

# YOUTH RIGHTS ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

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*Note: the content of this toolkit draws on a number of United Nations and external sources. To ensure the toolkit is user-friendly, content drawn from United Nations sources is not consistently referenced throughout, but included in the Bibliography.*

# Introduction

Welcome to the Youth Rights Advocacy Toolkit! This toolkit is the result of a partnership between the United Nations Human Rights Office, Education Above All Foundation and Silatech. The toolkit aims to empower young people to stand up for their rights.<sup>1</sup>

## Why a Youth Rights Advocacy Toolkit?

Throughout history, young people have been at the forefront of social movements, calling for, and often sparking social change. At the same time, youth activism is not always welcomed as a force for good, particularly where it is seen as a threat to the status quo and to well-established social norms, even if those norms perpetuate injustice and inequality and are used to justify the denial or even violation of human rights. Yet, making human rights a reality for all people is essential to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet in the present and the future agreed by the international community in 2015.

There is increasing recognition of the need to address young people's human rights concerns, but change doesn't happen overnight and it is not the sole responsibility of youth activists, youth advocates or civil society to ensure young people can exercise their rights. Governments, the private sector and other stakeholders play a critical role as well; however, the present toolkit focuses on empowering youth in all their diversity to advocate for their rights, and particularly young people in situations of vulnerability or marginalization. The toolkit recognizes that meaningful youth participation at all levels and in all areas that affect young people's lives are essential ingredients for youth leadership to promote youth rights.

A vast amount of information, resources and tools exist on human rights and young people. This toolkit does not seek to reinvent the wheel, but to gather the most important information in a single place, in an accessible, user-friendly way, and to point readers and users in the direction of additional resources to support them in their advocacy for youth rights.

## Who is the toolkit for?

The toolkit is for young people who want to learn more about their rights and how to advocate for them. This toolkit provides information on some of the human rights mechanisms and processes that exist at the global level, and how these can be used to promote youth rights. The toolkit also considers the importance of youth rights in the context of peacebuilding and humanitarian settings. No prior knowledge of or experience with any of the topics covered is assumed or needed.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the partnership between UN Human Rights, Education Above All Foundation and Silatech, visit: <https://www.ohchr.org/youth/working-and-youth-vulnerable-situations> (available in English)

The toolkit is primarily intended for use by young people and youth activists, including young human rights defenders and young peacebuilders, as well as youth-led, youth-focused and youth-serving organizations. International organizations working to promote youth rights, government representatives, Ministries of Youth and Youth Parliamentary Committees may also find the toolkit relevant to their work.

Youth is not a clearly defined age category, a topic addressed in Section A under the question '[What is youth?](#)'. The present toolkit is mostly aimed at young people aged 18 and older, although elements of it may also be relevant to those aged 15-17. Younger children will likely benefit more from resources focused on child rights.

## How was the toolkit developed?

The Toolkit is the result of a joint effort by the United Nations Human Rights Office, Education Above All Foundation and Silatech, based on consultations with young people, including a Youth Advisory Board established within the partnership and consisting of ten young people.

A series of six online youth consultations held in May and June 2022 targeted youth in different countries and regions. The consultations aimed to identify the key human rights challenges and obstacles young people face, including when they advocate for their own rights, and to identify good practice examples, success stories and useful tips for youth rights advocacy. The consultations were jointly facilitated by UN Human Rights and members of the Youth Advisory Board, who also provided extensive input into the toolkit through several rounds of feedback, including an in-depth discussion organized at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France in September 2022.

The toolkit was developed with a view to presenting its content in an interactive, engaging way through a dedicated website or microsite, which will follow the present, initial PDF format prepared for the UN Human Rights website.

## How is the toolkit structured?

Following the introduction and a brief overview of some basic definitions, the Youth Rights Advocacy Toolkit is structured in four sections:

- Section A: Human rights basics: principles and the treaties they underpin - how they relate to youth rights
- Section B: Advocating for youth rights
- Section C: Leveraging international human rights mechanisms and processes to advocate for youth rights
- Section D: Youth rights in peacebuilding and humanitarian settings

The toolkit is structured in a question and answer format. Each section consists of questions and sub-questions that address different topics. For each question, a shorter answer of a few lines to several short paragraphs is provided, along with a longer, more detailed answer for

those who are interested to go ‘More in depth’. Where relevant, links to resources where you can learn more and find additional information are also provided.

The different sections complement and build on one another, but can also be used separately depending on your needs and interests.

In addition, the toolkit contains an Annex which provides useful information on youth entrepreneurship as a way for young people to exercise their right to work. The Annex is structured in the same way as the Sections, but with a list of references at the end.

## How should I use the toolkit?

You may already be familiar with some of the topics covered in the toolkit. Answer the following, brief questions to assess your level of knowledge, and to get an idea of which section or sections may be most useful to you, depending on your interest.

### HOW TO USE THE YOUTH RIGHTS ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

	<b>Definitely not</b>	<b>Probably not</b>	<b>Maybe, I'm not sure</b>	<b>Probably yes</b>	<b>Absolutely, yes 100%</b>
<b>I am familiar with human rights and youth rights</b>	<i>Go through Section A</i>	<i>Go through Section A</i>	<i>Look at the questions and topics covered in Section A to decide what may be most relevant to you</i>	<i>Focus on ‘More in depth...’ and ‘Where can I learn more?’ for any questions or topics in Section A that may interest you</i>	<i>Skim through Section A in case anything may be of interest.</i>
<b>I have experience of doing advocacy</b>	<i>Go through Section B</i>	<i>Go through Section B</i>	<i>Look at the questions and topics covered in Section B to decide what may be most relevant to you.</i>	<i>Focus on ‘More in depth...’ and ‘Where can I learn more?’ for any questions or topics in Section B that may interest you</i>	<i>Skim through Section B in case anything may be of interest.</i>
<b>I have done advocacy, specifically on youth rights</b>	<i>Go through Section B.</i>	<i>Go through Section B.</i>	<i>Look at the questions and topics covered in Section B to decide what</i>	<i>Focus on ‘More in depth...’ and ‘Where can I learn more?’ for any</i>	<i>Skim through Section B in case anything</i>

			<i>may be most relevant to you.</i>	<i>questions or topics in Section B that may interest you</i>	<i>may be of interest.</i>
<b>I am familiar with and/or have experience using international human rights mechanisms to promote human/youth rights</b>	<i>Go through Section C.</i>	<i>Go through Section C.</i>	<i>Look at the questions and topics covered in Section C to decide what may be most relevant to you.</i>	<i>Focus on ‘More in depth...’ and ‘Where can I learn more?’ for any questions or topics in Section C that may interest you</i>	<i>Skim through Section C in case anything may be of interest.</i>
<b>I am familiar with, and have experience working on youth rights in peacebuilding and humanitarian settings</b>	<i>Go through Section D.</i>	<i>Go through Section D.</i>	<i>Look at the questions and topics covered in Section D to decide what may be most relevant to you.</i>	<i>Focus on ‘More in depth...’ and ‘Where can I learn more?’ for any questions or topics in Section C that may interest you</i>	<i>Skim through Section D in case anything may be of interest.</i>

## Getting started: some basic definitions

This toolkit uses a number of definitions and concepts that may be new to you. Below are some basic definitions that will help you to understand what we mean. Terms that are used very often throughout all sections are explained in more detail within the toolkit, for example, youth, human rights, or United Nations.

**Convention (or Treaty):** an agreement between countries that is formally accepted as law.

**Humanitarian setting:** a context in which an event (for example, armed conflict, natural disaster, epidemic, famine) or series of events has resulted in a critical threat to safety, security and well-being of a community or other large group of people.

**Intergovernmental organization:** an organization that is established by a group of countries, usually through a treaty, also often referred to as an international organization. An example of an international organization is the United Nations.

**International law:** a body of rules recognized by States that sets out their relations with one another.

**Peacebuilding:** a range of measures in the context of emerging, current or post-conflict situations for the explicit purpose of preventing violent conflict and promoting lasting and sustainable peace, often by addressing the root causes of violent conflict.

**Rule of law:** this means that laws apply to everyone in a given country, including lawmakers, the people who enforce the law, and judges.

**State:** another word for country; often used as 'member State', i.e. a State that is a member of an intergovernmental organization, such as the United Nations. Note: throughout this toolkit, State is always used to mean a country, not a subdivision or region within a country.

**United Nations:** an intergovernmental organization established in 1945, made up of 193 member States (as of 2022).

**United Nations General Assembly:** the primary decision-making body of the United Nations, where each country that is a member of the UN participates and has a vote.

**United Nations resolution(s):** formal expressions of the opinion or will of an organ of the United Nations, such as its General Assembly, the Security Council or the Human Rights Council.



# Section A: Human rights basics: principles and the treaties they underpin – how they relate to youth rights

*In this section: What are human rights and what are youth rights?*

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## A.1 What are human rights?

Going to school, finding a decent job, voting in elections: these are all examples of human rights in everyday life. Human rights are rights we have simply because we exist as human beings. They are universal and are inherent to us all, regardless of age, nationality, gender, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, disability, or any other status. Human rights range from the most fundamental - the right to life - to those that make life worth living, such as the rights to education, work, food, health, and liberty.

### A.1.1 More in depth...

There are several key concepts that underpin human rights. Firstly, everyone, everywhere is equally entitled to human rights, meaning that human rights are **universal**.

Secondly, human rights should not be taken away from people, which makes them **inalienable**. There are exceptions in specific situations, but any restriction must be determined and implemented according to due process; for example the right to liberty may be restricted if a person is found guilty of a crime by a court of law.

Thirdly, the enjoyment of one or several human rights also depends on the enjoyment of other human rights, for example being able to access decent work is also linked with access to adequate housing. The concept means that human rights are **indivisible and interdependent**. Therefore, making progress in access to certain rights (such as the right to freedom of assembly) can facilitate the exercise of other rights, while the violation of some rights (for example, the right to education) can negatively impact the exercise of many other rights.

Additionally, under international law, States have obligations and duties to respect, protect and fulfill human rights.

- The obligation to **respect** means that States must refrain from interfering with or curtailing the enjoyment of human rights.
- The obligation to **protect** requires States to protect individuals and groups against human rights abuses.
- The obligation to **fulfill** means that States must take positive action to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights.

Meanwhile, as individuals, while we are entitled to our human rights, we should also respect and stand up for the human rights of others.

## A.2 Where do human rights come from?

Human rights are legal obligations, they are an important part of the laws that govern our societies. At the global level, the foundation of all international human rights law is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or UDHR. Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, the UDHR was the first legal document to set out the fundamental rights to be universally protected. The UDHR provides the principles and building blocks of current and future human rights conventions, treaties and other legal instruments.

### A.2.1 More in depth...

A short (6-minute) video on the history, content and ongoing significance of the UDHR is available below in English (click on the image below to open the link).



While the UDHR is not legally binding on States, meaning that it does not create specific obligations for States, it serves as the basis of numerous conventions and other legal instruments, including those established under the United Nations. As of 2022, there are nine international human rights instruments, usually referred to as the ‘core’ international human rights instruments or treaties. These nine core instruments address a range of human rights, and specify the rights of specific groups such as women, children and persons with disabilities, among others. Each instrument has a committee of experts that monitor how State Parties are implementing that specific instrument and its various provisions. State Parties are those States that have agreed to be bound by that instrument or treaty in question.

Further information on the core treaties, as well as other international mechanisms and processes and how they can be used to support youth rights advocacy is provided in [Section C](#) of the toolkit.

### A.3 What is youth?

There is no consistent or universally agreed definition of the term ‘youth’ based on age. The variety of approaches and definitions reflects the reality of what youth is: a fluid and nonhomogeneous category, rather than a fixed age group. Unlike other forms of identity, such as gender, ethnicity, or race, youth is a transitory phase of life. While the transitory nature is what unifies the category of youth, it is difficult to define youth by focusing purely on chronological age; the transition from dependence in childhood to independence and autonomy in adulthood occurs at different times in relation to different rights, and depends on the socioeconomic context, among other aspects.

Recognizing that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines children as anyone below the age of 18 years, the present toolkit is predominantly aimed at young people aged 18 and over, although it may be relevant to those aged 15 to 17.

## A.4 What are youth rights?

Recognizing that young people face discrimination and obstacles to the enjoyment of their rights by virtue of their age, often in combination with other factors, youth rights - or the human rights of youth - refers to the full enjoyment of all fundamental rights and freedoms by all young people everywhere. Promoting or advocating for these rights means addressing the specific challenges and barriers that young people face in exercising their rights.

## A.5 What rights do young people have?

As human rights are universal, meaning that everyone is equally entitled to their rights, young people possess the same rights as everybody else regardless of age. Young people who belong to groups that have been historically marginalized and face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination such as youth with disabilities and young women are often protected from discrimination on the basis of their gender, disability or other status. More information on specific groups that have been recognized under international human rights law is available in [Section C](#) of the present toolkit.

The toolkit focuses on rights that are of particular relevance to youth in the transition from childhood to adulthood. However, you can find more information on all the different human rights that exist and apply to everyone, including youth at the [UN Human Rights website](#).

### A.5.1 Rights in focus: Right to education

Education is both a human right in itself and an 'empowerment right' or stepping stone to realizing other human rights. Education is the primary vehicle to lift economically and socially marginalized people out of poverty, to obtain the means to fully participate in their communities. As such, education serves to level inequalities and ensure sustainable development.

The right to education includes:

- Free education, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages
- Compulsory elementary education
- Free, or progressive introduction of free secondary education
- Equal access to higher education, with progressive introduction of free education
- Human rights education
- Right of the parents to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children
- Access to education as well as vocational guidance for young women, youth with disabilities and young refugees

#### A.5.1.1 More in depth...

Education is directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It should enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations and racial or religious groups.

Education at all levels should exhibit the following interrelated and essential features:

1. **Availability:** sufficient quantity of functioning educational institutions and programmes within each State. Requirements vary depending on the context, however certain infrastructure such as buildings or other protection from the elements, sanitation facilities, safe drinking water, teaching materials and trained teachers must be provided.
2. **Accessibility:** educational institutions and programmes have to be accessible to everyone, without discrimination. This includes appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities can access education on an equal basis with others.
  - a. **Non-discrimination:** education must be available to all, especially the most vulnerable groups.
  - b. **Physical accessibility:** education has to be within safe physical reach, either in terms of geographical location or via modern technology
  - c. **Economic accessibility:** education has to be affordable to all; primary education shall be available “free to all”, States should progressively introduce free secondary and higher education
3. **Acceptability:** the form and substance of education, including curricula and teaching methods, have to be acceptable (e.g. relevant, culturally appropriate and of good quality) to students and, in appropriate cases, parents.
4. **Adaptability:** education has to be flexible so it can adapt to the needs of changing societies and communities and respond to the needs of students within their diverse social and cultural settings.

To ensure the right to education for young people with disabilities, international standards as outlined in the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) must be observed.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the lack of access to education, particularly in contexts where it was not possible to deliver education online or remotely, highlighting the need to close the digital divide. In March 2020, over 1.5 billion young people in more than 165 countries were out of education, representing 87% of the global population enrolled at school or university. Data and information on the impacts of the pandemic on youth is available in the report of the United Nations High Commissioner on for Human Rights on the [human rights implications of the coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) pandemic on young people](#) (available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish), as well as via [UNESCO](#), particularly in relation to education.

Despite broad recognition of the right to education by States, education may and does come under attack, particularly in countries affected by armed conflict, insecurity, and weak systems of human rights protections or political pluralism. Educational institutions should be safe havens for students and educators, where they can work toward a better future.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, education can protect young people from forced recruitment into armed groups, child labour, sexual exploitation and child marriage. Attacks on education can be a grave violation of international

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<sup>2</sup> Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack: <https://protectingeducation.org/>

law, breaching international criminal law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

#### A.5.1.2 Where can I learn more?

For more information on the right to education, see:

- The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) webpage on [the right to education](#)
- The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights's [General Comment No. 13: The right to education \(article 13\) \(1999\)](#). Note: The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is a UN Human Rights Treaty Body. More information on the Treaty Bodies and their work is available in [Section C](#) of the present toolkit (see question [What are the Human Rights Treaty Bodies?](#)).

For more information on protecting education from attack, see:

- The [Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack](#), available in Arabic, English, French and Spanish, where you can find the [Safe Schools Declaration](#), an inter-governmental political commitment to protect students, teachers, schools and universities from the worst effects of armed conflict.
- The publication '[Protecting Education in Insecurity and Armed Conflict: An International Law Handbook](#)' produced by Education Above All Foundation (available in English).
- United Nations Security Council [resolution 2601 \(2021\)](#) on children and armed conflict.
- United Nations [Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict](#) (SRSG-CAAC), the leading UN advocate for the protection and wellbeing of children affected by armed conflict.

#### A.5.2 Rights in focus: Right to decent work

The realization of the right to decent work fosters autonomy and independence in young people, which can pave the way for the realization of other fundamental human rights. Work is not purely a means of generating income. The right to decent work implies just and favorable work conditions, and full and productive work should be promoted while respecting the fundamental political and economic freedoms of the individual. The right to decent work is closely intertwined with realizing the right to an adequate standard of living, and is an inseparable and inherent part of human dignity.

The right to decent work includes:

- Prohibition of forced labor; right to freely choose or accept work
- Safe and healthy working conditions
- Minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment
- Equality of opportunity and treatment; non-discrimination in accessing and maintaining employment
- Fair remuneration to achieve a decent standard of living
- Equal pay for work of equal value
- Reasonable working hours and holiday with pay
- Forming trade unions, and joining the trade union of one's choice

#### A.5.2.1 More in depth...

Decent work is work that respects the fundamental rights of the human person as well as the rights of workers in terms of conditions of work safety and remuneration. It also provides an income allowing workers to support themselves and their families. These fundamental rights also include respect for the physical and mental integrity of workers in the exercise of their employment.

Access to a first job constitutes an opportunity for economic self-reliance and in many cases a means to escape poverty. States have an obligation to adopt policy, legislative and budgetary measures aimed at attaining full employment to the maximum of their available resources. In addressing widespread unemployment among young people, and young women in particular, the right to work requires that States create favorable macroeconomic conditions for the realization of the right and adopt specific job promotion policies targeted at youth, particularly young women as well as youth in vulnerable situations.

The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the shift from long-term, more stable jobs to short-term, task-based jobs that often promote insecurity and instability, including poor pay, lack of access to social protections, occupational safety protections and healthcare, among others. The regulation of non-standard and precarious forms of work, including the prohibition of unpaid internships, is important to realize the right to decent work for youth.

#### A.5.2.2 Where can I learn more?

For more information, check out:

- The [International Labour Standards relevant to work and young persons](#), available from the International Labour Organization (ILO)
- The report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on Realization of the right to work ([A/HRC/40/31](#)) (2018)
- The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights's [General Comment no. 18 on the right to work](#) (2005)
- The ILO [statement](#) to the Third Committee of the 68th General Assembly - Decent work is a human right

#### A.5.2.3 What is entrepreneurship?

Entrepreneurship involves establishing a business or businesses while taking on some financial risk. Entrepreneurship has the potential to provide youth with real employment possibilities and opportunities, especially in sectors such as the digital economy, empowering young people to become job creators in the process. States can promote youth entrepreneurship through dedicated training and capacity-building for youth, which is essential to ensure young people develop the necessary knowledge and skills, as well as by facilitating access to credit or finance on favorable terms for youth.

However, entrepreneurship must always respect labor rights, and a focus on youth entrepreneurship should not come at the expense of wider employment and job creation



through broader and robust employment policies in order to avoid shifting much of the responsibility for job creation onto young people.

#### A.5.2.3.1 More in depth...

Small businesses have the potential to produce many jobs, making an important contribution to the countries and societies in which they operate. Establishing a business can also present an opportunity to generate solutions to a problem, including to address social issues and to promote human rights. Driven by creativity, entrepreneurship can lead to significant innovation.

Typically, an entrepreneur identifies and pursues an opportunity, taking on risk by raising funds to finance it, gathers the necessary resources (human, financial, etc.) for the business to function, sets goals, monitors and reviews progress, and takes the necessary steps to ensure success.

If you are interested in establishing your own business, you may want to identify and approach young people who have succeeded as entrepreneurs in order to learn from them. You may also want to explore financing options, for example through a bank or other financial institution, a government venture, or the private sector. Do they provide financial support to young entrepreneurs, and if yes, on what basis or terms? What is the process to gain access to credit, and what are the implications?

#### A.5.2.3.2 Where can I learn more?

To learn and understand more about entrepreneurship, including whether it's something you would like to pursue, how to go about becoming an entrepreneur, what to consider and what steps to take, have a look at:

- 'Start Your Business' manual, published by the International Labour Organization, available in [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#).
- The Entrepreneurship Development Training Manual published by DSW, available in [English](#).
- The Entrepreneurship 30 Curriculum Guide published by Saskatchewan Learning, a toolkit for teachers and students, available in [English](#).

Should you decide to start your own business, make sure to think about any ways your business can support or contribute to positive human rights change, and how it will respect human rights. To learn more about business and human rights, including the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, visit the UN Human Rights Office website at: [ohchr.org/business-and-human-rights](http://ohchr.org/business-and-human-rights) (available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish).

### A.5.3 Right to participate in public affairs

Participation enables the advancement of all human rights. It plays a crucial role in the promotion of democracy, the rule of law, social inclusion and economic development. It is essential for reducing inequalities and social conflict. It is also important for empowering



individuals and groups, and is one of the core elements of human rights-based approaches aimed at eliminating marginalization and discrimination. Moreover, decision-making is more informed, legitimate and sustainable when young people are at the table as it will respond to and address the real needs of youth. Youth-led and youth-focused organizations play an important role in public life.

The right to participation includes:

- Voting and being elected at genuine periodic elections held by secret ballot, affording universal and equal suffrage
- Taking part in the conduct of public affairs, either directly or through freely chosen representatives
- Equal access to public services
- Being consulted and given opportunities to be involved in decision-making processes on all matters of public concern

Additionally, the right to enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others in all aspects of life should be guaranteed, to ensure everyone including young people with disabilities can exercise their right to participation.

#### A.5.3.1 More in depth...

To avoid tokenism, youth participation must be meaningful. Efforts to increase young people's participation must go alongside more gender equality in representative bodies as well as intergenerational dialogue, to ensure youth participation does not happen in isolation. At all levels, from the local to the global, participation requires:

- An enabling environment that includes a legal framework giving effect to the right to participation, and generally an environment where all human rights, in particular the rights to equality and non-discrimination and to freedoms of opinion, peaceful assembly and association, are fully respected and enjoyed by all individuals.
- An environment that keeps young people safe and addresses the challenges faced by young women and other youth in vulnerable situations. This includes ensuring the right to physical integrity, liberty, security and privacy.
- Openness, transparency and accountability of public authorities at all stages of decision-making, from initial planning to budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Maximum disclosure of information of public interest by public authorities is key, including through platforms easily accessible to young people.
- Youth empowerment for participation, for example through civic education, including voter education.
- An environment that ensures public participation of young persons without discrimination, with particular attention given to young persons with disabilities (including accessibility considerations), young women and girls and young human rights defenders.

#### A.5.3.2 Where can I learn more?

- The [Guidelines](#) on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs (2018)
- UN Human Rights website on [equal participation in political and public affairs](#)

### A.5.4 Right to freedom of thought, conscience or religion

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought on all matters, to their personal conviction as well as to adopt a religion or belief of their choice and to manifest such religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching either individually or with others, in public or in private. The present right extends to conscientious objection to military service. Conscientious objection to military service concerns young people more than any other group as young people are drafted into compulsory military service or receive their call-up papers around the age of 18 in many States.

### A.5.5 Right to freedom of opinion or expression

The right to freedom of opinion or expression includes a number of elements. These include the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds without interference, as well as media freedom, which requires safety of journalists and other media workers. This right also includes the right to freedom of speech; however, promoting national, racial or religious hatred through incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence should be forbidden by law.

#### A.5.5.1 Where can I learn more?

To learn more, visit the UN Human Rights website on:

- [Freedom of Opinion and Expression](#)
- [Freedom of expression vs. incitement to hatred](#)

### A.5.6 Rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

The right of freedom of peaceful assembly includes the right to hold meetings, sit-ins, strikes, rallies, events or other forms of protests, both offline and online. Expressing grievances or concerns freely, through peaceful protest, also forms an integral part of the right to participation.

The right to freedom of association involves the right of individuals or any legal entities to interact and organize among themselves to collectively express, promote, pursue and defend common interests. This includes the right to form and run non-governmental organizations, trade unions, foundations, political parties and religious associations. Freedoms of peaceful assembly and of association serve as a vehicle for the exercise of many other rights and are essential components of democracy.

#### Where can I learn more?

For more information, visit the UN Human Rights Website on:

- The [right of peaceful assembly](#)
- [Freedom of assembly and of association](#)

## A.5.7 Right to social security

Social security, which is usually government-provided financial assistance, is widely recognized as an essential tool for reducing and alleviating poverty and promoting social inclusion. Social security guarantees dignity for all persons when they are faced with circumstances that deprive them of their capacity to fully realize their human rights.

The right to social security encompasses the right to access and maintain benefits without discrimination in order to secure protection from:

- a lack of work-related income caused by sickness, disability, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, old age, or death of a family member
- unaffordable health care
- insufficient family support, particularly for children and adult dependents

### A.5.7.1 More in depth...

The right to social security and the right to decent work are two sides of the same coin. While youth unemployment and underemployment rates could be the result of a variety of factors and may not be only or directly attributable to the State, the failure to fulfill the right to work requires States to take prompt action in ensuring the right to social security, without discrimination and regardless of the form of employment. This is particularly important given young people are more likely to be in non-standard and precarious forms of work (in the so-called 'gig-economy') than older generations, without access to social protection.

### A.5.7.2 Where can I learn more?

For more information on the right to social security, visit the UN Human Rights website on [the right to social security and human rights](#).

## A.5.8 Right to health

The right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health includes a wide range of factors that can help us lead a healthy life. It extends not only to timely and appropriate health care but also to the underlying determinants of health, such as:

- access to safe and potable water and adequate sanitation;
- an adequate supply of safe food, nutrition and housing;
- healthy occupational and environmental conditions; and
- access to health-related education and information.

The right to health includes access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Laws or policies that require parental or guardian notification or authorization before accessing SRHR goods and services such as contraceptives restrict young people's access and limit their agency.

#### A.5.8.1 More in depth...

Health services, goods and facilities must be provided to all without any discrimination. All services, goods and facilities must be available in sufficient quantity, as well as physically and financially accessible, respecting the right to seek, receive and impart health-related information in an accessible format. Moreover, the facilities, goods and services should also respect medical ethics, and be gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate. Finally, they must be scientifically and medically appropriate and of good quality.

The right to health also contains certain freedoms and entitlements. These include:

- The right to be free from non-consensual medical treatment, such as medical experiments and research or forced sterilization;
- The right to be free from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- The right to a system of health protection providing equality of opportunity for everyone to enjoy the highest attainable level of health;
- The right to prevention, treatment and control of diseases;
- Access to essential medicines;
- Maternal, child and reproductive health;
- Equal and timely access to basic health services;
- The provision of health-related education and information;
- Participation of the population in health-related decision making at the national and community levels.

#### A.5.8.2 Where can I learn more?

To learn more, take a look at:

- The UN Human Rights Website on [the right to health](#)
- The joint UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) and World Health Organization (WHO) [Fact Sheet No. 31: The Right to Health](#) (2008)

### A.5.9 Right to adequate housing

The right to adequate housing forms part of the right to an adequate standard of living; it means that everyone has the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity. It includes:

- Protection against forced evictions and the arbitrary destruction and demolition of one's home;
- The right to be free from arbitrary interference with one's home, privacy and family;
- The right to choose one's residence, to determine where to live and to freedom of movement;
- Equal and non-discriminatory access to adequate housing;
- Participation in decision-making related to housing at the national and community levels;
- Safe housing that is free of domestic or sexual violence.

Despite the centrality of the right to adequate housing, millions around the world live in conditions that are threatening to their life or to their health, for example in overcrowded slums

and informal settlements, or in other conditions which do not uphold their human rights and their dignity.

#### A.5.9.1 More in depth...

Adequate housing must provide more than just protection from the natural elements. A number of conditions must be met before particular forms of shelter can be considered to constitute “adequate housing”; at a minimum, housing must meet the following criteria:

- Protecting against forced eviction: everyone should have a degree of security that guarantees legal protection against forced eviction, harassment and other threats.
- Affordability: the cost of housing should not threaten the ability to enjoy other rights such as food, education, healthcare, etc.
- Habitability: adequate housing should provide adequate space, protection from cold, damp, heat, rain, wind or other threats to health, structural hazards, and diseases.
- Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure: adequate housing requires access to safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, energy for cooking, heating and lighting, sanitation and washing facilities, means of food storage, refuse disposal, etc.
- Accessibility: housing is not adequate if the specific needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups are not taken into account (such as the poor, people facing discrimination; persons with disabilities, victims of natural disasters).
- Location: adequate housing must allow access to employment options, health-care services, schools, child-care centers and other social facilities and should not be built on polluted sites nor close to pollution sources.
- Cultural adequacy: Adequate housing should respect and take into account the expression of cultural identity and ways of life.

#### A.5.9.2 Where can I learn more?

To learn more, check out:

- UN Human Rights and [the right to adequate housing](#)
- The joint UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) and UN-HABITAT [Fact Sheet No. 21 \(Rev. 1\): The Human Right to Adequate Housing](#) (2009)

### A.5.10 Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

A clean, healthy and sustainable environment is key to the full enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, including the rights to life, health, food, water and sanitation. Recognized by the United Nations Human Rights Council as a right in 2021 and by the General Assembly in 2022, the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment directly links environmental protection with human rights, providing an important basis for the protection of environmental human rights defenders. Climate change and environmental degradation also raise issues of intergenerational justice and equity – the idea that present generations have certain duties towards future generations.

#### A.5.10.1 More in depth...

Key elements of the right to a healthy environment include:

- A **safe and stable climate**: Ambitious climate action is needed to protect the rights of those who are the most affected by climate change, often while having contributed the least to its occurrence.
- **Healthy ecosystems**: Protecting the lands and waters around us is in the best interest of current and future generations.
- **Non-toxic environments**: Pollution is the largest source of premature death in the developing world and it disproportionately affects children and young persons, and particularly those in situations of vulnerability. All people are entitled to clean air to breathe, clean water to drink and safe food to eat.
- **Justice and inclusion**: All people have the right to access environmental information, to be meaningfully included in environmental policymaking and to have access to justice if affected by environmental harms in the short, medium or long-term.

Click on the image below to open the infographic on promoting the right to a healthy environment (available in English).



#### A.5.10.2 Where can I learn more?

For additional information, see:

- UN Human Rights website: [About human rights and the environment](#)
- UN Human Rights Office [infographic](#) on promoting the human right to a healthy environment for all
- UN Human Rights Council [resolution 48/13](#) on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment
- UN General Assembly [resolution 76/300](#) on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

#### A.5.11 Human rights in the digital space and right to privacy

Digital technologies provide new means to advocate for, defend, and exercise human rights and affect all types of rights. They shape how people access and share information, form their opinions, debate, and mobilize – they have deeply transformed the “public square”. But they are equally used to suppress, limit and violate rights, for instance through surveillance, censorship, online harassment, algorithmic bias and automated decision-making systems. The misuse of

digital technologies also disproportionately affects marginalized individuals and groups, leading to inequality and discrimination - both online and offline.

As our world unfolds increasingly in the digital space, the need for our rights to be respected both online and offline becomes even greater, something which is particularly true for young people who are among the primary users of digital and online technologies. At the same time, closing the digital divide to ensure internet connectivity for all is a prerequisite for the exercise of human rights online.

#### A.5.11.1 Where can I learn more?

Data-intensive technologies, such as artificial intelligence applications, contribute to creating a digital environment in which both States and business enterprises are increasingly able to track, analyze, predict and even manipulate people's behavior to an unprecedented degree. These technological developments have significant implications for human dignity, autonomy and privacy and the exercise of human rights in general, if applied without effective safeguards. Artificial intelligence systems can negatively impact the right to privacy, including for example in law enforcement, national security, criminal justice and border management, in public services, in employment contexts as well as in online information management.

For more information, check out:

- UN Human Rights website on the [digital space and human rights](#)
- UN Human Rights website on [digital privacy and human rights](#)

## A.6 What happens if I face barriers or obstacles in exercising my human rights?

Young people often face barriers or obstacles in exercising their human rights because of their age. However, age is one characteristic that can intersect with, add to and multiply discrimination based on other grounds. A number of options may be available to you if you feel that your rights have been violated, or you are facing barriers to exercising your rights. Action may be possible domestically, internationally or both, depending on the specific situation and where you live.

### A.6.1 More in depth...

While it is difficult to provide detailed, specific guidance that is broadly applicable across different contexts and settings, you may want to think about possible options. Safety and security are a key priority, so ensure that you are not putting yourself at risk of harm, including for your mental health, and assess whether you are facing an immediate threat or danger. More information on protection is provided in Section B under the question '[How can I stay safe and be protected while defending my rights?](#)'. Once you are confident that you are not putting yourself at risk of harm, think about potential courses of action.

Consider what would be most effective in addressing the situation you are facing, bearing in mind the avenues available domestically as well as internationally. For example, options may include advocating or campaigning for legal or policy change, seeking justice through the legal system, such as courts, or a combination of both. The nature of the barrier, obstacle or violation, and whether it affects one or several individuals or larger groups of people more collectively will also play a role.

#### A. Advocating or campaigning for legal or policy change

Advocacy or campaigns may be more appropriate in situations where a large group of people collectively faces barriers or obstacles to exercising their rights. For example, to address the situation of unpaid internships or lack of access to social protection for young people. Advocacy for youth rights is the focus of [Section B](#) of the toolkit.

#### B. Seeking justice and legal redress

Certain human rights violations, including violations of international human rights law by a State or government, may require legal action through the justice system, for example the excessive use of force against peaceful protestors.

At the national level, accredited National Human Rights Institutions (known as NHRIs) play a crucial role in promoting and monitoring the effective implementation of international human rights standards. NHRIs have a protection mandate to address and seek to prevent actual human rights violations within their jurisdiction. The NHRI mandate includes monitoring, inquiring, investigating and reporting on human rights violations, and may include handling individual complaints. NHRIs also play an important role to assist victims to find remedies to human rights violations and abuses.

The special character of NHRIs as a bridge between government and civil society can be especially important in prevention efforts by opening the space to address underlying structural causes of violations.

The Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) includes all accredited NHRIs worldwide. Further information on NHRIs, including details for your country's NHRI can be accessed via the [UN Human Rights website](#).

At the international level, a number of tools and mechanisms exist to address human rights violations, to monitor the implementation of human rights standards and to promote human rights. Further information on the use of international human rights mechanisms is available in [Section C](#) of the present toolkit.

#### A.6.2 Where can I learn more?

For more detailed information on National Human Rights Institutions, visit:

- The webpage on [UN Human Rights and NHRIs](#)
- UN Human Rights on [preventing human rights violations](#)



- The website of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions ([GANHRI](#))

## A.7 How can I promote awareness and knowledge of human rights among youth?

Human rights can only be achieved through an informed and continued demand by people for their protection. Human rights education promotes values, beliefs and attitudes that encourage all individuals to uphold their own rights and those of others. It develops an understanding of everyone's common responsibility to make human rights a reality in each community.

Human rights education constitutes an essential contribution to the long-term prevention of human rights abuses and represents an important investment in the endeavor to achieve a just society in which all human rights of all persons are valued and respected. Access to human rights education during youth, at a time when individuals develop their values and begin to explore the meaning of being members of a community and society, can have a significant impact in shaping and strengthening young people's engagement in their communities and society.

The fourth phase (2020-2024) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education – a global initiative to strengthen implementation of human rights education – focuses on youth, with special emphasis on education and training in equality, human rights and non-discrimination, and inclusion and respect for diversity with the aim of building inclusive and peaceful societies. The related [Plan of Action](#), adopted by States at the Human Rights Council, can serve as a tool to advocate for strengthened human rights education for youth at the national level. It also provides methodological guidance to achieve effective human rights education for, with and by youth.

A wealth of existing [resources](#) on human rights education for youth can help you embark on, or enrich your own journey as a young human rights educator.

### A.7.1 Where can I learn more?

For more information, visit the UN Human Rights website on [Human Rights Education and Training](#).

## A.8 What are my rights if I come into conflict with the law?

Anyone under the age of 18 who is alleged to have committed an offense should be considered under the juvenile justice system. Juvenile justice systems exist to recognize the specific situation of children and young people who come in conflict with the law, to enhance their protection and to promote reintegration into society. Some countries including Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden have extended the rules for juvenile justice to young adults over the age of 18, a move that aligns with findings from the scientific field of developmental psychology that are increasingly pointing to the fact that full maturity is reached around the age of 25.

### A.8.1 Where can I learn more?

In 1985, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the [UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice](#), known as the Beijing Rules. The Beijing Rules set out guidance and instructions on how minors should be treated when they come into contact with the justice system, and recommend that States make efforts to extend juvenile justice systems to young adult offenders.

Additionally, the Human Rights Committee, which is the UN Treaty Body or committee of independent human rights experts responsible for monitoring the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, has issued several General Comments that are relevant in the context of juvenile justice, as follows:

- [General Comment 21](#) on Article 10 (Humane Treatment of Persons Deprived of their Liberty), available in English
- [General Comment 32](#) on Article 14, Right to equality before courts and tribunals and to fair trial
- [General Comment 35](#) on Article 9, Liberty and security of person

In addition to the above, it is worth referring to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its [General Comment 24](#) on children's rights in the child justice system.

For more information on what the UN Treaty Bodies are and how they work, see Section C under '[What are the Human Rights Treaty Bodies?](#)'.

## Section B: Advocating for youth rights

*In this section: How do I advocate for my rights as a young person while staying safe?*

[B.1 What is youth rights advocacy and why is it important?](#)

[B.2 How can I stand up for my rights?](#)

[B.2.1 Step 1: Identify the key human rights issue or concern affecting young people that you want to address](#)

[B.2.2 Step 2: Set clear aims and objectives](#)

[B.2.3 Step 3: Think about how to achieve the aims and objectives](#)

[B.2.4 Step 4: Make a map of your partners and allies](#)

[B.2.5 Step 5: Develop your advocacy messages](#)

[B.2.6 Step 6: Revise, fine-tune and improve as you go along](#)

[B.2.7 Step 7: Evaluate](#)

[B.3 What are some good tips for youth rights advocacy?](#)

[B.4 How can I stay safe and be protected while defending my rights?](#)

[B.5 How can young people in vulnerable situations, including situations of conflict, violence and insecurity, advocate for their rights?](#)

[B.6 What are some examples of successful youth rights advocacy?](#)

### B.1 What is youth rights advocacy and why is it important?

Youth rights advocacy means promoting human rights for young people, including freedom of thought, expression, association and the right to access information. It means standing up for your rights as a young person. Although young people have many rights in theory, in practice you may face various barriers and obstacles to enjoying, or exercising, those rights. History has shown that marginalized groups often have to work hard to be granted rights, even though human rights are universal and inalienable. Youth rights advocacy can help address injustices and promote human rights for young people. While you have the right to promote your rights, this does not mean that you are obliged to do so at any cost. This section provides additional information on how to go about advocating for youth rights, while ensuring that you stay safe from harm.

### B.2 How can I stand up for my rights?

There are many different ways in which you can stand up for your rights as a young person, from very basic, simple actions to developing and implementing advocacy and campaigns. Below are a number of important, basic steps you should consider if you want to advocate for youth rights. Some steps may be more relevant than others depending on the context in which you are working. You may also want to consult other advocacy resources and consider additional factors or steps that apply to your situation. The UN Human Rights Office's Stand up for human rights campaign may provide some ideas and inspiration. For more information on the campaign, visit: [standup4humanrights.org](http://standup4humanrights.org)

## B.2.1 Step 1: Identify the key human rights issue or concern affecting young people that you want to address

You may already be a youth advocate or have some ideas in mind, but if you have not already done so, identify the key human rights issues or concerns affecting young people in your context that you would like to address.

Consider the extent to which the issue affects young people more broadly. Some things to think about:

- Does it affect all young people, or only a specific group?
- How does it affect different groups of young people in different ways? For example, how are young women, LGBTQI+ youth, young refugees and migrants, young people with disabilities, youth living in rural areas, young people of African descent indigenous youth, youth belonging to minority groups, etc. affected?
- How can you reach out to and involve the different groups affected to ensure their participation? It is important to put youth at the center to advocate for their rights, and to avoid making assumptions without consulting those who are directly affected.

If you have identified several different issues or concerns, narrow your focus down to one key concern or human rights violation that affects young people in your context.

**Important: make sure you are not putting yourself in danger and know where to turn if you are at risk.** For more information on how to be prepared and take precautions, see the question '[How can I stay safe and be protected while defending my rights?](#)'.

## B.2.2 Step 2: Set clear aims and objectives

Once you have narrowed your focus on one key human rights concern for youth in your context, you will need to identify what you want to achieve. To do so, think about the following:

- What is your primary aim or goal? Try to be as short and specific as possible.
- If relevant, break down your overall goal into a few clear objectives. For example, what are three key things that need to be achieved in order for your goal to be met?
- What is the impact you want to see, and by when? What would you like to see in the short-, medium- and long- term, and what time frame is necessary; how many weeks, months, years?
- Are your objectives realistic and achievable within the time you have and in the context where you will be advocating?
- How can you measure progress towards your goal and/or objectives?

An easy way to remember the above points is to check that your aims and objectives are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound (or SMART in English).

Think about your key limitations and constraints. Is there anything you can do to address them? If not, then recognize them and factor them into your planning.

### B.2.3 Step 3: Think about how to achieve the aims and objectives

When you have identified your aims and objectives, think about the different ways in which you can achieve them. For example:

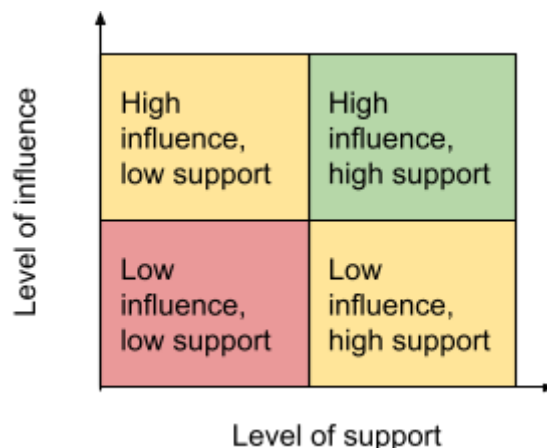
- What initiatives, activities or interventions would be most appropriate or effective?
- What resources do you have at your disposal to make the activities and interventions a reality? Resources may include funds or financial support, human resources, i.e. people and the time they have available, etc.
- How will you evaluate the extent to which different activities or interventions were successful?

### B.2.4 Step 4: Make a map of your partners and allies

Partnerships and coalitions can be a good way of building support for your cause. They may be particularly effective and important in situations where your advocacy work is perceived as a challenge to the status quo or a threat to authorities. It may be a good idea to involve potential allies and partners and youth directly concerned about the issue you want to address already in Steps 2 and 3, to build a sense of shared ownership and commitment among the main partners and to promote meaningful youth participation.

Once you have identified key aims and objectives as well as how you want to achieve them, start to map out partners and stakeholders, including those that you want to target and try to influence. Some things to think about:

- For each partner or stakeholder, consider their level of influence over decisions concerning your aims and objectives, as well as the extent to which they support your aims and objectives. It may help to use a graphical representation, as displayed below. Focusing on the players with both high influence and high support is likely to be most effective. You may want to consider how to build more support among the actors with high influence and low support, as well as how to leverage those who have high support even if their level of influence is low.



- Be as specific as possible. For example, if you identify a civil society organization as a key partner, check if the organization has specific policy and priorities that are in line with

yours, or whether a single team or individual within the organization is most closely aligned with your cause and what their influence can be.

- Make sure to consider both youth and human rights actors, which may include:
  - Youth: Ministry of Youth, Parliamentary Committee responsible for youth issues, local authorities, youth-led and youth-focused civil society organizations such as Local or National Youth Councils, Youth Parliament, organizations representing and/or working with youth in vulnerable situations, informal youth networks, etc.
  - Human rights: Ministry of Justice and/or Ministry of the Interior, Parliamentary Committee responsible for human rights, National Human Rights Institution, civil society organizations focusing on the promotion and protection of human rights, etc.

If youth and human rights organizations are not already working together, it may be a good opportunity to set up new partnerships for youth rights advocacy.

- When you identify the main partners you want to reach out to, think about what is most likely to guarantee their support and how you can convince them to partner with you. For example:
  - Clearly communicate your aims and objectives to them
  - What is the added value of your initiative or campaign, and how will it contribute to their overall goals? In other words, why is it in their interest to join forces with you?
  - What kind of support are you looking for? Be as specific as possible: are you forming a coalition of organizations, are you requesting resources (e.g. human or financial), are you searching for partners who can amplify your messages?

### B.2.5 Step 5: Develop your advocacy messages

Now that you know your objectives, how you want to achieve them, and who you will target to work towards human rights change, it's time to work on your advocacy messages. These messages will be the key points you want to get across to the different partners and stakeholders you target and interact with, but also to a wider target audience if you have one, to get your message out there and to build support. Some things to consider:

- Ensure your messages are brief and easily understandable
- Who is the target audience, and how can you appeal to them? Think about how to convey your message to the different audiences you are addressing. For example, you will most likely use different language when you are speaking to policy-makers or decision-makers, and when you are communicating about your work on social media. If you do not have much experience in developing advocacy messages for different audiences, do not be afraid to ask your closest partners for help.

### B.2.6 Step 6: Revise, fine-tune and improve as you go along

As you implement your activities or initiatives, be mindful of what seems to be working well and what you could still adapt or improve to achieve your goals. There is no one-size-fits-all; some activities may work well and be very effective in one context, but not in another, and you will only learn by trial and error.

## B.2.7 Step 7: Evaluate

Once you have concluded the initiative and/or activities you planned, look back in order to evaluate and assess what worked well and what could be improved next time, or as you move forward. For example:

- To what extent did you achieve your overall aim, as well as the objectives you identified in Step 2?
- What factors contributed to success? What factors hindered progress?
- What were the key obstacles and challenges?
- What would you do differently, and what are the key lessons learned?

To get an accurate picture, consult with those who worked most closely with you.

Based on the seven steps described above, next you will find a list of 10+1 Top Tips for Youth Rights Advocacy.

## B.3 What are some good tips for youth rights advocacy?

Based on the steps for youth rights advocacy, below you will find some top tips. Some may be more relevant to you than others, so feel free to reflect and think about some of your own tips based on your situation and experience.

### 10+1 TOP TIPS FOR YOUTH RIGHTS ADVOCACY

1. **Be clear about what you want to achieve:** set clear aims and goals and ensure that your actions are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound.
2. **Use research to support your advocacy:** look for any existing data or information that supports your advocacy aims and make use of it to strengthen your argument. Where these do not exist, you may want to consider including data collection as part of your advocacy work, particularly if it would have an impact on achieving your objectives.
3. **Put young people at the center:** make sure young people are in the driving seat at all stages, advocating for their own rights. Provide a safe environment where young people can express themselves freely, learn from each other and be empowered to become effective advocates by developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes required.
4. **Work collaboratively through inclusive partnerships and coalitions, in particular protection networks:** bring together a broad-based coalition of actors that support and strive towards the same or similar goals, including from other sectors and social movements. Be inclusive of different actors and young people from different walks of life. Ensure that you have a few focal points for emergency contacts and to report any threats or attacks that you face as well as to get assistance protecting yourself.

5. **Mobilize political, institutional and high-profile support:** build support for your cause, and bring political and institutional actors on board. Identify any high-profile or influential figures that can help attract support, such as celebrities.
6. **Develop clear and consistent messaging:** communicate about your objectives and work in a clear, consistent way. The same message can be communicated in different ways, so adapt the message to the main audience you are trying to reach at a given moment. Use online platforms effectively if they are widely available in your context and be strategic about reaching out to the media if you plan to do so.
7. **Be creative, innovative and flexible:** think about different and new ways to raise awareness and build support for your advocacy goals. Be open to change and adapt your activities based on what is most effective, likely to mobilize the most support and contribute towards the impact you are trying to achieve, but without compromising to a point where the activities or objectives would not bring any added value.
8. **Be patient:** change doesn't happen overnight, so make sure to acknowledge and celebrate even the small, incremental steps that bring your advocacy goals closer to being a reality.
9. **Reflect on, evaluate and learn from your advocacy:** think about the key messages you take away including what you learnt from others, and how you can use this knowledge to improve your future advocacy.
10. **Stay safe and take care of yourself:** ensure that you will not put yourself in danger or risk of harm as a result of your advocacy; be prepared and inform yourself about where you can go or who to turn to in case you face threats, intimidation or harassment. Avoid having a high level of visibility or public exposure if the situation is getting intense and keep a low profile for some time. Consider the impact your advocacy may have on your mental health and be prepared to set your boundaries and respect them.

And finally, one more bonus tip:

11. **Have fun!** Advocating for your own rights can be exhausting, frustrating and in some cases even dangerous. At the same time, it can be an empowering experience and an opportunity to meet like-minded people while developing a wide range of skills.

## B.4 How can I stay safe and be protected while defending my rights?

Safety and wellbeing, including when it comes to mental health, are utmost priorities when advocating for your rights, as reflected in Top Tip #9 in the previous question.

Without intending to discourage you from taking action for human rights, it is important to remember that advocating for human rights can be dangerous, particularly where there is strong opposition to the change you want to achieve.



Familiarize yourself with the context in which you are working. To what extent are those who defend human rights, including Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and human rights organizations, able to freely carry out their work? Some organizations monitor the civic space, i.e. the openness and freedom for civil society actors across the globe to operate without fear or reprisals; one example is the CIVICUS monitor, a tool that provides up-to-date data on the state of civil society and civic freedoms in 196 countries, available in [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#).

Human rights defenders often work together to pool knowledge and resources, offer support, recognition, personal security and solidarity through Protection Networks (PNs) that bring together different civil society actors at the local, national, regional and international levels. Protection Networks are vital, particularly in contexts where formal protection mechanisms are weak, unreliable or even hostile towards human rights defenders. Do some research to identify protection networks you may be able to link up with. PNs may not always be highly visible, so you could start by reaching out to organizations that work to promote human rights in your local or national context, or even at the regional or international level.

#### B.4.1 More in depth...

Before starting your advocacy, it is very important to:

1. **Ensure you are not putting yourself at risk of harm, including for your mental health:** to the extent possible, ensure that the course of action you choose to follow does not place you at harm. Consider whether there may be any backlash and from which actors, and inform yourself of what steps are available and where you can turn to in case of danger, such as a Protection Network. Think about your own boundaries and make sure to respect them, including when it comes to your mental health. Whenever you think the risks outweigh the purposes of your advocacy, feel free to step away and ensure your personal security first. Do not be shy to ask for assistance.
2. **Assess whether you are facing an immediate threat or danger:** if you are facing an immediate threat or danger, reach out to a competent authority or trusted individual, network or organization with a view to ensuring your safety. This may range from law enforcement authorities, to individuals or networks dedicated to the protection of human rights defenders, or even the United Nations.

Make sure you are aware of any online protection tools for digital security and equip yourself with other protection tools whenever possible. Learn about risk assessment and mitigation strategies.

#### B.4.2 Where can I learn more?

- You can read more about the UN's work to improve civic space at the country level and strengthen protection practices at the UN Human Rights [website](#).
- To learn more about protection and tools or resources that may be available, consult [Protection International](#) (available in English, French and Spanish) or [Frontline Defenders](#) (in English). Frontline Defenders provides an [Emergency Contact form](#) for Human Rights Defenders, to facilitate contact with someone who speaks Arabic, English,

French, Russian or Spanish that helps determine how best to support you in an urgent situation.

- To learn more about the various barriers and threats that young people face in civic space as well as key aspects of protecting youth in civic space, have a look at: [If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space](#) (available in English)

## B.5 How can young people in vulnerable situations, including situations of conflict, violence and insecurity, advocate for their rights?

First and foremost, young people in vulnerable situations must prioritize their safety and protection (refer to the previous question: [How can I stay safe and be protected while defending my rights?](#)). If you are unable to actively advocate for your own rights, in order to minimize any potentially severe risks or threats, try to identify organizations that can support you, to raise awareness and call for action on the challenges that you, and others like you are facing. These may include civil society organizations working to protect human rights or international organizations such as the United Nations.

### B.5.1 Where can I learn more?

For more information on the work of the United Nations to protect human rights during conflict situations visit the UN Human Rights [website](#).

[Section D](#) of the toolkit provides more information on youth rights in peacebuilding and humanitarian settings.

Have a look at the [11 ways to help young people in conflict zones](#) (available in English).

## B.6 What are some examples of successful youth rights advocacy?

Achieving success in your advocacy to have a lasting impact for youth rights depends on many different factors, and you cannot control all of them. There is no one single recipe for successful youth rights advocacy; however, below you will find some examples. They are not intended to be prescriptive, but rather indicative and to serve as a source of inspiration.

<b>Future we want (2020)</b>	
<b>Led by</b>	UNICEF Italy and UNICEF Italy youth advocates
<b>Scope</b>	National (Italy)
<b>Stakeholders targeted</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parliament</li><li>• Government policy-maker</li></ul>

<b>Youth rights in focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Right to participate in public affairs</li> <li>● Right to health, including mental health</li> <li>● Right to education</li> </ul>
<b>Main objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Introduce a youth participation dimension into the NextGenerationEU Recovery Plan, a European Union initiative to support recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic</li> <li>● Include civic education in school curricula</li> <li>● Support the introduction of mental health professionals in schools</li> </ul>
<b>Key outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Creation of a Youth Advisory Board for the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs</li> </ul>
<b>Success factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Overall institutional environment</li> <li>● Main objectives shared broadly by many civil society actors</li> <li>● Political figures in the Ministry of Youth were close to UNICEF</li> <li>● Broad media coverage</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The initiative was overly ambitious at the beginning, meaning that the goals had to be re-envisaged</li> <li>● Hard to ensure political momentum</li> </ul>
<b>Lessons learned</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Have clear, limited advocacy objectives that are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound</li> <li>● Use media effectively to leverage political momentum</li> <li>● Ensure a broad-based coalition</li> <li>● Have an implementing committee</li> </ul>
<b>More information</b>	<a href="https://www.unicef.org/eca/press-releases/future-we-want-manifesto-written-adolescents-italy-post-covid-19-future">https://www.unicef.org/eca/press-releases/future-we-want-manifesto-written-adolescents-italy-post-covid-19-future</a>

<b>You Matter (2019)</b>	
<b>Led by</b>	Youth Inter-Active (YIA)
<b>Scope</b>	Local (Umlazi Township and Durban, South Africa)
<b>Stakeholders targeted</b>	Municipality, civil society organizations
<b>Youth rights in focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Right to health, with a focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)</li> <li>● HIV/AIDS and human rights</li> <li>● Right to education, with a focus on human rights education</li> </ul>

<b>Main objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To build the capacity of young people from marginalized communities on their SRHR, while integrating civic education</li> <li>• To build social cohesion among youth</li> <li>• To decrease the infection rate of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections among youth</li> </ul>
<b>Key outcomes</b>	Adolescents and youth started making informed decisions about bodily autonomy, contributing to a decrease in the HIV/AIDS infections
<b>Success factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cohesion with the organization</li> <li>• Research-based advocacy</li> <li>• Engaging community leaders, actors and relevant stakeholders</li> <li>• Letting the voices of youth drive the initiative</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social constructs and systemic barriers leading to social exclusion</li> <li>• Lack of resources to mobilize; financial barriers</li> <li>• Lack of engagement from relevant stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>Lessons learned</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth leadership in the implementation of policies, not only seeing youth as beneficiaries</li> <li>• The voices of those who are marginalized must be heard in order to address marginalization</li> <li>• Data collection for advocacy</li> </ul>

<b>Books not Bullets (2019) - An initiative under 'Silencing the Guns in Africa'</b>	
<b>Led by</b>	GIZ African Union Office, Office of the African Union Youth Envoy
<b>Scope</b>	National (South Sudan)
<b>Stakeholders targeted</b>	Young people from South Sudan
<b>Youth rights in focus</b>	Right to education for young people living in refugee camps
<b>Main objectives</b>	Ending the use of guns by improving access to education, as the majority of young people in refugee camps could not access education
<b>Key outcomes</b>	More young people from refugee camps were admitted to education, avoiding the possible radicalization of youth
<b>Success factors</b>	Partnerships and collaboration with different stakeholders
<b>Challenges</b>	Lack of understanding of content-wide campaigns (such as Silencing the Guns) for the majority of citizens who do not have

	access to information about such campaigns, their target audience, etc.
<b>Lessons learned</b>	Partnerships are critical to promote human rights work and to gather support for achieving targets and goals

<b>Online petition to allow teenage mothers to resume schooling (2017)</b>	
<b>Led by</b>	Petrider Paul, youth activist
<b>Scope</b>	National (Tanzania)
<b>Stakeholders targeted</b>	Former President of the United Republic of Tanzania
<b>Youth rights in focus</b>	Right to education for young women, and teenage mothers in particular
<b>Main objectives</b>	To allow teenage mothers to return to education, reversing an earlier decree
<b>Key outcomes</b>	Support for the online petition with over 100,000 signature, resulting in a government decision to allow teenage mothers to access education in 2020 through alternative education pathways
<b>Success factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of online petition platform that is free and easily accessible</li> <li>• Social media platforms as an advocacy tool</li> <li>• International support from human rights defenders</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	Intimidation, particularly from people suggesting it was possible to be silenced or detained for opposing a Presidential decree
<b>Lessons learned</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth advocates / young human rights defenders need protection mechanisms to ensure that they are safe and secure while advocating for human rights</li> <li>• Avoid confrontational styles or approaches, particularly when communicating about human rights issues or work</li> </ul>
<b>More information</b>	See the <a href="#">online petition</a>

<b>Bringing youth concerns during political protests to the international level (2021)</b>	
<b>Led by</b>	The Millennials Movement, in cooperation with other youth organizations
<b>Scope</b>	National (Colombia); International (United Nations)

<b>Stakeholders targeted</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth-led organizations</li> <li>• United Nations entities, e.g. the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth</li> </ul>
<b>Youth rights in focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Right to participation, with a focus on civic engagement</li> <li>• Right to freedom of opinion or expression</li> <li>• Right to freedom of peaceful assembly</li> </ul>
<b>Main objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To identify the main issues facing young people in Colombia in the context of protests, and convey them to key UN stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>Key outcomes</b>	30 young people from Colombia shared their views and concerns through a series of youth hearings, contributing to a summary compilation shared with youth representatives at the UN
<b>Success factors</b>	Providing a safe space for young people to express themselves freely, while giving the opportunity to all participants to contribute
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of information about how to address human rights violations for youth</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge and integration of human rights by youth affected by different types of human rights violations</li> <li>• Limitations of online-only events; reaching young people without internet access</li> </ul>
<b>Lessons learned</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing a safe space is critical</li> <li>• Follow-up and continuity</li> <li>• It is important to have capacity building on the options available to submit information on human rights concerns or violations for youth</li> </ul>

<b>African Climate Mobility Initiative (ACMI) (2022)</b>	
<b>Led by</b>	ACMI, UNICEF, Migration Youth and Children Platform, Greenwall Foundation, Bosch Foundation
<b>Scope</b>	Regional (Africa)
<b>Stakeholders targeted</b>	African youth, especially those from vulnerable backgrounds
<b>Youth rights in focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Right to clean, healthy and sustainable environment</li> <li>• Right to seek asylum</li> <li>• Right to decent work</li> </ul>
<b>Main objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To enable African youth to design solutions to climate mobility, with a focus on green skills</li> <li>• To empower African youth to engage with climate policy-making, with a focus on capacity-building for the</li> </ul>

	Conference of the Parties (COP), a key UN conference on climate change
<b>Key outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8-9 youth finalists presented their proposals at the COP27 pavilion</li> <li>• Connected platform for youth collaboration across Africa</li> <li>• Recognition of the intersections between different youth rights</li> </ul>
<b>Success factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong public- and private-sector partners, including institutional support</li> <li>• Inclusive and meaningful youth engagement</li> <li>• Science-policy apparatus</li> <li>• Prevalence of climate mobility vis-a-vis youth rights</li> <li>• Prior experience of the Migration Youth and Children Platform with the Youth Innovation Award</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	Resource constraints among youth constituencies, and lobbying partners to provide resources to address the gap
<b>Lessons learned</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The importance of a collaborative process</li> <li>• Bridging the gap between science, policy and advocacy</li> <li>• The intersection of different youth rights</li> </ul>

## Section C: Leveraging international human rights mechanisms and processes to advocate for youth rights

*In this section: How can I use human rights mechanisms and processes to advocate for my rights?*

- [C.1 What is the UN?](#)
- [C.2 How does the UN work to monitor, promote and protect human rights globally?](#)
- [C.3 How can I engage with UN human rights mechanisms?](#)
- [C.4 What should I keep in mind if I want to engage with UN human rights mechanisms?](#)
- [C.5 What can I expect from engaging with the UN human rights mechanisms?](#)
- [C.6 What human rights bodies and mechanisms does this toolkit cover?](#)
- [C.7 What is the UN Human Rights Office and what does it do?](#)
- [C.8 What steps has the UN Human Rights Office taken on youth rights?](#)
- [C.9 How can I engage with the work of the UN Human Rights Office?](#)
- [C.10 What is the Human Rights Council and what does it do?](#)
- [C.11 What steps has the Human Rights Council taken on youth?](#)
- [C.12 How can I engage with the Human Rights Council?](#)
- [C.13 What are the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council?](#)
- [C.14 What steps have the Special Procedures taken on youth?](#)
- [C.15 How can I engage with the Special Procedures?](#)
- [C.16 What is the Universal Periodic Review?](#)
- [C.17 How can I engage with the Universal Periodic Review?](#)
- [C.18 What are the Human Rights Treaty Bodies?](#)
- [C.19 What steps have the Treaty Bodies taken on youth?](#)
- [C.20 How can I engage with the Treaty Bodies?](#)
- [C.21 How and when should I get involved with the different human rights mechanisms to maximize the impact of my work?](#)

### C.1 What is the UN?

The United Nations (UN) is an international organization founded in 1945 in the aftermath of the Second World War to maintain international peace and security, to develop friendly relations among nations, and to achieve international cooperation and encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. As such, human rights are at the core of the UN's work.



### C.1.1 Where can I learn more?

The UN is the one place where the world's nations can gather together, discuss common problems and find shared solutions. The organization's purposes and principles, membership as well as key organs and their functioning are described in the [UN Charter](#).

## C.2 How does the UN work to monitor, promote and protect human rights globally?

The UN has different bodies, mechanisms and processes that work to promote and protect human rights around the world. All of these combined give access to a wide range of reporting and monitoring tools you can work with to advance youth rights. The key is knowing how and when to use which one or which combination of processes to achieve your advocacy goals. The UN also operates at the regional and domestic level in many countries; however, this section gives an overview of the different tools and contains some tips on how to engage with the UN to advocate for youth rights, with a focus on mechanisms and processes that are available at the international level.

## C.3 How can I engage with UN human rights mechanisms?

There are different ways in which you can engage with the work of UN human rights mechanisms and processes. The work that the human rights mechanisms do is vital, but understanding how they work and being able to navigate them can seem daunting and complex. This toolkit does not assume or require prior knowledge of any of the mechanisms; however, as you familiarize yourself with them, think about the extent to and ways in which you would like to be engaged, taking into consideration your specific situation and available resources. To help you in this effort, the toolkit suggests three different forms or levels of engagement, as follows:

1. **Get informed:** develop a basic understanding of how different mechanisms work, access information such as human rights recommendations, and use them to support your advocacy work where relevant.
2. **Follow and spread the word:** follow some of the human rights bodies online via social media, share relevant human rights updates and information with your network and keep up to date with the latest activities.
3. **Get involved and participate:** develop a good understanding of how the different mechanisms work, assess which mechanisms are most relevant and could be most effective in promoting youth rights in your context. Use the mechanisms to promote youth rights by submitting relevant information and/or advocating for your issues to be addressed.

### C.3.1 More in depth...

Getting informed and/or following and spreading the word generally require less time and resources, however they do not constitute active involvement or participation through input into and influencing the work of the different mechanisms. Getting involved and participating can

entail more meaningful participation, but generally requires more commitment, time and resources.

Information on how to engage with the different bodies and mechanisms is structured around the three forms of engagement mentioned above. You may choose to mix and match, i.e. while you may want to get involved and participate in one mechanism or process, you may be satisfied with getting informed on another.

## C.4 What should I keep in mind if I want to engage with UN human rights mechanisms?

The UN can serve as a useful tool to promote and protect human rights, either to urge action on a situation that is overlooked domestically, or to supplement efforts to advocate for or advance youth rights nationally or internationally. Engaging with human rights mechanisms should not be an end goal in itself, but a means for improving the human rights situation in your context, or addressing critical and urgent human rights violations, especially where efforts or options available domestically have proven ineffective or inadequate.

First and foremost, consider your personal safety and do your best to ensure that you are not putting yourself at risk of harm or reprisals, particularly in the case of human rights issues which a State is unable or unwilling to address, and/or that are politically sensitive in the context where you work. For more information on safety, see Section B, question on [‘How can I stay safe and be protected while defending my rights?’](#).

## C.5 What can I expect from engaging with the UN human rights mechanisms?

Human rights mechanisms receive a high volume of information and requests for intervention from different sources. With the exception of very urgent or grave human rights situations, they are not always able to rapidly or comprehensively address all the issues that are brought to their attention. Nonetheless, do not let this discourage you from engaging with the mechanisms to raise the human rights concerns of youth in your context.

The UN produces numerous reports on human rights thematic and country issues. Some reports and recommendations carry more weight than others, particularly when States have a legal obligation to abide by certain provisions or recommendations. As you begin to navigate the different mechanisms and search through reports and recommendations, consider these as tools that can complement and bolster your advocacy for youth rights.

### **Using UN reports for youth rights advocacy**

In 2016, the first session of the UN Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law took place, focusing on the topic of widening the democratic space: the role of youth

participation in public decision-making. The Forum provided a space for young people and youth organizations to participate, contribute and put forward recommendations to States. The report from the Forum includes a number of recommendations on promoting meaningful youth participation, for example:

- Consider adopting or amending national legislation to align the minimum voting age and the minimum age of eligibility to run for office.
- Collect data to track youth participation, representation and inclusion in political processes and institutions.
- Establish or strengthen accessible and inclusive structures, such as local youth councils, youth parliaments or other consultative mechanisms, to foster youth participation in all institutions. Such mechanisms should be grounded in law, provided with an adequate budget and tasked with the formulation of recommendations that should be acted upon and followed up.

A summary of recommendations is available in [English](#), while the full report is available in [all six UN languages](#). While States are not obliged to implement the recommendations of the report, compiling recommendations from various sources can help build a case and apply pressure when advocating for youth rights.

## C.6 What human rights bodies and mechanisms does this toolkit cover?

The present toolkit primarily focuses on human rights bodies and mechanisms at the global level, as follows:

- The UN Human Rights Office
- UN Human Rights Council
- The Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council
- The Universal Periodic Review, a mechanism of the Human Rights Council
- The Human Rights Treaty Bodies

For each one of the above, you will find:

- A brief introduction to what the body or mechanism in question is and what it does
- What steps it has taken on youth rights (except in the case of the Universal Periodic Review)
- How you can engage in the work of the body or mechanism in question, following the three forms of engagement described previously, i.e. get informed, follow and spread the word, get involved and participate

## C.7 What is the UN Human Rights Office and what does it do?

UN Human Rights, or the UN Human Rights Office, also known as Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR), is the leading UN entity on human rights, and

has a mandate to promote and protect the enjoyment and full realization, by all people, of all human rights. UN Human Rights has its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland but works in many countries around the world.

### C.7.1 More in depth...

To fulfill its mandate, the Office's activities include:

- Providing technical assistance and expertise to Member States and supporting survivors of human rights violations, individuals and groups of individuals, and civil society, including youth organizations, in different areas of human rights.
- Writing reports on different aspects and evolving areas of human rights and organizing meetings, seminars, consultations, and panel events, among others, to protect and promote human rights.
- Raising awareness of human rights activities, promoting and engaging in dialogue with member States concerning human rights, coordinating UN human rights education and public information programmes, and making recommendations on how UN bodies can better protect and promote human rights.

### C.7.2 Where can I learn more?

For more information, visit: [ohchr.org](http://ohchr.org)

## C.8 What steps has the UN Human Rights Office taken on youth rights?

Since 2018, UN Human Rights has prioritized youth as a population group, aiming to put a spotlight on the human rights issues and concerns of youth, and to intensify its links with young people as well as youth-led and youth-focused organizations and movements. The Office's work to promote human rights with and for young people broadly falls into three categories:

- Project-based work funded by external donors, such as member States or foundations, with specific objectives or deliverables
- Mandated activities requested by the UN Human Rights Council
- Interagency cooperation in partnership with other UN entities, agencies, funds and programmes

### C.8.1 More in depth...

In 2019, UN Human Rights deployed a network of youth officers in Fiji, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Senegal and its headquarters in Geneva, to develop partnerships with and to support youth-led and youth-focused organizations in the promotion of human rights for youth and with youth. A key result of the network of youth officers has been more consistent and structured engagement with youth, and increased youth participation in shaping UN Human Rights' youth agenda and actions.

In 2022, UN Human Rights launched a Youth Advisory Board in the context of its partnership with Education Above All Foundation (EAA) and Silatech on working with and for youth in vulnerable situations including conflict, violence and insecurity. The Youth Advisory Board plays a key role in providing input and feedback on the overall direction of the project partnership, ensuring youth participation throughout the process.

## C.8.2 Where can I learn more?

More information including links to relevant reports and resources is available at:

[ohchr.org/youth](https://www.ohchr.org/youth)

## C.9 How can I engage with the work of the UN Human Rights Office?

### Get informed

- You can follow developments including upcoming and past reports, current projects and opportunities to engage in work focused on youth via the dedicated webpage: [ohchr.org/youth](https://www.ohchr.org/youth)
- Find out about UN Human Rights's work in your country or region. More information about where UN Human Rights works is available at: [ohchr.org/about-us/where-we-work](https://www.ohchr.org/about-us/where-we-work)

### Follow and spread the word

- Follow UN Human Rights on social media: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [TikTok](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#) (Note: the profiles listed here are at the global level and available in English. Some UN Human Rights field presences are also on social media, so make sure to check.)
- Subscribe to [email updates](#) from the Civil Society Unit and stay up to date on UN Human Rights activities and developments.

### Get involved and participate

- Look out for opportunities to submit information to reports prepared by UN Human Rights by checking out the call for inputs page: [ohchr.org/calls-for-input-listing](https://www.ohchr.org/calls-for-input-listing). Calls for inputs are often shared in the email updates that you can subscribe to receive (see link above under 'follow and spread the word').
- UN Human Rights offers a number of fellowship programmes aimed at specific groups such as indigenous representatives, LGBTI activists, minority rights defenders, people of African descent from the diaspora, and others to develop knowledge and skills on human rights and the UN human rights system. For more information, visit: <https://www.ohchr.org/about-us/fellowship-programmes>

## C.10 What is the Human Rights Council and what does it do?

The Human Rights Council is a body within the UN system made up of States, also known as an inter-governmental body, which is responsible for promoting and protecting human rights worldwide. The Council, which meets in Geneva, Switzerland three times a year for regular sessions and can convene for special sessions on urgent human rights issues or violations (focused on a theme or specific country situation), is made up of 47 members that are elected by UN Member States for a three-year term.

The Human Rights Council also has a number of mechanisms that support and assist its work.

A short video on the Human Rights Council is available below (audio in English with French subtitles, click on the image to open the link).



A brief video introduction to the Human Rights Council is available in other languages via the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), a Non-Governmental Organization (audio in English with subtitles in additional languages): [youtube.com/watch?v=8Ymr81rLPI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Ymr81rLPI)

### C.10.1 More in depth... on the Human Rights Council

The main outcomes of Human Rights Council sessions are resolutions adopted by the members of the Council, which contain conclusions on a specific human rights issue and setting out recommendations for future action. The Council also takes a series of actions to debate with a view to advancing human rights either on a particular human rights issue or country situation, including through the organization of an annual panel, an annual forum, consultations or seminars, the creation of a specific mechanism, and reports or studies, among others. These actions are implemented by or with the support of OHCHR. States draft and negotiate resolutions throughout the session and they can be adopted by consensus or with a vote, or rejected due to lack of enough support at the end of each session.

### C.10.2 More in depth... on mechanisms of the Human Rights Council

The Council has several subsidiary bodies and expert mechanisms and working groups which provide thematic expertise to the Council, and fora where States, civil society, academic institutions, Indigenous People's representatives and individuals can meet in a space of

dialogue and cooperation. More information on these mechanisms is available at: [ohchr.org/hr-bodies/hrc/other-sub-bodies](https://www.ohchr.org/hr-bodies/hrc/other-sub-bodies)

### C.10.3 What is the confidential Complaint Procedure of the Human Rights Council?

The Council's confidential Complaint Procedure is a victims' oriented process addressing consistent patterns of gross and reliably attested violations of all human rights and all fundamental freedoms occurring in any part of the world and under any circumstances.

Two distinct Working Groups, the Working Group on Communications and the Working Group on Situations are responsible, respectively, for examining communications and bringing violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms to the attention of member States of the Council, for their action. The Council examines reports and any situation placed before it by the Working Group on Situations in a confidential manner, with a view to enhance cooperation with the State concerned. It does so as frequently as needed, but at least once a year. This is also the only universal complaint procedure covering all human rights and fundamental freedoms in all United Nations Member States, irrespective of whether the country has ratified any particular treaty or made reservations under a particular instrument.

More information on the Complaint procedure is available at:

- UN Human Rights website on the [complaint procedure](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions about the Complaint Procedure](#)

### C.11 What steps has the Human Rights Council taken on youth?

In recent years, the Human Rights Council as well as several of its mechanisms have given increased attention to youth and human rights. Examples of the focus on youth include resolutions, thematic reports, as well as dedicated panel discussions. Reports prepared by the UN Human Rights Office at the request of the Council are available at: [ohchr.org/youth/reports](https://www.ohchr.org/youth/reports)  
Other relevant resources are available at: [ohchr.org/youth/resources](https://www.ohchr.org/youth/resources)

### C.12 How can I engage with the Human Rights Council?

#### **Get informed**

- Learn more about the Human Rights Council and how it operates. Visit the official website of the Human Rights Council, available at: [ohchr.org/hr-bodies/hrc/about-council](https://www.ohchr.org/hr-bodies/hrc/about-council)
- Find out when the Council is meeting and what's on its agenda (known as the programme of work). Find out more at: [ohchr.org/hrbodies/hrc/home](https://www.ohchr.org/hrbodies/hrc/home). You can also keep an eye on what the various expert mechanisms are focusing on too.

#### **Follow and spread the word**

- Follow the Human Rights Council: [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#), available in English



- Follow the sessions of the Human Rights Council, including via live webcast at: <https://media.un.org/en/webtv/>

### **Get involved and participate**

- Access the e-learning tool on the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms developed by the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to support the participation of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the work of Human Rights Council, which consists of four modules, in order to obtain a more in-depth understanding. The e-learning tool is primarily designed for government officials from Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) but can also be useful to other audiences. The tool is available in English and French at: [ohchr.org/hr-bodies/hrc/trust-fund/tool](http://ohchr.org/hr-bodies/hrc/trust-fund/tool)
- Explore civil society resources on the Human Rights Council that provide supplementary information on how the Council works and how you can engage. The International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) has developed an online academy, available in English, French and Spanish, which includes section on the Human Rights Council: [academy.ishr.ch/learn/un-human-rights-council](http://academy.ishr.ch/learn/un-human-rights-council)
- Find out when reports are being submitted to the Council and submit your information on the key human rights issues facing young people on the theme in question. For more information, visit: [ohchr.org/calls-for-input-listing](http://ohchr.org/calls-for-input-listing)
  - Tip: Any recommendations you include in a submission will generally be more effective if they are specific, measurable, achievable, resourced and time-bound. You can refer to [Section B](#) of the present toolkit for more information on advocacy.

## **C.13 What are the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council?**

Special Procedures are independent human rights experts that focus on various thematic human rights issues or country situations. Their role is to monitor, examine, provide advice, and report on the human rights issues within their mandate. Special Procedures can conduct a range of activities including country visits followed by public reports of their visits for the Human Rights Council, thematic reports on issues of relevance to their mandate for the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly, as well as advice to States on human rights issues related to their mandate. Special Procedures can also receive complaints of alleged human rights violations.

A video on the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council is available below in English (click on the image to open the link).





A brief video introduction to the Special Procedures is available in other languages via the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), a Non-Governmental Organization (audio in English with subtitles in additional languages): [youtube.com/watch?v=d7gD4mTRt8M](https://youtube.com/watch?v=d7gD4mTRt8M)

### C.13.1 More in depth...

There are different types of Special Procedures; they include independent experts, special rapporteurs, special representatives and working groups, often referred to as 'mandate-holders'. The UN Human Rights website contains more detailed information and resources on Special Procedures and their work, including:

- The Directory of Special Procedures Mandate Holders, available in [English](#)
- [Country visits](#)
- [Communications](#) related to complaints of alleged human rights violations

### C.13.2 Where can I learn more?

More information on the work of the Special Procedures is available at: [ohchr.org/special-procedures-human-rights-council](https://ohchr.org/special-procedures-human-rights-council)

## C.14 What steps have the Special Procedures taken on youth?

Several Special Procedures have covered human rights issues related to young people or put a spotlight on issues where youth are particularly at risk. Special Procedures have raised issues involving young people's vulnerabilities in accessing their rights to freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, health - including sexual and reproductive health and rights, education, access to water and sanitation, adequate housing, healthy foods, and others, including among different groups such as indigenous populations, internally displaced persons, migrants and minorities, youth with disabilities as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth.

The Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation periodically organized the Human Rights Youth Challenge. More information is available in [English](#).

## C.15 How can I engage with the Special Procedures?

### Get informed

- Familiarize yourself with the work of the Special Procedures via [ohchr.org/special-procedures-human-rights-council](https://www.ohchr.org/special-procedures-human-rights-council). Check to see whether any of the Special Procedures have issued reports for your country following a visit, or thematic reports on topics of interest. You may use any relevant recommendations for your advocacy efforts.

### Follow and spread the word

- Following Special Procedures on Twitter at: [twitter.com/UN\\_SPExperts](https://twitter.com/UN_SPExperts) (in English)

### Get involved and participate

- Explore civil society resources on the Special Procedures, how they work and how you can engage. The International Service for Human Rights's online academy has includes a section on the Special Procedures (available in English, French and Spanish): [academy.ishr.ch/learn/special-procedures](https://academy.ishr.ch/learn/special-procedures)
- *Submit information to a call for inputs:* Special Procedures issue calls for inputs requesting information ahead of a country visit or when drafting a thematic study. You can provide information to each of these processes. Sometimes, you may be able to meet with mandate-holders when they conduct country visits and they will also invite experts in specific areas to expert meetings when conducting work on a particular thematic area.
  - Note: during country visits, mandate holders usually have very tightly packed agendas; you may want to inquire with your civil society networks and partners about the possibility of joining a meeting with several organizations.
- Call for inputs are often published on the webpage of each individual Special Procedure, so keep an eye out by checking the webpage of mandate-holders whose thematic or country-specific work may be of interest to you, as well as by monitoring the UN Human Rights main call for inputs page at: [ohchr.org/calls-for-input-listing](https://www.ohchr.org/calls-for-input-listing)
- *Submit a complaint:* Individuals, groups of individuals, civil society, national human rights bodies, and inter-governmental entities can submit complaints to Special Procedures concerning individuals or a group of people. Complaints can be considered irrespective of whether a State has ratified a specific human rights treaty or has a reservation. When submitting a complaint, make sure that it is clear, comprehensive, detail-oriented and precise.
  - Check out the [leaflet](#) on Special Procedures Communications
  - Find out how to submit a complaint to Special Procedures at: [spsubmission.ohchr.org/](https://spsubmission.ohchr.org/) (available in English, French and Spanish). Note that the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances have different procedures.
  - If there is a situation of concern that may not yet amount to the threshold required for submitting a complaint or as a preventive step, you can communicate your concerns setting out the human rights problem to the office of the mandate-holder.

## C.16 What is the Universal Periodic Review?

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique mechanism established by the Human Rights Council aimed at improving the human rights situation in every UN Member State. The overall human rights record of each UN Member State is reviewed by all other UN Member States through a peer-led process, which takes place approximately every four and a half years.

Youth-led and youth-focused organizations can advocate for an increased attention to the human rights concerns of youth by engaging with the UPR mechanism to bring attention to, and advocate for proposals to address the obstacles young people face in realizing their human rights. This may also include emerging human rights issues, such as climate change, sustainable development, digital dimensions of human rights, including new technologies and artificial intelligence, and many others.

### C.16.1 More in depth...

The UPR is a periodic and cyclical mechanism, based on principles of universality of coverage and equality of treatment. It has a universal thematic coverage as the only UN human rights mechanism that covers all human rights issues. It also has universal geographic coverage; every UN Member State takes part in the UPR process and has been reviewed under the UPR, with 100% participation in the first three cycles.

The ultimate objective of the UPR is the improvement of the human rights situation in every country, with impact on the lives of people. Participation in the UPR is possible for relevant stakeholders, including civil society, National Human Rights Institutions, regional mechanisms, UN entities. Civil society actors are strongly encouraged to engage in all different phases of the UPR cycle.

### C.16.2 Where can I learn more?

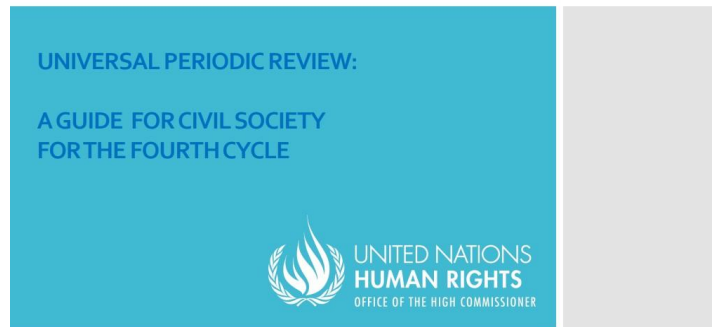
For more information on the Universal Periodic Review, visit:

- [Website](#) of the Universal Periodic Review
- UPR [Basic Facts](#)

## C.17 How can I engage with the Universal Periodic Review?

### Get informed

- For more information on how the UPR works, how civil society can engage and further resources, have a look at the UPR Guide for Civil Society, click on the image below to open the file in [English](#), which is also available in [French](#) and [Spanish](#).



- A brief video introduction to the UPR is available in several languages via the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), a Non-Governmental Organization (audio in English with subtitles in additional languages): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ct7aIBF2YUA>
- The non-governmental organization UPR Info provides support, training, and resources on the UPR process and how to effectively engage with it, including a database of all recommendations. For more information, visit: [upr-info.org](http://upr-info.org) (available in English, French and Spanish)
- University students can apply to participate in Model UPR organized annually by the Human Rights Centre of the University of Padova, in English. For more information about the Model UPR including eligibility requirements and registration, visit: [Padova Model Universal Periodic Review](#)
- Check when the most recent review took place and when the next review of your country, or the country or countries whose UPR you are interested in engaging with will take place.
- Consult the most recent UPR report and the recommendations put forward to the State under Review to check whether any recommendations explicitly mention youth, or if any human rights issues you are interested in are specifically addressed. All UPR documentation is available for each State at: [ohchr.org/hr-bodies/upr/documentation](http://ohchr.org/hr-bodies/upr/documentation); where you can consult the Report of the Working Group, available under 'Outcome of the Review'.

*Note: 2022 marked the end of the third UPR cycle and beginning of the fourth cycle, which means all States have been reviewed three times.*

It is possible to get involved with the UPR at any stage, whether before, during or after the Review takes place.

#### **A. Get involved and participate before the review**

- *Participate in the national consultation:* prior to your country's review, try to engage in the national consultation that States should hold to inform their preparation of their national report. This information is not always widely available but you can contact the government Ministry leading this process.

- *Submit your own information:* prepare and submit a report on the key human rights issues facing young people in your country. Submissions can be made by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs); make sure to follow the information and guidelines for other stakeholders (NGOs), available at: [ohchr.org/hr-bodies/upr/ngos-nhris](http://ohchr.org/hr-bodies/upr/ngos-nhris)
- *Work in partnership to submit information:* consider forming or joining a coalition with key partners and other civil society organizations in order to prepare a joint submission.
- *Contact Member States:* ahead of the review, you can conduct advocacy with Member States to raise awareness of the human rights concerns for youth in your country and encourage them to make recommendations.
  - In your country: Member States may obtain information from their embassy in the State under Review. Some embassies may even convene meetings with stakeholders including civil society in order to collect up-to-date data and information on the human rights situation.
  - In Geneva: You can contact States' Permanent Missions to the UN in Geneva to share your recommendations. Alternatively, you may also opt to send a short, one-page document with key highlights and your most important recommendations via email. Details of States's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva can be found via the Blue Book, available at: <https://www.ungeneva.org/blue-book> (Note: the Blue Book is only available in French).  
*Tip:* to better understand how to develop recommendations and language that is most impactful, and how to approach Member States, familiarize yourself with the resources mentioned previously, including the UN Human Rights [UPR Guide for Civil Society](#) (English) and the information and resources provided by [UPR Info](#) (English, French and Spanish).
- *Apply to participate in the UPR Pre-session:* approximately one month before the review, the non-governmental organization UPR Info runs a one-hour pre-session for other Member States to hear from civil society and other stakeholders. If you have submitted an NGO/civil society report for the Review, you can apply to be a speaker at the pre-session. The pre-session also offers an opportunity to approach Member States with your recommendations, even if you are not speaking on the panel. More information about the pre-sessions is available at: [upr-info.org/presessions](http://upr-info.org/presessions) (in English, French and Spanish).

## **B. Follow and spread the word during the review**

- Follow the review online, and consider organizing a live screening of the webcast for government, youth, civil society, the media and other key stakeholders. The review is broadcast live at: [media.un.org](http://media.un.org)
- Search for the report that is issued a few months after the review, which contains the recommendations to the State and is made available online at [ohchr.org/hr-bodies/upr/documentation](http://ohchr.org/hr-bodies/upr/documentation) (search for Report of the Working Group, available under 'Outcome of the Review').

### C. Get involved and participate after the review

- Follow up with your government, including regional and national stakeholders. You can use UPR recommendations to advocate towards your government and relevant Ministries as well as local and regional administration for legal and policy change domestically. These recommendations can also be used for monitoring and follow-up nationally and locally to track progress. When the next Review is approaching, take stock of any developments in case you want to repeat the cycle.

## C.18 What are the Human Rights Treaty Bodies?

The human rights treaty bodies are committees of independent experts that monitor implementation of international human rights treaties. There are nine international human rights treaties, often referred to as the core treaties, which States can sign up to, making them a State party to the treaty in question. Each State party to a treaty has an obligation to take steps to ensure that everyone in the State can enjoy the rights set out in the treaty. Therefore, when a State is under review for a treaty it has ratified, it has an obligation to address and implement the recommendations, or concluding observations that the treaty body in question sets forward.

Watch the short video below for a brief introduction to the Treaty Bodies (available in English, click on the image to open the link)



A brief video introduction to the Treaty Bodies is available in other languages via the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), a Non-Governmental Organization (audio in English with subtitles in additional languages): [youtube.com/watch?v=h2KV59JW318](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2KV59JW318)

### C.18.1 More in depth...

The nine core treaties concern:

1. civil and political rights;
2. economic, social and cultural rights;
3. torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
4. racial discrimination;
5. gender discrimination;
6. rights of persons with disabilities;
7. rights of the child;
8. protection of all persons from enforced disappearance;



9. rights of migrants workers and members of their families.

The compliance with and implementation of each of these nine treaties by States that have ratified them is monitored by an accompanying treaty body.

In addition to periodic reviews of State compliance with the conventions, treaty bodies consider individual complaints, conduct country inquiries, adopt General Comments that articulate the treaty body's interpretation of the treaty provisions, thematic issues or its own methods of work, and organize thematic discussions (known as days of general discussions) to interpret the provisions of their treaty or treaties, among others.

### C.18.2 Where can I learn more?

More information on the treaty bodies overall and individually per each treaty body is available at: [ohchr.org/treaty-bodies](http://ohchr.org/treaty-bodies)

## C.19 What steps have the Treaty Bodies taken on youth?

As part of their work, treaty bodies issue recommendations to States parties, i.e. States that have ratified a given treaty. In some cases, recommendations may specifically address the human rights concerns of youth. Treaty bodies also issue General Comments or Recommendations that elaborate on their interpretation of the treaty provisions, thematic issues or their methods of work. While there is no specific General Comment on youth, some Committees have covered issues that are of key importance to youth.

### C.19.1 More in depth...

Examples of General Comments (GCs) or Recommendations that mention youth or are relevant to young people include:

- The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights's General Comments (GC):
  - [GC no. 23](#) on the right to just and favorable conditions of work highlights the non-compliance of low wages that do not reflect youth's skills, and the excessive use of unpaid internships and short-term contracts with the right to just and favorable conditions of work.
  - [GC no. 14](#) on the right to the highest attainable standard of health highlights the need for youth-friendly health care, which respects confidentiality and privacy and includes appropriate sexual and reproductive health services.
  - [GC no. 22](#) (2016) on the right to sexual and reproductive health highlights that youth have the right to evidence-based information on all aspects of sexual and reproductive health, including maternal health, contraceptives, family planning, sexually transmitted infections, HIV prevention, safe abortion and post-abortion care, infertility and fertility options, and reproductive cancer.
- The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women's [General Recommendation no. 36](#) (2017) on the right of girls and women to education highlights the barriers to education and later employment for young women and girls, and the higher representation in part-time work and unemployment.

- The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in its [GC no. 5 \(2017\)](#) on the right to independent living, mentions the provision of services that facilitate the transition of young people to adulthood, including support with moving out of the family home, starting employment and continuing into higher education as crucial factors to support independent living.

While the Committee on the Rights of the Child regularly makes recommendations on children and youth, it is bound by the age limit established by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, defining a child as any human being below the age of 18.

## C.20 How can I engage with the Treaty Bodies?

There are a variety of ways to engage across the different areas of work of the treaty bodies, however, the methods of engagement and opportunities for civil society to engage varies from one treaty to another. Although understanding the treaty bodies may at first seem complex, there are a variety of resources that can help you obtain a better understanding of their functioning and opportunities for engagement.

### Get informed

- More information on the work of the treaty bodies is available at: [ohchr.org/treaty-bodies/what-treaty-bodies-do](http://ohchr.org/treaty-bodies/what-treaty-bodies-do)

### Get involved and participate

- The UN Human Rights Office has developed a [training package](#) on reporting to the treaty bodies, covering a range of topics and available in several languages.
- Explore civil society resources on the treaty bodies, how they work and how you can engage.
  - The International Service for Human Rights's online academy includes a section on the Human Rights Treaty Bodies (available in English, French and Spanish): [academy.ishr.ch/learn/treaty-bodies](http://academy.ishr.ch/learn/treaty-bodies)
  - The European Youth Forum's toolkit on promoting youth rights includes a [section on the UN](#) and the treaty bodies (available in English).
- The European Youth Forum has developed an [online toolkit on promoting youth rights](#), which includes a section on the United Nations and refers to the treaty bodies, available only in English

## C.21 How and when should I get involved with the different human rights mechanisms to maximize the impact of my work?

To achieve change and ensure youth rights are protected and promoted, you can engage with the various mechanisms that are available through the UN, to bring attention to the human rights concerns of young people. You can start by familiarizing yourself with recommendations and observations on youth, or on issues of primary importance to young people in your country.



To do so, check out the Universal Human Rights Index (UHRI), an online database of recommendations and observations made by the different human rights mechanisms: Treaty Bodies, Special Procedures and the Universal Periodic Review. You can tailor the search, for example by country, theme, human rights mechanism, among others. The UHRI is available at: [uhri.ohchr.org](http://uhri.ohchr.org)

### C.21.1 More in depth...

Navigating the UN system can be complex. Here are a few tips on how to make it easier:

#### **Get informed**

- Develop your knowledge and understanding of the different human rights mechanisms and processes and how they operate using the information provided in the present toolkit as well as other resources that are referenced and that provide specialized information and capacity-building.
  - The International Service for Human Rights has developed an [online academy](#) covering the different mechanisms, available in English, French and Spanish
  - The European Youth Forum has developed a toolkit on promoting youth rights that includes a section on the UN and addressed the Special Procedures, the Universal Periodic Review and the treaty bodies, available in English at: [tools.youthforum.org/youth-rights-info-tool/](http://tools.youthforum.org/youth-rights-info-tool/)
- Find out what is happening, on what topic, and when. Keep an eye on:
  - Which treaties your country has ratified, and when treaty bodies are reviewing your country
  - When Special Procedures are visiting your country
  - When your country is being reviewed at the Universal Periodic review
  - Human Rights Council sessions and what's on the agenda

#### **Get involved and participate**

- Sometimes it's better to work together with partners to engage with different human rights processes and mechanisms. For example, civil society organizations can make joint submissions to treaty bodies, Special Procedures, and the UPR. This can enrichen the submission while dividing the workload.
- Prepare submissions in response to calls for inputs from the UN Human Rights Office, Special Procedures, and Treaty Bodies, both about your country and about thematic issues.
  - Preparing submissions for thematic processes can contribute to change at global and national levels. By contributing to global policy developments on youth rights, you can feed into guidance that you can then take back to your government on how to improve the human rights situation of young people in your country, your region and around the world
- Plan your advocacy with Member States, Special Procedures mandates, and other civil society members to raise awareness of your human rights concerns and recommendations. This can be done through briefing meetings and sharing your concerns and recommendations in writing. It can be handy to have a short one-page

document highlighting your priority issues and recommendations to share. While this is often done in person in Geneva, you can also get in touch with States and explore possibilities for online or remote briefings. Details of State's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva can be found via the Blue Book, available at: <https://www.ungeneva.org/blue-book> (Note: the Blue Book is only available in French)

Keep in mind that human rights mechanisms and processes are complementary. If you work with all or several of the human rights mechanisms and processes, you will find they reinforce and complement the work of each other and contribute to strengthening the protection of human rights around the world. Don't hesitate to take recommendations from one mechanism or process to another.

## Section D: Youth rights in peacebuilding and humanitarian settings

*In this section: How are youth rights relevant in peacebuilding and humanitarian settings?*

[D.1 Why talk about youth rights in peacebuilding and humanitarian settings?](#)

[D.2 What is the existing legal framework?](#)

[D.3 What are the particular challenges of youth in humanitarian settings?](#)

[D.4 What is the role of youth in preventing violent extremism?](#)

[D.5 What role do young people play in peacebuilding?](#)

[D.6 Where can I learn about peacebuilding?](#)

[D.7 What funding opportunities are there for youth-led peacebuilding initiatives?](#)

### D.1 Why talk about youth rights in peacebuilding and humanitarian settings?

Globally, young people are significantly affected by different forms of violence. Although young people share many of the same peace and security challenges as adults and society in general, there are specific aspects of youth that confront young people with particular challenges and opportunities. Violent conflicts affect youth by destroying sources of stability and belonging and by disrupting the transition into adulthood by interrupting young people's education and decimating social support structures and livelihood opportunities.

#### D.1.1 More in depth...

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines **violence** as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against another person or against a group or community, that either results in or is likely to result in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.

Violence can be broadly divided into three categories: (1) self-directed violence; (2) interpersonal violence; and (3) collective violence. This section focuses on collective violence, which can be inflicted by larger groups such as States, organized political groups, terrorist organizations, etc. Collective violence includes social, political and economic violence.

- Collective violence that is committed to advance a particular social agenda includes, for example, crimes of hate committed by organized groups, terrorist acts and mob violence. Social violence can sometimes be induced by traditional beliefs and stereotypes spread in society, which may lead to discrimination and stigmatization of certain groups.

- Political violence includes war and related violent conflicts, state violence and similar acts carried out by larger groups.
- Economic violence includes attacks by larger groups motivated by economic gain – such as attacks carried out with the purpose of disrupting economic activity, denying access to essential services, or creating economic division and fragmentation.

Each of these types of violence has particular implications for young people, who already face age-based discrimination and socio-economic difficulties during the transition to adulthood. At the same time, young people play an extremely important role in addressing violence and promoting peace, which has already been recognised by the international community.

### D.1.2 Where can I learn more?

To learn more, check out:

- [The Missing Peace: Independent progress study on youth, peace and security](#)
- The World Health Organization's [World report on violence and health](#)
- [Youth, Peace and Security: A Programming Handbook](#)

## D.2 What is the existing legal framework?

In 2015, the United Nations Security Council, which is responsible for maintaining international peace and security, unanimously adopted the ground-breaking [Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security](#), recognizing that “young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security”. The resolution shifted the narrative of considering youth as either perpetrators or victims of violence to consider them as active agents of change in peacebuilding. It urges Member States to give youth a greater voice in decision-making at the local, national, regional and international levels and to consider setting up mechanisms to enable youth to participate meaningfully in peace processes.

The Security Council has adopted two more resolutions on Youth, Peace and Security; Resolution 2419 (2018) that calls for the meaningful inclusion of young women and men in formal and informal peace processes and Resolution 2535 (2020) that provided concrete steps for the operationalization of the YPS Agenda, which included a request for the strengthening of technical YPS capacity at HQ and in the field.

### D.2.1 More in depth...

In addition to the three Security Council resolutions, there are several resources focused on the participation of young people in peacebuilding processes and working with young people in the humanitarian settings:

- [The Missing Peace: Independent progress study on youth, peace and security](#): requested by the UN Secretary-General in response to Resolution 2250, the study presents findings on the positive contributions of youth to peace processes and conflict resolution, and recommendations for effective responses to support the agency,

leadership and ownership by young people and their networks and organizations, and to facilitate their equal and full participation in decision-making at all levels.

- [First](#) and [Second](#) Reports of the Secretary-General on Youth and Peace and Security: the biennial reports analyze recent trends and practices at the international, regional and national levels related to youth participation in peace processes, protection of youth in conflict, youth disengagement and reintegration, and partnerships with youth organizations involved in peacebuilding.
- A [Guide for Public Officials](#) in support of country-level operationalization of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda, and a [Five-year Strategic Action Plan for Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes](#) launched at the [High-Level Global Conference on Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes](#) held by the State of Qatar, Governments of Finland and Colombia, civil society and UN partners in January 2022.
- [Doha Youth Declaration on Transforming Humanitarian Aid](#): representing the opinions of global youth representatives on improving humanitarian action.
- [The Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action](#): a collective commitment of 50+ humanitarian actors working to ensure that the priorities of young people are addressed and informed, consulted, and meaningfully engaged throughout all stages of humanitarian action.
- [IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises](#): developed by UNICEF and the Norwegian Refugee Council as the ‘go-to’ guide for working with and for young people in humanitarian settings and protracted crises.
- [We are Here: An integrated approach to youth-inclusive peace processes](#): an independent policy paper commissioned by the United Nations Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, which analyzes where and how young people engage in peace and mediation processes.

### D.3 What are the particular challenges of youth in humanitarian settings?

Conflict, crime and other forms of violence affect young people’s lives in more ways than mortality. Although these effects are often unrecorded, young people suffer from a wide range of short-, medium- and long-term effects, ranging from repeat victimization, psychological trauma, identity-based discrimination, and social and economic exclusion.

#### D.3.1 More in depth...

The challenges can be different for certain groups of youth. For example, the risks of child marriage, sexual exploitation and abuse and unwanted pregnancy are higher for girls and young women, while the risks of association with armed groups, being radicalized or being targeted for harassment by police may be higher for boys and young men. Young people with particular vulnerabilities, like youth with disabilities, migrants or refugees, face heightened obstacles to the realization of their rights in the humanitarian context.

Overall, young people face many challenges in humanitarian settings, including, among others:

- During a conflict or disaster, a young person’s educational, social and emotional development may be interrupted. Emergencies can cause health problems and lead to new impairments, rupture families and social networks, expose young people to new risks, and restrict access to vital goods and services.
- Already experiencing age-based discrimination, young people in humanitarian settings face further marginalization and stigmatization due to stereotypes that associate youth with violence.
- Young people can face victimization and traumatization at the hands of armed groups, terrorists or violent extremist groups, gangs and organized crime networks, repressive governments and, in numerous countries, law enforcement personnel and criminal justice systems.
- Repressive conditions often present in the countries facing conflict or insecurity, affect the collective freedom of movement, assembly and expression, and shut down youth organizations, peacebuilding initiatives and peaceful movements in the name of counter-terrorism or the pretext of preventing violent extremism. The shrinking civic space in such settings requires additional protection efforts. For more information on staying safe, see Section B, for example the question ‘[How can I stay safe and be protected while defending my rights?](#)’.
- Young women and girls are affected disproportionately, facing multiple forms of gender-based violence. Child-bearing risks are also higher, due to increased exposure to forced sex, increased risk taking and reduced availability of adolescent sexual and reproductive health services.
- Young persons with disabilities, and girls and young women in particular, are more likely to be abandoned by their families, isolated in their homes, at risk of violence, and missing out on access to information and services that would strengthen their protection and resilience.
- Displaced young people, being separated from their homes and sometimes their families, often face violence, abuse and insecurity, and become vulnerable to trafficking and detention.
- Refugee adolescents and youth may have problems with legal recognition, lack of documentation, lack of freedom of movement, language barriers, discrimination, racism and xenophobia. Most refugees and displaced youth live in urban areas, and not in camps, which makes them less visible, often unreached with services, and particularly isolated.
- LGBTIQ+ youth face a complex array of challenges and threats in their countries of origin, and asylum, including discrimination, prejudice, violence and difficulty accessing assistance, and can be particularly targeted in situations of conflict and insecurity. Where can I learn more?

### D.3.2 Where can I learn more?

Additional information is available via:

- [The Missing Peace: Independent progress study on youth, peace and security](#)
- The UNFPA publication on [Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Programs in Humanitarian Settings: An In-depth Look at Family Planning Services](#)

- UN Interagency Network on Youth Development, Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding [Practice Note: Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding](#)
- Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines [With us & for us: Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises](#)

## D.4 What is the role of youth in preventing violent extremism?

Although there is no universally agreed definition of violent extremism, according to UNESCO, this term refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals. This can include terrorism and other forms of politically motivated violence.

Suffering from marginalization, unemployment, and poverty, young people are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups, which explains why many activities aimed at the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) specifically target youth. For the same reasons, historically, youth have been perceived as perpetrators or victims of extremist violence and were neglected when it was time to organize high-level peace efforts.

However, with the rise of the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda, it was acknowledged that young people play a crucial role in the implementation of the PVE work. They are now widely recognized as those best positioned to promote a culture of tolerance among their peers by engaging, supporting and encouraging them so they are better equipped to interact positively with the world around them.

### D.4.1 More in depth...

PVE programmes can be implemented by a variety of actors using methods ranging from formal education to sports and art to promote justice, equality, respect, and recognition. However, such interventions are not meant to forcibly impose a narrative of peace, empathy, and kindness, but to provide as many opportunities as possible for those qualities to emerge organically.

Young people contribute to the PVE in many different ways, including, for example through:

- PVE online/offline advocacy and awareness-raising, including through media messaging campaigns, awareness-raising events, leadership training, or workshops and dialogues with young people designed to raise their awareness against the appeals of violent extremism groups and promote tolerance, diversity and peace;
- Art and cultural activities which can help young people to express their identity, experiences and emotions, and serve as a communication tool connecting different groups and individuals;
- Sport activities, which can help build bridges between different groups, cultures and religions by promoting intergroup cooperation and uniting diverse participants in achieving a common goal;



- Volunteering and service learning projects, which encourage skill development, empowerment, and civic engagement of young people, simultaneously responding to community needs;
- Employment and entrepreneurship initiatives, which can connect young people to jobs or support their small- and medium-sized enterprises, thus helping to expand young people's opportunities and reduce material and social drivers of violent extremism;
- Development of online content, including videos, games and learning resources to facilitate intercultural dialogue, exchange between different groups and provide knowledge about diverse cultures, peoples and histories.

#### **Good practice: Online gaming for PVE**

*Online games can be an effective way to bridge the gap between young people of different backgrounds, to counter stigma and stereotypes, and to promote cooperation between players of different cultures, religions and ethnic groups. [Games for Peace](#) is a platform dedicated to bridging divides among young people from Israel, Palestine, and several Middle Eastern countries through popular video games with added elements of communication and cooperation. It helps to develop trust and friendship among children and young people from conflicting territories, thus promoting tolerance, acceptance and contributing to peace.*

## D4.2 Where can I learn more?

For more information, check out:

- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) [Youth led guide on prevention of violent extremism through education](#)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) global report [Frontlines: Young people at the forefront of preventing and responding to violent extremism](#)
- Report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on [best practices and lessons learned on how protecting and promoting human rights contribute to preventing and countering violent extremism](#) (2016)

## D.5 What role do young people play in peacebuilding?

Youth can and do play a variety of different, shifting roles in conflict and post-conflict contexts. These can range widely from dissenting or rejecting the peace process, political activism, becoming criminals and vigilantes, negotiating and mediating, becoming key security and justice actors or peacemakers. Thus, engaging young people positively and giving them a stake in their societies is important for long-term peace and security, and a way to ensure the full enjoyment of their right to participation. Therefore, it is important to ensure the meaningful participation of young people in peacebuilding efforts and peace processes.



## D.5.1 More in depth...

Young people can be important drivers and agents of change in the development of their societies. This may be because they demonstrate openness to change, feedback and learning, tend to be more future-oriented, idealistic and innovative, and willing to take risks. Overall, it is very important that the specific needs and priorities of different groups of young people during and after conflict are identified and addressed through targeted initiatives, which should be developed with and by young people themselves.

There are many types of youth peacebuilding engagements, which can be observed at different stages of conflict. For example:

- Youth can engage in endeavors to prevent the outbreak of violence in the “pre-conflict” settings, including through early interventions to prevent violence, such as education promoting a culture of peace, peace debates and dialogues, religious dialogues, civic and voter education, educational theater and community radio, sport and music festivals, and provision of humanitarian support.

### **Good practice: Latin America**

*The programme “OIJTravesías”, supported by the [International organization of Youth for Iberoamerica \(OIJ\)](#) created in 2018 a training and a cultural exchange initiative “Building peace through cinema” to allow young filmmakers from Mexico City (Mexico) and Colón City (Panama) to address violence through cinema. Young people were part of training sessions on documentary film-making and on the youth, peace and security agenda. Young people led the whole creative process, from writing the script, producing the film, being actors in it, and engaging their peers as viewers. Through these short films, they could express their views on issues related to peace and security in their local environment.*

- Youth can intervene to mitigate the impact of violent conflict where it has emerged, and to build peace and social cohesion – for example, through peer-to-peer dialogues in conflict-affected communities, through supporting the disengagement and reintegration of former fighters, or through monitoring and documenting human rights violations during conflict.

### **Good practice: Syria**

*The [Syrian Youth Assembly](#) is a fully youth-led initiative with a mission to empower and support Syrian youth and refugees around the world, and to build peace, dialogue and cultural exchange. Among many other activities, the Syrian Youth Assembly works to engage Syrian youth in the peace process in Syria and help make their voices heard in the UN-led peace process in Geneva. In addition, they offer young people various training and programmes related to peacebuilding.*

- Young people can also engage in efforts to ensure that various forms of violent conflict do not recur or re-emerge. They can engage directly or indirectly in formal and informal peace processes, take part in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, and raise awareness on past conflicts through art and media campaigns.

### **Good practice: Yemen**

*Yemen's youth played a key role in the establishment of a national dialogue process in 2011. Independent youth representatives, which made up 7 percent of members of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) aimed to shape the new Yemeni Constitution, worked together with women and other civil society constituencies, which enabled this unaffiliated group to acquire a significant role in the decision-making process. Despite youth being underrepresented in decision-making committees, their main outcomes of the NDC related to youth could be observed in three areas: political empowerment, economic empowerment, and education, for example, through the creation of a new independent authority named the Supreme Council of Youth with a mandate to supervise public policy. The State also agreed to guarantee a youth quota of 20 percent in various branches of government.*

## D.5.2 Where can I learn more?

To learn more, you can visit:

- [The Missing Peace: Independent progress study on youth, peace and security](#)
- High-Level Global Conference on Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes, [Implementing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda, A Guide for Public Officials](#)
- IANYD, Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding [Practice Note: Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding](#)

## D.6 Where can I learn about peacebuilding?

If you are interested in the topic of peacebuilding and want to learn more about youth engagement in peace-related activities, you can start at the [Youth, Peace and Security website](#), which compiles key resources on the topic.

There are also many educational resources and training courses available online or in-person, for example:

- The [Youth and Peacebuilding](#) course developed by UNITAR targets young people aged between 15 and 30 from conflict-affected countries or countries in special situations, that are already working, or interested in working with others in the fields of peacebuilding and political decision-making. It enables learners to better understand the current situation of youth in complex contexts, their needs, challenges and potential, and to explore possible entry points for young people's involvement in peacebuilding activities and strategies. The course is held entirely online and open for everyone.
- The [Youth Peace and Security primer](#) is a training course that can be taken online, it is self-paced, and only takes a few hours to complete. It provides the basic notions of YPS and [TF1] it's great training for those with little knowledge on the agenda.

- [UNSCR 2250 & Beyond: A Youth Toolkit](#), created by UNOY Peacebuilders provides an overview of useful documents and ideas to help better understand the importance and content of the UNSC Resolution 2250.
- The [Youth4Peace Training Toolkit](#) developed by UNOY Peacebuilders to guide youth trainers and educators in the field of peacebuilding through the concepts and practice of delivering educational activities on conflict transformation, peacebuilding, and the creation of peaceful narratives.
- The Conflict Series - the course developed by UNITAR consisting of 3 series: 1. [What is conflict?](#), 2. [Conflict analysis](#) and 3. [From conflict to peace](#). This is an open, self-paced course meant to provide an introduction to conflict studies and more advanced courses in conflictology.
- [Young Peacebuilders](#) is a peace education initiative of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations designed to provide young people with skills that can enhance their ability to positively contribute to peace and security and to preventing violent conflict. The course is held annually in a particular region, and the participants are selected for the course on the basis of applications.
- [Explore Your Changemaker Potential](#) - an Edapp free microlearning course developed by UNITAR to help learners to find their personal angle to creating positive change in the world.
- [UNHCR Youth Peacebuilding Toolkit](#) and [UNHCR Youth Peacebuilding Manual](#) designed as a guide for training refugee youth and host community youth in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

## D.7 What funding opportunities are there for youth-led peacebuilding initiatives?

Ensuring adequate financing is one of the central concerns for the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda. There is often a mismatch between the size and type of funding favored by donors and those that are accessible to young peacebuilders. Moreover, donors may impose eligibility criteria and application, reporting and fiduciary requirements which overburden the capacities of youth-led organizations, favoring more well-established actors. However, in recent years progress has been made. The United Nations has established several funds to support youth-focused and youth-led peacebuilding at country level, while a growing number of civil society organizations are also creating dedicated funds for such work.

### D.7.1 More in depth...

- [The UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund \(PBF\)](#) is the largest fund resourcing peacebuilding within the UN, and is currently the largest fund by volume supporting youth-focused peacebuilding. In 2016, the PBF set up a [Youth Promotion Initiative](#) (YPI) which allows the PBF to provide funding to civil society organizations as direct recipients or implementing partners jointly with UN entities. [PBF Guidance Note: Youth &](#)

[Peacebuilding](#) provides information and resources on how to design a project and apply for funding through PBF YPI.

- [UNAOC's Youth Solidarity Fund \(YSF\)](#) provides a unique source of funding specifically for youth-led peacebuilding. While smaller than the PBF, the YSF has been dedicated to specifically funding a diversity of youth-led organizations directly. The details on the application process can be found in the [YSF Application Guidelines](#).
- [The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund \(WPHF\)](#), while not solely focused on young people, is also a source of flexible and quality funding to both youth-focused and youth-led organizations, including non-registered organizations as co-implementers. Projects supported by the WPHF have focused on women and young women's participation in humanitarian crises, peacebuilding, and response to sexual and gender-based violence.

Opportunities for fundraising also exist outside of the UN. Some funds are operated by civil society organizations that can act as intermediaries helping youth-led organizations access funding and develop their capacities. For example, the [Local Action Fund](#) of Peace Direct supports locally-led youth peacebuilding initiatives that have not received support from traditional donors by giving small grants, coupled with training, information sharing, and opportunities for wider collaboration and advocacy. Some funds, such as the women's fund [FRIDA](#) or the [GPPAC's Small Grants Scheme](#) operate on a participatory grant making model, which enables youth groups that apply for grants to jointly decide how the funding is allocated.

## D.7.2 Where can I learn more?

To find out more, check out:

- The Background Paper on [Financing for Young People in Peacebuilding: an Overview](#)
- The UN Secretary-General's Report on [Youth and Peace and Security](#) (2022)
- [The UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Financing Dashboard](#)

## Bibliography and further reading

### International human rights treaties

International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Convention on the Rights of the Child

International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

### Right to education

CESCR [General Comment No. 13](#): The right to education (article 13) (1999)

UNESCO [The right to education](#)

### Right to decent work

ILO [International Labour Standards relevant to work and young persons](#)

OHCHR report on Realization of the right to work ([A/HRC/40/31](#)) (2018)

CESCR [General Comment no. 18 on the right to work](#) (2005)

ILO [statement](#) to the Third Committee of the 68th General Assembly - Decent work is a human right

### Right to participation

[Guidelines](#) on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs (2018)

OHCHR and [equal participation in political and public affairs](#)

### Right to health

OHCHR and [the right to health](#)

OHCHR and WHO, [Fact Sheet No. 31: The Right to Health](#) (2008)

### Right to housing

OHCHR and [the right to adequate housing](#)

OHCHR and UN-HABITAT [Fact Sheet No. 21 \(Rev. 1\): The Human Right to Adequate Housing](#) (2009)

### Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

OHCHR [About human rights and the environment](#)

OHCHR [infographic](#) on promoting the human right to a healthy environment for all

Human Rights Council [resolution 48/13](#) on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

General Assembly [resolution 76/300](#) on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

## Other

Report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on youth and human rights ([A/HRC/39/33](#)) (2018)

OHCHR [Human Rights Education and Training](#)

[UN Human Rights and NHRIs](#)

[Preventing human rights violations](#)

The Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions ([GANHRI](#))

OHCHR [Right of peaceful assembly](#)

OHCHR [Freedom of assembly and of association](#)

OHCHR [About the right to social security and human rights](#)

OHCHR [Digital Space and Human Rights](#)

Report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the right to privacy in the digital age ([A/HRC/48/31](#)) (2021)

## UN Human Rights Council

UN [Human Rights Council](#)

## Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council

UN Human Rights Council [Special Procedures](#)

Special Procedures [Country and Other Visits](#)

Special Procedure [Communications](#)

## Universal Periodic Review

[Universal Periodic Review](#)

Practical Guidance: [Maximizing the use of the Universal Periodic Review at country level](#)

UPR Info [The role of youth](#)

UPR Info [Q&A on the modalities of the UPR Process](#)

## Human Rights Treaty Bodies

The [Human Rights Treaty Bodies](#)

## Peacebuilding and humanitarian action

UNICEF, [Financing for Young People in Peacebuilding: an Overview](#)

UNFPA, [Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Programs in Humanitarian Settings: An In-depth Look at Family Planning Services](#)

IASC, [With us & for us: Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises](#)

[The Missing Peace: Independent Progress study on youth, peace and security](#)

UNDP, [Frontlines: Young people at the forefront of preventing and responding to violent extremism](#)

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# YOUTH RIGHTS ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

## Annex: Youth Entrepreneurship



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## 1. Why should we talk about youth entrepreneurship?

Young people face particular challenges in exercising their right to work, which leads to high rates of youth unemployment. Entrepreneurship, being a self-employment activity, can help youth become economically independent and, at the same time, contribute to economic growth and job creation.

Youth entrepreneurship alone, however, is not a solution to youth unemployment, but it can be seen as an important complement to broader youth employment and other policies.

### More in depth...

While young people have a growing interest in self-employment, they face numerous barriers often preventing them from realizing their entrepreneurship potential. These barriers are explained, among others, by the following factors:

- Lack of awareness of youth potential for entrepreneurship results in a lack of encouragement or even negative social attitudes.
- Education and training programmes generally do not do enough to nurture entrepreneurial attitudes and skills.
- Lack of previous work and entrepreneurial experience is a major factor impeding business creation and the effectiveness of entrepreneurial activity.
- Fewer financial resources and difficulty obtaining external finance, including debt finance, hampers business start-up.
- Limited business networks and business-related social capital have negative consequences for starting a business and gaining legitimacy.
- Market barriers, including a bias in financial markets against supporting youth-owned businesses and “discrimination” in product markets.

To address these barriers, comprehensive measures and programmes should be implemented at multiple levels, including those aimed at promotion of entrepreneurship culture, inclusion of entrepreneurship education at different education levels, improvement of the legal and regulatory environment, improving access to affordable finance and introducing business development services and support schemes.

## 2. What is entrepreneurship?

The word “Entrepreneurship” is derived from the French verb *entreprendre* which means “to undertake”. It refers to the process of identifying viable business opportunities and mobilizing resources to convert those opportunities into a successful enterprise through creativity, innovation, risk taking and progressive imagination.

## More in depth...

Though the above definition is not universally agreed on, it reflects some of the key aspects of entrepreneurship: finding opportunities, creating business and bearing risk, and exposes some of the qualities of entrepreneur, which will be further explored in Question 3.

Among the features of an entrepreneurial activity, the following are usually mentioned:

- a set goal;
- an element of risk;
- personal commitment;
- planning and preparation;
- a commitment of numerous resources.

Though the words “entrepreneurship” or “business” are usually associated with commercial activities, entrepreneurial organizations can also be non-profit, or make profit “with purpose”, which is called “social entrepreneurship”. For example, entrepreneurial activities can aim at tackling social issues such as environmental concerns, unemployment, stresses on the health care system, managing deficits, technological advancements, and human rights concerns.

## 3. What are the qualities of a successful entrepreneur?

Being an entrepreneur means not only having professional knowledge and business practices, but also having certain skills, attitudes and personal characteristics.

There are several characteristics which are usually associated with individuals who successfully engage in entrepreneurship. Among them are critical and creative thinking, goal-setting and goal-orientation, resilience and risk tolerance, communication and teamwork, planning and organizing, as well as interpersonal and leadership skills.

## More in depth...

It is considered that in order to be successful, an entrepreneur should be able to:

- stay motivated and committed to their business;
- think creatively (“outside the box”);
- solve problems and handle stress;
- set goals, develop a plan to achieve them, and carry out the plan;
- collect and analyze information;
- take risks;
- make decisions and act upon them;
- identify opportunities and generate ideas suitable to the opportunities;
- recognize trends and take advantage of them;
- demonstrate leadership;
- work well in a team;

- listen to others;
- negotiate and persuade;
- motivate and encourage others;
- have high ethical standards based on respect, integrity, fairness, compassion, truth, and courage.

Before you start your business, you can think of what qualities and characteristics you already have, and which of them need improvement. There are many ways to improve your business skills and alter your characteristics. You can, for example:

- talk to people in business to learn from them;
- get training, enroll in a course to study specific areas you need to improve in;
- become an assistant/apprentice to a successful business person;
- read literature that will help you develop your business skills;
- read articles about businesses and think about their problems and methods;
- consider finding a partner who would complement your strengths and weaknesses, instead of going into business entirely on your own;
- try to develop the described skills and attitudes by applying them in your daily activities. For instance, you can practice discussing the advantages and disadvantages of any situation or idea, increase your motivation by making a plan for your future, develop the ability to assess problems and take risks, learn how to deal with crises situations better, become more open to new ideas and other people's views and improve your ability to learn from mistakes.

## 4. How can I generate a business idea?

Every business is born from an idea. Business ideas should come from observation, from finding a potential opportunity, or from trying to forecast what people or other businesses might want. It is an idea about what products you are going to offer or what services you are going to provide; where and how you are going to sell them and who are you going to sell them to.

### More in depth...

To come up with a business idea, you should first identify a business opportunity. Opportunities occur when people discover a problem of some kind that can be helped with a product or service, or when people decide they have certain needs or wants to satisfy.

The sources of opportunities can be various factors including growing and evolving economies and economic niches, technological change, social change, demographic change, or political changes such as war, tariffs, and embargoes. Other conditions that create opportunities include shortages, surpluses, price response, and shifts in demand.

To think of business opportunities, you can ask yourself what things you find frustrating about your society:

- What kinds of things should be there, but are not?
- What things make you really frustrated and angry?
- What things do you find that don't work properly and should be fixed in some way?

When you see a business opportunity, you need to develop your thoughts into a business idea. A business idea is a short and precise description of the basic operation of the business. Your business idea will tell you:

- **What product or service will your business sell?** Your business idea should be based on a particular skill that you have. Maybe you have experience with or have been trained in a specific line of business.
- **Who is your business going to sell to?** Will you only try to sell to a specific type of customer or to everyone in an area? It is important to be clear about who you intend to sell to.
- **How is your business going to sell its products or services?** You can sell in many different ways. A manufacturer can, for example, sell either directly to customers or to retailers.
- **Which need will your business fulfill?** Your business idea should always have the customer and the customer's needs in mind. It is important to find out what customers want when you work out your business idea.
- **What impact will your business have on the community, the natural environment and human rights?** Your attitude and people's view on your business will determine your success. If you exploit labor, damage the natural environment (waste generation, water wastage, deforestation) or affect the rights of local populations, people might avoid your business.

When generating a business idea, it is best to try and keep an open mind. The first goal should be to think of as many ideas as possible and make a list of all the business opportunities you can think of. Business ideas can be generated through using your own and other people's experiences, investigating your environment (including natural resources, people's abilities and skills, institutions, industries, import substitution, waste products, etc.), and brainstorming.

Before going very far in developing an idea or opportunity, it is important to consider the criteria of feasibility, demand, usefulness and profitability.

## 5. How to develop a business plan?

The most important factor in beginning a successful business is careful planning.

Sometimes a business might seem like a good idea before the careful planning stage. It is possible that after some planning, certain problems cannot be solved and the best course of action is to abandon the idea. At that point, all that is lost is some planning time.

A business plan is a basic planning tool. It is a written summary of your proposed business, which includes information about the plans, operations and financial details, its marked opportunities and strategies, as well as the entrepreneur's personal background.

## More in depth...

A business plan is a document used to summarize an entrepreneur's business aspirations, secure legal authority and mobilize resources to launch the business.

When you are developing a business plan, think about the following issues:

### 1. The product

- Why would customers buy the product/service?
- Are the product specifications clear and acceptable?

### 2. The market

- Geographical description of the business location.
- Is there local demand for the product and if not, how can it be created?
- Who are the big competitors, how can you counteract them and their influence?
- How many competitors does the business have? If they are many, your market share is low, which means that aggressive promotion is necessary to ensure visibility.
- Does your product need publicity and if so, what expenses would that incur?
- What is the trend in the selling price? Is there any seasonality?

### 3. Technical factors

- Have you selected all the necessary equipment? What are your reasons for this selection?
- If you buy machinery, check if you have a guarantee and if after-sales service is included.
- Do you know where to source the equipment from? Who is the supplier?
- Do you have the necessary skills and if not, where can you get them?

### 4. Infrastructure

- Is the working/selling space adequate for your business operation to function?
- Are ownership/tenancy documents for the land/shop/workshop in order?
- If water is required for your business to operate, is it available close by?
- Do you have/need a supply of electricity?
- Is transport of raw materials or finished products a critical factor and if so, how do you plan to handle it while minimising costs?
- Do you need to register your business? What are the legal requirements?

### 5. Financial analysis

- Have you done financial calculations of needed costs, resources, income etc?
- Have all the costs of production been included in your calculations?
- Does the business generate enough cash from the beginning so as to meet immediate liabilities (e.g. rent, loan repayment)?
- Check your cash flow projections. Are they realistic?
- Check all estimates of capital required as well as running costs.

## 6. Compliance with human rights and environmental standards

- Will your business have an impact on the local communities and the environment?
- How will it contribute to a human rights enhancing economy?
- In what ways will your business uphold environmental protection?

Your business plan could include the following sections:

- A. Table of contents
- B. Executive summary
- C. Business description
- D. Personal background of a business owner
- E. Market research, analysis, and plan
- F. Organization and management
- G. Production plan/operating schedule
- H. Risk reduction
- I. Financial plan and budget

To develop a business plan, it is necessary to conduct a market analysis, which is explored in Question 6, and a financial analysis.

Financial analysis is required to form a budget of an enterprise. A budget is a calculated estimation of the value or price of the project and is always composed of the **expenses** – the costs of the project – and the **income** – the resources brought into the project to cover the expenses.

To start an enterprise, it is necessary to mobilize resources, which requires exploring what resources (including money, staff, training, equipment) are needed, what resource mobilization mechanisms (e.g. writing proposals, holding fundraising events, selling services, etc.) are available, and who can act as resource providers for your business (e.g. banks, micro-credit agencies, government agencies, and charitable organizations).

During the financial analysis, you should investigate as many sources of funding as possible in order to secure the best terms and conditions of repayment. The most important types of start-up funding are owner's private money, loans (personal or from a lending programme) and grants.

## 6. What is marketing?

Marketing is an important part of starting and running a business. It is the effort to identify and satisfy customers' needs and wants. Marketing involves the knowledge and all the processes you undertake to sell your product.

Marketing answers the following questions:

- Who are my customers?
- What are my customers' needs and wants?
- How can I satisfy my customers?
- How do I make a profit as I satisfy my customers?

### More in depth...

Before starting a business, it is absolutely important to know the market conditions in which the business will be operating. The market analysis, or market research, provides data about customers, products, services, prices, advertising, competition, and consumer behavior.

To do market analysis, you can:

1. Talk to **potential customers**. Ask them:
  - What products or services do they want to buy?
  - What do they think about your competitors?
2. Observe **your competitors' businesses**. Find out about:
  - What products or services do they provide?
  - What prices do they charge?
  - How do they attract customers?
3. Ask **suppliers and friends in the business**:
  - Which products do they sell the most?
  - What do they think about your business idea?
  - What do they think about your competitors' products?

You can also use sources such as trade publications, magazines, the Internet, accountants, lawyers, and other professionals, financial institutions, Chambers of Commerce, libraries, consulting firms, town/city councils, government agencies, and interest groups, to acquire more information about the products or services you want to provide, your competitors and new trends.

The market analysis will help you to develop your marketing strategy, which should be based on the information about the **4 Ps**:

- **Products/services your customers want.** Products/services you sell should relate to the needs and wants of the customers. You should always analyze which of your products or services sell well and which don't, and listen to the feedback from the customers to improve your business.



- **Price your customers are willing to pay.** Pricing refers to the process of setting a price for a product/service. Your prices must be low enough to attract customers to buy and high enough to earn your business a profit. To set your price, you should know your costs, how much the customers are willing to pay, your competitors' price and how to make your price more attractive.
- **Place where your business should be located in order to reach your customers.** Place means the different ways of getting your products or services to your customers. If your business is not located near your customers, you must find ways to get your products/services to where it is easy for customers to buy. For example, you can sell products directly to the consumers or use retail distribution and wholesale distribution.
- **Promotion to use to inform your customers and attract them to buy your products or services.** Promotion means informing your customers of your products and services and attracting the customers to buy them. Promotion includes advertising, sales promotion, publicity and personal selling.

## 7. How to set prices?

To be able to set your prices and make financial plans, you need to calculate all the money needed to operate your business. Costing is the way you calculate the total cost of making or selling a product, or providing a service. It will allow you to calculate the net profit you can make from your business.

Price is the monetary value of a product or service that you charge to cover your total costs and profit that you desire to receive on each unit of product or service.

### More in depth...

There are two types of costs associated with running a business, and both of them should be taken into account while setting the price of your product or service:

- **Fixed costs.** These are costs that do not change with the level of production. They are incurred even if no production takes place, e.g. rent of premises.
- **Variable costs.** These are costs that increase or decrease in direct proportion to the level of production, sales volume or the amount of services you provide, e.g. raw materials, stock, cost of packaging, transport, handling of products and electricity (if machines are used).

To estimate the total cost of each unit of your product/service, you have to add up the variable cost per unit with the fixed cost per unit. You can refer to the International Labour Organization's [Start Your Business: Manual](#) for a detailed explanation on how to calculate both costs.

The final price for your product or service should be set taking into account all of the following:

- **The total cost of your product or service.** If your total cost exceeds the price customers would be willing to pay, your product or service is not likely to be profitable.
- **The price customers are willing to pay for it.** The amount customers are willing to pay for your products or services also depends on how you market them.
- **The price charged by your competitors.** It will be difficult for you to charge higher prices than your competitors for identical products.

In order to increase your profit, you can either increase your revenue or reduce your expenditure. Revenue can be increased by adjusting the marketing 4Ps: product, price, place, and promotion. For example, you can sell more by reducing price, aggressively promoting your product, changing places where it is sold, increasing quality or making it more attractive. Expenditure can be reduced by taking measures on cost components between the producer and consumer, for example through acquiring supplies from more affordable sources or joining with other traders to reduce the cost of transportation or selling costs.

## 8. How does the business operate?

A business organization needs careful planning, coordination, implementation and controlling so as to ensure its proper management and smooth operation.

In addition to profits from your business, its success will also depend on the legal form in which it operates, the organization's internal structure and procedures, its employees, and compliance with legal obligations and responsibilities.

### More in depth...

Before starting your entrepreneurial activity, you should decide which legal form you will select for your business. Different forms of business organizations exist, including sole proprietorship, partnership, corporation, limited company, co-operative, and franchise. However, the options may vary depending on the country or countries where you will operate.

As you select the legal form for your business, you should take into account such factors as advantages and disadvantages, ease of creation, legal costs, longevity, necessary financing, taxes and tax exemptions, liability (limited versus unlimited) and administration.

When you run a business you have legal responsibilities, and you should be aware of the regulatory system that applies to your situation. Things to consider include taxes, payroll deductions, labor standards, copyright, health and sanitary regulations, licenses and permits, environment and safety, and human rights.

The internal structure of your organization will depend on its legal form and applicable laws and regulations. Often business organizations have a main representative body (e.g. the General Assembly), which makes decisions by voting, and an executive body (e.g. the Executive

Committee) which guides and coordinates activities of the organization by delegation from the representative body. Usually, organizations also have a finance officer or an internal auditor - a professional responsible for internal control and who checks financial records of the organization and reports findings to the representative body.

The productivity of your business will to a large extent depend on the people you employ and the way they are managed. In return for their wages, employees bring knowledge and skills to benefit your business. Therefore, the selection and performance of your workers will greatly influence the success of your business.

When recruiting employees you should:

- Determine the work to be done in your business:
  - Step 1: List the kind of work to be done and the skills and attitudes needed;
  - Step 2: Estimate the number of workers involved;
  - Step 3: Determine who should do the work.
- Attract suitable applicants and interview and select the right workers.
- Help the new worker settle in and understand your business (induction).

Another important feature of successful businesses is procedures that ensure looking toward the future, for example regular staff meetings; regular evaluations of the business, the market, and the competition; careful analysis of financial statements; attention to small problems; and identifying and implementing new ideas or products.

A business organization should also have human rights policies and processes in place appropriate to its size and circumstances. First, it must institute a policy commitment to meet the responsibility to respect human rights. Second, it must undertake ongoing human rights due diligence to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for its human rights impact. Finally, it must have processes in place to enable remediation for any adverse human rights impact they cause or contribute to. These obligations are detailed in the UN [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#).

## 9. What is record-keeping?

Records refer to the information created, received, and maintained as evidence by an organization, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business.

Record-keeping is a systematic process of compiling similar or related information resulting from business activities or operations and storing it in files/folders for the purpose of tracking and assessing the performance or operations of a business.

### More in depth...

It is important to have a functioning record-keeping in place, as it helps to:

- find and solve problems in a business;
- control business capital, especially cash;

- show the direction of the business;
- plan for the future;
- oversee expenditures, costs, and profit;
- analyze business development over time.

Record-keeping tools, such as books and forms, are critical to a successful business, and should be put in place before the business is launched. These tools help to ensure that documents are stored safely and methodologically. They can include daily sales record forms, receipt books, cashbooks, profit and loss statements, cash flow statements, and stock reports. You can find some of the sample forms in the Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung's [Entrepreneurship Development Training Manual](#).

## 10. Why is saving important?

Savings are money or other assets kept over a period of time, usually not to be consumed immediately but in the future. Savings can be kept in a bank or any other safe place where there is no risk of loss or spending.

There are many advantages to saving when you run a business. Saving funds allows to:

- provide for specific needs in the future;
- have access to monetary or other assets whenever needed;
- ensure financial independence;
- make one's own resources inaccessible for others without one's approval;
- safely store surplus;
- acquire skills for proper money management and self-discipline;
- qualify for certain types of loans.

### More in depth...

Savings can be done through:

- Small but regular deposits – this happens when you decide to sacrifice current consumption (use of assets, e.g. of money and goods) in order to increase the availability of assets for future consumption. It therefore involves postponing expenditures in order to accumulate a sizable amount of resources for future use.
- Automatic deductions from salaries, wages or income - this type of saving is not voluntary. It is a system used by most employers under the labor law.

There are several possible forms of saving:

- **Informal saving:** Savings societies, village banking
- **Traditional forms of saving:** Buying assets (e.g. houses, animals, art works), holding cash in “safe” places, such as pots or mattresses.
- **Formal savings:** Bank savings account; savings account with micro-finance institutions.

## 11. What are the human rights obligations of entrepreneurs?

Business can have a profound impact on human rights. This impact can be positive, for example by delivering innovation and services that can improve living standards of populations, or negative, for example where business activities destroy people's livelihoods, exploit workers or displace communities.

The [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) were developed by the United Nations to clarify the different roles and responsibilities that States and companies have to address business impact on human rights. According to the Guiding Principles, all business enterprises should respect human rights, meaning that they should avoid infringing on the human rights of others and should address adverse human rights impacts with which they are involved.

### More in depth...

The Guiding Principles clarify that the standard of responsibility for business with regard to human rights is to respect human rights, and they elaborate on the steps that companies must take to "know and show" that they do so. This responsibility means companies must know their impact, avoid human rights infringements and address any potential or actual impact. If companies find that they have caused or contributed to harm, they must provide for or participate in effective remedy processes.

An minimum list of the core internationally recognized human rights the companies must respect is contained in the International Bill of Human Rights (consisting of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and the main instruments through which it has been codified: the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) and the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#)), coupled with the principles concerning fundamental rights in the [ILO core conventions](#) as set out in the [Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work](#).

Depending on circumstances, business enterprises may need to consider additional standards, for instance, where they may have adverse human rights impacts on specific groups of population. In this connection, United Nations instruments have elaborated further on the rights of indigenous peoples; women; national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities; children; persons with disabilities; and migrant workers and their families.

The Guiding Principles clarify that the responsibility of businesses to respect human rights is independent of States' ability or willingness to fulfill their duty to protect human rights, and exists over and above compliance with national laws and regulations protecting human rights.

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