



National human rights institutions (NHRIs) Series:
Tools to support child-friendly practices.

ADVOCACY WITH AND FOR CHILDREN IN THE WORK OF NHRIS

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CONTENTS

ABOUT THIS TOOL	6
1. UNDERSTANDING CHILD RIGHTS-BASED ADVOCACY	7
2. KEY ELEMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	9
3. INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AS PARTNERS	12
4. DEVELOPING AN ADVOCACY STRATEGY	16
5. MONITORING AND EVALUATING ADVOCACY	36
6. RISKS AND CHALLENGES IN UNDERTAKING ADVOCACY	40
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	43

ABOUT THIS TOOL

Advocacy with and for children in the work of NHRIs

This tool provides detailed guidance to National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) on what is meant by advocacy, the steps involved and how to undertake advocacy in partnership with children and young people. The content is divided into six sections and includes additional resources for further study.

- **Section One:** Understanding child rights-based advocacy
- **Section Two:** Key elements for effective advocacy
- **Section Three:** Involving children and young people as partners
- **Section Four:** Developing an advocacy strategy
- **Section Five:** Monitoring and evaluating advocacy
- **Section Six:** Risks and challenges of undertaking advocacy
- **Section Seven:** Additional resources

Wherever possible, the content is illustrated by examples from the field.

The objectives of the tool are to:

- Enhance understanding of a rights-based approach to advocacy
- Highlight approaches to involving children in advocacy
- Provide a step-by-step approach to undertaking rights-based advocacy

1. UNDERSTANDING CHILD RIGHTS-BASED ADVOCACY

Advocacy can encompass a very broad range of activities, including both legal representation of individual children and wider policy change. This tool focuses on advocacy to achieve policy change on behalf of a wide constituency of children. Several terms are used interchangeably to describe advocacy work: lobbying, public relations, policy development, awareness-raising, empowerment, social mobilization, campaigning, media work and communications can all be used to refer to advocacy. It is worth noting that the term advocacy may be difficult to translate into some languages, as there may be no equivalent word.

It is important to be clear from the outset about what is meant by advocacy within this tool. The focus is on **advocacy for child rights, defined as a process that seeks to influence governments, policy makers, decision makers, stakeholders and other relevant audiences to support and implement actions that contribute to the realization of children's rights.**

Advocacy might seek to influence changes to legislation, policies, levels of resourcing and budgets, service design, innovative practices or institutional functions. The activities involved can take many forms, including media campaigns, parliamentary lobbying, petitions, letter-writing, research and policy or drafting legal reforms. Advocacy can also range from small-scale, highly focused activities (for example, seeking to improve policies or facilities at a children's home) to much wider-scale engagement, such as raising the age of criminal responsibility.

Child rights advocacy involves:

- challenging and changing opinions and mind-sets
- seeking political commitments to justice and respect for human rights
- proposing legal reforms
- highlighting an issue to render it visible
- enabling children's voices to be heard directly
- seeking strengthened accountability
- delivering recommendations (evidence-based where possible) to decision makers to promote compliance with children's human rights in legislation, policies, programmes and services.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee), in its General Comment No.2 on NHRIs, stressed that advocacy is an important core activity of these institutions. The Committee recommended, for example, advocacy to: ensure harmonization of existing legislation with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and repeal non-compliant legislation; introduce legislation necessary to promote and protect children's rights; ensure that economic policy takes account of the rights of children; promote children's meaningful participation in matters affecting them; and ensure that the principle of the child's best interests informs all laws, policies and services affecting children. NHRIs have a unique role to play in advocating for children's rights. Their independence, status, powers and human rights mandate provide them with both the legitimacy and responsibility to undertake this work on behalf of, and with, children.

A rights-based approach to advocacy requires that both the process and outcomes reflect human rights values. This means that advocacy efforts should:

1. **Involve children.** Children have the right to express their views on all matters that affect them and they should, whenever possible, have an opportunity to be involved in advocating for their own rights.
2. **Focus on governments' legal duties.** Child rights-based advocacy is directed toward ensuring that all laws and policies comply with the rights and principles of the CRC.
3. **Hold duty-bearers accountable.** A child rights-based approach recognizes that children have rights and that those with an obligation to fulfil those rights (duty-bearers) must be held accountable.
4. **Recognize the equal rights of every child.** Rights apply to all children without exception or discrimination.

France – Non-discriminatory access to school canteen

In 2017 a national law on equality and citizenship was adopted in France, which includes the right of every child to access meals served at school if this service is provided in the municipality. The provision echoes a key recommendation from the Rights Defender's 2013 report on primary school children's equal access to the canteen. An administrative court requested the Rights Defender's opinion on a case concerning the suppression of substitutes when pork was served in a city's public schools, on the basis of religious neutrality. In its legal opinion, the Rights Defender found that such a decision could be considered discriminatory, since the municipality had been offering substitutes for over 20 years. The court cancelled the mayor's decision, concluding that it was against children's best interests.

[Rights Defender Annual Report for 2017](#)

2. KEY ELEMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

When deciding to undertake advocacy, it is worth taking time at the outset to reflect on whether the NHRI has the necessary elements in place to successfully achieve its goals. NHRIs engage in a wide range of activities and fulfil numerous functions that involve knowledge, skills that can contribute to effective advocacy, including, for example:

- Receiving individual complaints
- Monitoring institutions where children are placed
- Undertaking investigations, research and special reports
- Annual reporting to the government/parliament
- Monitoring implementation of recommendations
- Reporting on implementation of the CRC and other treaty bodies (e.g., CRPD, CEDAW) and follow-up on recommendations
- Engaging with the media
- Training and capacity building
- Engaging with decision makers.

Bearing in mind this broad scope of activities, several factors should be taken into consideration.

1. Trust and credibility

The NHRI's reputation will strongly affect the extent of its influence on governments, communities, children and young people, professionals and parents. Many NHRIs have developed good relationships with parliaments, governments and other competent authorities through, for example, on-going meetings, annual reporting and work on monitoring. If the NHRI is widely respected, well known and has a reputation for high-quality work, its chances of being listened to and taken seriously will be much greater. It is also important that the institution is seen as independent and non-partisan, and that its assertions are based on the CRC and backed up, where possible, by professional and academic sources.

2. Knowledge and skills

Advocacy involves a range of skills including creative problem-solving, networking, analysis, research and effective communication of evidence and arguments. It also requires the capacity to make prudent and timely judgments on whether and how to act when sensitive or controversial issues are at stake. These skills are integral to much of the work of NHRIs, such as their work on monitoring compliance with the CRC and producing alternative reports to the CRC Committee. The NHRI will need to analyse the existing knowledge and skills of its staff and provide additional training if it identifies significant capacity gaps in the area of effective advocacy work for and with children.

3. Working with children

Rights-based advocacy calls for a participatory approach in which stakeholders (in this context, children) are directly involved in the process of advocating for change, wherever possible. It is important to reach out to those with direct experience of the issues being addressed and to include both girls and boys and children from different marginalized groups. This process might involve engaging with them to: determine the nature of change sought and outcomes being proposed, collect relevant data, decide what advocacy approach or communication strategy to adopt, and/or monitor and evaluate the impact of advocacy initiatives. If the NHRI has an advisory board of children, this might be a useful place to start. When involving children, it is vital to ensure that their participation is meaningful and handled ethically (see section three).

4. Partnerships and networks

Strong and effective partnerships can play a key role in effective advocacy. NHRIs cannot achieve effective changes for children without strong collaboration with other organizations. The broader the base of support and the more closely aligned the messaging across those partners, the greater the likelihood of reaching relevant decision-makers – whether at the local, regional or national level. This involves building good relationships within parliament and government, with civil society organizations, professional organizations, trade unions, networks of children’s organizations, academic institutions, think tanks and the media.

5. Commitment and resources

Depending on the issue, achieving change through advocacy can take time. An assessment will need to be made as to whether the necessary budgetary and human resources are available to see the process through – bearing in mind that scarce human and financial resources pose a challenge for most NHRIs.

Malta – Advocacy takes time

The Office of the Commissioner for Children argues that in children’s rights advocacy especially, patience is a virtue. This is particularly true of recommendations that require profound and extensive changes to the current legal and institutional setup. It points to the regulatory vacuum flagged by the Office’s work around water fun parks that allow some players in the industry to operate with an almost complete disregard for children’s safety and well-being. This clearly is not a vacuum that can be filled with a mere readjustment of organizational remits and responsibilities but calls for a rethink of how the state interfaces with establishments of this kind. In the past, the Office has fought battles that were won only after years of slow, or no, progress – or even backtracking at times. The Office is confident that it will manage to rally the necessary political will and technical expertise to fill this vacuum that is exposing children to many kinds of hazards.

<https://tfal.org.mt/en/publications/PublishingImages/Pages/Annual-Reports/CFC%20AR%202019%20Final.pdf>

The NHRI should undertake an internal review of the extent to which it can meet each of these considerations on a scale of low, medium or high. This can provide an overall guide as to the institution's level of preparedness to undertake advocacy work. The review can also help determine how to strengthen capacity across the organization, bearing in mind that NHRIs have different strengths in different fields. For example, it may have significant expertise and knowledge in the field of child protection, but less familiarity with education or health issues.

	Low	Medium	High
Trust and credibility			
Knowledge and skills			
Working with children			
Partnerships and networks			
Commitment and resources			

3. INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AS PARTNERS

For more information on children's participation and how to engage children effectively and ethically, see NHRI tool, [Children's participation in the work of NHRIs and Promotion and outreach by NHRIs with and for children](#)

NHRIs working with children should also always have a safeguarding policy in place. For guidance see: European Network of Ombudspersons for Children ([ENOC](#)) [Safeguarding policy](#)

Article 12 of the CRC asserts that children and young people have a right to express their views on all matters of concern to them and to have those views given due weight, in accordance with their age and maturity. The CRC Committee elaborated on this right in its General Comment No.12, stating that children should be supported to engage at the community, local and national levels to enable them to influence policies affecting them and to engage in collective advocacy.¹

Why involve children and young people?

There are powerful reasons for NHRIs to involve children and young people in advocacy:

- Children have a right to be part of the process of advocating for change. The CRC demands that they are not treated merely as objects of adult protection, nor should adults always speak for them or interpret their experiences. They are subjects of rights and agents of change entitled to speak for themselves.
- Creating spaces for children to identify the issues of most concern to them will ensure that advocacy is informed by the reality of their lives and lived experiences. It will ensure it is focused on meaningful priorities affecting them.
- Children often have innovative and creative ideas about how to present messages and communicate arguments.
- Making the case for change is always more effective when it is illustrated by case studies or personal narratives provided by children themselves, about what the problems are and why change is needed.
- Involving children in advocating for change affords them opportunities to acquire skills, gain confidence and understand that they can make a difference. It enables them to see the importance of holding governments and other decision-makers to account and can serve to empower them and strengthen commitment to democratic accountability.
- Involving children promotes the message that children have the right to be heard and provides invaluable evidence of their capacity to articulate their concerns on their own behalf. Thus the advocacy process itself conveys a message equally important to that of the issue being advocated for.

¹ CRC, GC No.12, CRC/C/GC/12, paras 127-131.

Wales – Charter for change: addressing child poverty in Wales

In 2018 the Children’s Commissioner for Wales undertook workshops and conversations with over 550 children and young people across both schools and community settings, ranging in age from 5 to 21, all of whom who had experienced living on a low income. In addition, a survey of nearly 300 parents/caregivers, workshops and conversations with around 20 parents/caregivers, and conversations with over 40 professionals working with children and young people in poverty were carried out. The subsequent report made several recommendations to the Welsh Government, including:

- Publishing a new plan with clear, measurable steps to be taken to improve the lives of children living in poverty
- Making more children eligible for free school meals
- Giving more children access to ‘Holiday Hunger’ schemes
- Making more families eligible for a grant to spend on school costs such as uniforms and equipment
- Making sure school uniform policies across Wales are affordable, flexible, and fair.

Importantly, the report argued that before any measures were introduced to address child poverty, the authorities must take into account the experience and needs of children and young people living in poverty. Shortly after the report’s publication the Welsh Government provided additional funding to extend grants for school uniforms, equipment and sport kits and introduce free sanitary products across schools. High-level meetings were also held with a view to following up on the recommendations and further action to address child poverty

<https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Annual-Report-2018-19.pdf>

When to involve children and young people?

Not all advocacy undertaken by NHRIs will involve children directly. Advocacy may be informed by children indirectly; for example, when the NHRI responds to patterns of complaints arising from children or draws on evidence from consultations with children already undertaken. However, children can also participate directly at all stages of the advocacy process, from identifying issues to designing strategies and carrying out campaigns.

- Identifying the issues: Children can identify an issue about which they wish to advocate for change. Through school councils, youth councils, child clubs or parliaments they may highlight concerns that they are facing; for example, lack of play facilities within their local community, failure to address environmental degradation, failure of the school curriculum to meet their needs as they move into the labour market or the continued prevalence of inhumane or degrading punishment in schools. These issues can be brought to the attention of the NHRI to gain its support. Alternatively, an NHRI may decide to undertake a consultation at the community or national level or with particular groups of children to identify their most pressing problems. This could be open-ended or in response to

an emerging pattern of complaints being brought to the NHRI – e.g., in relation to children with disabilities, children from refugee and asylum-seeking communities or those in institutional care. Listening directly to children can help identify where government legislation or policy is, or is not, effective and whether it violates children’s rights. Consulting with children can also highlight failures or gaps in effective policy implementation and areas where policies are resulting in unintended negative consequences.

- Planning an advocacy strategy. Advocacy strategies can be developed in partnership with children. They may have ideas about how to frame messages, make effective use of social media or mobilize communities of children to lend support to a campaign. Enlisting them as part of the NHRI team encourages children to feel ownership of the process.
- Implementing the strategy. Children can: serve as spokespersons, meet with government ministers and parliamentarians, speak at meetings and conferences and engage with the media. They can call on their own network of children’s organizations (where available) to lend support to a campaign. This can provide hard evidence of the challenges faced and produce illustrative material to strengthen the case for change.
- Monitoring and evaluation. Children can provide invaluable feedback on how effective the messaging was in a campaign, how involved they were and whether they were able to identify changes resulting from the advocacy, as well as suggest changes in strategy that might improve the outcomes.

In seeking to involve children and young people, the table below can help to analyse where and how they have contributed and assess the possibility of strengthening their involvement. All three levels of participation are legitimate and appropriate, depending on the context, the issues, the aims and the resources available. For example, consultative participation allows for greater numbers of children to be involved, whereas child- or young people-led participation offers opportunities for a greater level of empowerment.

	Consultative participation	Collaborative participation	Child- or young people-led participation
Identifying the issues	Children and young people are consulted on the advocacy agenda	The advocacy agenda is informed and shaped by the views of children and young people	The advocacy agenda is identified by children and young people
Developing the strategy	Children and young people are consulted on the design of the campaign, advocacy materials etc., and their views are taken into account	Children and young people work together with the NHRI to design the advocacy strategy, campaign and outreach	Children and young people lead on developing the advocacy strategy, while the NHRI provides guidance, support and information

	Consultative participation	Collaborative participation	Child- or young people-led participation
Implementing the strategy	Advocacy includes outreach to children and young people to seek their views, build evidence and strengthen the campaign	Children and young people work with the NHRI to contribute to the research, media outreach, public speaking and political engagement	Children and young people run the campaign, facilitated by the NHRI
Monitoring and evaluation	Children and young people are consulted on the effectiveness of the campaign and its outcomes	Children and young people work with the NHRI to design the monitoring and evaluation tool and collaborate in the process and subsequent analysis.	Children and young people organize their own system for monitoring and evaluating the advocacy process, with the support and guidance of the NHRI

4. DEVELOPING AN ADVOCACY STRATEGY

Developing and implementing an advocacy strategy involves several key steps – ideally taken in order – to help achieve the desired goals. At times NHRIs will have to engage in an issue on short notice and be unable to undertake each step.

Step one: Determining the priorities

In any given country there will inevitably be multiple issues that raise concerns about children’s rights – for example, violence against children; discrimination against children or groups of children; inadequate legislation, policy implementation or budgetary allocations for children’s services; or failure to train professionals appropriately. The NRHI may be concerned about the lack of awareness of children’s rights across the country and wish to advocate for better awareness- raising and information about rights. It will never be possible to address all of these issues, so the NHRI will need to make choices and select priority issues for its advocacy. Some sensitive issues may be better addressed through dialogue than high-profile advocacy, to avoid unnecessary confrontation.

When deciding on priorities, consideration should be given several questions that can help to determine: whether the issue is a real priority, whether it can be influenced through an advocacy campaign, whether it is possible to garner support and whether the timing is right for investment in advocacy. The box and figure below provide an illustrative example of how to consider these issues.

To advocate or not to advocate?

Concern is growing about the increasing number of children living and working on the streets. Would it be appropriate for the NHRI to undertake advocacy aimed at addressing this problem?

The severity of the problem: What is the scale of the issue? How many children are affected? Are boys and girls affected differently? How long has it been going on? What conditions are children experiencing? What rights are being violated? Although only a relatively small proportion of children overall may be affected, the severity of the rights violations they experience may justify a commitment to action.

Children’s views: Have children been consulted? Has the issue been identified as a priority by children? What is the nature of their concerns about the problem? In this context, engagement with children needs to draw specifically from those children previously, currently or potentially affected.

Public attitudes: Is there widespread public concern about the issue? Can it be easily communicated to the public? Will it be possible to mobilize public support? Public attitudes about an issue can be a powerful source of influence on governments and are thus important to consider. However, lack of public support does not mean the NHRI should not take up an issue – rather, it is one factor to consider. levels of awareness about public attitudes should inform the shape and content of a campaign.

Windows of opportunity: What is the attitude of the current government? Could the issue be highlighted in an election campaign or an upcoming legislative programme? Will the media respond positively? Will the changes sought involve significant resources? It is helpful to utilize the prevailing environment to maximize the potential for influence, for example, when a bill is going through parliament that could be amended to address the issues of concern. Elections afford an opportunity to influence the agendas of political parties. Or, a related issue being highlighted in the media can potentially be exploited to focus attention on the problems the NHRI seeks to address. If there is genuinely no possibility of achieving a change in government policy, the NHRI must consider whether investing in advocacy is appropriate at that point in time.

Partnerships and collaboration: Does the NHRI have a legitimate role to play on this issue? Are there partners willing to support the campaign? Will they provide resources and take on key roles? Are others already working on the issue? If so, the NHRI might want to consider how it can add value – for example, through its legal mandate, good reputation or access to government – rather than seeking to lead on the issue.

Scotland

The Children and Young People’s Commission for Scotland recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic was not only a health emergency, but also an education emergency for children once schools were closed. Closed schools led to growing concerns about children’s rights to, for example, mental health, access to food and child protection, as well to concerns about digital inequalities. The Commissioner responded by first reaching out to children to explore and document their experiences. This evidence was then used to both highlight the importance of listening to children and to present their concerns to parliamentarians. Meetings were also convened with the government group established to address education issues during the crisis, at which the imperative of a child rights-based response was emphasized and recommendations for action proposed. The evidence and recommendations will be published to achieve wider support. Finally, the Commission is working with Scotland’s Observatory of Children’s Human Rights to conduct a child rights impact assessment of the actions undertaken by the Government in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

<https://cypcs.org.uk/news-and-stories/coronavirus-is-an-education-emergency-for-scotland-children-and-young-people-must-be-involved-in-how-we-tackle-it/>

Step two: Assessing the evidence

It is essential to have evidence to support the advocacy case for change. Governments and other decision-makers need to be convinced that there is a problem that needs addressing and that it is worth investing energy in working towards change. Depending on the issue involved, this might be evidence of the extent of harm experienced by children, prevalence and impact of the problem, nature of the rights violations being perpetrated or the strength of feeling among children and young people. Consideration needs to be given as to whether evidence already exists or whether further research or consultations are needed.

A key source of evidence might be the pattern of complaints being registered with the NHRI, which provide an invaluable source of information as to what is happening in children's lives. Or it might be evidence that legislation or practice is inconsistent with the CRC and/or recommendations from the CRC Committee. Evidence pointing to the impact of a failure to act should also be considered. It is particularly important to obtain evidence from children and young people and to ensure that the experience of different groups of children is reflected, including: girls and boys, LGBTQ children, children with disabilities, refugee and asylum seekers, children from minority communities and children in institutions. It is also valuable to gather evidence on inspiring policies and practices that have successfully addressed the issue, to demonstrate that the recommended approach can and does work. Once the evidence has been gathered, it becomes possible to begin building an effective case for change.

Targeting corporal punishment

The NHRI seeks to launch a campaign to end the use of corporal punishment in all settings. The information needed to ensure that the NHRI has sufficient evidence with which to advocate on the issue would include:

International human rights standards: Articles 19 and 37 of the CRC are obviously relevant, together with their interpretations by the CRC Committee in its general comments. Check the Committee's concluding observations for the country, as well as those of other relevant treaty bodies, UN Special Rapporteurs and decisions by relevant regional bodies, such as the European Court of Human Rights or the Social Charter Committee, as a source of additional material to strengthen the case.

National legislation: Find out exactly what the law currently states. Does it protect children in all settings? Does it criminalize parents for hitting children? Are there examples from other countries, particularly those with similar characteristics, that could be helpful? How aware are people of the existing legislation? What impact does it have on behaviour? It is useful to know how influential the law is on both attitudes and practices with regard to corporal punishment. It is also important to be clear as to whether it is the law itself, or its effective implementation, that is the real problem.

Policy: Is there a relevant government policy addressing the issue? Do medical, nursing or other professions have a policy encouraging alternatives to parental use of corporal punishment? Is there guidance from the teaching profession? Are there government parenting programmes that promote positive parenting? Evidence based on these programmes could support the argument that the government already recognizes the need for changes in behaviour toward children or that many professional bodies working with children are convinced of the importance of halting corporal punishment.

Attitudes and social norms: What are the prevailing attitudes towards the use of corporal punishment? Is it accepted as a legitimate practice in school, in the criminal justice system, in institutions, in the family? Are attitudes changing? Has there been recent research into views on the use of corporal punishment? What are the most effective lines of argument likely to influence prevailing attitudes?

Prevalence and practice: What is the scale of the use of corporal punishment in different settings? What proportion of parents hit their children? What proportion of children experience regular or severe physical punishment? What are the age ranges and frequency of corporal punishment? How does it affect boys and girls? What form does the punishment take? Do adults use implements to hit children and if so, what? Is practice changing?

Children's views: Has any research been undertaken to find out how children feel about being subjected to corporal punishment? How does it make them feel? How does it affect their behaviour? Why do they think adults hit children? What changes would they like to see?

Impact: What research evidence is available nationally and internationally on the impact of corporal punishment on children, families and the wider society? In the short term on behaviour and in the longer term on well-being outcomes?

Hungary – Protection against violence

In 2006 the Council of Europe (CoE) launched a new programme entitled “Building a Europe for and with children”. One of the main objectives was to eliminate all forms of violence against children. This objective was also addressed in a global campaign against corporal punishment of children (‘Your hands should nurture not punish – Raise your hands against smacking!’) advocating for its total abolition and promoting positive, non-violent parenting in member states. In support of this initiative, in 2009 Hungary’s Commissioner for Fundamental Rights undertook a project on children and violence, to promote implementation of laws to protect children against physical and psychological violence. The Commission investigated special children’s homes, the operation of the child protection system, basic child welfare provisions and the situation of children taken into protection due to commission of a minor offence or crime. In the framework of the CoE programme, the Commission also conducted a comprehensive investigation, in cooperation with the commissioner for educational rights, concerning violence in schools. The Ombudsman for children stressed that prevention is critical to eliminating violence against children.

The project was sponsored by: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

Commissioner for Fundamental Rights <http://www.ajbh.hu/en/web/ajbh-en/>

Step three: Framing the goals

Once the priority issue has been identified and evidence is available to back up the case, it will become possible to determine the specific advocacy goals. Evidence is critical, as it will enable the NHRI to analyse the causes of the problem and in so doing, suggest the most appropriate potential solutions. The evidence might show, for example, that the legislation necessary to protect children from corporal punishment is fully in place, but the problem lies in its effective implementation, resulting in a lack of opportunity for children to make complaints and seek redress. Another evidence-based scenario might find that child poverty is not a result of the failure to provide social security benefits, but rather of factors such as: a failure to update benefit levels in line with inflation, access barriers that exclude the most vulnerable or corruption that affects distribution and outreach.

Parliaments and governments will respond more positively to specific, concrete proposals than to generalized criticism of their failure to protect children's rights. Clarity about what the issue of concern is and what outcomes are sought will help determine the shape of the advocacy, the strategies adopted, the timeframe needed and resources required. It is helpful to have realistic expectations about the likelihood of success and the length of time needed to achieve certain goals. Accordingly, the NHRI might consider setting both short- and longer-term objectives.

Children with disabilities

Evidence of the harm being caused to children through institutionalization has led the NHRI to advocate for a stronger focus on community-based services for children with disabilities. In framing the specific goals of the advocacy campaign, it is necessary to understand the history and pattern of placing children with disabilities in institutions and the drivers that perpetuate the status quo. The causes might be multiple and linked to:

- ❑ Family poverty
- ❑ Lack of benefits to support families caring or children with disabilities
- ❑ Lack of awareness of the rights of children with disabilities
- ❑ Prejudice and ignorance about the nature of disability and the potential of children with different impairments
- ❑ Failure to provide support services for families
- ❑ Resistance by teachers to inclusion of children with disabilities, compounded by lack of training
- ❑ Vested interests of residential workers and teachers, fearful of losing their employment
- ❑ Lack of a legal framework underpinning the rights of children with disabilities to family care and inclusive education
- ❑ Lack of government policy to bring an end to institutionalization of children.

The findings of the analysis will enable the NHRI to press for the most relevant recommendations to achieve its goals. For example, it will help to determine whether the demands of the advocacy should include one, or a combination, of the following goals:

- ❑ Specific legal reform to commit to inclusive education and de-institutionalization
- ❑ Changes in social norms and attitudes
- ❑ Increased budgets or staffing for services
- ❑ Better implementation of existing policies
- ❑ Child rights training for professionals
- ❑ Introduction of new community-based services for children with disabilities
- ❑ Development of improved accountability and redress for children
- ❑ Improved research and data collection on children's lives.

Step Four: Who needs to be involved?

Advocacy is usually more likely to be successful if it is supported by a wide range of stakeholders. Accordingly, once it has been decided to pursue a particular cause and the goals have been agreed, the next step is to build alliances and partnerships. The NHRI will already have a number of partnerships, which are a useful starting point. However, depending on the issue and its scope, it may be necessary to reach out to additional organizations or networks. Different partners will contribute their connections and influence, expertise, research capacity, motivation for change and capacity to engage in supportive activities. The NHRI needs to consider several questions when building a support network.

Greece – Children on the move

Recognizing the need for closer cooperation, mutual feedback and joint advocacy with agencies and actors working in the field, the Greek ombudsperson developed a 'Network for the Rights of Children on the Move', an informal network focused on refugee and migrant children. The network began its work in January 2017, following the first meeting of its founding members, and now has 27 members. It is coordinated by the deputy ombudswoman for children's rights. Assemblies are held monthly during which members report their observations from experience in the field. The main objectives of the network are: a) enhanced and inclusive monitoring of children's situation through: systematic collection of information by field actors, identification of institutional gaps and practical deficiencies in child protection and timely identification of new trends in children's situation; and b) strengthening the effectiveness of advocacy through evidence-based, inclusive proposals and recommendations.

[*Rights of Children on the move-Report 2018*](#)

1. Why is a broad alliance of stakeholders necessary?

Bringing together a broad alliance of partners and stakeholders who can add value will contribute to the effectiveness of any advocacy strategy.

- Audience: Different partners will have access to different audiences, so the choice may depend on who the NHRI seeks to influence, since some audiences are likely to listen to certain voices more than others. Some will be influenced by research data, others by who is delivering the message and others will respond according to the nature of the message being disseminated. To capture the widest possible audience, the NHRI needs to bring together a diverse range of partners.
- Expertise on the issue: Different partners will bring a greater depth of expertise and knowledge from different perspectives. Children and young people can contribute their own direct experience; parent groups can focus on the negative impact of the issue on their children; NGOs, professionals and academics may be able to provide wide-ranging evidence of the scale and impact of harm.
- Breadth of skills: A broad network of organizations will optimize the skill base. Some will have access to decision-makers or to the broader public or media contacts. Others can offer technical skills required to implement the advocacy campaign.
- Resources: Successful campaigns need multiple resources – finances, people, time. The wider the network, the more likely the campaign will have access to the resources it needs to be effective.

2. Who are the key stakeholders?

Supportive stakeholders

Depending on the issue, the NHRI will need to enlist the support of individuals, local groups, NGOs, networks of children and young people, professional bodies and trade unions, academic institutions, religious bodies and in some cases, the private sector. Different stakeholders will provide different types of contributions and can strengthen advocacy campaigns by speaking to and influencing diverse audiences. For example:

- If large numbers of individuals can be encouraged to sign up, this can have significant political influence and gain traction in the media. For example, they could all receive support to write to their political representative, send social media messages or sign a petition.
- Parents' groups can lend legitimacy, as they have direct experience of what is happening to their children and are often seen as the best advocates on behalf of their children's interests. However, caution is needed as the interests of parents and children can be in conflict, and the NHRI's focus must always be on the children and their best interests.
- Children's networks can gather evidence on the ground or through social media about the strength of feeling among children and young people and the nature of their concerns – stories reflecting direct experience can be very powerful.
- Religious groups often hold significant influence in local communities. If they are allies willing to support the issue, they can reach out and bring their wider communities on board. For example, the Global Initiative to End Corporal Punishment has worked to bring all faith communities together to support the campaign in all settings.²
- Professional bodies can provide evidence from their members' direct experience explaining the importance of the changes proposed and the severity of the problems facing children. For example, social workers are in a strong position to highlight challenges faced as a result of low investment in child protection services or the inadequacy of prevailing legislation to provide meaningful protection for children. Police bodies might be influential, for example, in pointing to the need for a shift in policy from law enforcement to a public health approach to tackling drug misuse.
- Policy makers, including parliamentarians, at the national and local levels can be powerful allies with access to decision-making processes.
- Academics and their institutions can provide the research and evidence needed to support a case for change and speak with authority on the findings.
- Media outlets and journalists can play a key role in formulating and supporting messages and gaining access to large audiences.
- Engaging the private sector might be useful, for example, for efforts to increase children's online safety.

² CNNV, Save the Children Global Initiative to End Corporal Punishment, *Ending corporal punishment of children – a handbook for multi-religious gatherings, and 'A Multi-religious Commitment to End Violence against Children (Kyoto Declaration)*. Nottingham, 2016

Opposition stakeholders

It is equally important to identify those likely to oppose the campaign. The NHRI will need to assess:

- Which bodies are likely to challenge the proposals?
- What are their reasons?
- How influential are they?
- What evidence will they bring to bear to support their case?

One of the tasks of the advocacy campaign will be to assess how these stakeholders can be challenged effectively, or engaged with, to diminish their opposition. This might involve:

- Analysis of their evidence base: How legitimate and well-grounded is it? Is it based on reliable data sources? Can it be effectively challenged by more credible sources of evidence?
- Potential common ground: Is it possible to explore the potential for common ground on the overall goals, rather than the means of achieving them? For example, it might be feasible to agree that the overall goal is less violence and street crime – even though opinion differs as to whether locking up children or investing in more youth and support services is a more effective means of achieving that goal. Finding areas of agreement opens the door to exploring collaborative, rather than confrontational, approaches.
- Consistent rebuttal: It is helpful to learn where opposition stakeholders promote their message – which media outlets, which politicians and other influential stakeholders support their cause? – and to try to ensure consistent efforts to engage and challenge them each time the issues are raised.
- Their interests: Do they have a specific interest in taking a given position?

3. What can stakeholders offer?

Once key stakeholders have been identified, the NHRI needs to consider how they can support the issue and what particular strengths they bring. The level and nature of support will vary significantly depending on how central the particular issue is to their wider organizational interests and focus. It is useful to be clear about expectations and demands for each stakeholder, in order to gain the optimum benefit from their potential contribution. They will also be more likely to remain involved if they feel they are working to their strengths and that their particular skills are valued and being utilized effectively. Considerations about the degree and nature of a potential stakeholder's influence and investment include:

- Its political, social and economic power and status
- Its ability to bring significant financial or human resources to bear
- Its willingness to prioritize the issue and staff capacity to do so
- Does it have reliable connections to key policy makers and influencers?
- Does it have a large membership or ability to reach out to large numbers of potential supporters?

- Is its contribution likely to be limited to letter writing or adding its name to a list? Or will it play a proactive role in lobbying, writing, speaking to the media, developing a campaign strategy?
- What skills does it have – strategic, media, communication, networking, policy analysis, research?
- Will its reputation lend legitimacy to the advocacy campaign? For example, in some countries the active support of certain professional associations, such as paediatricians or lawyers, can add particular weight to a campaign’s credibility.
- Would the partnership entail any risks, in either the short or long term?

This analysis will enable the NHRI to identify the strengths and weakness of its support base and reach out accordingly to build greater capacity where needed. It will also help to ensure that the added value of stakeholders can be used to greatest effect.

4. How to manage successful partnerships?

Successful collaboration can be achieved by adhering to some basic rules of respect, organization and procedures. Every issue will require a somewhat different approach but the points below can serve as a basic guide:³

a) Be clear about that the proposed advocacy issue is the focus of the partnership:

- Draft a statement clearly describing the issue
- Develop membership criteria and mechanisms for including new members and sustainability
- Involve potential members in determining the alliance’s purpose, scope and priorities
- Establish the boundaries of what the coalition will and will not do
- Decide how it will make decisions.

b) If a major campaign is needed – as may be the case for some issues – establish a task force to plan and coordinate activities, such as advocacy priorities, specific agendas, publicity, outreach, lobbying, fund-raising and procedures.

- Assess progress periodically and make necessary changes
- Review the coalition’s effectiveness in meeting advocacy objectives and opportunities for constituents to play a leadership role
- Promote communication and consultation among members to resolve problems and conduct outreach
- Ensure that the steering committee is accountable and responsible to the broader group.

³ Adapted from: Wolff, Tom, and Gillian Kaye, eds., ‘From the Ground Up: A workbook on coalition building and community development’, AHEC/Community Partners, Amherst, 1994; and Advocacy & Leadership Center, ‘Tips for Making a Coalition Work’, Institute for Sustainable Communities

c) Develop a code of conduct to ensure mutual respect and responsibility:

- Ensure that rules of collaboration acknowledge diversity in capacity and resources
- Seek the widest possible involvement in developing a code of conduct
- Ensure that all involved understand how to engage with children and young people on advocacy initiatives in which they are involved

d) Clarify commitments and expectations from members:

- Ensure that the goals are clear, so that organizations fully comprehend their commitment when they join
- Allow the membership and the issue to shape the coalition's structure and style – the form will depend on the needs arising from any particular issue⁷
- Choose interim and long-term objectives strategically to ensure a reasonable potential for success.

Addressing the common pitfalls of partnerships

- **Keep everyone informed:** Partners will be far more likely to feel positive about the campaign if they receive regular updates about what is happening – and are not left to feel marginalized or excluded.
- **Ensure credibility:** Advocacy claims must be consistently credible and grounded in the best possible evidence. Organizations will lose confidence if they feel they are being associated with poor quality advocacy or linked with bodies that may harm their reputation.
- **Recognize autonomy:** One of the challenges of partnerships is that members may fear the loss of their freedom to speak out independently on the issue without seeking prior agreement. They may also fear losing their visibility and autonomy. Clarifying the ground rules of membership and the limits on control by coalition leaders will help resolve such problems in advance.
- **Accept limits of unity:** Many partnership members will share a position on the particular advocacy issue that brought them together but may have very different positions on other issues. It is important not to assume a commonality beyond the specific campaign issue and to respect the legitimacy of different principles, focus areas and strategies.

Step Five: How to get the messages heard?

Once a partnership is established, one of the key tasks will be to promote and disseminate the campaign's messages. This involves four critical and closely linked dimensions, as depicted in the figure below.

1. Who to influence

While the underlying message of the advocacy campaign should be consistent, the way in which it is delivered will be informed by the particular audience the NHRI is seeking to influence. As highlighted earlier, advocacy activities need to engage and persuade different audiences that may be responsive to different approaches or aspects of concern – potential audiences include the media, local or national politicians, donors, the wider public, parents' groups, professional groups, children and young people, although some advocacy initiatives may be targeted at a fairly narrow audience. It is important to identify the motivations of different groups. This will have implications for the way the messaging is framed and what is emphasized. For example, depending on the target constituency, the audience may be motivated by:

- Political considerations – will adopting this issue have a positive impact on a government's or parliamentarians' popularity?
- Economic considerations – is investment in the proposed change likely to be cost-effective and lead to savings in the short or long term?
- Legal considerations – will failure to respond to the issue place the government at risk of legal proceedings or international censure from human rights bodies?
- Moral or ethical considerations – will the audience be moved by compassion or an appeal to their common humanity?
- Religious considerations – can the issue be framed as an appeal to different faith groups, based on their beliefs?
- Evidence-based considerations – will the weight of the evidence and its scientific basis serve to persuade certain audiences?
- Self-interest considerations – are there groups that will benefit from the proposed changes (beyond the children for whom the advocacy is undertaken) – such as parents, certain professionals or wider communities?

Whatever the audience, the core commitment to the realization of children's rights must not be compromised. For example, while there is strong evidence that corporal punishment has a negative impact on children's health and well-being and it is important to utilize that data, the primary argument must remain that children have a right to be protected from all forms of violence and such protection is fundamental to their human dignity. The fact that an issue is unpopular with a particular constituency does not mean that change should not be pursued. The point is to be aware of, and to anticipate, these considerations.

Malta – addressing the rights of migrant children

Irregular migration is a very sensitive issue for child rights advocates, who must defend and promote the needs and rights of child migrants and their families against an often large and articulate segment of the public that tends to view migration in a hostile light. Malta's Office of the Commissioner for Children issued numerous public statements on this issue during 2019. In these statements, which were published on most national news portals and papers, the Office lamented the fact that child migrants and their families often suffer real hardship, facing strife back home that forces them to leave their countries and embark on a perilous journey, only to encounter, if and when they reach their destination, many obstacles in their quest for and right to asylum. One such hurdle, which the Office spoke out against, was the decision by national authorities in receiving countries to refuse entry to sea vessels operated by humanitarian organizations carrying migrants rescued at sea, thus leaving migrants stranded at sea for days on end, unable to disembark and receive needed assistance. In its public statements, the Office was resolute in its position that child migrants and their families should never be held hostage to political and administrative squabbling over which country should receive the migrants, and that children's right to asylum and family life had to be guaranteed.

Although public advocacy for children's rights alone may not bring about the desired change, if it is effective in swaying public opinion in its direction, it definitely represents a catalyst for such change. Those who have the power to bring about change are much more likely to consider implementing the desired change if the weight of public opinion leans towards it than if it is neutral to or against it. For this reason, the Commissioner's Office did not simply advocate on the issues described above, but also worked closely with relevant authorities to address the issues.

<https://tfal.org.mt>

2. How to formulate the message?

Once an analysis of the audience and its potential motivations has been undertaken, consideration must then be given to formulating the advocacy messages. In all cases, the message needs to address:

Messages and demands need to be articulated effectively to reach different audiences. In considering how to construct the messages, useful questions include:

- Which arguments are most likely to persuade each audience?
- What information does that audience need to hear?
- What action is sought from any given audience, as the response needed from different groups will vary?
- What are their political interests? What group of people do they represent?
- What do they already know? What new information is being offered?
- Do they already have an opinion? What arguments will need to be countered?
- What personal interests do potential audience members have?

- Do their backgrounds (personal, educational, professional) suggest a bias? Can the issue be linked to something they support?

Greece – Ombudsman’s intervention with the Greek National Council for Radio and Television due to a breach by the MMC of children’s right to privacy

The Ombudsman was informed through the media of extended publicity of news concerning sexual abuse of a minor by a person in the family environment. Accordingly, the Ombudsman sent a letter to the Greek National Council for Radio and Television (NCRTV), stressing the need to protect the image of the child from the media and complaining about the violation of the minor’s right to privacy guaranteed by the CRC. In addition, the Ombudsman noted the trauma caused by publication of sensitive personal data, as the child is fully aware of the influence that this publicity has on her personal life as well as her family and educational environment, where her identity is known. The NCRTV responded on the same day, forwarding the Ombudsman’s letter to all broadcasting stations; the latter reacted by ceasing to spread news on this matter.

(23 Jan 2020)

<https://www.synigoros.gr/?i=childrens-rights.en.recentinterventions.635724>

A further consideration is the specific language to be adopted, for example:

- Is it child-friendly? If the aim is to reach out to children, the tone and language used needs to be accessible and relevant to them.
- Is it helpful to disseminate the message in locally relevant languages? It is important to ensure that groups are not excluded from participation as a consequence of language barriers?
- Is it culturally appropriate? Does it take into account the diversity of the communities the advocacy seeks to influence and engage?
- Is it appropriate to the particular audience? It is worth thinking about the specific audience in terms of their concerns, priorities and the kind of language they use. For example, the media prefer short, punchy sound bytes, politicians look for action-oriented solutions.
- Can it involve both rational and emotional approaches? Combining evidence and human-interest stories enables the message to reach both hearts and minds. An audience is more likely to be moved by and remember a story and repeat it to others, but stories need to be backed up by wider evidence of the problem.
- Is the language challenging? It is important not to weaken the advocacy by avoiding the language of children’s rights and associated obligations. But if the audience is resistant, it is helpful to explore ways of helping them understand the value of a rights-based approach. Efforts can also be made to demonstrate that rights do not pose a threat – their recognition derives from the basic needs of every child.

The table below could be used to help analyse the approach needed to reach out to different audiences, none of which are mutually exclusive.

Example:

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended to country X that the age of criminal responsibility should be raised from the current 12 years, which it has argued is far too low. The NHRI is seeking to persuade the government to raise the age to 16 years.

Audience	Their concerns	The messages
Decision-makers – including government ministers, legislators, administrators, corporation heads	Fear that raising the age will be politically unpopular and will send a message to young people that there is no effective deterrent to law breaking. Concern that it will lead to a rise in crime among young people, with no accountability	Gather evidence demonstrating that the drivers of crime lie in poverty, deprivation, poor educational opportunities, lack of youth services and lack of aspiration. Positive investment in young people will lead to lower crime rates and greater economic growth. Further, the Government ratified the CRC and has obligations under international law to comply with its standards.
Donors – including foundations, bilateral agencies, multilateral agencies	Need for funding and programmatic support to be directed to compliance with international human rights standards and practices	The CRC Committee, in its revision of the General Comment on children's rights in the justice system, strongly recommended raising the age of criminal responsibility to a minimum of 15 or 16 years. Accordingly, the case can be made that the advocacy initiative would work towards compliance with that objective
Children and young people and their organizations and networks	Negative experiences of being separated from their families and placed in detention, along with fears of bullying, violence and discrimination. Fears of getting caught up in further cycles of crime and drugs. Frustration about lack of constructive activities for young people in their communities	Voices from children and young people about the extent to which their health and well-being is seriously harmed by detention and the value of positive, constructive diversion strategies including sports, social, and cultural facilities that are far more likely to move them away from present and future criminal activity

Audience	Their concerns	The messages
<p>Civil society including NGOs, INGOs, parents’ organizations, community-based groups</p>	<p>Fears of rising levels of crime in local communities as well as concerns about lack of constructive activities for young people. Concerns about the negative or discriminatory attitudes of police towards young people, particularly those from minority communities</p>	<p>Focus on the need for the proposed change in the law to be accompanied by consultative and collaborative approaches at the community level stressing investment in a more positive environment for young people from all social groups. Also emphasize the greater effectiveness of restorative justice over punitive models when working with young people.</p>
<p>Journalists and other representatives of the media</p>	<p>Concerns may depend on the ideological persuasion of the journalist. Some will be concerned about lack of public interest in the proposed change. Others may fear it will be viewed with hostility by their readers.</p>	<p>Provide comparative evidence from across the region to show that other countries have higher ages of criminal responsibility and that it does not lead to higher rates of crime, that the current age is in breach of international standards and that early incarceration can cause irreparable harm to children.</p>
<p>Professionals working with children</p>	<p>Concerns about the educational, emotional, psychological and health damage inflicted on those detained at a very young age and the long-term detrimental consequences for their development.</p>	<p>Encourage members of the profession to pull together and publicize the strongest possible evidence of the long-term harm being done to children and the benefits of community-based interventions to address youth crime.</p>
<p>Opinion leaders – such as religious or community leaders</p>	<p>Concerns about the importance of building strong moral and ethical values within the youth population and the need for community cohesion and provision of faith-based support.</p>	<p>Emphasize the role of religious and community leaders in supporting young people within their faith communities and the need for a focus on forgiveness and rehabilitation rather than retribution and punishment.</p>

Audience	Their concerns	The messages
Celebrities	If the NHRI has access to a celebrity who has experienced detention as a child, they may be willing to share publicly how detrimental it was and the need for alternative approaches.	Personal stories from people with a high positive profile about the harm they experienced through detention can be used bring the issue alive. The issue will resonate more effectively if it is told by someone who is recognized and admired.

Latvia – Research on the right of the children of imprisoned persons to be in contact with their parents, 2016

Latvia's Ombudsman identified children of imprisoned parents as a vulnerable group and undertook research to learn about their experiences and to what extent their rights were being violated.

The research identified multiple problems experienced by these children, including trauma, anxiety and stress. Children often feel ashamed of the parents' imprisonment and fear negative attitudes by classmates. In response to the findings, the Ombudsman produced an information leaflet for adults working with these children and also made a number of recommendations for changes to regulations, sentencing practices, visiting, prison routines and the professional practices of social workers and judges.

http://www.tiesibsargs.lv/uploads/content/lapas/children_of_imprisoned_parents_1513769754.pdf

3. Delivering the message

Advocacy messages can be delivered in various ways. The choice will depend on the audience to be reached and the aim of the particular message.

- Face-to-face: There are many different ways of engaging people face-to-face, depending on: the issue, the scale of outreach being sought and the type of information being disseminated. Some examples include:
 - in-depth, one-on-one discussions with influential individuals whose support is very important
 - local group or community meetings to facilitate discussion and dialogue and explore local concerns
 - conferences and workshops with key speakers to reach out to a professional audience
 - public hearings to invite speakers who can be 'cross-examined'
- Print: Many different forms can be employed, including newspapers, magazines, journals, newsletters, posters, leaflets, pamphlets, reports, studies or letters to decision makers
- Electronic: The widest outreach and influence will be obtained through the media, including radio, television, video and film, Internet blogs, social media websites, YouTube and mobile phones

Ireland – citizenship and statelessness

In the course of its work, Ireland’s Office of the Children’s Ombudsman identified an emerging problem in relation to access to citizenship and statelessness, particularly for children whose parents were seeking international protection, who were undocumented, separated from their families and in the care of the State or were stateless. The office undertook research to explore how the system was working for these groups of children and the process they had to follow to gain Irish citizenship. The findings highlighted that children are at increased risk of delays in securing access to citizenship and its attendant rights. This is because children: a) cannot apply for international protection independently; b) cannot register with INIS before they turn 16; c) are not always registered/aware that they need to register once they do turn 16; and d) ordinarily derive their status from their parents/guardians. These factors also increase the risk that children may become undocumented or remain stateless. Accordingly, the Ombudsman’s Office produced a report making several recommendations to the government for addressing the problems through, for example, legislative reforms, waiving residency requirements and improving access to legal aid.

<https://www.oco.ie/library/pathways-to-irish-citizenship/>

Step Six: What action to take?

Once all of the preceding issues have been addressed, the next step is to develop a clear action plan setting out all the activities to be carried out. For a relatively narrowly focused issue (e.g., preventing the deportation of an unaccompanied, asylum-seeking child) the action may simply involve setting up meetings with the relevant government minister and encouraging follow-up scrutiny by the media. For more substantial issues, wider partnerships and a broader range of activities may be necessary. This might involve activities such as: publishing the evidence, engaging with local or national politicians, organizing a conference on the issue, engaging with the media, promoting a letter-writing campaign, drafting briefings or using social media to mobilize children. If the issue is particularly sensitive or controversial, the NHRI may conclude that it is best to address the issue directly with the government, without publicity or visibility, to avoid potential antagonism or backlash.

If the NHRI is working with organizational partners, it is helpful to identify who will be taking the lead on which activity, and provide a time-frame and an anticipated outcome. The table below provides an illustrative example of a possible framework for action.

	What	Who	When	Outcome
Awareness- raising, communication and media	Develop and deliver persuasive, evidence-based and solution-oriented messages to the public, decision-makers, stakeholders and those who influence them			
Building support	Reach out to the widest possible range of actors and encourage them to commit to support the campaign or issue; e.g., via petitions, published lists of named supporters, writing to their local parliamentarian			
Lobbying and negotiation	One-on-one discussions to influence decision-makers and policy-makers			
Research and publications	Identify or commission the evidence to illustrate the underlying causes and solutions to a problem, and produce recommendations that can be implemented by decision-makers and stakeholders			

	What	Who	When	Outcome
Engagement with children and young people	Support the creation of a platform for children’s and young people’s voices to be heard and acted on involving decision-makers and stakeholders			
Social mobilization and campaigning	Reach out to all levels of society, including marginalized groups, as potential allies and partners to enlist their support			
Conferences and events	Create opportunities to bring stakeholders and decision-makers together to hear from experts on the issue and work towards solutions			
Demonstrations and marches	Where lobbying and argument is not succeeding, supporters can be mobilized to take peaceful direct action either on the streets or through online petitions, although many NHRIs may not be comfortable with engaging in this type of activity.			

Step Seven: Monitoring and evaluation

At the end of the process, it is important to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the work. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) can examine the outputs, outcomes and impact of the work. Children’s perspectives on how effective the work has been must also be reflected in this process. The M&E process for monitoring and evaluating advocacy work is addressed in Section Five. *(see also monitoring tool)*

Summary: Advocacy checklist

Checklist for the advocacy process	
<input type="checkbox"/> What change is being sought?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Be specific about the goal ■ Develop indicators against which to measure success
<input type="checkbox"/> Who can make it happen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify all key target audiences
<input type="checkbox"/> What do they need to hear?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Elaborate specific messages for each target audience
<input type="checkbox"/> Have children been engaged?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reach out to children as partners at all stages of the advocacy process
<input type="checkbox"/> Who are the messengers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure that an appropriate spokesperson for each audience is identified
<input type="checkbox"/> How can they be reached	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Explore the most effective means of contacting/influencing each different audience (e.g., lobbying, social media, conferences)
<input type="checkbox"/> What capacity is needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Assess the level of capacity within the campaign and the need for training or additional partners
<input type="checkbox"/> How will the campaign/activity be organized?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consider a range of different activities to ensure that the optimum number and range of people are reached
<input type="checkbox"/> How to assess success?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Engage in ongoing monitoring and undertake a comprehensive evaluation at the end of the process

5. MONITORING AND EVALUATING ADVOCACY

Monitoring and evaluation should be an integral component of all NHRI work, including advocacy. Some observations to bear in mind during M&E exercises are:

- Change takes time, whether the aim is to for example, change behaviour, introduce new legislation or re-focus a policy agenda. So it is important to establish goals that monitor gradual progress over time. In this way it is possible to track changes as they occur, rather than focusing exclusively on the ultimate end-goal.
- Change can be the outcome of many different factors – such as a change of government, actions by other actors, external economic influences, or a high-profile media event. While it may not be possible to precisely define the NHRI's contribution to the change, the NHRI can still evaluate the nature and effectiveness of its work and seek to assess its contribution to any given change.
- It is important to collect data from different stakeholders and use a range of methods to build as comprehensive a picture as possible of what happened, why it happened, what worked and did not work and what concrete changes resulted from the effort.
- Engage children and young people in the process. They are the intended beneficiaries so it is important to use their ideas about what information best reflects their experiences and how to collect it. They could be engaged in the design of M&E tools, collecting data and or conducting interviews.
- It is always useful to undertake a baseline study at the outset; this will facilitate subsequent assessment of what has changed and how effective the advocacy initiative has been.

In reflecting on how to undertake M&E, consideration should be given to the questions listed below.

1. Why is monitoring and evaluating advocacy necessary?

- It enables the institution to identify which elements of the campaign were more (or less) successful, thus offering lessons and strengthening the quality of future work
- It helps to make the NHRI accountable – to children, donors and others
- It provides wider learning that can be shared with other bodies and contribute to progress in rights-based advocacy work.

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People undertook a review to explore the barriers that prevent children and young people from fully realizing their right to an effective education in the context of Special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream schools. It also assessed the impact on children's education, mental health and overall well-being when their needs are not met. This involved a comprehensive process of stakeholder engagement conducted over 18 months, as well as an analysis of official statistical data. The review found significant flaws in the system that prevent children and young people from accessing vital support and services. The review made 40 recommendations, requiring a system-wide response, to address the challenges identified. The findings were widely disseminated; next steps called for ongoing monitoring of progress and collaboration with all relevant agencies. The Commission will publish action taken to advance the recommendations, to maintain its commitment to progress.

<https://www.niccy.org/about-us/our-current-work/review-of-sen-provision-too-little-too-late/>

Malta – Children with disabilities in care

In 2018 the office of Malta's Ombudsman for Children published 'Molly's case', a report detailing a complaint received about a foster child with a disability. Molly is 16 years old and was born with Down Syndrome and severe autism. She was abandoned by her biological parents at birth and grew up in a foster home. The foster carer made a complaint to the Ombudsman about the level of support and services being provided to meet Molly's needs and support her placement. An investigation found a lack of coordination between the two agencies providing services (health care and child and family services), which resulted in insufficient services by both agencies. The Ombudsman was concerned that children with disabilities were not receiving every opportunity to reach their full potential and that foster family placements often ended prematurely, with the result that children with disabilities were placed in institutions from which they might never leave. As a result of the investigation both services made several significant and ambitious commitments and the Ombudsman's Office engaged with them both to ensure progress towards fulfilling these commitments. In early 2019 Office staff met with national and local teams responsible for implementing the recommendations and published an update on Molly's Case. Monitoring of progress is ongoing.

[Annual report, 2019](#)

2. What should be monitored and evaluated?

It is important to measure all aspects of the advocacy process if the NHRI is to gain maximum benefit from the process. This involves examining:

- Goals that were established for the initiative
- Structures created to build and support the partner base
- Activities undertaken

- Impact of the action and whether meaningful change took place.

For example:

Goals	Partnerships	Activities	Impact
Were they clear and able to be communicated easily?	Did the initiative engage the intended partners?	Did the process utilize an appropriate range of activities? What could have been improved?	Have attitudes towards the issue changed?
Could more have been done to frame them more effectively? Were the indicators SMART? (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound)	Could more have been done to engage and support partners? Was optimum use made of respective skills and resources?	What were the most effective activities for raising the profile of the issue, enlisting support and shifting attitudes?	Has the impact been different across different communities? Has government commitment to action been agreed?
Were they sufficiently/insufficiently/overly ambitious?	Did the process adopt the best possible structure to support the advocacy network/alliance/coalition?	How many supporters, organizations, politicians were reached?	Has there been a change in legislation/policy/ service design/ resource allocation?
Were the times-frames realistic?	How effective was communication and decision-making?	What level of media coverage was achieved? Number of outlets, articles, social media hits/likes?	Was impact realized equally for all affected children?
Were there appropriate short- and longer-term goals?	How actively involved were children and young people in the partnership? Could their involvement have been strengthened?	Did children and young people play an active role in the campaign? Could their involvement have been strengthened?	Do children and young people feel positive about the process and outcomes?
Did children and young people play a significant role in contributing to the setting of goals?			

3. How can the data be gathered?

The methodology for data collection will be driven by the scale and nature of the activity, as well as the NHRI’s capacities and resources. Different aspects of the process can be monitored using different approaches, including, for example:

- Documentary evidence can be used to demonstrate, e.g., the number of people who signed up to support the issue, number of media interviews, evidence of legislative or policy change, supportive media articles, research commissioned or statements by politicians.
- Interviews, including with children, can provide in-depth insight into how an advocacy issue has

been perceived and its effect on people. This permits greater understanding of whether, why and how a process has been effective or not.

- Surveys and questionnaires enable the NHRI to reach out to a larger number of people and gain a broad sense of the response to and impact of its work, as well as to assess public awareness of the issue. This is particularly helpful if a baseline survey was undertaken at the outset. Online surveys or social media outreach can enable the NHRI to reach a significant audience for feedback.
- Focus group discussions allow more exploration of the issues and can be used to help participants use their interaction to examine their views and how they have been influenced by the advocacy initiative or campaign.
- Stories of significant change are a powerful means of capturing progress. Encouraging adults and children who have been involved in the initiative to describe what has happened to them, their community or their organization as a consequence of the work they were involved in provides tangible evidence of how people have changed their views or behaviour, or how their experience has changed.

All these forms of data collection require efforts to create child-friendly tools that enable children to contribute effectively and safely. For guidance on practical examples of M&E tools that can be used with children: See [Lansdown and O’Kane, A toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children’s Participation, Booklet 5, Save the Children/UNICEF et al, 2014](#)

4. How can the findings be used?

M&E findings can be used in a number of ways:

- To assess strengths and weaknesses, to inform future advocacy work
- To identify additional capacity building, staffing or other resources that might be needed to strengthen this area of work
- To engage with children and young people and explore how collaboration with them worked and how it could be done more effectively
- To provide guidance to other organizations on the importance and potential value of advocacy work as a means of promoting children’s rights
- To raise the profile of the NHRI and encourage wider support for its work.

6. RISKS AND CHALLENGES IN UNDERTAKING ADVOCACY

Potential risks associated with advocacy, both to the NHRI itself and to the children and young people involved, must also be considered. An open assessment of these risks can help inform decisions both about whether to pursue the issue and, if so, what measures could be put in place to minimize the impact of potential risks.

Undertaking a risk analysis

Before undertaking any advocacy activity, it is worth undertaking an assessment of risks that might ensue as a result of NHRI engagement. This will require a judgment call in each specific context: NHRIs will have to weigh the pros and cons of pursuing the action against the possibility of negative consequences.

Key issues to be considered when undertaking a risk assessment include:

Responding to potential risks

The nature of the risk will differ according to the political, social, cultural, economic and religious environment in which the NHRI operates, as well as in accordance with the issue being advocated for and the nature and scale of support. Some potential areas worth considering are listed below.

1. Style of advocacy

- **The concern:** Some activities may be perceived as controversial, aggressive or too critical of the government. It may be that certain partners (e.g., religious leaders or professional groups) signed on to the issue in principle but are reluctant to be associated with very explicit advocacy.
- **Potential risk:** If certain partners feel they have been inadvertently associated with activities they disapprove of, the NHRI may lose their support, damaging relationships. It could also lead to a public repudiation of the advocacy campaign, provoking backlash on the issue. There is a potential for harm both to the reputation of the NHRI and to progress on behalf of children.
- **Mitigating the risk:** It is important to ensure that all partners are kept as fully informed as possible from the outset about the nature of the process and the proposed activities. When possible, it also helps to ensure that the advocacy avoids personal criticisms or abuse and focuses heavily on the evidence and proposed solutions rather than overt blaming. Ongoing monitoring of the impact of activities can facilitate rapid identification and response to any negative event or trend.

2. Involving children

- **The concern:** Children's involvement could be, or may be seen to be, exploitative or potentially harmful to their well-being.
- **Potential risk:** Children who place themselves in the public eye – either in person or through the digital environment – can be exposed to risk; for example, backlash by politicians, the media, the police, or even parents, teachers or other children. The backlash can take the form of on- or off-line bullying and attacks on their integrity, as well as actual physical threats or even arrest. Using children to engender sympathy for the cause in ways that are exploitative or tokenistic and allow them no

meaningful opportunity to speak for themselves is counter-productive and constitutes a violation of their rights. Moreover, it is less likely to make a convincing case, may turn potential supporters away and can engender cynicism and resentment among the children involved.

- Mitigating the risk: All staff working with children must be appropriately trained to ensure that the process and quality of work with children is fully ethical and compliant with the basic requirements for meaningful child participation. Children need to be provided with sufficient information to make informed choices concerning their engagement and to be fully supported throughout. Staff must make informed judgments about the context and the issue to determine whether they can and should involve children. If the NHRI is supporting an initiative instigated by children, it should provide guidance and advice on the potential risks, how children can keep themselves safe and how to minimize risks. Finally, it must be clear at all times that the NHRI – not the children – takes full responsibility for the advocacy initiative.

3. Working with partners

- The concern: While partnerships offer significant benefits, they may also present challenges, depending on the breadth of the alliance or network, level of work involved, visibility of the campaign and relationships among partner organizations.
- Potential risk: Working collaboratively can lead to a loss of identity for the NHRI. It could result in other members of the alliance taking credit for work that should belong elsewhere, and can also make it difficult to ensure that the quality of engagement is consistently high. Other problems can arise if the campaign decides to use high-profile celebrities to draw attention to the issue – the latter can sometimes go ‘off message’ or be involved in behaviours that lead to negative press coverage and serve to undermine the campaign. Enlisting the support of private sector entities might lead to loss of some potential support if the particular company has a track record of unethical actions. Some partners may be associated with political parties, exposing the advocacy campaign to the risk of being seen as politically aligned.
- Mitigating the risk: The NHRI should seek to ensure the greatest possible openness and collaboration with partners from the outset. This can be accomplished by establishing ground rules for the partnership and monitoring adherence. It will help, for example, to be clear about when partners are speaking on behalf of their own organization, and when they are speaking for the campaign. It is also useful to clarify the levels and nature of accountability of all partners. One approach might be to assess the potential risk presented by each partner and determine the nature of the relationship accordingly. When enlisting the support of celebrities, it is important to be aware of their public profile, past history and pattern of media engagement to help decide whether they are likely to be a greater liability or benefit to the cause. With the private sector, research into ethical standards would be sensible – for example: investment history, employment practices and use of child labour.

4. Contentious issues

- The concern: Some children's rights issues can be extremely contentious and provoke very strong reactions, particularly when they challenge deep-seated cultural or religious practices such as early marriage, sexual and reproductive health rights or even corporal punishment. Other issues may be politically sensitive, for example, approaches to youth justice or drug abuse.
- The potential risk: When responding to a highly contentious issue, the NHRI can be exposed to risk whether or not it decides to act. If it fails to act, it can jeopardize its reputation as a strong, independent voice on behalf of children and their rights. If it acts, it may encounter a powerful lobby of vested interests challenging its legitimacy and seeking to undermine its work. This may, in turn, affect its wider reputation and capacity to function effectively. In extreme cases, it may lead to cuts in government funding. Or it may engender hostile, threatening or offensive reactions, including through social media campaigns, attacking the NHRI.
- Mitigating the risk: The NHRI will need to carefully consider the balance between the risks and benefits of taking on a given issue. The determining principle should be the rights and best interests of the children affected. Will the advocacy achieve more by promoting respect for their rights than any harm that could result? It is particularly important, when backlash is likely, to ensure that the campaign and all related activities be grounded in the highest possible quality evidence and sources. It is also valuable to engage people with sufficient influence, capacity and platforms to speak out on sensitive issues. Negotiations with the government should seek to achieve a constructive dialogue. When people feel passionately about an issue it is easy for the emotional temperature to rise. The NHRI should seek to avoid this and encourage all partners to adopt a positive, non-abusive approach in their media and other communications. If the NHRI is threatened as a result of activities of a public campaign, the police should be notified; if attacks are promoted through social media, internet service providers should be made aware.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Securing Effective Change: How to make recommendations that bring about sustainable improvement to public administration, International Ombudsman Institute, 2017, <https://www.theioi.org/publications/oi-best-practice-papers>

Advocating for Evaluation: A toolkit to develop advocacy strategies to strengthen an enabling environment for evaluation, UN Women/UNICEF et al, 2015, https://www.evalpartners.org/sites/default/files/toolkit/UNICEF%20NY_Advocating%20for%20Evaluation_Web_1.pdf

Advocacy Matters: Helping children change their world, Save the Children, <file:///Users/gerisonlansdown/Dropbox/NHRI%20ECARO/Advocacy%20tool/Advocacy%20Matters%20%20Helping%20children%20change%20their%20world%20-%20A%20Save%20the%20Children%20guide%20to%20advocacy%20%20Participant's%20Manual%20|%20Resource%20Centre.html>

Advocacy Toolkit: A guide to influencing decisions that improve children's lives, UNICEF, 2009, https://www.unicef.org/cbsc/files/Advocacy_Toolkit.pdf

Training tool on engaging children in advocacy work on their right to participate in decision-making processes: Advocacy toolkit, Eurochild, 2018, https://www.eurochild.org/policy/library-details/article/training-tool-on-engaging-children-in-advocacy-work-on-their-right-to-participate-in-decision-making/?tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&cHash=4b8d32cb11c2b0fcf5e141cd500924a7

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