

Training Tool on
engaging **children**
in advocacy work
on their right to
participate in
decision-making
processes

Advocacy
Toolkit



Eurochild

Putting children at
the heart of Europe

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1. Introduction

In recent years, an understanding for children's participation in decision-making processes has gained ground. But what do we know about engaging children in decision-making processes, in particular in public decision-making processes? Do children get engaged and if yes, how? Are there any tools that can be used to engage children in a more structured and child-friendly way?

When children are referred to in the Toolkit, the definition of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is used "a child is every human being below the age of 18 years..." The term children include children and young people, as the term young people is often used for teenage children.

Why this tool?

The purpose of the Toolkit is to engage children and young people in advocating for children's right to participate in decision-making processes. It includes tools and methods to empower children to contribute to change in public decision-making. This change will lead to the engagement of more children from diverse backgrounds. The toolkit is intended to be used by NGOs working with children and young people,

including Eurochild members, as well as government officials at national, regional and local level, who want to engage with children and young people. In particular government officials in charge of the implementation of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child in the context of its Mid-Term evaluation by the Ad Hoc Committee for the Rights of the Child - CAHENF.

About Eurochild



Eurochild

Putting children at
the heart of Europe

Eurochild advocates for children's rights and well-being to be at the heart of policy making. It is a network of organisations working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. It influences policies, builds internal capacities, facilitates mutual learning and exchanges on practice and research. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the foundation of all its work. Eurochild has developed a child participation strategy, which embeds child participation into its working structures, including influencing policies, strategic planning and organising major events.

About the Council of Europe



The Council of Europe has included children's participation into its Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2016-2021 as one of the five priority areas to guarantee the rights of the child. Its Committee of Ministers has adopted the Recommendation CM/Rec (2012)2 on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18 and developed a child participation assessment tool for governments to assess the implementation of children's participation within their countries.

The structure of the Toolkit

The toolkit starts with explaining what children's participation means and how the toolkit will support children to advocate for the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child. We acknowledge that several tools exist already to engage children in advocacy and campaigning work and when used these are referenced in the toolkit.

The next chapter gives guidance on conditions and criteria for meaningful engaging children in public decision-making.

The last chapter is the main one of the toolkit and describes how you can develop an advocacy strategy together with children and young people. This is done with the support from different images, including a hot air balloon, which symbolises different parts of the development of the advocacy strategy. These can be used as exercises with children.

What does children's participation mean?

Children's participation means that children have the right to have their voices heard, are listened to seriously and are able to influence decisions affecting them. It is one of the rights children have which are laid down in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

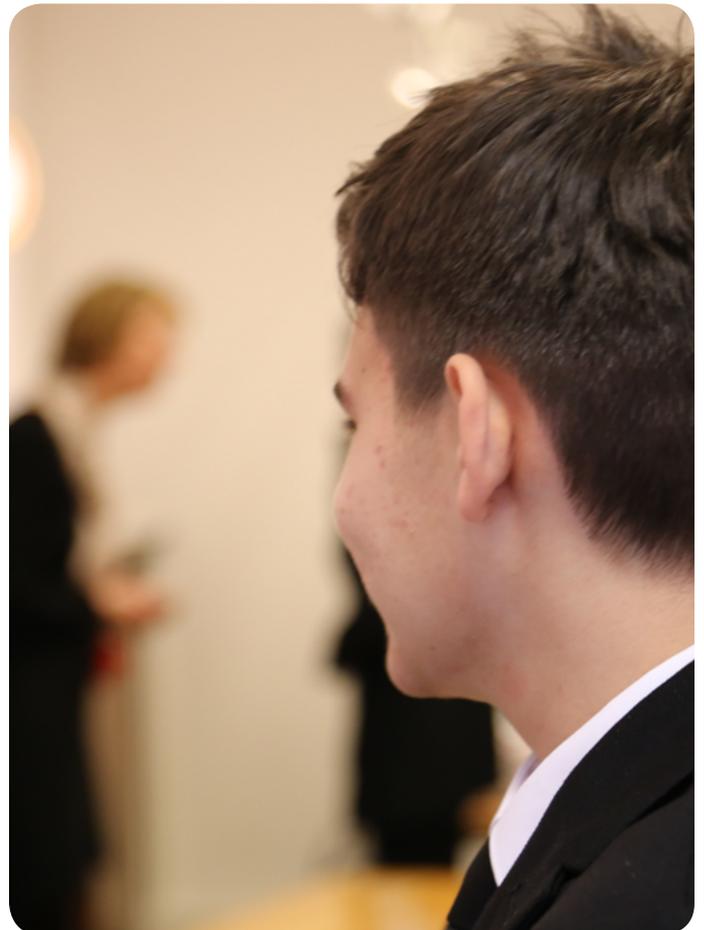
The right to participate is one of the four key pillars of the UNCRC. The official definition for children's participation is included in Article 12 UNCRC: "State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the view of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child". Articles, which are related to children's participation, include Article 17 on the right to have access to information and the right to freedom of expression in Article 13.

The right to set up an association is guaranteed by Article 15 and Article 14 guarantees the child's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Article 23 gives disabled children the right to actively participate in their community and Article 2 requires all of the rights of the UNCRC to be implemented for every child, without discrimination.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in General Comment no. 12 has given guidance on how Article 12 should be implemented in a range of settings, including in public decision-making. It states that "the child's right to be heard imposes an obligation on States parties to review or amend their legislation in order to introduce mechanisms

providing children with access to appropriate information, adequate support, if necessary, feedback on the weight given to their views, and procedures and complaints, remedies or redress".

When this toolkit is used in working with children, the nine requirements for meaningful, safe and inclusive child participation need to be taken into account.



These include transparent and informative; voluntary; respectful; relevant; child-friendly; inclusive; supported by training; safe and sensitive to risk; accountable.

These requirements reflect the meaning of Article 12 UNCRC and General Comment No 12 which support states parties in the effective implementation of Article 12.

The Recommendation¹CM/Rec(2012)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18 and the Child Participation Assessment tool and Implementation Guide recognise Article 12 as a general principle for the implementation of all other rights.

The nine requirements for meaningful child participation are elaborated further in Chapter 3.



How will the toolkit support children to advocate for the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child?

The Council of Europe protects and promotes human rights, which includes the rights of the child. The Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child² sets the priorities of the Council of Europe in this area for the period 2016 to 2021. The five priority areas to guarantee the rights of the child are:

1. **Equal opportunities for all children**
2. **Participation of all children**
3. **A life free from violence for all children**
4. **Child-friendly justice for all children**
5. **Rights of the child in the digital environment**

The beneficiaries of the priority areas and actions outlined in this Strategy are children living in the 47 Council of Europe member States. The action of the Council of Europe as an intergovernmental organisation, however, is mediated through the governments of its member States, which are driving its implementation along with other stakeholders, such as civil society and ombudspersons for children.

A mid-term evaluation on the strategy will be carried out after three years [2019] under the guidance of member States and other relevant stakeholders.



The advocacy toolkit aims to support children and civil society organisations working with children with the development of advocacy strategies for one or more of the above Council of Europe strategic priorities. The Council of Europe Children's Rights Division will support the children by providing them with a 'child-friendly' version of the Strategy.

The 'target audience' of the children will be their national governments (such as representatives from the Ad Hoc Committee for the Rights of the Child – CAHENF), which can receive requests from the children.

The outcomes of the consultations may be part of the governments' contribution to the mid-term evaluation of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child. The tool aims that a dialogue on one of the Council of Europe priority areas between children and young people and government representatives will take place.

Following the adoption of the UNCRC, various countries including Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK established mechanisms facilitating children's participation at multiple governmental levels from local and regional to key government departments through city and youth councils, advisory boards, summits, etc. (Perry-Hazan, 2016)³. Ireland went one step further and adopted a "National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making" in 2015, which is the first of its kind in Europe.

A key objective of the strategy is 'mainstreaming the participation of children and young people in the development of policy, legislation and research'⁴. An example where children's opinions contributed to Irish policies is the National Obesity Policy, for which in 2015 and 2016 national

consultations with children aged 8-17 were carried out on healthy lifestyles.

In April 2016 10 young people from across Europe participated in a high-level conference in Sofia, Bulgaria, where the new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child was launched. As well as participating in the conference the young people took on roles as moderators, speakers and rapporteurs. They had the opportunity to meet with high-level participants, including the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and their national Ministers. Social media were used by the young people to convey their messages during the conference to the outside world. They felt it was a valuable tool, as it allowed them to have an impact across Europe and the world, not just the event. The young people felt it was a great experience to participate in the conference and they liked that the participants were really listening to them and took their opinions seriously.

2. Foundations for advocacy with children and young people

What is advocacy?

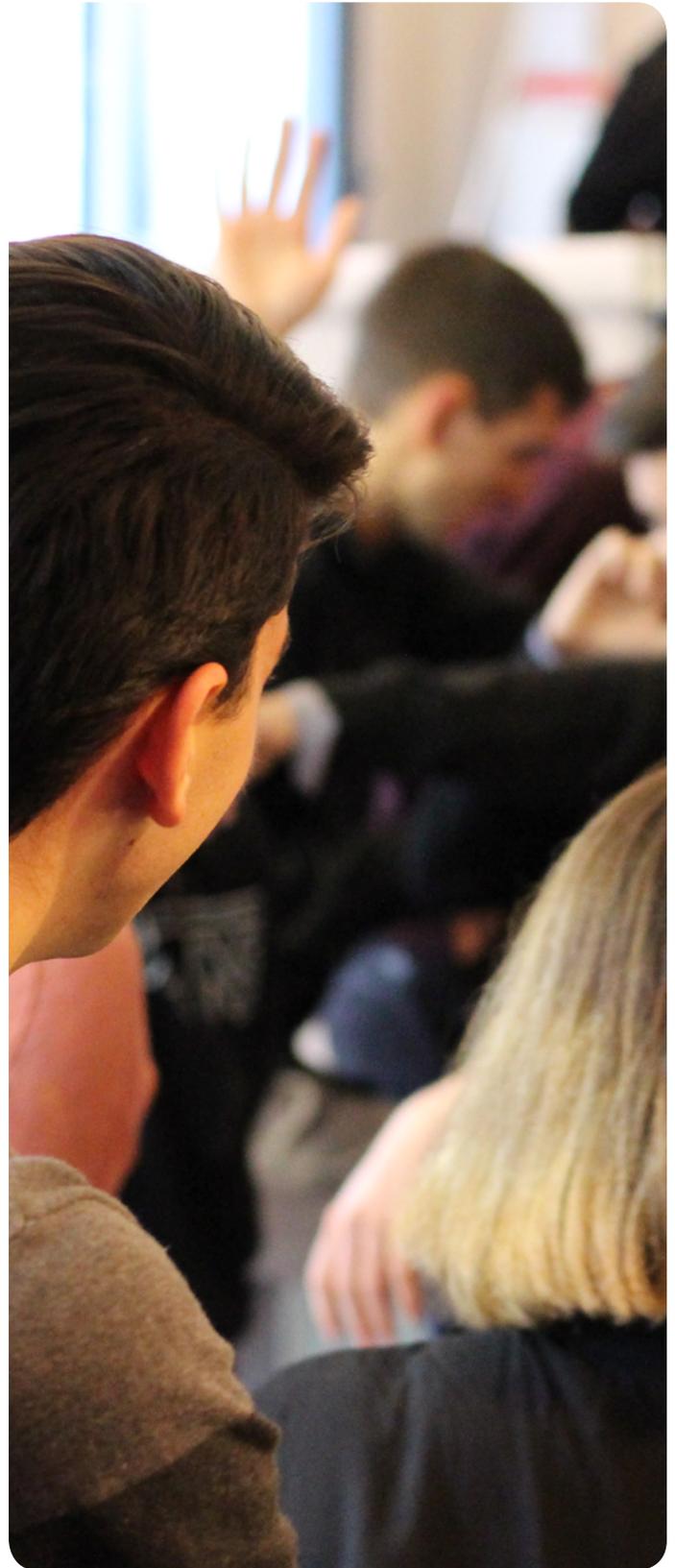
Children all over the world are advocating for the realisation of their rights, their peers' rights and the human rights of all, by acting as human rights defenders at local, national, regional and international levels. As individuals, or in a group, as part of an NGO, child-led forum or association, children are exercising their right to be heard and their civil rights and freedoms to advance and safeguard human rights and fundamental freedoms. The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders provides that any person or group of persons working to promote human rights, ranging from intergovernmental organisations to individuals working within their local communities, can be considered as defender. They can be of any age, gender, from any part of the world and from all sorts of professional or other backgrounds. There are many children who act as human rights defenders, a high-profile example is Malala Yusafsai. The most common term used for children is "actors" or "agents of change", "active citizens" and "civic actors".

The dictionary defines advocate as a person who publicly supports or recommends a particular cause or policy and someone who puts a case on someone else's behalf⁶. In practice, advocacy covers a range of activities that include direct lobbying and public campaigning. Lobbying takes a more targeted approach and reaches out to fewer people. An advocacy campaign publicly promotes an agenda, involving platforms where a wide audience can hear the advocate's message⁷.

Advocacy is a process, which requires strategic planning and constant rethinking, organisation and action. At the core of advocacy there is always an intent to achieve an outcome on the long term.

We could summarise that advocacy is about:

- challenging and changing opinions and mind-sets;
- seeking a political commitment for change, justice, human rights issues;
- changing policy, legislation, practice;
- including children's voices which often go unheard;
- supporting children to speak out and be heard directly;
- building healthier democracies;
- delivering evidence-based recommendations to decision makers to influence human rights and children's rights legislative and policy outcomes - all with the aim to make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of children.



The basic foundations of advocacy for children's rights

Child rights advocacy is rooted in the following elements:

1. It aims at ensuring that national policies and legislation comply with international standards and legal commitments to promote and protect children's rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the main foundation of child rights advocacy, since all countries in Europe have ratified it. In fact, it is the most ratified international treaty in the world!

The Council of Europe launched its Programme "Building a Europe for and with children" in 2006, and has since implemented strategies over a series of policy cycles to guide its work on children's rights.

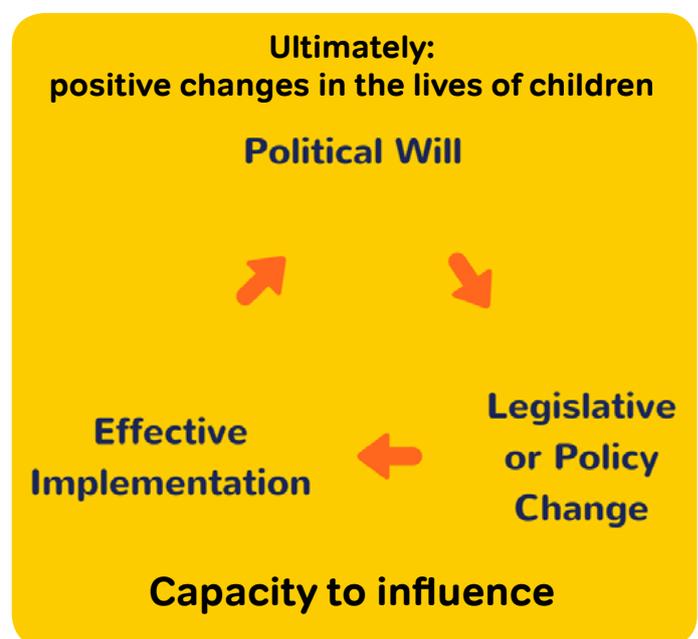
The Treaty on the European Union and its Fundamental Rights Charter have specific provisions about the EU's obligation to promote and protect children's rights.

2. It highlights the gaps and challenges, and makes proposals for steps to be taken by different stakeholders to improve the situation of children's rights and human rights of children, in line with the international standards and commitments.

3. It targets decision-makers with power to make the change happen. The intention is that they give their political commitment; take the necessary steps to make the change; and are held accountable for their decisions.

4. It recognises children as actors of change and promotes children's participation to ensure their voices are heard when decisions are taken that affect them.

The aim of advocacy:



The figure above shows the most typical aims of advocacy and how they build on each other. Ultimately the aim is to bring positive change to the lives of children. The types of changes usually called for include changing mind-sets or gathering commitment to a specific issue; ensuring there is legislative or policy change adopted by responsible decision-makers; and ensuring that they are implemented and followed through.

Underpinning all this advocacy work is the ability and the capacity of child rights advocates and children themselves to take action. Children's understanding of their rights, their capacity to assert their rights, and to make meaningful contributions to realising these rights are all important elements of a child-centred approach to advocacy. Both adult and young advocates need to be supported in learning about advocacy, about the people they are targeting, about the participatory practice with policy-makers, and about the ways they can engage in all steps of a legislative or policy process.

In order to reach our end goal about positive changes in the lives of children, those decision-makers who have the ability to induce a change first need to become aware of the problem. Having a champion for "the cause" is a first step to achieve change. As officials change positions and governments are reshuffled after elections there is a constant need to raise awareness about the importance of children's rights. It can be challenging to advocate for the realisation of children's rights, which requires taking a long-term perspective, in a political context that changes every few years. Another common challenge is ensuring that children's rights are taken into account across the different sectors and departments of decision-making – including in the less obvious areas such as budgets, economy and tax reforms, to name a few – policy areas which might not be focused on children but have a strong impact on their lives.

Once decision-makers have made a commitment to support the issue, it can take shape in several forms, for instance laws, regulations, national action plans, financial support, etc. Advocacy is needed then to try to shape these outputs, to influence the content

and budget foreseen and to include children's perspectives in their development. It is likely that the policy-makers responsible for the delivery of detailed government policies are not those who had agreed to support the main issue in the first place. A determining factor of success is strong cooperation between policy-makers and stakeholders, and among the different advocates themselves.

In many cases advocacy work targets the phase following the adoption of a legislation, strategy, or other policy guidance at the various levels of decision-making. The implementation of these policies and actions are just as important. Civil society together with children and young people have an important role in holding different levels of government to account in how they implement policies. Children should be consulted and involved in the official monitoring processes to evaluate the success and suggest improvements. Partnerships and cooperation between different stakeholders such as local government, local NGO, social services, families and children themselves, are needed. Furthermore, such collaboration needs to be promoted, and government authorities need to give it sufficient support.



3. Engaging children in advocacy work in a meaningful way

Children's involvement in advocacy work has to be adapted to their needs and capacities to ensure they will have confidence and the opportunity to participate meaningfully. This means that children will be enabled and empowered to work on advocacy issues, which are close to their living circumstances/world.

For children to be able to advocate, they need to develop skills in cooperation, decision-making, self-initiative, self-expression and self-evaluation.

Children can be involved in different ways in the advocacy work, in a consultative manner, in a collaborative way and it can be child-led. In the case of consultations children bring insight to the campaign, but the campaign is initiated, led and managed by adults.

With the implementation of the Council of Europe Child Participation Assessment Tool⁸ within Council of Europe member states, children's focus groups are organised to ensure qualitative input from children and young people about the implementation of children's participation within their country.

An example, where children were consulted comes from Bulgaria where the National Network for Children (NNC) involved a broad range of different age and social groups, who were consulted and contributed to the annual monitoring report "Report Card", which is tracking the extent to which governments are keeping up with their commitments regarding children's rights and well-being.

Besides the experts' report, a complementary booklet which presents the views of children, young people, parents, professionals and other people directly involved with children. For the Report Card of 2017 NNC members managed to hold 51 focus groups throughout the country.

Other examples implemented by various national children's rights coalitions, include the Dutch Children's Rights Coalition and the Children's Rights Alliance England, which have consulted children on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this way children could contribute to the alternative report to the UN

When children are able to collaborate in campaigning they cooperate with adults and are seen as equal partners in a campaign initiated by adults. Children will have the opportunity to influence the process and goals of the campaign.

A good example of a cooperative campaign is “Seekers of inequality” a nation-wide campaign from NNC in Bulgaria together with UNICEF Bulgaria. The participants in the campaign are teams of five young people aged 14-18 years and one adult as a mentor and coordinator of the team. The aim of the teams is to implement a child-led research, seeking to find if there are prejudices regarding Roma children in their region, and if these prejudices create unequal treatment within a specific topic they choose in the beginning of their research (education, culture, health, social services). The research of the team goes through five steps: planning of the research, searching for materials (media, interviews, focus group, etc.), analysing the material, summarizing the material and drafting conclusions, organizing an event to present the research and its results.

Another example comes from the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Estonian Institute of Human Rights. They asked the NGO the Estonian Union for Child Welfare to involve their youth council in the organisation of a conference.

The conference was prepared by the youth council in collaboration with adults. To prepare for the conference several workshops were held with the young people to find a way to show their opinions and thoughts (videos, animations and speech) and to gather their views to present. They also met with NGOs representing Refugees and the LGBT community to gain a deeper understanding of these topics and to represent them. The messages at the conference were prepared and delivered by children and young people.



When a campaign is child-led children control the campaign and have agreed on the subject that they want to advocate on; adults only intervene in a supporting role.

In Wales, United Kingdom, children and young people involved in the NGO 'Ethnic Youth Support Team' felt affected by the outcomes of the Brexit referendum and felt the need to react to this. They produced a video with their views on Brexit and the affect it has on migrant children in Wales, which has been shown to decision-makers and other NGO representatives as well as being put online.

Involving children in advocacy work needs to comply with the 9 requirements for effective and meaningful children's participation, which are based on Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the General Comment no.12 explaining this Article.

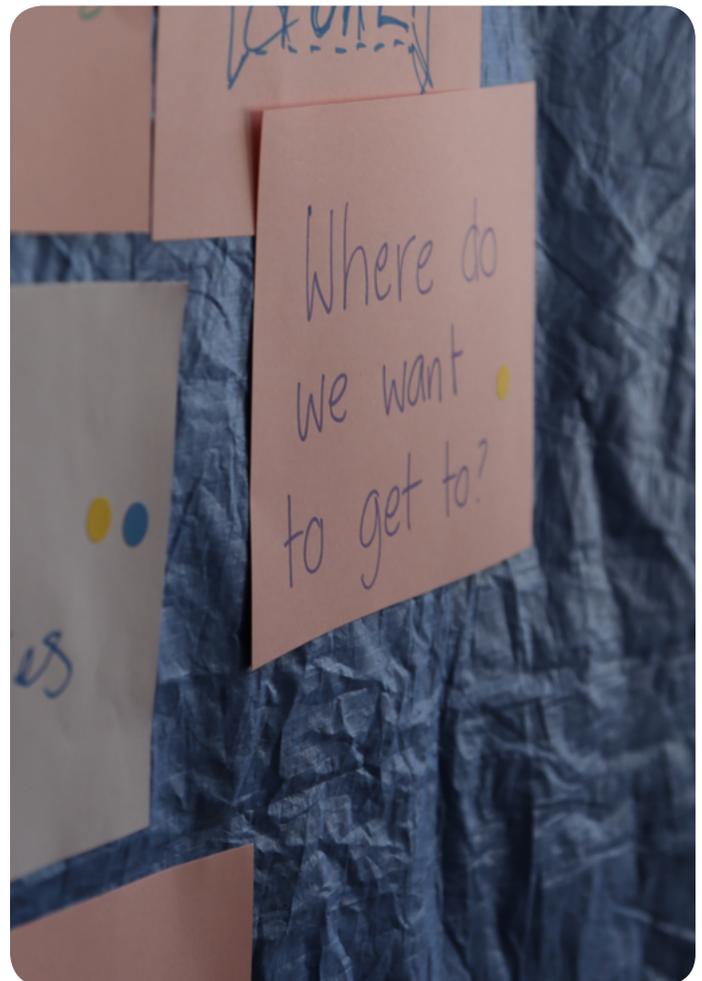
The CM/Rec(2012)2 on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18 and the Child Participation Assessment Tool do acknowledge the importance of these nine principles for meaningful children's participation.

- **Transparent and informative**
- **Voluntary**
- **Respectful**
- **Relevant**
- **Child-friendly**
- **Inclusive**
- **Supported by training**
- **Safe and sensitive to risk**
- **Accountable**

These requirements are the basis for ground rules for adults, whether they are representing civil society or government officials, when cooperating with children in advocacy work.

These ground rules include that an adult needs to ensure that the children know whom you are and what your role is and why you would like to cooperate with the children.

Next to these nine requirements it is important that funding for practical elements to allow children to participate, such as travel, is ensured. This is in particular relevant to allow marginalised groups of children to participate. To ensure ownership of the campaign children need to be able to contribute in a way, which respects all of these requirements.



Transparent and informative

When children are involved in advocacy work it needs to be clear what the purpose of their advocacy work is: what do they want to achieve? (see chapter 4 – how to develop an advocacy strategy). To be able to do this, children need to be informed about decision-making processes. For example, a local government will decide on the development of a children and youth clubhouse, where they will be able to have their own activities.

Children need to know when the decision making process will start, who is involved and what the issues are that need to be taken into account in the decision-making process (see chapter 4). Explain to children that when they advocate for change, for example by getting a new law or policy or action plan adopted by the local or national government, this might need a ‘long breath’. Changes usually do not happen overnight, but small steps and achievements towards the change can keep up the motivation for children to be kept involved.

The timing of children’s involvement in an advocacy campaign needs to be parallel to the decision-making process, which needs to be explained to the children, in order for them to be able to develop an advocacy strategy. On the other hand, children’s involvement in the campaigning needs to be adapted to the rhythm and activities of the children themselves. This means taking into account school hours, school exams, holidays, etc. This might cause some friction, since an important period to influence decision-makers might be during holidays or school exams. Children and support workers need

to be aware about this and need to discuss how children can cooperate with adults in their advocacy work.

Voluntary

Never force a child or group of children to be involved in advocacy work: participation in a campaign is always done voluntary. This means that children are allowed to step out of the advocacy work at any time and are informed before they participate that their participation is voluntary. Children need to be asked to sign a consent form that they are voluntarily participating. This also includes that children have a right not to answer questions or remain silent. With regard to this it is also important to allocate sufficient time for children to think and provide answers, this is in particular important when children are involved in the design of an advocacy campaign.

Respectful

Adults need to be respecting children’s opinions and be honest with children to what extent they can be involved in the advocacy campaign and explain why. Adults also have to make sure that children’s opinions will not be used against them and possible emotional stress that certain issues could have for children need to be taken into account. Especially regarding plans for signposting to or offering additional support if needed. (see also the paragraph on safe and sensitive to risk, page 17).

When children are meeting with decision makers as part of their advocacy work, it is important that they treat the children with respect.

The decision makers could be prepared for the meeting with a briefing on how to communicate with children (Eurochild has developed briefings for adults who participate in events with children, which can be used for this purpose). In case of urgent meetings or meetings organised at the last-minute children need to be with an accompanying adult who can ensure that in case of misbehaviour by the decision-maker the accompanying adult can interfere. For example, when a decision-maker is talking down towards a child or does not take the child's opinion seriously because of the young age of the child.

Relevant

It is important to work with children on issues, which are close to their lives, such as their schools, family matters, their immediate environment and their living circumstances. Children need to be involved in choosing the subjects they would like to advocate about.

Child-friendly

When working with children and young people you need to make sure not to use technical terms and jargon. Ideally when preparing campaigns with children this needs to take place in a child-friendly environment.

The advocacy work itself might not always take place in a child-friendly setting, but on the contrary, could be quite intimidating for children, such as parliamentary buildings, local, regional and national government buildings or other adult-settings.

Children will have to be prepared for this to make them feel at ease when entering these settings, for example by explaining what the building will look like, showing pictures or videos, do games and ensure they will be with accompanying adults and with other children and young people.

Inclusive

Advocacy work needs to be inclusive for children with different backgrounds or with particular vulnerabilities, but also for children of different ages. To allow equal participation of children the working methods might need to be adapted to take into account their specific needs, for example ensure special support for children with physical disabilities; ensure extra breaks and games.



Supported by training

To enable children to participate in decision-making processes and campaigning training is needed for both facilitators and decision-makers who will be engaged with the children. Children themselves also need to be trained on their rights and how to engage in advocacy work. Key to the training on children's participation is to provide a comprehensive overview of children's rights as laid down in the UNCRC. Children themselves can be involved as trainers and facilitators.

Training can involve capacity building to strengthen their skills, for example to bring across messages to decision-makers, dealing with the media, public speaking.

This toolkit is providing guidance that can be used for this. In addition, there are many tools developed by civil society that can be used in working with children⁹. Where decision makers and government officials are involved, it could be useful to couple staff who have had a positive experience of involving children with staff who have not (mentoring or peer-to-peer support).

Safe and sensitive to risk

Child protection is one of the core principles underpinning the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Measures to protect children from harm and abuse and to make them feel safe need to be in place when involving children in any activity, including advocacy work. In particular when involving children experiencing vulnerable situations, child protection measures need to be safeguarded throughout the process.

When an organisation or governmental bodies works with children or intends to work with children it is recommended to develop a child protection or safeguarding policy, including guidance for staff working with children on child protection issues. Children can only reach their full potential when a child protection policy is in place. Child protection measures need to be in place to protect children from harm and abuse; to ensure that staff is not a risk for the children and to protect an organisation's reputation (e.g. allegations of abuse can destroy an organisation's reputation). (Many civil society organisations in Europe provide guidance on developing such



policies for organisations or state bodies - including Eurochild, Keeping Children Safe, and NSPCC (UK) are able to provide guidance on child protection).

Accountable

How can we measure the success of advocacy initiatives? We need to be providing feedback to children on the impact of their involvement in advocacy work. When the advocacy initiative is covering a longer time span an on-going feedback process needs to be built in. This could for example be done by using a traffic light method. Each outcome of the advocacy activity could then be linked to whether it has taken children's opinions and messages into account (green light) or partly (orange light) or not at all (red light).

(To be further developed with support of a monitoring and evaluation tool: see chapter 4 on Monitoring & Evaluation)

Sufficient Resources

Next to the above requirements organisations (civil society and governments) will have to allocate sufficient resources to ensure a meaningful engagement of children.



This includes realistic budgets to cover the costs for involving children.

The costs that should be considered are: meeting costs, the development of child-friendly material, travel costs, including accompanying adults and refreshments, which are crucial for those children from low-income backgrounds, as well as sufficient human resources. Even where it is obvious that children from marginalised backgrounds need financial support, this is not always prioritised.

Children will need to be trained and supported to get involved in advocacy work by competent facilitators. This toolkit is providing a tool (the hot air balloon) to support children in this process.

4. Developing an advocacy strategy

From the perspective of the advocate, there are several stages of influencing (see image of the cycle of advocacy). First and foremost, the issue to be addressed has to be clearly defined. To do so one has to be able to formulate the problem; the solution to that problem; and be clear on why we are best-placed to advocate on this issue.

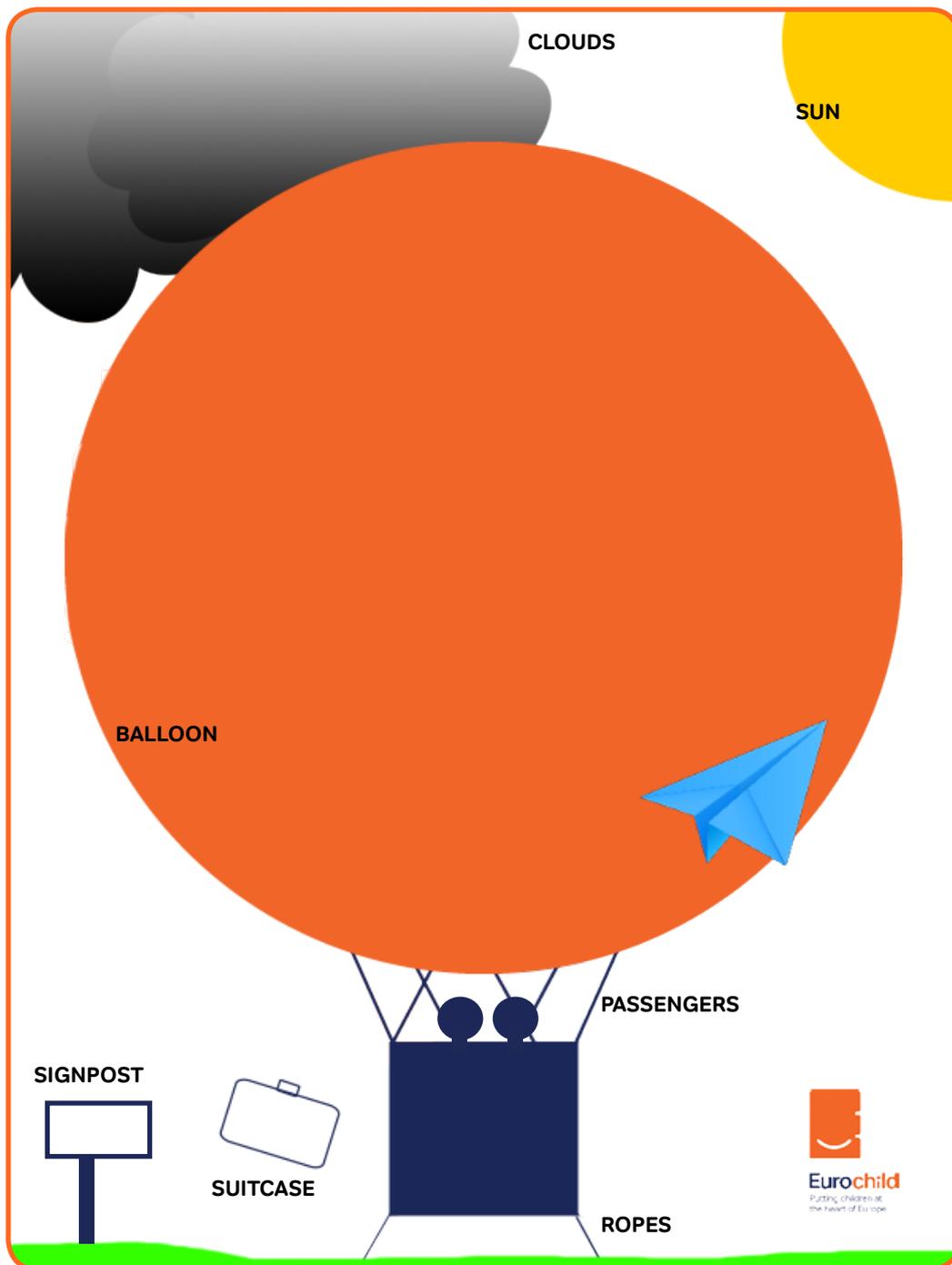
The next preparatory phase is carrying out an analysis of internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and challenges (SWOT analysis).

The core strategic piece linking together the various factors that need to be considered before taking action are then centralised in an advocacy plan or strategy, which can serve as a guidance and working document. The concrete activities then should be outlined in an action plan to be able to keep track of expected outcomes and how different actions build on each other. Finally, it is essential to monitor and evaluate on an ongoing basis what the various actions have achieved, to be able to shape future objectives and next steps.

Through the demonstration of an example used with children and young people in capacity building sessions on advocacy, this chapter aims to give some tools for understanding the different steps, and in particular for designing an advocacy strategy.



To help draft an advocacy strategy we can follow a series of guiding questions. The following diagram is a useful tool to summarise all the elements through the example of flying a hot air balloon. This tool was developed to help carry out capacity building workshops with children.



Steps

1. DESTINATION ON SIGNPOST (goal)

Guiding question: What do we want to achieve? Where do we want to get from here?

The golden rule is to keep it focused on one overall goal that the advocacy is aimed to impact. In some cases, it can be quite obvious while in others it can be difficult to decide on one goal we are setting out to achieve. It is best to use a simple and compelling statement about what the future should look like e.g. child poverty is reduced by half in our country / Europe.

2. WEATHER CONDITIONS (opportunities and external challenges)

Guiding question: What is the atmosphere like around us?

A very helpful exercise is assessing the environment for hooks, opportunities and for external obstacles or challenges. To answer this question, we have to consider circumstances, which are NOT within our reach to change.

SUN: What can help us (opportunities) e.g. political/cultural openness, upcoming events, media attention to an issue.

[Example: In Estonia experts from the Council of the Baltic Sea States supported the work of the Youth Council of the Estonian Union for Child Welfare and met with children and young people to openly discuss corporal punishment, how to campaign for it and what to do about it.]

[Example: The anti-bullying campaign of Children in Wales could be blown off course by schools not getting involved; people leaving; lack of confidence; young people feeling embarrassed about bullying; not having correct information; lack of resources; lack of commitment from young people; no staff commitment, etc.]

3. SUITCASE (internal strengths)

Guiding question: What are our assets that we bring to the campaign/advocacy work?

Carrying out an initial self-evaluation helps to position ourselves as advocates and the messages we can deliver. Starting with the positive, listing the valuable resources we bring to the campaign – e.g. experience, evidence, contacts, well-known profile, outreach, etc.

4. ROPES TYING THE BALLOON TO THE GROUND (structural weaknesses)

Guiding question: What is holding us back?

The other side of the self-assessment exercise is meant to help stay realistic. What are our short-comings? The available resources (human and financial) need to be taken into account. It is worth acknowledging what the capacity building needs are in-house.

When the NGO Children in Wales organised a campaign against bullying with children and young people they discussed what is holding them back: not educated enough; no communications between people; social media; newspapers; teachers don't try hard enough; funding; bullied victims don't want to speak; no promotion of children's rights, etc.

5. PASSENGERS IN THE BASKET (Target audience)

Guiding question: Who can help us get there? (The targets, both primary and secondary)

An important step in preparing an advocacy strategy is recognising who has to be convinced/influenced. Primary targets are people who could help make the change happen, e.g. local, national or European politicians, national or European civil servants, government officials. Secondary targets are those who have an influence on the primary targets. They are usually stakeholders without legislative power such as the media, children's ombudspeople, schools, civil society networks.

Examples of passengers on board in an anti-bullying campaign organised by Children in Wales and a group of children and young people included amongst others: head teachers, youth workers, social workers, mental health organisations, local councils, friends, the police

To identify the relevant people, we can ask the following questions:

Primary target: Who can make the change that you want? Who influences them?

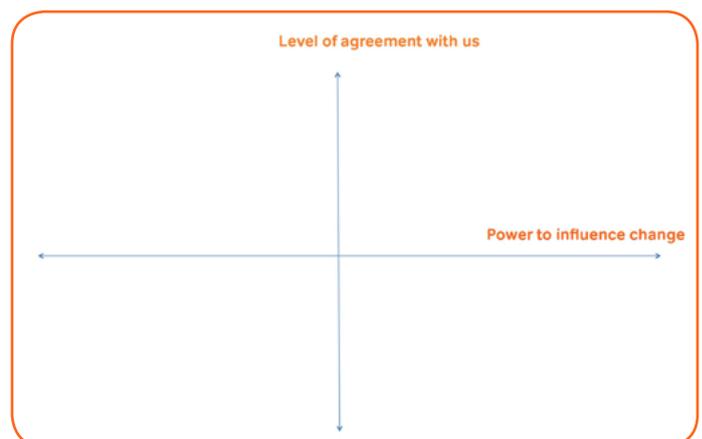
Secondary target: Who is your target influenced by? (e.g. voters, shareholders)

Allies: Who is for the change and what do you need to do to work with them?

Opponents: Who is against the change (and what do you need to do to get them to help you achieve the change? Is it possible?)

Once we have the relevant targets identified their influence (or power) over the issue can be assessed with the use of a power mapping grid.

Power Mapping Grid



Depending on the target and their level of influence, different tactics and messages are needed. A possible way to strengthen capacity around messaging is by developing an "elevator pitch" on specific issues. The elevator pitch is an exercise to practice conveying targeted messages to the target audience. It is set in the imaginary scene of accidentally sharing a ride in the elevator with the decision-maker relevant for the advocacy campaign. It requires being able to share 1) the problem; 2) the solution; and 3) the concrete request to that person in a very short amount of time.

[Messaging: In Finland in a project disabled pupils were involved to address the issue of inequality in society. They made suggestions on how to improve the situation of all children. The aim was to make children feel part of society and that they could celebrate Finland's 100th year anniversary in a meaningful way. The children sent a multi-artistic (videos, photos, voice) letter in which they asked a direct question to the President, to which the President had no choice but to answer. It indeed made an impact because the President reacted to the video of the children.]

6. BALLOON (activities and timeline)

Guiding question: What actions will you take to reach the change you want to see?
–e.g. campaigns, media, etc.

Example of an action/campaign:
Every year on 6 March (School Day against Bullying) the European Student Volunteer Network "You Smile", which is made up of mainly high-school students and supported by the Greek NGO Smile of the Child, asks schools and students all over Greece to produce and send material (videos, songs, posters, drawings, photographs) with their own messages against bullying. They have their own web TV and web radio, which is reaching over 385.000 viewers and listeners.

An example of a campaign using the hot air balloon method comes from the city of Espoo in Finland and involves the participation of disabled children in advocacy work. There are five children in the group, aged 9-15 with different disabilities, including autism, development diseases, visual impairments. The group met five times.

1. **The target** [destination] was to find different methods to increase children's participation in social work for disabled children. Different group work methods were used for the five participants and a questionnaire for a larger group of children and their parents was carried out. Another aim of the campaign was to influence the quality of social work with disabled children.

2. **Opportunities** [sun]: Nation-wide interest among professionals and researchers

3. **Obstacles** [clouds]: It was necessary, that there was a background story for the developing process. Children did not tell how they felt about certain services, they told how the background story character would feel or what he/she needed.

4. Actions [Balloon]: children were each working with their own assistant, and at first it did not seem that they were like a group at all. Now children have started to communicate with each other, sometimes in a way that at first was not visible to the adults in the group. It took a while before an individual method to communicate with each child was designed, because the assistants first had to get to know the child.

5. Stakeholders, who can help us [Passengers in the basket]: the project is funded by the European Social Fund. The National Institute of Health and Welfare and the University of Lapland are making a study of the project. The Results will be published in the National Institute for health and welfare handbook for disability services <https://www.thl.fi/en/web/handbook-on-disability-services> (in Finnish)



The best way to pull together the necessary information to decide on activities is to design an action plan. An advocacy action plan frames the advocacy work into clear and results-oriented steps for implementation. They are structured according to short or mid-term advocacy objectives.

To clarify: an advocacy goal is what the advocate hopes to achieve in the long term, possibly over several years; it is the overall change that is desired as a result of advocacy efforts. Objectives are shorter-term results that must be achieved in order to reach the advocacy goal. Advocacy strategies usually have multiple short or mid-term objectives that are achieved on the way to that goal.

When identifying goals and objectives, it is important to ask: What needs to be changed? What are the obstacles to achieving that change? What steps can be taken to address these obstacles? Have children led or commented on suggested or developed goals and objectives? Using the SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely) is a good way to ensure that. Goals and objectives should be worded in terms of the desired result or achievement, not in terms of the activity or what will be done. “Raise support for children’s rights among key decision-makers,” for example, is activity-oriented. A results-oriented outcome is: “Decision-makers X, Y and Z will demonstrate their increased support for children’s rights by calling for increased funding for boys’ and girls’ primary education.

Once we have identified a few mid-term objectives it is easier to fill in the details of the activities/actions that will lead us there. Activities are the specific outputs and products, which contribute to the advocacy objectives,

and might include events, conferences, press releases, publications, meetings, etc. The action plan should mention specifically the type of activities that will be carried out, who is responsible for them, the time by when they will be completed and the resources required to complete them. The overall time frame for advocacy will be set by the advocacy results desired. Remember that significant amounts of time may be needed to reach the advocacy goal⁷. You can find a template for an advocacy action plan on page 28.

Monitoring and evaluating the impact of advocacy needs to be part of the strategic approach as well. It is the last phase of one action but is part of evidence gathering for a potential follow-up. For every activity in the action plan it is worth identifying performance indicators, which are measured at relevant points in time. It is best to identify the method of data collection and the responsible people for carrying it out, and then dedicate the time to assess the impact and make assumptions and plan next steps.

Some guiding questions for carrying out an evaluation of actions are:

- **What is working?**
- **What is not working?**
- **Are there any unexpected outcomes?**
- **Do the objectives / targets / tactics need to change?**
- **What to do next?**

An example of positive outcomes by listening to children comes from the city of Opatija, Croatia.

Since 2001 the City Council of Opatija, Croatia agreed to support the establishment of a “Children’s City Council”. Its objectives include establishing relationships of mutual respect, listening and communicating between children and the City; enabling children to exercise their right to express their opinions; enabling children to make decisions for themselves and others; recognising the rights of all citizens and the development of the responsibility of children regarding decisions made. The Children’s City Council is supported by the city’s professional services and the mayor or his deputies are present at every meeting of the Children’s City Council. The Children’s City Council provides advice on budgetary proposals of the City and they are given feedback on why their proposals have been adopted or not. Thanks to the work of the Children’s Council they have contributed to a wide range of achievements for children in the city of Opatija, including 29 playgrounds; a playroom/workshop “Kolibrići” for children with disabilities at Society “Our Children” Opatija; children’s beach and Skate Park; equipped schools in disadvantaged areas with a library fund; removed the barriers on sidewalks for people with disabilities.

To Recap

- **Have a strategy. Write it down.**
- **Be totally clear on your aim, and how your objectives, messages, targeting gets you there.**
- **Think about resources – money, people, technology.**
- **Consider your tactics and build one action on another. What will create the change you want to see?**
- **Monitor, evaluate, learn, adapt.**

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Notes

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10. This section relies mostly on United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Advocacy Toolkit: A guide to influencing decisions that improve children’s lives, New York, 2010

Credits

- Photo on page 5: Council of Europe
- Photo on page 17: Federico Lanzo, Eurochild
- Other photos: Davide Rambaldi, Eurochild

Annex: Advocacy Strategy Template

Annex

Advocacy strategy template¹

<p>Issue What is the issue/problem that we want to do something about?</p>	
<p>Goal (destination on signpost) What is the change we want to bring about through our actions?</p>	
<p>Objectives What set of smaller goals will help us to achieve our overall aim?</p> <p>Make sure objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Specific• Measureable• Achievable• Realistic• Time specific	
<p>External opportunities (Sun) What can help us?</p> <p>External challenges (Clouds) What can hinder us?</p>	
<p>Internal resources (suitcase) What are our assets that we bring to the campaign/advocacy work? What do we have in terms of people, money, experience, etc.?</p> <p>Internal weaknesses (ropes tying the balloon to the ground) What is holding us back? What do we need to run the campaign?</p>	

Target audience (Passengers in the basket)

- **Primary target:** Who can make the change that you want? Who influences them?
- **Secondary target:** Who is our target influenced by? (e.g. voters, shareholders)
- **Allies:** Who is for the change and what do we need to do to work with them?
- **Opponents:** Who is against the change (and what do we need to do to get them to help us achieve the change? Is it possible?)

Key messages

What message(s) do we need to get across? Are they the same for everyone?

Tactics

What things will we actually do to achieve our campaign objectives? How should our activities build on each other chronologically?



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