

Redefining Power: Strengthening the rights of the child as the key to a future-proof Europe

A report
by children
for children



What was this conference about?

In November 2019 a Council of Europe conference in Strasbourg celebrated the 30th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The event was an opportunity to learn about how to do more to achieve The Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child.

[The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) is an international document which contains rights for all children. [The Council of Europe \(CoE\)](#) is an organisation which protects and promotes human rights. It is made up of 47 countries across Europe. It tries to make sure that children in European countries can enjoy the rights in the UNCRC. It also has its own human rights documents, such as the European Convention on Human Rights and a Recommendation on Child Participation.



[The Strategy for the Rights of the Child \(2016-2021\)](#) was written with the help of European countries, NGOs, and of course, young people. It is a six-year plan for how the Council of Europe and member countries will promote and protect children's rights. The Children's Rights Division and other parts of the Council of Europe have been working with the help of governments, NGOs (charities), and citizens like you, to achieve these five priority goals that children should experience. Find a summary of the Strategy in [English](#) or [French](#).

What did adults say at the conference?

Lots of adults in powerful jobs spoke at the conference. This included:

- The Secretary General, CoE
- The President of the Parliamentary Assembly, CoE
- The Commissioner for Human Rights, CoE
- The President of the European Court of Human Rights
- The Secretary of State on Child Protection, France
- Government Ministers from France, Iceland, Italy and Poland
- Director Generals of the CoE and EU
- Children's Commissioners and academics

This is some of what they said:

Marija Pejčinović Burić, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

"We have come together today to prepare the Europe of tomorrow - for this we need to strengthen the rights of the child."

Liliane Maury Pasquier, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

"Children are NOT half citizens with small rights, they are full-size human beings with full-size rights."

Snežana Samardžić-Marković, Directrice générale de la Démocratie

"Dans ce qui concerne la participation des enfants à la prise de décision, cela ne devrait pas être quelque chose de théorique, cela devrait être pratique."

Geneviève Avenard, Commissioner ENOC

« Il doit créer un espace de confiance pour les enfants pour s'exprimer. » "Children are experts in their own experience - we must hear them and act upon what they say" "What will you do to improve child participation in your policies and actions, as well as in their evaluation?"

Ton Liefwaard, Professor of Children's Rights, Leiden

"Shouldn't we include a paragraph in the next Council of Europe and EU Strategy that children have political rights - even more than just voting rights."

What did young people say at the conference?

We were thirteen children and young people from different countries across Europe who had come to the conference. We made speeches and asked questions to challenge adults and governments from across Europe to do more to respect, protect and promote children's rights. Before and during the event, we were supported by Eurochild and the University of Central Lancashire. Read some of the highlights of the programme below:

Opening Speeches – Emma and Elene

Emma and Elene spoke about the rights of children not being respected or even understood. Elene said sometimes this means that children are dying. Emma said we have 3 demands:

"We want to change people's attitudes towards the children. We want children to be safe, free from #violence and #poverty. We want #children to have access to #equal opportunities. Impactful and inclusive child participation is an essential part of this process."

The power of collaboration - Amadea

Amadea, from Albania, said *"We need to start at a lower level and get children to participate on a daily basis about the things that affects them. She also said nobody can talk about children better than children"*.

The power of inclusion – Bright and Liam

Bright and Liam, from Ireland, gave powerful messages about the need for universal community-based leisure provision for children. *"We have to make sure that LGBTQI children feel included."*

The power of media - Amelie

Amelie, from Germany, said *"The media should be encouraged to use its power to protect and promote the rights of the child"*. She also said that children should be educated to have a critical understanding of media.



The power of speaking up against violence - Kasra

Kasra, from Cyprus, spoke about being involved in campaigning and learning from his own personal experience. He said that governments have an obligation to create opportunities for children to express themselves without fear or coercion. The reason to do so is that *"When we find the courage to speak up, things get better. We don't want any child to go through what we went through"*.

The power of data and privacy - Andrea

Andrea, from Serbia, spoke about researching the digital environment. She said *"Just by tapping in our name in a search window we realise how much information is available about us online. And that opens up doors of misuse and manipulation of that information"*.

The power of participation and activism - James

James from Northern Ireland began a discussion on young Human Rights Defenders. He said that they need:

- *"A platform on which to speak and be seriously listened to"*
- *Disabled activists need inclusion and accessibility*
- *Children need political power - the voting age needs to be lowered and children need more political education."*

The power of family relations – Capucine and Luca

Luca & Capucine talked about the importance of participating in decisions. They explained that being heard is not enough in divorce decisions. Children want to see their questions written into the decision. Andrea from Serbia disagreed with one of the adult speakers, saying *"I disagree that the opinion of a child should not be taken seriously because they can change their minds. Judges can also change their minds. Children should be listened to."*

The power of support - Rostylavs

Rostylavs from Ukraine talked about solving problems about sexual abuse and sexual exploitation in the digital world. He said children should receive information by viral advertisements on who can help them when they are threatened. He also stressed the importance of children to be educated at school about cyber security and sexual education.

The power of Technology – Emma and Andre

Children want opportunities for digital leadership, not just learning about digital citizenship! With regard to Redefining-Power, a powerful call came from Emma *"for people to make inclusion real - the technology is available (almost everyone here has a new smartphone), yet tech for inclusion is often old and restricted - or not used."*

Closing speech - Amadea

Amadea, from Albania, said *"We want the right to be heard. There should be mechanisms and improvement to justice for all children. We need more reports by children in all dimensions of life"*. She also said *"There needs to be a special chain of response against bullying, which is an important problem for children today and requires a collective intervention by all professionals"*.

She asked the adults *"Violence against children is unacceptable in Europe, so how can you tackle this challenge?"* And on Twitter André, from Malta, said *"the right to vote should be given from the age of 8, and for mature younger children"*.

Key Recommendations for the Strategy for Children's Rights

After the conference, some of the children who were there discussed the evidence shared at the event and suggested priority issues for the next phase of the Council of Europe Child Rights Strategy because *"children are depending on us during this time of crisis"*.

- **Political Participation** supported by a lower voting age that includes children.
- **Civic Participation** supported by more opportunities for children to voice their opinions and discuss issues that concern them. A greater focus on countries where few opportunities exist to speak about, and contribute to, big decisions.
- **Critical education** for children so they can think, discuss without political bias and decide for themselves what is right and wrong. Education on politics and children's rights but also more participation in deciding what education should be about.



Eurochild and University of Central Lancashire were contracted by the Children's Rights Division of the Council of Europe to organise, coordinate and implement the participation of children at the conference.

For more information about child participation in this event please go to:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/-redefiningpower4children-child-participation>

