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CHILD PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

HOW WERE CHILDREN
INVOLVED IN OUR WORK
IN 2022?

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INTRODUCTION

At the Hintalovon Foundation, we work with children for children's rights. In 2022, we worked with nearly 40 children, held more than 70 meetings and discussions with them, and involved them in 20 projects. We involved children in a variety of roles, from counselling to awareness-raising, based on a tailor-made methodology. Their participation is governed by the Child Safeguarding Policy, which we review annually.

Our aim in reporting on the Children's Participation 2022 is to provide an overview of our work together, to highlight the diverse opportunities for involving children, and to contribute to the learning of good practices and the discussion of methodological dilemmas.

We particularly recommend it for those who wish to consider children's perspective when working, and for those who actually want to involve them.

After all, it is only worth thinking about children together with children.



HOW MANY CHILDREN WORKED WITH US IN 2022?

Just like in the previous years, in 2022 we worked together with approx. 35-40 children, in three capacities.

- Child Rights Ambassadors were collaborating just like our full-time colleagues in the activities of the foundation.
- The CLEAR-Rights project continued, so the Children's Advisory Team also continued to work on child-friendly justice.
- With occasional volunteers who either joined us for a previous call, project or as part of the School Community Service.

IN 2022

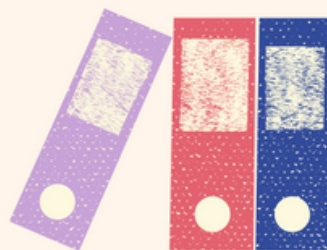
we worked with
nearly **40** children,



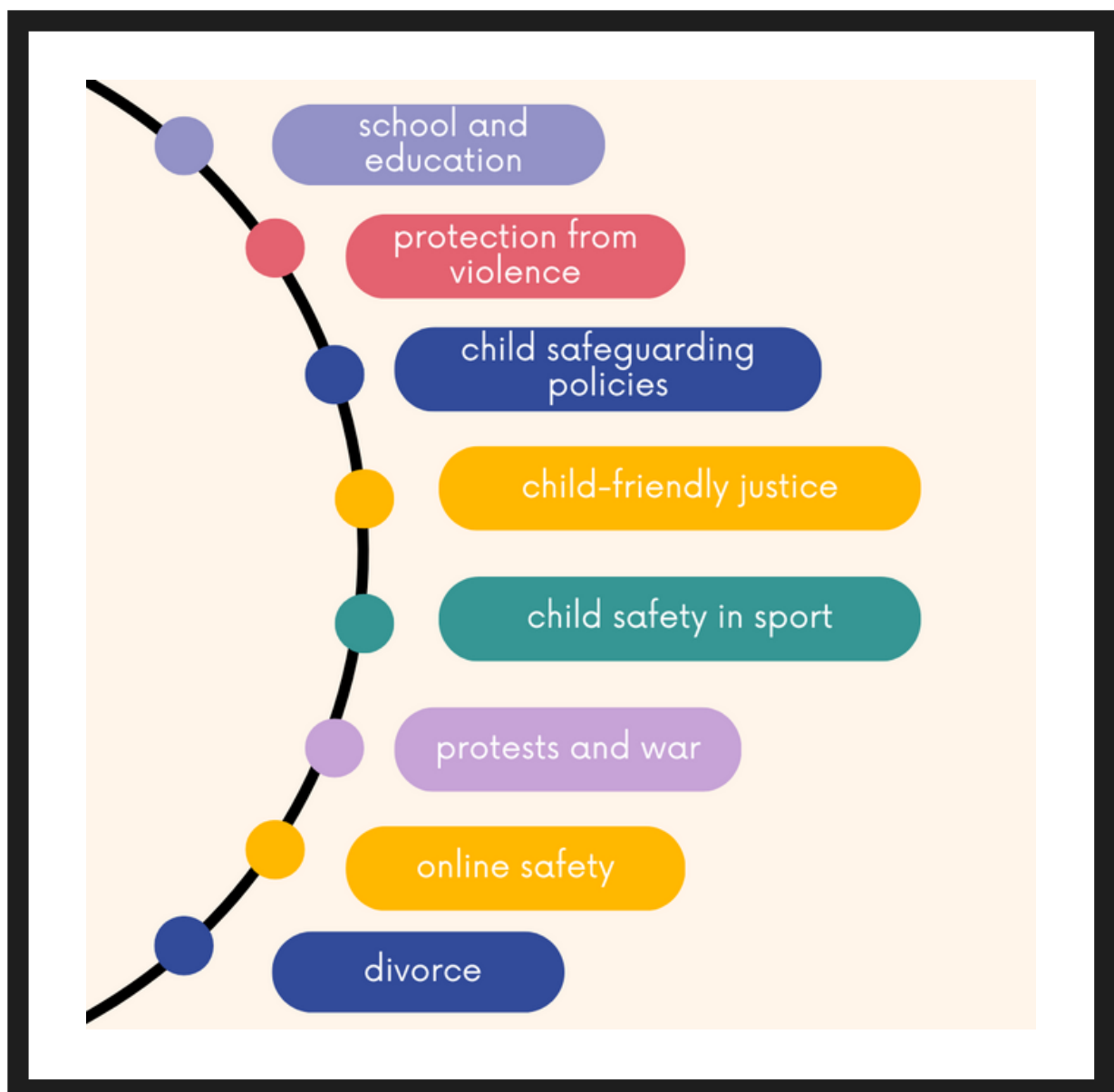
held more than **70**
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On what topics have we asked the children working with us for their views?



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2022



- We helped the European Council to include children's views in its recommendations on parenting divorce.
- The team of young people working with us has expanded and diversified, with 12-13 year olds and young people from outside Budapest joining us.
- We organised our first sleepover camp for the children who work with us.
- Our child volunteers gave presentations at national and international conferences, including Keeping Children Safe and the NGO Coalition on the Rights of the Child, and sent a video message to the PILnet global conference.
- We helped to bring children to a public forum on safe communities.
- Our Child Safeguarding Policy helped us to arrive prepared in difficult situations and to work safely for children and adults.
- We have experienced the impact that standing up for children's rights as part of a team has on children's own lives and their environment.

WHAT WERE THE CHILDREN INVOLVED IN?

The children were involved in most of the foundation's projects and tasks. In coordination with the foundation's other programs, they had a significant role in the projects below:

- The NEMECSEK Program worked together with the Child Rights Ambassadors in numerous ways. For example, they consulted about relevant questions related to certain projects every month. Moreover, the children were involved in the cooperation with partners and counselling.
- The NEMECSEK Sport Program has been collaborating with a Child Advisory Board since the beginning. From research to communication, they discussed every current topics and the children were asked to share their opinions on the matters.
- In the community safeguarding project, Child Rights Ambassadors fulfilled numerous roles. In 2022, the main focus was on the communication of research findings, the creation of an action plan and the participation in a community meeting. Within the framework of this project, the children created a podcast, choosing the topic and the processes themselves.
- Together with the Child Rights Ambassadors, our goal in 2022 was also to bring people closer to children's rights. The Ambassadors helped in the development of a children's rights lesson plan, and preparing for the high-school graduation, we collected frequently asked questions and the related answers.
- The most disturbing event in 2022 was the Russian-Ukrainian war. Using its skills and knowledge, the foundation tried to help refugee children and their families, and aimed to support teachers, adults and parents about how they can discuss the war with children. Our Child Rights Ambassadors helped in the development of these materials.



- The foundation has been making a comprehensive yearly report since 2016, about significant child rights events which reflect changes in legislation and statistics. The 2021 report, which was made in 2022, is somewhat more special, because it includes the thoughts and perspectives of the Child Rights Ambassadors.
- The „éniseztérzem” brand released its collection created in collaboration with the Hintalovon Foundation. The children who we work with were involved in the creation of the messages.
- In 2022, our Child Rights Ambassadors started to focus on the topic of mental wellbeing, however, due to the termination of the YELON Program, this project came to a halt.

The Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation is working with numerous international organisations, and in 2022, we participated in several international conferences, events and consultations. The Child Participation Program is one of the cornerstones, so the children who work with us have appeared on the international stage several times during the year.

- Launched in the summer of 2021 and running until December 2022, the CLEAR-Rights project (for child-friendly justice) has seen the establishment of Child Advisory Boards in three countries. The work of the Hungarian board was coordinated by the Hintalovon Foundation, involving 11 young people.



- One of the most exciting professional project of 2022 was commissioned by the European Council. The international organisation is developing tools to promote the best interests of children in relation to parental separation and care, taking into account the views of the children. We held six child consultations on the topic in Hungary, and supported our partners abroad in conducting child consultations there.
- In 2022, a Hungarian child was admitted to the Eurochild Children's Council, with the support of Hintalovon. The members of the current Children's Council will work together as advisors for two years to support the Eurochild's work.
- As a partner of Eurochild, Hintalovon's young colleagues participated in international forums (e.g. the 14th European Commission Forum on the Rights of the Child) and consultations (e.g. a group of 5 experts supporting the UN Human Rights Council, who work for women's rights, were interested in the experiences of girl activists).
- The Head of our Child Participation Program and one of our Child Rights Ambassadors gave a presentation at the Keeping Children Safe online conference about the importance, development and application of the Child Safeguarding Policy.
- The PILnet held its global forum for pro bono lawyers again in 2022. For this international event, members of the CLEAR-Rights Children's Advisory Board were invited to produce a video to adults with a message they consider important.



The children who work with us will also appear at public events in Hungary, as they are the ones who can best represent and express the children's point of view. In 2022, they made several appearances:

- The Foundation for Democratic Youth organised their 2022 Youth Conference, where our Child Rights Ambassadors were among the speakers. They spoke about child rights and the work of the Foundation.
- Within the framework of the CLEAR-Rights project, an international and a Hungarian conference was organised, where members of the Hungarian Children's Advisory Board were given a voice to express their views on the project and child-friendly justice. Another important element of the project was the training of lawyers; training sessions were held for practising lawyers, during which young people as experts in their field shared their views.
- At Magyar Telekom's Digital Parenting event, our Child Rights Ambassadors were among the participants in a roundtable discussion on the online presence of children and digital parenting.
- At the Child Rights Conference of the NGO Coalition on the Rights of the Child, one of our Child Rights Ambassadors was an important participant in the roundtable discussion on the meaningful and safe participation of children.
- The Kid Colleagues of the Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation created a video for the book entitled DURVA, published by Kolibri.
- The young people working with us also had the opportunity to participate in events where the Foundation was present. For example, before the MARGE concert, those interested could ask questions about the work of the Hintalovon Foundation and child rights.

HOW DID WE WORK TOGETHER WITH THE CHILDREN?

We involved children in our work in different roles

In 2022, children continued to be involved to different degrees in different projects, with different responsibilities and roles. In most cases, we consulted them on issues raised by themselves or by our partners (e.g. the European Council project on divorce and maintaining contact). There were also projects where we worked with them in a deeper partnership. We were the ones who raised the issues and the adults led the joint work, but the children had a direct influence on the development of the projects (e.g. the video produced for the PILnet conference in the CLEAR-Rights project). In 2022, there were no projects in which entirely children exercised leadership.

The team of adults working with children expanded

In the first half of 2022, 2 mentors worked directly with children; they were responsible for meetings with children, for children's well-being and for supporting adult staff in working with children. At the end of summer, when the team of adults working with children expanded, 3 volunteer mentors joined the Foundation to support the work of the 2 adults already in place. Our aim was to put the volunteers in the mentoring role so that our 2 staff members can fulfil a facilitator role in the projects.

We have developed a new structure to involve the children who work most closely with us, the Child Rights Ambassadors

In the spring term, we worked with the children in a similar way as we did in previous years. In total, we held 12 face-to-face meetings, with a focus on team building. In addition to these meetings, we held 32 project meetings, which were always tailored and organised according to the current needs and free capacities. Most of these meetings were held online. In this semester, we have worked with 9 ambassadors; in the meantime, several of them reached the age of 18, so we started recruiting for the fall semester at the beginning of summer.

Learning from the 2021 experience, all recruitment took place in the summer, so that it doesn't coincide with the beginning of the school year. The first step in the selection process was an online questionnaire. We wanted to know what type of activities the applicants were interested in, why they would like to become Child Rights Ambassadors, and we asked them for their opinion on a topic of their choice. The online application was followed by in-person interviews, where the two adult mentors talked with the children about the work of the Foundation, and about the applicants' interests and motivation. The final step of the selection process was a 3-day summer camp, where the children had the chance to experience what it's like to work together and they got to know the team. As a result, we started the autumn term with 18 youngsters.

In 2022, with the support of E.ON, we organised the first overnight camp of the Child Participation Program. The goal was to get to know each other with the growing team of children and to help create an open, honest and safe environment. The camp accelerated the process of getting to know each other and team building, so that the office meetings, which started in the autumn, were more relaxed, and so that it was easier to work together.

From the autumn term onwards, we worked with the children in a new system. We made changes in order to be able to involve those who do not live in or around Budapest, to move the work back from the online space to the offline space, and to meet the children on fixed days that could be planned in advance so that they did not have to work for the foundation between meetings. In the new system, we met for 2 hours on a Friday afternoon every month, and in about a two-week rotation, we spent together a weekend day (about 6 hours). These meetings consisted of four types of activities: training children, consulting with children on a topic, implementing the children's own projects and team building.

As a result of the new system, in the fall semester, we had a total of three separate online meetings for each project, and all other work was done in the 7 in-person meetings.



We have also worked with groups of children specifically set up for a certain project

In 2022, the CLEAR-Rights project continued, in the which we have been working with a dedicated Children's Advisory Board since the summer of 2021. The project ended in 2022. The project was led by Terre des hommes, Hungary, who provided the topics and tasks which were facilitated by the Foundation, and the Foundation's mentors were responsible for the safe participation of the children. During the project, the Board produced 2 videos, participated in 2 professional conferences and produced their own awareness-raising materials to make lawyers and professionals more attentive to children during the proceedings. In the almost 1,5 year-long project, the external invitation referred to 8 meetings; however, in order to keep the team together and to keep the children interested, a total of 15 meetings were held, alternating between online and in-person meetings, taking into account that many of the children do not live in Budapest. The difficulty of the project was that the project leaders did not foresee when the children's input would be needed, and in many cases, it was unforeseen that in exactly which topics did they want to involve the children.

The consultation with children on the topic of divorce, a project commissioned by the European Council, was also carried out with a group set up just for this project. It was conducted intensively over 6 weeks, with six meetings, with the participation of 4 children. The project was very definite, and thus it was easy for the children to plan, and to maintain their enthusiasm and interest until the end of the project. We kept the children informed about the results of the consultation and the development of the project after the intensive period as well.

HOW SHOULD WE ASSESS CHILD PARTICIPATION?

Assessment and monitoring of the substantial, high quality participation:

Quantitative way: The effect of child participation can only be measured by a few specific indexes. In 2022, we worked with nearly 40 children, held more than 70 meetings or discussions with them and we involved them in 20 projects.

Qualitative way:

- At the end of semesters or significant projects we asked them on questionnaires how they had found the common work. We tried to incorporate these feedbacks into our activity during the year.
- At the end of the semesters, 2 mentors sat down with each Child Rights Ambassador to talk personally about the common work and how they felt themselves. This was the platform for sharing personal feedback and difficulties. This is one of the best practices to build trust and get to know and understand children.

Reporting under the Child Safeguarding Policy:

Children working with us can report to the group responsible for our complying with the Child Safeguarding Policy if they are offended or have worries. In 2022, the group received one report, which was investigated together with the affected persons in accordance with the Child Safeguarding Policy.

The Child Rights Ambassadors assessed their own participation, as follows:

At the closing of each semester, beyond personal meetings we also ask the children to assess the projects, meetings and common work of the last period. It can be done by filling in a questionnaire, which was done by 8 out of our 9 volunteers in the first semester, and 14 out of our 18 volunteers in the second semester.

- They found the programme all in all and also each project very good.

- Most of them assessed the effectiveness of their work at the foundation 4 on a 5 point scale.
- However, we received various answers regarding the contribution to their personal development and aims. Although most of them still gave it a 4 score, some 3 scores and one 1 score were also given.
- Most of them found the personal meetings important with respect to building team spirit and active participation.
- Although in the first semester they determined objective difficulties that complicated the carrying out of their own projects, such as school tasks and loss of motivation, in the second semester they still found it more important to have their own projects.
- Most of them found it important to make trainings and information transfer part of the programme. Their interest mainly focuses on their rights in the school and the world of law itself.
- According to the opinion of almost all of the volunteers, during the common work, the child participation principles, such as 'make it clear what will happen', 'decide freely on your participation in each project' and 'make it clear how specific decisions are made', were definitely applied.
- Many said that they would have needed more feedback in connection with the projects.
- They assessed both the cooperation with each other and the common work with the colleagues of the foundation very positively, also with respect to communication and connection.

At the closing of the CLEAR-Rights project, the children also had the opportunity to give feedback in a questionnaire, which was filled in by 9 participants out of 11. Their feedbacks were the followings:

- All in all, almost each participant assessed the project 5 - in a 5 point scale - and they thought that they had gained new knowledge.
- However, the common work contributed less to their personal aims.
- They found communication with their mentors easy, they felt that they were treated respectfully.
- They felt that they were given an opportunity to evolve and they could participate in any activity they were interested in.

LESSONS LEARNED



Motivation

- Children were primarily motivated by transparent, clear frames and options, not the accomplishment of their own initiatives.
- They felt projects as their own ones not because they initiated them, but because they understood and knew their roles and margins.
- They could implement their own ideas the best way, if the aims, frames were determined precisely. This was given mostly for assignments coming out of the foundation.
- They were motivated when they worked in small groups according to their own interests.

Cooperation

- The children gave assistance in activities initiated by the foundation, and their own ideas, initiatives were accomplished through the guidance of their adult colleagues.
- Typically, the children did not coordinate projects, but they were responsible for specific parts of them.

Scheduling

- From the autumn semester, we worked with the children within a new system. Within the new system, we met twice a month, on a Friday afternoon for two hours, and two weeks after that Friday, we spent together one day of the weekend.

- This operation was more child-friendly, plannable and needed less organisation and it was more effective with regard to the building of team spirit. It helped that the children rarely had to deal with foundation tasks between the two meetings, which reduced the possible tension among the young people and took into consideration that the children were also burdened regardless of their foundation tasks.
- However, the common work with other adult colleagues of other programmes of the foundation became more difficult because of the weekend days.
- Project groups sometimes worked parallelly, therefore it was more difficult to solve if the children wanted to participate in more projects at the same time.
- The reduction of online meetings had a positive effect on enthusiasm.
- Due to new children joining the group of Ambassadors, the semester was more about getting used to them, getting to know them and not even about the work.
- Regular meetings with the children are necessary, as we have experienced, meetings once a month are not enough for the children to work as a group.
- If the focus of a project is very clear and its timeframe is short, the effectiveness of the group set up for this can be maintained till the end of the project.

Children Group

- Due to the new scheduling, which was obviously written down at the recruitment, more young people from the countryside could join us.
- In order that this group could work together for a longer period, we reduced the age limit. The youngest member of the autumn group was 12 years old, the oldest was 17. The huge age difference was also effective. Different aspects and dynamics were brought into the group by the primary school pupils and secondary school students. Despite the age difference, the children were open to each other and paid attention to each other.
- Due to the camp and the weekend days, they could build team spirit faster.
- In the overnight camp, other methods, means are worth trying, using the features of the place and time.

- At the beginning of the common work, it was difficult for the children to understand their roles, more time was needed for the presentation of the aims and activity of the foundation, and especially for the importance of child participation.
- If as part of an external assignment we set up an advisory group of children, who work together for a longer period, even for one or more semesters, it is better to adjust to the projects of an existing children group, than setting up a new children group, because we can prevent the decrease of enthusiasm and participation caused by the continuance of the project.

Adult Group

- The presence of the new mentors was helpful, but it also caused new challenges in the group dynamics.
- We held mentor trainings for the new ones, we discussed the topics mainly through particular cases. This generated the need for a regular intervision, a case discussion in a group among the mentors.
- In 2022, the other adult colleagues of the foundation who had been working with children for a longer time facilitated their own projects better, in many cases there was no need for the presence of mentors during the project discussions.

Projects

- Assignments provided by external partners (e.g. video recording) were tasks that could be easily understood, so the children could feel their role better and could participate effectively in them.

Role of the Child Safeguarding Policy

- Risk assessments and mechanisms of the Child Safeguarding Policy provided important assistance in difficult situations.

Creating design and methodology

It was easier to provide substantial child participation in assignments and projects, where the assignment focused on the methodology, instead of the aims. It was more important that the aim of why children are involved and asked be clear and understandable.



Where the aim of why children were involved was not determined, but there were specific plans for methodology, substantial participation was more difficult to be provided. Where the aim of child participation was clear, facilitators adjusted methodology to this.

Communication

- Online communication was cumbersome. In accordance with the Child Safeguarding Policy, Messenger remained the platform that we used, but relevant information needed to be discussed again in personal meetings.

Effect and effectivity

- The definition of quantitative and qualitative indexes might be helpful regarding the effect of child participation, but their roles were often difficult to be measured and recognized. Especially because child participation had an effect on the project not only where it was easily measured (e.g. they participated in an event or prepared a publication).
- Individual, group and project-based feedback were important for the children.
- In many cases, the effect of child participation can only be recognised during individual discussions (inter alia how it affected their individual lives).

Learning from each other

- In 2022, we launched the Child Participation Working Group of the NGO Coalition on the Rights of the Child, where we met representatives of 5-10 NGOs in order to share our experience on child participation and to learn from each other.
- It was inspiring to learn about the activities of other organisations regarding child participation, and it helped us to be aware of our own focus and practice e.g. it reinforced us to change our name.

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RIGHTS FOUNDATION

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Child Rights Foundation