

Children as defenders of human rights: a study on Council of Europe member states



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Children as defenders of human rights: a study on Council of Europe member states

Prepared by Child Rights Connect,
in co-operation with the Secretariat

French edition:

*Les enfants défenseurs des droits humains :
une étude sur les États membres du Conseil de l'Europe*

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Abbreviations

Human Rights Act	Act on strengthening the position of human rights in Norwegian law
CHRDs	Child human rights defenders
CDENF	Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child
CRC Committee	UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
ENOC	European Network of Ombudspersons for Children
HRDs	Human rights defenders
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
Paris Principles	Principles Relating to the Status of National Human Rights Institutions
UN DHRD	UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders
UN CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UN	United Nations

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Executive summary

This study is the first ever study about the Council of Europe member states existing national challenges and responses in regard to the recognition, protection and empowerment of children acting as “child human rights defenders”. Desk research, survey for the Council of Europe member states and consultations with children were used as methods to obtain qualitative and quantitative data. 20 out of 46 Council of Europe member states (Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Switzerland) provided replies to the questions of the survey. Targeted groups of child human rights defenders were invited to participate in the study. 62 children submitted replies to an online questionnaire and 23 children participated in online consultations.

The research reveals that the majority of member states lack a specific law, legal provisions or legal structure concerning human rights defenders and they refer to their legislation focusing on children’s rights and child protection as relevant to child human rights defenders. The latter usually do not include the terminology “child human rights defenders” and do not cover the full spectrum of the rights that child human rights defenders are entitled to. Although the right to participation is widely referred in national legislation, its implementation remains a major challenge and the participation of children in political and public affairs and decision making does not happen in a systematic and meaningful way. The personal stories of children shared in the report reflect systemic challenges, such as the lack of child-friendly information about children’s rights, including the rights of child human rights defenders, the lack of access to justice for child victims of human rights violations, and a predominant focus on the safety of child human rights defenders as opposed to a more holistic approach to safety, empowerment and participation.

The study demonstrates that Council of Europe member states would benefit from and generally welcome technical assistance to strengthen the legal framework and systematise implementation measures to advance the rights of child human rights defenders in their countries, such as training and capacity-building of professionals and the provision of financial support to child-led initiatives. Children are calling on their governments to change their approach towards them and start listening to their opinions, ideas and proposals, among others, during the development of laws and policies that can advance their rights as human rights defenders.

The study contains recommendations that aim to support member states in discharging their obligations towards child human rights defenders more effectively, particularly under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, in relation to, among others mainstreaming, access to justice, access to quality human rights education, awareness raising and capacity building of children and adults, and access to resources.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and scope of the study

On 23 February 2022, the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted the [Strategy for the Rights of the Child \(2022-2027\)](#). As part of the Strategy's implementation by the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF), a report on children as defenders of human rights was listed as a main deliverable under the CDENF's [Terms of Reference](#) for 2022-2025. Child Rights Connect was contracted to conduct the research, analyse the data collected and develop the study for the attention of the CDENF.

Although there is an increasing mobilisation of children acting as human rights defenders, many of them are facing numerous challenges in standing up for their own rights. In some contexts, they have even been threatened, pressured or prevented in other ways from taking action, or have been subject to reprisals for their engagement. It is therefore crucial to ensure that the participation of child human rights defenders is inclusive, empowering and sustained, that the spaces for this are safe and that access to justice for child victims of human rights violations is ensured. Supporting children's voices in debates and policy-making processes¹ is also vital to shape children's perceptions of democracy and strengthening it.

The current report is the first ever attempt in identifying the current state of play with regard to Council of Europe member states in relation to the recognition, protection and empowerment of children acting as defenders of human rights, otherwise referred to as 'child human rights defenders' (CHRDs). It was not meant to be a comprehensive study on the situation of or risks for CHRDs, but it is instead intended to provide a first analysis of existing national challenges and responses with regard to the rights of CHRDs. Based on the research methods explained below, the study identifies key gaps and recommends ways forward for both the Council of Europe and its member states.

1.2. Methodology of the study

The study was conducted using a combination of methods in order to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data: desk research, survey addressed to the member states of the Council of Europe and various methods of child participation (anonymous online survey and online workshops). Thanks to the mobilisation of the Secretariat of the CDENF, the network of Child Rights Connect, the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC), Eurochild and other partners, a significant number of stakeholders and children took part in the research and provided relevant data and information.

Desk research

Desk research was aimed at compiling and analysing existing materials related to children acting as human rights defenders within the Council of Europe and beyond, including: documents from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee) and other international human rights mechanisms; reports from civil society organisations, such as Child Rights Connect's Implementation Guide on the rights of child human rights defenders, and the submission to the 2018 Day of General Discussion of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child compiling and analysing the views of 2,695 children from 53 countries, including 20 within the Council of Europe area.

Surveys for the Council of Europe member states

The CDENF Secretariat disseminated the survey for Council of Europe member states with a deadline of 27 March 2023. The survey sought to gather information on the general situation of children acting as human rights defenders, legal framework, protection mechanisms, capacity building of children and adults, access to justice, accountability and technical assistance needed by states. Furthermore, it allowed the report to include specific and up-to-date information on existing gaps and good practices, and to raise awareness of the existence of CHRDs and why children should be empowered and protected through specific actions.

1. Based on Article 12 of the UNCRC and in line with the principles of the Council of Europe Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2012\)2](#) on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18.

20 out of 46 Council of Europe member states (Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Switzerland) responded to the survey questionnaire and provided crucial information that significantly contributed to the first European study on the situation of CHRDs.

Child participation: questionnaire for children and child consultations

The guiding principle of the study is that child participation is a right in itself (as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC), Articles 12, 13, 14, 15 and 17) and all child participation activities have to follow the nine basic requirements of the CRC Committee, further outlined in its General Comment No.12,² in particular ensuring:

- ▶ **Safety**, including sensitivity to, and minimisation of, risk;
- ▶ **Inclusivity and cultural sensitivity**, avoiding existing patterns of discrimination and taking an intersectional approach;
- ▶ **Accountability** to children by sharing how their inputs have informed the study, and to collect feedback on their participation; and
- ▶ **Sustainable, long-term process** with the opportunity to engage in follow-up actions.

In order to ensure the safety of the children participating in these activities, the Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedure of Child Rights Connect has been applied throughout the whole process. This included the preparation of a risk assessment, collection of informed consent of all child participants, and the appointment of a dedicated child safe guarder within Child Rights Connect. The methodology of child participation, including the questionnaire addressed to children and the framework for the online consultations, were developed with support from the global Children's Advisory Team of Child Rights Connect, which is a permanent group of 12 children forming an integral part to the Network of Child Rights Connect.

In total, 62 children submitted replies to the online questionnaire, of which 51 were between the age of 14 and 18. In terms of gender representation, 41 of them identified as female, 12 of them as male, seven of them as other and two children preferred not to reply to this question. The children were from Armenia (3), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1), Bulgaria (1), Croatia (10), Cyprus (7), Estonia (6), Greece (9), Ireland (1), Liechtenstein (1), Republic of Moldova (6), Spain (7) and the United Kingdom (10). Although the question about their background was optional, 13 children shared that they are member of the LGBTI community, six of them belong to minority groups where they share the same language, culture or religion and four of them have a disability. Moreover, two children said that they live now in another country than where they were born or where their parents were born, one child shared that they live in a care setting and another child is not studying at school anymore.

Besides the profile of the children who replied to the questionnaire, it is important to consider their previous knowledge about the topic and their experience as a child human rights defender. 55 children out of the total number of 62 heard about CHRDs before filling out the questionnaire, while 41 of them already read the official text or the child-friendly version of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (UN DHRD)³ in English or in their native language. This means that the questionnaire and the opportunity to participate in this research were relevant for these children and their contribution deemed to be crucial to get an accurate picture of the situation of CHRDs in Europe.

In addition to the online questionnaire, children had the opportunity to participate in online consultations which were held on 27 and 29 June, and 6 July 2023. In total, 23 children, between the age of 12 and 17, joined the online workshops from Armenia, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Republic of Moldova and Spain. Similarly to the participants of the questionnaire, the children consulted online also had a good understanding of the concept of CHRDs and had previous experience of standing up for human rights, individually or in groups, such as in children's and youth councils and advisory bodies of Children's Commissioners and/or Ombudspersons. Children gave overwhelmingly positive feedback about the consultations: *"I have previously been in different meetings, and I really liked the format because this is a session where we can all express our opinions and experiences, it was really interesting to hear about other's perspectives. I also got some new ideas to report back to my organisation."*

2. The nine basic requirements for child participation outlined in General Comment No.12 are: transparency, voluntary engagement, respect, relevancy, child -friendly environment, inclusiveness, supported by training, safe and sensitive to risk and accountability. United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, [General Comment No.12](#), The Right of the Child to be Heard, CRC/C/GC/12, July 2009.

3. The United Nations [Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#).

1.3. Key definitions and concepts

Child: The term child means every human being below the age of eighteen. Furthermore, all children's rights referred to in the study are understood in line with the standards of the CRC Committee and based on all the relevant instruments of the United Nations (UN) and the Council of Europe.

Young person: The term young person or youth is also used in order to capture the situation of those older children that also belong to the category of "young people", however, only in relation to the submission by the member states and in accordance with their own definition, given the current absence of an international legal definition of "young person" and "youth".

Human rights defenders: Human rights defenders (HRDs) are individuals or groups acting to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international level, in accordance with the UN DHRD.

Child human rights defenders: Building on the 2018 Day of General Discussion of the CRC Committee and the Child Rights Connect's Implementation Guide on the rights of child human rights defenders, child human rights defenders (CHRDs) are 'children who take actions to promote, protect and fulfil human rights, including children's rights, [...] even if they do not see themselves as such, or are not considered and called as such by others.'

2. Overview of international and European legal instruments related to child human rights defenders

2.1. International legal instruments

First and foremost, the UN CRC stipulates the civil and political rights that children and CHRDs enjoy: the right to freedom of expression and access to information, freedom of thought and religion, freedom of assembly and association. Additionally, the four general principles of the UN CRC play an essential role in the protection of the rights of CHRDs in a cross-cutting manner. A child rights approach distinguishes the realisation of the rights of CHRDs from adult HRDs: in all instances, children must be protected from discrimination (Article 2, UN CRC), their best interests must be a primary consideration (Article 3, UN CRC); their views must be sought and given due weight in all matters affecting them (Article 12, UN CRC); and their right to life, survival and development must be protected (Article 6, UN CRC).

Moreover, children's parents or guardians are required and entitled to give them guidance on the exercise of their rights (Article 5, UN CRC). Children's parents or guardians have a distinctive and important role in assisting children realise their rights as their capacities evolve.⁴

The right to have their views given due weight implies that CHRDs have the right to be heard and requires states to give opportunities to CHRDs to express their views, including in policy and law-making processes. Article 12 of the UN CRC is the legal basis for what the CRC Committee has defined as "child participation", which should be an on-going process, which includes information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults on the development of policies, programmes and measures in all relevant contexts of children's lives. In General Comment No.12, the CRC Committee also explains that Article 12 as a general principle of the Convention provides that States should strive to ensure that the interpretation and implementation of all other rights incorporated in the UN CRC are guided by it, in particular children's civil and political rights (Articles 13-17, UN CRC).

On 28 September 2018, the CRC Committee held its Day of General Discussion on the protection and empowerment of CHRDs which coincided with the 20th Anniversary of the UN DHRD. This occasion provided insights into the many ways in which children are acting in the defence of human rights across the world, challenging existing norms and practices and insisting on being heard. It also identified many of the distinctive barriers that children encounter when acting as HRDs. A picture emerged of an array of challenges that include: not having access to information, including about their rights; not being taken seriously by adults; receiving physical and verbal abuse and threats online and offline; being prevented from acting by their families, elders, schools or the police; and not having access to or information about effective supports or remedies. The definition of CHRDs suggested in this study is also the outcome of the General Day of Discussion:

"Children who take actions to promote, protect and fulfil human rights, including children's rights, are human rights defenders, even if they do not see themselves as such, or are not considered and called as such by others."⁵

In line with all these developments, the CRC Committee has been looking at the situation of CHRDs as part of the monitoring of the UN CRC and has formulated recommendations about CHRDs within the context of the Concluding Observations of the states concerned as well as General Comments, such as for example the recent General Comment on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change.⁶

4. Tobin, J. and Varadan, S. in Tobin, J. (Ed.) (2019) *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: A Commentary*, p.160.
5. United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, Day of General Discussion (DGD) 2018, [Outcome Report: Protecting and Empowering Children as Human Rights Defenders](#), p.5.
6. Committee on the Rights of the Child, [General Comment No. 26](#) on children's rights the environment, with a special focus on climate, change, CRC/C/GC/26, 22 August 2023,

As a soft-law instrument, the UN DHRD covers the rights of HRDs, including CHRDs. The Declaration specifies that “everyone has the right to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights”, meaning that there is no minimum age requirement to be protected by the Declaration, furthermore, it applies to CHRDs acting individually as well as those in association with others. The Declaration does not create new rights but instead articulates existing rights in international law in a way that makes it easier to apply them to the practical role and situation of HRDs, including CHRDs. Since the 2018 Day of General Discussion in which the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders has actively engaged, all mandate holders have reported cases and issued recommendations about CHRDs in their reports. In her last report to the Human Rights Council in 2023, the current Special Rapporteur reported on emblematic cases of CHRDs and recommended that States should, among other things, “address negative attitudes towards children who are human rights defenders, and build the capacity of State actors to engage meaningfully with children”.⁷ 40 Council of Europe member states joined 20 other states in welcoming the Special Rapporteur’s recommendations through a statement fully focusing on the protection and empowerment of CHRDs that was led and read out by Luxembourg at the Human Rights Council session in March 2023.⁸ Council of Europe member states have also started to issue recommendations about CHRDs to other states in the context of the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council.

The International Service for Human Rights, an NGO working more than four decades on serving, supporting and providing solidarity to HRDs, developed in 2016 a “Model Law for the recognition and protection of human rights defenders” in collaboration with over 500 defenders over a three-year period.⁹

The aim of the Model Law is to ensure the full and complete implementation of the UN DHRD and was endorsed by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders (special procedure of the UN Human Rights Council). The Model Law assures an effective protection of the rights of HRDs, including CHRDs, and instructs governments on how to implement it at the local level.

2.2. European legal instruments

In the European context, in 2012 the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted a Recommendation on participation of children and young people under the age of 18¹⁰ which, in line with Article 12 of the UN CRC, covers the rights of children and young people to be heard in all settings, including in schools, in communities and in the family as well as at the national and European level. It also contains guidelines that member states are encouraged to follow in implementing the Recommendation, such as protecting children and young people’s right to participate, promoting and informing children and young people about participation, and creating spaces for participation.

In 2018, the Council of Europe of Ministers adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)11 on the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe,¹¹ which includes recommendations for member states to provide a legal framework on human rights defenders to ensure the freedom to carry out such activities and live up to international law standards on this subject matter.

The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, who supports the work of HRDs and assists member states in fulfilling their obligations towards HRDs, advocates strongly for child and youth participation. In her human rights comment “Boosting child and youth participation – from voice to choice”, the Commissioner stated that “efforts to promote child and youth participation can be categorised into three different types of processes: consultative, collaborative and those promoting self-advocacy. When identifying the most appropriate method, it must be borne in mind that the first two types are usually adult-initiated and that special efforts must be made to ensure that children are offered a real chance of influencing both the agenda-setting process and also the choice of methodology used.”¹²

7. Human Rights Council [Report](#) of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, A/HRC/52/29, from 21 December 2022, para 127.

8. [Joint Statement](#) on Child Human Rights Defenders, 52 session of the Human Rights Council.

9. International Service for Human Rights, [Model Law for the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights Defenders](#), 21 June 2016.

10. Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2012\)2](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 28 March 2012.

11. Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2018\)11](#) on the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 28 November 2018.

12. Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Human Rights Comment, “[Boosting child and youth participation – from voice to choice](#)”, 01 July 2021.

Finally, the statement of ENOC,¹³ which describes CHRDs as “*human rights defenders under the age of 18 years*”, recognises the various ways in which CHRDs are at risk of suffering from children’s rights violations and urges all stakeholders to apply its recommendations. The recommendations stress the importance of paying attention and allocating resources to the specific needs of CHRDs in order to support them in their work and to protect their rights.

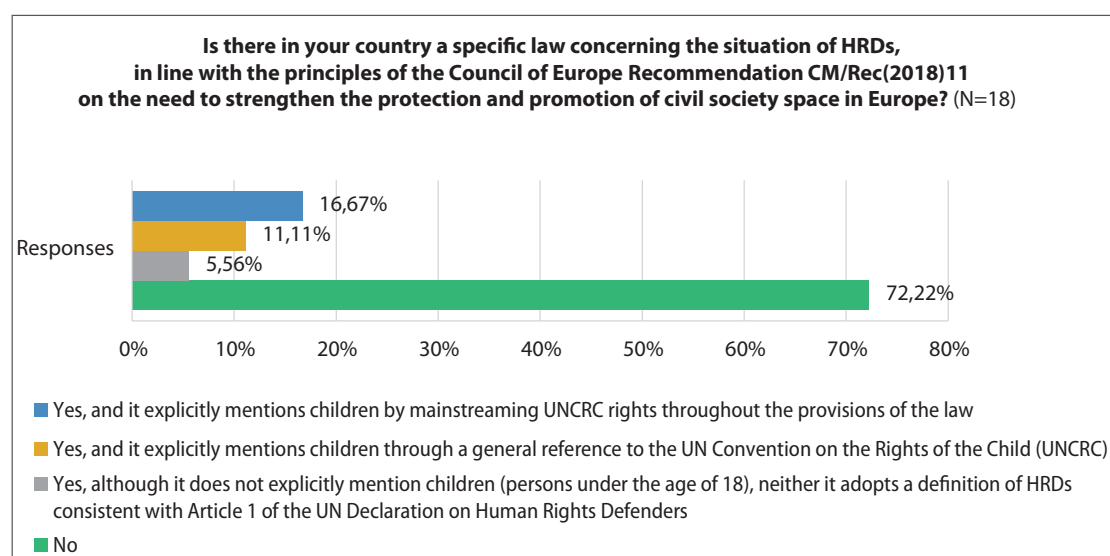
13. ENOC ad-hoc position statement “[Recognising and strengthening the protection of Child Human Rights Defenders](#)”, April 2023.

3. Children as defenders of human rights

3.1. Legal framework in Council of Europe member states

The majority of Council of Europe member states which replied to the questionnaire do not have a specific law or legal structure in place concerning HRDs which would be similar to the “Model law” developed by the International Service for Human Rights¹⁴ and endorsed by the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, and in line with the principles of the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)11 on the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe. Instead, the primary legal support for HRDs comes in the form of general protections outlined in the Constitution, the Civil Code or other relevant laws and covers the freedom of expression, right to freedom of assembly and association, and right to information. 62,5% of the member states responding expressly stated that these laws incorporate the provisions of the UN DHRD and ensure the protection of HRDs. Only four respondent member states stated that there is a specific law on HRDs whereas children’s rights are covered either by mainstreaming one or more references to the UN CRC (Armenia, Bulgaria, Hungary and Norway).

Figure 1: Existence of a law on HRDs in line with the principles of the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)11

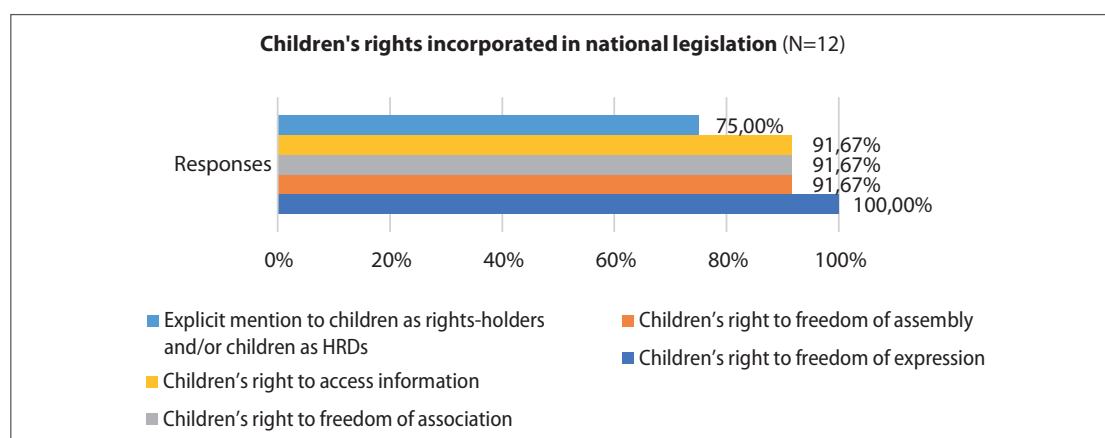


14. Ibid., note 9.

On the other hand, member states referred to legislation focusing on children’s rights and child protection as relevant to CHRDs. For example, in Armenia, the Law on Child Rights is based on the Constitution and the UN CRC and defines the rights of the child including freedom of thought, conscience and belief as well as freedom of association and assembly, the responsibilities of the government and other bodies, enterprises, institutions, organisations and citizens in protecting the rights of the child.¹⁵ In their replies both Bulgaria and Hungary referred to their Child Protection Act, while the Czech Republic shared the relevant provisions of their Civil Code. Four of the responding member states developed the relevant legislation in consultation with children (Armenia, Bulgaria, France and Norway).

Level of incorporation of the relevant children’s rights in legislation is quite high in the 12 member states replying to this specific question: all of them have a relevant provision on the right to freedom of expression and 92% of them introduced children’s right to access to information, freedom of association and freedom of assembly into their national legislation. Children’s rights to express their views and to be heard (78%) and the recognition of children as rights-holders and or human rights defenders (75%) are also incorporated widely. The relevant legislation includes the Constitution (Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Latvia and Norway), Law on Children’s Rights (Armenia, Austria and Iceland), Law related to Child Protection (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Latvia and Norway), Civil Code (Czech Republic) and other sectorial laws (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Latvia and Norway). In Norway, the Act on strengthening the position of human rights in Norwegian law (Human Rights Act) incorporated the UN CRC with its protocols and attached them as an Appendix.

Figure 2: Children’s rights incorporated in national legislation



Nevertheless, 64% of the member states shared that they have legal provisions which put a limit on the practice of children’s rights, particularly in the case of younger children. The age at which children are allowed to begin participating in the legal system ranges from 12 to 16. Generally, prior to this age, children are not considered “mature” enough or “capable” to make decisions, therefore parents, guardians or legal representatives do that on behalf of them.



EXAMPLE OF NATIONAL PRACTICE

Based on a study conducted by the Swiss Competence Center for Human Rights in 2020, the Federal Council of **Switzerland** acknowledged that the child’s right to be heard is not yet completely implemented in the country and widely differs based on the field of activity and the canton. Out of the 28 recommendations included in the study, the Federal Council only considered those addressed to the federal level. The Federal Council found that there is no need to review or update legislation, but the participation of children can be improved by awareness-raising and information sharing.¹⁶

15. The Law of the Republic of Armenia on the Child’s Rights , as amended on 13 September 2023.

16. Federal Council, [News item of the Federal Council of Switzerland](#) (in French), 02 September 2020.

Every child capable of forming his or her opinion has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. Therefore, parents, guardians and legal representatives need to inform, consult, and involve children in decision making which affects their lives.



EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL PRACTICES

In the **Czech Republic**, “before making a decision that affects the child’s interests, the parents shall inform the child of everything necessary so that he can form his own opinion on the matter in question and communicate it to the parents. [] Parents pay due attention to the child’s opinion and take the child’s opinion into account when making decisions” [Civil Code, § 875 (2)].

Similarly in **Croatia**, “in all proceedings in which a decision is to be made about a child’s right or interest, the child has the right to learn the important circumstances of the case in an appropriate manner, to receive advice and express his/her opinion, and to be informed of the possible consequences of respecting his opinion” (Article 86 of the Family Act).

Sometimes children face barriers when they are exercising their rights in real life even though they are stipulated by national legislation.



EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL PRACTICES

In **France** from the age of 16, children can create their own associations or join one without parental authorisation (Law n°2017-86 on Equality and Citizenship). Nevertheless, the parents must be informed and can object the participation of their child. Other practical difficulties are rooted in the limited legal capacity of the child under the age of 18: it is complicated to open a bank account and get a credit card for the association, furthermore, the child representative cannot conclude certain acts such as the purchase of real estate or request of a loan.

In the **Czech Republic**, at least three persons can create a society without age limit, however, the statutory representative must be over the age of 18 to be able to act on its behalf.

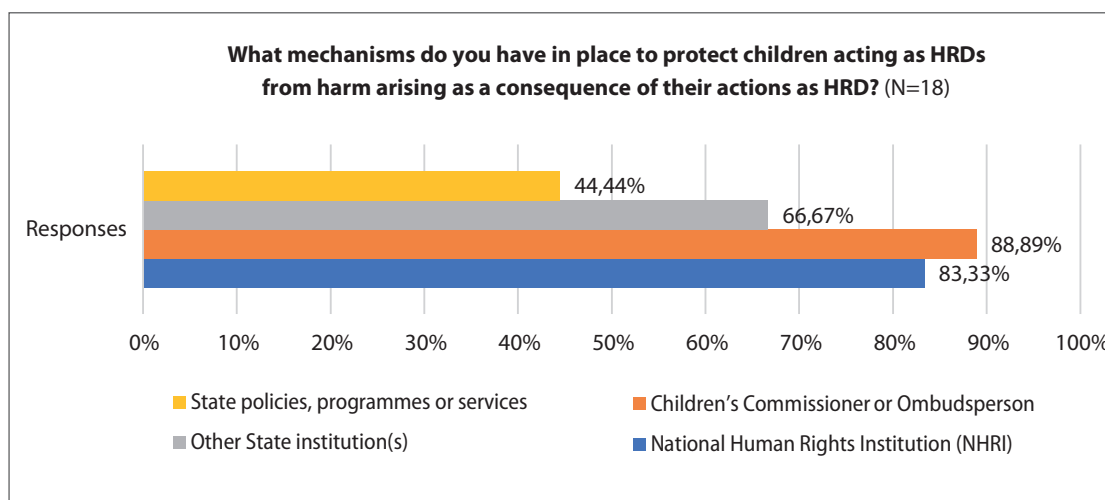
In **Greece**, children cannot join or form an association before they turn 18 with some exceptions: if the child is working, they can join a trade union to protect their labor rights; and if they are studying, they can practice their freedom of association in relation to their students’ rights. This means children have the freedom to create and join an association on their own, but in practice, they need adults helping them to exercise this freedom.

3.2. Protection mechanisms available for child human rights defenders

Children acting as human rights defenders need to have access to mechanisms which protect them from harm arising as a consequence of their actions. Harm should be interpreted to include all forms of violence as well as reprisals, intimidations, punishment, and any other negative consequences that may result from their actions as defenders and may occur off or on-line. Out of 18 respondents, 15 member states indicated that they have a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) established and operating within the terms of the Principles Relating to the Status of National Human Rights Institutions (Paris Principles)¹⁷, 16 member states have a Children’s Commissioner or Ombudsperson operating in line with General Comment No. 2 of the CRC Committee, 12 member states have other state institution(s) and 8 member states have state policies, programmes or services in place as protective mechanisms.

17. The [Paris Principles](#) set out the minimum standards that NHRIs must meet in order to be considered credible and to operate effectively. The key pillars of the Paris Principles are pluralism, independence and effectiveness.

Figure 3: Protective mechanisms available for CHRDs



As part of the online questionnaire, children were also asked about their knowledge concerning the protection mechanisms available for CHRDs: around 60% of them were aware of a Children's Commissioner or Ombudsman operating in their country whom children can turn to if they are at risk of harm.



WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?

One of the child participants of the online consultations stated: *"I will say that we have fighters for the rights, it is an institution and at the head of the Institution is our Ombudsman. About what they do, someone else already mentioned some things and in my country, it is working like that so if you mention that something is unfair to you, you go there, you make a report, and the Ombudsman makes sure that everything goes ok and gives help."*

High level of awareness can be explained with the fact that the children were from countries where the Ombudsman is actively engaging with children and that the questionnaire was disseminated through the network of ENOC. At the same time, children involved in advisory groups engaging with an Ombudsman seemed to be conscious of their special knowledge compared to their peers.

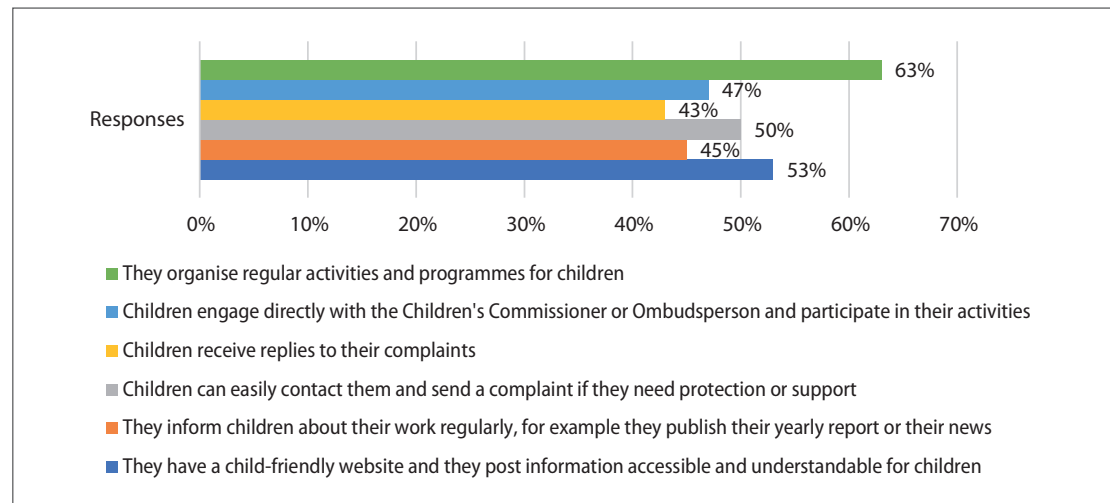


WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?

"I'm sure that most children do not know about the Ombudsman in our country because personally until the age of 16, I did not know who the Ombudsman was because we are not informed."
"We have a hotline and also a website, but we have people in society which is endangered but who don't know of the office or connect with them. Particularly about children but also adults. When you speak of a human rights institution people are surprised."

Children reported to have a good knowledge of the different activities of the Children's Commissioner or Ombudsman targeting children: more than half of them heard about regular activities and programmes organised for children by such institution and the possibility to consult their child-friendly websites for information. Around 50% said that children can submit complaints to the institutions, and they can expect to receive replies, while five children reported to have sought protection from the Children's Commissioner or Ombudsman of their country and one of them shared their experience. The child directly asked support from the Ombudsman to resolve a case of a child from their school whose rights were violated, but their request was ignored and never received any feedback from the institution. Less than half of the children were aware of opportunities to engage with the Children's Commissioner or Ombudsman as child advisors or ambassadors or simply be informed of their activities on a regular basis.

Figure 4: Opportunities to engage with the Children's Commissioner or Ombudsperson



As indicated above, most of the member states surveyed have **NHRIs** and almost all of them have specific mandates including children (Armenia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, France, Germany,¹⁸ Greece, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Portugal and Switzerland).



EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL PRACTICES

In **Bulgaria** and in **Latvia**, the Ombudsperson's Office has a division/directorate that deals with children's rights, raise awareness about them and receive complaints regarding rights violations - including from children.

In **Greece**, the Deputy Ombudsperson is appointed with the mandate to protect and promote children's rights, and to investigate and intervene in cases of violations that occur either by public or private entities and individuals. They can receive complaints by anyone including children without limitations.

The **German** Institute for Human Rights helps to spread awareness, implement and monitor the implementation of child rights in Germany in relation to various topics, all in accordance with the UN CRC. At the same time, at the level of the Federal States (Länder), children and their families can turn to an Ombudsperson's Office for advice, mediation and clarification of conflictual events in connection with the tasks of child and youth welfare.

Out of the states that have NHRIs, 70% of them have child-friendly content and child safeguarding policies in place within their NHRIs, but only 23% of them have institutionalised mechanisms for systemic engagement with children acting as HRDs.



EXAMPLE OF NATIONAL PRACTICE

The Human Rights Defender of **Armenia** has recently launched the Public Council on Children's and Youth Rights which consists of 21 members from all the provinces of Armenia, with support from UNICEF Armenia.

While the majority of NHRIs have the power to consider individual complaints and carry out investigations, including those submitted on behalf of or directly by children, such as the Ombudsperson for Children in Sweden, only three member states replied to the survey to ever receive complaints from CHRDs (Armenia, Bulgaria and Latvia). As an example, in 2021, the Bulgarian Ombudsperson's Office received 111 complaints from children, while the Human Rights Defender Office of Armenia receives around 1,000 complaints about violations of children's rights yearly, 1% of which are from children.

18. See German Institute for Human Rights, [Child-friendly justice](#) (in German).

Several of the member states which responded to the survey have separate **Children’s Ombudsperson or Children’s Commissioners** whose sole focus is the protection of children’s rights, including children acting as HRDs (Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republika Srpska), Croatia, Cyprus, France, Iceland, Luxembourg, and Norway). In the Czech Republic, amendment to the Law on the Public Defender of Rights is currently being drafted with the aim to create a separate Children’s Ombudsperson supported by an advisory body of children aged 12-18. While little data is published on how many children acting as HRDs leverage these services, most Children’s Ombudspersons or Commissioners have the ability to consider individual complaints and carry out investigations. Almost all of them (92%) have child-friendly and child safeguarding policies and procedures in place,¹⁹ and the majority (62%) have institutionalised mechanisms for systemic engagement with children acting as HRDs.



EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL PRACTICE

In **Iceland**, the Ombudsperson has a child advisory group that meets on a regular basis and can either work on topics that the Ombudsperson is working on, or bring forward their own topics that they find important and want to work on or advocate for.

In **France**, each year more than a thousand children participate in the annual children’s rights report of the Ombudsperson to be submitted to the President of the Republic and around 55,000 children are made aware of their rights by the institution.

The Commissioner for the Protection of Children’s Rights of **Cyprus** established the Commissioner’s Young Advisors Team, consisting of children aged 13 to 17 years, to discuss and exchange views on matters concerning children’s rights. The Commissioner furthermore consults with other organised groups of children, in particular the Children’s Parliament and the Pancyprian Co-ordinating Students’ Committee. The Commissioner receives complaints from children participating at Children’s Parliament, the Pancyprian Co-ordinating Students’ Committee, and the Young Advisory Team of the Commissioner, and whenever it happens, they provide information about the investigation process and its result to the children themselves.

Several members of these national child advisory groups participated in the online consultations and shared their positive experience with the Children’s Commissioner or Ombudsperson.



WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?

One child said that *“the human rights defender thought that children were not heard in general, not only those who try to protect human rights. Now it is getting better, of course we still don’t see individual cases like children on the news talking about how their rights are violated but it is definitely getting better because the office of the ombudsman exists, and they do everything they can to protect these children and their rights. I think our Council is proof of it.”*

Many member states reported to have **other state institutions** mandated to protect children acting as HRDs from harm, such as the State Agency for Child Protection (Bulgaria) and the State Inspectorate for Protection of Children’s Rights (Latvia).



EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL PRACTICE

In **Hungary**, the Integrated Legal Protection Service can be contacted by any child who wishes to consult the organisation or the children’s rights representative. Their contact information must be posted in a visible place in every kindergarten, school, childcare institution, local authority office and other places.

As part of their engagement with children, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, a governmental advisory body at the Office of the Government of the **Czech Republic** welcome two representatives of child-led organisations and involve them in their work (National Parliament of Children and Youth of the Czech Republic and Czech High School Union).

19. As an example, see the Ombudsperson for Children in the Republic of Croatia, [Child Protection Policy](#), 12 May 2020.

The **Portuguese** National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and the Protection of Children and Young People has a National Council of Children and Young People, an initiative that aims to give voice to the experiences, concerns, needs and expectations of children and young people. Within its scope and using formal education methodology, several activities and consultation processes have been developed on different themes, including the rights of children and young people, aiming to promote civic education and participation.

On the other hand, state institutions working on issues related to the protection of HRDs can also cover CHRDs.



EXAMPLE OF NATIONAL PRACTICE

Belgium shared that the Federal Institute of Human Rights (Institut Fédéral des Droits Humains) initiated a major survey entitled “Space for human rights defenders in Belgium” to learn about the situation of Belgian HRDs. The first edition of this survey focuses on civil society, and it was addressed to more than 1,000 organisations active in Belgium, including several dozen organisation defending children’s rights. The results of the survey will be published by the end of 2023.

As examples of protection mechanisms, eight member states shared **specific policies or programmes in place** designed to support child participation and advocacy, but roughly half of them are reported to be available at schools and only three of them have been developed in consultation with children.



EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL PRACTICE

In **Germany**, there is a national coalition of NGOs and initiatives that is funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth whose aim it is to promote and protect the right of children to participate.²⁰

In **Poland**, since 2016, the Council of Children and Youth of the Republic of Poland – with 32 members, two from each province – has been operating at the Ministry of Education and Science with the aim to express opinions on issues concerning children and young people in the field of matters covered by the government administration.

In **Spain**, the State Council for the Participation of Children and Adolescents (CEPIA) is a permanent and stable body for consultation, representation and participation of children, attached to the Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030 and created in 2021. In CEPIA, children and adolescents can freely express their ideas, propose measures that defend the social recognition of their rights, formulate proposals on issues that affected them at the state level, and became spokespersons and interlocutors for the rest of the country’s children and adolescents before public institutions. Children represented belong to municipal and regional participatory initiatives, organisations, associations, entities or groups children in vulnerable situations.

In **Luxembourg** «Jugendrot – Conseil National de la Jeunesse» is an umbrella organisation of youth organisations in the country. It is consulted by Ministries and other institutional actors on questions related to youth. It actively engages and advocates for the interests of young people in Luxembourg and in Europe.

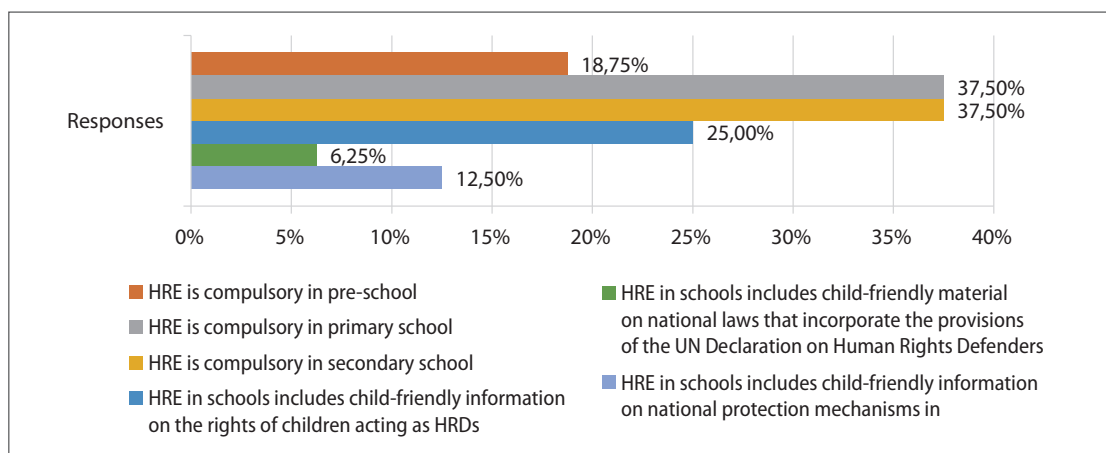
The protection mechanisms, be it national human rights institutions, Children’s Commissioners or Ombudspersons, other state bodies or programmes, empower children to act as HRDs and provide them with key supporting mechanisms to ensure that their voices are heard and that they are safe. Even though these institutions cannot provide data concerning their direct engagement with children and child complainants, the good level of awareness among children who participated in the survey shows that children appreciate these protection mechanisms and they are familiar with the ones relevant and accessible for them.

20. See an [example publication](#) by the German BMFSFJ.

3.3 Human rights education and capacity-building of professionals working with children

The responses to the specific question on human rights education, as per Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2010\)7](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education,²¹ revealed that human rights education at school is provided in 16 states, mostly at primary (six states) and secondary (six states) level, but few of them also in pre-school (Greece, Iceland and Latvia). Concerning the inclusion of relevant topics, some of the member states have child-friendly information on the rights of children acting as HRDs in the curriculum (Armenia, Germany, Norway and Switzerland), while only few of them have such information on national protection mechanisms in place to protect HRDs (Germany and Switzerland) and national laws that incorporate the UN DHRD (Germany). Nevertheless, the child-friendly version of the Declaration is available in national languages only in Armenia and in France.

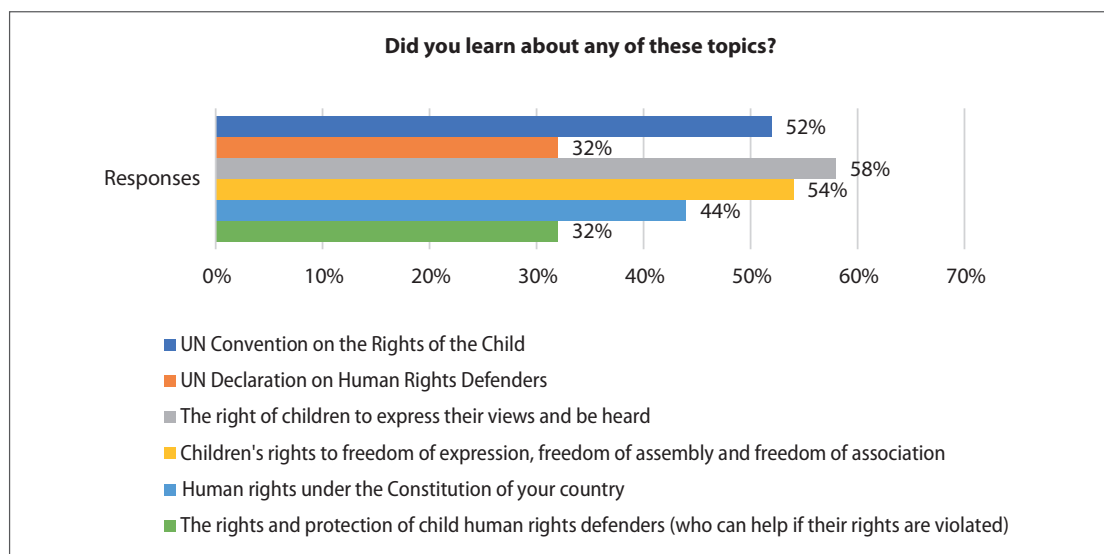
Figure 5: Human rights education in the formal education system



Sixty-nine per cent of the children who took part in the online questionnaire said that they studied about human rights in school. The majority of the children learnt about the UN CRC, the right to express their views and be heard, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of association in school and almost half of them studied about human rights “as declared by the constitution of their country”. Only one third of the children heard about the UN DHRD and the rights and protection of CHRDs at school.

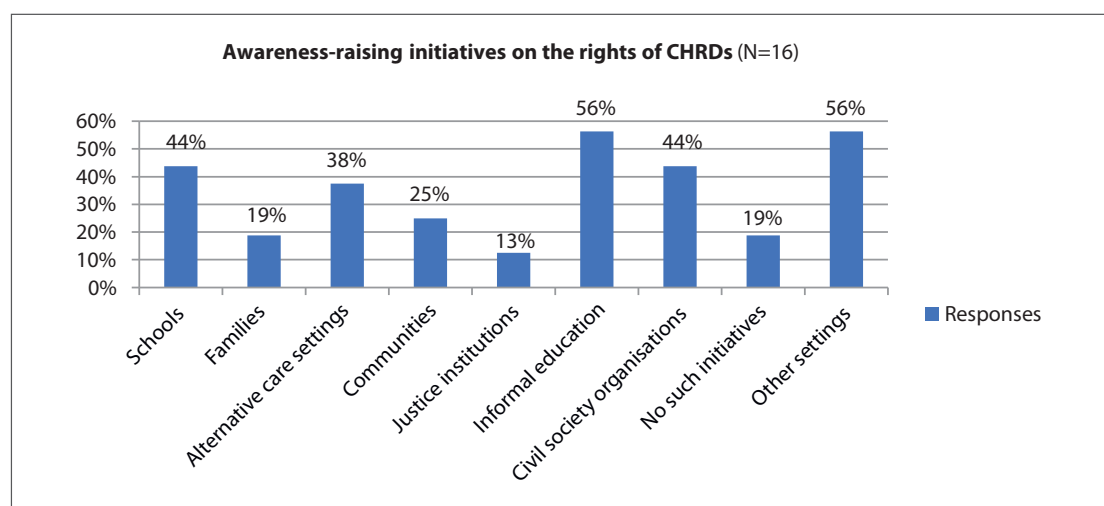
21. The Council of Europe developed two manuals on human rights education for children and young people: [Composito - Manual on human rights education with children](#) (3rd edition, 2021) and [Compass - A manual on human rights education with young people](#) (2nd edition, 2021). See also the [Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture \(RFCDC\)](#) and [other publications](#) on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education

Figure 6: Human rights topics taught in formal education system



In the majority of the member states which responded to the survey, there are awareness-raising activities in place in relation to the rights of children acting as HRDs in informal education and in other settings such as in the context of the National Human Rights Institution or Commissioner for Children (Armenia, Croatia, Greece and Norway). In 44 % of the member states responding to the question, these activities are common within the framework of the traditional school system or organised by civil society organisations, respectively. Alternative care, families, communities and justice institutions are less likely to raise awareness about the rights of CHRDs, while 19 % of the member states responded that they do not have such initiatives in place at all.

Figure 7: Awareness-raising activities on the rights of CHRDs

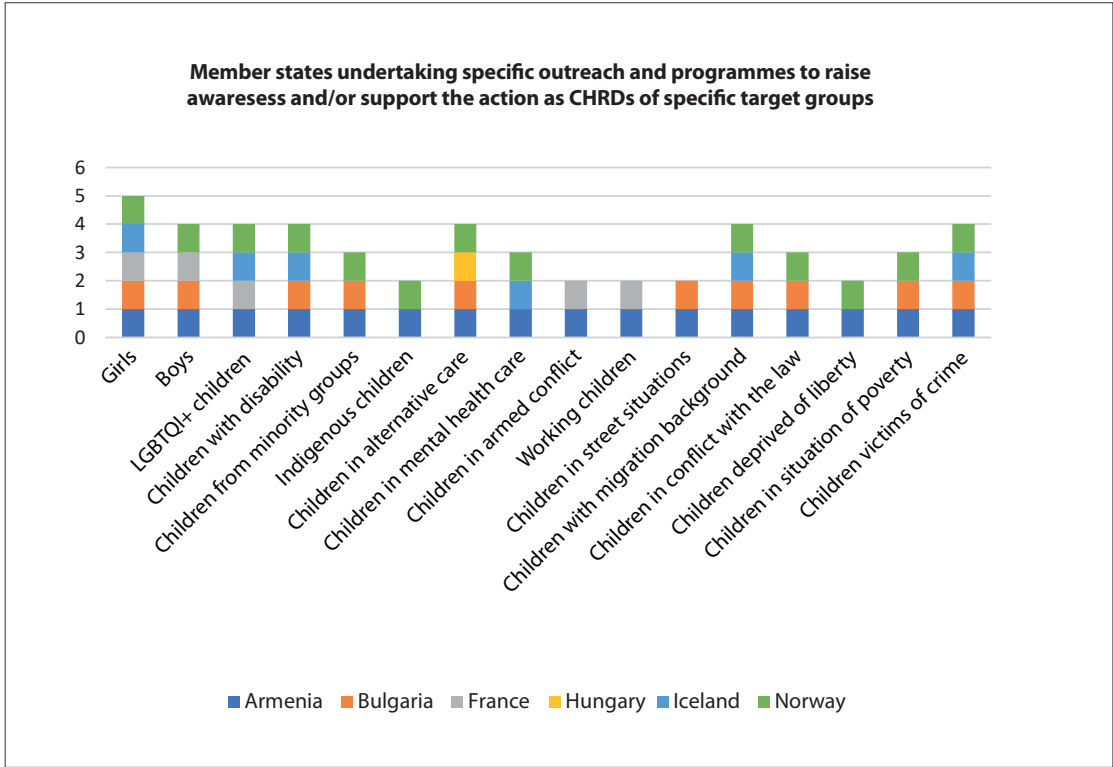


EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL PRACTICE

Among the practice, **Portugal** shared the awareness-raising campaigns organised by National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and the protection of Children and Young People and the local Commissions for the Protection of Children and Young People in relation to the anniversary of the UN CRC (20 November), the European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (18 November) and the Campaign Against Ill-Treatment of Children (during all the month of April).

In **Belgium**, awareness raising on human rights is part of youth work, for example, within the framework of the SONAR project of JINT, the youth agency of Flanders, which targets children and young people between the age of 12 and 30. As part of this project, a toolkit has been developed which consists of a booklet, working methods, a poster and activity cards, all freely accessible on the website of the agency.²²

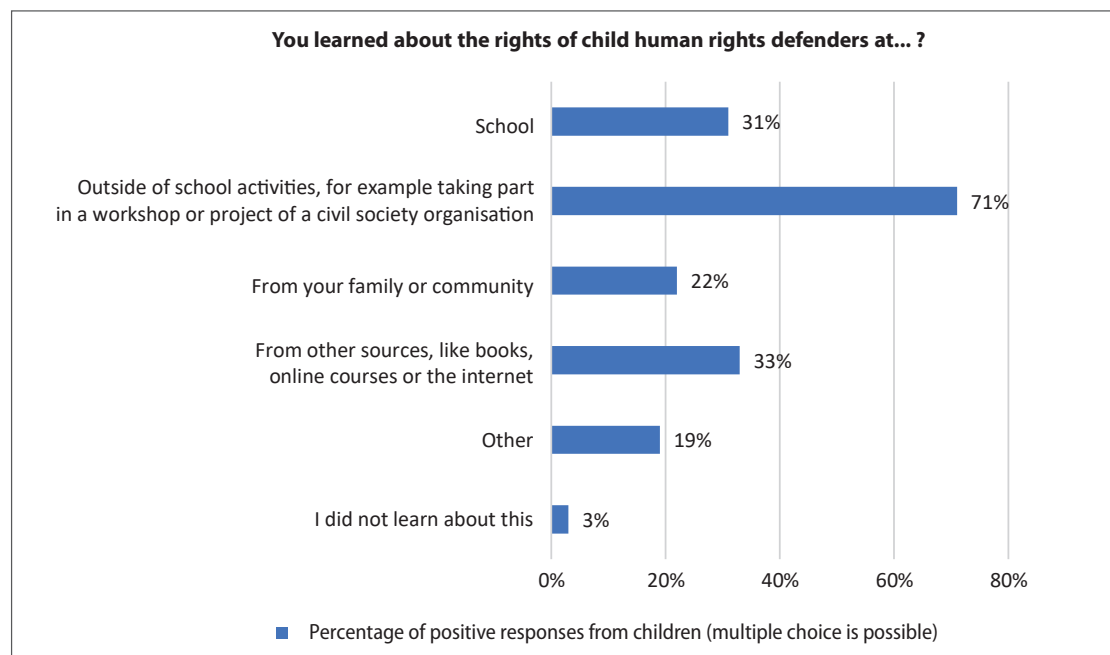
Figure 8: Outreach and programmes raising awareness and/or support the actions as CHRDs of specific target groups



When looking at the replies of children submitted through the questionnaire, 71% of them reported to learn about the rights of CHRDs outside of school activities, for example taking part in a workshop or project of a civil society organisation. 32% of the child respondents gained knowledge from other sources, like books, online courses or the internet, only 32% of them chose school as the provider of such information. It is noteworthy that 22% of the children said they learnt about this topic from their family or people around them in their community.

22. More information about the project is available at <https://www.jint.be/sonar>

Figure 9: Where children learn about the rights of CHRDs



Out of the 14 respondents to the question, nine member states²³ indicated that they take measures to build adults' awareness of and capacity to empower and protect children acting as HRDs. The target groups are professionals engaged in child protection (seven respondents), teachers (seven respondents), school directors (six respondents), civil society organisations (six respondents), parents and legal guardians (five respondents), professionals working in schools such as counsellors (five respondents), sport clubs and associations (five respondents), judiciary and lawyers (four respondents), religious leaders (three respondents), and parliamentarians (three respondents).



EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL PRACTICE

Poland has published guidance and trainings specifically designed for adults that interact frequently with children, such as educators and parents, on children's rights and how to protect children and support them in attaining their rights.²⁴

Germany has a comprehensive guide produced by the Institute for Human Rights that provides guidance for teachers and educators on how to educate children on their human rights and support them in protecting them.²⁵

Among the other target groups, **Portugal** shared that the National Commission for the Promotion of Rights and the Protection of Children and Young People has organised two workshops for journalists to sensitize them about the rights of the child enshrined in the UN CRC. These measures help to ensure children acting as CHRDs are protected against reprisals and have the adult support they need to succeed.

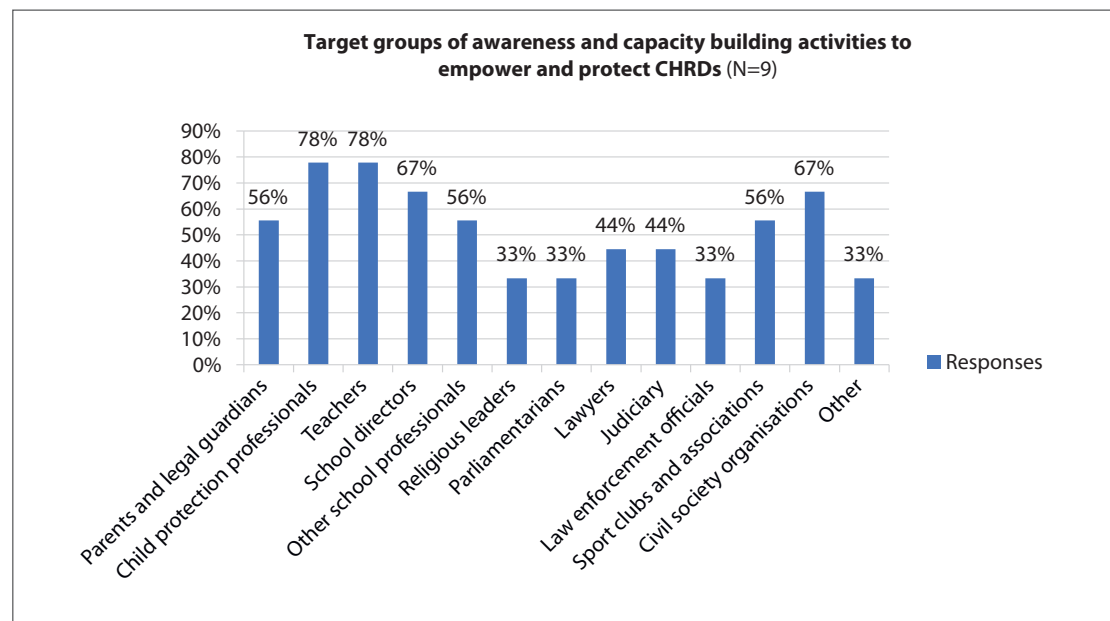
In **Norway**, significant efforts have been made to enhance the Family Counseling Services' expertise in communicating with children. The specialised competency services for children and adolescents within family counseling provide training, assistance, and guidance within the service. The service is responsible for the systematic improvement of competence in communicating with children, both at the national, regional, and local levels. It has developed a video and a brochure for children attending the family counseling office in connection with their parents' mediation. The service is in the process of developing proposals for a standardised process for conversations with children, both in mediation and clinical cases.

23. Armenia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, France, Iceland, Norway, and Portugal.

24. See Ombudsman for Children, [Adult Space](#) (in Polish).

25. See the German Institute for Human Rights, [Education Materials](#) (in German).

Figure 10: Target groups of awareness and capacity building activities



3.4. Access to justice

In terms of access to justice, the majority of member states have explicit legal limits or barriers for children's access to justice. These barriers and limits include age-based limitations to participation and filing of legal cases, requirements for parents to endorse, support or even file children's legal cases on behalf of the child.



EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL PRACTICE

In the **Czech Republic**, children under the age of 18 cannot file a complaint in court themselves.

In **Cyprus**, there are no age restrictions, but limitations on the exercise of children's right to access justice is based on the fact that parental consent is needed for children exercising that right.

In **Poland**, children older than 13 years have limited legal capacity to conclude legal acts and have procedural capacity in relation to them under the Civil Code and Civil Procedure Code.

Under the **Greek** Civil Code, any action with legal effects which includes a declaration of will is void if undertaken by a person who has not reached the age of ten, while under the Procedure Code, children over 16 years old can appear before the court in cases concerning their personal situation and exercise legal remedies and third-party appeals against the decision issued.

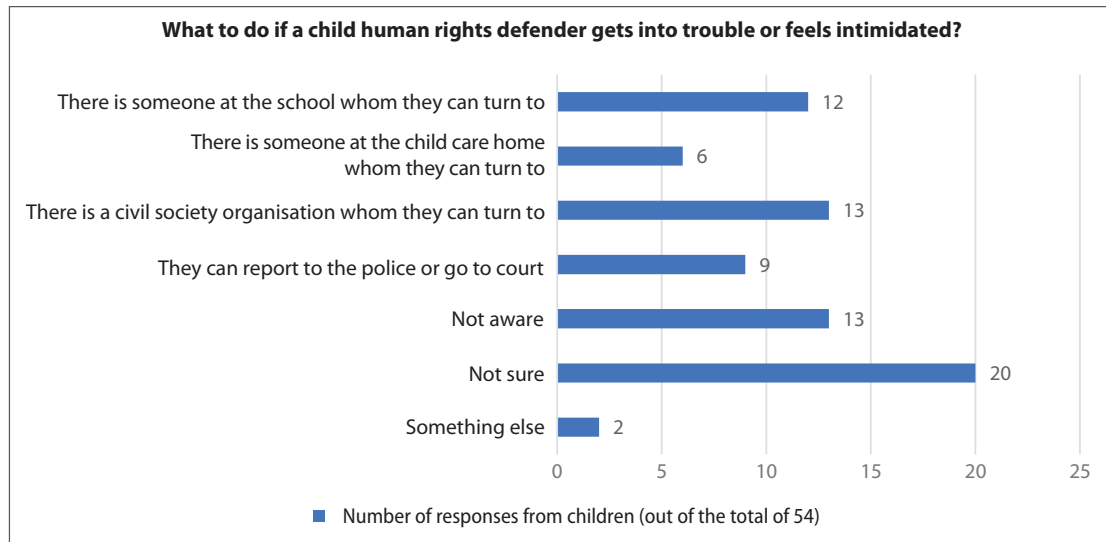
In **Austria**, from the age of 14 children can file petitions in proceedings concerning their personal contacts to their parents, in proceedings concerning care and upbringing (e.g. place of residence, education, medical treatment) and in civil proceedings related to cases for which they have contractual capacity.

In **Luxembourg**, under family law, children may request a change in the exercise of parental authority or visiting and accommodation rights. In such cases, the court appoints a lawyer for the child within a fortnight. After consulting the child, the child's lawyer will be responsible for filing a petition to modify parental authority or access and accommodation rights. If the child has already been assigned a lawyer, the child's request will be forwarded to the lawyer without delay.

According to children's replies to the questionnaire, the majority of children are not sure or not aware of where to find accessible information about how to go to court or how to find a lawyer. Only 17% of them knew or heard about child-friendly information available in courts, and this was thanks to information provided by the organisation of lawyers or civil society organisations. Similarly, the majority of children did not know or were not sure of what to do if a CHRD gets into trouble or feels intimidated because of their activities to stand up for

human rights. Among those who were aware of the available channels, 13 of them said there is a civil society organisation which can help, 12 of them can turn to someone at school for support, nine of them said they can report to the police or go to court, six of them knew about someone at the child-care institution whom they can turn to and one referred to the option to go to the Ombudsperson's Office.

Figure 11: How child human rights defenders respond to trouble or intimidation



Although the awareness of children regarding the avenues to seek justice is low, their replies show that member states have some sporadic good practices ensuring access to justice for them.



EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL PRACTICE

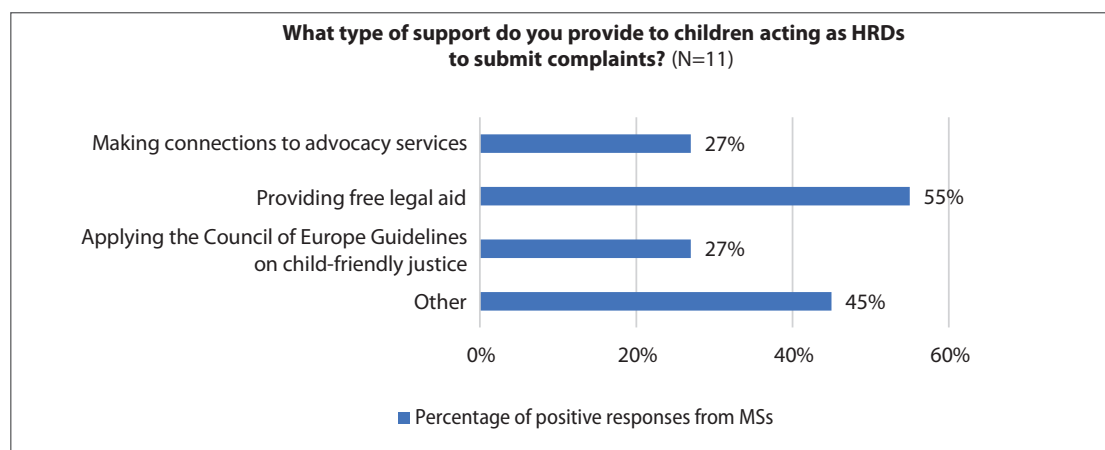
In **Hungary**, children's rights representatives and child protection guardians are obliged to provide information on the possibility of using the justice system to all children who contact them.

In **Poland**, children who are or may be participants in the proceedings before the court can find information posted on the websites of the Ministry of Justice, courts, prosecutors' offices, the Ombudsperson for Children and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) regarding the rights and obligations of children in civil and criminal proceedings as well as have access to leaflets on children's rights in court proceedings located in courts.

In more than half of the 11 member states which responded to the question on providing support to CHRDs who wish to submit complaints, children acting as HRDs are supported in submitting complaints if their rights have been violated through legal aid, while in three member states they can be connected to advocacy services or the Council of Europe Guidelines on child-friendly justice²⁶ can be applied to their case. Among other type of support besides referring to the general avenues, for example, the Commissioner for Children's Rights of the Republic of Cyprus may submit on behalf of any child an application for the appointment of a special representative in judicial proceedings affecting the child, where the law or the Court may exclude persons having parental responsibility from representing the child, as a result of conflict of interests with the latter.

26. [Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on child friendly justice](#) (adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 17 November 2010).

Figure 12: How member states support CHRDs to submit complaints



More than half of the member states submitting replies to the survey has mechanisms to protect children from reprisals both in alternative care and in justice institutions, however, only 38% of those states have such mechanism in place in schools (France, Latvia, Norway, Poland and Portugal). Other measures can be taken by the NHRI or the Ombudsperson for Children.

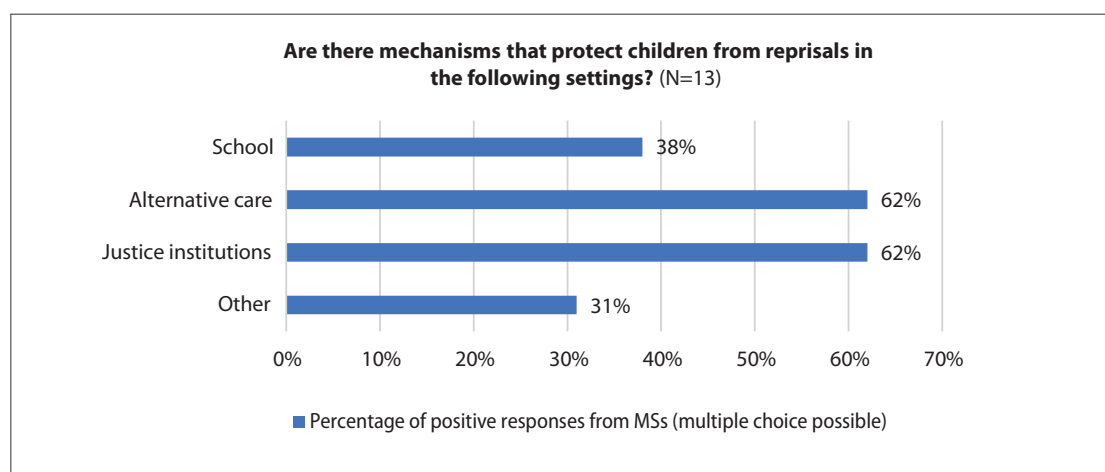


EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL PRACTICE

In **Greece**, the Deputy Ombudsperson closely monitors the case of the child and the competent authorities/agencies' response until resolution, encourages trust and communication with the child to ensure early identification of such violations, connect them with other competent services that also remain vigilant as well as includes civil society organisations through systematic networking to ensure information and advocacy co-ordination.

In **Latvia**, when a CHRD approaches the NHRI for support, his or her anonymity is ensured and measures are taken to achieve justice through the protection mechanism (for example, by lodging a complaint against a person who is in violation of the law).

Figure 13: Which mechanisms protect children from reprisals in different settings



3.5. Access to resources for children acting as human rights defenders

The perception of children who participated in the survey is that their governments are not giving money for CHRDs: only 17% of them said that they know about such opportunity or project. This is substantiated by the replies of member states, as 43% of the respondent member states declared to have specific financial allocations to advance the rights of children acting as HRDs in their public budget (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Iceland and Switzerland), while only 23% of them make these funding accessible directly for children (Bulgaria and Iceland). Few member states allocate separate funding and support for HRDs of all ages through their development co-operation or humanitarian aid programmes (Armenia,²⁷ France, Germany and Norway). Lastly, only a handful of member states responded that they grant children acting as HRDs access to foreign funding sources (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic and Iceland), but that usually happens without providing additional guidance or support.



EXAMPLES OF NATIONAL PRACTICE

Norway included reference to children as HRDs at particular risk in their Guidelines for support to human rights defenders.²⁸ This is a tool to help the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian diplomatic missions to systematise measures and efforts to support HRDs and their work.

In **Bulgaria**, funding is allocated to the Children's Council of the Chairperson of the State Agency for Child Protection in the annual budget of the agency whereas members of the Children's Council can request funding for their initiatives to be implemented in their district, county or city.

In the **Czech Republic** the funds are available for NGOs working with children with the aim to advance children's rights, similarly to **Iceland**, where many of the NGOs receive financial support to run child or youth councils.

The Ombudsperson for Children of **Croatia** decides how to further allocate the funding coming from the state budget to activities with children.

In **Switzerland**, the Confederations financially support Youth Session (la Session des Jeunes) and children's conference happening at the same time, while the cantons had a focus on child participation within the framework of their activities in 2021-2023 which included allocation of funding for projects in this field.

Generally, while member states allocate funding for the advancement of children's rights, they neither clearly nor separately allocate funds for children acting as HRDs within their public budgets. Furthermore, very little funding is directly accessible to children, who rely extensively on civil society organisations.

3.6. Monitoring, data collection and accountability

Overall, only few member states monitor the situation of children acting as HRDs either separately or as part of other monitoring practices that capture children's rights or the situation of HRDs generally (Armenia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Iceland and Portugal). The monitoring happens either through co-operation with civil society organisations (100% of the cases), consultation with children acting as HRDs (80% of the cases) or co-operation with academia and research institutions (40% of the cases). Only six of the nineteen member states replying to the relevant question, reported to have consulted children regarding their experiences as HRDs (Armenia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Greece and Romania). None of the responding member states use specific indicators on children acting as HRDs or specific guidelines for statistical institutes. This is not surprising as serious gaps in data collection have been discovered, including the lack of data on complaints filed, reprisals or any other quantitative indicators that would highlight systematic issues in the implementation of the rights of children acting as HRDs.²⁹ Additionally, no member state reported that they disaggregate data but they collect data based on self-reported demographic data. These gaps mean that critical issues or trends in implementation based on factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, or other diverse characteristics are not being monitored.

27. In Armenia, children and young people have the opportunity to implement youth initiatives, for which they can receive support, and it is not necessary to be a HRD.

28. The Government of Norway, [Norwegian guidelines for support to human rights defenders](#), 25 August 2023.

29. All of the 19 member states, reporting to the relevant question, answered negatively when asked about data disaggregation on any self-identified characteristics.

Concerning accountability, six out of 15 member states reported to have a national, regional or local mechanism in place which ensures that the views of children acting as HRDs are given due weight in decision-making processes on all matters affecting them. Nevertheless, most of the respondent member states referred to their NHRIs and Children's Commissioner as well as the accountability role of children and youth councils. Within the framework of their reporting obligations to the CRC Committee, half of the member states (seven out of 14) claimed to share information on the status of CHRDs, while one third of them shared that they actively support CHRDs to engage with international and regional monitoring mechanisms.

4. Obstacles and challenges faced by child human rights defenders

4.1. General situation of child human rights defenders from the perspective of the member states

The Council of Europe member states participating in the survey shared their views regarding the general situation of children acting as HRDs and some common points can be identified. First, several member states emphasised that the state authorities and bodies within the child protection and justice system are in operation, accessible and available for children seeking support or help for any reason. Second, a number of civil society organisations are defending children's rights and engaging with children in these countries, including those acting as HRDs. Third, children are considered citizens of the country, therefore they are entitled to human rights and freedoms irrespective of their age. Nevertheless, children acting as HRDs constitute a group characterised by intersecting vulnerabilities as both children and HRDs, and therefore considered to be at risk and exposed to harassment and bullying. Fourth, while some member states acknowledged that they do not have specific provisions or policies regarding CHRDs, they find that the UN CRC is a sufficient tool as it provides the full spectrum of rights needed for children to become and act as HRDs. Fifth, some member states shared their perception that there is a lack of interest among children to be involved in the protection of human rights and/or participate in public decision making or in organisations, despite of the growing number of opportunities available for them.

On the other hand, some member states had a more critical view of the situation and challenged several of these statements. Children are still considered as passive and helpless subjects of decisions made by adults, while this perception explains that the term CHRD is not widely known or understood as a child who represents their or other children's rights or who reports the violation of their rights. Due to the lack of comprehensive and appropriate mainstreaming of children's rights in national legislation, policies and strategies, children face the sectoral approach of the state regarding their needs and rights, and the support provided for them depends on the services available and accessible for each individual child. Although the right to participation as a core principle of the UN CRC is widely referred, it is not put into practice or the participation of children in public decision making does not happen in a systematic and meaningful way.

In their responses, member states frequently referred to children participating in children's and youth councils as HRDs (Armenia, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Iceland, Norway and Portugal). They did so either indirectly by sharing information about them or directly by saying these children are the HRDs in the country. However, they also pointed out that the functioning of children's representative bodies in schools, children's homes and in local communities heavily depends on the enthusiasm, approach and capacity of the professionals working there. Another risk is that even though these bodies are set up to support children forming and expressing their views, at the end of the day, children are not consulted in relation to important public decisions such as law reforms or the development of policies and strategies.

While member states mentioned the strong mobilisation of children and young people around the topic of climate change and the organisation of protests and demonstrations (Austria, France and Greece), actions of individual climate change activists were also shared.



EXAMPLE OF NATIONAL PRACTICE

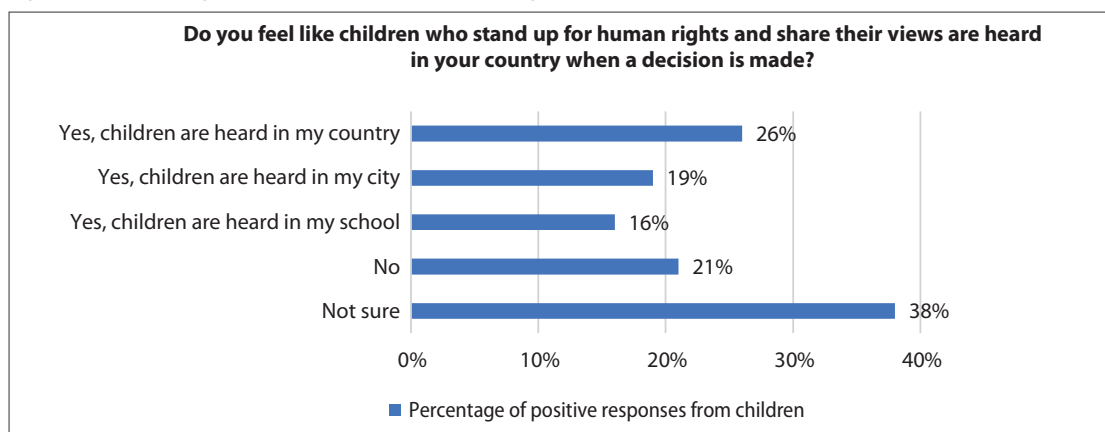
Portugal shared the case of six Portuguese young activists, three of them under 18, who demanded government action to fight climate change. On 2 September 2020, they filed a complaint before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) against 33 countries.³⁰ The case concerned the greenhouse gas emissions from 33 States, which, in the applicants' submission, contributed to global warming and resulted, inter alia, in heatwaves affecting the applicants' living conditions and health. The complaint submitted by the Portuguese young environmentalists followed to be examined by the Grand Chamber of Judges of the ECtHR, which is an indicator of its relevance.

Although member states understand and handle the situation of CHRDs differently, there seems to be an agreement on the need and willingness to improve it. 84% of the member states which replied to this question expressed the need to receive further technical assistance on how to advance the rights of children acting as HRDs. Besides financial support, member states asked for training opportunities in relation to effective monitoring mechanisms, best practices in the field of capacity building both for children and for supporting adults, and guidance on adjusting to cultural norms.

4.2. Personal experience of child human rights defenders

The majority of the children participating in the questionnaire were not sure or were negative about whether children who stand up for human rights and share their views are heard in decision making at any level in their country. 26% of the questionnaire respondents felt like children are heard in their country, 19% of them said children are heard in their city and only 16% felt like children are heard in their schools.

Figure 14: CHRDs' right to be heard in decision making



Similarly, the children participating in the online consultations mostly shared negative experiences of not being heard in public decision-making procedures.



WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?

"Children are heard by adults in my personal opinion but never in a way that matters because nothing actually changes and there isn't an actual way that you can directly help other children".

"For important things they don't listen to us or don't ask anything about them so that is stressful because, yes, they are asking us things but not what is important to us because they are "adult things".

"No, I don't think so, people and organisations really don't pay attention at what we children say. They would always say that we are very young and that we don't know."

"Mostly in the schools we are not heard because our teachers and everyone here thinks that they are better than children just because children haven't lived as much time."

30. Duarte Agostinho and Others v. Portugal and 32 Other States (no. 39371/20). For more information, see European Court of Human Rights, [Factsheet: Environment and the European Convention on Human Rights, September 2023](#) and the European Court of Human Rights, [Factsheet: Climate Change, February 2023](#).

While children felt appreciated and listened to in the participatory setting they are involved in, they felt unheard at school or by their governments.



WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?

“People don’t hear me in the school but when I arrived in the Council it was very life changing because I can give my opinion.”

“When I entered in the Council, I did not know that it existed, so I was feeling a little bit weird, but I felt very free. I am very thankful to all of them because I felt very listened to. [...] In my high school I must say that I am a bit ambitious so if people are not hearing me, I do everything I can to be heard.”

“Not really, no matter how much children’s rights advocates try to have impact on the government’s decisions, it doesn’t help.”

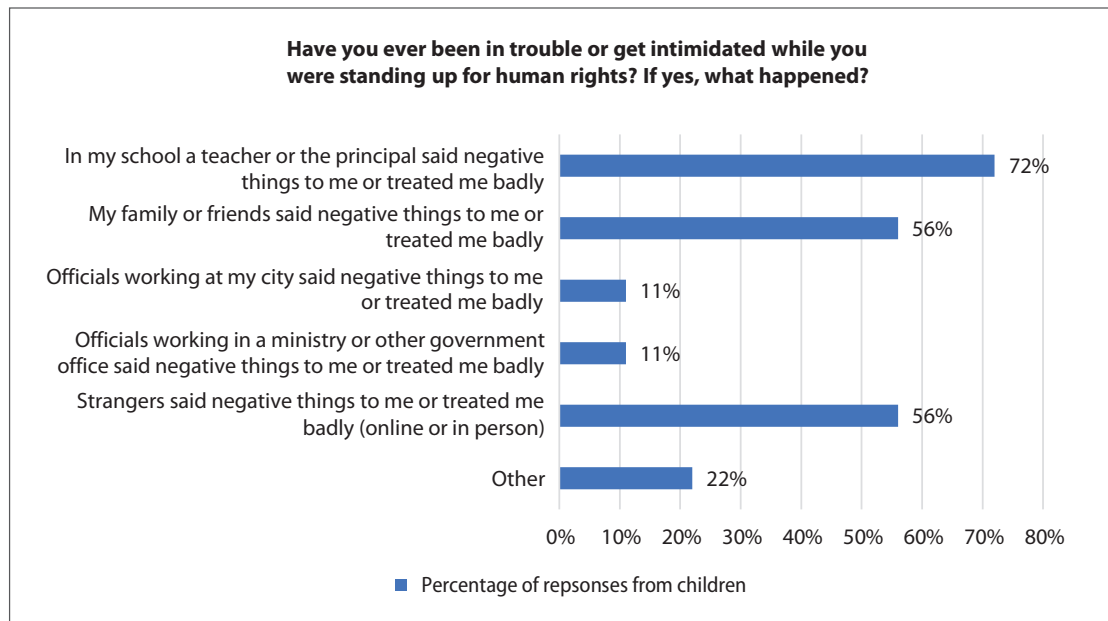
“There are many councils and also local councils of which the ideas can reach the government, but the government mostly doesn’t do anything.”

They also see the difference in the behavior and knowledge of their peers: *“But I have to say that most of the children here have no idea that they can give their own opinions or that they can take action in something”.*

4.3. Risks of reprisals faced by child human rights defenders

Considering the profile of the children participating in this research and their experience as HRDs, 17 of them reported that they had been in trouble or got intimidated.

Figure 15: Trouble and intimidation that CHRDs face



While the lowest number of cases (11%) involved officials from the government or from local authorities (respectively), the highest number (72%) concerned intimidation that happened at school where the teacher or the principal said negative things to the children or treated them badly.



WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?

“Children at my school laugh at me for sticking up for people who are part of the LGBTI community or people are generally referred to as ‘weirdos’”

“My very «conservative» school was strongly against me talking about human rights to my peers because they sometimes violated the rights, so they threatened to expel me.”

“Judged me and treated me badly for not dressing girly enough and for having muscles also said that members of the LGBTI community should not be taught at public schools.”

“I was discussing an important subject at school and the teacher said: why do women need rights if they already can give birth? I started to protest against it and he did the same. My classmates were looking at me very strange, at that time I didn’t have any friends. Also they did gossip about me being so absurd. Some teachers considered me «extreme». I felt so lonely.”

55% of the children taking part in the questionnaire shared that they were told negative things, or they were treated badly by their own family or friends as well as by strangers.



WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?

“Due to the response to Covid 19 my family and I are careful as to how we protect ourselves, which is very different to our peers. There are members of my household that are disabled. We have received many complaints, comments and actions against us because of our decisions, leading to myself and my parents being bullied or «pushed into a corner» because of it. Some of it has been taken care of, some remains but we believe it is a humans right issue because it is discrimination against the disabled and vulnerable.”

“Most of my friends including me, wear hijab (religious head coverings) over the years, I won’t go into too much detail, but we have experienced racism and bullying by our teachers, peers, strangers and basically everyone... even mild sexual harassment by classmates and strangers and whenever we have tried to stand up for ourselves or others it has always turned worse for us, and the victims are always blamed for one thing or another.”

At the online consultations without asking for personal experiences, children shared further concerns what can happen to children acting as HRDs.



WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?

“Negative stereotypes by the society. People believe that children’s rights defenders serve their own personal interests or goals and are not really interested in children’s rights.”

“I agree with everything that has been said but also one thing that has been a thing in [...] is verbal abuse by older people who have an old-fashioned view from the Soviet times like this old-fashioned mindset. They think why children should take part or have an opinion on things that are important, like you’re a child you don’t know anything.”

“In school teachers can punish their student with low grade and other people can start gossip this child.”

“The authorities may not respond properly to reports for children’s rights violations or may leak personal information to others. Lack of confidence in public authorities that are responsible to deal with violations of children’s rights.”

“When children and teens protest for their rights, the adults around them have to protect them. I don’t believe that anyone has to break into parades and start being violent and aggressive. That is pretty much it, but for example it’s pride month and imagine we had a parade for people who celebrate, which is totally valid, and some people, I have to mention that there were many children in the parade and adults had to break into the parade because they are homophobic, and many children were harmed.”

Children who were present during online consultations shared what channels they know about in case children feel at risk or intimidated. First, seeking help in school is one of their first ideas and if there is a system in place, children appreciate it.



WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?

“In my high school we also had a complaint box and we have a school councillor who hears us out or who helps us with anyone we need as well as a school psychologist. Our teachers also help us with anything we need.”

Second, in addition to the school, access to local services is also important: *“also in my own city there is a small council that you can talk to and even in the town hall, there is people where you can talk to.”*

"We also have a community council that are taking care about children, so if there is any problem a child could inform them without any adult and council will coordinate the solution of problem."

However, some children would be worried to seek help there.



WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?

"In the countryside there should also be one person in the centre of the city but that is also very complicated because everyone knows everyone so if you want to turn to someone anonymously it is like really stressing and difficult."

Third, children are aware that they can turn to the police or go to court, but they are hesitant whether this would be the best solution.



WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?

"It is difficult to report to the police if you are 13, you need an adult with you, either your parents or your guardian"

Fourth, the Ombudsperson seems to be more accessible, quicker and easier way to seek for help: *"children can report to the police or go to court, but it is a very long process, so actually if they call the human rights office, that is much easier for them and then they take care of it, kind of."*

4.4. Support for child human rights defenders: perspective of the children

Children participating in the online consultations shared their views about what kind of support they would need from their governments. First of all, children would expect their governments to change their approach towards them, start listening to them and take into account their opinion when making decisions.



WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?

"I think they need to listen to children. It is very important because we can say things that they didn't expect and maybe help them with things that they don't know of what they can do."

"I think that other governmental institutions should do better when it comes to supporting us and listening to us. I see a common pattern, where not only the adult population think "what do they know children don't have much life experience", so I see that it is a common thing. It seems like in countries where they listen to children, they get valuable input from us and we can often be much more creative than them, we can definitely be better at advertising things for us."

"Before governments make any decision, they should ask us for ideas, we are also a part of society and decisions also affect us. They should also give us more visibility to our Council, maybe with some budgets, maybe with some projects for schools because we are not very known."

Second, children would like to see more awareness raising about their rights and more opportunities to learn about how to defend their rights at school.



WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?

"I want to say that I think that governments should inform children about our rights, about how to protect our rights and to provide assistance."

"Have some lessons for all classrooms where children can learn how to defend their rights. Also to have practical solutions and ideas that other children have used in their countries and were successful."

"The government should prioritize the safety of child human rights defenders and also more classes where children can learn how to defend their rights because the governments brag about their educational systems, but we don't know important information."

"In class more child human rights defenders can do some kind of clubs, non-formal education like some kind of games that help young defenders and raise more awareness so more classes on children's rights."

Third, several proposals were put forward by the children what else can be done.



WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?

"I believe that the government doesn't do anything like that, at least in [...], but if they started giving away some money for such activities, I believe that child human rights defenders would be able to do some activities and raise awareness, it could be a good way to start various actions."

"Yeah, I think it is a great idea because a lot of child human rights defenders do not have the conditions to join zoom meetings or meetings with important people due to technical problems and all that."

Fourth, financial support provided directly to CHRDs would enhance their activities.



WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?

"We don't have that many organisations that care about children and their rights so first of all to create more organisations like that and co-ordinate that they do a good job."

"Create a national wide network where human rights defenders can share their stories or support each other and make conversation with people who share the same interest as them."

"They can share with us and speak about children's rights and give the opportunities to young people to participate in many meetings connected to their rights."

Fifth, involving children in law and policy making is always seen a huge achievement for them and a proof that children can influence decisions in a way to make them turn out better.



WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?

"In [...], we have a thing called the Youth Parliament, but I am not sure if it actually has the power or can raise awareness or make a report to change the law, but I know that it exists."

"In [...] we also have a youth parliament but once a year pretty much everyone can volunteer and they have like a meeting, like a Parliament but only young people and they build it up like a real Parliament and last year they made such actual points that the real Parliament took upon those laws."

5. Conclusions and way forward

The Council of Europe member states participating in the research provided crucial information and data from their jurisdictions and practice as well as shared their views regarding the general situation of children acting as HRDs. Some of the member states used more of a self-critical tone which eventually matched the experience shared by CHRDs. As an example, some member states mentioned that children are still considered as passive and helpless subjects of decisions made by adults, while children shared that they are excluded from important decisions related to “adult things” or they are not taken seriously because of their age. Furthermore, children were not sure or were negative about whether children who stand up for human rights and share their views are heard in decision making in their country.

Generally, the majority of member states do not have a specific law or legal structure in place concerning human rights defenders and they refer to their legislation focusing on children’s rights and child protection as relevant to CHRDs. While the level of incorporation of the relevant children’s rights in legislation is quite high, children face several restrictions due to their age or practical considerations. In some member states, owing to the lack of comprehensive and appropriate mainstreaming of children’s rights in national legislation, policies and strategies, children confront with sectoral approach of the state regarding their needs and rights and the support provided for them depends on the services available and accessible for each individual child. Although the right to participation as a core principle of the UN CRC is widely referred, its implementation remains a major challenge and the participation of children in political and public affairs and decision making does not happen in a systematic and meaningful way.

Most member states have national human rights institutions or Children’s Commissioners or Ombudspersons in place as the main protection mechanism for CHRDs. Several good practices were shared regarding these institutions’ engagement with children as advisors and ambassadors. Children taking part in advisory groups and children’s councils generally appreciate such opportunities and seem to have more trust in national human rights institutions or Children’s Commissioners or Ombudspersons than in other state institutions. Only a handful of member states have other state institutions and policies, programmes or services mandated to protect children acting as HRDs from harm.

All the member states reported providing human rights education at school and some of them stated that they cover several relevant topics such as the rights of children acting as HRDs and national protection mechanisms. Nevertheless, children taking part in the research either via the questionnaire or the online consultations expressed that there is still room for improvement in this field and they want to learn more about human rights and CHRDs at school.

Children shared several personal stories when they get into trouble or get intimidated because of their activities as CHRDs, and when they stand up for human rights. These stories are usually emblematic and reflect systemic challenges, such as the lack of access to justice for child victims of human rights violations. The majority of member states has explicit legal limits or barriers to children’s access to justice which include age-based limitations to participation and filing of legal cases, requirements for parents to endorse, support or even file children’s legal cases on behalf of the child. It exacerbates the situation that children seem to have limited knowledge concerning where to find accessible information about how to go to court or how to find a lawyer.

Generally, while member states allocate funding for the advancement of children’s rights, they neither clearly nor separately allocate funds for children acting as human rights defenders within their public budgets. Only few member states monitor the situation of CHRDs and have accountability mechanisms in place. None of the member states use specific indicators on CHRDs or specific guidelines for statistical institutes, neither collect disaggregated data in this field. Within the framework of their reporting obligations to the CRC Committee, some member states claimed to share information on the status of CHRDs, while only few shared that they actively support CHRDs to engage with international and regional monitoring mechanisms.

Both member states and children had a clear idea about what support they would need to improve the situation of CHRDs. Member states need technical assistance covering training and capacity building of professionals along with more financial support. Children claimed that, first and foremost, they would need their governments to change their approach towards them and start listening to their opinions, ideas and

proposals, among others, during the development of laws and policies. They further would like to learn more about CHRDs, in particular how to seek protection at school and how to access funding directly in order to take their own initiatives and implement their own projects.

Having particular regard to the lived experiences of CHRDs and based on the information provided by member states, the final recommendations of the study aim to support member states in discharging their obligations, under international and European legal instruments with support from the Council of Europe:

- ▶ Integration of a child rights approach into national legislation focusing on defenders of human rights and/or fundamental freedoms, including by removing undue restrictions to civil and political rights and by including a definition of CHRDs in line with the relevant international and European legal instruments.
- ▶ Mainstreaming of the rights of CHRDs in comprehensive child rights or thematic legislation and aligning them particularly with the provisions on the right to be heard and on the right to be protected from harm.
- ▶ Engagement of children into all national law and policy-making processes relevant to the rights of HRDs through inclusive, meaningful and child-friendly consultations.
- ▶ Establishment of national platforms that enable safe and inclusive child participation which function as a sounding board for national policies.
- ▶ Strengthening of existing protection mechanisms for human rights defenders to ensure CHRDs can access them through child-friendly information and procedures and be protected from all forms of harm, including reprisals for their actions as defenders.
- ▶ Enhancing the level of support that Children's Commissioners or Ombudspersons can provide to CHRDs, including through strengthened co-ordination with other protection mechanisms for HRDs and targeted outreach to CHRDs, especially those at greater risk.
- ▶ Improving access to justice for CHRDs victims of violations by raising their awareness on their rights as HRDs, enabling them to access effective child-friendly complaint mechanisms, and by providing free legal support and assistance.
- ▶ Ensuring that CHRDs' civil and political rights are protected in law and that any restrictions on the exercise of these rights by children are lawful, necessary, proportionate and non-discriminatory.
- ▶ Ensuring access to quality human rights education for children in schools, as per the Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2010\)7](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education and based on the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, and integration of a focus on the rights of CHRDs into the national curricula, including practical information on how children can exercise and claim their rights as HRDs.
- ▶ Increasing general awareness raising and capacity building for all adult stakeholders who are in contact with CHRDs and developing and promoting targeted trainings for parents/legal guardians, teachers and other key professionals that play a key role in the lives of children.
- ▶ Allocating the necessary resources into public budgets to advance all the rights of CHRDs, in consultation with children.
- ▶ Ensuring that children are able to access and take part in civil society organisations and that these organisations are not prohibited from seeking, receiving and utilising resources from domestic, foreign and international sources.
- ▶ Developing and systematically implementing a methodology for data collection and disaggregation specific to the rights of CHRDs, including through consultations and collaboration with CHRDs and civil society organisations supporting them. To the extent possible, in order to facilitate the detection of risks of discrimination and violence against CHRDs, data collection should be disaggregated by – inter alia – gender, sexual orientation and disability, with full respect to international data protection and privacy standards and national law.
- ▶ Advancing engagement with and reporting to national and international accountability mechanisms around the situation of CHRDs, including through facilitation of child-led reporting and engagement.
- ▶ Following up on the recommendations focusing on CHRDs by international and regional actors, including those made by the UN Human Rights Council, UN CRC Committee, the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, as well as the relevant bodies of the Council of Europe, including the Committee of Ministers and the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.

Annex 1

Overall timeline and milestones

End of December 2022	Child Rights Connect to submit a draft outline and methodology, including a draft questionnaire for States, to Council of Europe secretariat.
December-January 2023	Consultations with key experts on draft questionnaire for States (CRC Committee, SRSG VAC, etc.).
January-April 2023	Desktop research by Child Rights Connect and Council of Europe secretariat, including on relevant action undertaken by international or civil society organisations and other Council of Europe bodies; possible interviews with selected partners by the Council of Europe secretariat.
January-early February 2023	Focused discussions with the Children's Advisory Team of Child Rights Connect on the project and to inform the questionnaire for member states. Written feedback from Council of Europe Youth Advisory Council on the draft questionnaire.
Mid- February 2023	Finalisation and send-out of the questionnaire to member states with a deadline of response by end of March/early April 2023.
March-April 2023	Development of a child-friendly questionnaire with the Children's Advisory Team of Child Rights Connect.
Beginning of May 2023	Send-out of the child-friendly questionnaire with deadline for response by beginning of June 2023.
April-May 2023	Analysis of responses received from national delegations.
June 2023	Analysis of inputs received from children.
June-September 2023	Finalisation of the draft report by the consultant(s) in close collaboration with the Council of Europe secretariat.
September-October 2023	Consultation of Children's Advisory Team of Child Rights Connect on the draft report, in order to gather their feedback and proposals.
November 2023	Draft report to be presented to the CDENF at its 8 th plenary meeting; consideration of last comments/proposals coming from CDENF members for the final draft. Followed by publication process and next steps to be taken according to the recommendations made by the report (e.g., proposals for the development of European guidance or capacity-building action).
December 2023	Feedback to Children's Advisory Team of Child Rights Connect and discussion of next steps.

Annex 2

Online questionnaire for children

Before you start the questionnaire, we reply your questions first! Please know that we will close this questionnaire on the 9th of July 2023 and that you have time to complete it until then.

What is this questionnaire?

This questionnaire is part of a research project that the Council of Europe is doing in partnership with Child Rights Connect about children as defenders of human rights in Europe. They want to learn more about the situation and needs of child human rights defenders and what they can do to empower and support them.

What is the Council of Europe?

A European organisation of 46 countries, called member States, based in Strasbourg, France. It was set up to make sure that all these countries protect human rights, including children's rights, by supporting children and young people like you to develop their full potential, and by preventing any harm.

What is Child Rights Connect?

Child Rights Connect is a global network of over 100 international and national non-governmental organisations which works to make sure that all children can fully enjoy their rights as it is written in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Who are child human rights defenders?

They are children, meaning they are under the age of 18, who stand up to protect their own rights or the right of others (even of adults).

Why should I fill out the questionnaire?

This research project is about children, about you. This means that you have the right to share your opinion about it and we, adults, need to listen to you. It is important also because the governments already filled out their own questionnaire, so now it is your turn to share what you think about child human rights defenders.

Will anyone know that I filled out the questionnaire?

This questionnaire is anonymous which means that you don't need to give your name or contact information and nobody will know that you filled it or what you replied in the questionnaire.

Who can help me to fill out the questionnaire?

You can ask any adult you trust to help you to fill it out. You will also be accompanied by our little helpers who will also explain the difficult words and expressions next to each question.

Whom can I ask if I have a question?

You can send email to our Child Empowerment and Safeguarding Officer, Zsuzsanna Rutai.

Thank you for taking the time

Who is filling out this questionnaire?

We have few questions for you that can help us to understand better the replies.

*** 1. How old are you?**

Under 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17

*** 2. How do you identify?**

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

3. If you feel comfortable to tell us, are any of these sentences true about you?

- I am a child with a disability.
- I am member of a minority community where we share the same language, culture or religion.
- I don't live with my family but with foster parents or in a care institution.
- I live now in another country than where i was born or where my parents were born.
- I have to flee my country (with or without my family) because I felt unsafe there and now I have protection
- as a refugee or I asked for this protection and I am waiting for the decision in a European country.
- I am member of the LGBTI community.
- I am not studying at school anymore.

*** 4. In which country do you live?**

Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom

*** 5. Have you ever heard the expression “child human rights defenders” before?**

- Yes
- No

*** 6. Have you read the document “UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders”?**

- Yes
- No

*** 7. If yes, was it:**

- Official text in English or in other language
- Child-friendly version in English
- Child-friendly version in my native language or another language I understand
- I do not remember

8. Did you learn about children's rights at school?

- Yes
- No

9. Did you learn about any of these topics?

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders
- The right of children to express their views and be heard
- Children's rights to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of association
- Human rights under the Constitution of your country
- The rights and protection of child human rights defenders (who can help if their rights are violated)

10. You learned about the rights of child human rights defenders at... ?

- School
- Outside of school activities, for example taking part in a workshop or project of a civil society organisation
- From your family or community
- From other sources, like books, online courses or the internet
- Other
- I did not learn about this

*** 11. Do you feel like that children who stand up for human rights and share their views are heard in your country when a decision is made?**

- Yes, children are heard in my country.
- Yes, children are heard in my city.
- Yes, children are heard in my school.
- No.
- Not sure.

*** 12. Can child human rights defenders turn to the Children's Commissioner or Ombudsperson in your country if they need protection?**

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

13. Tell us if any of the following is true for the Children's Commissioner or Ombudsperson in your country!

- They have a child-friendly website and they post information accessible and understandable for children.
- They inform children about their work regularly, for example they publish their yearly report or their news
- in a child-friendly way.
- Children can easily contact them and send a complaint if they need protection or support.
- Children receive replies to their complaints.
- Children engage directly with the Children's Commissioner or Ombudsperson and participate in their

- activities such child advisors or ambassadors.
- They organise regular activities and programmes for children.

14. Did you ever ask protection from the Children’s Commissioner, the Ombudsperson when you were acting as a child human rights defender and you were afraid of harm or you suffered harm?

- Yes
- No

15. If yes and you feel comfortable to talk about it, please tell us what happened and how it went.

*** 16. Is there information available for children about how to go to court or on how to find a lawyer?**

- Yes, for example from the court, from the organisation of lawyers or civil society organisations
- No
- Not sure

*** 17. Do you know what to do if a child human rights defender gets into trouble or feels intimidated because of their activities to stand up for human rights?**

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

18. If yes, what can child human rights defenders do when they get into trouble or feel intimidated because of their activities to stand up for human rights?

- There is someone at the school whom they can turn to.
- There is someone at the child care home whom they can turn to.
- There is a civil society organisation whom they can turn to.
- They can report to the police or go to court.
- Something else.

19. If something else, tell us more!

20. Have you ever been in trouble or get intimidated while you were standing up for human rights?

- Yes
- No

21. If yes, what happened?

- In my school a teacher or the principal said negative things to me or treated me badly (e.g. gave me a worse grade than I deserved).
- My family or friends said negative things to me or treated me badly.
- Officials working at my city said negative things to me or treated me badly.
- Officials working in a ministry or other government office said negative things to me or treated me badly.

- Strangers said negative things to me or treated me badly (online or in person).
- Other

22. If you feel comfortable, could you tell us what happened?

*** 23. Do you know if the government in your country gives money for child human rights defenders for their activities?**

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

24. If yes, what do you know about these activities?

*** 25. Do you think children in your country need more support from government to feel empowered and act as human rights defenders?**

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

26. If yes, what would be useful?

27. Is there anything else you would like to share with us about child human rights defenders in your country?

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