

YOUTH RIGHTS ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

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

Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Why a Youth Rights Advocacy Toolkit?](#)

[Who is the toolkit for?](#)

[How was the toolkit developed?](#)

[How is the toolkit structured?](#)

[How should I use the toolkit?](#)

[Getting started: some basic definitions](#)

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

[A.1 What are human rights?](#)

[A.2 Where do human rights come from?](#)

[A.3 What is youth?](#)

[A.4 What are youth rights?](#)

[A.5 What rights do young people have?](#)

[A.5.1 Rights in focus: Right to education](#)

[A.5.2 Rights in focus: Right to decent work](#)

[A.5.2.3 What is entrepreneurship?](#)

[A.5.3 Right to participate in public affairs](#)

[A.5.4 Right to freedom of thought, conscience or religion](#)

[A.5.5 Right to freedom of opinion or expression](#)

[A.5.6 Rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association](#)

[A.5.7 Right to social security](#)

[A.5.8 Right to health](#)

[A.5.9 Right to adequate housing](#)

[A.5.10 Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment](#)

[A.5.11 Human rights in the digital space and right to privacy](#)

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

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

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

[Bibliography and further reading](#)

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

Introduction

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

Why a Youth Rights Advocacy Toolkit?

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

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

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

Who is the toolkit for?

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

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

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

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

How was the toolkit developed?

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

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

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

How is the toolkit structured?

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

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

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

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

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

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

How should I use the toolkit?

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

HOW TO USE THE YOUTH RIGHTS ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

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

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

Getting started: some basic definitions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[A.1 What are human rights?](#)

[A.2 Where do human rights come from?](#)

[A.3 What is youth?](#)

[A.4 What are youth rights?](#)

[A.5 What rights do young people have?](#)

[A.5.1 Rights in focus: Right to education](#)

[A.5.2 Rights in focus: Right to decent work](#)

[A.5.2.3 What is entrepreneurship?](#)

[A.5.3 Right to participate in public affairs](#)

[A.5.4 Right to freedom of thought, conscience or religion](#)

[A.5.5 Right to freedom of opinion or expression](#)

[A.5.6 Rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association](#)

[A.5.7 Right to social security](#)

[A.5.8 Right to health](#)

[A.5.9 Right to adequate housing](#)

[A.5.10 Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment](#)

[A.5.11 Human rights in the digital space and right to privacy](#)

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

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

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

A.1 What are human rights?

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

A.1.1 More in depth...

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

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

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

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

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

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

A.2 Where do human rights come from?

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

A.2.1 More in depth...

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



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

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

A.3 What is youth?

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

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

A.4 What are youth rights?

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

A.5 What rights do young people have?

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

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

A.5.1 Rights in focus: Right to education

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

The right to education includes:

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

A.5.1.1 More in depth...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A.5.1.2 Where can I learn more?

For more information on the right to education, see:

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

For more information on protecting education from attack, see:

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

A.5.2 Rights in focus: Right to decent work

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

The right to decent work includes:

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

A.5.2.1 More in depth...

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

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

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

A.5.2.2 Where can I learn more?

For more information, check out:

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

A.5.2.3 What is entrepreneurship?

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

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

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

A.5.2.3.1 More in depth...

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

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

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

A.5.2.3.1 Where can I learn more?

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

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

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

A.5.3 Right to participate in public affairs

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

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

The right to participation includes:

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

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

A.5.3.1 More in depth...

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

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

A.5.3.2 Where can I learn more?

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

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

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

A.5.5 Right to freedom of opinion or expression

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

A.5.5.1 Where can I learn more?

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

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

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

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

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

Where can I learn more?

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

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

A.5.7 Right to social security

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

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

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

A.5.7.1 More in depth...

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

A.5.7.2 Where can I learn more?

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

A.5.8 Right to health

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

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

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

A.5.8.1 More in depth...

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

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

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

A.5.8.2 Where can I learn more?

To learn more, take a look at:

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

A.5.9 Right to adequate housing

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

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

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

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

A.5.9.1 More in depth...

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

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

A.5.9.2 Where can I learn more?

To learn more, check out:

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

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

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

A.5.10.1 More in depth...

Key elements of the right to a healthy environment include:

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

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



A.5.10.2 Where can I learn more?

For additional information, see:

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

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

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

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

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

A.5.11.1 Where can I learn more?

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

For more information, check out:

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

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

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

A.6.1 More in depth...

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

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

A. Advocating or campaigning for legal or policy change

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

B. Seeking justice and legal redress

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

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

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

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

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

A.6.2 Where can I learn more?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A.7.1 Where can I learn more?

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

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

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

A.8.1 Where can I learn more?

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

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

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

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

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

Bibliography and further reading

International human rights treaties

International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

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

Convention on the Rights of the Child

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

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

Right to education

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

UNESCO [The right to education](#)

Right to decent work

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

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

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

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

Right to participation

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

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

Right to health

OHCHR and [the right to health](#)

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

Right to housing

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

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

Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

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

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

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

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

Other

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

OHCHR [Human Rights Education and Training](#)

[UN Human Rights and NHRIs](#)

[Preventing human rights violations](#)

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

OHCHR [Right of peaceful assembly](#)

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

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

OHCHR [Digital Space and Human Rights](#)

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

UN Human Rights Council

UN [Human Rights Council](#)

Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council

UN Human Rights Council [Special Procedures](#)

Special Procedures [Country and Other Visits](#)

Special Procedure [Communications](#)

Universal Periodic Review

[Universal Periodic Review](#)

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

UPR Info [The role of youth](#)

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

Human Rights Treaty Bodies

The [Human Rights Treaty Bodies](#)

Peacebuilding and humanitarian action

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

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

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

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

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

IANYD, Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding [Practice Note: Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding](#)

WHO, [World report on violence and health](#)

High-Level Global Conference on Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes, [Implementing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda, A Guide for Public Officials](#)
UNESCO, [Youth led guide on prevention of violent extremism through education](#)
Report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on best practices and lessons learned on how protecting and promoting human rights contribute to preventing and countering violent extremism ([A/HRC/33/29](#)) (2016)