PROMISE Elpis: Voices of Children

by Olivia Lind Haldorsson and Sven Wilson,
Council of the Baltic Sea States

PROMISE Elpis: Voices of Children

Publisher: Council of the Baltic Sea States

Authors: Olivia Lind Haldorsson, Council of the Baltic Sea States

Sven Wilson, Council of the Baltic Sea States

Would you like to translate this document? Please contact the Council of the Baltic Sea States to find out more about format, accreditation and copyright.

Published May 2025 in Stockholm.

Elpis terminology disclaimer:

This report is part of the EU-funded project 'PROMISE Elpis'. Promise Elpis is committed to upholding the highest standards in child protection and ethical communication. The Luxembourg Guidelines (2016) promote the use of consistent, accurate, and sensitive language - particularly in the context of child protection - that avoids confusion, stigma, and harm, and avoids contributing to further victimization or misunderstanding. The Guidelines are intended to be applied broadly within the field, including the creation of policies, legal documents, reports, and public communication.

To best achieve these aims, our work follows the Luxembourg Guidelines and any updates to it. Further, we adapt as terminology evolves by developing internal guidance that aligns with these principles. When citing external sources, we retain the original language to preserve the intended meaning and context, ensuring the accuracy and authenticity of the cited content.

Introduction

Child and youth participation is a human right. A right that recognises children's dignity, equality, and respect for their worth as a human person. The right to participate, set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 12, does not need to be justified any more than any other human right. It is a binding legal obligation in international law. Because the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by almost all countries in the world, it means that it is applicable in the Baltic Sea Region, in Europe, and beyond.

Despite this binding legal obligation, child and youth participation continues to challenge many governments, authorities, communities, organisations, and adults. A global survey of around 25,000 individuals under the age of 30 from 186 countries found that 56% of young people believe their views are being ignored when important decisions that impact them are made (Global Shapers survey, 2017)[1]. What is the reason for this? Sometimes it is because of attitudes, which undermine the perception of children's and youth's capabilities, competence, and commitment. It can also be a lack of understanding of the benefits of involving children and youth or not knowing exactly *how to* involve them.

One of the main objectives of the PROMISE Elpis project has been to adapt multidisciplinary services for cases of online child sexual abuse. Since children have a right to be heard in *all matters affecting them*, their viewpoints and engagement should be valued in designing, developing, and implementing multidisciplinary services. A crucial part of the Elpis project has therefore been to listen to and understand children's views on online harm and how they would like to be met by practitioners and service providers.

Although there is an increasing recognition that children and youth can bring real and necessary contributions, the extensive commitments to child participation as enshrined in Article 12 of the UNCRC are not always acknowledged. The Laura Lundy model of child participation provides a conceptual framework for Article 12 and highlights that for Article 12 to be successfully implemented: space, voice, audience, and influence must be considered.

By structuring this paper according to the four elements of the Lundy model, the aim of this summary report is twofold. First, introduce the work related to child participation in the PROMISE Elpis project. Second, to demonstrate how the work has successfully implemented Article 12 of the UNCRC.

---

[1] Global Shapers Survey, 2017. Retrieved from:
https://www.es.amnesty.org/fileadmin/noticias/ShapersSurvey2017_Full_Report_24Aug__002__01.pdf

Project Elpis and Lundy model for child participation

How do we ensure that we get child participation right? There are many models to ensure meaningful, safe and ethical child and youth participation. The focus of this report is the Laura Lundy model for child participation, which has been recognised by international actors such as the UN and the EU. The Model is about creating opportunities for space, voice, audience, and influence. All these elements are critical in and of themselves, but they are also interrelated.

Space

Giving children *space* is the starting point for meaningful engagement of children and youth. In short, this means creating an opportunity for involvement — it is not enough to sit around and wait for children and young people to express their views or get involved! So, we need to *actively seek* children's views and participation and provide a safe space where children can engage and express themselves freely. The concept of space encompasses both physical and emotional space. It also involves taking steps to ensure that all children who are affected can take part, regardless of language, special needs, or disability.

How has the Elpis Project worked to ensure *space*? The work with children in the project was spearheaded by *Children First,* who asked children and young people in Scotland about online sexual harm, including children with direct experience of it (Children First, 2024). The aim was to better understand children's and young people's perspective on what the current support system looks like and how they've experienced it, as well as how they would prefer to be encountered and supported by service providers and trusted adults in cases of online sexual harm.

This work intentionally took its starting point in the Laura Lundy model for child participation. Children were able to decide where – in which space – they wanted to participate to ensure that the physical surroundings were safe and comfortable, and food and snacks were offered. In addition, several measures were taken to consider a safe emotional space. Child protection considerations and potential risks were considered well in advance. During the activities, children and young people had constant access to support workers who were there to help the child, if needed. The participation was guided and paced by the children and young people, and they decided when to pause and finish, and the group sessions ended with a check-in.

The results of the consultations with children were summarised in a report. The report highlights six themes:

> (i) Value of a trusted adult/organisation,
> (ii) Going at children and young people's pace,
> (iii) Prevention and Protection,
> (iv) Importance of feeling heard

(v) Police response, and

(vi) Challenges of online world.

One of the conclusions from the consultations was that children experienced that the supporting adults at times lacked understanding of how to best respond and support them. The report also highlights aspects that children believed were important such as being met with empathy and not feeling rushed.

The full version of Children First's report, including methodology, can be found [here](#).

Voice

Giving children **voice** is about enabling children to engage. All children should be given an opportunity to be involved and express their views, and this means that there may be a need to support the child to do so. The starting point here is that all children should be supported to acquire the skills, capacity and self-confidence to express their views. Since children and youth form a diverse group with different needs, capabilities, and interests, it is important to ensure that there is a wide range of options for children to express their views and contribute. It is also important to pay attention to factors that can limit participation, such as marginalization, discriminatory cultural norms, social exclusion, disability etc. Voice is about thinking carefully about what information children need to grasp what you are doing and to form an opinion about it.

How has *voice* been considered in the project? Children First offered different means of expression for children and young people. An activity pack was created to facilitate individual participation, and participants could share their thoughts both in writing and through drawings. The group session, aimed at children who hadn't any known experience of online sexual harm, centered around two fictional but realistic cases of online harm. – 'Elsa' and 'Rory'. Participants were asked to read the two cases and then together choose which case to focus on. Both cases contained a background outlining the context, a brief description of how it escalated into online harm, and some questions to spark reflection, written in child-friendly, accessible language.

Moreover, children and young people – together with Children First – developed animated video recommendations for teachers, social workers, and police offering concrete guidance how children would like to be supported in cases of online sexual abuse (Children First, 2025).

> " We hope the animations will help you understand how to respond and the impact that online harm has on children's mental health. " Jamie-Leigh, young person

[See the animations...](#)

Audience and influence

Giving children and youth an ***audience*** means that the views and engagement of children and youth should be communicated to adults who are willing to consider them. This involves *determining* who the audience is and if there is a process in place for channelling children's contributions to the audience. Children and youth should also know where their views are going and what can and cannot be done with them. Which leads us to the last concept, ***influence***. Children's views should not only be heard - they should also be carefully considered as a serious contribution. This means that the views must be taken carefully into account, and that we communicate how the views were considered in policies, interventions, programs, and standards.

The animations developed by the children and young people and Children First were presented in a workshop at the 41st National Symposium for Child Abuse in the United States. The professionals at this symposium work to support victims of violence and abuse, and over 50 people attended the workshop. The participants in the workshop were asked to provide feedback on the question: "Now you have watched our videos, how can you better support children and young people? ". Over 30 comments were brought back to inform children how their videos had impacted professionals and what measures they would take after watching the videos.

In addition, taking children's experiences as the starting point, HEUNI developed five recommendations and a checklist for professionals investigating cases of online sexual abuse, focusing on how to encounter victims in a child-friendly and sensitive way. The report highlights five recommendations (Korkman 2025). Each of the recommendations is operationalised into concrete guidance for practitioners. For example, Recommendation 3, *Importance of feeling heard,* outlines, among other things, "Maintain eye contact, sit attentively, and use body language to convey understanding".

Lastly, children's voices were also used to update a child participation tool. The original tool was an evaluation tool for Barnahus, specifically tailored for children. It was available in two versions, one for children aged 8–12 and one for 13–17 (Lind Haldorsson & Heiberg, 2019). Based on the findings of the report, the tool was modified and was piloted between January 2024 and February 2025 at two locations in Germany (Berlin and Schwerin). The overall aim of this process was to develop a shorter child participation evaluation tool for Barnahus that will monitor the satisfaction of (younger) children, adolescents, and their caregivers (Charité 2025).

Conclusion

One of the main objectives of the PROMISE Elpis project has been to adapt multidisciplinary services for cases of online child sexual violence. Article 12 of the UNCRC stipulates that children have a right to participate in all matters affecting them. A key part of the Elpis project has been to listen to children and understand how they would like to be met by trusted adults and practitioners.

One of the strengths of the Lundy model is its flexibility -- there are different ways to conceptualise the model. This is especially true for the multifaceted concept of influence. Influence can mean getting feedback from relevant practitioners and contributing to policy recommendations. But we can also operationalise *influence* in other ways.

Children have provided opinions on how they would like to be encountered and supported by trusted adults in cases of online harm. One way to conceive of influence is to ensure that the preferences of children are respected by trusted adults and reflected in the services they encounter.

> "Now you have watched our videos, how can you better support children and young people?"[2]
> Erin, young person

Constructed this way, influence isn't something that can be achieved within the context of this project. Ensuring that children's voices permeate service delivery is more of an ideal to strive towards. Hopefully, the outputs – the reports, recommendations, and videos – outlined in this summary report can be a neat starting point for this work.

---

[2] Children First, Online harm: Advice and resources for professionals
https://www.childrenfirst.org.uk/about-us/working-with-professionals/online-harm/

References

Charité (2025). *Updated Child Participation Tool.* Manuscript.

Children First. (2024). *Children and young people feedback summary ELPIS Project*. Retrieved from: https://www.childrenfirst.org.uk/media/2kchpl0v/children-first-voices-of-children-and-young-people-elpis-project-feedback-summary-december-2024.pdf

Children First. (2025). Online harm Advice and resources for professionals. Retrieved from: https://www.childrenfirst.org.uk/about-us/working-with-professionals/online-harm/

Global Shapers. (2017). *Global Shapers Annual Survey 2017*. World Economic Forum. Retrieved from:
https://www.es.amnesty.org/fileadmin/noticias/ShapersSurvey2017_Full_Report_24Aug__002__01.pdf

Lind Haldorsson, O., & Heiberg, T. (2019). *Child Participation Tool*. Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat & Child Circle. Retrieved from
https://barnahus.eu/2022/12/27/the-promise-child-participation-tool/

Korkman, J. (2025). *Listening to Young Voices: Recommendations for Including Children in Investigations of Online Sexual Abuse. Insights from the ELPIS Project on Building Trust, Safety, and Empowerment for Children*. European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control (HEUNI).
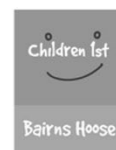
Implementing the Barnahus Quality Standards throughout Europe
PROMISE is supporting Europe to adopt the Barnahus model as a standard practice for providing child victims and witnesses of violence rapid access to justice and care. We undertake this work to fulfil the PROMISE vision: a Europe where all children enjoy their right to be protected from violence.

A Barnahus provides multi-disciplinary and interagency collaboration to ensure that child victims and witnesses of violence benefit from a child-friendly, professional and effective response in a safe environment which prevents (re)traumatisation. With the formal support from national authorities, PROMISE provides opportunities to translate national commitment into action and engage internationally in the process. In addition, regular networking and strategic communications continually activate our growing network of professionals and stakeholders who are committed to introducing and expanding Barnahus services nationally.

The first PROMISE project (2015-2017) set European standards and engaged a broad network of professionals. The second PROMISE project (2017-2019) promoted national level progress towards meeting the standards and formalised the PROMISE Barnahus Network. The third project (2020-2022) expanded these activities to include University training, case management tools, with a view to establishing a European Competence Centre for Barnahus and laying the groundwork for an accreditation system for Barnhaus. The current Project: PROMISE ELPIS (2023-2025) is managed by Charité-University Medicine, Berlin, and promotes multidisciplinary and interagency models for child victims and witnesses of sexual violence, with a specific focus on specialised interventions and excellence in practice in cases where there is a presumed online element of the sexual violence.

Access the PROMISE tools and learn more at www.barnahus.eu