

A QUICK INTRO TO THE NEW GUIDE:

THE RIGHTS OF CHILD HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS: IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

WHO ARE CHILD HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS (CHRDS)?

According to the United Nations, all children taking any kind of action to promote and protect human rights, including children's rights, are defenders, even if they or others use another terminology (i.e. actors of change, child advocates/activists, agents of transformation, etc.).

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO RECOGNISE CHRDS?

Because there is an on-going resistance to the idea that 1) children have rights, in particular civil and political rights, 2) children have the capacity to understand and claim human rights, and 3) children can and should be able to speak up on human rights abuses.

Adults and children must realise that children have human rights as defenders, as provided by the UN Declaration on human rights defenders. Children must be aware of the mechanisms at the national, regional and international level that can help them. Adults (together with children) must ensure these mechanisms are accessible to children and strengthen/create the systems where needed.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT FOR CHRDS?

CHRDS not only have the same rights as adult defenders, but the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child expands some of these rights taking into account children's distinctive social context. Children experience specific and additional challenges and violations when acting as human rights defenders because of their status in society, lack of political power, lack of voting rights and dependence on parents/guardians. Some children may face even more barriers based on their gender, ability, ethnicity, culture or because where they live.



IS IT ABOUT THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD?

Yes, but not only. CHRDS exercise a wide range of human rights, including civil and political rights (e.g. freedom of peaceful assembly and association). However, children's rights to be heard is one of the key specific rights that CHRDS exercise in the context of decision-making on matters that affect them. The Declaration on human rights defenders recognises that a child's engagement in public life is a "matter affecting the child". This helps to clarify that States have a human rights obligation to respect and support CHRDS and take them seriously on issues that are of public interest and may not look like child rights specific issues (e.g. environment, civil society space).

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

Respecting and supporting children as human rights defenders does not mean just calling them a human rights defender; it means that States need to take distinctive and additional actions that recognise the specific rights and status of CHRDS in society. It is crucial to build awareness and legal understanding of what it means to be a CHRDS and how their rights must be respected, protected and fulfilled at the national level through the coordinated implementation of the UNCRC and the UN Declaration on human rights defenders.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

The Guide “The rights of Child Human Rights Defenders: Implementation Guide” provides detailed guidance on what is distinctive about CHRDs and how to support them. Use the Guide to learn more about what you can do to strengthen the protection and empowerment of CHRDs and disseminate it among all relevant stakeholders who can play a role. There are many ways in which you and others can use the Guide, and these are few key examples of what different actors could do in practice.

AS A STATE REPRESENTATIVE

You can use the Guide’s recommendations to improve a wide range of national and local laws and policies, not only those that specifically focus on human rights defenders or children, but also those that relate to human rights of all and where children are often forgotten (e.g. laws on peaceful assembly and association). You can also use the language in the Guide to develop stronger international tools, such as resolutions of the Human Rights Council which require technical language.

AS A UN MECHANISM

You can use the Guide as a basis to call for the recognition of the important role of CHRDs and the specific attention that children are due because of their distinctive status. The Guide will assist you in developing stronger recommendations to States, including on issues that are often overlooked by both child-specific and general human rights mechanisms, such as civil and political rights.

AS A CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION

You can use the Guide to strengthen the legal and rights-based arguments for advocacy on many issues, such as child participation, parental rights, civil and political rights, education. You can also understand why and how the rights and specificities of CHRDs should be mainstreamed within advocacy and frameworks related to human rights defenders in general.

AS A CHILD

You can use the Guide to better understand your rights as a CHRD, although its child friendly version currently under development will be more accessible to children. You can use the Guide to raise awareness on your actions and rights as CHRDs among authorities who are in charge of making sure that your rights are realised (government, schools, etc.) and should use the Guide to do it well.