ChildACT+

Co-funded by the European Union

Child -ACT +

Cross-country collection of best practices



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Table of Contents



01 ..... Introduction

02 ..... Best Practice Collection Methodology

04 ..... Case Studies

26 ..... Cross-cutting Lessons

33 ..... Conclusion

Introduction

ChildACT+ is a European project focused on strengthening children's participation in public decision-making at local level, bringing together partners from five EU countries to examine how child participation mechanisms function in practice, identify the barriers that continue to limit meaningful engagement, and support the development of more effective and inclusive approaches.

This document presents a collection of best practices that demonstrate effective and meaningful ways of involving children in decisions that affect them. They were identified by project partners through the research activities carried out in each participating country, including desk research, interviews, institutional information requests, and focus groups.

The selection of case studies was guided by three main criteria: **impact, sustainability, and transferability.** Priority was given to practices that have produced tangible results, show evidence of continuity or institutional support, and may offer useful inspiration for adaptation in other local contexts.

This document does not aim to provide an exhaustive overview of all existing child participation mechanisms in the countries covered by the project. Its objective is to provide a structured selection of examples that can inform future work on strengthening child participation and support reflection on how more effective and inclusive mechanisms can be developed.

Best Practice Collection Methodology

The best practices included in this collection were identified during the research phase of the ChildACT+ project, as part of Work Package 2. Their identification was not treated as a separate activity carried out after the completion of the national research, but as an integrated component of the overall data collection process.

Project partners were asked to identify relevant examples of child participation mechanisms through multiple sources. These included desk research on national and local frameworks, interviews with children and children's representatives, institutional information requests addressed to local authorities, and focus groups with child-focused civil society organisations. This approach made it possible to identify practices not only through formal documentation, but also through stakeholder experience and institutional evidence.

The collection includes case studies from the countries directly involved in the project, namely **Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Romania, and Spain.** In addition, examples from **4 other EU Member States - Austria, Belgium, Ireland, and Finland** - were included in order to broaden the scope of the analysis and to capture further models of child participation that may be relevant from a comparative and transferability perspective.



The purpose of the collection was to document concrete mechanisms, initiatives, or models that illustrate meaningful ways of involving children in local decision-making. The selection focused on practices that could offer practical value for reflection and possible adaptation in other contexts.

To ensure a common approach across countries, the selection of best practices was guided by three criteria:

- **Impact:** the practice shows evidence of contributing to actual change, whether in decision-making processes, local policies, or the quality of children's participation;
- **Sustainability:** the practice demonstrates some degree of continuity, institutional support, or potential to be maintained over time;
- **Transferability:** the practice includes elements that could be adapted or replicated in other municipalities or national contexts.

Each case study included in this document was selected and documented by the project partners on the basis of these criteria. While the level of detail and availability of evidence may vary across cases, all examples were considered relevant for the objectives of the project and useful for illustrating different approaches to child participation in practice.

BEST PRACTICE

Vienna (Austria)

Participatory Children and Youth Budget ("Kinder- und Jugendmillion")



Description

Vienna's Participatory Children and Youth Budget is one of Europe's most advanced examples of **institutionalised child participation** in local governance. The initiative emerged from the "Werkstadt Junges Wien" process, which engaged more than 22,000 children and young people in shaping Vienna's Children and Youth Strategy.

The city allocates €1 million specifically for projects proposed and selected by children and young people aged approximately 5–20. Participants submit ideas for improving their neighbourhoods, schools, public spaces and services. Municipal experts work with children to assess feasibility, refine proposals and prepare projects for public voting. Winning initiatives receive municipal funding and are subsequently implemented.

The mechanism goes beyond consultation. Children influence agenda-setting, participate in project design, vote on priorities and observe implementation. It therefore combines elements of participatory budgeting, co-creation and democratic education.

The initiative is embedded within Vienna's wider Children and Youth Strategy and linked to other participation structures, ensuring continuity beyond electoral cycles.

AT A GLANCE

Location
Vienna, Austria

Target Group
Children and young people aged approx. 5-20 years old

Type of mechanism
Participatory budgeting

Year Initiated
Since 2014

Lead Actor
City of Vienna

LINKS

Junges.wien.gv.at

Use.metropolis.org

Eurocities.eu

Why is it effective?

- Participation is linked directly to municipal resources, making the impact visible;
- The process is institutionalised within the city's strategic governance framework.
- Deliberation is built-in: children receive expert support to understand practical constraints while maintaining ownership of ideas.
- It ombines individual participation with systemic change, informing the broader Children and Youth Strategy, creating lasting policy influence.

Evidence of impact

- Werkstadt Junges Wien involved 22,581 children and young people in 1,309 workshops;
- Children's input contributed to 193 measures included in Vienna's Children and Youth Strategy;
- Hundreds of project ideas have been submitted through Youth Million rounds.
- Multiple projects selected by children have been implemented using municipal funding.
- Recognised by networks such as Eurocities and Metropolis as a leading participation practice.

Gender and inclusion dimension

- Explicit efforts made to involve children who are often excluded from participation.
- Recruitment conducted through schools, kindergartens, youth centres, disability organisations, social services, residential care facilities.
- 56 dedicated workshops organised for children and young people with disabilities.
- Participation data showed near gender balance: approximately 51.7% boys, approximately 48.2% girls, approximately 0.1% other gender identities
- Included children from migrant backgrounds and children without voting rights.
- Child-friendly and age-adapted participation methods used.
- Professional facilitation and institutional settings provided safeguarding.

Transferability potential

Very high. Can be adapted by municipalities of different sizes. Does not require a €1 million budget; smaller municipalities can replicate the methodology with smaller funds.

The model aligns particularly well with Child-ACT's ambition to create sustainable child participation mechanisms linked to local policymaking and feedback obligations.



BEST PRACTICE

Ghent (Belgium)

Children's Council (Kinderraad) and Child-Friendly City Governance

AT A GLANCE

Location
Ghent, Belgium

Target Group
Children aged approx. 10–14, represented through schools

Type of mechanism
Youth/Children's Council;

Year Initiated
Early 2000s

Lead Actor
City of Ghent Youth Department

LINKS

stad.gent

Childfriendlycities.org

Description

Ghent has developed a long-standing child participation system centred on its Children's Council (Kinderraad), operating within the municipality's broader Child-Friendly City framework.

The Children's Council brings together children from different schools and neighbourhoods who meet regularly to discuss local issues and formulate recommendations for municipal authorities.

The council is **integrated into the city's governance structure** rather than functioning as a standalone youth activity. Children are consulted on urban planning, mobility, public spaces, environmental policies and community services. Municipal departments regularly seek the council's views on projects affecting children, and the council's recommendations are formally transmitted to elected officials and civil servants.

The mechanism is complemented by wider participation initiatives, including school consultations, neighbourhood engagement activities and child-friendly urban planning processes.

Why is it effective?

- Participation is embedded across multiple municipal departments, not only youth services.
- Children engage with real policy issues rather than simulated exercises.
- Creates direct communication channels between children and decision-makers.
- Participation is continuous and institutionalised.
- Children's perspectives are integrated into planning and service design.
- Builds a culture within the municipality that recognises children as stakeholders.

Evidence of impact

- Children's input has informed public space and playground design.
- Contributions have influenced mobility and traffic safety discussions.
- Child participation has become a recognised component of municipal planning.
- Ghent is frequently cited as a leading Child-Friendly City in Europe.
- The Children's Council has operated over multiple municipal administrations, demonstrating sustainability.
- Municipal departments increasingly incorporate child-impact considerations into policy development.

Gender and inclusion dimension

- Recruitment is conducted through schools across diverse neighbourhoods.
- Efforts are made to include children from migrant and socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Participation activities use child-friendly facilitation methods.
- Municipal social inclusion services support outreach to harder-to-reach groups.
- Representation aims to reflect the diversity of the city's child population.
- The municipality monitors participation patterns to encourage balanced participation of girls and boys.
- Activities are organised in safe and supervised environments.
- Participation methods are adapted to different ages and communication needs.

Transferability potential

Very high. Requires relatively limited financial investment and can be replicated through partnerships between municipalities and schools. Suitable for medium-sized municipalities as well as large cities.

Ghent's model could be adapted by establishing permanent Local Children's Councils in participating Child-ACT municipalities and requiring municipal departments to formally respond to children's recommendations within a fixed timeframe.

BEST PRACTICE

Viljandi (Estonia)

Viljandi Youth Council Project Fund



Description

The Viljandi Youth Council Project Fund is a **municipal grant programme** that enables young people to propose, develop and implement projects benefiting the local community. What makes the initiative distinctive is that the Viljandi Youth Council itself evaluates applications and decides how the municipal funding is allocated, giving young people genuine responsibility over public resources.

The City of Viljandi provides financial and administrative support for the programme, while project decisions are delegated to the Youth Council. This creates a practical model of participatory decision-making in which young people move beyond consultation to directly influencing municipal spending.

AT A GLANCE

Location
Viljandi, Estonia

Target Group
Children and young people aged approx. 7–26

Type of mechanism
Youth-led project fund / Participatory grant-making

Year Initiated
Could not verify

Lead Actor
Municipality of Viljandi in partnership with the Viljandi Youth Council

LINKS

Use.metropolis.org

Eurocities.eu

Why is it effective?

The Project Fund gives young people real decision-making authority by allowing the Youth Council to assess applications and distribute municipal funding.
Rather than acting only as an advisory body, young people determine which community initiatives should receive public support. At the same time, the municipality provides technical assistance, ensuring that projects are both youth-led and administratively feasible.
This combination of youth leadership and municipal support creates meaningful participation while strengthening young people's skills in budgeting, project evaluation and civic responsibility.

Evidence of impact

The youth council administers an 8,000-euro fund for supporting youth projects. Over the years, a number of outstanding and large-scale initiatives have been implemented with its support, including the construction of the VANT indoor skate park, the publication of VLND magazine, and the organisation of Gümnasistide Nädal (Secondary School Students' Week) and Kunstikompot. The long-term successful work of the Viljandi Youth Council was also recognised in 2019 with the national title of Participation Body of the Year.

Gender and inclusion dimension

Funding is accessible to a very broad target group — the fund supports projects and initiatives by young people aged 7–26. The formal applicant may be an individual aged 14–26 (for minors, a covering letter from an adult supervisor is required, ensuring safety) or a legal entity representing young people. Submission of applications and reports takes place conveniently through an electronic self-service environment (Spoku). This flexible approach enables both formal youth organisations and ordinary unorganised young people to realise their ideas.

Transferability potential

High. Any local government can allocate a dedicated sum from its municipal budget to support youth self-initiative. The delegation of the decision-making process is also readily replicable as a model — technical support for project applications is provided by the city government, while the substantive evaluation of applications and the distribution of funding are delegated to the local youth council. The Viljandi regulation provides a ready-made legal and organisational framework for this purpose.

The Viljandi model illustrates that meaningful participation is strengthened when young people are trusted with real responsibility.

BEST PRACTICE

Milan & San Donato Milanese (Italy)

Relational and Territorial Approaches to Participation of Vulnerable Young People



Description

The fieldwork conducted in Milan and San Donato Milanese focused on understanding how vulnerable young people experience participation in everyday life. Rather than identifying a specific programme or institutional mechanism, the research examined participation within two contexts: a youth aggregation centre (Centro di Aggregazione Giovanile – CAG) in San Donato Milanese and first reception services for unaccompanied foreign minors in Milan.

The analysis highlighted that **participation often emerges through relationships, trust and everyday experiences** rather than through formal consultation mechanisms. Young people described participation primarily in terms of feeling recognised, belonging to a community, developing stable relationships with adults and gaining confidence in navigating social and institutional environments.

The findings suggest that for many vulnerable adolescents, participation is a gradual process rooted in relational continuity, safe community spaces and coordinated support systems.

From this perspective, participation should not be understood simply as an institutional procedure, but as a socially and spatially situated process deeply connected to wellbeing, relational stability, and the possibility of inhabiting collective spaces without fear, stigma, or exclusion.

AT A GLANCE

Location
Milan and San Donato Milanese, Italy

Target Group
Vulnerable children

Type of mechanism
Community-based participation

Lead Actor
Educational services, youth centres (CAG), first reception services for unaccompanied foreign minors, social and third-sector organisations

LINKS

- San Donato Municipality Youth Centre
- Municipality of Milan for UAMs
- Psychosocial Well-being Programmes

Why is it effective?

- Recognises participation as a long-term process rather than a one-off activity.
- Places trust and relationships at the centre of participation.
- Creates opportunities for engagement through everyday interactions.
- Reduces barriers for young people who may struggle to engage in formal participation structures.
- Connects participation to wellbeing, belonging and social inclusion.
- Builds on existing community resources and support networks.

Evidence of impact

- Interviews and focus groups consistently highlighted the importance of trusted adults and long-term relationships.
- Young people reported greater feelings of belonging and recognition within accessible community spaces.
- Professionals observed that vulnerable young people often became more willing to engage after periods of relational stabilisation.
- Fieldwork identified stronger participation outcomes where educational services, municipalities, schools and social services collaborated.

Gender and inclusion dimension

- Strong focus on: unaccompanied foreign minors, migrant-background youth, socially isolated adolescents, young people experiencing psychological vulnerability, educationally disengaged youth.
- Recognises that vulnerable children often require tailored pathways into participation.
- Emphasises the role of cultural mediators and multidisciplinary support.
- No specific gender-targeted methodology was identified during the fieldwork.

Transferability potential

- High transferability as a methodological approach rather than as a service model.
- Applicable in municipalities of different sizes and contexts.
- Particularly relevant for communities seeking to engage children who are underrepresented in formal participation structures.
- Can complement children's councils, participatory budgeting initiatives and youth assemblies.

This case highlights an important lesson for ChildACT:
Participation should not begin with consultation; it should begin with trust.

BEST PRACTICE

Cork (Ireland)

Comhairle na nÓg (“Youth Council”)



Description

Comhairle na nÓg ("Youth Council") is Ireland's **national youth participation structure** and operates in every local authority area.

Cork's Comhairle na nÓg is among the most active and well-developed examples. It brings together young people aged 12–17 from schools, youth organisations and community groups to discuss issues affecting children and young people at local and national levels.

Participants identify priority topics, conduct consultations with peers, formulate recommendations and engage directly with decision-makers. The structure is supported by local authorities while also being connected to national youth participation mechanisms, creating a clear pathway between local experiences and national policymaking.

Young people receive training, facilitation and opportunities to participate in consultations, policy discussions and advocacy initiatives throughout the year.

AT A GLANCE

Location
Cork, Ireland

Target Group
Young people aged 12–17 years old

Type of mechanism
Youth/Children's Council

Year Initiated
National programme launched in 2001

Lead Actor
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Ireland)

LINKS

Hubnanog.ie

Comhairlenanog.ie

Why is it effective?

- Operates within a nationwide institutional framework.
- Ensures continuity regardless of local political changes.
- Provides training and capacity-building for participants.
- Connects local concerns with national decision-making processes.
- Creates formal opportunities for dialogue with public authorities.
- Includes structured follow-up and accountability mechanisms.

Evidence of impact

- Young people have contributed to discussions on mental health, education and online safety.
- Local recommendations have informed youth services and community planning.
- National consultations involving Comhairle na nÓg have influenced government policy debates.
- Evaluations report increased civic confidence and democratic engagement among participants.
- The model has been operating successfully for many years across Ireland.

Gender and inclusion dimension

- Dedicated outreach to: traveller communities, children with disabilities, migrant-background young people, rural youth, disadvantaged communities.
- Participation support includes accessibility measures and travel assistance.
- Girls consistently participate in large numbers and frequently hold leadership positions.
- Local authorities are encouraged to monitor representation and inclusion.
- Youth workers receive training on inclusive participation.
- Strong safeguarding procedures are in place, including child protection policies and supervised activities.

Transferability potential

Extremely high. It provides a ready-made model for municipalities seeking structured participation.

ChildACT could create a network of Local Child Councils linked through a national coordination platform in each partner country, inspired by the Comhairle na nÓg model.

BEST PRACTICE



Turku (Finland)

Children’s Parliament

AT A GLANCE

Location
Turku, Finland

Target Group
Children aged approx. 9–13 represented through schools

Type of mechanism
Children's Parliament; Consultation Mechanism

Year Initiated
Early 2000s

Lead Actor
City of Turku Education and Youth Services

LINKS

Turku.fi

Child friendly municipality

Description

The Children's Parliament of Turku is one of Finland's best-known examples of **representative child participation at municipal level.** Representatives are elected through schools and participate in a structured forum that enables children to express views on issues affecting their lives.

The parliament meets regularly and discusses topics such as education, school environments, mobility, leisure services, public spaces and community wellbeing. Representatives formulate proposals and provide input to municipal authorities, while maintaining close links with the schools they represent.

The Children's Parliament forms part of Finland's broader commitment to child-friendly governance and is frequently referenced within UNICEF Finland's Child-Friendly Municipality programme.

Why is it effective?

- Provides a permanent and structured participation channel.
- Uses democratic elections to strengthen legitimacy.
- Creates direct contact between children and municipal decision-makers.
- Encourages civic learning and democratic engagement.
- Ensures children's perspectives are considered in local planning.
- Links school communities with municipal governance.

Evidence of impact

- Children's recommendations have informed decisions on school environments and recreational services.
- Municipal authorities regularly consult the parliament on child-related issues.
- The model has operated for many years, demonstrating sustainability.
- Contributes to stronger dialogue between children and local government.
- Frequently highlighted within Finland's Child-Friendly Municipality programme.

Gender and inclusion dimension

- School-based elections provide broad participation opportunities.
- Representatives come from different schools and neighbourhoods.
- Participation is guided by principles of equality and non-discrimination.
- Child-friendly methods support participation by younger children.
- The Child-Friendly Municipality framework promotes inclusion of vulnerable groups.
- Teacher involvement helps ensure accessibility and safeguarding.
- Activities take place within established child-protection and educational structures.

Transferability potential

High. Relatively low-cost model, can be established through existing school networks. It is particularly suitable for municipalities seeking representative participation mechanisms. Adaptable to both urban and smaller municipalities.

ChildACT could pilot Children's Parliaments in selected municipalities, with elected representatives from schools feeding directly into local consultations, participatory budgeting processes and municipal action plans.

BEST PRACTICE

Latvia

Signal elections (Signālvēlēšanas)



Description

Signal Elections is a **national youth participation initiative** implemented in Latvia since 2025. Inspired by Nordic mock election models, it allows young people aged 16–17 to experience the democratic process before reaching voting age. Implemented through schools and vocational education institutions, the initiative combines civic education with active participation by enabling young people to organise election campaigns, manage voting processes and discuss issues relevant to their communities.

A distinctive feature of the model is its youth-led approach. Young coordinators take responsibility for communication, promotion, voter engagement and election administration within their schools, transforming participants from passive recipients of information into active organisers of a democratic process. By operating within formal education settings, the initiative reaches a broad and diverse group of young people across Latvia and provides practical experience of participation, responsibility and democratic decision-making.

AT A GLANCE

Location
Latvia (national level)

Target Group
Young people aged 16-17

Type of mechanism
Co-decision / Co-creation mechanism

Year Initiated
Since 2025

Lead Actor
European Movement Latvia, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, the Central Election Commission and youth civil society organisations.

Why is it effective?

Signal Elections moves beyond civic education by giving young people direct responsibility for organising and implementing the process. Young coordinators manage communication, promotion, voting arrangements and vote counting, while learning through peer-to-peer collaboration. By operating through schools and vocational education institutions, the initiative reaches a broader and more diverse group of young people than traditional youth participation structures.

Evidence of impact

The initiative reached approximately 60,000 young people across 201 educational institutions in 2026, supported by 340 youth coordinators. It strengthens civic knowledge, organisational skills and trust in young people's capacities. The process has also contributed to public debate, with youth proposals influencing discussions on issues such as summer night transport and youth involvement in election administration.

Gender and inclusion dimension

Implementation through schools and vocational education institutions helps reach young people from different regions and socio-economic backgrounds, including those who may not participate in youth organisations or councils. No significant differences between girls' and boys' participation have been reported. The model also has strong potential to engage rural youth due to its nationwide school-based approach.

Transferability potential

Transferability is high. The model uses existing educational institutions rather than requiring new participation structures and can be adapted to different local contexts. Its sustainability depends on continued institutional support, stable funding and cooperation between schools, public authorities and youth organisations.

Signal Elections demonstrates that schools can serve as effective participation spaces capable of reaching large numbers of young people. The practice highlights the value of peer-led approaches and shows how young people can take meaningful responsibility for organising civic processes when provided with appropriate support and trust.

BEST PRACTICE

Jēkabpils (Latvia)



Jēkabpils youth initiative project competition

AT A GLANCE

Location
Jēkabpils (Latvia)

Target Group
Children and young people aged 13-25

Type of mechanism
Participatory budgeting

Year Initiated
Could not verify

Lead Actor
Municipality of Jēkabpils

LINKS

Jekabpils.lv

Description

The Jēkabpils youth initiative project competition is a **promising local practice** because it gives young people aged 13-25 a clear opportunity to develop and implement their own ideas with municipal support. According to the Jēkabpils youth sector representative, this is one of the most accessible mechanisms for young people because it offers a short implementation cycle and visible results. Young people can organise activities, workshops, exhibitions, mental health events, improvements to youth spaces and other initiatives. This practice is effective because it lowers the threshold for participation. Compared with participatory budgeting, which may require technical knowledge, budgeting skills and more formal procedures, youth initiative projects are easier for young people to understand and use. They also create a sense of impact because young people can see the result of their own idea within a relatively short time.

The inclusion potential is strong because the mechanism is open from age 13, unlike several formal municipal participation mechanisms that start from age 16 or 18. This makes it particularly relevant for younger adolescents, who otherwise have fewer direct routes to influence municipal life. The main limitation is that the scale of funding is smaller and the practice depends on youth worker support and municipal willingness to continue the mechanism.

Why is it effective?

The competition lowers barriers to participation by providing a simple and accessible way for young people to develop and implement their own ideas. Compared to more complex mechanisms such as participatory budgeting, the process is easier for young people to understand and navigate. The relatively short implementation cycle also allows participants to see tangible results from their involvement.

Evidence of impact

The programme has supported a variety of youth-led initiatives, including workshops, community events, exhibitions, mental health activities and improvements to youth spaces. According to local stakeholders, it is one of the most accessible participation opportunities available to young people in the municipality and provides visible results within a relatively short timeframe.

Gender and inclusion dimension

The mechanism is open to young people from the age of 13, making it accessible to younger adolescents who are often excluded from formal participation structures. Its flexible format enables participation by young people with different interests and backgrounds, while support from youth workers helps reduce barriers for less experienced participants.

Transferability potential

Transferability is high. The model requires relatively modest financial resources and can be implemented by municipalities of different sizes. It offers a practical way to encourage youth participation through direct support for youth-led initiatives while building young people's confidence and project management skills.

The Jēkabpils model demonstrates that participation opportunities should not be limited to older adolescents or highly formal mechanisms. Small-scale youth initiative funds can provide an accessible first step into civic participation and help young people experience the impact of their ideas in a concrete and visible way.

BEST PRACTICE

Bacău (Romania)

Consiliului Local al Copiilor - Municipiul Bacău



Description

The Children's Local Council of Bacău is an **official consultative body** established by the Municipality of Bacău in 2022 as part of UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities Initiative. Created through a formal decision of the Local Council, it provides a permanent mechanism through which children and adolescents can participate in local decision-making.

The council consists of 20 children and young people under the age of 18 representing different schools, neighbourhoods and social backgrounds. Members contribute to discussions on policies, services and projects affecting children, while representing children's perspectives in the municipality's planning processes. The council also supports the implementation of Bacău's Local Action Plan for the Child Friendly Cities Initiative.

AT A GLANCE

Location
Bacău (Romania)

Target Group
20 children and young people under the age of 18

Type of mechanism
Children's Local Council

Year Initiated
2022

Lead Actor
Municipality of Bacău

LINKS

Municipiulbacau.ro

Instagram.com

Why is it effective?

The Children's Local Council provides a formal and permanent channel through which children can participate directly in local governance.
Unlike one-off consultations, the mechanism is legally established by the Municipal Council and functions as an advisory body involved in decision-making processes concerning children. It is integrated into the Child Friendly Cities Initiative, ensuring that children's views inform local planning and policy development. The council also creates regular opportunities for dialogue between children, elected representatives and municipal services.

Evidence of impact

The council has been formally recognised as part of Bacău's governance structure through Local Council Decision No. 413/2022.
Members have contributed to the municipality's Child Friendly Cities Action Plan and participated in consultations on local priorities.

Gender and inclusion dimension

Inclusion is a defining feature of the mechanism.
The council intentionally includes children of different ages, from different neighbourhoods and ethnic backgrounds, as well as children from vulnerable situations, including children with disabilities, children living in poverty and children from single-parent families. Selection procedures also sought to maintain gender balance among members. Participation follows UNICEF child participation standards, emphasising accessibility, safety, inclusiveness and child-friendly methods.

Transferability potential

Transferability is high. The Bacău model demonstrates how municipalities can institutionalise child participation through a formal consultative council supported by clear governance arrangements. Its integration within the Child Friendly Cities Initiative provides an adaptable framework that can be replicated by other municipalities wishing to strengthen children's participation while embedding it within local decision-making processes.

The Bacău model demonstrates that meaningful participation can be strengthened by giving children's councils formal legal recognition within municipal governance. Establishing children's councils through official local decisions, rather than informal projects, increases their legitimacy, continuity and influence on policymaking.

BEST PRACTICE



Valencian Community (Spain)

Red CLIA – Network of Local Child and Adolescent Participation Councils

Description

The Red CLIA (Network of Local Child and Adolescent Participation Councils) is a r**egional initiative** led by the Generalitat Valenciana **that supports and connects municipal child participation councils across the Valencian Community.** Through an annual grants programme launched in 2017, the regional government provides stable funding and technical support to help municipalities establish and strengthen permanent participation mechanisms.

The network links local councils through the Autonomous Children and Adolescents' Council (CAI-CV), enabling children to contribute to regional decision-making and to be represented at the national level through Spain's State Council for Child Participation (CEPIA).

With more than 85 local councils, around 1,700 participating children and adolescents, and increasing regional investment, Red CLIA has become one of Spain's most developed examples of a systemic, multi-level child participation model.

AT A GLANCE

Location
Valencian Community (Generalitat Valenciana)

Target Group
Children and adolescents participating in local child councils

Type of mechanism
Co-decision/Co-creation mechanism

Year Initiated
Since 2017

Lead Actor
Generalitat Valenciana (Regional Government of the Valencian Community)

LINKS

Comunica.gva.es

Serviciossociales.gva.es

Why is it effective?

A systemic regional model with 85+ local councils and approximately 1,700 child members, supported by annual grants of over €900,000 to local authorities. A regional children's and adolescents' council (CIACV) connects local councils to regional government. The annual grant programme has been active since 2017 with increasing funding year-on-year.

Evidence of impact

The network expanded by approximately 30% in a single year, growing from 55 municipal councils in 2022 to 72 in 2023, and exceeding 85 councils by 2024.
Approximately 1,700 children and adolescents currently participate in local councils across the region.
Regional investment has increased steadily, with annual funding rising from more than €900,000 in 2023 (supporting 112 local authorities) to €1 million in 2024.
The success of the network has also contributed to the wider institutionalisation of child participation. Law 4/2023 of the Valencian Community establishes children's participation as a requirement for municipalities, strengthening the long-term sustainability of participation mechanisms across the region.

Gender and inclusion dimension

Regional grants include inclusive design requirements. The network architecture is designed to reach municipalities of all sizes, including small ones, through financial and technical support.

Transferability potential

High at the regional level. This is a model for how a regional government can systematically drive and fund local child participation, independent of the political will of each individual municipality.

Red CLIA demonstrates that sustainable child participation requires institutional infrastructure, not only local enthusiasm.
The model also highlights the value of creating vertical participation pathways, ensuring that children's views can move from local councils to regional and national decision-making bodies.

BEST PRACTICE



Quart de Poblet (Valencian Community)

Municipal Council for Children and Adolescents (CMIA)

AT A GLANCE

Location
Quart de Poblet (Valencian Community)

Target Group
Children and adolescents

Type of mechanism
Youth/Children's Council

Year Initiated
Since 2006

Lead Actor
Municipality of Quart de Poblet – Department for Children and Adolescents (Regidoria d'Infància)

LINKS

Quartdepoblet.es

Description

The Municipal Council for Children and Adolescents (CMIA) of Quart de Poblet is one of Spain's **longest-running municipal child participation mechanisms**, operating continuously since 2006. The council enables children and adolescents to contribute to local policymaking through regular consultation, co-design activities and the annual Children's Plenary (Ple d'Infància).

The CMIA plays a central role in developing and monitoring the municipality's Local Plans for Children and Adolescents, including the current III Local Plan 2023–2027, which was co-produced with direct input from children. The mechanism is supported by a dedicated municipal department for children's rights with its own staff and budget, ensuring continuity across successive political mandates.

As a UNICEF Child-Friendly City and an active member of the Red CLIA network, Quart de Poblet is widely recognised as a reference municipality for institutionalised child participation in Spain.

Why is it effective?

One of Spain's most sustained municipal child participation mechanisms, active since 2006 across successive political mandates. The CMIA co-produces Local Plans for Children and Adolescents, holds an annual Children's Plenary (Ple d'Infància), and is embedded in a dedicated municipal department (Regidória d'Infància) with its own staff and budget. The III Local Plan 2023–2027 was developed with direct child input.

Evidence of impact

The CMIA has operated continuously since 2006, making it one of Spain's most established municipal child participation mechanisms.
Children have contributed to successive Local Plans for Children and Adolescents, including the III Local Plan 2023–2027, demonstrating sustained influence on municipal policy.
Quart de Poblet regularly participates in national child participation initiatives, including the 8th National Meeting on Child and Adolescent Participation held in Bilbao in January 2025.
The municipality has also been recognised by UNICEF as a Child-Friendly City, reflecting its long-standing commitment to children's rights and participation.

Gender and inclusion dimension

Member of the Valencian Community's Red CLIA, which applies inclusive design guidelines. Specific data on gender composition and inclusion outreach requires direct confirmation from the municipality.

Transferability potential

High. The mechanism's durability across successive mandates is directly linked to the existence of a dedicated department and budget line. The model is replicable in medium-sized municipalities with technical support and regional incentive structures such as those provided by the Red CLIA.

For ChildACT+, the key lesson is the importance of creating permanent local participation structures with dedicated staff, resources and formal links to policymaking. Integrating children's councils into strategic planning processes, rather than limiting participation to consultation exercises, can strengthen both the quality and the long-term impact of children's participation in local decision-making.

Cross-cutting Lessons

The review of child participation mechanisms implemented across European municipalities revealed a growing recognition of children as legitimate stakeholders in local governance. However, the analysis also highlighted significant differences in how participation is organised, resourced and embedded within decision-making structures. While many municipalities have developed innovative initiatives to engage children and young people, only a smaller number have succeeded in creating participation systems that are sustainable, inclusive and capable of influencing public policy.

The selected practices from illustrate a wide range of approaches, including participatory budgeting, children's parliaments, children's councils and structured consultation mechanisms. Despite their diversity, several common lessons emerged that are highly relevant for the upcoming activities of the Child-ACT+ project.

Meaningful participation requires institutionalisation

One of the strongest findings is that successful participation mechanisms are embedded within formal municipal structures rather than operating as isolated projects. In all high-performing examples, participation was supported by official mandates, dedicated staff, regular activities and clear links to decision-making processes.

Institutionalisation ensures continuity beyond electoral cycles and reduces dependence on individual champions within local government.



Children are more likely to engage when participation opportunities are predictable and recurring rather than occasional or symbolic. Municipalities that established permanent structures, such as children's councils or parliaments, were better able to sustain participation over time and demonstrate long-term impact.

The collection also shows that institutionalisation is strongest when participation mechanisms are embedded within wider governance systems rather than operating in isolation. Examples such as Vienna's Children and Youth Strategy, Ghent's Child-Friendly City framework, the Valencian Community's Red CLIA network, and Ireland's multi-level participation structures demonstrate how local participation becomes more sustainable when connected to broader policy frameworks, dedicated coordination structures and long-term public investment.

This finding suggests that ChildACT should prioritise the creation of permanent participation mechanisms rather than temporary consultation exercises. Sustainability should be considered from the outset, including the identification of municipal ownership, governance arrangements and long-term resource needs.

Participation is most effective when linked to real decisions

The most successful practices moved beyond consultation and provided children with opportunities to influence actual decisions. Children were significantly more engaged when they could see a clear connection between their contributions and concrete outcomes.

The Vienna Children's and Youth Budget is a particularly strong example, as children participate in proposing, discussing and selecting projects that receive municipal funding. Similar lessons emerged from children's parliaments and youth councils that maintain formal channels of communication with elected officials and municipal departments.

Similar approaches can be observed in Viljandi, where young people decide on the allocation of municipal project funding, and in Quart de Poblet, where the Children's Council contributes directly to the municipality's Local Plan for Children and Adolescents.

In contrast, initiatives that collected children's views without providing feedback or demonstrating impact risked creating frustration and reducing trust in public institutions.

A key implication for ChildACT is the importance of establishing clear feedback mechanisms. Municipalities should not only consult children but also communicate how children's recommendations were considered, implemented or, where appropriate, why they could not be adopted.

Participation requires adequate resources and political commitment

Participation requires adequate resources and political commitment
Successful child participation mechanisms depend not only on children's willingness to engage, but also on sustained institutional investment. Across the practices included in this collection, the most effective mechanisms are supported by dedicated staff, stable funding, and clear political commitment. These resources enable municipalities to organise participation activities consistently, provide appropriate facilitation and safeguarding, coordinate follow-up actions, and ensure that children's contributions are integrated into local decision-making processes.

Examples such as Vienna's Participatory Children and Youth Budget, Quart de Poblet's Municipal Council for Children and Adolescents, and the Valencian Community's Red CLIA network demonstrate that long-term investment in participation infrastructure contributes directly to the sustainability and effectiveness of participation mechanisms.

Conversely, initiatives that rely solely on temporary projects or individual champions are more vulnerable to changes in political priorities or staff turnover.

For ChildACT, this highlights the importance of encouraging municipalities to view child participation as a core governance function rather than an optional activity. Establishing dedicated responsibilities, allocating adequate financial resources, and securing long-term political support are essential conditions for creating meaningful and lasting participation opportunities.

Inclusion does not happen automatically and must be actively designed

A recurring finding across all documented practices is that participation mechanisms tend to attract children who are already active, confident and well-supported unless deliberate efforts are made to reach underrepresented groups.

Municipalities that achieved greater diversity invested significant effort in outreach, accessibility and tailored participation methods. Successful approaches included partnerships with schools, social services, disability organisations, migrant support organisations and youth workers. Some municipalities organised dedicated workshops for children with disabilities or adapted participation methods to different communication needs and age groups.

The review also confirmed that rural children, children from minority backgrounds, children with disabilities and children experiencing social exclusion remain among the groups least likely to participate in traditional governance structures.

This lesson is particularly relevant to ChildACT, given our explicit commitment to reducing participation inequalities. Inclusion should not be treated as a secondary objective but as a core design principle integrated into recruitment, facilitation, communication and evaluation processes.

Gender-sensitive participation requires active measures

Although gender equality is often assumed within participation initiatives, relatively few municipalities systematically monitor participation by gender or assess whether girls and boys experience participation differently.

The strongest examples collected gender-disaggregated participation data and actively monitored representation. Some municipalities used facilitation techniques designed to ensure balanced participation in discussions and decision-making processes.

The review suggests that equal participation cannot be assumed simply because participation opportunities are open to everyone. Social norms, confidence levels and group dynamics may affect who speaks, whose views are heard and whose priorities receive attention.

This finding reinforces the relevance of ChildACT's planned Gender and Diversity Dashboard. Monitoring participation patterns and outcomes should become a routine component of local participation mechanisms.

Schools are essential but should not be the only entry point

Schools emerged as the most common and effective channel for reaching large numbers of children. School-based elections, consultations and representative structures provide a practical mechanism for recruiting participants and ensuring legitimacy.

However, relying exclusively on schools may exclude children who are absent from school, have irregular attendance, are institutionalised or participate primarily through community organisations. Several of the strongest practices therefore combined school-based participation with outreach through youth centres, social services and civil society organisations.

The lesson for ChildACT is that schools should form a central pillar of participation efforts, but complementary outreach mechanisms are necessary to ensure that vulnerable groups are not overlooked.

Adult attitudes matter as much as children's capacity

Many municipalities initially focused on developing children's skills and confidence. However, the review suggests that the willingness and capacity of adults to listen and respond are equally important.

Where municipal staff and elected officials received training on child participation, participation mechanisms tended to have greater influence and sustainability. Children reported higher levels of trust when decision-makers demonstrated genuine interest in their views and provided clear feedback.

This finding supports ChildACT's dual approach of working with both children and local authorities. Strengthening institutional readiness for participation is just as important as empowering children themselves.

Measuring impact remains a challenge

Although many municipalities reported positive outcomes, evidence of long-term impact was often limited. Participation processes were frequently evaluated in terms of the number of children involved rather than changes in policies, services or governance practices.

The strongest examples documented specific policy changes, implemented projects or strategic measures that resulted directly from children's contributions. However, systematic impact measurement remains relatively rare across Europe.

Future participation initiatives should therefore include monitoring frameworks that capture both participation outputs and policy outcomes. Demonstrating impact will be critical for maintaining political support and securing long-term sustainability.

Trust and relationships remain essential for meaningful participation

While formal participation mechanisms provide important structures, meaningful participation ultimately depends on trust. Children are more likely to engage when they feel listened to, respected and supported by adults.

Several practices in this collection highlight the importance of safe, child-friendly environments, skilled facilitators and ongoing relationships that encourage children to express their views with confidence. Building trust is therefore not separate from participation - it is a prerequisite for ensuring that children's voices are heard and valued.

Conclusion



The documentation of European best practices demonstrates that meaningful child participation is both achievable and beneficial when supported by appropriate structures, resources and political commitment. The strongest practices share several common characteristics: they are institutionalised, linked to real decision-making, inclusive, supported by trained adults and capable of demonstrating tangible outcomes.

At the same time, the review highlights ongoing challenges related to inclusion, gender equality, feedback mechanisms and impact measurement. These lessons provide valuable guidance for the implementation of ChildACT and reinforce the project's emphasis on creating sustainable, inclusive and rights-based participation systems at local level.

Rather than treating participation as a one-off consultation activity, the reviewed practices demonstrate the importance of establishing a culture of shared decision-making in which children are recognised as active contributors to the design and improvement of their communities.

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