

THE BIG NATIONAL CONSULTATION “Giving young people a say”:

AIM

To give young people aged less than 18 years old a say: so that their voice can be heard on the major questions which concern them and so that their proposals can enrich the public debate on the fundamental rights of children.

OBJECTIVES

1. To open up a big public discussion with young people aged less than 18 years old on 8 fundamental rights:
 - *The right to education*
 - *The right to live as a family*
 - *The right to justice appropriate for young people*
 - *The right not to have to put up with violence*
 - *The right to the best possible health*
 - *The right not to be discriminated against*
 - *The protection of private life in relation to new technologies*
 - *The right to expression and participation*
2. To submit to the President of the Republic and the Parliament proposals from the young people on the progress still to be realised as regards fundamental rights of children and teenagers on the occasion of the 20 years anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of Children on November 20th 2009.

CONTEXT

- The implementation of certain fundamental rights of children is at the heart of debates around the future of society.
- In Particular in relation to the following rights:
 - ***The right to education***
 - What education should be given within the family, within school or outside school to allow all the children to become autonomous and fulfilled adults in an increasingly demanding and selective world?
 - ***The right to live in a family***
 - Faced with changes without precedent of family configurations (single-parent, recomposed, same sex families ...) how to organize the everyday life of the children in the respect of their various family and emotional bonds?
 - How can the child's voice be heard?
 - What is the place for third parties (step parents etc...) who intervene more and more in their education because of new family models?

- ***The right to a justice appropriate for young people***
 - How to coordinate education and prevention?
 - What are the sanctions and what can be done to reintegrate minors who carry out punishable or criminal acts?
 - What should be the age for penal responsibility?
- ***The right not to have to put up with violence***
 - How can the physical, psychological and moral violence which can certain children undergo on behalf of adults or other children be prevented and repaired?
 - How can institutional violence be identified and prevented?
- ***The right to the best possible health***
 - What are the responses vis-à-vis the worrying signs of the psychic suffering of increasingly young teenagers (suicide attempts, self-harm, multiple addictions - alcohol, tobacco, cannabis -, cyberdependancy...)?
- ***The right not to be discriminated against***
 - How can the discriminations undergone by too many children and teenagers due to their sex, their disability, their colour, their origins, or their sexual orientation be prevented and repaired?
- ***The protection of private life in relation to new technologies***
 - How to guarantee the respect and the protection of the private life of the children and teenagers through new technologies, in particular Internet? What education on the use of Internet is needed?
- ***The right to expression and participation***
 - How are the views of children and teenagers taken into account by the adults in charge of their education (parents, teachers, ...) and by magistrates charged with making important decisions concerning their life?
 - What space is there for young people to be heard in the press and the local political structures?

These questions feed the often impassioned debates of the experts in the field of justice, education, child welfare, and new technologies... and have lead to, or will lead to, important reforms in France, like those adopted during the two last years on child welfare and the prevention of delinquency and on the justice of the minors currently being prepared.

However these questions are generally discussed without collecting the opinion, the reactions and the proposals of those most concerned, i.e. the young people.

The 20 years of the International Convention of the Rights of Children is a strong symbolic moment to make the voice of the children heard so that the rights of the children are respected even better.

METHODOLOGY

Three main steps

1. A TOUR DE FRANCE

A **‘Tour de France’** with 8 thematic forums in 8 regions where young people from 11 to 17 years will have their voices heard.

These forums involve detailed work in workshops on a specific set of themes with school children, high-school pupils, (publicly-owned establishments, private and professional...), representatives of the town councils of young people, departmental councils of young people, regional councils of young people...). Each time 150 young people will be brought together.

For example the forum on the theme of the family, allowed 5 parallel mini debates on

1. The role of parents
2. The place of the child in the family
3. Parental authority
4. Parental separation
5. Difficulties in family life

These workshops were preceded by a short welcoming session in the morning.

Each workshop gathered about thirty children around two organizers. In these workshops pupils from all the classes of the schools taking part in the forum are mixed.

A few weeks beforehand two young ambassadors of the Children’s Ombudsperson , along with a territorial correspondent of the Ombudsperson, met each class twice: the first time to present the International Convention of the Rights of Children, the second to present the topic of the forum and the rights of children to them, in order to have a first debate with them on this topic.

Each workshop discussed two questions. The first was a more general one, common to the 5 workshops. The second, more specific, led the young people to deliver an opinion and to make proposals to the Children’s Ombudsperson.

In the afternoon two young volunteers per workshop presented the summaries and proposals from their workshops in plenary.

Four representatives of the elected officials and local institutions contributed their comments: the vice president of the Département responsible for the family and social affairs, the president of the court for family affairs, the director of the departmental services of Education, and the president of the departmental union of family associations.

The proposals from the young people were put into perspective by a “wise person”, a professor of Child Psychiatry, and the Children’s Ombudsperson drew up the conclusions.

2. AN INTERNET FORUM

An internet forum www.paroleauxjeunes.fr which makes it possible to open a great public discussion with the young people on the 8 selected topics. Each departmental or regional thematic forum leads to the parallel opening of a debate on this internet forum.

For example to accompany the Forum on the topic by the family a small survey was put on line: **What use is the family?**

The family is mainly useful

- to educate
- to give affection and to protect
- to give a roof, what to eat, dress themselves
- to prepare adult life

THEN on the role of the parents under the heading “is family a job?” these questions were put:

- Who has to help or advise the parents in the education which they give to their children? Why? Which are your proposals?
- Which can be the principal grounds for dispute between the parents and their children?
- Can one compare the childhood of your parents (or those which replace them) with yours? If you had a family, what education would you give to your children?
- Can you learned to be a parent? Would it be necessary to give advice, documentation, or training to parents? If so, on which subjects?

In the same way for all the other themes a series of five questions have been put online. Thus for another example:

On the place of the child in the family, under the heading “giving space to children!” the questions that are online are the following:

- Do you think that the age of majority (18 years old) should be changed?
- What does being a child mean according to you?
- Is it more difficult to be the eldest or the youngest of your brothers and sisters?
- Why? What do you suggest? And what do you suggest for only children?
- On what matters concerning their children should parents take into account their views?

3. A MAJOR NATIONAL EVENT

A major national event in Paris on November 20 2009 will bring together the **spokespersons of the young people** who will have taken part in the thematic forums in 15 Départements around the ‘witnesses of our times such as’ Boris Cyrulnik, Robert Badinter...

Following this national event a “golden book” of the voices of young people” will be presented to the President of the Republic and to the Parliament by the Children’s Ombudsperson on the occasion of the launch of the annual report for 2009.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION

Each regional forum has received the support of the departmental or regional authorities to cover the costs of venue, the young people’s travel and catering.

In order to ensure that this national consultation is well known, a certain number of partners have been mobilised:

➤ **The ministry for Education**

The consultation has been announced through the Official Journal of the Ministry for Education which is sent to all educational establishments.

The education directors in the Ministry for Education across France distribute the poster for the event in all schools and work with the Ombudsperson for Children in the preparation of the local thematic forums with the teachers and classes involved (mostly 6 classes from 6 different schools with varying sociological profiles and different orientations)

➤ **The liaison centre for teaching and information media (CLEMI)**

The centre is helping to make the launch of the big consultation known through a network of coordinators and its website.

➤ **The ministry for Health, Youth, Sports and NGO life**

The ministry is making the consultation well known on all its sites, especially on the portal jeunesse.gov and the web-site “Envie d’Agir” (‘want to act’).

The poster ‘Give a voice to young people’ is being distributed to a network of youth information centres in more than 1500 locations.

Information mailings are being sent to the Départemental directions for Youth and Sports, and to the Départemental directions for associations, etc.

➤ **The Ministry for Justice (department for legal youth protection)**

Is distributing the ‘Give a voice to young people’ poster to the services of the legal youth protection, and a linked educational activity will be proposed to all the young people in by Juvenile Justice programmes. In this way young people will be able to take part anonymously in the national consultation through the website.

The legal youth protection services will be present on the occasion of the thematic forum due to take place in Grenoble in October 2008.

➤ **Youth organisations**

Several youth organisations are partners in the national consultation:

“**The ink jets**’ is an association founded in 2007, which ensures the promotion and defence of the press of young people in the school context, in children and young persons’ councils and community centres..; it is coordinating a journal direct from the 8 thematic forums and during the big event in November 2008 with journalists from school publications from the thematic forums. The “Ink jets” will also take part in the forum on “expression and participation” which will take place in May 2009.

ANACEJ (national association of children’s and youth councils) will support young people from municipal, départemental and regional councils to take part in the 8 thematic forums and in the big national event on November 2008.

➤ **Youth press**

The youth press has agreed to act as a relay to its readers for the national consultation:

Milan presse is taking part in the national consultation, especially through the “**Keys to junior news**” (for 8-12 year olds) and the “**Keys to the news**” (for over 12 year olds) and a journalist will be present at all the thematic forums.

Bayard Jeunesse will take part in the consultation through two magazines: **Okapi** (for 10-15 year olds) and **Phosphore** (for high school and university students). The websites of Okapi and Phosphore will make a link to www.paroleauxjeunes.fr. The Bayard Jeunesse site has relayed information from the start of May and all along the 18 months of the consultation. A journalist will also be present at all the forums in mainland France.

Radio “Skyrock” which is very popular among youngsters will also talk about the consultation and the Ombudsperson for Children has started a blog on Skyrock in order to support as many young people as possible to take part in the consultation.

CONCLUSION

The children and young people of today are the adults of tomorrow, so it is crucial that their voice be heard and that their suggestions should be taken into account!