐ Provide information through channels that children and youth understand and follow
- ☐ Ensure that information is provided in an inclusive and accessible way
- ☐ Limit the spread of misinformation

Consultation, cooperation and joint decision-making

- ☐ Use established structures for children and youth involvement, also during times of crisis
- ☐ Regularly consult with children and youth on questions that concern them
- ☐ Give children and youth the opportunity to have a say in defining a crisis
- ☐ Use competences that were developed before the crisis
- ☐ Use different platforms for participation and find creative ways to include children and youth

Child and youth-led participation

- ☐ Build structures so that children and youth can engage with decision makers on their own initiative
- ☐ Compensate for the vulnerability of youth organisations

Non-participation and manipulated participation

- ☐ Also make conscious choices when not consulting with children and youth
- ☐ Never engage in or initiate manipulated participation
- ☐ Be candid about the perspectives of children and youth

Inclusion and non-discrimination

- ☐ Ensure that all processes and consultations are accessible
- ☐ Work with both inclusive and separate processes
- ☐ Take responsibility

Quality of participation in times of crises

- ☐ Involve children and youth before, rather than after, decisions are made
- ☐ Be open and transparent
- ☐ Ensure diversity and inclusion
- ☐ Do not promise too much
- ☐ Let children and youth know how their input was used



Final conclusions

"You need to do it well already. If you don't do it well before the crisis, then you don't stand a chance." (Christine Ravn Lund, Danish Youth Council)

How do we ensure meaningful child and youth participation in decision making during crisis? After having consulted with over 100 youth representatives from all over the Nordic region, as well as adult experts and decision makers, the short answer is simple: build resilient structures that work, because they will also work in a crisis.

However, the longer answer is somewhat more complex. Our usual participatory structures are at risk when decisions need to be taken quickly and when politicians and decision makers must make difficult trade-offs between different needs and rights. This is particularly true during a new crisis. If we did not know this before, the Covid-19 pandemic has certainly taught us this. To ensure child and youth participation during times of crises, it is important to stand on a basis that is consistent with children's rights. Knowledge, habits, and a genuine desire to learn from children and youth are essential.

To be heard is not only a right; the voices and perspectives of children and youth are also an invaluable resource for all decision makers that intend to make better decisions.

Reference list

Al-Dahash, Thayaparan and Kulatunga (2016). *Understanding the Terminologies: Disaster, Crisis and Emergency*. Retrieved 10 June 2022 from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320288179_Understanding_the_Terminologies_Disaster_Crisis_and_Emergency

Association of Finnish Municipalities (15 September 2022). *Ny handbok om beredskap och beredskapsplanering i välfärdsområdena*. Retrieved 15 September 2022 from <https://www.kommunforbundet.fi/aktuellt/2022/ny-handbok-om-beredskap-och-beredskapsplanering-i-valfardsomradena>

Bärkraft (2020). *Ålands väg under och ur coronakrisen*. Retrieved 5 June 2022 from https://issuu.com/barkraft/docs/statusrapport_4_barkraftwebb/44

Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) *General comment No. 12. The right of the child to be heard*. Retrieved 1 September 2022 from <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/advanceversions/crc-c-gc-12.pdf>

Danish Emergency Management Agency (n.d.) *Helhedsorienteret beredskabsplanlægning*. Retrieved 15 September 2022 from <https://www.brs.dk/da/nyheder-og-publikationer/publikationer2/alle-publikationer/2022/helhedsorienteret-beredskabsplanlagning/>

Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management (15 September 2022). *Áætlanir fyrir fyrirtæki, sveitarfélög og stofnanir*. Retrieved 15 September 2022 from <https://www.almannavarnir.is/forvarnir-og-fraedsla/aaetlun-fyrir-fyrirtaeki/>

Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management (15 September 2022). *Viðbragðsáætlanir almannavarna*. Retrieved 15 September 2022 from <https://www.almannavarnir.is/forvarnir-og-fraedsla/vidbragdsaaetlanir/>

DUF (2022). *Ungdomspanelen för ungas välbefinnande presenterar 15 rekommendationer till regeringen*. Retrieved 15 November 2022 from <https://duf.dk/nyhed/ungdomspanelet-for-unges-trivsel->

overrækker-15-anbefalinger-til-regeringen

DUF (2020). *Ungdomspanelet's anbefalinger til unges trivsel*.

Retrieved 15 November from

https://duf.dk/fileadmin/user_upload/Editor/documents/Ungdomspanelet's_anbefalinger_til_unges_trivsel_webudgave.pdf

Greenlandic Broadcasting Corporation (2022). *Mimi Karlsen om forsinket strategi mod selvmord: Unge skulle være hørt tidligere*.

Retrieved 5 October 2022 from <https://knr.gl/da/nyheder/mimi-karlsen-om-forsinket-strategi-mod-selvmod-unge-skulle-v%C3%A6re-h%C3%B8rt-tidligere>

Helfer, Alix Aapola-Kari, Sinikka and Ibsen, Jakob Trane (2023)

Children's and young people's participation during the corona pandemic – Nordic Initiatives, Measures and strategies of Nordic countries to safeguard the rights of children and young people in school, leisure, and civil society during the COVID-19 pandemic, Finnish Youth Research Society and Danish Center for Social Science Research, VIVE. [Children and Young People's Participation During the Corona Pandemic – Nordic Initiatives](#) (nuorisotutkimusseura.fi)

Nordic Council of Ministers (2020). *When involving children and young people in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Principles and approaches*. Retrieved 10 September 2023 from

<https://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1392351/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

Swedish Civil Contingencies Agencies (n.d). *Krisberedskap och civilt försvar*. Retrieved 15 September 2022 from

<https://www.msb.se/sv/amnesomraden/krisberedskap--civilt-forsvar/>

The Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection (n.d.). *Risiko, sårbarhet og beredskap*. Retrieved 15 September 2022 from

<https://www.dsb.no/lover/risiko-sarbarhet-og-beredskap/>

Nuva ry (2021). *Nuorisovaltuustoselvitys 2021*.

<https://nuva.fi/nuorisovaltuustoselvitys2021/>

UNDP (2016). *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030*. Retrieved 3 June 2022 from

<https://www.undp.org/myanmar/publications/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015->

2030?

[utm_source=EN&utm_medium=GSR&utm_content=US_UNDP_Paid_Search_Brand_English&utm_campaign=CENTRAL&c_src=CENTRAL&c_src2=GSR&gclid=Cj0KCQiAvqGcBhCJARIsAFQ5ke4GSwZ_YOkN6H1R7U1EikrTxh8olwn7E5u4zKuYJI_WPP5K_ERsqOOaAna_EALw_wcB](#)

UNDRR (2020). *Engaging Children and Youth in Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience Building*. Retrieved 3 June 2022 from [https://www.preventionweb.net/files/67704_67704wiachildyouthdrr202067704undrr.pdf?](https://www.preventionweb.net/files/67704_67704wiachildyouthdrr202067704undrr.pdf?_gl=1*15y1p1r*_ga*MTg3MDI5ODIxMi4xNjY2MzQyNTcz*_ga_D8G5WXP6YM*MTY2NjMOMjU3Mi4xLjEuMTY2NjMOMjg2MC4wLjAuMA)
[_gl=1*15y1p1r*_ga*MTg3MDI5ODIxMi4xNjY2MzQyNTcz*_ga_D8G5WXP6YM*MTY2NjMOMjU3Mi4xLjEuMTY2NjMOMjg2MC4wLjAuMA](#)

Abstract – Sammanfattning på svenska

Denna rapport innehåller rekommendationer för hur barn och ungas rätt till delaktighet kan säkras i den nordiska regionen under kriser utifrån lärdomar som gjorts under covid-19-pandemin. Rekommendationerna har tagits fram gemensamt av över ett hundra barn, unga och beslutsfattare i åtta digitala fokusgrupper och under en konferens i Oslo under 2022.

Det tydligaste budskapet från deltagarna i konferensen och fokusgrupperna är att nyckeln till framgång är att bygga stabila strukturer som fungerar före en kris. Då kommer de troligen att fungera också när en kris slår till.

Men under covid-19-pandemin var det en del etablerade strukturer, till exempel bland ungdomsråd och elevråd, som inte höll. Prioriteringar, avvägningar och snabba beslut gjorde att barn och ungas rätt till delaktighet var svag eller obefintlig i många delar av Norden. Deltagarna i fokusgrupperna lyfter också vikten av kunskap hos beslutsfattare tillsammans med vanan att konsultera unga och en genuin vilja att lära och lyssna som centrala framgångsfaktorer.

För att bli hörd är inte bara en rättighet. Barn och ungas perspektiv och erfarenheter är också en ovärderlig resurs för varje beslutsfattare som vill ta bättre beslut.

Checklista

Nedan följer en sammanfattning av rapportens rekommendationer. Rekommendationerna riktar sig i första hand till lokala beslutsfattare i alla delar av Norden, men kan också användas av civilsamhällsorganisationer och nationella aktörer.

Etablerade delaktighetsstrukturer före krisen

Bygg stabila strukturer för barn och ungas delaktighet före krisen

Inkludera rutiner för barn och ungas delaktighet i risk- och sårbarhetsanalyser, krisplaner, krissimulering och träning

Inkludera planer för inkludering och icke-diskriminering i dokument och rutiner som rör krishantering

Arbeta för att bygga upp det demokratiska självförtroendet hos barn och unga

Utbilda barn och unga om deras rättigheter och ge dem de verktyg de behöver för att utöva dem

Positiv syn och goda vanor

Investera tid i att bygga relationer före krisen

Arbeta för att skapa ett synsätt hos beslutsfattare där barn och unga ses som en källa till ovärderlig kunskap

Gör det till en vana att konsultera barn och unga

Barnrätts- och ungdomskompetens hos beslutsfattare

Utbilda alla beslutsfattare, inklusive de som ingår i krisstaben, i vad delaktighet är och betyder

Utbilda alla beslutsfattare i kommunikation med barn och unga

Odlad medvetenhet om position och makt hos vuxna beslutsfattare

Bygg kunskap hos beslutsfattare om icke-diskriminering och inkludering

Kunskapsbaserat, medvetet val av nivå och metod

Använd ett brett spektrum av metoder och arbetssätt för att inhämta barn och ungas perspektiv

Information

Tillhandahåll information genom kanaler som barn och unga förstår och följer

Säkerställ att information ges på ett inkluderande och tillgängligt sätt

Begränsa spridningen av desinformation

Konsultation, samarbete och medbestämmande

Använd etablerade strukturer för barn och ungas delaktighet också under kriser

Konsultera regelbundet barn och unga kring frågor som berör dem

Ge barn och unga möjlighet att vara med i definierandet av vad som är en kris

Använd den kompetens som byggdes före krisen

Använd olika plattformar för delaktighet och hitta kreativa sätt att inkludera barn och unga

Barn- och ungdomsdriven delaktighet

Bygg strukturer så att barn och unga kan kontakta beslutsfattare på eget initiativ

Vidta kompensatoriska åtgärder för att hantera ungdomsorganisationers sårbarhet

Icke-delaktighet och manipulerad delaktighet

Fatta medvetna beslut också när barn och unga inte konsulteras

Initiera eller delta inte i manipulerad delaktighet

Återge och använd information och perspektiv från barn och ungas på ett korrekt och sanningsenligt sätt

Inkludering och icke-diskriminering

Gör alla processer och konsultationer inkluderande och icke-diskriminerande

Använd både gemensamma och separata/separatistiska processer

Ta fullt ansvar för varje process tillgänglighet

Kvalitet på delaktighet i kris

Involvera barn och unga innan beslut fattas

Var öppen och transparent

Säkerställ mångfald och inkludering

Lova inte mer än du kan hålla

Informera barn och unga om hur deras inspel har använts och tagits tillvara

About the publication

Child and youth participation during crisis

Recommendations for decision makers in the Nordic region

ISBN: 978-91-89787-00-1

DOI: 10.52746/OKTA3233

Published by

Nordic Welfare Centre

© March 2023

Authors: Tove Kjellander and Lisa Sjöblom

Editors: Merethe Løberg and Christina Lindström

Publisher: Eva Franzén

Photos from Youth Summit in Oslo 20–22 October 2022:

Christina Lindström

Photos from Nordic cities: Mostphotos/Unsplash

Nordic Welfare Centre

Box 1073, SE-101 39 Stockholm

Visiting address: Svensksundsvägen 11A

Telephone: +46 8 545 536 00

info@nordicwelfare.org

Nordic Welfare Centre

c/o Folkhälsan

Topeliuksenkatu 20

FI-00250 Helsinki

Telephone: +358 20 741 08 80

info@nordicwelfare.org