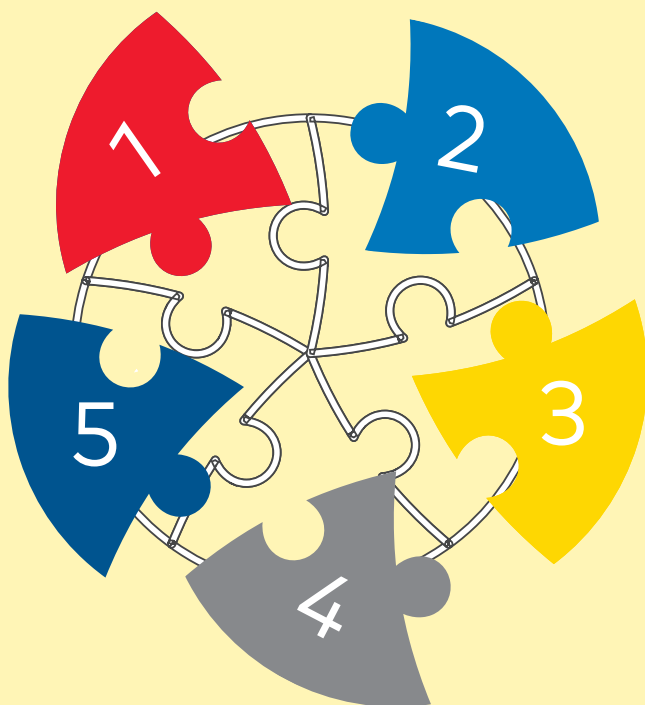


Are you wearing the right glasses?

A guide to integrating a child rights and youth perspective in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers



Nordic Council
of Ministers

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Nordic co-operation

Nordic co-operation is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, the economy, and culture. It plays an important role in European and international collaboration, and aims at creating a strong Nordic community in a strong Europe.

Nordic co-operation seeks to safeguard Nordic and regional interests and principles in the global community. Shared Nordic values help the region solidify its position as one of the world's most innovative and competitive.

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” The Nordic region
must be the best
place in the world for
children and young people.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which applies to everyone under 18, contains four guiding principles. These are:

- Article 2:** The principle of non-discrimination, that all children have the same rights.
- Article 3:** The principle that, in all decisions concerning children, the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration.
- Article 6:** The principle of right to life, survival and development.
- Article 12:** The principle of respect for children's views, and that all children have the right to express their views.

Other international human rights conventions include similar rights for young people over 18. When we talk about a child rights and youth perspective, it is important to remember that children and young people are far from being a homogeneous group. Dimensions like disabilities, gender, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs, sexual orientation, or age can affect the experiences, circumstances and needs of children and young people. But remember – they all have the same rights, and this must be considered in the work!

Foreword

"The Nordic region must be the best place in the world for children and young people."

This is the vision of the Nordic Council of Ministers as expressed in its cross-sector strategy for children and young people in the Nordic region. The 0–25 age group is a prioritised target group in the strategy.

A key objective in the strategy is that the Nordic Council of Ministers will increasingly integrate a child rights and youth perspective in its work, thereby raising the level of participation of children and young people. The objective is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but also on a conviction that today's projects and activities would be improved when children and young people participate and exert influence in various ways. Decisions would also be given greater legitimacy, and initiatives would be of higher quality and relevant to more people when the perspective of children and young people is incorporated. Participation in society and having influence over one's life is a **right** – but it is also a **resource**. Excluding children

and young people is therefore not only a violation of rights, but also a waste of resources.

What then does it mean to integrate a child rights and youth perspective in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers, and how do we go about it? This is what this guide explains in practical terms, and makes the issue more tangible.

We hope that this guide, together with the document *Do rights! – Nordic perspectives on child and youth participation*, will be useful for employees in the Secretariat, institutions and collaboration bodies of the Council of Ministers, for committee members, partners, decision-makers, and contractors, and in presidency countries, in the various processes and activities pertaining to the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Hopefully, it can even inspire other players in the work to integrate a child rights and youth perspective in their activities.

Preparation of this guide has been inspired by documents produced by organisations such as the Ombudsmen for Children in the Nordic countries, the Council of Europe, the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society, the Network for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. Representatives from UNICEF have also provided support and submitted proposals regarding this guide.

” Integrating a child rights and youth perspective in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers involves becoming acquainted with and considering what different children and young people think of, and how they are affected by, the decisions you take and initiatives you implement.

DID YOU KNOW?

Gender equality and sustainable development are other perspectives that must be integrated in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Although the issues differ, the approach to integration described in this guide can also be used for these areas.

A child rights and youth perspective in the Nordic Council of Ministers

Introductory definition – in theory and practice

CHILD RIGHTS AND YOUTH PERSPECTIVE IN THE NORDIC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

Acting on the basis of what the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates about what children (0–18 years) are entitled to, and analysing and considering the perspective and participation of children and young people (0–25 years).

MAINSTREAMING

Organise, develop and evaluate decision-making processes, so that a child rights and youth perspective (but also gender equality and sustainability perspectives) is incorporated in all decision-making processes, at all levels, and in all stages of the process, by players who are normally involved in decision-making.

(Inspired by the Council of Europe's definition of integration of a gender equality perspective.)

In all stages of the process... thought and action!

Integrating a child rights and youth perspective in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers involves becoming ACQUAINTED WITH and CONSIDERING what different children and young people THINK OF, and how they are AFFECTED BY, the decisions you take and initiatives you implement. It also involves THINKING and DOING.

■ THINKING entails, in different phases of the work processes, analysing how children and young people with different circumstances and living conditions in the Nordic region will be affected by the decisions taken. A consequence analysis is carried out before making decisions and in the subsequent evaluation.

■ DOING means taking action on the basis of the analysis you have carried out. It involves using the analysis to influence the process or end product you are working with.

” Integration as a method is based on the idea that you are the expert in your area, which makes you the best person to find links to children and young people.



Child rights and youth perspectives vary

Naturally, policy areas vary in how prominent a child rights and youth perspective can and needs to be – the link to children and young people's living conditions is more obvious in some policy areas than in others. At the same time, in most areas there are dimensions or issues that concern the lives and conditions of children and young people, or where their participation can contribute to development. These are the issues in which a child rights and youth perspective needs to be integrated. Integration as a method is based on the idea that you are the expert in your

area, which makes you the best person to find links to children and young people.

One way to identify links to children and young people in a specific policy area is to arrange a workshop involving officials in the relevant policy area and experts on child rights and youth issues (and, where relevant and appropriate, children and young people themselves). Working area by area, an analysis is carried out as to whether and, if so, how different children and young people are affected in both the short and long terms.

” In order to make the Nordic region the best place in the world for children and young people, you must play your part by identifying and integrating a child rights and youth perspective in the issues you work with and know best.

A preliminary attitude test – your personal starting point

The extent to which you will integrate a child rights and youth perspective depends on knowledge and tools, but also on something that is much more elusive – your approach.

The following is a brief test that can help you identify where you stand on integrating a child rights and youth perspective in your work. Choose the statement that applies to you, and then apply the relevant feedback.

"It's obvious!"

Great! Then you can use this guide as a checklist for your own use or, perhaps more importantly, to convince and support your colleagues and partners to take the same position.

"We do it already!"

Brilliant! But take another look at how your work links to the fundamental principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Then encourage other colleagues and partners to see and do the same. Set yourself the challenge of taking the degree of participation and influence to a higher level. Are you bold enough to give children and young people responsibility to carry out parts of, or even a whole project on their own?

"It's not needed!"

Oh yes it is! The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the standpoint of the Nordic Council of Ministers means that a child rights and

youth perspective is not a matter of choice. It's about seeing children and young people as a key group in society, both now and in the future. In order to make the Nordic region the best place in the world for children and young people, you must play your part by identifying and integrating a child rights and youth perspective in the issues you work with and know best.

"It doesn't concern my issues!"

Think again! The link may not be immediately obvious, but in all sectors and policy areas there are dimensions and issues that in one way or another concern children and young people and their lives. You are the expert in your area, and are therefore in the best position to identify the points of contact.

"We already have so many perspectives to consider – there's no room for more!"

Change your way of working! In most organisations today, there are perspectives that must permeate all sectors and issues. 'Perspective congestion' is not a new phenomenon... but it is manageable. In order for the perspective not to feel like an extra burden piled on top of your core issues, it is important to establish procedures that help to incorporate the perspective naturally in your work processes. This will make the perspective a natural part of your everyday professional activities.

STEP 1:
Awareness

STEP 2:
Process
mapping



STEP 5:
Integration

STEP 3:
Division of
roles and
responsibilities

STEP 4:
Knowledge
and tool kit

NORDBUK

The Nordic Committee for Children and Young People (NORDBUK) is the Council of Ministers' advisory and co-ordinating body for matters relating to children and young people. NORDBUK will assist the Nordic co-operation ministers in implementing, following up, and evaluating the strategy for children and young people in the Nordic region. NORDBUK will also help the Councils of Ministers work from a child rights and youth perspective.

This is what to do

This section will help you integrate, in practice, a child rights and youth perspective in your work. You can regard it as a step-by-step guide but, depending on your current position, you can enter the process at the most appropriate step in relation to where you are now.

STEP 1: AWARENESS

Carry out your own analysis of how your issues relate to children and young people and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

If you need to consult expertise or want more inspiration on the journey, contact NORDBUK or advisers for children and young people.



Integration as a method to ensure a certain perspective is incorporated in the work of an organisation is based on a very fundamental idea, i.e. that you are the expert in your area, so you are the most suitable person to develop and integrate a child rights and youth perspective by developing the way you work. It is therefore vital that you make a child rights and youth perspective "your own".

A fundamental analysis of how your issues relate to children and young people is therefore the basis of all integration.

How does your work help to address children's rights?

How do the issues you work with concern children and young people?

Which children and young people are concerned and which are not?

Who are excluded and why?

STEP 2: PROCESS MAPPING

Identify the processes – your work tasks and products – in which a child rights and youth perspective needs to be integrated.

As we described earlier, integration involves both thinking and doing. For this to be successful, it is important that you have an idea of **WHEN**, i.e. in which of your work tasks, you need to base your work on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. You also need to know when children and young people's experiences and voices need to be embraced and considered.

In which work processes can I integrate a child rights and youth perspective?



Some examples of processes in the Nordic Council of Ministers where integration may be needed:

- Formulation of co-operation programmes, strategies and action plans
- Budget processes (formulation and decisions on priorities)
- Preparation of presidency programmes
- Preparation of grant notifications
- Decision-making
- Design of projects or other initiatives
- Prioritisations and guidelines for a funding programme
- Implementation of projects, conferences, exhibitions, workshops
- Following up and evaluating policy documents and projects
- Placing orders with partners
- Management of external players
- Quality assurance of colleagues and the work of collaboration partners
- Appraisal discussions and various types of development dialogues

STEP 3: DIVISION OF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Decide who is to be responsible for what. Create an ownership to ensure integration of a child rights and youth perspective in the work.

Your role in the work will vary, depending on your position but also on the process in question. Advisers, project workers, project managers, collaboration partners and officials must all take responsibility for integration, on the basis of their own perspectives and tasks.

Who is responsible for integrating a child rights and youth perspective in the processes in Step 2?



Your role in various processes can be to:

- listen to children and young people
- initiate
- plan
- inspire
- make decisions
- guide
- lead/steer others
- analyse
- implement
- formulate tasks
- follow up and evaluate
- assure quality
- question

STEP 4: KNOWLEDGE AND TOOL KIT



Identify your needs for knowledge, and build up a tool kit of methods to embrace and consider the thoughts and ideas of different children and young people.

When you have identified the processes in which you will integrate a child rights and youth perspective, and when your role in each process is clear, you need to identify what knowledge you need about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and/or the conditions of different children and young people in each process. No doubt you have some knowledge already, but other parts you may need to acquire. There are many ways to find out about children and young people's various experiences, circumstances and thoughts. Different approaches bring varying degrees of participation and influence, and the circumstances determine which methods are suitable and realistic. It is therefore

important to adapt the choice of method on the basis of which area, which situation, and which children and young people are involved. A rule of thumb is that the more children and young people are affected by your decisions, the more they need to participate in your work. But remember that you as an adult must take responsibility for considering children and young people's opinions in relation to their age and maturity.

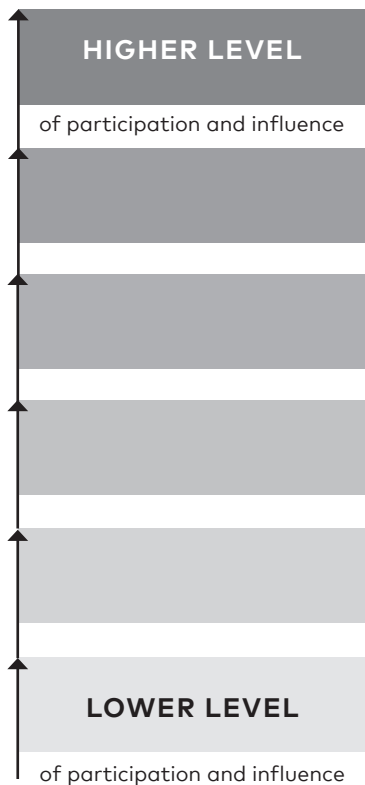
There are many ways to describe levels of participation and influence for children and young people. If you want to explore this in more detail, researchers such as Robert Hart and Harry Shier have described this in various ways.¹

What knowledge about children and young people or the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is needed in various processes?

How will you ensure that various dimensions that can affect the experiences of children and young people are considered, such as gender, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs, disabilities, sexual orientation or age?

How can you in your different roles incorporate the perspective of children and young people in planning, implementation and evaluation?

1. Robert Hart, *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship* (1992) and Harry Shier *Pathways to Participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations*. *Children & Society* 15 (2001).



You can do this, for example, by

- Allowing children and young people themselves to decide on and implement a project, parts of a conference, workshop or a meeting.
- Appointing a representative advisory children's and/or youth group that can be consulted on various issues, or working with existing mechanisms such as children's and young people's councils at school, community and national levels.
- Asking different children and young people directly, for example in age-appropriate focus groups, activities, questionnaires, and interviews, or on social media.
- Asking organisations that work with the living conditions of children and young people, or experts on children and young people's perspective in various issues.
- Finding out about children and young people's varying perspectives in existing research or in other types of documentation.
- Discussing with colleagues how different groups of children and young people could be affected by your decisions.

DID YOU KNOW?

The presence of children and young children in various decision-making processes is not enough for you to claim that children and young people 'were involved'.

To respect and increase participation of children and young people, you must also be open to taking seriously what they have to say, changing your way of thinking, and the way you do things.

Here are some common pitfalls to avoid (inspired by Hart's Ladder of Participation).

Uninformed alibii: Children and young people are involved – but with no clear purpose and sometimes just to strengthen an already finished concept.

Window-dressing: Children and young people are involved – but just to make it look good to others.

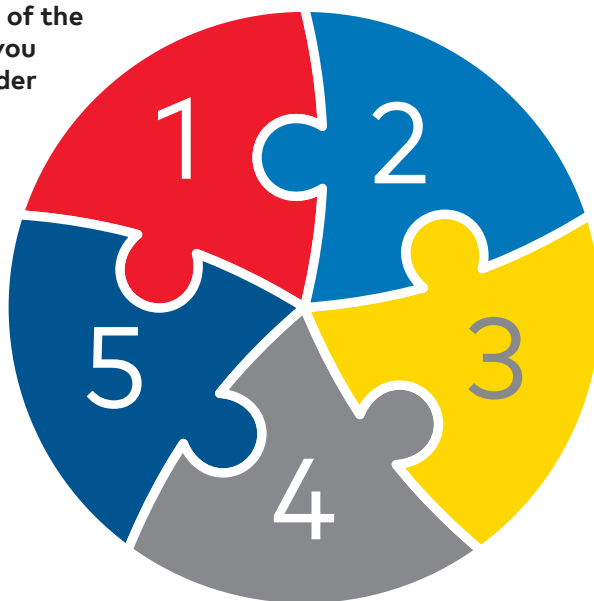
Passive interns: Children and young people are included – but simply because it is instructional for them and not for others.

STEP 5: INTEGRATION

Continually integrate a child rights
and youth perspective



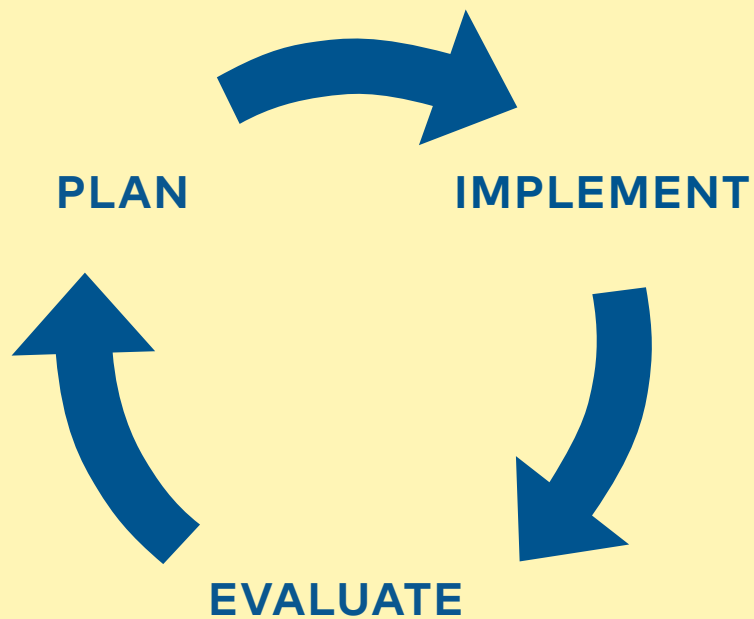
on the basis of the
awareness you
acquired under
STEP 1



in the processes
you identified in
STEP 2

on the basis of
your role as
described in
STEP 3

using the knowledge and
tools you were given in
STEP 4



This is now where you should be. However, the situation is not static – many of the decision-making processes above will undoubtedly recur, and they always involve planning, implementation and evaluation. In all stages of the journey, the child rights and youth perspective can be incorporated, and each time around the work can be improved.

Integration plan

This is the part of the guide where you start to take action. If we and you have done the work correctly, you should now be able to fill in one or two lines in each section of a table like the one below.

Complete each section according to the logic we have used in this guide, but in the format that is most suitable for you. Carry out a joint analysis and plan together with the colleagues who work with the same issues and processes. If necessary, you

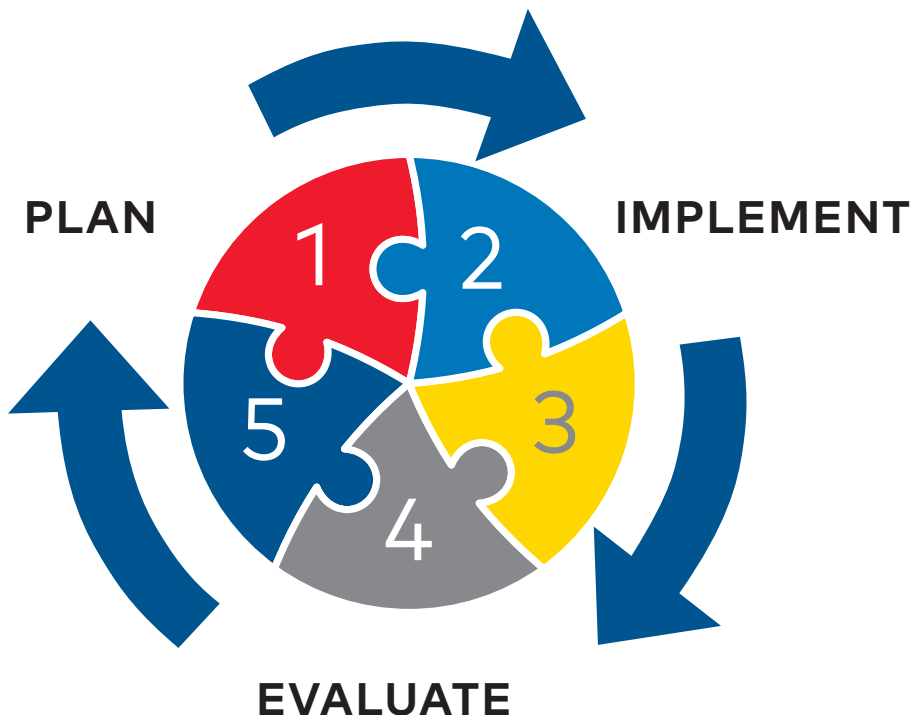
can always ask for help from NORDBUK, official advisers for child and youth issues, or other experts. Don't forget to include the sustainability and gender equality perspectives too. When you've finished, you have your integration plan!

KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS The issues I work with primarily concern children and young people in this general way:			
 PROCESS MAPPING Processes where a child rights and youth perspective is to be integrated:	 DIVISION OF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES The following players/ persons are responsible for the parts shown in each process:	 TOOL KIT We need the following knowledge about children and young people. A child rights and youth perspective will be embraced/children and young people will participate by:	

Some final words of encouragement

Integration is about incorporating certain perspectives in the issues you work with – in this case, a child rights and youth perspective. You are the expert on your issues, so you are in the best position to find the link to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the living conditions of children and young people. It's about wearing the right glasses.

The work on integration will never be finished, but practice makes perfect, and the working method will gradually become more and more natural. Remember, integration helps to improve the quality of your work. Challenge yourself to constantly increase the level of participation and influence for children and young people, and find new ways of working with the issues that affect children and young people.



**Thank you for helping to make the
Nordic region the best place in the
world for children and young people,
and good luck on your journey!**



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A key objective in the strategy is that the Nordic Council of Ministers will increasingly integrate a child rights and youth perspective in its work, thereby raising the level of participation of children and young people. The objective is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but also on a conviction that today's projects and activities would be improved when children and young people participate and exert influence in various ways. Decisions would also be given greater legitimacy, and initiatives would be of higher quality and relevant to more people when the perspective of children and young people is incorporated.

This guide provides support and inspiration in the work to integrate a child rights and youth perspective in the various processes and activities of the Nordic Council of Ministers. The guide also provides the knowledge and tools relevant to the integration work, and helps you think about which glasses you are wearing in your everyday work.