



**CHILD
RIGHTS
CONNECT**

ANNUAL
REPORT
2023



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1

03 INTRODUCTION

- 03 Forewords from our Child Advisors
- 04 Words from the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders
- 05 About us
- 08 Meet with our global Children's Advisory Team

2

09 PROGRAMMES

- 10 Celebrating 40 years of commitment to children's rights in a world in turmoil
- 12 Three key achievements in 2023
- 17 Additional programme highlights
- 20 2023 in numbers

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CONTENTS

3

21 WORKING GROUPS

4

27 ORGANISATION

27 Our Network

27 Our Executive Committee

27 Our staff, interns, consultants and volunteers

5

28 FINANCES

28 Balance Sheet

29 Operating Expenses

30 Our donors and supporters

6

31 LOOKING AHEAD

31 What's on in 2024?

INTRO

Forewords from our Child Advisors

Child participation is part of our DNA. What we do, how we do it and why we do it is driven by a [permanent, global Children's Advisory Team \(CAT\)](#). The team is made up of children who are acting as human rights defenders from the local to the global scale. This is what several of our child advisors said about their involvement in the CAT in 2023:

Being a Child Advisor has been a source of empowerment for me in various ways. It's the first time I've felt actively involved in making a positive impact on the world, and what makes it even more special is the child-friendly approach we take. Recognizing myself as a defender of children's rights fills me with pride. The Children's Advisory Team (CAT) provides a safe and welcoming space where I can learn, share experiences, be myself, and contribute productively. Meeting inspiring children from around the world and working with exceptional coordinators like Imen, Ana, and Agnes has been incredibly enriching. Speaking at conferences and being recognized as a valuable speaker for the first time is a clear sign of the inclusive and supportive environment created by Child Rights Connect. This experience motivates me to continue making a positive impact both on an international and national level."

Anghelina, 17, Moldova

[Through] becoming member of the global CAT of Child Rights Connect after, I was so lucky to represent Nepal and Nepalese children. I can fight for children, especially Nepalese children's problems, at the international level. I got the opportunity to be involved in many important documents like General Comment 26 [of the CRC Committee], [the OHCHR report on] inclusive social protection, [...] children's vision for human rights. Through all these documents I have told the situation of Nepalese children and was able to give suggestions and advice. I am aware about the future of the world through General Comment 26; that earth is more important for children. So, I have, and I will plant more trees on my own land and public property".

Arjun, 15, Nepal

Being a Child Advisor has been an incredible journey, and I feel immensely proud and fulfilled as Hala, representing Palestinian children. Achieving my dream of driving the voices of Palestinian children has been a source of great joy and motivation. It's heartening to see the positive impact we've had in advocating for their rights and ensuring their perspectives are recognized."

Hala, 16, Palestine

Being a child advisor for me has been a great experience! Being able to meet new people from all around the world and collaborate with other child rights defenders was so enriching and inspiring. Furthermore, the opportunities that have arisen through the CAT mandate were great to take action, in addition to also having the chance to evolve as a child rights activist and make connections with even more people."

Catarina, 17, Brazil

I love being a child advisor; especially the fact that I am able to make a difference in the world just by participating in activities and speaking out. [...] being part of CAT has changed my life. I've made new friends. I have learned a lot and gained a lot of experience. I have really enjoyed being part of CAT it has been one of the best experiences of my life. I hope to continue being a member of CAT so that I'll be able to learn more and gain more experience and I want to say thank you to all CAT members for the support and I hope they will continue transforming the lives of children all over the world."

Doris, 15, Zambia

DUCTION

Words from the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Extract from her speech at our Expert Conference, *Changing the narrative: promoting positive change with children around 40 years of civil society advocacy in Geneva*, held on 26 May 2023.



I want to congratulate Child Rights Connect on your 40th anniversary. Your commitment to advancing the rights of children and making sure that their voices are heard in the discussions and deliberations affecting them is truly admirable and I have learned so much from you. I'm particularly grateful for your work on children as human rights defenders which generated awareness about the rights of children and young people to advance and advocate for human rights issues. I appreciated the guidance and support to the mandate. I am especially delighted to know that so many children are participating in our discussion today and would like to welcome you and ensure you that I am always ready to advocate on your behalf with governments, the UN system, and other stakeholders. [...]

In my last report to the Human Rights Council, I wanted to highlight the successes of human rights defenders in the past 25 years since the declaration [on human rights defenders] was adopted. As we were collecting inputs into the report it became clear that many of these successes have been achieved by children who are human rights defenders over the years. Children and young human rights defenders have been working tirelessly over a broad range of issues, often at great personal risk improving themselves as drivers of change. For instance, in Bangladesh the national children's task force, an organisation run by children, reported that working with the local district commissioner, it has prevented 13 child marriages, notwithstanding the fact that its members often work at great risk including receiving death threats. I've also heard from children in Moldova who work on issues ranging from bullying in schools and demanding a stronger environmental protection. I welcome that children are now increasingly involved in drafting legislation that impacts, including initiatives on laws to protect human rights defenders. [...]

These are very encouraging developments but during my discussions with children who are human rights defenders I also heard about the difficulties and barriers that they

are facing. [...] Young human rights defenders in many instances are not able to access support mechanisms that are available to other groups of human rights defenders. This sometimes led to self-censorship and scaling back or altogether stopping their human rights advocacy work. Children who are human rights defenders face many of the same violations as all human rights defenders, but this is being compounded by specific barriers, risks and reprisals, due to their status in society, including age based and gender-based discrimination, paternalistic attitudes, dependency on parents, being seen only as passive objects of protection rather than having agency, stigmatization, lack of access to child friendly information and complaint mechanisms and support mechanisms.

Additionally, the consequences of these violations may be way more severe for children than for adult human rights defenders. As I stressed in my report to the Human Rights Council and would like to reiterate here as well, I think it is crucially important that governments explicitly recognize children who are working peacefully for the rights of others as human rights defenders and promote the rights of children to be defenders. States should address negative attitudes towards children who are human rights defenders and build the capacity of State actors to engage meaningfully with children. I am disheartened that even 25 years after its adoption, there continues to be a lack of recognition that the Declaration on human rights defenders also applies to children. I would like to reiterate that children have rights in their individual capacity, including civil and political rights. [...] Dr. Seuss said that adults are obsolete children so, as an old obsolete child myself, I would like to end my intervention with another quote from him: "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."

So please continue to care, continue to raise your voices for human rights, and we will do our best to listen, and to bring your voices to those in power. Children who are human rights defenders will be one of my priorities over the next three years.

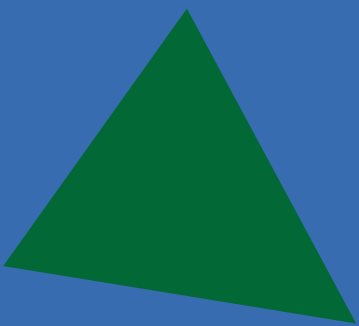


About us

Child Rights Connect is a non-governmental organisation founded in 1983 and now operates as the largest global network of child rights organisations. With 108 [member and observer organisations](#), it spans all regions, reaching millions of children in more than 190 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 us, civil society actors, 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 UNCRC and its Optional Protocols.



What added value do we bring?



Without CRCnct's presence, the global civil society's advocacy and influence on children's rights and child rights mainstreaming would be hampered."

External evaluators of our work, 2022

- We are an expert organisation on, and strategic partner of, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee), empowering civil society actors, including children, from around the world for more than 40 years.

- We are the largest global child rights network and platform for joint civil society advocacy at the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, as well as with the broader UN human rights system.
- We are the leading organisation bringing global attention to safe, empowering, inclusive and sustained child participation and the rights, empowerment and protection of child human rights defenders (CHRDs).
- 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 to the UNCRC on a Communications Procedure (OPIC).

Further strengthening our Network

Our members and observers are national, regional and international organisations, coalitions and networks 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 2023, our global engagement was enhanced with the admission to our network of **twelve new member organisations from all continents:**

- [Avenir Enfance](#) (Togo).
- [Environment Africa](#) (Zambia).
- Centre de Paix Junneuf (Democratic Republic of Congo).
- [The Organisation des Jeunes pour le Monde d'Avenir](#) (Democratic Republic of Congo).
- [SAVE CONGO](#) (Democratic Republic of Congo).
- [The Uganda National Medical Alliance for Prisoners](#).
- [Children's Rights Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand](#).
- "Hope For Children" CRC Policy Center.
- [The International Society for Social Pediatrics and Child Health](#) (Switzerland).
- [The Right to Education Initiative](#) (UK).

- [The Asociación Civil por los Derechos de Niños, Niñas, Adolescentes y Jóvenes Doncel](#) (Argentina).
- [The Arab Network for Child Rights \(Manara Network\)](#) (Lebanon).

With 75% of new member organisations based in the Global South, they bring greater geographical diversity to our Network, an actively pursued organisational priority.

On top of their geographic expertise, these new members bring thematic expertise on innovative or under-represented topics within the Network such as children and nutrition, children's rights and assisted reproductive technologies, children and livelihoods, and children's rights and artificial intelligence.

Our Network
has reached the
milestone of
108
organisations!

The permanent Children’s Advisory Team: a driving force for our organisation and for children’s empowerment worldwide

Building on successful experience since 2020, our permanent [Children’s Advisory Team](#) (CAT) continued to operate throughout the year as a **global team of empowered child human rights defenders, central to advancing our efforts on children’s empowerment globally**. In 2023, it was composed of 12 children, aged between 12 to 17 years old, from various countries on all continents.

Throughout the year, our child advisors shaped and carried out human rights actions, defining their own roadmap for action and contributing to ours, in line with our [Strategy](#). **Our CAT is behind many achievements in 2023**. Child advisors have channeled other children’s voices, championed children’s rights, and raised the profile of child human rights defenders in the work of several UN bodies and representatives.

They were the key vehicle through which children from across the globe were enabled to share their views with the **UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights** on their next strategic plan (a new practice), on their biennial report on children’s rights (focused, in 2023, on [inclusive social protection](#)), as well as in the context of the year-long initiative around the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Children’s views (including those from our child advisors captured in the report “[Children’s Vision for Human Rights](#)”) have influenced the key priorities to be pursued by the High Commissioner while implementing his human rights vision for the future, which include “meaningful decision making by youth and children”. Our CAT also contributed to driving the focus of the **UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders** on the protection and empowerment of CHRDs, and provided her with data to feed her analysis and recommendations to States.

On the front of **environmental action** too, our CAT pushed boundaries. As part of a [wider child participation process](#), our team contributed to the process of developing the far-reaching new [General Comment of the CRC Committee on children’s rights and the environment](#), and are acting for its implementation. Also, for the first time, they have participated in the activities of the [Aarhus Convention](#) on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.



The CAT has opened up doors for me to act globally, such as through the projects we have done contributing with the General Comment 26 or working through the UDHR75 and locally.”

A child advisor

Our CAT was also at the forefront of our [40th anniversary conference](#) in May 2023 where they’ve engaged, as panelists and moderators, around 200 actors from around the world (other children, child rights experts and practitioners, and UN representatives) on how to tackle the main obstacles faced by the child rights movement. **The CAT received the « ChangeMakers » prize from our member World Vision International, for their significant contribution to advancing children’s rights worldwide.**

In 2023 we further entrenched the CAT’s participation in how our organisation is run. Implementing a recommendation from the [2022 external evaluation of our work](#), we have started to pilot the participation of child advisors in the activities of our [Working Group on children and the right to education](#). Our CAT has helped develop a document on the functioning of the Working Groups, which indicates how children can contribute to the activities of the Working Groups. The CAT also shared feedback on the 2024 draft annual work plan for 2024 of the Working Group. CAT representatives’ participation in the meetings of the Executive Committee, and the intergenerational dialogue that this has triggered, have also brought more internal responsiveness and accountability to children.



I feel humbled that, as the Executive Director of Child Rights Connect, I get to report to children. This comes with some practical challenges, but it is so uplifting to have those we work for directly inform our work and how our organisation is and should be run. In fact, this should be the norm!”

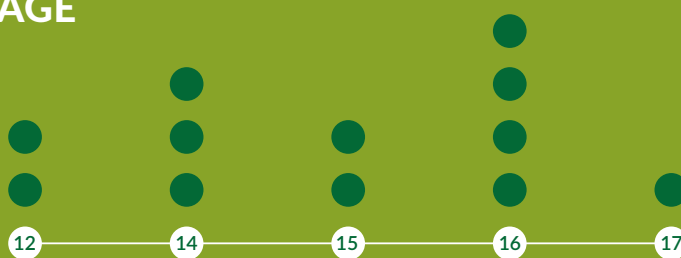
MEET OUR 2023 CHILDREN'S ADVISORY TEAM

12 Children empowered as human rights defenders to shape and take forward activities on child rights, in line with our 2020-2024 strategic plan.

**8 GIRLS
4 BOYS**

Each supported by one of our members/partners

AGE



WHERE THE CHILD ADVISORS ARE FROM

- all regions of the world

With members from Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Croatia, Iceland, Mexico, Moldova, Nepal, Palestine, Tunisia, Venezuela and Zambia.



What child advisors say about their participation in the CAT

Being a child advisor for me has been a great experience! Being able to meet new people from all around the world and collaborate with other child rights defenders was so enriching and inspiring.

Furthermore, the opportunities that have arisen through the CAT mandate were great to take action, in addition to also having the chance to evolve as a child rights activist and make connections with even more people."

Catarina, 16 years old, Brazil

I feel very lucky to be a member of the CAT of Child Rights Connect. I was working for children and child rights at national level through national child advocate council in Nepal but when I was selected as member of the CAT then I [became] able to represent Nepalese - actually Asia continent - children to the world and United Nations. I have got the opportunity to [contribute] to important documents like General Comment (GC) 26 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. I am aware about the future of the world through GC26 [...] so I have and I would like to plant more trees on my own land and public property".

Arjun, 14 years old, Nepal



PROOC

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, including their rights as child human rights defenders. This is 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 advancing 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 and other civil society actors to meaningfully participate in global advocacy for children’s rights at different levels.

How change happens: our Theory of Change

WORKING METHODS



Awareness-raising
Capacity-building
Knowledge-sharing
Technical assistance



Publications
Strategic advice
Support to litigation



Advocacy Communications
Networking, mobilization
and outreach

KEY OUTPUTS

Children’s rights defenders, including children, engage with the CRC and other UN mechanisms

Synergies emerge between the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other UN mechanisms

Child human rights defenders operate in a more enabling environment

Children’s rights defenders engage in advocacy on children’s rights, including towards ratification of the Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure

Children’s rights defenders use the Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure to address violations of children’s human rights

Key partnerships at national, regional and international levels are formed, strengthened and maintained

A strong and effective global Child Rights Connect Network

A well-functioning Secretariat supports Child Rights Connect’s mission

OUTCOMES



Empowered children’s rights defenders, including children



Strengthened human rights mechanisms and standards for children



Influenced political actions affecting children’s lives

IMPACT



Civil society and children effectively influence the actions of States, the UN and other duty-bearers resulting in children enjoying their rights



The United Nations system takes action and influences the actions of duty-bearers to respect, fulfil and promote child rights



States take action, and influence the actions of other duty-bearers, to respect, fulfil and promote child rights

Every child in the world enjoys her/his human rights, and duty-bearers are accountable to children

GRAMMES

Celebrating 40 years of commitment to children's rights in a world in turmoil



Our members, partners and child advisors celebrating our 40 years of existence in May 2023!

A reflection from our Executive Director



The world is in turmoil. Inequalities are rising. The triple planetary crisis - climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss - undermines life and the future of all beings in unprecedented and lasting ways. War, extremism and repression are waging on all continents. The political debate is increasingly polarized, and universalism is questioned ever more. Human rights are attacked, everywhere, through various tactics: harsh laws preventing the financing and functioning of civil society organisations (CSOs), reprisals against human rights defenders (HRDs), including children, budget cuts to the UN human rights system, and fake news campaigns on social media, among others.

Who bears the biggest brunt of these intertwined crises?

Who faces greater adversity? Children, undoubtedly. Because of their status in society. Because they are both the present of our societies and their future. As part of the [year-long celebrations of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (for which we supported the UN Human Rights Office), [almost 4,000 children from around the world](#) explained that the main human rights challenges they experience are universal and connected, and compounded by the above-mentioned crises, including discrimination and exclusion, denied safe and meaningful participation, violations of their right to education, lack of protection from violence, and violations of their right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. That said, **who fiercely stands up to address these pressing challenges?** Children, again! Because they act as human

rights defenders. They are audacious and want to grow up in and leave behind a better world. Children are bold when they speak their minds. They are unapologetic in wanting to transform challenges into solutions through energy, commitment, and action. And they make a difference.

Yet their potential is relatively untapped. Harnessing the strength and potential of children, their defenders, and the child rights movement in bringing lasting change calls for **a more articulated and strategic common response** to the pushback against rights and to interlinked crises. **And this takes adequate, sustained resourcing, among other key ingredients.**

We celebrated three important anniversaries in 2023: 75 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 25 years of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and 40 years of Child Rights Connect. An occasion to rejoice for the tremendous achievements of children and the child rights movement, to take stock of the main obstacles facing the movement, and to strategise for the future. ***Ironically, these celebrations have coincided, for us, with a mid-year financial crisis of such magnitude that the survival of our organisation was at stake.*** In a context of inflation, charitable giving decreased in 2023. While reaching a peak in 2022, development aid has been largely diverted to financial and humanitarian aid to Ukraine and support to refugees in donor countries, at the cost of efforts to advance sustainable development. Competition

for funding has severely increased. Several “mainstream” donors have de-prioritized funding for children’s rights. Global philanthropies and foundations have increasingly turned their back on “mainstream” children’s rights. The support that remains is often framed around issues such as education, health, and sanitation, or tied to very specific issues on trend, at the expense of a progressive vision of children as rights-holders and human rights defenders.

As a global, Geneva-based advocacy network with limited capacity, we have been struggling to adapt to other fast-changing trends affecting the funding landscape: the rise of digital fundraising and use of artificial intelligence technologies; the increased localization of funding, which is a welcome step in strengthening local civil society but inadequate for global action to support and amplify local advocacy, and vice-versa; and increased levels of earmarked funds, which are fundamentally mismatched to the needs of a network such as ours. In overcoming this existential financial crisis, we were very lucky to be able to count on the unwavering financial, technical, and moral support from our membership, close partners, and key donors. Members’ words of solidarity showed the continued relevance of Child Rights Connect in bringing together civil society worldwide to elevate the child rights agenda and foster a safe space dedicated to children’s rights internationally: “Child Rights Connect

[plays] a critical role in creating civic space for child rights realisation.” “Without [Child Rights Connect], the global effort to realise child rights will be much weakened.”

In their report “[Manufacturing moral panic: Weaponizing children to undermine gender justice and human rights](#)”, the Elevate Children Funders Group and the Global Philanthropy Project analyse how the anti-rights agenda, undermining the work of children, their defenders and the child rights movement in profound ways, has thrived thanks to massive and “cross-issue, world-building, long-term funding”. They call for a strong response by “progressive funders” who should “invest in sustained cultural shifts through long-term, unrestricted funding, as well as more immediate strategic communication campaigns for narrative change”.

Certainly, part of the answer is to be found in changing not only the narrative around children’s rights, but also the narrator, as pointed out by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights at our 40th anniversary conference. **With children, and through building more cross-sectoral support, we can win both the narrative and funding battle** so that years of progress in implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are not reversed but are instead expanded.

Alex Conte, Executive Director

Reflections from Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, on changing the narrative on children’s rights

The following is an extract from the High Commissioner’s Keynote Address at the Expert Conference, *Changing the narrative: promoting positive change with children around 40 years of civil society advocacy in Geneva*, held on 26 May 2023 around our 40th anniversary.

My warm thanks to Child Rights Connect for the invitation to speak today.

Congratulations on your 40 years of commitment to child rights – my Office is very grateful for our past and continuing collaborations. I am delighted to see many children here in the room and online today. For me, this shows the real progress we are making in ensuring children’s voices are heard in the conversations that matter. Let’s do everything we can to make sure direct discussions like this continue.

Dear friends, this conference is about changing the narrative on children’s rights. If we want to change the narrative, we need to change the narrator. This means children telling their own stories. Children enjoying their rights and envisioning a better future. The quest for rights and freedoms for all children is not the responsibility of children alone. We all need to accompany them on this

journey. Policy makers and people in power need to listen, actively, and they must act, urgently.

The last decades have brought many transformational shifts in child rights. The adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child – the most ratified international law convention in history – marked a crucial turning point. Since the Convention came into force, hundreds of millions of children have gained improved access to healthcare and education. They can more freely participate in discussions that affect their lives and their futures. This progress has been rapid, but it has not been universal. The rights enshrined in the Convention are far from the reality for every child. We know that children themselves are worried about the many challenges the world is facing – wars, climate change, poverty and the lingering impacts of COVID-19, including on education.

Friends, around the globe, children have been, and continue to be, powerful champions for change. They are leading the global fight on climate change. They are calling for action against racism, or violence against women and girls. They are demanding the rights of all people to love who they choose, no matter their gender. Their voices are not just contributing to policy, they are shaping it.

Yet in many countries, children continue to be excluded from decisions that have an impact on their lives. Human rights law, particularly the Child Rights Convention, says that children must enjoy the right freely to express their views. But many child rights defenders face serious consequences when they try to do so. Their opinions may be disregarded or dismissed. Some face punishments, threats, violence, disappearances, and even execution.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has said that countries must ensure child human rights defenders have access to child-friendly complaint mechanisms, so they can tell people when there are problems. However, many countries do not have these mechanisms in place. And children face issues accessing police assistance, courts and other forms of justice often because not many lawyers are specialised in children's rights. To achieve a world where the rights of child human rights defenders are truly respected, we must prioritise their protection. States need to play a crucial role, ensuring child rights defenders are safe and empowered.

Friends, the UN Guidance Note on Child Rights Mainstreaming is being finalised and agreed to across UN agencies. This marks a significant milestone for the United Nations, and will help all parts of the UN to systematically prioritise child rights in their policies, strategies and approaches. A shared UN child rights agenda means keeping to our promise of upholding 'all rights for all people,' to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and, ultimately, to strengthening our accountability to children.

I thank Child Rights Connect and your members for your powerful advocacy which was instrumental to this decision and process. This Guidance Note is just one step in a bigger process which will require wide, collective, and concrete action to implement its recommendations. To add to these efforts, my Office is also preparing a report on strengthening child rights mainstreaming, to be presented to the Human Rights Council early next year. [...]

Friends, we all know that children represent our future. But they also represent our here and now. Their rights matter – today. Children make up 30 percent of humanity. Ensuring each child has the best possible start in life and the opportunity to develop their potential is one of the best ways to secure human rights, social change and progress for all of society.

To the children who challenge injustice, fight for the rights of others, raise their voices for those who cannot, and who hold governments to account – thank you for everything you do. We celebrate you today.

Three key achievements in 2023

1

We further elevated the voice and rights of CHRDs in making a change across the globe, including influencing law reform in Moldova!

Looking around us, the evidence is unequivocal: children act as human rights defenders, and more and more of them do so. Children do so because they are gravely concerned about societal and global challenges, from gender equality, sexual and reproductive health, attacks on minorities, to the environment, poverty, and conflict. Children have lost faith in adults' ability to act with sufficient determination, action and speed to make a change. But, as they act as human rights defenders (HRDs), children face specific barriers, risks, and reprisals. This is "due to their status in society, including age-based and gender-based discrimination, paternalistic attitudes towards children [...], lack of

access to child-friendly information and to complaint mechanisms and effective remedies" (State joint statement at the Human Rights Council, March 2023).

At Child Rights Connect, child participation and the safe and sustained empowerment of child human rights defenders (CHRDs) is our key priority. We act globally, regionally, and nationally to empower CHRDs' safe and sustainable engagement as human rights defenders; and to create a more enabling environment for them through engaging and supporting States, intergovernmental organisations, and civil society to meet their responsibilities and duties vis a vis CHRDs.

In 2023 again, we have had key successes in working with children, and the impact this has at all three levels: global, regional, and national.

At the national level, we pursued the implementation of our two country projects in [Bulgaria](#) and in [Moldova](#) with our local members/partners.

- In **Bulgaria**, together with the New Bulgarian University – [Know How Centre for Alternative Care for Children](#) and the [National Network for Children](#), we focused on mobilizing, empowering, and supporting the CHRDs most deprived of their rights and at risk of family separation, including children with experience of the care system, Roma girls, children in foster care, and children living in poverty. Children who had never been exposed to human rights developed an understanding that children are rights-holders and that they can act as HRDs. They started implementing their new-found or improved confidence, knowledge, and skills by shaping and undertaking human rights action. They raised awareness about children's rights in forums, briefed their peers and younger children about their rights, and talked to parents to convince them not to retain girls at home and brought Roma girls back to school. And this has had a multiplier effect. The project connected individual aspiring/actual CHRDs together, and with supporting organisations, including at regional and international levels, feeding the emergence of a network of children and adults for child activism in Bulgaria. The engagement of national authorities led to a greater inclination to advance the issue of CHRDs in the country. *"The girls feel more powerful and enthusiastic. They feel like "I can" do now more"*, civil society partner organisation in Bulgaria.
- In **Moldova**, in partnership with our member the [Child Rights Information Centre \(CRIC\)](#), we supported CHRDs gain the necessary space and means to advance their rights as HRDs and influence relevant law-making processes. And we were successful in doing so! A new team of ten CHRDs aged between 13 and 17 years old (six girls, including from Ukraine, and two gender diverse children) was established and operated throughout the year. They developed their knowledge and skills on safe, empowering and sustained action as CHRDs through a series of capacity-building workshops. A 16-year-old boy reported to the CRIC team: *"I learned to ask questions, to understand the situation better, to be more analytical. I feel comfortable here."* They were also able to voice their views and rights as CHRDs before national and international [audiences](#). The team of CHRDs also gained knowledge of the stages of the lawmaking process in Moldova and how children can participate in it. They engaged State officials (including parliamentarians and representatives from

the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection), CSO representatives and representatives of international organisations in a roundtable discussion to jointly identify entry points for the participation of children in two legislative processes, including the law on children's rights. In parallel, CRIC advocated for the inclusion of CHRDs' rights in the revision of the law (through a working group coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection). As a result of more than three years of engagement raising the awareness on CHRDs in Moldova, the new law on children's rights, which entered into force in December 2023,¹ includes a specific provision on CHRDs, calling on State authorities to protect and empower CHRDs. **This is the first time that CHRDs are specifically mentioned in national legislation**, a major development which will improve the situation of CHRDs of Moldova and could inspire other countries in the world!

At the regional level

- We worked to foster greater recognition of CHRDs. We conducted the first ever [baseline study](#) across Member States of the Council of Europe on national challenges and responses regarding the recognition, protection and empowerment of CHRDs, in consultation with children and Member States. The report provides concrete recommendations to support Member States to better respond to the rights of CHRDs, including regarding access to quality human rights education and resources, awareness raising and capacity building of children and adults.

At the global level

- Here too, we elevated the voices and agenda of CHRDs. As an immediate impact of our 40th anniversary conference, CHRDs were for the first time asked to contribute to the work of the [Aarhus Convention](#) on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, through participating in two meetings. Their call for more child-friendly information on the environment was heard. The [outcome report](#) of one of these meetings encourages States parties, among other things, to develop a child-friendly version of the Aarhus Convention.
- We were also a driving force in convincing the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders to give more priority to the issue of CHRDs in her work. Her 2023 report to the Human Rights Council, presented in March, included explicit recommendations on CHRDs. In June 2023, she co-convoked with the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs a conference dedicated to child and young HRDs in Vienna. Among the 40 young HRDs who participated, nine were CHRDs, including our 16-year-old girl child advisor from Cameroon. We empowered

CHRDs to share the challenges they face in their activities and the forms of support they need when acting as defenders. Following this, and for the first time since the establishment of her mandate, the Special Rapporteur decided to **dedicate an upcoming thematic report to the role and work of child and young HRDs and the risks they face** (to be presented at the Human Rights Council in March 2024). We supported CSOs and children from around the world to prepare input to this report which will include targeted recommendations to States and others on how to better recognize, protect, and empower CHRDs.

- We continued to urge and assist the CRC Committee to expand space for and advance standards on CHRDs. The Committee adopted

strong recommendations on CHRDs to four States (Albania, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, and Togo). “*Children are paying the ultimate price for standing up for their rights and the rights of others. We cannot leave it to them: it is our job to ensure that children’s rights are not further eroded, and we need more than ever to be rights-based.*”, said Ann Skelton, Chair of the CRC Committee, at our 40th anniversary conference.

- We also drove the States’ attention to CHRDs. Following our advocacy and technical assistance, 60 States co-sponsored the **first-ever State statement focused on CHRDs** (led by Luxemburg) during the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of HRDs at the Human Rights Council session in March 2023.

¹https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=140710&lang=ro

2

We’re behind an historic step at the UN and greater momentum for implementing a child rights approach



Congratulations to the team with all the achievements under challenging circumstances. I feel so inspired by all the work on child right mainstreaming.”

A member of our Network from Africa at the May 2023 General Assembly.

Across the globe, children bear the brunt of multiple crises, violations of children’s rights are on the rise, and civil society actors, including children, face increasing challenges when defending rights. Too often, children’s rights remain confined to sector-specific, thematic, and welfare-oriented interventions. Too often, children continue to be put into the box of ‘vulnerable groups’ with not enough attention given to their capacities and empowerment. Too often, children are subsumed to “youth”. Too often, children are denied their right to be heard and participate in public affairs. More than ever, children’s rights need to be considered at all levels, from local to global, and across sectors for real progress to happen. This is called **child rights mainstreaming**.

We have long pushed the UN to take this issue seriously because the UN is uniquely placed to advise States on how to improve their law, policies, and practices impacting on children’s lives. Based on our prompting, the UN Secretary-General decided to develop, in 2021, a [Guidance Note on Child Rights Mainstreaming](#) (the Guidance Note) to guide the entire UN system on how

to systematically integrate children’s rights in all aspects of the organisation’s work. We have been involved all along the development process of the Guidance Note, facilitating the participation of more than 450 children aged 7-17 and 300 civil society actors worldwide in the elaboration of this document. With our members, we also influenced the content of the Guidance Note, including through a joint submission. Amongst other things, this resulted in the inclusion of strong language on child participation.

The adoption of the Guidance Note in July 2023 marks an **historic step** in advancing a child rights approach across the UN. All levels of the UN, across all three pillars (development, human rights, and peace and security), at Headquarters, and in regional and field contexts, now have specific guidance on how to integrate children’s rights within management, operations, and programmes. Through joint advocacy with members, and assistance to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), we leveraged the role of the Human Rights Council in implementing the Guidance Note. **And this is just the beginning.**

Beyond the Guidance Note, we’ve teamed up with children, mobilised widely, and engaged in a large civil society coalition to influence the 2024 [Summit of the Future](#), with a single goal: to make sure that children are not forgotten. Called for by the UN Secretary-

General, the Summit of the Future will be a “once-in-a-generation opportunity” for world leaders to make important decisions on how to address common challenges, through the Pact for the Future. These decisions will have a lasting impact on children’s rights and future generations. *“Children should be recognized and involved as key actors in the Summit of the Future. [...] Children deserve special attention and a space at the table, as important partners and stakeholders today [...], also as the most significant future decision makers [...]”* Statement of the CRC Committee on Human Rights Day 2023.

In 2022, we had succeeded in influencing the outcome report of the [High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism](#), which calls for a UN-wide approach to children’s rights. Together with our [Children’s Advisory Team](#) and members and in coordination with the [#CovidUnder19 initiative](#), we’ve since created room for and empowered children to influence civil society perspectives which will feed discussions at the Summit of the Future. Miriam, our former child advisor from Lebanon, presented an intergenerational research paper in the Global Futures Forum in March, convened by a large civil society coalition. Children’s contributions influenced the Forum outcomes, consolidated in the [Interim People’s Pact for the Future](#), especially as children are included as a cross-cutting consideration in the report. We’ve also teamed up with members and partners to advocate for children’s rights and voices, such as through a [joint submission](#) to inform the development of the zero draft of the Pact for the Future and [a joint submission](#) to feed discussions for a Global Digital Compact. And we will continue to press for the inclusion of children in the lead up to the Summit.

In Geneva too, we acted. During our 40th anniversary conference in May, the High Commissioner for Human Rights called or “putting children’s voices at the centre”, committing his Office to better incorporate the views

of children in their work. **We’ve helped his office translate this vision into reality.** With our technical assistance, the OHCHR for the first time directly consulted children in their strategic planning process. The survey, which reached about 4,000 children across the world was also used among other tools to elevate the voice and views of children as part of the year-long celebrations around 75 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (“[Human rights 75 initiative](#)”). Our Children’s Advisory Team was critical in empowering children from around the world to participate, advising the OHCHR on child participation, and directly sharing their views, including during a high-level event in Geneva in December. **The impact goes beyond 2023:** in his [human rights vision for the future](#) issued in early 2024, which will feed into discussions at the Summit of the Future, the High Commissioner lists “meaningful and equitable engagement of children in all their diversity in decisions concerning them” as one of his eight priorities.

We’ve also successfully advocated for the OHCHR to consult with children to inform their biennial thematic report on children’s rights (this year focused on inclusive social protection) and produce a child-friendly version (as called for by the 2022 Human Rights Council resolution on the rights of the child). We assisted the OHCHR roll out a safe and meaningful child participation process and produce a [child-friendly version](#) of their report on social inclusive protection, setting up a clear precedent for the reports to come. Between January and March, just over 600 children from 24 different countries across various regions engaged in consultations on this topic.



The most important thing is that the opinions of children and adolescents who participated in this report were added, hoping that everything will become a reality.”

A 14-year-old child from Mexico.



© Child Rights Connect / Ruhya Patel
Our child advisors with young participants at our 40th anniversary conference in May 2023



© Child Rights Connect / Lindah Muthee
The afternoon plenary session at our 40th anniversary conference in May 2023

3

We've helped children make history at the Human Rights Council and influenced recommendations on children's rights in the digital environment

This is no secret. For decades, children have been excluded from discussions and decision-making at the Human Rights Council, the main intergovernmental body within the UN responsible for advancing and protecting human rights, even when discussions concerned them. Yet, experience has shown that facilitating open, regular, and safe child participation in UN processes not only empowers children in advocating for their rights but also yields tangible positive outcomes at the national level. That is why institutionalizing child participation in UN processes has been one of our key priorities.

Our restless efforts with members and partners have contributed to reversing the trend of children's exclusion from the yearly celebration and discussion on children's rights during the March session of the Human Rights Council, the Annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child (ADRC). For more than a decade, children were excluded from these discussions. In 2019, a girl living with disabilities from Moldova was able to speak on the panel. This marked a turning point. This practice was further extended in the following years with increased opportunities for child participation.

In 2023, the ADRC and the UN General Assembly Resolution on the Rights of the Child, the theme of which was the digital environment, as well as preparations for the [Global Digital Compact](#), were key opportunities for our Network to drive awareness and reinforce global political commitment to the implementation of children's rights in this area (as set out in the UNCRRC its General comment No. 25 on children's rights in the digital environment). Ahead of the ADRC, we established a dedicated Taskforce with members to influence both the process of the ADRC – for safe and meaningful child participation – and its outcome, the General Assembly resolution on the same topic, as well as the Global Digital Compact.

We strongly voiced children's call to have a say during the ADRC, advocating with civil society and States. As a result of these efforts, **the 2023 ADRC had the highest number of child participants in the history of this event contributing to the discussions in different ways**. Overall, 13 children, mostly girls, participated in the event in person! By bringing children to the table, on an equal footing with adults, we contributed to ensuring that discussions on children's digital rights reflect children's views and lived experiences.

Children stood at the centre of the morning dialogue, making up, for the first time in the history of the Human Rights Council, the majority of the panel. Remarkably, following the practice of several NGOs, States like Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Romania, the Netherlands, Uruguay, and Slovenia gave their speaking slots to a child representative from their respective countries.



Child Rights Connect did such a great work at connecting the different organizations and bringing them into this space."

Abril from Argentina, 17

Beyond the process, we also influenced the content. We developed a [joint position paper](#) to inform the discussions of the ADRC and delivered a [joint NGO statement](#). We used the ADRC to influence high-level New York processes such as the above-mentioned UN General Assembly resolution on the rights of the child as well as the [Global Digital Compact](#). In parallel of the ADRC, jointly with other organisations, we hosted a side-event at the UN on "The Digital Future we want" during which the public was encouraged to reflect on children's recommendations on how they can be agents of change and child human rights defenders, and to commit to improve the digital environment for children. **Children were at the core of event, as panellists, moderators and undertaking advocacy on the sidelines of the event, exemplifying the shift toward more child co-led advocacy.**

Inputs from the ADRC, influenced by children, were used to shape the UN General Assembly Resolution on the rights of the child. Adopted by consensus, and echoing several of our joint key recommendations, the resolution notes that States parties to the UNCRRC should implement the Convention in relation to the digital environment, including the importance of privacy to children's agency, dignity and safety, and for the exercise of their rights. It marks a strong political endorsement of the requirements set out in the [General comment 25 to the UNCRRC](#). This creates **political space for progress and provides civil society and children with a strong advocacy tool to press for the realization of children's rights in the digital environment in a safe and empowering way.**

A YEAR IN REVIEW 2023

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS



ENABLING CHILDREN TO SHAPE NEW INTERNATIONAL GUIDANCE ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

We've helped children shape (by supporting our member Terre des Hommes Germany), and we've advised the development of, the powerful new General Comment of the CRC Committee on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change (GC26).

+16,000

contributions from children from 121 countries informing the development of GC26!



A remarkable progress from the previous General Comment process in 2021 where 700 children from 26 countries had been consulted.

12

child advisors advising the process & engaging children at all steps

The GC26 Children's Advisory Team we've helped Terre des Hommes Germany establish and run was made up of 12 child experts aged 10-17 from different regions and backgrounds. **A key milestone of a broader child participation process** to shape GC26.

Check out: <https://childrightsenvironment.org>

We've also helped children



- Launch a **social media campaign** to raise awareness around GC26.
- **Co-design and co-lead the launch** of GC26: an event at the UN and a tree planting ceremony in Geneva .
- **Co-develop the child-friendly version** of GC26 and disseminate it among their peers.

Voice of a GC26 child advisor

Children were at the centre. Even when reading the General Comment, you see there are so many references to children – their words are in there. I think this shows how central children are, and how central child participation was in this process."

Joint submission influencing GC26

Through our Working Group on children's rights and the environment and with others, we made strong recommendations to the Committee on the structure & content of GC26.

A groundbreaking General Comment

- **First official recognition** of children's right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment by the CRC Committee.
- **Children's views** must be considered in environmental decision-making and environmental education is critical for children to act (as CHRDs).
- States are responsible for protecting children's rights from immediate harm, **and for foreseeable violation**.
- States accountable **within and outside their borders**.
- Potential to influence other areas of international law.



What experts say about the General Comment

"A vital step forward"

UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment

"There is no doubt that [...] it will be deployed as an advocacy tool at the national and international levels. It [...] will certainly have an impact in [pushing forward children's enjoyment of their rights in the context of environmental harm]",

Prof. Aoife Nolan, University of Nottingham

"A long-awaited momentum toward securing a better future for our planet and its youngest inhabitants",


Agnes Gràcia, CRCnct

Read our impact story here: <https://childrightsconnect.org/our-impact/>

ENABLING CIVIL SOCIETY TO IMPROVE ACCOUNTABILITY TO CHILDREN THROUGH THE CRC COMMITTEE

We've empowered civil society, including children, to engage in reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee) for impactful recommendations to States.

296



Children's rights defenders, including **76 children**, from various countries around the world empowered to report to the Committee and engage in its pre-sessions. Among them, there were **188 women and girls**.

93%

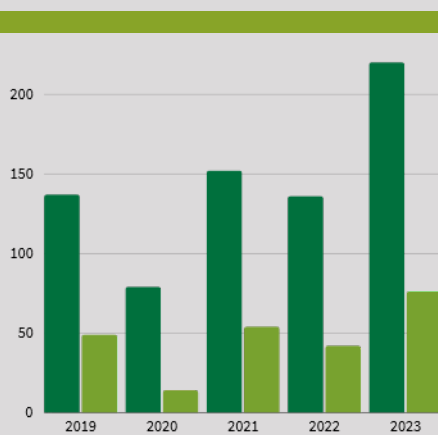
CSOs & children empowered to act

All the civil society actors surveyed reported that our technical assistance had been useful to prepare for the pre-session and/or children's meeting with the Committee, with **93% indicating it was "extremely useful"**.

A unique role

There is **no other global network** that assembles child rights-focused civil society actors, including children, and connects them to the human rights mechanisms in Geneva the way CRCnct does"

2022 External evaluation of our work



of children's rights defenders supported

2023 marks the highest # of **adults and children** supported since 2018 (92 actors had been supported then).

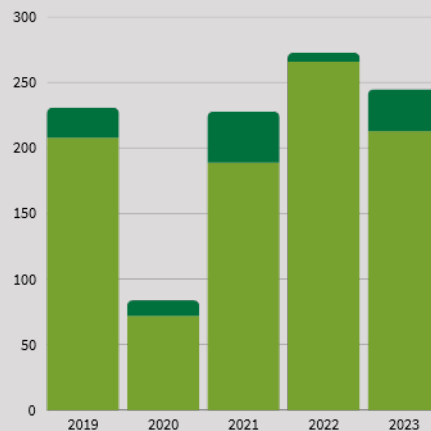
Child participation fostered, including in the implementation of CRC recommendations to States



BULGARIA: Children supported to influence strong CRC recommendations, including on CHRDs. An empowering experience for "children to see that even in an international context, their actions have led to [...] political change as a result of advocacy" (local partner).

ICELAND: First case study on children's engagement in the national implementation of the CRC recommendations by the State, with the Ministry of Education and Children.

ASIA-PACIFIC: 130 defenders, incl. 40 children, inspired on how to engage children in follow up to UN/CRC Committee recommendations, through an online workshop with Save the Children and CRC Asia (members).



Non-State CRC submissions

2023 counted with 213 **non-State submissions** to the Committee, incl. **32 reports informed or made by children**. This is the 2nd highest level of reporting since 2019, but lower than in 2022.

Read our impact story here: <https://childrightsconnect.org/our-impact/>

2023 IN NUMBERS

CHILD HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS (CHRDS)

- +500** CHRDs, other civil society representatives, other non-State actors, UN officials and State officials sensitised about the distinctive status, role and rights of CHRDs.
- 81%** of CHRDs trained in Bulgaria and Moldova feel more aware of ways they can engage as a defender in their country following our support.
- +60** States co-sponsored the first-ever State statement dedicated to CHRDs at the Human Rights Council.
- 1** domestic law influenced (in Moldova), with explicit recognition and protection for CHRDs.

PUBLICATIONS & COMMUNICATIONS

- 6** new multilingual resources developed to help children engage with the UN (5 tools) and adults to support children to engage with the UN (1 tool).
- +/-44K** new users of our websites in total.
- 8%** increase in the number of followers of our Facebook page compared to 2022 and 6% increase in the number of X followers.

CRC REPORTING

- 213** civil society submissions in respect to the 39 countries which pre-session or session were held during the year.
- 32** civil society reports led or informed by children.
- 296** civil society actors, including 76 children (of whom 49 were girls) empowered to report to the CRC Committee.

NETWORK

- 108** members and observers.
- 64%** of our Network organisations operate in the Global South.
- +100** individuals from the Network and CAT participated in our 40th anniversary conference.
- 108** MemberNews and email blasts issued to Network organisations in support of their work.

3

Working group on child participation

Composition

Convener: Child Rights Information Centre Moldova

Members and affiliates: Alana, APSCF Moldova, BICE, Child Friendly Governance Child Rights Coalition Asia, Defence for Children International Costa Rica, Doncel, Edmund Rice, Eurochild, Family for Every Child International, EKAMA Development Foundation Tanzania, Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver Canada, Fondation Apprentis d’Auteuil International, Halley Movement, Heirs to Our Oceans, Humanium, International Child Rights Centre (in CRC) Korea, ISI, Kindernothilfe Germany, Learning 4 Wellbeing Foundation, Lumos, Plan International, Plataforma de Organizaciones de Infancia Spain, Save the Children International, SOS Children’s Villages International, Terre des Hommes International Federation, World Vision International; CRIN, Foundation for Innovative Social Development, FOST, Pratyek, and Red de infancia de El Salvador RIA.

Strategic partners: Queen’s University Belfast

Key outputs

- Under the “Human Rights 75 initiative”, the Working Group supported a side event on mainstreaming child rights approaches and children’s participation in national and global policy agendas, with child advisors participating as co-moderators and panellists.
- The Working Group developed a concept note to support advocacy for children’s rights and civic space as the theme of the 2026 Annual day on the rights of the child of the Human Rights Council.
- In collaboration with the OHCHR and Save the Children international, the Working Group co-convened an expert workshop to inform OHCHR report on child rights mainstreaming (which will be presented at the 55th session of the Human Rights Council in early 2024).

Looking ahead

- Continue following up to the UN Secretary-General Guidance Note on child rights mainstreaming, with a focus on child participation as part of strengthening a child rights approach throughout the UN system, including by supporting the organisation of a global conference on children’s participation in global policy processes and events by international institutions and organisations.
- Building on the results of activities, pursue the advocacy for stronger recognition of children’s civil and political rights, including the right to participate in public decision making.

WORKING GROUPS

Working group on children and armed conflict

Composition

Convener: Defence for Children International (DCI)

Members and affiliates: World Vision International, War Child Alliance, Save the Children International, Reprieve, CRIN, Terre des hommes Federation, Concern Worldwide, Child Rights Connect, Plan International, Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, GCPEA, Geneva Call.

Strategic partners: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for children and armed conflict (SRSG CAAC) and the Permanent Representation of Belgium and Uruguay to the United Nations as coordinators of the Group of Friends CAAC, Committee on the Rights of the Child, Watchlist for Children and Armed Conflict.

Key outputs

- Defence for Children International (DCI) delivered a [joint statement](#) at the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council on behalf of Child Rights Connect, Human Rights Watch, Save the Children and the NGO Panel on Children Deprived of Liberty. It called on all UN Member States with nationals detained in northeast Syria for alleged association with the Islamic State to repatriate their nationals as a matter of urgency, giving priority to children, their mothers, and the most vulnerable, and to recognize that children who are detained for actual or perceived association with armed groups are first and foremost victims of grave abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law.

- The Working Group convened a meeting with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG CAAC) in March 2023 to share outcomes from 2022 activities and to coordinate projects in 2023. A similar meeting was held in August 2023 with the EU Office of the SRSG CAAC.
- The Working Group convener, DCI, and other members of the Working Group attended the annual meeting of the Group of Friends with the SRSG CAAC and other related events.
- Relations with the new representatives of Uruguay and Belgium as part of the Group of Friends on CAAC were reactivated.

Looking ahead

- Promote increased participation of children and youth in inter-governmental discussions on CAAC-related matters.
- Include children in the work of the Working Group, working with the Children's Advisory Team.
- Foster robust relationships with key entities like the SRSG CAAC, CRC Committee, and Group of Friends on CAAC to organise collaborative advocacy initiatives and events.
- Actively engage with relevant UN human rights mechanisms, in particular the CRC Committee and as part of the Universal Periodic Review, to advocate for CAAC issues and strengthen the coordination between New York and Geneva-based UN bodies.

Working group on children's rights and the environment

Composition

Conveners: CRC Asia and Save the Children

Members and affiliates: Alana Institute, CRC Cambodia, Child Rights International Network (CRIN), DKA Austria, Environment Africa, Global Action Plan, Franciscans International, Heirs to Our Oceans, Humanium, Make Mothers Matter, One Ocean Hub, Plan International, Plataforma de Infancia, Quaker UN Office (QUNO), Soka Gakkai International, Terre des Hommes, World Council of Churches (WCC), World Vision International (WVI), Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL), Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International

Strategic partners: CRC Committee members, OHCHR (CRC – Human Rights Treaty Branch), and Child Environmental Rights Initiative (CERI)

Key outputs

- Submitted a joint comment to the CRC Committee General comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change (GC26) in February 2023.
- Developed and delivered a statement at the meeting of the Working Group of the Parties of the Aarhus Convention in June 2023 and supported child participation to raise awareness and promote GC26.
- Developed advocacy messages around GC26.
- Launched GC26 through a side event around the 54th session of the Human Rights Council with the support of Morocco and participation of Costa Rica, CRC Committee, UNICEF, OHCHR Development, Economic, and Social Rights Branch and three CHRDs from Germany, Peru, and Sierra Leone.

- Coordinated and facilitated the participation of a young girl to promote GC26 at the meeting of Aarhus Convention Task Force on Access to Information, where the person delivered three statements under different agenda items in November 2023.

Looking ahead

With GC26 as roadmap of the Working Group, its primary responsibility is to make the GC26 known and to support its implementation at national level by governments, its integration in the work and advocacy of CSOs, and in relevant international processes (i.e. multilateral environmental agreement (MEA) negotiations, human rights monitoring instruments, discussions on the SDGs and other policy frameworks related to children's right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment). The objectives of the Working Group for 2024 are:

1. Raise awareness and advocate for the GC26 and the children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment at national, regional and global levels (through webinars, events, campaigns, etc.).
2. Support the implementation of GC26 at national level and increase accountability of State Parties (capacity strengthening, reporting, etc.).
3. Support the mainstreaming of GC26 in the workplans and processes of relevant stakeholders, including NGOs, UN agencies, and MEAs discussions.

The Working Group is currently holding dialogues with the CRC Committee Working Group on child rights and the environment to establish collaboration and to ensure that the work of the Working Group supports the work of the Committee to maximise impact.

Working group on children of incarcerated parents

Composition

Conveners: Plataforma NNAPES, International Coalition for Children with Incarcerated Parents (INCCIP)

Members and affiliates: Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE), Defence for Children International, DCI Costa Rica, Elizabeth Fry Society, Plataforma NNAPES, Quaker United Nations Office, Relais Enfants Parents Romands (REPR), Penal Reform International, SOS Children's Village International, International Catholic Child Bureau (BICE), INCCIP and TUNMAPS Ugandan Medical Alliance

Key outputs

- The Working Group continued to meet quarterly.
- The Working Group further developed and circulated the concept note for a UNODC Handbook on Children with Incarcerated Parents. Though covering the whole spectrum of children with incarcerated parents, this would contribute to the series of toolkits published to support the UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty, specifically Chapter 10 on children living in prison with their parent.
- The Working Group supported Penal Reform International to include, for the first time, information about parental imprisonment and the impact of incarceration on families in their annual publication, [Global Prison Trends](#), in 2023.
- Individual members of the Working Group have been working actively on topics that support the aims of the group, such as hosting international conferences and events; collating information on relevant legal decisions internationally; and addressing international gatherings such as the International Corrections & Prisons Association and the new Global Prison Nursery Network to promote the rights of children of an incarcerated parent.

- Individual members of the Working Group have also been learning from each other and collaborating with each other on shared issues, such as sport events organised throughout Europe and South America to build connections between children and their parents in prison and discussions with judges in Europe regarding the sentencing of parents.
- The Working Group continues to support [DCI's Roadmap for Action](#) on the implementation of the findings of the UN Global Study of Children Deprived of Liberty.
- The Working Group has reached out to other Working Groups – on education and on violence against children – to collaborate on shared agendas where possible.

Looking ahead

- Gather necessary support for the Concept Note to work on the UNODC Handbook.
- Consolidate the relationship with the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee).
- Mobilise Working Group members and other national NGOs through Child Rights Connect to submit information to UN human rights mechanisms (CRC Committee, Human Rights Council, Special procedures, UPR, etc.) on the human rights of children with parents in prison.
- Continue to support the implementation of the 2023-2024 [DCI's Roadmap for Action](#) regarding the chapter on children with incarcerated parents.
- Produce a briefing about children of incarcerated parents at the global level and/or influence reports and data collection efforts undertaken by other actors.
- Collaborate more effectively across Working Groups to improve progress on shared goals.

Working group on children and the right to education (established in May 2023)

Composition

Convener: Human Rights Watch

Members and affiliates: African Child Policy Forum, Alana Institute, ATD Fourth World, Avaaz, Centre de Paix Junneuf, Education International, Equal Education Law Centre, GI-ESCR, Global Campaign for Education, Initiative for Social and Economic Rights, Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, International Council of Women, ISPA, Make Mothers Matter, Malala Fund, Right to Education Initiative, Sesame Workshop, Plan International, World Vision

Strategic partners: Jonathan Todres, Mathias Urban, Klaus D. Beiter, OHCHR, UNESCO

Key outputs

- The new Working Group was launched in August. It comprises three subgroups, one of which focuses on strengthening the right to education in international law. This subgroup advocates for a new optional protocol to the UNCRC which would explicitly recognize all children's right to early childhood education, including at least one year of free pre-primary education, and free secondary education for all children. Another subgroup, led by the Rights to Education Initiative, focuses on monitoring the right to education. The other subgroup focuses on mainstreaming public education.
- The subgroup on strengthening the right to education developed joint advocacy letters addressed to Bulgaria, Brazil, and Thailand to secure their support to join the cross-regional group leading the initiative on developing a new Optional Protocol to the UNCRC.
- In December, the subgroup supported Luxembourg, together with Bulgaria and Armenia, in organising a briefing for Council of Europe Member States on "Strengthening the Right to Free Education: From Pre-Primary to Secondary".
- The subgroup developed a document for children explaining the initiative and the proposal for the new Optional Protocol.

Looking ahead

1. Subgroup on strengthening the right to education

- Conduct advocacy meetings with Permanent Missions in Geneva, and capital-based ministries of education, foreign affairs, and social affairs, to promote the strengthening of the right to education initiative at the national, regional, and global levels.
- Organise side events during the 55th and 56th sessions of the Human Rights Council.
- Support Sierra Leone and the Gambia to convene the Africa group to brief them on the initiative.
- Work with Kazakhstan to hold a briefing on the initiative for the Asia-Pacific region.
- Write an open letter from researchers and academics working in education and child development to highlight the growing body of knowledge about the importance of free quality education at all levels for the healthy development of children and the importance of international law making it free from pre-primary through secondary.
- Work with the Children's Advisory Team to develop a call to all governments, urging support for new international law. Produce a video featuring child advisors to promote the letter on social media.
- Work with the core group of States to develop the draft text of the Human Rights Council resolution for the 56th session of the Human Rights Council. The resolution will establish a Working Group to start drafting the new Optional Protocol.
- Prepare a joint NGO letter in support of the Human Rights Council resolution on an Optional Protocol.

2. Subgroup on monitoring the right to education

- Conduct a capacity building session to provide relevant education experts with the tools and guidance for monitoring the right to education and inform them about the existing reporting mechanisms and upcoming opportunities.
- Hold a second capacity building session to strengthen experts' capacity on how to involve children and youth in monitoring the right to education.

Working group on children and violence

Composition

Conveners: Arigatou International and World Vision International

Members and affiliates: Arigatou International, ATD Forth World, BICE, DCI, DCI Costa Rica, ECPAT International, Plataforma de Infanzia, Plan International, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes International, WWSF, War Child Holland, World Council of Churches, World Vision International, and World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT).

Strategic partners: UNICEF, the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, and the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children

Key outputs

- The Working Group met quarterly and focused primarily on the booklet on effective measures to prioritize eradication of violence against children (VAC).
- Based on its [advocacy strategy](#), the Working Group focused on three main activities in 2023:
 1. A meeting with 10 Permanent Missions was held in February to discuss best practices on ending VAC and how best to strengthen the human rights mechanisms in Geneva to prioritize and address VAC. Speakers included the Chairperson of the CRC Committee, the Ambassador of Sierra Leone, as well as representatives of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) on VAC.
 2. A consultant was hired to develop the booklet on effective measures, looking at effective measures taken by States to eradicate VAC. The booklet includes case studies from eight countries.
 3. Three [blog posts](#) were published to give visibility to underrepresented issues related to eradicating VAC.

- Prepared an [oral statement](#) for the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council - Interactive Dialogue with the SRSG VAC (delivered in writing).
- Held meetings with the SRSG VAC in March and December 2023 to share updates about work and identify space for coordinated actions.
- Shared priorities of the Working Group in meetings with the informal Group of Friends on child rights in February, and with the Working Group on Discrimination against women and girls of the Human Rights Council in December.

Looking ahead

- The primary focus will be to finalise the booklet, launch it at the World Health Assembly in May 2024 and advertise it in context of the ministerial conference on VAC in November 2024.
- Further develop key messages for advocacy and deliver an oral statement during the 55th session of the Human Rights Council in March 2024 (interactive dialogue with the SRSG VAC).
- Write bi-monthly blog posts.

4 ORGA

Our Network

The Child Rights Connect network is made up of 108 [members](#) and [observers](#) that are national, regional and international organisations, coalitions and networks 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.

Our Executive Committee

From June 2023

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

María Belen Paz Aguilar, Learning for Wellbeing Foundation, Vice-President of the Executive Committee

Maria Lucia Uribe Torres, Arigatou, Treasurer of the Executive Committee

Catherine Mbengue, African Child Policy Forum, Secretary of the Executive Committee

Flutra Gorana, War Child Holland, Focal point on child participation

Maria Amihan Abueva, Child Rights Coalition Asia

Dreeni Geer, Save the Children International

Leo Ratledge, Child Rights International Network

Until May 2023

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

Volunteers

Freya Marchesi (interpretation)

Gabriela Garcia (interpretation)

Kinga Veres

Volunteers for the General Assembly and 40th anniversary conference:

Batoul El Zein

Linda Buthee

Oshin Believe

Sofía Molina Araniva

Students from the Master Traduction Spécialisée Multilingue of the Grenoble Alpes University (translation)

Consultants

Annabel Trapp

Jennifer Lynn Conway (web and publications design)

Interns

Amen Mengistu

Aude Defline

Emma Longhini

Imen Talhaoui

Maria Giulia Vassallo

Or Salama

Ruhy Patel

Staff



Alex Conte

Executive Director



Ilaria Paolazzi

Deputy Director (until Oct 2023)



Fanny Cachat van der Haert

Programme Manager



Agnès Gràcia Corberó

Senior Global Advocacy Officer (until Oct 2023) / Head of Programmes (from Nov 2023)



Zsuzsanna Rutai

Child Empowerment and Safeguarding Officer (from Feb 2023)



Fanny Chappuis

Programme Officer, CRC Reporting



Leire Ibáñez Larrea

Network and Programme Officer



Imen Talhaoui

Associate Programme Officer (from Sep 2023)



Ana Dangova Hug

(maternity cover starting in Oct 2023)

ANISATION FINANCES

Balance Sheet

As at 31 December 2022 and 2023 (in Swiss Francs)

Assets	2023	2022
Cash and cash equivalents	92,487	50,410
Accrued income	60,769	86,926
Prepaid expenses	11,242	37,617
Sub-total current assets	164,497	174,953
Operational Contingency Fund	-	-
Cash deposits (visa card and office lease)	32,157	32,002
IT equipment and office furniture	3,844	5,435
Sub-total fixed assets	36,001	37,437
Total assets	200,498	212,390

Liabilities	2023	2022
Accounts payable	16,604	27,818
Accrued liabilities	47,847	43,490
Bank overdraft	7	300
Income received in advance	56,921	25,500
Sub-total current liabilities	121,379	97,107
Restricted funds on ongoing projects	43,000	139,947
Sub-total non-current liabilities	43,000	139,947
Restricted capital	37,130	37,130
Restricted capital - Operational Contingency Fund	-	-300
Free capital	-1,011	-61,494
Sub-total capital of the organisation	36,119	-24,664
Total liabilities and capital	200,498	212,390

Result of the year	2023	2022
Operating result (income minus expenses)	90	5,438
Bank fees	-2,258	-5,186
Exchange differences	-6,482	-27,635
Exceptional revenue, unique or one-off	-5,000	-
Variation of restricted funds	74,436	-125,191
Result	60,785	-152,575

5

Income and operating expenses

Income	2023	2022
Membership fees	148,352	127,009
Members' emergency support	64,120	-
Grant/donations from members	68,521	128,718
Grant/donations from governments	575,275	680,280
Grant/donations from foundations	141,357	103,147
Grant/donations from other organisations	19,872	18,708
Corporate donation	43,000	-
Other income	11,068	4,045
Total income	1,071,564	1,061,907

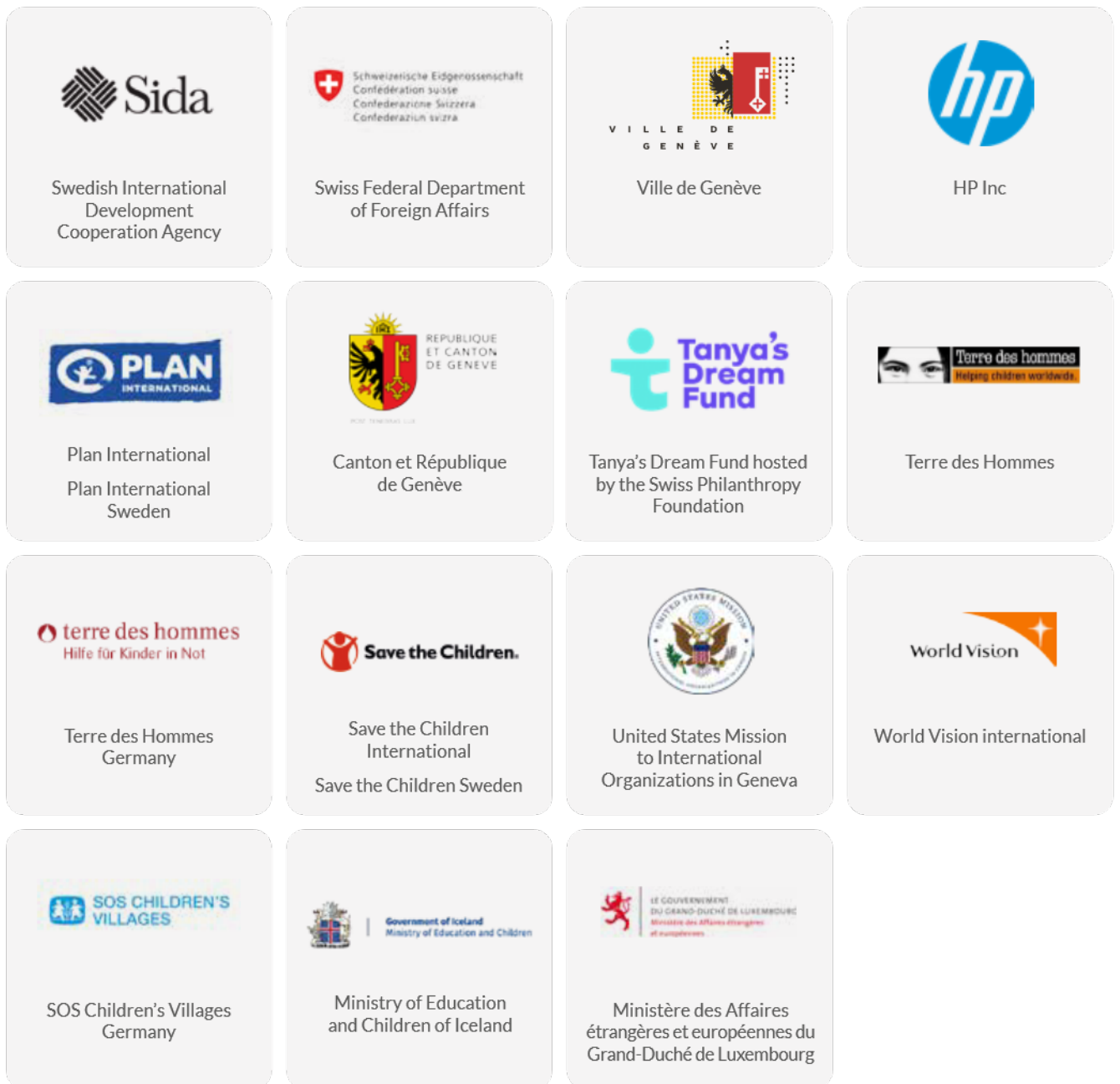
Breakdown of 2023 income	2023	%
Member fees	148,352	13.8%
Members' emergency support	64,120	6.0%
Plan International	27,770	2.6%
Save the Children	8,044	0.8%
Terre des Hommes Lausanne	10,000	0.9%
Terre des Hommes Germany	18,490	1.7%
World Vision International	4,217	0.4%
SIDA	436,407	40.7%
Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs	47,500	4.4%
Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs	9,615	0.9%
Canton de Genève	30,000	2.8%
Ville de Genève	20,000	1.9%
Iceland Ministry of Education and Children	10,502	1.0%
USA Mission in Geneva	21,252	2.0%
Tanya's Dream Fund	28,846	2.7%
Oak Foundation	22,511	2.1%
Private donor	90,000	8.4%
Council of Europe	10,015	0.9%
UN Consultancy subgrant	9,857	0.9%
HP Inc Corporate Giving	43,000	4.0%
Other income	11,068	1.0%

Operating expenses by cost centre	2023	2022
Personnel costs	811,502	826,131
Salaries and social charges	799,390	816,774
Other staff expenses	12,111	9,357
Operating costs	144,748	184,038
Office costs	76,473	85,864
Professional services	66,684	96,113
Depreciation	1,591	2,061
Activity costs	115,226	46,299
Consultants	5,087	26,255
Venue and catering	15,290	7,279
Travel	37,709	5,299
Design, layout, graphics, photos	4,180	4,005
Sub-grants to partners	52,961	3,461
Total costs	1,071,476	1,056,469

Our donors and supporters

We express our deepest gratitude to our donors, partners, and supporters who have continued to help us advance children's rights and give a voice to children to effect change around the world. **In particular, we are immensely grateful to our members and donors for their extraordinary support and mobilisation around our mid-year financial crisis.** Many of you

shared encouraging words of support, which were so heartening at a time of distress. Many of our members also provided both small and large levels of financial support, in different forms. Several donors also granted us one-off emergency or other forms of support. Every contribution counted to ensure we could continue to operate and deliver our mandate. **THANK YOU!**



What's on in 2024?

Launching a new global project to advance the rights of CHRDs

In April, with financial support from Global Affairs Canada, we will launch a new three-year global project aimed to enhance the empowerment, enjoyment of rights and protection for CHRDs worldwide. The project takes a dual approach focused on improving safe and sustainable promotion and defence of human rights by empowered CHRDs, particularly girl CHRDs and other groups of CHRDs most deprived of their rights, while also increasing effective recognition of CHRDs by duty-bearers and responsibility-holders, both contributing to a more enabling environment for CHRDs. Working with local members and partners, the project will test and embed global standards, practices and resources on the rights of CHRDs in pre-identified priority countries in four regions - Brazil, Moldova, Thailand and Togo - and use the findings from local action to inform global advocacy, standards and resources.

Sustaining the momentum for CHRDs at the UN and among States

Together with Save the Children and others, we will celebrate the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders "*We are not just the future*": challenges faced by child and youth human rights defenders", which will be presented to the Human Rights Council in March 2024, after a yearlong process which involved many CHRDs from across the globe. In this context, we will co-organise with Save the Children, Amnesty International and the Special Rapporteur a side-event "Advancing the rights of child and young human rights defenders: implementing the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders". More widely, we will continue to strategize with Save the Children on the establishment of a broad coalition for and strategy for sustained commitment from States, the UN, and other actors on CHRDs.

Feeding the development of the next General Comment of the CRC Committee

In addition to facilitating children's and other civil society actors' engagement in all the activities of the CRC Committee, including the reporting cycle, we will gear up for engaging around and mobilising support for the next General Comment of the CRC Committee on access to justice and remedies, including to promote safe and empowering child participation.

Continuing to press for child rights mainstreaming across the UN and beyond

We will continue to promote a network-wide effort on child rights mainstreaming. Together with our Working Group on child participation, to ensure that children's rights are high on the UN agenda, we will focus on supporting the implementation of the Secretary-General Guidance Note on child rights mainstreaming; capitalize on the 2024 Annual Day on the Rights of the Child to strengthen child participation practices at the Human Rights Council; influencing the Human Rights Council resolution on the rights of the child, including on advancing child rights mainstreaming through reinforcing the role of the OHCHR; and advocating for the voice, perspectives and rights of children to be reflected in discussions at the Summit of the Future and resulting Pact for the Future, as well as in the Global Digital Compact.

Enhancing CHRD activism through safe and effective ICT solutions

Because the digital divide prevents some of our child advisors from effectively participating online and making the most of the online environment for their activism, we will, with the support of HP Inc, undertake a project focused on improving their access to and use of safe and effective information and communication technologies (ICT) solutions (including hardware, software, online safety protocols and capacity-building on digital engagement).

ING AHEAD

Adopting a new Strategic Plan to guide our organisation for the next five years

We will hold consultations with children, our members and observers, and key partners for them to contribute to the identification of our priorities and development of our new Strategic Plan for 2025-2029. Our General Assembly will adopt the new Strategic Plan at its annual meeting in June 2024.



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The Child Rights Connect team



child rights connect

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