

## **Positive Practices for Child Participation in the EU: Children under protection and alternative care**

Child participation in all aspects of modern society is extremely important for the good development of children. Furthermore it is extremely important that children belonging to vulnerable groups that are already marginalized in society have an increased opportunity to participate in society and have their voices heard. This report is based on the EU Commission's report "Evaluation of legislation, policy and practice of child participation in the European Union."<sup>1</sup> Which examines the participation levels of children from vulnerable groups.

Despite legislation promoting participation of children in social care, children undergoing protection or under alternative care are considered to be vulnerable in relation to participation. Children who are deemed to be either suffering, or likely to suffer from abuse or neglect, go through the child protection system, which often results in having them removed from their home environment and placed in alternative care. In over half of the EU member states, there are specific laws that require children to be heard in cases of child protection. Despite the presence of these laws, child participation is considered to be low, since in many cases the state needs to act quickly to remove the child from harms way. A good example of combating this lack of participation can be seen in Austria, where children going through the protection system in highly sensitive cases are appointed a counsellor to follow the proceedings with the child and to communicate the child's concerns and opinions.

Other good examples can be seen in places like Sweden, where a voluntary monitoring and evaluation system, *Barns Behov I Centrum (BBIC)*<sup>2</sup>, has been developed in the early 90's and is now used by almost all of the municipalities in the country. BBIC focuses on providing quality care through providing methods for research, planning and evaluation. It also provides prompts for social workers to ask a child's opinion during meetings, and it also provides templates for interviewing children. In Finland, *The Young Developers Group* consists of young people with experience of going through child welfare services. These youths then meet with social workers twice a month to discuss issues about care provided in the system. The results are positive for both social workers who learn more about the children they are working with, and for the children who report feeling more like experts on the issues rather than victims and clients. Finally, *Voice of Young People in Care*<sup>3</sup>, a charity based in the UK, works to empower and enable young people and children who have experienced social care to participate in decisions that affect their lives. This is done through e-consultations, completing surveys and blogs.

*Written by Kareem Korayem, for Child Protection Hub for South East Europe, 2016.*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://childhub.org/child-protection-online-library/evaluation-legislation-policy-and-practice-child-participation-0>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.socialstyrelsen.se/barnochfamilj/bbic>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.voypic.org/>



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