



Briefings Briefing Paper

Briefing Paper

on children's participation,
protection and resilience*



1/2021

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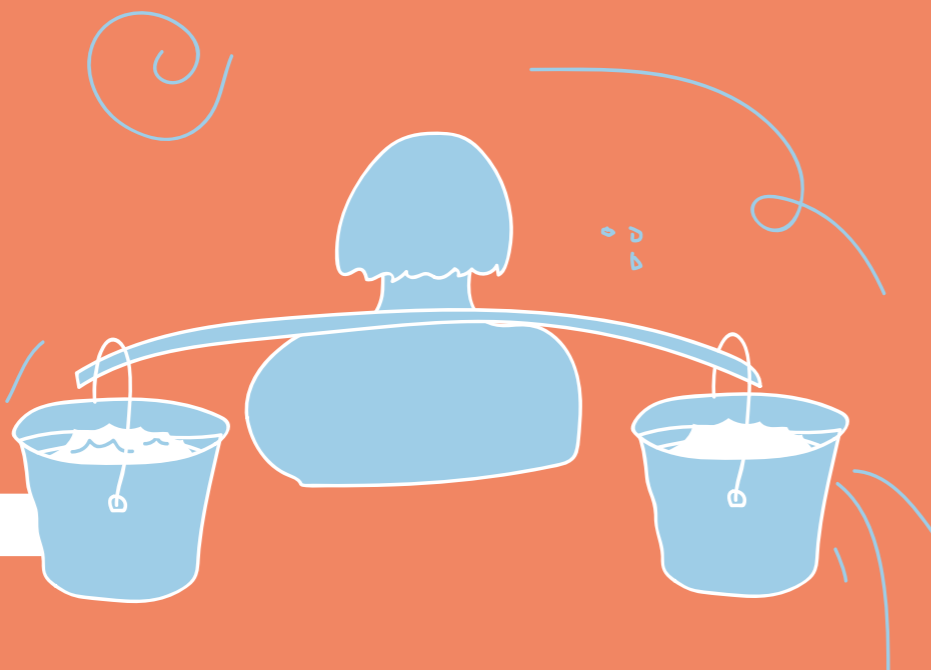


Federal Ministry
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Terre des Hommes
International Federation

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Kindernothilfe is a German children’s rights organization that supports vulnerable and marginalized children and youth to develop their full potential. We partner with local non-governmental organisations in 33 countries and empower children to lead independent, self-fulfilled lives.

Terre des Hommes International Federation is a network of ten national organisations committed to realizing children’s rights and to promote equitable development without racial, religious, political, cultural or gender-based discrimination.

Citation

Dialogue Works (2021) Briefing Paper on Children’s Participation, Protection and Resilience Written by: Barros, Ornella; O’Kane, Claire; Published by: Kindernothilfe and Terre des Hommes International Federation, Germany

Design & Concept

dombek—bolay Design Studio, Düsseldorf
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Photos

All photos provided by Dialogue Works partner organisations.

Supported by the

German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development



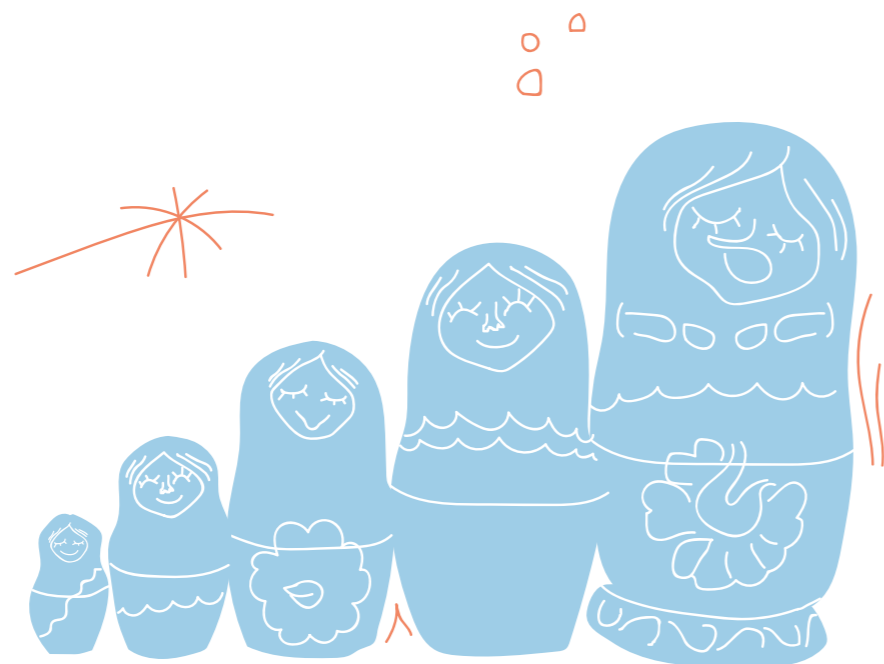
Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development

This publication is part of the global campaign “Dialogue Works”. The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the financing bodies.

1st edition, July 2021
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Melvin (14 years old) works in a quarry in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala
Foto: Jakob Studnar

The global campaign “Dialogue Works” aims ...

... to expand spaces for working children to participate in local to global policy debates to influence decisions that concern them. This briefing paper shares evidence concerning the relationship between children’s participation, protection and resilience. The paper focuses on three key thematic issues:

- I. Insufficient participation increases risks of abuse, exploitation, and harm
- II. Meaningful participation enhances children’s protection, well-being and resilience
- III. Meaningful participation contributes to more relevant, effective and sustainable decisions, programs and services.

The paper draws on findings from the former project *It’s Time to Talk - Children’s Views on Children’s Work*,⁵ (2016-2020), from an exploratory research study of working children’s experiences during COVID-19,ⁱⁱ as well as wider research and evaluation evidence.ⁱⁱⁱ

Meaningful participation of children is i) transparent and informative, ii) voluntary, iii) respectful, iv) relevant, v) child friendly, vi) inclusive, viii) supported by training, ix) safe and sensitive to risk, and xi) accountable.

Resilience refers to the capacity to successfully adapt to change and stressful events in healthy and constructive ways.

“It’s Time to Talk! – Children’s Views on Children’s Work” (2016-2019)

It’s Time to Talk! - Children’s Views on Children’s Work was a global campaign and research project steered by Kindernothilfe and Terre des Hommes to realize working children’s right to be heard and to support the voices of working children from many different contexts to be considered in local, national and global policy debates on child labour. The project supported consultations with over 1,800 working children (aged 5 to 18 years) across 36 countries in different regions of the world applying a participatory and rights-based approach to research. During the Time to Talk! research phase (2016-2018) members of 11 working children’s advisory committees (CACs)^{iv} analysed risk and protective factors that increase negative or positive outcomes of children’s work. The outcomes of this activity form the basis for the Briefing Paper at hand.



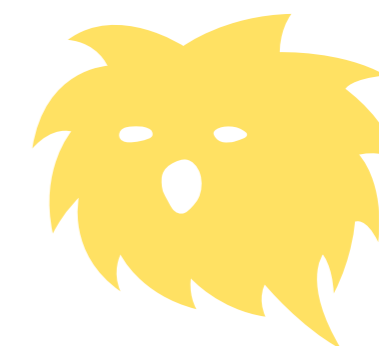
I. Insufficient participation increases risks of abuse, exploitation, and harm

In the “It’s Time to Talk!” research, the lack of opportunities for children to express their views and their exclusion from decisions affecting them has been identified as a risk factor by CACs as it increases children’s vulnerability to abuse and exploitation.^v Working children described how they face increased risks of negative outcomes when they are forced to work, and when they have no say in decisions about the work they do, for how long or how often they work. Some working children, especially girls, described how it was difficult to raise their concerns to their parents or employers; and how they would risk being scolded, beaten or getting reduced wages. Being forced to work increases the possibility of children undertaking work that they do

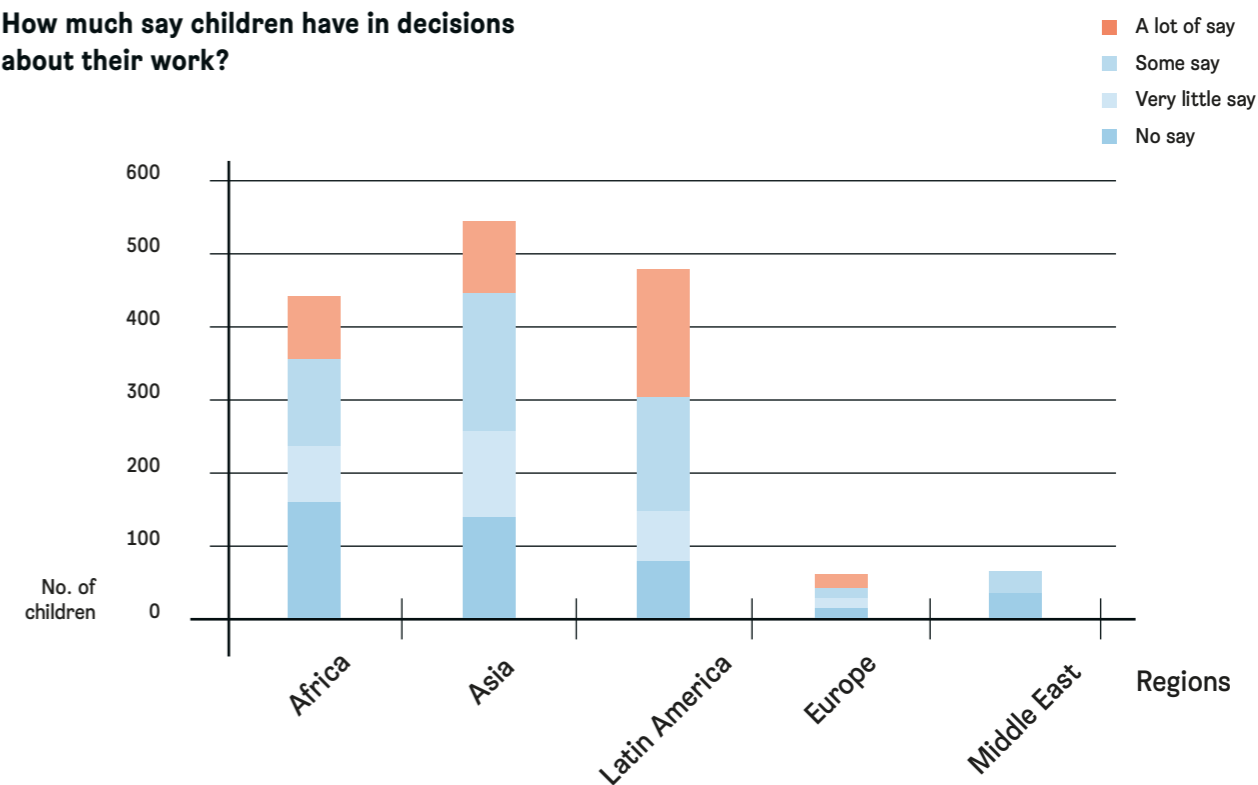
not like, or doing work that is too heavy or hazardous, thus increasing the danger of health risks and accidents. Being forced to work also negatively affects children’s emotional and mental health, which can lead to sadness and depression.^{vi} Other research with children and young people has revealed that exclusion from decision making, or insufficient efforts to take children’s views seriously create a sense of being ignored or overlooked, increasing children’s frustration,^{vii} fears, anxiety, sadness and despair,^{viii} contributing to decreased self-esteem and self-worth,^{ix} which in turn increases their vulnerability to abuse and exploitation.^x ●

There is a negative perception from some community members who still do not value and appreciate efforts being made by children to speak out.

Working children, CAC members, Kenya



How much say children have in decisions about their work?



II. Meaningful participation enhances children's protection, well-being and resilience

“It’s Time to Talk!” research revealed that listening to children’s views was seen as a protective factor by the CACs. When children’s views and suggestions are heard in decisions affecting them, in their homes, workplace, community, and in government policies and service delivery, it will improve their situation.^{xi} Children also explained that when their preferences on what work they do and on their working hours are seriously considered by their parents, caregivers or employers, this increases their protection and well-being. Furthermore, the exploratory study on working children and caregivers’ experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that despite the multiple stresses brought about by the pandemic, strengthened communication and improved relationships between children and their caregivers is an immense protective factor contributing to increased resilience of children, caregivers and families.^{xii}

Empirical research also provides an emerging evidence base for a positive correlation between children’s participation rights and children’s wellbeing.^{xiii} The process of meaningful participation often results in increased connectedness, belonging, more trusting relationships, increased self-confidence and self-esteem, and a greater sense of mastery and control,^{xiv} each of which enhance children’s resilience.^{xv} This was confirmed in an external evaluation of “It’s Time to Talk!” that identified significant positive outcomes for working children’s development and wellbeing, including increased self-confidence, improved relationships, increased knowledge and action on children’s rights, improved communication skills (especially among girls), and positive emotions.^{xvi} In addition, being a member of a working children’s association or group was identified as an additional protective factor.



[Shoe-shiners who are organised in an association in Paraguay defend their rights^{xviii}](#)

Boys aged 11 to 17 who attend school and work as shoe shiners in Asunción, Paraguay, described how they had been organising themselves in a shoe shiners’ association in the bus terminal. Their association had been running for 5 years. Through their involvement in the association, children had learned about their rights, they had analysed their realities, and they had protected themselves and their younger peers from dangers in the workplace. Through their organisational efforts they created space in their workplace to study and do their homework, to rest, to play, and to get meals. They were proud that they were working to help their families, and adolescent members of the association emphasised how their association had provided fellowship, respect, guidance, and the support needed to earn an honest living.

It increases working children’s collective power to defend their rights, to protect themselves, and to negotiate improved working conditions or compensation if they face any accidents. Working children described how they felt protected and made friends in their groups. Peers are a primary source of emotional support and solidarity for young people, especially for those who experience discrimination or stigma based on their identity or other diversity factors.^{xvii} ●

Overall results of children's advisory committee analysis on protection and risk factors¹:

+5

+4

+3

+2

+1

Neutral

Being boy
(+ 0.1)

-1

-2

-3

-4

-5

Child regularly goes to school or studies
(+ 4.8)

Child is member of a working children association
(+ 3.2)

Child's voice is heard in decisions about their work
(+ 2.8)

Child is only asked to do light work
(+ 2.6)

Child's working hours are part-time and flexible
(+ 1.2)

Child has a contract with employer
(-1)

Being a girl
(-2.4)

Child's family is affected by poverty
(-3.5)

Child works for someone outside of his / her family
(-3.3)

Child / family migrate for work
(-3.2)

Child is requested to do heavy or hazardous work
(-4.5)

Child is forced to work
(-4.5)

Child works late at night
(-4.3)

Child works on the streets
(-4.2)

Child does not live with his / her parents
(-4.2)

Child has long working hours
(-4.2)

Child / family is affected by conflict or disaster
(-4.0)

Child / family are refugees or stateless
(-4.0)

In addition to the 20 factors which were explored by CAC members in the 11 risk/protection factor activities, additional factors were suggested by members at other times, which were also supported by further analysis of the consultation results²:

Additional protection factors:

- Child experiences love, care and guidance from their family
- Good employment opportunities for parents in their own villages and towns
- Government investments in school infrastructure and other basic services
- Child works at home and/or with adult family members
- NGOs are active in promoting children's rights

¹ Showing the final average scores of combined results incorporating the CAC consultation, activity results and their feedback on the initial overall findings (shared in the July 2017 draft report).

² Some CAC members also emphasised types of work that were harmful, such as working in hotels, and waste collection, these findings were incorporated into Chapter 6 on work children can and cannot do.

Additional risk factor:

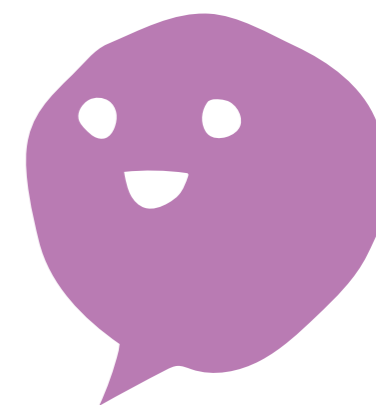
Child or family member is addicted to alcohol, drugs, gambling or internet

III. Meaningful participation contributes to more relevant, effective and sustainable decisions, programs and services

Participation recognizes children and young people as key actors and positive agents of change. The participation of children and youth adds new perspectives, energy and creativity to address discrimination and rights violations in local communities, and to improve policy and practices affecting them. Yet, across the globe insufficient action is taken to ensure ongoing processes and platforms for children and youth to influence improvements in protection, justice and education systems.^{xix}

The success of our advocacy was the acceptance and signing the code of conduct by employers. The employers and community become more responsible and aware about child rights and child labour policy.

CAC from Lebanon



Promising practices show the benefits of listening to children and young people.^{xx} When informed by the perspectives and experiences of children and young people of different ages, genders, abilities and backgrounds, policies, national plans of action, and services are more relevant and effective.^{xxi} Listening to children and young people, especially the most disadvantaged, helps to understand the complexity of social issues affecting them and informs the development of policy and practice based on the best interests of the child. For example, participatory research with children and young people has revealed distinctions between voluntary migration and trafficking; safe and unsafe forms of work; and other complex protection, care and justice issues.^{xxii} Listening to children and young people's views and ensuring feedback to them on government services and policies also increases government accountability.^{xxiii} ●



Manola (8 years old) with her brother Rudy (12 years old) in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala
Foto: Jakob Studnar

Conclusion

The evolution of resilience as a concept has led to a broader understanding that goes beyond an individual's capacity to adapt to change and cope with adversity. It encompasses the developmental and socio-ecological systems that influence the positive or negative outcomes of such adaptation.^{xxiv} The evidence presented in this paper necessitates increased diligence from adult duty bearers to create safe and inclusive enabling environments for children, especially the most disadvantaged to express their views and for their views to be seriously considered in matters affecting them. Through their individual and collective participation children and young people can increase their rights to survival, protection, development and participation, especially when the most disadvantaged are meaningfully involved. It is imperative that working children participate and represent themselves directly in policy dialogues from local to global levels. When opportunities for meaningful participation of working children are supported, their participation enhances their protection, wellbeing and resilience, and results in more relevant and effective policies and practices guided by their best interests. ●

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Briefings for children



***This paper is the first in a series of Briefing Papers that will be published in loose order in the course of the Dialogue Works campaign (2020-2024). The series primarily aims at policy makers, practitioners, researchers and all those interested in children's work and participation.**

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Gefördert durch das



Bundesministerium für
wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit
und Entwicklung

| Terre des Hommes
International Federation

