

## Positive Practices for Child Participation in the EU: Migrant 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."<sup>1</sup> Which examines the participation levels of children from vulnerable groups.

Migrant children, both asylum seeker and legal residents, experience low levels of participation. Various stakeholders have stated that young people from different ethnic backgrounds have often been the hardest group to reach, in terms of participation. One reason for decreased participation is that many of these groups have been excluded from services in the past, and don't see the point of engaging.

Some member states have taken steps to improve the process of reception for asylum-seeking unaccompanied children, such as Germany, which now provides special accommodation for separated and unaccompanied children, where they spend at least three months before any asylum procedure can be started. These special facilities provide check ups on the child's health and protection needs, and provides them with an education. Though this process is not enshrined in German law, it has been acknowledged as a good practice and adopted by many municipalities in the country.

The report states that there is a shortage of good examples in the EU when it comes to increasing the participation of migrant and asylum seeking children. Despite this, one good practice that can be learned from is the Finnish Refugee Council's *Safety Net* project. This project offers peer-to-peer counselling and social support for asylum seekers. The 23 counsellors who work with the children speak a combined total of 12 different languages, and all of them have been through the asylum seeking process themselves. The counsellors receive training, manuals, and guidelines so that they can help children navigate the difficult asylum seeking process by giving them advice learned through first-hand experience. They also, in many cases, share a similar culture or background as the children, which might help place the children more at ease in an unfamiliar situation. Also, in Austria, the NGO *Verein.Menschen.Leben* provides psychological care, German language courses, legal advice and escorts for doctor visits while the children are in the Initial Reception Centres.<sup>2</sup>

*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.menschen-leben.at/>