

Interview with Kristinn

In Iceland, one of demands during the protests that followed the financial troubles in 2008 was that the citizens would get to rewrite the constitution. The Constitutional Council was made up of 25 citizens and the process involved [crowdsourcing ideas and suggestions](#) from the Internet.

During the process of the revision of the constitution, UNICEF Iceland, the Ombudsman for Children and the City of Reykjavik launched a participation project called [The Young People's Constitution](#).

The purpose of the project was to ensure the opinions of children and young people are heard and taken into account in the constitutional amendment process.

During the Conference on the Council of Europe's Strategy for the Rights of the Child for 2012-2015 that was held in Monaco in November 2011, CRIN met with Kristinn Jóhannsson, the Representative of the Young People's Constitution Project. A few days ago we interviewed Kristinn to discuss his impressions of the project.

How did you get involved in the project?

I have been a member of the municipal youth council in my district for almost two years now. They asked for two people from each council to participate in the project and I was lucky enough to get on.

What do you do exactly in the municipal council?

We discuss matters that we judge relevant. Usually we narrow down the discussion to one topic and present our suggestions to the city. How much influence our suggestions will have depends on how good they think they are.

We try to introduce many things, for example, our last suggestion was about mobbing in schools. We first made a video toolkit about the issue for students to watch and then discuss the problem.

Secondly, we proposed that the mobbing reaction plans in schools should be changed. We generally received good responses and it was taken into very practical consideration. Schools all around the country now have a copy of the video toolkit. We might still need to follow up on the action plans.

We also would like to change the bus system.

Public transportation is pretty bad, buses in the morning are almost always late, there are not enough buses. One youth council managed to have student cards for students in elementary school. That was a really good thing.

How did the workshop go?

There were 38 of us, 23 girls to 15 boys, it doesn't seem like a lot but it is a small country!

There were two representatives from each youth council in Iceland. We have around 23 youth councils in the entire country. We had a pretty good participation. Some couldn't make it because they were from the other side of the country.

It was very Socratic in that we discussed things and they took note of our opinions.

The organisers showed us videos on different parts of the constitution and then we discussed them.

Did you feel that your ideas were listened to?

Yes, I do personally.

A group from the constitutional council came to the workshop to see what the results would be.

They said themselves that our opinions were the same as theirs, that we were thinking about the same things. That encouraged them to do something about it.

I think we were listened to. Especially seeing as they presented an amendment to the constitution regarding children's right to participate.

How do you think your experience could be beneficial to children in other countries who may not be able to participate?

Why can't they participate? They should create their own means to participate. Like we do with youth councils here in Iceland. It doesn't necessary have to be through youth councils.

I like the idea of children being able to affect what's going on.

In our Youth Council, it is us, the members, who set our own rules. It is still in development; we're still trying to figure it out.

They can get ideas about different means of participation children use in different countries. It would be useful for them to do some research to see how children in countries like Sweden or Norway participate.

If they approach their government with a plan, it might make it easier for the government to let them participate.

Are you familiar with your rights that are set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child?

In my opinion, we are not educated enough about our rights. Although posters were hanging on some walls in my old school, I never really got a proper look at them. I don't I think that I have been educated enough about my rights at all.

What do you think of the work of organisations working for the rights of the child? Did you feel they took your opinions seriously?

From where I stand, I think they're doing a pretty solid job.

On how seriously they took our opinions, I think it is very much dependent on each person. I have had different experiences; some were paying attention and some were not listening.

All in all we were listened to. The Ombudsperson for children's rights really took us seriously and asked us very relevant questions.