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# UNICEF Child Friendly Cities and Communities Initiative



## The Child-Friendly City Initiative in Finland

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## Methodological note

The case-study follows methodological guidelines developed as part of the CFCI Toolkit Development project. Country selection for case-studies resulted from a call for expression of interest addressed to all National Committees carrying out CFCI and attention to documenting a diversity of experiences in order to inform the CFCI Toolkit.

The visit took place in February 2016 in two cities, Hämeenlinna and Oulu, with an additional day spent at the National Committee discussing with various National Committee staff. Main criteria for the selection included: size, geographic location, length of engagement with the CFCI, accessibility with public transportation, and commitment by municipal staff to ensure adequate preparation for the visit.

A range of actors participated in group discussions and interviews, including adolescents.

Overall, there was a sense of ease and honesty in all actors and both National Committee staff and local municipal actors discussed both the positive aspects of being engaged in the CFCI, as well as, perceived challenges.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), February 2017

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Helena Lehkonen and the adolescents from the city of the Hämeenlinna; Eija Ruohomäki from the city of Oulu; and Tomi Kiilakoski, researcher on child and youth participation from the Youth Research Society.

The study was developed by Ana Isabel Guerreiro, International Consultant.

It is part of the CFCI Toolkit Development project commissioned to Rights On, as one of five case-studies elaborated to inform the development of the toolkit. The project was led by the Advocacy and Innovative Partnership Unit in the Private Fundraising and Partnership Division of UNICEF, managed by Marta Arias and Louise Thivant with the permanent support of Andrés Franco and Sally Burnheim.

# Executive Summary

The Child Friendly City Initiative in Finland has been in place since 2012 and was created as a pilot project of two years. The purpose of the pilot was to evaluate if and how the CFCI could benefit Finnish municipalities and how the National Committee could use it as a tool to advocate for implementation of child rights at the municipal level. The key success issue for the Finnish CFCI was a genuine pilot for experimenting and learning about the process. For example, the adaption of the 9 original building blocks and development of new ones adapted to the Finnish reality, were all developed during the pilot phase. Currently, there are 13 municipalities on board (ranging between 2,400 and 189,500 inhabitants) and they cover 18.8 per cent of the country population under 18 years of age.

There are three main people dedicated to the implementation of the CFCI in Finland, two of them working at the National Committee, the head of domestic advocacy and the advisor for domestic advocacy and an outside researcher, who maintained his collaboration from the start of the pilot phase.

In terms of accreditation, a municipality interested in gaining the National Committee's CFC Recognition needs to follow a two-year development process and present the results of that work to the National Committee for evaluation. The initial requirements for engaging in the CFCI include that the decision to start the process of accreditation be made by the City Council and that a coordination group is appointed for guiding the development process.

In Finland, 10 building blocks have been identified, which include the contents of the original nine building blocks of the CFCI, but they are organized and extended in such a way that they bring added value to the Finnish municipal context. What distinguishes the Finnish core components are its 6 building blocks focusing on child participation, 2 building blocks focusing on cross-sector work and 1 building block focusing on equality and non-discrimination, in addition to the one common building block on Making children's rights known.

The National Committee for UNICEF does not aim at having all municipalities recognized officially as a Child Friendly City (CFC). Instead the objective is to use the experience from the partnering municipalities to advocate nationally for the key elements of the model (such as systematically carrying out child impact assessments).

# 1. Development of the CFCI in the country

## The pilot project (2012-2013)

In 2011, the new Executive Director of the National Committee was very keen on developing the Child-friendly City Initiative (CFCI), so a decision was taken to prepare a pilot to understand whether the National Committee could add value to the work of the municipalities. The pilot was to be both a learning experience, as well as, a starting point. This was met by both a keen interest and a fear of overlap with ongoing work by other NGOs and the National Ombudsperson for Children. In Finland, municipalities have a broad responsibility for the provision of basic services to citizens. Local authorities have strong self-government based on local democracy and decision-making, and the right to levy taxes. This strong responsibility was an element of motivation for the National Committee to implement the CFCI. The National Committee took the final decision to start the CFCI at the end of 2011, after which a full-time project coordinator was hired to develop the CFCI model and evaluate its usefulness in Finland.

For the preparation of the pilot, the project coordinator consulted materials available within the CFCI Network (i.e. from Estonia and materials from the CFCI website) and was in contact with the National Committee for Germany and the Country Office in Brazil. The most useful information was the structure of the UNICEF Country Office for Brazil's Urban Platform model, in particular the balance between process and outcomes. In terms of support, the National Committee would have valued having access to more practical information or specific questions, especially available approaches regarding the programming cycles (i.e. 2 or 4 year cycles) and different management options according to the size of the CFCI, among other.

### UNICEF Country Office for Brazil - Urban Platform model

The UNICEF Country Office for Brazil - Urban Platform model seeks to achieve an inclusive development model for large cities, which reduces inequalities that affect children's lives, by guaranteeing enhanced access to quality education, health, protection and opportunities for participation.

The first phase took place between 2008 and 2012 in three cities and between 2013 and 2016 another eight cities. The rights to health, education, protection, sports and participation are monitored through 10 indicators.

For more information, please visit:

[http://www.unicef.org/brazil/pt/where\\_13615.htm](http://www.unicef.org/brazil/pt/where_13615.htm)

The key success issue for the Finnish CFCI was a genuine pilot for experimenting and learning about the process. For example, the adaption of the 9 original building blocks and development of new ones adapted to the Finnish reality, were all developed during the pilot phase. Additionally, at the time the development project was launched there was not a final decision as to whether or not launch the CFCI nationally. Indeed, the aim of the pilot was to understand whether the National Committee, through the CFCI, could add value to ongoing work on child rights in Finland and not to launch the CFCI in the country, as such. A central question to address during the pilot was 'what is the most effective strategy for changing children's lives'? The pilot and ongoing work has shown that the answer is a *child rights-based governance*.

The Finnish model for the CFCI was created as a pilot project of two years. The purpose of the pilot was to evaluate if and how the CFCI could benefit Finnish municipalities and how the National Committee could use it as a tool to advocate for implementation of child rights at the municipal level. The plan was to develop the model in cooperation with a municipality. For this, the National Committee partnered with the city of Hämeenlinna – a municipality of approximately 68,000 inhabitants in Southern Finland. Hämeenlinna was selected as the pilot city because it was

already involved in implementing child rights programming and there were established contacts for children's issues in the city. It is an actively engaged city and was already working on child participation and other issues at national level. Thirdly, Hämeenlinna is a medium-sized city, which was considered appropriate for the pilot; and, due to its proximity to Helsinki, where the National Committee is based, it made it easier to keep in close contact with the city officials, including via several visits per month.<sup>1</sup>

The National Committee hired a full-time coordinator with a background in municipal work on child and youth to both coordinate the pilot project and develop the Finnish model for the CFCI. Since the beginning, a youth researcher with a strong background in child and youth participation also assisted with the development of the project. An expert group was established to inform the project development and provide insights and comments for developing the contents of the model, made up of the following professionals and representatives:

- Researcher on child and youth participation (aforementioned);
- Advocacy Director, with knowledge on the CRC;
- Umbrella organisation for youth associations called Finnish Youth Cooperation Alliance, for their expertise in equality and non-discrimination;
- Central Union for Child Welfare, for the child protection perspective;
- Ombudsperson for Children of the Tampere municipality;
- Member of the Board for Children in Hämeenlinna.

The members of the expert group were consulted on an individual basis, firstly to present the project, on a second occasion to comment on the proposal for the building blocks and thirdly to discuss the final text and checklists of the building blocks. The last two exchanges were carried out by email.

There were two streams in developing the pilot. One aspect involved evaluating and developing the child friendliness of the city of Hämeenlinna. The other involved developing the contents and methods of the Finnish CFCI. These two components often intertwined. To ensure the adaptability of the model in different settings, in addition to the expert group, officers in other municipalities were also consulted during the process. As a result of the pilot project, in December 2013 the National Committee had prepared the contents and framework for action for the Finnish CFCI and the city of Hämeenlinna was recognized as the National Committee's first Child Friendly City (CFC). During the pilot project, upon invitation by the National Committee, 3 more municipalities started implementing the model in 2014. Currently, there are 13 municipalities on board (ranging between 2,400 and 189,500 inhabitants) and they cover 18.8 per cent of the country population under 18 years of age. Four of the cities have already received the recognition once (one of these, twice).

Altogether there are 313 municipalities in Finland. Their population ranges from 1,382 to 604,000 inhabitants. Only 20 municipalities have more than 50,000 inhabitants, whereas 139 municipalities have less than 5,000 inhabitants. The National Committee for UNICEF does not aim at having all municipalities recognized officially as a Child Friendly City. Instead the objective is to use the experience from the partnering municipalities to advocate nationally for the key elements of the model (such as systematically carrying out child impact assessments). The National Committee advocates for the general measures of implementation of the CRC (child-friendly governance) on both local and national level. The National Committee uses its experience from the municipalities/CFCI to advocate for certain solutions and/or to point out challenges in its implementation. Despite the independence of municipalities, the national government can guide them through legislation, information and resources. Currently, the National Committee is also strongly involved in the planning of a government programme that aims at making the operational culture in governance (all levels) more child-friendly.

There are 40 groups of National Committee volunteers across the country, who carry out mainly fundraising activities. So far, they have not been involved in implementing the CFCI. However, in one of the new municipalities (Pori) it was the local group of volunteers and other civil society organisations who signed a petition to ask for the recognition of Pori as a CFC.

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<sup>1</sup> Ira Custódio. Concept paper on The Finnish model for UNICEF's Child-friendly cities initiative. October 2014

## 2. Management of CFCI

### Management of the initiative within the National Committee

In 2011, the new Executive Director of the National Committee was very keen on developing the Child-friendly City Initiative (CFCI), so a decision was taken to prepare a pilot to understand whether the National Committee could add value to the work of the municipalities. The pilot was to be both a learning experience, as well as, a starting point. This was met by both a keen interest and a fear of overlap with ongoing work by other NGOs and the National Ombudsperson for Children. In Finland, municipalities have a broad responsibility for the provision of basic services to citizens. Local authorities have strong self-government based on local democracy and decision-making, and the right to levy taxes. This strong responsibility was an element of motivation for the National Committee to implement the CFCI. The National Committee took the final decision to start the CFCI at the end of 2011, after which a full-time project coordinator was hired to develop the CFCI model and evaluate its usefulness in Finland.

There are three main people dedicated to the implementation of the CFCI in Finland, two of them working at the National Committee, the head of domestic advocacy and the advisor for domestic advocacy and an outside researcher, who maintained his collaboration from the start of the pilot phase. The time dedicated by the head of domestic advocacy has varied along the development of the CFCI, but she currently spends approximately 10 per cent of her time working on the Initiative, which mainly consists in supporting the work. The advisor for domestic advocacy is working full-time at 100 per cent on the CFCI. Approximately 60 per cent of the officer's time is dedicated to the work with municipalities, while the rest is child-friendly governance. The researcher does up to 120 hours/year for the CFCI. During the pilot the researcher collaborated on the content, whilst currently the hours consist mainly of capacity building in the municipalities (together with the advisor for domestic advocacy).

In terms of funding, the National Committee has covered most part of the funding since the beginning of the initiative. The National Committee for Finland initially developed a proposal for funding (it applied twice but was unsuccessful). In 2013 the Ministry of Education awarded €30,000.00 to the CFCI (earmarked). The resources involved in absolute terms and in proportion to the National Committee's programme budget are approximately €40,000 a year, which represents 10.2 per cent of the advocacy costs. Whilst the team at the National Committee recognizes that having expert personnel represents a cost, it is considered essential for the impact of the CFCI.

### Linkages made with other National Committee initiatives

The CFCI model in Finland has given a lot to the National Committee. It has helped to understand and implement a child rights-based approach in Finland because it very concretely implements the CRC in practice and has shown the importance of working in a more participatory way, in terms of development work. This has led to re-thinking how to implement the model of participatory development in different platform initiatives, such as the rights respecting school platform. Indeed, currently in the National Committee there are discussions around shifting the work in schools from raising awareness on child rights, towards a more holistic whole school approach.

The National Committee considered the CFCI a keystone of its work. Importantly, the model has also provided evidence of what is happening and what needs to change nationally to improve the situation of children in the country, which can be used to influence the government in policy and decision-making. The CFCI is a platform initiative but also contributes to the foundational advocacy work of the National Committee.

As a result of the CFCI, the National Committee is now in a stronger position with enhanced credibility at national level. Internally, the CFCI has also helped to explain the objectives, means and methods of domestic advocacy work within the National Committee. At the same time, it has helped with fundraising because it provides a concrete example of what the National Committee is doing to help Finnish children.

The National Committee has not established any long-term partnerships for the implementation of the CFCI.

## Links with other departments

### *Communications*

The materials related to the CFCI in Finland are on the National Committee website under what UNICEF does and then Advocacy. The section includes materials directed at municipalities (8 documents). The original presentation on the CFCI has been downloaded at least 1.500 times, which shows the interest in the CFCI. The second part is how the city can benefit from the CFC recognition. There is also information about which cities are on board and about to receive the recognition. When the new cities are selected or receive the certificate, there is a press release.

From the communications point of view, the director stated that the Advocacy team has wanted first to have results and only then communicate actively. Therefore in the beginning the effort has been a minimum rather than a maximum approach. As cities have started to deliver results, more communications have been activated this gives credibility to communications.

The director of communications also stated that from a communications perspective, it is challenging to communicate about the CFCI, because the recognition is not given to municipalities because they are child-friendly but because they are engaged in the process. This easily leads to confusion amongst the citizens as a CFC can e.g. make budget cuts on children. What has become clear is that, in those cities where the CFCI is running, quite a number of people seem to know about it, even though the National Committee has not been actively promoting it in terms of communications. It would be worth to carry out a study in 1-2 years about the perception of the public. CFC is very practical and therefore positive initiative to communicate, but this contradiction in perception (process vs. results) needs to be managed well.

The director of communications further stated that, internationally, there has been no dialogue related to the CFCI from the communications point of view and he believes it could be beneficial to have this dialogue. Maybe CFCI members could bring the topic to communication directors for discussion.

## Support provided by the National Committee to municipalities

### *Capacity building*

The National Committee supports municipalities by building their capacity in questions of child rights and rights-based municipal development work. This is done through an initial training provided to each municipality by the advisor for domestic advocacy, often with the researcher or another National Committee staff member. Additionally, materials produced by the National Committee are provided and, if there is demand, materials or advice on specific themes. Other capacity building activities, or child rights expertise for their development work is provided upon request. One example is the development work done by the advisor for domestic advocacy on how to carry out child rights impact assessments. A guidance note on child rights impact assessment was prepared consisting of 8 steps and including issues to take into account for implementing each of them. The guidance was developed in the context of a workshop that took place in 2015 and it was later finalised based on the inputs from the discussions that took place. The implementation process, including initial training, seminars and assessment processes are done in a way so as to promote long-term organisational learning. In 2016, a thematic workshop will be delivered on Training of Trainers on the CFCI, aiming at strengthening local capacity to discuss child rights and the themes of the CFC; and providing local stakeholders with materials they can later use to organise workshops within the municipality and discuss the training strategies that can be applied.

## Networking

Yearly networking seminars are organized and held in a different municipality each time. In the first year, the main topics addressed were child impact assessments (outside speaker), child participation in the city planning (speaker of one member city) and participation of children in child protection (outside speaker). The pilot city of Hämeenlinna hosted the first network meeting in 2014 where 20 stakeholders participated, including 10 local stakeholders.

In the second year, 2015, the theme was equality and strategic planning across the municipality. The main topics addressed were child rights in municipal decision-making and service provision (National Committee speaker and outside speaker from a union of family associations and examples from municipalities), the Equality Plan as a tool for advancing child rights (National Committee speaker and examples from municipalities) and how to ensure the participation of children and young people throughout the municipal organisation (National Committee speaker and examples from municipalities).

The members of the Coordinating Group in Hämeenlinna that participated in the case study visit mentioned that they valued the networking seminars mostly for the opportunity to meet other Coordinators/members and exchange views on their shared work. The members also stated they would like to have the chance to discuss current issues in the network meetings (i.e. the design of equality plans, which is an important current topic for municipalities in Finland at the moment).

In Oulu, 3 officers from the Department of Education and Culture attended the networking meeting that took place in 2015, where they had the chance to hear about the practices in other CFCs, to get materials and have discussions with officers during informal sessions. The National Committee advisor for domestic advocacy also sent the network seminar presentations, which the coordinating team found very useful. The CFCI Coordinator in Oulu felt that the local team responsible for developing the CFCI would try to benefit more from the wider CFCI network when they advance the local CFCI implementation. As of now, the local team wants to focus on the city level planning, which is very different in CFCs and have not felt that it would be that useful at this point to contact other CFCs. At the same time, the networking seminar was very useful to know how other cities started and planned the CFCI. Finally, the coordinating team from Oulu is planning to meet officers from Rovaniemi in March 2016 to learn about how they are using child impact assessments in the development of the CFCI.

## Evaluating the CFCI process and results

The National Committee evaluates the implementation of the CFCI both in relation to the process and its results. As aforementioned, this is done on two different occasions. The first time is after the municipality has developed its action plan. The National Committee provides feedback and suggestions in order to make sure the plan is adequate and meets the requirements of the recognition.

## Cross-sectoral coordination

At local level, cross-sectoral work had been identified as a challenge in the country from the start of the development of the CFCI. The National Committee believed that it was fairly easy to work with the more 'traditional' child sectors, but city planning and the health sector, for example, were harder to engage. Two building blocks were developed with the aim to tackle this challenge and make all sectors engage with children, namely those entitled *Strategic planning, coordinating mechanisms and child impact assessment and Wide knowledge basis*. During the case study visit, it was obvious that this continues to pose a challenge in municipalities and is one of the biggest challenges in governance in general.

## Municipality leadership and coordination across sectors

The National Committee for Finland requires that the decision to start the process of becoming a child-friendly city be made by the City Council. This is necessary to highlight the idea that CFCI requires commitment from the entire municipal organization and requires buy-in at the highest level. The municipality will then appoint a coordination group responsible for guiding the development process. The National Committee recommends that the group be cross-sector, both in the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the municipal organization. It is also recommended to include civil society actors in the group. The group must also be in regular contact with children and youth and provide them with opportunities to participate as individuals or members of groups in different parts of the process.

In Hämeenlinna, the Board for Children and Youth Affairs is responsible for the CFCI. A coordinating group has been established, with 20 members, who meet twice a year. Among the members are two adolescents aged 14 and 18 years of age, purchasing directors for the Children and Youth Affairs Board (planning and service delivery) and representatives of civil society. The members of the coordinating group consider that the discussions have been very good and open and that the politicians have learned most of all, especially about what the local reality is and how things run. For the first time, there was space to have open and honest discussions between different levels of the organisation and civil society. The participation of the National Committee advisor for domestic advocacy and the researcher in the discussions was also considered a trigger for reflection.

The building blocks and checklists have been discussed at all levels of the municipality and in the 7 regional areas of the municipality. The self-assessment was carried out at all levels and discussed in the regions with different stakeholders, including politicians and civil servants, at different moments. The elements that were valued the most were the process and the organisational learning, because they have a sustainable and long-term impact.

In Oulu, the municipality has four service units, namely Education and Culture, Environment and City Planning, Welfare, and Overall Planning (centralised services responsible for democracy, regionalisation, etc). The CFCI coordinator is part of the Education and Culture unit. The coordinator has taken time to prepare the grounds for launching the CFCI in Oulu, which shows the commitment. The first meeting held with a representative of the National Committee took place in April 2015. From then, the coordinator and other team members have prepared a knowledge basis to try to raise motivation and commitment from all service units. From September 2015, the different service units took a formal commitment to participate in the CFCI. The final decision came from the City Council Board in December 2015, where it suggested that the four service units should do the coordination of the CFCI. In February 2016, the CFCI was launched in the city of Oulu. At present, there is a working group for CFCI implementation with 13 members. The remaining service units (outside Education and Culture) have been slow to nominate representatives and prepare common work after the decision to participate in the CFCI and its launch. The CFCI coordinator recognises the challenges in cross-sector collaboration, but also the importance of having all service units on board. For this reason, she has not promoted the adoption of the Action Plan prior to having representatives from all service units. It was clear that this type of reasoning is part of the approach which the National Committee in Finland wants to promote: to slowly build a knowledge basis and prepare the implementation process step by step, which may take time, but which in the long run will make the process more significant and sustainable. For example, in some CFCs, a coordinating group will have started the work and then after some time face the challenge of how to engage with other relevant stakeholders/units/sectors.

The average number of members of the coordinating groups and sectors represented in other CFCs is between 6 and 25. Usually all sectors have appointed a representative to the group but not all of them participate actively.

## 3. Accreditation process

### The process for municipalities' participation

A municipality interested in gaining the National Committee's CFC Recognition needs to follow a two-year development process and present the results of that work to the National Committee for evaluation.

UNICEF's National Committee to Finland requires that the decision to start the process of accreditation be made by the City Council. This is necessary to highlight the idea that CFCI requires commitment from the entire municipal organization and requires buy-in at the highest level.

The municipality will then appoint a coordination group responsible for guiding the development process, as required in the CFCI model for Finland. The National Committee recommends that the group be cross-sector, both in the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the municipal organization. It is also recommended to include civil society actors in the group. The group must also be in regular contact with children and youth and provide them with opportunities to participate as individuals or members of groups in different parts of the process.<sup>2</sup>

The accreditation process begins with a situation analysis carried out after the initial training. This self-assessment is done with the building block checklists. Completing the situation analysis requires cooperation with a variety of actors, including children. In fact, some of the questions in the checklists only children can answer (e.g. whether they have friends and safe adults in their lives).

Based on the situation analysis, the municipality will develop its action plan, after which the officers will present it to the National Committee and receive comments and suggestions. For the municipality to obtain the Child Friendly Municipality Recognition, promoting child rights needs to be cross-sector (e.g. not only focusing on schools, but also include, for example, city planning), have long term impacts and include child participation in the process.

At the end of the two-year period, the National Committee visits the municipality, which presents the process and results of the two-year work. Based on this, the National Committee assesses whether it will grant the Child Friendly Municipality Recognition. The recognition is valid for two years, and in order to renew it, the municipality must continue following the model. The Finnish term for "certificate" or "accreditation" has never been used, because the National Committee wants to avoid giving the impression that the recognition is some sort of a UNICEF stamp of approval or an overall evaluation on the municipalities' performance. Indeed, the National Committee chose the word "recognition" as opposed to "certificate" or "stamp" with the aim of highlighting that promoting child rights is a continuous process, not a one-off project and that the model can and should be applied by any municipality, not just by the wealthy ones.

### The National Committee's role: A critical friend

The National Committee's role can be described as that of a 'critical friend'. Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick define the term as follows:

*"A critical friend can be defined as a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work."*<sup>3</sup>

This kind of a role requires building trust and sharing common goals. It is also important that the National Committee has an adequate amount of knowledge of the municipal environment. As a 'critical friend', the National Committee

<sup>2</sup> Ira Custódio. Concept paper on The Finnish model for UNICEF's Child-friendly cities initiative. October 2014

<sup>3</sup> Ira Custódio. Concept paper on The Finnish model for UNICEF's Child-friendly cities initiative. October 2014

has two different but intertwining roles in the process. Firstly, it supports municipalities by building their capacity in questions of child rights and rights-based municipal development work. This is done through an initial training provided to each municipality. Additionally, materials produced by the National Committee are provided to participating municipalities and annual network meetings are held.

Secondly, the National Committee evaluates both the process and its results. This is done on two different occasions. The first time is after the municipality has developed its action plan. The National Committee will then provide feedback and suggestions in order to make sure the plan is adequate and meets the requirements of the certification. This happens approximately at the end of the first year of the cycle. The second evaluation takes place at the end of the second year, and this is when the National Committee may grant the municipality the CFC recognition.

The goals have been about the process, changing the quality of decision-making and making it child rights-based. During a second phase of the CFCI in Finland, when the knowledge basis has increased significantly, the CFCI could change to a more customised model (i.e. where municipalities are requested to do specific actions, such as child budgeting, child impact assessments, include other stakeholders, which have not been represented yet).

## Widening the CFCI in Finland

Currently, there is in-house discussion and different perspectives about where to take the CFCI next. One perspective is to either keep the CFCI small or to have a larger team, in order not to lose the participatory approach. One consideration is that a larger initiative would not necessarily add value to the advocacy work (i.e. provide more key messages). If the Committee is to be there for every child, this will not necessarily be achieved through Committee presence in every municipality. The National Committee believes that increasing in the amount of partnering municipalities would lead to thinner presence and hence, thinner results. Current resourcing considered, presence in every municipality would mean the National Committee would not even be able to visit all of them every year. This is why, from advocacy point of view, reaching all municipalities is neither realistic nor cost-efficient. Instead, the experiences and findings from the partnering municipalities need to be translated for national recommendations or the like, and those can then be advocated for nationally.

Another perspective is to aim at having all municipalities recognised. However, this has an impact on the management of the CFCI. One funding possibility is for the municipalities to pay for expert services. However, this would probably affect the municipalities' willingness to participate.

During the first process cycle of two years the results are often more about organisational learning than direct outcomes for children. The National Committee is currently considering whether the second process cycle would in future be four years instead of two. This would allow for more outcome-oriented evaluation (after the process for organisational learning has started). The desired outcomes would be described as recommendations that any given municipality could apply. The contents of the recommendations would follow the general principles of the CRC and the general measures of implementation (as do the Finnish building blocks). However, this still requires some development work with the municipalities so that the National Committee is able to describe how the desired outcomes can be reached in a way that is feasible and realistic to the different realities of Finnish municipalities.

## 4. Core components

### 10 building blocks for a child-friendly city in Finland

The development work during the pilot was based on evidence available in Finland on the state of art on child rights, including legislation, policies and gaps; and practices on child and youth participation. Taking into account that the national legislation in place and the structures and services available for children were significant and considered of high quality, it was clear from the start that one of the overall goals of the CFCI had to be that it added value and quality to ongoing work in municipalities. Three main issues were addressed when developing the pilot: child participation, cross-sector work and equality and non-discrimination.

Another consideration taken into account was the strong and autonomous local governance in Finland, which posed a challenge to the way the CFCI was to be implemented in the country. Another important element is to recognise the role of certain key professionals. For the model to succeed, there needs to be a buy-in not only in the top level but also by various groups of professionals. This is something to be remembered when communicating with different groups within the municipality or providing materials for them – it must be acknowledged their professional expertise and how the CFCI contributes to it and vice-versa.

In the end, the UNICEF CFCI nine building blocks were strongly revisited and adapted to the Finnish reality. Some of the original building blocks were dropped because they were already included in legislation. In Finland, 10 building blocks have been identified, which include the contents of the original nine building blocks of the CFCI, but they are organized and extended in such a way that they bring added value to the Finnish municipal context. What distinguishes the Finnish core components are its 6 building blocks focusing on child participation, 2 building blocks focusing on cross-sector work and 1 building block focusing on equality and non-discrimination, in addition to the one common building block on *Making children's rights known*.

Like in the UNICEF CFCI framework for action, each building block comes with a checklist, used to assess the current situation, select and develop actions and objectives, and develop indicators for monitoring progress overtime (See *Annex*). The National Committee stated that the building blocks in Finland may be revisited in time and highlight other issues that may be identified.

#### Building Blocks for a Child Friendly City in Finland

1. Making Children's Rights Known
2. Equality and Non-discrimination
3. Participation: Planning, Evaluation and the Development of Services
4. Participation: Planning and Development of Public Space
5. Participation: Agenda-setting and Influencing Decision-Making
6. Participation: Civil Society Activities
7. Participation: Peer and Adult Relationships
8. Participation: Valuing Children and Childhood
9. Strategic Planning, Coordinating Mechanisms and Child Impact Assessment
10. Wide Knowledge Basis

## 5. Participation

### Child participation in the National Committee's approach

Child participation is one of the pillars of the CFCI in Finland. When the pilot started, there was already legislation on child participation, many ongoing projects and available structures in Finland. However, the concept was broad, it did not always translate into effective child participation, and a more holistic approach was also found to be missing. For example, participation concerned mainly political participation (i.e. being heard and having a say in decision-making processes) and not everyday choices (i.e. sense of belonging and being accepted as oneself). The civil society component was also important because it has an important role in local governance – how to reach civil society and make it take children into account. The civil society aspect was/is important because children's experience of the municipality cannot be reduced to what the municipal government does. Civil society can in many ways contribute to the child-friendliness of the city and for example provide spaces for participation for children and youths. Another problem that the team was already aware of was that despite existing structures, children were listened to quite late in the decision-making process. One aim was to help municipalities involve children at all stages of decision-making from planning to the final decision. In terms of the participation of vulnerable groups, within the CFCI network, it is more at the awareness-raising stage than actively and effectively involving children from vulnerable groups. Addressing this issue is challenging because the starting point is an egalitarian society, so people are not used to paying attention to specific groups, but rather to ensuring participation for all. One last challenge identified was how to reach children who were younger than 7 years and therefore not part of the regular child participation mechanisms that exist in schools for children older than 7 years of age.

As mentioned above, child participation is prominent in the Building Blocks of the CFCI in Finland. The added value of having 6 building blocks on child participation is that it has enabled the National Committee to translate child participation into tangible actions. The more detailed building blocks have helped the municipalities to think with a child rights-based approach. At the same time, the checklists are so demanding, that they work as an eye opener. This is particularly important where people are used to working within a context where education and social services in general are already usually quite well functioning and of high quality. The focus was on the leap towards more equality and better quality.

### Child participation in CFCI management at city level

The main body through which children participate in the city's management is the child or youth municipal council. At the time the CFCI was developed in Finland, there was already national legislation on child participation, laying out the grounds for different structures such as School Boards to be established in all schools for children from age 7 and Youth Councils to be set up at municipal level. In Hämeenlinna, the *8th graders day* had been running since 2004. In the context of this programme, 8th grade students (aged 14-15) have the possibility to identify key initiatives to be implemented at municipal level. All schools are represented by 2 children each and they have a budget that is given on a yearly basis, which can be used for the initiatives that win the most votes. In Oulu, in terms of social participation, the municipality carries out a questionnaire on the perception of children of their well-being. Oulu has also carried out local research on the status of child participation from a life-course approach, covering different services and child age groups. The CFCI have strongly built on these available structures and related knowledge and resources.

With the case study visit it was clear that having detailed building blocks and demanding checklists was an important strategy to add value to ongoing work, considering the mechanisms already available in the country.

In Hämeenlinna, children who were members of the Youth Council, at the time already established for 5 years, contributed to drawing up the Action Plan for the implementation of the CFCI. Upon becoming part of the CFCI, the Youth Council received an annual budget of €30,000, which they can use for their own initiatives. Every year

the board decides how much is allocated to the Youth Council. At present, 38 and young people are members of the Youth Council, which holds monthly meetings. The Coordinator (municipal officer) puts forward the topics for discussion in the meetings, but the children can also bring forward new topics. In the next planned meeting after the case study visit, the members of the Youth Council will be discussing the City Plan. Usually, after the discussions, the Youth Council prepares a statement to be presented at a higher level. Mostly, the two children interviewed (aged 14-15) feel that their recommendations are seriously taken into account. Usually, the Youth Council has not received information in advance of the meetings, unless it is something important, such as the reform of the Youth Act, where they answered collectively to an online survey. The Youth Council does not get feedback on how their inputs have influenced or been integrated into municipal decisions. In relation to changes for improving how participation takes place in the Youth Council, the children interviewed in Hämeenlinna suggested more dialogue with the politicians, more feedback about what decisions are taken and more space for children and young people to be listened to. In relation to the participation of children of different backgrounds, the children stated that in theory they have the same opportunities as all other children to participate. According to those interviewed however, in practice not all children may be aware of existing mechanisms and other may have the right attitudes for participation (“they simply shout what is wrong and do not understand what participation is about”). The officer responsible for the Youth Council recognised that they have not included children from vulnerable groups during its functioning and that their effective participation represents a challenge.

A politician interviewed in Hämeenlinna stated that the involvement of the municipality in the CFCI has brought concrete changes in terms of their child participation practices. These have included a new attitude towards children, because decision-makers have participated in discussions with children, both in the context of the CFCI Coordinating Group and at City Council meetings; and have realised that children have an important contribution to make. At the same time, it is recognised that there is reluctance from less-traditional child sectors to let the children participate. The politician stated that it is important to address the existing challenges and gaps in terms of child participation. Some suggestions for this included setting up specific goals per sector; to invite the children to come more often to meetings with the whole council, particularly at crucial times, i.e. when the budget is decided and when the council work is assessed; to give them the information in advance about what will be discussed in meetings, so that they can participate more actively; and to create a sustainable system, so that at some point, children participate systematically, without it being pushed by one particular person – to make it a routine.

### Good practice from the city of Hämeenlinna - Translating municipal decision-making language for children

Taking into account the often complex language used by decision-makers at municipal level, a politician suggested a project for children to carry out. The so-called ‘Language Project’ has been taken on by teachers in schools. The children have prepared a lengthy dictionary, which includes various terms often used at municipal level, for example, ‘action plan’, ‘strategy’, ‘budget’, etc. The dictionary entries provide short expressions in easy language, plus more detailed explanations when an easy expression cannot be found. The dictionary is available online.

## 5. Participation

### The CFCI framework and the principle of equality and non-discrimination

A building block on equality and non-discrimination was developed in light of the Finnish national Equality Act 2014. The reason for having a specific building block on non-discrimination and equality was to emphasise that these two dimensions should not simply be considered in planning or generally aim at advancing equality. Instead, equality and non-discrimination should specifically *tackle equality proactively*. Therefore, equality and non-discrimination should be included not only in planning phases, but should also be used to assess whether and how existing structures take into account and have a positive or negative impact on different groups of children. The checklist on equality and non-discrimination identifies groups of children that may be at risk of discrimination, which corresponds to the ones identified both in the Equality Act and General Comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

#### Possible grounds of discrimination identified in the Equality Act and General Comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

- Age
- Origin
- Nationality
- Language
- Skin colour
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Religion
- Beliefs
- Political or other opinions
- Wealth
- Health
- Disability
- Place of residence
- Any other reason

The introductory text to Building Block 2 on Equality and Non-discrimination reads: *“At a structural level those working with and for children need to assess whether a particular way of working or a decision promotes equality or whether it (perhaps unintentionally) excludes some groups of children and youth from accessing activities and services. The identification of discrimination and the advancement of equality require systematic education within the municipal organization. The advancement of equality also requires information on the grounds of discrimination and of groups at-risk of or affected by discrimination. In its comments issued in 2011, the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed its concern of whether Finland has an adequate amount of information about the living conditions of poor children, children with disabilities, children from minority and immigrant backgrounds and children in foster care. It is of particular importance that children’s experiences and definitions of discrimination are the starting point for the advancement of non-discrimination. Various organizations and associations possess an ample knowledge and skills related to the promotion of equality. A Child Friendly Municipality can benefit from their experience in promoting equality and non-discrimination.”*

The questions in the checklist prompt municipalities to look at equality and non-discrimination in terms of information gathering, plans and strategies adopted and support given to children who are discriminated. The researcher stated that if he was to re-write the building blocks again, he would break down equality and non-discrimination into several building blocks, as was done with participation, i.e. look closely at evidence, and address equality and non-discrimination in all decisions at micro-level.

In Hämeenlinna, vulnerable groups of children are identified in the Child Welfare Plan, which was drafted prior to the engagement of the city as CFC.

Overall, at this moment of CFCI, the results regarding equality and non-discrimination have been more about awareness raising.

## 7. Partnerships

As mentioned previously, the National Committee set up an expert group to consult with during the pilot, which included members of civil society.

## 8. Monitoring and evaluation

The National Committee evaluates both the process and the outcomes of the implementation of the CFCI. For the municipality to obtain the CFC recognition, promoting child rights needs to be cross-sectoral (e.g. not only focusing on schools, but also include, for example, city planning), have long term impacts and include child participation in the process. Each municipality is evaluated based on its starting level.

Some of the results achieved so far have been:

- Child and youth participation has gained more visibility within the municipalities;
- Child impact assessment has gained more visibility and new practices have been proposed and/or piloted;
- Overall awareness of the CRC within the municipal organisations has increased;
- The difficulties concerning the organisational culture have been identified (i.e. cross-sector cooperation);
- There is a need to adopt a child rights-based approach to programming;
- There is a need to carry out further evaluations of the situation of children, especially equality and non-discrimination-related issues.

At present, there are two municipalities, which are not likely to be granted the CFCI recognition because, due to different reasons, they have not followed the different steps towards becoming a CFC. The National Committee sees it as a proof that its recognition does not come automatically for every municipality interested in it, and therefore it increases the credibility of the model. When it seems that a municipality is not committed to following the process, the National Committee points this out and offers solutions, such as suggested next steps and a modified schedule for the recognition. Then it is up to the municipality to decide whether to take the advice or not. With one of the two cities, the National Committee has already agreed that the recognition will be postponed for the time being and rescheduled at a later stage.

## 9. Key lessons learnt

The CFCI in Finland is a recent initiative. Nevertheless, the solid knowledge-based and strategic approach adopted provide valuable insight as to many questions that National Committees should address in various stages of the process. Concluding remarks will emphasize some of these of particular relevance for the development of the toolkit:

- *There are many benefits in a thorough knowledge-based initiative from the start.* Before officially launching the CFCI, the National Committee made a decision to study whether it could add value to existing work already in place in the country, it took concrete child rights gaps identified in the country to build its core components and has adopted a participatory approach coordinated and informed by experts.

- *There are crucial questions to be addressed by the National Committee in pilot or initial CFCI stages, namely:*
  - What is the added value that the CFCI can bring;
  - What should be the contents of the CFCI in that specific environment;
  - What is the method that will be used by the National Committee in their relation with the respective municipalities, i.e. a participatory approach or a standard setting approach?
  - How will the National Committee resource the initiative.
  - These elements together help to define the Committee’s role and the required capacity to deliver the intended results.
  
- *Balancing the autonomy and diversity of the municipalities and the guidance to be provided by the National Committee.* In terms of the experience of piloting and implementing CFCI, the National Committee stated that the most difficult issue to answer in the pilot was to find the balance between the autonomy and diversity of the municipalities and the guidance to be provided by the National Committee; and how to create a model that would function in relation to this. In the work with municipalities, the most difficult challenge is how active a role should be taken by the National Committee, i.e. where is the balance between actively promoting the CFCI and becoming too involved in the local processes, which is not cost-efficient nor sustainable?
  
- *The importance of taking time to test, learn and act accordingly.* According to the National Committee, it is not possible to say that anything has gone wrong in the implementation of the CFCI or different than initially predicted and the reason for this is the time taken during the pilot to discuss, test, reflect and to predict and prepare for problems that would arise when the CFCI took off. This has also influenced the work and the Committee has always advised municipalities to take time to reflect about different available options and go step by step. Mostly, this allows for space and time for learning.
  
- *Using the knowledge generated by the CFCI to influence national decision-making.* The National Committee uses the knowledge and experience gathered in the implementation of the CFCI to influence the national child rights agenda. Indeed, the officer responsible for CFCI uses approximately 40 per cent of her time for this effect.

## Annex: Building blocks and checklists for the child friendly municipality model

# **BUILDING BLOCKS AND CHECKLISTS FOR THE CHILD FRIENDLY MUNICIPALITY MODEL**

Finnish Committee for UNICEF, 2014

[Unofficial translation. Some parts of the original are altered or excluded for being very specifically about the context of Finnish municipalities and/or legislation. For more information please contact Ms. Ira Custódio / Advisor for Domestic Advocacy, [ira.custodio@unicef.fi](mailto:ira.custodio@unicef.fi) ]

## The Finnish Model for UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities Initiative

The Child Friendly Municipality is a model developed by the Finnish Committee for UNICEF. The purpose of the model is to encourage and support municipalities in ensuring policies, practices, and services respect and fulfill child rights. It also includes provisions for ensuring children and youth have the opportunity to participate in municipal activities and have their voices heard.

The model consists of ten building blocks, each of which is accompanied by a checklist that can be used to assess the current situation, select and develop actions and objectives, and develop indicators for monitoring progress overtime. The building blocks guide a municipality through a process of examining their current situation with the intent of moving towards fully respecting child rights cross-sectorally and throughout all aspects of municipal functions.

A municipality interested in gaining UNICEF's Child Friendly Municipality Certificate needs to follow a two-year development process and present the results of that work to UNICEF for evaluation. At the end of the two-year period a municipality may be granted the certificate.

UNICEF evaluates both the process and the outcomes. For the municipality to obtain the Child Friendly Municipality Certificate, promoting child rights needs to be cross-sectoral (e.g. not only focusing on schools, but also include, for example, city planning), have long term impacts and include child participation in the process. Each municipality is evaluated based on its starting level.

The Child Friendly Municipality model cannot be used to compare municipalities. It is, instead, a tool for developing practices and processes of the municipal decision-making and service production.

The Child Friendly Municipality model is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF's international Child Friendly Cities Initiative and on national research and expert data.

Further information on the model is available (currently only in Finnish) at: [www.unicef.fi/lapsiystavallinen-kunta](http://www.unicef.fi/lapsiystavallinen-kunta)

## Terms and Definitions

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, **a child** is under 18 years of age. In the context of municipalities, it is sometimes useful to consider children of different age groups separately and to make a distinction between children and youth, for example. However, for the purposes of the Child Friendly Municipality, the word 'child' always refers to anyone under the age of 18.

In Finland, **municipalities** have a broad responsibility for the provision of basic services to citizens. Local authorities have strong self-government based on local democracy and decision making, and the right to levy taxes.

The meaning of **participation** ranges from being heard and having a say in decision making (the political dimension) to a sense of belonging, community and being accepted as oneself or as a member of the group one belongs to (the social dimension). A child's own experience of participation or the lack of it is an essential element of both dimensions.

The **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** is a human rights convention that applies to all children under the age of 18. It defines the human rights of children and imposes an obligation on States to respect those rights. See <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child includes four guiding principles. These are:

1. Non-discrimination
2. Best interest of the child
3. Right to life, survival and development
4. Respect for the views of the child

## Building Block 1: Making Children's Rights Known

For children's rights to be realized, they must be known and understood by both children and adults. The Convention on the Rights of the Child includes an obligation to make the convention widely known to both adults and children. Children's upbringing and education must furthermore aim to promote respect for human rights. A Child Friendly Municipality must also, in all of its activities, aim to advance knowledge and understanding of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the attendant obligations, as well as respect for them.

Making the rights of the child known advances a number of objectives. It brings visibility to children and the issues that concern them and may mitigate negative attitudes towards children. It can increase respect for children and their rights. Knowing and understanding children's rights also enables us to protect the rights of children in a vulnerable position. Child rights education not only teaches children about their rights, it helps empower them to stand up for their rights and respect the rights of others.

To develop the structures, work practices and mindsets necessary to uphold children's rights, it is important to foster awareness and understanding of those rights. In addition to raising awareness in the general public and providing education for children about their rights, professionals who work with or for children also need training. Child rights education and training must be systematic and continuous, and it should not be based on one-off training events or campaigns. Both adults and children must also be aware of what to do if a child's rights are violated.

Respect for others and the defense of one's own rights cannot be learned merely by reading or hearing about them. Rather, they are internalized through experience and practice. It is therefore not enough for children and adults to be aware that such rights exist. Rather, there must also be a broader rights respecting environment.

The participation of children and youth is important when thinking about ways of fostering awareness of child rights, including participating in the implementation of the children's rights education and training. One example of this is a guidebook for children who are placed in foster care. The guidebook was planned and edited by young people who had themselves been in the child welfare system and was able to highlight child rights from their perspective. In addition to children and young people, Child Friendly Municipalities will also find important partners in civil society actors and the media.

## Checklist 1: Making Children's Rights Known

Do the municipality's strategy, policy programs and other regulatory documents respect Child Rights?

Are the municipality's decision-making and practices systematically evaluated from the perspective of the rights of the child?

Do municipality and/or school-specific curricula for all ages include child rights education human rights education and the rights of the child?

- For which age groups are they included in the curricula?
- For which age groups are they not included in the curricula?

Is awareness of children's rights monitored among

- Children?
- Adults?

Are children's views and experiences on the realization of their rights in everyday life investigated or surveyed?

Has the municipality undertaken active measures to make the public at large aware of the rules and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child?

This section demands a consideration of the following sub-sections:

### Children's Rights Education

- Which age group (children below school age, children in comprehensive school, upper- secondary level students) and in which environments is education on child rights provided?
- Are all children in these environments reached?
- Does child rights education for children take into account the situations and needs of different groups of children (such as children placed in foster care or children at-risk of discrimination)?

*Is child rights education for children of a high standard?*

- Is child rights education for children planned, systematic and continuous?
- Is child rights education built on the lived experiences of a child?
- Does child rights education for children take into account the knowledge and personal experience of the child?
- Are children and teenagers involved in child rights education as planners, actors and implementers?
- Are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in the child rights education?

### Children's Rights Training for Adults

- Have municipal officials and political decision makers received training about child rights?
- Is there an adequate amount of information on the rights of children with disabilities, children placed in foster care or children seeking asylum?
- Have the people who work with children and young people received training about the rights of the child (early childhood education, basic education, secondary level education, youth work, child welfare services, health care workers)?
- Are children's rights introduced in new employee's orientation for professionals working with children?
- Are educators provided with professional development training on children's rights education and the methods of non-formal education?
- Are there efforts to raise awareness of the children's rights among the general public, including parents?
- Is the training for and communication to adults planned, systematic and continuous?

Does the municipality provide information on what to do if a child's rights are violated?

- Is this information available and accessible to both children and adults?
- Is this information in plain language?
- Does this information reach children?

## Building Block 2: Equality and Non-discrimination

Non-discrimination is one of the general principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This means that all rights recognized in the Convention belong to every child. This should be a guiding principle during all stages of building a Child Friendly Municipality. The realization of non-discrimination requires constant and determined work against prejudices and commonly agreed upon ways to identify, intervene and prevent discrimination. This is why the promotion of equality and intervention in discrimination forms its own goal, in addition to being a general guiding principle, in any Child Friendly Municipality.

Equality and non-discrimination must be realized in terms of every goal. The right to participate, for example, must also be realized for the children of immigrants and children with disabilities, and the peer relations of children placed in foster care as well as their involvement in civic activities must also be promoted. Furthermore, the national Non-Discrimination Act obliges public authorities to assess and foster the realization of equality in all of their activities. Statutory equality plans must also account for children and teenagers as a diverse group.

Many children face discrimination and prejudice for a multitude of reasons such as origin, disability, illness or poverty. Studies have shown that discrimination takes place everywhere in the lives of children and youth – in schools, on the streets, and in public spaces – and often goes unnoticed by adults. It is important to be aware that discrimination is perpetrated by children, young people and adults alike and that it takes place in both in peer relations as well as in relations between adults and children.

At a structural level those working with and for children need to assess whether a particular way of working or a decision promotes equality or whether it (perhaps unintentionally) excludes some groups of children and youth from accessing activities and services. The identification of discrimination and the advancement of equality require systematic education within the municipal organization. The advancement of equality also requires information on the grounds of discrimination and of groups at-risk of or affected by discrimination. In its comments issued in 2011, the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed its concern of whether Finland has an adequate amount of information about the living conditions of poor children, children with disabilities, children from minority and immigrant backgrounds and children in foster care.

It is of particular importance that children's experiences and definitions of discrimination are the starting point for the advancement of non-discrimination. Various organizations and associations possess an ample knowledge and skills related to the promotion of equality. A Child Friendly Municipality can benefit from their experience in promoting equality and non-discrimination.

## Checklist 2: Equality and Non-discrimination

Do the municipality's strategy, policy programs and other regulatory documents account for the diversity of children?

- Have children or groups of children at-risk of being discriminated against been identified?
- Is the achievement of the goals set in the above-mentioned documents reviewed particularly from the perspective of children in danger of being discriminated against?

Are there methods for collecting information on the realization of the rights of children at- risk of discrimination?

Has the municipality drawn up an equality plan?

- Does the plan take into account children and teenagers and the diversity of children and teenagers?

Do the strategies, plans, and practices ensure that there is no discrimination based on the following reasons related to the child, youth or their families:

- Age
- Origin
- Nationality
- Language
- Skin color
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Religion
- Beliefs
- Political or other opinions
- Wealth
- Health
- Disability
- Place of residence
- Any other reason

What kinds of measures has the municipality undertaken to promote equality and remove discrimination

- At administrative and structural levels?
- In children's environments and in the services provided for children?
- In the attitudes and actions of the general public?

Is the municipality working against discrimination in cooperation with civil society actors?

Is everyone working with or for children adequately aware of issues concerning discrimination?

- Ban on discrimination
- Identification of discrimination
- Groups at-risk of being discriminated against
- Is this the case throughout the municipal organization in its different sectors?

Is equality respected and realized in the everyday interaction and communication (talk, acts, words, gestures) between

- Adults?
- Adults and children?
- Children?

Are there commonly agreed upon procedures to intervene when discrimination is occurring?

- Is everyone who works with or for children and youth aware of these?

Is the principle of non-discrimination taken into account in children's rights education?

Is information on discrimination experienced by children and youth collected systematically?

Is a child who has experienced discrimination supported?

- Is there room for discussing experiences of discrimination?
- Is a child who has experienced discrimination provided with support in defending his or her rights?

When planning measures to combat discrimination, are children and young people's experiences and viewpoints incorporated?

Are the measures for combating discrimination and their effectiveness evaluated?

- Have the measures been evaluated by children and teenagers?

## Building Block 3: Participation – Planning, Evaluation and the Development of Services

The idea that children and the experience of childhood are a valuable part of the community is at the core of a Child Friendly Municipality. Children and young people, like adults, should be respected as citizens and active members of society. The participation of children and respect for their experiences and views must therefore be promoted in all municipal activities.

In addition to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a number of regulations, such as the Constitution of Finland and the Youth Act, oblige authorities to guarantee children and youth their right to participate. Finnish legislation contains sections that guarantee citizens in general the right to participation (such as the Land Use and Building Act). It is nevertheless not enough that public hearings and other methods of participation are open to children and youth. Rather, their involvement must be consciously supported. It should also be noted that services provided to children include public transportation, infrastructure, and libraries in addition more traditionally thought of children's services such as day care, youth work and playgrounds. In a Child Friendly Municipality, all of these services are planned, provided, developed and evaluated against child friendly principles.

Promoting the participation of children and youth must be based on adults' genuine desire to listen to and respect the children's views. This applies to both respecting the individual child's view in matters that concern him/her, as well as to supporting the participation of different groups of children and young people in the planning of services and decision-making.

When promoting the participation of children and young people, it is often necessary to review the ways in which issues are communicated (the methods of communication, comprehensibility/clarity of language), work practices (ways and means of interaction, the hours of meetings and gatherings, the time reserved for the process) and structures (job descriptions). Respecting the views of the children does not mean that decisions would necessarily follow the views expressed by children. Nonetheless, it is important to follow up and explain the reasons behind decisions so as to value their input and prevent disillusionment.

Children and teenagers' opportunities to influence matters are often advanced through different representative groups, such as youth councils and student councils. It should nevertheless be noted that the Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees equal rights to participation for every child. Representative hearing alone is therefore insufficient. From the perspective of the children's right to participation, attention must be paid to different age groups and seek to include a variety of voices, including minority and disadvantaged groups.

Municipalities and non-governmental organizations already have in place many practices and models that promote the participation of children. Such practices and models can be of help when building a Child Friendly Municipality. There is also plenty of room for developing new kinds of engagement activities in cooperation with children and youth.

### Checklist 3: Participation – Planning, Evaluation and the Development of Services

Does the city's strategy and other relevant documents require all sectors to hear the voices of children and youth?

Do all departments in the municipality have both mechanisms and adequate competence for hearing children and teenager's voices in decision-making processes that concerns them?

- Are both the legal basis and methods for hearing children and teenagers voices included in the orientation and professional development training provided to staff?
- Are children and youth's voices heard in decision-making that concerns them in all departments of the municipality?

Are there both group-based and individual participation mechanisms and structures that guarantee every child the possibility to exercise his/her right to be heard and express their opinions in the decisions that affect them?

If the municipality has representative groups, such as youth councils, do they genuinely have access to decision-makers and a chance of influencing matters?

- How is the participation of children and teenagers who are not members of this representative group supported?
- Are different groups of children and young people heard in matters that concern specifically them (for example, are young skateboarders heard when planning a new skate park)?

Are children and youth informed about:

- The schedules of decision-making and its preparation?
- The grounds for a decision that has been made?
- The actual outcomes of their participation?

What kinds of roles and possibilities for participation are children and youth offered in the services provided specifically for them, such as at school, day-care or social services?

- Are individual children and young people heard in matters that concern them?
- Do children and young people, as the recipients of a service, have a say when their needs and best interest is being defined?
- Are children and youth involved in thinking about solutions to issues that concern them?
- Are there opportunities to participate in the development of operational culture as a peer educators, peer mediators or peer supporters?

Are mechanisms and methods of participation developed with respect to children and teenagers' opinions and experiences?

## Building Block 4: Participation – Planning and Development of Public Space

The physical environment has a substantial impact on children's quality of life, health, development and happiness. Built and unbuilt environments play their own roles in determining a child's possibilities for playing, recreation, participation and interaction with other people. One of the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that the child's best interest is considered when making decisions that concern a child or children. This should also happen with regard to zoning, land use, the planning of public spaces, transport and traffic planning and school district planning.

A functioning public transportation network and the good condition of pedestrian and bicycle routes are particularly important for children and youth for whom walking, bicycling and public transportation enable independent mobility. Facilities specifically for children and youth allow them to get together even during the cold winter months. These issues should also be viewed from the perspective of equality. Libraries and playgrounds, for example, must also be accessible to all children, including those with disabilities, and any possible discrimination in public spaces must be prevented.

A child's right to express his or her opinion in matters that concern them also applies to the physical environment. The views of children and youth should be given special consideration when planning facilities meant for their use. Children and teenagers' opinions on issues such as the safety and aesthetics of areas may differ from the views of adults. Even so, it is often the case that when decisions concerning environments meant for children and youth, such as schools and day care centers, are made, practicality or other considerations take precedence over the voices of children. Whereas the forest bordering the school building might be an inspiring spot for holding classes from the perspective of children, the primary interest of people responsible for zoning may be new housing.

It is often difficult, if not impossible, to change a built physical environment. To ensure that children and young people's needs and opinions are taken into account, the impacts that decisions have on children and young people must be assessed. Children must also be given a chance to participate in the planning processes as early as possible and to have the opportunity to shape the environment according to their specific needs. When hearing children and youth, special attention should be paid to children of different ages, and particularly to children and youth with disabilities, to ensure accessibility. Furthermore, it often makes sense to hear specific user groups such as skateboarders, for example, when planning a skate park.

## Checklist 4: Participation – Planning and Development of Public Space

Are the needs of children and youth mapped, and are their views taken into account in the planning and development of public space with regard to:

- Residential areas?
- Urban areas (parks, open spaces)?
- Built and natural green areas?
- Semi-public spaces (such as commercial premises, shopping malls, etc.)?
- Roads and pedestrian and bicycling routes?

Are the needs of different groups of children taken into account in the planning and development of public spaces, and are these groups heard?

- Children with disabilities (accessibility, availability)
- Children with specific hobbies (the planning of sports facilities and parks)
- Both current and potential users

What kinds of means and methods of data collection are there for investigating children and teenagers' opinions and experiences of public space and its use?

Are children heard early enough to allow for a genuine consideration of their views?

Are children and youth, and their needs and views, taken into account on par with the needs and views of adults when planning public spaces?

- Are the values and priorities of children and youth visible in the planning and decision-making concerning public spaces?

Are the needs of children and youth taken into account when hearing resident's voices in general?

- Are issues communicated to children and youth in a way that's understandable and accessible to them?
- Are the methods of participation suitable for children and young people?

Is the impact on children evaluated in connection to:

- Zoning?
- Transport and traffic planning?
- Planning of public facilities?
- Are children's views taken into account when evaluating the impacts?

Do children have the chance to influence the planning and development of a public space meant specifically for them?

- The design, furnishing and use of interiors and exteriors in day care centers, schools and educational institutions
- The location of facilities and spaces (such as sports facilities, playgrounds, youth facilities, libraries)
- The opening hours or availability of facilities and spaces

Do children have the chance to shape the environment and use it, also in ways or for purposes for which it has not been designed?

## Building Block 5: Participation – Agenda-setting and Influencing Decision-making

Children and young people's possibilities to participate should not be limited to the development of services provided for them or to being heard. We must also advance children and young people's opportunities to raise issues that are important to them and advocate for these issues. There should be an effort to foster mechanisms of interaction between children and decision-makers that leave room for thoughts, wishes and priorities of children. Child and youth-led activities must be supported in a way that they can also raise issues in which they feel that the decisions made by adults weaken the realization of their rights.

Rather than one-off events, interaction and dialogue between children and decision-makers should occur on a regular basis. Many municipalities organize annual discussions between children and decision-makers and public officials. Beyond these means, we must also ensure that daily interaction between adults and children gives children the chance to learn through experience that there is time and room for their opinions and that those opinions are valued. The most effective way to plan and develop such mechanisms of interaction is in cooperation with children and youth.

It is important that children and young people can choose the ways and environments where they participate. Instead of (or in addition to) making suggestions or initiatives, children and young people may prefer activities within their

immediate environment, such as in school or their neighborhoods. The activities may take the form of solo activities or activities within a group. It can be writing a blog, or discussing and influencing matters in the classroom, which in turn can lead to concrete activity, such as a community effort to clean up the school surroundings. Adults who work with children and youth must be aware of the different ways with which to support children's own initiatives, and any possible allocations granted for such activities.

It should also be considered whether the participation mechanisms provided for children and youth offer opportunities for participation for all children or whether they only offer it to some children. Correspondingly, it should be assessed how they reach various groups of children and youth. Different mechanisms for supporting child and youth participation should be evaluated as a whole, to ensure that, for example, children with disabilities, children from immigrant backgrounds and children of different ages, are also provided with opportunities to participate.

Furthermore, to ensure that children find these ways of working meaningful, attractive and accessible, they must be created and developed in cooperation with groups of children and youth.

## Checklist 5: Participation – Agenda-setting and Influencing Decision-Making

Is learning about and exercising democracy and citizenship included in the goals of

- Municipal and/or school-specific curricula?
- Municipal curriculum for early childhood education and care?
- Youth work?

Are there participation mechanisms and structures in the municipality that enable interaction and communication between children and youth and public officials and politicians who make decisions about matters that concern children?

- Do these practices make it possible for children and youth to determine subjects of discussion and raise issues and themes that are important to them?
- Are these practices made up of one-off events or do they allow regular interaction throughout the year?
- Do the mechanisms guarantee all children a chance to voice their own views?

Does the municipality have mechanisms and structures that support children's own initiatives for doing, developing and changing things they deem important?

Are the attitudes and mindsets of adults supportive of child and youth participation or do they in some occasions hinder it?

Are children consciously encouraged to express their views on things that are important to them?

Are children encouraged and supported to act on issues that are important to them?

Are there methods and practices of participation in the environments of children that ensure an opportunity for every child to raise issues important to him or her?

- Are these methods or practices a part of daily interaction?
- Do these methods and practices enable interaction between adults and children as well as interaction between children themselves?
- Are these methods and practices in use in all day care centers, schools, educational institutions and youth facilities or just in some of them?

Do children and youth have the chance to draw attention to their sources of joy, and the shortcomings they perceive, also within the scope of general public discussion?

- Are children given the opportunity to raise issues in the city's own communication channels?
- Is the local media interested in themes presented by children?
- Are children involved in the production of such media contents?

Is a diversity of forms of self-expression considered, such as:

- Art-oriented methods?
- The channels used by children and teenagers (including the internet)?

Are there different ways for collecting information about children's views concerning their possibilities to influence matters that are important to them?

If children and teenagers raise issues and themes important to them, are their views treated with respect?

## Building Block 6: Participation – Civil Society Activities

For children, civil society activities may translate into recreation and free time as well as opportunities to influence matters they deem important. It offers children and young people opportunities for expressing themselves and to grow as citizens. The Convention on the Rights of the Child secures children's rights to both freedom of association and playing, free time and culture. The Youth Act, in turn, defines youth work as encompassing, among other things, the provision of facilities and opportunities for recreational activities and support for youth associations and groups. It is important to take children's views and priorities into account when developing support for the civic activities of children and young people.

Civil society activities enable diverse involvement on a number of levels: in the context of hobbies, as members and active participants of organizations, in different projects and initiatives, in children's groups of friends and in virtual environments. Shared activities in the context of a common interest, or for a common goal, reinforce a child's experience of community membership and teach them about responsibility.

A Child Friendly Municipality must provide children with different kinds of opportunities to participate and to influence the content of civil society activities, too. Children and teenagers must be given a chance to participate in guided activities, hobbies and events as well as to independently plan and organize activities of their choice. For participation to be enjoyable and refreshing, it must be voluntary and not imposed.

Any support for civic activities must also pay attention to the realization of equality. The civic activities of children and young people must be considered as important as the civic activities of adults, and this must be visible in the support the municipality provides for such activities.

Resources should be allocated to children of all ages: small children need places to play in and young people places to gather and socialize. Support should be provided to the activities of NGOs and to activities planned and organized by children and teenagers within their own groups. It is particularly important to ensure that a family's limited means do not prevent the child's participation in civic activities.

It is advisable to plan, evaluate and develop both the civic activities of children and young people as well as the support for such activities in cooperation with children and young people, taking advantage of their points of view and experiences. Furthermore, it is advisable to involve children and young people who are not currently involved in any kind of civic activity, so that as many children and young people as possible who stand to gain from such activities could benefit.

## Checklist 6: Participation – Civil Society Activities

Is learning about and exercising democracy and citizenship included in the goals of

- Municipal and/or school-specific curricula?
- Municipal curriculum for early childhood education and care?
- Youth work?

Is civic activity understood in a broad sense as

- Free time, recreation and playing?
- Hobbies?
- Culture?
- Participation?
- Self-expression and the presentation of one's own views?
- Voluntary work?

Are the civil society activities of children and teenagers supported:

- In the form of financial assistance for activities and projects?
- By providing premises for such activities?
- Are these possibilities communicated to all possible applicant groups?

Does support for children's civil society activities equitably take into account:

- Children's activities in relation to adults' activities?
- Both organized civil society actors and informal groups?
- Activities meant for children of different ages?
- Activities meant for varying levels of intensity (e.g. competitive sports v. "playful" sports)?
- Children and teenagers with limited means?

Are there different ways for collecting information about children's views concerning recreation and the ways in which they prefer spending their free time?

- Is this information used to develop activities and allocate resources?
- Have the priorities of children and teenagers had an impact on the support for civic activities?
- Are children's views and opinions taken into account when developing support for civic activities?

Is information also collected from those who are not yet within the scope of support, but who could stand to gain from it?

Do children of various ages have premises and facilities for free time spent in:

- Guided activities?
- Independent activities?
- Are children and teenagers informed about the possibilities for independent gathering? Does the communication about the possibilities reach children and teenagers?

Is it possible for children to be in a public space the same way it is for adults, i.e. are children and young people treated equally in public space?

Are the civil society activities of children and teenagers supported by means of media education?

- Expression of opinion, its limits, bullying

What kinds of roles are there available for children in civil society activities:

- As their own target group?
- When participating in activities primarily meant for adults?
- With adults, as equal participants

What kinds of obstacles prevent children and young people from participating in civil society activities?

## Building Block 7: Participation – Peer and Adult Relationships

Building blocks 3, 4 and 5 examine child and youth participation from the perspective of influencing, changing, and shaping the processes, services, and environments that affect young people. Another way to examine participation is to pay attention to the groups and communities to which a child belongs such as family, friends, schools or neighbourhoods. In this case, we are examining the social dimension of participation and whether or not a child feels that he or she belongs and is accepted. When children and young people are asked what constitutes wellbeing, the answers invariably stress strong family and peer relationships. While this goal is therefore important in and of itself, it is also a condition for a child's possibility to be an active member of the community and participate in developing it.

From the perspective of an adult who works with children and young people, the question involves firstly an approach that takes into account peer relations and various group phenomena. In these cases, the goal is to reinforce a sense of community and social relationships and promote team building by different methods. On the other hand, the question also involves supporting the development and maintaining relationships that are important to an individual child. This is of particular importance when a child has been placed in foster care. It is important that a child feels accepted and valued in all different environments of everyday life regardless of his or her background, such as family situation or cultural background.

At the structural level, the promotion of the social dimension of participation means, among other things, increasing the sense of community, the child's subjective sense of security and reinforcing everyone's sense of belonging to a group. It can also translate into children's participation in drawing up school rules or into teaching children to resolve conflicts by means of peer mediation. In the case of an individual child or teenager, the promotion of the social dimension of participation may involve identifying possible loneliness and the lack of friendships. It also involves supporting families and ensuring that children and teenagers have safe adults who they can talk to about things that are important to them and when they need help. The support of one's own family is important for children and young people who belong to a sexual or gender minority, for example. Yet there are cases and situations in which the family does not know how to support the child. In such cases and situations, both the child and those closest to him or her need help and support.

As the question involves sense of belonging, safety and self-worth, the starting point must be the experiences and opinions of children themselves. The selection of suitable courses of action requires an investigation of the experiences of children and young people as individuals and as members of various groups. It also requires children and youth to be involved in the interpretation of this information and the selection of the appropriate course of action.

## Building Block 7: Participation – Peer and Adult Relationships

Have promoting the sense of community and the development of children's social relations been integrated in

- Municipal and/or school-specific curricula?
- Municipal curriculum for early childhood education and care?
- The goals of youth work?

Are there different ways for collecting information about children's views concerning their relations with their peers and with adults?

- Is this information used to promote the wellbeing of children and teenagers and in the development of the services provided for them?
- Are there also ways for collecting information from children in groups at-risk of discrimination?
- Do children feel that they have safe adults in their everyday life who they talk to about their joys and sorrows?
- Do children feel that adults in different growth communities and services are easy to approach and reliable?
- Do children feel that they have friends with whom to spend free time and share joys and sorrows?

Do people who work with children and teenagers have sufficient understanding and methodological competence with regard to the peer relations and various group phenomena of children and teenagers?

- Are people who work with children and teenagers provided with an opportunity for further training on this theme?

Are children and teenagers involved in developing their growth communities' operational culture, including:

- The development of practices that promote sense of community and safety?
- The drawing up of regulations?
- The resolution of conflicts?
- Is this realized in all day care centers, schools, educational institutions and guided free- time activities – or just in some of them?

Is team building and the development of children's social skills promoted through diverse means and methods in different growth communities?

Do the approaches applied in different growth communities also identify and account for various negative group phenomena such as

- Discrimination and bullying?
- Loneliness?

When promoting children's social relations, are online environments also taken into account?

Do different growth communities support a child's positive relationship with his or her parents and other adults important to the child?

Is the significance of peer and adult relations for a child also considered

- When the child is placed in care outside his or her home?
- In the everyday lives of children seeking asylum?
- In the everyday lives of children with disabilities?
- In the everyday lives of children who belong to sexual or gender minorities?

## Building Block 8: Participation – Valuing Children and Childhood

The key message of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the intrinsic value of children and childhood. Children and youth are not only important as future adults and taxpayers, but as individuals and citizens of today. It is the task of the Child Friendly Municipality to reinforce children's sense of being members of the community and

to stress that their experiences and views are important. This sense is born out of positive interaction with other members of the community and being welcomed in the various environments that make up that community.

Children and youth and their experiences are often sidelined in decision-making and various everyday situations due to their age, developmental stage, and inexperience. An adult may also sincerely think that he or she is acting in the child's best interests despite not having taken the time to ask the child what he or she considers important. For children and teenagers to be viewed as equals and for their experiences and viewpoints to be considered genuinely important, a shift in attitudes needs to occur. The environments in which interaction occurs must also foster a sense of safety for young people. It is also worthwhile for adults to take a self-critical look at whether there is actually room for children's views and whether those views are taken seriously even when they may differ from those of the adult(s).

Attitudes towards children and teenagers are sometimes negative, particularly in public places. The liveliness of children may be seen as disturbing, whereas groups of teenagers may be seen as intimidating. Children's presence, particularly in commercial premises, is at times frowned upon or seen as a nuisance. Sometimes certain behavior that is acceptable for adults, such as hanging around shopping malls without purchasing anything, is not tolerated for young people.

Segregating different age groups into their own spaces however does not promote positive interaction between generations or encourage children and young people to think they are welcomed members of the community. Therefore, it is necessary to promote positive everyday encounters of different populations and age groups. Different community center projects, for example, have successfully brought together people from different age groups, from babies to pensioners.

The media plays a key role in influencing the attitudes of the general public. For children and teenagers to develop a positive image of themselves as members of the community, it is important that they are treated in a positive and fair light in the media. When it comes to public discussion, allowing children and teenagers to participate in editorial work creates room for issues that they consider important. It also allows for making diversity visible, i.e. the fact that children and youth do not make up a single, coherent group.

To be able to intervene in negative attitudes and behavior towards children, one must know where they occur. It is therefore important to ask whether children and youth themselves feel that they are equal and valued members of society. If this is not always the case, we must find out in which situations and places children and youth feel unequal and unwelcome.

## Checklist 8: Participation – Valuing Children and Childhood

Is the message of the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning the intrinsic value of children and childhood a publicly pronounced principle that guides the municipality's activities and budgeting?

- Are children's rights, needs, play, activities and points of view considered as important as those of adults'?
- Is this apparent in the planning and budgeting of operations and services?
- Is this visible in the municipality's communications and in the media?

Is the realization of children's human rights consciously supported?

- Are the situations in which the realization of children's rights requires the special support of adults recognized and identified?

Do children and youth feel that they are equal and valued members of the community?

If activities or services are allocated on the basis of age, is this practice based on a consideration of the child's best interest?

Are children and youth as a group subject to restrictions that are not based on law or a consideration of the child's best interest?

Do children and youth have an equal right to the use of public space?

- Are activities, hobbies or the use of public space of the kind that is particularly enjoyable to children and youth unnecessarily restricted?
- Do children and youth feel that they are as welcome as adults in different public spaces?
- Are there different methods in use for collecting information about children's views concerning their experiences of urban space, and where they feel or do not feel welcome?
- Is this information used in the development of policies and practices?

How are children and youth as a group represented by the media?

- Are children and youth, and the issues they deem important, given room in public discussion?
- Is the emphasis on positive or negative aspects?
- Is the diversity of children and teenagers taken into account?
- What do children and youth think about the discussion concerning them?
- Are children and youth given a chance to participate in and influence this discussion?

Do the municipality's practices, activities and communications challenge negative generalizations concerning children and youth?

- Are children's own activities and self-determination enabled in this context?
- Do the media challenge generalizations concerning children and youth?

## Building Block 9: Strategic Planning, Coordinating Mechanisms and Child Impact Analysis

The guiding vision for child and youth policies in a Child Friendly Municipality is the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Regardless of the size or administrative organization of a municipality, the building of a Child Friendly Municipality requires a cross-sectoral, comprehensive, coordinated approach across various departments. By doing so, the best interest of the child can be ensured as required by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Considering the child's best interests requires that the impacts that policies, decisions or actions have on children be evaluated systematically. This applies to both administrative measures concerning an individual child as well as to all decision-making concerning children or youth, or groups of children or youth, either directly or indirectly. Budgeting must also be reviewed from the perspective of the impacts it has on children. The principle of non-discrimination requires that the effects also be examined from the perspective of groups at-risk of discrimination.

The coordination of matters concerning children in a municipality may be arranged in a number of ways, including the establishment of a coordination group or through the office of the child ombudsman. Coordination must also be supplemented with the monitoring of implemented child and youth policies and the evaluations of their impacts. It is important that children and young people are also given an opportunity to evaluate whether the impacts of these policies, decisions, or actions have been effective. When children and teenagers are empowered and aware of their own rights, they are also in the best position to point out the situations in which their rights are not realized.

Child friendly governance/administration refers not only to child policies that abide by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but to a child friendly operational culture: communication that is accessible to children and youth, interaction that accounts for their needs, and visibility of issues that concern them. This demands systematic training and information on child rights for children, youth and adults.

Child friendly practices must be implemented throughout the municipal organization. The plan required by the Child Welfare Act, for example, is a statutory tool that allows for the guidance, management and development of work concerning the wellbeing of children and youth in the municipality. If the municipality does not have a strategy or plan of action that obligates all branches of administration, there is a risk that any child friendly activities will remain isolated and not bring about systemic change or promote the position of all children and teenagers equally. To be genuinely useful, a strategy or plan of action must therefore possess sufficient weight within the municipal organisation.

## Checklist 9: Strategic Planning, Coordinating Mechanism and Child Impact Analysis

Are the obligations set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child taken into account in all decision-making? E.g. is the child's best interest considered when making decisions that concern both adults and children?

Is the Convention on the Rights of the Child a tool that guides the municipality's child and youth work and policies

- e.g. the governing principles, municipal strategy, equality plan and the wellbeing plan for children and youth?
- Are the Convention's general principles, in particular, visible (non-discrimination; the consideration of the child's best interest; the right to life and development; respect for the views of the child)?

Does the municipality have a department, unit or coordinating mechanism that monitors and evaluates the realization of the rights of the child as a whole?

- Does it have the expertise needed to promote the realization of the child rights and identify any possible violations of such rights?
- Has it been provided with a sufficient mandate to carry out its work?

Is the child's best interest considered in all decision-making concerning children?

- Are the impacts that decision-making has on children evaluated?
- In connection to which issues is such evaluation performed?
- In connection to which issues is such evaluation not performed?
- Are potential and realized impacts evaluated alike?
- Does the impact analysis take into account different groups of children and youth?
- Are children's views taken into account when evaluating the impacts?
- Are the budget's impacts on children evaluated?
- If not, how is the best interest of the child considered in decision-making?

Does the municipality have practices that allow children themselves to evaluate the realization of their rights?

If children's rights are violated, who can they tell and where can they get support from?

- Are children and teenagers aware of how to get help and from who and where to get help?

Are the results of the municipality's child and youth policies in line with the policies' goals?

- Is the success of child and youth policies evaluated in relation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child?
- Are children and teenagers and their parents involved in this evaluation?
- Are children and teenagers involved in making proposals on suggested measures and in the decision-making concerning those measures?

## Building Block 10: Wide Knowledge Basis

The Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that the best interest of the child be the primary consideration whenever making decisions concerning children. For this principle to be realized, we need information about children and youth. We also need to evaluate the impacts that policies, decisions and practices have on them. The plans required by the Child Welfare Act also include a monitoring component.

Many types of information on children are collected both nationally and locally. It is important to review the available information comprehensively and in relation to all branches of the administration. Furthermore, consulting with people who work with children and youth and who have vast knowledge about their lives is a valuable exercise for both decision-making and the horizontal development of municipal activities and services.

Information about the lived experiences of children should also be collected and used in addition to statistics and research data. Children and youth may bring new, creative perspectives and solutions to problems. There are also aspects that can only be evaluated by children and youth including their experiences of discrimination, the realization of the right to participate and their sense of safety. When possible, it is also advisable to consider situations in which children and youth themselves can act as researchers and collectors of information. Involving them in the interpretation of the collected data and decisions regarding measurement of success also furthers the aim of participation.

In addition, data collection must try to uncover the gaps in knowledge. Statistics and averages often do not provide the full picture, particularly in terms of disadvantaged children. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has expressed its concern on the lack of data concerning the living conditions of these children in particular. In order to do better for these children, it is important to collect information about their experiences in particular.

A carefully prepared child impact assessment that discusses both the potential and realized effects of a given action or decision may function as a method of compiling information concerning children in terms of individual themes or subjects. The views of children must also be an integral part of a child impact assessment.

## Checklist 9: Strategic Planning, Coordinating Mechanism and Child Impact Analysis

Does planning and decision-making that concerns children and youth take into account and take advantage of:

- The concluding observations and recommendations concerning Finland given by the Committee on the Rights of the Child?
- Research data?
- The knowledge and data of public authorities, including the knowledge of people who work with children and youth?
- The experience-based knowledge of children, youth and families?
- The expertise of NGOs?

Are there different methods in use for the collection of information on children's views and experiences concerning their everyday lives and wellbeing in a way that covers the entire Convention on the Rights of the Child?

- How is this information used?
- Is the information collected systematically and continuously from all groups of children?
- Is information collected particularly in relation to matters in which the subjective experience of the child should form a particularly integral part of the evaluation (the realization of the right to participate, experiences of discrimination, the sense of safety)?
- Are children and youth themselves involved in the collection of the information?
- Are children and youth involved in the evaluation and interpretation of the information collected from them?

Is the information concerning children and youth reviewed comprehensively, in a coordinated manner?

- Is the expertise of and information collected by people who work on various levels and parts of the municipal organization available to people who work on other levels or parts of the organization?
- Does the method of examination also allow for the detection of gaps?
- Is additional (e.g. qualitative or practical/experience-based) information collected whenever necessary, to get 'beyond' statistics and averages?

Are the impacts that policies, decisions and practices have on children evaluated?

- See building block no. 9: "Issues concerning children are considered..."