



Improving Justice in
Child Contact

PARTICIPATION TOOLKIT

December 2020

KEY MESSAGES

This toolkit has been produced as part of the Improving Justice in Child Contact project. It is aimed at women's and/or children's rights organisations across Europe wishing to undertake participation initiatives with children and young people relating to child contact and domestic violence.

PARTICIPATION TOOLKIT

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Terminology

Domestic violence

As outlined under the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention),¹ domestic violence:

- means all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim;
- disproportionately impacts women and is a manifestation of historically unequal relationships between men and women; and
- affects children as victims and not only as witnesses

Child contact

In cases of parental divorce or separation, child contact refers to the arrangements for the parent not living with the child (non-resident parent) to have contact with the child. These arrangements can be made informally by parents or through formal channels including court proceedings. This toolkit focuses on the formal legal systems that decide if, when, and how a child has contact with their non-resident parent in the context of domestic violence.

Children and young people

'Children' are defined in this toolkit as anyone under the age of 18, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We also refer to 'young people' which, for the purposes of this toolkit, means young adults between the ages of 18 and 25.

¹ Council of Europe (2014) The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence: Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168008482e>



Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 12 states that children have the right to express their views about matters affecting them and, moreover, for those views to be given due weight in decision-making.²

However, when it comes to children experiencing the court systems for child contact, this right can often be overlooked. It is well established from research undertaken in multiple countries that perpetrators of domestic violence frequently use child contact arrangements as a tool to continue abuse of women and children post-separation.³ If children's views on contact are not taken into account, the very systems designed to protect them can inadvertently increase risk of harm to them and their mothers. Conversely, the effective implementation of Article 12 – where children have been fully and effectively involved in determining the outcome of the decisions which affect them – is likely to ensure all other children's rights are recognised and promoted.⁴

[Improving Justice in Child Contact](#) (IJCC) aimed to address this by testing out models to better uphold children's rights in child contact systems and enhance children's participation in decision-making. In doing so, the ultimate aim was to improve child contact systems to better protect children and women who have experienced domestic violence.

The project, coordinated by partner organisations working on women's and children's rights in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Portugal, Romania, and Scotland, tested out two different models of children's participation originally piloted in Scotland: one at a national policy level and another at an individual level.

- **Participation model: Power Up/Power Down (PU/PD)** – This participation model focused on children and young people using their lived experiences of child contact in the context of domestic violence to influence and inform policy-making at a national level.

This participation project was undertaken jointly by [Scottish Women's Aid](#) and the [Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland](#). The project worked with 27 children aged between 6 and 17 to explore themes of power, children's rights, making their views heard in court, and how to improve the experiences and outcomes in contact decisions for children who have experienced domestic violence.

² UN Commission on Human Rights (1990) Convention on the Rights of the Child. Available at: https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/unicef-convention-rights-child-uncrc.pdf?_ga=2.258850190.545027101.1593081429-1790952204.1593081429

³ Bancroft, L., Silverman, J. & Ritchie, D. (2012) *The Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Families* (2nd Ed). Los Angeles: Sage; Australia's National Research Organization for Women's Safety (hereafter ANROWS) (2017) *Domestic and Family Violence and Parenting: Mixed Methods Insights into Impact and Support Needs: Key Findings and Future Directions*. Sydney: ANROWS; Bagshaw, D. Brown, T., Wendt, S., Campbell, A., McInnes, E., Tinning, B., Batagol, B., Sifris, A., Tyson, D., Baker, J. & Fernandez Arias, P. (2011) *The Effect of Family Violence on Post-Separation Parenting Arrangements' in Family Matters 86*. Canberra: Australian Government.

⁴ Lundy, L. (2007) "Voice" Is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child'. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6), pp.927-942.



Supported by specialist Women's Aid services, the children were given an illustrated story about two children who had experienced domestic violence and the family court system. The story was based on real life examples collected by Women's Aid groups across Scotland. The children and young people explored the story and then made changes to it to improve the outcomes for the children. Through this process the children and young people were able to identify key areas for positive change and they made recommendations for making the system better for children. These recommendations were then used to directly inform national policy and practice in Scotland.

- **Participation model: Child Contact Children's Rights Officer (CCCRO)** – This participation model focused on facilitating and empowering individual children to give their views when the court is making decisions about contact.

The model requires the involvement of a professional who, through a rights-based approach, supports children experiencing domestic violence to give their views and wishes on child contact to a judge. This professional is trained to understand and support children who have experienced domestic violence. Working as an advocate for children and supporting them to have their views represented, the CCCRO uses age-appropriate tools to help children tell the court what they want to happen with contact and why.

The IJCC project developed an additional participation model, a **Young Expert Group (YEG)**, to ensure that children and young people with lived experience of domestic violence were included in decision-making throughout the project. The YEG provided their expertise on key activities and advised the adults on how to involve children in the project safely, meaningfully, and ethically. With the support of adults, the YEG identified their own priorities for influencing decision-makers.

Using this toolkit

This toolkit complements wider resources on rights-centred participation of children through focusing on participation in the context of child contact and domestic violence. It aims to use the learning and best practice from the IJCC project to support women's and children's rights organisations across Europe to undertake initiatives to support children's participation relating to child contact and domestic violence.

A message from one of the project's young experts on the importance of participation

Yello! is the Young Expert Group for the IJCC project and our job is to support and guide the project overall—most of us have experience of different participation projects so we use that experience to make this project even better and have a successful outcome. Through Yello! and other projects, I have realised that participation projects are important and really do benefit us, as well as give us a voice and a chance to be listened to. It should be a priority to listen to children and young people and make them feel that their views matter, and this should be at the heart of a participation project.

These projects should be evaluated regularly to ensure that whatever you are trying to achieve is being worked towards, and it is vital for the young people to stay informed on what is going on at all times and what progress is being made (this is something that Yello! takes very seriously; we are always getting updates from the adults in the group on what has been happening and I value that a lot). Young people enjoy getting involved in projects like these, and personally it means a lot to me to be part of Yello! and be able to share my views and opinions on things that affect me and millions of other children and young people. It is inspiring seeing so many young people be brave enough to speak about their experiences and want to fight for change to make things better for everyone, and I am proud of myself and the other Yello! members for being so courageous! I hope that more projects and groups like Yello! are created so that even more young people have the opportunity to be heard and valued.

As we have said, enhancing children's participation in the context of child contact and domestic violence is crucial for better upholding children's rights and improving safety for both women and children experiencing domestic violence. This toolkit aims to facilitate such participation. However, it is important to recognise that meaningful participation requires significant resources, time, and skill. Not everyone will be in a



position to immediately implement the models outlined in this toolkit. Groundwork may be needed to ensure that participation can be safe, meaningful, and effective before embarking on your journey. We recognise that each particular context will be different and will therefore require tailored approaches. Therefore, while outlining the participation processes we followed in the IJCC project, this is not meant to be definitive; rather, it should be taken as a guide on what some of the important elements are when carrying out participation work on child contact and domestic violence.

Section 1 provides an overview of the key issues relating to child contact systems in the context of domestic violence. It highlights the similarities and differences experienced across the IJCC project partner countries.

Section 2 sets out general considerations for organisations to think about when adapting participation models to their context, including what needs to be in place before undertaking such initiatives.

Section 3 focuses on the *process* of participation in the context of child contact and domestic violence, using the IJCC participation models to provide practical steps and tools for taking a rights-based approach.

Section 4 focuses on using the *outputs* of participation to influence change in the context of child contact and domestic violence, including how to ensure children are active partners in speaking to power.

COVID-19

The IJCC Contact project took place from November 2018-2020, including therefore times when all project countries were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This toolkit is not specifically aimed at working in such circumstances but does include material and reflections which grew out of responses to that situation, such as developing ways of safely carrying out participation work with children and young people by virtual methods.

Section 1: Child contact and domestic violence

Despite IJCC project partners working across five countries and therefore operating within different legal definitions of domestic violence and different legal processes/frameworks, many of the problems around child contact and domestic violence were the same. As discussed previously, separation does not equate to safety for women and children; domestic violence will often continue or even intensify post-separation.⁵ Child contact and court processes are frequently used by perpetrators to continue their abuse of women and children post-separation.

This issue is exacerbated by wider issues within the court and contact system which further enable perpetrators to exert power and control. Key similarities experienced across the five countries included:

- **Lack of understanding in courts and among legal professionals of how children can be affected by domestic violence:** Children can be negatively affected in numerous ways by domestic violence even if they do not witness physical violence. This can include having their time and movements monitored and restricted alongside their mother, or the perpetrator deliberately undermining the mother-child relationship as part of their tactics of control.⁶ However, there can be a lack of recognition in courts about how children are impacted beyond witnessing physical violence.
- **Separation of parenting from partnering:** In spite of the substantial evidence that domestic violence is harmful to children, perpetrators' abusive behaviour is frequently separated from their parenting capacity by courts, rather than being seen as a parenting choice.⁷ This can lead to the attitude that domestic violence against the non-abusing parent, even when it is proven, is not a reason to prohibit contact with the child. This pro-contact philosophy can inadvertently minimise children's views and experiences.
- **Gendered double standards:** While male perpetrators are often viewed as 'good enough' fathers, women are often blamed for 'failing to protect' their child from domestic violence.
- **Restricted access to legal services:** Legal representation is expensive and often difficult to obtain. In addition, there is a lack of domestic violence-competent lawyers, which can discourage women from raising domestic violence concerns in child contact cases.
- **Issues with children's participation in decision-making:** While each country had different processes and laws in place around how children's views were included in

⁵ Thiara, R. & Harrison, C. (2016) "Safe not sorry": Supporting the campaign for safer child contact. Key issues raised by research on child contact and domestic violence. Commissioned literature review, Women's Aid. Coventry: University of Warwick.

⁶ Katz, E. (2016) 'Beyond the Physical Incident Model: How Children Living with Domestic Violence are Harmed By and Resist Regimes of Coercive Control', *Child Abuse Review*, 25(1), pp.46–59.

⁷ Mandel, D. & Rankin, H. (2018) '[Working with Men as Parents: Becoming Father-Inclusive to Improve Child Welfare Outcomes in Domestic Violence Cases](#)'. Columbus, OH: Family and Youth Law Center, Capital University Law School.



child contact proceedings, all experienced problems in ensuring children were able to participate fully and effectively in decision-making in court. Key to this was children having to fit into an adult-centred system rather than the system working to fit around children's needs.

Section 2: Getting started

What do we mean by participation?

Children’s right to participate as outlined under Article 12 of the UNCRC is one of the most well-known rights in the Convention, yet perhaps one of the least understood when it comes to its effective implementation. Participation is not just about listening to children’s views, but about these views actively influencing processes, decisions, and activities that affect their lives.⁸ Placing children in situations where they are told what they can say or exposing them to risk of harm through participation cannot be understood as implementing Article 12. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child published a General Comment on Article 12. This makes it clear that participation is an ongoing process, not a one-off event. Participation involves ‘dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account.’⁹ It specifies that in order to be effective, ethical, and meaningful, participation processes must be:

- Transparent and informative
- Voluntary
- Respectful
- Relevant to children’s lives
- Child-friendly
- Inclusive
- Supported by training
- Safe and sensitive to risk
- Accountable

We will go into further detail about taking a rights-based approach to participation in [Section 2](#).

Adapting participation models to your context: considerations before getting started

In the course of our journey implementing the IJCC participation models, we have encountered particular challenges that should be considered before starting. There are not always easy answers to these issues but considering them early on is helpful for informing your process and ensuring that participation is as effective and meaningful as

⁸ McMellon, C. & Tisdall, E.K.M. (2020) ‘Children and young people’s participation rights: looking backwards and moving forwards.’ *International Journal of Children’s Rights*, 28(1), pp.157-182.

⁹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009). General Comment No. 12: The right of the child to be heard. Available at: <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC-C-GC-12.pdf>



possible in upholding children's rights.

Contextualising your approach

As we have said, there will be a need to tailor your approach to participation according to your own specific context. While we experienced many similarities across our different countries, we were all working within different systems, meaning that our models had to adapt to fit within these systems. For example, if you are working in a context where there is little understanding or awareness of children's rights or how children are affected by domestic violence, there may be some initial groundwork to build capacity before you can take participation work forward (see the section on [dealing with resistance](#)). For example, one of the project partners found that before embarking on a participation model, they had to first prioritise awareness-raising around the lack of services for women and children affected by domestic violence and argue for stronger protection for children, including ensuring children's safety in relation to custody rights.

Translation of tools/concepts/systems

In relation to the activities and resources included in this toolkit, these have been included as they were found to be particularly successful in our experience of working with children. However, different groups of children will have different needs and you will likely have to adapt materials to better reflect the lived experiences and realities for children and young people in your particular context. For example, IJCC partners adapted the [original Power Up/Power Down stories from Scotland](#), changing character names or deleting scenes that did not align with their country context.

Domestic violence considerations

Safety

Safety must be a central consideration in all children's participation projects. Before starting a participation project with children, there needs to be a child safeguarding policy in place. All adults involved should be familiar with and understand the policy and child safeguarding procedures. It is best practice to have a designated child protection lead(s) who is responsible for implementing safeguarding policy and procedures and acts as a focal point for people to approach about child safeguarding issues (for a helpful overview of the specific tasks and requirements of a child protection lead, see page 138 of ['Operations Manual On Children's Participation In Consultations'](#) by the Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation¹⁰.)

In addition to general safeguarding measures, it is important to consider the particular risks when working with children and young people experiencing domestic violence, where their very involvement may put them at risk of retaliation from the perpetrator. Safety is context-driven, so the safety elements we outline in this toolkit will need to be adjusted according to the particular context you are working in. Be ready to change safety protocols as needed. For instance, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic required

¹⁰ Available at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/3337/pdf/3337.pdf>



IJCC partners to develop methods of working safely online with children and young people to continue their participation work, such as ensuring that the children and young people still had access to support.

Children's access to specialist support

The participation models in this toolkit worked with children and young people who have experienced distressing events in their lives; while every care was taken to minimise distress for those taking part, the subject of the work can bring up bad memories. As such, it is essential to provide access to support from professionals with specialist knowledge of domestic violence and its impact on children. It is most effective to involve specialist workers who already have an established relationship with the children and young people taking part. For instance, if you are working with children in a domestic violence shelter who have a trusted relationship with particular staff members, those staff should be included in the participation work if possible. This ensures that, if bad memories are brought up, children have someone in the room who already knows their story and is able to provide support accordingly without children having to retell distressing events. If it is not possible for such workers to attend every session with children, they should be in attendance at initial events until trust is built with other participation leads.

If you do not have specialist domestic violence support in place, it is advisable to first build a partnership with specialist domestic violence services. Alternatively, you can carry out participation with a group of children and young people who have knowledge of issues around gender equality but as far as you know have not been impacted by domestic violence. But you must always be prepared, as domestic violence is frequently underreported and you may not know if someone has experienced it.

Involving mothers

When working with children and young people experiencing domestic violence, there is another survivor to take into account. Domestic violence is a shared experience by women and children; while this does not mean they should be bracketed into one, the intertwined nature of their experiences must be acknowledged. Be aware of how a child's involvement in a participation project may impact mothers: for instance, they may worry that the child's involvement could 'out' the family as survivors of domestic violence, or that the safety of their child may be at risk. Risk assessment for children's involvement needs to be a shared process with mothers given the shared experience of domestic violence.¹¹ Mothers need to be given information about the process of participation in a way that balances the child's right to privacy with the mother's duty to protect her child's best interests. For instance, we have found it helpful to share information with mothers on activities so they know what will be discussed generally, but not sharing the detail of what children say in each session. Similarly, it is important to be clear with children from the outset that if you are concerned about their safety, you may have to share what they tell you with their mothers.

¹¹ Houghton, C. (2016) 'IMPACT Briefing 2: An ethics model for involving young survivors in policy-making'. IMPACT briefing series: children, young people and domestic abuse.

Resource considerations

Capacity

A key piece of learning from project partners is the level of time and capacity required for the participation models to work effectively. Partners confirmed that coordinating a project like PU/PD or a Young Expert Group could easily be a full-time job. If it is not possible to have a full-time worker to coordinate your participation work, consider how to ensure that adults coordinating participation work have protected time in their work-plan to take this forward.

Reimbursement and remuneration

It is also important to consider the resources required for valuing children and young people's time and effort. Children and young people should never be expected to spend money in order to take part: factor in costs for all expenses that will need to be covered, such as transportation, any materials they may need, and meals and refreshments. In addition, it is good practice to have recognition and reward schemes in place to demonstrate to children and young people that their involvement is appreciated and to ensure that participation is reciprocal (i.e. that children and young people are getting something out of being involved). This can be things like vouchers, fun activities/outings, and certifications that formally recognise the skills and qualities children and young people have developed through taking part. Cash payments are another option, though care should be taken to ensure that this does not affect the principle of voluntary participation nor cause problems with social security benefits.

Having the right space

Our experience has found that the space in which participation activities are undertaken is crucial to consider. Make sure you can access appropriate spaces to carry out participation activities ahead of time.

Safety is an important element; there may be areas where it is unsafe for children to go due to the risk of running into their perpetrator. If you are renting a space to carry out activities, make sure that the area where it is based is safe for everyone to attend. Try to meet in neutral spaces rather than domestic violence shelters.

Meeting spaces should also be child-friendly. Working with children in adult-centric spaces such as offices can be uncomfortable and even intimidating. Working in a bright, colourful space with comfortable seats will help put children at ease.

IJCC partners have used this checklist (see [Appendix 1](#)) when finding venues to carry out participation activities.



A child-friendly space used by IJCC project partners in Portugal (this photo does not include children who took part in the IJCC project and is included with permission from the young people featured)

Children and young people's participation: inclusivity considerations

A key principle of a rights-based approach is non-discrimination (as outlined in UNCRC Article 2). Children should not be excluded from taking part on the grounds of any characteristics; participation initiatives must avoid existing forms of discrimination and take steps to actively encourage opportunities for marginalised children.¹² We will go into steps we took to create an inclusive environment for children in [Section 3](#). However we wish to spotlight three particular issues around inclusivity here that emerged as key pieces of learning from the project:

Gender and participation

Our understanding of domestic violence is that it is deeply gendered and disproportionately impacts women. We understand domestic violence to be a cause and consequence of gender inequality. As such, it was important that the participation projects did not replicate harmful gender norms. This involved consideration of a number of factors, including:

- Encouraging all children to participate including both boys and girls – it is important to encourage girls to participate in such initiatives, building their capacity as leaders of the future in using their voices for change. Equally, it is important to acknowledge the impact of domestic violence on boys and ensure their participation. We found boys to be under-represented in our participation work and would encourage steps to be taken to ensure that boys are supported to take part through validating their experiences of domestic violence and building their capacity as allies in the fight for gender equality.
- Challenging gendered norms and attitudes – in mixed groups, be aware of not reinforcing gender stereotypes (e.g. that girls are quiet and obedient, boys are leaders). Children are exposed to such stereotypes from a young age – it is therefore important that gender as a power dynamic is taken into account when working in a mixed group to ensure that it does not hinder the participation of any children. This may involve things like undertaking activities with your group that challenge gender stereotypes and build their understanding and awareness of gender equality.
- Supporting gender non-conforming children – part of challenging gender norms and stereotypes is acknowledging that some children do not identify with the gender identity they were assigned at birth, nor indeed with any gender. Trans and non-binary children are particularly vulnerable to bullying and harassment due to transphobic attitudes and it is important to take their particular experiences into account in relation to domestic violence. When inviting children to take part in participation work, beware of your messaging; is it unintentionally excluding to gender non-conforming children?

¹² Bird, D., Hagger-Vaughan, A., Pinto, L., O'Toole, L., Ros-Steinsdottir, T. & Schuurman, M. (2020) *We Are Here: A Child Participation Toolbox*. (1st ed.). Brussels: Eurochild & Learning for Well-being Foundation. Available at: https://www.eurochild.org/fileadmin/public/05_Library/Thematic_priorities/05_Child_Participation/Eurochild/We_Are_Here_Toolbox.pdf



Age and participation

Meaningful, inclusive participation starts from the assumption that all children are capable of expressing their views and that they should be supported to do so in a way that is appropriate for them.¹³ It is therefore important to be flexible with age requirements and not to prevent younger children from taking part on the basis of their age.

Do not assume that putting children of the same age group together will necessarily be the best format: one eight-year-old child can be very mature and naturally gravitate towards older children, whereas another eight-year-old may feel more comfortable with younger children and more playful activities. Similarly, working with a mixed-age group is not automatically problematic; children often tend to take on different roles in such groups, with some being group helpers/mentors and others taking on the 'youngest' role.

It can therefore be helpful to have some one-on-one sessions with children before starting groupwork, to assess the best mix of groups and help to pitch activities at the right level to ensure that everyone understands without some feeling bored or patronised.

Digital exclusion

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the issue of digital exclusion. The project had to move to virtual working with children and young people; however, many of them did not have access to devices or phones, or lived in rural/remote locations with limited internet connection. With key support spaces (e.g. schools, community centres) closed, this proved a huge challenge in being able to continue working with children and young people.

In an increasingly technical world, digital exclusion is a highly present issue. Be aware of this when promoting opportunities for participation. Do not assume that children and young people you are working with have access to phones or the Internet; when working with a new group, establish individually what is the best form of communication for them. If much of your participation work will be carried out online, you may need to invest in providing devices for children and young people (for more information on working virtually with children and young people, see [Appendix 11](#)).

¹³ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) General Comment No. 12: The right of the child to be heard. Available at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC-C-GC-12.pdf>



Section 3: ‘Process, not just outcome’: Taking a children’s rights approach

Overview

A human rights-based approach has been articulated through the international development field. Unlike a ‘needs’ framework, which focuses on fulfilling the needs of marginalised people, a ‘rights’ framework provides a stronger basis for social change because it places obligations on states, as rights duty bearers, to respect, protect, and promote human rights.

For the purposes of this toolkit, two principles of a human rights-based approach are especially relevant:

- **Accountability:** governments and other rights duty-bearers must demonstrate to rights-holders how they have fulfilled their obligations to protect and promote human rights. Rights-holders are entitled to redress if duty-bearers do not uphold their obligations.
- **Participation:** all rights-holders are entitled to participate in the development of policies, programmes, and mechanisms affecting their rights.¹⁴

Building on these principles, a children’s rights approach is one that specifically furthers the realisation of children’s rights as laid down in the UNCRC and other international human rights instruments by:

- using child rights standards and principles from the UNCRC and other international human rights instruments to guide behaviour, actions, policies, and programmes;
- building the capacity of children as rights-holders to claim their rights; and
- building the capacity of adults as duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations to children.¹⁵

A children’s rights approach focuses on the process – not just the outcomes – of upholding children’s rights. Key to this is ensuring that adults understand their obligations as duty-bearers to promote, protect, and uphold children’s rights. Under the UNCRC, this is principally the Government, but the Convention also makes clear that all adults are duty-bearers; parents, teachers, service providers, and the wider community are all responsible for enabling children to enjoy their rights to the full and demonstrating to children how they are fulfilling this duty.

Therefore, before the stage of working with children and young people on your

¹⁴ UNDG (2003) The human rights-based approach to development cooperation: Towards a common understanding among UN agencies. Available at: https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/6959-The_Human_Rights_Based_Approach_to_Development_Cooperation_Towards_a_Common_Understanding_among_UN.pdf

¹⁵ UNICEF (2014) Child rights education toolkit: Rooting child rights in early childhood education, primary and secondary schools. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/media/63081/file/UNICEF-Child-Rights-Education-Toolkit.pdf>



participation project, make sure that all adults on the project are fully equipped as duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations. Think about whether there is any specific training or information you would find helpful on children's rights. There may be organisations in your country, such as a children's rights ombudsman, who can help to build your knowledge and capacity.

We will address empowering children to claim their rights further below.

Taking a children's rights approach

The experiences of living with domestic violence (and inappropriate responses from services) prevent the full realisation of children's rights in numerous ways. Some of these are obvious, such as children's right to be protected from all forms of violence, abuse, and neglect (UNCRC Article 19). However, children's rights may also be affected in less obvious ways. For instance, a child's right to relax and play may be undermined through deliberate social isolation by the perpetrator. Their right to education can be at risk through having to move schools repeatedly or not being able to complete their homework at night.

Participation activities need to take steps to address the negative impacts of domestic violence on children, by actively promoting their rights. Using a rights-based approach to participation with children affected by domestic violence is important because:

- A children's rights approach takes a holistic view of a child's wellbeing rather than focusing on just one area (e.g. safety is vital but it is also important to consider other things like children's right to privacy, their right to give their views in matters affecting them, etc.). This helps to ensure that we do not just define participating children solely through their experiences of domestic violence, but all aspects of their identity and personality. Children and young people involved in the IJCC project were clear that they did not want their experiences of domestic violence to define them.
- Learning about their rights can be empowering for children affected by domestic violence; seeing themselves as independent rights-holders can help them to reframe their experiences of domestic violence as a violation of their rights, increase their sense of self-worth, and may increase their confidence and skills in claiming their rights when engaging with agencies/services.
- A children's rights approach helps to uphold children's status as social actors who are able to propose solutions to their lives, rather than being viewed and treated as passive subjects. This is important in the context of recovery from domestic violence, where children's space for action is often restricted alongside their mother's.¹⁶

Implementing a rights-based approach

This section outlines how IJCC project partners took a children's rights approach to

¹⁶ Houghton, C. (2015) 'Young People's perspectives on participatory ethics: Agency, power and impact in domestic abuse research and policy-making.' *Child Abuse Review*, 24, pp.235-248.



participation, reflecting on learning from all partner countries. We set out the process we took for each model, highlighting what worked well, things to be aware of, and useful tools/resources.

Given the focus of the models on facilitating children's participation, we use Lundy's conceptualisation of implementing UNCRC Article 12 as a framework to discuss the process of each IJCC participation model.

Figure: Lundy's Voice Model Checklist for Participation as included in Ireland's National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020¹⁷



¹⁷ Ireland Department of Children and Youth Affairs, National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020 (17 June 2015), p. 21. Accessible here: <http://dcya.gov.ie/documents/playandrec/20150617NatStratParticipationReport.pdf>

Lundy's model provides a way of conceptualising Article 12 of the UNCRC in a way which focuses on its four key elements:

- **Space:** Children must be given the **opportunity** to express a view. This involves ensuring: that children are invited to take part if they wish to give their views, and that children have an inclusive space to take part in a way which does not risk reprisal for doing so.
- **Voice:** Children must be **facilitated** to express their views. This involves ensuring: children have information needed to make an informed view, activities and information are age-appropriate and child-friendly, and practical assistance is provided to children to enable them to give their views.
- **Audience:** The view must be **listened** to. This involves ensuring that children have a 'right of audience' – a guaranteed opportunity for their views to be communicated to those with the responsibility to listen.
- **Influence:** The view must be **acted** upon, as appropriate. This involves ensuring that adults not only listen to children but that they take children's views seriously. While this cannot be universally guaranteed, one incentive/safeguard is to ensure that children are told how their views are taken into account.

The model reflects the fact that these elements are interrelated. It depicts the fact that Article 12 has an explicit chronology. The first stage is ensuring the child's right to express a view. Following on from this is the child's right to have the view given due weight. However, in recognition of the fact that the decision-making processes are rarely static, the model acknowledges that, once the child is informed of the extent of influence, the process may begin again. Finally, the model represents the fact that Article 12 can only be implemented effectively when upholding other UNCRC provisions; in particular Article 2 (non-discrimination), Article 3 (best interests), Article 5 (right to guidance from adults), Article 13 (right to seek, receive and impart information), and Article 19 (protection from abuse).

Below, we highlight how each IJCC model addressed these elements, focusing particularly on 'space' and 'voice'.¹⁸ We will go into further detail on the elements of 'audience' and 'influence' in [Section 4](#).

Note: While we have outlined the participation processes in a linear fashion to enable clarity for those wishing to do similar projects, it is important to note that the elements are interrelated and overlap with one another; for instance, being accountable to children on how their views are being used should not just happen at the end of, but throughout the process.

Participation model: Power Up/Power Down

Summary of model: The Power Up/Power Down (PU/PD) model works with children with lived experience of domestic violence to make recommendations to improve the court system in relation to child contact and domestic violence. Over a series of sessions, children explore a story outlining children's journey through the child contact system. The story is based on lived experiences of women and children affected by domestic violence. Using a children's rights framework, the children make changes to the story to improve the outcomes for the child characters. The children's recommendations are presented to decision-makers and are used to inform relevant policy and practice.

A note of caution on the use of 'voice' ¹⁷

The use of 'voice' to describe the process of children giving their views can be a problematic one. There are two key issues to bear in mind when using this term:

- *Firstly, the term can be excluding to children who do not/cannot communicate through voice but through non-verbal means.*
- *Secondly, the very term 'children's voices' risks placing children into a single category rather than taking into account the diversity of children's lives and experiences (James 2007). One child's voice is not representative of all children, or even groups of children; and it is important to recognise that some children's voices are given more prominence than others.*

In using Lundy's concept of 'voice', we do not wish to reinforce the above and acknowledge the term's limitations.

¹⁸ For the note of caution on the use of 'voice', please see James, A. (2007) 'Giving voice to children's voices: practices and problems, pitfalls and potentials'. *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 109(2), In Focus: Children, Childhoods, and Childhood Studies (Jun., 2007), pp. 261-272. and Tisdall, E.K.M. (2018) 'Applying human rights to children's participation in research', in Twomey, M. and Carroll, C. (eds.) *Seen and Heard*. Oxford: Peter Lang, pp. 17-38.

Space requires:

- Providing children the opportunity to give their views, not excluding children on the basis of age or other characteristics.
- Ensuring a safe space for children to give their views without fear of rebuke or reprisal.
- Project leads partnered with specialist domestic violence services to support children taking part in the project and to advise on safety and wellbeing processes. These were discussed ahead of involving children in the project. All adults taking part were made aware of relevant organisational child protection policies and procedures.
- Domestic violence support workers approached children they were working with to explore their interest in taking part in the project. Workers provided child-friendly, age-appropriate information on what the project was about, what taking part would involve, and how their views were going to be used. This enabled children and their non-abusing parent (mother) to give **informed consent** to taking part.
- As the safety and wellbeing of the children involved was paramount, support workers discussed and assessed the potential risks of taking part with the child and their mother. If these risks were considered too serious, the child did not get involved (e.g. in cases where the child was still living with the perpetrator, this was generally considered too great a risk). If the risks were seen as manageable (e.g. keeping children's identities anonymous outside the project), then children got involved. This assessment was not just about safety but about children's wider wellbeing; for some children still recovering from traumatic experiences, it may be too distressing to take part in a project that could bring up bad memories. This needs to be assessed for each individual child as not everyone will have the same reaction and with care not to create yet another barrier frustrating children's rights to participate. These discussions took place ahead of, and throughout, the child's involvement in the project.

To ensure children's best interests were protected from the start of the project, workers were clear with children (and their mothers) about:

- *their right to choose to take part in the project, and the option to stop taking part at any time if it was too upsetting/difficult.*
- *being able to access extra support from their trusted support worker outside of the participation sessions if bad memories were brought up.*

- A space was arranged for children to do the PU/PD sessions. Care was taken to ensure that this space was child-friendly, comfortable, provided a quiet space for children to take a break if they needed, and catered to any additional needs of the children taking part (e.g. wheelchair accessible). For instance, one project partner worked with local stakeholders to secure a space dedicated to children and young people's rights owned by the city council to carry out their sessions.
- In the very first session with children, key issues were discussed before exploring the PU/PD stories. This included the beginning and closure of the sessions, the end of the project, and evaluations. Together, children and adults drafted a group agreement about safety and confidentiality. Having agreed upon these rules and making it clear that they were open to discussion as the project developed, the journey could begin.

UNCRC Articles 3 (best interests) and 19 (protection from abuse) are particularly relevant here. In addition to ensuring that general safeguarding measures and protocols are in place to protect children from violence and exploitation, it is vital to ensure children's participation will not increase their risk from the domestic violence perpetrator or set back their recovery.

What worked well

- Making use of existing partnerships is helpful for accessing child-friendly spaces, rights resources, etc.
- If working with children living in a domestic violence shelter, holding the sessions elsewhere is positive for enabling some distance from children's own experiences.

What we learned

- It is important to check in with mothers regularly throughout the project, not just at the beginning, to reassure them that taking part in the project is not harmful for their child. For example, sending a text message after a session to update mothers on how the session went for their child, showing them the physical space where the sessions will be held, inviting them to attend the first introductory session, etc.
- Relationships are crucial to this type of participation work and time needs to be taken to build these. Having an introductory session with children is important not only for establishing safety and wellbeing procedures, but in developing relationships within the group before getting started.

Tools/resources

- [Child Protection Policy](#) (Eurochild) – example child protection policy setting out essential safeguarding principles and child protection procedures
- Ground rules agreement ([Appendix 2](#)) – this was used to set and agree safety procedures with the children at the first session, and to be reflected upon at each subsequent session.



Voice requires:

- Children need information to make an informed view.
- Information and activities are age-appropriate and child-friendly, enabling the child to give their views in the way that works best for them.
- Children have practical assistance to give their views.

- The children took part in 6-8 sessions over the course of the project. Sessions were spaced out in a way that enabled children to have the time to digest the information between sessions, without leaving too long in between (e.g. once or twice a week). Sessions were designed to ensure that children and young people were able to give their views in a way that worked best for them and minimised distress while taking part. This included measures such as:

- having long breaks during each session;
- ensuring the sessions were fun and enjoyable (this is not, as Houghton says, a 'frivolous principle' – enjoyment and trust are vital to children and young people feeling able to talk about domestic violence);¹⁹
- having snacks and meals at every session; and
- providing small 'thank you' gifts (e.g. fidget toys, arts and crafts materials) at each session to show appreciation for children contributing their time.

- A key principle of a rights-based approach is building the capacity of rights-holders (children) to claim their rights. If children are not aware of what their rights are, they cannot claim them. Therefore, before getting children's views on how to improve court-ordered contact processes in the context of domestic violence, children needed knowledge and understanding of their rights, in order to be able to evaluate how these rights are currently being met in the court system. The initial sessions varied across project partners – some included children's rights activities in an introductory session, while others carried out rights-based activities over the first few sessions. Children were also provided with evaluation tools



'Thank you' gifts for children

Article 3 (best interests) is relevant here. When it comes to participation projects, applying the best interests principle means that taking part should not have any negative impact on children. Given the potentially upsetting subject matter of the project, it was important to take steps to mitigate any possible negative impact on the children's wellbeing, and to actively seek to ensure that taking part in the project was a positive and rewarding experience.

¹⁹ Houghton, C. (2016) 'IMPACT Briefing 2: An ethics model for involving young survivors in policy-making'. IMPACT briefing series: children, young people and domestic abuse.

to hold the adults involved in the project accountable for upholding their rights throughout the project. This helped them to apply their rights practically, building their capacity to make recommendations on changing the court system in later sessions.

- Children needed information about the court system conveyed to them in order to be able to make informed recommendations on what needs to change. However, this could be potentially distressing to children, some of whom had bad experiences of the court system. Using a story to explore topics personal to many children enabled some distance from their own experiences. The storybook form enabled a child-friendly way to provide information about the court system and get children's views on making improvements. Over the course of the sessions, the children explored the story and made changes to it to ensure that the child characters were safe and had their rights upheld.

UNCRC Articles 2 (non-discrimination) and 13 (right to information) are particularly relevant here.

As a participation project, it was important that all children involved in PU/PD were supported to take part to the best of their ability. This meant ensuring that resources and information were accessible for all children taking part, and workshops adjusted according to needs. For instance sessions were tailored to be appropriate to children's age and stage of development and providing both group work and one-to-one work assessed on individual need.



This is Mia – she’s 7 years old and loves animals and Lego. This is Zayne. He’s 11 years old and loves Pokémon and playing basketball. They live with Mum, Dad and their dog Toto.

A page from the original story given to children

(A brief note on the story approach: In the original Scottish pilot, a story was created ahead of children’s involvement, focusing on two siblings going through the contact system. IJCC partners found the Scottish story helpful, although they had to adapt it by taking out some scenes as they did not fit their country context. If you wish to create a story from scratch, be aware that this is a time-consuming process and should be factored into resourcing and planning from the start of the project.)

- Following completion of the sessions, there was a celebration event to thank children for their involvement and to acknowledge their achievement.



Children making changes to the original story

What worked well

- Making activities as dynamic, playful, and physically active as possible keeps children more engaged. Activities that require writing should not last too long.
- Adapting the story to a role play was helpful for keeping children engaged and reminding them of the story at the start of each session. If doing role play activities, be aware about who plays the role of the perpetrator; this should be an adult rather than a child, and care should be taken in portraying this.
- Having staff reflect at the end of each session is important for capturing any concerns about children and ensuring that staff have everything they need to be able to continue taking part.
- Taking time for celebration of the children's achievements is an important means of helping young participants feel valued, as well as providing a sense of closure.

What we learned

- While the story format is useful in many ways, it can be an overwhelming amount of information for children. Introducing the story in phases, over a number of sessions rather than all at once, is more accessible for children.
- Be ready to adapt your sessions at short notice: for instance, if an activity is not working well or some children are absent from the session.
- Having a larger adult-to-child ratio than you might normally have with other participation work is helpful due to the particular needs of children affected by domestic violence. For instance, if one child becomes distressed and needs to leave the group, there should be enough adults present for someone to support that child and to enable the activity to continue for other children. This does **not** mean that there should be more adults than children, rather that there are enough adults to provide the required support for the group.
- In spite of their fear of the perpetrator, many children still love them and worry about their welfare. It is important to be aware of this as an issue and concern for children and not to dismiss it.
- Break times in the sessions were the space in which support needs or concerns from children would most often emerge. Having an unstructured, informal period where children and adults had the space to chat was beneficial for enabling disclosures and further highlights the importance of having regular breaks for children in this context.

Tools/resources

- 'Introduction to rights' session plan ([Appendix 3](#)) – this session plan provides activities and resources to explore children's rights under the UNCRC and to introduce the concept of rights as a form of power.
- Rights' checklist ([Appendix 4](#)) – this questionnaire was used by children to assess how their rights were being upheld during every session.



- Power Up/Power Down original stories ([Appendix 5](#)) – the original story presented to children and young people in Scotland
- Power Up/Power Down role play activity ([Appendix 6](#)) – activity to refresh the children’s memory of the story between sessions
- Session evaluation activity ([Appendix 7](#)) – activity to enable children to give genuine feedback on sessions

Audience requires:

- A guaranteed opportunity to communicate children’s views to an identifiable individual or body with the responsibility to listen
- At the children’s celebration event at the end of the PU/PD sessions, they were reminded what their views were going to be used for and who was going to hear those views.
- The children’s views and recommendations were made into short videos to be presented to key decision-makers. The original story and rewritten story were made into a [booklet](#) to be used as an advocacy tool.
- Children’s views and recommendations were shared at events with key stakeholders from multiple professions (including the justice system, social work, education, etc.) to inform their work. Children were invited to attend an event with stakeholders (where this was safe to do so) to see how their views were being heard.
- Children were supported to meet directly with people in power. The original pilot in Scotland supported children to meet the First Minister for Scotland and to explain directly to her what they wanted to see change for children. Being met by the most powerful person in Scotland reinforced to the children that their views were worthy of respect and consideration and made them feel valued. (Best practice in supporting children to meet people in power is discussed in more detail in [Section 4](#)).

Influence requires:

- Children’s views to be taken seriously; there is accountability and transparency to children and they are told how their views are taken into account.
- Adult leads on the project fed back to children what influence their views had. For instance, in the original Scottish project, professionals attending the launch event of the children’s recommendations were asked to make short video messages of how they were going to use what they had learned from the children’s views in their own work. These messages were later presented to the children involved. As one young person stated, ‘This helped me to see that there were workers who were really interested

Article 13 (right to information) is particularly relevant here. Children have a right to access information about how their views are being used; this involves open communication channels for children beyond the lifetime of the project.

and listening to what young people were saying.’ The First Minister sent a written response to the children following their meeting with her, outlining how the Scottish Government’s actions were being informed by what the children had recommended.

- At the end of the project, adult leads provided their professional contact details to children to ensure that they were able to get in touch with any questions or updates about how their views were being used.

A note on endings

In addition to ensuring children finish on a positive note through celebrating their achievements, children need time to evaluate their involvement in a participation project. This is helpful: for children to reflect on their experience, to capture impact on the children’s own development, and to inform future participation projects you may do. Consider the following points:

- How will you keep in touch with children after the project? Even though the project is over, it will inform your ongoing work in the area of child contact and domestic violence. It is helpful for children to see how their views and recommendations have continued to have impact even after their involvement has officially ended. In addition to things like updating them by email, you could do creative things like a reunion one year after the project has ended.
- Is there opportunity for the children to continue being involved? While some will be happy to move on after their time on the project, others may be keen to continue being involved. For instance, some children from the Scottish PU/PD project later became members of the IJCC Young Expert Group as they had expressed that they wished to continue being involved in such projects.

Participation model: Child Contact Children’s Rights Officer (CCCRO)

Summary of model: The CCCRO role entails a dedicated worker supporting children experiencing domestic violence to give their views on contact to the court. The worker is knowledgeable and experienced in the dynamics of domestic violence and the impact of trauma, child wellbeing and development, and children’s rights. They are solely responsible for supporting the child to give their views rather than providing their professional recommendation to the court; however, if they identify a child protection risk, they will make this known to the relevant agencies. They are also able to refer children to other support services if the CCCRO identifies a need for additional support and guidance.

Space requires:

- Providing children the opportunity to give their views; not excluding children on the basis of age or other characteristics.
- Ensuring a safe space for children to give their views without fear of rebuke or reprisal.

As this model centres around a particular professional role, a large part of establishing space for children to give their views in this context is about setting up and developing



the role, ensuring that it can function properly and fulfil the aim of upholding children's rights.

- A case was built for developing the CCCRO role to ensure buy-in and obtain the resources required for the role to function. In the Scottish model, this developing a new role at the local council level, building on the remit of an existing children's rights officer who had identified a crucial gap in the service relating to child contact and domestic violence. Another IJCC partner worked with national decision-makers to approve the inclusion of a CCCRO role as a core staff member in a newly-created crisis centre for women victims of violence and their children.
- Once the CCCRO was in post, the first six months were spent refining the remit of the role, setting up a referral mechanism to the service, and developing the processes for giving the child's views to the court. This involved building relationships with court officials and judges and negotiating a process for obtaining children's views that was child-friendly and safe, but also adhered to court procedures and would be accepted by judges. In particular, procedures around confidentiality and who would get to see the child's views needed to be made clear, given concerns around potential reprisal from the perpetrator.
- The CCCRO set up a system for children to be referred to the service. Criteria did not exclude children on the basis of age, ensuring that even very young children could be referred. The CCCRO identified potential sources of referral in the local area (e.g. health, education, social work etc.) and approached them to explain her role and how to refer children to her service.
- The CCCRO built relationships with key agencies, including police, the local domestic violence and sexual assault team, specialist domestic violence services, social work, and education. These agencies were important for being able to access information and resources (e.g. child-friendly spaces) needed for the CCCRO to do their job effectively.

Article 2 (non-discrimination) and Article 3 (best interests) are particularly relevant here. It is vital that the CCCRO role is inclusive of all children needing the service, including very young children and those with additional support needs (e.g. disabilities).

The processes for obtaining children's views must be developed with their best interests as the primary consideration; the children's safety and wellbeing needs to be a top priority above 'gathering information' for the judge.

What worked well

- When building the case for a CCCRO role, it was helpful to centre it on the human rights' argument that upholding children's rights is an obligation; all European countries have ratified the UNCRC and therefore have a duty to take steps to uphold the rights it sets out.
- On a practical level, raising awareness of the CCCRO role as an early intervention measure was also helpful for overcoming resistance to financing it. Through investing in such a role, the inclusion of children's views helps courts to make better decisions that keep child safe, saving money in the long-term.
- In the Scottish context, the CCCRO role was developed partially as a result of the PU/PD project and the recommendations that the children made for improving the court process. The role is, therefore, grounded in what children want and highlights how similar participation projects can be used to build a case for such a role.
- It was important to create a new role rather than embed it into an existing one, given the specific set of skills and knowledge required to be effective.
- While the role should work closely with the court, it should not sit within the court system. This enables more autonomy for working in a child-centred way.
- The Scottish model funded the role through local authority funding dedicated to tackling violence against women and girls. This was useful for focusing the role on children's rights specifically in the context of domestic violence and being accountable to a set of requirements grounded in a gendered understanding of domestic violence.
- Building a relationship with court officials as well as judges was helpful for navigating court processes and procedures. Court officials organised for the Scottish CCCRO to sit in on court processes early in the role, which was helpful to build her knowledge and understanding of court processes.
- Keeping the referral process as simple as possible ensures better take up of the service. Enabling parents, as well as professionals, to refer assists children to access the support.

What we learned

- The CCCRO role cannot operate in isolation. To function effectively, it is essential to have supportive structures in place at the local level from multi-agency stakeholders.
- Time needs to be spent building credibility of the role among stakeholders, particularly judges. This requires open communication and ongoing dialogue. In the Scottish model, the CCCRO's background in social work role was a helpful factor, as she was a known entity to the courts having frequently given evidence in child protection cases previously. This is not to say that the CCCRO role should necessarily be from a social work background; however, in the Scottish context, this was helpful for building credibility. Consider what concerns judges may have and what may be helpful to overcome these if developing such a role in your context.

Tools/resources

- Overview of the Cyprus 'Women's House' model, including a CCCRO role (see [Appendix 9](#))

Voice requires:

- Children need information to make an informed view.
- Information and activities are age-appropriate and child-friendly, enabling the child to give their views in the way that works best for them.
- Children have practical assistance to give their views.

Children can be fearful of giving their views for many reasons, including reprisals from the perpetrator. Some may have bad experiences with other agencies or processes, and therefore be distrustful. They are often being asked to talk about difficult things which can be distressing. Given the context the CCCRO works in, they take several steps to make sure that the child is facilitated to give their views in a way that works for them.

- On receiving a referral, the CCCRO checks in with any relevant agencies involved in the child's life (e.g. domestic violence team, social work) to gain a picture of what might be helpful for the child in giving their views.
- The CCCRO sends the child and their non-abusing parent (usually the mother) some information about themselves and their role ahead of meeting the child. They do a home visit to the child to introduce themselves, and then arrange to meet the child in a neutral, child-friendly location based on the child's preferences (e.g. school, a community centre, etc.)
- The CCCRO meets with children multiple times in order to build trust and enable them to feel safe enough to give their authentic views. If the CCCRO feels they have not been able to elicit the full views of the child in the timeline given by the court, they ask the court for more time.
- At the initial meeting, children can choose to have a supportive, trusted person (e.g. teacher) with them until they get comfortable with the CCCRO. The initial meetings

Article 13 (right to information and expression), Article 16 (right to privacy) and Article 19 (protection from abuse) are particularly relevant here.

Children need to be provided with information and be supported to express themselves in a way that works for them. The CCCRO facilitates this through using child-friendly tools and resources and being adaptable to individual children's needs.

A balance is needed between protecting the child's right to privacy and protecting them from harm. The CCCRO only shares information about the child to others when there is significant risk to the child's safety and wellbeing. The CCCRO has a duty to be clear with the child on the limits of confidentiality, and only to share what is relevant and proportionate to the situation when talking to other agencies.

focus on providing the child with the information they need to make an informed view and establishing what methods of communication work for the child. The CCCRO takes the child through the court process in a child-friendly way so they understand the context in which their views are being heard and all the different professionals involved in the process.

For instance, in the Scotland model the CCCRO uses the PU/PD story to explain the court process to children; as the story is based on real life experiences, the children often relate to it and it helps them to feel more at ease. The CCCRO also establishes the following early on with the child and reiterates this throughout their sessions:

- That the child gets to decide what will be written to the judge. The CCCRO is there to help elicit their views, but the letter will be the child's direct words.
 - Explaining confidentiality – in the Scottish context, the CCCRO can be clear that only the judge will get the letter, not their parents. However, if there is a risk to the child, it may also need to go to other agencies.
- Mothers can be concerned that talking to the CCCRO may endanger their child. The CCCRO therefore also discusses their role with the child's mother, giving her information about their role and encouraging her to read the same information the children receives so they can use the same language and terms with the child.
 - Once trust has been built and the child has information about the court process, the CCCRO works with the child to elicit their views. They use creative techniques and activities to elicit children's views rather than asking direct questions about their situation: e.g. through drawing, games, etc. These are adjusted depending on the child's needs, age and stage of development. They work together to create the final letter that will go to the sheriff; the child approves the final wording.

Article 5 (right to guidance from adults) is particularly relevant here. Children have a right to receive guidance and direction from parents and carers as they grow up, so that they fully enjoy their rights. This must be done in a way that recognises the child's increasing capacity to make their own choices. The CCCRO is informed by mothers' knowledge and experience of the situation to ensure the safety of children, alongside the child's views and wishes.

What worked well

- Taking the lead from the child on their needs is important for building trust and enabling the child to give their views in the way that works best for them. For instance, some children want to write the letter to the judge themselves, while others prefer to dictate to the CCCRO.
- Framing the child as the 'boss' can help to break down adult-child power dynamics and ensure that the child feels able to say what they really feel, rather than what they think the CCCRO wants to hear. The CCCRO must demonstrate willingness to act on children's wishes and, if these are not possible to fulfil, give a full explanation why.
- Keeping up to date with what is 'trending' for children helps to keep activities relevant to children's lives.
- Interaction with the child should be a conversation, not an interview.
- It is helpful to have an anonymous evaluation system, in which children are asked to give their feedback after their engagement with the CCCRO. This is useful for continuing to develop the service to best fit the needs of children.
- Partnering with mothers and acknowledging their protective efforts is also important for ensuring the safety of the child and reassuring mothers that talking to the CCCRO will not be harmful or dangerous for their child. For instance, after obtaining a child's permission to discuss their wishes on contact with the mother, the CCCRO may ask the mother if a child's recommendation on contact could have negative repercussions from the perpetrator. The CCCRO may also ask to share mother's concerns with relevant agencies, for instance domestic violence specialists, to ensure support is in place for mother and child.

What we learned

- Some children do not just want to give a letter. They want to meet the sheriff face-to-face or give their views in a video. This can be a limitation in terms of enabling children to give their views in a way that works for them and highlights the need for courts to adopt a 'culture of the child'. Be aware of what the limitations may be in your own context, the legal requirements, and how to work around and with these to best accommodate children's choices and preferences.
- There needs to be a clear distinction between the CCCRO's role as an advocate and a wider child safeguarding role. While the CCCRO adheres to child protection procedures and refers children to other agencies if they assess that there is risk to the child, they do not provide their own professional assessment and recommendations to the court. This enables the child to trust the CCCRO to be a facilitator for giving their views, rather than a decision-maker, and reduces the risk of them 'editing' or inhibiting their views. However, having a separate, safeguarding role in place is also desirable to ensure that courts have all the information they need to keep children safe.

- The CCCRO should signpost children and their mothers to relevant support services (e.g. mental health, Women's Aid services) as the role is limited to the court process and therefore ends after this. Providing signposting and onward referral ensures ongoing support for children and their mothers after the court process is over; for instance, in the Scottish model several children accessed art therapy through the CCCRO.
- If possible within the legal system, it is desirable, after a decision is made by the court, to have a process in place to check with the child how well that decision is working for them.

Tools/resources

- [Super Listener](#) – the Scottish CCCRO gives this to children on first meeting them to explain her role and what her responsibilities towards them are. These are available in various languages.
- [Safe and Together](#) – Safe and Together is a child protection approach to domestic violence centred around the concept that children are best served by working towards keeping them safe and together with the non-offending parent (the adult domestic violence survivor). The Model provides a helpful framework and tools for partnering with domestic violence survivors in order to enhance the safety and well-being of children.



Audience requires:

- A guaranteed opportunity to communicate children's views to an identifiable individual or body with the responsibility to listen.
- Once the child is happy with the wording of their letter, the CCCRO submits it to the judge. The judge considers the letter alongside other evidence to reach a decision on contact. There may be further investigation as a result of the issues raised in the letter, or the judge may ask for more clarity from the CCCRO.

Influence requires:

- Children's views to be taken seriously; there is accountability and transparency to children and they are told how their views are taken into account
- Ideally, there should be direct feedback from the court to the children on the decision made and why that decision has been reached. At the time of writing, such a system was not in place by law in Scotland, and other IJCC project partners were too

early on in establishing their CCCRO role to have this system in place. The Scottish model was advocating to expand the CCCRO role to be able to feed back the court decision to the child, given they had an established relationship with them.

- In terms of accountability to children, the CCCRO is clear with children that, while it is not guaranteed that the child will get what they ask for, it is guaranteed that the judge will read the letter. Children can come back to the CCCRO at any time during the court process to ask questions.

We will further address working with adults to give children's views due consideration in [Section 4](#).

Participation model: Young Expert Group (YEG)

Summary of model: The YEG is a group of children and young people with lived experiences of domestic violence who work alongside adult partners on the IJCC project. They have previously taken part in participation projects; they use this experience and lived experiences of domestic violence to advise the development of IJCC project activities, identify and take forward priorities for influencing national policy, and hold adults taking part in the IJCC project accountable.

Note: The process of the YEG follows many of the same principles as the PU/PD process in terms of upholding children's rights, particularly in relation to safety, support, and wellbeing. For instance, specialist domestic violence support workers who have a trusted relationship with the participating children and young people are involved in the project; safety and wellbeing is discussed individually with the child/young person, a trusted worker, and non-abusing parent ahead of their involvement; and steps are taken to minimise distress and ensure that taking part is enjoyable and positive (e.g. providing snacks and food, having long breaks, and taking time to build relationships). The below therefore outlines where the YEG process differs from PU/PD, focusing particularly on 'space' and 'voice' in the context of supporting young participants to be joint decision-makers with adults.

Article 3 (best interests) is particularly relevant here.

Given the length of young people's involvement, requiring a significant amount of their time, it was important to make sure that taking part was worthwhile for them and that they were actively benefitting from it: e.g. through receiving training, gaining experience in a certain area to put on their CV.

Space requires:

- Providing children the opportunity to give their views; not excluding children on the basis of age or other characteristics.
- Ensuring a safe space for children to give their views without fear of rebuke or reprisal.
- Children and young people who had previously taken part in participation projects and who had expressed an interest in taking part in further projects were invited to join the YEG. They were given child-friendly information explaining the purpose of



the project, the length of time it would take, how expenses for taking part would be covered, and what taking part would involve. Given the length of their involvement (up to two years), the information was clear that they had the right to stop taking part at any time, and that their involvement would be spaced out throughout the project to avoid conflicting with other things in their lives.

- They were provided a form to fill out asking them:
 - if they needed anything to help them feel safe and comfortable to take part (e.g. dietary requirements, Easy Read documents),
 - how they preferred to be contacted,
 - what they wanted to get out of taking part (e.g. skills, experience), and
 - what times they preferred to have meetings.

What worked well

- Gathering information from children and young people ahead of their participation is important to ensure that they can take part to the best of their ability. The information provided by the children and young people helped adults to shape the processes of the YEG around the children and young people's needs. It also helped to establish from the beginning that the adults were there to facilitate the children and young people's work, rather than direct it; the children and young people had choice and control over how their participation would be structured and the adults were responsible for putting things in place to enable this.
- Be clear with children and young people about the level of commitment they are expected to give to the project: this might be difficult to be exact about, particularly when activities will be co-developed by children and young people themselves - but even an estimate of the commitment required is helpful.

What we learned

- Regularly revisiting children and young people's circumstances is important throughout the project, as circumstances change and processes may need to be adapted to enable them to continue taking part. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic the YEGs had to move to virtual working. The adults involved contacted every child and young person individually to see what they needed to facilitate virtual working; one had to be bought a tablet to enable them to continue taking part.
- Children and young people taking part preferred to meet during weekdays rather than weekends, when they wanted time to spend with friends and family. This required taking them out of school/college, so participation activities had to be scheduled around things like exam periods to ensure that they did not miss out on important elements of their education. It is important to be clear with schools about the beneficial learning experience of participation for children and young people if they are missing school to take part.
- Given the long-standing nature of the YEG, making a 'contract' at the start is helpful for protecting the time of the children and young people and ensuring they take part in activities that they are actively interested in. The contract also sets out how the children and young people will benefit from participating.



Tools/resources

- Blog on working safely with young people virtually ([Appendix 11](#))

Voice requires:

- Children need information to make an informed view.
- Information and activities are age-appropriate and child-friendly, enabling the child to give their views in the way that works best for them.
- Children have practical assistance to give their views.
- At the very first meeting of the YEG, the children and young people started to develop their priorities and work programme for the project. They explored:
 - the IJCC project aims, activities, and who the different project partners were;
 - their hopes and concerns about taking part;
 - activities they would like to take forward and things they did not want to do; and
 - what they needed to help them: feel safe; feel confident; enjoy themselves.

Article 13 (right to information and expression) is particularly relevant here. Things like team-building and transparency in decision-making are just as essential to enabling children to fully express themselves as making activities and information age-appropriate. Particularly given the children and young people's status as joint decision-makers, they needed to feel empowered to express their opinions to the adults on the project; this involved having all the information available to them that the adults had before coming to a decision as a group.

After this meeting, the adults drafted a work programme based on the group's discussions, which the children and young people approved at their next meeting. The work programme was also accompanied by a group agreement, based on what children and young people said they needed to be able to take part: for example, they identified that they needed time to do fun activities that did not involve any IJCC work in order to get to know each other better and feel comfortable working together. Time was therefore built into the work programme for such activities.

- It was agreed that because some members were interested in activities like writing blogs and others were not, there should be opt-in/opt-out activities/trainings (so not everyone has to attend a specific meeting if they are not interested in that particular aspect of the project). While all work is offered to everyone for transparency, not everyone has to do it.
- Collective decision-making is a key component of the YEG; no decisions are made about work activities until the children and young people approve them, e.g. an invitation to meet a politician. No external people are invited to YEG meetings without the approval of the children and young people.



What worked well

- Given the longer-term commitment of the YEG, having regular opportunities to socialise together without 'working' is important for group bonding. It also enables adults to observe how children and young people are doing in terms of wellbeing.
- Developing their own logo and branding separate from the IJCC project was helpful for building group identity and giving the young experts ownership and status over their work activities.
- Using mixed methods of communication with the group was helpful for ensuring that everyone received information in a way that worked for them.
- Providing evidence to the children and young people of their achievements and skills gained through participation important. For instance, writing up key skills for children and young people to use in CVs, supporting them to use their time spent on the project to work towards a volunteer award, etc.

What we learned

- Children and young people wanted to know about how their activities (both 'fun' and 'work' activities) were funded. Transparency about budget turned out to be an important piece of information for the children and young people.
- Having individual – rather than group – evaluation at the end of every YEG meeting helped ensure members were not influenced by others' opinions and enabled more honest feedback.

Tools/resources

- [Blog](#) from a young expert on taking part in Yello!
- Activity session plan: Co-producing awareness-raising videos ([Appendix 12](#))

Audience requires:

- A guaranteed opportunity to communicate children's views to an identifiable individual or body with the responsibility to listen.
- As advisors to the IJCC project, the YEG had guaranteed opportunities to give their views to the IJCC project partners. They decided how they wanted to engage with them and chose to do a session with the partners at a project meeting about how to work safely and meaningfully with children and young people. They designed an ice-breaker activity and made a presentation outlining their key advice to the partners.
- The YEG developed a comic strip aimed at other children and young people that the IJCC partners could present to children and young people they invited to take part in their own participation project.
- The YEG were supported to meet national decision-makers alongside the adults in the project. In Scotland, the YEG met with the Government Minister responsible for civil law, including child contact, to give their views and recommendations on changes that needed to be made to the system. They gave written and oral evidence to a Parliament Committee to inform the development of a piece of legislation



making changes to child contact procedures. Another IJCC project partner supported their YEG to attend a multi-sector forum on child contact and domestic violence and co-developed a briefing with them aimed at professionals.

[Section 4](#) goes into further detail about best practice in supporting children and young people to meet people in power.

Influence requires:

- Children's views to be taken seriously; there is accountability and transparency to children and they are told how their views are taken into account.

[Section 4](#) discusses how to encourage decision-makers to be accountable to children and young people in relation to influencing. The below focuses on how adults in the IJCC project were transparent and accountable to the YEG.

- The YEG received regular updates from the adults in the project about work undertaken and progress made, so that the YEG could assess how well adults were meeting project objectives.
- They were updated on how their outputs were used by the adults on the project. For instance, the comic strip they produced for the project was shared with violence against women professionals, and the YEG were given feedback on how the comic was received by these professionals.
- Adults undertook evaluation with the YEG at the end of every meeting and made changes as needed to subsequent meetings based on the children and young people's feedback.
- The YEG undertook an evaluation session partway through and at the end of the IJCC project to evaluate the overall progress of the project.
- The adults documented all evidence demonstrating the impact of the YEG (e.g. being mentioned in Parliament) for the YEG to see how their views were having influence.

Section 4: Speaking to power: influence and impact

In taking a rights-based approach to participation projects on child contact and domestic violence, the outputs will be invaluable for influencing positive change. In this section, we outline some tips on how to use the outputs of your participation project, including involving children and young people in influencing activities.

What does influencing involve?

In this section, 'influencing' essentially means working to bring about positive change in policy and practice affecting women and children experiencing domestic abuse. Influencing can entail:

- changing ATTITUDES (e.g. through awareness-raising and training);
- changing BEHAVIOURS (e.g. through engaging in the development of practice guidance and children's rights-centred processes); and
- changing SYSTEMS (e.g. through engaging in the development of laws and accountability mechanisms).

Tips for influencing

Identify who to target

Think about the key organisations/bodies you need to engage with. Who needs to know about the messages from your project? It is useful to do a mapping exercise to help you decide where would be most beneficial to focus your energies. What are the gaps and strengths in the current system around child contact and domestic violence? Where is there resistance and where are opportunities?

Think about what allies you already have who can support your influencing efforts; real change seldom comes from one organisation or individual but involves a collaborative effort. Alliance-building is an integral part of effective influencing. For example, with the help of one supportive judge, an IJCC partner was able to engage with other judges. Another made use of links with a feminist lawyer network to engage with law professionals.

What worked well

Bringing together key agencies through regular forums helps to assess areas for improvement in the system and serves as a sounding board to identify areas of resistance and opportunity. IJCC partners brought together a range of professionals, including police, social work, judiciary, education, and lawyers through regular forums to identify opportunities to take forward the learning and outputs from participation work.

Disseminate the messages

Develop a communications strategy to disseminate the outputs of the project: this could include things like a social media campaign or creating a dedicated website as a resource holding the outputs of the project.

Use participation outputs in training/awareness-raising

Incorporate the learning and outputs from your participation work into training and/or awareness-raising materials. For instance, one IJCC partner worked with a children's law centre to update their training for lawyers in child contact through using children's views and recommendations from participation work.

Engage in policy influencing

A key part of influencing is at the policy level - but what does this mean in practice? Policy can be a bit of a cover-all term that encompasses a range of things. When we talk about influencing policy, the main types of things we would be likely to focus on include:

- Legislation (e.g. relevant laws concerning domestic violence, children's rights, or court processes)
- Local and national strategies (e.g. national violence against women prevention strategies, children's rights strategies)
- Policy reviews/reforms (e.g. national/international policy consultations, including country reporting to UN Committees)
- Guidance (e.g. child protection guidance, best practice guidance in supporting victims of domestic violence)

Seek to engage in policy processes, using the outputs from participation work as evidence in consultation responses or when meeting with those drafting legislation.

Case study: Children's journey through policy influencing on child contact in Scotland

Children who took part in PU/PD were supported to meet with the First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon. They presented her with their recommendations from PU/PD and asked her how she would use her power to improve the system for children experiencing domestic violence.



Following this meeting, Scotland's national strategy to tackle violence against women included an action point to use the PU/PD recommendations to inform a national consultation to reform family law processes. Some of the children's recommendations were included as proposals in the consultation, such as giving children a range of

options for giving their views to courts. Through working with ally organisations, there was strong support for the children's proposals.



The consultation led to the development of a piece of legislation to reform elements of the family law system, including proposals for better protection for children and women experiencing domestic violence and improving mechanisms for children giving their views to the court.



The IJCC YEG for Scotland met with the Government Minister in charge of the legislation's development to give their views and what needed to be improved in the legislation for children affected by domestic violence. They also gave written and oral evidence to the Parliament Committee overseeing the legislation.



The legislation was substantially modified by amendments, with key recommendations from Yello! accepted. These included substantial new provisions, particularly a child advocacy service (a Super Listener) and measures to protect children's confidentiality. Other elements of the Bill were strengthened on children's participation. Yello! was recognised for their contributions throughout the Bill's journey through Parliament, with several MSPs quoting their evidence directly in the Bill's Parliamentary debates.

Dealing with resistance

Given the subject of the participation work outlined in this toolkit, there are situations where external stakeholders may react with a lack of understanding, disagreement, or even hostility. It is to be expected that both the methodology and messages from participation projects focusing on child contact and domestic violence will be met with resistance from some.

It is therefore important to have counter arguments prepared (see the [IJCC participation briefing](#) for counterarguments to common criticisms) and to take steps to keep yourselves safe. This is especially important if undertaking influencing with children and young people to ensure that they are not exposed to hostile resistance.

- **Using allies:** Approaching resistance in partnership with key allies can be a very helpful tool for backing up your arguments from another standpoint than your own, lending further legitimacy to your messages or simply for moral support. Given the resistance in some quarters to feminist understandings of domestic violence or children being entitled to have their say in matters affecting them, it may be more effective for your message to be promoted through allies in different fields.
- **Addressing antifeminist resistance:** Belgian anti-violence against women charity Garance ASBL has developed a 'Verbal Self-Defence' guide to tackling antifeminism.

The guide shares basic tools, tips, and tricks to know when to act, how to keep cool, how to protect yourself, and which tactics to use. The guide can be found [here](#).

- **Addressing resistance to taking violence against women into consideration in child contact cases:**
 - If your country has ratified the Istanbul Convention, this includes a legal duty to ‘take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that, in the determination of custody and visitation rights of children, incidents of [violence against women] are taken into account’ and to ‘take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the exercise of any visitation or custody rights does not jeopardise the rights and safety of the victim or children’.
 - [Statement](#) from international women’s right experts on the need to take violence against women into account in child contact cases and the danger of using the concept of ‘parental alienation’ to ignore, minimise, or deny domestic violence
- **Addressing resistance to children’s rights/participation:** In spite of the near-universal ratification of the UNCRC, there continues to be resistance to children’s participation, usually centring around arguments about children’s lack of competency or undermining parents’ rights and responsibilities. Often this is about building a better understanding of what children’s rights and participation entails; at times it may also be important to back this up with framing children’s rights as a legal obligation. Do your homework on the legal duties around children’s rights in your context to have your counter arguments ready.

A note on self-care

Influencing in a hostile or resistant environment can be tiring and stressful. Always remember to take care of yourself and children/young people you are supporting, keeping in mind the following points:

- Resistance cannot always be overcome: choose your battles
- Few wins happen without the trickle-down effect of persistent effort
- Making mistakes is okay: it can allow us to learn new strategies
- Where resistance is predicted at an event, try not to go alone – take backup for moral and emotional support
- Debriefing with trusted colleagues after dealing with resistance can be helpful for relieving any stress and developing new strategies

Involving children and young people in influencing

Depending on the context in which you are working, it may be inappropriate or impractical for children and young people to meet directly with people in power (e.g. it may be too unsafe). Some children and young people may also not want to take part in such activities. There are a lot of ways for children and young people to be involved in influencing without attending events/meetings in person. This can include:



- Co-producing influencing materials, e.g. working with children and young people to develop a website for the participation outputs, co-developing training materials using the participation outputs
- Supporting children and young people to develop their own response to a policy consultation (see the session on developing a consultation response with Young Expert Group ([Appendix 13](#)))

However, providing safe, meaningful opportunities for children and young people to meet decision-makers in person is an important part of influencing on child contact and domestic violence. It can be helpful in creating more accountability to children and young people, as they are able to give their views directly to decision-makers without their words being 'filtered' by adults; and decision-makers may feel more responsibility to take account of what children and young people tell them when meeting them in person.

Supporting children and young people to meet people in power

Meeting politicians and other powerful people can be intimidating for adults, let alone children and young people, so careful planning is needed to enable them to feel prepared and confident. There are particular safety and wellbeing factors to consider when supporting children and young people impacted by domestic violence to meet people in power. Below we set out what we have found is helpful in supporting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people affected by domestic violence when meeting decision-makers.

- Work with children and young people to identify people they want to meet. For the IJCC YEG, while they felt it was important to meet with politicians who had the power to change policy and law, they also wanted to meet directly with judges given that they are the ones who make decisions on child contact cases.
- Work with children and young people to decide in what capacity they want to attend events/meetings with decision-makers. For example, the YEG for one IJCC partner decided that they wanted to attend a multi-sector event as participants rather than as speakers. It is important not to pressure children and young people into something they do not want to do.
- Carry out a risk assessment of the meeting. This should examine what could cause harm to participants so that you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm. Your risk assessment should identify practical actions that protect people from harm and injury, including any potential for emotional distress. Some questions might include:
 - Are the issues being covered in the meeting likely to trigger emotional distress?
 - Is there potential that they will be exposed to hostile resistance?
 - Is there potential that participation could put the child or young person at risk from the domestic violence perpetrator?
 - Is there any risk from the perpetrator during the activity – to the individual child/young person, and other young participants?



This should also include an assessment of the external people they are going to meet – it is important not to make assumptions about adults’ knowledge of domestic violence.

- Agree safety and confidentiality procedures with adults, children and young people ahead of the meeting. For instance, agree on procedures for taking photos and how the meeting is publicised; in some cases this may be safe, but not in others.
- Provide information to the children and young people outlining the purpose of the meeting, who will be there, what will happen at each stage of the day and where the meeting will be held. Include photos of the meeting location and the people who will be attending so that the children and young people can build a picture ahead of time.

Tip: When the IJCC YEG met with a Government Minister, an official from the Parliament came to speak to them ahead of the meeting and talked through the process of coming to Parliament. Having this person give information helped to make it more ‘real’ for the children and young people involved.

- If children and young people are speaking directly at the meeting, work with them to come up with the key messages they want to discuss and what questions they may want to ask decision-makers. It is helpful to have a ‘rehearsal’ ahead of the meeting where children and young people have the opportunity to practice what they are going to say and get a feeling for how the meeting will go.
- Make a safe route into the meeting as much as possible – it is helpful to have a separate room available in case children and young people become overwhelmed during the meeting and need a quiet space to go to. Ensure that children and young people have had something to eat before the meeting. Take things with you to make the meeting place more familiar, e.g. fidget toys, arts and crafts. If children and young people are having a private meeting with a decision-maker, try to ensure that there are not too many other adults in the room.

Tip: Make sure that children and young people’s messages are written down and that adults supporting them have a copy. This is in case children and young people become overwhelmed and want a supporting adult to step in on their behalf during the meeting or to prompt them if they need it.

- Make sure there is opportunity for the children and young people to debrief after the meeting. A key recommendation from the IJCC YEG was to arrange a fun activity after a meeting with a decision-maker, so that that children and young people have something to look forward to and are able to ‘let off steam’ afterwards.
- Ensure a feedback loop – it is important that the decision-maker follows up directly with the children and young people, not just adults, after the meeting to show how they have taken their views seriously. This could be in the form of a letter, video message, or even a follow-up meeting.

Tools/resources

- Activity supporting children and young people to meet decision-makers ([Appendix 15](#))



- Letter from the First Minister of Scotland feeding back to children taking part in PU/PD – an example of people in power being accountable to children and young people ([Appendix 14](#))

Preparing people in power to meet children and young people

It is just as important to prepare people in power to meet children and young people as the other way around. As we have mentioned in the paragraph on dealing with resistance, decision-makers may not have a good knowledge of domestic violence. They may also be reluctant to meet children and young people as they are unsure how to engage with them, do not believe they are competent, or in the case of domestic violence are afraid that children and young people giving their views will 're-traumatise' them. Relationships need to be built with people in power and their representatives ahead of children and young people meeting them in order to address any concerns they have and to assess their understanding and preparedness to meet children and young people.

Brief decision-makers about what is safe and unsafe when engaging with the children and young people, and secure agreement from them that they will follow up with children and young people after the meeting to show how they have listened to their views.

Tools/resources

- Code of Conduct for adults ([Appendix 16](#)) – an example for an event asking attending adults to agree to measures to help attending children and young people be safe.
- Briefing for Committee members ([Appendix 17](#)) – a briefing sent to Parliament Committee members ahead of their meeting with YEG, outlining key issues to be aware of when meeting the children and young people.

List of Appendices

Appendices are available at <https://www.ed.ac.uk/education/rke/centres-groups/childhood-and-youth-studies-research-group/research/ijcc/participation-resources>

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ABOUT IJCC

Improving Justice in Child Contact (IJCC) aims to improve children and young people's participation in decision-making around child contact for families affected by domestic violence.

- By 'child contact' we mean communication (such as phone calls or spending time) between a child and a parent who are not regularly living together.
- By 'participation' we refer to children's human rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Children have a range of participation rights, including the right to express their views freely in matters that affect them and for those views to be considered seriously.

Improving Justice in Child Contact is a project across five European countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Portugal, Romania and Scotland) running from November 2018 to November 2020. Each country is exploring models for children and young people to participate and working with stakeholders to eliminate the barriers for, and enhance the mechanisms that support, children and young people's participation.

More information is available on our website.

www.ed.ac.uk/education/ijcc

Our Young Advisers

Improving Justice in Child Contact is advised by a group of young experts, called Yello!, who have previous



experience of participation work. The young people are aged between 12 and 18 and have experience of domestic violence.

SUPPORT

If you are looking for advice or information about domestic violence, help is available. Women Against Violence Europe have information on specialist services across Europe at www.wave-network.org/find-help

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