

GUIDE TO THE UNITED NATIONS

What is it?

The **United Nations** (UN) helps solve problems that challenge humanity. It is a massive web of organisations, bodies, courts and treaties that was formed in 1945 with the aim of preserving peace through international cooperation and collective security.

It is not a world government and does not make laws like national governments do. But it does provide the means to help resolve international conflicts and formulate policies on matters affecting all of us, including our human rights. If the UN has said something on how a country should ensure a particular children's right, for instance, this is terrific advocacy leverage to get that right respected at a national level.

Today, nearly every country on the planet is a UN Member State with there being 193 members. When States become members, they agree to accept the obligations of the UN Charter, which is an international treaty setting out the basic principles of international relations.

According to the Charter, the UN has four purposes (one of which you will notice concerns human rights):

- to maintain international peace and security;
- to develop friendly relations among nations;
- to cooperate in solving international problems and in promoting respect for human rights;
- and to be a centre for harmonising the actions of nations.

In terms of structure, the UN has six main organs. Five of them - the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council (which became obsolete after the end of the decolonisation process, which it oversaw) and the Secretariat - are all based on UN Headquarters in New York. The sixth, the International Court of Justice, is located at The Hague in the Netherlands.

There are then more than 30 affiliated organisations known together as the "UN system" which relate to, or are managed by, the six main organs mentioned above. For example, the Human Rights Council is a subsidiary body of the General Assembly.

What does it do?

The UN's main human rights work can mostly be broken down into two main areas - standard setting and enforcement. Below is a short summary of some of the work the UN does on human rights. You can find out more about what some specific bodies do by reading their dedicated pages.

Human rights standard setting

Through the UN, national governments have agreed principles to make the world a safer and healthier place for people to live with dignity, respect and equality. These principles are enshrined in many international treaties, which are agreements that States sign up to that have produced a large body of **international law**, including human rights law.

The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, proclaimed by the General Assembly in 1948, sets out basic rights and freedoms which all humans, therefore including children, are entitled to. Among them are the right to life, liberty and nationality; to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; the right to work and to be educated; the right to food and housing; and the right to take part in government; and many others. These rights are then made legally binding under international law by virtue of two international covenants, to which most States are parties. One deals with civil and political rights (the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**, often shortened to the ICCPR), and the other is on economic, social and cultural rights such as the right to health, right to housing among others. This second treaty is called the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** (ICESCR).

With the Declaration, these two covenants are often referred to as the International Bill of Rights, and have laid the groundwork for some 80 other covenants and declarations, which include some specific rights for children (mainly under the Convention on the Rights of the Child).

Enforcing human rights

With its standards-setting work nearly complete, the UN is shifting the emphasis towards ensuring people can actually enjoy their human rights. Many different arms of the UN enforce human rights, and below is a brief overview of the main ones.

The **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights** (OHCHR) has oversight of all the UN's human rights work. In particular, it coordinates and facilitates the work of other UN bodies enforcing human rights (eg the Human Rights Council, the Committee on the Rights of the Child), works with governments to improve their observance of human rights and seeks to prevent human rights violations.

The **UN Human Rights Council** (often referred to as the HRC, or the Council) is an intergovernmental body based in Geneva whose function is to monitor States' compliance with human rights law and protect fundamental rights and freedoms around the world. It holds public meetings (three regular sessions a year, as well as the ability to hold Special Sessions to tackle an urgent human rights crises) to review the human rights performance of States, adopt new standards and promote human rights. It also appoints independent experts to report on specific human rights abuses or to examine the human rights situation in specific countries. Read more about the HRC and suggested children's rights advocacy ideas on our dedicated page.

There are a number of ways that the HRC enforces human rights, including:

- Special procedures, which monitor, advise, and publicly report on human rights situations in specific countries or territories (called "country mandates", eg the Independent expert on the situation of human rights in Burundi), or on major issues (called "thematic mandates", eg Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children). Go to our dedicated special procedure page for more.
- Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which is a mechanism where the Human Rights Council examines the human rights situations in every UN Member State. Each State is examined once every four and half years, and importantly the Council considers reports from NGOs here. Go to our dedicated UPR page for more, including some suggested advocacy ideas.
- Regular Sessions are held three times a year for a total of 10 weeks in March (four weeks), June (three weeks) and September (three weeks). Importantly the Annual Day on the Rights of the Child - the one day a year where children's rights dominate the Council's agenda - is held during the March session. CRIN reports live from Geneva on the Annual Day on the Rights of the Child - just follow the links from UN latest news for recent coverage.

Treaty bodies, as their name suggests, are set up under individual treaties. They are committees of independent experts responsible for monitoring how States implement a treaty. There are currently nine human rights treaty bodies that monitor the implementation of the core international human rights treaties. Because children have human rights too, all these treaty bodies help enforce human rights for children. There is then the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which is the treaty body that enforces and monitors the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Go to our treaty bodies for more. We also have a dedicated page for the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The **General Assembly** (GA) is one of the six principal organs of the UN and is based in New York. It has been called the closest thing to a world parliament. Comprising of all 193 UN Member States, it provides a forum for discussion for countries around the world on a range of issues, including human rights. All Members States get one equal vote when it comes to General Assembly decisions (called "Resolutions"). Read more about the General Assembly on our dedicated page.

The **Security Council** (SC) has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. So it's not surprising that the bulk of the Security Council's work on children's rights focuses on children in armed conflict. It has powers to investigate any dispute or situation that could lead to conflict, and it is authorised to decide on economic sanctions or military action against States for breaches of the peace. More information on the Security Council can be found on our dedicated page.

Massive violations of humanitarian law in armed conflicts have caused the Security Council to set up international tribunals to try persons accused of war crimes. The first was the **International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia** in 1993, followed quickly by a second international tribunal set up in 1994 to hear cases involving accusations of genocide in Rwanda.

The **International Criminal Court** (ICC) is a permanent tribunal set up to prosecute individuals for the most heinous violations of human rights – genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Post 2017 it will also have jurisdiction over the crime of aggression, a war crime which covers acts that are so grave that they manifestly violate the UN Charter. The Court was established in July 2002 under the **Rome Statute**, and only has jurisdiction to prosecute for crimes committed since then. The Court officially sits in the The Hague.

Only 122 out of the 193 UN Member States recognise the Court's jurisdiction, and there is controversy surrounding what some States see as impinging on their sovereignty to protect their citizens from allegations. In particular, the United States is concerned as its international policies are commonly disliked, meaning it's worried its citizens around the world may be arrested and tried out of spite.

Other UN organisations working on children's rights

All human rights are interlinked, including children's rights. So like treaty bodies, there are a number of UN organisations dealing with specific issues that have an impact on children's rights. It's important that we keep these in mind so we look at human rights as they affect the whole child. The main ones are:

The **United Nations Children's Fund** (UNICEF) is explicitly concerned with promoting and protecting the rights of the child, and is the lead UN organisation working for the long-term survival, protection and development of children. It has programmes in over 150 countries that focus on immunisation, primary health care, nutrition and basic education.

The **World Health Organisation** (WHO) is concerned with the attainment of all people of the highest possible level of health (physical, mental and social well being), including implementing children's right to health.

The **International Labor Organisation** (ILO) seeks the promotion of social justice and internationally recognised human and labour rights. It sets labour standards and the rights of workers via conventions and recommendations, including **ILO Convention No.182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour** and **ILO Convention No.138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and Work**.

Then there is also: The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), The Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

Other areas of UN work with a human rights focus

Peacekeeping - This is where UN forces intervene to help stop a conflict escalating with the aim of resolving it. A number of UN peacekeeping operations have a human rights component since armed conflicts are often where gross violations of human rights occur. More specifically, peacekeeping missions help strengthen national capacities in human rights law, administration and education; investigate reported

human rights violations; and assist governments in taking corrective measures when needed.

Development - Promoting respect for human rights is becoming increasingly central to UN development assistance. In particular, the right to development is seen as part of a holistic process to improve the wellbeing of all individuals which integrates all rights (civil, cultural, economic, political and social).

SECURITY COUNCIL

What is it?

The main role of the [United Nations Security Council](#) (UNSC) is to help maintain international peace and security. This means the main issue it discusses when it comes to children's rights is the recruitment of children in armed conflict.

It has [five permanent members](#): China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States. It then has [10 non-permanent members](#) elected by the [General Assembly](#) for a term of two years.

Each Security Council member has one vote. Decisions on procedural matters are made by an affirmative vote by at least nine out of the 15 members. Decisions on substantive matters also require nine votes, but must have the agreement of all five permanent members. This is often referred to as the "veto power" as it only takes one of the five permanent members to disagree for a decision to fail. The veto rule has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years, and you can read more about the negotiations to [reform the Security Council](#).

When the Council receives a complaint, first of all it will usually recommend that the parties try to settle the dispute peacefully. In some cases, the Security Council will investigate the situation and then mediate between the parties. It may also appoint "Special Representatives" to address the situation, or request that the Secretary-General does.

See the full list of the [Security Council resolutions](#).

What does the Security Council do on child rights?

Although there are some internal challenges which at times limit the Security Council, recently it has strengthened its focus on children and armed conflict and has passed a number of specific resolutions. Specifically, the Security Council passed [Resolution 1612](#) in 2005, which led to the creation of the [Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict](#), as well as a monitoring and reporting mechanism on six grave violations of children's rights:

- Killing or maiming children
- Recruiting or using child soldiers
- Attacks against schools or hospitals
- Rape and other grave sexual violence against children
- Abduction of children
- Denial of humanitarian access for children
- The Working Group works with the Security Council to:
 - review the reports of the Council's monitoring and reporting mechanism, which was set up by resolution 1612 (2005) to systematically report on and document the six grave violations stated above.
 - look at progress made in developing and implementing action plans by groups named in the Secretary-General's list (see below on Annex 1 and Annex 2) to stop recruitment and use of children in armed conflict
 - make recommendations on measures to promote the protection of children affected by armed conflict
 - consider country reports

View the [Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict reports](#).

'Name and shame'

This is how the UN often tries to enforce human rights. It is non-invasive (unlike sanctions or peacekeeping) and makes it known around the world that a particular State has violated human rights. 'Annex I' and 'Annex II' are the Security Council's 'naming and shaming' list of States which have violated human rights standards on children and armed conflict. The list is updated each year and included in the UN Secretary General's report.

Annex I lists the worst offenders when it comes to children and armed conflict which are on the Security Council's agenda (ie States it is watching closely). Annex II lists the States, although not on the Security Council's agenda, where there are concerns about children in armed conflict.

The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Ms. Graça Machel, an independent expert appointed by the UN Secretary-General, submitted her report to the General Assembly called "[Impact of Armed Conflict on Children](#)" in 1996. This report led to the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 51/77 on 12 December 1996, establishing the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for a period of three years. The General Assembly has since extended this mandate four times and most recently by its resolution [A/RES/63/241](#) on 24 December 2008. Visit the [website](#) of the SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict for more.

Note there is also an SRSG for Violence against Children, which you can find out more about [here](#).

Further information:

- SRSG for children and armed conflict [website](#)
- [CRIN's information page on children and armed conflict](#)
- [Read / subscribe](#) to CRIN's Children and Armed Conflict CRINMAIL

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

What is it?

The **General Assembly** (GA) is one of the six principal organs of the UN and has been called the closest thing to a world parliament. Comprising all 193 UN Member States, it provides a forum for discussion for countries around the world on a range of issues, including human rights. It is based in New York.

All Member States get one equal vote when it comes to General Assembly decisions, called "Resolutions". Resolutions on the most important issues (peace and security; elections of members to other UN organs; admission, suspension and expulsion of UN Members; and budgets) are decided by two-thirds majority of those present and voting. All other questions are decided by majority vote.

Although these resolutions are not legally enforceable (except the General Assembly's decision on the UN's budget), they are a strong statement of what the international community thinks about a particular issue.

You can find the full text of General Assembly resolutions via [UNBISnet](#), the [Official Document System of the United Nations \(ODS\)](#) and on the [General Assembly website](#).

The General Assembly meets in regular, special (eg [Special Session on children](#)) and emergency special sessions. The regular session commences in September and finishes in December. It reconvenes if required the following year.

What does it do?

The General Assembly's functions and powers are set out in the UN Charter. The main functions are:

- To consider and make recommendations on maintaining international peace and security;
 - To discuss any question relating to international peace and security, except where a dispute or situation is currently being discussed by the [Security Council](#), and make recommendations on it;
 - To discuss, with the same exception, and make recommendations on any questions within the scope of the UN Charter or affecting the powers and functions of any organ of the UN;
 - To initiate studies and make recommendations to promote international political cooperation, the development of international law, the realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms and international collaboration in the economic, social, humanitarian, cultural, educational and health fields;
 - To make recommendations for the peaceful settlement of any situation that might impair friendly relations among nations;
 - To receive and consider reports from the Security Council and other UN organs;
 - To consider and approve the UN budget and establish the financial assessments of Member States; and
 - To elect the non-permanent members of the Security Council and the members of other UN councils and organs and, on the recommendation of the Security Council, to appoint the Secretary-General.
- Further Information:
- [Information about the General Assembly](#) - main committee details, agendas, voting information.
 - Read about the [programme of the GA](#), the [agenda](#) and the [rules of procedure](#).
 - [UN Web TV](#) - for webcasts of GA meetings.

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

What is it?

The **Human Rights Council** (HRC or Council) is the main human rights arm of the UN. Based in Geneva, its role is to monitor and protect fundamental human rights and freedoms around the world.

It holds public meetings to review the human rights performances of States, adopt new standards and promote human rights. These meetings include its three regular sessions each year (usually held in March, June and September), as well as the special sessions held when an issue needs urgent attention.

The Council is a subsidiary of the **General Assembly** and was created in 2006 to replace the Commission on Human Rights.

It has 47 members, which come out of the 193 Members States to the UN. Each State is elected by an absolute majority (so 50 per cent plus one) of the General Assembly, and are selected on the basis of their commitment to human rights. Each term lasts for three years and no State can be a member for more than two terms. As a form of diplomatic pressure and example of 'naming and shaming', the General Assembly (by a two-thirds majority vote) can suspend a membership to the Council for gross and systematic human rights violations (for instance, the General Assembly **suspended Libya from the Council in 2011**).

It's important to remember that States have to campaign to get onto the Human Rights Council. If your country is on the Council, or wants to be, you can use it to put extra pressure on them to respect human rights. Additionally, if you feel a current member of the Council does not deserve to be there because of its human rights violations, you can try to lobby the Council. See the **International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)** for more information.

What does it do?

The Council holds three sessions per year, with one in March (four weeks), June (three weeks) and September (three weeks). It also has the ability to hold special sessions (for example, to tackle a specific human rights crisis) upon request of a Council member with support of one-third of the Council.

Importantly, the Council holds the **Annual Day on the Rights of the Child** during its March session each year. This is the only day where children's rights feature exclusively on the Council's agenda, but of course since all human rights apply equally to children, the Council can still discuss children's rights throughout the year.

The Council also houses all the UN's **special procedures** and the **Universal Periodic Review**.

Children's rights advocacy at the HRC

Since the HRC is the UN's main human rights monitoring body, it is imperative that children's rights feature in its work. CRIN co-ordinates a group of NGOs who's aim is to get children's rights "mainstreamed" across the UN (i.e. systematically considered across all its work), and the HRC is a key target.

ADVOCACY AT THE HRC

As the UN's main human rights body, the [Human Rights Council](#) (HRC) is a key advocacy target when it comes to children's rights at the UN. Here are some ideas for how children's rights advocates can use the HRC to promote and protect children's rights. If you have any further ideas that would like to share with the children's rights community, please [email us](#).

Using the HRC to promote and protect children's rights

You have three main options when deciding what is best for your children's rights advocacy campaign.

Regular Sessions

- **Cover and comment on what's going on:** You can attend annual meetings, including the plenary where thematic issues are discussed, States make statements or ask questions, special procedures present their annual reports, and States and NGOs organise side events. If you are able to attend it's a great way to follow discussions, and lobby and meet new people to help with your advocacy work.

You must obtain prior accreditation to attend a session, and you can find out deadlines and the forms you need to fill in and submit on the [HRC sessions page](#).

It can be very difficult for some advocates to make it to Geneva and attend a HRC session in person. We cover all HRC sessions through our [CRIN library](#), and we also have a [Child Rights at the UN CRINmail](#) which you can subscribe to for free to keep you up to date on what's going on at the UN (including the HRC) and upcoming events and deadlines.

- **Make oral or written statements related to issues discussed:** You must have [ECOSOC](#) status to do to this. Reporting deadlines are listed on each [HRC sessions page](#).
- **Organise side events on a topic relevant to a HRC session:** Again, deadlines for applying for side events are listed on the [HRC sessions page](#), and you must have ECOSCO status.

Engaging with special procedures

These are independent experts (or groups of experts) who investigate and report to the HRC on specific country or thematic mandates. Find out more on [special procedures](#), including a list of all [current mandates](#). Below is a quick summary of advocacy ideas:

- Report an urgent matter to a specific special procedure and encourage the mandate holder to investigate. Access the list of [contact details for mandates](#).
- Find out when [special procedures might be visiting your country](#) and see if you can get a meeting with them as part of their visit.
- Special procedures sometimes put out a call for information, and NGOs can contribute to these consultations. See the full [list of current open consultations](#).

Engaging with the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

This is where the Council, the 47 elected Member States, examines the human rights situation in every Member State of the UN every four and half years. See background information on the [Universal Periodic Review](#) and [advocacy ideas for the UPR](#).

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

What is it?

The **Committee on the Rights of the Child** (CRC) is the UN body responsible for ensuring children can enjoy their human rights and live with dignity, respect and equality.

It is a body of independent experts who monitor the implementation of the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** (the Committee is established under articles 43,44 and 45) and its Optional Protocols - children in armed conflict; the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; establishing an international complaints procedure for violations of children's rights.

Other treaties have similar monitoring bodies– for example the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was set up to enforce and monitor the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Human Rights Committee does the same for the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). See more on these **other treaty bodies**.

What does it do?

The Committee works on a number of different areas. These include:

Examine the children's rights situation in countries

The Committee meets in Geneva and normally holds three sessions per year, for a period of three weeks in January, May-June and September. At each session, the Committee examines reports from approximately 10 State Parties, discusses issues in plenary with government delegations and issues concluding observations on how well each State under review adheres to the rights in the Convention.

All State parties that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child have to submit regular reports to the Committee on how children's rights are being implemented in their country. States must report initially two years after they become party to the Convention and then every five years after that. The Committee examines each report and addresses its concerns and recommendations to the State Party through "concluding observations".

The **Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights** (OHCHR), in cooperation with NGOs and host governments, occasionally organises regional and sub-regional workshops to follow up on implementation of the Committee's and other treaty bodies' concluding observations. CRC workshops have been held in Damascus (Syria), Bangkok (Thailand), Doha (Qatar), Buenos Aires (Argentina), Suva (Fiji) and San José (Costa Rica), and recommendations have been issued to the regions concerned.

The Committee also examines those reports from States who have ratified the Optional Protocols to the Convention on sale of children, children prostitution and child pornography; and children in armed conflict. (NB: There is also an Optional Protocol establishing a complaints mechanism.)

At its first session, in October 1991, the Committee adopted guidelines for State parties when they write initial reports.

As part of the Committee's review of a State, NGOs can submit alternative reports to give the Committee a different perspective and information on what's happening on the ground. This is a great way for advocates to get children's rights issues under the UN spotlight and put pressure on governments. All Alternative Reports are made available on the **CRIN library**.

Child Rights Connect gives advice and assistance to NGOs wanting to submit an alternative report.

How do the CRC reviews work?

A working group of the Committee meets prior to each Committee session for a preliminary examination of reports received from States Parties, and to prepare the Committee's discussions with the representatives of reporting States. They meet with UN agencies and bodies, as well as some NGOs and National Human Rights Institutions who have submitted information.

The end result of this pre-session is a "list of issues" that the CRC will examine the State on during its review. The list of issues is intended to give the government a preliminary indication of the issues which the Committee considers to be priorities for discussion. It also gives the Committee the opportunity to request additional or updated information in writing from the government prior to the session. This approach gives governments the opportunity better to prepare themselves for the discussion with the Committee, which usually takes place between three and four months after the working group. For more information read the Committee's [Rules of Procedure](#).

Complaints mechanism

As noted above, the Committee will soon be able to hear complaints about violations of children's rights submitted under the newest Optional Protocol to the Convention. CRIN has produced a [guide to the CRC complaints mechanism](#) for children's rights advocates, on how to best make use of this mechanism, as well as a comparison of how it compares to similar mechanisms under other human rights treaties.

General Comments

The Committee occasionally publishes its interpretation of provisions of the Convention in the form of [General Comments](#), sometimes following a Day of General Discussion debate. These are important as they are the Committee's latest thinking on a particular right, and allow the Convention on the Rights of the Child to evolve.

Days of General Discussion

Once a year, at its September session, the Committee holds a [Day of General Discussion](#) (DGD) on a provision of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in order to issue more detailed recommendations to governments. Each year, children, NGOs and experts are invited to submit documents to inform the Committee's one-day debate with stakeholders (UN agencies, Committee Members, NGOs, academics, lawyers, children, etc). All submitted documents are posted on the [CRIN library](#).

Report to the UN General Assembly

Once a year, the Committee submits a report to the [Third Committee of the UN General Assembly](#), which also hears a statement from the CRC Chair. The General Assembly then adopts a resolution on the rights of the child. You can find all the resolutions in [CRIN library](#).

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

What is it?

The **Universal Periodic Review** (UPR) is the term given to the **Human Rights Council**'s main way of enforcing human rights. The UPR is where the Council (the 47 elected Member States) examines the human rights situation in every Member State of the UN, every four and half years. It's like a 'peer review' for State's adherence to human rights.

A State's review is based on:

- information provided by the State, either orally or in writing (written forms cannot be longer than 20 pages).
- relevant information from other treaty bodies and special procedures (which can include the **Committee on the Rights of the Child** and special procedures such as the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children). This is compiled by the **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights** (OHCHR) and is no longer than 10 pages.
- information provided by civil society (eg NGOs, both international and local, and individuals). These are called 'alternative reports' and must also be no longer than five pages. This is a terrific way for civil society to get its messages about the human rights situation in a country on the international stage. Get information and advice on **what to put in an alternative report and how to submit one**.

During each State's UPR review, the Council takes three hours to consider each State's human rights situation based on the evidence before it, and then half an hour to adopt a report in plenary which includes conclusions, recommendations and voluntary commitments or pledges made by States.

NGOs can attend the plenary, but it is unlikely that they will be able to participate in the dialogue as there is a limited number of speaking slots for NGOs, and only those with **ECOSOC** status can make an oral statement.

Importantly, the UPR reports have two sets of recommendations - one based on the State's evidence, so something they will agree with, making it easier to ensure it happens; and another that is based on other evidence. The second part is often where the real issues are - and the diplomatic tensions.

Sign up to the **Children's Rights at the UN CRINmail** to receive monthly UPR reporting deadlines and other UN news, and find out more on what's happenings at the UN via our **advocacy calendar**.

ADVOCACY AT THE UPR

CRIN's research has found that children's rights are often neglected by the [Universal Periodic Review](#). This needs to change. The UPR is one of the best tools the UN has to promote and protect human rights, and children's rights must no longer be ignored.

Below you will find ideas on how to use the UPR both at the international and national level. Some NGOs are suited to lobbying on the international stage, whereas others are most effective in national contexts. Both are vital - one gets the issue attention and helps establish international norms; the other works towards making human rights a reality.

International advocacy: Engaging with the UPR

To ensure children's rights are central to the work of the [Human Rights Council](#), NGOs can use the UPR by getting involved at the review stage - this is where the Council gathers evidence before delivering a report on the human rights situation in a country. In particular, NGOs can try influencing the official State report, or submit their own - called an alternative report.

Influence the official State report

Human Rights Council Resolution 5/1 encourages States to prepare the information they provide to the UPR through a broad national consultation process with all relevant stakeholders. This means that governments should, at the very least, look at evidence NGOs provide them.

Submit alternative reports

The States provide their official reports. But is this really happening? Local NGOs can be the best source of this information, particularly when it comes to underreported issues like children's rights.

Submitting your own report for your country's UPR is a great way of getting children's rights and your message on the international agenda. The [OHCHR](#) has indicated that it really values the information provided by NGOs and that it can really help shape or even lead what issues the HRC considers in a State's UPR.

Importantly, NGOs don't have to be [ECOSOC](#) accredited to submit alternative reports, but the OHCHR would prefer them to be submitted along with alternative reports from ECOSOC accredited NGOs.

It is vital that you clearly identify the main issues you want the Human Rights Council to raise with the State during the UPR. This is because the OHCHR compiles all the information they receive from NGOs, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and other stakeholders into one 10-page summary. You can keep your message short and simple by either preparing short submissions specifically for the UPR, or if you want to send more detailed information that you think is really important (like original reports and research), you can provide short summaries of this information and then attach the original reports in an annex.

How to submit an alternative report

The OHCHR has produced [detailed and technical guidelines for submitting alternative reports](#), along with the latest deadlines for different States and a portal for submitting a report online (which has been compulsory since March 2013).

In summary, the OHCHR suggests:

- **Page limit:** NGOs are strongly encouraged to limit their submissions to five pages. More detailed and factual reports can be attached for reference. The OHCHR has emphasised that the five page document is extremely important and should clearly lay out all the issues you want to raise. Longer documents can be attached as annexes, but they are not as important.

- **Focus:** The document should highlight the main issue(s) of concern and suggest priorities for the Human Rights Council to discuss in the UPR. Facts and details in support, as well as suggested recommendations to be made to the State, can be annexed.
- **Time period:** The information provided should only cover the previous four and half years (as in, the UPR period).
- **Deadline:** These vary depending on when the State is being reviewed. CRIN's latest news and the [Children's Rights at the UN CRINmail](#) regularly give deadline information. The OHCHR's website also lists upcoming deadlines for different States.
- **Language:** The submissions must be written in a UN language (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian or Spanish), but ideally in English, French or Spanish.

Using the UPR to advocate for children's rights at a national level

Just because the Human Rights Council has said that a State must stop violating children's rights doesn't mean that it will automatically happen. And the UN follow up process can be slow and inadequate. So it is crucial that NGOs continue to put pressure on States to respect children's rights - it is often their role to keep it on the national agenda.

NGOs can be directly involved, and even drive the UPR follow up at national level. They can help the government address the recommendations, ensure children's rights are integral to the national agenda, and collaborate on the ground with national human rights groups, politicians, academics, the media and children themselves.

Advocacy ideas include:

- Distribute the UPR report nationally to bring attention to children's rights issues. You can send it to politicians, journalists, other human rights NGOs as well as anyone who works with children (eg teachers/schools, social workers, lawyers, judges, parents/guardian groups). To help draw attention to a particular issue, you should write a short summary or press release.
- Draw up an action plan or strategy that will help get the UPR's recommendations implemented, and send it to your government. If possible, try to set up follow up meetings with relevant officials. You can view mid-term progress reports on UPR recommendations submitted by States and NGOs to the UN.
- Monitor a State's progress since the UPR and how well they are implementing the recommendations can be a great way to identify shortcomings as well as advocacy success stories. You should welcome positive moves in children's rights by your government, both personally and in public with press releases and statements on your website. And you can then use this opportunity to remind them of ways they can still improve.

This is of course not an exhaustive list, and we encourage people to contact us with further ideas so we can help inspire others around the world to creatively and effectively campaign for children's rights, so please [email us](#).

SPECIAL PROCEDURES

What are they?

Special procedures are used by the **Human Rights Council** to find out about human rights situations for a given issue or in a particular country. It is the name given to the Council's mechanism for investigating and enforcing human rights.

Usually they are individual people, or groups of people - called 'Working Groups' - who are experts in a particular field. There are a few terms given to individuals acting as special procedures - Special Rapporteur and Independent Expert are common. It's important to note that special procedures are not paid positions and are not full time.

Special procedures are currently appointed on an ad hoc basis when the need arises by a Human Rights Council resolution.

What do they do?

The specific tasks given to special procedures may vary, but in a nutshell their role is to examine, monitor, advise and publicly report on human rights situations in specific countries/territories (called 'country mandates' - eg Independent expert on the situation of human rights in Burundi) or on major themes (called 'thematic mandates' - eg **Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children**). See the **full list of all the country mandates** and the **special procedure thematic mandates**.

Children have all human rights. Not because they are "the future" or the "adults of tomorrow", but because they are human beings today. This means that all special procedures relate to children. However, some have a specific children's rights mandate:

- **Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography**
- **Special Rapporteur on the right to education**
- **Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children**

The actual work special procedures do varies as well. They could conduct studies, do country visits, provide advice on technical legal or policy matters, reply to individual human rights violations complaints - all with the broad aim of promoting human rights in their special area. In particular:

- If special procedures find specific allegations of human rights violations, they can send urgent appeals or letters of allegation to governments asking for more information.
- They visit countries they are investigating (see the **list of upcoming visits**). But they can only do this if the country has given permission. Some countries have issued open invitations to special procedures, called a "standing invitation", which means they will always welcome special procedures. See the full **list of the countries extending a standing visit**. After their visits they write a report about what they witnessed and make recommendations.
- Every year all special procedures must present a report to the **Human Rights Council** about their activities, and sometimes they may report directly to the **General Assembly**.

The **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights** (OHCHR) has produced **official communications guidelines** for how people and organisations, including NGOs, can engage with special procedures. If you would like further information on how to use special procedures to promote and protect children's rights, please **email us**.

TREATY BODIES

What are they?

Treaty bodies, as their name suggests, are set up under individual treaties. This makes them different from other UN bodies (called 'charter bodies') that are established under the UN Charter (eg, the Human Rights Council, General Assembly and Security Council).

Treaty bodies are committees of independent experts responsible for monitoring how 'State parties' (ie those States that have signed and ratified the relevant treaty, or are 'a party to') implement the treaty. When a State ratifies a treaty, it assumes a legal obligation to incorporate it, including the bits about human rights, into its national law.

As there are nine human rights treaties, there are nine treaty bodies, one of which is the **UN Committee on the Rights of the Child**. Since children have all human rights, all other treaties and their respective bodies apply equally to children, and some have specific articles that relate to children. The treaty bodies include:

- The Human Rights Committee monitors implementation of the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**.
- The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) monitors the implementation of the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**.
- The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) monitors the implementation of the **Convention on Rights of the Child** and its Optional Protocols (one on children in armed conflict; one on the sale of children and child pornography; and one setting up a complaints mechanism).
- The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) monitors the implementation of the **International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination**.
- The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) monitors the implementation of the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**.
- The Committee Against Torture (CAT) monitors the implementation of the **Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment** and its **Optional Protocol** focusing on persons deprived of their liberty.
- The Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW) monitors the implementation of the **International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families**.
- The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) monitors the implementation of the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**.
- The Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) monitors the implementation of the **International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance**.

What do they do?

Their job is enforce a human rights treaty and monitor its implementation by States. This means they have a huge role to play when it comes to how effective the UN is at promoting and protecting human rights.

There are a number of ways treaty bodies promote and protect human rights, and the main ones are described below.

Examine State parties adherence to the treaty

When each treaty body is in session (you can find out when these are in our **events calendar**) they review a number of States for observance of the treaty and how it has been implemented into national law.

State parties are required to submit periodic reports that treaty bodies make concluding observations on, which include comments on how well the treaty has been implemented (or not) as well as recommendations for the State to improve implementation.

This is a good opportunity for NGOs because they can submit alternative reports to what the State has produced. In collaboration with [Child Rights Connect](#), CRIN posts all NGO submissions to the Committee on Rights of the Child in the [library section](#) of our website. Child Rights Connect gives advice and helps NGOs get involved with the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and submit these alternative reports.

General comments

These are important because they clarify or give concrete details of what an issue or article in a treaty means and how it should be applied. It is the responsibility of each Committee to write these, but at times, Committees may call upon the expertise of civil society, academics, or others to help in drafting general comments. There is no formal process for this as it is done on an ad hoc basis. Opportunities to participate and deadlines tend to be publicly advertised and we will announce these where relevant on our [library section](#) of our website, or you can [subscribe to our CRINmail](#) to be kept up to date.

Days of General Discussion

These are thematic discussions where the treaty body examines a particular human rights issue. The body then usually issues recommendations or conclusions. NGOs can play an important role here as they are often invited to make written contributions in advance of a meeting, and take part in the meeting itself. In partnership with Child Rights Connect, we post all NGO submissions to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in the [library section](#) of our website.

Individual complaints/communications

Treaty bodies can help stop human rights violations and give redress. All the above treaty bodies have the ability to hear individual complaints, the Committee on the Rights of the Child will soon have one. CRIN has developed the [CRC complaints mechanism toolkit](#) for children's rights campaigners on how to take a case to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and have done an analysis of existing complaints mechanisms under other treaties and how they can be used to enforce children's rights.