

VUci

TOOLKIT

Valuing and Understanding Children's Impact





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Minister's Foreword

The Empowering Children's Participation Project, co-funded by the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV), embarked on a transformative journey aimed at fostering a new collective mindset in how we approach and value child participation. Children are not only the future but also active contributors to the present. Their voices, perspectives, and experiences hold immense value, and when incorporated meaningfully, they can shape more inclusive, effective, and innovative policies.

This "Valuing and Understanding Children's Impact" (VUČI) Toolkit¹ represents a commitment to not only promote children's participation but also to accurately measure and understand its impacts.

Although significant efforts have been made across Europe to uphold the right to child participation, the VUČI Toolkit sets a new approach to measure progress in an innovative way and capture the true essence of children's voices in decision-making. The VUČI Toolkit provides essential tools for capturing and evaluating: the impact on children, the impact on adult decision-makers, and the impact on policy.

It is crucial to highlight that capturing the impact of child participation extends beyond merely validating its value. While Child participation is a fundamental right, comprehending its effects allows us to refine our strategies, build trust, and cultivate a more inclusive and responsive society.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone involved in the development of the VUČI Toolkit, with special thanks to University College Cork for their crucial role. I also extend my deep appreciation to the children whose invaluable contributions have been central to this effort. I sincerely encourage all stakeholders to embrace this toolkit and utilise it to enhance child participation initiatives. Together, let us work towards creating societies where every child's voice is both heard and valued.



¹ One of the main tangible results of the Project Empowering Children's Participation in Malta

Message from the Permanent Secretary

Child participation is not just a fundamental right, but a cornerstone of any thriving democracy. Fostering a culture where children feel heard, respected, and empowered is essential.

Ensuring that the 'impacts' of child participation are captured and evaluated is also fundamental for advancing our collective commitment to meaningful and impactful child engagement. It is within this context that the Empowering Children's Participation Project developed the "Valuing and Understanding Children's Impact" (VUČI) Toolkit that offers a practical framework for assessing the impact of child participation initiatives.

Developed through a collaborative process involving policymakers, experts and children themselves, the Toolkit offers a comprehensive approach to understanding how child participation influences not only the children involved but also the adults who engage with them and the broader policy and practice frameworks in which decisions are made. The guidelines provided will support the measuring of impact and continuously improve how we engage young people in matters that shape their future.

By measuring the effects on children, adults, and the policy landscape, we gain valuable insights into the strengths and challenges of our current practices, illuminating areas for improvement. The positive results of the Empowering Children's Participation Project will mark the future of child participation and provide better opportunities for children's growth, development, and empowerment.

I wholeheartedly encourage the widespread use of this toolkit to construct a comprehensive evidence base on child participation. By sharing our findings, we strengthen advocacy efforts, secure ongoing support for child participation initiatives, and ultimately contribute to creating a more child-friendly society.

Together, we lay the foundation for a brighter future for all our children.



1. Introduction and Context

Launched in 2023, the “Empowering Children’s Participation Project”² has taken a leading role to ignite a new collective mindset when it comes the children’s right to participate in decisions that affect them. Co-funded by the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV)³ Programme, the project aims to contribute towards improving child participation in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)⁴.



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- 2 This project is implemented by the Ministry for Social Policy and Children’s Rights (MSPC) in collaboration with University College Cork (UCC) and the Commissioner for Children (CFC), Malta.
- 3 Program on Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values. Accessible at: https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/citizens-equality-rights-and-values-programme/citizens-equality-rightsand-values-programme-overview_en
- 4 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Accessible at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

The project is anchored by four strategic objectives:

1 *Development of a Digital Participation Platform*

Central to the initiative is the Empowering Children App⁵, an online platform available as both a website and mobile application. Launched in 2023, the platform offers a safe, inclusive, and engaging space for children to express their views and contribute to national policymaking. Additionally, it features a dedicated chat service that provides professional support to vulnerable children facing social exclusion, abuse, neglect, or psychological challenges, offering them much-needed emotional, social, and moral support.

2 *Capacity Building for Policymakers*

To strengthen the integration of child participation in decision-making in governance, the project provided training to public officials, equipping them with the skills necessary to effectively support, monitor, and evaluate children's involvement in policymaking processes.

3 *Awareness-Raising on Children's Right to be Heard*

By educating a broad range of stakeholders—including children, policymakers, parents, and educators—the project promoted a comprehensive understanding of children's rights to be heard and ensure more robust implementation of participatory practices.

4 *Development of a Comprehensive Evaluation Toolkit – The VUČI Toolkit*

A unique toolkit has been created to measure progress and capture the authentic impact of children's voices in decision-making. This toolkit will help to assess ongoing efforts and continuous improvement in child participation practices.

The Empowering Children's Participation in Malta project represents a long-term commitment to empowering young voices, ensuring their perspectives are not only heard but also acted upon in shaping the present and future of society.

⁵ The Empowering Children App can be accessed at <https://empoweringchildren.gov.mt/>



2. Evaluating Impact

Article 12(1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Malta along with every EU State has ratified, provides as follows:

“States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with age and maturity.”

While there have been many efforts to implement the right across Europe, it is recognised that more needs to be done to ensure that policymakers and others can capture the impacts of child participation. This toolkit offers tools for capturing three different types of impacts:

- **Impact on children**
 - **Impact on adult decision-makers**
 - **Impact on policy and practice**
-

The different reasons for capturing the impact of child participation on children, adult decision-makers, and policy and practice are discussed below. At the outset, however, it is important to stress that the main reason for doing so is *not* to prove the value of child participation in order to justify undertaking it. Child participation is a human right and does not need to be justified any more than any other human right such as the child's right to education or to be protected from harm. It is grounded in concepts such as the child's right to dignity, equality and respect for their human worth. From this perspective, it does not matter that it does not deliver any other hoped-for outcomes for the child, policy, or services. It is important in itself.

That said, there are good reasons why it is useful and important to collect data on the impact of child participation. The first of these is rights-based – Article 12 of the UNCRC is recognised as fundamental to the delivery of the child's other human rights, therefore collecting information on its impact can be key to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child more generally. It can provide insights into whether children as rights-holders are enjoying their rights, whether adult duty-bearers are committed to implementing their obligations, and whether the ensuing policy and practice is improved. Other reasons, from the perspective of children and adults, are explored further below.

3. The Methodology

In line with the project's overarching commitment to child participation, a crucial part of the process was the establishment of the Child Advisory Board (CAB). This was organised by the Office of the Commissioner for Children and consisted of 20 young people between the ages of 12 and 16 who attend State, Church, and independent schools. The CAB played a vital role in the creation of the tool, which was developed through the following processes:



4. Capturing the Impact for Children

4.1 Why?

Children and policymakers were asked why the impact of participation on children should be captured. Here are some examples of the reasons they gave:

**“It’s
our life”**

Member of the Child
Advisory Board

Children's Reasons

Not just saying things for show, but
having our opinions change things.

Building confidence in the process.

Establishing a feedback system.

Providing new ways of communicating
and sharing information.

**“Children should feel like they
belong in these spaces. We must
give value to what they tell us.
That what they say is important
and that change can happen”**

Policymaker from the Ministry of Social
Policy and Children's Rights

Adults' Reasons

Reinforcing the value of children's
views and experiences.

Building trust.

Improving the approach to child participation.

Encouraging others to engage
in child participation.



4.2 What?

Children and policymakers were asked to identify what types of impact on children should be captured. Below are several examples:

Children's Responses

Meeting new people and forming new connections.

Learning new skills.

Learning from others' experiences.

Measuring feelings such as pride, happiness, validation, relief, importance, and being heard and included.

Meeting people in power and having an impact.

Having the chance to voice our opinions.

Adults' Responses

Creating a sense of belonging and meeting other children.

Learning new skills (technological, presenting, communication).

Learning from peers.

Increasing confidence, self-esteem, empowerment, and feeling important.

Gaining opportunities, ownership, and empowerment, enabling them to shape their future.

Improving relationships between children and adults.

Increasing awareness of rights, gaining knowledge of rights, and learning that they have a voice.

"It's not just about making statements; it's about transforming my opinions into real change."

Member of the Child Advisory Board



Capturing the Impact for Children

4.3 The Children's Impact Tool



Title of Event / activity here

It is our responsibility to take your views seriously.
Let us know if you agree / disagree with the following:

	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
I am more confident	☐	☐	☐
I learnt new things / skills	☐	☐	☐
Explain:			
I got to know new people	☐	☐	☐
I learnt how decisions are made	☐	☐	☐
I feel like my participation was valued	☐	☐	☐
I want to learn more about the topic	☐	☐	☐
I feel like I made a difference	☐	☐	☐
Explain:			
I felt comfortable sharing my opinions	☐	☐	☐
I feel hopeful that adults will take our views seriously	☐	☐	☐
The subject was well-presented	☐	☐	☐

Any other comments: Is there anything else you got out of taking part?

4.4 How the Tool Can be Used

Here are some ideas, discussed by policymakers and children, about how the tool can be used, including, at which point of the participation process, and in what format:

- It could be given to children individually in paper format and the results collated by the facilitator.
- It could be carried out through a walking survey where children write their score for each item on a set of posters.
- It could also be used as a starting point for children to discuss what they would like to get out of their involvement in a participatory process and/or at the end of the process in more traditional evaluation style.

The questionnaire will be available on **empoweringchildren.gov.mt**



Whichever approach is chosen, it is very important that the information is used to inform and improve child participation in policy and practice. So, for example, if children report a low score in any item, that should be a springboard for reflection with the children involved as to how this could be improved in future participatory processes.

5. Capturing the Impact for Adult Decision-Makers

5.1 Why?

Both children and policymakers were asked why the impact of participation on adults should be captured. Below are some of the reasons they gave:

“Adults should feel listened and supported when listening to the children. To feel valued in what you’re doing”

Member of the Child
Advisory Board

“It causes us to stop and think about the processes, it spurs on our own reflection.”

Policymaker from the Maltese Ministry
of Social Policy and Children's Rights

Children's Reasons

Adults know how to turn children's views into reality and make a change.

Adults might learn new ideas because some children have different skills and knowledge.

It is important that adults can help inform a child's opinion.

Adults can learn different views and how to be creative or communicate in different ways.

Adults' Reasons

Buy-in from adults leads to greater use.

It is important for adults to realize they are also impacted by child participation.

Motivated and inspired adults lead to greater use in general.

Seeing whether child participation practices help create the right conditions for increased participation from children.

5.2 What?

Children and policymakers were asked what should be measured to capture the impact of participation on children. Below are several examples:

Children's Responses

Have they gained new skills or learned how to be creative or improve communication?

How do they take action after hearing children's opinions?

Have they changed their views or been open-minded?

Have they learned about the challenges children face?

Adults' Responses

Knowledge of children's rights.

Gaining new skills, such as interacting with children and developing child-friendly materials.

Ability to effectively communicate what they have done.

Increased trust between adults and children.



Capturing the Impact on Adults

5.3 The Adults' Impact Tool



Title of Event / activity here

We want to understand what you got out of your involvement in child participation. *Let us know if you agree / disagree with the following:*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I learnt more about children's rights	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have better relationships with children	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have more empathy for children	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have a better understanding of the realities and diversity of children's lives	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I want to improve child participation in decision making	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I will provide feedback to children	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I will make information more child-friendly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I understand how to involve diverse groups (e.g. younger children) of children in decision-making	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have ended the activity with a fresh perspective	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have learnt new skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I wish to learn more about the topic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Any other comments: Is there anything else you got out of taking part?

5.4 How the Tool Can be Used

This information can be:

- Made available through a dedicated online questionnaire.
- Given by the facilitator in paper format.
- Sent electronically to adult participants who provide their email addresses.

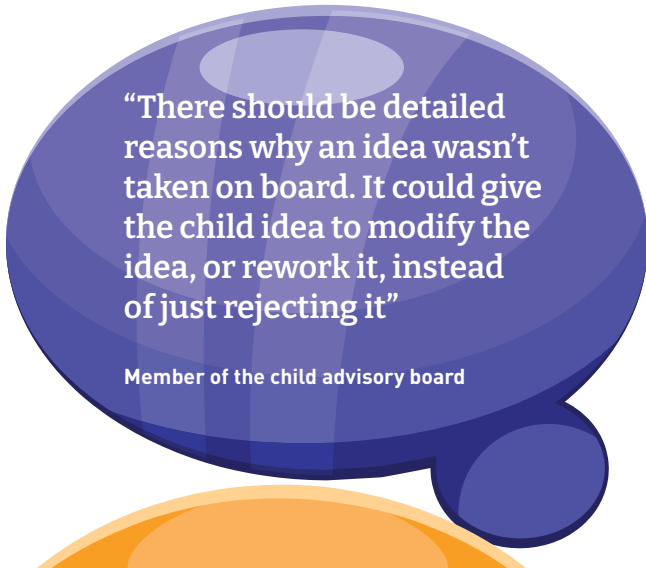
The questionnaire will be available on **empoweringchildren.gov.mt**



6. Capturing the Impact on Policy and Practice

6.1 Why?

Children and policymakers were asked why the impact of participation on policy and practice should be captured. Below are several reasons:



“There should be detailed reasons why an idea wasn’t taken on board. It could give the child idea to modify the idea, or rework it, instead of just rejecting it”

Member of the child advisory board



“Feedback should be distributed to those who are involved. But also reporting back to the kids.”

Policymaker from the Maltese Ministry of Social Policy and Children's Rights

Children's Reasons

Seeing if children are heard and feel understood.

Making children's views and opinions a reality.

Receiving feedback and respect.

Seeing how action is taken.

Adults' Reasons

Turning views and opinions into reality.

Showing commitment to children's ideas.

Ensuring children are informed.

Demonstrating respect for the children.

6.2 How?

Children and policymakers were asked how to capture the impact on policy and practice. They said that it should:

Children's Responses

Having discussions directly with the child who made the recommendations.

Ensuring information is recorded and written.

Implementing what the child is saying (speaking through actions).

Adults' Responses

Staying in contact through email, direct discussions, schools, or group settings.

Providing reasons for the actions taken.

Recording feedback, reactions, and confirming commitments for action.



6.3 The Policy Impact Tool



Here's what we did with what you said

We listened to your opinion *(summary of what children said)*

It is our responsibility to take your views seriously.

This is what we could do

Your idea was acted upon and action has been taken.

This is what we did.

(Provide description of what has occurred below)

Moving Forward:

(Adults to fill up information on follow up)

This is what we can't do and why

We could not act upon your idea because...

(money, ability, time, responsibility, etc)

Next steps:

(Adults to fill up information on follow up)

We would be in a position to reconsider if...

Thank you. You can still send us any other ideas through the app or website
empoweringchildren.gov.mt

6.4 How the Tool Can be Used

This information can be:

- Made available through a dedicated online questionnaire.
- Given by the facilitator in paper format.
- Sent electronically to adult participants who provide their email addresses.

The form will be available on **empoweringchildren.gov.mt** freely available to print.



7. Children's Reply to Policymakers Tool

In the process of working with the CAB, they suggested that there should be another tool where children can respond to the policymakers' feedback. This aligns well with the concept of rights-based participation which suggests that participation should not be a one-off event but an ongoing dialogue. This is the tool that the CAB children designed for this purpose.

Feedback Form



Thank you for your feedback.

Thank you for considering our ideas and opinions regarding:

I/We have read the feedback received. Having read your response, we would appreciate if you could consider our additional suggestions:

Thank you! We can be contacted in the following ways:

8. Appendices

A. Further Information on Capacity Building Events

The first phase of the Empowering Children's Participation Project resulted in a number of tangible achievements at the national level, making significant progress in establishing essential digital tools, engaging stakeholders, and advancing toward the objective of fostering a new collective mindset in how we approach and value child participation.



The first Capacity Building event took place in Malta from 27th to 29th, September 2023, at The Embassy Hotel in Valletta. The three-day event hosted 22 attendees and featured 5 guest speakers, including Marta Kuljon - Rights of the Child Team from the European Commission, Salvor Nordal - The Ombudsman for Children of Iceland, Antoinette Vassallo - Commissioner for Children in Malta, Anne O Donnell - Training, Facilitation, Child and Youth Rights Consultant, and Professor Paul Pace - EkoSkola. The sessions included the sharing of local and international best practices, offering theoretical and hands-on training on effective methods of working with children in policy and creating child-friendly policy documents. The event achieved success with 76.5% of attendees rating the training as very relevant or extremely relevant, while 97% believed that the presentations, tasks, and materials effectively met the capacity-building learning objectives.



The second Capacity Building took place in Gozo from 22nd to 24th April 2024. UCC started desk-based research in January 2024 aiming to gather all available resources on capturing the impact of participation, a domain where little comprehensive work has been done. This direction aimed to bridge the gap between children's actual needs and the adult-driven approach of such assessments, effectively creating a more robust evaluation tool.

The Child Advisory Board (CAB) were invited to the capacity building event in April. Here they were able to engage with all the attendees and give their opinion on how impact of participation should be collected and what indicators are of importance to them. It provided the first opportunity for the Maltese policymakers and the UCC team to meet the CAB which the Commissioner for Children (CFC) has been engaged with throughout the project.

B. Meetings of the Child Advisory Board

The Office of the Commissioner for Children (CFC) set up the Child Advisory Board (CAB). The children were presented with a choice of project logos for consultation and feedback and their final selection was chosen for the branding of the project. The children contributed to the design and layout of the Online Child Participation Platform and provided insights on the most effective way to create awareness about child participation among children, parents, educators, and other stakeholders. They worked on creating effective messages to be used for awareness raising, such as social media messages and scripts for public service announcements.

The first CAB meeting was held on 29/03/2023 and children were also consulted via email through the CFC. Physical meetings with children were held as follows:

Date	Purpose of Meeting	Output
29/03/2023	Kick-off meeting	Awareness on Children's Rights
17/05/2023	To Discuss the Social Media Campaign	CAB drafted a number of slogans on child participation to be used as part of the campaign
07/07/2023	To Discuss the Radio Campaign	CAB drafted a number of scripts for Public Service Announcements to be used as part of the radio campaign
06/09/2023	Promote the Role of the CAB	CAB produced a video on their role which was aired during the capacity Building seminars.
10/04/2024	Develop an Evaluation Tool	CAB put forward their ideas on how to measure the impact of Child Participation on Children, Adults and Policymakers
07/08/2024	Feedback on Drafted Tools	The CAB were presented with the draft tools and they provided their feedback and suggestions.

C. Co-Design with Policymakers

At the start of this 2nd Capacity Building event in April 2024, the research done by UCC was presented as a basis for discussion. The process of research conducted by UCC consisted of four steps:

- 1) Collecting information;
- 2) Creating a matrix with the information for various themes and points of interest;
- 3) Analysing the gaps of knowledge and what falls outside the scope of this project;
- 4) Formulating the 'Impact Statements'.

The initial collection and scoping went beyond just 'child' spaces, but rather identifying where similar toolkits existed in other fields (i.e. mental health, disability spaces).



Through the three sessions information was gathered from the input of children, the input of the policymakers in the room, and the research done prior to the event. The dialogues centred on asking three questions:

Why should impact be measured?

What should be measured?

How should this be communicated?



Several methods were used to engage in discussion and to gather information such as sticky dot voting next to statements or ideas policymakers most agreed with, and body mapping to identify various aspects and elements of child participation and their impact.

On the basis of these dialogues, three forms were created:

measuring impact on children,

measuring impact on adults,

feedback form on how participation impacted a policy.

These forms were presented to the CAB in July who provided their feedback, and further edits were made based on this dialogue.

Acknowledgments

Heartfelt thanks go to the entire team who contributed toward this project, particularly to the development of the VUCI toolkit. This project would not have been possible without the collaborative efforts, dedication, and expertise of each individual involved.

We are particularly grateful to Prof. Laura Lundy, a world-renowned pioneer in the area of child participation in decision making, for her vision in guiding this project together with other experts from University Cork College. Their unwavering commitment to ensuring meaningful impact of child participation in decision-making has been invaluable.

We wish to recognise the important role of the team of the Policy Development and International Affairs Directorate, within the Strategy and Implementation Division led by Director General Ms Alexia Vella and Director Mr Justin Facciol. Their important role in coordinating this project has been crucial in bringing this initiative to fruition. Heartfelt thanks also go to Ms Alison Meilak, the Project Manager, for her dedication and hard work throughout this project.

Special thanks go to the Commissioner for Children, Ms Antoinette Vassallo and her team, in particular Ms Suzanne Garcia Imbernon whose expertise in child engagement helped shape the core content of this toolkit. Their insights and contributions have ensured that this toolkit remains practical, child-centered, and impactful.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge the children and young people who contributed their ideas and perspectives during the development of this toolkit. Their participation and feedback were essential in shaping a resource that truly reflects the needs and rights of children.

This toolkit is a testament to the power of teamwork, collaboration, and a shared commitment to ensuring that children's voices are heard and valued in every aspect of society.



empoweringchildren.gov.mt



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR SOCIAL POLICY
AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh



Kummissarju għat-Tfal
Commissioner for Children