



United Nations Human Rights Office report on the rights of the child and violations of the human rights of children in armed conflicts

FACILITATOR’S GUIDE FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH CHILDREN

This guide has been developed for facilitators who want to support children to share their opinions for a new UN report on the rights of the child and violations of the human rights of children in armed conflicts. It is intended for organisations who are already familiar with children’s rights and are supporting activities with children in these contexts. Adults or children might organise and lead focus groups, or do this collectively. This guide has been developed by OHCHR and Child Rights Connect.

Disclaimer: This topic involves sensitive and potentially distressing experiences, as it focuses on children who are currently enduring or have lived through situations of armed conflict. Such experiences can have a profound emotional and psychological impact on them. It is crucial to approach discussions with care, ensuring a supportive and safe environment for children to share their thoughts only if they feel comfortable and willing. As part of the preparations, it is highly recommended to run a risk assessment and consider whether it is in the best interest of the children to participate at this consultation. Nevertheless, if the consultations go ahead, the facilitators and the Safeguarding Focal Point must be mindful of the potential for re-traumatization and prioritize the well-being of the children at all times.

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I. UN Human Rights Office report on the rights of the child and violations of the human rights of children in armed conflicts

A. What is the UNITED NATIONS and who is the High Commissioner for Human Rights?

The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945. Currently made up of 193 Member States, the UN and its work are guided by the purposes and principles contained in its founding Charter. The UN has evolved over the years to keep pace with a rapidly changing world. But one thing has stayed the same: it remains the one place on Earth where

all the world's nations can gather together, discuss common problems, and find shared solutions that benefit all of humanity.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights is the principal human rights official of the United Nations. His office is the leading United Nations entity in the field of human rights, with a unique mandate to promote and protect all human rights for all people.

B. What are the UN Human Rights Office reports on children's rights?

Every year the UN Human Rights Office writes reports about children's rights to support governments to improve the situation for children and realise the rights of every child. The report is developed in close cooperation with States and other key stakeholders, such as relevant UN agencies, national human rights institutions, and civil society, including children. Once it is finished, the report is shared globally with all governments at a meeting of the Human Rights Council.

C. What are the 2025 reports about?

One of the themes for the 2025 UN Human Rights Office report to the Human Rights Council is **the rights of the child and violations of the human rights of children in armed conflicts**. The upcoming report will explore the impact of armed conflict on the human rights of children, assessing how States uphold the **best interests of the child** under the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**, the most important international legal framework protecting children's rights.

It will analyze the current state of children's rights in conflict zones, highlighting both progress and the ongoing challenges that hinder the protection and well-being of children. It will also showcase innovative practices and initiatives that have shown promise in safeguarding children's rights in these environments.

Additionally, the report will offer actionable, evidence-based recommendations aimed at strengthening protections for children, enhancing accountability for violations, and improving national and international policy frameworks to ensure more effective and comprehensive responses to the rights and needs of children in armed conflict situations. For this, the report will be carried out in consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

This report will be discussed at the Human Rights Council in Geneva at its 60th session, in September 2025. For more information, see the call for submissions on the [OHCHR website](#).

D. How and when can children contribute?

Children, as rights holders and experts in their own lives, will be able to share and contribute their views on this important theme. If they wish and feel safe and comfortable in doing so, they can share their views in two ways:

- By email in direct response to the UN Human Rights Office's ['call for inputs'](#) (revised deadline for children's inputs: 12 March 2025). A child-friendly call for inputs has also been published by the UN Human Rights Office to ensure their meaningful participation in this process, highlighting the importance of listening to children's views on topics which directly affect them. You can access the child-friendly call for inputs in [English](#), [French](#), and [Spanish](#).
- By participating at the consultations, organised by civil society partner organisations between January – March 2025, in accordance with this Guide. In this case, the adults

organising the consultations will prepare an outcome report and share the views and thoughts of children through this report. You can always share with the participants of the consultations that they can also send their views directly using the first option.

E. Why should children participate in this activity?

- It's important to hear children's views, experiences, and recommendations directly.
- It promotes and advances children's rights at the UN.
- It encourages children's views to be taken into account and listened to by UN decision-makers, including governments.
- It empowers children to learn more about the UN's work and to defend human rights.

F. Feedback to children

- Once the input from children has been reviewed, the UN Office for Human Rights will integrate it into the report under a specific section dedicated to children's views.
- A child friendly summary of the report, along with the finalized UN Human Rights Office report, will be shared with civil society organisations that have supported children's participation. You will be encouraged to disseminate these documents widely with the children and your partners.

II. Planning children's consultations

A. Preparations

- ✓ First, **consider the size of the group** depending on the different factors such as the number of facilitators, the venue, and the particular needs of the children participating. In any case, group of 10-15 children is usually manageable for such consultation, while keeping in mind that a smaller size may be necessary due to the potential sensitivity of the topic.
- ✓ **Identify the children who will participate** and ensure that they will take part voluntarily. It is recommended that these children are already connected to existing groups / networks that have been working on child rights. This is an important opportunity to **promote inclusivity and diversity**, mobilising children from as many interested groups and networks as possible and ensuring that the voices of the most marginalised children are heard. This also means that you need to be aware of any situations of vulnerability the participants might be in and adjust the framework and setting of the consultations to ensure their meaningful participation.
- ✓ **Apply all the necessary child safeguarding measures, including ensuring that consent has been given** by children and parents/caregivers (for all the information on child safeguarding see below) and the assignment of the Safeguarding Focal Point.
- ✓ **Arrange the logistics for the consultation.** It can be online or in-person. E.g. locate a safe space, provide refreshments, and make sure writing materials are available for children to make or record notes if they want to.
- ✓ **Make arrangements for children** to arrive and leave from the location at the planned time. Ensure any necessary measures are taken to ensure the safe participation of all children.
- ✓ **Identify a facilitator**, ensuring that they are familiar with the purpose of the consultations and the questions to be discussed.

- ✓ **Identify a documenter**, preparing them with the discussion questions and the reporting templates.
- ✓ Arrange for **interpretation** during the session, if necessary, and arrange for the **translation** of the report into one of the working languages of the UN Human Rights office: English, French or Spanish.

B. Child Safeguarding

All organisations who will hold or support children’s consultations are expected to follow their child safeguarding protocols, or, they can decide to adhere to [Child Rights Connect’s Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedure](#) (child-friendly version [here](#)). Nevertheless, it is highly recommended to prepare a risk assessment and to assign a Child Safeguarding Focal Point for the consultations who is introduced to the children at the beginning of the consultation and available during and after the consultation as well. The Child Safeguarding Focal Point need to work closely with the facilitator(s) to prevent and mitigate risks as, furthermore, to react to safeguarding concerns and incidents.

If your focus group is taking place **online**, take time to make sure you are using a secure platform and put any measures you can in place to protect and secure the space. For example, make sure there is a password to enter the space and disable the chat function between participants.

Facilitators and other adult participants should always treat children with respect, and ensure they are not asked to comment on matters inappropriate to their age or where they are being asked to specifically disclose any sensitive personal information or any other information that might put them at risk. Even though the questions are not asking children to disclose abuse, the discussion might trigger some children to share that they have experienced abuse or that they have been involved in, or subject to criminal behaviour. Facilitators and Child Safeguarding Focal Points need to plan how any such issues will be dealt with the moment they are disclosed but also afterwards in terms of any need or duty to escalate or follow up. Children need to know that support is available and that they can access it through the Child Safeguarding Focal Point.

● Basic Requirements for Child Participation

It is important to be familiar with, and apply, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child’s 9 basic requirements for child participation. Here is a [link](#) to the basic requirements. See here for a child-friendly version:

1. *Being able to **access information** about the child participant’s right to be listened to and for their views to be acted on.*
2. *It is children’s **choice to participate** and they can decide not to take part at any point.*
3. *Children’s views and ideas to be **respected** by adults.*
4. *The activities will be **interesting and familiar** to the child’s life, and there will be space for child participants to put forward any issues that are important to them.*
5. *There should be **preparations** so that all children will feel happy to participate in the activities, within **comfortable and friendly spaces**.*
6. *The activities should be **open equally to all children** to take part from all communities and backgrounds, including children with disabilities.*

7. **Adults will be prepared** for the different activities so that all children are comfortable and feel supported and listened to.
8. Children must be **safe** and know who to talk to if they feel unsafe.
9. Children should get **feedback** on how their views have been acted on by adults, and the chance to give your opinion on the results of this project and the activities.

- **Informed Consent**

Make sure you receive **informed consent** from children for their participation in the consultation, and from their parents/caregivers. This can happen if appropriate information is shared with the children and their parents/caregivers about what is happening and why, how they can take part and how their views will be taken into account and what kind of follow-up and feedback there will be. Children should be provided with a range of ways to agree to giving their consent, these might include: verbally (via audio recording); thumbprints; writing their name or providing a signature. It is recommended to use written consent forms, in accordance with the national legislation of the country where the consultation is taking place and in a language that the parents/caregivers can read and understand.

You can use these examples of consent form: [ENG](#), [FR](#), [SPA](#)

III. FACILITATING THE CONSULTATIONS WITH CHILDREN

1. INTRODUCE

- ✓ Welcome participants and thank them for coming.
- ✓ Use some icebreakers so the children can get comfortable with you and get to know each other a bit before starting.
- ✓ Explain why the consultations is taking place and what it will be about, particularly mentioning the framework, the OHCHR report, and its timeline. At least explain about the role of the UN and mention that there are many different bodies and committees within the UN working on human rights. If you want, you can use the child-friendly leaflet developed by Child Rights Connect to talk about the role of the High Commissioner (in [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#)).
- ✓ Make sure you set expectations right, especially if you are consulting children directly affected by a conflict or war.
- ✓ If the group is not familiar with the concept of children's rights, you need to start the consultation with that or organise a preparatory meeting or share resources beforehand. You can introduce children's rights along with the CRC Convention by using the child-friendly version of it.¹ This child-friendly version is available in several languages and formats, you can even download the right cards one by one and use it during the consultations.²
- ✓ Explain what the rights of the child and the violations of the rights of children in armed conflict are, as well as the importance of their experiences and ideas being shared. You can use the child-friendly information sheet.
- ✓ Clarify confidentiality. Explain that notes will be made during discussions, but these will only be used for this report and will not be shared with anyone else. Important to mention that quotes and ideas noted down will not be linked to names, so no one can identify later on what said by whom at the consultations. If needed, you can also

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/sop/convention-rights-child-child-friendly-version>

² <https://weshare.unicef.org/CS.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&STID=2AMZIFJXAU>

reassure the participants that even the fact that they participated at the consultation will not be shared with anyone.

- ✓ Set / agree on ground rules for the session and present the safeguarding focal point. Explain that their participation is voluntary, any child can withdraw at any time or decide not to answer a question if they do not want to. You can also emphasize that aim of this consultation is not to share personal stories – maybe you will need to recall this during the session again – but to think together about the situation of children.

2. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Start the discussion explaining to the children that you will be following the main questions of the report: violation of children's rights, how children are protected now and if not, what are the reasons and what can be done to make things better. This way the structure of the consultation is clear and the participants know that there will be a moment to talk about all these. Depending on the situation, you can use to collect their ideas using a big piece of paper, a whiteboard or sticky notes. Feel free to adjust the methods.

The questions are the following, in line with the child-friendly information sheet which you can use during the consultations too:

- 1) **Exploring the problems:** What are the biggest ways war harms children's rights, both now and in the future?
- 2) **Looking at current protections:** How well are programs keeping children safe and helping those who've been hurt? What's working and what needs fixing?
- 3) **Barriers to protecting children:** What makes it so difficult for children to stay safe and be cared for during a war?
- 4) **Making things better:** What can be done to help children recover from war? What care and support do they need?

Tips for the facilitator:

- In terms of timing, you can prepare your own schedule about how much time you are planning to dedicate for each question, or you can simply go ahead with the discussions and stop for the breaks agreed with the group at the beginning of the consultation.
- Assure participants that it is fine if they do not know the answers to these questions. There is no right or wrong answer! It is important to recall as well that they do not have to reply all the questions all of them.
- Try to encourage discussion between participants and the active participation of all involved. Prompt if necessary but try not to give any answers.
- In case children are interested, you can encourage them to express themselves in different ways, not only verbally: this can include art, digital software or any other creatives methods.
- If you can organise it, you can go back to the group with the report of the consultations to check it and finalise it together.

3. CLOSING AND NEXT STEPS

- ✓ At the end of the discussion, thank all the participants for their valuable contributions.

- ✓ Ask children for their feedback about the session. What went well? What did not go so well? Any other comments?
- ✓ Remind them that their views will contribute to the opinions of other children from around the world for the 2025 UN Human Rights Office report to the Human Rights Council on children's rights and armed conflict.
- ✓ There will be a report for grown-ups and also a summary of the report for children. They should be able to see these documents in September 2025.
- ✓ Depending on the way you interact with this group, you can predict how you will inform them about the publication of the report. Providing follow-up is important, if you don't work regularly with the children participating at the consultations, you can always refer to the [website of OHCHR](#).

4. REPORTING

- ✓ Ensure that the documenter records what children say during the session, using the documentation template in Annex 1.
- ✓ If the documenter has not used this template during the session, please make sure that the notes are recorded in this format as soon as possible.
- ✓ Don't forget to record any important quotes. For each quote, please include the child's age, gender, and nationality, if possible.
- ✓ Please record the number of participants, their genders, and any other important information as requested at the reporting form. Please avoid sharing the names or any other personal data about the children that might make them identifiable.

5. SHARE

- Please send all the information collected by 14 March 2025 to: sulini.sarugaser@un.org.

Should you have any questions, please contact:

- Sulini Sarugaser, Human Rights Officer, OHCHR: sulini.sarugaser@un.org, or
- Child Rights Connect: submissions@childrightsconnect.org.

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ANNEX 1: Documentation template for consultations with children

Background information:

*Country:

*Date of consultation:

*Where the consultation took place:

*Name of facilitator(s):

*Name of documenter(s):

*Email address to contact the group:

Child participants:

*Total number of children involved:

* Gender of child participants: Female / Male / Other

*Ages of the children:

***Representation:** *Please note any other relevant background details about the children who have participated, including if they are familiar with any specific vulnerabilities and/or exclusion in any way. This might include, but not be limited to, being a member of an ethnic minority group, having a disability, living in alternative care, being out of school, children on the move, etc. This information will be helpful to offer a background and understanding of representation of the consultation and where/if gaps of inclusivity occur and how we can address this.*

***Selection:** Please describe how the children were gathered and selected to take part in this activity. Are they part of an existing project?

Children's views:

QUESTION 1:

Exploring the problems: What are the biggest ways war harms children's rights, both now and in the future?

Which were the most repeated violations of their rights? Were there unexpected or less common issues raised by children?

Other comments...

QUESTION 2:

Looking at current protections: How well are programs keeping children safe and helping those who've been hurt? What's working and what needs fixing?

Which specific programmes and good practices were mentioned? What are the main lacks in these programmes?

Other comments...

QUESTION 3:

Barriers to protecting children: What makes it so difficult for children to stay safe and be cared for during a war?

What did children say about the challenges that make help/support difficult to reach conflict-affected areas? Were specific groups of vulnerable children mentioned?

Other comments...

QUESTION 4:

Making things better: How can children recover from war? What care and support do they need?

What did children say about any examples or ideas to make their lives better, safer, and healthier during war? What help are they asking for? Are there any differences in conflict and post-conflict settings regarding recovery?

Other comments...

OTHER COMMENTS FROM CHILDREN

Feedback:

FEEDBACK FROM CHILD PARTICIPANTS:

What worked well? What could be better next time? Other comments.

FEEDBACK FROM FACILITATORS:

What worked well? What could be better next time? Other comments.