

Public consultation by the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism

Child Rights Connect submission

*Putting child rights at the center of all UN actions through a UN-wide child rights
strategy*

August 2022

About Child Rights Connect

Child Rights Connect is an independent, non-profit organization founded in 1983 as the Ad Hoc Group for the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Once the Convention was adopted, the network became the key strategic partner, with UNICEF, of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Child Rights Connect is now one of the largest international child rights networks. Through its 100 member organizations, it has a worldwide reach with members from all regions reaching millions of children in around 185 countries. Through Child Rights Connect, children's rights defenders, including children, can speak with one global voice in front of the international community and have a stronger influence on political decisions.

Summary of the submission

Child Rights Connect is calling on the United Nations (UN) to come up with a new plan to ensure the coherent and systematic application of a child rights approach by all UN entities. There is no comprehensive guidance on child rights for UN entities and this has concrete consequences: children being left out of programmes, decision-making, discussions and being subsumed under the terms "young people"/"youth". The UN must renew its social contract with children based on a more holistic approach to child rights and a more progressive vision of children as partners to be empowered and included on equal footing. A UN-wide child rights strategy co-developed with children would be a unique opportunity to come up with a renewed partnership that can translate into a more empowering and direct collaboration at national, regional and international level.

Recommendations to the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism

What are the areas of global concern where governance improvements are most needed?

While the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the most ratified human rights treaty, this near universal set of commitments has not yet translated into transformative change for children as rights holders. To the contrary, it is increasingly challenged by States on the basis of traditional values, patriarchal societal norms, lack of resources, competing agendas, as well as anti-human rights ideologies. Despite international standards and resolutions, many States increasingly question the very basic facts that children hold human rights, in particular civil and political rights, and that a child rights approach must be applied systematically across all sectors.

The COVID 19 pandemic has exacerbated the existing backlash against child rights, and violations of all children’s rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural– have exponentially increased everywhere in the past year. The Secretary General has alerted that “*children risk being the biggest victims and the impact of the pandemic on them risks being catastrophic and amongst the most lasting consequences for societies as a whole*”.¹ The CRC Committee has warned that years of progress in the implementation of the UNCRC are at risk of being lost and even reversed.² Indeed, the pandemic has taken the focus away from certain child rights even further, creating additional challenges to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. For example, civil and political rights, which have been historically overlooked, have been further deprioritized and often restricted due to the extreme pressure on the provision of basic services. UNICEF has stressed that State responses to COVID 19 should be integrated and multi-sectoral, grounded on the fact that rights are indivisible, interconnected and interdependent.³

More than ever, it is urgent to undertake the necessary governance improvements to ensure the holistic implementation of the UNCRC and child rights mainstreaming.

What governance improvements could be achieved? How could the international community seek more equity, fairness, and effectiveness in multilateral decision-making?

At the UN level, children remain the only group who have a specific human rights treaty without a dedicated UN strategy to ensure policy coherence within the system. This undermines the SG’s call, in *Our Common Agenda*, for a renewed social contract that is “*anchored in a comprehensive approach to human rights*”.

Children amount to over a quarter of the world population, but they constitute half of the world’s poorest,⁴ of which an estimated 356 million live in extreme poverty.⁵ These are only some of the figures that can give a sense of why policy coherence within the UN is needed now more than ever, at a time where decades of progress in implementing the UNCRC and its Optional Protocols have been undermined by measures taken under the COVID 19 pandemic and where an unprecedented pushback against child rights is being faced, compounded by decreased attention and commitments by States.

In order for the international community to seek more equity, fairness, and effectiveness in multilateral decision-making, Child Rights Connect suggests a clear governance improvement: a UN-wide child rights strategy.

A UN-wide approach to child rights is crucial to reinforce the UN’s capacity to support member States’ action at the national level. UN entities must be better equipped to show by example and provide technical assistance and recommendations that will promote the holistic implementation of the UNCRC and its Optional Protocols.

¹ https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/160420_Covid_Children_Policy_Brief.pdf

² Statement of the CRC Chair at the 2020 UNGA:

https://estatements.unmeetings.org/estatements/11.0030/20201012/TckzGJgecVh2/rlyQdztjqMu5_en.pdf

³ COVID-19 and the impact on children’s rights: the imperative for a human rights-based approach, UNICEF Programme Division, Human Rights Unit, April 2020.

⁴ <https://www.undp.org/press-releases/half-worlds-poor-are-children>.

⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/social-policy/child-poverty>.

During the 2020 High Level Panel on Child Rights Mainstreaming of the Human Rights Council,⁶ the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child noted that it was crucial to reflect on how a comprehensive approach to child rights could help to strengthen the coherence of the UN's work. It stressed that the mainstreaming of children's rights requires a comprehensive approach from micro to macro level, as well as a more comprehensive understanding of children's wellbeing.⁷ However, this high-level discussion is yet to deliver on concrete actions.

A UN strategy on child rights is the best way to ensure child rights mainstreaming through the proactive and systematic application of a child rights approach by the UN. The advantages of having a comprehensive UN strategy on child rights are many, including:

- Children will become more aware of their rights and the UN;
- they will be more empowered to engage and contribute to the UN's work, including with innovative ideas;
- the UN entities will become more effective in supporting and influencing States to advance the implementation of the UNCRC and international standards;
- more expertise and resources will be mobilized for child rights, including for UN Resident Coordinator and UN Country Teams;
- it will create an enabling environment for child participation in the UN which will benefit the enabling environment for civil society participation more generally, because child rights require higher standards in terms of empowerment and protection.

More information on the importance of child rights mainstreaming can be found in the Child Rights Connect [Position paper "Mainstreaming child rights: a call for a UN-wide strategy on child rights in response to Our Common Agenda"](#) and in our dedicated [website](#).

⁶ <https://www.childrightsconnect.org/the-human-rights-council-celebrates-the-30th-anniversary-of-the-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child-with-a-high-level-panel-on-childrens-rights-mainstreaming-within-the-un/>.

⁷ Statement of Benyam Mezmur at the High Level Panel on Child Rights Mainstreaming <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25605&LangID=E>.