

Policy for ethical youth participation

1. Introduction

This Policy affirms the commitment of the S²Cities programme to the ethical participation of young people and to upholding our duty of care to ensure the safety and wellbeing of young people in all programme activities.

This Policy is based on the central recognition that youth participation is integral to the S²Cities programme design. This Policy is furthermore based on the central recognition that ethical participation not only reinforces programme effectiveness but also empowers young people to actualise their right to be heard, influence decisions regarding their own lives and act as agents of change.

This Policy is also based on Global Infrastructure Basel Foundation (GIB)'s zero-tolerance policy for any kind of offensive, obscene, violent or otherwise harmful behaviour, as well as several (inter)nationally accepted standards on human rights and young person rights.

> Refer to [section 1 of the Annex](#) for information on these accepted standards.

2. Scope

This Policy and accompanying [Handbook for ethical youth participation](#) are inclusive to all persons involved in the S²Cities programme.

> Refer to [section 2 of the Annex](#) for more information on who must abide by the Policy.

3. Behaviours and responsibilities

In keeping with the central recognitions and standards upon which this Policy is based, everyone engaged in the S²Cities programme commits to:

- Protecting young people against all kinds of violence;¹
- Embedding participation rights;
- Actively embracing non-discrimination and anti-discrimination practices;
- Putting forward the best interests of young people;
- Upholding our duty to act in case of violations of the rights of young people; and
- Doing our utmost to ensure young people's safety and wellbeing by preventing unintended negative consequences, being transparent and accountable and reinforcing programme effectiveness through ethical participation.

> Refer to [section 3 of the Annex](#) for more information.

Furthermore, everyone engaged in the S²Cities programme commits to:

Never:

- Hit, beat or in any other way physically abuse young people.
- Shame, humiliate, shout at, use offensive or inappropriate language towards, bully, victim-blame, or in any other way emotionally abuse young people.

¹ Violence against youth is understood to take many forms, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and may involve exploitation, discrimination, neglect or deprivation. Adapted from UNICEF, Violence Against Children, May 2022, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/violence/>.

- Give advice that makes young people engage in behaviour putting themselves or others at risk, make themselves or others feel bad, or get into trouble.
- Make promises that cannot be kept.
- Have any sexual activity with young people below the age of 18 years, regardless of whether they are involved in the programme, or have any sexual activity with any young person involved in the programme in any capacity, regardless of age.
- Speak, look, or otherwise behave in suggestive ways, or touch a young person inappropriately.
- Ask young people for money or sexual favours, or perform work which lies outside the scope of the programme.
- Give preferential treatment or discriminate against any young person or group of young people.
- Spend too much time alone with a young person or group of young persons, including in cars, in rooms, or at the young persons' own homes, or invite young persons to stay in the personal homes of anyone engaged in the S²Cities programme. Whenever possible, at least two adults should be present when working with young people.
- Get involved in any unethical compromise or unlawful settlement with parents, abusers or authorities when a young person is abused, exploited or exposed to violence.

4. Complaints and whistleblowing

Any person who suspects or becomes aware of violations of this Policy can bring this knowledge or suspicion to the attention of programme partners by following the online [Complaints and whistleblowing procedure](#).

5. Provision for monitoring and reviewing the Policy and Handbook

The Policy and accompanying [Handbook](#) will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they remain relevant. To monitor the Policy and Handbook, indicators on meaningful youth engagement are included in the monitoring, evaluation and learning framework.

Annex to the Policy for ethical youth participation

1. Framework for the Policy

The Policy is aligned with the principles of internationally accepted standards on human rights and young person rights as well as relevant national policies and laws including national data protection regulations, as listed below²:

- [The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#)
- [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)
- [Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles](#)
- [New Urban Agenda](#)
- [The EU General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#)
- [The Swiss Federal Data Protection Act \(FADP\)](#)

2. Scope

All persons involved in the S²Cities programme should abide by this Policy. Local implementation partners should communicate the Policy and accompanying [Handbook](#) to all persons involved in the local implementation of the programme and ensure that the Policy and Handbook are properly and consistently implemented.

3. Behaviours and responsibilities

3.1 Protecting young people against all kinds of violence

A commitment to the rights of young people is also a commitment to protect young people from any kind of harm and to act whenever anyone's rights are violated. All persons involved in the S²Cities programme commit to ensuring the protection of young people against all kinds of violence by:

- taking young people seriously when they tell us about violence;
- taking action when we hear about any kind of violence involving young people in our programme;
- engaging the young persons themselves in finding the proper solution to violations of their rights; and
- ensuring that whenever we share photos, videos, interviews and texts about, with and among young people, then the activities and content are age-appropriate and carried out with the consent of the young people themselves and, if applicable, their guardians. We do our utmost to make our sharing online and on social media safe, constructive and a positive experience for young people.

3.2 Embedding participation rights and embracing non-discrimination practices

Every young person has the right to equal treatment irrespective of their particular characteristics, including but not limited to their socio-economic background, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, religious and political beliefs, and disability. All

² Links accessed in 2022.

persons involved in the S²Cities programme commit to protecting young people against discrimination, and enable meaningful participation by:

- ensuring that young people are safe when we engage with them within their communities and invite them for activities outside of their communities; and
- organising and facilitating activities in ways that are meaningful to young people, including with youth-friendly approaches and in keeping with the abilities and capacities of the different age groups.

3.3 Putting forward the best interest of the young person

As stated in the *UNCRC*, children and young people below the age of 18 years have the right to have their best interests assessed and put before anyone else's interests in all actions or decisions that concern the child or young person, both in the public and private sphere.

The S²Cities programme and its partners commit to putting the best interest of **all young people** above the interest of adults, even if the young person is above the age of 18, by:

- ensuring that when we take photos and videos of young people or interview them and share their stories, then the videos, photos and stories are respectful and are never sensual, make youth feel ashamed or put youth at risk;
- ensuring that when we facilitate the participation of young people in our programme, including but not limited to taking photos, videos, and participating in interviews, this is done with the consent of the young people themselves and, if applicable, their guardians. We always respect if a young person does not want to participate in an activity or in the programme, even if their guardian has given their consent; and
- maintaining compliance with relevant national laws on data protection when we are entrusted with young people's private and personal information.

3.4 Upholding our duty to act

All persons working and engaging with young people in the context of S²Cities commit to taking action to prevent, mitigate and respond to any violations of the rights of young people as stated in this Policy, in national law and in keeping with their rights.

3.5 Preventing unintended negative consequences

We commit to preventing unintended negative consequences by creating an enabling environment for young people's participation through mobilisation, awareness raising and, when necessary, capacity building of parents and guardians, local communities, local leaders, local authorities and, when required, regional and national authorities.

3.6 Being transparent and accountable

We commit to accepting responsibility for our actions and enabling young people to understand how we operate, how our actions may affect young people positively and negatively, and how we react if our activities have unintended negative consequences. We firmly believe that transparency underpins the accountability of our programming, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

3.7 Reinforcing program effectiveness through ethical participation

We commit to recognising young people as the real experts on their own lives. We believe that when young people's opinions are taken into consideration, it is far more likely that our programme will succeed and achieve its objectives. Inviting the considerations of young people on how particular decisions and actions will serve their best interest ensures that our programme remains relevant and sustainable.