

Setting up Child Advisory Boards for the CFJ-EN

Terms of Reference

Background & Rationale

The Child-Friendly Justice European Network (CFJ-EN) was officially launched in April 2019 by Defence for Children International Belgium (DCI-Belgium), as an informal Network. Its founding Members were the European Sections of Defence for Children International. In 2022, thanks to the financial support of the European Commission, through an Operating Grant, it was officially launched as a fully operational formal Network. Established through DCI-Belgium, which was created in 1991 under Belgian law with the aim of promoting children's rights as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the idea to set up a European Network specialised on child friendly justice came as a direct response to the numerous observations and needs assessments made by various lead European organisations active in the field of child friendly justice.

One main objective of the CFJ-EN is to empower children to have their rights respected in judicial proceedings, collect in a participatory manner their voices and make them heard, and build their capacity to become advocates of their own rights.

The organisation works so that children and adolescents are recognised as persons and citizens who are entitled to rights, able to participate and contribute to family, social and civil life and not only as subjects in need, considered exclusively for their possible vulnerabilities.

The main way this goal will be achieved is through the establishment of a child participation mechanism – through Child Advisory Boards (CABs) – gathering children and young people from several European countries for regular activities at their national level and at the European level.

During the CFJ-EN kick-off meeting in June 2022, CFJ-EN Members recognised that the participation of children through the setting up of child advisory boards is an important element of the network and that it is a good idea to have this component from the beginning of the network. It was agreed to share the methodology with justice colleagues who would be happy to participate. Also, probably envisage a partnership with academia.

The CFJ-EN is funded under a Framework Partnership Agreement with the European Commission. Under this FPA, child participation and empowerment has been enshrined as Specific objective 1: Empower and involve children, in a meaningful way, to claim their rights and use their own experience to improve the justice system. The associated multi-annual action plan includes the CABs as Activity 1.1.

To implement the FPA, the Grant Agreement signed for 2022 with the European Commission includes deliverable 2.1: Terms of Reference of the CAB of the Network, notably including child protection and safeguarding rules, and objectives of the CAB.

Benefits for child & youth advisors

Children and young people participating in the Child Advisory Boards will:

1. Gain autonomy as human rights defenders through human rights education and training, including as trainers for other children and youth in their local context, in order to maximize the impact of the Network.
2. Connect with children and youth from different backgrounds in Europe to develop mutual knowledge and cooperation, understand gaps and challenges, and share good practices for child friendly justice.
3. Share their aspirations and ideas with high-level national and European policymakers in a two-way discussion and mutual respect.
4. Participate in the development of the CFJ-EN in voicing their concerns and priorities.

The Child Advisory Boards

Description

The Child Advisory Boards of the CFJ-EN are groups composed of children and young people, set up by member organisations of the Network. At national/local level, the groups shall be involved in activities of special interest for them and their host organisation. At the Network level, CAB members shall participate in activities with a broader geographical and thematic scope.

Type of activities for the CABs

The children and young people in each group will have an important say in deciding the format and content of their activities, which they will integrate in their yearly roadmap/action plan. The list below is therefore only meant as an indication.

- Theme-centred activities on a specific aspect of child friendly justice
- Document-centred activities on regulation and norms from the European Union and the Council of Europe
- Strategy-centred activities on priorities of the Network/its members
- Capacity-building activities

These activities include – but are not limited to – an annual trip to European Union and Council of Europe institutions, meetings with justice practitioners and policymakers, group discussions to develop their own understanding and expectations towards the CFJ-EN and its member organisations, etc.

Profile of Children and Youth

The CABs shall be composed of approx. 5-10 children and young people per country, aged between 12 and 24, who have been in contact with the justice systems (civil, administrative, criminal) – or who have a strong interest in justice systems. Indicatively, children and young people will participate for one year (renewable).

The CABs shall include, but not be limited to:

- Children/young people who have been involved in administrative proceedings, including migration and asylum proceedings.
- Children/young people who have been involved in civil proceedings, including family matters, institutional care, adoption and guardianship proceedings.
- Children/young people who have been involved in criminal proceedings, including suspected and convicted offenders, victims and witnesses.
- Family members of persons who have been involved in judicial proceedings.
- Law and human rights students with an interest in child-friendly justice.

While it is desirable that all groups remain heterogeneous at the national level, member organisations remain free to select members of their CAB depending on national issues, priorities and local interests. Each national CAB will define their preferred themes and roadmap.

The CFJ-EN firmly believes that all children have a right to develop themselves to the full extent of their capacity and personality, at their own pace, including children with a disability and from an ethnic or religious minority, no matter their sex, gender, sexual orientation or cultural background. Above all, the facilitators will pay the utmost attention to maintaining an atmosphere of sharing and respect and giving a space for each child to express themselves and listen to their peers from different backgrounds.

Youth Facilitators

The children and young people will be accompanied at the national and European level by youth facilitators, trained in communication with children and in child safeguarding principles. Each organisation with a child and youth group is responsible for ensuring a facilitator is selected for their group. The facilitator may be a staff member, external hire or contractor, and should abide with the child protection and safeguarding policy at all times. For Network-level activities, facilitators will be selected from a pool of animators of local/national groups.

Selection process

The selection of the children and youth will be conducted in an open, transparent, child friendly and non-discriminatory manner by each organisation, based on a call for proposals launched by the CFJ-EN early 2023. Throughout its operations, the Network will encourage and support its members in setting up their own CABs. The CABs will also be advertised on social media in a child friendly manner and be open to other children in the countries CFJ-EN members work in. Support from the CFJ-EN operational team can be sought at any time throughout this process.

Functioning of the Child Advisory Boards / Roles and Responsibilities

Below is the role repartition between all parties:

Role of children and youth members

1. Act as a platform carrying the diversity of voices of European children and youth involved or formerly involved in justice proceedings
2. Participate in knowledge development and capacity-building activities
3. Develop child-led awareness-raising and advocacy material to the attention of children, young people and the general public – including child friendly versions of the CFJ-EN's strategy and safeguarding policy
4. Review creative products, resources and materials developed by the network to the attention of children, young people and the general public
5. Advise the CFJ-EN on their priorities, advocacy tools and goals; provide feedback and suggestions on the network's strategical documents
6. Participate in the continuous adjustment of the CAB guidelines and activities, and in the selection process of their successors

Role of youth facilitators

1. Propose topics and design a yearly road map/action plan with the children and young people involved
2. Prepare and animate local activities for the organisation's children and youth group
3. In collaboration with facilitators of other local groups and the operational team, create and adjust the programme of European-level activities

Role of CFJ-EN Members running a CAB

1. Select children and young people to form a local group
2. Participate in the design of the roadmap and planning of activities at the Network level
3. Hold activities at national level, at least once every two months
4. Inform the operational team of any special needs of the children and youth within their group, including needs for interpretation

Role of other CFJ-EN members

1. Make suggestions on topics and possible activities
2. Discuss the opportunity of setting up their own children and youth group
3. Provide input and guidance on their topics of expertise
4. Listen to recommendations from the children

Role of the Steering Committee

1. Review the terms of reference and roadmap of the CAB
2. Propose topics and activities

Role of the Operational Team

1. Provide general guidance to set up the CABs and provide support for logistical needs for European-level and national activities
2. Advise on the design and adjustment of the programme for national and European-level activities

A call will be issued early in 2023 to select four network members who will accompany each one local children and youth group.

Guidelines and child safeguarding policies

The operation of the Child Advisory Board shall be grounded in child protection and child safeguarding principles, and in full compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, its three optional protocols, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the European Social Charter and other international and European applicable standards. Facilitators and other adults in contact with children will sign and adhere to a code of conduct, inspired from pre-existing child safeguarding policies and codes of conduct developed by member organisations.

Personal information and media files concerning children will not be accessible to the general public and will be kept in a secure and access-restricted folder. In no circumstances shall children's data be shared to unauthorised persons or the general public without prior and informed consent of the child and, if appropriate their legal guardians and in compliance with the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation.

Timeline for setting up the CABs

The period May-December 2022 will be dedicated to develop the methodology to setting up CABs. The CABs should therefore start being operational from Spring/Summer 2023. Below is the list of activities conducted or to be conducted in 2022 in preparation for the first year of operation of the CAB.

- June 22** Consultation with Members about CAB during CFJ-EN Kick-Off meeting
- May-Sept 22** Development of the ToR, selection of CFJ-EN Members who will have national CABs, visits of Operational Team to selected Members (NL, GR, IT)
- Sept-Oct 22** Discussion with youth facilitators and children and young people for the CABs
- Nov 22** Online Workshop with youth facilitators and respective CFJ-EN members to discuss CAB draft roadmap for European-level activities
- Dec 22** Draft and submit roadmap and proposed programme for 2023
- Jan 23** Launch of the Call for proposals to members to set up CABs

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