

Engaging children and adolescents with disabilities in decisions affecting their lives

Conference on inclusive education, 16-18 March 2025
Poland's presidency in the Council of the EU

UNICEF Refugee Response Office in Poland

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What are the main barriers affecting participation of children with disabilities?

- Persistent negative attitudes still exist towards the participation of children with disabilities in decision-making.
- Children with different communication needs face barriers because of lack of access to accommodation such as sign language, and assistive devices such as hearing aids.
- Children with disabilities have few opportunities to develop skills, experience and confidence to participate.
- Lack of accessible and appropriate information disempowers children with disabilities from participating.
- There are few training resources dedicated to facilitating the participation of children with different disabilities.
- Many mechanisms for community engagement such as complaints procedures, are not accessible to children and adults with disabilities.

How to create meaningful, inclusive and accessible participation practice?

- Identify the nature of participation (e.g. consultative, collaborative, child-led).
- Ensure participation is ethical and meaningful (see [Participation Guidelines](#) - Accessible versions available at the [Disability Section's publications page](#)).
- Allocate funds for reasonable accommodation (e.g. for sign language interpreters, Braille copies of materials, support from Personal Care Assistants).
- Include children with disabilities in the development of agendas.
- Create a supportive environment and ensure all staff understand the value of the participation of children with disabilities.
- Ensure the venue is accessible and free of any barriers (see [Guidance on how to make events accessible](#)).
- Offer materials in accessible and alternative formats, e.g. electronic format or Braille for someone who is blind (see [Guidance on how to make Word documents accessible](#)).
- When engaging young people online or using different technology platforms, ensure that they are fully accessible.
- Ensure there are enough volunteers to support participants with and without disabilities.

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- Consult with participants with disabilities to develop a range of different approaches and methods to be used flexibly and creatively to ensure everyone participates equally.
- Some children with disabilities, such as those with intellectual or developmental impairments, may need additional time and support to contribute. Create space for them to understand and contribute, for example meet with them prior to a workshop to provide easy to understand information on the topic and how they can participate.
- Ensure children or youth with disabilities understand the purpose of the activities, and the ways in which their contributions will be used.
- Ask children and youth with disabilities about how to make your future events/meetings better and more inclusive, for example by asking for feedback after an event/meeting.
- Keep in mind that children and young people with disabilities may not be in school. When using school-based approaches for participation, consider community outreach to reach out-of-school children and young people with and without disabilities.

For detailed information on creating opportunities for the participation of children with disabilities, please see the following resources:

- [INCLUSIVE EDUCATION Understanding Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Guidance on Child and Adolescent Participation](#)
- [The Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation](#)
- [Take Us Seriously. Guidelines on engaging children with disabilities in decisions that effect their lives](#) - Accessible versions available at the [Disability Section's publications page](#).
- [Inclusive Communication module](#)
- [How to make events accessible](#)
- [How to make Word documents accessible](#)

