



The Universal Periodic Review, children's rights and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

Civil society advocacy

A series of four factsheets have been developed by Child Rights Connect and UPR-info to provide detailed information to civil society about the UPR with a focus on children's rights and linkages to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

- Factsheet 1: Information for civil society
- Factsheet 2 : Civil society written submissions
- **Factsheet 3 : Civil society advocacy**
- Factsheet 4 : Civil society follow-up

These factsheets were originally published in 2014 and have updated in 2020.

Please use these factsheets to support your UPR activities and get in touch with us if you'd like to know more or have any questions! UPR info: info@upr-info.org / Child Rights Connect: secretariat@childrightsconnect.org

What are the advocacy opportunities in the UPR?

Advocacy around the UPR refers to the activities civil society may undertake to influence target States that have an interest in the review of a specific State to ensure that they incorporate priority child rights issues into their UPR questions and recommendations. It also includes the activities civil society may undertake to encourage the State under Review ("SuR") to address child rights issues in its national report (the "SuR's report"), to accept specific recommendations it receives during the UPR and to implement all accepted recommendations in the next 4½ years.

Since the UPR is a state-driven process, only States, and not an expert body like the Committee on the Rights of the Child, can make recommendations to the SuR. States have a maximum of 2 minutes to deliver their statements [1] and usually manage to raise 2 to 4 issues during that time. It is therefore critical for civil society to communicate key issues, questions and recommendations as part of their advocacy as concisely as possible.

Since the inception of the UPR, civil society organisations (CSOs) have successfully advocated for child rights issues to be raised by providing information and recommendations to States interested in the issues and/or in the SuR [2] It is important that children are meaningfully and safely involved throughout these processes, according to the standards of the Committee on the Rights of the Child [3]

[2] See, for example, Save the Children, Universal Periodic Review: Successful examples of child rights advocacy, at: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/7959/pdf/upr_successful_examples_of_child_rights_advocacy_hjemmeprint1.pdf

[3] See the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Working Methods for Child Participation in Days of General Discussion https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC/C/155&Lang=en

UPR Info Pre-Sessions

To strengthen the voices and impact of civil society actors, UPR Info introduced in 2012 its Pre-session programme. These international conferences have become an integral part of the UPR process and provide a unique opportunity for civil society including CSOs, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), human rights defenders including children, academic institutions, ombudspersons, individual experts and regional organizations, to brief Permanent Missions on the human rights situation on the ground in the SuR. The objective of the Pre-Sessions is two-folded: to support bottom-up advocacy and to provide Permanent Missions with first-hand sources of information, with the ultimate aim to ensure that the recommendations that will be made at the UPR review are specific, well-informed and well-targeted. The UPR Pre-Sessions also present a good opportunity to arrange bilateral meetings with Permanent Missions, as well as with other civil society actors including NGOs and INGOs that are or could be interested in supporting your cause. For more information, see a UPR Info publication on the Pre-Sessions here: https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/general-document/pdf/2016_pre-sessions_empowering_human_rights_voices_from_the_ground.pdf

Advocacy by civil society that has not submitted written information

Civil society that was unable to submit written information prior to the UPR, for example for fear of reprisals or missing a deadline, can still advocate for their issues. In fact, advocacy will be their only opportunity to bring issues of concern to the attention of the States that will be making recommendations and influence the content of the UPR dialogue and outcome. For example, in Geneva CSOs can still attend the pre-session as observers and arrange their own advocacy meetings.

Why is advocacy on child rights important for the UPR?

As CSOs do not have a dedicated speaking time during the interactive dialogue of the UPR Working Group,^[4] NGO concerns and recommendations can only be voiced by States participating in the review.

1. To ensure that NGOs' priority child rights issues are raised in the SuR's report and during the UPR

SuRs are encouraged to prepare their report through broad national consultations, including with civil society and therefore, children. It is an opportunity for child rights defenders to feed into the State's inputs and ensure that key concerns are addressed in this report. CSOs should work with and alongside children to ensure that their views are integrated into the report. CSOs can also lobby SuR's for children to be consulted directly by the government when drafting its report.

States that will make recommendations during the SuR review may pick up issues and recommendations raised by civil society in their written submissions, especially if they were included in the OHCHR summary of stakeholders' information. However, given the high number of civil society submissions on a wide range of human rights issues and the limited speaking time, States are unable to raise a high number of issues.

2. To assist States to raise the most relevant child rights issues

State representatives who draft questions and recommendations might not be child rights experts and therefore may not be in a position to assess the priority child rights issues in each SuR. Through advocacy aimed at target States, CSOs can seek to ensure that recommendations made to the SuR reflect the reality faced by children. This is especially important when child rights issues are inadequately covered in the SuR's report, for example because no progress has been made or these issues are not considered a priority by the State. CSOs' advocacy can serve to bridge the gap between what States report and the situation on the ground. UPR Info provides a database of all recommendations made during the UPR. Civil society is advised to check the database to identify the States that previously have made recommendations on child rights issues, as this gives an indication of which States have a strong interest in children's rights.

[4] NGOs with ECOSOC status can deliver a short oral statement at the end of the UPR process, when the outcome report is adopted by the HRC. For more information, please see Fact Sheet No.4 "Follow-up to the Universal Periodic Review".

3. To reinforce key recommendations of other human rights bodies

Concluding Observations of treaty bodies, like the Committee on the Rights of the Child, as well as recommendations of Special Rapporteurs and regional human rights mechanisms are included in the OHCHR compilation of UN information. States cannot refer to all of them in their short intervention and may omit some key child rights recommendations emanating from other human rights bodies. Through advocacy, civil society can draw attention to such recommendations, use them to back their recommendations encourage States to reference human rights bodies recommendations and reinforce the body of international recommendations on child rights.

4. To get more recommendations accepted by the SuR

After its examination, the SuR has 3 to 4 months to make a final decision on whether to accept or note recommendations before the adoption of the outcome report at the HRC session. CSOs can use this time to lobby their State to accept key recommendations. This advocacy is, therefore, directed at the SuR as well as national actors that can support CSOs and influence the decision-making process [5].

5. To ensure the successful implementation of accepted recommendations

During the 4 ½ years between the reviews, CSOs' advocacy can be instrumental in keeping accepted UPR recommendations on States' agenda and holding them accountable for their full implementation by the next review.

6. To maintain a dialogue on noted recommendations

During the first and second UPR cycle, several States took action on recommendations they had initially solely "noted". There are many reasons why a State notes a recommendation [6], so on-going dialogue and advocacy should be maintained to put these recommendations on the State's agenda. It is therefore essential that CSOs keep raising issues contained in noted recommendations, as they may eventually convince the State to change its position. The possibility to note UPR recommendations does not mean that States can ignore certain child rights issues and leave them unaddressed.

How do States prepare their oral interventions for the UPR?

Each State has its own process to prepare its oral intervention. To maximise their advocacy opportunity, States advise NGOs to contact their embassies located in the SuR 3 – four months before a review and their missions in Geneva one month before the review.

For example, State A is interested in making recommendations to State B. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of State A will contact its embassy located in State B and ask for information on the human rights situation there. The MFA will then prepare a draft oral intervention and send it to its diplomatic mission in Geneva. The mission will revise the draft and send it back to the MFA, which will finalise the oral intervention and send it to its mission to be delivered during the review of State B.

Key characteristics of an effective advocacy strategy

TARGETED: States that already have an interest in the issues raised by CSOs will be more likely to include the suggested recommendations in oral interventions.

FOCUSED: To maximise the chance of getting one or two issues included in States' oral interventions, CSOs need to prioritise their issues and recommendations and present them in a S.M.A.R.T. format

COORDINATED: CSOs should coordinate their advocacy efforts with partners at national and international level to increase their impact

TIMELY: To have an impact, CSOs should aim to provide information on key issues and recommendations to State representatives when they are drafting the questions [7] and recommendations for the SuR.

[6] A note of a recommendation may, for instance, result from the actual wording of the recommendation or only be a temporary position which can be reversed through dialogue and advocacy.

[7] States can also send advanced written questions to the SuR 10 working days before the review.

With a view to ensure that the recommendations are precise and action-oriented, the “S.M.A.R.T” method has been established, which means that the recommendations should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound [8]:

- The requirement of “specificity” entails a well-defined action in relation to a specific right or violation.
- “Measurable” recommendations means that they can be monitored, and the implementation assessed.
- Whether recommendations are “achievable” is determined by the capacity of the SuR to comply with them. This refers to material capacity rather than political will.
- The recommendations should be “relevant” to the in-country situation and linked to the improvement of human rights
- Recommendations must be “time-bound” which means that the time frame for their implementation is by the next review or sooner, i.e., within 4 ½ years.

TARGETED ADVOCACY: How can civil society identify target States?

The ideal States to target for advocacy should have an interest in:

- The issues being raised.
- Making recommendations to the SuR.

Some steps civil society can take using the [database provided by UPR Info](#) to identify which States are interested in their issues:

1. Look at the recommendations tagged under “rights of the child” to see all previous recommendations and the States that made them.
2. Search the database, using key words, within the “rights of the child” category and other related categories, such as “women”, “right to education”, etc.
3. Look at which States made recommendations on child rights to the SuR during the last UPR to decide which States to direct your advocacy towards.

There can be many reasons why a State is particularly interested in the SuR, such as: being a neighbouring State or having political or economic ties. Some States have a policy of making recommendations to all SuR as a way of showing consistent engagement in the process. CSOs interested in knowing which States - or groups of States - have participated regularly in the UPR process can look at the statistics produced by UPR Info (see: <http://www.upr-info.org/database/statistics>).

What are the civil society entry points?

The ideal strategy is to approach the embassies of target States in the SuR, their diplomatic missions in Geneva, as well as their ministry in charge of the UPR in capital. If resources are scarce, CSOs can decide to only use one or two of these entry points.

- **Embassies in the SuR:** Embassies are interested in receiving updated information on the human rights situation on the ground from national CSOs. It is the most resource-effective advocacy entry point. Input is normally highly appreciated and shared with their missions in Geneva.
- **Diplomatic missions in Geneva:** Depending on the country, they may have more or less power in deciding the issues and recommendations that will be raised in their oral intervention. They are, however, always involved in its drafting and are the best placed to indicate the key person to contact. They are best approached when no other HRC event is taking place.

Ministries of target States (in capital): The ultimate decision regarding the issues and recommendations often lies with the national Ministry in charge of UPR, usually the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Ministry of Justice. NGOs can approach the diplomatic missions to get the contact details of the relevant person in the ministry.

[8] See UPR Info, The Civil Society Compendium : A Comprehensive Guide for Civil Society Organisations engaging in the Universal Periodic Review (2017) at: https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/general-document/pdf/upr_info_cso_compendium_en.pdf and UPR Info’s Guide for Recommending States (2015) at: https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/general-document/pdf/upr_info_guide_for_recommending_states_2015.pdf

[9] More explanation on the database can be found in UPR Info’s help guide: www.upr-info.org/IMG/pdf/Database_Help_Guide.pdf

[10] States that previously made recommendations on the same – or similar – issues, may have an interest in raising them again as a follow-up to previous recommendations.

[11] To check the annual calendar of HRC events, go to the HRC extranet at <https://extranet.ohchr.org/sites/hrc/PresidencyBureau/Pages/CalendarPoW.aspx> (username = hrc extranet ; password= 1session)

[12] To learn more about this, see UPR Info’s Pre-Session publication, at: https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/general-document/pdf/2016_pre-sessions_empowering_human_rights_voices_from_the_ground.pdf

UPR Advocacy Briefs

Whether civil society carries out their advocacy and lobby actions in the SuR or in Geneva, it is recommended that they develop UPR Advocacy Briefs. These Briefs should focus on priority issues or a particular human rights themes, such as children's rights, and include S.M.A.R.T recommendations (see above) and questions that civil society wishes to see raised at the UPR. Briefs of this sort have proven to be greatly appreciated by State delegates [12].

Does civil society need to go to the embassies or to Geneva to do their advocacy?

CSOs can do both or either. However, while face-to-face meetings are ideal, especially for sensitive issues or if there is a fear of reprisals, effective advocacy can also take place without arranging meetings. State representatives usually respond well to email, provided that you have targeted the right person and you follow-up with a courtesy call. Child Rights Connect can assist in identifying the right persons to contact in Geneva.

CSOs can also coordinate and send only one representative to meet with State representatives. If so, it will be important that this person is articulate and fluent in English.

FOCUSED ADVOCACY: How can CSOs approach target States and phrase their recommendations?

State representatives are often very busy and follow a wide range of meetings and issues. For a successful advocacy strategy, communications should be as concise, clear and straightforward as possible. It should also state who you are and what you expect from them. CSOs who are present in Geneva for the UPR Pre-Sessions are strongly advised to arrange meetings with the Permanent Missions. You can find the contact details for all Permanent Missions at: <http://www.unog.ch> or contact Child Rights Connect. You can also approach them in the room of the Pre-session.

Dear M./Ms [name of the State representative],

I represent "[name of the organisation or coalition]", an NGO working on child rights, based in [country]. We have noted the interest of [name of the target State] about the human rights situation in [name of SuR] and would like to share our information with you for the preparation of [name of SuR]'s UPR to be held in [month, year and session of the UPR].

I have attached our Advocacy Brief [as well as the written submission we produced for the UPR – if relevant] for your reference.

Would you be available to meet to discuss further our recommendations for [name of SuR]'s UPR [on [suggested date(s)] [from x hour to x hour]/[for one hour maximum]? If not, please let me know a convenient time for a short call.

I look forward to your response.

Best regards,

[your name, position and contact details]

COORDINATED ADVOCACY: How should civil society make their voices stronger?

Advocacy is always more influential - and thus more likely to be successful - when it is coordinated. When child rights NGOs and broader civil society works together and speaks with one voice, it gives more weight and legitimacy to their concerns. This will not only be useful to influence the UPR outcome but also to ensure effective follow-up.

Advocacy should be coordinated both at national and international level. Many international child rights NGOs have offices in Geneva and can often provide technical assistance to national child rights NGOs with their UPR advocacy. Contact Child Rights Connect for more information.

TIMELY ADVOCACY: When should NGOs advocate for their recommendations?

It is crucial that advocacy takes place when target States are preparing their questions and recommendations.

Check our **"Model UPR advocacy strategy for CSOs"** to have an idea of the ideal timeframe to target embassies and diplomatic missions in Geneva.

CHECKLIST

Key Elements for Effective Civil Society Advocacy

- Prioritise your issues and recommendations: the most effective lobbying focuses on three to four issues with five to six recommendations.
- Be clear about your advocacy objectives: if your strategy is too forceful, States may not incorporate your recommendations. NGOs should strike a balance between proposing recommendations that the target State will incorporate and that adequately address the gravity of the issue and how it should be resolved. If the State addressed a similar issue in the previous cycle, NGOs should provide an update on the situation and follow-up recommendations.
- Suggest S.M.A.R.T recommendations.
- Substantiate your recommendations with similar recommendations made by international human rights bodies, such as treaty bodies and Special Rapporteurs, that appear in the OHCHR compilation of UN information, where relevant.
- Highlight positive developments and whether further work is needed.
- Prepare a short advocacy paper (maximum 2 pages) which includes a short explanatory paragraph for each priority issue and corresponding recommendations highlighting why the issue should be raised and the supporting evidence.
- Identify the State representatives that work on the UPR of the SuR.
- Contact the relevant State representative directly - never send your advocacy paper to a general email address. Provide a brief explanation about your NGO or other, to demonstrate its legitimacy and authority on the issues.
- Provide the advocacy paper and follow-up with States to ensure that they received it and check if they need additional information.

Standards of the Committee of the Rights of the Child for child participation in the reporting process [13]:

- Transparent and informative:** Children should know that the right to be heard and listened to is the right of every child. They should receive detailed and accessible information.
- Voluntary:** Children should not be coerced into expressing views against their wishes and must be informed that they can cease involvement at any stage.
- Respectful:** Children's views must be treated with respect, both by other children and adults. Children of all ages should be supported to initiate their own ideas and take an active role
- Relevant:** Children should draw on their knowledge, skills and abilities to express their views on relevant issues.
- Child-Friendly environment:** Environments and working methods should be adapted to children's capacities. Adequate time and resources should be available to ensure that children are well prepared and have the confidence and opportunity to contribute their views to the process
- Inclusive:** Children are not a homogeneous group and participation needs to provide for equality of opportunity for all, including marginalized children, without discrimination on any grounds, including age, and be culturally sensitive to children from all communities.
- Supported by training:** Adults need preparation, skills and support to facilitate children's participation effectively. Children also require capacity-building to strengthen their skills relevant to the reporting process
- Safe and sensitive to risk:** Adults have a responsibility towards the children with whom they work and must take every precaution to minimize the risk of violence, exploitation or any other negative consequences of their participation. Organizations facilitating child participation in the reporting process must have a clear child-protection policy in place for all the children who take part in activities related to this process.
- Accountable/Follow-up:** All partner organizations and those supporting or facilitating child participation must be committed to ensuring follow-up and evaluation. Children should be informed on how their participation has influenced the discussion and any follow-up activities, and participate in evaluation processes.

[13] See the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Working Methods for Child Participation: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC/C/66/2&Lang=en

Model UPR advocacy strategy for CSOs

Remember:

At each step of the process, you can contact Child Rights Connect for assistance with your advocacy strategy.

**6 months -
1 year before
the review**

Encourage your State to hold national consultations before drafting its report

The UN HRC encourages States to prepare their report through a broad consultation process at the national level with all relevant stakeholders (resolution 5/1). Use this to make sure the State adopts an open and transparent process.

Take part in national consultations to influence the SuR's report

If you know that national consultations are taking place, make sure you are invited so that you can advocate for your issues to be included in the SuR's report.

Note:

the State has to submit its report 3 months before the review

TIP: you can refer to your participation in consultations in your advocacy with target States to reinforce your position, especially if you raised issues during consultations which were not considered.

**4-6 months
before the
review**

Prepare an Advocacy Brief

Select key issues to advocate for (4 max.). Draft a short paragraph to explain each issue, and 1 or 2 corresponding recommendations and questions. Include a short paragraph about your NGO.

Identify States You Will Advocate To

Use the UPR Info database to assess which States are interested in your issues and draft your advocacy paper accordingly. Check the States that made recommendations during the previous UPR and list States that may have an interest in your country.

TIP: Do not forget to refer to your UPR written submission if you have done one and to the OHCHR compilation if your issues were included.

**3-4 months
before the
review**

Contact Embassies

Call the embassies of target States to get the contact details of the person working on the UPR. Send them your advocacy paper and make a follow-up call a week later. Request a meeting to discuss the advocacy paper when you send it to them.

Note:

not all embassies have a person dedicated to the UPR nor do they all know about the UPR. If the embassies do not know who is in charge of the UPR, ask for the person in charge of human rights. Be ready to explain what the UPR is during your meeting.

TIP: Organise a briefing for several (eg., all European embassies/all Latin American embassies at once) or all embassies at the same time. It is more efficient and can help initiate discussion.

**2-3 months
before the
review**

Consult the OHCHR Stakeholder Summary

Read the summary to check whether issues raised in your written submission have been included. If they have, add the references in your advocacy paper and mention it to the States you approach.

**1-2 months
before the
review**

Consult the SuR's report

Read the report to see whether your priority issues are addressed. Use this information to introduce your issues and provide complementary information to target States.

Contact Diplomatic Missions in Geneva

Call the missions to get the contact details of the person working on the UPR or on human rights. Send them your advocacy paper and make a follow-up call a week later.

Note:

Check the UN calendar to avoid contacting them during other UPR or HRC sessions, as diplomatic missions will be too busy to focus on your issues. If such a session is held about 1 month prior to the review, try to target State representatives a couple of weeks before or the week after.

TIP: Contact Child Rights Connect or UPR Info to get the contact details of the diplomatic missions in Geneva.

1-2 months before the review **Participate to the UPR Pre-Session organised by UPR Info [14]**
If you are planning to come to Geneva for advocacy meetings, make sure you register for the informal public pre-session which will give you the opportunity to deliver a 5-10 minutes statement including your questions and recommendations in front of diplomatic missions interested in the UPR of your State (representatives of your country are likely to attend).

TIP: If you plan to come to Geneva, contact the NGO Group before making your travel arrangements to find out about additional meetings and entry points.

THE REVIEW

Attend the UPR of the State in Geneva or follow it online via the webcast on the [UN web TV](#)

Note

Find out if your State is organising a live session to follow the webcast or organise your own and invite key actors and partners, including the media.

2 days after the review

Read the Outcome Report on the OHCHR extranet (or on [UPR Info website](#))

If you were unable to follow the review, use this report to assess whether your issues were raised, whether they have resulted in recommendations and whether they were “accepted” or simply “noted”. Report the outcome to colleagues and partners.

Contact the States that Incorporated your Concerns

If a State incorporated your recommendations, contact them to thank them for their support.

0-3 months after the review /before the adoption of the outcome report at the HRC plenary

Lobby the SuR to Accept Recommendations that were “noted”

Request a meeting with State representatives of the relevant ministries to discuss those recommendations and advocate for them to be accepted when the outcome report is adopted.

NOTE:

Recommendations that “enjoy the support” of the SuR are considered accepted and do not need extra lobbying!

TIP: Do not forget to involve the national human rights institution of your country and supportive members of Parliament in your lobby.

3-12 months after the review

Follow-up on Accepted Recommendations

Follow-up with your government to offer assistance in implementing accepted recommendations, including through a draft action plan.

Maintain a dialogue on Noted Recommendations

If recommendations were noted, follow-up with the State to discuss the reasons why.

2-2.5 years after the review

Produce a Mid-Term Report

Produce your own mid-term report for recommendations of interest and encourage the State to produce a mid-term report tracking the progress made in implementing all the recommendations.

3,5-4 years after the review

Initiate a Dialogue on the Next Review Cycle

Encourage the State to hold national consultations involving civil society in an effective manner in preparation for the next UPR.

Follow-up with the embassies/diplomatic missions that made your recommendations

Provide updated information on the implementation or lack of implementation of their recommendations, especially if they were accepted and encourage them to follow-up with the State bilaterally.

TIP: The persons you were in contact with may have changed post or left the embassy/mission, so ask for the person who replaced them and follow-up with them.

START THE FULL CYCLE AGAIN!

[14] For more details on the pre-sessions and dates, see: <http://www.upr-info.org/Pre-sessions.1528.html>