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RESEARCH REPORT

STRATEGIES PROPOSED BY CHILDREN TO STRENGTHEN
THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE MUNICIPALITIES



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RESEARCH REPORT. STRATEGIES PROPOSED BY CHILDREN TO STRENGTHEN THEIR PARTICIPATION IN
THE MUNICIPALITIES

By IMCITIZEN COORDINATING TEAM.

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IMCITIZEN IMPLEMENTING CHILD PARTICIPATION PLATFORMS. ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN DECISION-MAKING

December 2024

By COORDINATING TEAM:

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Introduction

In order to fully exercise the right to participate in social life, it is essential to provide this civic opportunity through all available means. This necessary democratic effort requires the appropriate framework, resources, and capabilities to exercise this right. Public administrations and all those involved in education have both a political and a pedagogical responsibility to carry out the necessary tasks (legislative, regulatory, educational etc.) to ensure that participation is effective, without waiting for individuals to reach the age of majority. It should begin in childhood, not at the age of eighteen. Since participation is both a learning process and a right, educating for participation and making it a binding practice is a collective, ongoing, and essential task from an early age.

In this context, the *Municipal Strategic Plans for Child Participation* are a key tool for promoting children's active and meaningful participation in decision-making within their local communities. These Plans, developed by children of the Platforms set up in several public schools across the cities involved in the European IMCITIZEN project, aim to provide local governments with a well-structured framework that facilitates progress towards ensuring that children exercise their right to be heard and participate in local policy decisions.

Several issues concerning mobility in the city, public service hours, the design of leisure spaces, and the management of recreational, sports, and cultural facilities, to name some of them, directly affect the youngest members of society. However, they are rarely considered when addressing the design, location, use, and management of them. We fear that the adult-centred and condescending view of children remains more prevalent than would be desirable. As a result, this oversight has many negative personal and social consequences: disengagement from public affairs, lack of a critical stance, intolerance of differing opinions, failure to address the specific needs of young users, etc.

However, social participation is beneficial in many ways beyond this utilitarian and practical aspect. At a personal level, through conscious participation, children learn that shared responsibility for their community, having their own criteria and expressing them, and getting involved in what commonly affects them are all personal skills that make them better able to live with others. This is the intrinsic value of participation.

The methodology for developing these Plans establishes a series of mechanisms that not only facilitate participation but also ensure that it is inclusive, sustainable, and binding, thus promoting conscious, responsible, and democratic citizenship from an early age. At the same time, it educates children about the benefits of participating in their

community. These social skills will serve them in many aspects of their personal and civic growth and development.

Therefore, the importance of strategic plans lies in their ability to organise and amplify children's voices, creating stable spaces where they can express their opinions and act as agents of change in their home communities. By structuring children's participation in a strategic framework, these plans transcend conflict-driven, consultative, and minimally binding forms of participation. They allow children to engage in deeper processes of deliberation and decision-making with a forward-looking perspective. These Plans not only aim to improve local dynamics but also provide a means to influence public policy at regional and national levels, strengthening social cohesion and promoting a culture of respect for children's rights.

In the context of the IMCITIZEN project, the Municipal Strategic Plans for Child Participation are one of the key pillars to ensure that children's –all children's– participation leads to tangible and sustainable outcomes. Our project aims to empower young people in six municipalities in Spain where children, alongside their communities, design and manage participatory Platforms that open new avenues for dialogue and joint action with local authorities. The Strategic Plans aim not only to increase children's participation but also to ensure that these participatory processes have a real impact on local policies and decisions. This approach positions children as active agents in the creation of their own communities, driving systemic changes that extend beyond the respective cities.

This Report aims to analyse the strategies proposed by children to strengthen child participation at the local level, the key aspects to consider during the proposal development process, the elements that facilitated or hindered this process, and the lessons learnt along the way. The analysed information comes from the participation of 184 children from ten Child Participation Platforms, who, between February and June 2024, developed their Strategic Plans for their respective municipalities. Additionally, it includes contributions from 43 representatives of these platforms, who worked collaboratively during the Platforms Meeting held in Madrid in October 2024. Their contributions help identify municipal-level strategies that could enhance child participation, as well as the conditions necessary to advance from the child participation platforms in collaboration with municipal government teams.

1. Making their voices heard by local authorities

This project aims to strengthen children's sense of democratic citizenship as active, engaged members of their municipalities. It also seeks to identify strategies that enhance opportunities for decision-making and foster engagement in child participation mechanisms. Children are agents of change, citizens capable of influencing municipal policies and building democratic societies.

The previously designed objectives are, on the one hand, to raise awareness and educate both children and adults about children's rights—particularly the right to be heard—and about their participation in decision-making, in line with UN Comment No. 20 (2016). On the other hand, it encourages the co-design processes for Child Participation Platforms, together with children, to shape and self-manage local participation mechanisms within schools. Furthermore, it aims to support children in increasing participation initiatives at the local level by developing a *Municipal Strategic Plan for Child Participation* in each city involved in the project, in order to strengthen existing mechanisms and create new ones.

Finally, we aim to build knowledge on 1) the training of adults to support and facilitate children's participation in political and democratic life, 2) child-led awareness-raising on children's rights at school and local levels, 3) the processes of creating and operating child-led Child Participation Platforms, and 4) the *Municipal Strategic Plans for Child Participation* to strengthen participation mechanisms at both local and national levels.

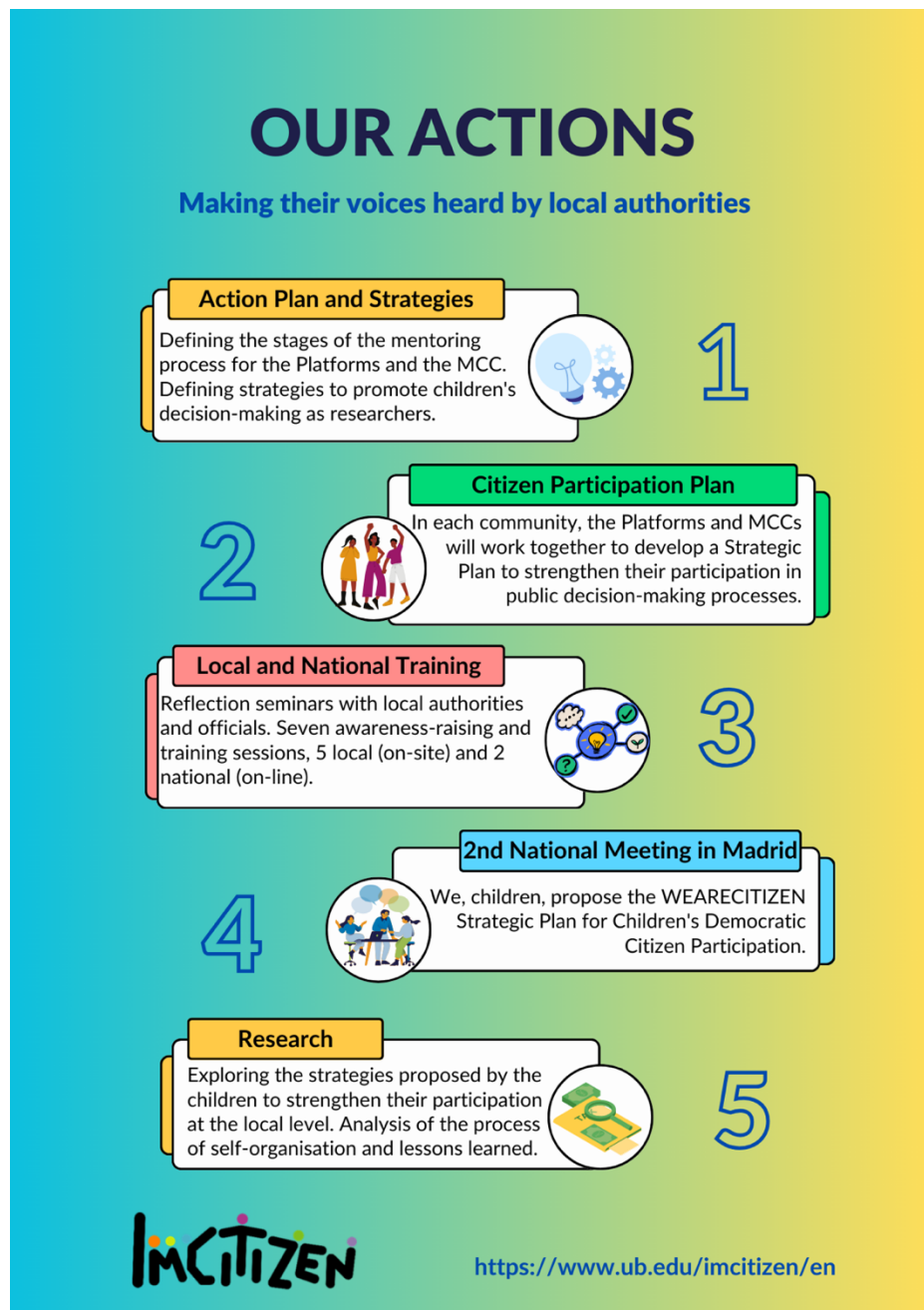
In short, these objectives are as follows:

1. To create Municipal Children's Councils (MCC) or strengthen their capacity to influence public decision-making processes.
2. To develop platforms and build bridges between the platforms of active democratic citizenship of the school, the MCC and local authorities.
3. To promote meetings between Platforms and local authorities to broaden opportunities for active participation in the municipality.

The timeline and milestones were carried out as planned (Figure 1). From March to June 2022, we focused on training in children's rights and on the IMCITIZEN partner network. From October to December 2022, children co-designed Child Participation Platforms in each school, with support from the teachers involved. Throughout 2023, these Platforms operated in every participating school, implementing three distinct actions at varying

levels of involvement, all aimed at developing a *Municipal Strategic Plan for Child Participation*.

Figure 1. Actions developed in the WP4.



Source: Own elaboration

By the end of 2024, it was expected that these actions would have influenced children's participation practices in schools and fostered a deeper understanding of their rights, as

well as their identity as citizens capable of participating in decisions that affect their communities. The IMCITIZEN inter-university team aimed to strengthen methodological strategies to support the development of democratic values and participation in schools.

Simultaneously, we aimed to increase the number of children taking on leadership roles as active, engaged citizens. It is crucial to expand these spaces for dialogue between young people and adults within governance contexts. Throughout, our goal was to contribute to the development of knowledge and tools to enhance children's participation in schools and governance contexts. In short, during this phase of the IMCITIZEN project, we aspired to create greater participatory opportunities for children in their everyday environments.

2. Study methodology

Coordinated by the team from the University of A Coruña (UDC), the research in this phase of the project aimed to study the strategies proposed by the children to strengthen their participation at the local level, as well as to analyse the process of self-organisation and the lessons learned from it.

To this end, four actions were initially proposed, the products or outcomes of which have provided valuable material for our research process.

A) INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONNAIRE: TELL US (IQ)

This involved collecting individual accounts of the perspectives of each child involved in the process of developing the proposals for the Strategic Plan. We were interested in understanding the process of self-organisation they went through to produce the Plan document (to select, develop, and refine the proposals). We also wanted to gain first-hand insight into the facilitating and limiting factors that hindered the process.

These individual questionnaires (see APPENDIX 1) were in turn used to support the development of the video scripts. They were presented as supporting material for the videos that the children produced together.

The questionnaires were administered by the facilitator in each city during the final session with the Platforms.

In the report, the answers to these questionnaires are coded according to the following scheme: (Gender, Territory, IQ).

B) LEARNINGS BOX (LB)

The idea was to provide Platform participants with a physical and/or virtual box in which they could deposit, at their discretion and as often as they wished, short texts expressing what they had taken away from their participation in the process. This box was a visible and permanent element in the usual meeting space until the end of the participatory process.

Some questions designed to *provoke* their thoughts were suggested by the research team and asked by the facilitators:

- Imagine that a child you don't know walks into this room and asks you: 'What are you doing here?' What would you say?
- And if they asked you: 'What do you like most about this space (the Platform)?'

- What have I gained from this process?

In the report, the answers to these questionnaires are coded according to the following scheme: (Gender, Territory, IQ).

C) ASSESSMENT REPORT

The facilitator of each Platform has been asked to produce a reflective report on the process carried out.

The document should be between three and five pages long. The elements on which this report focuses are:

1. What process have the children decided to follow to develop the Strategic Plan?
How would you describe the process they defined?
2. What do you think facilitated and hindered the process?
3. How has the group evolved in terms of skills? What strategies and methodologies have the children decided to use (questionnaires, workshops, radio, etc.)? In other words, what have they introduced into the process of developing the Strategic Plan?
4. Final evaluation (how have you experienced it from a professional point of view?)

The information obtained through this report will not be used in the present one, as we have opted to develop the findings based solely on the children's experiences and perceptions. However, this does not exclude the possibility of it being used later in a triangulation of both points of view.

D) CHILDREN'S VIDEO STORYTELLING (V)

It involved recording the children's ideas, allowing us to gather their stories on three areas of interest: dialogue, the process, and the continuity of the Platforms. Therefore, these are videos based on a script to record their responses.

The following set of questions was proposed for each of the areas of interest. For the video recordings, the PIN-PON interview technique was suggested, so that the children would lead and be the main actors of this activity. Another option proposed was the 'discussion group' dynamic, which would serve as a reflective space to answer the questions in the script.

FOCUS 1: Assessing the process of developing the Strategic Plan

- How did you design the strategies?

- What made the task easier or more difficult?
- What did you find most motivating? And what was the most challenging?
- How did you organise yourselves as a group?
- How did you motivate other children who are not part of the Platform to participate in the process?

FOCUS 2: Assessing communication

- What support did you receive?
- How did you share the proposals with the municipality and other stakeholders?
- What were these feedback sessions like?
- What is important for understanding between children and adults?

FOCUS 3: Assessing the continuity of the Platforms

- How do you see the Platform next year?
- What would you do to keep the Platform going?

Each recording lasted approximately 1-3 minutes. This material was also used to provide content for the Platforms' websites and for the second in-person meeting which took place in Madrid from 18 to 20 October 2024. The main purpose of this initiative was to continue building knowledge around the proposals of the Strategic Plans, as told by the main actors—the children of each Platform.

Finally, in some cases, the public presentation of the Strategic Plans in the respective territories was recorded as supporting material for this research.

In the report, the answers to these questionnaires are coded according to the following scheme: (Gender, Territory, IQ).

E) STRATEGIC PLANS

Another source of information is the final proposal document for each territory's Strategic Plan, which enables us to analyse the proposals made by the children to their municipalities.

In the report, the answers to these questionnaires are coded according to the following scheme: (Territory, strategy number, SP).

F) PRIORITISATION OF STRATEGIES (STICKERS/MACARONI)

At the Child Participation Platform meeting, the 43 participating children assessed and prioritised the 62 proposals outlined in the six Strategic Plans. This was done through a voting system using macaroni and stickers.

In the joint activities, each participating Platform publicly presented its Strategic Plan and explained the strategies. Based on these presentations, children formed groups of five and organised similar strategies around the main ideas, giving them names. They then voted on which strategy they considered the most important. Each Platform was given 20 pieces of macaroni and could vote on five topics, allocating 4 pieces to each. Then, within the voted topics, the actions considered most important were marked with stickers, as presented in point 3 of this report. The responses to this activity are referenced according to the following nomenclature: (Area, strategy number, SP).

2.1. Informants

IMCITIZEN is the result of the collaboration between six partners, each located in a different municipality in Spain. These partners have been responsible for reaching out to and informing schools about the project. Ten primary schools, all of them public, are currently participating and have their own Child Participation Platform.

In Azuqueca de Henares (A), Castilla–La Mancha, the coordinating entity is the Asociación Centro Trama, and the participating school is La Espiga Primary School. The co-designed participation Platform includes 12 participants aged 9 to 12.

In A Coruña (AC), Galicia, the project is coordinated by researchers from the University of A Coruña and members of the Provincial Federation of Public Schools of A Coruña, which includes family members of the schools' parent associations. The participating schools are Manuel Murguía and Ramón de la Sagra Primary Schools. The Platform at Manuel Murguía school includes 20 participants aged between 10 and 12, while the Platform at Ramón de la Sagra school includes 10 participants aged between 11 and 12.

In Barcelona (B), Catalonia, the project is coordinated by a team of researchers from the University of Barcelona and involves Els Porxos and La Pau Primary Schools. The Platform at Els Porxos Primary School consists of 18 participants aged 8 to 12, and the Platform at La Pau Primary School consists of 16 participants aged between 10 and 12 years.

In Castrillón (C), Principality of Asturias, the project is coordinated by the Asociación Los Glayus and involves the primary schools José Luís García Rodríguez 'Campiello' and El Vallín. The Platforms at both schools include 25 participants aged between 6 and 11.

In Madrid (M), Community of Madrid, researchers from the Complutense University of Madrid are coordinating the project, and El Espinillo Primary School is participating. The Platform is made up of 12 participants aged 10 to 11.

In Mislata (Mi), in the Autonomous Community of Valencia, a team of municipal public servants coordinates the project. The participating schools are Ausiàs March and Maestro Serrano Primary Schools. The Platforms at both schools include 23 participants aged between 9 and 12 years.

The working sessions for the development of the respective Strategic Plans were held on different dates and times depending on the territory, each with a specific objective and supported by specialised facilitators. The Platforms were provided with a facilitation plan for the sessions to ease the process of developing the Strategic Plan. This plan was adjusted to their pace, context, and preferences to maximise the pedagogical process and their contributions.

3. Findings

3.1. Strategies to be implemented according to the main actors, the children

In each participating municipality, the Platforms have worked collaboratively to develop the Strategic Plan. In three cases (Mislata, Azuqueca, and Castrillón), the process involved the Municipal Children's Council (MCC), reinforcing its participatory nature. In all the municipalities, the Strategic Plans have been submitted to the municipal authorities. In four of the five cases, they have also been publicly presented in spaces for discussion, encouraging interaction between groups of children and local representatives. In three municipalities, this presentation coincided with the renewal of the MCC, while in one case, where there was no such council, the Strategic Plan was presented at the Municipal Hall to political authorities and municipal public servants, as well as during a training session for the social and educational community.

An analysis of all the Plans shows that children emphasise the importance of improving and expanding their participation in their communities, as well as in other key settings such as the family and school. In four municipalities (Mislata, Azuqueca, A Coruña and Madrid) the Platform groups carried out an assessment of the state of children's participation, identifying the spaces where they can participate and how they can do so, while reflecting on the spaces that are effective and where and how they would like to be more involved. In Barcelona, the priority was to identify children's concerns about the city, while in Castrillón the proposals were formulated from a perspective that focused on the existing participatory structures in the municipality. All the Plans reflect the Platforms' commitment to promoting children's participation and strengthening their rights in their respective communities, as well as the need to include them in decision-making processes.

The process of creating the Strategic Plans has involved the development of significant actions. For example, one platform composed a song in support of children's rights; another concluded the plan with a guide of key principles for holding productive and enjoyable meetings between children and adults; and another produced a podcast with reflections on participation. All the Strategic Plans are publicly available on the project website: <https://www.ub.edu/imcitizen/en/plataformas/>

The analysis identified a total of **62 proposals**, some of which are identical or similar, while others are more specific and distinct. These proposals are distributed as follows: Azuqueca contributes 9 strategies, Castrillón presents 19 proposals, Barcelona 11, Madrid 10, A Coruña 5, and Mislata 14. The responses are identified according to the territory and the proposal number in the Strategic Plans.

3.1.1. Action proposals, similarities and differences between the actions presented in the Platform's Strategic Plans

The content analysis of the 62 action proposals made by children in the six Strategic Plans developed in each of the municipalities involved in IMCITIZEN reveals both similarities and differences that deserve further examination. Among the contributions that are most similar across the Strategic Plans, the need to establish effective actions to ensure children's participation in issues affecting their immediate surroundings stands out. The data collected highlights six key areas, ranging from meetings with relevant stakeholders and the creation of participatory spaces to actions aimed at gathering opinions from their peers, as well as initiatives focused on raising awareness and communication. This approach underscores a comprehensive strategy for promoting children's rights and encouraging their active participation.

These initiatives stress the importance of providing children with environments that promote intergenerational dialogue, as well as spaces for reflection and action, fostering their involvement in decision-making processes that impact their school and local communities.

I. Setting up meetings with other stakeholders

In the proposals, the word 'meetings' is mentioned 9 times and 'encounters' is mentioned 3 times, making this the most frequently mentioned dimension. This highlights the need to create more spaces for communication with authorities, with child participation groups that serve as role models, such as children's councils, and other spaces for exchange to connect with the community. These proposals range from "Encouraging associations, sports clubs, and municipal departments to consider children and collaborate with children's participation groups" (C,16) to ensuring spaces for collaboration with regularity and stability as a cross-cutting element in the relationships between children and their communities.

- a) *Meetings with local authorities and municipal public servants.* One of the main goals of this dimension is to foster **interaction with municipal authorities and**

public servants to make proposals, be involved in decision-making, and strengthen the connection between the Platforms and local government. Examples include:

'An encounter with municipal public servants.' (A, 9, SP)

'Invite the mayor or councillor to annual meetings in schools to listen to the Platforms and respond to their proposals.' (C, 17, SP)

'Organise regular meetings between the technical monitoring committee and the Platforms or participation groups.' (C, 11, SP)

'Meetings with the mayor or local politicians.' (B, 27, SP)

'The city council should hold more meetings to listen to us.' (M, SP)

'Meetings with city council staff to present our proposals, with the mayor, councillors, and public servants.' (M, SP)

- b) *Meetings with children's organisations.* Proposals to promote regular meetings and encounters between children's participation platforms and local children's councils, which are key vehicles at the municipal level. They aim to collaborate with the Children's Councils, considering them as accessible, representative, and effective spaces.

'Keep in touch and communicate with the MCC.' (A, 7, SP)

'Keep Children's Council plenary meetings friendly and enjoyable.' (18, SP)

'Meetings of the MCC with city council staff who organise the festivities.' (M, 54, SP)

- c) *Child and youth inter-group meetings for specific exchanges, aiming to visualise their participatory capabilities and expand their impact.*

'Organise local child participation meetings with all the groups and Platforms in the municipality.' (C, 16, SP)

'Events between schools participating in the municipality.' (B, 26, SP)

Again, these actions are proposed by the Platforms in municipalities with a history of participation and/or a MCC (Mislata, Castrillón, Azuqueca, and Barcelona).

II. Creating spaces for children's participation.

A significant number of recurring contributions highlight the need to create and strengthen structural spaces where children can meet, express their opinions, and participate actively. This dimension focuses on specific proposals related to 'creating a place,' 'generating a space,' or 'having a space,' reflecting their desire for environments exclusively dedicated to participation and accessible to them at school. The word 'space' is directly mentioned 9 times. These proposals revolve around creating opportunities for meetings and spaces where they can discuss issues that concern them and work together on possible solutions. Within this framework of contributions, three distinct spaces are identified, which are:

- a) *To create IMCITIZEN Platforms in all schools in the municipality.* Based on their experience and involvement in the process of co-designing participation platforms, they believe that others should be created to allow the IMCITIZEN project to reach more children.

'Propose the creation of Child Participation Platforms in all schools in the municipality.' (C, SP)

'Extend the IMCITIZEN Child Participation Platforms to all schools in the municipality.' (C, SP)

'Make IMCITIZEN bigger.' (B, SP)

'IMCITIZEN in all primary and secondary schools.' (Mi, SP)

- b) *Our own spaces for expressing opinions, meeting, deciding, and creating.* It is interesting to note that it is stated that the space should be 'our own' for 'our opinion' and that it should enable 'real participation.' Most of the proposals do not specify where this space would be located, except in the case of A Coruña, which proposes a dedicated space within the school. Initiatives to create their own spaces are found in Barcelona, Madrid, and A Coruña, where there are no functioning municipal structures for children.

'Create a place where children can express their opinions.' (B, SP)

'Our own space to create and meet.' (M, SP)

'Open effective channels for real participation.' (AC, SP)

'Have our own space in the centre for organised meetings and decision-making.'
(AC, SP)

In Castrillón, where there are participatory bodies, the proposed action is 'To keep the Children's Council plenary sessions friendly and enjoyable.'

- c) *To create spaces where children can self-manage and lead their own initiatives, promoting their autonomy in decision-making.* This category appears twice and is significant because the concept is not only about having their own space but also emphasises that it should foster self-management, i.e., children's autonomy and leadership.

'Own spaces for self-management.' (AC, SP)

'Working groups and collaboration.' (M, SP)

III. Training actions to raise awareness and promote children's rights, child participation and IMCITIZEN

This dimension encompasses actions aimed at raising awareness and educating both children and adults about children's rights, highlighting the importance of exercising and promoting them. It also includes initiatives to increase the visibility of the IMCITIZEN project as a key tool for fostering children's participation: 'Leverage the IMCITIZEN experience to lead and develop training using published materials and project guides' (C,15, SP). This set of actions is crucial to ensure that children's rights are understood and respected by both children and the wider community.

The proposals presented demonstrate a variety of approaches—from visual campaigns to specific training—reflecting a collective commitment to promoting a culture of participation and respect for children. In most cases, children act as the trainers, while in one instance, it is suggested that the adult should be the trainer: 'Teachers should explain what the right to participate means during tutorial sessions' (Mi, 46, SP). In all municipalities, except A Coruña, the need to raise community awareness of children's rights and participation is recognised. This approach not only empowers children but also fosters a cultural shift among adults and policymakers, creating a more receptive and participatory environment.

Seven actions explicitly mention children's rights, reflecting a cross-cutting commitment to this issue. These proposals use a variety of strategies, such as awareness-raising campaigns, classroom tours, commemorative activities, and visual resources. In Mislata

and Barcelona, proposals for rights education and the creation of materials such as murals or campaigns are common.

'Organise joint training sessions for adults and children to promote better connection and teamwork.' (C,21, SP)

'Campaign for children's rights.' (B,30, SP)

'Give talks in different parts of the municipality.' (B,33, SP)

'Explain rights and leave a legacy.' (M,10, SP)

'Teachers should explain what the right to participate means during tutoring sessions.' (Mi,46, SP)

'Campaign on children's rights, especially the right to participate.' (Mi,47, SP)

Some innovative and creative proposals were made, such as:

'A motivational song instead of the bell.' (M,36, SP)

'Paint a mural on children's rights in every primary and secondary school, each year focusing on a different right.' (Mi,52, SP)

'Keep libraries and schools updated with books on children's participation and children's rights.' (C,19, SP)

'Organise demonstrations for children's rights.' (B,25, SP)

'Organise a contest. To give a prize to the person who allows us to participate the most.' (Mi,56, SP)

IV. Communication and visibility actions

This set of actions aims to raise the visibility and awareness of both children and the wider community, encouraging greater involvement and understanding of the importance of children's participation. A significant number of the proposed awareness campaigns and events in the Strategic Plans lack specific details about their content, although it is understood that they focus on children's rights and/or the right to participate. For example, in Castrillón, it is proposed to 'promote events related to child participation through municipal websites, schools, posters, and community associations' (C, 20), encompassing various communicative formats. The plans show a consistent focus on initiatives that promote children's rights through the creation of communication channels, the production of posters, radio programmes, and the organisation of public celebrations and activities.

'Go on the radio and make a podcast.' (B, 28, SP)

'Create a communication channel at school.' (M, SP)

'Publish a daily newsletter.' (M, SP)

'Neighbourhood and online advertising. (M, SP)

'Put up posters around the municipality.' (B, SP)

V. Actions to gather other children's opinions

In most cases, it is about proposing how to gather opinions, but they also express a desire to be consulted on specific issues where they have concrete proposals.

The suggestion of a suggestion box or participation tables should be implemented in relevant areas of the municipality, where children and young people can leave creative ideas. The proposal for a suggestion box appears five times and is recommended in all municipalities except A Coruña.

'Participation suggestion boxes at the town hall, police station, and sports centre...' (A, 2, SP)

'Share your opinions in the suggestion box: Bústia Jove, Mislata t'escolta [Youth Suggestion Box, Mislata hears you].' (Mi, 51, SP)

'A participatory questionnaire to find out how the children in Azuqueca/the students perceive the school.' (A, 8, SP)

'Journalists from the town hall, playing table tennis.' (B, 24, SP)

'Recording a radio programme where we are asked for our opinions.' (Mi, 55, SP)

VI. Other specific actions in which they would participate as citizens

These are actions to improve the environment and promote social cohesion, led by children who wish to get involved in their community. In Mislata and A Coruña, they propose expressing opinions on specific issues, such as parks.

'Continue to make child plans and review their fulfilment together with the children.' (C, 10, SP)

'Have our say on how we want our parks, streets, and squares: through a survey, meetings with children and young people, or by asking them to draw.' (Mi, 53, SP)

'Collect rubbish and form chains of mutual help.' (M, 41, SP)

'Meeting places for young people.' (AC, 58, SP)

'Healthy play spaces.' (AC, 61, SP)

This analysis shows children's commitment to transforming the conditions of their participation in their communities by introducing actions that promote more inclusive, participatory, and collaborative spaces. The proposals reflect a deep understanding of the importance of building intergenerational, collaborative relationships with community leaders, creating decision-making spaces that enable the development of their autonomy and leadership, and improving their environment through their contributions and participatory actions. These actions not only strengthen children's participation, but also promote a culture of respect, equality, and shared responsibility in collective decision-making.

The analysis of the proposals shows that each municipality prioritises specific aspects based on its history of participation, existing structures, and local context. If we look at the differences between the strategic plans, they can be grouped into several dimensions:

- *Some Plans focus more on creating structured Platforms, while others prioritise one-off events or activities.* We find Plans where structural spaces predominate, Plans where specific one-off actions predominate, and Plans that combine structural spaces and specific activities (50%-50%). Some municipalities, such as Castrillón, stand out for their focus on creating structured Platforms that foster stability and sustainability. Proposals such as extending Platforms to all schools (C,14, SP) or holding regular meetings with public servants and Platforms (C,11, SP) demonstrate this approach. On the other hand, municipalities like Madrid prioritise one-off activities with an immediate impact, such as creating a song or running online campaigns (M,36, SP & M,38, SP). This approach seeks to connect with children quickly through creative actions, but with less continuity.
- *Diversity in the proposals for action, with a greater or lesser variety of participation mechanisms identified.* Municipalities with consolidated participatory structures tend to generate more varied and in-depth proposals. Mislata includes innovative formats such as podcasts, radio shows, and competitions (Mi, 55, SP & Mi, 57, SP), while Azuqueca presents a very narrow

focus on actions with little diversification in proposals, most of which promote technical meetings, classroom tours, and questionnaires (A, 8, SP & A, 9, SP). This contrast reflects a difference in the degree of innovation and experimentation.

- *Diversity in participation formats (consultations, representation) or proposals with limited room for innovation (contests or murals).* Strategic plans have been developed, some of which focus on formal meetings with the authorities, while others prioritise more creative activities and even self-organisation. Barcelona and Mislata stand out for incorporating actions such as podcasts, murals, and public campaigns (B, 28, EP & Mi, 49, EP), while A Coruña emphasises self-organisation and high-intensity forms of participation (AC, 62, EP). This level of action is only proposed in A Coruña: the possibility for young people to have their own spaces for self-management.
- *The proposed actions either connect the group of children with other stakeholders or simply involve actions that do not identify collaboration with other groups.* A key difference lies in how the proposals link children with other actors. Castrillón, for example, fosters close collaboration with local authorities, promoting formal spaces and collaborative structures with adults. In contrast, municipalities like Madrid show less direct connection with these actors and prioritise independent and self-managed activities.

The proposals developed combine traditional actions (own spaces, communication spaces with adults, campaigns, classroom tours, training sessions...) with innovative actions that open up new avenues for advocacy: a dedicated section on participation and rights in libraries; journalists from the local government; a motivational song instead of a bell; rewards for those who enable us to participate the most. The proposed actions focus on highlighting the need for regular meetings between children, municipal representatives, and children's organisations, emphasising the importance of making their contributions known, collecting those of other children, and guaranteeing the stability of these spaces over time. They have also led to the inclusion of innovations in the strategic plans for children's participation, focusing on promotion, recognition, and encouragement. The resulting proposals successfully combine proven traditional ideas with new perspectives that highlight innovative ways to promote children's rights and active participation. This balance emphasises a key idea: *children's participation must be integrated continuously, creatively, and across different spaces and formats.*

The proposed actions revolve around two main axes:

- **Regular and sustainable meetings.** It emphasises the need to establish stable structures that facilitate ongoing communication between children, local representatives, and child-related organisations. These Platforms not only allow participants to share their contributions and gather those from other children but also ensure that decisions and policies are genuinely inclusive. To achieve this, it is crucial to ensure the continuity and visibility of these spaces over time to reinforce their long-term impact.
- **Innovations that inspire and encourage participation.** The proposals include disruptive elements that broaden the understanding of what it means to participate, demonstrating creativity and adaptability. These include:
 - **Dynamic cultural and educational spaces.** Keeping libraries and schools up-to-date with materials on children's rights and participation, integrating these resources as key educational tools.
 - **Communication initiatives.** From 'local journalists' who make children's actions visible, to community campaigns and online networks that connect children's voices with their communities.
 - **Energising everyday environments.** Ideas such as replacing the school bell with a motivational song or organising competitions that reward those who facilitate participation are concrete examples of turning everyday activities into opportunities for empowerment and recognition.

'Keep libraries and schools updated with books on children's participation and children's rights.' (C, SP)

'Journalists from the town hall, playing table tennis.' (B, SP)

'A motivational song instead of the bell.' (M, SP)

'Neighbourhood and online advertising.' (M, SP)

'Organise a contest. Award a prize to the person who allows us to participate the most.' (Mi, 56, SP)

3.1.2. Proposals for action considered most important and innovative by the children who are members of the Platforms

Beyond the general opinion, we also consider each child's individual evaluation of their preferences or priorities regarding the strategies developed in their Strategic Plan. To understand how children assess the participation strategies implemented in each platform, we look at the 98 responses to the first question of the questionnaire administered to the children participating in the platforms: 'Of the different proposals you have developed to increase children's participation, which one do you think is the most important or innovative? And why?'

A total of 98 responses were recorded to this question in the questionnaire. It should be noted that 15 responses do not directly answer the question but instead focus on the importance of child participation itself, the attitudes necessary for participation, or the enjoyment of the process (5 responses). Two responses say, 'I like them all,' and nine others are either blank, fail to choose a strategy, or do not answer the question (2, 3, and 4 responses, respectively). This last group of responses is primarily found among the youngest children in 3rd and 4th grade of primary school. Therefore, the heterogeneity of responses can be attributed to the varying levels of internalisation and to the maturity of the participatory proposals, with many children responding to the question in relation to the global IMCITIZEN process, rather than only to the phase the question in the questionnaire refers to. It is also possible that, in some cases, they did not know how to answer the question.

There is a great deal of heterogeneity in the responses that align with the content of the question, so we have analysed them by grouping the responses according to the Platform each child participated in. This allows for better contextualisation of individual preferences, considering the autonomy of the platforms themselves, which carried out different activities throughout the process.

A CORUÑA, GALICIA

Ramón de la Sagra and Manuel Murguía Primary Schools Platforms

There are two responses to the questionnaire from the platforms in A Coruña. One of the responses is, 'I would emphasise trying to talk to adults, especially those who work in the city council. Because perhaps this idea will be respected, and eventually, they will listen to us' (Boy, AC, C), highlighting the importance of the strategy to promote *effective channels* for real participation, particularly with regard to city council staff. Another

response states, 'The videos and the suggestion boxes we put up in the school, because I liked them a lot and they encourage participation' (Girl, AC, C), highlighting the strategy.

AZUQUECA DE HENARES, CASTILLA – LA MANCHA

La Espiga Primary School Platforms and Azuqueca Children's Council

The children from the Azuqueca de Henares Platforms individually selected the strategies they considered most innovative or important for increasing participation. Of the ten responses from La Espiga Primary School, four highlighted the formative workshop as the preferred strategy, as shown by the following response: 'Workshops, presenting the platform to the people in the town hall' (Girl, A, C).

Following the previous response, two others highlight the possibility of presenting the platform to the CLIA and the Town Council ('Presenting the Platform to the CLIA and the town council' (Girl, A, C), and another response considers it important to present the platform to other children at the Casa de la Cultura [Culture House]. Another response supports the suggestion box. Two other responses do not address specific strategies but highlight the playful aspect of the platform and its ability to reach out to other children.

BARCELONA, CATALONIA

Els Porxos and La Pau Primary Schools Platforms

Within the Barcelona Platforms, children have different opinions about the participation strategies developed within each platform.

In Els Porxos, there is a high coincidence of responses in favour of raising awareness about children's rights and the IMCITIZEN project. Of the ten responses, four highlight the preference for developing a YouTube channel: 'Make a YouTube channel so that everyone knows what IMCITIZEN is' (Girl, B, C).

Three other responses are linked to making children's rights known to other children, such as the response that refers to 'Helping other schools and Platforms to do the same as us. We can do trainings and days with games about children's rights, explain our experiences and show the book with the steps to create a Platform' (Girl, B, C).

A similar response points to the importance of the YouTube channel in raising awareness of the IMCITIZEN project. This is in line with three other responses that opt for publicising IMCITIZEN in order to enable greater participation by children and to make the project bigger. Similarly, two responses reflect a concern to help other schools set up IMCITIZEN platforms through training or parties.

The thirteen responses on the La Pau school Platform have a more heterogeneous profile. Three of them stress the importance of the YouTube channel.

CASTRILLÓN, ASTURIAS

El Campiello and El Vallín Primary Schools Platforms

Individual children provide a wide variety of responses regarding the participation strategies used or planned in El Campiello and El Vallín Platforms. However, important trends can be identified. For example, of the thirty-three responses to the first question of the questionnaire, ten emphasise the importance of promoting games in relation to participation, highlighting the importance of having fun during the process. Among the games, some responses highlight activities such as the Exemplary Citizen activity.

Regarding participatory meetings, three responses highlight their preference for meetings between children as a form of participation, explaining their benefits: 'For me, one of the things I like most when I think about participation and the most important thing is to have fun and work as a team, respecting the turn to speak and contributing ideas to benefit the group' (Girl, C, C).

Five responses refer to the participation training classroom tour as a means to raise awareness of rights and the IMCITIZEN Platform, such as: 'Classroom tour, because this way the younger children participate just like we do. We share what we are doing through posters, videos, and other methods' (Girl, C, C).

Other children also refer to the need to meet with local authorities, either with the mayor (2 responses) or with the plenary (2 responses). Finally, two other responses refer to the idea of meeting with other schools in person or by video call: 'Meeting to talk about it. A video call to talk with other schools. The Tilín glass jar. Playing games to engage people' (Boy, C, C).

Regarding other strategies, two responses highlight the usefulness of leaflets as a training tool. Other isolated responses refer to specific dynamics such as workshops, presentations, or brainstorming.

Finally, seven responses cannot be taken into account because they assess the importance of participation or knowledge of children's rights but not the strategies followed.

MADRID, COMMUNITY OF MADRID

El Espinillo Primary School Platform

Due to the nature of the participatory planning process, the questionnaire could not be conducted, so no data is available for this Platform.

MISLATA, VALENCIAN COMMUNITY

Ausiàs March and Maestro Serrano Primary Schools Platforms and Mislata Children's and Young People's Council

Children evaluate different participation strategies through their individual responses to the questionnaire. Among the nineteen responses recorded, no dominant trends were observed. Two responses refer to the dynamics of role play: 'Role play, because I think it is a fun way to inform people' (Boy, Mi, C).

Other responses highlight the Participation Suggestion box, the Guidebook, and the participation training classroom tours. Two additional responses emphasise the importance of meeting with adults to explain the IMCITIZEN proposal, either with the teachers of the educational centres or with the mayor of the municipality: 'Let the mayor listen to us because I think it is a very good proposal' (Boy, Mi, 7).

Six responses do not specifically assess the strategies but rather the process in general or do not choose a particular strategy and therefore are not included in this analysis.

Overall contribution analysis

As a summary of the overall content of the responses to the questionnaire, 'Of the different proposals you have developed to increase children's participation, which one do you consider the most important or innovative? Why?', we can extract several ideas that provide a complementary perspective on the participation process through the individual contributions of the children.

Firstly, we observe significant differences in the responses based on participants' belonging to different Platforms, which is due to the flexibility and adaptation to the specific contexts of each one.

Also noteworthy is the role of peer-to-peer training among participants and the use of dissemination channels where they maintain a high level of autonomy and participation.

Finally, the different interpretations given to the question's formulation are worth noting, particularly among the younger participants, which led to a percentage of responses based on different interpretations, thus broadening the heterogeneity and diversity of the responses recorded.

3.1.3. Characterisation of the proposals for action that would make up a Strategic Plan shared by the ten Platforms

During the Child Participation Platforms Meeting, the 43 children present worked on the 62 proposals outlined in the six Strategic Plans to develop a joint proposal. The most relevant actions were prioritised using a voting system with macaroni and stickers. The main proposals are outlined below, along with specific examples of actions:

MAYOR, VISIT ME!

This action received 36 macaroni and involves organising visits with important people who work for children's rights. It received the highest priority, and among the proposals under this category, we find: 'Invite the mayor or councillor to annual meetings at schools to listen to the platforms and respond to their proposals' (2 stickers, C); 'Invite the councillor for childhood and youth (or similar) to our school and present the participation platform to them' (1 sticker); and 'Invite the town council staff to explain the Platform' (1 sticker).

The children titled the action *Mayor, Visit Me!*, reinforcing the idea of requesting meetings with adult authorities. The insistence on genuine engagement with political representatives reflects a perception of being ignored or neglected, as seen from a child's perspective. This highlights the need to build mutual trust and establish clear practices of accountability. In the meeting, some children explained their frustration with how political representatives had given them the run-around, saying they would come but never showing up. As a result, they felt the most appropriate title for the action was this call for commitment. The description also includes the idea that 'they really listen to us,' emphasising the need for active listening. The children need to reinforce the challenge for the community to listen to them in a conscious, authentic, and committed way.

GOAL: We want the mayor to really listen to us, and we want to be able to share our ideas with them and ask questions about what is happening in our community.

POWERFUL MEETINGS

Meetings with decision-makers were allocated 35 macaroni and ranked as the second most prioritised suggestion. It received the second-highest prioritisation, and among the proposals under this category were: 'Meetings with the mayor or a politician' proposed by

Barcelona, which received a total of five stickers; 'Meetings with the town hall staff' proposed by Azuqueca, which received one sticker; 'Hold regular meetings between the technical monitoring committee and the Platforms or participation groups' (1 sticker, C); 'Present the Platform to the participation council' (1 sticker, A); 'Meetings with the town hall staff to present our proposals, with the mayor, councillors, and public servants' (1 sticker, E).

This set of actions was finalised under the title *Powerful Meetings*, and the objective emphasises the importance of these meetings being with people who have the capacity to make decisions, and that these decisions should be meaningful.

It should be noted that children identify political and municipal public servants as key stakeholders in channelling their proposals and receiving feedback. It should also be noted that they consider themselves to be valid stakeholders in matters affecting children. This type of meeting sets a precedent for horizontal cooperation between adults and children, which legitimises children's participation in local governance processes. They describe in detail how to structure these meetings, the importance of focusing on the purpose of the meeting and specifying the types of meetings. It is necessary to schedule the meetings, integrate them into the duties of the political representatives and include them in the municipal agendas.

GOAL: To meet with the people who make important decisions.

COLLABORATION WITH THE CHILDREN'S COUNCIL

Another highly supported proposal is to collaborate with the local Children's Councils (collaborate with the MCC), which received 34 macaroni. The Platforms propose collaborating and joining the actions of the Children's Councils to increase children's participation in the community. The children recognise the importance of joining forces with other participatory bodies to enhance their collective impact. The idea is that together they can do more, share more ideas, and improve the city. Some of the actions they classified under this heading included: 'MCC meetings with the people from the council who organise the festivities' (2 stickers, E); 'Keep the plenary meetings of the Children's Council in a friendly and enjoyable format' (1 sticker, C).

The collaboration between the Platforms and the Children's Councils makes it possible to share challenges, strengthen proposed 'solutions', and increase the capacity to develop actions that can be taken further. This action facilitates the integration of the IMCITIZEN Platforms into broader structures recognised by the administration, which would ensure their sustainability. At the same time, this collaboration would strengthen

community cohesion, creating a more consolidated group of children empowered by their capacity for action and advocacy. The experiences of Mislata, Castrillón and Azuqueca are three successful examples of the viability of this collaboration, based on three Strategic Plans developed jointly by the two Platforms and the Children's Council.

GOAL: To increase children's participation in the community.

A SPACE OF OUR OWN

This proposal received 20 macaroni. They agreed on the importance of having their own space to create and meet (7 stickers), a proposal made by Madrid. However, all the Strategic Plans include the idea of having a space 'only' and 'exclusively' for meetings of Platform members to address issues that matter to them. This action highlights the importance of having a place that anchors their role, where they can meet and be met by others who can also contribute to improvements. Having a space affirms the value of their work and gives them visibility. Children see their own space as a tangible symbol of their protagonism and a place that validates their work. Having this space means organising and planning its use, as well as increasing the visibility and legitimacy of children's participation in the community (schools, leisure organisations, local communities...).

This time, the children proposed two new actions related to space: 'Find a place: quiet, spacious, and with the necessary materials (chairs, tables, cupboard, etc.)' (3 stickers), and 'Have a personalised space where we can meet' (2 stickers). A space designed and decorated by them reinforces the sense of belonging and commitment. It is worth mentioning that one of the IMCITIZEN Platforms has successfully secured its own meeting space in the school. Local communities and schools should designate their own spaces to show their support and confidence in children's participation.

GOAL: To create an exclusive space for the IMCITIZEN Platforms meetings.

GOING ON THE RADIO, MAKING A PODCAST

This action receives around 17 macaroni and 5 stickers. The children associate it with communication. It is presented in two municipalities that suggest using the radio as a channel to express their ideas and communicate what they have done to reach a wider audience. This idea of expanding their reach so that more people know who they are, what they do, and what they aim to do. This aspect highlights the importance of visibility and public communication in legitimising their proposals. Podcasts and radio are attractive and accessible media for amplifying children's voices. They use the digital format of

podcasts, which means that the content is available online and hosted in a space accessible to a much larger audience. A podcast can become a living archive of their experiences and ideas, promoting collective memory. 'Go to the radio and make a podcast' (B, 28) and 'record a radio programme where we are asked for our opinions' (E, 55). When elaborating the collective content, the children outline the steps to follow in order to create a podcast.

GOAL: To go on the radio to talk about IMCITIZEN, to start a podcast where we can share our ideas and to start a YouTube channel so that our voice can reach many more people.

SUGGESTION BOX

This action receives 17 macaroni and 5 stickers. The children associate it with communication. In a way, the installation of suggestion boxes allows the participation of children who are not actively involved in IMCITIZEN. The aim is to involve more children in the improvement of the neighbourhood or community by collecting what concerns them or what they propose to do. It is particularly interesting to see where they would be placed, specifying the exact locations (town hall, police station, sports centre, or simply a relevant place descriptor). The original proposals from Azuqueca, Barcelona, Mislata and Castrillón were as follows 'Participation letterbox in the town hall, police station, sports centre...' (A, 2); 'Suggestion boxes' (B, 23; 3 stickers); 'Express your opinion in the suggestion boxes: Bústia Jove, Mislata t'escolta [Youth Suggestion Box, Mislata Hears You]' (Mi, 51; 1 sticker); 'Put suggestion boxes or tables in relevant places in the community' (C, 22; 1 sticker). The descriptor for this action outlines the main guidelines for its use to fulfil its purpose of collecting more ideas to improve their communities. Monthly review and communication of results are key elements in maintaining confidence in the process.

Suggestion boxes democratise participation and allow more children to feel represented in local decisions. This action promotes a culture of consultation and active listening in the community, so it would be interesting to complement it with specific actions developed in the community that go beyond simple consultation.

GOAL: To collect ideas to improve our community and our city.

MAKE IMCITIZEN BIGGER

This action receives around 16 macaroni and a total of 15 stickers, distributed in three of the six Strategic Plans (Barcelona, Mislata and Castrillón). This action is a combination of 'IMCITIZEN in all schools to make it bigger' (6 stickers), 'Extend the IMCITIZEN participation platforms to all schools in the municipality' (2 stickers) and 'Make IMCITIZEN bigger' (7 stickers). The idea is to ensure that more children have the experience, discover their rights and have their own space to participate. It is suggested that it should take place in spaces frequented by children, most commonly schools, but also associations and sports clubs. The children recognise the need to expand IMCITIZEN to strengthen the participatory network and ensure territorial equity and equal opportunities to participate in proposals. Broadening the diversity of participants enriches both the proposals and the perspectives of the project. Once again, the description of the action outlines how it will be implemented; in this case, the proposals focus on how to reach more schools.

GOAL: To extend IMCITIZEN to more primary and secondary schools, sports clubs, associations, etc.

CELEBRATE CHILDREN'S DAY

This action receives around 12 macaroni and a total of 2 stickers. The children associate this action with the *Rights* label. The original proposal was made by Azuqueca, though all the Strategic Plans, except for A Coruña, mention actions related to rights. In this case, the action is linked to raising awareness and training on children's rights, with children proposing to organise events and classroom tours where they are promoters of children's rights. This action places children's rights at the heart of the awareness-raising efforts. The need or desire to celebrate strengthens the sense of belonging to the project and the community. The children's active role in the organisation enhances their leadership skills. In their description, they explain one of the first actions they experienced within the IMCITIZEN project, when, in April-May 2023, they carried out campaigns and/or classroom tours with their classmates, trained the teachers at their schools, or informed their families about their rights.

GOAL: To promote the idea that children have rights.

STAND UP FOR YOUR RIGHTS

This action receives about 12 macaroni and a total of 3 stickers. The children at the meeting associate this action with the *Rights* label. The Barcelona Platforms made the original proposal. The proposal is justified as the action that citizens take when they are not heard, after they have tried other avenues. They see this action as a practical way to defend their rights, just as other citizens do. Demonstrations are a means of practising active citizenship from an early age, while developing communication and mobilisation skills. This action shows the internalisation of the relevance of child activism by children who value the collective power of demonstrations to make their demands visible and generate social impact. This action allows them to claim public space and position themselves as agents of change.

They define it specifically as being active in ensuring that everyone knows they have rights. They propose doing this by making their rights known and standing up for them. They propose specific actions such as putting up posters, painting murals, and composing songs to promote their rights.

GOAL: To defend and raise awareness of our rights.

WORKING AND COLLABORATIVE GROUPS

This action receives around 10 macaroni and a total of 9 stickers. They associate it with the suggestion to collect feedback on consultations about what they want. The idea of meeting to discuss specific issues is included in all the Strategic Plans. Working groups are seen as essential spaces for developing proposals in an organised and collaborative manner. Children value working as a team, sharing responsibilities, and learning from each other. Strong bonds can be formed around a common goal that brings the working groups together and mobilises them. This includes upholding rights and promoting participation, which is the central theme around which they made proposals. It also covered other issues, such as collecting rubbish (M, 41), having a say in how we want parks, streets, and squares through a survey, meetings with children and young people, or asking them to draw (Mi, 53), and 'healthy play spaces' (AC, 61).

GOAL: To be part of working and collaborative groups dealing with issues of our interest.

By analysing the set of proposals for action drawn up by the 43 representatives of the 10 Platforms at the Madrid Meeting, several ideas can be identified:

- **Diversity and richness of the actions included in the agreed proposal.** The proposals cover a wide range of dimensions, reflecting the complexity and multiple facets of children's participation, from individual actions (such as sharing ideas and debating) to collective initiatives that transform environments and create social impact (manifestos and demonstrations). This reflects a holistic understanding of participation that encompasses both internal (reflection, empowerment) and external (action, advocacy) processes.
- **The centrality of children's rights and meaningful participation.** All proposals are inherently linked to the exercise and defence of children's rights. The children not only identify them as abstract principles but also incorporate them into concrete activities that allow them to experience and advocate for their respect.
- **Participatory and collaborative approaches.** A clear preference is observed for fun group dynamics that foster collaboration, dialogue, and mutual learning. The suggestions emphasise the importance of teamwork while also recognising the value of providing individual spaces for expression, which reinforces respect for each participant's needs and pace.
- **Direct impact on the community.** Many proposals are aimed at transforming specific locations (schools, neighbourhoods, cities), demonstrating a deep connection between children and their everyday spaces. This local approach is complemented by a global perspective, seen in actions such as demonstrations for universal rights.
- **The need for adult support, despite the emphasis on child leadership.** Although the proposals are child-led, the importance of adult support in providing resources, ensuring safety, and respecting children's autonomy is clear. This facilitating role is crucial to the success of the initiatives, without undermining the participants' leadership.

3.2. Keys to consider in the strategy design process

This section presents the contributions of children and young people in describing the process followed to draft the Strategic Plans. They have identified several key factors they consider relevant to the joint development of the proposals, as well as aspects that facilitate or hinder the process.

In a content analysis, the proposals relating to the group's constitution and way of working (34 responses), the generation of proposals and agreement (39 responses) and communication and interlocution (37 responses) stand out.

The video produced by the children of Azuqueca is a good example of their process:

We have created this Plan to gather the ideas we have as a group to improve participation through the Platform. First, as a group, we reviewed the goals we wanted to achieve in our Plan. Second, we did some research to analyse what resources are there in Azuqueca for participation. We found that there are not many, although fortunately, we have a Local Children's and Youth Council. Third, we decided to take action to raise awareness of our right to participate and to obtain more resources to express our opinions. Finally, as a group, we decided how to assess the objectives and what we need to do to achieve them.

Most of the children offer a proposal that specifies the phases to be followed, which we could organise as described below:

1. Be informed: Learn about children's rights and the project we are invited to participate in

They consider it essential to be informed about children's rights. 11 responses refer to understanding what they are, discussing them, being aware of them, reflecting on them, and engaging in activities or games related to children's rights. They mention: 'Knowing what rights are. The most important thing is equality. Respect for others' (Girl, C, IQ). However, it's not just about knowing, but also about acquiring the skills to communicate and raise other children's awareness of their rights: 'Knowing or explaining what rights are' (Boy, Mi, IQ); 'Explaining to children what rights are. Explain in a way that they understand' (Boy, C, IQ); 'First, tell them that children have rights and then get into groups to talk about children's rights' (Girl, AC, IQ); 'First, find out what participation and children's rights are. Then present the project to the whole school' (Boy, CA, IQ).

In line with the previous quote, five others point out that it is also important to know what IMCITIZEN is: 'Understand what the IMCITIZEN project is about' (Girl, C, IQ). They suggest adopting a proactive attitude by informing themselves, learning, and understanding what it's about before getting involved. They suggest consulting the website as a means of doing this.

2. Forming a group and organising themselves

A central element in the children's responses is the formation of the group, ranging from its configuration and identity definition, with 9 responses, to the identification of strategies for group functioning (18), including having a place and time (6), establishing a meeting dynamic (4), organising themselves (3), exploring the group's capacities (1), assigning roles (1), creating rules (2), and knowing how to work in a group (2).

Beyond their group, 7 children highlight the importance of involving others and encouraging them to join the initiative. They suggest: 'Think of ways to encourage people to join' (Girl, C, IQ), 'Get them to attend other courses like we did' (ND, C), 'Expand the group so that more people join' (ND, C, IQ).

In the videos, they describe specific organisational dynamics they adopted:

'Well, there are several people. There is one who writes, another who talks, and another who hangs the documents on a board we have at the school's entrance. Another one notes every day who has come to the meeting and who hasn't and writes it down on a piece of paper.' (Girl, CA, V)

3. Generating proposals

Thinking and generating ideas and proposals appears to be central to this process, with 35 responses referring to this. Some of them suggest strategies for generating ideas, such as 'brainstorming' (Boy, C, IQ); 'Take a piece of paper and write down all your ideas' (Girl, C, IQ); 'Let everyone think of ideas, then share them' (Girl, A, IQ); 'Let them stay with their classmates to come up with more ideas' (ND, C, IQ). They also highlight key inclusive principles, such as the importance of 'everyone contributing something' (Boy, C, IQ), 'Everyone can participate and contribute their ideas; no idea is bad' (Girl, C, IQ) or 'Let them come up with their own ideas' (Boy, C, IQ), without being influenced by others.

In the decision-making process, 4 respondents emphasise the importance of dialogue, sharing ideas, talking, and debating. They identify the key to this process as being able to reach agreements (5): 'Thinking carefully about what people propose, reaching agreements, and accepting the best proposal' (Boy, C, IQ); 'Giving different ideas and proposals to decide what we will do and what we want to do' (Girl, B, IQ). Voting is a strategy mentioned multiple times (5) as a way to reach these agreements: 'Voting so that children can decide which proposals are most important' (Boy, B, IQ). In the videos, they mention that:

'We would get together and express our opinions. How can we participate in the city? How can we improve the environment? And from there we came up with ideas' (AC).

'We really liked thinking about tools because we are a creative group and we always want to have ideas, but sometimes it's easier if you have examples from other children and from adults.' (A)

Once the proposals were generated, they would be developed into a plan, which would include 'defining the points you will follow, doing it roughly and then writing it down' (Boy, Mi, IQ); 'writing and drafting' (Girl, A, IQ); 'We write it down and photocopy it' (Girl, B). All with the goal of having a final result: the document with the proposal.

Regarding the design of the strategies, they indicated:

'We design the strategies by coming up with ideas together and then choosing the most important ones to include in the document.' (Boy, Ramón de la Sagra, V)

4. Communication with other stakeholders

It seems that a key step in the process is 'explaining it to those who need to know' (Boy, C), and they identify the following key stakeholders: other children (22), the mayor's office or town council (5), school management (4), teachers, adults in general, the local Children's Council, other children's Platforms, the project coordinator, and Europe. They frame their dialogue with political decision-makers as a claim for their right to be heard and for their proposals to be taken into account: 'Talk to the mayor's office so they listen to us' (ND, Mi, IQ); 'Teach them what to do with each plan' (Girl, C, IQ); 'Let them [children] do everything' (Girl, Mi, IQ).

In the videos they go into the assessment of these meetings' dynamics:

'It was good because they asked us about things we would like to improve in the local council and in the city, and it was good because they listened to us, we contributed ideas (...). I really like the venue because it is big, we all talk and at the end of the day we are all together and we get to know other people we have never met before.' (Boy, AC, V)

'I liked it because we were able to share our ideas with municipal public servants who can gather ideas and implement them in their work. I think it's important that we can work with them in some way.' (Boy, CA, V)

'Through meetings with the municipal public servants where we made suggestions. They told us whether they could do it or not, that they were going to do it, and we debated a bit and put our proposals together.' (Girl, CA, V)

A strategy is also provided to involve adults in the previous phase of defining the plan: 'make posters with the ideas and let the adults vote' (Girl, Mi, IQ).

One aspect that appears repeatedly in most of the questionnaires is that the process is not limited to the steering group or the Child Participation Platform; it is also crucial to communicate the project, the process, and the proposals to other children at the school, especially the younger ones, who, in several schools, were not included in the Platforms.

It is presented as a cross-cutting element throughout the different phases of the process, rather than as an end. They suggest various strategies for this communication, including: organising group meetings (3); going to other classes to show them what they are doing (3); preparing their own promotional materials and posters (3); making videos (4); etc. They highlight the complexity of this task and the need for planning and support: 'Think carefully about how to explain it to others' (Boy, C, IQ); 'Adapt it to children's age' (Boy, C, IQ); 'Ask them how to share it (since it takes a lot of work)' (Girl, C, IQ); 'Tell them what we planned to do in the course and what we aimed to achieve with the Platform' (Girl, AC, IQ).

The children's responses also offer us **methodological insights** into participation (28). They argue that active and engaging participation is a key element: 'We need participation because without it, we can't do anything' (Girl, B, IQ). Participation is seen as a process of cooperation and support, which involves respect, not judging, not feeling embarrassed, knowing how to listen, and expressing ideas aloud. Engagement and the importance of motivation are emphasised, highlighting that 'together you can ensure that this Platform continues to exist' (Girl, C, IQ).

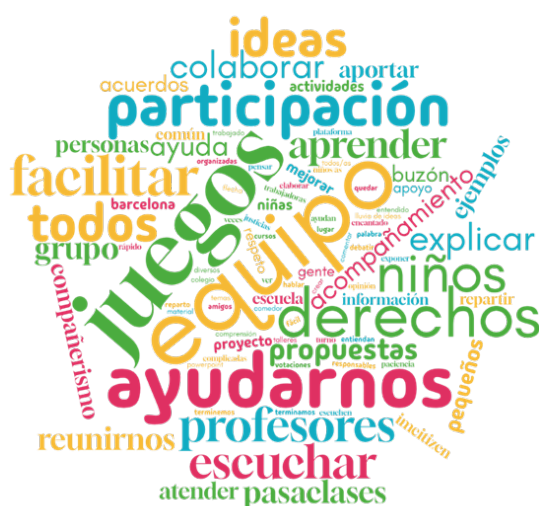
Several children (4) highlight the importance of imagination and creativity, which often needs to be nurtured: 'Experiencing things to open up the imagination' (Girl, B, IQ). 8 responses mention the playful aspect of the process and the use of games: fun games, questions, learning. It is emphasised that the process needs to be connected to enjoyment, the possibility of having fun, and feeling happy: 'Have fun, just like I did' (Girl, C, IQ).

3.3. Enabling and hindering elements

Regarding the factors that facilitated this process, the responses from children and young people collected through the Individual Questionnaire (IQ) *TELL US* were analysed, specifically from questions 3a and 3b: 'You have done a great work to prepare the proposals that you will present to the political representatives. What would you say facilitated or hindered this process?' Additionally, the responses in the videos (V) to the questions in Focus 1 (evaluation of the process of developing the Strategic Plan, specifically the elements that facilitated and hindered it) were considered. To maintain anonymity, a coding system is used that includes gender (in the IQ responses), territory, and instrument (e.g. Girl, CA, IQ). In some cases, respondents chose not to indicate their gender, and this is noted.

A frequency analysis of the most commonly used terms (Figure 3) shows that working as a team (23), the attitude of helping (14), play (12), rights (9), and participation (8) are central elements. Other attitudes such as facilitating (7), listening (6), collaborating (5), caring (3), contributing (3), companionship (3), etc., are also frequently mentioned. The educational processes of explaining (5) and learning (5) are also referenced. Also noteworthy are the roles and figures of support, such as facilitators and teachers (11).

Figure 3. Word cloud. Frequency of terms assigned as facilitators



Source: Own elaboration

Group work dynamics and competencies. They mention that the process was facilitated by teamwork, 'support from teammates' (Boy, C, IQ); help 'for children to participate and help each other' (Girl, C, IQ); collaboration, 'we all collaborate' (Girl, C, IQ); good organization of work and tasks, 'Listen to the teacher, pay attention, work well,

work as a team' (ND, C, IQ); as well as having a common goal: improving their city. They highlight the importance of being responsible 'and working hard' (Girl, C, IQ), having active participation, thinking, contributing ideas, developing proposals, and getting involved. They also emphasise communication skills, such as knowing how to listen and engage in dialogue, respecting the speaking turn, sharing ideas, respecting different opinions, and reaching agreements: 'It made the work easier, good and as a group' (Boy, Mi, IQ); 'It facilitated many things, like listening to us and letting us participate' (Girl, Mi, IQ).

Information and understanding of the project. The participants believe it was very important to understand from the beginning what the project was about, to be able to explain it to younger children, and to ensure that they could also easily understand it. They highlight their important role as multipliers and awareness-raisers: 'The younger children understood the project very easily' (Boy, C, IQ); 'The people who knew explained it to those who didn't' (Boy, C, IQ); 'The help from IMCITIZEN. I think the project is well done and it helped us' (Boy, C, IQ).

Self-identification as agents of rights. They identify as a facilitating element everything this process entails in terms of recognising their rights and making progress in exercising them: 'Knowing more about rights' (ND, C, IQ); 'Learning about rights, even if some already knew them' (Boy, C, IQ); and the possibility of 'being listened to' (Girl, B, IQ), 'having rights' (Girl, B, IQ), 'having justice' (Boy, B, IQ).

Adult support. Several responses highlight the importance of support from the adult facilitators and teachers who are allies in the process: 'The support of people, adults, etc. The help' (Girl, C, IQ); 'Having a counsellor to help us organise a bit' (Boy, AC, IQ); 'Being with a teacher who helped us' (Girl, AC, IQ); 'That the teachers are very patient' (Boy, Mi, IQ); 'That Alejandro explained very well' (Boy, Mi, IQ); 'The collaboration of the school' (Girl, C, IQ).

Ludic and relational dimension. They highlight that the fact that this experience is linked to pleasure and enjoyment helps a lot: 'It made it easier because we loved it' (Girl, C, IQ). They emphasise the possibility of playing and inventing games, as 'games make it easier' (ND, C, IQ). Similarly, the fact that it is a positive relational space where 'you can make new friends' (Girl, Mi, IQ). Meeting other children has facilitated their process: with the Children's Councils; with other schools, 'Working together with La Pau school because they help us or give us ideas to improve' (Girl, B, IQ); with children from other Platforms, 'Going to Barcelona' (Girl, C, IQ), etc.

process: 'At the beginning, we didn't know how to be a team, and we didn't work as a team' (Girl, B, IQ).

Difficulties in decision-making. The difficulty of reaching agreement on the final proposals to be included in the Strategic Plan was mentioned for a number of reasons: the fact that the work of drafting proposals is left to just a few people, because not all of them take responsibility; the critical attitude of some towards the proposals; the lack of inspiration at times: 'because when we didn't know what proposals to come up with and didn't have pics, we couldn't do it' (Girl, B, IQ); the difficulty of avoiding repetition: 'trying not to repeat the proposals' (Boy, C, IQ); or selecting the final proposals: 'sometimes it's hard to agree on everything' (Girl, A, IQ); 'choosing them, because there were some we didn't include' (Boy, C, IQ); 'It's sometimes difficult to come up with ideas, because when there are many, it's hard to give an opinion, and it's also hard to express yourself sometimes, but then, when you do, it feels really good' (Girl, AC, V). The difficulty in coming up with proposals is partly due to a lack of knowledge about what exists in their community and the available opportunities for participation, which makes it hard for them to imagine new scenarios.

Time and other organisational problems. They point to the lack of time: 'Not enough time to prepare the activities' (Girl, A, IQ), 'not being able to work on it every day' (Girl, C), as well as the fact of using the break time. They also point to 'difficulties with the organisation' (Girl, C, IQ), 'the organisation was not very good, and the project was not explained or internalised. Nevertheless, it was fun and interesting' (Boy, AC, IQ); the 'lack of people, information' (Boy, Mi, IQ), 'at the beginning, because we didn't know what it was, we didn't take into account what they said' (Boy, C, IQ); the lack of commitment and 'people who didn't show up' (Boy, Mi, IQ); that the person accompanying the process was not always present, 'not always seeing the IMCITIZEN teacher to ask questions' (Boy, C, IQ); limitations in 'the attention of the highest authorities' (Boy, C, IQ); the need for more exchanges, 'that there were more video calls to share the work' (Girl, C, IQ); or the methodology 'that we did very similar things. It would have been better to play more' (ND, C, IQ). Some of the groups focus their questions on the impact of the process, e.g. 'that we only learnt about rights and duties' (ND, C, IQ). They suggest that the difficulty may be in the next phase, in the implementation: 'The easiest thing was the beginning, now it is getting more complicated to move on to action and so on' (Boy, CA, IQ).

It is important to highlight that, in one instance, the impact of children's living conditions on the violation of their rights was acknowledged, showing that 'not having a home' (Girl, B, IQ) (as was the case for one of the children) makes it difficult to participate.

3.4. Lessons learnt

This section presents the lessons learnt from the perspective of children and young people from the different IMCITIZEN Participation Platforms in the process of *Making their Voices Heard by Local Authorities* (WP4). The learnt lessons are the knowledge assets gained from lived experiences, whether positive or negative. These lessons can take various forms: best practices, discoveries, recommendations, or warnings (González-Ramírez et al., 2021).

In order to characterise the lessons learnt, the responses collected through two research instruments have been analysed: 1) Individual Questionnaire (IQ) *TELL US* based on question 4: 'What have you learnt with your peers in the Platform?'; and 2) Learning Box (LB) through the written accounts by children collected from the Child Participation Platforms. To maintain anonymity, a coding system is used that includes gender (in the IQ responses), location, and instrument (e.g., Girl, CA, IQ).

In general, the participating children reported having acquired various lessons, which have been organised and classified into different dimensions of analysis (Knowledge Assets) to provide a more thorough and structured understanding of the findings (Table 1). These lessons offer an enriching perspective on both the development of the research process and the (socio)educational and formative impact that the experiences in each territorial Platform have had on the children involved in the IMCITIZEN project.

Table 1. Dimensions of analysis to categorise lessons learnt in WP4

<i>Dimension of analysis</i>	<i>Description</i>
Child rights, citizenship and participation	<i>Knowledge assets that promote learning about children's rights, their status as citizens, and their perception of participation as an exercise to be understood, practiced, and advocated for.</i>
CREAction capabilities	<i>Knowledge assets that stimulate the creative abilities of children and young people to think and envision their actions.</i>
Participatory skills	<i>Knowledge assets that support the acquisition and development of social, communication, organisational, and group (self)management skills.</i>
Collective construction and exchange	<i>Knowledge assets that nurture the 'I-we' citizen, with the ability to act in shared spaces through dialogue, ideas exchange, and</i>

	<i>participatory experiences with a diverse range of socio-educational stakeholders.</i>
Participation axiology	<i>Knowledge assets that promote the construction of values inherent in the multidimensional nature of participation (coexistence, inclusion, respect, mutual aid).</i>
Emotions and subjective-collective well-being	<i>Knowledge assets that enhance the affective-emotional dimension of participation on a personal, collective, and spatial levels.</i>

Source: Own elaboration

Knowledge assets related to children's rights, citizenship and participation

Statements such as 'I have learnt that children have rights and what they are' (AC, LB), 'I have discovered that children can participate' (B, LB), 'children's rights' (Girl, Mi, IQ), and 'to understand how I am a citizen' (Boy, C, IQ) highlight that the experience in all territories has been a significant learning process regarding children's rights. This underscores the importance of knowing, exercising, and actively advocating for their rights through practice: 'We can inspire more children to participate and have children's rights heard' (Mi, LB), and 'to implement children's rights' (Girl, C, IQ). This notable learning aligns with the results and conclusions from previous phases, as indicated in the *Research Report: Keys to Creating Child Participation Platforms in the EU* (Novella-Cámara et al., 2024).

They also emphasise that they have 'learnt how to participate' and 'the forms of participation' (A, LB), which demonstrates that the experience was an exercise in meta-participation. Through this reflection, they have redefined both their individual and collective understanding of the concept of participation. Furthermore, they have discovered that there are various ways to get involved and exercise their right to participate, thereby broadening their understanding of the multiple dimensions and possibilities of civic participation: 'to participate in the municipality' (ND, Mi, IQ); 'We have learnt to work as a team and as a Platform, to participate in our city' (Girl, B, IQ); or 'Well, we children could participate in so many things and we didn't know we had so many rights, and that is great for the future' (Boy, CA, IQ).

Taken together, these experiences have allowed children to recognise themselves as subjects of rights and active citizens in the present, expanding their understanding of what it means to be part of an engaged citizenship: 'We have learnt that children have

more rights and that we can contribute to improving our city' (C, LB) and 'Children can do so many things' (B, LB). This recognition of their active citizenship is a key element and, at the same time, the essential foundation for ensuring genuine participation and for taking on more prominent roles in participatory processes.

Knowledge assets linked to CREAction capabilities

The challenges of the experience have allowed them to learn how to create and do things. This is reflected in some of the children's narratives, which, in one way or another, focus on the materialisation of the work carried out by and through the respective Participation Platforms. In A Coruña, they highlight that they have learned 'how to create a children's participation group' (AC, LB), referring to the process of creating and launching their Platforms. This feeling is shared by a member of El Campiello Platform, who mentions 'creating a Platform' as one of his learnings (Boy, C, IQ).

In addition, some Platforms have collaborated with other child participation groups; for example, La Espiga Primary School Platform has worked with the Local Children's and Youth Council (CLIA). A member from Azuqueca de Henares points out that through this experience, they discovered 'how the CLIA works' (A, LB). They also learnt how to create organisational resources, as the goal of this phase was to advance participation at the local level, which required developing a Plan. In this regard, some say the experience taught them 'how to create a Plan' to guide their actions, 'how to create a script for our videos' (A, LB), or 'how to create a Platform' (ND, C, IQ).

On the other hand, the collective creation of the guide book developed during this phase of the project is highlighted on several occasions, an achievement mentioned with enthusiasm by the participants: 'Making a book' (Girl, A, IQ), 'We have a really cool book,' or 'What I liked most about IMCITIZEN was the guide we created and the T-shirts' (A, LB). Similarly, a participant from A Coruña highlights their interest in specific activities: 'The session I liked the most was when we made the participatory suggestion boxes' (AC, LB). Additionally, elements such as 'promotion' and 'friendliness and creativity' (ND, C, IQ) are also appreciated by participants. These experiences reflect how IMCITIZEN has provided children with specific tools and strategies for active participation, often for the first time, allowing them to take an active and leading role in creative and collaborative processes.

Knowledge assets on participatory skills

The children mention that the experiences they have lived have allowed them to develop various skills. First of all, several voices highlight that this process has enabled them to

learn to 'work as a team' (Boy, Mi, IQ) or 'work together' (ND, C, IQ). They note that they have improved in many ways by 'working better in groups' (Girl, Mi, IQ), to the point that 'sometimes working in a team is better' (Girl, AC, IQ). So much so that they emphasise the power of teamwork: 'When a team comes together is unstoppable' (Boy, C, IQ) and openly state that 'what I liked about IMCITIZEN is the teamwork' (Mi-LB).

On the other hand, the experience of working in a team has enabled them to develop skills in organising and managing their group, such as 'thinking carefully and waiting for their turn to speak' (ND, C, IQ). They also mention negotiation and consensus-building skills, such as 'putting ideas together, agreeing with everyone' (ND, C, IQ). Additionally, they indicate that their communication skills have improved. In particular, they highlight increased confidence in expressing themselves: 'I've learnt to overcome my shyness' (Girl, B, IQ) and 'making public presentations and many other things' (Boy, C, IQ). They even mention that this has helped them express their ideas, opinions, and individual needs more effectively: 'explaining my concerns' (X, B, CI), 'sharing my ideas with my peers' (AC, LB). An interesting point is that one participant highlights improvements in communication with adults, stating that they have learnt 'how to explain myself when we have meetings with them' (Boy, C, IQ).

Finally, they highlight the learning related to autonomy and self-management as a result of their active participation in planning and carrying out actions. The lack of prior experience in this area surprises them, and at the same time, they consider it to be something typically associated with adults. For this reason, they express that through the experience, they have learnt to be 'mini teachers' (C, LB), referring to taking an active role and being responsible for decisions in their own participation processes.

Knowledge assets linked to collective construction and exchange

Other accounts recognise the spaces provided for meetings, both virtual and face-to-face, offering opportunities to get to know each other, share experiences, work, viewpoints, and collective actions (both present and future): 'I really liked that there were meetings with other schools from different parts of Spain to talk about IMCITIZEN' (AC, LB); 'We had really cool meetings with the Council and games. I met a lot of people' (Mi, LB); or '(...) going to places to do things for the project, the meeting, and the day we had pizza' (B, LB). On the other hand, some say that learning comes from the very act of experiencing things: 'The best experiences were at the camps' and 'the excursions, the camps, and the working sessions between the Platforms', 'going on so many excursions and our political participation', 'going to the radio' (B, LB).

Among the spaces for dialogical exchange, they highlight the town hall: 'getting to know other elements of the town hall that help with participation' and 'going to the town hall' (Boy, Mi, IQ), 'talking about going to the town hall' (B, LB). This direct interaction with the town hall gave them the opportunity to learn in depth about the organisation and functioning of public institutions, as well as to explore their spaces and opportunities for civic participation. As one participant put it: 'Getting to know other elements of the town hall that help us participate' (Boy, Mi, IQ). In this way, the experience broadened their understanding of participation spaces and allowed them to identify new opportunities and areas where they could influence and/or actively engage in their immediate environment.

Knowledge assets linked to the axiology of participation

The child participants emphasised the importance of coexistence and mutual respect, reflected in comments such as 'learning to respect each other' and 'how to get along with people' (Boy, C, IQ), which enabled them to reach consensus and 'agree as a group' (A, LB). They also internalised the idea that 'no one is better than anyone else' (Boy, C, IQ), reinforcing the values of equity and acceptance of differences within the group. They also highlighted the importance of active listening and participation, expressed in phrases such as 'you must listen to others and participate' (Boy, C, IQ), demonstrating the need to collectively create a respectful and cooperative environment.

Finally, one key contribution emphasises: 'Helping each other makes everything easier and more fun' (A, LB); 'because doing it alone is more boring, all the work is on you' (Girl, C, IQ), highlighting the value of teamwork and mutual support as pillars for achieving a more dynamic and fulfilling process. This is because 'we want to help make the world a better place', 'help ensure that children are listened to' and 'help others and the city' (B, LB).

Knowledge assets linked to emotions and subjective-collective wellbeing

Emotion-related learning is a central aspect of the experience, as the consistently associate the process with positive emotions. Among these, they repeatedly highlight 'happiness' (B, LB) and explicitly describe the moments experienced as rewarding: 'good moments' (B, LB). They also mention that they enjoyed the experience and would recommend it to their peers: 'I had a great time, and it is worth it for other children to join' (B, LB). Other participants expressed emotions related to collective achievements and

personal emotional well-being. For example, they feel 'satisfaction from having achieved the goal of talking to the district' (B, LB) and 'peace of mind because I felt calm in this space' (B, LB), and they are grateful for the welcoming environment they experienced, expressing: 'Thank you for welcoming me' (B, LB). These emotions reinforce the positive impact of participation, not only at a cognitive level but also on the emotional well-being of the children involved: 'I took a big smile from the Platform' (Mi, LB); 'I overcame my shyness at school' (Girl, C, IQ).

4. Conclusions

As a final section of this research report, we present the main conclusions based on the different aspects that have been worked on. The aim is to highlight the fundamental issues that emerged from the careful listening, participant observation and reflection inherent in the process developed in the different contexts, both in a positive sense and in terms of areas for improvement.

In describing the process of developing the strategies, the children emphasise that knowledge is an essential pillar: **understanding children's rights and acquiring tools to communicate them to others**. This approach promotes not only awareness but also their active role, enabling them to become agents of change.

The **composition and organisation of the participating groups are central** to developing these strategies. From the definition of roles to the creation of a collaborative working dynamic, the **need to structure teams in a way that fosters commitment** was emphasised. Furthermore, **involving more people in these initiatives** was seen as an opportunity to expand the project's impact.

The **importance of developing proposals in an inclusive dynamic where everyone participates is highlighted** when it comes to generating proposals. Ideas and strategies should be encouraged through creativity and equal participation, using tools such as brainstorming, voting, and debate. These methods not only encourage the free expression of ideas but also facilitate consensus building. The aim of this process is to develop these plans in a structured way, gathering the agreement of the participants and challenging them to prioritise and discard some ideas.

Communicating with different stakeholders, such as policymakers, school communities, and other children's Platforms, was a key step in ensuring that proposals were heard and considered. Participants stressed that this **communication should occur at all stages of the process**, from defining the Plan and gathering proposals from others to implementation, ensuring that it reaches responsible adults and children of other ages.

On the other hand, **factors that enabled and hindered the development of the process were identified. Among the facilitators, factors related to the relational dimension stand out**. The participatory methodology was understood as a collaborative process based on respect, active listening, and imagination. Teamwork, **the constant support of adults such as teachers and facilitators and creating an environment where**

cooperation and companionship were fundamental were also highlighted. The ludic dimension, especially through games and recreational activities, helped foster interest and enjoyment, both of which are crucial elements for the success of these initiatives.

However, there were also significant obstacles. **Lack of time, scheduling conflicts and organisational issues hindered the smooth running of the process.** Disruptive behaviours, such as **lack of attention and cooperation**, also posed challenges and negatively affected group dynamics. In terms of content, **the initial lack of understanding of the project and the limited capacity to generate innovative proposals or make consensual decisions** were obstacles. In addition, some children faced challenges due to external conditions, such as the vulnerability of their living conditions.

Despite these difficulties, the process led to significant progress in recognising children's rights and enhancing their ability to actively participate in developing strategic proposals. This shows that, with the right support and an inclusive methodology, it is possible to empower children to take proactive, transformative roles in their communities.

The lessons learnt by the children in the IMCITIZEN Participation Platforms reflect a **process of both individual and collective growth integrating the knowledge they have acquired through direct participation experiences.** These lessons, ranging from knowledge of rights to teamwork skills, have emerged from **shared experiences in different contexts of participation and cooperation.** The responses to the research instruments, such as individual questionnaires and written accounts, show a significant change in their understanding of active citizenship and the exercise of their rights.

Through this process, the children **have learnt to see themselves as subjects of rights with the ability to influence their environment. They have become aware of the importance of actively participating in decision-making that affects their community.** The development of participatory skills such as **teamwork, organisation and negotiation, as well as the ability to make collective proposals**, has been central to this process. In addition, **interaction with different institutional actors and the creation of collaborative resources such as books and Platforms** have provided participants with practical tools to continue being active agents in their communities. Overall, **the lessons learnt show a positive impact on the children's emotional wellbeing, as participation has allowed them to strengthen their self-confidence, sense of belonging and ability to contribute to building a more just and inclusive society.**

There is a need to create and strengthen spaces for intergenerational interaction and cooperation. The proposals emphasise the need for regular meetings between children, community representatives, and children's organisations, highlighting the importance of listening to their voices and ensuring the long-term stability of these spaces, both within schools and at the local level. As one of the children's responses states, these meetings must be sincere and committed to their purpose, 'so that they listen to us in a committed and serious way.'

The range of actions proposed in the Strategic Plans demonstrates that children not only have valuable ideas but are also involved as active agents in the process of change and transformation. Disseminating this knowledge is crucial to breaking down stereotypes that underestimate their capacity for analysis, organisation, and advocacy. These initiatives reinforce the idea that children's participation is not only a right but also a valuable resource for building more just and inclusive societies. It is also clear that incorporating these actions would improve the conditions for exercising children's citizenship and foster co-governance with various political and local stakeholders.

The range of actions and the details of their development highlight the importance of inclusive and adapted methodologies to enable children to see themselves as agents of change and transformation. The analysis shows that effective participation requires safe spaces and dynamics tailored to children's needs. The proposals highlight the importance of methodologies that promote equality, active listening and flexibility, principles that can also inspire the design of public policies and educational programmes. Some of the proposals have been tested in the context of the Municipal Children's Council, others in the context of the participation project. It is therefore crucial to increase opportunities to generate knowledge about rights among peers, to promote the experience of engaging in participatory spaces, and to support children in defending their proposals to the authorities, in order to jointly identify improvements to strengthen participation.

Children's participation should be integrated continuously, creatively and transversally into different spaces and formats. These suggestions reveal a rich, multidimensional understanding of children's participation. It is not only about implementing practical actions but also about rethinking the structure of society in order to include children's voices at all levels. This combination of regular meetings and innovative dynamics points to a strategic model that **not only promotes children's rights but also highlights and reinforces them as essential pillars of community development.**

5. References

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ANNEXES

1. QUESTIONNAIRE TO PLATFORMS PARTICIPANTS

TELL US!

You have already defined your strategy to increase children's participation in the community. Congratulations! Before we finish, we need your contributions to enrich the IMCITIZEN journey. Thank you for your commitment.

First name and last name initials:

School:

Date:

City:

Class:

Gender: Girl Boy I'd rather not say

1. From all the different proposals you came up with to help more children get involved, which one would you choose as the best? Why?

2. Imagine that children from another city want to make their own plan. What steps would you suggest they take to come up with their proposals?

3. You have done a great job making the proposals you will present to the decision-makers. What do you think has made this process easier or harder?



MADE IT EASIER

A large, empty rounded rectangle with a green border, intended for users to write their responses for the 'MADE IT EASIER' category.

MADE IT HARDER

A large, empty rounded rectangle with a red border, intended for users to write their responses for the 'MADE IT HARDER' category.

4. What have you learnt with your friends in the Platform?

A large, empty rounded rectangle with a blue border, intended for users to write their responses for question 4.

5. How do you imagine the Platform next year?

A large, empty rounded rectangle with an orange border, intended for users to write their responses for question 5.

Thanks so much for your time and especially for your input!

