



THE VIEWS, PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF CHILDREN ACROSS THE WORLD This report has been developed by Professor Laura Lundy and Dr Michelle Templeton of the Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University Belfast, in the frame of the project "Protecting and Empowering Children as Human Rights Defenders" devised, promoted and implemented by Child Rights Connect. It aims to present the direct voices of the children who participated in the world-wide consultations.

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Thank you to the more than 2695 children who took part in the global consultations and to the DGD Children's Advisory Team – 21 child advisors from 19 countries covering all regions of the world – who ensured that children and children's views are at the heart of the DGD.

The DGD Children's Advisory Team

Aishwarya (girl, 17 – Asia-Pacific) Akanksha (girl, 15 – Western Europe and others) Ankit (boy, 17 – Asia-Pacific) Ariadna (girl, 15 – Eastern Europe) Mazidath (girl, 18 – Africa) Brighton (boy, 12 – Africa) **Cameron** (boy, 12 – Western Europe and others) **Christina** (girl, 16 – Western Europe and others) Diana Melissa (girl, 17 – Latin America and the Caribbean) **Dieudonne** (boy, 16 – Africa) Hannah (girl, 12 – Western Europe and others) Haya (girl, 16 – Asia-Pacific) **Josephine** (girl, 16 – Africa) Konstantinos (boy, 16 – Western Europe and others) Kurt (boy, 16 – Latin America and the Caribbean) Mariana Nicol (girl, 14 – Latin America and the Caribbean) Maxwell (boy, 15 – Africa) **Nayeli** (girl, 17 – Latin America and the Caribbean) **Sameer** (boy, 13 – Asia-Pacific) Sigurd (boy, 17 – Western Europe and others) **Stella** (girl, 17 – Africa)

We are also grateful for the collaboration with the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights and the leadership provided by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The Committee is a group of 18 experts from around the world that gives governments advice about how to keep the promises they made to children with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

On September 28th 2018, the Day of General Discussion (#DGD2018) will discuss issues related to the protection and empowerment of Children Human Rights Defenders (CHRDs). 2018 is also the 20th Anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs).



"We wanted to make sure that children's views were central to the DGD, so we set up an advisory group of 21 children from around the world. We would like to thank Child Rights Connect and the Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University Belfast, without which this would not have been possible."

Mikiko Otani and Luis Ernesto Pedernera, DGD COORDINATORS OF THE COMMITTEE

WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT?

The role that children can and do play as human rights defenders (HRDs).	pages 5-7
What helps children to act as HRDs.	page 8
What the barriers are and what risks children face.	pages 9-15
How to protect and empower children human rights defenders.	pages 16-22

HOW WE FOUND OUT WHAT CHILDREN THINK?

We asked them guestions about their experiences and for any advice they had for the Committee during group consultations and in an online survey. More than* 2695 children in 53 countries, aged 5–18 years participated.

Here is the link to the online consultation details:

https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/Discussion2018.aspx

In the report, we refer to the following regions where children have contributed to this project:

Africa, Asia-Pacific (including Middle East), Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Western Europe and others (including the United States of America).

WHO TOOK PART IN THE CONSULTATIONS?

The numbers^{*} and ages of children who participated in the consultations by region

UN Region	Number of Countries	Number of Children	Age Range	Number of Girls	Number of Boys
Africa	11	202	8–17	115	87
Asia-Pacific	9	132	12–17	83	48
Eastern Europe	8	269	9–18	162	96
Latin America & Caribbean	13	1515	5–17	438	368
Western Europe & Others	12	577	7–18	212	245
Total	53	2695	5–18	1010	844

* Some consultation reports did not include numbers, ages and sex of the children that participated. The table is based on the information we received.

HOW DO CHILDREN DESCRIBE CHILDREN HUMAN RIGHTS **DEFENDERS** (CHRDs)?

CHRDs are children who take action to PROMOTE & PROTECT their own rights or those of others. Here's what they had to say:

"I believe we are all human rights defenders in our own way. Some of us in small and quiet ways because that's how we feel and all we can give to the world and some in large ways. The impact may be big or small but we all fight for what we believe in." western europe and others

"We need to defend

"I imagine human rights defenders as a very intense role, marching/protesting, working at the United Nations. However, when you think about it, in the small things you can also defend human rights, and then you realise you are one [a defender] indeed." LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN



92% of children that responded to the online survey see themselves as a human rights defender.

"Human rights defenders; they have to stand firm and take responsibility on their advocacy for others, because if they don't, who would?" ASIA-PACIFIC









WHAT MAKES CHILDREN EFFECTIVE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS?

Children listed the qualities they thought made a good CHRD.

This shows which qualities came up and most often:

"If the world would see through a child's eyes, half of the problems in the world would have been solved, while the other half would have not existed." EASTERN EUROPE

VOIC

WHY CHILDREN SHOULD BE **SUPPORTED TO BE HRDs?**

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"Because only children can express their own worries and fears from adults' decisions." ASIA-PACIFIC

"I want to change the perception of people that we are only children. I want them to know that we are children, capable of expressing our opinion and fighting for our rights. We are not only of a playful level, but also the hope of the next generation to come. We are more than just toys, games, gadgets, we are what the future holds." ASIA-PACIFIC



WHAT MAKES IT DIFFICULT TO ACT AS A CHRD?

Core challenges centered on four key themes:

NOT TAKEN SERIOUSLY Almost all children considered that not being taken seriously was a major challenge to their actions as CHRDs.

NOT SAFE

NOT ABLE

Many children said that they were teased, bullied, threatened or punished by adults and other children for their actions as CHRDs.

NOT INFORMED

Many children said that they did not know their rights or were not able to get information they need in ways that they can understand.

Some children who wanted to act as CHRDs could not do so because of a lack of time or money or because there were no opportunities for them to take part in human rights activities.

"Adults do not believe what the child says. They do not give moral to the stories. We are ignored." LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN "The cultural background does not allow children to act as a human rights defender. The elders have always the rights and the last words". AFRICA

"Yes. It is easier for anyone who doesn't live on the streets. People will listen to them." AFRICA

SOME CHILDREN

STRUGGLE MORE

THAN OTHERS

NOT TAKEN SERIOUSLY

This was a constant in all contexts. Two common reasons that were given were that: adults did not see children as competent and cultural factors meant that children's views were not respected. "Opinions that we do not deserve the rights, that we need to know first of all our responsibilities". EASTERN EUROPE

"Unfortunately, sometimes it is difficult to fight for our rights at our age because adults do not necessarily take us seriously. Adults often deny our opinions because of our age, to be children. However, we want the same rights as the rest of the population. We want to be able to judge what is wrong in our world and act to change it." WESTERN EUROPE AND OTHERS

"The society we're living in mocks us when we try to raise our voice about a certain issue, treat us as people who're unable to take responsibility and not as people who're able think seriously on these matters." ASIA-PACIFIC

"Adults decide for us and think our opinions are less worthy than theirs just because we are younger. Adults play a negative role when they want to have the 'last say' without thinking they might be wrong." LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN "It is important that children and young people organise in different spaces where they face different realities, for instance children in the cities and children in the fields. We come together and organise thinking about the inclusion of all children, the diverse conditions [they face], ethnic, religious, cultural and social diversity. Because from here [from this organisation] it is possible to identify and reflect on the real needs of children."

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

UNCRC: Art. 15

You have the right to freedom of association: to meet with friends and to join groups.

Declaration on HRDs: Art. 7 You have the right, on your own or with others, to discuss new human rights ideas and principles and to argue for them.

UNCRC: Art. 2

All children have rights and no child should be treated unfairly on any basis.

> "They are not guaranteed when your gender is not respected, when your appearance / manner / you become a joke. They are not guaranteed when being what you are becomes wrong." LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

"They don't listen to us or they do not put themselves in our shoes, for example the International Labour Organization did not allow us to attend the Conference on Child Labour." LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

UNCRC: Art. 12 You have the right to give your opinion, and for adults to listen and take it seriously. "They told me 'feminazi' and that they would sexually assault me." LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

"When you defend human rights, someone may attack you." EASTERN EUROPE

NOT SAFE

Children told us about experiences they had that make it not safe for them when they try to defend their rights or the rights of others. Here are some examples:

"I have been insulted because of my feminist stances and expelled from public events." LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

> HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF THEIR EXPERIENCES FROM ACROSS THE REGIONS:

"The family might prevent you and say if you did a mistake you'll be sent back to (...), so you cannot interfere with these things because it might reach to the government and get misunderstood which will result in 'shooting' you back." ASIA-PACIFIC

"To challenge armed

groups so they leave

our communities and

we can live in peace.

I want to be proud of

myself and others."

LATIN AMERICA AND

DANGER

THE CARIBBEAN

BULLYING

VIOLENCE

70% of the children who responded to the survey were concerned about violence when they act as CHRDs.

SEXUAL ASSAULT GETTING SACKED CRIMINALISATION

DISCRIMINATION

"We want both governments to recognise us as children that are not related to any party of the conflict." ASIA-PACIFIC

DANGER

PERSONAL ATTACKS MOCKING & RIDICULE VERBAL ABUSE SEXISM STIGMATIZATION "I was ridiculed for seeking change or helping others to make their lives better by some of my friends. They said our country was different from others, so children shouldn't share things freely. It is also a difficulty for us to help children facing domestic violence speak out." ASIA-PACIFIC



Governments shall try to protect everyone, either on their own or when in a group, against discrimination and violence, threats, retaliation and pressure when they act as HRDs exercising their rights.



ABUSE



NOT INFORMED

Many of the children said that knowing about their rights is essential to enable them to identify abuses and to take effective action.

"If the defender does not know her rights, she cannot demand their fulfilment, she could not "A child can be a human rights defender. As long as she is informed, knows what she is defending and has a valid argument, she can make herself heard." LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

"To be informed

about that topic,

to understand the

situation, to iden-

tify the injustice."

EASTERN EUROPE

Some thought that there is a need to create laws and programs, from pre-school to high school, to teach people about rights, alongside study of the country's laws and

> "There is no culture of children or youth participation in (...) and children and youth have poor information about the opportunities they have as CHRDs or the ways they can stand for their and others' rights." EASTERN EUROPE

"Children wish that adults support them to know more about their rights. More information and education about human rights are needed, in order to strengthen children to become themselves human rights defenders." AFRICA

"Starting human rights movements requires a lot of coordination and sometimes money, which children cannot always organise." western europe AND OTHERS

> "We do not have a lot of time to conduct activities because we are studying and because we don't have the money to do much more than we are already doing." LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

NOT ABLE

Many children said that even if they are informed and willing to act as CHRDs, they may lack the resources they need to be able to take the appropriate actions. For example: time, money and lack of ability to travel.

'Some of the challenges we face [as human rights defenders] are related to the location of the activities and their difficulties to get there, the violence in our communities, the traffic of our country and the lack of money to mobilise." LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

UNCRC: Art. 42

You have the right to know your rights! Adults should know about children's rights too and help you learn about them.

UNCRC: Art. 13

You have the right to find out things and share what you think with others, unless it harms or offends other people.

"The Government is trying to stop any activities we are conducting that are related to some issues." ASIA-PACIFIC

40% of children agreed that one of the main challenges they face as CHRDs is the lack of information about rights.

43% said they do not have information on how to effectively generate change in their communities.

WHAT IS AN EMPOWERING **ENVIRONMENT FOR CHRDs?**

Here is how one group ranked what is needed for an empowering environment for CHRDs:

The human rights defender needs financial resources but also conviction, inspiration, will and love. A key aspect is the support and understanding of the people around her, a defender cannot work alone. As the defender is a child, she needs to work with others and learn from others.She needs guidance and support. LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

To consider the children's parliament and consultation with children in all decisions made. ASIA-PACIFIC

Continue to improve/update materials, adapt and revise the curriculum with relevant and interesting topics for children, and offer training for teachers including in respect of communication with children and children's participation. EASTERN EUROPE



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WHAT CAN

CHRDs?

Children need to be given spaces to work together because there is power in having many more children defending human rights. AFRICA

Create a virtual participation tool for children and adolescents to consider the mechanisms of the UN, amplifying their voices together in order to be heard by decisionmakers at the highest levels. LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

> Taking strict laws by the government for every online crime would be one way to make the online environment safer. EASTERN EUROPE

GOVERNMENTS DO TO EMPOWER AND PROTECT



WHAT CAN PARENTS/ GUARDIANS DO TO EMPOWER AND PROTECT CHRDs?

In many cases, children identified that the support of their families and others was important for their ability to act as CHRDs:

"I was trained by [an organisation] and my father who taught me that all children have rights and must be respected." AFRICA

"It helps us to feel accompanied by teachers, the school, our colleagues and families. That they believe in our word. That they give us a space to participate. That adults respect our decisions. That they teach us how to defend our rights." LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

27% of the respondents reported that a lack of support from adults was a major challenge for them.

However, in other cases, children identified parents'/guardians' concerns about their safety or the impact on their school lives as a barrier to their involvement:

"Parents are more likely to have their children stay at home studying, rather than participating in child-led groups aiming at raising their voices in relation to child rights violation." EASTERN EUROPE

"The barriers that I face as a human rights defender locally are my parents because they won't allow me to defend my rights because it will harm me." ASIA-PACIFIC

"Parents usually don't encourage us. We are asked to keep away from situations of violence." **ASIA-PACIFIC**

UNCRC: Art. 5

Your family can help you learn about your rights, and ensure that they are protected.

Some children thought that families could do more to recognise and support them and offer positive models of HRDs to their children. Here are some suggestions for families:

"Stop believing that a child's opinion is less relevant or not relevant at all." LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

"Not to foster stereotypes and see young people as immature, impose ideas, be too conservative, not listen to your children and persuade them to do what you want them to do." **WESTERN EUROPE AND OTHERS**

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO TO EMPOWER AND PROTECT CHRDs?

Educate children about their rights and how to exercise them:

"Schools should incorporate rights into school council and pupil voice, have rights education for all young people – even if you aren't in school. Schools should provide information on how to act and support rights." WESTERN EUROPE AND OTHERS

Enable children to exercise their rights in the school environment:

"The government should ensure child participation in decision-making through periodic consultative meetings. School should give equal opportunities to all children and must stop taking decisions for children, without listening to what children think." EASTERN EUROPE

"Educate against discrimination, foster debates and give voice to students. Talk about human rights, teach students how to act or what to do [to protect them], conduct campaigns to raise awareness and projects to engage students, motivate them to fight for their rights." WESTERN EUROPE AND OTHERS "The school should teach us peace not violence; hatred from teachers who are xenophobic, homophobic fuels this hatred in schools." AFRICA

> "People who are unaware of those laws will be educated and have the right to defend themselves for an instance if they will be in complicated situation." ASIA-PACIFIC

"Without education children will grow up lost and accept injustices, thus they will never speak out and help improve the world. It is important adults help children learn and grow so they can properly influence the world as they deserve to." WESTERN EUROPE AND OTHERS

"Everyone could do something to make sure human rights are protected, but almost no-one does. Schools for instance, they should talk more about human rights and how to make sure you can exercise them." LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

UNCRC: Art. 29

Education must help you develop your abilities, teach you about your rights and help you learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people.

"We want the ministry of education to issue a long term permission for the child parliament to conduct any activities in all schools, as all schools administration always ask us about the permission from the ministry of education. Also the permission issuing is taking a long time so we are wasting our time in the permission issuing." ASIA-PACIFIC

WHAT CAN BUSINESSES DO TO **EMPOWER AND PROTECT CHRDs?**

Many children identified ways in which businesses negatively affect their rights in relation to displacement, noise, air and water pollution, and how these affect their lives and health and the communities in which they live. Some thought businesses could also support them. Here are their suggestions:





Declaration on HRDs: Art. 13

Everyone has the right, either on their own or with others, to seek and get the resources they need to promote and protect human rights peacefully, in accordance with article 3 of the Declaration.

Opportunities

Offer internships for CHRDs to develop their organisational, communication, leadership abilities. More opportunities for volunteering in NGOs for students.

Donations and Sponsorship Offer donations and support for students to disseminate through mass media their actions, plans, opinions.

"We can use social media to share our opinions, disseminate information about important issues to us in order to transform things in a fast and sustainable way." WESTERN EUROPE

AND OTHERS

"Social media is an effective tool and covers a bigger population of the world." AFRICA

"Some radio stations are

supporting the children and help us to disseminate the child life saving messages. One of the benefits of using TV, radio and social media is that we can target a large number of people in the community. Social media can make advertisements for child rights issues for free." ASIA-PACIFIC

WHAT CAN MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA DO TO EMPOWER AND **PROTECT CHRDs?**

Not all children have access to media and social media. This varies across regions. Some children use it to get and share information, and for campaigning.



"The challenge of using social media is that you can find people there that discriminate and cause great harm to others." LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

> "There is also harassment over the internet." EASTERN EUROPE

"If I post something that other people don't like, these people can identify me and cause me harm". LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

But many children are concerned about their safety on social media.

> "Use local languages to ensure that most people understand. Most of the programming is done by radio stations, we need to get in and advise on the topic. Most

"There must be firm safety and security features to protect personal accounts and other information for online safety." ASIA-PACIFIC

stations don't consult the children." AFRICA

"One challenge is to be able to differentiate what is good and what is bad." WESTERN EUROPE AND OTHERS

WHAT DO CHILDREN WANT THE COMMITTEE TO KNOW?

The children were asked for their views on their most important issues and what needs to be done to help them act as CHRDs.

Every word sent by the children was sent to the Committee in separate reports. Here we provide examples of some of the key issues:

Continue improving methodologies of **PARTICIPATION** AND LISTENING to contribute to the exercise of citizenship of children and adolescents. ACT QUICKLY on our opinions. **MONITOR** the implementation of the Committees' recommendations. Create a **VIRTUAL PARTICIPATION TOOL** for children and adolescents to consider the mechanisms of the UN. Greater consideration needs to be given to CHILD-FRIENDLY, ACCESSIBLE FEEDBACK AND **REPORTING MECHANISMS. INVOLVE CHILDREN** in the reporting process. Combat the

use of the **INTERNET** for purposes that **HARM** and do not **RESPECT** the Rights of the Child. Ensure **GENDER EQUALITY. HELP SUPPORT** our privacy. Ensure INCLUSIVE EDUCATION and **NO DISCRIMINATION** for all. More powerful **INVOLVEMENT** in protection of children's rights. Making sure the protection system works. Pointing more serious **VIOLATIONS** of child rights. Find more ways to **SUPPORT NGOs** in their work in the field to protect children's rights, because they are the main HRDs . Plan more **POWERFUL CAMPAIGNS for INFORMING PEOPLE** about child rights and make them understand their meaning. **INTRODUCE PROGRAMMES**, on volunteer bases, to assure respecting of children's rights everywhere. **PROMOTE EQUAL PARTNERSHIP** between children and adults. Promote more the idea of listening to children's opinions. The state has to contribute to **BIGGER RESPECT** for children's rights. **EXPLAIN TO THE CHILDREN** that it is not good to hide how they feel. **CREATE A PROTOCOL** for CHRDs. We **NEED AN IMAGE AND BEING RECOGNISED** by the UN and work with it.

PARTNERS

The following members and partners of Child Rights Connect organised consultations with children from all over the world and submitted children's views on how to protect and empower children human rights defenders:

Enfants Solidaires d'Afrique et du Monde (ESAM) — Benin Arigatou International	Defence for Children International Edmund Rice Advocacy Network	Mindanao Action Group for Children's Rights and Protection (MAGCRP) — Philippines Movimiento Latinoamericano y del Caribe de Niños/as y Adolescentes Trabajadores (MOLACNNATs) Northern Ireland Commissioner for	
Association Conseil de la Paix – Comores	Ekama Development Foundation – Tanzania Comité de los Derechos del Niño/a –		
Child Rights Centre – Serbia	Uruguay		
Child Rights Information Center	Good Neighbors – Mongolia	Children and Young People	
(CRIC) Moldova	Joy for Children – Uganda	Observatory on Human Rights of	
Children in Wales and Young Wales	La Red para la Infancia (RIA) de	Children	
Children's Commissioner for Wales	El Salvador	PRATYeK	
Children's Parliament (Scotland)	La Red Nacional de NNA de	Sarvodaya – Sri Lanka	
Coordinadora por los Derechos de	El Salvador (RENAES)	Save the Children	
la Niñez, Adolescencia y Juventud – CODENAJ – Red Niña Niño –	La Red Latinoamericana de NNA y adolescentes (REDNNYAS)	Scottish Youth Parliament	
Guatemala	Lleisiau Bach-Little Voices	Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) Union Fait la Force — Benin	
Colectivo de Derechos de Infancia y	Marist International Solidarity		
Adolescencia – Argentina	Foundation (FMSI)		
CONAFE		War Child UK	

DONORS

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CENTRE FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University, Belfast, founded in 2012, is an interdisciplinary research centre which has developed innovative approaches to participatory children's rights-based research and applied them on a global scale for organisations such as the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the European Commission, Council of Europe, Save the Children and others.



Child Rights Connect is a nongovernmental, non-profit organisation. We are the world's largest network for children's rights. We link those who stand up for children's rights to the United Nations human rights system. Through more than 80 member organisations, we reach every country across the globe.

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