



DIGITAL PROTECTION OF CHILD HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



**SURVEY OUTCOMES
FOR CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE**

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Why did we do this survey and how?

Children all over the world are standing up for human rights – fighting for the future of the planet, access to education for all, or peace in their communities. Many of you do this work online, using social media, videos, podcast and other digital tools to share your message and connect with others. But being active online can also bring particular risks that can affect your safety, privacy, and wellbeing.

Empowering child human rights defenders (CHRDs) is a core activity of Child Rights Connect. We wanted to understand what it's really like for child human rights defenders online – what challenges you face, how you protect yourselves, and what support you need. We are going to use the findings to develop or improve our resources and tools on digital protection of child human rights defenders.



“It is essential that child rights defenders enjoy freedom of expression, free from any form of intimidation.
Child respondent of the survey”

The online survey was shared widely in March - April 2025. Children could fill out the survey in 6 languages: English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Russian and Arabic. It was anonymous, so the respondents didn't have to share their name or contact information.



It is important to know that this survey doesn't represent all child human rights defenders everywhere. The children who answered were mostly connected to civil society organisations in our network or our Children's Advisory Team, though there were replies from all over the world. Finally, we relied on what children told us about their own experiences, which means some things might have been forgotten or remembered differently. Despite these limitations, the survey still gives us valuable insights into the reality of child human rights defenders online.



This is an issue that will gain momentum in the coming times because it will be the new way they try to silence activism and the defense of children's rights.

Child respondent of the survey



Who responded to the survey?

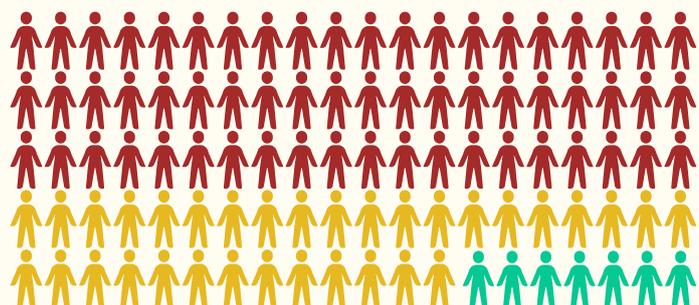
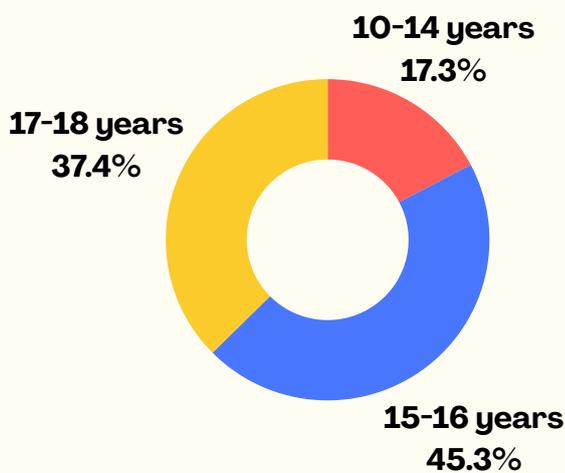
139 children responded from 20 different countries and 6 regions of the world.

- Albania
- Australia
- Brazil
- Canada
- Croatia
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Estonia
- Germany
- Ireland
- Madagascar



- Malaysia
- Moldova
- Niger
- Pakistan
- Palestine
- Philippines
- Singapore
- Spain
- United Kingdom
- Zambia

The respondents were between 10 to 18 years old, and there were bit more girls (60%) than boys who filled out the survey.



Girl



Boy



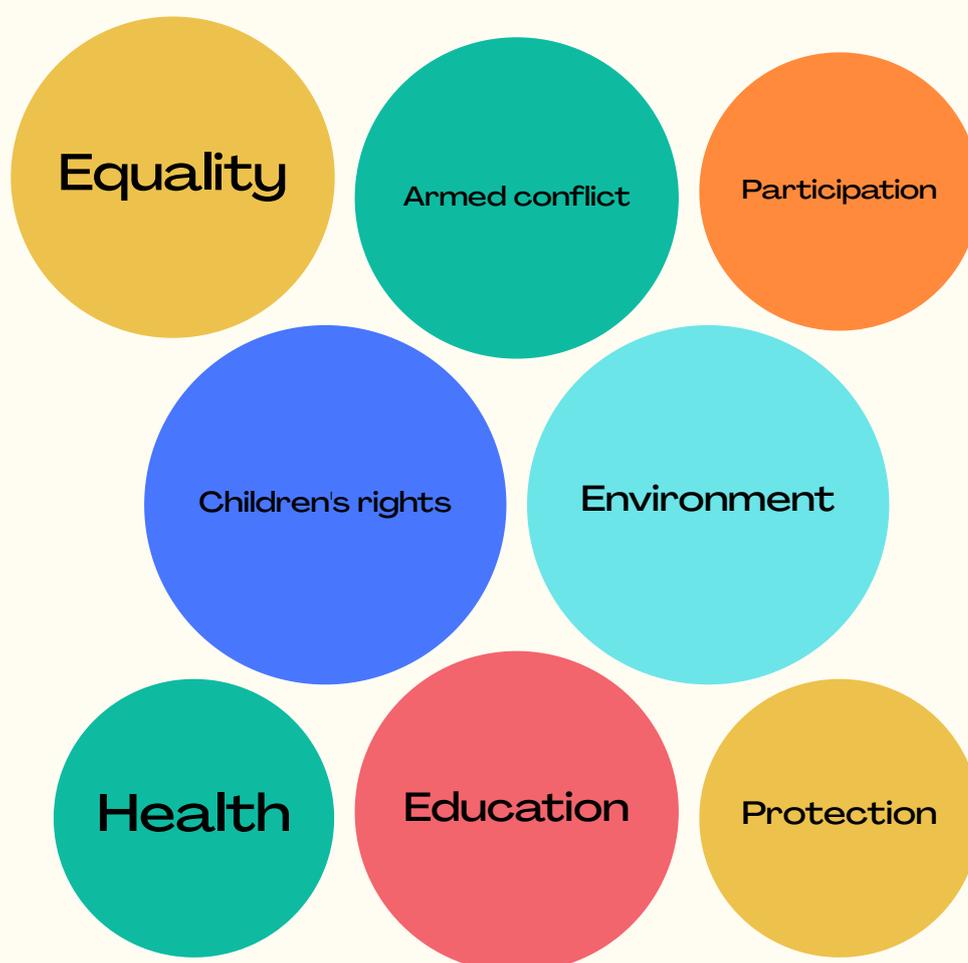
Other / Prefer not to say

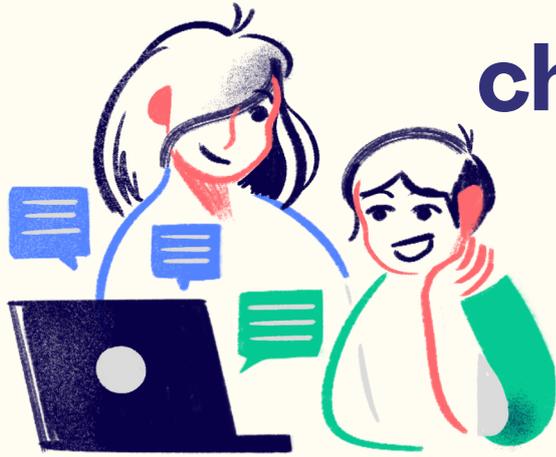


Half of the children said that they face additional challenges as a human rights defender due to:

- Being a member of a minority community
- Having a disability
- Being out of school
- Being a member of the LGBTIAQ+ community
- Being a migrant or a refugee

The child respondents said that they are advocating for the following issues:





What did the child respondents tell us about parental support?

92%

The vast majority of respondents said that their parents are supportive of their online activism, with over two-thirds saying their parents are both supportive and fully aware of their activities.

5%

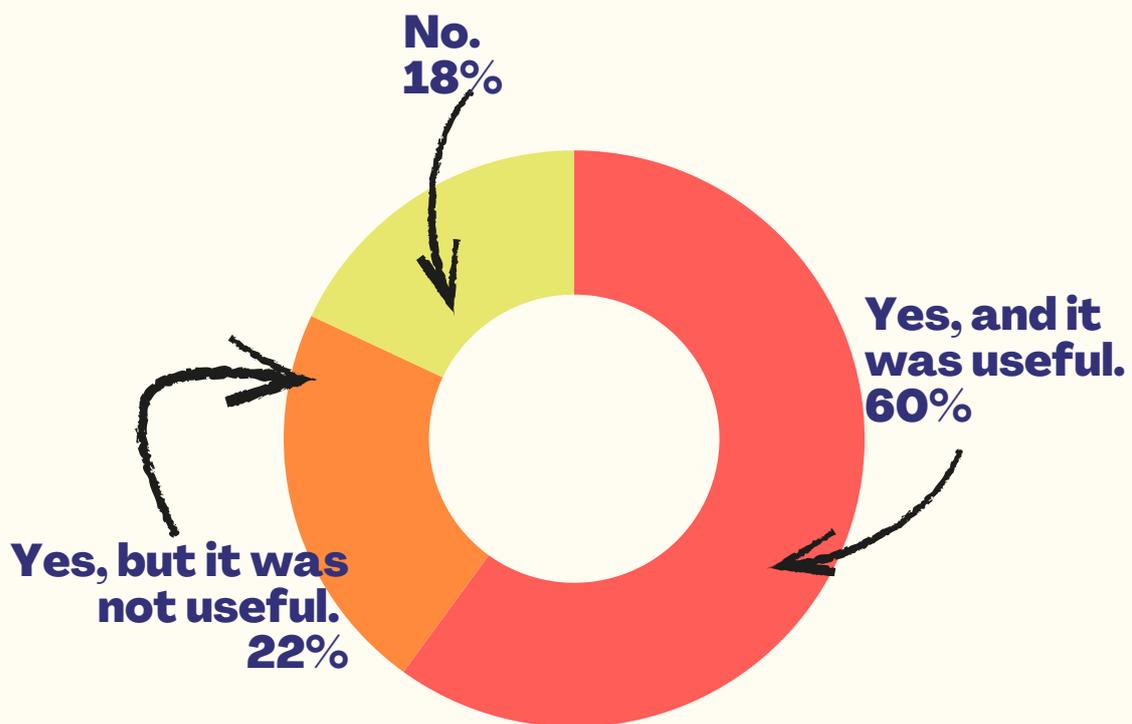
Small number of children said their parents do not support their activism, although it happens that they are following their online activities.

3%

Even smaller number of children said their parents are not aware of their activism at all, so they don't know that they are advocating for human rights online.

This seems to show that parental support is important for child human rights defenders. It can involve moral support but also following their online activities and being there for them if they need help.

Did the child respondents study about internet safety at school?



This was an interesting question, because children from different countries had different experiences, but children from the same country saw similarly the quality of their education - meaning how useful was it. These results show that in some countries there is room for improvement.

How the child respondents search for information online?

119 out of 139 respondents (85.6%) said they are relying on online information sources, particularly on the following ones:



Websites of human rights organizations

64 %



Search engines

63 %



Social media search

46 %



Follow HR defenders on social media

38 %



Artificial intelligence

36 %

Besides the official websites, majority of CHRDs use social media as a source of information and one third of them use artificial intelligence. This means that critical thinking and the safe use of these platforms are particularly important for child human rights defenders.



How CHRDs express their opinion online in relation to human rights and children's rights?

98 out of 139 children (71%) said that they actively use online platforms to express their opinion.

“I have a social media account to share or post information or my opinion.”

82%



“I post videos or podcasts.”

18%



“I write articles.”

10%



“I have a channel/room on a messaging app.”

5%



“I have my own blog or website.”

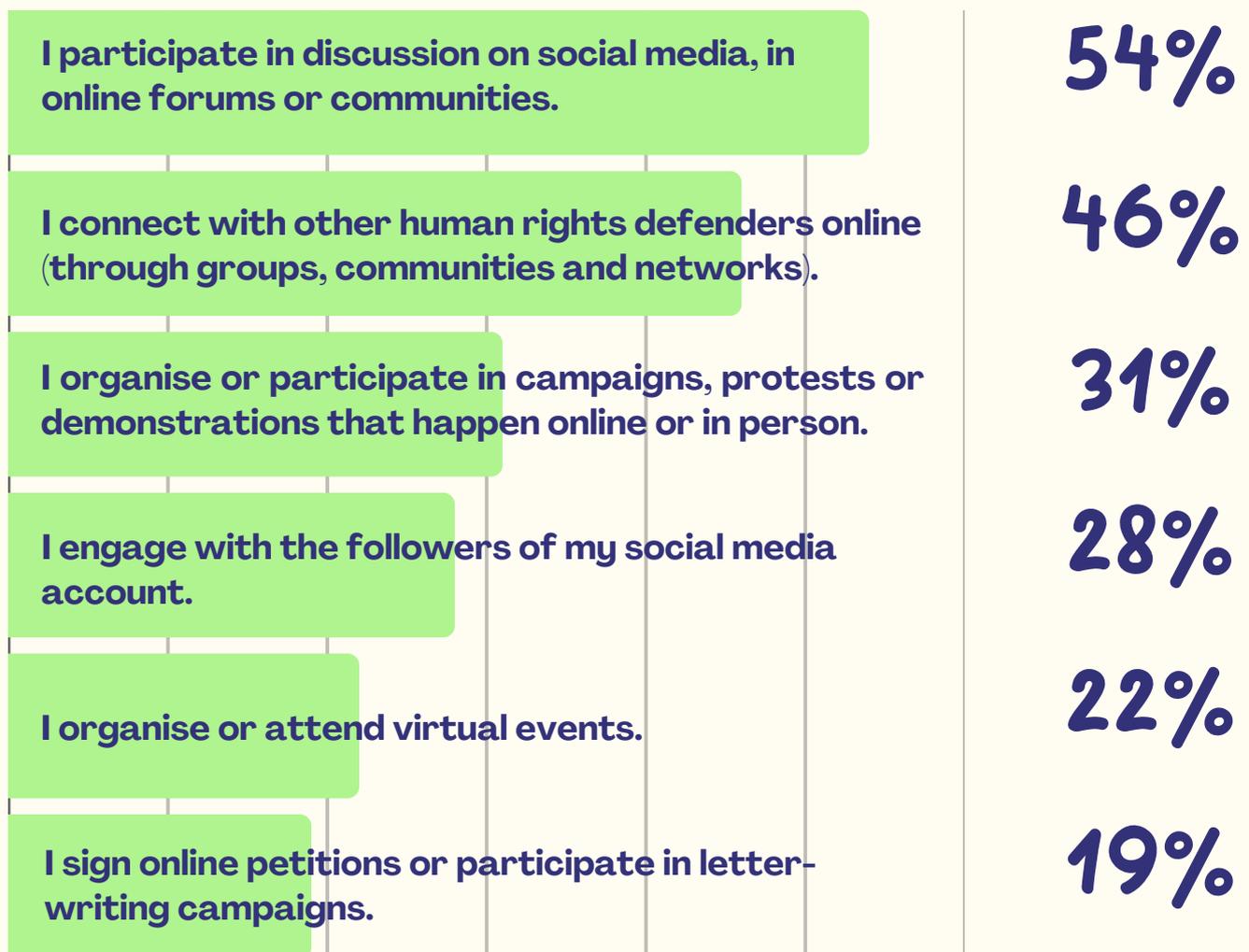
5%



It is clear that the majority of the children use social media to share their thoughts online, while some of them use several different methods at the same time. This means that they are visible to the wider public and they are exposed to risks related to that.

How child human rights defenders engage with others online?

101 out of 139 (73%) children said that they take advantage of online platforms to engage with others as part of their activism and selected at least one of the options below.

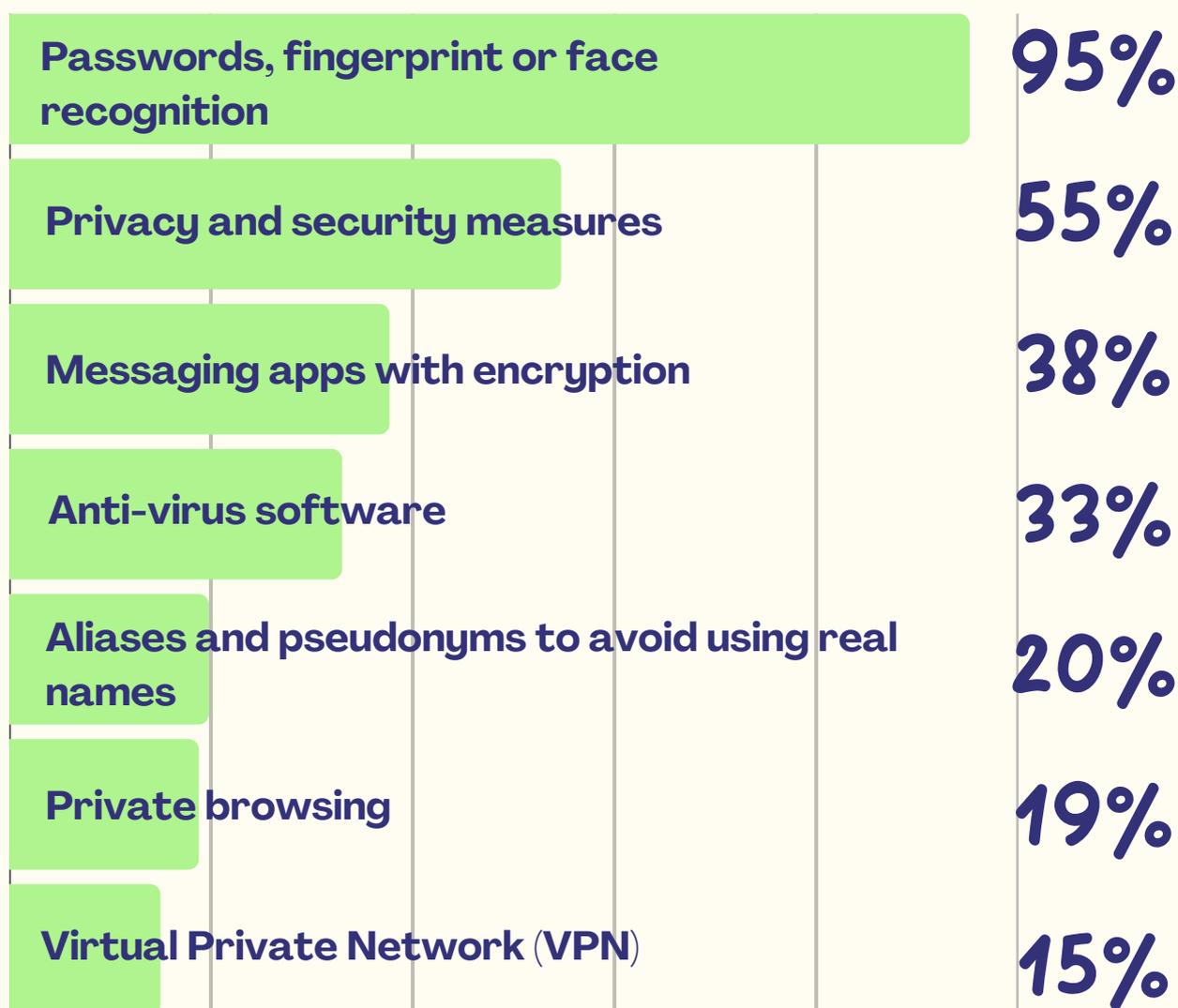


This shows that the internet provides several opportunities for child human rights defenders to connect with others.

Do child human rights defenders use methods to protect themselves online?



106 out of 139 children (76%) said that they use at least one of the methods below to protect their devices, emails and social media accounts.



It seems like CHRDs are familiar with general privacy and security measures, but they know less about technical tools and solutions.



Do child human rights defenders use methods to protect their privacy online?

102 out of 139 children (73%) said that they take steps to protect their privacy online, but only 61% uses more than one of the strategies mentioned below.

Cautious about sharing personal details

53%

Separate personal/activist social media accounts

49%

Regularly search their own name online

33%

Don't share photos revealing face

24%

Know how to request info removal from platforms

24%

The results show that half of the child respondents set up separate accounts, one for personal purposes and another one for their advocacy. This means they are aware of risks such as harassment and they want to protect their private life. At the same time, it is alarming that only half of them are cautious about sharing personal details online.

What child human rights defenders do to prepare and protect themselves?

102 out of 139 children (73%) said that they take steps in order to avoid risks and dangers related to their activism as a child human rights defender.

Educate themselves about their rights as child human rights defender

71%



Know how to report harassment to platforms/police

61%



Be aware of legal consequences of activism in their country

39%



Back up data regularly to a secure location

31%



Use fact-checking websites

28%



Have account/data recovery plan in case of privacy breach

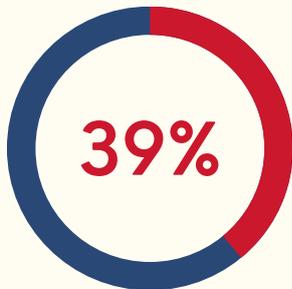
27%



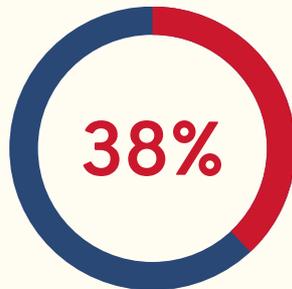
It looks like children are taking proactive steps for their protection, but they are less knowledgeable about technical solutions.

Did the respondents already have a negative experience online?

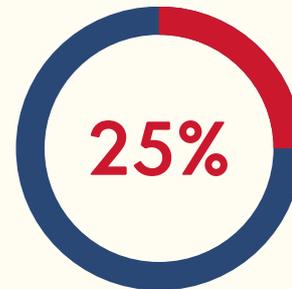
It is worrying that 55% of the children reported at least one of the incidents below, while 42% of them were involved in serious digital security incidents.



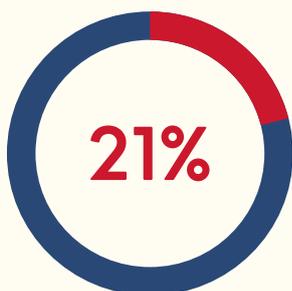
They were exposed to misinformation.



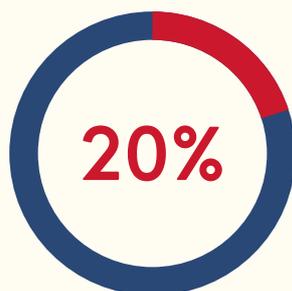
Their device or account was hacked.



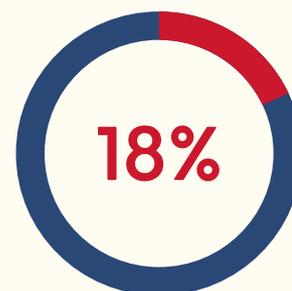
They registered as underage on a platform.



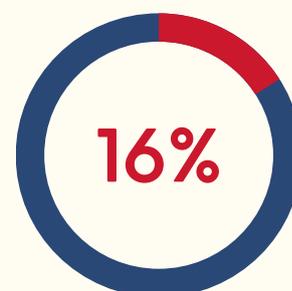
Their device was infected with a virus or malware.



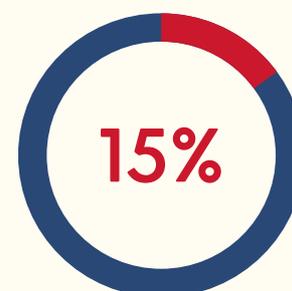
Someone used their name, face or personal information (e.g. fake accounts).



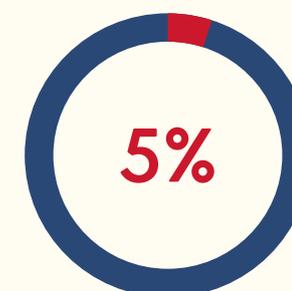
Some spread lies or intimidated them in order to make them stop their activism.



They were harassed or threatened online.



Their personal data or photos were shared without their knowledge or consent.



They were under surveillance by a government or another organisation.

What happened exactly?

Once, my Facebook account was hacked through another account. Someone contacted me and messaged me. I was young, around 10 or 11 years old. After communicating with me for about half an hour, they told me a code would be sent to me and asked me to send it. I didn't know what the code was for, so I gave it to them. Seconds later, they hacked my account, changed the password, and then closed it.

I was at school and I got a notification from Instagram where was mentioned that someone entered my account.

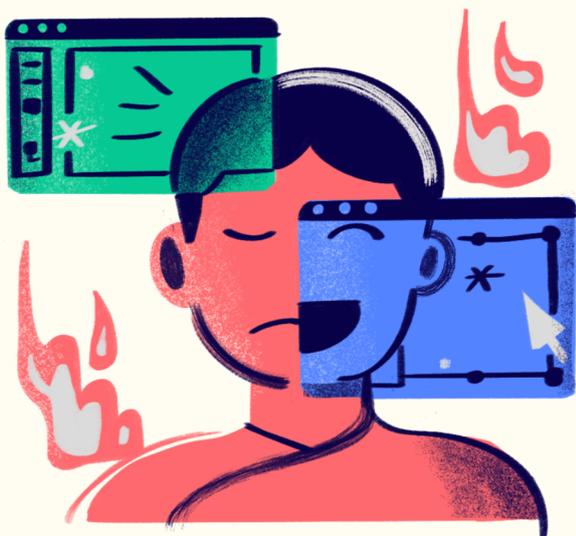
That person changed my username and things like this, when I saw that I immediately changed my password and I put more identification methods.

I posted a face photo on Instagram and a person took it, distorted it and posted it with bad things on their social network.

I registered to social media underage because there was social pressure to do so.

I thought I had found a new fellow child activist, and I blindly trust them when they told me to help do their survey by clicking on the link first. Fortunately enough I could get my account back by switching password using email.





“ They created an anonymous Instagram account to talk bad about people including me. ”

“ For fake content, it is mostly made by right wing influencers with AI. ”

“ My harassment began during the wars. During this time, the warring parties used us in the conflicts by force. They mistreated us, killed us without distinction of race, ethnicity, or tribe. Every movement was forcibly controlled, and we were deprived of all online communication. ”

“ If I shared my beliefs online I would inevitably get attacked by those who disagreed. ”

“ One time someone make a fake account (which is my name) on fb, then suddenly that account add my account, I was shocked because I didn't create that account... So I decided to report that account so they can't spread lies to my name until that account was reported and banned. ”

What do children need to act safely as a human rights defenders online?

Digital security education, awareness programs and trainings as well as technical tools

“ They need to have digital literacy training so that they can understand online risks and how to mitigate them, including cyberbullying, online harassment, and identity theft. ”

“ By raising awareness and educating communities, policy makers, and stakeholders about children's rights and issues. ”

“ Antivirus, VPN, two-factor authentication, secure passwords. ”

“ All of us should be educated and mindful when it comes to use such platforms because I believe that safety and privacy will depend on how we drive and use social media. ”

Parental support

“I believe that, mainly, they need the support and trust of their guardians, as this relationship is crucial for the minor to feel protected.”

Laws and policies protecting child human rights defenders and legal aid available

“We first need to be recognized as human rights defenders [...] I have been the target of large-scale smear campaigns, which forced me to leave the country and go into exile four years ago.”

“Laws should be put in place that allow them to be online defenders without fear, and if something happens to them, you should be the first to help them.”



Mental Health & Psychosocial Support

“ They provide psychosocial support to cope with the stress and potential risks. ”

“ I think they need emotional support that will give them confidence and they should be encouraged and corrected kindly if they make a mistake and not be discouraged. ”

“ In my opinion, we should have moral support and we should feel truly safe when we defend our rights and express ourselves. ”

“ Child human rights defenders should be taken care of online to make them feel safe which will make them confident enough to participate and be very active online. ”



Holding platforms accountable and creating safe reporting mechanism

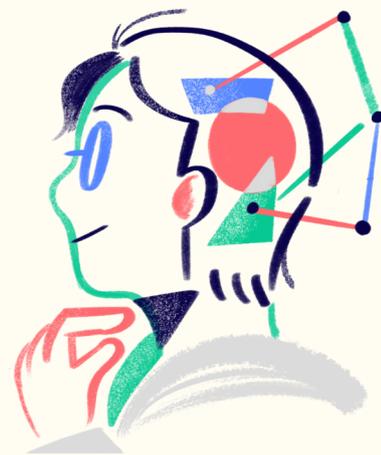
“More human moderators for platforms and watch groups for activities that are specifically targeted by a group of people.”

“They would need a person/company whom they could report negative activity (hate) to.”

“Child human rights defenders need strong privacy protections, digital security tools, supportive adults, safe reporting channels, and online platforms that take threats seriously.”



What are the main findings of the survey?



The results of the survey show that child human rights defenders are often acting online. While they do so, they face risks and difficult situations that they do not feel prepared to manage. While children take steps to protect themselves, they also need more information, better education and tools. They also need stronger support from adults, parents, schools, governments, and online platforms to stay safe and continue their activism and advocacy.

KEY NUMBERS

- **139** child human rights defenders from **20** countries participated in the survey.
- **71%** of the respondents express their opinions online, mostly on social media, and **73%** engage with others as part of their activism.
- **76%** use at least one digital security measure, while **73%** take steps to protect their privacy.
- **55%** experienced at least one digital security incident, while **42%** of the respondents were victim of a serious security breach.

This publication was prepared by Zsuzsanna Rutai, Child Empowerment and Safeguarding Officer at Child Rights Connect with support from the Children's Advisory Team of Child Rights Connect.