



CHILD RIGHTS CONNECT



2025



ANNUAL
REPORT



Contents

1 Foreword & Introduction

- 5 Foreword from the Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
- 6 Forewords on 2025 – A Year of TransformationThe strength of the Network

2 Who We Are

- 7 Who We Are: The Irreplaceable Convening Role
- 8 Anchored in our Strategic Plan 2025-2029

3 The Sector Crisis Context

- 9 The UN Liquidity Crisis & Treaty Body System
- 10 The Funding Crisis in the Child Rights Sector
- 11 Global Pushback on Children's Rights

4 What We Achieved: Key Impact Areas

- 13 Advancing Child Participation & the Rights, Empowerment and Protection of CHRDs
- 17 Advancing Accountability to Children
- 21 The How To Child Rights Series

5 The Children's Advisory Team

- 23 The CAT as the Enabling Mechanism for Wide Child Participation
 - 27 What the CAT Makes Possible
 - 28 Why the CAT was established
-

6 Working Groups

- 30 Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict
 - 32 Working Group on Children and the Right to Education
 - 35 Working Group on Children and Violence
 - 37 Working Group on Children's Rights and the Environment
 - 39 Working Group on Children of Incarcerated Parents
 - 40 Working Group on Child Participation
-

7 Organisation & Finances

- 42 Organisation
 - 44 Finances
 - 47 Our Donors and Supporters in 2025
-

8 Looking Ahead

- 49 Looking Ahead: Why the Network Must Survive

Acronyms

ADRC	Annual Day on the Rights of the Child
CAT	Children's Advisory Team
CHRDs	Child Human Rights Defenders
CRC Committee	UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EU	European Union
HTCRS	How To Child Rights Series
HRC	Human Rights Council
OHCHR	UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
ToT	Training of Trainers
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Foreword & Introduction

✦ Foreword from the Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

Child Rights Connect remains an indispensable partner in advancing the mandate of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and strengthening the global system of accountability for children's rights. Through its tireless work in mobilising civil society organisations from every region of the world, **Child Rights Connect** ensures that the Committee's monitoring function is informed by diverse, credible, and ground-level perspectives. By facilitating the preparation of written submissions and creating meaningful opportunities for both in-person and online engagement with the Committee, it helps bridge the gap between international human rights mechanisms and the realities faced by children in their communities.

Equally important is **Child Rights Connect's** unwavering commitment to the meaningful participation of children themselves. Ensuring that children's voices are reflected not only in written reports but also through direct engagement with the Committee is essential to realising the spirit and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The inclusion of children in reporting and review processes enriches our work and reminds us that children are not only beneficiaries of rights, but active rights holders whose perspectives must shape decisions affecting their lives.

The year 2025 has presented extraordinary challenges. Financial budget cuts have created significant setbacks across the human rights landscape, limiting resources and placing additional strain on organisations and institutions committed to protecting children's rights. In such difficult circumstances, the role of **Child Rights Connect** has become even more critical. At a time when both civil society and the Committee face mounting pressures, its steadfast support, coordination, and advocacy have proven essential.

As we navigate these challenges, **Child Rights Connect's** contribution stands as a powerful example of resilience, solidarity, and dedication. Its support for the Committee and the broader child rights movement is both - valuable and crucial. Together, through sustained cooperation and shared commitment, we can continue to safeguard the rights of every child, even in difficult times the modern child rights whole landscape is facing.

■
Prof. Dr. Sophie Kiladze

Chair

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

🌱 Forewords on 2025 – A Year of Transformation

2025 was a year of paradox and transformation for **Child Rights Connect**. As this report details, our organisation faced unprecedented challenges: the loss of a thirty-year core funding partnership with SIDA, the global funding crisis affecting CSOs worldwide, and the continuous shrinking space for civil society including a sustained pushback on children's rights. Yet, against these headwinds, the network endured and even grew. Eighteen new member organisations joined our network, bringing our total to 128 from 47 countries, the majority of them operating in the Global South. Organisations working with children whose proximity to the sharp edge of rights violations makes this network's work the most urgent cause to join. This growth, at a moment of institutional fragility, is a testament to the unwavering solidarity and shared conviction among our members and broader child rights community. Together, we confirmed that this network is not just valuable, but indispensable.

2025 was also a year of transformation and restructuring of our team and operations. Thanks to difficult but necessary adjustments (cost reductions, redundancy measures, and the rebuilding of reserves), the financial position of **Child Rights Connect** is considerably improved compared to 2024. The Organisation secured as well new funding sources, retained long-standing donors and gathered support from members. All these steps have ensured our viability beyond 2026, even as we continue to navigate uncertainty in the broader sector.

Our achievements in 2025 as network are to be praised. With a small and committed Secretariat, along with members and Working Groups, the Organisation could still support global civil society and children's engagement with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, launched a Strategic Vision reframing children as human rights defenders, facilitated the first direct

consultation between children in conflict zones and the European Union for the Human Rights Council resolution, supported over thousand children across 12 countries to shape an international treaty process (Optional protocol 4 to the UNCRC).

As we enter 2026, the road ahead remains challenging. The funding horizon is still uncertain, and the sector-wide crisis continues to impact all of us. But we do so as a leaner, more financially stable organisation, with a Strategic Plan whose ambition has not diminished. The pages that follow tell the story of what happens when a network refuses to let go of its purpose, even when everything else is giving way. It is a story of resilience, solidarity, and the power of collective action.

We would like to thank all the people that made it possible: Secretariat staff, interns, volunteers, member organisations, Working Groups' convenors and members, partner organisations and experts, as well as ExCo members that have worked hard during this 2025. A particular thought goes to those of us, within the Secretariat and members alike, that separate from their organisations due to the financial crisis: a wholehearted thank for their commitment, their professionalism and their humanity over years and sometimes decades, and a wish for all the best in their lives.

Likewise, we are deeply grateful to our members, partners, and donors for their trust and support. Together, we will continue to champion the rights of children and ensure their voices are heard at the highest levels.



Mikiko Otani, President

Rossella Urru, Interim Executive Director

2

Who We Are

The Irreplaceable Convening Role

For more than four decades, **Child Rights Connect** has occupied a place at the United Nations (UN) that no other organisation occupies. Founded in 1983 as the Ad Hoc Group for the drafting of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the network helped shape the world's first binding international treaty dedicated solely to children's rights – and has remained at the

heart of its implementation ever since. Today, **Child Rights Connect** is one of two key strategic partners of the CRC Committee, alongside UNICEF, and the only permanent platform that connects civil society – including children themselves – to the UN human rights system on children's rights in Geneva.



Child Rights Connect is the largest global child rights network. Its 130+ member and observer organisations from 47 countries span all regions, with over 75% operating in the Global South, and reach millions of children in more than 190 countries.

- Our organisation brings together a wide array of expertise and a vast diversity of experiences and pioneering approaches for realising children's human rights worldwide.
- National, regional and international organisations, coalitions and networks pool their knowledge through thematic Working Groups, joint submissions, coordinated advocacy and shared positions – speaking with one voice in defence of every child's rights, while translating international standards back into national-level change.
- Our work is grounded in a simple but powerful belief: **when children's rights are respected, societies become more just, peaceful, and resilient.**

What sets **Child Rights Connect** apart is the way it works. The organisation provides a unique local-to-global and global-to-local advocacy platform, where evidence and lived experience from members and children across regions inform advocacy in Geneva, and where international commitments secured at the UN are integrated back into national-level action. This two-way

movement – articulated as a core principle of our Strategic Plan 2025-2029 – is what makes **Child Rights Connect's** convening role irreplaceable. It is not any single programme or output that defines the organisation; it is the convening function itself, sustained over four decades of trust, technical expertise and institutional memory.

An independent external evaluation commissioned by Sida in 2022 reached the same conclusion. Without **Child Rights Connect**, civil society's advocacy and influence on children's rights, child participation, and child rights mainstreaming at the UN would be considerably hindered. No other entity occupies this space. As the global child rights ecosystem comes under unprecedented pressure – the focus of the section that follows – the value of this convening function only grows.

In 2025, we further expanded our global reach with the addition of eighteen new member organisations from Africa, Asia, Europe and North America to our network:

- 5Rights Foundation (United Kingdom)
- Action Hope Malawi (Malawi)
- Actions Solidaires et Multisectorielles pour le Développement Endogène Relief (ASMDE-RELIEF) (Democratic Republic of Congo)
- Beyond Our Hearts Foundation (Malawi)
- Children and Young People Living for Peace (Nigeria)
- Community Focus (COFO) (Malawi)
- EFry Hope and Help for Women Society (Canada)
- Global Campaign for Education (GCE) (South Africa)
- Kalkal Human Rights Development Organization (KAHRDO) (Somalia)
- Meremeta Community Initiatives Organisation (Tanzania)
- Music For Every Child (MFEC) (Canada)
- New Friends Club (NFC) (Nepal)
- Peace Stability Social Welfare Development Organization (PSSWDO) (Afghanistan)
- Prisoners Future Foundation (PFF) (Zambia)
- Rural Women Empowerment Network (RUWONET) (Uganda)
- Women Actions for Development and Solidarity (WADS) (Tanzania)
- Uganda Child Rights NGO Network (Uganda)
- Words Matter (United Kingdom)

With 83% of new member organisations based in the Global South, these new members bring not only geographical expertise but also thematic expertise to existing priority areas such as children and the right to education, children's rights and the environment, and children and violence. Another key focus of the new members' work is on health and access to justice.

“

Child Rights Connect's commitment to advancing the rights of children and making sure that their voices are heard in discussions and deliberations affecting them is truly admirable and I have learned so much from [them]. I'm particularly grateful for [their] work on children as human rights defenders which generated awareness about the rights of children and young people to advance and advocate for rights issues.”

— Mary Lawlor, Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders

■ Anchored in our Strategic Plan 2025-2029

In June 2024, our General Assembly adopted **Child Rights Connect's** Strategic Plan 2025-2029. The Plan reaffirms our identity as the global civil society convener for children's rights at the UN and concentrates collective effort around four Strategic Priorities: advancing child participation and the rights, empowerment and protection of child human rights defenders (CHRDs); advancing accountability to children at global and national levels; strengthening **Child Rights Connect's** financial stability; and further strengthening the organisation's governance and operational structures. The achievements set out in the sections that follow are framed against these priorities – and tested against a year in which delivering them required exceptional resilience.

The Sector Crisis Context

2025 was the year three crises converged. The UN human rights system, on which **Child Rights Connect**'s entire model depends, was destabilised by the worst UN liquidity crisis in its modern history adding to an already underfunded system. The international funding architecture for civil society contracted at unprecedented speed, with consequences for children already being measured in lives. And across the political

landscape, children's rights themselves – and the defenders who advance them – continued to be under sustained pushback. Together, these crises produced a year in which the very infrastructure that shields children's rights at the global level was tested as never before. The achievements documented in Section 4 should be read against this backdrop.

🌱 The UN Liquidity Crisis & Treaty Body System

The UN human rights system entered 2025 in a state of acute fragility. Driven by chronic underpayment of assessed contributions by Member States to the UN, the liquidity crisis stripped the Treaty Body system of 30 per cent of its meeting time, postponed 39 State party reviews, and delayed 185 individual communications.

For the CRC Committee, the impact was direct: the May 2024 pre-session was cancelled outright, and so were the September 2025 session and pre-session. Hybrid modalities – the lifeline that allowed children and civil society, particularly from the Global South, to participate remotely – were discontinued.

What is at stake is not procedural. When the CRC Committee cannot meet, accountability is delayed: State conduct goes unexamined, recommendations go unmade, and children whose rights are being violated lose the most authoritative international avenue for redress. The Committee currently faces one of the highest backlogs in the UN system, with 69 State party reports awaiting review – a measurable rollback in the world's primary mechanism for monitoring how governments treat their children, at precisely the moment when monitoring is most needed.

How the network responded

Child Rights Connect was at the forefront of the response. Continuing actions taken in 2024, we organised a second joint letter signed by Permanent Missions and the UN Secretary-General — signed by more than 150 organisations, including individual experts and National Human Rights Institutions — raised concerns specifically about the impact of both the liquidity crisis and the UN80 reform process on children's rights.

When sessions were cancelled, we worked with UNICEF and the Committee to develop alternative formats, including online pre-sessions, so that civil society and children's voices still reached the Committee. The infrastructure held — because the network held it. Together with the TB-Net coalition – the network of nine international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) supporting the UN Treaty Body system, of which **Child Rights Connect** is a member, we used every opportunity of dialogue with UN high officials to raise concern.

The Funding Crisis in the Child Rights Sector

The UN crisis did not arrive in isolation. It compounded a wider, structural collapse in the international funding architecture for civil society. Across 2025, major donors – including governments – drastically reduced or restructured their development and humanitarian funding. The consequences for children are already stark: the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action found that 1.1 million children across 23 countries had already been directly impacted by funding cuts exceeding USD 110 million in early 2025 – from just five agencies surveyed. UNICEF Innocenti’s January Global Outlook estimates that cuts by major donors will cause at least 4.5 million additional child deaths by 2030.

This crisis hit the Geneva ecosystem particularly strong. According to a [survey conducted by the International Geneva Welcome Centre \(CAGI\)](#) in 2025, 50% of

NGOs reported decrease in their income in 2025 compared to 2024 (with 40% witnessing decrease of more than 20%) and 35% expect a further reduction in forthcoming years. Organisations had to take swift and difficult decisions to mitigate impact of funding cuts, demonstrating resilience and the willingness to maintain a presence in Geneva, confirmed by 95% of NGOs.

Child Rights Connect was not insulated from this crisis. The loss of Sida’s core funding – thirty years of partnership, and half the organisation’s 2024 income – required fundamental transformation. The decisive action taken in response is addressed in Section 7. What matters here is the context: the organisation navigated its own restructuring while the sector around it was contracting, and while the UN mechanisms it exists to support were operating at reduced capacity.

The paradox of 2025: a network that grew as the Secretariat consolidated

Even as resources contracted and the team was reduced, demand for **Child Rights Connect**’s convening role did the opposite. In 2025, 18 organisations applied to join the network, bringing total membership to 128 — a rise that mirrors the network’s growth in 2024. The membership continued to grow even as the team that supports it was reduced by around 40 per cent in a single year.

That paradox is not incidental; it is the central message. Organisations queue to join **Child Rights Connect** at a moment of unprecedented sector-wide contraction because the convening function is irreplaceable.

The decisive action taken in 2025 — austerity measures, contract renegotiation, the securing of new partnerships — has put the organisation on a viable footing for 2026 and given it visibility into 2027. The network did not survive the storm by accident. It survived because it acted.

Global Pushback on Children's Rights

The third strand of the storm is political. Across regions, children's rights continue to face generalised backlash, and the defenders who advance them – including children themselves – are increasingly contested actors in spaces that should protect and empower them. Civic space is shrinking: more than 130 countries have adopted restrictions on international and foreign-funded NGOs over the past three decades¹, and UNICEF now describes the sector as facing “unprecedented uncertainty”. Girls’

right to participate in public and political life is being continually challenged; CHRDs raising their voices on the environment, conflict, and discrimination face heightened risks of intimidation, surveillance, and harm; and the few hard-won standards on child participation, civil and political rights, and access to justice are being relitigated rather than implemented. This risk is generational – a measurable backsliding in children's rights, just as the next generation of defenders is coming of age.

¹ UNICEF Innocenti, “New era for NGOs: Reimagining civil society's role and possibilities” (Office of Strategy and Evidence, Innocenti)

What We Achieved

Key Impact Areas

The 2025 achievements documented in this section did not happen in a vacuum. They were delivered in a year of financial crisis and attacks on the very foundations of human rights, particularly children's rights. They were delivered by an ever-shrinking Secretariat that was simultaneously navigating restructuring, financial uncertainty, and an operating environment that tested every organisation in the sector. That context is not incidental to what follows. It is the lens through which every result in this section should be read.

This section is structured around **Child Rights Connect's** Strategic Plan 2025-2029, adopted by the General Assembly in June 2024.

The Plan concentrates the organisation's work around four Strategic Priorities:

- Advancing child participation and the rights, empowerment and protection of CHRDs (SP1)
- Advancing accountability to children at global and national levels (SP2)
- Strengthening financial stability (SP3)
- Further strengthening governance and operational structures (SP4)

The first two strategic pillars are the programmatic heart of the organisation's work and form the backbone of what follows. SP3 and SP4, which speak to the organisation's own institutional resilience, are addressed in Sections 7 and 8.

What the Strategic Plan calls for – and what 2025 required in practice – is a particular kind of organisational resilience: the ability to hold the thread of long-term, systemic change while responding to immediate crises; to maintain the trust of 128 member organisations while adapting how the Secretariat works; and to keep children's voices at the centre of UN processes even when those processes are being cancelled, postponed, or reshaped around them.

The sections that follow show, concretely, what that discipline and determination produced. Each achievement is not a standalone activity. It is evidence – of impact already generated, of infrastructure still holding, and of a network that, in one of the hardest years in its history, continued to do work that no other organisation in the world is positioned to do.

✶ Advancing Child Participation & the Rights, Empowerment and Protection of CHRDs

There is a particular kind of courage required to stand up for the rights of others when you are still a child yourself. In 2025, **Child Rights Connect** dedicated its most ambitious work to recognising, protecting, and amplifying exactly that courage – in four countries, across every continent, and at the highest levels of the UN.

We pursued this through two complementary and mutually reinforcing avenues. The first was to strengthen the recognition, protection and empowerment of CHRDs, working to ensure that children who speak out for their rights and the rights of others

can do so safely, effectively, and with the support of stronger legal and policy frameworks. The second was to advance standards and practices for meaningful child participation within UN human rights mechanisms – promoting approaches that are safe, equitable, empowering, and sustained. By combining advocacy for systemic change with direct support for children’s engagement, we sought to create an environment in which children’s voices are not only heard, but valued, protected, and able to influence decisions at global, national and institutional levels.

■ The CHRD Strategic Vision: From Blueprint to Living Movement



The year opened with a defining public moment. In March 2025, at the 58th session of the HRC in Geneva, **Child Rights Connect** formally launched the **Strategic Vision for Promoting and Protecting the Rights of Child Human Rights Defenders** – a landmark document co-designed with more than 50 CSOs, policymakers, academic experts, and children themselves over years. Available in multiple languages and accompanied by a child-friendly version, the Strategic Vision gives the global child rights community a shared language and a practical roadmap for the decade ahead.

The **launch of the Strategic Vision** formed part of a broader advocacy effort to influence the HRC’s triennial resolution on human rights defenders in the context of digital and new technologies, led by Norway. Through the side event and targeted advocacy by **Child Rights Connect** members and partners, we sought to secure recognition of CHRDs and their specific protection needs in the resolution. While the final text included important references to children and online child safety, it did not recognise CHRDs or address the particular risks they face. This highlighted the continued need to raise awareness of the vital role CHRDs play in

advancing human rights and reinforced the importance of sustained advocacy through the Strategic Vision.

child safety, it did not recognise CHRDs or address the particular risks they face. This highlighted the continued need to raise awareness of the vital role CHRDs play in advancing human rights and reinforced the importance of sustained advocacy through the Strategic Vision.

But a vision is only as powerful as its implementation. In June 2025, a fourth co-design session convened endorsers and key partners from across time zones to do the harder work: mapping what was already being done under the Vision’s four pillars, identifying where gaps remained, and building the structures needed to close them. The session produced a concrete outcome: advancing the Vision through regional dialogues, and the identification of Latin America as the first region to lead those in 2026 – a region with deep civil society roots in child rights and acute urgency given the political context. We also began to see some implementation efforts in Asia Pacific where our partners, Save the Children Thailand Country Office and the youth-led movement “Bad Student”, co-hosted an interactive session during CIVICUS’ Virtual International Civil Society Week, presenting the Strategic Vision and sharing practical lessons on supporting child and youth-led organisations.

▪ Four Countries. One Movement.

Underpinning this global advocacy is “The Now and the Future” – a three-year project cofounded by different donors to advance the rights, empowerment, and protection of CHRDs, with a particular focus on girls and children from groups most deprived of their rights. This work directly advances Strategic Priority 1: building the enabling environment



Brazil

In July, **Child Rights Connect** and its partner Instituto Alana launched the project's capacity strengthening work piloting a Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop for adult professionals from civil society, government, and international organisations. The ToT curriculum – a non-formal, participatory methodology grounded in experiential learning – is designed to equip adults not simply with knowledge about CHRDs, but with the concrete skills to recognise, empower, and protect them within their own institutional contexts.

CHRDs gathered for the project's first in-country workshop aimed to strengthen their skills - the first direct test of the ToT methodology with children themselves. Working through theatre, role-play, and collaborative exercises, participants built practical skills and, critically, the confidence to use them: to name their rights, to plan action, and to engage with the human rights system system on their own terms. It was capacity strengthening designed not to inform children about advocacy, but to empower and support them when doing it.

Thailand

In August, a capacity-building workshop with Amnesty International Thailand brought together children and young people from some of the country's most marginalised communities – stateless children, ethnic minority and indigenous children and youth, LGBTQIA+ children and young people, and children from low-income households, with girls making up the majority.

The workshop equipped child defenders with the skills to document their own rights experience through child-led data collection and to use that evidence to engage directly with Thailand's upcoming Universal Periodic Review. The link between local lived experience and international accountability mechanisms - the local-to-global approach at the core of **Child Rights Connect** – was not a theory here. Participants left with the tools to make it real.

In October and November, **Child Rights Connect** and its partner Plan International Togo Country Office delivered the project's most geographically broad in-country programme to date – reaching adult civil society professionals and children from across all five regions of the country. The children who participated reflected the diversity that the project was designed to reach: girls, children from ethnic minority and Indigenous communities, children experiencing economic hardship, and young people with disabilities. By the close of the workshops, participants had together identified the most pressing children's rights violations in their country and committed to preparing a children's UPR report for submission – translating capacity into concrete, child-led accountability action.

Preparatory groundwork was laid for activities launching in 2026 – building and country-level foundations that will allow the project to deliver in its fourth country context in the year ahead.

This experience of direct in-country work with three members (Alana, Plan, CRIC) and a strategic partner (Amnesty) has been seminal in testing concrete ways to nourish the local-to-global and global-to-local advocacy work.

■ Children at COP30: Climate Justice at the Heart of Child Rights

In November, in partnership with the Alana Institute in Brazil, **Child Rights Connect** supported two CHRDs to attend COP30 in Belém, Taissa, a fifteen-year-old Indigenous activist from the Ómagua Kambeba people of the Amazon, and Lova, a UNICEF Youth Advocate from Madagascar. Both were selected because they carried something no policy brief can replicate: the lived experience of the climate crisis, from communities on its front line.

COP30 marked a historic turning point. For the first time, children and youth were meaningfully and systematically

integrated into official Presidency activities, consultations, and panels. The conference outcome texts contain the most significant recognition to date of children's rights in the context of climate change – a milestone orchestrated through years of sustained advocacy by child rights organisations, with **Child Rights Connect** among them.

COP30 illustrated how the empowerment of CHRDs and the institutionalisation of meaningful child participation can reinforce one another, enabling children not only to be present in global decision-making spaces, but to shape them.

■ Embedding Child Participation Standards in International Human Rights Mechanisms

Throughout 2025, **Child Rights Connect** worked with UN human rights mechanisms to strengthen the standards, guidance, and modalities needed for safe, meaningful, and sustained child participation. Our focus was not only to support children's engagement in individual processes, but to help ensure that participation becomes a systematic feature of how UN human rights bodies operate – rather than an ad hoc practice. By developing

practical tools, guidance and participation methodologies, we contributed to building more consistent and child-rights-based approaches across the UN system.

A key milestone was the first session of the Intergovernmental Working Group on a possible fourth Optional Protocol to the UNCRC—the first treaty-drafting process to formally request child participation. Through capacity-building, safeguarding

support and participation planning for [five child delegates](#), we helped establish child participation practices that can serve as a model for future international treaty-making processes.

To strengthen institutional approaches to participation more broadly, we supported the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to develop public [Guidance for States on Supporting Child Participation at the Human Rights Council's annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child](#) – a practical joint resource, published in December 2025, designed to lower the

barriers for States to bring children's voices into this annual accountability forum. The guidance was developed for the 2026 annual day focusing on children's rights in situations of armed conflict.

We also supported the CRC Committee's development of General Comment No. 27 on children's rights to access to justice and effective remedies. Together with our CAT and UNICEF, we produced child-friendly information on the General Comment process and GC27 ([English](#) – [Français](#) – [Español](#)), as well as a methodology for consulting

▪ The Thread That Ran Through It All

Across all of this work – from Geneva to Belém, from national workshops in Brazil, Thailand, Togo and Moldova to treaty negotiations at the UN – a common thread emerged: children are not only beneficiaries of the human rights system, but key actors in it. In 2025, [Child Rights Connect](#) worked both to strengthen the protection and empowerment of CHRDs and to ensure that institutions are equipped to engage with children safely, meaningfully, and sustainably. Together, these efforts contributed to a growing shift in how children are viewed and included: not as occasional participants, but as rights holders, advocates and partners in shaping the decisions that affect their lives. While significant challenges remain, the foundations strengthened this year bring us closer to a future in which children's participation is systematic, CHRDs are recognised and protected, and children's voices can influence change at every level.

Advancing Accountability to Children

In 2025, against the backdrop of a continued challenging environment marked by shrinking civic space, sustained attacks on human rights institutions, and growing resistance to child rights standards in national and multilateral arenas, **Child Rights Connect** continued to work with members, children, and partners

to strengthen accountability to children. We did so through coordinated engagement with UN human rights mechanisms and the broader UN reform process – ensuring that mechanisms designed to hold governments to account for children’s rights did not erode while the world was looking elsewhere.

Keeping Accountability to Children Alive: From Engagement with the **Committee on the Rights of the Child** to UN Reform

Throughout the year, **Child Rights Connect** continued to provide consistent support to CSOs to engage with the CRC Committee, including during the January session, the February pre-session, the May session and September pre-session, and navigate the cancellation of meetings, ensuring that civil society and child voices continued to reach the Committee despite an increasingly constrained operating environment.

When the escalating UN liquidity crisis forced the unprecedented cancellation of one session and two pre-sessions, **Child Rights Connect** took a series of targeted measures to help safeguard continuity in children’s rights accountability processes.

First, it stepped up its support to help ensure that one of the cancelled pre-sessions could still take place online, working closely with UNICEF in support of OHCHR, to enable civil society and child participation despite significant logistical and financial constraints.

Second, recognising the reduced opportunities for direct engagement between the Committee and civil society, **Child Rights Connect** supported a dedicated exchange between the CRC Committee Chair and network members – maintaining dialogue at a time when formal spaces were disappearing.

Third, it coordinated collective civil society advocacy to raise concerns about the broader implications of the liquidity crisis and related UN reform processes for children’s rights. This included a joint letter to Permanent Missions and the UN Secretary-General, endorsed by more than 150 organisations. Marking Human Rights Day, **Child Rights Connect** also issued joint civil society messaging on the UN80 reform process. These communications highlighted the impact of cancelled Committee meetings on children’s rights monitoring and called for reforms to be guided by the UN Secretary-General’s Guidance Note on Child Rights Mainstreaming. They stressed the need to ensure that UN80-related reforms strengthen, rather than weaken, children’s rights protection, including through meaningful child participation, protection of civil society space, and adequate resourcing of child rights mandates.

Together, these actions sustained civil society engagement with the CRC Committee, maintained dialogue during a period of acute institutional disruption, and strengthen collective civil society positioning on what UN reform must protect regarding children’s rights.

CRC Reporting at a Glance (2025)

Sessions in 2025

Session 98 January 2025 – 7 reviews + pre-session held

Session 99 May 2025 – 6 reviews + pre-session cancelled

Session 100 cancelled and rescheduled to January 2026 + pre-session held online September/October 2025

Crisis innovation: online pre-sessions co-developed with UNICEF and the CRC Committee when sessions were cancelled – ensuring civil society and child participation continued despite the UN liquidity crisis.

Submissions

193 Civil Society Submissions

39 Child-Led or Informed Submissions
20.2% of total non-state submissions

▪ A Good Start in Life: Coordinating Civil Society for Early Childhood Development

A further strand of accountability work in 2025 ran through early childhood development. The **Child Rights Connect** Inclusive Social Protection Task Force – convened by Hope and Homes for Children and bringing together fifteen co-endorsing organisations, among them Lumos, Better Care Network, Plan International, SOS Children's Villages International, Make Mothers Matter, and Moving Minds Alliance – coordinated civil society advocacy around two connected moments: the 2025 Annual Day on the Rights of the Child (ADRC), held at the fifty-eighth session of the HRC and themed on early childhood development (ECD), and the General Assembly's biennial resolution on the rights on the same theme adopted in December 2025.

In the lead-up to the ADRC, the Task Force advocated for the integration of ECD in global child rights discussions with a focus on child participation and family-based

care, and co-organised a side event at the HRC in Geneva in March 2025 (highlighted also under the Working Group on Child Participation in Section 6). The Task Force also designed a methodology for consulting young children on early-childhood issues, engaging children's advisory boards so that the youngest children were represented in the debate.

At the heart of the effort was a joint position paper, *The Right to a Good Start in Life: A Child's Right to Holistic Early Child Development*², published in July 2025 with collective endorsement of the Task Force. Setting out cross-cutting recommendations across its rights-based thematic areas, it served as the primary civil society advocacy document in the negotiations of the UNGA resolution and its priorities carried into the text the General Assembly went on to adopt³, from family-based care and the reform of child-protection systems to inclusive social

² Hope and Homes for Children and partners, *The Right to a Good Start in Life: A Child's Right to Holistic Early Child Development*, July 2025, endorsed by 15 organisations. Available at <https://www.hopeand-homes.org/publications/the-right-to-a-good-start-in-life-ecd-report>.

³ General Assembly resolution 80/190, Rights of the child, adopted 15 December 2025.

protection, integrated early-childhood financing and emergency preparedness, maternal and child health, universal birth registration, and access to early learning and the route toward a new Optional Protocol.

What made this strand distinctive was the bridging of Geneva and New York.

Coordination with the New York-based child-focused agencies, with direct expertise in the General Assembly's Third Committee negotiations, proved decisive in shaping and advancing the resolution text – a reminder that the network is at its most effective when its Geneva advocacy and its New York presence pull together.

▪ Advancing UN Human Rights Standard-Setting on Children and Armed Conflict with Children at the Core

Building on efforts to strengthen how UN human rights mechanisms engage with children and improve standards and practices for accountability, **Child Rights Connect** supported a coordinated set of activities in 2025 aimed at ensuring that children's lived experiences directly inform the development of international standards on children and armed conflict (CAAC). As part of these efforts, we facilitated the first-of-its kind consultation with children on the HRC resolution on the rights of the child!

The OHCHR, with support from **Child Rights Connect** and our Child Advisory Team, collected children's perspectives through a call for inputs for its 2025 report on the rights of the child and violations of human rights in armed conflicts. The report assessed the impact of armed conflict on children's rights and was intended to inform the ADRC and the forthcoming resolution on children and armed conflict in March 2026. **Child Rights Connect** provided technical advice on the development of the methodology and child-friendly information materials, including a facilitators' guide for CSOs. We also supported our Child Advisory Team to submit inputs to the consultation and later facilitated their review of the child-friendly version of the draft report to ensure that children's perspectives were accurately reflected.

This work formed part of a continuous engagement process designed to ensure that children's voices directly informed the evidence base and negotiations underpinning the HRC resolution on children and armed conflict in March 2026.

On 13 December 2025, **Child Rights Connect** – working with its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and partners including Lumos, Save the Children, War Child, Arigatou International, DCI-Palestine, and QADER for Community Development – organised the first-ever direct consultation between children living in conflict-affected contexts and the EU to inform the HRC resolution on the rights of the child, for which the EU serves as penholder.

Children from 10 countries spoke. From Ukraine, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, Colombia, Mexico, Afghanistan, Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Uganda, they brought firsthand accounts of what armed conflict means for children: not as statistics, but as rights-holders demanding to be heard by the people writing the rules that are supposed to protect them. They spoke about education cut short, mental health unaddressed, protection systems that had failed them, and their determination to be included in the conversations shaping their futures.

It was the first time in history that a consultation with children has been organised by the penholder of a HRC resolution. Their voices shaped the draft text. And the fact that it happened at all was the result of months of quiet, tenacious advocacy by **Child Rights Connect** and members – coordinating across time zones, working with members on the ground to ensure children's safety, and navigating the procedural architecture of the HRC to open a door that had never existed before.

■ What Accountability Looked Like in 2025

Across these efforts, **Child Rights Connect** contributed to strengthening accountability to children by ensuring that civil society and child voices remained engaged in CRC Committee processes even during periods of institutional disruption, and by safeguarding continuity of engagement in a resource-limited UN environment. At the same time, we worked with members and partners to respond to wider pressures on child rights and civic space within UN reform discussions, helping to ensure that emerging changes to the UN system do not weaken, but rather reinforce, children's rights protection and meaningful participation.

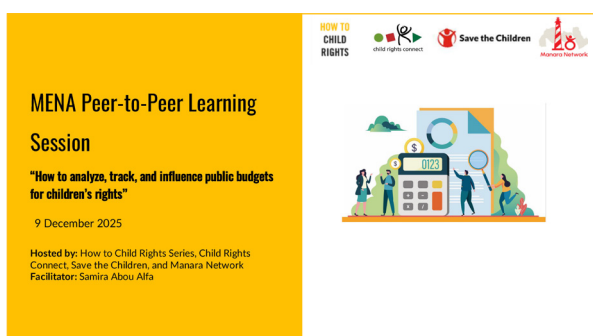
Through targeted support to standard-setting processes, particularly on children and armed conflict, and by facilitating direct engagement between children and UN decision-makers, we helped ensure that international human rights mechanisms are increasingly informed by children's lived experiences. Together, these actions advanced a more coherent and consistent approach to accountability to children across the UN system, strengthening both the accessibility of existing mechanisms and the quality of standards that guide their work.

The How To Child Rights Series

There is a particular kind of institutional knowledge that only accumulates over decades – knowledge about what civil society practitioners actually need when they sit down to apply an international framework in daily work; about how to translate the formal language of UN General Comments and State reporting cycles into tools that a CSO in Cairo or Casablanca, Bogotá or Bangkok can pick up and use on a Monday morning. That knowledge is exactly what the How To Child Rights Series (HTCRS) was created to hold.

In April 2025, Child Rights Connect became the host of the HTCRS, taking over stewardship of the series from member organisation Save the Children. The transition was not merely administrative. It was a recognition that **Child Rights Connect**'s unique position – at the intersection of civil society, the UN system, academia, and global practitioner networks – makes it the natural home for tools that turn international standards into ground-level change. In 2025, the first test of that stewardship produced results that exceeded expectations.

■ Tools for the MENA Region and Beyond: The Public Budget as a Child Rights Instrument



One of the year's most significant HTCRS development was the creation of practical guidance tools on analysing, tracking, and influencing public budgets for children's rights – the first HTCRS outputs delivered specifically for and with practitioners in the Middle East and North Africa region. The work was made possible through the Advancing Children's Rights Research Network Palestine (ACoRN) partnership with University College Cork, anchored in expertise grounded in the realities of Palestine and the wider MENA region.

The context matters. In a region where public financing for children's rights is shaped by political complexity, humanitarian emergency, and the vast distance between international commitments and domestic budget allocations, the ability of civil society to engage thoughtfully with public budgets is not a technical nicety – it is a lifeline for children. **Child Rights Connect** and its partners set out to give practitioners the tools to do that work.

The development process was deliberately, genuinely participatory. Drafts were translated into French, Spanish, and Arabic – not as an afterthought, but as a precondition for meaningful consultation across regions. Two rounds of written feedback were gathered: first from technical experts; then from the civil society practitioners who would actually use the tools in the field. Four online drop-in consultations sessions, in Spanish, French, English and Arabic, drew a combined total of 132 participants from across the globe.

In early December, a dedicated peer-to-peer learning session for the MENA region brought together 37 civil society practitioners and child rights defenders from Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, and Morocco to share practical experiences in using public budget processes to advance children's rights. The session is available as a lasting bilingual resource on the [Save the Children Resource Hub](#).

Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, and Morocco to share practical experiences in using public budget processes to advance children's rights. The session is available as a lasting bilingual resource on the [Save the Children Resource Hub](#).

The result is three complementary tools: an introductory guide for civil society on public budgets for children's rights; a step-by-step

methodology for budget allocation and expenditure analysis using a child rights lens; and a practical guide to developing effective budget strategies and plans. The tools were co-sponsored by UNICEF, Save the Children, World Vision, QADER for Community Development, Manara Network, Nabaa, IPRODES, Child Fund International, Bayti,

and Amis Clac – a breadth of institutional endorsement that speaks to both the rigour of the tools and the trust **Child Rights Connect** has built across the MENA child rights ecosystem. The tools were finalised at the time of this report and are expected to be made publicly available in early 2026.

■ General Comment 26: Connecting Children's Rights to the Climate Crisis

COP30 was not the only moment in 2025 where **Child Rights Connect** worked to embed children's rights into the global climate conversation. In September, led by Save the Children together with the **Child Rights Connect** Working Group on children's rights and environment, took place the global launch of the HRC authoritative guidance on General Comment 26 on children's rights to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. Two launch webinars – spanning time zones to ensure genuine global reach – brought together practitioners, policymakers, CSOs, and child rights advocates from across

regions. Members of the CAT played a central role, presenting their child-friendly school kit on GC26 that they helped to develop – a resource designed specifically from their own experience, and ensured that children's perspectives were woven into how it was received from the very first moment. The GC26 launch was one of many moments in 2025 in which the CAT contributed to work that extended well beyond their formal mandate - enriching HRC outputs as much as they did the organisation's direct advocacy.

■ A Living Infrastructure for Global Child Rights Practice

The HRC is more than a publications programme. It is a living infrastructure for connecting practitioners, bridging geographic and linguistic divides, and ensuring that the latest thinking in child rights – from UN Committee rooms to local-level implementation – reaches the people who need it in a form they can actually use.

As host organisation, **Child Rights Connect** supported the development of an additional tool under the HRC: the **CSO Guidance on integrating environment and climate change considerations into the reporting cycle for the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)** – extending the series into a regional human rights framework that serves children across an entire continent.

The tool led by Save the Children, has the support of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and over 50 organisations across Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone Africa. The development of this tool reflects the same principle running through every HRC output: that international standards only change children's lives when they are made

accessible, practical, and available in the right language, at the right moment, for the right audience. That is what **Child Rights Connect** is committed to making happen.

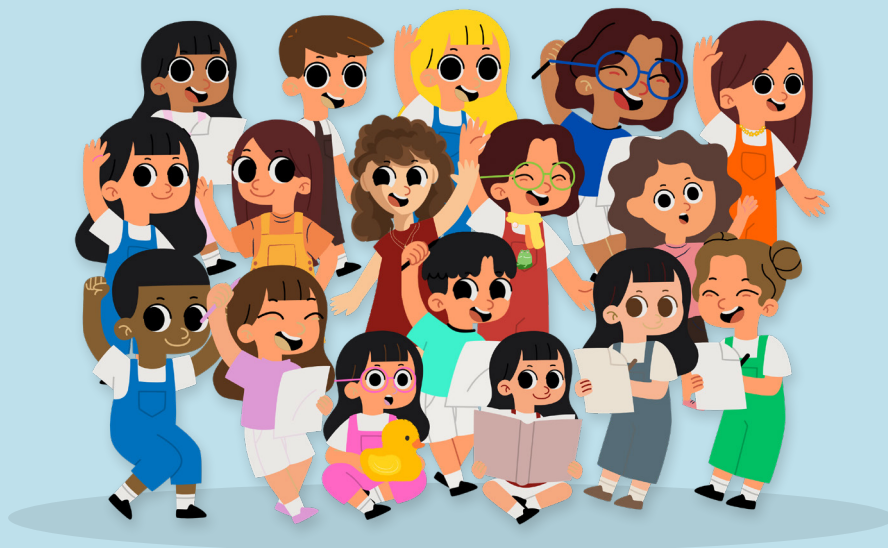


The Children's Advisory Team

🌱 The CAT as the Enabling Mechanism for Wide Child Participation

Child participation is a cross-cutting principle of **Child Rights Connect** and is embedded across its governance, programmes, projects, and advocacy work. The Children's Advisory Team (CAT) has been one of the key mechanisms through which the organisation has advanced meaningful child participation, both within **Child Rights Connect** and across the wider children's rights community. Moreover, CAT has been instrumental to advance programmatic work, engage with member organisations and UN strategic partners, as well as to deliver on commitments.

In a year defined by institutional pressure, funding cuts, cancelled UN sessions, and the contraction of civic space across the globe, **Child Rights Connect's** Children's Advisory Team (CAT) did the opposite of retreating. In 2025, the CAT deepened its engagement with the UN system, led some of the year's most significant advocacy interventions, co-designed tools that will protect other children for years to come, and demonstrated – once again, for anyone who needed the reminder – that children are not the beneficiaries of a child rights movement. They are among its most essential architects.



The CAT is **Child Rights Connect's** permanent body of CHRDs: aged 13 to 17, drawn from all regions of the world, who bring the voice and perspective of children into everything the organisation does – its programmes, its advocacy, its published tools, and its institutional positions. Their participation is not decorative. It is structural.

Child Rights Connect's Strategic Plan 2025-2029 is explicit: children must inform not only the organisation's outputs but its governance. In practice, the CAT is central to ensuring that **Child Rights Connect** can fulfil its commitment to empowering children to claim and exercise their rights by advocating for and facilitating their participation in national, regional and international human rights mechanisms and processes, including as CHRDs. Crucially, the CAT functions as an enabling mechanism to ensure that children across the wider **Child Rights Connect** network and beyond can meaningfully access and engage with UN human rights processes, by supporting the development

of child-friendly information, consultation methodologies, and participation tools that make these processes understandable, accessible and safe for children, further helping mobilise them in their own countries to take part in key opportunities to speak up. Through this, the CAT acts as a practical vehicle that transforms participation principles into accessible entry points, enabling the widest possible engagement of children with UN human rights mechanisms. This year, that commitment was tested against one of the most difficult operating environments in the organisation's history – and it held.

■ Shaping International Law: A New Optional Protocol on Education

One of the year's most consequential engagements came through the United Nations' process to develop a new Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on free pre-primary and secondary education. The process – a slow-moving but momentous exercise in international lawmaking – opening in 2025 with the first session of its Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG). **Child Rights Connect**, with the support of its Working Group on Children and the Right to Education, placed children at the centre of it.

When the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) called for input to the Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group exploring a possible optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on free public pre-primary and secondary education, the Children's Advisory Team carried the question to children themselves. Through surveys and consultations conducted around the world, it gathered the views of 1,297 children from 12 countries into a narrative report: what it means, what barriers prevent it, and what an Optional Protocol would need to say to make a real difference to children's lives. It was one of the largest child-led consultation processes of its kind. The results were compiled into a formal submission to the IGWG, published in English and Spanish, alongside child-friendly survey results in three languages and 12 individual country sheets that gave

granularity and geographic breadth to what children were saying.

Then the CAT took those findings directly into the room. In September 2025, states, experts and five child delegates representing the world's five regions — two of them CAT members and one from a network member organisation — gathered in Geneva for the Inter-Governmental Working Group's first session, which closed with a commitment to further consultations ahead of the second session in 2026.

Child Rights Connect provided intensive preparation, co-designed the child-led session, and accompanied all delegates throughout the entire Working Group meeting – present not as observers, but to ensure that their participation was meaningful, safe, and genuinely heard.

To ensure those consultations included children and not only adults, the CAT teamed up with the child delegates to co-design and co-organize a round of online regional sessions, held in safe spaces. Each consultation was run by the children themselves: child moderators opened with presentations on their national-level advocacy and on the UN process behind the protocol's development, then led a guided discussion built around a set of leading questions, while a child rapporteur drew together the key points at the close of each meeting and went on to help prepare the consultation report.

■ The Council of Europe: Children Leading on Health and Sexuality Education

Child Rights Connect supported the participation of seven child participants including 3 CAT members for the **Mid-Term Review Conference of the Council of Europe's** strategy for the rights of the child on April 2025.

They actively **contributed** to two key sessions: one on protecting children from violence through age-appropriate sexuality education, and one on promoting children's participation in decisions about their own health. They did not attend as observers.

Furthermore, the child advisors presented a **report** with the outcomes of the consultations related to the development of the Committee of Ministers Recommendation on comprehensive sexuality education and launched a **booklet**: "Your Health, Your Say! Key Messages from the Council of Europe's Guide to Children's Participation in Decisions About Their Health".



The booklet is complemented with by an Annex with practical tips for any adult who wants to use this resource with children, for instance parents, teachers, social workers and health professionals.

The most important audience was not the one watching the livestream. It was the Committee of Ministers, whose Recommendation on comprehensive sexuality education the CAT's consultation had helped to shape.

■ Armed Conflict: A Historic Consultation That Changed the Rules

Throughout 2025, the Children's Advisory Team (CAT) made children's own voices central to international advocacy on children in armed conflict, topic of the Annual Day on the Rights of the Child forecast for March 2026. The work began in April 2025, when CAT members drew on their own networks and communities to consult 230 children from four countries, gathering their views into a report submitted to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Following up on that, the child advisors also gave their opinion of the draft child-friendly report of the High Commissioner before its launch, ensuring that one of the most important accountability documents in the UN system was accessible not only to diplomats and legal experts, but to children whose rights it was designed to protect.

That momentum carried into December 2025, when the CAT was at the centre of something that had never happened before in the history of the HRC.

Child Rights Connect (the Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict and the Secretariat) convened the first-ever direct consultation between children living in conflict-affected settings and the European Union, as penholder of the Human Rights Council Resolution on the Rights of the Child. 24 children from ten countries – Ukraine, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, Colombia, Mexico, Afghanistan, Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Uganda –, among them among them three CAT members came together to share what armed conflict had done to their lives and what they needed decision-makers to do about it. They spoke about education cut short, about mental health unaddressed, about protection systems that failed them, and about their determination to be part of the conversations that shape their futures.

It was the first time children had been directly consulted by the penholder of a HRC resolution. Making it happen required

careful, strategic work – coordinating across regions, working through trusted organisations to ensure children’s safety, and navigating the procedural architecture of the HRC to open a door that had never previously existed.

After the consultation, a CAT member prepared the child-friendly summary of outcomes, returning to children, in language and format that belonged to them, what

they had said to the people who write the rules.

What the children shared was not abstract. They described the destruction of schools, the bombing of hospitals, the separation of families, the silencing of children who dare to speak. They described what they needed from a world that had largely been making decisions about them without them.

“ There are no children’s rights that are not violated in war.”

— Child from Ukraine

“ We are denied of all of our lives — even our smiles and happiness.”

— Child from Palestine

“ Adults take decisions without us but we are living the consequences of the war directly.”

— Child from Colombia

The children were not only witnesses. They were analysts, advocates, and architects of the recommendations they wanted to see in the resolution. They called for the protection of schools and hospitals, access to education without discrimination for displaced children, psychosocial support, accountability for violations – and, above all, the right to be meaningfully heard.

“ Children are not just victims. We are the holders of hope and the future.”

— Child from Afghanistan

“ And we dream of peace.”

— Child from Palestine

■ Development of the New General Comment of the CRC Committee

In its 95th session, the Committee on the Rights of the Child decided to dedicate General Comment No. 27 to children's right to access to justice and to an effective remedy. As with any General Comment, the Committee's working methods invite all stakeholders, including children, to take part in the consultations that shape it. To support the access of children and civil society to that process, **Child Rights Connect** developed a consultation package for each round of consultations, in cooperation with UNICEF in the second one.

Each package pairs a methodology for consulting children with child-friendly materials explaining the General Comment — its topic in the first round, and the first draft in the second.

The Children's Advisory Team was central to developing these packages: across both rounds the child advisors were consulted on the documents and the methodology, their feedback was used to revise the materials, and at a second meeting they reviewed and validated the updated versions — shaping the

very tools that made the wider participation possible. Then, like any other group of children, they gave their own views on the content of the General Comment, which were submitted officially to the Committee.

Across the two rounds, the reach was considerable. In the first, on the concept note (May–December 2024), the Committee received 315 written submissions and the outcomes of more than 141 consultations; of these, over 82 engaged children directly, bringing the views of at least 7,215 children into the process.

In the second, on the draft General Comment (April–June 2025), around 100 children took part through consultations facilitated by member and non-member organizations of **Child Rights Connect** across 19 countries.

A child-friendly version of the General Comment is pending to be developed with the CAT once the Committee approves it, and will ensure that children worldwide can access this instrument and understand it.

What the CAT Makes Possible

In 2025, the Secretariat of **Child Rights Connect** was reduced in size. Resources were constrained. The operating environment grew harder by the month. And the Children's Advisory Team did not slow down. It expanded its reach, deepened its advocacy, entered more rooms, and opened more doors than in any previous year.

Across 2025 and 7 different initiatives led by CAT, +40 non-CAT child participants were directly involved (i.e. attending the extended CAT meetings, speaking in public, co-moderating events, drafting & building child-friendly resources, coordinating consultations in their regions/countries); of 1,400 child participants indirectly involved (i.e. participating in child consultations, submission, etc).

That is not a coincidence. It is evidence of something important: that **when child participation is truly embedded in how an organisation works – not as a programme, but as a principle – it becomes resilient in ways that survive even the most difficult years.** And in 2025, it showed what that means by continuing to ensure that their support is key to ensure the widest possible engagement of children with UN human rights mechanisms.

Why the CAT was Established

As recognized in the 2022 external evaluation of our work, **Child Rights Connect** is a driving force to advance the debate, set the standards and build the capacity for child participation at the global level.

“Key informants [...] recognize **Child Rights Connect** as an international authority on child participation.” (SIDA mandated evaluation, 2022). “**Child Rights Connect** has pushed the agenda and increased the acceptance, demand and practice of safe, empowering, and sustainable child participation at multiple levels, specifically amongst its Network members and in the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee), and to some extent within the wider UN system.”

The special relationship of CRCnct with the work of the Committee is also seminal in how the CAT was established. The journey began in 2018 with a project-specific global group of 21 children advising the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child’s Day of General Discussion on child human rights defenders, followed in 2019 by a global CAT supporting the development of UNICEF’s child-friendly version of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. While these initiatives demonstrated the importance of child participation, they were resource-intensive and limited to specific projects.

Recognising the aspirations of the network for more sustained engagement, we established the CAT in 2020 as a permanent global body at the heart of our work on children’s rights and empowerment. Moving from project-based participation to a comprehensive and continuous participation model enabled children to shape organisational priorities, governance, advocacy, and programmes year-round.

Since then, the CAT has grown in diversity, representation, and influence—from responding to the impacts of COVID-19 and publishing child-led resources, to participating in our Executive Committee as part of our governance structure. Today, the CAT brings together child human rights defenders from across the world, ensuring that children’s perspectives consistently inform our decisions and actions. In 2025, the CAT was composed by 17 members and almost 60% of them are supported by member organisations or observers of the network.



Working Groups

Working Groups are what the network looks like in action. Established and run on the initiative of members, they are spaces where organisations with shared expertise and shared purpose coordinate advocacy, pool evidence, align positions, and move together on the issues that matter most for children. The Secretariat channels information and aligns planning processes, but the energy comes from the members themselves – which is why the Working Groups continued to meet, coordinate and produce results even in 2025, when the Secretariat was operating at significantly reduced capacity.

The structural pressures of the wider sector – funding retrenchment, reduced civil society capacity, cancelled UN sessions – meant that engagement was not uniform across all six groups in 2025. Where Working Group activity was more limited than in previous years, that reflects the sector's wider crisis, not the commitment of the organisations involved. The groups that were able to mobilise fully did so with remarkable effect. Their contributions are evidence that the network's collective power persists even as the infrastructure supporting it faces an existential test.

The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict was among the most active – and among the most urgently needed. With armed conflict now affecting children across every region, and with a major UN resolution process in process in preparation for the 2026 Annual Debate on the Rights of the Child, the moment demanded exactly what this group does best: convening authority, coordinated advocacy, and a willingness to ensure children's voices reach the rooms where decisions are made.

Across 2025, the number of children living in zones of active armed conflict continued to rise. Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Ukraine, Myanmar, Haiti, among others – the geography of children's exposure to violence is not shrinking; it is expanded with seemingly unimpeded rapidity. The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict exists precisely for moments like this: a coalition of organisations that know this terrain intimately, have spent years building relationships with the key UN mechanisms, and have shown, repeatedly, that coordinated civil society action can move the institutions designed to protect children.

Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

Convener: Defence for Children International (DCI)

Members: Arigatou International, Care International, Child Rights International Network, Plan International, Save the Children, SOS Children Villages, Terre des Hommes Foundation, War Child Alliance, World Vision International

Observers: Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, Watchlist, Justice Rapid Response, Rescue International, International Bureau for Children's Rights

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, ICRC

Key outputs

- The WG convened a **meeting with SRSG Gamba** in March 2025, sharing activities and common action between the SRSG Office and the members of the WG. In line with the WG's commitment to institutional coherence, the group has also established a standing policy to invite the CAAC focal points of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to its meetings. A second meeting with the European Liaison Office of the SRSG took place on 27 August 2025.
- **Joint Side Event at HRC 58 – Children in CAAC/Accountability**

In accordance with the WG's 2025 work plan, a high-level joint side event was organised during the 59th session of the Human Rights Council on 15 March 2025: Strengthening International Accountability: Protecting the Rights of Children in Palestine.

The event was moderated by Alex Kamarotos, Executive Director of DCI and Convenor of the WG CAAC, and featured five distinguished speakers:

Benoît Van Keirsbilck, Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child; Ms. Khadeja, International Advocacy Officer, MIFTAH; Chris Sidoti, Commissioner, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel; Khaled Quzmar, Director General, DCI-Palestine; Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory since 1967.

During the same HRC session, a second CAAC-related event was organised — sponsored by Save the Children and co-sponsored by the Group of Friends on CAAC — on the theme: Towards a strong and comprehensive resolution for the 2026 Annual Day of the Rights of the Child: strengthening prevention of, response to, and accountability for violations and abuses against conflict-affected children.

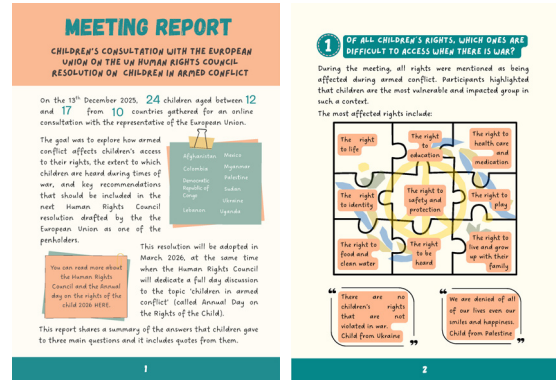
- In anticipation of the **report of the High Commissioner on Children and armed conflict** presented in the 60th Session, the members of the Working Group coordinated several written submissions, including children led submissions.
- **Election of the new SRSG CAAC and mobilisation of the WG**

Following SRSG Gamba's announcement of the end of her mandate, the WG received concerning information in early 2025 about a lack of transparency in the process for designating her successor. The group responded swiftly by coordinating a letter to the UN Secretary-General calling for a transparent, open recruitment process and prioritising candidates with a strong child rights background. The letter was widely endorsed by WG members and allied networks, and co-signed by seven former Chairpersons of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Office of the Secretary-General responded positively on 8 April 2025, confirming that an open recruitment process would be launched.

- **Preparation of the ADRC and HRC CAAC Resolution**

From October 2025 onwards, the WG organised multiple coordination sessions in preparation for the 2026 Annual Debate on the Rights of the Child (ADRC). Work was structured across two streams: one group coordinated participation in the Annual Debate, including child participation in official debates and side events; a dedicated task force focused on influencing the zero draft of the HRC resolution through to its adoption in April 2026.

A notable innovation was the organisation of a structured consultation between the penholders of the resolution (the European Union and GRULAC) and children directly affected by armed conflict. An [online consultation](#) was held on 13 December 2025, facilitated by members of the WG under the coordination of **Child Rights Connect**.



A [child-friendly report](#) on the consultation has been published and widely disseminated. What the children shared was not abstract. They described the destruction of schools, the bombing of hospitals, the separation of families, the silencing of children who dare to speak. They described what they needed from a world that had largely been making decisions about them without them.

- **Looking Ahead**

The WG CAAC will continue to:

- Promote meaningful and safe participation of children and young people in intergovernmental discussions on CAAC-related matters.
- Foster robust relationships with key institutional partners — including the SRSG CAAC, the CRC Committee (and its two new CAAC focal points), and the Group of Friends on CAAC — to drive collaborative advocacy initiatives and events.
- Actively engage with relevant UN human rights mechanisms, including the CRC Committee and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), to advocate for children affected by armed conflict and strengthen coordination between Geneva- and New York-based UN bodies.
- Cultivate ongoing dialogue with Special Procedures mandate holders of the Human Rights Council and contribute relevant insights to their reports.
- In 2026, priority activities will centre on events and child participation around the ADRC. See the WG CAAC Planning 2026 for full details.

Working Group on Children and the Right to Education

Convener: Human Rights Watch

Members and affiliates: African Child Policy Forum, Alana Institute, ATD Fourth World, Avaaz, Defence for Children International, Dublin City University, Edmund Rice International, Education International, Fondation Apprentis d'Auteuil International, Georgia State University, Girls Not Brides, Global Campaign for Education, Humanity and Inclusion, Human Rights Watch, Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, Inclusion International, Initiative for Social and Economic Rights Uganda, International Council of Women, Irish Network for Education Worldwide, Fey y Algeria, Jesuit Refugee Services, Lumos, Organisation for Early Childhood Education, Malala Fund, Make Mothers Matter, Moving Minds Alliance, National Education Union UK, North-West University (South Africa), Plan International, Plataforma de Infancia, Red CLADE, Results Canada, Right to Education Initiative, Sightsavers, Their World, UNESCO, War Child, World Vision

Key outputs

- **Webinar:** On 11 February, the Working Group organized a webinar on the proposed new optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to strengthen the right to education (OP-FRED). It was attended by 150+ participants from around the world. Presenters included various Working Group members and a member of the Child Advisory Team.
- **Side Event “Strengthening the Right to Free Education to Transform Millions of Lives”**

During the March session of the Human Rights Council, the Working Group organized a side event featuring a video message from a former Child Advisory Team member, and panel presentations from the ambassadors of Ghana and France, UNESCO, and Plan International supporting the OP-FRED initiative.
- **Workshop:** On 14 May, Sierra Leone and the Working Group hosted a workshop on “Strategy for a successful outcome of the first meeting of the Inter-Governmental Working Group for a new Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.” The primary objectives of the workshop were to collaboratively define strategic goals and ensure alignment on key messaging to effectively address the challenges and issues surrounding the initiative. At least 26 permanent missions participated.
- **Committee on the Rights of the Child Briefing**

On 21 May, Sierra Leone and various Working Group members briefed 11 members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the latest developments around OP-FRED. The newly elected chair of the committee made clear her own personal support for the initiative.
- **Side Event “Children’s Voices for a Free Education Protocol”**

During the June session of the Human Rights Council, the Working Group convened a side event highlighting children’s perspectives on the proposed optional protocol. Around 26 government representatives were in attendance. Remarks were delivered by the ambassadors of Bulgaria and the Dominican Republic. A member of the Child Advisory Team presented the results of their multi-country consultations. Another child from Liberia’s National Children’s Forum shared findings from consultations with children from each of Liberia’s 15 counties. Professor Eirini Gkouskou of University College London offered insights from consultations with over 1,000 preschool-aged children in ten countries. OHCHR provided an overview of submissions received in response to the global call for input.

- **Side Event “Transformation through Education”**

The Human Rights Council’s Social Forum took place on 30–31 October, focusing on the contribution of education to the respect, promotion, protection, and fulfilment of all human rights for all. Working Group members presented on the optional protocol initiative at a side event organized by OHCHR and various Working Group members. The side event shared country-level examples illustrating how cost remains a key barrier to accessing pre-primary and secondary education, alongside good practices from countries in the Global South.

- **Submissions Ahead of Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG) on Free Education Treaty**

The Working Group organized more than 30 submissions from civil society, children, and academics in support of the proposed optional protocol ahead of the first IGWG. OHCHR also received input from approximately 8,000 children (through a combination of consultations and submissions), including children as young as 3 and members of the Child Advisory Team.

- **IGWG on Free Education Treaty**

Many Working Group members joined the 92 states that attended the first IGWG. Some Working Group members made interventions in person, some by video, and many also as expert panellists. Six new countries added their voices of support—bringing the total number of countries to

have done so to 58. In a historic first, five children—two of whom were members of the Child Advisory Team—took part in official deliberations on a new treaty affecting their rights, sharing their views and recommendations.

- **Intersessional IGWG meeting**

In December, the Chair of the IGWG held an intersessional meeting focussed around a discussion paper by Prof. Klaus Beiter of North-West University in South Africa. Participation was strong and diverse: at least 74 countries from all regions took part in the consultation, reflecting sustained global interest in the initiative. Twenty-six states took the floor, with nearly all expressing appreciation for Professor Beiter’s analysis. At least six members of the Working Group participated, with at least two making statements. Two more new countries announced their support for the initiative, bringing the total to 60.

- **Child-Led Consultations**

The Children’s Advisory Team, together with child delegates to the IGWG, began organizing a series of online, regional consultations led entirely by children. These consultations aim to raise awareness about the proposed optional protocol, share children’s lived experiences and advocacy efforts, identify active child activists across regions, and explore how children can engage their peers in national, regional, and global advocacy. The first consultation, for the Africa region, successfully took place on 16 December.

■ Links

- Sierra Leone's Minister for Education, Conrad Sackey, published an [op-ed](#) in Modern Diplomacy highlighting how a new human rights treaty recognizing pre-primary and secondary education could accelerate educational access worldwide.
- At the IGWG, the Global Campaign for Education delivered a [joint statement](#) signed by 15 NGO partners, which called for swift action in drafting the protocol.
- Opinion piece on the initiative from the president of the Retired Teachers' Association of Ireland, Máire Ní Chuinneagáin, published in the [Irish Examiner](#).
- Human Rights Watch [summary of the IGWG](#) "UN Progress on the Right to Free Education: A Clear Path Toward Drafting a New Treaty" published in NORRAG Global Education Centre.
- Professor Jonathan Todres published an [article](#) in the International Journal of Children's Rights offering a powerful argument for the need for a new Optional Protocol and exploring its broader implications.
- All public [submissions](#) made ahead of the IGWG.

■ Looking Ahead

In 2026, the Working Group will continue to mobilize support for the proposed new optional protocol, will organize a side event during the June Human Rights Council session, and will attend and participate during the second official meeting of the IGWG. The child consultations being co-organized by the Child Advisory Team continued with meetings held for children in the Americas, Europe, and Asia.

Working Group on Children and Violence

Conveners: Maria Lucia Uribe & Emma Nowotny (Arigatou International), Brikena Zogaj (World Vision)

Members: Arigatou International, Bureau International Catholique de l'enfance (BICE), Defence for Children International – International Secretariat, Defence for Children International – Costa Rica, ECPAT, International Movement ATD Fourth World, Kindernothilfe, Lumos Foundation, Plataforma de Organizaciones de Infancia, Plan International, Save the Children International, SOS Children's Villages International, Terre des Hommes International Federation, OMCT – World Organization Against Torture/SOS Torture, War Child Holland, Women's World Summit Foundation – WWSF, World Council of Churches, World Vision International

Strategic partners: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, World Health Organization, Committee on the Rights of the Child

Key outputs

- Coordinated a high-level side event on sustaining momentum to end violence against children, bringing together key stakeholders to reinforce accountability, promote multisectoral collaboration, and emphasize the importance of translating commitments into concrete action, including meaningful child participation through video contributions from six children engaged in efforts to end violence against children. Convened over 140 participants, both in person and online, including representatives from 24 Permanent Missions to the UN in Geneva. The event was co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Kenya, Colombia, and Canada.

Strategic contribution: Strengthened coordinated advocacy with UN actors, Permanent Missions, and civil society to advance accountability on commitments to end violence against children.

See below some of the thought-provoking insights children brought to the conversation:

“ I want to invite you to stand firm in the commitments made in the Ministerial Conference, so that girls, boys and adolescents feel protected and live in equality.”
— Paula, 15

“ [An urgent issue to address is] violence in the family, I know in many households, parents are violent against their children.”
— Julian, 15

“ More workshops where children and young people have a voice and are heard, so they can speak for themselves.”
— Sara, 15

“ I would like to stress the importance of this being a global effort. It's crucial that we also encourage other governments to abide by their commitments and work together to create a better future for all children.”
— Tseten, 17

“ I urge leaders to recognize the power of younger generations. Involve us, inspire us, and together, we can create a just society where every child is respected and enjoys equal rights, free of any violence. Together, we can make a difference.”
— Sahadip, 16

“ It is everyone's obligation to realize our duty to be there for one another... We are here, including us children and young people, to support and reinforce the pillars of our future and not destroy it.”
— Jaskiran, 16

- Convened a meeting between the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children and members of the working group to strengthen collaboration, exchange updates on global efforts to end violence against children and identify opportunities to advance joint advocacy in Geneva. Brought together more than 15 civil society organizations during the SRSG's visit to Geneva in connection with the presentation of her annual report to the Human Rights Council. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the Global Pathfinding Alliance, upcoming advocacy priorities, and avenues to strengthen collective action to end violence against children.

Strategic contribution: Reinforced collaboration and support to the SRSG on Violence Against Children while strengthening coordinated advocacy among Geneva-based civil society actors.

- Initiated preparations for a side event in the margins of the March 2026 Human Rights Council session to sustain momentum on commitments to end violence against children and strengthen multilateral engagement on child rights. Prepared the concept note and convened three coordination meetings to align actions with the framing of the second Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children, leveraging Geneva's UN advocacy spaces to engage Permanent Missions and reinforce accountability on commitments.

Strategic contribution: Advanced the Working Group's role as a Geneva focal point for advocacy on violence against children by coordinating engagement with UN mechanisms and Permanent Missions.

■ Links

- Detailed information on the side event at the 58th Human Rights Council – [Accountability and Action: Sustaining Momentum on Ending Violence Against Children](#).
- [Videos](#) of the children who participated in the side event.

■ Looking Ahead

- Organize Side Event during the 61st UN Human Rights Council Session on Reinforcing Accountability to End Violence against Children
- Research and updates on VAC's integration in Concluding Observations and UPR Recommendations.
- Continued engagement with WHO to build momentum toward the Second Ministerial Conference.

Working Group on Children's Rights and the Environment

Conveners: Namo CHUMA (Environment Africa), Tenar LORENTE (Plan International)

Members: Alana, Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Early Childhood (ARNEC), Austrian National Coalition (DKA Austria), Child Rights Coalition Asia, Child Rights Coalition Cambodia, Child Rights International Network (CRIN), Child Rights Information Centre (CRIC) – Moldova, Environment Africa, Franciscans International, Global Action Plan, Human Rights Watch, Heirs to Our Oceans, Humanium, Make Mothers Matter, Plan International, Plataforma de la Infancia, Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), Save the Children International, SOS Children Villages International, Terre des Hommes, University of Strathclyde Law School, World Vision International

Affiliates: Project Dryad, Amnesty International, World Council of Churches, Soka Gakkai International, Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL)

Strategic partners: Office of the Special Rapporteur on Climate Change, Secretariat of the Aarhus Convention, CRC WG on Environment

The Working Group on Children's Rights and the Environment, convened by Environment Africa and Plan International, spent 2025 turning General Comment No. 26 – the Committee's authoritative statement on children's rights and the environment – from a normative text into something States and civil society could act on. (Its global launch through the HTCRS is described in Section 4)

Key outputs

Contributing to Outcome 1.3 of the Strategic Plan of Child Rights Connect: Global and national legal and policy frameworks on the rights, empowerment and protection of CHRDs are strengthened, in particular with respect to CHRDs' civil and political rights

- Continued promotion and operationalization of the implementation of General Comment No. 26 (GC26) on children's rights and the environment, with a particular focus on child participation and child rights-based climate action
- Organized a high-level side event during the Human Rights Council bringing together the Special Rapporteur on Climate Change, government representatives (including Costa Rica), civil society partners, and girls and young activists to discuss implementation pathways for GC26 and advancing meaningful child participation in climate decision-making
 - » Facilitated direct engagement between girls and decision-makers on translating normative commitments into implementation measures
 - » Strengthened visibility of child-led perspectives on climate justice and environmental rights
- Supported advocacy efforts to strengthen recognition of children as rights holders in environmental and climate governance processes, emphasizing:
 - » Meaningful and safe participation
 - » Intergenerational justice
 - » Accountability for implementation of children's environmental rights

- Expanded dissemination and localization of GC26 through regional learning initiatives
 - » The “How to Child Rights” series incorporated new sessions contextualizing the normative framework of GC26 within regional realities, including an African perspective on children’s environmental rights
 - » Sessions supported practical understanding of implementation pathways across different legal and policy contexts

Outcome 2.5: UN human rights mechanisms coherently enhance standards and practices to provide accountability to children

- Supported collective advocacy efforts on implementation and accountability for General Comment No.26 through the **Child Rights Connect** Working Group on Child Rights and the Environment
- Strengthened engagement around international climate processes, including COP30, to ensure child rights considerations were integrated into climate governance discussions
- Developed joint advocacy messages and common positioning among Working Group members
- Supported coordinated messaging emphasizing children’s rights, child participation, and environmental justice
- Drafted and coordinated child rights-focused messaging and statements linked to the opening of COP discussions
- Advanced practical implementation tools to support use and uptake of GC26
 - » Supported dissemination and continued development of the Guidance for CSOs on supporting implementation of General Comment No.26 on children’s rights and the environment

- » Contributed to development and coordination of thematic explainers designed to operationalize different components of GC26 for civil society and other stakeholders
- » Thematic explainers aim to provide practical entry points for implementation and accountability efforts, including participation rights, education, health, access to justice, business responsibilities, and international cooperation
- Strengthened evidence generation and monitoring of GC26 implementation
 - » Working Group members undertook surveys and mapping exercises to assess early experiences and challenges related to implementation of GC26
 - » Findings helped identify emerging practices, gaps, and opportunities for strategic advocacy and future guidance
 - » Continued development of practical advocacy and capacity-building tools
 - » Expanded use of child-friendly and practitioner-oriented resources to support implementation of children’s environmental rights
 - » Strengthened links between normative standards and practical implementation at international, regional and national levels
- Plan International, as co-convenor/member of the Working Group, supported coordination across organizations to align advocacy strategies, consolidate messaging, and strengthen collective engagement with UN and climate processes.

■ Looking Ahead

- Continue supporting implementation and localization of GC26 through practical guidance, thematic explainers, and capacity-building initiatives
- Strengthen monitoring and evidence generation on implementation of children's environmental rights and identify opportunities for accountability
- Expand regional adaptation of implementation tools and training materials
- Further strengthen engagement with UN human rights mechanisms and climate processes, including follow-up to COP30 outcomes
- Continue promoting meaningful and safe participation of children and young people, particularly girls and children in vulnerable situations, in environmental and climate-related decision-making
- Support dissemination and use of the finalized GC26 toolkit and thematic explainers among civil society organizations and wider stakeholders
- Organisation of an “Environment Summit” for CRC members in cooperation with UNICEF, CRC and UNIGE.

✶ Working Group on Children of Incarcerated Parents

Conveners: Kristy Gordon (Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver (EFry)), Catalina Orelana (International Coalition for Children with Incarcerated Parents (INCCIP))

Members: Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE), Defence for Children International (DCI), Defence for Children International Costa Rica (DCI), Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver, Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) (QUNO), International Catholic Child Bureau (BICE), International Coalition for Children with Incarcerated Parents (INCCIP), Niñas, Niños, Adolescentes con Padres Encarcelados (NNAPes), Penal Reform International, Prisoners Future Foundation (PFF), Relais Enfants Parents Romands (REPR), SOS Children's Villages International

Likewise other working groups, the crisis affected overall participation and activity implementation of this Working Group.

Despite the disruption, the Working Group remains an important space for collaboration, exchange of good practices and advocacy to advance the rights of children with incarcerated parents.

Working Group on Child Participation

Conveners: Louise Thivant (Child and Youth Friendly Governance Project) and Diarra Diop (Save the Children) (until August 2025)

Members: Alana, APSCF Child Rights Information Center Moldova, Arigatou International, Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance (BICE), Child and Youth Friendly Governance Project, Child Rights Coalition Asia, Child Rights International Network (CRIN), Defence for Children International Costa Rica, Doncel, Edmund Rice International, ECPAT International, Eurochild, Family for Every Child, Fondation Apprentis d'Auteuil International, Halley Movement, Heirs to Our Oceans, International Child Rights Centre, ISI, Kindernothilfe, Learning 4 Wellbeing Foundation, Lumos, Terres des Hommes Germany, Plan International, Plataforma de Infancia, Save the Children International, SOS Children's Villages International, Terre des Hommes Switzerland, World Vision International

Affiliates: Pratyek, Foundation for Innovative Social Development, Farm Orphan Support Trust (FOST), Red de Infancia de El Salvador (RIA)

Strategic partner: UNICEF

Reflections on 2025 – a year in transition

The Child Participation Working Group experienced a challenging year, with lower levels of activity than originally anticipated. Progress against the work plan was affected by a combination of factors, including transitions in the group's leadership structure and significant changes in membership, with several members who had committed to planned activities no longer able to participate.

Despite these challenges, Working Group members continued to contribute to child participation efforts through a range of activities and initiatives outside the formal work plan. These efforts helped maintain momentum and continue knowledge-sharing within the network.

The year also highlighted the importance of stable leadership arrangements, active member engagement, and realistic planning processes. With the appointment of a new co-chair from Save the Children and renewed membership, the Working Group enters the coming year with strengthened capacity and a solid foundation for revitalising its activities and advancing its objectives.

Key outputs

- The WG supported the global consultation process to support children in develop their own standards for their meaningful participation in international events. The Children's Task Group was coordinated by Dialogue Works (Terre des Hommes Germany and Kindernothilfe), with support from Arigatou International, CACLAZ, **Child Rights Connect**, Child and Youth Friendly Governance Project, the European Commission, Jesus Cares Ministries, NEXUS3 Foundation, Queen's University Belfast, Save the Children, University College Cork, OHCHR, and World Vision. Two online surveys were circulated through the working group to support the consultation process and collect views from children around the world. The Children's Task Group convened a consultative meeting with children and experts in September to further refine the draft standards, that were officially launched in April 2026.
- The WG supported a side event to the Human Rights Council's Annual Day of discussion on the Rights, titled 'Making Early Childhood Development Real: Stories from Grassroots to Government Action'. The event was led by Hope and Homes for Children and Lumos and facilitated by UNICEF, with support from **Child Rights Connect**, Family for Every Child, Defence for Children Alliance, Child and Youth Friendly Governance Project and Moving Minds Alliance, and brought together voices from children and experts to discuss the rights of children during early childhood.

- For World Children's Day 2025, the WG supported a child- and youth-led awareness raising campaign 'AI and Us', initiated by the Child and Youth Advisory Board of the Child & Youth Friendly Governance Project. The project, supported also by **Child Rights Connect**, 5Rights, the Concerned for Working Children, Heirs to our Oceans, Aldeas Infantiles SOS España, and CIDDC, featured drawings, poems, and statements from children and young people around the world on how AI is impacting their lives – and what they would like decision-makers to do about it.

- For the International Day of Play 2025, the WG supported a video campaign featuring the voices of children and young people around the world. In the series of four videos, launched ahead of the International Day of Play, children and young people spoke about the importance of play to their wellbeing and learning, and called for action to make play a reality for every child. The campaign was supported by the Child and Youth Friendly Governance Project, Eurochild, 5Rights Foundation, the Concerned for Working Children, and Children in Wales.
- The WG also contributed to consultations on the Optional protocol on Free Education

■ Looking Ahead

With a new co-convener to be appointed in the next year, the group will revisit its work plan and priorities for the year ahead. This will include a renewed consultation with members to better understand the priorities of new and existing members, identify areas of shared interest, and define realistic opportunities for joint action.

This process will help ensure that the Working Group's activities remain relevant, member-driven, and aligned with the capacities and expertise within the group.



Organisation & Finances

Organisation

The Executive Committee

Child Rights Connect is governed by an Executive Committee drawn from its member organisations. In 2025, the Committee provided close and active oversight throughout a period of exceptional challenge, maintaining regular communication with the Officer in Charge/Interim Executive Director and providing governance continuity to the organisation at a critical moment.

Two new members join the Executive Committee at the General Assembly: Vishna Shah-Little of Save the Children and Catalina Perazzo of Plataforma de la infancia. Their election reflects the continued commitment of member organisations to the governance and sustainability of the network.



Mikiko Otani, Child Rights Coalition Asia, *President*



María Belen Paz Aguilar, Learning for Wellbeing Foundation, *Vice-President*



Maria Lucia Uribe Torres, Arigatou International, *Treasurer*



Catherine Mbengue, African Child Policy Forum, *Secretary*



Flutra Gorana, War Child, *Member*



Leo Ratledge, Child Rights International Network, *Member*



Vishna Shah-Little, Child Rights International Network, *Member* (coopted in January 2025 and elected June 2025)



Catalina Perazzo, Plataforma de la infancia, *Member* (elected June 2025)



Rossella Urru, Child Rights Connect Secretariat (ex-officio member), *Officer in charge/Interim Executive Director*

The International Secretariat

■ Staff



Alex Conte, Executive Director
(until May 2025)



Rossella Urru, Officer in charge/
Interim Executive Director
(since September 2025)



Agnès Gràcia Corberó
Head of Programmes



Zsuzsanna Rutai
Child Empowerment and
Safeguarding Officer



Fanny Chappuis
Programme Officer,
CRC Reporting (until June 2025)



Leire Ibáñez Larrea
Network and Programme Officer
(until June 2025)



Imen Talhaoui
Associate Programme Officer
(until May 2025)



Maria Giulia Vassallo, Associate
Programme Officer (until March 2025)



Cliodhna Phelan, Finance Officer
(since March 2025)



Emma McGeachy, Grant Compliance
Officer, supported coordinating
drafting of the Annual Report 2025
(since February 2026)

■ Interns



Erine Peguet



Candice Enes



Pallavi Baraya

Erica Wang



Cindy Chung



**Salvador Campbell
Drummond Borges**

■ Consultants

Jennifer Lynn Conway
Samira Abou Alfa
Lubna Iskander
Frances Sheahan

■ Volunteers

Auramaria Castiblanco, Hassen Tijjani, Tess Linnell (interpretation)
Mohamed Bouain (translation & proof-reading)
Clare Nakatte, Flora Gasne, Margaux Darolles, Nareamah Perret,
Ilona Domoratska (Annual GA)

The decrease in internal capacity did not translate into a decrease in output. The sections of this report that precede this one are the evidence. What the Secretariat achieved in 2025 — across child participation, CRC reporting, CHRD advocacy, the HRCRS, and the Working Groups — was accomplished by a team that was simultaneously navigating redundancy processes, financial uncertainty, and an operating environment that tested every organisation in the sector.

Unavoidable redundancy measures at Secretariat represented the departure of experienced colleagues that dedicated their professionalism and passion to the mandate of **Child Rights Connect** over the years: the Organisation thank them for their accomplishments and efforts and wish them the best.

Finances

2025 was the year **Child Rights Connect** turned the corner. After closing 2024 with an operating deficit of CHF 135,370 and a capital shortfall of CHF 39,256, the organisation ends 2025 with a positive result of CHF 186,501 and free capital restored to CHF 110,115. That turnaround was the result of determined and deliberate action – a programme of restructuring, cost control, and a new partnership development undertaken in parallel with the continued delivery of the organisation's full mandate.

Balance Sheet

as at 31 December 2025 and 2024 (in Swiss Francs)

Assets	2025	2024
Cash and Cash equivalents	118,386	16,643
Receivables W	164,424	42,656
Prepaid expenses	13,220	8,512
Current assets	296,030	67,811
Funds reserved for operational contingencies	45,322	96
Cash Deposits (lease and credit card securities)	32,341	32,315
Machines and furniture	1,114	2,304
IT equipment	5,714	-
Non-current assets	84,491	34,715
Total assets	380,521	102,526
Liabilities and capital	2025	2024
Accounts payable	31,606	14,793
Accrued liabilities	54,736	35,948
Other liabilities	9,578	2,029
Income received in advance	74,178	79,590
Current liabilities	170,098	132,360
Restricted funds on ongoing projects	63,178	9,422
Restricted capital	37,130	37,130
(Uncovered) / free capital	110,115	-76,386
Capital of the organisation	147,245	-39,256
Total liabilities and capital	380,521	102,526
Result of the year	2025	2024
Operating result	192,056	-135,370
Bank fees	-1,923	-3,316
Exchange differences	-1,078	5,789
Exceptional revenue, unique or off-period	51,202	3,279
Variation of restricted funds	-53,756	-16,422
Variation of unrestricted funds	-	50,000
Result of the year (before allocation to/use of capital)	186,501	-96,040

Income and operating expenses

(in Swiss Francs)

Income	2025	2024
Membership fees	148,450	147,959
Grant/donations from members	43,263	21,283
Grant/donations from governments	506,774	613,926
Grant/donations from foundations	154,705	50,000
Grant/donations from other organizations	9,845	13,286
Member emergency support	-	-
Other income	29,941	7,376
Total income	892,978	853,830

Breakdown of 2024 income	2025	%
Swedish International Development Agency	252,260	28%
Global Affairs Canada	179,866	20%
Membership fees	148,450	17%
University College Cork, Ireland	104,705	12%
Private Foundation	50,000	6%
Canton of Geneva	47,648	5%
Plan International Sweden	43,263	5%
City of Geneva	27,000	3%
Council of Europe	9,845	1%
Other income	29,941	3%

Operating expenses by cost centre	2025	2024
Personal costs	454,457	778,401
Salaries and social charges	451,448	773,579
Other staff expenses	3,009	4,822
Operating costs	157,056	168,576
Office costs	74,706	76,830
Professional services	79,200	90,206
Depreciation	3,150	1,540
Activity costs	89,409	42,223
Consultants	-	7,304
Venue and catering	617	2,658
Programme, travel & workshop costs	40,230	4,442
Design, layout, graphics and photos	-	4,180
Sub-grants to partners	48,562	23,639
Total costs	700,922	989,200

■ Financial Position and Going Concern

The organisation is in a considerably improved financial position compared to 2024, despite broader structural pressures affecting the sector — pressures that are particularly pronounced in International Geneva.

The positive financial result reflects a difficult adjustment process: financial stabilisation, tight cost reduction, redundancy measures, and reserve rebuilding to ensure viability beyond 2026.

Management have focused in parallel on exploring additional funding sources to secure the organisation's sustainability following the end of the core donor partnership with Sida by 31 December 2025. New funding sources were secured with the University of Cork and the City of Geneva, including extraordinary support dedicated to NGOs from the Canton of Geneva. Furthermore, technical assistance contracts were also negotiated with the Council of Europe and UNICEF.

While the organisation has significantly improved its financial position in the 12 months to 31 December 2025 and is committed to identifying an operating model aligned with anticipated funding levels, some uncertainty around its future remains. The financial crisis in the wider sector is still prevalent and continues to impact the organisation directly and indirectly.

Our Donors and Supporters in 2025

Child Rights Connect is grateful to all donors and supporters who made its work possible in 2025. The organisation's funding diversification strategy — a core component of Strategic Priority 3 — produced concrete results: new institutional relationships with the University College Cork, the Canton of Geneva, and the City of Geneva, alongside continued and deepened partnerships with Global Affairs Canada and Plan International Sweden.

The year also marked the final disbursement of Sida's core funding, following more than thirty years of partnership with Sweden. That legacy is honoured separately below. Its significance for the organisation's history — and for the children whose rights it helped protect — cannot be overstated.



■ Sida: A Partnership Retrospective

Some partnerships are measured in project cycles. This one is measured in generations. For more than thirty years, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) has stood alongside **Child Rights Connect** — through institutional transitions, global crises, leadership changes, and the long, patient work of forging an infrastructure that gives children a voice at the UN. Sida's core funding to **Child Rights Connect** began 30 years ago, while it was still under the banner of the NGO Group for the CRC and the network had a handful of — mostly international — organisations. By the time the final disbursement was made in 2025, that number will have grown to 128 — with more than 75 per cent operating in the Global South. That trajectory alone tells a story about what strategic, flexible core funding makes possible.

Sida's investment over the last partnership 2019-2025 period totalled SEK 31.7 million, representing between 41 and 50 per cent of the organisation's annual income in any given

year. But the significance of core funding cannot be captured in percentages alone. What Sida resourced was not a programme. It was the convening function itself — the institutional backbone that enabled everything else to happen. The technical assistance that helped CSOs from more than thirty countries report to the CRC Committee each year. The safeguarding scaffolding and child participation methodologies that made it possible for children, many of them girls, to engage directly and safely with the UN. The network coordination that allowed 128 organisations to speak with one voice in defence of every child's rights. The policy advocacy that, over years, shifted how the UN system itself thinks about children.

The results speak for themselves: between 2019 and 2024, more than 1,200 children's rights defenders—including over 330 children and nearly 200 girls — were empowered to report directly to the CRC Committee, a trajectory that grew every year despite the pandemic, the UN liquidity crisis, and the

organisation's own financial emergency. Over the same period, more than 1,200 non-State submissions reached the Committee, and 166 civil society reports were led or directly informed by children's own voices. The CAT, established as a permanent body during this period, became a model for what meaningful child participation looks like – not as a programme that could be switched on and off, but as a structural commitment woven into everything the organisation does. The Secretary-General's Guidance Note on Child Rights Mainstreaming, the CHRD Strategic Vision, the first UN Special Rapporteur's report dedicated to child and youth defenders, – each of these milestones traces a direct line back to work that Sida's core funding made possible.

Last Sida's own evaluation report found that **Child Rights Connect** had “managed to influence institutional systems and practices of actors of central importance from a child rights perspective, in particular at the global level,” and that results achieved under the partnership “concern changes in attitudes and practices that are likely to be of lasting nature.” Most significantly, **Child Rights Connect** had increased the acceptance of child participation within the UN system itself – setting an example whose impact reaches well beyond the organisation's own programmes. This is evidence of what sustained, trust-based partnership between a donor and a civil society network can achieve when it is given the time and the space to work.

Sida's decision to conclude its core funding was not a reflection of dissatisfaction with the partnership, but part of a broader strategic shift in Swedish development cooperation – one that saw Sida's overall budget reduced by 20 per cent and bilateral cooperation phased out in five countries. **Child Rights Connect** was not alone in being affected; across the sector, the consequences of that shift are still unfolding. Sida's departure unfortunately materialised at a moment when every other funding source in the child rights ecosystem was contracting simultaneously. The convergence of that loss with the UN liquidity crisis and the broader political pushback against children's rights is what made 2025 the year that it was.

But perhaps the truest measure of a partnership is what it leaves behind. The structures that Sida helped to build did not collapse when the funding ended. They adapted. The CAT continued its work. The CRC reporting function continued to grow. New partners stepped into the space that Sida's investment had created, drawn by an organisation whose track record of delivery and institutional resilience had been tested and proven. The network itself continued to attract new members, even as the Secretariat consolidated.

Child Rights Connect expresses its deepest gratitude to Sida – and to Sweden – for a partnership that shaped not only the organisation, but the global child rights landscape itself. What was built together will endure.



Looking Ahead

Why the Network Must Survive

Read this report from beginning to end and one pattern becomes impossible to ignore. Children speaking to the European Union about what war has done to them – for the first time in the history of the HRC. An entirely new generation of CHRDs in Brazil, Togo, Thailand, and Moldova equipped with tools and confidence they did not have a year ago. A treaty body system that lost 30 per cent of its meeting time and still, because the network held, received civil society submissions and gave children access

to its processes. A Secretariat reduced to a fraction of its former size that delivered, without interruption, the full breadth of its mandate.

None of that was inevitable. All of it was contingent – on an organisation that still existed, still functioned, and still had the trust of 128 organisations and the UN system it serves. The question that closes this report is that one that will define the year ahead: can it continue?

What Disappears if the Network Cannot Sustain Itself

The answer to that question is not abstract. It is specific, measurable, and in several cases irreversible. The table below spells out what is actually at stake – not as advocacy language, but as a factual inventory of what this organisation does that nothing else in the sector is positioned to do.

Capability	What is at stake
The bridge to the CRC Committee	No other organisation provides the combination of technical assistance, logistical coordination, and trust that allows civil society from every region — including children — to meaningfully engage with the CRC Committee’s review cycle. When sessions are cancelled or postponed, it is Child Rights Connect that builds the alternative.
A permanent space for children at the UN	The Children’s Advisory Team, the child participation methodologies, and the safeguarding infrastructure that make it possible for young people to engage safely with UN processes represent more than a decade of learning. This is not a programme that can be paused and resumed. It is a living commitment that requires sustained investment to remain intact.
The convening power of 128 organisations	When Child Rights Connect mobilises, the sector moves with it. That power exists only as long as there is a Secretariat capable of holding the network together.
The child rights mainstreaming agenda	The Secretary-General’s Guidance Note on Child Rights Mainstreaming — years in the making — is now part of the UN’s operating framework. Without sustained civil society pressure, coordinated by an organisation with the relationships to hold the UN system accountable, it becomes a document rather than a change.

Capability	What is at stake
Four decades of institutional knowledge	Relationships with CRC Committee members built over years. Procedural expertise in the Treaty Body system accumulated across cycles. The trust of Permanent Missions and UN Secretariat staff that took decades to earn. The working knowledge of how civil society can most effectively influence the intergovernmental machinery that exists to protect children's rights. This is not transferable. It is not digitizable. It lives in the organisation and in the people who have sustained it — and it would take a generation to rebuild if lost.

What Child Rights Connect Is Committed to

Under Strategic Priorities 3 and 4 of the 2025-2029 Strategic Plan, the organisation has made concrete commitments that the work of 2025 has already begun to honour. Funding diversification is not an aspiration – it is an active programme, with new donors engaged and new models being tested. Governance has been strengthened through the Executive Committee's sustained engagement during the most testing period in the organisation's recent history. The membership – 128 organisations from 47 countries – continues to grow, demonstrating

that the network's relevance to civil society worldwide is undiminished.

The operating model is leaner. The team is smaller. The organisation is adapting – not retreating. The Strategic Plan's Theory of Change remains intact: local evidence and children's lived experience informing global advocacy; international standards flowing back to national implementation; the cycle of accountability that only functions where there is a trusted, independent body sitting at its centre.

What We Are Looking For

Child Rights Connect closes 2025 in a substantially stronger financial position than it entered it – the balance sheet is positive, reserves have been rebuilt, and new institutional partnerships have created a funding base. But the funding committed is not yet sufficient to sustain the organisation at the level its mandate demands. What Sida resourced was the infrastructure – the convening function, the coordination capacity, the institutional backbone that makes all the project work possible. Core, flexible, multi-year investment remains the gap: not because programme outputs are unimportant, but because the convening infrastructure that makes those outputs possible cannot be sustained on project funding alone. The strategic challenge of 2026 and 2027: to secure the core support

that allows **Child Rights Connect** to be not just a project implementer, but the network it was built to be.

2025 tested **Child Rights Connect** in ways that would have ended less resilient organisations. It did not end this one. What allowed the network to hold was not simply the determination of a small team under extraordinary pressure – it was forty years of accumulated trust, relationships, and purpose. That is what is being asked to survive. That is what the global child rights movement cannot afford to lose.

The network held in 2025 because it acted. What happens next depends on whether the broader community acts with it.



Child Rights Connect General Assembly 2025

Images credits © Child Rights Connect



Child Rights Connect

1 Rue Richard-Wagner (1st floor) 1202
Geneva Switzerland

+41 (0) 22 552 4130
www.childrightsconnect.org
secretariat@childrightsconnect.org

**To support our work, please make a
donation to:**

www.childrightsconnect.org/donate

Child Rights Connect
UBS SA Vermont – Nations
17 Chemin Louis Dunant
1211 Geneva 20
Switzerland

Designed by Tony Liong