



Declassified¹

AS/Soc/Child (2021) PV 03add

14 January 2022

Asocchildpv03add_2021

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Sub-Committee on Children

Draft minutes

Public hearing on “Listening to children: child participation, a foundation for democratic societies”, held in a hybrid manner on Monday, 22 November 2021

In the framework of the report currently in preparation on “Listening to children: child participation, a foundation for democratic societies” (Rapporteur: Baroness Doreen E. Massey, United Kingdom, SOC) the Sub-Committee held a public hearing with the participation of:

- **Burntwood School, London, United Kingdom – UNICEF Rights Respecting School**, represented by Frida, Kasmala and Vani, accompanied by Ms Katelyn Farrenson, Teacher
- **Romains Primary School, 5th grade class – Strasbourg Koenigshoffen, France**, accompanied by Ms Marie Pincemaille, **Themis Association** and Mr Benjamin Corvi, Teacher
- **Foróige, Youth Development Organisation, Ireland**, represented by Mae, Finlay and Orla, accompanied by Ms Sandra McIntyre
- representatives of the **Youth Council of the City of Strasbourg, France**, accompanied by Ms Laurence Mauler and Mr Julien Harmand

Ms Wonner (France, ALDE), Chairperson of the Sub-Committee, opened the meeting and welcomed the numerous guests as well as the members present. This hearing was being held in connection with the United Nations World Children’s Day. Children’s participation was a key part of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. She explained that Baroness Massey was unable to attend for health reasons and wished her a speedy recovery on behalf of the Committee. The aim of this meeting was to take stock, with the children involved in the Parliamentary Assembly’s work, of their impressions and of the lessons to be learned before the report was presented for debate at the January 2022 part-session.

Ms Chatzivassiliou-Tsovilis, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly, welcomed the participants and said she was pleased that the Assembly’s work was being widened to include children. Getting young people involved was no straightforward task; this pilot project was an important learning tool for the Assembly. She thanked the children, teachers, NGOs, experts and members of the Sub-Committee for their involvement and comments, which had included both positive feedback and constructive criticism. The Assembly would do its best to incorporate these proposals as far as possible into its work. The children could take pride in being among the first to participate in the Assembly’s work and this experience could encourage them to play an active role in other areas. She invited them to follow the Assembly’s debates on topics of interest to them.

Ms Wonner asked the young people to share their impressions of the activities held in connection with the Parliamentary Assembly’s work. She gave the floor to the children in the room, then those participating online.

Jeremy and Najar, who both sat on Strasbourg’s Youth Council, reported that their group had held a video conference and two in-person meetings with Baroness Massey to discuss the report and exchange views with city councillors. The children had suggested several means of consultation such as surveys, public hearings and an online platform where young people could talk together.

Aya, a pupil at Romains Primary School, said that her classmates had discussed their experience of taking part in the Council of Europe consultation process. Some children had found it “odd but good” and others had felt that

¹ Minutes approved and declassified by the Sub-Committee on Children at its meeting on 17 March 2022.

their voices had been heard. She and her classmates from CE2 (year 3) had really enjoyed the visit to the Organisation, as it was a first for them. **Lucy** added that Strasbourg's youth councillors had suggested holding a Youth Day to promote public participation and include young people in parliamentary debates to foster more intergenerational dialogue.

Elora stressed the importance of listening to children in court proceedings, for example in complaints related to bullying. **Aya** listed some of the issues on which children would like to be consulted: school rules and schoolbooks; public amenities and urban planning (e.g., playgrounds, new buildings); the environment; and children's rights.

The Chair invited the children to ask the members of the Sub-Committee questions, too, so that they could all learn from one another, which was very important.

Prusothman wondered whether the KUDO platform that was being used for the meeting could help widen participation to include other young people. **Ilyana** said that laws should be drawn up to preserve peace and deal with climate change. Regarding the use of digital media, **Anne-Sophie** suggested that exchanges of views should be supervised by adults to ensure a respectful online environment was maintained.

Ms Chatzivassiliou-Tsovilis mentioned in this respect that a report on the use of the internet and the protection of children would be prepared by the Assembly. A balance must be struck between freedom of expression and the protection of children. Mr O'Reilly, together with a youth group, had initiated this report. **Mr O'Reilly** invited those interested in the report to get in touch with him or the Secretariat to share their comments or suggestions.

Weilana thought it would be useful if parliamentarians had greater input in this discussion. It might be worthwhile to note all the suggestions made during the meeting down on a blank sheet of paper. **Lizzie** pointed out that children's opinions should be sought on issues that were straightforward and of interest to them. Adults should try to put themselves in children's shoes.

Ms Farrenson, Assistant Principal at Burntwood School, explained that the four pupils who had participated in the previous activities had now left the school. She thanked the Assembly on their behalf for the opportunity to take part in this initiative. Lord Russell and Lady Fookes had since visited Burntwood School, which hoped to welcome Baroness Massey once she was better. The pupils had been delighted to question the peers and follow the House of Lords' parliamentary debates on online age assurance.

Ms Sumelzo stressed the importance of children's participation and informed participants about a statement on the worst forms of child labour which she was putting forward for signature by members of the Assembly.

Vani, from Burntwood School, said that she was glad to have been able to talk to the members of the House of Lords. Enabling children throughout the country to participate in the Assembly's work would be a good idea and would open it up to a wider, more representative and diverse audience. Climate change and travel disruption caused by the pandemic meant that online tools like Meetings and Zoom provided great solutions to foster dialogue. Children could use these opportunities for democratic participation in a responsible way to improve their own lives. Surveys, meetings and opinion polls could be carried out, too.

Finley, from Foróige, argued that although the right to participate had not really been extended to children, they did have opportunities to take part. He had started drawing up a child-friendly version of the report. He was grateful for the liberty he had been given in the drafting process and for being able to participate freely in meetings.

Mae stressed the importance of ensuring that any adults working with children were sincere in their involvement, as children were very sensitive to this and could be put off by a lack of genuine interest. She appreciated the involvement of the adults who worked with them, which had been sincere and motivated by the right reasons. She particularly wished to thank Mr O'Reilly for his time and input. **Orla** suggested that picturing a real child when discussing children's rights issues was a good idea, as it helped to identify children's needs. Using language that children could understand was crucial.

Aya proposed that parliamentarians should come to schools to explain how the Assembly worked and that teachers should hand out information sheets on this. It was important to know that the Assembly's work could have implications for countries Europe-wide. All children should be able to participate and to do so, they needed to have ideas.

Mr O'Reilly expressed his gratitude to Baroness Massey for launching the project. He thanked the children and the Foróige organisation, as well as Sandra McIntyre, National Chairperson of Foróige, Mr Campbell and Mr James Maher, facilitators at Foróige. In response to Finlay's comments, he said that it had to be ensured that children's participation became a right. A direct link should be established between children and the Assembly's decision-making. As Mae had pointed out, children were very sensitive to whether grownups were sincere. Children did not understand the jargon used by adults, so they should adapt the way they talked and prepare child-friendly materials, as Orla had suggested. Children from other countries should be involved, too. Mr O'Reilly

was very proud of the work done by Foróige, which he had followed since his own youth. He had never thought that he could one day involve them in the Council of Europe's work. Coming from a modest background, he had not even thought he could become a member of the Assembly, but this proved that anything was possible. He asked the Secretariat to find the resources to bring the Irish children to Strasbourg for the report's adoption in January 2022. He would be inviting them to visit the parliament in Dublin once the Covid-19 restrictions were lifted.

Elora suggested that children could meet in the Council of Europe's large Assembly chamber, which had 800 seats. The question would be how to choose the children; they could be elected online, and 47 children (one per country) could receive an invitation via the foreign ministers. **Elssa** replied that the children should be chosen by holding elections in the member States, with the participation of children and adults. **Elyana** suggested drawing lots, as it would take less time. **Aya** thought that this process should lead to concrete results, such as new laws on peace and climate change or measures to take into account children's views on issues of interest to them.

Prusothman felt that if children's participation in such an initiative were to be decided by a vote, they should be elected by fellow children. With regard to the proposal to have the Irish group visit, he was sure it could be done. The Strasbourg youth councillors had also just visited Stockholm to share their experience. **Nazare** pointed out that not all children had the same level of maturity, so it might be a good idea for adults to vote as well to ensure a proper outcome. **Melih** said that having direct communication between children and parliamentarians was important. As it was hard to find time for travel during term time, parliamentarians could come to the classroom.

Ms Wonner pointed out that this already took place in France, which also had a Children's Parliament. This was an interesting initiative: children could put forward proposals for laws and participate in exchanges of views with parliamentarians. This practice should be further developed and followed up, including in the proceedings of this Committee.

In response to Mr O'Reilly's proposal, **Anne-Sophie** said that if the Irish group came to Strasbourg, it would be great to hold a meeting with the Strasbourg Youth Council and that setting up this kind of exchange with children from other countries from around the world would also be a good idea.

Laura thought that more ideas would be generated if there were more children involved. **Ilyana** said that participation in families and schools was important, and that class and neighbourhood councils were useful tools. Children could also attend courses in the various institutions.

Vani spoke of the digital divide: the pandemic had shed still more light on the stark gap between those with digital access and those without. Governments should do more to deal with the problem. Before the pandemic, children had been afforded more opportunities to have a say in the school curriculum through citizenship lessons, school councils and programmes like UNICEF's.

Elssa noted the importance of knowing the issues behind the topic at hand.

Kasmala explained that participation had been made a top priority at her school. Children participated in groups like UNICEF's, the school council played an active role and children had their say on the curriculum to make sure it included certain topics. *Teams* was a good online learning tool, making it easier for students and teachers to exchange ideas. It was also very useful for thematic group work. Their school did children's rights work in other countries, too, such as a project with a Moroccan school. It also supported local projects, for example, by organising primary school visits to talk about children's rights. Participatory learning was highly valued by pupils and should be introduced in other schools.

Weylana said that small interactive activities would be a good way to foster children's active participation. **Aya** noted the importance of being able to rely on the support of an association, such as Themis, parliamentarians like Ms Wonner, teachers, specialists, and foreign ministers.

Mr Grin stressed that the participation of children, who represented the future of democracy, was vital. Switzerland had a Federal Youth Parliament, and his town also had a local one whose members were elected directly by young people. Having children participate had offered a wonderful opportunity for young people and parliamentarians alike, as it had enriched the debate. Such participation should take place at various levels: children should be given a voice by their families, schools, local communities – and even by international organisations. Children were very well informed on some issues like recycling, and they should be listened to more. **Najar** said that the group had been very impressed by how waste was sorted during their visit to Sweden; this experience warranted further study.

Frida put forward three issues that should be priorities for the Assembly: mental health, racism, and climate change. The issue of mental health was still complex, but young people were talking about it more and more openly. Funding was needed. Her school had supported a "Hobby Sharing" project that had helped children

keep up social contact during lockdowns. It also had an anti-racism programme and supported environmental actions such as planting trees.

Mr Corvi explained that in France, participation was an integral part of the school curriculum. Children should be familiar with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, have the ability to express themselves and play an active role in the community as committed citizens. Although postgraduate qualifications were a must for becoming a teacher, there was not enough focus on participation in their initial training. As far as in-service training was concerned, there were not enough substitute teachers to stand in while they were away. School administrators were themselves overburdened, as head teachers also had to teach. More resources were needed, and more attention should be paid to individual values, too. The way in which the role of children was seen in society, including within the family, should be taken into account. Theory usually took precedence over practice but learning about democracy worked best when it was put into practice first.

Ms Pincemaille reminded the participants of the Themis Association's goals and spoke about its future projects to provide training for teachers and elected representatives. Themis was working with the French Ministry of Education to set up participation mechanisms and developing such partnerships to foster implementation was crucial.

Ms Farrenson said² that her school had put out a newsletter and run a programme on anti-racism. UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Award was a fantastic vehicle for ensuring that students could exercise their right to have their voices heard. The award scheme provided training for staff to put the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child at the heart of everything that they did and for children to understand their rights. Winning this award had afforded Burntwood School a huge number of opportunities such as being invited to work with Baroness Massey and the Council of Europe. It had also hosted delegations of teachers and education ministers from around the world to demonstrate how powerful student participation and outreach could be.

Ms Pererva thanked all the partners who had contributed to the initiative and said that they would be informed about how the children's suggestions would be taken into account in Baroness Massey's report and in the Assembly's future work.

Ms Wonner noted that the discussion had been lively, praised the participants for their spontaneity and summed up what had been said. The children had seemed delighted to work with the parliamentarians and were very motivated to continue their involvement. They had called for such participation to be opened to children from the 47 member States of the Council of Europe. She thanked all the participants and expressed her conviction that Baroness Massey's report would make a useful contribution to this cause.

² Contribution submitted after the meeting, at the invitation of the Chairperson, after the hearing.

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development
Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable

Sub-Committee on Children
Sous-commission sur les enfants
List of participants / Liste des participant.e.s
 (28 seats / 28 sièges) **22. 11. 2021**

Chairperson / Président : Mme Martine WONNER, France

Vice-Chairperson / Vice-Président : M. Jean-Pierre GRIN, Switzerland / Suisse

Members / Membres

Alternates / Remplaçant(e)s

1.	Mr	Stefan SCHENNACH	Austria / <i>Autriche</i>		ZZ...
2.	Ms	Sevinj FATALIYEVA	Azerbaijan / <i>Azerbaïdjan</i>	Ms	Parvin KARIMZADA
3.	Ms	Els van HOOFF	Belgium / <i>Belgique</i>	Ms	Latifa GAHOUCI
4.	Ms	Alena GAJDŮŠKOVÁ	Czech Republic / <i>République Tchèque</i>		ZZ...
5.	Ms	Tarja FILATOV	Finland / <i>Finlande</i>		ZZ...
6.	Mme	Martine WONNER	France	Ms	Jennifer DE TEMMERMAN
7.	Mr	Ulrich OEHME	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Mr	Matern VON MARSCHALL
8.	Ms	Nina KASIMATI	Greece / <i>Grèce</i>	Mr	Kyriakos VELOPOULOS
9.	Mr	Joseph O'REILLY	Ireland / <i>Irlande</i>		ZZ...
10.	Mr	Gianluca PERILLI	Italy / <i>Italie</i>	Mr	Manuel VESCOVI
11.	Ms	Françoise HETTO GAASCH	Luxembourg		ZZ...
12.	Ms	Reina de BRUIJN-WEZEMAN	Netherlands / <i>Pays-Bas</i>		ZZ...
13.	Mr	Zbigniew GIRZYŃSKI	Poland / <i>Pologne</i>	Mr	Tomasz LATOS
14.	Mme	Edite ESTRELA	Portugal		ZZ...
15.	M.	Viorel Riceard BADEA	Romania / <i>Roumanie</i>	Mr	Cristian-Augustin NICULESCU ȚĂGÂRLAȘ
16.	Mr	Vladimir KRUGLYI	Russian Federation / <i>Fédération de Russie</i>		ZZ...
17.	Ms	Carmen LEYTE	Spain / <i>Espagne</i>		ZZ...
18.	Ms	Susana SUMELZO	Spain / <i>Espagne</i>		ZZ...
19.	Ms	Carina OHLSSON	Sweden / <i>Suède</i>		ZZ...
20.	M.	Jean-Pierre GRIN	Switzerland / <i>Suisse</i>	Mme	Ada MARRA
21.	Ms	Emine Nur GÜNAY	Turkey / <i>Turquie</i>		ZZ...
22.	Mr	Richard BACON	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>		ZZ...
23.	Baroness	Doreen E. MASSEY	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>		ZZ...

ex officio : **Mr Luís LEITE RAMOS** (Chairperson, Portugal, *Président, Portugal*)

OTHER PARLIAMENTARIANS / AUTRES PARLEMENTAIRES

Mr / M. Armen GevorgyanArmenia / Arménie

Hearing participants / Personnes participant.e.s à l'audition

Burntwood School, London, United Kingdom / Londres, Royaume-Uni – UNICEF Rights Respecting School, represented by / représentée par Frida, Kasmala et Vani, accompanied by / accompagnées de Ms / Mme Katelyn Farrenson

Romains Primary School, Year 6 class / École Élémentaire des Romains, classe de CM1 – Strasbourg Koenigshoffen, France, accompanied by / accompagnés de Ms / Mme Marie Pincemaille, Themis Association & Mr / M. Benjamin Corvi, Teacher / Enseignant

Foróige, Youth Development Organisation, Ireland / Irlande, represented by / représentée par Orla, Mae & Finlay, accompanied by / accompagnés de Ms / Mme Sandra McIntyre

Representatives of the city youth council / représentant.e.s du conseil des jeunes de la ville, Strasbourg, France accompanied by / accompagnés par Ms / Mme Laurence Mauler, Youth Participation and Engagement Officer / chargée de mission Participation et Engagement de la Jeunesse & Mr / M. Julien Harmand, Youth Participation and Engagement facilitator / animateur Participation et Engagement de la Jeunesse

COUNCIL OF EUROPE STAFF / SECRETARIAT DU CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

**SECRETARIAT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY /
SECRETARIAT DE L'ASSEMBLÉE PARLEMENTAIRE**

Ms / Mme Despina Chatzivassiliou-Tsovilis, Secretary General of the Assembly / Secrétaire générale de l'Assemblée

Ms / Mme Marja Ruotanen, Director of Committees / Directrice des commissions

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development /
Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable

Ms / Mme Tanja Kleinsorge Head of the Secretariat / Cheffe du Secrétariat
Ms / Mme Yulia Pererva Secretary to the Committee / Secrétaire de la commission
Ms / Mme Aiste Ramanauskaite Secretary to the Committee / Secrétaire de la commission
Mr / M. Guillaume Parent Co-Secretary/ Co-Secrétaire
Ms / Mme Anita Gholami Co-Secretary / Co-Secrétaire
Ms / Mme Melissa Charbonnel Assistant / Assistante
Mr / M. Arturs Mietulis Trainee / Stagiaire