

# Handbook for Children Participating in the Pre-Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child



Child Rights Connect

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## About *Child Rights Connect*

*Child Rights Connect* is an international network of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that advocates for children's enjoyment of their rights and empowers children's rights defenders, including children, NGOs, national human rights institutions (NHRIs) and Ombudspersons, to engage effectively with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (the Committee).

Since our creation 40 years ago, we have assisted and supported children's rights defenders from all countries of the world to use the Committee's work to make change happen on the ground for children. Our longstanding experience and unique partnership with the Committee and its Secretariat, which is part of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), has made us their focal point for the participation of children's rights defenders in the Committee's work.

## How to use this Handbook

This Handbook has been developed by *Child Rights Connect* to assist those who accompany and support children to submit information to the Committee on the Rights of the Child as part of its reporting cycle.

It contains practical information about how children can further engage by meeting the Committee during the pre-session week in a safe and meaningful way and the formalities that need to be completed for such a meeting to happen. It also includes the official working methods for the participation of children in the reporting process of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which are the basis of our guidance and the framework of children's interaction with the Committee.

This Handbook complements the information you can find on our mini site on the Committee's reporting cycle: <http://cocreporting.childrightsconnect.org/> and the practical information shared in our **Handbook for Adults Participating to the Pre-Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child**.

## Tell us what you think about this Handbook

We would very much appreciate any comment you might have on this Handbook. We would particularly like to know how you have used it, what you found most helpful and what you feel is missing so that we can improve it for others.

Please send your comments to: [cocreporting@childrightsconnect.org](mailto:cocreporting@childrightsconnect.org)

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### CONTACT US!

If you have any question or need additional guidance to ensure child participation in the Committee’s reporting cycle, please contact us:

- via email at: [crcreporting@childrightsconnect.org](mailto:crcreporting@childrightsconnect.org)
- by phone: landline: +41 22 552 41 30
- via WhatsApp: Child Rights Connect mobile number is shared upon request.

## I. Which children can meet with the Committee?

Children who meet with the Committee must be children's rights defenders, in the sense that they act as representatives of other children, not in their individual capacity as a child.

Indeed, the Committee cannot intervene directly to improve the lives of individual children who meet with its members. Meeting the Committee is therefore an opportunity for children representatives to provide children's perspectives on problems affecting the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child or its Optional Protocols and give the Committee a more complete understanding of the situation of children's rights in their country.

### Rules for selecting children representatives that can meet with the Committee:

Children should select their representatives themselves through consultations, direct elections, and open competition or through informed consent to an adult's selection.

Children representatives who wish to participate to the country pre-session or to a children's meeting (see below) should:

- ✓ Have been involved in the elaboration of children's views to the Committee (e.g. children who have drafted a report, have participated in the consultations for the elaboration of a report, have produced or contributed to the production of a video, etc.);
- ✓ Be trained about their rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, if relevant;
- ✓ Be informed about their participation in the reporting process of the Committee (scope, purpose, impact, modalities, barriers, risks);
- ✓ Be willing to participate;
- ✓ Understand that they would participate as a representative of a group of children and be able to represent different groups and concerns of the children in their country (special efforts should be made to ensure that children in marginalized and vulnerable situations are represented);
- ✓ Be able to draw on their knowledge, skills and abilities to express their views on relevant issues;
- ✓ Be respectful of their peers' views.

## II. How can children meet with the Committee?

### During a country pre-session

! Children can participate in the country pre-session, if they wish so.

Rules for the participation of children during the country pre-session (see paragraphs 18-22 of the Committee's working methods on child participation in the reporting process in the annex below):

- ☑ Priority will be given to children who can provide submissions to the Committee.
- ☑ If more than one child representative is attending the meeting, they should as far as possible represent different groups and concerns of the children in their country, especially children in marginalized and vulnerable situations.
- ☑ In exceptional cases, the Committee reserves the right to limit the number of children who are invited.



The Committee's Secretariat, in collaboration with *Child Rights Connect*, will, on request, provide technical assistance to children who are invited to attend.

### During a separate children's meeting

Children who would like to have a separate private meeting with the Committee or country rapporteurs should submit a request to have a "children's meeting" to the Committee's Secretariat. The Committee decides whether or not to accede to the request.

#### Key aspects of the children's meeting:

- ✓ Informal 1-hour child-friendly and confidential meeting, which takes place during the pre-session week of the Committee, either in one of the Committee's meeting rooms in Geneva, Switzerland, or through phone or videoconferencing. Children can consult the [child-friendly information on the membership of the Committee](#) to get familiar with who they will be meeting.
- ✓ Only takes place upon acceptance of the Committee following a formal request (see section V below).
- ✓ Children participating to the meeting must be **under the age of 18 at the time of the meeting**. Young adults who were involved in preparing the children's submission when they were under the age of 18, can, like any other adult representative, either provide the children with support during the children's meeting — if the children want so — or take part in the country pre-session (see our Handbook for Adults Participating in the Pre-Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and our [mini-site](#)).
- ✓ Children participating to the meeting can be accompanied by their chaperones if they want to. But the Committee can limit the number of adults present in the children's meeting, if these are not chaperones of the children.

- ✓ Children can decide on the format of the meeting (e.g. whether they would like to make an oral presentation or to present a video first, whether they would like Committee members to ask questions first, etc.).
- ✓ **No official interpretation is provided during the meeting:** if the children do not speak English, adults accompanying the children should ensure interpretation from the children's mother tongue into English. If this is not possible, as provided in the Committee's working methods (see annex below), you can request technical assistance from the Committee's Secretariat and *Child Rights Connect*. Contact us at [crcreporting@childrightsconnect.org](mailto:crcreporting@childrightsconnect.org) to discuss options and how to proceed.
- ✓ All Committee members are invited to attend children's meetings, but they may not all attend. Usually, at least the country rapporteurs and task force members for the State concerned come.

**Number of children who can participate in a children's meeting:**

There is no formal limit to the number of child representatives.

Based on our experience, having 2-3 children representatives per group of children who have been involved in an alternative report generally ensures a good representation and fits well within the children's meeting's settings.

### III. The role of the chaperone

Children who come to Geneva to participate in person to a country pre-session or a children's meeting must be accompanied by a chaperone, i.e. an accompanying adult responsible for them during the **whole travel** to and from Geneva.

Being a chaperone is a **twofold responsibility**:

1. The chaperone has to ensure that children are safe and protected in compliance with the child protection policy of the organisation of the chaperone.
2. The chaperone has to create an enabling environment for the children by addressing all barriers to their participation.

**Chaperones should be prepared and supported by their respective organisations and should be selected based on their experience and skills** to facilitate the children's participation effectively, as well as their relationship with the children concerned.

The responsibility of the chaperone starts from the time the children leave their parents or caretakers and ends when they are safely back with their parents or caretakers.

**! The chaperone must ensure that each child is safe and cared for during the whole duration of the trip.**

#### Before coming to Geneva

Here are some tips and guidance to help chaperones in the process of preparation:

- ✓ Fully read and understand the Committee's working methods on child participation (see annex below);
- ✓ Fully read and understand the Committee's child safeguarding procedure (see [annex](#) below);
- ✓ Discuss with the children about your role, this experience, their objectives and expectations (see our [Guide to CRC reporting for children](#) and for [accompanying adults](#));
- ✓ Undertake a risk assessment of the whole experience – including logistical arrangements – well in advance to the pre-session – at the very least 1 month before the travel to Geneva – to prevent or minimise risks (see our Template Risk Assessment, p. 41, and Check List for Logistics, p. 18 of our [Guide Together with children](#));
- ✓ Manage children's expectations: explain what the Committee can and cannot do, in particular, remind them that the Committee cannot directly improve their lives or the lives of their families and friends and that their participation can only influence the general recommendations the Committee will make to the State;
- ✓ Explain the principle of confidentiality to the children (see section IV below) and what it means in practice.



About **1 month before the pre-session**, *Child Rights Connect* will contact you to organise a Zoom call with you and the children **to discuss and respond to any of your questions/doubts about children's participation to the Committee's pre-session**.

## During a separate children's meeting

First of all, children have the right to **decide if they want to have the children's meeting with the Committee alone or if they need your support**. You will have to discuss about this with the children in advance.

If you participate to the meeting, **please keep in mind** that children are the key players in the children's meeting. You should not speak unless you are providing language/interpretation/translation or the children ask for explanations. While doing this, **you should not give your own opinions or try to influence those of the children**.

**Please also keep in mind** that the Committee encourages children to attend the pre-session with the adults, if they want to. Your role is to help the children understand the discussions and participate if they wish to do so. It is essential to explain to the children the methodology and the format of the meeting beforehand, so that they can take an informed decision whether attending or not.

### Important Information

There is no interpretation service during children's meetings. If the children do not speak English, adults accompanying the children, i.e. chaperones, should ensure interpretation from the children's mother tongue into English. It does not need to amount to a professional level of interpretation, rather the adult who will translate needs to know the children in advance and be able to capture and reflect what they want to say, without adding opinions or influencing the meeting.

If this is not possible, as provided in the Committee's working methods (see annex below), you can request technical assistance from the Committee's secretariat and *Child Rights Connect*. Contact us at [crcreporting@childrightsconnect.org](mailto:crcreporting@childrightsconnect.org) to discuss options and how to proceed.

## During a country pre-session

The role of the chaperone towards children is the same as during the children's meeting.



## IV. The principle of confidentiality

### Why is it essential to preserve the confidentiality of the meetings with the Committee?

The principle of **confidentiality** constitutes one of the key components of the working methods of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, as country pre-sessions are closed meetings, not open to the public.

Its objective is to ensure the meaningful and safe participation of national actors, including children, to its meetings by enhancing freedom of expression and protection from reprisals.

**Confidentiality should be respected with regard to ALL MEETINGS organised with the Committee during the pre-session week: FOR YOUR SAFETY AND THE SAFETY OF OTHERS involved.**

**!** Be aware that some children's rights defenders participating to the same country pre-session as you or to another meeting taking place before or after yours, **could be at risk if their presence was known to others**. They engage with the Committee on the Rights of the child because of the confidentiality of its meetings, please respect their needs.

**!** Children are more vulnerable and may not fully realise the risks and consequences of not following the principle of confidentiality for themselves and for others. It is essential that this is clearly explained to them in advance of a meeting with the Committee and reiterated just after the meeting.

### WHAT MUST REMAIN ABSOLUTELY CONFIDENTIAL

- ✓ The names of the **participants/organisations** attending a country pre-session or a children's meeting with the Committee must not be disclosed. Only selected children's rights defenders are invited to the pre-session and no observer is allowed in the room.
- ✓ The **content of the discussion** during a country pre-session or a children's meeting cannot be mentioned or shared. You can say what points you raised, but you **CANNOT** make any reference to what has been said by other people, including Committee members. NO participant to those meetings, including the Committee, NGOs, NHRIs, UN agencies, and children can mention **what is said and discussed** during the meeting. There are no public minutes or recordings of the meetings.
- ✓ The **date and time of a country pre-session or children's meeting** must NOT be disclosed or shared. While the dates of the week of the pre-session is public information that can be found on the OHCHR website, the exact dates of each country pre-session – which could indicate when children's rights defenders from which countries will be in Geneva – are strictly confidential.

### What can children's rights defenders decide to make public?

- ✓ Children's rights defenders decide **if** and **when** they want to make their alternative report public. They can also decide if they want to provide the government concerned with a copy of the report. If children contributed to the alternative report, they should be consulted before the report is made public and, in any case, anonymised.

- ✓ Children’s rights defenders decide if they want their alternative report to be uploaded on the OHCHR website after the pre-session. If they decide to make it public after having uploaded it, or if they would like to make another public version, they can send this public version directly to the Committee’s Secretariat at [ohchr-crc@un.org](mailto:ohchr-crc@un.org) rights after the country pre-session specifying that it is for upload on the OHCHR website.

## Confidentiality: DOs and DON'Ts

DOs	DON'Ts
Keep the information heard during a country pre-session or a children’s meeting confidential.	Do not publicise or share the names of other participants (individuals/organisations) of a country pre-session or a children’s meeting
Only share on internet/social media the topics and issues you raised during the country pre-session or the children’s meeting AFTER the pre-session week.  Only make reference to your own report.	Do not publicise what has been said during the pre-session by other participants, including Committee members.  NEVER share your topics/issues live as this would indicate the date of the country pre-session or children’s meeting.
Explain the principle of confidentiality to your colleagues and to the children you support and accompany.  Make sure they understand what it means and the importance of respecting confidentiality for their safety and the safety of others.	Do not take pictures during the meeting.  Do not take pictures of other participants outside of the meeting without asking for their prior authorisation.  Do not take pictures of children participants without asking the children, getting their chaperones’ consent and informing them about how you will use the pictures and possible implications.
Write ‘Confidential’ on all the pages of your report submitted in confidence.	NEVER invite journalists to a country pre-session or a children’s meeting or to meet in the premises of such meetings before or after.  NEVER disclose the dates of a specific country pre-session or children’s meetings outside your own organisation (and for internal purposes).

## V. How can you request a children's meeting with the Committee?

Your request for a children's meeting with the Committee on the Rights of the Child should be made [through the online platform](#) while submitting the report.

The format could be a meeting in person in Geneva, a meeting via phone or video conference or a mix of both in person and remote participation.

The Committee decides whether to accept or not the request.

## VI. How can children register and participate in a country pre-session?

### 1. Registration

Children representatives who wish to participate in the country pre-session should register through our [online registration form](#) as well as the chaperons and other representatives of the organisation.

! Children are allowed to change their mind with regard to their participation to the country pre-session: they can decide not to participate at all or to attend only part of it. In case of doubt, it is therefore better to register and cancel their participation later than the other way around.

### 2. Accreditation to enter the UN buildings: for in person participation only

Once you have registered children online, you must submit a request to get accredited to enter the UN building where the Committee will meet with you, only if you will participate in person.

! Failing to do so will prevent you from accessing the building and attending your country pre-session.

Accreditation to the UN is done in 2 steps:

#### 1) Before the country pre-session:

- ✓ Participants must register through the unique OHCHR online platform for accreditation, Indico. The private link will be provided to the invited participants by email, together with the invitation to the pre-session sent by the Secretariat of the Committee. Kindly allow two working days for your request to be processed.

#### 2) On the day of the country pre-session:

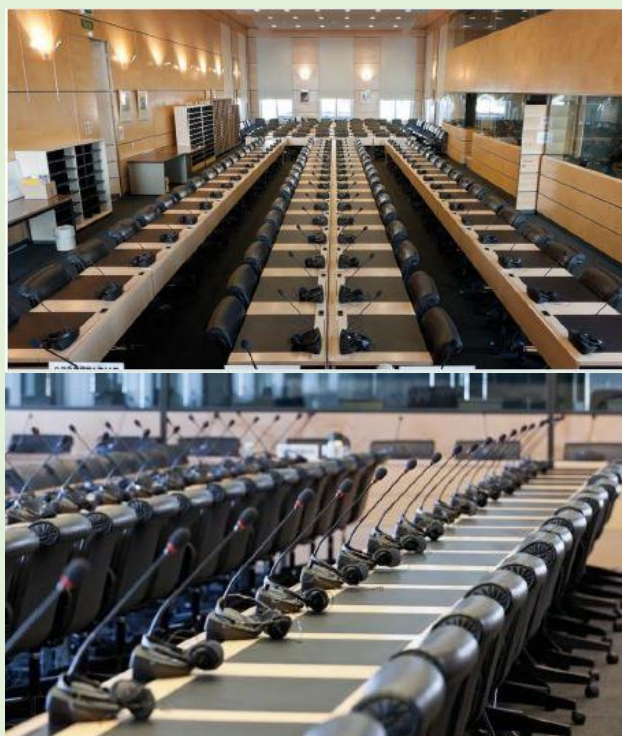
- ✓ Withdraw your badge at the Palais des Nations (street address: *Pregny Pavilion, Avenue de la Paix 14, 1211 Genève*. Open from Monday to Friday from 8.00 am to 4.45pm).
- ✓ Go to the security gate of Palais Wilson (street address: 52 rue des Pâquis, 1201 Geneva, Switzerland) where the country pre-session will take place.
- ✓ Bring the confirmation of registration which includes the QR code and your passport or your ID card.

### 3. The room

## *The room*

The children's meeting usually takes place in a meeting room of the OHCHR headquarters, in the historic Palais Wilson building (see picture below).

Children are invited to sit around the tables in the middle, together with the Committee members participating in the meeting.



Source: UNOG

## **VII. Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedure**

Child Rights Connect is committed to being a child safe organisation and to ensure the safety and wellbeing, and the prevention of abuse, of all children involved in its activities, and swift and appropriate action to be taken by adults should an incident or concern arise.

We have developed our own [Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedure](#).

The policy and supporting forms could be used and adapted to inspire your own child safeguarding policy.

During the pre-session, the Committee will apply its own Child safeguarding procedure for child participation in its work (see [annex...](#))

A child safeguarding focal point from the Committee's Secretariat will be present for every children's meeting.

## **VIII. The nine requirements for the participation of children in the reporting process of the Committee on the Rights of the Child**

As explained in the Working Methods for the participation of children in the reporting process of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (see Annex), the Committee has defined 9 principles to guide the participation of children in its work and make sure it is:

1. **Transparent and informative:** accessing all information about your participation and about your right to express your views and for your views to be acted on.
2. **Voluntary:** it is your choice to participate and you can decide not to take part at any point.
3. **Respectful:** your views and ideas should be respected by adults and you should be given opportunities to bring your ideas and activities.
4. **Relevant:** the activities will be interesting and familiar to your life, and there will be space for you to put forward any issues that are important to you.
5. **Child-Friendly environment:** there will be preparations so that all children will feel happy to participate in the activities, within comfortable and friendly spaces.
6. **Inclusive:** the activities should be open equally to all children to take part from all communities and backgrounds, including children with disabilities.
7. **Supported by training:** adults are prepared for the different activities so that all children feel supported and listened to. Children are also supported to be comfortable and able to participate.
8. **Safe and sensitive to risk:** Adults will make sure that children are safe and know who to talk to if they feel unsafe.
9. **Accountable/Follow-up:** you will get feedback on how your views have been acted on by adults, and the chance to give your opinion on the results of the activities you took part in.

United Nations

CRC/C/66/2



## Convention on the Rights of the Child

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### Committee on the Rights of the Child

## Working methods for the participation of children in the reporting process of the Committee on the Rights of the Child\*

### I. Introduction and objectives

1. The right of all children to be heard and taken seriously constitutes one of the fundamental values of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>1</sup> It is the right of every child, without exception. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has identified the right to be heard (article 12) as one of the four general principles of the Convention. As such, the right to be heard is not only a right in itself, but also should be considered in the interpretation and implementation of all other rights. At the international level, the involvement of children in the work of the Committee has particular relevance, including in the reporting process of States parties' implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocols, the development of general comments,<sup>2</sup> the days of general discussion, in-country visits and other events. With regard to the reporting process, States parties have an obligation to ensure that children are encouraged and enabled to participate in the preparation of the State reports to the Committee.

2. Under article 45 (a) of the Convention, the Committee may invite specialized agencies, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other competent bodies to provide expert advice on the implementation of the Convention. Child-led

\* Adopted by the Committee at its sixty-sixth session (26 May–13 June 2014).

<sup>1</sup> Children's participation rights are set out in articles 12, 13, 14, 15 and 17 of the Convention.

<sup>2</sup> The Committee publishes its interpretation of the content of human rights provisions in the form of general comments on thematic issues.



organizations or groups fall within the definition of “competent bodies” that can provide expert advice on the actual implementation of the Convention. In its general comment No. 12 (2009) on the right of the child to be heard, the Committee explicitly recognized the role that child-led organizations and children’s representatives play in the reporting process. In paragraph 131 of the general comment, the Committee “welcomes written reports and additional oral information submitted by child organizations and children’s representatives in the monitoring process of child rights implementation by States parties, and encourages States parties and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to support children to present their views to the Committee”.

3. The present working methods were drawn up to define, facilitate and promote the meaningful participation of children in the reporting process. Guidelines for other areas of work of the Committee, such as children’s participation in the days of general discussion, will be prepared at a later stage. The working methods are based on the Committee’s general comment No. 12, as well as on its working methods, its rules of procedure, and the guidelines for the participation of partners (NGOs and individual experts) in the pre-sessional working group (CRC/C/90, annex VIII). They draw on the experience of the Committee in reviewing children’s submissions, in meetings with children (see para. 23 below), and the day of general discussion in 2006 on the right of the child to be heard.

## **II. Basic requirements for child participation in the reporting process**

4. For child participation to be effective and meaningful at international level, it must be understood as a process and not as a single event. To the extent possible, children should be given support and encouragement to form their own organizations and initiatives, which will create an environment for them to discuss their rights and express their own views on their State’s progress in implementing the Convention and its Optional Protocols, as part of the ongoing monitoring process.

5. At the time of the country review, NGOs and UNICEF are strongly encouraged to ensure meaningful participation and representation of children in the reporting process.

6. All those facilitating children’s participation in the reporting process, including States parties, NGOs and UNICEF, should ensure that the interests and priorities that are represented in the reporting process are those of the children themselves and not of the adults or organizations they work with.

7. In accordance with general comment No. 12, the following nine requirements must be respected for all processes in which children are heard and participate, including the reporting process:

(a) **Transparent and informative:** Children must receive full, accessible, diversity-sensitive and age-appropriate information about their right to express their views freely and to have their views given due weight, and about how this participation will take place, its scope, purpose and potential impact;

(b) **Voluntary:** Children should not be coerced into expressing views against their wishes and must be informed that they can cease involvement at any stage;

(c) **Respectful:** Children’s views have to be treated with respect, and children should be provided with opportunities to initiate ideas and activities. Persons and organizations working for and with children should respect children’s views with regard to participating in events and meetings;

(d) **Relevant:** Children should draw on their knowledge, skills and abilities to express their views on relevant issues. Space needs to be created to enable children to highlight and address issues they have identified as relevant and important;

(e) **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;

(f) **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. Special measures should be taken to include very young children and children from marginalized communities;

(g) **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, for example, in effective participation, awareness of their rights, public speaking and advocacy;

(h) **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;

(i) **Accountable:** Child-led organizations, children's groups, NGOs and UNICEF should ensure that children have a clear understanding of their role in the reporting process and, more specifically, in meeting with the Committee. A commitment to follow-up and evaluation is essential. Children who have taken part in the reporting process — be it in research, consultations, drafting the report or meeting the Committee — should be informed about how their views will be interpreted and used.

### III. Methods of participation in the reporting process

8. The main ways that children can participate in the reporting process of the Committee are as follows:

(a) Children's submissions, either their own or through NGOs, for the adoption of lists of issues and review of States party reports;

(b) Oral presentations during the meetings of the pre-sessional working groups;

(c) Private meetings with the Committee members during the meetings of the pre-sessional working groups;

(d) Participation in videoconferencing;

(e) Participation in plenary sessions of the Committee.

#### A. Background information

9. The Committee emphasizes that due consideration of children's views and other forms of information from children, in accordance with article 12, must be an integral part of its reporting functions. It strongly encourages children to participate in the reporting process either by contributing to NGO reports or submitting their information through child-led organizations, informal children's groups or NGOs, in order to provide their perspectives on how the Convention and its Optional



Protocols are being implemented in their country. This will enable the Committee to better understand the implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocols in the country and provide information that will feed into the list of issues, the dialogue with the State and the concluding observations.

10. Child-led organizations, children's groups, NGOs and UNICEF should take special measures to ensure that children in marginalized and vulnerable situations — such as girls, young children, children affected by poverty, children in street situations, children in institutions, children with disabilities, refugee and displaced children, children in conflict with the law and children belonging to indigenous and minority groups — should be encouraged and enabled to participate in the reporting process on an equal basis with other children.

11. The Committee counts on the accompanying NGO and UNICEF representatives to ensure that the children and adults in their delegations are informed about, and respect, the confidentiality and privacy of the children, as is the case for other people present in the meetings.

## **B. Children's submissions to the Committee**

12. The Committee welcomes information from child-led organizations and children's groups, such as children's reports, films, studies, photographs and drawings,<sup>3</sup> that reflect children's views and recommendations in the same vein as reports or other forms of information from other non-governmental stakeholders, such as NGOs' alternative reports.

13. The Committee requests that submissions prepared by children, or reflecting children's views, detail the process by which children were selected to participate in a meaningful way in the reporting process in line with its basic requirements, as well as about the methods used to collect, interpret and articulate the children's views. While the Committee welcomes the details of the process, children should not be identifiable by name or photo.

14. The Committee also requests that information provided by child-led organizations or children's groups, or through NGOs or UNICEF, be submitted to the Committee secretariat at least two months before the beginning of the pre-session working group meeting. In the case of written information, twenty copies of each document should be provided to the secretariat, if possible.<sup>4</sup> The information is presumed to be confidential unless the submission contains a clear indication otherwise and written consent to make it public.

## **C. Pre-session working group**

15. The pre-session working group meeting is an opportunity for the Committee to conduct a preliminary review of the State party report and obtain additional information from non-governmental stakeholders, including children, on the situation of children's rights in a particular country. The Committee meets three times a year for four weeks (three weeks in session and one week in a pre-session working group). It conducts its preliminary review during its pre-session meeting, usually two sessions ahead of the scheduled examination of the report of the State party.

16. During the pre-session working group meeting, the Committee meets with representatives of specialized agencies of the United Nations, child-led organizations, NGOs and national human rights institutions, as well as children's

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<sup>3</sup> A children's report should only reflect the views of children under the age of 18, as defined by the Convention. The views of young adults may be reflected in the NGO report.

<sup>4</sup> For assistance with logistics in this process, refer to Child Rights Connect.

representatives, to hear from them about the pressing issues that will be used for the list of issues, the dialogue with the State and the concluding observations.<sup>5</sup> The list of issues is a series of questions or queries drawn up by the Committee to clarify or supplement the information provided in the State party report or to request the State party to update the Committee on any recent changes since the submission of its report.

17. The pre-sessional working group meetings are private, closed to the public and no observers are allowed. Everything discussed during these meetings and the identity of people or organizations present should remain confidential and should not be communicated to anyone who did not participate in the meetings. This confidentiality clause ensures that all those present can speak openly, which is especially important as it may be dangerous to disclose who was present and what was said. If children want to give feedback to their peers, they can tell them about the topics that were discussed, without going into detail.

### **1. Children's participation in the pre-sessional working group**

18. While the pre-sessional working group is more technical and less child-friendly than a children's meeting (see subsection 2 below), children have the opportunity to attend the working group meeting along with other non-governmental stakeholders and to make presentations to the Committee. They can give their opinion on the State party report and highlight the key concerns and problems that children are facing in their country. The Chair will ask child representatives to make a short introductory statement highlighting a limited number of key issues of concern and recommendations.

19. Although these pre-sessional meetings are not open to the public, representatives of national human rights institutions, United Nations agencies and NGOs may also be present. Children may, in addition or instead, request a private meeting with the Committee (see subsection 2 below).

20. Child-led organizations or groups that wish to participate in the working group meeting should clearly state so in a letter to the Committee. The Committee will then issue a letter acknowledging receipt of the written information and inviting child representatives to be present on the date and at the time when the working group will consider the particular report. Priority will be given to children who can provide submissions to the Committee (see section III B above). In exceptional cases, the Committee reserves the right to limit the number of children who are invited. The secretariat, in collaboration with Child Rights Connect, will, on request, provide technical assistance to children who are invited to attend.

21. If more than one child representative is attending a meeting, they should as far as possible represent different groups and concerns of the children in their country. Special efforts should be made by all actors, including NGOs and UNICEF, to ensure that children in marginalized and vulnerable situations are able to participate in the pre-sessional working group and children's meeting. The Committee will take all measures possible to facilitate their attendance.

22. As the Committee cannot intervene directly to improve the lives of individual children who participate in the children's meeting or pre-sessional meeting, children should be fully informed by accompanying NGOs or UNICEF that these meetings are a place to provide their perspectives on various problems affecting the implementation of the Convention and/or its Optional Protocols in a specific State party and that their contribution enables the Committee to have a more complete understanding of the situation of children's rights in the State party. Accompanying or supporting child-led organizations, NGOs and UNICEF should ensure that children attending the pre-sessional working group meeting have realistic

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on the pre-sessional working group, its working methods and rules of procedure, see [www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/WorkingMethods.aspx#a2a](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/WorkingMethods.aspx#a2a).

expectations and are provided with clear information on how their participation in the working group or private meetings can influence the outcomes. Children should also be permitted to take part in follow-up activities.

## **2. Children’s meeting during the pre-sessional working group**

23. In addition to attending the pre-sessional working group meeting, children’s groups or organizations may request a private meeting with the Committee or country rapporteurs during the meeting of the pre-sessional working group (referred to here as the “children’s meeting”). The private meeting allows children to have informal interactions with the Committee members. The request for the meeting should be sent to the secretariat of the Committee, and the Committee will decide whether or not to accede to the request.

24. The children’s meeting is exclusively for children who are under the age of 18 at the time of the meeting. If young adults were involved in preparing the children’s submission when they were under the age of 18, they can, like any other adult representative, either provide the children with support during the children’s meeting — if the children request it — or take part in the pre-sessional meeting. The Committee reserves the right to limit the number of adults present in the children’s meeting.

25. The children’s meeting lasts up to one hour and is scheduled for the same week as the pre-sessional meeting for the State under review. The meeting focuses on the information submitted by children and has a more child-friendly format than the pre-sessional meeting. While there is no formal structure for these meetings, they usually consist of children presenting the key issues and recommendations either orally or through a video. Time is allotted for Committee members to ask the children questions in order to enable them to gain a better understanding of the situation in the country.

26. The United Nations does not provide interpretation for the children’s meetings, as they are scheduled outside the official meeting time of the Committee. If the children do not speak English, adults accompanying the children should ensure interpretation from the children’s mother tongue into English.

27. The main interlocutors of the children’s meeting are the children themselves. The accompanying adults providing support to the children during these meetings should not speak unless they are interpreting or giving explanations to the children, where there is a need for essential information to be clarified and the child invites an adult to do so, or whenever the child needs and explicitly requests support. Accompanying adults should focus on supporting the children and refrain from giving their own opinions or trying to influence the opinions of the children. They should also ensure that children are able to communicate and participate in discussions outside the meeting.

28. The Committee recognizes the critical role of accompanying adults, and it counts on the national stakeholders facilitating child participation to ensure that the accompanying adults uphold their primary responsibility for the safety and welfare of the children in their care at all times. The Committee recalls that this responsibility starts from the time when children leave their parents/carers to travel and ends only when they are safely handed over to their parents/carers upon their return. The way in which accompanying adults take care of children should be appropriate to the children’s age and maturity.

## **D. Children’s participation through videoconferencing**

29. Technology enables children to engage with the Committee through various channels and mitigates the barriers created by distance or economic status. The Committee is particularly concerned that children from marginalized groups and

remote areas have limited resources and opportunity to interact with the Committee in Geneva. The Committee will endeavour to conduct children's meetings distantly using the most effective and appropriate tools. For instance, through phone or videoconferencing, the Committee may be able to include children based in other locations in the reporting process and enable them to share their views and recommendations. The Committee will give due consideration to the protection of children when deciding whether or not to engage with them through technology, especially when the engagement poses a security risk to the children and their families.

## **E. Plenary sessions of the Committee**

30. The State party report will be discussed in open, public meetings of the Committee, during which both the State representatives and Committee members take the floor. Representatives of relevant United Nations bodies and agencies, NGOs and the press attend the session in Geneva to observe it in person, or follow it through the live webcast in their country. The Committee encourages children to attend the plenary sessions and/or follow the interactive dialogue with the various States through the webcast.

31. Children may also request an informal meeting with the Committee's rapporteurs or the members of the Committee in charge of the country under review (the country task force) during the Committee's sessions in Geneva before the official review with the State party.

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