

23PT11 – Developing structural tools to support the implementation of the European Child Guarantee in Portugal

Activity 3.2 – Technical note on international good practices from EU/OECD countries on communication with and participation of children and young people



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Table of contents

Acronyms and abbreviations	4
1 Context	5
<i>Project information and objective of the technical note</i>	<i>5</i>
2 Communicating with and engaging children and young people within the European Child Guarantee and beyond: an overview	6
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>6</i>
3 Austria (Vienna)	11
<i>Vienna's experiences in communicating and engaging with children and young people</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Adopting comprehensive strategies to foster communication and participation</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Box 3.1. Strengthening skills and competencies for meaningful child and youth participation among local public officials ...</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Box 3.2. Cooperating with a specialised independent organisation to support the city's efforts to promote child and youth participation: WIENXTRA</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Setting up dedicated fora and participatory budgeting initiatives to enable children and young people's participation</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Key lessons learnt</i>	<i>16</i>
4 Ireland	17
<i>Ireland's experiences in communicating with and engaging children and young people</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Building solid legal and institutional frameworks for children and youth participation</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Implementing whole-of-government strategies to mainstream children and young people's participation</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Developing practical guidance to build competencies and skills for child and youth participation and age-sensitive communication</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Towards a dedicated communications platform</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Key lessons learnt</i>	<i>23</i>
5 Sweden	24
<i>Sweden's experiences in communicating and engaging with children and young people</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Implementing mixed-methods, multi-actor engagement initiatives</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Engaging children and young people to monitor the progress of the European Child Guarantee's National Action Plan</i>	<i>26</i>

6 Key lessons learnt	28
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References	30
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Acronyms and abbreviations

Acronym/Abbreviation	Full title
CG	Child Guarantee
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DG REFORM	European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support
EU	European Union
NAP	National Action Plan
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PADE	Walloon Action Plan on the Rights of the Child
UN	United Nations

1 Context

Project information and objective of the technical note

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are providing technical support to Portugal to successfully implement and monitor its Child Guarantee National Action Plan (CG NAP). The support is provided through project 23PT11 – *Developing structural tools to support the implementation of the European CG in Portugal*, funded by the European Union through the Technical Support Instrument. The project aims to improve child well-being and tackle child poverty and the social exclusion of children and young people, by focusing on the successful implementation and monitoring of the European CG at the central and local levels in Portugal.

In the context of this project, as part of Activity 3.2, the OECD has prepared this technical note to present relevant international practices on communication with and participation of children and young people in policy design and service delivery, mainly from Austria (city of Vienna), Ireland, and Sweden. These three countries were identified in conjunction with the Office of the National Co-ordinator of the CG in Portugal and DG REFORM based on an initial shortlist of 14 countries that have taken steps to promote age-sensitive public communication with children and young people, as well as to strengthen the participation of child and youth stakeholders in policy design and service delivery.

This technical note is structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides an overview of selected initiatives for targeted communication with and participation of children and young people in policy design and service delivery across EU/OECD countries, with a focus on the European CG.
- Sections 3, 4 and 5 provide an in-depth presentation of key initiatives in Austria (Vienna), Ireland, and Sweden, respectively.
- Finally, Section 6 concludes with key lessons learnt from these experiences, relevant for the Portuguese context.

The note is based on desk research and existing case studies, and it is complemented by insights gathered from public officials and experts through interviews conducted by the OECD between June and October 2024.

This is the final version of the note as approved by the project's Advisory Group. Insights from this note will also be presented and discussed as part of Activity 4.2 (knowledge transfer and/or policy dialogue workshops).

2 Communicating with and engaging children and young people within the European Child Guarantee and beyond: an overview

Introduction

Effective age-sensitive communication and meaningful participation of children and young people in policy design and service delivery are important components of inclusive governance. Across the European Union and the OECD, initiatives and policies have been put in place to empower children and young people and to strengthen their voices in decision-making processes. Promoting the participation of children and young people in public and political life can reinforce their trust in government, strengthen democracy and support social cohesion (OECD, 2022^[1]). In addition, the participation of children and young people informs policymaking processes, helping mainstream their needs and expectations across policy and service areas. OECD data from 2020 shows that 92% of ministries in charge of youth affairs across OECD countries had informed and consulted young people as part of their policy cycle over the previous 12 months. However, it also revealed that consultation and engagement practices¹ targeting these cohorts are not always uniformly adopted across other line ministries (OECD, 2020^[2]), meaning that child and youth perspectives may not be systematically integrated in key policy areas such as education, health, housing, and welfare, among others. The OECD *Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People*, to which Portugal is an Adherent, further underlines the importance of strengthening the participation of children and young people, with a focus on those from marginalised and underrepresented groups (OECD, 2022^[1]).

¹ As explained in the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government (OECD, 2017), “stakeholder participation” refers to all the ways in which stakeholders can be involved in the policy cycle and in service design and delivery, including:

- 1) Information: an initial level of participation characterised by a one-way relationship in which the government produces and delivers information to stakeholders. It covers both on-demand provision of information and “proactive” measures by the government to disseminate information.
- 2) Consultation: a more advanced level of participation that entails a two-way relationship in which stakeholders provide feedback to the government and vice-versa. It is based on the prior definition of the issue for which views are being sought and requires the provision of relevant information, in addition to feedback on the outcomes of the process.
- 3) Engagement: when stakeholders are given the opportunity and the necessary resources (e.g. information, data and digital tools) to collaborate during all phases of the policy-cycle and in the service design and delivery.

Communication and participation are also important components of the European Child Guarantee (CG), which calls on governments to engage with children and young people throughout the design phase, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the CG National Action Plans (NAPs) in EU countries. The European CG was launched in 2021 with the aim of combatting social exclusion and breaking the poverty cycle of children and young people in need in EU Member States by enabling access to free early childhood education and care, free healthcare, healthy nutrition and adequate housing (European Union, 2021^[3]). EU Member States have since developed NAPs to implement the CG at national level.

OECD/EU Members have adopted different practices to promote the participation of children and young people in different stages of the CG. This Section provides a brief overview of key initiatives aimed at engaging and communicating with children and young people in policy design and service delivery across EU and OECD countries, with a particular focus on the European CG. The subsequent Sections delve into selected country-specific experiences in greater detail.

Children and young people's participation in the elaboration of the CG and communication efforts

Some EU countries have prioritised children and young people's participation in designing their CG NAPs.

For instance, **France** consulted the High Council for Family, Children and Age in the development of its NAP. The Council includes numerous governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, including a group of 12 children and young people (6 boys and 6 girls) from different backgrounds. The consultation included preparatory workshops and a concluding workshop on three key themes related to children exposed to poverty and social exclusion: 1) basic needs; 2) health; and 3) school. The discussions of the Council resulted in a series of observations and proposals aimed at better preventing and combating social exclusion (Government of France, 2022^[4]).

Germany included the views of children and young people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the development of its NAP through individual interviews and group discussions providing participants with the opportunity to share their views on the content of the EU CG as well as their expectations of the NAP (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2023^[5]).

Similarly, **Greece** conducted online surveys and focus group discussions with children and young people from marginalised and underrepresented groups, including Roma children, children with disabilities, unaccompanied minors, LGBTQI+² children and families, children in institutional care, those experiencing precarious living conditions, and children from low-income households. Outreach and information dissemination to children and young people in the framework of the CG NAP are organised at both national and local levels. At the national level, communication actions targeted at children and young people in need include campaigns in social and traditional media such as videos and posts, dedicated phone helplines for information provision, and the publication of articles in various media outlets. Additionally, a child-friendly online platform offers relevant information on the services offered under the NAP. At the local level, communication with children and young people occurs through network representatives who operate regionally, for example through interviews, activity groups, and consultations. Additional communication and information measures include street campaigns using printed materials (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2022^[6]).

In **Lithuania**, local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) reached out to vulnerable children specifically to enable their participation in consultations to identify priorities, which informed the design of the NAP. The selected vulnerable groups – children from families in precarious situations, children in foster care, children with mental health challenges, children with disabilities, children in migration, children of migrant

² LGBTQI+ people include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, queer and intersex people and other sexual orientations and gender identities.

origin, children of national minorities (including Roma children) – had been previously identified during Lithuania’s participation in Phase III “Testing the Child Guarantee in the EU Member States”, intended to prepare for the implementation of the Child Guarantee. The Lithuanian Government also aims to create a child-friendly version of the NAP that will be publicly accessible on the website of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour (Republic of Lithuania, 2023^[7]).

Similarly, **Spain** developed various communication measures in its NAP including a dedicated website, regular seminars, and efforts to create child- and youth-friendly versions of relevant materials; and has also created a child- and youth-friendly version of the NAP to communicate the General Comments (Ministry of Social Rights and the 2030 Agenda, n.d.^[8]).

Meanwhile, in **Slovenia** national ministries and NGOs co-organised a consultation with 37 children aged 12-15 from across the country during the elaboration of the NAP. The Slovenian NAP also proposes the development of an online information point to provide children and their families with knowledge about the assistance available through the NAP (Republic of Slovenia, 2022^[9]).

Children and young people’s participation in the implementation of the CG

Some countries plan to involve children and young people in the implementation of the CG.

Spain aims to leverage existing structures to engage children and young people in the implementation of its NAP, including the State Council for the Participation of Children and Adolescents, as well as local child and adolescent participation bodies (Ministry of Social Rights, 2022^[10]).

In **Germany**, the NAP envisions consultative initiatives such as workshops and project groups during the implementation (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2023^[11]).

In **Belgium**, where the NAP implementation is mainly delegated to regions and communities, Wallonia’s Action Plan on the Rights of the Child (PADE) envisions children and youth-led councils conducting consultations on PADE’s content and implementation progress (PPS Social Integration, 2022^[12]). These councils will determine themes and areas of action within PADE, receive a participatory budget, and provide recommendations to the Walloon government based on the outcomes of their consultations (PPS Social Integration, 2022^[12]).

Children and young people’s participation in monitoring and evaluating the CG and other strategies

Some countries prioritise the participation of children and young people in monitoring and evaluation processes of their CG NAPs to involve both groups in promoting accountability and transparency.

For instance, in **Estonia**, a cross-sectoral working group is set to monitor and track the NAP’s measures and targets, with children and young people participating in its activities (Ministry of Social Affairs, n.d.^[13]).

In **Italy**, the CG NAP established a Youth Advisory Board to consult children and young people from diverse and vulnerable backgrounds in the monitoring of the NAP’s implementation (Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 2022^[14]).

In **Lithuania**, a temporary Children’s Council, made up of 15 children, was established from 2021 to 2023 to discuss topics important to children with experts and child rights advocates and to share insights with public institutions, supporting the monitoring of measures covered by Lithuania’s NAP (Republic of Lithuania, 2023^[7]).

A number of countries have also involved children and youth in the monitoring and evaluation of government strategies beyond the CG, which can offer useful insights. In **New Zealand**, young people participated in the evaluation of the first national youth plan to inform the development of the renewed

Youth Plan: Voice, Leadership, Action, launched in 2023 (Ministry of Youth Development, 2023^[15]). The evaluation processes included a survey and engagement sessions with young people and the youth sector to gather their insights (Ministry of Youth Development, 2023^[15]).

Similarly, **Canada** engaged children and young people in the periodic review of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child through a threefold review process, recognising their expertise in their own lives (Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, 2023^[16]). The process included a comprehensive survey to identify children's and young people's priorities, in-person sessions, and virtual roundtables with government officials and youth representatives from various organisations. Data resulting from this process was subsequently analysed by a team including children and young people and key insights were outlined in a dedicated report (Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, 2023^[16]).

Participation of children and young people from vulnerable backgrounds

Engaging and supporting children and young people from vulnerable and marginalised backgrounds is a core component of the CG and several national action plans. Enabling their participation requires targeted measures given the specific barriers they face in taking part in participatory initiatives, including financial, time, and geographical restrictions to participate in meetings as well as language and ability barriers. Stigma and discrimination may further impede the full participation of children from marginalised backgrounds in decision-making processes.

Phase I of the Preparatory Action of the European Child Guarantee identified four groups of vulnerable children: children with disabilities, children residing in institutions, children with a migrant background including refugee children, and children living in precarious family situations. Furthermore, in the elaboration of NAPs, countries defined vulnerable groups relevant to their own national context. For example, **Portugal** highlights children and young people from Roma communities and children and young people from Ukraine in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Several countries have implemented initiatives to ensure these groups receive targeted support to participate effectively, both within and beyond the CG. For example, **Italy** identified in its NAP outreach measures to involve minors and their families, "starting with those who are the most vulnerable", in order to ensure that their needs are heard and accepted (Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 2022^[14]).

Beyond the CG, *Reaching In* is a collaborative, multi-country project of Eurochild, a non-governmental network of organisations and individuals working with and for children in Europe, aimed at promoting the participation of marginalised children in decision-making at local, national, and European levels emphasising the use of interactive, co-created, and child-friendly communications materials. The target audience of this project are marginalised and vulnerable children, including children from the Roma community, children in alternative care facilities and children from migrant backgrounds. As part of *Reaching In*, for instance, **Belgium** developed a participatory project involving 12 children and young people from asylum-seeking background through a range of activities aimed at engaging them in open dialogue on their needs and rights, in relation to the Child Guarantee (Eurochild, 2023^[17]).

Some countries have also implemented targeted programmes to improve access to services and build trust between Roma children and young people and public institutions. These initiatives can offer insights for Portugal, whose CG NAP also includes an important focus on Roma children and young people: in fact, it is estimated that 45% of people in Roma communities in Portugal are aged below 18 years (Government of Portugal, 2023^[18]). The city of Budapest in **Hungary** developed the *Child Citizens* project aimed at strengthening the participation of children in decision-making processes on matters that directly impact them, with a key focus on Roma children and those from other vulnerable groups. The project includes interactive workshops on children's rights education as well as activities and events to sustain dialogue and participation (e.g. through board games, story-telling workshops, re-imagining and co-designing the district, etc.). In addition, the project includes capacity-building activities for professionals working with

children and young people to strengthen local capacities (Eurochild, 2023a_[19]) (Eurochild, 2023b_[20]). In **Spain**, educational activities targeted to Roma children aimed to raise awareness about their rights as well as efforts to make the European Child Guarantee more accessible to them. For instance, illustrations and logos featuring the priorities of the CG were co-designed with the target group to promote child-friendly approaches to public communication. Roma-led organisations were also involved to support outreach activities: for instance, these organisations worked with 54 children from a disadvantaged area to raise awareness about their rights (Eurochild, 2023c_[17]). The city of Stockholm, in **Sweden**, has launched a project to foster trust between the Roma community and the government, a factor that has been identified as one of the primary barriers preventing Roma families from enrolling their children in Stockholm's preschools. This project offers Roma families access to a dedicated open preschool, once a week. The project facilitates meaningful interactions between Roma parents and city officials and emphasises openness, safety and care in the preschool environment for all family members (Eurocities, 2023_[21]).

While a comprehensive analysis of the success factors of the initiatives outlined above remains beyond the scope of this note, the following sections will dive more deeply into country-specific experiences and practices.

3 Austria (Vienna)

Vienna's experiences in communicating and engaging with children and young people

The OECD *Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People* highlights that local youth strategies can help promote a comprehensive and integrated approach to ensure youth-responsive services and policy outcomes across all relevant sectors (OECD, 2022^[1]).

The City of Vienna in Austria has set an ambitious goal of becoming the “most child and youth-friendly city in the world” (Stadt Wien, 2020^[22]). For years, the City Administration has been committed to upholding children's rights and strengthening the participation of children and young people in decision-making processes. This culminated in 2019 in the organisation of *Werkstadt Junges Wien*, the largest participation project registered in Vienna, engaging over 22,000 children and young people to shape a comprehensive, cross-cutting strategy informed by young people's realities: the *Vienna Children and Youth Strategy 2020-2025* (Stadt Wien, (n.d.)^[23]).

This Section highlights some key practices and initiatives in place in the City of Vienna to promote targeted communication with children and young people and ensure their participation in policy making and service delivery at the municipal level. These experiences can offer valuable inspiration for Portugal as it seeks to enhance the involvement of children, young people and relevant stakeholders notably in local-level implementation and monitoring efforts for its European CG NAP.

Adopting comprehensive strategies to foster communication and participation

The *Vienna Children and Youth Strategy 2020-2025* aims to enhance the well-being of children and young people (ages 0-19) through a comprehensive set of measures. It lists a total of 193 measures, many of which aim at mainstreaming the perspectives of children and young people and providing opportunities for their participation in policymaking (Stadt Wien, 2020^[22]). A central element of the Strategy is, in fact, ensuring all new legislation and regulations in Vienna are reviewed to assess whether the interests of children and young people are taken into account. The schedule for these assessments is to be prepared by the Strategy's coordination office. Additionally, the Strategy includes a variety of measures to foster the participation of children and young people in decision-making as well as strengthen the competencies and capacities of public officials to meaningfully engage with them (Stadt Wien, 2020^[22]), for example through guidelines and training programmes (Box 3.1. Strengthening skills and competencies for meaningful child and youth participation among local public officials). It also foresees measures to tailor the city's public communication efforts on media and social media to children and young people by ensuring the use of comprehensible and youth-appropriate language.

Box 3.1. Strengthening skills and competencies for meaningful child and youth participation among local public officials

“Dialogue at Eye Level” guide

As part of the *Vienna Children and Youth Strategy 2020-2025*, the city developed the guide “Dialogue at Eye Level” (or *Dialog auf Augenhöhe*, in German), which outlines criteria and standards for effective child and youth participation.

Launched in December 2023, the guide provides a set of criteria and guiding principles for local public officials to implement participatory initiatives for and with children and young people. These principles include: (1) commitment and obligation; (2) activity and self-efficacy; (3) transparency and clarity; (4) exchange and reflection; (5) voluntarism and self-determination; (6) impartiality; (7) respect and appreciation; (8) competent support; (9) social justice; (10) ongoing documentation and evaluation; (11) children and youth-friendly setting and (12) public relations.

In addition, the guide highlights the benefits and added value of meaningful and effective child and youth participation. Initiatives like the Children and Youth Parliament and the Participatory Children and Youth Million (see sections below) are showcased as examples of successful formats. The guide is currently being disseminated among stakeholders in politics, administration, and child and youth services.

Competencies and skills for child and youth participation

The development of adequate skills and competencies for engaging children and young people is a key objective of the *Vienna Children and Youth Strategy 2020-2025*. Measures include the expansion of the Wien Akademie’s training programme for public officials on participation skills, with a special focus on child and youth participation. Also known as the Vienna School of International Studies, the Wien Academy is a training institution that offers a variety of courses, including executive training programmes for diplomats, public administration officials and companies as well as postgraduate degrees for graduates of all disciplines.

Participation is also promoted across educational and youth institutions in Vienna, for instance by establishing class councillors, organising role-reversal activities, nominating school spokespersons and representatives, and creating joint blogs, all supported by training courses and dedicated material. An additional training course targeted at facilitators is set to be developed to enhance digital participation skills.

Source: (Diplomatische Akademie Wien, 2024^[24]); (Stadt Wien, n.d.^[25]); (Stadt Wien, 2020^[22]); (Stadt Wien, 2023^[26]).

Since the Strategy was officially launched in 2020, important measures have been implemented to enhance communication with and participation of children and young people, including:

- The **creation of a dedicated website** “Young Vienna” (*Junges Wien*), which consolidates all relevant information about the Strategy’s goals and the status of its implementation, participatory projects of interest to children and young people, as well as blog posts written in an accessible and engaging manner.
- The **development of a dedicated app** which facilitates direct communication between the city administration and young users, sharing accessible information and enabling digital participation in votes and surveys (e.g., on priorities for youth-related projects) in a simplified way without requiring prior registration (Stadt Wien, 2020^[22]).

- The **Participatory Children and Youth Million initiative** (see relevant section below), which allocates municipal funds to implement ideas put forward by the city's young residents.
- The **Children and Youth Parliament** (see relevant section below), which fosters children and young people's participation in the monitoring of the Strategy (Stadt Wien, 2020^[22]).

Moreover, in order to strengthen the systematic integration of children and young people's perspective in decision-making, the Strategy envisions:

- The creation of a **youth barometer** to review the availability and accessibility of opportunities in the city for children and young people (Stadt Wien, 2020^[22]).
- A **review of Vienna's communication and outreach capacities** (Stadt Wien, 2020^[22]).
- The development of an **advisory board made up of children and young people** to serve different agencies within Vienna (Stadt Wien, 2020^[22]).

Interviews with local public officials highlighted the critical role of high-level political support and collaboration across stakeholders in the local public administration, local politics, youth sector and others for the successful implementation of the *Vienna Children and Youth Strategy*. In the implementation of the Strategy, Vienna has also been supported by an independent expert organisation, WIENXTRA (see Box 3.2. Cooperating with a specialised independent organisation to support the city's efforts to promote child and youth participation: WIENXTRA) with deep ties to the local public administration, which was considered important to provide flexibility, dedicated capacities and specialised expertise.

Box 3.2. Cooperating with a specialised independent organisation to support the city's efforts to promote child and youth participation: WIENXTRA

WIENXTRA is an organisation dedicated to supporting all children and young people across Vienna through services such as events, information, education and counselling, mostly free or at low cost. WIENXTRA focuses on people aged 0 to 25 years old, as well as schools, adults accompanying children in Vienna, adults working with children and young people such as youth workers, teachers, nursery schoolteachers, and anyone interested in leisure, media, or educational activities. WIENXTRA operates as a private association with board members but no owners, involving by statute various societal institutions such as the city's Youth Department and all political parties in the City Administration, striving for consensus.

The team consists of experts in child and youth participation, who collaborate closely with various departments of the city's administration. Notably, WIENXTRA staff conducts weekly meetings with the staff of the Municipal Department for Education and Youth to ensure co-ordination at technical level. To promote accountability and high-level co-ordination, WIENXTRA's activities are overseen by a Steering Body comprising representatives from all local government departments, which meets two to three times a year. Additionally, a "leading committee" within the Steering Body meets five to six times a year to facilitate co-ordination, provide adequate resources to initiatives and promote alignment with the city's broader agenda for children and young people.

Source: OECD interview with staff from WIENXTRA and Vienna City Administration conducted in June 2024; (WIENXTRA, n.d.^[27]).

Setting up dedicated fora and participatory budgeting initiatives to enable children and young people's participation

Children and Youth Parliament

The *Children and Youth Parliament* is a flagship measure of the *Vienna Children and Youth Strategy 2020-2025*. This participatory initiative brings children, young people, and politicians face-to-face, fostering direct engagement and inclusive dialogue. The first edition of the *Parliament* took place in 2022, with the participation of more than 300 young residents aged 5 to 20 years old (Stadt Wien, n.d.^[28]). The *Parliament* has been established as part of the monitoring system of the *Vienna Children and Youth Strategy*. To ensure accountability and transparency, implementation reports of the Strategy, drafted by the Children's and Youth Ombuds Office, are to be shared with the *Parliament* at least yearly (Stadt Wien, 2020^[22]).

Members of the *Parliament* engage in ongoing dialogue with the Vienna City Administration to monitor and evaluate the Strategy's implementation, ensuring measures are effectively carried out and targets are met. Participants are divided into groups discussing measures in specific thematic areas in workshops, prepare statements, and receive responses from local officials, fostering a cycle of feedback and dialogue. This structured process not only provides a space for children and young people to nurture skills and competencies to participate in local decision-making, but also provides valuable insights to the municipality, thus generating new proposals, ideas, and solutions. The *Children and Youth Parliament* operates both at city-wide level as well as at district level, with districts running their own parliaments to ensure wider reach and inclusivity. Children (aged 5 to 13 years) usually participate with their school or kindergarten class, while young people (aged 14 to 20 years) can apply individually or be nominated by their district. According to interviews with local public officials, having a comprehensive communication

campaign, involving social media, billboards, posters, and outreach through youth centers and schools has been crucial for the success of previous editions.

WIENXTRA, a key partner in this initiative, supports the *Children and Youth Parliament* through a team of 18 facilitators, including three staff members from the co-ordination office (see Box 3.2. Cooperating with a specialised independent organisation to support the city's efforts to promote child and youth participation: WIENXTRA). For instance, in the first session, WIENXTRA visited schools and kindergartens to raise awareness for the *Children and Youth Parliament* and the Strategy and encourage participation.

Participatory Children and Youth Million

The *Participatory Children and Youth Million (Kinder- und Jugendmillion)* is another flagship measure of the *Vienna Children and Youth Strategy 2020-2025*. This initiative allocates a budget of two-yearly EUR 1 million to implement projects proposed, selected and designed by and for children and young people, aged 5 to 20 years. Officially launched in 2021, it encourages this age group to submit their ideas for the city's future (Stadt Wien, n.d.^[29]). A dedicated website has been created to facilitate the submission of proposals, as well as to disseminate relevant information on children and youth participation in government.³ Proposals can be submitted individually or in groups, such as kindergartens and school classes, and youth groups. A card game has been developed to communicate with children and young people and help them generate ideas in groups.

The first round of this initiative proved successful, with around 250 ideas submitted. WIENXTRA plays a pivotal role in supporting the Million initiative throughout its six-phase process. Within the submission process, participants are asked to link their ideas to relevant areas of the Strategy, ensuring alignment with its overall goals. To foster transparency, a Leading Committee pre-selects submissions based on eligibility criteria which are widely communicated in advance, according to the OECD interviews. The proposals are categorised into broad categories. To evaluate the feasibility of these proposals, and develop initial ideas into full-fledged proposals, 350 children and young people collaborated closely with staff from 27 different departments of the Vienna City Administration and various municipal districts, including urban planning experts and district youth representatives. Consideration was given to regularly inform participants about next steps and provide feedback, promoting dialogue and a collaborative environment, which allowed children and young people to voice their expectations, needs and concerns throughout the process.

Subsequently, all Vienna residents aged 5 to 20 years were invited to vote online on the selected project proposals, with WIENXTRA explaining the feasibility of projects. In 2023, voters could choose from 49 projects, covering areas such as leisure and culture, public Wi-Fi, and access to water (e.g. drinking fountains). Over 4,700 children and young people cast their votes, and ten projects were chosen to be implemented in the next few years by the City Administration in collaboration with WIENXTRA and the original submitters (Stadt Wien, n.d.^[30]).

Overall, the *Participatory Children and Youth Million* initiative highlights the importance of extensive and targeted communication and outreach. Supported by the municipality and various organisations, a broad communication campaign successfully reached children and young people through social media, posters, and flyers. The initiative has also promoted dialogue and co-operation between city officials and children and young people throughout the process, also helping policymakers understand the importance and value of meaningful child and youth participation.

³ <https://einreichen.junges.wien/group/14171>

Key lessons learnt

The experience of the city of Vienna, Austria, demonstrates that:

- High-level political support and cross-stakeholder collaboration are essential for the successful implementation of integrated youth strategies. Vienna's experience shows that involving local public officials, youth services, and external partners like WIENXTRA has helped ensure flexibility, expertise, and adequate resource allocation for child and youth engagement initiatives.
- Capacity-building efforts are key for equipping public officials with the skills and competencies needed to engage meaningfully with children and young people. Vienna's focus on developing these skills through targeted training, guidelines, and resources have played an important role in fostering effective youth participation. Initiatives like the "Dialogue at Eye Level" guide have ensured that officials have the tools and knowledge to meaningfully engage with young people, ensuring a sustainable approach to capacity development across the City's public administration.
- Targeted communication and outreach, including at the proximity level, are crucial for the success of participatory initiatives. Vienna's approach, which includes a wide range of communication strategies – from social media campaigns, to dedicated apps and direct engagement in schools and youth centres – has helped ensure that children and young people are well-informed and actively involved at all stages of policymaking. By using accessible and youth-appropriate channels, the city has been able to reach a diverse audience and foster inclusive participation.

4 Ireland

Ireland's experiences in communicating with and engaging children and young people

With a stated ambition to become “one of the best small countries in which to grow up and to raise a family and where the rights of all children and young people are respected” (Government of Ireland, 2014^[31]), Ireland has undertaken important measures to embed child and youth participation in decision-making (OECD, 2024^[32]). Notably, the country has set up robust legal frameworks to ensure the consultation and engagement of children and young people in policymaking, supported by institutional arrangements and structures, a dedicated national policy framework, and practical tools and resources.

This Section delves into Ireland's experience in fostering communication with children and young people and their meaningful participation in decision-making processes, highlighting practices that could serve as valuable examples for Portugal as it aims to strengthen communication and participation mechanisms in the implementation and monitoring of the European CG NAP at the local level.

Building solid legal and institutional frameworks for children and youth participation

Provisions to include children and young people's perspectives in national policy making have been part of legal frameworks in Ireland for decades.⁴ Recently, amendments to the Child Care Act 1991, through the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2022 and the General Scheme of the Child Care (Amendment) Bill 2023, reaffirmed that children's views shall be integral to policies that affect them (Government of Ireland, 2023^[33]).

In addition to robust legal frameworks, Ireland has set up numerous institutional arrangements and structures intended to foster child and youth participation in decision-making. These efforts align with relevant provisions of the *OECD Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People*, which calls on governments to create or strengthen institutions such as youth advisory bodies and opportunities for consultation with youth councils at national and subnational level, as ways to involve young people in policymaking and strengthen the evidence base (OECD, 2022^[11]).

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth (DCEDIY) is responsible for policies related to children and young people in Ireland. It oversees the implementation of national strategies and ensures compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As such, DCEDIY also works to ensure that children and young people have a voice in the design, delivery and

⁴ Legal requirements to consult children and consider their views in decisions that affect their lives are included, for example, in the Education Act 1998, the Children Act 2001, the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002, the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, the Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015, and the Thirty-first Amendment of the Constitution (Children) Act 2015.

monitoring of government policies, programmes and services, at national and local level, and is committed to including seldom-heard⁵ children and young people in participation structures and initiatives.

The National Participation Office, established in 2021 as a permanent office within DCEDIY, manages and co-ordinates the activities of some of the main local and national participation structures, including:

- The **Comhairlí na nÓg** (Children and Youth Councils), which exist in each of the 31 local authorities in Ireland, provide children and young people aged 12-17 with the opportunity to shape the development of services and policies at the local level. Since 2002, these councils have worked on topics that are relevant to children and young people and served as a consultative forum for local policymakers (Government of Ireland, 2015^[34]). *Comhairlí* are usually involved by local authorities through various activities, such as presentations to County Councils and consultation in the development of sectoral strategies (Comhairle na nÓg and Pobal, 2023^[35]). Funded by DCEDIY, local authorities, and other local organisations, *Comhairlí* also benefit from the support of local youth services and other key local stakeholders (Comhairle na nÓg, n.d.^[36]). Annually, each *Comhairle na nÓg* holds a general meeting, inviting 80-150 children and young people from schools, local youth organisations, and other actors to identify local topics of importance to them. A *Comhairle na nÓg* Committee elected at the annual meeting then works on those issues during the coming year and acts as the consultative forum with local decision-makers.
- The **Dáil na nÓg (National Youth Parliament)** provides a forum for children and young people aged 12-18 to debate and vote on issues that impact their lives (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015). Approximately 200 elected delegates from the 31 *Comhairlí na nÓg* attend *Dáil na nÓg* every two years to discuss topics identified by each *Comhairle* as important to young people in their area. *Dáil na nÓg* delegates vote on these issues and make recommendations for their *Comhairle na nÓg National Executive* (see below) to work on over their two-year term.
- The **Seanad na nÓg**, first held in 2022, is a forum allowing children and young people to discuss and vote on key issues they wish the Seanad (the Upper House of Ireland's Parliament) to debate. The *Seanad na nÓg* is set to convene every two years, alternating with *Dáil na nÓg*.
- The **Comhairle na nÓg National Executive** is a group including one representative drawn from each of the 31 *Comhairlí na nÓg*, who are tasked with progressing on issues of national importance for children and young people, based on recommendations from the *Dáil na nÓg*. For example, in 2019, following discussions on sustainable transport solutions in *Dáil na nÓg*, the *Comhairle na nÓg National Executive* proposed a Youth Travel Card to provide a 50% discount on all public transport systems for young people aged 23 years and below. With the support of DCEDIY and the Department of Transport, the proposal was accepted and announced in the Budget in October 2021 (Government of Ireland, 2023^[37]). The 31 representatives are supported by DCEDIY and a team from Youth Work Ireland and Foróige – a federation of 20 youth services and Ireland's largest youth organisation, respectively – to ensure that they engage with the right policymakers and decision-makers.
- The **National Youth Assembly of Ireland** is a consultative forum for children and young people aged 12-24 established by DCEDIY in 2022 to meet key commitments in the Programme for Government by collaborating closely with other government departments on specific policy areas. It provides a structured opportunity for children and young people to debate and make

⁵ "Seldom heard" is a term used in Ireland to refer to children and young people facing significant barriers and limited opportunities in their lives. This may include, but is not limited to: babies, toddlers and children aged under 5 years; children and young people with a disability; children and young people with neurodiversity, experiencing mental health issues, in care, and/or in aftercare; children and young people from ethnic minority backgrounds, rural areas, and/or disadvantaged areas; children and young people experiencing homelessness; young carers; children of prisoners; children and young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and others (LGBTQI+); quiet children and young people; and aged out unaccompanied minors (Government of Ireland, 2024).

recommendations that can feed into government policy on a variety of issues that are relevant to them, such as climate change and rural development. The Assembly is composed of 50 delegates who meet four times a year (Government of Ireland, 2023^[38]).

In 2023, the National Participation Office also supported young people to take part in a number of engagements with key decision-making committees such as the National Economic Dialogue (Ireland's principal institutional forum for public consultation and discussion on the Budget) and the National Climate Stakeholder Forum (a consultative forum on climate issues held on a yearly basis) (Government of Ireland, n.d.^[39]).

Recognising the importance of co-ordinating training activities and resources across government to enhance child and youth participation, in 2017, Ireland established a national centre of excellence known as *Hub na nÓg* (**Error! Reference source not found.**). As a key complementary structure to foster the participation of children and young people in decision-making, *Hub na nÓg* provides capacity building and resources for policymakers and service providers, enabling them to better integrate children and young people's voices into policy-making and service delivery.

Box 4.1. Hub na nÓg

Hub na nÓg is a national centre of excellence and co-ordination established by DCEDIY in 2017 to enhance the participation of children and young people in decision-making. It offers trainings and methodological resources for consultation and participation initiatives to government departments, state agencies, public service and non-governmental organisations, with a particular focus on reaching out to seldom-heard children and young people.

The *Hub* develops and disseminates guidelines, good practice case studies and methodologies. It also provides coaching and mentoring opportunities. For example, in 2021, the centre published the *National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making* to equip departments, agencies, and organisations with tools and guidance to improve child and youth participatory practices (see section below).

In addition, the Hub develops trainings on how to effectively engage children and young people in decision-making by using age-appropriate methods, tailoring these activities to the needs of the specific organisations. Notably, *Hub na nÓg* offers both bespoke training and sectoral, targeted training programmes supporting organisations in involving children and young people at all stages and in all aspects of decision-making, from policy to planning, practice, services, and culture. Most trainings, designed based on a Training Needs Analysis, are two-days long and include components on theory, legal frameworks, policy context, and how to leverage advisory groups. *Hub na nÓg* also offers "train the trainer" programmes, which build sectoral capacity to train others and broaden the reach of participation training in everyday spaces of children's and young people's lives.

Source: (OECD, 2024^[32]); (Government of Ireland, 2024^[40]).

Stakeholders trained by *Hub na nÓg* highlight the value of gaining both theoretical learning and practical skills tailored to their organisations' role and work. They also emphasise their improved ability to plan and implement effective children and young people's participation processes, listen to children and young people's perspectives, and ensure their voices are taken seriously, leading to tangible and positive outcomes and change (Government of Ireland, 2024^[40]).

Implementing whole-of-government strategies to mainstream children and young people's participation

Over the past years, Ireland has developed various national policy frameworks to foster the well-being of children and young people and to enhance their participation in society and decision-making. Indeed, since the launch of the National Children's Strategy in 2000, the Government has adopted a comprehensive approach to ensuring children and young people are consulted in decisions affecting them (Government of Ireland, 2015^[41]), which has been confirmed in the country's national policy frameworks for children and young people: *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* (2014-20) and *Young Ireland* (2023-28). In addition, a series of dedicated strategies and plans have been developed and implemented to further advance this goal.

National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020

In 2015, the Government of Ireland introduced the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (2015-2020), acknowledging that children and young people are not "beings in becoming" but rather "citizens of today" deserving respect and a voice during childhood, adolescence, and transition to adulthood (Government of Ireland, 2015^[41]). This Strategy – the first of its kind in Europe – aimed at promoting the active participation of children and young people in decision-making across various areas and sectors, including local communities, education, health, well-being, and legal matters. Recognising that empowering children and young people in decision-making requires a collaborative government-wide approach, the Strategy outlined both general and specific actions for relevant government departments and agencies.

Notably, the Strategy emphasised the importance of involving certain groups of children and young people that organisations usually struggle to engage in decision-making, including LGBTQI+ children and young people, those with disabilities, those from ethnic minorities, Travellers and Roma children and young people, and young carers. The Strategy also aimed at strengthening national leadership on participation, promoting organisational change, mainstreaming child and youth participation in policy development, legislation and research, and improving education and training activities for professionals working with children and young people (Government of Ireland, 2015^[41]). In addition, it emphasised the need to create age-appropriate communication channels that effectively convey information to children and young people in a variety of formats.

As evidenced by its final Review undertaken in 2023, the Strategy has been instrumental to strengthening public consultation practices across departments and agencies in Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2023^[37]). One of the key commitments in the Strategy was the establishment of *Hub na nÓg* (Box 4.1), which, together with the National Participation Office, has created new impetus to involve children and young people in policy development across government departments and agencies (Government of Ireland, 2023^[37]).

Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making Action Plan 2024-2028

Released in 2024, the *Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making Action Plan 2024-2028* builds on the achievements of the *Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making*. It aims to better integrate the voices of children and young people in decision-making, policy, service development, legislation, and research as well as to build capacities across government sectors to engage children and young people in public consultations (OECD, 2024^[32]).

The *Plan* addresses some of the lessons learnt from the annual implementation reports of the previous Strategy, including:

- the importance of closing feedback loops after consultations with children and young people;
- the need to expand the reach of existing participation structures to include seldom-heard and vulnerable groups; and
- the opportunity to leverage technology for safely engaging children and young people online (Government of Ireland, 2024^[40]).

To inform the preparation of the Plan, at the end of 2022, DCEDIY launched a public consultation to secure views and opinions of the public. It also organised a series of consultations with over 1,200 children and young people from schools and *Comhairlí na nÓg*, with a view to promoting geographic diversity and representation of harder-to-reach populations. Additional consultations took place in 2022 with young carers, minority ethnic young people, and young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Developing practical guidance to build competencies and skills for child and youth participation and age-sensitive communication

Ireland has developed practical guidance to equip professionals working with children and young people at every level with the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to communicate with them and support their meaningful involvement in decision-making.

National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making

In 2021 the Government of Ireland published the *National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making* to further strengthen participatory practices. The Framework, which was prepared with inputs from child and youth stakeholders (e.g. *Hub na nÓg*, focus groups with school teachers, social workers, youth workers, paediatric nurses), responded to calls from government departments, agencies, and non-government organisations to access training and guidance on a rights-based approach to child and youth consultation (Government of Ireland, 2021^[42]). The Framework, which was developed by *Hub na nÓg* in collaboration with academia, delivers on the objectives of the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making 2015-2020* by providing practical guidance to ensure all children and young people, including those most vulnerable and under-represented, are listened to and involved in decision-making processes, both in person and online (Box 4.2).

The Framework is based on the child rights Lundy model of participation⁶, which seeks to operationalise Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by supporting decision-makers in ensuring that: 1) children have the space to express their views; 2) their voice is enabled; 3) they have an audience for their views; and 4) their views will have influence. Recognising that meaningful and sustained children and youth participation requires strong organisational commitment, the Framework also identifies key enabling factors: organisational buy-in, training and capacity-building for decision-makers, allocation of necessary (human, financial, time) resources, and effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

⁶ This model was developed by academic Laura Lundy, Professor of international children's rights at the School of Education at the Queen's University of Belfast. Her model, detailed in a 2007 publication in the *British Educational Journal*, provides a way of conceptualising a child's right to participation, as laid down in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is intended to focus decision-makers on the distinct, although interrelated, elements of the provision: space, voice, audience, and influence (Lundy, 2007).

Box 4.2. Practical guidance offered by the National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making

The National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making aims to provide practical tools to ensure that children and young people are included in decision-making in all settings where decisions made by adults will impact their lives. To do so, it includes a series of checklists with questions, as well as good practice examples on the use of consultative, collaborative, and child/youth-led projects, initiatives, and meetings:

- The **Planning Checklist** provides guidance to departments, agencies and organisations on listening to children and young people and involving them in decision-making in the development of policies, plans, services, programmes, governance, research and legislation at national, local and organisational level.
- The **Evaluation Checklist** is a tool for self-evaluation and external evaluation to be used by departments, agencies and organisations following the completion of policies, plans, services, programmes, governance, research and legislation.
- The **Everyday Spaces Checklist** provides guidance to teachers, early years' practitioners, social workers, youth workers, youth club volunteers, sports coaches, and other adults on listening to children and young people and giving them a voice in decision-making in everyday spaces or settings, in person or online.

In addition, the Framework proposes child/youth evaluation forms to be completed by children and young people at the end of relevant activities.

Source: (Government of Ireland, 2021^[42]).

Towards a dedicated communications platform

As illustrated in previous sections, Ireland's commitment to meaningful child and youth participation in the policy cycle has been closely tied by to the importance of fostering tailored communication. This is further highlighted in *Young Ireland*, the new national policy framework for children and young people launched in November 2023.

As part of its Enabling Environment actions, *Young Ireland* includes prominent efforts to build communication and awareness on policies and services, including:

- The development of an online communications platform to raise awareness of child and youth rights and well-being. The platform will serve as a central hub for information sharing and as a channel for communication between the Government and the general public, including children and young people. Key components will include the development of a campaign website, a social media campaign, and reoccurring events. The platform will recognise that children need information that is accessible to them in order to participate fully in the realisation of their rights. As such, part of the communications platform will involve the development and dissemination of child-friendly versions of publications that are of relevance to children, over a range of age groups.
- A Communications Youth Advisory Panel will be established to guide the direction of the communications platform, ensuring that it reflects the priorities and perspectives of children and young people in Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2023^[33]).

Key lessons learnt

The experience of Ireland demonstrates that:

- Strong legal and institutional foundations have proven key to fostering child and youth participation in decision-making. Indeed, Ireland's success in engaging children and young people stems from its robust legal frameworks and dedicated institutions, co-ordinated by a single, permanent office within DCEDIY, which provide a solid foundation for sustained communication and meaningful participation.
- A whole-of-government commitment to fostering child and youth participation, backed by clear objectives outlined in dedicated strategies, has helped drive comprehensive approaches across departments, agencies, and sectors. This co-ordinated effort acknowledges the cross-cutting nature of promoting child and youth well-being, ensuring a more unified and effective approach to involving them in decisions that impact their lives and address their needs.
- Practical guidance, methodological support, and capacity building have been crucial in embedding child and youth participation as a standard practice. *Hub na nÓg* offers valuable resources and targeted training, equipping policymakers and key professionals with the skills needed to listen to children and young people, including those from vulnerable backgrounds, and to ensure their voices are meaningfully integrated into decision-making processes.

5 Sweden

Sweden's experiences in communicating and engaging with children and young people

The rights and interests of children and young people hold significant importance in Sweden, and since 2020, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has been incorporated into Swedish law (European Union, 2020^[43]). Sweden's child rights policy aims, among others, to ensure that children and young people are respected and given the opportunity to develop, feel safe, and participate in matters that concern them, and that children's rights are integrated across all policy and service areas.

This Section provides a brief overview of the Swedish Ombudsman for Children's efforts to enhance communication and engagement with children and young people, as well as the country's recent work in promoting child and youth participation in the implementation and monitoring of its European CG NAP. These experiences may provide valuable insights for Portugal as it seeks to strengthen child and youth participation in its own CG NAP.

Implementing mixed-methods, multi-actor engagement initiatives

In Sweden, the main government agency responsible for representing children and young people's rights and interests on the basis of the CRC is the *Barnombudsmannen*, or the Ombudsman for Children (Barnombudsmannen, 2021^[44]). The Ombudsman advocates for children's rights, raises public awareness, and monitors the implementation and interpretation of the CRC across Sweden's municipalities, county regions and government agencies. By identifying gaps in CRC compliance, the Ombudsman can also propose changes to both legislation and policy (Barnombudsmannen, 2021^[44]). Each April, it submits an annual report to the Swedish government, offering analyses and recommendations for improving the well-being of children in Sweden on selected topics (e.g., mental health, social exclusion, bullying and harassment, etc.).

Given its crucial responsibility in representing the interests of children and young people in the public debate, the Ombudsman holds regular dialogue with children and young people in Sweden to gain knowledge about their situation and opinions on current issues. To ensure meaningful participation, it employs various methods, including consultations, focus groups, polls, meetings, and creative approaches to ensure children's voices are heard and considered. This mixed-methods approach combines both surveys and interviews, with surveys often promoted through targeted NGOs to reach specific groups. Interviews range from one-on-one discussions to small group settings, and are designed to feel informal, allowing children to lead the conversation, with staff members guiding the discussions using a common questionnaire when appropriate.

The Ombudsman has extensive experience engaging a variety of children, including vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied migrant children, children in community care, those exposed to violence, as well as children and young people with criminal backgrounds. For example, in 2023 the Ombudsman prepared its annual report on "Early community interventions to empower children and prevent crime"

(Barnombudsmannen, 2023^[45]), which was informed by consultations with children affected by crime, as detailed in Box 5.1.

Box 5.1. The Ombudsman for Children's experience in engaging children and young people with criminal backgrounds

In preparing its 2023 annual report on “Early community interventions to empower children and prevent crime”, the Ombudsman for Children in Sweden engaged directly with children and young people who had experiences with crime.

Recognising that children are experts in their own lives, the Ombudsman conducted individual interviews and group discussions with 72 children aged 5 to 17, including 25 girls and 47 boys, with most participants being between 13 and 17 years old. Six young adults slightly over 18 were also included. The children were contacted through ten organisations and institutions across Sweden, focusing on those who work with children at risk of exclusion or involved in crime. These included children from socio-economically vulnerable areas, those with disabilities, children in contact with social services, children with incarcerated relatives, and those in closed youth care.

The children had the option to participate individually or in groups, either in person or online. Seventeen individual interviews were conducted, three of which were online, along with smaller group discussions involving 55 children in total. The interviews, guided by a counselling tool, covered topics such as participation, family, school, health, leisure, exclusion, crime, trust in society, and hope for the future. Rather than using detailed questions, the interview guide focused on broad areas to allow the children to express their realities in their own words. The children's perspectives, experiences, and needs were central to the discussions, with flexibility in the format to adapt to the group dynamics and individual capabilities.

In addition to consulting with children, the Ombudsman established a reference group of six children under 18. This group met physically and online six times to provide feedback on various aspects of the Ombudsman's investigation, offer insights on problem areas, and help interpret findings from a child's perspective.

Source: (Barnombudsmannen, 2023^[45]).

As illustrated in Box 5.1, the Ombudsman adapts its engagement strategies to cater to different age groups and needs, using a variety of tools and activities. The aim is not only to ensure that children feel heard but also to foster lasting relationships and maintain ongoing dialogue. For younger children, playful approaches such as drawing and creative activities are used, while conversations with adolescents are generally more direct. However, the specific approach often depends on the individual being engaged. To support this flexibility, the staff from the Ombudsman for Children utilises a versatile toolbox for diverse interactions.

The Ombudsman also develops child-friendly materials, such as videos, to effectively communicate the outcomes and discussions. Notably, it hosts a dedicated website “My Rights” (*Mina Rättigheter*), which provides information on children's rights for different age groups: 2-5 years, 6-9 years, 10-13 years, and 14-18 years. This approach aims to ensure that children of all ages can easily access and understand their rights, although it remains common for children to be unaware of their own rights, as revealed during OECD interviews.

Engaging children and young people to monitor the progress of the European Child Guarantee's National Action Plan

Similarly to Portugal, Sweden's European CG NAP emphasises the importance of ensuring that children and young people have a say in decisions affecting them. It also focuses on raising awareness among children and their families about their rights, including efforts to ensure that information about the NAP effectively reaches the key groups it aims to support (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2022^[46]).

The implementation of the NAP is overseen by the National Co-ordinator of the European CG, placed at the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. During the design phase of the NAP, the Office of the National Co-ordinator consulted the Children's Rights Delegation (*Barnrättsdelegationen*), a permanent forum for dialogue between the Swedish government and civil society organisations that work on children's rights nationally and internationally. The Delegation includes, among others, the Ombudsman for Children, UNICEF Sweden, and Save The Children. However, due to time constraints, children and young people were not directly involved in the design phase. Additionally, as the European CG is a relatively recent instrument, there are no specific participatory activities outlined in the framework of Sweden's NAP.

In turn, Sweden has begun involving young stakeholders in the monitoring of the NAP to ensure that their views and perspectives are considered. Notably, the 2024 *Progress Report on the National Action Plan for the European CG* was informed by consultations with children and young people (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2024^[47]), facilitated by the Ombudsman for Children. During the consultation, children and young people emphasised the importance of having online access to age-appropriate information about the European CG. They also addressed the consequences of living with financial difficulties and described the multifaceted impacts on children and young people's lives, including difficulties in studying and in maintaining interpersonal relationships (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2024^[47]).

Regular monitoring of the NAP will be supported by the *Living Conditions Survey of Children*, which is conducted by Statistics Sweden, the government agency in charge of national statistics. Sweden's approach to the rights of children and young people is underpinned by robust data collection mechanisms. In 2023, the *Living Conditions Survey of Children* incorporated responses from around 30,000 randomly selected children and young people aged between 12 and 18 years. Through an online questionnaire, children and young people shared information about their well-being and experience in the national educational system (Statistics Sweden, n.d.^[48]). The *Living Conditions Survey of Children* operates at a national level and its results are used to track progress against the indicators of the European CG.

Beyond this survey, the *LUPP Survey* (or "Local Follow-Up of Youth Policy") conducted by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society offers insights into the well-being and opinions of young people aged 13 to 25 years old, ensuring that decisions impacting their lives are informed by their own experiences. This survey can be conducted at the municipal or regional level and provides data on young people's experiences, welfare, and opinions (MUCF, 2019^[49]).

Interviews highlighted the importance of ensuring that future consultations for monitoring the Swedish NAP include a representative sample of children and young people, taking into account intersecting factors.

Lessons learnt

The experience of Sweden demonstrates that:

- Engagement methods need to be adapted to suit different age groups and individual needs. From creative, playful activities for younger children to more direct conversations with adolescents, tailored approaches help ensure that children feel heard and can express themselves in a way that

suits them best. This flexibility fosters stronger relationships and ongoing dialogue with children and young people.

- Child-friendly communication is also a key factor to raise children's awareness about their rights and foster meaningful dialogue. To effectively communicate outcomes and foster awareness, Sweden has made efforts to develop age-appropriate materials such as the "My Rights" website, designed to inform children across different age groups about their rights. This demonstrates the value of creating accessible, child-friendly resources to raise awareness of rights and services, a crucial step in empowering children to understand and exercise their rights.
- Despite strong efforts, challenges may persist in reaching children. Strengthening local partnerships and ensuring children's voices are heard in both design and monitoring processes are key steps toward addressing these challenges.

6 Key lessons learnt

This technical note provided an overview of various international practices for communicating with and engaging children and young people, primarily focusing on the application of the European CG. It also included an in-depth presentation of practices and experiences from Austria (Vienna), Ireland, and Sweden. The experiences of these three countries provide success factors and lessons learned, offering valuable insights for Portugal in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of its own CG NAP.

Regarding **institutional, legal and strategic arrangements**, the experiences of Austria (Vienna), Ireland and Sweden demonstrate that:

- High-level political commitment and consensus across parties and administrative departments are important elements to ensure the cohesive and effective implementation and long-term sustainability of child and youth initiatives. This is already evident in Portugal at the local level, where the signing of protocols for the implementation and monitoring of the CG NAP demonstrates strong political will and collaboration, and is further supported by experiences in Austria (Vienna) and Ireland.
- A whole-of-government commitment to fostering child and youth participation, grounded in clear objectives outlined in dedicated strategies, has helped drive comprehensive approaches across departments, agencies, and sectors. This co-ordinated effort acknowledges the cross-cutting nature of promoting child and youth well-being, ensuring a more unified and effective approach to involving them in decisions that impact their lives and address their needs.
- Raising awareness among children and young people about national strategies, such as the CG NAP, and providing adequate time and resources for child and youth participation in their development and implementation are key success factors, as experienced in Sweden.
- Cross-stakeholder collaboration is essential for the successful implementation of youth strategies. Vienna's experience shows that involving local public officials, youth services, and external partners like WIENXTRA has helped ensure flexibility, expertise, and adequate resource allocation for child and youth engagement initiatives.
- Strong legal and institutional foundations have proven key to fostering child and youth participation in decision-making. Ireland's success in engaging children and young people builds on robust legal frameworks and dedicated institutions, co-ordinated by a single, permanent office within DCEDIY, which provide a solid foundation for sustained communication and meaningful participation.
- When considering specific initiatives, it can be helpful to focus on specific and few priorities, in line with the issues that children and young people most care about, as experienced in Sweden.

Regarding **capacities of government actors**, the experiences of Austria (Vienna), Ireland and Sweden demonstrate that:

- Practical guidance, methodological support, and capacity-building efforts are key factors for equipping public officials with the skills and competencies needed to engage meaningfully with children and young people. Vienna's focus on developing these skills, for example thorough the "Dialogue at Eye Level" guide, have played an important role in fostering effective youth

participation while ensuring a sustainable approach to capacity development across the City's public administration. Meanwhile, Ireland's *Hub na nÓg* offers valuable resources and targeted training, equipping policymakers and key professionals with the skills needed to listen to children and young people, including those from vulnerable backgrounds, and to ensure their voices are meaningfully integrated into decision-making processes.

- Quality onboarding of staff working with children and young people and the allocation of sufficient resources to review inputs are important for the success of initiatives conducted for and with children and young people, as evidenced in the *Participatory Children and Youth Million* initiative in Vienna.

Regarding **communication with children and young people**, the experiences of Austria (Vienna), Ireland and Sweden demonstrate that:

- Targeted communication and outreach, including at the proximity level, are crucial for effective participatory efforts. For example, Vienna's mixed-methods approach, which includes a wide range of communication strategies – from social media campaigns to dedicated apps and direct engagement in schools and youth centres – has ensured that diverse children and young people are well-informed and actively involved at all stages of policymaking.
- Child-friendly communication through age-appropriate and easily accessible language, formats, and channels is key to raise children's awareness about their rights and available services and to foster meaningful dialogue. To effectively communicate outcomes and foster awareness, Sweden has made efforts to develop age-appropriate materials such as the "My Rights" website, designed to inform children across different age groups about their rights.

Regarding **practical and methodological aspects of children and youth participation**, the experiences of Austria (Vienna), Ireland and Sweden demonstrate that:

- Involving children and young people through co-creation helps aligning initiatives with their motivations. It is also important to maintain intensive and regular communication with young people who have contributed inputs throughout the whole process, making sure to close the feedback loop. This practice was particularly evident in Vienna's *Participatory Children and Youth Million* initiative.
- Engagement methods must be adapted to suit different age groups and individual needs. From creative, playful activities for younger children to more direct conversations with adolescents, tailoring approaches ensures children feel heard and can express themselves in a way that suits them best. This flexibility fosters stronger relationships and ongoing dialogue with children and young people.
- Designing methods to ensure diversity and representatives of focus groups and advisory bodies requires further attention, as learnt from Sweden's experiences.

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