

The UNICEF "Child-Friendly Communities" Initiative makes an impact

Results and findings from the evaluation of the
"Child-Friendly Communities" Initiative



Image source: Chris Reist

UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein launched the "Child-Friendly Communities" Initiative (CFCI) in 2006 with the aim of integrating the guiding principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child within both countries. The main objective of the initiative is to ensure the rights of children and young people to participate at a communal level. The Stiftung Mercator Switzerland foundation has supported the CFCI since 2019. One aspect of this partnership centres on evaluating the "Child-Friendly Community" label. UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein has advised and supported municipalities over the last fifteen years, during which time its consultancy work has steadily intensified. Following on from an initial evaluation in 2015, UNICEF, together with Mercator Switzerland, is seeking to implement additional measures over the next few years and, in so doing, further strengthen the "Child-Friendly Communities" Initiative. Child-friendliness and child participation are likewise set to be supported to an even greater extent and further integrated at the local level, with a particular focus on their impact and sustainability.

UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein seeks to ensure that the initiative continues to develop in a way that responds to municipalities' needs to the greatest possible extent. The initiative is an international programme, which means that the same framework conditions apply to municipalities around the world. The outline of each stage of the process consequently remains the same regardless of the location, but can be adapted based on local factors such as the political system or specific challenges. At an international level, UNICEF

The purpose of evaluating the label was to

- record the impact of the label within municipalities
- discover the reasons for not getting involved
- assess the existing measures implemented by UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein or formulate new ones

to ensure that the initiative continues to develop in a needs-oriented way.

recognised this local adaptability as a key characteristic of the initiative, as it ensures that the initiative can be implemented sustainably, take root at a communal level and show an impact. In terms of quality management, the insights gained help to further develop the elements, focal points and work undertaken by UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein in regards to the CFCI. The aim of this evaluation was to assess the impact that the label has had in municipalities throughout Switzerland and Liechtenstein. It also identified reasons for not getting involved and assessed the measures that UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein has already implemented. Furthermore, new measures were formulated to ensure that the initiative continues to develop in a needs-oriented way.

Methodology | Qualitative and quantitative evaluation

Impact-oriented work is highly important for UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein. An impact model that makes the distinction between a qualitative and a quantitative survey was used to generate the questions to be used for the evaluation of the “Child-Friendly Communities” Initiative. The qualitative survey (external evaluation) was carried out by Nadine Käser of the Institute for Social Planning, Organisational Change and Urban Development at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland, while the quantitative survey (internal evaluation) was conducted by UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein in certified municipalities as well as in municipalities in the process of acquiring the label.

As part of the **external evaluation**, expert interviews were conducted to discover why municipalities decide against working with UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein or are reluctant to get involved with the certification process. It also identified expectations regarding the label. The aim was to include contrasting cases as far as possible, so questions were directed at municipalities with structures that differed as widely as possible. The survey focused on the following three stakeholder groups with four municipalities in each case:

- (a) Municipalities that do not have the label but which have proven to be child-friendly and have, for example, received an award for child-friendliness or for supporting child participation.
- (b) Municipalities that are interested in the issue of child-friendliness and are in contact with “jugend.gr”, the umbrella association that promotes the rights of children and young people in the canton of Grisons. “jugend.gr” is a UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein partner organisation and is responsible for implementing the initiative at a local level in Grisons.
- (c) Municipalities that, after initial interest and contact with UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein, decided against acquiring the label.

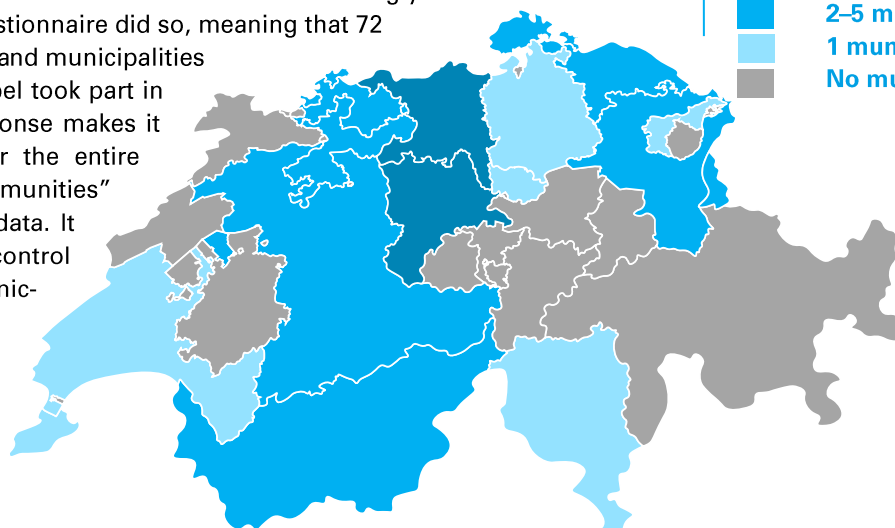
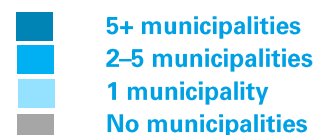
The **internal evaluation** examined how the label is viewed in certified municipalities, as well as in municipalities in the middle of the process. This makes it possible to deduce the perception of both the label and child/young people participation among parties directly involved. The collected responses also indicate how the label functions within municipal structures, highlight areas for improvement and show how working with UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein is perceived. An online questionnaire was created accordingly. 39 of the 54 municipalities asked to complete the questionnaire did so, meaning that 72 per cent of certified municipalities and municipalities in the process of obtaining the label took part in the survey. This high rate of response makes it possible to draw conclusions for the entire group of “Child-Friendly Communities” based on the available gathered data. It was also possible to generate control groups based on the size of the municipality or the status of the process (for example), which aided in analysing the results.

“It’s important to UNICEF that the initiative develops in an impactful and needs-oriented way. Evaluations are a necessary and useful tool in ensuring that this becomes a reality.”

Bettina Junker
CEO

UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein

Overview of the reach of the CFCI in Switzerland and Liechtenstein:



Results and findings of the evaluation

The following summaries detail the results of both the qualitative and quantitative surveys:

| Results of the external (qualitative) evaluation Communities without the label | |
|--|--|
| Overall perception of the label | Positive; regarded as a good thing. |
| Reason for not getting involved | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial and personnel-related obstacles, suspected additional costs. General, tangible benefit and value added by the label hard to qualify or understand, which limits its political feasibility. Concerns about “labelitis” among municipalities. Respect for UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein’s high expectations. Binding commitment which entails obligations. Interference in municipal politics by a third-party, external institution. |
| Perceived benefits of the label | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Label provides basis and legitimacy for resources and measures to support child-friendliness at the political level, which supports its political feasibility. Improvement of interdisciplinary cooperation within administrations and policy-making authorities. Flagship with considerable external impact. High level of quality and professionalism in technical support. Binding, continuous and clearly structured process supports strengthening of child-friendliness at the municipal level. Possibility of exchange and networking with other municipalities. Cooperation with UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein and local partners welcomed. |
| Alternatives for increasing child-friendliness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of municipality-specific guiding principles on issues related to children and young people with corresponding concrete measures. Individuals with a mandate to further the cause of child-friendliness. |
| Expectations regarding the label | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of blind spots as well as existing potential in terms of child-friendliness. The process of becoming a “Child-Friendly Community” provides more continuity and structure for ensuring child-friendliness. Promotion of and support for interdisciplinary cooperation. Offer of further education and training. Access to information and expert knowledge. Close technical support. Access to case studies and platforms for networking with other municipalities. Occasionally: Expectation of financial support from UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein. Label compatible with and adaptable to municipalities’ specific circumstances. |

Table 1: Overview of results from external evaluation (qualitative)

| Results from internal evaluation (quantitative) Communities in the Child-Friendly Communities process | |
|---|--|
| Perception of the “Child-Friendly Communities” Initiative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The steps are seen as appropriate. • Useful tool for supporting child- and youth-friendliness. • Improved networking between various stakeholders. • Support for the systematic inclusion of children and young people. • Increased legitimacy for measures associated with child- and youth-based policies. • Increased attractiveness as a place to live. • Label a tool for implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), particularly in municipalities involved in the process over several years. • Personnel requirement considered to be rather high. • Financial costs considered to be moderately high. • Cooperation with UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein satisfactory |
| Desired assistance from UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support with implementing guidelines, strategies and action plans. • Informative events as part of regional planning associations and regional meetings. • Ideas and models for implementation, standardised process. • Tools/assistance with participatory workshops and case studies. • Mentoring system and visits to other municipalities with the label. • Reduced cost of re-certification. |
| Impact of the initiative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the introduction of the label, the interests and opinions of children and young people are valued more highly in municipal policy-making. • Binding implementation of the action plan on children and young people. • Increased investment in children and young people. • Increased child and youth participation. • Overall improvement in collaboration on child and youth issues within the municipality. • Over half of municipalities now have an interdisciplinary working group within their administration thanks to the label. |
| Child and youth participation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipalities recognise the importance of ensuring participation. • Participation increasingly integrated at an institutional level over time. • The most commonly used participation vehicles are: child and youth representatives, regular open consultations, children’s/youth council or parliament. • The municipality considers participation in leisure and spatial development matters to be the most meaningful and profitable option for all parties involved. • The potential influence of children and young people is lowest in terms of municipal administration. |

Table 2: Overview of results from internal evaluation (quantitative)

“We would like to see regional meetings and stronger networking between Child-Friendly Communities. These help municipalities to come together and support child-friendliness across the region.”

Child-Friendly Community

Increased awareness of the initiative as a tool for implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was observed in municipalities that have been involved in the process for a longer period of time. Child participation is a central component of both the process and the UNCRC. Long-time UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein partner municipalities are

also better at meeting the requirements in terms of the impact of the label than newly named “Child-Friendly Communities”. This demonstrates that the **impact of the initiative becomes more profound over time**.

Cities and small municipalities in both Switzerland and Liechtenstein are implementing the “Child-Friendly Communities” Initiative, and all of the communities involved have different perceptions of the label acquisition process and related issues. Categorising municipalities and assessing their strengths, as well as the challenges that they are confronted with, is therefore useful and important when it comes to providing individually targeted advice and assistance. **Participating and non-participating municipalities alike view or consider the process of becoming a “Child-Friendly Community” to be a useful vehicle for making sustained improvements in terms of child-friendliness**. As such, the expectations of the majority of non-participating communities coincide with the experiences of “Child-Friendly Communities”. When asked about their needs, participating communities say they want meaningful insights into child-friendliness. To this end, external visibility should be ensured and both knowledge transfer and regional networking made more robust.

The evaluation also shows that child and youth participation is recognised and seen as a key means for increasing child-friendliness. It is therefore necessary to use contacts, leaflets or brochures to help raise municipalities’ awareness of how wide the available range of participation vehicles and types really is. There needs to be more visibility of the objectives and outcomes during the label acquisition process. Policy-makers and administrators also require support. A professional and comprehensive set of indicators for evaluating child-friendliness would therefore be useful. The participation workshops for children and young people, the action plan and the stocktaking stage are the most popular aspects in relation to the standardised process for the initiative. By contrast, the self-evaluation is somewhat less popular. This demonstrates the value of investing in models and regulatory documents, as well as in setting clear standards and quality criteria, all the while taking into account municipalities’ desire to manage their own structures – including those that relate to the obligatory stages of the process.

Figure 1: Changes since the introduction of the label (N=40)

Please rate the following statements: Since the label was introduced...

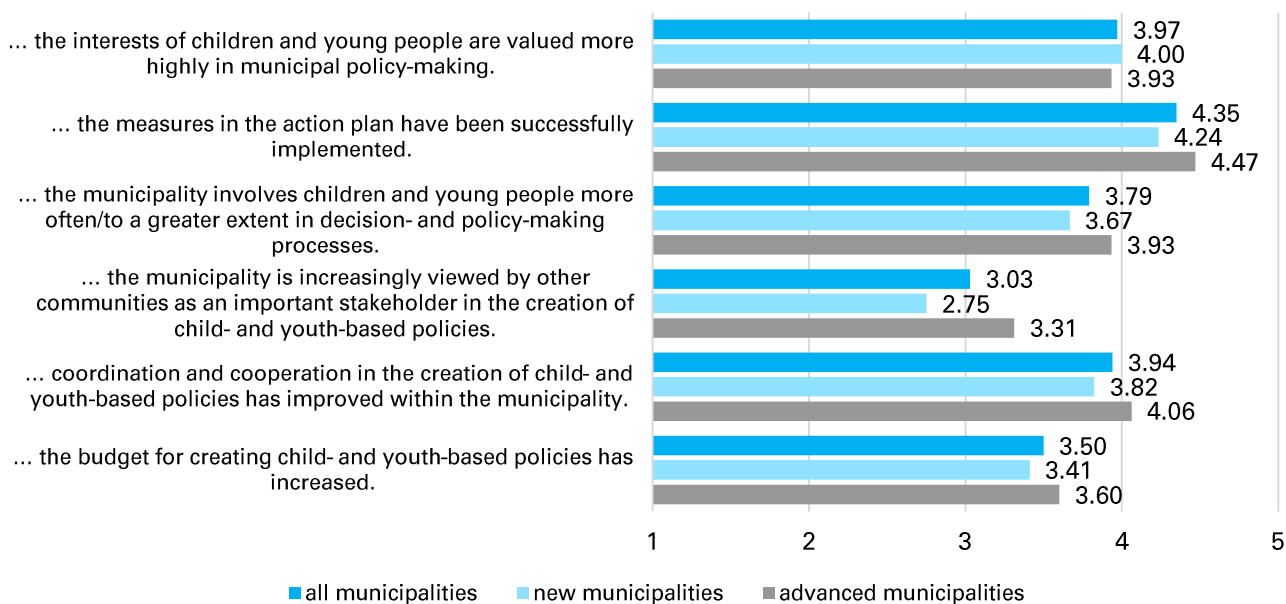
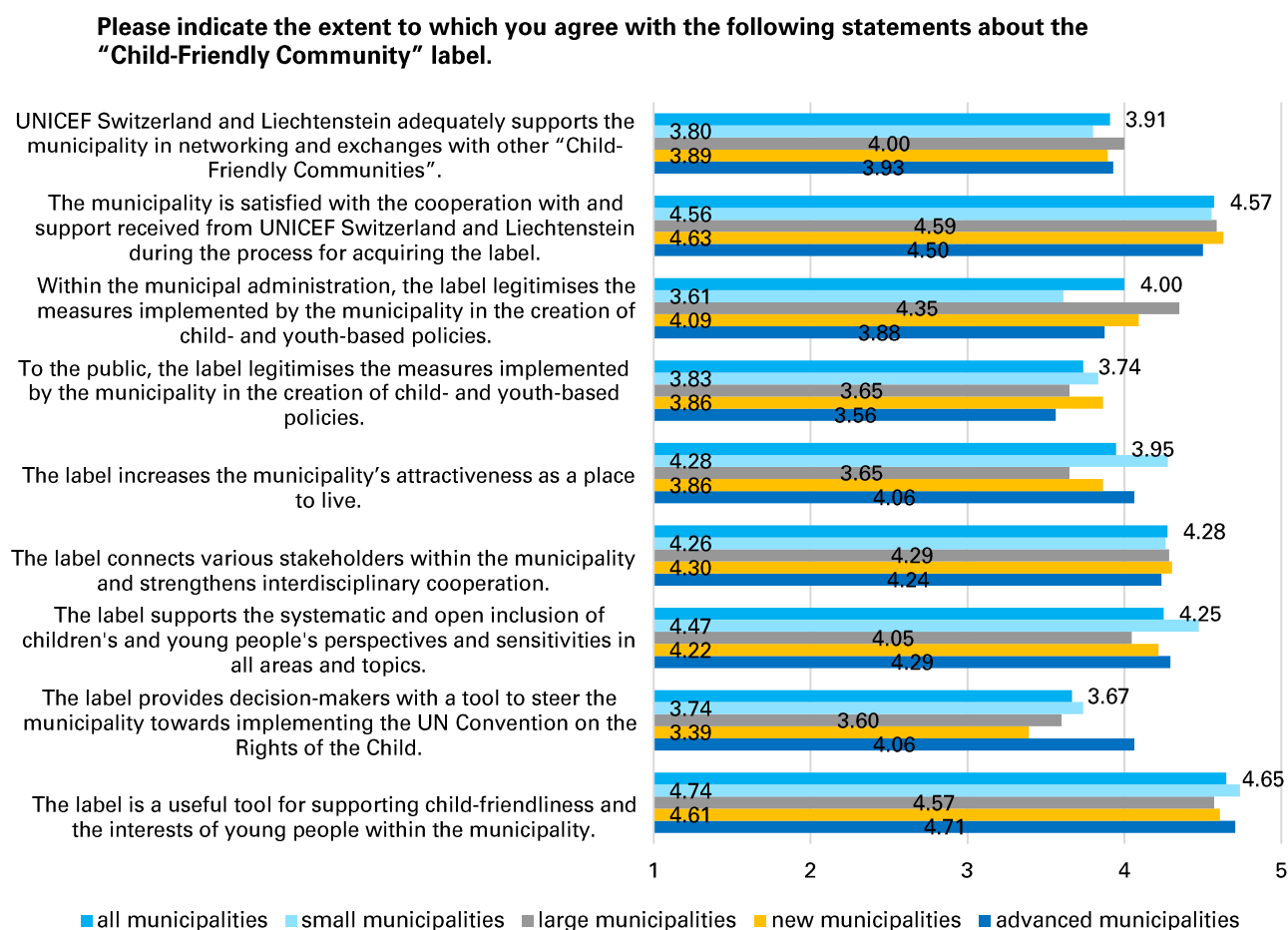


Figure 2: Agreement with statements about the process label (N=40)



Note: Mean values, based on a scale of 1 ("Completely disagree") to 5 ("Completely agree").

Conclusion and possible packages of measures

The perceptions regarding the benefits of the label among municipalities that have decided against the initiative match almost exactly with the actual experiences of certified communities. **The label consequently meets the expectations of the majority of municipalities.** The perception that the label is associated with significant personnel and financial resources is only true to a certain extent, with the personnel requirement deemed to be greater than the financial outlay. **The initiative is having a clear structural impact:**

- in the form of improved cooperation between the various stakeholders
- in the creation of interdisciplinary working groups
- in the increase in participation vehicles and types
- in greater investments in child and youth-based projects.

The process of continually improving child-friendliness makes it easier to implement measures and track relevant child- and youth-related issues over time. As such, the "Child-Friendly Communities" label leads to tangible and visible structural changes that benefit children and young people. **Furthermore, the process is seen as a useful tool for progressing towards a "Child-Friendly Community". Municipalities welcome working with UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein.** However, the benefits and added value of the label are still too intangible and difficult to comprehend, especially at the beginning of the process. This is where investment would be useful.

The partnership with Stiftung Mercator since 2019 has made it possible to address and act upon many of the issues and needs that came to light during the evaluations. For example, the comprehensive and professional support offer for municipalities has been further expanded and a municipal fund created in order to satisfy the need for support at a regional and local level and the demand for financial aid respectively. It is important to continue to develop the initiative in a participatory and collective way, wherever this is possible in terms of international assimilation. To this end, a workshop involving long-time implementing

The impact of the label can clearly be seen:

- in improvements in cooperation, e.g. establishment of interdisciplinary working groups
- in the increase in participation vehicles
- in greater investment in child and youth-based projects

municipalities was held in December 2020. The outcomes of the discussions held during the workshop at the end of 2020, as well as the results of this evaluation, are providing food for thought in terms of further measures and developments. This will ensure that the initiative continues to develop and be optimised in a needs-oriented way. The concrete measures and focal points form part of the strategic process, in which the following issues and packages of measures have been identified:

- From the beginning, clearly identifying and ensuring visibility of the **added value and impact** of the “Child-Friendly Communities” label.
- Establishing a stronger link between the **aims of the label associated with the process** on the one hand and both the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the strengthening of participation and implementation of action plans on the other.
- **Increasing still further the support and advice** available to municipalities, together with local partners.
- **Co-financing opportunities at the cantonal and federal level**, orchestrated with other organisations.
- Making **existing co-financing opportunities, such as the community fund**, more visible, including to interested municipalities. Via simplification of application procedures.
- Stronger **networking between municipalities** by evaluating the opportunities for regional exchange and considering digital forms and new platforms.
- **Categorising of municipalities** in Switzerland and Lichtenstein based on challenges (in terms of the issues involved) and demographic data. This makes it possible to provide more specific, targeted advice and offer aid.
- **Creating a staged process** for becoming a “Child-Friendly Community”, involving individual, bookable modules.
- Setting out a **clear position** on the meaning and added value of child-friendliness, on meaningful participation and on vehicles, types and methods of participation via publications appropriate to the target audience.
- **Providing opportunities for further training to all interested municipalities, in particular to municipal policy-makers and administrators**, on how to make tangible improvements in terms of child-friendliness and how to make the case for adopting child-friendly policies.
- Introducing **mandatory insistence within “Child-Friendly Communities”** on new and expanded vehicles and types for participation in the process.
- Investing in **models and regulatory documents, and setting clear standards and quality criteria** to reduce the personnel requirement for both UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein and municipalities.

We welcome feedback and questions about the evaluation, and will be happy to provide you with additional details if interested. Contact us at kfg@unicef.ch.

In partnership with

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Hochschule für Soziale Arbeit

The Institute for Social Planning, Organisational Change and Urban Development ISOS | Nadine Käser

With support from

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UNICEF is the United Nations children’s fund, and has over 70 years of experience in development cooperation and emergency aid. UNICEF works to ensure that children survive and enjoy a safe, healthy childhood. Core missions include health and nutrition, education, water and sanitation, and the protection of children against abuse, exploitation, violence and HIV/AIDS. UNICEF is financed exclusively through voluntary contributions unicef.ch

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