



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

# **PROMOTION AND OUTREACH WITH AND FOR CHILDREN**

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# ABOUT THIS TOOL

## Promotion and Outreach by National Human Rights Institutions with and for Children

This tool provides detailed guidance to National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in relation to their promotion and outreach activities with and for children. It aims to provide a practical approach to promotion and outreach focused on long-term, sustainable strategies and processes. It reviews what a child rights approach means in this context, the types of activities NHRIs can carry out and the partnerships they can foster to do so. It builds on the link between promotion, outreach and increased visibility of the institution. It provides practical examples from the field and also introduces a framework for helping NHRIs monitor and evaluate their promotion work.

The content is structured as follows:

- **Sections 1 and 2** present the framework applying to this area of work and its importance for the effectiveness of NHRIs.
- **Section 3** provides guidance for the development of a promotion and outreach strategy.
- **Section 4** lists possible approaches and channels that NHRIs can use for promotion and outreach for and with children.
- **Section 5** elaborates on the concrete steps the NHRI needs to take in its own organizational setting for effective promotion and outreach.
- **Section 6** identifies common challenges and how to address them.
- **Section 7** provides elements for a monitoring and evaluation framework.

### Objective of the tool

- To provide a framework for identifying key overarching messages as a basis for child rights promotion
- To enhance understanding of what it means for NHRIs to work on the promotion of children's rights with and for children
- To provide guidance on how children can be involved in promotion work
- To provide guidance on strategies to be used to promote the objectives of NHRIs for and with children
- To lay out conditions for effective promotion strategies
- To provide illustrative examples of implementation
- To provide a framework for monitoring and evaluating the scope, quality and outcomes of promotion and outreach with and for children in the work of the NHRI

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge of the NHRI and its role is a precondition for children to have access to it, claim their rights (in particular through the complaint mechanism) and participate in its work. The existence of a mechanism dedicated to defending children's rights also conveys an important message to children: that they have rights and there are means within their reach to ensure these rights are respected. However, surveys show that children are little aware of the existence and mandate of NHRIs and their responsibility to defend children's rights.

For NHRIs, promotion and outreach for and with children is a means of interacting with children and having direct knowledge of their experiences, beyond the complaint mechanism. It therefore needs to be understood as an instrument for a two-way exchange with children, which enables the NHRI to access information from children, rather than see such activities as a one-way exercise in which the NHRI only imparts information to children.

This is why promotion and outreach for and with children is an essential element of the effectiveness of NHRIs in relation to children's rights. It ensures that the strategy the NHRI puts in place to increase children's awareness of its work builds on a child rights approach, with children fully involved in and informing initiatives.

NHRIs' mandate to undertake promotion and outreach for and with children rests on several provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:

- Article 12 on the right of the child to be heard, which requires states to hear children's views in all matters affecting them and to give them due weight. This aspect of the work of NHRIs is extensively elaborated on in the *tool on child participation*, but it is also highly relevant to this tool.
- Article 13 on the right of the child to freedom of expression and information, which spells out children's right to express themselves by imparting information, but also to receive information of all kinds, through the media of the child's choice.
- Article 17 on the right to information, which recognizes children's right to access information from a variety of sources, especially those aimed at promoting their well-being.
- Article 29 on the aims of education, which includes as educational goals: respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and preparation for responsible life.
- Article 42, in which states commit to making the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.

The Paris Principles<sup>1</sup> underline the importance of promotion and outreach activities in the work of NHRIs. They recall the role of NHRIs in publicizing human rights and addressing discrimination by raising awareness. General Comment 2 of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child also emphasizes the role of promotion and outreach in the child rights mandate of NHRIs, and recommends that NHRIs undertake human rights education focusing on children, in addition to awareness raising with the general public. The Committee provides that NHRIs should proactively reach out to all children, in particular the most marginalized and discriminated against, since accessibility to the institution is even more difficult for them. It also invites NHRIs to have direct contact with children and develop ways in which children can communicate directly with the institution.

<sup>1</sup> Paris Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions, Adopted by General Assembly Resolution 48/134 of 20 December 1993.

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This tool on promotion and outreach for and with children needs to be understood in connection with the other tools developed, and specifically those on child participation, complaint mechanisms and capacity building. Although promotional activities may include an advocacy dimension, pure advocacy work by NHRIs with public authorities (such as with parliaments and governments) is beyond the scope of this tool.



## 2. THE IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTION AND OUTREACH FOR AND WITH CHILDREN FOR NHRIs

Promotion and outreach for and with children is a central element of the work of an NHRI. While promotion and outreach needs to address various audiences, a major challenge lies in targeting children themselves. NHRIs with a broader mandate may be known in the general population, due to publicity around their role and their own promotional activities. However NHRIs may not have the tools and know-how to address children directly. Effectively communicating with children requires knowing which channels they use, adapting language to a younger audience, and using symbols that are meaningful to children.

Working collaboratively with children to develop outreach strategies presents a double advantage: (1) it helps to ensure that messages and the channels through which they are conveyed are defined by those they target and therefore reach them more effectively; and (2) it contributes to building children's competencies for learning and communicating about their rights and the mechanisms that exist to defend them. This is also a critical element of children's right to be heard and of children's participation in the work of the NHRI (see *tool on child participation*).

Promotion and outreach for and with children are therefore important because:

- *They are integral to a child rights based approach to NHRIs' work.* The approach based on child rights emphasizes the importance of recognizing children as rights holders, not only the passive recipients of services and institutions, but also able to play an active role in shaping them and contributing to their effectiveness.
- *Children need to be aware of their rights in order to be able to claim them.* They also need to know the remedies available. Promotion and outreach for and with children focuses on awareness of rights and possible violations, as well as on the mechanisms available to stop these violations and through which to seek redress.
- *They are critical for the accessibility of the institution.* The first barrier to accessing the NHRI for children is not knowing of its existence and/or how to approach it. Outreach is particularly important in this respect. Even though children may be aware that remedy mechanisms exist, they may not have the ability or the courage to reach out and ask for help.
- *They contribute to establishing a direct link between the NHRI and its 'child clients'.* NHRIs are meant to serve children as rights holders. However, there is very often a significant distance between the public institution and children. The relationship between the NHRI and children is usually initiated by adults: parents, childcare professionals, health professionals and teachers, among others. Ensuring promotion and outreach for and with children bridges the gap between the institution and those it is meant to serve.
- *They are means of identifying issues of concern to children.* While the complaint mechanism may help pinpoint a number of problems, some issues may not be reflected in individual complaints but could rather emerge as a result of awareness-raising discussions on children's rights, through a collective process.
- *They help to focus on the communication channels children and adolescents use.* When children and young people are involved in promotion and outreach activities for their peers, they know which tools their generation utilizes to communicate, which may be different from those of adults.
- *They are part of building a culture of children's rights.* They help build both children's and adults' understanding that children are full citizens and actors and should have their rights respected and be able to claim them.

### Promotion and Outreach for and with Children: A two-way process

**Involve**

**Train**

**Inform**

**Share** child rights knowledge

**Listen**

**Ask** about approaches

**Ask** about priorities

**NHRI**

**CHILDREN**

**Feed**

**Share** lived experiences

**Express** views

**Support** communication with peers

**Provide** feedback

**Inform**

### 3. DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR PROMOTION AND OUTREACH

Promotion and outreach for and with children requires the development of a full-fledged strategy with a clear vision and stated goals. This helps to ensure that promotional activities do not remain one-off events but set out a long-term, continuous process. There is a risk of concentrating on involvement in high-visibility larger events, such as meetings, conferences and various types of shows, that are intensive in time and resources but remain adult-led and have shorter-term effects, at the expense of low-key processes built into children's daily realities. Such low-key processes may attract less media attention but they do enable the NHRI to involve and reach out to a larger range of children. Such processes can have a multiplier effect and enable the institution to expand the audience reached, using peers as communication channels. This approach requires longer-term commitment and persistence, as reaping the fruits of efforts is likely to take more time. However, it is also expected to be more sustainable, informative and effective in prompting children to access the institution.

In order to give direction to the process and ensure measurable progress, the strategy needs to formulate the NHRI's overall objective(s) in its promotion and outreach activities for and with children. It must then articulate intermediate goals that will support the realization of the larger objective(s) and help identify milestones for progress. It will go on to define activities and how they contribute to advancing the stated goals. The strategy finally has to include a set of indicators that will enable monitoring of progress towards achieving goals and assessment of the impact of activities.

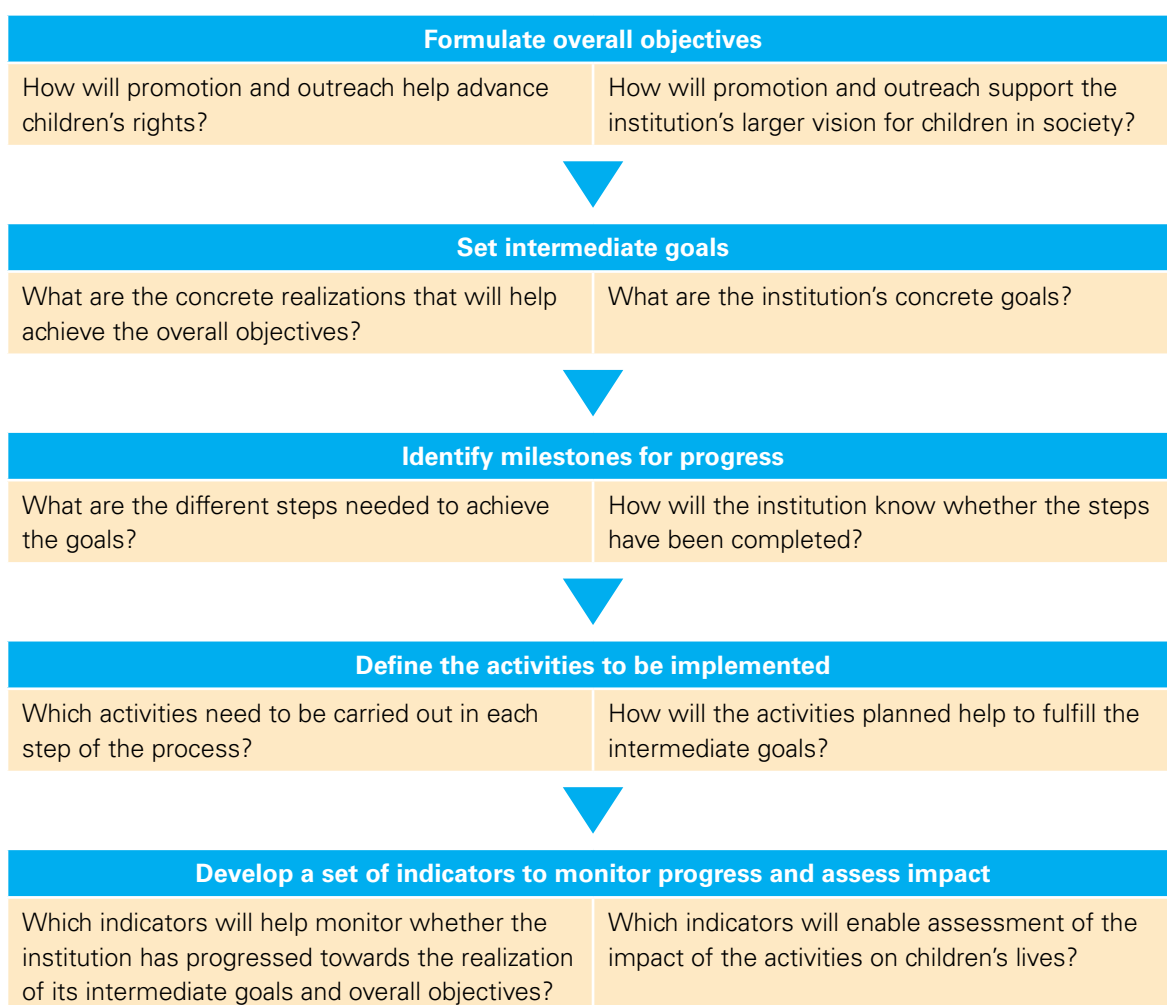
Importantly, the process of selecting priorities and developing the strategy needs to involve children themselves. The various ways in which children can be consulted are elaborated upon in the *tool on child participation*. They include among others:

- *Consulting with the NHRI's consultative body of children (such as a child advisory council).* Due to its permanent status, this body can provide ongoing advice, support and feedback to the institution on its promotion and outreach strategy.
- *Conducting surveys to seek children's views on the institution, assess their understanding of children's rights and remedies available to them in case of rights violations, and identify the issues that matter most to them.* The survey should ideally be developed – and conducted – jointly with children, to ensure the relevance of the questions asked, their adequate formulation, and their appropriateness for various groups of children. It is important to plan for the survey to be adapted for different child audiences, in terms of age, gender, language, disability and other characteristics.
- *Organizing focus group discussions.* Focus group discussions with specific groups of children, in particular those who are marginalized, enable inputs to be received on the barriers these children need to overcome to access the institution and help reflect on ways to ensure they are reached.
- *Consulting with youth groups and associations.* Youth groups and associations can valuably be called upon to express informed views of the priorities the NHRI needs to focus on in relation to promotion and outreach for and with children. They can also then help transmit information to their groups and beyond.

An important element in defining the promotion and outreach strategy is building on synergies between child rights promotion and awareness-raising, and outreach by the institution itself. Messages around respect for children's rights can be valuable in supporting the informing of children about the existence of the NHRI and its roles in providing remedies for violations and monitoring the realization of rights. Therefore the strategy for promoting the NHRI should not be disconnected from the broader child rights education initiatives that the institution promotes. However, these objectives need to remain distinct.

The processes of raising awareness about children’s rights and promotion of the institution are different, even if linked, and progress towards both objectives needs to be measured separately.

The steps detailed below can be followed to develop a solid promotion and outreach strategy:



*Formulate overall objectives.* The first step towards effective promotion and outreach is setting clear objectives. These objectives will vary from country to country and institution to institution. However, regardless of specific situations they will have to fit into the overall child rights framework and promote an understanding of children as subjects of rights. The overall objectives of the promotion and outreach strategy need to be articulated in terms of change. Rather than focus on the institution itself, they need to express the change sought for children and the increased effectiveness in ensuring that their rights are realized.

Defining the objectives will depend on the institutions’ overall priorities and identified gaps in this area. This would normally result from an assessment of the NHRI’s strengths and challenges in the promotion, protection and monitoring of children’s rights. The NHRI may determine that certain groups of children are insufficiently reached and/or particularly vulnerable to rights violations, such as children

in care, children in detention or children with disabilities, for example. It may identify certain areas of the country where public institutions are less accessible for various reasons, including geographic and language barriers, conflict, or being an area where an ethnic minority lives or where trust in institutions is limited. The NHRI may realize that its social media presence only attracts a small number of children. It may also conclude that a number of child rights messages are insufficiently heard and that key issues deserve increased attention among children, such as bullying, responsible internet use, and discriminatory behaviours, among many others. It may also conclude that children do not know they can directly access the complaint mechanism. These are only a few examples of the type of issues that may emerge as the NHRI reflects on existing gaps and outstanding issues.

The objectives will serve as the basis for developing key messages. These messages should communicate about the institution and/or identify and address rights violations. They need to focus on prompting action by those they target. It is not enough to make children aware that the institution exists: it also important that they realize what it can do for them and how they can access it.

## The Three-year Strategic plan 2016-2018 of the Ombudsperson for Children in Ireland

### **Objective 1**

We will increase awareness of children and young people's rights, the UNCRC and the role of OCO [the Ombudsperson for Children's Office].

### **Objective 2**

We will work to build capacity among public organisations whose work impacts on children and young people to develop and implement a child rights based approach to their practice.

### **Objective 3**

We will influence positive change for and with children and young people in Ireland.

See: <https://www.oco.ie/about-us/oco-strategic-plan/>

*Set intermediate goals.* The intermediate goals will translate the overall objectives into the concrete changes the NHRI will seek to achieve. For example, the institution may have as an overall objective to "increase awareness among children of the existence of the NHRI." It then needs to ask what it needs to achieve to reach that objective. An intermediate goal could be: "Ensure that all children in Grade 5 know that they can complain to the institution if their rights are violated."

*Identify milestones for progress.* The NHRI then needs to identify the various stages required to reach the intermediate goals. This will help the institution to take a step-by-step approach, rather than focus on a goal that may seem out of reach, and therefore make the process more practical and implementable. It will also enable the monitoring of progress against these milestones on a shorter-term basis, rather than solely assess whether the final goal has been achieved or not. This in turn will serve to demonstrate that the NHRI is working towards objectives that may take several years to be attained. In the example mentioned, milestones may include "Grade 5 curriculum revision includes lessons on the NHRI," "Grade 5 teachers are trained on child rights and the role of the NHRI" and so on.

*Define activities to be implemented.* To reach these milestones, the NHRI will need to undertake specific activities. At this stage, the strategy focuses on very practical matters that can actually constitute the basis for the child rights departmental work plan. In our example, revision of the Grade 5 curriculum will require “advocacy with the Ministry of Education”; “development of pedagogical materials for Grade 5 students” and so on. Teacher training will require, for instance, “development of a training module (in partnership with...)”; “advocacy with teacher training institutes to include knowledge of the NHRI in initial teacher training”; and so on.

*Develop a set of indicators to monitor progress and assess impact.* The set of indicators should firstly facilitate the monitoring of progress towards objectives. The strategy should take account of each step and milestone indicators in order to assess: (1) whether the activity has taken place, milestones have been reached and goals have been realized; and (2) the quality of the action (Has it had the outcome sought? How many beneficiaries – for example, teachers or children – have been reached? What could have been done better?).

The set of indicators should secondly serve to assess impact. Has the change sought been achieved and, if so, to what extent? Are children better aware of the institution? More information on possible indicators is provided in the last section of this tool on monitoring and review.

Anticipating possible domino effects of the promotion and outreach strategy is an essential element of the institution’s strategy. These can be positive, with multipliers including peer-to-peer communication and social media visibility. It can be very helpful to predict these effects at the planning stage and build upon them to increase the impact of implementation. Conversely, negative effects need to be factored in through a risk assessment to develop any mitigation measures that might be needed. These could include “the ransom of success” with increased demands on the institution, instrumenting of messages for political purposes or politicization of issues raised, misunderstandings or misinterpretation of communications, and potential resistance by actors, among others.

### Checklist of things to remember

- ❑ Build promotion and outreach into a well-articulated, coherent, proactive strategy, rather than as an ad hoc process responding to events and opportunities set by others.
- ❑ Make sure that the strategy is developed in close consultation with children.
- ❑ Formulate clear objectives based on priorities identified in a thorough consultation process.
- ❑ Define the goals, milestones and activities that will help you reach your objectives, and keep your focus on these.
- ❑ Ensure that your strategy includes monitoring of progress using appropriate indicators, and regularly assess how implementation of the strategy is advancing.

## 4. DETERMINING APPROACHES AND CHANNELS

The approaches and channels that will be used to reach children need to be determined following a careful assessment of the most effective approaches to communication for and with children. Here too they should seek to build sustainable processes. The involvement of children in such processes is itself a further guarantee of sustainability and effectiveness. For this reason, it is important to make full use of children's knowledge and competences in this area, rather than tackle the issue with adults' eyes. While major, highly visible events and activities can be considered in some circumstances, they should remain exceptional and should not absorb most resources. Rather, a combination of channels using various entry points is likely to yield results and ensure better coverage. Each institution will define an appropriate method based on its stated goals and the country context.

Institutions have used a large range of creative initiatives for promotion and outreach for and with children. The following provides an indicative list of channels that institutions have relied on to involve children in their outreach with children. While using these various channels – and others the NHRI will find appropriate – the institution can build on various approaches to convey messages and information about children's rights and its role in defending them.

Importantly, NHRIs need to be mindful that, more than the physical environment, what really makes for a safe space is the attitude of adults involved in such processes. Training of staff is therefore particularly important. Ultimately, children will freely express their views and fully engage in promotional and outreach activities – whatever their roles in such activities – if the attitudes of adults and atmosphere make them feel safe. Providing such spaces is therefore not necessarily resource-intensive. It does not require a fancy room but for children to be made to feel valued and respected.

- **Spaces where children can learn about rights and the institution, and express themselves.** Space is an essential condition for child participation, as explained in the *tool on child participation*. Children need to have spaces in which they can learn about their rights and the institution, and where they can discuss issues and express their opinions. Promotion and outreach for and with children require such spaces to be provided. They can be part of the institution's premises, or temporarily utilize schools and other structures welcoming children, or any public area. It is important, however, that these be safe spaces, and that children are able to speak out in confidence.
- **Social media strategy informed and fed by children's views.** Children, and especially adolescents, are closely connected to social media. Social media are widely used by institutions to communicate about their role, activities and complaint mechanism. However, for social media feeds to reach children and support the institution's objectives, they need to use accessible language and tools, be fun to read and watch, and help promote dialogue with children. The best way to do so is to involve children as full participants in the social media strategy, by inviting them to post content such as messages, photos and videos, for example, and to participate in social media discussions – with due attention to respect for their privacy and online protection. This implies constant online facilitation of the content posted, and possibly the deletion of inappropriate content and comments, as well as the taking of steps to guarantee confidentiality, by hiding family names for example. Communications tools and codes among children and adolescents vary constantly. Each generation has its own set of symbols and 'common language'. These can be as diverse as specific expressions, a particularly famous song, a video clip or television show, websites, or role models. One effective approach is to use these generational symbols to address children and enable them to become active participants in the promotion and outreach with the communication tool they 'own'.

## Selfie your rights! (Selfie tes droits)

### Ombudsperson for Children, Belgium (Wallonie & Brussels)

In 2014-2015, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Ombudsperson for Children organized a promotional campaign entitled 'Selfie your rights!' Children were invited to take selfies illustrating the rights in the Convention and submit them as entries for a competition. The best selfies were featured in an exhibition. A pedagogical toolkit was developed for professionals working with children, in order to help them prepare with children for visits to the exhibition.

See: <http://selfietesdroits.be/>

- **Posters, leaflets, brochures.** Even though today's communication for and with children tends to take place online, more traditional channels such as posters, leaflets and brochures can be particularly useful for outreach, in particular for children in situations of, or at risk of, marginalization. They offer the benefit of being visible without children needing to take additional steps, such as going online or participating in a meeting. They have limited costs. They can easily be placed in strategic locations where children spend time, such as schools, and are useful for children who may have limited internet access or movement, including those in childcare institutions, detention centres and shelters. They can easily be translated into different languages and be made available in different formats. However, here again it is important to involve children in the design and in testing their effectiveness, to ensure that children will be receptive to them.
- **Major events.** Many NHRIs organize and contribute to major events with the aim of promoting children's rights and the role of the institution. This includes using World Children's Day or relevant national events to plan a promotional activity. As mentioned earlier, a promotion and outreach strategy centred on such events is not desirable, as they tend to remain one-off actions that do not necessarily develop the sense of proximity and continuous process needed to prompt action. If such events are planned, they need to fully involve children and young people in their organization, in particular in deciding on the themes to be tackled and the methodology for activities. Importantly, for both organizers and participants, they should foresee a 'before' and an 'after'. In other words, they should only represent one stage of a longer process that does not begin and end with the event, but includes a preparation phase and follow-up actions that children should be fully involved in as actors.
- **Peer-to-peer communication.** Peer-to-peer communication entails children and young people themselves informing their peers about their rights and the institution. Peer-to-peer communication requires investment to ensure that the participating children are provided with capacity building and support. They need to fully understand what children's rights are and how the institution functions in order to be able to communicate with their peers. This approach is founded on the idea that children and young people will be better able to find appropriate ways to discuss issues with their peers, and children will feel more comfortable talking openly about the daily problems they face with each other. It also relies on a multiplier effect, in which the institution delegates to a few young people the task of promoting and reaching out to many more children.



## Children as Ambassadors

### Children's Commissioner of Wales, UK

In 2015-2016, the Commissioner introduced a system of child ambassadors to communicate about the Commissioner's office and her role, raise awareness about children's rights and feed back information to the Commissioner to help her in her work. These ambassadors have volunteered or been elected at three levels:

- Community ambassadors to work within community or local groups and clubs;
- Student ambassadors to work in secondary schools; and
- Super ambassadors to work in primary schools.

Thirty-two per cent of secondary schools are already signed up to the secondary school programme, while 262 primary schools have signed up for the super ambassador scheme.

- **Approaches that are inclusive, involving marginalized children.** Promotion and outreach needs to involve those it targets, including children who are marginalized and less likely to be reached by public institutions and services. These children are also the ones who are most likely to have their rights violated and require access to an independent institution. It is important to identify who they are by reviewing the child rights situation in the country and analysing the complaints received. Marginalized children often include children in care or in detention, children with disabilities, children with a migrant background, children from ethnic or religious minorities, and children living in remote and/or disadvantaged areas. By hearing their views and engaging them in promotion and outreach, the institution will ensure that information reaches them, convey the message that it also works for them, and build trust and confidence, even if such groups have a history of mistrust of public institutions in general.

## Involving persons with disabilities to ensure that information is accessible

### Children's Commissioner for Wales

Working with deaf young people from Swansea, the Children's Commissioner has introduced the main sections of information on its website as British Sign Language videos. This includes videos on every right under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

See: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLGslZNczbJKhq3lfdkTMSbNIhtBzu5yrc>

- **Working with youth groups and children's structures.** Institutions can usefully build on existing organizations and structures for promotion and outreach for and with children. Youth groups and associations are particularly valuable partners in this endeavour, and alliances with them can be an effective strategy. Such alliances provide the benefit of strengthening these groups, while also utilizing them to inform other children about the institution. Likewise, facilities where children spend time – such as schools, care institutions, and sport clubs among others – provide access to children in environments that can be mobilized to invite children to design and contribute to promotion and outreach projects.

## World Children's Day

### Children's Commissioner Office, Malta

In order to raise awareness about children's rights and the office, the Children's Commissioner developed a new approach to celebrating World Children's Day on 20 November. Instead of organizing an event of its own, it encouraged organizations working with and for children in Malta to mark the day through a special event held during the week leading up to it. The Commissioner's Office distributed a range of its educational materials to children across all schools. In the end, more than 50 schools and entities working with children organized a variety of activities, such as a homework-free day, special assemblies, healthy eating workshops, sports activities, games, crafts, discussions and activities embracing diversity. In addition, various local councils held events within their localities to commemorate the day.

### Checklist of things to remember

- ❑ Use a mix of approaches and channels to reach out to children.
- ❑ Think creatively about the possibilities that communication tools offer.
- ❑ Involve children in identifying adequate channels and developing messages.
- ❑ Make sure that the approaches used enable the inclusion of children who are excluded and less likely to be reached through usual channels.

# 5. ORGANIZING THE NHRI FOR PROMOTION AND OUTREACH FOR AND WITH CHILDREN

Undertaking promotion and outreach for and with children can create challenges for the NHRI. While initiatives may not need to be intensive in terms of financial resources, it is important to ensure that staff have the necessary skills and time, knowledge and capacity to reach out to different constituencies of children. This requires planning and adequate internal organization of the office. The promotion and outreach strategy should fully incorporate these elements. Otherwise, the risk is that the NHRI lacks institutional capacity to effectively carry out the initiatives it has envisioned.

A number of issues need to be considered when an institution is planning promotion and outreach for and with children.

## 1. **Having staff with competencies to work with children, including marginalized children.**

Interacting with children requires a specific set of skills to ensure that the activities are respectful of their rights and are adequately adapted to their situation. The *tool on child participation* provides guidance for involving children in the work of the institution. In relation to promotion and outreach specifically, a key element is to communicate with children in a way that is accessible to them and conveys – in its content but also in how it is presented – human rights and dignity. While child-friendly formats are integral to this approach, they are not sufficient to communicate with children in a way that will make them feel empowered and engaged. To be effective promotion of the institution with children, especially the most marginalized, needs to focus on and support children's agency and ability to act: for their rights and for those of their peers. When working with children it is essential not to underestimate their capacities but to treat them as competent actors and full partners. This is all the more important for children from marginalized groups, who often suffer from lack of self esteem and a sense of limited power and opportunities. Even unconsciously, staff from the institution and the partners they work with may have internalized some of the stereotypes society holds vis-à-vis certain groups. Adequate staff training on all these issues needs to be part of the institution's strategy for promotion and outreach.

## Communicating with Children: Principles

### **Principle 1. Communication should be age-appropriate and child-friendly**

Children need and have a right to clear and interesting child-centred (not adult-centred) communication. Children at different stages have very different needs and interests and learn in different ways from different media/materials. Simply adding child-like characters or a child-friendly production format, such as using animation or comics, does not automatically make something 'appropriate for children'.

Guidelines for Principle 1:

- ▶ 1A - Be age-appropriate
- ▶ 1B - Encourage and model interaction
- ▶ 1C - Use special effects wisely

## **Principle 2. Communication for children should address the child holistically**

All aspects of child development are interconnected. Physical, social, emotional and cognitive development are inextricably linked. Communication that balances and gives complementary attention to all their developmental needs best serves all children, from infants to adolescents.

Guidelines for Principle 2:

- ▶ 2A - Use an integrated rather than single-issue approach to communication
- ▶ 2B - Offer positive models for adults in their relationships with children
- ▶ 2C - Create 'safe havens' as part of communication

## **Principle 3. Communication for children should be positive and strengths-based**

Strengths-based communication focuses on nurturing the strengths and potential in every child rather than focusing on deficits. The goal is not only to teach but also to develop resilience and the capacity to cope – for both large and small struggles in life. This helps move communication from focusing only on problems to presenting options and possibilities.

Guidelines for Principle 3:

- ▶ 3A - Build self-confidence as well as competence
- ▶ 3B - Use positive modelling
- ▶ 3C - Include children as active citizens who model social justice and mobilization
- ▶ 3D - Do no harm

## **Principle 4. Communication for children should address the needs of all, including those who are most disadvantaged**

Media reflects who and what is valued by society. This is true in presentations of people and of cultures and traditions. It is critical that communication allows all children to hear and see themselves reflected positively, as opposed to communication that focuses on marginalization, shame, or negative or patronizing portrayals. Good communication includes positive portrayals of children from different cultures and ethnic groups and all socio-economic backgrounds, children with disabilities, and children who have experienced or are experiencing trauma, grief or living through emergencies.

Creative solutions and competencies should come from marginalized groups themselves, not just from those in positions of authority or from privileged backgrounds. Conscious decisions should be made to include the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children as a regular part of all types and forms of communication. Boundaries need to be pushed to ensure that the needs and abilities of all are portrayed.

Guidelines for Principle 4:

- ▶ 4A - Reflect the dignity of each child and every adult
- ▶ 4B - Be inclusive: celebrate and value all types of diversity
- ▶ 4C - Ensure communication is free of stereotypes
- ▶ 4D - Reflect and nurture the positive aspects of indigenous cultures and traditions

*Adapted from UNICEF, Communicating with children <[https://www.unicef.org/cwc/cwc\\_58583.html](https://www.unicef.org/cwc/cwc_58583.html)>*

2. **Being close to children.** In order for children to learn about the institution, it is up to the institution to go to them. Even assuming that they are willing to reach out to the institution, children have limited capacity to move around and visit the institution's premises. This causes difficulties for the children but also for the adults that may support them. Institutions' offices are typically located in the capital city and may not be easily accessible. Even though they can usually be reached by other means, such as telephone, letter or email, making the institution feel familiar and close to children requires physical proximity. Many institutions may find it challenging to find the time and resources to get to where children are.
- **Presence at the local level.** Being present where children are requires ensuring that the institution and its representatives or staff spend time in the field, and do not solely remain in the capital city on the office's premises. There are several ways in which NHRIs can facilitate proximity with children:
    - ▶ *Having staff travel across the country to meet with children.* The institution has a headquarters location but sends representatives to meet with children in their areas. Enabling staff to meet with children in their own daily environment and hear their views is essential to their ability to adequately promote the institution to children. This implies planning for staff travel and setting aside the corresponding budget to cover travel costs. Travel is staff- and resource-intensive. Some institutions may struggle to have sufficient resources in place. They should look for innovative ways of pooling resources, for example by pairing up with existing visits to limit transportation costs. In particular, if staff are travelling to a region to monitor a childcare institution or detention centre, for example, they could take the opportunity to also visit a couple of schools or local youth organizations for awareness-raising activities. In any case, it is important to include travel as part of the child rights institution or department's work plan with adequate resources to the maximum extent possible, and to reach out to other possible funding sources for this purpose.
    - ▶ *Setting up branches at local level, ensuring they include a focus on children's rights.* Many NHRIs have branches or permanent representatives at local level. They provide a more accessible way for citizens to address the institution and support closer relationships between local authorities and the NHRI. They are therefore an important element of the institution's outreach strategy. Available data show that they play an important role in increasing the number of complaints filed. A challenge for NHRIs with a broad-based human rights mandate, however, lies in guaranteeing that local representatives have the skills required to promote the institution for and with children. These offices are usually small and need to address the full range of issues the institution's mandate includes. Staff may be recruited based on a varied set of human rights related competences, with limited knowledge of child rights approaches. Capacity building on children's rights, including training and on the job guidance, therefore needs to be integrated as part of the institution's local presence strategy.

## The Child Rights Bus

### Ombudsperson for Children, Belgium (Wallonie-Bruxelles)

In order to reach out to children where they are, in 2009, the Ombudsperson bought a 18-metre bus, thanks to funding from the European Social Fund. The bus was branded with child rights and Ombudsperson decorations, and was equipped with a multimedia room, a conference room and a reception area for information and training sessions for children and professionals. The bus is available to associations and children's and youth organizations wishing to raise awareness about children's rights. Young delegates of the Ombudsperson also use the bus for participatory awareness-raising activities with children.

See: <http://www.dgde.cfwb.be/index.php?id=2522>

- ▶ *Being an autonomous independent institution with a local jurisdiction.* Several states with federal or highly decentralized political systems, such as the United Kingdom and Belgium, have established independent institutions for children's rights with subnational jurisdictions. In some instances there is also an institution with a national mandate, while in others there are only local-level institutions. The decision to create an institution with a local jurisdiction typically rests with local authorities. This has the advantage of having a strong local presence with full recognition by local authorities. Often, though not always, these institutions have a child-specific mandate, meaning that in principle they have better access to children and the actors working with them. This can be put to use by building on these proximal connections for promotion and outreach purposes. Even a local institution cannot assume that it is known by, and easily accessible to, children.

These various approaches to ensuring a local presence are complementary and can be implemented simultaneously. For instance, even when institutions have branches at the local level or a local jurisdiction, they can work on getting closer to children using other means, such as having local representatives closer to the field and ensuring that their staff travel within their geographic area to directly interact with children.

- **Visits to places where children are.** The NHRI needs to plan for visits to places where children spend time. The most obvious and immediate is schools. Reaching out to children in schools is considered an effective way to undertake promotion and outreach because it is a familiar setting for children and therefore can help to build their trust in the institution. Visits may also be made to childcare institutions, juvenile detention facilities, shelters, hospitals, youth clubs, playgrounds, summer camps, refugee camps and Roma settlements, among others. Visiting such places is an important element of the monitoring mandate of the institution. Monitoring visits will consist of assessing the conditions in which children live and whether they are respectful of their rights. However, beyond monitoring visits, it is important that children spending significant time in these spaces are aware of the existence of the institution and the complaint mechanism it offers in case their rights are violated. Institutions therefore need to undertake visits specifically aimed at informing children of their mechanism and use other communication means to guarantee that children are aware of their existence, such as posters and leaflets in an accessible format.

## Reaching Out for Complaints

### Public Defender of Georgia

The office has conducted field visits to 109 schools in different regions of Georgia and met school children. Usually, children do not file complaints on their own but when the Office organizes meetings with various groups of children, the children have opportunities to speak out about their experiences and report specific violations of child rights. After these informational meetings at their schools, children started to report violations of their or other children's rights to the Office of the Public Defender of Georgia. In one school, when representatives of the child's rights centre at the Office of the Ombudsman met a group of children, they reported various violations of their rights by the school director. The Office investigated the case and sent the findings to the Ministry of Education. Following the investigation, the Ministry concluded that child rights violations had indeed occurred and sought measures of redress, including sanctioning the school director by removing him.

3. **Fostering partnerships and building networks.** NHRIs' child rights departments and ombudspersons are usually small offices with limited staff and resources, and promotion requires significant efforts and resources to reach all groups of children. Promotion and outreach is an area in which partnerships with other institutions, organizations and associations is particularly valuable in order to achieve goals. On an organizational level, this requires the identification of organizations with similar goals and an ability to sensitize and connect with significant numbers of children. This could consist of developing joint initiatives or using existing projects to make the organization known. While in some instances these partnerships can be informal and temporary, based on immediate circumstances, the NHRI should work on a full-fledged strategy that aims to develop long-term alliances based on formal agreements and memoranda of understanding that clearly spell out the nature of the cooperation and respective roles. These alliances can also be created through networks, which can be formalized in order to increase their political weight at the national level.

## Partnerships

### Défenseur des droits (JADE) France

In the context of its mandate to promote access to rights, the Défenseur des droits has entered a large number of partnerships with public institutions, professional organizations and a range of associations in order to: (1) facilitate complaint handling; and (2) support organizations wishing to develop awareness raising and training initiatives. These include the National Committee for UNICEF; youth organizations; associations of magistrates; lawyers and doctors; school-related associations; training organizations; and public bodies operating at national and local level.

For the full list see: <https://www.defenseurdesdroits.fr/fr/institution/relations/partenaires>

4. **In-reach approaches.** One way of reaching children is to bring them to the office or another identified setting. Some offices have set up a special room to welcome groups of children. The idea is to invite children over rather than go to them. Taking children away from their usual environment can help prompt questions and participation in a different way. This approach is interesting in smaller countries or when working at regional level, where children can travel back within the day. It is less resource-intensive for the institution, as staff do not have to take time to travel and transportation costs can be borne by other sources. However, this should not preclude office staff from travelling, if such an approach is not appropriate given the country situation and in order to understand children's experiences where they live.

## Workshops and seminars

### Ombudsman for Children Office, Ireland

The Ombudsman for Children Office in Ireland organizes regular workshops and seminars on children's rights on its premises. Children come and visit the Office, which has a space dedicated to its activities with children. Workshops aim to help children and young people understand their rights and provide an opportunity for the Office to listen to what they have to say. Workshops focus on making rights real for children by making connections between rights and their daily lives. All of the workshops are age-appropriate, interactive and fun. They are free of charge, last for 90 minutes and are intended for primary schools, secondary schools or youth groups. Bookings can easily be made online on the Office's website.

One objective is that children and young people who participate in the workshops can in turn share their learning back in their schools or youth projects. Visiting groups receive a resource pack to support them to raise awareness of children's rights among their peers. Ideas could include: creating a display board about children's rights, writing about the visit in a school newsletter or on social media, or carrying out a bigger project about children's rights in Ireland.

*Adapted from <http://www.oco.ie/childrens-rights/workshops-and-seminars/>*

## Checklist of things to remember

- Provide adequate training for staff to interact with children in the context of promotion and outreach activities.
- Make the necessary arrangements to be present where children are.
- Work in partnership with other organizations and institutions to multiply opportunities to promote the NHRI's work and reach out to all children.
- Organize children's visits to the office.



## 6. ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES AND BUILDING ON THE BENEFITS

Effective promotion and outreach for and with children should lead to increased visibility of the institution and greater awareness of children's rights. This in turn should entail an increased demand on the NHRI – in terms of complaints, technical advice and advocacy among others – which it should be prepared to address. In order to fully reap the benefits of an outreach strategy, the NHRI will need to anticipate the possible challenges that may arise and take steps to address them.

These challenges may include:

- *An increased number of complaints.* One of the primary objectives of promotion and outreach is to make the institution more accessible to children who experience rights violations, and to enable them to file complaints. Therefore, the number of complaints can be expected to grow: receiving more complaints could be one measure of success of the institution's outreach strategy. However, this would result in an additional stretch on the resources of the NHRIs. Handling complaints requires significant time and resources, in particular human resources. The NHRI needs to be prepared to respond to the complaints that may be filed as a result of its promotion activities (see also *tool on complaint mechanisms*). It also needs to have a system in place to register and address complaints that may arise during such activities, as children come to understand the role of the NHRI and bring cases forward. In such situations, it is important that the NHRI does not simply answer by providing information on channels children can use to file the complaint at a later stage, but be ready to register the complaint on the spot and follow up on it like any other complaint it receives. This may also involve referring a case to the criminal justice system as relevant. The alert system put in place by the Défenseur des droits in France in the context of the JADE programme (see box above) is an example of how this can be done. Another problem related to the increased visibility of the NHRI is that it may nurture a belief that it can solve any situation. This runs the risk of the NHRI being flooded by complaints of limited relevance, diverting its resources from more proactive actions to address systemic problems, through advocacy and child rights education for instance.
- *Managing expectations about what the NHRI can do.* The NHRI has numerous limitations to its work. Two critical ones relate to (1) its legislative mandate; and (2) its capacity. The mandate of the NHRI sets limits on the cases it can handle, in terms of complainant, issue raised and legal means to make the violation stop. Some complainants may not have the legal capacity to complain on behalf of a child. A number of issues may be beyond the scope of the NHRI, such as issues related to defence for example. Others may not be handled because a court case is already in progress. In yet other cases, a rights violation may result from legal provisions over which the NHRI does not have influence. Finally, the powers at the disposal of the NHRI to make violations stop usually rest on mediation and good will, rather than on binding powers as is the case with courts. Consequently, even if the NHRI has concluded that a rights violation has taken place, it is not necessarily in a position to make it stop if other stakeholders refuse to cooperate. The promotion and outreach strategy therefore needs to include communication about existing limitations, in a way that does not discourage potential complainants.
- *Politicization of the NHRI.* As the NHRI becomes more visible and tackles politically sensitive issues, it may become vulnerable to politicization and other forms of opposition. Children's rights can be seen as a political agenda. Some political actors could potentially perceive empowering children to know and claim their rights as a threat. For example, reaching out to child migrants to inform them about their rights and remedies in case of violation can be perceived as taking sides in a fiery debate with political implications nationally. More generally, outreach with and for the most

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excluded and marginalized in society can prompt resistance from the more privileged groups in power. Some child rights issues – such as violence against children and corporal punishment – may not reflect settled opinion in the country and lead to accusations of the institution trespassing in the private sphere. As a result, it is critical that the NHRI anticipates these possible accusations and develops a communications strategy aimed at responding to and deflating such criticisms.

# 7. MONITORING AND EVALUATING PROMOTION AND OUTREACH FOR AND WITH CHILDREN

Monitoring and evaluating promotion and outreach for and with children is essential for the NHRI to assess progress and identify how to strengthen and adapt its approach. It is important that NHRIs undertake their own regular evaluations of their action, in addition to possible periodic external evaluations. Regular evaluation of activities can be conducted in a simple and easy manner, through short feedback surveys with participants. These will give the institution an immediate view of whether the activity was successful and what can be done to improve it.

As an integral part of its strategy in the area of promotion and outreach, the NHRI should also develop a more elaborate framework for monitoring and evaluation, with corresponding indicators. The NHRIs should develop full-fledged strategies with measurable progress.

Each NHRI will therefore develop its own monitoring and evaluation framework depending on its priorities and the local context. However, it would be beneficial if it includes the following elements:

- *What was the scope of promotion and outreach for and with children?*
  - ▶ Which channels/tools were used?
  - ▶ At what point of the promotion and outreach initiative/strategy did children get involved (situation analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, dissemination and/or feedback)?
  - ▶ Which children were involved (ages, abilities, situation)?
- *What was the quality of promotion and outreach for and with children?*
  - ▶ How many children were reached?
  - ▶ Which children were reached?
  - ▶ Were the messages understood?
  - ▶ Did children get involved in a dialogue/discussion?
  - ▶ Which other actors did the NHRI work in partnership with?
- *What were the outcomes of promotion and outreach for and with children?*
  - ▶ Are children better aware of their rights (for example, can they name three rights, can they identify child rights violations)?
  - ▶ Do children know the NHRI better (for example, do they know it exists, do they know what it can do for them)?
  - ▶ Did the number of complaints filed by children increase?
  - ▶ Who files complaints?
  - ▶ Do children know of other remedies in case of rights violations?

# APPENDIX 1. ADDITIONAL ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES OF PROMOTION AND OUTREACH FOR AND WITH CHILDREN

The following are additional examples of activities undertaken by NHRIs for promotion and outreach for and with children. The first section presents examples related to approaches and channels for promotion and outreach, while the second section refers to how the work of the NHRI is organized to ensure such activities.<sup>1</sup> Many activities cut across these two dimensions and are also found relevant for child participation in general. For this reason, some of them are also featured in the *tool on child participation*.

## Approaches and channels

**Ireland:** In order to communicate about its complaint mechanism, the Office of the Ombudsman for Children in Ireland developed several videos based on real cases it has handled. In the videos posted on Youtube, the children explained how they filed their complaints, how the complaints were dealt with, and the outcomes. This enabled the Office to present concrete, real-life stories, told by children themselves, and to encourage other children to speak out if their rights are violated.

*The videos can be watched here:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3n9liLOrA4&list=PL1C55497498FE447A>

**Scotland, UK:** The Office of the Children and Young People's Commissioner of Scotland recruited six young people as bloggers in order to encourage young people to visit the Office's website and learn more about the issues that matter to them. Young bloggers are invited to write on a regular basis about anything they want – popular culture, rights or issues they care about.

*See their blog entries at:* <https://www.cypcs.org.uk/news/young-bloggers>.

**France:** The JADE programme ('Jeunes ambassadeurs des droits de l'enfant', 'Young Ambassadors for Children's Rights') is an outreach initiative that aims to communicate about children's rights and the institution in places where children spend time. It involves 76 young people (aged 18-25 years) who work voluntarily with the Rights Defender during their civic service (which enables young people to undertake activities of common interest with a stipend paid by the State). Young Ambassadors visit schools, vocational training institutions, leisure centres, detention centres, hospitals, children in care, unaccompanied minors and specialized institutions among others to sensitize children about their rights. First, they present children's rights. Then during a second session, they explore a right the children have selected in depth with games and activities. Prior to the visit, Young Ambassadors meet staff of the school or institution to adapt their interventions. Young Ambassadors also receive training on handling possible cases or indications of problems that may emerge during their interventions. An 'alert notice' is sent to the Defender when a child's words may suggest a child is at risk. Other notices may be sent for cases requiring attention but that do not represent an immediate danger for the child (e.g. family matters, privacy issues). In 2016-2017, over 44,000 children and young people were sensitized and 55 alert notices were sent.

**Wales, UK:** As part of the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the Children's Commissioner's Office in Wales in 2011, the Commissioner partnered with the Scouts to create a badge enabling Scouts and Guides of all ages to learn more about children's rights and about their Children's Commissioner. Scout

<sup>1</sup> These examples are, variously, drawn from: *Championing Children's Rights: A Global Study of Independent Human Rights Institutions for Children*, 2012, Florence, UNICEF; *Children's Rights in National Human Rights Institutions: A Mapping Exercise*, 2018, GANHRI/UNICEF; UNICEF ECARO mapping exercise of NHRIs, 2017.

badges are meant to attest to progress or achievement and to be awarded on completion of a number of activities or challenges, while exploring new activities and developing new interests. The Children's Commissioner Office has developed a resource pack for various age groups defining the requirements to be met in order to receive the badge.

See: <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/uncrc-childrens-rights/scouts-guides-rights-challenge/>

**Belgium (Flemish Children's Rights Commissioner):** The Flemish Children's Rights Commissioner (Belgium) has involved young people to design and produce a television programme to inform children about their rights and the work of the Commissioner.

**Afghanistan:** In 2008, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission organized 'child-to-child' workshops to train more than 2,700 children on various child rights topics so that the participants could in turn train their peers.

**Serbia:** The NHRI's panel of young advisors, which includes 30 children aged 13 to 17 years from all Serbian regions, has performed visits and educational and inclusive activities with children who live and work on the streets. Panel members also conduct peer activities within their own schools and neighbouring schools aimed at informing peers about children's rights.

**Wales, UK:** From 2005 to 2008, the Child Commissioner in Wales looked at children's awareness of their rights and of the work of the Commissioner. From the outset, the project employed 15 young researchers aged 12–20 years who provided advice on the research methodology and on the design of child-friendly communication materials. About 2,500 girls and boys aged 7–16 years were consulted in the evaluation process through a school-based survey.

**Mauritius:** Since 2004, the Ombudsperson's Office has worked with a network of adolescents aged 12–18 years called Budi's Friends. These young people receive training on issues including child abuse and violence, and participate in debates in the media. They act as a link between their peers and the Ombudsperson's Office.

## Organizing the NHRI for promotion and outreach for and with children

**Hungary:** The staff hold training events in schools and attend events organized for children on World Children's Day. At the dean's invitation, the staff visited a high school for children from the Roma community for their programmes for International Human Rights Day in December 2017. In a 90-minute session, the staff members met with young people aged 15-16 to discuss the meaning of zero tolerance of child abuse and cyberbullying. The children asked many questions, gave examples and shared their own – very sad – experiences.

**The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:** The NHRI reports that it conducts activities in schools regarding children's rights, that are intended to acquaint the children with their right to participation in the decision-making process.

**Greece:** The Greek Ombudsman has created a Network for the Abolition and Elimination of Corporal Punishment of Children, that, through multiple interventions, has managed to have the relevant law changed by the parliament. It has also established a national Network for the Rights of Children on the

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Move in operation since 2016, which has facilitated the exchange of information and the development of joint advocacy activities by all major organizations active in the field.

**British Columbia, Canada:** Following a 2006 review of the child protection system in British Columbia (Canada), it was recommended that at least one of the three senior people heading the Office of the Children’s Advocate be Aboriginal and that Aboriginal people should be represented at other levels within the organization. As an indigenous person in British Columbia noted: “We often don’t like to contact an organization that doesn’t look like us.”

**El Salvador:** As stated in its 2011 annual report, in El Salvador, the Procuraduría (Attorney’s Office) has set up a number of Unidades de Difusión Juvenil de Derechos Humanos (Juvenile Dissemination Units for Human Rights) composed of approximately 300 young volunteers aged 15 to 25 years old, who are based in local offices of the Procuraduría. They were initially set up to promote human rights but their purpose and function have transformed into a role monitoring state action.



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