

ANNUAL REPORT 2020





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Introduction

Forewords from our Child Advisors

At Child Rights Connect, our work and the way we work is guided and informed by a permanent Children's Advisory Team (CAT).* This is what three of the CAT members had to say about 2020:



Being a child advisor to the global Children's Advisory Team (CAT) with Child Rights Connect is one of the greatest experiences of my life. My home is in Barishal, a small city in Bangladesh. Since I was a child, I have worked on children's rights, environmental rights, and climate justice. I never thought that I would ever be able to express my thoughts on an international scale which was made possible by Child Rights Connect. I learned a lot more about child rights and while attending various international events, I had the opportunity to spread my voice, the words of my spirit among many others, who are working on this issue across the globe. I have met children from various parts of the world and learned many things from them. Unfortunately, because of Corona epidemic, we have not had the opportunity to meet face to face, which make me distress. And that pains me. However, I am going to use these experiences for my upcoming work on children's rights and environment. As well as I look forward to this forum supporting me for my work on children's right establishment. Thanks to Child rights Connect and Plan International, my supporting organisation.

Kathak, 2020 child advisor, Bangladesh



Being a part of the CAT as a child advisor has helped me built an amazing character and expand my knowledge about children's rights. I'm more than happy to be a part of an incredible community that fights for the best for all children!

Rea, 2020 child advisor, Kosovo



Being a member of CAT has truly been a great experience and a great honour. Having the opportunity to work and cooperate with children from all around the world shows what the true meaning of democracy really is. The People including children working together and making their opinion heard. And I can't wait to see what more this wonderful experience has to give to me in the near future.

Andreas, 2020 child advisor, Cyprus

* <https://www.childrightsconnect.org/organisation/#children-advisory-team>.

Words from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights



I'm delighted to be speaking with you today. The pandemic has changed many things about the ways we work – but it has not shaken our common determination to advance the protection and promotion of children's rights.

The relationship between Child Rights Connect and my Office spans several decades. It includes engagement with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and in international fora such as the Human Rights Council, the General Assembly, and the High-Level Political Forum. Above all, it is about creating impact on the ground, so that all children can enjoy their human rights and no child is left behind. We are fortunate to be able to count on this strong, foundational partnership as the world's children face new, and very dangerous, challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastating short-, medium- and long-term consequences for children and their rights. It threatens to set back the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals, which go to the heart of children's rights, their well-being and their development. The case for rebuilding much more resilient societies could not be more clear. States need to take immediate action to better protect children now, and in the coming months and years. We need to build back better, in order to be better prepared for future crises. My Office is working with other UN partners to advance a child rights-based and multi-sectoral response to the pandemic, both by the UN and by Member States. We need to see more disaggregated and transparent information, and greater solidarity – with strengthened support to developing countries, in particular to social and child protection systems. We need to promote social policies that do a better job of reducing inequalities, and assist authorities to develop planning for better social and child protection services in the future. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has also issued an important statement on the impact of COVID-19 on children, calling on States to protect the rights of children by prioritizing child protection, health care, water, sanitation and birth registration services; releasing children from all forms of detention, whenever possible.

The pandemic and accompanying recession have an impact on the availability of resources. But we cannot

afford to de-prioritise children's rights. In all decisions concerning children, the focus must remain the best interests of the child. Healthcare for children; their education; and advancing their economic and social rights are essential in themselves – but they are also drivers for more sustainable, more successful societies. States' responses to COVID-19 need to adopt an effective, child rights-based approach that emphasizes those in most vulnerable situations, while advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Civil society has a key role to play here. We need the full engagement of civil society to identify gaps in child protection; to advocate better solutions on the ground; and to help support children and protect and promote their rights.

We also need to listen to children. They should be informed, in "child-friendly" language; and they should be involved in discussions concerning policies regarding COVID-19. Child participation is also a critical element of building back better. This means consulting children, listening to them, and incorporating their views into responses. Civil society has a crucial role to play in supporting children through these processes.

Finally, I want to thank all of you for your invaluable contributions to the rights of children around the world. Working in very different, and sometimes very challenging, contexts, you continue to advance our understanding of children's rights on the ground, and the solutions to those issues. All of us can stand up for human rights – and you are doing that. Standing up for other people's human rights means pushing back when we see discrimination or abuse, and stepping forward when the right to access essential services are being ignored. It means resisting the urge to hate, which seems to be growing in many societies, and speaking up for justice.

Your actions are helping to change your societies, and our world. They bind our societies to fundamental values of decency, fairness and understanding, and they flow into deeper mutual confidence and respect."

Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, at Child Rights Connect's General Assembly on 25 June 2020

About us

Child Rights Connect is a non-governmental organisation founded in 1983 and now operates as the largest global network of child rights organisations. With more than 90 member organisations, it spans all regions, reaching millions of children in almost 200 countries, and benefits from a diversity of approaches and experiences in realising the rights of the child under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and its Optional Protocols. Through Child Rights Connect, children's rights defenders, including children, can address the international community with one global voice and have a stronger influence on political decisions.

Vision

We envision a world in which all children have their human rights respected, protected, promoted and fulfilled, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.

What added value does Child Rights Connect bring?

- We are an expert organisation on, and strategic partner of, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, empowering children's rights defenders, including children, from around the world for almost 40 years.
- We are the largest child rights network in Geneva and platform for joint civil society advocacy at the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, as well as with human rights treaty bodies.
- We are the leading organisation bringing global attention to empowering, sustainable and safe child participation and the rights and empowerment of child human rights defenders.
- We advocate for access to justice for child victims of human rights violations, principally through the universal ratification and strategic use of the third Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure (OPIC).



Strengthening our Network

Diversifying our reach: Ten new members joined the network

Child Rights Connect members are national, regional and international organisations and coalitions working with and for children in various contexts. This broad and diverse membership brings together a wide array of expertise in children's rights and a vast diversity of experiences and approaches for realising children's human rights worldwide.

In 2020, ten new members joined the network, including three from under-represented regions within the network (Africa, Asia-Pacific and the Middle East and North Africa), further diversifying the composition of our membership. Our new members are the: **Aliance za dětská práva** (Alliance for the Rights of the Child) in the Czech Republic; **Family for Every Child** in the UK; **Halley Movement** in Mauritius; **IDAY** in Belgium; **International School Psychology Association** in The Netherlands; **Korea Council of Children's Organizations** in South Korea; **Learning for Well-being Foundation** in The Netherlands; **Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society** in Malta; **National Coalition for the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** in Austria; and the **Plateforme pour la Convention Droits de l'Enfant** in Morocco. In addition to bringing geographic expertise, these new members enrich our network by contributing their expertise on important topics such as child participation, child survival, child protection, children's right to education, children without appropriate parental care, and children's right to a healthy development and quality of life.

Child participation at the core of our organisation: the permanent, global Children's Advisory Team

In 2020, we took decisive steps to be more responsive and accountable to the views, aspirations and needs of children, as final beneficiaries of our work. Building on our previous experiences, a new global Children's Advisory Team (CAT) was established in early 2020, and operated throughout the year, as a **permanent group within our organisation and central to advancing our efforts on children's empowerment globally.** In 2020, this team was composed of 12 children living in diverse contexts, including 5 girls and a child living with disabilities, aged between 10 and 17 years old, who have been empowered as child human rights defenders to shape and take forward activities on children's rights, in line with our Strategy. They defined their own roadmap of action and implemented numerous activities in 2020, including following a 3-week e-learning online child advisor course, reviewing the child-friendly page of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, publishing their own storybook 'Our Lives Under Lockdown', and a briefing for governments on how to support children's rights before and during a pandemic. In 2020, our Executive Committee (ExCo) approved a two-year pilot project for including child representatives in its structure and work, based on internal guidelines and capacity-building of ExCo members on child participation and safeguarding. Selected child advisors will join their first ExCo meeting in May 2021.



I feel like I have learned a lot more about other countries especially from my fellow child advisor's views. CAT has been an amazing experience and I hope to have more."

Hisaye, 16 years old, Palau



Being part of the CAT allowed me to learn about the lives of children from different countries, as well as widen my ability to bring change not only among my community, but to also fight for children's rights on an international scale."

Reece, 16 years old, South Africa

Meet with our permanent, global Children's Advisory Team

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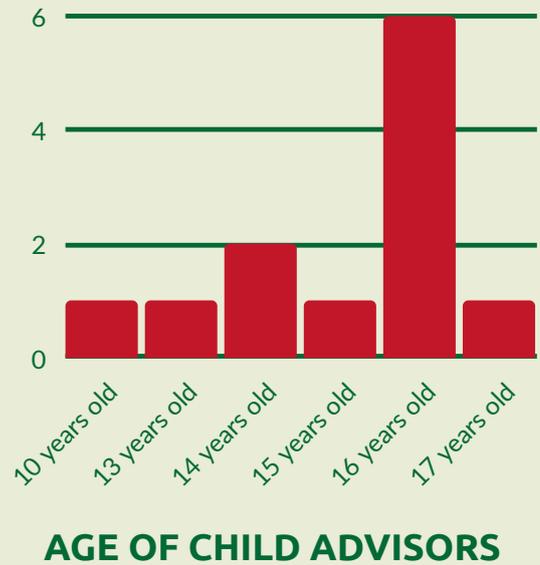
CHILDREN EMPOWERED AS HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS TO SHAPE AND TAKE FORWARD ACTIVITIES ON CHILD RIGHTS, IN LINE WITH OUR 2020-2024 STRATEGIC PLAN



5 GIRLS & 7 BOYS

including a child living with disabilities

EACH SUPPORTED BY A MEMBER/PARTNER OF CHILD RIGHTS CONNECT



WHERE THE CHILD ADVISORS ARE FROM

ALL REGIONS OF THE WORLD



WHAT CHILD ADVISORS SAY OF THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE CAT



I have become even more interested in politics in areas I haven't been before (e.g. America, the Pacific) since I have joined the CAT. It is a very valuable experience for me, to have the opportunity to cooperate with children from all around the world and with international organisations."

Andreas, 16 years old, Cyprus



The times I spent with the CAT were very eye opening for me. I had a deep understanding of what's child right even more and it was a great journey."

Nomundari, 14 years old, Mongolia

L'ÉPU ET MOI

Mon guide
pour participer à l'ÉPU



Programmes

From mission to realisation

Children's rights can only become a reality for every child, if all States fulfil their obligations under the UNCRC and its Optional Protocols, and if children are empowered to claim and exercise their rights. This represents the impact goal of Child Rights Connect and its partners. Children's enjoyment of their rights is made possible – and is largely determined – by the actions of States, civil society and the UN human rights system.

Mission

We advocate for and support the universal adoption and full implementation of the UNCRC and its Optional Protocols, for the realisation of children's rights worldwide. We do this by convening and engaging with civil society and other relevant actors, by fostering cooperation and collaboration, and by empowering children's rights defenders, including children, to meaningfully participate in global advocacy for children's rights at different levels.



How change happens: our Theory of Change



What the COVID-19 pandemic meant for child rights

1. A reflection from our Executive Director



We started the year with continued celebrations of the 30th anniversary of UNCRC and historical moments such as the High-Level Panel of the UN Human Rights

Council on mainstreaming child rights, where both the UN and States for the first time acknowledged that much more needs to be done to ensure that the child rights approach is systematically applied across all the UN pillars. With our members, we seized that momentum to call on the UN to develop a child rights strategy applicable across the whole UN system. Children are the only group of rights holders who have a specific human rights treaty but no corresponding UN strategy to ensure policy coherence within and across the system. They are also the only group who routinely remain excluded from important civil society spaces such as around the UN's climate change inter-governmental process, simply because of their age and their perceived "lack of maturity".

This was already enough evidence of the need for positive change. However, many adults still oppose the very idea of children being rights-holders and many others simply do not consider child rights amongst their priorities. Hitting all societies in the world, the COVID-19 pandemic then exacerbated the de-prioritisation of child rights because children have not been the immediate and direct victims of the virus. Violations of all children's rights – civil, political, social, cultural and economic – have increased. The Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee) has warned that years of progress in the implementation of the UNCRC and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are at risk of being lost and even reversed.

These challenges show that, more than ever, child rights need to be placed at the core of all planning and policy/decision-making at national, regional and international levels to ensure adequate and sustainable responses to, and recovery from, the pandemic and, for that matter, any other similar future challenges. A comprehensive approach that considers the full spectrum of children's rights is needed to ensure the adoption of coherent measures to address and overcome the pandemic. Although we have never faced similar challenges before,

we must learn from the situation and strengthen the application of a child rights approach by the UN and Member States. A strong focus on child rights will contribute to realize everyone's human rights, whereas adult-centered discussions and decisions will not.

Despite decreased attention by adults and adult-centred institutions, children have increased their attention to the world around them. More than ever, children are mobilizing and coming up with calls to action and possible solutions for problems faced by them and everyone. The experience of our Children's Advisory Team shows that this happens especially when children are empowered, provided with the right information, and connected to their peers. The special context of 2020 made it even more important and urgent for us to make the Children's Advisory Team a permanent body of our network. The pandemic has proven that we, child rights experts, must learn from and with children in all contexts. 2020 has been a year full of learning, including on how to become more effective and more respectful of the environment. The increased digital shift we were forced to make taught us how to improve our working methods and maximize our effectiveness in the online environment, including on ways to expand our outreach to children's rights defenders on the ground.

The coordination between our organisation and civil society was particularly important in the context of the pandemic as the work of the UN human rights mechanisms has been significantly disrupted, rescheduled, and shifted online with very little public information available. Child Rights Connect has become even more the key reference point for civil society, including children, and the main source of up-to-date information on possibilities of engagement with the CRC Committee and other UN human rights mechanisms through a dedicated webpage and targeted technical assistance to civil society organisations. We also voiced and amplified civil society concerns about the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on children and, together with TB-Net, about the effect of the UN financial crisis on the Treaty Bodies and their ability to monitor the implementation of the UNCRC by States, amid the human rights crisis triggered or exacerbated by the pandemic.

Alex Conte, Executive Director

2. COVID-19 unveiled gaps in child rights mainstreaming

The UNCRC is one of the most comprehensive human rights treaties and certainly one that poses the greatest challenges in its implementation given its holistic nature, the dependent status of children and their evolving capacities. All children's rights are interlinked but this is rarely translated into practice and the application of a child rights approach remains a major challenge. Without an effective application of a child rights approach, some rights are overlooked or only partially realized, and child rights mainstreaming cannot be fully achieved. All too often, the rights of children are ignored by governments. In some cases, it is politically convenient to do so. In others, the lack of resources or conditions on the ground act as barriers to progress.

Many of these gaps have been aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, showing how ad-hoc and fragile the application of a child rights approach still is. This was one of the key messages that was shared with States during the virtual briefing on adopting a child rights-based approach to responding to COVID-19 that we convened in May 2020, in collaboration with the Permanent Missions to the UN of Germany, Slovenia, Uruguay and the European Union. The briefing was an opportunity to familiarize States with the guidance developed by the CRC Committee, other UN entities and civil society, on how to adopt a child rights-based response to COVID-19; to learn from good practices on implementing the guidance at the national level; to listen to children's views and recommendations; and to explore opportunities for multi-stakeholder collaboration.

The briefing *"provided excellent information regarding the rights of children, which could be overlooked during the time of COVID-19"*. *"[As a follow-up], a report has been drafted for senior officials on the importance of including child rights in all policy responses to COVID-19"*, said a State official who participated in the May 2020 briefing.

One of our members added: "It's really helped with our advocacy. It was only down to my invitation to speak at this event that the Government produced their report against the Committee's recommendation, and that I received a letter

last night from our Minister restating the Government's commitment to incorporate the UNCRC before 2021 – quite a result for a five minute presentation!"

The briefing was one of the first moments during the pandemic that shed light on States' obligation to work with children to face, respond to, and recover from the pandemic. Ajlin, a girl from Bosnia and Herzegovina, shared her experience as child researcher for one of the first global consultations with children conducted in the context of the pandemic by our member World Vision International. Ajlin told State representatives that children's rights are directly affected by the pandemic and that children are playing a key role in the fight against the COVID-19, and that this must be recognized.

"The panellists highlighted why it is important to have children's rights at the centre not only of the responses but also for the future. [...] As pointed out, implementing a child right based approach is not easy in practice so we welcomed the different pieces of guidance provided by the CRC Committee, OHCHR, UNICEF, crucial not only for the UN system but for States as well", said another representative who participated in the May 2020 briefing.

Many members of Child Rights Connect have undertaken similar consultations with children. We have supported them by providing an overview of child participation activities focused on responding to COVID-19 to facilitate coordination and avoid duplication; facilitating exchanges of information about the safe and effective use of online platforms to communicate with children; and promoting follow-up to ensure positive impact and sustained processes for children's continued empowerment. For instance, CRIC (our member in Moldova) used the information shared during the briefing to convince the OHCHR office in Moldova to create a sub-group dedicated to children's rights, within the larger group of CSOs involved in Treaty Bodies reporting coordinated by the OHCHR, to monitor the situation of children in the analysis of the impact of COVID-19 measures at the national level. Further, CRIC was inspired to replicate the child rights impact assessment during COVID-19 and surveys with children and young people which another member, Together Scotland, has undertaken in Scotland.

3. Children's response to COVID-19

Just weeks after a new global Children's Advisory Team was established at Child Rights Connect, we faced the COVID-19 outbreak. Soon after, the 12 child advisors, based across all regions of the world, began adapting to a new Team and getting to know one another. They were mobilising and responding to a completely unexpected, unknown, and rapidly evolving pandemic. The child advisors set out to assess the challenges and issues facing children during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Team were forced to rethink their human rights defender activities to ensure they could reach children who might not have online access, to keep their work as inclusive and far-reaching as possible. The child advisors came together through the support of Child Rights Connect via online platforms on a regular basis, to support one another, share their experiences and develop their ideas of how they may collectively respond to some of the COVID-19 challenges and issues raised. They decided to create a storybook of positive narratives around children's experiences during the lockdown measures, to help spread positivity among children worldwide, including those in more vulnerable situations. They also collected what they believed to be good practice examples of ways that theirs or other governments were responding to the pandemic for children, making recommendations to decision-makers on how they could improve their actions when facing a pandemic.



It's our responsibility to enforce and apply the needed measures to slow down the virus. While we take care of ourselves, were taking care of each other. The CAT has come up with amazing ideas to support children around the world physically but also mentally. Our mission is very inclusive and as a team we'll always make sure to be the voice of the children who are being spoken for."

Rea, 16 years old, Kosovo



The Covid-19 pandemic is no exception. Governments and decision-makers have the responsibility both ethically and legally (UNCRC articles 3,12) to hear what children have to say and to use the valuable information they will have received to make decisions that are for the best interest of the child."

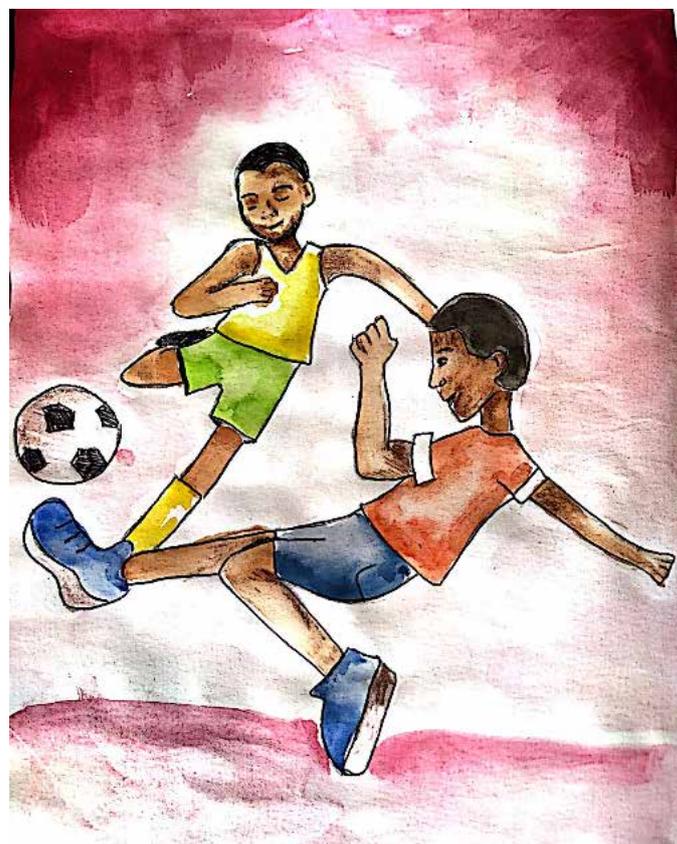
Andreas, 16 years old, Cyprus

Not only we have supported the child advisors in taking their own initiatives, we have also created opportunities for them to participate in wider child participation processes, such as for example the #CovidUnder19 initiative led by our member Terre des Hommes, to meaningfully involve children in responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included a global consultation with a total of 26,258 children aged 8 to 17 from 137 countries. Our current and former child advisors Reece and Konstantinos actively engaged in the project, including by informing the design of the survey.



One of the biggest threats we are currently facing is misinformation and fake news. It is very important to build trust between officials such as the WHO with different media outlets and children. WHO should produce child friendly documents to share with schools, children and parents. We cannot expect to have full information as even the top epidemiologists do not have that, what we require is reliable information on how to stay safe".

Konstantinos, 2018-2019 child advisor, Greece



Three key achievements in 2020

1. We have filled a crucial gap with the first comprehensive guidance on the implementation of the rights of child human rights defenders

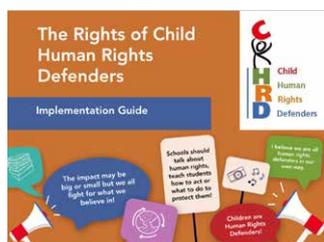
The 2018 Day of General Discussion of the CRC Committee on “Protecting and empowering children as human rights defenders” was an eye-opener about the barriers to the realization of the rights of children who act as defenders. One of the most fundamental problems is that there is little understanding of who child human rights defenders are, why it is important to recognize them, and what it is different for them as opposed to adult defenders. **Protecting and empowering child human rights defenders does not mean just calling them human rights defenders; it means that States, and all adults, need to take distinctive and additional actions that recognize and guarantee the specific rights and status of children in society.** The Rights of Child Human Rights Defenders: Implementation Guide that we have published in 2020 is crucial to build awareness and legal understanding of what it means to be a child human rights defender and how their rights must be respected, protected, and fulfilled at the national level. This should happen through the joint implementation of the UNCRC and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders but, the latter is still unknown to most people working on child rights and with or for children.



The Guide shows that more linkages should be built between the work of human rights defenders and child rights, including the strengthening of linkages between the two communities: cooperation with the mandate would be a good opportunity for this, I believe.”

Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

The Guide is the result of a year-long consultative process with children, civil society representatives and experts. It has been developed in collaboration with Queen’s University of Belfast as well as with Child Rights Connect’s members, the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, the CRC Committee, and adult and child experts from around the world, including our Children’s Advisory Team which is developing the child-friendly version of the Guide, to be published in 2021.



This document is especially significant for children globally, as it will not only protect children fighting for a brighter future but will also allow them to be encouraged and feel safe in the efforts for peace.”

Reece, 16-year-old, member of our 2020 Children’s Advisory Team



What is happening is that now, it is becoming more and more dangerous for us to be able to defend ourselves, to be able to defend our rights, to be able to raise our voice. That is why having a guide for child defenders is very important for us because through it we can know, learn, reflect and have a great support about the work we are doing.”

Leomar, child human rights defender from Mexico

The Guide can also help adults to **better respond to the unprecedented mobilization of children** globally around the COVID-19, as well as other matters that affect them and others, such as the environmental crisis, racism, or police brutality.



[The Guide] assists and it honors those children who make a special contribution to the rights of the child. At UNEP, we are really looking forward to using this guide as a tool to inform the implementation of our own organisational policy that seeks to promote greater protections for environmental human rights defenders, and to empower child environmental rights defenders.”

Angela Kariuki, representative from the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)



This Guide will also help me and other UN mechanisms that are not specific to children, to strengthen my and our collaboration with children, and to implement my and our respective mandates with the child rights approach.”

Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

2. We have contributed to advancing children's right to a healthy environment

The consideration of children's rights has been historically absent from environmental or climate-related policies, laws, and action, due to weak political will and a general lack of awareness of the many links between child rights and a safe and healthy environment. **2020 was an instrumental year for making the healthy environment a child rights concern.** It started with the extraordinary 84th session of the CRC Committee in Samoa, where we supported child environmental human rights defenders from the Pacific to share their views and recommendations with the Committee. It then continued with the Human Rights Council holding its annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child focusing on "Realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment". For the first time ever, two child environmental human rights defenders spoke up in such setting to denounce environmental issues affecting children's rights, while the UN High Commissioner for human rights openly stated that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates the detrimental effects of climate change on children's rights.



World leaders, we want this space to go beyond the formal statements and we commit ourselves to the international campaign for the environmental rights of children, young people and adolescents of the whole world. We are not the generation of destruction; we are the generation of transformation."

Juliana, child environmental human rights defender from Colombia



Thanks to Child Rights Connect, I received an effective support throughout this process, despite the distance. My participation allowed me to speak freely. It helped me to see that adults and authorities are interested in children's right."

Junior, child environmental human rights defender from Ivory Coast.

States began listening to the millions of children across the world who have been calling for more urgent and ambitious action through adopting by consensus, on 7 October 2020, the annual resolution on the rights of the child with a focus on realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment. The resolution clearly states that the environmental crisis is a children's rights crisis, and that States should take all measures to protect children's rights from environmental harm. It largely reflects the advocacy efforts undertaken throughout the year by Child Rights Connect, together with our Working Group on child rights and the environment coordinated by Terre des Homme and the Child Rights International Network (CRIN), as well as key partners such as UNICEF and UNEP. The multi-stakeholders call to action, launched by CRCnct's Working Group in partnership with the Children's Environmental Rights Initiative, and endorsed by 40 organisations and high-level experts, ahead of the ADRC has paid off.



A key issue moving forward will be safeguarding and emphasizing the participation of children and youth in environmental decision-making affecting their lives now and in the future. A safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is necessary for children to be able to enjoy all their human rights. We have a duty to act, and we have a duty to act now."

Stated the Representative of Germany, when presenting the resolution on behalf of the EU.



3. We have contributed to enhancing access to justice for child rights violations in Latin America

Latin America is the second region in the world with most States parties to the Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure (OPIC), with 11 States from the region having ratified the OPIC (as of February 2021). 16 per cent of the decisions adopted by the CRC Committee under the OPIC in 2020 pertained to communications against Latin American States. However, **the potential of the OPIC to bring justice and remedies to children who have suffered human rights violations is still largely underestimated.** Children's rights defenders do not know the OPIC well enough to be able to effectively use it to advance the implementation of the UNCRC and its Optional Protocols. Often, they also lack connections to build the necessary partnerships, including with lawyers who have experience in litigation. To address this, we organised, jointly with Save the children and in collaboration with the CRC Committee and the OHCHR, the **first ever regional capacity-building on strategic litigation with a focus on the OPIC** in November/December 2020. The goal of the training was to provide an in-depth understanding of the OPIC and to empower children's rights defenders to design effective litigation strategies that will strengthen advocacy on issues such as sexual and reproductive health rights and freedom of peaceful assembly.

Around 60 CSO representatives, lawyers, and representatives from National Human Rights Institutions and children's Ombudspersons, International Organisations and Universities (including 74.6% of women) from 17 Latin American countries took part in the two-day online training. This training was not only an opportunity to transfer knowledge and skills to those who are at the forefront of child rights advocacy on the ground, it also facilitated exchanges and collaborations with and between participants which may result in new admissible communications to the CRC Committee.



[I gained] greater knowledge of the Third Protocol, guidelines for action before the Committee, criteria for evaluating cases that may lead to strategic litigation, and topics that the Committee has addressed to date within the framework of the OPIC."

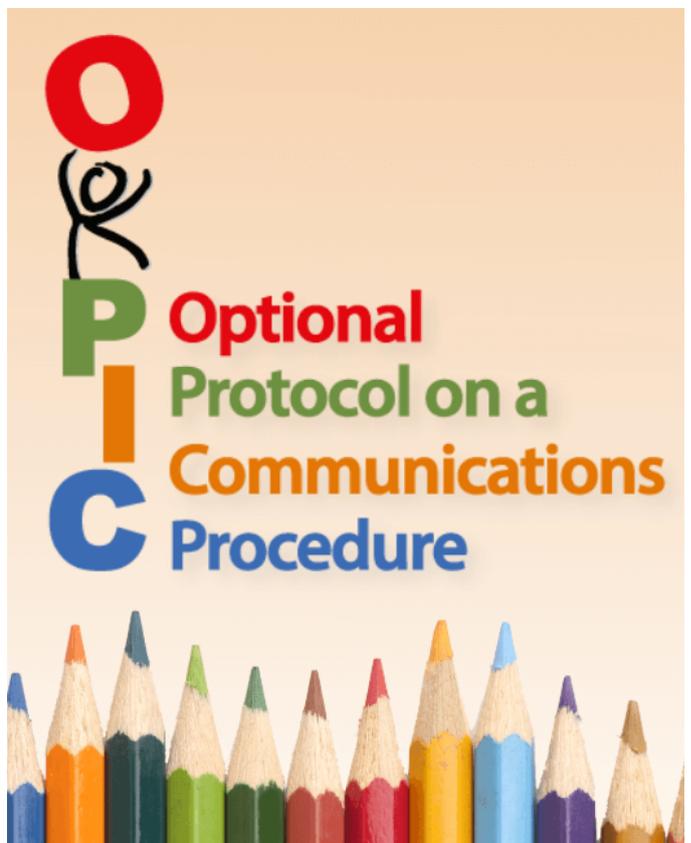
A lawyer from Costa Rica



[I gained knowledge of] strategic litigation, understanding litigation as an advocacy action that can bring about changes in the design of public policy."

A representative from an international organisation working across Latin America

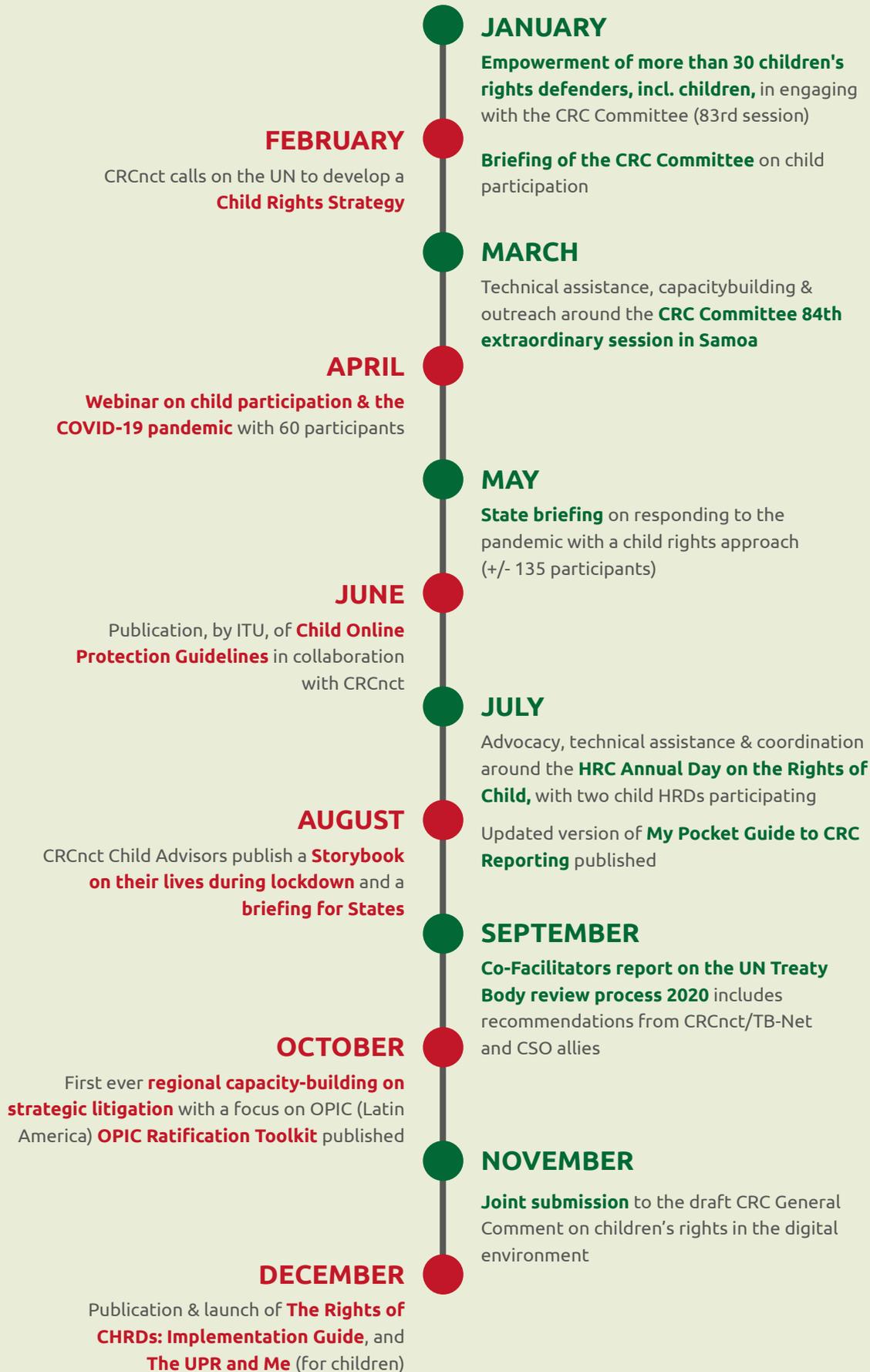
A follow-up training, dedicated to discussing specific litigation strategies based on case studies put forward by participants, will be held in early 2021.



Additional programme highlights

2020 A YEAR IN REVIEW

Despite the pandemic, Child Rights Connect (CRCnct) continued to make contributions to the realisation of child rights around the world.



1. Engaging the most remote and under-represented region around the extraordinary 84th session of the CRC Committee

The Pacific is the region with the lowest level of engagement with UN Treaty Bodies, both from States and civil society. The CRC Committee is lucky to have the only member that Treaty Bodies have ever had from the Pacific, and this resulted in the initiative of holding the **first ever session of Treaty Bodies outside Geneva and New York**. During the week of 2 March 2020, the Committee held an extraordinary session in Samoa to review the implementation of the UNCRC by the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Tuvalu and to hold the pre-session of Kiribati.



More than 100 children from Samoa and other Pacific islands engaged with the Committee; State delegations shared their challenges with the Committee, some with tears in their eyes; the Committee session was held before record numbers of civil society representatives during the States reviews; and Child Rights Connect established connections with over 20 civil society organisations in the Pacific region. This was the extraordinary session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Samoa.”

Emma Grindulis, Programme Officer and Child Participation & Safeguarding Focal Point at Child Rights Connect

The session was the opportunity to establish a close partnership with the Pacific Commonwealth Equality Project Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) which took a vital lead in engaging civil society throughout the process. Child Rights Connect and RRRT ensured that civil society participation was at the core of the extraordinary session. Given the scarce number of child rights-focussed civil society organisations in the region, **we strengthened the capacity of grassroots organisations, including indigenous people and children, to engage with the Committee and the UN not only around the session but also in its follow-up**, to ensure that the low levels of civil society reporting to the Committee becomes a distant past.



I received valuable support and tailored technical assistance from Child Rights Connect and as a result, felt much more confident and prepared to participate in the session activities.”

Teretia Tokam, from the Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre (KWCS)

We also jointly prepared a child participation strategy and child safeguarding materials with OHCHR and assisted the UN Resident Coordinator in Samoa and UNICEF Pacific in the preparations for child participation.



The collaboration between the different UN bodies and agencies around this extraordinary session will have to be used as an example to build on to foster child rights mainstreaming within the UN at international, regional and national level.”

Child Rights Connect statement at the opening of the extraordinary 84th session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child



2. Strengthening the capacity of children's rights defenders, including children, to use reporting to the CRC Committee as an advocacy tool

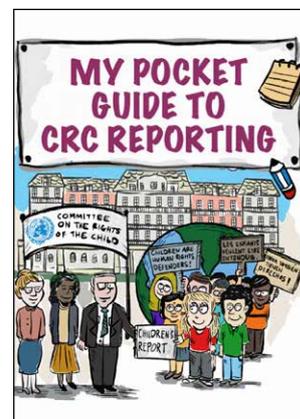
The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected the functioning of all UN mechanisms, including the CRC Committee. The major challenge has been the postponement of all State reviews by the CRC Committee after its March 2020 extraordinary session in the Pacific, resulting in a significant protection gap for children's rights. That said, civil society reporting has not been suspended. Civil society organisations have continued to make submissions to the CRC Committee through the online platform which we have been operating, in respect of which we have continued our technical assistance support to children's rights defenders.

In 2020, we empowered more than 90 children's rights defenders from national, regional and international organisations and coalitions, including 14 children (of whom 11 were girls), to engage in reporting to the CRC Committee. Further, as noted above, in the context of engaging in the extraordinary 84th session of the Committee, we supported around 100 children from the Pacific Islands to directly follow and learn from the CRC Committee session, reporting cycle, and other activities as part of a wider capacity-building and technical assistance mission.

In 2020, our technical assistance to children's rights defenders in reporting to the CRC Committee was special on two different counts. First, due to the pandemic, we provided tailored support children's rights defenders, including children, from Canada, Iceland, the Philippines, Ukraine, and Vietnam to engage in the first fully online edition of the CRC pre-session in September/October 2020. More than 90% of the children's rights defenders who took part in our survey reported that our technical assistance was either extremely or very useful. Children had similarly positive feedback. **"Children have positive feedbacks. They feel their importance and they enjoyed being heard. Also, they were excited to speak up and share their thoughts"**, a children's right defender from Ukraine. We also shared feedback with the Committee on the challenges and possible solutions to make online pre-sessions even more effective.

Second, as the Committee continued to implement two distinct reporting procedures in 2020, we provided specific technical assistance to children's rights defenders from various countries to engage in the Simplified Reporting Procedure (SRP) and published a comparative table of the two distinct procedures to help children's rights defenders grasp and navigate the differences between the SRP and Standard Reporting Procedure.

Amongst various tools developed for both children and adults, in 2020 we published an updated My Pocket Guide to CRC Reporting in English, French and Spanish as a guide for children on engagement with the CRC Committee. The Guide may also be used by adults to empower children in participating in the CRC reporting cycle.



We will share the Guide widely and use it to improve the reporting process with Senegalese children that we have initiated in 2006, and with Child Rights Connect's collaboration, of children's reports that we have submitted to the CRC Committee in 2016, and under the UPR in 2018."

A representative from a Senegalese civil society organisation

In the past years, CRCnct has supported the establishment of a child rights coalition – the Plateforme pour la Convention Droits de l'Enfant (PCDE) Maroc – composed of 29 non-governmental organisations operating in Morocco to strengthen the voice of civil society involved in the promotion and protection of children's rights at the national, regional and international levels. PCDE Maroc officially became a member of our network in 2020. In 2019, we had facilitated a capacity building workshop for the coalition's members, in Rabat, focusing on CRC reporting and identification of complementary advocacy opportunities at the UN. We continued providing targeted advice and strategic support to the platform, including through convening an online training on child participation in CRC reporting for the coalition's members in October 2020, to support the coalition in engage children in the preparation for and submission of the next civil society report to the CRC Committee.

3. Increasing child participation within and through the Universal Periodic Review

Whilst there are many good practice examples of children's participation in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the levels of engagement globally remain low and there is very little child-friendly, accessible information to ensure children can learn about, take part in, and influence the process. Child participation in the UPR is also almost entirely adult-led. In 2020, we strengthened our partnership with UPR Info to make this change, by developing the first ever comprehensive child-friendly guide to the UPR. The multilingual guide, entitled *The UPR and Me*, will help **raise awareness and understanding of the mechanism among children and empower them to engage throughout the cycle on equal footing as adults**. It may also be used by adults as a reference document to brief children ahead of their engagement within and through the UPR.

The Guide has been informed by a children's consultation with over 140 children globally who took part in an online survey and small focus groups. Their inputs helped to shape both the design and the content of the Guide. It was launched in December 2020, through an online event which gathered more than 130 CSO representatives, children, UN officials and State representatives. They discussed why the Guide is important for children's participation at UN level, and how it can be used to advance children's engagement in the UPR so that they are able to act on the human rights issues most important to them.

Reflecting on his direct experience with the UPR, a child representative from Albania explained: ***"Because in my whole experience, the whole year that I actually prepared to be at that the pre-session, I came to the conclusion that the UPR is not just an event, it is a process and a platform which can be used to help children and change their day to day lives. So the implementation of the whole explanation of the UPR in a child friendly language was absolutely a necessity"***.



I think the main obstacles for children's participation in the UPR process so far, were the misconception about UPR and less information about the process of the UPR. But now, I think that the child friendly UPR will be able to fix their problems."

A child representative from Bangladesh supported by Save the Children at the Guide launch.



It is of great asset to bring together such a diverse group which is able to discuss issues on a completely equal footing."

A permanent mission representative who took part in the Guide launch

The draft Guide also helped children, and those working with or for them, to get ready for their own engagement in the UPR. In 2020, children from Nepal submitted their own report under the UPR, with support from the Consortium of Organizations Working for Child Participation (Consortium Nepal) and technical assistance from Child Rights Connect.



Take us seriously because we learn to solve problems now and will be able to solve big problems later."

Extract from the Nepal child-led report under the UPR

Children from Jamaica and Honduras were offered the opportunity to participate in the UPR pre-session in 2020, after years of these meetings involving adults only.

4. Informing, with children, the development of new international standards on the digital environment and peaceful assembly

2020 was the key year for the drafting of the CRC Committee's General Comment on children's rights in relation to the digital environment. Children are active users of the digital environment, many times even teaching adults, including their parents and caregivers, how to use the different technologies. While many children use the digital environment to get and/or share information and socialize, child human rights defenders are using it to learn about their human rights, to meet and collaborate with others to promote their own human rights and the rights of others, as well as to effect change locally and globally. The digital environment provides them with both additional opportunities and challenges that are distinctive to children. Our submission to influence the General Comment was specifically oriented to **give visibility to the difficulties and barriers that child human rights defenders face while promoting and defending human rights in the digital environment, as well to provide guidance on what concrete measures can be taken to empower them in the exercise of their rights online.**

Thanks to our collaboration with the School of Education of University College Dublin and the Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University Belfast, the submission was directly informed by the views and recommendations of more than 35 children, aged 13 to 18 years old, from 15 countries in all regions of the world, who use the digital environment to act as human rights defenders. The views were collected as part of a study exploring in-depth the issues raised by child human rights defenders specifically related to the digital environment, following up on the consultations conducted for the 2018 Day of General Discussion of the Committee on "Protecting and empowering children as human rights defenders".

Children voiced how critical it is to: 1) address the negative experiences of child human rights defenders caused by people, companies and legislations; 2) recognize children's active engagement with the digital environment and this space as an enabler of communication and collaboration among child rights human rights defenders; 3) take advantage of the digital environment as an effective platform to disseminate the work of child human rights defenders; and 4) promote greater support from adults to secure the full participation of children.

Adopted in February 2021, the CRC Committee's General Comment reflects this and gives effect to the claim that rights apply online as offline, including the rights of child human rights defenders. As the first international

authoritative legal document recognizing explicitly that children's rights apply both offline and online, this General Comment **recognizes children's active engagement with the digital environment and this space as an enabler of communication and collaboration among child human rights defenders; encourages State parties to support them in safely using the online environment** in the exercise of their freedom of association and peaceful assembly; and **makes specific reference to the barriers and challenges faced by girl child human rights defenders** when exercising their rights online, in line with our recommendations. In a video thanking children for their inputs, the Vice-Chair of the CRC Committee said: *"I would like to thank you for your beautiful and wonderful contributions to the children's consultations that helped us in the development of this very important General Comment on the rights of the child in the digital environment"*.

We have also supported the global consultation with more than 700 children conducted by 5Rights and Western Sydney University by mobilizing our members and partners to expand the outreach to children from different regions and backgrounds.

With an increasing number of children taking part in peaceful protests around the world, most notably in strikes against climate change, **we sought to ensure that, for the very first time, children could share with the UN what the right to peaceful assembly means to them and what barriers they face in exercising this right.** Through a survey, we heard from 91 children, aged 10-18 years old, from 15 different countries, across five regions to inform our submission to the Human Rights Committee. This was the first time ever that children participated in the work of the Human Rights Committee.

Drawing on the inputs from children, our submission highlighted that peaceful assemblies are an important way for children's voices to be heard, enabling them to participate in social and political life, particularly on matters affecting them. It included the recommendations that States should adopt special measures to accommodate the unique position and needs of children exercising their freedom to assemble peacefully; States should create an enabling environment, online and offline, for all children to be able to fully enjoy their assembly rights; and the right to peaceful assembly should be part of the human rights education children receive in school as well as the professional training for school staff.



Unfortunately, children and adolescents face several difficulties, especially with regard to participation, because adults insist on discrediting the potentiality of the excluded individuals, characterizing them inferiorly, which in such a way makes them inferior...”

Vitor, 17 years old, Brazil

The Committee adopted its General Comment on Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in July 2020, which provides every human being with the right to freedom of assembly, considering some of our key asks. The General Comment recognizes the positive obligation of States to facilitate the participation of individuals who may face particular challenges in participating in assemblies, such as children. It also mentions the need for training of law enforcement officials policing assemblies to sensitize officials to the specific needs of individuals or groups in situations of vulnerability, which can include children. These standards are particularly important for children because they, unlike adults, cannot vote and are not represented in traditional State structures. Hence, children are at a greater need for opportunities to participate in political and public affairs.



5. Addressing the slow rate of ratification of the OPIC

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic where the number of child rights violations have exponentially increased worldwide, ensuring access to justice for children who are victims of human rights violations may seem an obvious priority. However, the reality is very different and, no new States ratified or signed the OPIC in 2020. At the current rate of ratification of the OPIC, it would take 20 years before 80% of States parties to the UNCRC ratify this instrument, and almost 30 years for all 196 States to be parties to the OPIC. Children cannot wait for that.

We therefore doubled our efforts to promote the universal ratification of the OPIC, an indispensable mechanism for children’s right to remedy, focusing on equipping civil society from around the world with the necessary information and advocacy tools to effectively press for OPIC ratification in their respective countries. We updated our *OPIC InfoPack* and published a new practical tool, *the OPIC Ratification Toolkit*, which provides guidance on how to convince States to ratify the OPIC. The toolkit is mainly for civil society organisations, but it can be used by public officials in their efforts to push ratification from inside, using evidence-based arguments. It explores some of the concerns and misconceptions that may be creating barriers to ratification – such as the fear that OPIC may add a financial burden on the State, drawing out the ‘value-added’ of ratification – and explains the nuts and bolts of the ratification process. The national case studies included in the toolkit provide insights into context-specific concerns that Governments have and demonstrate innovative advocacy strategies that speak to those concerns.



Many thanks for sharing this resourceful document. Also, we are glad that our initiative is integrated in the toolkit. It will be helpful in our advocacy.”

A representative from Child Nepal

6. Strengthening the role and effectiveness of the UN Treaty Bodies through coordinated advocacy

Resolution 68/268 of the UN General Assembly on Treaty Body strengthening provided that an overall review of the effectiveness of the measures taken to implement the resolution should happen no later than 2020. In April 2020, the President of the General Assembly asked Switzerland and Morocco to lead on and initiate the review process, which involved several consultations with States, UN agencies and civil society. In the special context of the pandemic and UN financial crisis, this process could become a real threat to Treaty Bodies' work, by opening up opportunities for States to undermine rather than strengthen the Treaty Body system. For example, the proposal for a code of conduct of Treaty Body members was put forward by several States, which would be incompatible with the full independence of the Treaty Bodies.

We worked in close partnership with our members, TB-Net, Treaty Bodies, civil society organisations and like-minded States such as Switzerland and Morocco to influence this process and make it an opportunity for Treaty Bodies to gain political support, obtain more resources, and secure the means to improve their working methods. As a member of TB-Net, we actively engaged in the consultations, including by submitting in July 2020 a joint proposal with the International Service for Human Rights on how to **ensure regular, predictable, and universal State reporting**, which was adopted and endorsed by 86 organisations (including many of our members and partners). The core of the proposal was the reform of the Treaty Body system through the establishment of a fixed and coordinated calendar of State reviews according to which each State would be reviewed based on a four-year cycle, alternating between two levels of review, a comprehensive and a focused one. This proposal would enable the Treaty Bodies to ensure regular monitoring for all States, focused on the most pressing issues and would ease the reporting and resources burdens.

Our proposal was taken up in the outcome report of the 2020 review as well as by the Treaty Bodies' Chairpersons who included the idea of the focused review in their submission to the consultations.



The consultations have demonstrated that the development of a predictable review cycle and, to the extent possible, a coordinated, fixed and multiyear calendar for all of the Committees is a desirable feature of any future format of the human rights treaty body system. A master calendar should be coordinated across all Committees and include the due dates for States parties' reports and the dates for the constructive dialogue",

Extract from the 2020 review report by Switzerland and Morocco

By joining forces with other civil society organisations, we also contributed to the inclusion of strong recommendations on nomination and elections of Treaty Body members, additional funding and allocation of resources, participation of civil society in the work of Treaty Bodies, and accessibility through digital means.

This process was a unique opportunity to strengthen our members' understanding of the political dynamics behind the Treaty Body system. By coordinating messages with members at the national level, we have empowered them to undertake advocacy with their authorities on matters that are considered to be Geneva and New York issues, such as Treaty Body strengthening.

7. Advancing child rights by supporting members and partners to effectively engage in strategic litigation before international and regional mechanisms

With increasing numbers of individual communications submitted to the international and regional human rights mechanisms, the demands for support by Child Rights Connect have also increased. In 2020, we strived to be as reactive as possible to the requests for technical assistance and legal advice from our members and partners. For example, we contributed to the success of the first ever decision of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on a case concerning sexual violence in schools (*Guzmán Albarracín and Others v. Ecuador*). We facilitated the connection between the petitioners of the case, namely the Center for Reproductive Rights-Latin America, our member ECPAT and the Council of Europe, to provide a strong *amicus curiae* (third party intervention) in support of the Court's decision.

The *amicus* explained the standards of the Lanzarote Convention setting the content regarding States' obligations to protect children from sexual harassment and the duty to criminalize all kinds of sexual offences against children. The *amicus curiae* was very relevant as it was the first case concerning sexual violence in schools before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and the latter was not familiar with the Lanzarote Convention. Explicitly mentioning the *amicus curiae*, the Court set new important standards through this case, which could set a precedent for other court rulings given the growing influence of jurisprudence globally. The collaboration around the *amicus curiae* allowed the actors involved to exchange and learn from each other and testifies to the effectiveness of collectively using complementary expertise towards a common goal.

Child Human Rights Defenders (CHRDs)

12

child advisors, members of our Children's Advisory Team, empowered as human rights defenders to shape and take forward activities on child rights.

CRC reporting*

72

civil society submissions to the Committee on the Rights of the Child from 9 countries.

OPIC

2

multilingual tools published to support OPIC ratification and use.

Publications and communications

9

new/updated multilingual resources published to help children engage with the UN (3 tools) and adults to engage or support children to engage with the UN (6 tools).

Network engagement

91

network members (against 85 members in 2019).

6

webinars / online events held on CHRDs' rights, and child participation and safeguarding

150+

civil society representatives, children, UN officials and State representatives took part in the online launch of the Implementation Guide on CHRDs' Rights

12

civil society reports led or informed by children.

93

children's rights defenders, including 14 children, empowered to report to the CRC Committee*.

59

civil society representatives, lawyers, and representatives from National Human Rights Institutions and UN agencies (including 44 women) participated in the first ever regional workshop on strategically using the OPIC.

25

adopted decisions by the CRC Committee under OPIC (the highest number of decisions in any given year), of which 10 decisions were on the merits finding human rights violations.

52,000+

users of our websites in total (amongst whom around 46% of women and 61% below 35 years old).

19%

increase in the number of Twitter followers, and 39% increase in the number of followers of our Facebook page.

14

webinars held with members in total (twice as much as in 2019).

110+

MemberNews and email blasts issued to keep our members abreast of UN developments, facilitate their engagement with UN mechanisms, and ensure joint advocacy.

* Note: There have been fewer civil society submissions and children's rights defenders supported in 2020 than in 2019 because of two factors: (i) a reduced number of CRC Committee sessions held in 2020 due to the pandemic; and (ii) amongst the States reviewed by the Committee in the first part of 2020, several were Pacific Island countries with an historically low level of civil society engagement in CRC reporting.

Working groups

Working Group on children and armed conflict

Composition

Convenor: Defence for Children International (DCI)

Members: Arigatou International, Child Rights International Network, Defence for Children International, ECPAT International, Humanium, Plan International, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, War Child Holland, World Vision International, and Women's World Summit Foundation.

Observer and Strategic Partners: Geneva Call, Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, War Child UK, and Watchlist.

Key outputs

- ✓ Met with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG CAAC) in October 2020 to discuss the UN Secretary-General annual report on children and armed conflict and ways to increase cooperation with the Geneva CAAC Group of Friends and the SRSG, among other issues.
- ✓ Organised a side event during the 44th session of the Human Rights Council and the High-Level Political Forum in July 2020, with the participation of the Office of the SRSG CAAC, SRSG on Violence Against Children, Human Rights Watch and DCI on the impact of COVID-19 on children deprived of liberty, attended by more than 250 participants from different countries.

Looking ahead

- Push for the implementation of the *UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty* recommendations, particularly for the adoption of a formal monitoring mechanism
- Improve coordination between Geneva- and New York-based actors on CAAC issues and speak of one voice within the CAAC space in both places
- Conduct advocacy before the Human Rights Council, through events and statements, to influence HRC resolutions related to CAAC
- Advance access to justice for child victims of human rights violations in situation of armed conflict

Working Group on children of incarcerated parents

Composition

Conveners: Plataforma NNAPES and Quaker United Nations Office.

Members: Children of Prisoners Europe, Defence for Children International, DCI Costa Rica, Elizabeth, Fry Society, Plataforma NNAPES, Quaker United Nations Office, REPR, SOS Children's Villages, and BICE.

Observers and Strategic Partners: Penal Reform International and INCCIP.

Key outputs

- ✓ Completed initial steps towards the development of a *UN Handbook on Children of Incarcerated Parents*.
- ✓ Prepared for participation in the UN Crime Congress and for the conduct of a side-event. A pledge was also drafted on child rights and criminal justice. The Congress was postponed to 2021 due to the pandemic.
- ✓ Submitted information to relevant UN human rights mechanisms including oral statements in the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children.
- ✓ Published a briefing paper on international standards related to children of incarcerated parents which is available in English, French and Spanish.
- ✓ Published a briefing paper about the impact of, and recommendations on, COVID-19 and children of incarcerated parents.

Looking ahead

- Raise awareness with key actors, taking advantage of the 10-year anniversary of the DGD on Children of Incarcerated Parents of the CRC Committee.
- Publish the *UN Handbook on Children of Incarcerated Parents*.
- Support the participation of of the Working Group members in the side-event at the UN Crime Congress and in the Justice for Children Congress to be held in Mexico by the end of 2021
- Coordinate and support actions of the International Coalition for Children with Incarcerated Parents.
- Proactively incorporate impacted children and youth voices in the actions and meetings of the Working Group.

Working Group on children's rights and the environment

Composition

Conveners: Child Rights International Network and Terre des Hommes

Members: Associated Country Women of the World, CRC Asia, CRIN, Franciscans International, QUNO, HRW, Humanium, Make Mother Matter, Austrian National Coalition for the Implementation of the UN Convention, Plan International, Plan International, Save the Children International, Terre des Hommes, and World Vision International.

Observers and Strategic Partners: Children's Environmental Rights Initiative, Committee on the Rights of the Child Working Group on children's rights and the environment, Project Dryad, RtHE coalition, and UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment.

Key outputs

- ✓ Established a mandate that lays out the Working Group rationale, goals, and scope of activities.
- ✓ Issued a joint statement during the Interactive Dialogue with UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment on good practices related to the human right to a healthy environment at the 43rd session of the Human Rights Council in March.
- ✓ Functioned as a civil society contact point for the preparation of the 2020 Human Rights Council annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child on "Realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment", including participation in the intersessional event with the permanent missions of Uruguay and the EU, OHCHR and UNICEF; inputting into OHCHR report on realizing children's rights through a healthy environment; issuing a strong call for action together with partners; and contributing to drafting the resolution 45/30 on the rights of the child through a healthy environment, adopted by the Human Rights Council in October.

Looking ahead

- Build a relationship with the new Working Group of the CRC Committee on children's rights and the environment.
- Support the CRC Committee in its State review process in relation to environmental matters.
- Follow-up to the Human Rights Council resolution 45/30 on the realization of the rights of the child through a healthy environment.
- Ensure members coordinate and align their plans for child and youth related activities to COP 26.
- Support the civil society call for the Human Rights Council to pass a resolution on the recognition of the human right to a healthy environment by September 2021.

Working Group on children and violence*

Composition

Conveners: Arigatou International and World Vision International

Members: Arigatou International, Defence for Children International, DCI Costa Rica, ECPACT International, International Catholic Child Bureau, International Movement ATD Forth World, Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, Plan International, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, Women's World Summit Foundation, War Child Holland, World Vision International, and World Organization Against Torture.

Observers and Strategic Partners: Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children of the UN Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, UNICEF, and World Council of Churches.

Key outputs

- ✓ Finalised the mapping of how violence against children has been addressed in 47 countries through the concluding observations of the CRC Committee, the UPR recommendations and resolutions of the Human Rights Council during the last five years.
- ✓ Commissioned a consultant to analyse the mapping and develop a report on the main findings, gaps, challenges, and recommendations. Working Group members provided inputs to the work of the consultant. It was presented to the Working Group members in November 2020.

Looking ahead

- Develop an advocacy strategy (advocacy messages, key targets, strategies, and indicators).
- Convene meetings with the SRSV on Violence Against Children, CRC Committee, and Permanent Missions to share the findings of the above indicated report.
- Further develop the mapping of how violence against children is addressed in 20 additional countries through the concluding observations of the CRC Committee, the UPR recommendations and resolutions of the Human Rights Council.

*Please note that the former Working Group on Ending Sexual Exploitation of Children has merged with the Working Group on Children and Violence in June 2020.

WG on children without appropriate parental care

Composition

Conveners: Hope and Homes for Children and Save the Children.

Members: African Child Forum, Family for Every Child, FICE International, Global Initiative to End Corporal Punishment of Children, Hope and Homes for Children, International Council of Women, International Federation of Social Workers, International Foster Care Organisation, International Movement ATD Fourth World, International Social Service, Lumos, Plan International, Quaker United Nations Office, RELAF, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages International, Terre des Hommes, and World Vision International.

Observers and Strategic Partners: Better Care Network, Better Care Network Netherlands, the Oak Foundation, University of Strathclyde Centre for Looked after Children (CELCIS), and UNICEF.

Key outputs

The following global level outputs were delivered, together with wider coalitions:

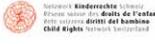
- ✔ Supported preparation for the Day of General Discussion (DGD) on child rights and alternative care of the CRC Committee (postponed to 2021 due to the pandemic), including by drafting the DGD concept note and guidelines for submissions, developing a proposal and draft guidelines for DGD Hubs, organizing meetings with CRC Committee, and setting up task forces. To ensure children and young people meaningfully voice their opinions and input into the DGD recommendations, two Advisory Teams of children and young people with lived experience of the care system were created and provided with on-going support.
- ✔ Participated in the Inter-Agency Task Team on COVID-19 and Children's Care which developed two resources: a) Technical Note on the Protection of Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Children and Alternative Care, available in 14 languages; and b) Guidance for Alternative Care Provision During COVID-19 (soon available in French and Arabic).
- ✔ Supported the establishment of a new Global Collaborative Platform on Transforming Children's Care.

Looking ahead

- Continue preparations for, and participate in, the 2021 DGD of the CRC Committee.
- Streamline activities of the Working Group with the Global Collaborative Platform on Transforming Children's Care, to share its specific expertise of engaging with Geneva-based UN human rights mechanisms, ensure more effective engagement as well as better advocacy coordination and coherence with the global movement.

Organisation

Members

	Action for Children and Youth Aotearoa (ACYA), New Zealand		Centre of Excellence in Alternative Care of Children, India		Conseil Français des Associations pour les Droits de l'Enfant (COFRADE), France
	African Child Policy Forum, Ethiopia		Child Rights Coalition Asia		Consortium for Street Children (CSC), United Kingdom
	Alliance for Children Mauritius, Mauritius		Child Rights International Network (CRIN), United Kingdom		Defence for Children International (DCI), Switzerland
	Alliance za dětská práva (Alliance for the Rights of the Child)		Child Rights Network Switzerland, Switzerland		Defence for Children International Costa Rica (DCI), Costa Rica
	Alliance of NGOs active in the field of Child and Family Social Protection (APSCF), Moldova		ChildPact, Romania		Edmund Rice International, Switzerland
	Arigatou International, Switzerland		Children Advocacy Network (CAN-Pakistan), Pakistan		EKAMA Development Foundation, Tanzania
	Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW), United Kingdom		Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE), France		Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver, Canada
	Association for Childhood Education International		Children's Parliament, Scotland, United Kingdom		Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, USA
	Baha'i International Community, USA		Children's Rights Alliance, Ireland		ECPAT International, Thailand
	Bir Dünya Çocuk Derneği (Children of One World), Turkey		Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE), United Kingdom		Eurochild, Belgium



European Association for Children in Hospital (EACH), Switzerland



IDAY



International Inner Wheel, United Kingdom



Family for Every Child



INGO "Ponimanie", Belarus



International Juvenile Justice Observatory, Belgium



Fédération Internationale des Communautés Educatives (FICE), Austria



Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, Netherlands



International Movement "ATD Fourth World", France



Franciscans International, Switzerland



International Association of Youth and Family Judges and Magistrates (IAYFJM/AIMJF), Switzerland



International Play Association, United Kingdom



Friends International Suisse, Switzerland



International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN/GIFA), Switzerland



International School Psychology Association (ISPA)



Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) (QUNO), Switzerland



International Catholic Child Bureau (BICE), Switzerland



International Social Service (ISS), Switzerland



Halley Movement



International Child Rights Center (InCRC), Korea



Kinderrechtencoalitie Vlaanderen (Coalition of children's rights NGOs in Flanders), Belgium



Hope and Homes for Children, United Kingdom



International Council of Women (ICW/CIF), France



Korea Council of Children's Organizations (KOCCO)



Human Rights Watch, USA



International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), Switzerland



Lumos, United Kingdom



Humanium, Switzerland



International Foster Care Organization, Ireland (IFCO), Ireland



Make Mothers Matter, France



Marista Solidarity International Foundation (FMSI), Switzerland



Red Latinoamericana de Acogimiento (RELAF), Argentina



The Learning for Well-being Foundation



National Coalition for the Implementation of the UN-Convention on the Rights of the Child in Austria



Red Latinoamericana y Caribeña por la defensa de los derechos de los niños, niñas, y adolescentes (REDLAMYC), Mexico



The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society



National Coalition Germany, Germany



Relais Enfants Parents Romands (REPR), Switzerland



The Rights of the Child NGO (ROC)



Niñas, Niños, Adolescentes con Padres Encarcelados (NNAPES), Uruguay



Roshni Homes Trust, Pakistan



Together Scotland, United Kingdom



Our Children Opatija, Croatia



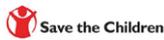
Rural Women Development Initiative (RUWODI), Tanzania



Voces Ciudadanas (ACEPT), Peru



Plan International, United Kingdom



Save the Children Sweden



WAO Afrique, Togo



Plataforma de Organizaciones de Infancia, Spain



Save the People (SAPI), Switzerland



War Child Holland, Netherlands



Plateforme CDE Maroc



SOS Children's Villages International, Switzerland / Austria



Women's World Summit Foundation (WWSF), Switzerland



Proyecto Solidario, Spain



Tanzania Child Rights Forum, Tanzania



World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS), United Kingdom



Railway Children, East Africa office, United Kingdom



Terre des Hommes International Federation, Switzerland



World Organisation Against Torture/ SOS Torture (OMCT), Switzerland



World Vision International, USA

Executive Committee and staff

Executive Committee

From June 2020

Maria Herczog

Family Child Youth Association (Eurochild), President of the Executive Committee

Sigurd Johns

Save the Children International, Vice-President of the Executive Committee

Alan Kikuchi-White

SOS Children's Villages International, Treasurer of the Executive Committee

Catherine Mbengue

African Child Policy Forum, Secretary of the Executive Committee

Chris Derksen-Hiebert

World Vision International

Maria Amihan Abueva

Child Rights Coalition Asia

Rut Feuk

Plan International Sweden

Until June 2020

Théophane Nikyèma

formerly of the African Child Policy Forum, former Vice-President

Rozanne Chorlton

Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights), former Secretary

Caroline Ford

Consortium for Street Children

Delia Pop

Hope and Homes for Children

Dorothy Rozga

formerly of ECPAT International

Smiljana Frick

Child Rights Information Centre

Stephen Langton

Independent co-opted member

Consultants

Annabel Trapp

Esther Garcia

Jennifer Lynn Conway (web and publications design)

Prof. Laura Lundy and Michelle Templeton

Queens University Belfast

Shazeera Ahmad Zawawi

Staff



Alex Conte

Executive Director



Ilaria Paolazzi

Deputy Director



Fanny Cachat van der Haert,

Programme Manager



Emma Grindulis

Programme Officer



Agnès Gràcia Corberó

Programme Officer



Olivia Solari Yrigoyen

Legal Officer



Fanny Chappuis

CRC Reporting and Programme Support



Leire Ibáñez Larrea

Network Assistant

Interns and volunteers

Amy Jones

Anežka Trizuljaková

Catherina Funck

Celia Limpo

Cynthia Maria De Meuron

Emanuela Abe

Florence Muller

Gizmane Ahmed

José Cornejo Cárcamo

Margad-Erdene Olzbaatar

Mathilde Hot

Maty Diawara

Mike Winther Hansen

Paulina Rachwalak

Ursula Gutierrez Trapaga

Victor Lisandro Elias

Finances

Balance sheet as at 31 December 2020 and 2019

Assets	2020 CHF	2019 CHF
Cash and cash equivalents	204,564	256,123
Accrued income	7,958	40,000
Prepaid expenses	3,248	3,248
Current assets	304,509	299,371
Operational Contingency Fund	50,000	-
Cash deposit (visa card)	5,002	5,002
IT equipment	4,864	9,252
Fixed assets	59,866	14,254
Total assets	364,375	313,625

Liabilities	2020 CHF	2019 CHF
Accounts payable	7,985	25,662
Accrued liabilities	88,445	36,711
Income received in advance	180,013	117,486
Current liabilities	276,444	179,859
Restricted funds on ongoing projects	22,121	-
Non-current liabilities	22,121	-
Restricted capital	37,130	37,130
Restricted capital - Operational Contingency Fund	50,000	-
Free capital	-21,320	96,636
Capital of the organisation	65,810	133,766
Total liabilities and capital	364,375	313,625

Income and operating expenses

Income	2020 CHF	2019 CHF
Membership fees	106,317	103,549
Grant/donations from members	93,929	11,134
Grant/donations from governments	577,894	702,826
Grant/donations from foundations	132,768	150,000
Grant/donations from other organisations	51,614	24,011
Other income	3,078	465
Total income	965,600	991,985

Breakdown of 2020 income

	2020 CHF	%
SIDA	427,894	44%
Switzerland	150,000	16%
Oak Foundation	132,768	14%
Member fees	106,317	11%
Plan International	73,446	7.6%
UN Environmental Programme	43,614	4.5%
SOS Children's Villages	10,914	1.1%
Save the Children Sweden	9,569	1.0%
Convention against Torture Initiative	8,000	0.8%
Other income	3,078	0.3%

Operating expenses by cost centre

	2020 CHF	2019 CHF
Personnel costs	712,066	666,806
Salaries and social charges	694,129	646,005
Other staff expenses	17,937	20,801
Operating costs	147,300	186,572
Office costs	51,074	62,754
Professional services	92,861	104,086
Governance and network management	0	18,327
Bank fees	3,365	1,405
Activity costs	117,829	114,944
Consultants	101,425	40,177
Venue and catering	274	10,591
Travel	14,364	61,774
Miscellaneous	1,766	2,402
Total costs	977,195	968,322



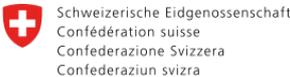
Our donors and supporters

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our donors, partners and supporters. Your contributions enable us to support children’s rights defenders around the globe to engage with each other and the UN human rights system, and to take important steps towards the universal realisation of children’s rights.

Donors



Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency



Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs



United Nations Environment Programme



Oak Foundation



Plan International Sweden



Save the Children Sweden



SOS Children’s Villages International



Convention against Torture Initiative

Supporters and Pro Bono partners



Castelli Italy



Looking ahead

What's on in 2021?

At the time of writing this report, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the lives and work of all individuals and organisations, including ours. We have however adapted our working methods to continue to deliver our mandate towards realizing children's rights, as well as, to some extent, the nature of our work to respond to the specific challenges to child rights posed by this pandemic.

Further follow-up to the 2018 DGD and Implementation Guide on the rights of Child Human Rights Defenders (CHRDs): using the Guide at all levels to realize the rights of CHRDs

We will focus on developing the child-friendly version of the *Implementation Guide on CHRDs' rights* as well as rolling out aspects of the *Implementation Guide*, including through the establishment of an online toolkit for CHRDs and those supporting them, development of complementary guidance to the Guide starting with the theme of permissible restrictions to CHRDs' civil and political rights, and piloting activities at the national and regional level with network members and strategic partners such as UNEP. We will also undertake advocacy and provide technical support around the application of the Guide by the CRC Committee and Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. We will continue to provide technical assistance to network members in the review of national law and policy affecting the rights of CHRDs and/or child participation and/or the right to be heard, as well as in strengthening their child participation and safeguarding standards and practices.



Further enhancing child participation in the activities of the CRC Committee and other UN mechanisms

Accompanying *My Pocket Guide to CRC Reporting*, an updated version of *Together with Children* will be published in 2021 to guide adults in their efforts to empower children engaging in reporting to the CRC Committee. Building on the lessons learned from the 2018 DGD, and particularly through our Working Group on children without parental care, we will provide technical guidance and support to the CRC Committee on working methods and child participation for the 2021 DGD focused on children in alternative care, along

with mobilizing network members and children engagement. Efforts will also concentrate on increasing empowering, safe and sustained child participation at the 2021 annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child of the Human Rights Council. Using *The UPR and Me Guide*, and jointly with UPR Info, we will support our network members and other children's rights defenders to facilitate child participation through and within the UPR and increase child rights focussed UPR submissions. We will continue providing capacity-building and technical assistance to children's rights defenders around the world to enhance their coordinated, long-term engagement with the CRC Committee with a focus on further increasing child-led participation in the activities of the CRC Committee, building links with the UPR, and supporting those in countries where civil society participation has been weak (particularly as a follow-up to the extraordinary 84th session of the CRC Committee in Samoa).

Mainstreaming of a child rights approach across the UN

We will boost our advocacy for the development of a UN strategy on children's rights, to ensure that the child rights approach is systematically applied and that spaces for children to engage are secured and effective across all the UN pillars (including, for instance, around the UN climate change inter-governmental process). We will initiate and act as catalyst for a multi-stakeholder dialogue between UN entities, States, civil society and children around the gaps, needs and way forward related to a UN system wide approach to child rights. We will continue to stir a child-rights approach in the work of UN mechanisms by creating synergies between the CRC Committee and other Treaty Bodies, the Human Rights Council, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the youth agenda, to enhance accountability to children.

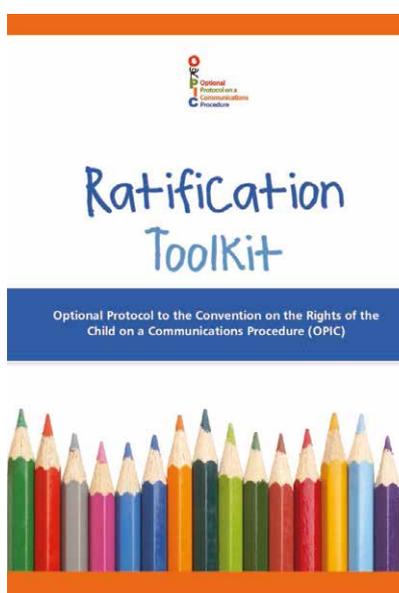
Enhancing the links between child rights and the implementation of the SDGs

Having entered in 2020 the decade of action to deliver the SDGs, 2021 will offer many opportunities to advocate for the application of the child rights approach in the implementation of the 2030 agenda. We will contribute to the organisation of the annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child of the Human Rights Council, which will be dedicated to the rights of the child and the SDGs. We will seek to ensure that children's views are included and that concrete commitments are made by States. We will also create synergies with

the High-Level Political Forum on the SDGs and the child rights processes of the UN General Assembly. Further, we will engage in the development, by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, of a General Comment on sustainable development, including through mobilizing children engagement and pressing for the consideration of their rights. In 2020, with our members we had capitalized on the fact that the UN General Assembly and the Human rights Council were biennialising the annual resolutions on the rights of the child to encourage States to use this opportunity to strengthen synergies between the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council in relation to child rights. As a result of this advocacy, the 2021 Human Rights Council annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child will focus on child rights and the SDGs with the aim to inform the resolution that will be later adopted by the General Assembly on this topic. We will continue to use the process of biennialisation to ensure synergies and strengthen the impact on the ground of the work of the General Assembly and Human Rights Council.

Further promoting the ratification and use of OPIC to ensure children's access to justice

We will pursue our OPIC ratification campaign with a focus on supporting the advocacy led by our regional network members, with a focus on Africa and Asia, including through the *OPIC Ratification Toolkit* published in 2020. An emphasis will also be placed on further disseminating the Toolkit with members and partners along with developing child-friendly versions of our OPIC resources. Capacity-building efforts will concentrate on raising the awareness of OPIC for public officials including child policy authorities in Latin America, as well as equipping children's rights defenders, representatives of National Human Rights Institutions and children's Ombudspersons, and lawyers with the necessary knowledge and know-how to strategically use the OPIC to provide remedies for children victims of human rights violations (particularly in Latin America and in the State of Palestine).





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**To support our work,
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