



Thematic Glossary of Child Protection Systems and of the Promotion of Children's Rights

focused on the hearing of the child in especially vulnerable contexts

Financed by:

Iceland 
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Thematic Glossary of Child Protection Systems and the Promotion of Children Rights focused on child participation in especially vulnerable contexts (English version)

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PART I – Framework and nature of the Thematic Glossary

Context

The Thematic Glossary of Child Protection Systems and of the Promotion of Children’s Rights, focused on the hearing of the child in especially vulnerable contexts, is one of the two final outputs of the bilateral initiative on “Enhancing the protection of the rights of the child in priority areas”. Totally financed by the Fund for Bilateral Relations of the EEA Grants, it involves Portugal and Norway, namely through the National Commission for the Promotion and the Protection of Children and Young People, as the Portuguese promoter of the Initiative, and the Agency for Child and Family Welfare of the City of Oslo, as the Norwegian partner.

The bilateral initiative was launched on July 2, 2019 at the Portuguese Assembly of the Republic, in Lisbon. Its public presentation was integrated in the opening session of the International Seminar “Reflecting upon child participation in public decision-making” and counted with the intervention of several international lecturers with vast experience in the promotion of the rights of the child.

The closing event of the initiative took place on December 16, 2020, in an online format, and counted with the participation of

speakers from both countries, as well as from Eurochild. The recorded event is now available to the public.

Alongside this Thematic Glossary, the Digital Referential of Good Practices for Enhancing Child Participation in the Promotion and the Protection of the Rights of the Child comes as another output of the bilateral initiative at stake, both resulting from the same context and methodology and contributing to the same goals.

The selection of the area around which the Thematic Glossary revolves was based on its relevance to ensure the right of children to participate, be heard, have their opinions appreciated and taken into account, access equal opportunities and have the fundamental principle of the best interest of the child taken as a primary consideration, in all policies and practices concerning child protection and the promotion of the rights of the child.

Goals

The main and most immediate common goal of both outputs of this bilateral initiative is to stimulate and support child participation, having in mind the need for implementing special support measures that are adequate to overcome constraints deriving from vulnerabilities and any possible limitation to the access of children to participation and full enjoyment of this right, on an equal opportunities basis, free from any discrimination stemming from the context or from the personal situation of the child. This goal is multifold. On one hand, it allows systems of protection and promotion of children and young people and all stakeholders to increase the potential for application of already existing policies, projects, practices and activities based on or involving child participation, both in Portugal and in Norway. On another hand, it allows further contribution and inspiration to other initiatives that may result from all knowledge and experiences shared during the elaboration of both products, as well as from their dissemination, which goes well beyond the closure of the initiative. The fact that the two products are available in digital format eases their distribution and the promotion of the debate among peers and anyone involved or interested in contributing to stimulate child participation on a regular and equal opportunities basis, in all areas of intervention – the fulfillment of children's rights is an obligation of everyone and their scope encompasses all contexts of children's life, directly or indirectly, from where they live, are cared and assisted to where they learn and play.

The Thematic Glossary also aims specifically at organizing a list of terms chosen as the ones that must be taken as a technically useful resource for professionals and stakeholders of the civil society, in all relevant dimensions of child participation, when offering, preparing or facilitating initiatives that encourage the protection and the promotion of children's rights. As a tool to stimulate and support child participation opportunities in full respect for their rights, while keeping in mind the special attention required by children belonging to vulnerable groups or with personal conditions of vulnerability, the Thematic Glossary is not an exhaustive document, but rather reflects a dynamic reality and shall be taken as a basis for a regular update towards its enrichment with new knowledge and experiences brought about by new challenges, mirroring a learning process that occurs with the intervention of all stakeholders involved in the protection of children and in the promotion of their rights.

Other common goals of both outputs are to continue to: enrich the bilateral relations of Portugal and Norway through further exchanges of knowledge and practices; further increase the added-value that resulted from the team work developed along the process of the elaboration both materials, involving professionals working in child care and child protection, as well as children in both countries; to stimulate bilateral partnerships between Portugal and Norway in other areas of common interest, as well as to share with the international community their policies and practices to face current and future challenges, namely within the scope of the protection of children and of the promotion of their rights, including the right to participate – one of the most relevant ones, which has not yet been implemented nor attained all its reach.

Nature and methodology

The Thematic Glossary is a technical tool, which was produced with the active involvement of all relevant professionals of child protection systems and all sectoral areas whose scope of action was considered enriching, as well as with the fundamental involvement and the participation of children.

Stakeholders came together in thematic workshops and parallel events held in Portugal and in Norway. Four members of the technical team of the bilateral initiative – two Portuguese and two Norwegian elements – participated in all workshops in which the most significant and relevant technical terms or expressions were identified as the base for a common approach, to all stakehol-

ders involved in promoting or facilitating child participation: in the public or private sector; in governmental and non-governmental organizations; internationally, nationally, regionally or at local level; on a political, professional or voluntary basis, in the best interests of the child.

Children in Portugal and in Norway participated in workshops and consultation processes along the elaboration of both products, either to be heard on child participation, on the difficulties felt regularly regarding the implementation of this practice in several contexts and on how they consider these constraints could be overcome. The contributions of children were mostly collected during a workshop with the participation of children and through the dissemination of an anonymous online questionnaire.

Both outputs of this bilateral initiative embody years of experience and knowledge acquired by the involved stakeholders in the area of child participation: Norway, holding a much longer experience in child participation, which became a regular practice; Portugal, which has taken several steps in the recent years towards that goal. Both experiences proved to be very enriching to one another and the outcomes of this initiative are expected to contribute to enlarge and deepen the debate among professionals and their commitment in creating and facilitating child participation – children’s voices are irreplaceable and very important aspects can be learned from them, in order to improve policies and practices in the protection of children and the promotion of their rights.

In this context, it shall be highlighted that Norway introduced the concept of love in child care, as established through the Child Welfare Act¹, which entered into force in Norway on the January 1, 1993 and is also documented in the corresponding explanatory notes of Julia Köhler-Olsen², that will be presented hereafter. For methodological reasons, the concept of love is not an entry of the thematic glossary, since it results from legislation and did not arise in the workshops and initiatives held within the scope of the Bilateral Initiative. Nonetheless, the document at hand may well serve as a source of inspiration for decision makers, legislative bodies and all stakeholders involved in the promotion of the rights and the protection of children and young people in Portugal to introduce the concept of love in the Portuguese legislation and make it a reality, similarly to what it has been in Norway for almost 30 years, considering the benefits of its corresponding effects within the scope of the promotion of rights and the protection of children and young people.

It is noteworthy to mention that the purpose of the Child Welfare Act is described in its section 1-1 as “(...) (4). *The law shall help ensure that children and young people meet with safety, love and understanding (...)*”. According to note 5, added on August 15, 2018, by Julia Köhler-Olsen “(...) *the purpose of meeting children and young people with confidence, love and understanding should highlight the value basis for child welfare work. Despite objections made in some consultation statements, the Ministry³ supports the view that child welfare services should provide children in child welfare care and empathy and recognize their need for safety and love. The Ministry also believes that safety, love and understanding are important elements of the purpose of the Child Welfare Act to help ensure that children receive the necessary care (...)*”.

The concepts of safety, love and understanding are based on subjective feelings that can hardly be defined and that are not suitable to enforce. It is thus not easy to give the concepts a legal content and children are not given a right to experience safety, love and understanding, which can be enforced and tested.

That the incorporation of concepts without legal content are nevertheless incorporated into the provision of the purpose of the law is precisely its special feature. The provision shall express the objectives of the activities of the child welfare authorities and provide direction for the service’s priorities in general and for the interpretation of the individual legal provisions. The Ministry believes that this specific part of the purpose provision will have an important symbolic value and signal an expectation that employees of child welfare services meet children with safety, love and understanding”.

In what Portugal is concerned, the main legal acts on the protection of children and young people are:

- i) The Act on the Protection of Children and Young People in Danger⁴, which aims to promote the rights and the protection of children and young people in danger, in order to ensure their welfare and integral development. It encompasses amendments made over more than twenty years since the creation of a system to protect children and young people, in order to update the responses to emerging challenges and to extend its scope of intervention to the promotion of rights additionally to the protection of children⁵; and the

¹ LOV-1992-07-17-100, Lov om barneverntjenester (barnevernloven), available at <https://bufdir.no/Bibliotek/RettsdataStartPage/Rettsdata/?grid=gL19920717z2D100>

² <https://www.oslomet.no/en/about/employee/juliak/>

³ The note refers to the Barne- og familie departementet (BFD) of the Royal Ministry of Children and Family Affairs of Norway.

⁴ Lei de Proteção de Crianças e Jovens em Perigo, *i.e.*, Law No. 147/99, of September 1, amended by Law No. 31/2003, of August 22, Law No. 142/2015, of September 8, Law No. 23/2017, of May 23 and Law No. 26/2018, of July 5.

⁵ The amendments also extended the possibility of providing protection to young people aged up to 25 years old whenever necessary, in case of having been previously subject to a protection measure whose application was decided by a local Commission for Protection of Children and Young People while they were aged below 18.

ii) Educational Guardianship Law⁶, which establishes the legal provisions for the application of educational guardianship measures to children, aged 12 to 16, in case of practice of facts legally qualified as a crime by the latter.

The current legal framework of the National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and the Protection of Children and Young People was established by Decree-Law No. 159/2015, of August 10, amended by Decree-Law No. 139/2017, of November 10, and builds upon the inheritance of more than two decades of experience and lessons learned on protecting children in Portugal by its predecessor – the National Commission for the Protection of Children and Young People at Risk, created by Decree-Law No. 98/98, of April 18 –, broadening the latter's scope and competences.

As a matter of fact, the work accomplished along the years by the National Commission for the Protection of Children and Young People at Risk – specifically focused on children and young people at risk – and the knowledge gathered from national and international approaches made it clear that, despite the notably increased need of the most vulnerable for protection, all children and young people must fully enjoy and exercise their human rights and be protected from experiencing human rights violations.

Furthermore, the need for the creation of a new structure also arose from the increasingly recognized relevance of the dimension of prevention in eradicating child victimization and revictimization, along with the importance of raising not only children's awareness and increasing their empowerment regarding the exercise of their rights, but also of raising the awareness of all entities and of the civil society towards the need for implementing and respecting children's rights.

November 2015 opened the floor to a new stage: the creation of the National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and the Protection of Children and Young People, allowed the establishment of a mission encompassing a broader target and setting a larger scope of action and competences, reflecting the inclusion of all children and young people and the promotion of their rights alongside their own protection, as entailed in its current designation.

A new step forward was taken by Portugal through Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 112/2020, of December 18, which approves the National Strategy on the Rights of the Child for the period 2021-2024. This Strategy is based on the definition of an integrated and comprehensive vision that aims to contribute to building the foundations of a new planning cycle for children and youth with an innovative approach in Portugal, namely by involving the participation of children. In this regard, it is noteworthy to highlight that the elaboration of the Strategy⁷ itself comprised a consultation with children, additionally to the regular public consultation process. This Strategy is based on five main pillars, one of which concerning child participation:

1. Promoting well-being and equal opportunities for all children and young people;
2. Supporting families and parenting;
3. Promoting access to information and participation for children and young people;
4. Preventing and combating violence against children and young people; and
5. Promoting the production of tools and scientific knowledge to enhance a global vision of children and young people's rights.

The legacy of Norway and Portugal in the national legislation, policies and practices that promote and protect children's rights was taken in consideration in the production of both outputs of this bilateral initiative – the Thematic Glossary and the Referential of Good Practices.

Moreover, relevant Conventions and Protocols of the United Nations and of the Council of Europe on human rights in general and on children's rights in particular were also taken into account, alongside with recent documents published and events organized by international organizations, the European Union, non-governmental organizations around the topic of child participation, as well as with the interventions of children and young people as speakers in panels at European and international level.

This Thematic Glossary is a first step in a work in progress – a never ending work, as this is a dynamic reality that keeps bringing new possibilities and challenges. It is expected to inspire good practices on child participation, also bearing in mind that those who are in a more vulnerable situation require special attention, as to have equal opportunities in accessing this right, which is a right of all children, irrespectively of their characteristics, belonging, conditions or context.

Children have the right to participate, to be heard and to have their opinions taken into account. Governments and societies have the obligation to ensure them the full enjoyment of that right on an equal opportunities basis and in the child's best interests. Additionally to being a right, child participation is true richness for sustainable, balanced, healthy and ecological societies, where all live better lives, feel at home wherever they are, at any moment of their life. Child participation is a key-factor in the creation of child-friendly societies that are also humanity-friendly societies, since it contributes to overcoming hurdles emerging from vulne-

⁶ Lei Tutelar Educativa, *i.e.*, Law No. 166/99, of September 14, amended by Law No. 4/2015, of January 15.

⁷ Available at www.cnpdpcj.gov.pt

rabilities and to creating equal opportunities for all to be heard on a regular basis, a challenge to governments, societies and the children themselves.



PART II – Thematic Glossary

Introductory Note

This Thematic Glossary includes entries organized in alphabetical order – in Portuguese and in English, accordingly with the language of each version – corresponding to terms or expressions identified, as described in Part I, as fundamental dimensions to consider to ensure or facilitate activities that promote the participation of children, including vulnerable children – regardless of personal characteristics, conditions or contexts –, keeping in mind the potential need to meet special requirements as to ensure the full enjoyment of the right of children to participate, to be heard and to have their opinion respectfully taken in consideration, on an equal opportunities basis.

The purpose of this Thematic Glossary is to provide technical and practical knowledge translated into the language of professional staff based on their direct experience in the protection and care of children and in the promotion of their rights. It is not meant to deliver definitions of the selected terms and expressions, which would be a scientific role to be played by the academia, not by the stakeholders involved in this process. Children – the most important stakeholder – do not use scientific language but rather a practical one, quite connected with their own experience of participating, with their difficulties to participate, with their lack of participation and with how they think they would feel more stimulated to participate and comfortable in doing so.

Therefore, each of the terms or expressions bellow contains the dimensions that shall always be taken into account to implement the participation of all children, without discrimination of those who are in more vulnerable conditions or contexts, irrespecti-

vely of whether these conditions are of a transitory or permanent character.

Child participation is a right of all children and no one shall be left behind.

Child participation matters a lot to children, to other children and to all societies.

Concepts in alphabetical order

Access to information

The **access to information** is a concept that corresponds to a right of the child recognized by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – adopted by General Assembly Resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989 –, whose nature is specified in article 17.

This access shall be filtered according to context, conditions and age group of the children and adequate to the child's capacity for critical analysis of the information made available, allowing child participation to be a more conscious action.

As with any other children's right, this access must be ensured always in respect for the best interests of the child, which shall be taken as a primary consideration, according to article 3 of the CRC.

Active Listening

Active listening is a key concept to express the attitude of listening to the child with mindful attention and in a proactive way, which encompasses giving feedback to the child on the issues the child is being heard and validating the message conveyed by the child. The action of actively listening is of utmost importance in stimulating child participation since children feel encouraged to participate when they feel they are being heard attentively and that adults are interested in understanding what they are communicating.

Active listening to the child implicates effective and appropriate communication with the child, which contributes to strengthening the child's perception of whether she/he is heard and understood. This includes giving children continuous feedback on what was understood and requesting them to validate the message by asking if it corresponds to what they were seeking to express. Therefore, actively listening to children also contributes to their empowerment, as they feel they are being given attention and importance.

It is important that all various interlocutors of children cultivate active listening in the several contexts of their life, including in the family, at school, in playgroups and in institutions providing childcare, among others.

A culture of actively listening to the child also contributes to reinforced attention being paid to messages that may constitute alerts to possible dangers children may face or be facing. Recognising the lack of knowledge of the family or other interlocutors in comparison to the know-how and resources held by the child – namely at the digital literacy level and matters dealt with in the dark web – is an important dimension of actively listening to the child that shall be considered in connection with this concept. Having adult caregivers (family and professionals) conscious of their own lack of information is a step ahead towards having adult caregivers who are more attentive to messages they do not understand. This may instigate those caretakers to look for further information, that enables them to protect the children and make them feel heard, understood and protected, while possibly avoiding risks that exist in real and virtual contexts where children interact.

Adversity

Adversity is a relevant concept to child participation, especially to children belonging to the most vulnerable groups or in vulnerable contexts throughout the child's life. It can be linked to risk factors that cause or increase vulnerability. It implies something that is not easy nor pleasant, a challenge or a circumstance that delays attaining a certain objective. It may limit, retard, hinder,

block or cut off access to an opportunity, including to opportunities to participate, among many others related with all the other rights of the child.

The impact of adversity is inversely proportional to the child's resilience and the importance it assumes depends on if and how the adversity is solved. People in all support contexts – relatives, school staff, care personnel and other support personnel – are fundamental to help children find strategies for dealing with and overcoming adversities. Adults of reference or adults who children have a bond with are an important support for children while facing adversities, dealing with these, building self-confidence and taking opportunities that arise in all areas of their life.

Autonomy

The concept of **autonomy** entails security, self-confidence and self-esteem and is also connected with forms of valuation of the child starting from the child's birth.

It means having secure and safe connections children believe in because someone who is important to them is giving them due value – and that makes children feel accepted, appreciated, loved.

Autonomy comes along with responsibility. This is also relevant to child participation since it makes children feel safe, comfortable and confident to give their opinion.

There are several ways of valuing children that contribute to foster their belief in themselves, which, in turn, increases their autonomy and confidence to expose themselves and their opinions.

Child-friendly communication

Communication with children should be a **child-friendly communication**. This expression puts children and the child's best interest at the centre of the communication process.

It is mainly based on the principle that, when adults talk to children, they should do it in a way that is friendly to the children.

Communicating in a child-friendly manner is communicating with affection, so that the child feels she/he matters, is not alone and is important, and therefore realizes that what has been said is also important and is heard. It is not only a matter of giving voice to children but also making children feel heard with attention, respect and consideration. It encourages child participation and an active role of the child.

A child-friendly communication uses simple and clear terms in a language that children understand, that are adequate to the child's cognitive and socio-affective development and also entails interacting with children while respecting their individuality and their rights.

Child-friendly language is a positive speech expressing mutual trust that contributes to create a child-friendly space for dialogue, in an informal tone, language and setting, suitable for children to feel comfortable, understood and express themselves, feeling that they are heard with attention and what they are saying is important. As such, a child-friendly language is also a language that promotes child's self-esteem and self-love.

Whenever child participation is requested (e.g. through the reply to a questionnaire), adults should be present to explain what is intended with that particular consultation process and clarify any issues that may be brought about by the children.

Citizenship in Childhood

The expression **citizenship in childhood** aims to express the knowledge, understanding, developing skills and attitudes conducive to the full exercise and enjoyment of children's rights and duties in society and to value diversity, while playing an active part in democratic life. This notion naturally occurs throughout the life of the child, assuming several forms according to the child's development stage, background, experience and accomplishments at the different levels and life contexts and in relation to other adults and children.

The development of awareness towards the exercise of citizenship in childhood contributes to child participation, since it enhances children's active voice to contribute with their opinions to the promotion and protection of their rights, as well as to build a more child-friendly society in all contexts, including in the digital environment, which encompasses and requires a dimension of digital literacy and digital citizenship of adults as well.

This dimension is also directly related to the aforementioned right of the child to access information. Its potential increases in a facilitating environment and contributes to the development of the child's autonomy and, consequently, to the child's self-confidence and self-esteem.

Commitment

The notion of **commitment** corresponds to the assumption of the responsibility for a legitimate objective internalised as being one's own and of the group.

For a commitment attitude to emerge, it is necessary that the child recognizes their own expectations or those of the group and that she/he will strive to achieve.

Commitment is related to responses to the underlying expectation towards the objective to be achieved. It also relates to development in stages according to pre-established rules between the parties involved, whether intentionally communicated or only perceived by the child.

Problems in the communication – oral or of other nature – may confuse the child and avoid commitment or create false expectations in the child, in the group or in the adult with whom the child interacts. This potentially affects child participation and, more importantly, the child's perception of safety, acceptance, recognition, value and esteem.

Culture of affection

It is important to make it clear that a **culture of affection** is, necessarily and above all, a culture of respect for all children's rights. Therefore, it totally excludes any situation of violation of children's rights, including disrespectful or abusive attitudes and behaviour towards children and their rights – may it be manipulation, abuse of power, abusive and criminal conduct – and in no way can these be taken as a demonstration of affection, but rather a misconception of it.

A culture of affection is a culture of attachment, where the expression and exchange of emotions and feelings is perceived as contributing for well-being, health and happiness in full respect for the rights of the child, as clearly enshrined in the CRC. For children, a culture of affection is especially important, as affective bonding is essential for living and growing up in an environment that fosters attachment and feelings of emotional protection as a result of the behaviour of parental figures or legal guardians with whom children feel safe, comfortable, cared and loved.

A culture of affection should exist in any context as to promote and enhance the expression of affection with different variables, according to the degree of proximity of the relationships and always in full respect for the rights of the child.

Contexts with a culture of affection, that encourage and respect the child's individuality and forms of emotional expression at all levels – physical, verbal, non-verbal, among others –, prompt the stimulation of abilities, competences and characteristics involved in processes of participation (e.g. communication and self-esteem) and contribute to the development and well-being of the child.

Culture of the child

The expression **culture of the child** aims to express a culture of respect for the rights of the child, based on the child's best interests taken as a primary consideration. This involves the increasing development of a society and a culture of protection and promotion of the rights and interests of the child, as well as a permanent attention to create opportunities to the participation of children in all matters that concern them, in all contexts, including in the digital environment.

A culture of the child is a culture that creates a facilitating environment (*cf* the concept of "facilitating environment"), which

provides and promotes the full harmonious development of children, in respect for each one's own differences and specificities and without any kind of discrimination.

A culture of the child is based on the idea of Children as subjects and objects of rights and on the perception of the Child as a Child – not as a “minor”, since this wording commonly reports to an associated expression of diminishment that is not respectful of the image of the child, despite being aged below 18 or less, in case of countries where majority is legally achieved earlier. In a culture of the child, the concept of children coincides with that is clearly described in article 1 of the CRC, pursuant to which “**a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier**”. As such, a child would define herself/himself/themself as “a person below the age of 18”.

A culture of the child is a culture that provides children: a learning environment; access to appropriate information, from a non-adult-centred perspective but rather in a child-friendly approach, adapted to the child's age and maturity and in a language which the child understands; regular opportunities to speak out their voice; encouragement to participate; opportunities to be heard and to be listened to; the certainty of having their opinions taken in due consideration.

A culture of the child also entails the dimension of the reconciliation of work and family life, since the paradigm of putting children first and giving more importance to the time families spend with their children still challenges the conceptions of many in today's societies.

Empathic solidarity

The concept of empathic solidarity is very important to support and stimulate child participation and to relate with children in all contexts and situations.

Empathic solidarity towards the child is the ability of a person to put oneself in the child's position, to be sympathetic and tolerant and to use a language of affection that inspires feelings of comfort and respect in the child, regardless of all specificities and potential vulnerabilities. In case the child is in a more vulnerable situation, empathic solidarity eases the feeling of suffering through the reinforcement of feeling understood, accompanied and supported.

Empathic solidarity is also connected with the concept of active listening (*cf* “active listening”), which embodies the ability to know how to listen to a child and to understand her/his situation as a whole.

Empathic solidarity allows a more conscious participation, filtered according to the context, conditions and age group and adapted to the child's capacity for critical analysis of what is being asked and willingness to reply according to her/his/their own knowledge and experience.

Empathic solidarity is the ability to give oneself to others on a basis of respect, equal dignity and social justice, through a commitment and responsibility towards the Other, interacting in a sensitive manner that makes the Other feel comfortable to share difficulties and seek possible solutions that an attitude of distance or indifference would block. It also involves learning to act together in finding solutions to problems and challenges and intervening for the well-being of others and the common good, with the best interests of the child always at the basis for any interaction with children.

Empowerment

The concept of **empowerment** is very important within the scope of child participation since it incorporates the dimension of giving power to children and allows the full enjoyment of their right to participate, as clearly established in article 12 of the CRC.

Empowerment is giving children access to relevant information, in a child-friendly language that they can understand and use to express themselves regarding matters of their concern. Therefore, a learning environment contributes to sharing the power of information and to influence decisions at all levels – in family and local contexts, but also at regional, national and international levels.

It similarly involves recognizing and giving children the opportunities to participate in decision-making processes, as they are entitled that right, and having a voice which is given due weight.

Since empowerment is also related to the child's right to participate, it contributes to the development of proactivity. Giving children a voice in several ways and in several contexts boosts their self-confidence and fosters its demonstration, namely through the creation of opportunities of autonomous and active participation. Empowerment presupposes the identification of the child's vulnerabilities, seeking the latter's roots and best resolution within the group structures the child is part of or in a larger scope, if issues exist in a broader scale. Thus, giving children a voice helps them overcome possible limitations deriving from duly identified existing vulnerabilities.

Empowerment has also a dimension related to demystifying wrong and erroneously structured concepts of Other(s) and to building upon a basis of equal opportunities for all, which requires special attention to more vulnerable groups of children, whose possibly different needs have to be met to duly ensure their access to information, participation and influence decision-making without any discrimination.

Equal opportunities

The concept of **equal opportunities** in the context of child participation relates to giving all children access to opportunities to be heard and express their opinions without limitations, regardless of any specific needs that must be met to overcome particular vulnerable conditions or situations. It corresponds to the absence of discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the children's, their parents' or legal guardians' race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, possessions, disability, birth or other aspect.

Equal opportunities aim to eradicate any kind of discrimination based on any factor that could put the child in a position of fragility or limitation to access an opportunity, including the right to participate. Therefore, it translates into ensuring rights and their full enjoyment, working for the common good of all children, while keeping one in mind as an individual.

To ensure equal opportunities is to ensure rights and to respect all and every child's integrity, personal characteristics and background experiences, guaranteeing the necessary conditions for an active participation, its impact on the purposes of the consultation – framed by consideration of the best interests of the child –, and the feedback to children on their participation, reinforcing their self-respect, self-esteem and empowering them for further participation opportunities – including on their own initiative and not necessarily simply in reply to one's challenge to express themselves.

Child participation activities or consultations should be based on common premises, such as respect for the specificities, needs and capacity for self-determination of each individual child, taking into account her/his/their cultural context and previous experiences, while always seeking to guarantee fundamental human rights and values. These should include the child-specific rights, which encompass pondering their age, development stage and specific needs while being informed on the scope and objective(s) of the consultation, so that children can participate in an informed fashion, knowing she/he/they will be attentively listened to and that his/her/their voice or expression is respectfully considered, no matter the support means used to convey it: orally, in written form, artistic expression, among others.

Besides being a right of the child, the concept of equal opportunities also draws on the importance of the diversity of children, their characteristics and contexts as an enriching factor, both for children and for the outcomes of the participation or consultation activities, adding to the contribution it represents to the promotion of children's rights.

Facilitating environment

The notion of **facilitating environment** is a crucial concept when talking about child participation. To guarantee children's integral development, a facilitating environment should be cross-cultural and permanent in their life.

Providing a child a facilitating environment implies generating appropriate conditions to ensure the well-being of the child, allowing her/him/they to be attentive to the objectives of interaction and context, without constraints.

A facilitating environment needs to be a secure and child-friendly environment where the child feels safe and comfortable, according to child's culture.

Spaces for auditions of or for hearing the child should have in consideration that the adult is the one who shall meet the child

in the child's world, in order to preserve him/her/they from entering the adult's world. This requires that societies and governments think urbanism and public spaces according to a child's approach, fitting the child's sense of safety, comfort and well-being.

A facilitating environment provides proximity and fosters the willingness of the child to listen, to be listened, to learn, to play and to live.

Feedback on child participation

The expression "**feedback on child participation**" is crucial to ensure that the message the child wanted to communicate was correctly interpreted, giving the child the right and the comfort of feeling listened to with attention and correctly understood. This allows the child to perceive that his/her/their participation mattered.

Giving feedback to children on their participation is to interact with them while creating a dynamic that entails a two-way communication channel between them and adult facilitators, which is related to the active listening of the children and the validation of their message, as previously referred.

Depending on each situation, feedback to the child on the child's participation may be given during the process of children participation (e.g. during a workshop, an interactive dialogue, a debate, an interview) or only after it has occurred (e.g. after filling a questionnaire).

There are several strategies to return to the children the result of their participation. This feedback must be perceived by children as a right in order to be effective. So, once again, it is paramount that differentiated strategies are used and adapted to children's age, maturity, cognitive skills and any vulnerable context or condition that may require specific arrangements as to guarantee equal opportunities and fully respect all children without discrimination.

In some circumstances, facilitators may need to refocus on the matters at stake, in order for the child to keep on participating should any difficulty arise and needs to be solved, with the support of the facilitator and with all respect for the child and respective specific needs.

Giving feedback implies that facilitators express appreciation for what has been said by the child and a true praise conveying recognition for the participation, while keeping in mind that all contributions given by children are valuable. In fact, these contributions are meaningful in many ways, including as a means to identify problems that limit or block the intention of children to participate or that disturb occasions created for child participation to take place. The reasons underlying such challenging situations are relevant and should be taken seriously and respectfully, in order to safeguard the best interests of children.

The absence of feedback or a feedback that instils in the child a sense of failure or of lack of ability to provide useful contributions or information of interest may lead to damages in the child's emotional state and self-esteem, to reluctance in trusting others and to avoidance in participating or even non-participation in other occasions meant for children participation.

Management of children's expectations

Managing children's expectations is a relevant concept to ensure the full enjoyment of children's rights, including the right to participate, and one that has to be present so as to make child participation a positive experience that stimulates children to grow assuming a participative attitude. This attitude shall also be fuelled by the feeling that they are attentively heard, respected and taken in consideration and according to their expectations, whose management facilitators are responsible for since the preparation of child participation activities.

Creating expectations that are unfit for children's age, stage of development, knowledge of the language or the culture of the group where they belong at a certain moment, or any other variable factor that may impair children's understanding of what they are being asked may compromise their participation and frustrate their expectations. This, therefore, may affect children's availability to be open to participation in further occasions and, even more seriously, affecting their sense of security, justice, equality, self-confidence and self-esteem.

As such, managing children's expectations, preparing the participation in a way that attends and respects all children's characteristics and competences, informing them previously on the realistic outcomes of their contribution and valuing the contributions

they were able to provide according to their own specific stages and conditions is deemed of utmost importance to keep expectations in a pragmatic, down-to-earth level. By keeping the expectations to actually viable and achievable options will help prevent a feeling of delusion and discomfort in children that would rather happen in face of promises that could not be kept. Moreover, managing children's expectations also concurs to helping them valuing the contribution they are prepared to deliver, which facilitators know can be of use in the best interest of children in each participation action.

Children's expectations are a very important aspect while arranging child participation, as it allows encouraging children to participate, to be and feel informed, trusted – and feel that they can trust –, comfortable, self-confident, empowered and available to participate in further occasions.

Managing children's expectations necessarily respects the time of the child, a concept that constitutes an autonomous entrance in this glossary.

Nevertheless, irrespectively developed by all efforts of facilitators, managing children's expectations may result in an unavoidable frustration of the child, as children have their own and unique experiences. In those cases, managing children's expectations will help children avoiding potentially oppressive guilt feelings and focusing on their effort to participate even if they felt blocked, frustrated or limited in any way. It may be a useful occasion to talk with the child on the hurdles in which the situation is rooted, to hear the child attentively and to provide information on available specialized help and how to access it, if need be.

Hence, managing children's expectations is a complete process of accompaniment throughout all stages of children's participation: previously, in the preparation phase; during the act of consultation/participation/hearing of the child; and after the participation action has occurred, while giving feedback to the children.

Message validation

Message validation is a concept that intends to safeguard the correct interpretation of the child's participation by the facilitators, making sure children feel respected and that their emotions, feelings and opinions are taken in consideration, regardless of their age or any other personal criteria, situation or context.

Message validation corresponds to the ability to make children feel they were attentively heard, listened to, read or observed and understood as they intended to be.

Message validation can be carried out using several strategies, including by repeating to the child what has been listened during her/his/their participation, to check whether what was said was listened to and understood correctly, may it be orally, in written form or expressed in any other way. It also requires not making value judgments on what children said nor by any way introducing personal values into the message conveyed by the child. This embodies a respectful attitude that inspires trust in children vis-à-vis the outcomes of their participation. In case children amend the facilitator's interpretation or express themselves again, this time differently, because they feel they have not communicated exactly the way or what they wanted to, the right of the child to amendment or clarification shall be respected, since it must be up to children to validate their own messages.

Societies and governments should promote a culture of validation of children's messages. This would also contribute to avoiding child revictimization processes that result from recurrent needs to repeatedly hear children in different occasions and contexts and have them repeatedly reliving traumatic situations.

Parenting

The concept of **parenting** corresponds to a set of activities performed by the child's parents or adults who assume parental responsibilities towards the child, in order to ensure the child's survival and integral and harmonious development. These parental references usually correspond to adults who live with the child on a daily basis and the ones the child establishes the closest emotional ties with.

The parental references at stake are responsible for caring, stimulating, educating, loving, imposing limits and teaching how to deal with these, strengthening the autonomy and preparing the child for the challenges and opportunities of her/his present and adult life.

Blood ties are still of great value in our society and biological parents are therefore expected to exercise their parenting role. However, it must be stressed that love and affective bonds are a construction, which are not necessarily based on biology but rather on emotional factors of connection and bonding with the child, as is the case with foster families, *de facto* caregivers and transitory families.

Parental practices can be regarded as either negative or positive for children's development and the latter should be promoted, since living in a nurturing environment is a right of the child and since parenthood has long-lasting effects on the child's health, development and happiness that manifest throughout their whole life.

Participation

The concept of **participation** is key in the context of this thematic glossary and perceived as engagement in a process in which children freely offer their informed opinion and receive feedback on their participation.

Child participation should occur within strict respect of children's rights, without discrimination, *i.e.*, regardless of children's or their parents' or legal guardians' race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, possessions, disability, birth or other aspect.

The right of the child to participate shall be implemented through opportunities, occasions and moments to attentively listen, consult and hear children on matters that concern them, inviting them to express their opinions, feelings, emotions, fears, dreams or suggestions. It means giving children the active voice they have the right to speak out.

Participation must be active – sometimes proactive –, meaningful, effective and sustainable. Children should be informed on their right to participate and to have their voices heard, respected and duly considered.

Children have the right to participate on a voluntary, informed, transparent and inclusive basis. Participation shall be prepared and facilitated by skilled and accountable professionals, who shall make it happen in a safe child-friendly environment, sensitive to risk, respectful of children's rights, using child-friendly language and making it relevant for children. It is important to encourage all children to participate, including the most vulnerable ones, making them feel they are able to do it and offer valuable opinions. Some of the important steps of the preparation of children participation actions include helping children to overcome feelings of discrimination, lack of confidence and of self-value.

A child-friendly environment and child-friendly language should be used as well to provide children equal opportunities, which is prone to neutralise perceived or real vulnerabilities that may block or limit their participation. Giving children feedback on their contribution, validating the message they wanted to express and informing on how it will be used is fundamental for fostering good participation experiences. This attitude, along with managing children's expectations in a realistic way, also contributes to inspire in children the notion that they are actual elements of change regarding matters of their interest and the common good as well, in different circles: family, institution, group and society, among others.

Positive parenting

The concept of **positive parenting** goes beyond parenthood and biology. It corresponds to the supporting role of parents or legal guardian(s) with parental responsibility for the child and implies the full protection of the child and of her/his/their rights in all stages of her/his/their development, based on her/his/their best interests, responding to specific needs and to each child's individuality, encompassing the provision of subsistence, accommodation, health, security and education to culture, well-being, happiness, love, affection and attachment.

Positive parenting aims at raising and educating children according to their best interests and in full respect of their rights, in all dimensions: nurturing, loving, caring, educating, playing, empowering, guiding, recognising children as individuals and helping them develop their potential to the fullest.

Positive parenting, as a parental behaviour based on the child's best interests, also gradually prepares children to their growing autonomy, in an age and development stage-appropriate manner until they become independent adults. It is an on-going growing process of children's empowerment, capacity and competence building, that sets relevant boundaries and rules in preparation for

children's interaction with other children and adults, in a (co)responsible and respectful dynamic, and enables them to look for help and stand up for themselves in case of disrespect by others in any situation or context.

Positive parenting is a concept that entails a regular attitude of actively listening to the child, attending their needs, respecting their specificities and their rights and taking the best interests of the child as a first consideration.

Additionally, positive parenting encompasses the dimension of parenting in the digital age, since the digital environment is a regular context for nowadays' children and one where social attention shall be paid in order to ensure all their rights. This requires parents or legal guardians of the child to learn about the digital world, namely side by side with the children, in order to protect their image, dignity, health, education and security in that context as well.

Societies have the responsibility to make reconciliation of working life and parenthood possible, with a view to provide parents or other adults with parenting responsibilities adequate, decent conditions and time to duly accompany and love children as much as needed by the children and enable the latter to fully enjoy their rights.

Protective factors

Protective factors are essential to ensure the full development and well-being of children in all stages of their life. Protective factors are all circumstances, policies, measures, initiatives, projects, attitudes and activities that contribute to promote children's rights, full development, well-being, trust, valorisation, self-esteem and happiness. The assessment of the child's best interests acts as protective factor itself.

Protective factors can be originated in all contexts affecting children's life, be it of a political, legislative, institutional, and social nature to family, groups and the digital environment, among others.

Positive parenting is a factor of protection for children because it is committed with attentively listening to them, giving them voice, provide them with useful information and resources, built upon trust and love, affection, bonding and attachment, in full respect for children and their rights – making the child feel heard, respected, valued and loved is a very important protective factor. Positive parenting can be fostered within the family and through it, but also within care institutions and in the digital environment, as it is a dynamic reality that responds to challenges in a protective approach towards children, always putting their best interest first. In order to develop protective factors, it is vital to invest in getting to know the child, in hearing and understanding her/him/ them and the diversity of their characteristics and interests in connection with the specificity of each child. Protective factors have to consider the specificities of all groups of children and their particular vulnerabilities, as to function as a counterpower that eradicates risk factors that may compromise children's rights holding long-lasting victimization effects.

Promoting child participation is an important protective factor as it contributes to hear and know children, empower them and let them speak out – namely within the scope of trusted relationships –, to help them develop critical thinking, which is key to their protection against danger, and giving them access to information and resources to build and sustain their empowerment and resilience against risk factors, diminishing or eradicating the effects of the latter by avoiding child victimization or revictimization.

Resilience

The concept of **resilience** is paramount, generally and also specifically while facilitating and promoting the participation of children. It is adults' responsibility – family, caregivers, school, society at large – to teach children how to develop resilience and its relevance for their mental health.

Resilience is the ability to deal with constraints and be able to bounce back. It is the ability to (re)invent oneself, start anew after a difficulty – not denying it existed, but rather learning with it and becoming stronger after it is overcome. It is to improve and build one's own strengths.

It is important helping children understand everyone goes through hard times and how to move on, as well as seeking to help children solve or overcome hurdles, focusing on positive things and leaving the negative parts behind if one cannot change them.

Resilience helps turning difficulties into challenges or opportunities, even when there is no other solution, since they represent possibilities for personal growth while looking for the support of family, friends, and professionals, if need be.

Child participation may also pose specific difficulties, especially for children belonging to more vulnerable groups, for those of a more introspective nature or for the ones who feel insecure or are less used to express their feelings, emotions, fears, dreams or opinions. Adults should act as facilitators in helping create suitable conditions for children to participate, adequate to their specific needs while boosting children's confidence to speak and fostering feelings of comfort. Once children voluntarily exercise their right to participate, they feel more empowered and resilient whenever further occasions and opportunities to participate arise.

Respecting the child

The expression **respecting the child** is a paradigm that should always be present, in all and any contexts and occasions, whenever interaction with a child takes place. Despite the fact it may seem a very basic and obvious idea, it is a very important and meaningful one.

First of all, at the core of this expression is the principle that children should be treated as a rights holder and in respect of their inherent dignity as human beings.

It is a right of children to be respected and to have their rights respected as human beings and specifically as a child too, always and in all situations and contexts. Therefore, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a benchmark that all adults should have in mind as a guide to apply in their natural practice while interacting with children. This international benchmark is of utmost importance and so are its versions in child-friendly-language. As a matter of fact, these provide children adequate information about the rights they are entitled to, which is crucial for them to know whether their rights are being respected or not and whether their relations with others – be them adults or other children – are based on mutual respect or not.

The respect for the child is a very comprehensive notion that includes safeguarding children's rights, respecting the fundamental principles of non-discrimination, equal opportunities and the children's characteristics and stage of cognitive and emotional development, as well as respecting their space, time, ideas and self-determination, which includes the possibility to grow and develop their potential as much as possible, always putting the focus on the best interests of the child. The best interests of the child are inalienable rights which must take precedence over anything, namely the culture of origin or family traditions, in case these violate the rights of the child (e.g. female genital mutilation).

Respecting the child also comprehends assuming children's rights to have access to information and to opportunities of participation, to make themselves attentively and respectfully heard while having their own identity, nationality, language in which they communicate, individual characteristics or special needs respected, in order to realize actual equal opportunities of child participation.

It is the States' responsibility to protect all children, including at the international level. However, the full exercise of the rights of the child is far from being a global reality as it is still a challenge for all societies to ensure full respect for all children and for all their rights.

Risk factors

Risk factors are an important concept when having in mind the protection of children. Risk factors are personal physical or psychological health conditions of the child, as well as situations that contribute to create or increase vulnerability. Risk factors related to children can be temporary (e.g. migration contexts) or permanent (e.g. disabilities), both having in common the increasing exposure of children to danger.

Risk factors encompass a varying dimension, which may change according to contextual and developmental constraints of the child. They may arise from the lack of internal and external resources that result from families' conditions, such as parental separation or divorce, unemployment, lack of social responses, lack of oversight/scrutiny, abusive relationships or lack of ensuring children's basic needs. Regardless of the roots of the constraints, there is an underlying common trait: reinforcing vulnerability by increasing children's exposure to potential aggressions that may come from closer contexts, such as the family, or from external circles, such as social groups children integrate while performing regular activities in the most varied contexts: educational, foster care, sports, religious, recreational and the digital environment, among others.

When the rights of the child are not safeguarded, risk factors emerge that may compromise children's safety, security, subsis-

tence, education, health, participation, well-being and full development of their capacities.

If no protective mechanisms or factors exist to counterbalance the existing risk factors, the latter end up being reinforced and will increase the vulnerability and the fragility of children in all contexts, particularly in those where they are unaccompanied, being them virtual contexts or physical ones.

The promotion of children's rights develops protective factors that contribute to minimize risk factors, due to their protective nature, as referred in the corresponding concept in this Thematic Glossary.

The child's own time

The concept of **the child's own time** is very important to respect each child's individuality and fully respect his/her age, stage of development, personality, abilities and previous experiences.

The child's own time does not necessarily correspond to the time of adults or even of other children. As such, this domain shall be taken in consideration by facilitators of child participation initiatives or of child hearings.

It is noteworthy to mention that this aspect is of utmost importance while managing children's expectations – especially those of children belonging to the most vulnerable groups –, reviewing and anticipating scenarios in preparation of child participation activities that may require specific conditions to be delivered on an equal opportunities basis, avoiding discrimination and negative effects that may block or limit child participation or cause any discomfort, sense of disrespect or vulnerability on the child.

Trust

The concept of **trust** used in this Thematic Glossary is conceived in association with the full respect for children's rights. Therefore, violations of children's rights cannot be mistaken for trust, since the former corresponds to manipulation, abuse of power, abusive and criminal conduct and are totally excluded from this scope. In fact, abusers often belong to the so-called "circles of trust", *i.e.*, family and persons close to the child. However, abusers do not correspond to trusted persons, for the manipulation exerted over the child to make the latter trust them is not a building block of a relationship of trust, but rather an abusive behaviour disrespectful of the child, who becomes abused and victimized.

Trusting relations, totally respectful of children's rights, are a facilitating factor for protection, namely while enabling the reporting of incidents by children and adults, as well as speedy intervention of social services in high risk situations.

The concept of trust is paramount to stimulate child participation, especially when analysed in close connection with the principle of respect for the rights of the child, which, in turn, builds upon best interest of the child as a fundamental basis. Communication is fostered by mutual trust between the various interlocutors involved in the interaction, including technicians and staff, as well as relevant intervenients in other contexts of the child's life, among which family and school.

Trust entails believing in the child and giving the child support, so as to establishing mutual trust and providing reassurance. Trust inspires safety in the child, along with the feeling that she/he is heard, trusted, important and that what she/he says matters. Therefore, trust also contributes to building the child's self-image, self-concept and self-esteem.

Trust also entails a dimension of reliability and loyalty. All interlocutors of children should be seen and felt by children as reliable, in addition to being able to convey children the certainty of being listened to attentively along with the feeling that loyalty is being kept towards them, regarding all that was shared by the children in the occasion. If trust is broken, communication stops or only occurs superficially, not allowing the child to feel safe and comfortable enough to speak out her/his feelings, fears, hopes and opinions.

Giving children feedback on their participation is also a dimension of a trustful relationship, since it allows children to realize they were effectively heard and understood. This process creates an opportunity to ensure that children were duly understood, validate the message and also acts as an expression of recognition for children's opinion and participation.

Building trust involves establishing a relationship with the child based on trusting the child and being taken as trustworthy by

the child. It also involves continuity because trust requires spending time with the children, investing time in the children, caring for and listening to them and to their concerns. Depending on child's life experiences, it may take longer for the child to trust someone, namely if the child had experienced some sort of constraints.

Trust is also connected with empathy and empathic solidarity, another concept with an entry in this Thematic Glossary. The communication is easier when the child feels an empathic attitude from the interlocutor, since this enables the child to trust the latter and feel understood.

Trust may also be stimulated by the perception of identification with someone. This aspect should be taken in careful consideration, as a perspective of risk may arise in case the child perceives some kind of identification with non-reliable people (e.g. influencers, aggressive YouTubers).

Child safeguarding policies in all sectoral areas should incorporate principles which reflect the conditions that foster the child's perception of trustworthiness regarding institutions and individuals, namely, the duty to care, accountability, responsibility and capacity, including appropriate qualifications and training.

Valuing participation

The expression **valuing participation** connects with that of actively listening to the child. It corresponds to giving importance to the active role of the children and providing them feedback on the importance of their participation.

It involves bringing back to the child the impact of the message the child has conveyed and the results that may result from it, transmitting children the feeling that their participation is an actual contribution for active citizenship, which empowers them and cultivates their proactivity and self-esteem.

Stimulating the active role of children in society, thus empowering them to exercise their active citizenship and contribute to a better and more child-friendly and sustainable world, may be achieved holistically through the: development of a culture of the child in societies; use of appropriate and child-friendly language to communicate with children according to their maturity; respect regarding any possible specific difficulties of communication and providing support to overcome them; adoption of an active listening attitude towards the children; and the creation learning, comfortable, safe and welcoming environments.

Vulnerability

The notion of **vulnerability** corresponds to a situation or condition of fragility that puts the child at risk in a certain context. It may be permanent or temporary, but in no case should one underestimate its effects on the child's full enjoyment of all the other rights, on an equal opportunities and non-discrimination basis. Vulnerability is always a risk factor while it lasts, as well as its effects. As such, it should be taken in consideration so that its negative effects on the child can be eradicated or minimized as much as possible.

Vulnerabilities can derive from congenital disabilities, illness or accidents that affect the child, *i.e.*, from birth or from a certain moment of her/his/their life on. Moreover, they can also occur, play a role in or result from any context - family, school, community and caregivers, among others – and may cause impact on the child at different levels: economic, social, physical, psychological or other.

Relations of power or dependence may also increase vulnerability. In fact, situations or contexts of vulnerability may be created by parental figures of reference, caregivers, other adults or other children in a situation of power, who adopt an abusive behaviour to generate insecurity or fear in the child or to hurt her/him/them physically or psychologically.

Vulnerability involves stress that can trigger damage, thus it requires that preventive and protective measures are implemented to avert or reduce harm as much as possible.

Children who find themselves in any condition or situation of vulnerability may have to deal with effects that potentially compromise their survival, health, education, development, self-esteem and self-confidence, in case they do not receive proper support regarding their specific needs as they have the right to.

Providing children effective understanding and support, adequate to their specific condition or situation of vulnerability, helps them develop resilience, empowers them and inspires feelings of self-confidence, support and love, irrespectively of any permanent or temporary limiting characteristic or condition, as children have the right to know their equal value, dignity and rights.



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Promoter:



Partner:

