

No child or young person shall be left behind

A child rights and youth perspective
in Nordic disability co-operation



Nordic Welfare
Centre

No child or young person should be left behind

A child rights and youth perspective in Nordic disability co-operation

Published by the Nordic Welfare Centre

© June 2020

Text: Maria Montefusco and Merethe Løberg

Publisher: Eva Franzén

ISBN: 978-91-88213-66-2

Photo: Mostphotos

Nordic Welfare Centre, Sweden
Box 1073, SE-101 39 Stockholm
Visiting address: Drottninggatan 30
Tel: +46 8 545 536 00
info@nordicwelfare.org

Nordic Welfare Centre, Finland
c/o Folkhälsan
Topeliuksenkatu 20
FI-00250 Helsinki
Tel: +358 20 741 08 80
info@nordicwelfare.org

This publication can be downloaded from:
nordicwelfare.org/en/publikationer

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
The human rights perspective	6
What does it mean to incorporate a child rights and youth perspective?	8
How should we work in practice?	9
Activities	10
Children and young people's own activities and opportunities to have a say	10
1. Empower youth organisations and Nordic co-operation	10
2. Youth panels and youth council	10
Co-operation and the consultative role of children and young people.....	11
3. A child rights and youth perspective in the Disability Council.....	11
4. A child rights and youth perspective in the Nordic Council of Ministers' Action Plan for Nordic Co-operation on Disability.....	12
5. Monitoring and evaluating Nordic disability co-operation	13
References	14

Introduction

The vision of Nordic co-operation is to achieve the world's most integrated and sustainable region by 2030. To succeed, it is vital that we involve children and young people in the development, implementation and evaluation of policy.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' cross-sectoral strategy for children and young people states that "the Nordic Region must be the best place in the world for children and young people". A child rights and youth perspective is therefore integrated into every aspect of Nordic co-operation. There are essentially two aspects to a child rights and youth perspective:

- In accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the best interests of children and young people, focusing on their rights, knowledge, needs and wishes and with their living conditions in mind, shall be the paramount consideration of Nordic collaboration; for example, when exchanging knowledge and experience and mapping needs. As an adult, the principled position should be to allow oneself to be guided by the child's perspective.
- Accessible conditions must be provided to ensure that children and young people can participate and be involved in matters that concern them.

Nordic disability co-operation mainly encompasses the Nordic Council of Ministers' advisory body the Council of Nordic Cooperation on Disability (the Disability Council) and the Nordic Council of Ministers' Action Plan for Nordic Co-operation on Disability 2018-22. The Nordic Welfare Centre is an agency under the Council of Minister's Welfare and Health and Social Affairs sector. Disability is one of the Nordic Welfare Centre's target areas, involving projects and networks, as well as expert groups.

A child rights perspective has previously been highlighted in Nordic disability co-operation and young people with disabilities have been involved in projects, events and expert groups; however, this has not been systematically implemented or regularly followed up. The Nordic Committee for Children and Young People (NORDBUK) has tasked the Nordic Welfare Centre with, in dialogue with the

Disability Council, developing a scheme for how disability co-operation can adopt a more explicit child rights and youth perspective. This is a project within the scope of the Nordic Council of Ministers' Action Plan for Nordic Co-operation on Disability 2018-22 and at the same time contributes to the implementation of the strategy for children and young people.

During spring 2019, NORDBUK together with the Nordic Welfare Centre and the members of the Disability Council appointed an expert group to provide specialist knowledge to the project. This group has a broad knowledge of and insight into issues related to child rights, youth work and disabilities. Above all, the scheme includes initiatives to ensure that a child rights and youth perspective is clearly and visibly included in the Action Plan for Nordic Co-operation on Disability 2018-2022 and in the work of the Disability Council.

The scheme has been discussed by the expert group and members of the Disability Council, as well as at a meeting on the ability of young people to exert influence held in Helsinki on 13 January 2020. The meeting was attended by 34 representatives of organisations for young people with disabilities, representing a total of 21 organisations from across the Nordic region. During February 2020, the members of the expert group and the Disability Council have had the opportunity to provide written input to the proposal, as have the delegates who attended the Helsinki meeting. NORDBUK will discuss the proposal during spring 2020.

The human rights perspective

In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Nordic Council of Ministers shall work to protect and promote the rights of children and young people and help provide their opportunities to exercise those rights and be able to participate in society. This implies that all children and young people living in the Nordic countries shall have the right to good living conditions irrespective of their gender, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs, disability, sexual orientation or age. All children and young people have the right to social and economic security, good physical and mental health, leisure and culture, identity and language and to opportunities for education and personal development.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child, the role of which is to monitor and review national compliance with the Convention, has written a General Comment on the following up on the rights of children with disabilities (CRC/C/GC/9). While all the rights stated in CRC also apply to children with disabilities, the Committee notes that children and young people with disabilities are especially vulnerable to discrimination, social exclusion and various forms of violence.

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), everyone with a disability shall be involved in a meaningful way in decision-making and monitoring processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities. This is specified in the articles 4 (3) and 33 (3).

In its General Comment No. 7 (CRPD/C/GC/7), with regard to how these articles should be implemented, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that “the effective and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities [] is at the heart of the Convention”. The comment also underlines the importance of involving children and young people with disabilities in a meaningful way in all matters concerning them.

In terms of child rights, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities largely reflects the perspective of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 7 specifically deals with children with

disabilities and develops the principles of the best interests of the child and the child's right to express their views freely on all matters concerning them. Article 7 (3) of CRPD reinforces article 12 of CRC. It clarifies that when necessary children shall be provided with "disability and age-appropriate assistance" to freely express their views.

The starting point of this scheme is human rights but also sustainable development. An important theme in the UN Agenda 2030 for sustainable development is "leave no one behind". There is a clear integrated child perspective in the goals and targets of the agenda. To implement Agenda 2030 we will therefore work systematically with the inclusion of children and young people with disabilities.

What does it mean to incorporate a child rights and youth perspective?

Nordic co-operation on disability should be relevant to all children and young people. According to the decision by the Nordic Ministers for Co-operation, just like any other Nordic policy, disability co-operation shall have an integrated child rights and youth perspective. The perspective must be adopted in drafting as well as when seeking input, for example, in the earliest project description. This can be most effectively achieved by involving children and/or young people in the development of project concepts and activities from day one. When engaging in dialogue with children and young people, it is important to adopt a vocabulary and use a language that is accessible and inclusive, and to provide relevant examples.

Children and young people have knowledge of what it is like to be a child or youth today, that adults do not possess. They also have other needs, interests and living conditions than adults. Although the needs and living conditions of children and young people with disabilities differ from those of their peers, there is no reason to believe that they have different interests to peers without a disability.

Accessibility is a fundamental aspect determining the conditions for participation by children and young people with disabilities. The surrounding environment can enable or prevent participation. Given the shortcomings in accessibility in our society, this impacts on children and young people with disabilities to a greater extent and in more ways. Children and young people with disabilities have the right to be involved in decisions that concern them. This implies that they can and should be given responsibility and influence.

How should we work in practice?

The Nordic Council of Ministers has published its principles and approaches in the document *When Involving Children and Young People in the Work of the Nordic Council of Ministers* and these should be applied when working with disability co-operation. Among other things, the document addresses issues of representativeness, diversity and respect for the right to privacy of children and young people. The following also generally applies to disability co-operation:

- While a child rights and youth perspective is highlighted in disability co-operation in general, it is also emphasised in some selected and prioritised activities and processes. Children and youth delegates are also involved in the process.
- Accessibility is a prerequisite for participation. Children and young people with disabilities are an extremely heterogeneous group with a wide variety of accessibility needs that must be considered if involvement is to be meaningful.
- It must be the child or young person themselves who decides the agenda for their co-operation and sets the limits for their engagement. The project owner or organisation shall not place an undue burden on children and young people to meet their own needs or (bureaucratic) structures.
- Any and all involvement of children and young people shall be meaningful in as much as they are involved in good time when there is a real opportunity to exert influence.
- All involvement should be followed up with feedback from the responsible organisation.
- Many youth organisations in the disability movement represent and include a group with a higher age limit than would be found among other organisations representing young people. Those representing young adults are often around 30 years of age. This is due to the many and varied barriers presented to children, young people and adults with disabilities, meaning that in many cases the transition from youth to establishing oneself as an adult takes longer. It is for the youth organisation itself to decide which age limit is relevant.

Activities

Children and young people's own activities and opportunities to have a say

Quite often, it is necessary to empower organisations and their Nordic co-operation make it possible to involve young experts and representatives. Some organisations have strong democratic structures while others are networks. In many cases, they are youth groups within another organisation for adults or representing all age groups.

1. Empower youth organisations and Nordic co-operation

The Nordic Council of Ministers and official disability co-operation should support youth organisations in various ways to reinforce the exchange of experience and knowledge and the conditions for representing common interests; for example, through annual meetings and funding for joint projects or network creation. The Nordic Welfare Centre's funding scheme for Nordic co-operation between disability organisations prioritises collaborative projects and meetings between organisations representing young people. There are also other funding schemes available to promote the involvement of young people and Nordic co-operation, many of which are listed on the Nordic Council of Ministers website.

2. Youth panels and youth council

One way to involve children and young people with different forms of disability is to establish regional (Nordic) youth panels or a youth council with representatives from various disability organisations. These can act as forums for young people with disabilities to make recommendations regarding disability activities in general and/or specific issues. Panels or the council can, for example, participate in evaluating the work of the Council of Ministers in the field of disability, write or otherwise document shadow reports regarding Nordic co-operation and make proposals for the further development of the work. They could also play an important role in formulating the Council of Ministers' next strategy or action plan on disability co-operation. A youth council should also have a mandate

to implement independent initiatives, make proposals and ask questions to the various stakeholders in Nordic co-operation. The council and panels may also act as consultative bodies.

Co-operation and the consultative role of children and young people

Children and young people with disabilities shall be invited to co-operate with and advise the Nordic Council of Ministers' advisory bodies and to take part in projects and other activities that concern them.

3. A child rights and youth perspective in the Disability Council

The Nordic Council of Ministers' Disability Council consists of experts appointed by governments and umbrella organisations representing people with disabilities throughout the Nordic region. The Disability Council is tasked with developing, promoting and monitoring disability co-operation and with offering advice and proposals regarding inclusion to Nordic co-operation policy areas.

- At every meeting and when planning and evaluating each activity, the Disability Council shall systematically utilise and reflect on the issues raised in the Nordic Council of Ministers publication *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*. The key issues include: How does the activity contribute to improve the living conditions and situation of children and young people? Have we involved concerned children and young people in a meaningful way? How does what we do concern children and young people? How has the work affected children and young people?
- The Disability Council invites representatives of young people with disabilities to council meetings and other activities. Primarily, these are representatives from democratically structured organisations but they may also be young people with disabilities whose personal experiences are relevant to the matter in hand. This may be in the role of observer or as an external expert who can provide input from their own

perspective. The Council of Ministers' documented principles and approaches for involving children and young people shall be applied.

4. A child rights and youth perspective in the Nordic Council of Ministers' Action Plan for Nordic Co-operation on Disability

The Nordic Council of Ministers' Action Plan for Nordic Co-operation on Disability 2018-2022 includes two activities that explicitly concern children and young people with disabilities. The first is a survey of which official stakeholders are responsible for promoting the rights and involvement of children and young people with disabilities, including examples of promising praxis in schools and leisure activities. The second is a seminar tour on international student mobility and disability in higher education, originally an initiative from the Deaf Nordic Youth Council. Young people with disabilities were consulted in the planning and implementation of both projects.

The child rights and youth perspective shall also be systematically integrated and young people and/or children with disabilities shall be meaningfully involved in all other activities included in the Action Plan based on the two aspects described above. The project manager for each activity is responsible for adopting a child rights and youth perspective. The Nordic Council of Ministers' publication *Do Rights! Nordic perspectives on child and youth participation* contains inspiration regarding how this can be accomplished in practice.

The activities for each focus area are listed below:

Human rights

- 1.1 Efforts to improve knowledge and dialogue relating to human rights and disability
- 1.2 Project on indigenous peoples and disabilities
- 1.3 Children and young people and their participation in school and recreation

Sustainable development

- 2.1 Integration of the disability perspective in the activities of the Nordic Council of Ministers
- 2.2 Universal design and accessibility – participation and democracy
- 2.3 An inclusive labour market in the Nordic Region

Freedom of movement

3.1 A disability perspective in Nordic co-operation on freedom of movement

3.2 Student mobility in the Nordic Region

3.3 Social and urban planning that supports freedom of movement for everyone

5. Monitoring and evaluating Nordic disability co-operation

The Disability Council submits an annual report on the progress of disability co-operation to the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Health and Social Affairs (EK-S). A more extensive dossier is submitted to the Nordic Council of Ministers every other year, which is then presented to the full session of the Nordic Council. On such occasions, the Disability Council is also required to report on how transversal perspectives are being integrated, including the child rights and youth perspective.

Representatives of children and young people with disabilities are consulted in the evaluation of the Action Plan and involved in drafting proposals for the next scheme.

References

Do rights! Nordic perspectives on child and youth participation

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 9 (2006) on the rights of children with disabilities (CRC/C/GC/9)

UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities General comment No. 7 (2018) on the participation of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations, in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention (CRPD/C/GC/7)

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

SE: <https://www.norden.org/sv/publication/har-du-ratt-glasogon-pa-dig>

IS: <https://www.norden.org/is/publication/ert-thu-med-rettu-gleraugun>

FI: <https://www.norden.org/fi/publication/katsotko-asioita-oikein-silmin>

When Involving Children and Young People in the Work of the Nordic Council of Ministers: Principles and approaches

SE: <https://pub.norden.org/nord2020-012/>

NO: <https://pub.norden.org/nord2020-013/>

DA: <https://pub.norden.org/nord2020-014/>

FI: <https://pub.norden.org/nord2020-016/>

IS: <https://pub.norden.org/nord2020-017/>

The Nordic Council of Ministers' Action Plan for Nordic Cooperation on Disability 2018-22

The Nordic Council of Ministers theme page on disability

Nordic Council of Ministers Vision 2030

Nordic Welfare Centre website on disability

Nordic Welfare Centre funding scheme for Nordic cooperation between organisations for people with disabilities

Applying for funding for Nordic cooperation

Nordic Welfare Centre
Box 1073, SE-101 39 Stockholm
Visiting address: Drottninggatan 30
Telephone: +46 8 545 536 00
info@nordicwelfare.org

Nordic Welfare Centre
c/o Folkhälsan
Topeliuksenkatu 20
FI-00250 Helsinki
Telephone: +358 20 741 08 80
info@nordicwelfare.org