



Kummissarju għat-Tfal
Commissioner for Children



LET'S TALK YOUNG, LET'S TALK ABOUT THE PROTECTION & PROMOTION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

REPORT ON THE WORK CARRIED OUT IN 2023 BY
THE EUROPEAN NETWORK OF YOUNG ADVISORS
(ENYA) AS PART OF ENOC'S ANNUAL THEMATIC
POLICY AREA



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Foreword

The 2023 edition of ENYA is a very important one since the theme is directly in line with the work carried out by ENOC members. As Independent Children's Rights Institutions (ICRIs) we have the duty to involve children and young people in the work carried out by our institutions in Protecting and Promoting Children's Rights.

Whether ICRIs are separate specialised institutions, or integrated in a broader institution, like a National Human Rights Institution or an office of the national Ombudsperson, these institutions are important mechanisms to ensure the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other Human Rights Instruments.

Children are still too often at the mercy of adults to access their rights and they are often left out of decisions being made that may have a direct or indirect impact on them. Through ENYA, ENOC aims to listen to children so as to ensure that the work carried out by its members is Efficient, Accessible, Visible and also carried out in Engagement with Children. The young advisors have put forward a large number of recommendations which continues to emphasise the important role ICRIs play in enabling Children to access their rights.

We owe it to the young people to ensure that the recommendations that they have put forward are incorporated into the work carried out by children's rights advocates. We urge all institutions including national/regional Ombudspersons and Commissioners for Children; Governments; the European Union; the Council of Europe; the United Nations and all other stakeholders to follow-up on these recommendations so as to ensure that children's rights are guaranteed!

Introduction

One of the roles of ICRI is to assess the impact of legislation and policy decisions on children. ICRI should also monitor the best interests of children and their rights. They should act as spokespersons and defenders for children and children's rights.



ICRIs should provide remedies for children's rights violations and should be accessible, both physically and geographically, to all children. ICRI should reach out to all children, particularly those who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged including migrant children, children in care, children with a disability and LGBTIQ+ children. Various methods of communication should be established so as to ensure that children can make direct contact with ICRI in a way which is age-appropriate and sensitive to their needs.

Children need to be made aware of their rights and the role of ICRI so as to empower them to recognise any violations of their rights and to encourage them to reach out for help and support should they need it.

ICRI has a key role to play in promoting respect for the views of children in all matters affecting them as articulated in article 12 of the UNCRC. Children should also be involved in the work carried out by ICRI.

It is for this reason that ENYA 2023 was of significant importance to listen to children to really ensure that the work carried out by ICRI does indeed have a positive impact on the lives of children.

Young people from 18 countries/regions participated in discussions about strengthening ICRIIs by increasing their powers, improving their accessibility and visibility, sustaining their engagement with children and young people, and thus making their work more effective and impactful.

Participating Countries/Regions:

Andalusia/Spain	Cyprus	Luxembourg
Armenia	Estonia	Malta
Basque country/Spain	Greece	Northern Ireland/UK
Belgium/Flanders	Iceland	Poland
Catalonia/Spain	Italy	Slovakia
Croatia	Jersey/UK	Scotland/UK

Malta was the ENYA General Coordinator and provided guidance and support throughout the whole process. Between February and May the ENYA coordinators have facilitated and organized a number of meetings and activities with groups of young people on a national/regional level. Prior to the meetings held with children, a training event on child participation and child protection in child participatory processes was held in February in which coordinators were asked to participate. The aim of this training event was for the coordinators to engage in discussions about meaningful child participation and ensuring child protection in such process. It also gave the coordinators the possibility to address challenges faced and share examples of good practice. Eurochild was invited to deliver a presentation to share their examples of good practice.

Following the training event, coordinators held meetings with their newly formulated or already existing advisory groups. The main aim of these meetings was to create a better understanding of children's rights as enshrined in the UNCRC as well as the role of ICRIIs. Particular emphasis was placed on ensuring that ICRIIs are Accessible, Visible and Engaging 'with' and 'for' children and young people. This will really ensure that the work carried out by ENOC and its members is in actual fact child-friendly, accessible to all children, and effective in protecting and promoting children's best interests and their rights. The participating countries/regions were also encouraged to discuss the powers of such institutions. Each participating country/region was asked to put forward 8 rights-based recommendations on any of the above-mentioned topics.

The ENYA Forum

The ENYA Forum was held in Malta between the 4th and the 5th of July. The Forum was hosted by the Office of the Commissioner for Children in Malta, which had the ENYA 2023 Coordination role Suzanne Garcia Imbernon (Malta) is the ENYA 2023 General Coordinator.

35 young people, from 18 countries/regions, between the ages of 12 and 18 attended the forum. The young people were supported by their coordinators who also facilitated different sessions over the two days.



The interactive programme consisted of various sessions including: ice breaking and team building activities; presentations from each of the 18 countries/regions to highlight the main activities and discussions held at national/regional level; a workshop on active citizenship which aimed to empower the young people to be children's rights advocates.

This workshop was carried out in collaboration with the national youth agency; a workshop on the importance of the role of ICRI in ensuring realisation of children's rights. This workshop was led by Dr Ruth Farrugia, a well renowned children's rights expert. A music workshop was also held by two musicians with the aim of highlighting different ways of creating awareness and advocating for children's rights. Together with the facilitation of the musicians, the young people wrote the lyrics of a song promoting children's rights. (Full song can be found in Annex 2 of this report).



The Minister for Social Policy and Children's Rights, Dr Michael Falzon visited the participants and reiterated the importance of child participation in decision making. The Commissioner for Children in Malta, Antoinette Vassallo and the ENOC Chair, Salvör Nordal, as well as other ENOC members, were present throughout the two days. The event also received Media coverage on a national level.

Recommendations

Each of the participating countries/regions submitted 8 recommendations. The ENYA General coordinator compiled the recommendations so as to produce a comprehensive list of recommendations removing any repetition or overlap. The list of recommendations was shared amongst the coordinators prior to the forum.

The compiled list of recommendations consisted of 24 recommendations regarding Visibility, 8 recommendations regarding Powers, 15 recommendations regarding Accessibility, and 21 recommendations regarding Engagement with children. The recommendations were presented to the young advisors at the forum. The young people discussed the recommendations so as to really understand the recommendations put forward by the other countries/regions. The young people were then given 5 different coloured stickers and they were asked to vote for the 5 preferred recommendations to be considered when incorporating the ENYA recommendations in the ENOC Statement to be adopted at the ENOC General Assembly in September. The full list of recommendations is included as Annex 1 of this report and also the number of votes received for each of the recommendations.



Conclusion

The young participants have actively participated in the ENYA process both at national/regional level and at European level. They have strongly underlined the important role of ICRI through their recommendations which have been submitted to the ENOC Working Group on the role of ICRI. The young people will also be presenting their work at the ENOC Annual Conference. It is now up to all the institutions who work towards guaranteeing children's rights for every child to really listen to what young people have to say!



Recommendations on Accessibility

1. ICRI's should create safe spaces (digital and physical) to receive direct communication and attention in a safe, fast and private way from children. A virtual space can be created by means of an APP that gives the possibility to chat, call and make an appointment directly with ICRI's. Chats should be deleted after a few minutes of inactivity but ICRI's keep a copy of the conversation. This should be available outside of school hours and should be accessible in schools. This form of communication should also be made accessible to children with disabilities. **(22 votes)**
2. Young people should have the possibility to contact ICRI's confidentially as they worry that their parents, schools etc will find out about their concern. Such contact should be secure so as not to leave a digital trace.
3. Children and young people should be asked what their preferred way of communicating is. **(2 votes)**
4. Adopting mechanisms that provide 24/7 access to children (i.e. hotlines with psychological support and informed operators). **(4 votes)**
5. ICRI's should be accessible to children from all regions/provinces. There should be sub-offices in various regions or ICRI's should carry out regular visits and communication with children from rural areas and from different provinces/municipalities to inform them about their rights and to listen to them. ICRI's could be represented by other offices which would promote the effectiveness and immediate response regarding in situ visits and inspections. **(1 vote)**
6. Evaluations of the results of the investigation of complaints should be published in such a way that no sensitive personal data is disclosed. Recommendations concerning the general improvement of procedures and practices of government agencies dealing with and related to children should be highlighted.
7. Access to ICRI's should be increased through:
 - Having in a child-friendly format of the Convention in various languages, including braille and sign language.
 - Decentralization of actions – more actions in rural areas
 - Implementing actions or posters on topics that concern specific groups of children.
 - Hosting discussions and campaigns on the social media or other platforms/forums on specialized issues and to promote contact with ICRI's.
 - Being able to search and locate the ICRI's website in more languages.
 - Organizing days to highlight characteristics or recognize the diversity of specific groups of children.
8. The venue of ICRI's should be easily accessible to children and persons with disabilities and should have appropriate, child-friendly spaces for meetings with children and families.
9. ICRI's should make sure their office is accessible to all children regardless of language, age, religion or ability. They should have staff who are properly trained to make sure they use appropriate communication for the target audience, including very young children, non-verbal children and children and young people outside formal education. **(1 vote)**

10. ICRI needs to use words and ways of talking that children can easily understand, so that they are able to understand what is being said. The words and messages need to be clear, in different languages and easy to grasp for all children, regardless of their background or abilities.
11. ICRI should provide accurate, age-appropriate information which is accessible to all. **(3 votes)**
12. ICRI staff should attend capacity building trainings, including sign language, so as to ensure communication with children with disabilities without any barriers. **(1 vote)**
13. It is important that ICRI are accessible and visible to all children. All accessibility services must be available including contact information on school websites, they should offer digital solutions and make sure that all children's participation is free of charge. **(3 votes)**
14. ICRI should take all backlashes and setbacks seriously, especially when it comes to loss of civil rights, stigmatization and increased prejudice. Children must be able to complain and given a quick response.
15. ICRI should make resources accessible to create awareness about children's mental health so that they can access professional services when necessary. **(1 vote)**

Recommendations on Visibility

1. Must Incorporate human rights education in school curricula starting from early education leading up to adolescence. This should include the role of ICRI which should be promoted in schools through visibility campaigns. This could be done by celebrating an annual ICRI and human rights day in the school itself. **(23 votes)**
2. ICRI should teach children how to recognize when their rights are not being respected. These children can then share the important work that the institution does with others.
3. Specialised representatives in every school who would replicate the work of the ICRI from close proximity. This could be a profile that is easily recognisable by the other students who, in addition to offering information and direct attention, can carry out mediation and rights monitoring work in schools. ICRI would be responsible for training these figures. **(1 vote)**
4. ICRI should train professionals and everyone working with children, particularly teachers on children's rights and the role of ICRI. Such training must include children's ideas. **(2 votes)**
5. ICRI should create awareness about children's rights through supporting education in schools and child-friendly communication on different platforms using videos, games and media campaigns. They should also make sure parents and all those who work with children and young people should know about children's rights.
6. ICRI must ensure their presence at parents' councils and teachers' councils in schools.

7. ICRI must increase the visibility in schools through posters and notices available on bulletin boards and other places in schools that will attract attention and will include contact information of the ICRI. In these materials, the specific reason/example when children can contact the Office should be clearly emphasized.
8. ICRI should Implement actions that aim to break the stereotypes related to the role of children within society. In this way, it will become evident that children and adults are all humans with rights and have an equal place in the society. **(1 vote)**
9. ICRI must ensure that children are educated about marginalized groups and prejudice that they face. It is important to emphasize that those who educate belong to the marginalized group themselves.
10. ICRI should find a way to become influencers within society through social media and youth councils.
11. The role of Young Advisors should be promoted in their schools and community youth groups, in the promotion of children's rights and the visibility of ICRI. ICRI should also promote the work done by their young advisors on social networks such as TikTok and Instagram. Workshops should also be carried out in schools to encourage the participation of new young advisors.
12. Develop fun, dynamic and age adapted materials and communications on Human Rights and children's rights. Materials such as comics, simple books containing morals, games, actions in social networks.... They must be materials that are capable of capturing attention and that guarantee that all children (regardless of their capacities, diversities and realities) can understand them. Short and effective video clips should be used. **(4 votes)**
13. It is necessary to make attractive communications that attract attention and activate interest: making fashion videos, having young people be the ones to tell the story, having celebrities/influencers talk about the subject... All of this aligned with the needs, interests and times of young people. **(5 Votes)**
14. Points 11,12 and 13 should be designed by children/young people together with experts.
15. ICRI should be active on social networks particularly through the creation of various content related to children's rights such as podcasts, reels, youtube shorts, instastories etc. As part of these activities, it is necessary to connect with famous people and influencers. Interactivity within social networks is also an important factor. The content must be understandable. (for example creating a series of instastories "Interview with the Commissioner" /on various topics/ Q/A).
16. Through education, ICRI should be known to young people. Young people need to know more about their rights and where to turn if their rights are violated. The diversity factor is very important. Young people from other cultural backgrounds are often even less familiar with children's rights. The parents of these children and young people should also be aware of children's rights. In its recruitment policy, the children's rights committee should try to be as diverse as possible in its composition as well.
17. Street signs with QR codes, with information addressed to children and adolescents could be used to create awareness about the role of ICRI.
18. ICRI should encourage the media to raise awareness of their activities through adverts. They should design a motto/slogan that will increase visibility to children and an animated video that will promote ICRI, so that it can be seen as an advertisement on major prime-time TV programmes. ICRI should also support the participation of children in TV shows, particularly debating shows.
19. ICRI should organize large-scale events to promote children's rights and the role of ICRI. **(1 vote)**

20. ICRI must develop modern interactive websites adequate for children and young people, if the institution forms part of the General Ombudsman, there should be a separate website.

21. The Ombudsperson/Commissioner should go to places where young people are, like schools and youth houses. One example would be a special bus all about children's rights and travel around different places, talking to kids and making sure their voices are heard. Schools should also visit ICRI Offices. **(4 votes)**

22. ICRI should involve children and young people in the creation of promotional material. ICRI should create a special item that children will like and use. It could be a lunch box with all the important details on it, like how to get in touch with the institution.

23. Governments should promote good practices carried out by ICRI, to promote their visibility.

24. ICRI should create awareness on the need and importance of collaboration (child, parents, school, media) in the promotion of the ICRI and the realization of children's rights. **(2 votes)**

Recommendations on Engagement

1. ICRI should really put themselves in a child's position in order to understand what the child feels so as to put forward the child's perspective. ICRI should know and understand all the realities in order to propose solutions that duly take into account economic, social and territorial diversities. **(10 votes)**

2. Activate a participation council in every school. ICRI should support such children's councils which should be made up of groups of about 15/20 participants that guarantee the diversity and reality of all. They should work on issues related to children's rights with the aim of incorporating into the day-to-day life of the schools a view capable of identifying violations and risks to their rights, as well as their awareness and sensitisation. A local level group could be set up in areas/towns with many schools. **(1 vote)**

3. ICRI should create a model of active collaboration with all public and private actors involved in socio-cultural activities in order to disseminate their activities, to share the message and value of rights for children, and to attract as many people as possible to listen to their different points of view.

4. ICRI should have a permanent group of young advisors who meet several times a year to discuss the work of ICRI. The group should be diverse, fixed, but also have new, younger intake every school year. The young advisors should also receive training on topics they bring up themselves that have to do with children's rights. This can include that an expert is invited, or even better that young people with a specific knowledge or problem come to talk to them. They should also do group-strengthening, fun activities together to get to know and appreciate each other better, and to be able to disagree with each other in a constructive and safe way.

5. The timing of when the group of young advisors meet, needs to be flexible taking into consideration school commitments. Physical meetings should be prioritised. Meetings should be fun, engaging and not too long.

6. For those Children and young people who find it difficult to come forward, outreach sessions should be held by ICRI to listen to their experiences.

7. ICRI should engage with children of all ages in age-appropriate ways. **(1 vote)**

8. ICRI should organise capacity building for their advisors to fully understand the issues of child rights protection and promoting child participation. ICRI should have trained staff particularly responsible for child and youth engagement. Such staff should be youthful and open.
9. Once young advisors turn 18, until they turn 26, they should be roped in as mentors for the younger advisors. **(19 votes)**
10. ICRI should meet with young people once or twice a year physically and more meetings held online, where the topics come from the young people themselves in order to create an understanding of the violations of children's rights that children experience or see in their surroundings.
11. ICRI should work on issues important to children and their rights. These can be topics that affect a lot of children and young people, such as mental wellbeing or social media or bullying or how schools deal with online learning platforms. But they can also be topics that are very important for a specific or minority group of children in dire situations, e.g. LGBTQ+ youth, children on the run, etc.
12. ICRI should involve children themselves in the selection of topics that they are invited to engage in (including the annual advocacy area of ENOC).
13. Children should be involved in the monitoring of the work of ICRI including activities and interventions, as well as recommendations.
14. Children and young people should be able to play an active role in how ICRI deliver their work. This involves all aspects of Article 12 as set out in the Lundy model including; access to information, having a say, access to the right audiences and meaningful influence in decisions. It is important that ICRI spend time on this aspect of their work to practice what they preach to Government.
15. ICRI should strengthen the cooperation of its young advisors with the Children's Parliament, they should engage with children of all ages. A Parliamentary session should be held annually for children where participation is both optional and done with a random sample. There, children's priorities and interests should be discussed, and then communicated to the government and local authorities. Meetings should also be held with Ministers. **(2 votes)**
16. ICRI should show governments how to effectively promote participation of children and young people in all decisions that affect them, whether that is in anything from their education, health and environment. Children's voices are important in any decisions and ICRI should clearly promote this message and monitor to make sure it happens. **(2 votes)**
17. It is important for ICRI to promote children's participation and that all children have the opportunity to take part in making decisions that concern them. ICRI should be role models when it comes to children's participation and advise and support others.
18. ICRI should conduct research to identify problematic situations in which children's rights are violated. An example would be to send questionnaires to all children in order to identify the problems they face. Research should include, Communicate, Represent, and Involve all children and young people, targeting groups depending on what the purpose of the research is.
19. ICRI must have a national annual action plan that details engagement with children, young people, organisations, and adults, that determines the work of the ICRI. This should be developed and evaluated primarily with and for children and young people. A scrutinising mechanism should be in place to hold the ICRI's national annual action plan to account.
20. An app should be developed which will give children access to a platform in which they can share their ideas and opinions as well as put forward suggestions to be taken into account by ICRI.
21. ICRI should implement a mechanism where suggestions/comments from citizens are taken to improve its work (either through an online system, or with focus groups of children and adults).

Recommendations on Powers

1. ICRI must be completely impartial, apolitical, non-partisan and independent institutions. **(18 votes)**
2. Adequate resources of ICRI including staff, an adequate budget, carefully managed and audited by an internal and external auditor, as well as technical support and legal support. ICRI must have access to required finances to investigate children's rights breaches.
3. The recommendations of ICRI must be more binding and there must be clearer consequences, including sanctions, when necessary, for not implementing the recommendations in an appropriate period of time. **(17 votes)**
4. Open and Clear process for the Appointment of Ombudsperson/Commissioner for Children including children in the process. **(3 votes)**
5. Children's Ombudsperson must be independent, equal to and collaborate with from the General Ombudsperson. Its interventions must avoid bureaucracy and long procedures. **(3 votes)**
6. ICRI must be clearly independent from Government and not take on the role of Children's Ministers or Children's Champions. Their duties and powers must be written in law so that their role is clear and independent assessment of how Government is doing at promoting and protecting children's rights is respected. **(2 votes)**
7. ICRI must have in their mandate to support Children and young people access justice, whether this is an individual case of a breach of a child's rights when trying to access public services or if it is a bigger case involving many children in the country. Child friendly justice is an important part of making rights real (ICRI must have the final decision in cases related to Children).
8. ICRI interventions must avoid delays and long procedures.

Annex 2 ENYA Forum Song Lyrics

CHANGE

The world needs to change
In these two days.
It may appear strange
But we have our own ways.

Let's smile, laugh, shout and be together
As long as the music is forever
We can dance under the sky
It makes us feel like we can fly.

CHORUS

We want you to listen to our voice
Because it's our right
to make some noise.
To live in peace is our choice
To make the kids of Europe rejoice!

Let's talk about children's rights
In these beautiful Maltese nation
It's not should it's a must
Let's think participation

Barriers have been broken
Friendships have been made
Loads we have learned
We are not gonna be the same!

CHORUS

We want you to listen to our voice
Because it's our right
to make some noise.
To live in peace is our choice
To make the kids of Europe rejoice!

