

Positive Practices for Child Participation in the EU: Disabled Children

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."¹ Which examines the participation levels of children from vulnerable groups.

Children with disabilities are another group of children who experience low levels of participation. Additionally, there does not seem to be any legislation aimed exclusively at this group of children in terms of participation, legislation exists only in terms of rights.

There are several reasons why there is a lack of exclusive legislation and efforts towards children with disabilities. Many countries, such as Lithuania, underestimate the number of children with disabilities in their counties by at least half. Another reason is the fact that children with disabilities lack the special equipment and conditions that they need in order for them to participate. Additionally, the main barrier seems to be the belief that children with disabilities are not able to participate in decision-making. In Europe as a whole, but especially in Eastern Europe, there is a stigma associated with special needs, adding to the paternalistic culture towards these children, which limits their participation in society as a whole.

The good practices that were recognized were usually related to specialist provisions such as specialist school, and NGOs. The Association of Support to Intellectually Disadvantaged People in Slovakia runs a project in partnership with NGOs in four other countries that aim at improving the self-advocacy skill in children, and even adults. In Spain, the FEAPS Foundation² runs a project titled V.I.D.A. This projects works to strengthen the participation of children with developmental disabilities by promoting their self-determination, giving these children the ability to make decisions about their own futures.

Another good example of how to reach disabled children to open the way for their participation in society was seen in Ireland. In 2010, there was a national consultation into the experience of children in the care of the state, but there was difficulty in hearing the opinion of the disabled because they had difficulty using their own voice. Addressing this, the state launched a parallel process that provided additional support for those children, allowing them to give their own opinions and ideas.³

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

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

² <http://www.feaps.org/>

³ http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/LTOV_report_LR.pdf



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