

YOUTH RIGHTS ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

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

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

Introduction

Welcome to the Youth Rights Advocacy Toolkit! This toolkit is the result of a partnership between the United Nations Human Rights Office, Education Above All Foundation and Silatech. The toolkit aims to empower young people to stand up for their rights.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 C: Leveraging international human rights mechanisms and processes to advocate for youth rights

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

[C.1 What is the UN?](#)

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C.1 What is the UN?

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

C.1.1 Where can I learn more?

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

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

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

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

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

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

C.3.1 More in depth...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Using UN reports for youth rights advocacy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For each one of the above, you will find:

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

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

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

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

C.7.1 More in depth...

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

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

C.7.2 Where can I learn more?

For more information, visit: ohchr.org

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

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

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

C.8.1 More in depth...

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

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

C.8.2 Where can I learn more?

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

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

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

Get informed

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

Follow and spread the word

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

Get involved and participate

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

More information on the Complaint procedure is available at:

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

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

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

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

Get informed

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

Follow and spread the word

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

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

Get involved and participate

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

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

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

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



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

C.13.1 More in depth...

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

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

C.13.2 Where can I learn more?

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

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

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

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

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

Get informed

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

Follow and spread the word

- Following Special Procedures on Twitter at: twitter.com/UN_SPExperts (in English)

Get involved and participate

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

C.16 What is the Universal Periodic Review?

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

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

C.16.1 More in depth...

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

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

C.16.2 Where can I learn more?

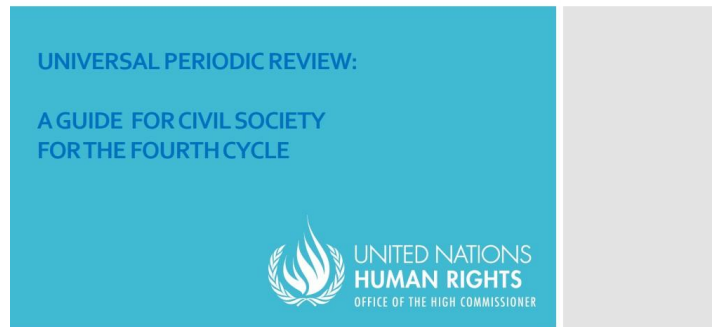
For more information on the Universal Periodic Review, visit:

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

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

Get informed

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



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

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

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

A. Get involved and participate before the review

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

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

B. Follow and spread the word during the review

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

C. Get involved and participate after the review

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

C.18 What are the Human Rights Treaty Bodies?

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

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



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

C.18.1 More in depth...

The nine core treaties concern:

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

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

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

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

C.18.2 Where can I learn more?

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

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

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

C.19.1 More in depth...

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

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

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

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

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

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

Get informed

- More information on the work of the treaty bodies is available at: ohchr.org/treaty-bodies/what-treaty-bodies-do

Get involved and participate

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

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

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

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

C.21.1 More in depth...

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

Get informed

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

Get involved and participate

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

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

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

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)